

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AKA “TEN YEARS OF CATASTROPHE”:
THE ROLE THAT HISTORICAL REPRESENTATION HAS PLAYED
IN CHINA SINCE 1966

By

Alice Thacker

U195744

Liberal Arts and Sciences
Prof. dr Arnoud-Jan Bijsterveld and Prof. dr Ruud Welten
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ABSTRACT

Relatively few studies have been conducted into the Cultural Revolution in comparison to other human atrocities. Even fewer studies have been conducted into the role that representation of the revolution has played in China. By examining the Chinese state's and the Chinese people's interpretation and representation of the Cultural Revolution, I explain the roles that historical representation has played in China since 1966. I analyse academic literature regarding the state's and the people's interpretations and representations of the Cultural Revolution whilst the movement was ongoing, when it ended, in the 1980s and in contemporary China. This thesis argues that since 1966 historical representation has been used by the Chinese state and the Chinese people to play three roles. The state has used historical representation to legitimise its rule which has resulted in an abuse of history and its people. The people have used historical representation to prevent personal persecution and as a channel through which they can convey their experiences and lessons, process their trauma or construct their identities.

INTRODUCTION

In comparison to other social experiments and human barbarisms of similar scales, the Cultural Revolution is less understood and studied. For example, the atrocity of the Holocaust committed by Nazi Germany has been well documented and studied to prevent such an event from reoccurring.¹ It seems that George Santayana's idea that "Those who cannot remember their past are condemned to relive it," is fervently applied to other extreme human cruelties, but the Cultural Revolution has seemingly been overlooked in this regard.² In secondary school I remember World War II and the Holocaust being taught in great depth, but the Cultural Revolution was not even mentioned. A similar pattern was repeated in university. The first time I can recall finding out that the Cultural Revolution had happened was when I was 14 and read Jung Chang's *Wild Swans*. I was motivated to choose the representation of the Cultural Revolution as the subject for my bachelor thesis because it is a relatively understudied matter and my education has thus far lacked insights into cultures outside of Europe. I specifically chose to study the representation of the Cultural Revolution to understand the role that historical representation has played in China because it happened long enough ago that a generation has been born and grown up after it, but not long enough ago that all those who survived the movement have died. How the representation of the Cultural Revolution has been negotiated, comprehended and instrumentalised by the state and the people in the years since its occurrence provides an insight into the role that historical representation has played in China since 1966.

At present, the studies about the Cultural Revolution that have been undertaken fall into two categories: those that interpret the movement largely in accordance with claims made by Mao and his supporters or from the assessment provided by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); and those that take the form of personal memoirs of the revolution.³ The former tends to provide a description of the movement and its unfolding, without reflection on the role that representation of the event has had in the post-revolution era. The latter often focuses on the protagonists as victims and does not discuss how personal memoirs and their casting of victimhood produce a representation of the revolution. Both categories do provide representations or descriptions of representations of the Cultural Revolution, but they do not analyse the role that these representations have played in China. In the 1980s, scholars, including Lucian Pye and Harry Harding, discussed the reinterpretation of the Cultural Revolution that was taking place inside and outside of China as the atrocities of the period were being exposed to a greater extent.⁴ In 1981, the CCP itself issued a reassessment of the movement as being "ten years of catastrophe," (skirting over the significant role that the Party played in the revolution). This reassessment has, on the whole, prevailed as the most popular evaluation of the Cultural Revolution in the present.⁵ This representation has prevailed because the CCP has made great efforts to suppress and restrict discussion about the movement. In Beijing, academic research into the Cultural Revolution is inhibited and

¹ Xing Lu, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: The Impact on Chinese Thought, Culture, and Communication* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 1.

² Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125-133 at 133, doi:10.2307/488538.

³ Xing, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 6-7.

⁴ Lucian W. Pye, "Reassessing the Cultural Revolution," *The China Quarterly*, no. 108 (December 1986): 597-612, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/653530>; Harry Harding, "Reappraising the Cultural Revolution," *The Wilson Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (1980): 132-141. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40256005>.

⁵ Pye, "Reassessing the Cultural Revolution," 598; Tom Phillips, "China breaks official silence on Cultural Revolution's 'decade of calamity,'" *Guardian*, May 17, 2016, www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/17/cultural-revolution-reduced-to-footnote-as-communist-party-says-china-has-moved-on

there are no official museums about the movement, preventing Chinese citizens from studying and understanding this part of their history.⁶ Research into the Cultural Revolution is restricted in China as official research in national archives of the revolution can only be conducted by the Party's internal historians.⁷ The education about the Cultural Revolution that the next generation has acquired is also limited as politically sensitive information about the revolution has been removed from textbooks. As a result, the textbooks propagate the CCP's official assessment of the movement.⁸ From the efforts that the state has made to restrict exchanges about the Cultural Revolution, it can be understood why there is relatively limited documentation and studies about the movement and why the CCP's representation of the revolution, as devised in 1981, has prevailed.

Nevertheless, those who have conducted studies about the movement have emphasised the state's control of how the Cultural Revolution is represented and warn that one must be wary of accepting this representation. Xing Lu explains how during the revolution, Mao and his followers controlled the media, meaning that the Cultural Revolution was represented in the media through propaganda.⁹ Pye states that one should be careful in accepting the opinion voiced by the Chinese state, which is considered to be the official view, of the Cultural Revolution as having "no redeeming feature."¹⁰ Kleinman and Kleinman state that from 1976 to 1980, the Chinese state allowed a period in which victims could express their loss and trauma, but in 1980 with many of these biographical literary accounts criticising the Chinese state, a campaign was instigated to suppress them.¹¹ Despite the state's attempts to suppress discussion of the Cultural Revolution, it has become part of the Chinese collective memory.¹²

The state's control of conversations about the Cultural Revolution has prevented open public debate about the era. May 16, 2016 marked the fiftieth year since the Cultural Revolution began. Outside of China, several media outlets published articles that revisited the revolution, its causes and the lasting effects that it has had on Chinese society today in commemoration of the anniversary. But in China, the official media remained silent.¹³ The following day the state-controlled media platforms broke the silence by calling on the people to leave the movement in the past and look to China's bright future.¹⁴ In new media, the revolution is slightly more openly debated, but China's system of online censorship works hard to limit the sharing of information.¹⁵

⁶ Phillips, "China breaks official silence"; Lijia Zhang, "The Specter of the Cultural Revolution," *New York Times*, 22 May 2012, www.nytimes.com/2012/05/23/opinion/the-specter-of-the-cultural-revolution.html

⁷ Kathrin Hille, "China's 'sent-down' youth," *Financial Times*, September 20, 2013, www.ft.com/content/3d2ba75c-1fdf-11e3-8861-00144feab7de

⁸ Shan Jie and Lin Xiaoyi, "Cultural Revolution never forgotten in Chinese textbooks or society," *Global Times*, September 13, 2020, www.globaltimes.cn/content/1200705.shtml; Mandy Zuo, "Controversy over Chinese textbook's Cultural Revolution chapter as state publisher denies censorship," *South China Morning Post*, January 11, 2018, www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2127817/controversy-over-chinese-textbooks-cultural-revolution-chapter

⁹ Xing, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 3.

¹⁰ Pye, "Reassessing the Cultural Revolution," 598.

¹¹ Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman. "How Bodies Remember: Social memory and Bodily Experience of Criticism, Resistance, and Delegitimation following China's Cultural Revolution," *New Literary History* 25, no. 3 (1994), 707-723 at 714, doi.org/10.2307/469474

¹² Xing, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 2.

¹³ Roberto Bendini, *The Cultural Revolution in China: its 50th anniversary was ignored but its legacy lives on today*, Directorate-General for External Policies, PE570470 (Belgium, 2016), 1, [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/570470/EXPO_IDA\(2016\)570470_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/570470/EXPO_IDA(2016)570470_EN.pdf)

¹⁴ Bendini, *The Cultural Revolution in China*, 1.

¹⁵ Yaqiu Wang, "In China, the 'Great Firewall' Is Changing a Generation," *Politico*, September 1, 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/01/china-great-firewall-changing-generation; Karintha Lowe, "Unraveling the Chinese Cultural Revolution Through Media: How College Students Understand the 'Ten Years of Chaos',"

Research Question

The aim of this thesis is to research the change in the Chinese state's and the Chinese people's interpretations and representations of the Cultural Revolution over time in order to understand the role that historical representation has played in China since 1966. In chapter two, I will examine how and why the state and the people interpreted and represented the Cultural revolution whilst the movement was ongoing and when it ended. In chapter three, I will discuss how and why the state's and the people's interpretations and representations of the revolution changed in the 1980s. In chapter four, I will explore how and why the state and the people interpret and represent the movement in contemporary China. In chapter five, I will explain the roles that historical representation has played in China since 1966.

Method

I will conduct my research by analysing academic writing regarding the interpretation and representation of the Cultural Revolution in China. To understand how the movement was interpreted and represented when it was on going, I will consult academic literature that discusses the movement as portrayed by the state in official media and the people in unofficial media. I will examine the state's and the people's interpretations of the revolution when it ended through literature that describes their reactions to, and representations of Mao Zedong's death. I will examine academic works that detail how the state's and the people's interpretations and representations changed in the 1980s. I will focus on the state's representation of the Cultural Revolution as delineated in the 1981 "Resolution on History" and the people's representation of the movement in Scar Literature and in the 1989 Democracy Movement. In order to understand how the state interprets the movement in contemporary China, I will analyse representation in the media, museums, and secondary school textbooks. To discern how the people interpret the revolution in contemporary China, I will examine academic literature that discusses how the 'lost generation' and the generation born in the 1990s interact with and reflect on the subject of the Cultural Revolution.

Theoretical Framework

I will use Jan Assmann's theorisation of collective memory to explain the fundamental role that representation has played in constructing the memory of the Cultural Revolution.

Assmann conceptualises collective memory as being comprised of two stages: communicative memory and cultural memory.¹⁶ Communicative memory is formed through everyday interactions with others, meaning that they are socially mediated memories that relate to a certain group that is unified through a common idea of their past. Everyday interactions being fundamental to the production of communicative memory means that its scope does not extend past one hundred years, at the most, into the past. Cultural memory is distanced from the everyday as it is constructed after the witnesses or participants are no longer living. Cultural memory is not the product of direct experience, but the product of repeated representations as it is always formed as a result of mediation, acts of communication or textualization. Assmann states that cultural memory functions through reconstruction, meaning that contemporary contexts prioritise certain aspects of the memory

Tapestries: Interwoven voices of local and global identities 5, no. 1 (2016): 1-10 at 4, <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/tapestries/vol5/iss1/5>.

¹⁶ Assmann and Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," 126-133.

that they deem most relevant to itself in its recollection.¹⁷ Margaret Macmillan's idea that memory is selective and malleable and can be instrumentalised to validate, justify or achieve contemporary goals will be used to support this notion.¹⁸

I will argue that the Chinese state has attempted to control discussions and representations of the Cultural Revolution in order to direct communicative memory to achieve its contemporary goals of legitimising its rule, preventing the reoccurrence of the movement and dissuading compensation claims. In controlling communicative memory about the movement, the state has also attempted to control the second stage of collective memory, the formation of cultural memory, so that it will be able to continue to legitimise its authority. I will support this argument by using Ernest Renan's discussion of selective remembrance as being a key strategy for unification in post-conflict governance and Macmillan's theory that history is often used to increase group solidarity by writing about the group in a positive light and disallowing alternative interpretations.¹⁹ I will posit that the state allowing only one interpretation of the Cultural Revolution arguably reflects its desire to legitimise its authority through strengthening Chinese nationalism by preventing the reproduction of "old conflicts in present-day society."²⁰ I will also explain that the state's extreme fear of the Cultural Revolution reoccurring has, as Pye argued, motivated it to suppress liberalisation and decentralisation and to maintain tight control over representations of the Cultural Revolution.²¹

I will use Anne Thurston's conceptualisation of survivor's guilt in the context of the Cultural Revolution to explain the Chinese people's interaction with collective memory. Survivor's guilt is a psychological injury gained through surviving an extreme event and is often associated with post-traumatic stress disorder.²² Thurston argues that survivors of the Cultural Revolution experienced survivor's guilt because they felt that they were either complicitous in the regime or the violence, unable to protect their family or because they betrayed their loved ones.²³ I will posit that survivor's guilt caused some survivors to speak out about their experiences, actively cultivating the communicative memory through disseminating their personal representations, in order to educate future generations to prevent a second Cultural Revolution, which the survivors greatly fear. I will argue that for others, survivor's guilt has meant that they have refrained from discussing the movement, choosing not to include their representations in the communicative memory, because the past is too painful to recall.

I will posit that other survivors represent the movement through a sense of nostalgia in order to negotiate their identity in contemporary China. I will explain that, as Michel Bonnin, Alberto Castelli, and Lei Ouyang Bryant state, the nostalgic representation this group has of the Cultural Revolution is a reaction to their contemporary context. The survivors' current society is significantly different to that of their youth and in which they are often marginalised or forgotten.²⁴ I will use Svetlana Boym's notion of nostalgia as being divided

¹⁷ Ann Rigney, "Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory," *Journal of European Studies* 35, no. 1 (2005): 11-28 at 17-18, doi:10.1177/0047244105051158

¹⁸ Margaret Macmillan, *Dangerous games: the uses and abuses of history* (New York: Modern Library, 2009), 115,165.

¹⁹ Ann Rigney, "Reconciliation and remembering: (how) does it work?" *Memory Studies* 5, no. 3 (2012): 251, doi:10.1177/1750698012440927; MacMillan, *Dangerous games*, 115,165.

²⁰ Rigney, "Reconciliation and remembering," 251.

²¹ Pye, "Reassessing the Cultural Revolution," 610-611.

²² Anne F. Thurston, "Victims of China's Cultural Revolution: The Invisible Wounds: Part II," *Pacific Affairs* 58, no. 1 (1985): 5-27 at 7, doi:10.2307/2758007

²³ Thurston, "Victims of China's Cultural Revolution," 8-9.

²⁴ Michel Bonnin, "Restricted, Distorted but Alive: The Memory of the 'Lost Generation' of Chinese Educated Youth," *China Quarterly* 227 (2016): 752-772 at 756, doi:10.1017/S0305741016001053; Alberto Castelli,

into two types, restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia.²⁵ Restorative nostalgia being the attempt to reconstruct the lost home, in contemporary contexts this is often manifested in an attempt to return to the origins. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, is the longing for the home itself, the cherishment of fragments of memory.²⁶ I will explain that those who interpret, discuss and fondly reminisce about the Cultural Revolution era, do so through reflective nostalgia as they do not have desire or attempt to restore the period but view it through the romanticised notion that it was period of simplicity and community.

To explain the roles that historical representation has played in China since 1966, I will use Macmillan's idea of how history is abused and Paul Ricoeur's concept of "memory work." Macmillan argues that history is abused when individuals or a group attempt to disregard or suppress information that contradicts their preferred interpretation of the past.²⁷ I will argue that the state has abused history by propagating a singular representation of the Cultural Revolution and suppressing the people's dissenting interpretations. I will reason that the people who suppressed their own interpretations and instead propagated the state's to avoid state persecution, facilitated this abuse of history and the abuse of their fellow citizens. "Memory work" is the ethical obligation to remember trauma in order to bring justice to others.²⁸ For "memory work" to be carried out, an audience who is willing to listen to the testimony of trauma is essential. I will posit that the state's use of historical representation has not only abused history, it has also abused its people. Attempting to suppress the people's interpretations of the movement has forced them to suppress their trauma, making it challenging for them to engage in "memory work." I will argue that in contemporary China, the people are pushing back against this suppression and doing "memory work" through discussing different interpretations of the revolution.

"Chinese Postmodernism: A Decadent Nostalgia," *Research Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2016): 11-25 at 16,

iiardpub.org/get/RJHCS/VOL.%202%20NO.%201%202016/Chinese%20Postmodernism.pdf; Lei Ouyang Bryant, "Music, Memory, and Nostalgia: Collective Memories of Cultural Revolution Songs in Contemporary China," *China Review* 5, no. 2 (2005): 151-175 at 162, www.jstor.org/stable/23462034.

²⁵ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41.

²⁶ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 41.

²⁷ Macmillan, *Dangerous games*, 68.

²⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 88.

CHAPTER TWO: REPRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION 1966-1976

The important role that representation and interpretation played in the Cultural Revolution is evidenced by the reinterpretation of a play being widely considered to be the catalyst of the revolution.²⁹ In November 1965, Beijing's vice-major and historian Wu Han's 1961 play, "The Dismissal of Hai Rui" was reinterpreted as heretical by Yao Wenyuan, the Propaganda Department Chief of the CCP.³⁰ Yao published an article in the *People's Daily*, the official newspaper of the CCP, condemning the play for supposedly implicitly criticising Mao.³¹ The accusation made by Yao sparked the first attacks on Party authorities in the form of internal assaults on different departments.³²

In this chapter, I will examine how the state and the people represented and interpreted the Cultural Revolution during the movement and when it ended. In the first section, I will discuss how the movement was represented in the official media and the Red Guard Press during the Cultural Revolution in order to understand how the state and the people interpreted the movement whilst it was ongoing. The second section will explain how the revolution was interpreted by the state and the people when it ended through an analysis of the way in which Mao Zedong's death was represented.

I. DURING THE MOVEMENT (1966-1976)

During the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong and the Central Cultural Revolution Group, responsible for implementing Party policy, usurped the control of the mass media and propaganda agencies.³³ Mao used the mass media to propagate his interpretation of the revolution by issuing guidelines for the contents of official and unofficial publications, and punishing anyone who disobeyed the guidelines. In doing this, Mao was able to coerce the mass media into only projecting one representation of the Cultural Revolution. Whilst some publications still attempted to rebel against Mao's guidelines, their authors were quickly reprimanded, limiting the lifespan of their publication and their dissenting views. As a result, the revolution was represented in the way in which Mao wanted it to be: as the movement that would 'combat and prevent revisionism' by eradicating the bourgeois capitalists and ultimately creating a classless and egalitarian society.

In this section, I will focus on the representation of the Cultural Revolution in the media, specifically the representation in official media and the Red Guard Press. First, I will discuss how and why Mao captured the control of the mass media, the resulting rise of the Red Guard press and Mao's reaction to it. Next, I will examine how Mao legitimised and encouraged the Red Guard's weaponizing of the big character posters, how the posters functioned and what they depicted. I will mention that some dissenting opinions existed in the media, but that they were suppressed through fear of persecution. I will then explain how and why the newspapers and big character posters changed after the end of the Red Guard movement. Finally, I will argue that Mao's control over the mass media caused the Cultural

²⁹ "Sixty years of news media and censorship," Reporters Without Borders, 1 October 2009, rsf.org/en/reports/sixty-years-news-media-and-censorship.

³⁰ Tom Fisher, "'The Play's the Thing': Wu Han and Hai Rui Revisited," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 7 (January 1982): 1- 35 at 1, doi:10.2307/2158821

³¹ "Sixty years of news media and censorship."

³² Nicolai Volland, "The Control of the Media in the People's Republic of China" (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Heidelberg, 2003), 397.

³³ Winberg Chai, "The Reorganization of The Chinese Communist Party, 1966-1968," *Asian Survey* 8, no. 11 (1968): 901-910 at 904, doi:10.2307/2642373

Revolution to be represented as a positive movement in which Mao would lead the masses forward to necessary socialist progress.

The State

THE MEDIA

Mao usurped control of the mass media in order to ideologically legitimise the Cultural Revolution through representing the movement in a positive light. Mao believed that the mass media played a fundamental role in influencing the people's beliefs and ideology. He also believed that for the Cultural Revolution to be successful, mass mobilisation was necessary, the first step of which was aligning the people's ideology with his. In 1962, Mao expressed this opinion when he stated, "To overthrow a political power, it is always necessary, first of all, to create public opinion, to do work in the ideological sphere. This is true for the revolutionary class as well for the counter-revolutionary class." This idea was also repeated in the May 16 Circular, issued May 16, 1966, by the Central Committee (CC) of the CCP which officially launched the Cultural Revolution by delineating its agenda.³⁴ Having control over the mass media meant having control over the only means of mass communication.³⁵ If Mao did not succeed in seizing control of the mass media his opponents would use the media against him to represent their own ideologies. To gain this control, Mao criticised the mass media industry for obstructing his call for mass mobilisation in 1963 and in 1965 he started purging the propaganda system.³⁶ Mao used opposing factions within propaganda agencies and opposing newspapers to attack each other in order to remove prominent intellectuals and propaganda officials.³⁷ Certain publications, predominantly journals and newspapers, were suspended which prevented the intellectuals and officials who had been removed from voicing any criticisms of Mao and his leadership.³⁸ The newspapers then formed the medium through which Mao, and his supporters within the Party, mobilised the youth.³⁹

The Maoist leaders communicated their ideology to the masses officially through the major periodicals, including the *People's Daily* and *Red Flag*.⁴⁰ Two key aims of the Cultural Revolution were frequently repeated in the official media: (1) to prevent capitalism; and (2) to strengthen the socialist system for the ultimate consummation of a communist society.⁴¹ The first clause of the Party's media concept was the obligation that "the media must represent the unified single voice of the party."⁴² The "unified single voice of the party" was Mao Zedong Thought, which had become the official ideology of the Party in 1945. Mao Zedong Thought was a combination of Marxism and Leninism and it was the primary

³⁴ Alain Badiou and Bruno Bosteels, "The Cultural Revolution: The Last Revolution?" *East Asia Cultures Critique* 13, no. 3 (2005): 481-514 at 494, 508, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/190188/pdf>

³⁵ Barry M. Broman, "Tatzepao: Medium of Conflict in China's 'Cultural Revolution,'" *International Communications* (1969): 100-127 at 101, doi:10.1177/107769906904600115

³⁶ Alan P. L. Liu, "Mass Communication and Media in China's Cultural Revolution," *Journalism Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (1969): 314-319 at 318, doi:10.1177/107769906904600213

³⁷ Liu, "Mass Communication and Media," 318.

³⁸ Liu, "Mass Communication and Media," 319.

³⁹ Broman, "Tatzepao: Medium of Conflict," 104.

⁴⁰ Hong Yung Lee, "Mao's Strategy for Revolutionary Change: A Case Study of the Cultural Revolution," *The China Quarterly* 77 (March 1979): 50-73 at 58, www.jstor.org/stable/653089.

⁴¹ Xing, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 5.

⁴² Volland, "The Control of the Media," 417.

guidance on which the leadership had to base all major political and ideological decisions.⁴³ The media was restricted to only propagating the Party ideology because the Party wanted to prevent publication of articles that criticised the Party. When Mao usurped control of the mass media, the content restrictions that had been in place ensured that only articles that supported Mao's leadership and the Cultural Revolution were published. One news outlet understood the role that it had been told it was allowed to play as it published an article stating: "The proletarian press is a tool of the dictatorship of the proletariat and makes propagating and defending the invincible Mao Zedong thought its most basic task. This is the most basic political direction of the proletarian press."⁴⁴ Mao's authoritarian control over the official media meant that all publications represented the Cultural Revolution in a positive light. It was to be the movement that would create an equal society in which the citizens would have a good life.

The People

I. THE RED GUARD PRESS

The communist propaganda in the mass media was effective at getting the Chinese masses to embrace the notion that a communist society was the ultimate conclusion of social progression and would guarantee a superior material life for all of society.⁴⁵ The Cultural Revolution appealed to many of the citizens' because it was sold to them as the movement that would fulfil their desire for a good life and egalitarian society. In this way, Mao did achieve his aim of ideologically legitimising the Cultural Revolution through the official media.⁴⁶ In response to the launch of the Cultural Revolution, youths from high schools and universities and radicals organised themselves into militant groups, known as Red Guards, with the aim to combat "revisionist" authorities.⁴⁷ Having recognised the important role that the media played in the ideological sphere, Mao legitimised the creation of revolutionary publications such as the Red Guard press.⁴⁸ The Red Guard press disseminated a variety of publications including leaflets, handbills, magazines, pictorials, big-character posters, and newspapers or "little papers" (*xiaobao*) written by Red Guards.⁴⁹ Mao also exerted a high level of control over how the unofficial media, including the Red Guard press, represented the Cultural Revolution by issuing guidelines and punishing those who did not follow them.

NEWSPAPERS

Red Guard newspapers resembled official newspapers as they carried reprints of editorials, news items or leaders' speeches from state-controlled newspapers.⁵⁰ As Xing Lu stated, the Red Guard press' publications "were basically plagiarized versions of official Communist

⁴³ Barbara Barnouin and Yu Changgen, *Ten Years of Turbulence: The Chinese Cultural Revolution*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 1.

⁴⁴ Volland, *The Control of the Media*, 417.

⁴⁵ Xing, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 5.

⁴⁶ Xing, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 5.

⁴⁷ "Red Guards: Chinese political movement," Britannica, 2016, www.britannica.com/topic/Red-Guards; Xing, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 5.

⁴⁸ Barnouin and Yu, *Ten Years of Turbulence*, 416.

⁴⁹ Stanley Rosen, *Red Guard Factionalism and the Cultural Revolution in Guangzhou (Canton)* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1982), 5-6; Guobin Yang, *The Red Guard Generation and Political Activism in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 73.

⁵⁰ Guobin, *The Red Guard Generation*, 74.

Party discourse.”⁵¹ The Red Guard newspapers were largely critical in nature, regularly criticising particular individuals, policies, institutions or ideologies.⁵² The targets were not always officially sanctioned by the CC, but the criticisms were unrestrained for no one would risk questioning the validity or reliability of their accusations.⁵³ The Red Guard newspapers were recognised and endorsed by the CC in May 1967 when rules for the press were published in an official document entitled “Opinions Regarding Improvement in the Propaganda of Publications by the Revolutionary Mass Organisations.” In the document the CC acknowledged the Red Guard press as playing an “important role on the propaganda front” and detailed rules regarding the publications.⁵⁴ Several of the rules issued set the parameters for the papers’ content: (1) attacks on the People’s Liberation Army were forbidden; (2) it was prohibited to publish any directives or speeches of Mao Zedong, Lin Biao, the CC, or the Central Military Commission that had not been officially released; (3) international affairs were not to be published by mass organisations’ papers; (4) gossip and “street talk” was not to be disseminated; (5) the respectability of the press was to be maintained by printing criticisms of capitalists that focused on issues of ideology, not on the “yellow news.” In the CC having specified the correct form of critiquing capitalists, one of the Red Guard press’ primary functions was identified: to denounce capitalists. One of the “Opinions” made it overtly clear as to the ideology and content that the Red Guard press was to publish: “The papers of the revolutionary mass organisations shall strictly follow the instructions of Chairman Mao, vice Chairman Lin, the CC, and the Central Military Commission; they shall consult the important editorials and commentaries of RMRB, *Hongqi*, and JFRB for their own propaganda.”⁵⁵ The press’ function being to denounce ‘capitalists’ was reinforced by another official document released in August of the same year which included the names of 55 senior officials that could be criticised in the official and unofficial media.⁵⁶

In defining guidelines for the Red Guard press, Mao and the CC tried to control the contents of their publications. Many Red Guard publications adhered to the rules laid out by the CCP, but the lack of a functioning institutional media structure allowed a small number of papers that were not motivated by revolutionising the nation to emerge.⁵⁷ These papers expressed dissenting opinions or featured gossip, slander and pornography. These underground papers were usually published anonymously with very few gaining publicity making their presence short-lived. Due to the scarcity and fragility of these dissenting papers, their negative representation of the Cultural Revolution had no impact on the representation in the larger newspapers. The Red Guards’ adherence to the guidelines issued by the CC and the suppression of publications with dissenting opinions meant that the Red Guard newspapers reflected the official positive representation of the Cultural Revolution and praised Mao.

⁵¹ Xing, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 4.

⁵² Hong Yung Lee, “Utility and Limitation of the Red Guard Publications as Source Publications: A Bibliographical Survey,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 34, no. 3 (1975): 779-793 at 784, doi:10.2307/2052554

⁵³ Hong, “Utility and Limitation of the Red Guard Publications,” 784.

⁵⁴ For this and the following, Barnouin and Yu, *Ten Years of Turbulence*, 408-410 (quote from 408).

⁵⁵ “Renmin Ribao: Chinese Newspaper,” Britannica, www.britannica.com/topic/Renmin-Ribao. RMRB is the abbreviation for *Renmin ribao*, the Chinese name for the ‘People’s Daily’; “China to Furl Red Flag: It’s Maoist Theoretical Journal,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 May 1988, www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1988-05-01-mn-3384-story.html. *Hongqi*, meaning ‘Red Flag’, was a theoretical journal published by the CCP in the 1960s and 1970s; Volland, “The Control of the Media,” xi, 91, 409. JFRB is the abbreviation for *Jiefang ribao*, a CCP newspaper.

⁵⁶ Barnouin and Yu, *Ten Years of Turbulence*, 410.

⁵⁷ For this and the following, Volland, “The Control of the Media,” 405.

Traditionally, in China, big character posters (*dazibao*) have been a medium through which citizens could express discontentment with their political governance because almost all other means of communication have been state-controlled.⁵⁸ Taking the form of a handwritten political text, that may include images, *dazibao* were usually posted in a public space to incite discussion and were to be replicated and distributed.⁵⁹ During the Cultural Revolution, *dazibao* were used as a means to mobilise the masses by criticising opposition to Mao and the Cultural Revolution and through threatening people with persecution if they failed to create their own *dazibao*.

Prior to the Cultural Revolution, in 1958, Mao had proclaimed that *dazibao* were a medium to be weaponised in conflicts: “The big-character poster is an extremely useful new type of weapon. It can be used in cities and the countryside, government and other organisations, army units and streets, in short, wherever the masses are. Now that it has been widely used, people should go on using it constantly.”⁶⁰ Mao encouraged and legitimised the Red Guards’ production of *dazibao* on August 5, 1966 when he created his own *dazibao* and posted it on the door of the CC’s meeting room.⁶¹ It called for the Red Guards to “bombard the headquarters” of the Party members who employed “bourgeois dictatorship.”⁶² After Mao’s created his own *dazibao*, Red Guards rushed to Peking and the number of *dazibao* which attacked Mao’s opposition increased significantly.⁶³ *Dazibao* became the main instrument of the Red Guards as the campaign “purge by poster” was launched.⁶⁴

Superficially, the words written on the *dazibao* represented Mao’s ideology of class struggle, but the *dazibao*’s rhetoric demanded violent action, dehumanised its targets and featured martial language.⁶⁵ The *dazibao* were used “to attack those overt and covert factions in power who follow the capitalist road, and all demons and freaks.”⁶⁶ The accused would commonly be named “ox devils and snake spirits” (*niugui sheshen*) after the *People’s Daily* published an editorial in June 1966 calling for the citizens to “Sweep Away All Monsters and Demons.”⁶⁷ Once identified as a ‘devil’ or ‘evil spirit,’ the accused were forced to wear dunce caps or placards which asserted their monstrosity.⁶⁸ In these actions, the verbal violence written on the *dazibao* developed into physical violence.⁶⁹ Using *dazibao* to destroy individuals’ reputations effectively excluded them from society, but also forced them to suffer the psychological impact of terror and humiliation.⁷⁰ Those who were targeted by the *dazibao* were often Mao’s political opponents or they were believed to be in one of the “five

⁵⁸ Fairbank Centre for Chinese Studies, *Black and Red Revolution: Dazibao and Woodcuts from 1960s China* (2017), YouTube, online video, 1:00:17, www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjbZOjLn7qY&t=1s.

⁵⁹ “Exhibiting the Cultural Revolution, Part 1,” Fairbank Centre Blog, 7 November 2017, medium.com/fairbank-center/exhibiting-the-cultural-revolution-part-1-reading-big-character-posters-d3edd7bb0104.

⁶⁰ Broman, “Tatzepao: Medium of Conflict,” 103.

⁶¹ Richard King, ed., *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-76* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2010), 33; Harvard Fairbank Centre for Chinese Studies, *Black and Red Revolution*, 24:03.

⁶² King, *Art in Turmoil*, 33; Fairbank Centre for Chinese Studies, *Black and Red Revolution*, 24:03.

⁶³ Broman, “Tatzepao: Medium of Conflict,” 103.

⁶⁴ Broman, “Tatzepao: Medium of Conflict,” 100, 127.

⁶⁵ Ho, “The Mao Era in Objects,” 3; “Exhibiting the Cultural Revolution, Part 1.”

⁶⁶ Broman, “Tatzepao: Medium of Conflict,” 103.

⁶⁷ “Exhibiting the Cultural Revolution, Part 3,” Fairbank Centre Blog, 14 November 2017, medium.com/fairbank-center/exhibiting-the-cultural-revolution-part-3-dazibao-exhibitionism-3855a62a8bc6; “Monsters and Demons (1966-1967),” chinese-posters.net/themes/monsters-demons

⁶⁸ “Monsters and Demons (1966-1967).”

⁶⁹ “Exhibiting the Cultural Revolution, Part 3.”

⁷⁰ Fairbank Centre for Chinese Studies, *Black and Red Revolution*, 59:04.

black categories.” During the Cultural Revolution, people were pigeonholed into either “five red categories” or “five black categories” based on their family backgrounds.⁷¹ The “five black categories” were landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, criminals and rightists, and the “five red categories” were revolutionary cadres, revolutionary soldiers, revolutionary martyrs, workers, and poor and lower-middle peasants. Red Guards were pressured to denounce friends, colleagues, neighbours and family members as well as public figures.

Dazibao did also function as a way for the citizens to express discontentment with Mao’s political governance and in a few instances during the Cultural Revolution *dazibao* were used to communicate heterodox thought.⁷² However, in these instances the author often faced punishment. For example, in 1966 Yu Luoke wrote an essay entitled “On Family Origin.” It was a *dazibao* criticising the ideology that class characteristics, those of the proletariat or the bourgeoisie, were inherited.⁷³ Yu’s essay spoke out against the automatic persecution of the immediate relatives of those accused of being counter-revolutionary and the idea that based on family background one would inevitably be a ‘criminal’.⁷⁴ The *dazibao* found some admirers amongst the citizens and was replicated in other areas of the nation.⁷⁵ However, in March 1970, Yu was executed for having written the essay.⁷⁶ The punishment of authors like Yu Luoke makes it clear that *dazibao* were only to criticise the political governance that opposed Mao, not Mao’s political governance.

The *dazibao* “almost without exception” featured “vilifying and angry words.”⁷⁷ Xiaofei Tian stated that in the writing being vilifying “there’s an implicit command or coercion of people to be angry,” that if the viewer is not angry then they are not a revolutionary.⁷⁸ Encouraging anger amongst the people through aggressive language was instrumental in mobilising the masses to support the revolution. The volume of *dazibao* also worked to endorse this mobilisation because everywhere the citizens looked, they were constantly greeted with *dazibao* that reaffirmed support for the Cultural Revolution. *Dazibao* were posted wherever anyone chose to post them, they were often pages long and they would be plastered on walls as high as one could reach and hung from wires “strung up like clotheslines.”⁷⁹ The big characters on the posters were legible from great distances and were displayed in such volume that they have been remembered as “blotting out the sky and covering the earth.”⁸⁰ The *dazibao* were so numerous that Jie Li describes the citizens as being compelled to look at and read the writings because they were a “visual obstacle,” they invaded one’s vision as they were everywhere one went.⁸¹ The citizens were not only compelled to read the *dazibao*, they were also compelled to write their own. If individuals failed to write *dazibao*, they could be accused of being a counter-revolutionary and be persecuted. This compelled behaviour created a cycle in which more and more *dazibao* were created that reinforced Mao’s positive representation of the revolution.

⁷¹ Xing, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 23.

⁷² Fairbank Centre for Chinese Studies, *Black and Red Revolution*, 1:00:17.

⁷³ “Exhibiting the Cultural Revolution, Part 3”; Yu Luowen, “Political ‘Guilt’ Still Linked to Family Bloodlines in Today’s China,” Radio Free Asia, 28 September 2016, www.rfa.org/english/news/china/politics-guilt-09282016121224.html

⁷⁴ Yu, “Political ‘Guilt’ Still Linked to Family.”

⁷⁵ Fairbank Centre for Chinese Studies, *Black and Red Revolution*, 1:00:40.

⁷⁶ Yu, “Political ‘Guilt’ Still Linked to Family.”

⁷⁷ Fairbank Centre for Chinese Studies, *Black and Red Revolution*, 47:26.

⁷⁸ Fairbank Centre for Chinese Studies, *Black and Red Revolution*, 47:26.

⁷⁹ Cushing and Tompkins, *Chinese Poster*, 30.

⁸⁰ Fairbank Centre for Chinese Studies, *Black and Red Revolution*, 53:53.

⁸¹ Fairbank Centre for Chinese Studies, *Black and Red Revolution*, 38:42.

The *dazibao* also became necessary reading for the citizens so that they could follow even subtle ideological and factional shifts, with numerous new *dazibao* being posted daily.⁸² With subtle but serious changes occurring frequently within the ideological line of Cultural Revolution, the *dazibao* offered the citizens unambiguous information as to what behaviour and slogans were allowed in that specific moment.⁸³ They were considered to offer more dependable guidance than the media due to the speed of their production in comparison with more lengthy publications like newspapers.⁸⁴ Therefore, when the people looked to *dazibao* as an informative source, they were also constantly greeted with confirmation that the Cultural Revolution was in their best interests. Xing Lu posits that *dazibaos* incited mass mobilisation on such a grand scale because the posters' appeal to absolute certainty and support of Mao and the Cultural Revolution, fundamentally transformed the Chinese thought processes.⁸⁵

As Xing Lu argues, the *dazibao* represented, at minimum, a superficial semblance of genuine mass participation but they did act as a catalyst for unparalleled mass mobilisation.⁸⁶ The *dazibao*, as a catalyst for mass mobilisation, arguably played an instrumental role in Mao's rivals having been overthrown and China coming so close to anarchy by late 1968.⁸⁷

II. AFTER THE RED GUARDS

The Red Guard movement, of which unofficial newspapers and *dazibao* were the mouthpieces and weapons, only lasted two years, from 1966 to 1968.⁸⁸ During the Red Guard movement, the number of factions all claiming to be the true representative of Chairman Mao increased dramatically and violence between the opposing groups became more extreme with fights breaking out in the streets and on university campuses. Mao ended the Red Guard movement late in 1968 as his political opponents had been denounced and overthrown and the nation was fraught with chaos. The Red Guards were instructed, by Mao, to go to the state farms in rural China in order to be "re-educated" by the farmers and peasants through labour. This rustication movement was initially welcomed by the Red Guards as they believed they would be carrying the revolution to the rural areas.⁸⁹ However, the cold reality of exile soon chilled their revolutionary fervour.

The Red Guard movement's ending saw a decrease in the level of physical, verbal and written aggression, but not in Mao's level of control over media content. Mao's influence over media content is evidenced by the fact that Red Guards still produced *dazibao* in the rural areas that they were sent to even though the *dazibao* had already achieved their purpose of mass mobilisation. The Red Guards continued to create *dazibao* even though their revolutionary spirit had been reduced by the hard labour because they feared the consequences of appearing to be a counter revolutionary. Gu Xiong was one of the seventeen million Red Guards who were sent "up to the mountains and down to the villages" between 1968 and 1979. He later recalled that the Red Guards would continue to create "big character slogans," which would be painted on houses and rocks, and engage in "revolutionary criticism sessions."⁹⁰ However, Gu stated that their revolutionary spirit had been dampened

⁸² Fairbank Centre for Chinese Studies, *Black and Red Revolution*, 24:20.

⁸³ "Cultural Revolution Campaigns (1966-1967)," chineseposters.net/themes/cultural-revolution-campaigns

⁸⁴ "Cultural Revolution Campaigns (1966-1967)."

⁸⁵ Belk, "Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution," abstract.

⁸⁶ William Belk, "Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: Impact on Chinese Thought, Culture, and Communication (review)," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9, no. 3 (2020): abstract, doi:10.1353/rap.2006.0000

⁸⁷ King, *Art in Turmoil*, 10.

⁸⁸ For this and the following, King, *Art in Turmoil*, 10.

⁸⁹ Zhigang, "Chinese Scar Literature," 165.

⁹⁰ King, *Art in Turmoil*, 10, 112.

by the hardship and isolation they were faced with when labouring on the farms.⁹¹ Gu explained that while they came to internally question the Cultural Revolution, they could not express their doubt for fear of the consequences of being labelled a counter-revolutionary. As a result, the youths would continue to write the “big character slogans,” even though many of them believed them to be “meaningless,” in order to represent themselves as “good political activists.” Towards the end of the revolution, the *dazibao* became meaningless and their impact and power decreased. Yu Hua explains that “By 1975 people had been numbed into indifference by big character posters and seldom read the new exposés that sprouted up overnight. Now on their way to losing all relevance, posters were becoming merely newspaper...”⁹² It can be understood that after the *dazibao* had completed their task of mobilising the masses, their relevance was quickly diminished, and they just became wallpaper. Nevertheless, it was still wallpaper that had to adhere to Mao’s guidelines and so represented the Cultural Revolution positively and praised Mao’s leadership.

There was a change in the media industry with the end of the Red Guard movement as publications other than party documents or Mao’s works were circulated.⁹³ Journals that had stopped being published in 1966 recommenced distribution and new works of fiction began appearing in the early 1970s. Nevertheless, the new works that were published were still forced to obey the cultural standard Mao promoted: that art and literature should endorse socialism and serve the Chinese people.⁹⁴ Essentially meaning that the publications had to support Mao, his ideology and the Cultural Revolution. For example, Hao Ran, one of the most popular authors in China during the early 1970s, wrote fiction that promoted Mao’s revolution by idealising peasant life and portraying “proletarian heroes who serve the state with self-sacrificing dedication.”⁹⁵

Conclusion

In having seized control of the mass media, Mao and his political supporters dictated the representation of the Cultural Revolution in the media in order to ideologically legitimise it and incite mass mobilisation. The movement was represented as combatting and preventing revisionism by purging the Party and society of the bourgeois capitalists, ultimately creating an equal society. Official media representation of the Cultural Revolution was instrumentalised to ideologically legitimise the movement by appealing to the people’s desires for an egalitarian and classless society. The representation of the revolution in the Red Guard Press, especially in the *dazibao*, was weaponised to mobilise the people in support of the revolution. Mass criticism disseminated by the official media and the Red Guard Press was fundamental to facilitating the Cultural Revolution as it deterred others from acting against the revolution’s ideology for fear of punishment.

⁹¹ For this and the following, King, *Art in Turmoil*, 112.

⁹² “Exhibiting the Cultural Revolution, Part 3.”

⁹³ King, *Art in Turmoil*, 11.

⁹⁴ “Introduction to Chinese Literature,” Asia for Educators, afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_1900_literature.htm

⁹⁵ Hao Ran, “Date Orchard,” *Chinese Literature* 4 (April 1974): 36-48 at 36, afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/china/hao_ran.pdf

II. THE END OF THE MOVEMENT (1976)

The Cultural Revolution is generally regarded as having ended with Mao's death on September 9, 1976 and the arrest of the Gang of Four on October 6, 1976.⁹⁶ The Gang of Four was a group of four radical and influential members of the CCP, consisting of Mao's third wife, Jiang Qing, and major party officials from Shanghai, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wen Yuan and Wang Hongwen.⁹⁷ Mao died as a result of the "worsening of his illness and despite all treatment."⁹⁸ As Mao's health declined, the Gang of Four took control over several government organisations and eventually attempted to take control of China when Mao died.⁹⁹ At the time of his death, Mao was eighty-two years old and was still Chairman of the CCP.¹⁰⁰ As Mao was still Chairman and still led the Cultural Revolution when he died, observing how the Chinese state and people reacted to Mao's death will enable us to understand how they interpreted and represented the Cultural Revolution when it ended.

To understand how the state and the people interpreted and represented the Cultural Revolution when it ended, I will discuss the reaction to Mao's death. First, I will examine the state's interpretation of the Cultural Revolution through how it represented Mao in the official announcement of his passing and the state's framing of his memorial services. Next, I will explore how the citizens interpreted the movement through their emotional response to Mao's death. I will argue that the state unquestioningly represented the Cultural Revolution positively in order to legitimise its rule whereas the people represented themselves as supporting the movement, but with divided interpretations.

The State

At the end of the Cultural Revolution, the CCP proclaimed their continued support for Mao and the Cultural Revolution through the announcement of Mao's death and its framing of his funeral. Following Mao's death, the state issued an announcement and organised his funeral and memorial rally. The announcement the CCP gave on the day of Mao's death praised Mao for being the "the founder and wise leader" of the CCP and for his governance of China against "counter-revolutionary revisionists" and "opportunists."¹⁰¹ Mao was described as "the esteemed and beloved great leader of our party, our army and the people of all nationalities of our country."¹⁰² In his leadership of the Cultural Revolution, the CCP applauded his putting forth of "the great theory of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat, and laid down the party's basic line for the entire historical period of socialism."¹⁰³ In the announcement, the CCP repeated seven times the idea that China "must carry on the cause

⁹⁶ King, *Art in Turmoil*, 11; "After Mao," chinese-posters.net/themes/mao-after

⁹⁷ "Gang of Four: Chinese politicians," Britannica, www.britannica.com/topic/Gang-of-Four; Kallie Szczepanski, "What Was the Gang of Four in China," Thoughtco, www.thoughtco.com/the-gang-of-four-195613

⁹⁸ John Gittings, "From the archive, 10 September 1976: Power vacuum in China following Mao's death," *Guardian*, 10 September 2014, www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/10/mao-chairman-china-dead

⁹⁹ Szczepanski, "What Was the Gang of Four in China."

¹⁰⁰ "Mao Zedong dies," HISTORY, 8 September 2020, www.history.com/this-day-in-history/mao-zedong-dies; Frederic Wakeman, Jr., "Revolutionary Rites: The Remains of Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Tse-tung," *Representations*, no. 10 (1985): 146-193 at 157, doi:10.2307/3043803

¹⁰¹ Wakeman, Jr., "Revolutionary Rites," 152.

¹⁰² *New York Times*, "Text of the Announcement Issued by Peking Reporting Death of Chairman Mao," 10 September 1976, www.nytimes.com/1976/09/10/archives/text-of-the-announcement-issued-by-peking-reporting-death-of.html

¹⁰³ *New York Times*, "Text of the Announcement."

left behind by Chairman Mao.”¹⁰⁴ Mao’s accomplishments were described as being “immortal” and having “earned him the love and respect of the Chinese people as well as of revolutionaries throughout the entire world.”¹⁰⁵ Although Mao’s death was “bound to evoke immense grief” in the Chinese people, the government stated that “the radiance of Mao Zedong thought will forever illuminate the road of advance of the Chinese people.”

The CCP called on the public to carry on Mao’s cause by continuing the fight against imperialism, supporting the Party, continuing the criticism of Deng Xiaoping and observing proletarian internationalism. The slogan “turning grief into strength,” that was printed repeatedly in major propaganda media following Mao’s death, enforces the idea that the people were to use their grief at Mao’s passing as sustenance to continue to fight for Mao’s revolution “through to the end.”¹⁰⁶ From the glowing report that the CCP gave of Mao as a man, but also as a leader of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Cultural Revolution, the state’s belief in the movement is explicit. The CCP’s support of the Cultural Revolution is undeniable as it declared to work to continue the movement and called on the citizens to do the same. Through expressing its belief in the Cultural Revolution and its continuation, the CCP represented the movement as a “victory” and socially progressive.¹⁰⁷

Whilst one would normally consider the deceased to be the “star” of their own memorial services, at Chinese political memorial services, the leaders who were currently in charge were the real stars.¹⁰⁸ In China, the state believed that the people observed political funerals and obituaries as sources of political legitimacy so the state instrumentalised these memorial services in order to validate their legitimacy and honour.¹⁰⁹ This was evidenced at Mao’s memorial rally when Hua Guofeng, Mao’s successor, concluded Mao’s eulogy by requesting that the people accepted the new leadership of the CC “in order to carry through to the end the proletarian revolution that Chairman Mao had pioneered.”¹¹⁰ The state also sought to validate its legitimacy through creating an atmosphere of “national mourning.”¹¹¹ This atmosphere was achieved through a show of continued support for Mao and his revolution, which they proclaimed in the first announcement, and through televising Mao’s funeral. The broadcast of Mao’s public funeral at Tiananmen Square focused on capturing footage of the mourners as they paid their final respects to Mao with almost all of the mourners shown were crying at the leader’s passing.¹¹² The Party framed the announcements and memorial events to represent Mao as having been a great and revered leader in order for the new leadership to identify with its forebearer, legitimising its rule and reaffirming its ideology amid the people.¹¹³

¹⁰⁴ *New York Times*, “Text of the Announcement.”

¹⁰⁵ For this and the following, Wakeman, Jr., “Revolutionary Rites,” 152.

¹⁰⁶ Wakeman, Jr., “Revolutionary Rites,” 159

¹⁰⁷ *New York Times*, “Text of the Announcement.”

¹⁰⁸ Wen-Hsuan Tsai, “Framing the Funeral: Death Rituals of Chinese Communist Party Leaders,” *China Journal*, no. 77 (2016): 51-71 at 71, www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/688428

¹⁰⁹ Wen-Hsuan, “Framing the Funeral,” 70.

¹¹⁰ Wakeman, Jr., “Revolutionary Rites,” 162.

¹¹¹ Wen-Hsuan, “Framing the Funeral,” 67.

¹¹² S. L. James, *China: Communist History through Film* (1976), Internet Archive, online video, 1:50:53, archive.org/details/china-communist-history; Wakeman, Jr., “Revolutionary Rites,” 152.

¹¹³ Wen-Hsuan, “Framing the Funeral,” 71.

The People

The news of Mao's death incited widespread grief throughout China.¹¹⁴ Robert Dunn described the severity of the grief that the citizens felt: "Masses of people gathered in the huge squares and grief buckled their knees and swayed their backs so that from high up they seemed to ripple like a wheat field in a strong wind."¹¹⁵ Cheng Taiqian, a Chinese citizen, recalled how he "thought the sky would fall down" when Mao died, he stated "I cried, I cried, I cried."¹¹⁶ Similarly, Zhang Zhaohui, who was just nine years old when Mao died, remembers "Everybody just crying! The whole school the whole classroom."¹¹⁷ Over the seven-day designated mourning period, from September 11 to 17, it is estimated that more than one million Chinese people paid their respects to Mao whose body was in a flag-draped coffin in public view.¹¹⁸ More than 300,000 people in Peking voiced pledges to continue Mao's cause as they, "with grief and esteem and love, came to the mourning hall in the Great Hall of the People to pay last respects to the remains of Chairman Mao."¹¹⁹ Almost all of China's 800 million citizens observed the silent tribute for three minutes at Mao's funeral in Tiananmen Square.¹²⁰ The people who expressed the most profound sense of grief over Mao's passing were the very young whom Mao had "metaphorically fathered and nurtured" and the old who had viewed Mao as a great emancipator.¹²¹ These citizens' grief at Mao's death indicates that, like the CCP, their belief in Mao's ideology, leadership and revolution remained unwavering.

However, for some citizens grieving was a performative emotion to prevent punishment. Shen Ji, who was a student in class when Mao's death was announced, recalled his "classmates sobbed, then burst into tears. I tried to do the same, but failed," he believed that his teacher saw him sat "tearless" and wondered "How would she react? Would she criticize me or report me to the school authorities, saying that I had no love for Mao?" Shen said that "At that moment I knew I was finished. My career was ruined, my dreams of being a Communist Party member dashed."¹²² Shen stated that he held a "persistent love and respect" for Mao, but when he heard the news of Mao's death, it seems that he cried because he feared the consequences of looking as if he did not love Mao, opposed to his actual grief.¹²³ Performatively crying in order to escape persecution indicates that whilst citizens may have loved and respected Mao, they had recognised, if not necessarily consciously, that the Cultural Revolution was not purely a positive and just movement. Fear motivated some citizens to represent themselves as unquestioningly believing in Mao and the Cultural Revolution even though their interpretation did not necessarily match.

After grief, uncertainty followed. It has also been noted that whilst citizens publicly wept over Mao's body, their tears were an expression of the spontaneous initial grief they

¹¹⁴ Robert Dunn, "When Mao Was Gone," *Mississippi Review* 11 (1982): 27-30 at 27, www.jstor.org/stable/20133887.

¹¹⁵ Dunn, "When Mao Was Gone," 27.

¹¹⁶ Tom Cheshire, "'When Mao died I cried and cried': China to mark 70 years of Communist Rule," *Sky News*, 28 September 2019, news.sky.com/story/when-mao-died-i-cried-and-cried-china-to-mark-70-years-of-communist-rule-11820643

¹¹⁷ Cheshire, "'When Mao died I cried and cried'."

¹¹⁸ Wakeman, Jr., "Revolutionary Rites," 152-153; "1 million people attend funeral of Mao Zedong," *HISTORY*, 16 September 2020, www.history.com/this-day-in-history/funeral-of-mao-zedong

¹¹⁹ Wakeman, Jr., "Revolutionary Rites," 154.

¹²⁰ "1 million people attend funeral of Mao Zedong."

¹²¹ Wakeman, Jr., "Revolutionary Rites," 159.

¹²² Ted Gup, "The Day Mao Died: The Impact Was Even Greater Than When Kennedy Was Shot Here.: Peking Journalism Students Remember Where They Were," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 September 1986, www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1986-09-07-tm-12040-story.html

¹²³ Gup, "The Day Mao Died."

felt. These signs of spontaneous grief were somewhat uncommon in Peking because there were greater concerns over the Party leadership.¹²⁴ The initial grief was quickly replaced with concern over the succession struggle for the Chairmanship that would take place between the Gang of Four and Mao's designated successor, Hua Guofeng. Many citizens felt ambivalent about Mao's death and were greatly concerned over which policies and ideology they would then be required to follow. As a result, Mao's death caused many people to feel less grief-stricken and more "at a loss."

Mao's death did spark a reaction of immense grief in many of the Chinese people living in China and around the world. At the time of his death, Mao was still loved, respected and admired by many of those he governed and so grief was a natural reaction to his passing. Nevertheless, there is division between how the citizens interpreted the Cultural Revolution. However, the citizens' grief, whether performative or real, initial or prolonged, represents the movement as favoured by the people. In contrast, it is unambiguous that the CCP desired to represent the movement as positive, having the support of the state and people, through framing Mao's memorial services in order to legitimatise its rule and reinforce its ideology.

Conclusion

During the Cultural Revolution, the state used the media to represent the movement so as to ideological legitimise it and to incite mass mobilisation. As a result, the revolution was represented as a positive movement that would purge the society and Party of bourgeois capitalists in order to combat revisionism and ultimately bring about an egalitarian and classless society. At the end of the movement, the state continued to represent the Cultural Revolution positively in order to legitimise its rule in the wake of Mao's death and to reassert its ideology amongst the masses. Consequentially, the state represented the revolution as being supported by the people and the state through creating an image of national mourning and pushing for the revolution to be continued. Therefore, it is evident that between 1966 and 1976 the state instrumentalised historical representation in order to legitimise its rule and ideology.

While the Cultural Revolution was ongoing, the people could not choose how to represent the movement in the unofficial media. The state told them what they were to represent, and many followed the guidelines for fear of persecution should they dissent. As a result, the people's representation of the movement reflected that of the state. At the end of the Cultural Revolution, the people's grief at Mao's death represented the revolution as being favoured and supported by the people, although it did not necessarily match their interpretation. The discrepancy between some people's interpretation and representation can be explained by the fear of being persecuted should they appear counterrevolutionary. Consequentially, it is clear that between 1966 and 1976 the people chose to accept the state's instrumentalization of historical representation in order to escape punishment.

¹²⁴ For this and the following, Wakeman, Jr., "Revolutionary Rites," 151.

CHAPTER THREE: CHANGE IN THE 1980s

In this chapter, I will explain how and why the state's and the people's representation of the Cultural Revolution changed in the 1980s. First, I will explain the Resolution agreed upon in 1981 at the Sixth Plenum of the CC as evidence of the change in the state's interpretation and representation of the Cultural Revolution. I will then examine Scar Literature as a medium through which the people were able to represent the dark side of the revolution and the CCP's consequential reaction. Next, I will discuss how the students of the 1989 Democracy Movement learned from the post-Maoist and Scar Literature representations of the Cultural Revolution, and so were careful to distinguish themselves from the Red Guards.

The State

Between the end of the Cultural Revolution and 1980, the governmental attitude towards the Cultural Revolution and Mao had considerably changed and "it was an open secret in Peking that some party leaders actually wanted to tear down the chairman's memorial hall."¹²⁵ In 1979, the CCP began to disclose some of the human costs of the movement as Party Secretary-General Hu Yaobang estimated that 100 million Chinese people had suffered "unjustly" during the Cultural Revolution.¹²⁶ State officials even seemed to delight in unmasking the cruelties of the revolution if blame could be assigned to the Gang of Four.¹²⁷ The *People's Daily* "sponsored a forum to criticize 'Gang of Four Literature,'" allowing people to speak out about their experiences or trauma if blame was assigned to the Gang of Four.¹²⁸ The Gang of Four were largely used as a scapegoat for the violence and horrors of the movement and even had a nationally televised show trial in 1980 although it failed to satisfy those who "quipped among themselves about the fifth member of the gang, Mao himself."¹²⁹ After the Cultural Revolution had ended, criticism of Mao and the movement had become more explicit causing the CCP's legitimacy to come into question.¹³⁰ As a result, by 1980 it had become necessary for the CCP to publicly re-evaluate and re-represent its history, Mao, and the Cultural Revolution in order to legitimise its authority. A significant turning point in how the Cultural Revolution was represented occurred in June 1981 at the Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP.

At the Sixth Plenum of the 11th CC of the CCP the main item on the agenda was the "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China."¹³¹ The three principal topics of the Resolution were the reassessment of the Cultural Revolution, the role of Mao Zedong in Chinese politics since the mid-1950s, and the nature of Mao Zedong Thought.¹³² The Party has been known to reassess

¹²⁵ Wakeman Jr., "Revolutionary Rites," 177.

¹²⁶ Harding, "Reappraising the Cultural Revolution," 137.

¹²⁷ Dowland, "The Chinese Cultural Revolution," 16.

¹²⁸ Zhigang, "Chinese Scar Literature," 7.

¹²⁹ Wakeman Jr., "Revolutionary Rites," 178; Guobin Yang, "Days of Old Are Not Puffs of Smoke: Three Hypotheses on Collective Memories of the Cultural Revolution," *China Review* 5, no. 2 (2005): 13-41 at 19, www.jstor.org/stable/23462029.

¹³⁰ David S. G. Goodman, "Legacy of the Cultural Revolution," *Problems of Communism* 30, no. 5 (1981): 62-65 at 62,

heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/probscmu30&div=51&g_sent=1&casa_token=&collection=journals; David S. G. Goodman, "The Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP: Look Back in Anger?" *China Quarterly* 1981, no. 87 (September 1981): 518-527 at 520, www.jstor.org/stable/653602.

¹³¹ Goodman, "Legacy of the Cultural Revolution," 62.

¹³² Goodman, "Legacy of the Cultural Revolution," 62.

its own history, but it is, and was, unusual for them to do so through declaring it in a resolution.¹³³ In the discussion of reappraising the PRC's history, members of the CC were united in their opposition to the Cultural Revolution but divided when it came to evaluating Mao's role and the nature of Mao Zedong Thought.¹³⁴

The CC reappraised the Cultural Revolution after detailing the CCP's successes before and after 1949 in the first two sections of the Resolution.¹³⁵ The Resolution condemned the period of 1966-1976 as unnecessary, a "calamity" for China and an "appalling catastrophe suffered by all our people."¹³⁶ In Article 20 the movement was portrayed as a ghastly mistake: "Practice has shown that the "cultural revolution" did not in fact constitute a revolution of social progress in any sense, nor could it possibly have done so."¹³⁷ In describing the Cultural Revolution as a failure that did not create any sort of social progress, the Party officially denounced the movement for the first time. As attitudes towards the Cultural Revolution had changed so drastically in the preceding years a new consensus on how to reassess the movement was relatively easily reached.

The Party needed someone to blame for the Cultural Revolution so that it could absolve itself. It chose Mao. Mao, having been the leader of the movement was a logical choice, and him being dead meant that he could, conveniently, not object. It assigned responsibility for the "appalling catastrophe" to Mao in Article 32: "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."¹³⁸ Although the CC blamed Mao for the Cultural Revolution, it also unrightfully diminished the violence and suffering of the period to a small blip in Mao's and the CCP's history by labelling it as an "error." In assigning responsibility for the movement to Mao, the Party could exonerate itself, re-validating its legitimacy to rule.

However, the Party had to give a more nuanced critique of Mao because at the end of the movement, the new leadership had legitimised its rule by identifying with Mao, its forebearer. In consequence, Mao's role in Chinese politics since the mid-1950s was not condemned, in fact, it was frequently praised. In Article 5, the Party acknowledged Mao's leadership: "Our party and people would have had to grope in the dark much longer had it not been for Comrade Mao Zedong, who more than once rescued the Chinese Revolution from grave danger."¹³⁹ The Resolution explained Mao's role in the Cultural Revolution as having been as a result of misinterpreting the political situation in China and Mao Zedong Thought. The CC claimed that's Mao's belief that "the socialist society at all levels was undermined by capitalist and revisionist agents whose purpose it was to restore capitalism" was completely inaccurate.¹⁴⁰ It was also specified that Mao's "entirely erroneous appraisal of the [...] political situation in the Party and the state" was the immediate cause of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁴¹ The CC stated that Mao's "errors" were exploited by "careerists, adventurists, opportunists, political degenerates, and the hooligan dregs of society,"¹⁴² including the Gang of Four, who harboured ulterior motives.¹⁴³ Whilst Mao was considered to be responsible for the "ten years of chaos," the CC simultaneously pardoned Mao's

¹³³ Goodman, "The Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee," 519.

¹³⁴ Goodman, "The Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee," 521.

¹³⁵ Goodman, "The Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee," 521.

¹³⁶ Harding, "Reappraising the Cultural Revolution," 137.

¹³⁷ Goodman, "The Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee," 524-525.

¹³⁸ Goodman, "The Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee," 525.

¹³⁹ Goodman, "The Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee," 522.

¹⁴⁰ Barnouin and Yu, *Ten Years of Turbulence*, 1; Harding, "Reappraising the Cultural Revolution," 137.

¹⁴¹ Barnouin and Yu, *Ten Years of Turbulence*, 1.

¹⁴² Harding, "Reappraising the Cultural Revolution," 137.

¹⁴³ Goodman, "The Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee," 524.

actions, to an extent, by surmising that “after all” the Cultural Revolution was caused by “a great proletarian revolutionary.”¹⁴⁴ By pardoning Mao’s role in the Cultural Revolution and reinforcing the idea that he was a great and revered leader who just made a mistake, the Party was able to maintain its second claim to legitimacy. This is because completely criticising Mao, as the previous leader of the Party, would severely damage the Party’s legitimacy to rule. As a result, the Resolution concluded that Mao’s “merits are primary and his errors secondary.”¹⁴⁵

In order to criticise Mao, the man and propagate Mao Zedong Thought, the Resolution separated the two. Mao Zedong Thought had been the Party ideology and guiding principle since 1945, four years before the Party had even come to power so it was essential to reassert this ideology in order to legitimise the leadership’s rule. In order to separate Mao and Mao Zedong Thought, the CC reformulated the ideology as a collective genesis of the Party: “...Mao Zedong Thought, which came into being through the collective struggle of the Party and the people is recognized as the guiding ideology of the Party.”¹⁴⁶ The CC reinforced this separation by claiming that the Cultural Revolution was completely inconsistent with Mao Zedong Thought.¹⁴⁷ Whilst the CC held that Mao’s beliefs about society were completely inaccurate, it did not offer any explanation why the Party leadership had still supported Mao’s policies.¹⁴⁸ By aligning itself with Mao Zedong Thought, the Party could attempt to absolve itself from blame for the Cultural Revolution and legitimise its rule through claiming to follow the Party ideology.

The Resolution represented the Cultural Revolution as Mao’s personal “error,” rhetorically lessening the extent of the true horror and anguish caused by the movement. The Party aimed to exonerate itself by blaming Mao and aligning itself with the people and Party ideology in order to validate the legitimacy of the CCP’s leadership. In re-evaluating the Cultural Revolution, the Party desired to leave the “error” in the past and move forward into a greater socialist society.¹⁴⁹

The People

I. SCAR LITERATURE (1976-1980)

At the Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP in 1981, the Resolution was passed that proclaimed the Cultural Revolution to have been a ghastly mistake for which Mao was responsible. Prior to this meeting, the Third Plenum in 1978 had been held, at which Deng Xiaoping’s liberation campaign was approved and launched.¹⁵⁰ This was based on the notion that “practice must be the sole criterion to judge the truth.” After the Third Plenum, there was still a limit on freedom of expression as writers could only implicitly testify to the suffering they experienced. Yet, intellectuals and writers were encouraged to think and write freely on the Cultural Revolution and its socio-cultural effect.¹⁵¹ In 1979, at the Fourth Congress of Writers and Artists, Deng reinforced his liberation campaign by making “a speech promising an end to the Party’s interference in artistic creation.”¹⁵² From then on,

¹⁴⁴ Goodman, “The Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee,” 525.

¹⁴⁵ Goodman, “The Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee,” 526.

¹⁴⁶ Goodman, “The Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee,” 522.

¹⁴⁷ Goodman, “The Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee,” 524.

¹⁴⁸ Barnouin and Yu, *Ten Years of Turbulence*, 1.

¹⁴⁹ Goodman, “The Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee,” 519-520.

¹⁵⁰ For this and the following, “Literature as a source of Socio-cultural studies,” 33.

¹⁵¹ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 4, 51; “Literature as a source of Socio-cultural studies,” 34.

¹⁵² Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 8.

literary works focused on the traumatic experiences of victims of the movement began to appear. With these changes in political policy towards the Cultural Revolution and censorship, a brief period of literary liberalisation was afforded. This resulted in the so-called Scar Literature. This was a brief “literary flowering,” centring around invisible and visible trauma experienced by individuals during the Cultural Revolution, focusing on the victims’ “human nature.”¹⁵³ Scar Literature enabled the survivors to represent the dark side of the revolution that they had experienced.

Each work of Scar Literature tells a different story “not because what happened to so many others was intrinsically ‘different,’ but because of the way in which victims and survivors grasped and related their experiences comprises the actual core of ‘their story.’”¹⁵⁴ Many of the authors of Scar Literature still retained their faith in the CCP and did not see the entire revolution as a communist catastrophe. They believed that the Party could still rectify the wrongs done.¹⁵⁵ Scar Literature included topics such as the persecution of intellectuals or people who had “foreign connections,” meaning people who had relatives abroad, or who had studied or worked abroad.¹⁵⁶ Some stories told the experiences of those who had been persecuted and some stories told the experiences of those who had persecuted others.¹⁵⁷ Authors wrote about the denouncing of friends and family members, for example Chen Kaige, who wrote about his father’s denunciation: “When my father’s name was called, the crowd shouted “Down with Chen Huaikai!” and I shouted, too. I heard my own voice – it was very loud. One Red Guard called my name and I went forward in front of people’s stares. Now I don’t remember what I said. I only remember that my father glanced at me once and I shoved him on his shoulder. I am not sure how heavy the shove was, but after all, I shoved my father.”¹⁵⁸

Authors who had been Red Guards wrote about the rustication movement and the physical and psychological alienation that it brought.¹⁵⁹ Lu Xinhua’s ‘Shanghen’ (meaning ‘The Scar’) is widely considered to have been the first literary work of the Scar Literature, giving the genre its name.¹⁶⁰ ‘Shanghen’ tells the story of what a mother and daughter endured in the Cultural Revolution. In the novel, the mother is branded a traitor of the revolution and the daughter denounces her. However, the daughter has to continue to live with her family background having been demonised as the enemy. The revolution ends and the mother is officially rehabilitated. The daughter rushes to her mother but it is too late, the mother has died but left her daughter a letter in which the “mother recounts that although she has scars on her body, the wounds on her daughter’s heart might be even worse.”

In writing Scar Literature, the victims of the Cultural Revolution represented their own experiences of the movement, they wanted to record the horrors of the revolution so that they would not be repeated, and they attempted to deal with their trauma through testimony.¹⁶¹ The authors felt that they needed to record their experiences of the revolution and expose the suffering it caused so that there was proof of the national catastrophe. Some authors also sought to examine “the negative side of the Chinese national features in order to draw the correct lessons from this disaster.”¹⁶² The literature, in its being written and read,

¹⁵³ “Literature as a source of Socio-cultural studies,” 34.

¹⁵⁴ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 58.

¹⁵⁵ “Literature as a source of Socio-cultural studies,” 34.

¹⁵⁶ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 91.

¹⁵⁷ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 107.

¹⁵⁸ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 118.

¹⁵⁹ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 165-166.

¹⁶⁰ “Literature as a source of Socio-cultural studies,” 34; For this and the following, Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 1.

¹⁶¹ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 2, 263.

¹⁶² Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 54.

also functioned as a method to help the wounded “clean their injuries and put-on bandages.”¹⁶³ Scar Literature gave the authors a means through which they could process and work through their trauma after a decade of what Ba Jin called “ideological slavery.”¹⁶⁴ For many of the writers of Scar Literature, recording their experiences allowed them to regain their voice which had ripped away from them as punishment for being intellectuals by the Maoist regime. For the Chinese readers of Scar Literature, many “identified with the Cultural Revolution’s victims and worked through their personal trauma.”¹⁶⁵ Scar Literature became a cultural and social movement because it gave those who lived through the Cultural Revolution a space in which to confess, to expose the pain and suffering and to heal their trauma.

For the authors of Scar Literature, the representations of their experiences were restricted in several ways. The authors were initially restricted by their own trauma which they felt they had to unburden in a way that “did justice” to their “inner compulsion to tell.”¹⁶⁶ For the survivors of the Cultural Revolution, the acknowledgement and exploration of their trauma was deeply distressing and painful.¹⁶⁷ In recording a memory or trauma, the survivor struggled with committing the experience to words because words cannot always hold the “precision and force of their memory.”¹⁶⁸ After gaining the courage to tell their stories, the survivors of the Cultural Revolution faced the second set of restrictions: the politics of producing their story and having their story received.¹⁶⁹

Even though Deng had proclaimed that the Party had ceased intervention in artistic creation, the CC had passed a Resolution stating that the Cultural Revolution was an “error,” and a liberation campaign had been launched, few Chinese writers dared to explicitly exhibit their opinions and ideas for fear of persecution.¹⁷⁰ Some writers wrote autobiographies, but many opted for fiction as it granted them “a means to fictionalize what could not be said due to the political climate of the time period.”¹⁷¹ The Scar Literature that was produced inside China greatly differed from that produced outside of China because the writers had different material conditions of production and reception. In other words, the level of state censorship, self-censorship and the attitude of the audience differed which affected what the authors could and would write. Although Deng had slightly lightened state control, state censorship was still in place in China and writers still faced the danger of political persecution if they were too critical of the Party. In contrast, Chinese writers living outside of China, and especially those who would not return to China, did not face the same danger of political persecution so could write more freely, explicitly and critically. With the fear of political persecution hanging over the writers in China, they had to engage in great deal of self-censorship. The authors had to testify to their trauma through implication, writing explicitly could incur severe political charges and their work was unlikely to be published.

The political circumstances dictated the boundaries in which they could speak in their personal voice. The writers outside of China faced neither the state censorship nor the self-imposed censorship because they were free from the danger of political persecution. However, for some authors they did not feel completely free from restraints as they experienced inner turmoil resulting from “their love of the motherland and their discontent

¹⁶³ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 11.

¹⁶⁴ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 54.

¹⁶⁵ Min Yang, “Revolutionary Trauma and Reconfigured Identities: Representing the Chinese Cultural Revolution in Scar Literature,” (PhD, University of Alverta, 2012), 9.

¹⁶⁶ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 49-50.

¹⁶⁷ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 58.

¹⁶⁸ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 50.

¹⁶⁹ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 58.

¹⁷⁰ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 51.

¹⁷¹ For this and the following, Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 57-60 (quote from 57).

with the Maoist political system under which they had suffered.” The conflict arose because in China, patriotism was and is seen as essentially the same as socialism, which translates to loyalty to the country meaning loyalty to the Party.¹⁷² The audience of Scar Literature within China was “numb in the post-trauma stage” providing two responses to the literature: either the audience remained silent in the fear that a second Cultural Revolution would begin or they asked sceptical questions including: “If everyone has a traumatic story, what’s the point of telling it?”¹⁷³ The audience outside of China welcomed any information about the Cultural Revolution and the Mao era as it had been obscured by the CCP for so long. Regardless of the censorship and restrictions, Scar Literature started to appear in 1976 before the Party officially denounced the Cultural Revolution, illustrating the writers’ courage as they spoke out about the old regime.¹⁷⁴ The writers inside China spoke “audaciously at the risk of criticism and investigation,” the writers outside of China were fortunate to have the freedom to write and not face the danger of persecution.¹⁷⁵ An example of one such writer inside China is Ba Jin whose *Random Reflections* was published in Beijing in 1987.¹⁷⁶ Ba Jin said that he “could not die peacefully until he uttered the truth” and being in his eighties he wrote boldly as if it was his will.¹⁷⁷ Ba Jin explicitly dealt with “such themes as humanism vs. animalism, the Cultural Revolution as an inferno, the exposure and the healing of the scar left by the individual and collective trauma.”¹⁷⁸ The risk of writing about such themes was great but Ba Jin escaped persecution possibly because he held a significant position in the literary sphere.

The victims of the Cultural Revolution used Scar Literature to represent the dark side of the revolution. They gave a voice to the human experience of the revolution which had been suppressed by the Party and the “ideological slavery” of the decade. The authors represented the movement as having been a period in which human bonds had been severed as people committed atrocities against each other. Scar Literature told the story of how it felt to be on the perpetrating and receiving ends of mass criticism. It enlightened its readers to the emotional toll on the individuals who lived through the revolution, those who had persecuted others, and those who had been persecuted by others. Authors within China had to imply the direct effect that Mao and the CCP had had on them and the physical and psychological trauma they had experienced because the fear of political persecution remained long after the Cultural Revolution had ended. However, they still represented the revolution as being a period of pain and suffering rather than a step towards the Maoist utopia. Chinese authors living outside of China freely and explicitly detailed the suffering that they had experienced as a result of Mao and the CCP’s policies. Scar Literature represented the Cultural Revolution as an era in which Chinese people were subjected to extreme corporal and mental pain, torment and suffering which “almost exceeded the range of human experience” under the instruction of their own government.¹⁷⁹

STATE REACTION TO SCAR LITERATURE

Not everyone appreciated the authors of Scar Literature recording the dark side of the Cultural Revolution. There was debate about whether literature should aim to praise or

¹⁷² Macmillan, *Dangerous games*, 68.

¹⁷³ For this and the following, Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 59-60.

¹⁷⁴ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 9.

¹⁷⁵ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 66.

¹⁷⁶ Tongqi Lin, “A Search for China’s Soul,” *Daedalus* 122, no. 2 (1993): 171-188 at 173, www.jstor.org/stable/20027172.

¹⁷⁷ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 51.

¹⁷⁸ For this and the following, Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 52.

¹⁷⁹ Zhigang, “Chinese Scar Literature,” 59.

expose.¹⁸⁰ Some critics, who still followed Maoist ideology, argued that literary works should continue to follow the principle of socialist realism instated in 1949 which held that literature should praise the Party and its socialism. Scar Literature was faulted for exposing too many of the negative events in society and it was claimed that it would have a negative impact on people's political views. Nevertheless, the majority of the literature's audience believed that it was a "positive development of profound social and historical significance." However, there was one important and powerful group in the audience that by the 1980s had grown less than happy about the Scar Literature's exposing tendencies: the CCP.

Initially, the CCP tolerated Scar Literature because it followed the line of Deng's liberation campaign and could be used as a political tool. Although a highly politicised medium in itself, as it asked questions about the Maoist regime and the social, cultural, and political state of China, Scar Literature also became instrumentalised by Deng. It did not actively originate to serve as political legitimisation for Deng's new regime of socialist modernisation, but it did end up partly serving as such.¹⁸¹ Scar Literature emerged as a result of the more liberal campaign which encouraged intellectuals to freely write their opinions. Hua Guofeng's political reputation was somewhat tarnished by the stories told by the Scar Literature because he still remained loyal to Mao's campaign in the post-Mao era.¹⁸² Posters began to appear that criticised Hua as he was portrayed "as a puppet controlled by Mao from beyond the grave." Deng on the other hand, had himself faced persecution during the beginning of the Cultural Revolution as he was accused of thinking capitalistically and so stripped of his government titles (although he was allowed to remain a member of the Party).¹⁸³ Scar Literature aided Deng in resting the paramount position in the Party from Hua because in criticising Hua for continuing to expound Mao's campaign, which the country had turned its back on, Deng rose as the face of the "new era of economic growth and political stability after decades of turmoil and uncertainty."¹⁸⁴

After instrumentalising Scar Literature in order to gain political legitimisation, Deng's tolerance of its expression of public loss and anger receded. The authors of Scar Literature had articulated the traumas of the Cultural Revolution and then had begun to examine societal injustices which had been caused by Party policies.¹⁸⁵ The stories began to take a more critical tone and were considered to be "morbid" by China's political leaders.¹⁸⁶ The analysis of contemporary societal injustices culminated in the early phase of a call for democratisation of China. For the CCP, the call for democracy passed the boundary of acceptable public expression and so the Party attacked the movement.¹⁸⁷ By the 1980s, a new campaign was launched which cracked down on the freedom of expression in the Scar Literature, effectively ending the expressions of social criticism and the traumatic effects of terror and loss through literature.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁰ For this and the following, Zhigang, "Chinese Scar Literature," 10-11.

¹⁸¹ "Literature as a source of Socio-cultural studies," 34; Kirk A. Denton, "Review: [Untitled]," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 61, no. 2 (December 2001), 433-441 at 440, www.jstor.org/stable/3558575; Robert Weatherley and Qiang Zhang, "Conclusion" in *History and Nationalist Legitimacy in Contemporary China* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

¹⁸² For this and the following, Weatherley and Qiang, "Conclusion."

¹⁸³ Whitney Stewart, *Deng Xiaoping: Leader in a Changing China* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company, 2001), 72.

¹⁸⁴ Weatherley and Qiang, "Conclusion."

¹⁸⁵ Weatherley and Qiang, "Conclusion."

¹⁸⁶ For this and the following, Kleinman and Kleinman, "How Bodies Remember," 714.

¹⁸⁷ Weatherley and Qiang, "Conclusion."

¹⁸⁸ Kleinman and Kleinman, "How Bodies Remember," 714.

In suppressing the publication of Scar Literature after it had ceased been a useful political tool for the state, the CCP aimed to enforce their policy of “Forgetting History.”¹⁸⁹ A policy which requires any detail of history that is not in the interests of the Party to be excluded from any medium in an attempt to coerce the society into forgetting its occurrence.¹⁹⁰ As a result of the suppression of criticism in literature, the CCP began modifying the social memory of the Cultural Revolution into “an authorized version”, a “public transcript” which placed responsibility for the movement with Mao and absolved the Party.¹⁹¹ This “public transcript” was officially established in the 1981 Resolution.

II. THE DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT, 1989

The Democracy Movement in China in 1989 was sparked by the death of the former Party Secretary Hu Yaobang who had been removed from office when he failed to “come down hard” on student protesters in 1987.¹⁹² Hu did not advocate for democratic rights, but he played a significant role in the 1980s reforms, winning the support of intellectuals, including students, by “representing their interests and restoring reputations that had been trashed during the Cultural Revolution.”¹⁹³ The Democracy Movement began on April 17 and ended by aggressive military suppression on June 4, 1989, now widely known outside of China as the Tiananmen Square Massacre. The protestors argued that the government’s economic reforms were not enough to reverse the regress caused by much of the communist era, that political reforms were also necessary.

Many of the protestors viewed democracy as being primarily in service to the national strengthening of China and to prevent another national tragedy like the Cultural Revolution.¹⁹⁴ “Democracy means that the people enjoy the free and equal right to vote, and freedom of speech, the press assembly, association, procession and demonstration” the Communist Youth League even stated.¹⁹⁵ The League, along with the protestors, pressed for the establishment of democracy to avoid another “catastrophe” like the Cultural Revolution.¹⁹⁶ Scar Literature had given the next generation a new way to value personal life, supporting their claims to speak as individual citizens who desired the right to “pursue happiness, not only material well-being or public virtue” which they saw as only possible in a democratic China.¹⁹⁷ Whilst only running for six weeks, the Democracy Movement was “the largest, most enduring, and best organized antiestablishment campaign since the founding of the People’s Republic of China” and it mobilised millions of Chinese citizens.¹⁹⁸

The Cultural Revolution influenced the Democracy Movement of 1989 and the state’s suppression of it, as the revolution had been interpreted as a cautionary tale.¹⁹⁹ To the citizens, the Cultural Revolution was a warning of the dangers of Maoism, whereas to the

¹⁸⁹ Fang Lizhi, “The Chinese Amnesia,” *New York Review*, 27 September 1990, www.nybooks.com/articles/1990/09/27/the-chinese-amnesia/

¹⁹⁰ Fang Lizhi, “The Chinese Amnesia.”

¹⁹¹ Kleinman and Kleinman, “How Bodies Remember,” 714.

¹⁹² Tianjian Shi, “Movement in China in 1989: Dynamics and Failure,” *Asian Survey* 30, no. 12 (December 1990): 1186-1205 at 1186, doi.org/10.2307/2644993; Timothy Brook, *Quelling the People: The Military Suppression of the Beijing Democracy Movement* (California: Stanford University Press, 1992), 21.

¹⁹³ Brook, *Quelling the People*, 21.

¹⁹⁴ Calhoun and Wasserstrom, “Legacies of Radicalism,” 37.

¹⁹⁵ Patricia Kim, “Chinese Student Protests: Explaining the Student Movements of the 1980s and the Lack of Protests Since 1989,” *Berkeley Undergraduate Journal* 21, no. 2 (2008): 1-42 at 28, escholarship.org/uc/item/25r226jz.

¹⁹⁶ Kim, “Chinese Student Protests,” 28.

¹⁹⁷ Calhoun and Wasserstrom, “Legacies of Radicalism,” 46.

¹⁹⁸ Zuo and Benford. “Mobilization Processes,” 131.

¹⁹⁹ Calhoun and Wasserstrom, “Legacies of Radicalism,” 35.

state, the Cultural Revolution told a story of how dangerous student protesting could be.²⁰⁰ The students who initiated the Democracy Movement had been taught the post-Maoist representation of the Cultural Revolution “as a virtual paradigm case of chaos and political evil” in which the Red Guards had played a significant role.²⁰¹ They had also had access to Scar Literature and so understood the darker side of the revolution which the people had been subjected to at the hands of their government. These representations taught the protestors in 1989 that it was imperative to distinguish themselves and their actions from those of the Red Guards and to prevent the path of degeneration as seen in the Cultural Revolution.²⁰² The protestors repeatedly differentiated themselves from the Red Guards verbally, in writing and through their actions. They were wary of manipulation from above which the Red Guards had fallen prey to and desired to maintain a level of organisation which early leaders of the Red Guards had lacked. Organisation was achieved by “using techniques like linking arms while marching in order to keep out agents provocateurs.”²⁰³ The demonstrators also constantly sought to emphasise the legal and constitutional nature of their protesting to prevent a degeneration similar to that of the Cultural Revolution.²⁰⁴

The CCP disseminated the idea that the 1989 student protestors were the same as the Red Guards through their state-run newspapers because it wanted to stop the Democracy Movement that threatened its power. The students fought against this judgement by distributing handbills insisting that the comparison was inaccurate.²⁰⁵ A handbill written by graduate students at Beijing Normal University stated: “We hope you [government leaders] will act out of concern for the interests of the whole country, and recognize this pure patriotic student movement as the successor to the May Fourth Movement seventy years ago. This movement should not be so much as mentioned in the same breath with the movement of the Red Guards...who were manipulated and deceived by others.”²⁰⁶ In this handbill, the students aligned themselves with the students of 1919 whose anti-imperialist protest on May 4 brought a change in mass consciousness and culture and culminated in the establishment of the CCP in 1921.²⁰⁷ In identifying their actions with those of the students in the May Fourth Movement, it can be argued that the students of 1989 hoped to remind their government of a student protest that was interpreted as legitimate and positive, so that they might see the 1989 protest in the same light. The protestors represented the Red Guards, their predecessors, as victims having been deprived of their autonomy as they were “manipulated and deceived by others.”²⁰⁸ In blaming “others” for manipulating the Red Guards, the students do not specify who it is that they believe was responsible for the Cultural Revolution, they could have been referencing Mao as the “public transcript” stated, or they could have been suggesting that the Party as a whole was to blame. The protestors had to be extremely careful because if their grievances were interpreted as being critical of the Party, the state would crush the movement with a violent response that it could easily legitimise when referencing the Red Guard movement.²⁰⁹

To the protestors in 1989 Democracy Movement, the Cultural Revolution, as represented in the post-Mao era and in Scar Literature, was educational. The representations

²⁰⁰ Calhoun and Wasserstrom, “Legacies of Radicalism,” 35, 47.

²⁰¹ Calhoun and Wasserstrom, “Legacies of Radicalism,” 34.

²⁰² Calhoun and Wasserstrom, “Legacies of Radicalism,” 33, 47.

²⁰³ Calhoun and Wasserstrom, “Legacies of Radicalism,” 47-48.

²⁰⁴ Calhoun and Wasserstrom, “Legacies of Radicalism,” 49.

²⁰⁵ Calhoun and Wasserstrom, “Legacies of Radicalism,” 34.

²⁰⁶ Calhoun and Wasserstrom, “Legacies of Radicalism,” 34.

²⁰⁷ Joseph T. Chen, “The May Fourth Movement Redefined,” *Modern Asian Studies* 4, no. 1 (1970): 63-81 at 63, www.jstor.org/stable/311753

²⁰⁸ Calhoun and Wasserstrom, “Legacies of Radicalism,” 46.

²⁰⁹ Zuo and Benford. “Mobilization Processes,” 139.

taught the protestors three things. Firstly, that the current political structure was insufficient to prevent a reoccurrence of the Cultural Revolution, hence their call for democracy. Secondly, in order for the protestors to achieve political change and prevent the state from aggressively crushing the movement, they had to distinguish themselves from the Red Guards. Thirdly, the representations informed the students' interpretation of the Cultural Revolution. The students interpreted the movement in line with the "public transcript" insofar as they considered the revolution to have been a period of horrors and suffering, but it followed the Scar Literature's representation of the revolution in holding the Party responsible for the horrors and the suffering.

Conclusion

The interpretation and representation of the Cultural Revolution in China changed in the 1980s because the post-Mao government and the public re-evaluated the Cultural Revolution and Mao's historical role, bringing a change in political and economic policies.²¹⁰ In 1981, the Party sought to readdress Mao's persona and his place in history by creating a public transcript that assigned full responsibility for the Cultural Revolution to Mao. Nevertheless, the state still argued that Mao's positive contributions to China overshadowed his mistakes: "Even though he committed serious mistakes during the period of socialist construction, his accomplishments were first, his mistakes second."²¹¹ The state changed its interpretation and representation of the Cultural Revolution in the 1980s in order to legitimise its rule, which had come into question, through exonerating itself from blame for the movement.

The post-Mao government appeared to be keen to move away from the Cultural Revolution and to begin to economically develop China. In 1978, only two years after Mao's death, the Third Plenum meeting took place, which is considered to be the event that began China's era of "Reform and Opening Up" by making a decisive break with its past.²¹² It was as a result of that meeting that Deng effectively took power from Hua and a new economic policy for China was implemented.²¹³ The change in political policy and representation of the Cultural Revolution allowed a brief period of liberalisation in China which gave some victims of the Cultural Revolution the opportunity to express their trauma and the dark side of the movement in Scar Literature. However, the authors of Scar Literature living within China implied the direct effect that Mao and the state had had on their trauma because they feared political persecution. The 1989 Democracy Movement protestors' interpretation of the Cultural Revolution combined the public transcript's and Scar Literature's representations of the movement. From their interpretation, the protestors learned that it was necessary to differentiate themselves from the Red Guards to prevent the state from legitimising a violent crackdown on the movement. In the 1980s, the people changed their interpretation and representation of the Cultural Revolution because the change in political policy had brought a level of liberalisation that gave them an opportunity to express their interpretations. However, the peoples' interpretations were not fully realised in their representations of the movement because the threat of state persecution was still very strong.

²¹⁰ Wakeman Jr., "Revolutionary Rites," 177.

²¹¹ Wakeman Jr., "Revolutionary Rites," 178.

²¹² "Literature as a source of Socio-cultural studies – Study of the Chinese society of the Cultural Revolution through "Scar Literature"," (The English and Foreign Languages University), 33; Barry Naughton, *Growing Out of the Plan: Chinese Economic Reform, 1978-1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge, University Press, 1995), 74.

²¹³ Naughton, *Growing Out of the Plan*, 74.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONTEMPORARY REPRESENTATIONS

Ever since the CC issued the 1981 Resolution which detailed a “rapid and highly abstract consensus” on the Cultural Revolution, the conversation about the movement has been set in stone: “the Cultural Revolution was a disaster, full stop. It’s time to move on.”²¹⁴ The fixed discourse about the Cultural Revolution is consistently repeated in contemporary China through the frequent censorship of differing opinions. The state has propagated the fixed discourse in order to achieve its present goals of legitimising its rule, preventing a second Cultural Revolution and dissuading compensation claims. However, the citizens seem to desire a more nuanced and holistic, and sometimes even nostalgic, picture of the movement which they find in discussions in new media and in the personal stories of members of the ‘lost generation.’ As a result, the official representation of the Cultural Revolution differs to the interpretation that some of China’s citizens have of the movement.

In this chapter, I will discuss how the state’s representation of the Cultural Revolution, as delineated in the 1981 Resolution, is propagated in traditional media, museums - or rather the lack of museums - about the Cultural Revolution, and in secondary school history textbooks. I will then explain the division in the ‘lost generation’s’ approach to representing the movement as being a result of survivor’s guilt: some choose to speak out, others stay silent, and some carry out memorial activities with a sense of nostalgia. Finally, I will assess how the generation born in the 1990s interpret the Cultural Revolution and the impact that the movement has had on them.

The State

I. THE MEDIA

In the current media landscape of China, state-controlled outlets extol the official opinion of the Cultural Revolution, as defined by the CCP, with many television programs and films avoiding the movement all together.²¹⁵ The CCP has even warned publishing houses, newspapers, journals, and television and radio broadcasters that the Cultural Revolution is a “forbidden area” or at least one liable to strict censorship.²¹⁶ There are a very limited number of articles published by traditional media that oppose or deviate from the official transcript. The majority of critical standpoints in regard to the Cultural Revolution are expressed in new forms of media, such as blogs.²¹⁷

May 16, 2016, the fiftieth anniversary of the start of the Cultural Revolution, passed with no official acknowledgement or commemoration from the CCP or its media outlets.²¹⁸ Discussions about the anniversary were even suppressed on social media platforms.²¹⁹ The silence was broken the following day by the Party’s official mouthpiece the *People’s Daily* and the state-controlled *Global Times* which published articles condemning the theory and practice of the Cultural Revolution and calling on the citizens to look to the future.²²⁰ The *People’s Daily* praised China’s progress in the “30 years of reform and opening up” and

²¹⁴ Kerry Brown, “Why China still can’t make sense of the Cultural Revolution,” *Conversation*, 20 May 2016, theconversation.com/why-china-still-cant-make-sense-of-the-cultural-revolution-59624

²¹⁵ Lowe, “Unraveling the Chinese Cultural Revolution,” 3.

²¹⁶ Tammy Erickson, “Generations in China,” *Harvard Business Review* (2009): hbr.org/2009/03/generations-in-china

²¹⁷ Lowe, “Unraveling the Chinese Cultural Revolution,” 4.

²¹⁸ Bendini, *The Cultural Revolution in China*, 1.

²¹⁹ Bendini, *The Cultural Revolution in China*, 4.

²²⁰ Bendini, *The Cultural Revolution in China*, 4.

effectively termed the Cultural Revolution a closed chapter as the writer called for the citizens to rally around the Party and its leader, Xi Jinping, looking to the “brighter future.”²²¹ The article claimed that the reassessment of the Cultural Revolution laid out in the 1981 “Resolution on History” was a “factual” evaluation that has “withstood the test of experience, the test of the people, and the test of history, and [it] possess[es] unshakable scientific truth and authority.”²²² The citizens were called on to look to the future, down the “increasing broad road” that China is taking, and to “firmly fix in our memories the historic lessons of the Cultural Revolution, firmly adhere to the party’s political conclusions about the Cultural Revolution, and resolutely prevent and resist meddling from the left and the right that focuses on the problems of the Cultural Revolution.”²²³

Essentially, the article informed the reader that the Party had taken all necessary lessons from the Cultural Revolution and assimilated them into their current doctrine rendering any further questioning or reassessment of the movement not only unnecessary but also prohibited. The editorial published by the *Global Times* on the same day reflected this idea as it claimed that “the lessons of the turmoil had been learned” and that “entirely denying the values of the Cultural Revolution will help Chinese society remain vigilant against the danger of all kinds of disorder.”²²⁴

It has been observed that content concerning the Cultural Revolution is often blocked in Chinese on the internet.²²⁵ Nevertheless, those born in the 1990s, who grew up under the rhetoric of the official transcript, are using blogs and social media websites to discuss different perspectives on the revolution.²²⁶ However, access and content restrictions in new media, such as on social media websites and blogs, are still strictly implemented. The Great Firewall is the colloquial name given to China’s system of online censorship which has existed since 2000.²²⁷ In 2000, the Ministry of Public Security launched a system of “censorship and surveillance aimed at restricting content, identifying and locating individuals, and providing immediate access to personal records.”²²⁸ Due to the Great Firewall, Chinese people are faced with an alternative internet to the rest of the world. With thousands of foreign websites blocked, including Google, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, Chinese people are provided with a plethora of heavily censored Chinese websites which serve the same functions.²²⁹ Yaqiu Wang described this censorship as “people [...] living in an information bubble that the government is getting better at controlling.”²³⁰ It is unclear as to how aware or concerned new media users are about the level of control the government has over the internet.

When an image of Jiang Qing, Mao’s third wife, member of the Gang of Four, and who the CCP held heavily responsible for the violence of the Cultural Revolution, was shared

²²¹ *People’s Daily Online*, “Commentary: China will never allow the repetition of Cultural Revolution,” 17 May 2016, en.people.cn/n3/2016/0517/c98649-9059031.html

²²² *New York Times*, “Excerpt From People’s Daily on the Cultural Revolution,” 17 May 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/05/18/world/asia/cultural-revolution-peoples-daily-commentary.html

²²³ *New York Times*, “Excerpt From People’s Daily.”

²²⁴ Bendini, *The Cultural Revolution in China*, 5.

²²⁵ Zhang, “The Specter of the Cultural Revolution.”

²²⁶ Lowe, “Unraveling the Chinese Cultural Revolution,” 3-4.

²²⁷ Tyler Smith, “Breaching the Great Firewall: What has censorship done to the Chinese public’s demand for politically sensitive news?” *American Economic Association* (2019) www.aeaweb.org/research/censorship-china-cultural-revolution-new-york-times; Yaqiu Wang, “In China, the ‘Great Firewall’ Is Changing a Generation,” *Politico*, 1 September 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/01/china-great-firewall-changing-generation

²²⁸ Yaqiu, “In China, the ‘Great Firewall’.”

²²⁹ Li Yuan, “A Generation Grows Up in China Without Google, Facebook or Twitter,” *New York Times*, 6 August 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/08/06/technology/china-generation-blocked-internet.html

²³⁰ Yaqiu, “In China, the ‘Great Firewall’.”

with the heading, “do you know who this person is?” most people who frequent blogs were unable to identify her. One individual explained their inability to identify Jiang Qing: “You hear Jiang Qing’s name in classes and once or twice in the news, but if you’re not interested in history like me, that’s about it. When my girlfriend showed me the photo, I thought it was [Taiwanese actress] Jiang Qingpin.”²³¹ This example of Jiang Qing’s photo being circulated suggests that the CCP’s restrictions placed on education about the Cultural Revolution are effective as many people failed to correctly identify the person in the photo. Nonetheless, this example does also indicate that The Great Firewall has not completely censored or prevented discussions about the Cultural Revolution in new media.

One student who reported on her interactions on the blogosphere supported this idea when they expressed that “These discussions [on the Cultural Revolution] seem more real to me than what you see on television or in the paper, because it is just people freely speaking their minds.”²³² This user’s report suggests that in the blogosphere there is greater diversity in the perspectives on the Cultural Revolution that are expressed in comparison to traditional media, such as newspapers, the content of which can be more easily manipulated by the government. Yu Haiping supported this idea when he argued that new media serves as an “outlet of public outcry and a transmission belt of public opinion.”²³³ The very limited conversation about Jiang Qing suggests that the CCP’s desire to relegate the movement to history and “move on” is being largely achieved in educational spheres. However, it appears that in new media, the Cultural Revolution is more openly discussed and represented in a myriad of ways.

II. MUSEUMS, OR RATHER THE LACK OF

In the 1980s, Ba Jin called for the creation of a Cultural Revolution museum as he wrote that “‘Let history not be repeated’ must not be an empty phrase.”²³⁴ But Ba’s proposal was quickly dismissed, and governmental archives of the period were closed for consultation, with most still remaining closed today.²³⁵ Feng Jicai, the author of “Ten years of Madness,” along with many other intellectuals also petitioned the government to institute a museum to commemorate the revolution, but they were repeatedly rejected.²³⁶ When the National Museum of China near to Tiananmen Square was renovated in 2011, the Cultural Revolution was commemorated in the form of one photo of Red Guards waving to Mao and one line of text.²³⁷ The lack of museums about the Cultural Revolution due to the government’s consistent dismissals of proposals illustrates the Party’s desire to prevent further re-evaluations, effectively leaving the movement in the past. However, in 2005, two independently run Cultural Revolution museums were finally established: one that commemorates and honours those who lost their lives and one that tries to preserve history in line with the CCP’s doctrine.²³⁸

²³¹ Lowe, “Unraveling the Chinese Cultural Revolution,” 1.

²³² Lowe, “Unraveling the Chinese Cultural Revolution,” 7.

²³³ Lowe, “Unraveling the Chinese Cultural Revolution,” 4.

²³⁴ Barclay bram Shoemaker, “Fan Jianchuan’s Museum Industrial Complex,” *Medium*, 19 January 2018, medium.com/@barclaybram/fan-jianchuans-museum-industrial-complex-534108783b62

²³⁵ Bendini, *The Cultural Revolution in China*, 9; Perry Link, “50 years later, China still has yet to come to terms with Mao’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution,” *Diplomat*, 16 May 2016, thediplomat.com/2016/05/how-china-remembers-the-cultural-revolution/

²³⁶ Zhang, “The Specter of the Cultural Revolution.”

²³⁷ Zhang, “The Specter of the Cultural Revolution”; Shoemaker, “Fan Jianchuan’s Museum Industrial Complex.”

²³⁸ Quartz, “Two museums in China about the Cultural Revolution show very different versions of history,” 16 May 2016, qz.com/684836/two-museums-in-china-about-the-cultural-revolution-show-very-different-versions-of-history/

The first unofficial Cultural Revolution Museum is situated in Shantou and was opened after Peng Qi'an, a former local Party official and the museum's founder, spent two decades collecting donations.²³⁹ Peng told the press that after the museum was opened they have had "few visitors because they aren't allowed to publicise its existence."²⁴⁰ At the museum's centre is a building of green, red and yellow tiles which describes the brutality of the revolution through documents and photographs.²⁴¹ There are 70 graves of people from Shantou that died during the movement scattered around the hill on which the museum is built, including one mass grave in which 28 people were buried together.²⁴² It is the only museum in China that commemorates the victims of the Cultural Revolution. In the lead up to the fiftieth anniversary of the start of the revolution, exhibits at the museum started to be covered by the CCP's propaganda posters and banners. The government had banned activities or public remembrances of the movement and it was claimed that "Because of the need to adjust the function of the park [where the museum is situated], repairs will be carried out," After this announcement, workers "smoothed concrete over the names of victims, wrapped "Socialist Core Values" banners around the main exhibition hall, placed red-and-yellow propaganda posters over stone memorials, and raised scaffolding around statues of critics of Mao."²⁴³

The CCP never condoned the creation of the Cultural Revolution Museum in Shantou and it appears that it decided to try and silence its commemorative efforts by 'covering up' representations of the past.²⁴⁴ Nevertheless, after visiting the museum in 2016 one writer wrote, "But there are signs of visitors who have refused to forget. Flowers, now withering under the sun, lay at the tombstones for the deceased."²⁴⁵ In continuing to remember and commemorate those who lost their lives in the Cultural Revolution, some citizens refuse to subscribe to the idea of the public transcript as being set in stone. The actions of remembrance that defy the public transcript suggest that there are some Chinese citizens who hold a different interpretation of the movement.

The second museum which marks the Cultural Revolution is the Jianchuan Museum Cluster in Chengdu, the largest museum complex in mainland China.²⁴⁶ The museum is divided into four sections: the Anti-Japanese War, the Cultural Revolution, major earthquakes, and folk culture. Life under Mao's rule is displayed in over 100,000 Cultural Revolution exhibits including newspaper articles, washbasins and cups decorated with quotations from Mao, stories of educated youth, propaganda posters, and badges engraved with words such as "loyal" and "long live Chairman Mao." The independently run museum, established and funded by property developer and collector Fan Jianchuan, still follows the public transcript as there are relatively few mentions of the revolution's brutality. Commemoration for the lives lost is not an intention of the museum as its exhibitions on the Cultural Revolution prioritise artefacts such as porcelain art work, clocks, badges and stamps.²⁴⁷ In the museum's collection of artefacts, those relating to the Cultural Revolution are most numerous, but they are also closed to external academic inquiry. Fan stated, "I have

²³⁹ *New York Times*, "Fate Catches Up to a Cultural Revolution Museum in China," 3 October 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/10/03/world/asia/china-cultural-revolution-shantou-museum.html

²⁴⁰ Shayla Love, "My grandparents survived the Cultural Revolution: have I inherited their trauma?" *Mosaic*, 13 December 2016, mosaicscience.com/story/trauma-china-cultural-revolution-epigenetics-psychology/

²⁴¹ *New York Times*, "Fate Catches Up."

²⁴² Yang Fan and Qiao Long, "China 'Tries to Cover Up' Guangdong's Cultural Revolution Museum," *Radio Free Asia*, 5 June 2016, www.rfa.org/english/news/china/china-tries-to-cover-up-05062016113127.html

²⁴³ *New York Times*, "Fate Catches Up."

²⁴⁴ Fan and Long, "China 'Tries to Cover Up'."

²⁴⁵ *Quartz*, "Two museums in China."

²⁴⁶ For this and the following, *Quartz*, "Two museums in China."

²⁴⁷ "Jianchuan Museum," The Best in Heritage, presentations.thebestinheritage.com/2016/JianchuanMuseum

signed a memorandum with them [the government-affiliated Chinese Social Sciences Academy] agreeing access.”²⁴⁸ The agreed access being exclusive access to the collection for the Chinese Social Sciences Academy and the artefacts being emphatically closed to all other academics. Fan carefully chooses what he will exhibit because “so many people, both powerful and ordinary, are so intimately implicated in it [the Cultural Revolution] that were he to reveal the entirety of his archives now he would likely change history and reopen old wounds.”

In the museum, Fan has the power to choose which stories about the Cultural Revolution are told, he creates a narrative about the time period. However, his choice in narrative still seems to be influenced by the Party transcript as he regularly collaborates with the local governments on different projects and will leave the entire Jianchuan museum project to the Chengdu government when he dies. In displaying paraphernalia from the Cultural Revolution era it could be interpreted that the museum does deviate from the official transcript by carrying on the conversation about the movement and not leaving it in the past. However, the museum’s exhibitions do not challenge other aspects of the CCP’s reassessment of the movement, instead they conform and propagate the conclusion reached in the 1981 Resolution. For example, the official verdict of Mao being “70% correct and 30% wrong,”²⁴⁹ is reflected in artefacts that feature quotations of Mao such as the above-mentioned badges and pictures stating, “serve the people.”²⁵⁰ It can therefore be understood that the Jianchuan Museum Cluster predominantly represents the Cultural Revolution by focusing on the positive actions of Mao and ignoring or overlooking the atrocities committed.

The state has sought to control the representation of the Cultural Revolution in the media and by consistently dismissing museum proposals in order to direct communicative memory so that compensation claims would be dissuaded. If the CCP was to admit to having played a part in, or even actively enabled, the horrors committed during the Cultural Revolution, it would open itself up to compensation claims from the movement’s victims.²⁵¹ The state has thus, made great efforts to direct communicative memory through issuing one acceptable representation of the movement in which the CCP is absolved from all responsibility. Jan Assmann recognises communicative memory as the first stage of collective memory, comprised of memories that are based exclusively on everyday communication between eyewitnesses and participants, meaning that they are socially mediated and relate to a group. The most important characteristic of communicative memory is its limited temporal horizon, meaning that, as oral history studies indicate, its scope does not extend further than eighty (at the most, one hundred) years into the past and so changes with the passing of time.²⁵² The state has attempted to control communicative memory about the Cultural Revolution by preventing the publication of representations that differ from the CCP’s official representation of the movement and dismissing proposals for a museum. If the media was to publish dissenting views or a Cultural Revolution museum was to be opened, a discussion would be facilitated in which various representations of the movement would be communicated between the survivors. Limiting the expression of memories of those who survived the Cultural Revolution aims to prevent the production of a communicative memory in which the CCP can be held accountable for the cruelties. The state has instead assigned responsibility to Mao and the Gang of Four, who are deceased and so obviously cannot hope to offer any compensation. Nevertheless, members of the lost generation have organised memorial activities and events which has led to petitioning and demands for compensation

²⁴⁸ For this and the following, Shoemaker, “Fan Jianchuan’s Museum Industrial Complex.”

²⁴⁹ Bendini, *The Cultural Revolution in China*, 6.

²⁵⁰ Quartz, “Two museums in China.”

²⁵¹ Bonnin, “Restricted, Distorted but Alive,” 766.

²⁵² Assmann and Czaplicka, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” 127.

from the government because they feel that, as a victimised group, they are owed something by the state.²⁵³ These demands and petitions serve to reinforce the Party's determination to monitor memorial practices and dictate the production of communicative memory.²⁵⁴

II. SECONDARY SCHOOL HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

The CCP's propaganda and education departments make sure that schools teach the representations of history that help to legitimise its rule: students are taught about the suffering experienced by the Chinese due to imperialism and that the CCP has guided China to its current happiness.²⁵⁵ The secondary school history textbook used in China in 2020 (which will be adopted by all regions in mainland China by 2022) is the national unified edition and was published in the previous year by the People's Education Press under the Ministry of Education.²⁵⁶ In 2016, it was decided that textbooks for Chinese politics and history should undergo national standardisation so in 2017, according to standards given by the Ministry of Education, a group of history experts started assembling the necessary books.²⁵⁷ Chu Zhaohui, a research fellow at China's National Institute of Education Sciences told the state-controlled *Global Times* that "With the standardized textbook, the country is to give young people a common understanding of history" and that "The current depiction is consistent with Chinese people's memories of the Cultural Revolution."²⁵⁸ However, it could be argued that the "Chinese people" to whom Chu refers are the members of the CCP.

The section of the history textbook that deals with the Cultural Revolution falls under the subtitle "Chaos and Catastrophe" and conveniently blames its failure on the likes of "Lin Biao, Jiang Qing, and their cronies [who] colluded to create two counter-revolutionary organisations."²⁵⁹ Mao receives minor criticism, but only for his misinterpretation of Marxism: "Mao incorrectly believed that there was revisionism in the party centre and that the party and country were facing the risk of the resurgence of capitalism."²⁶⁰ The revolution's excesses are glossed over, perhaps because secondary school textbooks are very rarely detailed due to the limited teaching hours, as one expert who compiled the textbook claimed.²⁶¹

A history teacher noted that the theme of "the hard exploration and construction achievements of socialism" to which the Cultural Revolution is attached usually takes half of a lesson.²⁶² Whilst time restrictions may have an impact on the detail in which the Cultural Revolution can be taught, it remains that one of the key aims of China's history textbooks is to legitimise CCP leadership.²⁶³ The curriculum of any school always follows and seeks to propagate one group's vision of legitimate knowledge, it is never neutrally created. In China, the "legitimate knowledge" which is used to compile the history textbook emanates from the CCP and has done so through the official regulation of textbooks since the Party first assumed power. In its constant attempt to control the content and flow of information to

²⁵³ Bonnin, "Restricted, Distorted but Alive," 754, 767.

²⁵⁴ Bonnin, "Restricted, Distorted but Alive," 767.

²⁵⁵ Macmillan, *Dangerous games*, 121.

²⁵⁶ Shan Jie and Lin Xiaoyi, "Cultural Revolution never forgotten in Chinese textbooks or society," *Global Times*, 13 September 2020, www.globaltimes.cn/content/1200705.shtml

²⁵⁷ Shan and Lin, "Cultural Revolution never forgotten."

²⁵⁸ Shan and Lin, "Cultural Revolution never forgotten."

²⁵⁹ Robert Weatherley and Coirle Magee, "Using the Past to Legitimise the Present: The Portrayal of Good Governance in Chinese History Textbooks," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 47, no. 1 (2018): 41-69 at 52, doi:10.1177/186810261804700102

²⁶⁰ Weatherley and Magee, "Using the Past to Legitimise the Present," 52.

²⁶¹ Shan and Lin, "Cultural Revolution never forgotten."

²⁶² Shan and Lin, "Cultural Revolution never forgotten."; Zhang, "The Specter of the Cultural Revolution."

²⁶³ For this and the following, Weatherley and Magee, "Using the Past to Legitimise the Present," 48.

support its political goals, the CCP ensures that history textbooks highlight the positive aspects of China's history which work to legitimise its regime.²⁶⁴ Simultaneously, the negative historical events are conveniently overlooked or justified. Evidence of this can be seen in the incredibly brief documenting of the Cultural Revolution as secondary school students apparently only "need to study the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution," helpfully ignoring the years of persecution and violence enabled by the CCP.²⁶⁵ The state also tries to prevent teachers from deviating from the prescribed history as it encourages students to inform the government when educators stray from the correct ideological view so that they can be punished.²⁶⁶

The state-control of history textbooks' contents supports Ernest Renan's idea that 'engineering' collective memory in order to construct a peaceful co-existence is one of the underlying aims of (post-)conflict governance.²⁶⁷ This is because in dictating what students will learn about the Cultural Revolution, the state influences the cultural memory so that the national identity is sustained. In influencing the cultural memory in this way, the state employs a key method of sustaining and strengthening national identity: preventing the reproduction of "old conflicts in present-day society."²⁶⁸ The state needs to appeal to national identity in order to legitimise its rule. Ann Rigney explains that cultural memory is the second stage of collective memory as there are no longer any eyewitnesses or participants, only relics and stories that tell of the past experiences.²⁶⁹ Cultural memory is the product of the repetition of representations and has fixed points that remain unchanging with the passing of time as it is distanced from, and thus transcends, the everyday. Assmann states that the fixed points are memories of specific events in the past that are preserved by cultural formation and institutional communication.²⁷⁰ History textbooks, as a form of institutional communication, are essential to creating and sustaining the cultural memory of the Cultural Revolution. In blaming Mao and the Gang of Four in history textbooks, the state has painted the Chinese people and itself as victims. This victimhood works to create a sense of sameness in order to strengthen the national identity. The state can appeal to this shared victimhood in order to legitimise its rule, because as a victim it has the inherent inability to do wrong. As Margaret Macmillan argues, memory is selective and malleable, making it easily instrumentalised to validate, justify or achieve contemporary goals.²⁷¹ In this instance, the CCP has instrumentalised the cultural memory of the Cultural Revolution in order to achieve its contemporary goal of validating and legitimising its rule.

The state does not take well to anyone challenging its authority or its instrumentalization of the cultural memory. This was made clear when the government shut down the journal 'Freezing Point' after it published an article criticising the contents of secondary school textbooks. Chinese historian Yuan Weishi, the author of the article, argued that secondary school history textbooks essentially only contain "errors and distortions." Yuan claimed that the textbooks provide students with an extremely biased and one-sided representation of history that claims the Chinese civilisation to be superior to all others and that foreign societies are a threat. The statement that really angered the Party was that history is being taught to legitimise the use of political power, including violence, to ensure that the people stayed on the "right path."²⁷² The Party defended the representation of history taught

²⁶⁴ For this and the following, Weatherley and Magee, "Using the Past to Legitimise the Present," 52.

²⁶⁵ Shan and Lin, "Cultural Revolution never forgotten."

²⁶⁶ Yaqiu, "In China, the 'Great Firewall'."

²⁶⁷ Rigney, "Reconciliation and remembering," 251.

²⁶⁸ Rigney, "Reconciliation and remembering," 251.

²⁶⁹ Rigney, "Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory," 14.

²⁷⁰ Assmann and Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," 129.

²⁷¹ MacMillan, *Dangerous games*, 115, 165.

²⁷² For this and the following, Macmillan, *Dangerous games*, 121.

to students by accusing Yuan's views of being heretical and attacking "socialism and the leadership by the party." It appears that the government saw Yuan's criticism as threatening the legitimacy of its leadership and so responded by denouncing and seeking to silence him through the discontinuation of the journal.

The state has also sought to control the representation of the Cultural Revolution in history textbooks because the CCP has come to see too much political and cultural free thinking as an extreme danger.²⁷³ As a result of the movement and having seen first-hand a generation of young Chinese people attack all institutions of authority, including the Party, the state saw large-scale student protests as incredibly dangerous and intrinsically irrational. Essentially, the Cultural Revolution taught the CCP to fear its reoccurrence and to not trust its own people. This view helps to explain why the government responded to the student-led 1989 Democracy Movement with the Tiananmen Square Massacre.²⁷⁴ The threat that the CCP believes student mobilisation poses was also evidenced in 2013 when the Party prohibited seven topics from being discussed with students: free press, universal values, civil society, the Party's past 'mistakes', corruption, civic rights and independent judiciary.²⁷⁵ The state fears that liberalism and decentralisation would lead to a second Cultural Revolution. After having lost trust in its people, the state makes efforts to prevent student mobilisation through prohibiting them from discussing democratic topics that could spark criticism or uncomfortable questions about China's history and the Party's legitimacy to rule. Controlling the representation of the movement in history textbooks is arguably a strategy to prevent this from occurring.

The representation of the Cultural Revolution in any official capacity is controlled by the CCP and so propagates its final assessment of the movement as having been Mao's error from which all necessary lessons have been learned and therefore should be left in the past. Traditional media outlets explicitly expressed this representation in their articles published just after the fiftieth anniversary of the start of the Cultural Revolution. The Party's refusal to establish a Cultural Revolution museum and the 'covering up' of the museum in Shantou that commemorates the lives lost during the movement, implicitly communicates the CCP's final assessment. The lack of museums attempts to hinder a further reassessment or conversation about the revolution. The Party intends for its reassessment to be the only story told about the Cultural Revolution now and in the future as it is the singular representation that secondary school children are taught. The state has propagated this singular representation, and in doing so has attempted to control communicative memory about the movement, in order to achieve its contemporary goals of legitimising its rule, preventing the reoccurrence of the movement and dissuading compensation claims.

The People

I. THE 'LOST GENERATION'

There is a generational divide between Chinese citizens' interpretations of the Cultural Revolution. Those who lived through the movement remember and thus interpret the revolution differently from those who were born after the revolution and have learned about it second-hand. For the 'lost generation,' the memories of fifty years ago are still living ones to them. Ba Jin argued that the suffering of the movement is difficult to deal with for many

²⁷³ Pye, "Reassessing the Cultural Revolution," 611.

²⁷⁴ Calhoun and Wasserstrom, "Legacies of Radicalism," 47.

²⁷⁵ Isabel Hilton, "The Chinese Communist Party's fear of its people spells trouble," *Economist*, 15 June 2018, www.economist.com/open-future/2018/06/15/the-chinese-communist-partys-fear-of-its-people-spells-trouble

because the division between victim and protagonist was blurred, the complexity of the memories evading any easily accessed moral narratives.²⁷⁶ As previously explained, some survivors of the period tried to work through their trauma by writing and reading Scar Literature. In more recent years, despite any public repentance being discouraged by the state, individuals have tried to reckon with their past by apologising for their actions.²⁷⁷ For example, in January 2014, several alumni of the Experimental Middle School of Beijing Normal University apologised to their former teachers for the role they played in the violence of August 1966, during which the deputy principal Bian Zhongyun had been beaten to death.²⁷⁸ The former students, now in their 60s, said to their teachers who were still alive that “they had been waiting to make this gesture and that we should have done so long before.”²⁷⁹ At the age of 67, former Red Guard leader Chen Xiaolu apologised to his teachers for the violence that he had presided over. But Chen made sure that he was careful in his critique of the Cultural Revolution, explaining that he was only criticising himself, not Mao and was “certainly not implying any criticism of China’s current leadership.”²⁸⁰ This statement suggests that there is still a fear of punishment or of negative repercussions should the state be criticised.

Public response to the apologies of former Red Guards has been mixed. Some believe that they are insufficient, others believe they have gone too far.²⁸¹ Some people view that “Of course a late apology is better than no apology.”²⁸² Hu Ping, who was a secondary school teacher during the 1960s and was forced to take part in “struggle sessions,” stated “Of course it’s late, a lot of the victims have already died. They should have been apologizing much earlier for the wrongs that they did to them. Nonetheless, we should recognize this apology as sincere, and we should still encourage it.”²⁸³ However, the apologies are not always well received nor are they necessarily forgiven, for instance, the widower of Bian Zhongyun dismissed the former students as giving “hypocritical apologies” and accused them of trying “to unburden their guilt.”²⁸⁴

The guilt that the widower of Bian Zhongyun believes the former Red Guards are trying to unburden is, as posited by Anne Thurston in 1985, survivor’s guilt. Thurston interviewed about fifty Chinese intellectuals who had been victims of the Cultural Revolution, none of whom had been able to fully explain the movement or integrate it into their lives.²⁸⁵ Thurston attributed the survivors’ inability to fully explain the movement or integrate their experiences into their lives to survivor’s guilt, a wound that results from surviving an extreme situation and is often associated with post-traumatic stress disorder.²⁸⁶ Elie Wiesel, an Auschwitz survivor, articulated the elemental phenomenon best when she stated, “I live and therefore I am guilty. I am still here because a friend, a comrade, an

²⁷⁶ Brown, “Why China still can’t make sense of the Cultural Revolution.”

²⁷⁷ Evan Osnos, “The Cost of the Cultural Revolution, Fifty Years Later,” *New Yorker*, 6 May 2016, www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-cost-of-the-cultural-revolution-fifty-years-later

²⁷⁸ Osnos, “The Cost of the Cultural Revolution”; Brice Pedroletti, “China’s former red guards turn their backs on Maoism,” *Guardian*, 5 May 2014, www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/05/mao-cultural-revolution-china-red-guard

²⁷⁹ Pedroletti, “China’s former red guards.”

²⁸⁰ Anthony Kuhn, “Chinese Red Guards Apologize, Reopening A Dark Chapter,” *National Public Radio*, 4 February 2014, www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/01/23/265228870/chinese-red-guards-apologize-reopening-a-dark-chapter

²⁸¹ Kuhn, “Chinese Red Guards Apologize.”

²⁸² Shi Shan, “Red Guards Say Sorry,” *Radio Free Asia*, 11 November 2010, www.rfa.org/english/news/china/apology-11112010100431.html

²⁸³ Shi, “Red Guards Say Sorry.”

²⁸⁴ Pedroletti, “China’s former red guards.”

²⁸⁵ Pye, “Reassessing the Cultural Revolution,” 606.

²⁸⁶ Thurston, “Victims of China’s Cultural Revolution,” 7.

unknown died in any place.”²⁸⁷ A further degree of survivor’s guilt is linked to what the ones who were spared did in order to survive and their feelings when others were selected to die whilst they were not. Within the context of the Cultural Revolution, Thurston argues that there are at least three factors that contribute to survivor’s guilt: the belief that they were complicitous in Mao’s regime or in the actual persecutions of the movement; guilt over having betrayed their friends or family; and guilt over having been incapable of protecting their family from persecution.²⁸⁸

How each individual has dealt with their guilt greatly differs: for some, survivor’s guilt has caused them to recall their experiences in order to repent and seek forgiveness, for example the alumni of the Experimental Middle School of Beijing Normal University and Chen Xiaolu. For others, their guilt has caused them to recall their experiences, which, through their publicising, are added to the communicative memory. Many of those who recall their experiences do so with the intent to educate the next generations in order to prevent a second Cultural Revolution. Some people do differentiate between their subjective and objective view on whether the Cultural Revolution could actually reoccur.²⁸⁹ They argue that, objectively, practical circumstances have changed to a sufficient extent due to reforms that another such movement would be barred. Nevertheless, subjectively, they remain afraid of the possibility. For others, they do not draw a distinction and are simply just afraid, especially for their children and future generations. In order for a second Cultural Revolution to be prevented, and for the people’s fear to be abated, some feel that they must tell of their experiences so that lessons can be drawn from the past.²⁹⁰

Lijia Zhang stated that for the essential lessons to be learned, people should “remember it, reflect on it and answer the uncomfortable questions.”²⁹¹ Remembering, reflecting and answering questions being necessary actions for the formation and development of communicative memory. The authors of Scar Literature played a fundamental role in initiating a movement of representing the Cultural Revolution in such a way that remembrance, reflection and answering questions were enabled. Peng Qi’an continued the movement by opening the first unofficial Cultural Revolution Museum in Shantou, as did the former Red Guards who apologised. There is another group who have suffered from survivor’s guilt that choose to remain silent about their experiences: “We haven’t heard an apology from a single one of the key assassins, the ones who went around beating people to death.”²⁹² The realisation that they had been complicit in the regime and the actual persecutions of people, along with the high possibility that they had betrayed loved ones, would have left many former Red Guards with an almost unbearable burden. For some these memories would be too painful to remember, reflect on and answer questions regarding.

One of the universal aspects that accompanies old age is “retrospective stock-taking of one’s life,”²⁹³ making it unsurprising that in contemporary China, the ‘lost generation’ is probably the most active group in the sphere of collective memory.²⁹⁴ There is a group within the lost generation who, since the 1990s, have reinterpreted the Cultural Revolution through a framework of nostalgia, especially for the rustication movement. Michel Bonnin referred to this nostalgia as “paradoxical nostalgia” or “a nostalgia for the bad old days,” because during the movement nearly all of the “sent-down youth” just wanted to escape the countryside and

²⁸⁷ For this and the following, Thurston, “Victims of China’s Cultural Revolution,” 8.

²⁸⁸ Thurston, “Victims of China’s Cultural Revolution,” 8-9.

²⁸⁹ Thurston, “Victims of China’s Cultural Revolution,” 15.

²⁹⁰ Zhang, “The Specter of the Cultural Revolution.”

²⁹¹ Zhang, “The Specter of the Cultural Revolution.”

²⁹² Shi, “Red Guards Say Sorry.”

²⁹³ Thurston, “Victims of China’s Cultural Revolution,” 20.

²⁹⁴ Bonnin, “Restricted, Distorted but Alive,” 756.

go back to their cities.²⁹⁵ It is a “paradoxical nostalgia” in the sense that their nostalgia is not a yearning to actually return to the period of Mao’s rule, instead it is a feeling that their youth has passed during which they lived through an incomparable time that has deeply marked them.²⁹⁶ The nostalgia is an expression of pride and satisfaction that they came through and learned from an experience no one else will ever experience again. Youth united and coming together *en masse* in the rustication movement to achieve the same goal of building socialism, incites nostalgia as, for some, it was the essence of the revolution.²⁹⁷ The nostalgia focuses on their youth being a more innocent time typified by close community relations, a general attitude of cooperation, honesty and trust.²⁹⁸ Interestingly though, almost none of them remained in the countryside as soon as they were allowed to return to the cities and nor would they like their children to be rusticated as they were.²⁹⁹

To use the language of Svetlana Boym, nostalgia for the period is “reflective nostalgia” opposed to “restorative nostalgia” because it romanticises the movement, dwelling in “longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance,” but does not desire its restoration.³⁰⁰ The nostalgia for the Maoist period is almost a reaction to, or critique of, the speed and perceived moral degradation of contemporary China.³⁰¹ Alberto Castelli and Lei Ouyang Bryant both argue that nostalgia is an instrument that connects the past to the present by constructing a meaning for past emotions and experiences in reaction to one’s contemporary context.³⁰² Nostalgia functions through the superimposition of two images or representations, that of the past and the present.³⁰³ The exceedingly different environment of contemporary China, created by changes in economic, political and social spheres, is contrasted, by the ‘lost generation,’ with the society of their adolescence.³⁰⁴ Bryant argues that the camaraderie, energy and the group solidarity of the Cultural Revolution era are largely absent in present-day China, meaning that the ‘lost generation’ likes to look to the past and their constructed memory of themselves as energetic youths in order to create their identities.³⁰⁵

This idea is supported, in contemporary China, by involvement in the rustication movement frequently being used as a form of political capital. Their involvement in the movement is believed to display their successes as having been achieved through fundamental hardship and determination. The experience serves as “badges of martyrdom or sacrifice.”³⁰⁶ The nostalgic memories can incite a completely positive evaluation of the rustication movement, but they can also exist simultaneously with a more nuanced assessment. For those who were “sent-down youths,” regretting their experience is not possible because it was imposed upon them, they did not choose to be rusticated, and yet it has had a foundational impact on their lives and their identities.³⁰⁷ Even those who were dissidents of the generation and extremely critical of Mao will participate in nostalgic activities such as singing “red” songs that praise Mao because they are the only songs that

²⁹⁵ Bonnin, “Restricted, Distorted but Alive,” 762.

²⁹⁶ Bonnin, “Restricted, Distorted but Alive,” 762.

²⁹⁷ Castelli, “Chinese Postmodernism,” 14.

²⁹⁸ Castelli, “Chinese Postmodernism,” 14.

²⁹⁹ Bonnin, “Restricted, Distorted but Alive,” 762.

³⁰⁰ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 41; Iza Ding and Jeffrey Javed, “Understanding ‘Red Memory’ in Contemporary China,” 15-16, www.jeffreyjaved.com/uploads/8/6/1/2/86128854/ding_javed_red_memory_latest.pdf

³⁰¹ Ding and Javed, “Understanding ‘Red Memory’,” 16.

³⁰² Castelli, “Chinese Postmodernism,” 16; Bryant, “Music, Memory, and Nostalgia,” 162.

³⁰³ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 41.

³⁰⁴ Bryant, “Music, Memory, and Nostalgia,” 168.

³⁰⁵ Bryant, “Music, Memory, and Nostalgia,” 171.

³⁰⁶ Ding and Javed, “Understanding ‘Red Memory’,” 5.

³⁰⁷ Bonnin, “Restricted, Distorted but Alive,” 763.

they can remember from their youth.³⁰⁸ So even those who have evaluated the Cultural Revolution as having been entirely negative can mix their assessment with their personal nostalgic feelings for their youth. In contemporary China, song-and-dance performances from the Cultural Revolution era are being reintroduced. In Luoyang, nostalgia for the movement is expressed in the main square daily by the old, the poor and the marginalised through singing odes to Mao.³⁰⁹ For members of the 'lost generation,' nostalgia is important for them to negotiate their place and self-conceptualisation in contemporary China, which explains their persistence in organising memorial activities even when they are prohibited by the government.

II. THE GENERATION OF THE 1990s

The generation that was born during the 1990s grew up under the rhetoric of the official transcript of the Cultural Revolution. When reflecting on what they were taught about the movement in school, Ji Jingyu wrote, "As for what I know about the Cultural Revolution, in our high school history class there was a verdict: The "10 years of chaos" happened because of Mao Zedong's mistakes in his old age that were exploited by the antirevolutionary Gang of Four. The 10 years totally violated Mao Zedong Thought, which was to "liberate your mind, seek truth from facts." We only had to adhere to Marxism, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping Thought, and the important "Three Represents," and we could prevent such mistakes from happening again! As for Mao, our history course said he was 70 percent good and 30 percent bad."³¹⁰

Ji's recollection supports the idea that school curricula and textbooks are heavily influenced by the Party ideology and reassessment of the Cultural Revolution. Traditional media also either disseminates the CCP's interpretation of the movement (apart from some very rare exceptions) or avoids the subject all together due to it being a "politically and culturally sensitive time period."³¹¹ The generation of the 1990s are aware of government censorship and acknowledge the fact that traditional media is highly influenced by the Party. They also recognise that there is limited representation of the movement in the media: "In magazines, there's really not much on the Cultural Revolution right now [...] But it's not because people don't care [...] I think the government is in an awkward position because we know that the Cultural Revolution was bad, that it was the Chairman's mistake. He had too much power back then, he changed so many people's fates into tragic ones. But the government can't print that, so they just talk around it."³¹² This individual expresses an awareness of the government's direct influence on media outlets and that what the media portrays is heavily impacted by the Party doctrine. The wording "we know that the Cultural Revolution was bad" indicates that there are certain presumed facts about the revolution, with the use of the pronoun "we," suggesting that the public has an interpretation of the movement that is not represented in traditional media. This implies that there is a disparity between public opinion of the Cultural Revolution and the public transcript.

In order to gain a more complete understanding of the Cultural Revolution, many members of the generation of the 1990s rely on oral history.³¹³ Personal stories told by friends and family, members of the 'lost generation' are, for many, major influences on their

³⁰⁸ Bonnin, "Restricted, Distorted but Alive," 764.

³⁰⁹ Gerry Shih, "Nostalgia for Mao 50 years after China's Cultural Revolution," *Associated Press News*, 16 May 2016, apnews.com/article/0f9a377a75b04b1882c3e0c9fba3fe91

³¹⁰ *New York Times*, "Readers Respond: The Cultural Revolution's Lasting Imprint," 16 May 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/05/16/world/asia/china-cultural-revolution-reader-responses.html

³¹¹ Lowe, "Unraveling the Chinese Cultural Revolution," 4.

³¹² Lowe, "Unraveling the Chinese Cultural Revolution," 6.

³¹³ For this and the following, Lowe, "Unraveling the Chinese Cultural Revolution," 7.

understanding and opinions about the Cultural Revolution. One individual stated, “I learned a lot about the Cultural Revolution through my family members and professors. They experienced the time period, so what stories they tell are generally very detailed and vivid.” The personal stories give a human dimension to the umbrella term “Ten Years of Catastrophe” with which the Cultural Revolution is now labelled in China.³¹⁴ Parents and grandparents tell their descendants about their homes being ransacked, their parents being denounced, and rustication in the countryside. In each family, how openly the experiences are communicated greatly differs. Some members of the ‘lost generation’ are unable to communicate their experiences to their families because they fear that their pain will be passed on to their children and grandchildren.³¹⁵ Whether or not stories of the movement are explicitly told to their descendants, the attitude the ‘lost generation’ learned during the revolution, of it being “safer to work hard and keep quiet,” is passed on.³¹⁶ Li [first name not given], whose father’s parents lived through the Cultural Revolution, explained how her family has spoken about their trauma: “Here in the U.S., we talk about the legacies of the Cultural Revolution often within the family, but when I’m in China, it is only mentioned as a reminder to work hard, so we can have a Plan B when things go south.”³¹⁷ The generation of the 1990s seems to have, in some way, inherited their parents or grandparents trauma whilst being fortunate enough to not have directly experienced the events.³¹⁸

Tomas Plänklers explained this idea, “what is, I think, realistic to say is that a greater part of the population has been severely influenced by the Cultural Revolution and they transmitted these experiences to the second generation.” Shayla Love, whose mother is a member of the ‘lost generation,’ describes how she feels fraudulent when feeling a sense of loss and hurt in regard to the Cultural Revolution, having not directly lived through it herself: “I have never been able to describe my feelings of loss surrounding the Cultural Revolution, but I have always known they are there. [...] When I try to explain how the Cultural Revolution has affected me, even after all I’ve learned, I feel like a fraud. I have no memories of it, nothing concrete to offer as proof. No wound to point at to say, look: I *am* hurt.” She expressed that she had a “hunch” that similar feelings exist in others her age too.

In contemporary China, with the birth of the next generation, divisions have appeared in how the Cultural Revolution is interpreted and represented by the people. The strongest divide is between the ‘lost generation’ and the generation of the 1990s. However, even within the ‘lost generation’ there are differences in how they interpret and represent the movement fifty years later. These differences depend on the individuals’ reaction to their survivor’s guilt or whether they feel nostalgically towards the era. Those who experience survivor’s guilt either speak out to seek forgiveness or to stop a second Cultural Revolution from occurring, or their pain prevents them from speaking out. Those who feel a sense of nostalgia do so in reaction to their contemporary society and through which they try to negotiate their identity. In choosing to speak about their experiences, the ‘lost generation’ transmit their historical representations of the era to the generation of the 1990s.

The generation of the 1990s appears to have considered the official transcript about the Cultural Revolution, as represented in their formal education and in the media, to be insufficient and so have sought oral histories to give them a more complete and personal understanding of the movement. The stories from their friends and family members have not always necessarily been forthcoming, but the lessons, fears and attitudes taught by the revolution have been transmitted to them regardless. Members of the generation of the 1990s

³¹⁴ Lowe, “Unraveling the Chinese Cultural Revolution,” 3.

³¹⁵ Love, “My grandparents survived the Cultural Revolution.”

³¹⁶ *New York Times*, “Readers Respond.”

³¹⁷ *New York Times*, “Readers Respond.”

³¹⁸ For this and the following, Love, “My grandparents survived the Cultural Revolution.”

have been affected differently by the personal stories they have been told, for some it has given them a greater understanding of the time period, whereas for others an intimate sense of loss has also been induced. The generation of the 1990s “know[s] that the Cultural Revolution was bad” but their interpretation of just how bad it was is conveyed to them through the stories of personal experience. This episode in China’s painful past is part of the collective Chinese memory despite the government’s efforts to ignore it.³¹⁹ “People remember. Families talk. The imprint of old fear remains.”³²⁰

Conclusion

In contemporary China, the state uses traditional media outlets and history school textbooks to represent its 1981 reassessment of the Cultural Revolution. The state’s refusal to create a Cultural Revolution museum and its efforts to control the representations in the unofficial museums about the movement support the propagation of the state’s desired representation. The state has persisted in promulgating the representation of the Cultural Revolution that it issued in 1981 in order to legitimise its rule, prevent a second Cultural Revolution and to discourage the survivors of the Cultural Revolution from making compensation claims. It is clear that in contemporary China, the state has employed historical representation as a tool to control collective memory in order to benefit itself and achieve its own aims.

In contemporary China, the ‘lost generation’ struggles with survivor’s guilt or feels nostalgia for the Cultural Revolution era. In reaction to survivor’s guilt, some people have spoken out about their experiences of the Cultural Revolution to seek forgiveness or to prevent the movement from reoccurring through education. Others have reacted by staying silent because the past is too painful to recall. The people who feel nostalgically towards the revolution era do so in order to ascertain their identity in their current society. In consequence, the ‘lost generation,’ uses historical representation as a tool to construct their personal identities and to prevent a second Cultural Revolution.

The generation of the 1990s has learned about the Cultural Revolution through the state’s 1981 reassessment of the movement and the stories of the ‘lost generation.’ With friends and family members having survived the revolution, often with harrowing memories, the trauma and lessons learned have been inherited by the generation of the 1990s. As a result, the generation of the 1990s has used historical representation to inform their interpretation of the past.

³¹⁹ Xing, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 2.

³²⁰ *New York Times*, “Readers Respond.”

CHAPTER 5: EVALUATION: THE ROLE OF HISTORICAL REPRESENTATION

In contemporary China, the state and some of the 'lost generation' do share a common aim. They wish to prevent a second Cultural Revolution through education. However, the state has chosen a fixed historical representation to transmit to the next generations, whereas the 'lost generation' has numerous different stories to tell that do not follow a specific narrative. The difference in how they seek to achieve their aim is as a result of their different motivations. The state is motivated to prevent a second Cultural Revolution because its aftermath threatened the legitimacy of its rule. The 'lost generation' is motivated to prevent the past's reoccurrence because they do not wish for their children and grandchildren to have similar atrocities committed against them. The difference between the state's and the people's motivations is not unique to contemporary China, the difference has existence since 1966. As a result, the state's and the people's use of historical representation has differed in accordance with their different motivations.

In this chapter, I will explain how the difference between the state's and the people's motivations has influenced their use of historical representation since 1966. I will argue that the state's incentive, being to legitimise its rule, has remained constant between the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and the present day. I will posit that the people were initially motivated in their use of representation to prevent their personal persecution, but that in contemporary China age has become a stronger motivator. Then, I will explain how these different motivations have caused historical representation to play three roles in China since 1966. I will argue that the first role has been to legitimise state authority which has consequentially abused history and the people. I will discuss how historical representation has played a role in protecting individuals from persecution but simultaneously facilitated the state's abuse of history and other citizens. I will examine how historical representation in contemporary China has played the role of being an outlet for processing trauma, educating the next generation and aiding identity construction.

From the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the state has changed its interpretation and representation of the movement, but its motivation behind its chosen representation remained constant. The state was motivated to legitimise its rule through ideological validation. Legitimacy that often came at a severe cost to the people. The revolution was initiated and sustained, by the state under Mao's control, through representing the movement in the media so as to ideologically legitimise the movement. When the revolution ended with Mao's death, the state maintained this representation in its framing of Mao's memorial services in order to legitimise the new leadership. In the 1980s, the state's interpretation and representation of the Cultural Revolution changed as it was reassessed in the 1981 Resolution in order to legitimise the Party's rule as it was being questioned. This representation has persisted in contemporary China as the state enforces it through the media and by teaching it to the next generation so that in the present and future the state can appeal to history to legitimise its rule. In each era, legitimising its rule has been the state's consistent incentive behind how it has represented the Cultural Revolution.

In contrast, the change in the people's representation of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 up until the contemporary period has heavily depended on how great the threat of state punishment was. As a result, the people's interpretation was often suppressed or very tentatively represented. In contemporary China, the lost generation is motivated to represent their interpretation of the movement, not because state punishment is less likely, but because of their age. Some feel that they must unburden their guilt or pass on the lessons to the next generation before they die. Others engage in retroactive stock-taking of their lives.

During the Cultural Revolution, the people represented the revolution in the unofficial media outlets in the way that the state dictated it should be. Publishing any dissenting

interpretation was not tolerated and would likely result in extreme persecution. When the movement ended, there was division in the reaction to Mao's death. But many people showed an expression of grief for fear of being labelled a counterrevolutionary if they did not, and thus represented themselves as supporting the movement. The people's representation of the movement also changed in the 1980s. They were able to represent their interpretation of the dark side of the revolution in Scar Literature, albeit somewhat briefly as the state soon tried to suppress the literature. The 1989 Democracy Movement protestors interpreted the revolution as a cautionary tale of how dangerous angering the state could be. The protestors sought to prevent a violent crackdown on the movement through disassociating themselves from the Red Guards. In contemporary China, some members of the lost generation express their interpretations of the movement to their peers and to their children and grandchildren. Such expression and engagement in the memorial activities that often accompany it are prohibited by the state. However, the 'lost generation' continues to speak out either to seek forgiveness, educate the next generation or reflect nostalgically on their youth. The generation of the 1990s uses the stories from the 'lost generation' to inform their interpretation of the movement. In each era, the threat of state punishment has been present, even in contemporary China. This threat has often influenced the people's choice in how to represent the Cultural Revolution. In contemporary China, it appears that for many members of the 'lost generation' their age has become a stronger source of motivation for their use of historical representation than avoiding persecution.

The state and the people using historical representation in accordance with their different motivations has resulted in historical representation playing three roles in China since 1966. For the state, historical representation has played the role of justifying, validating, and legitimising its rule and goals. The original goal being to start the Cultural Revolution. The end goal being to force the people to forget the movement ever happened. For the people, historical representation has been a vehicle to deter personal persecution and has acted as an outlet through which survivors, fifty years later, can transmit their experiences and lessons, process their trauma or construct their identity.

Historical representation being employed to legitimise the state's rule and goals has resulted in an abuse of history. Macmillan explains that an abuse of history occurs when evidence is ignored or suppressed because it could threaten or challenge a group's preferred interpretation of the past.³²¹ In only allowing one representation of the Cultural Revolution to be propagated in each era, the state has used historical representation to abuse history since 1966. The state has clearly abused history as it has repeatedly suppressed the people's differing interpretations of the revolution through threats of persecution. In suppressing the people's interpretations, the state has sought to control the formation of collective memory. The state has intended to construct a communicative memory in order to legitimise its rule in the present and to develop a cultural memory which will legitimise its rule in the future. This collective memory has been used as a foundation for the Chinese national identity, to which, as previously stated, the state needs to appeal to in order to legitimise its rule. Essentially, the state has abused history as it has used historical representation to construct a one-sided collective memory of the Cultural Revolution, and thus steered the Chinese national identity in a way that will legitimise its rule.

However, historical representation not only facilitated this abuse of history, it also facilitated the state's abuse of the people. State-controlled media representation sparked the Cultural Revolution during which historians estimate between 500,000 and two million

³²¹ MacMillan, *Dangerous games*, 69.

people lost their lives.³²² In the aftermath of the movement, the state attempted to silence survivors when they became too critical of the regime. In contemporary China, the state still tries to prevent memorial services and activities. These attempts to suppress the people's memories and acts of remembrance is an abuse because it forces individuals to carry the entire burden of remembering the injustices they experienced. As Paul Ricoeur states, this burden causes the individuals' victimhood to become their entire identity.³²³ Survivors of the Cultural Revolution all experience a sense of victimhood. The Red Guards were victims of their government's manipulation and many of the other survivors were victims of the Red Guards persecution. This means that the 'lost generation' is a generation of victims whose government is attempting to force their experiences to be forgotten as they are omitted from the collective memory. As a result, the state has made efforts to marginalise the 'lost generation,' excluding them from the citizenship as they are unable to relate to the national identity. In controlling the representation, and consequently the collective memory of the Cultural Revolution, the state has abused history and its people in order to further its goal of legitimising its rule.

In using historical representation to protect themselves from state persecution, on an individual basis, the people sadly aided the state's abuse of history and of their fellow citizens. Supporting the state's representation during the Cultural Revolution, through creating *dazibao* or denouncing their friends and family members, allowed the state to control the narrative of the movement. Similarly, at the end of the revolution, the people who engaged in performative grief to prevent themselves from being labelled as counterrevolutionary, supported the state's chosen representation. In assisting the state's propagation of its singular representation, through suppressing their own interpretations, the people helped the state to abuse history. The majority of the people suppressing their own interpretations also left those who chose to contradict the state's interpretation of the movement vulnerable to state persecution. It is unlikely that these people aimed to facilitate the state's abuse of history and of their fellow citizens, but that was the ultimate outcome of their use of historical representation to protect themselves.

In contemporary China, the role that historical representation plays for the people is changing. The people are now using historical representation to process their trauma, construct their identities and as a result, they are educating the next generation. Ricoeur explains that "The duty of memory is the duty to do justice, through memories, to an other than the self."³²⁴ Listening to the testimonies of victims, and giving them a space in which to share their experiences, enables reconciliation to take place between individuals and groups and develops a more inclusive citizenship.³²⁵ The interaction between the lost generation and the generation of the 1990s creates such a space. The generation of the 1990s wanting to hear stories of the experiences of their friends and family members provides the 'lost generation' an opportunity to publicise their memories. In publicising their traumatic memories, the lost generation educates subgroups within the generation enabling them to understand and respect these different groups' versions of the past. For example, the victims of the Red Guard persecution describing their experiences educated former Red Guards as to the pain they inflicted. Some former Red Guards then, after understanding and respecting the experiences of their victims, apologised for their actions. The reconciliation between former Red Guards

³²² Tom Phillips, "The Cultural Revolution: all you need to know about China's political convulsion," *Guardian*, 11 May 2016, www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/11/the-cultural-revolution-50-years-on-all-you-need-to-know-about-chinas-political-convulsion

³²³ Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016), 68.

³²⁴ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 89.

³²⁵ Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, 68.

and their victims cultivates a more inclusive citizenship in which both groups are present and respect the other. The publicising of their experiences causes the individuals to be included in the citizenship and their experiences to form part of the collective memory. This prevents the survivors of the Cultural Revolution from being marginalised as the state intends.

As Ricoeur states, “memory work,” the remembering of and listening to memories of trauma, is an ethical obligation as it brings justice to the victims.³²⁶ In doing this “memory work,” survivors of the Cultural Revolution are able to construct an identity which is not purely based on their victimhood. In contemporary China, the ‘lost generation’ struggles to construct their identity because the state tries to prevent them from engaging in “memory work”. As a result, some of the members of the ‘lost generation’ have reflected on the Cultural Revolution era nostalgically. This is so that they use their memories of themselves as energetic youths, and not only as victims of the movement, to inform their identities. If they were able to engage in “memory work” more openly, the ‘lost generation’ could also work through their trauma resulting from being both protagonists, as the energetic youths, and victims of the movement.

In doing “memory work,” to the extent that they are able, the ‘lost generation’ also educates the generation of the 1990s as it passes on the lessons it learned from the Cultural Revolution. The generation of the 1990s being educated on the Cultural Revolution through the ‘lost generation’s’ historical representation, challenges the idea of the Party as a legitimate authority. Challenging this idea or assumption can be painful, as Macmillan states.³²⁷ For the generation of the 1990s, this pain takes the form of inherited trauma, that has been transmitted through the stories of the ‘lost generation’s’ experiences. They feel a sense of loss and hurt as the stories about the horrors of the movement that they are told by their friends and family members challenge the public transcript that they have been taught in school and see in the media. However, as Michael Howard argues, challenging comfortable assumptions about a group, in this case the government, is “a mark of maturity.”³²⁸ As a result, “memory work,” in its transmission of historical representation, is not only an ethical obligation but it is a sign of the country maturing as the people reconcile their differences and the citizenship becomes more inclusive.

There is obviously a tension between the role that historical representation plays for the state and the role that it plays for the people. The state disseminates one representation of the Cultural Revolution in order to construct a collective memory and national identity that excludes the ‘lost generation’ in order to legitimise its rule. The people do not accept the state’s singular representation. Instead, the people discuss a myriad of representations which results in attempts to include the ‘lost generation’ in the collective memory and national identity. The state has persistently abused the ‘lost generation’ since 1966. This abuse has been physical and psychological as it has tried to silence a generation, erasing their experiences from history. In contemporary China, for many, the threat of physical abuse no longer works to completely silence them. They feel that their age demands them to clear their conscience, whether that be through apologising or attempting to protect the future generations from having to suffer such a revolution. Reconciliation between the state and the people is necessary to relieve this tension. Unfortunately, such reconciliation seems unlikely as the CCP has had a history of perceiving its citizens’ dissatisfaction or need to process trauma as a threat to its authority.³²⁹ Instead, the state has chosen to use historical representation to assert its legitimacy and strengthen its rule in China.

³²⁶ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 88.

³²⁷ MacMillan, *Dangerous games*, 71

³²⁸ MacMillan, *Dangerous games*, 71

³²⁹ Emily David, “1984 with Chinese Characteristics: How China Rewrites History,” Project 2049 Institute, 19 July 2017, project2049.net/2017/07/19/1984-with-chinese-characteristics-how-china-rewrites-history/

CONCLUSION

In conducting my research, I found that literature more frequently focused on how and why the state had interpreted and represented the Cultural Revolution than how and why the people had. The literature often concentrated on the effect that the movement had had on the people opposed to the people's opinion of the revolution. I also found that there was a greater amount of literature that described how the Cultural Revolution had been represented by the people than how the movement had been interpreted. This is as a result of the state suppressing the people's interpretations of the movement that dissented from its own. From 1966 to 1976, the state prohibited the publication of any views that criticised the revolution. Prohibiting the publication of dissenting opinions by punishing those who expressed them has meant that other interpretations of the movement have gone unrecorded. Scar Literature features the people's interpretations of the revolution to an extent, but often its contents had to be adapted so as to appease the state otherwise it would not get published. The majority of Scar Literature that is more explicit about the people's interpretations had to be written outside of China. However, some of these interpretations have even had to be self-censored in order for the authors to be able to return to China should they wish. Scar Literature is also limited in informing us about the people's interpretation of the movement because it is only representative of the authors' views. The Democracy Movement protestors' interpretation also only represents that of a certain group and so is similarly limited. As a result, literature about the people's interpretation of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 up until the contemporary period is relatively scarce. With the survivors of the movement now in their seventies and their memories modified by their later experiences, along with the state's suppression of discussion about the movement, we can only gain a limited understanding of how the people interpreted the movement whilst it was ongoing. As there are still living survivors of the movement, literature that explains their interpretation in the present day is comparatively more common.

As a result of the available literature and its focus points, I have been able to examine how and why the state and the people represented the Cultural Revolution during the movement, when it ended, in the 1980s and in contemporary China. I have answered the question of how and why the state interpreted the movement in each era. However, I have only been able to fully explain how and why the people interpreted the movement in contemporary China. My explanation of how and why the people interpreted the revolution whilst it was ongoing and when it ended had been based on inferences from the way in which the people represented it. Whilst my examination of how and why the people interpreted the movement in the 1980s is sufficient, it is limited due to Scar Literature and the 1989 Democracy Movement often being self-censored and unrepresentative of the entire population. Nevertheless, the lack of literature regarding the people's interpretation of the Cultural Revolution has not hindered the exploration of what roles historical representation has played in China since 1966. The existence of an adequate amount of literature that discusses how and why the movement was represented in each era by both the state and the people has allowed me to explain the roles that historical representation has played. Overall, my research has enabled me to sufficiently answer the question of how and why the Chinese state's and the Chinese people's interpretations and representations of the Cultural Revolution have changed over time.

In light of my research, a question that should be explored further is how the roles that historical representation has played in China since 1966 has impacted the relationship between the state and the people. Future studies could examine the relationship between historical representation in China and the state-society relationship in order to understand the influence representation could have on future political relations in China.

My research has only considered how the Chinese state and the Chinese people interpreted and represented the Cultural Revolution. Widening the scope of the research by considering how and why the West interpreted and represented the movement could provide insights into why it is an understudied social experiment and human barbarism. Conducting research into the western interpretation of the revolution could also explain the relationship between historical representation and international relations, in the past and present.

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