

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND THE WAR AGAINST FASCISM

BY YONGYI SONG

In this speech at a conference marking the sixtieth anniversary of the “victory over fascism” at the University of Chicago on September 24, an expert on the Cultural Revolution explains why China needs to face up to its crimes against its own people, especially as it demands reparation for war crimes by Japan.

Some of you may think it is strange that an expert on the Cultural Revolution is addressing this conference. But I think the topics are related, as I will illustrate with a story about myself.

In 2003, some Japanese universities invited me to speak on the Cultural Revolution. The topic was, “The Forgotten Massacres of the Cultural Revolution.” When I spoke on this topic at Tokyo University’s History Institute, several Japanese professors asked the same question: “You Chinese never give up demanding accountability for the Nanjing Massacre, in which you say 300,000 people were killed—and Japanese scholars believe this number is exaggerated. Then why do your government and the people of China to this day refuse to acknowledge the massacres that took place during the Cultural Revolution, and even conceal this part of history? You yourself were imprisoned for half a year in 1999 on charges of ‘stealing state secrets’ when you went to China and collected some Red Guard newspapers on this topic.”

When I heard this question, I felt deeply humiliated, because if a country, a government, doesn’t have even the minimum of courage required to reexamine and acknowledge this dark portion of its own history, then how can you have the gall to condemn the crimes of another country?

The Chinese government and Japanese scholars remain in disagreement over the number of victims of the Nanjing Massacre. The Chinese government says more than 300,000 people, while the Japanese say it wasn’t anywhere near that many. Now, let’s say for the sake of argument that the number established in the Tokyo War Crimes Trial in 1946–48, 200,000—or at least 200,000—conforms to international standards. How does the killing of 200,000 people fit into the framework of the Cultural Revolution?

I can tell you that in the months from July to December of 1968, around 200,000 people were killed under orders of China’s central government in Guangxi Province alone! At that time there were two factions in Guangxi: one faction, in opposition to the provincial leadership headed by the provincial Party secretary Wei Guoqing, was called the 411 Group; the other was a conservative faction supporting Wei referred to as the Lianzhi. The opposition group was unarmed, but had managed to steal some weapons to defend itself. Using this as a pretext, with the permission of the central government, Wei Guoqing mobilized the armed forces of Guangxi for a massive six-month-long operation against the “armed bandits” of the 411 opposition group.

There are now two official reports referring to this particular massacre: one is in a book called *A Timeline of Major Events of the Cultural Revolution in Guangxi*,¹ which is an “internal publication” that has been made publicly available. There is also a “top secret” edition of this report, which has not been made public. A few years ago one of the writers involved in compiling this top-secret edition brought it out of China.² The secret version of the report reveals that in this six-month period, the military and the Lianzhi faction wiped out the “class enemies” of the 411 faction, a total of nearly 200,000 people. This is a very reliable figure.

Many of you are no doubt familiar with the book written by Zheng Yi, *Scarlet Memorial*,³ in which he recounts instances of cannibalism during the Cultural Revolution in Guangxi. This occurred against the backdrop of this massacre. The “cannibalism” consisted of slaughtering “class enemies” such as those labeled landlords, rich peasants, oppositionists, bad elements and rightists, along with their families, including newborn babies and elderly people, and then consuming their flesh to demonstrate commitment to “revolution.” At present there are records of some 2,000 to 3,000 named individuals who were cannibalized in this way.

Of course there was a similar phenomenon of Japanese soldiers committing brutal acts of cannibalism during the Sino-Japanese war, but these were exceptional cases. I would like to emphasize a simple fact: in the one case we have a foreign nationality carrying out crimes under conditions of war; in the other we have the “People’s Liberation Army” and uniformed militia killing and eating their own people.

During the period of Party rectification and purges in the 1980s, it was found that the incidence of slaughter was greatest in Guangxi, and some 47,000 Party members were dismissed as a result, mainly as a result of the fact that militia and military personnel were Party members as a matter of course. This is the figure openly acknowledged in the book *A Timeline of Major Events of the Cultural Revolution in Guangxi*, and it is quite possible that the actual number was much higher.

At this point we can make a comparison between the Nanjing Massacre and the Guangxi Massacre. We should ask: if a country or a government lacks the most basic capacity for self-reflection, is incapable of squarely facing up to a dark period in its own history, and is capable only of accusing others and producing venom-spewing hyper-nationalistic youth, or rather “patriotic thugs,” can it ever hope to resolve the massacre issue? I am in no way excusing Japan in this case—what the Japanese did was absolutely wrong. But if the “patriotic thugs” only attack and condemn one evil and completely ignore another that is even more tangible and actually located within their own home, and if while attacking and condemning the foreign evil they even go so far as to demonstrate coy approval of their domestic evil, I feel that such a country is pathetic beyond words. This is my personal feeling, and is also why I say the Cultural Revolution and the Sino-Japanese War are related.

The secret of CCP collaboration with the Japanese

In the course of the uprisings during the Cultural Revolution, a strange set of circumstances conspired to reveal a closely-held national secret of Chinese Communist collaboration with the occupying forces during the Sino-Japanese war. I will recount one true story here, which is part of a case selected for publication in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution CD-ROM Database*.⁴

It is common knowledge that Zeng Qinghong's⁵ father was named Zeng Shan, and that he was one of the Chinese Communist Party's top spies and head of its internal affairs bureau. During the Sino-Japanese War he took on a very important mission in northern Jiangsu Province that involved going to Shanghai and Nanjing for talks with the Japanese. The main focus of the talks was to convince the Japanese to fight the Kuomintang forces only, and not the CCP. During the Cultural Revolution, in September 1967, the opposition faction revealed this case and labeled Zeng Shan a traitor, subjecting him to mass struggle sessions. As a result, Zeng Shan telephoned Zhou Enlai and asked for his help. Zhou knew this was a top secret matter of the Party, and in his own hand he immediately issued a central government document with four directives:

- 1) While the errors of Comrade Zeng Shan can be criticized, handling of the matter should be determined by the central government;
- 2) Comrade Zeng Shan's activities were under orders of the central government, and the opposition faction should not interfere;
- 3) Students from outside are not allowed to interfere in matters of the internal affairs bureau and must leave immediately;
- 4) The use of physical torment in a mass struggle session is

wrong and contravenes central government regulations; from now on corporal punishment of any kind is forbidden.

Zhou Enlai was an extremely prudent person, and always handled cases in the name of Mao Zedong. But this particular document never went through Mao, and by issuing that document with its four points, he rescued Zeng Shan. All of this is recounted in *The Biography of Zeng Shan*,⁶ published in China. And what was the state secret that was being protected? None other than the collaboration between the Chinese Communist Party and the occupying Japanese forces. So this is another instance in which we can see a connection between the Cultural Revolution and the Sino-Japanese War.

How many people were actually killed in the Cultural Revolution?

Many friends who are concerned with the Cultural Revolution ask me how many people were actually killed during that period. Many Japanese students asked this same question while I was in Japan for my lectures. This also caused me great shame, because the Chinese government has never publicly released a figure on how many people lost their lives during this time.

A number of scholars, especially those overseas, have undertaken the arduous and sometimes dangerous task of trying to assemble statistics relating to this question. For example, Dr. Wang Youqin at the University of Chicago has carried out individual interviews regarding the abuse and killing of teachers during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. She has assembled these cases one by one over the course of many years, recording between 1,000 and 2,000 cases to date.

According to the estimates of overseas scholars, based on secret documents that have been leaked, approximately 2.8 million people met with unnatural deaths during that period. This compares with approximately 1.7 million officers and soldiers who fell during the Sino-Japanese War. So we can see that the number of people persecuted to death during the Cultural Revolution is far greater than the number of military personnel who sacrificed their lives fighting the Japanese.

We cannot get away with focusing only on fascists outside of China, especially in the long term. Nor can we allow our textbooks to present the world in two extremes, with one side completely right and the other completely wrong, or pose communism at one extreme and capitalism at the other. There is fascism in the center as well, and communism itself has many fascist elements. In terms of the threat it presents, communism could even be said to be more dangerous than fascism.

Fascist and terrorist activities of the Chinese Communist Party

The second question I'd like to address is activities the Communist Party engaged in during peace time, specifically during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. In particular, did the Party engage in any terrorist or fascist activities?

I was born in 1949, the same year as the “Red Republic.” We all know that those of us born in that period were taught that we must “liberate the two thirds of the world that remained imperiled,” including Americans and Taiwanese; of

course we eventually came to realize that the people imperiled were actually ourselves. Another interesting aspect of the Cultural Revolution is that we young people were contaminated virtually beyond redemption; back then I truly believed that there were black people literally starving to death on the streets of America, waiting for us Chinese to donate some of our monthly quota of grain to save their lives. When I think of it now, it seems ridiculous!

I would like to take some time to describe terrorist activities within and outside of China during the Cultural Revolution under the direct orders and instigation of the CCP. First of all there was the “strike, smash and burn” campaign that the Beijing-based Red Guards directed at foreign embassies in 1967. Under the influence of a fanatical foreign affairs policy, the Red Guards ransacked the Indian embassy on June 18, the Burmese embassy on July 3 and the Indonesian embassy on August 5, and on August 22 they actually burned the British Office to the ground. They not only burned the British Office, but even submitted the British charge d’affaires, Donald Hopson, to a struggle session, and forced all of his staff to bow before a photo of Mao Zedong and “beg his pardon.” This is analogous to the activity that took place in Iran during the Islamic uprisings, when the U.S. Embassy was subjected to terrorist attack. The August 23 edition of People’s Daily reports the incident as follows:

Red Guards of the nation’s capital and revolutionary masses totaling more than 10,000 people last night broke into the British Office for a mass rally. In front of the mission door they enumerated the crimes of the British Empire against China, and vented their indignation in violent measures against the British Office.

What is this if not encouraging terrorism?

Some of our Hong Kong friends will also remember the “1967 riots,” which were initially approved by Zhou Enlai. It was only when they ran out of control that Zhou came forward and said that things could not continue this way.

It was during the 1967 riots that Chairman Mao’s portrait was hung from Hong Kong’s Bank of China building, and the slogan “First ask for instructions, then report back” was used to inspire Mao worship and instigate general strikes with the aim of “liberating” Hong Kong. Later, when the Hong Kong police and military took action, the communists used roadside bombs, a similar tactic to that used against American soldiers in Iraq today. It could be argued that the development of this kind of urban warfare among Islamic insurgents can be attributed in part to the CCP. The tactic of exploding roadside bombs targeting police and military personnel was used until an incident in Hong Kong’s North Point district in which an eight-year-old girl and her seven-year-old brother were killed, at which point local opposition put an end to such tactics.

“Exporting revolution” during the Cultural Revolution

The Cultural Revolutionary practice of “exporting revolution” is probably epitomized by the massacres carried out by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Khmer Rouge leaders Pol Pot and

Khieu Samphan both went to China for training, as it happened, during the Cultural Revolution. They were granted personal audiences with Mao Zedong, as well as his blessings, and received personal instruction from Zhang Cunqiao, a member of Jiang Qing’s Gang of Four. However, in this case “the student surpassed his teacher,” and the Cultural Revolution Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan waged turned out to be even more grotesque than that in China.

China’s Cultural Revolution was meant to be a “Great Leap Forward” in the ideological and political sense, and to make Mao Zedong the Grand Poobah of the international communist movement. But the ambition of the Khmer Rouge was even greater; they wanted to collapse China’s dozens of movements and campaigns into one grand movement. We all know the results: the international academic world is in general agreement that at least one million people were killed in Cambodia, including some 200,000 of the 410,000 ethnic Chinese living there at the time, and all of the 20,000 ethnic Vietnamese. Here we can see how a terrorist movement originating in Mao Zedong’s “Third Milestone”⁷ of world revolution was transformed into Pol Pot’s “Fourth Milestone.”

According to recent articles based on research of CCP history, the CCP deployed at least 320,000 armed personnel to Vietnam during the Cultural Revolution, including army, special forces, air force and engineer corps. I have spoken with the dissident Wei Jingsheng, who served in the army at that time, and he says this number does not include people’s militia. What does that figure mean in context? At that time the entirety of U.S. military personnel deployed in Vietnam totaled 550,000. It could be said, in effect, that the Vietnam War involved an equal number of Chinese and American troops. But of course, this was all carried out under conditions of secrecy.

We are also aware that the Communist Party of Burma (now Myanmar) also received all of its training in China. After establishing a local power base, the Burmese communists began cultivating and selling opium. Back then young people such as myself were really naïve. Some 2,000 educated youth from Yunnan Province crossed the border to implement Mao Zedong’s ideology of world revolution in Burma. At least 1,000 of those young people died on the battleground. Some joined the Burmese guerilla forces as military base chiefs of staff. Back at home, official files designate them as having “genuinely participated in revolution.” China also sent a large number of military officers to serve as “military advisors” to the Burmese communists, where they in fact often directed military actions. These activities are detailed in *My 15 Years Among the Burmese Communists*⁸ and other books by a Chinese woman, Yang Jianjun.

As for Malaysia, the Malaysian Communists had a radio station, “Voice of the Malaysian Revolution,” which was actually set up in Hunan Province.

I sometimes think how fortunate it is that this “export of revolution” and the Cultural Revolution died with Mao Zedong. If he had really been “immortal” (wanshou wujiang), the situation could have become even worse; China would have become like North Korea today, and the world would be that much the worse for it.



Thousands of protesters turned out at anti-Japan rallies in 2004, but protests against human rights abuses by the Chinese government are strictly forbidden. Photo: AP Wide World Photos

Some of the problems lingering to this day, such as the situation with Maoist guerillas in Myanmar, originated with Mao's support. Mao's reach was enormous. For example, the recent Mao biography by Jung Chang⁹ reveals that Cuba's Che Guevara met Mao Zedong in the 1960s, and that Mao gave him \$60 million, with no obligation for repayment. The money was to support Guevara's efforts to overturn lawful regimes in Latin America.

It's clear what "exporting revolution" actually meant to us back then. I recall a song that was popular with the Red Guards at that time, called, "Offered to the Martyrs of the Third World War." Who were those martyrs? They were people such as ourselves. The song included lines such as, "Let blood stain the White House and recover Red Square," and, "let it bathe every last step of the White House and liberate the people of America." Of course we can laugh at this now—who on earth would they be liberating? But it shows how an entire generation of people was drowned in an insane ideology of communism combined with fascism.

Ridiculous as this all may seem to people here in America who are aware of the facts of history, the sad truth is that there are quite a few people in China today who still fervently believe it. For instance, not long ago, Zhu Chenghu, the grandson of Party elder Zhu De, advocated engaging in nuclear warfare. He was prepared to sacrifice all of China's cities east of Xi'an in exchange for destroying hundreds of American cities.¹⁰ Zhu apparently believed that as long as he stayed west of Xi'an, he himself would be safe. Just like those "heroes of

the Third World War" years ago, he believed that he would ultimately have his photograph taken on the steps of the White House as a victor, not a victim.

This should indicate how dangerous Chinese terrorism actually is. Sometimes in a moment of self-reflection, I can't help but think that back then during the Cultural Revolution, if Mao Zedong had told us to take part in terrorist activities, we would have done it. Why? Because we had been brainwashed and deceived, and we were contaminated beyond redemption.

The Communist leadership is irrational and unprincipled

Someone once said something interesting about life philosophies. He said the western philosophy of life is generally "I'm okay, you're okay," in spite of the adversarial tone of politics and elections; on the other hand, the communist philosophy of life is, "You die and I live," as employed in class struggle; and the terrorist philosophy of life is, "You die and I also die," as exemplified by suicide bombers. In fact, the "You die and I also die" philosophy was prevalent in the Cultural Revolution. Whether we are talking about Islamic terrorists or guerilla insurgents attempting to "export revolution" all over the world, the Chinese Communist Party has a lot to answer for.

Communism and fascism are both rooted in warfare and killing. In 1997 a French institute published *The Black Book of Communism*,¹¹ which estimated that up to the 1990s, the Communist movement had led to the deaths of 100 million people. The figure given for China was rather conservative at around 65 million.

If we consider the wars after World War II, one of the bloodiest was the Korean War, in which millions of soldiers were deployed on each side. Who started that war? Kim Il Sung. Who supported him? Stalin and Mao. Millions more soldiers were engaged in the Vietnam War, and Vietnam claims it lost 1.5 million people, while the U.S. lost more than 50,000 soldiers. Who started that war? North Vietnam invaded South Vietnam under the banner of patriotism, unification and nationalism. Similar beautiful slogans are currently being employed to justify the possibility of military action against Taiwan. It kind of makes you think, doesn't it?

Another thing worth thinking about is that since World War II, there has been no instance of a western democracy declaring war against another western democracy, or of a capitalist country declaring war against another capitalist country. On the other hand, socialist countries have been fighting each other constantly since World War II. Back in 1969 the Soviet Union and China came very close to declaring war.

I remember that when Wei Jingsheng was arrested back in 1979, I was studying in Shanghai. At that time in our political class we were reading Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*.¹² Lenin saw imperialism as a sign that capitalism was decaying and moribund. The reason was that capitalism wasn't engaged in struggle, while communist and socialist countries were always fighting something or other. We saw how casually Deng Xiaoping said, "Let's teach them a lesson," and hundreds of thousands of soldiers went to Vietnam to fight.¹³ It is clear how closely related communism is to warfare, and how that warfare routinely lacks any clear rational basis.

Why has the dangerous nature of communism been forgotten?

After all this, we have to ask, why is the threat of communism more easily overlooked in the west than the threat of fascism? In 1997 a French writer published an article in an American magazine entitled, "The Forgotten Communist Threat."¹⁴ The writer gave the following reasons for Communism being ignored: 1) The fall of the Nazi regime in Germany led to full disclosure of its crimes, giving the public a more comprehensive understanding; 2) During World War II, western democracies joined hands with the Soviet Union in an effort to more quickly defeat the Nazis, and thereby became less inclined to criticize communism; 3) The Jewish people have been assiduous and highly effective in exposing the crimes of the Nazis.

The writer further observed that socialist countries such as the Soviet Union and China had been successful in drawing clear distinctions between socialism and capitalism. According to this division, Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and Japan were all considered capitalist countries, and as a result the United States also came to be considered a fascist country. I can personally attest that from childhood I was taught that the U.S. was a fascist country.

In addition, communist autocracy destroyed civil society and exterminated or neutralized the intellectual elite. Likewise in China, intellectuals do not like to lie, but they do so almost unconsciously. That's because everyone knows that in China there are two kinds of speech. One is what you say at home, and the other is what you say at work or in public, and the two are completely different. In public you will naturally lie, and that explains the public utterances of China's intellectuals.

Finally, the writer noted that overlooking communism helped intensify memories of Nazism, while recollections of Nazism were counterproductive to recalling the wrongs of communism. I believe his analysis is very reasonable, and it goes back to the topic of today's discussion. We need to clearly recognize that this communist society still carries the threat of fascism, and that the combination of fascism and communism can easily engender the seeds of war.

Only eradication of despotism can bring world peace

In the history of Chinese Communism, it seems that there has been one leader and one military general expressing the greatest interest in nuclear war. The leader was Mao Zedong, and the general is Zhu Chenghu. Mao once said, "Nuclear war is no big deal. It would only cause the deaths of 300 to 400 million people." In his mind, these 300 to 400 million people were only a statistic, not human beings of flesh and blood. This is another example of the conviction among those who advocate nuclear war that they themselves will not be among the fatalities. Likewise, among those "angry young men" who are always spouting off on the Web sites about fighting Taiwan, it can be certain that they themselves don't expect to do the fighting. This is an interesting cultural phenomenon of Chinese communism; Chinese communists like to describe others as "verbal revolutionaries," but in fact they themselves are classic

verbal revolutionaries. The war they supposedly waged against the Japanese occupation 60 years ago was a typical example of that kind of verbal revolution.

For that reason, I believe that while we here today commemorate China's victory over Japan and over fascism, we must ensure that we never forget the even more formidable responsibility that people in our generation continue to face: that is the existence of Chinese communism, its tendency toward fascism, and the possibility that it will kindle a war. For that reason, we must do all in our power to eradicate despotic rule around the globe before there can be any hope of world peace.

Translated by Stacy Mosher

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NOTES

1. *Guangxi wenge dashi nianbiao*, Guangxi Renmin Chubanshe, 1990.
2. See Wu Ruoyu "Zhonggong jimi wenjian jilude wenge Guangxi datusha," *Beijing Spring* (August 2003). See also Song Yongyi, ed., *Masacres During the Cultural Revolution (Wenge datusa)*, Open Magazine Publishing (HK), 2002.
3. Cheng Yi, *Hongse jilanbei*, CTS Culture Enterprises, Taipei, 1993. Published in English as *Scarlet Memorial: Tales of Cannibalism in Modern China* (Westview Press, 1996).
4. *Wenhua dageming sujuku*, (Hong Kong Chinese University Press, 2002).
5. Zeng Qinghong has been vice president of the P.R.C. since 2003.
6. Su Duosou, *Zeng Shan zhuan*, Jiangxi Renmin Chubanshe, 2003
7. Mao referred to Mao Zedong Thought as the third milestone in world revolution after Marxism and Leninism.
8. Yang Meihong (Yang Jianjun), *Wo zai miangong shiwu nian*, (Hong Kong: Cosmos Publishing Ltd., 2001).
9. Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, October 2005) See the book review elsewhere in this issue of CRF.
10. Major General Zhu Chenghu is the dean of the Defense Affairs Institute for China's National Defense University of the People's Liberation Army. Speaking at an official briefing in July 2005, Zhu advocated the use of nuclear weapons against the U.S. "if Americans draw their missiles and position-guided ammunition on to the target zone on China's territory" in a conflict over Taiwan. Although Zhu stressed that his comments reflected his personal views, he was the first high-ranking Chinese military official in the past ten years to raise the possibility of using nuclear weapons against the U.S. See Joseph Kahn op cit. "Chinese General Threatens Use of A-Bombs if U.S. Intrudes," *The New York Times*, July 15, 2005.
11. Stephane Courtois, ed., *Le livre noir de Communisme*, (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1997); published in English as *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
12. Published in Chinese as *Diguozhuyi shi zibenzhuyi de zui gao jieduan*, Renmin Chubanshe, 1974.
13. This was in a two-week border war in 1979 in which tens of thousands of Chinese and Vietnamese soldiers died.
14. See Hu Ping, "Gongchan zhuyi yu Zhongguo," *Beijing Spring*, No. 5 and No. 19, 1999.