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'In Memory of Norman Bethune': Two Resurrections of the 'Spirit of Selflessness' in Maoist China¹

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Abstract

This article examines how a single phrase praising the 'spirit of selflessness' of the Canadian doctor Norman Bethune, which appeared in his obituary by Mao Zedong in 1939, led to two conflicting exegeses in the medical literature of the People's Republic of China. The first exegesis identified Bethune as a prototype of self-cultivation for medical workers, while the second identified him as a prototype of the abolition of the self. In this article I demonstrate how the two 'resurrections' of Dr Bethune's 'spirit of selflessness' reflected and fuelled conflicting governmental understandings of the 'technology of the self' necessary for socialist construction during the first two decades of the People's Republic of China.

On November 12 1939, after having served as a medical volunteer for almost two years under Mao Zedong's Eight Route Army, the Canadian doctor Norman Bethune died of septicaemia caused by a self-inflicted cut on his finger during surgery. Little more than a month later, on December 21 1939, Mao wrote a memorial to Dr Bethune entitled 'In Memory of Norman Bethune', describing him as a man who 'died a martyr at his post'. In fact, as he himself admitted, Mao had met Dr Bethune only once and had sent him a single letter in response to a long string of epistles on the Canadian doctor's

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part. Nevertheless, besides praising his internationalism as a model for all Chinese communists, Mao exalted 'Comrade Bethune's spirit, his utter devotion to others without any thought of the self' as against people 'who are irresponsible in their work, preferring the light and shrinking the heavy, passing the burdensome tasks on to others and choosing the easy ones for themselves'. The two-page long memorial ended in typical didactic tone:

We must all learn the spirit of absolute selflessness from him. With his spirit everyone can be very useful to the people. A man's ability may be great or small, but if he has this spirit, he is already noble-minded and pure, a man of moral integrity and above vulgar interests, a man who is of value to the people (Mao, 1967: 326).

The memorial, which was published in the Yan'an press at the time, was little more than a typical acknowledgement of the bravery and self-sacrifice of a man who had devoted his medical skill in the fight against social injustice in such diverse battlefields as Spain and China, while keeping in line with Comintern orthodoxy. Although the significance of the memorial within guerrilla controlled territories in China before 1949 is an area well worth researching, this article will focus on the resurfacing of this short obituary in post-Liberation medical literature in China. More precisely, I will examine what, following Alain Badiou (2009), I call the two resurrections² of Dr Bethune's 'spirit of selflessness': one in the first years after Liberation and one during the Cultural Revolution. In other words, I will investigate how the spectre of the internationalist doctor's selflessness took flesh in these two distinct historical contexts of Chinese socialist state-formation in the form of two diametrically opposed exegeses of Mao's memorial article. The choice of the term exegesis should not be taken as a token of allegiance to the hermeneutic school of cultural anthropology. On the contrary, the term should be given all its political-theological gravity, in analysing the two resurrections of Dr Bethune's 'spirit' not as mere resurfacings of a sign, but rather as material returns of the indivisible remainder identified with the *nom propre* of Bethune as the battleground between two distinct governmental practices in the People's Republic of China.

² For an excellent discussion of Badiou's notion of resurrection see Wright (2008).

During his 1978-1979 'Birth of Biopolitics' lectures at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault (2009) made a rare passing reference to Marxist-Leninist regimes and parties, noting that their governmentality is largely exegetical, in other words, based on conflicting readings of Marxist and Leninist scriptures, precisely because Marxism lacks a unique governmentality in and of itself. In this respect, Maoist China can be considered paradigmatic amongst 'really existing socialist' regimes in its reliance on the exegesis of texts, ranging from classical Chinese literature to Marxist-Leninist canonical works, for the formation and contestation of the 'correct line' as the mode of governmentality proper to constructing socialism. Nowhere else in 20th century's state-socialist archipelago do we see so much public strife over the interpretation of play-scripts such as Wu Han's *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* or novels such as the *Dream of the Red Chamber* or *Water Margin*³ (Unger, 1993), let alone the actual Marxist-Leninist canon. Perhaps the exegetic emphasis of Chinese Marxism-Leninism owes its persistence to the long bonding of Chinese governmental reasoning with Confucian concerns over the correct identification of words and deeds, necessitating technologies of *zhengming*, the so-called rectification of names (Steinkraus, 1980), described by Ames and Hall (1987) as a method of ritually organising the relation between the self and the other with respect to the truth and in quest for the preservation of social harmony. The late Cultural Revolution obsession with issues of Legalism and Confucianism (Wu, 1983), as well as Dengist resurrections of Confucius, as the patriarch-sage of Chinese political reasoning (Dirlik, 1995), add weight to this tentative hypothesis.

Though lesser in scope than these grand narratives of socialist state-formation, the exegetic resurrections of Norman Bethune were far from simply reproducing socialist realist semiotics of militarist heroism, like the

³ In the September 4 1975 editorial of the *People's Daily* entitled 'Unfold criticism of Water Margin' (reprinted as a leading article in the *CMJ*: Anon., 1975) we read: 'The Chairman recently pointed out: 'the merit of the book *Water Margin* lies precisely in the portrayal of capitulationism and serves as teaching material by negative example to help all people recognize capitulationists' (ibid: 391-392). This exegesis then fuelled much of the argument of the famous Gang of Four article 'Reversing Correct Verdicts': 'Like Sung Chiang in the novel *Water Margin* who, though having joined the ranks of the peasant insurgents, still represents the landlord class, the capitalist-roaders are "communists" in name but actually representatives of the old and new bourgeoisie within and outside the Party' (Anon., 1976: 157).

better known case of the glorification of Lei Feng (Sheridan 1968). Instead, they reflected fundamental processes of contestation over the correct technology of the self, and over the relation between individual and public interest in Maoist China, which formed a core part of the overall struggle between technocrat based and mobilisation based modes of governmentality in the first decades of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Sublimation and the Cultivation of the Self

The first exegetic resurrection of Norman Bethune in PRC medical affairs occurred in December 1952 and was authored by no less than Fu Lianzhang, the President of the Chinese Medical Association (CMA) at the time. Delivered as a commemorative lecture on the 13th anniversary of Bethune's death, the paper was titled 'What We Should Learn From Dr Bethune's Revolutionary Humanitarianism'. The lecture, which was subsequently published in the *Chinese Medical Journal (CMJ)* in May 1953, began typically, recounting Bethune's deeds:

When our war of resistance to Japanese aggression broke out, he was sent by the Communist Parties of America and Canada to China, where he led a Canadian-American medical corps to help the Eight Route Army. Although at the time we intended to keep him at Yan'an, he insisted on going to the front; and on the mountainous regions of Shansi, Chahar and Hopei and on the plains of Central Hopei he saved countless lives of the Eight Route Army soldiers, enabling many to recover and continue fighting (Fu, 1953a: 164)

Then, Fu made his exegetical move proper, in an attempt to provide an official interpretation of Mao's Bethune memorial article. According to the CMA President, who claims in the lecture to have worked with Bethune 'for a time' back in 1938, the first lesson to be learned from Mao's Bethune was his 'spirit of Communism and Internationalism' while the second was his 'high sense of responsibility and devotion to his comrades'. Furthermore, Dr Bethune was exalted for combining 'knowledge with practice', a skill demonstrated by his construction of saddles for carrying medical equipment to the front, as well as by his ability of engaging in 'criticism and self-criticism'. According to Fu, Dr Bethune's practical stance was exemplified in his supposed maxim: 'Let us be

ruthless in our criticism, cruel to personal vanities, indifferent to age, rank or experience if these stand in our way' (Fu, 1953a: 165). Fu's lecture ended by proposing an ideologically condensed exegetic formula that put emphasis on Norman Bethune's ability to identify his individual goals with the general interest of the workers:

Comrade Bethune has no personal interests or private ends. His life is the highest manifestation of the selfless spirit in that he had merged his personal interests and aims in the general interests and aims of the proletariat. He has set an inspiring example (Fu 1953a: 165).

This is the first recorded reference in PRC medical literature to Norman Bethune's 'spirit of selflessness' or 'selfless spirit', as the key phrase of Mao's memorial. Following Fu's reading, the 'selfless spirit' of the Canadian doctor was manifested in his self-sacrifice, which in turn expressed his ability to merge his personal goals with the 'general good' of the proletariat. Put simply, in this interpretation of Mao's memorial, Dr Bethune was rendered an enduring example to health workers as a man who identified his interest with the masses to the degree of self-sacrifice. What we must note here is that nowhere in this discourse is there evidence of emulation of self-sacrifice as a goal in and of itself, or of personal interest being identified as a source of absolute evil. On the contrary, in typical dialectical reasoning, Bethune's achievement is identified with the fact that he sublimated his personal interest into the interest of the proletariat. Yet, in order for this sublimation of the personal ego into the proletarian Other to take place, what was presupposed was first of all a meticulous cultivation of individual virtue, and a resulting purity of the self reflected in its very overcoming. In other words, following Marxist dialectics, the general interest (identified as the dictatorship of the proletariat) was determined by individual interest, in the sense that the latter was always-already the quantitative precondition of the former as a higher qualitative synthesis.

Rather than mere dialectical materialist gymnastics, this reading of Mao's memorial to Norman Bethune by Fu Lianzhang can be seen as constituting a careful move of discursive domestication at a critical junction for Chinese governmentality. December 1952, when Fu delivered his lecture, was less than a year after Mao's launch of the most surprising campaign in the realm of

public health on the pretext of the alleged biological war waged against China by US armed forces occupying the southern part of the Korean peninsula. Initially the handling of the alleged crisis was delegated to the old medical guard of Guomindang turncoats, with a provision that if the emergency continued it would be handed over to the Soviets (Endicott & Hagerman, 1998). Yet, at the same time, amongst the high ranks of the Party a heretical report authored by Liu Lantao, Third Secretary of the CCP's North China Bureau, had been circulating since March 5 1952. It discussed the successes and failures of the anti-epidemic campaign and urged mass mobilisation so that, 'under Mao's direction, the CCP anti-epidemic policy began to change from a purely anti germ-warfare strategy into a policy for initiating a nationwide mobilisation for social reform' (Yang, 2004: 170). This should be achieved not through employment of experts and the top-down medicalisation of the population, but through methods of mass mobilisation as invented and practiced in Yan'an, a process aimed at changing '[w]orkers-peasants-soldiers [...] from passive objects of medical care into proactive fighters that would use their healthy bodies to prevent potential diseases' (Yang, 2004: 173).

This generalisation of germ-warfare containment methods to the entire field of public health was formulated and organised in terms of a Patriotic Hygiene Campaign which, as Rogaski (2002; 2004) has demonstrated, engineered a vast biopolitical apparatus of capture organised around what, following Badiou (2007), we could call the *event* of germ-warfare and the governmental void perceived as accentuating the crisis: technocratic elitism. The Patriotic Hygiene Campaign of 1952, consisting in the mass mobilisation of hundreds of thousands of civilians in a battle against supposed disease vectors, challenged the ability of the medical and scientific elite to manage the epidemiological crisis, and promoted the Yan'an model of the 'mass line' and 'people's war' as a panacea for every problem facing socialist construction in China.

Seen in this historical context, Fu's exegetic choice, drafted a few months after this unique challenge to scientific authority, must be admitted as carefully eclectic. Though one cannot dwell, as Koestler (1968: 16) would have it, in the 'grey foggy landscape between [his] second and third [cerebral] lobe', it is interpretively safe to assume that Fu Lianzhang had very good sense in choosing to concentrate on the most radical passage of Mao's memorial, containing the controversial phrase on the 'selfless spirit' or the 'spirit of

selflessness' of Norman Bethune. For in this way he managed, for the moment at least, to domesticate this phrase's political potential, by reterritorialising it within a familiar and orthodox dialectical framework of Hegelian sublimation; a framework that posited the self and its cultivation as a necessary prerequisite of any self-sacrifice meaningful to the synthesis of a greater, proletarian, good.

This ability of Fu Lianzhang to recuperate the perilous potential of Maoist governmentality in a way that minimised harm as regards biomedical technocrats was equally demonstrated during his talk to the 9th CMA Conference (December 14-17, 1952), where he addressed the problem of 'how do we make effective the principle of carrying out the people's health work by actively taking part in the mass health movement?' (Fu 1953b: 161). Fu's answer demonstrates his unwavering propensity to turn Maoism and the 'mass line' on its head:

Above all, we medical workers should play an active part in the movement, sustain and add to its vertebrate strength [...] there must be better guidance in scientific and technical matters, and our specialists and health workers must be right in the centre of the movement, gaining experience from among the people, seeking after difficulties and providing solutions [...] Health organisations bring forth concrete health problems among the people that require practical solutions and turn them over to the specialists, and the latter in turn deal with these problems in the light of their experience gained from working among the people – this is how scientific research is brought into unity with the masses (Fu 1953b: 161)

This in turn involved an implicit overture to the patron of scientific experts and Mao's alter ego in the Party, Liu Shaoqi, an alliance that would later lead to Fu's purge at the hands of the Red Guards (Anon., 1978). It was in 1939, the same year that Mao wrote his Bethune memorial, that Liu produced a series of lectures later to be published under the title 'How To Be a Good Communist'. Liu's treatise included a famous chapter on 'self-cultivation', which consisted of an innovative combination of Confucian doctrines on virtue (*de*), universally understood in China, with methods of communist discipline and subjection to the Party, pioneered in the Soviet Union. Originally presented by Liu Shaoqi as

a lecture at the Marx-Lenin Institute in Yan'an on July 8 1939⁴, the treatise aimed at problematising cadres' often non-proletarian background, and the 'class-enemy' residue this brought into the Party. As Boorman (1963: 337) has argued, the technology of the self that Liu endorsed was based on immersing cadres of suspect class origins in a long process of 'steeling and self-cultivation':

An immature revolutionary has to go through a long process of revolutionary tempering and self-cultivation, a long period of remoulding, before he can become a mature and seasoned revolutionary who can grasp and skillfully apply the laws of revolution. For in the first place, a comparatively immature revolutionary, born and bred in the old society, carries with him the remnant of the various ideologies of this society (including its prejudices, habits and traditions) (Liu, 1939).

This then put Liu's technology of the self, his mode of *subjectivation* (Butler, 2001) proper to socialist construction, in line with the Bolshevik problematisation of the 'New Man', the *partiniinost* [party-minded] communist, as the potentiality, if not the destiny, of every member of the revolutionary community (Cheng, 2009). Yet, at the same time, as Boorman (1963: 377) has noted, in contrast to Soviet orthodoxy, Liu's thesis on self-cultivation placed the subjective over the objective, personal choice over social determination, in that it implied that anyone can 'acquire a proletarian standpoint and political outlook even though he comes from a bourgeois class background'. Boorman is correct to trace the roots of this heresy to the Confucian legacy of Liu's thought, which set his communist mode of subjectivation in line with the paradigm of cultivating 'superior men' [*junzi*]: 'Communism, like virtue, is both normative and self-fulfilling; and being a good Party member, like being a chün-tzu [*junzi*], is its own reward' (Boorman, 1963: 382).

Liu's Confucianism has been an oft noted but scarcely analysed phenomenon, with crucial documents like his 'On Enjoyment and Happiness' and 'Opposing Hedonism' lectures, delivered during the same period, totally ignored by scholars. Though there is little space here to elaborate on these themes, it is worth noting that Liu followed a clear Neo-Confucian model

⁴ Published in three issues (82-84) of *Liberation*, and republished with important revisions in August 1962 when the *People's Daily* devoted six pages to it.

focused on processes of 'self-watchfulness' reflecting the philosophy of Wang Yangming (Nivison, 1956), whose influence on Mao's thought, albeit on issues largely pertaining on the relation of theory and practice, has been expertly analysed by Wakeman (1973). In this sense, Liu's model of self-cultivation did not follow the horticulturalist ideal of Mencian scholars (Ivanhoe 2000), but rather a polemical stratagem according to which the eradication of selfish desires was similar to a war of eradicating bandits and thieves:

One must, at all times, be like a cat catching mice – with eyes intently watching and ears intently listening. As soon as a single [selfish] though begins to stir, one must conquer it and cast it out. Act as if you were cutting a nail into two or slicing through iron. Do not harbour it, and do not allow it to escape (Wang Yangming, in de Bary, 1991: 102).

Thus, far from being concerned with the imagined clash of Mao's 'nativism' and Liu's 'cosmopolitanism', so often reproduced in studies of conflict within the CCP, what is important here is to stress that the impact of Neo-Confucian ideas on the relation between practice and theory, in the case of Mao, and self-watchfulness, in the case of Liu, created a common ground for the contestation of the self, as a field for the enclosure of symbolic capital and its transformation into a mobilisable force (Apter and Saich, 1994).

From this critical analytical perspective, Liu's combination of Bolshevism and Confucianism was not the outcome of some philosophical eclecticism, but the concrete expression of a technocratic socialist governmentality in incubation under conditions of deep illegality. Liu had experience organising the great strike of the Anyuan miners in the autumn of 1922, and had been an organiser of anti-British agitation in Shanghai during the May 30 Movement (Dittmer, 1998). This was an activist profile further enriched by his consistent work amongst industrial workers throughout the bitter decade of the 1920s (Boorman, 1963: 374). Liu thus acquired direct experience of organising and tempering collective industrial skills and struggles, whilst Mao was preoccupied with what from a Marxist perspective looked like little more than quaint *jacquerie* in the backwater of rural Hunan. After the Shanghai 1927 massacre, Liu's role in the Jiangxi Soviet was mainly in labour organisation, while after the Long March he largely remained behind enemy lines, becoming the leading underground party strategist (Dittmer 1998). There he employed a

cautious long-term policy aimed at fostering the battered secret Party apparatus, while extending its influence amongst students and workers in ever-harder conditions of illegality.

It is here, in conjunction with the immediate needs of the United Front strategy of the Communist Party at the time, that we can discover the root of Liu's self-cultivation compound. On the one hand, conditions of illegality made it a vital technology for sustaining party discipline in conditions of minimal communication and strained command-control. And on the other hand, the labour movement before 1927 was already highly involved in a revolutionary discourse which emphasised and valorised technical and professional skill (Bergère, 1989), deriving its identity *vis-à-vis* the bourgeoisie and the militarists as a class composition of technically skilled professionals who could take over production from 'social parasites' and rationalise it based on practical science and party discipline. Within the exceptional opportunities and constraints of the United Front, Liu's technology of the self thus enclosed these assemblages of dissent, providing a concise method of subjectivation that reflected a long urban radical tradition, overlooked by Mao's guerrilla apparatus, while incorporating a Neo-Confucian discourse both understandable and non-offensive to intellectual allies of the Communist Party. Enclosing them dialectically, in terms of a new problematisation centred on party-formation, Liu's political strategy engineered a potentially dynamic class alliance between skilled workers and urban strata of technocrats, intellectuals and economic experts that would prove pivotal in the aftermath of the October 1949 Liberation.

In the nascent PRC this ad hoc alliance assumed a vital position within the new state-formation, and especially in the realm of science and medicine. With state power finally in its hands, the CCP had no choice but to fully incorporate the pre-existing apparatus of both applied and theoretical sciences in the newly found People's Republic (Lampton, 1972). That the Communist Party had to employ and rely on what effectively was an apparatus of Guomindang (GMD) scientists was not a surprise but something long anticipated through the tactical decriminalisation of the intellectuals as national bourgeois elements during the civil war. In his acclaimed book *The Politics of Medicine in China*, David Lampton (1977) has argued that after Liberation, the Ministry of Health consisted of, and was under the control of, a body of biomedical experts and a few bureaucrats, most of whom had been

serving under the Nationalists. This toleration of Guomindang elements reflected the vital need for biomedical experts by a new regime struggling to construct a comprehensive biopolitical apparatus. Such experts were desperately lacking within the Party machine, for during the civil war the CCP had paid little attention to technical and scientific issues. The People's Liberation Army had of course developed excellent medical skills fit for the battlefield⁵, but these had little bearing on organising and controlling the complex public health milieu necessary to provide biopolitical control over the vastness of Chinese society. Hence, the collaboration of the Party with the old Nationalist medical apparatus was inevitable.

Yet, although in the abstract this might have been an acceptable thaw, within the concrete reality of CCP politics it posed an acute problem. Made up of old Nationalist cronies and overnight turncoats, the biomedical elite was terrified by the perceived vulgarity of the battle-worn guerrillas, yet relatively comforted by the European manners and urbane outlook of Soviet advisers and their technocrat allies. Thus, the legions of biomedical experts who the Communists were forced to recognise, *carte blanche*, as a 'national bourgeoisie' were under threat of being (or in fact threatening to be) assimilated and co-opted by the party's technocrats, forming a new social and political stratum of urban-minded experts, mirroring developments in the Soviet Union at the time⁶.

It was under these contradictory conditions that the CMA's leadership chose to counteract Mao's mass mobilisation paradigm by means of domesticating one of the pivotal articles of faith opposing technocrat hegemony: Norman Bethune's memorial. Although it would be far-fetched to claim that, faced with the Patriotic Hygiene Campaign, Fu Lianzhang's exegesis of Mao's article was Liuist in and of itself, it did in fact reproduce the cornerstone of Liu's socialist Neo-Confucianism: the polemical, Wang Yangming styled, cultivation of the self as a pre-requisite of socialist construction. More than that, it denied the memorial's most radical potential, by reterritorialising 'the spirit of selflessness' into an exegetical matrix that put emphasis on being professionally expert as the dialectical prerequisite of being politically red.

⁵ For an interesting discussion on medical innovation in Yan'an, see Taylor (2001).

⁶ Here I am far from adopting the idea that Mao's 'new class' discourse was identical to Djilas' critique of prestige within ruling Communist Parties of the East Block in Europe.

It is indicative of the political nature of this exegetic resurrection of Bethune's 'spirit of selflessness' that we find it repeating itself almost identically 12 years later in the context of a similar governmental urgency. Despite the annual memorial services in his honour, if one examines the full record of official medical journals between 1953 and 1965 one is unable to find a single feature article referring to the heroic Canadian doctor. What then urged the reprinting of Mao's memorial in November 1965 in the CMA's flagship, the *Chinese Medical Journal*? The answer lies in the editorial accompanying the reprint, which attempted once again to provide a cautious interpretation of the controversial tract on the 'spirit of selflessness'. The context of the reprint and commentary was made explicit in the editorial itself, in all probability authored once again by the acting head of the CMA, Fu Lianzhang:

Mao bids the Chinese people to learn from Comrade Bethune his spirit of internationalism and communism, his selfless spirit of doing everything for the benefit of others, his high sense of responsibility and warm-heartedness towards the comrades, and his spirit of ever seeking fresh knowledge and improving his professional skill [...] Following the teaching of Chairman Mao Zedong, the Chinese people have learned from Comrade Bethune and are marching along the road of "red in politics and expert in profession" (Anon., 1965: 701).

Fu's revamped editorial thus placed the emulation of Norman Bethune's 'spirit of selflessness' within the context of the red and expert debate raging at the time, in a way that trod a fine line on the subject. Claiming that Mao's memorial urged medical workers to be 'red in politics and expert in profession', the editorial adopted a calculated attitude towards the bitter battle between proponents of professional skill and proponents of mass mobilisation in command of health issues. And yet, such a fine line was not a neutral political statement in November 1965, as five months earlier Mao had launched his famous attack on the health apparatus of the PRC as nothing more than a lackey to a new bourgeoisie.

On June 26 1965 Mao famously accused the Ministry of Health of working 'for 15% of the total population of the country and that this 15% is mainly composed of gentlemen, while the broad masses of the peasants do not get

any medical treatment' (Mao, 1965). Calling it the 'Ministry of Gentlemen's Health', Mao attacked the biomedical elite:

They work divorced from the masses, using a great deal of manpower and materials in the study of rare, profound and difficult diseases at the so-called pinnacle of science, yet they either ignore or make little effort to study how to prevent and improve the treatment of commonly seen, frequently occurring and wide-spread diseases (Mao, 1965).

Defending the self-sublimation exegetic thesis in this context thus amounted to no less than full support for the technocrat mode of governmentality that had prevailed in China after the disastrous failures of the Great Leap Forward (GLF) and its methods of mass mobilisation (Dikötter, 2010). Armed with a combination of Saint-Simonist resolve and Leninist organisational rigour, CCP technocrats had managed to partly reverse the late 1950s string of economic and subsistence disasters and stand the People's Republic on its proverbial feet (Schurmann, 1968). What has often been called, evocatively if in fact inaccurately, the Chinese New Economic Policy was based on small-plot cultivation, industrial rationalisation, economic incentives based labour and market-oriented production (Schurmann, 1968). At the heart of this 'one step backward' approach lay Liu Shaoqi's old technology of the self which was propagated with evangelical fervour to the masses. After an illustrious edited republication in the *People's Daily* in 1962, Liu Shaoqi's treatise 'How to Be a Good Communist' was reprinted in no less than sixty million copies and was distributed as the economic reform's blueprint for China's prospective Nepsmen (Boorman, 1963). These developments led by late 1964 to an organised counter-attack by cadres and intellectuals close to Mao, favouring methods of mass mobilisation and moral incentive as the proper mode of socialist governmentality (Lampton, 1977).

Mao's June 26th speech was thus a foretaste of his campaign to contain and reverse the post-GLF technocrat tide, which would reach its peak in the Cultural Revolution. In this context, the *CMJ*'s November 1965 reprint and editorial of Mao's 'In Memory of Norman Bethune' must be seen as a renewed attempt of domesticating the radical potential of the memorial, which was once again being widely propagated by the proponents of the 'mass line' at a grassroots level, by reterritorialising it within the old dialectical

schema originally proposed in December 1952 under similar emergency conditions by Fu Lianzhang. It is within this contestation of power and knowledge that we must place the radical shift of Bethune related exegesis away from the cultivation of the self and the sublimation of professional skill into proletarian interest, towards the abolition of the self and professional skill as forms of private property and as obstacles to the construction of a classless society, which took central stage in December 1966.

The Abolition of the Self

On December 21 1966 a *People's Liberation Army Daily* editorial, commemorating the 27th anniversary of Bethune's death, argued that Mao's memorial 'provides us with a powerful weapon to eradicate self-interest and foster public interest', helping every communist 'to sweep away the filth in the depth of our souls' (Anon., 1967a: 328). The editorial went on to claim that the change in world outlook regarding self and public interest 'is a change in class stand and class sentiments, a change in the basic attitude towards life, society and all things, a change in the essentials of one's thought'. It added that 'the kernel of the proletarian world outlook is the concept of complete devotion to the public interest, the concept of saving people wholeheartedly, the communist spirit of utter devotion to others without any thought of the self', whereas 'the kernel of the bourgeois world outlook is the concept of self-interest, selfishness, advancing one's own interests at the expense of others, and extreme individualism'. As the new socialist society was in need of 'men of a new type', the struggle against the self would 'not cease as long as classes and class struggle exist'. The PLA editorial, which was reprinted in all major medical journals at the time, explained:

Private ownership has been in existence for several thousands of years; the concept of self-interest of the exploiting classes, which upholds private ownership, has the deepest influence over people. It is a stubborn enemy that permeates everything. It may be thoroughly repudiated on one particular question and in one particular form today, but tomorrow it will appear again on another question and in another form. Therefore, the struggle to eradicate self-interest and foster public interest needs to be carried out repeatedly and continually, throughout

one's whole life. Each comrade, new or old, of whatever class origin, must wage such a struggle conscientiously (Anon., 1967a: 329).

It is clear that this PLA exegesis of Mao's memorial to Dr Bethune was far removed from the one provided in 1952 by Fu Lianzhang or the one repeated, in all probability by Fu again, in the 1965 *CMJ* reprint and editorial. Rather than as a surprise attack, the editorial must be seen as the final surfacing of a discourse that had dominated developments in the biomedical sphere for the past two years, glimpses of which are afforded by a careful look at the small print of medical journals at the time. For example, it was but a short *CMJ* 'News and Notes' item that announced the First Resolution of the Five-Point Decision of the Ministry of Health Party Committee made on February 16 1966. This resolution called on medical and public health workers 'to study Chairman Mao's thinking concerning people's war and wholehearted service to the people' so as 'to make our health work stand the test of war and difficulties' (Anon., 1966a: 205). Three months later, it was again a *CMJ* 'News and Notes' item that attacked: 'medical workers who believe that "one who has technical skill has all" and consider skill as an inalienable private property that may lead to fame and fortune, those who think only of their personal gain and loss and not the interests of the people, and who still have idealistic, subjectivist, and metaphysical tendencies, and believe in foreign patterns and formulas' (Anon., 1966b: 345). And, in the same volume of the *CMJ*, it was yet again a minute 'News and Notes' item that announced that on January 17 and February 13 1966 a conference was held in Beijing concentrating on the red-expert debate: 'The conference agreed that medical workers, being a body of intellectuals, were most liable to individualism, looking down upon the working people, being afraid of difficulties and prone to arrogance and subjectivism' (Anon., 1966c: 271).

Although under-represented in the official medical press, these two 'Ministry of Health Meetings on the Study of Mao Zedong's Works', headed by Vice-Premier Lu Dingyi, and attended by more than 10,000 medical workers of Beijing, were decisive in settling the red-expert debate in the field of medicine and health. During the meetings, Professor Lim Kha-ti, the Vice-President of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, touched upon the issue of 'correctly handling the relation between politics and profession and integrate politics with professional work'. Conducting her self-criticism over overemphasising

professional work, Professor Lim urged that, ‘technical skill, however high, could not prevent slips or errors in clinical practice; more important was wholehearted devotion to the service of the people’ (Anon., 1966c: 271). The meetings ruled that, ‘medical workers, being a body of intellectuals, were most liable to individualism, looking down upon the working people, being afraid of difficulties, arrogance and subjectivism’. The overcoming of ‘bourgeois individualism’ and the eradication of ‘arrogance and view of the achievements and shortcomings of their own and others’ was consequently dictated as a general aim of the medical profession (Anon., 1966c: 272).

If, as seen in both the short ‘News and Notes’ glimpses above and in the December 1966 PLA editorial, private property had suddenly become the epicentre of the problematisation of the ‘spirit of selfishness’, this was due to a radical identification of professional skill with symbolic capital. The explicit aim of this radical exegetical turn targeted the cultivation of the self as a means of private accumulation of capital in the form of skill:

Medical workers who believe that ‘one who has technical skill has all’ and consider skill as an inalienable private property that may lead to fame and fortune, those who think only of their personal gain or loss and not the interests of the people, and those who still have idealistic, subjectivist and metaphysical tendencies, and believe in foreign patterns and formulas (Anon., 1966b: 345).

It is indicative that, at the same time as medical articles on Bethune started adopting this new exegetic turn regarding the issue of ‘the spirit of selfishness’, another genre of articles made its appearance across medical journals. These articles directly attacked the cultivation of the self as the kernel of counterrevolutionary reaction evident in the so-called ‘February reactionary wind’, the technocrat’s reaction to the accelerating Cultural Revolution exemplified in the ‘January Storm’ of 1967. Paradigmatic of these articles was a leading article in *China’s Medicine* ‘Get Rid of Self-Interest, Forge a Great Alliance of Revolutionary Rebels’:

Unless we seize power from ‘self-interest’ in our minds and get rid of “self-interest” in our minds, we will not be able to seize power from the handful of persons in the party who are in authority and taking the

capitalist road [...] a spiritual thing will turn into a material thing. If we seize power with self-interest in our minds, even though power is seized it may still degenerate into bourgeois political power (Third Headquarters of the Capital's Red Guards, 1967: 201).

Besides the obvious reference to Liu Shaoqi, what must be noted here is the establishment of a causal relation between self and private property:

All negative tendencies spring from the mode of small-scale production and the bourgeoisie's insatiable longing for fame and material gain. All of them can finally be attributed to "self-interest" (Third Headquarters of the Capital's Red Guards, 1967: 205).

Extending this causal reasoning, the same article further claimed:

This 'self-interest' is precisely the bourgeois headquarters in the minds of many comrades. The struggle for power between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is also going on in our minds. Unless the 'power' in our minds is seized by the proletariat, that is to say unless the headquarters in our minds are occupied by Mao Zedong's thought, then it will be of little consequence even if we do seize power from those in authority who are taking the capitalist road (Third Headquarters of the Capital's Red Guards, 1967: 205).

Such discourse was far from an isolated incident in the period immediately following the 'February reactionary wind' (Dittmer, 1998). In May 1967 a concentrated effort to discredit the technocrat technology of the self culminated in the simultaneous publication in *Red Flag* and *People's Daily* of a scathing article titled 'Betrayal of Proletarian Dictatorship is Essential Element in the Book on "Self-Cultivation"'. The article, reproduced in all medical journals, began with the following paragraph:

The book on 'self-cultivation' of communists is the representative work of the top party person in authority taking the capitalist road. It is a big poisonous weed opposed to Marxism-Leninism, and Mao Zedong thought. Its poison has spread throughout China and the world. It must

be thoroughly criticised and repudiated (Editorial Departments of *Red Flag* and *People's Daily*, 1967: 530).

The article sought to place the blueprint of the technocrat technology of the self within a wider context of demonology of anti-orthodox renegades:

'Self-cultivation' of this kind can only 'cultivate' philistines who will not take part in revolutionary war and do not want to seize political power! The philistine products of such 'cultivation; are no communists at all, but social-democrats of the Second International [...] 'Self-cultivation' of this kind can only 'cultivate' a Bukharin type of person who goes in for capitalism instead of socialism or a Khrushchev type of person who rejects the dictatorship of the proletariat and works to restore capitalism! (Editorial Departments of *Red Flag* and *People's Daily*, 1967: 532).

Within this climate of purge and purification, typical of rectification campaigns since 1942 (Teiwes, 1979), the spectre of Norman Bethune was paraded again and again in medical journals and handouts. There it was systematically combined with two other articles written by Mao, 'Serve the Peasants' and 'The Foolish Old Man who Removed the Mountains', into a discursive compound, thus forming the 'three always read articles', which were to be the guidelines for the rectification of experts throughout the Cultural Revolution.

Stories of medical achievement and reform

As a result of the above developments, medical periodical literature at the time of the Cultural Revolution came to be dominated by a large corpus of articles aimed at the rectification of the medical elite, which more often than not took the form of personal stories and narratives. These narratives can be further classified into stories of achievement and stories of reform. The former gave supposedly authentic accounts of medical doctors originally and spontaneously committed to serving the people and emulating Norman Bethune's 'spirit of selflessness'. The latter portrayed initially selfish medical doctors who end up repenting, confessing their bourgeois outlook, and rectifying themselves according to the 'selfless spirit' of Dr Bethune.

A typical example of stories of achievement is the article titled 'A Propagandist of Mao Zedong Thought and a Close Friend of the Poor

Herdsmen', which appeared in December 1968 in the pages of *China's Medicine*. The article presents the story of Li Fengming, a devoted medical worker at the Haipei Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture suffering from displacement of an intervertebral disc. The article portrays how Li Fengming persists in his efforts to help the minority peasants despite this requiring hard horseback exercise, which further worsens his condition:

Each time he reached a destination he experienced a severe pain in his loin, which sometimes rendered him unable to walk for a moment. However, simply ignoring his discomfort, he would enter the tent, refuse all offers of drink and rest, and lose no time in treating the sick, explaining the 'three constantly read articles' to the herdsmen (Anon., 1968: 752).

In short, this article, like all similar stories of achievement, portrayed the 'spirit of selflessness' of devoted doctors treating patients in remote rugged areas of China. At the same time, stories of achievement portrayed how the ethic of socialist-minded doctors, and above all the new paramedical force of barefoot doctors, broke with the 'the influence of the counter-revolutionary revisionist medical line advocated by China's Khrushchev, Liu Shaoqi and company' (Anon., 1968: 754).

Time and again in such stories of achievement the high-brow attitude of university trained 'leather shoe' doctors was condemned, or presented in a dim light as an obstacle to the new-spirited doctors in the field: 'The revolutionary proposals of the young fighters were nipped in the bud for the time being by the handful of capitalist roaders in the Party' (Section of Politics and Education Under the Revolutionary Committee of Shanghai First Medical College, 1968: 725). The standard method of fighting against this reactionary stance was healthy 'class sentiment':

We must never forget our bitterness and soften our blood-and-tears hatred for the old society. We must, without the least hesitation, go to the mountainous regions and rural plains, return to our class parents and resolutely serve the workers, peasants and soldiers – serve the people heart and soul (Section of Politics and Education Under the Revolutionary Committee of Shanghai First Medical College, 1968: 727).

Norman Bethune figured consistently in these stories as the prototype for selfless medical workers. His description here is very different from the sober accounts of pre-Cultural Revolution medical literature. Dr Bethune is described as a larger than life figure who urges his medical colleagues: 'You should use me as you use a machine gun' (Anon., 1967b: 823). In an article titled 'The Spearhead Squad Youth Medical Workers Nurtured by Mao Zedong's Thought', for example, a case of acute appendicitis complicated by localised peritonitis is recounted. Due to a flood hampering transportation to a hospital, the local doctor decides to operate on the patient in her home:

The great image of Comrade Bethune operating on the wounded in a small broken-down temple sprang to their minds [...] With two planks serving as an operating table and a flash light for illumination, a successful operation was performed under the guidance of Mao Zedong's thought (Section of Politics and Education Under the Revolutionary Committee of Shanghai First Medical College, 1968: 731).

On the other hand, stories of reform focused on self-criticism, thus fuelling the ever-growing genre of repentance and rectification that dominated the Cultural Revolution press. A prime example of such medical articles is the one authored under the name of Wu Zemin. In graphic autobiographical style Wu recounts how he was sent to the Dongjingcheng People's Commune, set in a deep mountain ravine in Ning'an County, as part of the Red Flag Production Brigade and the only thing he could think of was how his medical career was being wasted. Accommodated at a room of a poor peasant's house, Wu could hardly sleep: 'what would be my future, I thought, if I worked in this place?' (Wu Zemin, 1968: 276). Although greeted cordially the following morning by the villagers, he 'took no interest in them or their chit-chat. My only thoughts were of going back to Mutankiang where I had come from'. Following the call of home, the next morning Wu deserted his post. Yet back home he failed to find the reception he expected:

At daybreak the next day, I left for home without a word to anyone, on my arrival at home my mother was greatly surprised and asked me why I had returned. When I told her my reason, she expressed her strong

disapproval. In the evening when my father came back from work his first words on seeing me were: 'Why have you come back? You left home only two days ago'. I started to tell him of my dissatisfaction with my assignment but he did not let me finish. Indignant, he said: 'You have just started to work and you complain at this and that. You must go back tomorrow' (Wu Zemin, 1968: 276).

Recounting the bitter ordeals suffered by his family under the 'old society', and how they were eventually saved by Mao's revolution, Wu continued: 'Thinking of Chairman Mao's benevolence [*ren*], of the training of the Party had given me [...] I shed tears of remorse. I saw my error'. Looking up to the portrait of the Chairman, Wu dedicated himself to reading 'the two brilliant articles – "Serve the Peasants" and "In Memory of Norman Bethune"'. Taking inspiration and shedding 'bitter tears of remorse', he made his way back to his production brigade. After being warmly welcomed back by the villagers, Wu settled, resolute in his decision to be the first doctor to serve the community. Yet a series of problems cropped up in the course of his work:

One day a young student called me to treat uncle Wang Chin-Tao [...] suffering from acute gastroenteritis. As I attended him, I had the uncomfortable feeling that the patient might vomit and soil my clothes. At this moment, however, the heroic image of Doctor Norman Bethune emerged before me. I thought to myself: Uncle Wang was my class brother and I must do everything I could for him. So I gave him an injection, and then cleaned up the room and bathed him (Wu Zemin, 1968: 278).

Although happy to see Uncle Wang recovered, upon returning to his hut, Wu fell into deep reflection:

I struggled with myself over my fear of dirt, which is a reflection of bourgeois ideology. Chairman Mao says: 'I came to feel that compared with the workers and peasants the remoulded intellectuals were not clean, and that, in the last analysis, the workers and peasants were the cleanest people and, even though their hands were soiled and their feet smeared with cow dung, they were really cleaner than the bourgeois and

petty-bourgeois intellectuals'. This was a precise criticism of my bourgeois and petty-bourgeois thoughts. What were dirty were not the peasants but my own ideas (Wu Zemin, 1968: 278-279).

Thus, his experience with Uncle Wang made Wu reflect on his relations with the peasants:

Treating Uncle Wang had made me realise that although I was an intellectual who had come to the countryside to work among the former poor and lower-middle peasants every day, I had not merged with them in my thinking and feelings and had not thoroughly changed my stand and attitude, and thus could not serve them heart and soul (Wu Zemin, 1968: 279)

Deciding to stay at the Red Flag Production Brigade, Wu spent the next few years helping the peasants with all the skills he possessed. Then one day in 1965 the secretary of the commune's Party committee proposed to him to become the first half-time doctor, half-time farm worker in the commune. Overcoming his doubts about the efficiency of such arrangement, Wu concluded:

Without integration with the masses, how can I be a real revolutionary? Half-time medicine, half time farming makes an intellectual better able to identify himself with the masses of the peasants, better able to remould his world outlook and better able to serve the people and is an important means of promoting ideological revolutionisation (Wu Zemin, 1968: 281).

Taking up the task, Wu still felt he could not fully integrate with the peasant masses:

Because I had a big 'self' in my mind, I had not changed my world outlook. I resolved that I must solve this problem in this Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. I explained to my wife what I had in mind. I started by saying that there were two kinds of power to be seized during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution – one from those in

authority taking the capitalist road, and the other from the 'self' (Wu Zemin, 1968: 282).

As a result, Wu asked his brigade to assign his work points and treat him as an ordinary commune member, in the hope of shedding the last vestiges of his former specialisation and alienation from the masses. Soon an excellent opportunity appeared for Wu to prove his rectified heart and mind (*xin*):

As it happened the brigade needed someone to take care of the pigs. I insisted on taking the job and refused to listen to the objections of some of the commune members and cadres who thought that the work was too dirty and tiring for a doctor to do. I stood firm in my decision to do this work because I thought that it would be very beneficial to my ideological remoulding and would temper me in physical labour" (Wu Zemin, 1968: 283)

Summarising the lessons to be learnt from his efforts to integrate with the masses at the Red Flag Production Brigade, Wu concluded his autobiographical article in a programmatic tone:

Combating self-interest and fostering devotion to the public interest requires a long course of repeated ideological struggles. Each step forward has to be made through struggle with the 'self' [...] In the struggle between the two classes, two roads and two lines I must destroy self-interest and cultivate devotion to the public interest, make revolution in the very depths of my soul in order to thoroughly remould my world outlook (Wu Zemin, 1968: 284)

We should here return to Badiou's definition of *resurrection* as the process that 'reactivates a subject in another logic of its appearing-in-truth' (Badiou, 2009: 65), in order to point out that, from an anthropological perspective, as a reflection of the second coming of Bethune's 'spirit of selflessness' Wu's discourse is predicated on the subjectivation of 'a new present [...] to the point of attaining its immanent eternity' (Badiou, 2009: 497). What this indicates is that, both in the case of the post-Liberation technocratic backlash and during the Cultural Revolution, the cohesion of the resurrected spirit of Bethune

could be efficacious only to the extent that it entailed a new process of conversion to the revolution.

Two Modes of Conversion

In his 'Hermeneutics of the Subject' lectures of 1980-1981 at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault (2005: 208) argued that, 'we cannot understand the revolutionary individual and what revolutionary experience meant for him, unless we take into account the notion or fundamental schema of conversion to the revolution'. Accordingly, the two exegetic resurrections of Norman Bethune's 'spirit of selflessness' must be understood within the confines of conversion, and more specifically within a struggle over the necessary transformation of the Chinese into a 'new people' (*xinren*) as a prerequisite of socialism. Thus, far from confining ourselves to the question of how two rival socialist governmental perspectives *inhabited the world*, we must examine the contested resurrection of Dr Bethune's 'spirit of selflessness' in terms of how these two perspectives sought to *transform the world* through specific technologies of the self and its self-transformation.

The first resurrection, engineered from a technocratic perspective within the Chinese Communist Party, assumed one's conversion to the revolution to consist in adopting the position of the only class proper, the *universally potential* stance of the proletariat. In contrast, the second resurrection, engineered from a 'mass line' perspective within the CCP, conceived this conversion as a process of realising and eradicating the only real class, the *universally actual* reality of the class-enemy.

As a result, if for proponents of the 'sublimationary mode of subjectivation' everyone could become-proletariat (the New Man), for proponents of the 'abolitionary mode of subjectivation' everyone always-already was the class-enemy (the Old Man). Whilst the former prescribed a conversion based on transferral, the latter demanded one based on disavowal. In other words, the 'sublimationary mode', exemplified in the all-too-sober lectures of the CMA President Fu Lianzhang, required from medical doctors to identify with an objective class essence (the proletariat as the universal class) and get on with their work. In contrast, the 'abolitionary mode', as the case of Wu Zemin so clearly illustrates, required from the same professionals engagement in a perilous process of dynamic class re-positioning, where the elusive nature of

one's own self as the enemy provided the fuel for one's perpetual but never finalised true conversion to the revolution.

It is hence important to note that if the first resurrection of Bethune's 'spirit of selflessness' was performed in a milieu of revolution-accomplished, its second resurrection was performed in a milieu of perpetual revolution. For the former, the self should be allowed to flourish according to the Bolshevised version of Neo-Confucian cultivation promoted by Liu Shaoqi: as the finest fruit of 'victorious Marxism'. For the latter, the self had to be abolished as a *point de blocage* inhibiting access to the object of revolutionary desire: the always-already deferred classless society. If the first resurrection and its prescribed mode of conversion generated symbolic capital for an elite of otherwise class-suspect experts, the second resurrection and its adjacent mode of conversion created debt /guilt as the universal condition of selfhood under conditions of a revolution always left to be completed. In contrast to symbolic capital that applied selectively to medical experts and other members of the national bourgeoisie, debt /guilt was truly ecumenical in that it applied equally to experts, workers, peasants, cadres, guerrilla veterans and every other single stratum of Chinese society.

As a result, Norman Bethune's second coming during the Cultural Revolution no longer functioned as the institutionalisation of a consensus figure or of an ideal type that should be emulated, in terms of particularist politics, by medical professionals. It rather signified the establishment of *the return of the impossible* as the general grammar of Chinese communist revolution: the institution of debt /guilt towards a prototype that resisted any attempt to emulate it, and thus generated its endurance as the ultimate and ultimately unreachable *telos* of the socialist construction of the New Man.

Conclusion:

We can thus say that while the first exegetic resurrection of Norman Bethune's 'spirit of selflessness' engineered the 'New Man' as a form of revolutionary *spirituality* imbued with the values of Confucian self-cultivation, its second resurrection introduced Chinese socialist subjectivation into the realm of *political theology* proper. A realm where the self as the form mediating the passage to communism was rendered the 'symptomal kernel', in the Lacanian sense of the term, of the 'historical process': the blocking element in the course of revolutionary actualisation that could never be fully

eliminated precisely because it was what sustained and sanctioned the social fantasy of the revolution. In these terms, the self was rendered a negation that should but could never be fully negated. We can thus understand the Maoist conception of the 'New Man' *qua* abolished self as an effort to overcome the structural inconclusiveness of the revolutionary process through a violent 'going through' of China's socialist-modernist fantasy; a desperate attempt to overcome the inherent gap in the actualisation of a communist self, by transferring to it the debt /guilt residue of the impossibility of a classless society.

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