The Making of Chinese Intellectuals: Representations and Organization in the Thought Reform Campaign*

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ABSTRACT Through analysing the early 1950s Thought Reform campaign, this article suggests a new approach to studying Chinese intellectuals. I highlight the reification of this social category under Communist Party rule. The campaign universalized *zhishifenzi* (知识分子) as a social classification, absorbed a diversity of people into the category and established within it multiple subject positions. This reification of the Chinese intellectual, which persisted after Thought Reform, had serious impacts on central policies, local organization and individual behaviour. My analytical perspective can further the understanding of CCP rule, state–intellectual relations and the experience of so-called Chinese intellectuals.

Research on Chinese intellectuals, like studies of intellectuals elsewhere, typically defines its subject *a priori* as critical thinkers, cultural producers, professional experts or, more broadly, mental workers.[1] These definitions share the functionalist view that intellectuals perform a unique role in society, but employ different technical and normative standards to define what intellectuals are. Their dominance masks their inconsistencies and, more importantly, the social processes through which "Chinese intellectuals" or *zhishifenzi* (知识分子) have emerged and have been understood as a social category. In the occasional works that seek to circumvent the functionalist view, the Chinese intellectual is theorized as a purposive representation invested with social and political significance. But such analyses concentrate only on the ways elite scholars or dissidents represent themselves as intellectuals.[2] They, too, obscure how *zhishifenzi* has been constituted and altered as a social category.

Empirically, research on Chinese intellectuals emphasizes their relations to the state. This reflects astute attention to the Confucian ideal of the literati servicing the public through officialdom, to the May Fourth tradition of intellectual

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1 For example, Merle Goldman, *China's Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). This paper uses "intellectuals" and *zhishifenzi* interchangeably.

2 Most recently, Timothy Cheek, "Xu Jilin and the thought work of China's public intellectuals," *The China Quarterly*, No. 186 (2006), pp. 401–20.

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dissent, and to the fact that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has dominated social life since the 1949 revolution. In conjunction with functionalist definitions and a tendency towards elite analyses, this focus on traditions and domination has illuminated disproportionately the lives and work of famous scholars and writers.[3] We lack conceptual schemes for researching ordinary people who have been identified as Chinese intellectuals.

This article studies the formation of *zhishifenzi* as a major social category in the early 1950s and explores the social impact of this process. The Thought Reform campaign was the defining moment when the phrase *zhishifenzi* entered popular consciousness as a classification for a diversity of people. The campaign institutionalized political subdivisions within this new category and imposed upon its members individualized intellectual identities. The CCP, of course, had been defining, analysing and classifying what it regarded as intellectuals before Thought Reform. It had deployed political study, confession and other tactics it normalized in the campaign even before the revolution on so-called intellectuals. Thought Reform, however, transformed the Party's conception of *zhishifenzi* into a widely recognized social type. It turned otherwise unaffected people into Chinese intellectuals and engendered new layers of incentives for social behaviour.

Put differently, this study does not place analytical emphasis on writers or others identified *a priori* as intellectuals. It examines how the Party converted its particular way of imagining, describing and categorizing *zhishifenzi* into the only legitimate approach. It thus adds to an emerging body of research that stresses social re-classification as a critical process through which the CCP consolidated its power at the local level.[4] Thought Reform extended the Party's vision and division of the Chinese intellectual nationwide, as Land Reform and other campaigns reconfigured how Chinese understood their society and how they should behave. It elevated the Chinese intellectual to an embodied level of personal, social and political existence.

To use Pierre Bourdieu's terminology, I describe Thought Reform as a "rite of institution" that instituted new social boundaries and differences pertaining to the category *zhishifenzi*. Such distinctions had roots in the division of labour, but the campaign reorganized and magnified the differences based on the CCP perspective on intellectuals.[5] This official reification of *zhishifenzi* would persist and evolve after Thought Reform. It has been a key feature of CCP rule with a serious impact on central policies, local organization and individual behaviour.

3 For example, Ka-Ho Mok, *Intellectuals and the State in Post-Mao China* (New York: St Martins's Press, 1998).

4 Julia Strauss, "Paternalist terror: the campaign to suppress counterrevolutionaries and regime consolidation in the People's Republic of China," *Comparative Studies of Society and History*, No. 44 (2002), pp. 80–105; Eddy U, "The making of *zhishifenzi*: the critical impact of the registration of unemployed intellectuals in the early PRC years," *The China Quarterly*, No. 173 (2003), pp. 100–21; Zhang Xiaojun, "Land reform in Yang village: symbolic capital and the determination of class status," *Modern China*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2004), pp. 3–45.

5 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 117–26.

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In the next section, I use linguistic evidence to show that *zhishifenzi* became a dominant term of social classification only during Thought Reform. I then summarize the campaign's discourse of intellectuals and show how it opened up within the category multiple subject positions for social identification. Using Shanghai as an example, the third and fourth sections discuss how the campaign inscribed subdivisions and individual political identities on those encompassed by the category. The conclusion suggests direction for future research on the CCP reification of the intellectual and its social impact.

The Rise of a Classification

Zhishifenzi was not a common term of social classification before 1949. It circulated within the Communist Party and among scholars, writers and college students with multiple meanings. Thought Reform pushed the CCP interpretation of *zhishifenzi* into popular consciousness. The rise of this social classification was concomitant with the rise of CCP rule.

Zhishifenzi is a relatively new phrase. Its printed appearance is now dated to 1920 in the journal *Gongchandang* (共产党, *Communist Party*) established by the newly formed Chinese Communist Party. The term is included unremarkably in an essay on postrevolutionary Russia and refers to its educated population.[6] During the early 1920s, other phrases for the educated, especially "the intellectual class" (*zhishi jieji* 知识阶级), were more popular than *zhishifenzi* in leftist journals.[7] In December 1925, when Mao Zedong's "Analysis of the classes in Chinese society" was first published, he wrote that many higher *zhishifenzi* belonged to the "middle bourgeoisie," but used two other phrases, *xiao zhishi jieceng* (小知识阶层, the petty intellectual stratum) and *fandong zhishijie* (反动知识界, reactionary intellectual circles), to capture the class locations and politics of educated Chinese.[8] Qu Qiubai, another leader of the incipient communist movement, had categorized educated people with a class language derived from tradition. He saw officials, politicians and parliamentary members as part of an incorrigible, *old* intellectual class, but regarded teachers, students and others in modern-style establishments as an emerging and promising *new* intellectual class.[9]

By the late 1930s, *zhishifenzi* had become the CCP's main referent for educated people. In his 1939 essays, "Recruit large numbers of intellectuals" and

6 Wang Zengjin, *Houxiandai yu zhishifenzi shehui weizhi* (*Postmodernity and Intellectuals' Social Locations*) (Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2003), pp. 12–13; Wu Xie, "E'guo gongchan zhengfu chengli sanzhounian jinian" ("The third anniversary of the communist government in Russia"), *Gongchandang*, No. 1 (1920), p. 9.

7 See the 1923 and 1924 issues of *Xin qingnian* (*New Youth*).

8 Stuart Schram (ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. 2 (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. xli, 252, 254 and 261; Wang Zengjin, *Postmodernity and Intellectuals' Social Locations*, p. 13.

9 Qu Qiubai, "Zhengzhi yundong yu zhishi jieji" ("Political movement and the intellectual class"), *Xiangdao* (*The Guide*), No. 18 (1923), pp. 47–49; Eddy U, "The origins of the Chinese intellectual and the recent reconstructions of the category," paper presented at the conference on Chinese Visions on a Planetary Scale, Monash University, Australia, August 2007.

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"The Chinese revolution and the Chinese Communist Party," Mao used *zhishifenzi* but not any of the above phrases to refer to the educated.[10] However, it is not entirely clear from his work who the intellectuals were. He sometimes included secondary students as intellectuals, but more often linguistically identified college and secondary students as *qingnian xuesheng* (青年学生, young students). He occasionally separated *zhishifenzi* from *ziyou zhiyezhe* (自由职业者, independent professionals), among whom he included doctors and surgeons, thereby implying that *zhishifenzi* had to be paid employees.

Equally oblique in Mao's work was the status of educated persons within the Party. Were they *zhishifenzi* or not? Mao sometimes suggested that learned and committed Marxists (such as himself) were part of the working class. More often, he described the Party's educated personnel as "revolutionary intellectuals" and complained about their attachment to bourgeois or traditional values. These people therefore were not part of the working class, but were nevertheless better than other intellectuals.[11] These definitional ambiguities regarding *zhishifenzi* would persist after 1949 and would be reinforced by the Thought Reform campaign.

Before 1949, the term *zhishifenzi*, like the term *zhishi jieji*, appeared outside the Communist Party with different meanings. It was used interchangeably with older terms for the educated such as *shi* (士, scholars), *wenren* (文人, literati) and *dushuren* (读书人, men of letters). One writer asserted that "*shi* is the abbreviation of *zhishifenzi*"; another noted that *zhishifenzi* is a modern phrase for *wenren.* As with the older phrases, a weighty moral discourse accompanied the new classification.[12] For example, the famous writer Zhu Ziqing believed that all *zhishifenzi* had to choose between "supporting the oppressors and the leisure class" and assisting the public.[13] His and others' writings on *zhishifenzi* reverberated with the then most internationally known interpretations of the intellectual – Julien Benda's vision of an intellectual stratum independent of major social classes.[14]

Notwithstanding such debates on *zhishifenzi* in the political or literary realm, the term was not used widely otherwise before 1949. Table 1 summarizes the number of *Wenhui bao* (文汇报) articles from the 1930s to the 1990s that contain

10 Mao Zedong, "Da liang xishou zhishifenzi" ("Recruit large numbers of intellectuals") and "Zhongguo geming yu zhongguo gongchandang" ("The Chinese revolution and the Chinese Communist Party"), *Mao Zedong xuanji* (*Selected Works of Mao Zedong*) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991), pp. 618–20 and 641–42.

11 Mao Zedong, "Zai Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua" ("Talks at the Yenan Forum on literature and art"), *Selected Works*, pp. 804–35.

12 He Ruojun, "Shi de sufu ji jiefang" ("The constraints and liberation of scholar-officials"), *Wen yu shi* (*Literature and Historical Age*), No. 24 (1947) in Shanghai Municipal Archives (SMA) D2-179-2; Huai Xiang, "Wenren gaizao chuyi" ("My rude proposal on the reform of literati"), *Wenhui bao*, 15 May 1946, p. 6. See Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) pp. 184–94 for the use of *zhishifenzi* and *zhishi jieji* outside the Communist Party.

13 Zhu Ziqing, "Zhishifenzi jintian de renwu" ("The present obligations of Chinese intellectuals"), *Zhu Ziqing quanji* (*Collected Works of Zhu Ziqing*) (Beijing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1990), pp. 538–39.

14 By the 1940s, Benda's *La Trahison des clercs* had been translated into 50 languages. Charles Kurzman and Lynn Owens, "The sociology of intellectuals," *Annual Review of Sociology*, No. 28 (2002), p. 65.

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Table 1: **Number of *Wenhui Bao* Articles with Terms for the Educated Population**

	Before 1949		After the 1949 revolution						
	1938	1946	1952	1957	1962	1969	1986	1990	1997
Zhishifenzi[a] (intellectuals 知识分子)	27	53	798	1,511	212	642	341	361	272
Xuezhe (scholars 学者)	210	285	141	317	266	12	585	478	967
Wenren (literari 文人)	93	113	26	80	99	20	40	72	148
Wenhuaren (cultural personnel 文化人)	25	113	12	9	6	2	21	20	92
Dushuren (men of letters 读书人)	9	25	9	19	26	2	14	13	27

Note:
[a]The figures include both Chinese phrases for intellectuals, *zhi1shifenzi* and *zhi4shifenzi*. The latter was dropped by *Wenhui bao* after the 1949 takeover.
Source:
Electronic database of *Wenhui bao* at Shanghai Municipal Library

various phrases referring to the educated. A newspaper in metropolitan Shanghai, *Wenhui bao* was established in January 1938 and became a bestseller and a channel for political and intellectual debates. It was closed down by the puppet Wang Jingwei regime 15 months later and reopened in August 1945, only to be shut down by Nationalist officials in May 1947. Re-established after the Communist revolution, the paper has since been sponsored by the state.[15] It is valuable for gauging linguistic changes in urban China.

The data show that *zhishifenzi* was not a popular phrase in *Wenhui bao* before the revolution. The lack of entries of the phrase in pre-revolutionary dictionaries confirms that it was not a major concept of social classification. After the revolution, the phrase appeared frequently in the newspaper at the other terms' expense; it was collected into dictionaries, especially those aimed at spreading CCP ideas of politics, society and history.[16] The Party included people whom it identified as *zhishifenzi* in political study, school takeovers, cadre-training classes, mass campaigns and other activities to reconstruct state and society. All these activities promoted the CCP understanding of intellectuals.

No event, however, was as crucial as Thought Reform in elevating *zhishifenzi* to a dominant concept of social classification. The origin of this campaign can be dated to September 1951 when Peking University organized political study for the faculty and staff. Shortly afterwards, Mao indicated approvingly that "a campaign of self-education and self-reform" was needed on "the educational

15 Xiong Yuezhi (ed.), *Lao Shanghai mingren mingshi mingwu daguan* (*An Overview of Famous People, Events and Objects in Old Shanghai*) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1997), p. 329; *Shanghai zhanggu cidian* (*Dictionaries of Shanghai Anecdotes*) (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2000), pp. 314–15.

16 The original 1947 edition of the authoritative dictionary *Cihai* (*The Sea of Words*) and the 1948 edition of *Ciyuan* (*The Roots of Words*) do not have an entry for *zhishifenzi*, only *zhishi jieji*. For more information on related dictionary entries, see U, "The making of *zhishifenzi*," p. 101, n.1.

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and cultural fronts and among various types of *zhishifenzi*." The thought reform of Chinese intellectuals, he stated, was "one of the important requirements" for China to "achieve democratic reform thoroughly and industrialization step by step."[17]

In Shanghai, Thought Reform pushed the usage of *zhishifenzi* in *Wenhui bao* to new heights because of official announcements, model essays by professors and others undergoing thought reform and rejoinders by teachers, students and so on. The overlapping registration of unemployed intellectuals (*shiye zhishifenzi* 失业知识分子) produced other news items that included the phrase as well.[18] When the campaign peaked in 1952, almost 800 articles incorporated the phrase, often repeatedly. This represented a 70 per cent increase from the previous year and a 2,000 per cent increase from the 1940s. The phrase's appearance was extraordinarily high given that the newspaper printed only 40 to 80 articles per day during this period. Moreover, radio programmes, magazines and neighbourhood announcements promoted the thought reform of intellectuals. District governments held conferences and study classes as writers, teachers and others criticized themselves as intellectuals.[19] These state-orchestrated events led to innumerable public uses of the phrase *zhishifenzi*.

A few years later, when professors, engineers and others spoke out during the Hundred Flowers campaign, many referred to themselves as *zhishifenzi*; some resuscitated pre-revolutionary interpretations of the concept to oppose CCP political domination.[20] The composition of such professional groups had undergone major changes since 1949, as a result of the Party's intervention in the workplace. But when the above people called themselves or one another *zhishifenzi*, differences in their backgrounds, lifestyles or beliefs had become secondary. They categorized themselves as the Party had classified them. When the CCP hit back with the Anti-Rightist campaign, it attacked the educated personnel carried over from the revolution as *zichan jieji zhishifenzi* (bourgeois intellectuals). This label affected high school and college students trained under CCP rule, too, as the Party indicated that some of them had embraced bourgeois thinking rather than working-class standpoints.[21] With the publication of the attacks and counterattacks, *Wenhui bao* recorded the highest usage of *zhishifenzi* in 1957.

17 Wang Wen, "Jianguo chuqi zhishifenzi sixiang gaizao yundong" ("The early PRC Thought Reform of intellectuals"), in Guo Dehong *et al.* (eds.), *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo zhuanti shigao 1949–1956* (*Special Topics on PRC History*) (Sichuan: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2004), pp. 328–38.

18 U, "The making of *zhishifenzi*."

19 Pan Hong, "Shanghai zhishifenzi sixiang gaizao yundong" ("The Thought Reform campaign and Shanghai intellectuals"), in Zou Yonggeng (ed.), *Lishi jubian 1949–1956* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2001), pp. 319–37; Theodore Chen, *Thought Reform of the Chinese Intellectuals* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), pp. 59–79.

20 Zhu Zheng, *1957 nian de xiaji* (*The Summer of 1957*) (Henan: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1998) summarizes the debates.

21 Yang Fengcheng, *Zhongguo gongchandang de zhishifenzi lilun yu zhengce yanjiu* (*The CCP's Theory of and Policies on Intellectuals*) (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2005), pp. 143–45.

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The Thought Reform Discourse of Intellectuals

During Thought Reform, CCP discourse about intellectuals inundated the media and work organizations. It absorbed a diversity of people into the category and publicized their alleged class-based shortcomings as well as potential for political improvement. The discourse disseminated an official perspective on the intellectual and opened up multiple subject positions within the category for social identification.

The CCP began to publicize widely its conception of *zhishifenzi* after the revolution. Borrowing from Leninist thinking, it defined intellectuals as a stratum of mental workers between the antagonistic classes of capitalists and workers.[22] China's intellectuals were artists, officials and other jobholders who had shared different relations with the communist movement. This definition was reprinted in dictionaries, but meant little for the vast countryside and increasingly less for urban areas, because of capital flight after the revolution and Party intervention in private enterprises. A no less formal definition appeared in late 1951, when the Party sought to register unemployed intellectuals and return them to productive labour. Intellectuals were defined as virtually all those who had completed junior high school or had an equivalent education. Large numbers of shop managers, office personnel, schoolteachers and technicians became intellectuals *de jure*. Provided that they met the requirements, former religious practitioners, fortune-tellers, dance-hall girls, children of expropriated landlords, housewives and secondary school dropouts could all register as unemployed intellectuals.[23] By an act of the state, these people were included in the same social category as professors, writers and engineers – they were all intellectuals.

If the registration of unemployed intellectuals institutionalized the CCP definition of *zhishifenzi*, Thought Reform popularized the Party's view of these people. As in the 1942 Yan'an Forum, the Party castigated intellectuals for their poor political consciousness and understanding of the working class. The rebuke was harsher than before, because the Party now confronted all intellectuals rather than a selected group of writers and artists sympathetic to its cause, as in the Forum. Theodore Chen's research on the CCP perspective on intellectuals in the early 1950s still stands as the most thorough, even though he focused only on the highly educated. To summarize Chen, the Party considered intellectuals pro-American and hostile towards the Soviet Union. They supported bourgeois political ideas and practice and looked down upon workers and peasants. Some of them still secretly supported the Nationalist Party or other political parties, while others were indifferent to politics. Furthermore, intellectuals were pleasure-seeking and lacked professional discipline and dedication. Professors, scientists and engineers relied on theories, methods and equipment from capitalist societies, but regarded knowledge as above class and politics.[24]

22 V. I. Lenin, *On the Intelligentsia* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983), pp. 11–13.
23 U, "The making of *zhishifenzi*," pp. 109, 112.
24 Chen, *Thought Reform*, pp. 54–56, 62–69.

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These ''class attributes'' of intellectuals were publicized in the media and through local meetings. They were restated in the workplace by Party officials. Professors and others were forced to detail how their lifestyles – so different from those endured by workers and peasants – had led to political and ideological errors. And the press printed confessional statements from writers, scholars and others. Reinforced by such personal ''confirmations,'' the Thought Reform discourse of intellectuals must be contrasted with the Party's concurrent depiction of the working class. With facts, data and analyses few and far between, workers were presented as patriotic, selfless and committed to socialism.[25]

The CCP, however, maintained that no matter how careerist or anti-revolutionary intellectuals had been, they could turn over a new leaf through diligent study and reflection. This assumption exemplified the Party's united-front policy of the early 1950s and justified the Thought Reform campaign. Intellectuals purportedly would gain understanding of the communist movement and socialism and therefore appreciate CCP rule. Even those intellectuals inside the Party were not spared from the campaign. As Premier Zhou Enlai noted, they should continue to ''explore, study and practise'' the ''advanced thinking'' of the working class.[26]

The official inclusion of different kinds of people in the category of intellectual and the presupposition of their political improvement engendered a need for distinction. In reality, local CCP authorities had been differentiating so-called intellectuals before Thought Reform. A well-known example was recruitment into cadre-training classes, which favoured young people and reflected the Party's ''cult of youth'' traceable to student mobilization in the May Fourth Movement.[27] Moreover, even before the revolution, the CCP underground had penetrated schools and universities and investigated faculty and students to assist political mobilization.[28] Thought Reform furthered the Party's investigation and classification of intellectuals. Like Land Reform and the Three-Anti and Five-Anti campaigns of the early 1950s, which penetrated the countryside, government and industry, Thought Reform imposed social distinctions and divisions perceived by the Party on state and society.

It must be noted that the CCP was neither the first nor the only ruling regime to have an official category of intellectuals. The Chinese followed the Bolshevik example, which was also adopted by other state-socialist countries. The official discourse, division and classification of intellectuals in these countries probably reflected their own history and politics. But there has been little effort to study

25 See the summer and autumn 1952 issues of *Wenhui bao*.

26 Zhou Enlai, ''Guanyu zhishifenzi de gaizao wenti'' (''Regarding the thought reform of intellectuals''), *Zhou Enlai tongyi zhanxiang wenxuan* (*Selection of Zhou Enlai's Writing on the United Front*) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1984), pp. 215–17.

27 Ezra Vogel, *Canton under Communism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 55–57; Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment*, pp. 59–61.

28 See, for example, Lü Xingwei, *Shanghai putong jiaoyushi 1949–1989* (*A History of Shanghai Primary and Secondary Education*) (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994).

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the reification of the intellectual in these societies, as functionalist definitions are still routinely applied to officially-determined categories. The following sections will further show how Thought Reform reified the Chinese intellectual and how an alternative approach to studying intellectuals is possible without succumbing to *a priori* functionalist definitions.

Campaign Mobilization and Group Relations to the Intellectual Category

Thought Reform's pattern of mobilization placed different social groups in different relations to the category *zhishifenzi*. Professors, scientists, writers and secondary school teachers were drawn into the centre of the category, most strongly implicated in the class-based shortcomings alleged by the state. Well-educated officials, industrial managers and others shared less intense relations to the category. The campaign enhanced the status of the Party members and young adults encompassed by the category, and extended such a privilege to college and senior high school students. This is not say that these relations would become permanent, but that Thought Reform, like later state-sponsored events, shaped group relations to the category *zhishifenzi*.

When Mao mentioned thought reform for intellectuals in late 1951, he meant that every educated person in government, industry and other sectors should undergo the exercise, if not everyone who had completed junior high school, although he specifically highlighted thought reform for educational and cultural personnel. Two weeks later, the China Democratic National Construction Association, a political association with many businessmen and industrialists that the CCP had kept under its supervision, decided to initiate thought reform in the commercial and industrial sectors.[29] The fact that the Association took action implies that its representatives thought that there were many intellectuals in these sectors. Representatives of commerce and industry in Shanghai did believe that many intellectuals were in the sectors and began to organize thought reform in December 1951.[30]

Shanghai's Thought Reform campaign, however, converged on the educational and cultural sectors. Business and industrial personnel, Party and state officials as well as doctors and nurses who qualified as *zhishifenzi* were not major targets. The campaign began in universities, spreading to secondary schools and research institutes and encompassing writers and newspaper employees.[31] There were three main reasons behind this pattern of mobilization. First, it reflected the CCP belief that "a cultural army" (*wenhua jundui* 文化军队) was urgently needed for rallying support for the regime.[32] Expediting the re-education of

29 Tang Peiji (ed.), *Zhongguo lishi dashi nianbiao*, *xiandai juan* (*Chronology of China's Main Historical Events, Volume on the Contemporary Period*) (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe), p. 611.

30 "Gongshangjie biqie xuyao sixiang gaizao" ("Thought Reform is urgently required in the commercial and industrial sector"), *Wenhui bao*, 10 December 1952.

31 Pan Hong, "The Thought Reform campaign and Shanghai intellectuals," pp. 322–34.

32 The concept of cultural army was articulated in Mao's talk at the Yan'an Forum on Arts and Literature.

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teachers and writers and integrating them into the Party's cultural front was important politically. Secondly, the CCP had conducted purges in government and other institutions to remove undesirable personnel, especially those who had had close ties to the Nationalist regime. Many of the dismissed, however, had found work in the expanding educational or cultural sector.[33] Thought reform was most needed in these sectors.

Thirdly, however, the most important reason why the Shanghai campaign turned only sections of so-called intellectuals into targets was the onset of the Three-Anti and Five-Anti campaigns. A month after Mao announced thought reform for intellectuals, he initiated the Three-Anti campaign to tackle problems in government. Two months later, the Five-Anti campaign was launched in the economic sector to attack malfeasance.[34] These campaigns targeted the staff in those sectors as government officials or economic personnel but not as *zhishifenzi*, although many qualified as such under the Party's definition. Hence the political study and other thought reform practices that Shanghai officials, engineers and others underwent occurred outside the Thought Reform campaign. Thought Reform was, in practice, deployed against educational and cultural personnel.[35] This reflected, first, the impact of coexisting political developments and, secondly, the Party's preoccupation with strengthening ideological control. Thought Reform pulled the educational and cultural personnel into the centre of the social classification. By contrast, industrial managers, government officials and other educated people were not inscribed with an equally strong – and dubious – identity as *zhishifenzi*, although many of them were found to be inadequate in other ways by the Three-Anti and Five-Anti campaigns.

Thought Reform reinforced the higher status of those Party members encompassed by the official category of "intellectuals." In Shanghai, the government depended on these people to conduct the campaign. Within secondary education, for example, a group of Party members who were education officials, school principals and teachers was first trained for the campaign. They underwent political study, confession and criticism and self-criticism and were taught how to organize these activities. An additional 120 Party members received training before the campaign engulfed the entire faculty and staff. At the college level, Party members were sent directly from party-state agencies to campuses.[36] Data on the academic qualifications of the Party

33 Harry Harding, *Organizing China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), p. 74; Eddy U, "The hiring of rejects: teacher recruitment and the crisis of socialism," *Modern China*, No. 30(2004), pp. 46–80.

34 Pang Song, "'Sanfan,' 'wufan' yundong" ("The Three-Anti and Five-Anti campaigns"), in Guo Dehong *et al.*, *Special Topics on PRC History*, pp. 300 and 312.

35 Regional differences existed as to who were affected by the campaign. Whereas 6,000 Beijing primary school teachers participated in thought reform in late 1951, Shanghai's primary school teachers were not included in the campaign, Pan Hong, "The Thought Reform campaign and Shanghai intellectuals," pp. 335–37. Within Shanghai newspaper organizations, only editors and managers, but not journalists, were targeted, SMA B36-1-14 (1953), p. 17.

36 Pan Hong, "The Thought Reform campaign and Shanghai intellectuals," p. 323.

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members are not available, but most of them probably qualified as *zhishifenzi*. Thought Reform involved many literary-based activities such as political study and evaluation of written confessions. The Shanghai government probably stressed academic qualification when assigning Party members to school and universities.

During the campaign, Party members were in charge of scheduling activities and explaining policies and procedures. They evaluated individual performances, investigated those suspected of sabotage, co-ordinated with the police and prepared reports for higher authorities. They received help from a larger group of activists, some of whom had also been trained for the campaign. Mostly in their 20s and drawn from their own workplaces, these activists helped set standards of performance, led political study, kept records of small-group activities and nudged and assisted peers to heed state requirements.[37] These Party members and activists saw their positions among so-called intellectuals elevated by their leadership role in the campaign.

Thought Reform also conferred upon college and senior high school students preferred statuses as intellectuals. Compared to the experience of Party members and activists, this was an unintended consequence, notwithstanding the CCP's cult of youth. In September 1951, when the first 6,000 college personnel underwent thought reform in Beijing and Tianjin, their students helped publicize the campaign and demand effort from faculty and staff.[38] When the campaign reached Shanghai, college and senior high school students (but not junior high school students) had become targets, too. This reflected the Party's redefinition of intellectuals as anyone who had completed junior high school or had comparable education; by implication, such students should be subject to thought reform. The Shanghai planners stated specifically that "the content and requirements of the training [for college students] should be comparable to that for the faculty."[39]

In practice, Shanghai students were not so much a target as a tool of the campaign, especially after March 1952 when the CCP allowed local governments to deploy students in their teachers' thought reform.[40] What occurred at the East China Normal University was instructive. Student representatives attended faculty political study daily and worked with the authorities on how to "relay in detail … teachers' confessions" to the student body. The latter would evaluate the confessions, consider the backgrounds and job performance of the teachers and then offer them "earnest advice" on "undertaking analysis and criticism" of themselves. The students would use "weapons of publicity" that included

37 Information on activists came from three informants, all in their early 20s during the campaign. One was a Party member and two were activists. They helped organize the campaign in the institution of education.

38 "Jingjin gaoxiao jiaoshi yihuo chubu chengji" ("College teachers in Beijing and Tianjin have obtained initial successes"), *Wenhui bao*, 14 November 1951, p. 1.

39 SMA B105-1-646 (1952), p. 2.

40 Wang Wen, "The early PRC Thought Reform of intellectuals," pp. 344–45.

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blackboard messages and flyers to pressure teachers to act properly in political study, confession or self-criticism.[41]

At the university, small "visiting groups" composed of students were formed under official auspices. Their members went to the workplaces and contacted the classmates, colleagues, friends and relatives mentioned in faculty confessions. They examined faculty publications and writings as well as syllabi and lecture materials. The aim of these visits and research was to confirm the truthfulness of faculty confessions and to unravel faculty backgrounds and political consciousness further on behalf of the state. The visiting groups also conducted evening home visits to "assist teachers" to carry out thought reform.[42]

At the secondary level too, students became an instrument of the campaign. An excellent example was what the Shanghai government called "teacher-student symposia" in which faculty were forced to divulge "political and ideological errors" to student representatives. The latter then recommended how the teachers should improve themselves to serve their country and profession. It was reported that in one August evening in 1952, over 300 students listened attentively when some teachers "bravely exposed" their shortcomings.[43] When teachers completed thought reform, moreover, students would organize celebrations on campus. In one school, they put up banners and bulletin board messages, staged performances, wrote essays, cleaned faculty offices and even decorated the school with flowers to welcome these supposedly changed men and women.[44]

The interactions between teachers and students during Thought Reform practically elevated the latter into a politically desirable sub-group within the category of intellectuals at their teachers' expense. They reinforced the Party's cult of youth or the perceived generational gap in the institution of education that was a legacy of the May Fourth Movement. In other words, the campaign extended to the students the belief that young intellectuals were better than older intellectuals.

Investigation, Discipline and Political Classification

I have so far indicated that Thought Reform normalized the CCP classification of intellectuals and placed different groups in different relations to the category. This section focuses on the campaign in Shanghai secondary education to illustrate how official processes of investigation, discipline and political

41 "Bangzhu jiaoshi sixiang gaizao de chubu jingyan," *Wenhui bao*, 6 May 1952, p. 10.

42 *Ibid.*; two of the above informants.

43 "Relie juxing shisheng zuotanhui" ("Fervently organizing faculty–student symposium"), *Wenhui bao*, 20 August 1952, p. 3; "Zai jiaoshi sixiang gaizao xuexi zhong yinggai shuli zhengque de shisheng guanxi" ("The need to establish the right faculty–student relation in teachers' thought reform"), *Wenhui bao*, 25 August 1952, p. 6.

44 "Daozhong nüzhong tongxue relie huanying laoshi sixiang gaizao guilai" ("The students of Daozhong Girls' Secondary School happily welcome their teachers' return from thought reform"), *Wenhui bao*, 15 September 1952, p. 3.

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classification divided so-called intellectuals into different classes of political subjects and inscribed upon them individual political identities.

For the CCP, Thought Reform was not only about re-educating intellectuals; it was part of the regime's post-revolutionary effort to ascertain the composition of local society to strengthen communist political control. Through the campaign, local governments compiled what Michel Foucault would have called "a meticulous archive constituted in terms of bodies and days" on the participants' lives.[45] Party officials compared class backgrounds, job histories and lifestyles to identify potential sources of support and resistance within universities, publishing houses and other workplaces.

The CCP was most interested in knowing so-called intellectuals' associations with other political forces, because this would help it gauge individual political consciousness. Table 2 reports the ties the Shanghai secondary school faculty and staff had allegedly had to the Nationalist regime before 1949.[46] The data were mainly collected through confessions that provided details of offices, movements and activities. At least 20 per cent of the people had been active in the defeated regime, and a small number had held ranking positions or worked undercover in schools. Similar data were collected in other places. Within a group of 356 newspaper editors, almost 40 per cent reportedly had "historical political problems," that is, had acted against the communist movement in some

Table 2: **Former Nationalist Experience of Shanghai's Secondary School Faculty and Staff (out of 7,069 people in regular and technical schools)**

KMT Party or Youth Corps administrators or administrators in KMT-sponsored political organizations (from district to provincial level)	331
High- and mid-level government officials, military officers or police officers	376
Other officials, military officers or police officers	316
Group leaders of special agents and group leaders in KMT-sponsored political organizations (proven or suspected)	53
Special agents (proven or suspected)	367
Regular members in the KMT Party, Youth Corps or other KMT-sponsored political organizations	1,515
Low-level state employees (section chief and below)	600
Total	3,558

Notes:

High- and mid-level officials, military officers and police officers include heads of province and county; heads of central ministry and county and municipal bureau; section chiefs in district governments; and divisional and regimental military commanders as well as lieutenant colonels. KMT-sponsored political organizations include the Youth Party and Social Democratic Party.

Source:

SMA B105-1-664 (1952–53)

45 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 189.

46 Established in the early 1920s, the Chinese Youth Party (*Zhongguo qingnian dang*) had an anti-Communist, anti-Soviet agenda and was merged into the Nationalist Party after the Second World War, Xiao Zhaoran *et al.*, *Zhonggong dangshi jianming cidian* (*A Concise Dictionary of the Chinese Communist Party's History*) (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1986), p. 32. From the CCP perspective, the Chinese Social Democratic Party (*Zhongguo minzhu shehuidang*) represented the interests of the landlords and compradors. Its members were mostly officials and politicians, *Zhongguo zhengdang cidian* (*A Dictionary of Chinese Political Parties*) (Beijing: Jiling wenshi chubanshe, 1988), p. 69.

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capacity. Among them, 28 had worked for the Nationalist Party or its intelligence agencies, and 15 were former military officers.[47]

The government also reported that former local hegemons (*e'ba* 恶霸), landlords, religious cult leaders, bandits and child molesters were found among the faculty and staff, and that womanizing, gambling and other forms of "hedonism" and "decadence" were "extremely serious" in the teaching ranks.[48] It reported cases of corruption, theft and other illegal activities.[49] It noted that student background in private colleges and universities was "extremely complicated," with hooligans, gamblers, former special-service agents (*tewu* 特务) and even prostitutes found among the students.[50]

Of course, information such as the above contains both overstatements and understatements of political offices, activities and wrongdoing. The Party recognized this problem and would continue to investigate Thought Reform participants after the campaign.[51] Still, the local authorities found the information indispensable. Before discussing how they used it to classify the participants into different political categories, we need to explore the punishment meted out to people identified as wrongdoers by the authorities, because such punishment had critical impacts on the collective and individual identities of so-called intellectuals.

Despite finding large numbers of former Nationalist personnel and lawbreakers in secondary schools, the Shanghai government removed only a small minority of these people from the campuses. The penal instruction below summarized the official strategy of "bringing down one man to warn a hundred":

> Insist on not arresting those who could either be arrested or let go. Make sure those who are arrested have committed a crime deserving five years of imprisonment or more. For individuals whose crime warrants less than five years of imprisonment, suspend their sentences, put them under criminal control (*guanzhi* 管制), or keep and monitor them in the schools.

The government added: "Even objectionable elements, such as those who had raped female students or trafficked in drugs, need not be handled at once. Only

47 SMA B36-1-14, p. 18.

48 SMA B105-1-665 (1952–53), p. 27; SMA A22-1-233 (1956), p. 114; U, "The hiring of rejects," pp. 50–59.

49 SMA B105-1-663, 1952–53, p. 29; SMA B105-1-664 (1952–53), p. 30; Pan Hong, "The Thought Reform campaign and Shanghai intellectuals," p. 324; "Huiyi jiefang chuqi Shanghaishi zhongdeng xuexiao jiaozhiyuan de sixiang gaizao yundong" ("Thought Reform in Shanghai secondary schools"), in Xiang Bolong (ed.), *Zhonggong Shanghaishi Jiaoyu weisheng tiyu xitong dangshi wenji* (*Collections of Party Historical Materials on the Shanghai Systems of Education, Health and Sports*) (Shanghai: Tungji daxue chubanshe, 1996), p. 46.

50 Pan Hong, "The Thought Reform campaign and Shanghai intellectuals," p. 324.

51 Powerful pressure was exerted on the participants during confession, but the state had limited capacity to corroborate the collected information. There were exaggerations of political ties or wrongdoing by individuals under duress, and concealment of such connections and activities by others who feared that disclosure would do them greater harm, Wang Wen, "The early PRC Thought Reform of intellectuals," pp. 344–53.

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when it is absolutely necessary should we use the law against them. Whenever we can use some leniency, use it."[52]

Why did the Party encourage leniency that amounted to an about-face from the "sharp and deliberate" deployment of terror in the previous campaign to suppress counter-revolutionaries?[53] First, the Party leadership did not want Thought Reform to produce dismissals that would exacerbate the sharp rise in unemployment resulting from the Five-Anti campaign.[54] Secondly, it feared that use of severe punishment would discourage Thought Reform participants from disclosing their backgrounds, thoughts and behaviour. Thirdly, from a Leninist perspective, which the Party leadership then shared, incarcerating or dismissing educated people was not as prudent as exploiting their labour to develop the economy. In other words, the need to sustain Thought Reform's momentum, maintain social stability and pursue modernization inhibited the use of harsh punishment. In fact, the Shanghai government wanted former Nationalist personnel, especially those with "proficiency in a line of work" (*yiji zhichang* 一技之长), to stay on campus provided that they had been co-operative and there was no "mass outrage" against them.[55]

The retention of wrongdoers such as the above turned them into primary objects of state surveillance and, as the political climate tightened, sabotage suspects. One can only imagine how Chinese history after 1949 might have changed had the Party used Thought Reform resolutely to purge schools, colleges and other establishments of questionable intellectuals. Would the state-sponsored struggles against so-called intellectuals still have intensified in the Mao era? As it turned out, the campaign reified the Chinese intellectual, especially the non-student sections, into an undesirable social type in three ways: public denunciation; documentation of individual oppositional thinking and deviant behaviour; and retention of wrongdoers and lawbreakers in the workplace. It reinforced the CCP belief that intellectuals were not trustworthy.

During Thought Reform, local governments used the information they collected to divide the participants into different political categories for the purposes of political control, much as Land Reform and the Five-Anti campaign led to classifications of landlords and businesses. Five categories of intellectuals emerged from secondary school personnel in Shanghai: progressives, middle elements, backward elements, reactionaries and counter-revolutionaries.[56] The classification instantly inscribed upon each individual a political identity, the

52 Quoted in Eddy U, "Leninist reforms, workplace conflicts, and teachers in the Chinese Cultural Revolution," *Comparative Studies of Society and History*, No. 47(2005), p. 123.

53 Strauss, "Paternalist terror," p. 83.

54 Christopher Howe, *Employment and Economic Growth in Urban China, 1949–1957* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 96.

55 SMA B105-1-661 (1951–53).

56 The Party authorities had been classifying so-called intellectuals before the campaign. Thought Reform systematized the practice. Originally, up to 18% of the faculty and staff were to be classified as reactionaries. The target was revised to 2–5% probably because of the strengthening of the United Front Policy, SMA C21-2-221 (1951), pp. 43–44.

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justification for which was presumably evident from the records compiled during the campaign.

The "progressives" had three main characteristics: they had disclosed their backgrounds willingly, led a morally principled lifestyle and performed well at work. Former Nationalist personnel were not precluded from this classification. The "middle elements" shared the above traits, but had been guilty of wrongdoing or had shown strongly individualist or other "bourgeois" or "petty-bourgeois" attitudes. The "backward elements" were deemed to be resentful of CCP rule or had been concealing important aspects of their lives. Some had been guilty of sexual harassment, embezzlement or other wrongdoing or had been active in the Nationalist regime. The "reactionaries" were normally former Nationalist agents who had organized attacks against the communist movement or even killed CCP members or been guilty of serious crimes. The backgrounds of "counter-revolutionaries" were often not very different from those of the reactionaries, except that they had not co-operated in the campaign or had "mass outrage" against them for alleged criminal behaviour before the revolution.[57]

The Shanghai government began to recruit "progressives" to become activists while Thought Reform was still under way. Within secondary education, the campaign produced a total of 1,800 activists from the faculty and staff. These people were asked to support school management and future political study classes. The government launched special Sunday training for some 700 teachers with "clear histories and reliable political stances" and intended to recruit 200 of them into the Party to help manage the schools.[58] At the famous Fudan University and Communications University, 45 people were recruited into the Party.[59] For the individuals, their selection as Party members or activists confirmed that they were, in thoughts and deeds, better than their colleagues. To the authorities, these new Party members and activists were obviously some of the best intellectuals – ones who could be used for controlling the teaching profession or even the rest of the category of intellectuals.

Conclusion: Studying the Reification of the Chinese Intellectual

No amount of analysis of work responsibility or social function would prove that professors, industrial technicians, proof-reading clerks and others who have completed junior high school belong to a selfsame category of intellectuals. Because research has ignored the theoretical leap in the CCP definition of intellectuals – by substituting Western academic functionalism for the CCP's official Marxian functionalism or by taking the part (notable scholars) to stand for the whole (the category *zhishifenzi*) – it has failed to examine the multi-

57 See n. 35.
58 SMA B105-5-665, pp. 27–28.
59 Pan Hong, "The Thought Reform campaign and Shanghai intellectuals," p. 325.

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layered process through which the Party imposed its understanding of intellectuals on state and society after 1949. During Thought Reform, the official mobilization of local populations and deployment of discourse, confession and other practices of domination converted the once obscure, contested concept of *zhishifenzi* into a highly visible social type.

Thought Reform, however, did not turn the CCP classification of *zhishifenzi* into a neatly defined social category. It reproduced and extended pre-revolutionary ambiguities concerning the category's composition, especially those surrounding the place of Party members and students among intellectuals. If professors, writers and teachers were regarded as prototypical intellectuals after the campaign, the relations of educated government and industrial personnel as well as of Party members, high school students and others to the category were less straightforward. Moreover, the official discourse of intellectuals did not address ongoing social change. Would jobholders (including workers) undergoing adult education become intellectuals upon acquiring a junior high school level of education?

Nor did Thought Reform engender a monolithic social identity for those identified as intellectuals. The pattern of mobilization, investigation, punishment and classification gave so-called intellectuals different political traits, to the extent that local governments regarded these people differently. Equally important, the CCP reification of *zhishifenzi* would continue after Thought Reform, with the classification assuming new political meanings, internal divisions and even technical definitions, not to mention new terms of abuse, such as "bourgeois intellectuals" and "stinky ninth category," that signified critical change in the official view on *zhishifenzi*. Moreover, resistance against the official classification apparently persisted. The figures in Table 1 (some of which are reproduced in Figure 1) suggest that the political relaxation of the early 1960s, mid-1980s and late 1990s promoted older phrases for the educated, while political tightening increased the circulation of the term *zhishifenzi.* By the late 1990s, the phrase *zhishifenzi* had clearly lost its dominance as a referent for the educated. The concept has since been reinterpreted and now embraces a diversity of meanings, as it did before 1949.[60]

The reification of *zhishifenzi* has been a central feature of CCP rule. The Party's vision and division of the intellectual has had a profound impact on central policies, local organization and individual behaviour that only future research can elucidate. My analysis of Thought Reform contains hints for such research that can advance understanding of CCP rule, state–intellectual relations and the experience of so-called intellectuals. First, to unravel the CCP reification of the intellectual and its impact on central policies, we need to examine the Party's discourse over time to see how the Party defined, differentiated and represented intellectuals and established instructions for social control. On the

60 See two recent volumes on Chinese intellectuals, Xu Jilin (ed.), *Gonggongxing yu gonggong zhishifenzi* (*Public-ness and Public Intellectuals*) (Beijing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2003) and Zhu Yong (ed.), *Zhishifenzi yinggai ganshenme?* (*What Should Intellectuals Do?*) (Beijing: Shishi chubanshe, 1999).

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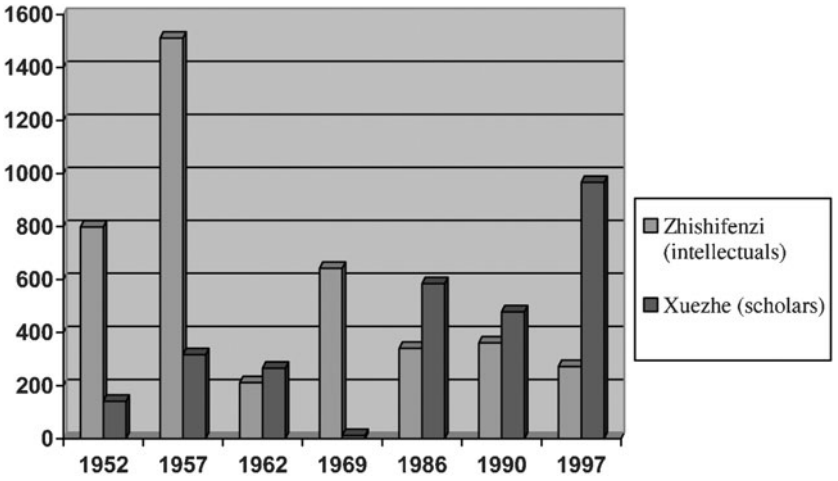
Figure 1: **Number of *Wenhui Bao* Articles with the Phrases *Zhishifenzi* and *Xuezhe***



one hand, this would involve delineating the theoretical thinking and representational strategies the regime invested in describing the intellectual by studying widely circulated texts (such as speeches, news items and films). On the other hand, it would require analysing the relations between these pronouncements and political and social programmes carried out by the Party (such as the Hundred Flowers campaign, workplace policies and changing salary schemes). For instance, the CCP has used cinema widely to spread its understanding of intellectuals. But research has yet even to describe the content of the films, let alone analyse how they fitted with Party policies.

Another major issue is how the CCP discourse influenced local organization and hence the local identities of so-called intellectuals. Thought Reform placed the question of intellectuals not only on local government agendas, but also as a matter of political control within universities, factories, trading firms and many other workplaces. Thereafter, countless officials and managers encountered issues related to *zhishifenzi* (their role in management, compensation, Party membership applications and so on). These officials and managers acted *within the local context of work and social relations*. Their actions could not but affect local organization and the lives of so-called intellectuals differently. Common phrases the Party used to censure local authorities for mismanaging so-called intellectuals, such as "switching erratically between left and right" (*huzuo huyou* 忽左忽右) and "preferring to be left rather than right" (*ningzuo wuyou* 宁左勿右), not to mention rectification campaigns, suggest that there are many interesting local histories of organization vis-à-vis so-called intellectuals waiting to be excavated.

Finally, we need to explore how the CCP reification of the intellectual shaped individual behaviour. With its definition, investigation and classification of

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intellectuals, Thought Reform inserted new layers of incentives into the workplace, as local authorities used gathered information and their judgement on so-called intellectuals to elicit co-operation, exercise surveillance and allocate authority. Those affected by such changes reacted differently. Some school-teachers in Shanghai reportedly switched to a crew cut and began wearing canvas shoes immediately – they adopted "the appearance of veteran workers."[61] In other words, intellectuals began to remake their intellectual identities as soon as they were identified as such by the local authorities. Some would move into other locations within the category *zhishifenzi*; some would virtually move out of the category by getting blue-collar jobs or ascending the Party ranks. An analysis of how individuals negotiated their intellectual identities based on their other social identities, such as age, gender, level of skill, class background and work history, and on changes in the official discourse would certainly advance understanding of state–intellectual relations and the lived experience of so-called intellectuals.

In conclusion, this article has not regarded the Chinese intellectual as any specific type of individual. It has, instead, described the political campaign that reified the Chinese intellectual into a major social category. I have further suggested that to study the CCP reification of *zhishifenzi*, delineating the theoretical thinking and representational strategies the Party invested in reproducing the category is an excellent starting point. Mapping out how the official discourse of intellectuals has affected central policies, local organization and the status, interests and behaviour of individuals is also important for advancing research on Chinese intellectuals.

61 "Women fangwen le canjia sixiang gaizao de laoshimen" ("We visited our teachers undergoing thought reform"), *Wenhui bao*, 16 August 1952.

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