Listening to the State: Radio and the Technopolitics of Sound in Mao's China

by

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My dissertation argues that radio played vital roles in state building and social integration in the 1950s and 1960s China. Radio as a technological infrastructure brought about a series of radical changes that fundamentally affected the state’s self-perception as well as its agenda in transforming everyday life. My dissertation demonstrates that the acoustic state heavily utilized the senses and techniques of hearing and listening. The state incorporated listening techniques into government bodies during the management of everyday life to inform, educate and mobilize the masses and to modernize the country. The techniques of speaking and their institutionalization in return signaled the state’s efforts to search for and naturalize a voice for its presence in daily life. The dissemination of the voice further gave birth to a new type of state-agents, the radio operators, who carried radio sets with them to areas beyond the reach of electricity. As radio became integral to listeners’ work and life, it triggered further political and social changes, one of which was that listeners learned to circumvent local authorities and contact the higher-level radio stations for solving their concerns. Listeners also became not only selective in listening to state-sanctioned programs but also curious enough to transgress the state’s acoustic boundary to listen to radio programs from abroad. Radio also played a crucial role in drawing the boundaries between enemies and people, which was crucial to the creation
and maintenance of the socialist regime. Such transgressive listeners prompted the state to perceive sound as sovereign territory and consequently led it to territorialize sound to defend itself from the sonic invasion of capitalist countries. To conclude, radio not only equipped the state with new techniques of governance but also fundamentally changed the way the state interacted with the masses, reshaping socialist modernity and subjectivity.
Acknowledgments

Finishing up this dissertation has taken a bit longer than I originally anticipated. I was admitted to the Ph.D. program in 2012 to further expand my project on a topic in late Qing legal history. This anticipated trajectory went awry at a conference dinner in summer 2013. While chatting with a professor about researching in mainland China, I was told that PRC history was the most urgent subject that historians could do because many witnesses of that period are aging and dying without their accounts of the history being recorded. PRC historians, he added, had an extra duty to rescue history from time. Now, sitting at the table and finishing the last pages of my dissertation, I think PRC history may not be the most important subject a historian can do, but definitely one of the most difficult to wrestle with, in both the ivory tower and reality.

At that time, I was very interested in sound studies, a field that I was fascinated with after taking a film class for my M.A. program at Dartmouth College. My first visit to the Hebei Provincial Archive allowed me to check out their collection on radio broadcasting, with files dated from 1949 to the 1990s. The first few hundreds of pages I read, copied and xeroxed there allowed me to zoom in and take a closer look at the intersection between politics and technology and their acoustic consequences. Coming back from the field, I started to prepare myself for the forthcoming comprehensive exam and oral defense. I still remembered how Professor Yiching Wu was shocked when realizing that I was going to do something entirely different from the exam questions on the day of the defense. Professor Li Chen, who is my supervisor, has been not only sympathetic to my topic but also generously supported it. Despite his busy schedule, he has spent many hours carefully and patiently reading, editing, and commenting on various versions of chapter drafts. His insights were instrumental to the current shape my dissertation is taking.

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Chapter 1:
Radio, Technopolitics, and the Economics of Shortage

1.1 Introduction

In May 1958, Hebei Provincial People’s Radio Station (hereinafter HPPRS) organized a special radio program for listeners to call in and share their good news with the radio station to celebrate the ongoing Great Leap Forward. It rewarded the news informer a chance to request their favorite programs to be broadcasted to people across the province. This program attracted a variety of participants such as cadres, factory managers and workers, and agricultural commune members. Unexpectedly, listeners repeatedly requested “Liu Qiaoer” (刘巧儿), a program that bore no relationship with the Great Leap Forward. Others, for instance, workers from the Hebei No. 1 Hospital, favored the program “Doctor on Duty” (值班医生 zhiban yisheng), which turned out to be a sarcastic program making fun of doctors.¹

This dissertation examines the complexities, uncertainties, and subversions generated by radio communications technologies to early PRC governance as it was used to consolidate state-building and social integration from the late 1940s to early 1960s. I contend that the early PRC government’s desires for creating a socialist economy, culture and society guided the use of radio communications technologies in the state’s quest to reach and govern its populace and bureaucracy in innovative ways and at an unprecedented level. These innovations, in turn, allowed these actors to re-imagine and re-negotiate their relationships with the state and position themselves accordingly. Furthermore, a series of developments during this time concerning radio fundamentally transformed the existing soundscape by cultivating the habits of public listening, institutionalizing radio operators, and constructing sound scripts. The state’s economic and political considerations shaped the way technologies of communication transformed the nation.

¹ See Hebei Provincial Archive (hereinafter HPA) 1032-2-106, “Wenyi guangbo wei zhengzhi fuwu de zhongyao fangshi” (Important ways for literature and art radio programs to serve politics), Yewu yanjiu 24, October 17, 1958.
I use the concept of *technopolitics* to further articulate the above argument. As Gabrielle Hecht defines it, *technopolitics* “refers to the strategic practice of designing or using technology to constitute, embody, or enact political goals.”² “These technologies were not, in and of themselves, technopolitics; rather, the practice of using them in political processes and/or toward political aims constitutes technopolitics.”³ Technopolitics could not be *reduced* to politics as the effectiveness of these technologies were crucial to solving concerns and accomplishing real material purposes.⁴ Furthermore, similar to science, it was “tightly coupled to regime legitimacy and political consolidation and played a key role in achieving Party control in rural areas.”⁵ It perceived human as well as non-human subjects, in particular, radio cadres, operators, radio programs, scripts, voice, as well as broadcasting techniques as hybrids of technology and politics. Indeed, the early PRC government’s quest for the unity of “red” and “expert” is the best proof to demonstrate that technopolitics was critically important to the building of socialism.

The significance of the Chinese case lies exactly in the fact that it offers a laboratory to test the operation of technopolitics in a developing and authoritarian country where the shortage of resources existed widely in various levels of government and society. The problem of the concept of technopolitics, however, was that it was so perfectly tailored to the analysis on state engineers and upper-level bureaucrats in state administration that it reserved no space for an in-depth discussion on the role economic factors played in the shaping of technopolitics and how the non-state individuals, such as the local peasants or factory workers examined in this study, shaped the interplay of technology and politics.⁶

The concept of “economics of shortage,” as a descriptor of the social and economic environment where technopolitics took place, is critical to explain how economy affected the operation of technopolitics. “Economics of shortage” refers to the condition when “inputs required for the

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³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 10

⁶ Ibid., 28.
fulfillment of some serious intention were not available."7 This concept connotes not only traditional economic relations but also political-economic ones, namely politics, culture, communications, and technology that were superstructure in general. For instance, radio operators, which was a special type of technology users, emerged in the early 1950s to cope with the shortage of radio sets in the absence of a public radio reception network. Their duty was to tour the radio sets among different population sites to give listeners access to information that was otherwise unavailable.8 Furthermore, illiterate commoners became candidate operators as human resources with technological knowledge and skills were running short. In other words, the economics of shortage conditioned the unfolding of technopolitics in the early PRC.

1.2 Revisiting Radio in Cold War China

Radio caught scholars’ attention immediately after the P.R.C. government decided to build a nation-wide radio reception network in 1950.9 Franklin W. Houn, for instance, perceived radio as “an important weapon of propaganda and indoctrination.”10 This view was later repeated in the works of communications scholars, such as Frederick T. C. Yu and George P. Jan, and became a major theme in the studies of politics and communications on the 1950s and 1960s China.11 The problem of such a view is that it understands the interaction between politics and technology so


8 Scholars have noticed similar cases in their studies. For instance, Michael Dutton has made the argument that the invention of work units (单位 danwei) allowed the state to government the population at a low cost, not only in terms of finance but also resources in general. See Michael Dutton, Policing Chinese Politics: A History (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 166.

9 “Xinwen zongshu fabu guanyu jianli guangbo shouyinwang de jueding” (The General News Bureau announced the decision to establish the radio receiving network), People’s Daily, April 3, 1950. For relevant secondary literature in this period see, for example, Frederick T. C. Yu, A Brief Report on the Home Service Broadcasts of the Central People’s Broadcasting Station in Peking, 1952. on file at the University of Southern California.


rigidly that it sees the conflicts between radio program designers and their listeners, as well as between the radio station and their operators, as evidence of the Chinese Communist Party’s self-defeating and dysfunctional management of radio.\textsuperscript{12}

Such an approach is flawed also because, as Alain P. L. Liu points out, it fails to realize that China was a developing country. According to Liu, China should be simultaneously understood as a totalitarian regime and a developing country. He situates the government utilization of radio in the context of third world development and explores how the party-state attempted to integrated various actors into the nation-state.\textsuperscript{13} Liu acknowledges the efficiency of radio in overcoming difficulties caused by linguistic and cultural diversities. He further discerns the power of radio in not only making the masses obedient and docile but also encouraging them to actively participate in economic production activities and social affairs. Yet, Liu’s framework is so Western-centric that the unfitting of China into the theories of development and communications was interpreted as China’s failure to achieve national integration, due to its economic underdevelopment and political instability.\textsuperscript{14}

More recently, Wei Lei explores how the functions of radio had changed as it took part in the transformation of the 20\textsuperscript{th}-century Chinese society. While mainly used for military and commercial purposes in the republican period, radio was heavily involved in the making of a patriotic, productive and politic public in Mao-era.\textsuperscript{15} For Lei, the changing social and political realities of China inspired the birth of new radio forms in public life. Loudspeakers were particularly important in this sense, because they supported collective listening activities, which

\textsuperscript{12} Houn, “Radio Broadcasting and Propaganda in Communist China”, and Yu, “Communications and Politics in Communist China”. All of them for longer or shorter periods had been affiliated with the Center for International Research at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, established with the purpose to study how people in totalitarian states access and interpret news and propaganda. See Jing Liu, “The Studies on Communications in Communist China in MIT Center for International Studies in the Cold War Era,” Guoji xinwenjie, 2016.


\textsuperscript{14} Liu, \textit{Communications and National Integration in Communist China}, 6.

\textsuperscript{15} Wei Lei, \textit{Radio and social transformation in China} (New York: Routledge, 2019), 28-56.
were political, obligatory and highly organized, in effectively mobilizing the masses for various political and economic campaigns in the 1950s and 1960s.\footnote{Wei Lei, Wanning Sun, “Radio listening and the changing formations of the public in China,” \textit{Communication and the Public} 2, no.4 (2017): 320-334.}

Despite the shortcomings in the works of early communications studies scholars, they nevertheless raised a crucial question that still awaits responses today. As Liu aptly puts it, if radio operated in its technological logic, then how did it interact with the political logic of the state?\footnote{Liu, \textit{Communications and National Integration in Communist China}, 6.} In other words, how would radio as a particular type of technology politically inform the way the state exercised power and how would such exercise, in return, affect the development of radio technology? Although later in the 1980s books that spent a chapter or two on China still came out, none of them created a huge impact that could challenge the thesis that Franklin Hou and others developed thirty years ago.\footnote{Howkins, John. \textit{Mass Communication in China} (New York: Longman, 1982), 5; Won H. Chang, \textit{Mass Media in China: The History and the Future}. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989.}

This question has also been explored recently by scholars working on empire and imperialism. Daqing Yang, for instance, argues that the expansion of the Japanese empire offered a chance for communications engineers and administrative bureaucrats to experiment with technologies and techniques to meet the demand of Japan’s spatial challenges. The invented technologies of telecommunications, in turn, would help integrate various types of space into the empire via the expanding network of communication.\footnote{See Yang Daqing, \textit{Technology of Empire: Telecommunications and Japanese Expansion in Asia, 1883-1945} (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010), 8.} Similarly, Michael A. Krysko contends that radio helped diffuse American values to radio listeners as it expanded in China. The significance of the American case, according to Krysko, is that it betrays “a huge gap” between radio experts’ confidence in radio as a powerful tool for China’s modernization and their ignorance of Chinese social and political realities.\footnote{Michael A. Krysko, \textit{American Radio in China: International Encounters with Technology and Communications, 1919-41} (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3.} Their inability to fill the gap and perceive the politics at work behind the expansion of radio technological infrastructure in China led to the failure of American radio companies in competing with the Japanese during the Second World War.
This dissertation tackles the above questions in a subtler and more comprehensive manner. It explores how politics and technology mutually amplified each other’s influence on society. For instance, radio stations invented a variety of broadcasting techniques to influence their worker-listeners to achieve the political task of catching up with the West. The positive results generated by such techniques further encouraged government leaders to utilize them more widely and intensively for even higher production output. It was this politics-technology loop that kept driving the Great Leap forward.

This study also discusses how politics and technology complemented each other when one was unable to achieve its intended goal. For example, when the government was promoting the right of the populace to listening to radio programs, radio stations worked on jamming technologies to ensure that foreign signals remained unintelligible to listeners. Meanwhile, as its technology was unable to jam these foreign signals, however, the government would reinforce its political tropes, such as “class enemies”, to deal with those who listened to radio stations from abroad.

Moreover, it further investigates how radio technologies triggered structural changes within the state apparatus, which were much less explicit than the struggles between being “red” and “expert” as manifested in public campaigns. New actors concerned with radio, such as technicians, operators, announcers, and relevant bureau staff, emerged within the state as radio technologies developed and extended its influence toward the populace. These actors increasingly identified themselves as authentic representatives of the state and hence demanded a share of power as well as equal treatment with other cadres. In particular, superior radio stations vertically demanded the cooperation of lower administrative units in dealing with local issues. Horizontally, radio cadres encountered significant challenges as they tried to merge themselves into the cadres at their levels. Although both tendencies were suspended by political considerations in the mid-1950s, they convincingly demonstrated technology’s profound impact on politics as it reconfigured power dynamics within the government bureaucratic system.

This dissertation explores the interaction between politics and technology in everyday life. Focusing on everyday life, to quote Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson, is to “take what

21 Gross, Farewell to the God of Plague, 10-11.
people actually did as the starting point.”22 “People,” in this context, refer to users of radio communication technologies. They include radio listeners and program designers if divided by their positions in the chain of communication, cadres, and commoners if by their political status, workers and peasants if by career, and men and women if by gender. It is critical to consider “people” in different dimensions, because they constantly function as reminders of the complexities of reality in which one acted with multiple identities. I prefer “users of technology” over “technician” for the same reason. That is, the former not only places people with diverse understanding of technologies on equal ground but also overcomes the elitism imbedded in the term “technicians” that emphasized the relatively small number of people with a relatively higher degree of knowledge and expertise.

The use of the concept “politics” in this study is informed by the broadened perspective on technology and its application environment described above. It encompasses not only actions of the few decision makers but, more importantly, the average cadres and rank-and-file officials serving at various levels of the government system with common or conflicting interests. These government actors were crucial to the creation of an state effect, which was delivered to listeners, as they were receiving and digesting agricultural and industrial techniques, skills, and knowledge from radio.23

Defining politics and technology so allows one to see the socialist state not as an abstract and homogeneous entity, but rather, a versatile, concrete, yet also highly localized set of practices in relation to its surrounding social and economic environment.24 It was in these practices that the socialist subjects, be they cadres, commoners, technological experts or amateurs, found politics


and technology inseparable from each other. They also discovered, at the same time, themselves entangled in this techno-political web that affected each person and every arena of the society.

The study is grounded in the Hebei Provincial Archive’s collection of the Hebei Provincial Radio Bureau (Hebeisheng guangbo shiye ju), a government body that administered the development of radio broadcasting in the province. I consider the particularities manifested in the documents and files and explore how local factors actively participated in the shaping of provincial radio broadcasting in the socialist era. The value of these documents, I contend, goes beyond the confinement of their locality. They speak to the larger issues that were not only common in other provinces, but also prevailed in the socialist state apparatus, social integration, subjectivity formation, and the perception of the enemies that marked the borders of the state.

1.3 Turning to Radio Archives

Archival documents from the radio system were important to a critical understanding of technopolitics in the early PRC because they offered a rich picture of how cadres in different positions understood the roles and functions of radio in building a socialist country. Such a picture was often found flat and biased in the documents of relevant administrative and economic government bodies whose cadres treated radio as a costly tool of entertainment and announcements from radio as unreliable and secondary to those in written form. In this section, I will use Wugong Village in southeastern Hebei as an example to showcase how the unfair treatment of radio in government archives and popular literature could lead to a biased understanding of the role that radio actually played in rural political and economic activities.

For certain government bodies, radio was an effective tool for the development of national economy and culture. The Common Programs that functioned as the PRC’s interim constitution in 1949 stipulated that the new government would “develop people’s radio broadcasting” (发展人民广播事业 fazhan renmin guangbo shiye). The directive of the General New Bureau (新闻总署 Xinwen zongshu) on the establishment of the radio reception network in 1950 further demanded government branches, army divisions, institutions, factories, and schools to develop their radio operators to help organize radio listening activities. In the following year, Mei Yi, the head of the State Radio Management Bureau (广播事业管理局 Guangbo shiye guanli jiù),
published a commentary on People's Daily calling upon “leaders of various government levels to fully consider and utilize” this new tool for facilitating their work and for educating the masses. Provincial leaders of the radio system in Hebei accordingly developed its district radio reception network and extended it to major towns and villages in 1951.

While central and provincial leaders supported radio for its efficiency, lower level cadres remained suspicious about its authority in communication within and without the government body. They preferred written documents to radio announcement as the embodiment of state power and authority. For instance, some county leaders refused to follow the directives from above if the latter came in the form of radio broadcast transcripts. They would like to wait a few more days for the arrival of the written documents, no matter how urgent and time-sensitive the issues could be.

Radio in Wugong village underwent a more complex trajectory of development. Wugong, as one of the nationwide model cooperatives, established the first tractor station in the whole province in 1953 but did not have radio until 1960. Although proposals to purchase a radio set and loudspeakers were raised in as early as 1952, none of them turned effective. According to the Wugong Biographies (人物志 renwu zhi), a person named Wei Lianyu, head of the department of general affairs (总务处 Zongwuchu), made the first attempt by ordering radio equipment under the name of “Construction” (建设 jianshe) while Geng Changsuo, the head of the commune, was away for the provincial people’s congress. This order was canceled by Geng when he came back. In a more recent biography of Geng and the Wugong co-operative, it became the leader of the first production team who planned to buy a radio set to help team

25 HPA 1032-1-3 “Baoding renmin guangbo diantai liangge yue gongzuo zonghe baodao” (Baoding people’s radio station’s general report on the work conducted in the past two months), April, 1950.

26 Ibid.

27 According to Raoyang County Gazetteer, broadcasting in Raoyang County started in 1960. Located in Wugong village, the radio station had one 25-watt radio machine, 2 staff and 8 loudspeakers along the streets broadcasting 3 times a day. See Raoyangxian difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui ed., Raoyangxian zhi (Beijing: Fangzhi chubanshe, 1998), 661.

members learn characters and improve their literacy. This proposal was rejected by Xu Shukuan, women’s team leader and wife of Geng Changsuo, who explained that “the priority [of expenses] should be investments on production.” The first production team ended up buying nine farming forks for excavating animal manure. Wugong did not give up its long resistance against radio until 1960 when the provincial authorities planned to cover every inch of the province under the radio reception network.

Radio in Wugong was deemed detrimental to the development of economic production. As a biased understanding of radio not only denied the latter’s legitimacy in taking part in local social and economic activities but also forged a moral discourse that denounced those who proposed to use radio for production purposes. The author of the Biographies placed jianshe into quotation marks to be sarcastic to Wei’s branding of radio equipment as production investment. If, according to the Biography of Geng Changsuo, there existed a work ethic in Wugong, it was about commune members working in frugality and committing themselves to the development that could directly benefit production. Spending money on radio was against that ethic. It became a reason to charge Wei of misappropriating collective production investment and a moralized label to denounce Wei who had already been depicted as lazy, calculative, and careless about public property.  

The bias towards radio persisted even after Wugong built its radio station in 1960. For example, the Wugong Biographies highlighted a few scenes in which radio rendered Wugong’s dark and silent nights sonorous and connected Wugong villagers to the larger world as they listened to operas and news from outside. These scenes, with no exception, described radio as a tool of communication, entertainment, and consumption. Such popular narratives failed to perceive radio as an interactive media critical to the facilitation of production.  

Local cadres’ resistance to radio delayed the latter’s appearance in the history of Wugong. Furthermore, these cadres’ flat understanding of radio as merely a tool of entertainment and consumption prevented them from utilizing radio productively. Together, these factors resulted in...

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29 Xiao Xianfa, Yang Diantong and Zhang Shaoliang, Geng Changsuo zhuan (Biography of Geng Changsuo) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2005), 185-186.

in the absence of radio in the documents on economic production. As these documents went to
the archives became evidence of history, the bias they carried over radio were so implicit that
they could easily escape the eyes of the most seasoned historians. For instance, Edward
Friedman, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Marl Selden’s study of Wugong in their *Chinese Village,
Socialist State* deepened our understandings on many of the central issues concerning the
localization of state power as well as the strategic copings of the peasants in the first few decades
of the PRC. The variety of materials they consulted were remarkable even by today’s standard:
classified inner-party reports to higher authorities held in the Raoyang County Archive, internal-
circulated village clipping files and the prefectural newspaper, and a village accountant’s record
books covering a period more than 30 years. Yet, these documents were so politics and
economy oriented that they mentioned little about how the technological infrastructure that
enabled the production, circulation, reception of radio broadcasting fundamentally transformed
the dynamics between different bodies of the state apparatus, as well as between cadres and
common villagers. One has to turn to the radio archives to find the answers.

Furthermore, Hebei is prominent in the history of Chinese radio broadcasting because it was one
of the origins of communist radio broadcasting. Zhangjiakou and Handan radio stations were
established soon after the central radio station in Yan’an, Shaanxi province started broadcasting
in 1945. These two radio stations were critical to the development of the CCP’s central radio
station as it moved to Xibaipo, a small village in northern Hebei, in 1948. Their resources and
experiences were incorporated into the standardization and institutionalization of radio
broadcasting as preparation for an effective nationwide radio reception network shortly. Such as
tendency continued as many of the Hebei announcers later went to Beijing and became an
important component of radio announcers in central radio stations there. The Hebei case
therefore serves as a window through which to see how regional practices were fused into the
making of national acoustic standard and aesthetics.

Hebei well captured a common issue shared by other provinces and institutions: the tension
between the development of technological infrastructure and the political agenda that motivated
it, As these announcers went to Beijing and broadcasted in Mandarin, they left behind the local-

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31 Edward Friedman, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven: Yale
University Press, 1991), XV.
dialect speakers who constituted the majority of the provincial population. For the Hebei provincial radio station, one of their critical tasks was how to translate written languages into oral forms and render them intelligible to local listeners. I anchor this study on these intersections of written and oral media of communications and explore how dialects served as keynotes for radio stations to resonate with dialect-speaking listeners and win their support during social and political campaigns in the early 1950s. While the specific dialects of each province may vary, they all actively participated in the translation/transcription of written, formal, and official languages into localized linguistic forms to render the state intelligible to the populace.

I by no means suggest that Hebei province stand as a representative of China, or even its microcosm. Nor is it my intention to offer a comprehensive examination of the interaction between technology and politics in this study, at least not in this stage. The case of Hebei is valuable for illustrating certain aspects and forms of the convergence and divergence of technology and politics, including the above-mentioned flow of expertise from regional centers to the state. It is, however, not the best site by which to examine how transgressive listening practices affected the exercise of state power on a daily basis, since it was not immediately close to Taiwan or Hong Kong that had powerful relay stations broadcasting anti-communist programs to mainland listeners. Nor is it the best case to uncover the acoustic making of socialist villages, which was a very crucial component of the socialist utopia. Shanxi might be a much better case for that issue, particularly because the Shanxi People’s Provincial Radio Station had a special program called “Learning from Dazhai in Agriculture” (nongye xue dazhai 农业学大寨) running from the early 1960s to the late 1970s and was emulated by various provinces across the country. All relevant radio transcripts of the program are now lying on the shelves of the Shanxi Provincial Archive, open to the public. However, Hebei offers valuable opportunities explore how the interaction between technology and politics shaped the trajectory of the socialist state and opens up space and possibilities for scholars to look into that direction.

1.4 Chapter Outline

Chapter Two focuses on the structural changes within the state apparatus as the state extended its influence with the employment of radio operators. The radio operators emerged in the early
1950s, due to the lack of electricity, to distribute information as well as to spread knowledge and technology to the public. They, like other state agents such as local cadres and labor models, played a crucial role in the social integration and transformation of individuals into socialist subjects.

Studying radio operators in the PRC era allows one to see that what seems to be a technological issue on the surface was actually a political one concerning the distribution of power and resources. Radio operators were considered governmental employees or cardres to smooth the path of state expansion in all aspects of governance and life. The invention of these positions, however, provoked conflicts within the state apparatus. While radio operators saw their work underappreciated by their county and local authorities, these leaders, by contrast, perceived the operators as a financial burden, “useless and unneeded” in mediating between the state and the populace. The precarious position of radio operators in the bureaucratic system rendered the radio operators an easy target for the government as the latter decided to attenuate its financial burdens. As it eventually turned out, radio operators’ marginalization was solved in the way of de-bureaucratization, with recognition criteria switched to political loyalty and material success.

Chapter Three continues to focus on the operation of technopolitics that accompanied the expansion of radio infrastructure and state power. Specifically, I explore how the HPPRS attracted and interacted with listeners via radio programs from the late 1940s to the end of the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957. As I will demonstrate, radio programs allowed listeners to circumvent local authorities and directly identify the HPPRS as representatives of the state. Hence, conflicts arose between the provincial radio station and county and brigade level cadres. I argue that these conflicts were essentially over the hermeneutics of state power, namely, who was the legitimate interpreter of messages from the central and provincial government.

This chapter contains three sections. First, I explore the emergence and divergence of cadre and non-cadre listeners as radio broadcasting was fine-tuning itself in communicating the state to the public. Second, I investigate how the HPPRS appealed to listeners by implementing keynote sounds from everyday life into its programs. Such a strategy was intended to more effectively discipline and instruct listeners towards becoming an economically productive and politically conscious socialist subject. Third, I examine the political challenge the HPPRS posed to local cadres in accurately interpreting policies and directives from provincial and central government
offices. Fourth and last, I look into the process behind the HPPRS’ retreat from this competition, and the consequences of this retreat towards relations between the state apparatus and the populace.

Chapter Four engages with the vocality of the state. I analyze the composition of a specific style of speaking that triggers emotional responses as it delivers messages to the masses. I explore this natural tone of speaking as a technique which came into being while interacting with the Chinese revolution, social integration, and state building. More importantly, I investigate how the state found its voice during the revolution and institutionalized it as the revolution continued. This chapter explores the formation of the natural tone, a particular style, and culture of speaking among the radio announcers in the 1950s Hebei. It discusses how these influential forces, as sets of techniques and knowledge, intersected with and fused into each other at various levels of circulation and dissemination.

Specifically, I examine how the natural tone had changed from being sets of gendered techniques and knowledge to a particular type of popular culture during the contested process of interactions between various social, political and economical factors. I argue that the feminine voice was instrumental in shaping the voice of the state. Such a voice of socialism later lowered its technological requirements to trade for its expansion and domination with the country. The result of such an exchange and fusion was that radio announcers in Hebei at various levels of administration were able to practice the nature tone by the time of the Great Leap Forward, with high volume and rich emotion as its characteristics.

Chapter Five discusses the role of technologies of communications in shaping the mass iron-making project in Hebei province. In particular, I study how radio fostered an atmosphere of competitive production targets. Radio allowed the provincial cadres to extend this competition from a single village factory into one that encompassed the entire province. I argue that radio not only transfigured the process of industrial production but also restructured participants’ identities

32 For instance, unlike the cadres at the struggle meetings who interacted with the masses on site, the radio announcers worked in the announcing room, a space separated from that of the masses. The only medium the announcers had was their voice. Hence a series of efforts were made to set up a standard about what should be in the voice of the announcers.
and their social relations. Furthermore, it was the operation of the sonic regime that energized the mass iron-making movement and elevated it to the national stage.

This argument will proceed in three sections. First, I will investigate the techniques embedded in different types of radio broadcasting in the early stages of the Great Leap Forward. I will then explore the radio station’s concerted efforts of integrating these techniques into the mass iron-making campaign in rural and urban spaces. The last section focuses on the impact of the production campaigns on the making of radio programs.

The final chapter explores the acoustic border of the state by examining the state’s attitude towards the act of listening to foreign radio stations in the 1950s and early 1960s China. It interprets relevant attitude changes in the context of the international competition between the communist regime and the anti-communist forces, first the United States and later Taiwan, over the power to control the circulation of information in China. Specifically, socialist China focuses on how radio created a new condition for the state to identify the enemies not only by the class status they were categorized to, no matter how arbitrary the status was, but also by the behavior of listening to foreign radio stations, or enemy radio, that were hostile to the new regime.

The rise of this new technique uncovers an overlooked yet very crucial aspect of Mao’s China: the socialist state governed the populace by channeling them into an informational order in which the state defines what truth and rumor are. While this information order contests the Western hegemonic discourse of democracy and freedom, it also, compounded with the broadcast of the enemy-radio stations, triggered a new form of governance by connecting the populace with the radio network, pinpointing and identifying those who listened to the radio programs from abroad as enemies. Hence, the dividing line between the enemy and “us” now took up an acoustic form: whoever listened to the socialist radio programs were one of “us” and whoever did not were the enemies.

Overall, my dissertation connects the social changes, brought by the introduction of radio, to the broader context of the Cold War and interprets the Asia-Pacific space as a network for the global circulation of technology and information across the ideological divide. My research challenges the dominant understanding of Mao’s China as a totalitarian country by investigating the collision between and collaboration of politics and technology and their unintended social and political consequences. It also compels one to think about territorial sovereignty not only in
terms of the state’s ability to defend its physical border but also its ability to regulate or control electromagnetic signals from the aerospace.

2.1 Introduction

Busy preparing material for the nomination of provincial model radio operators, county government cadres in Hebei province received a directive from above in May 1957. The directive informed them that in order to “increase production and practice thrift” (增产节约 Zengchan jieyue), the Hebei Provincial Radio Management Bureau (河北省广播事业管理局 Hebei sheng guangbo shiye guanli ju) had decided to cancel the provincial conference for excellent radio operators. Anticipating the complaints and dissatisfaction that this directive might give rise to, provincial officials explained that those who had already begun preparations should submit all relevant materials to the province within the next two weeks. As a result, a total of 13 county radio operators from 5 prefectures were nominated as excellent provincial workers, the labor models (劳动模范 laodong mofan) in their career. Thus concluded Hebei’s first and last provincial conference for excellent radio operators.¹

Such an abrupt ending to radio operators’ former political esteem begs a rethinking of the significance of radio operators as labor models in 1950s China. Largely ignored by existing English literature, radio operators in the early PRC referred to technicians who carried radio sets in and outside their office to invite the populace to listen to radio programs.² They began as cadres registered within the government payroll system. Personnel reforms in 1955, however, saw the removal of these radio operator positions from the government bureaucratic system, replaced instead by common villagers on an informal basis. Radio operators began to disappear

¹ Hebei Provincial Archive (hereinafter HPA) 1032-1-79 “Hebeisheng renmin weiyuanhui guangbo guanlichu tongzhi jinnian buzai zhaozhai quanguo xing de guangbou shouyin youxiu gongzuozhe huiyi” (Hebei Provincial People’s Committee announcement: this year will no longer have a nationwide conference for excellent radio operators), May 16, 1957.

² Similar careers also include film projectionists, tractor drivers, et al. see, for example, Miin-lin Yu, “‘nannu dou yiyang’ – nu tuolaji shou yu xingbieguan” (‘men and women are the same’ – female tractor drivers and the gendered view), in Xinsu xinren: Zhonggong xuanchuansheng yu sulian jingyan (Molding new humans: propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party and Soviet experience) (Taipei: Zhongyuan yuan jinshisuo, 2015), 261-306.
in 1956 as the central government shifted its focus on radio broadcasting from wireless radio reception, which heavily relied on mobile radio operators, to wired radio network that broadcasted to urban and rural residents via loudspeakers installed on poles and buildings.

Part of this story of radio operators resonates with the findings of political scientists about early PRC cadres gradually losing their status within the state apparatus.\(^3\) Writing at the dawn of the Cultural Revolution, A. Doak Barnett pays attention to the stratification of cadres within the government and party systems and attributes the success of the CCP to its ability to elicit positive commitment from cadres at different levels.\(^4\) Since the Cultural Revolution, however, scholars have tended to be cautious about the achievements the cadres had accomplished. The very occurrence of the Cultural Revolution compelled many to reflect upon its impact on Chinese politics and society. Harry Harding, for example, explores the impacts the Hundred Flowers Movement (1956-57), and the Cultural Revolution (1966-68) had towards the transformation of the cadres and the bureaucratic system.\(^5\) For Hong Yung Lee, who wrote in the early 1990s, the question became one of how the purged cadres, as they returned to power, transformed their experience of being victims during the Cultural Revolution into justifications for social and economic reforms in the post-Mao era.\(^6\)

Both interpretations assumed or implied the existence of the bureaucratic system whose efficiency varied among different periods. This assertion has recently been challenged. For instance, Eddy U argues that what socialist China has developed was not a system of bureaucracy system but one of “counter-bureaucracy,” which was incapable of rationalizing the

\(^3\) Part of this has to do with the lack of access to archival material in the past, but more pertinent was the simplistic understanding of radio operators and radio broadcasting in general as being merely propaganda that does not merit close evaluation. Alan Liu was an exception, who also emphasized the role of radio as tool of social integration. This eye-opening work of the time spent three lines on radio operators and described as a sign of formalism that only did a minimum amount of required work. See Alan P. L. Liu. *Communications and National Integration in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press,1971), iviii.


state with “a single hierarchy, competent staff, [and] impersonal norms.” Socialism in China failed, he further concludes, because such a counterbureaucratic system was unable to drive socialist ideals to the heart of each person within the state.

The radio cadres to be discussed here do not fit squarely into any of the above-mentioned interpretative frameworks. While Lee’s work focuses cadres from a rural tradition and U investigates school teachers from an urban bourgeois background, the radio operators examined in this study have distinctively different features. First, they were at the bottom of the cadre hierarchy. Second, their political status and identities were constantly changing, from party employees to that of government, from full-time to part-time, and from cadres who were officially on government payroll to ones financed less formally by local cooperatives and communes. More importantly, the above-mentioned frameworks see cadres as technocrats who were trained to do administrative work, but they often fail to recognize that many of these cadres had multiple identities. The radio cadres, first and foremost, were trained technicians. My analysis of radio cadres highlights the role their technician identity played in conditioning their precarious position within the bureaucratic system. I further argue that radio operators represented a group of human agents that sat at the intersection of politics and technology.

The appearance and disappearance of the radio operators demonstrate how the operation of “technopolitics” triggered profound political and social changes in early 1950s China. As Gabrielle Hecht has suggested, technopolitics refers to “the strategic practice of designing or using technology to constitute, embody, or enact political goals.” Radio operators in early PRC, as “hybrids” of technology and politics, emerged in response to the dilemma that faced most developing countries: how to consolidate state power in a resource-scarce environment.

Studying radio operators in the PRC regime allows one to see that what seems to be a technological matter on the surface was indeed a very political one concerning the distribution of power and resources. Radio operators were given positions within the government to facilitate

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state expansion in all aspects of governance and life. The invention of these positions, however, provoked conflicts inside the state apparatus that further marginalized the radio operators within the bureaucratic system. To attenuate its financial burdens, the government decided to place the radio operators outside the bureaucratic system and measure them by their political loyalty and material success.9

Another part of the trajectory of these radio operators concerns their identity as labor models, which can be analyzed in two different ways. One is to study the motives, strategies, and criteria that conditioned the selection of these models. The advantage of this approach is that it takes the selection process to task and explores the politics not only in the making of the models but also in the allocation of financial and material supports to the models to ensure that they would maintain their exemplary status and inspire others to emulate them.10 The other approach is to focus on the labor models’ personal accounts as well as their nomination material and study the making of labor models as techniques of writing. As Gail Hershatter aptly points out, having their identities and memory weaved into the grand narrative of the state, labor models “inhabited the diffuse and ambiguous zone where the state effect was produced.”11

In this chapter, I employ both approaches to understand the socialist state’ perception of technology by investigating two questions. First, what led the government to train new recruits to be technicians while at the same time marginalizing/excluding those who were already sophisticated practitioners of relevant skills? Second, what drove the transformation of radio operation from a career that required both technological literacy and professional expertise into one accessible to villagers who were equipped with inadequate knowledge and skills? The key to answering these two questions lies with the appearance and disappearance of radio operators, who, similar to political elites, played a crucial role in the social integration and transformation


of individuals into socialist subjects. Such changes concurred with structural changes within the state apparatus, as the state extended its influence to distant areas via the aid of radio technology to inform as well as reform the populace.

In particular, I argue, the mechanism of model making functioned as a remedy to the marginalization of radio operators within the state bureaucratic system. It was the failure of integrating technicians into the state apparatus that compelled the state to create labor models for the purpose of mobilizing emulation campaigns at a lower institutional and economic cost.

This chapter consists of three sections. First, I focus on the marginalization of radio operators and the institutional factors that conditioned it. I explain how the state preferred the illiterate over those who were knowledgeable about radio and radio operating. I then explore the consequences of that preference, especially regarding the tensions and conflicts that occurred during the expansion of state power into rural areas. The second section analyzes the de-bureaucratization of the radio operators as a solution to the rising tensions and conflicts between radio cadres and their same-level supervisors. Local brigades were now financially responsible for the operators as they were removed from the government payroll. Meanwhile, opening up these positions to villagers not only profoundly changed the way the state exercised its power but also conditioned the making of labor models. Moreover, the creation of the model radio operators, as a set of writing strategies, was to meet the need of the state to produce socialist subjects who were not only politically reliable but also technologically skillful to bolster the development of the socialist state.

2.2 At the Bureaucratic Margins

There were a couple of reasons for the radio operators’ marginalization within the bureaucratic system. One concerns operators’ capabilities, who were not knowledgeable enough about basic properties of electricity or principles of telecommunications and machine maintenance. Among

the first batch of 57 radio operators in Hebei, for instance, only 17 finished attending middle-school. The rest of them, 70% of the total, received elementary-school education. Regarding their backgrounds, there were seven peasants, three merchants, and 46 students assuming various positions such as bookkeepers, secretaries, propagandists, assistants, accountants, and members from district culture centers.\(^ {13}\)

The composition of the operators had its theoretical origin in the CCP’s conceptualization of knowledge. Knowledge, skills, and experiences were never neutral. In the new regime, they did not constitute a kind of cultural capital, but instead, became the evidence to identify enemies: whoever had them could be working in radio stations either controlled by the nationalist government, the Japanese, or the puppet regime in the colonized areas.\(^ {14}\) Therefore, loyalty to the new regime became the most important criterion during selection. Among the party members and cadres in the government and army systems, those who passed the rectifications in the 1940s were deemed as the most revolutionary.\(^ {15}\)

Such an uneven and inadequate knowledge background created a pedagogical difficulty for the transmission of technological knowledge in operator training sessions. Instructors had to revise their syllabus to facilitate students’ listening process. For instance, instructors initially planned to lecture on a broad array of topics: basics of electricity, radio set operation, maintenance, identification and repair of malfunctions, battery maintenance, news dictation, and speedy writing techniques. They later had to limit their focus on the erection of antenna and the use and maintenance of batteries and radio receivers.\(^ {16}\)

The instructors also had to improvise and introduce new organizational methods to the training

\(^ {13}\) See HPA 1032-1-9, “Hebeisheng shouyinyuan xunlianban dui jianzhi shouyinyuan gongzuo de chubu diaocha cailiao” (Material of Hebei provincial radio operator training class’ primitive instigation on the work of its part-time radio operators), 1949.

\(^ {14}\) See Richard P. Suttmeier, Research and Revolution: Science Policy and Societal Change in China (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1974), 129.


\(^ {16}\) See HPA 1032-1-1, “Zhonggong hebeisheng xuanxuanchuanbu shouyinyuan xunlianban xueji zongjie” (The Chinese Communist Party Hebei Provincial Committee Department of Propaganda summary of the radio operator training class), August 11, 1949.
sessions. They copied the textbook passages onto the blackboard and asked students to write them down to help them memorize technological concepts and theories. Instructors would review the content twice towards the end of the class and answer any questions before moving to the next topic.

The provincial radio station further assisted the students by establishing a party branch (党支部 dang zhibu) among them. Under the leadership of the party branch, seven to nine students from the same or nearby areas would form one group, with the one who joined the party the earliest or worked for the longest time serving as group leaders. Every Saturday afternoon, each group would have a group meeting for study, criticism, and self-criticism. Branch-wide meetings were also organized for students to raise and solve problems that appeared in their studies.\(^\text{17}\)

The result, however, was far below the provincial trainers’ expectations, in spite of the various types of effort invested in students’ learning process. The trainers initially believed that radio operators would greatly facilitate the communication between the Party and the populace in urban and rural areas through radio sets and amplifiers in each area. In reality, radio operators generally had difficulties in detecting malfunctions, let alone repair them.\(^\text{18}\) The result of their dictating practice was revealing: a quarter of the operators failed by missing too many words and sentences. A few remained unable to operate the radio.

The lack of proper radio operators remained to be an issue in the next few years. It was worse in regional radio stations. In 1954, the Zhangjiakou prefectural radio station trained three candidates from the subordinate agricultural cooperatives. Only one of the three managed to transcribe most of the news reports. The other two only completed a small portion. One candidate was so ill prepared that he essentially failed the test. The prefectural radio station sent him back and wrote to the local cooperative leader for a substitute. This request was soon rejected by the cooperative as the latter insisted that there was no better person than the disappointing candidate to conduct radio operation there. As a result, the radio station


\(^{18}\) Ibid.
compromised and let the candidate return to the training session.\textsuperscript{19} Although it remained unknown if the cooperative leader was telling the truth, the lack of proper candidates from local political bodies clearly was one of the factors that led to the short supply of qualified radio operators.

Suffering from inadequate technological skills, the radio operators faced yet another new institutional hurdle: their transfer from the Party to the government. In 1951, the CCP decided to hand the radio operators under its supervision to the State Council (政务院 Zhengwu yuan) to strengthen the government’s propaganda efforts and capabilities. Later in the same year, the State Organization Commission (国家编制委员会 Zhongyang bianzhi weiyuanhui) stipulated that there should be one full-time staff member responsible for radio operation under every county government secretary office (秘书室 Mishu).\textsuperscript{20} Although such radio operators occupied a county government personnel spot, they also had to follow instructions from the Party’s county department of propaganda. Necessary expenses for purchasing transistors, paper, and pens and so on would be covered by the host institution.\textsuperscript{21}

Very few radio operators appreciated the reform, despite its importance to the rationalization of the bureaucratic system. They felt that the government cared less about them than the Party did.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See HPA 1032-2-21, “Hebei renmin guangbo diantai Zhangjiakou xiumizhan guanyu xunlian wo zhuan sange nongyese shouyin gongzuo renyuan qingkuang de baogao” (Zhangjiakou maintenance station’s report to the Hebei provincial radio station on the training of 3 agricultural cooperative radio operators in Zhangjiakou prefecture), 1954.
\item A. Doak Barnett translates \textit{bianzhi} into table of organization (see Doak, “Social Stratification and Aspects of Personnel Management in the Chinese Communist Bureaucracy,” 13), which did not quite fit into the context here. I therefore follow the official translation of the current Central Institutional Organization Commission (Zhongyang jigou bianzhi weiyuanhui) and translate \textit{Guojia bianzhi weiyuanhui} into State Organization Commission. Unlike county operators, prefecture (专区 zhuanqu) and district radio operators worked part-time. See HPA 1032-1-9, “Zhonggong Hebei shengwei xuanchuanbu guanyu jianli quji shouyinwang de zhi shi” (The Chinese Communist Party Hebei Provincial Committee Department of Propaganda’s directive on the establishment of district level radio reception network), August 3, 1951.
\item It further specified that the funding of the operators should not be taken from the funding for electricity. Once the funding was insufficient, it should be covered by the funding for propaganda. See HPA 1032-1-3, “Baoding tai jianli shouyinwang gongzuo baodao” (Baoding radio station’s report on the establishment of radio reception network), September 27, 1950.
\item HPA 1032-1-28, “Shouyinwang gongzuo zongjie” (Summary of the development of radio reception network), 1953.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
While working under the supervision of the Party, the radio operators frequently received instructions and help for their work. The government, however, operated under a different logic. It prioritized social stability, agriculture, industry and many other issues over radio operation. Radio operators, therefore, became upset and worried about losing jobs or being assigned to other posts.

The operators’ concern was not groundless. While many counties followed the directive and placed radio operators under the designated office, their leaders did not fully understand the significance of the radio operator in connecting the state with the populace. In Shanghe county, for instance, the operator asked one of the leading officials to listen to the radio talk of the Provincial News and Publishing Bureau secretary. The official replied: “I haven’t been done with my real work; how do I get time to listen to that?” He did not know that the secretary’s talk, entitled “The people’s government at each level should help improve the reception of radio broadcasting,” was exactly designed for officials like him.

By contrast, some county leaders were found blantly neglecting radio equipment and their operators. One leading cadre in Shahe county randomly assigned a room for radio storage. The room was so humid that the radio set’s batteries, which normally should have lasted for more than two weeks, lost all its power in two days. Other officials did not care if they had one radio operator in the department. As a result, those who were initially appointed as full-time now turned part-time, and those who were initially part-time were now regularly assigned for other duties. These reasons together prevented the fulfillment of four full-time county radio operators and 35 part-time district radio operators in Shijiazhuang and four other prefectures as late as 1953, as one survey indicated.

The absence of care from local leaders created obstacles for operators to carry out their jobs. Some of the obstacles were institutional. For instance, in April 1953, Tangshan prefecture organized a prefecture-level secretary meeting and proposed to ask county radio operators


\[24\] Ibid.
partake other jobs besides taking care of radio operation.\textsuperscript{25} For provincial radio leaders, however, Tangshan prefecture’s proposal violated the previously mentioned state order that specifically allocated a full-time position for county operators. They emphasized in its reply to Tangshan cadres that, “county radio operators should enjoy treatment equivalent of a rank-and-file cadre and receive administrative supervision from the secretary office and career-related instructions from relevant culture and education departments.”\textsuperscript{26} Although the provincial supervisors killed the proposal before it took effect, it nevertheless indicated the tendency at the local level to use radio operators in ways that were at variance with the provincial and central government agenda.

Other obstacles emerged in actual practice. When the Shijiazhuang prefecture was organizing its operators’ meeting in 1953, the prefecture official informed the county and district radio operators that the prefecture had no responsibility to cover their food and accommodation expenses since they were registered with the Public Service Bureau (事业局 shiye ju).\textsuperscript{27} After that, no operators wanted to visit the prefecture government anymore.

All these factors discussed above — the unstable political status, institutional obstacles as well as practical hurdles — contributed to the anxiety and disappointment of the radio operators. To make it worse, they led to no satisfactory results after a long period of communications with the local government leaders. Instead, reassurances of clarifying the leadership of radio operators did not receive serious attention in government meetings.\textsuperscript{28} Realizing that the provincial government was unable to solve the problem, operators also resorted to higher authorities. For example, operator He Guozhu wrote twice in 1954 to the central government demanding a proper solution. Far from receiving a satisfying answer, the central government instead referred him to the very

\textsuperscript{25} HPA 1032-1-28, “Hebeisheng xinwen chuban chu fu tangzhuan zhuanzhi shouyinyuan buying jianzhi zuo qita gongzuo” (Hebei provincial news and publication bureau’s reply to Tangshan prefecture on full-time radio operators should not be assigned to other posts), 1953.

\textsuperscript{26} See HPA 1032-1-28, “Shouyinwang gongzuo zongjie” (Summary of the development of radio reception network), 1953.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
prefectural department of propaganda that he was trying to bypass.29

Meanwhile, widespread views of the radio operators’ relative inefficiency amongst local officials, in turn, made the latter believe that radio operators were useless or even a hindrance to effective governance. For instance, the radio operator in Linyu County never reported to county officials. As one Linyu County cadre wrote in 1954 to the People’s Daily, “It seemed that the full-time radio operator did not do anything throughout the day.”30 Hence, this cadre found it justified to propose cancellation of this full-time position so that money and labor could be saved to support “important projects.”31 Similar to operator He, this letter writer also received a referral from the provincial leaders informing the local officials to “improve their work.”32

The HPPRS discerned the accumulation of anxiety, anger as well as frustration from both local cadres and operators. Unable to decide on this issue independently, it requested advice in a report to the Provincial Department of Propaganda (省委宣传部 Shengwei xuanchuan bu) and the Provincial Culture and Education Committee (省文教委员会 Sheng wenjiao weiyuanhui). In this report, the HPPRS complained that after the county party committee handed the leadership of radio operators to the government in 1952, the “provincial radio reception network turned chaotic immediately” and “many radio reception sites remained paralyzed till this day.”33 To secure this full-time position, the HPPRS proposed to return the leadership of the radio operators to the Party. The HPPRS reminded its superiors that in 1953 the vice chairman of the provincial government had issued an instruction stating that “the leadership of the radio reception sites had

29 HPA 1032-1-35, “Zhongyang zhengwuyuan wenjiao weiyuanhui guangbo shiyue ju zhi hebei renmin guangbo diantai han” (State Council Culture and Education Committee Radio Broadcasting and Management Bureau’s letter to Hebei provincial radio station), March 24, 1954.

30 HPA 1032-1-33, “Shoudao renmin ribao zhuhanai nisheng linyu xian renmin zhengfu Long Yuxiang tongzhi laixin” (Receiving People’s Daily’s transfer of a letter from your province’s comrade Long Yuxiang in Linyu county), June 25, 1954.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 HPA 1032-1-33, “Hebeisheng renmin guangbo diantai dangzu guanyu gexian shouyinzhan jianzhi wenti de jianbao he yijian” (Hebei provincial radio station party team’s report and advice on part-time radio operators in each county) April 2, 1954.
to be considered together with the reconfiguration of the registrar system.” Since the government was updating the registrar system now, the HPPRS suggested, it could channel the leadership of the county radio reception sites back to the county department of Propaganda to create convenience for the work.

Radio operators from various subordinate areas, according to the HPPRS, supported this full-time position. In a supplementary report, the HPPRS party committee emphasized that all the seven prefectural departments of propaganda were willing to keep the position. Tianjin, in particular, had already written that into their personnel plan. The report also pointed out that, most of the counties wanted to keep this full-time position as full time. Only one of the few insisted on cancelling it. That county did so, according to the HPPRS party committee, because it lacked the county leaders’ support and poorly did its operation tasks. In other words, the HPPRS party committee argued that the counties leaders who were thinking of canceling the position should have themselves criticized first because it was their neglect or dismissal of radio broadcasting’s importance that caused the latter’s poor performance in their jurisdictions. The HPPRS awaited affirmations from above to further ensure that these full-time positions were indeed filled as the HPPRS instructed.

The Provincial Organization Committee (省编制委员会 Sheng bianzhi weiyuanhui), however, had other plans. Perhaps influenced by the cadres who complained about the inefficiency of radio operators, it planned to cancel the full-time positions. Although the HPPRS produced follow-up reports to emphasize the necessity of maintaining these positions, their attempts ultimately failed. The Provincial Organization Committee soon issued an instruction stipulating

34 HPA 1032-1-33, “Hebeisheng renmin guangbo diantai dangzu guanyu gexian shouyinzhan jianzhi wenti de jianbao he yijian,” April 2, 1954.

35 Ibid.

36 HPA 1032-1-35, “Shoudao renmin ribao zhuanlai nisheng linyu xian renmin zhengfu long Yuxiang tongzhi laixin” (Receiving People’s Daily’s transfer of a letter from your province’s comrade Long Yuxiang in Linyu county), June 25, 1954.

37 HPA 1032-1-35, “Zhonggong Hebei shengwei guangbo diantai dangzu guanu baoliu gexian zhuanzhi shouyinyuan de yijian” (The Chinese Communist Party Hebei provincial radio station party team’s advice on reserving the full-time radio operators in each county), April 13, 1954.

38 Ibid.
that each county could decide whether to keep the position as full-time or part-time, based on their specific conditions.\textsuperscript{39}

This “laissez-faire” attitude of governance effectively marginalized the operators. When the Government Administrative Council first demanded that each county should have a full-time radio operator, some counties, such as Tangshan prefecture discussed above, remained obstinate and sent the operators away for other jobs. One can imagine the damaging consequences such precedence could pose to the HPPRS’ power had it become a norm.\textsuperscript{40} Furthermore, what disturbed the HPPRS was not only the content of the instruction but also how it circulated within the bureaucratic system. The fact that the provincial bureau in charge of radio operators was the last to know the cancellation of the position demonstrates that the HPPRS may not be as central within the provincial bureaucratic system as it claimed to be.\textsuperscript{41}

Before the HPPRS was able to recuperate, it received another heavy blow from the government. In 1954, the central government took an initiative to restructure county-level administrative divisions (\textit{quhua}) across the country.\textsuperscript{42} While such an arrangement effectively allowed the state to break traditional local power structures, it also dismantled some of its ongoing projects in expanding state power.\textsuperscript{43} Radio operators were among the victims. As the initiative reduced the number of townships to lessen financial burdens and to smooth the communication between regional administrative bodies, it also eliminated a significant number of part-time radio operator positions. In accordance with this streamlining, many were ordered to leave their radio sets behind to take up new positions in the government. Consequently, this move jeopardized the

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\textsuperscript{39} HPA 1032-1-35, “Zhonggong Hebei shengwei guangbo dianzhu guanu baoliu gexian zhuanzhi shouyinyuan de yijian”, April 13, 1954.

\textsuperscript{40} HPA 1032-1-35, “Zhonggong Hebei shengwei guangbo dianzhu guanu baoliu gexian zhuanzhi shouyinyuan de yijian”, April 13, 1954.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{42} For counties and districts that were split and remerged, their cadres would be dispatched to take up duties in new government branches.

\textsuperscript{43} Chen Yiyuan and Huang Kun, “Tudi gaige yu nongcun shehui zhuanxing — yi 1949 nian zhi 1952 nian hunansheng youxian wei gean” (The land reform and rural social transformation — taking You County, Hunan Province from 1949 to 1952 as a case), \textit{Zhonggong dangshi yanjiu} 4, (2013): 93-99.
\end{flushleft}
efficiency of internal communications and threatened further financial inefficiencies to address new issues that arose from this reorganization.

To preserve these untended radio sets, the HPPRS made three suggestions to its provincial superiors, which brought a new life to radio operating activities. First, the dissolved government bodies needed to return the radio sets to the province. Second, radio sets in culture stations (文化站 Wenhua zhan) were to remain there, and station cadres were to be made responsible for their radio operation activities. Third, the rest of the radio sets were to be transferred to agricultural cooperatives, which had to cover all related expenses themselves. As I discuss in the following section, shortly after the proposals were approved, agricultural collectivization took place in the countryside. These proposals, especially the third, not only rejuvenated radio operation, but also led to the de-bureaucratization of radio operators and thus fundamentally transformed the way technology was used in bringing the state to the peasant listeners.

2.3 De-bureaucratization, Mobile Operators, and Flexible Practices

The expansion of state power as exemplified in the development of radio broadcasting in Hebei province opens up space for re-evaluating Franz Schurmann’s argument on de-centralization in Maoist China, which is still widely accepted in much scholarly literature on early PRC governance. For Schurmann, the de-centralization process took place in two forms: “Either decision-making power is transferred all the way down to the production units themselves, or it is only transferred down to some lower level of the regional administration.” For him, the Chinese government practiced the first type of decentralization during the mid-1950s and switched to the second in the late-1950s, which later led China to the Great Leap Forward.

44 For more recent articulation on Schurmann’s idea of decentralization, see David Bachman, Bureaucracy, Economy, and Leadership in China: The Institutional Origins of the Great Leap Forward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Miriam Gross. Farewell to the God of Plague: Chairman Mao’s Campaign to Deworm China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 43-60.

45 See Franz Schurmann, Ideology and Organization in Communist China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 175.
The case of Hebei demonstrates that the communication of political power worked in a more nuanced way than Shurmann’s top-down model suggests. Indeed, the expansion of the state’s influence was carried out as a product of the exchange of power between same-level bureaucratic institutions in the state apparatus.

In March 1955, the State Council issued an instruction encouraging cooperatives to build radio reception sites to push forward the socialist agricultural revolution. The instruction demanded the building of 10,000 radio reception sites nationwide in one year. From that total, each province was to set a specific quota according to their needs and send the figure for approval by the central government. Consequently, these 10,000 radio sets were unevenly distributed. While well-developed cooperatives enjoyed priority, the rest were considered afterward. Furthermore, most of the radio sets were claimed by grain-centered cooperatives, while the rest went to fishery, forestry, livestock, and vegetarian ones. Finally, only one cooperative per county could establish a radio reception site, regardless of how many cooperatives were in a county.46

The party committee of the HPPRS perceived a rapid increase of radio operators after the central government’s instruction took effect. In fact, their numbers would grow too large for the HPPRS to manage. This prompted the HPPRS to think about new possibilities that could benefit the development of radio broadcasting without compromising the existing technological infrastructure. In June 1954, the party committees of the HPPRS and the Provincial Culture Bureau submitted a joint report to the Hebei Provincial Party Committee and proposed to let the Culture Bureau supervise the current radio reception network. According to the report, the Cultural Bureau could integrate existing resources and accelerate the development of radio broadcasting in several important ways. In particular, it would reinforce collaborations among newspapers, drama troupes, wired and wireless radio broadcasting, and other forms of communication technologies, and therefore amplify the impact of propaganda in urban and rural areas. 47


47 See HPA 1032-1-45, “Zhonggong hebeisheng wenchuaju dangwei zhonggong hebeisheng renmin guangbo diantai dangzu guanyu tongyi shouyinwang lingdao wenti de yijian de baogao” (The Chinese Communist Party Hebei
Upon assuming power, the Culture Bureau immediately augmented the radio reception network by adding four to five official radio cadre positions to its payroll system. Accordingly, the radio station in each county was given personnel space for one to two cadres to supervise radio broadcasting. At the provincial level, responsible cadres would sit in HPTRS meetings and advise the directions of radio broadcasting in the province.

The Hebei Provincial Radio Bureau decided to transfer some of its authority to the Provincial Culture Bureau in return for expanding the radio reception network. Such a form of de-centralization had left significant political and social consequences. These consequences are crucial to note because they pointed to an alternative path of socialism that was cut short by the Great Leap Forward.\(^48\) One of them to be discussed extensively shortly was that it allowed the government to flexibly reach out to the villagers, as demonstrated in the radio operators’ daily practice of going to the masses and playing programs for them. This discussion hence brings to light the little understood specifics of the mechanisms by which the socialist state tried to turn the villagers into a receptive audience of its messages.

In spite of the critical roles the co-op radio operators played in rural transformation, their existence received little attention. Nothing so far is written about the number of operators in each county, province or across the country in this period in both Chinese and English. Overall information about their names, gender, career, age or position and titles in their departments also remained obscure. What is available, are fragmented portraits of these individuals from various documents scattered about in archival documents and memoirs. The following pages will offer an overview on the practice of the co-operative radio operators and a microanalysis on one single radio operator via a series of her biographical writings.

The co-op radio operators constituted one of the most concerted efforts by the state since its inception to effectively disseminate information and cultivate socialist subjects. Before

encountering the radio operators, peasants in the countryside had already met with work teams who intended to inform them of the necessity of land reform, mobilize them for the Korean War, and educate them about the new Marriage Law, the Unified Purchase and Sell (统购统销 tonggou tongxiao) policy, as well as other new social and cultural norms. The work teams attempted various ways (eating together, sleeping together, working together, helping them carrying water and firewood, et al.) to gain villagers’ trust and acceptance.

Administratively, the co-op radio operators were no longer cadres registered with the state payroll. Instead, their salaries, together with the costs of batteries and other necessary expenses, were covered by the cooperatives they belonged to. Moreover, cooperative radio operators only worked part-time since they received no payment from government personnel. Taking up this new position forged an identity that placed these operators somewhere between official cadres and common villagers.

Such an identity allowed radio operators to enjoy a great extent of freedom and flexibility to make use of various types of existing space and resources to present the state to villagers. They were also remarkably different from village heads and brigade party leaders who had authority over local affairs. The radio operators had to improvise, strategically organize villagers, gently convey reports and policies from above, and convince them with reason. It became even more so as the recruitment opened up to school teachers, students, and Youth League members, and no longer a privilege of Party members or registered cadres.

It is important to note that the expansion of state power does not necessarily mean the decline of the regional authority. Rather, as we see from the recruitment of county and lower level radio operators, the authority of local political bodies was well respected by their superiors. For


example, the selecting criteria required a candidate operator to be “politically reliable, interested in operating radios, and have received certain levels of education.” Political reliability often associated with people coming from the proletariat-peasant class background. It served to prevent “bad elements” from “disrupting” socialist production. For instance, youngsters like Yan Huizhen from Fangshan county were ideal candidates, who were born to a poor peasant family, received a proper education, and followed the call of the Party to stay in the countryside to help with agriculture. She, however, might have fit the criteria of “political reliability” and “certain education,” but not “interest in radio operation.” As she admitted, “I had never seen a radio set before. How can I know how to use it for work?” Such self-doubt in her words indicated to at least a certain degree that she was not confident of her abilities. She ultimately, however, accepted the position. “As a Youth League member, how can I disagree?” Her membership and loyalty to the Youth League played a more decisive role than other factors.

The most decisive factor for radio operator selection, the recommendation of cooperative leaders, remained hidden under the three ostensive criteria. With a recommendation, one could be a radio operator without meeting all the criteria on paper. As Yan recalled, to be a radio operator was an “assignment” (任务 renwu) the cooperative leader gave her. One crucial factor that encouraged such toleration was the growing precarity of radio operators. Since the newly recruited 10,000 radio operators were not registered cadres, the state did not have to pay them salaries. Since it was the host cooperative and nearby cooperatives that enjoyed listening to the radio, they should be responsible for any associated costs. Similarly, cooperatives figured that they would not have to pay much, if at all, for the radio operators, since they were unpaid positions. The fact that Yan later did become cooperative radio operators implied that the provincial officials tolerated local cooperatives’ violations of these criteria.

52 HPA 1032-2-39, “Fangshan xian ge nongyeshe de guangbo shouyin gongzuo zai relie de kaizhan zhe” (Fangshan county’s co-operatives’ radio broadcasting is prosperously developing), 1956.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 HPA 1032-2-100, Benchu ji ge zhuanshu guanyu biaoyang youxiu shiyouyuan shili (The bureau’s and prefecture’s material on excellent radio operators), 1957.
As a result, these local-born radio operators were found in various types of space, such as radio reception sites, schools, meeting room, personal households and fields, carrying a large radio receiver and a set of two batteries which weighed more than 10 kilograms total. These radio operators not only created chances for villagers to have close contact with the state by listening to speeches of state leaders, but also fundamentally transformed the local landscape of power as they broadcasted and interpreted messages of the central and provincial government to the villagers without the mediation of county and brigade cadres. The radio operators, in the process of transmitting and translating the state into locally intelligible languages, found themselves being “enlightened” by the socialist ideology and became socialist subjects.

The radio reception site (收音站 shouyin zhan) was radio operators’ main site of interaction with villagers. Religious buildings such as temples and houses for the worship of lineage ancestors were commonly confiscated and re-designated for public purposes by the government as part of major land reforms during the first years of the PRC. One of the radio reception sites’ main functions was to gather villagers together to listen to radio broadcasting collectively. The radio reception site did not require any props or equipment. It was better for the room to be empty so that nothing obstructed listeners’ hearing while messages were being broadcast. A good listening site was likely to be of considerable size so that listeners could find enough space to sit in instead of standing, crowding against each other or spilling outside the edges of the room.

The radio reception site also had its limits. Since several villages shared one site, those who lived far away or found it inconvenient to travel to the site were often reluctant to attend these sessions. It became imperative for radio operators to for more accessible places and convert them into radio listening sites for villagers’ convenience. For instance, operator Fan in Shijiazhuang prefecture regularly brought his radio set to local markets in 1956 and early 1957. He played peasant programs and news from both provincial and central government radio stations as peasants from nearby villages sold and bought eggs, vegetables, and other articles.56

Diversifying the functions of existing spaces was another approach that operators often adopted. For instance, in addition to his radio operator duties, Chen from Tangshan prefecture taught at a

56 HPA 1032-2-100, Benchu ji ge zhuanshu guanyu biaoyang youxiu shiyouyuan shili (The bureau’s and prefecture’s material on excellent radio operators), 1957.
local adult school in 1956. Since both his lessons and radio broadcasts for peasants took place in the evening, Chen regularly turned on radio during class, effectively transforming his students into radio listeners. This strategy enabled Fan to attract significantly more listeners and students than before. It was so successful that 110 more illiterate youngsters from across the county shortly joined Fan’s school to study.\(^57\) Similarly, private places such as households could also double as listening sites. For example, operator Yuan’s cooperative in Tangshan prefecture consisted of six villages; each one was about seven \(li\) apart.\(^58\) She had to carry the radio set and batteries, both of which were very heavy, and walk to the households of those who missed collective listening due to schedule conflicts.\(^59\)

For radio operators, radio listening sites were always to be listener-centered. As such, they were often fluid instead of being limited to a specific location or type of space. Operators frequently designated or moved these sites according to where crowds normally gathered or could be most effectively assembled. When the time came that commune members were busy with agricultural work, such as picking cotton fruits and applying fertilizer to the field, operator Yan would bring the radio set there and play it during the break.

The fluidity of radio listening sites was not only reflected in radio coming after villagers but also in villagers following radio wherever it went. For instance, villages under the administration of Fang’anzhai County were mountainous. Their villagers responded passively to the establishment of agricultural cooperatives. Everybody came to the celebration of the cooperative upgrade, however, once they heard that operator Yuan borrowed a high-volume loudspeaker from 15 \(li\) away to the meeting to play news, music, and opera. One of the senior villagers said: “On the very first day of the advanced commune, I have my eyes opened. I heard an iron box speaking and singing!”\(^60\) The amalgamation of the political event and sonic device formed a perfect techno-political spectacle: audible was the state!

\(^{57}\) HPA 1032-2-100, *Benchu ji ge zhuanshu guanyu biaoyang youxiu shiyouyuan shili*, 1957.

\(^{58}\) 1 \(li\) equals 500 meters.

\(^{59}\) HPA 1032-2-100, *Benchu ji ge zhuanshu guanyu biaoyang youxiu shiyouyuan shili*, 1957.

\(^{60}\) HPA 1032-2-100, *Benchu ji ge zhuanshu guanyu biaoyang youxiu shiyouyuan shili*, 1957.
When the radio operators communicated with villagers, their guiding principle was “speak reason (讲理 jiang li),” namely, to talk to and convince them through reasoning. Initially invented in the 1940s, “speak reason” became a popular approach for state agents to inform peasants and include them into state plans. Operator Chen’s account of his experience offers some insights into what this process ideally looked like from radio operators’ perspectives. Chen once encountered Fan, a production team leader of Chengjiagou Village, who was illiterate and yet refused to learn. With the help of radio, Chen patiently talked to Fan and pointed out to him the problems caused by illiteracy, especially the embarrassing fact that a team leader could not write down and calculate work points. Fan’s own experience confirmed that and eventually decided to join Chen’s adult school. Within five months, he was able to recognize 1000 characters, calculate work points, and read newspapers.

Sometimes “speak reason” did not work, especially with children. During the early 1950s, HPPRS radio programs mainly targeted adult laborers at home or in the field. In the eyes of radio operators, however, villagers were not simply labor forces, but more importantly, parents who had to take care of their children. As such, listening sites often doubled as caregiving sites that allowed parents to look after children and playgrounds for children to spend time with their parents and entertain themselves. The negative side of having children at listening sites was that they made such noise and commotion that no one could hear each other, least of all the radio reports. These children could not be kept out either, because if the operator did so, he or she would lose a significant number of adult listeners who essentially saw the sites as a nursing place. To solve this dilemma, Operator Yan placed a loudspeaker in an adjacent room. Segregating caregiving and listening spaces in this way kept children busy and offered a readily accessible area where parents could choose at any time to listen to radio programs relatively free from distraction.


62 HPA 1032-2-100, Benchu ji ge zhuanshu guanyu biaoyang youxiu shiyouyuan shili, 1957.
Sometimes, no strategies would work, especially when radio operators could not figure out a way to mediate between the demands of entertainment and politics. When radio first came in, peasants in Hebei province loved to use it to listen to Ping opera (评戏 ping xi), one of the most popular opera genres in north China. When operator Yan played opera, everybody sat there listening to it quietly and attentively. The moment she switched to political reports, however, she immediately saw listeners’ disappointing faces. Despite popular protest against political reports, Yan continued playing them. After all, it was the operator’s duty to make policies known by every person in the village. As a result, fewer and fewer people came to the listening site. There was nothing she could do but to set up a board to forecast programs before operating so that listeners could walk in for their favored programs and walk out to avoid the non-favored ones.

Other operators gave in to listeners. They did not try to correct “wrong” listening habits and bring up “right” ones. Instead, they fed listeners their favorites. Operator Zhang played for his listeners the traditional Bangzi opera Sheep Fence (牧羊圈 muyang juan), and the newly released Ping opera Village Girl (乡村姑娘 Shancun gu’niang). Villagers received them warmly.63 Notably, the two operas carried conflicting meanings. The traditional opera valued “feudalist” heroism that one returned home after ascending to a high official rank. The newly released opera featured a poor peasant who reported an escaped landlord and eventually had him prosecuted by law. The latter, in contrast to the former, valued the power of poor peasants. That such two plays were showed at the same time suggests that the operator was unable to distinguish the class-based moral messages underlying in the texts.64 For him and the listeners, the two operas were the same: entertainment. While enjoying the operas, they were unconsciously absorbing two contradicting values at the same time.

To summarize, the debucreautization of the radio operators allowed techniques of political, social, and cultural transformation to take place within a tight financial budget. Moreover,
comparing with cadres from outside, local cooperative radio operators enjoyed a significant
degree of flexibility and autonomy in appropriating existing spaces and local resources to bring
the state to the peasants. The drawbacks of this localization were also obvious. Due to the lack of
political awareness and analytical skills, not all cooperative radio operators could identify what
was productive and counterproductive to the making of a socialist countryside. Thus, we see that
while art pieces in cities that had even the slightest connection with “feudalist” ideas were
censored and barred from entering into the realms of circulation and consumption, they kept
flowing to the countryside by way of state-authorized channels. As I will discuss in the
following section, the authorities in the radio system perceived the tensions that resulted from the
interplay between economic thriftiness and political sensitivity and kept wrestling with them in
the mid-1950s. The solution they formulated was embodied in the writing of socialist labor
models.

2.4 The Craft of Model-making

In this section, I scrutinize a series of operator Yan Huizhen’s application letters for the honor of
“Individual of Excellent Work Performance” (先进工作者 xianjin gongzuozhe) and relevant
nomination materials from her danwei. These documents won her honors as the county and the
provincial model radio operator. I investigate how the tension between technology and politics
shaped the writing of these nomination materials as well as the identity of labor models.

65 See, for example, the campaigns against the film Wuxun zhuan and the novel Dreams of Red Chamber in the early
1950s. On Wuxun zhuan see Jun Yang, “On the Campaign of Criticizing the Film Wu Xun Zhan in Shanghai in
1951,” Historical Review 2 (2007): 73-81. On Dreams of Red Chamber see Tina Mai Chen, “Peasant and Woman in
Maoist Revolutionary Theory, 1920s-1950s” in Catherine Lynch, Robert Marks, and Paul Pickowicz, ed., Reform,
Revolution, and Radicalism in Modern China, Essays in honor of Maurice Meisner (Lanham, MD: Lexington Press,

66 Liu Yigao, “‘Qiongbangzi she’ gushi li de quanli yu shehui liehen” (Power and social fractures in the story of “the
poor country bumpkins”), Han Gang ed., Zhongguo dangdaishi yanjiu vol.2, (Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2011)
164-199. Yajuan Liu, “Cong Zhang shunyou dao ‘Zhang shunyou’: yuanxing, dianxing yu bianxing” (From
(Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 161-188. Yue Qianhou and Huang Xin, “‘Guo sike shijian’ yu ‘fangeng xianfeng’
de goujian—guanyu fenxixian huojiapingcun tugai zhong pinnong zhisi yian de kaocha” (‘Guo Sike’ incident and
‘pioneer of an-fedualism’: An investigation on the case of the death of poor peasants during the land reform in
huojiaiping village, fenxi county), Chinese Agrarian Studies, vol.7, Philip Huang ed., (Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu
Hershatter has noted in the making of female models, power functioned by twisting facts, making up fictions and smoothing barriers to create a reading experience that endorsed the building of a socialist state.67

Similarly, I argue that state actors in various levels adopted labor model writing as a way to reconcile divergent political, technological, and financial considerations. On the one hand, the radio operator was designed as a heroic altruist and passionate subject to inspire the general public. On the other, the radio operator was portrayed as a rational and economic individual to appeal to internal reviewers within the state apparatus. This balance served to both satisfy bureaucratic demands for high political loyalty and justify the avoidance of extra financial burdens by refusing the formalization of radio operator positions. At the same time, this measure sought to prevent such frugality from completely compromising radio dissemination as a state-building tool, whether in regards to equipment, infrastructure, or the hiring of radio personnel.

Yan was a native of Fangshan county. In 1955, she graduated from elementary school, returned to her village, and took up the position of female team leader (妇女队长 funü duizhang) at the agricultural cooperative there. In 1956, Yan became a radio operator. Unlike many of the trainees in earlier periods, Yan quickly picked up operating skills. Yan carried the radio set to the field during the noon and to the grain grinding ground (场 chang) in the evening. She organized villagers to listen to radio during breaks in the day. Thanks to Yan’s persistent organizing activities, listening to radio now became a habit for the commune members and an important part of their everyday life. Because of these initiatives and results, Yan Huizhen was selected as a county model radio operator in June 1956 and deemed a provincial “person of excellent work” (优秀工作者 youxiu gongzuozhe) in 1957.

Materials available on Yan in the Hebei Provincial Archives consist of five chronically arranged documents.68 The first and earliest piece, dated September 13, 1956 (hereinafter, the September-1956 piece), was Yan’s speech draft at the Fangshan county radio reception conference, while


68 See the appendice 3 of this dissertation for the 5 nomination documents.
the fifth and last file, dated July 24, 1957 (hereinafter, the July-1957 piece), was the provincial evaluation of Yan’s achievements as a candidate for the “person of excellent work” title. Of the five documents, only these two were meant to be publicly circulated. The second (dated October 10, 1956, hereinafter, the October-1956 piece), third (date unknown, hereinafter, the date-unknown piece), and fourth (date unknown, but definitively after March 1957 and before July 1957, hereinafter, the March-July piece) documents were for officials to review if she was qualified for the honor. These documents, together with the speech draft, contained varying degrees of revisions. Each of them showcased patterns of handwriting that were remarkably different from each other. Yan may have written her speech herself, but many others clearly and extensively edited it.

The editors of Yan Huizhen’s documents were likely Hebei county and prefecture officials. Though unstated, their identifying traces can be discerned based on government structure. Winning the title of a provincial model was not only an honor for the selected person but also an affirmation of the work of county and prefectural radio stations and bureaus. As such, this award would add points towards county and prefecture officials’ promotion. Furthermore, the model candidates’ evaluation materials had to be reviewed by county and prefecture officials before they reached provincial leaders. Others had no access to it.

The documents’ revisions illuminate how the state regulated and presented individuals deemed exemplary as they entered into the state apparatus, as well as the state’s expectations towards its cadres. One critical revision over several drafts was the appearance and disappearance of an emphasis on radio operators’ compliance towards their superiors, such as actively seeking their support. Such a motif appeared in the first four documents but disappeared in the award citation from the provincial radio station. This was important to note because it showcased how some of the issues that were tackled previously, especially the conflicts between radio operators and their same-level supervisors, managed to meander into the narrative of labor models.

Such an emphasis was achieved through a set of writing techniques. For instance, seeking advice from leaders constituted one of the multiple methods that Yan took to solve the difficulties that emerged during village radio operating activities. Other methods included organizing meetings and explaining to villagers the benefits of listening to radio, and using two loudspeakers to separate adult listeners from teenagers. In the October-1956 piece, these methods were grouped
into one: seeking support and advice from village cadres. Such a tendency continued in the rest of the nomination documents. It ranked the first of the four criteria in the date-unknown piece that valued Yan’s achievement. Such an emphasis, however, was toned down in the March-July piece. The above-mentioned methods were no longer manifestations of Yan’s rapport with her leaders but rather evidence of her creativity in coming up with ideas and solutions to practical problems in radio operation. Indeed, according to the provincial award citation, it was Yan who maintained regular radio listening activities among the commune members, “established radio listening teams,” “noted down radio programs, copied them onto wallpapers, and conducted roof-broadcasting.”

The village and brigade supervisors virtually vanished. Clearly, the tension between politics and technology that had existed in the state apparatus could not be resolved, even in writing. Hardly unintentional was the provincial radio cadre(s)’s negligence of the village, brigade, and county leaders’ emphasis of their importance in radio operators’ daily practice of radio operation. As this chapter has discussed earlier, these administrative and party cadres often caused difficulties for regular radio operating activities. Emphasizing the significance of local cadres would further undermine the provincial radio organ’s authority as it signified to the rest of the radio operators that they had to obey the local cadres’ leadership to be qualified for a labor model.

The controversy between the provincial radio leaders and the local cadres mainly evolved around concrete issues of whom the operators should submit to. The two bodies remained unanimous in emphasizing the superiority of the collective and the necessity of subjecting the individual to the collective. Indeed, Yan’s editors polarized the interests of the self and the collective. This was manifested in one edit that appeared in the September-1956 piece. According to Yan’s speech at the county meeting, she had a psychological struggle of deciding whether to accept the radio operator job. She saw radio operation mainly as a job assigned to her by the Youth League, of which she was a member. A sentence was added by editors to summarize her internal struggle: “The interests of the people and the interests of the individual were struggling against each other in my head.”

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69 HPA 1032-2-100, Benchu ji ge zhuanshu guanyu biaoyang youxiqu shiyouyuan shili, 1957.

70 Ibid.
Youth League member into one of a communist youngster who was actively and consciously thinking about the interests of the collective and the state.

The narrative of putting the individual against the people or collective was effectively an extension of the campaigns that the CCP launched to encourage the masses to learn from labor models in the early 1940s. The purpose of emphasizing such polarization was to promote a story of overcoming obstacles and birth of collective consciousness. Such a narrative divided the masses into advanced/new individuals and the backward/old individuals, and into the individual and the state. The heroine had to overcome the old self to give birth to a new one. The revolutionary work ethic was critical to that birth as it offered a socialist solution of the existing economic crisis. The moral effect of labor models functioned to educate and transform the rest who were judged as backward by a certain standard.  

The same motif also occurred in a story of overcoming difficulties incurred by natural disasters. For instance, Yan’s village was situated on low-lying land, which became challenging to walk through during rainy days. In the summer of 1956, the village was surrounded by water and mud which created much inconvenience for walking. Rambling in water and mud, Yan asked herself: “How could I let the bad road condition affect radio operation?” Notably, according to Yan, she was emulating the People’s Volunteer Army soldiers in the Korean War. She recalled the stories her teachers told students at school about the brave soldiers coping with extreme difficulties. Comparing herself with these soldiers, Yan thought that what she encountered was nothing. Therefore, she told herself: “I must do this radio operation job well.” The Korean War soldiers functioned as the model’s models and evidenced the success of the state to employ multiple types of media to educate and mobilize the masses, which created further convenience for their

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71 See Zhou Haiyan, “‘Zhao zhankui yundong’: xinwen shengchan zhong gongren mofan de shehui jiyi chonggou” (“Zhao zhankui movement”: the reconstruction of social memories of labor models produced in news media), *Journalism Review* (2012), 78-84.


73 HPA 1032-2-100, *Benchu ji ge zhuanshu guanyu biaoyang youxiu shiyouyuan shili*, 1957.
integration into the state. By the same token, the imagery of the heroics of Chinese soldiers in the Korean War was a product of similar mass media campaign and possibly the radio networks. If so, this example also illustrates the cyclical effects of broadcasting in reinforcing Party ideology and propaganda through the radio system and also by indoctrinating the radio operator or communications agents.

In contrast, materials for internal review highlighted something else. Compared with earlier descriptions, the image of Yan here was much more realistic and economically conscious of the ownership of the radio set. The Korean War story disappeared in the October-1956 piece composed immediately after the county speech. Descriptions of her internal struggles were shortened into one sentence.

Narratives highlighting economic thriftiness became the focus. In the October-1956 piece, new content about Yan taking care of the radio set emerged. According to the material, “[Yan] always thought that the radio set was commune property. If it broke down, the commune would lose the property. … Because of this highly active and responsible spirit, she never had the radio set encounter any malfunctions or related property loss.” Such a claim not only demonstrated Yan’s superb ability in maintaining the machine but artfully spoke to one of the problems discussed earlier, that is, the carelessness of cadres toward the maintenance of radio sets.

The emphasis on protecting collective property was further elaborated in the March-July piece that reached provincial reviewers. Similar to the previous case, Yan was again presented as a responsible youth who devoted her life to the protection of collective property. Close-ups were given where she carried the radio set on her back, fell twice on the way, had muddy water all over the body, and had the set safely covered by a piece of waterproof cloth. Such a scene delivered a clear message to the reviewers that Yan was willing to sacrifice herself for the protection of collective property.

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74 Hou Songtao, Quanneng zhengzhi: Kangmeiyuanchao yundong zhong de shehui dongyuan (Totalitarian politics: social mobilization during the Anti-American and Assist-Korean movement), (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2012).

75 HPA 1032-2-100, Benchu ji ge zhuanshu guanyu biaoyang youxizu shiyouyuan shili, 1957.
The dual image of model radio operators as both politically altruistic and economically conscious catered to two different types of readers and listeners. The document that celebrated political loyalty was intended to be read out in public for other radio operators to hear and emulate. The ones that underlined economic thriftiness, by contrast, only circulated internally for officials to review and evaluate. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, the maintenance of the machine was always a concern for the officials, especially given that many of the devices were in short supply and expensive to repair. The reviewers evidently cared more about what the radio operator could actually do beyond simply possessing a loyal heart.

The fusion of patriotism with economic thriftiness was perfectly captured by Yan’s provincial award citation, which praised her night walk as “strong professionalism and unafraid of obstacles.” She “carefully used the radio set, [and was] serious and responsible.” Now, Yan the loyal youth league member has become a skillful radio operator. She was ideologically mature and professional. The initial imbalance between political loyalty and technological savviness was finally resolved, at least in the official narratives.

Moreover, writings about Yan address a critical question that the CCP had since its establishment, namely, how to let the populace work for communist ideals. The CCP developed its socialist work ethic as it transformed rural “idlers”  to peasants devoted to their work and further linked workers to socialist work instructions and guidelines in factories in the revolutionary bases during the 1940s. Such an ethic integrated work into the narrative of the socialist sublime that the value of one’s labor lies in the reformation and rebirth of the self as one worked to better their living world.

Whereas work ethic concerning workers was built around the intricate relationship between the Party, factory administrators, and the workers’ union, such a structural relationship did not exist.

76 Hershatter pays attention to the circulation of the materials about models as they may cater to different reader communities. See Gail Hershatter, The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China’s Collective Past, 223.

77 HPA 1032-2-100, Benchu ji ge zhuanshu guanyu biaoyang youxiu shiyouyuan shili, 1957.
for co-operative radio operators. The latter did not belong to the workers’ union, or women’s federation, who could have treated them differently from the Party. The significance of the work ethic centering on co-operative radio operators was that it set into direct contact, on the one hand, their technological authority, which by virtue of their radio expertise, vertically concerned all levels of government, and on the other hand, their political duties, which ran horizontally as they answered to the same-level brigade/county administrators. Hence, as I demonstrate in the following chapter, what was deemed valuable by the techno-authorities might be seen as harmful by the local political leaders. What critically mattered, in this case, was not the epistemological question of why one should work, but rather, the methodological question of how to work. The answer seemed to be clear now: the radio operators were to be politically loyal, technologically savvy, and economically frugal in the discharge of their duties.

The most fundamental tension, however, lies in the cancellation of the provincial conference for excellent radio operators that the models were originally selected for, to order to comply with the central government’s spirit of “increasing production and practicing thrift.” The state disallowed these model radio operators to share their experience with their colleagues about how to be the perfect embodiment of political loyalty, economic thriftiness, and technological savviness to remain productive and economic. Such an ending of the model-making process makes one further ponder about how politics and technology might have affected the structure of the state apparatus, to be discussed in the following chapter.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the conflicts and tensions caused by the emergence of radio operators within the bureaucratic system as the latter was trying to employ communications technologies to link the populace to the state. These conflicts and tension were manifested not only in the radio operators’ anxiety over their unstable political status within the bureaucracy, but also in local leaders’ complaints about their supposed work inefficiency. Although the

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problem was solved later in the de-bureaucratization of the radio operators, the concern over the triad tension between politics, economy, and technology remained central to the changing power dynamics in early socialist China.

The following chapter continues to explore the unfolding of technopolitics and the structural changes it triggered in the PRC’s bureaucracy. While the present chapter focuses on operators who played radio programs from their sets, the next chapter examines how the producer of these programs, the HPPRS in particular, envisioned its role in mediating between the government and the populace. As I will demonstrate, while the HPPRS interpreted and translated state policies and instructions into various types of messages intelligible to everyday listeners, it also established its credibility among them like the mouth of the state. This, consequently, also challenged the authority of local leaders, who saw themselves as being the state’s traditional interpreters and representatives. I argue that at the core of this competition with the local cadres over the support of the populace was how communications technology fundamentally shaped the hermeneutics of state power.
Chapter 3: Radio Programs and the Hermeneutics of State Power

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have discussed how radio operators exemplified both the limit and potential of the socialist state. It signified the limit because nearly all levels of government underappreciated operators’ role from the moment they emerged to when they diminished. It also represented the potential of radio operators as a solution to the bureaucratization of the socialist state. This chapter continues to analyze the operation of technopolitics that accompanied the expansion of radio infrastructure and state power. Specifically, I explore how political concerns critically informed the development of radio programs of the Hebei Provincial People’s Radio Station (hereinafter, HPPRS) from the late 1940s to the end of the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957. As I will demonstrate, radio programs allowed listeners to circumvent local authorities and directly identify with the HPPRS as the representative of the state. Hence, conflicts arose between the provincial radio station and county and brigade level cadres. I argue that these conflicts were essentially over the hermeneutics of state power, namely, who was the legitimate interpreter of the messages from the central and the provincial governments.

This chapter is divided into three sections. First, I explore the provincial government and radio station’s changing perception of important population groups during social integration and state building by closely investigating the rise and fall of a special radio program targeting women, youth and workers in the late 1949 and early 1950s. Second, I focus on how the HPPRS appealed to listeners by implementing keynote sounds from everyday life in its peasant programs. Such a strategy effectively disciplined and instructed listeners towards becoming an economically productive and politically conscious socialist subject. Moreover, it led to the divergence of rural listeners from the cadres as radio broadcasting was fine-tuning itself in communicating the state to the public. Third, I examine the political challenge the HPPRS posed to local cadres in accurately interpreting policies and directives from provincial and central government offices. I further explore the process behind the HPPRS’ retreat from this competition, and the consequences of this retreat towards relations between the state apparatus and the populace.
3.2 The Rise and Fall of the Rotating Program

Radio occupied a crucial position in the communist efforts of state building. In a letter to Joseph Stalin in 1922, V.I. Lenin referred to radio as an absolute necessity to be massively produced and widely distributed, because it was the only way “to enable our few communist professors, who are capable of delivering lectures on social sciences, of delivering these lectures for hundreds of localities in all parts of the Federation.”¹ For Lenin, radio was economic, fast, and efficient to greatly empower the state for knowledge dissemination.²

Following Lenin’s lead, the newly established People’s Republic of China (hereinafter, PRC) wrote “Developing People’s Radio Broadcasting” into the interim constitution in 1949.³ The notion of “radio reception network” (广播收音网 guangbo shouyinwang) first appeared in April 1950. In a formal directive, the General News Bureau (新闻总署 Xinwen zongshu) defined it as a network of radio operators who were in charge of radio sets in government and army branches, organizations, communities, factories as well as schools to receive and transcribe news, political reports as well as instructions broadcasted by central and provincial radio stations.⁴

The CCP started to think about returning to cities and to envision the post-revolutionary society shortly after the Second World War ended in 1945. By March 1949, as the Chinese Civil War swung clearly in Mao’s favor, he ordered the communists to prepare themselves for entering large cities and taking urban issues as a central task for the establishment of the new regime. Scholars such as Ezra Vogel, Kenneth Lieberthal, and Frederic Wakeman have explored this transitionary period in such large cities as Tianjin, Canton, Hangzhou, and Shanghai. They cover the training and assignment of cadres to various aspects of urban governance, the restoration of

¹ “Sulian guangbo-wei gongchan zhuyi shengli er douzheng de qiangda wuqi” (Soviet Radio-the Great Weapon for the Success of Communism), People’s Daily, November 23, 1954.
³ see “Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi diyi quanti huiyi zhongyao wenxian” (Common Program of The Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference) in Xinhua shudian ed, Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi diyi quanti huiyi zhongyao wenxian (Beijing: Xinhua shudian, 1949), 39.
⁴ “Xinwen zongshu fabu guanyu jianli guangbo shouyinwang de jue ding” (The General News Bureau released its decision to establish the radio broadcasting network”), People’s Daily, April 23, 1950.
economic order, and the arrest of those who were deemed damaging to social and political order. More recently, historians have become interested in less metropolitan cities and begun to see how their experiences differed from the ones already discussed. For instance, James Gao explores how the peasant cadres understood modernity, revolution, and tradition, and how this understanding affected their take-over of smaller, less industrial, but highly cultural cities like Hangzhou. Jeremy Brown inspects how occupying cities such as Tianjin and Shijiazhuang occasioned the CCP’s redrawing of boundaries between urban and rural cadres, as well as between city residents and peasants.

This section of the chapter aligns with this scholarship, but explores a less examined yet nonetheless important aspect of this urban transition in another locale: Hebei province. The value of focusing on Hebei, and the HPPRS in particular, is that it offers a vantage point over an area with significantly different conditions from those explored above. It concerns how an administrative region, where over 90% of the population were peasants, adjusted the state apparatus’ demands in relation to workers, cadres, peasants, and other population groups as it mediated between the city-centric directives of the central government and Hebei’s rural local realities.

This section also explores how technologies of communications intersected with the PRC’s early efforts at urban transition in Hebei. It demonstrates that the HPPRS actively responded to the state’s political concerns towards this transition by categorizing the populace into overlapping listening groups. As people’s social and political positions changed during the new regime’s construction, the HPPRS accordingly created, amplified, and trimmed the length of relevant radio programs and adjusted their broadcasting frequencies.

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Home to the CCP’s central radio station prior to the establishment of the PRC, Hebei was ahead of other provinces in implementing a provincial radio reception network.\(^8\) The provincial government also readily acknowledged the vital importance of the HPPRS within the provincial bureaucratic system, as illustrated by its demand that all subordinate government branches provide the HPPRS with copies of documents sent to the governor’s office.\(^9\) If needed, the radio station could announce directives before they were printed and distributed to lower government bodies.\(^10\)

In accordance with the urban shift in state policy, the HPPRS proclaimed that, “the programs must root itself in the city and at the same time be mindful of the countryside.”\(^11\) It designed the following eight programs for its broadcasting routine in pursuit of this goal: Music [音乐 yinyue], Local News [地方新闻 defang xinwen], General Reports [综合报道 zonghe baodao], Cadre Education [干部教育 ganbu jiaoyu], Arts and Entertainment Bulletin [文艺通讯 wenyi tongxun], Market Updates [市场行情 shichang hangqing], Rotating Programs [轮回节目 lunhui jiemu] and Transcription Time [记录时间 jilu shijian].\(^12\)

The initial purpose of the HPPRS was to use radio to issue state directives to cadres in low-level government branches, institutions, and companies. Its intended listeners were primarily cadres in leading organizations, as the content of the programs were mostly instructions and decisions

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9 HPA, No. 1032-1-1, “Guanyu jiaqiang baoding renmin guangbo diantai gongzuo ji geji shouting gongzuo de zhishi” (A directive about strengthen the force of Baoding people’s radio station as well as the receiving force at each level), October 31, 1949.

10 HPA, No. 1032-1-1, “Wei chongfen shiyong guangbo diantai tuidong gongzuo de tongzhi” (Annoucement on fully utilizing the radio station to push forward the work), June 12, 1950.

11 HPA, No. 1032-1-1, “Hebei renmin guangbo diantai jige wenti de jianyao baogao” (Hebei provincial radio station’s brief report on a few issues), July 2, 1949.

12 Ibid.
from above and model production experiences from below.\textsuperscript{13} The public was largely excluded from this listener community due to government restrictions over the circulation of radio sets.\textsuperscript{14}

Guiding principles of these programs entailed “prioritizing instructions, decisions, and announcements from the provincial government and its branches, with a focus on the publicization of agricultural and industrial production experiences.”\textsuperscript{15} For instance, the program \textit{Transcription Time} which lasted for 55 minutes, was designed to assure the smooth and prompt transmission of decisions, instructions, legal regulations, and administrative orders from central and provincial government offices to their subordinate branches.\textsuperscript{16} During the program, announcers would read and repeat transcripts a few times at slow and regular paces.\textsuperscript{17}

To expedite and ensure the circulation of intra-government orders, directives, and reports, radio operators were assigned to listen to, dictate, and reprint the messages from radio and hand them to responsible heads in their respective departments. For issues that needed to be widely circulated and known, radio operators would copy them onto the wallpapers of regional schools. Before being sent out for broadcasting, a supervising team in the radio station would go over the scripts to ensure that they did not contain erroneous interpretations or classified information.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{13} HPA, No. 1032-1-1, “Hebei renmin guangbo diantai jige wenti de jianyao baogao” (Hebei provincial radio station’s brief report on a few issues), July 2, 1949.

\textsuperscript{14} On February 21, 1951, the Ministry of Public Security (\textit{Gong’an bu}) released a regulation on the usage of radio which required radio set owners to register with the local public security bureau otherwise face penalty. see “Zhongyang renmin zhengfu guanyu shishi chengzhi fangeming tiaoli de mingling” (Central People’s Government’s order on materializing the counterrevolutionary penalty regulations) (February 21, 1951), \textit{Zhonggong zhongyang wenjian xuanji}, [Selected writings of the Chinese Communist Party Central] vol.5, (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2013), 172-175.

\textsuperscript{15} HPA, No. 1032-1-1, “Hebei renmin guangbo diantai jige wenti de jianyao baogao,” July 2, 1949.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} Other programs included “Local News”, which took 20 minutes. It functioned as an instruction over various aspects of issues taking place in one area to solve general problems. “General Report,” 15 minutes long, praised exemplary economic production from cities and the countryside and exhorted its listeners to emulate them in their work. One interesting phenomenon is, of the 6-hour long program, music program took 15 minutes in total, but it appeared three times. Each time it occurred, it showcased a different type of music, which included traditional music, Western music and Soviet music.

\textsuperscript{18} HPA, No. 1032-1-1, “Hebei renmin guangbo diantai jige wenti de jianyao baogao” (Hebei provincial radio station’s brief report on a few issues), July 2, 1949.
Rotating Programs is particularly critical for understanding the radio station’s efforts to implement the PRC’s early urbanization efforts. It directly echoed the overall policy change in content and constituted one of the most important programs designated for urban residents. The Rotating Programs originated from pre-existing programs aired by the Zhangjiakou People’s Radio Station, which was previously the Mongolian Radio Station (伪蒙疆放送局 Wei mengjiang fangsong jü) under Japanese control. As the CCP took over Zhangjiakou in 1945, it utilized the radio station and designated programs, such as Lectures for Workers (工人讲座 Gongren jiangzuo), Lectures for Women (妇女讲座 Funü jiangzuo), and Lectures for the Youth (青年讲座 Qingnian jiangzuo) to speak to the needs of different urban listeners in this highly industrial city.\(^1\)

Listeners were mostly members of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (中华全国总工会 Zhonghua quanguo zong gonghui), the Chinese New Democratic Youth League (中国新民主主义青年团 Zhongguo xin minzhu zhuyi qingniantuan) and the All-China Women’s Federation (中华全国妇女联合会 Zhonghua quanguo funü lianhehui), all of which were mostly active in cities. Lectures for Workers aimed at improving workers’ class awareness, introducing them to the family life of workers in liberated areas, encouraging them to learn politics and culture, and promoting production by broadcasting emulative examples and methods for increased productivity. Meanwhile, Lectures for Women focused on women’s liberation through socialist cultivation. It broadcasted programs such as “The Social Origins of the Oppression Against Women.” Lectures for the Youth similarly emphasized reforming students’ thoughts and personality. For example, it invited the President of Huabei Lianhe University to deliver the following lectures: “Cultivation of the Youth,” “Reform Oneself, Improve Oneself,” and “Chairman Mao on the Learning and Reform of Intellectuals.”\(^2\)

The Rotating Programs was institutionalized and became a regular program for all regional radio stations as the CCP kept expanding its area of influence during the Civil War. In early 1949, the

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\(^1\) The Zhangjiakou station was one of the earliest CCP radio stations. It was formerly the The CCP took it over after Japan’s surrender in August 1945. See Hebeisheng guangbodianshiting shizhi bianweihui ed., Zhangjiakou, Jinchaji Xinhua guangbo diantai huiyilu (Shijiazhuang: anonymous publisher, 1989), 21, 50.

\(^2\) Hebeisheng guangbodianshiting shizhi bianweihui ed., Zhangjiakou, Jinchaji Xinhua guangbo diantai huiyilu, 21.
CCP instructed each of the regional radio stations to increase their broadcasting towards cities and urban listeners. Following this instruction, radio stations in Yanji, Jilin, Harbin, Qiqihar, and Jinzhou launched their *Rotating Programs* in March in collaboration with regional trade unions and women’s federations. Radio stations in Nanjing, Shanghai, Changzhou, Suzhou and Hangzhou followed suit later in the same year. In June, the newly established national radio station created its *Rotating Programs* in collaboration with the Beiping People’s Radio Station, All-China Federation of Trade Unions, the Chinese New Democratic Youth League, the All-China Democratic Youth Association (中华全国民主青年联合会 Zhonghua quanguo minzhu qingnian lianhehui), the All-China Students Association (中华全国学生联合会 Zhonghua quanguo xuesheng lianhehui) and the All-China Women’s Federation.

The HPPRS’ *Rotating Programs* shared the same three components with other provincial radio stations when it started broadcasting in August 1949. These programs were further broadcasted in close collaboration with local workers, women, and youth institutions. For instance, the Hebei Provincial Workers’ Union spoke to worker listeners via the program about union laws, labor protection regulations, and patriotism in production competition. These organizations also collaborated with each other via radio. During the Korean War, the Provincial Youth League, Workers’ Union, and Women’s Federation collectively delivered lectures on patriotism to their members and called on the masses to respond to the call for donating aircraft and cannons to the army. The *Rotating Programs* closely tied themselves to political assignments and their promotion.

By the early 1950s, the state began to lift restrictions over listenership and implemented concerted efforts to mass-produce and distribute radio devices. Although unspoken, this was

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22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 HPA, No. 1032-1-7, “Bentai dui gaijin lunhui jiemu de jidian yijian.”

25 HPA, No. 1032-1-7, “Bentai dui gaijin lunhui jiemu de jidian yijian.”

effectively due to the increasing acknowledgment of the utility of radio towards anti-counterrevolutionary efforts (domestic and foreign), as part of a broader technopolitical effort to enhance social and political integration via communications. This provided cadres with access to a variety of radio programs. During the Anti-America and Assist-Korea campaign in late 1950 and 1951, for instance, cadres were able to listen to programs calling for donations to help the government purchase aircraft and cannons for the Korean War. After listening to the programs, one of the district leaders in Changli county and two village propaganda members (宣传员 xuananchuan yuan) each donated 5,000 yuan.27

Meanwhile, cadres began using radio for their own sake beyond simply receiving and passing down orders and other announcements from their superiors.28 Although programs such as “Cadre Education” was established in late 1949 to give brief political lessons for “elevating” cadres’ political consciousness, it ultimately failed to generate a satisfactory result as few cadres knew the existence of such a program. In early 1950, radio operators emerged to bring the radio sets to cadres in their respective danwei, the state-owned workplace units whose employees were guaranteed a variety of social and political privileges and economic benefits.29 Others who could not bring radio to them would instead go where radio sets were located. For instance, in Qianxi County, when coming to the county office for meetings, cadres from constituent towns and communes would listen to radio programs during breakfast every Tuesday and Friday. Radio operator Zheng played to them lectures on political economy and economic production. Once the lectures were finished, he would then ask the cadres to discuss the lectures they heard from the radio. The cadres were reportedly satisfied with the arrangement, as they preferred listening to lectures and discussing ideas to simply reading books.30

27 The yuan here was a much inflated monetary unit. Every 10,000 yuan equated 1 new yuan after the fiscal reform in 1955. HPA, No. 1032-1-9, “1951 nian hebeisheng guangbo shiye fazhan gaikuang (Developments in radio broadcasting careers in 1951), November 27, 1951.”

28 HPA, No. 1032-1-9, “Liangnian lai wosheng guangbo shouyinwang de fazhan ji jinhou yijian (Development of the provincial radio reception network in the past two years and future advices),” 1951.


30 HPA 1032-2-100, Benchu ji ge zhuanshu guanyu bianxianyou shiyouyuanshi (The bureau’s and prefecture’s material on excellent radio operators), 1957.
Intriguingly, the three components of the Rotating Programs took on very different paths in the next few years. Specifically, the workers’ program kept expanding and became a program of its own while the youth and women programs gradually declined until they were finally canceled in 1952. This section mainly focuses on the changing trajectory of the women’s program, as publicly available archival documents contain very little information on the cancellation of youth programs. In the following pages, I will first examine the decline of the women’s program and then shift to the expansion of the workers’ programs. I argue that changes of these programs not only reflected the self-tuning and self-adjusting of the HPRS but also indicated the change of the state’s government methods toward the populace.

Although the HPPRS did not state why to cancel them, traces of thought could be found from the reports delivered at the first national radio broadcasting conference in 1952. Hebei was not unique in canceling such programs. The radio stations in north China in general were reported to have had a wide array of radio programs as they started broadcasting. They cut down programs after a short period of exploration and experimentation. Many radio stations had either completely stopped their women and youth programs or deemed them secondary. Meanwhile, these radio stations shifted their focus to programs targeting workers, peasants, and provincial political affairs.\(^{31}\) The central station’s report at the conference further stated that programs that bore no close relationship with the masses would not be welcomed. The Rotating Programs of urban employees, women, and youth was exactly a case of failure.\(^ {32}\)

Records of the HPPRS’ communication with local radio operators, however, seemed to offer a different story. The women’s program actually closely tied itself to the masses. It was highly welcomed by female radio listeners. According to the HPPRS’ survey in 1951, 34 out of 85 cities had regular listening activities to listen to the women’s program. Forty-four cities listened less frequently but still managed to keep up the habit.\(^ {33}\) In terms of organization, women organized large and small listening groups to maximize the use of the program. For instance, after listening to the broadcasting about drafting the patriotism contract, one team not only drafted one for

\(^{31}\) HPA, No. 1032-2-5, “Huabeiqu sannian lai renmin guangbo shiye fazhan gaikuang.”

\(^{32}\) HPA, No. 1032-2-5, “Zhongyang renmin guangbo diantai de gongzuo gaikuang.”

\(^{33}\) HPA, No. 1032-1-7, “Funu jiemu shouting qingkuang diaocha.”
themselves but also persuaded others to do the same. Funing county once organized 5000 female listeners to listen to the provincial labor day radio conference.\textsuperscript{34}

Leaders of the HPPRS cared less about the women’s program than they claimed. At one of the cadres’ meetings, representatives from 26 cities expressed their interest in listening to programs that address women’s and children’s hygiene issues. The HPPRS not only rejected the proposal but also planned to shorten the women’s program from twice a week to once a week and “stop broadcasting content about women and children hygiene issues or transfer it to other programs.”\textsuperscript{35} As it turned out, what disappeared in 1952 was not only topics on hygiene. The whole women’s program vanished.\textsuperscript{36}

Clearly, the state and provincial radio authorities’ observation of the women programs failed to stay in contact with the masses meant something else. In 1949, the CCP perceived cities not only as a critical component of society but more importantly as a critical production space in which every resident, regardless of their occupations, produced and contributed to the development of the national economy.\textsuperscript{37} Under such a policy, radio programs that were not readily relevant to production would be constrained and gave way to those that were productive. Topics on hygiene were important for women but they failed to directly bolster production activities. Instead, it ran the risk of draining labor from production as listeners might choose to prioritize the protection of their bodies over the facilitation of production.

The cancellation of the women’s program revealed a crucial dimension of gender politics in socialist radio broadcasting in the early 1950s. It demonstrated that the CCP at this moment had not realized the importance of women in economic production. Although female listeners could

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35} HPA, No. 1032-1-7, “Guanyu gaijin guangbo jiemu neirong de yijian.”

\textsuperscript{36} Time slots for women and youth programs were given to the newly designed programs \textit{Students’ Time} and \textit{Party Life} to serve the rapid increase of student radio listeners and the political necessity to report on the work of the countryside party branches. Although these two programs were part of the \textit{Rotating Programs} their listener community was broader in scope. \textit{Students’ Time} listeners, for example, included not only cadres in the student union but also average students themselves in city and county middle schools. The \textit{Students’ Time} was canceled shortly. See HPA, No. 1032-1-7, “Bentai dui gaijin lunhui jiemu de jidian yijian.”

still listen to other programs, they were not recognized as women with regards to production. They appeared instead as cadres, urban workers and other genderless public categories that could directly influence production activities.

In contrast to the quick decline of the women’s program, the _Workers’ Program_ expanded rapidly. It claimed half of _Rotating Programs_’ total broadcasting time. It was further divided into _Factory and Mine Time_ (工矿时间 Gongkuang shijian) and _Union Time_ (工会时间 Gonghui shijian) to cater to the interests of different worker communities. While broadcasting twice a week previously, it increased into three after September 1951. 38 Its services accordingly broadened to include not only helping specific administrative departments to facilitate economic production activities in different areas but also promoting emulative experiences from workers in different areas. 39 It also broadcasted recreational radio programs that the HPPRS journalists composed after visiting local factories and mines. 40 As the program expanded, its intended listeners extended from cadres in the workers’ unions to average workers and employees in factories, mines, and companies. 41

The establishment of factory radio stations further provided an infrastructure for the development of broadcasting to workers. According to a joint announcement of the Central Government News Bureau and the All-China Worker’s Union, state-owned factories, mines, and enterprises that hired more than 300 employees had to establish a radio station. These radio stations could design their own programs and relay programs from state and provincial stations. Those that had under 300 employees should establish public sites for collective listening activities (see Chapter one). Leaders of the radio stations and listening sites would report their activities to their respective workers’ unions, municipal, provincial and state radio stations, as well as the All-China

38 It changed from once each Sunday and Wednesday to once each Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday. See HPA, No. 1032-1-7, “Bentai dui gaijin lunhui jiemu de jidian yijian.”


40 HPA, No. 1032-1-7, “Bentai dui gaijin lunhui jiemu de jidian yijian.”

41 Ibid.
Federation of Trade Unions. Provincial and municipal radio stations were to provide technical support.\textsuperscript{42}

The link between worker listeners and radio stations forged by the joint announcement fundamentally changed the way radio operated. Previously, radio stations only had to be responsible for the design and delivery of radio programs. Now, they had to make sure that, technologically and organizationally, listeners had access to the programs. As such, loudspeakers were found in not only various parts of factories but also in workers’ dormitory buildings so that they and their families could listen to radio after work. Permissions to establish a dormitory radio station were also given if conditions were met.\textsuperscript{43} Ultimately, radio was to be always within earshot of workers regardless of where they were and what they were doing. As the joint announcement summarized, listening to radio had become an indispensable part of factory workers’ everyday lives.\textsuperscript{44}

The rapid and comprehensive development of factory worker radio broadcasting was closely tied to the changing politics of production in the early 1950s. Workers were not only the most important production forces but also the ideal political subjects to build the future socialist society. It therefore became critical for the government to educate workers and prepare them for their assigned historical destiny. Radio was a powerful tool for inculcating certain knowledge into workers, improving their political conscious, and having them act accordingly. The task of factory radio stations, therefore, was to design programs in the forms of news, lectures, reports, and entertainment to serve the workers and factory production, instead of remaining a mere mouthpiece of state and provincial radio stations.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{42} HPA, No. 1032-1-86, “Guanyu zai quanguo gongchang, kuangshan, qiye zhong jianli guangbo shouyinwang de jueding.”

\textsuperscript{43} HPA, No. 1032-1-86, “Guanyu zai quanguo gongchang, kuangshan, qiye zhong jianli guangbo shouyinwang de jueding.”

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{45} Mei Yi, “Da li kaizhan gongren zhong de guangbo gongzuo” (Vigorously carrying out the work of radio broadcasting towards workers), \textit{People’s Daily}, May 19, 1951. To resonate with Mei Yi’s article, the Central Radio Management Bureau issued an instruction to urban radio stations on how to guide the development of factory radio stations. The instruction emphasized that local radio stations should realize that doing the job of worker’s radio broadcasting is the most important political task for urban radio stations. Local radio stations should see opportunity to do investigation and study the condition of local factory, mine and enterprises’ radio reception network as well as
The HPPRS’ adjustment of its *Workers’ Program* perfectly responded to the state’s increasing awareness on the significance of workers and their position in the building of socialist subjects. In 1952, the HPPRS separated the *Workers’ Program* from the *Rotating Programs* and renamed it as Radio Broadcasts to Workers (*对工人广播节目* *Dui gongren guangbo jiemu*) and increased its frequency from three times a week to once per day. This new workers’ program closely served the ongoing political activities in the province. For instance, it broadcasted contents that promoted exemplary production experiences and criticized those who were reluctant to adopt such experiences and ideas or those who worried about failure during Hebei’s promotion of the patriotic production movement in July and August 1952.\(^46\)

The actual radio listening activities in factories, however, turned out to be disappointing in comparison with the various efforts the HPPRS invested in its workers’ programs. According to a survey the HPPRS conducted in 1953, very few of the 16 factory and mine radio stations in Shijiazhuang, Jingxing, Handan, Fengfeng, Zhangjiakou, Xuanhua and Baoding prefectures broadcasted on a regular basis.\(^47\) More critically reasons affecting the reception of the HPPRS programs included the malfunction of factory radio stations. The majority of the radio stations hired part-time staff who often put radio broadcasting aside when occupied by other issues.\(^48\) Their self-designed programs were also poorly prepared that even reading newspapers could become a problem. For example, one station misread “watching out for the enemy’s plot” for help them solve technological difficulties and listen to factory workers’ comments on radio broadcasting. See “Zhongyang guangbo shiyeju wei zhixing ‘guanyu zai quanguo gongchang, kuangshan, qiye zong jianli guangbo shouyinwang de jueding’ gedi gedi renmintai de zhishi,” September 29, 1951. From *Dangdai zhongguo de guangbodianshi* bianjibu ed., *Guangbo dianshi shiliao xuanbian*, vol.4, *Zhongguo de youxian guangbo* (Beijing: Beijing guangbo xueyuan, 1988), 36-38.

\(^46\) HPA, No. 1032-1-14, “Qiyuefen gongzuo jiannbao” and “Bayuifen gongzuo jiannbao.”

\(^47\) The Longyan mine radio station was a positive example. It had a complete organization and won the attention of the factory party branches. As workers commented, radio had turned Longyan from a place “full of ghost cries” into one of “real paradise.”

\(^48\) Firstly, the 16 wired radio stations had 23 amplifiers with a total output of 4350 watts. Among them, the most powerful one was 500 watts and the least was 50 watts. Each amplifier is attached with microphones, together with 638 loudspeakers. Among them, 61 were 25 watts. Mines such as Fengfeng, Jingxing and Longyan had four recording devices. The equipment was great. Regarding staffing, 8 of them had 16 full-time radio broadcasting cadres. Another 21 part-time cadres. See HPA, No. 1032-1-16, Hebei renmin guangbo dian tai tinglianke, “Guanyu muqian changkuang youxian guangbozhuan de yidian qingkuang he liangdian yijian.”
“watching out for our plot” during one broadcast.\textsuperscript{49} Although the situation became better in 1954, there were 5 out of 18 factory radio stations that had the condition to relay the workers’ programs and did not do so. Another four still lacked the devices for program relays.\textsuperscript{50}

The negligence of the workers’ program in factories was further demonstrated in their relay programs. Many factory radio stations considered radio as a tool for cadres to receive instructions from above and consequently paid considerable attention to the programs for cadres, who often monopolized the use of radio in their offices.\textsuperscript{51} Certain factories, for instance, made it an assignment for workers to listen to a talk by the vice minister of the provincial industrial ministry, followed up by an organized discussion. Workers, by contrast, were given little consideration in these factories, which rarely relayed the Provincial “Radio Broadcasts for Workers.” Nor did these factories reach out to the provincial radio station requesting the workers’ programs’ schedules and arrange listening activities accordingly. As the report pointed out, these factories failed to perceive the connection between their workers and the provincial workers’ radio programs.\textsuperscript{52}

The HPPRS decided to cut the 30-minute broadcasting time by half after reviewing the report. With this new 15-minute long program, Yu Xin, the head of the HPPRS stated, workers did not have to worry if they could not finish listening to it.\textsuperscript{53} Such a decision certainly demonstrated the flexibility of the HPPRS in adjusting its programs to local realities. It nevertheless indicated how the expansion of state power to workers via technologies of communication could actually be constrained by the very structure that it utilized to get in touch with the workers. The factory radio stations’ poor utilization, for instance, could be caused by leaders who saw radio broadcasting as interrupting production procedures. Similarly, cadres who monopolized radio

\textsuperscript{49} HPA, No. 1032-1-16, Hebei renmin guangbo diantai tinglianke, “Guanyu muqian changkuang youxian guangbozhuan de yidian qingkuang he liangdian yijian.”

\textsuperscript{50} See HPA, No. 1032-1-25, “Shouyin gongzuo jianbao.”

\textsuperscript{51} HPA, No. 1032-1-16, Hebei renmin guangbo diantai tinglianke, “Guanyu muqian changkuang youxian guangbozhuan de yidian qingkuang he liangdian yijian.”

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{53} HPA1032-1-7, “Yu Xin zhi Mei Yi de xin” (Yu Xin’s letter to Mei Yi), 1953.
sets for their own use was also likely to think of radio as a powerful tool to improve their political awareness in dealing with factory issues. Regardless of the intentions, the very action of silencing provincial radio programs in the factory effectively spoiled the connections that the HPPRS tried to build between the state and workers.\textsuperscript{54}

The rise and fall of workers’ programs demonstrated that the connections between the state and its radio listeners were fragile and difficult to maintain. In the following section, I will explore how the HPPRS failed in maintaining such a connection after successfully building up one with its rural listeners in its development of the peasant radio programs. The value of the peasant programs is that it pointed out the condition when conflicts rose between the technologies of communication and local authorities when the latter did perceive and appreciate the value of the former in educating and mobilizing the populace. Conflicts rose because cadres now realized that their authority could be undermined and even unacknowledged as technologies of communication helped the state bypass them to expand its influence over the populace.

3.3 Keynote Sounds and the Discovery of Peasants

In this section, I argue that the HPPRS consciously appropriated existing keynote sounds in a rural area and dubbed it with new meanings to make sure that its radio programs were actually heard and understood by listeners.\textsuperscript{55} Its ultimate goal was to make these new meanings sound \textit{shun’er} (顺耳), or “pleasant to the ears” of peasants, and hence became “natural,” “comfortable,” and “easy to understand.” This study further shows that the newly transformed keynote sounds actively participated in the transformation of the rural power structure in Hebei. With such sounds, the HPPRS rendered the state audible and directly connected it to peasants, consequently turning local cadres into an unnecessary mediator between the two.

\textsuperscript{54} Elizabeth J. Perry, for example, argues that part of the reasons that the workers were able to get organized and strike in 1957 was because the walkers exercised a certain amount of freedom in dealing with factory activities. see Perry, “Shanghai’s Strike Wave of 1957,” \textit{The China Quarterly} 137 (1994): 1–27.

\textsuperscript{55} Chang-tai Hung calls this process “filling old bottles with new wine” (jiuping zhuang xinjiu). For his studies on the communist reform on traditional art forms, see Chang-tai Hung, \textit{War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 86-92.
The concept “keynote” refers to “the key or tonality of a particular composition.” In sound studies, Murray Schafer adopts this term to describe sounds that were continuously or frequently heard by a particular society and thus became their identifiers. For Schafer, keynote sounds were socially conditioned. While in agrarian societies they were often the noise of animals and livestock that prevailed in rural life, keynote sounds that dominated the ears of urban residents came from hallmarks of industrial societies, such as steam engines, telephones, gramophones, sirens, train whistles, and radios. Schafer further contends that the 20th century witnessed the expansion of urban soundscape over rural areas.

Although Schafer’s concept of the keynote was extracted from the context of Euro-American industrialization, it can help interpret rural transformations in 1950s China. In this period, the state actively built radio stations, trained radio operators, and distributed radio sets across the country to mobilize peasants for political movements, campaigns, but more importantly, to disseminate scientific knowledge concerning regular agricultural activities. Together, they formed the “radio reception network,” which systematically collected, selected, edited, and reused existing keynote sounds of rural China.

Rural Hebei had its own distinctive keynotes, ranging from local dialects and slang to oral performances in the form of kuaiban (or clappertalk, a Chinese style of rhymical singing with a pair of clappers) and pingxi opera. While the radio station could not broadcast in local dialects due to state regulations, it did make efforts to adopt slang, idioms, and commonly used

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60 Clappertalk was popular throughout the 1950s, including the great famine. See Jeremy Brown, *City versus Countryside in Mao’s China: Negotiating the Divide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 53.
vocabularies in peasants’ language to retool the existing sound environment.\textsuperscript{61} For instance, the scriptwriters affiliated with the HPPRS used the local idiom “one bites into the ground when he stands” to describe a steep mountain and referred to a selfish person as “having a little abacus in the front pocket.”\textsuperscript{62}

The HPPRS also fostered agricultural production by adding new terms to the existing rural soundscape. Chemical terms such as nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium appeared frequently in agricultural programs. These terms had no equivalence in peasants’ vocabulary. The radio station had no other choice but to impose these new terms on its listeners. To have listeners accept these neologisms, the radio station would give them brief explanations during broadcasting. Meanwhile, the radio station also approached cadres to ask them to use these terms first when meeting with peasants.\textsuperscript{63} After constantly hearing the radio station and cadres repeating the new phenomes, the peasants learned to pronounce and use them as well.

The provincial radio station heavily took advantage of local oral performances to make its listeners feel at home. Considering the popularity of pingxi in this area, the radio station injected excerpts of pingxi into intervals between formal programs. As a result, listeners who wanted to listen to pingxi had to listen to the news or political reports first.\textsuperscript{64} While pingxi was too complicated to be produced by radio station scriptwriters (they hired professionals instead), they often wrote kuaiban programs themselves. Initially, the scriptwriters, often urban and elitist, regarded kuaiban as a vulgar and culturally backward form of oral art and thus inappropriate for radio broadcasts, since the latter formally represented rural listeners’ taste. Radio announcers often found it awkward to speak kuaiban and were thus even more reluctant to use it. It was only when radio operators returning from the countryside informed them of the positive feedbacks of

\textsuperscript{61} The communist party had been conscious about the use of Putonghua in radio broadcasting before 1949. See “Xinhuaazongse guangboyuanbu zanxing gongzuo xize” (Xinhua News Agency temporary regulations for the department of radio language), dated June 1946, see Zhao Yuming ed, Zhongguo xiandai guangbo shiliao xuanbia (Selected documents on modern Chinese radio broadcasting) (Shantou: Shantoudaxue chubanshe, 2007). 306.

\textsuperscript{62} HPA, No.1032-1-17, “Juban wei nongmin guangbo jiemu de yixie jingyan” (Some experiences about organizing radio programs for peasant listeners),1952.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
these kuaiban airings that they felt reassured that they were on the right track. Gradually, it became a fashion among the scriptwriters to compose scripts in kuaiban style. The announcer responsible for the countryside also learned to speak kuaiban.65

The HPPRS not only excelled in utilizing local slang and oral performances to provoke emotional reactions from its listeners, but also exceeded in assigning new meanings to the keynote sounds. An investigation of the term wangben (ungratefulness), for example, in the following kuaiban script reveals the radio station’s sophisticated use of keynotes. In October 1954, the radio station designed a script in kuaiban style titled “Selling surplus grain” (卖余粮 Mai yuliang) to encourage peasants to sell their grain to the state as a token of their support to the Unified Purchase and Sell policy (统购统销 tonggou tongxiao).66

This kuaiban program featured a family of four: Yang Luoquan, the father who was previously penniless but gained eight mu fields during the land reform, the mother in charge of home affairs, the daughter who joined the Youth League (青年团 qingnian tuan), and the son who was in Korea fighting imperialists. The story evolved around the “relatively backward minded” (思想较落后 sixiang jiao luohou) wife. Luoquan repeatedly attempted to persuade her to sell to the state grain that he viewed as “unneeded.” The use of “unneeded” here to characterize the character yu in yuliang, which also means “surplus,” speaks to an infusion of socialist rhetoric into rural life (in this case, via kuaiban) that hinged upon the newly molded concept of “ungrateful”:

Luoquan: It was the communist party that changed our life. It was because we joined the agricultural co-operative last year that our life has now become better. And we have a good storage of grain. Now the state wants us to sell the grain to support industrial construction. You disagree? Are you ungrateful?

65 HPA, No.1032-1-17, “Juban wei nongmin guangbo jiemu de yixie jingyan” (Some experiences about organizing radio programs for peasant listeners), 1952.

66 HPA, No.1032-1-57, “Mai yuliang” (Selling surplus grain), Guangbo gaoxuan (Selected radio scripts) no. 4, 1955.
Luoquan’s wife: Ungrateful?! You call me ungrateful. I will be ungrateful. No matter what you say, the grain is my life. I will not sell it!67

Two conflicting moral discourses were at play here between the two peasants.68 Luoquan understood the economic benefits given by the party as a moral debt, and therefore, insisted on paying back this debt by selling the family’s unneeded grain to the state. Speaking on behalf of the state, Luoquan used the story of economic transformation to form a moral attack on his wife. The rhetorical efficacy of the word “ungrateful” stemmed from it being heavily-loaded with newly established moral norms that emphasized the benevolence of Mao and the communist party during the PRC’s early land reforms.69 This rendered Luoquan’s charge nearly impossible to dispute.

Luoquan’s wife, nevertheless, nearly succeeded in achieving such a feat. Her response, “You call me ungrateful. I will be ungrateful,” indicates her acceptance of the accusation.70 She saw the family harvest as a reward for their diligent labor in the fields. Their yield thus bore no direct relationship to the state. More importantly, however, the yuliang to be sold was not “unneeded,” but rather, a surplus that could save lives in years of scarcity and starvation. In her view, morality meant the survival and prosperity of the family. It was her duty, as a virtuous woman in charge of inner spheres, to make sure that the surplus grain was used properly to secure her family’s well-being.71

What ultimately changed her mind was her daughter Cuilian’s words. Cuilian was a model of cadres and outreach of state: literate, good at spinning and weaving, first rank in both agricultural

67 HPA, No.1032-1-57, “Mai yuliang” (Selling surplus grain), Guangbo gaoxuan (Selected radio scripts) no. 4, 1955.

68 Philip Huang has an insightful review on the rational peasant and moral peasant. He suggests, neither of them is valid enough to describe the condition of Chinese peasants. Only an integrated view of the two will do. See Huang, The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China, 3-7.

69 For moral discourses in villages, see Ellen Oxfeld, Drink Water, but Remember the Source: Moral Discourse in a Chinese Village (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

70 HPA, No.1032-1-57, “Mai yuliang.”

71 On women’s virtue and inner spheres, see Dorothy Ko, Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-century China (Stanford University Press, 1994), 143-178.
production and school, and a propaganda member in the Youth League. She spoke of the state as the caregiver and sole provider of the collective’s welfare. She reminded her mother of her son, who went to the Korean War, by asking: “If my brother cannot have a full stomach, how can he defeat the enemies?” She further included workers and cadres (the non-peasants) and peasants who suffered natural disasters into the socialist collective. While previously being perceived as the antithesis of peasants, who took the grain away from them, these population groups were categorized together as an inseparable community. Cuilian questioned: “If we don’t sell grain, what do these people eat? How can we maintain a peaceful heart while seeing these people starving?”

The dialectics of ungratefulness was rearticulated by Cuilian through socialist collectivity. She used “we” to encompass all peasants: “Life has changed since the land reform. We have a good government which leads us to establish the gongxiao she and brings soybean, plows, pesticide, and everything to the door.” She attributed the making of the good life to workers: “cloth, coal, and salt are cheap and good, but where are they from? Is it not from our worker brothers?” She set up a dialectical relationship between the peasants and workers: on the one hand, the peasants produced grain, and the workers did not; on the other hand, if the peasants did not sell grain and feed the workers, the workers would stop producing products and therefore spoil peasants’ happy lives.

The socialist dialectics elaborated by Cuilian not only served to convince her mother that grain sale was an important manifestation of mutual help between peasants and workers but essentially a manifestation of the Socialist enlightenment: peasants should showcase their gratefulness to the state by molding themselves to the collective. In this case, this molding process was marked by Luoquan’s wife’s conceptual shift of understanding yuliang from surplus grain to unneeded grain.

72 HPA, No.1032-1-57, “Mai yuliang.”

73 Ibid.

After hearing her daughter’s words, Luoquan’s wife admitted, again, in local slang: “You are right! I got stuck in the cow’s horn, too stubborn.” She found herself at fault: “my mind takes a long time to come around. I was occupied by the idea of living the disastrous year again.” She continued, “If every household is like me (not to sell the grain), what do the workers eat? What do the disaster-beaten people eat? What does the army eat? …You are right. We are going to sell all the 3000 jin surplus grain to the state.” Now, morality concerning the personal became immoral; the state monopolized the moral discourse.

The purpose of this kuaiban piece was not to praise Luoquan’s wife for her defense of the family. Rather, she was meant to be conquered, to be a negative model that no listeners wanted to identify with. According to several reports on the reception of “Mai yuliang,” the hypnotic effect of infusing new meanings into existing keynote sounds, as exemplified in wangben, was immediate and tangible. After listening to such programs, Li Ku, of Jinxuntun village, Luanping County, re-calculated his unneeded grain and revised his original plan of selling to the state 400 jin to 1600 jin. Ju Yuanfa, a 64-year-old farmer who came from the same village with Li Ku, listened to 4 radio programs about selling grain, revised his plan twice, and increased the amount of grain he sold from 150 jin to 600 jin, and eventually, to 1000 jin. As a result, their village exceeded the assigned quota by 3364 jin. In Renqiu county, 250 students listened to these programs, and then all wrote to their families asking them to sell grain to the government.

Powerful as it was, the efficacy of keynote sounds had declined over the next few years. One reason that accounted for the decline was the very localness of the keynote sounds. As it was pointed out in a report, phrases and idioms that were considered keynote sounds of one area were

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75 HPA, No.1032-1-57, “Mai yuliang” (Selling surplus grain), Guangbo gaoxuan (Selected radio scripts) no. 4, 1955.

76 The hypnotic effect can be dated back to the 1930s when leftists were trying to use public speech to influence the public. See Ling Kang, “Awakening China, Hypnotizing China: The Body Techniques and Emotion Work of Public Speaking” and Tie Xiao, Revolutionary Waves: The Crowd in Modern China (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 25-58.

77 A jin, or catty, was equivalent to 0.6 kilogram before the measurement reform in 1959. See HPA, No. 1032-1-35, “Shiyi yuefen tinglian qingkuang (Radio receiving in November).”

78 HPA, No. 1032-1-35 “Shiyi yuefen tinglian qingkuang.”

79 HPA, No. 1032-1-35 “shier yuefen tinglian qingkuang” (“Radio receiving in December”).
often found to be unintelligible to listeners in other areas. Second, not all rural listeners appreciated the use of keynote sounds from their daily life. As summarized by one propaganda cadre in Liangxiang county, *Kuaiban* was only popular in the early 1950s. The public found it boring and simplistic after listening to *kuaiban* programs for a few years. “The masses,” as he put it, were “exploring a richer and more colorful cultural life now.”

The third reason, evidently the most fatal one, concerned increasingly rigid imaginations of certain keynote sounds. Their divorce from local realities only turned off local villagers from state broadcasts. For example, as journalist Jiang Chengzhan noticed, peasant programs routinely started with sentences like “Dear fellow villagers, [I will] now read a few things,” or “Commune comrades, [I will] now talk about a few problematics.” Jiang felt frustrated about the monotonous form of language. As he pondered: “Don’t they know there are other ways to express the same meaning?” The language of the radio scripts was “uncouth” (*tulituqi*): “It did not belong to the learned people, nor was it the words and sentences of the honest laboring masses.” More striking was the fact that when he went to the peasants, he noticed that nobody spoke like that in the countryside. Such an awkward phrase was a product of the scriptwriters imagining the speech of a peasant who did not exist. It was, as Jiang concluded, “neither fish nor fowl” (*sibuxiang*) and “lacked the air of real life.”

To overcome the poverty of language, Jiang suggested, one needed to read literary works and learn how recognized authors employed vocabularies. These works, from the Soviet Union as

80 HPA, No.1032-1-17, “Juban wei nongmin guangbo jiemu de yixie jingyan” (Some experiences about organizing radio programs for peasant listeners), 1952.

81 HPA, No.1032-2-111, Jiang Chengzhan, “Guanyu women guangbo gaojian de yuyan fengge wenti de yidian yijian” (A few suggestions about the language style of our radio scripts), August, 1956.

82 HPA 1032-2-54, Jiang Chengzhan, “Tantan yuyan fengge de gaijin wenti” (Speaking about the improvement of language style), September 3, 1956.

83 Ibid.

84 HPA 1032-2-54, Jiang Chengzhan, “Tantan yuyan fengge de gaijin wenti” (Speaking about the improvement of language style), September 3, 1956. *Tulituqi* refers to something that, in a negative fashion, had a “countryside feeling.” While the term “rustic” is perhaps a more literal translation, it often possesses positive connotations that *tulituqi* does not contain.

85 Ibid.
well as from ancient China, could provide writers with vocabularies and semantic styles that were vivid, figurative, as well as emotion-rich. They, Jiang further contended, were what could make the radio scripts beautiful and pleasant to the ear (顺耳 shun’er). Perhaps to demonstrate his skills in writing, Jiang employed metaphors, comparison, parallels, rhetorical, and interrogative questions throughout this short report.  

To fully understand the significance of Jiang’s article, it is critical to situate its publication in the context of the PRC’s social transition and the radio system’s bureaucratic reform. First, the socialist reform on agriculture, industry, and commerce that started in 1949 was near its completion in early 1956. Prime Minister Zhou Enlai had further recognized intellectuals as part of the working class and would be given a certain amount of autonomy to exercise their expertise in building socialism in a report in January 1956. Similar attitudes were expressed by Mao and other top leaders on different occasions and made known to the public via newspapers, meetings, and radio broadcasts. As a college graduate and the one who received the highest level of education at the HPPRS, Jiang probably believed that he belonged to the intellectuals and now eventually got a chance to share his expertise with his colleagues.

The second issue concerned the political reform within the party and the state apparatus. Shortly after Mao delivered his speech on the “ten relations” at an enlarged session of the CCP’s Politburo meeting on April 25, 1956, Liu Shaoqi, Vice Chairman of the central government, met with Mei Yi, the head of the national radio system and complained to the latter about the content of the radio programs, which was full of politics and contained “no taste” of real life. Radio programs, Liu pointed it out, should be listener-centered and attentive to what they were interested in and cared about. After that, stations could claim that they truly served the people. Two months later, at the fourth national radio conference, Mei elaborated the Vice Chairman’s

87 Meisner, Mao’s China, 172.
instruction in his report by highlighting the absence of real life in the radio programs and relating such an absence to the linguistic poverty and rigidness of radio programs.\footnote{HPA 1032-1-266, Mei Yi, “Zai disici quanguo guangbo gognzuo huiyi shang de jianghua”’ (A talk at the fourth national radio conference), August 16, 1962.} Perceiving these linguistic issues as a form of bureaucratism, Mei proposed that radio stations should innovate their language style, avoid the eight-legged essay format, and make the radio language close to life. After the conference, each provincial radio station received a copy of Mei Yi’s report. Jiang had read and referred to it as he drew effective connections between the bureaucratic tone in the radio scripts as a national phenomenon and the bureaucratism within the HPRS.

Appreciating Jiang’s critique of the problems in the peasant programs and solutions he offered, the HPPRS’ chief editor assigned that article, together with Mei Yi’s report, to journalists and editors to read and study. The distribution of these two reports sparked a heated debate between those who contended that the value of the language of the peasants was its plainness, and others who believed this language was simply uncouth and thus unfit for government public radio broadcasting. The debate on the linguistic style of peasant programs came to an end two weeks later, but as will soon be seen, the criticisms Jiang raised would land him in much political trouble a year later in 1957.\footnote{HPA 1032-2-56, “Gaijin gongzuo fangan de taolun” (The discussion on plans to improve work), Bianbo yewu yanjiu 110, October 4, 1956.}

### 3.4 The Emergence of Rural Power Conflicts

Through the newly constructed radio reception network and keynote sounds, state narratives of an imagined community were able to penetrate rural society far more extensively than ever before. Unlike urban-centered and print-based media characteristic of earlier periods, radio was instantaneous and required neither mass reading literacy nor the constant heavy material logistics associated with paper circulation.\footnote{For studies on printing industries in urban centers before the establishment of P.R.C. see Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014). Henrietta Harrison briefly discussed the circulation of newspapers in rural areas in her *The Man Awakened from Dreams: One Man’s Life in a North China Village, 1857-1942*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).} This suited the nascent PRC regime well, which was still in
the midst of recuperating national economy and social stability in cities and countryside. In a rural province like Hebei, the contribution of the provincial and local radio stations was thus put the state into direct contact with peasants, who constituted the majority of the population.

This technological outreach had significant political consequences. It triggered a rapid increase in non-cadre listening activities. As early as April 1951, peasants in villages and local markets in Hebei were able to listen to radio programs from the HPPRS. They listened to programs about the Anti-America and Assist-Korea campaign and excitedly commented on them. One peasant said: “The Americans were really disgusting. We are going to beat them to go back home.”

Listeners in Yuan village, meanwhile, remarked that, “radio answered a good deal of our questions about agricultural production.”

While the Korean War special radio program sparked the HPPRS’ interest in peasants as a new and increasingly important group of listeners, it was the special program’s renaming as “Mass Listening Time” (群众收听时间 qunzhong shouting shijian) later in the year that officially commenced the targeting of non-cadre listeners on a regular basis. Half a year later, the HPPRS again changed the title to “Broadcasting to the Countryside” (对农村广播节目 dui nongcun guangbo jiemu). This indicated that the radio station narrowed the scope of its listeners to a specific locale, namely, cadres and peasants in the countryside.

The HPPRS perceived different modes of listening from its cadre and peasant listeners. In many cases, while peasants listened for content, cadres listened for methodology — namely, how the content was to be interpreted and articulated. For example, one radio session on work-points

Cynthia J. Brokaw approached the circulation of information in the form of books from the perspective of commercial history, see Commerce in Culture: The Sibao Book Trade in the Qing and Republican Periods. (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007).


94 HPA, No. 1032-1-16, “Luancheng xian guanyu zhaokai shouyinyan gongzuo huiyi de baogao” (Luancheng county’s report on the commencement of the radio operator conference), 1952.

95 HPA, No.1032-1-17, “Juban wei nongmin guangbo jiemu de yixie jingyan” (Some experience of creating and maintaining this ‘Broadcasting to the peasants’ program), 1952.

96 Ibid.
would possess two concurrent aims: firstly, to help peasants understand the points system, and secondly, for village cadres to grasp the methods the radio station employed to interpret work points so that they could use them when answering further inquiries. One cadre from the fourth district of Fucheng county commented: “Before, I did not know what to say to the peasants about the work points. Now I have a lot to say.” Giving cadres “a lot to say” certainly empowered them when dealing with commoners, but it also increasingly rendered them dependent on radio for the interpretation and execution of state policies and regulations.97

When listeners took radio as an embodiment of the state, they, as the Hu Junnü case below shows, also believed that the radio station would provide them with justice and correct mistakes made by lower level authorities. In June 1957, Hu, a resident of South Gucheng village in Tangxian county, wrote a letter to the HPPRS addressing the mishandling of work-points (gongfen) in her brigade. Upon receiving Hu’s letter, the HPPRS believed her brigade cadres were indeed making calculation mistakes. It broadcasted Hu’s letter and offered criticism to the cadres in the program “Broadcasting to Peasant Listeners” (dui nongmin guangbo jiemu).98 A few days later, the HPPRS received another letter about Hu, this time from her brother asking the radio station to rescue her sister. Hu had become a “criminal,” in the words of the local cadres, “with the intention of destroying the co-operative.” Realizing the seriousness of this matter, the HPPRS sent a work team down to the brigade to investigate if the mishandling of work points did exist.99 This case ended with the local cadres apologizing for their improper response to the radio station, with no mention of Hu’s fate.

Hu’s case sheds light on an overlooked change of power in the transformation of the countryside: the coming of radio rendered local cadres less important as a mediator between the state and peasants. Scholars have shown that local cadres were critical to the state’s outreach to rural areas

97 HPA, No.1032-1-17, “Juban wei nongmin guangbo jiemu de yixie jingyan,” 1952.

98 HPA, No. 1032-2-111, Tinglianzu, “Jinlai jixu fasheng cun she ganbu dui laixin tingzhong liuxing daji baofu de xianxiang” (The recent continuation of the phenomenon that commune and brigade cadres attack radio listeners) Yewu yanjiu (work studies), no. 191, September 20, 1957.

99 Ibid.
and populations. Their authority grew as the state continuously transferred its power to low-level administrations as well as production units since the early 1950s. As a result, local cadres became new power holders and reconfigured local power dynamics.

The coming of radio, however, challenged this authority of the local cadres and reversed the process of de-centralization. As discussed earlier, in the process of rural transformation, local cadres found radio so empowering that they only needed to “repeat to the masses” what the radio fed them. While radio was certainly convenient for doing their jobs, local cadres eventually discovered that this device effectively stripped the monopolistic power they formerly held to interpret messages from central and provincial offices to peasants. Rather, it was now the radio-as-state that interpreted these messages for them, cadres and peasants alike.

Upon realizing this unsettling trend, the cadres from Hu Junnu’s brigade decided to strike back. First, they strongly criticized Hu. The co-operative head, who was also a party member, judged Hu’s action of circumventing the co-operative’s leadership via her letter to the HPPRS as “a serious political mistake.” Second, the cadres forced Hu to write a second letter as a rebuttal to the first one. Meanwhile, as representatives of the authority of the local production and

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administration unit, the cadres sent a letter to the radio station demanding an immediate correction and apology.

Facing local cadres’ hostile attitudes toward their criticism, the HPPRS dispatched an investigation team to Hu’s village and conducted interviews with brigade members. As it turned out, the issue of unreasonable work point management did exist. Liu Mazong, head of the 7th production team in Hu’s co-operative, told the investigators that the problem Hu reported did indeed exist. “Take my team as an example,” Liu commented. “If only a few people come to work, we give them extra work points. If everybody comes, we give what they deserve. Therefore, people complain.”

It was only the numeric figures the radio station reported were somehow inaccurate.

The problem identified by Liu existed not just in his co-operative. It was ubiquitous among co-operatives across the country. As early as 1955, Deng Zihui, the head of the Central Rural Work Department (Zhongyang nongcun gongzuobu), warned that the rapid development of rural co-operatives brought forth a series of mistakes that hurt the interests of peasants, with mismanagement of work points being one of them. However, before Deng was able to launch a full-scale reduction of co-operatives, he was dismissed by Mao, who passionately supported collectivization. Mao claimed that attempts to truncate co-operatives amounted to “dismantling the coalition between workers and peasants.”

The unfolding of Hu’s case revealed the competition between techno-bureaucrats and political-bureaucrats over the hermeneutics of state power. Although such competition can be dated back to the late Qing and Republican periods, it only permeated the whole bureaucracy in the PRC as the latter implemented techno-bureaucrats such as radio cadres in each level of the administrative

105 Ibid.
106 See Bo Yibo, Ruogan zhongnda juece yu shijian de huigu (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1997), 342-348.
107 See Mao Zedong, “Guanyu nongye hezuohua wenti” (On agricultural collectivization), in Mao Zedong wenji, vol.6, (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1999), 436. On collectivization at the national level, see Gao Huamin, Nongye hezuohua yundong shimo, (Agricultural collectivization from the beginning to the end) (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1999), particularly 362-370. More recent works include Xing Leqin, Ershi shiji wushi niandai zhongguo nongye hezuohua yundong yanjiu (A study on the agricultural collectivization movement in 1950s China) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2003); Luo Pinghan, Nongye hezuohua yundong shi (History of the agricultural collectivization movement) (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2004).
Furthermore, the newly emerged radio reception network signaled the technological rearrangement of space that enabled the state to reach geographically distant areas and integrate them into the nation by requesting, collecting, and processing information in a rapid and standard manner. The cadres, in contrast, represented a more traditional mode dependent on the composition and delivery of reports, directives, and orders as well as the organization of meetings and conferences at different administrative levels, which cost time and compromised efficiency. While local cadres functioned as voices of state in their actual management of the local affairs, the radio station presented the voice of the state to the ears of local listeners. From the perspective of the radio station, cadres represented a separate and counterproductive set of elements of the state that could not be disciplined through programming. As the Hu case revealed, local cadres not only failed to connect the state with the peasants, but also consciously prevented them from speaking to each other.

Cases similar to Hu’s also occurred in other areas in this period. For instance, shortly after the arrival of Hu’s letter, the HPPRS received a letter from Lang Shugang in Lang village reporting the unreasonable calculation of work points for student labors. The station responded and sent a letter to his co-operative to check the validity of the reported issue. Very soon, Lang came to the station not to further the communication on work points but to take back the letter for self-defense. It turned out that the co-operative cadres not only hijacked the station’s letter to Lang but also informed the latter that he intended to overthrow the co-operative party committee by writing letters to the provincial radio station without the co-operative leaders’ permission. Lang

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109 For works addressing the roles communications played in the expansion of empire, see Daqing Yang, Technology of Empire Telecommunications and Japanese Expansion in Asia, 1883-1945 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010); Harold A. Innes, Empire and Communications (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).

110 David Bachman notices there were conflicts among top leaders as about the relationship between light and heavy industries which eventually led to the happening of the Great Leap Forward, see Bachman, Bureaucracy, Economy, and Leadership in China: The Institutional Origins of the Great Leap Forward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
was consequently labeled as a rightest awaiting severe criticism once the co-operative party secretary came back from meetings.  

As the HPPRS further demonstrated its authority as a directive representative of the state during the investigation of Hu’s case, it encountered the turn of the Rectification Movement (整风运动 Zhengfeng yundong) to the Anti-Rightist Campaign (反右派运动 Fanyoupai yundong). The Rectification Movement formally began on May 1st, 1957, with the initial intention of welcoming criticisms concerning the attitude and actions of party cadres in order to avoid a “Hungarian revolution” in China. The focus of criticism quickly turned within a few weeks from the individuals at fault to the system itself. The criticism that was envisioned to generate stabilizing factors for socialism now turned into a destabilizing one. The Rectification Movement transformed into the Anti-Rightest Campaign on June 12 with Mao’s famous article “Things Are Now Changing” (事情正在起变化 Shiqing zhengzai qi bianhua). Those who were previously encouraged to expose problems of the party now became the target of criticism. Mao’s article initially circulated among only the leading cadres of the state and provincial administrations. Therefore, it was likely that the HPPRS staff did not yet know of this development upon receiving Hu’s letter just three days later on June 15th. For the radio station, correcting the wrongs of the local cadres constituted the best evidence to demonstrate that the radio station was truly the mouth of the state.

The Anti-Rightest Campaign, however, silenced this mouth. On July 17th, a month after receiving Ms. Hu’s letter, Meng Jiefu, the deputy chair of Hebei provincial radio, went to Beijing to take part in the national radio broadcasting conference. At the conference, Meng argued that

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111 See HPA, No. 1032-2-111, “Jinlai jixu fazheng cunshe ganbu dui laixin quanzhong shixing daji baofu de xianxiang” (Recent continued phenomenon of village and commune cadres attacking letter writers), Bianbo yewu yanjiu, no. 191.


radio stations should study, investigate, actively reveal social conflicts, and push relevant
departments to solve internal conflicts. Meng’s argument stood out at the conference, because
other radio station leaders mainly focused on how to better serve the authority and interest of the
Party and the government. For example, Li Yi from Jiangsu provincial radio station contended
that the radio station should follow the steps of the government and never reach out on its own.
Actively reaching out would make the job of the government difficult. Miao Lichen from Beijing
radio station argued that the station should listen to the party. If the party had not issued
instructions, the radio station should ask for instructions before it proceeded.

The disagreement between Meng Jiefu and leaders of other provincial radio stations manifested
two different understandings about what constituted the “mouth” of the state: one was to speak
for the state, and the other with the state. While speaking for the state assumed the state could not
speak without the help of radio, and recognized the prestige of radio in taking the initiative to
render the state audible, speaking with the state presupposed that the state could speak through
cadres at different levels of party or government administrations. Therefore, the job of the radio
station was to repeat and elaborate on what the cadres had said, not the other way around. This
could also be interpreted as the state having given up on the voice that previously spoke for it. It
now preferred that this mouth was kept shut unless otherwise instructed as the Rectification
Movement quickly turned into the Anti-Rightist Campaign.

Realizing he was on the wrong track, Meng criticized himself and promised to revise the agenda
of the radio station to fit the new political environment. Meanwhile, the two parties ultimately
apologized to each other. The radio station apologized to Hu’s brigade for not checking the
validity of the numbers before criticizing them publicly, while the brigade cadres apologized to

115 HPA, No. 1032-1-70, “Guangbo huiyi jianbao” (Radio meeting minutes), 1957.

116 Ibid.

117 Indeed, if Meng Jiefu continued to uphold his view, he was likely to be targeted as a rightist in the HPPRS, since
one of the criteria that constituted a rightist was to criticize the party and its branch representative. Peasant Lang
depicted in footnote 72 was labelled as a rightist for such criticism. On criticisms against the party during the Anti-
shehuixue jiedu” (The rightist multitude: a sociological interpretation of the Anti-Rightist Campaign at the grass-
the radio station for their hostile behavior and actions. Furthermore, in September 1957, Hebei provincial radio station abolished the practices to speak to peasants on their reported issues directly on radio. In order to prevent such confrontation with local cadres in the future, the station released three points of instruction. First, it defended the right of the masses to write to newspapers and radio stations. Second, it forbade mentioning the names of related people or places when delivering criticisms. Further, it would carefully check if what was stated in letters was valid, because if not the broadcast would only led to detrimental effects on the relationship between the party and the masses. The impact of this instruction was profound. Omitting the names of cadres who made mistakes significantly undermined the power of radio to criticize and punish. By regularizing the fact-check procedure, it imposed an incredible amount of work on the station before publicizing letters from listeners. In order to avoid this laborious process, radio stations began to back away from reporting on complaints.

As such, radio transmissions gradually withdrew from reporting on local conflicts. By the Anti-Rightest Campaign’s conclusion, the HPPRS had largely ceased speaking to rural radio listeners directly regarding their needs and concerns. It switched to the promotion of state policies, demands, and regulations over economy, politics, and culture. While in the early fifties the state left space for peasants to express their different opinions, such a space would shrink substantially in the years to come.

Meanwhile, the HPPRS reinforced the use of keynotes in its radio programs by counter-attacking those who previously criticized this practice. Jiang, the journalist mentioned previously who wrote on incorrect usages of peasant speech in state radio, was charged of attempting to maneuver the direction of political broadcasting. This charge, which was also a political statement, argued that linguistic commonality constituted the foundation of the political alliance between the party and peasants as well as between the state and peasants. These rural keynote sounds in radio programs were a “bond” (联系 lianxi) between peasants and political

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118 HPA, No. 1032-2-111, Tinglianzu, “Jinlai jixu fasheng cun she ganbu dui laixin tingzhong liuxing daji baofu de xianxiang” (The recent continuation of the phenomenon that commune and brigade cadres attack radio listeners) Yewu yanjiu (work studies), no. 191, September 20, 1957.

119 HPA, No. 1032-2-111, Jin Wei, “Zai gaijin gongzuo de beihou” (Behind the improvement of work) Bianbo yewu yanjiu, no. 180, August, 1957.
broadcasting. Removing them from programs would mean “cutting off” (割断 geduan) this bond.

This criticism further articulated that the purpose of the peasant programs was not to seek variety and difference. Rather, it was about making loud the voice shared between the radio station and its peasant listeners. To speak the way the listeners did was to demonstrate class solidarity. Therefore, instead of abandoning the peasant tradition, the radio station should overcome all possible difficulties to make themselves speak as the peasants do so that the latter would perceive the radio station as a part of a larger imagined community.121

Jiang’s proposal of searching for vocabularies from literary works was labeled as aesthetic (唯美主义 weimei zhuyi), a term related to the bourgeoisie, who, according to the communist ideology, were the opposite of the proletariats. Unfortunately, we do not know if Jiang got a chance to speak this time, since nothing about him after 1957 was kept in the Hebei Provincial Archive’s radio collection. He was labeled a rightist who was against the party and socialism. After being fired by the radio station, he was sent off to the countryside for labor reform.122

Although Jiang was dismissed from his position, the problems he pointed out persisted. The radio listeners kept sending in letters complaining about the radio programs as repetitive, out of date, and lacking in variety. For instance, intending to impress upon student listeners the importance of going back to the countryside for agricultural production, the station aired an opera series that proclaimed that learning and pursuing a scholarly path was the most superior among all other choices!123

120 HPA, No. 1032-2-111, Jin Wei, “Zai gaijin gongzuo de beihou” (Behind the improvement of work) Bianbo yewu yanjiu, no. 180, August, 1957.

121 Ibid.

122 Jiang Chengzhan, “Zhongguo xinwenshi shixuehui huiyuan dengjiibiao” (Registration chart for members of the Chinese journalism history association). Personal Collection.

123 HPA, No. 1032-2-111, “Cong jianting zhong xiangdao de wenyi jiemu zhengzhi yundong wenti,” (A few thoughts from listening [to radio programs] on entertaining programs collaborating with political movements), Bianbo yewu yanjiu, no. 185, August 25, 1957.
3.5 Conclusion

This chapter explores the emergence and divergence of different listener communities as the state increasingly adopted radio as the chief technology of political communications. The adoption of existing rural keynote sounds with new meanings facilitated peasant listeners’ identification with the state, thus further compelled them to make sacrifices for it. It also accelerated the competition between provincial radio authorities and local cadres over the power to interpret state policies, regulations, and directives. As cadres subjected themselves to the authority of radio, radio stations no longer viewed cadres as the mediator between the state and the peasants. In other words, local cadres that had previously been indispensable to clearing out obstacles of communication between the state and people now became obstacles themselves.

Although the Anti-Rightist Campaign interrupted radio station’s marginalization of local cadres, it could not hide the fact that radio had become a powerful technique of sound operation to trigger social and political changes. After 1957, the HPPRS changed its position of checking the power of local cadres and geared its efforts towards injecting ideological indoctrination into programs concerning agricultural production. Such a tendency continued into the Great Leap Forward.
Chapter 4: Forging the Socialist Voice: The Natural Tone and Its Politicization

4.1 Introduction

June 30, 1949, was a good day. Wu Xin, the 16-year-old graduate from the North China Academy of Military and Politics (华北军政大学 Huabei junzheng daxue), carried his clothes and beddings to a place called The Light Garden (光园 Guangyuan) in Baoding, Hebei Province.¹ The Light Garden had been the venue for Hebei Radio Station under the government of the Republic of China.² In early 1949, the liberation army took over Baoding and decided to make use of the equipment in The Light Garden. Hence started the Hebei Provincial People’s Radio Station (HPPRS). Wu was the first male radio announcer there, young and having received no training relevant to broadcasting. The only thing that connected him to radio was that he was a big fan of Qi Yue (1922-1993), the most famous male radio announcer of the New China Radio Station (新华广播电台 Xinhua guangbo diantai), and used to imitate Qi making announcements.³

Wu was nervous when thinking that the next day he was going to speak in front of a microphone and his voice would be heard by all listeners sitting around a radio set. An idea came to him and quickly calmed him down: Why not listen to how Qi spoke? Wu turned on the radio and tuned to the channel of the New China Radio Station.⁴ He listened and quickly got confidence in his new job. However, Wu never remembered what Qi had said.

¹ Wu Xin, “Wangshi liusheng” (The past is audible), Hebei Guangbo, 4 (2009), 8.
⁴ Wu Xin, “Jiantai wushiwu zhounian suigan” (Reflections on the 55th anniversary of the station), Hebei Guangbo, (2004), 2015.
A hundred miles away in Beijing, sitting in the broadcasting room of the newly erected building for the New China Radio Station, Qi Yue equally had no idea that in that particular night his voice became a model for a teenager to start his new career. Even if he did, he would not have time to feel excited about it, because that night he was going to broadcast Chairman Mao’s seminal article “On New Democracy” (新民主主义论 Xin minzhu zhuyi lun).  

These were just two of the several dozens of radio announcers the new regime had developed in the past nine years. They equally had no idea about how significant their jobs were in enabling the party and the state to speak. The development of print capitalism certainly made it possible for newspapers to widen their circulations and inform readers of daily events in vernacular language. Hence was the origin of the modern nation. As I show in this chapter, the emergence of radio broadcasting in the revolutionary years allowed the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to develop its vocal style which later became the voice of the state.

This chapter explores the formation of the natural tone, a particular set of techniques, style, and culture of speaking among the radio announcers in the 1950s Hebei. Hung Chang-tai has identified radio broadcasting, festivals, yangge (秧歌), woodcut prints as important components of a political culture, which functioned as a tool to help the public favor, obey and politically identify with the CCP and hence change public political belief. Hung demonstrates that the CCP took these art forms primarily as political tools and refuses to acknowledge if there was a socialist aesthetic embedded within. More recently, Denise Ho, in her study of exhibitions and museums in 1960s China, contends that there is indeed a socialist culture that not only passionately produces revolutionary ideas but also consciously gave them material forms so that

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7 Hung Chang-tai, Xin wenhuashi yu zhongguo zhengzhi (New cultural history and Chinese politics) (Taipei: Maitian publish house, 2004), 263. Also see David Holm, Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).

8 Hung Chang-tai, Xin wenhuashi yu zhongguo zhengzhi (New cultural history and Chinese politics) (Taipei: Maitian publish house, 2004), 187. Similar views can also be seen in, for example, David Holm, Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
the public could understand and employ vocabularies of revolution and socialism in their localized manners.\textsuperscript{9} Furthermore, scholars have reached the consensus that the making of the socialist culture in Mao’s period involves multiple influences that originated from the Soviet Union, the communist revolutionary bases, Chinese tradition, and new cultural elements since 1919.\textsuperscript{10}

This chapter deepens the current scholarship by placing these trajectories of influence in the context of technopolitics and explore how these influential forces, as a set of techniques and knowledge, intersected with and fused into each other at various levels of circulation and dissemination. Specifically, I explore how the natural tone had changed from being sets of gendered techniques and knowledge to a particular type of popular culture during the contested process of interactions between various social, political and economical factors.\textsuperscript{11} I argue that the feminine voice was instrumental in shaping the voice of the state. Such a voice of socialism later lowered its technological requirements to trade for its expansion and domination with the country. The result of such an exchange and fusion was that radio announcers in Hebei at various levels of administration were able to practice the natural tone by the time of the Great Leap Forward, with high volume and rich emotion remaining as its characteristics.

This chapter contains three sections. In the first section, I look into the natural tone’s origin, its circulation, and standardization in the liberated areas before the establishment of the PRC government. The feminine voice emerged in this period as a result of political considerations to overcome technological shortcomings. I also pay attention to the local announcing practices by looking at how the announcers at the newly established HPPRS coped with the announcing needs. In the second section, I explore the encounter of this freshly created vocal style with the influential Soviet announcing techniques. I emphasize that the Chinese radio authorities were


\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, 378.

\textsuperscript{11} For instance, unlike the cadres at the struggle meetings who interacted with the masses on site, the radio announcers worked in the announcing room, a space separated from that of the masses. The only medium the announcers had was their voice. Hence a series of efforts were made to set up a standard about what should be in the voice of the announcers.
selective in deciding what to learn from the Soviet model, which laid the foundation for the break-up in the late 1950s. After receiving criticisms during the Great Leap Forward, the Soviet vocal techniques retreated from the public yet nevertheless remained in use in private. Equally important was the local factors that were not only able to survive the penetration of the state and international influence, but more importantly played a vital role in the shaping of the socialist voice. The absence of knowledge and skills in local radio institutions further compelled authorities to rely on political liability to ensure that the power to speak rested in the hands of the right people. Such a tendency became prominent during the Great Leap Forward as the socialist voice was so politicized that the announcers had to remake themselves to be ready for the birth of such a vocal subjectivity.

4.2 The Feminine Voice

Due to the lack of access to materials, previous scholarship tells us little about CCP’s first radio station. The CCP established its first radio station in Yan’an with components brought by Zhou Enlai (1898-1976) from the Soviet Union. On December 30, 1940, this new station, named The New China Radio (新华广播电台 Xinhua guangbo diantai), made its first call to the public: “Yan’an New China Radio, XNCR, now starts broadcasting!”

As the mouthpiece of the CCP, The New China Radio Station had for a long time been dominated by female voices. It started with two female announcers, Xu Ruizhang and Yao Wen, who were graduates of the Yan’an Academy (延安学院 Yanan xueyuan). Due to war and

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13 According to Xu Ruizhang, the announcers had Jiangsu accent and never learned about announcing before. The only help they could find was a little dictionary, with which they followed the New China Newspaper (新中华报
technical issues, the station stopped broadcasting in 1943. As it resumed on September 11, 1945, it rehired two announcers to fill up the positions left by the previous ones, who had been assigned to other positions. The two new announcers, Meng Qiyu and Li Mulin, were female as well. As I will demonstrate in the rest of this chapter, such a tendency continued after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 and permeated the broadcasting system in the 1950s.

The domination of female announcers in CCP’s and later PRC’s radio stations separated this revolutionary regime from many of its Western counterparts. In the United States, although female announcers existed in cities, the majority of the radio announcers were male in the 1920s and beyond.14 Similar in Germany where the first female announcer was hired in 1932, almost a decade after their male counterparts had taken the position.15 Great Britain had employed its first female announcer in 1933.16 In Argentina and Uruguay where female radio announcers were employed, they served to purposely spawn the interest of female listeners and trigger domestic transformations.17 Such prejudice against women had its origin in the imperfection of communication technology. Female voices (characteristic with a high pitch) suffered from


distortion when being converted from sound waves into electrical signals in the 1920s.¹⁸ Meanwhile, this technological bias was so closely intertwined with gender hierarchy that even as the technological problem was solved in the later period that women in Germany, as Kate Lacey explains, were still deemed unsuitable for radio announcing as late as 1941.¹⁹

The interaction of technological and political factors, however, pushed female announcers to the forefront of publicity in the Communist Party’s radio broadcasting to the nation. The 1940s China witnessed the competition and contention between political powers on land as well as on the air. The communist-controlled radio stations, operating in low output power, were further weakened by jamming signals from both the nationalist government and the Japanese invaders. As Lu Dingyi (1906-1996), the head of CCP’s Department of Propaganda, noted, the male announcer’s voice could hardly pass the jamming signals and remain intelligible. Therefore, he instructed radio stations to hire female announcers, as their voices enjoyed the privilege of higher pitches and therefore were able to afford the double distortions and remained comprehensible.²⁰

This female voice not only stayed highly active during the war but also set up the “natural tone” (语气自然 Yuqi ziran) as the guiding principle for radio broadcasting in socialist China, which remained foundational till this day. Meng Qiyu, the inventor of the natural tone, defines the natural tone as follows:

“In announcement making, precision is the priority. One should have an accurate understanding of the spirit of the radio script and give that spirit a proper form of expression. One needs to be well prepared and highly concentrate one’s mind on the content of the script in front of the microphone in order to be free from the constraints


¹⁹ Kate Lacey, Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere, 1923–1945 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 198. Similarly, in England, as Murphy notes, “[s]peaking at a conference in January 1938, the BBC’s Women’s Press Representative, Elise Sprott delivered the ‘sad truth’ that women’s voices ‘on the whole are not awfully good over the microphone’.” See Kate Murphy, Behind the Wireless: A History of Early Women at the BBC, 225.

and have a natural tone. When announcing, the more one concentrates on the content, the better one deploys the emotion and the tone. Otherwise, one easily makes mistakes when only paying attention to the techniques of oration and only thinking about moving his lips rather than his mind.”

Meng Qiyu acknowledged that the announcer should understand the content of the script as well as the author’s intention before broadcasting. The announcer was only able to do so via the natural tone, which constituted the ideal medium for a written script to be oral. Meng, however, gave zero space to the announcer’s autonomy over the interpretation of the script. The announcer’s duty was to submit himself or herself to the script and let script choose its form. In this perspective, the natural tone constrained the announcer more than it liberated them. It was secondary to and dependent on the script. To further understand the hierarchy at work within the natural tone, it was necessary to look into the origin, or more accurately myth, of the natural tone that Meng recalled in her autobiography.

Meng presented her pursuit of the natural tone in opposition to techniques in her autobiography. As a southerner, Meng initially learned to speak Mandarin in elementary school in Beijing. Meng had assumed announcing to be an easy matter of “reading out scripts.” When she started announcing, however, Meng noticed that her voice was rather “flat” and “emotionless.” To eradicate these flaws, Meng first sought for technical tips. For instance, she forced herself to speak Mandarin in daily conversations. She marked vocal signs on radio scripts that only herself could decode. Unfortunately, none of these tips worked.

The epiphany came to her in April 1946, when Ye Ting (1896-1946) the leader of the New Fourth Army and his crew died in an airplane crash. Meng was responsible for delivering the

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21 Qi Yue, Xiangei zugo de shengyin (The voice devoted to this country), (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1991), 25. See also Yang Shalin, Yong shengming boyin de ren-yi qi yue (The person who broadcasted with life-commemorating Qi Yue), (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1999), 64.

22 Xun Zhou, Dahai de yiduo langhua: meng qiyu de guangbo dianshi shengya (A spray in the ocean: Meng Qiyu’s career of radio broadcasting), (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 2008), 80.

23 Meng Qiyu, “Wo zai yan’an xinhua guangbo diancai boyin de shihou” (When I was broadcasting in yan’an radio station), Zhongguo guangbo dianshi xuehui shixue yanjiu weiyuanhui, Beijing guangbo xueyuan xinwen chuanbo xueyuan xinwenqi ed., Yan’an (Shanbei) xinhua guangbo huiyilu xinbian,( Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe,2000), 144.
message to the public. With a sorrowful heart, she could hardly control herself and not crying. She told herself: “At this precise moment, my duty is to report this truth, word by word, clean and clear to the listeners. However, I cannot report this saddening message in an indifferent tone.” In the end, she managed to embed this sorrowful feeling into her speech without affecting its accuracy and clarity. Her success of provoking listeners’ condolence to the martyrs was further employed in the narrative of the autobiography as the result of her finetuning emotion, rather than techniques, to perfect her announcing skills.

The discovery of emotion signaled a revolutionary understanding of radio announcing not as a vocal replica of the script but as its vocal and emotional double. It manifested MacLuhan’s idea that “the media is the message.” The signifance of Meng’s, and by extension the CCP’s, discovery was not that it predated MacLuhan’s; rather, it suggested an alternative origin of the duality of the media. Namely, media was not uniquely a product of the postmodern/post-revolutionary condition, nor was it purely an issue of rhetorics. It could be right here, in the revolution, in the war of national liberation, that the duality of media was discovered and appropriated. The revolution became a sound laboratory of the revolutionaries.

To be sure, the purpose of this chapter was not to construct a dichotomy of emotion and techniques. It was quite the opposite: placing emotion at the center of announcing practice was a very sophisticated technique of speaking. It had to manage the linguistic message and emotional elements at the same time. In other words, both of the vocal signs (used by orators) and emotional elements (mobilized by Meng) was crucial components of the announcers’

24 Meng Qiyu, “Wo zai yan’an xinhua guangbo diantai boyin de shihou,” Yan’an (Shanbei) xinhua guangbo huìyìlu xinbian,( Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe,2000), 144.

25 Ibid., 80-81.


performance. Her dismissal of the vocal signs and turning to emotion was, in fact, the replacement of one technique with another. Thus, the natural tone was essentially a result of denaturalization: a process that played with the idea of “spontaneity” and ultimately transformed it into an attitude of “self-consciousness.”

The natural tone discovered by Meng was quickly transmitted to listeners at different regional radio stations with the help of the radio reception network. As early as 1941, the CCP had drafted regulations demanding all regional radio stations to relay and listen to the Yanan New China Radio. In June 1946, shortly after Meng discovered the natural tone, the Xinhua News Agency drafted its first regulation on radio broadcasting, stipulating that the announcers should speak Mandarin with short sentences and simple words for listeners to understand upon hearing them. The announcers should be mindful of rhythm and at the same time remain vivid and sonorous.

As the radio stations under CCP’s control in north and northeast China listened to the programs of Yan’an, they also actively participated in the nationalization of Yan’an’s definition and standardization of the natural tone. Yan Lin, the announcer of Benxi radio station in Liaoning province, recalled that when he was relaying the programs from Yan’an, he “paid special attention to the pronunciation, tone, and pitch of the announcers and sometimes marked them down on a notebook.” “Gradually,” Yan remembered, “I was able to handle the cadence of...

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28 For the mechanism and popularization of the vocal signs, see Ling Kang, “An Orator Prepares: The Body Techniques of Public Speaking.”


30 “Zhonggong zhongyang shujichu guanyu tongyi ge gengjudi xuanzhe de zhishi” (The Chinese Communist Party Central’s directive on the unification of outward propaganda institutions in revolutionary bases) (May 25, 1941), Xinhua she xinwen yanjiu bu ed, Xinhua she wenbian ziliao xuanbian, vol 1, (Beijing: publisher unknown, 1981), 9. See also, “Zhongxuanbu dui gedi chuban baozhi kanwu de zhishi” (The Chinese Communist Party Department of Propaganda’s directive on the publication of newspapers and journals in each area) (December 10, 1942), Xinhua she wenbian ziliao xuanbian, vol 1, (Beijing: publisher unknown, 1981), 13.

31 Yao Xishuang, Zhongguo jiefangqu xinwen boyin yuyan guifan yanjiu (A study of the linguistic norms of the news radio in liberated China), (Beijing: Yuwen chubanshe, 2007), 153.
words and express my emotion freely.”"32 At Yan Ji, Handan and Zhang Jiakou radio stations, announcers modeled themselves after Meng Qiyu, and consulted dictionaries for the standard pronunciation of certain characters.33 The natural tone invented by Meng proceeded the CCP in unifying the country as it was adopted and practiced by the announcers under the radio reception network.34

The popularization of the natural tone not only brought the party a distinctive vocal identity but also produced multiple sonic bodies for it. In early 1947, the nationalist army attacked Yan’an and forced the New China Radio Station to evacuate. Unwilling to remain silent, the CCP asked the staff in the aforementioned Handan radio station to substitute Yan’an.35 The Handan radio station subsequently selected two announcers who were good imitators of Meng Qiyu and Li Mulin’s announcing style.36 When listeners heard the familiar voice of Meng Qiyu and Li Mulin from their radio sets in early April, they never realized it was somebody else faking them.37 The success of this faking experiment was certainly inseparable from the Handan announcers’ remarkable skills of annunciation, but one fundamental factor was that the natural tone had

32 Yan Lin, “Benxi, Andong liangtai boyin shenghuo de huiyi” (Memories of broadcasting at Benxi and Andong radio stations), Zhongguo renmin guangbo huiyilu, vol 4, (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1990), 165.

33 Liu Jing, “Nanwang de suiyue: ji zai Yanji xinhua guangbo diantai gongzuo pianduan” (The unforgettable years: Recalling fragments of working at Yanji new China’s radio station), vol 1, (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1990), 190-200; Yao Xishuang, Zhongguo jiefangqu xinwen boyin yuyan guifan yanjiu, 169-172; Bai Li, “Boyin gongzuo de pianduan huiyi,” cited from Yao Xishuang, Zhongguo jiefangqu xinwen boyin yuyan guifan yanjiu, 172.

34 In fact, radio as a modern media free from geographical boundaries was widely used by modern political powers for the purpose of social integration. See, for example, Chanan Naveh, “Israeli Radio during the Six Day War: The Voice of National Unity,” The Journal of Israeli History 28, no. 2, (September 2009), 99–116. Alexander Badenoch, Voices in Ruins: German Radio and National Reconstruction in the Wake of Total War (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

35 Xiao Feng, “Baozheng zhenli de shengyin bu zhongduan—huiyi handan diantai jieti shanbei diantai guangbo de jingguo” (Ensure the voice of truth not to be interrupted-recalling the transaction of Handan radio station taking up broadcasting duties from Shanbei radio station), Handan Xinhua guangbodiantai huiyilu, Hebeisheng guangbo dianshi ting zhiyi bianweihui ed, (Shijiazhuang: Hebeisheng guangbo dianshi ting zhiyi bianweihui, 1988), 21.


37 Ibid.
become a norm that it was no longer identified with only one individual. It became an identifier and style of the CCP’s announcer community.

In the initial weeks of faking the Yan’an station, the Handan station drafted a two-step plan to further integrate the natural tone into its training scheme. Specifically, announcers should focus on clarity in pronunciation in the first month and then shift to the natural tone in the second month. Shortly after the plan was released, the station produced a very detailed guideline about how to use the natural tone: “The tone [of the announcer] is sonorous, colorful and bold. [The announcer] uses different tones to speak for different identities. It should be natural (not artificial), fluent (avoid unfamiliarity with the script and pauses), firm (no wavering), and calm (not flamboyant).” The natural tone was ranked as the first criterion and functioned as the opposition of the artificial tone.

4.3 Male Announcers

By the time the Yan’an station received Qi Yue, its sole male announcer in August 1947, the natural tone as a guiding principle of annunciation had deeply taken root in the minds of the CCP radio announcers. Although the career of announcing was new to Qi, he had expertise and rich experience in reading and orating poetry. Qi was a fan of Russian literature and was particularly addicted to the poems of Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov in his college life at the Xibei University in Xi’an. Each morning, Qi would wake up early, climb onto the city wall and stood there reading out loud his favorite poems. In 1945, when Pushkin had its 145th anniversary, Qi organized a commemoration meeting during which Qi recited Pushkin’s “Ode to


40 Yang Shalin, “Shengzhen huanyu, qingxi tingzhong-yi Qi Yue boyin suiyue pianduan” (Sounding the universe, emotion attached to listeners - in commemoration of Qi Yue’s broadcasting years), in Zhao Shuifu ed., *Shiji xinyu Zhongguo laoguangbo dianshi gongzuozhe ganwulu* (Beijing: Zhongguo guoji guangbo chubanshe, 2003), 151.
According to the poet Niu Han, “Qi’s deep, high-pitch and thick voice roared in the reading room like thunders.” There was “something” special in Qi’s voice, as Niu reckoned, that made him feel that it was Pushkin reading out his own poems.

Although at this moment, the new poetry readers became conscious of the reading and orating techniques, no evidence suggests that Qi received similar training. Rather, as Niu Han recalled, “it was not very likely that he trained his voice or learn the performing techniques via imitation.” “I believe,” Niu Han continued, “he was born with such a vocal quality and artistic personality.” If, as Tie Xiao suggests, the association of voice with agency and interiority was central to the modern conception of subjectivity, then Qi stands as an ideal new youth of the May Fourth generation: sentimental, passionate and articulate.

Qi travelled to Yan’an to join the Party after being dismissed from school for having been a student activist in 1947. Thanks to his distinctive voice and clarity in pronunciation, Qi became the second male radio announcer in the Xinhua Radio Station’s history. Listeners were delighted with his voice. As Yang Zhaolin, one of the radio workers, recalled: “Qi’s voice was rhythmical and powerful. It was smooth and natural without any breakdowns from the beginning to the end.”

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41 Yang Shalin, Yong shengming boyin de ren-yi Qi Yue (The person who broadcasted with life-commemorating Qi Yue) (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1999), 12.
42 Niu Han (1923-2013), poet and an important member of the July school.
43 Yang Shalin, Yong shengming boyin de ren-yi Qi Yue, 17. Also see, Niu Han, Niu han shiwenji, vol. 5, (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2010), 811.
44 Niu Han, Niu han shiwenji, vol.5, 809.
45 Ibid.
47 After the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1945, many intellectuals in cities were disappointed by the corruption of the Kuomintang and believed the Communist Party was to bring a better future to China. For relevant studies, see Suzanne Pepper, Civil War in China: The Political Struggle 1945-1949 (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999).
48 Yang Shalin, Yong shengming boyin de ren-yi Qi Yue, 63.
Shortly after joining the station, Qi realized that his understanding of the natural tone was at odds with his colleagues’. In a regular meeting, Qi’s fellow announcers pointed out to him that his tone was not “natural.” Hearing the advice, Qi decided to let his tone “loose a little to announce naturally.” The result, however, was disastrous. He made two mistakes on the same day. One was announcing “Zhonghua minzu” (people that had Chinese origins) as “Zhonguo renmin” (people that were Chinese nationals) and the another announcing XNCR as XMCR, which was the call letter of the Northeast New China Radio Station. These were huge political mistakes.

In a subsequent meeting, Qi realized that in the Party’s radio station “to be natural” did not mean “to let loose.” After listening to Meng’s definition of the “natural tone,” Qi reflected on his mistakes in his diary: “The natural tone as an announcing technique is rooted in seriousness and responsibility. It is not about one opening up at will and letting the words pass by freely.” “Partiality to techniques is wrong.” This proved to be a turning point in Qi’s career. Later when one of his listeners wrote to him asking about his announcing experiences, perhaps to avoid misunderstanding, Qi entirely skipped the vocal techniques and omitted the natural tone. Instead, he emphasized precision (准确 zhunque), clarity (鲜明 xianming) and vividness (生动 shengdong).

While recognizing the domination of the standardized natural tone within the established radio network, it is also important to keep in mind that other feminine vocal forms of announcing also existed and made its way into the state apparatus. Returning to Wu Xin, the first male announcer

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51 Qi, *Xiangei zuguo de shengyin*, 28.

52 Liu Huai, *Qi Yue he tade boyin shengya* (Qi Yue and his radio announcing career) (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1993), 11-14.

53 Yao Xishuang, *Zhongguo jiefangqu xinwen boyin yuyan guifan yanjiu* (A study of the linguistic norms of the news radio in liberated China) (Beijing: Yuwen chubanshe, 2007), 224

54 Qi, *Xiangei zuguo de shengyin*, 176-178.
at the Hebei Provincial Radio Station, although he listened to Qi’s programs, he knew nothing about this newly invented natural tone. Rather, he learned most of his announcing skills from Wang Jialu, a female announcer of the Hebei Radio Station under the Republican government before the Communist Party took it over. While many government employees of the previous regime were dismissed as the CCP took power, Wang continued to work as an operator at the newly organized provincial radio station. While no evidence in the archives explains why Wang managed to stay, the fact that she was only recently admitted to the previous radio station and was politically innocent (18 years old) probably created the condition for her to stay there as the only experienced announcer in this new regime’s radio station.

Announcer Wang, in Wu’s own words, “took it to heart” to teach him how to announce.\(^{55}\) It was possible that Wang saw Wu as her brother, who was two years younger than her, and took it as her responsibility to teach him techniques of broadcasting. It was also possible that Wang wanted to show Wu, who was a party member and cadre at the station, how progressive she was so that she could continue to work there. The reasons might remain obscure, but for Wu, now recalling that piece of memory nearly 60 years later, Wang was the only “sister” that helped him wholeheartedly. Wu probably did not care much about the natural tone either, since for a person like him with no experience in announcing, a more urgent task was to learn to speak with clarity. After all, getting the message delivered was the prime concern.\(^{56}\)

The HPPRS’ announcers resorted to a diversity of traditions as they committed themselves to the improvement of announcing skills. They went to learn from a folk artist who once performed with a single-string instrument in front of the late Qing Empress Dowager Cixi. They also consulted an actor from the local drama troupe about Italian singing techniques. The third important source was local knowledge. In 1950, Wu was about to read a 15000-word report to radio listeners. Worrying that such a heavy workload must wear out Wu’s tone, the colleagues figured out a solution: they mixed a raw egg with sesame oil for Wu to drink. From then on, drinking two raw eggs every day became a new spectacle at the HPPRS until they realized that it


\(^{56}\) Ibid.
was not hygienic. Together, these cases suggest that it mattered little for Wu and his HPRES colleagues where the techniques came from as long as they were useful. This vocal void generated between the standardizing efforts of the state and the local pragmatism allowed various forms of vocal techniques to find their ways into the voice of the state as the latter was taking shape.

4.4 Learning from the Soviet Union

The natural tone continued to dominate the aesthetics of radio announcing in China until the Soviet influence came in in 1954. On July 5, 1954, Wen Jize (1914-2000), who was the vice director of the Radio Management Bureau (广播事业局 Guangbo shiye ju), led the Radio Workers Commission (广播工作者代表团 Guangbo gongzuozhe daibiaotuan) to visit the Soviet Union. Two of the commission members were the aforesaid radio announcers, Qi Yue and Meng Qiyu. A fashion of learning from the Soviet announcers quickly spread out from Beijing to the rest of the country as the commission returned.

Heavily influenced by Konstantin Stanislavski’s system theory, the Soviet announcers saw themselves as performers of a drama show, whose job was to effectively convey the “super-objective” (最高任务 zuigao renwu) supposedly contained in the radio script. The principle of authenticity required them to deeply engage with the script, generate appropriate feelings for it, and eventually imagine themselves as the author of the script when delivering it to listeners. Meanwhile, they needed to speak with a sense of freshness to make the listeners believe that they


58 While at the Moscow Radio Station, Qi met with the Soviet model announcer Yuri Levitan (1914-1983) and took a photo with him. See Yang Shalin, “Qi Yue shengping dashiji,” Cangzhou shifan xueyuan xuebao 33, no.1, (March 2017), 89.

59 Fu Xiewoluoduofu (Vladimir Vsevolodov), “Sulian guangbodiantai boyinyuan de gongzuo jingyan” (Soviet radio station announcers’ working experience), Guangbo gongzuo cankao zilião vol. 1, zhongyang guangbo shiyeju ed, (Beijing: Zhongyang guangbo shiyeju, 1955), 61.
were the first ones who heard the story.\(^{60}\) Other paths to reaching listeners were deemed as unnatural. Furthermore, the announcers were encouraged to imagine themselves talking with his family members.\(^{61}\) As such, they would think of “just one or a few listeners sitting by a radio set or a loudspeaker in a small room.”\(^{62}\) Together the ideas of authenticity and freshness brought into being a “live” experience for announcers to deliver the scripts to listeners in a natural manner and build up a friendship with them.\(^{63}\)

The announcers had to find a matching tone and vocal style for each type of scripts. For example, when reading political articles such as commentaries (社论 shelun), the announcer should employ a calm and reserved tone in the beginning. When the content intensified, the announcer should raise the tone to reflect the intensification. For commentaries that ended with slogans, the announcer needed to control and reserve one’s strength for the last paragraphs to give it full effect and power.\(^{64}\) Reading articles from newspapers and journals required a different set of vocal techniques. The announcer should imagine oneself having a daily conversation with the listeners. Since in conversations one would use a diversity of tones to indicate different emotions such as silence, happiness, furiousness, excitement, and anger, the announcer should also make use of these different tones as well as the volume of the voice, dynamics of rhythm, and tone colors to let the listeners feel that the announcer was conversing with them. For daily news, the announcer should read it out passionately to arouse listeners’

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\(^{62}\) Fu Xiewoluoduofu (Vladimir Vsevolodov), Guangbo gongzuo cankao ziliao vol. 1, zhongyang guangbo shiyeju ed, (Beijing: Zhongyang guangbo shiyeju, 1955), 62.


\(^{64}\) Fu Xiewoluoduofu (Vladimir Vsevolodov), “Sulian guangbodiantai boyinyuan de gongzuo jingyan” (Soviet radio station announcers’ working experience), Guangbo gongzuo cankao ziliao vol. 1, zhongyang guangbo shiyeju ed, (Beijing: Zhongyang guangbo shiyeju, 1955), 62.
curiosity so that they wanted to learn from the heroes presented in the news and thus better their own work.\textsuperscript{65} In principle, radio announcers had to imagine themselves “talking” to listeners, except for two caveats. One was that announcers had to adopt a calm, solemn and dignified tone to represent national dignity when broadcasting government announcements. The other was with foreign reports. The announcer had to put aside the talking mode and instead “read” it in a particular way to make sure that listeners knew they were listening to material from abroad and therefore did not reflect the view of the socialist state. Reading, in this case, created and reinforced distance and difference.\textsuperscript{66}

The Soviet techniques to produce naturalness quickly became the yardsticks for Chinese announcers across the country to learn and practise. In March 1955, the directors of the Radio Management Bureau decided to organize the first national meeting to update all the radio workers in the system about the Soviet experience. Those who spoke at the meeting included Mei Yi (1913-2003) and Zuo Ying (1917-1984), who served as the bureau’s director and vice director respectively. Mei and Zuo skipped the principle of freshness and directly entered into the discussion on authenticity. Elaborating on Stanislavski’s theory of super-objectives, Zuo pointed out that while the specific super-objective of each script may vary, they all shared the same general super-objective of building socialism and promoting the socialist general line (总路线 Zongluxian). The duty of the announcers was to comprehend the specific super-objective of each script in relation to this general super-objective and carry it throughout the announcing process. Moreover, to speak authentically, the announcers should respect the genre of each script and uncover the strong sentiments the writers had invested in the script.\textsuperscript{67} Meanwhile, Zuo asked the announcers to stop imagining their listeners as masses sitting together as if “in a meeting.”

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{66} Fu Xiewoluoduofo (Vladimir Vsevolodov), “Sulian guangbodiantai boyinyuan de gongzuojingyan” (Soviet radio station announcers’ working experience), Guangbo gongzuocankao ziliao vol. 1, 62.

\textsuperscript{67} Zuo further articulated that for news and commentaries that expressed ideas through clear logic, the announcers should think about it seriously and cautiously, solidly grasp the structuring logic to arrive at the overall thesis. For artistic pieces that composed vivid stories through rich vocabularies, the announcers should grasp the script’s general idea first and then deploy various methods and techniques to bring that idea to the listeners. See Zuo Ying, “Boyin shi yizhong yuyan yishu huodong” (Announcing is an artistic activity), Zhao Yuming, ed, Fengfan changcun: zuoyin jinian wenji (Beijing: Zhongguo chuanmei daxue chubanshe, 2005), 93.
Rather, they should envision “three to five people” listening to the radio quietly at home or other places.  

The Soviet announcing experience essentially promoted “a middle-class mode of radio listening.” As Stephen Lovell has correctly pointed out, radio listening in the Soviet Union had changed from a collective activity in the early period into a private and individual practice as radio sets had secured a place in Soviet domesticity in the late 1930s and 1940s. The middle-class aesthetics was further evidenced in the emergence of photos in radio journals in this period featuring three or four radio listeners sitting around a radio set at home or in a backyard. Such a mode of radio listening did not fit with the reality in China where an average of 1370 households shared one radio set, according to the statistics in 1955. The resources on private listening were further shifted to public listening as the central government launched the agricultural collectivization movement in 1956. In other words, it was unrealistic for Chinese radio announcers to imagine themselves talking to “three to five people.” Moreover, as I argue in previous chapters, peasants and workers would not sit at home listening to the radio; they were out for work, either in the fields or the factories. The purpose of radio listening in China was not for relaxation and recreation, but for production and reproduction.

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68 See Zuo Ying, “Boyin shi yizhong yuyan yishu huodong” (Announcing is an artistic activity), Zhao Yuming, ed, Fengfan changcun: zuoying jinian wenji (Beijing: Zhongguo chuanmei daxue chubanshe, 2005), 93-94.


70 Ibid.

71 In an internal-circulation journal, Zuo reported that about eighty thousand families owned radio sets, while public listening sites including those in co-operatives, factories, government offices reached the number of fifty-six thousand. Zuo Ying, “Fazhan nongcun youxian guangbowang, jianshe nongcun shouyin wang de fangxiang: dui jinming liangnian zai quanguo youtiaojian de sheng qu zhubu jianshe nongcun youxian guangbo de zhishi de shuoming” (The direction of development for rural wired radio reception and radio listening network: An explanation on the directive of gradually developing rural radio reception network in the next two years in qualified provinces), *Guangbo yewu*, no. 1, (1955), 47-55. The figure concerning households comes from Guojia tongjiju renkou tongjisi ed., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo renkou tongji ziliao hubian 1949-1985* (Beijing: zhongguo caizheng jingji chubanshe, 1988), 2.
Noticing that the Soviet experience was at odds with Chinese reality, Mei Yi carefully modified the former to fit the latter.\textsuperscript{72} He removed the “small room” from the milieu of a live experience and changed the style of conversation into one between two persons as one was telling important news to the other. Although Mei emphasized the importance of announcing techniques, he was more concerned with the use of Mandarin in broadcasting as the announcers shouldered the final responsibility for the standardization of Chinese spoken language.

In contrast, Zuo Ying highly valued the importance of announcing as a special artistic creation. “No two scripts were the same,” Zuo argued, “since the composition of emotion, tone, speed and the up-and-down of the pitches varied.”\textsuperscript{73} Zuo also suggested, however, radio announcing was never only about beautiful rhythms and clear syntactical pronunciations. “It was about whether the most natural tone and sentiment could come out of the convergence of the announcer’s emotion and the emotion embedded in the script.”\textsuperscript{74} Zuo consequently labeled one extremity as self-exhibitionism, in which the announcer cared too much about the self and hence failed to read into the script. The self-exhibitionist announcing style was formalistic, artificial, and superficial. The other extremity was complete reliance on the script and developed announcing skills from total imitation. For Zuo, such practices lacked individuality. To find a fine balance between the two extremities, Zuo offered a list of fields that announcers should learn and have: Marxism, Leninism, basic knowledge of humanities and social sciences, loyalty to the communist revolution, a proletarian worldview, awareness of current affairs and policies. Familiarity with radio was at the very end of the list.

\textsuperscript{72} Scholars have noted the existence of similar practices in other fields. Thomas P. Bernstein names it as “bureaucratic and middle-class Stalinism.” He further contends that “[f]he Soviet specialists who came to China in the early 1950s were to varying degrees the product of the bureaucratic mentality.” See Thomas P. Bernstein ed., \textit{China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-Present} (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 8. For specific case studies on this issue see Tian Chen’s article on film, Jian Zang’s article on women and Elizabeth McGuire’s article on Chinese students in the Soviet Union in Thomas P. Bernstein ed., \textit{China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-Present}.

\textsuperscript{73} See Zuo Ying, “Boyin shi yong yuyan jinxing xuanchuan de yishu huodong,” (Radio announcing was an artistic activity that uses language to communicate) \textit{Boyin gongzuo jingyan huiyi}, Guangbo shiyuje yewu yanjiu shi ed. (Beijing: publisher unknown, 1961), 18.

Mei, together with Zuo, further criticized the absence of class politics in the Soviet operation of the natural tone. As Mei asked, how could it be possible for an announcer with a landlord background and position (立场 li chang) to have any positive feelings about the undergoing land reform in the countryside? Similarly, how could such an announcer have a correct understanding of a script celebrating the success of the land reform? It was thus impossible to imagine asking such an announcer to bring to live the happiness of the poor peasants who managed to turn their back on in the new regime.75

From their perspectives, the natural tone took root in the life and language of the masses. Mei asked the announcers to learn from poor peasants at the speaking bitterness (诉苦 su ku) meetings. The cries of the peasants were genuinely touching, for they were retelling the miserable stories they had indeed experienced. In contrast, most announcers with an intellectual background lacked the knowledge about economic production and class struggle. Therefore, Zuo asked the announcers to go to factories and the countryside to get in touch with the local workers and peasants. According to him, “That would not only help the announcers accumulate knowledge, but also let them know the patterns of people’s emotional change and linguistic expressions.”76 “That,” Zuo further argued, “was the only valid path for the announcers to reform their petty bourgeoisie sentiment, establish a proletarian worldview and form an authentic attitude toward the people.”77

In 1957, The HPPRS leaders drafted a provincial instruction encouraging announcers to accompany journalists in their visits to factories and the countryside. They would compose and read the scripts directly to the workers and peasants to get a sense of direct communication and revise accordingly.78 For instance, announcer Wu and a journalist colleague went to visit the labor model Geng Changsuo, soldier-turned-mayor Bai Fangyu, and the first groups of the send-


76 See Zuo Ying, “Boyin shi yizhong yuyan yishu huodong” (Announcing is an artistic activity), Zhao Yuming, ed, Fengfan changcun: zuoying jinian wenji (Beijing: Zhongguo chuanmei daxue chubanshe, 2005), 93.

77 Zuo Ying, “Boyin shi yizhong yuyan yishu huodong,” 93.

down youths. Wu worked, ate, and lived with them for more than 20 days to develop a sympathetic feeling that could later be used in announcing. In this case, the reality in China was well respected by radio leaders and announcers.

Many of the instructions from Mei and Zuo were incorporated into the speech of Qi Yue, the model announcer at the national radio station. Qi’s speech was important for discussion here, partly because it announced the Soviet style from a skilled Chinese announcer’s perspective. More important, it served to distribute information independently of the official channels that were defined and patrolled by state directives and regulations. Such a channel allowed information, the middle-class friendly tone in particular, to reach out to a wider audience in spite of the resistance it encountered from state authorities. Furthermore, Qi quoted Stanislavski and Kalinin to demonstrate that voice training and daily practices were indispensable for announcers to improve the quality of their voice. He further cited Aleksei Puzin, the head of the Soviet Radio committee, to argue that announcers should think about announcing as talking to “a good friend,” “at home” or in “small” radio reception teams.  

Qi’s speech reached the HPPRS as the latter was planning to improve its announcers’ announcing skills in 1956. The HPPRS announcers studied Qi’s speech and decided to read the recommended Soviet works. Wu Xin, who became a team leader now, led announcers to discuss Konstantin Stanislavski’s *An Actor Prepares*. Wu and other announcers read scripts while imagining there were two to three listeners in front of them. Such a practice was deemed so strange that their colleagues laughed upon seeing them taking notes, reading, and performing with imaginary beings. Such an account nevertheless demonstrated that the Soviet announcing

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79 Interestingly, even at the state level, not all announcers were able to grasp the Soviet style. As one listener wrote in a letter to the Central People’s Radio Station that the quality of announcing decline after learning from the Soviet. It was weak and slippery. The pronunciation of words was “unclear.” According to the listener, he could not feel the power in the voice of the announcer as the latter was criticizing the American imperialism via radio. He further demonstrated that the fact that his attitude remained unchanged toward American imperialism was the best evidence for the announcer’s failure. As it turned out, the announcer took Soviet announcing as a soft and chuckling tone and used it for all types of scripts regardless of their content. See HPA, No.1032-1-61, Qi Yue, “Xiang sulian boyinyin xuexi: zai boyin yewu xuexihui shang de fayan tigang” (Learning from the Soviet announcers: outline for the speech delivered at the announcer learning conference), March 1955.

style had successfully taken root in the HPPRS and had been incorporated into the announcers’ announcing skills.

Indeed, the HPPRS announcers were much more than mediators who acted with limited agencies within the pre-decided frames from the outside as well as from the central government. As I have demonstrated previously, the HPPRS had its own ways to develop announcing skills. As early as 1951 when HPPRS launched the new program *Broadcasting to the Factory Workers*, Liu Shu, the newly arrived announcer did not know how to announce scripts. The worker listeners told her that she had a “student tone.”81 To get rid of the student tone and speak naturally to the workers, she went to the local waving factory, ate and lived there with the female workers for a month. Liu recalled:

> When the workers were on duty, I would take a look at the spines and check out the waving machines; when they finished, I would join them reading newspapers, designing blackboard announcements and discussing production issues. Gradually, I got familiar with them.82

Liu Shu’s story was one against the grain. It reminds readers that the provincial announcers’ agency on certain occasions could go beyond the anticipation of the state. The absence of such stories in the dominant narrative had to do with its potential to subvert the authority of the former. The happening of such a practice was so contingent that the practitioner failed to realize how important it might be for the development of the natural tone. Liu Shu and the provincial radio station did not report this experience to the central government, which left the dominant narrative ignorant of its existence. Liu’s familiarization with the people was a one-woman’s solo. It ended when her technical issue was solved. The method of joining the masses in the latter’s experiences was not institutionalized and consolidated into a set of routines. The invention of the local remained local.

81 Liu Shu, “Wo yisheng zhong’ai de boyin shiye” (The career I love for the whole life), *Hebei guangbo*, no.4, (2009), 7.

82 Ibid.
4.5 County style, Country style

The localization of the natural tone continued with the training of even lower level announcers. In 1956, the Central Radio Management Bureau decided to expand the radio reception network to the countryside. The lack of quality radio announcers seriously dragged down the expansion of the network in Hebei, where countryside broadcasting had always been the HPPRS’ priority. Later in October, the Hebei Radio Management Bureau decided to organize a 10-day long announcer training session to set up some basic rules of radio announcing to guide county announcers’ performance.

Standardization remained to be a big concern. However, its target had shifted from the natural tone to the bright and sonorous voice. The trainer observed: “We do our job through voice. If we cannot pronounce words clearly and speak beautifully, people would not want to listen.” To speak loudly, the announcer should have an excellent vocal strength (气力 qi li). For many of the county announcers with only elementary school education, vocal strength was something mysterious, not to mention how to use it properly. Therefore, part of the training session focused on teaching the announcers to speak appropriately. For instance, it taught announcers to protect their throat by avoiding substances that might be irritant to the throat, such as cigarette, spicy pepper and alcohol. It also advised announcers to do physical exercise because if “the announcer got a cold, his voice would sound stuffy (闷 men) or hoarse (沙哑 shaya).” Ensure “enough sleeping time” was equally important.

County announcers enjoyed a lot more freedom than their provincial counterparts in the language they used and the way they spoke. Although Mandarin was the designated language for radio announcers, it lost such a prestige once being introduced to county announcers. The county announcer training session completely dropped the topics of Mandarin and announcers’ responsibility in standardizing Chinese spoken language. One crucial reason for that was

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83 HPA No.1032-1-58, “Boyinyuan huiyi” (radio announcer meetings), 1956.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

Mandarin required time and practices for one to fully cultivate. For county cadres who were eager to expand their agricultural cooperatives, they found themselves severely short of time to handle multiple tasks. Furthermore, Mandarin could drive away their listeners as very few listeners could understand it. County announcers were also exempted from speaking clearly and sonorously. For instance, on the typed teaching script, it wrote “[the radio announcers] must have a clear and sonorous voice.” Perhaps realizing it was unrealistic, the trainer drew a caret sign above “must have” and placed inside “make efforts to cultivate oneself to.” Now the whole sentence became “[the radio announcers] must make efforts to cultivate oneself to have a clear and sonorous voice.” Such the revision revealed authorities’ consideration that the national standard had to be lowered otherwise few county listeners could meet the requirement.

Influences from the Soviet Union became increasingly formalistic as it approached the county announcers. Again, take Stanislavsky’s super-objectives, for example. In the training session, county announcers were asked to read a script four times before announcing it. For the first time, one skimmed it over, picking out the unknown characters, unclear sentences, and erroneous facts and solving them by consulting with colleagues and dictionaries. For the second time, one should find out the script’s “central task.” Anticipating the difficulty for announcers to understand the neologism, the trainer explained that “the central task equates the script’s central idea,” which addressed “what the script was about, its intention, and what the super-objective it aimed to achieve.” The most central concept, the “super-objective,” was left unexplained. This could be because the trainer found it hard to explain, or none of the announcers would understand it even if it was explained. To grab a little bit of the “central task,” or “central idea,” would suffice.

Similarly, the natural tone turned out to be optional for county announcers. It lay in the fourth layer of the reading practice, during which one should imagine him or herself facing “concrete listeners.” The numbers and locations of the listeners that authorities quibbled with each other

88 HPA No.1032-1-58, “Boyinyuan huiyi” (radio announcer meetings), 1956.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
at the state level vanished now. County announcers only needed to think of listeners as “concrete” beings. Seeking out the embedded emotion in the script remained important for announcers, but none of them were told how to do so. The trainer only warned them not to feel content with a fluent reading of the sentences. Later the publicized regulations on announcers stipulated that “the announcer should read through the scripts at least three times before broadcasting them.” In either case, the natural tone ceased to be mandatory. It became an ideal for those announcers who were unsatisfied with a smooth reading of the script.

What remained unchanged at the county level was the emphasis on announcers’ political status. It was now closely tied to the authenticity of the voice. Like Mei who elaborated on the politics of the voice, the provincial trainer highlighted that a good announcer should be very passionate about politics and strongly motivated by patriotism and internationalism. If the announcer lacked them, he or she would not succeed in developing a proper attitude toward the script and consequently were “doomed to fail to speak with authenticity.” Clearly, for local operators, authenticity was less of a technique or skill than something closely related to the class status and political identity of the announcer. As the case of Wang Jingxuan below shows, such a tendency became even more pervasive at local institutions that political liabilities became a hard currency that could trade for skills as well as knowledge of radio announcing.

Wang Jingxuan was an announcer in Changli county. For her, being an announcer in the county radio station meant a completely different scenario from those working in the state and provincial radio stations. As an elementary school teacher with ample lecturing experiences, Wang thought it was easy to be an announcer: one only needed to “speak a few words and play a few records.” She learned how wrong she was only after becoming an announcer in September

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91 HPA No.1032-1-58, “Boyinyuan huiyi” (radio announcer meetings), 1956.

92 Other regulations included: the announcers should prepare themselves for the script on time. They should not chat or do other irrelevant things. If encountering words, sentences or passages that one does not understand, one should make sure to consult with each other, check dictionaries. If still cannot understand, the announcer should consult the supervising editor.

93 HPA No.1032-1-58, “Boyinyuan huiyi” (radio announcer meetings), 1956.

94 HPA No. 1032-2-100, “Hebeisheng renmin weiyuanhui guanlichu biaoyang guangbo shouyin youxiu gongzuozhe de tongbao (Hebei provincial people’s committee radio management bureau’s announcement of compliment for excellent radio announcers), July 24, 1957.”
1956. She not only needed to speak a few words and play a few records, but more importantly, she had to know the machines that enabled an announcer to talk and play records.

She was shocked. If it were a central or provincial radio station, she would not have to worry about the machines or record playing. There would be professionals to take care of them. However, since it was a small, county station, she had to take care of editing, announcing, recording scripts all at once. Wang Jingxuan was intimidated by her new job: “the wires here, the machine there, this button to turn on and that button to turn off: things are so complicated.”95 She was particularly scared by the electricity running through these machines. The sense of danger was intensified as she sat in the announcing room, with the power on, three to four hours a day. She was almost about to “collapse,” as she recalled.

However, she did not collapse. She started to learn how to use machines. Whenever the technician came to operate the machines, she would come close and watch. Quickly she got familiar with all the buttons and tried them out. Three days later, Wang was able to do basic operations independently. While learning to use these machines, she noticed that the uncomfortableness gradually went away. She started to like the job. As someone who knew nothing about broadcasting, Wang learned to use the recorder to record other announcers’ voice and carefully listened to the embedded rhythms and emotion. She also recorded her voice when rehearsing her announcement. She would have spent more than six hours on practicing recording, announcing and operating the machines each day.96

While being selected to attend the above-discussed announcer training session, Wang found the classes extremely helpful: “Although only lasted a dozen days, it was like offering firewood to me in a snow storm.” In particular, Wang Jingxuan successfully adopted Zuo Ying’s moderated version of Stanislavsky’s supreme task theory. Each time before announcing, she asked herself when preparing the radio script: What script is this? To whom am I announcing? Why should this script be announced? How to announce it?97 Meanwhile, regardless of how busy she might

95 HPA No. 1032-2-100, “Hebeisheng renmin weiyuanhui guangbo guanlichu biaoyang guangbo shouyin youxiu gongzuozhe de tongbao, July 24, 1957.”

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid.
be, Wang always left herself time for preparation, from getting familiar with the scripts to consulting others about uncertain words and sentences. The announcing etiquette successfully reached the local.

Wang also worked on the natural tone. Comparing with the provincial regulation that asked announcers to read a script four times, Wang would read three more times after getting extremely familiar (熟透 shu tou) with the script. She would mark out where to stop, where to pause, where to invest more emotion in the script. For her, “the natural tone came out [when one got] extremely familiar with the script.” Wang could not speak Mandarin well, although she was already the best in town. A dictionary was all she had to consult with when feeling unsure about certain words’ pronunciations. Neither did she follow the principle of imagining “concrete listeners” when reading the scripts. There was no need to do so in the county since she was with listeners all the time. She saw them every day after finishing announcing and walking out of the room. For instance, at one time after she had finished broadcasting, one listener told her that she was a little fast, Wang said: “I will slow down next time. Please listen and give me some more advice.” Closer to the masses than the state and provincial announcers were, Wang Jingxuan interacted with listeners on site and listened to their advice on a regular basis.

Wang further invented new programs to refine her radio station. Local listeners would not only know about what was happening far away in the capital but also heard of new things nearby. She also commenced the “Listener’s Service” (听众服务 tingzhong fuwu) program. County fellows who lost something or found others’ lost objects could come to the station to make announcements. Wang also accepted suggestions from listeners to increase the diversity of traditional operas. She used the station recorder to record operas broadcast from provincial radio stations and broadcast the recordings at the county station.

County listeners warmly welcomed Wang’s experiment with the radio programs. Upon hearing the radio talking about how to do housework, some female listeners were excited: “The radio is

98 HPA No. 1032-2-100, “Hebeisheng renmin weiyuanhui guangbo guanlichu biaoyang guangbo shouyin youxiu gongzuozhe de tongbao, July 24, 1957.”

99 Ibid.
perfect! It even teaches us to do housework.” To listen to the opera, the listeners would stand under the loudspeaker and expose themselves to the freezing weather and icy wind in the coldest days of the winter. For many others who did not want to come out, they sneezed in and twined another wire to the major one so that they could hear it at home. In 1957, Changli county had about 1000 state-sanctioned loudspeakers, but the number of illegal ones went beyond 300.

Before, the listeners called the loudspeaker as “dumb speaker” because it always failed to talk. Now the “dumb speaker” turned back to “loudspeaker.” Listening to the radio became a daily practice for many county residents.\(^\text{100}\)

Notably, Wang did not state her attitude toward announcing in political terms. Instead, she wrote that she had “deep love” (深刻的爱 \textit{shenke de ai}) for this new job.\(^\text{101}\) Such a love reportedly had its origin in the training session where she learned that “the announcers controled one of the key steps that the party employed to deliver guides and policies to the masses.\(^\text{102}\) All of a sudden, she realized that “the announcer was the tongue of the Party!”\(^\text{103}\) Such a discovery got rid of all the discomfort she had previously experienced in dealing with those strange and scary machines. This new job, in Wang’s own word, gave a new meaning to her life and allowed her to find a new and energetic herself. In return, Wang would “run to the light” and complete the job the party gave her.\(^\text{104}\) Such claims entailed the compatibility of political passion and deep love. Furthermore, in Wang’s case, the deep love became a variant and integral part of the political passion.

\(^\text{100}\) HPA No. 1032-2-100, “Hebeisheng renmin weiyuanhui guangbo guanlichu biaoyang guangbo shouyin youxiu gongzuozhe de tongbao, July 24, 1957.”

\(^\text{101}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{102}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{103}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{104}\) Ibid.
4.6 The Birth of the Voice of Socialism

The Great Leap Forward was decisive in transforming the natural tone into the voice of socialism. Listeners reportedly felt from it deep class-emotions, vibrant political passion, as well as a serious attitude toward people and socialism. Lin Tian, head of the announcer team at the Central People’s Radio Station, even composed a poem to describe the components encapsulated in such an announcing style:

With emotions as deep as the ocean,
voice as beautiful as singing a song,
language pure and vivid,
the style of announcing rich and diverse as one hundred different flowers.
It would penetrate people’s heart,
fly around the earth, the moon and the song;
It will generate endless power like a nuclear explosion.

Lin concluded, the announcers had invented “a Chinese announcing style that’s deeply rooted in class, people and the nation.”

The political motivating for asking radio announcers to “go to the masses” played a crucial role in energizing such a process of transformation. While “going to the masses” in the 1940s allowed intellectuals to better prepare themselves for the ongoing revolution, it became a synonym of revolution in the late 1950s when war was nowhere to be found. As Lin admitted,

105 Lin Tian, “Yongyuan ting dang de hua, zuo hongtou zhuanshen de boyinyuan” (Forever listen to the words of the party and be a red and expert radio announcer), Guangbo shiyeju yewu yanjiushi ed, Boyin gongzuo jingyan huiji (Beijing: Guangbo shiyeju, 1961), 4.

106 Lin Tian, “Yaozuo youhong youzhuan de boyin yuan” (to be a red and expert radio announcer), Guangbo shiyeju yewu yanjiushi ed, Boyin gongzuo jingyan huiji (Beijing: Guangbo shiyeju, 1961), 10-11.

107 Lin Tian, “Yongyuan ting dang de hua, zuo hongtou zhuanshen de boyinyuan” (Forever listen to the words of the party and be a red and expert radio announcer), Guangbo shiyeju yewu yanjiushi ed, Boyin gongzuo jingyan huiji (Beijing: Guangbo shiyeju, 1961), 5.

although she was a seasoned revolutionary, she had failed to go to the countryside for four years after moving to the city. Her knowledge of social reality came from books and reports. She needed to go back to the masses to recharge her voice with “a full and concrete emotion.” As a result, Lin and two colleagues went to the Huangtugang People’s Commune. She ate, lived and worked together (“three togethers”) with local peasants. She helped the commune with their radio station’s broadcasting. At the commune, Lin felt through her body “the elegant nature and radiating power of the working people.” The images of workers standing beside the furnace and peasants in the fields were so impressive to her that they appeared in her mind immediately after she picked up the radio script in the announcing room. Such a practice continued to 1959 when 25 Central People’s Radio Station announcers gave up their break to work in a local commune during the Chinese New Year. Coming back from the countryside, Lin noticed that their “voice was vibrant and filled with powerful emotions” and that it reflected the spirits of the Great Leap Forward.

The making of the natural tone as an early socialist tradition also involved the efforts to reinterpret the past and reposition its relationship with the Soviet experience it had received earlier. Mei Yi, the head of the National Radio Management Bureau, in particular, emphasized that communist announcers had used radio creatively and produced “profound political impacts” on the development of revolution. Mei lamented that such experiences were not being studied after the establishment of the communist regime. According to Mei, such negligence was largely caused by the coming of the Soviet model, which prompted announcers to “favor techniques over content.” Such a preference, in Mei’s words, were “unrealistic” and “bureaucratic,” as they were adopted by those who were content with “arbitrary” plans.


110 Lin Tian, “Yongyuan ting dang de hua, zuo hongtou zhuanshen de boyinyuan” (Forever listen to the words of the party and be a red and expert radio announcer), Guangbo shiyuju yewu yanjiushi ed, Boyin gongzuo jingyan huiji, (Beijing: Guangbo shiyuju, 1961), 2.

111 Mei, “Jianli yizhi youhong you zhuan de guangbo gongzuo duiwu, meiyi tongzhi zai diyici quanguo guangbo gongzuo huiji shang de zongjie” (Establish an army of red and expert radio announcers: comrade Mei Yi’s concluding remarks at the first national radio broadcasting conference), April, 18, 1958, from Guangbo dianying dianshibu zhengce yanjiushi dangdai zhongguo de guangbodianshi bianjibu, ed, Mei Yi tan guangbo dianshi, (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1987), 135-136.
One consequence of such interpretation was that the voice of socialism became increasingly political and pertinent to one’s relationship with the revolution. As Lin Tian has pointed out, young radio announcers often failed to announce the voice of socialism because they started their career after the liberation and did not receive the “test of revolution.” Further, since many of them “were born to exploitative families, they had bourgeoise individualism deep in their heart.” Such announcers had to gain that political sensitivity by throwing themselves into the ongoing revolutionary production campaigns. As Lin summarized, “one had to be political to do the propaganda work for the party.” Indeed, being political is work.

The HPPRS witnessed a similar politicization of the natural tone. Radio announcers had to test if their voice contained “sharp political judgment and full political passion.” They were encouraged to step out of the announcing room to join workers and peasants. Similar to their colleagues in Beijing, the HPPRS announcers reportedly noticed that their voice did become natural and warm at the production site. Experiencing this new reality, one announcer commented: “Witnessing the rise of the blast furnaces, how can you not feel proud for yourself and the worker-peasant brothers?” To keep up with the new reality, announcers were asked to equip themselves with “The politician’s mind, the philosopher’s thinking, the laborer’s emotion, the orator’s skill, the spirit to join the frontline, and finally, the tone of the masses.”

Such a politicizing process, however, resulted from a different set of technopolitical concerns in Hebei. Unlike the central radio station where the majority of its announcers knew the Soviet-style, in the HPPRS only a few were sophisticated practitioners of those vocal techniques. These few announcers identified themselves as proud students of the Soviet model with “superb

112 Lin Tian, “Yongyuan ting dang de hua, zuo hongtou zhuanshen de boyinyuan,” 1.


114 Hebei and Tianjin radio station jointed announcing team, “He ‘wei tiancai lun’ de yichang lunzhan” (A debate with the ‘genius’ theory), Guangbo shiyuju yewu yanjiushi ed, Boyin gongzuo jingyan huiji, (Beijing: Guangbo shiyuju, 1961), 40.

115 HPA 1032-1-146, “Wubanian boyin gongzuo zhong de jidian tihui” (several thoughts on radio broadcasting in 1958), Yewu yanjiu 56, February 21, 1959.

116 Hebei and Tianjin radio station jointed announcing team, “He ‘wei tiancai lun’ de yichang lunzhan” (A debate with the ‘genius’ theory), Guangbo shiyuju yewu yanjiushi ed, Boyin gongzuo jingyan huiji (Beijing: Guangbo shiyuju, 1961), 36.
language skills and good at acting, reciting, and telling stories.” By contrast, most announcers continued to find it challenging to be a Soviet-style announcer. They started to see these Soviet students as prodigies and consequently lost confidence in themselves. One announcer said: “I feel awkward each time I listen to my own announcing.” Another commented that “I might be good at doing something else. Art? No way.” The ability to emulate the Soviet announcing style became a marker of social distinction in the HPPRS.

A debate on “What constitute the art of announcing” thus started within the HPPRS to solve the identity crisis among its announcers. Curious announcers raised questions such as “One without talents cannot be an actor. Stanislavsky said it; it must be true”, and, “the great poet Wang Bo won fame when he was a teenager while many others lived a long and unknown life. Is that decided by the number of efforts they make?” In response, the HPPRS authorities replied that youngsters such as Wang Bo surpassed many of his seniors not because of their talents, but rather because “they found the right direction, were brave to try out their ideas and without being constrained by the old rules (老规矩 lao guiju).” To reaffirm such a stance, the authorities continued that those who only wanted to pursue the improvement of skills were “idealistic” and therefore “bourgeoisie.” The techniques could do nothing but to “mislead” and “constrain” announcers’ creativity. The only valid path for announcers to improve their skills was to join the masses and discover the vocal forms that were pleasant to the masses’ ears. Only then could the announcers catch up with the social and political “reality” of socialist China, which at the moment was centered on the Great Leap Forward.

117 Hebei and Tianjin radio station jointed announcing team, “He ‘wei tiancailun’ de yichang lunzhan,” 36.

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid, 38.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid., 42.
4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how the natural tone as a set of techniques of radio announcing developed in the 1940s gradually evolved into a particular type of political culture over the next decade. Such a transformation was enabled by information distribution channels such as the radio reception network, government directives, reports, national and regional conferences. These channels allowed the natural tone to reach lower-level announcers and more importantly tolerated information of heterogenous origins as they sought to be incorporated into specific localities.

These sites were significant because they brought to light a much less discussed dimension of the Soviet influence in China. Namely, while the state authorities perceived the Soviet model as foreign and learned from it selectively, both the state and Soviet models became equally foreign as they landed in many of the local rural communities in the early PRC. County announcers, for instance, enjoyed a great amount of autonomy in choosing among local knowledge, state model, and the Soviet experience. Criteria concerning knowledge, oratory skills and training consequently gave way to political reliability to ensure that the job of announcing was carried out dutifully.

As the tendency to emphasize announcers’ political background and their alliance with the state became increasingly prominent, it eroded the existing vocal diversity and rejected the existence of announcing techniques that did not fit into the state ideology. The outbreak of the Anti-rightist movement in 1957 and the Great Leap Forward in the late 1950s and early 1960s further intensified this tendency to such a level that politics became the only descriptor of the voice of socialism. The politicization of the socialist voice, in return, posed a serious challenge to the announcers who had to reform themselves in body and in spirit to renew their voice. The growing pressure for claiming the new socialist subjectivity led to the emergence of an increasingly standardized, new voice of socialism in the early PRC.
Chapter 5: Let Radio Produce Iron: The Sonic Regime and the Making of the Great Leap Forward

5.1 Introduction

Let Radio Produce Iron (让广播产铁 rang guangbo chantie), was a slogan coined by the staff at the Hebei Provincial Radio Station (hereinafter, HPPRS) during the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961). It refers to the practice of using radio broadcasting to bolster the mass iron-making (大炼钢铁 dalian gangtie) movement. Current scholarship on the Great Leap Forward highlights the conflicts between Mao and his colleagues and interprets the launch of the Great Leap Forward as a product of Mao’s collaboration with provincial leaders to reclaim the lost political power in the central government.¹ More recently, scholars have emphasized the roles local factors played in the implementation of radical policies in each region.² Although such perspectives are instrumental in understanding the politics at play in this ground-shaking experiment, they cannot explain how this movement on industrial production unfolded itself the way it did.

The newly emerged scholarship on emotion was particularly inspiring in pointing out a subtle technique at work in Chinese revolution and in showing how the CCP deployed emotions for social and political mobilization and state-building. Elizabeth Perry has looked into the mobilization of emotions in the revolutionary years in class-struggle meetings in the form of


speaking bitterness and accusations.\(^3\) She points out that the CCP has continued to employ the techniques of emotion mobilization after the founding of the PRC in a series of movements from the 1950s to the Cultural Revolution. Perry urges scholars to explore the “relationship that different emotional states—hope, fear, regret, shame, anger, and so forth—may bear to different types of revolutionary (and post-revolutionary) action.”\(^4\) The emotional effects could be carried out in a variety of forms, such as literary works, artistic pieces, dances, and opera.\(^5\) Each emotional effect may correspond to different techniques in mobilizing the masses for different types of social campaigns.\(^6\) Equally stressing the significance of emotion engineering in political campaigns, Julia Strauss argues that the CCP did not rely on morality and moralization alone. It also heavily practiced coercion, morally and legally, to compel people to conform their thoughts and behavior to the standards set up by the Party.\(^7\) In the past few years, scholars have further extended the scope of analysis to include how other hitherto underexamined factors such as local experience and professional knowledge played in the Great Leap Forward.\(^8\) Take the mass iron-production project, the most important component of the Great Leap Forward, for example. Jiang Qin, in his study of Songyang county, Zhejiang

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\(^6\) Yu Liu, “Maoist discourse and the mobilization of emotions in revolutionary China,” *Modern China* 36, no.3 (September 2010): 329-362.


Province, argues that traditional metallurgical knowledge not only allowed local workers to increase their production but also kept these production targets within reasonable limits.9

Following such a revisionist trend, I discuss the role technologies of communications played in the mass iron-making project in Hebei province. I argue that radio not only transfigured the process of industrial production but also restructured participants’ identities and their social relations. Furthermore, it was the operation of what I would call a sonic regime that energized the mass iron-making movement and elevated it to the national stage. The sonic regime refers to a set of practices, techniques, and knowledge systems that defines and regulates who has the power to speak and what would be heard. In particular, I examine how radio, as an embodiment of the sonic regime, was used to foster an atmosphere of competitive production targets. Radio allowed the provincial cadres to extend this competition from a single village factory into one that encompassed the entire province.

To make this argument, this chapter will proceed in three sections. First, I will investigate the techniques embedded in different types of radio broadcasting in the early stages of the Great Leap Forward. I will then explore the concerted efforts of integrating these techniques into the mass iron-making campaign in rural and urban spaces. The last section focuses on the impact of the production campaigns on the making of radio programs.

5.2 Dianbo

Call-in radio, or dianbo (点播), refers to the practice of radio stations broadcasting programs based on listeners’ requests made by phone or mail. In the Republican period, dianbo was used primarily for recreational listening. After 1949, especially during the Great Leap Forward (hereinafter, GLF) in Hebei, dianbo marked the direct intervention of radio broadcasting into industrial production. In April 1958, the HPPRS decided to invite workers in the Shijiazhuang Steel and Iron Factory (石家庄钢铁厂 Shijiazhuang gangtie chang) to request their favorite

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music pieces to be played on the air, as a recognition of their contribution to Hebei’s first provincial-level steel and iron enterprise. After this initial phase, dianbo went through significant technological changes over the next few months. In this section, I will discuss how dianbo and industrial production mutually influenced and shaped each other.

*Dianbo* embodied the sonic regime that controlled who had the power to speak and what content needed to be heard. In the case of the Shijiazhuang factory, workers were informed that priorities would be given to “advanced” individuals and groups since it was impossible to let each worker request their own favorite songs. It was reported that *dianbo* pushed workers to accelerate their pace of work to such a degree that the furnace at the Shijiazhuang factory started iron production three days earlier than scheduled.¹⁰ In the end, factory workers gathered to listen to their requested programs. Shanxi workers contented themselves with listening to their local opera and folk songs, and Hebei workers were able to hear the lively string music of their hometowns. These music requests, in return, functioned to consolidate the existing relations in the factory. As one listener remarked, “Our Supervisors value us so much!” After listening to these programs, another worker exclaimed “I don’t know how to say things. I will let you see it at the production site.”¹¹ *Dianbo* transformed passion into productivity.

The participation of listeners in program design profoundly influenced the dynamics of radio broadcasting. Normally it was the editors who designed programs according to the instructions from above; however, in *dianbo*, listeners structured their own programs. Such an arrangement not only reoriented this top-down structure, but also effectively elevated workers’ class consciousness and motivated them to increase production.¹² This, as one report concluded, became an important way for radio programs to directly serve politics.¹³

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¹¹ Ibid.


¹³ Ibid.
In May, the HPPRS organized an 11-day long special program using dianbo to celebrate the International Workers’ Day. It encouraged those who had good news about production to report (报喜 baoxi) to the radio station. As a reward, these reporters would receive an opportunity to request their favorite programs to be broadcasted via radio to the whole province. Applications went to the radio station from a wide range of listeners including, peasants, factory workers, as well as secretaries of prefecture and county levels of government.

The HPPRS noticed a strange phenomenon as the program proceeded. Listeners chose programs that seemed at odds with the nature of their work. For instance, workers and peasants frequently requested opera pieces such as Liu Qiaoer (刘巧儿) and Qin Xianglian (秦香莲). Liu Qiaoer featured a young woman named Liu Qiaoer in the Shanganning revolutionary base who was brave enough to marry her beloved husband, thus breaking the arranged marriage from her father in 1942. Qin Xianglian was about a young woman named Qin Xianglian in Song dynasty who committed her life to serving her husband’s parents as well as her two children while her husband remarried a princess and lived a comfortable life in the capital city. Later, Qin Xianglian was murdered by her husband as she went to the capital searching for him. The story ended with Qin’s husband receiving a capital punishment. Interesting and moving as the plots were, these two opera programs had nothing to do with the increase in production, which was the central theme of the Great Leap Forward.

Such a disjunction between radio programing and the government’s economic policies concerned the HPPRS. They attributed this disjunction to the lack of up-to-date radio programs. If listeners were aware of a variety of new programs, they would surely call in and request them. Indeed, the HPPRS broadcast newly composed socialist music pieces in its June special program “Hebei Iron and Steel Industry in the Leap Forward” (Yuejin zhong de hebei gangtie gongye). The HPPRS not only broadcast new songs and poems to listeners but also actively collected,

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15 Similarly, Hejian county organized a singing contest but they requested a program that was not a song at all. The workers from the Hebei Number 1 Hospital earned a chance for making the request after adopting a new and advanced treating schedule after the two Antis. However, the program “Doctor on Duty” (zhiban yisheng) they requested was a sarcastic piece making fun of doctors. It also bore no connection with the ongoing Great Leap Forward. See HPA 1032-2-106, “Wenyi guangbo wei zhengzhi fuwu de zhongyao fangshi” (Important ways for literature and art radio programs to serve politics), Yewu yanjiu 24, October 17, 1958.
compiled and composed pieces on topics relevant to iron and steel production. For example, HPPRS editors used newly collected folksongs and poems for a special program to praise Dongguang county for its local industrial development.\(^{16}\)

However, the HPPRS remained unsatisfied. It recognized that the radio station had created a bond between arts and politics, but such a bond remained somehow precarious and unofficial as these two spheres were still technically separate from each other.\(^{17}\) Such a flaw was evidenced in their lack of radio programs that were designed with material \textit{from} and \textit{for} the individuals or entitles that made the request. This imperfection prevented listeners from immediately associating the sounds they heard to the achievements of the reward receivers. This flaw was fixated in July, with the special program “Satellite Launching Station” (卫星发射台 \textit{Weixing fashe tai}).\(^{18}\) During the provincial irrigation campaign, Zhaobazhuang village in Shenze county set a record of finishing drilling a well within 8 hours. The HPPRS composed a song for Zhaobazhuang to further speed up such projects for agricultural or industrial production. While the HPPRS had its editors serve as lyric writers, it gathered staff members during nap time to practice, rehearse and finally record the song.

The reception of this improvised music piece surprised the staff at the HPPRS. The Shenze county Party committee leaders heard this music piece and immediately directed the county Party newspaper (机关报 \textit{jiguan bao}) to publish it. Another leader wrote passionate commentaries on it and urged residents of the county to learn and sing this song.\(^{19}\) Such responses compelled the HPPRS staff to rethink about the nature of radio programs. Initially, they saw it as a political task to compose lyrics, music and sing and did it with minimum passion. But they now started to think that even radio programs with an explicit political or economic agenda did not mean poor quality. Rather, this “composing-on-demand” was such an effective

\(^{16}\) HPA 1032-2-106, “Wenyi guangbo wei zhengzhi fuwu de zhongyao fangshi” (Important ways for literature and art radio programs to serve politics), \textit{Yewu yanjiu} 24, October 17, 1958.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.

\(^{18}\) It was entitled “Shenzexian zhaobazhuang well-making squad created a miracle by making a well in 8 hours.”

and popular method in incorporating political messages into radio programs that it should be recommended for wider adoption.\textsuperscript{20}

Over the next four months, the HPPRS continued to refine its target listener communities. In April, it focused on advanced individuals and groups; in May it shifted to those who made good news to report; in July it became those who hit production records. Following the change of target listeners, the HPPRS adjusted duties of station staff accordingly. As the Zhaobazhuang case reveals, the job of editors had shifted from organizing and scheduling programs to composition. Although it emphasized the importance of mobilizing “authors, actors and the general masses” to compose radio scripts, editors inevitably became the major force for composing “short, tiny, smart and convenient” pieces.

The addition of dianbo was illuminating in twofold. First, it was a product of “experimentation,” in which the local was given the access to resources before its wide application to the rest of the province.\textsuperscript{21} In other words, the radio technocrats were so adaptive to the local actors, condition, and knowledge and flexible to take the local into consideration and further incorporate it into technological innovation.

Equally significant was the challenge posed by listeners to the state-approved program schedule. In June 1958, Zhou Yang, Vice Minister of the Central Department of Propaganda, instructed that radio stations should follow the three-thirds rule (三三制 sansan zhi): traditional programs took one third, Western programs one third and new programs that reflect new socialist fashions one third.\textsuperscript{22} In dianbo, such an arrangement would be impossible to implement. Listeners in Hebei, most of whom were from the countryside, were much more interested in traditional opera than in Western and new socialist art pieces. As a result, conventional opera pieces claimed most of the time during dianbo.


\textsuperscript{22} HPA, 1032-1-120, Zhou Yang, “Diwuc quanguo guangbo gonzuo huiyi jianghua” (Talk at the fifth national radio broadcasting conference), June 15, 1968.
5.3 Guangbo dahui

Radio conference, or Guangbo dahui (广播大会), refers to the use of radio to address a large number of listeners. Guangbo dahui also represented a form of the sonic regime, but it operated in a slightly different manner, with implications for who had the power to deliver their voice to themselves and others. Guangbo dahui supplemented dianbo in multiple ways. With guangbo dahui, editors no longer had to worry about the shortage of radio programs. Once being recorded, these could be stored for future uses. Guangbo dahui further pushed listeners to the center of the sonic regime. While in dianbo, those who requested programs could only have their names, together with the programs they requested to be heard by others, guangbo dahui allowed them to speak in front of the microphone and therefore had their own voice directly audible to other listeners.

The HPPRS organized two types of guangbo dahui. The first type resembled a traditional conference, which provided a central venue for participants to gather and communicate with each other on site. In this type of guangbo dahui, radio delivered voice of the announcers to each corner of the venue and allowed leaders to deliver speeches, make mobilization calls, and invite participants’ responses without worrying about not being heard by their listeners. Prior to the Great Leap Forward, the HPPRS only organized a few such radio conferences, one of which was to mobilize the masses for the Korean War in late 1950.

The drawbacks of this type of guangbo dahui were also obvious. Although the venue rendered it easy for organizers to gather attendants from different regions, it also placed a limit on it. For example, no venue at that time was large enough to hold 10,000 participants at once. This posed a constraint on the size of mass gatherings. A more pertinent reason for the first type of guangbo dahui to quickly become outdated was that it was time-sensitive. For the cadres to speak at the conference, they had to punctual, no manner how busy or far away they were. For many, this was an impossible requirement as they were already too busy with multitasks during the Great Leap Forward.

The second type of guangbo dahui did not need a central venue other than the broadcasting room of the HPPRS. Listeners did not have to flock into one place or room from different regions. Rather, they could go to their regional venue, which was connected to the HPPRS by wire. Without such spatial limitations, the second type of guangbo dahui could easily see the number
of its listeners easily adding up to 100,000. For instance, the conference on tree planting attracted three million listeners in March 1958.23

With the second type of guangbo dahui, neither was time limitation a problem any longer. The recording technology, in particular, allowed responsible cadres from all six prefectures to take part in the conference by speaking to a string recorder ahead of time without actually traveling there. This was a critical innovation for cross-regional communications, especially when considering that Hebei was a lengthy province with the southern counties 1000 kilometers away from the northern ones. The provincial leaders’ support for the string recorder further tied it to the Great Leap Forward. These authorities informed all six prefectures that they could invite journalists from HPPRS to record their speeches. For the prefectures that did not have HPPRS’ journalist stations, cadres could ask the local radio station for help with the recording. The recording tape would be delivered from the prefectural Party committee to the HPPRS whose staff in the broadcasting room would play the records out. For example, Zhao Ke, the first secretary of Tianjin prefecture, had been occupied by several priorities during the above mentioned tree-planting conference. He called HPPRS’ journalists at midnight and delivered an impromptu speech to their recorder for them to play at the station.24

The second type of guangbo dahui also helped ease the staff shortage. Although it required several staff to do the preparation work, once the conference started, it would only need one announcer in the broadcasting room to read the opening and ending remarks and introduce the speakers before playing their records. If the announcer was equally busy, he or she could also have their words recorded as well. Program editors of the HPPRS would make sure that each part of the program was in the right order. In a word, with the second type of guangbo dahui one only needed to press a few buttons to start, and then it would run on its own.

The HPPRS staff further invented a format of serial radio conferences. Comparing with the one-time radio conference that took place at the beginning or the end of a certain event, the serial radio conference ran through the whole process of the event. The HPPRS staff compared the

23 HPA, 1032-1-105, “Guangbo dahui zai Hebei renmin guangbo diantai shenggen faya” (guangbo dahui is rooting itself in Hebei provincial radio station), Yewu yanjiu 19, October 14, 1958.

24 Ibid.
serial radio conference to a battle (zhanyi) consisted of several combats. It started with a radio conference to mobilize listeners, proceeded with a series of updates on the development of the competition, and then concluded in another radio conference that summarized the results and commended those leading in the competition.

The Great Leap Forward offered the HPPRS a chance to invent new forms of radio broadcasting to serve the rapidly changing reality. These new forms, such as dianbo and guangbo dahui were so effective that they helped the HPPRS gain attention from higher government authorities. For instance, the provincial Party committee now saw radio as “the most powerful and convenient tool” to mobilize the masses and bolster movements. It further asked the radio station to think about the situations in Hebei at the level of the provincial Party committee. Such compliment from provincial government leaders further encouraged the HPPRS to brainstorm creative ways of using radio to stimulate higher production productivity and wage political campaigns effectively. This was well captured by the slogan “Let Radio Produce Iron,” to be discussed below.²⁵

5.4  Let Radio Produce Iron, Phase I: the Countryside

In 1958, a movement known as Dalian gangtie (大炼钢铁) or Mass Iron-making swept across the country. The assignment that Hebei province received from the central government was 1.4 million tons of iron. This project had completed only one percent by the end of June. The provincial leaders were concerned that they might not be able to meet the remaining quota in the second half of the year. Placing themselves in the provincial leaders’ shoes, the staff at the HPPRS decided to use radio to organize a province-wide iron and steel production campaign. It dispatched two groups of journalists to Baoding, Shijiazhuang, Handan, Chengde, Zhangjiakou and Tangshan prefectures to help local party committees organize the special radio program “Marshall Steel Entering the Tent (钢铁元帅升帐 Gangtie yuanshuai shengzhang)” to stimulate steel production across the province.

On August 13, as the HPPR journalists returned to the station and sat down to discuss strategies to launch the campaign, news came that a Duzhuang Village Iron Factory (杜庄炼铁厂 Duzhuang liantiechang) in the northeast of the province had set a record of producing 7.25 tons of iron a day. At night, the news about Chairman Mao visiting Hebei reached the station. Following Mao’s instructions, the provincial party committee pointed out that the task for Hebei in the rest of the year was to “demand iron from time” (向时间要铁 Xiang shijian yao tie). It further resolved that efforts should be made to set up the Duzhuang factory as a high-productivity model (高产卫星 gaochan weixing) for the whole province to emulate. Meanwhile, those journalists, after touring across the province, reached the consensus that reports on efficient and sustainable furnaces would help the regional government find their ways to improve iron-making in a rapid and thrift manner. Duzhuang factory hence became ideal for a special radio program.

Having set up the target, the journalists started to discuss more specific questions, one of which was what record to feature in the special program. Although the record of 7.25-ton iron a day would certainly excite the public, it was already a record of the past. After brief discussions, the journalists decided to report on the record of 8-tone a day. Such a record would demonstrate to the populace that if one liberated the mind and solved the technical difficulties the potential of blast furnace will be infinite. A second question that immediately followed was how to report on something if it had not yet happened? The journalists were confident that the broadcasting

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26 Mao visited Xushui county on August 4 and Anguo county and August 5. Both places were famous for their effortless promotion of the people’s commune and public canteen during the Great Leap Forward. See Liu Zihou, “Huiyi maozhuxi zai hebei de jige pianduan” (Several memory fragments of Chairman Mao in Hebei) in Zhonggong hebeishengwei bangongting and Zhonggogn hebei shengwei dangshi yanjiushi, etc. ed., Lingxiu zai hebei (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1993), 93-94.

27 HPA 1032-1-105, He Huaming, “Guangbo chu gangtie: ji caifang duzhuang liantiechang chuang quanguo gaochan jilu de jingguo” (Radio produces steel and iron: on interviewing Duzhuang village iron factory for its making of the national production output record), Yewu yanjiu 16, September 26, 1958.

28 It also claimed that it would enhance people’s confidences in production and offer a vigorous critique on the wrong thought that “the small and local do not work.” HPA 1032-1-105, He Huaming, “Guangbo chu gangtie: ji caifang duzhuang liantiechang chuang quanguo gaochan jilu de jingguo,” Yewu yanjiu 16, September 26, 1958.
techniques they had developed earlier, especially dianbo and gaungbo dahui, would let “radio produce steel and iron” (guangbo chan gangtie).²⁹

On the morning of August 15, the journalists attended one workers’ meeting and listened to the team leader reporting each team’s output and praising the model workers of each shift. Inspired by the meeting, the journalists made a few proposals to create incentives for competition over access to the acoustic space and radio program. These proposals demonstrated how radio broadcasting became an important means for increasing productivity. First, following the format of guangbo dahui, it invited the most “advanced” worker to speak in front of the microphone and this allowed them to be heard by others. Second, it arranged dianbo programs for those who were praised during a shift to request a song or opera piece, which would be played in HPPRS’ special radio program “Satellite Launching Station” (Weixing fashe tai). This gave the competition winners the privilege to listen to their favorite programs. Other workers would need to work harder to be the next day’s model workers for similar privileges.³⁰ The radio station started broadcasting at around 5 p.m. when most of the workers were in the factory.³¹ Besides frequent announcements of each team’s production records, it also broadcast their challenge letters (Tiaozhan shu). Workers did whatever they can to get a change to speak in front of the microphone. The result of these strategies was satisfying. Duzhuang Iron Factory produced 7.98 tons of iron in 24 hours, which marked the new national record of the day.

Shortly after it was born, this new record went on a tour beyond the village. Journalists in Duzhuang carried it to an iron factory 120 li away in Qinhuangdao city. Realizing that their rivalry was now ahead of them, the workers in the iron factory in Qinhuangdao, launched a cheer-up meeting (shishi dahui) and agreed to make a pledge: “Never take a break before catch up with Duzhuang.” The journalists from the HPPRS recorded the Qinhuangdao cheer-up


³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ The HPPRS journalists were very aware of the social environment of the station and purposely made use of it. Workers in Duzhuang factory were divided into three shifts. 5 p.m. was when the morning team were in their summary meeting after finishing their shift. It was also when the afternoon team just had their preparation meeting before starting their shift. The evening team was also coming to the factory to have dinner.
meeting, brought it to Duzhuang and had it played at their celebration meeting. Duzhuang workers listened to the Qinhuangdao recordings and felt their blood burning again. One of the workers said: “Today we are number one, and tomorrow we become number two. How can we let this happen? No matter what, we cannot let them catch up with us.”32 They were going to work even harder to retain their lead. Thus radio started off a new round of competition, no longer between teams in the same factory, but between different factories.

Still, the HPPRS journalists were unsatisfied. They aimed at expanding this competition between two factories into one that covered the whole province. On August 17, the journalists rushed back to the radio station. They worked overnight and produced a 3-hour long special program about the Duzhuang Iron Factory. At noon on August 18, they broadcasted the Duzhuang example to the whole province.33 Shortly after, the provincial radio station started receiving phone calls from various regions informing the former that their production records have surpassed that of Duzhuang. While the validity of these news pieces remained in question, the story of Duzhuang as a model of production gained traction quickly.

The Duzhuang special program further played a vital role at a provincial-wide radio conference on August 20. The Provincial government and Party committee intended to use the radio conference to start off an even larger production campaign. They planned to salute the forthcoming national day with a record of producing 270,000 tons of iron within 40 days. The broadcast of the Duzhuang special program at the conference offered listeners advanced production experiences in a refreshing manner. Shortly after the conference, steel factories in Chengde and Zhuo counties sent back news reports about how their production records had surpassed that of Duzhuang, as evidence of their contribution to this campaign.34


33 This special program had several components: Two recorded reports called “One Unusual Day and Night” and “Iron Warriors at Qinhuangdao are determined to catch up with Duzhuang”; two pieces of newly drafted music: “Praising the Duzhuang Iron Factory” and “Praising the Worker Zheng Quanzhi.” One journal report, “The Two Zhengs at Duzhuang.” There were also recordings of the vice-head of the Qinhuangdao propaganda department, and the conversation between the HPPRS journalists and the factory party head.

34 HPA, 1032-1-105, “Guangbo dahui zai Hebei renmin guangbo diantai shenggen faya” (guangbo dahui is rooting itself in Hebei provincial radio station), Yewu yanjiu 19, October 14, 1958.
The Duzhuang Iron Factory became a national model shortly after the broadcast of the Duzhuang special program. On August 23rd, 1958, People’s Daily published a news report commending the factory for its achievement. In less than a month, two presses published books to promote its furnace to the whole country. One more book on this topic came out the month after. The Duzhuang factory and its furnace became a symbol of the people’s ingenuity and creativity in the industrialization of socialist China.

After the radio broadcasting made a provincial hit, the journalists of the HPPRS went back to Duzhuang to let the workers listen to their special program. It was already evening when they arrived. Once the loudspeaker started announcing, the whole factory turned silent. All factory workers began smiling and laughing as they heard the announcer saying “Dear listeners, the rocket from Duzhuang iron factory we are launching now is one that breaks the national record!”

The experience of listening to the radio programs about and for themselves inspired Duzhuang workers to tie the value of their work to the power to speak. For instance, a senior worker asked a factory leader after the broadcast for difficult tasks so that his name could be heard in radio next time after he had completed the task. Other workers posted a big character poster demonstrating their commitment to a higher volume of production and get on the radio again.

35 “Funingshi gaolu chanliang jiama, chuangzao richang shengtie qi dian jiuba dun xin jilu” (Having its output increased, the Funing style furnace made a new national record with 7.98 tons of raw iron a day), People’s Daily, August 23, 1958.

36 See Jizhong youxiu de xiao gaolu (Several excellent types of small scale furnace), Yejin gongye chubanshe ed., (Beijing: Yejing gongye chubanshe, 1958), 25-34; Tu yang jiehelu liantie jing yan (iron-making experiences from foreign-native mixed furnaces), Henansheng yejin gongyeju ed., (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1958), 36-40

37 Kexue puji chubanshe ed., Tuyang bingju daban gangtie gongye de jingyan (Experiences about utilizing foreign-native mixed methods to build steel and iron industries) (Beijing: Kexue weisheng chubanshe, 1958), 109-120.


Listening to such radio programs successfully channeled one’s desire, impulse, and affection into the making of collective identity.⁴⁰

These workers also understood themselves as an integral part of the factory. One senior worker said: “Phoenix does not stay on shabby trees. Duzhuang is an extraordinary place.” This program further helped factory workers earn respect from local peasants. One landlord told his worker tenants, “You people are great. Keep it up!” After listening to the radio the next morning, Duzhuang workers posted a big character poster to demonstrate their determination to send up an even higher production target and get on the radio again.⁴¹ Indeed, radio helped listeners forge a collective identity shared by residents regardless of age and career.

The Journalists from the HPPRS also found themselves at the center of a series of changing power relations. First, they did not remain observers witnessing and recording the event. Their function in the factory was to actively influence workers and ultimately foster production activities. Meanwhile, the journalists found themselves with little control over the world they entered. For instance, they had never anticipated that they would be invited to the stage and spoke in front of a large number of people. They felt nervous and did not know what to do. One fresh female journalist hid behind her colleagues when she was being introduced to the public. Nevertheless, the journalists found themselves powerful in the eyes of the local workers. They were invited to local workers’ home and given gifts. They were asked to offer advice as well. One worker, for instance, had difficulty choosing whether to stay working in front of the furnace or switch to a different environment. He asked the journalist for advice, whom he only met once or twice. As the journalist himself recalled, he never thought himself so important for others.⁴²

In this section, I have discussed how radio broadcasting played a vibrant role in launching the mass iron-making project during the Great Leap Forward. Radio as a technique of sonic regime

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⁴² HPA 1032-2-106, “Wenyi guangbo wei zhengzhi fuwu de zhongyao fangshi” (Important ways for literature and art radio programs to serve politics), Yewu yanjiu 24, October 17, 1958.
exemplifies its power by regulating who had the chance to speak up and what could be heard. Along with the production competition was also the competition over the access to sound. The Duzhuang case also reveals the social dimension of the acoustic technique. It re-organized the dynamics of production competition and created a link between the workers and the place they worked for. It also transformed the journalists who had actively involved in the making of the production record.

The Duzhuang case, however, cannot be applied to the urban areas where modern infrastructure was in-place, and the radio reception network was established. Therefore, I offer the second case about radio actively fueling the mass-iron making project in the metropolitan Tianjin in the Great Leap Forward. The Tianjin case was an extraordinary extension of Duzhuang factory, not only because it was inspired by the former, but also because it incorporated all the advanced radio techniques developed in earlier periods and further applied them extensively to turning the whole city into a giant and sonorous furnace.

5.5 Let Radio Produce Iron, Phase II: Cities

On September 1, 1958, two weeks after the Duzhuang special program, the Central Party Committee called upon the country to “work for [the goal of]10.7 million tons of steel.” After the experiment in Duzhuang, the HPPRS staff had frequently applied the techniques of dianbo and guangbo dahui to provincial iron and steel campaigns in the second half of 1958. In less than two weeks, the HPPRS established a frontline (火线 huoxian) squad composed of journalists, editors, announcers, actors as well as technicians. Comparing with the previous


44 Deborah A. Kaple notes that Soviet factories consciously used radio in various aspects of social life, such as parks and dormitories, to deliver stories of successes to workers in the 1940s. Kaple suggests that the Chinese Communist Party borrowed the whole package of high socialism from the Soviet Union to apply to the management of its own factories. Radio was one part of the mass political work. See Deborah A. Kaple, Dream of a Red Factory: The Legacy of High Stalinism in China (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 49.

temporary teams sent to Duzhuang, the frontline squad was more diverse in composition and stable as a regular team. Under the leadership of the HPPRS editorial board, the frontline squad was to visit production sites and foster intensive production-related activities.

Although the frontline squad followed a similar working procedure with previous teams, what separated it from the rest was that it further conceded the power to workers. In Duzhuang, the HPPRS journalists took charge of radio announcing and occasionally let the factory workers speak. In the frontline squad, factory workers and team leaders claimed most of the time in front of the microphone. They used radio to issue directives, exchange information, moderate production, and coordinate each other. One team leader in Xinxing steel factory noted: “Speaking via radio solved many issues that were previously unnoticed when issuing instructions in front of the furnace.” Indeed, radio in the hands of team leaders became truly powerful as it functioned as the nerve of the factory maximizing the production output through communicating information with each participant.

Returning the power to speak to the producers won the frontline squad support from factory authorities. Within a month, the frontline squad visited Tianjin Steel Factory, the construction site of the Steel Factory and the Xinxing Factory more than a dozen times. Furthermore, they followed the HPPRS journalists to Chengde, Wuhan, Handan and Jinxian counties across the province. Meanwhile, the HPPRS repeatedly received phone calls from these factories requesting a second visit of the frontline squad since workers thought about them ever since they had left.

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46 In terms of working routine, for example, the frontline squad collected information about production tasks upon arriving the No. 1 Steel Making factory of the Tianjin Steel factory. Then they spoke to the workers through the factory radio site and told them that if they manage to produce a production satellite, the HPPRS would let the whole city hear their good news. In the next step, the journalists joined the factory propaganda members to encourage workers to go to the factory radio site to announce their guarantees, express their determinations, report the weaknesses in their work, compose radio scripts, and help the workers with recordings.

47 HPA 1032-1-106, “Huoxian guangbo zuotanhui jiyao” (minutes of the frontline radio broadcasting meeting), “Huoxian guangbo-xinde weili Juda de guangbo xingshi” (frontline radio broadcasting-a new and powerful form of radio broadcasting), and “Guangbo chuilian fa gangshuai laladui” (blast with radio, marshal steel’s cheerleaders), Yewu Yanjiu, no. 46, December 30, 1958.


In September, the frontline squad refashioned its name and membership. Under the name of *Huoxian tuidui* (火线突击队), the squad was now composed of editors, crosstalk (*xiangsheng*) actors,\(^50\) as well as opera actresses who used to be core members of HPPRS’s drama troupe. This new composition allowed the squad to further specify its duty as creating skill-needed art works, such as crosstalk, songs, opera excerpts as well as paragraphs (*duanzi*). Their traditional occupation of news writing was leased to non-professional journalists, including factory workers, propaganda members as well as radio operators.

The *Huoxian tuidui* closely incorporated radio broadcasting into production to greatly cheer up the workers. If a production team worked in front of a furnace, the squad would compose scripts to congratulate them on their success in advance with the production figures incorporated into the scripts and broadcast immediately. If a certain team needed collaboration, the squad would compose programs on collaboration to attract those who were able to help. With materials prepared by factories themselves, these scripts were all about real workers and their production activities. After having finished composing the scripts, the squad members would start practicing and rehearsing them. It might only take as little as 10 minutes to produce and present a *duanzi* to the public. In one case, the squad produced more than 30 *duanzi* during one night.\(^51\) In another, they produced more than 150 pieces of *changci* scripts over a dozen visits to iron factories.\(^52\)

The transformation of the frontline squad evidenced the proletarianization of artists as well as the transformation of workers into artists. Such tendency became increasingly prominent in October when Tianjin planned to organize a frontline radio broadcasting to start a city-wide iron-making campaign. Compared with earlier activities, the frontline radio broadcasting in October covered

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\(^{51}\) Shitai huoxian xuanchuan xiaozu, “Huoxian xuanchuan xiaozu gongzuo jianjie” (a work summary of the frontline squad), *Yewu yanjiu* 29, November 14, 1958.

\(^{52}\) Anonymous, “Quyitian huoxian tuji gongzuo zongjie” (a summary of the drama troupe frontline squad), *Yewu yanjiu* 30, November 17, 1958.
broader areas and involved more participants. For instance, the broadcasting on October 25 covered 250,000 residents in Hebei district, Tianjin.\textsuperscript{53}

Such a conglomeration of space and population compelled the HPPRS to further change its methodology of broadcasting. It moved the coordinating center to the district government offices for the convenience of the district leaders. Meanwhile, the HPPRS adopted a specific frequency to ensure smooth communication for broadcasting during this campaign. Hence, when people across the Haihe river were asleep at midnight, vehicles in the Hebei district were roaring high and running constantly between furnaces in different locations and news report were flooding to the coordinating center.\textsuperscript{54} In the end, the Hebei district party secretary announced that they “produced” 200 tons of steel within 24 hours. Upon hearing the news, authorities from the rest six districts immediately called the HPPRS to help them organize frontline broadcasting as well.\textsuperscript{55}

To satisfy these districts, the HPPRS proposed to the Tianjin municipal Party committee to organize a city-wide radio conference and received immediate approval. This conference covered the whole city and its 800,000 residents. Again, due to the amount of work required to process such a large space and number of people, it was no longer proper to place the headquarters in the government buildings. This time, the municipal steel office moved into the HPPRS and established the headquarter there to maximize the use of the communication network. As the campaign began on October 29, each of the departments and work units turned on their radio receivers for instructions. An army of 800,000 people lit a total of 17,000 iron-making furnaces after getting the instructions of the municipal party committee through radio. Their voices roared up in the sky as competition over iron making continued among streets, districts, factories, schools, communes, and government branches.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{53} Anonymous, “Quyituan huoxian tuji gongzuo zongjie” (a summary of the drama troupe frontline squad), \textit{Yewu yanjiu} 30, November 17, 1958.

\textsuperscript{54} HPA 1032-1-106, Shitai xuanchaun xiaozu, “Huoxian guangbo zuotanhui jiyao” (minutes of the frontline radio broadcasting meeting), \textit{Yewu Yanjiu}, November 14, 1958.

\textsuperscript{55} For instance, the Hedong district Party committee made more than 10 calls a day for help.

\textsuperscript{56} HPA 1032-1-106, Shitai xuanchaun xiaozu, “Huoxian guangbo zuotanhui jiyao” (minutes of the frontline radio broadcasting meeting), \textit{Yewu Yanjiu}, November 14, 1958.
Staff at the HPPRS were among the busiest of all. While some were rehearsing programs, others had to pick up phone calls from across the city to write down achievements, progresses, newly emerged production records as well as calls for help. In the case of Hongqiao and Hebei districts, they had to receive their workers who had driven to the editors’ office after failing to get through over the phone. Meanwhile, they needed to help record programs composed by amateur artists as well as the voice of steel-making workers, who came to the station in their dusty and muddy coats and just wanted to get themselves heard by their colleagues on the air. Together, these sounds and voices composed a symphony vibrating through the whole HPPRS building.57

5.6 Iron Reproduces Radio

Although constantly being reformed since the Yan’an Forum in 1942, authors and artists in the 1950s still found a lot of reasons for having doubts about the idea of letting arts serve politics. For instance, the HPPRS authors used to frown upon the programs that were produced in a rush to promote political ideas. They dismissed the behavior of inserting opera and folk song pieces into political programs as “decorative” and “meaningless.”58 They believed that as its reflection, arts necessarily fell behind the evolving social reality. Therefore, it was impossible for arts to keep up with the rapidly changing political movements. If arts were to be produced overnight, they would be doomed to be formulaic, stereotypical and consequently fail to attract listeners.59 “Such works,” they concluded, “had no value to be preserved.”60

The Great Leap Forward greatly transformed the HPPRS artists’ perception of arts. They realized that arts did not have to follow the steps of social reality or just be its reflection. They could be


58 HPA 1032-1-106, Hebei renmin guangbodiantai wenyibu, “Wenyi guangbo wei zhengzhi fuwu de zhongyao fangshi” (Important ways for literature and art radio programs to serve politics), Yewu yanjiu 24, October 17, 1958.


60 Ibid.
ahead of reality. As such, the purpose of arts was no longer to reflect reality but rather create or reshape it. Furthermore, the assumption that art works of high quality required time to ferment and come into being was dismissed as a flawed understanding of time and reality. The intensity of such politically charged campaigns had left no time for artists to think with “a cup of tea, a pack of cigarette and a bunch of flowers in the moon.” They had to devote themselves to the actual production activities and seek inspirations there. For the same reason, the artists had to be good at different types of tasks to avoid falling behind. For instance, Xin Yunxia, an expert of Jingyun dagu (京韵大鼓) now stepped out of her comfort zone to learn other art genres such as shidiao and pingju. Others felt unsatisfied with current art forms and thence created new ones such as xiao hechang (小合唱) and xiao yanchang (小演唱).\(^61\)

Such a movement also changed artists’ self-perception in relation to their art works. Previously, one of the reasons that led the artists to undermine the value of politics-oriented art pieces was that, as one editor admitted, they felt such works “were not done by oneself.”\(^62\) For them, an art piece had to be filled with the author’s own intention and thoughts and took the shape the author gave it. However, as this editor started writing with political agenda in mind, he was surprised by the enormous amount of power such works generated in influencing listeners and impacting the social reality. In other words, the editor found long-wanted self-esteem and personal value in the works that were “not done by oneself.” Only then this editor had realized that doing art pieces collectively also had another name: “going to the masses.”\(^63\)

5.7 Conclusion

As embodiments of the sonic regime, dianbo and guangbo dahui had effectively transformed the capacity of speaking and listening into a disciplinary technique: one had to be “advanced” in order win the privilege to speak to others and hear the sound comfortable to his or her ears. Such

\(^{61}\) Ibid.

\(^{62}\) Ibid.

a regime bolstered the competition for productivity at different levels of the Great Leap Forward. More importantly, it helped solve workers’ identity crisis and prevent their loss of their passion for production, a tendency which had become obvious by 1957. It is also important to recall that the sonic regime was also a product of continuous refinement. While in Duzhuang, the production and dissemination of sound were still separated from each other, such boundaries became blurred later in Tianjin when the whole city was mobilized for steel making.

Meanwhile, an intense economic and political campaign like Great Leap Forward also pushed radio beyond its traditional boundaries of operation. The transfiguration of radio during the Great Leap Forward was also a revolution of sound production. The purpose of radio broadcasting changed from consumption to production and continuous reproduction.

Lastly, there is no doubt that, as Richard King has pointed out, these types of work was “intended to inspire enthusiasm for the initiatives and innovations of the time as well as compliance with the demands” from above. It was equally important, as I demonstrate in this chapter (and indeed the previous chapter as well), that such euphoria was created in close interaction with production activities. Therefore, a careful, critical reflection should reexamine not just the writers who composed these works, but also the whole overarching structure that encompassed writers, technology of communications as well as production activities of early socialist China.

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6.1 Introduction

The question of identifying an internal “enemy” (敌人 diren) occupied a central position in revolutionary China during the twentieth century.1 The “enemy” represented a category as well as a categorization in opposition to the people. Its meaning frequently changed: landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists could all be enemies. The Chinese Community Party (CCP) regarded the identification of these enemies as a defensive necessity during the white terror, the land reform before 1949, and later, various movements to bolster social integration and state-building.2 According to Michael Dutton, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) heavily based itself on this enemy-friend differentiation during its early stages. For many scholars, an intrinsic connection existed between the identification and production of enemies on the one hand and, on the other, public campaigns that constantly sought to “find a new version of the enemy.”3 Campaigns, as Julia Strauss has rightly pointed out, “met the

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challenges of revolutionary regime consolidation because of the way in which campaigns rapidly and publicly concentrated minds around the \textit{modus operandi} of the new government.”

Although these campaign-centered studies provide valuable insight into the operation of socialist regimes in China, they pay inadequate attention to the institutional forces that operated continuously and less noticeably amongst the public. Michael Schoenhals’ recent work amends this tendency by emphasizing the role institutional security forces played in the identification of potential enemies and the maintenance of social order in daily life.\footnote{Julia Strauss, “Paternalist Terror: The Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries and Regime Consolidation in the People’s Republic of China, 1950-1953,” \textit{Comparative Studies in Society and History} 44, no.1 (2002), 80-105.} Such an approach, however, so closely ties the identification of enemies to domestic issues that external factors from beyond the border, such as foreign radio broadcasting, are given little consideration. This trend is generally replicated in current scholarship, rendering it difficult for the understanding of enemy-making in China to escape from the narrative of terror, violence, and totalitarianism.

This chapter, by contrast, nuances this enemy-making process by examining the intersections between radio technology, information regulation, and governmentality that profoundly undergirded it. It demonstrates that the early PRC created a new condition for the state to identify its enemies in the 1950s and early 1960s, in response to American and Taiwanese counterrevolutionary efforts. No longer was an “enemy” defined simply by an ascribed class status, but also by the act of listening to foreign radio stations that the state deemed as “enemy radio” and thus hostile to the new regime.\footnote{Michael Schoenhals, \textit{Spying for the People: Mao’s Secret Agents, 1949-1967} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).}

The rise of this new type of enemy highlights an overlooked yet crucial aspect of Mao’s China: the socialist state governed the populace by channeling them into an informational order in which the state defined what truth and rumor were. This anti-liberal information order did not simply seek to contest the Western hegemonic discourse of democracy and freedom. It also

\footnote{The term “enemy radio” was used in other socialist regimes as well. See Evans-Romaine Smorodinskaya and Goscilo, ed, \textit{The Encyclopedia of Contemporary Russian Culture} (New York: Routledge, 2007), 80-81.}
triggered a new form of governance by connecting the populace with the radio network, pinpointing and identifying those who listened to the radio programs from abroad as enemies.

I will trace this development in three parts. I first investigate the early PRC’s campaign against the Voice of America (VOA), an American radio station and propaganda piece, and its listeners. This campaign was one of many in the CCP’s drive to establish sovereignty over information production and circulation. Its significance, however, laid in its birthing of the enemy-radio discourse, which commenced the reconfiguration of the PRC’s informational order in later periods. Second, I examine how radio was used in serving not only public security needs but also demands for communication between the state and the populace. This generated a space that partially tolerated enemy-radio listeners and their transgressive listening practices, thus complicating state control over radio use. Third, I focus on letters sent from the mainland to the Voice of Free China (自由中国之声 Ziyou zhongguo zhi sheng, hereinafter VOFC), another major radio propaganda station in Taiwan. I trace the flow of these letters and investigate how these diverse voices from mainland listeners were silenced and made to conform to a single one of anti-communist sentiment. Meanwhile, identifying the enemy-radio listeners as a threat to the state, the PRC government conveniently borrowed pre-existing class-based terminologies to define transgressive behaviors stimulated by newly-emerging radio communications technologies. The dividing line between the “enemy” and “us” now took up an acoustic form: those who listened to socialist radio programs were considered to be one of “us,” while those who did not were labeled “enemies.”

6.2 “Get the VOA out of China”

Radio broadcasting in China began as an international enterprise. In 1923, American technician E.G. Osborn (dates unknown) established China’s first radio station in Shanghai. British, Japanese, and local merchants quickly followed suit, and several dozens of radio stations emerged and took over the Chinese radio broadcasting market. With imported and locally

assembled radio sets, urban residents started experiencing a new world by tuning in to domestic and international radio programs. Similar to watching movies and listening to records, listening to foreign radio programs became a crucial component of modern life and a marker of one’s cosmopolitan identity. The popularity of American radio stations rose during the Second World War by providing Chinese listeners in large urban centers with timely updates about the war.

The VOA came to China in 1942. Administered by the U.S. Foreign Information Service, the VOA started broadcasting to Chinese listeners in Cantonese, Mandarin, as well as dialects from Shanghai and Fujian province. To attract listeners, the VOA advertised in journals and newspapers to promote its frequencies, schedules, as well as its three Chinese radio announcers. When WWII ended in 1945, the VOA encountered its ebb as the U.S. government saw no value in continuing wartime propaganda in China. It quickly revived in 1950 when the Korean War broke out, and the U.S. government sensed the necessity to maintain its hegemony over the production and circulation of information in East Asia.

This type of cosmopolitanism was part and parcel of colonial modernity, operated at the cost of Chinese sovereignty. Although the nationalist government tried to legally regulate foreign radio


10 See, for example, Wan Guan, “Meiguo jiu jin shan guangbo diantai xi ‘meiguo zhiyin’” [The American San Francisco radio station is the “Voice of America”], *Shengli Wuxiandian* 4, (1946), 13; “Jieshao meiguozhiyin diantai: zuishou huanying de meiguozhiyin huayu baogaoyuan zhongguo xiaojie: quanlin meitian anshi xiang zhongguo tingzhong baogao” [Introducing the “Voice of America” radio station: the most popular Chinese announcer: Miss. Quan Lin reports to Chinese listeners each day on time], *Dianxun* 1 (1947), 23; “Meiguo zhiyin” [Voice of America], *Yisiqi huabao* 14 (1947); “Meiguo zhiyin’ huayu guangbo: qiyuefen shijianbian” [“Voice of America” Chinese radio broadcasting: July schedule], *Xinwen ziliao* 184 (1948); “Meiguo zhiyin’ de duiwai guangbo” [Voice of America’s international radio broadcasting], *Dianxun* 2 (1948), 28.


stations in 1928, the existence of extraterritoriality and international concessions rendered it impossible to make these regulations effective. The CCP made a similar attempt in 1949 by revoking foreign journalists’ Chinese press cards and consequently prohibiting news agencies such as the VOA from reporting in China. This marked the return of China’s sovereignty over information production and circulation. For radio listeners, listening to foreign radio programs no longer symbolized their cosmopolitan identity. Rather, it became an indicator of one’s putative connection with the West and hence a potential threat to the new regime.

China’s efforts to consolidate information sovereignty climaxed at the beginning of the Korean War, when the state initiated a campaign against those who listened to the VOA. This campaign not only led to the birth of a new discourse regarding the practice of listening to the enemy radio, but also inaugurated China’s reconstruction of the information order. On October 18, 1950, faced with a crumbling North Korean ally and the unfavorable prospect of a US-backed rival on China’s doorstep, Mao Zedong (1893-1976) decided to send the “People’s Volunteer Army” into Korea. Six days later, the Central Committee of the CCP instructed lower party branches to guide the flow of public opinion on the war and propagate its necessity to the masses.

Meanwhile, one news article appeared on the regional Northeast Daily (Dongbei ribao) that introduced the VOA to readers across the country. The People’s Daily (Renmin ribao), the central party newspaper, quickly picked up and paraphrased this article. It labeled the VOA as a tool of American imperialism and the world’s most prominent “rumor mill” (yaoyan gongsi) that used electromagnetic waves to confuse listeners.


15 “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu tongling yu wo shang wu waijiao guanxi guojia de jizhe tingzhi guojia de jizhe shenfen huodong gei huodongjü deng de pifu” [The Party Central’s reply to the eastern China bureau on journalists whose country has no diplomatic relationship with China should stop their journalist work in China], Zhongyang danganguan, Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, ed, Zhonggong zhongyang wenjian xuanji [Selected writings of the Chinese Communist Party Central] vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2013), 1-4.

16 “Fensui meiguo zhiyin” [Shattering the Voice of America], People’s Daily, November 8, 1950.
In the next two weeks, this two-way discourse on the VOA’s ills, in which state and regional newspapers jointly produced and amplified narratives of the radio station, triggered a denunciatory campaign of it, its listeners, and their listening practices. This quickly swept across Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou and other major cities. Whereas the VOA was labeled a rumor mill and tool of American imperialism, those caught listening to it were also classified as enemies, and their act of listening to the VOA deemed illegal and subversive.\textsuperscript{17} From this moment on, listening to foreign radio programs ceased to be a token of cosmopolitanism; instead, it became immoral, illegal and threatening to the state.

Intellectuals, students, shop owners, homemakers, etc. were compelled to publicly voice their opinions on the VOA to demonstrate that they no longer had connections with it. Official news reports of these popular self-criticisms frequently used the terms “rumor” and “rumor mill” to tag the VOA. For example, more than 100 faculty members at Yenching University called the VOA, “a giant and virulent rumor mill of American imperialism.”\textsuperscript{18} Faculty members and students from the Department of Journalism, in particular, expressed that, “if we are against rumor-mongering, we must stop listening to the VOA.”\textsuperscript{19} Female workers in the Second Factory of the Chinese Weaving Company (中纺二厂 Zhongfang erchang), meanwhile, commented that the VOA was simply the “corrupted tongue” (烂舌头 lan shetou) of American imperialism and had nothing to say but rumors. Likewise, students from the Zhengjiang Provincial Girls School and Hongdao Girls School wrote to the Zhejiang Daily (浙江日报 Zhejiang ribao), complaining that, “the VOA was a rumor radio that every single upright person should stop listening to.”\textsuperscript{20}

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\textsuperscript{18} “Yanda jiaoyuan liangci zuotan dui meiguo renshi meidi liyong situleideng jinxing qinlue huodong ‘meiguo zhiyin’ zaoyao qipian bixu jinzhi shouting” [Yenching University faculty members held two meetings on their understanding about the United States. The American imperialists utilized John Leighton for invasion purposes and the rumor-making and deceiving VOA must be made forbidden for listening to], \textit{People’s Daily}, November 19, 1950.
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\textsuperscript{19} “Yanda xinwenxi zuotan fandui shouting ‘meiguo zhiyin’ jianyi zhengfu xuanbu ting ‘meiguo zhiyin’ wei feifa” [Yenching University Department of Journalism held meetings protesting against listening to the VOA and suggested that the government announce listening to the VOA as illegal], \textit{People’s Daily}, November 19, 1950.
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\textsuperscript{20} “Shanghai Hangzhou deng gejie renmin zhuzhang qudi shouting ‘meiguo zhiyin’.”
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VOA listeners who subsequently confessed under various pressures or motivations borrowed similar or identical terminology. One factory worker admitted that he used to be a listener of the VOA. He enjoyed it, he explained, because information arrived much faster through it than domestic newspapers. It brought him a sense of being “well-informed,” which he became “addicted to.” As such, he could not stop listening to it. He “realized” now that he had surrendered himself to the “American rumor camp.” His sources of information were not objective, but reactionary and false.\(^\text{21}\)

The PRC government’s action to expel the VOA should be understood primarily as a form of Cold War competition over communications, rather than simply a violation of the free flow of information. Indeed, as Jennifer Spohrer notes, the very idea of the “free flow of information” was a product of Cold War propaganda. It had only gained currency from the late 1940s on when the United States and Britain formulated an information campaign surrounding that idea. It transformed international broadcasting to the Soviet Union from a transgression of national sovereignty to “internationally sanctioned defenses of individual human rights.”\(^\text{22}\)

As the most powerful propaganda organ on the Euro-Asian continent, the VOA developed its own style of information processing. As Raymond Swing, who long served as VOA’s chief English language commentator, stated, the news of the VOA during this period were, “stuffed with items chosen primarily for being unfavorable to the Communists… anything subtler than a bludgeon was considered ‘soft on communism.’”\(^\text{23}\) This trend was commented upon by many VOA listeners in China during the campaign. Factory worker Xiao Darong, for instance, observed that the VOA first presented itself as judicious with facts here and there. It would then insert twisted opinions amid those facts so that listeners would easily believe that the facts were

\(^{21}\) “Dui fandong zaoyao de ‘meiguo zhiyin’ jinhou juexin buzai shouting” [Never listen to the reactionary and rumor-making VOA in the future], People’s Daily, November 18, 1950.


well-supported. Therefore, it was impossible to find truth in reading, comparing and analyzing news from a variety of sources. The variety only served to further deceive listeners.

What remains intriguing, however, was Xiao’s proposal that the solution to end colonial and postcolonial control over the production of truth was a strong government. He suggested: “Nowadays what has been reported by the people’s press is very much true. It has analysis, explanation, and critique. Is that not enough for us to understand reality?” To combat former colonial powers’ continuing influence over the formation of truth, Xiao proposed to hand over the power of jurisdiction to the state rather than to each person, and thus to let the state decide what was true and what was false.

Regardless of whether Xiao genuinely believed his words or was pressured into saying them, his quote speaks to the PRC’s state-centric interpretation of postcolonialism via its anti-VOA campaign. Its purpose was to reclaim the power of truth-making from perceived imperialist counterrevolutionary agents. Asserting itself as China’s postcolonial savior, the party-state was to head this effort. Using the terms “rumor” and “rumor mill” to characterize information from the VOA allowed the state to not only define the content of information but also control its circulation altogether. This anti-VOA campaign thus successfully placed the power to produce and circulate truth in the hands of the new regime.

Consequently, the ever-changing line that distinguished truth from rumor now also served to differentiate the enemies from the people. Those who spread rumors were enemies, and enemies were those who spread rumors. However, the way the campaign dealt with VOA listeners during the first few years of the PRC was so militaristic that it ruled out the possibility of using radio sets for other purposes. As I demonstrate in the following section, this behavioral control began to change as the state launched a series of modernization projects that rendered radio an indispensable means of communications between government organs and the populace. The use of radio immediately varied as a result, which loosened and thus complicated state control over radio listening behavior.


25 “Dui fandong zaoyao de ‘meiguo zhiyin’ jinhou juejin buzai shouting.”
6.3 Radio and Security: Clashing Interpretations

Radio occupied a unique position in the socialist imagination of modernity. It was a powerful tool for the government and organizations to indoctrinate state-ideology and to mobilize the masses. As early as 1922, Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) praised radio for its high efficiency in educating and cultivating socialist subjects. Following Lenin’s instruction and the Soviet model, the Chinese General News Bureau (新闻总署 Xinwen zongshu) publicized an order in 1950 to build radio listening sites in government branches and the military. In 1951, a second instruction followed up to further expand the radio reception network to factories, mines, and enterprises. The expansion won support from central and regional leaders as well as policy makers who spoke favorably about the use of radio in daily life, economic production and policy execution.

All these factors contributed to a boom in radio use and culture in the early PRC. In November 1952, the number of radio relay stations in the country had increased to 4743, supplemented by


27 “Sulian guangbo- wei gongchan zhuyi shengli er douzheng de qiangda wuqi” [Soviet radio- the great weapon for the success of communism], People’s Daily, November 23, 1954.

28 “Xinwen zongshu fabu guanyu jianli guangbo shouyinwang de jueding” [The General News Bureau announced the decision to establish the radio receiving network], People’s Daily, April 3, 1950.

29 “Xinwen zongshu, Zhonghua quanguo zonggonghui guanyu quanguo gongchang kuangshan qiye zhongli guangbo shouyinwang de jueding” [The General News Bureau and All-China Federation of Trade Unions’ decision to establish the radio receiving network in factories, mines, and enterprises throughout the country], Guowuyuan fazhi bangongshi ed, Zhonghua renmin gongheguo fagui huibian 1949-1954 (Beijing: Zhongguo fazhi chubanshe, 2005), vol.1, 507-508.

30 For example, see Mei Yi, “Geji lingdao jiguan ying youxiaodi liyong wuxiandian guangbo” [Responsible departments at different levels should effectively use radio broadcasting], People’s Daily, June 6, 1950; “Sige yue lai quanguo guangbo shouyinwang de fazhan” [The development of the national radio receiving network in the past four months], People’s Daily, September 15, 1950; Meng Wen, “Gongren youxian guangbotai de zuoyong” [The function of the workers’ wired radio station]; Mei Yi, “Dali fazhan gongren zhong de guangbo gongzuo” [Bolstering the use of radio among workers], People’s Daily, September 13, 1951.
20519 listening sites and 42722 operators.\footnote{31} Although the total number of radio sets across the country remains unknown, the figure from one province is telling. In 1952, there were a total of 13016 crystal radio sets in Hebei province, a number that was at least two times higher than the 1940s.\footnote{32} Furthermore, the journal *Wireless* (*无线电 Wuxiandian*), established in 1953, provided all readers with a forum to exchange ideas as well as radio parts. As a popular magazine, it effectively converted youth and adults into radio fans and disseminated radio knowledge to a much wider user community.

The rapid expansion of radio infrastructure certainly accelerated China’s social and economic transformation, but it also raised an urgent issue for the state to address: how to deal with enemy-radio listeners and their radio sets. In the early 1950s, the government Ministry of Public Security (公安部 Gong’an bu) shouldered the responsibility of investigating and uncovering those who spread unsanctioned news and posed a threat to the state. However, as industrialization and collectivization projects gained momentum, the party’s Department of Propaganda (宣传部 Xuanchuan bu) began to use radio intensively to communicate with the people to make sure that they were ready for forthcoming social and economic changes. This encouragement of popular radio use by propaganda departments broke the security forces’ monopoly of jurisdiction over the proper use of radio sets. It increased the chances that listeners would utilize it in ways deemed transgressive.\footnote{33}
Moreover, as David Bachman has noted, conflicting interests between different political organs added further difficulties to the actual implementation of policies. The case of Xianghe County (香河县), Hebei Province, further complicates this argument by suggesting that disagreements often prevailed within individual political organs as well. They were so severe in certain instances that no consistent policies could exist. In Ximajiaqiao Village (西马家桥), for example, 61 of the 670 households owned radio sets, 8 of which received signals from enemy radio. If listening to loudspeakers constituted a form of public engagement, then listening to enemy radio was a private practice, clandestine and threatening to the government and the party. The county’s propaganda cadre thus decided to modify the villagers’ radio sets and stop them from receiving signals from abroad. To encourage them to hand in the radio sets, the cadre claimed to have excellent repair and maintenance skills. He boasted that their radio sets would no longer require frequent changes after he had fixed them. “[It would] work stably, with sound coming out in a clear and loud manner.” More importantly, this service would be free. Tempted by such an attractive advertisement, many villagers happily submitted their radio sets for maintenance, only to discover that some channels that had been available before were now gone.

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37 Similar practices of radio set modification were previously employed by Japanese colonial administrations and, later, the Nationalist government during the Chinese civil war. Technicians could disable a radio set’s shortwave signal receiving function in factories by disconnecting relevant wires or removing a certain transistor from the device. The PRC government adopted these methods and included them in factory regulations. Although this organizational approach was considerably effective on new and mass-produced radio sets, it had a limited impact on those produced before 1949 as well as those assembled by radio users themselves. See Guizhousheng difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Guizhousheng zhi zhi Gong'an zhi* [Guizhou provincial gazetteer public security section] (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 2003), 532.

38 *Shouyin gongzuo jianbao*.

39 Ibid.
The Hebei Provincial People’s Radio Station (河北人民广播电台 Hebei renmin guangbo diantai, hereinafter HPPRS) issued an immediate criticism upon hearing of such modifications in Xianghe County. The HPPRS pointed out that modifying the radio sets was, first of all, a mass work (群众工作 Qunzhong gongzuo). The masses had to voluntarily give up listening to enemy radio and submit their radio sets for modification. Any practice that involved forced obedience, bypassing patriotic education, or dishonestly modifying the radio sets was disallowed. The HPPRS further instructed that cadres should educate stubborn listeners with a good political background and await their awakening. Those deemed as “bad elements” (坏分子 huai fenzi) — namely, counter-revolutionaries, landlords, rich peasants, or previous Republican officials — should be handed over to the local public security department.40

The criticism from the HPPRS was significant in two ways. First, it employed the narrative developed in earlier campaigns: the class background of the listeners defined the nature of their listening practices. If the listener was one of the masses, then he or she deserved education and salvation. If not, the listener would be dealt with by the police. Second, it connected the modification of the radio sets with the thought reform of the listeners.41 The modification should take place after the elevation of listeners’ awareness. Otherwise, listeners with low political awareness might still search for ways to continue listening to enemy radio. In other words, modifying the radio sets was also a soul-making process.42

More important, however, were the divergent understandings of state security between different political organs. The propaganda cadre manifested a techno-centric attitude in creating an VOA-free environment for people to live in. Leaders at the radio station, by contrast, preferred to work on the human body directly. They emphasized class conscious and patriotism, which could be indoctrinated via education, to inspire individuals to actively resist programs from foreign radio stations.

40 Ibid.


Notably, even within the radio system, conflicting opinions appeared regarding the management of enemy-radio listening practices. While the Xianghe County cadre was busy modifying radio sets, one enemy-radio listener in the nearby Anxin County (安新县) wrote to the Central People’s Radio Station (中央人民广播电台 Zhongyang renmin guangbo diantai, hereinafter CPRS) claiming that the local radio operator had infringed upon his right to listen to enemy radio. Very soon, the CPRS sent a letter to the local operator informing him not to limit individual listening activities.\(^{43}\) The local cadres there faced a dilemma: would they defend the security of the state or respect the rights of the people who desired to develop political awareness themselves?\(^{44}\) The cadres asked the HPPRS for advice but received no response. The reason that the HPPRS chose not to respond was evident: as a subordinate of the CPRS, the HPPRS certainly had no authority to overturn a decision from above. However, it equally did not want to revoke its instructions because that might only further encourage enemy-radio listening. The local cadres had to decide which instructions to follow on their own.

These different understandings of socialist governance converged in 1955. In January, the Department of Propaganda and the Ministry of Public Security issued a joint announcement stipulating that the primary methods of controlling the current and future practice of listening to enemy radio would be persuasion and education.\(^{45}\) Notably, the previously discussed methods of criminalizing and penalizing enemy-radio listeners were not listed. The Department of Propaganda evidently played a more decisive role than the Ministry of Public Security in composing this announcement. The attitude of the state as manifested in this announcement allowed even more listeners, from students to cadres, to listen to enemy radio and spread what they heard in daily life.

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\(^{43}\) Shousyin gongzuojianbao.


The previous framework of “conflicts between the enemy and us” (敌我矛盾 di wo maodun) had now been rearticulated into a framework of “conflicts within the people” (人民内部矛盾 renmin neibu maodun). The former dichotomy emphasized the radical Otherness of an enemy that precluded him/her from political and ideological salvation. Consequently, anyone found in collaboration (variously defined) with an enemy constituted the enemy. The framework of conflicts within the people, by contrast, operated within a camaraderie style of correction through criticism and self-criticism. Enemies still existed, but those who fell under their sway were often seen as having done so mistakenly, depending on the severity of the crime. As a part of “us,” these people were now victims of these enemies, and as such, could and should be fully remoulded back into the community.

The listening space carved out by this joint announcement did not last long. From the late 1950s on, it faced increasing pressure from various forces and was constantly subjected to political manipulation. The conflicts within the people were again interpreted as conflicts between the “enemy” and “us.” Some researchers attribute the resurgence of the enemy paradigm to the influence from Eastern Europe and the Anti-rightist campaign in 1957. In the following section, I will demonstrate that the rise of the “enemy” discourse was closely related to the ongoing struggle between the socialist regime and U.S.-supported Taiwan over information production and circulation in China.

6.4 The Illusion of Deterritorialization

As I have suggested above, enemy-radio listeners were products of the Cold War’s ideological and technological clashes. Their lives and identities were closely intertwined with the hostile

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foreign relations that existed between China and its capitalist rivals. Moreover, the space produced by this international competition was not a geographical one, but rather, a deterritorialized composition, in which enemy-radio listeners synchronized themselves with the outside world by listening to radio programs that penetrated state borders. However, this phenomenon of deterritorialization did not result in autonomy over their actions. Instead, enemy-radio listeners became a means for the Cold War rivals to spy on, plot against and undermine each other.

In the early 1950s, radio stations in Taiwan had very limited reception in the mainland. This situation changed in 1955 when the nationalist government erected a medium-wave launch station with an output power of 600 kilowatts per hour. Its signals could cover all of China as well as Southeast Asia. The CPRS noticed this signal change from across the strait in 1956. But it decided not to publicize the news that the enemy’s signals had been amplified so that listeners would not think to search for them.

Meanwhile, the CPRS accelerated its building and improving of jamming stations in major cities. Jamming refers to the practice whereby one station broadcasts on the frequency already in use by another station to prevent radio sets from receiving the latter’s signals effectively. In 1954, for example, a medium-wave jamming station was built on the outskirts of Tianjin, the second

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49 In 1951, radio signals from Taiwan could reach as far as Kunming, Yunnan. Once the PRC finished building jamming stations in 14 major coastal cities in 1952, these signals failed to extend beyond Changsha, Hunan. See Zhongyang weiyuanhui diliuzu ed., *Dui dalu guangbo gongzuo gaishu* [A general introduction to the radio broadcast to mainland China] (Taipei: Zhongyang weiyuanhui di liu zu, 1954), 24.

50 Zhongyang guangbo diantai, *Dui dalu guangbo liunian de gui hu yu qianzhan* [Reflection and Perspectus for radio broadcasting to the mainland in the past six years] (Taipei: Zhongyang guangbo diantai,) 2.

51 “Gei zhongyang xuan chuan bu de baogao” [A report to the Central Ministry of Propaganda] (January 29, 1957), HPA1032-1-70.

52 Jamming stations have two main components: a command console and a launching station. While the command console was in charge of signal detection, jamming and monitoring, the launching station issued signals. Upon receiving signals from enemy radio stations, the command console would send these signals to the launching station for calibration. With calibrated data, the launching station would then send designed signals with the same frequency to purposely decrease the signal-to-noise ratio and therefore paralyze the enemy radio transmissions. See “Ditai dui wo dalu guangbo huodong he wotai ganrao qingkuang baogao” [Report on enemy-radio’s activities in the mainland and our jamming practices] (June 15, 1963), HPA1032-1-218.
largest city in north China. It was effective within a range of 10 kilometers. In 1956, the city supplemented it with a short-wave jamming station in the city center, which covered a range of 5 kilometers. A second short-wave one had been built by the end of 1962. They were equipped with a total of 18 short-wave and 18 medium-wave launching machines, the highest output power among them being 2 kilowatts per hour.

The output power of these jamming stations was considerably lower than that of China’s rivals, such as the 600-kilowatt medium-wave launching station in Taiwan or the 1000-kilowatt medium-wave and 35-kilowatt short-wave launching stations in Okinawa, Japan. The 18 medium-wave launching machines in Tianjin had an average output power of 530 watts. As a result, they were only able to jam around 6 of the 20 frequencies from the VOA. Even worse were Tianjin’s two short-wave stations, which proved incapable of blocking any signals at all.

The broadcasts of numerous other foreign radio stations were thus able to slip past, such as Radio Japan, the British Broadcasting Company and the Voice of Free China (VOFC). VOFC’s reach in mainland China particularly demonstrated the consequences of this technological gap. Its mainland listeners often referenced it when publicly talking about and criticizing current social and economic problems. In June 1955, one influential newspaper noted that many people listened to the VOFC to enjoy “yellow music,” a term used to refer to erotic or indecent music pieces. During the Rectification Movement (Zhengfeng yundong) in 1957, when the

53 “Ditai dui wo dalu guangbo huodong he wotai ganrao qingkuang baogao.”

54 “Ditai dui wo dalu guangbo huodong he wotai ganrao qingkuang baogao.”


56 Dui dalu guangbo liunian de guihu yu qianzhan.

57 Other examples include Voice of the East, Voice of Hope, Hope of the Far East, Hong Kong Radio of Hope and Radio Vatican, see “Ditai dui wo dalu guangbo huodong he wotai ganrao qingkuang baogao.”

58 Dui dalu guangbo liunian de guihu yu qianzhan, 24. For an insightful study on yellow music, see Andrew Jones, Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
party temporarily welcomed criticism from the public, cadres in Harbin’s provincial radio station praised the VOFC’s superior broadcasting style for its rich and vivid contents. One Shanghai student listener of the VOFC even tried to print out what he heard and distribute it to other youngsters.

The information above was found in one of VOFC’s internal publications. This illustrates that these responses and reactions were collected and interpreted through a behavioral coding process that was then sent to the program producer. In this process, the VOFC staff collected, summarized and sometimes fabricated such information and presented it to the designated intelligence department in a way that ‘evidenced’ the success of its propaganda efforts.

This process of information circulation was further facilitated by thousands of listeners’ letters that travelled throughout the Asia Pacific area in the early 1960s. On August 1, 1960, the VOFC launched a new program called Listeners’ Mailbox (听众信箱 Tingzhong xinxiang), which invited listeners to write letters to the radio station. Broadcasting every Tuesday and Saturday from 1:15 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., this new program claimed to help mainland listeners find their missing relatives and friends. Listeners could ask for help by writing letters to the station. Initially, it set up a mailbox in Taipei. The station received its first letter from Taiyuan two weeks after its first broadcast. Encouraged by this quick response from mainland listeners, the VOFC set up two more mailboxes in February 1961, one in Bangkok and another in Manila.

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59 Dui dalu guangbo liunian de gui hu yu qianzhan, 24.

60 Ibid., 28.


62 Cong dalu tingzhong laixin kan feiqu, 2.

63 Ibid., 4.

64 Ibid., 14, 21.
By the end of 1962, Taiwan established a total of 15 corresponding mailboxes in 6 countries and regions.65

The VOFC received a total of 509 letters in 1962 alone.66 This number was remarkable given the PRC’s strict censorship over letters circulating abroad. In one case, the radio listener wrote 13 letters to the designated address, but only one managed to get through.67 The rest fell into the hands of the police. Therefore, the actual number of letters sent was likely far more numerous.

One remarkable feature of these letters is that many of them addressed their Taiwanese correspondents as “elder sister” or “second sister,” with Chiang Kai-shek being the “father.”68 Part of this had to do with the training on secret codes that VOFC broadcasted to listeners over the radio. Those claiming that they had “conducted business” actually meant sabotage against the Communist Party.69 Those who liked the “flying arrow brand soap” were actually expressing praise for the radio special called “Flying Arrow,” about a communist pilot named Liu Chengsi (刘承司 dates unknown) who listened to the VOFC and flew to Taiwan with his fighter aircraft on March 3, 1962.70

Upon receiving these letters, the VOFC would register, categorize, and assess them according to their value for conducting psychological warfare. While those deemed most valuable would be directed to higher level offices, those that were urgent were answered on the air. If the listener

65 Zhongyang guangbo diantai, ed, Yinian lai dalu tingzhong laixin zhi fazhan [Development of mainland listeners’ letters in the past year] (Taipei: zhongyang guangbo diantai, 1963), 110. One document in the Academia Historica archive, Taiwan, noted that the Nationalist Government also rented a mailbox in Macau in 1961. See Academia Historica 020-091101-0145 Gang’ao zajuan. I want to express my thanks to Jackson Yuebin Guo for locating this source for me.

66 Of these 509 letters, most of them came from coastal areas. In particular, 131 letters were sent from Guangdong province and 50 from Fujian. Inland provinces such as Hubei and Sichuan saw less than 10. Second, while the number of letters decreased as the distance from Taiwan increased, all 27 provinces had listeners who wrote letters to the station. Places as remote as Xinjiang had 3 letters, while Qinghai had 2. See Yinian lai dalu tingzhong laixin zhi fazhan, 7.

67 Yinian lai dalu tingzhong laixin zhi fazhan.

68 Ibid., 21.

69 Yinian lai dalu tingzhong laixin zhi fazhan, 31, 55.

70 Ibid., 108-109.
managed to write back, he would receive a number, and his activities would be filed up as a case (案 an). The station accumulated 708 cases from 1960 to 1962. Regarding content, a reported 60.17% of the letters received in 1961 requested food, clothing, and medical support; 20.1% expressed their intention to flee to Taiwan; 2.82% plotted against the party, and 2.08% searched for missing family members. Unsatisfied with these results, especially the lack of anti-communist activists, the VOFC decided to actively approach listeners by repeating provocative messages in multiple languages and setting up overseas mailboxes to attenuate the risk of exposure.

These strategies proved to be very successful. Of the 509 letters received in 1962, 43 of them reported on their anti-communist actions; 65 letters requested support for the continuation of their anti-communist activities; 61 letters asked for anti-communist assignments; 48 letters begged for military unit numbers; 47 letters offered advice on how to retake the mainland; 38 letters provided intelligence; 65 letters expressed the intention to come to Taiwan and 138 letters listed the atrocities of the communist party. In sum, 94.89% of the letters received in 1962 had strong political agendas while only 5.11% limited their requests to food, clothing and medical support.

The PRC government’s need for foreign currency played a crucial role in allowing this transgressive and transnational communication to continue. The government severely lacked foreign currency throughout the fifties and sixties. The money from overseas Chinese to their family members and relatives in mainland China proved to be a vital source of that. Therefore, those who had overseas connections were given special permission to write letters abroad.

71 Dui dalu guangbo liunian de gui hu yu qianzhan, 1.
72 Yinian lai dalu tingzhong laixin zhi fazhan, 1.
73 Cong dalu tingzhong laixin kan feiqu, 6.
74 Yinian lai dalu tingzhong laixin zhi fazhan, 11.
76 “Zhonggong Zhongyang Zuzhibu fu Zhonggong Harbin Shiwei Tongzhanbu guanyu huaqiao xuesheng rudang de yijian” [Central Ministry of Organization’s response to the Harbin Party Committee United Work Front on overseas
Thanks to this permission, radio listeners in Fujian and Guangdong provinces with a long tradition of working in Southeast Asia could pretend they were writing to their relatives while communicating with the VOFC. As a result, letters from China’s coastal provinces outnumbered those from the rest of the country.

PRC security departments, furthermore, took advantage of these letters by letting some of them pass in hopes of exposing more important counterrevolutionary figures. For instance, the first letter the VOFC received was from Shanxi Province by a person named Songyun (松云). In the letter, Songyun wrote that he had received the party’s education for a few years and accumulated some good feelings for it. He knew that the party had done terrible things to the people. Listening to the VOFC’s programs every night sometimes made him feel happy. The purpose of this letter, as he put it, was that he wanted to be “a useful person.” 77 He ended the letter by assuring the VOFC that there were no fingerprints on the paper.

Shortly after being sent, the letter fell into the hands of the Taiyuan Municipal Bureau of Public Security in Shanxi Province on August 5, 1960. The Bureau identified Songyun as a counterrevolutionary who “intensely” hated socialism and wanted to serve as Chang Kai-shek’s special agent. 78 Based on Songyun’s indication that he would stay in Taiyuan until September 1 and head to Tangshan the following day, the Municipal Bureau suspected Songyun to be someone disguised as a worker or cadre in a factory, mine, enterprise or school who could thus go to Tangshan for justified reasons. Songyun was deemed as likely having a radio set or living in a place that had one so that he could listen to the VOFC at night. Also, leaving no fingerprints on the paper made him a person knowledgeable about the techniques that usually pertained to special agents. Overall, the letter was written, “fluently with cogent sentences and complete meanings,” indicating an adequate level of education received. With these traces and pieces of

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77 Cong dalu tingzhong laixin kan feiqu, 9.

78 “Guanyu chazhao yu Taiwan jinxing lianxi de fangeming fenzi Songyun de tongzhi” [Announcement about searching for the counterrevolutionary Songyun who contacted Taiwan], East China Normal University Contemporary Research Center, En 0351-206-057.
evidence, the Municipal Bureau organized a thorough survey of possible suspects in their supervised communities.

Due to the lack of further sources, it is unclear if the police ever found Songyun. It seems likely they did not. The police decided to let go of Songyun’s letter hoping the author might contact the VOFC a second time so that more clues might appear. On August 2, 1961, Songyun’s letter reached its destination, P.O Box No.1800 in Taipei. One year had elapsed since it had been mailed out. Perhaps sensing this to be a ruse from the PRC, and with its content bearing little useful information, the VOFC did not value Songyun’s letter much as it had many other letters. The uniqueness of this letter, however, lies in the fact that it was the first one that came directly from a mainland VOFC listener. As a result, it was photocopied and printed in internally-circulated publications that applauded the success of the program.

In sum, I argue that the foreign radio programs that reached mainland listeners in the 1950s did not function as a deterritorializing force that undermined state borders. Rather, they rendered enemy-radio listeners vulnerable to exploitation by both domestic and international political powers. Enemy-radio listeners who sought changes to their current living conditions ended up being used by the Nationalist government as intelligence collectors and vanguard for the future retake of the mainland. The state border, as a result, was strengthened as the PRC state utilized a variety of methods to search for these internal “enemies” throughout the country.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that the production of enemies in the 1950s and early 1960s was heavily informed by the state’s ability to take charge of information production and circulation within its borders. When the state was capable of controlling radio signals from

79 Cong dalu tingzhong laixin kan feiqu, 9.

80 Similar patterns also occurred in Eastern Europe, where communist regimes interwove transnational radio listening with the surveillance apparatus so that state power could penetrate into the practices of everyday life. See Dana Mustafa, “Geographies of Power: The Case of Foreign Broadcasting in Dictatorial Romania,” Airy Curtain in the European Ether: Broadcasting and the Cold War, 149-178.
abroad, it would identify enemy-radio listening as conflicts within the people. However, as anti-communist forces upgraded their radio technology, the PRC government found itself increasingly incapable of jamming enemy signals. It thus resurrected previous narratives that labelled those who listened to enemy radio as an irreconcilable Other.

Moreover, two distinctively different approaches to state security in the PRC were at work to manage enemy-radio listening. The first, spearheaded by security forces, depended on punishment and technological control as methods of deterrence. The other, led by propaganda departments, insisted on education and the cultivation of political awareness within individuals to help immunize them from information from abroad. The divergence and convergence of these two approaches were instrumental to the identification of the internal enemy in socialist China.

This was only the beginning of the acoustic transformation of China’s geographical border, which continued to unfold itself throughout the 1960s and was largely completed by the end of the 1970s. By that point, China’s radio receiving network had become so vast that it covered the entire country. This acoustic state was maintained through such means as the reconfiguration of radio sets, the blocking of foreign electromagnetic signals, and investigations over broadcasting mistakes. Together, these strategies fundamentally changed the auditory experience of individuals in socialist China.
Epilogue

On November 5, 2017, China Central Television (CCTV) broadcasted a news report featuring Hebei province’s Shijiazhuang prefecture activating its radio network of 4200 loudspeakers in 3,760 administrative villages. These loudspeakers broadcast at 7 a.m., 12 p.m., and 6 p.m. every day. Villagers could hear them regardless of where they were. According to Guo Jinshu, a resident of Tayuan village, radio allowed him to listen to local as well as national news anytime even when they were occupied by other things. Liu Shuyan, the party secretary of Lijiazhuan village, claimed that his villagers felt energetized and confident about the future after listening to the radio report on the nineteenth national congress of the CCP.¹

Readers might find the news report about quite familiar with the cases discussed in this study about the influence of radio broadcasting on the interactions between the state and its subjects in the early PRC period. The development and use of radio broadcasting, this study has shown, were technopolitical, because they involved not only technological innovations but also changes in political structures within the state bureaucracy. Such technologies allowed the state to uphold the proclaimed socialist ideal as it communicated with the populace regardless of geographical distances and political distinctions. Meanwhile, new challenges emerged as the technological infrastructure unfolded and prompted a recalibration of the informational order within the state. The ways the state dealt with these potential and challenges provided an important window for understanding the conflicts and cooperation between technology and politics in Maoist China.

The intimacy between technology and politics can be dated back to the late nineteenth century when Qing officials and intellectuals tried hard to find ways to defend and strengthen the country with science and technology from the West. The application of telecommunication technology in particular, not only allowed the Qing government to bolster intra-governmental communication but also provided it with an effective tool to defend its national integration and state security.

¹ “‘Shijiuda shengyin jin wanjia’ Shijiazhuang ‘xinongcun dalaba’ xuanchuan shijiuda xin sixiang xin zhengce” (‘Voice of the 19th national congregation entering ten thousands families’ Shijizhuang ‘[socialist] new village loudspeakers’ communicating new thoughts and new policies) http://m.news.cctv.com/2017/11/05/ARTI6IxGr5b0mSNSGwvYcG171105.shtml, accessed on May 23, 2019.
This technopolitical approach continued into the Republican era with the eager adoption of foreign scientific and technological methods as well as the establishment of research institutions. Science and technology became key components of the Republican culture and formed part of the nationalist discourse. The imperative to use science and technology intensified as the Second World War swept across the country. As scientists and technical experts were deployed to explore new ways to mobilize resources and population for the nation, intellectual autonomy was gradually eroded.

The newly established PRC furthered this technopolitical tendency via a series of social campaigns and institutional restructuring in the 1950s. Together, it resulted in a discourse of *you hong you zhuan* (red and expert) that emphasized a perfect marriage of politics and technology, as a state-led solution to satisfy domestic, social and economic needs. This presented an alternative to the elite and private enterprise-oriented mode of scientific and technological development commonly attributed to the West. From this perspective, the value of the Chinese experience, as Suttmeier recognized several decades ago, lay in its development of “a unique and somewhat attractive method of creating a national [my italics] tradition of interest in science and an appreciation of the value of science and technical innovation for production.”

Such an alternative to the Western mode of scientific innovation, however, should not lead to rosy depictions of a utopic Maoist mode of development during the early-mid PRC. My

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research further demonstrates that the proclaimed socialist utopia of letting technology serve the people was characterized at least partly by its violence against those that were deemed as enemies. The enemies were generally depicted in the socialist discourse as those who sought to use radio for selfish purposes instead of serving the majority. Their conduct was accordingly understood as intending to interrupt, subvert, and destroy the state. As such, those who were able to circumvent the informational order sanctioned by the state and listen to radio programs from abroad received punishments ranging from oral and written criticisms to imprisonment.

While economic scarcity no longer remains an urgent concern today as in the early reconstruction years of the PRC, the desire to use technology to serve political interests has become only stronger. A media platform and application called *Xuexi qianguo* was put into use on January 1, 2019. The Communist Party Department of Propaganda directed all cadres and party members to install this application on their phones and spend a certain amount of time every day on the application to earn points, as evidence of improvement in their political awareness. Facial recognition technology was used in a growing number of Chinese cities to identify pedestrians who failed to abide by traffic rules in 2018 or otherwise have been wanted by law enforcement agencies. The social credit system that is expected to take effect across China in the near future is another ambitious example of deploying modern media technology to strengthen state power and authority by placing the populace further under the gaze and control of the government. In the 1950s, the nation-wide radio broadcasting system, as illustrated in this study of Hebei province, was likewise designed to bring the masses, including millions of villagers in otherwise inaccessible places, under the acoustic influence and political messaging of the socialist authorities.

Although such policies towards radio listening are no longer visible today, the discourse of the enemy in relation to evading the state-authorized informational order remains. In the past few years, those who designed or sold VPNs risked to be arrested according to newly effective government regulations.⁷ News reports about students as well as government and institution

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employees being warned and penalized for accessing foreign media platforms that were banned by the government have earned high publicity constantly appeared online.\textsuperscript{8} Although these technologies targeted different population groups, they all pointed to the state’s effort to reach out to the human subjects and impact them. Similar to the radio reception network in the 1950s that rapidly expanded within the country to disseminate the voice of the state to its listeners, the information network today allows the state to locate each person where there is a signal. Diverse as the channels of information circulation are, they nevertheless fall under the close supervision of state censors. What made the technologies of communication in the 1950s stand out is that they sought to directly simulate emotional responses for higher production output.

The interplay of politics and technology concerning the informational order is getting increasingly intense on the international stage as well. The Huawei case is an example. The controversy with Huawei is essentially over who will be the dominant provider of 5G technology, anticipated as an essential aspect of any informational order in the near future. On 15 May 2019, U.S. President Donald Trump issued an executive order authorizing the government to restrict transactions between U.S.-based companies with “foreign adversaries” that involve information and communications technology. These adversaries, according to Trump, posed “unacceptable risks” to the national security of the United States.\textsuperscript{9} The U.S. government’s political intervention into economic and technological affairs when perceiving China’s potential towards providing an alternative informational order to the world strongly resonates with the PRC government’s politicization of those who listened to foreign radio stations during the Cold War.

I have no intention to suggest the return of the Cold War. Rather, my study of the Maoist government’s management of radio illustrates that ever-increasing information circulation across


borders between multiple states do not necessarily dilute the intimate connection between technology (as a result of multilateral collaboration) and politics (of individual states). Indeed, it may well become strengthened as the state starts to increasingly perceive each person not only as a bio-body that dwells within the national border, but also as an information processing terminal connected with other terminals in a world-wide web. The revision of the U.S. immigration document DS-160 on May 31, 2019, which now asks applicants who want to enter the country to provide their usernames on all media platforms, is another striking example of that.10

The sounds of the 4,200 loudspeakers in 3,760 administrative villages in Shijiazhuang in no way indicate a return to a Maoist sonic regime, although they may succeed in triggering memories of this socialist legacy. Radio in the 1950s represented not only a type of high technology but also a novel experience.11 As I have argued earlier in this study, such novelty was appropriated by the state for the populace to listen to the government’s messages as well as to encourage economic production. This novelty is no longer affiliated with radio today when one has cell phones and computers as well as a variety of internet applications to access the world beyond their immediate living environment. It has become an ‘uncanny’ experience to listen to radio nowadays.

Radio still claims to represent the interest of the people but no longer functions as an enabling media for listeners to defend their interests by appealing to higher authorities as it did in the early 1950s. Rather, the state discourages such attempts because they have the potential to challenge the existing social order and stability. Individuals who have tried to shangfang (that is, petition to higher authorities) are disallowed to purchase a train ticket after being blacklisted in the government information system.12 Moreover, the state can easily censor traces of such attempts should they appear online on social media. Two weeks ago, a Chinese media reported that one


certain person has succeeded in developing a software to help the *Xuexi qiangguo* users earn points automatically without actually spending time on it. No traces of it could be found online as I am trying to verify the source and finish this sentence, as if it has never existed.
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Appendices
### 1949年保定人民广播电台广播节目表

#### 9月份

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<tr>
<td>12:15</td>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>各地行情</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>12:45</td>
<td>对时，转播中央人民广播电台第二次普通话新闻</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:45</td>
<td>13:00</td>
<td>城市政策或通讯</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:00</td>
<td>13:30</td>
<td>工商广告</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:30</td>
<td>——</td>
<td>终了曲，休息</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:20</td>
<td>17:30</td>
<td>开始曲，报告晚间节目，对时</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:30</td>
<td>17:50</td>
<td>轮回节目：周日、三职工，一、四青年，二、五妇女，六周末文娱</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:50</td>
<td>18:10</td>
<td>娱乐节目</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:10</td>
<td>18:30</td>
<td>指示、专论或经验介绍</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:30</td>
<td>18:40</td>
<td>西乐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:40</td>
<td>19:00</td>
<td>干部学习</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:00</td>
<td>19:15</td>
<td>京剧</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:15</td>
<td>19:30</td>
<td>综合报道或通讯</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:30</td>
<td>19:40</td>
<td>国乐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:40</td>
<td>19:50</td>
<td>政府文告或听众服务</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:50</td>
<td>——</td>
<td>苏联歌曲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:00</td>
<td>21:00</td>
<td>中央人民广播电台联播节目</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:00</td>
<td>21:15</td>
<td>京戏</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:15</td>
<td>21:35</td>
<td>第一次本省新闻（农村）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:35</td>
<td>21:40</td>
<td>预告明天节目，终了曲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:40</td>
<td>22:40</td>
<td>记录新闻</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22:40</td>
<td>——</td>
<td>报时，休息</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendice 2 Mai Yuliang 1952

快板剧—卖余粮

作者 王钧

河北人民广播电台 活页广播稿选 第四号

人物：杨洛全 简称全 六十来岁，思想进步

洛全妻，简称妻 五十多岁，思想较落后

杨翠莲 简称莲 十八岁 青年团员，思想进步

上场


白：翠莲他娘，翠莲他娘/有个事咱们商量商量

妻唱：这几天不实闲/过冬的棉衣还没做全/纺了棉花又浆线/卸了磨子我又套碾/活儿忙，我脑子乱/再过两月又是年/听见前屋一声唤/想必是翠莲他爹回家园/

白：哎，来啦，有什么事你就说吧
全唱：翠莲他娘，听仔细，有个事儿我告诉你/刚才我到社里去开会/社长大中把话提/他说“国家正搞大建设/农民要走向社会主义/号召全社买余粮/帮助国家把那工叶建设起/国家工叶要是建设好/咱们耕地才能使上拖拉机/咱家的日子怎么来/还不是多亏了毛主席/咱们的余粮定要买/我问你同意不同意/

妻白：什么？卖粮食？！你就忘了前几年咱们这闹灾荒，咱家吃了这顿没那顿的穷日子啦，咱不是商量好，放着这两大囤子谷子过歉年吗？你这是又想起什么来啦？

唱：没主意的老东西/你忘了咱怎么商量的/灾荒年头多可怕/哪来的钱把粮食X，一天就涨三个价，XX了连糠也吃不起，要卖谷子我不答应。

全唱：翠莲娘，别着急/有个事咱提一提/咱们现在的好日子/你想想这是谁给的/

妻白：（生气）这好说，毛主席

全白：对呀，毛主席。共产党领导咱们翻了身，去年有参加了农叶生产合作社，因此，咱家的日子才好过起来，打的粮食才富裕，现在政府号召咱们把余粮卖给国家，支持国家工叶建设，这你就有意见啦？你这不是忘了本了吗？

妻白：忘本？！你说我忘本，我就忘本，反正粮食是我的命根子，我不卖！

翠莲上唱：我叫翠莲本姓杨，在本村里把冬学上/速成识字我学的好/纺线织布我样样强/生产学习我数第一/青年团里把宣传委员当/今天团里来开会/号召家家卖余粮/我家还有谷子两大囤/原打算撂着度荒年/咱们国家要工叶化/建设就需要大批量/把用不着的粮食卖给国家/这事说来最正当/给我爹一说准同意/不同意卖粮的准是我亲娘/说话到了家门口/听见爹娘直XX，/不知为了那桩事/进门细问我爹娘。

妻白：你反正怎么说俺也不卖。

全白：这不是翠莲回来啦，叫他评评这个理。

翠莲白：你们为什么吵啊？

全白：先叫你娘说吧！
妻白：翠莲，刚才你爹回来，二话不说，就要把咱家那预备着度荒年的那两大囤粮食卖出去，你想，翠莲，那几年闹灾荒的时候，连糠都吃不上，全家差点没饿死。这几年的日子才好了，攒下了点粮食，放着过歉年。谁知你爹这个老东西，非要把它卖出去不行！你看着多叫人生气啊！

唱：叫翠莲，你听真／你爹说话气死人，灾荒年的难处你也知道，吃糠咽菜哪里寻，攒下点粮食过歉年，没有粮食要饿死人，粮食要是卖出去，干活赶着也不松心，翠莲你评评这个理，谁是谁非你仔细

翠白：原来为这个事，俺也正想着说说呢。

唱：叫声娘，你听真，卖粮不能有二心，看看这回富裕的好生活，想想过去受苦受罪难死人，要是挨不了共产党，咱家还不得受苦贫，现在过着好日子，不能忘了就名人，咱把吃不下的粮食卖，为国为己又为民，国家有了粮食物价稳，物价稳定少担心，卖粮的钱财入了社，大伙集股买羊群，多买猪来多攒粪，明年的粮食准多分，俺哥哥杨新龙，他在朝鲜当志愿军，俺哥哥要是吃不饱，他还怎么着抗美援朝打敌人，还有个道理要记真，有余粮别忘了缺粮的人。工人干部都不耕地，旱涝地区有灾民，咱不卖粮他们吃什么？咱们饱他们饿怎能安心？

全白：对呀！咱们说什么也不能那么办哪！ 反过来说有道理，也是一样。比方，咱家要是碰见个在荒年，别人有粮不卖，咱们怎么办呢？大家都不把余粮买个国家，到那时，奸商再给抬高粮价，生产糊不上，怎么办呢？就得依靠政府救济，政府的粮食从哪里来呢？你想？叫翠莲说说。

翠白：对呀，我爹说的都是实在话。

唱：自从翻身分了地，世道比前可不一样，咱们有了好政府，领导咱成立了供销社，各种用品送上门上，豆饼，步犁和农药，布匹盐贱又强，这些东西哪里来？还不是工人大哥帮的忙？国家工业建设起，到那时，咱生产方便生活好，幸福的日子强又强。可是工人得吃饭，需要咱们供应食粮，有粮不向国家卖，城市工人闹饥荒，要是工厂停了工，哼，咱们的幸福生活是没指望。工人农民互相支援，咱们要赶快卖余粮。
全白：这一回可明白了吧！把余粮卖给国家，这对【国】家对咱们自己，都是有好处的，
把这死物放在囤里，不是怕潮，就是怕老鼠咬，整天在家还得结记着它，再说，你就是放
上几十年，它也不会下下的。要把它买了，多方便哪，愿意买东西，就买点，不愿意买，
就把钱存到银行里，国家还给生利息，这是多好的事啊！

妻白：可不是，我光往牛犄角哩钻啦。（稍停，下慢）要论咱这日子，要不着毛主席，共
产党，还不是过那租人的地，受人的气，吃糠【咽】嚥菜的穷日子。现在国家用着咱这点
粮食啦，本来早就应该卖给国家。别说国家还给钱，就是不给钱，我也没意见。唉，俺这
脑子是一时转不过弯来，光是怕再过那在荒年，要是家家像我这样，那工人吃什么？灾区
吃什么？咱们的军队可吃什么？咱们以后还得依靠政府帮助啊！X，你们说的对，咱们就
把咱那两千斤余粮全卖给国家。

全白：这就对了么！

翠（和全同时说）： 哈，娘想开啦！

三人同唱：毛主席，指到那，咱就跟着走准没差，农民跟着共产党走，多余的粮食卖给国
家，工人农民团结紧，早日实现工叶化
Appendix 3 Yan Huizhen’s Model Material 1957

河北省人民委员会广播管理处表扬广播收音优秀工作者的通报

通报时间：1957年7月24日

通报范围：专署，县、市、自治区人民委员会文化科（局）、广播站

阎惠珍：房山县火距（炬）社收音员。（县里有广播站，社里有收音员）工作一贯积极负责，在社员中保持了经常的收音活动。1956年由于她刻苦工作，发挥了收音宣传作用，在各项工作中收音宣传成绩突出，被评为房山县先进收音员。今年整社以后为便于生产，由大化小，收音机没有确定到南良各庄社，她就积极地在良各庄村利用矿石机收听广播，加强了对矿石机户的管理组织工作，并建立了一个业余收听小组，通过矿石机记录材料，刊登黑板报，进行屋顶广播，因为她认真地从事了收音工作，对矿石机持有者进行说服解释，使之扭转了单纯娱乐观点（这也恰恰是为什么一开始老百姓对广播那么感兴趣的原因：娱乐），收听了政治广播，对中心工作有了很大推动作用，在节约粮食和争取农业大丰收方面有显著成绩，为此房山县人民委员会又予通报表扬。

阎惠珍同志是一个一九五五年夏季长沟小学六年级毕业的学生。上学的时候，由于老师加强了劳动教育，使她在思想上真正认识到参加农业生产的重要意义和光荣。因而，就在内心里奠定了从事农业社会主义建设的决心，于是毕业后很愉快地投入了农业生产。

五六六年春季，该社建立了收音站，社领导决定，叫他（她）担任收音工作。当时，他（她）在农业社里担任生产队妇女队长的责任。
她知道自己是一个青年团员，应当把自己的一切力量献给伟大的社会主义建设事业。于是，她就勇敢的毫不犹豫的担当起这个任务。

在五六年三月份房山县召开的收音训练班上，她的积极努力，刻苦钻研的学习精神是很突出的。

广播宣传工作刚开战时，她首先在南 北良各庄建立了两个固定收听站。每星期利用中午加晚上时间，分别到各收听站组织两次收听。同时，在坚持固定收听站的前提下，有时还结合各种会议和民校等，组织干部和群众收听。

工作开始时，群众没有收听习惯。爱听戏，不要听报告。当她放戏的时候，社员们都很安静的听。放报告的时候，有的社员则不安心听，要求放文艺节目。这样，参加收听的人数越来越少。这就给她在思想上造成了很大的苦恼。后来，经过她仔细的考虑终于解决了。她首先随时随地的通过各种方式问题进行了收听广播的意义和好处的宣传解释，使社员们克服了单纯文艺观点。同时，在每次组织收听前，都向社员们首先介绍广播节目的中心内容，并选择适当的节目定在黑板报上。这样，使社员们能够选择自己所点听的节目参加收听，有力的吸引了听众。同时，通过收听广播社员们逐渐体会到收听广播的好处，因而积极参加收听的社员一天比一天多了。

农忙季节，每天都结合生产把收音机带到田间，利用生产空隙时间组织社员收听。这样，使广播宣传工作在启发和鼓舞社员的生产和组织上就起到了很大作用。比如社员徐文如，在收听了省台关于“祖国社会主义建设的新成就”的广播后，对我们祖国进行社会主义建设的伟大前路有了更进一步明确的认识。因此，她说“要想早日实现社会主义社会，就先说我们大家马上使劲搞好生产，支持各项工业建设”。

阎惠珍同志的广播收音工作坚持了经常，是社员们逐渐养成了收听习惯，收听广播已经成为社员们日常生活中不可缺少的一项内容了。同时，不少社员都把地头组织收听成为“田间俱乐部”。

夏季到来以后，这就给她在工作中造成很大困难，因为，良各庄是一个很低洼的地区，每年的雨季，道路都很不好走。特别是五六年，雨水过大。村里村外，简直是一片泥浆。北
良各庄收听站虽然距离南良各庄村仅2里地，但这具体到阎惠珍通知来说，并不是没有困难的。一天晚上，她从北良各庄村收听站组织收听回来，天阴的很黑，真是伸手不见掌。他（她）本来不愿意回家了，但是当她想到，明天早晨还要领导社员生产的时候，于是就决定一定得回去。但是怎样回去呢？把收音机和电池放下吧，又怕别人给弄坏。带着吧，又怕半路上栽跟头把机子电池摔了。她为了半天难。最后，她把电池安放在收听站，自己背着收音机，鼓着勇气，加着十二分小心，一步一步的回来了。终不出所料，结果在半路上栽倒了两次，摔得全省都是你，幸喜收音机用油布抱着，背在自己的悲伤没有碰着。

阎惠珍同志不仅把收音工作搞的很好，同时在领导生产上积极参加劳动上都是很突出的，她的生产队在南良各村来说是一个比较优秀的生产队。阎惠珍通知在参加劳动上，已经获得了广大社员的好评。

阎惠珍同志，她之所以能这样积极努力克服困难，把收音工作搞好。这主要是由于她对农村广播收音工作的热爱。她认识到，收音机是党在农村进行政治思想教育的有效工具。因而，在实际工作中，突出的表现了对收音机的爱。她不仅在使用上细心，同时在管理上也表现了责任感。每次收听都加着十二分小心，轻拿轻放，并且是收音机经常吵吃着清洁，干净，因此从建站以来，收音机始终不发生过故障。

今年三月的整社运动开始以后，火炬农业社被分成八个小社（每社一个村）。根据工作需要，收音机不能确定给南良各庄农业社。当时，她在内心里确实有些不高兴。很显然，这是由于她对收音工作的热爱。但是，当她考虑到工作需要的时候，她并悲观失望和灰心。结果，她考虑，如果把每个社员自己安装矿石机利用起来，也同样起到广播收音工作的效果，于是，她就深入到各个安装矿石机的胡，虽然解释收听广播的好处，使平时爱听文艺节目的社员扭转单纯娱乐观。同时，她还组织了一个六个人的收音小组，每天利用业余，通过矿石机抄收电台的记录新闻和重要广播节目。然后，选择适当的内容，刊登黑板报，或进行屋顶广播。因而就同样起到了广播宣传作用，有利的推动了中心工作的开展。

突出的是在宣传贯彻节约粮食和争取五七年农业大丰收方面，起的作用尤其显著。如，在三月粮食的广播内容进行扩大宣传以后，手两两个村很快出现了节约粮食的热潮。
阎惠珍同志这种积极努力，利用矿石机进行广播宣传的模范行动，不仅获得了社领导和广大社员的好评，同时还获得了房山县人民委员会的通报表扬。

（版本三）

优秀工作者阎惠珍同志事迹（稿纸上印河北省人民委员会广播管理处公用笺）

阎惠珍，青年团员，她是房山县长沟镇星火农业社的收音员。她在收音工作中，充分发挥了积极性，克服了各种困难，在收音工作中取得了一定的成绩。主要有：

一、依靠领导，取得领导重视支持，逐渐克服了收音工作中的混乱现象（如听众只愿听文艺节目，不（原稿此处有“愿”字，后被划掉）听文字节目，等）。

二，事业心强，不怕困难。她在阴雨连绵之际，也背着收音机去各队组织收听，因道路滑曾多次被摔倒，有时几乎成了泥人。但未被这些困难阻碍住她的正常收音工作。

三，由于她对收音机使用得细心，认真负责，她这架收音机从未出故障，始终保持了收音工作的正常开展。

四，由于阎惠珍同志对收音工作的积极努力，使收音工作在推动农业生产，推广农业技术和配合各个时期的中心工作与宣传上都起了应有的作用。除此，还有对社员加强思想教育上，通过收听广播，是社员的政治觉悟不断提高，进一步认识到祖国建设远大前途。

（版本四，五六年十月十日，划线部分为原文所有，线为红色）

青年团员阎惠珍是房山县长沟镇星火农业社的收音员。她在收音工作中，发挥了高度的社会主义积极性，克服了各种困难，使收音工作很好地开展起来，并取得了很大的成绩。因此，被评为房山县的模范收音员。
阎惠珍同志是从今年三月份开始做收音工作的。开始是，由于她对收音业务和技术都很生疏，缺乏开展工作的方法和经验，因而，工作开展得不够好，特别是在收音效果上很差。因此，她首先加强了自己的业务和技术学习，并认真分析了工作开展不好的原因。通过她深入的考虑，找到了工作开展不好的主要原因是：一、没有依靠领导，在工作中遇到困难和问题时，不能及时得到解决。二、社员对收听广播缺乏正确的认识，绝大部分社员存有单纯娱乐观点。爱听戏，不爱听报告。三、缺乏组织听众工作：在组织收听当中，秩序很乱，特别是对小孩缺乏具体的安排。为了扭转这种不良现象，使收音工作很好地开展起来，她就积极的主动的找到社领导，向社领导反映这种情况，并提出了自己的意见。这样，就取得了领导上的重视和支持。通过各种会议由领导上向广大社员讲解收听广播的意义和好处，扭转了社员们的单纯娱乐观点。同时，她自己在每次组织收听中也向社员进行解释，并对小孩加以适当的安排。经过这样做以后，基本上克服了以前的混乱现象，使收音工作正常的健康的开展起来。她为了把收音工作做得更好，在每次组织收听前都把节目内容作一简单介绍，重要节目还提前写在黑板报上，使社员能对节目内容实现有个初步了解。为使社员听得更好，她在社组织收听时还经常用两只喇叭把大人小孩分开，这样就使收音效果有了很大提高。

雨季到来以后，就有给她的收音工作带来了很大困难。南良各庄村（星火社的一个行政村，也是阎惠珍的家乡）是个很低洼的地区，所以每当雨季到来以后，街道非常难走。今年的雨水比往年都大，这个村的村里和四周简直完全是泥水。行走一不小心就会跌到稻地或泥塘里。显然，阎惠珍在组织收听当中是有很多困难的。但是，她并没向这个困难低头，她为了组织社员收听，不知跌了多少个跟头。有一次，在晚上组织收听回来，浑身栽的和泥人一样。但是她从来没考虑过这些。她的收音工作始终在不间断地开展着。

阎惠珍同志不仅在工作上是这样积极努力，同时在保管收音机方面也有很大成绩。她常这样想，收音机是社里的公共财产，如果收音机发生了故障，就会使社里的资产受到损失。同时，也会影响工作。因此，她在工作中对收音机的保管和使用非常细心。的别胡思随着社员下地组织收听时总是加上十二分小心。由于她这种积极（原文后还有努力，但被划掉）负责的精神，使收音机是中未发生过故障。不仅没使社的资产受到损失。同时，也保证了收音工作的正常开展。因此，社干部常夸惠珍可是个好孩子。
由于阎惠珍同志的积极努力，使搜因工作在推动农业生产，推广农业技术和配合各个时期的中心工作开展宣传上都起了很大作用，特别是在加强社员的政治思想教育上，使社员们通过收听广播提高了政治觉悟，进一步认识到我们祖国的社会主义发展的光明伟大的前途。如社员徐文如在收听了省台节目“祖国社会主义建设的新成就”的广播后说，我们一定要努力生产，争取打更多的来那个是，以支持国家的社会主义建设。

阎惠珍同志这种积极努力克服困难的工作精神是值得我们学习的。她的成绩也是很大的。但是她并不满足。她说，我不过只做出了一点点成绩，离我们的要求还差得很远。今后，我会更加努力，以使我们社的搜音工作更好地开展起来，取得更大的成绩。

（版本五，阎惠珍手稿 1956年9月13日）

各位领导，各位同志们，

我被批准参加这次评比会议，使我感到非常高兴。因为这次会议使我学习很多工作方法和经验，进一步提高工作能力和业务水平，将是我们社的搜音工作能更好地开展起来。因此，我愿意我我社的搜音工作情况简单的介绍一下。促到我们这次会议的中心目的——互相学习互相交流经验。

我是从今年三月份才开始作搜音工作的。还记得在我作搜音工作的前几天生产队长（此处有樊华同志四字，被划掉）找到（此处有并跟我四字，被划掉）说，社领导给你一项任务……当搜音员。（由于被替换为可是）我连搜音机都没（此处有“有看”二字，被划掉）见过，（更不用说四字也被划掉）怎样进行工作的。但是，我想（加入到自己，删去第二个我）我是（删去一）个青年团员，这怎么能不答应呢（被改为这怎能说出不干呢）？（此处加入人民的利益和个人利益在思想上进行着斗争）。过了几天，社里就通知我去开搜音（后加小组二字）会议。会上首先由（首先由三字改为是）社副主任刘福田同志（刘福田同志五字被划掉）讲解了搜音工作的重要意义，然后搜音小组长冯凤兰同志（冯凤兰同志五字被划掉）向我们传授了保管和使用搜音机的方法和技术。通过（被改为经过）这次会议使我（插入首先二字）认识到（改成了）广播搜音工作是当和政府加强农
民政治思想教育的重要工具之一，是祖国社会主义建设中不可缺少的一部分。因而，也使我感到这个任务的光荣。同我也感到，作好收音工作，必须具有一定的业务和技术水平。于是，我首先就加强了业务学习并积极的向收音小组长请教。这样，我很快的就熟悉了收音工作的初步任务和投稿组织了。正式开始组织收听时从四月一日开始，在头一次组织收听时和其它地方一样，社员来的很多，没有秩序，特别是小孩乱打乱闹，因此收音效果很差。我便向社员们解释，大家要安静些，注意听广播等。但是，没有解决问题。屋里依然是那样响乱。我为这个问题苦恼了好几天，最后我想，必须要通过领导，结合会议，想大家宣传一下收听广播的意义，扭转部分社员的单纯文艺观念，然后在组织收听前，首先向大家解释一下收听广播的好处，把小孩加以适当的安排，这样就可能好一些。于是，我就找到队长，向他提出了我的意见，取得领导上的支持，经过这样做了几次以后，基本克服了混乱现象。社员们对收听广播也有了正确的认识。在听播音时，除了个别的小孩以外，都很安静的听。后来，我们为了使收听效果更好些，在每次组织收听时使用两个喇叭，把大人和小孩分开，这样就比以前又好些。

工作总是不一帆风顺，这个问题虽然解决了，但是新的困难又来了，麦收了，XXXX特别忙，社员们整天在地里生产，晚上都不能休息，这样（很难开展收音工作？）XXX领导上曾经说，我们的收音工作应该考虑到下地啊，带着机子到地里组织收听。经过试验以后，社员们都很满意。于是，我们开始了广播深入田间，在每天的中午和晚上都把机子搬到田里和场里进行组织收听。

工作中的困难总是不能没有的。雨季到来以后，又给我们的收音工作带来很多困难。我们村是个低洼地区，一下雨道路就很难走。特别是今年雨季比往年都打。因此，村的四周简直完全是泥水，行走非常不便。我们每次组织收听（都去？）北良各庄取机子。同时，取送机子又不能影响生产，必须是在晚上或早晨上地以前这两个时间。所以，在取机子是很困难。但是，我想收应该做能因道路不好而停顿吗？当时我想起了校里老师给我们讲的志愿军叔叔在朝鲜战场上的故事。他们在那种困难的情况下，还是那么勇敢、坚强。想到这里，给了我很大鼓舞。我们这点困难算得了什么呢？于是，我就下定了决心：一定把收音工作坚持好。
以后，我又组织了一个收听小组，把我们一块毕业的几个同学组织起来，协助我进行工作。在农活特别忙的时候，我们小组就组织收听。听了以后，再利用黑板报、屋顶广播和口头等向社员进行宣传。

由于我们的收音工作坚持了经常，使我们的广播宣传起了很大作用，特别是在推广农业技术和加强社员的政治思想教育上，是社员们学习了很多先进的生产技术，提高了政治觉悟。进一步认识到我们的祖国社会主义建设的美满幸福的前途。如在稻田插秧时，从省台的农民广播节目里收听了导电的插秧和管理秧苗的技术，社员们进行了讨论一致认为这个方法很好，在今年我们社的秧田管理上就采用了这个方法，效果很好。

又如，社员徐文如收听了省台“祖国社会主义建设的新气象”的广播后说“我们必须要加紧生产，争取打更多的粮食，支持我们祖国的工业建设”

我们的工作虽有一定成绩，但是，还存有很多缺点。离我们的要求还差的很远。我一定要更进一步的努力，把我们的收音工作更好的开展起来，使收音机发挥更大的作用。此外，我希望大家给提出意见，帮助我改进工作。

最后，祝各位领导和各位同志身体健康。
简芳同志：您好。于7月29日听见关于大陆和台湾通信的地址，很高兴，但不知是否真能收见呢？我是受过中共的几年教育，在某些地方对中共有些好感，但在今天的中共对大陆政策确采用了残苦（酷）手段，进行对人民种种XX难尽。我每天晚上21点以后都收听台湾对大陆的国语广播，有时感到很愉快。

去信目的：想作一个有用的人，但现在无法写清我的地址，怎么办？我一时还难想。

9月1日，我在山西省。9月2日，我去唐山。

1，此信见否，我在《特约通讯》内听。

2，此信没有任何指纹和痕迹，可以保我安全。

落款：松云于太原