

Modern Chinese Humanities Seminar Featuring Pang Laikwan – Economic Sovereignty in Contemporary China: The Biopolitical Subject as Garlic Chive, October 7, 2021

– Okay, well, good evening, everyone, or good afternoon, good morning, depending where you're tuning in from. Welcome to the Modern Chinese Humanities seminar. My name is Li Je and I teach Chinese Film and Media Studies at Harvard. I'm co-organizing this lecture series together with my colleague David Wang to feature a new scholarship in modern Chinese literary media and cultural studies. We're very grateful for the sponsorship and logistical support of the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies with special thanks to Mark Grady for setting everything up. And before introducing our speaker today, I just wanted to mention two further upcoming talks on Zoom this fall semester. In three weeks, exactly at the same time, on Thursday, October 28th, 8:00 PM, Professor Shaoling Ma from Yale-NUS will be speaking about her new book, "The Stone and the Wireless: Mediating China, 1861-1906." And then on Friday, November 12th, at noon, Professor Michelle Hawks from the University of Notre Dame will be giving a talk on the "Shifting Limits of Reform Literature and Censorship in China since 1979." Today we're really delighted to welcome Professor Pang Laikwan, whose work has really been the source of inspiration for myself and many of our students. Professor Pang is a professor of cultural studies and head of the Department of Cultural and Religious Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She is, this year, a fellow in residence at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavior Sciences at Stanford University. So she's on research sabbatical this year, but has very kindly agreed to come and speak to us. And Laikwan is an amazingly prolific scholar, whose six single-authored monographs actually span the remarkable range of issues and time periods from the Chinese left-wing cinema movement of the 1930s to copyright and piracy in China's creative industries. And my graduate students, we just read your "Distorting Mirror: Visual Modernity in China at the Turn of the 20th Century." And also, this book is also quite essential reading, "The Art of Cloning: Creative Production During the Cultural Revolution." I've taken this book with me across continents several times. Her most recent book is "The Appearing Demos: Hong Kong During the Umbrella Movement" which was published last year in 2020. And in fact, Professor Pang was originally scheduled to come to Harvard in March 2020. And we had to, for our workshop on Asian media studies that we unfortunately had to cancel because of the pandemic. We'll be hoping to bring her back to campus, but unfortunately this is not yet possible. The paper that she was originally going to present last year was called "Mask as Identity." So it was a very timely topic, the political subject in 2019, the Hong Kong social unrest. So if you're interested in that, please also check that out. It's been published in the "Journal of Cultural Studies" earlier this year. And now she has already moved on to a new book project about the intellectual and cultural history of state sovereignty in modern China. And her talk today is called

"Economic Sovereignty in Contemporary China: The Biopolitical Subject As Garlic Chive." Please join me in virtually welcoming Professor Pang Laikwan.

- Thank you very much.

- [Li] Over to you.

- Thank you, thank you very much to Li Je and David for bringing me here. I'm very honored to be a part of this. So today I'm going to talk about a paper I already just published, but that is actually a part, also a part of my ongoing project, as Li Je just mentioned, that this is, because I'm interested in tracing the development of the concept of sovereignty, particularly in terms of the state/people relationship from ancient to current time, spanning the Imperial period, Republican, socialist and post-socialist period, how a concept or a structure gets altered. And also continuously aggrandized during this very troubled 20th century. This paper situates at the end of this historical spectrum. While I actually am now working more on the historical dimension of it, in here, I particularly choose the concept of economic sovereignty to try to understand the relationship between the state and the people during this period. So here we go, I'm going to start. Okay. Sorry. In the three lectures he delivered in Paris in the mid-'70s, Foucault offers a thorough analysis of the development of modern governmentality of Western liberal countries, which he terms biopolitics. Foucault first demonstrates that the biological states not only manage life, but manage to make it proliferate, giving the subjects the impression that the state serves their natural desires to prosper. That's the first book. That it must be defended. In a subsequent set of lectures, now titled "Security, Territory and Population" as a book title, he provides an overview of the new technology of power over population developed in Europe, connecting this new mentality to the rise of the modern nation states. In the final lecture of this famous trilogy, Foucault deals with the biopolitics from an economic perspective, tracing how an economic rationality emphasizing freedom and competition developed into an economic juridical ensemble in the 20th century. Although Foucault himself does not offer an all for all analysis connecting the three sets of lectures, he provides the macro scannings of contemporary governmentality, in which there are logical, but economic and political, deeply intertwined. In this lecture, I want to investigate precisely the relationship between the biological, economic, and the political in contemporary Chinese governmentality. Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism is based largely on an easy marriage between the biological and the economic in which they are both caught in a blind drive for development. In this lecture, I want to explore following this thinking, but I also want to challenge it a little bit by exploring if there is a political consciousness of the biological subject. I also want to bring back the specificity of the different states into discussions of governmentality, because we do know that in

general Marxist analysis, the state is often understood as the political organization of the bourgeoisie to serve the economic interest. There's also a similar assumption in Foucault's analysis that a dominant political system dovetails with the dominant economic structure. So instead of assuming the economic as the base upon which all is built, I would like to point out an opposite tendency in post-socialist China. That is to say, capitalism is only a means for empowerment of the state. We must remind ourselves that governmentality is ultimately state-specific, so that neoliberalism could not be a consistent practice globally. A more complex framework must be developed for the contemporary PRC, and that would help us gain better insights about the increasing intertwining relations among the political, the economic, and the biological development in the world. Today, I would like to focus on a meme that has spread rapidly among Chinese internet users in the last few years. That is chives, or in Chinese, jiucai. This metaphor is used in contemporary China to refer to those ordinary Chinese people who are constantly lured to participate in all kinds of economic activities, but the investments are destined to be consumed by the establishment. Corresponding with this garlic chive is the sickle, liandao, which is used to describe the economic and political forces feeding upon the fortunes lost by individual investors. Before I go on to the cultural representations of the jiucai, I would like to first engage with the political economy here. Economic sovereignty is not a widely circulating concept. Now, when it is used, it usually refers to the state's right to regulate economic activities within the state borders. However, since it concerns with the exchange and circulation, economics tend to trespass national boundaries and such transnational movements are further reinforced in the age of globalization. But the PRC also gradually develops a special affinity with the term "economic sovereignty," emphasizing the need to control the foreign trade and prevent global finance from influencing or controlling China. The PRC has been very vocal, in fact, about its success in protecting its economic autonomy. It proclaims that the country was able to sail through the 2008 Global Financial Crisis because of the strong economic sovereignty. And the term became popular again in the 2019 Sino-US Trade War, in which the PRC accused the United States of invading China's economic sovereignty by demanding a structural change to its economic structure. While critics have praised the Chinese government's pragmatic approach to economic activities, providing both private enterprises and state enterprises with room to prosper. But other critics also observe that China's recent economic growth has been based largely on the local competitions among towns, cities, and, actually, individuals. Domestic cutthroat competition is extremely common in China. Such reckless internal competition is becoming more intense as China enters its so-called "Great Domestic Circulation Period" reflected in the sudden popularity of the term neijuanhua in China's internet world, since the second half of 2020, just a year ago. So what does the term mean? We have to go back to 1963. Clifford Geertz, in his book, "Agricultural Involution" studies the centuries of wet rice cultivation practices in

Indonesia. In hindsight, the repeated and labor-intensive practice did not bring significant technological or political change, but rather to put the people under more intense labor competition without improving their skills or methods. American scholar Philip Huang first used Geertz's idea of involution to describe Chinese rural development in the Ming-Qing period, which was also characterized by ever-increasing labor input with diminishing marginal returns. In the Chinese translation of the book, the neologism neijuan is used to translate Geertz's idea of involution. While the term has been used in China for three decades, it certainly became a buzzword on the Chinese internet in 2020, when globalization slowed down substantially due to the coronavirus pandemic, and the Sino-US decoupling. The term is now widely used to describe the ferocious rivalry and competition Chinese citizens needed to face, to the extent that where even toddlers in kindergarten already exposed to the rhetoric of comparison and competition. I'm giving you an example here. This is an advertisement for a Chinese cram school, and goes, "We will nurture your kid if you come. We will nurture the competitors of your kid if you don't come." So this vividly demonstrates the kind of internal competitions that China and ordinary Chinese citizens are facing today. So to come back to garlic chives or jiucai. Garlic chive is an extremely adaptive plant and is capable of enduring both cold and hot weather. It is widely cultivated in different parts of China. It is basically perennial. So that once the seeds are planted, they will regrow every year. It is also very easy to manage to the extent that farmers just need to cut the plants with a sickle, or sharp mussel shell in some places when they are tall enough, and the remaining parts will grow up again. Ecologically, it is described as a kind of noxious weed, highly aggressive, and spreading rapidly, often invading other existing plants and creating a monoculture. While garlic chives have been associated with grassroots, low trend productivity China's culture, jiucai fast became an trending term on China's internet around 2020, describing those investors or traders who lost money in the rapidly-expanding stock market. And they were called jiucai. In 2011, a woman who calls herself a haijingxia "ocean-star scent" lamented on the internet how she had lost money rapidly on the stock market, and she pleaded for help from fellow netizens for investment strategies. Her appeal received a wide response with both reproaches and sincere assistance, giving her a short fame as "Jiucai Girl". The term then became a buzzword and went viral, widely used to refer to all those individuals who keep losing money in the investment, but never learned their lessons, and who maintain a blind faith in their luck or whatever inside tips they receive to beat the market. And there was also a best-selling book titled "The Self-Cultivation of Garlic Chives", "Jiucai de Duo Shouyang" which was published to provide psychological and strategic tips for succeeding on the stock market. This title shows how the garlic chive is a metaphor of such information in contemporary China, used by the Chinese people themselves to mock the voluntary participation in the jungle of greed and brutality. Here I'm going to show you some clips explaining what

the jiucai has become an internet meme. Let me see if I can share screen.

- Is it the YouTube, I see the YouTube link, but I.

- Because my, okay, here we go.

- Did you share sound?

- Can you hear it?

- No, when you did screen-share did you press the share sound? There's a button for sharing sound. We can't hear anything.

- You can't hear anything, okay. All right, so I need to go back to-

- When you go to share screen, there should be a button for like at the lower left corner that says, "share sound."

- Okay, I got it, all right. Okay, I'm gonna stop here. I just want to use this example to show you that the jiucai has quickly entered popular culture with people, there's people making up songs and DIY MVs to be uploaded to Douyin, those of you who are familiar with Douyin you'll know that they are the Chinese version, the original Chinese version of TikTok, and other Chinese online platforms. There was considerable interest in this "jiucaai ge", which was adapted from a 2002 pop song titled "en es chang", because there is a line repeating the word here, jiuzai, and then they turned it into a cover song by changing jiuzai to jiucai. Those who are here, jiucai. And then I'm going to show you, all right, can you see this? Can you see? You can, okay, let me show you another clip, which is actually known as the recent upload in Bilibili, or "B Zan" in China. It shows an ordinary video teaching people how to grow jiucai. It received millions of views. You can see that there were actually more than 1 million viewers, because they are very entertained by this original video, which was simply trying to teach people how to grow the jiucai. We know that Bilibili is a video sharing platform where people can, members can actually put in their comments directly on the video. So we can take a quick moment. This looks like.

- Okay. I'm going to just stop here, but you see the point, this woman who just simply wants to teach how people can grow jiucai, but then the netizens picked this up and then put on the comments, and the comments actually reveal, how the jiucai is actually a very popular metaphor for the sufferings people have been going through and particularly the kind of class struggles that is implied in the comments, we can actually see a lot of such connotation being revealed, such as for example, the capitalist talking about the desk that is a reflection of the capitalist and ways of treating ordinary people. So I'm now going to stop right now. And now look back to the

political economy in a little bit. In 2002, the "Three Represents" theory, credited to Jiang Zemin, was rectified by the CCP to allow capitalists to join the party. This theory also marks the official incorporation of the Privately-Owned Enterprises, POEs, to become a legitimate part of the socialist economy. In 2017, the Xi Jinping government began to strengthen SOEs, the State-Owned Enterprises, by issuing a series of supporting policies and promoting mergers and acquisitions. The state's increasing demand for compliance has become even more obvious since the advent of the COVID-19 and the escalation of the Sino-US tensions, with Xi making it clear that patriotism is the foremost criterion for Chinese enterprises in such times. Critics began to describe the state's harvesting of the POEs in the manner of garlic chives being cut down by the sickles with the private capitalists having to sacrifice themselves in the face of state demands. So major entrepreneurs, as powerful as Jack Ma and Ren Zhenfei are all now subject to the state's taxing control. So what I'm trying to discuss and demonstrate here is, before we would consider, I mean, the netizens would consider the sickle as the capitalist. But now, there seems to be a switch, where the capitalists themselves are also becoming jiucai. Now let me show you a couple more clips. Before I show you that, I will briefly explain what I'm showing you. The metaphor jiucai went viral again, immediately after the Youth Day, May 4th, 2020, when the popular online video sharing platform Bilibili published a short video: "To the young generation", "Zui Hou Lang" sensationally narrated by the famous 50-year-old actor He Bing. In the video He represents the older generation, who celebrate the quality, achievements, and global perspectives of the new generation. It attracted waves of compliments and criticism, including many derivative and ironic videos produced by the younger generations themselves. Needless to say, many of them quickly disappeared under Chinese censorship. So, these videos demonstrate the frustrations of younger people who all too aware are of the disparity. They're overworked, underpaid, and sent to Africa for the Belt and Road initiative. There we also see jiucai widely used as a metaphor to represent the younger generation who are exploited and harvested by the establishment. And the second video I would like to show you is the, is the video titled "Je Chen Lang" "To the Older Generation". In where the young narrator, mimicking the tone of He Bing announces "You are very fortunate to meet garlic chives like us, but we garlic chives are very unfortunate to meet people like you." Now I'll try to share.

- And I'm sorry, I had to suffer you with this. I hope you liked it, partly because I want to show you the derivative from the He Bing video. This video doesn't have subtitles. And so you have to bear with me. I will have to speak on top of the existing soundtrack so that those who don't understand Chinese will be able to catch something. Those who say each generation is less than the last one must be you. Okay, I know I'm pretty annoying for having two soundtracks being played together. Let me now go back to my- So while globalization has been the major factor behind China's recent economic miracle, the

sheer volume of the Chinese population is indeed the largest asset of the national economy. This explains Premier Li Keqiang first advocating the idea of mass entrepreneurship and innovation in 2014 and 2015. He advanced the slogan "Entrepreneurship for the Masses, Innovation of the Multitude" to describe a new national economic retention. This campaign rides the tide of new information and creative economy through which the government could upgrade its economy from low-end commodity production to high-end innovation technology. The promotion of mass entrepreneurship also ties into another popular governance discourse, financial inclusion "pu hui jinrong". This concept began to gain wide global attention in the early 2000s, when the World Bank identified a direct correlation between poverty and financial exclusion, meaning that those people who do not have access to banking and financial services tend to be poor. Financial inclusion has definitely been widely promoted around the world, and it has become a popular ideology in recent international policy circles as an effective way to eradicate poverty and improve human development. Governments are advised to facilitate individuals and small businesses to be included in the formal financial system to have access to appropriate, affordable, and timely financial products and services. It is believed that encouraging the people to have access to financial means, they can become stakeholders in a national economy, promoting and sharing the benefits of overall development. Financial inclusion was quickly absorbed into the rhetoric of the PRC sovereignty. In 2015, the state council issued the first national strategic plan to promote financial inclusion. And it was further popularized in China, along with the e-commerce boom with a consumer society so eager to buy and the micro-finance system so established to loan. Individuals can become new capitalists very quickly. But since most of these new entrepreneurs either do not have a credit history or operate very small businesses, they turn to online banking. Online banks or P2P lending platforms for easily obtainable, high-interest loans. Many of them are quickly caught up in the web of digital loan. Along China's system of social surveillance, preparing the ground for the P2P online lending bubbles. The PRC's elaborate social credit system further requires China's citizens to comply with social norms, as any deviation could be felt in deterioration of one's social credit, therefore downgrading one's position in society. In fact, China's national economic development has been threatened largely by a process called resource capitalizations through loans and debts. So in that sense, the jiucai is a very amazing metaphor to describe the kind of political economy that is now circulating in China. The jiucai are indebted to their lenders, while the political regime also relies on the constant borrowing of the people to stabilize the economy. The fate of the people has to stay deeply intertwined under this mutual indebtedness, so in other words, every citizen becomes jiucai. Before I end this, I'd like to give you a short insight on . Unfortunately, I am not able to give you much insights about the future. This is way beyond my ability. But I can tell you some of my reflection about this. Other than jiucai and neijuan, there's also a number of recently

popular terms on the internet in China, describing those who have been so exposed. The first one is tangping, it describes those who have been so exposed to the social involution, they choose a cooperate and resigned attitude to face the immense pressure and toxic work culture. And the other, the second one is jiaxu. A lot with this idea was- it has been used by some netizens, but mostly those who use Twitter via VPN or outside China to describe China's current political dire straits, whose rapid deterioration is reinforced by the state's authoritarian control. This is just a passive revolution, observing the regime digging its own grave. The third term is ruguan, entering the pass, which refers to the 17th century historical event of the Manchurian banner armies entering the Shanghai Pass, "ru san guan" which facilitates the Qing army's final victory over the Ming, to set up the Qing dynasty. This buzzword is very visible on the Chinese internet, used by many ordinary Chinese netizens who urged the nation to defeat the United States to become the final master of the world. So ruguan represents the ability of the Chinese people to enter the world. So all these memes and codewords are characteristic to an internet culture of so many people participating, but so much censorship. I do not doubt the Chinese people's capacity to survive the system with their own tactics and interests fulfilled. But I hope to see the Chinese netizens or citizens capable of seeing themselves as neither isolated entrepreneurs nor as a unified people, but the plural existence of many individuals, different from each other, upon which a political community can be built. As both Agamban and Esposito have reminded us, biopower establishes close connections between the life and death so that biopolitics easily becomes thanatopolitics, shown most radically in Nazism, which guarantees that race will live by advancing itself over another race. Obviously I'm not suggesting any connections between, Chinese and German situations in the Second World War. I would just want to remind us that this is the most important historical lessons of the 20th century. We must learn. If biopolitics refers to the life of the human species in its totality and reduces it to the most rudimentary survival drive. I think that jiucai has built a reflection of this, and also it has the ability to counteract by claiming one's individual's life back. And this awareness might lead you closer to a true emancipation. As Esposito writes, "The only way for life to defer death isn't to preserve it as such, but rather to being reborn continually, in different guises." This is exactly what jiucai tries to do. The biopower of jiucai could be appropriated by the dominant regime, but could also become a mighty, resilient force if it could gain intersubjective awareness through its continual becoming and thus remain powerful. Thank you very much.

- Thank you so much.

- [Laikwan] Thank you.

- Well, so just a note to the audience. So if you have a question for



Professor Pang, please submit it through the Q and A, but first I think professor David Wang and I, we will, we have some questions for you. David, you can go first if you want to.

- Sure. Thank you so much, Laikwan, for a wonderful paper. I had the honor actually to have read the, the article. So I was really amazed at, by, by your observation, your erudition, and of course the very polemical argument you made throughout the paper. But here, let me just make the first one observation and then I would raise one question. First, I thought beyond the sublimation of biopolitics, probably in light of this jiucai, the garlic chives image, actually versus the image of the sickle, that image, the metaphor. I wonder if you could actually develop a, kind of an ecological dimension of your critique. I thought I'd probably just take one step for you to pursue something even more politically suggestive. When you get to this very intriguing contrast between jiucai, or garlic chives on the one hand, and the sickle on the other, which you actually downplay in your presentation. And of course we are all aware of the, the political symbolism implied in this, this, I don't know what to say, this, this tool of, of a governance or control, whatever. Okay, but anyway, my question actually has to do with the last part of your presentation, which has to do with political self-consciousness on the one hand, and of course your aspiration for some kind of an agency. I wanted to find out more about the, the nuances implied in your survey of the forms of the agency, as you have identified either in your research or in your article, because if we go back to the metaphor of the garlic chives, I probably would suggest that there are different species of garlic chives, and there are different kinds of political agency and of political consciousness. And of course, today in your presentation, we, we saw the kind of very grotesque kind of a parody or some kind of caricature of the power, either financial power or a political power in charge of the, of the nation and the state. I wonder if there are any other forms of agency you could introduce in terms of this kind of, this kind of rampant vitality, this kind of energy, as you seems to be indicating in your evocation of this metaphor of jiucai, garlic chives. I do see there's a powerful potential in your evocation of the ecological dimension of your symbolism. So I think all of that's very, very promising, and I just want to learn more from you, thank you.

- Thanks, David. You're asking me deep, impossible questions. In terms of agency, that's exactly what I want to explore, but at the time I didn't use, just because I don't think this term really touts, can be most useful in describing the current Chinese situation. Because on the one hand, we do see a very homogenous kind of unified voice from China about a lot of things happening in the world. Like how, how China happens to be a better place in terms of handling the pandemic and handling a lot of things, while other parts of the world are in a mess. So in essence, they're right, in certain ways, right? We do know that the pandemic is largely contained in China through their own means. So these are powerful forces we cannot ignore. I mean, we

cannot just simply say that they are brainwashed or whatever. I mean, these represent actual people's mentality and the observations to a certain extent, even though they're manipulated through the state's propaganda machines, but at the same time, it was a reflect certain real sentiments, but at the same time, it's precisely due to this kind of unified voice, which is like one single voice representing 1.4 billion people. That makes it very skeptical, how much, so to speak, the majority can be conceptualized. So in this, in a way, no one in the whole world, I think including the people in China, really know what the people are thinking, because for them who the idea has also been working on the social period, they I'm sure would know that. One of the major problem of the grading forward is precisely the fact that the regime itself is duped by its own propaganda. They became so successful in containing the peoples, giving only one voice to the people, to the extent that they themselves thought that the people really thinks like what they wanted them to think. So in that sense, we really do not know from any perspective, who the Chinese people are, how many different voices they have, how do they actually see things? Because I'm sure that 1.4 billion people in China, and each one of them has different ways of responding, but at the same time we all represent one self or one circles. So anytime we see people saying, oh, I think the Chinese people actually thinking this way, we cannot but be doubtful. So in essence, I really don't know how to conceptualize agency at this point. If we are thinking about agency as a collective, as some kind of collective dimension, not that there isn't that, it's just that it's not accessible to us at this moment, under this kind of national environment and political environment. So to what extent we can actually conceptualize and more kind of in bigger emancipation projects? I don't know; I can only say that history will tell. I mean, history will move in its own way, and how that is going to evolve. Probably at this moment is inaccessible to us, but it doesn't mean that it won't be revealing itself. So I guess, I don't know that this is a satisfying answer. In reality it is logical to take- Yes, that's another problem here. Jiucui, as I've mentioned, is actually a pretty obnoxious plant. We know that when we plant your tiny one plant, it will just invade everywhere. So jiucui is actually, it's very nutritious, but also ecologically, very problematic. So to what extent that it also, jiucui can also pose a challenge to the kind of biodiversity that we should expect. That Earth needs right now more than anything else. And would say that the Earth doesn't need jiucui at all, if we can put it such a direct way. But to what extent that we can turn it into something productive, it's also up to us to practice. I'm not a farmer. I hope there's somebody in the audience can give us some hints about how to make jiucui an environmentally friendly plant. It's unfortunate that we're stuck in this situation, particularly in any association to Chinese people, that those are something I feel very uncomfortable. So to what extent the jiucui can represent the Chinese people, I think I feel guilty for writing this because this is exactly what I don't want it to be. I don't want to have it a symbol. In that sense I'm also struggling with

how to present the dilemma on the one hand, want to know what Chinese people are thinking, but at the same time also don't, because they don't want to structuralize it. Am I answering your question? I'm so sorry.

- Thank you so much. I, before, there are a couple of questions coming in in the Q and A, but I, if I may, I'm really curious about this. I actually find that this is a metaphor, or like jiucai as a metaphor. It really captures a really complex issues. And thank you for unpacking a lot of that for us. And, you know, as you know, I'm very interested in, in the socialist period. And as you're talking about jiucai, this noxious plant, I can't help but think about "ducao", or the poisonous weed, and then the sickle is cutting the poisonous weed, of course, in the, throughout the 1950s to the 1970s. And I also was wondering sort of what is then the legacy of revolution from revolution to involution, or are we, and then is the sickle referring, still referring, to the party, because there are a lot of, a lot of the internet memes that you pointed us to, for example, the self cultivation of the jiucai is a reference probably to Liu Shaoqi's, how to be a self cultivation of a communist. And, and I kept on wondering then how did people refer to themselves in earlier time periods? I mean, a plant metaphor of more like from Tokugawa, Japan, would be like the sesame, this, you know, the, I think a Bakufu official actually said that people were, the peasants are like sesame. The more you press them, the more you get out of them. So this, this idea of extraction of the peasant from the government, it's oftentimes the government making that comparison. In the Mao era, I guess people are sunflowers. Or they referred to themselves as sunflowers who are looking up to the sun. I think the only kind of actually creature that is, has the same kind of complexity as garlic chive is actually the sparrow. You know, I've been really interested in the sparrow, but Mao referred to the sparrow as this little creature that can grow infinitely through sparrow warfare, because a sparrow is, sparrow warfare is almost like a synonym for guerrilla warfare. And so in 1945, he said, how did we grow our prowess with sparrow warfare? Sparrows fly wherever they can find food. The sparrows in the sky were our seeds that grew many sprouts. And with those seeds, we grew the party, the regime, the base areas, the people, the food and training for cadres. And even those sparrows are opportunists that follow food. They're small, but you add them up, they amount to a lot. And then he says that our sparrow is going to grow up into the big pung bird until it eagle. And, but then later, of course, he called for the extermination of sparrows, and the, so, so obviously he compares the peasant to the sparrow, but then also doesn't care so much about the killing of the peasants in the Great Leap around the same period. So I think this is the only kind of parallel. So the overall question is more, what is the relationship then between the current biopolitical subject and the earlier regimes, or earlier, say, than the Maoist biopolitical subject, you know, if there is such a thing, how would you connect them?

- Wow. Yeah, and thanks for just reminding them, now that you've mentioned the sparrows, you are totally right that there's such an interesting comparative link between the two metaphors, although, I mean, in a way they are both strong, both sparrows and the jiucai have very strong productivity. Again, if we go back to Foucault, talking about, he's talking precisely about this kind of celebration over the promotion of their life, you know, prospering. So in that sense, as far as the jiucai, both very vivid metaphor for a biopolitical subject, if we use Foucault's analysis, but at the same time, as I said, the biopolitics is so much connected to sentinel politics. So again, the sparrow, also full of life, revealed that dimension that at one point Mao celebrated, and the other point he asked the Chinese people to exterminate it. So if it's growing to a certain force that come back to, to the extent that you can no longer use it to threaten the power and celebrate it has to be, you know, taken away. So the life and death are always connected, in both, particularly in biopolitics analysis. So I do think that the sparrow could also be understood as a biopolitical subject, and particularly a state engine, engineered biopolitical subject. Jiucai is slightly interesting because it's a folk kind of metaphor. It's not a state production, it's self irony. It has a lot of self reflection. And one of the most, I think, those who are from China would know that this is one of the most popular and widely recognized cold wars, if we want to use that term, in terms of the internet. So jiucai also has a, itself has a dissident kind of dimension. Although that's dissidence also complying with certain mechanisms of the state. So it has a different dimensional, additional dimension of self mockery, which is, you know, which is very complex to me. As David mentioned that, that the sickle is a bit too, you know, obvious, referring to the power, representing the power, the political power. So to what extent the sickle, I mean the jiucai, represents a certain metamorphosis of the sparrow, I don't know, but that will be interesting thing to think about, but thanks for referring this.

- Oh, thank you. I think we have a, shall we go to the Q and A? There are a few really interesting questions from the Q and A and maybe I will just read the question. So the first question is from Shaoling Ma, who will be giving a talk in our series in three weeks. "Thank you for a great paper, Professor Pang, I learned a lot. I'm curious whether jiucai emerges in discourses about rural revitalization policies, agriculture reforms, and their related internet and e-commerce developments like rural we media, or "zi meiti".

- Wow, it might be a connection, which I am not yet aware of, but I think jiucai is definitely a referral of the individual subject. It's a, it's a, as I said, a self kind of reference, in an ironic and satirical way. But to what extent they really treat the jiucai as a plant that actually can grow in rural areas and can be, you know, becoming a way of developing the rural economy; I don't think so yet.

I guess it's not that prominent because it's used in a displaced way, a transformed way. As Metonymy. So to what extent that it might be related to rural existence, I would love to hear Professor Ma's comments. I don't know much about it.

- David, do you want to sort of moderate or I, I can, I can continue doing it, okay. Another question is what is intersubjective awareness? I think this was in the last slide. And what does it mean that we all survive just like chives?

- Thank you for giving me this opportunity to explain the intersubjective awareness here, because I think garlic chives is also, as a metaphor also represents a very individualized, atomic, like a very individualized existence. Jiucai, you can say, has no awareness of what's going on. The only thing jiucai knows is to grow. That's all about jiucai. We know we want to, I mean, the way that people understand jiucai in China is precisely it grows so fast. You cut it and it continue to grow, cut it, and continue to grow. And then it just invades the entire place with such a strong life power. So in that sense, I think we, what we might want to think about this, how the jiucai can stop just growing, just stop vertically going up, but to become a more aware of other jiucai also caught in the same situation, caught in certain blind drive. That's the reason why I think that in the beginning of the paper, that it's most important is to reconfigure that drive. How this life power can no longer be appropriated by the economic sovereignty in terms of using it as an engine for economic growth, but to start, you know, investing the political dimension of it in order to come to terms with political subjects, the intersubjectivity is extremely important because without an awareness of other existing, you know, subjects or agencies of citizens or whatever, or whoever you want to claim it, a political company cannot be formed, a political consciousness cannot be formed, cannot just form your own political conscious. You have to do it with a group of people. So this is the idea that I was hoping to suggest. How the jiucai do not just think of itself, its only existence, but others' existence and try to think, really think about the possibility of the public. Well, the jiucai was a very private metaphor, it's more what I think. But I do think that there's dimensions of the jiucai metaphor actually implies. Intersubjective awareness, what does it mean we all survive like the chives? In a way, I think a lot of the people in China, particularly people do be constantly jiucai. They're always calling themselves, however much they accept the political kind of ideology, but they still call themselves jiucai because this is very private. I mean it's like, it's, their own survival experiences. They feel like they are being so good. So to that extent, a lot of people have the sense of living like a jiucai, but again, how do we transform that? Isolate an experience or sentiments into a public consciousness is something we could further think about.

- Thank you so much, yeah. So in many ways, how can some jiucai become

aware of other jiucai, also, as different beings, right?

- Yes.

- We have a number of questions now. So I want to get to on a question by a Hongrou Xiu. "Many things for your great talk. I am an Asia, Asia fellow in Ash Center at the Harvard Kennedy School. My question is about the mass entrepreneurship mentioned. How do you evaluate the social effects of stimulating mass entrepreneurship in recent years? Is it a solution to address the inclusion problem in China?"

- That's besides, that's a very important questions because it relates to how much China is in a neoliberal kind of society or how much neoliberalism is the driving ideology of China. The whole idea of entrepreneurship is called to neoliberalism, we all know that. Each of us have to become entrepreneurial to become a capitalist machines. And then, and then again, going back to the private economic driver and forget about the other, you know, public participation and so forth. So this mass entrepreneurship has both dimensions, right? It's entrepreneurs tends to be individualized, as defined as individuals, but mass as this, you know, collective mass kind of like big number of them together. So it's both individual, but also, you know, invested with sort of the mass and the people, that sort of thing. But at the same, at the end of the day, I do think that the mass entrepreneurship is a neoliberal kind of strategy. And it's meant to, again, neoliberalism solved a lot of economic problems, but also created a lot more. So in that sense, I do think that mass entrepreneurship gets extremely problematic in the current Chinese situations. At the same time, the entrepreneurship itself, going back to liberalism kind of like discussions, I think this ideology, or this economic kind of like policy also being challenged by the state itself. I think the current Chinese government are also not breaking this kind of development, applying a break to make sure that China is going in that direction, to that direction, because they also see a lot of problems developing, but particularly in terms of the important political crisis that it might at the end one day kind of invite. So is there a solution to addressing problem? So it's both a solution and itself a problem.

- Thank you. The next question is from graduate student Xiaolin Zheng. "Thank you so much for your talk, Professor Pang. I'm wondering how you see the role of contemporary media cultures and platforms in shaping the discourse around these trenchant sociopolitical issues, especially given the socialist legacy of media forms and its strong metaphorical tie to the poisonous weed."

- I don't know yet, because I think we, we are very aware that in the last couple of months, particularly, the media censorship has become much more, I mean it has been always here, but then after, in the last two months, it's even getting more fierce. So to one extent that media can have any effect, political effect, probably not in this

environment, because the state is very, very strong in controlling it, but we do see glimpses of such, you know, burst, creativity burst just like what I showed you. The Zhi Hou Lang is not just a Zhi Hou Lang. In fact, there were many, many of such videos. One is the Zhi Fei Lang, it's the, Fei Lang is the African waves, there's a, a video showing this mimicking being ironic to the, of the Belt and Road initiatives that thought that young people are sent to Africa. And there's also Zhi Jiu Lang, the ways of jiucai. So there are a lot, a lot of these that are coming up, but it comes up and then being censored, comes up and being cut down, just in a way very much like the jiucai itself. The sickle is very active in cutting down this kind of like folk creativity. So there are long, we have to remember TikTok is originally a Chinese invention, proudly, but at the same time, there's a kind of folk energy and folk creativity can also be extremely dangerous to the, for the political regime. So to that extent that we have to see the kind of tug of war. How is it going to end up?

- Our last question here is from another graduate student, Hai Peng. "Thank you so much for such an informative and entertaining talk. I'm wondering given how ephemeral and fast updating today's media texts are, how much of the parodies is media entrepreneurship in the attention economy and how much of it is articulation of political consciousness? Are those parody artists not reaping attention dividends and profits from those who watched them?"

- Well, of course, of course. But where does the attention come from? The attention itself has political meanings. Otherwise like you remember that, the jiucai, the Bilibili video. Obviously that woman do not have any intentions of providing a parody, political parody, but netizens themselves gave that meaning. So this attention precisely came from the netizens, and the ordinary people. So how do we see this kind of attention as being simply economic or it does so many times a lot of political meanings. Both, right? So to what extent we need to negotiate them and how they might end up moving one direction or the other is hard to say, but I don't think that we need to condemn anything asking for attention itself, because attention, it means a lot. It means people, it means the collective attention. That might not be bad.

- I'm somehow reminded of just how vibrantly, there's a lot of expression, even, I think every sort of propaganda text you show us produced so many other parodies of it that actually show alternative forms of thinking than, you know, so it's not as if the mainstream, the main melody discourse is completely sort of brainwashing or in any way sort of taking over, but rather there's a, or even the Bilibili, it's quite interesting how the, the comments each, that is also a display of mass creativity. But I do wonder also about the political energy, whether that will translate itself into any, or it is, it is kind of an outlet of frustration for them.

- Exactly, I totally agree with you. I mean, there's no reason to invest too much, you know, you know, meanings to them politically and saying that this is going to become a major political force. I don't think so, but what we can only say is that however powerful the state authority is, people can still find ways to voice themselves. Like the Zhi Hou Lang, in the second video that I showed you, I don't know whether you were able to see that. I think the summary and in the middle, the narrator used a lot of, or the people who produce the video, used a lot of clips from Stephen Chow's film "The King of Comedy." He uses, he or she uses a lot of the clips from that one film. So it's very interesting because the film itself is a black comedy, and it actually shows how an ordinary, very serious actor, who really wanted to become a major in the acting career, but can only work as an extra. So it's a very dark comedy, but at the same time, it shows how these video producers are aware. Using different kinds of helpful resources to help articulate and point. So in that sense I'm very optimistic in the sense that these people are aware of what's going on. And so, for example, in China, for example, it looks like there's a major consensus related to Hong Kong, but at the same time, when we see Hong Kong being represented in a such nuanced way, we also realize that it might not be entirely the way that the state depicts. Those are major questions, so we have to see. Again, you're right, that I really have, I should, no one should invest too much aspirations in this kind of playfulness.

- If you would, there's another last question that came in from another graduate student, Will Julian. "Thank you for the wonderful presentation. I found the connection between jiucai as perennial and persistent plant and jiucai as plastic and politically charged meme especially poignant in the explosion of "Danwu", or user generated comments, across the screen as an unwitting gardener of the former was instantly transformed into an unwitting medium of the latter. I wonder if you can comment on those sociality of "danwu" user generated subtitles, and whether you see them as having a unique resilience or productive power."

- I know, I mean, I think the B Zan app, the Bilibili, is another very interesting platform that really helps, because the Bilibili is a platform where everybody can upload their materials, and everybody can comment on the materials. So there is still a quasi-democratic idea attached to it, or where internet should actually be invested with it. So in essence, I agree with you that the fact that there's this, you know, ordinary clip is being converted into expressions, a political expression. That was very interesting. So whether we can see that "danwu" has the particular unique resistance. Yes, I agree because it does show, because we know that the "danwu" has to be a synchronized kind of like relations between the comments and the video. So when we are, and then the, the comments accumulate to an extent that many different comments can appear together. So at the same time, it is, you can say



representation of democratic voices, and contestations going on, but with the kind of censorships going on, and a lot of people are very aware of the limitations. So I, again, I don't know how it's going to grow, to become, you know, I come from Hong Kong, so I am very sentimental about resistance, and in a way also very pessimistic about it. So if you asked me whether I have any hope, probably not.

- Yeah, could I ask one follow up question? I think one thing you didn't quite cover in today's presentation, but you did develop in your article is the very menacing possibility of the mutual implication between garlic chives and a sickle. In other words, that means the garlic chives are not just always self contented garlic chives. Sometimes they may end up becoming a different layer of a social interaction, kind of a form of a sickle. Jack Ma seems to be a sickle to the investors or potential investors of the ants. But, you know, another round of sort of a battle between the government and the enterprise, Jack Ma turned out to be one of the two garlic chives. So would you comment upon this? I really feel very intrigued by this, this is a kind of an involution, I guess.

- Yes, exactly. It's the tragedy of this, because it's like, there's another, there's also another way of saying how the traditional kind of power relationship, there is an oppressor and oppressed. There's a capitalist and there's the proletarian kind of analogy don't work, precisely because the proletariat wants to become the capitalist, right? And the capitalist can become a proletarian in any given day. This is the unique Chinese situations that we have to, you have to face. To extend it, I do think there's a lot of insecurity among many people, particularly those who are sickles, who have been sickles, because they know that one day they can become a garlic chive very, very easily in this kind of environment. So we have to be aware that in such a power, intensive kind of environment and situations, as you know, contemporary China, power moves very quickly, those who own power and those who are deprived can quickly turn around, and who is in control? I don't know. Some people might think that they are in control, but seeing this kind of circulations, rapid circulation, just like what we saw in the Cultural Revolution, for example, we just, once we allow this kind of intensive power to circulate, the power would go anywhere and come back to those who think toward control anytime. So I totally agree with you, what you're, I think your reminder is very important. Thanks for that.

- And thank you. And your last comment also answered the question about the revolutionary legacy and similarities to the, yeah. I think our time is more or less up, and thank you for, for sharing with us this wonderful paper, and thank you everyone for the thoughtful questions and for tuning in. So hope you will tune in again in three weeks' time for Professor Shaoling Ma's talk. And so thanks, good night.