



Europe-China Comparative Study

Rethinking, Reflection, Repentance:

Comparing “Coming to Terms with the Past” in Europe and China

C. K. Martin Chung
European Union Academic Programme Hong Kong
Hong Kong Baptist University

This article has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this article are the sole responsibility of the author and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.



This project is co-funded
by the European Union

Europe-China Comparative Study

Rethinking, Reflection, Repentance: Comparing “Coming to Terms with the Past” in Europe and China

C. K. Martin Chung
European Union Academic Programme Hong Kong
Hong Kong Baptist University
ckmartin@hkbu.edu.hk

“Let me speak! I have to tell everyone.
Never again the great tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki!
Never again the ten catastrophic years of the ‘Cultural Revolution’!”
Ba Jin¹

Abstract

This paper compares Chinese and European attempts at “coming to terms with the past”. Three types of Chinese *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (VgB) are identified in this study: 1) Chinese as perpetrators against others, including non-Han minorities; 2) Chinese as victims of their own, i.e. Chinese atrocities committed against fellow Chinese, and 3) Chinese as victims of foreign aggression. Through specific case studies in each category, attention is drawn to the particular ways through which suffering, guilt and responsibility were framed by Chinese intellectuals such as Wang Lixiong, Ba Jin, Tu Weiming and Jin Yong. The intellectual roots of their expressions are also traced in order to highlight the “Chinese” resources for coming to terms with the past as well as the extent of cultural “import” from Europe in this spontaneous undertaking.

Through this discourse analysis, one comes to the preliminary conclusion that when “Chinese as victims of fellow Chinese” is concerned, the European experience of VgB does serve as a source of inspiration for Chinese VgB, as manifest especially in the works of Ba Jin and Yu Jie. But when it comes to the other two categories of VgB, such cultural borrowing remains limited and the results diverge significantly. Indeed, the stark contrast of spirits (i.e. in comparison with Karl Jaspers, Günther Anders, Abraham Joshua Heschel, etc.) puts in doubt whether the Chinese attempts in question can measure up to the VgB standards set by their European counterparts. These findings will be further tested in a planned book project based on the framework of this study.

Since mid-2013, a series of public apologies has been issued by Chinese individuals who had done “terrible things” during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). In the

¹ Ba Jin, *巴金隨想錄 (合訂本)* [Ba Jin's Random Thoughts Vol. 1-5] (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1988), II-132.

five months between June and October, no less than half a dozen such instances were recorded from Hebei to Fujian.² Among these mostly retired individuals was Liu Boqin, who advertised his apology with *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, a respected monthly in the Mainland.

I am Liu Boqin. During the early phase of the 'Cultural Revolution' I was a high school student in Shandong Province... I was young and ignorant, with a stupid and stubborn character, couldn't differentiate between right or wrong. Under the misguidance of the others, I participated in the struggle sessions [of specific school teachers]... the raids of the homes [of specific schoolmates]... I also hassled the families [of specific individuals]... etc., causing extreme harm to them and their relatives. As I am approaching old age, I rethink (*fansi*) on these with deep pain. Although there was the factor of being coerced by the big environment of the 'Cultural Revolution', the individual responsibility of wrongdoing cannot be dismissed. Therefore, I sincerely apologize (*daoqian*) to the abovementioned teachers, schoolmates, gentlemen and others who had been hurt by me! I wish you could forgive my faults in the past.³

While greeted by those who have long wished for an adequate national reflection on the Cultural Revolution, Liu was dissuaded by his schoolmates, who were of the opinion that such an "event of the long-gone past" deserves no re-mentioning at all.⁴ Yet a Chinese commentator encouraged other individuals to follow the footsteps of Liu, including the present leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). "The Cultural Revolution was started by Mao Zedong," said Yao Jianfu, a former researcher at the State Council's Development Research Center, "the present leaders were also victims during the Cultural Revolution. But they have inherited Mao's political legacy, assets as well as liabilities."⁵ Yao further referred to Willy Brandt, whose *Kniefall* in Warsaw counts among the most iconic political images of the Twentieth Century. "He was also not a perpetrator at that time", but represented

² Among other press reports, see "文革紅衛兵登廣告道歉," [Cultural Revolution Red Guard places apology advertisement], *Southern Metropolis Daily*, 18 Jun. 2013; "溫慶福：我只是普通人做了普通事," [Wen Qingfu: I'm just an ordinary man who did an ordinary thing], *Beijing News*, 3 Aug. 2013; "一名紅衛兵的懺悔," [A Red Guard's repentance], *Beijing News*, 7 Aug. 2013; "河北退休幹部向文革受害者道歉," [Retired Hebei official apologizes to Cultural Revolution victims], *China News Service*, 14 Aug. 2013; "紅衛兵公開懺悔," [Red Guard repents in public], *中國新聞周刊網*, 3 Sept. 2013; "湖南老人就文革中批鬥恩師致歉," [Aged man from Hunan apologizes for Cultural Revolution struggle session against his teacher], *瀟湘晨報*, 27 Jul. 2013.

³ LIU Boqin, "鄭重道歉," [Earnest Apology] *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, no. 6 (2013): 83. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Chinese and German sources, including the present one, are my translation.

⁴ Among other commentaries, see XU Ben, "「紅衛兵」道歉是一種怎樣的良心行為," [Apology by Red Guards as an act of conscience], *Southern Metropolis Daily*, 23 Aug. 2013; HU Yinbin, "遲到 45 年的對不起道出個體的擔當," [Belated 'sorry' bespeaks individual responsibility], *Beijing News*, 28 Jul. 2013; XIONG Zhi, "懺悔之路也是通往現代公民之路," [The penitential path is also the path to modern civil society], *Southern Metropolis Daily*, 17 Aug. 2013; "社論：遲到的公民懺悔在為民族清「毒素」," [Editorial: Belated civil repentance rids the nation of poison], *ibid.*, 15 Aug.

⁵ "舊同學忙阻攔 學者讚有良心," [Discouraged by schoolmates, praised by scholars], *Ming Pao*, 19 Jun. 2013.

“those who should kneel”. “The Chinese nation lacks precisely this courage of admitting mistakes, this courage to do repentance (*chanhui*)” he said.⁶

Indeed, when political leaders are concerned, public expression of repentance – whether vis-à-vis the domestic or foreign audience – does not seem to belong to the common fixtures in the long history of China.⁷ Yet in civil society, individual voices like Liu’s, though rare, do become audible from time to time. Ba Jin’s *Random Thoughts*, for example, which was first published in 1979, is often touted as a model “reflection” (*fanxing*) on the Cultural Revolution. It is therefore not true that “only now” that some kind of Chinese “coming to terms with the past”, to use the German concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (hereafter VgB for short), is taking place.⁸

Though present and audible, these individual Chinese expressions of “rethinking”, “reflection” and “repentance” – whether they are expressed in the context of the Cultural Revolution or the Tiananmen Massacre (1989) – are seldom analyzed under the rubric of “overcoming the past”.⁹ Furthermore, when coming to terms with the national past is concerned, if the comparative framework developed in the past twenty years or so can serve as a guide,¹⁰ shouldn’t it include first and foremost *that* past or those “pasts” in which the nation or a significant part of the nation was the perpetrator towards the “others”, external as well as internal? To push Yao’s argument further, Brandt wasn’t in Warsaw to confess to a “German-German” wrongdoing, but to the Nazi German-initiated/-executed atrocities against the Jewish people (which included Polish Jews and German Jews, among others). In other words, Chinese VgB as a *comparable* phenomenon cannot, from an empirical point of view, be confined to those expressions that deal exclusively with the *intra*-Chinese past; reflections on the Han-Tibetan and Han-Uighur relationships burdened by Han Chinese wrongdoing against the minorities should also be included if not of primary focus.¹¹

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Whether the CCP’s 1981 resolution on “certain historical problems” presented an exception is a subject of debate. Some are of the opinion that it was an honest admission of mistakes by the Party; others point to the fact that guilt was assigned to a few individuals while leaving those now in power intact. See Steve Smith, “Coming to Terms with the Past: China,” *History Today* 53, no. 12 (2003).

⁸ For an overview of this concept and phenomenon, see Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2001); Norbert Frei, *1945 und Wir. Das Dritte Reich im Bewußtsein der Deutschen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2005); and Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2006).

⁹ See Smith, “Coming to Terms with the Past: China.”; and Felix Wemheuer, *Steinnudeln. Ländliche Erinnerungen und staatliche Vergangenheitsbewältigung der "Großen-Sprung"-Hungersnot in der chinesischen Provinz Henan* (Frankfurt a.M./Bern: Peter Lang, 2007). While Smith’s article provides a helpful anthology of Chinese literary works dealing with the recent traumatic past, Wemheuer’s dissertation focuses on a particular location to explore Chinese VgB concerning the “Great Leap Forward”.

¹⁰ For comparative studies of VgB, see Christoph Cornelißen, Lutz Klinkhammer, and Wolfgang Schwentker, eds., *Erinnerungskulturen: Deutschland, Italien und Japan seit 1945* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2004); Kathy Harms, Lutz R. Reuter, and Volker Dürr, eds., *Coping with the Past: Germany and Austria after 1945* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Siegmund Schmidt, Gert Pickel, and Susanne Pickel, eds., *Amnesie, Amnestie oder Aufarbeitung? Zum Umgang mit autoritären Vergangenheiten und Menschenrechtsverletzungen* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009); and Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices* (New York: Norton, 2000).

¹¹ The author is of course aware of the official use of the term “Chinese” to include also the Tibetan and Uighur peoples among other minorities and the Han majority. By not categorizing these relationships as “intra-Chinese”, I acknowledge simply the fact that these peoples do not necessarily consider themselves “Chinese”. Likewise, as we shall see, by calling these Chinese intellectuals’ efforts as “coming to terms with past”, there is no intention to suggest that the suffering of the minorities under the Han majority is already “over”. Rather, it is to recognize that VgB does not have to begin *ex post facto*, when the “fact” can span decades and dynasties to the present.

The following analysis of the relevant Chinese discourse, which is the preliminary study of a planned book project, proceeds with the analytical framework derived from Alfred Grosser's definition of VgB:

I would like very much to defend the word *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. ... *Every German* should have the wish and the will to become master over the fate, which those responsible from difficult times have laid upon the later Germany. *Every victim* of this time... must become master over the anger, the resentment, which comes from his suffering and that of his own people. ... To come to terms with the past means to master it, in order to make it usable (*brauchbar*). Usable for a more peaceful, more just future.¹²

Grosser's conception of VgB is pertinent not only because it envisages the perpetrator's *and* the victim's differentiated tasks in this joint enterprise, but also due to his own lifelong engagement with it. As a Jewish youngster, Grosser had to flee Nazi Germany with his family and returned after the war as a French citizen. He wrote articles about the famished and disoriented German youths, and argued vehemently against the "collective guilt" thesis.¹³ At times, he also stood up to challenge what he perceived to be an abuse of suffering-history, the so-called "Auschwitz as moral club".¹⁴ Hence his "mastering" of the past on the side of the victims is richly illuminated with personal examples.

From this analytical standpoint, the paper will first look at Wang Lixiong's efforts at "overcoming" the Han-Tibetan and Han-Uighur past (and present) as a sample of the first type of Chinese VgB, namely, "(Han) Chinese as perpetrators". It will then proceed to two variants of the second type of Chinese VgB, that is, "Chinese as victims". The first variant deals with "Chinese as victims of fellow Chinese", with samples coming from the above-mentioned reflections by Ba Jin on the Cultural Revolution. The second variant deals with "Chinese as victims of foreigners", in this case the sample used is Chinese intellectuals' (including Tu Weiming's, Ji Xianlin's and Jin Yong's) dialogues with Ikeda Daisaku.

The aim of this paper is to answer the following questions, which also serve as the comparative framework of the study:

1. Guilt and remembrance: How is the suffering of oneself or the others remembered? How is guilt and responsibility assigned?
2. Self-positioning: How do these intellectuals position themselves vis-à-vis the victims, the perpetrators, one's own nation, and the political leadership?
3. Intellectual resources: What are the proposed courses of remedy? What are the actual terms/metaphors/models/stories used in the discourse and what are their origins?
4. Cultural borrowing: Are there foreign examples used? Which ones and in what context?

¹² Alfred Grosser, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung. Rede an der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, gehalten am 18. 5. 1994* (Jena: Universitätsverlag, 1994), 7. Emphasis added.

¹³ For Grosser's engagement in the early postwar years, see Martin Strickmann, *L'Allemagne nouvelle contre l'Allemagne éternelle. Die französischen Intellektuellen und die deutsch-französische Verständigung 1944-1950* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2004).

¹⁴ Alfred Grosser, "Israels Politik fördert Antisemitismus," *Stern*, 12 Oct. 2007.

Chinese as Perpetrators: Wang Lixiong’s Tibet and “Xinjiang”

Background

Since his first political novel published in 1991, *Yellow Peril*, Wang Lixiong has already earned fame as one of the most outspoken writers presently still residing in Mainland China. His subsequent works on Tibet and Xinjiang only further entrench this reputation. Born in 1953, Wang was once “inside” the system and later became critical about it. He was briefly imprisoned in Xinjiang while doing research for his book on Han-Uighur relations. This imprisonment, however, became a “blessing”, a “fulfillment”, for without it, he would never have, according to himself, gained a real friendship with an Uighur intellectual sharing the same prison cell, from whom he earned a glimpse into the “Uighur heart”.¹⁵ In fact, his works on both Han-Uighur and Han-Tibetan relations were substantially based on his conversations with his “minority” counterparts, including the Dalai Lama, with whom he had multiple audiences and from whom he received the Light of Truth Award in 2009.

Guilt and remembrance: Communist guilt, Han innocence

One of Wang’s essential contributions is to give voice to the suffering of the persecuted minorities in China. A substantial chapter of his *My West Land, Your East Country*, for instance, is his conversation with his Uighur cellmate and friend, “Mokhtar”. In this conversation, the Chinese reader can learn about how a Uighur intellectual remembers the suffering of his own people under Chinese rule, how he sees history and how Han Chinese are perceived by the Uighur minority.¹⁶ Wang was deft in eliciting these from his discussion partner, without – in most cases – interruption, defensiveness or premature judgment.

In his own evaluation of this suffering, Wang did not shy away from downright condemnation of injustice: he put “grand Han-nationalism” on a par with Fascism, and criticized his own nationals in Xinjiang, who, although oppressed by corrupt officials themselves, “consciously or unconsciously take the side of the oppressors” when it comes to the suppression of the locals.¹⁷ Likewise with Tibet, Wang recognized the suffering of the local populace under Han violence, both before and after 1949, that is, during the Xinhai Revolution and after the Chinese Communists had risen to power.¹⁸ He minced no words in his critique of the high-handed approach of the CCP, which he judged as “illegal and inhumane, even by Chinese Communist standards”.¹⁹

But how did he see the responsibility of Han Chinese intellectuals, and the Han Chinese people (not just those in living in these troubled regions) at large? Of the first, Wang found their attitude towards the minorities appalling. “Their image is usually one of reform, openness and rationality, but when it comes to the Xinjiang problem, their mouths blurt out ‘killing’ so blithely. If genocide could save China’s

¹⁵ WANG Lixiong, *我的西藏, 你的東土* [My West Land, Your East Country] (Taipei: Locus Publishing, 2007), 7-8.

¹⁶ Not only Uighur suffering was remembered in this dialogue, though. For instance, at one point the two talked about how Communist soldiers in Xinjiang were given “wives” in the 1950s purportedly coming from the closed brothels throughout China, thus giving witness to what can be a veritable Chinese “comfort women” system. See *ibid.*, 300.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

¹⁸ *天葬：西藏的命運* [Sky Burial: The Fate of Tibet] (Ontario: Mirror Books, 1998), 84-85, 182-189.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

sovereignty on Xinjiang, I think they might look on to the slaughter of millions of Uighurs without a word of protest.”²⁰ To the second, larger group, however, Wang ascribed only innocence.

[T]he Chinese occupation of Tibet... was not as clear-cut as Japanese invasion of China... The suffering of the Tibetan nation (*minzu*) and the people (*renmin*) of Tibet, brought about by the oppression of the Chinese Communist Party is well-known to all. It is partly attributable to state competition for sovereignty, partly to the ideologically-motivated autocratic regime. But none of these can be counted as national oppression (*minzu yapu*). For one, the people of a state (even the main nation of the people) cannot be made responsible for the non-elected autocratic regime, much less for the ideology of the rulers; secondly, the majority of the people of the Han nation have not obtained any benefit from the CCP’s oppression of other nations... Therefore, one can only say that the Chinese Communist regime, not the Han people, has oppressed China’s minority nations, including the Tibetans... Han people should not be made to bear the guilt of the oppression... Tibetan suffering under CCP rule is part of the overall catastrophe of the entire Chinese people... If we turn the problem into an ethnic one, we are actually confusing the fundamental conflict.²¹

When the conception of state-people guilt-relationship is concern, this position of Wang’s is in sharp contrast to the attitude of those in Europe who had sought also to grapple with state wrongdoing.²² Martin Niemöller preached already in 1945 that it was not enough to give all the guilt to the Nazis or to Hitler, the Church must also admit its own guilt.²³ Karl Jaspers’s guilt thesis also left no room for such guilt-shoveling to the state or the “ruling clique”: “A people is liable for its polity (*Staatlichkeit*)... We are collectively liable... There is necessarily collective guilt (*Kollektivschuld*) as the political liability (*politische Haftung*) of the nationals of a state (*Staatsangehörigen*), but not in the same sense as moral and metaphysical, and not as criminal guilt.”²⁴ In this regard, Wang Lixiong diverges from the reflective path of Ba Jin, who, as we shall see later, saw guilt not only in the Communists and Chinese elites, but also in ordinary Chinese themselves, in his reflection on the Cultural Revolution.

Self-positioning: An observer-cum-victim

Wang often presented himself as a “mediator”, though not only as a mediator between the Han and the Tibetan/Uighur nations, “to resolve inter-ethnic conflicts”,²⁵ but also as a mediator between the Communist “rulers” and the governed people of China. In fact, the latter rather than the former was the central axis of Wang’s inter-ethnic

²⁰ *My West Land, Your East Country*, 59.

²¹ *Sky Burial*, 240-242.

²² This earlier attitude of Wang’s seems to have undergone a discernable change through the years; his later work on Xinjiang showed more consciousness of the guilt of Han Chinese – in culture and indifference – not just the elites. See for example *My West Land, Your East Country*, 56, 63. It remains to question whether this has to do with the change of subjects (from Tibetans to Uighurs) or with the change of the author’s own awareness.

²³ Quoted in Willem A. Visser’t Hooft, *Die Welt war meine Gemeinde. Autobiographie.*, trans. Heidi von Alten (Munich: Piper, 1972), 230-231. See also Niemöller’s more elaborate, personal “confession” of guilt as concentration camp inmate in his *Die Erneuerung unserer Kirche* (Munich: Neubau-Verlag Adolf Groß, 1946).

²⁴ Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1946), 56.

²⁵ WANG Lixiong, *Sky Burial*, 540.

endeavors. As he explained: “The reason why I research on the Tibet problem is because I’m convinced that the first challenge of China’s political reform is the problem of nationalities.”²⁶ His reason for “reflecting” on these issues was that he believed if everybody in the society dares to tell the truth, then no revolt or revolution is needed for the dictatorial regime to collapse.²⁷

Through this mediator-role, Wang sought to assign the bulk of the blame to the Chinese Communist Party, while trying to break a “Middle Path” (see below) for *both* the Han and the minority peoples.²⁸ As to himself, Wang displayed sympathy to the suffering of the minorities, at times with the self-consciousness of a Han intellectual,²⁹ but sometimes also presented himself *as* a victim among the victims of oppression. He began his book on Xinjiang, for example, by recounting his own suffering under state security personnel during his research for the book, from being invited to Xinjiang to the attempted suicide after breaking down under interrogation and having betrayed a friend.³⁰ Remarkably, these pages of lamentation are interlaced with photographs of the old and the weak Uighurs, thus reinforcing visually the co-victimhood of the author and the subjects of his book. He ended this section with repeated quotations from a Uighur poem he had seen in the prison cell, now being used as *his* words of defiance to the authorities.³¹

With regard to Tibet, Wang advocated the “transcendental position” that is purportedly “above” partisan polemics. “Both Beijing and Dharamshala have their share of lies... yet they are both honest...” “One must transcend the conflicts and stand above them... The Tibet problem is actually humanity’s problem...”³² This self-extricating position, however, carries with itself the problem of “playing judge”: not only one’s loyalty towards the position of one’s national group is dissolved, but one feels now also entitled to point to the guilt of the others. Hence Wang was only too eager to point out that Tibetans themselves were the ones destroying the temples during the Cultural Revolution, as if the guilt of initiation could be alleviated by the guilt of execution, a point bitterly resented by the Tibetans.³³ In this regard, Wang could have benefited from the German debates about the “guilt of others”, as they navigated between German guilt and Allied guilt,³⁴ and also from Charles Maier’s observation of the “asymmetrical obligations of memory”.³⁵

²⁶ *My West Land, Your East Country*, 13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 410.

²⁹ “I as a Han cannot tell the Tibetans [to give up their hopeless struggle]...” *Sky Burial*, 539.

³⁰ *My West Land, Your East Country*, 40.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

³² *Sky Burial*, 6-8. This earlier position of aloofness was noticeably changed when Wang wrote his later work on Xinjiang: “Since my blood spilled in Xinjiang, Xinjiang is no longer a concept, [the Uighur nation] is no longer an object of observation, but has become an organic, inseparable part of my life...” *My West Land, Your East Country*, 73. This change however was also anchored in the self identification *as* victim, rather than *with* the victim as part of the guilt-bearing group.

³³ See Tsering Shakya’s critique of this attitude in his “Blood in the Snows,” in *The Struggle for Tibet* by WANG Lixiong and Tsering Shakya (London/New York: Verso, 2009).

³⁴ See for example Helmut Thielicke and Hermann Diem, *Die Schuld der Anderen. Ein Briefwechsel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1948).

³⁵ Charles Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 166.

Proposed remedy: “Middle Path” and practicality

Even as Wang sounded generally pessimistic about the possible outcomes of both the Han-Tibetan and the Han-Uighur conflicts, he nonetheless saw a possibility of “minimizing the costs” of Han and non-Han conflicts through the “middle path” and his vision of Chinese democratization.³⁶ “[I]t depends on the art of the Middle Path (*zhong yong zhi dao*)... transcending the vortex of conflicts, giving up emotional finger-pointing and insistence on one’s viewpoint, finding the win-win path with understanding and accommodation...”³⁷ “I as a Han can only turn my love for Tibet into a force to reform China, making it more democratic, tolerant and fair”.³⁸

Yet as a self-professed observer “above the conflicts”, Wang also could not refrain from advising his counterparts. So although he agreed that Hans must be the first to choose the Middle Path, he nonetheless concluded that “it is not realistic to ask millions upon millions of indoctrinated Hans to repent (*chanhui*) for Han misdeeds... it is more possible for the organized Tibetans to change first, to proactively understand Han thinking...”³⁹ Indeed, he repeatedly grounded his position on the conviction that it is not possible to go against the will the billion-strong Han Chinese to preserve country and nation. As he told his Uighur friend: “I do not mind if Xinjiang becomes independent, as long as the people live well, it doesn’t matter to become a country. But among Hans there are very few who think like that...”⁴⁰ And when he reflected on Tibet: “I do not see Han bottom lines as justified at all, but whether you like it or not, it is a reality... Just like facing a sick giant, if you touch a certain meridian on his body, he will go berserk, so you may only consider him sick, not reproach him as unjust... It is wise not to intentionally touch that meridian, or at least until he is healed.”⁴¹ Hence practicality, rather than that – to paraphrase Jaspers’s formulation of VgB as repentance (*Umkehr*) – *unreserved recognition of the consequences of wrongdoing*,⁴² seems to characterize Wang’s efforts at “coming to terms” with the Chinese past (and present) in Tibet and Xinjiang.

Chinese as Victims of Chinese Perpetrators: Ba Jin’s Cultural Revolution

Wang Lixiong, though prominent, was not the only Han intellectual who sought to do Chinese VgB with regard to the minorities in China.⁴³ Yu Jie, for instance, also published a direct apology to the Tibetan people as a member of the Han intelligentsia, in response to the witness of Tibetan suffering, Palden Gyatso.⁴⁴

³⁶ Wang proposed a progressive democratization process from below. See his *與達賴喇嘛對話* [Talking with Dalai Lama] (Illinois: Green Valley Publishing, 2002), 234-351; and a critique of this proposal in Sebastian Veg, “Chinese Intellectuals and the Problem of Xinjiang,” *China Perspectives*, no. 3 (2008).

³⁷ WANG Lixiong, *Talking with Dalai Lama*, 19.

³⁸ *Sky Burial*, 540.

³⁹ *Talking with Dalai Lama*, 20.

⁴⁰ *My West Land, Your East Country*, 401.

⁴¹ *Talking with Dalai Lama*, 236.

⁴² See Karl Jaspers, *Wohin treibt die Bundesrepublik? Tatsachen. Gefahren. Chancen* (Munich: R. Piper & Co., 1966), 238-239.

⁴³ See for example an earlier work cited multiple times by Wang Lixiong, CAO Changqing, ed. *中國大陸知識分子論西藏*, [Mainland Chinese Intellectuals on Tibet] (Taipei: China Times Publishing, 1996).

⁴⁴ See YU Jie, “向西藏忏悔—读《雪山下的火焰 一个西藏良心犯的证言》,” [Repent to Tibet: Reading “Fire under the Snow”] accessed 8 Nov. 2013, http://blog.boxun.com/hero/yujie/166_1.shtml; and Palden Gyatso and Tsering Shakya, *Fire under the Snow: Testimony of a Tibetan Prisoner* (London: Harvill, 1997).

In his own right, Yu counts as one of the pioneers of Chinese VgB in that he has dealt with the multiple traumatic pasts of China's: the past and ongoing suffering of minorities, the Tiananmen Massacre, as well as Chinese suffering under militarist Japan. We will come back to his reflections on the Chinese past as victims of oneself using the “mirror” of Germany. The case below is his forerunner in this category, Ba Jin's autobiographical rethinking of the Cultural Revolution.

Background

As one of the most prolific Chinese writers of the Twentieth Century, Ba Jin was banished as a “Cow Ghost and Snake God” during the Cultural Revolution, to be forcefully “reformed” in the “cowshed”. His wife died in 1972 due to the lack of adequate medical treatment, while he himself suffered multiple “struggle sessions” and long years of hardship. After the turmoil ended with Mao's death and the downfall of the Gang of Four, Ba Jin tasked himself to write up five volumes of short essays dedicated to the “Ten Years of Catastrophe”, as he called the period. These were published as serials and compendia since 1979.⁴⁵ These texts have since then been widely referred to within Chinese intelligentsia as exemplary reflections on that fanatical era, with Ba Jin's clarion call to establish a “Cultural Revolution Museum” in the Mainland constantly being recalled even after his death in 2005.

Guilt and remembrance: The Gang of Four and the “executive's will”

The topics of these short essays by Ba Jin range widely, but invariably they are linked to the suffering of the victims during the Cultural Revolution. Individual writers, for example, were remembered: how they had gone through unjust accusations, and some, like Lao She, even met death as a result of the more violent struggle sessions. Ba Jin repeatedly blamed himself for having “brought trouble” upon his wife, a translator, who could have been cured of her cancer had it not been for his “cow” status.

She didn't want to die, she wanted to live, she was willing to reform her thinking, she was willing to see the completion of Socialism... She could have lived, if not for being ‘Black Old K's’ ‘filthy whore’. In short, it's me, I'd brought it upon her, I'd ruined her.⁴⁶

Aside from this *fellow* victim, he also apologized to his *own* victim, a fellow Chinese writer whose suffering was linked to a “critique” Ba Jin had penned on the hope of “surviving” the then growing mass mania. “I still have to apologize here to comrade Lu Ling. I did not know him personally... I did not intend to hurt [him]... but when the movement escalated, my essay also escalated... but do I not have my share of the responsibility for having cast a stone at the mouth of the well? ... I will not forgive myself for those ‘reluctant comments’.”⁴⁷ One can notice that the formulation of Liu Boqin's apology quoted in the beginning of this paper closely resembles this original formulation of Ba Jin's.

The aim of writing these “random thoughts”, as the author himself explained, was not to “torment” the others, but to protect oneself and subsequent generations, so that the

⁴⁵ Ba Jin, *隨想錄 (第一集)* [Random Thoughts Vol. 1] (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1979).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁷ *Ba Jin's Random Thoughts*, V-197-198. Elsewhere he had also referred to his own “stone-casting” during struggle sessions as a “follower of the others”. See *Random Thoughts*, 160-161.

“catastrophe” will not happen again.⁴⁸ He asked “why there were so many people who turned from human beings into animals overnight, who grabbed their own siblings (*tongbao*), ‘ate their flesh and skinned them’ (*shirou qinpi*).”⁴⁹ Ba Jin was indeed obsessed with the question of how men became “tigers and wolves” so easily, and how “animalism” triumphed over humanism.⁵⁰ Hence unlike Wang Lixiong, who generally framed the Han-Tibetan and Han-Uighur problems as products of misguided Communist policy, Ba Jin invited his readers to follow his example of “digging deep into his own soul” and “willing to exhibit his own ugliness” in order to understand what the Cultural Revolution meant and to “help others realize where the empty speech (*konghua*) of the ‘extreme left’ can lead people to”.⁵¹

I always think: We must not only blame Lin Biao or the “Gang of Four”, we must also blame ourselves! It was only because we “bought” those feudal goods that Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four” could be doing so good business selling them. Or else, how was it possible that a casual “order” could render families asunder? Or else, why did we raise our voices several times a day at that time to “sincerely wish” for the “perpetual good health” of Lin Biao and Jiang Qing?⁵²

By those “feudal goods” (*fengjian huose*) Ba Jin meant that it was not socialism or the CCP per se that was to blame for the Cultural Revolution, but that it was a product of feudalism itself. “All that the ‘Gang of Four’ was selling was feudal goods,” he could not emphasize enough.⁵³ In fact, in connection with the larger May Fourth historical narrative, he even blamed his own generation for “not having fulfilled the duty of anti-feudalism”, that was why the Cultural Revolution *milieu* was possible.⁵⁴ In this assessment, though, socialism or the CCP would seem to be the victim needing restitution rather than the culprit needing reflection. In fact, Ba Jin’s double love for nation and socialism was apparently unshaken by his own suffering under his “Communist” cadres.

Going deeper than distributing blame and responsibility to individuals and groups, Ba Jin also identified a way of thinking that was, according to him, at the bottom of the Cultural Revolution phenomenon. He called it the “executive’s will” problem (*zhangguan yizhi*), by which he meant the uncritical incorporation of the official judgment as if it were beyond error and doubt. “Some people have the habit of treating the ‘executive’s will’ as their own will; for them, it offers security and ease of mind...”⁵⁵ He criticized this “security-and-ease philosophy of life” and saw its continuity even in the post-Cultural Revolution era, when people were ostensibly “coming to terms with the past”: they simply replaced the “capitalist roaders” with the “Gang of Four”, without any change of the dependent mindset.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ *Ba Jin's Random Thoughts*, III-128.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, III-127.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, V-23.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, III-95.

⁵² *Random Thoughts*, 62.

⁵³ *Ba Jin's Random Thoughts*, V-101.

⁵⁴ *Random Thoughts*, 81-82.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

This insight of Ba Jin’s is comparable to Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich’s diagnosis of the German nation in relation to the Führer. In their *Inability to Mourn*, the Mitscherlichs accused the Germans of having incorporated exactly that “executive’s will” – in this case, the Führer’s – as if it were their own – what one may call an act of conscience-outsourcing. Through the new obedience-relationship to this “superfather” (*Über-Vater*), the Nazis experienced a new “freedom” in expressing contempt and in committing acts against traditional authorities that they dared not do before.⁵⁷ Consequently, the overcoming of the past would necessary require the overcoming of this borrowed conscience inside, or as Ba Jin simply put it, to regain “independent thinking”.⁵⁸

In this connection, Ba Jin even did not shy away from comparing his own father, a late Qing official, with the perpetrators during the Cultural Revolution, for both believed in and employed torture to elicit “confessions” from “suspects”. “This two years of experience [i.e. watching his father meting out torture] made me loathe corporal punishment... or any kind of oppression. ... For torture begets injustice, who would speak the truth under such oppression?”⁵⁹

For both Ba Jin and the Mitscherlichs, the blind worship of a person-god was judged as the “misguiding path” that led to the atrocities committed by the respective peoples. But with Ba Jin, the issue of Mao worship was not brought to the forefront (rather, lower-ranking leaders were named), the reader must arrive at that conclusion by herself. Hence unlike Lev Kopelev, whose “confessions” as a Soviet soldier and then prisoner went all the way to his own “Stalin worship”,⁶⁰ Ba Jin stopped short at the “executive’s will” of the Gang of Four and went no further.

Self-positioning: A potential perpetrator

The Great Helmsman, socialism and country aside, Ba Jin’s “random thoughts” do share the characteristics of “confession” in that he was equally scathing in his own self-judgment as – if not more so than – his accusation of the others. As we have seen above, he not only confessed to the “guilt” of ruining his own wife,⁶¹ but also to the guilt of “lying” and having contributed to the denunciation of the innocent. “I believed in lies, I spread lies, I did not fight against lies. ... It was only because there was no lack of people like me, that lies had such a booming market, that liars could have great advancement in their careers.”⁶²

Yet with regard to his tormentors and the bystanders, Ba Jin demonstrated much more leniency. Hence he contradicted himself by reaffirming his readers that “I know in New China heroes and good people are the overwhelming majority”.⁶³ And he showed also a remarkable awareness of his own “crime potential” – something “shared” with the actual perpetrators. When speaking of someone who had

⁵⁷ Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern. Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (Munich: R. Piper & Co., 1967), 61-62.

⁵⁸ Ba Jin, *Random Thoughts*, 81.

⁵⁹ Ba Jin's *Random Thoughts*, III-122.

⁶⁰ Lev Kopelev, "Bekenntnisse eines Sowjetbürgers," *Die Zeit*, 11 Feb. 1977.

⁶¹ This can only be counted as “guilt”, of course, in the moral constellation in which a husband is duty-bound to bring a comfortable life to his wife; any actual hardship – no matter of which or whose cause – is therefore counted as “guilt”, or better rendered as “debt” or “disappointment”.

⁶² Ba Jin, *Ba Jin's Random Thoughts*, II-96.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, III-1.

participated in a “struggle session” against him and sought his forgiveness afterwards, he said,

that I had not taken to the stage at that time to criticize anybody, it was only because I had not had the chance. Had I been allowed to show myself on stage, I would have considered it a great fortune. ... It was because I did not have the qualification to “demonstrate loyalty”... that I could preserve my personal innocence. What scared me was my own psychological condition and my thoughts at that time; without falling into the abyss was my greatest fortune. When I search my heart at night, I’m still horrified.⁶⁴

Once again, it is left to the reader to decide whether he will follow Ba Jin’s footsteps in self-reflection as a “(potential) sinner among (actual) sinners”, or as an innocent observer (the “majority” of kind-natured ordinary Chinese) reading about some other people’s victim-perpetrator story. As the author wrote in 1986: “it’s been twenty years... we have to earnestly face this problem, earnestly face ourselves, to think about what kind of mistakes we ourselves have committed. We all have to come to a conclusion (*zongjie*). We better establish a ‘museum’, a ‘Cultural Revolution museum’.”⁶⁵

Chinese as Victims of Foreign Perpetrators: Dialogues with a Repentant Japanese

Ba Jin visited Hiroshima in 1980, where he saw the “Peace Flame” memorial. He reported this in his reflections on the Cultural Revolution: “I will not forget this inextinguishable flame. In order that the ten years of the great tragedy will not happen again... let us light up our own beacon, and make our children and grandchildren remember this painful lesson for generations.”⁶⁶ He also recorded a dream he had of Nagasaki: “I was there in my dream... The mushroom cloud... children crying out loud ‘Papa! Mama!’ ‘Water! Water!’ ... I shouted: ‘Let me speak! I have to tell everyone. Never again the great tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki! Never again the ten catastrophic years of the ‘Cultural Revolution’!”⁶⁷

On the one hand, it is remarkable that Ba Jin did not identify himself with the Chinese victims of the Nanjing Massacre, but with the Japanese who suffered atomic bombing. On the other hand, this identification seems only understandable: In Ba Jin’s eyes, the Cultural Revolution and Hiroshima were *both* self-inflicted suffering (or at least a self-initiated chain of sufferings coming back ultimately to oneself) by the Chinese and the Japanese nations respectively. This is a rare insight through which the otherwise sacrosanct boundaries of national identities are breached. As we shall see in the analysis of “Chinese as victims of foreign aggression” discourse below, this cross-identification is indeed uncommon for which Ba Jin should be credited.

Background

Ikeda Daisaku, successor and spiritual heir of Japanese resisters during the militarist era, Makiguchi Tsunesaburo and Toda Josei, has been known as a seeker of dialogues

⁶⁴ Ibid., III-133.

⁶⁵ Ibid., V-105.

⁶⁶ Ibid., II-76.

⁶⁷ Ibid., II-130-132.

and a worker of Sino-Japanese reconciliation. Among his worldwide dialogue partners include Tu Weiming, Jin Yong, Ji Xianlin and Zhang Kaiyuan, eminent figures in Confucianism, Buddhist learning, Chinese literature and historiography. In these wide-ranging dialogues, the issue of militarist war crimes against the Chinese surfaced often. These exchanges – though at times inundated with mutual congratulations – therefore offer the opportunity to gauge whether and how these traditions are tapped into to facilitate the difficult dialogue on national guilt and repentance.

Guilt and remembrance: The inability to co-reflect

Ikeda often began the dialogue with the recognition of Chinese suffering under militarist Japan and the unreserved admission of Japanese guilt. As he told Ji Xianlin, who was in Nazi Germany when the war escalated in East Asia: “Regrettably, Japan had invaded your beloved motherland and committed irreparable crimes. I apologize as a Japanese from the bottom of my heart.”⁶⁸ Quoting his own brother who had fought war in China, Ikeda added: “Japan is so inhumane, the Chinese are so miserable... Japan must atone for its crimes to China!”⁶⁹ For him, China has always been Japan’s “benefactor-teacher” (*enshiguo*),⁷⁰ hence the crimes of militarist Japan constituted nothing less than the sacrilegious betrayal between student and teacher, or “repaying goodness with wrongdoing” (*en jiang chou bao*).⁷¹

Regarding the guilt for this suffering and betrayal, though Ikeda was critical without reservation against the military leaders, he also blamed the wider Japanese populace of that time to be only too docile, too preoccupied with the idea of “social harmony” (*he*) and looked away when evil happened just before their very eyes.⁷² In terms of the cultural roots of this aggression, Ikeda seemed to share the idea that such was due to Japan’s learning from the (then colonial) West, as he credited Huang Zunxian, a late Qing scholar, for having “warned” Japan of “unbalanced, extreme Westernization”.⁷³

Faced with this frank admission of guilt, Ikeda’s Chinese counterparts often expressed admiration, but stopped short of dwelling deeper into the cultural, intellectual and spiritual “genesis” of the Nanjing Massacre and of the wider militarist inhumanity of that era. Tu Weiming, for example, after briefly elaborating on the difference between the “brutality of Japanese soldiers” and the “national character of the Japanese people”, simply changed the topic to talk about how he admired Japanese aesthetics despite his hatred against “Japanese militarism”.⁷⁴ Ji Xianlin, on the other hand, seemed more interested to propound his thesis that “only Eastern thinking can save

⁶⁸ Ji Xianlin, JIANG Zhongxin, and IKEDA Daisaku, 暢談東方智慧 – 季羨林、蔣忠新與池田大作鼎談集 [On Eastern Wisdom] (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 2004), 15.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁷⁰ ZHANG Kaiyuan and IKEDA Daisaku, 歷史與傳承 – 章開沅與池田大作的對話 [History and Tradition] (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 2013), 102; and *On Eastern Wisdom*, 139.

⁷¹ IKEDA Daisaku and Jin Yong, 探求一個燦爛的世紀 [Searching for a Splendid Century] (Hong Kong: Ming Ho, 1998), 92.

⁷² TU Weiming and IKEDA Daisaku, 對話的文明—池田大作與杜維明對談集 [The Civilization of Dialogue] (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 2008), 41-42.

⁷³ *History and Tradition*, 112. It must be noted, however, that Ikeda’s critique of this Japanese learning from the West was not an evasion of Japanese guilt, but essentially a critique of Japanese “outward” learning, as he quickly added that “Japan only imported the external ‘cunning and excesses’ of Western civilization”, instead of “internal, spiritual enlightenment” (ibid., 113-114). Compare also *Civilization of Dialogue*, 227.

⁷⁴ *Civilization of Dialogue*, 41.

humanity”⁷⁵ (and by that he meant Chinese thinking as the core),⁷⁶ instead of exploring together with his Japanese discussion partner (and readers) possible connections between “Eastern thinking” and the guilt of militarist Japan. After all, the fact that a highly civilized (or at least industrialized) nation like Japan, nourished for centuries by “Chinese” currents of thought, ended up committing some of the most hideous and barbarous atrocities humanity has ever known, shouldn’t it be occasion for reflection – not only for the misbehaving student, to use Ikeda’s metaphor, but *also* for his teacher?

But this path of “rethinking” was not taken by the Chinese partners of Ikeda’s. In part, it is not difficult to understand, for the emphasis of Confucian “reflection” appears to predicate on its hierarchical relationships: the subject must constantly scrutinize his own loyalty towards his lord, and whether he has applied what his teacher had taught him, not vice versa.⁷⁷ In the succinct words of Jin Yong: “Japan and China are of the same text and race (*tongwen tongzhong*)... China gave culture and civilization to Japan, but Japan forced its sword and cannon upon China.”⁷⁸ In other words, *despite* everything shared between the two nations, what was good in Japan came from China, what was bad was from itself or elsewhere.

This conception of “reflection” as a solitary enterprise (done by the wrongdoer himself) is markedly different from “repentance” as *asymmetric mutual-turning*, that is, the very “turning” aimed at in the wrongdoer entails also and relies upon the turning (though not identical) on the part of the wronged sufferer. Jewish thinkers in Europe and elsewhere have long “practiced” this vision in their reflection on the crimes committed by Nazi Germany. From Max Picard to André Glucksmann to Avraham Burg, defeating the “Hitler in ourselves” has remained an enduring theme right from 1945 to the present.⁷⁹ And already as the Nazi atrocities were unfolding in Europe, Abraham Joshua Heschel had been promulgating the Jewish paradigm of repentance, that is, the *teacher’s* repentance.

[W]here were we when men learned to hate in the days of starvation?
When raving madmen were sowing wrath in the hearts of the
unemployed? Let Fascism not serve as an alibi for our conscience...
when will we start to conquer the evil within us?⁸⁰

By contrast, the penitential path of “the Japanese soldier in ourselves” proves antithetical to Chinese reflections on Sino-Japanese problems. No word from the Chinese side, for instance, was spent in the dialogues on the problems of contemporary Chinese military buildup and of nationalistic education in the

⁷⁵ *On Eastern Wisdom*, 142, 197, 228, etc.

⁷⁶ “Ancient China’s idea of *tianren heyi* is the most exemplary representative of Eastern mindset.” *Ibid.*, 181.

⁷⁷ Confucian “reflection” (*zixing*) is often summarized as a daily exercise: whether one has been faithful in carrying out duties, sincere in treating friends, and whether one has learned and practiced what his teacher has taught him (*Analects*, Xue Er).

⁷⁸ *Splendid Century*, 92.

⁷⁹ See Max Picard, *Hitler in uns selbst* (Erlenbach-Zürich: Eugen Rentsch, 1946); André Glucksmann, “Hitler bin ich,” *Spiegel-Spezial*, no. 2 (1989); and Avraham Burg, *Hitler besiegen. Warum Israel sich endlich vom Holocaust lösen muss*, trans. Ulrike Bischoff (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 2009).

⁸⁰ Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Meaning of This War,” *The Hebrew Union College Bulletin* (1943): 2, 18.

Mainland,⁸¹ even after Ikeda had expressly brought up the topic of lingering nationalistic currents.⁸²

This non-turning on the part of the Chinese thinkers, aside from causing the lack of reflective depth in these dialogues (which can only be reached as a co-reflective project), has resulted also in the blindness of “learning from Japan”. Zhang, for example, advised that Chinese should learn more from the Japanese way of “selectively” and “creatively” learning from the West, as if one could simply assume without further ado that “partial learning” would only become a problem for the Japanese, not for the Chinese.⁸³ Jin Yong on the other hand rightly criticized the kamikaze suicide pilots’ “stupid loyalty” (*yuzhong*), but nonetheless lamented that the Chinese were not as “united as one” as the Japanese.⁸⁴ And Ji Xianlin’s discontent against the West led him to the uncritical approval for modern Japan’s military triumph over the West, thus overlooking momentarily the suffering this military might had also brought to Japan’s neighbors.⁸⁵ His self-righteousness concerning the purported superiority of “Eastern/Chinese wisdom” was of such an unbearable extent that Ikeda went out of his usual “zero-confrontation” way to issue a mild warning against re-making the mistake of militarist Japan.

Ji: I think integration must have a principal-subsidary hierarchy (*zhuci*). Eastern culture must be the principal, Western culture can only be subsidiary. Only Eastern culture can cure the ills of Western culture. There are only Eastern and Western grand cultural systems in the world; the West does not shine, the East does. Now we’re in the 21st Century, it is time that Eastern culture shines again.

Ikeda: It is true that “light comes from the East”. The era in which Eastern wisdom enlightens the world will surely come. But when this assumption takes only one single misstep, then it may fall into self-centered “Asianism” or “Japanism”. One must not overlook this danger.⁸⁶

Taken at face value, appreciation for one’s own cultural heritage, “unity” and “selective learning from the West” do not of course equate the “sin” committed by the militarists. But a sin-perspective – that is, one that looks for the causes of wrongdoing beyond national specificity to universal potentials and tendencies – should at least bring the Chinese dialogue partners of Ikeda’s to a more cautious approach to these “famed Japanese qualities” in order to arrive at more precise differentiations and distinctions. After all, what did Ikeda mean when he said that Meiji Japan only learned superficially from the West without “inner enlightenment”?⁸⁷ And why did nationalism appear so suspicious to him?⁸⁸ Aren’t these of reflective relevance not

⁸¹ To be fair, Tu Weiming did voice some reservation about “brainwashing” nationalist education and “xenophobic statism”, but none of these remarks were directed to the present situation in China. *Civilization of Dialogue*, 24, 114. Compare with a Hong Kong intellectual’s frontal critique of Chinese nationalism: “Why when others assert territorial integrity... we say they are influenced by militarist education, but our nationalist education is beyond question?” See CHEUNG Yuk Man, “為什麼?,” [Why?], *Ming Pao*, 25 Aug. 2012.

⁸² *Splendid Century*, 79. Jin Yong simply changed the topic.

⁸³ *History and Tradition*, 109.

⁸⁴ *Splendid Century*, 127.

⁸⁵ *On Eastern Wisdom*, 245-246.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 243. Ikeda further quoted Jaspers’s warning against the metaphysical essentialization of cultures.

⁸⁷ *History and Tradition*, 113-114.

⁸⁸ See for example his Buddhist-based reservation in *On Eastern Wisdom*, 122-123.

only to present-day Japanese but to present-day Chinese as well? These possible turns of co-reflection were unfortunately not taken by his Chinese partners.

Self-positioning: Inside-victims, outside-perpetrators

When referring to the wrongdoers who had committed unspeakable crimes in the Nanjing of 1937/38, Ji Xianlin used the term “Japan-militarism’s bestial beings” (*shoule*),⁸⁹ thus erecting an insurmountable gulf between *them*, the “animals”, and *himself*, a human being, whose nation had fallen victim to this bestiality. The apparently unbreachable victim-perpetrator divide, however, was blithely “overcome” a few exchanges later when another atrocity was concerned – the Cultural Revolution. When asked by Ikeda about the situation during those years, Ji replied: “During the turmoil of the ‘Cultural Revolution’, conflicts between factions were very serious... To discuss or debate now about who was right and who was wrong is completely meaningless. No matter who is concerned, when a person finds himself in such a situation, he is like bewitched... mutated into a non-human (*feiren*). *The beaters and the beaten were both victims, only their positions were different.*”⁹⁰

Jin Yong also seemed to share this “we-are-all-victims” attitude towards Chinese perpetrators of Chinese victims. When he recalled the murder of his father after the “liberation” as a landowner, he said: “I was of course very sad, but I had no hatred in my heart, because I have already fully understood that this was *a common tragedy (pubian beiju)* hardly avoidable in epoch-changing times...”⁹¹ This readiness to see the commonality, however, was hardly shown when “the Japanese” were concerned.⁹² So when Ikeda was willing to use Richard von Weizsäcker’s 1985 speech to criticize his own national politicians’ “historical amnesia”,⁹³ Jin Yong could only find words to praise Deng Xiaoping as a “great hero” and how the CCP’s “iron discipline” has united the Chinese to make them “powerful”, while paying scant mention of the Tiananmen Massacre, which he called an “incident”, or the official obliteration of its memory.⁹⁴

This strict demarcation between *nei* (inside) and *wai* (outside), or “us” and “them”, is in stark contrast to the national identity-crossing spirit exemplified by European Jewish thinkers like Günther Anders and Ralph Giordano towards the later generation of the “perpetrators”. Anders wrote open letters to Klaus Eichmann, a son of Adolf’s, counting himself among “Eichmann’s sons”, or “sons of the Eichmann-world”.⁹⁵ In effect, the personal and national crimes were enlarged and sublimated into an epoch-encompassing phenomenon in which the victim could include himself as someone needing also to do “repentance” from. Giordano, on the other hand, while calling the younger German generation as “victims” of their parents and grandparents who had bequeathed them with the “second guilt” (that is, the non-recognition of the “first

⁸⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 19. Emphasis added.

⁹¹ *Splendid Century*, 133. Emphasis added.

⁹² Ji Xianlin, one must add, has at least shown the willingness to include wartime ordinary Japanese as part of the victims (*On Eastern Wisdom*, 15). The problem of this “all-victims” paradigm, though, is that if all are victims, then who is guilty? And why only one victim-nation should bear the burden of reflection, while the others not? See the alternative “all-sinful” paradigm below.

⁹³ *Splendid Century*, 122. On the debates aroused by this speech in Japan see Martin Kaneko, “Über japanische Geschichtslügner. Professoren-Ignoranz oder ist Vergangenheitsbewältigung nur ein Problem der Deutschen?,” *Nachrichten der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens*, no. 165-166 (1999).

⁹⁴ *Splendid Century*, 112-114, 127.

⁹⁵ Günther Anders, *Wir Eichmannsöhne. Offener Brief an Klaus Eichmann* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1964), 56.

guilt” of Nazi atrocities), nonetheless sought ways to identify himself as *one among the guilty generation* being spoken of. He saw “parallels” between the guilty and himself – the uncritical faith in a “political god”, Stalin, and the denial of inhumane acts in “one’s own camp”.⁹⁶

While there are other ways to create a “community” between perpetrators and victims (such as Chinese Communist attempts to enlist the Japanese “victim-nation” in the united front against “Western fascism”),⁹⁷ only these European Jewish “self-guiltifying” voices, however, serve the purpose of inviting the dialogue partners to greater depths of reflection and repentance,⁹⁸ not to foreclose it, as Ji Xianlin’s and Jin Yong’s do to intra-Chinese reflection (“At least not in front of the Japanese!”).

“Chinese” Resources and Foreign “Import”

At one point of their conversation, Tu Weiming raised the issue of how to properly deal with *yuan*, or resentment and hatred arising from perceived or real injustice between individuals and communities. “Some of the religions of the world teach us to respond to animosity with animosity. Others teach us to respond to it with love. I believe we should respond to it with justice (*yi zhi bao yuan*).”⁹⁹ This position stems from the Master himself: “When Confucius was presented with the Taoist challenge to ‘repay malice with kindness,’ he retorted, ‘How would you repay kindness?’ He then recommended ‘Repaying malice with uprightness and repaying kindness with kindness.’”¹⁰⁰

The question, of course, is what can be meant by “uprightness”, and what it can offer as a means of “overcoming the past”. Tu Weiming repeatedly emphasized: Confucian *ren* is not just about mercy and tolerance, which it undoubtedly represents; *ren* is also “strict toward schism-causing evils”.¹⁰¹ Characteristically, Ikeda “agreed” with his dialogue partner without further ado. This lack of readiness for disagreement with the “victim” (which Grosser encouraged his German audience to have)¹⁰² is unfortunate, for the analysis of the Confucian concept of *zhi* could have led the reader to some of the most deep-seated problems of Sino-Japanese VgB: if *zhi*, as Tu proposed, is the way for communities to deal with resentment arising from past atrocities, then the Chinese “teacher” should have no qualms about their Japanese “student” trying to hide their parents’ inconvenient past, for the Master himself had said: “The father should cover up for the son, the son should cover up for the father, therein is uprightness”.¹⁰³ Furthermore, how should the present-day Confucian teacher and

⁹⁶ Ralph Giordano, *Die zweite Schuld oder Von der Last Deutscher zu sein* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2000), 29.

⁹⁷ See for example GUO Moruo, “寄日本人民,” [Letter to the Japanese people], in *Collected Works of Guo Moruo Vol. 4* by (Beijing: 1984); MEI Ruao, “掃除改善中日關係的障礙,” [Removing the obstacle to improving Sino-Japanese relations] *Shijie Zhishi*, no. 18 (1955); and MEI Yaxuan, “關於日本戰犯的寬大處理問題,” [On magnanimously treating Japanese war criminals] *ibid.*, no. 13 (1956).

⁹⁸ For Anders, the severance of intellectual and cultural ties with the Eichmann-world; for Giordano, the prevention of further passing on of the “second guilt” by the present to the future generations.

⁹⁹ This translation is taken from TU Weiming and IKEDA Daisaku, *New Horizons in Eastern Humanism: Buddhism, Confucianism and the Quest for Global Peace* (New York: I. B. Tauris & Co., 2011), 57.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁰² See Grosser, “Israels Politik fördert Antisemitismus.”

¹⁰³ Analects, Zilu. There is of course the possibility of interpreting *zhi* differently in the two contexts. But this again should belong to the co-reflective project of VgB.

student deal with the Confucian edict that one should not “inherit the same heaven” (*fu yu gong tianxia*)¹⁰⁴ with the murderers of one’s own parents in the context of post-militarist Japan and post-Nanjing Sino-Japanese relationship? Neither Tu nor Ikeda (nor Jin Yong, for that matter, whose novels are suffused with the themes of *enyuan*, or gratefulness and resentment) has directly tackled these issues, but instead, focused only on the expression of mutual goodwill. In the face of an East Asian public who has seen and heard the iconic European VgB expressions and come to expect the same (at least from the perpetrator-other), it seems only pertinent for its intellectuals to honestly reflect on their own respective intellectual traditions and see if they are conducive to engendering such symbols.

Ba Jin, as already mentioned above, showed little inhibition against “uncovering” his own father’s purported similarities with his tormentors, the Gang of Four, nor for criticizing “Chinese” traditions.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, a distinct recourse marks Ba Jin apart from the other Chinese intellectuals analyzed thus far. Time and again, the persecuted author referred to Western literature as his source of comfort for both surviving the Cultural Revolution and writing about it afterwards. As he spoke of Rousseau, “I was consoled by the author of ‘Confessions’; I learned to tell the truth.”¹⁰⁶ He credited Alexander Herzen’s *My Past and Thoughts* – which he translated into Chinese and called it his “teacher”¹⁰⁷ – for having produced the “byproduct” of his own *Random Thoughts*.¹⁰⁸ He also recalled how he had been reading and getting strength from Dante’s *Divine Comedy* as he entered the “cowshed”.¹⁰⁹ His appreciation of the Western “confessions” canon seems to have had a positive impact on his readiness to do VgB through the sin-perspective, resulting in a rare identity-crossing, self-interrogating piece of Chinese text.¹¹⁰

Perhaps the most direct example of borrowing from the European experience to do Chinese VgB is Yu Jie’s recent work, *From Berlin Wall to Tiananmen*. The dissident writer, whose apology to the Tibetan people was already mentioned above, had visited some concentration camp memorials in Germany, and recorded his own “rethinking” on the path of Chinese modernization. His conclusion was stark: the paths of Chinese and German modernization (“speeding and over-speeding”) are remarkably similar.¹¹¹ He asked: “How did Germans deal with the problems of history and memory? Can Taiwan’s ‘2.28’ and China’s ‘6.4’ ... be evaluated and reflected upon through the dimension of the ‘Holocaust’?”¹¹² He visited the Memorial to the

¹⁰⁴ See Lauren Pfister, “Ruist Traditions of Revenge in Tension with Justice and Reconciliation” (paper presented at the Conference - The Power to Heal: Ways and Obstacles to Collective Reconciliation in Eastern and Western Traditions, The University of Hong Kong, 13-15 Jan. 2011).

¹⁰⁵ To be fair, of course, one might argue that for someone like Ba Jin, a victim who remained convinced in socialism and espoused May Fourth anti-tradition values, such a “self-critique” does not take nearly as much psychic effort as it would do a Confucianist.

¹⁰⁶ Ba Jin, *Random Thoughts*, 89.

¹⁰⁷ “Afterword,” in *往事與隨想 – 赫爾岑著，巴金譯* [Alexander Herzen’s *Past and Thoughts* translated by Ba Jin] (Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing, 1983), 395.

¹⁰⁸ *Random Thoughts*, 169.

¹⁰⁹ *Ba Jin’s Random Thoughts*, II-34-35.

¹¹⁰ On the dearth of this genre in Chinese literature, see LIU Zaifu and LIN Gang, *罪與文學：關於文學懺悔意識與靈魂維度的考察* [Confession and Chinese Literature] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹¹¹ YU Jie, *從柏林圍牆到天安門 — 從德國看中國的現代化之路* [From Berlin Wall to Tiananmen] (Taipei: 允晨文化 [Asian Culture], 2010), 8-9.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin and wrote: “Erecting a memorial is an act of proactive, self-conscious defense of memory, and memory is the beginning of repentance (*chanhui*). It is collective, public repentance. ... For post-Holocaust Germany and for post-Cultural Revolution, post-June Fourth... China, repentance should not be a ‘private act’ or belong to ‘privacy’, as some would like to suggest, but it should become a public affair and state ideology (*guojia yishixingtai*). ... How far away are we Chinese from repentance?”¹¹³

In his own “repentance” to the Tibetans already mentioned above, Yu Jie also used the European example as both a tool for reflection and a source of inspiration: “If Nazi extermination of the Jews was mainly physical, then the Chinese Communist destruction of Tibet is concentrated on culture and religion.”¹¹⁴ He then quoted approvingly from a fellow Chinese writer, Liao Tianqi: “Just as German Chancellor Willy Brandt kneeling down in 1970 before the Jewish memorial in Warsaw, one day China’s head of state should... kneel down before the people of Tibet to beg for forgiveness.”¹¹⁵ Hence in the vision of Chinese intellectuals like Ba Jin and Yu Jie drawing from European examples and resources, the China of the future should have enough honesty and humility to come to terms with the past in which one was the perpetrator of oneself *and* of the others.

Conclusion

This work is about looking critically, with the help of the European experience, at Chinese self-reflection in the three victim-perpetrator configurations involving internal and external entities. It is about what has been done in terms of “overcoming the past” by independent Chinese intellectuals, what has been lacking, and what still needs to be done. With various shortfalls, Chinese VgB has begun despite political and institutional limitations, especially in the “Chinese as victims of oneself” category (Ba Jin and the apologizing former Red Guards). While there are signs that this phenomenon is spreading towards the “Chinese as perpetrators of the others” category (Yu Jie, Wang Lixiong, etc.), a survey of the Ikeda dialogues makes it doubtful whether the notion of VgB as a co-reflective project (Grosser) can also take root in the Sino-Japanese discourse. Certain “Chinese” resources for VgB seem ill-suited for such an endeavor as they tend to conceptualize VgB as solitary, one-way self-reflection on the one hand, and to support “cover up” rather than unreserved self-revelation on the other, hence the Chinese inability to co-reflect with the Japanese. Further research therefore should be directed towards examples of such co-reflective initiatives and their corresponding, enabling intellectual resources.

¹¹³ Ibid., 237-238.

¹¹⁴ “Repent to Tibet”.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

References

- Anders, Günther. *Wir Eichmannsöhne. Offener Brief an Klaus Eichmann*. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1964.
- Assmann, Aleida. *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*. Munich: C. H. Beck, 2006.
- Ba Jin. *隨想錄 (第一集)* [Random Thoughts Vol. 1]. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1979.
- . "Afterword." In *往事與隨想 – 赫爾岑著, 巴金譯* [Alexander Herzen's Past and Thoughts translated by Ba Jin]. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing, 1983.
- . *巴金隨想錄 (合訂本)* [Ba Jin's Random Thoughts Vol. 1-5]. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1988.
- Barkan, Elazar. *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices*. New York: Norton, 2000.
- Burg, Avraham. *Hitler besiegen. Warum Israel sich endlich vom Holocaust lösen muss*. Translated by Ulrike Bischoff. Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 2009.
- CAO Changqing, ed. *中國大陸知識分子論西藏*. [Mainland Chinese Intellectuals on Tibet]. Taipei: China Times Publishing, 1996.
- CHEUNG Yuk Man. "為什麼?" [Why?]. *Ming Pao*, 25 Aug. 2012.
- Cornelißen, Christoph, Lutz Klinkhammer, and Wolfgang Schwentker, eds. *Erinnerungskulturen: Deutschland, Italien und Japan seit 1945*. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2004.
- Frei, Norbert. *1945 und Wir. Das Dritte Reich im Bewußtsein der Deutschen*. Munich: C. H. Beck, 2005.
- Giordano, Ralph. *Die zweite Schuld oder Von der Last Deutscher zu sein*. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2000. First published in 1987.
- Glucksmann, André. "Hitler bin ich." *Spiegel-Spezial*, no. 2 (1989): 73-75.
- Grosser, Alfred. *Vergangenheitsbewältigung. Rede an der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, gehalten am 18. 5. 1994*. Jena: Universitätsverlag, 1994.
- . "Israels Politik fördert Antisemitismus." *Stern*, 12 Oct. 2007.
- GUO Moruo. "寄日本人民." [Letter to the Japanese people]. In *Collected Works of Guo Moruo Vol. 4*, 381-383. Beijing, 1984.
- Harms, Kathy, Lutz R. Reuter, and Volker Dürr, eds. *Coping with the Past: Germany and Austria after 1945*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.
- Heschel, Abraham Joshua. "The Meaning of This War." *The Hebrew Union College Bulletin* (Mar. 1943).
- HU Yinbin. "遲到 45 年的對不起道出個體的擔當." [Belated 'sorry' bespeaks individual responsibility]. *Beijing News*, 28 Jul. 2013.
- IKEDA Daisaku, and Jin Yong. *探求一個燦爛的世紀* [Searching for a Splendid Century]. Hong Kong: Ming Ho, 1998.
- Jaspers, Karl. *Die Schuldfrage*. Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1946.
- . *Wohin treibt die Bundesrepublik? Tatsachen. Gefahren. Chancen*. Munich: R. Piper & Co., 1966.
- Ji Xianlin, JIANG Zhongxin, and IKEDA Daisaku. *暢談東方智慧 – 季羨林、蔣忠新與池田大作鼎談集* [On Eastern Wisdom]. Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 2004.
- Kaneko, Martin. "Über japanische Geschichtsleugner. Professoren-Ignoranz oder ist Vergangenheitsbewältigung nur ein Problem der Deutschen?". *Nachrichten der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens*, no. 165-166 (1999): 165-187.
- Kopelev, Lev. "Bekenntnisse eines Sowjetbürgers." *Die Zeit*, 11 Feb. 1977.
- LIU Boqin. "鄭重道歉." [Earnest Apology]. *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, no. 6 (2013): 83.
- LIU Zaifu, and LIN Gang. *罪與文學: 關於文學懺悔意識與靈魂維度的考察* [Confession and Chinese Literature]. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Maier, Charles. *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

- MEI Ruao. "掃除改善中日關係的障礙." [Removing the obstacle to improving Sino-Japanese relations]. *Shijie Zhishi*, no. 18 (1955): 5-7.
- MEI Yaxuan. "關於日本戰犯的寬大處理問題." [On magnanimously treating Japanese war criminals]. *Shijie Zhishi*, no. 13 (1956): 5-6.
- Mitscherlich, Alexander, and Margarete Mitscherlich. *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern. Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens*. Munich: R. Piper & Co., 1967.
- Niemöller, Martin. *Die Erneuerung unserer Kirche*. Munich: Neubau-Verlag Adolf Groß, 1946.
- Palden Gyatso, and Tsering Shakya. *Fire under the Snow: Testimony of a Tibetan Prisoner*. London: Harvill, 1997.
- Pfister, Lauren. "Ruist Traditions of Revenge in Tension with Justice and Reconciliation." Paper presented at the Conference - The Power to Heal: Ways and Obstacles to Collective Reconciliation in Eastern and Western Traditions, The University of Hong Kong, 13-15 Jan. 2011.
- Picard, Max. *Hitler in uns selbst*. Erlenbach-Zürich: Eugen Rentsch, 1946.
- Reichel, Peter. *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute*. Munich: C. H. Beck, 2001.
- Schmidt, Siegmund, Gert Pickel, and Susanne Pickel, eds. *Amnesie, Amnestie oder Aufarbeitung? Zum Umgang mit autoritären Vergangenheiten und Menschenrechtsverletzungen*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009.
- Smith, Steve. "Coming to Terms with the Past: China." *History Today* 53, no. 12 (Dec. 2003): 43-45.
- Strickmann, Martin. *L'Allemagne nouvelle contre l'Allemagne éternelle. Die französischen Intellektuellen und die deutsch-französische Verständigung 1944-1950*. Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2004.
- Thielicke, Helmut, and Hermann Diem. *Die Schuld der Anderen. Ein Briefwechsel*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1948.
- Tsering Shakya. "Blood in the Snows." In *The Struggle for Tibet* by WANG Lixiong and Tsering Shakya. London/New York: Verso, 2009.
- TU Weiming, and IKEDA Daisaku. *對話的文明—池田大作與杜維明對談集* [The Civilization of Dialogue]. Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 2008.
- . *New Horizons in Eastern Humanism: Buddhism, Confucianism and the Quest for Global Peace*. New York: I. B. Tauris & Co., 2011.
- Veg, Sebastian. "Chinese Intellectuals and the Problem of Xinjiang." *China Perspectives*, no. 3 (2008): 143-150.
- Visser't Hooft, Willem A. *Die Welt war meine Gemeinde. Autobiographie*. Translated by Heidi von Alten. Munich: Piper, 1972.
- WANG Lixiong. *天葬：西藏的命運* [Sky Burial: The Fate of Tibet]. Ontario: Mirror Books, 1998.
- . *與達賴喇嘛對話* [Talking with Dalai Lama]. Illinois: Green Valley Publishing, 2002.
- . *我的西藏，你的東土* [My West Land, Your East Country]. Taipei: Locus Publishing, 2007.
- Wemheuer, Felix. *Steinnudeln. Ländliche Erinnerungen und staatliche Vergangenheitsbewältigung der "Großen-Sprung"-Hungersnot in der chinesischen Provinz Henan*. Frankfurt a.M./Bern: Peter Lang, 2007.
- XIONG Zhi. "懺悔之路也是通往現代公民之路." [The penitential path is also the path to modern civil society]. *Southern Metropolis Daily*, 17 Aug. 2013.
- XU Ben. "「紅衛兵」道歉是一種怎樣的良心行為." [Apology by Red Guards as an act of conscience]. *Southern Metropolis Daily*, 23 Aug. 2013.
- YU Jie. "向西藏懺悔—讀《雪山下的火焰 一個西藏良心犯的証言》." [Repent to Tibet: Reading "Fire under the Snow".] Accessed 8 Nov. 2013. http://blog.boxun.com/hero/yujie/166_1.shtml.
- . *從柏林圍牆到天安門—從德國看中國的現代化之路* [From Berlin Wall to Tiananmen]. Taipei: 允晨文化 [Asian Culture], 2010.
- ZHANG Kaiyuan, and IKEDA Daisaku. *歷史與傳承—章開沅與池田大作的對話* [History and Tradition]. Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 2013.

- "一名紅衛兵的懺悔." [A Red Guard's repentance]. *Beijing News*, 7 Aug. 2013.
- "文革紅衛兵登廣告道歉." [Cultural Revolution Red Guard places apology advertisement]. *Southern Metropolis Daily*, 18 Jun. 2013.
- "河北退休幹部向文革受害者道歉." [Retired Hebei official apologizes to Cultural Revolution victims]. *China News Service*, 14 Aug. 2013.
- "湖南老人就文革中批鬥恩師致歉." [Aged man from Hunan apologizes for Cultural Revolution struggle session against his teacher]. *瀟湘晨報*, 27 Jul. 2013.
- "溫慶福：我只是普通人做了普通事." [Wen Qingfu: I'm just an ordinary man who did an ordinary thing]. *Beijing News*, 3 Aug. 2013.
- "社論：遲到的公民懺悔在為民族清「毒素」." [Editorial: Belated civil repentance rids the nation of poison]. *Southern Metropolis Daily*, 15 Aug. 2013.
- "紅衛兵公開懺悔." [Red Guard repents in public]. *中國新聞周刊網*, 3 Sept. 2013.
- "舊同學忙阻攔 學者讚有良心." [Discouraged by schoolmates, praised by scholars]. *Ming Pao*, 19 Jun. 2013.

Correction:

WANG Lixiong. 我的西域, 你的東土 [My West Land, Your East Country].