

# Carnegie Mellon University

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To whom it may concern:

This is to certify that on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Yutong Zhu submitted an honors thesis entitled "**The Chinese Fashion Industry on the Eve of Shanghai's Socialist Transformation, 1946-1956**" to the Department of History. This thesis has been judged to be acceptable for purposes of fulfilling the requirements to graduate with Dietrich College Honors.

Sincerely,



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# **The Chinese Fashion Industry on the Eve of Shanghai's Socialist Transformation, 1946-1956**

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## Introduction

In May 1949, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) marched into Shanghai, “liberating” China’s largest and most commercially developed urban center. After twenty years in the countryside, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) faced monumental challenges in the “semi-colonial” metropolis where it had been founded in 1921. As Chen Yi, the soon-to-be mayor of Shanghai, said in a meeting just before the takeover, “Shanghai is a port swallowing and spitting out imperialism. We don’t understand its complex situation.”<sup>1</sup> Now, having occupied Shanghai, the CCP found itself in an urban setting caught between an enduring obsession with cosmopolitan modernity and a nationalistic anxiety over Western imperialism. While a large number of Shanghai elites decided to flee the Communists, the vast majority of urbanites, whether they were supportive or suspicious of Mao Zedong’s “New China,” had no choice but to stay. It became the new regime’s task to incorporate the city into its vision of socialist China and convince Shanghai’s residents to take part in its transformation.

For Communist leaders, the city of Shanghai, home of China’s *laissez-faire* capitalism, emphatically symbolized China’s ambivalent history as both victim and beneficiary of Western imperialism; it occupied a central place in the Chinese imagination of both national subordination and cosmopolitan modernity.<sup>2</sup> “Semi-colonialism,” an analytical category heavily used by the CCP to describe cities like Shanghai, was intended to denote incomplete and informal colonization—that is, economic domination and socio-cultural assimilation without formal

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<sup>1</sup> Xiang Shourong, “忆上海战役前陈毅同志的一次讲话 [Recalling a Speech of Comrade Chen Yi before the Battle of Shanghai],” *Tie Jun*, no. 9 (2011): 14-15.

<sup>2</sup> Studies have argued that Shanghai fell within an ambivalent space between cosmopolitan coexistence and colonial subjugation. See Isabella Jackson, *Shaping Modern Shanghai: Colonialism in China’s Global City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 7-10; Bryna Goodman, “Improvisations on a Semicolonial Theme, or, How to Read a Celebration of Transnational Urban Community,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 4 (2000): 915-919; Robert Bickers, “Incubator City: Shanghai and the Crises of Empires,” *Journal of Urban History* 38, no. 5 (September 2012): 865-870. See also James Carter, *Champions Day: The End of Old Shanghai* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2020).

territorial acquisition. The “semi-colonial” condition differed from formal colonization, as China remained a sovereign, not subject nation despite the extraterritoriality of treaty ports. In Shanghai, there had never been a unified structure of colonial authority until the Japanese invasion. Local and Western elites cohabited in the foreign settlements and established reciprocal relations with each other. The distance from rivalries on the European continent allowed a local settler cosmopolitanism to flourish within foreign communities, where Chinese elites were often part of this cosmopolitan milieu. Yet, the “semi-colonial” condition was more than just economic and political imperialism. Despite cross-national interdependencies among Western and Chinese elites, trade and cultural contact outside elite circles took place on starkly unequal terms. Foreign residents’ discourses and social norms reveal, treaty-port Shanghai displayed the racial, linguistic, and sexual politics characteristic of European colonial societies.

As Chen Yi noted, Shanghai was an exploitative and decadent capitalist city. However, its industrial base was essential for the post-war recovery of the national economy.<sup>3</sup> This study uses the combined experiences of Shanghai’s fashion stores and fashion consumers during the early years of the People’s Republic to investigate the city’s treaty-port legacy and its transition into a socialist society. Viewing Western fashion as a legacy of “semi-colonialism” and fashion stores as a high-end and speculative service industry that did not serve the People, from 1949 to 1956 the new regime adopted coercive political campaigns and de-marketization policies that ravaged the private fashion stores. In doing so it enjoyed initial success establishing a new hegemony of proletarian fashion.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the imposition of a new fashion regime and de-marketization policies mutually reinforced each other, resulting in a quicker transformation to public-private joint

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<sup>3</sup> Marie-Claire Bergère, *Shanghai: China’s Gateway to Modernity*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 342-352; Chen Zueng, Ye Bin, and Li Tiangang, 上海通史 [*General History of Shanghai*] ed. Xiong Yuezhi (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1999), 11: 3.

<sup>4</sup> In Chinese, the word “fashion” (*shishang*) when used alone, primarily denotes non-proletarian clothing.

management than the state initially had planned. As I demonstrate, the apparent enthusiastic support from both store owners and the public turned Shanghai's 1956 completion of joint management into a highly-publicized state bailout of the fashion industry. However, public sentiments did not change overnight, but through processes of gradual renegotiation. Over several years, both store owners and consumers continued to challenge the new hegemony on their own terms. Although the exact moment when popular sentiments shifted are obscured by the available sources, evidence suggests that the Party's early attempt to remold the humiliating cultural legacy of treaty-port era achieved only mixed results. At least until 1957 ambivalences remained within Shanghai's grassroots society and these ambivalences found their way into political discourse where they functioned as a new counter-hegemony. This political discourse of ambivalence dwindled in 1957 when the Anti-Rightist Campaign reduced the space for public negotiation over the meaning of socialist fashion.

Existing studies on the Socialist Transformation of Industry and Commerce tend to focus on state actions and elite politics as they relate to ownership modes, labor relations, political campaigns, and commerce through the experience of industrial capitalists and large commercial enterprises. Under the framework of New Democracy, the Party had promised to preserve the private economy for an indefinite period of time but quickly abandoned such promise in 1953 when the "General Line for the Transitional Period" announced a clear intention to gradually nationalize the private economy. While earlier scholarship argued that the communist state tactically lured private enterprises to its side as a way to monitor and control them, more recent studies, such as by Robert Cliver and Bennis Wai-yip So, offer evidence of a more ad hoc trajectory

not always guided by a clear state agenda.<sup>5</sup> According to these authors, although the state did not fulfill its New Democracy promise to the bourgeoisie, it was not a trap as some have suggested. Instead, the promise itself was untenable and policy developments were contingent upon the problems that arose from the initial compromises between the bureaucratic state and the private economy.

By contrast, there have been few studies that shed light on the experiences of small producers labeled the “petty bourgeoisie” by the CCP.<sup>6</sup> This study takes them as its subjects to understand the uneasy transition to socialism at the level of grassroots society. While prominent industrialists had a better chance of weathering the storm of economic reorganization, the problems of state capitalism were felt more saliently by the owners of small stores and workshops in commercial sectors placed under the blanket term “capitalist industry and commerce.” Their attempts at renegotiating the socialist revolution reflect the predicaments faced by the broader society during the early years of the People’s Republic.

My examination of grassroots experiences and everyday culture builds off Antonio Gramsci’s idea of hegemony, defined as the spontaneous consent given by the masses to the cultural construct of a dominant group.<sup>7</sup> Gerry Groot has examined the CCP’s attempt to build a new hegemony in socialist China through formal political organizations and elite politics.<sup>8</sup> As such, his work is

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<sup>5</sup> Bennis Wai-yip So, “The Policy-Making and Political Economy of the Abolition of Private Ownership in the Early 1950s: Findings from New Material,” *The China Quarterly* 171 (2002): 682–703; Robert K. Cliver, “Surviving Socialism: Private Industry and the Transition to Socialism in China, 1945–1958,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 4, no. 2 (2015): 694–722.

<sup>6</sup> The class terms used in industry association reports reflect the state designation of labels, which are ideologically loaded and may not correspond to the subject’s own self-perception. While “national bourgeoisie” refers to prominent capitalist that the CCO tried to consolidate ties with during the period of economic recovery (1949–1953), “capitalist” was an amorphous notion that could be applied to a massive diversity among the millions of manufacturers and merchants nationwide. Many of the Shanghai “petty capitalists” in this story were small business owners who only employed a handful of employees.

<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive definition, see T. J. Jackson Lears, “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities,” *American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (1985): 567–593.

<sup>8</sup> Gerry Groot, *Managing Transitions: The Chinese Communist Party, United Front Work, Corporatism, and Hegemony* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

centered on elite co-optation and symbolic, instead of popular, consent. By focusing on formal politics, Groot along with most studies on the 1956 Socialist Transformation of Industry and Commerce, have little to say about elements of everyday culture. On the other hand, cultural historians have turned our attention to everyday consumer trends in the early decades of socialist China.<sup>9</sup> Most recently, Karl Gerth has argued that persistent state-endorsed consumerism within new hierarchical identities and desires blunted the realization of socialist ideals and helped sustain state capitalism.<sup>10</sup> While Gerth is interested in understanding the Maoist political economy as a variety of industrial capitalism, this paper focuses on two themes that are constantly present but not foregrounded in his book—the tension between imaginations of nationhood, socialism, and modernity and the processes of negotiation between the grassroots society and the party-state. The circulation of commodities did not solely define culture and desire. Rather, ordinary people laden consumer items with a multiplicity of meanings and feelings and made socialism a site of profound contradictions.

Fashion offers a particularly interesting lens to view Gramscian notions of hegemony as it blurs the boundary between symbolic consent and spontaneous culture. While normative standards of dress demarcated a line between friend and enemy for the CCP, even under socialism trends in fashion constituted expressions of real desires. For instance, by examining shifting negotiations

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<sup>9</sup> In the case of Shanghai studies, Chinese authors often have approached this period through lens of societal cosmopolitanism and state disciplining, while the 1955 dress reform is often seen as the interaction between state and public opinion. For example, see Zhou Wu, “革命文化的兴起与都市文化的衍变——以上海为中心 [On Rise of Revolutionary Culture and Evolution of Urban Culture]”, *Journal of Social Sciences*, no. 10 (2009): 146-155+191; Geng Chunxiao and Cui Hanying, “短暂的“时尚之春”:服装改革在上海的开展 (1955-1957) [The Transient ‘Fashion Spring’: The Clothing Reform in Shanghai from 1955 to 1957]”, *The Journal of Humanities*, no. 12 (2020): 101-110; Dong Qian, “阶级与审美之间的集体选择——《新民晚报》与社会主义社会初期上海的着装时尚) [Collective Selection Between Ideology and Taste: *Xinmin Evening News* and the Dress Fashion in Early Years of Socialist Shanghai]”, *Shanghai Culture*, no. 4 (2016): 33-45+126. For another prominent work on the complex interaction between state and urban culture, Zhang Jishun, *远去的都市:1950年代的上海 [A City Displaced: Shanghai in the 1950s]* (Beijing: Shehuikexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2015), accessed on Weread.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Gerth, *Unending Capitalism: How Consumerism Negated China’s Communist Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

over socialist fashion in the 1950s, Antonia Finnane, Sun Peidong, and Tina Mai Chen have complicated the conventional vision of a homogenized sartorial socialist fashion landscape.<sup>11</sup> While recognizing the reneged upon promises of tolerance made to the bourgeoisie by the CCP and affirming Gerth's position that consumers were not passive bystanders but instead negotiated their identities through material possessions, this study of the fashion industry fills a gap by including the small business owners. In doing so it connects the shifting trends of fashion to wider structural changes and nationalist narratives of the Chinese revolution.

Compared to other sectors of the economy, the highly Westernized fashion industry in Shanghai provides a unique lens from which to examine 1950s Shanghai's uneasy transition from the cultural hegemony of a mercantile treaty-port to that of a socialist city. Many mass-produced goods such as bicycles and sewing machines were easily integrated into the CCP's socialist vision because they were considered essential to proletarian life. On the other hand, the state, adapting the already potent ideas of nationhood growing out of anti-imperial struggles, was able to forcefully suppress Westernized arts, American films, and foreign churches, all of which it perceived as representing the poison of imperialist legacy. Clothes tailored in Western styles, however, had a more ambivalent status within the legacy of Western cultural influence. For one thing, despite several waves of pushback against foreign textiles waged by the Chinese public and elites since the early twentieth century, it was a lot harder to clearly delimit the scope of foreign styles, with which the term "fashion" (*shizhuang*) was implicitly associated in Chinese. As Gerth summarizes, "Both 'Chinese' and 'foreign' were flexible constructs" that "vary overtime in order

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<sup>11</sup> Antonia Finnane and Peidong Sun, "Textile and Apparel in the Mao Years: Uniformity, Variety, and the Limit of Autarchy," in *Making Fashion in Multiple Chinas: Chinese Styles in the Transglobal Landscape*, ed. Wessie Ling and Simona Segre-Reinach (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 16-43; Tina Mai Chen, "Dressing for the Party: Clothing, Citizenship, and Gender-Formation in Mao's China!," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 5, no. 2 (2001): 143-71.

to stigmatize specific commodities, companies, and consumers.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, the iconic styles that had symbolized modern Chinese masculinity and femininity over the first half of the century were all hybrid products that synthesized traditional sartorial elements with Western designs. These included the Sun Yat-sen jacket that the Communists took as their official outfit. Even after the takeover, Shanghai’s pre-1949 fashion culture remained deeply entrenched within urban society. Even if the practitioners of the industry were primarily small business owners, it operated through bourgeois and Western cultural hegemony at the level of everyday consciousness. With its belief in the historical inevitability of linear progress to socialism, the CCP imagined that in the new society high-end consumer businesses would naturally wither away. For this reason, for most of the 1950s it did not forcefully police what individuals bought or wore and allowed consumers space to argue that Westernized fashion was not contradictory to socialism.

Shanghai’s clothing industry had eight industry associations, including men’s suit (*xizhuang*), women’s fashion (*shizhuang*), shirt (*chenshan*), and cloth shoe (*buxie*).<sup>13</sup> Prior to 1949 these guild-like organizations regulated competition, set industry standards (prices and wages, for example), trained apprentices, and lobbied the government.<sup>14</sup> According to Groot, in the 1950s industry associations were transformed into corporatist organizations that represented the interests of private capitalists but also channeled state demands downwards.<sup>15</sup> The sources for this study come from the suit and fashion sectors where most stores were small-scale businesses with their own backroom workshops that engaged in both commerce and production. I employ reports sent to the Shanghai Bureau of Commerce and other municipal authorities by the Shanghai industry

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<sup>12</sup> Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and Creation of the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 20.

<sup>13</sup> Ren Shan, “1949-1965 年上海服装业发展研究 [Study on Shanghai Fashion Industry’s Development 1949-1956]” (master’s thesis, Donghua University, 2014), 20.

<sup>14</sup> Chen Huili, “近代上海服装行业相关同业公会研究 [Industry Associations of the Shanghai Fashion Industry in Modern Era]” (master’s thesis, Jiangnan University, 2020), 14-16.

<sup>15</sup> Groot, *Managing Transitions*, 70.

associations (*yongye gonghui*), particularly those filed by the Fashion Industry association, which specialized in Westernized women's dress, and the Suit Industry Association, which specialized in Westernized men's dress.<sup>16</sup> Collected in the Shanghai Municipal Archives, the majority were written upon the Party's request by management boards of the industry associations between 1953 and 1956 and appear to have been produced in preparation for the socialist transformation of commerce and industry. The voices appearing in them are therefore subjective assessments filtered through the state bureaucracy. Most often, they reflect what leaders in the industry associations chose to tell the Party. These reports, therefore, are marked most saliently by the absence of their subjects' own voices. While a store owner might be quoted complaining about the severe loss of revenue or an employee griping about the declining standard of meals provided by ownership, these testimonies were selected, compiled, and perhaps edited by industry association officials who found it necessary to paint an extremely bleak picture of the industry. To borrow the words of Michel Foucault, in this respect they are "lives of a few lines," which otherwise would be unknown if they had not been illuminated for a moment by their encounter with state power.<sup>17</sup> However, they are important precisely because narrated realities are part of the mental universe and competing discourses that affected the real albeit obscured lives of its characters in concrete and irreversible ways.

In addition to archival sources, I employ articles, editorials, and letters to the editor found in the *Xinmin Evening News* (*Xinmin wanbao*). A popular Shanghai daily founded in 1929 that after 1949 continued to be a main source of public information, *Xinmin* offers a way of reading public

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<sup>16</sup> Li Zhaoqing, "老上海时装研究(1910-1940s) [Old Shanghai's Fashion Industry 1910-1940s]" (Ph.D. diss., Shanghai Theatre Academy, 2015), 23.

<sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men," in *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 2001), 157.

sentiments, state intentions, and state-society interaction.<sup>18</sup> Before 1949, *Xinmin* pieces by and large reflect opinions, observations, and advocacies circulated within a somewhat left-leaning intellectual milieu. Under the new regime, the messages conveyed in *Xinmin* suggest the public stance of its editors and authors, making it a crucial site to observe the interaction between state and society.

Analyzing the transition into socialism through grassroots society helps explain the desires and circumstances in which people participated and negotiated the socialist revolution, but it also offers a framework to evaluate how China reached its current stage in the twentieth-first century. It is necessary to ask how China embarked on the road of eliminating the private economy because the resultant specter of economic scarcity and the collective memory of “Struggling with the Heaven, the Earth, and the People” shaped the mentality of a generation of Chinese who would dive into the sea of globalization in the Reform era, when all that used to be thought holy now appeared profaned. It is critical to ask how the CCP, despite China’s economic underdevelopment at the founding of the PRC, asserted itself as the last defense against Western culture and Western power in the imagination of revolutionary cosmopolitanism, while seventy years later an economically and politically empowered China attempts to undertake a similar cultural battle in a narrative of Realpolitik.

This paper begins with the origins of foreign fashion and the ambivalent urban sentiments in Shanghai towards Western fashion before the 1949 Communist takeover. It then explores the “post-liberation” transition from the old cultural hegemony to the new fashion regime through the experiences of fashion stores and fashion consumers, both of which interacted with and were acted

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<sup>18</sup> Helen Xiaoyan Wu, “Xinmin Evening News,” *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture*, accessed December 1, 2021, [https://contemporary\\_chinese\\_culture.en-academic.com/891/Xinmin\\_Evening\\_News](https://contemporary_chinese_culture.en-academic.com/891/Xinmin_Evening_News). The name, meaning “New People,” was a reformist neologism denoting the development of national character, espoused by intellectuals such as Liang Qichao.

upon by the new state. Despite the quick success of the Socialist Transformation of Industry and Commerce, evidence from 1955 to 1957 reveals the persistent existence of space for renegotiation over what constituted “socialist” fashion and socialist commerce. Based on such evidence, I conclude that the new cultural hegemony failed to take root during the first decade of the Communist regime. At least until 1957, societal ambivalence towards Western fashion remained and urban culture veered back and forth between cosmopolitanism and nationalism.

### Clothes as Instruments of Meaning-Making

When the First Opium War concluded in 1842, Shanghai became one of four treaty ports opened to the West as part of the Treaty of Nanking. In the narrative promoted by the Chinese state and most Chinese intellectuals, the barrage of Western gunfire marked the beginning of modern China (*jindai*). For many Chinese, most of all the CCP, the century that followed the Opium War serves as an emblematic symbol of national humiliation under imperialism and provides a powerful case for a unified China. For some others, it marks the start of an age of openness in which foreign “Old China Hands” mingled with Chinese, creating a charming cosmopolitanism. For proponents of this vision, the cheerful life of a global city was brought to an end by first by WWII and then the communist takeover. Neither prism is satisfactory. The former simplifies complex historical processes into the convenient dichotomous grids of imperialist oppression and colonial victimhood. The latter is a wishful rosy picture viewed from the top of a structural hierarchy, devoid of class and race.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> As David Graeber points out, those backed by the greater threat of force are prone to perceive social and cultural structures as a more simple and schematic kind, because they are usually not obliged to do interpretive labor—that is, to imagine alternative points of view. See David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (London: Melville House, 2015).

An examination of history through clothes refutes and complicates both interpretations. In China, the semantics of clothes had long been an instrument for the communication of finely tuned messages by either marking the indices of status or disrupting social parameters. Shifting political regimes were always matched by vestimentary regimes that deliberately subverted their predecessors. The Qing Empire's dress code for nobles and officials, for instance, including summer hats, robes, and sleeves with horse-shoe shaped cuffs, flipped the clothing norms of the Ming dynasty, denoted conformity to Manchu rule, and established hierarchies of rank within a multi-ethnic regime.<sup>20</sup> During the Taiping civil war (1850-1864), Taiping men wore their hair long and women "wore gaudy colors and styles that transgressed prevailing standards of informed good taste," deliberately inverting social norms of the incumbent Manchu regime.<sup>21</sup>

Westerners and Western material culture arrived on the Chinese coast at a time when the Manchu empire started to lose its dynamism and legitimacy.<sup>22</sup> Changes to fashion, the bodily markers of political regimes, were part of the societal change that came along with the decline and fall of imperial China. As early as the 1840s, Chinese fiction writing in the Yangtze Delta area depicted literati characters clad in imported Western cloth (*yangbu*), revealing linkages to the world economy of textile and its modern sensibilities in fashion.<sup>23</sup> In the 1850s, when Shanghai became the major center of foreign residence, its tailors began to make Westernized clothes for expatriates in the foreign settlements.<sup>24</sup> They came to be known as the Red Gang tailors (*hongbang caifeng*), as foreigners were considered red-haired. These tailors initially served mainly the

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<sup>20</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press), 25-26.

<sup>21</sup> Tobie Meyer-Fong, *What Remains: Coming to Terms with Civil War in 19th Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 90.

<sup>22</sup> Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 550-552.

<sup>23</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 65.

<sup>24</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 112.

expatriate communities and entertainment quarters.<sup>25</sup> However, even as traditional elites of the scholar class clung to the old vestimentary order that defined their privileged status, by the last decades of the Qing, transcultural agents—Christians, compradors, courtesans, oversea Chinese, and Western-educated students—escorted foreign elements of design into the wider public.<sup>26</sup> These early usherers of Westernized fashion were groups of people whose occupations necessitated the adoption of foreign styles, but they did not simply circulate, adapt, and use commodities for practical purposes. As was the case with previous periods of social and political transformation, the adoption and adaptation of foreign styles and conservative reactions to these cultural shifts were actions of profound meaning-making. As Finnane puts it, Chinese people of the twentieth century “wore the nation on their backs.”<sup>27</sup>

### **The Clothing Revolution in Modern China**

Chinese intellectuals and politicians of the early twentieth century engaged in a protracted debate of modernization and nation-building. Advocating for a consciousness of linear progress, they desired to become “contemporary” with modern societies in the West and many promoted the adoption of Western material culture, of which clothes were a particularly visible manifestation. Such consciousness and desire developed during times of political and cultural crisis. The Qing’s defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895 had an especially decisive impact on the mindsets of many Chinese intellectuals who saw Westernization of culture as a cure for national weakness.<sup>28</sup> In the aftermath of the 1901 Boxer Uprising, the tottering empire launched a last-ditched attempt to modernize, known as the New Policies. These reforms, which included the introduction of

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<sup>25</sup> Li, “Old Shanghai’s Fashion Industry,” 19.

<sup>26</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 17.

<sup>28</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 12.

Westernized uniforms for a new western-style military, reflected and contributed to a wider yearning for modifications in civilian wear.

In her 1943 “A Chronicle of Changing Clothes,” one of the most famous articles written on Chinese fashion, Eileen Chang locates the point of rupture in societal clothing culture around 1907, when “the fashions and fancies of the great commercial ports were swiftly introduced in the interior.”<sup>29</sup> In the last decade of imperial China, trousers, jackets, straw boaters, and leather shoes, all styles adopted from the West (often through Japan), became prevalent among educated young students in new-style schools.<sup>30</sup> By 1906, a newspaper article, one of many to openly discuss this topic, ardently advocated for a state-led change in appearance (*jianfa yifu*), stating, “To follow universalism, the Chinese hair cannot be preserved; to carry out militarism, the Chinese clothes cannot stay unchanged.”<sup>31</sup> Unlike Meiji Japan, however, the Qing state never endorsed whole-scale Westernization of clothing.

The 1911 Revolution that overthrew the Qing was accompanied by a wider shift in clothing culture toward Westernization. In December 1911, the majority of the provincial representatives showed up to the interim presidential election in Westernized clothes.<sup>32</sup> By a 1912 decree, the new government ordained frock coats, neckties, and top hats to be the formal wear for officials. Change came slower to wider society, where the interest of domestic textile industry and the Chinese public’s inability to afford new clothes both limited the adoption of Westernized styles.<sup>33</sup> Still, the end of Qing sumptuary strictures and the appearance of new officials wearing European styles

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<sup>29</sup> Zhang Ailing and Andrew F. Jones, “A Chronicle of Changing Clothes,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 11, no. 2 (2003): 427-441.

<sup>30</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 76.

<sup>31</sup> Yang Kuisong, “问道于器: 辛亥以来国人着装西化的成因与经过 [The Reasons for and the Process of the Westernization of Chinese Clothing Styles since the 1911 Revolution],” *Modern Chinese History Studies*, no. 5 (2020): 30.

<sup>32</sup> Yang Kuisong, “Westernization of Chinese Clothing Styles,” 31.

<sup>33</sup> Yang Kuisong, “Westernization of Chinese Clothing Styles,” 32-35. The 1912 Clothing Law mandated the sole of Chinese silk for official wears.

were part of a rupture with the past that observers at the time could hardly fail to notice.<sup>34</sup> While traditional Chinese aesthetics tended to favor wide and roomy clothes, a 1911 magazine articles observed that “fashionable women’s wear regarded short as beautiful” and featured female figures in short tight sleeves and short pants.<sup>35</sup> Advertisements in the pivotal Shanghai newspaper, *Shenbao*, reveal that right after the revolution, foreign outlets such as Whitelaw’s Department Store started marketing their clothes for the Chinese audience in Shanghai.<sup>36</sup> Over the decades that followed, men’s dress in followed a global trend toward simplicity and sobriety, while the spacious and flat women’s Manchu jackets with pipings and railings gave way to close-fitting clothes with a narrow cut.<sup>37</sup> The early-Republican fashion favored boyish straight lines for women, a trend that continued until the Nanjing decade (1927-1937).<sup>38</sup>

All commentators of the revolutionary period fashion attribute these changes to the influence of Western designs, which introduced Chinese tailors to the idea of fit—that clothes should delineate the human body and offered ease for movement—alongside the ideal of physical fitness.<sup>39</sup> Marked by a crusading zeal toward “civilized” modernity, the reformist agenda for cultural renewal invested the quotidian world with political connotations. The appearance of the body in everyday life signaled modernity and national strength and was tightly wrapped up in the Chinese nation-building project.<sup>40</sup> Tellingly, the Chinese media termed the slim and high-necked dress imported from Japan as “civilized new dress” (*wenming xinzhuang*), a student wear which

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<sup>34</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 12.

<sup>35</sup> Xu Hualong, 上海服装文化史 [*The History of Clothing Culture in Shanghai*] (Shanghai: Dongfang Chuban Zhongxin), 113-114; Judge, *Republican Lens*, 86.

<sup>36</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 97.

<sup>37</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 80, 92.

<sup>38</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 93.

<sup>39</sup> Wan Fang, “民国时期上海女装西化现象研究 [The Westernization of Woman’s Wear in Shanghai during the Republican Period],” 13-32. See also Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 93.

<sup>40</sup> Joan Judge, *Republican Lens: Gender Visuality, and Experience in the Early Chinese Periodic Press* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 6.

later became a powerful May-Fourth symbol.<sup>41</sup> In magazines, the state of the nation was discussed side by side with modern techniques for cutting garments.<sup>42</sup> As Eileen Chang would observe, “[s]ocial flowers and prostitutes” of the early Republic became fond of wearing spectacles for ornament because society associated spectacles with the notion of modernity.<sup>43</sup> Be it intellectuals or common urbanites, the search for modern China looked to the Westernized styles as an explicit frame of reference.<sup>44</sup>

The ardent desire by many reformers for material modernity collided with the anxious reactions of more conservative groups. New modes of dressing not only transgressed the old sumptuary lines of nation, gender, and class, they were intertwined with the complex and bitter history of Chinese encounters with the imperialism of free trade. It was in treaty ports established through imperial wars that mechanized textile production, enabled by machinery imported from abroad, infiltrated the quotidian life of urbanites.<sup>45</sup> “European and American merchants won [Chinese] women over,” wrote Bao Tianxiao, a Republican-era intellectual.<sup>46</sup> To him, high heels and sheer silk stockings marked the defeat of Chinese culture by Western fashions. In fact, intellectuals advocating for new clothes as symbols of civilization implicitly acknowledged a racialized hierarchy of cultures, in which “Chinese” was often synonymous with stagnation. China’s past was “so dilatory and so quiet,” wrote Eileen Chang in her 1943 article, that “over the course of three hundred years of Manchu rule, women lacked anything that might be referred to as fashion.” Chang’s sarcastic words implicated a certain degree of self-deprecation that was typical of intellectuals of her time—it was the West that injected fashion into a motionless empire, the

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<sup>41</sup> Xu, *Clothing Culture*, 2.

<sup>42</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 95.

<sup>43</sup> Zhang, “Chronicle,” 434.

<sup>44</sup> Judge, *Republican Lens*, 23, 24.

<sup>45</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 107.

<sup>46</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 97.

same way that industrial capitalism was thought to have introduced linear progress into a motionless history. As Chinese elites acquiesced to the idea that modernity could only come from the outside, the craze for Western material culture reflects an internationalization of “semi-colonial” cultural relations between China and the metropolitan West.

It is therefore no surprise that foreign fashion, while appreciated by the cosmopolitan elites as a harbinger of progress, also engendered societal anxiety and sparked reactions from voyeuristic curiosity to vehement hostility. Fashion, along with other aspects of culture, was quickly construed by ordinary citizens living with foreign and colonial presence as the border guard of national culture. Under a “semi-colonial” context, the adoption of Westernized lifestyle implied membership in classes that lay on the margins of a national boundary still being forged. In the late nineteenth century, compradors, who served as the bicultural middlemen and forged a lifestyle that mixed the exotic and the traditional, were often portrayed as lackeys of foreigners, transferring China's wealth outward. Children in the streets of Shanghai reportedly shouted “Beat the fake foreigner!” at by-passers wearing foreign clothes.<sup>47</sup> Shanghai's tabloids conjured up acerbic phrases like “lion heads and donkey feet” to ridicule those Chinese who appeared Westernized.<sup>48</sup> As courtesans were the first women to conspicuously adopt Western fashion trends, students who wore stylish Westernized clothes were considered by many to be redolent of escorts and therefore morally depraved.<sup>49</sup> As nationalism grew in the early 1910s, progressive journals like *Women's*

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<sup>47</sup> Xu, *Clothing Culture*, 84

<sup>48</sup> Xu, *Clothing Culture*, 84

<sup>49</sup> Hang Bangqing's 1892 *Sing-Song Girls of Shanghai*, one of the first novels set in Shanghai and the founding work of the “Shanghai School” (*haipai*) of literature, depicted imported fashion to an elaborate extent. For example, see Han Bangqing, *海上花列传 [Sing-song Girls of Shanghai]* (Beijing: Huaxia Chebanshe, 2016), accessed on Weredad. Collections of photographic portraits suggest that Western fashions had been added to the repertoire of courtesans by the early twentieth century. Victorian dresses, with flowered straw hats, high-button shoes, lace, bows, and fur-trimmed collars were featured in the 1917 collection of courtesans' self-portraits. Hershatter, 83. See Bao Tianxiao, *钏影楼回忆录 [Memoir of the Xunying Tower]* (Beijing: Zhongguo Dabaikequanshu Chubansh, 2009), 438-439. For articles on *Women's Times*, see Xu, *Clothing Culture*, 118. For YWCA's criticism, see Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 99.

*Times* (*Funü Shibao*) and organizations such as Young Women's Christian Association both argued that women's fascination with Western material culture was a sign of national weakness and a loss of dignity.<sup>50</sup> These responses reveal that many groups likened foreign textiles and foreign styles to encroachments on China's national psyche and economy.<sup>51</sup>

The combination of zeal and anxiety continued into 1920s Shanghai, when a full-fledging fashion industry took shape. By the time of the Nanjing decade (1927-1937), now remembered as China's golden age of fashion, Westernized styles could be seen everywhere in the streets of Shanghai. Expatriates often marveled at Chinese tailors' ability to make exact copies of the latest foreign styles.<sup>52</sup> Chinese merchants and Russian expatriates opened burgeoning fashion stores in the International Settlement and French Concession.<sup>53</sup> As Chinese-inflected global fashion became accessible to the public in China's fashion capital, an emerging trans-national popular culture emerged catering to urbanites' quest for novel entertainments and visual wonders. Calendar posters marked the heyday of the vernacular press with photos of cover girls clad with sleeveless tops, exposed thighs, and high heels. The fashion industry, propelled by industrial production, the expansion of retail outlets, and the maturation of the advertising industry, cultivated a cultural sophistication that turned the exotic into the everyday.<sup>54</sup> However, as seen through anti-imperialist boycotts and National Products Exhibitions, clothes continued to acquire weighty political meanings in a social environment resembling other imperial and colonial settings.<sup>55</sup> "Shanghai society manifested some deep anxieties that do not seem qualitatively different from those evident in Bombay or Calcutta," Finanne observes.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, even through the 1930s the

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<sup>50</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 99.

<sup>51</sup> Judge, *Republican Lens*, 62

<sup>52</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 113.

<sup>53</sup> Li, "Old Shanghai's Fashion Industry," 19.

<sup>54</sup> Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor*, 51-76.

<sup>55</sup> For a discussion on these topics, see Gerth, *China Made*.

<sup>56</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 104.

burgeoning fashion scene had yet to directly impact the everyday clothing choices of most Chinese in the city. Retrospective surveys show that only the modestly prosperous stratum of Shanghai could afford tailors and ready-to-wear clothes. The majority still wore clothes made at home.<sup>57</sup> The spectacles of *qipao* and department stores featuring European mannequins remained unaffordable to the laboring masses, whose voices were often not included in printed media.

Thus, by the second half of the Republican period, foreign fashion captured a cultural ambivalence caught in the tension between reactive nationalism and an appreciation for cosmopolitan modernity, that was also interwoven in dynamics of gender, class, and nation. During the Chinese Civil War (1946-1949), this cultural anxiety over foreign clothes and other foreign material comforts came to a head when goods and troops from the United States revived the bitter memory of treaty-port era. The societal discourses over Shanghai's Westernized material culture foreshadowed the languages that the CCP adopted after its accession to power in 1949. Long after foreigners were driven out of the city and tangible foreign influence purged from its surface, the "semi-colonial" past of Shanghai and the disappointed chase of a global modernity proved to be resilient sites of memory. The anti-imperial rhetoric that the CCP endorsed struck familiar chords, exposing the link between the socialist experiment and reactive nationalist fervor.

### **Western Fashion on the Eve of Communist Victory**

To understand why the 1956 Socialist Transformation of Industry and Commerce went relatively smoothly in Shanghai, historically-minded scholars have looked at how the way was paved by the economic, political, and cultural conditions of the 1940s. They argue that decades of social and political turmoil had shifted societal ideology toward sympathy for socialism, enabling

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<sup>57</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes*, 115.

the CCP to gain significant influence among the petty urbanites.<sup>58</sup> An examination of nationalist sentiments seems to delineate a similar narrative. While in 1945 Shanghai's residents ardently welcomed American troops who came to enforce the Kuomintang (KMT)'s takeover of the city, this quickly changed to anxiety and anger against American imperialist practices.<sup>59</sup> In films during the Civil War, the so-called Sun Yatsen jacket, a Chinese style that incorporated Westernized features, always symbolized the hero while villains were featured wearing fancy Western suits and leather shoes, living in elaborately furnished Westernized apartments and immersed in lavish Westernized lifestyles.<sup>60</sup> Together with the fundamental social, economic and cultural change brought to China by the War of Resistance and the Civil War, as well as the appalling extent of corruption and incompetence of the KMT, the circumstances invoked a renewed sense of national crisis, providing a favorable ground for a radical change both in regime and in culture.

This well-grounded narrative is congruous with the CCP's official historiography, one in which the Chinese people, sick-and-tried of imperialism and capitalism, threw off their chains and stood up to the West. It resonates well with Mao's famous 1949 statement that the prestige of U.S. imperialism had gone "bankrupt" among the Chinese people.<sup>61</sup> In this simplistic historiography, Shanghai, the city that embodied China's past humiliation vis-à-vis the West, embraced the Communist victory and reorganized under the new regime to become a glorious production-oriented city. The story of the city's transformation is thus blessed with a veneer of historical inevitability in which imperialist intrusion is defeated by popular response.

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<sup>58</sup> Wen-Hsin Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 3, 196.

<sup>59</sup> For an account of this anxiety through the lens of Shanghai comic arts from 1945 to 1950, see Adam Cathcart, "Atrocities, Insults, and 'Jeep Girls': Depictions of the U.S. Military in China, 1945-1949," *International Journal of Comic Art* 10, no. 1 (2018): 140-154.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph W. Esherick, "War and Revolution: Chinese Society during the 1940s," *Twentieth-Century China* 27, no. 1 (2001): 8, 22.

<sup>61</sup> Mao Zedong, "Farewell, Leighton Stuart," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1961), 4: 438.

Nevertheless, the realm of everyday material culture reveals an uneasy picture of Shanghai's transition across the 1949 divide. In 1943, wartime treaties with the Allied Powers relinquished their long-held extra-territorial rights, bringing an end to the era of treaty ports. However, the long shadow of "semi-colonial" culture lived on. In the late 1940s, Shanghai's Westernized urbanites displayed profound everyday tensions between their manifested sentiment of national crisis, which always gets emphasized in official history, and their simultaneous appreciation of Western material culture. Close to the end of the Civil War, such opposing and conflicted sentiments shed light on the urban culture that the Communist Party inherited from its predecessor.

While fashion by and large belonged to the cultural sphere, attitudes toward it were overwhelmingly shaped by concrete encounters with hegemony in economic, political, and social spheres. After the end of the war with Japan, economic and social events ranging from trade policies to the personal conducts of American soldiers reignited nationalist sentiments against foreign presence in China. The Sino-American Commercial Treaty, signed by the KMT on November 4, 1946, was condemned by the CCP as National Humiliation.<sup>62</sup> This indictment, whether overstated or not, clearly resonated among much of the public as demonstrated by a burst of stories in *Xinmin* that documented misbehavior by American troops and conveyed sentiments of economic and moral crisis. One contribution to *Xinmin* warned that American economic penetration threatened a return of Open Door Policy imperialism, saying, "Our door has been reopened, to let the foreign masters thrive, purchase, manufacture, trade, live and voyage freely on this sub-colonial land."<sup>63</sup> A rape committed by an American soldier in Beijing in December 1946

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<sup>62</sup> M. E. Orlean, "The Sino-American Commercial Treaty of 1946," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (1948): 354.

<sup>63</sup> Yu Yue, "读中美商约有感 [Thought on the Sino-American Commercial Treaty]," *Xinmin Evening News*, Nov. 18, 1946.

spurred massive demonstrations and boycotts of American goods and crystallized the bitter resentment of many Chinese against the foreign presence in China.<sup>64</sup>

By 1948, Shanghai was overwhelmed with American-imported goods, and foreigners holding foreign currency enjoyed exclusive protection from the inflation that impoverished the Chinese.<sup>65</sup> Noel Barber, a British expatriate journalist, described Shanghai during the Civil War as “the city of contrasts.”<sup>66</sup> While war inflicted inflation and poverty upon the Chinese, it nevertheless made Shanghai a “cut-price paradise” for Westerners and allowed them to continue their extravagant lifestyles.<sup>67</sup> Chinese refugees huddled together on the pavements, while the Shanghai Club, the principal men’s club for British residents, still offered so plentiful wines, spirits, cigarettes, and petrols that a newcomer in 1948 “couldn’t take in the sight of all those bottles behind the bar.”<sup>68</sup> This “riotouse abundance” that newcomers marveled at contrasted sharply with the Chinese beggars waiting for leftovers outside the American-owned restaurants on Nanking Road.<sup>69</sup>

However, even amid the growing national crisis and after the relinquishment of extra-territoriality, the cosmopolitan craving for Western culture, with its roots in the treaty-port era, clearly remained as demonstrated by narratives surrounding Western fashion. A sarcastic article in *Xinmin* from July 1946 depicted the potent psychological legacy of colonial aura:

In Shanghai, you can hardly find anyone who has never used foreign goods . . . Walking along Avenue Joffre, your attention was suddenly caught by a beautiful figure, a bejeweled Chinese daughter arm in arm with a foreign teenager wandering from across the street. Foreign tongue, foreign lover, foreign clothes, foreign wallets . . . everything is foreign except her flesh that cannot change . . . You went to Mary's tobacco shop. The whole place is filled with foreign

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<sup>64</sup> Esherick, “War and Revolution,” 24; Robert Shaffer, “A Rape in Beijing, December 1946: GIs, Nationalist Protests, and U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Pacific Historical Review* 69, no. 1 (2000): 45.

<sup>65</sup> Noel Barber, *The Fall of Shanghai* (New York: Putnam, 1979), 36-37. In February 1947, 12,000 Chinese yuan equaled one US dollar.

<sup>66</sup> Barber, *Fall of Shanghai*, 16.

<sup>67</sup> Barber, *Fall of Shanghai*, 18.

<sup>68</sup> Barber, *Fall of Shanghai*, 35.

<sup>69</sup> Barber, *Fall of Shanghai*, 31.

goods, except the proprietress, a Chinese lady using a foreign nickname. She says to you in contempt: “We also sell Chinese products.”<sup>70</sup>

The impression that 1946 Shanghai left to the author was unambiguous, that “the 48 thousand Western sojourners,” in the eyes of many Shanghai, have given the city “all its spiritual and material civilization.”<sup>71</sup>

Beyond doubt, the physical imprints of Western imperialism were fundamental in the making of Shanghai. The “Old China Hands” and colonial officials felt Shanghai to be a product of their own work, that they had a legitimate claim to the city of splendor. And they were right to some extent. The infrastructural construction under the foreign concessions transformed the face of the city. As Wen-hsin Yeh writes, “Shanghai was a spatially re-imagined place of clock towers, church steeples, park greens, paved roads, street lights, tramways, domed tops, vaulted ceilings, stepped entrances, colonnaded fronts, and steel and cement structures that housed images of the Madonna and child.”<sup>72</sup> Its banking offices, docks, warehouses, clubs, hostels, waterfront bars, fire stations, schools, printing houses, churches, and police stations all make evident the Western influence.

However, while Westerners had shaped the spacial order of other treaty ports, many Shanghai urbanites took pride in their highly Westernized lifestyle and cosmopolitan sophistication, a distinct culture that separated the city from the rest of China. The obsession of some Shanghai residents over Western culture can be detected in the pages of *Xinmin*. In 1946, for example, *Xinmin* argued that Shanghai’s culture had been “opening up” (*kaifang*) as modern ladies often publicly wore clothes printed with English words.<sup>73</sup> Column contributors traced the first Chinese person to wear Western suits, allegedly the son of a late-Qing literati in Beijing who had learnt

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<sup>70</sup> “漫步在霞飞路上 [Wandering on Avenue Joffre],” *Xinmin Evening News*, July 26, 1946.

<sup>71</sup> “Wandering on Avenue Joffre.”

<sup>72</sup> Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor*, 54.

<sup>73</sup> “上海点滴 [Shanghai Everyday Life],” *Xinmin Evening News*, Aug. 22, 1946.

pidgin English when befriending the “foreign devils.” According to the probably fictitious story, he had fled to Hong Kong after leading the British and French into the Qing Summer Palace in 1860 which the foreign soldiers then looted and burned. Unable to return to China, the traitorous Chinese man stayed in Hong Kong under British rule, cut off his queue, and put on Western suits. As the looting of the Summer Palace is one of the most infamous events in China’s “Century of



Figure 1: A 1946 *Shanghai* magazine cover showing a Chinese woman clutching to the arm of a tall, well-built American soldier. Donning wedged shoes, the woman displays her Westernization via her stylish outfit. These ladies who cavorted with American troops during the Civil War were derisively called “jeep girls.” Source: Cathcart, “Jeep Girls,” 145.

Humiliation,” it seems quite astonishing that this contribution in 1947 was able to compliment this man, who could well be accused of being a national traitor, as a “bold pioneer” leading the way for national culture in clothing.<sup>74</sup> Another contributor to *Xinmin* described foreign female models behind the windows of department stores as “blue-eyed heroes” who “inspired the enthusiasm for European and American fashion.”<sup>75</sup> In a 1948 story on second-hand men’s suits, the author argued that “Chinese always follow the Euro-American styles when choosing suits” and people who shopped on Avenue Joffre are “highly foreignized Chinese.”<sup>76</sup>

These articles, together with other popular media sources (See Figure 1), demonstrate the

<sup>74</sup> Chen Tong, “第一个着西装的中国人 [The First Chinese to Wear Suit],” *Xinmin Evening News*, Sep. 9, 1947.

<sup>75</sup> “液体丝袜光临上海 [Liquid Silk Stocking Comes to Shanghai],” Apr. 29, 1947; “衣冠分别身价高低，模特儿有幸与不幸 [Difference in Clothes and Social Status, the Fortunes and Misfortunes of Models],” *Xinmin Evening News*, Oct. 27, 1947.

<sup>76</sup> “从旧衣市场看上海 [Looking at Shanghai through the Second-Hand Clothes Market],” *Xinmin Evening News*, Sep. 25, 1948.

familiarity and self-conscious obsession with foreign culture and the West, which still dominated the cosmopolitan atmosphere of everyday life during the Civil War. Yet, these accounts reflecting such obsession appeared at the exact same time when societal responses towards the foreign were again in flux, leaning toward the side of uneasiness or antagonism. From historical essays to commercial fads, the *Xinmin* pieces gave evidence to a tension—on one side was the lure of the foreign that called to mind an internalized appreciation for the colonial order, and on the other side was a nationalist fervor grounded in historical memories of imperialism. The persistence of Western cultural hegemony that seemed to belie the humiliating memory of imperialism contrasted sharply with the vehement grievance expressed in newspapers and nationalist protests. It is worth noting that *Xinmin* was a left-leaning newspaper, whose authors and editors were particularly vocal in their nationalist appeals. Apparently, these progressive and patriotic authors and many other Shanghai urbanites were not at all prepared to align every aspect of their life strictly along the lines of national allegiance.

Perhaps we can identify the young women in the *Xinmin* stories as bearers of the burdens of representation, objects both of desire and anxiety, and the Westernized suit-wearers as the emasculated colonial men, objects of ridicule and bitterness. Narratives surrounding them displayed a typical psychological anxiety under the colonial context. While Shanghai itself was a hybrid, neither foreign nor Chinese, and while historians debated whether or not Shanghai had been a colonial city, the everyday objects that citizens used and desired had their distinct labels and told unambiguous stories of the prevailing hegemony of Western culture.

To Noel Barber, Shanghai before the takeover was the “last oasis of yesterday in the China of tomorrow.”<sup>77</sup> Of course, Barber, like other expatriates, experienced and remembered Shanghai

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<sup>77</sup> Noel, *Fall of Shanghai*, 13.

through a rosy lens, believing it was “a city of free choice” where “[n]o colonial administrators had imported cheap indentured labor to work in the factories erected by the white men.”<sup>78</sup> Whether or not the Chinese counterparts of his time shared this wishful view, Barber was right in that Shanghai was indeed a product of yesterday, shaped by the promises and tensions of mercantilist imperialism and industrial capitalism.

In May 1949, the KMT fled without a fight. Daybreak befell upon the city of yesterday. On Wednesday, May 25<sup>th</sup>, the people of Shanghai woke up to find Communist troops sitting along the roadside. However, Shanghai and its six million residents did not become “socialist” overnight. The huge city remained fragmented, diverse, and poverty-stricken as it was before the takeover, a “complex situation” in the words of Chen Yi. Necessity ensured that pre-1949 institutions and industries would continue to play major roles in the early years of the new republic even as the CCP carried out its prolonged mission of social reforms.<sup>79</sup> The Communists inherited the treaty-port legacies and had to figure out how to deal with them. In the ensuing decade of socialist transformation, representatives of the new regime negotiated laboriously their vision of New China with people coming from a variety of backgrounds and possessing different worldviews.

### The Decade of Socialist Transformation

The official historiography in China, along with many Western scholars, depicts the early “post-liberation” years between 1949 and 1953 as the “recovery period” or “honeymoon period” when the communist party encouraged the recovery of private industry in order to revive the

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<sup>78</sup> Noel, *Fall of Shanghai*, 25.

<sup>79</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see *Dilemma of Victory*.

production of China's war-torn industries.<sup>80</sup> This period adhered to Mao's design for New Democracy, which originated in the First United Front of the 1920s and was fully established in his 1940 essay "On New Democracy." The New Democracy Period in theory combined a cross-class coalition with semi-democratic political institutions and a public-private hybrid economy. According to Mao's original design, it would continue for an indefinite period of time until conditions allowed for the nationwide socialist transformation of commerce and industries to be completed.<sup>81</sup>

Three major campaigns characterized the Party's efforts at mass mobilization during this period of recovery. The Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries in 1950 and 1951 persecuted former KMT members, criminal gangs, and religious sects, leading to the imprisonments of 2 million and numerous mass executions. The Three-Anti Campaign in 1951 targeted party cadres and bureaucratic officials allegedly corrupted by the bourgeoisie. The subsequent Five-Anti Campaign in 1952 targeted the bourgeoisie in response to the bureaucratic rentier-capitalist behaviors in state capitalism, such as tax evasion and appropriation of state supplies.<sup>82</sup>

In June 1953, the central committee of the CCP announced the Party's "General Line for the Transitional Period."<sup>83</sup> This signaled an earlier-than-expected shift from New Democracy to socialism and therefore an end to the previous promises that the dual private-public economy

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<sup>80</sup> Zhu Jinhai et al., eds., 上海通史 [*General History of Shanghai*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1999), 12: 56-63, 68-70. For one study that refers to the early 1950s as the "honeymoon period," see Tiejun Cheng and Mark Selden, "The Origins and Social Consequences of China's Hukou System," *The China Quarterly* 139 (1994): 646.

<sup>81</sup> Nara Dillon, "New Democracy and the Demise of Private Charity in Shanghai," in *Dilemmas of Victory*, ed. Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 80.

<sup>82</sup> Cliver, "Surviving Socialism," 149; So, "Policy-Making and Political Economy," 695.

<sup>83</sup> Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, "The Early Years of the People's Republic of China: An Introduction," in *Dilemmas of Victory*, ed. Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1-5. The General Line was a surprise to cadres and capitalists as it was more radical than the Party's previous statements. See Hua-Yu Li, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China, 1948-1953* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 2.

would exist for a protracted period of time.<sup>84</sup> From 1949-1956, the state economy incorporated the private sector into centralized planning and state control through “state capitalism.” Initially, state capitalism took various forms ranging from state purchases from and contracts with private corporations—which the CCP inherited from the KMT’s wartime economic policies—to public-



Figure 2: 1956 Celebration of the completion of public-private joint management on Nanjing Road outside the famous Yong'an Department Store. Yong'an, opened in 1918, was one of the most elite department stores in Shanghai. Source: “历史上的公私合营 [Public-Private Joint Management in History],” *Zhihu*, <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/84042105> (Accessed April 16, 2022).

private joint ventures.<sup>85</sup> From 1953’s General Line, however, the Party announced that the conversion of private companies in commerce and manufacturing to joint state-private ownership would be the final stage of state capitalism before the realization of full state ownership.<sup>86</sup>

In 1953, Li Weihan, head of the CCP’s United Front Work Department, which was responsible for coopting the national capitalists, estimated that the process of socialization would take fifteen years to complete.<sup>87</sup> In 1955, however, Mao shortened the period to just two years from 1956 to 1957. While Party leaders predicted that the socialization of industry and commerce would require a massive struggle surpassing all previous campaigns, in

<sup>84</sup> So, “Policy-Making and Political Economy,” 686. In 1953, Li Weihan brought up the term “state capitalism” in a report to the Politburo. See Liu Jianhui and Wang Hongxu, “The Origins of the General Line for the Transition Period and of the Acceleration of the Chinese Socialist Transformation in Summer 1955,” *The China Quarterly* 187 (2006): 725.

<sup>85</sup> Cliver, “Surviving Socialism,” 143, 144; So, “Policy-Making and Political Economy,” 686.

<sup>86</sup> So, “Policy-Making and Political Economy,” 687.

<sup>87</sup> Dillon, “Demise of Private Charity,” 90; Cliver, “Surviving Socialism,” 154. Likewise, in March 1953, mayor Chen Yi said it would take 10 or 20 years to convert all private corporations into state-owned enterprises. See Chen Yi, “陈毅在上海市第一届第三次工商界代表会议上的讲话” [Chen Yi’s Speech in the Third Session of the First Conference of Shanghai Business and Industrial Communities],” in 中国资本主义工商业的社会主义改造：上海卷（上）[*China’s Socialist Transformation of Capitalist Industry and Commerce: Shanghai, Volume I*], ed. Zhonggong Shanghai Shiwei Tongzhanbu, Zhonggong Shanghai Shiwei Dangshi Yanjiushi, and Shanghaishi Danganguan (Beijing: Zhonggong Dangshi Chubanshe, 1993), 185.

January 1956, Beijing and Shanghai almost seamlessly completed their transitions to public-private joint management (Figure 2). The former owners still received shares and, in many cases, continued to work as managers.<sup>88</sup> Rather than acting as agents of resistance, in many cases the active cooperation of capitalists reduced the whole process to the mere paperwork of government buyout.<sup>89</sup>

### New Hegemony in the Making

While a Chinese socialist state was a vision that the CCP had to create largely from scratch, by 1949 ideas of nationhood and nationalism growing out of anti-imperial struggle already had a potent resonance which the CCP was able to adopt and adapt. In the CCP's own narrative, the end of the Civil War was marked not just by the triumph of a communist party, but the final victory of China's century-long national struggle against imperialism. By taking a side in an already existing tension and juxtaposing capitalism with Western imperialism, the new regime reconciled the contours of socialism, supposedly universal, with the finite boundaries of nationhood. In his 1949 speech, "Cast Away Illusions, Prepare for the Struggle," Mao described the civil war as an invasion of the US against the Chinese people.<sup>90</sup> Referring to the fact that Chiang's army was subsidized by the US, Mao put it into the long list of anti-imperial struggles which he traced all the way back to the Opium War. "From the time of China's defeat in the Opium War," wrote Mao, "Chinese progressives went through untold hardships in their quest for truth from the Western countries."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Andrew G. Walder, *China under Mao: A Revolution Derailed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 79.

<sup>89</sup> Dillon, "Demise of Private Charity," 99; Zhu et al., *General History of Shanghai*, 81.

<sup>90</sup> Mao Zedong, "Cast Away the Illusions, Prepare for the Struggle," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1961), 4: 426

<sup>91</sup> Mao Zedong, "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1961), 4: 412.

Not anymore. The CCP declared the West to have gone “bankrupt” in the eyes of the Chinese people.

Mindful of the city’s colonial legacies, the Communist government in Shanghai was unwilling to reconcile with what it perceived as the worship of Western and bourgeois culture. The CCP, with its Marxist belief in a nationalist, utopian transcendence of the legacy of “semi-colonialism,” attempted to tear down the old cultural hegemony and create a “socialist new human.” After a century under imperialism and decades of disillusionment with the West, for many the Marxist ideal of linear progress and total transcendence of the old filled a spiritual vacuum. Rather than coping with the awkward legacy of the cosmopolitan and “semi-colonial” past, as the KMT had tried after relinquishing extra-territorial rights, it seemed easier to impose the totalizing expectations of a new national culture. As discourse on the eve of takeover shows, there had been longstanding grievances over the continued Western presence in Shanghai. Clearly, the tragic history of national weakness provided an incentive for many urbanites to accept a new China that took matters into her own hands.

In the 1940s, the Party formed its alliance with civil society by utilizing its counter-hegemonic position against imperialism and capitalism. Upon entering Shanghai, the Party aligned with the side of nationalistic anxiety. Almost immediately after the communist takeover, appreciative voices of cosmopolitanism disappeared from official news outlets and gave way to anti-foreignism. In June 1949, only several weeks after the PLA captured Shanghai, *Xinmin* ran a piece on five foreign women who after allegedly beating some Chinese kids in public had been turned in to the police by an indignant passerby. The author specifically compared it to a similar case in Hong Kong, where a foreign perpetrator who hit a child with a bike and beat an onlooker who interfered was exempted from punishment. “This is where a country differs from a colony,” the author

concluded.<sup>92</sup> In January 1950, a contributor wrote a piece on how Saint John's University in Shanghai used to be a colonial institution where a few “Upper-Class Chinese” lived a Westernized life but since the end of WWII had become a center of the national revolutionary movement.<sup>93</sup> In September 1950, *Xinmin* published a sarcastic paragraph scorning “foreign worshippers” in the upscale neighborhood of west Shanghai who had purchased brandy that turned out to be fake wine.<sup>94</sup> While in 1946 *Xinmin* depicted a “Chinese daughter arm-in-arm with a foreign teenager” with sarcasm, in 1950 it openly condemned the marriage of Korean women and American soldiers under Rhee Syngman’s regime as a form of prostitution. The author alleged that Ewha Women’s University ran a special course teaching rich Korean daughters how to befriend and get along with American soldiers and even gave a name list of those prestigious daughters who had married Americans.<sup>95</sup> Clearly, *Xinmin*, now an official state press, had gone nativist and adopted a far less ambivalent attitude towards foreign cultural hegemony.<sup>96</sup> Of course, the public stance that *Xinmin* took does not tell us much about what its editors and authors really thought. Certainly, non-revolutionaries could not become true believers overnight. It is more likely that they sensed the political winds and quickly learnt a new set of vocabularies.

As citizens learnt to speak in socialist lexicons, they learnt that the foreign was always paired with the bourgeoisie. Under the new regime in which every Chinese must “lean either to the side of imperialism or to the side of socialism,” Westernized Chinese urbanites fell into an ambivalent category.<sup>97</sup> In 1949 Mao proclaimed that the People (allies of the CCP) are “the working class, the

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<sup>92</sup> Yang Liufeng 杨柳风, “管闲事打不平: 两个地方的两件事实 [Stand Up against Injustice: Two Incidents from Two Places],” *Xinmin Evening News*, June 19, 1949.

<sup>93</sup> “象牙之塔归人民 [The Ivory Tower Belongs to the People],” *Xinmin Evening News*, Jan. 2, 1950.

<sup>94</sup> “拜洋者喝假白兰地 还称赞味美的原因 [Foreign Worshippers Drink Fake Brandy and Compliment the Flavor],” *Xinmin Evening News*, Sep. 8, 1950.

<sup>95</sup> Min Hua 民华, 请看美帝的走狗 [Look at the Running Dogs of American Imperialism],” *Xinmin Evening News*, Mar. 6, 1950.

<sup>96</sup> Zhang, *A City Displaced*, accessed on Weread.

<sup>97</sup> Mao, “On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship,” 415.

peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie.” However, the connection of many petty bourgeoisie to Western culture made this promise tenuous. Take the example of a confession in *Xinmin* from 1952. Fang Juemin, the son of a high-level *yanghang* (foreign firms) employee (a member of the petty bourgeoisie), described how his father had encouraged him to follow the Western ideal of individualism, to study abroad in the U.S., and to marry a British wife. “My father poisoned me with these colonial thoughts. . . I am determined to jump out of the mire of bourgeois thought.” In critiquing the foreign together with the capitalist and the feudalist, the new regime sent out a clear message: after a century of following foreign concepts of what it means to be modern, revolutionary China would enter the modern world on its own terms. While in the past, Shanghai had relied on Western sources to provide the blueprints of modernity, the new regime prescribed an alternative path. Remolding nationhood and eradicating Western hegemony became a project coterminous with that of socialism.

As the CCP attempted to remold Shanghai’s urban culture, however, ambiguity toward its Western legacy did not disappear overnight. Rather, it sank beneath the surface of formal discourse. Like the editors of *Xinmin*, urbanites sensed the preference of the new regime and made the appropriate gestures of compliance. At the same time, Shanghai was indeed a stronghold of reactive nationalism—there likely was genuine appreciation, especially among those who were not privileged enough to take part in Shanghai’s cosmopolitanism, for the new regime’s nationalist vocabulary and the ideal figure of the “socialist new human.”

### **Spontaneity and Coercion in Changes to Fashion**

Right after the 1949 Communist takeover, the fashion industry confronted a seemingly spontaneous consumer break with Western culture. Even before the start of political campaigns,

the Shanghai that was reborn under the CCP already exuded a fresh breath of simplicity and frugality, according to observers at the time. In 1949 *Xinmin* reported that men started to wear grey leather shoes and stopped wearing ties.<sup>98</sup> While class hierarchies and visual differentiation based on clothes still existed, new trends of socialist fashion quickly proliferated in the streets.<sup>99</sup> Urban women replaced their tight *qipao* with cadre uniforms and cotton shoes. The windows of fashions stores became plain with proletarian dresses that conveyed austerity and egalitarianism. As the Shanghainese writer Wei Shaochang recalled, soon after “liberation” *Remin* suits and Lenin coats immediately became the fashionable apparel in the streets. Less men appeared in Western suits and more showed up in Sun Yat-sen suits, or as Westerners later called it, Mao suits.<sup>100</sup> Women put on androgynous clothes more convenient for work and sported a one-piece Russian-style dress called *Bulaji*, a colorful style considered to be socialist until the Sino-Soviet break.<sup>101</sup>

Fashion and cultural aesthetics mattered for the CCP because they demarcated a line between friend and enemy. As the Party sought to weed out old aesthetics by replacing remnants of “feudal” “pornographic” and “imperial colonial” consumer culture with a coarse utilitarian taste, the state and society began to redefine and contest what fashion meant within socialist culture.<sup>102</sup> Even though clothes had not yet become the target of policing, during the constant demarcation and re-demarcation of class lines in the early-to-mid 1950s, names and styles of clothing became conspicuous metaphors for politics. For example, a *Xinmin* piece in 1952 describes a disloyal capitalist who attempted to trick the Party as “wearing Lenin coats and *Remin* coats over his

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<sup>98</sup> Dong, “Collective Selection,” 44.

<sup>99</sup> Gerth, *Unending Capitalism*, 82-83

<sup>100</sup> Chen Danyan, 上海的红颜遗事 [*Shanghai Beauty of the Past Age*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 2000), accessed on Weread.

<sup>101</sup> Ren, 19; Gerth, *Unending Capitalism*, 84-86. Certainly, many women felt pressured to do so, but this change was also a signal of gender equality.

<sup>102</sup> Yang Dong, “论建国初期上海月份牌年画改造 [The Transformation of Calendar Pictures in the Early Years of PRC],” *Art Observation*, no. 8 (2016): 107-108.

[Western] suit.”<sup>103</sup> As the name suggested, wearing a *Renmin* suit denoted being part of the People, while donning a men’s Western-style suit or women’s *qipao* aligned with colonialism and feudalism. In fact, the Chinese translations literally mean “Western dress” (*xi zhuang*) and “Manchu coat” (*qi pao*).<sup>104</sup>

As Jeremy Brown and Paul Pickowicz note, the first decade of the new regime were years of “fear mixed with hopeful idealism,” during which nonparty figures tried to come to an accommodation with the regime to spare themselves of unnecessary turbulence.<sup>105</sup> Some adjustments Shanghai urbanites made in fashion were spontaneous efforts to creatively renegotiate new norms. For example, one fashion store renamed a Westernized jacket as *Remin* suit, with which it shared some common features.<sup>106</sup> However, much of this cultural change was certainly due to fear of persecution. In the early years of the People’s Republic, especially after China’s entry into the Korean War, mass campaigns engendered widespread suspicion of foreign contact and exposure to foreign culture could be used to demarcate class lines. In 1951 at the end of the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries, when the regime began to establish more pervasive documentation to surveil hidden enemies among the population, many targets were identified as having problematic backgrounds simply based on having overseas connections or listening to foreign radio broadcasts.<sup>107</sup> The nationalistic anxiety over Westernized urbanites made them easy suspects of subversive activities. After the state launched the Three- and Five-Anti campaigns in 1951, Shanghai’s economic elite largely stopped buying luxury items such as jewelry and avoided

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<sup>103</sup> Jing Sheng, “绣花枕头 [Embroidered Pillow],” *Xinmin Evening News*, Mar. 10, 1952.

<sup>104</sup> Qi refers to the multiethnic banners that officially formed the highest rung of Qing society.

<sup>105</sup> Brown and Pickowicz, *Dilemmas of Victory*, 10.

<sup>106</sup> Dong, 44.

<sup>107</sup> Yang Kuisong, “新中国巩固城市政权的最初尝试：以上海‘镇反’运动为中心的历史考察 [An Initial Attempt to Consolidate the Urban Regime in New China: The ‘Suppressing Counter-Revolutionaries’ Movement in Shanghai],” *Journal of East China Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 36, no. 5 (2004): 1-20.

wearing Western suits or evening gowns.<sup>108</sup> In this climate of fear, a dramatic decrease of business in the fashion stores is not surprising.

In addition to deterring consumers through fear of persecution, the Five-Anti Campaign directly hit the owners of fashion stores. While the state only intended to target five illegal practices, in reality cadres and workers often went far beyond. They turned it into a struggle against general market activities, the profit principle, and bourgeois lifestyle and used physical force to exact wage hikes.<sup>109</sup> During the campaign, cadres convened mobilization meetings with officials and members of industry associations to explain state policies, solicit confessions and accusations, and stage struggle sessions. The impact of the Five Anti Campaign on the fashion industry is illustrated by the case of Dong Linwei, the suit industry association head in Changning district. In 1952 Dong refused to deliver notification of a Five-Anti mobilization meeting to shop owners in the district. The reason he cited was business difficulties among store owners, who were unwilling to attend political sessions. Dong's concern was legitimate. The ongoing campaign had already resulted in violent assaults on employers, thwarted regular factory work, and imposed heavy fines for "corrupt" commercial misdeeds.<sup>110</sup> However, this very action put him in a more difficult situation—he, along with the district-level industry association heads of the leather, silk and satin, bicycle, department store, silk weaving, cloth, and umbrella industries, was publicly declared to be an example of those who "Refuse to Confess, Attempt to Resist."<sup>111</sup> Dong's story suggests that within private commerce passive non-cooperation was initially prevalent in 1952, but that the Party ultimately forced store owners to participate in a campaign in which they became targets. The

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<sup>108</sup> Gerth, *Unending Capitalism*, 138.

<sup>109</sup> Dillon, "Demise of Private Charity," 92.

<sup>110</sup> The campaign reduced the production from private factories in Shanghai by 20 percent. See So, 695.

<sup>111</sup> 长宁普陀两区部分工商业者,不肯坦白犹图抗拒五反运动 [Some Store Owners in Changning and Putuo Districts Refuse to Confess and Attempt to Resist the Five-Anti Campaign]," *Xinmin Evening News*, Feb. 6, 1952.

campaign deterred market activities, strained labor-capital relation, and pressured fashion stores into a more difficult economic position. As Nara Dillon argues, after 1953 such pressure motivated store owners to demand state takeover.<sup>112</sup>

### **From Boss to Comrade: The Contradictions of State Capitalism**

From 1949 to 1951, central Party policy toward private capitalism had stressed toleration of private capitalism and adopted “adjustment” measures that aided businesses by giving out loans, offering contracts, and pacifying trade unions.<sup>113</sup> As So points out, these policies that expanded state contracts with the private sector for economic recovery in effect reduced capitalists to contractors dependent on the state and who profited through a bureaucratic rentier-capitalist relationship.<sup>114</sup> When the private economy languished in the years of political campaigning, the state increased its contracts with private factories to rescue industries and maintain employment, which further deepened this relationship.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, public-private joint management benefited petty capitalists by changing the ambiguous status of private business into the politically safer status of state-private enterprises. As a result, business owners experiencing economic and political difficulties generally were more likely to embrace state capitalism than other petty bourgeoisie.<sup>116</sup>

However, these adjustment policies did not apply to the fashion stores. There were two reasons. On one hand, the Party considered fashion to be a legacy of Western bourgeoisie culture

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<sup>112</sup> Dillon, “Demise of Private Charity,” 94.

<sup>113</sup> Bergère, *Shanghai*, 354; So, “Policy-Making and Political Economy,” 689; Zhu et al., *General History of Shanghai*, 74; Robert Cliver, *Red Silk: Class, Gender, and Revolution in China’s Yangzi Delta Silk Industry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2020), 27; Jackie Sheehan, *Chinese Workers: A New History* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 18-21, 30. Before 1952–53 the official policy towards the private economy only talked of “use” and “restriction,” while the much harsher term “transformation” was not officially added into the policy until 1953. See So, “Policy-Making and Political Economy,” 686. In pacifying labor-capital conflicts, the Party subordinated workers’ demands and instead pushed for labor-capital cooperation and wage reductions.

<sup>114</sup> So, “Policy-Making and Political Economy,” 695.

<sup>115</sup> At the end of 1952’s political campaign, state contracts accounted for 58.8% of Shanghai’s private industrial production, supplying stable capital and material to the capitalists. Zhu et al., *General History of Shanghai*, 76.

<sup>116</sup> Cliver, “Surviving Socialism,” 140.

not essential to “national welfare and people’s livelihood” and therefore not worthy of state investment.<sup>117</sup> On the other, the fashion industry consisted of small-scale commerce and backroom workshops, not large-scale mechanized factories. Their scale made it logically difficult for the state to contract with them. Because of the minimum purchasing limits of state orders and the highly specialized character of fashion stores, to incorporate them into centralized planning would require considerable effort.<sup>118</sup> Hence, while fashion stores were affected by de-marketization and state involvement, unlike many other industries they did not receive state support. They therefore struggled to sustain their business in the shrinking market. For instance, small fashion stores were unable to purchase raw materials, such as cloth, in bulk from the state-run China Department Store Company (*Zhongbai*).<sup>119</sup> Instead, they had to make purchases at higher prices and on credit from other private merchants.<sup>120</sup> There were attempts to mitigate this difficulty. A December 1954 report from *Zhongbai* to Shanghai’s Bureau of Commerce suggested lowering the minimum wholesale volume to make it easier for private stores to purchase from *Zhongbai*.<sup>121</sup> An industry association report on the fashion and suit industries also asked *Zhongbai* to contract with more private stores.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Zhou Enlai’s 1950 directive drew line of demarcation that reserved joint venture only for industries beneficial to the “national welfare and peoples’ livelihood.” See So, “Policy-Making and Political Economy,” 687.

<sup>118</sup> For example, before 1954 only 0.9% of the industrial corporations engaged in joint-management, but they accounted for 20.3% of the city’s industrial production, meaning that these were exclusively large factories. See Zhu et al., *General History of Shanghai*, 78.

<sup>119</sup> *Zhongbai* was not the only source of state monopoly. After the communist takeover, government organs, state-owned factories, and state-run corporations tended to provide welfare facilities that covered many of the services that private industry had offered but at cheaper prices. SMA, B6-2-136-25, 6.

<sup>120</sup> Private market was quite active in the early 1950s. For one account, see Cliver, “Surviving Socialism,” 149-150.

<sup>121</sup> Shanghai Municipal Archives (hereafter SMA), B123-2-835-67, 2. It suggested that the state-imposed minimum purchasing limit should be reduced from 15 meters to 5 meters for woolen cloth stores and should be cancelled for the women’s fashion and men’s suit stores.

<sup>122</sup> SMA, B98-1-57-28, 3. The majority of private commercial sectors shared the same predicament. For example, a 1955 report of major department stores also indicated that the industry’s foremost problem is the lack of supply, since some goods were controlled by state-owned companies. See SMA, B121-1-14-6, 1.

Besides not providing state contracts, Party economic policies handicapped fashion stores by fixing prices with a specific profit rate for each industry and forbidding price adjustments.<sup>123</sup> Stores were no longer allowed to adjust prices based on demand. Instead, each industry had a distinct profit margin set by authorities. This was set at 14 percent for the suit industry and 20 percent for the fashion industry.<sup>124</sup> Hence, stores could not cut prices for unpopular products or raise them for products in high demand. The state viewed market-based price adjustments as activities of speculative merchants who “disturb the market.”<sup>125</sup> Fashion and suit stores were also forced to price custom-made tailoring services at the same level as standardized mass-produced goods.<sup>126</sup> In 1950, when the consumer market fell into depression due to a rapid reduction of currency in circulation and competition from the state retailing, private stores tried to reduce their prices below state prices but were criticized by local officials for “cheating consumers and ruining the reputation of the public and state sector.”<sup>127</sup> State price fixing thus disempowered fashion merchants in making their own business decisions.

As a result, even as other sectors of Shanghai’s economy recovered from the Civil War and the shock of the Five-Anti Campaign, the fashion industry continued to decline.<sup>128</sup> This resulted in dire human consequences. In 1952, heads of the suit industry reported that since the city’s “liberation” its business had suffered losses year after year while capital reserves had gradually been depleted. As a result, between 1950 and 1952, the labor force within the suit industry

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<sup>123</sup> SMA, S243-4-1-44, 6. On the same road, two stores belonging to different industries could have very different prices for the same piece of clothes.

<sup>124</sup> SMA, S243-4-1-44, 6.

<sup>125</sup> So, “Policy-Making and Political Economy,” 693.

<sup>126</sup> SMA, S243-4-1-44, 6.

<sup>127</sup> So, “Policy-Making and Political Economy,” 690. The revolutionary authority saw independent price-adjusting as “speculation”. See Cliver, “Surviving Socialism,” 152.

<sup>128</sup> Again, we can see evidence of recovery from unemployment statistics. From 1953 to 1955, the number of unemployed decreased by 80,000 and 110,000. In 1955, the registered number of unemployed had decreased to 15,000. This aligned with the beginning of Socialist Transformation after the 1953 General Direction, which saved many industries on the brink of breakdown. Wu Wenjun, “上海失业问题及其治理研究（1949-1957）[Unemployment and its Governance in Shanghai 1949-1957]” (Ph.D. diss., Soochow University, 2017), 29.

decreased from 2262 to 1506 persons.<sup>129</sup> Around 1954, as industries were preparing for the transition to public-private joint management (since Mao's 1953 declaration made clear that its completion was inevitable), the industry associations produced many reports describing the current status of their industries. These reports indicated that revenue in the fashion industry during the third quarter of 1954 decreased by 47 percent from the same quarter of 1953, while that of the suit industry decreased by 59 percent.<sup>130</sup> In October and November 1954, the revenue of 652 stores in the suit industry decreased by 64-66 percent compared to the same period in 1953. Reports show that less than ten stores had enough money to purchase woolen cloth in bulk from state-owned factories due to the state-imposed minimum purchasing limits.<sup>131</sup> In 1954, 85 percent of shops in the garment industry could only provide their employees with "two porridges and one rice," and 10 percent could not even afford the expense of porridge.<sup>132</sup> In June 1955, a letter written by a local union of store clerks detailed the dire living condition of the suit industry workers five years into socialist transformation. Due to diminishing business, closures were common and many stores had stopped providing meals for their employees. Among the 70 stores in the district, half had been forced to withhold their employees' paychecks, most for 2 to 3 months but some for 7 to 8 months. In addition, 16 were unable to provide meals for their workforce. Many stores had defaulted on rent and taxes, had sold their furniture, and had to borrow money to survive.<sup>133</sup> Stores were selling everything they had—cloth, racks, mirrors—but even then were not making enough to offer meals to their workers. The wife and son of one shop owner labeled a "capitalist" allegedly

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<sup>129</sup> C48-2-472-18, 1.

<sup>130</sup> B98-1-57-28, 1.

<sup>131</sup> SMA, B123-2-835-67, 1

<sup>132</sup> SMA, B98-1-57-32, 1.

<sup>133</sup> SMA, B6-2-136-55, 2.

had to do laundry and work as hired help to make a living.<sup>134</sup> In another shop, both the “capitalists” and workers reported selling their own blood to survive.<sup>135</sup>

By 1954, it was clear to store owners that state capitalism did not work for the fashion and suit industries. Joint management therefore became a highly sought-after state bailout, a generous gift from socialism. While in December 1956, the fashion and suit industries each wrote a collective application for joint management, hundreds of individual stores drafted their own applications, which were handed to the state via the industry associations.<sup>136</sup> The applications followed a general format and vocabulary, expressing gratitude that “the big ship” of the state economy could carry along the “small boats” of fashion stores. However, some contained very specific requests, for example, allowing the store owners’ family members to join the collective.<sup>137</sup> Forced by state policies into a dire straits, many store owners thought of joint management as an opportunity to elicit state aid in the form of reliable wages and supplies of raw material.

### **Renegotiation: Proliferating Revolutionary Culture Amid a Lack of Consensus**

Sources from the fashion industry offer one explanation for the faster-than-expected speed of socialist transformation. From 1949 to the eve of socialist transformation in 1956, the state initially managed to impose a new fashion regime thanks in part to the mutual reinforcement between its economic policies and the collective choice of fashion consumers. However, the Party’s vision of “socialist new human”—an attempt to reconcile high-modernist socialism with a rigidly nationalist cultural ideal—was challenged between 1955 and 1957 by the rearticulation of grievances. This veering back and forth of cultural sentiments testifies to the persistence of

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<sup>134</sup> SMA, B98-1-57-32, 1.

<sup>135</sup> SMA, B6-2-136-55, 1.

<sup>136</sup> For the collective applications, see SMA, C48-2-1296 and B123-3-465, Page 3.

<sup>137</sup> SMA, S243-4-38.

ambivalence and a lack of consensus among consumers and producers over what socialist fashion and socialist commerce meant. Despite officially completing the socialist transformation of industry and commerce clearly, as late as 1956 the new hegemony of socialist fashion had not taken root.

In the years before the 1956 transition to joint management, the impact of economic policies on individual fashion store owners created a scarcity of Westernized fashion and helped shift the collective choice of fashion consumers. Because of state interference into the market, fashion stores faced severe difficulties even during the initial years of economic recovery and were unable to supply Westernized clothes that at the time might still be somewhat in demand. This predicament certainly eased the societal transition of everyday fashion into the socialist culture. While in an unobstructed market, scarcity could possibly make Western styles more in demand, the new regime deliberately tried to limit the circulation of Westernized fashion and reorient consumption choices away from the legacy of treaty port. As Gerth observes, right after “liberation” the Party sought to channel desire for bourgeois consumerism toward socialist mass-produced commodities by magnifying a new discourse about fashion and lifestyle while mass-producing proletarian clothes to replace imported foreign products.<sup>138</sup> With the diminishing supply of Westernized fashion from individual producers, mass-produced proletarian clothes endorsed by state propaganda came to dominate the sphere of consumption, accelerating the transformation of culture away from Shanghai’s “semi-colonial” legacy.

In turn, the shifting trend in consumption was instrumental in the socialist transformation of the private fashion industry. Industry association reports show that the decline of sales in the fashion sector and many other consumer-oriented industries started before the introduction of

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<sup>138</sup> Gerth, *Unending Capitalism*, 16-22, 81-84, 86, 137.

political campaigns and implementation of de-marketization policies. Part of the reason, as *Xinmin* articles reveal and memoirs confirm, is that the public knew which way the political winds were blowing. Many seem to have made a collective decision to change their clothing choices right after “liberation” when there were still many private dealers from whom they could purchase fabric. This is confirmed by the industry association reports, which largely ascribed their early predicament to a change in societal culture in which frugality was prized over indulgences, and austere uniforms over Western bourgeois dress.<sup>139</sup> It is therefore clear that the choices of the public, and not solely campaign deterrence and de-marketization policies, devastated private fashion stores from the start.

Yet, while the mutual reinforcement of consumption and state de-marketization policies accelerated the transition into socialist culture in the early 1950s, the widespread ambivalence of pre-1949 urbanites caught between obsession and anxiety suggests that it is necessary to examine the new hegemony of revolutionary culture as a gradual renegotiation. The Party did not discipline what people said at home or thought in private, but instead only expected them to make the appropriate public gestures. While publicly available sources do not reveal hidden sentiments, we should assume that ambivalence, the combination of appreciation and anxiety that were publicly expressed everywhere in the discourse before 1949, persisted silently into the decade of socialist transformation. In fact, as soon as the political climate allowed, these hidden sentiments seeking to renegotiate what constitutes “socialist” re-emerged. As early as 1954, fashion producers voiced their discontent with the economic policies under state capitalism through the channels of industry associations. This culminated in 1957’s Hundred Flower Movement. Fashion consumers, on the

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<sup>139</sup> SMA, B98-1-57-28, 2.

other hand, made their case for non-proletarian fashion in the beautification movement of 1956. These acts of renegotiation demonstrated the lack of consensus that persisted during the decade.

Already by 1954, not only managers but also workers were expressing grievances towards their new status in the socialist society. By the eve of the 1956 transition to Joint Management, widespread complaints were expressed among both labor and management in fashion stores. As the contradictions of dual economy pushed fashion stores into economic precarity, their employees, supposedly proletarian allies of the Party, voiced tremendous anger about their own predicament. For instance, Zhu Hengtang, a fashion store employee, complained, “by the time [China] gets to socialism, we will already have starved to death.”<sup>140</sup> An employee of the fashion store Qinfu Ji wrote, “[the government asks us to] overcome, overcome, overcome till when? The [state-run] labor union asks about our situations, but it never addresses them.”<sup>141</sup> Another employee from a suit company was quoted saying, “if we are fired in the future, our only option is to find the crematorium.”<sup>142</sup> Reports also expressed concerns over common instances of suicide.<sup>143</sup> These employees were upset because their place in the new society had not been secured and they felt left out of the state economy.

More predictably, those labeled “petty capitalists” had their own complaints. However, because of their political vulnerabilities, unlike workers, reports show that they often relied on an array of passive coping strategies.<sup>144</sup> In the suit industry some expected things to turn around in several years, but most were pessimistic and only hoped to remain afloat till the day that the state completed joint management. Complaining about the lack of revenues and deterioration of labor-

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<sup>140</sup> SMA, B6-2-136-55, 6.

<sup>141</sup> SMA, B6-2-136-55, 6.

<sup>142</sup> SMA, B98-1-57-28, 3.

<sup>143</sup> SMA, B6-2-136-55 6.

<sup>144</sup> Such strategies were quite commonplace. For the passive resistance in the shoe industry, see SMA, B98-1-57-34, 3.

capital relations, one said, “I cannot stand it anymore... government cadres must take the management of my company.”<sup>145</sup> “Capitalists show a lack of confidence in the prospect of business,” another report claimed, “drinking all day and leaving day-to-day management to their employees.” One “capitalist” complained bluntly, “the general line of socialism will get us in serious trouble.”<sup>146</sup> As a result of these sentiments among “capitalists”, a strange phenomenon occurred in small fashion stores of the 1950s: many bosses did everything they could to jeopardize their own enterprises.<sup>147</sup> Their hope was to find an excuse to fire employees and downsize their business, as laying off workers required the approval of the government. On the other hand, even if a lack of revenues meant that employees were reimbursed poorly, they still struggled to maintain the businesses against their bosses’ will in order to keep their jobs. Certainly, years of political campaigns strained labor relations in these family-sized stores and disheartened the morale of store owners. In fact, as speeches of Party leader show, there was widespread labor militancy in small-scale stores.<sup>148</sup> Still, under the imposition of a new order, employees and “petty capitalists” respectively pursued what they perceived as their best interests. How this development impacted the direction of state policies and the outcome of the efforts to transition to Joint Management deserves further research.

Such ambivalent attitudes toward socialist commerce culminated in 1957 during the Hundred Flowers Movement, when in response to an April directive by the First Bureau of Industry and Commerce, the fashion and suit industry associations produced their respective “Historical

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<sup>145</sup> SMA, B6-2-136-25, 13.

<sup>146</sup> SMA, B6-2-136-25, 13. For similar kinds of complaints, see Cliver, “Surviving Socialism,” 152.

<sup>147</sup> SMA, B6-2-136-55, 6-7.

<sup>148</sup> Chen, “Chen Yi’s Speech,” 179-180; Liu Changsheng, “刘长胜关于目前劳资关系问题的讲话” [Liu Changsheng’s Speech on the Current Issue of Labor-Capital Relationship,” in *中国资本主义工商业的社会主义改造：上海卷（上）[China’s Socialist Transformation of Capitalist Industry and Commerce: Shanghai, Volume I]*, ed. Zhonggong Shanghai Shiwei Tongzhanbu, Zhonggong Shanghai Shiwei Dangshi Yanjiushi, and Shanghai Danganguan (Beijing: Zhonggong Dangshi Chubanshe, 1993), 152-153.

Experience” reports.<sup>149</sup> The Hundred Flowers Movement was a time when Mao encouraged citizens to criticize the shortcomings of the Party. In this context of relative openness to ideas from non-communists, the reports, written by former industry association directors, capitalists, and veteran tailors, appear to reflect an attempt by the authors to make their case for an expansion of what counted as socialist fashion.<sup>150</sup> Not only did the two reports speak approvingly of former capitalists who came from professional backgrounds, they spent long paragraphs discussing the technical details of tailoring during the treaty-port era—taking measurements, cutting, stitching, mockup, fitting, sewing, and ironing, where to use yarn and silk thread, how to wash and shrink lining—and included three pages of color schemes.<sup>151</sup> The reports also emphasized the conflict between experienced tailors and young tailors under the piecework wage system, pleading, “this issue [senior tailors’ loss of power] would result in a tremendous loss of craftsmanship. We suggest reversing the trend of favoring politics over expertise . . . and give senior workers higher salaries than general young workers.”<sup>152</sup> They therefore sent a clear message: there is value in the skills of making well-fitting clothes and innovative fashion.

The authors also took aim at certain state policies, such as price fixing, fixed industry profit rates, and inflexible supplies of fabric due to central planning.<sup>153</sup> They even cited compliments by foreigners for the old Shanghai fashion industry. In two cases, these included flattering remarks by the American actress Mary Pickford and Queen Elizabeth.<sup>154</sup> Clearly, these authors took pride in their professionalism. The Hundred Flower Movement gave them a brief period of hope that they might again have the opportunity to make exquisite fashion that many now deemed as un-

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<sup>149</sup> SMA, B123-3-1022-1, 1-2.

<sup>150</sup> Walder, *China under Mao*, 9.

<sup>151</sup> SMA, S243-4-1-44, 1-4, 9-12.

<sup>152</sup> SMA, B123-1-660-83, 8-9,

<sup>153</sup> SMA, S243-4-1-44, 6; SMA, B123-1-660-83, 8.

<sup>154</sup> SMA, S243-4-1-44, 1.

socialist. What happened to the authors of the reports is unclear. However, the reports were not published until August 1957, after the start of the Anti-Rightist movement, a violent reaction to the avalanche of criticism launched during the preceding period.<sup>155</sup> Given the timing, they may have been used as material for anti-Rightist struggles.

On the consumer side, acts of renegotiation re-emerged in the “beautification movement” over women’s clothing. Begun by a Beijing magazine in March 1956, even before the start of the Hundred Flowers, the beautification movement quickly spread to other cities before eclipsed in spring 1957 by the Anti-Rightist movement.<sup>156</sup> During this period, there emerged within *Xinmin* and other media nontrivial spaces of negotiation about the ways people dressed themselves, spaces that the state had tolerated in the early 1950s despite its coercive disciplining of other legacies of treaty-port era. The continued negotiation over the meaning of socialist fashion lends evidence to Gerth’s argument that consumers under socialism refused to give the state monopoly power over the ethos of living. Moreover, it confirms that Shanghai’s fashion culture under socialism inherited the kind of ambivalence in the terrain of Westernized fashion that was seen before 1949.

In the early 1950s, *Xinmin* described bourgeois and Western dress in mocking manner and “found” that high-end clothes and the stores that produced and sold them no longer suited public taste. In contrast, during 1955 and 1956’s beautification movement, several pieces in *Xinmin* advocated for the pursuit of women’s feminized beauty and against strict egalitarianism. In March 1956, for instance, *Xinmin* published letters from numerous female readers, one of whom wrote, “what woman would like to wear a blue shirt and blue coat all year long? Pretty clothes and pretty dresses are what we like, but we are afraid of others calling us ‘bourgeois lifestyle’ and ‘not

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<sup>155</sup> The suit industry’s report was published in August 1957 by the state-operated Shanghai Clothes Company. See SMA, B123-1-660-83, 8. SMA only has a hand-written draft of the fashion industry report that appeared to have been circulated internally for proofreading.

<sup>156</sup> Chen, “Dressing for the Party,” 153.

austere enough.' Female cadres who engage in mass work are even more afraid of attracting public attention."<sup>157</sup> From 1955 to 1957, editorials and stories in *Xinmin* also advocated for the revival of the *qipao*. They criticized the ideological monkish discipline of austerity while complimenting the convenience, elegance, frugality (less cloth), and cheapness of this Westernized Manchu hybrid.<sup>158</sup> In a satirical article that appeared in April 1955, a contributor to *Xinmin* relates a telling a story. She writes that when she wore a new crimson *qipao* to work, colleagues mocked her as a newly married bride going to a banquet. They made so much fun of her that the next day she dyed the crimson *qipao* black.<sup>159</sup>



Figure 3: A 1954 magazine cover for *Chinese Youth* promoting the adoption of the *bulaji*, a colorful Soviet one-piece dress. Source: Gerth, *Unending Capitalism*, 90.

Other pieces cited Soviet-style dresses (See Figure 3)

as evidence that colorful clothes were compatible with socialism, a clear reference to influence from Soviet consumerism. In 1956, a *Xinmin* story featuring a model Shanghai worker's visit to the Soviet Union documented Soviet women's elegant fashion, overtly promoting hair salons and fashion-related businesses. In fact, this piece even led to the assignment of a skilled hair stylist to the author's district.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, in 1955-1956, both before and during the completion of the transition to Joint-Management, grand fashion exhibitions opened in department stores on Shanghai's famous shopping street

<sup>157</sup> Dong, "Collective Selection," 36.

<sup>158</sup> Dong, "Collective Selection," 36.

<sup>159</sup> The influence was spread by popular media like the magazine *Soviet Woman* and by the Soviet experts who consumed "cheap furs, china, silks, [and] dresses" lavishly in China (to the extent that many Beijing stores posted Russian signs). See Gerth, *Unending Capitalism*, 78-80; also see Finnane and Sun, "Textile and Apparel," 22-24.

<sup>160</sup> Gerth, *Unending Capitalism*, 90.

Nanjing Road and beyond.<sup>161</sup> The names of clothes other than Lenin and *Renmin* showed the continuing semiotics of the West under socialism: clothes branded “Shanghai”, “Hong Kong”, and even “Hawaii” existed as by-words for Westernized cosmopolitanism.<sup>162</sup>

These sources demonstrate the ongoing lack of consensus towards Westernized fashion and constant efforts by fashion stores and consumers to re-interpret where the boundaries of socialist fashion lay. Clothing—what socialism should look like in streets and shop windows—was part of the vision that the new regime wished and tried to convey. Clearly, by 1956, it had not succeeded in transforming the consciousness of the urban public in Shanghai. We do not know the exact reasons that elites in Beijing and Shanghai suddenly started to voice their attitudes for elegant fashion in the public discourse under the name of “building socialism.” Certainly, as Gerth points out, Soviet influence blurred the line between “middle-class” fashion and socialism. Perhaps, also, the completion of Socialist Transformation gave producers and consumers a greater sense of empowerment so that they dared to challenge a rigidly leftist view on fashion. As the letters from the shopkeepers reveal, they clearly hoped that their earlier gestures of collaboration could be redeemed for political and economic favors. Or perhaps, they were fatigued and disillusioned after years of political campaigns and were glad to see their sentiments being shared by other sectors of the society. Certainly, the beautification movement is part of the wider political and social liberalization in the mid-1950s, and one that deserves further research. What seems clear is that throughout the decade different actors sought to renegotiate the position of Westernized fashion—from frocks to pinafores and blouses—into a narrative that spoke of desire in terms of service by

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<sup>161</sup> Dong, “Collective Selection,” 37-38.

<sup>162</sup> Finnane and Sun, “Textile and Apparel,” 31.

the Party to the people and vice versa.<sup>163</sup> Not until the 1960s would the Party formally critique the pursuit of “fashion” as a cultural manifestation of “capitalist restoration.”<sup>164</sup>

## Conclusion

The story of clothes and fashion in Shanghai from 1946 to 1956 shows that the 1949 takeover is not simply a national victory that ended subjugation to foreign culture and brought a fresh start to a decadent “semi-colonial” city. Nor is it, as many expatriate memoirs and some scholars have expressed, the tragic end of an age of cosmopolitan openness. Both narratives have degree of truth, but, in Jeffery Wasserstrom’s words, they are also “fairy tales” and “city myths” that conceal other realms of complicated lived experience.<sup>165</sup>

Before the CCP’s takeover, tension and anxiety around foreign culture and foreign presence in Shanghai had been intense, perhaps more so than they had been throughout the twentieth century. Despite the continued fascination with Western material culture among urbanites, imperialism was acutely and tangibly felt everywhere in society. In the years following “liberation,” the CCP took over the city and took a side in that already existing tension. From the Party’s perspective, in the early 1950s people appeared to have initially aligned with it and made a collective choice away from what it saw as the legacy of imperialism. This was true even after their purchasing power recovered from wartime austerity and increased through the salary reform of 1952.

However, this seemingly collective choice made by a broad spectrum of astute political actors with the grassroots society was done in a climate of fear mixed with idealism. From 1950 to 1956,

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<sup>163</sup> Finnane and Sun, “Textile and Apparel,” 17-18.

<sup>164</sup> Gerth, *Unending Capitalism*, 98-100; Chen, “Dressing for the Party,” 161.

<sup>165</sup> Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, *Global Shanghai 1850-2010: A History in Fragments* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 6-13.

the contradictions embedded within the New Democracy dual economy forced the fashion industry to demand state help in the form of Joint-Management. Amid a chaotic and precarious environment, the complex motives of petty capitalists and shifting attitudes of consumers ended up boosting, perhaps unduly, the Party's confidence in its utopian vision of both nationhood and socialism. Such vision was eventually challenged by the rearticulation of grievances between 1955 and 1957. As records from this period demonstrate, both store owners and consumers in fashion and suit industries seized the window of the Hundred Flowers and voiced grievances that had been concealed in the early 1950s. Clearly, Shanghai's grassroots society inherited the pre-1949 ambivalence toward Western fashion.

Even with the advantage of forceful de-marketization policies and the appeal of existing nationalist fervor, the state was not able to gain a monopoly over expressions of fashion taste. Instead it had to cope uneasily with the ambivalence towards Westernized fashion inherited from the past. Since the state did not resort to forceful discipline and even tolerated expressions of non-proletarian fashion prior to 1957, the Shanghai public continued to justify dressing in brightly colored clothes, asserted fashion as a signifier of national pride, and sought to redefine the scope of socialist clothing.<sup>166</sup> Perhaps the state tolerated these voices because the attempts of renegotiation mainly came from cultural elites and industry personnel and had not translated into societal momentum. In April 1955, a *Xinmin* piece commented sarcastically about the lackluster customers at a fashion exhibition, “Pushing and shoving in the piles of colorfulness, the crowds were however a sea of blue!”<sup>167</sup> The crowds in blue jackets and blue pants were either afraid, unwilling, or unable to respond to cosmopolitan resurgence in the media. Behind the magazine

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<sup>166</sup> Chen, “Dressing for the Party,” 148.

<sup>167</sup> Dong, “Collective Selection,” 37-38.

covers and newspaper articles, it is uncertain to what extent the advocates for fashion actually challenged the habits of self-discipline and self-censorship among the urban crowd.

In 1957, the Anti-Rightist movement cut the regime's tie with Shanghai's educated urbanites. Currently available sources do not detail what happened to the fashion industry, but it is reasonable to expect that it suffered at least as much as other industries. Still, the fervor for Western cosmopolitanism persisted into the early 1960s. For example, it was displayed publicly by the thousands of people waiting in line for "Lady Racketeer" (*Meiren ji*) and "The Wedding Night" (*Xinhun diyiye*), Hong Kong films that continued to be shown in Chinese theaters until 1963 and served as proxies for Hollywood and Western modernity.<sup>168</sup> The narrow channels between Shanghai and Western culture closed during the forceful disciplining of the Cultural Revolution, but even the ransacking of homes by Red Guards helped expose bourgeois material culture to the proletarian mass. Otherwise coated in thick layers of dust, the camphor-scented memory of cosmopolitanism was taken out and displayed under sunlight. So overwhelmed with luxurious clothes were second-hand stores in the former foreign settlements, that in 1970 the rampant purchasing of ransacked clothes by foreigners caught the attention of the Party.<sup>169</sup>

After Mao's death, when his successors declared defunct his autarkic ideal, the longing for cosmopolitanism resurfaced. In 1978, Deng Xiaoping reportedly said, "Engels never took a plane and Stalin never wore polyester," indicating that the Party would look outward to keep up with the times and welcomed foreign material culture back to China.<sup>170</sup> The new party leadership adopted an Open-Door policy to foreign businesses and foreign culture. In the 1980s, Shanghai was still characterized by restricted marketization on the edge of the state economy. Due to the city's

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<sup>168</sup> Zhang, *A City Displaced*, accessed on Weread.

<sup>169</sup> SMA, B123-8-353-30, 2-3.

<sup>170</sup> Finnane and Sun, "Textile and Apparel," 38.

strategic importance, the central government was reluctant to allow any fundamental economic restructuring in Shanghai. However, following Deng's 1992 Southern Tour, the new leadership allowed the city again to embrace foreign capital, foreign brands, and the circuits of global capitalism. The following year, Mayor Huang Ju articulated the official vision of the Party: Shanghai of the future would be "the oriental Manhattan," a statement carefully chosen to sketch out the ambition for reorientation.<sup>171</sup> Despite associations with its "semi-colonial" past, Shanghai was set to reclaim the position it held in the 1930s as an international metropolis. Between 1990 and 2000, a total of \$31.2 billion Direct Foreign Investment flowed into the city. From 1995 to 2000, about 30 percent of all land transactions involved foreign developers.<sup>172</sup>

In May 1949, as the PLA pressed southward, an expatriate lady named Mrs. Khi said to her Shanghai friends, "We lost. The Communists will conquer all China, and our world will be forgotten."<sup>173</sup> The Communists did drive Westerners out of the country and seized foreign property in an attempt to erase the city's disgraced past—that of a mercantile, exploitative, and "semi-colonial" hybrid city shaped by the forces of imperialism and capitalism. However, when thirty years of revolutionary experiment ended, Shanghai's urbanites spontaneously retrieved yesterday's world of the Shanghai. No longer the center of revolutionary cosmopolitanism, many reimagined themselves as launching a new march toward entry to the global capitalist order. As the Party openly championed what was once regarded as the legacy of imperialism, nostalgic urbanites, through the newly formed cultural market, reimagined Shanghai's "semi-colonial" past with a profound sense of loss and a yearning for recuperation.

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<sup>171</sup> Zhang Le-Yin, "Economic Development in Shanghai and the Role of the State," *Urban Studies* 40, no. 8 (2003): 1550.

<sup>172</sup> Zhang, "Economic Development in Shanghai," 1556.

<sup>173</sup> Barber, *Fall of Shanghai*, 43.

Since the 1980s, the cultural market rediscovered “semi-colonial” Shanghai as “the epitome of Chinese urban modernity.”<sup>174</sup> Capitalizing on widespread feelings of nostalgia, the rising cultural industry helped Shanghai re-imagine a cosmopolitan past when Shanghai was a metropolis on par with the other international cities of the world, a past celebrated through consumption. Guidebooks, museums, and refurbished historical sites re-established the city’s connection with its pre-socialist splendor. Novels, memoirs, and photographs reconstructed the Westernized social milieu of Republican-era elites.<sup>175</sup> The culminating event in the reinvention of the city’s past was the posthumous rise of Eileen Chang to cult status. The writer captivated readers of the 1990s with her descriptions of Old Shanghai, including meticulous attention to the clothing of her characters. Revival of bourgeois aesthetics allowed consumption to communicate new meanings and form new cultural hierarchies where China and the West met again on an unequal footing. Once again, the classical mechanism of capitalism worked its way—consumption constitutes a system of classification, where people distinguish themselves through their relation to commodities. Needless to say, commodities are not just the constellation of a uniform human labor, but have their distinct labels and tell unambiguous stories of the prevailing hegemony of Western culture.

In the fervor to catch up, the initial period of ambivalent negotiation in the wake of a traumatic socialist experiment easily slipped from public memory. While the conjoined forces of colonialism, capitalism, and nationalism shaped Shanghai into a city full of tensions and contradictions, filmmakers, writers, and intellectuals of the Reform Era rewrote Shanghai’s pre-socialist history as a romanticized chronicle of its uniqueness. To firmly establish an urban

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<sup>174</sup> For one study, see Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia: Postrevolutionary Allegories in Wang Anyi’s Literary Production in the 1990s,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 8, no. 2 (2000): 353-356, 376-382.

<sup>175</sup> Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor*, 206-20

genealogy that “supplied indigenous grounding to the post-Mao policies of openness,” writes Wen-hsin Yeh, it became necessary to “shift attention away from imperialism and capitalism.”<sup>176</sup> It was more convenient to imagine the transition of 1949 as clear-cut. On one side of the divide stood the stylish spectacles of Miss Shanghais, merchants, and foreigner taipans, a middle-class global city; on the other side, the lackluster sight of ideologues, militant youths, and victims of political campaigns, a lesson not to be repeated. Yet, most people who lived through this history were neither Miss Shanghais nor revolutionaries. The state was more than a few crucial figures who imposed their vision upon the anonymous, passive masses. Instead, ordinary representatives of the Party negotiated with equally ordinary citizens, and together, they determined how Mao’s vision would look like in reality. The story of transition revealed through their experiences complicates clear-cut narratives.

This brief history of fashion as a window onto Shanghai of the 1950s is worth retelling not only for complicating the narrative of the country’s urban socialist transformation, but also because it offers intriguing parallels to the transformations we are witnessing today—for example, the story surrounding Hong Kong. Both cities occupy central spots in both the popular imaginations of cosmopolitan culture and state-led historical narratives of imperialist oppression and national rejuvenation. Deng Xiaoping’s post-Handover promise that in Hong Kong “Horses would still run” is reminiscent of the New Democracy promise made in 1950s Shanghai. The end of “cosmopolitan” Shanghai in the 1950s resembles the encroachment on “Asia’s World City” today. Yet, the experience of everyday people who have had to live through hegemonic orders complicate grand narratives and refute easy interpretations. Beyond the circle of elite politics are ordinary people, shopkeepers, workers, students, housewives, and officials, who interact with one another

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<sup>176</sup> Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor*, 211

and bring the shape of nations and states into being. The lives of a few lines, in their nameless adventures, negotiate the monumental transformation out of their minuscule histories.

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