
RECOVERING HISTORIES

LIFE AND LABOR AFTER HEROIN IN
REFORM-ERA CHINA

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Introduction

Toward a Phenomenology of Recovery

BACK ON THE MOUNTAIN

On a crisp spring morning in 2004, just before dawn, Xun Wei left his apartment. Most of his neighbors in Gejiu, a city of 310,000 residents crowded into a narrow valley floor in a mountainous area in southern Yunnan, had not yet awakened.¹ Xun entered Huawei Park, a wooded area to the east of the city center. Old Yin Mountain loomed above him. Its peak was accessible by mounting a winding staircase of more than twenty-five hundred carved steps.

He set forth for the mountain that morning, like many other times in his life, in pursuit of a work opportunity. Xun had once been a wealthy tin mining boss, enjoying a lavish lifestyle while overseeing more than two dozen employees at a nearby mountainside site. That was many years earlier, before his heroin habit contributed to his losing his mining tunnel to competitors. In recent months he had enrolled in a newly opened government clinic that provided him with daily doses of methadone to stave off his heroin cravings. Determined to heal his body and stay busy, Xun filled his days with walks around the lake and badminton games with his fiancée. When he saw signs posted by local government officials offering cash rewards for harvesting rodents in the nearby hills, Xun eagerly pursued the opportunity to reenter the legal workforce.

As he trudged up the steep slope, Xun passed a group of residents hiking to the top of the mountain. Approximately four hundred people, many of them unemployed or furloughed state workers, made the trip every day, with



FIGURE 1. Abandoned tracks on Old Yin Mountain. Photo by author.

a thousand or more regularly summiting on the weekends. Veering off this busier paved path, Xun passed over a defunct railway line that had once transported tin from tunnels on Old Yin to the city center (see figure 1). The minerals in these mountains had attracted human settlers for more than three thousand years. Remnants of infrastructure from various eras of mineral extraction were still visible on the mountainside and throughout the city center. In the new millennium, mining outfits drilled ever more deeply into the earth—now as far as two kilometers underground—to find unclaimed, high-grade ore.

Nearing a cluster of trees, Xun heard the rattling of a mountain rat inside a metal cage. He carefully picked up the device by the handle, then walked to

another spot nearby, then another. Within a few minutes he had retrieved all six of his traps, five of which held large, squirming rodents. He walked back down into the city center. The rats struggled furiously, and the cages occasionally bumped against his legs. Once back at his apartment, Xun carefully released this group into a holding pen in his living room, where they joined others he had captured in previous days.

“You should have seen all those rats!” Xun Wei paused in his retelling for dramatic effect. His narrow, angular face was framed by closely shaven hair, chunky black eyeglasses, and a pronounced Adam’s apple. A T-shirt tucked into acid-washed jeans accentuated his skinny frame. His voice was raspy, some might say grating. Like many residents in a prefecture famous for its tobacco, he constantly smoked cheap Red River cigarettes. As we sat in his apartment in early 2010, he took a puff, cleared his throat, and continued his story.

Twice a week Xun delivered his cargo to the disease prevention station (*fangyizhan*), where he collected a prearranged payment of 10 yuan per live rodent. He never learned the rats’ fate. Xun excelled at this job; in total, he secured close to 2,000 yuan in that first month, a sum equivalent to the salary of a midlevel government cadre or manager of a respectable local business. But the venture did not last for long. Overexploitation of the mountain’s rodents—several dozen other rat catchers competed with him for the government payouts—resulted in a decreased supply and smarter rats. His fiancée, unhappy sharing their apartment with such houseguests and worried about the gashes on his legs left by their teeth and the metal bumping against his skin, eventually convinced Xun that this business was best abandoned.

When talking about the role of the mountains in Gejiu life, local residents during my time in the region taught me an old Chinese slogan: “Mountain dwellers *kao* the mountains, shore dwellers *kao* the sea,” with *kao* translatable as “rely on,” “make use of,” or “exploit.” I initially imagined that this phrase referred to the stable rhythms that had emerged between this mountainside community and the natural resources that surrounded it. What became clear to me from my time in Gejiu was that in recent decades the possible futures nurtured by the extraction of natural resources in this region had been rapidly shifting. The mountains, of course, were always there, but the careers and rhythms of living they supported were in a state of flux.

People with a history of heroin use faced particular challenges adapting to the changes that had swept the region. Xun’s career is exemplary in this sense.

A child during the last years of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1970s, he scavenged steep nearby slopes for wild vegetables when state-rationed food did not provide enough calories for his large family. In his teenage years, during Deng Xiaoping's tenure, Xun submitted to the rigid schedule of state-affiliated mining enterprises before striking out on his own to become a wealthy private-sector mining boss. Following a stint in a compulsory labor center, he returned to the nearby mountains in the mid-1990s to start a trucking venture that helped connect sellers in regional open-air markets.² In the early 2000s, after he gave up rat catching, Xun opted to stay in the city, taking on a series of temporary, low-paying jobs that included helping his in-laws sell lottery tickets. But the mountains—and dreams of other futures—were never far from his thoughts. For Xun, like others I met in Gejiu, recovery from heroin use merged with striving to find a way to *kao* the mountains and achieve a “normal person's life” (*zhengchangren de shenghuo*) in changing times.

At the time of our conversation in 2010, Xun was serving as director of a grassroots nongovernmental organization (NGO), managing three part-time outreach workers and a financial accountant. Living in an apartment he and his wife had bought at a reduced rate from his father's state employer, Xun was one of a relatively small group of people I knew with heroin use history in the region who had found desirable, full-time work. The mountains provided him with a venue for periodic team-building and outreach activities. Peer educators from competing nonprofit organizations prowled mountain mining outposts searching for heroin-using miners, to whom they could provide HIV testing and referral services.

Xun finished his cigarette in silence. Despite his recent successes, he was unsure about how long he could successfully find donors to support his organization. We could hear the clanging of construction outside; another high rise was being built next to the lake, part of a seemingly endless expansion upward from the narrow valley floor. Partially visible through the window, Old Yin Mountain silently loomed above us.

OUT OF TIME? AN EPIDEMIC OF THE RECENT PAST

Drug users—and in particular those consuming heroin—have often been depicted as lacking an awareness of history. William Burroughs describes the heroin user as living in “junk time,” in which his “body is his clock, and junk runs through him like an hour-glass. Time has meaning for him only with

reference to his need" ([1953] 1977, 180).³ Caught up in the self-contained thoughts and actions born of physiological craving, drug seeking, and withdrawal, addicts, in this Beat writer's account, are radically disconnected from a broader social world and, by extension, shared historical time. Focusing on experiences of those attempting to rebuild lives after extended periods of heroin use, *Recovering Histories* argues that the men and women I encountered in Gejiu were especially attuned to what we might call the fraught historical times of the nation. Achieving recovery for this group was inextricably linked to responding to the challenges of the historical moment, a struggle not only to find a position within society but also to become oriented to shifting experiences of social time.

A brief history of my own relationship to this topic and place may help introduce the reader to what follows. I first heard about Gejiu city in 2002 while working as an assistant programs officer in the Beijing office of a social marketing organization operating under the umbrella of the China-UK HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care project. Public health experts at the time warned of a looming "titanic peril" and potential "fault line" that could threaten national development (UNAIDS 2002; Wolf et al. 2003). Located fewer than two hundred kilometers from the Vietnamese border, Gejiu was identified in early epidemiological surveys as a priority area for HIV programming because of a concentration of heroin use and sex work in the region.⁴ Buoyed by a post-SARS commitment to effective public health and supported by deep-pocketed international donors (cf. Mason 2016; on surveillance see Fearnley 2020), Gejiu officials in the mid-2000s spearheaded dozens of projects targeting "high-risk" populations. International news media soon lauded the city as a "model" for China's HIV prevention efforts (Yardley 2005). Service providers offered local drug users access to methadone maintenance therapy, needle exchange, targeted medical care, and expanded social support. Peter Piot, at that time the director of UNAIDS, and a handful of international public health luminaries made brief visits to Gejiu to inspect what was billed as an innovative and progressive local response to the country's HIV/AIDS epidemic.

In 2008, when I was working part time for the International Harm Reduction Development Program (IHRD) at Open Society Institute (now Foundations), I visited the city for the first time to meet with a number of recovering drug users who had formed a regional network dedicated to improving the lives of their community. IHRD provided the group with a start-up grant to

fund work in five cities across the prefecture. As a result of my initial connections with members of this network and my growing interest in the dynamics of drug use in the region, I moved to Gejiu in August 2009 to begin my dissertation research, a project that I believed would focus on a widespread and visible heroin epidemic.⁵

Hyper-alert for drug references and struggling with the local dialect, my ears during my first weeks living in the city would prick up every time I heard the city's nickname; "tin capital" shares the same phonetic pronunciation as "using drugs" (*xidu*). I quickly found that my initial assumptions formed through reading reports about the local crisis were mistaken. Following a pattern of "drug generations" identified in many parts of the world (Golub, Johnson, and Dunlap 2005), consumption of heroin in Gejiu had in fact been confined primarily to a single historical cohort. Born during the second half of the 1960s or in the 1970s, most local users first encountered the drug in the late 1980s or early 1990s. At the start of the new millenium, as many as 15,000 of the city's 310,000 residents experimented with the opioid (Li and Zhang 2003). By the early 2010s, its use was limited to approximately twenty-five hundred predominantly middle-aged local residents.⁶ A heavy toll of overdoses and infectious diseases, as well as intense stigmatization of the drug by nonusers, had contributed to the rapid reduction of what was once a sizable heroin-using community.

I was also mistaken in thinking that most heroin users I encountered would be heavy users. Though "sneaking a puff" (*touxi*, the intermittent heroin use sometimes referred to in English as "chipping") was not uncommon, few of the individuals I came to know well were engaging in the "ripping and running" often associated with acute physiological addiction (cf. Agar 1973). By the time I arrived in Gejiu, the availability of methadone substitution therapy and intense police crackdowns on organized crime and drug dealing had noticeably constricted supply and demand in the local heroin market. In addition, supporting heavy habits had become more difficult for aging users, who were increasingly excluded from licit and illicit forms of economic activity. Cumulatively, this shifting scene led drug users and non-drug users alike to remark that I was "late" to arrive; if I was interested in experiences of an epidemic, I should have been in Gejiu to witness the widespread use that started in the 1980s and peaked in the 1990s.

Unlike many studies that have focused on encounters taking place in a clinic, service agency, or residential center (Carr 2010; Waldram 2012; Hansen 2018), my fieldwork in Gejiu was conducted largely outside of spaces dedicated

to drug treatment. As I lacked an official hosting institution, Green Orchards, an internationally funded, government-affiliated drop-in center for heroin users, became an important fieldwork site. During frequent visits to the patio where “members” (*huiyuan*) congregated, I met a rotating group of people with heroin use history—some actively using and others abstaining—who stopped by to while away the afternoon hours. In addition, former IHRD grantees from the regional network introduced me to their friends. Meals and tea in private homes and at outdoor restaurants, wedding celebrations, family and job-related events, and weekend hot springs retreats provided occasions for me to form longer-term, more intimate relationships with a smaller group of recovering users. Through these interactions, my initial interest in the intersection of drug use practices and state policing came to be replaced by a desire to better understand lived experiences of recovery.

The people with heroin use history I came to know in Gejiu fundamentally challenged my own preconceptions about addiction and recovery. Rather than seeing themselves as individual patients suffering from a relapsing brain disease, this group often spoke about their struggles as a generation of workers who had become lost while attempting to “get ahead” of other local residents as teenagers and young adults. Forging a life after heroin required searching for opportunities to live and labor in a world that bore little resemblance to either the Maoist work units of their childhood or the disorienting but opportunity-filled chaos associated with the mining boom of their early careers. Personal experiences of recovery were thus intimately shaped by their understanding of the collective horizons of their heroin-using cohort, the city, and the nation.

Recovering Histories describes distinct ways that individual members of this generational cohort conceptualized and moved toward life after addiction. In contrast to the government’s attempts to define distinct *phases* of recovery defined by bodily recovery, long-time heroin users in Gejiu frequently disagreed about what bodily habits, friendships, and career ambitions they should preserve from their pasts and what vision of a future life they should pursue. If the addicts in Burroughs’s fictional accounts existed outside of historical time, the recovering drug users who appear in these pages were intensely concerned with both the lived temporality of their own lives and the shifting collective time associated with China’s reform and opening. Close attention to their experiences reveal a complex temporal politics of healing and conveys powerful, rarely considered perspectives on China’s historical trajectory.

APPROACHING HISTORICITY

Conversations about historicity in anthropology, philosophy, and related disciplines provide conceptual scaffolding and methodological inspiration for this investigation. Phenomenologist David Carr argues that scholars interested in historicity “want to know how history is encountered, how it enters our lives, and in what forms of consciousness and experience it does so” (2014, 47). Carr’s formulation immediately raises important questions: What is the relationship between lived individual and collective experiences of time? To what degree are ways of encountering, living, and becoming conscious of history distinct processes? How might centering these philosophical questions inform a study of recovery from heroin addiction?

This account starts with a phenomenological interest in the lived time of individuals. While early phenomenological work aimed at developing a technical vocabulary to describe the unifying structure of temporal experience (Husserl [1928] 1964), more recent phenomenological attention to temporality by anthropologists has shown how individuals’ lived relationships to past and future horizons are shaped by concrete experiences in the world (Desjarlais and Throop 2011).⁷ Historicity grapples with the overlapping lived relationship between an individual’s immediate past and future (the flux or flow of qualitative time); more habituated ways of engaging the world (temporal orientations or shifting horizons of approaching the past or future); and the reflexive, shared narratives, discourses, and events that connect individuals to broader groups (Stewart 2016, 86). Historical time understood as the connection between the lived time of individuals and groups has been approached as social experience; a type of narrative; a form of consciousness; and shared knowledge, intuitions, and feelings. I briefly introduce three distinct approaches to historicity.

Certain cultural Marxist scholars emphasize the importance of historical consciousness as a critical means of gaining a perspective on the present. One author defines historicity as “a perception of the present as history; that is, a relationship to the present which somehow de-familiarizes it and allows us that distance from immediacy which is at length characterized as a historical perspective” (Jameson 1990, 284). Whether struggling in a “thick present” of the post-9/11 global order (Harootunian 2007) or living “pure and unrelated presents in time” in late capitalism (Jameson 1990, 27), historical actors often struggle to understand how the collective past shapes the present. Particular individuals—often academics and cultural producers, but also workers

(cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1992)—through attention to historical process come to effectively diagnose, grasp, and critique events in an otherwise opaque historical present.⁸

If the writers in this first group see historicity as enabling a critical perspective on the complex reality of the present, postcolonial scholars and some anthropologists have emphasized the potential dangers of drawing on European ways of accounting for social time. This historicity scholarship discusses the cultural assumptions and political implications associated with historicism, the tradition undergirding modern understandings of history. Originating in the writings of eighteenth-century scholars in Europe and disseminated through commerce and conquest, the principles associated with historicism—including assumptions about chronology, historical linearity, and ideals of progress—spread around the world, partially displacing other modes of understanding the past and the present and shaping commonsense ways that individuals and groups experienced the movement of time (Anderson 1983; Koselleck 2004; Iggers 1995; Bambach 1995; Hodges 2019).

Assumptions associated with historicism inflect academic writing, national media campaigns, and individual narratives in potentially destructive ways (Fabian 1983; Young 1990; Chakrabarty 2000). In exposing the relationship of “Westernization,” modernization, and development, anthropologists have shown how tenets of historicism justified the spatialization of global hierarchies and advanced European and American colonial and imperial ambitions (Ferguson 2006; Pursley 2019). For example, at the height of the Cold War, Zambian urban residents were encouraged to embrace “expectations of modernity” and focus on the “not-yet” of a future horizon of imminent economic and social prosperity (Ferguson 1999). Dreams associated with narratives of Zambia’s future position in a global order worked to silence workers’ dissatisfactions in the present. In the new millennium, historicism continues to exert powerful effects on how people in many parts of the world experience and narrate their own positions within a shifting global order.

A final cluster of historicity scholarship has focused on “forms of human awareness of being and becoming in time” that emerge from “nonhomogeneous social field(s)” (Palmié and Stewart 2016, 210, 223).⁹ Rather than rely on experience-distant attention to discourses and social ideology, this work has been attentive to intuition, fantasy, and imagination in exploring historical sense (cf. Berlant 2011). Complicating culturalist formulations that emphasize sharp divisions between European and other conceptions of history, recent

anthropologists' attention to historicity has shown how concrete dramatic performances, shared rhythms of laboring, dreams, and perceptions of landscapes contribute to intimations of historical time (Lambek 2002; Hirsch and Stewart 2005; Stewart 2017; Stewart and Strathern 2003).¹⁰

I approach *historicity* broadly through attention to individual and social experiences of time. Following Paul Ricouer's (1990) creative engagement with aporias in human time and Victoria Browne's (2014) multilayered approach to lived historical time in feminist conversations, the chapters in this book adopt diverging approaches and temporal scales. I attend to verbal and non-verbal experience, cognitive thought and embodied feeling, rhythms produced through everyday embodied routines, and the politics of negotiating personal and collective pasts in the present. Some chapters, for example, foreground the existential challenges of reckoning with difficult pasts, while others look at how recovering heroin users participated in public conversations about Gejiu's future. I also explore how contemporaneity—the intimate relationships that develop between long-term heroin users—functions as “a mediating structure between the private time of individual fate and the public time of history” (Ricouer 1990, 113). The next three sections show how the three approaches outlined here—historicity as critique of the historical present, historicity as exploration of the legacies of historicism, and historicity as ethnographic attention to experience in concrete encounters—help to elucidate the dynamics of the recovering histories featured in this book.

ADDICTION AS A HISTORICAL PROBLEM: LABORING, IDLING, AND SOCIAL CRITIQUE

The complicated temporal politics of recovery became clear to me in the tension that emerged between two common Chinese phrases: “quitting drugs” (*jiedu*) and “returning to society” (*huigui shehui*).¹¹ Though each could be translated under the English umbrella term “recovery,” these two phrases register important divergences in how efforts to build a life after heroin in China came to be conceptualized and lived. The most widely used term, *jiedu* or “quitting drugs,” referred to breaking physiological addiction to the substance—a potential synonym for “detoxification” (*tuodu*), though it also encompassed longer-term efforts to live an abstinent life. Focused on preventing relapse, private hospital doctors, “folk” minority practitioners, employees

at the national methadone maintenance clinics, and other service providers tended to speak about recovery as *jiedu*. They did not, as a rule, address broader questions their patients faced in building a life and finding work after drugs.¹²

The phrase “return to society” (*huigui shehui*) appeared frequently in government documents, on posters, on banners, and in everyday conversations during my time in China. Government propaganda campaigns encouraged a variety of “marginalized groups” (*bianyuan renqun*), including orphans, street children, government officials convicted of corruption, and former Falungong members to “return to society.” The Chinese characters for “return” (*huigui*) are the same ones used to describe the process by which Hong Kong “came back to” Chinese rule in 1997 after more than 130 years under British control, an event commonly known in English as “the Handover.” To return thus connotes a reintegration into a previously existing set of relationships, the taking back of a position that one has left in the past. If “quitting drugs” tended to emphasize the accumulation of quantitative, linear “drug-free time,” the temporality of this state-sponsored call to “return to society” drew attention to heroin users’ relative position in relation to the contested historical time of the nation.

The importance of distinguishing between “return to society” and “quitting drugs” became clear to me through a blunder I made during one of my early visits to the Green Orchards drop-in center. I had learned that Old Kaiyuan, a frequent attendee at the center identifiable by his bald head and slight limp, had abstained from opioids for more than three years. Curious how others viewed this figure, I asked a small group of regular attendees if Old Kaiyuan might be a candidate for having successfully “returned to society.” Li, his frequent companion at the center, responded to my question with incredulity. Barking at me in a frustrated tone, he protested, “Someone like Old Kaiyuan? How could you think that he has ‘returned to society?’” Li noted that this aging, penniless idler was estranged from his family and came to the center in part because slightly better-off friends would buy him snacks and alcohol. That I would attempt to nominate this socially marginalized and unemployed—albeit opioid-free—middle-aged man as someone who had “returned” struck Li as a cruel joke.

The encounter underscored the centrality of laboring to ideas of recovery in China. With close to 80 percent of registered drug users across the country reporting that they were jobless (National Narcotics Control Commission

2009), many people with heroin use history whom I met spoke of persisting unemployment—referred to by my interlocutors as “idling” (*xianzhe*)—as the primary barrier they faced in their attempts to “return.”¹³

While having a job was a crucial part of any return, my interlocutors held diverging understandings about which forms of labor were healing, what living conditions and career ambitions they might aspire to, and perhaps most important, who was responsible for ensuring that they worked.

A closer exploration of how the “society” was conceptualized by heroin users helps to explain these diverging attitudes toward labor. *Shehui* is a relatively recent addition to the Chinese language, appearing as a translation of the European term by way of a Japanese loanword at the end of the nineteenth century (Vogelsang 2012). Two coexisting meanings in the English etymology of the word are relevant to how *shehui* came to be used by my interlocutors in Gejiu: society conceptualized in a Durkheimian sense as a national modern collective, and society understood as an exclusive group or club. Future chapters explore the attitude that my interlocutors held toward shifting national regimes of labor in China during and after Mao’s reign.¹⁴ People with heroin use history in Gejiu also spoke about their past involvement in “society” best understood as a club or special group. The great majority had grown up “inside the state system” (*tizhili de ren*) as members of the exclusive “small society” (*xiao shehui*) that Yunnan Tin and its partners created for their workers under Mao. In addition, chapter 1 documents the importance of “mixing in Society” (*hun shehui*) early in their careers, a usage I distinguish through capitalization to refer to a group of pioneering private sector workers who had great influence in the city in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The multivalence of this group’s understanding of *shehui* combined with the ambiguous temporal politics of *huigui* converged in their frequent discussions about how recovering addicts might be expected to labor. Maoist, Deng, and post-Deng state regimes espoused different ideas about collective life, state employment, and the therapeutic value of laboring for individual addicts (see the appendix). Echoing the rhetoric of laid-off state employees in Beijing and the Bolivian and Tswana miners who traced their own struggles to broader market forces (Yang 2015; Nash 1979; Comaroff and Comaroff 1987), my interlocutors offered critical analysis of the harms of market-oriented policies guiding the state’s contemporary approach to governing. In debating how they might reenter the workforce, Old Kaiyuan, Li, and other idlers with heroin use history sometimes drew on Maoist imaginaries, or what Michael Dutton

refers to as “the ever-present specter of another type of politics” (2008, 110) to imagine alternate ways of participating in collective laboring.

BEHIND THE TIMES? THE FRAUGHT TEMPORAL POLITICS OF CATCHING UP

Historicist assumptions, numerous observers have argued, thrived in recent decades in China (e.g., Sahlins 1990; Ferguson 2006). Interactions over the years in China exposed me to the concrete ways that assumptions about development and historical movement appeared in everyday conversations. Acquaintances, including people with heroin use history, on occasion asked me to quantify in years how far the Middle Kingdom was behind the United States. References by Gejiu residents to how Laos or North Korea existed “decades behind” the People’s Republic underscored the commonsense perspective that China was moving in homogenous, linear, and global time. Historical modes of reckoning supplemented by embodied sensations of movement and its absence also appeared in my interlocutors’ descriptions of addiction and recovery.

Meng’s views on his own recovery introduce these themes. I first met Meng just after he had been released from a two-year stint in a compulsory labor center at the office of a grassroots NGO that was part of the Honghe Prefecture drug-user network in a nearby city. His parents had recently passed away, and unusually for someone born before 1980, he had no siblings. With nowhere else to go, the thirty-six-year-old temporarily slept on a couch in the NGO office while working as a volunteer.

In our early encounters, Meng had intense anxiety about his own position in contemporary society, which came to be expressed in frequent comments about how he lagged behind his contemporaries. For example, he told me one day that he liked to watch tennis and named a few of his favorite players. I teased him that he must not have been a very committed fan, as those he mentioned had all retired in previous years. He looked at me seriously. “It’s not that I don’t like tennis. It’s that I’ve been using drugs and in labor camps for much of the past twenty years!” Shuttling between periods of heroin use and stints in state detention, Meng argued, had removed him from historical time and led to deficits in his ability to navigate city life.

In another of our early meetings, Meng complained to me that until very recently he had not known how to operate a smartphone, use the internet,

or withdraw money using a bank card. He asked me rhetorically how this could be possible in 2009. When I pointed out that I had been in a bank the previous week when a worker from a nearby farming community—likely in the city for seasonal employment—had struggled to operate an automated teller, Meng sighed and noted with frustration that *he* had been born and raised in one of Honghe's biggest cities; his own expectations about the trajectory of his life should not be compared to that of a peasant (for an exploration of the category of peasant in China, see Cohen 1993). Meng felt that the combination of periods of heroin use and bouts in state detention had kept members of this cohort from responding to the needs of the national trajectory: "While others are moving with the development of society (*genzhe shehui de fazhan*), we [long-term heroin users] are still stuck in (*tingliu*) the '80s or '90s!"

Other middle-aged, long-term heroin users I came to know in Gejiu also saw addiction as an affliction that impeded workers from keeping up with the historical present. For some, recent feelings of obsolescence tied to their own repetition of behaviors associated with the past contrasted sharply with their early careers, when they "moved with the waves of society" (*genzhe shehui de langchao zou*) and "caught the latest fashion" (*ganshimao*) by taking advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities in their youth.¹⁵ Bodily symptoms including complaints of remaining stationary or being stuck in a previous era functioned as socially recognized symbols communicating shared pressures of responding to a rapidly changing local economy (cf. Geertz 1968).

Attention to state discourses on development help to explain how experiences of addiction came to be linked to a presumed historical movement of the country. China scholars have shown that assumptions of historicism have undergirded nationalist rhetoric in China for over a century and across differing political projects.¹⁶ In recent years, government directives in a range of fields, including real estate regulations, mental health guidelines, statistics bureau operations, and national and regional labor policies, evoked the necessity of national development to frame their programs (Greenhalgh 2003; Zhang, 2006; Liu 2009; Hoffman 2010). Workers negatively impacted by shifting policies and emerging regimes of labor in the post-Deng economy complained of feeling "pushed backward, toward the socialist past . . . and obsolescence" (Solinger 2013, 60).

Building observations of the prevalence of this language into an expanded criticism of contemporary Chinese society, Yan Hairong argues that keywords

promoted by the Chinese government “coded the social landscapes” beginning in post-1980s China. Migrant workers were taught that they “lack a consciousness of development that the post-Mao Chinese state has been striving to foster through reform and opening” (Yan 2008, 114). They came to understand their own movement to the city to work as a pursuit of “self-development” that mirrored the country’s purported work of “catching up to,” “advancing,” and “getting on track with” wealthier nations in the global market economy (2, 115, 189; see also Yan 2003; Pun 2005). In moving from observing the prevalence of this developmentalist discourse to critiquing its effects, Yan argues that state messages about the inevitability of following particular historical trajectories served to distort and mask a new “subterranean” reality (2008, 24, 249): the exploitation of a massive rural workforce for the benefit of “new masters” in China’s reform and opening.

While recognizing the power of Yan’s account, this book eschews embracing overarching arguments to focus on the situated ways that individuals and groups debated and internalized their positioning within a broadly shared “cultural anxiety about temporality” (Zhang 2000, 94).¹⁷ For long-term heroin users, questions of who was exploiting whom under what conditions were contested. Moreover, these conversations were always linked to immediate existential and practical challenges of attempting to forge new lives in changing, uncertain times.

Meng adopted a pragmatic attitude toward an understanding of recovery that he conceived of as “catching up” to the demands of the contemporary economy. He saw the need of immediately addressing the “huge” gap that he sensed existed between his own “psychological development” and an imagined urban dweller who was “a similar age and background to my own.” In the first months after his release from the compulsory laboring center, he prioritized learning how to operate computers, type, Microsoft Office programs, and participate in various online communities. He also argued that people with drug use history needed to learn to be content with and embrace an “ordinary” (*pingpingdandan*), frugal lifestyle—typical urban residents in the new millennium could enjoy basic comforts, but not the pursuit of gratuitous pleasures that he had embraced as a teenager in an earlier moment of market opening. A few months after we first met, Meng obtained an entry-level job at a private security firm and was quickly promoted to a management position. The quiet, stable life he enjoyed in the later stages of my fieldwork for Meng validated his self-diagnosis and response.

DISORIENTATION: MOVING IN THE HISTORICAL PRESENT

Interactions I had with Pan, a long-term heroin user who appears in chapter 5, provide an opportunity to explore how historicity impacted recovery from addiction on a more intimate scale. Sitting on his living room couch one afternoon, Pan complained that he felt his heroin use history continued to cast a shadow over his future plans. At the time of our conversation, he noted that he had managed to “keep his integrity” (*baochi caoshou*—i.e., abstain from heroin use) for more than two years. He said he believed he had “walked half the road” (*zoulebanlu*) out of addiction. When I asked him what remained for him to do to “return to society,” he grew apprehensive and again brought up the question of time. “One, two, three, four years. Who’s to say I won’t be good by then? That’s my thought, but I’m not able to make sense of this question. In the end, where is the place that [a return] exists?” (*wo gaobudong zhege wenti, [huigui] daodi cunzai zai shenme difang?*).

Pan’s interest in locating a “place where return exists” drew attention to his anxiety about the type of future he should strive for, a crucial question confronting every figure appearing in this book. Pan’s musing also drew attention to how recovering drug users might assess if they were moving closer to a “return” in a given moment, and what facilitated a shift in these feelings shift over time.

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed speaks of the concept of orientation as crucial to how we both “find our way” and come to “feel at home” as we extend our bodies into space (2006, 7). Ahmed’s critical acumen foregrounds queer, critical race, and feminist mediations; she rereads foundational texts in the phenomenological tradition, challenging their white European male creators’ heteronormative presumptions and expanding on possibilities for queer life. Her focus on the power of disorientation in embodied everyday experience deeply resonates with how the recovering addicts at the center of this book perceived their failure to fully inhabit the current historical moment. “Collective direction,” as Ahmed puts it, comes to be imposed on individuals by outside groups—we are asked to turn in particular ways, and our bodies take shape as a result of the accumulation of how we are directed through time (2006, 16–17, 20). Disorientation occurs when we lose the taken-for-granted sense of following established ways of moving—that is, when we stray off of the paths or lines that others have made before us (11).

Ahmed’s phenomenological attention to orientation offers inspiration for approaching long-term heroin users’ recovery on a more intimate scale in

attending to how bodies acquire shapes in relation to particular gatherings and objects. In thinking about how this perspective applies to my encounters with Pan, one day in particular comes to mind. In 2011 I accompanied a group of recovering drug users on a trip to a hot springs. Though three of my companions were experienced drivers, I ended up behind the wheel as the only person with a valid license. Never having mastered manual transmission, I was slightly apprehensive operating the “bread van” we had rented for the occasion. Pan volunteered to sit next to me. He deeply identified as a driver, which had been his professional vocation for a number of years when he was in his twenties and thirties. I learned on this trip that he was intimately familiar with the particular model we rented, as he had repaired and driven these vehicles during a stint when he worked as a mechanic. From helping secure the rental to coaching me on when to switch gears to sharing trivia about driving in the area, Pan seemed happy and at ease throughout the day, particularly when we were in the car.

After dropping off the other passengers, I drove with Pan and his wife, Su, to the outskirts of the city to return the vehicle. He asked me if he could take over driving. We pulled over, and he slipped into the driver’s seat. With Su growling from the back seat that he needed to be careful, he pulled onto the road. Though it had been close to a decade since he had been at the wheel, Pan effortlessly returned to the road, moving through the various gears. After a couple of minutes, Su began to chide him, saying that he shouldn’t be driving in the city center without a license. When we returned the car, Pan eagerly told the proprietor of the rental business that he expected to be back in the future. In subsequent weeks he energetically renewed his search for delivery positions that might help him reenter the workforce and spoke more frequently about hoping to take the test to have his license reinstated so he could work again as a driver.

One way of thinking about “return to society” is an attempt to find a new equilibrium after becoming “disoriented” (*mimang*), a term that my interlocutors used to describe both the effects of past heroin use and their early efforts to rejoin society. While some in this book questioned their acquired orientations and saw the need to deviate from previous lives, others hoped for a “return” to familiar lines. This book at times focuses on these attempts at reorienting—unearthing old skills such as playing table tennis or mahjong—or finding pleasure in gaining new competencies, ways of connecting, or bodily habits that made moving in unfamiliar spaces easier. Our day of driving was

not a significant moment in Pan's life. And yet, small actions like orchestrating a ride in a familiar car might become more substantial parts of recovering histories, opening individual future horizons and deepening visions of lives that were worth living. "Hope," Sara Ahmed writes, "is an investment that the 'lines' that we follow will get us somewhere" (2006, 18).

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

Attention to historicity in this account unsettles persistent assumptions that undergird popular understandings of recovery. Derek Summerfield, for example, writes that recovery is what "happens in people's lives rather than in their psychologies. It is practical and unspectacular, and it is grounded in the resumption of the ordinary rhythms of everyday life—the familial, sociocultural, religious, and economic activities that make the world intelligible" (2002, 1105). While informed by a sensitivity to lived experience, Summerfield here fails to address a crucial recurring concern of my Gejiu-based interlocutors: What if the "activities" and "ordinary rhythms" that *once* "made the world intelligible" fail to correspond to opportunities available in contemporary social and economic life?¹⁸ This book describes diverging understandings of recovery that are inextricably imbricated with sensing and responding to a dynamically shifting historical present.

In chapter 1, I show how heroin use for Gejiu residents took on meaning within shared horizons of a young generational cohort's early laboring experiences. Recounting events occurring more than two decades before my arrival in the region, the chapter documents how early encounters with the opioid were shaped by a tin mining boom that occurred in the late 1980s and 1990s, a time I call the Rush years. Three coming-of-age stories focus attention on the shared existential challenges of young people who came to believe that the ways of laboring and navigating the world associated with their parents were increasingly inadequate to the changing times. In attending to how these young workers shared ideas about the possibilities and challenges of rejecting local Maoist traditions, this chapter foregrounds the lasting impact of risk-taking on the experiences and outlook of a group I call the Heroin Generation.

Each of the remaining five chapters focuses on how individuals during my fieldwork defined and moved toward life after heroin. Chapter 2 begins by describing how Sam, a onetime mining boss, and his friends struggled to

navigate a private sector economy that had changed dramatically since the 1980s. An account of my trip to the nearby mountains documents the radical reorganization of labor that had taken place since this group first came into contact with heroin. I then show how Sam came to understand his heroin habit as intimately connected to a broader crisis in his self-conception as a worker. Recovering from heroin for Sam required “adapting” to social realities of the new millennium by breaking habits accumulated in the Rush years and emulating later-arriving entrepreneurs who had replaced him.

Chapter 3 explores the struggles of a small group of long-term heroin users who, in contrast to others in this book, argued that the window when they might have returned to society had closed. Focusing on particular encounters when my interlocutors communicated severely diminished expectations concerning their own futures, I show how a particular mode of narrating and experiencing their lives as “sacrificial offerings of the Reform era” facilitated connection with their peers even as it contributed to individual suffering and shared, overwhelming feelings of obsolescence.

Drawing on conversations with regulars at Green Orchards, a drop-in center and harm reduction NGO, chapter 4 shows how idling long-term heroin users turned to the therapeutic potential of two distinct legacies of socialist laboring. Members of this group spoke about the care provided to employees by state-owned enterprises in the 1980s as well as the radical revolutionary power of collective “remolding through labor,” imagined to have existed in the first years of the People’s Republic, as potent examples of how the state could encourage—and even force—drug users to “merge into” society as productive workers. In questioning what constituted appropriate interventions into citizens’ lives, Green Orchards members drew on the country’s past to criticize contemporary state policies that they argued contributed to a condition of addiction that they saw as inseparable from their involuntary idling.

Chapter 5 starts with a detailed description of a wedding ceremony. The rituals associated with this event helped make visible a more general set of opportunities and risks that Su, the bride, faced in her attempts to return to society. Drawing on the concept of caring labor to foreground the importance of maintaining and renewing relationships with others, I show how Su’s efforts to improve her own life came to be entangled with attending to aging family members, restarting her career as a saleswoman in a multilevel marketing organization, expanding her family, and forging new connections with “normal

people.” In these activities, Su confronted gendered expectations of where and how she should labor and negotiated relationships complicated by the specter of her history of heroin use.

Chapter 6 documents the career of Yan Jun, a controversial NGO leader and onetime colleague of Xun Wei. I explore two distinct ways that Yan came to narrate his civil society work: first as building a grassroots network and later as embodying the position of brave protector of the rights of people with drug use history, including his own. Observers who knew him questioned not only his motivations but also the very principles of civil society that he claimed to embody. My struggles in making sense of Yan Jun’s experiences prompt me to revisit the book’s phenomenological approach to recovering histories and briefly consider how a psychoanalytically informed attention to the dynamics of the encounters described in this book might open up other perspectives.

Drawing on observations from a trip to Gejiu made a decade after my first visit to the city, the epilogue offers a brief meditation on how recent changes in this community impacted collective ways of experiencing the future. The book finishes with Xun Wei and me taking a trip to the nearby mountains to visit his former mining site a decade after my first visit to the city.

The structure of the book aims to pluralize understandings of addiction as each chapter explores how historicity—the complex interweaving of personal and collective experiences of time—impacts recovery. Some focus on narratives of life events and diagnosis of contemporary society, while others work to examine how nonverbal ways of relating to the past and future, impact individual and collective outlooks. All draw attention to the importance of labor in thinking about possibilities for living in the fourth decade of the country’s reform and opening.

Most of the figures appearing in this book are men. This is in part due to my own difficulties in forging close relationships with women recovering heroin users in Gejiu. But it is also a reflection of the fact that men made up the great majority of heroin users throughout the country: 85 percent according to national public security registers (National Narcotics Control Commission 2009). In this particular corner of the country, heroin had initially spread most quickly among entrepreneurs connected to the male-dominated mining industry at a time when such ventures were a “sign of risk, glory, and masculine strength” (Rofel 1999, 54). Chapters 1 and 4 in particular explore how historically particular gendered division of labor impacted the lives of my interlocutors.

LOCATING ADDICTION

This book joins a body of scholarship that has pushed against waves of medicalization that depicted addiction as a pathological personality disorder or, more recently, a relapsing disease of the brain (Lindesmith 1938; Acker 2002).¹⁹ Anthropologists have contributed to broader conversations about addiction by showing how patterns of structural violence perpetuated through race, gender, and class differences shape the distribution of illicit drugs as well as harms associated with use (Bergmann 2008; Bourgois 2003; Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Knight 2016). Occasionally in some of this important scholarship, ethnographers have argued substance abuse is an “epiphenomenal expression” (Bourgois 2003, 319) of underlying societal inequalities, as marginalized subjects “self-medicate the hidden injuries of oppression” (Baer, Singer, and Susser 2004, 169). In a similar vein, Pierre Bourdieu depicts drug addicts as individuals who, due to “the smooth functioning of habitus,” remain largely unaware of their “hidden” suffering and the broader social conditions that fuel their misery (Eagleton and Bourdieu 1992, 121). The sage social scientist in these accounts helps users to “make their situation explicit” through rigorous socioanalysis—including historicizing the roots of drug-related suffering (Eagleton and Bourdieu 1992, 121). My discomfort with the move to understand problem drug use as primarily an unconscious or “hidden” expression of suffering is that it risks homogenizing how people with drug use history come to inhabit the historical present and potentially overlooks the critical role that analyzing, reflecting up, intuiting, and feeling shared historical time has for long-term heroin users in how they understand and respond to their condition.²⁰

Angela Garcia’s attention to temporality and history in *The Pastoral Clinic* (2010) has influenced my approach. She describes the Hispano heroin users in her account as “melancholic subjects,” figures for whom the use of opioids is connected to intergenerational experiences of dispossession and “endless” suffering. Garcia argues that experiences of loss come to be inflected by a Hispano tradition of mourning that “commemorates the singularity of death while insisting on the inevitable repetition of it” (2010, 73).²¹ Throughout her account, she shows how the pain and relief of heroin use mingles with the psychic legacies of events occurring months, years, or even centuries in the past. If, as a local saying puts it, “history is a wound,” Garcia’s phenomenologically oriented study of the heroin epidemic in Espanola Valley documents

the deep, collective scars created through familiar cycles of painful loss and attention to collective ways of reckoning with this past (97).

My exploration of historicity in Gejiu draws attention to a markedly different temporal dynamic. Though residents in this tin mining community, too, reckoned with individual and collective pasts as part of the recovery process, my interlocutors often understood themselves as grappling with a pernicious form of obsolescence. Many members of this generational cohort of predominantly Han urban residents saw themselves as having once played a central role in implementing the early marketization policies touted by Deng Xiaoping at a time when engaging private sector activity was deeply stigmatized; they thus were haunted by missed possibilities associated with unpredictable ruptures, openings, and fault lines in the country's ongoing development rather than living through a perceived "endlessness" of exclusions and loss.

I also want to underscore that this is an ethnographic study of recovery rather than of drug use. During my fieldwork, I was rarely in the presence of the drug. Some might argue that a phenomenologically oriented account of people whose lives had been deeply affected by their consumption of this potent drug needs to give extended attention to direct experiences of heroin use.²² My response is that my relationships with many of the people in the book emerged in part because I became deeply invested in their attempts to start new lives. In following their struggles to break from painful parts of their pasts, aspects of my interlocutors' lives became central to this research, while others were either inaccessible to me or failed to find their way into this account. I came to believe that this group's efforts to "return to society"—and by extension to diagnose, explore, and move through a rapidly shifting social world—offer important perspectives on broader experiences of labor and life in contemporary China and beyond.

BACK ON THE MOUNTAIN?

On a spring day in 2015, Xun took me to visit his office. Funding that had been available in previous years had become difficult to come by, and the spacious two-bedroom apartment that had formerly served as the organization's headquarters had been replaced by two tiny, separate rooms on the ground floor of an apartment building. As director, Xun sat at a single desk in a closet-sized space at the front of the building, while peer educators and the group's finan-

cial officer crammed into a room across the hall. After closing the door to leave for dinner, he cursed softly when he realized he had left his keys inside his office.

Now in his late forties, Xun appeared both thinner and frailer than when I had first met him. After a nasty motor scooter accident, a metal bar had been inserted along the right side of his collarbone. This bar had subsequently broken, and the pieces visibly protruded from underneath his skin. For years after the accident, he struggled to carry even light packages with his injured hand. Xun was acutely aware of his own appearance. Once, while telling me a story about his youth, he actually apologized for his diminished physique, as if the discrepancy between his earlier actions on the mountain and his present appearance strained his credibility.

Looking in through a window protected by an iron grating, we could see his keys were on the far side of his desk, several feet away from us. I suggested that we call the locksmith to open the door. Xun replied that he had another idea. He plucked a bamboo rod from a nearby flowerpot and unwound a metal wire that was holding up a nearby window plant. Fashioning this metal into a hook that he attached to the rod, Xun began slipping this quickly constructed fishing device through a slit in the open window.

A young man in his early twenties, wandering to his parked car across the street, stopped to watch. "You really think you can get it?" he asked incredulously. Xun ignored him.

Although his initial attempts fell far short of his target, Xun adjusted his grip and extended the makeshift pole. By flexing his arm to allow the rod to move a few more inches inside the office, he bumped the hook up against the keys. "It won't take long now," he noted. Sure enough, with a few more flicks of his wrist, he managed to catch his keyring on the metal hook and carefully retracted the pole until his keys had reached the windowsill. He then pulled them through the metal bars, placed them in his pocket, smiled briefly, and turned to walk home.

Though it lasted less than twenty minutes, this scene holds an enduring significance for me. It reminded me of Xun's vulnerability; leaving his keys was part of a growing forgetfulness that he frequently commented upon, and the strangely configured office was a sign of the tenuous status of his NGO—and civil society actors more generally—under the Xi government. I saw, in his quiet indifference to the incredulous comment of the younger passerby,

his strength in enduring frequent slights that included discrimination at hotels and an encounter with a shop operator who (knowing his history) refused to touch money that Xun placed on the counter to make a purchase. But this was also an instance of Xun's self-reliance and stubborn ability to forge his own way. His patient resourcefulness also helped him to produce a budget, write grant applications, and become a steady leader of his NGO. These were qualities he attributed to his entrepreneurial past on the mountain. More than anything, Xun's successful recovery of his keys, to me, represented his tenacity in keeping his future open at a time when many with his background faced difficult prospects.

Xun and I never discussed the key-fishing episode. Indeed, perhaps the meaning I have bestowed on this event is more a product of my own projections and associations than a reflection of the significance it held for him. In making these connections, however, I draw on conversations that occurred over a number of years as well as my sense of his patterns of moving in and making sense of the world. I thought I could feel Xun finding the pleasures of rediscovering his own inventiveness as he opened doors that appeared to have closed on him. Subtle, situated acts like this one were part of how the past came to be negotiated and a "return to society" enacted.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION: TOWARD A PHENOMENOLOGY OF RECOVERY

1. Names and, in a small number of instances, identifying details of individuals in this account have been changed to protect privacy.

2. This is the term I use throughout the book to refer to a national network of government-run centers that forced detainees to engage in laboring activities for up to three years. See chapter 4 for a history of these centers.

3. Steve Brady, the narrator in Susan Isaacs's *Magic Hour*, offers a similar evaluation, arguing that the heroin he encountered in Southeast Asia "takes you out of time" (1992, 19), as opposed to marijuana, which he describes as slowing down the passing of time.

4. At the time, more than half of all detected HIV infections in the country were traced to intravenous drug use. HIV/AIDS played an important part in the lives of many people with heroin use history in Gejiu; approximately half of my interlocutors were HIV positive and receiving state-provided antiretroviral treatment. In order to keep a focus on the shared problems of recovery, I do not discuss the HIV status of individuals here. Instead, my focus is on the general way that members of this group grappled with the immense toll that a variety of health conditions, as well as overdoses, took on this group. For more on the HIV epidemic and government response in China, see Hyde (2007), Liu (2011) and Uretsky (2016).

5. I ended my formal affiliation with international health organizations in the summer of 2009. For my dissertation research, I lived in Gejiu for just over a year between 2009 and 2011. I also made shorter visits in 2012, 2013, 2016, and 2018. Previous experiences conducting public health work in China, as well as six months of fieldwork in Beijing and Ningbo, also inform the arguments made in this book.

6. My estimate is based on conversations with employees at two harm reduction organizations that conducted extensive mapping activities as part of their outreach work.

7. Scholars in this tradition have explored the temporal experiences of everyday risks of illegality faced by migrants in Tel Aviv and documented the rhythms of life on the fringes of postindustrial American cities among shelter dwellers (Willen 2007; Desjarlais 1997). Other important work documents the experiences of Chilean families whose lives are shaped by a “temporality of credit” characterized by waiting and uncertainty (Han 2011) and Eastern Congolese cobalt miners whose lives lack an incremental flow of time due to the collapse of social institutions, widespread violence, and “temporal dispossession” (Smith 2011). While not directly addressing historicity, this body of critical phenomenological scholarship shares an interest in how individual experiences of past, present, and future come to be shaped by social forces.

8. The term *historical present* initially appeared in Husserl’s writings. I use it to refer to the way that individuals feel, intuit, or reflect on the way that their lived present relates to a public sense of inhabiting a shared time and events. Karl Mannheim observed that “human beings do not theorize about the actual situations in which they live as long as they are well adjusted to them” ([1936] 1952, 299). I contend that vicissitudes in the life trajectories of heroin users in Gejiu contribute to this group’s frequently perspicacious attention to the historical present.

9. Anthropologists have argued for the importance of distinguishing between Western history as paradigm on the one hand, and “Western history as nonhomogeneous social field, on the other” (Palmié and Stewart 2016, 210). The messy plurality of a “nonhomogeneous social field” in my reading allows for the shifting perspectives future chapters take on this topic.

10. Marshall Sahlins’s (1985) pithy formulation “other cultures, other historicities” indicates a division between European and Polynesian modes of historical production that is typical of culturalist formulations.

11. *Kangfu* is a third term associated with recovery that emphasizes bodily rejuvenation. Recent ethnographic explorations of the temporality of cure, remedy, and recovery include Meyers (2013), Wolf-Meyer (2014), and Venkat (2016). Zoë Wool’s (2015) attention to the extra/ordinary in her study of returned American soldiers severely injured in war offers a nuanced approach to the temporal politics of recovery.

12. Methadone, an opioid substituted for heroin, complicates this “quitting drugs” distinction. Nevertheless, patients and clinicians alike still referred to the amount of time they had accumulated without using heroin as a key indicator of the program’s success.

13. While working at the foundation before starting my fieldwork, I found that prospective Chinese grantees were eager to pitch proposals—opening a waste disposal company, for example—with the primary goal of employing recovering drug users, sometimes even after I had explained that such programs did not fit within IHRD’s funding mandate. These advocates expressed surprise at my employer’s circumscribed health and advocacy agenda; it seemed obvious to them that any serious intervention to improve the lives of long-term heroin users required putting chronically underemployed people to work.

14. They also referenced “old society” (*jiushèhui*), the Communist Party’s term for the time before the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949 when this part of Yunnan had been flooded by French colonial and Chinese private sector business owners.

15. The language of historicism appears frequently in ethnographic accounts of China. See, for example, Yan (2003, 213) on how *sui daliu* (following the big trend) serves as rationale for making a particular fertility choice. Chu (2010) also foregrounds the importance of particular orientations toward the future in her documentation of Fuzhounese migrants’ attitudes toward their impending illicit journey to the United States. For an exploration of temporal reasoning among struggling workers in post-socialist Sarajevo expressed in a similar language, see Jansen (2014b).

16. Tropes of progress, development, and the pursuit of the promises of modernity took root in China in the early twentieth century in response to the collapse of the Qing empire (Duara 1996). These themes continued to play a central part in Communist campaigns, most famously through the Great Leap Forward’s revolutionary ideal of “catching up to America, surpassing England” (*ganmei, chaoying*). While Buddhist and other traditions of understandings of time provide alternatives to the assumptions of historicism in certain communities (e.g., Yang 2020), scholars have noted how campaigns in Maoist and reform and opening China operated according to a shared historicist rhetoric focusing on a “fantasy destiny of the future perfect” (Harootunian 2007, 489; see also, Anagnost 1997; Hershatter 2014, 83; Rofel and Yanagisako 2018, 145).

17. Even as “social order (is) organized around national development” in Nepal, Stacey Pigg (1996, 17) emphasizes the role of dialogue and iterative processes of negotiation in mediating between state messages and situated individual understandings of development.

18. Following my interlocutors to broaden what constitutes the problem of addiction builds on a long tradition of medical anthropologists who push against biomedical logics that reduce complex, socially embedded conditions to diseases treated in the clinic (Kleinman 1980; Lock 1986; Young 1982).

19. For an insightful mapping of the assumptions of biomedical and other discourses on addiction, see Keane (2002). Sandra Hyde (2011) explores the migration of Western treatment modalities and understandings of addiction to Yunnan.

20. This concern echoes Lauren Berlant’s reservations about the tendency of certain cultural Marxists—including Harry Harootunian and others representing the first mode of historicity previously presented—to see the present as “an effect of historical forces that cannot be known fully by the presently living, who require scholarly and political education toward comprehending the structural and the systemic” (2011, 65).

21. What Garcia refers to as Hispano “tradition” or “ethos” could be interpreted as a challenge to the linearity of the historicism latent in dominant North American modes of historical time.

22. A team of medical experts declared heroin had the highest potential for abuse among more than a dozen commonly abused drugs (Nutt et al. 2007).