

Consuming Counterrevolution: The Ritual and Culture of Cannibalism in Wuxuan, Guangxi, China, May to July 1968

DONALD S. SUTTON

Carnegie Mellon University

People are eating each other, came the message from southern Guangxi to Peking in the early summer of 1968, as the violent phase of the Cultural Revolution was drawing to a close. When militia reinforcements arrived in Wuxuan, parts of decomposing corpses still festooned the town center (Zheng 1993:2–3). No proper investigation was conducted, however, for this was a county in which order had already been imposed and the rebels had been crushed. Only in 1981–83, long after the Gang of Four had collapsed, was an investigation team sent into the county. It compiled a list of those eaten and a number of the ringleaders in cannibalism. Fifteen were jailed, and 130 Party members and cadres were disciplined. The Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region announced the expulsion from the Party of all who had eaten human flesh.¹ But the regulations were withdrawn quickly for fear that the document would be slipped out to Hong Kong and reveal this episode of cannibalism to the world (Zheng 1993:52).

The local and national authorities wanted to forget about these events, and no Western work mentions them. However, the well-known writer, Zheng Yi,² heard of the cannibalism and decided that he would investigate it for himself. He visited Wuxuan and other parts of southern Guangxi in 1986 and

Earlier versions of this essay were discussed at the University of Pittsburgh on November 19, 1993, and Columbia University on October 13, 1994. I wish to thank the members of both seminars, and also the following for further suggestions or other assistance: Monte Broaded, Bernard Gallin, Perry Link, Judith Modell, Richard Schoenwald, Tang Wenfang, Tong Enzheng, Zheng Yi, and a referee for this journal. I am responsible for any errors and eccentricities of interpretation.

The maps were prepared by Derek Wahila of Computing Services, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Carnegie Mellon University.

¹ In theory, punishments were still to be carried out according to its prescriptions. Several former officials in the county who had pressed for a full investigation later described it as incomplete, even a coverup, arguing that the numbers were far greater and the punishments too light (Zheng 1993:95).

² Zheng Yi, born in 1947, is best known for his novels, *A Distant Village* (1983) and *The Old Well* (1985).

0010-4175/95/1792-0396 \$7.50 + .10 © 1995 Society for Comparative Study of Society and History

1988 and left China after the Tiananmen incident in June 1989 to publish the evidence. His persistence at the risk of his own safety and the tone of his account put into proportion the terrible events he describes. His analysis, to simplify, blames the policies of the Communist Party for a recrudescence of earlier local customs and is particularly caustic of the government's failure to make former officials accountable for the violence of 1968. I shall rely heavily on his materials for Guangxi in 1968, but in trying to shed light on this incident I pursue here a different and more comparative line of analysis.

GUANGXI IN 1968 AND THE EVIDENCE OF CANNIBALISM

The Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region was notorious for its violence in the Cultural Revolution. The cause of this lay in the province's remoteness, its internal political relations, the extended factional conflict, and the character of its ruler, Wei Guoqing. A sinicized member of the Zhuang minority and former high Communist military officer, Wei had ruled almost single-handed since 1954. A political rival, Wu Chinnan, had on April 22, 1967, mobilized 40,000 Red Guards to overthrow Wei on Nanning (Karnow 1972:433–6). Wei was initially hounded down by rebels and red guards and paraded in a huge duncecap in the streets of Guilin (Hua 1987:143) but within a few months recovered power, joined by most but not all military units, along with much of the militia. Months of inconclusive skirmishing followed. Guangxi borders on Vietnam, and as the rebellion of Wuhan and turmoil elsewhere began to subside, Beijing grew concerned with the security of the railway and with new airfields constructed to help North Vietnam in its war with the United States. Late in 1967 Wei and Wu were summoned to the capital to negotiate a settlement. On their return, however, tension intensified in Guilin and Wuzhou. Wei despatched loyal militia to strategic counties throughout the region and set up revolutionary committees in the great majority of counties. Proclaiming his adversaries counterrevolutionaries, his Alliance Command attacked with heavy weapons in both Wuzhou and Liuzhou. On April 26 he vowed not to rest until victory was complete. It took a month of heavy fighting and heavy destruction and loss of life before Wei's forces controlled the two cities. Outgunned and outnumbered, desperate Grand Army activists then derailed and pillaged trains carrying military supplies to Vietnam. Alarmed, Beijing sided decisively with Wei Guoqing, who was summoned again to the capital and photographed with Mao Zedong on July 3 (Karnow 1972:439). On the same day a proclamation in the name of all the main central government departments warned that further resistance in Guangxi would be "severely punished" (Zheng 1993:8). Wei steadily established his authority in the various counties. What followed can only be called a reign of terror in which between 90,000 and 300,000 "counterrevolutionaries" and other "bad elements" (the official figure for all deaths in the Autonomous Region was 30,000) may have been killed. It is clear that Wei Guoqing's uncompromising

policies (he is said to have ordered peasants to kill with their hoes any rebels taking refuge) (Hua 1987:10), and the emotions aroused by a protracted and violently concluded conflict directly led to the widespread violence in many Guangxi counties in the summer of 1968, including the cannibalism of Wuxuan.

Wuxuan in 1966 was a fairly remote county reporting a population of 221,786, situated on the Qian River slightly closer to Liuzhou than Wuzhou. The Cultural Revolution was declared by the county head in January 1967, six months later than the rest of the country. Parades ensued, attacking several county officials along with a large number of people accused of “going the capitalist road.” The local rebel faction seized power on January 26. In June, as tension grew between Wu Chinnan and Wei Guoqing, the masses divided into two irreconcilable factions, the ins and the outs, dubbed respectively the Big Faction (“Alliance Command”) and the Small Faction (“April 22”). For six months there was only verbal conflict, but in January 1968 the two sides armed themselves and within a month twice attacked each other’s strongpoints. The militia took the side of the Big Faction. The first deaths occurred on February 18, when two middle school students were shot as they came out to surrender. Significantly, says Zheng Yi, the Armed Forces Department did not pursue the matter, sticking to its hands-off policy. The standoff continued in the county capital until the Revolutionary Committee was set up on April 15. In theory, this ought to have calmed things down, for its membership combined the two factions, but the plum jobs were taken by the Big Faction members, who made no secret of their determination to smash their rivals and protect what they called the New Red Political Power. Five Small Faction strongpoints were simultaneously attacked on May 11, using methods of bombardment learned in Vietnam. On May 12 reinforcements arrived from Liuzhou for the Big Faction. The Small Faction, its supplies and ammunition almost exhausted, was forced to break out across the Qian river. On May 13 the remaining Small Faction fighters were rounded up and executed (Zheng 1993:58–60).

The figure of ninety-seven killed made this one of the more costly battles in the province. What was most significant for the worse deeds that followed was the depth of feeling the conflict at Wuxuan had produced. The Big Faction drove out a motorboat and shot the fleeing swimmers. The majority of the dead, who were chiefly on the Small Faction side, Zheng Yi was told, were killed after being taken captive.

In the ensuing six weeks the frenzy of cannibalism erupted. From May to July, struggles were held in all or the great majority of the 114 brigades (villages and streets [*jie*]), and no fewer than 90 had one or more struggle meetings that terminated with on-the-spot execution. Of a total of 524 executed, 64 (later amended to 75 or 76) were eaten throughout the county’s municipality and nine communes, according to the official investigation (Zheng 1993:58, 96).

Considerable encouragement for violence came from Wuxuan leaders. Killing without trial had been tolerated from March 19. At the start of June the Liuzhu branch military district summoned a “Blow the typhoon meeting” which three military and civil officials from Wuxuan county attended. On June 14 the Wuxuan revolutionary committee convened a meeting of cadres from the county, district, *dadui* [or village], and production brigade, at which Armed Forces Department head Wen Longjuan declared: “The struggle against the enemy requires a Force Twelve typhoon. The methods are: Mobilize (*fadong*) the masses fully, depend on the dictatorship of the masses, hand over policy to the masses. In making class struggle you cannot be gentle (*shouroan*)” (Zheng 1993:66). On June 26, after some 120 had been killed in the various districts and some people were calling for an end to the struggle parades (*jieshang youdou*), Sun Ruizhang, the Armed Forces Department’s political representative and concurrent first deputy of the county revolutionary committee, said, “What are you afraid of! . . . If we don’t suppress the class enemies in this way, we cannot strengthen the will of the people!” (Zheng 1993:73). This was a guarantee that murder in the right political framework would go unpunished.

Did cannibalism actually take place in Wuxuan? In other societies reliable eyewitness accounts of the consumption of human flesh are almost non-existent. Reports originate from sources other than the groups described, usually neighboring enemies. Missionaries and colonial conquerors seized on such reports as evidence of the savagery of the people they were about to civilize or enslave (Arens 1979).³ Yet neither logical consistency or dietary and mortuary practices lend cultural support for eating human flesh. As so often in the case of witchcraft, cannibalistic accusations tell us much less about those accused than about the accusers. Even our own culture, writes one anthropologist, “like many others, finds comfort in the idea of barbarians beyond the gates” (Arens 1979). So some scepticism is in order.

As an ethnography, Zheng’s book, *Red Memorial* (1993),⁴ is not everything

³ W. Arens (1979) has questioned not only the early reports of the Spaniards about the Caribs (whose name corrupted to Canib, was given to the practice) but also reports about cannibalism in Africa, the American mainland, and New Guinea, some of them by reputable anthropologists. Arens is “dubious about the actual existence of this act as an accepted practice for any time or place” (Arens 1979:184, 9). But for evidence of actual cannibalism in New Guinea set within various frameworks, see Gillison and Poole’s articles in Brown and Tuzin (1983) and Stürzenhocker (in press).

⁴ I am grateful to Mr. Zheng for letting me see a copy of the corrected text before publication. The work has already been discussed by Liu Binyan in the *New York Review of Books* (April 8, 1993). The first five chapters deal with Guangxi. Chapter 1 deals with the Cultural Revolution in four counties, where there was considerable violence; chapter 2, with the cannibalism in Wuxuan; chapter 3, with the career of Wang Zujian, who served two spells in labor camp, the second for blowing the whistle on the cannibalism. Chapter 4 deals with the starvation of 40,000 people in Huanjiang (Yibei) county after the Great Leap Forward (1958); chapter 5, with Zhuang culture through ethnography and the historical record, with special reference to cannibalism; six more chapters consist of a scathing indictment of Marxist and Maoist practices in China. I use here

that would be desired. Not being a witness to the events he relates, he can only tour a few locations and visualize the horrors of 1968. Fearing for his own safety and for the security of the materials he had already collected in other counties, he does not venture outside the town of Wuxuan and its environs (Zheng 1994). In only a few cases, discussed below, can he illuminate the personal relationships and conflicts behind the choice of victims. But Zheng does describe in convincing detail his own partly unsuccessful effort to breach the barriers of official secrecy and evasiveness. As the writer of an exposé, he can be more revealing about the identity and character of obstructive officials and helpful informants than a conscientious ethnographer could be. His Wuxuan evidence, copiously footnoted, is often drawn verbatim from the investigators' secret official chronicle, which he took pains to check with informants; and he also makes footnoted references to the diaries kept by himself and his future wife, Bei Ming, who accompanied him on the 1988 trip to Guangxi. Although some of his extrapolations are unconvincing, for example, that as many as 10,000 in Wuxuan ate human flesh, it seems plausible, in view of the incomplete coverage of the investigation, that cannibal victims may have numbered almost twice as many as those named in the official chronicle.⁵ On this and other matters, his evidence and analysis are easy to separate. That the incident truly occurred was independently confirmed by a recent visitor to Wuxuan, the scholar and journalist, John Gittings. An off-duty local clerk spoke airily of the killings and the cannibalism—obligingly writing down his name and address when asked—and added with a touch of pride, "In Wuxuan . . . we ate more people than anywhere else in China" (*The Guardian*, November 27, 1993).

Zheng's book is of a very different quality from the dubious cannibal reports that Arens criticized. His second chapter is closely based on the official report of what happened, dated May 1987, and a separate list of 64 victims, dated July 4, 1983. Fifty-six had their heart and liver cut out; 18 were completely consumed (down to the soles of their feet), 13 had their genitals eaten, one was decapitated after being eaten, and 7 were actually cut up while they were still alive (Zheng 1993:96). The locations of the struggle meetings leading to cannibalism are listed in the report (see Figures 1 and 2).

Names are also supplied of those punished for eating people. Fifteen were prosecuted, receiving terms of imprisonment up to fourteen years; 27 Party

chiefly the first two chapters, in all about 67,000 characters in length. A partial translation is slated for publication by Westview Press in 1995.

⁵ He estimates 100 and several tens in Wuxuan, which may be correct, though I am assuming only the official figure of 64. Less plausibly, he suggests that 100,000 people ate human flesh in Guangxi in the early summer of 1968 because there were probably 1,200 victims. Both figures seem too high. Few people were eaten in their entirety, and there is credible evidence outside Wuxuan only for the Qinzhou region to the south, where a tea center and four communes in four different counties (Qinzhou, Lingshun, Hepu, and Pubei) were, in an official report sampling "typical" communes, acknowledged to have had 62 cases.

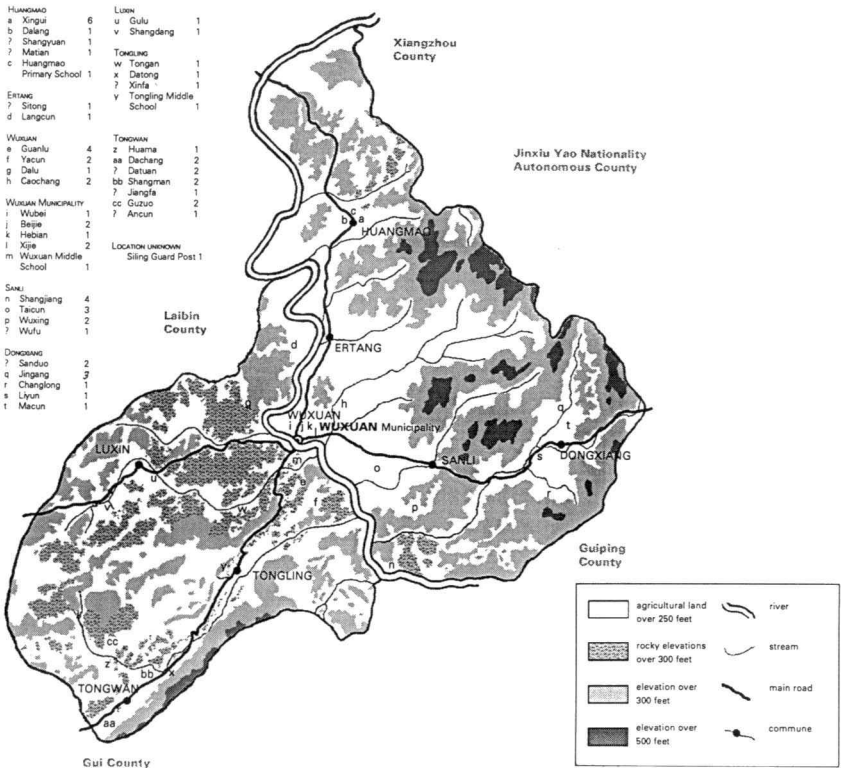


FIGURE 1. Map of political cannibalism in Wuxuan County, May to July 1968.

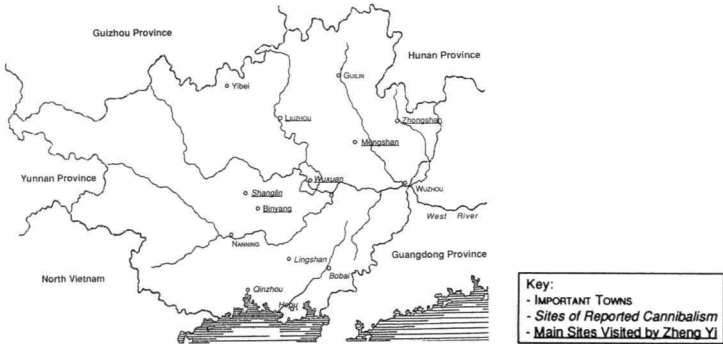


FIGURE 2. Map of Guangxi Province (technically, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region).

cadres, 5 worker Party members, and 59 peasant Party members were expelled from the Party; 18 non-Party cadres were dismissed; and 21 workers had their work points reduced (Zheng 1993:100).⁶

⁶ The extent of cannibalism in this county is suggested by the 400 names of flesh eaters on an initial list.

Moreover, Zheng tracked down some of the victims' families—his interviews with them are harrowing—and spoke to several people who admitted eating human flesh. There are numerous photographs of those interviewed as well as of the original documents he uses. Finally, as I shall argue at length, there were cultural resonances that rendered cannibalism highly plausible.

Wuxuan's cannibalism was not an isolated act of spontaneous vengeance but a custom that briefly flourished and had its own political and cultural logic. Clearly, there was no breakdown of social order, no outbreak of chaos. The incidents of cannibalism spread all over the county over a six-week period (see Figure 1). Those who took the lead were not the crazed nor idealistic teenagers well known from accounts of the Cultural Revolution (Bennett and Montaperto 1972; Ling 1972; Liang and Shapiro 1983; Gao 1987; Thurston 1987), but Communist Party members and other cadres trained to be moral exemplars as well as followers of central authority. The forces of law and order, not the revolutionary rebels, were the killers and eaters. Moreover, the forms of cannibalistic consumption varied within a narrow range. People agreed on the best body parts and insisted on them being cooked; and the selection, killing, and consuming of victims were relatively systematized. Cannibalism evidently made sense to and had its own meanings for the participants. It was in fact ritualized. Besides being rich in symbolic meaning, it was carried out by people as a group, demarcated from ordinary life, in a fully predictable sequence of events.⁷ The human flesh banquets (*renrou yanxi*), as they were called, were integrated with the ritual of struggle (*pidou*) (see Table 1) and suggest a fresh interpretation of that well-known feature of Maoist China.

This article explores the logic of political cannibalism in three ways. First, it analyses the various aspects of Chinese culture that facilitated this particular form of violence. Second, it synthetically explores the shape and order taken by collective rituals of struggle including cannibalism. Finally, it examines the specific case of Wuxuan, in which local features gave support to what were very exceptional circumstances, even in the period of the Cultural Revolution.

THE RESONANCE OF CULTURE

In spite of the impression that the Cultural Revolution represented a collapse of all cultural norms, people from all sectors of society—not just fiery youth, but old women lining up with baskets (Zheng 1993:74), local state functionaries, and even some teachers—participated in Wuxuan cannibalism. Such a

⁷ The certainty of death once struggle began may be contrasted with the relatively unpredictable witchcraft accusations and trials in early modern Europe. See especially Lerner (1981:114). The tendency to ritualization even in beatings to death is exemplified in Binyang county. "The victims in general were not tied up, because they had nowhere to escape, and no hope of life. As soon as they heard the cry of command, more obediently than sheep they stepped forward on the path to death. They didn't seek nourishment, shout curses, try to argue, their expressions were cold, without any consciousness of resistance; they knelt silently on the ground and let people batter them to death. If they were knocked over on the ground, they were made to kneel properly; knocked over, they would again kneel properly, until they lost consciousness (Zheng 1993:14).

TABLE 1
Details of Select Cases in Wuxuan County Province from May through July 1968

<i>Date</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Victims</i>	<i>How Killed</i>			<i>Parts Cut for Eating</i>	<i>How Disposed</i>
			<i>Type</i>	<i>Method</i>			
May 4	Tongwan	2 Tans	Struggled	Shotgun	All flesh	Distributed	
May 10, 12	Wuxuan	Tan, Wei	Captive	Cut up alive	Heart, liver, flesh	Shared, eaten with pork	
May 13	Wuxuan	Zhou brothers	Captive	Cut up	Heart, liver, flesh	Shared	
May 14	Tongwan	Chen	Waylaid	Knifed	Liver	Night snack (for 20)	
June 18	Sanli	3 Chens	Struggled	Knifed	Liver	Villagers cook, eat	
June 18	Huangamo	Zhang	Struggled	Knifed	Heart, liver, flesh	Flesh banquet	
June 18	Wuxuan	Wu	Struggled	Beaten	Heart, liver, thigh	School banquets	
June 21	Dongxiang	Zhang	Struggled	Beaten	Genitals, Heart, liver	Not known	
June 22	Wuxuan	3 Lis	Struggled	Cut up alive	Liver, genitals	Banquet, River	
July 1	Tonglin	Huang	Struggled	Beaten	Flesh stripped	Eaten in school	
July 10	Mashan	Diao	Fugitive	Shot	Heart, liver	Hot pot by Militia	
July 17	Sanli	2 Liaos, 2 Zhongs	Struggled	Clubbed	All flesh	Eaten by 20-30 at Brigade HQ	
July ??	Tongwan	Gan	Struggled	Cut up alive	Genitals, thigh, liver, all	Not known	

wide participation indicates the presence of powerful cultural resonances and rationales that need to be explored in the full setting of local historical experience. There has been some scholarly resistance to the application of cultural interpretations to the People's Republic (White 1989:315–7),⁸ even to the idea that culture matters at all. The anthropologist, Myron Cohen, has argued that “political relationships in modern China have no shared cultural framework. . . Hegemony in modern China receives no commonly accepted legitimation through culture, rather it represents the culture of the barracks, a culture of compliance, of slogans, posters, and mobilizations conveying messages and commands rather than meaning.” The notion of “flat cultureless culture” which Cohen sees as particularly characteristic of the campaigns (*yundong*) of the Maoist period (Cohen 1991:130) seems overstated, in spite of Mao Zedong's famous description of the peasants as a blank sheet of paper.⁹ Even the forms standardized by the mass media of the People's Republic had to seem persuasive in terms of Chinese culture. In the case of the struggle movements, a Communist invention with no earlier Chinese model, the oxshed made sense because it referred to ox ghosts, a term for one of the well-known servitors in purgatory that was widely applied to class enemies in the Cultural Revolution; the reference was to someone rather menacing but in the permanently liminal state that purgatory represents. The iconic display of street struggle parades, complete with drums and cymbals, recalled the traditional religious procession, with its implications of local order and authority. The scalp crosses and placards bearing the labels designating outcasts recalled the public shaming formerly imposed by the tatoos and cangues worn by traditional criminals. The revolutionary dances that outcast groups were forced to perform were reminders of the comic troupes at local festivals that satirized bad behavior among neighbors. Thus, as actually practiced, the struggle campaign was put together out of miscellaneous elements of Chinese

⁸ After asking, “How much was tradition to blame?,” Lynn White III notes that “if the Cultural Revolution were crucially a result of Chinese habits, then China would have cultural revolutions all the time” (1989:315–6). The question I ask is not why the Cultural Revolution took place, but what forms it took, a question with a partly local and certainly partly cultural answer. He also asserts, “Any ‘culture,’ framing enough of the environment of those who use it to deserve that name, is probably too various to determine specific behavior” (1989:47). I would grant that culture may not determine specific behavior, but behavior occurs in a cultural context which may help to shape it, especially as one moves away from official ideology and the political center to explain local events. In a recent collective work representing a “neo-culturalist” viewpoint, Elizabeth Perry (Wasserstrom and Perry 1991:45), distancing herself from earlier static and monochromatic portraits of Chinese society in the political culture vein, writes of a “multiplicity of available cultural repertoires.” Such a formulation makes culture not fixed and determining but accessible to particular adaptations, and is compatible with the approach of this essay. For an early comparative treatment of thought reform consistent with a cultural interpretation, see Clark (1976).

⁹ Temporizing with local culture was a feature of the early Communist movement. One early leader, Peng Zhimin, would light incense and candles and sign blood oaths when he first organized a local peasant movement (Ristaino 1987:190); on local religious belief supplying a framework for Communist activity in the Taihang area, see also Thaxton 1983:140–59.

culture—a process Lévi-Strauss has called bricolage. At the same time some elements of the struggles have long been central to Chinese culture, notably the sense of collective family guilt and the diminution of the individual. It is no accident that the struggle campaign is unique to Chinese socialism.

Local adaptations remain to be explored.¹⁰ One example not far from Wuxuan may be mentioned (Figure 2). Binyang county in July 1968 was swept by a movement to “make gods [images]” (*zaoshen yundong*), images that represented the slogan, “Seek instructions in the morning, report in the evening” or the “Loyalty character dance” and what was called the “Three Loyalties to the Four Unlimiteds.” Within several weeks, no fewer than 3,883 people were to be killed in the county. The god’s images, Zheng Yi notes, had helped to break down the usual taboos against killing people (Zheng 1993:8). In understanding Wuxuan-style cannibalism as another local adaptation of the struggle movement, one made out of widely diffused Chinese cultural material, we should look closely at, first, particular ideas about proper punishment; second, unsuitable food; third, folk traditions of actual cannibalism; and fourth, polarities and metaphors surrounding death.

Imagery: Courts of Empire and Purgatory

The violence of spring 1968 in Wuxuan resonates with traditional ideas of punishment. In courts of the past, long a feature of local opera in China, the means of execution were graduated according to the severity of the crime. Worst of all was the archaic death by slicing and other mutilations (McKnight 1992:329–30). Such a death in China violated the filial obligation to parents and ancestors to keep the physical body in one piece, even in death.

After the last great battle between the Big and Small Factions in Wuxuan, body parts were displayed on trees (Zheng 1993:60). This was a clear echo of the practice of exposing criminals guilty of treason in the marketplace, reducing them to meat. A variant was the parade of body parts. Thus, after the military defeat of the Small Faction, Zhou Weian, its captured leader, was executed and his head and legs taken first to Luxin village as a sacrificial offering at the memorial meeting for two of the Big Faction members and then to the county seat for theatrical use in a cruel catechism with his pregnant widow (Are these your husband’s head and legs? Was he a bad person? Is this your husband’s thigh bone?) (Zheng 1993:61–62). Here Zhou Weian’s body signified the hard-earned victory of the Big Faction. It was as powerful an icon as the god’s images that in living memory had paraded proudly before rival communities.

The popular sense of justice required that the punishment fit the crime and

¹⁰ Cases besides the struggle campaigns could be mentioned. Endicott (1988) has an example of a Sichuan ritual spontaneously devised in response to the news that Mao had handed mangoes to militia groups in Peking, signalling unmistakably that the Red Guards were on their way out. The commune organized processions reminiscent of gods’ processions in the past in which mangoes decorated with ribbons were formally passed from one production brigade to the next.

that no punishment was severe enough for an old feud. Zhou Weian's brother and two students killed earlier may all have been eviscerated alive, though testimony is conflicting (Zheng 1993:61–62). Cannibal consumption was an extension of the same idea. To chop up, cook, and masticate was a still more complete way of offending bodily integrity, depriving the enemy of humanity by reducing him to the status of a comestible. At Huangmao Street, the center of the county's northernmost commune, a primary school teacher, Zhang Boxun (a poor peasant but with a Small Faction viewpoint), tried to escape during a street struggle on June 18 by jumping into the river. His heart and liver were cut out by the militiaman, Guo Lixiang, who used a 5-inch knife and who, with another man, cooked them in an earthenware pot. Others cut away the rest of Zhang's flesh and intestines. Everywhere there were people eating human flesh. In one place a 1.8-foot stewpot served enough to banquet (*jucan*) over ten people. At the Huangmao Foodstuffs Depot and the Distribution Office, over 80 percent of the units' members ate, some under duress. The official report commented that "the masses called it, 'A human flesh banquet'" (Zheng 1993:68–69).

On the same day, a geography teacher of the Wuxuan Middle School, Wu Shufang, was beaten and killed after a series of struggle meetings directed at the faculty. Student leaders forced four of the other teachers, identified as a black gang, to carry the body to the river and made one of them cut out the heart and liver and slice off the thigh flesh. The flesh, packed into plastic bags or slung from rifle muzzles, was carried back to the school grounds. A woman from the kitchen staff was roused to open up the main kitchen, and seventy or eighty students partook of the teacher's flesh; other parts were cooked in an earthenware pot in the campus lodging of the vice head of the Revolutionary Committee and eaten by four students in his presence. A third group of students barbecued on a walkway outside classrooms number 31 and 32 (Zheng 1993:69–70).

Visiting and photographing the sites of these horrors almost three decades later, Zheng Yi repeatedly is reminded of hell's paintings (Zheng 1993:11, 92), and in fact the images of hell may have been their inspiration. In these graphic visions of hell's punishments, still to be seen in popular religious books and many Taiwan City God temples, demonic half-human figures tore apart, boiled, and dismembered their live victims for the crimes they had perpetrated on others during their lifetimes (Teiser 1988). Observers were supposed to be cautioned by such pictures, but it is just as likely that they imagined their enemies in torment, not themselves. In castrations dead or alive, in frying or roasting of body parts, people empowered themselves to actualize such punishments in the real world. Torture and cannibalism created a sort of secularized hell, offering immediate sadistic satisfactions and serving as a warning to one's local enemies.

These public punishments thus combined the imperial courtroom with the

torments of purgatory. The eviscerating and eating of human flesh fitted the traditional sense that punishment should vary in form and degree according to the turpitude of the offender. Cutting up alive was fully suitable for one's worst enemy. But unlike the Qing legal system, in which the sentence had to fit the motivation, status, and circumstances of the crime precisely (Bodde and Morris 1971:30–32), here it needed only to match the already demonized criminal. Fearful punishments could be justified in the absence of any proven wrongdoing.

Flesh, Bones, and Pork

Beliefs about the dead also play a key role in cannibalism, reflecting the south Chinese polarity between bones and flesh. Once again, there is little that is random and arbitrary in the practices of consumption and disposal extemporized in the spring of 1968. Bones, an important focus of ancestral worship, are treated with caution. There is one touching case in which the father of a victim (Deputy Principal and ex-guerrilla Huang) refuses to tell where his son's remains are kept, even when his former commanders come to pay their respects. He fears that the bones will be destroyed in some future turn of the political winds (Zheng 1993:87). In south China the bones represent the perduring part of the dead man's power: his authority as the recipient of ritual and symbolic obeisance—and bestower of misfortune if such filial duties are forgotten (Aherm 1973). The bones are of no use to others and might indeed bring harm. Thus, when the disposal of bones is mentioned, they are invariably cast into the river (Zheng 1993:62, 70, 72).

Carving people up when they were still alive must be explained in terms of the power attributed to the flesh. One case within the Gan surname group, presumably a single lineage, in Datuan village in the far south Tongwan commune was described in the official report as “too horrible to contemplate” and later confirmed for Zheng Yi by a number of witnesses. Gan Dazuo, after his struggle session, was castrated and disemboweled alive by other men surnamed Gan, who ignored his cry, “Wait 'til I'm dead, then cut.” Gan Ziyang, who had shouted, “The Seven-Inch *Qicun* [that is, penis] is mine, no one else can cut it off!,” was the first to move, ignoring Dazuo's terrible screams. Others swarmed up and cut the flesh clean. Gan Ziyang eventually received the light sentence of a seven-year incarceration (Zheng 1993:73). Even this horrifying act makes cultural sense. Human flesh is yin, as distinct from the yang of bones. It is supposed to rot under the ground after burial.¹¹ Yet human flesh possesses beneficent transforming power which immediate consumption would make available (compare Thompson 1988:100–2) before the yin element had become dangerous in the state of putrefaction (J. Watson

¹¹ “Just as the flesh of the deceased disappears through decay, so certain parts of his authority are lost when he dies” (Aherm 1973:209). The sons must allow the flesh to decay and must wait patiently for the patrimony to be conveyed to them in due course.

1988:155–86). Male genitals are particularly coveted for their link with *yang* fertility.

Women's flesh, presumably being too *yin*, does not offer the same source of power. When the two Small Faction women, one of them the pregnant widow of its leader, are hauled to the stage, they resist the humiliation of taking off their blouses. One of the organizers cuts the material from the back but scoffs "Old women's flesh! Inedible!" (Zheng 1993:61). On the list of those eaten in Wuxuan only one name obviously belongs to a woman (Zheng 1993:65). When a teacher was discovered to have eaten a "beautiful" girl student for medicinal purposes, he was not copied but stigmatized as deranged (Zheng 1993:44).

There is a tendency to hierarchize consumption. In the several examples given, governmental units appropriate the flesh and share it around a table, denying ordinary people; a militiaman takes off with the prized liver and heart; an unnamed youth is left to lift up and shake the intestines, the least desirable portion (Zheng 1993:68–69). This may be an echo of the ritual distribution of pork widely found in South China lineages after the offering at the ancestral grave, when the cooked pigs are divided among the branches according to their status. As at Cantonese graves, open conflict could ensue (R. Watson, in J. Watson and Rawski 1988). But the distribution of raw parts was never ritualized in Wuxuan, where the crowd's mad scramble is more common (see Zheng 1993:71, 74).¹²

The only meat mentioned as being mixed with human flesh is pork (Zheng 1993:61), perhaps to make it more palatable or perhaps because human flesh actually tastes like pork (Camporesi 1989 [1980]). The association may have a deeper resonance. The symbolic logic of funerals in China is to transform a corpse into an ancestor by manipulating symbols of regeneration and fertility. One important way this is done in central Taiwan is by means of the prestation of pork, which is associated with the flesh of the deceased and in a sense replaces it in clothing the bones (Thompson, in J. Watson and Rawski 1988:95–102). In the period before the funeral, the descendents of the deceased (except women who are married out to other families) are supposed to abstain from pork. According to villagers, to eat it would be unfilial: "It would be like eating the dead person's flesh."

Whether or not ancestors were ever eaten—as origin myths for pork sacrifice assert in southeast China (Ahern 1973:205–12) and in Oceania¹³—the

¹² Zheng describes a day in July (given as July 17 in the official report but corrected by him to July 10) when in Sanli commune at Upper River Production Brigade, there was a brief struggle meeting and four men, two each surnamed Liao and Zhong, were beaten to death with clubs. The scene as people swarmed about cutting off flesh was "extraordinarily exciting [*renao*]." Someone remembered seeing an old white-haired woman brazenly grab a piece of human liver and contentedly carry it home in the rain, the drops of blood staining the road. The four corpses were cut up and taken back to the headquarters of the Production Brigade and cooked in two large pots, and then were eaten by some twenty to thirty people (Zheng 1993:73–74).

¹³ Like the thoroughly "un-Chinese" Guangdong and Minnan custom of chewing *binglang* (betel nut), it may be an imported custom.

symbolic equation of the two may have subconsciously facilitated cannibalism by means of a literalistic inversion, explicit or unconscious, of substances already metaphorically linked.¹⁴ Instead of being metaphorically consumed as pork by ancestors, flesh was directly consumed by the survivors, regenerating them, just as pork was believed to regenerate ancestors. In this light the human flesh banquets are no less horrifying, but become culturally meaningful.

Past Cannibalisms of Necessity, Hatred, and Devotion

Chinese local histories repeatedly mention cannibalism in desperate times (Chong 1990:56–62).¹⁵ The term “so hungry that they ate each other” was no doubt often figurative, and works that take such expressions at face value should be treated with suspicion. But when people are chewing bark from trees, digging insects from the ground, and mixing mud with chaff, as in numerous historical famines, the prospect of human meat amid pains and hallucinations of extreme hunger may be hard to resist; and there is ample evidence of resorting to cannibalism in Europe in similar conditions (Camporesi 1989:44–55).¹⁶ It is impossible to know how often such “survival cannibalism,” to use Chong’s phrase, was done in repugnance and how often it was done in response to the indirect cultural supports of cannibal practice. In any case the cannibalism as the result of need may have established a precedent for symbolic forms of cannibalism.

Symbolic cannibalism is also not uncommon: A political or personal enemy would be eaten to seal his defeat. The preferred method was pickling in late Zhou times, serving in stew during the Warring States period (Lewis 1990:28, 148; Chang 1977:34; Chong 1990:153–6). Chong (1990:79–92, see also Schafer in Chang 1977:135) assembles numerous references to learned canni-

¹⁴ The powerful set of associations of flesh and pork, and their links with death and continuity may be compared with the Christian Eucharist (Bynum 1987:ch. 4). In Europe the orthodox pattern is that Christ sacrifices himself literally, to save humanity, and is consumed metaphorically in Communion, conceived as equal under the priest’s guidance. In China the conventional pattern of funeral sacrifice just noted is *metaphoric* consumption of whole cooked pig as *flesh* for the dead to become ancestors, followed by *actual* consumption of pieces of *pork* by the hierarchized members of the community. In both cases substitutions and inversions might transform these most powerful symbols in the interest of particular social groups. Women mystics could survive on the eucharistic bread alone, have visions of sucking Christ’s lactating wounds, could bleed like Christ, give their own bodily suppurations to feed others as Christ had sacrificed himself for humanity. In modern times, young Catholics justified the consumption of relatives and others in the Andean air crash by taking a literal interpretation of the Eucharist (Gzowski 1980).

¹⁵ Chong (1990:55–62) lists a number in dynastic records by place from 205 B.C. to 1639 A.D. With very few exceptions cannibal incidents were reported in the northwest or the north China plain. The most common cause given was drought. The question of the actual incidence of all kinds of cannibalism needs to be examined with a great deal of caution. Chong’s work is mainly useful in showing how widely people believed it to be and what forms and motivations were associated with it.

¹⁶ Camporesi quotes Lévi-Strauss: “No society is proof, morally speaking, against the demands of hunger” and notes that “the horror for anthropophagy and patrophagy becomes ever more consistent the more Western European society is spared the pangs of hunger (1989:52–53).

balism from Han to Ming times and points to officialdom's political exploitation of hatred. The most famous case in late Imperial China, though not attested in official records, was the cutting up of the powerful late Ming eunuch, Liu Jin, into innumerable pieces for distribution among the people who detested him. The dramatic act of consumption involved bravado and must often have been intended to intimidate other potential challengers.

Such practices were more than acts of revenge. Rather, they were sacrificial in meaning and reflected well-known stories of early dynastic crises of legitimation. The Yellow Emperor, said to be the founder of civilized warfare and even Chinese civilization itself, had first to defeat the half-monster warrior, Chi You, who was cut apart and shared in a meat stew among the victorious soldiers. The Xia could only be reestablished after the defeat of the usurper, the archer Yi, fed to his own son by a treacherous minister, who was overthrown in turn. The Shang could only replace the Xia when the founder offered himself up as a sacrifice. The Zhou could only replace the Shang, according to some texts, when the dead king was offered up in a sacrifice, and according to others, when its founder had personally killed King Zhou by eating him raw or lapping up the blood (Lewis 1990:165–6, 206–10). It is notable that these stories are recounted not disapprovingly but from the point of view of the victors, that is to say, that of the cannibals, and as moral acts.

For these mythic events, numerous conflicting accounts survive, some offering alternative versions of legitimation. It is likely that some figures have been euhemerized from earlier culture heroes or portrayed in acts they did not commit. But that does not affect the argument here: Widely believed stories underlined the necessity of sacrifice (the offering of oneself or of one's enemies) and represented cannibalism as not only emotionally satisfying but also ritually appropriate. The sacrifice that sealed victory (compare with the fate of Zhou, leader of the Small Faction) confirmed the covenant that traditionally began battle and at the same time cleansed the pollution incurred by regicide. Cannibal sacrifice, in its full form, was a ritualized political act. It legitimized the group's ascendancy over those defeated and fortified the cohesion of the group and its leaders' ascendancy over his followers. It drew its power from the afterlife, for sacrifice was offered to the ancestors or in some cases the leader just fallen in battle; and the sacrificial victims were punished in death. Such stories, spread in regional opera and storytelling traditions, kept the idea of revenge cannibalism alive and sustained acts of cannibalistic revenge, both individual and collective.¹⁷ People will still say today of a bitter enemy, "I hate him so much that I could eat him," an idea that can be found as early as the *Zuozhuan* (Chong 1990:48–49). In the recent historical novel, *Red Sorghum*, set in Shandong province during the war against Japan, a bandit leader

¹⁷ Luo Guanzhong's *Sanguo yanyi* has examples of actual cannibalism, and enmity for the villain, Sun Quan, the King of Wu, is expressed both by Guan Yu's ghost and Liu Bei in terms of a desire to eat his flesh (Luo 1976:244, 258, cited by Chong 1990:131–3).

orders the decapitation of a suspected spy: “rip out his heart and liver and cook them to go with the wine!” (Mo Yan 1993:243). He is countermanded, but a recent memoir notes an actual case, during land reform, of a Communist team leader eating the heart of a bandit leader (Chang 1991:167).

Metaphorically, to “eat” someone in China has long meant an extreme use of power, both to uphold and to overthrow unjust authority. An oppressor ever since Zhou times has been one who “treats the people as fish and meat” (*yu rou xiaomin*). In the same spirit, Lu Xun’s modern short story in the vein of Gogol describes a Chinese madman who sees a truth missed by the sane: Cannibals are on every page of the history books (Lu Hsun 1980 [1918]). What better revenge, one might suppose, than an inversion—to eat the oppressor? This logic of eating the villains, but in a metaphorical sense, was present very early in Chinese Communist practice. Instead of “eating bitterness,” the standard term for suffering, peasants were urged publicly to “speak bitterness,” blaming local villains for their sufferings. In his writings on the Hunan peasant movement in 1926, Mao Zedong described how peasants would “eat up powerful families” (Schram 1968:249; *cf.* Solomon 1971:165). They would demonstrate at the house of a “local bully” or rich landlord hostile to the association, “tak[ing] their meals at his house, slaughtering his pigs and consuming his grain” (Schram 1968:256). The bullies and landlords were not actually eaten, of course, but in the carnivalesque atmosphere of Wuxuan in 1968 the same logic made the figurative literal.¹⁸ The conversion of the oppressor into food for the former victims must have seemed a fitting revenge.¹⁹

A cannibalism of devotion is also to be found very early: A man would knowingly eat his son out of loyalty for his lord or would give up his own life to be consumed. In Late Imperial times this becomes something of a cult assimilated to Confucian family values, though it was often criticized by Neo-Confucian writers. A filial daughter or son would cure a sick parent by cutting out his or her liver or a piece of thigh and cooking and feeding it to the patient.²⁰ Significantly this act—which may often have been faked or purely symbolic—was generally attributed to a woman, married or not (Chong 1990:93–103, 115–23), specifically on behalf of a mother or mother-in-law.²¹ Structurally a woman was a true member of neither her natal nor her marital family and therefore was detached emotionally from both. The desperate and widely admired act of flesh cutting may have been intended to strengthen

¹⁸ See for example the killing of the Peartree Lis, below.

¹⁹ Conversely Nancy Munn (1986:220–8, 271) wrote of the Gawa witches, whose necrophagy stood for the greed of their victims.

²⁰ The story of Guanyin, who sacrificed her arms and eyes for the sake of her father, was a popular example of filiality widely known through popular drama and ritual in China (Dudbridge 1978). The violation of filial duty is justifiable *in extremis* in this form of ritualized contravention. Solomon (1971) deserves credit for pointing to the Chinese theme of eating as aggression.

²¹ Chong (1990:97) suggests that this is because women have more attachment to their mothers in early childhood, but that does not explain mothers-in-law.

these weak bonds in one household or the other. Here we have a surprising conjunction with political or hate cannibalism. Though opposites, giving or taking a life and using one's own or another's body as food are both ritual acts giving intense emotional meaning to relationships conceived in moral terms. Whereas cannibalism severs all social and human attachment between two people, thigh cutting underscores filial ties between mother(-in-law) and daughter(-in-law). What made both rituals meaningful, very much in the spirit of approved Confucian rituals, was the emotion and intention on the part of the donor and eater respectively. As earlier noted in connection with taboo foods in general, context was what counted. Love or filial cannibalism is, then, to be seen as a sort of structural reversal of revenge or political cannibalism, gaining its meaning from cultural assumptions about ritual in human relations.

The preference for liver among filial self-mutilators was echoed in the Cultural Revolution. In one Guangxi county, Shanglin, activists ate only the livers of their victims (Zheng 1993:20, 23). While the liver is associated with anger, it is also linked with intimate affection in the compound term, "heart liver" (*xin'gan*), and the two organs seem to be identified with life itself. In early Chinese political theory, the heart signified power; it was a metaphor for the sovereign, his ministers being the limbs. Cutting out a powerful enemy's heart may be regarded as the Chinese equivalent of the royal decapitation in Europe, where the king symbolized the head of state. Thus, the political cannibal of folklore and history often ate both the heart and liver, a cultural precedent followed in Wuxuan in 1968. When Wuxuan Middle School colleagues of the geography teacher, as noted earlier, were forced to use a knife on him, armed students warned them, "We just want the heart and liver!" (Zheng 1993:70, *cf.* 74–75). As we have seen, fifty-six, or 87.5 percent, of the known Wuxuan victims initially had their heart and liver gouged out (Zheng 1993:96).

Taboo: Classificatory or Humanistic?

Almost all societies oppose cannibalism, but in a variety of ways besides direct prohibition. In Europe people are presumed to differ from beasts at creation, and dietary prescriptions distinguish not only between domestic and wild animals but among different kinds of domestic animals, setting up in the process categories of edibility that by implication exclude cannibalism. Leach (1964) argued that the Western classification of animal edibility corresponds to distance from human society. We are revolted by the thought of eating dogs, "man's best friend," to whom we give names and give the run of our houses; we find the consumption of horses imaginable because they live further away, yet still distasteful because they work closely with people; we find pork quite acceptable because pigs are only scavengers not partners, and we regard beef as the superior food because cows are the farthest removed of all four animals. Sahlins (1976), who agrees with Leach, adds a further logical continuum: We prefer to eat the more external over the more internal of animal parts. The

inner logic in the two schemes, he claims, is to reject eating what resembles oneself, that is to reject cannibalism. Neither scheme is applicable in the Chinese case. While the Chinese find it good to think with food (the expression is that of Lévi-Strauss) they categorize it as cooked or uncooked, medicine as “hot” or “cold.” Therefore we may conclude that the categorization of Chinese food did not give powerful support to repugnance for cannibalism.

The Chinese taboos on cannibalism are equally implicit and powerful but, rather than depending on logical categories, are above all social, that is to say, moral. Since classical times humanity was seen to be separated from animals not at creation but by the successive acts of the sages in inventing the arts of constructing houses, carts and boats, making clothes and cooking, and in perfecting the arts of humane government (Knoblock 1990 2:5–6, also vol. 1:188). Good rule, and for Confucians especially, education and proper social distinctions were what ensured appropriate behavior among people. Such morally based taboos could break down, I suggest, if powerful moral justifications could be made in favor of cannibalism. This is what happened in cases of love (filial) and hate (vengeance) cannibalism, in which general social rules gave way under the pressure of special moral obligations. Something similar seems to have happened in 1968, when national ideology combined with the local features of Wuxuan. In the atmosphere of the Cultural Revolution, a single set of political criteria was elevated above all others, polarizing good and bad under a special morality that could not be questioned and indeed had to be acted upon. The usual restraints on violence broke down, and the result in Wuxuan was the ritualized eating of men whose civilized humanity was denied, indeed negated in the act of eating. It is no accident that Wang Zujian, the man who did most to bring the episode to light and helped local society rediscover its moral bearings, reminded Zheng Yi of a Confucian scholar (Zheng 1993:ch.3).

Beyond the moral prohibition against beast-like behavior, Chinese culture did not encourage dietary taboos that might have inhibited cannibalism. Forbidden foods, such as wild dogs or black goats with white heads, seem to be rare in Chinese popular or educated circles and were in no case universally avoided. The extensive discussion of food taboos by Chia Ming (1368) outlaws almost nothing from the healthy diet. What he warns against is excess in eating and drinking, neglect of the consumer’s state of health, the wrong time of the year, the wrong combination of foodstuffs. His advice, then, was conditional and contextual and was probably interpreted so flexibly that the word, taboo, seems out of place (Mote in Chang 1977:228–32). This is typical of Chinese attitudes towards food: discriminating as to context but catholic as to the nature and origin of food. People did not have to go against general assumptions about odd food in rationalizing what must have been instinctively repugnant. Of course Chinese food preparation by chopping into small and unrecognizable pieces, mixing many ingredients in the same dish, and adding strong sauces (Chang in Chang 1977:8) made unfamiliar food go down easily.

So much for some possible obstacles to cannibal practice. What of the positive cultural encouragement, however indirect? Chinese are accustomed to eating bitter tasting, even repulsive looking, food as medicine: the worse it tastes, the better its presumed effect. People have long taken human body products as medicine (Cooper and Sivin 1973). China's most famous modern writer wrote "Medicine," a short story about a couple who acquired a steamed bun dipped in the blood of an executed revolutionary to feed their ailing son (Lu Hsun 1980 [1919]). And in some parts of China, even in modern times, executioners are said to have done a lively trade, on the side, commonly using a large knife to cut out their victims' hearts and livers for curative purposes (Tong Enzheng, Personal Communication).

A belief held of both animal and cannibalistic consumption was that one could absorb the qualities of what one ate. Thus, eaters of the goshawk or tiger would become strong and brave (Schafer in Chang 1977:132; Mote in Chang 1977:243). The Chinese demand for the horn of the rhinoceros, identified as a locus of potent virility, is notorious among conservationists. In a similar vein, a recent historical novel set in Shandong describes a form of indirect cannibalism. After a Japanese massacre of villagers, dogs grow fat living off their flesh. The author describes his father and grandfather surviving on fatty dogmeat in the winter of 1940: "the same as eating a winter's supply of human flesh. Later [my father] would grow into a tall, husky man who could kill without batting an eye. I wonder if that had anything to do with the fact that, indirectly, he had cannibalized his own people?" (Mo Yan 1993:271). In this way of thinking, vigor and ruthlessness are enhanced by indirect cannibalism. Generally it did not matter if the eaten were friend or enemy. Perhaps because the Chinese thought that the spirit was separated from the body in death or unconsciousness, only the desired traits, not the malevolent ones, of an animal or human were absorbed.²²

The Culture of Cannibalism

If we summarize the various cultural resonances of cannibalism, most noticeable is the availability of moral underpinnings for the practice. There are the hellish torments designed for the wicked, the link of flesh consumption to sacrifice to the revered ancestors, a folklore of revenge culminating in justifiable cannibalism. On the other hand there were morally grounded taboos not tied to accepted systems of classification and liable to be overridden by larger sociopolitical claims.

²² Chinese notions of digestion, which use the term *hua*, to transform, or (colloquially today *xiaohua*, melt and transform); but the term *hua* is actually untranslatable with a single English word, for it usually means change into something good. It is used in various binomes for sinicization of the barbarians and for the conversion of paper money and other objects into a medium of exchange that can be utilized by the gods and (with the addition of paper household objects) by dead relatives. Here, embedded in the language, was protection against moral taint, insofar as the properties of what was eaten were selectively appropriated by the eater.

The extreme violence of cannibalism is not, then, above or below culture. A culture of cannibalism was rooted in Chinese written records and folk ways. Traditional tales, fictional or not, spread the belief that eating people was not just practiced by wild beasts and monsters but was justifiable in the right situation. This is not to say that the leap from cultural familiarity to practice, from imagery and metaphor to reality, was an easy one. There had to be an extraordinary political atmosphere and particular local reasons we shall return to. What occurred in Wuxuan was a sort of carnival²³—a moment of hyperbole, a time for Force Twelve typhoons. It was a time to transfer metaphor and simile into action, to make literal the possible. Some people in Wuxuan extemporized powerful metaphors based on the human body, always a rich store of meaning (Douglas 1970). Cannibalism constructed a sort of theatre of the body, embodying and disembodying Chinese cultural truths and local realities. We should now look more closely at the structure of the rites. What various motives explain who participated in them? How did they have the power, beyond the cultural resonances noted already, to draw together whole groups into collective acts normally unimaginable?

THE ORDER IN VIOLENCE

Perpetrators and Victims in the Struggles

We have seen what cultural resources could be drawn upon by those who eat human flesh but not how the process could be institutionalized. Although there were instances of unritualized consumption, the usual method was to append a human flesh banquet to the standard ritual of struggle.²⁴ In the course of being struggled, a person was transformed into a ritual object; and the rest of the group, into performers of a ritual act full of meaning.

Like other campaigns, the start of a struggle was a series of press and radio announcements repeating certain slogans and targeting people bearing particular labels. Through a public ritual of humiliation, labelling came to transcend the human character of the victim. In the most extreme form, labelling made it conceivable that a ritual act could culminate in killing the victim as a metonym of what the label designated.

But while the labels were supplied by higher authorities, the choice of victims is very much part of local history, the history of face-to-face communities settled for generations by the same families. The violence of land reform and other episodes, Madsen has argued, had left “the social landscape . . . littered with dangerous memories of arbitrary injustices endured and inflicted” (Lipman and Harrell 1990:187). Seeing the PRC under Mao as a

²³ A carnival may be described as a festive, no-holds-barred event outside the rules of ordinary life. Bakhtin (1968) pointed out that carnival removes hierarchy, reducing people of power to ordinary mortals, in this case literally to flesh and blood.

²⁴ For accounts of struggle campaigns, see Whyte (1974), Cell (1977:34–41, 130–2), Madsen (1984:80–95), Chen (1986:181–201), and the case studies cited below.

violence.³⁸ Slogans like capitalist roader needed to have tangible local definition, and action had to assume a formal, ritualized character to have persuasive authority. Lacking the right language or ritual, rebel students trying to exhort Guangxi peasants to support the Cultural Revolution met a wall of incomprehension (Hua 1987:ch. 7). What the violent struggle meeting and street struggle parades did in many Guangxi counties was to give physical form to the humiliation of an enemy, expulsion of harm, reintegration of community, and obedience to the center.

Why did Wuxuan in particular develop the peculiar violence of ritual cannibalism? If Chinese culture had so many resonating elements, one should expect other occurrences elsewhere. Indeed, unknown to Zheng Yi, a senior official in a speech at a conference of writers in 1981 reportedly mentioned, along with Guangxi, two other places where cannibalism occurred in the Cultural Revolution but should not be written about. The other sites were southern Henan and western Hunan province (Daoxian) (Personal Communication). Information is lacking as to what form the cannibalism took, but all three locations are poor and remote. Poverty meant earlier folk memory of cannibalism of need. Isolation meant the absence of outside help or retribution, and may have pushed conflict beyond its normal bounds. Daoxian, like Wuxuan, was on the old ethnic frontier where Han and non-Han had lived in proximity, a point to which I return below.

Zheng notes an arresting scene hinting at specialist local knowledge of cannibalism. In one of the first Wuxuan murders in June 1968, when a man with a knife hesitates before the corpse wondering where to cut, an old man comes forward and explains, "Cut in the form of the *ren* (man) character" (Zheng 1993:68, note). Was this local wisdom acquired at the execution ground? Perhaps. There is at present no evidence that it had been put to local use in such times of famine as 1903, when people were obliged to "drown girls and sell boys" (Chu and Pang 1934:15, 2:30) or in the Great Leap Forward, when Wei Guoqing commandeered the entire harvest of 1959 on orders from Beijing (Zheng 1993:ch. 4).

There are stronger resonances with the endemic feuding in Wuxuan and with the local youths' reputation for violence, at least since the Taiping movement (1850–64), which had drawn many adherents from the county (Tian 1935:248). Arguably, too, the bloody Zhuang practice of ox sacrifice might be echoed in the bloody street struggles prevalent in 1968 throughout Guangxi.³⁹

³⁸ For a summary of peasant responses to the Cultural Revolution, see Liu (1976:151–6). For examples of countryside struggles that were mild or perfunctory, see Siu (1989) and Chen (1973), though their informants (as Siu at least makes clear) probably minimized the violence.

³⁹ I have noted that the Chinese generally lack the European aversion to eating household pets (see above). Wuxuan peasants actually loved to eat what was near and dear to them: The same traveller reported that the women's "affection (*aihu*) for their pigs was sometimes greater than for their own lives" (Tian 1935:248). If we add the symbolic interchangeability of human and pig flesh in South China, bringing oneself to eat people may have been a smaller step than elsewhere in the Guangxi turmoil of 1968.

As for the place of cannibalism in Zhuang culture, that is very uncertain.⁴⁰ In spite of many references in Chinese histories, one can doubt whether cannibalism was ever practiced by the Zhuang. In the absence of detailed accounts of cannibal practices, there is a strong case for the application of Arens' argument that people suspect rival neighboring groups of cannibalism without any foundation. Nor in 1968 were eaters of human flesh in Wuxuan identified specifically as Zhuang.

We have seen so much consistency with elements of the Chinese (in particular, South Chinese) cultural mainstream that it may be superfluous to look at the Zhuang. More plausible may be the theory that ideas of violence and cannibalism are somehow a by-product of interaction on the frontier. Frontier Han not only applied to other ethnic groups all the stereotypes of barbarians as cannibals and witches, but some also treated them not quite as human beings. The exemplary and unprovoked massacre of minority non-combatants by Han armies was a feature of the 1911 Revolution both in west Hunan and Guizhou (Shen 1981:19–25; Sutton 1980:130–1). The flesh of the aborigines of Taiwan was openly sold in pork baskets in one town during the nineteenth century (Sangren 1987:223), and an American Chinese working in Guangxi in the 1940s told me that it was common knowledge that human brains could be purchased there. A racist strain in Han frontier culture, then, may be at least as much at fault.

It is important here to know that people referred to as Zhuang were actually migrants from Fujian, Guangdong, and elsewhere, who had been acculturated to Zhuang ways after settling in this remote country (Chu and Pang 1934:10, 25). What may have played a role was the local belief that the Zhuang had once eaten people. Knowing themselves to have Zhuang blood, could not locals have turned to the human flesh banquets, as these caught on in village after village, in a sort of self-conscious atavism, turning Han myth into reality?

If the available information on local Wuxuan culture seems not quite sufficient to account for the wave of cannibalism, it may be because of the way cultural change is normally viewed. I have assumed that in some ways culture governs us and in others we consciously manipulate it (Ortner 1990). What I would also underline is that a culture, Chinese culture for instance, is not to be taken as a universally recognized, mutually consistent set of traits, but of polarities or implied polarities, associations or sets of associations, which at their simplest are embedded in the language itself, like raw and cooked, and at their most developed become Turner's "root metaphors" or Ortner's "cultural schemata." (An example of an enduring Chinese schemata might be the "rejected loyal minister" replayed by so many idealistic Red Guards who fought on in 1968, refusing to believe that Mao Zedong had withdrawn his support.)

⁴⁰ Zheng Yi (1993:ch. 5) sees a cannibalism of need as a universal early stage of human development, suggests that the Zhuang ritual ox sacrifice replaces human sacrifice, and stresses evidence of revenge cannibalism in Chinese culture which may have influenced the Zhuang.

People choose or are brought unconsciously to choose within a repertoire of such cultural elements.⁴¹ In times of political tension, mass participation, and a degree of local isolation, new forms of political behavior may appear, drawing from less familiar elements in the cultural repertoire, augmenting and reassembling them. The trend to innovate is widely evident in Guangxi, where the pressures I have described made killing alone seem insufficient. Focused on a central town with special local conditions, each county reached a crescendo of violence in its own time and found its own method of mass killing—a method ritualized and institutionalized to varying degrees, from spontaneous to controlled by county or military authorities. In Mengshan, some of those called “enemies of the people” were buried alive. In Zhongshan and Binyang, they were slowly beaten to death in mass meetings, and in street struggles elsewhere. In Lingshan, over 520 entire families were wiped out, while in parts of Rongan and Mengshan, fathers and sons were murdered but not wives. In Shanglin, only the victims’ livers were eaten (Zheng 1993:13–14, 20, 23, 35, 43, 48). The street struggle terminated by the human flesh banquet was the distinctive solution of Wuxuan.

Discussions of causation in social and political change often seem to depend on implicit chemical reaction or machine models. A more suitable analogy here might be drawn from genetics, in which what is passed down is not seen as a bundle (like “tradition”) but, rather, as mutations (or “sports,” to use a botanical metaphor) that appear but are not fully explicable in terms of the political machinery or cultural ingredients at hand. I would suggest an explanation distinguishing a mutation from what follows. The very first human flesh banquet actually occurred on May 4, ten days before the climax of the factional warfare in the county seat, in Tongwan commune in the heavily Zhuang southwest, when two people surnamed Tan, one evidently a woman, were struggled, killed with a shotgun, and their flesh cut up, shared, and eaten (*gerou fenshi*). On May 14, in another village in the commune, a man from a neighboring county was waylaid as he passed through the region, in an unexplained event, and was similarly eaten (Zheng 1993:65–66). Here Zhuang-speaking people may have been conscious of recreating in this time of disorder what they believed to be a Zhuang tradition of eating enemies. Word of these remarkable events spread to the rest of the county, and in the second stage the practice was grafted onto the standard street struggles. Other counties found different solutions because things started differently. This particular cultural mutation was cut short in July, and perhaps self-disgust was already causing it to fade. But it was no less cultural, no less Chinese, than other contemporary experiments.

Cannibalism, ritualized or not, is as rare in China as elsewhere, yet even

⁴¹ There is a problem of recognizing culture in crisis situations where there may be inversions of usual behavior and resorting to unusual parts of the cultural repertoire. Few would deny the Americanness of American radicals of 1968, even though they contravened mainstream American values.

fringe behavior in an aberrant event like Wuxuan's human flesh banquets can be fruitfully placed in cultural contexts (*cf.* Simpson 1984). Event and culture, in fact, can illuminate each other. Just as a historian of France (Darnton 1984) has explained a massacre of cats in a Parisian quarter in terms of local culture and society and thereby shed light on eighteenth-century France, so in explaining the bout of cannibalism in Wuxuan I have tried to shed light on cultural traditions as well as local circumstances in 1968. Explanation invariably widens into the most diverse factors, pan-Chinese and local, Communist and popular, political and cultural. Among cultural factors I have enumerated predisposing medicinal and food habits that Wuxuan people shared with other Chinese, the customary sacrifice and banquet that drew communities together in the face of enemies, the folk belief in hell's just punishments, the historical-mythical tales of justified cannibalism. I have noted persistent metaphors and symbols in south Chinese death practices. I have pointed to a Han belief throughout the Southwest that Zhuang had been eaters of human flesh, a tradition that could be self-consciously rehearsed in the events of 1968, and within the county, to the pugnacious reputation of local male youths. Mine should not be mistaken for the kind of cultural or "culturalogical" (Fox, in Ortner 1990) interpretation criticized by White and other political scientists (1989:315–7). I have acknowledged that politics was the cause of violence: Virtual civil war in Guangxi and constant encouragement from Beijing to root out unflinchingly those regarded as enemies of the people combined to make the most extreme acts seem appropriate. Killing and eating scapegoats fulfilled the interests of a variety of participants from local bullies and good-for-nothings to those harboring grudges or ambitions for personal advancement. But the form that political violence took was decisively influenced by culture.

If Wuxuan cannibalism had been "cultureless" as a political act or ritual, it could not have caught up so many participants from all levels of society; nor would the survivors continue to feel shame, and the former cannibals continue to feel self-righteous. Writers on the Cultural Revolution usually juxtapose Maoist ideology with traditional culture in the sense of values articulated by elites or expressed in religion. Only in this sense can the Cultural Revolution be taken at face value and assumed to be somehow beyond culture. But if Chinese culture is seen, rather, as a repertoire of ingrained but not unchanging habits and preferences, linguistic and symbolic associations, folk and elite images—if culture is seen not as an organic or even holistic entity transcending time and place but as subject to contingent elaboration, reinterpretation, and even inversion, then the Maoist Cultural Revolution and its local adaptations were also cultural, with resonances beyond ideology that need to be explored. Struggle meetings, street struggles, and even cannibalizations were grounded in familiar cultural symbols and associations. Taking the reassuring form of the rite of passage, they were felt by many as expressions, however alienated from Chinese humanist values, of a kind of order, not as mere chaos. That is how more than seventy people, mostly unconnected with the

recently ended factional conflict, were eaten by thousands of fellow villagers and townspeople at the close of Wuxuan's Cultural Revolution.

REFERENCES

- Ahern, Emily Martin. 1973. *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Arens, W. 1979. *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1968 [1965]. *Rabelais and His World*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Bennett, Gordon A.; and Ronald N. Montaperto. 1972. *Red Guard: The Political Biography of Dai Hsiao-ai*. Garden City: Doubleday.
- Bodde, Derk; and Clarence Morris. 1967. *Law in Imperial China: Exemplified by 190 Ch'ing Dynasty Cases*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Brown, Paula; and Donald Tuzin, eds. 1983. *The Ethnography of Cannibalism*. Washington, D.C.: Society for Psychological Anthropology.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. 1987. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Camporesi, Piero. 1989 [1980]. *Bread of Dreams: Food and Fantasy in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Polity Press/Blackwell.
- Cell, Charles P. 1977. *Revolution at Work: Mobilization Campaigns in China*. New York: Academic Press.
- Chan, Anita; Richard Madsen; and Jonathan Unger. 1992 [1984]. *Chen Village under Mao and Deng*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Chang, Jung. 1991. *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Chang Kwang-chih. 1977. *Food in Chinese Culture: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Chen, Jack. 1973. *A Year in Upper Felicity: Life in a Chinese Village during the Cultural Revolution*. New York: Macmillan.
- Chen Yung-fa. 1986. *Making Revolution: The Communist Movement in Eastern and Central China, 1937–1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Chong, Key Ray. 1990. *Cannibalism in China*. Wakefield, N.H.: Longwood Academic.
- Chu Changkui [xiu] and Pang Kengxin [zuan]. 1934. *Wuxuan xianzhi* [Wuxuan county gazetteer]. 18 juan. N.p.
- Clark, Ernest. 1976. "Revolutionary Ritual: A Comparative Analysis of Thought Reform and the Show Trial." *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 9:3, 226–43.
- Cohen, Myron L. "Being Chinese: The Peripheralization of Chinese Identity." *Daedalus* [Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences], 120:2, 113–4.
- Cooper, William; and Nathan Sivin. 1973. "Man as a Medicine," in *Chinese Science*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Darnton, Robert. 1984. *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. New York: Basic.
- Dittmer, Lowell. 1987. *China's Continuous Revolution: The Post-Liberation Epoch, 1949–1981*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Douglas, Mary. 1970. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. New York, Pantheon.
- Dudbridge, Glen. 1978. *The Legend of Miao-shan*. London: Ithaca Press.
- Endicott, Stephen. 1988. *Red Earth: Revolution in a Sichuan Village*. London: Tauris.
- Friedman, Edward; Paul G. Pickowicz; Mark Selden; and Kay Ann Johnson. 1991. *Chinese Village, Socialist State*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Gao, Yuan. 1987. *Born Red: A Chronicle of the Cultural Revolution*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Gennep, Arnold van. 1960. *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gzowski, Peter. 1980. *The Sacrament: A True Story of Survival*. New York: Atheneum.
- Hardy, Grant. 1993. "The Reconstruction of Ritual: Capping in Ancient China." *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 7:2 (Summer), 69–90.
- Hinton, William. 1966. *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- . 1983. *Shenfan*. New York: Random.
- Hua, Linshan. 1987. *Les Années rouges*. Paris, Seuil.
- Huang, Shu-min. 1989. *The Spiral Road: Change in a Chinese Village through the Eyes of a Communist Party Leader*. Boulder: Westview.
- Joseph, William A.; Christine Wong; David Zweig, eds. 1991. *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies.
- Karnow, Stanley. 1972. *Mao and China: From Revolution to Revolution*. New York: Viking Press.
- Knoblock, John. 1988, 1990. *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, vols. 1–2. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Kraus, Richard Curt. 1981. *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ku, Hua. 1983. *A Small Town Called Hibiscus*. Peking: Chinese Literature Press.
- Larner, Christina. 1981. *Enemies of God: The Witch-hunt in Scotland*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Leach, Edmund. 1964. "Anthropological Aspects of Language: Animal Categories and Verbal Abuse," in E. H. Lenneberg, ed., *New Directions in the Study of Language*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1966 [1962]. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Lewis, Mark. 1990. *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Liang, Heng; and Judith Shapiro. 1983. *Son of the Revolution*. New York: Knopf.
- Lin, Jing. 1991. *The Red Guards' Path to Violence: Political, Educational, and Psychological Factors*. New York: Praeger.
- Ling, Ken. 1972. *The Revenge of Heaven; Journal of a Young Chinese*, Miriam London and Ta-ling Lee, trans. New York: Putnam.
- Linger, Daniel. 1992. *Dangerous Encounters: Meanings of Violence in a Brazilian City*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Lipman, Jonathan; and Stevan Harrell, eds. 1990. *Violence in China: Essays in Culture and Counterculture (SUNY Series in Chinese Local Studies)*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Liu, Alan P. L. 1976. *Political Culture and Group Conflict in Communist China*. Santa Barbara: Clio.
- Liu Binyan. 1993. "Review." *New York Review of Books* (April).
- Lu Hsun. 1980. *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*, vol. 1. Beijing: Peking Foreign Languages Press.
- Luo, Guanzhong. 1976. *Three Kingdoms: China's Epic Drama*, Moss Roberts, trans. New York: Pantheon.
- Madsen, Richard. 1984. *Morality and Power in a Chinese Village*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- McKnight, Brian E. 1992. *Law and Order in Sung China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mo, Yan. 1993. *Red Sorghum: A Novel of China*. New York: Viking.

- Munn, Nancy D. 1986. *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) Society*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ortner, Sherry. 1990. "The Foundation of Sherpa Monasteries," in *Culture Through Time. Anthropological Approaches*, Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Potter, Sulamith Heins; and Jack Potter. 1990. *China's Peasants: The Anthropology of a Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Riches, David, ed. 1986. *The Anthropology of Violence*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ristaino, Marcia R. 1987. *China's Art of Revolution: The Mobilization of Discontent, 1927–1928*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Sahlins, Marshall. 1976. *Culture and Practical Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sangren, P. Steven. 1987. *History and Magical Power in a Chinese Community*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Schram, Stuart R. 1969. *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*. New York: Praeger.
- Shen Congwen. 1981. *Congwen zizhuan* [Autobiography of Shen Congwen]. Beijing: People's Literature Company.
- Simpson, A.W. 1984. *Cannibalism and the Common Law: A Victorian Yachting Tragedy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Siu, Helen F. 1989. *Agents and Victims in South China: Accomplices in Rural Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Solomon, Richard H. 1971. *Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stürzenhofecker, Gabriele. 1995. "Sacrificial Bodies and the Cyclicity of Substance." *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 104:1, 1–18.
- Sutton, Donald. 1980. *Provincial Militarism and the Chinese Republic: The Yunnan Army, 1905–25*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Teiser, Stephen F. 1988. *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Thaxton, Ralph. 1983. *China Turned Rightside Up: Revolutionary Legitimacy in the Peasant World*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Thurston, Anne F. 1987. *Enemies of the People: The Ordeal of the Intellectuals in China's Great Cultural Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Tian, Shulan. 1935. *Guangxi lüxing ji*. Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju.
- Tong Enzheng. 1993. Personal Communication (October).
- Turner, Victor. 1967. *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Wasserstrom, Jeffrey N.; and Elizabeth J. Perry. 1992. *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China: Learning from 1989*. San Francisco: Westview.
- Watson, James L. 1982. "Of Flesh and Bones: The Management of Death Pollution in Cantonese Society," in Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, *Death and the Regeneration of Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Watson, James L.; and Evelyn Rawski, eds. 1988. *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- White, Lynn T. III. 1989. *Policies of Chaos: The Organizational Causes of Violence in China's Cultural Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Whyte, Martin King. 1974. *Small Groups and Political Rituals in China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wortzel, Larry M. 1987. *Class in China: Stratification in a Classless Society*. New York: Greenwood.
- Zheng, Yi. 1993. *Hongse ji' nianbei* [Red Memorial]. Taipei: Huashi.
- . 1994. Oral Communication (October 22). Pittsburgh.