

Documenting Memory, Remembrance and Commemoration: Hu Jie's »My Mother Is Wang Peiying« (2010)

Agnes Schick-Chen

*Dokumentácia pamäte, spomienok a pamiatky:
Hu Jieho »Mojou matkou je Wang Peiying« (2010)«*

Resumé Text sa zameriava na pochopenie čínskeho dokumentárneho filmu »Mojou matkou je Wang Peiying« (2010) ako pokusu vyrovnat' sa nespravodlivosťou minulosti spôsobenou excesívnymi kampaňami Maovej éry. Zámer režiséra Hu Jieho zdokumentovať bezprávie prípadu a uchovať pamiatku pani Wangovej ako jeho obeť môže byť chapaný ako doplnenie či dokonca náhrada oficiálneho aktu rehabilitácie pani Wangovej.

Abstract The text aims at understanding the Chinese documentary My Mother Is Wang Peiying (2010) as an attempt at coming to terms with past injustice caused by excessive political campaigning in the Mao era. Director Hu Jie's intention to document the unjust case and preserve the memory of Wang Peiying as its victim can be seen as complementing or even substituting the official act of Wang Peiying's rehabilitation.

Keywords China, History, 1966–76, Rehabilitation, Unjust Cases (yuanjia cuo'an 冤假錯案) · China, Cinema, 1976–, Independent Documentary, Hu Jie 胡傑 (b1958), Wo de muqin Wang Peiying 我的母親王佩英 (2010)

Introduction: The Aim of Historical Documentation and Individual Representation

Wode muqin Wang Peiying 我的母親王佩英 (My Mother (is) Wang Peiying; 2010), is the third by Chinese film maker Hu Jie's 胡杰 documentaries dedicated to individual stories of victimization during the Cultural Revolution. With his cinematic attempts at coming to terms with some of the most problematic chapters of China's socialist past, which also include films focusing on the Great

Famine, and the Anti-Rightist campaign¹ Hu Jie can be seen as an exception within the field of Chinese independent documentary making that has formed in the 1990s.² Despite the fact that many of those who form part of what has been defined as a movement, more recently aim at identifying and displaying problematic aspects of social development—and in spite of many scholars agreeing on the fact that the consequences of excessive campaigning in the Mao era are haunting Chinese society to this day—the number of independent documentaries dealing with historical events or developments of the Mao era has remained rather small, compared to the considerable amount of documentaries addressing present day issues of marginalization and injustice.³

Hu Jie (b1958) who had served in the army for fifteen years and studied oil painting at the Art College of the People's Liberation Army for three years before becoming a documentary filmmaker was in his forties when he had to quit his job with Xinhua News Agency in order to make a documentary about Lin Zhao 林昭, a woman who had been detained in 1957 and executed in 1968 for speaking out against political persecution.⁴ Hu Jie claims that having been deprived from any deeper understanding of what had been going on around him at some sensitive junctures in time, he felt the urge to know more about these

- 1 *Xinghuo* 星火 [Spark; 2013], *Guoying Dongfeng Nongchang* 國營東風農場 [The East Wind State Farm] (2009).
- 2 For names of other documentary filmmakers who have ventured into addressing sensitive issues of the recent past like Wu Wenguang's 吳文光 1966: *Wo de hongweibing shidai* 我的紅衛兵時代 [My Time as a Red Guard; 1992], see the site Independent Documentaries on the Mao Era (1992-2015) provided by the Centre d'Etudes Français sur la Chine Contemporaine (CEFC) at <cefc.com.hk/fr/la-recherche/projets-collectifs/nouvelles-approches-de-ler-maoiste-1949-1976-histoire-quotidienne-et-memoire-non-officielle/independent-documentaries-on-the-mao-era-1992-2015/>.
- 3 Dan Edwards, *Independent Chinese Documentary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 74-77; Ian Johnson, *China's Invisible History: An Interview with Filmmaker and Artist Hu Jie* <www.nybooks.com/bloggs/nyrblog/2015/may/27/chinas-invisible-history-hu-jie>, (last retrieval 06 June 2015).
- 4 Johnson, *China's Invisible History*.

and earlier periods of political excesses himself—and to preserve the memories of those who witnessed them, so their knowledge would not be lost to coming generations upon their elders' passing away.

If considering Hu Jie's films *Xunzhao Lin Zhao de linghun* 尋找林昭的靈魂 (In Search of Lin Zhao's Soul; 2004), *Wo sui siqu* 我雖死去 (Though I am Gone; 2006), and My Mother Wang Peiying a *yuanjia cuo'an* 冤假錯案 ('unjustly, falsely and wrongly sentenced cases') series or trilogy, one way of approaching Hu Jie's historical documentaries would be to treat them as an attempt at creating an alternative archive,⁵ an alternative discursive space⁶ or even at writing an alternative history of the sensitive parts of Chinese development in the second half of the twentieth century. In fact, the way in which films like My Mother (Is) Wang Peiying line up one interview after another, with historical witnesses recalling their experiences, without much of a direct intervention or commentary from the interviewer and/or filmmaker in fact appears close to the methodology of oral history research.

At the same time, Hu claims in more than one of his own interviews that people portrayed in his documentaries sacrificed themselves for the sake of himself and his fellow countrymen, so he feels morally indebted to tell their stories:⁷

The other point is that during this bitter era, this violent era, this most terrifying era, people still tried to reflect on what was happening. They weren't afraid to die. They died in secret, and we of succeeding generations don't know what heroes they were. I think it's a matter of morality. They died for us. If we don't know this, it is a tragedy.⁸

5 Chris Berry and Lisa Rofel, »Alternative Archive: China's Documentary Culture« in *The New Chinese Documentary Movement: for the Public Record*, ed. by Chris Berry, Lu Xinyu and Lisa Rofel, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 151–154.

6 Marie Nicole O'Connor, »Capturing the Memoryscape: Alternative Visual Discourse and the Documentaries of Hu Jie and Wang Bing« (Master's thesis, The University of British Columbia, 2010).

7 Tania Branigan, »Film-Maker Defies China's Censors to Reveal Horrors of the Great Famine«, *The Guardian* 10 August 2014 <theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/10/china-censors-film-maker-horrors-great-famine> (last retrieval 10 June 2015).

8 Johnson, *China's Invisible History*.

This statement points to Hu Jie's personal motivation of honouring the people portrayed in his documentaries, answering to a general need for representation of the victims of former political persecution acknowledged as part of what has been termed transitional justice in after-conflict societies.⁹ In post-Mao China, this specific aspect of coming to terms with the past has been addressed in form of post-mortem commemoration ceremonies forming part of the rehabilitation rite in the cases of victims ranking highly in the political and/or intellectual sphere. The private initiative of a Chinese entrepreneur to commemorate his late mother, an ordinary cadre employed at a ministry's nursery school, by holding a ceremony in the semi-public space of a luxury hotel in Beijing is both following and deviating from this tradition of Chinese politics of memory as practiced in post-socialist China. On the one hand, his mother's case is indeed one of the many cases of wrongful persecution and execution in the Cultural Revolution and earlier campaigns; on the other hand, she did not belong to those who were famous enough to be honored by way of official commemoration after rehabilitation. The message of Wang Peiying's story being both singular and representative, standing for so many life stories that had not been paid tribute or even individual attention to in the course of or after their formal rehabilitation in the early 1980s, is spread by the event of her commemoration and the film that was first screened on this occasion.

Hu Jie made the documentary on initiative of and together with Wang's third son and youngest daughter, Zhang Dazhong 張大中 and Zhang Kexin 張可心,¹⁰ which could be seen as a continuation and intensification of Hu's approach of working in close cooperation with relatives or friends of those whose cases he is documenting. He is not only speaking on behalf of but in unison with those who are trying to find an outlet for their grief, anger—and answers to those questions with regard to the tragedies they lived through and witnessed that are left open by the formal act of rehabilitation. In their joint insistence in

9 Thomas Obel Hansen, »Transitional Justice: Toward a Differentiated Theory«, *Oregon Review of International Law* 13,1 (2011), 1–46.

10 Zhong Dazhong is named as director, Zhang Kexin as in charge of interview coordination, and Hu Jie and Hu Min 胡敏 as editors in the end titles of the documentary.

answering those questions revolving around Lin Zhao's, Bian Zhongyun's¹¹ and Wang Peiying's fate by way of research and documentation, those involved in the making of the films seem to form something like a community of fate, irrespective of different life experiences and present day status. In the case of *My Mother (Is) Wang Peiying*, Zhang Dazhong's potential of the entrepreneur and urge to tell about his family's past¹² meets with Hu Jie's mandate of the intellectual to arouse the awareness of society and—at least indirectly—point to the omissions of the rulers.

*Collecting Memories to Reconstruct a Mother's History:
Daughter and Son as Interviewer and Interviewee*

The outcome of Hu Jie's and Zhang Dazhong's common endeavour, i.e. the cinematic account of Wang Peiying's life (1915–1970), is preceded by the opening of her case file and the disclosing of her death sentence issued by Beijing Intermediate People's Court, approved by the Party Central and executed in

- 11 In the planning process for *In Search of Lin Zhao's Soul* Hu Jie at first intended to document the efforts of one of Lin Zhao's former classmates to publish a book on her, before deciding to collect facts and statements on her life and death himself (Dan Edwards, *Independent Chinese Documentary*, 77). In *Though I am Gone* it is Bian Zhongyun's 卞仲耘 widower Wang Jingyao 王晶焄 whose photographs and memories of his wife having been murdered by Red Guards at the prestigious girls' high-school where she had been teacher, deputy principal and party secretary, and his claim for historical truth and justice are at the core of Hu Jie's account of this case (Hu Jie, *...nicht der Rede wert? Der Tod der Lehrerin Bian Zhongyun am Beginn der Kulturrevolution*, ed./tr. by Wolfgang Schwiedrzik and Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik (Neckargemünd/Vienna: Mnemosyne 2009); Edwards, *Independent Chinese Documentary*, 68–95).
- 12 Li Guangmin 李光敏 and Yuan Ling 袁凌, »Qiyedia Zhang Dazhong faqi xilie xingdong jinian "fan Wenge xisheng" muqin« 企业家張大中發起系列行動紀念「反文革犧牲」母親 [Entrepreneur Zhang Dazhong Initiates a Series of Activities Commemorating his Mother who has »Sacrificed Herself Opposing the Cultural Revolution«], *Fenghuang Zhoukan* 28 (2010), <news.ifeng.com/opinion/meiti/ph/detail_2010_10/13/2767400_0.shtml> (last retrieval 15 July 2015).

People's Worker Stadium in January 1970. Quotes from these documents are displayed in typewriting against the background of the partly hand written original.

After this short intro, Wang Peiying's youngest daughter Zhang Kexin 張可心, a woman in her fifties, is shown sitting on a train, embarking on her travel to the past which at first leads her to her mother's hometown Kaifeng in Henan province. Against the background of images first of the train station and streets of today's Kaifeng, then of historical photographs, she starts to talk about Wang Peiying's being a single child and educated in a missionary school where, according to her daughter, she was taught to be an enlightened young woman. She introduces her father, with whom her mother became acquainted in the 1930s, as a Beijing law school graduate and member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), from where the account is taken over by the first interviewee, a retired cadre and former friend and colleague of Wang Peiying's. The old woman and Zhang Kexin deliberate about her father's underground work in the 1940s and her mother's joining the Party in 1950. Showing old photos, Kexin and her elder brother Dazhong then explain why their parents moved to Beijing in order to work in the new railway ministry and leading a happy family life with their children in the early 1950s.

Not all of the siblings are equally present in the documentary. Some of them appear in interviews only once and only as listeners, some are not part of the film at all. In the first half of the film, Zhang Kexin is mostly shown accompanying the film team and speaking from behind the camera, or as a background voice to the pictures shown. Zhang Dazhong is one of those interview partners who are interviewed several times forming something like the »backbone« or the »main characters« of the documentary together with some of Wang Peiying's former colleagues from the ministry and the daughter of a couple Wang Peiying and her husband had befriended in their days of his underground work for the Party. The form of his interviews does not differ much from those with other witnesses.

The only detail that distinguishes him from the other interviewees whose name, former position and present or pre-retirement occupation is inserted each time they speak, is that he is only introduced as 'third son 三子' without providing any information on his personal and occupational background. The

room in his house in which the interview is done as well as most other private locations used for the interviews do not reveal much about the interviewees' living situation, as for most of them only a small section of the rooms are shown. Nevertheless, they still insinuate that most of those speaking are leading a more or less comfortable life in their respective present-day positions or after their retirement. Zhang Dazhong's being more than well-off, a fact that is never directly addressed throughout the film, for example, is hinted at by the high-tech TV set and loudspeakers partly visible in the background during his interviews.

A beyond average background is also displayed by the images of the compound two former colleagues of Wang's husband are living in. They are among those interviewees testifying to Wang Peiyong's being a caring wife and mother before the Great Leap Forward and the early death of her husband due to illness aggravated by deprivation in 1960—two events that turn out to become the watershed in Wang's life, causing a change in her perception of and attitude towards the political situation she is living in. Her son Zhang Dazhong seems set on clarifying that this did not mean his mother had been a dissenter from the beginning, when he recalls how she had bought a bust of Mao Zedong for their home shortly after their father's untimely death.

Memories of Politics....: How to Face a Mother's Dissent and Desertion?

Wang Peiyong's eventual turning against Mao—though not against communism or the Party—is vindicated by historical footing of the effects of his erroneous economic policy culminating in the disasters of the Great Leap and the Great Famine in the late nineteen fifties, as well as by statements of former political heavyweights like Zhang Shen 張申 and academic experts like Gao Hua 高華.¹³ Their explanations and other witnesses' testimonies appear in sharp contrast to short takes from official documentaries of the National Day Parade held on 1 October 1959, showing enthusiastic to exalted faces, the difference to the actual meaning of the events being underlined by gloomy music bearing no good for the

13 Zhang Shen was Chairman of Henan Province Chinese People Political Consultative Conference CPPCC and local party secretary in Kaifeng in 1959; Gao Hua 高華 was historian and professor at Nanjing University until his death in 2011.

upcoming developments. The description of the disaster plaguing the whole country fades into the recollections of the extremely hard times the widow was facing with her seven children as remembered by former colleagues and friends. From the combination of both, the film seems to insinuate, Wang Peiying finally drew her individual conclusion to favour Liu Shaoqi over Mao Zedong and asking the latter to step down in view of the harm he had caused. This was extremely problematic in the early sixties, but of course had even darker consequences when Liu Shaoqi's political career crumbled and finally ended in his being purged and coming to death at the height of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁴

At first, Wang Peiying's political ideas lead to her being diagnosed a psychological disorder and locked up in a psychiatric clinic. At this point, Zhang Kexin switches to the function of an interviewee for the first time, seated on a sofa in an undefined room, speaking about her early childhood memories, thereby becoming part of the story she has been tracing from the outside so far. Unlike other interviewees, the Kexin of the old times is introduced as an innocent little girl with the help of a childhood photo titled 'the youngest daughter'. In the interview she faintly remembers to have cried and hugged her mother when the latter told her that she would have to depart and leave Kexin and her siblings alone, asking the elder children to take care of the younger ones. While other witnesses acknowledge Wang Peiying's political acumen in hindsight, her son Dazhong only states that calling for Mao Zedong to step down because of his mistakes leading to death and despair of so many in China was clearly exceeding the scope of what could be said or even thought of in those times. He remembers going to see his mother once a month alone, as the clinic is quite far away from their home and he as a sixteen years old student is the only one with a bicycle and some spare time. He tries to explain the silence between him and his mother during these visits, experienced as dismal by the son in hindsight, by saying that she was taking sedating medication. Nevertheless, he remembers his mother apologizing for »getting them implicated« in this bad situation and the terrible things that were still to come. And he remembers the

14 Lowell Dittmer, »Death and Transfiguration: Liu Shaoqi's Rehabilitation and Contemporary Chinese Politics«, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 40,3 (May 1981), 455-479

recommendation of a woman doing the clinic laundry who asks him to take a picture with his brothers and sisters for his mother who is said to be missing them deeply. The black and white photo that he has brought to his mother is displayed for a moment, it is showing four healthy young men and three kids, each with a scarf—which can be guessed to be red—and smiling. The red scarves from the picture are echoed and multiplied by the thousands in a historical footage of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution with a vast crowd of young people vowing to be part of it, on Tiananmen Square in August 1966. One scene in which a man is accused and bullied by several young men with »little red books« in their hands and used as truncheons is finally foreboding the darkest chapter of Wang Peiyong's story.

...and the Individualization of Politics of Memory:

How to Face the Memory of Deserting Your Mother and Mistreating Your Comrade?

Wang Peiyong is being dismissed from hospital given that her problem is not a psychological, but a political one—that has to be taken care of elsewhere, as declared in the handwritten discharge papers, again traced by the typewriter, with the name of the doctor signing the paper openly displayed to the film audience. She is transferred back to the railway ministry as her former work unit, and Zhang Dazhong remembers realizing the situation was critical when he was asked by those in charge of cadre investigation within the work teams to get some sanitary items for his mother. Wang Kexin remembers seeing her mother's face half covered by a dust mask but still visibly frightened, when brought back, but does not speak about any inner or outward reaction of herself at the time. She contents herself by saying that she was »so young, in primary school still«—which could be interpreted as an explanation for her not responding emotionally to her mother's misery in the past. Instead she seems eager to approach her mother's story from the annalist's position, showing the place in Beijing Xidan 西單 where her mother posted her critical ideas in written form on the walls of the former Central Organization Department compound.

At a certain point in the conversation with the former headmistress of the railway ministry kindergarten when the letter recounts Wang Peiyong being terribly worried about her little daughter, Kexin finally breaks down and finds

the tears she did not shed forty years ago and has not been able to cry since. Leaning against the shoulders of this person of her and her mother's past, she utters one more time that »being so young, being so young, one just does not know so many things«, before declaring or nearly vowing that now she »really wants to understand about mother's past«. This emotional outburst is not only felt as a catharsis for the grown up daughter who had never been able to give way to the feelings and mourning for her mother. It also comes as a relieve to the viewer who is watching all those people in a prolonged row of interviews talking about the cruel and devastating events of the past with straight faces, without frowning or wincing, and—at least in a few cases—even smiling or laughing at the ridiculousness of the deeds and ideas that harmed or even destroyed so many peoples' lives, back then and today.

A telling example of this seemingly detached and wordly-wise manner of recounting traumatic experience are the interviews with three of Wang's former cell mates in the so called »*niupeng* 牛棚 (cowshed)«, a place of politically motivated confinement in the Cultural Revolution. They describe quite matter-of-factly how Wang was mistreated when refusing to take back her criticism on Mao and keeping to her laud for Liu, but add they did cry in secret when it happened. Zhang Dazhong also remembers shedding some hidden tears after the detention of his mother, but at the same time admits to being very clear about the necessity of drawing a line between her and himself in order to avoid becoming an outcast himself. This together with other memories of not taking the mother's side in difficult situations makes him »involved or implicated (*qianlian* 牽連)« in or by the victimization (*shoubai* 受害) of his mother in more than one sense. In a similar manner, Zhang Kexin's constant pointing to her young age and intellectual deficit could be read as an apology for not allowing herself speaking on behalf of or at least feeling for her mother when she would have needed it most. The question of whether this makes her less of a victim is not answered by the documentary.

Most interestingly, without making any difference in the neutral style of presenting witnesses, the film also shows the retrospective view of the perpetrators. One of them declares herself to have been part of the so called

zaofanpai 造反派 [rebel faction]¹⁵ in the beginning, and to have agreed to Mao's denouncement of Deng Xiaoping und Liu Shaoqi, concluding her statement with the question: »Who would not have listened [to him] then?« The rhetorical character is resonating with the general and therefore even more pressing question of how could anybody—including oneself—be so misguided and do so much harm? In a similar way, the statement by a former leading cadre of the cadre investigation bureau of the railway ministry in charge of CR policy implementation also points to the broader implications of their dealing with deviant behavior. Her retrospective amazement about the fact that no matter how high-ranking the interrogator, Wang Peiying would still keep to her positive evaluation of Liu Shaoqi, implies that the insolence of resisting the culturally implanted hierarchical order was outweighing the mistake of ideological dissent—in spite of the fact that at least in theory, voicing your critical opinion to your superiors freely should have been in tune with the revolutionary spirit of those times.

*Conclusion: The Function of the »Rehabilitation Documentary«
Beyond Historical Documentation and Individual Representation*

In the end, none of those who have been interviewed as witnesses, victims, or perpetrators is speaking directly about Wang Peiying's ordeal culminating in her being tortured to death on the way to her execution in January 1970. Pan Shihong 潘士弘, who had been primary school teacher in Beijing in the early 1970s before emigrating to the United States, is introduced as an external figure, not belonging to those who have become familiar faces to the viewer, to speak about the mass tribunals and executions in the Beijing Worker's Stadium (*Beijing gongren tiyuchang* 北京工人体育场) during the Cultural Revolution. The information he provides on the procedure and the atmosphere of these mass events is further illustrated by historical images of the full ranks of the stadium and the

15 For an overview of literature on the formation of factions within the Red Guards Movement and a local case study see Dong Guoqiang and Andrew Walder, »Factions in a Bureaucratic Setting: The Origins of Cultural Revolution Conflict in Nanjing«, *China Journal* 65 (January 2011), 1–25.

shouting of Cultural Revolution slogans. In the following takes, solemn choral singing underlines the images of and verdicts¹⁶ against Wang Peiying and two other victims of the Cultural Revolution¹⁷ read aloud by a voice that could very well be the loudspeaker voice in the Worker's Stadium. The naming of other victims at the point of culmination of the storyline, developed from the sequel of interviews throughout the film, seems evidence to the documentary's aim of presenting Wang Peiying's case as one of so many to be remembered. This reminder for the audience has actually been anticipated in a take when the daughter of her parents' friends who accompanies Zhang Kexin on her journey to the past at a certain point in one of her interviews sequences suddenly turns from Wang Peiying's to her own family's story, by saying that she keeps asking herself similar questions about the fate of her own parents who both died young in the turmoils of political campaigning and persecution in the early years of the PRC.

Finally, the film exemplifies that even Wang Peiying's case itself is not about one person's tragic fate only, and that by reconstructing their mother's life, Zhang Dazhong and Zhang Kexin are trying to sort out and come to terms with their own past as well. Towards the end of the documentary, Kexin is performing both her role as the annalist and a protagonist of the story told in the documentary. When an unidentified man shows her the wasteland in the outskirts of Beijing through which the transport of political convicts had passed on its way to the Workers Stadium, she is shown in profile again, nodding to the

16 The wording of »relying on the political authority of Mao Zedong Thought and issued 'according to the law« [*yifa* 依法] reveals the re-adaptation of politico-legal rhetoric in the second phase of the Cultural Revolution.

17 The two victims introduced by the documentary are Ma Zhengxiu (Han Sanzhou 韓三洲, »Bei yiwangde "Wenge sixiangzhe" Ma Zhengxiu« 馬正秀被遺忘的“文革思想者”馬正秀 [Ma Zhengxiu, a Forgotten Thinker of the Cultural Revolution], (Xianggang Zhongwen daxue Zhongguo yanjiu fuwu zhongxin: minjian lishi), <mjlsh.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/book.aspx?cid=6&tid=157&pid=3356> (last retrieval 10 July 2015) and Yu Luohe 遇羅克 (*Zhongguo renquan xianfeng* 中國人權先驅 [A Pioneer of Human Rights in China], ed. by Jin Zhong 金鐘 (Hong Kong: Kaifang chubanshe 2010).

background information she receives on this most cruel part of her mother's story. She appears as someone investigating, not connected, to the tragedy of the latter's dying in this benighted place. Nevertheless, shortly before that, she is shown desperate and nearly unable to descend the staircase of the apartment building in which she has interviewed one of Wang Peiying's former colleagues who remembers having heard—she does not recall from whom—that Wang Peiying was not shot in the Stadium, but had died from the injuries inflicted on her during transport to the execution site. It is the typewriter, one more time that confirms this »rumour« to be a historical fact against the scenery of the wasteland passing by an invisible vehicle and invisible passengers on their way to nowhere...

Thinking back at the proposition of the documentary as a form of alternative history writing, the typewriter in this and many other instances of the film could be seen as the »proofreader« of the material manifestations of history presented at some crucial points of Wang Peiying's story, or else as an administrator of the alternative archive of memories created by the filmmakers. In continuation of this line of thought, the retyping of what is already written in the official documents could in fact be interpreted as an act of »rewriting« history. At the same time, the interspersed historical footing is to be understood as a constant hint to the overall dimension of the historical development forming the background to Wang Peiying's individual case rather than a comprehensive account of the periods comprised by her life story. The picture of Chinese history in the twentieth century as drawn by the documentary remains fragmentary and can only be appreciated on the basis of sound background knowledge on the part of the audience. This, to a certain extent, seems to compromise the goal of passing on historical knowledge and awareness of the so called *unjust cases* (*yuan'an* 冤案) from the Mao era to coming generation, named as one of Hu Jie's motivations to document the past. Rather than informing or educating, the film seems to call on its audience to become part of the community of fate formed by those involved in making it. Instead of documenting history, it is documenting remembrance; the outcome therefore being a document on how the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution and other tragic periods of the Mao era are remembered more than thirty years after its end, i.e. the memory of revolutionary China in China of the twenty-first century.

In all aspects named above, i.e. individual representation of victims as part of commemoration,¹⁸ leading to an individualization and subjectivization of politics of memory, and finally addressing the traumata of those who do not allow themselves full ‘implicated and affected person’ (*qianlian* 牽連) status due to their memories of emotional alienation and actually failing the victim, the documentary appears to be complementing if not substituting the formal act of ‘redress and rehabilitation’ (*pingfan* 平反) supposed to end victimization by way of rescinding the wrong verdict.¹⁹ The film does not indicate that Wang Peiyong’s post mortem rehabilitation was applied for by a relative, Zhang Dazhong, who used the modest compensation paid by the state to lay the foundations of his future business enterprise, as in many other cases. The rehabilitation document issued by the Intermediate People’s Court and approved by the CCP in April 1980 is displayed without any commentary, except for the typewriter reproducing the passage in which Wang Peiyong’s dedication to the Party and her contributions to the Revolution are highlighted as reasons for redressing her case and overruling the unjust verdict. It is the film as a kind of second rehabilitation document which is reestablishing Wang’s image as steadfast defender of truth and justice and her role as caring, beloved and, above all, unforgotten mother—both for the sake of her and her children’s untainted memory.

18 This aspect gains even more weight when the celebration held in commemoration of Wang Peiyong in Beijing in March 2010 with 500 invited guests is included as a coda in a later version of the documentary <youtube.com/watch?v=dr3TJKkzWHs>.

19 For an overview of the rehabilitation drive of the late 1970s to early 1980s see Dong Baoxun 董寶訓 and Ding Longjia 丁龍嘉, *Chenyuan zhaoxue: pingfan yuanjiacuo'an* 沈冤昭雪—平反冤假錯案 (Hefei: Anhui Renmin Chubanshe 1998); Dai Huang 戴煌, *Hu Yaobang yu pingfan yuanjiacuo'an (xiudingban)* 胡耀邦與平反冤假錯案修訂版 [Hu Yaobang and the Rehabilitation of Unjust, Falsely or Incorrectly Tried Cases (revised edition)]. (Beijing: Zhongguo gongren chubanshe 2004); He Zai 何載, *Yuanjiacuo'an shi zheyang pingfan de* 冤假錯案是這樣平反的 [This is How Unjust, Falsely or Incorrectly Tried Cases Were Rehabilitated]. (Beijing: Zhongguo zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1999).

The eulogy of the Party leaders who have taken over China from the times of redress and rehabilitation in the late 1970s and early 1980s and have led her population to a state of 'modest prosperity' (*xiaokang* 小康) is typewritten against the background of the seal on the rehabilitation paper. It is followed by the filmmakers' final statements: »Those who have sacrificed themselves in a heroic manner during those times of catastrophe may rest in peace.« and »[To] my most beloved mother—Wang Peiyang immortal [*bu xiu* 不朽]!« The order in which these concluding statements are shown in white characters against an imageless black background allows for a twofold interpretation. It could be read as an admonition that the death can only find their peace if China's development is left in the hands of a successful leadership. Finally, it could as well point to the need to acknowledge the sacrifices of society and the individual and raise the question whether the memory of individual and collective sacrifice could ever be weighed against economic growth and stability of a nation.

University of Vienna, Department of East Asian Studies