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The Suppression of Memory of the Cultural Revolution in China

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Introduction

Mao Zedong, leader of the Chinese Communist Party, launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966 in order to advance his revolutionary vision of Chinese society. He sought to purge capitalists from the Communist Party and to eradicate inappropriate cultural traditions. The Cultural Revolution left China wounded, economically, socially, and culturally. Millions of people were humiliated, tortured, or killed. The effects are still present, but open discussion is prohibited. The 1981 *Resolution* was the last official discussion of the Cultural Revolution.

Several questions arise. How is memory of the Cultural Revolution suppressed in China? Is there an official perspective on the Cultural Revolution? If so, what is it and has it changed? Does it differ from individual narratives? Were such restrictions only aiming at the Cultural Revolution?

History of Cultural Revolution—1966 to 1976

The opening salvo of the Chinese Cultural Revolution was the article titled, “Sweep Away All Monsters and Demons!,” in *People’s Daily*. On May 25, 1966, Nie Yuanzi, a teacher at Peking University used *dazibao*, large posters in black ink with accusations highlighted in red, to attack the university leadership. Many students joined Nie’s *dazibao* voluntarily. Mao also wrote his own *dazibao* in July, entitled “Bombard the Headquarters,” which led people to target headquarters of counterrevolution. Chairman Liu Shaoqi directed Mao’s *dazibao*. Mao later blamed him for carrying the revolution in a capitalist direction. Publicly beaten and humiliated, Liu Shaoqi died in 1969.

At the early stage of the Cultural Revolution, Mao responded to rebel students with a note saying, “To rebel is justified!,” which encouraged the student organization known as the Red Guards. The

Red Guards were groups of students who had complete faith in Mao and would defend Mao's thought to the death. Members of the Red Guard believed that not everyone could be a member, only those who came from pure families. Soon the revolution escalated into physical attacks. The Red Guard's victims were forced to walk around school campuses with bare feet, carrying posters labeling them as "dogs of capitalism." The first death occurred at Beijing Normal University. The vice-president Bian Zhongyun lost consciousness after continued torture.



The explanation of Mao Zedong's first Big Poster. Very Daily. Source: <http://www.verydaily.com/review/artical-346.html>

On August 18, more than a million students gathered in Tiananmen Square to listen to the speech by the military leader, Lin Biao, and some student representatives got the chance to meet Mao. On that day, Mao introduced the idea of destroying the "Four Olds," which meant old customs, culture, habits, and ideas. Violence spread out from Beijing to the whole country, with Red Guards targeting everything relating to the past. More encouragement came from the central government, contributing to the escalation of revolutionary violence. For example, on August 23, the *Liberation Army Daily* praised the Red Guards: "what you did was right, and you did it well!" Foreign churches were burnt; libraries were attacked; many books were destroyed. Starting in 1968, students were banished to the countryside in order to "learn from the masses." Every year there were hundreds of

thousands of student exiles in the countryside, most of whom faced harsh living conditions.

The Cultural Revolution was most extreme in the first three years. As it reached its zenith in 1969, teachers and intellectuals became the main targets; schools closed; books were burned. Teachers suffered public humiliations, like kicking and beating, and many lost their lives. Many committed suicide. On April 27, 1969, Lin Biao appealed for an end to the revolution, proclaiming a "great victory." In this report, Lin pointed to Mao as the source of all wisdom, and emphasized that opposition would be "condemned and punished by the whole party." He acknowledged violence but blamed saboteurs for such disorders.¹ In subsequent years, some schools were able to reopen, like Peking University in 1970. Admission standards changed: only those who were politically advanced—who studied Mao's thought and had at least three years of practical experience in the fields—were accepted. The *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, also known as the "Little Red Book," was mandatory reading.² The Red Guards carried the banner of Mao wherever they went. Badges with Mao's image were popular, and there were one billion badges, four times greater than the total Chinese population at that time.³

In sum, the impact of the early Cultural Revolution was staggering: around two million people died, and many more suffered. Students were relegated to the countryside. People lost their culture, dignity, careers, and family members. Colleges closed during the revolution, officials destroyed books, and many traditions and habits, like Chinese New Year, vanished during the chaos.⁴

Official Memory of Cultural Revolution in 1981

According to the official view, the Cultural Revolution ended when Mao died in 1976. Hua Guofeng, the successor of Mao, called for the official ending of the ten-year revolution.⁵ He proclaimed victory in putting down the revolution's saboteurs. Interestingly, Hua did not emphasize Mao's initiation of the

¹ Stanley Karnow. "Mao's Aide Signals End of Cultural Revolution." *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, April 28, 1969.

² Michael Frolic. "A Visit to Peking University - what the Cultural Revolution was all about." *The New York Times* 24 Oct 1971.

³ Jiang Jiehong. *The Revolution Continues: New art from China*. Rizzoli International Publications, 2008, 54.

⁴ Frank Dikötter. *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History 1962–1976*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

⁵ Ibid.

revolution. He was a faithful follower of Maoism, and he once openly said, according to *People's Daily*, that people should follow whatever instructions Mao gave unswervingly.⁶



The mythology of the great proletarian cultural revolution and the Chinese ultra-left - Donald Parkinson. <https://lib-com.org/history/mythology-great-proletarian-cultural-revolution-chinese-ultra-left-donald-parkinson>

When Deng Xiaoping took control of the party in 1978, the Communist Party tried repeatedly to close the chapter of the Cultural Revolution. On June 27, 1981, the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China passed the *Resolution on certain questions in the history of our Party since the founding of the People's Republic of China*. The *Resolution* states that the Cultural Revolution, which lasted from May 1966 to October 1976, “was responsible for the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the state, and the people,” and it further admits that the revolution “was initiated and led by Comrade Mao Zedong.” It then argues that Mao was a normal human being, who made mistakes too in his life, and that “in his late years, he confused right and wrong and the people with the enemy during the ‘Cultural Revolution’.” Next, the Party shifts blame to counter-revolutionary forces, indicting the Gang of Four and general Lin Biao. The Gang of Four were four leading figures in the Party. During

the later years of the revolution, they became a “political faction,” blamed for competing for political powers. Emphasis was on the distrust between Mao and Lin Biao, especially after Lin Biao became the second most popular figure in the party. Lin and the Gang of Four are criminals and “two counter-revolutionary forces.”

The overall assessment of Mao in the *Resolution*, however, was positive. The Party emphasized Mao’s overall contribution to the country. Although Mao committed some mistakes in his final years, the Party concluded, “his contribution to the Chinese revolution far outweighs his mistakes. His merits are primary and his errors secondary.” The conclusion was that “the Chinese people always regarded Comrade Mao Zedong as their respected and beloved great leader and teacher.” The ten years of revolution were “a great victory won by the entire Party, army and people after prolonged struggle.”⁷

Though muted, as we shall see, the image of Mao as a “respected and beloved great leader” and of the Cultural Revolution as “a great victory” remain the official view.

National Efforts on Suppressing the Cultural Revolution’s Memory

The legacy, however, is highly ambivalent. While the government maintains an official memory of the Cultural Revolution, it suppresses anniversaries of the Cultural Revolution. It is common to celebrate anniversaries or decadal milestones of major historical or political events from the past. In China, each year people celebrate the establishment of the People’s Republic of China or fighting against the Japanese invasion, but there was never an official event for the Cultural Revolution. After the 1981 *Resolution*, the government never officially spoke of these events again. There were no official statements or commemorations in 1996, the thirtieth anniversary of the Cultural Revolution.⁸

⁶ “Hua Guofeng,” *The Times*, Aug 21, 2008. <https://search-proquest-com.libezproxy2.syr.edu/docview/319924964?accountid=14214>.

⁷ The Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. *Resolution on certain questions in the history of our party since the founding of the People’s Republic of China*, June 27, 1981. Accessed on November

14, 2018. <https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/history/01.htm>.

⁸ “30 Years on - the Forgotten Revolution,” *South China Morning Post*, May 12, 1996.

Ten years later, on the fortieth anniversary of the revolution, an international conference on the Cultural Revolution took place in New York City (May 16, 2006). According to Hong Kong based Ming Pao, the Chinese government prohibited scholars from attending. The seminar was entitled “Historical Truth and Collective Memory,” and was intended as an open discussion on major Chinese events. Chinese scholars did not participate. For example, Xu Youyu, a famous researcher on the Cultural Revolution and member of the Institution of Philosophy of the China Academy of Social Science (CASS), received phone calls from the CASS every day to check if he was there (he did not apply to join the seminar). A historical scholar who was the Acting Executive Chairman of the Foundation for China in the Twenty-First Century commented that the seminar would be “helpful for the CCP and for China in absorbing lessons and making progress,” but no governmental funding was forthcoming. The Central Propaganda Department demanded that no activities of the fortieth anniversary of the revolution be held, because the Central Committee of the CCP had already published an official record on the revolution. Suppression of the Cultural Revolution’s memory was tighter than ten years previously.⁹

Fifty years after the revolution began, *People’s Daily*, the main newspaper of the Communist Party, made the most high-level public comment on the anniversary: “History always advances, and we sum up and absorb the lessons of history in order to use it as a mirror to better advance.” The *Global Times* published a commentary emphasizing that the Cultural Revolution would never come back and people should instead focus on the Party’s achievements. These two voices were unusual and seemed to mark progress compared with the thirtieth and fortieth anniversaries. The Communist Party always discouraged discussing or studying the history of the revolution, but *People’s Daily* and *Global Times* had broken the silence. However, those commentaries

made no major break-through. They certainly did not satisfy victims or historians who had waited so long to hear from the government.¹⁰

The decadal anniversaries of the Cultural Revolution, especially the commentaries in *People’s Daily* and *Global Times* in 2016, showed that the official view of the Cultural Revolution remains the same as the one expressed in the *Resolution*, in which mistakes are always secondary and people are encouraged to focus on the Party’s contributions and the future.

The shutdown of the only museum of the Cultural Revolution in 2016 was one of the most direct moves prohibiting people from remembering the past. In 2005, Peng Qi’an, a former local official from the Communist Party, built the first Cultural Revolution museum in Shantou, Guangdong province, more than 1100 kilometers south of the capital, Beijing. The purpose, according to Peng, was to “mourn the dead, to remember the history, to learn lessons from it.” He insisted that his museum was “memorial, not political.”¹¹ Peng never publically advertised this museum, and there was no sign in Shantou that gave directions to the museum; television and radio ignored its existence.¹² The distance of the museum from Beijing and the idea to maintain a low profile allowed it a ten-year existence. But in late April 2016, a few weeks before the fiftieth anniversary of the Cultural Revolution, workers arrived and wrapped “Socialist Core Value” banners around the hall. Those banners represented values like patriotism. The museum closed and everything was kept inside from that day forward. Peng was surprised because not many people actually knew about the museum, and the intention was never about politics. He stated, “Spring would come, but we didn’t know that spring didn’t come, winter did.”¹³

Major historical museums tend to forget the decade from 1966 to 1976. The National Museum of China, closed in 1966 and reopened in 1979, and The Museum of Modern Literature in Beijing, both

⁹ “China’s Suppression of Cultural Revolution Debate “Stronger than 10 Years Ago,” *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, May 15, 2006.

¹⁰ Chris Buckley, “Chinese Party Paper Breaks Silence on Cultural Revolution,” *International New York Times*, May 18, 2016.

¹¹ Didi Kirsten Tatlow, “Cultural Revolution Museum, a Labor of Love and Loss, Succumbs in China (Page A6 N),” *New York Times*, Oct 03, 2016.

¹² Mark MacKinnon, “The Museum You’re not Supposed to Find,” *The Globe and Mail*, Jul 23, 2010.

¹³ Didi Kirsten Tatlow, “Cultural Revolution Museum, a Labor of Love and Loss, Succumbs in China (Page A6 N),” *New York Times*, Oct 03, 2016.

simply omit the Cultural Revolution. Instead, they focus on the Party's achievement and ancient Chinese civilization. In 1991, the CCP introduced a program called the Patriotic Education Campaign to educate youth with patriotic ideology and historical education. However, the Cultural Revolution was missing.¹⁴ The Cultural Revolution is also absent in middle school education. Starting in 2018, the new edition of textbooks barely contains any details about the Cultural Revolution.

In China, several major publishing houses produce different versions of school textbooks. Chapter order and language may vary, but themes and ideas are always similar. In middle school, the Cultural Revolution is normally included in the second semester of eighth grade textbooks. People's Education Press (PEP), established in 1950, is a major official publisher. In 2016, the PEP started to publish new versions of middle school history textbooks, and this year it just updated the book that contains information about the Cultural Revolution. In the old version, the Cultural Revolution is included in Chapter 2, Unit 7, under the topic "The Ten Years of 'Cultural Revolution'." The first paragraph of that unit says "Mao Zedong wrongfully assumed that the Party and Chinese people were facing dangers from the restoration of Capitalism....the Party incorrectly criticized the Chairman Liu Shaoqi." Just like the contents in the *Resolution*, it quickly shifts to the role of Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, stating that they were responsible for all chaos and disorders.

The textbook then jumps to the end of the revolution, with no details. It states that in October 1976, Hua Guofeng and other Party officials "successfully ended the control of those counter-revolutionary forces," and they "saved Chinese Socialism from crisis." The textbook spends four pages on the Cultural Revolution, and its treatment is similar to that in the *Resolution*.¹⁵ Textbooks published by other publishers have similar content. For example, Beijing Normal University Publishing Group also published history textbooks for middle schools. It

has the phrase "Cultural Revolution" in the table of contents and contains the same narrative as the 1981 *Resolution*.¹⁶



Cultural Revolution. History. A&E Television Networks. <https://www.history.com/topics/china/cultural-revolution>

However, PEP updated the textbook and now there is even less discussion of the Cultural Revolution in the latest 2018 edition. The Cultural Revolution appears under Chapter 3, Unit 6, and now has a different title, "Arduous Exploration and Making Achievements." It now becomes "a careless decision during the development of Chinese Socialism." The book states, "Mao Zedong thought the Party and the country were facing danger from the restoration of Capitalism....In the summer of 1966, the 'Cultural Revolution' was launched." Instead of saying that Mao wrongfully initiated the revolution, the new contents simply delete the word "wrongfully." A new paragraph states, "Our Party did not fully understand what Socialism is, so they went in the wrong direction while exploring Chinese Socialism. Nothing can be all smooth sailing." That paragraph

¹⁴ Shan Windsript, "A Modern History of Forgetting: The Rewriting of Social and Historical Memory in Contemporary China, 1966-Present." *Quarterly Journal of Chinese Studies* 1 (4) 2013: 59-68.

¹⁵ "中国历史". (Chinese History) "文化大革命'的十年" (The Ten Years of "Cultural Revolution"). People's Education Press. Translated by author.

¹⁶ "中国历史". (Chinese History) "文化大革命'十年内乱" (The Ten Years Chaos of "Cultural Revolution"). Beijing Normal University Publishing Group. Translated by author.

ends the two-page Cultural Revolution discussion, and the next two pages are about the Party's achievements.¹⁷

These textbooks represent the official narrative on the Cultural Revolution. The old version of the eighth-grade textbook echoes the *Resolution*, stating that Mao made a mistake by starting the Cultural Revolution. Both emphasize the role of the two counter-revolutionary forces. The new 2018 edition, on the other hand, no longer follows the *Resolution* narrative. It does not call Mao's decision on launching the revolution a mistake. The ten-year-long disaster is now "a careless decision."

All of this suggests that the Chinese government is trying to redeem Mao. The contents in the textbook look like the Cultural Revolution was just Mao's decision—not a wrong decision, but just a decision. Moreover, the Cultural Revolution becomes even less important in the textbook. It is no longer mentioned in the table of contents, and is only described under the heading "Arduous Exploration." The latest textbook reduces the contents to two pages and brings in new information about "Making Achievements."

This change in how textbooks depict the Cultural Revolution may have a huge impact. At the beginning of 2018, schools that used textbooks from the PEP all switched to the new edition. Students who just started their second year in middle school now have even less exposure to the Cultural Revolution. It is also possible for them to understand the revolution and Mao's image in a different way because the textbook downplays calling the revolution a mistake. It is unclear whether other major publishers will produce new versions of their textbooks, but what PEP changed in their version of the textbook may be a sign of the government's changing perspective. For decades, the official line was that Mao made a mistake, but his contribution outweighed his errors and people should still regard him as a great leader. In official memory, Mao's mistakes are whitewashed, and the Cultural Revolution becomes almost a footnote in history.

The Cultural Revolution is receding on the internet, as well. Books and articles are under scrutiny. No major website mentions details about the Cultural Revolution. Ordinary people do not have access to historical documents from that period because most of them are classified. The government policy that bans access to any foreign website, like Google or Facebook, makes Chinese people learn information only from an official Chinese perspective. Baidu, the biggest, most accessible search engine, represents the Chinese government's perspective on the revolution. Baidu functions like Wikipedia, in that people can find "historical" material, but it is not credible in its sources and citations. Under "Cultural Revolution," we read "The Cultural Revolution was initiated by Mao Zedong, but manipulated by counterrevolutionary groups...it was responsible for the heaviest damages suffered by the Party, the nation, and people."

There are five categories: Background; Launching; Course; Influence; Major Events Time Line. Under "Influence," it says Mao should take major responsibility. A transition states that Mao made these mistakes while he was trying to explore the Chinese pathway to Communism, shifting the focus from his errors to his good intentions. The final paragraph of this entry summarizes the 1981 *Resolution*.¹⁸ Wikipedia, by contrast, has more information, like memoirs or films, and includes the debate over some key questions on the revolution. It states, "Public discussion of the Cultural Revolution is still limited in China."¹⁹ Indeed. Baidu and Wikipedia, taken together, reveal the difference between a Chinese perspective and a foreign one. Ordinary Chinese do not have access to Wikipedia, leaving Baidu as the only source. Since teachers do not give lectures on the Cultural Revolution, what Baidu says is what people learn about the Cultural Revolution.

Individual Choices on Forgetting the Past

The Chinese Communist Party has made efforts to control the narrative of history. However, silence is

¹⁷ "中国历史". (Chinese History) "艰辛探索与建设成就" (Arduous Exploration and Making Achievements). People's Education Press. 2018. Translated by author.

¹⁸ "文化大革命" (Cultural Revolution) Baidu. Translated by author. Accessed on November 15, 2018.

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/文化大革命/117740?fr=aladdin>.

¹⁹ "Cultural Revolution." Wikipedia. Accessed on November 15, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_Revolution.

private as well as public. Many people choose to hide or forget. As a young girl Wu An'na, a survivor of the Cultural Revolution, witnessed the humiliation and beating of one of her father's colleagues. That colleague later told her that he chose to say good things about a student who kicked and beat him. When Wu asked him why he chose silence, he replied that he did not want to destroy the young student's future, so he worked hard at learning forgiveness, trying to let the past be the past. Wu later learnt that many victims chose silence and forgetting because bringing up history would only reopen their wounds.²⁰ A villager, who experienced the Cultural Revolution and saw his own village destroyed by outsiders, conducted an interview with BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific and said he does not talk about what happened in the past unless asked. He said "let bygones be bygones," without emotion.²¹

Survivors choose forgetting or forgiving because they do not want to live with nightmares, angers, or fears. Since there is no memorial, no museum, and no education about the Cultural Revolution, it may seem pointless to bring up the topic in any event, as a growing number of people do not understand it well. Perpetrators tend to hide their past too, but for different reasons. They seldom apologize publicly for their behaviors because they either consider themselves as victims or do not want to face criticism. Former Red Guards, who are now in their sixties, lost touch after the revolution. It is only in recent years that some of them stood up and gave public apologies. In 2008, Wang, a city youth sent to the countryside during the revolution, shared his apology in a national journal, the first public personal apology from the Cultural Revolution. He felt guilt after the revolution ended and decided to take personal responsibility because "otherwise, my heart will be troubled for the rest of my life."²²

Chen Xiaolu's apology on August 2013 stands out. He is the son of a former CCP general. In

the blog post of his school website, he admitted his participation in organizing the denunciations of school leaders when he was the director of the school's Revolution Committee, and said he would bear direct responsibility.²³ In October, he visited his school and gave face-to-face apologies to his teachers who suffered in camps during the Cultural Revolution.²⁴ His apology was unusual, and it went viral on the internet.

Some people were both victim and perpetrator. In extreme situations, people protected themselves or their families, and it sometimes led to hurting others. For those people, it is hard to define their roles in the revolution. Silence is the common reaction. Some of them refer to themselves as "victims" or "responsible actors," but not perpetrators. They believe the Party manipulated them in the 1960s. A Hong Kong based publisher, Bao Pu, stopped publishing Cultural Revolution memoirs in 2016 because "everyone feels he was a victim."²⁵

Even in cases when people are trying to recollect memories of the revolution, the stories vary since people had different perspectives. Some key information may be unavailable because people refuse to share. Song Binbin, for example, has long been accused of causing the death of the vice president of the Girl's Middle School in Beijing, Bian Zhongyun. She eventually made a public apology in 2010, but it received little attention. In 2014, her second apology attracted more notice, and she told the story of spreading violence in her school. In her apology, she said that when she learnt the students were beating teachers and faculty members at the playground, she tried to convince them to stop and went to the supervisors who should supervise the teachers. As she saw the supervisors did not object to the beating, she left.

On the evening of 5 August, when she heard vice president Bian was lying on the ground, she and other teachers took her to the hospital, but it was too

²⁰ "After Half a Century, the Imprint of Cultural Revolution is Still Deep," *New York Times*, May 17, 2016.

²¹ "Museum of China's Cultural Revolution Meets Apathy, Official Disapproval." *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, May 23, 2005.

²² Didi Tang. "WOUNDED MEMORIES; Fifty Years of Waiting for Apologies; Decades After China's Cultural Revolution, Many Yet to Say Sorry for Wrongdoings." *Chronicle - Herald*, Jun 03, 2016.

²³ Jane Perlez. "A Leader in Mao's Cultural Revolution Faces His Past." *New York Times*, Dec 07, 2013, Late Edition (East Coast).

²⁴ Cary Huang. 2013. "Chen Xiaolu apologizes for torture of teachers at Beijing alma mater," *South China Morning Post*, 16 October.

²⁵ Sui Noi Goh. "Ghosts of the Cultural Revolution." *The Straits Times*, May 16, 2016.

late. According to her, she was not directly responsible for Bian's death. Several other students from the school shared their narratives, but none of them were directly involved in the beating.²⁶ Bian's husband Wang Jingyao refused to make any apology, since no one so far talked about what happened on the evening of 5 August.²⁷ Stories on Bian's death show the divergence of multiple narratives and the fact that there are still people who do not want to share their stories. While some people are making announcements and apologies, willingly or unwillingly, more choose to hide the past. It is not clear whether Song was sincere in her apologies or buckled under pressure, but her story provides people with more information on the Cultural Revolution.

Individual memories come from multiple groups, and it is often hard to draw conclusions from personal narratives, especially when the official narrative is missing. While individuals are openly recollecting memories, the government acts as an inhibiting force. On 13 January 2014, the State Council Information called for removing articles of apology. *China Digital Times* provides the rationale and instructions: "Because online public sentiment is complicated, all websites must cool down the story, 'Song Renqiong's Daughter Song Binbin Apologizes.' First, remove the article from homepages. Interactive platforms must not promote related topics."²⁸

Consequences of Suppression

The Chinese Communist Party made many mistakes in launching the Cultural Revolution, and the purpose of suppressing its memory has been to protect the legitimacy of the party and the image of Mao Zedong. The CCP wanted to maintain its power and societal stability, and it tried to avoid responsibilities for crimes. The Party wanted people to forget, and they forced people to forget. It refused to go into details of its own failure, and that decision—to suppress

people's memory of the Cultural Revolution—has consequences.

Above all this process is an example of selective historical memory. The government must draw on its connection to its past, but only the "correct" past helps its legitimacy. In China, events like the anti-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War, were victories of the Communist Party. They are part of the "correct past," and it is beneficial for the party to emphasize them. The Cultural Revolution is certainly unwanted because it represents a failure.

However, it remains unclear whether the suppression of the memory of the Cultural Revolution was only specifically aiming at the Cultural Revolution or whether it is part of larger practices of Chinese governmental censorship. The Cultural Revolution is not the only banned history in China. It is possible that the Chinese government has been limiting other resources that could harm its image; the Cultural Revolution happens to be one of several. Be that as it may, it is a fact that in the past thirty years, starting from the 1981 *Resolution*, the government has made it clear that people should not focus on the Cultural Revolution and look to the future. The official line on the Cultural Revolution remained more or less the same, and the new 2018 middle school history textbook was the first sign of a change in official memory.

Many victims and survivors of the revolution are still waiting for an answer from the country, or an apology from the perpetrators. The state has not yet taken responsibility for its people's sufferings. The national suppression of memory of the Cultural Revolution allows perpetrators to continue hiding and not taking responsibility for their participation. Chen Shuxiang, who lost his father in the revolution when he was five, said ever since then he has waited for the people who killed his father to show up and apologize. No one has.²⁹ Even though there are people who stood up and made public apologies, trying to change the collective memory, their numbers are

²⁶ Binbin Song. 2014. "Wo de fan si" (Coming to terms with my past). *Jiyi* 106(15 January), 31-37, <http://www.xujuneberlein.com/Rem106.pdf>

²⁷ Jingyao Wang. "Guanyu Song Binbin, Liu Jin xuwei daoqian de shengming" (Statement about the false apology of Song Binbin and Liu Jin), 21ccom.net, 31 January 2014, http://www.21ccom.net/articles/ljld/ljld/article_2014013099870.html.

²⁸ "Red Guard Apologies for Role in Teacher's Death." *China Digital Times*. Accessed on November 16, 2018. <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2014/01/red-guard-apologizes-role-teachers-death/>.

²⁹ Chris Buckley. "May 15, 2016 (Page 5 N)." 2016a. *New York Times*.

small. In many cases, like Song's apology, the government stepped in and limited further discussion.

Individual memories vary because people have different perspectives. It is hard to draw a conclusion from these memories, especially when the official response is missing. Limited access to the Cultural Revolution has left the young generation completely ignorant. In June 2012, students of a graduating class of Central China Normal University dressed in Red Guard uniforms in their graduation photo. They had no understanding about the Cultural Revolution or the Red Guards. Otherwise, they would not have dressed up like a group who were responsible for millions of deaths.³⁰ When asked about the Cultural Revolution, a high school student said, "My feeling about the CR is that it's mysterious and complicated, a little terrifying, but also kind of funny... I wish I had a better understanding of the CR, but I don't know where to begin."³¹ Such ignorance is the result of decades of deliberate effort, to the detriment of China's youth.

For the Communist Party, the decision to make people forget the Cultural Revolution has been successful in terms of maintaining a stable society and legitimating the government. Ordinary people, however, have forgotten an important period of national history. Survivors cannot seek redress, and the young generation is ignorant. At what point will people start to remember? When will the government open discussion? Increasing globalization is making the suppression more difficult because more Chinese people have access to foreign websites. When people truly start to remember, what will the Party's explanation be?

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³⁰ Yu Hua. "April 11, 2014 (Page A27 N)." 2014. *New York Times*, Apr 11, 1.

³¹ Windscrip, Shan. 2013. "A Modern History of Forgetting: The Rewriting of Social and Historical Memory in Contemporary China, 1966-Present." *Quarterly Journal of Chinese Studies* 1 (4) (Summer): 59-68.

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