

Frances Niebuhr (PhD Candidate Heidelberg University), described the dialectic interconnections between a big hydropower project and the re-location of a temple and the meaning ascribed to major flood event in the vicinity. A poster by Amelie Huber (Bogazici University) examined the socio-political dimensions of a hydropower project in the eastern Himalayas.

In the concluding discussion, participants developed key questions for future research on the theme of the workshop. The discussion addressed the analytical and epistemological implications of the participants' research on water knowledges. One question that emerged was whether, and to what extent the engagement with water could open a new tool box that would help to challenge existing epistemologies of water.

An edited volume building upon the workshop is now inviting contributors.

Ravi Baghel and Lea Stepan

## Popular Memory of the Mao Era and its Impact on History

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At an usual autumn day in 1976, a knell suddenly tolled all over China. Mao Zedong, who had overcome thousands of difficulties and finally reached to found the PRC, a young socialist state, closed his eyes forever. Mao's death marks the passing of an era. As a general consensus largely accepted, the periodization of post-1949 can be roughly divided into two periods. 1976 has become a watershed. The revolutionary period of 1949–1976 is called "Mao Era." The post-Mao Era's beginning is marked by Mao's death, the downfall of the "Gang of Four," and the consolidation of Deng's power (in 1978). Nowadays, for most Chinese, the Mao Era has been long gone, so have those deeply buried histories of the blood-soaked decades, political struggles, and fresh memories from people who had witnessed the age of turbulence.

As time passing by, in the PRC the boundary of speech has been slightly loosened up. Thus the collective memories of the Mao Era have chances to become a popular topic. The memories are usually divided into two categories: officially recognized memories controlled by the mouthpiece of the government (traditional media, Internet propaganda, etc.) and popular memories that mostly take positions of grassroots class. As no coincidence, there's a great gap in between. Despite being feeble, the influence of popular memory couldn't be ignored. Not only helping to expand the boundary of speech, popular memory can also affect official discourses to some extent. For instance, along with the rise of plentiful popular memory of "the great famine," the official discourse has been changed from "the three years of natural disaster" (*san nian ziran zaihai*) to "the three difficult years" (*san nian kunnan shiqi*) which refers to 1959–1961.

Sinology has been very sensitive to the thriving development of popular memory of the Mao Era in the PRC. At a time like this, a conference called "Popular Memory of the Mao Era and its Impact on History" was convened in Paris. Organized by CEFC, this conference is one of the research results in the framework of the project "New Approaches to the Mao Era (1949–1976): Everyday History and Unofficial Memory" funded by ANR (France) and RGC (Hong Kong). The conference speakers included scholars from various fields (literature, historiography, sociology, film studies, and sinology) coming from both China (mainland and Hong Kong) and the western world (France, Netherland, Germany, and USA). Five experts of Chinese or Soviet studies had been invited as discussants for each panel (the institutionalization of popular memory; vectors of popular memory; reconsidering history: grassroots resistance;

popular history's contribution to historiography; and a film screening). The film screened is called "Spark," shot by Hu Jie, a famous Chinese independent documentary film producer and director.

To sum up, the conference made three major contributions. First of all, it provided an overview of the various carriers of popular memory, such as private museums in the PRC presented by Kirk Denton from Ohio State University, fictional and documentary writing about the Mao Era presented by Sebastian Veg from CEFC/EHESS, independent films about rightist presented by Judith Pernin from CEFC/IHTP, etc. Different from western scholars, the presentations of three mainland experts showed more concern about the collection of oral history and related methodology issues. Secondly, the conference prompted interdisciplinary exchanges in the framework of Chinese study and pointed out a new direction for modern Sinology. Different from classical sinological studies, which mostly focus on classical Chinese literature / philosophy / phonology, etc., modern sinology cares more about the issues in modern Chinese society and shows a social science turn. Thirdly, the conference practiced a cross-cultural interaction. During these two days, different kinds of researching methods, problem consciousness, and ideologies inspired heated discussions. What's more, a new perspective of comparison was provided.

Among these outstanding presentations, two made profound impressions on me. One is the presentation of apolitical art and private experience by Wang Aihe, historian and anthropologist, also witness of CR and former member of the Painting Group "No Name" (*Wuming*, active 1973–1981). Wang used a unique female perspective by analyzing multiple paintings under an artistic point of view to present a three-dimensional and representational Mao Era. Her research is very objective despite of rich emotions. Moreover it successfully avoided getting politicized as some other similar studies in China. The other one is the presentation of a case study about readdressing past injustices (counterrevolution, rightist and other political crimes charges) in Post-Mao Era by Daniel Leese from Freiburg University. Leese has studies a large amount of historical materials and presented a complete, rigorous study under the framework of historiography. His study can be seen as an excellent example of a modern sinological study.

Ultimately, popular memory of the Mao Era looks very different from Chinese and western viewpoints. It's a twofold question. The advantage of western study is being more objective and macroscopic, which most of Chinese researches lack of. However, at the level of authorial presence, the Chinese studies obviously have more superiority. Considering the academic ethics, for western world Chinese culture is a foreign culture whereas for Chinese culture the western Sinology is also a foreign culture. The tension caused by these two "foreign cultures" makes modern Sinology look not only paradoxical but also charming. The significance of this conference is not merely for the study of popular memory of the Mao Era; moreover, it contributed to the long road of the development of modern sinology.

Jiawen Sun