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**Trapped in Time: Bodily Experiences of Family Dependent Workers (jiashu) in Daqing,  
a Model Industrial City in High-socialist China**

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**Abstract**

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The thesis focuses on the bodily experiences of family dependent workers (*jiashu*) in Daqing, an industrial city in high-socialist China. *Jiashu* referred to housewives that were mobilized by the state as temporary “workers” but didn’t enjoy the due social status or welfare. The thesis uses two kinds of materials: life stories of Daqing *jiashu* who worked in the 1960s-70s, and a drama on Daqing *jiashu*, *The Rising Sun*. The Maoist Marxist theorization of women’s liberation prophesied that women would be liberated by fully participating in productive labor. Bound by their housewife identity, *jiashu* was never included in the state’s imagination of a utopian communist future. The state included *jiashu*’s productive bodies for socialist industrialization, and excluded *jiashu*’s reproductive bodies as their own “burden” that should be overcome by themselves. The high-speed economic growth of socialism largely depended on the gendered division of labor and these docile socialist female bodies.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Do you know about sparrows? Sparrows shit into piles. We gave birth just like sparrows; we would work in the farmland during the day and go back in the middle to give birth, as if it was just shitting. We only had 30 days of maternal leave, while officially-hired women had 59 days. Now my arms and legs all hurt so much; it is due to the lack of rest during my childbirth confinement. That time period was so bitter, so exhausting. The officially-hired one in the family only came home once or twice a month. In order to take care of the babies, I just put some bricks on the edge of the heatable bed (*kang* 炕), so that the baby didn't fall over the bed. No matter what, we just needed to do our work in the farmland. Even if we were sick, the leader would keep an eye on us and stop us from going to the hospital. Only if our kids were sick, then the leaders would finally allow us to go to the hospital. (Grandma Liu, interview by author, 2017)

On July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017, one week after I arrived at the Daqing Oilfield, I encountered Grandma Liu in an elderly community. Grandma Liu was a retired *jiashu*<sup>1</sup> (家属 family dependent) in her later 80s. Grandma Liu vividly expressed to me how she needed to tend both her family and her farm work, how her demand for medical services was not met both due to the bad medical conditions and the strict working schedules, as well as how the extremely physically-demanding

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<sup>1</sup> In the work of Shuxuan Zhou (2018) about family dependents in the forestry during the Mao era, in referencing this people group, besides “*jiashu*”, the author has also used “*jiashu gong*” (家属工 family dependent worker). Zhou made this decision because both terms were used by her interviewees to refer to themselves. In my archival materials and interviews, however, the term “*jiashu gong*” never came up. This could be attributed to the strict distinction between *jiashu* and officially-hired workers in Daqing. In order to set the national model for *jiashu*, in Daqing, there were a clear division of labor and an obvious social hierarchy between *jiashu* and officially-budgeted workers. In other words, the identity of Daqing *jiashu* was not connected to the identity of “worker” that formed the leadership of PRC in its political discourse.

work and lack of care led to her sickness almost half a century later, such as the constant pain in her legs, waist and fingers. In her narrative, “the officially-hired one” refers to her husband, and the reason that she had to prevent the children from falling off the bed was that she had to leave the house and participate in the farming labor, and thus would not be able to take care of them. In her own eyes, her birth-giving was just like sparrow’s defecation: it was considered so natural and easy that it should be scheduled into a regular workday and didn’t deserve special care afterwards.

*Jiashu* was a category that emerged in Maoist China (1949-1978). They were housewives in industrial and urban areas who were mobilized into productive labor by the state as “workers”, but didn’t have officially-budgeted positions as officially-designated workers<sup>2</sup> did, and their employment had always been temporary. These women migrated to industrial and urban areas to reunite with their husbands from various rural and urban origins. In the Daqing Oilfield that was an innovative rural-urban-integrated industrial district, *jiashu*’s main assignments were to do the “dirty” jobs in agricultural production, the construction work for the Oilfield, and the supplementary working at the oil wells. Compared with officially-hired women workers, the status of being a family dependent worker meant lower salaries, worse social welfare such as a much shorter maternity leave, and heavier working loads.

How was power of the high-socialist labor regime practiced in the Daqing Oilfield? How were *jiashu* mobilized in the Daqing Oilfield to participate in hard work, and how did they perceive and experience their labor? How does the focus on the bodily experiences of *jiashu* extend our understanding of the nature of high-socialist China, as well as the Maoist gender project?

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<sup>2</sup> In the Mao era, “worker” was not simply defined by the kind of labor that people were in. It was a class category with officially-budgeted positions, decent social welfare and high social status. For socialist workers, the working positions would commonly last for until their retirement, and could be inherited by their offsprings.

During the Mao era, what kind of future was imagined for women, and how were *jiashu* included in or excluded from this imaginary? In the high-socialist China where property was collectivized, what was the role of gendered division of labor in the economic development? How can the analysis of *jiashu*'s bodily experiences expand our understanding of labor relations, and generate new forms of feminist Marxist politics and resistances?

In order to answer these questions, I examine the lived experiences of family dependent workers both in the personal narratives they told me and in a theatrical drama, *The Rising Sun*, which was composed in 1966 by Sun Weishi. Maintaining feminist methodology, I pay attention to the specificities of time and locations in the two kinds of narratives, the multiple identities of the story-tellers, their contrasting silences, and how they challenge, complicate and supplement each other.

Through the analysis of these materials, I argue that high-speed economic growth of high socialism and its imagination of a communist future were largely dependent on the gendered division of labor and the female bodies in it. *Jiashu* were mainly mobilized through intensive political study sessions of Maoist ideas, which created a socialist “docile” body that would “go all out” for socialist construction. In other words, *jiashu*'s bodily experiences were erased in the Maoist gender project, which imagined erasing biological differences in pursuit of a futuristic communist utopia. The CCP's Marxist theorization of women's liberation prophesied that all women would be liberated by fully participating in productive labor, as derived from Engels's theorizing of women's liberation (1978). However, due to their identity, which was bound to the domestic sphere, the imagination of the communist future never included *jiashu*.

In analyzing the relations between *jiashu*'s productive and reproductive labor, Song Shaopeng claims that because high-socialist China still followed a production-oriented economic

system, the liberation of women would never be truly realized (2012, 2013). She argues that the collective economy should have been able to invent an “other modernity” that was different from capitalism, a human-centered, public-private-integrated system that balances the production and social reproduction. However, in a new socialist country that pursued high-speed industrialization, the promise to socialize domestic labor was never realized (Ibid.). This echoes the feminist Marxist critiques of what conventional interpretation of Marxism leaves out, namely the social reproduction and dependence of capitalism, or as Nancy Fraser calls it, “Marx’s hidden abode” and “the back-story” of capitalism (2014). The docile female bodies of *jiashu*, which were disciplined by the norm of a proper Maoist *funü* (妇女 woman) body, were the sites of the socialist primitive accumulation as well as its quick pathway to reach communism. Paying attention to the bodily experiences of *jiashu* opens up possibilities to analyze the intersectional institutional forces that contributed to the hidden structural inequality that supported the seeming socialist equality in the Mao era, and therefore will extend our understanding of exploitation and expropriation and their forms in socialist societies.

## **1.1 THE MAO ERA AND HIGH-SOCIALIST CHINA**

Historical studies commonly use “the Mao-era”, “the Maoist period” to reference the time period of 1949-1978, the time span between the founding of PRC (People’s Republic of China) and the Chinese economic reform that transformed a highly-collectivized Chinese economy into a socialist market economy, a combination of public ownership and the system of market economy.

Two approaches in the study of the nature of the Mao era benefit my understanding of this time period. The first approach focuses on the institutional structures of the Chinese societies, tends to follow a linear timeline of political campaigns, and pays attention to the impacts of Chairman Mao and his ideas on the Chinese society, and tend to use official archives and records

as their main materials. In order to understand the nature of the Mao era, they analyze Mao's documents and their reflection of the CCP's revolution (Cheek 2002), the characteristics and impacts of Mao's leadership and political campaigns (Walder 2015; Shapiro 2001), and generalize the common form of industrialization organizing (Walder 1986). This approach, though creating a singular narrative of the Mao era, provides the readers with a general context of studying this time period as well as an understanding of its shared and dominant nature. For example, in his book *China Under Mao: A Revolution Derailed* (2015), Andre G. Walder conceptualizes three institutional characteristics of how the CCP (the Chinese Communist Party), the sole ruling Party of the PRC, ruled the country during the Mao era (1949-1978): 1) the Stalinist organization of politics and economy, 2) the charismatic leadership of Mao Zedong, the first Chairman and leader of the PRC from 1949-1976, and 3) mass mobilization. Walder (2015) further argues that in the early years of the CCP state, China followed the model of the Soviet Union both economically and socially, regarding agriculture, industry, the political system, religious freedom and intellectual institutions, which transformed the old regime and founded the Party state a solid foundation for ruling. Before the political split between the PRC and USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) in the late 1950s, Chairman Mao was dedicated to fully pursuing a Stalinist model, which was named after Joseph Stalin, the supreme leader of USSR from 1920s to his death in 1953 (Walder 2015). The includes a supreme leader, a one-party political system with strict hierarchy, state ownership and planned economy, an extensive military and public security system, and an economy that privileged heavy industry and weaponry (Ibid.). However, two historical incidents threatened Mao and pushed him away from the Stalinist model, to an over-reliance on mass mobilization and political campaigns. *China Under Mao* (Walder 2015) gives a clear introduction of these two incidents and their impacts. In the mid-1950s, a global trend of de-Stalinization

emerged in USSR and East Europe, with the aim to remove the Stalinist model. This trend threatened Mao. In 1956, Mao launched the Hundred Flower Campaign in 1956, a political campaign encouraging citizens to express their opinions of the CCP regime with the purpose of consolidating its governance. However, to Mao's surprise, many people expressed critical views about the CCP regime. These two events pushed Mao to carry out political campaigns that relied on mass mobilization instead of a Stalinist model of planned economy (Walder 2015, 135-148). This evolved into the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957-1959), a campaign that purged the "Rightists", meaning people who criticized the CCP regime and socialism, and the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960), a campaign aiming at rapidly transforming the traditional agrarian society into a socialist one through high-speed industrialization, agricultural collectivization and the establishment of the collectivized People's communes. During the process, Mao pushed the mass mobilization strategy to its limit, which in turn led to the Great China Famine (1959-1961). This general historical context is the one in which my research on the Daqing Oilfield is situated in.

The second approach focuses on the "particularism" (Brown and Johnson 2015, 5), meaning the interests that conflicted with the ones of the central CCP Party-state. Particularism exists in all forms of governance and daily behaviors. Because it's hard to trace these behaviors in official documents, this approach adopts alternative materials such as oral history, and unofficial archives such as diaries and memoirs. Instead of following a singular narrative and analyzing the society on the macro level, scholars adopting this approach focus on the heterogenous experiences on the local level and the specificities in the political, economic and social networks. Their works elaborate the contradictory perceptions of politics and the varied experiences of the socialist revolution on the grassroot (Brown and Johnson 2015; Frolic 1980; Perry 1997), the conflicted feminist agendas between female cadres and male cadres in the central government (Wang 2017),

and everyday gendered experiences of labor in the private and public spheres both in the rural and urban areas (see Davin 1976; Andors 1983; Jiang 2004; Wolf 1985; Gao 1994; Jin, Manning, and Chu 2006; Hershatter 2007, 2011). In Gail Hershatter's important work on Shaanxi rural women's memories of the Mao era in the 1950s (2011), she contrasts the sense of time in the memories of rural women and the "political campaign time" that follows the timeline of political movements such as "the Liberation" that refers to the founding of the PRC in 1949, the Hundred Flower Campaign, the Anti-rightist Campaign, and the Great Leap Forward. Her work reveals the heterogenous experiences of high-socialist temporality that is multiple.

These two approaches both add to my understanding of Maoist China and inform me on my historical approach. I maintain that in the study of the Mao era, it is important to both acknowledge the supreme leadership of Mao, the impacts of his political campaigns, and the conflicted and heterogenous everyday life of the people. In referencing the time period that I focus on, which is 1959-1978, the time span between the discovery of the Daqing Oilfield and the economic reform, besides using "the Mao-era" and "the Maoist period", I also use "high-socialist China". "High-socialism" is a term that Brown and Johnson (2015, 6) bring up, which refers to the time period of mid-1950s to the end of 1970s, the time span between agricultural collectivization and industrialization, and the reform and opening up. This time span covers the time period that I study, and my understanding of this historical period is also in line with theirs. Brown and Johnson (2015) claim that "high socialism was characterized by state ownership of property, Party-state fusion, the politicization of everyday life, and a planned economy that privileged heavy urban industry by extracting grain from the country-side and restricting internal migration" (6). This term de-centers the male supreme leader and his sole impacts on the Chinese society while acknowledging the due importance of his influences. In other words, I think any kind of discussion

about experiences in this time period should be contextualized in the extraordinary situations of the Mao era as mentioned above, but that is not the whole picture; the heterogeneous everyday life and people's conflicted beliefs, as well as the intersectional institutional forces that caused these conflicts, such as gender, class and rural/urban statuses, should be taken into consideration and granted enough attention.

## 1.2 MAO'S GENDER PROJECT

### Compressed Time and "Utopian Urgency"

In order to understand the everyday experiences of women in the high socialism, we need to firstly understand the relations between human consciousness and nature in the dominant Maoist ideas. Mao believed that nature should be conquered with a strong human will. Two slogans can help us understand the Maoist perceptions of the relations among nature, time and the human will, *ren ding sheng tian* (人定胜天 Humans must conquer the nature), and *ren you duo da dan, di you duo da chan* (人有多大胆，地有多大产 As great as is the courage of human will, so great will be the yield of the earth). In other words, in the high-socialist time, Mao launched a war against nature and natural laws (Shapiro 2001). Mao also raised two other slogans, *duo kuai hao sheng* (多快好省 More, faster, better and more economical) and *guzu ganjin, lizheng shangyou* (鼓足干劲，力争上游 Go all out and aim high)<sup>3</sup>. These slogans were theorized as the Central Line of Socialist Construction, and became key parts of the dominant ideology in the high-socialist time. In short, we can understand the high socialism as a time period of speed, which Shapiro (2001) theorizes as "utopian urgency" (67). It was reflected especially in the Great Leap Forward, but was

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<sup>3</sup> The English translations of the former two slogans are by the author because there is no widely-accepted conventional ones for them. The translations for the latter two slogans are the conventional ones of the original slogans.

also deeply influential during the whole high-socialist time. In order to achieve this speed, natural laws of ecology, anatomy or physiology should give way to human subjectivity, which would help the young state overcome the problems of lacking advanced technologies and decent infrastructures for the people.

### **The Maoist Gender Project**

The CCP Party-state's agenda of gender equality, or as Xin Huang (2018) terms, "the Maoist gender project" (23), evolved from Engels' theorizing of the origins of gender oppression. Engels claims that the oppression of women is due to the existence of private property. He describes women's secondary status as "the first class oppression", and maintains that the abolishment of private property will automatically eliminate gender oppression in the family. Without inheritance, there will be no reason for any kind of gender oppression. (Engels 1984) Xin Huang defines the Maoist gender project as "a range of discourses, policies, and practices concerning women and gender put in place by the socialist women's liberation movement of the Mao era, which promoted gender equality, encouraged women's participation in public life and 'the construction of socialist China', and institutionalized and enforced a range of new gender ideas and practices" (2018, 5). In service of the Maoist project, the category "*funü*" was created. Literally meaning "woman", *funü* is a political subject constructed by the CCP party state. According to Barlow (1994, 2004), before the twentieth century, *funü* was an identity deeply situated in a Confucian *jia* (家 the family), but the *funü* in the Mao era was situated in *guojia* (国家, the state) and the Marxist *jiating* (家庭, the family). In other words, the Maoist gender project transformed women who were mainly bound by family and the private sphere to women who were both active participants in productive labor in the public sphere and carriers of domestic obligations of wives and mothers in the private sphere. This double burden was theorized by many

feminist scholars. For example, Manning theorized it as “Marxist maternity” (2006), and Young calls it “socialist androgyny” (1989, 236), both referring to the situation where Chinese women were androgynous and sexless in the public sphere and following the standard of their male counterparts, but continued their roles as subordinates in the domestic sphere.

According to Huang, the Maoist project of *funü* was realized through reshaping gender expressions of femininity and masculinity (2018). The Maoist gender expression of *funü* discarded the traditional or conventional femininity in China and theorized them as either feudal or petty bourgeoisie. Iron Guniang, for example, was an ideal socialist woman, who was strong in body, proletarian in class and revolutionary in mindset. On the contrary, *jiatingfunü* (housewives 家庭妇女) were considered backward and should be transformed from only being responsible for the domestic sphere to active participants in productive labor. However, after some transformation and education, they were still considered backward, since the CCP Marxist theorization of women’s liberation was solely based on their participation in production in the public sphere (Davin 2011). In other words, the Maoist gender project which created the subject of *funü* excluded women who didn’t fit its standard of their political subject, and “rendered other gendered existences illegitimate” (Huang 2018, 48). *Jiatingfunü* and *jiashu* were thus left out of history, and their labor in the domestic sphere was rendered unacknowledged while their labor in the public sphere was under-compensated.

### **1.3 THE DISCOVERY OF DAQING**

In the late 1950s, a shortage of crude oil slowed down the presumed high-speed industrialization process in China. While the USSR -- the former main source of crude oil for China -- threatened to cut its supply, shortage of oil escalated to the level of a national security (Hou 2018, 2). The Daqing Oilfield was discovered in this crucial time period in 1959. This solved

the oil crisis as well as the crisis of the Chinese industrialization in general, granting the Oldfield dominant political positions and the nickname of “the son of the PRC”, a rather patrilineal diction that reflected the gendered division of labor that parallels men with heavy industry in the PRC’s industrialization, as well as the androcentrism in CCP’s regime during the high-socialist period. From 1964 to 1980, the Daqing Oilfield contributed over 50% to the crude oil production in China, bringing in benefits of approximately 68.1 billion yuan for the state (Hou 2018, 2).

Li Hou gave a comprehensive introduction of Daqing’s general history in her book *Building for Oil, Daqing and the Formation of the Chinese Socialist State* (2018). According to Hou, Daqing was “a symbol and a showcase of the PRC’s modern industry and independence” (2018, 2). She argues that, “The tensions of life, the conflicts between collective and individual interests, the distance between the urban and the rural and between the ideal and the reality, exhausted both the people and the land” (2018, xxii). Throughout the book, Hou (2018) has two major arguments. First, Daqing was the showcase of Chinese industrialization, where people’s everyday lives were so closely intertwined with state agenda and ideologies. Second, the “Daqing model” was the Chinese alternative to USSR’s socialist urban construction model, which represented Chinese leaders’ imagination of a socialist modern future, where people would sacrifice themselves for the state just as in the Stalinist model, not in a modern city that doesn’t have any rural areas as in USSR, but in a self-sufficient structure that would be only realized through a “urban-rural integrated” landscape (Hou 2018). In 1964, Daqing was lauded by Mao as the model for industrialization in China. Today, Daqing is a major city of 2,700,000 residents, and is still officially the largest oilfield in China, with more than 200,000 formal employees. *Jiashu* ceased to exist after all of these women retired from their positions in their fifties.

The Daqing model set up three kinds of labor models for the whole nation: Iron Men, Iron Guniang, and Family Dependent Workers. Daqing is most known for its “Iron Man,” Wang Jinxi, an oil worker who jumped into an oil well to stir cement on a freezing day and prevent a disastrous blowout of petroleum. He survived and was praised by Mao as a “leading figure in industry” (*gongye daitouren* 工业带头人) in 1964 and received the honorary title of Iron Man. Some of his famous sayings include “We should solve the problems when conditions permit it; but if conditions do not permit it, we will create the necessary conditions to solve the problems.” This motto was recognized as the “Iron Man Spirit” that composes the high socialist ideology in the 1960s. The Iron Man Spirits occupied a central position in the forming of political awareness in the 1960s and 1970s in the whole country and was a predominant narrative in Daqing. The “Iron Guniang” (*tie guniang* 铁姑娘)<sup>4</sup> originated as a cultural icon in 1964 in agricultural work in Dazhai, Shanxi Province, and it then quickly used in the public narrative to reference young women who did physically-demanding work in both agriculture and heavy industry. Iron Guniang and Iron Guniang Brigades consisted of officially-hired women in the Daqing Oilfield who challenged the limits of human bodies in their intense physical labor. These male and female exemplary model workers represented the dominant socialist discourse of a productive body that was enabled by officially-budgeted working positions, the invisible domestic labor, and the supplementary and under-valued labor in the public sphere by *jiashu*, a people group that I will introduce in the following part.

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<sup>4</sup> “*Tie guniang*” is commonly translated as “Iron Girl” in the current literatures. “*Guniang*” literally means “girl” in English, but its connotation with marriage status overrides its age association. A senior woman who is not married should still be referred to as “*old guniang*” (*lao guniang* 老姑娘). Therefore, I will reference this concept as “Iron Guniang”.

#### **1.4 *JIASHU* AND THE “INDUSTRIAL-RURAL VILLAGE” MODEL**

In order to understand the reasons why the Daqing model became the national model for industrial cities, we first need to understand the relation between agriculture/industry and rural/urban in the Mao era. If China followed the USSR’s model of urbanization and modernization, the national grain harvest wouldn’t be able to support the pace of socialist industrialization. This was another bottleneck for Chinese industrialization besides the lack of crude oil in the late 1950s. As mentioned above, China experienced the Great Chinese Famine from 1959 to 1961. Hou (2018) gives a clear introduction of how the Famine influenced the lives of people in Daqing. In 1960, food reserves in Daqing were exhausted as the number of residents in Daqing surged with workers arriving for the Oilfield construction. Influenced by the famine in 1960, starting in January 1961, Kang Shi’en, the minister of the National Ministry of Petroleum and Industry, mobilized workers in Daqing to join a campaign against hunger. Besides their work at the production frontline, they also had to hunt for wildlife and wild vegetables. This movement was quickly taken over by some housewives who started voluntarily farming the nearby lands. (Hou 2018, 53-55) The local administration encouraged this model. It was during this process that five dependent workers earned the honor of “Using Five Iron Shovels to Carry Out the Revolution”, which was the beginning of a mass mobilization for all housewives to join the farm work.

A quote of Liu Shaoqi, who was PRC President in 1961, can hint at how valuable the Daqing Model was for the Chinese leaders in their planning for a socialist/communist future: “construction of Daqing’s mining district and the revolutionization of the dependents have solved those problems that utopian socialists such as Robert Owen and Charles Fourier had not been successful in solving for more than one hundred years... This is the path that world Communism

should follow” (Hou 2018, 85). Even though Liu acknowledged the contribution of dependent workers, he also instructed oil workers to stay in the frontline of oil production instead of doing agricultural work, because “it’s not worth the 50 yuan<sup>5</sup> per month that we pay.” (Ibid.)

Afterwards, the traditional Chinese gendered division of labor model of “men farming and women weaving” (*nangeng nüzhì* 男耕女织) was replaced by “men working [in the heavy industry] and women farming” (*nangong nünong* 男工女农). The first model follows the Confucian ethics of *neiwai* (内外, domestic and public spheres), where “*nanzhuwai, nüzhunei* (男主外, 女主内, men in charge of the public sphere and women in charge of the domestic sphere). The former gendered division “men farming and women weaving” was associated with the natural economy before the collectivization of agriculture before the Liberation, and was located in the agrarian family, *jia*. On the contrary, the new model, “men working and women farming” described a particular gendered division of labor in the public sphere while ignoring the domestic sphere. This new kind of gendered division of labor serves to confirm the scholarly idea that the Maoist gender project made the domestic labor invisible by theorizing it as a kind of “burden” that women were supposed to overcome by themselves. (Hershatter 2002)

## 2. METHODOLOGY

In this thesis, I mainly use two kinds of materials: *The Rising Sun*, a theatre drama play written by Sun Weishi, and the life stories of retired dependent workers that I interviewed in Daqing in July and August, 2017. In the analysis of these two kinds of materials, I maintain feminist epistemology and methodology. Kamala Visweswaran defines “feminist ethnography” as “ethnography that foregrounds the questions of social inequality vis-à-vis the lives of men, women,

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<sup>5</sup> 50 Yuan was about the average salary for workers of different levels in the Daqing Oilfield.

and children” (1997). She argues that ethnographies are inherently fictional due to the power relations in the process of knowledge production, and the multiple and conjunctural identities of both the interviewers and the interviewees (Visweswaran 1994). Feminist ethnography must reflect the complex politics of self-representation of the local communities (Visweswaran 1994). In order to do so, it must focus on “how different narrative strategies may be authorized at specific moments in history by complex negotiations of community, identity, and accountability” (Visweswaran 1994, 15). In the ever-evolving fieldwork, feminist ethnography cannot be realized without the examination of power relations, the process of community solidarity building, as well as the reflection of blurred identities and categories.

Drawing on Visweswaran’s theorizing of feminist ethnography, I consider *The Rising Sun* as an ethnographic fiction and CCP-state’s representation of the Daqing *jiashu*’s living experiences. *The Rising Sun* was created in a time when Mao’s line on art and literature was considered as standard for artistic creation. In 1942, at the Yan’an Forum in Yan’an, Shaanxi Province, which was the base of the CCP between 1935-1947 before they took over China, Mao gave a speech, “Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art”, which has three major points. First, art and literature should reflect the real life of the working class, which are the great mass of the Chinese people, and in turn consider the mass as the main audience. Second, art and literature should serve the target of socialist revolution and become a weapon to unite and educate the people as well as fight against enemies. Third, all kinds of artistic creation should be realized through “going to the people”, and artists should conduct fieldwork and mingle with the working class before starting their creation. The Yan’an Talk gathered and created a group of intellectuals that considered publicizing Mao’s ideas and advancing the ideological work and socialist revolution the major tasks of their cultural production.

Sun Weishi was among the first group of theatre drama experts that followed Mao's line of art and literature. Reading through *The Rising Sun*, I am impressed by how dedicated Sun was to live among family dependent workers for two years, and how situated and rooted her work was. A lot of the details in her work match the ones in my interviews, which were conducted almost 60 years later. In analyzing *The Rising Sun*, I pay attention to how the play both reflects the politics of self-representation of the local *jiashu*, and represents the dominant narratives and master scripts of the Maoist socialist women, so that it could serve as political propaganda materials to educate and transform *jiashu* and the mass.

Works on feminist autobiography studies argue that women tend to follow masculine norms and tell stories through the lens of patriarchal culture (Smith 1987). Women tend to adopt master scripts, including patriarchal, masculine and heterosexist "genre, plot, style or rhetoric" (Ibid., 25). This adoption reproduces dominant discourse and ideologies about women, and mutes women by depriving them of their potentials of complex self-representation and creative self-knowledge, and consolidates the structures that subjugate women. For example, they may tell stories in the standard of conventional norms of women's predictable fates, such as a focus on marriage and motherhood and ignore the longing for community building. To address, feminist autobiographers aim at giving voice to otherwise silenced subjects, acknowledging multiple marginalization of women regarding gender, race, class and nationality, and exploring the contests between women's self-representation and the master scripts.

In order to account for women's multiple marginalization, Sidonie Smith calls for a "woman-centered and woman-defined" discourse (1987, 59) to represent women in their narratives. With the purpose of understanding how the gender project of the Mao era is experienced and challenged by women both in the past and today, Huang (2018) develops Smith's "woman-

centered and woman-defined” discourse and adopts a two-time story telling method. During the first interview, Huang (2018) asks women to just tell their stories so that they can have agency and use their imagination. The interviewees get to decide the content as well as the structure of the stories, which gives the author an opportunity to examine the representation of their lives through both the content of the stories and the form of narration. During the second interview, the author probes the interviewees with her checklist of questions that were related to gender, including family relations, marriage, friendship, and biological processes such as birth, pregnancy, menstruation and menopause. She also invited these women to reflect on their two-time storytelling process. In this way, Huang (2018) is able to help these women break away from the master scripts which were masculine and heterosexual and examines the messiness of time and temporality in these stories. In her analysis of these interviews, she pays attention to what was missing in the first interview, as well as how the first stories are often revised and challenged by the retelling. The contradictions and conflicts between the two interviews that often occur challenge the master scripts by surfacing the muted experiences in history and empower the narrators who gained self-knowledge and complicated self-representation by conveying previously inexpressible desires and experiences (Huang 2018).

Huang’s method shows her understanding of feminist epistemology that scholarly works are always processes of collaboration and co-authorship. What makes her work feminist is not just the fact that she invites ordinary women to tell their stories, which rarely happened in their lives before and can be considered as an activist practice, but also in the fact that she intervened in the process by her feminist “probing” of her checklist. Huang’s approach is simple and inspiring. To begin with, she doesn’t deny the existence of the campaign-time chronology and its predominant influence on these women’s interpretation and representation of themselves especially shown in

their first story-telling. Instead, she analyzes of the contrast between the first telling and the second telling, focuses on the contrast and the silence in both story-telling processes, especially women's correction of the first telling. By adopting her approach, she lets the readers see more clearly the conflicts and overlaps between multiple temporalities in women's direct expressions of them.

Due to her participatory writing method, I consider Sun's drama as an "ethnographic fiction" (Visweswaran 1994, 9) because the play represents the situated struggles and campaigns of the local Daqing women, and was informed and formed by Mao's line of art and literature. The drama, as created in 1966, follows most of the master scripts of that time period, such as *suku*, the liberation of women, the desire of a strong and adamant female body, and the ideology that "*funü neng ding ban bian tian*" (women hold up half of the sky 妇女能顶半边天). The women's lives in the drama play out these master scripts. My interview methods are in accordance with the Huang's second-time storytelling method, during which I focused on specific themes, such as family and working relations, their bodily experiences at work, birth-giving, menstruation and medical conditions. Drawing on Huang's approach, I consider *The Rising Sun* as a "telling" process, and my interviews as a "retelling" process of the experiences of Daqing family dependent workers. Maintaining feminist epistemology, I understand that both of the two kinds of materials are "contaminated" and fictional, but together they have the potential of enriching our understanding of the Mao era and its impacts on common people in their overlaps and contrasts, as well as the silence in and between them.

### **3. *THE RISING SUN***

#### **3.1 THE CREATION, PERFORMANCE AND AUDIENCE**

In 1964, right after Mao referred to Daqing as the model for national industrialization, Sun Weishi, the adopted daughter of the Premier Zhou Enlai, was sent to Daqing to find some inspirational stories. Sun Weishi (1920-1968) was the daughter of Sun Bingwen, a communist martyr who died in 1927 in a persecution by the KMT (Kuo Min Tang), the Ruling Party of the Republic of China. In 1937, when Sun was 16, she was adopted by Zhou Enlai before she went to Yan'an. In 1939, she left for Moscow, and earned degrees in performance and directing in the Russian Academy of Theatre Arts. In 1946, she returned to China, and joined the land reform in Shannxi and Shanxi Provinces, during which time she publicized the CCP's agenda with her cultural productions such as skit performances. She became the chief director of the China Youth Art Theatre in 1950 as well as the Chinese Experimental Theatre in 1956 in Beijing. Politically, she was the member of the 2<sup>nd</sup> through the 4<sup>th</sup> Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, which consists of members of various democratic political parties as well as independent members who were not affiliated with political Parties. The conference provides political advice to the CCP as a form of demonstrating PRC's democracy. From 1954-1956, Sun worked as the main instructor of the cohort of directors of the China Central Drama College in Beijing, during which time she set the foundation of Chinese drama theories with her introduction of the Stanislavski system and its application in the Chinese socialist revolution. She is remembered as the importer of the Stanislavski's system of drama, which emphasized the realism of drama and its educational significance (Han 2012).

Sun stayed in Daqing for two years and lived among dependent workers to record their stories. In 1966, Sun published *The Rising Sun* (1977)<sup>6</sup>, about the family and productive life of dependent workers in Daqing. *The Rising Sun* was her first and last originally-created and produced drama. It was very well-received in Daqing and Beijing in the 1960s, and is still discussed today as a great example of “go deep into the masses and into the thick of life”<sup>7</sup>(深入群众, 深入生活), which followed Mao’s mass line of art and literature creation. In an eulogy 10 years after her death, her husband, Jin Shan, who was also a famous drama director, summed up her major life achievements as “using art to mobilize people to participate in economic construction during the first three years of PRC for economic recovery, criticizing the Rightists in the anti-Rightist movement with satire, praising the three red flags during the People’s Commune campaign” (1978).

In 1964, Zhou Enlai instructed Sun Weishi to stay in Daqing to create some inspiring works<sup>8</sup>. During her stay, Sun participated in the labor with *jiashu*, “she joined in manure collection, weeding, and soybean collection, built rammed-earth houses and farmed in the land. She herded cattle with *jiashu* Lu Ju, a famous *jiashu*. Whatever the *jiashu* did, she did. No matter how much muddy water *jiashu* got on their bodies, she did the same...she also lived for a week with one of the five iron shovels – Xue Guifang” (Chen 1977). In selecting the cast, Sun had three standards. Instead of letting professional actresses play *jiashu parts*, all the performers of *jiashu* roles had to

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<sup>6</sup> Created in 1966, *The Rising Sun* was not officially published until 1977 by *Renminwenxue chubanshe* (People’s Literature Publishing House) in Beijing.

<sup>7</sup> This is the conventional translation of the original slogan.

<sup>8</sup> In 1964, Zhou Enlai encouraging socialist artists to leave Beijing and stay with the local people, in order to protect them from the persecutions in the Culture Revolution in Beijing. See Wang (2017). After Sun returned to Beijing in 1966, she died in 1968 in a Culture Revolution persecution initiated by Jiang Qing, the person in power during the Cultural Revolution.

be *jiashu* in the real life; the performers had to have participated in the collective labor, and the performers had to be able to learn how to perform (Bai 2014).

Starting in January 1966, the drama was performed by selected Daqing dependent workers to large audiences in Beijing over 180 times. The play was attended by Sun's adoptive parents, Premier Zhou Enlai and his wife Deng Yingchao, who was the chief of the All-China Women's Federation. This demonstrated the ACWF's support for promoting the Daqing model to mobilize family dependent workers, as well as its recognition of the Daqing model as a right way to liberate women and transform *jiatingfunü* into proper socialist subjects. According to the report in *People's Daily*, the play had a large public audience which included cadres, officially-hired workers and housewives. For example, on March 8<sup>th</sup> (International Women's Day) in 1966, 8000 *jiashu* and housewives watched the play, and many later expressed how they were deeply impressed and touched by the Daqing *jiashu* and wanted to learn from them as the model. Some Party activists mentioned that they wanted to learn the way that Daqing cadres did ideological work (*People's Daily* 1966).

### **3.2 THE PLOT SUMMARY**

In a "Watching Instructions" by Sun that was handed out in the performance in Beijing, she writes, "with the construction of the Oilfield, *jiashu* gradually came. However, in this giant grassland, basic necessities of life became a big problem. How should we solve this problem? Should we build a city that has a whole set of facilities and just serve them, or should we build a rural-urban integrated village, organize *jiashu* into collective productive labor just as officially-hired workers, so that they could support themselves?" This paragraph set the basic tone for the major reason for her choice of *jiashu* as the focus of the drama: it is to publicize a new model for resource-extracting districts in China and educate the masses about the advantages of this model.

The drama has seven leading characters. In the following table, I follow the original order in which Sun introduces the character in the “table of characters” in the play. I add a column of gender and status, in order to show how social and productive relations were intertwined in the play.

Table 3.1. The Leading Characters in *The Rising Sun*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Additional Information</b>
Party Representative Luo	Male	In his 40s	Cadre	The Party Representative and the top leader of the Drilling Group in the Daqing Oilfield
Guo Deying	Female	In her 30s	<i>Jiashu</i> ( <i>jiashu</i> cadre)	The instructor of the Jiashu production team of the Drilling Group
Director Wang	Male	In his 40s	Cadre	The husband of Guo, The director of the Jiashu administration committee.
Xin Yuhong	Female	in her 20s	<i>Jiashu</i>	Migrated to Daqing from the rural area
Master Li	Male	In his 30s	Worker	The husband of Xin, a drilling worker
Lin Caiying	Female	in her 20s	<i>Jiashu</i>	Migrated to Daqing from the urban area

Master Zhao	Male	In his 30s	Worker	The husband of Lin, a drilling worker
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In Daqing, both cadres and workers had officially-budgeted positions. *Jiashu*, however, was always stuck in this status for their whole life. *Jiashu* cadres were cadres among *jiashu*, a sub-category of *jiashu*. These women’s social status was in-between *jiashu* and officially-hired workers, even though their official status were still *jiashu*. There is no female worker in the play, partially due to its focus on *jiashu*, and partially due to the fact that officially hired women were very rare at that time period in Daqing (Hou, 2018).

Sun continues in the “Watching Instruction”, “this story happens in 1964, when difficulties emerged in the construction of the rural-urban integrated village. Through a series of complex struggles, a new socialist petroleum district appeared as a rising sun in the Daqing Oilfield. The *jiashu* in Daqing march ahead in the path of collectivization, revolutionization and joining the productive labor.” What kind of difficulties did Sun refer to? As shown above, this drama focuses on the *jiashu* characters and officially hired workers in three families. Guo Deying faces two difficulties: how to educate *jiashu* who are “backward” and how to transform her husband’s disdain of *jiashu*. Xin Yuhong faces the problem that Master Li, her husband, won’t let her participate in productive labor. Lin Caiying faces the most serious problem: as a *jiashu* from the urban area, she is very delicate and unwilling to work, and she looks down upon the Daqing Model. She has a husband who wants to motivate her to join productive labor, but she resents the idea of working. These difficulties are gradually solved in the drama. After being educated by Party Representative Luo and witnessing the high-quality performance of *jiashu*, Director Wang learns of the contribution of *jiashu* to socialist construction; Master Li agrees to let Yuhong join in

productive labor; after constant ideological work by her co-workers, especially by Deying, Caiying realizes the significance of the Daqing Model and is finally willing to work. The drama ends with a victory meeting of the Daqing Oilfield, which celebrates the achievements of workers and *jiashu* of the Daqing Oilfield, and looks forward to a communist future.

Besides the stories of the seven leading characters, the play also has six supporting characters, as listed in the table below. I use “X” to indicate the lack of information in the play.

Table 3.2. The Supporting Characters in *The Rising Sun*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Additional Information</b>
Mom of Tiedan	Female	X	<i>Jiashu</i>	X
Little Liu	Female	X	<i>Jiashu</i>	X
Little Zhang	Female	X	<i>Jiashu</i>	X
Little Fen	Female	X	Student	Student of The College of Petroleum, an intern in the Daqing Oilfield
Little Huang	Male	X	Student	Student of The College of Petroleum, an intern in the Daqing Oilfield
Little Chen	Male	X	Student	Student of The College of Petroleum, an intern in the Daqing Oilfield

From Table 1.1 and Table 1.2, we can see how the intersectional factors that contribute to Daqing people's differentiated social statuses. All the *jiashu* are female, and all the officially-hired workers are male. The people currently in the status of "student" who are interns have the potential to be officially-hired in the near future. The play doesn't explicitly point out, but according to the age of college graduation in high-socialist China, I assume that they are unmarried young people in their late teens. They represent the next generation, the communist future. There are both male and female students, with more of the former. Different from *jiashu*, without the burden of family, young female students can be officially-budgeted workers in the near communist future, when the burden of domestic labor is collectivized and ceases to exist. These women can thus become proper *funü* subjects. They will have a future that *jiashu* will never have, due to the latter's bondage to the domestic sphere.

### **3.3 GENDER RELATIONS AND RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION**

The new model of the division of labor, "men working and women farming", had profoundly influenced the gender relations in Daqing, which is reflected in *The Rising Sun*. For example, some male workers resent the idea of family dependent workers participating in farming and construction work. Party Representative Luo is the top leader of the Drilling Group in the Daqing Oilfield, and he supports the new labor division. Director Wang is the director of all family dependent workers, who was sent by Luo from the production frontline to direct the work of family dependent workers. He discredits the contribution of dependent workers, and is impatient toward them, until the second last scene of the play. Master Li and Master Zhao are two common workers, with the former opposing the idea of wives joining in production in the public sphere, and the latter supporting the idea. Director Wang assumes that *jiashu* are less capable than officially-hired workers, and refers to them as "lao niangmen" (old women 老娘们), which is a sexist disdainful

reference to women's universal lack of ability and their confinement to the domestic sphere. Master Li, on the other hand, wants to keep his wife within the house, "don't mistake productive labor as the only way of joining the revolution. You just stay at home and take care of the housework. In that way, I can full-heartedly contribute to production. This is the real revolution for you. Instead, you always talk about joining in farm work, which upsets me. If I am upset, I can't fully devote myself to the science experiments that I do. As a result, my team can't have world-level achievements. It would have bad impacts on the revolution" (Sun 1977, 35)! Director Wang's contempt for *jiashus'* labor and Master Li's discontent of *jiashu* participating in production represent the contradictions between officially-hired workers and family dependent workers both in the public sphere and in the private sphere.

### **3.4 BODILY EXPERIENCES: CREATING A PROPER *JIASHU***

Lin Caiying: How can rural life compare with life in urban areas? Daqing is a big industrial area, therefore it must be a big city! For office work, there will be a multi-storied building; for residence, there will be a welfare building. For shopping, there will be a big shopping mall. There will be multi-storied buildings everywhere. There will be lamps and telephones, curtains and sofa, whatever you want. On the paved streets, there are gardens in the city center, workers' clubs, theatres, movie centers... When my lover<sup>9</sup> (爱人 *airen*) is done with his job, we can just walk on the street, go to a movie, do whatever we want. It's much better than the rural life! I have heard that people in Daqing live in *gandalei*, which is even better than the multi-storied building! ... (to others on the train), look (takes

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<sup>9</sup> "Lover" is the gender-neutral term to refer to domestic partners during high-socialist China.

out the curtains from the cloth-wrapper), I bought these green curtains. It must look good in the *gandalei* in Daqing. (Sun 1977, 8)

Migrated from the urban area, Caiying is a typical “spoiled” *jiatingfunü*. When she moves to Daqing, she has the idea that she doesn’t need to join the socialist construction, and only has to take care of domestic labor instead. In this extract, she mentions many symbols of her imagined “modern” socialist life: multi-layered buildings, lamps, telephones, curtains and sofa. She also has a very particular image of the Daqing landscape and its infrastructure, which includes modern streets, theatres, gardens and so on. As a woman who has lived in the urban area before she moves to Daqing, she even brings with her green curtains, an object that symbolizes her desire for city life and her imagination of modernity, and shows it off to other passengers in the train.

With industrial sites considered as socialist “cities”, the First Five-Year Plan (1953-1957) set the bottom line that construction in these cities should be in service of industrialization rather than of urbanization or livelihood. In government documents, city construction was divided into “productive” and “nonproductive” sectors, with the former referring to industrialization, and the latter referring to facilities of public services and goods. In 1955, the CCP Central Committee called on cities to continuously lower the standards for nonproductive construction, which turned Mao’s industrial development process into an anti-urbanist one (Hou 2018; Ma 1976; Solinger 1991; Cell 1980). Among the nonproductive constructions, facilities such as gardens, movie theatres and shopping malls as desired by Caiying in the drama, were criticized as “luxurious” and unnecessary.

Caiying’s body, in relation to her imaginations of modern life, is lagged-behind and doesn’t fit the standard of a socialist *funü*. As a woman who doesn’t have an officially-budgeted position, she cannot be a qualified socialist subject. To make it worse, she is not even a qualified *jiatingfunü*

due to her imagination of a luxurious modern city, her denial of the Iron spirit, and her contempt for the rural life style as well as the urban-rural integrated model. Therefore, she must be transformed by her leaders and co-workers in the Daqing Oilfield. Caiying's body is too delicate, and her ideology is "backward". For the rest of the drama, Caiying becomes the major object of transformation. The extract as follows shows how Caiying interacts with other *jiashu*, and their subtle emotions and their nuanced bodily experiences in the landscape of the Daqing Oilfield.

In the drama script, after several days of political study of the Maoist ideology, Caiying finally agreed to work on the farm:

[It is windy outside. The dependent workers get back from work. They carry iron shovels, pickaxe, baskets and shoulder poles. Everybody who walks in carries with them a puff of wind and snow. People rub their hands, stamp their feet, or stand against the heatable wall. Caiying stands on the side by herself, silently.

Little Liu: The wind is so strong.

Tiedan's mother: Surely it is! My whole heart is cold now! And we needed to spread the manure to the fields. The manure was blown over onto my whole face! Pfff, pfff, pfff! And what did we get in return? ...

[The dependent workers leave the room one by one. Lin Caiying sighs, and then starts slowly washing and re-dressing. Xin Yuhong comes to the stage.

Xin Yuhong: Caiying, why aren't you done cleaning-up? Hurry up, let's get lunch together.

Lin Caiying: Who can be as fast as you? I can't compare myself to you.

Xin Yuhong: Come on, hurry up. Just wash your hands, wipe your face clean. Let's have lunch. After a short break, we need to start our study of politics and the socialist ideology...

Lin Caiying: You go ahead. (combing her hair) It's so stinky! How can I eat!

Tiedan's mother: (Just got out of the inner room, ready to get lunch) Stinky? Our counselor said, "The more stinky the manure is, the more delicious the food is." The stink will only add to the flavor of the food!

Lin Caiying: Then why don't you just let me eat the manure instead! I won't come here tomorrow. (Rushes into the left inner room angrily) (Sun 1977, 45-47)

In the extract above, Sun lets Tiedan's mother, another family dependent worker, describe her nuanced bodily experience in the farming labor. The literal stink of manure, which saturates her clothes, infects her hair, and gets into her mouth from time to time, adds to the disillusion of Caiying's dream for a modern life in Daqing.

In the next scene, Caiying pretends to be sick in order to skip the farming work. In this extract, Caiying's body and mind again become the objects of transformation and the targets of education. Interestingly, in reality, the winter in Daqing was notoriously cold and abominable, but the only sickness in the drama is this "pretended" one of Caiying. Caiying's "pretended" sickness shows Sun's attitude of disapproval toward women's illnesses, which doesn't fit the image of a proper socialist *funiu*. She must be adamant, and therefore would not and cannot be sick. Caiying's "sickness" both emerges as a proof of her backwardness as being too delicate, and serves as an opportunity for Guo to bring up the new clinic, showing the superiority of socialism. This story follows the linear socialist time: to transform women, both from the domestic sphere to the public sphere, and from bourgeoisie mistresses who would "pretend" to be sick, who longed for capitalist modernity, who were afraid of the coldness, and who couldn't bear the stink of manure, to the standard proper socialist *funiu* who was strong and determined and whose spirit could conquer minor bodily discomfort and diseases.

### 3.5 MAO'S MASS MOBILIZATION: POLITICAL STUDIES AND *SUKU*

#### 3.5.1 *SUKU*

In this part I will analyze how the *suku* (诉苦 speaking bitterness) narrative contributes to the ways the stories are told in the drama. In the drama, after Caiying makes some denigrating comments on the Daqing Model and threatens to leave Daqing and go back to “real” cities, Deying realizes that Caiying’s ideology was not just lagged-behind but “wrong” (Sun, 52). In order to educate Caiying, she gives a long monologue of bitterness in the “old societies”.



“Instructor Guo Deying uses her own miserable family history to condemn the evil old society, and raises workers’ class consciousness.” (Sun 1977, vi) This photo captures the scene of Guo excoriating the old society. Other *jiashu* burst into tears after hearing her sad story. Photo Credit: Xinhua News Agency.

Guo Deying: We poor people were the same. (sadly) My dad was a long-term-hired hand. He worked so hard for the landlord, but still didn’t have enough to eat or wear. I didn’t have shoes to wear. During winter, I was herding the cattle for the landlord. It was

so cold that I put my feet into the cow dung to keep warm. One day I got too hungry, and I reached for the dog's food. The landlord found out and hit me and knocked me out. My mom could only hold me and cry, without even being able to defend me. My family in-law were also poor, and the father of my child worked in the Yumen Oilfield as a driller. At that time, we workers were treated worse than cattle. The Yumen Oilfield at that time was surrounded by wire net, like a prison. Whoever went in couldn't get out. Workers were naked with only gunny-sack cloth to cover their bodies; they didn't have the dignity of human beings. When mothers went to visit their sons, wives went to visit their husbands, they could only wipe off their tears with the wire net in between.....If a worker got sick, it was even more bitter. They would be pushed into a big room, in there was a big pot of herb medicine, no matter what diseases these workers had, they could just drink this one kind of medicine. Once you drank it, don't even think you would survive, and before you died, you would be dragged into a mass grave pit (*wanren keng* 万人坑) to stay there to die. One time, the father of my child got injured, and the capitalist didn't want to treat him. Instead, he fired him, and his co-workers carried him home. I took a look at him: he was covered with blood, and his face was pale and yellow. I trembled because of fear. I was in my confinement after childbirth; I had just given birth 7 days ago. I carried my baby, walked all the way in wind and snow to beg the capitalists, to beg these lords not to fire my Old Wang. If he was fired, none of us could survive. The capitalist just ignored me, and told people to drag me out. They pushed me and my baby into the snow, and I couldn't even get up...

[All the dependent workers were touched. There is sound of crying...Caiying also bursts into tears. (Sun 1977, 52-53)

*Suku* was a tool for political mobilization and education of the CCP that originated in the land reform in the 1940s and 1950s, in which CCP members instructed the poor peasants to speak about their suffering due to the oppression and exploitation of the landlords (L. Li 2007). It later became a dominant narrative in the CCP's political campaigns to cultivate socialist political subject. In order to mobilize people efficiently and construct a coherent proletarian subject the *suku* narrative is an exclusive one that only focuses on a particular kind of bitterness, which is class conflict (Rofel 1999). Due to their low social status and perceived emotional nature, women were often the key speakers in the CCP's *suku* practices (Hershatter 2002; L. Li 2007). Because it gives marginalized people an opportunity to speak, it has the power to form a collective agency of the oppressed group and build solidarity.

Deying's story, which follows a typical *suku* narrative of a class oppression, was able to touch all the *jiashu* and raise Caiying's class consciousness. After illustrating why the old society was absolutely evil, Deying continues, "now that we are liberated, our situations were turned over, but we cannot forget the bitterness in the past! If we forget the bitterness in the past, and don't want to join the revolution any more, how happy would those landlords and capitalists be! Young people should have the ambition, the ambition for revolution! Participating in productive labor is revolution!" (Sun 1977, 54) Guo's story follows a clear progressive timeline, which is another characteristic of the *suku* narrative: a drastic change in life before and after the Liberation. Her narrative follows a socialist developmental and progressive temporality: transformation of the feudal past and capitalist residuals, into a utopian socialist future.

### 3.5.2 POLITICAL STUDY SESSIONS



Guo Deyng and Xin Yuhong leading the *jiashu* in learning about Mao's document "Serve the People" and the story of Zhang Side. The book that she holds in hands is *Anthology of Mao Zedong*. Photo Credit: Xinhua News Agency

Political study was a key part of Mao's mass mobilization, especially on the grassroots level.

The drama has a scene of a *jiashu* political study session:

Xin Yuhong: (reading) "...Our team is to liberate the people, and to full-heartedly serve the people. Comrade Zhang Side is a comrade in our team." (Looking forward. The image of Zhang Side in the Long March appears ahead of her) Following Chairman Mao, Zhang Side fought so many battles!...After he arrived in Shaanxi, he sacrificed himself for the people and the revolution...What do people live for? What's the significance of life? Instructor, suddenly I understand so many things. I understand why Zhang would sacrifice his life for the Communist Party. I understand what people should live for. (Sun 1977, 54-55)

The quotation is from Mao's article "Serve the People", which is a eulogy to Zhang Side, Mao's bodyguard who died in a cave house<sup>10</sup> collapse while rescuing his two comrades. It was among Mao's "three constantly read articles" (老三篇, *lao sanpian*), along with "In Memory of Dr. Norman Bethune", and "The Foolish Old Man Who Moved Mountains". "In Memory of Norman Bethune" is Mao's eulogy for Norman Bethune, a Canadian doctor who selfishly helped wounded CCP soldiers and villagers during the Sino-Japanese war. "The Foolish Old Man Who Moved the Mountains" is about how perseverance would bring Chinese people victory. It cites an old Chinese story: an old man insisted on removing two big mountains with hoes day by day, and eventually they impressed God, who removed the mountain for him. Mao claimed that this "God" was the broad masses of the Chinese people. What the three articles have in common is the invincibility of human will, the importance of hard work, and the sense of altruism and willingness to sacrifice for socialist construction.

In the drama, in Yuhong's interpretation, "Serve the People" is about the importance of the spirit of sacrifice and the ultimate significance of life – to join the revolution. During the political study, Maoism transformed the ideas of Caiying:

Lin Caiying: I was wrong, instructor. I want to learn from your spirit of the Five Shovels.

I want to study hard and join the revolution!

Guo Deying: Great. It's nice that you finally understand it. We should all live like Zhang Side. Whatever we do, we do it for the revolution; with the purpose of the revolution, we are not afraid of anything. Even if we face a mountain of and a sea of fire, we will still go ahead! (Sun 1977, 55)

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<sup>10</sup> A cave house is a common housing form in the Shaanxi Province, China.

The fact that Caiying's mind would be magically transformed by Mao's ideas shows that the drama followed Mao's line of art and literature and was created with a purpose of being a part of Mao's mass mobilization. The depiction of the political study scene offers us materials to understand how it was organized and the narratives that were invoked.

### 3.6 IMAGINING A COMMUNIST FUTURE

As many other works that follow Mao's line on art and literature, the last scene of *The Rising Sun* is one to celebrate current achievements and prophesy an utopian communist future. At the Daqing victory meeting, Party Representative Luo compliments *jiashu* and acknowledges their contribution to socialism.

Do you know what the family dependent workers in Daqing are doing? They are doing pioneer work! They are pioneering for the tradition of dependent workers joining the revolution; they are pioneering for the great task of “everybody works, everybody studies, everybody works, and everybody joins the revolution”; they are pioneering for the great task of eliminating the “three big differences”! (There are people singing in the background) Listen! The students are singing. We all participate in labor, our families are revolutionaries, and our descendants are all workers and revolutionists. The wishful idea that imperialists and revisionists have for us to evolve peacefully can never be realized. (Sun 1977, 88)

In Luo's narration, family dependent workers are doing the great work that sets the foundation for a communist future where everybody is a worker and a revolutionary. The “three differences” in the extract refers to the Maoist theorizing of differences between rural and urban areas, between industry and agriculture, between intellectual work and physical work. The Daqing Model would eliminate all the three differences. The singing of student interns foreshadows the

hope of a communist future: at that time, everybody will be equally participating in productive labor, and there will be no need for the lead of *jiashu*. Again, *jiashu* is a transient category, trapped between the primary stage of socialism and a communist future.

Even though Party Director Luo describes *jiashu* as pioneers who would bring in an equal society, in the drama, dependent workers are always subordinate to male characters, not only to their husbands but also to their male co-workers. Another quotation better elaborates Party Director Luo's conceptions of family dependent workers' social status when he educates Director Wang because of his contempt of *jiashu*, "Old Wang, Chairman Mao said, 'Chinese *funü* are a great human resource. We need to explore his resource and strive for a great socialist country.' Comrade, we need to liberate the whole world eventually. If we can't liberate the family dependent workers who are led by us, how can we emancipate all mankind?" (Sun 1977, 74) After bringing up *funü*, he immediately sets the tone that *jiashu* are led by officially-hired male workers, instead of being an equal political subject in themselves as *funü* were. Luo's speech reveals the hypocrisy in the Maoist gender project: Chinese women were considered as the resource for economic development, and their liberation was in the service of socialist construction rather than being an end in itself.

#### **4. STORIES FROM DAQING**

During my stay in Daqing from July to August, 2017, I interviewed 9 retired *jiashu*. During the interviews, I would first ask them to introduce themselves, inquire about the time when they migrated to Daqing, and the kind of work they participated in. After it, I would start asking questions about their gender-related experiences, such as family and working relations, their bodily experiences at work, birth-giving, menstruation and medical conditions. In this part I focus on two people, Grandma Zhang and Grandma Liu, who had very different experiences as *jiashu*. These

two women had both experienced multiple positions, and they shared the same fate: they would always be *jiashu* for their whole lives.

Grandma Zhang, born in 1936, migrated to Daqing from Dalian, Liaoning Province, in 1962. After a short period of staying at home and being a housewife, she joined the *jiashu* team, and became a *jiashu* propaganda cadre. In 1980, she was assigned the position of the principal of the No. 1 Kindergarten affiliated with the Oilfield Construction Company, the new name of the Daqing Oilfield after the economic reform in 1979. In 1982, she was co-hired as the chief of the neighborhood committee, and retired in 1985. After her retirement, she remained chief of the neighborhood committee until 1995. Grandma Liu was born in 1937. She migrated to Daqing in 1964 from Qingdao, Shandong Province. She worked on the farmland from 1964 to 1965, in the canteen from 1966 to 1967, and did construction work for two years in 1968. After 1973, she was transferred back to the farm. Starting in 1981, she became a janitor until her retirement in 1987. Three themes emerged from the interviews, and they correspond the ones in the Sun Weishi's drama: division of labor and relations of production, the tight time schedule and experiences of sickness and reproduction, and the political study sessions.

#### **4.1 DIVISION OF LABOR, RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION, AND THE *JIASHU* CADRE**

In contrast to the drama, where a male worker is assigned to instruct *jiashu*, in the real life, *jiashu* were mobilized and administered by the female workers. Female workers were in charge of the political mobilization of *jiashu*, and they also had the power to evaluate *jiashus'* performance and decide on their promotions to *jiashu* cadres.

As mentioned before, when the PRC was first founded, *jiatingfunü* was a category that equaled “parasites” of the young state and needed to be transformed. For example, on the March

8th International Women's Day in 1950, Song Qingling, the vice-president and head of ACWF, called on *jiatingfunü* to join in production and construction, and claimed that domestic labor was what "limited, suffocated women and made them conservative and stupid" (Zhongguo funü guanli ganbu xueyuan 1988, 59). *Jiatingfunü* should be transformed from consumers of social wealth into producers of social wealth. The term *jiashu*, or family dependent workers, appeared in 1951, when both the ACWF and the National Workers' Union started to emphasize organizing family dependent workers (*People's Daily*, 1951). Cai Chang, the then head of ACWF, gave a speech at the first and only National Conference of Family Dependent Workers in Beijing in 1957, and she commented that all labor that benefited socialism was honorable. Her speech clarified two things: 1) domestic labor is labor, 2) the hierarchy of women's labor follows this ascending order: domestic labor, social labor and productive labor, with the last one being the highest and the ultimate target of women's liberation. The level on which a woman was liberated was proportional to the kind of labor she did (Zhongguo funü guanli ganbu xueyuan 1988, 294).

Grandma Zhang told me a story of how *jiashu* were organized by officially-hired women, "At the beginning, we were organized by female workers in our husbands' working unit, especially for political study. During winter, because we couldn't farm, we had more free time, and therefore more political study sessions. The female worker would gather us together. The female worker had many study materials, including newspapers and other political documents. She was an officially hired worker, and had access to a lot of political study materials, and she would just share with us. She would read the materials, and take notes of our discussion, and she had an attendance book to keep record of people's participation" (Interview). The hierarchy of labor is reflected in the labor relations in Grandma Zhang's story. At the very beginning, the social status distinction

between female worker and *jiashu* was already very clear, with the former in charge of the administration, education, and mobilization of the latter.

The political study session was where Grandma Zhang was noticed and later promoted by a female worker into the *jiashu* cadre position, “one day, after sharing a good deed from the local newspaper, the female worker led people in a discussion. Everybody just kept their heads down without saying anything. I got impatient, and I said, ‘I feel educated by the good deeds that we learned today. We are all human beings, and we *jiashu* are also capable. We should learn from them.’ She took notes on my speech, and the second day she started counting on me. She told everybody, ‘I have other work to do later. Starting tomorrow, Zhang will facilitate the political study for me when I am not here.’ Starting that day, she would give me some political study materials. I would lead the study session, keep track of the participation and keep notes on people’s comments, and report to her from time to time. After the *jiashu* administration station was founded in 1964, she assigned me to be the *jiashu* cadre in charge of propaganda. I was among the first group to be assigned” (Interview by author, 2017).

Regarding how the shift in gender relations into “men working and women farming” impacted family relations, in my interviews, in contrast to Sun’s drama, not a single woman mentioned her husband’s disagreement with their participation in productive labor in the public sphere. This can be attributed to several reasons. First, when I interviewed these women, they faced a young woman who was interested in their honorable past, which is rarely brought up or publicly acknowledged now. Mentioning family conflicts would not add to their self-representation, even if they existed. Second, when living conditions were so abominable as in the early 1960s, it was not realistic for the whole family to survive with only one officially-hired worker’s salary, as many interviewees mentioned. Third and most importantly, even though Sun

simplified the relations between dependent workers and officially-hired workers into gender relations, an evident theme in my interviewees' stories is the relations and power dynamics between officially-hired women and dependent workers.

When I first came here, there were not so many officially-hired women. Even when there were more of them, if both groups went to the construction site, we would always do the heavier work. We carried the bricks and stones back and forth, so that the officially-hired men could use them to build the rammed-earth house. Sometimes we would do some light work, such as stirring and carrying concrete to workers in a huge scoop. The worker was building the house, and we just took the concrete to him, and when he used it up, we gave him another scoop. But if an officially-hired woman was present, she would naturally be the one who did this light work, and we would have to return to carrying bricks and stones, sometimes with a cart, sometimes with our bare hands. (Grandma Zhang, Interview by author, 2017)

Sun's drama and my interviews supplement each other in the understanding of how labor was divided, and the double burden carried by these family dependent workers. At home, it was assumed that *jiashu* would take up all the housework. In the public sphere, they either did farm work or the performed supplementary roles in construction work, and they were assigned physically-demanding jobs due to their temporary hiring status, while officially-hired women and their bodies were valued more and protected better in the daily labor.

## **4.2 THE TIGHT TIME SCHEDULE AND EXPERIENCES OF SICKNESS AND REPRODUCTION**

We would get up at around 5 or 6 to cook for the family and take care of the children. We needed to gather at 7:30. We also did some political study before work, during

which we would read some newspapers, and discuss how to apply Mao's ideas in our actual work. Then the *jiashu* cadre would lead the *jiashu* to the farmland. We had no spare time, not even half an hour or 40 minutes for break. During the 'breaks', the *jiashu* cadre would gather people and lead people to study politics. Commonly I would read a paragraph from the newspaper or other materials such as Mao's documents, and I would lead people in discussing their ideas about these materials. After a day's work, we couldn't just go home. Commonly we would stop working at 5:30 or 6. After a quick dinner in the canteen, we would start the evening political study sessions. The political study usually ended at 8:30. We all sat down for political study meetings. We would summarize how we spent the day one by one. Besides learning the study materials, everybody was required to speak a bit about her performance during the day: the good things she did and her weaknesses. (Grandma Zhang, Interview by author, 2017)

According to Michele Foucault (1977), a carefully-designed timetable is a key technology of creating and disciplining the docile body. Time plays a distinctively important role in Marx's labor theory of value (Marx 1992). Surplus value, the key argument in Marxism, is based on the extra time besides the one that is needed to reproduce the labor forces. Workers need to work for certain hours that they get paid for to sustain themselves, and the extra working time creates the value that leads to the accumulation of capital (Ibid.). In other words, Marxism is largely a theory of time. In order for workers to survive, they must follow a factory/machine time that is regular, linear and stable. For women, it means that their need for the time to take care of social reproductive activities would always be in competition with the machine's time.

In *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (1990), David Harvey furthers Foucault's discussion on time and discipline and theorizes time as social

constructs. Harvey (1990) claims that because people experience time as natural progression, they tend to naturalize it and overlook its construction. He reminds us of the social construction of time, such as industrial time, family time, progressive time and so on (Harvey 1990). All of them are organized and constructed around the logic of capital accumulation. People have emotions and affect related with these times, which further naturalizes the sense of time. For example, people would feel guilt for leisure, frustration for lateness and content for good use of time. Even if he bases his argument on capitalist societies, and the affect for time derives from an illusion that people own their time in capitalist societies which is actually a construct, the theory helps us understand how the system of time can be constructed, and that affect and emotions can be attached to it once it is a set system. In the case of high-socialist China, people lived in the temporality of utopian urgency would have feel that the time and body didn't belong to oneself but to the collective in the construction of a bright communist future. After numerous rounds of political study sessions, *jiashu*'s bodies were the affective sites of realizing a Chinese high-socialist political economy, which was regulated by a compressed daily schedule.

#### **4.2.1 SICKNESS AND DISCOMFORT**

During the Mao era, androgynous and strong bodies became the norm for women, which was emphasized in the “Iron” narrative and considered as an achievement of gender equality, showing the superiority of socialism. Sexual differences and women's biological bodies were erased in the public narratives for the purpose of easy labor mobilization in line with Mao's mass politics (Li 1989; Barlow 2004). Scholars have examined the bodily experiences of women in physically-demanding labor and the impacts of heavy labor on women in rural areas, such as struggles related to childbirth and menstruation, as well as female hygiene issues such as the increased rate of uterine prolapse (Hershatter 2011; Gao 1994; Jin, Manning, and Chu 2006). In

my interviewees' experience, instead of being completely invisible, the visibility of bodily experiences including sickness and reproduction was carefully theorized and designed with the purpose of including and collectivizing the female bodies as workforce for high-speed socialist industrialization and construction, while excluding their discomfort and sickness from socialism and categorize them as women's own burdens that should be overcome with Maoist thoughts and the Iron Spirit.

### **Discomfort and Stink**

The abominable working conditions are brought up a lot in *The Rising Sun*. Supplementing it, the oral narratives in my interviews give more nuanced and detailed description of what the working conditions were like.

During winter, the traditional toilet gets full so quickly. Because it was outdoors, the human waste got frozen so easily. You needed to use a chisel to dig it into small pieces. The human waste was valuable for farming, which was referred to as "manure collection". We needed to work during the Spring Festival, too, which was referred to as "Door-Opening Red" (开门红, kaimenhong, an idiom meaning a good start). We wore dog-skin hats and facial masks. Still, the fragments of the manure got everywhere. On the facial mask, for example, which was so hard to clean. On the eyebrows, too, which was impossible to clean. Nobody dared to go inside immediately after work; we took off our coats and masks outdoors. The masks were so dirty; we needed to carry two to three for exchange. On the kang (炕, a heatable brick bed), there is a heatable wall (火墙, huoqiang). I fixed a wire to the heatable wall for the purpose of drying clothes. Things like towels and masks dried easily. Because they had fur, there was always frozen manure powder in our dog fur hats, and we couldn't clean them simply shaking them. We tried our

best to shake them so that there was no waste on them; but once we brought them home, we could still smell it. And it was hard to dry (due to the fur), so we just hung it outdoors (instead of washing and drying it). (Grandma Zhang, interview by author, 2017)

The story told by Grandma Zhang supplements Sun's drama, showing us how bad the working situation was and why Caiying would resent it so much in the drama. Even after the work, the smell still followed them and could not be easily cleaned. Women who were willing to engage in this kind of labor would have to follow the standard of the Maoist *funü*: she should be a proletarian woman who is willing to endure difficult situations in the socialist construction.

### **Sickness**

Different from the drama, where sickness in Daqing only appears once, sickness and lack of care always came up in my interviews.

After 1964, the administrative station for *jiashu* was built, and they sent me to the station. I became the *jiashu* cadre who was in charge of propaganda in my team. I would report to the upper-level cadres the situations of dependent workers, and I also made blackboard newspapers, where I wrote about good people and good deeds. Some people didn't feel well or have some "little problem" (xiao maobing 小毛病), and they would just squat on the side of the road and take a break. After a while, they felt better, and they would get up and continue their work. Sometimes the chief would ask, are you OK? Do we need to send you home? At that time, home was so far away. Most people would say, I don't need to go home. I would just take a break and then continue. (Grandma Zhang, interview by author, 2017)

When I asked her what kind of “little sickness” these women had, she said, “sometimes it was stomachache. At that time people didn’t have enough food, so it was easy to have stomach issues. Sometimes it was their period. It was a hard time, but nobody would take a break” (Ibid.).

Grandma Zhang’s narration is in interesting contrast both with the drama extract above and with narrations of other women. For example, Grandma Liu, the woman who compared herself to sparrows at the beginning of the paper, told me about her experience at work when she menstruated, “At our time, we didn’t have pads like today’s people do. We just used cloth with cotton or ashes inside it during our periods. Sometimes we needed to walk a long distance to get to the fields where we worked. (Whispering to me) *Guniang* (unmarried young girl 姑娘), let me tell you something embarrassing, but don’t laugh at me. Because of the long walk between home and the land, I remember my two thighs were chafed bleeding from the menstruation cloth. But I couldn’t take a break. I needed to feed my family and myself. If I left, I could easily be fired. It was already difficult for a spousal worker to find a job at that time” (Interview by author, 2017).

As a *former jiashu* cadre who was in charge of political propaganda, Grandma Zhang’s story matches *The Rising Sun* in its invisibility of sickness. In the drama, sickness is related to Caiying, the woman who is backward both in her body and mind. A good deed would be about someone who endured her sickness and pain, and returned to productive labor shortly in spite of it. Grandma Liu, on the other hand, told her story in a way that expressed the bitterness she experienced: the fear of being fired, the menstruating and bleeding body, the thighs that were chafed bleeding and the shame related to it, and especially, the “leader” who supervised her. Her narration is in direct contrast to Grandma Zhang’s: Grandma Liu remembers how she persisted in the farming labor when her body was in an uncomfortable condition, yet did not dare to leave not because of the dedication to the socialist state but due to her fear of losing her job. Grandma Zhang,

as a *jiashu* cadre, was among the people who were the “leaders” that had the power to evaluate common *jiashu*, were among the people who oppressed her in Grand Liu’s memory. Some *jiashu* who were more educated, very vocal of the socialist ideology, and could elaborate Mao’s ideas well, such as Grandma Zhang, had the opportunity to become *jiashu* cadres. *Jiashu* cadres were not registered as cadres and didn’t have officially-budgeted positions, but this social status did create a hierarchy among *jiashu* and led to varied memories related to their bodies.

#### 4.2.2 INVISIBILITY OF THE REPRODUCTIVE BODY

As many post-socialist feminist scholars in China argue, Li Xiaojiang claims that the Mao era denaturalized women’s bodies. She argues that China’s modernity was “male”, and the conflict between efficiency and fairness lay on women’s bodies. Because women had no biological body in the official narratives, they could be easily mobilized in labor, which is in line with Mao’s mass politics and subjects (1989). Because of this mass politics and the androgynous gender project, women were able to enter the public sphere and work equally with men, but they couldn’t distinguish themselves from men and thus would not be able to have a separate and complete female subject (Ibid.). Therefore, Li (1989) calls on Chinese women to break away from the male subject, and argues that the natural science knowledge of chromosomal bodily difference must be recognized to achieve women’s *reng* (public standing 人格), otherwise a woman would always be incomplete because she is simply included in a mass Maoist subject. She doesn’t have a feminine body, nor does she have the male individuality that men had. National development and justice for women didn’t go along with each other during the Mao era (Ibid.).

Even though I disagree with Li’s statement which essentializes the gender binary, I find her argument that the imagination of a socialist *funü* followed the standard of a male subject helpful in my understanding of the bodily experiences of family dependent workers in Daqing, as well as

their conflicted narrations of health and reproduction. This kind of conflicts and contrast emerge both between the drama and the interviews, and among the interviews. I agree with Li that the erasure of chromosomal difference was a purposeful “reconstruction” of femininity and the creation of the female body of a proper Maoist socialist woman. In contrast to Li’s argument that women didn’t have a feminine body, I argue that in the private sphere, concerns and discussions regarding the reproductive bodies were never absent. Here I again quote Grandma Zhang. The following interview happened in a park in the elderly community where I first interviewed her.

Me: I always felt terrible before I got my period. I can’t imagine the time when people still needed to do their work when were having in their period.

Grandma Zhang: Do you have cramps? Let me tell you something, drink some brown sugar water. Drink it while it’s warm, as long as it doesn’t burn your lips (it would be fine). You drink it several times, and the cramp will go away. No cramps any more. Don’t eat anything cold, or drink cold water before or during your period.

Me: Did people have brown sugar back then?

Grandma Zhang: We had brown sugar. Brown sugar belongs to the category of “hotness”. All cramps come from coldness. As long as you take some hot brown sugar water, there was no pain any more. [Here due to the lack of grammatical tense in Chinese, I can’t tell whether she is talking about the present or the past)

Me: Did women during the Great Oil Battle have brown sugar, too?

Grandma Zhang: At that time, we had it at our own places. If we didn’t have it, we couldn’t drink it. If we could afford it, we would buy some, like one *jin* (500g 斤) or half a *jin*, and make some brown sugar water. During the first two days, I always felt a lot of pain. After the first two days, the pain would pass. I just needed to pay attention to it myself, and hang

on until it passed. Once I had my period, I didn't want to move. Sometimes I would heat my belly on the *kang*. Once it was warm, I felt better.

Me: Who taught you this?

Grandma Zhang: Old women told me this before I moved to Daqing. Everybody knew that brown sugar water would remove the pain. It is the old wisdom.

Me: Any information from it in public, such as from female cadres?

Grandma Zhang: Nobody taught you anything about menstruation in public. It's a private matter. The women cadres only organized women, publicized the new spirit, and organized political study sessions. Besides, where there were good persons and good behaviors, she helped publicizing them. Menstruation was something "feudal" and wouldn't be discussed in the public. (Interview by author, 2017)

Her comment on menstruation as something "feudal" is interesting. Because menstruation belonged to the private sphere, it should not be mentioned in the public, and the treatment of it also was the obligation of individuals in the private sphere. "Anti-feudalism" was a major agenda of state feminism, aiming at eliminating traditional ideas of gender that oppressed women before the Liberation (Wang, 2017). However, because women's bodily experiences, such as the monthly cycles, didn't fit the rhythms of the socialist high speed, they should therefore be made invisible. The whole erasure of physiological difference by imposing the *funü* image such as Iron Guniang, actually reinforced the traditional and local beliefs and practices of the female reproductive bodies. The concealing the biological differences left no room for public discussion of them, and added to the feeling of shame and embarrassment. This explains the reason why Grandma Zhang referred to experience of menstruation as "feudal". Hershatter (2011) discusses how the campaign time's limits became evident in the case of childbirth, when all kinds of practices coexisted even after the

state's campaign to reform childbirth, and she argues that the experiences of childbirth were not only shaped by political campaigns, but also by cultural traditions and social relationships that women were engaged in. Similarly, *jiashu*'s memories of the reproductive body could not be erased no matter how careful and purposeful the Party state's theorizing was in order to exploit them, or how aggressive the political campaigns were; it would always be experienced individually by these family dependent workers. Further, the very existence of multiple temporalities regarding sickness and reproduction were caused by the political campaigns that aimed at liberating women. The standard *funü* image, which centered on the public and erased the experiences in the private sphere, eliminated open expressions of reproductive experiences in the public narrative and made them private and invisible, just as the political campaigns made domestic labor invisible. The reproductive experiences of these women overflowed the contour of a narrative in which all women were as physically capable as men. These experiences, as well as family dependent workers' identity as *jiatingfunü* who were bound to the private sphere, predicted a future where their contribution and sacrifice would easily be concealed and erased, and therefore exploited by the CCP state.

### **4.3 THE POLITICAL STUDY SESSIONS**

Besides reading Mao's documents as in the drama, these are two stories that Grandma Zhang remembers well. "They talked a lot about the situations in our country. At that time, we didn't have oil, but Daqing was a land of wonder. After we came, we should just settle in, and root ourselves here. Men would go to the frontline and construct the oilfield, and we *jiashu* were organized to do the agricultural work. Daqing was such a big grassland at that time. We would turn the grassland into farmland shovel by shovel, and then we would farm the land. We would plant corn, soybeans and all kinds of vegetables to feed the officially-hired workers" (Interview

by author, 2017). In this story, Grandma Zhang equated men with officially-hired workers and women with *jiashu*. This story is in line with *jiashu*'s major assignment of agricultural labor as mentioned before. It was a relatively accurate reflection of Daqing's demography. At that time Daqing was a male-dominated place demographically. *Jiashu* arrived before more women were officially-hired to meet the 10% quota in the 1970s, and later the 50% quota after the economic reform in 1979.

“They also told us that what the Five Shovels did was more than agricultural work. At the beginning, when the workers drilled the oil wells, the wives would use basins to carry water and pass it to the workers. The oil won't come up without putting enough water down” (Grandma Zhang, interview by author, 2017). Both of these stories are “good people and good deeds” about division of labor. The first one is about mobilizing *jiashu* into agricultural work, and the second one is about women doing supplementary work in the production frontline.

In Grandma Zhang's narrative, she mentioned that she thought people were positively influenced by Mao's ideas, “at that time, we really believed in Maoism. We were even willing to sacrifice ourselves with no concern for ourselves” (Interview by author, 2017). In her stories, it is mainly reflected in two ways, “the level of people's ideology and morality was very high. People were very moral. There were no thieves, and we would sleep with the window open without worrying” (Grandma Zhang, interview by author, 2017), and that “we would just join the revolution heart and soul and spare no time for ourselves” (Ibid.).

Grandma Zhang's story supplements the depiction of political study sessions in Sun's drama. Besides Mao's documents that people all over the country were supposed to read, people in Daqing also used local examples, especially examples of the *jiashu* models, to mobilize and

educate *jiashu*. The intensity of political study, which left people with no personal leisure time, created the rhythm in *jiashu*'s bodies which fit the high-speed essence of high socialism.



The picture captures how *jiashu* broke up the collected manure in early spring in 1975. Grandma Zhang is the second on the right. She especially told me that she had political study material in her pocket, which would be used for study by the whole team during the break. She was selected as a representative of “learning and applying Maoism”. This was the photo that was taken by the propaganda department of the Oil Construction Section of the Daqing oilfield after she was selected. Photo Courtesy: Grandma Zhang

Grandma Zhang's positive comments on the political study could be due to her past position as the *jiashu* cadre who was in charge of propaganda. Grandma Liu, on the other hand, felt confused about why she was so dedicated to contributing to socialist construction, “Now when I think about the past I always ask, why did we work so hard? Why were people so silly (*sha* 傻) I always say I have been silly my whole life” (Interview by author, 2017). By calling people in high-socialist time, including herself “silly”, what she refers to was actually a status of being mobilized.

Her story, together with Grandma Zhang's story, shows how Mao's mass line was effective in its labor mobilization. During the post-reform time, in a time of market economy and individualism, the past when people were mobilized into selfless sacrifice for the country under the blueprint of a communist future became surreal and confusing.

#### 4.4 NO FUTURE FOR *JIASHU*

Compared with the play, where a communist future is promised for *jiashu*, the stories of *jiashu* today are full of disillusion.

Talking about why they didn't give us officially-budgeted positions, *jiashu* of my generations have a whole belly of tears. We did all kinds of work. Besides farming we removed the rust in the machines, we built houses and carried big stones, we even worked as plumbers when they didn't have enough work force. Those were such heavy labor. Our footsteps were everywhere in the oilfield, and we had *fenggong weiji* (great achievement 丰功伟绩). They just didn't take us seriously. Premier Zhou visited Daqing, and said that Daqing was "both industrial and agricultural" (yigong yinong 亦工亦农). We gained the comment of Premier Zhou as "both industrial and agricultural, beneficial for production and convenient for life". But the leader of Daqing in the 1970s, Chen Limin, told the Central government that there were no dependent workers in Daqing, and therefore Daqing didn't need the quota for officially-budgeted positions for us. After that, our fate was set, and we would remain as family dependent workers our whole lives. (Grandma Zhang, interview by author, 2017)

In her study of women in the rural areas, Hershatter (2011) claims that the burden of domestic labor made women less valued in the division of labor. Song (2012) challenges Hershatter for putting the public sphere in contrast to the "private" and following the Western

dichotomy of the public and the private, without explaining adequately either the extent to which family formed the private sphere in the Maoist time, or the relation between the public and the private. She argues that domestic labor was not always “invisible” as Hershatter argues, but it became invisible after the Great Leap Forward, and it has always been purposefully and carefully theorized to set the rank of domestic labor and the bearers of it in the socialist production hierarchy (2012). Drawing on this, I argue that the category of family dependent worker was also purposefully theorized, so that only experiences regarding production were visible, valued and remembered. Sicknesses that were not fatal, childbirth, women’s monthly cycles, on the other hand, were made invisible most of the time, and only became visible with a sense of “triumph” and “conquest”, when these women overcame their “incapabilities” and again actively joined in the socialist production.

The acknowledgement of *jiashu*’s triumph had a time limit. At the National Conference of Family Dependent Workers in Beijing in 1957, Cai Chang elaborated that domestic labor was at the bottom in the ranking of women’s different kinds of labor, but it was still important at the primary stage of socialism. But the ultimate goal of Marxist theory of women’s liberation would always be women’s full participation in social and productive labor (Zhongguo funü guanli ganbu xueyuan 1988, 294). This theorization helps us understand the temporality of the family dependent workers: temporal, transient, always in transition and trapped between the old society and the communist future. In short, *jiashu* as a category was never included in the imagination of a socialist future, one for fully-liberated women instead of women who are still bound by family burdens and reproduction.

## 5. CONCLUSION

On the land of Daqing, the intensively organized political study was the major method to mobilize *jiashu* and transform their bodies. During this practice, power was practiced through the politicization of everyday life and the publicizing of Maoism as a kind of powerful knowledge. It created a socialist docile body that would contribute and sacrifice itself in a compressed time rhythm in the service of a communist future, where all women would fully participate in productive labor. However, the CCP state never included family dependent workers in their plan and imagination for a communist future, because these women's political identity was bound in the private sphere and could never be fully liberated. The kind of labor that family dependent workers carried out, namely both domestic and supplementary labor for the Daqing Oilfield, was carefully designed and theorized so that the state can exploit these women as producers of social wealth, without providing them with the welfare and care they deserved in the past, or acknowledging and respecting their contribution in the future. However, dependent workers experience multiple temporalities. On one hand, due to the intensive political study sessions, their memories followed the timeline of the political campaigns; on the other hand, issues like sickness and reproduction spilled out of the macro-narratives and were highly individual.

Why didn't the elimination of private property solve the problem of gendered oppression in high-socialist China? Heidi Hartmann (1979)'s critiques of Marx offer some answers to this question: on one hand, this is due to the limited analytical power of Marxism that doesn't clarify the origins of patriarchy and the alternatives to it; on the other hand, men simply don't have any reasons to give up the gendered benefits that they enjoy in maintaining women as the subordinated. The way that the labor regime functioned in Daqing pushes us to reflect on the understanding of "public ownership". In high-socialist China, public ownership largely equaled "state ownership".

Even though private ownership was abolished, the Party-state owned and regulated the collectivized property. In a hostile and threatening international environment, state ownership led to extreme and large-scale exploitation and oppression through mass mobilization. In the case of *jiashu* in Daqing, the exploitation was reflected in the gender and class inequalities, which was disguised in socialist ideologies and the Maoist gender project.

In *The End of Capitalism* (2006), Gibson-Graham criticize the dominant ideas that reproduce the problems of capitalism through repeating the hegemonic discourses that mistake Marxism as synonymous with class struggles only. Drawing on feminist theories and unsettling the meaning of capitalism through the lens of identities, they search for the margin and outside in order to find the inconsistencies, discontinuities and vulnerabilities of capitalism. Even though their theories are not situated in socialist societies, they are inspiring for my understanding of labor in high-socialist China. Experiences of labor that are concealed and devalued, such as the bodily experiences of *jiashu* in high-socialist China, must be examined to challenge conventional understandings of socialism and find alternatives to economic exploitation.

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