

Lijia Zhang's experiences varied throughout the assigned reading as it documents her late childhood to early adulthood. As her story begins, she is a youth who desires to be a student at a world-renowned university. Still, her mother is a constant reminder that education in China is very much class-based, primarily determined by one's health and status in Chinese society. Zhang's mother continually pushes her to take on state employment as it is what she grew up doing and believes it would be best if her daughter followed as a state employee, relying heavily on the benefits and propagating the belief that factory work was for the real liberators and backbone of society, "the working class leads everything!" and that workers are "the masters of the nation."<sup>1</sup> were both statements parroted by newspapers of the time in China.

Despite Zhang's Mother's wishes, she remained affixed to obtaining a higher education as her main goal. Still, through something known as dingzhi, she was forced to occupy her mother's previous employment and abandon her dream of becoming a journalist. All hope was not lost. Zhang remained committed to hard work and teaching her new career as she hoped it would allow her to go beyond her new factory life. Women were now full-fledged workers in revolutionary China but still faced criticism for how they acted or dressed. Zhang's only excluding factor from a "model worker" selection in the factory she worked at was that she believed she "wore a perm" and that Zhang had left an impression of "someone who likes freewheeling lifestyle with your leopard-skin jacket and things."<sup>2</sup> Despite being discriminated against for her appearance, she still got what she needed through hard work to get accepted to a large university for Mechanical Engineering, leading her to her ultimate goal of education. Elements of the pre-revolutionary world were still very much present. Still, the post-revolutionary world was also starting to exert its benefits and inequality in the recognized effort of the laboring class.

Her experiences differ from what the architects hoped to achieve because she was still forced to live up to her family code of honor as an obedient child to her Ma, an act that was a relic from the old world. Initially, she did not completely understand or agree with the previous ruler of revolutionary China, Mao, but as time went on and Zhang experienced all spectrums of life in China, she truly embraced Chairman Mao as she discovered "it was great fun to be a rebel"<sup>3</sup> and she truly learned to embrace her individuality among the "collective spirit"<sup>4</sup> of conformity.

This complicates our understanding of global history in a post-World War II era because it illustrates a global desire for individuality and a global passion for everyone to have the ability to excel. The reading demonstrates that even those under communist rule in China are afforded the same opportunities to excel. Zhang proved that even the poor may exceed societal expectations. It also illuminates that communism is far different from what we are led to believe in Western countries. Through Zhang's studies, she illustrated that Western desire for Freedom and Communism can, in a sense, go hand in hand.

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<sup>1</sup> Lijia Zhang, *Socialism is Great, A Workers Memoir of the New China* (2009) P. 9

<sup>2</sup> Lijia Zhang, *Socialism is Great, A Workers Memoir of the New China* (2009) P. 103

<sup>3</sup> Lijia Zhang, *Socialism is Great, A Workers Memoir of the New China* (2009) P. 195

<sup>4</sup> Lijia Zhang, *Socialism is Great, A Workers Memoir of the New China* (2009) P. 196