

BOOK REVIEW

Eddy U,

Creating the Intellectual:

Chinese Communism and the Rise of a Classification

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Creating the Intellectual: Chinese Communism and the Rise of a Classification, by Eddy U, puts forth an important new understanding of the intellectual as a social category under Chinese Communism. Through novel interpretations of pivotal moments in the history of Chinese Communism, U shows how the Chinese Communist Party imposed a category onto a diverse population, who then in turn sought to renegotiate the parameters of that category. In that sense, the “intellectual” has been defined and redefined by both the Party and the people who made up that very label. Relying on archival, film, published, and academic sources in Chinese and English, U shows that the category of “intellectual” needs to be understood particularly in terms of how it has been socially constructed. *Creating the Intellectual* is in conversation with previous scholarship on the history of intellectuals as a group as well as scholarship on social identification and categorization in general from Alexopoulos,¹ Andreas,² Bowker and Star,³ Browning and Siegelbaum,⁴ Cheek,⁵ Fitzpatrick,⁶ Goldman,⁷ Kuhn,⁸ and Kurzman and Owens.⁹

To begin, chapter 1, “Reexamining the Intellectual and Chinese Communism,” introduces the rest of the book’s chapters, its main arguments, and U’s theoretical approach to the study. He calls this, “An Institutional-Constructivist Approach” (4). U points out that while previous scholarship on the intellectual and Chinese Communism has focused mostly on the rubric of the people versus the regime, his new approach, drawing from the theories of Durkheim, Foucault, and Bourdieu, is based on the importance of seeing how the category of “the intellectual” itself was created and negotiated over time in the PRC. Indeed, one of the most powerful and important arguments of this book is that we should consider how the category of “intellectuals” was contextually created by both people who identified as them and those who sought to identify others as such. Three other major points that U introduces in the first chapter are “Official Representation of the Intellectual” (7), “Local Identification of the Subject” (8), and “Informal Negotiation of the Classification” (9). These themes run throughout the stories told in the book. The CCP sought to create official representations of intellectuals through propaganda, culture, education, political discourse and training, bureaucratic institutions, and a litany of paperwork. Despite these centrally orchestrated attempts, however, examples from across the country show that, at the local level, people tended to interpret the official representation in a variety of ways. The response to all of this

labelling from intellectuals themselves constituted an informal process of negotiation over how to define and represent intellectuals.

Chapter 2, “The Birth of a Classification,” traces the fascinating origins of the Chinese word for intellectual, “*zhishifenzi*” (知识分子/知識分子). U provides here the first explanation for the origins of this term in this way, differing from earlier writings that link it to the French “*intellectuels*” and the Russian “*intelligentsia*.” Instead, U shows that “*zhishifenzi*” was deliberately chosen by the CCP’s leaders to replace the more amorphous, commonly used during the May 4th period, “*zhishijieji*” (知识阶级/知識階級), or “intellectual class.” U points out convincingly that these terms do not come from French or Russian, but like many other modern political ideas in China, are “return graphic loans”—that is, Japanese using Chinese characters in a Classical Chinese sense to translate from Western languages, and then reintroduced into China by translating texts from Japanese into Chinese. The Japanese original for “the intellectual class” is “*chishiki kaikyuu*,” which was widely used by Japanese writers in the 1910s. By the 1920s, “*zhishijieji*” was commonly used in Chinese journals and newspapers. These neologisms came at an important time, replacing words that had fallen out of favor with the collapse of the Qing Dynasty like “*shi*” (士) (sir or gentleman), “*wenren*” (文人) (person of culture), and “*dushuren*” (读书人/讀書人) (one who reads books). These older words were too problematic in Republican China because of their strong connections with the imperial tradition of Confucian scholarship and education. U then traces some of the debates among CCP leaders about intellectuals, showing that in the 1920s they went back and forth about different parameters and understandings of what exactly intellectuals are in a Marxist sense, before finally abandoning the term “intellectual class” after the 1927 Shanghai Massacre and using “*zhishifenzi*” exclusively instead. In Marxist-Leninist theory, there could not be a separate class of intellectuals, but instead most of them were either bourgeois or petty-bourgeois in origin and could either be pawns of the ruling class or weapons for the working class, and thus “*fenzi*”—societal elements. Interestingly, during the first decade of the CCP’s existence, we can already see a trend that would be repeated throughout the Party’s history: people who clearly came from intellectual backgrounds recast themselves as “proletarian revolutionaries” and then portrayed fellow educated people as

problematic “intellectuals.” Chen Duxiu did this first by separating himself from other May 4th intellectuals like Hu Shi, and he was followed in this pattern by subsequent CCP leaders.

Chapter 3, “Visible Subjects in the Countryside,” focuses on the Rectification Campaign of 1942 to 1944 in the communist base area of Yan’an. This campaign was the template used in subsequent targeting of intellectuals. It introduced the techniques of reeducation, self-criticism, supervision, and punishment of intellectuals used later on in the PRC. After the CCP welcomed some 40,000 intellectuals from across China into Yan’an to work in propaganda, culture, fine arts, administration, and education, it became clear to the Party’s leaders that these people had the potential for both usefulness and risk to the Party. On the one hand, the Party always said that it needed to welcome intellectuals and experts into its fold to help build socialism, on the other hand, it made sure to portray intellectuals as the most likely people to subvert the socialist revolution from within due to their selfishness, individualism, careerism, and slavishness. Ironically, as a college graduate educated in the classics with work experience as a librarian, teacher, and school administrator, if Mao Zedong had not been a CCP leader, he certainly would have been labelled a “*zhishifenzi*.” However, in reality, he and his veteran comrades dropped their intellectual statuses for the superior title of a “proletarian revolutionary,” someone more educated and experienced than the average proletarian who could lead them to the communist revolution that they needed. During the Rectification Campaign, a series of articles appeared in the communist press criticizing writers, artists, and teachers who expressed bourgeois and petty-bourgeois behaviors and attitudes while living in the communist base area. Things like wearing neat scholars’ robes and western-style hats could make one a target in Yan’an for criticism, reeducation, and even relocation to the countryside. In response, intellectuals in Yan’an adopted survival strategies like donning peasants’ clothes, volunteering to join the People’s Liberation Army, and recasting their personal biographies to downplay their privileged past in favor of experienced suffering. Revealingly, the Party chose not to relocate the majority of intellectuals to the army or the countryside, preferring to instead keep them in the Party’s schools, publishing houses, and offices as useable, highly objectified subjects.

Chapter 4, “The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of a Registration Drive,” turns to a case study of the 1951-1952 registration drive of unemployed intellectuals in Shanghai. Relying on archival sources from the Shanghai Municipal Archives, this chapter analyzes how the PRC’s largest city categorized and objectified a population of 40,000 unemployed intellectuals. Most of these people actively wanted to apply for unemployed intellectual status because it meant they would soon be placed for jobs in a city with a then 20% unemployment rate overall. The state hoped to find experts who would be useful for the rebuilding of war-torn China. They were disappointed to find that most of the city’s unemployed intellectuals had no specific skills and had not been to college. Despite the lackluster results of the search, the process of registering them itself was very significant. The registration drive involved submitting one’s family background, individual class status, past and present

involvement in political organizations, the backgrounds of all close relatives and friends, and an individually written biographical narrative. In order to make sure that the paperwork matched with reality, the city’s relevant government offices sent teams of officials to investigate the applicants’ living conditions and close associates. After a process that lasted several months in total (too long for some people desperate for work), tens of thousands of people who previously never considered themselves “*zhishifenzi*” now did. They thus became legible and useable subjects to the Communist regime.

Chapter 5, “Classification and Organization in a School System,” continues with using archival sources to tell this time how the classification and monitoring of intellectuals played out in the workplace in early 1950s Shanghai. Officials with the city’s Ministry of Education went into Shanghai’s schools to investigate teachers, administrative staff, and students. Teachers were repeatedly classified and examined for past and present political associations, attitudes towards cooperating with the state, and political outlook. The understandably large number of teachers and administrators with past links to the GMD alarmed the Communist officials observing them, as did their selfish behaviors and licentious habits. Reminiscent of the CCP leadership, these officials mostly came from intellectual backgrounds themselves but cast themselves as very distanced from the teachers in their reports. In response, the teachers issued complaints to the state during the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Three-Antis and Five-Antis Campaigns, when the state asked teachers to criticize officials for corruption and excess. In their complaints, teachers cast officials as rude, mean, unhelpful, wasting money, and imposing too many rules too often on them. Reminiscent once again of their predecessors in Yan’an, these teachers, when faced with reeducation and questioning, tried to emphasize that they were oppressed under GMD rule, which led their questioners to think that the teachers were only saying what they thought the officials wanted to hear and thus were dishonest and careerist. Once again, intellectuals (in this case schoolteachers) became legible, classified subjects who were both useable and suspect to the CCP.

Chapter 6, “An Open Struggle of Redefinition,” examines intellectuals during the Hundred Flowers Campaign, Anti-Rightist Campaign, and 1957 Rectification Campaign. In the wake of De-Stalinization across the Communist world, mid-1950s China was embroiled in an open debate about redefining the intellectual. According to the author, three images of the intellectual emerged at this time in China: the intellectual as state partner, legislator, and red-and-expert personnel. Of these three, the last was the only one embraced by the Mao regime most explicitly. Drawing from the Confucian, May 4th, and Yan’an traditions, intellectuals in China openly told the Party and society what they wanted to do for China’s socialist revolution. As state partners, they wanted to be advisors to the Party and government, while remaining explicitly outside of the Party itself. As legislators, some intellectuals invoked Western intellectual traditions of the intellectual as arbiter of Reason to society and government, above petty partisan politics. These critiques were perhaps the most dangerous to make at the time, as they heavily relied on calling the CCP, the Soviet Union, Lenin, and Stalin revisionists of Marx and Engels’ original

vision. As red-and-expert personnel, the Party put forward its vision of privileging previously underprivileged people in education and making sure that experts underwent long, strenuous ideological reeducation before they could go back to their research and work. The intellectuals wanted rule of law, scientific reasoning, and expert advising of the government. Instead, they received paranoia, attacks, relocation, and public humiliation.

Chapter 7, “Ugly Intellectuals Everywhere,” takes on a very different topic from the earlier chapters, analyzing representations in theater and film from 1958 to 1963. U analyzes two productions of this time period, the folktale-turned-play-turned-film *Third Sister Liu*, and the 1963 film *Early Spring in February*. *Third Sister Liu* started as a Zhuang ethnic minority folktale promoted by the Guangxi provincial government during the Great Leap Forward, leading to it becoming a very popular play performed all around the country. In this play set in the Tang Dynasty, a peasant woman defeats three Confucian literati in a traditional singing contest. The literati are portrayed as immoral, hypocritical, exploitative, and lacking in real world knowledge. In *Early Spring in February*, an intellectual family of petty-bourgeois origin helps out their less fortunate neighbors in the 1920s. U argues that these two films were “ideological antitheses” (137) of each other for how to represent intellectuals. The stories that U presents of these two productions’ creations and responses from the state and audiences are fascinating to read, and U’s interpretations of them are convincing. *Third Sister Liu* was promoted by the CCP leadership for satisfying the requirements of cultural productions during the Great Leap Forward and it proved very popular among the general population well outside of Guangxi Province. However, its popularity petered out by the time it was released as a film in 1961, at which point artistic and academic journals reviewing the film criticized it for historical inaccuracies. *Early Spring in February*, in contrast, was released in the Fall of 1963 alongside dozens of official essays criticizing it in the press for promoting bourgeois values. Its official denunciation ironically made it more successful at the box office and audience reactions showed that most people did not agree with the state’s condemnation of the film, and that most young people liked the film’s characters. U leaves the chapter with a warning that this episode hinted at what was to come during the Cultural Revolution.

Chapter 8, “The Intellectual and Chinese Society: from Past and Present,” acts as a conclusion to the monograph. In this chapter, U concludes that the CCP’s greatest achievement was the successful imposition of its political imagery and categories upon the population. U also makes the case for taking intellectuals seriously as a category of people who were policed just as much as landlords were. Intellectuals never existed before the label was put on them, in essence. The chapter ends with U using recent internet sources and speeches from Xi Jinping to show that the mutual defining of the intellectual by intellectuals and the CCP has lasting legacies to this day. Interestingly, as a search of journals and newspapers shows, “*zhishifenzi*” appears half as much in print now as it did at the

end of the Maoist era. In its place, the terms “*dushuren*” (educated people), “*xuezhe*” (学者) (scholars), and “*zhuanjia*” (专家) (experts), have all increased in use in print instead.

As an intellectual historian-in-training myself, I am pleased to have the opportunity to review Professor U’s new monograph. I think that the most significant argument put forward by this book is that we need to not just take intellectuals as a given category, but we also need to think critically about how the entire label of “intellectual” exists in the first place and is imbued with all of the assumptions, stereotypes, and responsibilities that we assign it. Earlier studies of the intellectual under Chinese Communism focus on individual intellectuals’ cooperation with or resistance to the regime, the evolution of their ideas, and their organizations. In these studies, the intellectual is largely presupposed to exist, and yet *Creating the Intellectual* shows us that throughout the PRC’s existence, intellectuals and the Party have been engaging in a back-and-forth discussion over what exactly they are supposed to be and what they are supposed to do.

Creating the Intellectual shines not only for this important argument but also in its new interpretations of some famous moments in Chinese history that are well studied and written about in previous scholarship: the first decade of the CCP’s existence, the Rectification Campaign and the Yan’an Way, post-liberation social reorganizing, the Hundred Flowers Campaign’s fallout, and the Great Leap Forward. All of his new interpretations and stories of intellectuals during these pivotal time periods are refreshing. Also, his new narratives of the registration drive of unemployed intellectuals in Chapter 4 and the two films discussed in Chapter 7 are excellent additions to CCP and PRC history. *Creating the Intellectual* should interest those working on intellectual history, social identification and organization, PRC history, and CCP history. Its findings on the creation of the category of the intellectual are essential to those working on intellectual history or the history of class in China. I have several questions for consideration and discussion after reading this book. For those of us working on intellectual history, how could we bring U’s approach together with other kinds of intellectual histories (e.g., the evolution of ideas, an individual’s intellectual development, intellectual activities and relations with society and state, etc.)? Should an intellectual history of ideas incorporate the historical construction of the “intellectual” as a category, or are these two separate types of intellectual history scholarship? What is the relationship between an idea or school of thought, and the creation of the category of the “intellectual” who does the thinking? Finally, when writing about intellectuals, should we only focus on people who identify as such, or should we impose the label onto other people who may not see themselves as part of this category? It seemed at times that the author agreed or disagreed with the CCP’s labelling of certain people as intellectuals or revolutionary proletarians. How should we decide on whether to consider one an “intellectual” or something else?

¹ Golfo Alexopoulos, *Stalin's Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State, 1926-1936* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

² Joel Andreas, *Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China's New Class* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

³ Geoffrey Bowker, and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000).

⁴ Christopher Browning, and Lewis Siegelbaum, "Frameworks for Social Engineering: Stalinist Schema of Identification and the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft," in *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, edited by Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick, 231-65 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁵ Timothy Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Timothy

Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia," *Journal of Modern History* 65, no. 4 (1993): 745-70. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear Off the Masks! Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁷ Merle Goldman, *China's Intellectuals: Advise and Dissent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

⁸ Philip Kuhn, "Chinese Views of Social Classification," in *Class and Stratification in Post-Revolution China*, edited by James Watson, 16-28 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

⁹ Charles Kurzman, and Lynn Owens, "The Sociology of Intellectuals," *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002): 63-90.

Response

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I want to thank Patrick Buck for his thorough and generous review of my new book. He raises important questions on the intellectual, on the use of the term “intellectual,” and on the integration of intellectual traditions on behalf of historical research. Let me provide further background of the book that would help explain the positions that I take with regard to his questions.

In 1996, Jerome Karabel, one of my teachers, published “Toward a theory of intellectuals and politics” in *Theory and Society*.¹ After reading Foucault, including most probably his 1980 interview with *Le Monde* titled anonymously then as “The Mask Philosopher,” Karabel accepts the following: “it is impossible to neglect the power dimensions in the very act of defining the term ‘intellectual,’ for different definitions will support or undermine the discursive claims of competing groups.” In the next sentence of his article, Karabel in effect reverses his position: “Yet any attempt at constructing a theory of intellectuals and politics will perforce require some specifications of whom we are talking about when we refer to intellectuals.” The power dimensions supposedly central to the exercise of defining the intellectual, whether they are related to academic authority, political power, literary prestige, scientific research, folk understanding, or other sources, receive no further attention in the article. Karabel goes on to reject the notable definitions of the intellectual given by Richard Hofstadter and Edward Said as being too aesthetically and too ideologically oriented respectively. He then advances a structural understanding of the category of intellectuals, with an argument that the members of this population share similar locations in society and, especially, in the sphere of culture.

Whether Hofstadter, Said, or Karabel recognized it or not, they were protagonists in what Bourdieu would regard as an enduring classification struggle inside the academe—one that seeks to resolve what intellectuals are and who they are. Beneath their different understandings of the intellectual, the scholars, however, shared an identical assumption about the social world. They saw it as composed first and foremost of individuals and groups occupying one or another type of social positions or performing one or another type of tasks. Such an ontological assumption, or what Bourdieu called the substantialist perspective, has dominated the transnational literature on intellectuals since its inception. The more scholars study intellectuals, the more they discover that different types of intellectuals exist, and the more they match these persons to specific spaces, roles, and functions. The literature on intellectuals thus features a growing list of subtypes, for example, critical intellectuals, organic intellectuals, free-floating intellectuals, establishment intellectuals, traditional intellectuals, dissident intellectuals, academic intellectuals, media intellectuals, radical intellectuals, humanistic intellectuals, nonacademic intellectuals, revolutionary

intellectuals, technical intellectuals, public intellectuals, and citizen intellectuals. By contrast, Foucault insisted that the intellectual is an imagined subject inseparable from discourse and practice. He took a constructivist view of the subject. Foucault, however, spoke out of both sides of his mouth. When he wrote about “universal intellectuals” and “specific intellectuals,” he did the opposite, seeing them as objective social types because of what they do in the realms of knowledge and work. Likewise, Bourdieu put social practice and social relations before the appearance of peoples and imaginations of peoples, but frequently spoke as if intellectuals exist objectively. How do we resolve the tension between the substantialist and the constructivist understanding of the intellectual?

If I have to choose one book that inspired *Creating the intellectual*, it would be Michael Omi’s and Howard Winant’s now-classic *Racial Formation in the United States*.² Their account of race does not assume its objective existence. They study, instead, how racial categories and racialized peoples became “common sense” in American society. Like the study of race, research on intellectuals has given multiple definitions and assessments of its subject of investigation. Unlike the study of race, however, research on intellectuals continues to embrace its inaugural substantialist paradigm. There is little investigation on how discourse and practice have constituted “objective” populations of intellectuals under concrete historical circumstances, or analysis like those that challenges previous assumptions of what race is and rebuilds our understanding of what it is. Should we accept the implication from existing research that intellectuals are inherently more real than racial groups?

From the late 1990s onward, my transcontinental life as a researcher reinforced my desire to study the formation of the intellectual category in China. When I asked any group of colleagues in the US, England, or Australia who they regarded as intellectuals, the unusual and sometimes uncomfortable conversation always ended up as an unresolvable debate. The following examples reveal the divergence of opinions. A senior graduate student in the US considered Kurt Cobain of Nirvana an intellectual; a full professor in the English department of an elite Australian university doubted that she was an intellectual. The divergence mirrors the wide range of definitions of the intellectual found in research. Meanwhile, when I traveled to China, the question of intellectuals came up sometimes even before I asked questions about this social category. Students, colleagues, and advisers occasionally began their sentences with these or other similar phrases: “We, the intellectuals...,” “As an intellectual...,” “You are also an intellectual...” They gave largely identical replies to questions about membership of the category until the answers became less uniform by the late 2000s. How should we account for cultural differences in the understanding of the intellectual?

Creating the Intellectual is my effort to address the above questions. The book suggests that the intellectual, like race, is a classification of people that have been deployed under many different circumstances. The classification is a product of discourse and practice. Its deployment engenders further discourse and practice. If the twentieth-century struggles in the US, England, or elsewhere over the meaning of the classification—or what intellectuals are, who they are, and what they should do—amounted to nothing more than a storm in a teacup, the same struggle in China transformed the nation in dramatic fashions. The book documents some of the key episodes in this Chinese struggle as well as its consequences for state, society, and individuals. In particular, the book argues that the struggle fed the growth of three central institutions of Chinese Communist rule, namely, workplace management by Communist Party members, ideological education, and mass surveillance. In other words, the struggle's legacy still looms large over China.

In his review, Buck raises two sets of excellent questions. One set has to do with writing about intellectuals while maintaining that recognition of their existence is inseparable from prior discourse and practice. When does one then regard, label, or speak of an individual as an intellectual? The issue is similar to writing about race but asserting that it does not exist other than as a social construction. In the book, I have adopted a hermeneutic approach to writing about the intellectual. The latter is an idea of the Chinese Communist Party, a social identification used by individuals and organizations, and a self-identification adopted by some. My objective is to lay out a multitude of contexts in which the term “intellectual” was used (e.g. party speeches, political reeducation, theater performance, registration campaign, interpersonal interaction) as well as the purposes and intentions behind the usage (e.g., state domination, political analysis, self-denigration, pursuit of employment). I describe how individuals and organizations did things with the concept, as it were. At the same time, I show that the usage of the term, whether by individuals or organizations, was not static, but depended on the context in which it was invoked. The term “intellectual” acquired a multiplicity of meanings.

Using such an approach to write about intellectuals is not the same as suggesting that they have never existed. Quite the contrary, my point is that they have existed in particularly vivid manners in the minds of the Chinese population since the 1949 revolution. *Creating the Intellectual* uses the term “intellectual” specifically to capture how Chinese society produced and reproduced this ontological certainty and, equally important, layer after layer of ambiguities behind it. When I mention Mao Zedong, Chen Duxiu, Zhang Bojun, Tan Tianrong, and other important characters in the classification struggle, I emphasize their backgrounds, occupations, positions, or accomplishments instead of labeling them intellectuals. When I discuss schoolteachers, artists, college students, or party cadres who were swept up in the struggle, I refer to them as such rather than predefining them as intellectuals. I will leave it to other researchers to decide and defend how they use the term “intellectual” within the context they choose to study. They will choose how they want to navigate the philosophical terrain between objectivism and subjectivism and the methodological

divide between substantialism and constructivism. The last thing I want is to offer another general definition of intellectuals in *demographic* or *political* terms and recommend it to be applied to the contemporary Chinese context.

Buck's other set of questions has to do with the integration of intellectual traditions. Does my extension of constructivist research to the study of the intellectual have implications for research on intellectual histories? I think it does with regard to intellectual histories in contemporary China. During the twentieth century, the class schema of the Chinese Communist Party and its classification of the intellectual expanded and eventually enveloped the literary, educational, legal, and other fields. Everyone saw themselves and was seen by others as one or another type of class subjects. In 1980, the famous writer Ba Jin signaled that official mechanisms of mobilization and domination related to the intellectual had profound impact on writers and scholars after the Antirightist Campaign or thereabouts.

When friends visited from faraway places, we happily met and sat down and then spent a while talking about the great situation of the country and its bright future. Only after such singing merits and praising virtues would we have any frank conversation about anything. During those years, I wrote very few novels. But I did not completely part with my habit of exploring people's feelings (*renxin*). As campaign after campaign appeared endlessly, I discovered that after each campaign people hid more of their feelings. Increasingly, I could not tell how others felt and did not hear them saying anything they believed in. I increasingly hid my feelings, too, feeling like I had reached the edge of the abyss and had been walking on thin ice, trembling with fear and only wanting to find ways to protect myself.³

During the early 1960s, American sociologist Erving Goffman wrote about *moral careers* of the stigmatized, or their learning experiences of their deficiency and responses to it in everyday life.⁴ Under the PRC, Ba Jin and many other writers and scholars were living such a career.

For intellectual historians, the analytical challenge, it seems, is to document, understand, and explain how knowledge production and other intellectual activities occurred as Chinese socialist discourse and practice reified the intellectual into a stigmatized political subject. The reification was neither static nor uniform. Its impact was uneven across individuals. How did scholars, writers, or journalists choose their projects, topics, and even dictions? How did meetings and interaction happen in the fields of philosophy, literature, biology, or economics? How did geographers, architects, or judges take notes, write letters, or keep diaries? How should one codify the relationships between the social construction of the intellectual and the production of knowledge and ideas? *Creating the Intellectual* contains evidence that the rise of the intellectual classification led to structural, cognitive, and behavioral changes across social space. Ordinary people, cadres, college students,

schoolteachers, playwrights, and party leaders found themselves navigating the ideological, administrative, and organizational webs resulted from the deployment of the classification.

If intellectual historians accept the thesis that the social construction of the intellectual was a primary feature of the Chinese socialist revolution, their analysis of people, ideas, and institutions during this period would gain a new dimension, beyond existing emphases on the impact of Confucian traditions, revolutionary commitment, professional ethic, Western influence, state control, moral outrage, and so on. Shortly after publicizing his above predicament and those of his friends, Ba Jin made another similar observation, one of many

that he had made and would make. The observation suggests further the necessity for intellectual histories of the PRC to take into account the reification of the intellectual. Ba Jin virtually confesses that his writings after 1949 lined up with the meanings that the state invested in the intellectual. During the Cultural Revolution, he indicates, he wrestled with the severe rhetoric of the state but believed time and again that he needed to reform himself from inside out as it demanded—until he recognized his journey during the Mao years were filled “with lies, lies adorned with bright and fresh flowers.”⁵

¹ Jerome Karabel, “Toward a theory of intellectuals and politics,” *Theory and Society* Vol. 25, No. 2 (April 1996), pp. 205–233.

² Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1986).

³ Ba Jin, *Suixiang lu xuanji* (Selections from random thoughts collection) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2003), 2.

⁴ Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 32–40.

⁵ Ba Jin, *Sui xiang lu xuanji*, 7.