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A SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT: OVERSEAS ELECTRONIC RESOURCES ON CHINESE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

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Abstract: The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) represents a highly tragic and complex chapter in contemporary Chinese history. Many scholars have called for the establishment of a Cultural Revolution Museum to preserve a nation's memories, but because of government censorship, there is currently no real possibility of building such a museum in China. However, with the help of modern technology, overseas Chinese scholars and librarians have recently accomplished two major museum-like projects, namely, The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database CD-ROM and The Virtual Museum of the Cultural Revolution. This paper focuses on how modern technology has provided many scholarly opportunities to enhance librarianship, including the promotion of the free flow of information and facilitation of battles against government censorship.

The 21st Century is marked by fast growing modern technology that provides many scholarly opportunities to enhance librarianship. Today more than ever librarians as information specialists ought to undertake difficult tasks by using computerized technology, including the strong promotion of free flow of information and facilitation of battles against government censorship. Based on two crucial achievements in the field of recent Cultural Revolution studies, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database CD-ROM* and the "The Chinese Cultural Revolution Virtual Museum," this paper has made it crystal clear that the utilization of modern technology can play a vital role in preserving true history and a nation's collective memories.

Filling Crucial Gaps to Build up a Nation's Memories

The Cultural Revolution that took place in China from 1966 to 1976 represents a highly significant and complex chapter not only in contemporary Chinese history, but in world history as well. The late John King Fairbank (1987), a distinguished Sinologist, once noted the Cultural Revolution's "surprises, scale, impact, and complexity." He stated that "At any rate, the Cultural Revolution will be studied from many angles for a long time to come." There is indeed little doubt that the impact and complexity of the Cultural Revolution that Fairbank refers to "will be studied from many angles for a long time to come."

First of all, the Cultural Revolution was a historical tragedy. Initiated by Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) because of internal strife within the CCP, this so-called "Revolution" claimed the lives of millions of innocent Chinese and inflicted excruciating pain on hundreds of millions of others and their families. In addition, the Cultural Revolution resulted in disregard for and a decline of education as well as the total collapse of all basic standards of decency and of a civilized society. It also irreparably damaged China's age-old cultural heritage and civilization. In view of this, as early as 1986 the renowned Chinese writer Ba Jin called for the establishment of a "Cultural Revolution Museum," because he believes that the survivors of the Cultural Revolution have an obligation to "make sure that future generations will forever remember the painful lessons during those ten years". Unfortunately, for various reasons, the Chinese government has ignored this proposal and allowed the memory of the Cultural Revolution to fade away. Ba Jin's call for the establishment of a "Cultural Revolution Museum" in mainland China, where such a museum would be most fitting, will likely remain an impossible dream during his lifetime.¹

The Cultural Revolution also changed the entire political and economic landscape of contemporary China. When Mao Zedong and the CCP disastrously pushed their erroneous political philosophy and ideology to the

¹ In May of 2005, the first Cultural Revolution Museum was established in Santou city, Guangdong Province by some local people. However, this is a small regional museum that neither addresses the fundamental causes of the Cultural Revolution and nor fits Ba Jin's original design for such a museum.

extreme, anyone left with any common sense must have readily realized the madness and absurdity of the official doctrines imposed upon them. This was one of the reasons why the post-Cultural Revolution CCP leaders were compelled to adopt the reform policies and to open up China to the outside world. It is also an established fact that the widespread skepticism toward Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought that began during the Cultural Revolution provided an important impetus for the democratic movements during the post-Cultural Revolution era in China. For all of the above reasons, it is clear that the role of the Cultural Revolution in contemporary Chinese history over the past half a century merits serious study.

It has been nearly thirty years since the end of the Cultural Revolution. An interesting situation has evolved surrounding the study of the Cultural Revolution as a research subject both inside and outside of China. On the one hand, there is the phenomenon of the “inexhaustible Cultural Revolution,” i.e., the Cultural Revolution has become an enduring popular research topic the world over. It is estimated that, in the thirty years between 1966 and 1996, about 7,000 titles were published on the Cultural Revolution throughout the world in various languages (Song, 1998). On the other hand, there is the phenomenon of the “forbidden Cultural Revolution,” i.e., the Cultural Revolution as an independent research subject remains a taboo in mainland China.

Despite this ban, scholars and writers in mainland China are combating such government censorship by penning memoirs and reports, among other writings. Yet Cultural Revolution researchers both inside and outside China are still faced with many challenges. Chief among them is the lack of original historical materials and the absence of a mechanism to collect, organize, and archive the vast amounts of original historical materials systematically. An abundance of publications, both official and unofficial, appeared during the Cultural Revolution, but there has been no open access to such materials in any Chinese libraries in the post-Cultural Revolution China. On the other hand, a great many valuable Cultural Revolution resources in the hands of private collectors and researchers, both inside and outside of China, cannot reach their full research potential because of the lack of a resource-sharing mechanism. There exist widespread factual errors, distortions of truth, and even a research vacuum due to the lack of primary historical sources, thus greatly hampering the study of this significant research area.

Since building a database or a virtual museum for the Cultural Revolution is an extremely difficult task inside China, some overseas Chinese scholars and librarians have taken the initiative to undertake these tasks. By a fortunate coincidence, not long after the end of the Cultural Revolution, computer network technology became mature enough to provide the technical basis for a huge “database” or “museum” built in the virtual space of network. It was with a view to summing up the historical lessons, disclosing the historical truth, and promoting the study of this important historical subject that the first “Virtual Museum of the Cultural Revolution” was inaugurated in 1996 by a group of Chinese students in North America through their famed website *Chinese News Digest* (*Hua xia wen zhai*). Several similar websites on the Internet during the past decade have come and gone, but only the “Virtual Museum of the Cultural Revolution” has withstood the test of time and undergone stable and successful development. It is also the sole “Virtual Museum of the Cultural Revolution” on the Internet. The editor of this virtual museum is Dr. Xinmin Hua, a senior scientist from the Washington D.C. area.

Two years later, in 1998, seven mainland China scholars and librarians now living in North America and one Taiwan scholar established the Editorial Board of the *Chinese Cultural Revolution CD-ROM Database*, thus inaugurating a monumental compilation and archival project for Cultural Revolution-related historical materials. They are Mr. Yongyi Song, Dr. Zheng Ding, Dr. Yuan Zhou, Dr. Zhijia Shen, Dr. Jian Guo, Prof. Zehao Zhou, Dr. Youqin Wang and Dr. Shiyu Shih. The goal of this project was to build a professional and scholarly database for the scholarly community of China studies and millions of common Chinese people. Their work soon won strong support from many scholars in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China. The Universities Service Centre for China Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong has become a partner in this project.

During a four-year period from 1998 to 2002, members of the Editorial Board visited Asian libraries throughout the world, collected a myriad of materials from private collectors, and salvaged untold amounts of original written materials. After professional editing and proofreading of millions of official

and unofficial documents, the editors collectively produced the CD-ROM database comprised of nearly ten thousand documents. This Database was published at the end of 2002 by the Chinese University of Hong Kong and soon sold about 250 copies to libraries all over the world including China. It is the only Database of this kind in the world to date, and it significantly helps fill the gap in the field of Cultural Revolution studies.

Preserving True History in the Multi-Functional CD-ROM Database

The materials in the CD-ROM database consist of only primary sources. Although some materials were published after the Cultural Revolution, they were closely related to the Cultural Revolution and were therefore also included. Sources such as memoirs and interviews are not included. Consisting of nearly 30 million words, this database is made up of the following sections:

Part I: *CCP Documents, Directives, and Bulletins concerning the Cultural Revolution.*

Part II: *Mao Zedong's Speeches, Directives, and Writings concerning the Cultural Revolution.*

Part III: *Lin Biao's Speeches, Directives, and Writings concerning the Cultural Revolution.*

Part IV: *Speeches, Instructions, and Other Writings by CCP Leaders during the Cultural Revolution.*

Part V: *Important Newspaper and Magazine Editorials and Articles concerning the Cultural Revolution.*

Part VI: *Important Documents of the Red Guards and the Mass Movement during the Cultural Revolution.*

Part VII: *Important Documents of Heterodox Thoughts during the Cultural Revolution.*

To facilitate the retrieval of the information included in this database, the materials are indexed in both English and Chinese. However, the entire body of literature is not yet available in English owing to the vast quantity of the literature and the overwhelming amount of resources that would be required to translate it into English.

In terms of the interface of this CD-ROM database, it was designed exactly like a traditional open book. The left-frame seems at first sight just a "Table of Contents," and the right-frame looks like full-text pages of each chapter as the search starts. However, thanks to Web technology, a further detailed table of contents for each section arranged by dates will be automatically opened on the right-frame when a user continues to click the sub-section (folder) on the left-frame (see Figures 1 and 2). If a user selects a particular date, e.g., "Mao Zedong's speeches in 1966" (see Figure 2), he/she will be able to view immediately in the right-frame a list of Mao's speeches in 1966 available in the Database. At the bottom of the right-frame, it also indicates there are sixty speeches from 1966 housed in the Database.

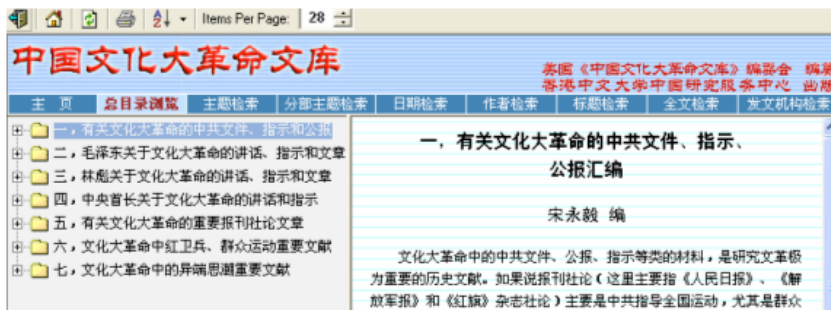


Figure 1 The interface of the CD-ROM Database



Figure 2 Function of left and right frames

The historical materials included in this database would amount to hundreds of print volumes, creating serious storage problems. However, the advent of computerized technology makes it possible to condense these materials into a compact disk, searchable by “author,” “title,” “time,” and “keyword.” In terms of the multi-searching functions, it can be said that modern technology has helped to create this “Cultural Revolution Museum,” an invaluable resource for both academic research and archival purposes. These kinds of convenient searching functions not only give results promptly, but also they also provide a historical overview about a person or an event and even trace the history of a popular slogan.

An example of the latter is a search for the phrase “A handful in the army” (see Figure 3) through “Keyword Search.” When a user puts the phrase into the box of “Full-text Search (by keywords),” the right-frame will give a tally of 78 documents in the Database: the first two appear in Zhou Enlai’s speech in 1966 and 1968 and an Editorial of the *People’s Daily* entitled “Warmly respond to Chairman Mao’s great call and celebrate the establishment of the new CMC CRG” on Jan. 13, 1967. Apparently, this phrase was created by the CCP with the approval of its top leader Mao. It is worth noting, however, that the frequent-usage period for the phrase in CCP documents is the duration of the “Wuhan Incident” in July and August of 1967. From these documents, users also discover that it was Mao who made an about-face by criticizing this phrase in September 1967 during his inspection tour in the provinces. After that, the phrase was soon turned into a reactionary slogan denounced by all CCP’s documents in several political campaigns later, such as the “Campaign to Eliminate the May Sixteenth Clique” in 1970s and the “Campaign to Clear up the Three Kinds of People” in 1980s to suppress rebels. After reading the list of documents, a researcher could easily conclude that those political campaigns were caused by totally contradictory policies of Mao and the CCP. However, they turned thousands of ordinary people into victims.

主 页	总目录浏览	主题检索	分部主题检索	日期检索	作者检索	标题检索	全文检索	发文机构检索
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全文检索

军内一小撮

与 / AND

(检索所需时间较长)

[提交](#) [重置](#)

检索词：是文库所收文章的内容里的任意一个连续部份。例如：“文化大革命的**决定**”和“**毛泽东思想**”都是内容“……贯彻执行中共中央关于无产阶级文化大革命的**决定**，更高地举起毛泽东思想……”的检索词。
使用“YYYY.MM.DD”或“YYYY.MM”的格式，还可检索日期。如“1966.08”可检出该月的文献，“1966.08.02”则可检出该日的文献。利用“与”的功能，再加一个检索词，也可检出同该日期及检索词有关的文章。

1. 周恩来六六至六八年有关江苏省文化革命的部分讲话	1966.10.6
2. 热烈响应毛主席的伟大号召，祝贺新的全军文革小组成立	1967.1.13
3. 从政治上思想上彻底打倒党内一小撮走资本主义道路当权派	1967.7.22
4. 北京支持你们！	1967.7.26
5. 乘胜前进——祝武汉地区无产阶级革命派夺取更大的新胜利	1967.7.27
6. 中共中央、国务院、中央军委、中央文革小组给武汉市革命……	1967.7.27
7. 革命的新生力量所向无敌——再祝武汉地区无产阶级革命派……	1967.7.28
8. 受蒙蔽无罪反戈一击有功	1967.7.28
9. 向武汉的广大革命群众致敬！	1967.7.28
10. 坚决同武汉地区无产阶级革命派战斗在一起	1967.7.29
11. 千万不要忘记阶级斗争！——大家都来关心国家大事	1967.7.29
12. 沿着毛主席的无产阶级革命路线乘胜前进	1967.7.29
13. 老鼠过街，人人喊打！	1967.7.30
14. 武汉无产阶级革命派大团结万岁！	1967.7.30
15. 新的考验	1967.7.30
16. 再论受蒙蔽无罪，反戈一击有功	1967.7.30
17. 周恩来粟裕吴德在科学院革委会成立大会上的讲话	1967.7.30
18. 紧急通告	1967.7.31
19. 无产阶级必须牢牢掌握枪杆子——纪念中国人民解放军建军……	1967.7.31
20. 向人民的主要敌人猛烈开火（一九六七年第十二期社论）	1967.7.31
21. 毛主席为我们撑腰，我们要为毛主席争气	1967.8.2
22. 四·一四思潮必胜——给河南造总一战友的一封信	1967.8.3
23. 高举“拥军爱民”的伟大旗帜	1967.8.4
24. 王力对湖北日报长江日报的指示	1967.8.4
25. 中央首长在武汉革命派组织的座谈会上的谈话纪要	1967.8.9
26. 论无产阶级文化大革命的最高形式仍然是武装夺取政权（摘……	1967.8.10
27. 中央首长在对学生代表的讲话	1967.8.11
28. 陈伯达康生江青接见“三军”党委时的指示	1967.8.17

(1 - 28/78) [1] 2 3

Figure 3 Keyword search of a particular phrase

Another major feature of the Database is that the editors created their own subject heading system for “Subject Search.” The Database could not follow Library of Congress Subject Heading system (LCSH) simply because there is only one LC subject heading for the Cultural Revolution, i.e., [China -- History -- Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976](#). Instead, the editors created 54 subject headings on most important persons, events, and fields during the Cultural Revolution (see Figure 4). By using the Web technology, a user only needs to click on those subject headings to obtain all materials in the Database related to this theme. This powerful function provides a very convenient way to gather many documents for users who may focus on one proposed topic.

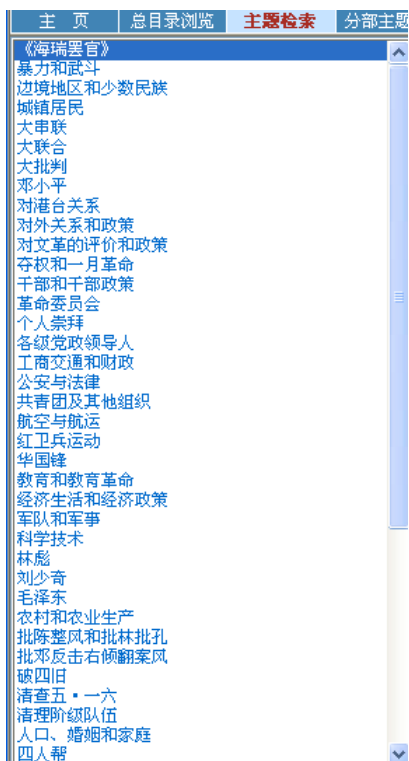


Figure 4 Editors created 54 subject headings on their own

Furthermore, the Database contains a unique “Date Search” function that affords users a chronological view of the decade long turbulence. For instance, if a user selects a particular date in the left-frame, the right-frame will immediately provide important CCP documents, CCP leaders’ speeches, *People’s Daily* editorials and big character posts issued on that particular day (see Figure 5). Thus, it has painted a vivid but detailed picture of the whole tumultuous decade if a user glances over the Database day by day.

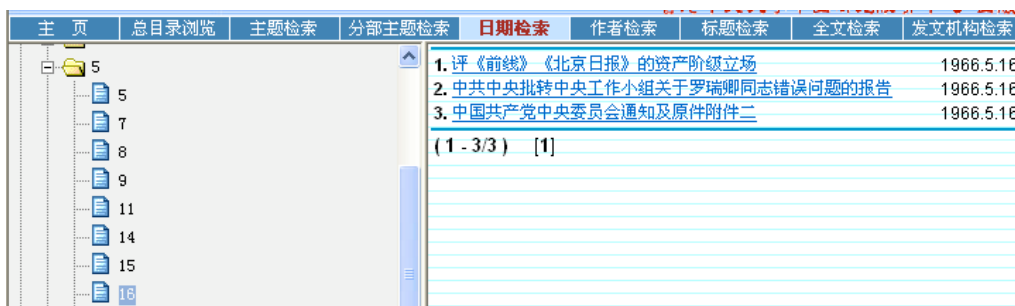


Figure 5 Result of “Data Searching” on May 16, 1966

Another value of the Database is that it furnishes current and future researchers and scholars with the most convenient ways to utilize substantial primary sources. The Database was universally hailed by scholars worldwide, such as Professor Andrew Walder (2002), Professor Yu Yingshi (2002), Dr. Jonathan Unger (2002), Dr. Michael Schoenhals (2003) and Dr. Warren Sun (2003) as “an extraordinary achievement” and “a monumental reference tool” for the Cultural Revolution, when it first emerged in 2002.

Breaking Through Government Censorship through the Internet

Whereas the CD-ROM format of *Chinese Cultural Revolution Database* was created by professionals, the “Virtual Museum of the Cultural Revolution” is a website built by volunteers who have used web technology to digitize its collection. In terms of contents, most documents in the “Virtual Museum of the Cultural Revolution” are published research articles, which differs from the first-hand archives in the Database. However, this website has its own meaningful future for the Cultural Revolution studies as it is the first website entirely devoted to collecting and exhibiting historical materials and commentaries related to that chaotic decade.

The first important feature of this virtual museum is its multi-format of collections. In the words of the editor of the museum, Dr. Xinmin Hua (2002), “The aim is to collect and preserve any format of Cultural Revolution-related historical materials before a physical Cultural Revolution Museum is built in the future.”² This general goal gives the website great flexibility to house a variety of materials, including historical pictures, research papers and even books. Taking a glance of this virtual museum (<http://museums.cnd.org/CR/>), one could find it sorted into eight “Exhibition Areas.” These exhibition areas are (1) “Documents and Sources,” (2) “Research and Studies,” (3) “In Search of History,” (4) “Personal Narratives,” (5) “The Sent Down Generation,” (6) “Echoes from Overseas,” (7) “Celebrities of Revolution,” and (8) “Literature and Artistic Works.” (See Figure 6) In addition, newly collected articles are published in “Cultural Revolution Museum Bulletin” (see Figure 7) once or twice a month as supplement issues of the *Chinese News Digest*. These new items, while being posted to respective exhibition areas in the museum, are also listed in the museum’s “New Collections” area, to keep visitors updated.



Figure 6 Interface of Virtual Museum of the “Cultural Revolution”

Since 2003, the museum has also housed historical photos of the Cultural Revolution, which to date number around 200 (see Figure 8).

² Hue, Xinmin, “An Introduction to the Virtual Cultural Revolution Museum,” *The 53rd Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies*, Washington D.C. April 7, 2002.



Figure 7 Issue no. 282 of the Cultural Revolution Museum Bulletin

文革图片资料

10 items in this album on 2 pages [slideshow]

Gallery: [CND图片资料](#)

▶ ◀ 1 2 ◦ ▶▶

 <p>Album: 重大事件和历史文件</p> <p>Changed: May 29, 2005. Contains: 21 items. Viewed: 1988 times.</p>	 <p>Album: 红卫兵运动</p> <p>Changed: Jun 26, 2004. Contains: 24 items. Viewed: 2257 times.</p>	 <p>Album: 造反有理</p> <p>Changed: Jun 03, 2004. Contains: 25 items. Viewed: 4061 times.</p>
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Figure 8 Photo collection in the Cultural Revolution Virtual Museum

Another principal feature of the museum is its circulation and communication method, i.e. it utilizes e-mail to deliver its Bulletin to subscribers worldwide and allows visitors to download any content of the museum in some FTP-sites. Up to now, the museum exhibits over 1,000 titles of articles containing nearly 8 million Chinese characters. Since 1996, the museum has successfully delivered 284 issues of “Cultural Revolution Museum Bulletin” to its tens of thousands of subscribers, mainly in mainland China. For daily visitors of the website, it has reached 150 people per day on average, and around 60,000 yearly. There is no doubt that technology has provided a cutting-edge weapon for breaking through Chinese government censorship on this sensitive topic.

Last but not least, as the Internet becomes more and more accessible to the Chinese people, the editors of the virtual museum have received more and more contributions from researchers inside mainland China. The virtual museum, particularly its Bulletin, has turned a simple digest into a real online journal for the publications of many articles that are banned in mainland China. It matters very much for this transition because this newly established platform has greatly encouraged the Chinese scholars in their struggle for academic freedom. It has also produced a noteworthy increase of the contributors from inside China, who

not only include the representatives of a younger generation of Cultural Revolution researchers, but also attract more and more well-known scholars. The long list of authors include Professor Wang Nianyi, a senior researcher in the PLA on the Cultural Revolution and author of the well known book *The Years of Great Chaos*, Mr. He Shu, a famous expert on CCP's history in Sichuan Province, Professor Tang Shaojie, a scholar at Tsinghua University, and Professor Yin Hongbiao at Beijing University. Because of the vast space the online journal is capable of providing, the Bulletin often carries long personal narratives and memoirs in installments. An example of this was the personal memoirs of Mr. Zhou Ziren, who was an editor of an important Red Guard tabloid in the city of Chongqing during the Cultural Revolution. His memoirs very truthfully reflected the life and thoughts of college students in that turbulent decade.

Having analyzed how modern technology has assumed increasing prominence in the Cultural Revolution studies, the key to any successful future undertaking is the ability to keep abreast of the fast growing technology. It seems, fortunately, that the scholars and librarians who were and are still working on either the CD-ROM Database or the Virtual Museum fully recognize this trend. The editors of the CD-ROM Database will publish a new Web-version database with an addition of nearly 2,000 new documents in spring 2006. The Virtual Museum will also develop its new photo and relic collections in the near future.

Despite the passage of time and CCP's attempts to conceal the facts and discourage Cultural Revolution studies both inside China and overseas, the Chinese people's memories of the Cultural Revolution remain fresh. Their interest in the Cultural Revolution studies has not abated. Many in China as well as overseas today believe that efforts to uncover the facts about the Cultural Revolution will help move political reform and democracy forward in China. Those who don't remember the past are condemned to repeat it. Thus, the benefits of involving the modern technology such as CD-ROM Database and websites in the effort to document the Cultural Revolution are manifold and substantial. They provide significant mechanisms to help strengthen people's collective memories, preserve the truth about the Cultural Revolution, and gain deep and fresh insights into contemporary Chinese history as well as current events in China.

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