

Female Hooligan Youth and the Regulation of Socialist Morality in 1960s Rural Beijing

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Introduction

On November 5, 1968, two cadres from the Revolutionary Committee of Sijiqing People's Commune, Zu Huiying and Zhu Zhiqiang, sent a seventeen-year-old young female "hooligan" to the Haidian Public Security Bureau, the local security branch in Beijing. Gong Moumou, who was seventeen years old in 1968, was described as being involved in "beating, looting, and hooliganism (*liumang xingwei*)" and as "committing crimes [starting] in 1967."¹ On these grounds, she was officially detained at the branch barracks and enrolled in the fifth phase of a Mao Zedong Thought class. Such classes were part of the government's program to regulate and reform hooligan youth during the Cultural Revolution.

Gong was born into a poor, peasant family in Landianchang, Haidian, in northwest Beijing.² Landianchang was home to a production brigade under the Sijiqing People's Commune. Gong's mother was a worker at a local state enterprise (*defang guoying*), the Landianchang coal factory, and a member of the working class (*gongren jieji*).³ Gong's oldest brother was a member of the Communist Youth League and worked at the Beijing Xijiao Farm.⁴ Her other older brother worked at the

¹ Beijing shi Haidian qu Sijiqing renmin gongshe geming weiyuan hui, "Gong Moumou diaocha, jiaodai, jiefu cailiao," [Gong Moumou's investigation, confession, and expose materials], 1968, 2. Gong Moumou is a pseudonym I have given young lady Gong. Gong is her true Chinese family name but I have changed her given name to Moumou. There are no page numbers, titles, or sub-titles in the original file. We do not know which work unit or governmental department in Beijing kept these documents or why it was appeared in the flea market. The set of documents was acquired as a cluttered pile of papers. I have assigned page numbers and a title to this file, so that if it is ever made publicly available in an archive or digitized form my citations can be located.

² Beijing shi Haidian qu Sijiqing renmin gongshe geming weiyuan hui, "Gong Moumou diaocha, jiaodai, jiefu cailiao," [Gong Moumou's investigation, confession, and expose materials], 1968, 2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Landianchang Construction Team.⁵ Her family origins were politically favourable during the Cultural Revolution. As a working-class family of a poor peasant background, they were regarded as “both red and expert” (*youbong youzhuān*). “Red” because they possessed the correct political orientation, and “expert” because they served the people through their professional knowledge and skills.⁶ Li Gucheng notes in his glossary of Chinese political terms that “to be both red and expert” (*youbong youzhuān*), one must become both politically and professionally qualified.⁷ Though Gong was still technically a student, her mother and two older brothers were all working-class members “serving the people.” This politically preferred social background may have contributed to a sense of confidence in Gong Moumou, believing that her family’s working-class bona fides would function as a political shield for her transgressive behaviours.

According to Gong’s personal information form, she left school during her second junior high school year in Class No. 4 at the Beijing Landianchang Middle School, well below the level of education customarily attained by a seventeen-year-old student.⁸ The arrival of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 disrupted Gong Moumou’s and her classmates’ education, distracting them from their studies. Lacking materials, having increased free time, depressed about their long-term prospects, and without supervision from teachers and parents, Gong and other youths in Landianchang roamed unhindered during the Cultural Revolution. From September 1967, Gong Moumou started committing crimes, including getting into ten fights, two episodes of vandalism, and one case of robbery.⁹ The Haidian Public Security Bureau defined her crimes as hooliganism (*liumang xíngwéi*; literally “hooligan behaviour”), characterized by so-called “beating, smashing, and looting.”¹⁰

On August 23, 1968, Haidian authorities interrogated Gong Moumou for the first time, during which she explained the details of her specific crimes. While Gong was officially sent to the security bureau on November 5, 1968, she had been detained

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Gucheng Li, *A Glossary of Political Terms of the People's Republic of China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1995), 544.

⁷ Ibid., 544.

⁸ Beijing shi Haidian qu, “Gong Moumou diaocha,” 2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

since October. She was subjected to Maoist moral reform through thought classes and was not allowed to go home until December 31, 1968. During this period, she submitted written confessions every few days as part of her thought classes, recalling her crimes and mistakes, and reflecting on how to correct these mistakes.

Hooligan crime (*liumang zui*) and juvenile criminal behaviour were not officially defined as legal offences until 1979 in the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China (PRC).¹¹ However, the local government during the Cultural Revolution still punished Gong through the application of a loose legal definition of “hooligan crime” used by the Party to impose their broader puritanical moral agenda.¹² Gong's confessions of hooliganism and wrongdoing, in the form of self-reports to the CCP, were divided into five main sections: (1) “the wrongdoings of beating, smashing, and looting”;¹³ (2) “what things other people gave me and what things I gave others”;¹⁴ (3) “issues of weapons for criminal purposes”;¹⁵ (4) “issues in the [sexual] relationship between male and female”;¹⁶ and (5) “issues with hanging out together” (i.e., dating men).¹⁷

Much of Gong's confession material is repetitive, demonstrating, if not the internalization, at least the regurgitation of lessons in socialist morality. However, in Gong's final confession report, submitted for the conclusion of her thought class, the typical final two sections about “sex” and “hanging out” are missing. It is unknown exactly why Gong did not reflect on these sections in her final confession report. It is possible that the authorities did not allow Gong to include these sections in her final official version because the details were too erotic. On December 31, 1968, Gong Moumou ended her study in the Mao Zedong Thought class, and the authority certified her good reform results on a trainee registration form.

The Chinese Communist Party consists of different levels. In Gong Moumou's case the local governmental level managed her case, producing an internal CCP report

¹¹ Harold M. Tanner, “The Offense of Hooliganism and The Moral Dimension of China's Pursuit of Modernity, 1979–1996,” *Twentieth-Century China* 26, no. 1 (2000): 10.

¹² *Ibid.*, 24.

¹³ Beijing shi Haidian qu, “Gong Moumou diaocha,” 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

composed of Gong's written confessions, a report exposing her activities, and detailed records of her trial. The author of the current study found this file on an online second-hand book market in China called Kongfuzi.com. All materials are handwritten. Such "grassroots sources" are referred to as "rubbish materials" (*laji cailiao*) in Chinese, commonly collected from "flea markets, peddlers, and other underground channels."¹⁸ Jeremy Brown writes that grassroots sources can also include "archival documents, internal circulation (*neibu*) collections, oral history, and unpublished diaries and manuscripts."¹⁹ These files describe the lives of grassroots people in China, such as Gong Moumou. Brown observes that the school of "sonological garbology" or the study of "rubbish materials" has gained popularity among an international cohort of scholars who use "diaries, personnel dossiers, public security and legal files, Red Guard leaflets, and other ephemera to shed light on phenomena—family life, petitioning, and sexual behavior, for example—that official archives redact, withhold, or simply do not contain."²⁰

The methodology used in this study is a grassroots historical approach. In the most famous PRC grassroots study, *Maoism at the Grassroots*, Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson emphasize that historians who research grassroots history need to "look at the individuals in villages, factories, neighbourhoods, counties, and ethnic minority regions from the bottom up, and in everyday contexts that make the familiar analytic categories of 'state' and 'society' impossible to distinguish from each other clearly."²¹ In other words, the approach to "history from below" is a way to reconstruct the history at the local level. Furthermore, this approach facilitates the detailed study of the effects of "repression," "surveillance," and "political labelling" at the individual level.²² By centering the experiences of individual people at the local level, the grassroots approach can provide microhistories that derive broader conclusions from the study of many individual life-experiences. In this way social histories are

¹⁸ Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson, "Introduction," in *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China's Era of High Socialism*, ed. Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

²² *Ibid.*, 7.

reconstructed from the bottom-up as opposed to more top-down historical approaches.

Existing literature has shown that individuals at the local level, like rural female hooligans, operated politically. Gail Hershatler studies which aspects of socialism were local, for whom, and how gender figured into its creation.²³ Hershatler stresses that we should not forget that all socialism —like “all politics,” in Tip O’Neill’s famous aphorism, is local in China.²⁴ Chinese people have a common saying: “while above there are national policies and official orders, below there are local countermeasures” (*Shang you zhengce, xia you duice*).²⁵ This saying implies a degree of competition between the centre and the local: while the Party centre may dictate the policy, its real-life application and form is determined at the local level. In addition, Huang Xin states that Mao’s gender ideas of were “shaped by institutional, individual, and local contestation and negotiation.”²⁶ Thus, large historical processes affected the experiences of rural young women, however the specific influence of local level authorities, in turn affected how these policies were implemented and how women from various regions experienced them differently.

Gong’s file contains dated and signed handwritten confessions of behaviour that violated the moral standards of Maoist China during the Cultural Revolution. As an adolescent, she would have experienced constant state-mandated sexual repression. For example, dating or “making friends” was taboo for middle school students. Gong’s classmates reported her *liumang* behaviours to the CCP, harshly condemning her immoral behaviour. They reported that Gong often mingled with men or male hooligans and was having sex with them; however, there was no evidence to prove that their reports were factual. Nonetheless, Gong’s confessions provide evidence about the nature of the CCP’s efforts to regulate socialist morality and reform transgressive individuals. In her confessions, Gong located her behaviour as arising from the reactionary thoughts of the bourgeois class—an analysis which would have

²³ Gail Hershatler, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China’s Collective Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 8.

²⁴ Hershatler, *The Gender of Memory*, 13.

²⁵ Erika E. S. Evasdottir, *Obedient Autonomy: Chinese Intellectuals and the Achievement of Orderly Life* (Vancouver, B.C.: UBC Press, 2004), 188.

²⁶ Huang Xin, *The Gender Legacy of the Mao Era: Women’s Life Stories in Contemporary China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 7.

pleased her CCP audience. Still, it is impossible to ascertain whether Gong sincerely admitted that she had made mistakes or felt compelled to regurgitate Mao Zedong Thought.

Gong Moumou's experience in rural Beijing illustrates the state's attempts to regulate socialist morality, reform rural young women during the Cultural Revolution according to the standard of the ideal socialist woman, and control and repress their sexuality, which was interpreted by the CCP as evidence of dangerous bourgeois thinking. According to government ideology, Gong's case represents the violence, immorality, and "bourgeois lifestyle" that threatened the security of socialist China in the 1960s. During the Cultural Revolution, the Party attributed all unethical behaviours to the influence and trappings of capitalism. In such an era of distorted thinking and politicization, the ideology of some young people also became distorted. It was difficult for them to tell whether their actions were correct or heinous. For teenagers, fighting, stealing, exchanging gifts between boys and girls, kissing, and exploring sex were all a normal part of adolescent rebellion. However, the turbulent era of the Cultural Revolution turned previous social norms upside down. There was no series of formal legal provisions to determine or restrict juvenile criminal behaviour. The police only judged allegations of so-called hooliganism based on other people's reports, and problematic teenagers were eventually accused of being "hooligans" or "women hooligans." The hooligans became a "tumour" threatening socialism and needed to be reformed via the teachings of Mao Zedong Thought.²⁷ Hooliganism ran counter to the socialist code of conduct and the standards of the proletariat.

During the government's reshaping of society in the 1960s, authorities especially targeted female hooligans for cultural reform because their activities conflicted with the image of the ideal working-class, revolutionary woman. Seen as lazy, immoral, and idle, the image of the female hooligan was inconsistent with the ideals of the Cultural Revolution.

The remainder of this study is divided into three thematic sections: the first will discuss the inconsistencies between the image of the female hooligan and the ideal socialist woman; the second will examine the CCP's attempts to regulate socialist morality; and the final section will explore sexual repression in 1960s Maoist China.

²⁷ Beijing shi Haidian qu, "Gong Moumou diaocha," 10.

After 1949, “sex” was gradually regarded as the political enemy of the revolution, and finally, an asexual culture of the Cultural Revolution appeared. The party aimed to control the ownership of both women’s bodies and their sexuality because it was feared that unregulated sexual desire would lead to individual political liberation and undermine the power of the CCP. Finally, in this context, it will be discussed how class discourse defined the “crime” of female hooliganism. Gong confessed that a bourgeois lifestyle influenced her behaviour of falling in love, “beating, smashing, and looting” and should, as a result, be criticized.²⁸ During the Cultural Revolution, the hooliganism of female youth was condemned as a violation of socialist morality and judged, without the formal processes of a criminal justice system, to be criminal behaviour.²⁹ Throughout this article an argument is developed that the CCP tried to contain and reform the behaviour of female hooligan youths as part of a broader effort to regulate rural female youth according to a standard of socialist morality and to control the discourse of power for Chinese females at the local level during the Cultural Revolution.

Female Hooligans versus Socialist Women

During the Cultural Revolution, regulating the image of the female hooligan was a way for the CCP to stabilize its political power at the local level. As a threat to the construction of socialist China, female hooligans were considered loose, immoral, Westernized, and lazy. Gong had a lot of free time of her own during the Cultural Revolution. The term “hooligan” (*liumang*) was used punitively by the CCP soon after coming to power and forming the PRC in 1949.³⁰ However, law enforcement was not modified and only gendered the term in 1979 to separately classify female criminals as female hooligans (*nü liumang*).³¹ Therefore, the gendered term “female hooligan” does not appear in the Haidian Public Security Bureau branch’s documents about Gong, as

²⁸ Beijing shi Haidian qu, “Gong Moumou diaocha,” 3.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Yvon Y. Wang, “Heroes, Hooligans, and Knights-Errant: Masculinities and Popular Media in the Early People’s Republic of China,” *Nan Nü: Men, Women, and Gender in Early and Imperial China* 19, no. 2 (2017): 325.

³¹ Ibid., 325.

it was not yet in use.³² This suggests that the word “female hooligan” was not yet commonly in use or even ignored in the justice system of the 1960s. The authorities usually used the term “hooligans” to describe both male and female hooligans, indicating that the Party-state defaulted to gendering hooliganism as a largely male crime before 1979. Wang argues that “the Party-state began using *liumang* punitively soon after its accession to power,” but *liumang* “was still coded as male, a fact obvious on even the semantic level: only when law enforcement wanted to talk about a female hooligan did they modify the generic term with gender to become *nü liumang*.”³³ The CCP stereotypically believed that women would not become hooligans because the Party believed the image of evil and disorder was exclusively represented by men.

Tani E. Barlow traces the constructs of Chinese gender concepts in different historical and political contexts. In the early days of the 1920s New Culture Movement, the binary gender concepts of woman (*nüxìng*) and man (*nanxìng*) emerged as fundamental categories of colonial modernity in China.³⁴ The term women (*nüxìng*) was “in a newly modernized, Westernized, semi-colloquial language,” which played “the part of a subject of representation and an autonomous agent” in the post-May Fourth Movement of 1919.³⁵

By contrast, Chinese women were called *fūnǚ* (working-class women) after the Communist revolution. After 1949, the Communist government often declared the success of the women’s liberation movement, pointing as evidence to the impact of the 1950 New Marriage Law, especially in the rural areas.³⁶ The law not only allowed the CCP to portray itself as a “saviour” for women who suffered in pre-1920s China—granting them new identities, wealth, rights, and social status equal to men after the Communist revolutions³⁷—it was also the foundation on which the CCP began to define the image of the ideal socialist woman.

³² Beijing shi Haidian qu, “Gong Moumou diaocha,” 2.

³³ Wang, “Heroes, Hooligans, and Knights-Errant,” 325.

³⁴ Tani E. Barlow, “Theorizing Woman: Funu, Guojia, Jiating,” in *Body, Subject & Power in China*, ed. Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 267.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 267.

³⁶ Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 93.

³⁷ Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), 261.

The CCP first defined women—especially rural peasant women—as proletarians and promoted their participation in the Communist Revolution at the local level. The term *fūnǚ* refers not only to “married women” and “kinswomen” in Chinese but specifically to working-class women as a socialist term. The modern socialist term *fūnǚ* thus replaced *nǚxìng* to symbolize the Party’s changing ideal of a Chinese woman in the Mao era. Tani E. Barlow argues that the political *fūnǚ* was used to label women as a social category in the PRC to fit Mao’s campaigns of anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism.³⁸ Barlow emphasizes that the term *fūnǚ* represented the political woman—married, working class, collectivist women—inside Chinese socialist families and the state under Mao. The Party used this term as opposed to the “Westernized *nǚxìng* (women),” which was “redesignated as bourgeois” and “marking it off as normatively forbidden.” Barlow argues that modern *fūnǚ* are “offering the sexed bodies of peasant women as a space of modernization.”³⁹

At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards—a mass student-led paramilitary social movement concentrated in urban areas—went on strike and left school to join the “Revolution.” Gong’s files do not provide evidence that she participated in the strike, but she did indeed leave school during year two of middle school and, like other youths in rural areas, engaged in acts of “beating, smashing, and looting” in her daily life. In contrast with “good rebellion,” these youths were described as being involved in hooliganism (*liumang xíngwéi*), which was a representation of the counterculture during the Cultural Revolution. Yao Yunsheng writes that “the underlying cause of the emergence of this new kind of youth gang was the Cultural Revolution, which weakened the authority of school and parents and gave teenagers unprecedented freedom and opportunities to rebel.”⁴⁰ Without the supervision of parents and teachers, wandering young people began to form gangs to fight, steal, and make friends. Female hooligans began to appear in public view. They were a socially marginalized group similar to the image of male hooligans. The female hooligans went against the purpose of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution because they were the opposite of the image of the ideal socialist woman, who was

³⁸ Barlow, “Theorizing Woman,” 254.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁴⁰ Yao Yusheng, “The Elite Class Background of Wang Shuo and His Hooligan Characters,” *Modern China* 30 (2004): 438.

married, collectivist, proletarian, and thus committed to the reproduction of the socialist nation-state.

Gong was incompatible with the standard of a socialist woman (*fūni*): she left school but did not participate in socialist production in Landianchang like her mother. Historian Chen Shehong describes the life of underage girls in the Chen family who lived in rural Jiading County near the city of Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution.⁴¹ Chen states that “our family was bigger, with three children, and we took more grain from the production team,” The work-points earned by her mother were “barely enough to cover our expenses” in 1966.⁴² In that year, all schools were closed.⁴³ As the eldest child in the Chen family, the eldest daughter Chen Shezhen (born in 1954) had to drop out of school and “started to learn farm work and earned about eight hundred work-points that year” to support household expenditures.⁴⁴ Chen Shehong’s work shows how the eldest daughters in rural families were also responsible for household work. The image of young rural women in Chen Shehong’s book conforms to the standard of socialist women (*fūni*) in rural areas during the collective era.

By contrast, Gong chose a different path than most young rural women, pursuing freedom and leisure time, fighting, dating, and making friends. She could do this partly because, as the youngest in her family, she did not have many family duties, which fell to her mother and two older brothers. On the other hand, as the youngest child in a family, Gong was bound by familial discipline such as the authority of her older brother. Gong’s confessions allude to the family tensions that resulted from her non-socialist behaviours, commenting that her oldest brother beat her because her male hooligan friends went to her home to find her.⁴⁵ Not only did Gong’s oldest brother have a family duty to educate his “disobedient” younger sister but he also hated Gong’s social network. Yvon Y. Wang argues that “accounts of hooliganish youths are peppered with their rebuttals to the condemnatory voices of authority.”⁴⁶ It is therefore likely that Gong’s “hooligan” behaviours, described in her confessions, were

⁴¹ Chen Huiqin, *Daughter of Good Fortune: A Twentieth-Century Chinese Peasant Memoir* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 1.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Beijing shi Haidian qu, “Gong Moumou diaocha,” 12.

⁴⁶ Wang, “Heroes, Hooligans, and Knights-Errant,” 352.

a way to rebel against social and familial authority. Yao Yunsheng also describes how the hooliganish youths and other gang members sought their “status, freedom, and power in their struggle against traditional and new hooligan groups, parental and school authorities,” and social taboos, as well as “the awakening of adolescent sexuality.”⁴⁷ As a rebellious adolescent child, Gong may have responded to her brother’s control and restraint of her freedom by acting out even more rebelliously.

Although the Marriage Reform of 1950 afforded women more rights, the CCP continued to regulate the image and behaviour of women. The Revolutionary model presented in operas during the Cultural Revolution show the Communist government’s standardization of the image of socialist working-class females. Chen Xiaomei states that “Cultural Revolution feminism” used the issue of women’s exploitation to consolidate political and state power so that the “worker-peasant-soldier model women” idealized on stage was absorbed into the broader concept of the “revolutionary masses.”⁴⁸ According to the Party, women like Gong, who refused to internalize and act according to the ideal of the socialist woman, were dangerous because they were considered as counterrevolutionary with a rebellious consciousness. As such, at the conclusion of her Mao Zedong Thought class, the authorities required Gong to “go up to the mountains and down to the countryside” to receive re-education from the poor and lower-middle peasants.⁴⁹ The purpose of this re-education was to stabilize proletarian politics and state power. However, the Party ignored individuality. Under the long-term ideological confinement of Communist education, some young people of the new generation wanted to do stimulating things to enrich their boring lives.

Gong’s life experience in a young hooligan gang was to challenge the routine elements of socialist life in the PRC. In the 1950s at stalls and shops in cities and towns across China, many youths bought and rented novels and comics spun off from Hong Kong and Taiwanese “capitalist” films.⁵⁰ They sought out small paperback comics known as *lianhuanhua* or “linked pictures,”⁵¹ which included not only stories about

⁴⁷ Yao, “The Elite Class Background of Wang Shuo,” 438.

⁴⁸ Chen, *Acting the Right Part*, 254.

⁴⁹ Beijing shi Haidian qu, “Gong Moumou diaocha,” 160.

⁵⁰ Wang, “Heroes, Hooligans, and Knights-Errant,” 330.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

sexual depravity and violent crime but also on the theme of *xia* (meaning hero, swordsman, or knight in ancient China).⁵² The pictures allowed children to access the comics' plots even if they were illiterate. Students in the 1950s started to imitate the culture of *xia* found in novels and other popular media.⁵³ For example, some youth hooligans in Tianjin used the language and culture of *xia* to organize gangs like The Thirteen Allies (*Shisan meng*), The Five Little Justices (*Xiao wu yi*), The Five Tigers (*Wuhu*), and The Five Rats (*Wushu*).

Xia culture may have influenced Gong as a child born in 1950. Yvon Wang describes the moral culture in hooligan gangs that youth hooligans used the language of *yiqi* (righteousness) and *lianmian* (face), allusions to vigilante martial-arts heroes, to justify their actions and signal their brotherhood.⁵⁴ This interpretation would seem to fit with Gong's description of her best female friend and a male youth hooligan as sworn brothers (*baibaxi*, or "swearing oaths of brotherhood").⁵⁵ She was very proud that she could make so many gallant friends outside of school as often described in *xia* novels.⁵⁶ Gong described the male hooligan as the big brother; herself as the second; and her female friend as the third.⁵⁷

Within Gong's family, her eldest brother did not want his youngest sister maintaining contact with hooligan boys. He beat Gong in an attempt to reform her ways and force her to adopt the behaviour of a good girl. Gong's community must have regarded her deviance from the ideal of the socialist woman as unacceptable. When family efforts failed to reform youth hooligans like Gong, they were often reported to the local government by a third party and the authorities intervened to reform them through re-education.

Regulating Socialist Morality

In the 1960s, the CCP regulated socialist morality to strengthen Party control and to reform "bourgeois" thought at the local level. In her daily confession reports, Gong

⁵² Ibid., 332.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 334.

⁵⁵ Beijing shi Haidian qu, "Gong Moumou diaocha," 26.

⁵⁶ Wang, "Heroes, Hooligans, and Knights-Errant," 334.

⁵⁷ Beijing shi Haidian qu, "Gong Moumou diaocha," 26.

adopts the language of regulation and reform, always defining her behaviour, such as fighting and dating, as the result of a bourgeois lifestyle. Gong constantly emphasized the need to criticize her bourgeois reactionary thoughts and claimed that her “bourgeois thoughts should be eliminated.”⁵⁸ However, it’s unclear that Gong recognized in her heart that her behaviours were immoral. The audience for Gong’s confessions was always the policeman supervising her class. After reading the files, it is questionable whether the police successfully led Gong to recognize her “mistakes.” As such, these reports tell us less about Gong than about the CCP’s efforts to regulate socialist morality and reform those contravening its tenets; how the Party directed these efforts against rural hooligans in the 1960s; and the way sexuality was emphasized in reforming female hooligans.

Prior to the Cultural Revolution, hooligans were not subject to moral regulation and reform. During the Social Reform Movement of the early 1950s, the CCP focused on eliminating major chronic social problems from pre-revolutionary Chinese society.⁵⁹ These included “widespread opium addiction,” “prostitution,” and the “crime and corruption” of “a vast underworld of secret societies and labour gangs.”⁶⁰ According to CCP ideology at the time, the Party identified hooligans as part of the lumpenproletariat—the downtrodden masses of the poor—which in urban areas included rickshaw drivers, casual “coolie” labourers, beggars, and petty thieves.⁶¹ The CCP aimed to attract their support and allow the great majority of the urban lumpenproletariat participate in the Revolution.⁶² The CCP also defined rural hooligans as lumpenproletariat because they were “members of a class so long victimized by extreme socioeconomic oppression” by the old regime.⁶³ This rural lumpenproletariat included marginal men, such as bachelors, bandits, and gangsters. Yvon Y. Wang argues that the rural “lumpenproletariat” took on a new importance with the rise of the Chinese Communist Party.⁶⁴ When the embattled Communists

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Maurice J. Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic*, 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1999), 81.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 81.

⁶¹ Ibid., 79.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Wang, “Heroes, Hooligans, and Knights-Errant,” 325.

were blocked from the coastal cities by the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang), the Party looked to the rural “lumpenproletariat” for cadres and military personnel.⁶⁵ This situation suggests that the CCP did not seek to socially exclude hooligans from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s.

With the advent of the Cultural Revolution, socialist morality became more class-oriented. Only after the CCP firmly established and stabilized itself as a new regime did the Party consider hooligans a threat to socialist morality and social stability and begin sanctioning them. The Draft Guiding Principles for the Criminal Law of the PRC of 1954 reads:

Hooligan elements (*liumang fenzi*) who do not engage in honest work but gather to gamble, traffic in people, insult women, corrupt youth or otherwise disrupt public order shall be sentenced to up to five years of fixed-term imprisonment, life imprisonment, or death.⁶⁶

The CCP gradually began to crack down on hooligans and classify them as criminals because the Party interpreted hooligan behaviour as undermining socialist morality. The 1954 definition and outline of sentences for hooligans laid the foundation for the CCP’s handling of hooligans throughout the 1960s. The only difference is that in the 1960s, the CCP emphasized that hooligans followed a bourgeois lifestyle.

Gong’s case was not a criminal offence within the formal justice system because she was only accused of hooliganism. Jeremy Brown argues that “criminal justice during the Cultural Revolution was flawed, but it was a complex system that evolved over time and sometimes functioned as it was intended.”⁶⁷ Although Gong’s beating, smashing, looting, and stealing constituted crimes, these were all classified as hooliganism and, thus, as activities associated with bourgeois morality, in contravention of socialist morality. Therefore, what might have been punished with a five-year imprisonment, according to the draft criminal laws of 1954, instead resulted in being assigned to a Mao Zedong Thought class to transform Gong’s capitalist thinking.

Mao Zedong Thought was prescribed through classes as a medicine for female hooligans for the reformation of bourgeois thought. Maoist ideology, and the emphasis on class, are evident in Gong’s handwritten reports. For example, Gong

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Tanner, “The Offense of Hooliganism,” 11.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 128.

consistently quotes from Mao Zedong's supreme instructions in her confession diary. On September 15, 1968, she writes: "The great leader Chairman Mao taught us that we must also exercise dictatorship against thieves, deceivers, murderers, arsonists, hooligans, and all kinds of bad elements in order to maintain social order and the interests of the broad masses of people."⁶⁸ In the CCP's view, Mao Zedong Thought classes were necessary to reform and regulate people engaging in behaviours that the Party associated with a bourgeois lifestyle.

On May 11, 1955, the newspaper article "Against the Erosion of the Revolutionary Ranks by the Bourgeois Lifestyle," published in the *People's Daily*, mentions the characteristics of people with a bourgeois lifestyle whose behaviour reflects selfishness, individualism, excessive self-pursuit, pleasure, exploitation, eroticism, and decadence.⁶⁹ On June 1, 1966, an article titled "Sweep Away Ox Ghosts and Snake Demons" appeared on the front page of the *People's Daily*. Its author argued that the bourgeoisie and its old class culture needed to be struggled against and criticized because it threatened the dictatorship of the proletariat.⁷⁰

The Party also advocated a form of asexuality because promiscuous sexual behaviour was one aspect of the old culture and bourgeois lifestyle that needed to be destroyed. Neil J. Diamant explains how sexual behaviour became construed as an attack on socialist morality by the "bourgeoisie class":

Together with the class-based attacks on the sexual decadence of "bourgeois" culture, the Buddhist-inspired sexuality conjured up by the "ox ghosts" and "snake demon" slogan provided youth with ample justification for making sexual behavior a criterion for participation in or exclusion from the new revolutionary community.⁷¹

On the other hand, sponsoring Mao Zedong Thought study classes was an alternative form of detention and moral reform aimed against bourgeois corruption. The state sentenced offenders to this type of ideological re-education for the duration of their imprisonment.

⁶⁸ Beijing shi Haidian qu, "Gong Moumou diaocha," 79.

⁶⁹ "Fandui zichan jieji shenghuo fangshi dui geming duiwu de qinshi [Against the erosion of the revolutionary ranks by the bourgeois lifestyle]," *People's Daily*, May 11, 1955.

⁷⁰ "Hengsao yiqie niugui sheshen [Sweep away ox ghosts and snake demons]," *People's Daily*, June 1, 1966.

⁷¹ Neil J. Diamant, *Revolutionizing the Family: Politics, Love, and Divorce in Urban and Rural China, 1949-1968* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 287.

Gong's comments in "An Open Letter to All Members of the Study Class" suggested the intended ideological impact of the class:

We had been in the study class for more than twenty days, and I have a preliminary understanding of my mistakes. I realized that mistakes I made before were not in the interests of the party and the people and were opposed to Chairman Mao's proletarian revolutionary line. I accompanied some people fighting, smashing, and looting in society who did not follow Mao Zedong's thoughts. This indeed hindered the smooth progress of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and was unfaithful to the broad masses of the people and the great leader Chairman Mao. The broad revolutionary masses have helped us to run study classes now. This is a good opportunity for us to repent of our mistakes. We should reform our thinking and dig into all the filthy things deep in the soul...⁷²

Gong's open letter, the last of her confessions in the file, instead of elaborating on the five aspects of her wrongdoings as her previous confessions had, focused on the class's effectiveness in reforming her thoughts. In this letter, Gong's tone was positive, and she used many "red" words to demonstrate her determination to correct her mistakes. Perhaps the teachers and the police leading the class required Gong to employ this language style and vocabulary in her open letter, which she may have read in front of all the students, teachers, and police officers. The latter may have also wanted to establish Gong as a "model" (*mo fan*) of possible successful reformation through the class. It's difficult to ascertain Gong's personal feelings amidst the ideological parroting found in her confession reports acknowledging the "moral mistakes" that she committed against the party.

Regardless, the Haidian Public Security Bureau must have been satisfied with her reform progress. On December 31, 1968, they ordered Gong to complete her reform by going "up to the mountains and down to the villages" and "receiving re-education from the poor and lower-middle peasants."⁷³ Jeremy Brown states the punishment and re-education of hooligan elements (*liumang fenzi*) between 1966 and 1969 usually involved being sent to prison, labour camps, or the countryside.⁷⁴ For example, in

⁷² Beijing shi Haidian qu, "Gong Moumou diaocha," 10.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁷⁴ Jeremy Brown, "A Policeman, His Gun, and an Alleged Rape: Competing Appeals for Justice in Tianjin, 1966–1979," in *Victims, Perpetrators, and the Role of Law in Maoist China: A Case-Study Approach*, ed. Daniel Leese and Puck Engman (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018), 135.

1966, Zeng Huizhen's husband reported that a policeman named Mou in Tianjin confessed to raping Zeng Huizhen in late 1958. Under a hooligan offence, Mou was sentenced to more than two years and was "deported to his native place, a village in Hebei Province to be handed over to the poor and lower-middle peasant for supervision and reform."⁷⁵ The documents about Gong never state to which village she was sent. However, because she lived in a rural area, it is likely she was sent to Landianchang for reform through agricultural work.

Sexual Repression in the 1960s

The sexuality of hooligan youths became a special target of state criticism and regulation because it most plainly represented their participation in an immoral bourgeois lifestyle. Michael Schoenhals states that "Mao's dictatorship of the masses' did away with the restraints that previously had succeeded in no small measure in keeping the most private of the private parts of people's lives out of the public arena."⁷⁶ This extended to the Party's efforts to control sexual expression in Maoist China.

The CCP regarded sex outside of marriage as taboo. For example, in Gong's case, two of the wrongdoings she confessed to were related to sexual relations, including "issues in the relationship between male and female" and "issues with hanging out together."⁷⁷ Gong likely believed that her sex life was her own private business and beyond public scrutiny; however, the CCP did not overlook even private matters in seeking out threats to their government. Under intense political pressure and inner condemnation during the thought class, Gong expressed the realization that she could not lie to the Party. She had to honestly confess her sinful sexual relationships to the Party because only it could save her.

For the Party, it was necessary to intervene in the private lives of young people through thought classes to reform women like Gong. Diamant argues that sexual behaviour became directly linked to class status and represented the culture of

⁷⁵ Ibid., 127.

⁷⁶ Michael Schoenhals, "Sex in Big-Character Posters from China's Cultural Revolution: Gendering the Class Enemy," in *Gender Politics and Mass Dictatorship*, ed. Jie-Hyun Lim and Karen Petrone (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 250.

⁷⁷ Beijing shi Haidian qu, "Gong Moumou diaocha," 161.

“capitalists” or the “bourgeoisie” as a symptom of a “decadent” bourgeois lifestyle lingering even among peasants in remote villages.⁷⁸ Gong’s confessed sexual behaviours, as well as her class-inflected rejection of them, illustrates how the CCP state married class ideology to state repression, producing both a chilling effect and a discursive surge in conversation around sexuality. Youth accused of hooliganism were made to openly discuss their sexual behaviours in order to, in turn, reject them. Since the CCP is atheist, its taboo on sex had nothing to do with religious ideology or culture and everything to do with exerting state power over the Party’s perceived class enemies via the social regulation and control of body-related discourses.

Yao Yusheng explains how hooligan youths in the Cultural Revolution sought self-emancipation and individualism, especially for sexual experimentation. Yao argues that “adolescent sexual experimentation was an important component of the youth counterculture that emerged during the Cultural Revolution.”⁷⁹ Likewise, Yvon Y. Wang argues that hooligan youths consistently “used the rhetoric of free love to justify their sexuality.”⁸⁰ The politically countercultural undertones to sexual experimentation in this era suggests that Gong may have been actively rebelling against authority through her exploration of sexual behaviours such as kissing and hanging out with boys.

Some scholars have focused on how the Party regulated adolescent youths’ taboo behaviours, such as sexual behaviour. For example, Diamant argues that the sexuality of young women during the Cultural Revolution played “a role in political critique.”⁸¹ Though sexual relations belonged to the realm of personal privacy, sexuality became an open secret and a criticized behaviour during the Cultural Revolution. For the female hooligans during the Cultural Revolution, the Party construed sexual relations as mistakes that violated socialist morality. As such, sexual relations unsanctioned by the Party were considered a more serious offence than acts such as dating, beating, smashing, or looting.

Diamant argues that sexual behaviour represented the culture of “capitalists” or the “bourgeoisie,” a symptom of the “decadent” bourgeois lifestyle lingering even

⁷⁸ Diamant, *Revolutionizing the Family*, 286.

⁷⁹ Yao, “The Elite Class Background of Wang Shuo,” 441.

⁸⁰ Wang, “Heroes, Hooligans, and Knights-Errant,” 352.

⁸¹ Diamant, *Revolutionizing the Family*, 286.

among peasants in remote villages.⁸² Lin Jiao argues that “moral obligation defined femininities in the Mao era,” and that Mao-era gender formation was “desexualization.”⁸³ The popular culture of masculinization erased femininity during the Cultural Revolution.⁸⁴ For example, unmarried women were made to bind their breasts during the Cultural Revolution; girls who did not hide their breasts and body curves were denounced as “tramps,” “femme fatales,” “being smug,” “seeking the limelight,” and “showing off.”⁸⁵

However, paradoxically the CCP’s attempts to regulate socialist morality and to contain, repress, and reform what it conceptualized as bourgeois sexual feelings and actions resulted in the proliferation of sexual discussion amongst youth. As Evertt Yuehong Zhang writes, “Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis in the context of Victorian sexuality aims to correct the blindness of such a hypothesis to the other side of repressive power: the enticing and constructing of sexual desire through scientific knowledge in discourse.”⁸⁶ Although the Cultural Revolution and the Victorian era are quite different in many regards, Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis for the Victorian era can still help explain the relationship between sexuality, repression, and power during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. In Gong Momou’s case she was required to repeatedly confess her sexual behaviour to state agents. Thus even as the CCP exerted state power over sexuality and the body, it produced more discussion of sex not less. However, within the context of the Cultural Revolution, in which socialist morality replaced sexual education, youths like Gong were forced to reform their thoughts and criticize sexual behaviour as immoral. This dynamic of forcing youth to discuss and condemn their sexuality is exactly what made it taboo and thereby simultaneously enticing.

Evertt Yuehong Zhang states that the body was a focal point for the concentration of state power and ownership by the CCP and Chairman Mao.⁸⁷

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Lin Jiao, “Reconciling Femininities and Female Masculinities: Women’s Premarital Experiences of Breast-Binding in the Maoist Era,” *Modern China* 48, no. 2 (2022): 4.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁶ Evertt Yuehong Zhang, “Rethinking Sexual Repression in Maoist China: Ideology, Structure and the Ownership of the Body,” *Body & Society* 11, no. 3 (2005): 5.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 6.

Teachers and police officers supervising Gong's thought class believed they had an obligation to know the details of her sexual behaviour and contact with male hooligans because they represented the authority of the Party to control Gong's body and sexuality. They required Gong to describe and confess the details of her sexual behaviour. According to Gong's handwritten confession on November 7, 1968, she met Liang Quan to kiss at the cement bridge in Landianchang village on January 3, 1968. She also met Zhang Liancai to kiss at the same cement bridge and confessed that Zhang touched her breast once in early March 1968.⁸⁸ Gong's detailed confessions of her sexual behaviours—in which she provided dates, times, and locations—demonstrate the level of state control exerted over her. As part of the thought class, she attempted to purify her morality and soul by confessing and repenting to the supervising teachers and police officers. The latter used Gong's alleged "decadent" bourgeois lifestyle—which in the eyes of the authorities amounted to an ideological attack on the local dictatorship of village proletariats—as an excuse to ask Gong to write daily confessions. Gong's bourgeois lifestyle was a pretense for enacting a confessional model of sexual regulation.

During the Cultural Revolution, most accusations against women for violating the socialist women's standard were unfounded. Although these cases had no evidence and involved personal private matters, the Party still targeted hooligan women to eliminate remnants of the bourgeois lifestyle from socialist China. Gong's case was based on a report filed by her classmate, Cui Shaoying, who wrote that Gong had made friends with 'Jackal' [nickname] from a work-study school (a study school for juvenile delinquents).⁸⁹ Cui writes that she had heard that "Gong had sex with six men."⁹⁰ Cui emphasizes that Gong often fooled around with the hooligans of Landianchang, Haidian, and Liulangzhuang villages.⁹¹ This was an allegation without evidence, based on gossip and the stereotype of female hooligans as "loose women." Consequently, because Gong was labelled "bourgeois" due to the sexual nature of her transgressions against socialist morality, she required a different form of punishment: not a criminal sentence but a public shaming.

⁸⁸ Beijing shi Haidian qu, "Gong Moumou diaocha," 95.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Similarly, but more public, was the case of Zhang XX. Zhang was an ‘old Bolshevik’ who had been a student at Sun Yat-sen University in Moscow between 1925 and 1930. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, a large-character poster was anonymously circulated exposing Zhang XX’s sexually promiscuous bourgeois lifestyle as threatening to socialist China.⁹² These posters did everything possible to make her appear decadent and morally contemptible, claiming that “Zhang XX murdered her baby boy, born out of wedlock.”⁹³ The anonymous poster also criticized Zhang’s alleged licentiousness, claiming that Zhang wrote to her husband and asked him to purchase some hormone drugs to use as an aphrodisiac in March 1951.⁹⁴ The cases of Zhang and Gong, though hard to assess the veracity of their sexual conduct, illustrate how regulating sexual conduct became a key feature of the CCP’s attempts to eliminate the rights of the people accused of living a “bourgeois lifestyle.”

Regarding the reason why Gong’s classmate, Cui Shaoying, wanted to expose Gong, it is possible that Cui was jealous of Gong’s beauty, sexual attraction, and social skills. As a classmate of Gong Moumou, Cui Shaoying knew Gong’s daily life. During the Cultural Revolution, women were supposed to dress plainly and were not allowed to wear make-up. Perhaps Gong was considered a “femme fatale” in her female classmates’ eyes. Teenage girls like Cui may have been jealous of Gong’s beauty and ability to enthrall boys, so she reported Gong as having sex with male hooligans without evidence. In this way, Cui attempted to subject Gong to public shaming.

Conclusion

Through the example of Gong Moumou, it was shown how the CCP attempted to regulate the discourse, image, and moral standards of female hooligan youths during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s as a means to reinforce the Party’s social control. Although there is no systematic academic research on female hooligans in the rural area during the Cultural Revolution, Yao Yunsheng’s article “The Elite Class Background of Wang Shuo and His Hooligan Characters” does offer some relevant insights into hooligan culture in Beijing’s urban and political elite families during the

⁹² Schoenhals, “Sex in Big-Character Posters,” 249.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 250.

Cultural Revolution. Yao studies a group of core hooligan characters Wang Shuo's novels "whose prototypes are clearly his childhood friends and himself" in urban Beijing during the Cultural Revolution.⁹⁵ Yao argues that "the Cultural Revolution provided a unique environment for children of the political elite to develop a new kind of hooliganism and youth counterculture that contradicted Mao's aim to empower them to join his revolution."⁹⁶

Beyond the counterculture of hooligan youths from elite families in urban Beijing, this study builds upon Yao's observations and offers an example of how rural hooligans who tried to break social taboos around romance and sexuality were, in turn, subjected to political and moral regulation. Thus, the "intensification of class bias and struggle," "disruption of the school order," the "termination of entrance examinations for middle school and college," and the "weakening of parental and school authority" all provided "an unprecedented opportunity for children" to experiment with hooligan lifestyle during the Cultural Revolution.⁹⁷ In this way, the gang activities and sexual experimentation of adolescents, like Gong Moumou, challenged the "hegemonic revolutionary ideology" and "culture of the Cultural Revolution."⁹⁸

Gong's file ends with a final confession report dated December 31, 1968. It is unknown what happened next in Gong's life. There were many innocent "problem teenagers" like Gong during the Cultural Revolution's student strike period. They symbolized wildness, freedom, romance, and rebellion, and, for the CCP, the trappings of capitalism and the bourgeoisie. Regarding Gong's future, perhaps she followed the instructions of the police officers to go to Landianchang to participate in agricultural labour. Perhaps she was again accused by others of being a "femme fatale" after she joined the agricultural production team because her cheerful personality and social skills continued to attract the attention of men.

Although Gong's file was part of an official archive (even if it was later leaked), some of its contents are questionable. For example, Gong's final confession did not include the standard confessions of her sexual improprieties, including "issues in the

⁹⁵ Yao, "The Elite Class Background of Wang Shuo," 434.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 445.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 446.

relationship between male and female” and “issues with hanging out together.”⁹⁹ The final confession report was completed the same day as Gong’s official registration form for the fifth phase of the Mao Zedong Thought class.¹⁰⁰ The registration form was also on the previous page of Gong’s last confession report. In other words, these two documents may be official documents that had to be submitted to higher-level departments for review or archiving. It is possible the teachers and police officers responsible for overseeing Gong’s education considered her descriptions of sexual behaviour too explicit. Therefore, they may have required Gong to delete these entries concerning love and sexuality.

From the 1950s, the authorities banned “capitalist” films and took American movies out of public circulation. Some people who tuned in to “enemy stations” from Taiwan and Hong Kong were accused of listening to “yellow” broadcasts by the authorities.¹⁰¹ Therefore, people on the mainland were restricted from movies and books about love and sex after 1950. Pornography and romantic movies were also banned from broadcasting in mainland China. In turn, Communist education suppressed people’s bodies and sexual desires. In this repressed social context, the statements about the issues of sexual relationships in Gong’s daily confession reports became a type of pornography for the teachers and police officers in the Mao Zedong Thought class. As members of the Communist Party who had also experienced sexual repression for a long time, they may have had their sexual desires gratified to some extent by the narration of sex in Gong’s daily confession reports.

Stereotypes including being loose, immoral, Westernized, and lazy surrounded female hooligans during the Cultural Revolution. They lost their personal rights because of negative social and political labels ascribed to them. Gong’s case is an example of an individual who could not resist the hegemonic authority of the state exercised during the Cultural Revolution. Many other individuals like Gong were compelled to obey the authorities’ sexual and moral regulations during the Cultural Revolution.

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⁹⁹ Beijing shi Haidian qu, “Gong Moumou diaocha,” 9.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Wang, “Heroes, Hooligans, and Knights-Errant,” 330.

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