

From Individual Guilt to Public Remorse: The “Confessions” (*chanhuilu*) Column in the Journal *Yanhuang Chunqiu*

Sebastian Veg

When, in 1986, the writer Ba Jin (1904-2005) published an essay calling for a “Museum of the Cultural Revolution,” and referring to his visit to the Auschwitz memorial, he sparked one of the first limited discussions in China about the question of collective guilt for the events of the Mao era (1949-1976). Since the end of the Cultural Revolution, the death of Mao and the adoption of the “Reform and Opening” policy, various individuals and groups had tried to come to terms with the legacy of collective violence under Mao’s rule. The Chinese Party-state’s official approach to this question is a central subject of the volume and is dealt with systematically in the introduction. Suffice it to note that the break with the Mao era was three-pronged. On the political level, the precondition for confronting the events of the Cultural Revolution was the removal of the Gang of Four, followed in the last months of 1980 by a precisely choreographed trial that was conceived as a political spectacle. Second, on an ideological level, the June 1981 Resolution on Party History served to clarify the role of the Party in the events that had taken place during the Mao era. Third, on a legal and administrative level, a massive investigation of claims took place known as the “revision of unjust, false and mistaken verdicts” (*pingfan yuan jia cuo an*), including in relevant cases financial and administrative compensation. It was followed by a campaign to identify compromised younger party officials and prevent their promotion.

However, moral questions did not figure prominently in these political, ideological and administrative processes. The notion of “injustice” implicit in the revision of verdicts was based on the legal and political norms at the time of the original judgment, which often boiled down to whether a conflict should have been treated as an antagonistic contradiction or as a “contradiction among the people.”¹ Collective violence was not envisaged in any detail but rather generically blamed on incitement by Party radicals and, ultimately, the Gang of Four.² The emphasis was on compensating victims or their families, while local authorities had considerable leeway to exercise discretion and leniency in dealing with participants in violent

¹ See Daniel Leese, *Maos langer Schatten. Chinas Umgang mit der Vergangenheit* (Munich: CH Beck, 2020), 242-244.

² Leese, *Maos langer Schatten*, 262, 445-46.

activities and only a small number of leaders of rebel or other violent groups were sentenced in provincial courts.³ While the state approach was not necessarily atypical in comparison with similar situations in other countries, it left many individuals to find their own ways of dealing with issues of individual and collective guilt, moral (rather than legal or administrative) responsibility, and the need to seek atonement and pardon.

The debate sparked by Ba Jin in 1986 remained limited in scope, but it introduced the key notion of *chanhui* 懺悔 (“confession of guilt and remorse”), which periodically resurfaced in discussions over the following decades. In fact, the sporadic chronology of debates is not unlike the situation in post-World War 2 Germany, where a few significant early publications, such as Karl Jaspers’ book *The Question of Guilt* (*Die Schuldfrage*, 1946), did not lead to broader discussion within society until several decades later. This chapter explores one of the most recent and significant episodes of this ongoing debate in China through an analysis of a regular column titled *Chanhuilu* (“Confessions”), which appeared from 2008 to 2014 in *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, a semi-official journal largely devoted to memories and historical debates of the Mao and post-Mao eras. It argues that the notion of *chanhui* provided a culturally significant and yet sufficiently flexible framework for a public discussion of individual guilt and atonement for acts of collective violence. As elucidated below, the notion is vague enough to avoid overstepping political red lines of public discussion, even as it accommodates a variety of configurations of violence and individual responsibility. In the absence of satisfactory official or collective mechanisms to deal with guilt and atonement, individuals use written public statements of “confession and repentance” to take moral responsibility, seek atonement, and transmit knowledge of historic events to the next generation.

The Discussion about Guilt and Atonement

Moral issues did not feature prominently in official documents of the post-Mao transition. After Mao’s death, the narrative of the Cultural Revolution was dominated by a notion of “universal victimhood,” in which all guilt was apportioned to the Gang of Four, while almost everyone else became a victim. This gave rise to an outpouring of claims. As has

³ See the discussion of cases in Liaoning and Shanghai in Leese, *Maos langer Schatten*, p. 449-452; and on rebel leaders p. 455-458. See also Daniel Leese, “Revising Political Verdicts in Post-Mao China. The Case of Beijing’s Fengtai district,” in Jeremy Brown and Matthew Johnson, eds. *Maoism at the grassroots: everyday life in China’s era of high socialism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2015): 102-128.

been noted, the 1981 Resolution was designed to stem the flood and avoid a cycle of revenge, although self-victimizing narratives continued to proliferate.⁴ It is true that the Resolution says little about mass violence; however, the suggestion that it articulates or even suggests “universal complicity” is not persuasive.⁵ Paragraph 20(3) of the Resolution, when considered as a whole, clearly presents the “masses” as victims rather than accomplices of violence:

Nominally, the “Cultural Revolution” was conducted by directly relying on (*yikao*) the masses. In fact, it was divorced both from the Party organizations and from the masses. After the movement started, Party organizations at different levels were attacked and became partially or wholly paralysed, the Party’s leading cadres at various levels were subjected to criticism and struggle, inner-Party life came to a standstill, and many activists and large numbers of the basic masses whom the Party has long relied on were rejected. At the beginning of the “cultural revolution”, the vast majority of participants in the movement (*bei juanru yundong de daduoshu ren*) acted out of their faith in Comrade Mao Zedong and the Party. Except for a handful of extremists, however, they did not approve of launching ruthless struggles against leading Party cadres at all levels. With the lapse of time, following their own circuitous paths, they eventually attained a heightened political consciousness and consequently began to adopt a sceptical or wait-and-see attitude towards the “cultural revolution”, or even resisted and opposed it. Many people were assailed either more or less severely for this very reason. Such a state of affairs could not but provide openings to be exploited by opportunists, careerists and conspirators, not a few of whom were escalated to high or even key positions.⁶

Despite their legitimate enthusiasm for Chairman Mao, most members of the masses found themselves “rejected” by the movement; some were “drawn into” (*bei juanru*) it, but “did not approve of launching ruthless struggles,” and many were “assailed” because they “resisted and opposed” it. While it is certainly true that the Resolution was designed to put an end to the ongoing discussion about responsibility for the events of the Cultural Revolution and put

⁴ Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, “In Search of a Master Narrative for 20th century Chinese History” (*China Quarterly* 188, December 1986, 1070-1091): 1085-86. It is noted that “self-victimization” also played a role in post-war Germany.

⁵ See for example: “Instead the ‘masses’ are included in the system of complicity. They ‘supported’ the idea of the Cultural Revolution and only later became sceptical. Did the young people not respond enthusiastically to Mao’s appeal? Their involvement was not compliance but an active form of support. ... The Red Guards and the ‘rebels’ are neither heroes nor victims. They are accomplices.” Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, “In Search of a Master Narrative,” 1081. It is unclear which term in the Resolution might be translated as “supported.”

⁶ Article 20(3), “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China,” 27 June 1981, *The Maoist Legacy*, <https://www.maoistlegacy.de/db/items/show/2610> (last accessed 12 December 2020).

the Party back in control of the narrative, it mainly did so by reaffirming the guilt of the two “counter-revolutionary cliques,”⁷ as well as the “handful of extremists” and a few “opportunists, careerists and conspirators” who abetted them. In any case, questions of individual and collective responsibility, guilt, remorse, and pardon were largely left unresolved.⁸

Therefore, when Ba Jin, at the time the president of the Chinese Writers’ Association, called for a frank commemoration of both victims and perpetrators of violence, it caused some debate among Chinese intellectuals. Published just before the 20th anniversary of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, and almost exactly ten years after Beijing residents had congregated on Tiananmen Square to commemorate Zhou Enlai and express their rejection of the Cultural Revolution, his essay transcribes a conversation with a friend:

[Ba Jin:] “It’s not easy! Some people say: ‘We should forget the past.’ Others blame everything on the Cultural Revolution. Some would like to cross it out with a single stroke, others wish it could be repeated. ... As for us, twenty years later, we are still thinking about our pain, so we should confront this question seriously, confront ourselves seriously, and reflect on what mistakes we committed. Everyone should come to a conclusion. The best would be to build a museum, a ‘Museum of the Cultural Revolution.’” I had finally voiced the thought I had kept in my heart for ten years.

He replied: “After reading your essay ‘The Story of Auschwitz’ [1951], I was deeply shaken, as if I had visited the Nazi death factory myself. ... We should establish a museum, a memorial, I fully agree with your view. That everyone should carefully consign to memory their own words and acts and those of others during those ten years is not meant to prevent them from forgetting past grudges. It is only to remind us to remember our own responsibility, the responsibility we must take for bringing about this great catastrophe for several generations named ‘Cultural Revolution.’ Victims or perpetrators, older or younger generation, regardless of who has raised their hand or

⁷ Cf. “As for Lin Biao, Jiang Qing and others, who were placed in important positions by Comrade Mao Zedong, the matter is of an entirely different nature. They rigged up two counter-revolutionary cliques in an attempt to seize supreme power and, taking advantage of Comrade Mao Zedong’s errors, committed many crimes behind his back, bringing disaster to the country and the people. As their counter-revolutionary crimes have been fully exposed, this resolution will not go into them at any length.” “Resolution on certain questions,” art. cit., para 19.

⁸ There are obviously some exceptions. For an example of how a “perpetrator” who was punished after the Cultural Revolution expressed a form of “remorse” during internal procedures appealing his earlier judgment in the 1980s, see: Zhang Man, “From Denial to Apology. Narrative Strategies of a ‘Perpetrator’ after the Cultural Revolution,” in Daniel Leese and Puck Engman, eds., *Victims, perpetrators, and the role of law in Maoist China: a case-study approach* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018): 150-173.

nodded their head, whether rebels, ‘capitalist roaders’ or carefree clique (*xiaoyao pai*), whether dragon or phoenix, horse or ox, all could come to this place to scrutinize themselves in a mirror and contemplate what we have personally done to advance or oppose the ‘Cultural Revolution.’ Otherwise, how could we ever repay the indelible debt that we owe to our children and descendants!”⁹

This exchange makes several important points, including the implicit but daring comparison between Maoism and Nazism, and the inextricable tangle of guilt and victimization, in which no participant can claim the innocence of pure victimhood. It also assumes a form of responsibility and “debt” (*zhai*) to future generations, which can best be dealt with by providing a museum, an institutional space of memory, where each person can reflect individually. This suggestion goes well beyond the framework of the 1981 Resolution.

The relatively liberal context of 1986 was conducive to further debate within the semi-official sphere.¹⁰ Commenting on Ba Jin’s work, Liu Zaifu (b. 1941, head of the Institute of Chinese Literature at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences since 1985), in a text published in *People’s Daily* in September 1986, endorsed what he described as Ba Jin’s call for “confession and repentance” (*chanhui*). In his view, Ba Jin’s wish to “share the responsibility of history” stemmed from the writer’s “moral conscience” (*liangzhi*), and was therefore situated on a deeper level than political or legal responsibility. Liu justified his choice of the word *chanhui* (whereas Ba Jin used *huihen*, remorse) by pointing out that it encompasses the meaning of guilt (*zuigan*), as distinct from “legal crime” (*fali shang de zui’e*) and “religious sin” (*shenxue shang de yuanzui*). There were self-criticisms during the Cultural Revolution, he notes, but – not unlike the self-negating religious repentance of Augustine’s *Confessions* (*Chanhuilu*) – they only strived to demonstrate the lowliness of humans with respect to the supreme savior. On the contrary, Ba Jin does not use a divine yardstick to measure human action, but uses the notion of guilt to “resist acts that trample on human values and respect.”

⁹ Ba Jin, “Jinian” [Remembering], *Suixianglu xuanji* (Beijing: Sanlian, 2003): 53–54. The essay, dated April 1, was first published in the Hong Kong *Ta Kung Pao* on 13 April 1986. See also Ba Jin, *Nacui sharen gongchang: Aosiweixin*, Shanghai: Pingmin, 1951 (reprinted in volume 17 of *Ba Jin quanji*, Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1991).

¹⁰ In early 1986, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences published a report recommending more separation between State and Party to improve management of economic reforms; Yan Jiaqi, the head of CASS’s new Institute of political science, published an article calling for political reforms and study of parliamentary systems. The same year, Yan Jiaqi and his wife Gao Gao published the first book-length history of the Cultural Revolution in China. After the anti-bourgeois liberalization campaign of 1987, discussion of the Cultural Revolution was further curtailed in 1988, see: “Regulations governing the publication of books about the ‘Great Cultural Revolution’, 10 December 1988, in MLD, item no. 4748.

Liu Zaifu outlines three dimensions of guilt implicit in Ba Jin's self-scrutiny: collective guilt for the backwardness of the Chinese nation, "survivor guilt" in view of sacrificed comrades like Lao She (the inability to save the most outstanding intellectuals of one's generation), and the weakness of national character (servility, blind loyalty and xenophobia derived from "feudal thinking"). The latter defines the need for a new individual, self-affirmative repentance based on a "self-realization of subjective values" (*zhuti jiazhi de ziwo shixian*), which unlike self-cultivation in traditional culture does not simply aspire to compliance with external norms. Also, unlike Rousseau's fictional *Confessions*, Ba Jin's reflections are truly authentic (*wanquan zhenshi*).¹¹ Although Liu Zaifu is to some extent ensconced in the intellectual frames of the 1980s (more so than Ba Jin in fact), like the notions of national character and responsibility to the nation for not having prevented the disasters of the Cultural Revolution, he also captures the moral and individual dimension of the responsibility for acts of violence envisaged by Ba Jin.

Finally, in October 1986, Liu Xiaobo (1955-2017), then a young academic and literary critic, picking up some of Liu Zaifu's points, attacked the "scar literature" that had been actively perpetuating the universal victimhood narrative of the Cultural Revolution. As a basis for his criticism of the literature of the "new period" and its "feudal ethics," he underscored its nostalgia for the socialist purity of the "seventeen years" (1949–1966), and its ultimate upholding and affirmation of the reeducation process that brings intellectuals closer to the proletariat, echoing Liu Zaifu's description of the "wrong" form of self-criticism that had been widespread under Mao's rule.¹²

Although it is hard to determine how much of this debate was influenced by readings dealing with the German post-War or possibly Soviet contexts, the main arguments were not particularly unique to China. The question of individual and collective guilt has been widely discussed in political transitions after episodes of mass violence. After World War 2, the prevailing legal approach excluded the notion of collective responsibility for mass crimes.

¹¹ Liu Zaifu, "Xinshiqi wenxue de tupo he shenhua" [Breakthrough and deepening accomplishments of the new era literature], *Renmin ribao*, September 8, 1986, p. 7. The full text was later published as: "Wenxue yu chanhui yishi: Du Ba Jin de *Suixianglu*" [Literature and repentance: Reading Ba Jin's *Random Thoughts*] [Dec. 1986], *Liu Zaifu Ji* (Harbin: Heilongjiang Jiaoyu, 1988), 313–26.

¹² See Liu Xiaobo, "Weiji! Xin shiqi wenxue mianlin de weiji" [Crisis! The literature of the new era faces a crisis], *Shenzhen Qingnianbao*, October 3, 1986. See also my discussion in: "Literary and Documentary Accounts of the Great Famine: Challenging the Political System and the Social Hierarchies of Memory" in Sebastian Veg, ed., *Popular Memories of the Mao Era* (Hong Kong: HKUP, 2019): 116-117. Liu Xiaobo became more critical of Ba Jin after he withdrew into silence following 1989. See for example Liu Xiaobo, "Ba Jin shi yimian xiaochui de baiqi" (Ba Jin is a drooping white flag), *Minzhu Zhongguo*, 25 October 2005.

While the “Versailles model” had criminalized entire nations and consequently inflicted retribution on state entities, the “Nuremberg model” adopted a principle of individual responsibility and collective victimhood.¹³ In the German post-war context, a few intellectuals raised the issue of guilt, although the general discussion remained quite limited. For example, in his book *The Question of Guilt (Die Schuldfrage)*, 1946, Karl Jaspers famously argued for a distinction between political responsibility, which was collective, and moral guilt, which could only be individual, although it too could be understood as a form of “everyman’s guilt.” Jaspers called for a “cleansing” of guilt through atonement, reconciliation and transformation (although critics have pointed out that this approach is too subjective and pays insufficient attention to the victims’ act of pardoning). Theodor Adorno, by contrast, in a lecture delivered in 1959, argued that collective atonement was impossible among the generation of participants in state crimes and that it would be preferable to concentrate on “democratic education” of the following generation.¹⁴ Hannah Arendt offered yet another critique by arguing that Jaspers’ emphasis on the sincerity or authenticity of reconciliatory communication risked shifting concerns toward a sentimental or ritualistic form of performance, away from the more pressing demands of political efficiency of atonement.¹⁵

China’s case obviously has its own specificities with respect to the German debate. The connection between mass violence and various incarnations of the state during the Cultural Revolution may have been a relatively more open question for a time, with few archival records directly available, but recent research has shown the overwhelming role of state, party and military actors in mass violence.¹⁶ In contrast to Germany, China’s state

¹³ Gerry Simpson, “Men and abstract entities: Individual responsibility and collective guilt in international criminal law.” In A. Nollkaemper, H. Van der Wilt, eds., *System Criminality in International Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 69-100. By virtue of the same principle, the Emperor, seen as a symbol of the nation rather than an individual, was left out of the Tokyo trials. In this way it was hoped to “free the nation from the burden of collective guilt while detaching those responsible from the society concerned and eliminating their political influence.” Madoka Futamura, “Individual and Collective Guilt: Post-War Japan and the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal,” *European Review* 14.4 (2006): 471-483.

¹⁴ Theodor Adorno, “Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit” (1959) in *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970): 10-28. Michael Schefczyk, “Aufarbeitung von Schuld. Eine philosophische Auseinandersetzung mit Jaspers und Adorno,” in: Thorsten Moos & Stefan Engert, eds., *Vom Umgang mit Schuld. Eine interdisziplinäre Annäherung* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2016, 247-264): 252. See also Habermas’s formulation: “There is no collective guilt. Whoever is guilty must answer for it individually. At the same time, however, there is such a thing as a collective responsibility for the mental and cultural context in which mass crimes become possible.” Jürgen Habermas and Adam Michnik, “Overcoming the Past” (*New Left Review* 203, Jan-Feb 1994, 3-16): 7.

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963). Andrew Schaap, “Guilty Subjects and Political Responsibility: Arendt, Jaspers and the Resonance of the ‘German Question’ in Politics of Reconciliation.” *Political Studies* 49, no. 4 (September 2001): 749–66.

¹⁶ See for example Andrew Walder, “Rebellion and Repression in China, 1966-1971,” *Social Science History* 38, no. 4 (2014), 513-539.

institutions as established in the period from 1949 to 1966 remained in place after 1976, with the caveat that some had become defunct between 1966 and 1976 and had to be revived, while certain institutions associated with the Cultural Revolution (Case Examination Groups) were now viewed as illegal and phased out. The state did not recognize its “guilt” on a philosophical and historical level, even less issue any apology, although a limited form of responsibility is implicit in the reversal of verdicts and the payment of reparations, and was sometimes acknowledged.¹⁷ In the Soviet Union, too, a debate about guilt and repentance began in the samizdat literature in the 1970s and 1980s, within the framework of the communist regime, with Solzhenitsyn arguing for a form of collective responsibility and national repentance for the crimes of the Stalin era while Grigorii Pomerants argued for a more individual model of guilt.¹⁸

In China, although the 1986 debate did not immediately give rise to any high-profile initiatives, some low-level discussion of how to deal with individual and collective responsibility for the Mao era continued over the years.¹⁹ One important incident took place in 1999-2000, when the young firebrand intellectual Yu Jie (b. 1973) attacked the older writer Yu Qiuyu (b. 1941) in the essay “Yu Qiuyu, why won’t you confess?” (*Yu Qiuyu, ni weihe bu chanhui?*), accusing him of having been a propaganda writer in the service of Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyan under the name Shi Yige. This set off a protracted controversy, until a Shanghai court found Yu Jie’s allegation to be without basis. It also sparked a more general discussion of *chanhui* in society, when the large-circulation *Southern Weekend* published opposing articles by the philosopher and Cultural Revolution scholar Xu Youyu (b. 1947) and the poet Yu Jian (b. 1954). Xu Youyu did not mention Yu Qiuyu but made a renewed case for the need to confess and repent:

¹⁷ See for example Hu Yaobang’s speech on 25 September 1978 (MLD, item no. 4829) quoted in Leese, *Maos langer Schatten*, 260. For an example of apologies on the local level see the chapter by Song Guoqing in this volume.

¹⁸ See Mischa Gabowitsch, “Foil and Mirrors: The Soviet Intelligentsia and German Atonement,” in Gabowitsch, ed., *Replicating Atonement. Foreign Models in the Commemoration of Atrocities* (Cham: Springer/Palgrave, 2017): 267-302. The introduction also develops the idea the German “model” of public atonement is unsuited to many other historical situations.

¹⁹ For example, two well-known journals, *Dongfang* (Orient) and *Jiaodian* (Focus) were shut down when they tried to publish issues dealing with the Cultural Revolution in a more critical way for the 30th anniversary in 1996. The *Jiaodian* issue was mainly a collection of oral history interviews by Xu Youyu. Gao Xingjian’s *One Man’s Bible*, published overseas in 2000, sets up an explicit comparison between the Holocaust and the Cultural Revolution, but did not receive much attention in China.

To this day, Ba Jin's words are a model of morality and conscience for the entire nation. His words were sincere and courageous, but compared to the depth of the catastrophe, I think they are not profound enough and are even somewhat hollow and weak. Have his words become the upper limit of our nation's moral standard and historical wisdom? ... I believe that repentance is absolutely necessary, at least for those who have harmed others. ... Some principals and teachers, after waiting for more than ten or twenty to thirty years, finally received an apology from the students who had struggled against them, and this was a great comfort to them. Of course, in the vast majority of cases, they have waited for decades without hearing from the victims, so that the wounds of the victims never heal. ... Nonetheless, in the last analysis, I believe that repentance is for the sake of the wrongdoer; it does not offset the wrongdoing, but it transforms your moral stance. If you don't have the courage to face the past and repent publicly, then the debt you owe will follow you for the rest of your life.²⁰

Xu Youyu develops the argument that public confessions are essential both for the victims to receive recognition and for the peace of mind and self-respect of the perpetrator.

Yu Jian by contrast highlighted that repentance was an act of individual freedom and no one could be forced to repent – otherwise China would only see a repetition of the Cultural Revolution witch-hunts. He also took issue with Yu Jie's statement that he was not targeting Yu Qiuyu as an individual but as a symbol of the entire era: "Why did the Red Guards feel no qualms of conscience when they struggled against teachers back then? – precisely because those teachers had become detached from concrete people – mothers, women, men, friends, that person grading your homework under the lamp – and had become abstract symbols. For the Red Guards too, 'the target was not an individual' but the 'whole'."²¹ Although he concludes that no one can escape their guilt, including Yu Qiuyu, Yu Jian is in fact accusing Yu Jie of being a new-style Red Guard. The fear of witch-hunts is of course a legitimate concern and also featured repeatedly in discussions about transitional justice in post-communist Eastern Europe. Either way, the passionate debate of the early 2000s showed that the issue of *chanhui* was still incandescent and that it was probably too early for a more systematic engagement with the historical, legal, and moral questions raised by the memory of

²⁰ Xu Youyu, "Chanhui shi juehui biyaode" (Confessing is absolutely necessary) *Nanfang zhoumo*, 2 June 2000.

²¹ Yu Jian "Chanhui shi geren ziyou" (Confessing is an individual freedom), *Nanfang zhoumo*, 2 June 2000. More material on the debate can be found in: Yu Kaiwei, ed, *Chanhui haishi bu Chanhui* [To repent or not to repent] (Beijing: Workers' Press, 2004).

violent persecutions.

***Yanhuang Chunqiu* and Its *Chanhuilu* Column**

New public forums, though still controlled, began to appear in the 2000s, with the rise of unofficial (unauthorized) publications, such as newsletter-type journals like *Jiyi* (Remembrance) and *Zuotian* (Yesterday), as well as semi-independent authorized journals like *Lao Zhaopian* (Old Photographs) and *Kan Lishi* (Looking at History). They were followed by a few high-profile cases of public apologies for participating in mass violence, in particular during the Cultural Revolution.²² Academics and former participants in the events of the Cultural Revolution then in turn questioned these as incomplete or insincere and gave rise to further academic debate.²³ During this time, *Yanhuang Chunqiu* became the prime venue for debates over historical issues.

Yanhuang Chunqiu (sometimes translated as “Annals of the Yellow Emperor” or “China Through the Ages”) was a very unique journal, from its establishment in 1991 until it was rectified in 2016, after it published a series of commemorative essays for the fiftieth anniversary of the Cultural Revolution. It was founded in the aftermath of the Tiananmen crackdown by Du Daozheng (former director of the General Administration of Press and Publications) under the protection of General Xiao Ke, in order to maintain a dialogue between intellectuals from different groups in China and overseas, and was able to take over the registration number of a journal that had ceased publication and exist legally (while avoiding the strict vetting process for new publications). Its staff was entirely made up of retirees who lived off their pensions and its operating costs were covered by a loan that was gradually repaid thanks to subscriptions. The decisive force was its seven-person editorial board, which included chief editor Wu Si and retired journalist Yang Jisheng, and it made decisions based on a majority vote. Wu Si describes it as both a state-run and a private, peer-managed (*tongren*) publication, protected mainly by the high rank of some of its editors. From an early circulation of about 40,000 copies, it gradually increased to a print-run of almost 200,000 copies in 2014, including 138,000 subscriptions, with a strong online presence and

²² The most well-known former Red Guards to apologize are Chen Yi’s son Chen Xiaolu in August 2013 and Song Renqiong’s daughter Song Binbin in January 2014.

²³ See for example the series of special issues devoted by *Jiyi* to Song Binbin’s apologies. Song Binbin, “40 nian lai, wo yizhi xiang shuo de hua” (For 40 years, here’s what I’ve been wanting to say), *Jiyi*, no. 80 (February 4, 2012), http://news.qq.com/a/20140113/001794_all.htm. The special issues devoted to the Song Binbin case are *Jiyi* nos. 47, 49, 80, and most recently no. 112.

11 million followers across a series of social media portals. The government began to reassert control over it in 2014, and entirely reorganized the journal in July 2016.²⁴ In the early years, *Yanhuang Chunqiu* published texts on political reforms, originating mainly in the orbit of Hu Yaobang's friends and collaborators, but as time went on, its trademark and arguably most popular content became amateur and oral history, unpublished documents or memoirs, and other forms of critical reflection on the Mao era.

One of the most remarkable examples of a public forum to discuss sensitive episodes in PRC history in general, and in particular issues of historical guilt was the *Chanhuilu* column. The column published 18 articles between 2008 and 2014; 15 appeared between September 2009 and July 2012 (about one every other month).²⁵ The column presents a rich set of data for a survey of how confessions and remorse could be expressed in a public forum, at least for about half a decade. Wu Si, the chief editor at the time, noted that it was generally the editors who, when receiving a suitable submission, decided to run it in the *Chanhuilu* section.

The *Chanhuilu* column was specifically set up by the editors. In general, when the editors saw a suitable manuscript, they would include it in that column. Just like for other columns, it would be rare for authors to specify where their contribution should appear. But I can't confirm 100%. Sometimes authors, usually unfamiliar to us, might specify "for such and such a column" on the manuscript.

Part of the manuscripts also came from a book edited by Wang Keming and others, *We Confess*. The book had an editorial committee, which I was also a member of. We reached an agreement that if we received or commissioned this kind of manuscript, we would first publish it in *Yanhuang Chunqiu*. Quite a few manuscripts also came from this source.

Before the *Chanhuilu* column was established, *Yanhuang Chunqiu* published some confession articles, but very few. After the column was set up, whenever such an article

²⁴ This paragraph is based on Wu Si, "Reconstructing a Public Memory of the Mao Era," in Sebastian Veg, ed., *Popular Memories of the Mao Era* (Hong Kong: HKUP, 2019), p. 47-49. Wu Si discusses the significance of the *Chanhuilu* column on p. 53. I particularly want to thank him for drawing my attention to its significance. On *Yanhuang Chunqiu* see also Mary Mazur, "Public Space for Memory in Contemporary Civil Society: Freedom to Learn from the Mirror of the Past?" *China Quarterly* 160 (December 1999), pp. 1019-1035.

²⁵ Some additional pieces were published as inserts and are sometimes counted as part of the column, e.g. the insert by Liu Boqin in the June 2013 issue.

came along, we would include it. The column was always in need of articles, we wanted to keep it running.²⁶

Wu Si provides some important clues as to how the texts published under the column heading came to be connected. While he does not dwell on the term *chanhui*, the fact that the editors were able to immediately earmark new submissions for this column suggests that they had an implicit model of what a “confession” should contain.

Without placing too much emphasis on the etymology of the word *chanhui*, it is still relevant to briefly summarize its origins. The word originated as a Buddhist term, a compound of *chan*, a phonetic transliteration of the Sanskrit *kṣama* (“expression of remorse”), followed by the Chinese word *hui* (repentance). It designated an elaborate penitential liturgy (“confession of guilt and remorse”), in which generic lists of sins were enumerated in a collective chant, following a fixed classification. No individual sins were confessed, nor was there any notion of absolution or supernatural confirmation that a sin had been eliminated (since the karmic process could not be undone); instead it was hoped that the “merit” (*gong*) produced by the liturgy would be collectively shared among the community, improving the “karmic balance” of all sinners.²⁷ In later centuries, *chanhui* became syncretically intertwined with both Confucian practices (in particular based on the innate moral knowledge encapsulated in the term *liangzhi* as it was used by Wang Yangming) and Christian representations (as noted previously, the term was used to translate Augustine’s opus), through which it acquired new resonances.²⁸ *Chanhui* is widely understood today as an endogenous term, rather than a Western import, while its long syncretic tradition makes it extremely malleable and suitable to incorporate different types of practices.

Wu Si also highlights the importance of Wang Keming’s book, *Women chanhui*, published in 2014. Out of the 18 articles published in the *Yanhuang Chunqiu* column, seven also appear in the book (which contains a total of 35 essays, including a few older classics). Although the column does not contain any editor’s guidelines, the book contains a preface by the editorial committee (in which Wu Si was a member), which is said to have been sent as a

²⁶ Email interview with Wu Si, 18 February 2019. On Wang Keming’s book, see also Zhang Man, “Narratives and Voices of Cultural Revolution ‘Perpetrators’,” in this volume.

²⁷ See Jonathan A. Silk, “Buddhist *Chanhui* and Christian Confession in Seventeenth-Century China,” in J. Silk, ed., *Buddhism in China* (Leiden: Brill, 2013): 609-35.

²⁸ Wu Pei-yi, “Self-Examination and Confession of Sins in Traditional China” (*Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 39, no. 1, 1979: 5–38).

letter to solicit contributions (*yuegaoxin*). This preface may have therefore further shaped contributors' understanding of what was expected of them.

In the preface, the editors make a number of programmatic arguments to persuade the reader of the virtues of *chanhui*. They list four levels of responsibility: individual and moral, political, cultural, and historical. On an individual psychological level, former perpetrators have avoided mentioning their crimes because they do not want to betray the idealism of their youth, but hiding crimes does not remove them (“We were participants in crime, just like young Germans following the Führer”); in fact, only confession can make the crimes of their youth meaningful. Politically, the silence of the perpetrators has created the conditions for people to praise the Cultural Revolution and call for its repetition: this must be avoided at all costs. On a cultural level, it is easy to blame those who gave the orders in order to escape responsibility (“We were victims – what is there to confess? We only followed orders – if they don’t confess why should we?”), but taking responsibility will improve both the person who confesses and humanity as a whole: “For us, confessing is the self-awakening of moral conscience, an elevation of humanity.” *Chanhui* can make Chinese society more tolerant and humanity more forgiving. Finally, with regard to history, confessing can transform the unbearable experience of the past into a lesson for the future: “Repenting means speaking the truth, and asking for forgiveness. ... Settling accounts does not mean taking revenge [*qingsuan bu shi fuchou*]. Only if we confess can we be pardoned, because confessing means saving my own soul; pardoning means saving the other’s humanity.”²⁹ This preface highlights some of the “ingredients” that are expected in a “confession”: there is a need to both detail the acts committed (“speaking the truth”) and to avoid blaming them on others. Psychologically, confession can provide a form of redemption; although forgiveness depends on the victims, the confession itself can lend new meaning to an experience that is remembered as shameful. Redemption is achieved because the confession makes society as a whole more tolerant and more moral. The editors’ arguments - which are both normative and utilitarian - highlight the psychological benefits of *chanhui* for the perpetrator, the moral improvement for society as a whole, and the better prospects for democratic reforms.

²⁹ Editors (Bianweihui), “*Women chanhui shidu: qianyan*” (Preface: an attempt to read *We Confess*), *Women chanhui. Tuoxia mianju, taochu liangxin, wenge canyuzhe shouci tanlu xinsheng* (Beijing: CITIC, 2014): 4–8 (the first three quotations are on page 6, the last on page 8).

Events and Narrative Strategies in Confessions: Establishing Individual Guilt

The second half of this chapter provides a detailed analysis of the “confessions” published in the *Chanhuilu* column. It must be noted that these narratives are submitted to the journal on the author’s own initiative. Apart from a modest honorarium, they could hardly expect any symbolic – or even less, any political – gain from their publication. However, they do provide the authors with a form of control over the narrative; in this sense they are “confessional scripts” that may re-narrate or reshape the past in connection with the author’s needs in the present, and should not necessarily be taken at face value.³⁰ For this reason, the analysis begins with a typology of the historical events and types of crime or transgression that are documented in each article. It then attempts to investigate the position of the authors and their strategies for narrating the events and their own role and responsibility within them. Finally, it will attempt to circumscribe the notion of *chanhui* on the basis of how each contributor performs their act of confession and repentance, and defines an underpinning notion of justice or morality.

All of the 18 articles deal with Mao-era political events. All except one (no. 12) implicate the author, directly or indirectly, in some form of political violence. Most of the articles are written by men, but 3 or 4 are authored by women. It should be pointed out that, although the Cultural Revolution in the broad sense occupies two thirds of the articles, the column covers a variety of events and places, spanning a broader chronological range (the number in parenthesis from 1 to 18 refers to the articles in chronological order as they appear in the appendix).

Table 1. Historical and geographical contexts of acts of violence

Historical Event	Location
Early (land reform and suppression of counterrevolutionaries) campaigns (1950)	2 articles: both on Guangxi (8, 13)
Anti-Rightist movement (1957)	4 articles: Qingdao (5), Datong (6), Zhejiang (14), Shanghai (17)
Cultural Revolution proper (1966-69)	10 articles:

³⁰ Leigh Payne, *Unsettling accounts: neither truth nor reconciliation in confessions of State violence* (Durham: Duke UP, 2008). Some typical strategies in perpetrator narratives are denial, heroism, betrayal, and de-personalized remorse, as discussed in detail in Zhang Man, “Narratives and Voices of Cultural Revolution ‘Perpetrators’,” in this volume.

	4 on Beijing schools (2, 3, 4, 7) 2 on Beijing state administrations (12, 16) 1 Shanghai (9) 1 Guangzhou (10) 1 Hebei village (11) 1 Hubei cadre school (15)
“One Strike, Three Anti” (<i>yida sanfan</i>) campaign (1970).	2 articles: Shaanxi (1), Anhui (18).

The types of offense or transgression are generally not particularly remarkable per se, although there are a few cases of severe violence (including a death case) or with extremely grave consequences (execution). The suggested typology below classifies the confessions into four categories based on the setting and the type of connection between the victim and the perpetrator. The three cases of Cultural Revolution violence selected for an in-depth discussion at the end of the chapter are in bold.

Table 2. Settings and targets of acts of violence.

Setting	Target and type of violence
Violence against family members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sending son for reeducation (5) - struggling and beating a great-great aunt during land reform (13) - denouncing mother and having her executed. (18)
Violence in the school/university setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - denouncing a high school classmate in Beijing and handing in his diary (2) - beating teachers in junior high school (3) - killing another student in a vocational high school (7) - taking part in beating teachers in Shanghai senior high school; being an enthusiastic red guard (9) - investigating and denouncing teachers in Guangzhou (10)

	- beating other children in junior high school (Hubei Cadre school), lecturing father (15)
Violence within the work unit	<p>- denouncing and beating local cadres; denouncing and deporting a refugee (1)</p> <p>- designating a subordinate in a factory as a rightist (6)</p> <p>- arresting and executing a rebel leader (8)</p> <p>- struggling against war hero Xiong Junchang (11)</p>
Attacks against major political figures	<p>- denouncing Hu Yaobang (4)</p> <p>- writing film reviews for Jiang Qing (12)</p> <p>- writing a report on Zhang Naiqi (14)</p> <p>- accusing Tao Zhu (16)</p> <p>- attacking Prof. Sun Dayu at Fudan University (17)</p>

While the acts that are discussed are banal, the confessions establish the author’s guilt on the basis of two criteria: the personal connection between the victim and the perpetrator, and the long-ranging consequences in the victim’s life.

First, the confession almost always contains a discussion of the connection between the victim and the perpetrator that cuts through the veil of “collective violence.” As Yu Jian noted, as long as the victims are anonymous, when violence is presented as directed against a class or a group, there can be no individual guilt. In the essays, the victims are not members of a class, but parents or other blood relations, classmates, teachers or other elders. Many perpetrators recall wronging elders: of course, violating the order of seniority is an offense with a long history in Chinese law. During land reform in Guangxi (text 13), the author, aged 15, and his brother, 13, are made to beat their great-great-aunt with a bamboo stick in a struggle meeting; the author insists on the transgression that is being committed as a result of sharing a common ancestor with the victim. In other examples, children talk back to parents or lecture them, and in one case, report them to the police. Sometimes offenses also include violence against a character with a specific moral aura like former war heroes: Xiong Junchang (a former Guomindang officer who returns to his village in Hebei) and the politician and intellectual Zhang Naiqi.³¹

³¹ Zhang Naiqi (1897-1977) was a journalist, politician and “third road” intellectual with an interest in economic questions in the 1930s and 1940s, who cofounded the China National Democratic Construction Association (Min

However, it is not always the case that the transgression also violates the social or generational order. Guilt can also be connected to using violence against someone younger or inferior. The writer Lao Gui recalls an incident that took place in July 1966 when he was a student in Beijing no. 47 High School, and doing his utmost to demonstrate his political credentials (text 2). While his classmate, Song Er’ren, who had always been kind to him, was home for the weekend, Lao Gui found his diary under his pillow in the dorm, read his “reactionary thoughts” (“clouds gathering over the motherland”) and reported him to the work team. Later, when he wanted to apologize, he discovered that Song had been sent to labor camp in Heilongjiang, and died in 1977. Here the transgression is not so much against the social hierarchy as a betrayal of trust and friendship. Another example is the confession of a mother who sent her son to reeducation in a village during the Anti-Rightist movement (text 5), ultimately taking responsibility for the son’s premature death, although it occurred decades later.

Framing guilt in terms of a personal connection can be seen a strategy for establishing individual responsibility. In a context in which violence was widespread, sometimes ubiquitous, it is suggestive to focus on violence directed against a person with whom the author has a direct connection of kinship, trust, or feeling. While the act of violence may still be part of a broader historical context, the betrayal of a personal connection (or *renqing*) becomes a tangible exemplar of a moral wrong and triggers the will to seek individual atonement.

Second, confessions tend to engage with the consequences of the perpetrator’s act: the feeling of guilt is often connected to the subsequent turn in the victim’s life and possibly early death. In some cases, this can be very straightforward, in particular when physical violence entails direct consequences, but in other cases the causality is more complex. In the mother’s confession mentioned above (text 5), when the whole family is targeted in the Anti-Rightist movement, their 13-year-old son, left alone in Qingdao, begins trading on the parallel market, stealing, and living a generally disreputable life. When the parents briefly return from labor camp, they decide to have him sent to a village for reeducation, which becomes a turning point in his life. It is followed by several other self-perceived mistakes made by the mother at crucial moments (university exam, transfer to a work unit). Although the son did end up going

Jian) in 1945. He was among the “major rightists” removed from their positions in June 1957. His rightist “hat” was removed in May 1975 but he was only fully rehabilitated in 1982, five years after his death. See the account by his son, a well-known intellectual in his own right: Zhang Lifan, “Fengyun chenzhou ji. Zhang Naiqi zai 1957” [Shipwrecked among hardships. Zhang Naiqi in 1957], *Ershiyi shiji* 40 (April 1997), 43-57.

to university and becoming a musician, he died at age 49, triggering his mother's remorse for her role in his early death, and the realization that it is too late to apologize. The transgression in the perpetrator's act is therefore all the more significant as it is understood to have derailed the victim's entire life beyond the original act of violence, constituting a form of unnatural intervention into the victim's destined lifepath (*ming*). If this is indeed a consideration that hovers in the background of some of the narratives, it would represent an obvious departure from the Maoist project of creating a "new man" and a profound undermining of the philosophical foundations of Mao's regime, as it would suggest that the kind of social engineering that took place in the large-scale campaigns of the Mao era is fundamentally illegitimate or immoral.

The Significance of *Chanhui*: Individual and Public Atonement

Many (but not all) of the texts published in the *Chanhuilu* column directly express feelings of remorse, repentance, or explicit apologies. However, the vocabulary (*chanhui*, *xiezui*, *daoqian*, *kuijiu*), form, and addressees of these expressions can vary quite considerably. Alternatively, certain texts describe symbolic acts that the responsible person has undertaken to convey their remorse to the victim and atone for their acts. For example, Lao Gui (text 4) sent a copy of his book *Xuese Huanghun* (Blood-stained sunset) to Hu Yaobang in the 1980s to apologize for having taken part in a struggle meeting against him during the Cultural Revolution. A party-secretary in a factory in Datong, when forced to identify rightists in his work unit in 1957, chose one of his best engineers – due to the latter's family connections to the Guomindang (text 6). The alleged rightist went through 20 years of labor camp and died of liver cancer shortly after his rehabilitation in 1979; his daughter was prevented from attending university despite her outstanding grades. From that date onward, the former party secretary anonymously sent a monthly pension to the engineer's widow. Guilt is not expressed in the form of an apology, and the monetary compensation remains anonymous, as if the party secretary was seeking to make up for a lack of state reparation. Although the money is paid from his own salary, his wish to preserve anonymity can perhaps be understood to mean that he is taking a share of collective responsibility rather than individual responsibility as such. The article is written by the party secretary's daughter who insists that, after her father died in 2004, his eyes "wouldn't close" until the family promised

that they would continue to pay 300 yuan a month to the victim's widow.³² Here the sense of guilt and need to atone for past wrongs is transmitted to the next generation.³³ The essay finally lifts the veil on the origin of the anonymous donation, perhaps personalizing the act of apology.

In some cases, the perpetrator performs a kind of ritual, for example in the confession by Wang Jiyu (text 7), who killed another high school student by hitting him on the back of the head in hot pursuit on August 5, 1966. Wang does not offer an apology since repentance is in any case insufficient: "At the bottom of my heart I still have something hard and stubborn. But my reason keeps repeating clearly 'You are a criminal!' In the human world, where we are united by nature, divided by our habits, how was so much hatred produced? Repentance is not enough [*chanhui shi bugou de*]: maybe all of this will require several generations of introspection."³⁴ But he recalls that at the winter solstice following the death, he burnt paper money first for his father and grandmother, then for Wang Yanhong, the student he killed (seeking atonement by providing for the dead person's wellbeing in the other world). However, the money won't burn until he says out loud: "No need to pardon me, I owe you!" The point here is not so much the reference to traditional culture as the lasting need to express feelings of guilt, and the transitive dimension of pardon. Only a "sign" from the victim can effectively absolve the perpetrator of his guilt. Finally, while the "ceremony" itself was private, its restitution in the confession text gives it an additional, though belated, public dimension.

The explicit expression of a public apology is often connected to the impossibility of direct communication with the victims, either because they are dead or impossible to locate or reach. For example, the author who beat his great-great-aunt during land reform in Guangxi (text 13) finally returned to his village after the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Party Committee and tried to apologize (*xiezu*) to her. However, she had moved to another valley and was often not home; when he tried to go back later she had already died. The essay is therefore presented as an opportunity to make up for the failed apology and repent (*chanhui*). It also cannot be excluded that, in this and in other cases, the author may have intentionally avoided or at least not very actively sought to offer an apology in person. The public apology

³² Wang Ying, Text 6, 46.

³³ See also Sascha Klotzbücher, *Lange Schatten der Kulturrevolution. Eine transgenerationale Sicht auf Politik und Emotion in der Volksrepublik China*, Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 2019.

³⁴ Wang Jiyu, Text 7, 74.

then becomes a kind of substitute and atonement for the inability or unwillingness to seek pardon directly from the victim.

Another interesting example is a text (16) by Yan Changgui (b. 1937; Jiang Qing's former secretary), who accuses himself of having contributed to the attacks on the head of the propaganda department Tao Zhu (1908-1969), who died of cancer under house arrest in the Cultural Revolution. Yan receives a reply from Tao Zhu's daughter Tao Siliang, who pardons him, arguing that ordinary people cannot bear individual responsibility for acts they committed in the Cultural Revolution, and ultimately blames Mao for the demise of her father.³⁵ Whereas the perpetrator is eager to establish his individual responsibility, the victim's descendant falls back upon the official narrative according to which ordinary people ("the masses") were manipulated by the leaders of the Cultural Revolution – with the added nuance that she explicitly includes Mao among them. It is true that Adorno, for example, has voiced doubts about the legitimacy of perpetrators receiving pardon from the victim's descendants.³⁶ However, this case shows that the framework established by the 1981 Resolution, provided it is accepted by the victims rather than imposed by the perpetrators, can serve to appease social conflicts and prevent further acts of revenge.

Similarly, several texts mention the issue of retribution (*baoying*), with some perpetrators expressing the view that they were (justly) punished (by fate) in return. He Qiongwei expresses his regrets about having written a report to denounce the alleged crimes of Zhang Naiqi (text 14): despite subsequently obeying requests to denounce other people, he himself ended up being accused of being a rightist, and spent 20 years in and out of prison. As he reflects, he remembers a few sayings of Zhang Naiqi's: "You don't need to be a minister or National People's Congress member, but you can't avoid being a human being"; "I refuse to mix up truth and falsehood to face others, or to obliterate truth and falsehood to face myself." He concludes that Zhang Naiqi can still be considered a gentleman with an iron spine, whereas he himself is just a fabricator of "special reports," a weak and ordinary person, who received just retribution for having contributed to attacking a morally impeccable gentleman and war hero like Zhang.

However, even as they express feelings of remorse and guilt, some texts also attempt to elucidate the social and historical causes and consequences of the violence, at the time and

³⁵ On the persecution of Tao Zhu, see also Mark Czeller's chapter in this volume.

³⁶ Adorno, "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit," 25.

up to the present day. This can sometimes create some tension with the narrative of guilt. Lu Xiaoya (text 3), describes how 13-year-old primary school students preparing for the middle school test in Shanghai in the Summer of 1966 were dehumanized in the name of the revolution: “We were still children but taught to see a group of people as ‘targets of the revolution’.”³⁷ A former Shanghai student reflects on why she joined in violence against teachers (text 9), after a 2005 class reunion at which her classmate does not dare go with her to visit their class teacher. Comparing the treatment inflicted on teachers (wearing black tags, shearing their hair) to Jews in Auschwitz, she asks herself why she took part, and recalls being terrified of being excluded, becoming a “daughter of a seven black element” (*heiqilei ziniu*).³⁸ Those excluded from joining the “heirs of communism” (*gongchanzhuyi de jiebanren*)³⁹ would have neither friends nor future. In this context, denouncing others became a method of self-preservation and reciprocal denunciation was ubiquitous. She concludes that the moral breakdown of the Mao years – despite the civility education campaign of the 1980s – explains why morality has collapsed in today’s Chinese society, in which everyone mistreats or tortures others. This conclusion stands in contrast to other historical contexts, in which regime change and the denunciation of earlier injustice was used to provide moral legitimacy for the new regime: by pointing out the continuity between the moral breakdown of the 1960s and the 2000s, the author on the contrary suggests continuity in the regime. At the same time, the argument does not pry down to an individual level to ascertain moral responsibility, ascribing the violence to a collective effect of the regime, the ubiquitous fear and dehumanization, while remaining silent about the perpetrator’s fear of apologizing directly to her victim.

Shi Liang (b. 1956), a well-known Beijing intellectual and member of the Writers’ Association, was sent down with his parents to a May Seventh Cadre School⁴⁰ set up by the Ministry of Culture in Hubei in 1969, when he was in his first year of junior high school. In his confession (text 15), he recalls how he acted like a “little cadre” (*xiao ganbu*), enjoying violence against others and preaching ideological conformity. After describing an incident in

³⁷ Lu Xiaoya, Text 3, 66.

³⁸ The “seven black elements” are a variant of the more widely used expression “five black elements” (landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries, bad elements, rightists). According to the author, the two additional categories referred to in this context are capitalists and revisionists (capitalist-roaders).

³⁹ After the establishment of the PRC, training the “heirs of communism” became a central element of the new education system.

⁴⁰ May Seventh Cadre Schools, named after a directive issued by Mao on 7 May 1966, were set up around the country from 1968 for cadres and officials to take part in manual labor. Shi Liang is also the author of an essay collection *Chanhui de shiren* (The remorseful poet).

which he struck a classmate with a spade, he notes “madness can become addictive” (*fengkuang shi nenggou shangyin de*). In another incident he denounces a classmate who has written a big-character poster complaining about the lack of food. When his father reproaches him for the poster, Shi Liang lectures his father on the need to “struggle against unhealthy tendencies (*buliang xianxiang*).” He expresses contradictory feelings about this incident:

This too is one of the incidents in my life I feel guilty [*kuijiu*] about. But it was also typical of the times [*juyou shidai secai*], it can also be described as a kind of “madness” [*fengkuang*]. Social relations at the time were not based on advocating tolerance and good intentions, but rather on setting off waves of struggles and criticism in the name of the so-called “revolution,” producing a kind of political struggle madness throughout society [*yigu doulaidouqu de zhengzhi fengkuangbing*]. I too unconsciously [*bu zijue de*] became infected with this “political madness,” to the point of having no scruples about unleashing “criticism” on my own classmate.⁴¹

Shi Liang’s invocation of the times and the pervasive atmosphere of violence, expressed in the metaphor of a “madness” which “infects” him, is clearly a form of attenuation of agency or even evasion of responsibility. Nonetheless, Shi does ask for forgiveness for not having helped a classmate who is persecuted and beaten by others and concludes: “If I had been 10 or 20 years older, I would have become a Yao Wenyuan or a Qi Benyu,” comparing himself to two key members of the Cultural Revolution Small Group and radical theorists who engaged in violent attacks on Mao’s enemies. While the text displays a desire to sincerely explore the psychological state of the child who became “intoxicated” with violence, the explanation tends to drift toward an evasion of individual responsibility.

Yan Changgui (text 16) attributes his willingness to join attacks on Tao Zhu to his own faith in Mao which reached the “level of superstition,” his obedience “to the level of blindness.” From a poor peasant family, Yan truly believed Mao’s argument that revisionism and the restoration of capitalism were an imminent danger (Yan refers to a “Damocles sword hanging over the heads of party leaders”), and that they were entitled to take any measures to protect the party and socialism against this existential threat.⁴² Wang Jiyu (who killed a student), like others, particularly refers to the effects of the “three loyalties and four

⁴¹ Shi Liang, Text 15, 86.

⁴² Yan Changgui, Text 16, 83-84.

boundlessnesses” (*san zhongyu si wuxian*)⁴³ to explain why young people feared neither suffering nor death (*bu pa ku, bu pa si*). It is of course undeniable that the psychological conditioning associated with the intense Mao cult was a factor in radicalizing many perpetrators. However, in this case too, individual responsibility is attenuated through the psychological explanation.

In this perspective, the attempts by many of the perpetrators to provide a socio-historical explanation for the breakdown of basic ethical rules of social interaction, highlighting the effects of revolutionary doctrine, social conformity, and a general willingness to engage in violence resulting from the breakdown in social taboos, can also be seen as a form of limitation of individual liability, to use a legal term. While they are willing to confess participation in collective violence and to seek atonement for some of their individual acts, these authors also highlight the collective context. This tension can in fact cut both ways. As argued by Karl Jaspers, political responsibility is collective, while moral responsibility is individual, and highlighting both is not necessarily a contradiction. However, Adorno’s view is also relevant, in the sense that many of the individual attempts to seek atonement come too late to receive pardon from the victims themselves. In such cases, Adorno highlights the displacement from the imperative to apologize to the victims towards an imperative to educate the next generation.⁴⁴ This dimension too is implicit in the narratives that highlight the sociopolitical factors in the collective violence of the Mao era.

Violence in the Cultural Revolution: Three Apologies

Since many of the cases are highly individual and resist summarization or typologies, this paper will conclude with a more detailed narrative of three cases presented in the column and test the previous conclusions (framing of guilt as a personal connection; engaging not only with the act but also its lifelong consequences; staging a symbolic act of repentance or apology; elucidating the sociopolitical context of violence) against these cases. Since the Cultural Revolution is at the core of the *Chanhuilu* project, the three texts discussed below deal with the Cultural Revolution period, in three different settings: within the school, within the work unit, and within the family (leaving aside the more ambiguous category of verbal violence against political leaders), presented by order of publication. They present different

⁴³ Two slogans related to the personality cult of Mao that reached a peak in 1968. The three loyalties referred to: loyalty to chairman Mao, to Mao Zedong thought and to Mao’s proletarian revolutionary line; the four boundlessnesses designated boundless worship, love, belief and loyalty to chairman Mao. See Daniel Leese, *Mao Cult. Rhetoric and Ritual in China’s Cultural Revolution*, Cambridge, CUP, 2011, p. 175-185.

⁴⁴ Schefczyk, “Aufarbeitung von Schuld.” 261.

outcomes of the process of confession and redemption: in one case pardon is granted by the victim, in the second the apology is delayed until the victim can no longer receive it but presented to society, in the third it is inserted into a narrative of the party's self-rectification.

Violence on a Collective Farm in Shaanxi: Successful Pardon

In "How I beat Gu Zhiyou," the first text of the series to appear in the journal, Wang Keming, a writer close to *Yanhuang Chunqiu* and the main editor of the associated book of confessions, discusses three events that took place in Yujiagou, a village in northern Shaanxi where he had been sent as a rusticated youth: two persecutions of local cadres, and one case of deporting a fugitive back to southern China. During the "One Strike, Three Anti" (*yida sanfan*) campaign in 1970,⁴⁵ every production brigade (*dadui*) had to identify at least one person as a target for struggle. Since they had no counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, or landlords and since their only rich peasant was too poor, Wang's brigade identified a cadre, Gu Zhiyou, who had been attacked in the "Four Clean-Ups" (*siqing*) campaign (also known as the Socialist Education Movement) just before the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Gu's main crime was saying, "when three rings appear in the skies, many heads will fall on Earth."⁴⁶ Wang Keming suggests that in context it may have been a prophecy either of natural calamity (drought) or manmade disaster (the One Strike, Three Anti campaign), adding political criticism to its superstitious essence.⁴⁷ In any case, the superstitious and therefore reactionary nature of the proverb was established in meetings, and the production team reported it to the people's commune; the struggle meeting at the brigade level included one person from each village, including Gu. For this struggle session, production was stopped and everyone received work points for attending the meeting. Indeed, it seems everyone attended; women and girls even donned new clothing for the event. Wang Keming, together with other educated youths, shouted insults at Gu and physically assaulted him.

Wang Keming explains his enthusiastic participation by his frustration at having been originally unable to join the Red Guards because too many of his relatives had been

⁴⁵ This campaign launched in January-February 1970 was designed to oppose three economic crimes (graft/embezzlement, speculation/profitteering, extravagance/waste) and to "strike" the "counterrevolutionaries" connected to a Soviet-US conspiracy to invade China. Over the course of the year, several hundred thousands were arrested (especially those who criticized the Cultural Revolution) and thousands were executed (among them Yu Luoke). See Roderick MacFarquhar, Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006): 301-307.

⁴⁶ Wang Keming, Text 1, 64.

⁴⁷ The saying *Tianshang san huantao, dishang rennao pao* seems to be widely attested in Northern China (with local variants for the last character).

criticized.⁴⁸ This was his chance to join the “revolutionary violence,” and he describes himself as “following like a hooligan” (*pizi*). Recalling his wish to draw blood, he writes: “At the time, I saw him [Gu] as an enemy and myself as a revolutionary far above him.” Afterwards, Wang and Gu worked together for eight years in the fields, and Wang recalls that Gu always helped him and took care of him. However, he continued to see him as an enemy, someone with a “problem.”⁴⁹

Wang then begins to reflect on the reasons for the violence and his own position in the events taking place. By joining the violence against Gu, a “victim” (*shoukuren*), Wang becomes a “participant” in the Cultural Revolution. By taking part in the top-down “One Strike, Three Anti” campaign and deriving advantages from it, even if it is only “keeping safe” and being seen as “politically reliable,” he takes up a role that cannot be dealt with through simple moral remorse; he needs to take political responsibility. Among the reasons, a decisive role in legitimating violence is played by the phrase “In the name of the Revolution,” which serves as a blanket justification. Wang also points out the importance of the “three loyalties and four boundlesses,” which could only take place unchecked in a “totalitarian dictatorship” (*zhuanzhi jiquan*). However, Wang insists that he needs to take individual responsibility: he personally supported the Cultural Revolution (although he hated Jiang Qing) and the violence it entailed. As an activist, he understands himself as a participant in a “crime” (*zuiguo*) of organized, pre-meditated violence. In his view, “After the trial of the Gang of Four, the initiators of the Cultural Revolution (*Wenge fadongzhe*) were not required to take further responsibility, and we who had displayed boundless loyalty to them were not required to take responsibility either, everything was crossed out with one stroke, and everyone marched forward with light baggage.” However, he claims this need for himself: “If we don’t take responsibility for opposing civilization, how can we learn to take responsibility for defending civilization? If I defend myself in the name of youthful sincerity, I would never understand the collapse of my moral conscience. If I don’t take responsibility for my crime (*zuiguo*), I might continue to support such crimes forever.”⁵⁰ Wang’s conclusion can serve as a model of the classic distinction between collective political responsibility and individual moral guilt, with Wang taking responsibility for both, arguing that the “totalitarian system”

⁴⁸ Recruitment into the Red Guards was limited to members of politically “pure” families from the “five red categories,” often the children of high-ranking cadres, which was a source of considerable resentment for enthusiastic students in 1966, who went on to join the ranks of the “rebels.” See Andrew Walder, *China Under Mao. A revolution Derailed*, Harvard UP, 2015, p. 213-222.

⁴⁹ Wang Keming, Text 1, 65.

⁵⁰ Wang Keming, Text 1, 66.

functioned on a collective level to enable “organized, planned persecutions,” and underscores his desire to be held individually accountable for actively taking part in them.

The second event is the repatriation of a starving fugitive from the south. He is captured and accused of stealing cow feed. His language is incomprehensible to his captors, among them Wang Keming, so he is accused of refusing to confess, beaten, and tied up. The political commissar finally stops the *zhiqing* from further beating him and orders them to deliver him to a “Repatriation Station” (*qianfanzhan*)⁵¹ in the county town. In view of his pitiful demeanor, Wang surmises that he must have been a survivor of the Cultural Revolution massacres, maybe in Guangxi. If sent back home, he would have certainly been executed. Wang then asks: Why did we do it? Again, the phrase “in the name of the Revolution” figures prominently among the justifications for their “sadism” (*shinièkuang*).

These two events (as well as another cadre beating) trigger a long process of reflection and coming to terms with the need to apologize: “For 30 years I tried to convince myself that beating someone who was being struggled against was not wrong.” However, Wang cannot shake off the feeling of guilt. At this point he seeks out Gu Zhiyou in the cave he is living in (northern Shaanxi is famous for cave-homes) and apologizes (*daoqian*) to Gu, who excuses him, saying they were just children, and even presents him a gift of embroidered cloth shoes: “Ha! It was a campaign! You children didn’t understand a thing!”⁵² Wang then brings up the case of the fugitive, wondering how to apologize (*xiezuì*) to him 38 years later. This is in fact one of the rare examples of a direct apology being presented to the victim and granted.

The essay concludes with a reflection on the act of apologizing. Wang points out that during the Cultural Revolution, confessions and apologies were also ubiquitous (*women ye chanhui guo*), but at the time confessions were a tool of “totalitarian oppression,” since “anything that was not Mao Zedong thought could become a crime” (a point previously mentioned by Ba Jin and Liu Zaifu). For decades afterwards, the system did not require, and in fact actively prevented him from recognizing his mistakes (*rencuo*). Today, his apologies are justified in the name of a “common humanity”: “Only when I understood that humanity is above everything else, did I see the necessity of apologizing. Each person’s confession can be an experience for humanity.” There are two levels to this reversal. On a political level, after several decades of reforms, Wang argues that “today as we are actively building a democratic

⁵¹ Since domestic travel was not allowed under ordinary circumstances, “vagrants” (*mangliu*) could be forcibly “repatriated” to their place of origin (*yuanji*) as evidenced by their household registration (*hukou*).

⁵² Wang Keming, Text I, 67.

system, individual confession and reflection [*chanhui fansi*] contribute to resisting undemocratic values of human nature.” The second level is moral and generational. Wang refuses to be remembered by the next generation (*miandui houdai*) as a cynic, or as morally deficient, or as a moral pygmy who fears the judgment of history (*haipa lishi de airen*). Having passed middle age, he believes that his generation has an obligation to tell their children about their evil acts. He concludes with the sentence: “Once I had passed middle age, I understood that I have no enemies.”⁵³ This conclusion represents an inversion of his earlier worldview, when society was divided among allies and enemies. It is justified not in a political manner, but as a process of biological and moral maturing, related to the transience of human life, and the need to give meaning to his generational experience as part of his legacy to the next generation.

Wang Keming has obviously devoted a great deal of thought to the issue of *chanhui* and some of the points from the preface to the book *Women chanhui* also appear in his text. Like Liu Zaifu, he points out the need to overcome the common understanding of apology as a variant of Cultural Revolution-style self-criticism, in a society divided between friends and enemies. The gradual realization that perpetrator and victim share a common humanity is what allows Wang to directly seek pardon from his victim, and subsequently to transmit his historical experience to the next generation. His is a rare case in which the two alternatives envisaged by Adorno (receiving pardon and transmitting the memory to the next generation) are both realized. In this case, the essay serves not as a substitute for the too-long delayed apology but as a way of sharing the liberating experience of being pardoned.

Violence in a Guangzhou High School: A Series of Failed Apologies

“How I wronged my teachers” by Zhou Jineng (text 10) is a long text by a former student in Guangzhou no. 17 high school, class of 1966, who enthusiastically joined the Cultural Revolution. Like most of his classmates, Zhou was from a worker family. In July 1968, during the Cleansing the Class Ranks (*qingli jieji duiwu*) campaign (which targeted “class enemies” and the “five black elements” from late 1967 until it merged with the One Strike, Three Anti campaign in 1970), Zhou Jineng and his classmates formed a militia team, and Zhou joined in various acts of violence against teachers. Zhou states his wish to confess his role in the campaign. He describes the campaign activities he engaged in as organizing

⁵³ Wang Keming, Text 1, 67.

Mao Zedong thought study classes around the city, uprooting the “five black elements” and “GMD trash” among teachers, which is generally consistent with the targets of the campaign nationwide. In early July 1968, their team leader obtained personal files of a number of teachers: within the Cleansing the Class Ranks campaign they were supposed to be used to clarify the teachers’ family backgrounds and identify targets for home searches. In particular, the files contained confessions from different periods, including the result of the Open Your Heart to the Party (*xiang dang jiaoxin*) campaign, which required denouncing rightists to the authorities in the aftermath of the Anti-Rightist movement.⁵⁴ These confessions were now used against the teachers. Zhou’s team raided a dozen teachers’ houses and some of the targets were imprisoned. Zhou remembers escorting Mr. Feng, a physical education teacher, back home from a prison in the faraway suburbs, without speaking to him and without helping carry his luggage. When he sees him again at a class reunion in the 1990s, they speak and joke, but Zhou states that he is unable to apologize, without explaining why. He later attends his funeral in 1996 and can now only apologize silently. Another teacher, Ms. Rong, whose house they raided twice and whom Zhou had beaten, has emigrated to the United States. When Zhou asks a classmate to apologize to her for him, it turns out that she is in an old age home in Los Angeles suffering from dementia, and thus cannot receive the apology. These two examples again suggest that perpetrators may not have been very eager or very persistent in attempting to apologize. The written public “confession” thus becomes a kind of substitute for the failed apology.

Zhou’s group also took part in raiding the home of Mr. Lin, a 50-year-old bachelor teaching chemistry, who was accused in a letter written by a nurse of harboring inappropriate thoughts (*feifen zhi xiang*). In 1978, someone investigating the rectification of “unjust, false and mistaken” verdicts contacted Zhou (then working in a factory for ten years) to ask about the raid on Mr. Lin’s apartment: Lin had accused the Red Guards of destroying his furniture and taking 500 yuan. At that time, Zhou, frightened by the accusation and the large amount of money, gave a written statement in which he expressed an apology (*di yi ci biaodale qianyi*) to Lin, presumably to show his sincerity and mitigate the seriousness of the accusations (although it is not clear whether this was a requirement). There is no follow-up to the inquiry (*meiyou xiawen*). Much later, in 2009, Zhou tried to inquire about Lin, who had left the school

⁵⁴ The author situates it in 1959, although it is generally understood to have taken place in the first half of 1958. The “Open Your Heart to the Party” movement was similar to the Anti-Rightist movement in form (study and self-criticism), but targeted intellectuals who were “on the side of the people,” while the Rightists were defined as having sided with the enemies of the people.

a long time ago. In his essay, Zhou again expresses an apology (*wo dui Lin laoshi biaoda chanyi, shizai duibuqi*) for his “bestial acts” (*shou xing*).

Zhou expresses his remorse about all of the acts that took place in his school, in which, in two years, seven students and four teachers died “unnatural deaths” (*fei zhengchang siwang*). As he writes, “an ordinary school was turned into a meat grinder” (*jiaorouji*). To justify his change in attitude, Zhou argues that he has kept these secrets locked up for over 32 years and has reached old age. There had been an opportunity to take responsibility in the early 1980s when the school investigated so called unnatural deaths in the Cultural Revolution and reached out to one of Zhou’s classmates (this seems to be a separate investigation from the one triggered by Lin’s complaint and request for financial compensation). As Zhou writes: “I was the one who was best informed about the antecedents and could have best cleared up the situation. However, I was afraid of harming my ‘future,’ and was too scared to come forward spontaneously. Although I could have used the ‘environment of the times’ as an excuse [*dunci*], in the event I once again proved unworthy of [*duibuzhu*] the dead.”⁵⁵ Zhou Jineng concludes by apologizing to the dead and expressing his repentance (*chanhui*).

Zhou’s case is interesting because, in addition to the usual characteristics (individual guilt established through a personal connection), it presents a series of failed apologies. In the late 1970s, when victims requested financial compensation, and in the early 1980s, when the school conducted an investigation, Zhou was not in a mindset to confess and atone, fearing punishment and social ostracism. While this is not difficult to understand on a psychological level, it triggered an increased sense of guilt for not having taken individual responsibility. It is only with the passage of time, and in fact after the perpetrator can be fairly sure that his victims are dead or incapacitated, that he feels not only compelled to offer a public apology, but also comfortable in doing so.

Violence within the Family in Anhui: Redeeming the Revolution

The last case is a particularly tragic one, presented in a “Letter without an address” (text 18) written 34 years after the events by the author, Zhang Hongbing, to his mother, Fang Zhongmou. The author describes himself kneeling at his computer looking at his mother’s portrait on the screen and crying as he types the letter, written in the second person. Zhang Hongbing (b. 1953), who became a lawyer, launched a legal case to have his mother’s tomb

⁵⁵ Zhou Jineng, Text 10, 82.

recognized as a monument. This was widely reported in the mainstream media around 2013 but the case was unsuccessful.⁵⁶

On February 13, 1970, the author and his father reported the author's mother – the deputy director of the outpatient department of the People's Hospital in Guzhen County, Anhui – to the authorities for criticizing the revolution, supporting Liu Shaoqi, opposing Mao's personality cult, and expressing criticism of his foreign policy (although this took place during the "One Strike, Three Anti" campaign, the denunciation is presented as a spontaneous act "on the basis of the 1967 regulations on public security"⁵⁷). The author's father also joined the denunciation because he himself had been accused of revisionism in 1966, made to wear a dunce cap, and paraded in the streets. The mother had been cleared of being a spy in 1964, but in the Cleansing the Class Ranks campaign she was again accused of being a landlord and spy. After hearing his mother privately criticize the leadership, Zhang confronted her, which led to her tearing a poster of Mao from the wall. Zhang, aged 17, persuaded she was a class enemy, wrote a denunciation letter which he put into the "complaint box for the masses." She was rapidly arrested and executed on April 11, 1970. The author remembers how she took off her cloth shoes at the execution, just like her father who had been executed in 1929 for joining the CCP, suggesting a parallel between persecution by the GMD and the CCP, in a reversal of history. To show that they had drawn a "clear line" with her, father and son refused to collect the corpse, which was then buried in a ditch for criminals.

The author begins with a dramatic statement: "I want to confess and apologize once more to you (*zaici xiang nin chanhui, daoqian*). With my own hands, I betrayed you to evil and escorted you to the execution grounds. Mother! I am unworthy of you (*wo duibuqi nin*). If I could redeem your precious life I would willingly die immediately, even one hundred times."⁵⁸ The author feels guilt at reaching the age of 60 (a significant number in China), having lived 16 years longer than his mother. He also contrasts his own and his family's party

⁵⁶ E.g. "Lüshi wenge shi jubao muqin, zhi qi bei qiangjue, 40 nianhou shenqing mu mudi wei wenwu" [Lawyer who reported mother during Cultural Revolution, leading to her execution, applies 40 years later to have her tomb listed as monument], *Xinjingbao*, 7 August 2013. <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2013/0807/c1001-22471729.html>

⁵⁷ Article 2 of the Regulations on Strengthening Public Security during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (13 January 1967) famously designated any criticism of Mao Zedong and Lin Biao as a counter-revolutionary crime. See Leese, *Maos langer Schatten*, 144 or Guo Jian et al, *Historical Dictionary of the Cultural Revolution* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2006): 243-44. It is worth noting that this incident took place during the years when public security agents were under widespread suspicion and had been made the objects of a nationwide investigation campaign. See Michael Schoenhals, *Spying for the People*, p. 1-14.

⁵⁸ Zhang Hongbing, Text 18, 29.

membership with his mother's, who was a stauncher party member but rewarded only with persecution.

The author's justification takes place on several levels. First, he is eager to prove that his mother was truly loyal to the party (and hence that he was wrong to denounce her). Her case was officially redressed in 1980 and she is said to have acted in a moment of alienation. Zhang underscores that the critical views expressed by his mother at the time were vindicated in the 1981 Party Resolution. He further highlights that he, his wife, daughter, and son-in-law have all remained loyal party members. He defends his father who "drew a clear line" with his mother, and later remarried, as being motivated only by the desire to protect his children. Consequently, he sought redress for his mother through both the legal and the party system, applying to reinstate her party membership and even for revolutionary martyr status, all the way to the Supreme People's Court, without receiving a response. As part of the legal procedures, he discovered that the accusations of being a landlord and a spy were groundless. Having built a tomb for her in 1982, they applied to the local government to request that it be given monument status, also without success. The legal and symbolic procedures are part of the author's attempt at atonement. However, the apology itself obviously comes too late, so that the essay once more serves as a substitute for the missed apology.

On a second level, the author goes beyond the issue of whether his mother was guilty or not and demonstrates some introspection. He confesses that after the arrest of the Gang of Four in October 1976, his faith "collapsed" and he went through a deep depression. He describes himself as having been completely "indoctrinated" by the bloodline theory and eager to go to any length to prove the "three loyalties and four boundlesses." Finally, quoting the execution of the French revolutionary Vergniaud and the phrase "the revolution devours its children," he expresses the hope that his mother's case can serve as educational material for the next generation, to vaccinate its members against indoctrination.

This is perhaps one of the most convoluted *chanhui* texts, no doubt because the events are so dramatic. The author largely relies on the official party framework to deal with his mother's case, meticulously establishing that the accusations against her were ungrounded and applying through the relevant administrative mechanisms for compensation and redress. His own role is largely attributed to the official narrative of indoctrination by the personality cult and the radical theories of the time, as set out in the 1981 Resolution. Despite the dramatically proclaimed apology, introspection on his individual moral responsibility or guilt plays a lesser role and is ultimately displaced in favor of a somewhat trite meditation on

history and the need to prevent similar tragedies from happening again. Ultimately, what is redeemed in this narrative is not the perpetrator's conscience, but the correctness of the revolution, and the insistence that both the author and his mother were loyal revolutionaries. It is therefore not always the case that the closer the personal ties between perpetrator and victim, the more the moral framework prevails over the official political framework. Zhang Hongbing ultimately succeeds in writing his mother's death into a larger political narrative. Wang Keming argues that it is only when he overcomes the enmity between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries that he can truly apologize to his victim in the name of a shared humanity. Zhang Hongbing, by contrast, apologizes in the name of a shared revolutionary ideal.

Conclusion

The *Chanhuilu* column provided a rare public forum to offer both detailed narrations of events and public reflections on guilt, atonement, and justice. Almost all the essays describe acts of violence committed by the authors during political movements of the Mao years, in which specifically identified victims suffered some form of physical or mental injury. Even as the essays attempt to excavate events obscured by the passing of time, the focus of the narrative is generally on the moral dimension, seeking to articulate an expression of guilt and atonement that can provoke, ideally in some rare cases, the victim's pardon, but in the other cases, at least the sympathy of later generations of readers.

The narration of the historical events is usually interwoven with the author's own process of recognition of him- or herself as the perpetrator of the crime or transgression, established through a personal connection with the victim, and through an understanding of how the act of violence has upended the victim's entire life. Individual responsibility is established through the personal connection between perpetrator and victim, while guilt is evidenced by the transformation of the victim's life path. The apology itself is sometimes performed through a symbolic or ritual act rather than discursively articulated in presence of the victim. More often than not, the author of an essay dwells on the missed opportunities for presenting apologies in person, so that the essay itself becomes a final chance to make amends, the public nature of the text serving as a stand-in for the missed apology. More than a pardon from the (often deceased) victims or their descendants, the authors of the confession seek the lenient judgment of their readers, of society in general, and of the coming generations.

Most authors share an understanding of the distinction between collective political responsibility, which can be to some degree attributed to the radicalization of politics under Mao (as it is in the 1981 Resolution) and the individual dimension of moral responsibility. However, not every author is prepared to shoulder the full weight of individual moral guilt for the violence that was exercised by individuals empowered by the shared ideology and revolutionary discourse from above. As Adorno noted, when a pardon from the victims becomes improbable or impossible, the focus often shifts to a historical elucidation of the collective context and the individual's role. The ultimate meaning of the public apologies performed in the columns of *Yanhuang Chunqiu* is therefore not only to take on the burden of individual guilt, but to share historical knowledge that may contextualize if not attenuate the perpetrator's responsibility and seek the lenient judgment of later generations.

Appendix: List of Texts Published in the *Chanhuilu* Column

- (1) Wang Keming 王克明, “Wo da Gu Zhiyou” 我打谷志有 (How I beat Gu Zhiyou), May 2008, p. 64-67.
- (2) Lao Gui 老鬼, “Wo gaofale tongxue Song Er’ren” 我告同学宋尔仁 (How I denounced classmate Song Er’ren), September 2009, p. 79-80.
- (3) Lu Xiaoya 陆晓娅, “Shengming de anye” 生命的暗夜 (A dark night in life), October 2009, p. 64-67.
- (4) Lao Gui 老鬼, “Wo dou Hu Yaobang” 我斗胡耀邦 (How I struggled Hu Yaobang), November 2009, p. 47-48.
- (5) Shamo 沙漠, “Yige muqin de chanhui” 一个母亲的忏悔 (A mother’s confession), January 2010, p. 60-65.
- (6) Wang Ying 王瑛, “Fan You qianxia de liangxin zhai” 反右欠下的良心债 (A debt of conscience owed since the Anti-Rightist Movement), February 2010, p. 46-47.
- (7) Wang Jiyu 王冀豫, “Beifu sharen de zize” 背负杀人的自责 (Taking responsibility for murder), May 2010, p. 72-75.
- (8) Zhang Hongyun 张红云, “Niming xin rang wo cuo sharen” 匿名信让我错杀人 (How an anonymous letter made me wrongly kill someone), August 2010, p. 75.
- (9) Wang Lianli 王炼利, “Women wei shenme hui zhu Zhou wei nüe” 我们为什么会助纣为虐 (Why we abetted an evildoer), October 2010, p. 79-82.
- (10) Zhou Jineng 周继能, “Wo duibuqi laoshimen” 我对不起老师们 (How I wronged my teachers), February 2011, p. 79-82.
- (11) Li Hua 李华, “Wo dui pidou ‘fandong junguan’ de chanhui” 我对批斗“反动军官”的悔恨 (I repent for struggling a ‘reactionary officer’), May 2011, p. 72.
- (12) Wu Qiwen 吴启文, “Wo zai ‘Chu Lan’ xie wenzhang” 我在“初澜”写文章 (How I wrote for ‘Early Waves’), July 2011, p. 75-77.
- (13) Huang Yiying 黄仪瑛, “Wo da dizhu tang zeng zumu” 我打地主堂曾祖母 (How I beat my landlord great-great aunt), October 2011, p. 92-93.
- (14) He Qiongwei 何琼玮, “Wei xin de baoying” 违心的报应 (Retribution against my will), May 2012, p. 84-85.
- (15) Shi Liang 施亮, “Wo wei zai 5.7 ganxiao daren shen gan kuijiu” 我为在五七干校打人深感愧疚 (Feeling deep remorse for beating people in a May 7 Cadre School), June 2012, p. 85-86.
- (16) Yan Changgui 阎长贵, “Wo canyule dadao Tao Zhu” 我参与了打倒陶铸 (I took part in taking down Tao Zhu), July 2012, p. 82-84.
- (17) Wu Zhenping 武振平, “Wo shangmen pipan Sun Dayu” 我上门批判孙大雨 (How I visited Sun Dayu to criticize him), August 2013, p. 72-73.

(18) Zhang Hongbing 张红兵, “Meiyou dizhi de xin: gei wo de mama Fang Zhongmou”
没有地址的信：给我的妈妈方忠谋 (A letter without address: to my mother Fang
Zhongmou), March 2014, p. 29-36.