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**Build Up Collective Memories of Mao's Era:
Databases of Contemporary Chinese Political Campaigns, 1949-1976:
A Project Report**

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In 1998, four Chinese Librarians and three scholars (Yongyi Song, Yuan Zhou, Zhijia Shen, and Zehao Zhou; Guo Jian, Ding Shu and Wang Youqin), along with some scholars from Taiwan and Mainland China, embarked on the construction of an archival series project titled *Databases of Contemporary Chinese Political Campaigns, 1949-1976*. Sixteen years later and with much hard work, this monumental historical project has finally been completed with the publication of the last database in the series titled *Database of Chinese Political Campaigns: from Land Reform to State-Private Joint Ownership*. To date, the database series has collected a total of 32,000 original archival documents with approximately 107,460,000 Chinese characters. Among them, CCP Party and internal documents account for about forty percent. Readers can review the following chart to understand the process of the database's creation over the past sixteen years:

Database Title	Publication Dates	Current Edition	No. of Original Documents
<i>The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database: 1966-1976</i>	2002 (First edition) —2014	Third	6,748
<i>The Chinese Anti-Rightist Campaign Database, 1957-</i>	2010 (First edition) —2013	Second	10,101
<i>The Chinese Great Leap Forward Great Famine Database, 1958-1962</i>	2013 (First edition) —2014	Second	6,024
<i>Database of Chinese Political Campaigns: from Land Reform to State-Private Joint Ownership, 1949-1956</i>	Forthcoming: End of 2014	First	9,072

Today, we can claim without any exaggeration that this historical series is the first and the largest database in the world on the history of political movements during the Mao Zedong era. It is a completely electronic database series that makes full use of the latest technologies in library and information science. As such, new sources are added on a monthly basis and large updates will be made annually.

Unlike traditional print publications, the databases in the series are searchable in both Chinese and English by subject, date, author, title, and keyword. They are also searchable by place, organization, and allow easy toggling between Chinese and English. With the development of eBooks and cell phone technology, we are also collaborating with the Mirror Publisher to produce hundreds of eBooks as part of *The Series on the History of the People's Republic of China* in order to reveal the "national history" to more people, especially the younger generation.



Figure 1: The online version of the database series ([http:// http://ccrd.usc.cuhk.edu.hk](http://ccrd.usc.cuhk.edu.hk))

The initial impetus for embarking on this historic project was our desire to facilitate research on the Cultural Revolution for the academic community outside of China. As members of China studies and library circles, the editors were well aware of the paucity of original sources for studying the Cultural Revolution. This was due in part to the Chinese government's stranglehold on sensitive archival documents and in part to the lack of scholars outside China who were committed to such a historical project. As survivors of the Cultural Revolution who pursued advanced education in the United States and considering most of us came to work in the library field, we felt called to take on this project. Thus the first database was conceived and born: *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database: 1966-1976* was published in 2002. It was not only our sense of duty but also our conscience that compelled us to expand the historical project to the Anti-Rightist Campaign, Great Leap Forward-Great Famine, and even the Land Reform and the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries.

In the process of selecting and compiling nearly 7,000 original documents for the database on the Cultural Revolution, we were astounded by the vicious repetitiveness and consistency of the Chinese political movements throughout the Mao Zedong era. For instance, in the files on the massacre of the so-called "Landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, and bad elements" in Guangxi and the Dao county in Hunan province, it is not difficult to notice that the massacre strongly recalls the practices of the Land Reform in the early PRC in both content and form. The hair-raising "Highest Court of the Poor and Lower-Middle Peasants" during the Cultural Revolution was practically a reoccurrence of the "People's Court" during the Land Reform—an "on-site execution" rally, followed by the announcement of a verdict and the brutal slaying of the victims. It is worth noting that, before such executions, the executioners during the Cultural Revolution would often force the victims to turn in their "portable properties," by giving them the false information that it was in keeping with the "Land Reform policy" of giving

up a one's money in order to save his life. Likewise, after slaughtering the victims, the perpetrators would never forget the Land Reform tradition of dividing up all the "portable properties" of the victims, including the young females from these families. If there is any difference between the Cultural Revolution and Land Reform, it is the fact that the perpetrators during the Cultural Revolution could no longer get any land from the victims as their land had already been nationalized in the name of "agricultural cooperativization." All these findings have helped us realize that by limiting our historical archival project to just the Cultural Revolution, we would not be able to provide information about the interconnections among various historical events and consequently fail to illustrate all facets of the political movements in contemporary Chinese history.

The history of contemporary China is also a history of political movements. Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party used unending political movements as the primary form and means of ruling and managing the country. On the one hand, the regime tried to acquire short-term efficiency in ruling the country by eschewing legal institutions and due process of the law. Operationally, on the other hand, the regime used the absolute power and authority of its leader and the Party Central Committee to launch top-down, large-scale violent mass movements, often with limited and short-term effectiveness but which caused chronic disruptions of social order. For instance, Mao Zedong launched the Three Antis Movement in early 1952 in order to address the increasingly serious problem of corruption within the party. This raging mass movement succeeded in hunting down several million big or small "tigers" and led to the public executions of nearly 50 senior party officials. While corruption within the party at that time was somewhat reined in, other forms of corruption began to emerge. Consequently, Mao launched a "New Three Antis Movement" in early 1953 to prevent the new corruption.

Likewise, there is the frequent reoccurrence of political movements with the same name. From 1950 till the late Cultural Revolution (e.g., The Campaign against Lin Biao and Confucius), the "rectification campaign" was an ongoing campaign despite the fact that the quality and public image of the party got progressively worse as the rectification campaigns went on. To give another example, at least three rounds of the "Three Antis Movement" and two rounds of "Five Antis Movement" were launched during the Mao Zedong era. Aside from the aforementioned "Three Antis Movement" and "New Three Antis Movement" in 1952-1953, Mao Zedong in early 1960 launched yet another "Three Antis Movement" that was identical to the earlier ones (anti-corruption, anti-waste, and anti-bureaucratism), although it tapered off without much impact.

Of the two rounds of "Five Antis Movement," the one launched in 1952 targeted national bourgeoisie and refers to the campaign against "bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating on government contracts, and stealing of economic information." The one launched in March 1963 spread across the country and refers to the campaign against "embezzlement and theft, speculation, extravagance and waste, decentralization, and bureaucratism." These continuous repetitive political movements never truly addressed even once rampant corruption and factionalism within the party. Instead, they were predestined, as it were, to lead the country towards even larger and more

comprehensive and radical campaigns such as the Four Clean-up Campaign and the Cultural Revolution.

Yet another reason for us to go beyond the Cultural Revolution Database to cover archival sources on all political movements during the Mao era was our astonishment at not only the sheer enormity of the number of political movements, but also their amazing frequency and the unprecedented cruelty and the humanitarian disasters that resulted. In terms of the number of political campaigns, for instance, Mao Zedong and the Party Central Committee launched over forty political campaigns just in the years between 1949 and 1956 in the initial phase of the PRC, including grain requisition, rent reduction, bandit eradication, crackdown on local tyrants, Land Reform, Resist America Aid Korea, suppression of counterrevolutionaries, ideological remolding, the Three Antis Movement, criticism of the "Story of Wuxun," unified purchase and sales of grain, and agricultural cooperativization.

In other words, in just the first six years of the early People's Republic of China, there were on average six to seven political campaigns a year. While many of them occurred in the economic and non-political arenas, it must be pointed out that everything was politicized during the Mao Zedong era and carried out in the form of stormy political campaigns.



Figure 2: CD version (cover) of *Database of Chinese Political Campaigns: from Land Reform to State-Private Joint Ownership, 1949-1956*

The over 30,000 archival documents included in this database series serve to reveal and remind people of the historical truth that has fallen into oblivion. For instance, the Land Reform is widely viewed as the first political campaign after the CCP took over power in rural China. The fact of the matter is that the “Grain Requisition Campaign” in the “newly liberated areas” was the true first political campaign in rural China. From 1949 to early 1950, the CCP launched a large-scale “Grain Requisition Campaign” that covered nearly two-thirds of these areas. Ignoring the fact that the previous Kuomintang regime had already levied a whole year’s grain tax in these areas, the new regime forced peasants to pay one extra year’s public grain. The grain tax for well-to-do peasants and so-called “big households” increased by as much as two-hundred to three-hundred per cent.

In the three provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan, where Deng Xiaoping was in charge, the government adopted the drastic approach of “armed grain requisition” to deal with a discontented public, which resulted in famine. Such oppressive government measures triggered large-scale incidents of people resisting grain requisition. Even some former members of the Kuomintang military personnel who had already defected to and joined the communist side also participated in the resistance movement. Despite the fact that quite a few party documents revealed reflections on and attempts to correct these drastic measures, all members of the public who participated in this resistance movement were treated as “counterrevolutionaries” and persecuted either in the wake of the resistance or during the subsequent campaigns to “eradicate bandits” and “crack down on local tyrants.” Anyone who has read the nearly one-hundred original documents on the “grain requisition movement” in this database series will notice that the failure of the CCP’s rural policy began with the “Grain Requisition Campaign” before the Land Reform, rather than during the periods of the People’s Communes and Agricultural Cooperativization.

Notwithstanding the tens of millions of victims of myriad political movements, the Chinese Communist Party has been consistently illusive about the specific numbers of victims. Take, for example, the “Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries” of 1951-1953. The general public has a rough idea from the currently published historical documents that the percentage of the population that Mao Zedong had designated for execution was one-thousandth of the total population, or between 450,000 to 500,000 people. However, according to the CCP leaders’ acknowledgement, the actual number of executed people was around 700,000, or over 200,000 more than popularly perceived. On July 1, 1955, the Ministry of Public Security in its document titled “Outline of the plan for arresting counterrevolutionary elements and criminals of all kinds across the country between 1955 and 1958” acknowledges the following: “During the three-year Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries, a total of 3,585,432 people were arrested and 753,275 people were executed.” The same document also acknowledges that this campaign did not really stop in 1953, as indicated by the following notation: “The total number of people executed was 765,761 people by the end of the first quarter of 1955.”

In the top-secret telegram that Mao dispatched to the heads of major districts on April 20, 1951 titled “Instructions on the ratio of killings,” one will notice that the actual rate of executions had risen to two-thousandth of the population. Based on the estimated Chinese

population in early PRC of around 450,000,000 to 500,000,000, there should have been approximately 900,000 to 1,000,000 “counterrevolutionaries” who were executed.

It must be pointed out that the nearly one million victims were those who were formally tried and then executed by the public security agencies. They do not include those who were tortured to death while in detention or were extrajudicially killed or forced to commit suicide during mass movements. According to statistics from the document “Report of the Southwest Public Security Bureau on the basic situation concerning the suppression of counterrevolutionaries in the Southwest eight months after the Fourth National Public Security Conference and suggestions for the future” dated July 21, 1951, “23,000 people were executed.” However, the same document notes that “the number of those who were previously targeted but not arrested and then died from diseases or through suicides was approximately 25,000.” In other words, the number of unnatural deaths in many places was actually higher than the number of official executions. The total number of victims of the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries could be as high as two million.

For over a decade, the editors of the database series have read, selected, and compiled tens of thousands of archival documents with mixed feelings of anguish, horror, and disbelief. These documents have recorded the ordeals that the Chinese people went through during those political movements: myriad persecutions, suicides, murders, as well as spouses turning on each other and parents and children hurting each other. In addition to causing endless incarcerations and deaths, these political movements were also responsible for the “Great Famine,” an unprecedented disaster in thousands years of Chinese history that forced tens of millions of peasants to sell their children, flee their hometowns for survival, engage in cannibalism, die from famine, and litter the fields with their corpses. No matter how absurd and laughable these incomprehensible “movements” may seem from today’s perspective, our conscience as scholars of Chinese descent compelled us to objectively preserve these historical documents through this database series so as to provide an opportunity for people today and people tomorrow to learn from history. As such, the significance of this database series is elevated from simply benefiting academic research to the preservation of the collective memory of a people and revelations of historical truth. The Mao Zedong era marked the most disastrous years in Chinese history. It happened half a century ago, but it is not that far behind us. At a time when Mao Zedong is still hailed as a hero by the powers-that-be in China, the tragic repeat of history is not impossible.

Our hope is that the database will make a contribution not only to the study of contemporary Chinese history, but also to the preservation of collective national memory and drawing lessons from history.

Library of California State University, Los Angeles, December, 2014