

Testimony, History and Ethics: From the Memory of Jiabiangou Prison Camp to a Reappraisal of the Anti-Rightist Movement in Present-Day China*

Sebastian Veg†

Abstract

The memory of the Anti-Rightist Movement has long been a blind spot in Chinese debates, with historiography limited to elite politics and little engagement with the repercussions of the movement at grassroots level. However, the publication of Yang Xianhui's 2003 book, *Chronicles of Jiabiangou*, marked a turning point. Based on extensive oral history interviews, Yang's book makes a substantive connection between the Anti-Rightist Movement and the establishment of dedicated *laojiao* camps such as Jiabiangou in Gansu province. Documenting what he claims was a policy of dehumanization, he suggests that intellectuals were far from the only victims of a movement characterized by its extra-legal procedures. Ordinary people were often drawn into it and were more able than intellectuals to resist the legitimizing discourse of loyalty to the Party to which many intellectuals continued to cling. For Yang, the testimonies of the Rightist victims in Jiabiangou provide a fruitful field in which to investigate the breakdown of elementary social trust in society during the Anti-Rightist Movement. Situated ambiguously between oral history and literary intervention, Yang's work has, together with other recent publications such as *Tombstone*, contributed to reopening the debate on Maoism in Chinese society today.

Keywords: Anti-Rightist Movement; memory; China; oral history; reeducation through labour (*laojiao*); Yang Xianhui

The Anti-Rightist Movement, the 1957 political campaign that marked Mao Zedong's clampdown after the Hundred Flowers experiment, although well

* An early draft of this paper was presented at the HKUST symposium, *History and Fiction*, 10 January 2011, and more substantial ones at the seminar on modern Chinese history, Kyoto University Institute for Humanities, 8 July 2011, and at the AAS meeting in Toronto, 17 March 2012. The author hereby thanks all those who gave valuable comments at those times.

† French Centre for Research on Contemporary China (CEFC), Hong Kong. Email: sveg@cefc.com.hk.

documented by historians, seems forgotten in today's China. Coherent with Mao's anti-elitism, the movement targeted intellectuals and was of a relatively small scope (officially, a little over 550,000 people were labelled as Rightists out of an estimated population of 640 million; the highest estimate is 1.8 million¹). It thus never gained the same prominence as the Cultural Revolution, which became the emblem of how "ordinary" people suffered under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Similarly, in historiography, the focus has largely been on the factional struggles in elite politics that triggered the movement, or on its most prominent victims.² There have been few studies on how the movement impacted ordinary people in the provinces or rural areas, and the connection between the Anti-Rightist Movement and the establishment of specific reeducation through labour (*laojiao* 劳教) camps has barely been touched upon.³

In official discourse, there has been no condemnation of the movement equivalent to that provided for the Cultural Revolution in the 1981 "Resolution on certain questions in the history of our Party since the foundation of the People's Republic," and no compensation has been offered. The Anti-Rightist Movement was led by Deng Xiaoping 邓小平, who became head of the general-secretariat of the CCP in 1956, and it is widely believed that Deng's personal responsibility for the movement explains his reluctance to rehabilitate victims after his return to power in 1978.⁴ A simple notice was issued, followed by detailed implementation guidelines in 1978, Central Documents No. 11⁵ and No. 55, the latter establishing the official number of condemned Rightists as 550,000 and stipulating that:

In accordance with the spirit of Central Document No. 11 of 1978 and the 1957 "Party central notice regarding the criteria for designating Rightist elements," there will be no general reexamination and rehabilitation of Rightist elements; for those whose designation as Rightists was truly erroneous, correction should be granted by seeking truth from facts.⁶

This meant that all cases were to be treated individually by the work units responsible for finding work for reinstated Rightists. There was also no automatic restitution of Party membership. Despite these limitations, more than 99 per cent of Rightists returned to ordinary life, which left roughly one hundred individual

1 See Ding 2006, 297–310. Ding estimates that 1.1 million people were branded as Rightists, 600,000 as anti-socialist elements and 100,000 others were found to be "elements" guilty of Rightist theories in 1957 and 1958 (310).

2 Classic studies on the Anti-Rightist Movement include Goldman 1967; MacFarquhar 1974, 261–310; Teiwes 1993, 216–260; and, most recently, Shen 2008.

3 Teiwes notes the connection in passing (1993, 229); a fuller analysis is offered in Domenach 1992, 126–134 and 142–45.

4 For a recent assessment of Deng's role, see Chung 2011.

5 The appendix reads: "In 1957, the struggle to smash capitalist Rightists by forceful attacks personally launched by Chairman Mao was a great socialist revolution on the political and the ideological front. In this struggle, 450,000 people nationwide were designated as capitalist Rightists, and they underwent reform through education ... most of them have changed, and are doing quite well, only an extremely small number have committed new anti-party and anti-socialist crimes." See Document No. 11 1978.

6 See Document No. 55 1978. More material is available at: <http://www.57hk.org/Note.asp>. For the official view, see also Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi 2011.

cases unresolved. Memoirs of the movement were censored and went largely unnoticed.⁷ In contrast, there was a strong interest in the 1980s for Cultural Revolution writing, which was often imbued with an ambiguous nostalgia for China's pristine countryside where the urban youth were sent for "rustication." The Anti-Rightist Movement, however, not only remains generally absent from museums, school textbooks or public discussions, but has also been slow to enter unofficial (*minjian* 民间) political debate.

Leading up to the 50th anniversary of the Anti-Rightist Movement, there were renewed appeals by ageing Rightists for recognition and reparation.⁸ Rightists who had survived the labour camp system began to publish their memoirs, several of which touched on Jiabiangou 夹边沟 camp in Gansu province. He Fengming's 和凤鸣 memoir, published in 2001, was the first to expose the scale of the famine in Jiabiangou and to propose a political reading, and was the precursor to other memoirs.⁹ A series of texts by Yang Xianhui 杨显惠, based on interviews with camp survivors, was first published in *Shanghai Literature* (*Shanghai wenxue* 上海文学) in spring 2000. A selection of these texts then appeared in book form under the title *Chronicles of Jiabiangou* (*Jiabiangou jishi* 夹边沟记事) in 2002, followed by the full collection, *Farewell to Jiabiangou* (*Gaobie Jiabiangou* 告别夹边沟), in 2003.¹⁰ The independent film director, Wang Bing 王兵, bought the rights to Yang's collection soon after its publication and dedicated almost a decade to conducting over one hundred preparatory interviews for his first feature film, *The Ditch* (*Jiabiangou*, 2010).¹¹

Yang Xianhui's work stands out on several counts. First, few books on the Anti-Rightist Movement have been published within China, and those that have are mostly personal memoirs, often intent on eschewing direct criticism of the Party. Almost all of the publications are focused on intellectual elites in

7 One exception is Jean Pasqualini's *Mao's Prisoner*. See Pasqualini and Chelminski 1973.

8 For two examples, see *Surviving Victims of the Anti-Rightist Campaign* 2007 and Pils 2007. More recently, the case of Yan Guixun surfaced at Peking University: see "Bashi sui fanyou xingcunzhe Yan Guixun shangfang Beida weiquan bei dashang" (80-year old anti-Rightist survivor Yan Guixun is injured petitioning Peking University to recognize his rights), *Yazhou zhoukan*, 26 June 2011. Boxun has maintained a page of commemorative essays since 2007: see Boxun.com. 2007. "Boxun redian: fanyou 50 zhounian" (Boxun Hot topic: the 50th anniversary of the Anti-Rightist Movement), 18 January, http://www.boxun.com/hot/fanyou_50.shtml. Accessed 23 January 2013.

9 He 2001. Other autobiographical works include Xing 2004; Zhao 2008; You 2001; Gao 2004. Part 2 of Gao Ertai's memoir is translated into English (Gao 2009). A fuller bibliography of Jiabiangou memoirs appears in note 1 of Huang 2007, 125.

10 The first edition, *Jiabiangou jishi*, contains 7 stories (Yang, Xianhui 2002); the second edition, *Gaobie Jiabiangou* (Yang, Xianhui 2003), contains 19 stories and a foreword by the critic, Lei Da. This latter version was confusingly reprinted under the title, *Jiabiangou jishi* (Yang, Xianhui 2008). Thirteen stories have been translated into English as *Woman from Shanghai* (Yang, Xianhui 2009). Unfortunately, several texts were sacrificed to make the volume more "readable." The English translation is also marred by approximations, faulty Romanization (e.g. Xintiandun), the illogical sequencing of stories ("I hate the moon," which chronologically follows "The thief," has been placed before it), excision of words or key concepts (probably deemed too complicated for the English-speaking reader), etc. In this article, I refer to the Chinese version (Yang, Xianhui 2008).

11 See Veg 2012.

Beijing and the intellectual debates that triggered the persecution rather than the everyday lives of those labelled as Rightists and banished to faraway provinces.¹² *Chronicles of Jiabiangou* is not a personal memoir by a survivor, but rather a collection of interviews conducted and organized by the author in a specific way. It presents itself as fiction (*xiaoshuo* 小说), but retains a fragmented structure of self-contained, individual narratives, much like first-hand transcribed oral history.¹³ This article will analyse how these narratives, presented as literary, nonetheless construct a claim to a form of historicity, and in so doing, how they attempt to present a new reading of the Anti-Rightist Movement and Maoist politics in general, situated within the recent reassessment of Mao in China.

The article begins with a presentation of Yang's book and its claim to historicity. It then follows with a detailed examination of three aspects of the book. First, by focusing on corporality and the subjective dimension of dehumanization in oral history accounts of Jiabiangou survivors, Yang raises the question of famine as policy. Second, his investigation of the Anti-Rightist Movement is read as a contribution to the ongoing political debate in China on the legality and legitimacy of the socialist state since 1949. Finally, on a literary level, analysing the extreme moral dilemmas presented in the stories, I attempt to draw some conclusions as to the author's ethical reflection on PRC history and how it sets him apart from the victimization discourse often articulated by Chinese intellectuals until recently. Yang Xianhui may thus be seen as putting forward a new approach through which to appraise the Maoist era, emblematic of the larger reassessment currently taking place in unofficial discussions in China.

Literary Form and Historicity

Chronicles of Jiabiangou consists of 19 texts, including one based on an interview with He Fengming. Each text tells a similar story about the nationwide purge launched by Mao, and its repercussions in Lanzhou where, after Deng's speech on 15 January 1958, Party secretary Zhang Zhongliang 张仲良 led a violent purge against three vice-governors.¹⁴ Yang Xianhui, born in 1946 in Lanzhou, did not experience the movement first hand; however, he does have memories

12 See e.g. Niu and Deng 1998, a collection of writings from Peking University in 1957, which includes the personal testimonies of several well-known intellectuals (Sun Gannu, Ding Ling, Chen Qixia and Wang Meng); see also Qian 2007, which is more diverse but was not published in China.

13 This structure also resulted from a political strategy: Yang was certain that he would not be able to get his work published in book form so he approached *Shanghai Literature* with short pieces, which were enthusiastically accepted by successive editors, Cai Xiang and Chen Sihe. Once a journal had published them, it was easier to find a book publisher. Interview with Yang Xianhui, 29 November 2011.

14 Dikötter (2010, 22) writes about Gansu: "By March 1960, some 190,000 people had been denounced and humiliated in public meetings and 40,000 cadres were expelled from the party, including 150 top provincial officials." He also notes that the closure of Jiabiangou in December 1960 took place "in the wake of Zhang Zhongliang's fall from power" (289). However, Yang Jisheng believes that Gansu should not be viewed as an exception: "Judging from the available historical materials, it is manifestly unjust to attribute all the problems in Gansu Province to the thinking and character of Zhang Zhongliang ... Viewed from the present, these incidents do not appear so egregious; much greater 'magnification' took place in Henan, Sichuan and Anhui." Yang, Jisheng 2012, 155.

of how his primary school principal was removed one day in 1957 – he later found out that he had died in Jiabiangou.¹⁵ Yang finished high school in Lanzhou in 1965 and volunteered to work as an educated youth (*zhiqing* 知青) on a farm in Anxi 安西 county. He met many former Rightists in the 11th agricultural brigade of the Gansu Production and Construction Corps (*bingtuan* 兵团) from 1965 to 1981, as he explains in the afterword to his collection:

From their mouths, I learned that in Jiuquan 酒泉 county there had been a prison farm called Jiabiangou, which from October 1957 held 3,000 Rightists. In December 1960, when the work team dispatched by Party central and the north-west [Party] office jointly determined that the Gansu provincial committee was guilty of Leftist deviation and sent the Rightists back home, only several hundred prisoners returned alive from Jiabiangou. The shock at hearing these Rightists' stories never faded and, many years later, in 1997, I undertook to investigate the events of Jiabiangou. Every year for three years, I spent two or three months interviewing survivors and camp staff and reading archives, and I travelled twice to Jiabiangou itself. [...] Jiabiangou prison farm was established in March 1954 as an office-rank (*keji* 科纪) unit, it was originally a reform through labour camp for criminals. Its administrative name was the Gansu Province Eighth *Laogai* Detachment. In the second half of 1957, the *laogai* prisoners were moved, and Jiabiangou became a reeducation through labour farm, in order to “house” the extreme Rightists exposed during the anti-Rightist struggle in the administration units, enterprises and schools of Gansu province [...]. A total of some 2,400 people (according to the official figure) underwent reeducation through labour there. In September 1960, apart from the very weakest among them, all of Jiabiangou's prisoners were moved to Mingshui 明水 township in Gaotai 高台 county to cultivate the wilderness. After three months – in December 1960, Party central determined that the Gansu provincial committee was guilty of Leftist deviation and, rushing to save lives, repatriated the prisoners. The remaining number of – barely – surviving prisoners was then 1,100.

The infamous Jiabiangou prison camp was closed in October 1961. [...]

As an author, I am retelling the stories uncovered in my investigation in order to reopen a page in history covered by the dust of 40 years, in the hope that such a tragedy could not be repeated, and in order to bring to those souls laid to eternal rest in the wilderness of the Gobi desert the consolation that history will not forget Jiabiangou.

Scrutinizing the history of those who preceded us means scrutinizing ourselves.¹⁶

When Yang's first stories were published in *Shanghai Literature* in 2000–2001, and then reprinted in the Lanzhou paper, *Dushi tiandi* 都市天地 (*Metropolitan World*), more former Rightists, such as 82-year-old Pei Tianyu 裴天宇, began to contact him.¹⁷ All in all, he conducted about 100 interviews.¹⁸ However, although *Chronicles of Jiabiangou* was noticed by critics,¹⁹ it was not until his following collection, *Tales of Dingxi Orphanage* (*Dingxi gu'eryuan jishi* 定西孤儿院

15 Interview, Yang Xianhui.

16 Yang Xianhui, “Xiezuo shouji” (Writing notes), in Yang, Xianhui 2002, 355–56, my translation. There are some discrepancies in the figures for survivors (“several hundred” or “1,100”): asked about this contradiction, Yang replied that the official *neibu* report released after 1978 states that 40% of approximately 3,000 prisoners survived; however, the doctor responsible for statistics told him that there were 490 survivors. Interview, Yang Xianhui.

17 Sai Niya, “Lishi de buding” (Mending history), in Yang, Xianhui 2002, 3.

18 Interview, Yang Xianhui.

19 Despite searching several databases, I have not been able to locate any significant review of *Chronicles of Jiabiangou* in the mainland press, and Yu Jie's article (Yu 2002), published in Hong Kong, seems to be the first substantial discussion in Chinese. Shi Tao, noting that the authorities had only responded to the call to bury the bones of dead prisoners in 1987, had previously used Yang's book to call for the establishment of a memorial (Shi 2002). See also Li 2004.

纪事), dedicated to the famine caused by the Great Leap Forward, was showered with prizes in 2007 that Yang became well known in the Chinese literary world.²⁰

As the work of an author born in 1946, *Chronicles of Jiabiangou* demonstrates the appropriation of the memory of Mao's purges by a new generation. Together with Yang Jisheng's 杨继绳 *Tombstone* (*Mubei* 墓碑), a memoir of the Great Leap Forward famine also based on interviews with survivors published in 2008, *Chronicles of Jiabiangou* constitutes a new approach to considering the Maoist era. It was reprinted three times, in runs of 10,000, 20,000 and 60,000 copies, respectively, and was officially published in China, unlike *Tombstone*. Like the latter, *Chronicles of Jiabiangou* was also circulated widely in pirated editions, especially during those years when it was not granted reprint permission (2005–2008). These works caused a stir within intellectual circles because they had broken away from the usual endorsement of the national narrative still palpable in the autobiographical “prison camp literature” that was published in the 1980s by authors such as Zhang Xianliang 张贤亮 and Wang Meng 王蒙.²¹ As Yenna Wu shows, writers like Zhang Xianliang and Cong Weixi 丛维熙 often ended up expressing approbation, or even gratitude, for their reeducation, producing what she calls “sentimentalized and unrealistic accounts.”²² In his survey of Jiabiangou literature and its reception, Huang Yong 黄勇 similarly contrasts Yang Xianhui's works with the epic dimension of Zhang Xianliang's writings, in which individual subjectivity, even when employed to critique Maoist politics, ultimately gives way to a grand narrative, echoing Liu Xiaobo's 刘晓波 famous attack on “scar literature” and on Zhang Xianliang as early as 1986.²³ Yang Xianhui, by contrast, recalls seeing the stacks of Jiabiangou files in the provincial archives and, knowing that he could not access them, decided to “take the unofficial path” (*zou minjian de daolu* 走民间的道路).²⁴

Yang Xianhui's writing is not easy to classify, although it is generally within the tradition of “reportage literature” (*baogao wenxue* 报告文学), which gained prominence in the 1980s. As he writes in the afterword, his collection is based on interviews which are re-narrated and then labelled as fiction (*xiaoshuo*): “It's not that Chinese writers don't know the difference between fiction and non-fiction writing. It's just that the difficult circumstances of contemporary life have presented them with no choice but to deliberately blur these lines as a strategy.”²⁵ Texts like *Chronicles of Jiabiangou* contain important historical information about labour camps and political campaigns such as the Anti-Rightist

20 Yang, Xianhui 2007. The book was awarded the *Xin Jing bao* (*Beijing News*) publication prize (*Tushu jiang*) for 2007; Yang was chosen as author of the year by the *Zhonghua dushu bao* (*Chinese Reader*), also in 2007.

21 For an overview, see “Prison writings” in Williams and Wu 2004, 154–188, and Williams and Wu 2006.

22 Wu and Livescu 2011, 52.

23 See Huang 2007, note 7, which also mentions Wang Meng as an example. See also Liu 2011.

24 Interview, Yang Xianhui.

25 Wen Huang, “Preserving memories,” in Yang, Xianhui 2009, xiii. Yang Xianhui has also privately stated that the “short story” label can be seen as a kind of packaging (*baozhuang*).

Movement.²⁶ However, literary rewriting is not simply a disguise; it can also be, as has been debated in relation to Holocaust literature, a specific way of interpreting and configuring the historical material from the survivors' interviews.²⁷ Yang Xianhui purposely chose the term *jishi* 记事 (“chronicles”), whereas in his two subsequent works he used *jishi* 纪事 (“tales”), a choice he justifies by his desire “to underscore the truthfulness” of his book on Jianbiangou.²⁸ Yang Xianhui thus uses literary technique to add a moral, political and historiographical aspect to his contribution to the current debate on the Maoist era.

Rewriting the History of Jiabiangou: *laojiao* and the Policy of Dehumanization

Compared to the number of famine victims during the Great Leap Forward and the vast reach of the now well-documented prison camp system,²⁹ the thousand-odd dead of Jianbiangou can easily be written off as a simple anomaly. For Yang Xianhui, however, Jiabiangou encapsulates important characteristics of the Maoist system of government. His aim was to produce an account of the Anti-Rightist Movement rather than a book about a prison camp. In his opinion, the Rightists of 1957 were the first after 1949 to understand that Mao had become an emperor (*diwang* 帝王) and that China was moving towards a dictatorship.³⁰ In his recent book on the Great Leap Forward famine, Frank Dikötter also describes Jiabiangou as a telling example of the Chinese labour camp system rather than as a local exception. According to one Gansu archive document quoted by Dikötter, there were 82,000 *laogai* prisoners in 100 camps in the province in June 1960, and 72,000 in December of the same year; 4,000 deaths occurred in December alone. Documents in Hebei provided him with a similar death rate.³¹ Jean-Luc Domenach found the death rates to be similar for Qinghai (Tanggemu 塘格木 camp), Shandong (Linyi 临沂) and Guangdong

26 See e.g. the discussion in Mühlhahn 2009, 270 ff.

27 For example, Imre Kertész, taking issue with Theodor Adorno's well-known rejection of writing about the Holocaust (Adorno 1982), argues that only fiction can bestow subjectivity and envisage history from the point of view of the individual: “The concentration camp is imaginable only and exclusively as literature, never as reality. (Not even – or rather, least of all – when we have directly experienced it.)” Kertész 2001, 268. Hence, I agree with Yenna Wu's plea for readings that are both political and aesthetic, “fusing the study of human rights and suffering with that of aesthetics” (Wu and Livescu 2011, 14).

28 Interview, Yang Xianhui.

29 The Laogai Research Foundation has documented 1,007 prison camps currently in operation and estimates the number of prisoners who have passed through the system since 1949 to be between 40 and 50 million. See Laogai.org. 2010. “The *laogai*: exercising dictatorship over dissent,” http://laogai.org/system/files/u1/lrf_laogai_factsheet.pdf. Accessed 7 April 2014. For a comprehensive but older study, see Domenach 1992.

30 Interviews with Yang Xianhui, 29 November 2011, and 18 April 2012.

31 Dikötter 2010, 289. Dikötter also quotes an official estimate given by the minister of public security, Xie Fuzhi, at a 1960 conference. According to Xie, in 1960 there were 1.8 million prisoners in the *laogai* system in 1,077 industrial and 440 agricultural work units; 440,000 prisoners were sent to the reeducation through labour (*laojiao*) units such as Jiabiangou that opened after 1957 (289, note 13; 290, note 17). Dikötter himself estimates the figure to be 8 to 9 million (291).

(Yingde 英德) in 1960.³² The systemic nature of Yang's analysis is also highlighted in Chinese discussions of the book: quoting a study on writing about Auschwitz, Huang Yong describes books on Jiabiangou as "rising beyond the simple but necessary historical reflection to an interrogation of human nature, a concern with humanity, and finally a systemic introspection" germane to a deeper understanding of society under Mao.³³

Corporality

Zhang Xianliang's novella *Mimosa* (*Lühuashu* 绿化树) was famously lambasted by critic Li Tuo 李陀 for painting a picture of labour camps that lacked concrete details and which glossed over the horrors of everyday life there.³⁴ By contrast, Yang Xianhui's treatment of the subject begins with the body. Yang spends little or no time on discursive explanations of ideology and reeducation, but instead provides the reader with a wealth of specific, corporal details about imprisonment in Jiabiangou, given in understated descriptions. The most harrowing scenes are reserved for the effects of famine as, for example, when a medical assistant assigned to work with the Rightist doctors in Jiabiangou enters the camp clinic shortly after all prisoners have been sent on to Mingshui: "I examined each patient closely. Their expressions were horrifying and their suffering palpable. Their bodies were dried up like thin wooden sticks, their eyes sunk deep into the sockets, and their faces stuck like parched paper to their skulls" ("The army doctor" 454; WS195).³⁵ The Jiabiangou clinic, deserted by all who still had any hope of survival, is depicted as death's antechamber. Similar characterizations, which call to mind the "Muselmänner" of Nazi concentration camps, are repeated throughout the book. For instance, in "The Potato Feast," Gao Jiyi 高吉义 describes the signs of approaching death:

I had already witnessed many deaths at Mingshui and was familiar with the symptoms of a dying person. First they suffered from edema. It would disappear for several days and then return. When that happened, it meant imminent death. Sometimes, patients' faces swelled up to the size of pumpkins. Their eyelids bulged like soft pears, while their eyes shrunk to slits. When they walked, they hobbled along, stopping for a few seconds between steps. Their lips were so swollen that they couldn't close their mouths. From a distance, you might think that they were perpetually smiling. Their hair stood upright. When they talked, they sounded like whimpering puppies. On that day, Niu's 牛 face, voice, and his gait matched this description

32 Domenach 1992, 238–242. Domenach estimates the overall death rate in the *laogai* system at 10%, or 4 million deaths between 1959 and 1962. While he considers that mass mortality remained "exceptional" in the *laogai* system prior to 1957 (217), he also quotes exceptions such as Niu Tou Keng, Guangdong (212, note 59; 594).

33 Huang 2007, 120. The essay on writing about Auschwitz is included in Lin 2005.

34 "The man in that story suffered? Yes, he suffered. But he still did eat. And he could write. He even had a woman's love. You think that was the worst of labor reform? Nonsense! I know a man who went to a camp that held thousands. He and only six others came back. Seven out of thousands. But nobody writes about that!" Li Tuo, quoted in Link 2000, 145–46.

35 Page numbers refer to Yang 2008, followed, when relevant, by the page numbers in the published English translation (Yang 2009), preceded by the abbreviation "WS." English translations are used where available, but are modified according to the original text when necessary.

of a dying person. Five days after I saw Niu for the last time, I escaped Mingshui. I was still young and didn't want to die like Niu, and could see no hope of survival. (159–160; WS219)

Clinically listing the symptoms of imminent death, the protagonist, in a style no doubt meant to remind the reader that this narrative is based upon a compilation of interviews, depicts famine as a reduction of the subject to its most elementary biological functions. Even Gao's attempted escape is justified through a kind of animal instinct for survival, as if he was incapable of making a conscious decision, but let himself be guided by physical instinct. This signals a displacement: according to Yang's understanding, these events are not the unintended side effects of a progressive ideology, but an expression of deliberate humiliation.

In other episodes, prisoners who are given a chance to eat, despite being warned about the possible consequences, are unable to stop themselves from the compulsive eating that leads to stomach perforation. Famine destroys consciousness and paves the way for a type of physical self-destruction. After a night of vomiting, the narrator of "The potato feast," Gao Jiye, wakes up to find his fellow inmate, the elderly Niu Tiande 牛天德, on the roof of their dormitory drying Gao's vomit in order to eat the undigested potato chunks within it. When Gao tries to restrain him, he is violently rebuffed by Niu:

Waves of sadness swept over me. Here he was, a well-educated and respected engineer. How could he humiliate himself by eating another person's vomit and excrement? I had tried to protect his dignity. How could he think I was evil for trying to snatch his food away? As I was going over these thoughts in my mind, tears welled up in my eyes. I began to sob. (154–56; WS215–16)

This is the first formulation of a series of moral dilemmas. Gao holds back from giving the starving Niu a moral lecture; however, Yang Xianhui reserves his moral reflections for today's reader, who, like Gao, is not in a position to blame Niu but who, with the hindsight of history, is able to redirect the moral outrage against the system that has reduced the elderly intellectual to the condition of a famished animal.

Yang also describes how starving inmates resorted to eating potentially dangerous concoctions which, although not nourishing, made their bellies feel full. Commonly, cogon seed dough (*huang maocao zi mianjin* 黄茅草籽面筋) was used to make a soup. If the cogon seed soup is ingested before it hardens into a rubbery dough, it glues together the intestines and eventually leads to death. In "Woman from Shanghai," the narrator discovers that a prisoner has drunk a bowl of cogon soup and decides to try to save him by "digging:"

Often, in the latrine, we'd help each other out. One person would lie on his stomach with his butt in the air. Another would squat behind him, digging. For this we used a special tool – a long wooden spoon made from a red willow twig. If we didn't have one, we'd use a metal spoon. When Wen 文 told me he had drunk the soup, his condition had already reached a painful stage: his lower abdomen was bloated like a drum and he couldn't pass anything. He leaned on a wall, his pants around his ankles. I knelt behind him and began to operate. I poked for a long time without success. I tried to break the hard lump into pieces but failed. Wen was moaning with pain. My tool had caused serious bleeding, but the lump inside his intestines remained intact. Wen's stomach grew bigger and bigger. Five days later, the bloating killed him. (5; WS31–32)

In describing the conditions at the labour camp, there are no examples of heroic resistance or dignified stoicism: the situation described is not only undignified to the extreme, but also, in its immediate causes, entirely self-inflicted. Mentions of ideology or thought-reform are rare: Yang focuses on corporality. By clinically confronting the most prosaic corporal aspects of famine and suggesting that they are the result of a victory of instinct over basic common sense and rationality, Yang Xianhui is indeed breaking with the narratives of those persecuted intellectuals who were made to recant and embrace the Party, but who in this very persecution appear somehow as dignified victims. Yang objectively sees them as examples of a conscious policy to break down all personal dignity, reducing humans to self-destructive instincts and repugnant bodily functions.

The politics of famine

These descriptions, although almost shocking in their detachment, are not, however, gratuitous. On the contrary, they are designed to raise the question of how famine and dehumanization are used as methods of government, which is, in a way, the focus of Yang's book, as it is also of Yang Jisheng's *Tombstone*. Yang Xianhui takes particular care to highlight the difference between "reform through labour" (*laodong gaizao* 劳动改造, or *laogai*) and "reeducation through labour" (*laodong jiaoyang* 劳动教养, or *laojiao*). The *laogai* system was instituted by a resolution, passed by the Third National Conference on Public Security on 15 May 1951, which was followed with the promulgation of a *laogai* statute on 26 August 1954.³⁶ It was originally designed to deal with political prisoners, but was gradually merged with the ordinary prison system. The *laojiao* system, on the other hand, first proposed in a Central Committee directive issued on 25 August 1955 during the Campaign to Suppress Counter-Revolutionaries, was specifically implemented by a State Council resolution on 3 August 1957 to serve the needs of the Anti-Rightist Movement.³⁷

Jiabianguo was, as previously noted, a *laojiao* farm, expressly designed to house Rightists. Yang describes how from the moment they arrived at the camp, when they were forced to deposit cash and bonds (9, WS36), detainees were subjected to endless searches and harassment by various levels of officialdom, which were always accompanied by violent ideological rhetoric. Self-sufficiency in terms of food production was one of the founding principles

36 See Mühlhahn 2009, 224–29. Domenach points out that labour camps originated in the Republican era, and were instituted under the same name (*ganhuayuan*) by the Jiangxi Soviet and the Nationalist government, respectively, in June and October 1932. See Domenach 1992, 41, 44. *Laogai* camps (which probably continued to exist between 1949 and 1951) were placed under the responsibility of provincial public security bureaus after 1951.

37 See Zhu 1998, 490; Fu 2005; Mühlhahn 2009, 215–17. In the PRC, in addition to *laogai* and *laojiao*, (*liuchang*) *jiuye* (job placement (within the camp) for prisoners who had lost their residential registration, which was most of them) often added many years of punishment, see Mühlhahn 2009, 228. For more on the various systems, see also Tanner 1994; Seymour and Anderson 1998, 18–19.

of the *laogai* system;³⁸ however, in Jiabiangou, “the Gansu Provincial Bureau planned to convert about thirty thousand hectares [500,000 *mu*] of wild grassland and desert into farmland” (2; WS28), a virtually impossible goal. Mühlhahn confirms the connection between the establishment of *laojiao* and utopian projects, noting that “in the Gobi desert, for example, prisoners were summoned to construct a ‘new Shanghai’.”³⁹

The fiction of a self-sufficient labour farm thus appears to be a convenient cover-up of a policy of deliberate food deprivation in Jiabiangou and other reeducation camps. This is confirmed by Yang Xianhui’s depictions of the obsessive control displayed by the camp authorities (supported by the military and by “crutches” or *guaigun* 拐棍, prisoner-guards similar to *kapos* in Auschwitz) over anything resembling food. Even on the verge of death, inmates were subjected to endless body searches, and even the unnourishing and potentially lethal cogon grains were carefully concealed “in small bags, which we sewed inside our under-shirts. We had to hide them well, since camp officials constantly checked on us and would confiscate the seeds if they found them” (3; WS29–30). However, prisoners seemed able to find food as soon as they left Jiabiangou, whether in Jiayuguan 嘉峪关, Lanzhou, or in care packages sent by family from other parts of China. For Yang Xianhui, the physical descriptions of humiliation (eating vomit, “digging” in their companions’ anuses) that deprive the camp inmates of even the most basic respect associated with humanity can thus be seen as the true objective of the *laojiao* system. Huang Yong similarly understands Yang’s portrayal of imprisonment as a demonstration that the punishment was “incommensurate” (*zuixing shi du* 罪刑失度) or “excessive” (*guodu chengfa* 过度惩罚) when compared to the political “errors” of which the inmates were accused.⁴⁰

In the story, “A visit to Wang Jingchao” (*Tanwang Wang Jingchao* 探望王景超, untranslated), based on an interview with He Fengming (thinly disguised as He Sang 和桑; Wang Jingchao was the name of her husband), He Sang recalls that the leaders of No. 10 Labour Farm, where she was stationed, tried to protect the prisoners:

According to the regulations from above, we Rightists were not allowed to go to Yellow Flower Farm, but were to be concentrated in No. 4 Labour Farm. This was another *laogai* camp: it was full of Rightists and former *laogai* prisoners who had served out their term and were kept in forced employment in the camp [*jiuye* 就业]. Just as Schindler saved Jews from the concentration camps, the leaders of No. 10 Labour Farm, at the risk of being criticized or punished, added the names of several dozen Rightists to the list of camp employees, and had them transferred to Yellow Flower Farm, including myself. (232)⁴¹

He Fengming, the original interviewee, here suggests that the difference between two types of farms – those in which people survived and those in which people

38 Seymour and Anderson 1998, 16.

39 Mühlhahn 2009, 277.

40 Huang 2007, 124. This questions the conventional wisdom that, as Teiwes writes, *laojiao* camps were established “to absorb rightists and others whose sins were considered less serious than those of individuals confined to labor reform camps” and therefore took a more lenient approach (Teiwes 1993, 229).

41 My translation.

died – was well known to the leaders involved. Her explicit comparison with Schindler and Nazi concentration camps suggests that, even considering the possibility that “death camps” like Mingshui were the result of a neglect of duty and hierarchical fear rather than deliberate policy, sending prisoners there could still be equated to issuing a death sentence. This echoes the assertion in her own book that the choice of Jiabiangou, and later Mingshui, reveals an intention on the part of the authorities to “exterminate intellectuals:” “That the provincial *laogai* bureau should choose to move the only reeducation through labour farm in the province, principally holding Rightists, to Jiabiangou, meant that this policy must have derived from previous instructions, [and had] been previously thought out.”⁴²

Such assertions are partly buttressed by recent historiography, despite the absence of comprehensive archival material. Frank Dikötter, who highlights the number of deaths caused by deliberate violence during the great famine, writes: “Food was commonly used as a weapon. Hunger was the punishment of first resort, even more so than a beating.”⁴³ He also quotes an example from Guangdong, where an ideologically-inspired ranking system determined each worker’s food rations, “a small step to elaborate the system further and make calorie income dependent on rank.”⁴⁴ Klaus Mühlhahn writes: “one has to understand hunger as a basic condition of life in the Laogai until 1978. [...] the use of hunger that had given impetus to the revolution became, after 1949, a disciplinary means of keeping the new regime’s subjects in line.”⁴⁵

Yang Jisheng provides the most detailed analysis of the politics of famine in Tongwei 通渭 county, Dingxi 定西 prefecture, at the eastern end of Gansu, which he describes as worse than Xinyang 信阳 in Henan, with one third of the population dying during the famine. Drawing on internal reports on the “Tongwei problem,” he makes a connection between the worsening of the famine and the stepping-up of political persecution. In August 1958, 1,169 cadres were labelled as Rightists, as the county secretary, Xi Daolong 席道隆, had been promised a rapid promotion if he could solve the grain procurement problem in Tongwei.⁴⁶ Yang Jisheng suggests that the famines with the highest mortality rates are usually related to political persecution, although it is difficult to infer a direct causality between the two.

In any case, Yang Xianhui does not go as far as He Fengming in suggesting that famine was a deliberate policy of extermination, although it is clear that, in a context of limited food supply, choices were made, at least by default, within

42 He 2001, 56, my translation. She adds that when the first reports of excessive deaths in Jiabiangou were submitted in the autumn of 1958, the provincial leaders carefully phrased their reply in such a way as to tacitly encourage camp authorities to pursue their projects. This is, of course, a fascinating field for further archival investigation, along the lines of Christopher Browning’s analysis of the bureaucratic ambiguity surrounding orders for the first mass exterminations of Jews on the Eastern Front in 1941 (Browning 1992).

43 Dikötter 2010, 302.

44 Ibid., 304.

45 Mühlhahn 2009, 275–76.

46 Yang, Jisheng 2012, 137–155.

the leadership, which led to certain categories of the population being starved more systematically than others: camp inmates, routinely subjected to hunger, were probably not at the top of the regime's priority list. As Mühlhahn writes, during the famine, "within three years, whole camp populations vanished because of hunger, deprivation and sickness."⁴⁷ Yang Xianhui shows famine as a calculated punishment and tool of political governance, a "technique of disempowerment and disconnection," to borrow Yenna Wu's comment on Harry Wu's *laogai* memoir.⁴⁸ Central to Yang's analysis is the notion of dehumanization, which he derives from the clinical description of the humiliations described in the testimonies gathered in interviews. While it is not easy in the absence of full archival disclosure, and despite a series of punctual corroborations to conclude that a deliberate policy of starvation existed, the appearance of this claim in the Chinese intellectual debate on Maoism is in itself meaningful.

Legality and Legitimacy: Political Aspects of the Anti-Rightist Movement

Based on this idea of a policy of dehumanization, Yang Xianhui's book can be read as a reflection on the political significance of the Anti-Rightist Movement. In organizing his interviews, he devotes particular attention to the movement as a turning point in the undermining of legality in the PRC and questions the accepted wisdom according to which intellectuals were the only target of Mao's campaign. By depicting the campaign's victims as the defenders of legality and by showing that designated Rightists were sometimes simply the casualties of personal feuds or circumstances, Yang denies the movement both formal legality and ideological legitimacy. Other recent publications (for example, those by Zhang Yihe 章诒和, Chen Ziming 陈子明, Dai Qing 戴晴 and Song Yongyi 宋永毅) have similarly sought to underscore the political "loyalty" of high profile Rightists (for instance, Zhang Bojun 章伯均, Luo Longji 罗隆基, Chu Anping 储安平) who implicitly accepted the Party's "mandate" to govern China in what retrospectively appears to be a typical expression of naïve idealism.⁴⁹ Yang Xianhui, moving beyond the Beijing elites, shows that this contrast between a professed loyalty and the employment of illegitimate and illegal means by the state is equally true at the grassroots level among the most ordinary victims of the movement.

Administrative absurdity

While Yang's interviewees rarely mention doctrine or ideology, almost all insist on the administrative absurdity and illegality of the proceedings against them, suggesting by contrast their prior confidence in the Party's respect for legal frameworks and procedures. The extra-legal nature of their persecution is repeatedly

47 Mühlhahn 2009, 232.

48 Wu and Livescu 2011, 56–57.

49 See Chen 2007; Zhang 2004; Qian 2007; Dai 2009; Song 2010a.

highlighted by the use of the terms *daishang youpai de maozi* 戴上右派的帽子 (to be made to wear a Rightist “hat”) and *hua cheng youpai* 划成右派 (to be “labelled” a Rightist), reminding the reader that such a designation is not based on a trial or a judge’s decision, and thus there can be no appeal against it: it is an inner-Party sanction giving rise to the administrative sentence of reeducation through labour (*laojiao*). Here lies one of the originalities of Yang’s book, in contrast to writers like Zhang Xianliang who “emphasizes that most prisoners did not reject the Laogai policy or the assumption of their own guilt.”⁵⁰ Yang exercises understated irony when using the various terms employed to designate Rightists, as if they were rigorously defined legal offences: “big” and “small” Rightists (*da* 大, *xiao youpai* 小右派), and “moderate” and “extreme” Rightists (*zhong* 中, *ji you fenzi* 极右分子, 254). The actual punishment varies according to factors that can only be guessed at: Party membership, family background, or connections. One humorous depiction of how the Rightist “label” is used is recounted in “The Clinic director:”

One time, a Rightist became sick and went to see director Chen 陈. After examining the patient, he wrote these comments on the prescription form: “This patient wears a shirt that used to have two breast pockets. I noticed that the pocket on the left side of this patient’s shirt has been torn off. The fact that he chooses to keep the pocket on the right side indicates that he is still clinging stubbornly to his Rightist bourgeois opinions.” (466; WS258)

Rightism here becomes a pretext to view the most mundane events in political terms, but it in fact simply hides an assertion of arbitrary authority.⁵¹ The legal historian Klaus Mühlhahn confirms Yang’s insight that, well before the Cultural Revolution, the Great Leap Forward “prompted a faction within the party leadership around Mao Zedong to abandon the party’s commitment to maintaining a comprehensive legal system.”⁵²

The circumventing of legal procedure is best illustrated in “Arriving at Jiabiangou.” Qi Yaoquan 祁钥泉, the county-level Youth League secretary, has offended his county secretary and is then subjected to a personal vendetta, which begins with being harshly criticized for “anti-Party crimes” at public condemnation meetings. Initially, he is confident in the Party and Mao’s words: “He thought: if they want to label me a Rightist, so be it. So what if I’m a Rightist? Chairman Mao has said that people with ideological problems should not be treated like criminals or class enemies. I don’t think they will disobey Chairman Mao’s words” (45; WS11). Subsequently, he is arrested in public, but challenges the county public security bureau chief:

The Party urged us to voice our criticisms, so I did. Was that a violation of the law? If so, I would say that the County Party Committee has also violated the law, because every committee

50 Mühlhahn 2009, 274.

51 This recalls Hannah Arendt’s characterization of totalitarianism as the invasion by politics into the most mundane realms of life. See e.g. her comment on the “neutrality of chess” in Arendt 1979, 322. The only child born in Jiabiangou similarly receives the name Jia(biangou)-Nong(chang); perhaps “Gulag” would be a more eloquent translation of its name for Western readers.

52 Mühlhahn 2009, 190.

member was involved in the campaign. They are the ones who encouraged people like me to speak our minds. Should they be under arrest too? (46, WS12–13)

Qi clings to the legal framework, replicating on a micro-local level the same attitude displayed by politicians like Zhang Bojun of a legalistic loyalism to the Party line based on the Constitution.⁵³ Qi is investigated by the county prosecutor in a criminal procedure and sentenced to six years in an “ordinary” prison, to be served in a comparatively less life-threatening labour farm named Yinma 饮马 No. 3. Although not ignorant of the dangers, he appeals against this sentence: surprisingly the “counterrevolutionary” charge is overturned, “the criminal appeal procedure is hereby terminated” (52; WS20, not translated), and Qi’s “release” is ordered. However, when the court official comes to the labour farm to read the verdict, the second part of the sentence is revealed to Qi: “We have overturned the counterrevolutionary charges against you, but you remain a Rightist. Stay here for now. There will be a decision soon” (52, WS21). Several months later, a simple “announcement” (*xuanbu* 宣布) is made by the vice-director of the county rectification team (*zhengfeng xiaozu* 整风小组) in the courtyard of the county Party committee: “Qi Yaoquan has been determined a Rightist: He will retain his position, but proceed to Jiabiangou Reeducation through Labor Camp” (52; WS21). On the way there, another former official called Zhao 赵 asks him:

Do you know why you ended up at the detention center after the court released you from Yinma camp? Secretary Qin 秦 issued a secret order to have you detained. Qin said to me: “If we can’t get him prosecuted by court, let’s request the most severe administrative penalty possible.” [...] In the end, the provincial government agreed to send you to a reeducation camp, but fell short of terminating your employment. (53; WS22–23)

Yang Xianhui chooses to end this carefully constructed story just after this pronouncement as the characters arrive at Jiabiangou, thus highlighting the concrete details of how the law was used to dress up a personal vendetta. Qi’s insistence on legalism and respect for Chinese laws – and even Chairman Mao’s words – contrasts starkly with the extra-judicial system of intra-Party discipline through administrative measures, whereby, even when acquitted of all criminal charges by the Party courts, a prisoner may be virtually condemned to death in a parallel administrative system in which no appeal is possible. At the same time, he remains a Party member and retains his life-employment (*gongzhi* 工职) and status in his work unit. This profoundly absurd system is one of the recurring grievances exposed in *Chronicles of Jiabiangou*.

“Ordinary” victims

The intellectuals’ elitist worldview and their alleged latent hostility to the Party were used as justifications for the Anti-Rightist Movement.⁵⁴ However, were

53 Another example can be found in the collection of 1957 writings from Peking University Rightists. See Niu and Deng 1998, 163–64.

54 New Left critic, Lü Xinyu, after a screening of Wang Bing’s documentary entitled *He Fengming*, similarly pointed out that He embodies the contradiction of Chinese intellectuals who as a class supported

intellectuals really the only victims of the movement? Two of the most egregious cases of “ordinary victims” documented by Yang are related to women. Zhang Qixian 张启贤 is set up by her husband, who denounces her for mentioning to a friend that she is delivering a secret document: “Zhang was convicted as a Rightist and sent to Jiabiangou. Immediately after her sentencing, her husband filed for divorce and married a young college graduate. It was clear that the husband had been having an affair with that woman for some time and had deliberately framed his wife” (393; WS278).

In another instance, Qi Shuying 戚淑英, the narrator of “Jianong” 夹农 describes how and why she was labelled a Rightist:

Our bureau chief was a notorious scumbag and womanizer. He always liked to talk dirty to women in the office. He pulled me over to a chair and sat down next to me, and looked at me lustfully. His lecherous behavior made me nervous. I told him to move away from me. He acted deeply offended. The next day, he organized an all-staff meeting and denounced me before it, threatening to make me a Rightist. [...] You’ve probably heard about Zhang Bojun, the famous Rightist in Beijing. He deserved the label because he tried to challenge Chairman Mao. He claimed that the Chinese president’s position should not be held for life. [...] But what did I do? I didn’t even finish college and I certainly wasn’t smart enough to come up with sophisticated and counterrevolutionary ideas. (390, WS275)

While “drawing a line” between herself and Zhang Bojun may seem like a way of blaming others, it demonstrates the subjective belief among victims that their incarceration was simply a huge misunderstanding. However fallacious the argument, the reasoning given for the Anti-Rightist Movement’s purge of intellectuals is justified by the hostility shown by the intellectuals towards the Party. However, Yang Xianhui effectively calls this idea into question by showing how, along with high-ranking cadres and intellectuals, many ordinary people with little or no connection to politics became caught up in the intrigues and personal vendettas that fed the uncontrollable bureaucratic dynamic of the movement.⁵⁵

Paradoxical loyalty

Finally, one tragic aspect of the intellectuals’ engagement in politics is undoubtedly the blind idealism shown by the victims. Intellectuals in China had been “loyalized” by being granted the special status of government employees after 1949; the loss of this status was synonymous with being excluded from society. However, their concerns go well beyond the necessities of retaining an iron rice bowl. Qi Yaoquan, in the first story, holds an unshakeable belief in the ultimate capacity of the system to do justice, exclaiming: “I can’t die. If I die, I won’t be able to clear my name and seek justice” (47; WS14). Dr Shang 尚 in “The army

footnote continued

the proletarian revolution, but then tried to remain its guiding force – a contradiction which, in Lü’s opinion, provoked the Anti-Rightist Movement (Lü 2008).

55 Similar episodes of “ordinary victims” are discussed in Zhu 2004, 314–367; Ding 2006, 253–265.

doctor” is inundated with letters from the dying Rightists in the dispensary begging him to alert Party Central: “The Central Committee doesn’t know anything about our suffering. If you only sent my letter out, the Party would know about it and come to rescue us” (454–55; WS195). Here, the purge is attributed to local excesses, while the Centre remains innocent even in the minds of those prisoners close to death.

However, some prisoners are not blind to the reality of the situation. In “The train conductor,” Li Tianqing 李天庆 describes his idealistic loyalty to the Party:

I had joined the Communist revolution at an early age, with the idealistic notion that I was helping [to] overthrow an old regime in order to establish a new society. I took part in the war against the Nationalist government and was wounded in the Korean War against the Americans. After being convicted as a Rightist, I still clung to the hope that I could reform myself through hard labor and that the Party would eventually forgive me and embrace me. If I had escaped, it would have meant I had jettisoned all my old ideals. I would have undermined my future in China. (437–38; WS79)

However, his fellow prisoner, Wei Changhai 魏长海, awakens him to the reality of his situation and succeeds in convincing him to escape with him:

Why are you being such a fool? You were kicked out of the Party long ago. Nobody thinks that you are still a Communist revolutionary, except you. You’re an enemy of the people. You are receiving reeducation at a labor camp. You act like a foolish wife who prays for her treacherous husband to return. It’s not going to happen. Even if we don’t die of starvation, there’s no end to our exile here. (438; WS80)

The insistence of many intellectuals that they are loyal Party members and their psychological incapacity to envision escape are, in a way, signs of their enduring idealism and their paradoxical attachment to a Party-state that had decided to eradicate them as a class.⁵⁶

While both intellectuals (whom we may broadly define in Yang’s account as people with government jobs who had at least finished high school) and “ordinary people” undoubtedly suffered in the Anti-Rightist Movement, Yang Xianhui exposes an important aspect of Maoist policy. The devising of the Rightist classification, and its justification as a means of reeducating intellectuals and laying waste to their ambitions of playing a leading role in society, directly led to the creation of a category of second-class citizens: people who were judged guilty although they had not been legally tried and convicted, and who, even after their release from prison, remained subject to various means of control and political discrimination. Yang Xianhui’s characters repeatedly characterize Mao’s China as a caste society, a charge that, ironically, had been levelled during the Hundred Flowers experiment by critics who were later labelled as Rightists.⁵⁷ Family background (*chengfen* 成分) was one of the major reasons for being labelled as a Rightist, as exemplified by Li Xiangnian 李祥年: “In November

56 In a review of the German edition of *Jiabiangou*, Sascha Klotzbücher seems to miss the point that Yang, by inserting dialogues like this one, is intentionally distancing himself from his interviewees’ faith that they will be saved by the “centre” to which they remained loyal (Klotzbücher 2010).

57 See, e.g., Shen Dike, “Tantan wujieji shehui zhong ren de dengji” (On hierarchy in a classless society) in Niu and Deng 1998, 174–77.

1957, because my father used to serve in the Nationalist government, I was officially declared a Rightist. As a result, I stopped writing to Shumin 淑敏. If I continued dating her, I would ruin her future” (62; WS120). Transferred via blood ties, Rightism is therefore also contagious by proximity and requires a rigorous quarantine to protect others from its effects.

At the core of Yang Xianhui’s reflection on the Anti-Rightist Movement lies a series of paradoxes: while the victims of the movement, accused of anti-Party activities, proclaim their endorsement of the legitimacy of the Party’s rule, the Party itself operates by creating new political categories that are beyond the reach of the law. Although the intellectuals who fall victim to the movement share the Party’s proclaimed aim of creating a classless society, and thereby condone their own persecution, the Party on the other hand is depicted by Yang as intent on creating a new society, not only of classes but also of hereditary castes. In this new society, a revolutionary elite is endowed with boundless power, while a group of people – whose designation is the exclusive prerogative of the same elite – is stripped of its most basic claims to a dignified existence. Finally, it is not so much among the intellectuals, blinded by their willingness to demonstrate their loyalty, as among the handful of “ordinary people” caught up in the cogs of the bureaucratic machine, that some form of resistance, or at least non-acceptance of Party discourse, finds space to develop.

Ethical Questions and Reassessing Maoism in Today’s China

This article has attempted to characterize Yang Xianhui’s narratives in two ways. First, on a historiographical level, Yang focuses on corporality and subjectivity to demonstrate a conscious policy of “dehumanization” and the debasement of the most elementary human dignity in the Jiabiangou *laojiao* camp. Famine, whether intentional or as the result of bureaucratic neglect, is part of this policy. Second, on a political level, Yang questions interpretations which place intellectuals at the heart of the movement as its “misunderstood” victims whose loyalties were tragically and ironically punished. Yang shows that while many intellectuals died in Jiabiangou, they were not the movement’s only victims, but that their self-representation as loyal Party followers who would eventually be rewarded was precisely what prevented them from understanding the extra-legal nature of Maoist policies and the creation of a caste society. A third focus of Yang’s collection will be discussed below: moral introspection as a way of probing the nature of social cohesion and human relations in Maoist China in what Frank Dikötter has termed “a society in disintegration.”⁵⁸ Although *Chronicles of Jiabiangou* is not an autobiographical memoir, the aesthetic dimension of Yang’s writing can, on one level, be seen as a “strategy” to recreate a minimal

58 Dikötter 2010, xiv.

form of the subjectivity of which his protagonists have been deprived.⁵⁹ However, even more importantly, I will argue that Yang seeks to probe the institutionalized moral breakdown of an entire society, even at the price of aesthetically recreating the humiliations experienced by individuals.

Moral breakdown

Yang's investigation into the breakdown of society is vividly illustrated by the pervasive abuse of power by cadres, even at a very low level. No power is too petty to be abused: in "Escape," a man uses the authority of his uniform to bully passengers waiting in the bus terminal and confiscate a ticket from someone who cannot produce an ID card (173; WS231). In another example, a judge who signs execution orders while playing chess circles the wrong name, leading to the "execution of a prisoner sentenced to *laogai*" (408–09; WS294) – regardless of whether this story is actually true, it no doubt reflects the popular view of officials at the time. The most striking example of abuse of power is provided by Chen Tiantang 陈天堂, the "more red than expert" clinic director with dubious medical credentials, who sets up an elaborate scheme to embezzle the money that inmates are obliged to deposit upon arriving at Jiabiangou. In collusion with the bank clerk, he issues orders to prevent sick inmates from withdrawing funds, which were often badly needed to purchase additional rations in order to survive, from their accounts. When the inmates die, he then takes the money from their accounts: "Anytime a patient died, Director Chen would personally handle the possessions of the deceased, including the patient's bank accounts, bonds, watches, and so on. Could it be possible that Chen was cashing in the money from the patient's bank accounts with the help of the bank clerk and then splitting the profits with him?" (471; WS266). In a particularly unsettling instance, Chen plots to send an inmate with attractive personal possessions to the morgue alive, while accusing his colleague, the interviewee/narrator of the story, of having had the inmate transported when he was no longer fit to move. Chen later tries to bribe his colleague into silence by leaving a luxury watch in his desk drawer: "I didn't touch the watch. I wondered if it had been taken from the wrist of a deceased Rightist. Taking the bribe would be against my conscience" (474; WS268). The abuse of power illustrated in this story is taken to another level: even in a prison camp for Rightists who have received a virtual death sentence without trial, Chen does not hesitate to take advantage of the inmates' weakness and vulnerability for his own personal profit.

Yang also demonstrates that the moral breakdown is not limited to those in power; on the contrary, he also records inmates scavenging dead people's bones ("The thief") and organs ("The train conductor"), echoing a powerful literary trope of modern Chinese literature that, from Lu Xun's 鲁迅 madman to

59 See Wu and Livescu 2011, 36, 40–41.

Mo Yan's 莫言 *Liquorland* (*Jiuguo* 酒国), has come to stand for the enduring evils of Chinese society.⁶⁰ In this way, Yang painstakingly probes the moral dilemmas that this loss of human dignity poses for historians. How far are today's "civilized" readers prepared to go in transferring the responsibility for morally questionable acts to "the system" and away from the individual?

In "The train collector," Li Tianqing alerts a supervisor, Si Jicai 司机才, to the suspicious activities of his fellow inmate, Wei Changhai. Upon investigation, they discover the mutilated corpses of several inmates:

"Those bastards," said Si as we walked away. "They don't have a shred of humanity. You know what they were boiling that day? Human organs! They were cooking human hearts, livers, and lungs! The dead didn't have much flesh left on their arms or thighs. Years of hunger and hard labor had reduced them to skin and bones. When the bastards couldn't find anything edible, they hit on the idea of opening the chest to harvest their organs..." (432; WS73)

After Wei is caught, the initial reaction among his fellow inmates is outrage, although whether that anger only stems from the fact that Wei has found a method of procuring food that he has not shared with them remains ambiguous. Gradually, outrage gives way to discussion:

Wei was accused of lawlessness and moral degradation and some even suggested capital punishment. Others said he was worse than a dog or a pig. [...] Gradually, as the anger subsided, a few dissenting opinions came out: "What crimes did Wei commit? Did he rob or murder anyone? Did he rebel against the Communist government? What laws did he break?" The discussions were long and complex.

In my cave, the majority agreed that he hadn't broken any laws. He had simply violated the moral code – but how could one clearly define moral standards in a reeducation camp like Jiabiangou? (435; WS77)

In the end, Li feels regret for the part he has played in Wei's punishment and rescues Wei from the pit where he has been tied up so tightly that he is in danger of losing the use of several limbs: "I was the one who had reported Wei. If he died, I would be a murderer. If I managed to survive, I would be haunted by guilt for the rest of my life. Wei had certainly done something terribly wrong, but he didn't deserve to die" (436; WS 78). Li therefore saves Wei, who repays him by taking him along on his escape bid, arguing against Li's blind trust in thought-reform through labour, and even carrying him through the desert when Li's strength fails him. Li describes his contradictory feelings: "I used to despise him for his lack of morals. I rescued him from the isolation cell for my own selfish reasons – I wanted to relieve my guilt. I could never have imagined that my unintended gesture of kindness would be met with such deep appreciation" (439; WS80). The very possibility of moral judgment is effectively deconstructed by Yang Xianhui. The cannibal's survival instinct proves superior to that of many others who do not come back alive, and he morally redeems himself by saving the man who reported him from certain death by starvation in Jiabiangou. Finally, Li's moral act of saving Wei from the pit is qualified by his own admission that it

60 For a discussion of cannibalism as literary trope and historical fact, see the enlightening chapter, "Eating culture: cannibalism and the semiotics of starvation, 1870–2001" in Edgerton-Tarpley 2008.

was motivated by selfish reasons. Yang's careful construction of the story puts the reader in a position from where any moral judgment becomes impossible: this finely balanced ethical dilemma is typical of the literary dimension of Yang's writing.

Breakdown of social trust

Yang's work outlines how successful Maoist political persecution was at breaking down family ties, even to the point that family members could become the most dangerous of connections. Owing to the hereditary and contagious nature of class guilt, prisoners were often determined to be Rightists because of their family background. However, conversely, this label could also affect the family of a prisoner (even if already guilty of a non-proletarian background) and thus encouraged families to collaborate with the authorities in "drawing a clear line" between themselves and the prisoner. In "The train conductor," the narrator, Li Tianqing, after successfully escaping from Jiabangou, concludes the story as follows: "As for myself, I couldn't even go home. My family lived in Wuhan. If I showed up there as an escaped Rightist, I could implicate my parents and make their life even more miserable than it already was. Without any options, I returned to Wangjiaping 王家坪 [*laogai*] farm" (444; WS86).

The result of this form of organization and control is a breakdown in the elementary social trust without which society cannot function, as depicted in particular in "The love story of Li Xiangnian." The eponymous protagonist has been declared a Rightist because of his father's connection with the KMT government and is demoted from basketball player to janitor. After being told that he will be sent to Jiabangou, he escapes and returns to his family in Beijing, but does not dare tell his parents as his father lives in constant terror and his mother is a communist activist and "a 'neighborhood grandma' [*jiedao lao dama* 街道老大妈] who would spy on each individual family and report everything to the police" (70; WS122). On three occasions, he is betrayed by various family members who each time collaborate with the authorities to send him back to Jiabangou and possible death by starvation. When he finally returns to Beijing 20 years later, he confronts his sister: "Was I a murderer or an arsonist, a traitor or a rapist that you should draw a clear line with me? [...] In the years when I was starving, I wrote to you asking for some parched flour, some money, but you sent me not an ounce, not a cent, I almost died! How could you be so full of hatred?" In reply, "she told me she was a believer in the power of thought reform. She believed that the labour camp was a humane place and that I wasn't being mistreated" (79; partial translation WS139).

Yang paints a portrait of ubiquitous spying and informants, even among the closest blood relations. In this sense, in the memories of the witnesses, Maoism succeeded at times in breaking down all personal ties that were not based on political allegiances. Family relations, although loaded with Confucian references in a Chinese context, are simply a symbol here for the breakdown of the entire network of social trust, as exemplified by the constant spying and meddling by the

protagonist's mother, uncle, sister, and even his toilet stall neighbour. The Jiabiangou testimonies reworked by Yang, although marked by the particular moral vein characteristic of the way in which many Chinese intellectuals deal with Mao, add an important aspect to our understanding of society under Mao. They document how violence was able to spread from the political into the personal domain, eroding the moral fabric of society.⁶¹

Conclusion

To sum up, some ambiguity inevitably surrounds Yang Xianhui's monumental project: while grounded in documentation through oral history interviews, it sets itself apart from the more widely practised memoir genre by the way it selects and organizes these narratives. According to the wishes of the interviewees, Yang sometimes uses real names (Li Xiangnian), sometimes semi-disguised names (He Sang for He Fengming) or pseudonyms (Dr Zhao in "The clinic director"). However, the use of individual names (real or substituted) corresponds with Yang's intention to provide an explicitly individual, rather than collective, account of history. In this sense, it stands as a rebuttal of the deliberate policy of depriving individuals of the most basic respect, which, initiated by the state, spread throughout the society depicted in Yang's book. In a way that historians may struggle to capture, he probes the effects of a deliberate attempt to break down the elementary moral and human values on which life in society is usually understood to be based. However, although he quotes examples from survivors' memories, he makes no direct claim to factual accuracy when presenting details that have been sifted through several layers of remembering and retelling. In this sense, Yang's choice to present his collection as literary also serves to short-circuit the discussion on the accuracy of historical details, which could be used to throw doubts on the credibility of the testimony. Therefore, his work should probably be viewed foremost as a reflection on Maoism within the contemporary debate on PRC history, suggesting the rise of a parallel, or "popular" (*minjian*) history, against "the monopoly of official discourse."⁶²

Yang's decision to use fragmented short pieces rather than an overarching narrative, as well as his use of clinical corporal descriptions that resist any kind of political rationalization, represents a significant break with previous approaches to labour camp writing in China, in which the discourse of resistance is, at best, implicit. Perhaps because *Chronicles of Jiabiangou* is not a memoir, Yang does not seek to preserve the status of victims as dignified idealists seeking redemption. Some of the victims he describes do believe that, at some level, the Anti-Rightist Movement, and their sentencing to a *laojiao* camp, took place within a

61 Again, we may note commonalities with Frank Dikötter's investigation, which highlights the scope of political violence during the Great Leap Forward years, estimated to account for 2.5 million deaths (Dikötter 2010, 298). While Dikötter's figures have been criticized (see e.g. O'Grada 2011, 191–210), Yang's qualitative analysis is harder to invalidate.

62 Wu and Livescu 2011, 81.

framework that held a political rationality and legal predictability; they see their own case as a deviation from this framework, a regrettable but isolated error. However, by juxtaposing their narratives and repeatedly highlighting the same phrases, which he then contrasts with the wholly extrajudicial nature of the Rightist purge, Yang unmasks the systemic irrationality of the movement and its ability to manipulate its victims.

Finally, the distance between the narrator and the interviewees allows him to highlight how the victims themselves were progressively deprived of feelings of humanity, so that the distinction between innocence and guilt becomes highly questionable, and even cannibalism (whether considered historical fact or literary trope) may appear as morally tolerable. There are no heroes and no resistance fighters in this narrative, as suggested in the preface of Frank Dikötter's study of the great famine where he notes that "the very survival of an ordinary person came increasingly to depend on the ability to lie, charm, hide, steal, cheat, pilfer, forage, smuggle, trick, manipulate or otherwise outwit the state," quoting Primo Levi's exploration of the "grey zone" of "human behavior in times of catastrophe."⁶³ Yang Xianhui, in carefully crafted literary constructions, shows that such acts are not limited to situations in which individuals try to trick the state, but also how they try to trick each other. Song Yongyi has also made a similar argument.⁶⁴ However, Yang also documents that although survivors are not heroes, they remain moral subjects, scarred by the ethical dilemmas they have faced. All too often Chinese intellectuals have portrayed themselves as helpless victims of the state; Yang, however, insists on this feeling of ethical responsibility that stems from hindsight – not in order to condemn the former prisoners, but as an indictment of the system. In this sense, Yang's book stands out from the recent growing body of investigations and interventions into the Anti-Rightist Movement and the early history of the PRC. Of course, more documentation and official recognition is needed. While the memorial at Jiabiangou called for by blogger Shi Tao 师涛 may seem a far-off prospect, databases⁶⁵ and online documentation sites, such as the 1957 Study Society established by former Rightists in Hong Kong,⁶⁶ have been effective in gathering together and making available precious resources. Despite these efforts, there is also an argument to be made for China's writers and intellectuals to reflect further on their own particular responsibility in dealing with the heritage of Maoism today.

References

- Adorno, Theodor. 1982 [1967]. "Cultural criticism and society." In Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 17–34.
- Arendt, Hannah. 1979 [1951]. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

63 Dikötter 2010, xiv–xxv.

64 Song 2009.

65 Song 2010b.

66 57hk.org. 2013. *Xianggang wuqi xueshe* (Hong Kong 1957 Study Society). Accessed 26 January 2013.

- Browning, Christopher. 1992. "Improvised genocide? The emergence of the 'final solution' in the 'Warthegau'." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (Sixth series) 2, 51–78.
- Chen, Ziming. 2007. "1957 nian 'zhudong youpai' de sanzhong leixing" (Three types of "active Rightists" in 1957: right-wing intellectuals, reformists, and rights defenders), <http://minzhuzhongguo.org/ArtShow.aspx?AID=1036>; partially translated as "The active Rightists of 1957 and their legacy" in *China Perspectives* (2007)4, 39–50.
- Chung, Yen-lin. 2011. "The witch-hunting vanguard: the Central Secretariat's roles and activities in the Anti-Rightist Campaign." *The China Quarterly* 206, 391–411.
- Dai, Qing. 2009. *Zai Rulaifo zhang zhong: Zhang Dongsun he ta de shi dai* (In the Palm of the Tathagata Buddha: Zhang Dongsun and his Era). Hong Kong: CUHK press.
- Dikötter, Frank. 2010. *Mao's Great Famine*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Ding, Shu. 2006. *Yang mou: fanyoupai yundong shimo* (An Open Plot: The Bottom Line on the Anti-Rightist Movement). Hong Kong: Kaifang.
- Document No. 11. 1978. "Zhonggong zhongyang pizhun 'Guanyu quanbu zhaidiao 'youpai' fenzi maozi de qingshi baogao' tongzhi." (Notice on approval by Party Central of the "Report and request for instructions on completely removing the 'Rightist' hat"), 5 April, <http://bbs1.people.com.cn/postDetail.do?boardId=24&treeView=1&view=2&id=93929584>. Accessed 23 January 2013.
- Document No. 55. 1978. "Pizhun Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu, xuanchuanbu, tongzhanbu, gong'anbu, minzhengbu guanche zhongyang guanyu quanbu zhaidiao youpai fenzi maozi jue ding de shishi fang'an" (Approbation of the proposal by the Organization Department, the Propaganda Department, the United Front Department, the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Civil Affairs for implementing the Central Party's decision to remove the Rightist hat completely), 17 September, <http://www.51labour.com/lawcenter/lawshow-37986.html>. Accessed 23 January 2013.
- Domenach, Jean-Luc. 1992. *Chine: l'archipel oublié*. Paris: Fayard.
- Edgerton-Tarpley, Katherine. 2008. *Tears from Iron. Cultural Responses to Famine in Nineteenth-Century China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fu, Hualing. 2005. "Reeducation through labour in historical perspective." *The China Quarterly* 184, 811–830.
- Gao, Ertai. 2004. *Xunzhao jiayuan* (In Search of My Homeland). Guangzhou: Huacheng.
- Gao, Ertai. 2009. *In Search of My Homeland. A Memoir of a Chinese Labor Camp*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Goldman, Merle. 1967. *Literary Dissent in Communist China*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- He, Fengming. 2001. *Jingli. Wo de 1957 nian* (An Experience: My 1957). Lanzhou: Dunhuang wenyi.
- Huang, Yong. 2007. "Jiabiangu youpai lao jiao wenxue shuxie" (Literary narratives of the Jiabiangu Rightist reeducation camp). *Ershiyi shiji* 102(August), 118–126.
- Kertész, Imre. 2001. "Who owns Auschwitz?" *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14(1), 267–272.
- Klotzbücher, Sascha. 2010. "Rezension zu: *Die Rechtsabweichler von Jiabiangu*," 15 December, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2010-4-190>. Accessed 7 April 2014.
- Li, Yuxiao. 2004. "Yang Xianhui jiekai Jiabiangu shijian zhenxiang" (Yang Xianhui reveals the truth about Jiabiangu), *Wenzhaibao*, 5 September, http://blog.boxun.com/hero/201209/beijingzhomoshihui/12_1.shtml. Accessed 7 April 2014.
- Lin, Xianzhi. 2005. *Wuye de youguang. Guanyu zhishifenzi de zhaji* (A Dark Glow in the Night. Notes on Intellectuals). Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue.
- Link, Perry. 2000. *The Uses of Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Liu, Xiaobo. 2011 [1986]. "Weijil" (Crisis!). In Liu Xiabo (Sebastian Veg (trans.)), *La philosophie du porc*. Paris: Gallimard, 57–87.
- Lü, Xinyu. 2008. "Zai lishi de jiliu zhong bashe. Xin jilu yundong he Zhongguo lishi de fuzaxing" (Struggling through the torrent of history. The new documentary movement and the complexity of Chinese history), Hong Kong, HKIFF seminar, March 2008.
- MacFarquhar, Roderick. 1974. *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution. Volume 1: Contradictions among the People, 1956–1957*. London: Oxford University Press.

- Mühlhahn, Klaus. 2009. *Criminal Justice in China. A History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Niu, Han, and Deng Jiuping (eds.). 1998. *Jiyi zhong de fanyoupai yundong (Memories of the Anti-Rightist Movement)*, in 3 vols.: *Yuan shang cao (Reeds on the Steppe)*; *Liu yue xue (Snow in June)*; *Jingji lu (A Thorny Road)*. Beijing: Jingji ribao.
- O'Grada, Cormac. 2011. "Great leap into famine." *Population and Development Review* 37(1), 191–210.
- Pasqualini, Jean (Bao, Ruo-Wang), and Rudolph Chelminski. 1973. *Prisoner of Mao*. NY: McCann and Geoghegan.
- Pils, Eva. 2007. "The persistent memory of historic wrongs in China: a discussion of demands for 'reappraisal'." *China Perspectives* 4, 99–107.
- Qian, Liqun. 2007. *Jujue yiwang: "1957 nian xue" yanjiu biji (Refusal to Forget: Notes for "1957 Studies")*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Seymour, James, and Richard Anderson. 1998. *New Ghosts, Old Ghosts. Prisons and Labor Reform Camps in China*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Shen, Zhihua. 2008. *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo shi (3): Sikao yu xuanze: cong zhishifenzi huiyi dao fanyoupai yundong 1956–1957 (History of the PRC Vol. 3: Reflections and Choices: From Memories of Intellectuals to the Anti-Rightist Movement)*. Hong Kong: CUHK Press.
- Shi, Tao. 2002. "Huyu jinkuai jianli 'Jiabianguo jinianguan'" (Call to establish a Jiabianguo memorial as soon as possible), 15 September, http://blog.boxun.com/hero/shitao/45_1.shtml. Accessed 7 April 2014.
- Song, Yongyi. 2009. "Linglei 'fanyou': Zhongguo zhishi jingying de choubing he chiru" (Bizarre 'anti-Rightists': the ugliness and shame of China's elite intellectuals), http://www.boxun.com/news/gb/z_special/2009/09/200909061752.shtml. Accessed 26 January 2013.
- Song, Yongyi. 2010a. "Fanyou dang'an: gaomi, xuesheng dou laoshi he bei yiwangle de fuqin de 'youpai yanxing'" (Anti-Rightist cases: informants, students beating teachers and a father's forgotten 'Rightist words and deeds'), *Zhongguo renquan shuangzhoukan*, www.boxun.com/news/gb/z_special/2010/04/201004260024.shtml. Accessed 26 January 2013.
- Song, Yongyi. 2010b. *Zhongguo fanyou yundong shujuku 1957– (The Chinese Anti-Rightist Movement Database, 1957–)*. Hong Kong: CUHK Press (CD-ROM).
- Surviving Victims of the Anti-Rightist Campaign. 2007. "Petitioning for redress over the Anti-Rightist Campaign." *China Rights Forum* 2, 179–189.
- Tanner, Harold. 1994. "China's 'gulag' reconsidered: labor reform in the 1980s and 1990s." *China Information* 9(2–3), 40–71.
- Teiwes, Frederick. 1993. *Politics and Purges: Rectification and the Decline of Party Norms, 1950–1965*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Veg, Sebastian. 2012. "The limits of representation: Wang Bing's labour camp films." *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 6(2), 173–187.
- Williams, Philip, and Yenna Wu. 2004. *The Great Wall of Confinement*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Williams, Philip, and Yenna Wu (eds.). 2006. *Remolding and Resistance among Writers of the Chinese Prison Camp*. London: Routledge.
- Wu, Yenna, and Simona Livescu (eds.). 2011. *Human Rights, Suffering, and Aesthetics in Political Prison Literature*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Xing, Tongyi. 2004. *Huang ruo ge shi. Huimou Jiabianguo (Like Another World. Remembering Jiabianguo)*. Lanzhou: Lanzhou daxue.
- Yang, Jisheng. 2012. *Tombstone. The Great Chinese Famine 1958–1962*. (Stacy Mosher and Guo Jian (trans.)). New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.
- Yang, Xianhui. 2002. *Jiabianguo jishi (Chronicles of Jiabianguo)*. Tianjin: Tianjin guji.
- Yang, Xianhui. 2003. *Gaobie Jiabianguo (Farewell to Jiabianguo)*. Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi.
- Yang, Xianhui. 2007. *Dingxi Gueryuan jishi (Tales of Dingxi Orphanage)*. Guangzhou: Huacheng.
- Yang, Xianhui. 2008. *Jiabianguo jishi (Tales from Jiabianguo)*. Guangzhou: Huacheng.
- Yang, Xianhui. 2009. *Woman from Shanghai*. (Wen Huang (trans.)). New York: Pantheon.

- You, Fengwei. 2001. *Zhongguo 1957 (China 1957)*. Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi.
- Yu, Jie. 2002. "Du Jiabiangou jishi (zhi yi), Zhongguo gulage qundao fuchu shuimian" (Reading *Chronicles of Jiabiangou* (1), the Chinese Gulag archipelago rises to the surface). *Kaifang* 192 (December), 88–91.
- Zhang, Yihe. 2004. *Zuihou de guizu (The Last Aristocrats)*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Zhao, Xu. 2008. *The Tragedy at Jiabiangou*, Washington, DC: Laogai Foundation.
- Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi (ed.). 2011. *Zhongguo gongchandang lishi 1949–1978 (History of the Chinese Communist Party, 1949–1978)*. Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2 volumes.
- Zhu, Zheng. 1998. *1957 nian de xiaji: cong baijia zhengming dao liangjia zhengming (The Summer of 1957: From the Contention of 100 Schools to the Contention of Two Schools)*. Zhengzhou: Henan renmin.
- Zhu, Zheng. 2004. *Fan youpai douzheng shimo (The Bottom Line on the Anti-Rightist Struggle)*. Hong Kong: Mingpao.