
CULTURAL REVIEWS

Bian Zhongyun: A Revolution's First Blood

By Wang Youqin

The senseless death of a school teacher set the tone for Mao Zedong's 10-year reign of terror, the Cultural Revolution.

Bian Zhongyun was born in 1916 in Wuwei, Anhe Province. Her father worked his way up from a struggling apprentice in a private bank to the wealthy and socially prominent owner of his own private bank. After Bian Zhongyun graduated from high school in 1937, her plans to enter college were interrupted by China's war with Japan, and she participated in the resistance effort in Changsha. She was finally able to attend college in 1941, and became a member of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in the same year. She graduated in 1945 and then joined her husband, Wang Jingyao (who had studied with her in college), in the Party-controlled area of China. In 1949, Bian began work at the Beijing Normal University Attached Girls' Middle School (hereinafter Attached Girls' School), first as a teacher, then gradually rising through the ranks to become vice principal. By the time of her death at the age of 50, Bian had been working at the Attached Girls' School for 17 years. She was the mother of four children. Her husband was a historian in the faculty of philosophy and sociology at the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

The Attached Girls' School was established in 1917, one of the oldest secondary schools in Beijing. When the CPC came to power in 1949, all of the school's administrators were replaced with Party members. The school was located in Beijing's Xicheng District, only a kilometer away from Tiananmen Square and Zhongnanhai, where Mao Zedong and the rest of China's top leaders

lived. Given its proximity to the central government and State Council, as well as its long-standing reputation for excellence, the Attached Girls' School was inevitably attended by many daughters of China's top leaders.

At that time, entry to all secondary schools required passing city-wide examinations for both middle and high school. Prior to the Cultural Revolution, however, examination results were not the sole criteria for entry. In the autumn of 1965, shortly before the Cultural Revolution began, half of the students at the Attached Girls' School were the daughters or relatives of senior government officials. This element became an important factor leading to Bian Zhongyun's death.

The sequence of events resulting in Bian Zhongyun's death began on June 1, 1966. On that evening, the China Central People's Broadcasting Network broadcasted the contents of what Mao Zedong referred to as "China's first Marxist-Leninist big-character poster," which had been plastered to a wall at Peking University. Apart from attacking the administrators of Peking University, the poster also called for the "determined and thorough eradication of all cow ghosts and snake spirits" (the labels applied to those considered enemies of the state). At noon the next day, three students from the Attached Girls' School, led by upperclassman Song Binbin, put up that school's first big-character poster, which called for students to "pledge your lives to the Party central, pledge your lives to Chairman Mao," and attacked the school administration.

In fact, this student protest was not responding merely to the Peking University poster. On May 16, the Party's central leadership had issued a comprehensive, 10,000-word notice that launched the Cultural Revolution and explicitly called for a "thorough criticism of academia, educators, journalists, artists, publishers and other representatives of the capitalist class, and seizing the leaders of the cultural sector." One day earlier, the Party had published a letter that Mao had written to his lieutenant, Lin Biao, on May 7, in which Mao stated that "the phenomenon of capitalist intellectuals controlling our schools cannot be allowed to continue."

This article is an edited excerpt from a book chapter: Wang Youqin, *Wenge Shounanzhe* [Victims of the Cultural Revolution: An Investigative Account of Persecution, Imprisonment and Murder] (Hong Kong: Open Magazine Publishing, 2004).

Under Bian Zhongyun's administration, the Attached Girls' School gave special attention to the daughters of senior officials. Many, but not all, class monitors and leaders of the student council were daughters of top leaders. However, girls from ordinary backgrounds were also included among the student leaders, and class monitors, who enjoyed potentially considerable influence, were elected by the students themselves. Thus, even though not all students enjoyed equal status, the school administrators clearly did not believe that the daughters of top leaders should monopolize leadership positions within the student body. This policy embodied one of the traditional principles educators brought with them; during imperial times, the exam system was largely independent of the power structure. The first month of the Cultural Revolution's full-scale launch provided the first opportunity for the children of top leaders to make a grab for power within the schools. What started out as an attack on school leadership was eventually depicted as a romanticized revolt. But any objective examination of the facts reveals that this was no rebellion against the power structure, but rather an extension of totalitarian power.

After students posted the first big-character poster at the Attached Girls' School, the Communist Youth League sent a "working group" to the school on June 3, 1966. The working group immediately voiced enthusiastic support for the efforts of Song Binbin and other revolutionary students to "expose and criticize" the errors of the school administrators.

The working group pushed aside the school's administrators and took over school supervision. It also established a Revolutionary Teachers and Students Committee, with the leader of the working group as its head and Song Binbin as vice chairman. Each class had a representative on the committee, and all but one of those representatives were daughters of the most senior officials, including Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping. These committees and their particular composition were replicated throughout Beijing's other secondary schools.

The big-character posters at the Attached Girls' School accused Bian Zhongyun of a number of "crimes." First among them was participation in a "counterrevolutionary coup d'état" by the previous Beijing Party Commit-

CULTURAL REVOLUTION: CHRONOLOGY

May 16, 1966: Chinese Communist Party led by Mao Zedong issues the "May 16 notice" proclaiming the start of a "Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution."

May 29, 1966: First group of Red Guards forms at Tsinghua University Middle School.

August 18, 1966: First Red Guard rally in Tiananmen Square. Mao stands at peak of Tiananmen Square Gate as millions of Red Guards gather and cheer.

January 1967: Rebel organizations snatch power from local government officials in Shanghai, with the encouragement of Mao. This scenario repeats itself across the nation.

December 1968: Mao begins the "Down to the Countryside" Reeducation Movement. Hundreds of thousands of youths, intellectuals and cadres are forced from cities into rural areas.

April 1, 1969: The 9th Party Congress begins, where Minister of Defense Lin Biao is designated as Mao's successor.

September 13, 1971: Lin Biao dies in a plane crash en route to the Soviet Union. Afterwards he is denounced by the government as a counterrevolutionary.

1974: Mao initiates the "Criticize Lin (Biao), Criticize Confucius" political campaign.

April 5, 1976: Thousands congregate in Tiananmen Square to pay last respects to the late Zhou Enlai and to protest government policies and the Gang of Four (consisting of Mao's wife Jiang Qing and Shanghai Party leaders Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen). The government orders the military to disperse the protestors.

September 9, 1976: Mao Zedong dies. Hua Guofeng becomes Party Chairman.

October 6, 1976: All members of the Gang of Four arrested as the Cultural Revolution draws to a close.

Compiled by HRIC

tee.” Even allowing that any such plot existed, a secondary school student could not possibly have known about it. However, no one voiced any doubts about the accusation, nor was Bian allowed a chance to deny it. Another of Bian’s alleged crimes was “opposing the Party’s class road.” The main supporting evidence cited was President Liu Shaoqi’s daughter’s denied admission to the Attached Girls’ School in 1962 because her exam score fell short by two points. In fact, the city’s key schools used admission criteria at the time, but gave preference to the children of top leaders. Even with this advantage, Liu Shaoqi’s daughter had fallen short of the mark. The school made a point to consult Beijing’s Party Committee and the Education Ministry, and on the basis of their advice had not admitted Liu’s daughter.

Bian was also accused of “opposing Chairman Mao.” The students cited as supporting evidence an incident in March 1966, just after an earthquake had hit a suburb of Beijing. As a precaution, administrators of the Attached Girls’ School told students that if an earthquake should hit the school, they should quickly leave the classrooms. A student asked if anyone should take the trouble to remove the portraits of Chairman Mao that hung above the blackboards in each classroom. Bian Zhongyun did not answer directly, but told the students to move as quickly as possible out of the classrooms and into open areas outside of the school.

One big-character poster was posted on the door of Bian’s home in June 1966:

You Rightist who slipped through the net, you black element conspiring with the former municipal Party committee, vanguard of opposition to the Party, you bastard implementing bourgeois dictatorship over revolutionary students and teachers, you damned petty despot, come clean or face the unsparing consequences!

Another poster was affixed to her bedroom door:

Despotic dog, poisonous snake Bian, you’d damn well better listen: if you dare to continue to run roughshod over the working people, we’ll whip your dog’s hide, rip out your dog’s heart, lop off your dog’s head. You’d damned well better not place any

hopes in a comeback! We’ll cut you off without descendants and smash you to smithereens!

On June 23, 1966, the school’s student working group held a “struggle session” against Bian Zhongyun, which all students and teachers were required to attend. At the beginning of the session, several students dragged Bian onto the stage of the assembly hall, and escorted the school’s four other administrators to the front of the stage to face the assembly. The targets were forced to bend 90 degrees at the waist to show they were “bowing under their guilt.” The students responsible for exposing and criticizing the offenders mounted the stage and furiously screamed accusations at them, beating and kicking them at the same time. The exaggerated self-regard of many participants, coupled with the demands of this kind of political performance, make it difficult to imagine what the experience was like for their targets. During the struggle session, students ran onto the stage to strike at Bian with iron-clad wooden training rifles. Each time Bian fell to the floor, someone would douse her with cold water and drag her upright again by the hair to endure further criticism.

After the struggle session, Bian wrote a letter to Party officials criticizing her own “errors,” including some she had never committed, and expressing her support for the Cultural Revolution. She then requested that no violence be used against her:

During the public criticism, I was shackled and tormented for more than four hours: I had to wear a dunce cap and bow in a kneeling position while I was struck and kicked. My hands were tied behind me, and two dummy rifles used for militia training were jabbed into my back. Mud was stuffed into my mouth and smeared all over my face and body.

She never received a reply to her letter. The quotation above comes from a draft that she saved. After Bian died, her family worried that Red Guards would search their home and discover the draft, so Bian’s husband hid it in a space behind a wall until the end of the Cultural Revolution.

Meanwhile, the working group divided the school’s administrators into four types according to the severity

of their “errors,” ranging from “relatively good” to “bourgeois rightist.”

In mid-July, the Beijing student working groups sent the majority of the city’s secondary school students to a military base for training, while those students regarded

as “problematic” were sent out to labor in the countryside. Students who qualified as “leftists” remained at the schools to deal with the teachers and administrators, whom they rounded up and divided into separate groups for “debriefing” or “self-criticism.” Teachers from the Attached Girls’ School were sent to Mashen-

SILENCING THE DEBATE, SUPPRESSING NATIONAL MEMORY: RECENT CENSORSHIP OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Academic Research In August 1999, Song Yongyi, an expert on the Cultural Revolution, was detained in China and charged with “the purchase and illegal provision of intelligence to foreigners.” Song, who is based in the U.S., had been in China collecting information on the Cultural Revolution. Despite the fact that the materials he gathered had been widely available in Chinese markets, Song was held for five months. He was released in January 2000 after growing international pressure on China.

Film Hu Jie’s 2006 Cultural Revolution documentary, *Though I Am Gone*, is currently banned in China. In March 2007, the Yunnan Multi Culture Visual Festival was suspended after the film was included. Hu himself had stated in a 2005 interview, “I feel we could and should have numerous films only about the Cultural Revolution . . . because the Chinese official authority does not want us to remember the history, we non-official people should remember on our own.”

China has also banned fictional films partially set in the years of the Cultural Revolution, notable examples being Zhang Yimou’s *To Live* (1994), and Chen Kaige’s *Farewell My Concubine* (1993).

Textbooks To this day, details about the Cultural Revolution are routinely left out of Chinese textbooks. In September 2006, John Pomfret of the Washington Post published an article describing the experiences of Wu Xiaoqing, whose parents were killed by Red Guards. Wu later joined the Communist Party, and in recent years was asked to write a chapter on the Cultural Revolution for a high school history textbook. Wu said that he had tried to include a critique of the Cultural Revolution in his chapter, but that this part was eventually removed.

Commemorations The forty-year anniversary of the Cultural Revolution in 2006 was met with silence in the state media and continued censorship efforts by the government:

- In March 2006, Culture Minister Sun Jiazheng stated in response to reporters’ questions that there would be no special events observing the anniversary, saying that China should “look to the future.”
- Top Cultural Revolution scholars in China were barred from participating in a May 2006 conference in New York commemorating the start of the revolution. The conference was organized by Song Yongyi.

Compiled by HRIC

miao Primary School, where the working groups required each teacher to write a self-criticism before being processed individually. All over China, even in the border regions, educators were being handled in this same way.

At the end of July, Mao Zedong ordered all Cultural Revolution Working Group leaders to withdraw from the schools where they had been deployed. On July 31, the schools announced the establishment of their own Red Guard units. After the working group members left, schools fell under the control of these Red Guard units and the Revolutionary Teacher and Student Committees that the working groups had established. Most of the members of the Teacher and Student Committees were in fact students, and these students were also Red Guard leaders.

Members of the Red Guard unit at the Attached Girls' School enjoyed three major privileges: (1) they were allowed to conduct struggle sessions against students designated as "degenerates" based on their "bad family backgrounds"; (2) they could conduct struggle sessions against teachers and administrators without obtaining prior permission; (3) they were allowed to use violence in their attacks on students and teachers.

On August 4, 1966, the day before Bian Zhongyun was beaten to death, the Red Guard unit at the Attached Girls' School carried out a struggle session against students with "bad family backgrounds." During a struggle session in one of the classes, Red Guard members bound ten students with ropes and forced them to "explain" their "reactionary thoughts" and the "crimes" of their parents. At the end of the session, they were forced to repeat three times, "I am a son-of-a-bitch, I am a scoundrel, I deserve to die." Similar sessions took place in the other classes.

That afternoon, a group of Red Guards chanting, "No reactionary gangs allowed," burst into a classroom where school administrators were being held and beat them with wooden training rifles and leather belts. That night at home, Bian Zhongyun said to her husband, "To beat someone in my position to death is the same as killing a dog." She knew she was in mortal danger, but could think of no way out. She and her husband discussed whether it would be better to send another letter to the leadership pleading for help, or simply to make a run for it. But they did neither. The next morning, Bian's elderly housekeeper pleaded with her, "Don't go to school." But Bian Zhongyun, resigned to her fate, went to school at her usual time.

The reality in Beijing at that time was that there was no place to hide or seek refuge, much less any opportunity to resist. Knowing that the school had reached a crisis point, another vice principal, Hu Zhitao, rose at dawn on August 5 and went to the Beijing Municipal Party Secretariat seeking the official responsible for education and culture. Hoping to find some sympathy and support, she told the official that people at the school were in danger for their lives. But the only reply she received was, "Go back to the school." And so Hu returned to the Attached Girls' School in despair, and that same afternoon witnessed the murder of her colleague of many years, beaten to death before her very eyes, while she herself was seriously injured.

Translated by Stacy Mosher

To see Wang's virtual memorial to the victims of the Cultural Revolution, see www.chinese-memorial.org.

Refusing Amnesia: A Conversation with Gao Wenqian on *Though I am Gone*



***Though I am Gone* (2006)**
Director, Editor & Camera: Hu Jie
Running Time: 68 minutes
(Mandarin with English subtitles)

Sharon Hom discusses Hu Jie's documentary and the legacy of the Cultural Revolution with Gao Wenqian, HRIC's Chinese Editor-in-Chief. Gao was previously an associate research fellow and editor-in-chief at the Research Center on Party Literature for the Communist Party of China. He is the author of *Zhou Enlai: The Last Perfect Revolutionary*, and received an Asian Pacific Award for the Japanese edition.

From 1966 to 1976, China underwent a decade of terror, fear, and chaos during the Cultural Revolution unleashed by Mao. *Though I am Gone*, by documentary filmmaker Hu Jie, looks at the violent death of Bian Zhongyun, a vice principal of Beijing Normal University Attached Girls' Middle School. Teacher Bian's death was the first, but was followed by millions of other victims who were beaten, tortured, or persecuted to death by zealous Red Guards. More than 40 years after the Cultural Revolution was launched, the Chinese leaders are still suppressing critical reflection and accountability, and remain intent on enforcing a collective historical amnesia.

Time, memory, and death are made painfully visible in the documentary's opening sequence. The ticking of a clock as backdrop to a visual alternating between the past and the present: between the murdered teacher, Bian Zhongyun; the camera's eye staring out at us, the viewers; and Wang Jingyao, her husband. The filmmaker's camera closes in on the old camera in Wang Jingyao's hand. The credits and title appear—*Though I am Gone*—Wang Jingyao looks out at us, shots of Teacher Bian's battered corpse, close up of Wang trying to remember, a shot of her corpse again. The interview

begins, and a voice asks, *Was it hard to take pictures of your wife's corpse?* He answers, *Of course, but I want to record history. This is evidence.*

SH: Watching this film from our two different perspectives and backgrounds, I was aware of what a difficult experience it must be for you, since you actually lived through the Cultural Revolution. Even for me, it was painful to be a witness—although a mediated one—to the terror, violence, and death. And it wasn't just Teacher Bian—there were millions after her. Her death was just the beginning.

GWQ: Yes—the hysteria, violence, and blood in the documentary are not foreign to me. I was an eyewitness to the Cultural Revolution. I was thirteen at the time. And after I watched the film, my first thought was, I can't bear to remember this.

Even after you gave the documentary to me to watch, I kept putting it off. Why? Because I lived through it. Because of my personal experience, after so many years, it is still a wound to the heart. The wounds may seem to have closed, but watching the film was like reopening them. Watching it brought me back to those years where I experienced the Cultural Revolution.

This documentary has a lot of history to it. That was the wildest and most frenetic period in modern Chinese history. You can see how bloody and violent and fearful the environment was back then.

When I was watching it, I took especial note of the expressions in people's eyes. There were two expressions that were particularly meaningful—the sincere expression of the pure and young people who really believed in what they were doing (even as they were beating and torturing others)—they were so convinced that they were right. The second expression I noticed was fear—those who recoiled at the sight of the beatings but were scared, and did not speak out.

Bian was not like the other teachers. She was the vice principal of the school, and she was a Party leader there. Why were the students in the documentary so cruel? Because they had been raised on “wolf's milk.” When I say “wolf's milk,” I am referring to the Communist Party

culture of indoctrinating youth with hateful thoughts. In our generation, there is a very famous saying, “Living in the new China, we grow up under the red flag.” The Communists taught even the very young to hate, and continued to instill hatred in them as they grew up.

The Party divided people into different categories—if you were categorized as the enemy, no mercy would be shown to you. The Lei Feng way of thought that Mao had established has a saying that goes: You must be as ruthless to your enemies as the harshest winter. And so, as the students increasingly viewed Bian as the enemy, they became merciless towards her. They beat Bian to death in the most inhumane manner. This was a result of the long-term indoctrination of hatred that the Communist Party endorsed.

It was also a competition to see who could be the most revolutionary. Those who did not beat her were seen as not being as revolutionary as those who did. Cruelty became a sign of your loyalty to the cause of revolution.

Why did Mao Zedong do this? He just used the students as weapons to strike down his opponents. He took blank pages and painted them with hate, brainwashing naïve, young, pure students (teenagers mostly). He planted these seeds of hatred in the Red Guards. They were incited to enact violence against their enemies.

SH: That is a very powerful phrase—being raised on wolf’s milk. Yet there were those who did not buy into the ideology, like you. Why was this, when everyone else was being brainwashed? How is it possible for people all drinking wolf’s milk and exposed to the same propaganda to act, to think differently?

GWQ: Each person is different because of family, environment, or personality. When I was six years old, my father was labeled as an “enemy of the Party.” In 1959, my family was kicked out of our house. So by the time the Cultural Revolution started, we were already suspicious and doubtful of its tenets. The suffering of those who were persecuted in the Cultural Revolution was already familiar to me.

However, there were also those who fell in the middle (not to either extreme of being either revolutionary or

enemy class) and for them, the Cultural Revolution became an opportunity to express and develop their revolutionary fervor.

SH: If one person witnesses two students beating teachers—or 100 students beating a teacher, in the second situation, there arises a kind of mob mentality that intimidates and makes any witness less likely to speak out.

GWQ: When I saw people being beaten, I felt shaky inside. But I didn’t tell people to stop, and I didn’t speak up to tell them that it was wrong. Even though people were destroying each other, their families, themselves, it was so rare for someone to stand up and say that it is wrong.

The person who was responsible for starting all this was Mao Zedong. In the documentary, there is the infamous scene showing Song Binbin, a fervent young Red Guard, meeting Mao for the first time. When Mao asked her name, Song replied politely, Binbin. But Mao exhorted: The Revolution does not want Binbin to be polite! Be Violent!

It was not Mao Zedong who physically persecuted or killed hundreds of thousands of people. Mao did not order Teacher Bian to be beaten to death. But it was through a series of things he did that ordinary people became so vicious and turned on one another.

SH: Throughout this process, from the beginning of the Cultural Revolution—there was a steady intensification in rhetoric. There was rhetoric condemning others as the enemy, and rhetoric casting others as demons, monsters, inciting and calling for violence. This rhetoric of violence is tragically not unique to China—it was used in Rwanda also, where an entire ethnic group was labeled as cockroaches, not even human. So what you describe as Chinese Communist Party culture, and this rhetoric of violence denying a group its humanity, has been historically used by dominant powerful groups to suppress, murder, or exploit others all over the world, for example genocide in Rwanda, slavery in America, or apartheid in South Africa. This is the danger when you start dehumanizing people.

Atrocities occurred under the Communist flag, but similar scenarios happen around the world. It's really a mixture of power and fear that allows these terrible things to happen. I have to ask myself—if I had lived back then and witnessed those brutal things, would I have helped those being beaten? Would I have had the guts to stand up to them, or take the risks like the priests and others who hid people in Rwanda from the butchery at risk of their own lives? I am just grateful that I have not had to stand that test.

GWQ: Nobody stood up. It was fear. If the Communist Party said anything against you—it was over. They dehumanized their enemies. And afterwards, they prohibited any public discussion on the Anti-Rightists movement and the Cultural Revolution, and tightly controlled information on the Revolution. The whole nation “lost” its memories of the Cultural Revolution, lapsing into a collective historical amnesia. But to understand the present, you have to first understand the past.

SH: Yes, and you have to understand the past to know how to act in the present—so that there is a possibility for an alternative future.

GWQ: After Mao died, the Communist Party did acknowledge that the Cultural Revolution was a mistake. Yet they still forbid people from talking about it. Even though Mao is dead, the Communist Party has used the same medicine, but under a different label. They need to preserve their legitimacy. For example, the Shi Tao case, the Guo Feixiong case—the reasons for all those cases are the same: the Communist Party does not want people to truly understand history.

SH: In mainland China today, there is no possibility for ordinary people to reflect on their national history. Overseas, there are processes of transitional justice (such as in South Africa) where perpetrators and victims can speak about their experiences and confront one another. Perpetrators have to admit, “This is what I did,” and give details, and apologize. Participating in this process sometimes allows them to avoid criminal prosecution. This process may not always be successful, forgiveness is complex, but it's a start. This kind of process, of collective memory, responsibility, opening the way to healing, is something I've thought that

China could explore, but the attempts to totally censor the past during the 40th anniversary of the Cultural Revolution made it clear: this process of healing cannot even start.

GWQ: There are two reasons why this would be difficult in China. First of all, the conditions don't exist for this—the Party would not allow this. Mao's corpse is still in Tiananmen. The Communist Party is willing to go after the small perpetrators but not the big ones.

The second reason is the refusal of ordinary civilians to acknowledge past wrongs committed. There are a few exceptions, such as the anonymous person who witnessed the murder of Teacher Bian and wrote to Wang Jingyao—that was a brave act. But that was the limit of courage. That person was not willing to talk about it even now, and is still afraid to be interviewed on camera.

The Revolution has been over for forty years, but it is still rare to find former Red Guards who are willing to engage in self-introspection and reflect upon the things they did. This has to do with traditional Chinese culture, which does not advocate repentance and confession. In this way, Chinese culture is very different from Western culture.

SH: This is the enduring power of the fear, even 40 years on. There were some themes of the documentary—the theme of time—time of now, the time of 40 years ago. I think that the film was very conscious about time passing. The second theme was something we already discussed—how did the process become so increasingly violent, and then explode so terribly?

And finally, what remains—those family members left behind—silent witnesses then but speaking out after 40 years, revealing the truth, and excavating the preserved evidence: the old suitcase, the photos, the contents of Teacher Bian's bag, Mao's little red book, all the revolutionary pamphlets—the tangible last remains of a life—her school ID badge, strands of hair, her torn blood stained shirt and soiled pants, and her watch, stopped at 3:40 when the terror began and ended.

GWQ: The shot of the clock stopping at 3:40 holds great significance. It wasn't just time that stopped during the

Revolution—the system had also stopped. The Chinese political system was exposed for its phony superficial changes. It may have shifted in its form during then, but underneath, its essence was still the same. The Communist Party still controlled everything. The stopped clock is a symbol of a frozen Chinese political system that has not changed.

Yet, although China may currently be transitioning from a totalitarian society to a post-totalitarian society, the authorities' rule still depends upon their interpretation of history, and this interpretation is built upon lies. They have covered up China's historical and present problems with falsehoods. And just like the child in the Hans Christian Andersen story "The Emperor's New Clothes," the masses do not dare to expose the lies because they live in a climate of fear. What really struck me was the fact that the anonymous letter-writer in the documentary risked persecution in writing the letter that year, but still cannot stand up publicly and talk about it 40 years on. The Revolution ate its own children and created a tragedy, but there is not enough reflection about it. We can't forget the human cost.

During the Velvet Revolution, Vaclav Havel exhorted the Czech people to follow their consciences, speak the truth, and refuse to forget, saying that this was the "power of the powerless." In the documentary, Wang Jingyao took the bloody clothes of his wife and put them in a leather suitcase. He has slept with this suitcase under his bed for 40 years. This is his refusal to forget.

The power that the ordinary people have is, as Havel said, to resist lies, refuse amnesia and tell the truth. If each person adhered to this philosophy, we could influence our families, our friends, and our society. We could tear down the lies that have preserved this totalitarian system. The day we all vanquish the fear inside our hearts is the day that the Communist regime will collapse.

In Search of a Breath of Fresh Air

**A Review of *Reflections of Leadership: Tung Chee Hwa and Donald Tsang 1997–2007*
By Christine Loh and Carine Lai
Civic Exchange Hong Kong, June 2007
303 pages**

By Jonathan Mirsky



This well-documented and convincing deconstruction of the two men who have ruled Hong Kong on behalf of Beijing since July 1997 reminds us how a city of remarkable citizens can survive and even thrive despite leadership worse than it deserves.

I state immediately that I know the principal author, Christine Loh, as well as Tung Chee Hwa and Donald Tsang. Ms. Loh and Mr. Tsang are also both good friends.

Ms. Loh, one of the most admired women in Hong Kong and at one time a star of its Legislative Council, is the founder of the non-profit think tank Civic Exchange, which lobbies on public issues such as Hong Kong's environment and its need for representative government. Carine Lai works for Civic Exchange and is a well-known political cartoonist.

The essence of this admirably expressed book (Ms. Loh's best-written to date) is that while Mr. Tung and Mr. Tsang could not be more different in background and personality, both distrust democracy and are out of touch with the convictions and hopes of Hong Kong people. The book relies on copious quotations from speeches and policy statements of both men. Since both they and their speechwriters command clear English, there can be no doubt about what was on their minds.

The authors underscore that for both Mr. Tung and Mr. Tsang, the demands of their masters in Beijing were and remain paramount. From the time of Deng Xiaoping, Beijing's leaders have suspected Hong Kong people of disloyalty. This suspicion arose when Hong Kong residents demonstrated in huge numbers against the Tiananmen killings in 1989, and again in 2003 when

hundreds of thousands marched in protest against a public order law championed by Beijing and Mr. Tung. That second march—which unfortunately the authors fail to fully explain—also signaled the public’s rejection of Mr. Tung, and became a major factor in his resignation in 2005 before his term expired.

One of the book’s most interesting analyses is of what the authors call “state corporatism” in which society is organized along the “functional constituencies” that constitute Hong Kong’s lines of occupation. Organized first by Britain, functional constituencies “appear superficially representative of society while being fairly politically homogeneous and avoided subjecting candidates [for the Legislative Council or for the position of Chief Executive] to broad popular approval.” In China, as the authors rightly observe, this is called the “United Front strategy”; it aims to “co-opt the friendly and neutral minority in order to better isolate and attack the hostile minority.” In Hong Kong, this united front strategy is carried out by the Beijing State Council’s Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office, which aims to “build support for the Chief Executive of Hong Kong and to galvanize nominations and the vote for the selection of the Chief Executive.” The only caveat I have here is that in Hong Kong the excluded “hostile” group is unquestionably the majority.

The authors ask if Hong Kong people should reject functional elections altogether because they see them as a hindrance to creating a fair society. “Surely there is a danger in sustaining an electoral system that pitches the interests of the people against the interest of Beijing.”

This exclusion of the majority, the authors argue, explains why democratization remains “the key tussle between the people of Hong Kong and Beijing ten years on from 1997.” It explains, too, why “the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is squeezed between Beijing and the people of the city.”

While describing the common challenges of the two Chief Executives, the authors compare and contrast their political personalities. Mr. Tung admirably suited Beijing’s definition of a “patriotic capitalist.” Heir to a tottering shipping empire, he was bailed out of virtual bankruptcy by Henry Fok, another tycoon who was

close to Beijing. An American-educated businessman from a rich Shanghai family, Mr. Tung was close to the Shanghai clique that elevated Jiang Zemin to high office—the very same Jiang whose televised handshake with Mr. Tung long before his “election” revealed to everyone in the city what the future held.

As the authors note, Mr. Tung based his policies on appeals to the “Chinese identity” of Hong Kong’s people, and therefore to their patriotism. This is a complex issue; the people of Hong Kong are indeed patriotic, but their Hong Kong identity is a core characteristic. (On more than one occasion, Mr. Tung said to the foreign press, “you can’t understand my policies because you are not Chinese.” I asked him how he would have felt if British governors had said to Chinese reporters that they couldn’t understand because they were Chinese. As usual, he looked amiable and blank.)

Mr. Tung also rang the changes on “Chinese values” of trust, love and respect for family, integrity, honesty and a commitment to education (though he offered no reply to comments that these were also Western values). He contrasted these values with “the deterioration of social order” he had observed in the West. However, when it came to actual social order, to be enforced by Article 23 (the bill to control dissent), and what to do about the SARS epidemic, Mr. Tung faltered and failed.

Donald Tsang’s background, as the authors correctly say, couldn’t have been more different. The son of a police station sergeant, Mr. Tsang performed brilliantly as a graduate student at Harvard without having been to college, and worked his way up the civil service ladder on merit. He was knighted by Hong Kong’s last governor, Chris Patten, but never uses his title. Hong Kong welcomed his succession to Mr. Tung as a local boy made good, a tune that Mr. Tsang has often, and justifiably, played. He has said more than once that while he personally favors universal suffrage, “the development of our political system is not up to me alone, I must also operate within certain parameters.”

It is far from clear, however, that Mr. Tsang genuinely favors universal suffrage. The authors note that he has “never bothered to explain why many democracies are also vibrant economies. Indeed, the freest democracies

are often the best economies on a sustained basis.” Ms. Loh and Ms. Lai sum up his “naked desire to be a ‘strong leader’” (his words), heading a “strong government.” They see a “steam-rolling streak in him” and quote his dislike of organized opposition, which he terms a “horrible animal.” He calls the city’s democrats “bloody-minded politicians” and freely admits to dealing differently with “friendly and hostile camps,” demonstrated by his tendency to ignore hostile members of the legislature. On one occasion, he told Ms. Loh that he would discuss a policy question with her “only if she agreed with him” in advance. Mr. Tsang still enjoys favor in public opinion, but when asked whom they would prefer to be Chief Executive, most Hong Kong people do not name him.

Christine Loh’s determination and productivity (her books are published in Chinese as well as English) provide an excellent opportunity for Hong Kong people and the wider world to inform themselves about the

current situation in the richest city in China, and the interests and hopes of its people. Another book authored by Ms. Loh, *From Nowhere to Nowhere: A Review of Constitutional Development 1997–2007*, expands on the themes in *Reflections of Leadership*. The cleverly titled *Still Holding Our Breath: A Review of Air Quality in Hong Kong 1997–2007*, and *Idling Engine: Hong Kong’s Environmental Policy in a Ten Year Stall 1997–2007*, coolly and comprehensively survey problems that Donald Tsang still refuses to take seriously. China is now the most polluted country on the planet, and Hong Kong, a city whose inhabitants are literally gasping, could provide important lessons for the whole country. Even if he cannot bear the notion of genuine democracy, Mr. Tsang, a local boy, could really make good if he turned his excellent mind and devotion to his native city, in particular to an environment that chokes its inhabitants. If he does, he could become a breath of fresh air.