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Coping with the Cultural Revolution: Contesting Interpretations

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Abstract

In this paper, I would like to look at the public process of coping with the Cultural Revolution. This process got started in 1976, and although many people inside and outside of China claim that there has been no public discussion of this event in the PRC, a closer look at what has been going on since 1976 reveals the contrary. The Cultural Revolution is a major topic of public debate even though the CCP would prefer for it to fall into oblivion.

Coping with the Cultural Revolution as a Trauma Process

I regard the public process of coping with the Cultural Revolution as a trauma process. The trauma I am talking about in this context is a collective trauma that is to be differentiated from individual traumatization.

As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion.¹

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¹ Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 2.

In the case of a collective traumatic experience that falls under the category of “cultural trauma”, the question whether or not each and every individual belonging to a certain collective hit by a traumatic event was traumatized is of secondary importance. What is important is the effect the event has on collective identity and whether or not it has a long-lasting effect on the basic assumptions that a collective shares as part of its collective identity. As a consequence of a loss of identity induced by a traumatic event, the collective needs to go through a “trauma process”,² which can take the form of a public debate. In this process, publicly articulated memory fulfils two functions. On the one hand, it is part of a healing process which mostly affects survivors of the event in question. On the other hand, publicly voiced memory transfers the experience of traumatization to the next generation turning those who do not know about the event into indirect participants. A “cultural trauma” can be recognized as such by its long-lasting effects on the non-participant next generation. As long as the healing process has not yet come to an end, later born generations will be affected by the lack of cohesion and the lack of continuity in the history of the collective they are born into. They are subject to a process of secondary traumatization.³ Once the healing process has come to the point of enabling the collective to integrate the traumatic experience into its identity and history, later born generations will be confronted with a narrative of the event that by its very existence de-traumatizes the event. Nevertheless, the very nature of the traumatic event will compel later born generations to contest this narrative time and again which is why they will feel for a long time to come the urgent need to re-interpret the traumatic event even when it has already found its place in the continuity of history and identity.

Through public debate about the traumatizing event, the affected collective re-establishes its cohesion and re-defines the relationship between different groups of participants. In this process, intellectuals usually play a crucial role as they can act as voices for “carrier groups” who feel the urgency of the problem, but are very often unable to articulate their claims, interests and desires in public. “Carrier groups” are collectives of participants sharing the same experience with regard to the traumatic event. Once the event is over, survivors who belong to one carrier group tend to communicate about the experience amongst each other, but they often hesitate to communicate about their experience with non-participants or with members of other carrier groups. That is why outside observers tend to come to the

² Alexander in Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*, p. 3.

³ Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (München: C. H. Beck, 2006); Dan Bar-On, *Die Last des Schweigens: Gespräche mit Kindern von NS-Tätern* (Hamburg: Reinbek, 2003).

conclusion that survivors of the traumatic event prefer to “forget” or else suppress the memory of what happened. In case of individual traumatization, one possible reaction can be to keep silent about the event.⁴ However, in case of collective traumatization, the inability to communicate about the event in public does not imply that people suppress the memory of the event.⁵ It only means that people refrain from voicing their memories in public, i.e. beyond the limits of their respective carrier groups. However, once the public healing process gets started, carrier groups seek the assistance of intellectuals with privileged access to the public in order to be able to participate in the debate.

Comparing the Cultural Revolution with the Great Famine (大饑荒) as two cases of potentially traumatic dimensions in post-49 Chinese history, the role of intellectuals becomes quite clear. As I could show elsewhere,⁶ the memory of the Great Famine was long left unarticulated in public even after the Party had admitted its mistake and had made its assessment public through the “Resolution on Some Questions Concerning the History of the Party since the Founding of the PRC”.⁷ One reason, among many, for the long silence surrounding this event is the fact that the social group most affected by this disaster was the group of peasants. As peasants are a carrier group that encounters multiple difficulties when trying to articulate itself in public, the event did not arouse public debate until recently. The Cultural Revolution is a social movement that strongly affected the political and intellectual elites of the PRC. As I hope to be able to show in this paper, this event has been under debate ever since it got started with a great diversity of interpretations voiced in public. In this case, intellectuals form carrier groups or are part of carrier groups which they assist in gaining access to the public while serving their own purposes. That is why, even though the CCP tried to suppress open debate on the Cultural Revolution, the public process of coping with this trauma is much more visible than in the case of the Great Leap Forward (大躍進) and especially the Great Famine.

⁴ For a thoughtful discussion of the state of the art in trauma research see “Introduction,” in Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler, *Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma* (New York, London: Routledge, 2003).

⁵ Luisa Passerini, “Memories between Silence and Oblivion,” in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, eds., *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 238-254.

⁶ 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* 1:1 (March 2003), pp. 39-67.

⁷ Michael Schoenhals, ed., *China’s Cultural Revolution, 1966-1969: Not a Dinner Party* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), pp. 33-42.

However, the debate on the Cultural Revolution shows that publicly voiced memory is subject to selection and interpretation. The “trauma process” is a process of contestation in which different carrier groups struggle over the importance of their experience as part of the collective interpretation of the event and over the meaning of the event for understanding the past and the future of the collective. Recent discussions on the Cultural Revolution show that there is a strong divide between participants who feel the urge to articulate their memories while others prefer to stay silent. Generally speaking, the so-called Red Guard (紅衛兵) generation is very articulate about their memories of the Cultural Revolution. Members of this generation dominate the discussion and call for collective remembering. The so-called “old cadres” (lao ganbu 老幹部) group of participants has stayed silent although their fate was the focus of discussion in earlier phases of public assessment. Except for rare cases of publishing personal memoirs,⁸ they usually do not voice their grievances and prefer for their children or disciples to take over the part of making sure that their fate is not forgotten.⁹ Also, members of the old cadre group of participants although admitting to their victim status in the movement often tend towards “forgiving” the perpetrators. They not only do this to show their high level of moral sophistication, but also to support the idea of preserving social stability by avoiding a public debate on the issue of the Cultural Revolution. There is also a strong divide between the perspectives of participants and non-participants. Participants seem to claim that they are the only ones to know the facts reproaching non-participants of a lack of interest in the Cultural Revolution.¹⁰ All these views are voiced as part of a heated debate

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馬識途，《滄桑十年》（北京：中共中央黨校出版社，1999）；武光，《不是夢：對「文革」年代的回憶》（北京：中共黨史出版社，2000）；季羨林，《牛棚雜憶》（北京：中共中央黨校出版社，1998）；聶元梓，《聶元梓回憶錄》（香港：時代國際出版有限公司，2005）。

⁹ 周明主編，《歷史在這裏沈思：1966-1976年紀實》（北京：華夏出版社，1986），卷1-6。

¹⁰ See the following articles published in 《華夏文摘增刊》：徐友漁，〈總結和反思〉，期272，2001年11月4日，<http://www.cnd.org/cr/ZK01/cr111.hz8.html#1>；〈我們敢不敢直面歷史〉，期292，2002年5月29日，<http://www.cnd.org/cr/ZK02/cr131.hz8.html#3>；〈博物館與真實記憶〉，期292，2002年5月29日，<http://www.cnd.org/cr/ZK02/cr131.hz8.html#4>。劉心武，〈寄望於新一代思想者與行動者——遇羅文《我家》序〉，期228，2000年8月16日，<http://www.cnd.org/cr/ZK00/zk228.hz8.html#1>；王友琴，〈一封等待了兩年的信〉，期292，2002年5月29日，<http://www.med8th.com/humed/5/050615yfdllndx.htm> (2008年8月9日查閱)。 In a 2006 conference which will be discussed later in this paper, Wu Di 吳迪 speaks about “a generation which lost its memory 失憶的一代” saying: “Among those who should understand the Cultural Revolution there is hardly anyone who knows anything about it. That means, future intellectuals and people in the cultural sphere will form a generation that lost its memory and the [research on the] Cultural Revolution will develop into ‘a discontinued field of scholarship’.”

over the assessment of the Cultural Revolution. Although the majority of publications from the PRC strongly criticize the Cultural Revolution as “ten years of chaos” (十年動亂), there seems to be a growing minority holding a more positive view of what happened between 1966 and 1976. These views are mostly aired by overseas Chinese and are made known to the public via the internet.¹¹

The articulating discourse surrounding cultural trauma is a process of mediation involving alternative strategies and alternative voices. It is a process that aims to reconstitute or reconfigure a collective identity through collective representation, as a way of repairing the tear in the social fabric.¹²

In some cases, and the case of the Cultural Revolution clearly fits into this category, the trauma process is in its initial phase embedded into a process of regime change.¹³ Under these circumstances, the trauma process is influenced by the necessity to define the legitimacy of the elite that claims power as a result of bringing the traumatic event to an end. This means that the newly established elite has to take the decision whether to define a group of perpetrators and “outlaw” them or whether to blur the dividing line between victims and perpetrators. In many cases, even though initially it seems more feasible to unite with the victims against the perpetrators, the newly established power holders accommodate victims and victimizers, fellow travellers and resisters. They feel the need to overcome internal fighting as the most effective way to consolidate their power. Consequently, they also seek compromise with former power holders on procedures of settling accounts with victims and perpetrators.

In order to achieve this aim, the newly established elite tries to define a memory frame which gives orientation to the public and makes clear what is right and what is wrong to think about

See 郝建整理編輯，《文革四十年祭：2006北京文化大革命研討會全記錄》（美國：溪流出版社，2006），頁173。

¹¹ Mobo C. F. Gao, *The Battle for China's Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution* (London, Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2008).

¹² Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*, p. 4.

¹³ See Assmann for an analysis of the trauma process in Germany; Frei for a study on West Germany during the first years after the war; Gebert for a study on Poland between 1989 and 1996; Roniger and Sznajder for a study on Argentina's process of re-democratization, for more examples see Hodgkin and Radstone. Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*; Norbert Frei, “Amnestiepolitik in den Anfangsjahren der Bundesrepublik”; Konstanty Gebert, “Wenn schlafende Akten lügen... Das Für und Wider der Öffnung von Geheimdienstakten”; Luis Roniger and Mario Sznajder, “Menschenrechtsverletzungen in Argentinien: Kollektives Erinnern und Vergessen nach der Redemokratisierung,” in Gary Smith and Avishai Margalit, eds., *Amnestie oder die Politik der Erinnerung in der Demokratie* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), pp. 120-137, 138-152, 155-178.; Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, eds., *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003).

the traumatic event. This is what makes the trauma process a political process in which different parts of the elite as well as different carrier groups display loyalty or dissent with the defined memory frame. Especially in the initial phases of the trauma process, alternative memory frames contest and influence each other, and under the surface of reconciliation, the struggle over the interpretation of the event can easily be as fierce as the conflict itself (even though it usually takes a decisively different form). It is focused on certain key issues:

National or cultural trauma always engages a ‘meaning struggle’, a grappling with an event that involves identifying the ‘nature of the pain, the nature of the victim and the attribution of responsibility’.¹⁴

The “trauma process” is not about the truth of history in the usual sense of the word.¹⁵ It is a process of social construction in which people struggle to find a way of “coping with the trauma” that can be shared by the majority of the involved collective.¹⁶ This includes the possibility that post-traumatic societies refrain from open debate on the traumatic event for a long time before specific circumstances push them into the “trauma process”.¹⁷ This silence is, as a matter of fact, not imposed on society, but the result of an agreement between different elites and between elite and non-elite members of society. This, however, only postpones public debate over the memory frame and an adequate way to de-traumatize the event in question. The idea is that those who can successfully establish their memory frame as dominant will legitimately dominate the collective. Under certain circumstances this means that the eventually dominant narrative about the traumatic event helps the victims to overcome their humiliation and to define the responsibility of those who victimized others. In other cases, the accepted memory frame refrains from clarifying responsibilities. No matter for which option the involved collective opts, it has to define the dividing line between the majority it thrives to integrate into the new collective identity and the minority it expels from the majority. In order to reach this aim, it has to take in account what the majority of those who survived accept to be the truth of what happened. This truth about the past is always a

¹⁴ Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*, p. 3.

¹⁵ This does not mean that participants in the trauma process do not struggle over the “truth” of history. Different carrier groups usually hold the opinion that only their own version of the past is the truth about of history. See as an interesting and important example the documentation in宋永毅主編，《文化大革命：歷史真相和集體記憶》，上/下冊（香港：田園書屋，2007）。

¹⁶ Dieter Simon, “Verordnetes Vergessen,” in *Amnestie oder die Politik der Erinnerung in der Demokratie*, pp. 21-36.

¹⁷ Luisa Passerini, “Memories between Silence and Oblivion,” in *Contested Pasts*, pp. 238-254.; Gesine Schwan, “Die Idee des Schlussstrichs-oder: Welches Erinnern und welches Vergessen tun der Demokratie gut?” in *Amnestie oder die Politik der Erinnerung in der Demokratie*, pp. 90-102.

truth that complies with the needs of the present and plans for the future. No truth can be accepted by society at large that makes people unable to cope with the present. That is why the trauma process keeps presenting new answers to old questions. However, the origin of the questions lies in the past, the traumas of which cast a long shadow on the present.

This paper will analyse major contributions to the above mentioned trauma process. As the CCP was both instrumental in launching the Cultural Revolution and in bringing it to an end, we are confronted with a very complicated situation regarding the political elite in the PRC. In order to come to terms with the political aspect of the trauma process surrounding the Cultural Revolution we will analyse the CCP's policy of interpreting the Cultural Revolution, especially one of the major documents published in this context, the "Resolution on Some Questions Concerning the History of the Party since the Founding of the PRC".¹⁸ "Official historiography" in the PRC is based on this resolution and fulfils the task of influencing the trauma process according to the CCP's interpretation. However, with the CCP allowing for public debate to take place to a greater degree than in Maoist times, it is also necessary to look at "unofficial historiography" in its many different forms in order to identify the above mentioned "carrier groups", their interpretative strategies and claims. In this context, the fact that many active participants of the Cultural Revolution now live outside the PRC has to be taken into account. The internet is an instrument to bridge the gap between the discourses inside and outside of the PRC. And even though the PRC government's internet policy makes it impossible for all contributions to the discussion to be read in China, we will see in the course of this paper that there is a strong relationship between the inside and the outside discourse.¹⁹

An event of traumatic dimensions calls for a redefinition of foundational assumptions. The fact that it is connected to an event "violating one or more... fundamental cultural presuppositions"²⁰ compels the affected collective to undergo a process of collective identity repair that is at the same time a process in which many individuals redefine their identities without ever being able to forget those individual memories that do not comply with the public assessment of the traumatic event. During the course of the 20th century, people have learned that the most dramatic traumatic events are man-made. Natural disasters might have a devastating effect on the community they hit, but in most cases they can be accepted as a

¹⁸ Passed July 1, 1981. For an English translation see Michael Schoenhals, ed., *China's Cultural Revolution, 1966-1969*, pp. 33-42.

¹⁹ Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "In Search of a Master Narrative for 20th Century Chinese History," *The China Quarterly*, No. 188 (December 2006), pp. 1070-1091. Also published in Julia Strauss ed., *The History of the PRC (1949-1976)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 216-237.

²⁰ Smelser in Ron Eyermann, *Cultural Trauma*, p. 2.

terrible strike of fate. Man-made disasters confront us with our imperfection and thus with our inability to live up to our ideals. This is what makes coping with the trauma such a painful and long-lasting experience.

Working Through the Experience of the Cultural Revolution under the Victimization Paradigm (1976-1981)

What many observers do not take into account is the fact that “working through” the experience of the Cultural Revolution began immediately after the purge of the so-called “Gang of Four” (四人幫) during the campaign to “criticize and unmask” Jiang Qing 江青, Zhang Chunqiao 張春橋, Yao Wenyuan 姚文元 and Wang Hongwen 王洪文.²¹ Right from its very beginning, the campaign touched upon many important political issues related to the Cultural Revolution. The memory frame it tested out suggested that the Cultural Revolution was originally a fruitful undertaking that had been distorted only because the “Gang of Four” had used the opportunity to sneak their way into the power system and prepare for their take-over after Mao’s death. The 11th Party Congress eventually declared the fall of the “Gang of Four” to be the victory of the Cultural Revolution,²² and thus tried to stick to a positive assessment of the time period between 1966 and 1976. However, the political movement going on between October 1976 and the 11th Party Congress in July of 1977 went far beyond the limits of the assessment the then majority in the CCP leadership had defined. The many cartoons to be found everywhere in the PRC at the time clearly testify to this.²³

That is why, much in contrast to the intentions of the 11th Party Congress, the debate on the Cultural Revolution continued to stress the negative aspects of “Mao’s last revolution”. Simultaneously, many political verdicts of the Cultural Revolution were overthrown, politically persecuted cadres and intellectuals were rehabilitated with their stories of persecution published in the newspapers. Deaths and suicides that had taken place during the Cultural Revolution were investigated into and compensations paid to the “old cadre”

²¹ Lowell Dittmer, “Rethinking China’s Cultural Revolution amid Reform,” in Woei Lien Chong, ed., *China’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: Master Narratives and Post-Mao Counternarratives* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), pp. 3-26.

²² 金春明, 《「文化大革命」史稿》(成都:四川人民出版社, 1995), 頁472。

²³ Johnny Erling and Detlev von Graeve, *Tigermaske und Knochengespenst: Die neue chinesische Karikatur* (Köln: Prometh, 1978).

victims.²⁴ The campaign against the “two whatevers” (liangge fanshi 兩個凡是) was launched in order to establish the idea of “practice as the only criterion of truth” (實踐是檢驗真理的唯一標準). In this situation, the critical assessment of the Cultural Revolution was part and parcel of the process of reshuffling power inside the Party, and it was a process in which the same population that had responded to Mao’s Cultural Revolution initiative responded to the Party’s appeal to criticize the “Gang of Four”.

The movement reduced the complexity of the Cultural Revolution to the minimum of reconciling the present with the past. People were told that the original intentions of the Cultural Revolution were right and that they had rightly participated in it. At the same time it was explained to them that whatever negative aspects had occurred during the Cultural Revolution were somehow or other related to the intrigues of the “Gang of Four”. The movement helped to overcome anxieties and feelings of guilt as it opened the door to externalizing responsibility and defining the majority of the population as victims of the “Gang of Four”. It gave people the chance to voice their anger, hatred and feelings of revenge under the precondition of relating it to the criticism of the “Gang of Four” and those of their followers that had been selected as targets of attack by the Party. The more the people responded to it, the more it helped the later victorious faction of Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 to weaken Hua Guofeng’s 華國鋒 position. The unity of a society the social fabric of which had been torn by the Cultural Revolution was re-established as the unity of victims, and thus a memory frame was established that people used and had to use.

The CCP Resolution on Post-49 History and the Assessment of the Cultural Revolution (1981-1986)

For Jin Chunming 金春明, however, what counts is when the Party leadership started discussing the issue.²⁵ For him, this kind of discussion first took place during a meeting of the CCP CC in November and early December of 1978. Chen Yun 陳雲 supposedly gave a speech on this occasion that led to a thorough discussion of the Cultural Revolution issue even

²⁴ Sue Trevaskes, “People’s Justice and Injustice: Courts and the Redressing of Cultural Revolution Cases,” *China Information* 16:2 (2002), pp. 1-26.

²⁵ 金春明, 《「文化大革命」史稿》, 頁485-488。

though it had originally not been on the agenda. It was this discussion which prepared the ground for the 3rd Plenum of the 11th CCP CC in 1978. During this crucial meeting the assessment of the Cultural Revolution was linked to the topic of rehabilitating Liu Shaoqi 劉少奇 and criticizing Mao Zedong 毛澤東.

By 1980, the Party leadership initiated the process of drafting the “Resolution on Some Questions Concerning the History of the Party since the Founding of the PRC” which lasted until July 1981. It was Deng Xiaoping himself who gave the instructions for the draft committee by saying:

Through this resolution we should come to an overall assessment of events in the past. We are dealing with the past, and the summary should (therefore) be sweeping rather than finicky. The aim of summarizing the past is to lead people to unite and look ahead. We should strive to have things clarified inside the party and among the people by the time the resolution is passed. People’s understanding should be unified and the discussion on major questions of history should come to a close by that time.²⁶

It is very clear from this quotation that Deng who together with his allies was the main beneficiary of popular participation in the campaign to criticize the “Gang of Four” and overthrow verdicts from the Cultural Revolution wanted to have the assessment of the past come to an end as soon as possible. The trial against the “Gang of Four” and other leading members of the Party and the Liberation Army that came to a verdict in 1981 also served this purpose. However, by 1984 discussions on how to assess the Cultural Revolution aroused again focusing on the demand to “totally negate the Cultural Revolution”, a demand that was published in all major newspapers and journals and which again called for popular support.²⁷ Jin Chunming claims that this discussion went on for two years. In 1986 the Cultural Revolution’s 10th and 20th anniversaries marked the end of this discussion accompanied by quite a number of new publications. A symposium on the Cultural Revolution, however, was not organized. Thereby, the discussion complied with the Party leadership’s idea of limiting the space for public debate while at the same time suggesting a new frame for the memory of the Cultural Revolution through “total negation” (quanpan fouding 全盤否定). Quite

²⁶ Deng Xiaoping quoted in 金春明, 《「文化大革命」史稿》, 頁503。

²⁷ Anita Chan, “Editor’s Introduction: A Brief Analysis of the Cultural Revolution by Liu Guokai,” *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*, Winter 1986-1987, pp. 3-13.; Lowell Dittmer, “Rethinking China’s Cultural Revolution amid Reform,” pp. 3-26 ; 政治學院「思想戰線」編輯室編, 《徹底否定「文化大革命」》(北京: 解放軍政治學院出版社, 1985)。

obviously, Deng's hope to end the discussion on the Cultural Revolution with the help of the 1981 Resolution had not come true.

Gao Mobo 高默波 argues in his articles on memories of the Cultural Revolution that official historiography is only interested in the power struggle among the political elite.²⁸ It is not concerned with the Cultural Revolution as a social movement, and it sees everything as part of the "ten years of chaos" paradigm. As a matter of fact, the 1981 Resolution is predominantly focused on assessing the inner party struggle and it makes clear that the Cultural Revolution is to be assessed negatively because it brought harm to the Party and the people:

History has shown that the 'cultural revolution' initiated by a leader labouring under a misapprehension and capitalized on by counter-revolutionary cliques, led to domestic turmoil and brought catastrophe to the Party, the state and the whole people...Chief responsibility for the grave 'Left' error of the 'cultural revolution', an error comprehensive in magnitude and protracted in duration, does indeed lie with Comrade Mao Zedong.²⁹

This is the main difference between the early phase of debate on the Cultural Revolution and the Resolution: the Cultural Revolution is a "mistake", a "catastrophe" and a "turmoil". Mao Zedong no longer represents the positive aspects of the Cultural Revolution and the "Gang of Four" those who led the mass movement onto a wrong path. Mao is responsible for the mistake. However, the leadership of the Party did not prevent Mao from making this mistake and agreed to launch the Cultural Revolution although "the majority of members of the Eighth Central Committee of the Party and the members it elected to its Political Bureau, Standing Committee, and Secretariat" were on the right side of the struggle. How could this happen? The answers given in the Resolution remain comparatively vague: a lack of experience in building socialism, a wrong assessment of the danger originating from "revisionism", the high prestige of Mao Zedong as well as his tendency to "act more and more arbitrarily and subjectively"³⁰ and outside the rules of democratic centralism. "Thus, it was hard for the Party and state to prevent the initiation of the 'cultural revolution' or check its development".³¹

²⁸ See several contributions Mobo Gao made between 1994 and 2002 and his recent book *The Battle for China's Past*. Mobo C. F. Gao, "Maoist Discourse and a Critique of the Present Assessment of the Cultural Revolution," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 26:3 (1994), pp. 15-31; "Memoirs and Interpretations of the Cultural Revolution," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 27:1 (1995), pp. 49-57; "Debating the Cultural Revolution: Do We Only Know What We Believe?" *Critical Asian Studies* 34:3 (2002), pp. 419-434.

²⁹ Michael Schoenhals, ed., *China's Cultural Revolution, 1966-1969*, p. 299.

³⁰ Michael Schoenhals, ed., *China's Cultural Revolution, 1966-1969*, p. 303.

³¹ Michael Schoenhals, ed., *China's Cultural Revolution, 1966-1969*, p. 303.

Mao is responsible for developing the idea of the Cultural Revolution as a consequence of his theoretical considerations, the Party is responsible for not stopping him, and the “Gang of Four” made things even worse as they “rigged up two counter-revolutionary cliques in an attempt to seize supreme power, taking advantage of Comrade Mao Zedong’s errors”.³²

As far as the victims are concerned, the Resolution comes to a very problematic assessment. While it clearly states that “the so-called bourgeois headquarter inside the Party headed by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping simply did not exist” and all party cadres attacked in this context were regarded to have been victimized,³³ the Resolution uses the formulation “muddled up the distinction between the people and the enemy” when it comes to assessing the persecution of intellectuals.³⁴ This implies that intellectuals might have been criticized too strongly and wrongly treated as enemies. But this does not mean that there was no reason whatsoever to criticize them. Instead of clarifying that intellectuals who were persecuted during the Cultural Revolution had in fact been supportive to the socialist system in China and should not have been persecuted, the Resolution suggests that intellectuals who were attacked during the early phase of the Cultural Revolution might in fact have been disloyal to the Party and the socialist system. With other words: intellectuals are not simply to be regarded as victims of the Cultural Revolution, they are to some degree responsible for their own fate as at least some among them had turned away from the CCP during the years preceding the Cultural Revolution.

The twisted formulation regarding the participation of the masses also shows that the Party is not ready to dismiss the “masses” from their responsibility:

At the beginning of the ‘cultural revolution’, the vast majority of participants in the movement acted out of their faith in Comrade Mao Zedong and the Party. Except for a handful of extremists, however, they did not approve of launching ruthless struggle against leading Party cadres at all levels. With the lapse of time, following their own circuitous paths, they eventually attained a heightened political consciousness and consequently began to adopt a sceptical or wait-and-see attitude toward the ‘cultural revolution’, or even resisted or opposed it. Many people were assailed either more or less severely for this reason. Such a state of affairs could not but provide openings to be exploited by opportunists, careerists, and conspirators, not a few of whom were escalated to high or even key positions.³⁵

³² Michael Schoenhals, ed., *China’s Cultural Revolution, 1966-1969*, p. 297.

³³ Michael Schoenhals, ed., *China’s Cultural Revolution, 1966-1969*, p. 297.

³⁴ Michael Schoenhals, ed., *China’s Cultural Revolution, 1966-1969*, p. 298.

³⁵ Michael Schoenhals, ed., *China’s Cultural Revolution, 1966-1969*, p. 298.

Contrary to the first phase of public debate on the Cultural Revolution, the masses are not unequivocally regarded as victims of the Cultural Revolution. Instead, they are told that they cannot hide away from their responsibility of having actively participated in the Cultural Revolution. Only after having first followed their beloved leader who had wrongly launched the campaign did they gradually turn into fellow travellers complying with the Cultural Revolution or victims alienated from the movement. Only few are regarded as having actively resisted against the Cultural Revolution while many were deceived into supporting opportunists escalated into leading positions. This means that the so-called masses, adored by Maoism as the sole source of truth, did not inhibit Mao from launching the Cultural Revolution, but instead supported him and those that are regarded by the Resolution as counter-revolutionaries. Neither are the masses granted the privilege of having stood on the right side of history, nor are they acknowledged the status of victims. They are agents and victims of Mao's error at the same time.

For those who were persecuted and attacked this assessment is no consolation, as the Resolution does not condemn or at least explain the long enduring violence that spread throughout the country and caused so many casualties. For those participants who were later on turned into victims it does not offer exculpation, and for the many fellow travellers it is no relief as it does not refer to expediency as a legitimation for their behaviour. This is one of the major reasons why the Resolution has so far not been able to achieve its proclaimed aim of bringing the discussion on the Cultural Revolution to an end.

Responsibility and Complicity

Why can the Resolution not be much more outspoken about defeat and victory, about right and wrong, about justice and injustice? It was passed after hundred thousands of party cadres, army officers and prominent intellectuals had been rehabilitated. Every major city in the PRC had organized committees investigating into murders and suicides related to the Cultural Revolution, and the mass movement of criticizing the "Gang of Four" had brought many things to the public that had been covered up before. At the time, the majority of the people seemed to be relieved that the Cultural Revolution had come to an end, and most of the people seemed to be happy with the so-called "old generation of revolutionaries" back in their former positions. Why did this group of victims turned victors not take the opportunity to have their view of what happened dominate the Party's assessment of the years 1966-1976?

The main problem the Party leadership is confronted with is its own problem of ambiguity.³⁶ It starts with the problem of assessing Mao Zedong's role, and related to this, it is the ambiguity arising from party members on all echelons of the CCP playing a double role in the Cultural Revolution. In order to survive and eventually regain power in the Party, even those who were victimized participated in the Cultural Revolution when it first got started. Only very few of the party leaders who later became heroes in the fight against the "Gang of Four" had resisted against the idea of launching the Cultural Revolution before being targeted. Virtually nobody could claim not to have been supportive of the Cultural Revolution.³⁷ According to the tradition of the Party, whoever had been on the wrong side during one of the many line struggles would never have this taint taken away. If those who eventually won the battle insisted their story of victimization and resistance be generally accepted as true, they would have provoked massive contestation. They would have excluded too many from their memory frame and would have made a political compromise with all those who had come into leading positions during the Cultural Revolution impossible. In the course of this debate, documents would have been unearthed showing how party leaders who after 1976 were highly critical of the Cultural Revolution had complied with Mao's policies even when under severe attack using the language of the Cultural Revolution to defend themselves against it. A second aspect of ambiguity is related to the generational structure of the political elite in China. The problem of recruitment for membership in the political elite has not found an institutional solution in China so far. That is why two conflicting strategies—recruitment through the procedures of meritocracy versus recruitment along the lines of descent—coexist and provoke constant conflict. As the Red Guard movement was in its initial phase overwhelmingly a movement of the sons and daughters of leading cadres in Beijing, condemning the Red Guard movement would mean tainting the records of many of those young people who were destined to eventually take over leadership. The fact that the generation of "old cadres" dominating the Party in 1981 refrains from answering the above mentioned questions leaves the window of opportunities open for their own offspring to take

³⁶ According to recent accounts, Deng Xiaoping also criticized what I call the ambiguity of the 1981 Resolution. Already in 1982, he asked for a revision of the 1981 Resolution. He criticized that the Resolution "compromised on important issues... in some cases argued against its own convictions and was to a certain degree selfish [in its assessment]". 羅冰，〈爭鳴：萬里上書籲重評毛澤東〉，2006年6月15日，<http://www.epochtimes.com/gb/6/6/15/n1352522.htm>（2008年8月9日查閱）。

³⁷ Song Yongyi 宋永毅 regards the idea that even the later on propagated heroes of the fight against the Cultural Revolution such as Deng Xiaoping and Ye Jianying 葉劍英 were strong supporters of Mao's idea in the early phase of the movement as a major finding of the New York Conference in Commemoration of the Cultural Revolution held in 2006. See 宋永毅主編，〈文化大革命：歷史真相和集體記憶〉，上冊，〈前言〉，頁ix。

over leadership. If an unequivocally negative judgement regarding Red Guard participation had been included into the Resolution, the dominant generation of party leaders would have inhibited their own offspring from taking over. They would have inhibited their own families from holding their position among the leading elite for the next generation to come. That is at least yet another reason why they refrained from retaliatory judgement against the generation of those most active in violent fighting. With this decision, however, the Party Resolution was bound to refrain from acknowledging victim status to intellectuals under Red Guard attack during the initial phase of the Cultural Revolution.

What looks like a solution reinforces, in effect, the problem of ambiguity. Members of the so-called “Old Red Guards” (lao hongweibing 老紅衛兵) can also claim to be victims of the Cultural Revolution as they had come under heavy and bloody attack from rebel organizations once Mao had decided to divert the attention of the movement from “reactionary academic authorities” (fandong xueshu quanwei 反動學術權威) to “capitalist roaders inside the Party” (dangnei zouzipai 黨內走資派). On these grounds, they can regard themselves as victims among the Red Guard generation and claim the “rebel factions” (zaofanpai 造反派) to have been the perpetrators. The post-Cultural Revolution Party leadership, however, was unable to accept this argument because making a clear judgement against the “rebel factions” would have alienated a group of people which the Party leadership had to fear as a possible opposition to its post-Cultural Revolution rule. The young people from the “rebel factions” had been mobilized by Mao to fight against the “capitalist roaders” under the leadership of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping. They were the most likely to oppose the rehabilitation of these cadres and especially their dominant position in the CCP leadership. No wonder the Resolution refrained from making a clear statement about the mass movement aspect of the Cultural Revolution, and was unable to pronounce a judgement on the issue of factionalism. The Party leadership uses the ambiguity inherent in the process of assessing the Cultural Revolution to prevent conflicts that had been instrumental in generating and developing the Cultural Revolution from resurfacing. That this problem is still haunting the generation of Cultural Revolution survivors is vividly described in an article by Ji Xianlin 季羨林 who belongs to a carrier group of old cadres victimized during the Cultural Revolution. He refers to this question in the context of explaining why he refrained from revenge after the Cultural Revolution was over:

I know love and hate, envy and revenge, my mind is no broader than anybody else's. But as soon as I come to think about revenge, I realize that everybody no matter to which camp or to which faction he or she belonged had turned under the given circumstances and in the prevalent atmosphere into a monster as if everybody had drunk a magic potion. Even when I was already beaten near to death, I still believed that the 'Cultural Revolution' was correct. How could I dare to be overdemanding? Those who plagued others and those who were plagued are all victims, with the only exception that they acted out of different positions.³⁸

What looks as a statement fulfilling all the requirements the Party leadership would propose for the memoir of an "old cadre" arguing in favour of "uniting in peace" and overcoming factionalism is more complicated at second glance. Ji Xianlin goes on to admit that he had long hesitated to write down his memories:

The factionalism has left more or less obvious traces on people's minds. If we do not watch out, it will come back to the surface immediately. More than half of the comrades I cooperate with were on the other side during the ten disastrous years, they criticized me and struggled against me, they said bad things about me and questioned me, they put their feet on me. Some among them seem to feel sorry about that. I think that these people are all good comrades; like me they got confused for a certain period of time and did bad and unreasonable things...If these people of good will got to know that I have a book under the title 'Memories from the Cowshed' in my drawer, they would definitely think that I was settling accounts for the day of reckoning and was to take revenge...How could I work at one desk with them with these anxieties on my mind?³⁹

This quote comes from a text published in 1998. It shows that the "unity" the Party had tried to establish with the help of the 1981 Resolution is still not as solid as hoped for. By deciding to avoid an altogether negative assessment of Mao Zedong and sticking to Mao Zedong Thought as the guiding principle of the Party, the Resolution had no choice but to turn away from the Party's initial strategy of uniting the people as victims of the Cultural Revolution. Instead, it had to admit that everybody from the top to the bottom of Party and society had been part of it. However, this turn around with all its advantages had a major disadvantage. It claimed overall complicity and thereby overall responsibility. It had to deny acknowledgement of their sufferings to the victims and leave the perpetrators unpunished. In order for the CCP to handle this dilemma, it had to replace the strategy of framing memory by the strategy of amnesia. It tried to convince the public that not to remember sufferings of the

³⁸ 季羨林，《牛棚雜憶》，頁2。

³⁹ 季羨林，《牛棚雜憶》，頁4。

past would help everybody to live in the present. The nation united by collective memory was to be turned into a nation united by collective amnesia.

The fact that the experience of ambiguity is widespread if not the common experience of Cultural Revolution survivors is reflected in the ongoing adoration for Mao as well as for Zhou Enlai 周恩來. For the individual having to live with the ambiguity of being both victim and perpetrator it must have a consoling effect to see that even those people at the very top of state and society share the problem. However, in the case of Mao Zedong we see that the adoration developed in the Mao cult of the 1990s was mostly about suppressing ambiguities and going back to worshipping the untainted leader.⁴⁰ In the case of Zhou Enlai, the object of adoration is the ambiguity itself. The story that is being told in quite a number of varieties is the story of a loyal minister managing to stay morally untainted while complying with the politics of the evil emperor. These feelings were first articulated on the occasion of his death in January 1976, and the idea that Zhou was worthy of adoration for having lived through the Cultural Revolution though suffering by his entanglement soon became dominant. Zhou was believed to be morally justified in supporting the Cultural Revolution because only through this support was he able to prevent the worst from happening. This is reflected in the commemorative articles that have been published since the early 1980s,⁴¹ and is spelled out in Gao Wenqian's 高文謙 book *Wannian Zhou Enlai (The Late Zhou Enlai)*.⁴² The book shows how Zhou Enlai had his personal reasons as well as political considerations that made him participate in the Cultural Revolution as victim and perpetrator, supporter and opponent, instrument and instrumentalizer. It is this ambiguity of his personality which is so familiar to all those sharing this experience with him. And it is an ambiguity that has deep roots in history as it is generated from what people believe has been the traditional relationship between emperor and minister.⁴³

In a case study regarding the polity of Athens at the beginning of the 5th century BC Wilfried Nippel comes to a most interesting conclusion, he writes:

⁴⁰ For a recent discussion of the "Mao fever" in the context of remembering the Cultural Revolution, see 胡平, 〈評毛澤東熱——寫在文革四十周年〉; 陳小雅, 〈毛澤東的「品牌化」、神話及其退化——「毛澤東熱」透視〉, 收入《文化大革命》, 下冊, 頁941-951、951-981。

⁴¹ "Zhou Enlai: A Tribute 10 Years after His Death," *China Daily*, January 8th, 1986, p. 4.

⁴² 高文謙, 《晚年周恩來》(香港: 明鏡出版社, 2003)。

⁴³ For a recent discussion of the last years of the Cultural Revolution and Zhou Enlai's role, see Frederick Teiwes and Warren Sun, *Chinese Politics during the Twilight of the Cultural Revolution, 1972-1976* (Armonk, London: Sharpe, 2007).

Many examples from world history show that chances for a group of people to be pardoned after a major political change grow with the extent of their crimes and the number of people entangled in their misdeeds as well as with the remaining potential they dispose of in destabilizing the new system.⁴⁴

The fact that the Cultural Revolution by its very nature had forced the vast majority of Chinese into participation has produced ambiguous memories on the side of the majority of its survivors. This is what made it feasible for the Party leadership to turn away from its idea of universal victimhood and establish the frame of overall complicity. The necessity to do so, however, originated from the elite's concern about the future of their offspring and from an inner-elite struggle among those around Deng Xiaoping who had been targets of the Cultural Revolution and those who had profited from the Cultural Revolution as supporters of Mao and the "Gang of Four". The basis of their compromise was their shared loyalty to Mao Zedong and therefore their inability to criticize Mao without harming the CCP's claim to monopolize the political system in the PRC. However, the fact that those among the party leadership who were criticized and attacked had originally supported the idea of the Cultural Revolution is another reason for the 1981 Resolution underlining overall complicity. What looked like a good solution to a complicated situation at the time would eventually turn out to be the beginning of a long-lasting dispute. As soon as the Party realized that the memory frame suggested by its 1981 Resolution was unacceptable for too many, it started to suppress public debate.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, all those who were waiting for explanations, consolation and acknowledgements continued to voice their views.

Comparing the situation in the PRC to other countries in the world that go through a similar process we realize that there are more similarities than differences. Although the PRC is the only one among those countries that still sticks to its socialist regime, it is not the only country in which the discussion oscillates between the memory frames of total complicity and overall victimization. In all countries involved,⁴⁶ the judiciary approach to settling accounts with the past only played a minor role and was limited to a very small group of people. In all

⁴⁴ Own translation; Wilfried Nippel, "Bürgerkrieg und Amnestie: Athen 411-403," in *Amnestie oder die Politik der Erinnerung in der Demokratie*, p. 118.

⁴⁵ This assessment of the situation can also be found in 郝建整理編輯, 《文革四十年祭》, 頁162-163。Hao Jian deplors the fact that because of the ambiguity inherent in the 1981 Resolution the tendency among the elite and among Chinese society to forget about the disastrous events of the past was strengthened which is why "according to my assessment, the underlying method of thinking characteristic of the Cultural Revolution still continues to exist among the normal people and the rulers in China. This is very dangerous for Chinese society" (頁162).

⁴⁶ Gary Smith and Avishai Margalit, eds. *Amnestie oder die Politik der Erinnerung in der Demokratie*.

countries, the idea of publicly debating the past is itself under debate and the demand that traumatic events of the past be publicly remembered highly contested. In none of the countries, be they in Africa, Latin America or Eastern Europe, the trauma process has come to a point where a new post-traumatic identity has already been accepted. In China, the trauma process is less open and less direct. There is no debate about archival proofs (as archives are still not open to the public). But as in all the other countries there is a more or less articulated demand to identify the victims and the perpetrators, to answer the question of responsibility and thus to come to terms with the past.

Coping with Ambiguities: The Struggle over the Issue of “Totally Negating the Cultural Revolution” (1984-1986)

The assessment of the Cultural Revolution had been controversial already before the Party had passed its 1981 Resolution. The keyword in this connection is whether or not the Cultural Revolution should be “totally negated”.⁴⁷ This term was already in use during times when the Cultural Revolution had not yet come to an end (at least according to today’s official periodization). In early 1968, after armed fighting had been explicitly condemned by Mao Zedong and the Party leadership, students were sent back to school to continue with the Cultural Revolution in their classrooms. As a reaction to this, discussions aroused on whether or not this turn around was part of a countercurrent to the Cultural Revolution similar to the “February Countercurrent” (eryue niliu 二月逆流) in 1967. Articles appeared in Red Guard magazines warning against “negating” the Red Guard movement on grounds related to the problem of factionalism. In this context the term “right deviationist wind to overturn verdicts” (youqing fan’an feng 右傾翻案風) was coined, a formulation that should stand at the center of the second round of public discussions on the assessment of the Cultural Revolution which took place in 1975 and 1976.⁴⁸ By that time, the Red Guard movement was no longer of major interest. Instead, the assessment of the Cultural Revolution as articulated by Liu Bing 劉冰 and Zhou Rongxin 周榮鑫 from Qinghua University 清華大學 was focused on the question of the educational system that had been introduced since the re-opening of the

⁴⁷ Lowell Dittmer, “Rethinking China’s Cultural Revolution amid Reform,” pp. 3-26.

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印紅標，〈紅衛兵運動述評〉，收入張化、蘇采青主編，《回首文革：中國十年文革分析與反思》（北京：中共黨史出版社，1999），下冊，頁721。

universities. This round of assessment was part and parcel of the overall attempt to shift focus from politics to economics pursued by the group of rehabilitated party leaders around Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping. It came to a standstill with the repression of the public protest movement on Tian'anmen Square 天安門廣場 in April 1976 before reclaiming dominance after the death of Mao Zedong. In late 1975 and early 1976 those who criticized the educational system were supposed to be “totally negating the Cultural Revolution” and “overturning verdicts”, and the argument against them was not only that the Cultural Revolution had to go on, it was also to be repeated as long as remnants of the “old society” had not been totally liquidated.

Since then, two more rounds of discussions took place, one in the context of the discussion on the “two whatevers” and “practice as the only criterion of truth”, and the other one between 1984 and 1986. In both cases, the idea of “totally negating” the Cultural Revolution claimed dominance. Lowell Dittmer argues that it was through this later round of discussion that people tried to go beyond the assessment as given in the 1981 Resolution.⁴⁹ The discussion was focused on the possibility for the Cultural Revolution to reappear and argued in support of economic and political reforms that had to go on in order to overcome remnants of feudalism and small scale agricultural economy (xiaonong jingji 小農經濟). Post-Mao China should be in itself a negation of the Cultural Revolution.⁵⁰ However, Anita Chan reports that during this period of debate “all cadres denounced the ‘ultra-leftist’ thinking and activities of the Cultural Revolution and—if they could be pinned with participation in such activities—publicly made a clean breast of their errors...Whatever the political intention behind this campaign, one fact is very clear: the factional antagonisms that surfaced in 1966 and 1969 are still entrenched in society twenty years later”.⁵¹ If her interpretation is correct, the debate on “totally negating the Cultural Revolution” and on the danger for a Cultural Revolution to re-emerge is in effect a debate over the inability to overcome factionalism. While the 1981 Resolution had avoided addressing the question of factionalism hoping to unite former friends and enemies, it had left people with the fear of factional struggles resurfacing. People were asked to suppress their feelings of hatred and revenge without offering a clear assessment of who was right and who was wrong during the Cultural Revolution. It was this dissonance

⁴⁹ Lowell Dittmer, “Rethinking China’s Cultural Revolution amid Reform,” p. 15.

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〈關於「文化大革命」的再認識座談會發言（摘登）〉，《青年論壇》，1986年7期，頁1-10。

⁵¹ Anita Chan, “Editor’s Introduction: A Brief Analysis of the Cultural Revolution by Liu Guokai,” pp. 11-12.

between pretending to have overcome factionalism in everyday life on the one side and longing for a clear assessment of factionalist struggles (which implies condemning one side and supporting the other) on the other side which provoked continued discussions on the Cultural Revolution. Because of its ambiguity, the 1981 Resolution, although addressing the issue of responsibility, did not give an answer to the “nature of the pain” evoked by the Cultural Revolution. By avoiding the problem of factionalism as the most important traumatic experience,⁵² it had made a repair of the social fabric Eyerman refers to impossible. However, the still ongoing discussion on the necessity to totally negate the Cultural Revolution shows that whenever the victims of the Cultural Revolution see the danger of leftism re-emerging they launch yet another discussion on the Cultural Revolution asking for its “total negation”. In 2006, they reportedly asked for a new Party Resolution arguing that even Deng Xiaoping had criticized the 1981 Resolution to have been too vague.⁵³ However, they were rebutted by articles stressing that there was no need for a new resolution as the existing one had already come to a totally negative assessment of the Cultural Revolution.⁵⁴ In 2007, Xie Tao 謝韜 argued that the Party had in effect not learned its lessons from the Cultural Revolution and would soon be confronted with a social movement of a similar kind if it did not quickly take to reforming itself and the political system.⁵⁵ This shows that more than 30 years after the end of the Cultural Revolution people having gone through this experience still interpret ongoing political struggles in terms coined during the Cultural Revolution.

The question remains why the dissatisfaction with the memory frame offered by the 1981 Resolution focuses on the question of “totally negating the Cultural Revolution”. Is the 1981 Resolution not outspoken enough in criticizing the Cultural Revolution as “chaos” and “turmoil”? Do these formulations not imply a “total negation” of the Cultural Revolution? If my analysis of the 1981 Resolution is correct, the problem with the Resolution lies in its inability to come to terms with the assessment of the role of intellectuals as the first target of attack of the Cultural Revolution and with the double role of the “Old Red Guards” who were most active in attacking these intellectuals but later on attacked by the “rebel” organizations. Both groups have played a major role in the ongoing modernization process in the PRC; no

⁵² 曉地主編，〈「文革」之謎〉（北京：朝華出版社，1993）。

⁵³ 羅冰，〈爭鳴：萬里上書籲重評毛澤東〉。

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聞岩山，〈重溫鄧小平等革命家論述：堅持團結一致向前看〉，2006年5月16日，<http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1026/4376050.html>（2006年6月17日查閱）。

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謝韜，〈只有民主社會主義才能救中國〉，<http://www.chinaelections.org/NewsInfo.asp?NewsID=100318>（2007年9月1日查閱）。

wonder that they are trying time and again to use their position in society to make the Party meet their demands. As long as the above mentioned two questions have found no clear reply, the negation of the Cultural Revolution is incomplete.

The discussion about “negating the Cultural Revolution” at first glance looks like an inner-elite political debate that cannot be understood as a trauma process. Instead, the discussion creates the impression that the debate about the Cultural Revolution is a continuation of the power struggles that took place during the Cultural Revolution. The event in the past creates “stakeholders” defending the position they took in the past and using this as an asset to claim a certain position in the present. However, the discussion shows that even under one party rule it is impossible to impose a unified view of traumatic events such as the Cultural Revolution on society. The trauma process develops in the form of contesting the “official” Party view as put down in the 1981 Resolution. Gao Mobo rightly gives his recent book the title of *The Battle for China’s Past* implying that the battle for the past is a battle for the present. In this discourse the question of truth does not play a major role. The question is how to use the past to criticize the present or vice versa: how to criticize the past to affirm one’s judgement about the present. However, as soon as the trauma process needs to include the younger generation of non-participants, new questions arise and have to be answered. They necessitate that the assessment of the traumatic event can produce a certain plausibility that prevents the younger generation from questioning the ability of the participant generation to come to terms with its own past. In this context, party historiography plays an important role as it fulfils the double function of transmitting official assessments of the past to the younger generation of high school and university students and to party members.⁵⁶

Stretching the Frame: Party Historiography and the Memory of the Cultural Revolution (1986-1996)

Party historiography started dealing with the Cultural Revolution as soon as the Party Resolution had been passed. Until 1996 some 600 articles and monographs were published according to official estimates, not counting all those publications on post-49 history that do not focus on the Cultural Revolution but have special chapters or volumes dealing with the 1966 to 1976 period.⁵⁷ While writing on the Cultural Revolution was difficult and not

⁵⁶ Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, “Party Historiography in the People’s Republic of China,” *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 17 (January 1987), pp. 77-94.

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numerous until the mid-1980s, the year 1986 saw a first upsurge of publications responding to the 10th and 20th anniversaries of the Cultural Revolution. In these publications, the question of what structural and cultural reasons were responsible for the Cultural Revolution formed the focus of attention with two explanations dominating the discussions: those looking for reasons in the social structure blamed remnants of feudalism for having caused the extreme personality cult, the blind adoration of the leader by the masses, and the violence against so-called enemies as well as the inability on the side of the political elite to resist Mao's plans. Publications that looked for reasons in the economic sphere blamed "small scale agricultural production" and China's lagging behind in terms of modernization and industrialization.⁵⁸ These publications are quite clearly within the frame defined by the 1981 Resolution, but also influenced by the CCP's agenda of the mid-1980s. For the Cultural Revolution never to happen again China had to be modernized both in economic and political terms. Only democracy—so the argument goes—could prevent the adoration of the supreme leader from re-occurring, and only prosperity as a result of a modernized economy could prevent people from searching for a better future in utopia. This discussion pushed the attempt to at least partly externalize responsibility for the Cultural Revolution one step further. Not the supreme leader or the "Gang of Four" and their false policies were responsible, but the "deep structure" of Chinese society. Thus it proposes a new method of overcoming the ambiguity inherent in the 1981 Resolution. There is no need for personal responsibility. The fact that everybody was entangled into the movement is due to the fact that the movement was a result of inadequate socio-economic structures. With this suggestion, the idea of "totally negating the Cultural Revolution" unites friends and enemies by treating a full fledged negative assessment of the Cultural Revolution as an: nobody has to struggle with the problem of personal responsibility anymore.

Yan Jiaqi's 嚴家其 and Gao Gao's 高臯 publication has to be seen as part of this discourse. Their project is of some interest especially as it is an early example of borderline publications situated between the official and the unofficial spheres.⁵⁹ The book is the outcome of a private initiative Yan Jiaqi had launched long before 1981 by gathering a private collection of Cultural Revolution related materials. His collection opened the possibility to work on the 1966 to 1976 period without gaining access to the Party Archive and without using oral

⁵⁸ 劉國新，〈「文化大革命」史研究：現狀與評述〉，《當代中國史研究》，1996年第6期，頁63-67。

〈關於「文化大革命」的再認識座談會發言(摘登)〉，《青年論壇》，1986年第7期，頁1-10。

⁵⁹ 嚴家其、高臯編著，《中國文革十年史》（香港：大公報社，1986）。

sources as the only basis of research.⁶⁰ As Yan Jiaqi did not belong to the field of party historiography, he did not have to pay tribute to the 1981 Resolution. However, given his prominent position at the time the book was published, it has to be seen as authoritative even though published outside the realm of party historiography. For him and Gao Gao the core problem is that the Cultural Revolution destroyed whatever remnants of a market economy still existed and thus drove the Chinese economy into ruins. At the same time, it suffocated what was left as democratic procedures in the Party as well as in society replacing it by Mao Zedong's populist mobilization strategy. Quite clearly, what is depicted as the main "mistake" of the Cultural Revolution is the exact opposite of the CCP agenda under Zhao Ziyang 趙紫陽 in the mid-1980s. The anniversary of the Cultural Revolution was used to launch the idea of "totally negating" the Cultural Revolution by interpreting it as a juxtaposition to the project of economic and political modernization.

In the late 1980s, although not as clearly as in the 1990s, party historiography was met by growing competition from the side of the numerous publications that came out in the form of memoirs and monographs on topics that were difficult for party historians to write on. Jin Chunming's book-length publications of 1995 and 1996 show how much the mood of writing on the Cultural Revolution had changed since the anniversary of 1986.⁶¹ Jin, of course, acknowledges the authority of the 1981 Resolution, but he admits that the Resolution did not give an answer to the question why so many people inside and outside of China were enthused by this movement. He also refers to the Cultural Revolution as a "big and deep wound, especially a wound in the soul of the whole nation, a wound which is far from having closed and the consequences of which can still be seen everywhere up until the present day".⁶² Even though he is absolutely explicit in his "total negation" of the Cultural Revolution he seems to show some understanding both for the traumatic character of the event as well as for certain nostalgic tendencies of going back to its original intentions. He even points to the problem that the outcome of the Cultural Revolution was so much contrary to what people had expected at the beginning by saying:

⁶⁰ 嚴家其、高臯編著，《中國文革十年史》，頁2。

⁶¹

金春明，《「文化大革命」史稿》；席宣、金春明，《「文化大革命」簡史》（北京：中共黨史出版社，1996）。

⁶² 金春明，《「文化大革命」史稿》，頁1。

The practical outcome was the exact opposite of what was originally declared. It generated extremely cruel and disastrous consequences...Why was the objective outcome of the Cultural Revolution to the opposite of what people had hoped for?⁶³

Jin Chunming's work appeared in two different versions between 1995 and 1996. The 1996 version is a more popular version which is aimed at influencing public opinion by arguing against certain tendencies among the interested public. First of all, Jin demands that the Cultural Revolution be totally negated. Having said this, he stresses that negating the Cultural Revolution does not imply that nothing positive had happened between 1966 and 1976. This is how he tries to overcome the idea that the Cultural Revolution was a break or discontinuity in the history of the PRC and stresses instead that it was only one aspect of the historical development and therefore not identical with the history of the 1966 to 1976 period as such.⁶⁴ Arguing against people he does not name but who obviously uphold a positive assessment of the Cultural Revolution he explains that none of the important documents from the Cultural Revolution mentions anti-bureaucratism, and among all the leading cadres of the CCP who were criticized during the Cultural Revolution none was reproached for bureaucratism. To interpret the word "capitalist roader" in the sense of "bureaucrat" is therefore not justified.⁶⁵ Accordingly, there is no justification for a positive assessment of the Cultural Revolution as a struggle against bureaucratization.

As an answer to the question why people were intrigued by the idea of the Cultural Revolution Jin makes four suggestions. First, he reiterates the explanation of the 1981 Resolution saying that people's confidence in Mao made them believe in what he said and follow his suggestions. Secondly, he refers to the plausibility of Mao's theoretical assumptions. Their consistency had a mobilizing effect which was especially powerful as people had been indoctrinated by this ideology for several years. Thirdly, the climate created by the combination of the two already mentioned factors pushed everybody into articulating his or her beliefs (biaotai 表態) if only to avoid being selected as a target of attack. This again was used, said Jin Chunming, by the "Gang of Four" who forced everybody to join.⁶⁶

This shows that 20 years after the end of the Cultural Revolution the idea of personal responsibility and agency in history was again a topic of concern. In contrast to the 1981 Resolution Jin focuses on mass participation. However, in order for his interpretation to unite as many friends and enemies as possible, Jin Chunming acting as a mouth piece for the party

⁶³ 金春明，《「文化大革命」史稿》，頁5。

⁶⁴ 席宣、金春明，《「文化大革命」簡史》，頁360。

⁶⁵ 席宣、金春明，《「文化大革命」簡史》，頁361-365。

⁶⁶ 席宣、金春明，《「文化大革命」簡史》，頁367-368。

sees the need to treat the idea of “total negation” for a clear acknowledgement of the “good intentions” the masses had when participating in the Cultural Revolution. The outcome of the Cultural Revolution was, unfortunately, bad and the Cultural Revolution should in this sense be “totally negated”, even if the masses had joined it with best intentions. With his focus on mass participation, Jin Chunming changes the mode of externalizing responsibility back to internalizing responsibility.⁶⁷ In this sense he goes back to the 1981 frame of overall complicity. However, he makes this approach more acceptable by acknowledging the supposedly “good intentions” everybody had in joining the Cultural Revolution.

Although Jin Chunming uses all his authority as a well-known party historian to reply to questions without clarifying where they come from, there are certain topics that he does not touch upon. He shies away from an overall assessment of the Red Guard movement as well as of the campaign to send young intellectuals to the countryside. He also refrains from writing about the fate of intellectuals and other victims of the Cultural Revolution, and from overcoming the vagueness of the 1981 Resolution with regard to the problem of factionalism.

Contesting the Past between Official and Unofficial Historiography: Assessing the Red Guard Movement (1996-2006)

The question that arises from Jin Chunming’s account of the Cultural Revolution is where the pressure comes from that he feels when replying to questions that—according to his understanding—the Resolution had not answered. By looking into publications from the realm of unofficial historiography we will easily detect the source of his worries. The focus of discussion in this field is the problem of how to relate the power struggle inside the CCP leadership to the Cultural Revolution as a mass movement. It is through this discussion that we see an alternative memory frame emerging that is defined by the Red Guard generation of participants. Fang Su 方蘇 and Zheng Yi 鄭義 are two important authors in this context.⁶⁸

They both stress that the Cultural Revolution brought many atrocities with it, but demand at the same time that the kind of progress it achieved should not be overlooked. For Fang Su,

⁶⁷ Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, pp. 170-174.

⁶⁸ See the two articles published in
《華夏文摘增刊》：方蘇，〈文革：一場轟轟烈烈的大革命〉，期84，1996年4月21日，<http://www.cnd.org/cr/ZK96/zk84.hz8.html#1>
；鄭義，〈兩個文化大革命雜議：僅以此文紀念文化大革命中所有受難者〉，期83，1996年4月16日，<http://www.cnd.org/cr/ZK96/zk83.hz8.html#1>
(2008年8月11日查閱)。

the main aim of the Cultural Revolution was to overthrow the bureaucratic class which had come to power during the 1950s and 1960s, “the blackest period” in the history of the PRC. Mao acted as the saviour of the masses and was therefore supported by them and their enthusiasm for the Cultural Revolution while the faction of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping tried to suppress mass participation. For him, the “Old Red Guard” faction is to be assessed negatively. However, in later phases of the movement all factions of the Red Guard movement were infiltrated and instrumentalized for the purpose of inner elite struggle. This is why the movement lost its dynamism. This theory implies that the Cultural Revolution was a reaction to growing dissatisfaction among the “masses” which Mao Zedong took advantage of in order to get rid of those inside the Party he held responsible for bureaucratism. But even though the Cultural Revolution did not achieve the aims it was directed at, it had a positive impact on the development of Chinese society. Inner party struggle is no longer as obscure as it used to be, the ideas of human rights and rule of law are spreading, and class struggle is no longer a legitimate tool. The Red Guard movement generated the first generation of independent intellectuals which forms the social basis for a bright future.⁶⁹

Zheng Yi supports the “Two Revolution Theory” which goes back to Wang Xizhe’s 王希哲 article “Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution” published in 1981.⁷⁰ It implies that two revolutions were taking place simultaneously. On the one hand, the Cultural Revolution was an anti-communist rebellion of the masses. On the other hand it was a power struggle among the members of the leading elite. At the beginning, both revolutions were complementing each other, but when the mass movement reached its peak, Mao lost control and realized that the mass movement was capable of overthrowing the whole system. With the help of the army he “mercilessly killed the movement”. Zheng Yi is part of the generation that felt relief and liberation when participating in the Cultural Revolution. Although comparing the Old Red Guards to the Hitler Youth, he acknowledges the legitimacy of the mass movement as a reaction to the dictatorship people had to suffer under during the years preceding the Cultural Revolution. The same people who were responsible for this dictatorship were also responsible for suppressing the mass movement evolving in 1966. The violence that broke out as part of the Cultural Revolution is explained by Zheng Yi as a reaction to the violence exerted by dictatorship. Mao is held responsible for the masses not reaching the aim they had hoped for. With him interfering in the struggle between different factions there was no chance for the mass movement to generate any positive results. Zheng Yi regards the Cultural

⁶⁹ 方蘇，〈文革：一場轟轟烈烈的大革命〉，《華夏文摘增刊》，期292。

⁷⁰ 郝建整理編輯，〈文革四十年祭〉，頁91。

Revolution as a democratic mass movement albeit not mature enough to develop the idea of a modern democratic system. Its main problem is that it did not have the perspective of replacing one system by the other but only of replacing one leadership clique by another.⁷¹

Zheng Yi's explanation has aroused more discussions than Fang Su's. Xi Dong 喜東, for example, interprets Zheng Yi as a typical representative of the "rebel faction". He reproaches Zheng of trying to see the Cultural Revolution in the light of anti-communist rebellions of the late eighties and early nineties. And he reminds him of the fact that all attempts to reform communism from a "rightist" point of view led to its defeat. Only Mao attempted to reform socialism from a "leftist" point of view by launching the Cultural Revolution in order for socialism in China not to take the same form as in the Soviet Union.⁷²

Zheng Yi and Fang Su contribute to the discussion of the Cultural Revolution by using the internet. They argue from outside the PRC, but their arguments seem to stand for carrier groups with "rebel faction" background favouring a more positive assessment of the Cultural Revolution. This is what compels Party historians like Jin Chunming and others to fill the gap left by the 1981 Resolution by discussing the Cultural Revolution as a mass movement.

Yin Hongbiao 印紅標 is one among the few who dares to present his assessment of the Red Guard movement.⁷³ Yin traces the different factions back to the social backgrounds of the students, underlining that the leadership of the Cultural Revolution used the Red Guards to create "great chaos under heaven" while the work teams (gongzuozu 工作組) which were sent to schools and universities were aimed at using the Red Guards to channel student protest into the existing Youth League (qingniantuan 青年團). The "theory of descent" (xuetonglun 血通論) is according to Yin a reflection of arrogance and the striving for privilege on the side of the "Old Red Guards". It is the main reason for the later emergence of the "rebel faction". He reports the number of deaths that occurred during August and September of 1966 in Beijing as well as the number of houses that were ransacked,⁷⁴ but refrains from direct criticism. He only mentions "enlightened leaders" among the Red Guards who were

⁷¹ 鄭義，〈僅以此文紀念文化大革命中所有受難者〉，《華夏文摘增刊》，期83。

⁷² See Xidong's two articles published in 《華夏文摘增刊》：喜東，〈十年文革，還是兩年文革？〉，期84，1996年4月21日，<http://www.cnd.org/cr/ZK96/zk84.hz8.html#1>；〈兩個文革，還是一個文革？〉，期83，1996年4月16日，<http://www.cnd.org/cr/ZK96/zk84.hz8.html#2> (2008年8月11日查閱)。

⁷³ 印紅標，〈「文化大革命」中的社會矛盾〉，收入《回首文革》，上冊，頁347-359；〈紅衛兵運動述評〉，收入《回首文革》，下冊，頁694-730。

⁷⁴ 印紅標，〈紅衛兵運動述評〉，收入《回首文革》，下冊，頁705。

concerned about the chaos. As the chronology of the narrative is confusing at this point, it is not clear to the reader whether or not both factions participated in these excesses or whether according to Yin only the “Old Red Guard” should be held responsible.

When the “rebel faction” became the mainstream (zhuliu 主流) of the movement and was instrumentalized by the Cultural Revolution Small Group in the struggle against the leading cadres of the Party, the “Old Red Guards” were cruelly pushed aside. However, the movement reached a peak by 1967 when other social groups joined in. Leading members of Red Guard organizations took over administrative duties and participated in media activities while making use of the liberty to organize associations independent of the Party, publish uncensored newspapers and demonstrate in the streets. “A level of ‘great democracy’ that had so far never been reached in the history of socialist states aroused the strong interest of students to participate in politics”.⁷⁵ At the same time, the leaders of Red Guard organizations started to develop their personal interests, a tendency which is regarded as one major reason for the emerging factionalism. The fact that the leadership of the Cultural Revolution pursued the policy of backing the leftists and a wrong policy on the side of the Army instigated armed fighting between the different organizations: “All sorts of reasons made the suicidal tragedy of the Red Guards spread all over the country”.⁷⁶ The last phase of the Red Guard movement is characterized by theoretical discussions, an outstanding example of which according to Yin is Yang Xiguang 楊曦光 and his article “Whither China”.⁷⁷

The overall assessment of the Red Guard movement by Yin Hongbiao stresses social status as the background of factionalism and student participation, instrumentalization by different political agendas held among the Cultural Revolution leadership as well as entanglement into conflicts between the Party and the Army. “Mao Zedong succeeded in creating, mobilizing and finally dropping the Red Guards, and as the Red Guards knew little about Mao’s plans, they were not the masters of their own fate”.⁷⁸

Comparing Yin Hongbiao to Fang Su and Zheng Yi, all three versions clearly have a strong Mao focus, and all three versions regard Mao as the master of the movement. They all draw a mostly positive picture of the masses with Fang Su and Yin Hongbiao showing a certain bias towards favouring the “rebel faction” over the “Old Red Guard” faction. All three authors treat bureaucratism and the privileges enjoyed by the members of the elite as the target of the

⁷⁵ 印紅標，〈紅衛兵運動述評〉，收入《回首文革》，下冊，頁717。

⁷⁶ 印紅標，〈紅衛兵運動述評〉，收入《回首文革》，下冊，頁718。

⁷⁷ 印紅標，〈紅衛兵運動述評〉，收入《回首文革》，下冊，頁720。

⁷⁸ 印紅標，〈紅衛兵運動述評〉，收入《回首文革》，下冊，頁725。

movement and regard the movement as instigated by the problems accumulated during the years preceding the Cultural Revolution.

For Fang Su, Zheng Yi and Yin Hongbiao the “masses” play an active role in the Cultural Revolution. The obvious difference between the three authors is that Fang Su and Zheng Yi attribute political aims to the masses while Yin Hongbiao stresses divergent personal interests as the driving force behind mass participation. All three authors agree that Mao instrumentalized the “masses” although Yin does not view Mao as a manipulator deceiving the enthusiastic participants of “his” revolution. In tune with his idea of personal interests motivating young people to join the Cultural Revolution Yin detects these personal interests also as the reason for factional fighting. For Fang Su and Zheng Yi the “masses” have a political agenda of their own and factional fighting is a consequence of manipulation and deception. All three authors agree that the “masses” finally were victimized by Mao no matter on which side of the factional struggle they stood.

Yin not only goes beyond the 1981 Resolution, he also gives a much more positive and detailed assessment of the Red Guards than Jin Chunming. His reference to the “great democracy” developed during the Cultural Revolution contradicts what Jin Chunming writes,⁷⁹ and his assessment of the problems that accumulated during the years preceding the Cultural Revolution goes beyond the 1981 Resolution. Yin Hongbiao’s article does not side with those victims of the Red Guard movement who demand an explicit condemnation of the movement, but instead externalizes responsibility by stressing Mao as the creator and manipulator of the movement and the entanglement in internal conflicts among the leadership of the Party and the Cultural Revolution. Two “heroes” of the movement, Yu Luohe 遇羅克⁸⁰ and Yang Xiguang, are mentioned, both from the “rebel faction” while at the same time trying to divert attention from the responsibility of the “Old Red Guards” for the cruelties of the very early phase of the movement. He not only is obviously informed by research about the Cultural Revolution from outside the PRC,⁸¹ he also reacts to the ongoing discussion in the internet.

A similar tendency can be found in an article from the field of party historiography which assesses the movement to send young intellectuals to the countryside. This article is another

⁷⁹ 席宣、金春明，《「文化大革命」簡史》，頁369-370。

⁸⁰ 印紅標，〈紅衛兵運動述評〉，收入《回首文革》，下冊，頁710。

⁸¹ See for an example: Anita Chan, Stanley Rosen, and Jonathan Unger, “Students and Class Warfare: The Social Roots of the Red Guard Conflict in Canton,” *China Quarterly*, No. 83 (September 1980), pp. 397-446. And for an overview over the state of the art in CR research, see Kam-ye Law, ed., *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Reconsidered: Beyond Purge and Holocaust* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

sign of reaching out to unofficial historiography as it is a reprint within the realm of party historiography from a publication which had appeared outside the system of party historiography in 1996.⁸² The article written by Gu Hongzhang 顧洪章 and his co-author explains the economic reasons for sending the young generation to the countryside. By explaining the situation in the cities as the reason for the movement it unmasks the logic of the argument that they needed to go through another round of education by living and working among the peasants. At the same time, it applauds to the willingness on the side of the young students to go through the hardships related to this unexpected turn in their lives. While stressing that the generation of those who were sent down to the countryside made enormous contributions to the development of the rural areas in China, the authors underline the importance of their contributions to the modernization of China. They also mention that some of them are extremely successful while others live under difficult conditions having missed the chance to go to university and catch up with post-Mao reform.

Looking at unofficial historiography, the issue of suffering and marginalization of the “sent down youth” (shangshan xiexiang zhishi qingnian 上山下鄉知識青年) has lately grown in importance. Liu Xiaomeng 劉小萌 focuses strongly on this issue in his account based on oral history by acting as mediator for those among the intellectual youths who have been hit badly by growing unemployment in the cities.⁸³ The kind of pressure official historians when dealing with this topic is best reflected by a fairly recent article showing how the Party was aware of the hardships and finally tried to adjust to the situation.⁸⁴ The story goes that the parents of a sent-down youth wrote a letter to Mao Zedong complaining about the difficulties and hardships her son had encountered in the countryside. Mao responded to this letter and asked Zhou Enlai to take care of the situation. This led to a nationwide investigation during which many of the allegations were proven to be right. While taking pains to show that even during the Cultural Revolution it was possible to make adjustments and corrections, the author reports about cases of sexual harassment that were uncovered and punished at the time as well as cases of “going through the back door” in the context of workplace assignments that were criticized and corrected. He also describes incidents that occurred during the course

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顧洪章、胡夢洲，〈知識青年上山下鄉的原因及評價〉，收入《回首文革》，下冊，頁883-898。

83 劉小萌，《中國知青口述史》（北京：中國社會科學出版社，2004）。

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蔡天新，〈李慶霖上書毛澤東與知青政策調整〉，《中共黨史研究》，2003年第4期，頁30-35。

of the investigation with sent-down youths terrorized by local officials when asking for nothing more than what the Party leadership had agreed upon.

The alternative memory frames that are emerging from the debates on the Cultural Revolution are shaped by an obvious agenda. Participants voice perspectives which are influenced by the agenda they had during the Cultural Revolution. Their participation in the discussion is characterized by their striving for acknowledgement in political, economic and social terms. As the memory of participation is for many so painful, trying to legitimize participation as meaningful helps them in living with the pain. Both Fang Su and Zheng Yi stress that the mass movement has to be regarded as a positive aspect of the Cultural Revolution and they underline that in the early stage the movement was a creation of its participants and not of the Party or Mao Zedong. However, when it comes to the defeat of the movement, the man responsible is Mao.

The alternative memory frame sketched by Zheng Yi and Fang Su overcomes the idea of total complicity and the idea of overall victimization by relating good intentions to bad outcomes. Thus they re-write the story of ambiguity which implies the simultaneity of being victim and perpetrator into a chronology of participation based on good intentions and victimization as a consequence of deceit.⁸⁵ By stressing the importance of the mass movement as a factor that does not fit into the power struggle paradigm they come to a positive assessment of the role the “masses” played and their ability to resist against the dictatorship which the CCP had established after coming to power. Based on this assessment they design a memory frame with the masses legitimately resisting against communist dictatorship. While Mao first took their side he finally led the movement to defeat by changing sides as soon as the movement had become strong enough to threaten the political system. The power struggle paradigm which Zheng Yi and Fang Su see dominating the official interpretation of the Cultural Revolution cannot acknowledge the legitimacy of a mass movement fighting against Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping as leading representatives of a new class of beneficiaries, be it called “bureaucracy” or “new bourgeoisie” or “capitalist roaders”. As resistance from inside the Party against the Cultural Revolution was extremely weak party historiography has so far shied away from including resistance into the narrative. Only Hu Sheng 胡繩 who stresses the fact that the only positive aspect of the Cultural Revolution was the eventually victorious

⁸⁵ see also: Arif Dirlik, “The Politic of the Cultural Revolution in Historical Perspective,” in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Reconsidered*, pp.158-183.

fight against it includes this aspect in his narrative. To my knowledge this argument has so far been marginal to the discourse.⁸⁶

By the end of the 1990s the discourse on the Cultural Revolution inside and outside of China was more and more dominated by different ways of coming to a positive assessment. Among the former participants of the Cultural Revolution, member of the so-called “rebel faction” related the memory of the Cultural Revolution to a critique of Deng Xiaoping and those leading members of the CCP who had gone through a similar experience of first supporting Mao’s ideas, then being attacked by Mao and finally bringing the Cultural Revolution to an end. However, the positive assessment propelled by the “rebels” is limited to redefining the role of the so-called “masses”. It does not include any explicit discussion of the violence that occurred in China on all levels of the polity.

What Does “Totally Negating the Cultural Revolution” Mean Today?

On the occasion of the 40th anniversary, the CCP Propaganda Department declared the Cultural Revolution a taboo topic for the year 2006. However, even though the Chinese internet is known for its harsh controls chat rooms and weblogs discussing the assessment of the Cultural Revolution mushroomed. Simultaneously, the “old generation of revolutionaries” spoke up. According to a report in the Hong Kong based magazine Zhengming 爭鳴, Wan Li 萬里 sent a letter to the Party leadership asking for a total negation of the Cultural Revolution and a more critical assessment of Mao Zedong.⁸⁷ Eventually, the Party which had initially planned to keep silent was forced to enter the debate. Articles appeared in the press underlining the validity of the 1981 Resolution.⁸⁸ Leading intellectuals were officially invited by the Party to voice their opinions with the result that the CCP was confronted with the unanimous demand that victims be finally acknowledged by establishing a Cultural Revolution Museum, a demand that Ba Jin 巴金 had already articulated back in the 1980s.⁸⁹ Again the question of compensation for families whose members were maltreated, injured or killed during the Cultural Revolution was raised.

⁸⁶ 胡繩，〈歷史經驗是寶貴的財富——談社會主義時期黨史研究〉，收入《回首文革》，上冊，頁1-3。

⁸⁷ 〈爭鳴：萬里上書籲重評毛澤東〉。

⁸⁸ See for an example: 聞岩山，〈重溫鄧小平等革命家論述：堅持團結一致向前看〉。

⁸⁹ 巴金，〈「文革」博物館〉，《華夏文摘增刊》，期138，1997年11月24日，also in: <http://lz.book.sohu.com/chapter-7674-6-28.html> html

Outside China, a group of mostly Chinese academics gathered in New York for a re-assessment of the Cultural Revolution.⁹⁰ This group was united in accepting the idea that the Cultural Revolution was of great harm to the people of China: “The Cultural Revolution was a collective crime of the Communist Party of China”.⁹¹ By saying this, Song Yongyi underlines the necessity to overcome a Mao-centred approach toward criticizing the Cultural Revolution. Instead, he wants to stress the fact that the entire leadership of the then CCP supported the idea of the Cultural Revolution enthusiastically.

This symposium was supported by foundations from outside China and “boycotted” by the Chinese government which would not let scholars from mainland China participate in the conference. However, in March 2006, a group of intellectuals from the PRC and some researchers from outside China met near Beijing to discuss the issue of remembering the Cultural Revolution. The focus of their debate was the question of how to assess the Cultural Revolution. This conference, too, was united in its negative assessment of the Cultural Revolution. However, explicitly or implicitly most of the time was spent to reject the tendency to rehabilitate the idea of the Cultural Revolution. A whole sub-section of the conference was dedicated to discussing the “theory of the two revolutions”,⁹² another one on the question of “how to evaluate the Cultural Revolution”. In sub-section four, paper givers as well as discussants were mostly concerned with the Cultural Revolution nostalgia which can be observed everywhere. Comparing the discussion during the year 2006 with those in 1996 and 1986, Ding Dong 丁東 comes to the astonishing conclusion that only the survivors of the Cultural Revolution are still interested in negating it. The younger generation, if at all interested in the subject, tends in its discussions in the internet towards a positive assessment.⁹³ What used to be the “Mao fever” in former years is now gradually turning into a positive assessment of the Cultural Revolution reflecting the accumulation of social frictions during the course of the ongoing modernization process. This implies that on the occasion of its 40th anniversary, the “negation of the Cultural Revolution” is no longer an issue of inner-elite debate only. Negating the Cultural Revolution now means hindering a counter-narrative on the Cultural Revolution from emerging as a subversive discourse on what is going on in China today.

(2008年8月28日查閱)；李輝，〈「文革博物館」：巴金晚年的痛與夢〉，<http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/zhuanti/443579.htm>

(2007年9月1日查閱)；〈爭鳴：萬里上書籲重評毛澤東〉。

⁹⁰ The symposium took place from May 12 to May 14, 2006. 60 researchers delivered their papers documented in 宋永毅主編，《文化大革命》，上/下冊。

⁹¹ 宋永毅主編，《文化大革命》，上冊，〈前言〉，頁ix。

⁹² 郝建整理編輯，《文革四十年祭》，頁91-132。

⁹³ 郝建整理編輯，《文革四十年祭》，頁62-63。

Hao Jian 郝建 differentiates between “the normal people” and the intellectuals. According to his assessment of the situation there are strong nostalgic tendencies among the “normal people” in China. They derive from dissatisfaction with the current political and economic situation. The way this dissatisfaction is being articulated resembles very much those methods that were characteristic of the Cultural Revolution. Motivated by a demand for absolute equality, lower class people still believe in the necessity to use violence as a means to achieve their aims. They do not obey the constitution and the laws, and they also do not show any reserve in violating other people’s human rights.⁹⁴ Besides these motivations stemming from social inequality, Hao Jian also observes a “nationalist” tendency identifying the Cultural Revolution as a phase in Chinese history when foreigners were afraid of and unable to impose any ideas on China. During the Cultural Revolution, this kind of nationalism united the leadership with the normal population and made what looked like spontaneous forms of resistance into Party-orchestrated anti-foreignism. Today, the “normal population” feels left alone with its demand for national pride and particularity. Intellectuals, especially of the generation too young to have experienced the Cultural Revolution, relate to international debates on the Cultural Revolution and underline their positive assessment by referring to internationally acclaimed new leftist theorists such as Frederic Jameson and his arguments about the global significance of Maoism.⁹⁵ In both cases, the fact that the Cultural Revolution can be understood as something that underlines the particularity of China as well as its ability to attract international attention and acclaim plays a major role.⁹⁶

In his recent book, Gao Mobo spells the counter-narrative on the Cultural Revolution out in great detail. Based on his analysis of internet communications he condemns the fact that the mainstream among Chinese intellectuals both inside and outside of China participates in the “chaos” discourse asking for a “total negation” of the Cultural Revolution. Gao says:

⁹⁴ 郝建整理編輯，《文革四十年祭》，頁170。

⁹⁵ Although the conference stressed the need “to negate the Cultural revolution”, some of the participants relativized this overall consensus. Chen Donglin 陳東林 argues, for example, that the Cultural Revolution was not the overall “chaos” most people believe it was. The particularity of this “revolution” is due to the fact that it was based on Mao’s idea of a new bourgeoisie emerging under socialism. Because it was directed against this group of people it had to look for new ways of mobilizing the masses and therefore depart from the conventional way of having the masses guided by “work groups”. Chen also stresses the possibility to form mass organizations, publish newspapers and run radio stations as a form of democratization impossible in any other socialist state at the time. Without these experiences, the CCP would not have decided on its policies of “reform and opening”, and without the generation which had learned to doubt everything during the Cultural Revolution, China would not have moved forward so rapidly.

⁹⁶ 郝建整理編輯，《文革四十年祭》，頁34-40。
郝建整理編輯，《文革四十年祭》，頁72-75。

Denunciation and condemnation of the Cultural Revolution by those who suffered in one way or another is understandable and can be an individual's way to cope (sic) or heal the emotional trauma. However, to participate in the official project of reducing everything to the label of 'ten years of calamities' is another matter.⁹⁷

Gao defends the idea of the Cultural Revolution against the reality of the Cultural Revolution. Very much in tune with Arif Dirlik's approach,⁹⁸ he pleads for going back to the original intentions of the Cultural Revolution as the basis of its assessment rather than looking at what actually happened in terms of violence and brutality. For him negating the Cultural Revolution means backing the current regime in the PRC and bestowing it with a special kind of legitimation which is based on its claim to have brought the Cultural Revolution to an end. As part of this legitimation strategy, the CCP leadership argues that only by having brought the Cultural Revolution to an end was it possible to lead the Chinese people onto a political path of reform and opening. In opposing this idea, Gao stresses that "the ideas of Mao and the staging of the Cultural Revolution actually trained and prepared many people, who were young and idealistic at that time, to think and reflect critically about political and social issues. Some of this 'Cultural Revolution-generated thinking generation' have become dissidents and anti-communists. But there are some who do not oppose communism for the sake of opposing and who do not embrace capitalism as an ideological crusade. These are the people who have begun to raise their voices by questioning every accepted aspect of the manufactured truth [about the Cultural Revolution]".⁹⁹

Gao relates his defence of the Cultural Revolution to his criticism of the ongoing reform process. He stresses that "the truth and belief values of using capitalist means to achieve wealth and prosperity have been widely accepted in China now. But the truth and belief values of socialism have not been completely abandoned".¹⁰⁰ The demand for social equality and fairness is at the very heart of what Gao calls socialism and opposed to what he calls capitalism. The essence of the Cultural Revolution is—according to Gao Mobo's analysis of the ongoing discussion in China—preventing capitalism from taking over China and establishing a regime of inequality and unfairness. The more people lose their belief in development being of advantage for everyone and instead regard themselves as the losers of the modernization process, the more they tend towards a counter-narrative on the Cultural Revolution as an alternative orientation. Wang Xizhe argues in a similar direction. For him

⁹⁷ Mobo C. F. Gao, *The Battle for China's Past*, p. 16.

⁹⁸ Arif Dirlik, "The Politics of the Cultural Revolution in Historical Perspective," pp. 158-183.

⁹⁹ Mobo C. F. Gao, *The Battle for China's Past*, p. 156-157.

¹⁰⁰ Mobo C. F. Gao, *The Battle for China's Past*, p. 194.

the idea of totally negating the Cultural Revolution was an invention of those who took over leadership after Mao's death hoping to reinstall a regime similar to that before 1966. He therefore reiterates the idea that the Cultural Revolution was a form of popular resistance against a dictatorial regime.¹⁰¹ This is how the insistence of former "rebel" participants on criticizing a Mao centred view of the Cultural Revolution, and regarding it instead as a movement of social unrest relates to an inner-Chinese nostalgia that according to Gao Mobo unites more and more people critical of the current situation in the PRC beyond generational divides.

Conclusion

As we see from the above account, the debate on the assessment of the Cultural Revolution has been going on at least since the death of Mao Zedong and the fall of the "Gang of Four". Much in contrast to what most observers outside China believe, the assessment of the Cultural Revolution has been a battleground of fierce struggle with the CCP leadership and participants of the Cultural Revolution taking the most active part in framing the memory of the Cultural Revolution. While the CCP defines the memory frame according to its internal needs of political realignment as well as in light of its legitimation, participants of the Cultural Revolution shape their memories according to their experiences during the Cultural Revolution as well as their experiences in the present. The "old cadres" seek/acknowledgement for their sufferings in the past, but deplore the lack of interest for their fate in the present. The Red Guard generation struggles for its experiences to be included into the dominant memory frame. However, they are still split in pretty much the same factions that emerged during the Cultural Revolution. The generation of intellectuals targeted by the Cultural Revolution keeps mostly silent, making their claims heard through their offspring and disciples, who not only prove their moral qualities by keeping the memory of the suffering alive but also struggle to reestablish the status of the respective families in society. Hardships in the past function as a reservoir that different survivor collectives can draw upon in the present. This implies that those who are dissatisfied with the present are most inclined to participate in the discussion about the past. If the older generation of intellectuals refrains

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王希哲，〈文化大革命十批判書(紀念文革40週年)〉，2006，<http://www.peacehall.com/news/gb/pubvp/2006/06/200606070502.shtml> (2008年8月9日查閱)。

from directly interfering with the discussion on the Cultural Revolution, this might not only be a sign of their moral norms forbidding them to make their personal hardships a topic of public debate. It might also show that they feel well accommodated and have nothing to complain about. The fact that “old cadres” now voice their grievances in the form of memoirs about their Cultural Revolution experience might be part of the Party’s strategy to overcome the still existing remnants of factionalism and revenge. It might also be a reaction to the “old generation of revolutionaries” being more and more distanced from the centre of power while the generation of perpetrators moves from the margins to the centre. However, it might also be motivated by a fear of a reoccurrence of the Cultural Revolution as a consequence of accumulating dissatisfaction with the ongoing modernization process.¹⁰² The problem of generational change within the political elite is reflected by the 1981 Resolution and its leaving the Red Guard problematic unmentioned. However, recent publications from the realm of party historiography assessing the Red Guard and the “Sent Down Youth” movement show how even the most official of historiography in China is no longer immune against contestations and has to yield to a stretching of frames on the side of unofficial historiography.

Although there are striking differences between what people remember about the Cultural Revolution, it seems quite clear that the experience of the Cultural Revolution is regarded by the participating generation as a major event in 20th century Chinese history.¹⁰³ No matter whether one tends more toward negating or supporting the idea of the Cultural Revolution, the fact that it developed into a civil war and that its results were very much opposed to its original intentions has had a disturbing effect on the ability of members of Chinese society to approach each other with respect and in solidarity. It clearly has had a devastating effect on the social fabric as well as on the identity of the Chinese people. Rather than insisting on the idea that open debate on the Cultural Revolution is impossible in China, we should come to realize that despite ongoing discussions in more or less open forms Chinese society so far has not had the chance to go through a process of reconciliation. Instead, conflicts which go back to the Cultural Revolution experience are being suppressed. That is why the debate on the Cultural Revolution is at the same time everywhere and nowhere. People shy away from settling their personal accounts and therefore keep silent on this issue; at the same time, a public discussion goes on but still has not reached the point where it can help to overcome factionalism and propose an assessment of the Cultural Revolution that can be shared by a vast majority. The Party is too weak to impose amnesia and not strong enough to impose its

¹⁰² 謝韜，〈只有民主社會主義才能救中國〉。

¹⁰³ 羅冰，〈官方民意調查嚇壞中南海□〉，《爭鳴》，2000年第2期，頁8-9。

memory frame on the people. The participants can drive the discussion on the Cultural Revolution onwards, but their memory is so fragmentized that so far they can only contest the officially held view without replacing it by some other frame. The trauma process has not yet come to end.

In this situation, those who feel victimized by the Cultural Revolution observe with horror that a nostalgic reorientation is taking place developing a counter-narrative to the idea of “totally negating” the Cultural Revolution. The inability of the Party and of the Cultural Revolution survivors to overcome ambiguity and fragmentation in assessing the Cultural Revolution leaves a window of opportunity open for those who use the example of the Cultural Revolution to prove that “revolt is justified” (造反有理).

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