

The Afterlife of Memory in China: Yang Jiang's Cultural Revolution Memoir

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I. Memory and Trauma in China

The study of the collective and personal memory of historical trauma has taken the Holocaust as the paradigm, but in recent years scholars have turned to other cultures and events such as the Chinese response to the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Millions perished in that upheaval in the decade between 1966 and Mao's death in 1976. Because the ferocity and scale of the violence that gripped China in the early phase of the Cultural Revolution seemed unprecedented for the People's Republic of China, even when compared to the elimination of the landlord class that occurred during land reform in the early fifties, some Western scholars have used the Holocaust as an analytic and comparative category in their studies.¹ Chinese scholars rarely make such direct comparisons out of regard for the uniqueness of these two disparate events, but some intellectuals have seen a similarity between the two in the aspects of trauma and survivor guilt.² These discussions formed part of a larger discourse on remembering and reevaluating the Cultural Revolution that occurred prior to the events in Tiananmen in June 1989.

Lowell Dittmer has surveyed the phases of the re-evaluations of the Cultural Revolution undertaken by the Chinese as they attempted to learn from this "trauma" within the context of post-Mao politics. He makes a distinction between two types of national trauma or what he called "particularly devastating formative experiences" (19). The first type is usually "limited to national elites responsible for guiding future national policy" and he cites Munich and Vietnam as examples. The second type is rarer and requires that its "lessons" be "propagated intensively among all members of the national political culture." This type he calls "cultural learning" and cites the Nazi Holocaust's impact on the

Jewish community as “the paradigm case.” He believes that the Chinese efforts since 1976 “to review and reassess the Cultural Revolution experience” are an instance of such cultural learning (19–20).

This type of cultural learning was always fraught with danger as the regime that initiated the Cultural Revolution remained in place. In a society like China “control over the discursive realm is fundamental” (Watson *Memory* 11), so that a key issue was how the unofficial or oppositional past is transmitted: “how people remember what is meant to be forgotten” (Watson *Memory* 7). While the Cultural Revolution was thoroughly discredited within China following Mao’s death and the trial of his widow and her colleagues in the so-called “Gang of Four,”³ the evaluation of Mao’s historical legacy remained problematic. Chinese intellectuals have had a long tradition of the role of “*daiyan ren*” or carriers of the word from the culturally dispossessed below to the wielders of political power above. The rediscovery of that role in post-Mao China has been described by Vera Schwarcz as part of the intellectuals’ “recovery of memory,” an issue that is fraught with tension. So difficult is this act of “remembering” by the educated elite in China that Schwarcz argues that it can only be done from the “periphery” and this sometimes means from outside China itself (Schwarcz *Strangers* 58–59).

The first wave in this recovery of memory took the form of literary accounts of the “Ten Lost Years” in what became known as the “Literature of the Wounded,” a term later translated as “scar literature” (Barmé & Lee 1979). However, many intellectuals found fiction a problematic genre for remembering and learning from those traumatic times. They displayed not only misgivings similar to those expressed about Holocaust fiction⁴ but also a deeply rooted Confucian cultural preference for the “truth” or substance of historical narrative as opposed to *xiao shuo* or “small talk”—the Chinese term for “fiction.” Jaroslav Prusek noted in a perceptive essay, “Reality and Art in Chinese Literature,” that “what was always most highly valued in Chinese literary works was ‘truthfulness,’ that is, the accurate recording of facts [*shi*] ... whereas fantasy was rejected, as something ‘empty’ [*xu*], existing only in the imagination” (91).

One alternative to fiction was the memoir: the *huiyilu* or *zhuanji*. The term *ji* or record connotes something close to historical writing;

it means to put down in writing or record the facts, and as *jishi* refers to a type of classical historical writing usually translated as “chronicle.” Hence, the memoir appealed both to those who had no talent for fiction and those who sought a more “substantial” or “truthful” account, closer to Chinese historical narrative and its requirement to learn from the past. This choice of genre finds an echo in the Jewish historical/Biblical injunction of *Zahor*—to remember—as *ji* also has the meaning of “to remember” and conveys a similar moral imperative embedded in the act of historical remembering.⁵

Paradoxically, however, it was easier to write fiction under the constraints of Communist censorship, as if the current regime shared the imperial disdain for *xiaoshuo*, and gave greater scrutiny to the solid words of “fact.” Most of the important early memoirs of the Cultural Revolution, such as *To the Storm* (Wakeman and Yue 1985), *Wild Swans* (Chang 1992), or *Life and Death in Shanghai* (Cheng 1986), were all written by women and either published abroad or written by those who had left China. As Schwarcz suggests, they were written on the periphery.

One very notable exception⁶ written and published not at the periphery but in Beijing was the striking and evocative memoir of Yang Jiang, entitled *Six Chapters of Life in a Cadre School* [Ganxiao Liu Ji]. *Six Chapters* (or Six Records—Liu Ji) *of Life in a Cadre School* was first published in Hong Kong in May of 1981, but that version had many errors. A correct and definitive edition was then published in Beijing in July of that year. A second edition was published in Beijing in 1986, followed by a second Hong Kong edition. It has since been reissued in China both as a single volume and as part of several collections of Yang's prose works (Yang, *Ganxiao*, 1992; Yang, *Collected Works*, 1993; Yang, *Yang Jiang's Selected Prose* 1994).

There have also been three English translations of this slender volume, one under the title *Six Chapters of My Life “Downunder”* (Goldblatt 1983), another as *Six Chapters of Life in a Cadre School* (Djang 1986), and the third as *A Cadre School Life, Six Chapters* (Barmé 1982).⁷ All three titles grapple with the wonderfully compact Chinese title, which literally translates as Cadre School Six Records. Yang's audience could

easily fill in the blanks of her title: six records of my life as an intellectual sent down to live among and learn from the peasants at a May 7th Cadre School. The term “cadre school” comes from a letter written by Mao to then head of the army Lin Biao on May 7th, 1966, authorizing the People’s Liberation Army to take control of various key organizations, including schools and universities. The cadre school became a center of reform-through-labour for intellectuals or party and government officials (*ganbu* or cadres) suspended from their work as the army took control. During the early period of the Cultural Revolution (1966–71), as such institutions were shut down, most intellectuals were transferred down to the countryside and required to do manual labour (Goldblatt, 105–06; Djang, xi–xii). While the May 7th cadre schools were not concentration camps, the hardships and cruelties inflicted resulted in numerous deaths and trauma for those who survived.

Yang’s cryptic title was not merely a form of code particularly suited to the Chinese language where words can be omitted and the meaning remain clear. It was actually a deliberate reference to and intended echo of a much earlier work, Shen Fu’s 18th century classic *Six Records of a Floating Life* [*Fusheng Liu Ji*]. Commentators have noted this deliberate stylistic modeling and the obvious similarities between the two works. In his Preface to the Goldblatt translation, historian Jonathan Spence says

... Yang Jiang has recaptured Shen Fu’s moods with uncanny skill: in her work one finds a similar gentle melancholy concerning the individual’s helplessness in the face of a tyrannical society, along with similar celebrations of the tiny victories that are made possible by aesthetic sensitivity or by the strength of personal love. Neither book claims to be an accurate portrayal of the ‘real’ world in all its dimensions, but each is content to be—unabashedly—an intellectual’s appraisal of how to withstand the harshness that surrounds all. (Goldblatt vii)

Djang Chu makes similar comparisons in his translation, noting that Shen Fu was a rebel who challenged the validity of tradition and openly defied it. He points out that Yang followed Shen Fu’s technique of avoiding direct criticism, but by describing “seemingly irrelevant and minute

events” allowed the reader to “figure out the hidden meaning the author has tried to convey” (Djang xii). Moreover, Djang emphasizes that both books are fundamentally love stories between husband and wife, and concludes:

Perhaps the author had intended her book to be a testimony of their enduring love as well as an indictment of the irrational social system of the time. (Djang xiii)

I agree entirely with these comments, although I find Djang's “Perhaps” far too tentative. Nonetheless, I feel no one has fully grappled with the larger implications of choosing such an intertextual reference as a model for life writing.

By deliberately restricting herself within the confines of Shen Fu's highly literary and “unique” genre (Djang xii), Yang Jiang not only draws attention to the similarities between the two works, but also forces us to question the form of the memoir itself. The *ji*, or record, becomes now both less and more of an historical chronicle, a work at once both consciously literary and factually real. This self-conscious erasure of boundaries between history and literature, between “reality and art,” between *ji* and *xiaoshuo*, points to the essentially ironic mode and subversive intent of Yang Jiang's work. In this striking way, Yang reveals herself as a rebel and critic every bit as much as Shen Fu. Like her predecessor, she subverts the patriarchal and authoritarian substance of her society, but in a way that enables her to continue living and working under that same system. Her version of the Cultural Revolution may not be, as Spence has said, “an accurate portrayal of the ‘real’ world in all its dimensions,” but if we examine it closely, the intent and the truth becomes clear.

II. Yang Jiang and the Cultural Revolution

Yang Jiang (pen name of Yang Jikang) was born in 1911, the year of the fall of the Manchu dynasty, and was still alive at the time of the publication of the 1993 edition of her collected prose works for which she wrote the Introduction.⁸ In the early 1930s, she studied at a variety of Chinese universities, including Tsinghua in Peking where she met and married Qian Zhongshu. In 1935, they went abroad to study at Oxford

where Qian earned a B.Litt. During a year in Paris, Yang Jiang furthered her major interest in Romance Literature and Languages. They returned to China after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937, and Yang published essays and short stories in various well-known journals during the thirties and forties. Following their move to the relative safety of the French concession area of Shanghai in 1942, she began to write a series of successful plays. After 1949 and the Communist accession to power, Yang Jiang and her husband returned to Tsinghua to teach English literature. After Tsinghua was reorganized as a technical University, both became members of the prestigious Academy of Sciences. As a Fellow of the Institute of Foreign Literature, she produced many notable essays, as well as translations of European novels, including *Don Quixote*. Her husband also became a noted scholar and novelist. His award-winning satirical novel, *Fortress Besieged*, originally published in 1947 and reissued in Beijing in 1980, has been translated into many languages.⁹

In November 1969, Qian was “sent down” to a cadre school in Henan province. Yang Jiang followed him a few months later, but they were not allowed to be together because they had belonged to different work units in the Academy (Djang x-xi). This was the first of many bureaucratic cruelties and stupidities endured during the two years spent in Henan before being allowed to return to Beijing. During that time, their son-in-law committed suicide. After the fall of the Gang of Four, they were rehabilitated, and resumed an active intellectual and literary life.

Theirs has been described as “a genuine literary partnership” (Goldblatt *xii*), and in that as well as the love story presented in the *Six Chapters*, theirs resembles the partnership of Shen Fu and his wife Yun. Just as Shen Fu gave “voice” to his wife, so Yang did to Qian, as each spouse became a striking presence in the work. Yang Jiang, however, enabled Qian to speak directly by having him write the Forward to her work. In this sharply worded piece, Qian suggests that remorse and shame should be the dominant responses to the Cultural Revolution of all those who aided and abetted in the process and lacked the courage to speak out. Qian considers himself one of those “people who lacked the courage to protest that which they believed unjust, but whose most courageous act was ‘passive’ participation in the campaign” (Goldblatt 2). Such people,

and here Qian really means the Chinese intelligentsia generally, need to write a "Record of Shame" but are unlikely to do so because

they have no recollection of what they did and feel no remorse over it. They may have forgotten the past precisely because of a sense of shame, or because they are impervious to shame. (Goldblatt 2)

Rather than writing about the "adornments" like "Labor" or "Leisure"—Yang's chapter titles—he suggests that she should have written one more chapter called "A Sense of Shame: Participating in Political Campaigns." In conclusion, he notes that Shen Fu's work—"a book I never did like"—has only four extant chapters while his wife's work of six should have been seven. "So who can say," he concludes, "that the day will not come when the missing chapters of these two books will be found to fill in the gaps, thereby lessening somewhat the number of defects in the human world" (Goldblatt 3).¹⁰

Qian's Foreword is very revealing in that it foreshadows the ironic mode of his wife's manuscript. I agree with Goldblatt that his confession of dislike for Shen Fu's book is ironic and that "we must assume that the opposite may be closer to the truth" (Goldblatt 99). In a Forward that contains elements of both irony and satire from a celebrated satirist, we are alerted to the need to see the "major story" behind the "minor incidents" that comprise Yang's memoir and "to fill in the gaps" (Goldblatt "Foreword") in this otherwise deceptively restrained memoir where anger and recrimination are notably absent. Having given her literary and life partner a voice, Yang Jiang speaks to us, sometimes in dialogue with him, in her own unique, and I would argue, feminist voice. It is the voice of a survivor.

III. Yang's *Six Chapters*

Like the title of the book itself, each of Yang's chapter titles is a four-character phrase, a favorite stylistic device of the language. Each presents a word compound use of *ji*, or record, from the "Record of Departure" with which it begins to the "Record of Presumptuousness" with which it ends. The record of departure slowly builds its tragic irony through

small details. Yang worries about her husband's ability to cope at age 59 with the rigors of life in the harsh and poverty-stricken Henan countryside. The right clothing would be crucial so she modifies his pants to give extra padding and warmth, but the resultant sewing leaves a criss-cross pattern on the seat that "resembles a globe" (Goldblatt 8); nonetheless, Qian is delighted with his built-in cushion seat. By adapting the lines of a well-known 10th century poem, Yang Jiang underscores the deep sorrow of the parting, a sorrow that belies the "grand sendoff" of fifes and drums and red flags given the first groups to the train.

Yang Jiang builds her irony in the manner of the playwright she once was, namely, with the classic juxtaposition of what the audience knows and what the characters say. Thus, when Qian leaves, his wife, daughter, and son-in-law, Deyi, who is very helpful, not only to Qian but also to others struggling with piles of luggage, accompany him. Yang comments:

Seeing the enthusiasm with which our son-in-law offered his services to others, Mo-cun (Qian's courtesy name) and I were moved to praise the direction the new society was taking. At the same time we reminded ourselves of our good fortune that A-yuan had a gentle, sincere man like Deyi. (Goldblatt 9)

Her Chinese readers likely already know what is explicitly discussed a few pages later, that Deyi committed suicide rather than make up lists of colleagues to be denounced as ultra-leftists. When Yang herself leaves in July, only A-yuan is there to see her off in a moment of heartbreaking poignancy.

Such sometimes tragic but often comic contrasts pervade the text. They underscore the most basic irony of all and the core of Yang Jiang's critique, the gap between the stated aims of the Cultural Revolution and the reality. The regime's stated aim for the cadre school was to "temper" the intellectuals through labor, to break down the gap between urban and rural, mental and manual labor, to bring the cadres closer to the peasants so that they could "learn from them." It was to be anti-elitist, and anti-bureaucratic. The reality was far different. The peasants remained remote and distant from these urbanites. They were actually kept away, and made only brief appearances to steal from the school.

The peasants' continued "awe/envy" of the traditional Chinese ruling class is most clearly shown by Yang when she recounts that they stole feces to fertilize the fields, based on the sound reasoning that, given the superior diet of the cadres, their shit must be richer than that of peasants (Goldblatt 35).¹¹ While the peasants made good use of everything they could remove, most of what the cadres grew on their land was never used. At a later date, they were moved to another school where they did no labour but had constant study sessions and watched movies. Yang Jiang expressed her feelings of guilt at getting three good meals and doing nothing. They always ate better than the peasants from who they were supposed "to learn." A sense of waste, futility and loss pervades the book, and builds through small but telling details a devastating critique of the system that unleashed this cruelty, loss of life and waste of human talents. The greatest irony was that the "class solidarity" that emerged was not with the "masses" but with the fellow sufferers in the school:

But after months and months of manual labor at the cadre school, with no other prospects in sight, a 'group mentality' gradually took over.... We 'students' at the cadre school were viewed as outsiders by the peasants To them we were anything but part of 'us'; they referred to us as 'ill-clad, well-fed people with wrist watches'—in other words, 'them.' (Goldblatt 31–32)

The most striking illustration of Yang Jiang's literary artistry can be found in the chapter devoted to Quickie, the dog that became her companion at her first cadre school and was left behind when they moved. The puppy was brought to them by a poet in their work detail, and was given the name *Xiao Qu*, or Quickie, as a pun on the poet's name. Both the mysterious arrival of the dog and the connection to the poet suggest that the dog may not have been just *xiao qu* but *xiao shuo* that is, fiction. Certainly, this episode permits Yang to develop some of her most important and intertextual references.

In the first instance, in Mao's China keeping and feeding dogs was considered "bourgeois," especially as so many peasants did not have

enough to eat. Yang herself had a dog and was pictured with it in her collected works. Feeding the dog scraps from the table became a subversive act at the cadre school. Like all the country dogs, Quickie ate excrement, a point Yang develops in some detail (Goldblatt 53–54). She sketches in deft outline how the dog grew, and became her loving and faithful companion. Not only does Quickie fill the void left by separation from family, but she also brings out Yang’s maternal side.

The most telling part of the Quickie chapter is its conclusion. At New Year’s the cook bought a dog to serve since dogmeat was cheaper than pork. Yang notes that some villagers could not bear to sell their dogs despite their own poverty, while others would sell but not kill and still others “were prepared to kill *and* sell theirs” (Goldblatt 63). The dog their kitchen bought had already been killed. Yang then discusses favoured recipes among Northerners for preparing dog. Recipes are sometimes seen as a “trivial” detail of “women’s writing”; however, Yang Jiang uses this not only to refute that assessment but more importantly to point us to a literary reference, the classic Chinese novel of outlaw brothers, *Water Margin* (Shui Hu Zhuan). She muses whether their kitchen followed the recipe favoured by Lu Zhishen, the Tattooed Monk of that novel who broke his vows by gorging on dog meat. This points the reader to a view of the cadres as a “brotherhood” of “outlaws.” Yang makes a point of buying and tasting the dog meat, but in a crucial passage notes,

Everyone said that Quickie had refused to eat the dogmeat, either raw or cooked. The poet ... told me that Quickie had held a piece of the meat in her mouth, dug a hole in the ground, and buried it. Not believing him, I asked if he was sure, and he swore that he had seen her do it. But I was convinced that this was nothing more than a figment of the poet’s vivid imagination. (Goldblatt 64)

This display of “species loyalty” contrasted vividly with the cruelties and disregard for human life of the regime. But is Yang also pointing us toward literary artifice, and is Quickie a fiction, a product of a writer’s “vivid imagination”? Certainly this episode, the climax of the chapter,

points us not just to Lu the monk of *Water Margin* or to poets, but also to another Lu, to Lu Xun the most famous literary star of twentieth century China. In one of his most celebrated stories, *The Diary of a Madman*, the narrator of the title, a young scholar, returns to his native home and descends into madness. He reads the Confucian classics but instead of morality and piety he sees on every page the words "PEOPLE EAT PEOPLE." As William Lyell (1976) noted in his study of Lu Xun, the themes of cannibalism and the passivity of China's peasants figured often in his writings. Yang Jiang has deliberately echoed these themes in her peasants who might sell and/or kill their pet dogs and a dog that refuses to be a cannibal. The references and critique would be apparent to any literate Chinese. So intertextual is this entire passage that it seems closer to fiction—a "vivid imagination"—than to fact.

The chapter ends as news arrives "suddenly" that the cadre school is to move en masse. Quickie is left behind in the company of soldiers and Yang worries if that was the right thing to do or if they should have defied the authorities and brought her along. Others did bring their dogs but all those were driven away in the end. She concludes this section saying that she and her husband often muse about Quickie's fate. Her husband says that "Maybe she's already been eaten and is now nothing more than a pile of manure." To this, Yang replies: "Well, maybe she has, and maybe she's a mother by now, eating manure to stay alive and having one litter of puppies after another ..." (Goldblatt 65).

This is the most telling and evocative metaphor of the book. It is the survivor's metaphor: to eat shit and survive. At the end of her book, Yang will ironically say of herself, "I was nearly as selfish now as I had been in the beginning. I was still the same old me" (Goldblatt 98). Of course, she was not. She had eaten shit and survived. In imagining Quickie as a mother who eats shit not merely to survive but to breed and to protect her family, Yang points to a feminine sensibility. As a form of life writing, her book offers an affirmation of the personal and the familial that stands in absolute opposition to the totalizing authoritarian Communist state that sacrificed those values to the collective and its own will to power. Yang Jiang understood that the state had inherited and expanded the authoritarian politics and patriarchal family system

of traditional China against which Shen Fu had rebelled. Both authors found refuge in aesthetics and above all in the love between husband and wife. This explains why Yang wrote a memoir that was so carefully crafted to replicate Shen Fu's.

This metaphor of survival may also be a striking intertextual reference of another sort. The Lady Ban Zhao, a distinguished author and court historian of the first century of the Common Era, wrote in her *Lessons for Women* (Nu Jie) that woman is

lowly and weak, and should regard it as her primary duty to humble herself ... Should she do something good, let her not mention it, should she do something bad, let her not mention it. Let her bear disgrace; let her hold filth in her mouth, let her swallow insult. (Nelson and Peebles 104)

The translation is a polite euphemism as the Chinese literally means to swallow or eat shit. This call for women to silence themselves has led at least one scholar to declare that the Lady Ban Zhao would warrant being called China's first feminist were it not for the fact that she authored this bigoted and misogynist volume (van Gulik 97). The Ban Zhao text was read as approving the silencing of women as normative, and that is why the government of the late imperial era promoted it as appropriate reading for women. In fact, the *Lessons for Women* was not a widely read text for women in China until the late imperial period, and anyone of Yang Jiang's age, education, and gender would have known it.

Even in the face of such use of this text, it is possible to read it differently as one of the "patterned ... indirect and concealed ways" Chinese women achieved some control over their lives "even as they overtly accept" the system imposed on them (Johnson 17). Ban Zhao herself endured a difficult marriage and found freedom only as a widow. Her book was written for her daughters and may well have served as a survival guide for women in "the most difficult and degrading" (Johnson 10) point in their lives, as new brides entering their husband's household. While this new bride experience could vary significantly depending on region and class, it was one commonly fraught with danger and required survival strategies. Until the birth of a son cemented a bride's

position in the household, her best weapon was perfect adherence to strict Confucian norms, or as Ban Zhao said, to humble herself and swallow insult. Thus, I maintain that the language around Quickie is an intertextual reference to the *Lessons* and its images of feminine survival strategies. Yang Jiang's implied identification of herself with Quickie as a mother who eats shit underscores what I believe to be both the feminist and literary quality of what she writes.

IV. The Literary Memoir and the Afterlife of Memory

Yang Jiang has created a memoir that mixes fact and fiction in a literary style. I have called this novel form of life writing a "literary memoir." Such a genre raises difficult questions about the role of truth in women's autobiography or memoir when they are written as oppositional texts. In the study she edited of oppositional discourse in controlled societies, Rubie Watson defined the memoir as a "personal memory of events and situations personally experienced" (*Memory* 8). Further on, however, she links the memoir to art forms and novels as one of many "media of memory" that contribute to a shared or collective memory that is independent of the actual experience of the events so remembered. In other words, the memoir itself creates the afterlife of memory: "personal memory, shared memory and narrative (written) history interact in highly complex ways, shaping each other as versions of the past are constructed and reconstructed" (*Memory* 9). This suggests that we should view memoirs in such societies as constructed versions of the past intended to shape a collective memory. Yang Jiang's highly self-conscious literary memoir is just such a construction.

Moreover this type of constructed memoir fits within a Chinese tradition of *zizhan* or "self-mocking autobiography" or "wild histories" as opposed to orthodox history (Schwarcz *Strangers* 52–53). As in the past, this practice has resulted in the creation of a kind of code language to express these dangerous words:

Having lived compromised lives, they have learned to read between the lines, to write between the lines, to live, as it were, between the lines ... the one politically correct line is still dic-

tated from above. Around its harsh and ever-changing edges,
oppositional memories sprout like mushrooms after rain.
(Schwarcz *Strangers* 47)

Schwarcz's point about language and style—"between the lines," which owes much to George Orwell and "doublespeak," does evoke Yang Jiang's work, so rich in irony, word-play and intertextual references. It is these qualities of her memoir that share something with what we now call postmodernism, even though hers is not a postmodern memoir as neither the term nor the concept had yet entered the Chinese language or intellectual discourse at the time she was writing.¹² More importantly, her language is linked to a "rich vocabulary" of subversion that existed in the past among the educated elite in Chinese culture. However, such traditional forms were accessible only to the highly literate. Written in a kind of insider code, such words relied on "erudite allusions, linguistic puns and insider information known only to the most educated" (Watson *Making Secret Histories* 70). Certainly Shen Fu's work is exactly like that, and Yang's is also on occasion. But Yang Jiang's work is much more accessible. Hers was not even like "much protest in China [that] remains a highly secretive discourse managed by and for a small group of intellectuals" (Watson *Making Secret Histories* 70). Yang's very simplicity and her literary skill as a playwright enabled her to build mundane details into a harrowing critique. The message of Quickie can be easily grasped whether or not you know *Water Margin*, *Diary of Madman*, or *Lessons for Women*. The daring of Yang Jiang was to use life writing to create a novel form that brought living and reading between the lines from the edges to the center.

In attempting to theorize the meaning of this work as a form of life writing, I have placed it within both a long Chinese cultural tradition as well as a more recent literary and intellectual history common to dissent under authoritarian regimes such as China's. I have tried to show that this work raises questions about memory and history, about the fiction of truth and the truth of fiction. Only by pointing to literary predecessors like Shen Fu, could Yang Jiang tell truth to power. Contrary to what her husband suggested, she had in fact written the "missing" seventh

chapter, as her entire memoir is the “record of shame” for intellectual complicity, for compromised lives. She was thus able not only to recover her own memory but also to shape the afterlife of memory in China. The final words of her memoir reveal the ultimate irony:

It has now been eight years since I returned to Beijing. So many little incidents are as fresh in my mind as if they had happened only yesterday, and since that period of my life has proved to be an invaluable experience, I have written these six chapters. (Goldblatt 98)

Far from being merely “fresh in my mind,” the events of eight years ago leave the scars of trauma. In recording these “invaluable experiences” in her six chapters, Yang Jiang took the “position of witnessing” (Kristeva 12). The ultimate irony of her work is that this seemingly dispassionate literary memoir conceals a “passionately engaged individual” (Kristeva 12). Only by concealing herself and her true feelings behind Shen Fu’s work and her “minute events” could she write her “Record of Shame and Remorse.”

Notes

- 1 L.T. White, K.Y. Law and A. Dirlik are among those who make this comparison in their essays in K.Y. Law, ed. *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Reconsidered*.
- 2 In 1986–87, victims of the Cultural Revolution began to use the term *huojie*, literally plunder by fire, to describe their experiences. Barmé & Minford (110, 381) point out that this term was initially used to describe Japanese atrocities in WWII, but was borrowed first to describe the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews and then by victims of the Cultural Revolution.
- 3 For a dispassionate evaluation of both the development community’s embrace of the Cultural Revolution, and an account of its successes and failures, see Pepper, *Radicalism and Educational Reform in 20th-Century China*.
- 4 In *Voicing the Void* Sarah Horowitz discusses the controversy over fictional representations of the Holocaust.
- 5 For a comparison of the Jewish and Chinese concepts of the moral imperative of remembering see Vera Schwarcz, *Bridge*, especially chapter 2. The Jewish conception of *zabor* is discussed in detail in Yosef H. Yerushalmi, *Zabor* (1982).
- 6 Closer to Yang’s tone but not style is Chen Xuezhao’s memoirs (1990), which she began writing in 1978 and which were published in China in the early 1980s.

- 7 The title of Geremie Barmé's Hong Kong Joint Publishing 1982 edition is closest to the original but relies on the flawed 1981 edition. I generally cite from Goldblatt unless I feel the Chu translation is to be preferred.
- 8 There is no biography or full-scale study of her works. Biographical information derives from the English editions of her work, especially Goldblatt (ix–xi).
- 9 For details of Qian's biography see Goldblatt xii–xiii and Kelly & Mao, Introduction.
- 10 I have modified the translation somewhat based on the 1992 Beijing edition.
- 11 Chinese farmers always collected what was referred to as “night soil” from urban areas, composted it, and used it for fertilizer.
- 12 Post-modernism, both the term and the concept did not come into China until Jameson lectured in Beijing in 1985, long after Yang wrote her text. After 1989 and the crushing of the democracy movement in Tiananmen, postmodernism became a conservative discourse in China as its decentering of “universals” such as human rights sanctioned attacks on the “Enlightenment” project. See Lu, 34–37.

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