

# RECALLING BITTERNESS: HISTORIOGRAPHY, MEMORY, AND MYTH IN MAOIST CHINA

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*For Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party, the socialist transformation after 1949 was not only a political and administrative construction, but also a process of transforming the consciousness of the people and rewriting history. To fight lukewarm attitudes and “backward thoughts” among the peasants, as well as their resistance to rural socialist transformation and collectivization of production and their private lives, Mao decided that politicizing the memory of the laboring class and reenacting class struggle would play a significant role in ideological indoctrination and perpetuating revolution. Beginning in the 1950s, the Party made use of grassroots historical writing, oral articulation, and exhibition to tease out the experiences and memories of individuals, families, and communities, with the purpose of legitimizing the rule of the CCP. The cultural movement of recalling the past combined grassroots histories, semi-fictional family sagas, and public oral presentations, as well as political rituals such as eating “recalling-bitterness meals” to educate the masses, particularly the young. Eventually, Mao’s emphasis on class struggle became the sole guiding principle of historical writings, which were largely fictionalized, and recalling bitterness and contrasting the past with the present became a solid part of PRC political culture, shaping the people’s political imagination of the old society and their way of narrating personal experience. This article also demonstrates people’s suspicion of and resistance to the state’s manipulation of memory and ritualization of historical education, as well as the ongoing contestation between forgetting, remembering, and representation in China today.*

KEYWORDS: *historiography, Mao Zedong, socialist education, memory, recalling bitterness*

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between memory, history, and collective identity has drawn much research interest in recent years.<sup>1</sup> Scholars from multiple disciplines have explored

<sup>1</sup> Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); and Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

modern Chinese historical traumas and their representation: Peter Zarrow has studied the role of traumatic memory in anti-Manchuism in late-Qing China and argues that it played a complex role in instigating nationalist feelings, giving vent to Han Chinese anxieties, and essentializing two different and confrontational races; Klaus Mühlhahn focuses on the impact of traumatic experiences on individuals and their communities, and, more importantly, how narrative and memory were used by Chinese writers to create connections with the past; Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik discusses how the Great Leap Forward and the Great Famine from 1958 to 1959 were remembered and represented in Chinese official historiography and more liberal literary works in post-Mao China. Paul G. Pickowicz examines the reminiscences of a rural intellectual about Chinese revolution and collectivization, while Ban Wang approaches the issue of trauma and memory by analyzing Chinese film and fiction.<sup>2</sup> But there is a lack of research on the role collective memory played in the enactment of rural class struggle and the portrayal of the pre-Communist “old society (旧社会 *jiu shehui*),” as well as the multiple forms of production and distribution carried out in the name of socialist education.<sup>3</sup> Maurice Meisner describes the Socialist Education Movement of 1962–1965 as “an attempt to counter the bureaucratization of Chinese political life,” and focuses on the different approaches of Mao Zedong (毛泽东 1893–1976) and Liu Shaoqi (刘少奇 1898–1969).<sup>4</sup> This article argues that, driven by both the ideological need to indoctrinate peasants and future generations about class struggle and a genuine interest in historical (re)writing from the bottom up, the socialist/class education campaign was also a grassroots-level cultural movement that attempted to reconstruct the modern Chinese historical narrative and let workers and peasants tell their own life and history. In other words, it aimed at the

<sup>2</sup> Peter G. Zarrow, “Historical Trauma: Anti-Manchuism and Memories of Atrocity in Late Qing China,” *History and Memory* 16, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2004): 67–107; Klaus Mühlhahn, “Remembering a Bitter Past: The Trauma of China’s Labor Camps, 1949–1978,” *History and Memory*, 16, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2004): 104–39; Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, “Trauma and Memory: The Case of the Great Famine in the People’s Republic of China (1959–1961),” *Historiography East and West* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 39–67; Paul G. Pickowicz, “Memories of Revolution and Collectivization in China: The Unauthorized Reminiscences of a Rural Intellectual,” in *Memory, History, and Opposition under State Socialism*, ed. Rubie S. Watson (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1994), 127–47; Ban Wang, *Illuminations from the Past: Trauma, Memory, and History in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Philip Huang points out that past scholarship on the “Four Cleanups” campaign in the countryside has not paid enough attention to the reenactment of land-reform class struggle when focusing on struggle against rural cadres. See Philip Huang, “Rural Class Struggle in the Chinese Revolution: Representational and Objective Realities from the Land Reform to the Cultural Revolution,” *Modern China* 21, no. 1 (January 1995), 140.

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Meisner, *Mao’s China and After: A History of the People’s Republic* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 288–92. Roderick MacFarquhar sees the Socialist Education campaign as Mao’s effort to prevent revisionism, mainly targeting rural cadres, but he briefly mentions the “recitals of bitterness” during the process. For MacFarquhar, the organization of recalling bitterness was less about showing the communist cadres’ solidarity and ability to confront peasants’ resistance. See Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution* vol. 3 *The Coming of the Cataclysm 1961–1966* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 334, 341–42.

transformation of class and historical consciousness rather than simply attacking local bureaucratism.<sup>5</sup>

This article traces how individual memories of the formerly oppressed were gradually teased out by the Chinese socialist state to construct a class-based collective memory of the pre-1949 “old China (旧中国 *jiu Zhongguo*)”; how these memories were utilized and reworked in the campaigns of mass writing of personal and communal histories; and how the writing and publication in turn helped facilitate the recalling-bitterness campaign. Different from “speaking bitterness (诉苦 *suku*)” in the Land Reform movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s, which was mainly implemented as a technique of mobilization, the “recalling bitterness (忆苦 *yiku*)” campaign in the 1960s aimed at reenacting class struggle and reinforcing class awareness by invoking collective memory.<sup>6</sup> During this process, which was largely interactive and involved different levels of the Chinese state apparatus, history became personalized and also gradually fictionalized, and the oral presentation of memory became ritualistic and volatile to suit the needs of different political agendas. This project of ideology-driven and class-based historical writing and oral articulation was interestingly conducted mainly by writers of fictional works or manipulated by cultural officials of the state, and there was a gradual blurring of the boundary between history and fiction. Many family history stories appeared in literary magazines rather than journals of historical research. Finally, past bitterness not only became the articulation of individual and collective memories, but also involved rituals and performance, and thus was successfully incorporated into the larger institution of propaganda and Chinese popular culture.<sup>7</sup> As a result, all depictions of the old society in the recalling-bitterness movement were dissociated from “objective realities” and became “representational realities.”<sup>8</sup> Finally, post-Mao cynicism and skeptical

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Uhalley Jr. discusses the conflict between Mao and Liu and the intensified class-struggle theory and practice, and how the established historian Luo Ergang was criticized for his interpretation of the Taiping hero Li Xiucheng, but this approach is more focused on professional historians rather than the grassroots-level historical writing of the period. See Stephen Uhalley Jr., *A History of the Chinese Communist Party* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1988), 130-139. Maurice Meisner also discusses the debates on history between 1962 and 1965, but he is still mainly focused on prominent scholars. See Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, 299-300. Most research on modern and contemporary Chinese historical writing focuses on CCP leaders, trained scholars, or official histories rather than popular, mass-based historical writing that was assisted by writers. See Albert Feuerwerker, ed., *History in Communist China* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1968); Axel Schneider, “Between Dao and History: Two Chinese Historians in Search of a Modern Identity for China,” *History and Theory* 35, no. 4, Theme Issue 35: Chinese Historiography in Contemporary Perspective (December 1996): 54-73; and Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, “Party Historiography in the People's Republic of China,” *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 17 (January 1987): 77-94.

<sup>6</sup> For the study of speaking bitterness in Land Reform, see Li Lifeng, “Tugai zhong de suku: yizhong minzhong dongyuan jishu de weiguan fenxi” (Speaking Bitterness in Land Reform: A Microanalysis of a Technique of Mass Mobilization), *Nanjing daxue xuebao* no. 5 (May 2007): 97-109.

<sup>7</sup> For the characteristics of propaganda in socialist China, see Timothy Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 7, 14. For Chinese propaganda art during the Cultural Revolution, see Barbara Mittler, *A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Asia Center, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> For the distinction between objective and representational realities, see Huang, “Rural Class Struggle in the Chinese Revolution,” 105-43.

attitudes toward the recalling-bitterness literature and performance remind us that the party-state's successful domination of historical imagination has provoked resistance and alienation.<sup>9</sup>

### FROM "FOUR HISTORIES" TO "RECALLING BITTERNESS"

In a broader sense, the Socialist Education Movement (社会主义教育运动 *shehui zhuyi jiaoyu yundong*) should not be understood as only the anti-bureaucratic campaign that started in 1962. It had an ideological concern beyond the economic and organizational ones that are most often discussed by scholars, and even a longer history.<sup>10</sup> The early 1950s saw peasant resistance to high procurement of grain by the state and to collectivization, which resulted in lowered incomes. A 1956 survey showed that among 183,000 households in 20 provinces, 28.1 percent had lower incomes than before collectivization. Some peasants petitioned to higher authorities, wanting to withdraw from co-ops.<sup>11</sup> The party-state changed its strategy of coping with peasant discontent from violent suppression to a nonviolent method of "persuasion and education (说服教育 *shuofu jiaoyu*)" to defend socialism and collectivism.<sup>12</sup> In July 1957, while the Anti-Rightist Movement was underway, Mao asked the Party to carry out a "Socialist Education Movement." A formal directive was issued in August, requiring a "large-scale socialist education campaign targeting the rural population."<sup>13</sup> In a 1958 speech, Kang Sheng (康生 1898–1975), the Party ideologue and Mao's confidant, emphasized that socialist education was not only a top-down campaign targeting the masses, but should also be a bottom-up movement in which the masses also educated the Party with their collective wisdom.<sup>14</sup> In that same year, the Agricultural Bureau and the Cultural Bureau of Guizhou Province collaborated to collect and exhibit "materials that can highlight the feudal landlord class's cruel

<sup>9</sup> For this framework of studying both dominance and resistance, see Vivienne Shue, *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 19.

<sup>10</sup> The anti-bureaucratic dimension of the Socialist Education Movement was better known as the "Four Cleanups"—clean up politics, ideology, organization, and economy. See Richard Baum, *Prelude to Revolution: Mao, the Party, and the Peasant Question, 1962–6* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975). Richard Madsen points out the importance of the ideological dimension of the movement in *Morality and Power in a Chinese Village* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984), 69.

<sup>11</sup> Li Ruojian, *Zheshe: Dangdai Zhongguo shehui bianqian yanjiu* (A Study of the Social Transformation of Contemporary Chinese Society) (Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue chubanshe, 2009), 103.

<sup>12</sup> Huaiying Li, *Village China Under Socialism and Reform: A Macro-History, 1948–2008* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Jin Chunming, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jianshi, 1949–2007* (A Short History of the People's Republic of China, 1949–2007) (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2008), 74; Ezra Vogel, *Canton under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949–1968* (Cambridge: MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 205.

<sup>14</sup> Kang Sheng, "Kang Sheng zai Chengdu gaodeng jiaoyu gongzuo zuotanhui shang de jianghua" (Kang Sheng's Speech at the Higher Education Work Conference in Chengdu), January 11, 1958. File No. 90, Cataloguing No. 1, File 1696, Guizhou Provincial Archives (hereafter GPA).

oppression and exploitation of peasants and materials that can compare and contrast the lives of landlord and peasant.”<sup>15</sup>

It was also in 1958 that Chinese academia saw an upsurge of “historiographical revolution,” which stressed that historical research should meet the needs of the party-state and emphasize class struggle.<sup>16</sup> The writing of commune histories as a grassroots-level cultural movement appeared in this context of political and academic radicalization. The Xushui People’s Commune of Hebei Province produced one of the earliest commune histories, which was co-edited by the Xushui County’s Committee of Writing Movement and the county’s Federation of the Art and Literature Circles. Published in 1959, *A History of the Xushui People’s Communes* (徐水人民公社史 *Xushui renmin gongshe shi*) recorded the county’s struggles in the Boxer Rebellion of the late 1890s and in the Anti-Japanese War of the 1940s, as well as peasants’ participation in the Great Leap Forward (大跃进 *da yuejin*) of 1958. The four parts of the book each had between three and ten articles from local writers, an essay from the modern writer Kang Zhuo (康濯 1920–1991), and transcripts of interviews of peasants.<sup>17</sup> The overall tone of the book was actually positive and optimistic, and none of the pieces focused on the hardships the peasants had suffered under the old landholding system. Nor were there any articles on their rebellion. Later that year a book review pointed out this weakness, describing it as a sign of the neglect of class struggle as the main moving force of rural history.<sup>18</sup>

After the downfall of Peng Dehuai (彭德怀 1898–1974), the Minister of Defense, at the Lushan Conference in 1959, Mao—for the second time—called for socialist education in the countryside.<sup>19</sup> In the meantime, the new Minister of Defense, Lin Biao (林彪 1907–1971), approved the campaign of “Two Recalling; Three Examining (两忆三查 *liang yi san cha*)” within the People’s Liberation Army in 1960, in which soldiers were mobilized to recollect the “bitterness of class (阶级苦 *jiejī ku*)” and the “national grievance (民族恨 *minzu hen*).” Lin Biao emphasized that this campaign was a “living education” that could effectively overcome the mentality of pacifism and enhance the soldiers’ will to fight. “If the past bitterness is not understood, the present sweetness will be unknown. [Some] might regard today’s sweetness as bitterness,” Lin Biao said.<sup>20</sup> In February 1960, the CCP’s Jiangsu Provincial Committee decided to launch a socialist education campaign and a two-line struggle between socialism and capitalism. This was

<sup>15</sup> Guizhou sheng nongye ting guanyu xuanchuan jiaoyu gongzuo de zhishi (Guizhou Provincial Agricultural Department’s Directive Concerning the Work of Propaganda and Education), File No. 90, Cataloguing No. 1, File 1682, GPA.

<sup>16</sup> Huaiying Li, *Reinventing Modern China: Imagination and Authenticity in Chinese Historical Writing* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2013), 132.

<sup>17</sup> See Xushui xian xiezuo yundong weiyuanhui, Xushui xian wenxue yishujie lianhe hui, ed., *Xushui renmin gongshe shi* (A History of the People’s Communes in Xushui) (Baoding: Baoding diqu renmin chubanshe, 1959).

<sup>18</sup> Xiao Wen, “Ping Xushui renmin gongshe shi,” *Dushu* no. 2 (1959), accessed February 30, 2011, <http://www.cnki.com.cn/Article/CJFDTotal-DSZZ195923007.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Qiusuo Zhongguo: “Wenge” qian shimin shi* (The Search for China: A History of the Decade before the Cultural Revolution) (Beijing: Remin chubanshe, 2011), 993.

<sup>20</sup> Ji’nan tieluju geming weiyuanhui zhenggongzu (Political Work Group of Jinan Railway Bureau), *Xuexi cailiao* (Materials for Studying), June 5, 1970 (Los Angeles: Zhongwen chubanshe, 2002), 3.

followed by a similar directive from the Beijing Municipal Committee in November 1961.<sup>21</sup> With Mao's influence, the Party center issued an official document requiring nationwide socialist education that year, which was reiterated at the 10th plenum of the 8th CCP National Congress in 1962.

After the 10th plenum, two local leaders, Wang Yanchun (王延春 1910–1984) of Hunan Province and Liu Zihou (刘子厚 1909–2001) of Henan Province, discussed socialist education with Mao during his inspection tour of the provinces. At the central working conference in February 1963, Mao urged attendees to carry out the campaign, distributing reports from Hunan and Henan concerning socialist education and the rectification of working styles and the communes. Mao stated that such a campaign was necessary because “sharp class struggle” was occurring in Chinese society, which was manifest in the re-emergence of exploitation, counterrevolutionary sabotage, and usurpation of the revolutionary power.<sup>22</sup> Mao saw sabotage and the lack of thoroughness of the democratic revolution as the root cause of the Great Famine, and decided that socialist education was the best way to address the issue.<sup>23</sup> Worried about the return of the old exploitative ruling classes and their thought, Mao attempted to educate peasants to identify with the socialist vision of life and the virtue that he represented.<sup>24</sup>

The post-Great Leap Forward famine changed the outlook of peasants and ground-level cadres, pushing them to seek incentives and economic liberalization, but, in Mao's eyes, the widespread resentment among people of all walks of life and the masses' loss of interest in collectivization were manifestations of class struggle.<sup>25</sup> During the Great Leap Forward, many peasants had complained about public mess halls. In 1960, the worst year of the famine, some workers with “wrong thoughts” in the Anshan Steel Company (鞍山钢铁公司 *Anshan gangtie gongsi*) complained: “In the past, when working for the landlord, I was allowed to eat as much as I could!” and

The old society was no good, but you could eat fish, shrimp, [and] meat and drink wine [...] everything; the new society is good, but there is nothing to purchase. This is not as good as working as hired labor for a landlord, and is even worse than pigs and dogs in the past.

One peasant living in a suburb of Shanghai said, “Under Jiang Jieshi (蒋介石 1887–1975), we suffered but we ate rice; Under Chairman Mao we enjoy happiness [...] but eat rice porridge only.”<sup>26</sup> As a result, grassroots-level officials

<sup>21</sup> Gao Hua, “Dayuejin yundong yu guojia quanli de kuozhang: yi Jiangsu sheng wei li” (The Great Leap Forward and the Expansion of State Power), in Gao Hua, *Geming niandai* (The Age of Revolution) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2010), 256.

<sup>22</sup> Xiao, *Qiusuo Zhongguo*, 1007.

<sup>23</sup> Gao Hua, “Jieji shenfen he chayi: 1949–1965 nian Zhongguo shehui de zhengzhi fengceng” (Class Identity and Stratification: 1949–1965), in Gao Hua, *Zai lishi de fengling dukou* (At the Fengling Ferry Crossing of History) (Hong Kong: Shidai guoji chuban gongsi, 2005), 326.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Madsen, *Morality and Power in a Chinese Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 82–83.

<sup>25</sup> Dali Yang, *Calamity and Reform in China: State, Rural Society, and Institutional Change since the Great Leap Famine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 7, 40.

<sup>26</sup> Gao Hua, “Da jihuang zhong de liangshi shiyong zengliang fa yu dai shipin” (Food Substitutes during the Great Famine), in Gao, *Zai lishi de fengling dukou*, 168.

had to organize discussion meetings to encourage peasants to compare present-day life with pre-Liberation life, and to convince them that successes outnumbered failures. Only poor peasants were allowed to speak at these meetings; former landlords and rich peasants were silenced.<sup>27</sup> By the end of 1962, Sichuan and Shandong Provinces had completed their collection of “reactionary” folksongs and were fully prepared to launch the socialist education campaign to reverse the trends of skepticism and cynicism among the people.<sup>28</sup>

Mao might have exaggerated the degree of class conflict in the countryside, or he might have misperceived the problem. Having initiated the campaign, though, he searched for effective forms and policies to carry out socialist education. He soon found one experience from the grassroots level to be useful: summoning the past to defend the present. In Jinxian County, Liaoning Province, the Party Committee emphasized the “education” of the masses, and this approach was approved by the CCP’s Northeastern Bureau. The bureau dispatched an official to Yuji Commune in the county to help with this work, and special attention was paid to class education among the youth in that province. Song Renqiong (宋任穷 1909–2005), the secretary of the Northeastern Bureau, submitted a report to Mao Zedong on April 10, 1963, advocating the encouragement of self-education among the masses and class education targeting youths. On May 2, Mao commented favorably on Song’s report and decided to disseminate it among high-ranking officials so that others could learn from the experiences in the Northeast. Mao remarked: “The method, as mentioned by Comrade Song Renqiong [...] is widely doable.”<sup>29</sup> On May 10, Mao signed off on a formal order in the name of the Party urging all regional bureaus and provinces to accelerate rural socialist education.<sup>30</sup> At the Party’s Hangzhou working conference in May 1963, Mao went so far as to say that “Researching history won’t do without combining it with reality. Studying modern history without conducting research on village history and family history is like bullshit.” He considered the empirical study of village and family histories to be as valuable as the archaeologists’ discovery of oracle bones testifying to the existence of the Shang Dynasty.<sup>31</sup>

With the promulgation of a “Draft Directive on Some Problems in Current Rural Work” (aka the “First Ten Points” 前十条 *Qian shitiao*) in late May, the Socialist Education Movement was transformed from a limited rectification

<sup>27</sup> Vogel, *Canton Under Communism*, 207–08, 253.

<sup>28</sup> Gao Hua, “Da zaihuang yu siqing yundong de qiyuan” (The Great Famine and the Origin of the Four Cleanups Campaign), in Gao, *Zai lishi de fengling dukou*, 195.

<sup>29</sup> Song Renqiong, *Song Renqiong huiyi lu* (Memoir of Song Renqiong) (Beijing: Jiefangjia chubanshe, 1994), 390.

<sup>30</sup> Mao Zedong, “Zhongyang guanyu zhujing jinxing nongcun shehui zhuyi jiaoyu de pishi” (The Center’s Instruction on Promoting Socialist Education in the Countryside), in Mao Zedong, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao, di shi ce* (Articles and Notes of Mao Zedong after 1949, vol. 10) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1996), 297.

<sup>31</sup> Mao Zedong, “Zai Hangzhou huiyi shang de jianghua” (Speech on the Hangzhou Conference), *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui* (Long Live Mao Zedong Thought), Unofficial publication of the Red Guards, n.p. 1969, 471. Here Mao did challenge the traditional understanding of the historian’s professionalism and called for historical research to be relevant to ordinary people’s lives. For a similar critical analysis of the role of historians among modern Western scholars, see Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 37.

movement in selected areas into a full-blown nationwide campaign.<sup>32</sup> In the First Ten Points, the Henan experience of combining the history of the revolutionary struggles with the history of agrarian collectivization to remind the older generation of the suffering they sustained in the old society was mentioned and praised as a good method of indoctrination.<sup>33</sup>

To see the writing of micro-histories as merely a political strategy of mobilization is over-simplification.<sup>34</sup> The year 1964 was the year Mao Zedong warned Chinese communists against the dilution of communism, which he believed had occurred in the Soviet Union, by attacking Khrushchev's "Phony Communism."<sup>35</sup> It was in this same year that Mao showed intense interest in historiography. He perused the ancient classic, *The Records of the Grand Historian* (史记 *Shiji*), and the modern historian Fan Wenlan's (范文澜 1893–1969) *A Brief History of China* (中国通史简编 *Zhongguo tongshi jianbian*), and wrote a poem titled "Reading History" (读史 *Dushi*). In this poem, Mao continued his historical thinking, placing class struggle at the center of the evolution of history as the driving force of human progress. He also extolled the role of the peasant uprising.<sup>36</sup> Also in 1964, Mao reemphasized his interest in writing history from the bottom up. For Mao, an atomized study of various dimensions of history was the very foundation of writing general histories, and he had long been an enthusiastic reader of local gazetteers.<sup>37</sup> When some local Party officials published "A Tentative Discussion of the Significance of Compiling and Studying the 'Four Histories,'" Mao was immediately attracted. He underlined and commented on the article.<sup>38</sup>

This article seemed a positive response to a directive Mao issued in 1964, which urged professional historians to get involved in the writing of the Four Histories—"mass history" that reflected the point of view of the masses who were not able to articulate themselves in old times.<sup>39</sup> Mao's directive was dispatched to the historians at the Modern Chinese History Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, including Liu Daniao (刘大年 1915–), Li Shu (黎澍 1912–1988), and Li Xin (李新 1918–), who were conducting the Four Cleanups (四清 *siqing*) in Zhangye County, Gansu Province. Liu Daniao was very enthusiastic about Mao's new directive concerning historical writing, but he and the others felt quite confused about how to enact it. What puzzled them, according to Li Xin's

<sup>32</sup> Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, 289.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Baum, *Prelude to Revolution*, 26.

<sup>34</sup> For this technique and indoctrination, see Richard Baum and Frederick C. Teiwes, *Ssu-Ch'ing: The Socialist Education Movement of 1962–1966* (Berkeley: The Center for Chinese Studies at the University of California at Berkeley, 1968), 26.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Uhalley, *Mao Tse-tung: A Critical Biography* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975), 145.

<sup>36</sup> Zhang Tao, Shi Haiwei, "Cong Hexinlang dushi, kan Mao Zedong de shixue sixiang" (A Study of Mao Zedong's Historical Thought in Light of His Poem Hexinlang/Reading History), *Lilun xuekan*, no. 11, serial no. 153 (2006): 101.

<sup>37</sup> Zhang Yijiu, *Mao Zedong du shi* (Mao Zedong's Reading of History) (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 2010), 35.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>39</sup> For this turn of historiography, see John Bryan Starr, *Continuing Revolution: The Political Thought of Mao* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 270.



memoirs, was how to integrate the materials of family, village, and commune histories into the academic research of history, while also being politically correct. Li Xin knew that historiography in Mao's time was expected to serve proletarian politics and that only good things could be said about poor people. However, what he saw during his work in the Four Cleanups Campaign was nothing more than poverty, backwardness, and the dark side of socialist China. In addition, none of the historians in the Modern History Institute were familiar with "factory history (厂史 *changshi*)."<sup>40</sup> In fact, Li Xin and his colleagues only paid lip service to the idea of the Four Histories. In private conversations in 1964, Li Shu and Li Xin even questioned Mao's radical historical thinking that considered "hatred and struggle" a permanent and absolute pattern in landlord-peasant relations.<sup>40</sup> An editor of the authoritative journal *Historical Research* (历史研究 *Lishi yanjiu*), Li Shu adopted a "scientific" and "historicist" attitude towards historical research as early as 1961, and it was clear that he was uncomfortable with Mao's radical assumption of class struggle as the key to historical study and Mao's extremely populist methodology of digging up the individual, familial, and communal experiences of peasants' past suffering.<sup>41</sup>

In spite of the skepticism of many trained historians, the CCP's Beijing Municipal Committee, which was sending its work teams to the countryside to carry out socialist education, immediately responded to Mao's call. Without relying on professional historians, the work team "borrowed" some people with strong writing abilities—including the prominent short story writer Ai Wu (艾芜 1904–1992)—to work on a publishing project that compiled village and family histories. The literary writers' participation in interviews—and their work transcribing, polishing, and editing the life stories—implicitly, yet fundamentally, challenged the legitimacy of historical research based on the critical selection and careful interpretation of reliable source materials. At the same time, the displacement of trained historians and the engagement of fiction writers in historical writing made the literary flavor and character of historiography a default value, blurring the line between fact and fiction.<sup>42</sup>

Local history written in this climate of class struggle was selective and politicized. In September 1963, Wugong Village, Hebei Province, produced its own history aimed at educating young people in class awareness and revolutionary traditions. In the history, the authors "exaggerated suffering in the first half of the twentieth century and were silent on the state policies that caused starvation in the early 1960s."<sup>43</sup> By November 1963, a writing group in Beijing produced several

<sup>40</sup> Li Xin, "Siqing ji" (An Account of the Four Cleanups), in Guo Dehong and Lin Xiaobo, eds., *Siqing yundong qinli ji* (Personal Experiences during the Four Cleanups Campaign) (Beijing: Remin chubanshe, 2008) 267–268.

<sup>41</sup> For Li Shu's historical thinking in the early 1960s, see Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "On Shi and Lun: Toward a Typology of Historiography in the PRC," *History and Theory* 35, no. 4 (December 1996): 89, and Huaiying Li, *Reinventing Modern China*, 192–203. For Chinese historians' attempt to achieve intellectual independence from the Soviet Union's historiography, see Edward Q. Wang, "Between Marxism and Nationalism: Chinese Historiography and the Soviet Influence, 1949–1963," *Journal of Contemporary China* 9, no. 23 (2000): 95–111.

<sup>42</sup> The challenge to historicity and emphasis on the literary characteristics of historiography is actually a very post-modern way of thinking, and it was the tendency of Hayden White in *Metahistory*. See Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "On Shi and Lun," 94.

<sup>43</sup> Edward Friedman, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Mark Selden, *Revolution, Resistance, and Reform in Village China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 37.

volumes, including a “history of blood and tears” of poor peasants in Louzi Village and an account of the crimes of its landholding class. Another was a compilation of family histories based on interviews of formerly oppressed people, who invoked their memories of the old society. The accounts of past bitterness included one hired laborer’s frustration that he was not able to get his mother a piece of watermelon that she desired before her death. A tenant forced to flee his creditors was eventually crippled by frostbite. A young man was unable to have normal bowel movements after eating the hard shells of grain. The process of Four-History writing prompted the authors to write an essay titled “A Tentative Discussion of the Significance of Compiling and Studying the ‘Four Histories’ (试论编写和研究“四史”的重大意义 *Shi lun bianxie he yanjiu ‘sishi’ de zhongda yiyi*),” published in *Historical Research* in 1965.<sup>44</sup> In a 2006 article, the main compiler, Zhao Youfu (赵友福), recalled the process of reproducing peasant memories. He reiterated that the goal of writing local and family histories was to educate the people, and he admitted that the writing group which he joined was composed of three to five writers and that the completed work would be read and approved by the Party organization at higher levels. The article recalled the selection process for the interviewees, and also the time limitations of storytelling, because all the narratives were supposed to focus on the oppression and exploitation of peasants immediately before Liberation in 1949.<sup>45</sup>

In the preface to *Poor Peasant’s “Family Tree” through Ten-Thousand Generations* (贫农家谱万代传 *Pinnong jiapu wandai chuan*), the editors claimed that one of the outcomes of Louzi Village’s historical writing was that the poor and lower-middle peasants conducted a large-scale class education campaign through “Recollecting Bitterness and Pondering Sweetness (忆苦思甜 *yiku sitian*).” The peasants, they explained, not only compared and contrasted past and present, but also elevated their consciousness from individual, familial, and fragmentary bitterness to the bitterness of the whole class, and in so doing educated the youth and refreshed the memories of old people. The editors detailed the methods adopted: members of the Communist Youth League in the village were mobilized to interview former hired laborers and poor peasants among the elderly. Additionally, sessions for families to speak bitterness were organized to collect source material, which was edited and polished into drafts, which then were extensively discussed and supplemented by the peasants. Thus, the book was considered a composition of the masses as a collective.<sup>46</sup>

The preface to the *Beijing Series of the Four Histories* of 1964 illuminates the educational purpose of the compilation, and the significance of remembering the past:

<sup>44</sup> Zhao Youfu, “Nongcun ‘siqing’ yundong zhong xie ‘sishi’ de chengxiao he qishi” (The Achievement of Writing the Four Histories in the Countryside), *Beijing dangshi*, no. 6 (2006): 52.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>46</sup> Beijing shi louzizhuang renmin gongshe cunshi bianxiezu, *Pinnong jiapu wandai chuan: Louzi zhuang renmin gongshe cunshi, jishi xuanbian* (Poor Peasant’s “Family Tree” through Ten-Thousand Generations: A History of the People’s Commune in Louzi Village) (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1964), 2-3.

The younger generation is the successor to the revolutionary cause, and it has heavy duties and a long way to go. Only when youth truly learn the hardships of the old generation [...] recollecting bitterness and pondering sweetness, can they not forget the past and never forget where they come from.<sup>47</sup>

In the postscript, the editors reiterated the necessity of educating youths who had not experienced life in the old society. Due to their lack of life experiences in the dark old society as well as in class struggle, the article reasoned, young people were vulnerable to the corruption of bourgeois ideology. At the same time, some people who had lived in the old society were “forgetting” the class hatred and suffering of the past. According to the postscript, their minds had “faded,” and thus, all people needed an education by reading family histories that focused on bitterness, hatred, and misery.<sup>48</sup>

To encourage the cultural and historiographical trend of writing family and village histories, the *People's Daily* published a polemical article, entitled “Write History of Peasants; Write History for Peasants (写农民的历史, 为农民写历史 *Xie nongnin de lishi, wei nongmin xie lishi*),” that challenged the elitist tendency of historical writing. Peasants love learning history, the article asserted, but they were deprived of the opportunity to learn “correct” and “scientific” historical knowledge and were largely misled by folklore that was fabricated by the exploitative class. The article argued that peasants had deep feelings about the history of the motherland and the communist revolution and what they needed were good books and proper guidance. The article confirmed the educational power of historical knowledge and pointed out that historical knowledge was an ideological arena in which Marxists wrestled with reactionaries, fighting for the support of the young audience. Writers must prioritize the history of the peasants’ own struggle, because the peasants had been the main players in Chinese history for thousands of years. To achieve this, historians needed to change their methods and go deep into the villages to investigate the past and present of the countryside and understand the living conditions, emotions, and demands of the peasants. The article lauded the campaign of writing the Four Histories as a “great movement of self-education” and called on historians to get involved. Based upon feedback from the peasants themselves, the main weaknesses of existing historical works were summed up: they were boring, suffered from a lack of vivid narratives, used overly scholarly language, and lacked familiarity and relevance.<sup>49</sup>

## FROM MEMORY TO FICTION

Collective memory can be defined as “recollections of a shared past ‘that are retained by members of a group, large or small, that experienced it,’” and this

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>48</sup> Beijing sishi congshu bianji weiyuan hui, *Beijing Sishi congshu 5: Erqi nutao gungun liu* (Beijing Four Histories Series No. 5: Angry Waves of February Seventh) (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1965), 1, 121.

<sup>49</sup> Xia Xiang, “Xie nongmin de lishi, wei nongmin xie lishi” (Writing History of Peasants; Writing History For Peasants), *Remin ribao*, November 12, 1965.

“socially constructed, historically rooted collective memory functions to create social solidarity in the present.”<sup>50</sup> During the process of socialist education, the party-state attempted to build a class identity grounded in a shared memory of past suffering, but did so by gradually compromising historical authenticity. “Pure memory” was reworked to take on “quasi-hallucinatory forms” when it was put into images to configure tragedy and trauma.<sup>51</sup> Emphasizing class confrontation, hatred, and bitter memory, the narrative schema of semi-fictional family histories show several common characteristics.

First, many family histories during the socialist education movement appeared in multiple literary magazines at national and provincial levels or were published in volumes dedicated to reportage literature (报告文学 *baogao wenxue*), emphasizing “vividness (生动 *shengdong*)” and “literary character (文学性 *wenxuexing*)” in addition to “educational meaning.”<sup>52</sup> The famous myth about a female tenant-farmer named Leng Yueying (冷月英 1911–1984) being locked in landlord Liu Wencai’s (刘文彩 1887–1949) “water dungeon (水牢 *shui lao*)” was published as fact-based “reportage literature” in 1963.<sup>53</sup> Many works in this genre were written by authors of fiction and essays. The short story writer Ai Wu wrote an article entitled “Miserable Childhood (苦难的童年 *Ku’nan de tongnian*)” to tell the stories of two peasants in the Beijing suburbs. The stories were published by the leading literary magazine *People’s Literature* (人民文学 *Renmin wenxue*) in February 1964. The same issue also contained another family history written by the famous essayist Yang Shuo (杨朔 1913–1968).

Second, landlords and capitalists were portrayed as extremely brutal and inhumane, particularly to women and children. Ralph A. Thaxton, Jr., points out that the post-famine recalling-bitterness propaganda was aimed at altering the villagers’ memory of the Great Famine (the “bitterness” produced by the CCP) and replacing it with the “bitterness” from before 1949.<sup>54</sup> Yet, if the memory of the Great Leap Forward and the famine was more about bodily pain and hunger, the bitterness in pre-1949 China presumably had a much broader spectrum, ranging from physical pains and emotional frustrations to sociopolitical inequality, and

<sup>50</sup> Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*, 5-6.

<sup>51</sup> This process of phenomenological construction is thoroughly analyzed by Paul Ricoeur in *History, Memory, Forgetting*, 52-55. For both Frederick Jameson and Paul Ricoeur, the capacity of organizing experience “narratively” is crucial, and both Hayden White and Jameson acknowledge that literature does help people understand the nature of human relationship with the past. See Frank Ankersmit, “The Dialects of Jameson’s Dialectics,” *History and Theory: Studies on the Philosophy of History* 51 (February 2012): 100. We might argue that the CCP had a purposeful blindness to the difference between novels and historical writing, as long as both allegedly capture the essence of the past.

<sup>52</sup> See the editors’ preface to *Zhongguo zuojia xiehui nongcun duwu gongzuo weiyuanhui*, ed., *Baogao wenxue, di yi ji* (Reportage Literature) (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1963), 2.

<sup>53</sup> Li Lei, Zhi Guang, “Cong shuilao li huo chulai de renmen” (People Who Survived the Water Dungeon), in *Baogao wenxue, di yi ji*, 3-27. For how the water dungeon myth was challenged in recent years, see Guo Wu, “The Social Construction and Deconstruction of Evil Landlords in Contemporary Chinese Fiction, Art, and Collective Memory,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 142-46.

<sup>54</sup> Ralph A. Thaxton, *Catastrophe and Contentment in Rural China: Mao’s Great Leap Forward Famine and the Origin of Righteous Resistance in Da Fo Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 303.

emphasized the sense of humiliation and de-humanization in the old society. One such story recounted the experience of a boy named Xiaotieliang (小铁梁), who said that he was a helper in the house of landlord Kang and was beaten all day long. He would be beaten if he got up late, if he moved slowly, if the landlord's little son cried, or if the pig got sick or a chicken died. If a landlord was a local philanthropist, then the story was meant to reveal his true face as a sham who hoodwinked laboring people.<sup>55</sup> In Guizhou, the provincial literary magazine published a story entitled "The Suffering of Two Generations (两代人的苦难 *liangdai ren de ku'nan*)," in which a female narrator told about how the landlord's wife pinched her breasts, causing her milk to spray several inches. This story was written by the Writing Group of the Four Histories.<sup>56</sup> A reader whose letter was published in the October 1964 issue of *Shandong Literature* (山东文学 *Shandong wenxue*) was deeply moved by the three family histories that had appeared in the magazine earlier that year. The reader said that the stories were all true and very educational, and offered his own examples of bitter experiences. He knew a thirteen-year-old girl, Xu Ronghua (徐荣华), who had worked as a servant and had had to carry the landlord's daughter on her back to school. Grandma Zhang, another servant, was forced to drink her employer's urine. Of the Zhangs' twelve children, three were tortured to death by capitalists, six were starved to death, and the remaining three were sold. However, the author of the letter said that the family stories also provided evidence of how sweet the new society was. Xu Ronghua survived and became a Party member, and the sold children were returned to Grandma Zhang with the aid of the communist government. The details cited in the letter repeated the sadistic plots of the bitter story: as a wet nurse, Grandma Zhang's breasts were pinched by her employer, Landlord Chen Number Three, with wood splints to produce more milk until her breasts became red and swollen. To prevent Zhang from breastfeeding her own child, Chen was said to have used iron rings to encase Zhang's nipples when she went out and to have them checked when she returned.<sup>57</sup>

Third, narratives about the plight of poor peasants in the pre-Liberation countryside all emphasized their inability to rebel. The stories include comments such as: "The hired laborers had to endure no matter how hard they were exploited and oppressed by the landlords" and "For those in dire poverty who owned nothing, no matter how capable they were in the old society, they still had to jump into the fire pit even if they knew [the consequence]. Otherwise, how could they survive?"<sup>58</sup> Peasants were presented as weak and hopeless in the stories, which all ended with salvation coming from the Communist Party and Chairman Mao. However, while the Party exaggerated the weakness and passivity of the poor to highlight its own role as the savior of the oppressed classes, it simultaneously undermined another historiographical and ideological tradition

<sup>55</sup> Beijing shi Louzizhuang renmin gongshe cunshi bianxiezu, *Pimong jiapu wandai chuan*, 13.

<sup>56</sup> Zhonggong Guiyang shiwei xuanchuanbu "wushi" bianxiezu, "Liangdai ren de zaoyu" (The Experiences of Two Persons), *Shanhua* (November/December 1964), 60.

<sup>57</sup> Lu Hui, "Huanying zheyang de jiashi" (We Welcome Family History Like This), *Shandong wenxue* (October 1964), 77.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

of its own—the prominence the Party gave to peasants' rebellions and revolution as the driving force of Chinese history to replace the influence of the bourgeoisie in Western Marxist historiography. On the one hand, ruthless landlords, as depicted in the stories, made no concessions at all. On the other, the oppressed peasants never attempted to rebel.<sup>59</sup> This lack of coherence implies a tension between the narrative of the peasant revolution and the emphasis placed on the leading role of the Party. Overall, historicity in its strict sense was less relevant now that historical narrative by the people had become the revolutionary aesthetic. Hayden White's summary of Schopenhauer applies: "Fantasy is superior to fact, which means that poetry is superior to history."<sup>60</sup>

Fourth, the history of ethnic minority families also followed the oppression-liberation master narrative pattern by denouncing slave owners among the Tibetan and the Yi people. A collection of stories was edited by the Chinese Department of Sichuan Teacher's College and published under the general title *Unyielding Serfs* (不屈的农奴 *Buqu de nongnu*). In the stories, Tibetan Buddhist Lamas were portrayed as violent and abusive people who whipped the narrator, a hungry little slave who stole butter from the temple. A Lama then threw him into the monastery's jail, where he was nailed to a wooden board. A recurring theme was that serfs who offended chiefs might have their eyes scooped out or a tendon removed. In the stories, a living Buddha was called a reactionary, and the abused serfs were said to have privately cursed Bodhisattva and Dharma for being hypocritical.<sup>61</sup> A family history book on the experience of the Yi people in Sichuan's Xiaoliangshan (小凉山) mountain area contained one story about a slave whose owner gave her sheep excrement to eat, which the slave refused. Another story told of how the narrator's children were pulled away and sold by a slave owner, forced to work when they were four and five years old. Besides the fixed pattern proclaiming that all slaves were emancipated by the Communist Party and Chairman Mao, one story particularly emphasized that "The Han nationality big brother is our closest family," in the words of one former slave.<sup>62</sup> When dealing with bitter stories in monasteries, the stories tended to emphasize the "class" divide between "upper-class monks" and "lower-class monks" in terms of different standards of living.<sup>63</sup>

Fifth, while fictitious stories were often told in the name of "reportage," sometimes they featured a real person as the main character. The famous soldier-writer

<sup>59</sup> For an assessment of the PRC historiography on peasant rebellion and its role in Chinese history, see Kwang-ching Liu, "World View and Peasant Rebellion: Reflections on Post-Mao Historiography," *Journal of Asian Studies* 40, no. 2 (February 1981): 295-326. For the Chinese Communist view of the role played by the peasant wars, see James P. Harrison, "Chinese Communist Interpretations of the Chinese Peasant Wars," in Feuerwerker, *History in Communist China*, 189-215.

<sup>60</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 241.

<sup>61</sup> Ganzi Zangzu zizhizhou wenjiaoju/Sichuan shifan xueyuan zhongwen xi, eds., *Buqu de nongnu* (Unyielding Serfs) (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 1977).

<sup>62</sup> Ninglang Yizu zizhixian geweihui zhenggong zu, *Buyuan zuo nuli de renmen* (People Who Do Not Want to be Slaves) (Kuming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1972).

<sup>63</sup> Jia Shanren: *Dizhu zuixing lu* (A Record of the Crimes of a Landlord) (Beijing: Nongcun duwu chubanshe, 1965), 32.

Gao Yubao (高玉宝 1927-?), an orphan who had labored for a landlord, published his autobiographical account titled *Gao Yubao* in 1951, which was reprinted in 1972. Gao explained how his experiences were written and revised as a semi-fiction:

With the help and cultivation of the Party and the leaders, I finally completed the first draft of the *xiaoshuo* (小说).<sup>64</sup> Later, the Party Committee of the army dispatched experts to help me revise. Based on the draft, we cut, concentrated, and summarized the characters and the plots, and thus finished this novel.<sup>65</sup>

Here Gao does not deny that his work is a fictional *xiaoshuo* based on personal experiences, and that it had been reworked by the author and professional writers to meet the needs of political propaganda. Gao further discussed how his understanding of how to write *xiaoshuo* was deepened:

When I started to write *Gao Yubao* [...] I did not have time to study some political theories and lacked profound understanding of the great Mao Zedong Thought [...] Particularly I did not know what *xiaoshuo* means, nor did I know that the personas and plots can be created. As a result, what I wrote was nothing but an autobiography [...] When revising it, I reasonably highlighted the spirit of rebellion of Yubao and the masses, and enhanced the class feelings among the laboring people in their consolidated struggle. I also deepened my exposure of the reactionary nature of the exploitative class. In addition, I added [...] the Party's influence on Yubao.<sup>66</sup>

For the reader, an autobiographical account whose title is identical to the author's name is easily accepted as truth, but Gao did not mind blending real experiences with imagination and editing based on political need.

In addition to writing, the visualization of class education became another form of preserving and reinforcing the collective memory of victimization. The theme was soon boiled down to two key words: bitterness (苦 *ku*) and hatred (仇 *chou*). The documentary "Never Forget Class Bitterness, Forever Remember the Hatred in the Sea of Blood (不忘阶级苦, 永记血海仇 *Buwang jieji ku, yongji xiehai chou*)," made in 1965, was based on an exhibition promoting class education in Shandong Province. The film showed the objects on display, including a leather whip, club, and walnuts filled with lead that capitalists allegedly used to beat workers. These items were interpreted in the voiceover narrative as part of the "so-called bourgeois civilization." The documentary showed a photo of an unemployed worker selling his daughter. Most other images were painted pictures with motifs such as child laborers burying, with agony, the dead body of their little colleague, headmen watching them with whips in their hands; a child worker with a fever who fainted into a wok filled with boiling water; and a sick child buried alive in a wooden box while he was striking it

<sup>64</sup> *Xiaoshuo* is a generic word in Chinese for fictional novels, novellas, and short stories.

<sup>65</sup> Gao Yubao, *Gao Yubao* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1972), 168.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-71.

from inside with his fists. The plight of the peasants was another main theme of the exhibition and of the documentary, both of which displayed a quilt that a poor peasant family had allegedly used for three generations, a wooden pillow that was said to have been used for four generations, and the one pair of pants that a poor couple had shared for many years. The forced separation of families by poverty was a recurring theme of the exhibition and recalling-bitterness literature. Parents were forced to sell their children; a wife was sold to a human trafficker to pay her husband's debts to the landlord. The documentary ended with the liberation of the people and the founding of the People's Republic. The voiceover stated,

In the socialist society, class struggle still exists. All these that have passed, we can never forget! The blood debt owed by imperialism, the crimes committed by landlords and capitalists, and all the suffering inflicted on us—can we forget them?

Afterward, the documentary showed a village history tablet that bore an inscription of four characters, *Yong Bu Wang Ji* (永不要忘记): “never forget.” The voiceover concluded: “No, we cannot. This hatred is as deep as the sea and the animosity is as heavy as a mountain, and let them be inscribed on the rock and let our offspring never forget.”<sup>67</sup>

All the textualized and visualized recalling-bitterness stories pointed to one goal. The evilness of the old society must not be forgotten. People's hatred of it must be perpetuated. The stories all contributed to the social imagining of the old society. It is very difficult—and perhaps not relevant—to authenticate or debunk these stories. It is more appropriate to see them as rhetoric to serve the purpose of socialist propaganda and education. As rhetoric, they were important then for the party-state to tell its version of historical truth, as it is important now for us to understand how the party-state constructed historical imagination.<sup>68</sup>

### STAGING BITTER MEMORY: POLITICAL RITUAL AND PUBLIC PERFORMANCE

In the 1960s, the party-state sought to indoctrinate students through face-to-face oral reports by older people that emphasized their suffering before Liberation. One document of the Chinese Communist Youth League Central Committee in 1963 urged all middle and high schools to use the bitter memory of the older generation to educate students so that they would not forget the past, and it reminded the people that without timely education, even those with good class backgrounds could degenerate into counterrevolutionaries.<sup>69</sup> Turning a personal, bitter story of an older

<sup>67</sup> Anonymous, “Bu wang jieji ku, laoji xuehai chou” (Never Forget Class Bitterness, Forever Remember the Hatred in the Sea of Blood) *Dianying wenxue*, no. 4 (April 1966): 26-36.

<sup>68</sup> For the importance of rhetoric rather than facts in studying the history of ideas in Foucault's historical thinking, see Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1993), 106-16.

<sup>69</sup> “Gongqingtuan zhongyang pizhuan Chongqing jiuzhong he Anren zhongxue guanyu dui xuesheng jinxing jieji jiaoyu de jingyan” (CCYLCC's Dissemination of the Work Experience of Class Education Undertaken by Chongqing No. 9 Middle School and Anren Middle School), my personal collection, November 21, 1963, 3.



person into a public political asset was the essence of the recalling-bitterness sessions around the country. They operated on the belief that traumatic memory and emotional power could perpetuate revolutionary enthusiasm and a love for socialism. Selecting the right person to speak and creating the appropriate theatrical atmosphere was crucial to the success of recalling bitterness and evoking emotional responses from the audience. In their study of Chen Village, Anita Chan et al. describe the “recall past bitterness” meetings that were held every evening in the village’s cultural hall: “kerosene lamps were extinguished to evoke the darkness of the past,” and trained peasant orators would gulp wordlessly in pain when their narrations reached a climax. Listeners at such events would cry out slogans such as “Down with the old society!” “Down with the Guomintang reactionaries!” or “Down with the landlord class! Long live Chairman Mao!”<sup>70</sup> The ability to touch the audience was the main criterion in selecting speakers. After being chosen, the speakers were trained further to ensure they were eloquent, emotional, and able to cry easily.<sup>71</sup> One speaker, Master Hao, showed good skills in sobbing, talking, eating a steamed bun, and wiping off tears—almost at the same time.<sup>72</sup>

The audience for the recalling-bitterness speeches varied, but on the Yanglin village farm in August 1963, the sessions started as a forum to educate young farm workers who were thought to lack the experience of being oppressed and exploited and to have low levels of class hatred. The Rural Work Department of the CCP’s Liaoning Provincial Committee confirmed in its report that large-scale speaking-bitterness meetings at one farm worked very well among its 250 workers. The report said that recollection and speaking-bitterness were the best methods to elevate class consciousness and provoke class hatred. The document also explained how the department picked and cultivated four orators with “big bitterness and deep hatred” to address the meeting, which stimulated widespread bitterness-speaking among listeners.<sup>73</sup> On a Jiangsu Province farm, sent-down youth constituted 54 percent of the workers by November 1963, and the farm targeted the sent-down youth to carry out thought work by inviting a Red Army veteran to tell his story of the Long March. According to a report, the young workers often compared the standard of living on the farm with that of their native city of Nanjing and felt unhappy about rural life. However, after the bitterness-recalling, they started to contrast their lives with those of Red Army soldiers, stating: “After the contrast, we found we were living in happiness without knowing it!”<sup>74</sup> In one People’s Commune in Hebei Province, the masses were organized to recall

<sup>70</sup> Anita Chan, Richard Madsen, and Jonathan Unger, *Chen Village: Revolution to Globalization*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 79.

<sup>71</sup> Zhonggong Lezhi xianwei dangshi yanjiushi, *Lezhi xian wenhua dageming yundong jishi* (A Chronicle of the Cultural Revolution in Lezhi County) (n.p., 2007), 172.

<sup>72</sup> Wu Nailong, “Yikufan” (Recalling-Bitterness Meal), accessed November 16, 2011, <http://wu-nailong.hxwk.org/2011/11/15/%E5%BF%86%E8%8B%A6%E9%A5%AD/>.

<sup>73</sup> Zhonggong Liaoning sheng wei nongcun gongzuo bu, “Guanyu Panjin nongkenju Xi’an nongchang shehuizhuyi jiaoyu yundong shidian gongzuo baogao” (Report on the Xi’an Farm’s Socialist Education Work under the Farming Bureau of Panjin), File No. 90, Cataloguing No. 1, File 3334, GPA.

<sup>74</sup> “Jiangsu Yuntai nongchang dui chengshi xia chang qingnian shi zenyang jinxing zhengzhi sixiang gongzuo de?” (How Did the Yuntai Farm of Jiangsu Province Conduct Thought Work on Reeducated Urban Youths?), File No. 90, Cataloguing No. 1, File 3334, GPA.

bitterness caused by four evil forces: imperialism, feudalism, capitalism, and the small-peasant economy. The report submitted to the Party center and circulated to all provinces recounted the youths' alleged statements: "Those bitter things shown in films were actually experienced by my parents" and "This was not just bitterness of one or two families, but all the families of the oppressed class had it." However, some students seemed to be overly dramatic in the recalling-bitterness meeting because of the emotional atmosphere and feelings of peer pressure, and the genuine effect was questionable. One former student later said:

All the students cried when they heard the stories. The atmosphere was that if you didn't, others might think you didn't have class consciousness. There was this type of suppression [...] and it became a show [...] For about ten days after the recalling-bitterness meeting, most of the students would become more activist [...] and do more good things in the dormitory [...] However, after that, they'd revert to their usual behavior.<sup>75</sup>

Besides educating the younger generation, who were assumed to lack the experience of living in the old society, recalling-bitterness was also used to influence older peasants who did have such experiences. In late 1963, a commune in Shaanxi Province held its first recalling-bitterness, pondering-sweetness meeting. The speakers were the most miserable and poorest peasants in the area, and other peasants were required to attend the meeting so their enthusiasm for "loving the new society and the collective" could be fully aroused. One former middle peasant who attended the meeting even wrote a folksong based on the content of a speaker's report, in which he listed past sufferings from the old society, including rent, debt, labor service, conscription, and beatings.<sup>76</sup> While the famine had greatly frustrated and disappointed the peasants, the post-famine meetings of recollection, comparison, and contrast encouraged, to some extent, the peasants to think positively and to continue to trust the Party.<sup>77</sup> A former poor peasant family in Hebei Province applied for membership in the poor-peasant association in 1965, and their application letter stated that the socialist education campaign had enabled them to "more deeply realize that the current happiness is brought forth by Chairman Mao and the Communist Party," and the "contrasting of current happiness" with "the past bitterness" made them hate the old society even more.<sup>78</sup>

Each recalling-bitterness meeting had its own specific but generally volatile agenda, depending on the political climate and needs of the time. In the Four

<sup>75</sup> Anita Chan, *Children of Mao: Personality Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 55-56.

<sup>76</sup> Hou Yongfu, *Nongmin riji* (Diary of a Peasant) (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2006), 124-25.

<sup>77</sup> Positive feeling after the recalling-bitterness sessions can be also found in the discussion of rural politics in Peng Zhengde, *Shengcun zhengzhi: guojia zhenghe zhong de nongmin rentong: yi 1950-1980 nian de Hunan sheng Liling xian wei ge'an* (Politics of Subsistence: Peasant Identity in the Process of State Integration: A Case Study of Liling County, Hunan Province, 1950-1980) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2010), 209.

<sup>78</sup> Huadong shifan daxue dangdai zhongguoshi yanjiu zhongxin, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai minjian shiliao jikan* (Non-Official Historical Source Materials of Contemporary China) vol.1 (Shanghai: Dongfan chubanzhongxin, 2009), 69.

Cleanups Campaign targeting grassroots-level officials, speaking bitterness by former poor peasants was utilized as a means to attack the village power-holders. The first task was to reveal the crimes of landlords before Liberation and then accuse the bad elements that had snuck into the Party after Liberation. In Yanggao County, Shanxi Province, a brigade mobilized 127 women over 16 years old to participate in recalling-bitterness sessions, and one woman accused her parents-in-law as well as local cadres who withheld food from her.<sup>79</sup> One purpose of remembering the past in Chen Village, Guangdong, was to reinforce the awareness of China being encircled by enemies, such as the US and the USSR, and to emphasize the importance of guarding “political power” on behalf of the Chinese and other oppressed peoples in the world.<sup>80</sup> In Chen Village, such recalling-bitterness sessions commonly sought two goals. One was to reiterate that peasants’ lives were improving, and the other was to call on the peasants to examine themselves and denounce their personal acts of selfishness.<sup>81</sup> As an organizer and observer of this method in 1964, Yang Shangkun (杨尚昆 1907–1998) was convinced that recalling bitterness was the best way to seize power from grassroots leaders. For him, it was an education provided to the work team by the masses, and not just a method of self-education for the masses.<sup>82</sup>

### REFLECTIONS ON THE “RECALLING-BITTERNESS” EXPERIENCE

During the Cultural Revolution, peasants were encouraged to participate in the political education of the sent-down youth from urban areas.<sup>83</sup> The re-education of the urban youths by peasants through the emotional transmission of bitter experiences changed the traditional power relationship between educated elites and less-educated peasants. In the scenarios of speaking-bitterness sessions, bitterness became the symbolic capital of the peasants, who were now teaching budding intellectuals. Peasants were thus empowered, and the intellectual superiority of students was undercut because they lacked valuable life experiences.<sup>84</sup>

Many memoirs of the Cultural Revolution’s sent-down youths, written in the 1980s and 1990s, recall how formerly urban students were re-educated by old peasants about past bitterness. Yet, these reminiscences are mixed, showing both the effect and the limits of state propaganda and its politics of memory, as well as the audiences’ skepticism and resistance, the unintended consequences of recalling-bitterness.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Xing Long et al., *Yue dang du shi: beifang nongcun de jitihua shidai* (Consulting Archives, Reading History: The Collective Era of Rural North China) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2011), 231.

<sup>80</sup> Chan et al, *Chen Village*, 78.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>82</sup> Yang Shangkun, *Yang Shangkun riji* (Diary of Yang Shangkun) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2001), 442.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas P. Bernstein, *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 167.

<sup>84</sup> Pan Mingxiao (Michel Bonnin), *Shiluo de yidai: Zhongguo de shangshan xiexiang yundong 1968–1980* (Generation Perdue: Le mouvement d’envoi des jeunes instruits a la champagne en Chine, 1968–1980), trans. Annie Au-Yeung (Beijing: Zhongguo dabaike quan shu chu banshe, 2009), 29. Also see Deng, *Zhongguo zhiqingmeng*, 66.

<sup>85</sup> For a theoretical position on the limits of the totalitarian state and its dominance of memory, see Rubie S. Watson, “Memory, History and Opposition,” in Watson, *Memory, History and Opposition*, 14–15.

During the Cultural Revolution, the promotion of hatred through imagining the evil old society did contribute to Red Guard activism. The diary of one Red Guard shows that, in a class at Peking University (北京大学 *Beijing daxue*, or Beida) in July 1966, the recalling of bitterness by an invited old worker was directed against Lu Ping (陆平 1914–2002), the Party Secretary. After the report, one student said with tears on his face: “Lu Ping [...] wants to restore capitalism at Beida, and inflict suffering on poor peasants for the second time. We children of workers-peasants-soldiers will never agree!”<sup>86</sup>

The deep sense of victimization was effectively used to justify the violence and physical abuse of Red Guards. One former Red Guard recalled that when he and his peers were reluctant to beat students with bad class backgrounds, one radical student stood out to do “thought work.” He talked about the bitterness and hatred of the laboring people, the slaughter of revolutionary masses by the Nationalist Party, and the death of his uncle in the Civil War. Through tears, the student asked: “Back then, who sympathized with us? Who pitied us? Today, can we have mercy on these people? Can we pity them?” Upon hearing this, some students’ eyes turned red, shouting: “No, we can’t!” Some turned back and slapped the face of the student who had been beaten, though doing so half-heartedly.<sup>87</sup> Other former students, however, recalled their experiences with skepticism. One former sent-down youth working in Inner Mongolia wrote that recalling bitterness meetings became the “privilege” of a chosen few in his village. However, the content was never consistent, he reported. The orator first said that he became a shepherd for the landlord at twelve, but then he would say that was when he was ten. The village chief would go so far as to speak about the bitterness he suffered during the Great Famine in 1961 and 1962.<sup>88</sup> In Yunnan Province in 1969, the Provincial Revolutionary Committee issued a directive requiring ideological education for sent-down youth. In one village, there was a famous female orator who had been an adopted daughter-in-law. With innocent eyes, a tanned face, and big, rough hands, the old woman convinced listeners of her past suffering. When her talk reached its climax, she burst into tears and cried out loud. Her crying, which was in itself an accusation, automatically triggered the crying of the audience, and was followed by slogan shouting. The sent-down youth who provided the reminiscence, however, said that he was later told that the old woman’s four brothers starved to death during the famine of 1960, and the bitterness under communism, which she was forbidden to mention, might have been the real cause of her crying.<sup>89</sup> Very often, an invited bitterness speaker confused pre-Liberation bitterness and post-Liberation suffering, as recounted by a low-level government official, Party Secretary Ye. According to Ye, the local government usually invited a

<sup>86</sup> Chen Huanren, *Hong weibing riji* (Diary of a Red Guard) (Hong Kong: Xianggang zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2006), 220.

<sup>87</sup> Wen Dayong, *Hong weibing chanhui lu* (Redemption of a Red Guard) (Hong Kong: Mingbao chubanshe youxian gongsi, 2000), 283–84.

<sup>88</sup> Fu Zhong, “Nao hong weibing na nian” (The Year that Saw the Red Guard Turbulence), in Benshu bianweihui, ed., *Caoyuan qishi lu* (Revelations of the Grassland) (Beijing: Zhongguo gongren chubanshe, 1991), 17.

<sup>89</sup> Deng Xian, *Zhongguo zhiqingmeng* (Dreams of Chinese Sent-down Youths) (Chengdu: Sichuan wenyi chubanshe, 2009), 64–66.

person whose “living conditions improved significantly after the Liberation” to address the youngsters. Once, however, an old man described the “difficult time he experienced after the failure of the Great Leap Forward: how much hunger he had suffered during that period, and how many people he had seen die.” The host of the event wanted to stop him, but found that the young audience listened with amusement, that is, until the host himself began to feel like laughing.<sup>90</sup> For the sent-down youth Zhu Xueqin (朱学勤 b. 1962), who later became a famous historian, an old peasant’s anachronism in accusing collectivization under communism, the starvation of the villagers, and deprivation of the right to beg for food, was much more enlightening than it was entertaining, because it destroyed his youthful dream of revolution *in toto*.<sup>91</sup>

Another influential ritual of recalling bitterness was called “eating a recalling-bitterness meal,” in which low-quality materials were used to make a meal so that young people could imagine how poorly the oppressed, laboring people ate before Liberation. Some recalling-bitterness meals were made of tree leaves, potherb, bran, and white mud.<sup>92</sup> How the barely edible food was eaten was considered a sign of political attitude; those who ate fast would be praised, and those who ate slowly or threw the food away were criticized.<sup>93</sup> One essay published in 1998 recounted the author’s experience of eating a recalling-bitterness meal when he was an elementary school student in the early 1970s. The ritual followed this order: After the announcement was made by the Commune’s party secretary, a female teacher sang a well-known propaganda song, which went, “Stars in the sky, the moon is bright/A meeting is called in the production team/And we speak bitterness and utter grievances.” The song was followed by the speaking bitterness from former poor peasants. If one of the peasants was too shy to talk in public, a militia leader spoke bitterness on his or her behalf. After shouting the slogan, “Never forget class bitterness, firmly remember the hatred of blood and tears,” the assembled ate the recalling-bitterness meal. The author detailed the materials used to cook the educational meal, including steamed buns made from the flour of ground sweet potato vines, added to the leaves and starch of sweet potatoes. After the coarse buns were finished, the teacher asked the school children, “Was it good?” To the astonishment of the teacher, the kids all joined the chorus: “Yes!” For the children, the sweet potato-based bun was actually not much different from what they normally ate at home. Prepared for an ideological education, the teacher was ready to say, “Yes, comrades, it was indeed very bad. In the evil old society [...]” Yet the reply of the students contradicted his expectations. Infuriated, the teacher pinched the ear of a boy and stared at him, saying: “Say it again and say it is good or bad!” The boy replied: “No—good.” The teacher turned to other kids, saying: “Everyone should be honest. Was it good or bad?” The enlightened students then shouted: “No—good!” “That’s correct, comrades,” the teacher replied, and then started his lecture about past bitterness and present sweetness.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Huang Shu-min, *The Spiral Road: Change in a Chinese Village Through the Eyes of a Communist Party Leader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 83–84.

<sup>91</sup> Zhu Xueqin, “Li Hongxin de mimi” (The Secret of Li Hongxi), *Nanfang zhoumo*, February 23, 2005.

<sup>92</sup> Chen, *Hong weibing riji*, 180.

<sup>93</sup> Deng, *Zhongguo zhiqingmeng*, 61.

<sup>94</sup> Liu Jungang, “Yiku fan” (Recalling-Bitterness Meal), *Shandong wenxue*, July 1998, 66.

In his novella, *My Two Realms—Yin and Yang: Love in the Revolutionary Era* (我的阴阳两界/革命时期的爱情 *Wo de yinyang liangjie/Geming shiqi de aiqing*), the writer and former sent-down youth Wang Xiaobo (王小波 1952–1997) showed the deepest cynicism towards the recalling-bitterness education he experienced. Wang mocked the clichés and fabrications of recalling-bitterness speeches during the Cultural Revolution: “All the speeches would say how bitter the past was and how the poor ate poorly, and how sweet it is today: we can even eat rice. It suffices to hear just one,” the narrator of the novella says. His girlfriend then retells a bitterness story originally told by a PLA officer and supervisor of student military training, who recalled how he and his elder sister depended on each other in the evil old society. On one New Year’s Eve (“This type of story always occurs at the New Year’s Eve,” the narrator notes), when it was snowing badly (“It was always snowing,” the narrator comments), the sister and brother went out begging for food. The protagonist-narrator then interrupts his girlfriend, saying, “I know what will happen—the sister will be bitten by the dog of a landlord.” But the narrator is wrong. His girlfriend says that the sister found something on the snowy ground that looked like a sweet potato, and she picked it up and brought it home. Unfortunately, the sweet potato-shaped item was, in actuality, the frozen excrement of the landlord. In the novella, the narrator and his girlfriend discuss the meaning of this bitterness story. His interpretation is that the story showed that poor people not only had to eat bad food, but were also forced to eat excrement. His girlfriend, however, believes that the landlord defecated sweet-potato shaped excrement on purpose to humiliate the poor peasant. In conclusion, Wang Xiaobo jokes that the old landlord must have been born with a vicious anus and that the story, if one accepts the analysis of the girlfriend, is creative, and even romantic. The novella goes on to narrate another bitterness story full of sexual connotations in a report given by the same officer. In the second story, the four young aunts of the PLA officer are kidnapped by Japanese invaders, brought to a rundown temple, and raped in the darkness of night. The speech exposes the girlfriend to the word and concept of “rape” for the first time. Instead of cultivating national hatred, the huge impact makes the adolescent girl develop a masochistic sexual fantasy, in which she is one of the four raped aunts.<sup>95</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Beginning in the 1950s, writing, speaking, and staging history from the bottom up emerged as a cultural movement aiming at persuading and educating the people in socialist China about the misery in the old society and the legitimacy of the new socialist state. Its multiple forms, including writing local and family histories, articulating recalling-bitterness stories in public, eating recalling-bitterness meals, and publishing stories of bitter history died out only with the end of the Mao era. After that, China entered a new period of reform and opening-up under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping (邓小平 1904–1997). This was also when Chinese historiography started its turn to the master narrative of modernization, and the

<sup>95</sup> Wang Xiaobo, *Wo de yinyang liang jie/Geming shiqi de aiqing* (My Two Worlds: Yin and Yang/Love in the Era of Revolution) (Harbin: Beifang wenyi chubanshe, 2006), 204–06.

focal points became reform, elites, and urbanization in modern Chinese history.<sup>96</sup> In this context, Chinese historians also started to retreat from the mythologization of history and switched to an approach based on empirical study.<sup>97</sup>

This article delineates the process of the political reconstruction of the old China that started as a mixed mission of popularizing historical writing as well as ideological education. It, too, had mixed legacies. On the one hand, it narrated the life-world of peasants who lived in pre-1949 China. The many interviews done by cadres and writers with the peasants and workers remain a valuable source on the memories of the people and in showing new directions for historians to engage ordinary people and redefine the discipline. The Maoist strategy of reshaping memory was certainly successful and had a profound effect: the influence of the practices of the 1960s—the writing of local history from the bottom-up, the transformation of personal experiences into public memory, the use of memory and its open articulation for ideological indoctrination, the state’s manipulation of the production of politicized memory, the fictionalization of historical narrative, rituals of speaking bitterness and eating recalling-bitterness meals, and class education exhibitions as a practice of politicized public history representation—have been ingrained in contemporary Chinese culture, helping construct a nexus of representation and imagination of “old society” and “landlord” in contrast to the “new society” and the Communist Party. Ironically, the recalling-bitterness, pondering-sweetness narrative strategy was unconsciously inherited by authors who grew up in the Mao era and later chose to emigrate to the West, when they wrote memoirs about their “bitter” experiences in Maoist China.<sup>98</sup>

However, in spite of its seemingly plausible methods, the cultural movement had obvious flaws. First, the interviewees were selected by the Party, and all articulations pointed to one teleological end: the bitter old society must be overthrown to usher in the new society led by the CCP. Any “sweet” or neutral memory of the old society was purged by the power of the state. Second, during the process, the experience was politically organized to fit into a standardized narrative. In addition to contributing to Red Guard violence, the exaggeration and fictionalization of the bitter past created not only false and abused memory but also epistemological difficulty for future generations seeking solid historical knowledge. Third, quasi-religious rituals such as eating recalling-bitterness meals were often unpopular and even counterproductive.

The power of memory and its enactment never ended. Right after the Cultural Revolution, a series of “scar films” used flashbacks “motivated by a character remembering their suffering back then in the ‘Cultural Revolution.’”<sup>99</sup> Jiao Guobiao (焦国标 b. 1963), a former Peking University professor of journalism who was expelled because of his open attack on the CCP’s Department of

<sup>96</sup> Huaiyin Li, “From Revolution to Modernization: The Paradigmatic Transition in Chinese Historiography in the Reform Era,” *History and Theory*, no. 49 (October 2010): 336-60.

<sup>97</sup> Paul Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 284-88.

<sup>98</sup> Peter Zarrow, “Meanings of China’s Cultural Revolution: Memoirs of Exile,” *Positions* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 165-91.

<sup>99</sup> Chris Berry, “Seeking Truth from Fiction: Feature Films as Historiography in Deng’s China,” *Film History* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 90.

Propaganda, launched an unofficial online magazine named “The Black Five Types Recall Old Times (黑五类忆旧 *Heiwulei yijiu*)” in 2010. It publishes reminiscences by political outcasts in Maoist China, mainly the surviving children of landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists. The pieces in the magazine often read like new recalling-bitterness literature, yet they are about pain and suffering in the post-1949 new society. Similarly, bitter collective memory helps build new group identity among former rightists and the offspring of the “black five types” based on traumatic experience, memory, and a shared sense of victimization.<sup>100</sup> Old “rightists” founded their own magazine, modestly titled “Small Scars of the Past (往事微痕 *Wangshi weihen*),” in 2007 in order to “tell all people in China and our descendants about our suffering.” It is notable that the editors of both magazines consciously call for tolerance, love, and harmony, but also for “rejecting forgetting (拒绝遗忘 *jujue yiwang*).”<sup>101</sup> At least as rhetoric, these narrations of the past, no matter how bitter they remain, are now invoked only to combat forgetfulness, to preserve memory, and to fight censorship and self-censorship, not to perpetuate hatred and struggle.

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<sup>100</sup> The online magazine *Wangshi weihen*, accessed May 14, 2011, [www.chinainperspective.com/ArtShow.aspx?AID=13903](http://www.chinainperspective.com/ArtShow.aspx?AID=13903).

<sup>101</sup> Tieliu, statement of his motivations and guidelines, accessed May 14, 2011, <http://boxun.com/news/gb/china/2011/07/201107230115.shtml>.