

# Global 1968 Reconstructed in the Short Century

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**Abstract:** The story of Paris 1968, connects and overlaps, with the Chinese "Cultural Revolution". However, in the wake of the "Cultural Revolution", the commemorations to 1968 have remained silent about the events in China. In 2018, Chinese young intellectuals have a distinctive feature for the retrospection on the 1968, that is, to maintain a distance from the classic style of commemoration of the 1968. In order to reconstruct the memory of the 1960s, the national liberation movement, the Cultural Revolution and the struggle against racial discrimination before and after 1968 and the workers' movement have all been included in the field of vision, and the conversion of the "short May" into "long 1968", was an inevitable narrative strategy. With the focus of discussion shifting from the classic memory of 1968 to different directions, there are three notable aspects: first, the focal point of the observation is not the short red May, but the interaction and alienation between students and workers' movements and radical organizations. The second focus is not in the disoriented student movement and its simultaneous rejection of the two camps, the East and the West, but the movement between the movement and the widespread struggle against imperialism in the Third World and its connection with different other forms of communist movements, which all constitutes the historical spectrum of 1968. Thirdly, the overall melody of China's "Cultural Revolution" echoes in the European movement, suggesting the connection between the two, but in general, the "Cultural Revolution" is still a silent heritage that is difficult to tackle. If the "Cultural Revolution" lies in "May", then how come it did "not become a legacy"? If it's not present, how can we nevertheless understand the relationship between the "Cultural Revolution" and "May 68"?

**Keywords:** exodus and bring back, output and convergence, the long 1968

The story of 1968 in Paris connects and overlaps with the Chinese "Cultural Revolution." However, the commemorations of the "Cultural Revolution", which should have been regarded as an indispensable part of the Global 1968 discussion, have remained silent in China since its termination in 1976. 1998, 2008, when the whole world was discussing 1968, the Chinese intellectual community fell into a collective embarrassment. However, a change finally occurred in 2018: under the joint efforts of young editors, journalists and intellectuals, "The Paper News (*Pengpai xinwen*, [www.thepaper.cn](http://www.thepaper.cn))" set up a commemorative column and published a series of articles about 1968, with broad views and reflective depth, which far exceeded the previous discussions. The authors and editors who participated in the discussion were all born in the 1970s and 1980s. While these participants could not have directly experienced 1968, their writings

place them as the descendants of the 1968 spirit. By reconstructing the historical context and reflecting on the power and limitations of the movement, they attempt to re-establish contact between 1968 and the contemporary China.

As a historical milestone, 1968 is a symbolic expression of the 'global 60s' in general. With Red May in Paris serving as the focal point, it also started a particular style of commemoration. This style of commemoration is a process of forgetting. In the words of Wang Pu, "they were all yelling Maoist, anarchist or anti-imperialist slogans. But now they tell everyone that the true meaning of May [1968] was just about the 'individual', nothing but a liberation of the individual. It was merely a celebration of the younger generation daring the tradition, marking the transformation of France from traditional capitalism to a postmodern consumerist society. It was a puny cultural adjustment, a passport to the freedom of consumption and hedonism. As a social transformation and a cultural reform, it is inevitable. It is ultimately a grand reconciliation within the street barricades (!) and a celebration of cultural exchange. The continuous workers' struggles are absent. The Third Worldism is nowhere to be found. The ideological debates are gone. Instead, the revolutionary subject changes into the sociological intergeneration and political struggles turn into ethical clashes. The only main character left in this adulterated historical drama is: a young student/individual/consumer; and there simultaneously remains only one director — capital. 'The subject of individual freedom was, - in a nutshell - depoliticized.'

Yin Zhiguang revisits the "Long 1968" from the perspective of the Arab world around the time of "Sixty-Day War" in 1967. This unique perspective reveals that the image of a 'global 1968' constituted by anti-Vietnam War protests in the U.S., the Black Civil Rights movement, and series of European student movements under the Parisian "May storm" still projected a "Eurocentric standpoint". Such a 'global 1968' continues to celebrate the student movements in European countries as a 'new forms of social organization and political activism, using radical or even violent methods to confront various types of 'authority'. 1968 unfolding in this context bears several crucial characteristics. On the one hand, it is viewed as a 'global movement' that transcends national boundaries and ideological camps. On the other hand, its political results have achieved reconciliation with the Western democratic political narrative by becoming the symbol that reiterating the universality of the claims such as the 'awakening of society' and the 'crisis of the state'. It is immanent to this logic that the failure of the left-wing socialist political demands represented by the 1968 student movement in Europe ushers the world into the revival of 'liberalism' and 'democratic politics'. Hence, as a left-

wing 'humanist' movement, 1968 was incorporated into the mainstream historical and political narratives of the West and become an event that 'shook the world'.<sup>1</sup>

To rebuild the memory of the 1960s which includes the national liberation movements, the Cultural Revolution, the struggle against racial discrimination before and after 1968, and the workers' movement, we must covert the "short May" into a "long 1968". These contemporary young Chinese intellectuals are distinctive in their revisiting of 1968. They maintain distance from the classic narrative of 1968. The editor of the column in the "澎湃新闻 Surging news" clearly stated that the goal of the column was to salvage the "heaviest part" of history that was obscured by the tamed classic narrative. "50 years later, after the Cold War, when 1968 is mentioned, people think of the May storm in France, the 'radical philosophy', *la Nouvelle Vague*, rock music, hippies.... The rebellion of the '68 generation' seems only to transform resistance into an ornament and ultimately helps capitalism to triumph. Through such a deliberate commemoration, the heaviest part of 1968 is inevitably forgotten. It should rather be said that 50 years later, people are immersed in the homogenized romantic nostalgia for passion, rebellion and liberation. We are reluctant to be infected with the smell of blood from that era. We are unwilling to touch upon the heterogeneous struggles in different regions. However, it is the world image shaped by these struggles that brings the 'global 1968' truly alive".<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, it's not Paris in May 1968 that creates the 'global 1968'. Instead, we should look at the sacrifice of Che Guevara, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the Vietnam War, the national liberation movement in Palestine, the black Civil Rights movements in America, the worker and student movements in France, Germany, and Italy, the students and citizen protests in Japan, the democratic socialism in Poland, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovak, the 'long 1968' from the Arabic perspective, the active responses to the above mentioned movements from China, and even the violent revolutionaries such as the Italian red brigades and the *Sendero Luminoso* from Peru. All these distinct movements shape the complicated spectrum of a true "global 1968." Perhaps we should also include the Bandung conference, the Sino Soviet debate, and the safeguarding the Diaoyudao Island movement in Taiwan. Exploring the blood-stained memories is not to repeat their tactics but rather to analyse the reasons behind the disintegration of 1968; and to understand the "completely heterogeneous struggles" obscured by the radical, yet romantic and ornamental revolt of 1968.

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<sup>1</sup> Wang 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Yin 2018.

With the focal point shifting away from the classic historical narrative of 1968, I propose three areas of attention for further discussions. First, research should not focus on the short Red May, but the interactions and alienations between the students and worker's movements. Second, the historical spectrum of 1968 is not comprised of the disoriented student movement and the simultaneous rejection of the cause by the Eastern and the Western blocs. Instead, it is formed by the widely spread resistances against imperialism in the Third World, as well as the connections among various forms of communist movement. Third, in the midst of the European movements there was a resounding tune reminiscent of the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," which hints to their connection. However, the "Cultural Revolution" is still muted in the prevailing narrative of '68, appealing almost to be an embarrassing inheritance. Therefore, when these contemporary Chinese authors claim that "May 68 has not become a legacy, but still remains emblematic of contemporary society",<sup>3</sup> they leave the question of whether or not the lingering "May 68" incorporates the "Cultural Revolution" for us to address. If the "Cultural Revolution" is internal to the "May 68", then in what sense does the 'May 68' remain relevant to today? If not, then how should we comprehend the relationship between the "Cultural Revolution" and "May 68"?

**'Converging' Politics: An 'Acentric' 1968, Class, Party, and State**

Let us begin with the first question, which is the connection of 1968 with the workers' movement and the theoretical questions relating to such a connection. How to understand the relations between the events of 1968 and concepts such as social class, organization, and the political party. 1968 has a lot of theoretical designations that we ought to take into consideration. For example, Alain Tourraine and Michel Crozier regard '68 as a "new type of social conflict" and "product of an institutional crisis". Edgar Morin prefers to understand it as "a generation clash (patricide)". Pierre Bourdieu has explained this complex movement as a structural field, in which crisis in all the Western societies resonates with each other. Not to mention Raymond Aaron, who, from a conservative view, maintains that this movement is only an "elusive revolution" or "the event that turned out to have been a non-event".<sup>4</sup> The young Chinese commentators have revisited these narratives about an acentric and bizarre revolution only to move away from focusing on the movement's 'acentric' characteristic. Instead, they begin to describe and comprehend the convergence of the students, the working class and other social movements.

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3 From the *Surging news thought market*, 16. 6. 2018, according to the editor of the column "1968".

4 Zhao Wen 2018.

The shift of focus from the "decentralised" deconstructionist narrative to the analysis of the 'convergence' of the heterogeneous revolts, is in fact a deviation from the '68 generation's self-narration and self-reflection. As a participant of the 1968 movement, Perry Anderson "examined the development of German, French and Italian Marxism from 1918 to 1968, and regrets that Western Marxism "severed the bond it should have had with the mass movement striving for revolutionary socialism". His discussion is based on the research of the radical movements of 1968 from the perspective of the European, Soviet and Asian revolutionary traditions. However, due to the fact that Anderson's reflections are founded on his own personal experience with the events of '68, he neglects social resistances, which were also ignored and devalued by the youth in the midst of the climax of 1968. Wang Xingkun presents an alternative to Perry Anderson's narrative, through focusing on the "development of Italian revolutionary Marxism from the sixties onward." By introducing this aspect into the investigation of the Italian "long 1968", Wang Xingkun notices that the revolutionary bond established through the movement of winning the support of the mass is the most important neglected aspect of 1968. The "revolutionary Marxism" Wang refers is mainly suggesting the "left-wing movements independent of the Italian Communist, socialist parties, and parliament", namely the Leninist-Maoist "Avanguardia Operaia" in 1968, the Maoist "Potere Operaio", "Lotta Continua" and "Il Manifesto" (expelled by the Italian Communist Party in the same year) in 1969. The most influential one among these organisations was the workerist "Potere operaio".<sup>5</sup>

These four groups of revolutionary Italian Marxism and the 1968 student-workers movement are tightly connected. If we consider them to be the "the largest Western European new leftist groups", the common description of the European new left is inevitably bound to change. The power of the New Left in the intellectual sphere claims its theoretical link with Maoism. However, it also gains its influence by distancing itself both the political party and the state. Maoism, on the other hand, also criticized the Soviet Union and the increasingly dogmatic Western European Communist Parties. It cannot be said to have completely abandoned the line of establishing a truly radical political party, nor can it be said to have abandoned the line of creating a socialist country. In the "post-68" atmosphere, radical thought turned to the criticism and deconstruction of classes and political parties, but the "long 1968" also entailed a pursuit of the class politics and organized mass resistance. The student movements were not as 'innocent' as some of their participants later claimed. These movements largely contributed one way or another to the later 'terrorist' groups. Founders of later organizations such as Franco Piperno and

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5 Ibid

Oreste Scalzone for the “worker's power” (potere operaio), and Renato Curcio for the “Brigade Rosse”, had all played an important role on the stage of the Italian ‘long 1968.’<sup>6</sup>

The same situation played out all through Europe and the United States. As Zhao Wen points out: “In the United States, from the early 1960s, the student movements were already happening in large scale and systematically. With the “Huron Port statement” of the “Students for a democratic Society” as its symbol, and going through the student protests at the University of California, Berkley, the substantive social resistances organised by student organisations across the US persisted well into the 1970s. In fact, the climax of the May '68 movement in France was when the workers' movement were set off by the student's movement. It was only after the biggest workers strike in France's history, after the most widespread riots in the world's most developed region since the Second World War that the “May storm” began to truly take shape. For the first time, the general strike in France in 1968 burst out from the manufactural sector, the conventional epic centre for worker movements, and moved into the media and cultural industries. It manged to spread into almost all the sectors of social reproduction and lead to the formation of the theory of practice for an actual ‘worker autonomy’.<sup>7</sup>

The discussion of “convergence” focuses on the following aspects: the student movement can only have a real impact when combined with the workers' movement; students can only produce a real revolution when they are separated from their “student identity”. Despite the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) and the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) have already turned into conservative institutional powers, class and organisation remain to be the prerequisites for a revolutionary and wide-spread mass movement. In this sense, the young Chinese intellectuals' reviews of 1968 share Perry Andersons' self-criticism of rather than a post-modern deconstruction of the '68. Their interpretations of the '68 are much closer to the Marxist tradition and the Chinese revolutionary experience instead of the genealogy developed within the tradition of postmodernism. The sort of problems the young Chinese intellectuals posed in their interpretations of the '68 are in fact the sort of problems that both contemporary Chinese society in general, and the new generation of young Chinese intellectuals in particular, are facing. The problem is that in the era of market expansion, the educational institutions mushroomed as well. Intellectuals are no longer capable or able to maintain links with workers, peasants and other social classes.

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<sup>6</sup>Wang Xingkun 2018.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

With the exception of a short-lived experience of some Chinese, which was annulled quickly after 1989, forty years after the end of the “cultural revolution”, many generations of Chinese have been unable to establish independent organizations and participate in collective political action.

Since 1989, on the one hand, large-scale expansion of economic industrialization and urbanization, continuous social division, contradictions and conflicts, were all concealed by rapid economic growth. On the other hand, in the midst of a historical forgetting under the strong leadership of the state, neoliberal ideology permeates all the sectors. We appeal to be no longer able to see the continuous youth movements and their interactions with all the other social sectors which were common in the 20<sup>th</sup> century China. The expansion of manufactural industry also marks the booming of the size of Chinese working class. There are about 260 million new workers in China. I have made a distinction between two types of ‘new poor’ in contemporary China. The first type of ‘new poor’ have higher level of education and technological skills. Their imagination of the world is closely associated with the dynamic of the consumerist society. The other type refers to the new working class which features with the largest number of *mingong* (migrant workers who use to be farmers) in the world. Both types reside in the margin of the market society without the ability to form a new ‘convergence’.

The strikes of Guangzhou Honda Motor Company, the suicide of Foxconn workers, and the struggle of many new working classes reveal that in the struggle to change their own destiny, the workers' groups are exploring their own identity and their political demands. However, the question, as to whether the identity and status of the new industrial workers can produce or need to produce a class consciousness similar to that of the working class of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, is, to this day, still controversial.<sup>8</sup> Despite the fact that the “new poor” groups lash out their discontent on the social media such as Weibo and Wechat, they nevertheless failed to launch a new political imaginary. They are disillusioned by their lack of consumption. Yet, they continue to reproduce operative logic compatible with the consumerist society. We see similar images in recent political movements such as the Arab spring, Occupy Wall Street, and the protests in the streets of Moscow. However, China seems to be an exception to all of these. Since 1989, with the minor exception of the self-organization and mobilization of overseas students in 2008 to defend the Olympic torch, the political struggle of the Chinese youth is rare; the direct link between the two types of “new poor” is extremely thin.

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<sup>8</sup>Zhao, 2018

Over the last decade the situation is changing. 2018 is destined to be an important turning point in China. In the late 2017 and early 2018, the government of Beijing drove out many immigrants living in the suburbs on a massive scale. The expulsion of immigrants inspired numerous young people to travel to Beijing to express their solidarity and support for the immigrants or express their critical opinions of Beijing's anti-immigration policies on social media. In May 2018, workers of Shenzhen Jasic Technology Co., Ltd. attempted to negotiate with the company because the workers were dissatisfied with how the company treated them. They tried to form a workers' union to negotiate with the company management. This eventually resulted in the termination of employment for some of the workers. In July 2018, in the struggle for more workers' rights, some workers were beaten and arrested. Similar incidents occurred frequently in Guangdong, but with an important difference: students from the best universities in China, such as Sun Yat-Sen University, Beijing University, Qinghua University, and Renmin University of China, gained information from online and formed student support groups. They continued to publish lists of arrested workers for the public and report these workers current conditions. This eventually led to the arrest of several students which initiated support and sympathy from many young people. Unlike the liberal or neoliberal tendencies of many movements after the end of the Cold War, this wave of youth movements clearly positions itself within the Left. The Chinese government and universities have strengthened their control over students and have even blocked teachers from serving as mentors for those student societies. Under this high pressure, these young people show courage, persistence and demonstrate an ability to think which does away with the cynical attitude of the past 30 years. These young students pay close attention to their relationship with workers and their social stratum. They excel at using social media to struggle. They support workers to organize trade unions. And they try to use student associations to conduct legitimate struggles.

Trade unions, student societies, and the search for some kind of theoretical, Marxist orientated guidance, constitutes the most urgent demands of the contemporary Chinese workers' movement and student movement. Most of the students who are directly involved in, or express solidarity with, the workers, were born in the 1990s. The students who have the most organisational experiences are members of Marxist study groups at Universities. Their discursive rhetoric is different from the discourse of the young Chinese intellectuals who wrote and edited the columns on '68. The latter is deeply influenced by the new European left, while the former seems to have a more explicit Marxist character of "returning to class." In terms of mobilization and formation of the

movement itself, this is a relatively simple student movement that seeks to explore the link between rebuilding itself and connecting with the working class. Its appeal is how it supports the workers' unions and demands for the inclusions of a diverse range of legitimate struggles within the autonomously formed student associations.

The focus of the commemoration of 1968 shifts from a simple student movement and youth movement to a "convergence" and organized resistances. One question to posit at this juncture is that while the concept of "convergence" can be said to theoretically demonstrate how the concept of "the masses" replace the concept of "class", the returning to class and organisational problems occurred during the exploration of the methods of "convergence" prove that the concept of class has unique political and mobilizational functions which can not be replaced by other ideas. The Chinese revolution of the 20th century was never a simple class movement, but a mass revolutionary movement with peasants as the main subject. However, the concept of class and the political organization established on the basis of this concept, constitutes the foundation of revolution. How do we analyse the political purchase of the concept of class which transcends its merely descriptive connotation? Why is it that that concepts which accurately describe the heterogeneous identity of the formation of social movements, also have immense difficulty in articulating the link between mass movements and revolutionary socialism?

### **The Spatial Dimension of 1968: Exodus, Return, and Exportation**

In addition to the transformation of a "short May" to a "long 1968" along the time axis of the logic of "convergence" and the process of failure, retrospective analysis of '68 from 2018 brings us back to the topic of struggle against imperialism, of the third world, and also from a temporal dimension. If the key word of the spatial dimension is "convergence", then the central term of the temporal dimension is "exodus" and "return" or "bring back." Although many commentators have analysed and reviewed '68 in the framework of the "global 60s", most of the memories, summons, and reflections have centred around the students and intellectuals in Paris, Europe and the United States. The significance of the revolt in 1968 lies precisely in its worldwide reach: the "Cultural Revolution" in China, the national independence movements of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and the student movement beginning from the safeguarding Diaoyudao Island movement in the 1960s, the social and student movements in Hong Kong and Macao. Liu Ye outlines the development of the Black struggle in America. He points out that in its initial stage, the antiracism of the American black movement did not possess the internationalist traits of anti-capitalism, anti-colonialism, nor anti-imperialism like the European

Left wing ideology. However, the interactions of different movements in the era created a “convergence”, in which the American black movement experienced “exodus” and “bringing back” and transformed into a part of the global 1960s. It is not surprising that the main character who “exodus” and then being “returned” was not the civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., who became “sanitised” by the mainstream. Instead, it is Malcom X. His dual identity of both being black and a Muslim made him particularly difficult for the American mainstream society to swallow. In 1964, Malcolm X’s pilgrimage to the Middle East and North Africa brought the anti-imperialist struggle in the Third World to the American black civil rights movement. Not only he gained direct contact with African anti-colonial leaders, but also began to pay attention to the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan , the Vietnam War and the US Hegemony in Asia. He also fervently praised the Chinese Cultural Revolution and its political line.

"Exodus" and "Return" are relevant to the movements in the United States and Europe. If we shift the gravity centre of our narrative to the destination to where these Western activists ‘migrant’ and the origin from where they brought back spiritual inspiration, we consequently will have a story of ‘exportation’. Who is exporting? In 1963, after receiving another African American leader Robert Williams, whom also “migrated” from his home country, Mao Zedong issued a statement in the *People’s Daily* calling for "all the workers, peasants, revolutionary intellectuals, enlightened bourgeois elements and other enlightened people in white, black, yellow, brown, etc. to unite against racial discrimination inherent in American imperialism and support the struggle of black Americans against racial discrimination. After all, racial struggle is a question of class struggle..."<sup>9</sup> Malcolm X started a practice of integrating the US hegemony from outside the US. This transformation distinguishes him from the previous American Civil Rights movement leaders. Malcolm X’s act created a direct link between the Red China and the African American and student movements. They together fed into the revolutionary tide of anti-imperialism. The fact that Malcolm X and the various political groups he inspired, such as The Black Panthers, are difficult for the liberal mainstream to consume is not only due to his defense of the rationality of the violent struggle, but even more importantly his political stance of uniting with the international revolutionary movement undermining the American hegemony during the Cold War. For the imperialist system, the interactions among “exodus”, “bringing back” and “exportation” are most dangerous. The decrease of such interactions was accompanied

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<sup>9</sup> Mao Zedong: "The call to the people of the world to unite in opposition to racial discrimination of the American hegemony and the declaration of the support of the struggle against the racism of the Black Americans", 8. 8. 1963.

by the decline and dissolution of the “long sixties”. The disintegration of the 1960s is clearly related to two main premises. First, the coming to an end of the socialist and national liberation movement form the basic precondition of the dismantlement of the 1960s. Second, the termination of the aforementioned interactions means that internationalism in the 20th century eventually lost to nationalist and imperial politics. "Politics" has once again returned to the sphere of imperial hegemony and national sovereignty.

The anti-Vietnam war movement is significant in the sense that it too placed the US in the global hegemonic system. It consciously regards the US hegemony as the external enemy against the world’s people and consequently target of its own resistance. Just as Lenin called for an internal revolution in the First world war and forced his country to withdraw from the war, so too the anti-Vietnam war movement brought "war" back to the United States, and changed the imperialist war relationship (us vs. enemy) into the antagonistic relationship between a protest movement and a hegemonic power. It was this reconstruction of the relationship between us and the enemy that had created interaction and allianship between the American radical movement and socialist countries such as China. One after another, American university students visited Beijing, radical intellectuals at Paris peace talks helped the Communist party of Vietnam, the radical anti-war organizations and Mao Zedong’s thought were interlinked. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Weather Underground Organisation (WUO), which was the armed division affiliated to the SDS, the Marist-Leninist Progressive Labour Party, and factions dedicated to the violent revolution, which were created through the divisions and reorganisations of the movements, were all organizations that deviated from the mainstream political narrative. In terms of short-term goals, the 1960s movement did not fail. The Vietnam War is not only considered to be an outright military failure of American hegemony, but it is also a political and moral failure as well. The radicalization of the anti-War movement with its stance against U.S. imperialism, determined the fate of the radical movements. They were ultimately all mercilessly suppressed, dismantled, divided, and eventually marginalized, but their power is still unforgettable. Perhaps if we can look back at their fate from the place where they migrated to, instead of from within the US, we might be able to find different meanings.

Apart from "exodus", "bringing back" and “exportation”, it is necessary to emphasize the historical context of the third world's own political practices and the endogenous roots of their struggles. There is a mutual oscillation between these various struggles and they inspire political struggles in other regions. However, “the Third World might not need to acquire its historical and political subjectivity through the 'discovery'

of Western intellectual elites. By expanding the horizons to broader historical periods and geopolitical spaces, we can discover that the demonstrations of the Tunisian student, that shocked Foucault, should be understood in the context of a long anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggle of the Third World."<sup>10</sup> For example, the student strikes in Tunisia in March 1968 and the broader social protests in which miners participated, the roots of which included multiple historical lineages, such as *le Groupe D'études et d'action socialiste en Tunisie* (the Tunisian Left-wing Student Organization Socialist Research and Practice Group), *Parti socialiste destourien* (the Tunisian Socialist Constitutional Liberal Party), the Trotskyist Gilbert Naccache, the Tunisian Communist Party, and the Arab nationalist movement. "The founder of the 1967 protests, Ben Genette, was a student at Al-Zaytuna. During the Bourguiba period, the Grand Mosque of Zaytuna and its subordinate, University of Zaytuna, were considered to be the home base of Islamic fundamentalism in Tunisia. These thoughts seem to be irrelevant, but in the context of the Middle East, the common political demands of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism have become the key driving force for connecting these trends of thought and establishing their 'pan-left' colour. Therefore, rather than seeing these movements as part of the global student 'radical movement', it is more appropriate to understand them in a broader and longer genealogy of anti-imperialist, anti-colonial movements of the Third World."<sup>11</sup> In order to explain the close relationship and mutual support between China and the Third World National Liberation Movement, the global radical anti-imperialist movement has to be placed in the framework of the entire twentieth century, and not just of 1960s.

For Chinese young intellectuals in 2018, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of '68, it is once again clear that the relationship between the anti-imperialist movement in the third world and the European and American student movements has multiple meanings. First of all, salvaging the complex relationship between 1968 and the Third World Movement and the violent revolution serves to understand anew the 20th century Chinese revolution and its international connections. 1968 is not an event distant in the horizon, but a process closely related to China itself. The Korean War, the Bandung Conference, the Vietnam War, the Palestinian issue, and the Third World political line marked by the aid in construction of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway and China's return to the United Nations with the support of third world countries constitutes an important context for understanding the history of the People's Republic of China. In the aftermath of 1989, this overall context gradually

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10Yin Zhiguang 2018.

11 Ibid.

disappeared. As early as 2015, the commemoration of the Bandung conference began to break away from the indifferent attitude in the past. The issue of the third world internationalism has once again entered the public sphere.

Secondly, the rupture, failure, and continuation of 1968 raises a series of questions that need to be addressed. As Liu Ye said in his article: "1968 is a dazzling climax, and also a watershed." "In 1968 and before, participants in the movement only needed to have a relatively loose and ambiguous identification to form an alliance. The then political circumstance did not require people to make clear choices and political decisions." However, after 1968, should the dramatic conflict be translated into a seemingly trivial but fundamental mobilization and solidarity of the masses? Is it possible to refrain from the illusion of absolute freedom and seek the dialectical unity of the individual and the collective?"<sup>12</sup> These questions did not get clear answers with the different choices of the post-1968 moment, but are instead now reemerging in new ways with the contemporary youth and their movements.

Thirdly, along with the rapid growth of China's economy and the persistence of the global economic crisis, China is re-entering Africa and Latin America, and its Asian neighbours, under new impetus, in the form of the "Belt and Road" initiative. This is a completely different attitude from the China of the 1960s and 1970s. China's re-entrance is surrounded by accusations and criticisms of it being "neo-colonialist" and the "neo-imperialist" from the western world. The African nations also have mixed feelings about the return of China. They welcome and criticised China's move. They hold expectations as well as concerns. In such a complex context, how should we understand the international role of China? How can we reconstruct the discourse of the third world internationalism? How should we analyse the situation, challenges to the status quo of the third world countries after the national liberation movement? These are all bound to become important issues which the new generation of Chinese will have to face. China's role in Africa depends not only on how China handles it, but also on how we assess the achievements and failures of the national liberation movement, how we explore the role of China in these regions and its differences to the European and American forms of colonialism and imperialism in Africa, as well as the new role of China within the global capitalist system. Although young commentators, in their examination of the events of '68 did not directly answer these questions, their efforts to rebuild third world internationalism and its position in the history of the 20th century are not only relevant, but also bound to influence the understanding of the historical role of China and

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12 Liu Ye 2018.

the orientation of the youth movement for the new generation. Therefore, in the foreseeable future, the reflection and activism of Chinese youth will necessarily also include the interconnection between “exodus”, “bringing back” and “convergence”. However, the connotations of these terms will be very different from that of 1968.

Why is it that the movements of the Western world, the Asia-Africa and Latin America, and the Soviet Union, have different appeals and different historical contexts, but these different historical backgrounds and movement can nevertheless interact and merge at this very historical juncture? The "Cultural Revolution" in mainland China, the Safeguarding Diaoyudao Island Movement in Taiwan, the rebellious movements against colonialism in Hong Kong and Macao — why are these separate movements capable of echoing one another and connecting with each other? What are the foremost fundamental conditions for this? The younger generation transcended their national and ethnic identities, standing firmly against imperialism. They gave birth to a real progressive politics in a historical moment that connected different regions. Without the history of imperialism, we might not be able to comprehend the internal logic resonating in these events, making them to connect with each other.

There is another basic condition for the interconnection of such different movements, namely the existence of the socialist state system after the October Revolution, especially after the Second World War. First of all, it is difficult to account for the rise of the post-war Third World national liberation movement and new forms of internationalism, without first taking into consideration the emergence of the Soviet Union, the Eastern European system, and China. Secondly, within the socialist camp, between the Communist Parties of various countries, differences in political lines and dramatic theoretical debates were made manifest since the 1950s, The Poznań 1956 protests, the Hungarian crisis and the Prague Spring are the landmark events in which political differences have developed into interstate conflicts. There were differences in political lines and ideological debates between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, between China and the Soviet Union, between China and Yugoslavia, between China and the Western European Communist Party, between European Communist Parties, and within Communist Parties across the world. Therefore, the global movement that reached its climax in 1968 actually had to answer the questions of how we are to understand the socialist state, the socialist system, and even the October Revolution. The '68 movements had to choose between the Chinese and the Soviet line and had to respond to the socialist countries, or the theoretical divisions within the Communist Party. The new left wing that matured in the 1968 movement came to the stage in the right way and drew the bow in the

direction of the Right and in the direction of the Left. To the Right: against the capitalism and imperialism; to the Left: towards the Soviet Union and the Communist Party. But with the disintegration of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the new left has also weakened as an ideological movement, and intellectuals and youth culture have gradually fallen into a long sense of powerlessness and melancholy. In other words, after 1968, the power of the new left (including the liberal left) originated from its critique of the socialist system and the Communist Party's organizational capability, while simultaneously relying on the structural existence of this power. In my opinion, this is one of the "heaviest parts" of the motivation that prompted the new generation to reclaim anew the events of 1968.

### The Chinese 1960s and the Global 1968

This touches upon the third aspect mentioned at the beginning of the article, namely the Cultural Revolution, which has been time and again critically questioned, but has never managed to appear directly on stage. The "Cultural Revolution" is internal to the “long 1968”, but it is also very unique that has not been adequately examined and given a comprehensive answer. Looking back at 1968, the commentators talked mostly about the interaction between the Parisian students and “Cultural Revolution” propaganda, especially the thought of Mao Zedong, Red China's support for the African American and the student movements, the Sino-Soviet debate, the critique from the student movement against the French and Italian Communist Parties, and China's contribution to internationalism in the third world. On an international level, commentators also pay attention to the Chinese military involvement in the Vietnam War from June 1965 to January 1972 when the Vietnam-US Paris Peace Accords was signed. During this period, China dispatched a total number of 320,000 soldiers to the North Vietnam, carrying out missions such as air defence, military combat, engineering, minesweeping, and logistic support. In 1965, China also began to conduct geological survey in order to prepare for the construction of the TAZARA Railway. From October 1970 to July 1976, China, in cooperation with Tanzania and Zambia, completed the construction of an 1860.5 kilometres long railway. From supporting Vietnam against the US invasion, to the construction of the TAZARA Railway, China could only perform these missions for being a socialist country led by a communist party. No other organisations would be able to achieve these goals. The Soviet support of the third world national independence movement, including its large-scale aid to the industrialisation of China in the 1950s should not face total oblivion just because of its chauvinist tendency and internal arbitrary actions. When examining 1968, how could we praise internationalism abstractly without acknowledging the role played by political parties and states? How could we ignore the political pretext before the formation of

the third world internationalism? How could we only focus on researching the postcolonial condition and categorically negate the significance of sovereignty and state? How could we, after all, face national liberation, the most important achievement of the third world national independence movement, but without actually acknowledging it? It is without questions that hegemony, intervention, and imperialist domination continue to have their ways in today's world. It was not very long ago when external powers could monopolise national resources and wantonly change demographic structure in the third world nations simply through installing puppet governments. However, thanks to the achievement of the national independence movement, the era is now long gone.

The political events of 1968 correctly exposed the shortcomings of the socialist system in practice as well as in theory. A shortcoming that functions as the starting point, and a mutual echo between the various social movements in Europe, the United States, and of course the "Cultural Revolution". During this period, China experimented with nearly almost all possible political options. Not only criticism and resistance to imperialism and capitalism, but also criticism and resistance to the Soviet Union. Not only the rebellious movement of students and the experience of establishing various organizations, but there was also a denial of the new bureaucratic system under the leadership of the Communist Party. There was not only "cultural battles" but also "armed battles". However, these attempts failed one by one. Due to the violent elements in the movement, the protracted reaction to this movement provided reasons for the depoliticization process in the next few decades. In fact, the denial of the "Cultural Revolution" was not only a process after 1976-1979, but was also already hidden within the "Cultural Revolution" itself. Under the conditions of continuous armed struggles and chaotic social order in some areas, in August 1968, Yao Wen Yuan published the slogan "The working class must lead everything" in the *Red Flag* magazine. Since then, the workers' propaganda team successively stationed in educational, as well as other institutions. Yao's slogan directly refers to class, rather than the political party, as the subject of leadership. This attention to class demonstrated the "Cultural Revolution's" awareness that the political party had transformed from a majority into a minority. However, since the power of the mass movement was already declining, the actual role and influence of this radical slogan itself has been very limited.

Since the beginning of 1968, the rebel movement transitioned and developed a revolutionary committee centred around the idea of the "three-in-one" of the heads of mass organizations, namely: local garrison leaders, leading cadres of party, and government organs. The highest authority figure within the revolutionary committee was not a

rebel, but the leading cadre who played a "core and backbone role" in the organization and a military representative who played a "significant role". Within the 28 provinces and cities in the country, with the exception of seven provinces and cities such as Shanghai, Heilongjiang, Shanxi, Shandong, Beijing, Hebei, and Shaanxi, the first leaders of other provinces and cities were all from the military. The rebels were ebbed away from positions of authority and centres of power. In order to solve the problem of urban unemployment and address the fast growth of the population, under the banner of "taking the road of the integration of workers and peasants", the large scale Down to the Countryside Movement was launched nationwide. All of this also indicates that the rebel movement that began in 1966, in China, was at the time heading towards a turning point. Therefore, the focus on 1968 in Europe and the United States also needs to shift to incorporate China's own point of view of these events and social changes, especially the waning of the "Cultural Revolution".

In Europe and the United States, there are very few scholars and intellectuals who regard the "Cultural Revolution" as an intrinsic or even as a key element of the revolts of 1968, but the failure of the "Cultural Revolution" lies in their own reflections on 1968. The denial of the radical "great democracy" or the mass movement is but one of the most mainstream, ideological attitudes, and a deeper reflection will touch upon the limitations of the movement, involving concepts such as classes, political parties, and states. After the "Cultural Revolution", the suspicion, reflection and criticism of the sovereign form of states in the framework of the socialist states based on the expansion of the class struggle, the violence of mass movements, the bureaucratization of revolutionary parties, the radical European left gradually performed a series of theoretical replacements. The concept of the multitude replaced class, political organization replaced party, the politics of equality replaced class struggle, the politics of the recognition and multiculturalism replaced the liberation movement, the concept of the global south replaced the third world, practice oriented socialism, or workers countries replaced the communist hypothesis, cosmopolitanism replaced the people liberating internationalism... Yes, it is not possible nor necessary to repeat the strategies and ways of 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, global capitalism has absorbed almost all of these subtle critiques and practices and has managed to turn them into a driving force for its self-renewal. The aforementioned theoretical replacement also cannot change the weakened state that the contemporary Western Left now finds itself in. The radical theoretical position is linked with depression and loneliness, not to mention that this exploration of the third world is reduced to the play of a small number of academic intellectuals.

Perhaps, based on this theoretical situation, we in 2018 China must adopt a retrospective view of 1968 which seeks to transcend the framework of the Parisian revolts and once again salvage the hardest, blood-soaked, broken pieces, and reconstruct the complete historical view of '68. In this act of retrospection, the "cultural revolution" serves only as a reference point for 1968. No one has exhaustively placed the Cultural Revolution directly within the historical map of 1968 and examined its prophecy for the future failures. If we say that the act of salvaging the historical significance of 1968 is to be found within a reflection on the events of '68 on a global scale, then the prevailing absence of the Cultural Revolution in these reflections, together with the failure of multiple political experiments, ensures that 1968 remains a very hard nut to crack. There is still much to be salvaged, and the work is still not complete. However, the efforts of a new generation to re-present the historical landscape in a broad and heterogeneous relation is generating multiple clues to the mystery of the 1968 story. The contemporary Chinese youth movement, while still quite small but nevertheless still unfolding, is undecided as to what name to adopt for itself. The youth movement does not know, what form it ought to take, or how to set periodic objectives and final goals, or how to establish the unity of intra-state and international political lines. In this sense, reflection and retrospection are the preconditions for the formation of a new politics.

In 2018, the revisiting of 1968 is a rejection of the myth of 1968 as the "last revolution". As Jiang Hongsen demonstrated to all in his speech, an advertisement of the art movement from the French May storm, the ATELIER POPULAIRE - "May 1968, the beginning of a protracted struggle."<sup>13</sup> The significance of revisiting the 1960s lies in reiterating this slogan, however the more pressing issue now is, where to start the new protracted struggle?

23<sup>rd</sup> September 2018, Göttingen  
 Translated by Katja Kolšek

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 13 Jiang Hongsen, the author's speech at the online seminar session on the 25th May, 2018 at 7pm, "The art movement Atelier Populaire in the May storm", published at the Wechat group *Artworking*, founded by Qu Yingzuo, professor at the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts. <http://jiliuwang.net/archives/73963>

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