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Husman, Daniel Raymond

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Long Bow: Memory and Politics in a Chinese Village

by

Daniel Raymond Husman

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

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in

Anthropology

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Liu Xin, Chair

Professor Aihwa Ong

Professor Alexei Yurchak

Professor Cihan Tugal

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Abstract

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This dissertation traces the interlocking problems of remembering the past, acting in the present, and imagining the future in the village of Long Bow, Shanxi Province. In 2008-09, I lived for eleven months in the house of the former village Communist Party Secretary while I collected the life histories of sixty-two informants, representing a diversity of ages, genders, and economic backgrounds. I also did further in-depth interviews with twenty-five of these informants, observed daily life in the village, studied village government and local Communist Party branch archives, and collected demographic and economic data on the village.

I investigate how the past is socially produced and reproduced and how historical representations are invested with political and ethical significance. Close attention to narratives of the socialist past in contemporary Chinese society reveals how the political idiom of the communist revolution continues to be powerful in a context of rapid social and economic change. Contemporary China presents a paradoxical combination of neoliberal economic policies with a political imaginary that still draws deeply on the memory of the Maoist past. In this context, I argue that China is experiencing a crisis of historical representation, wherein the question of how to bring the past to bear on the present and future has become highly problematic and politically charged. My dissertation explores this crisis as it is manifested in memory practices in Long Bow, especially as they inform the micro politics and ethics of daily life.

Long Bow was chosen as the site for this ethnographic study because of the special relationship it has to its own past. The village was the site of William Hinton's firsthand account of the late-1940s Land Reform movement, *Fanshen*, a classic of rural anthropology, Chinese historiography, and the history of ideology and socialist revolution. Because of the influence of that document and its author, Long Bow has a complex relationship to its own history. I show how memories of the collectivist past in Long Bow inform the local understanding of the social changes and national discourses of the Reform Era. Furthermore, I explore how memories of the Mao Era are invoked in local politics, and how narratives of the past constitute a crucial resource for the construction of authority and resistance. I trace these themes in various forms—local museums and memorials, home construction, oral history, and farm labor.

I understand memory to be the form of the past as it is experienced in the present. This perspective on

memory opens up possibilities for seeing how situated, everyday practices enact a collective historical consciousness. In this sense, the particular memory practices of Long Bow village can be a lens for understanding the linked problems of history and national identity in contemporary China more widely. Attending to the construction, narration, and politicization of history and memory at the micro level of the village illuminates processes of the formation of national ideology and the dynamic links between local and national discourses.

To the people of Long Bow village
for your hospitality, openness, and warmth

Thank you

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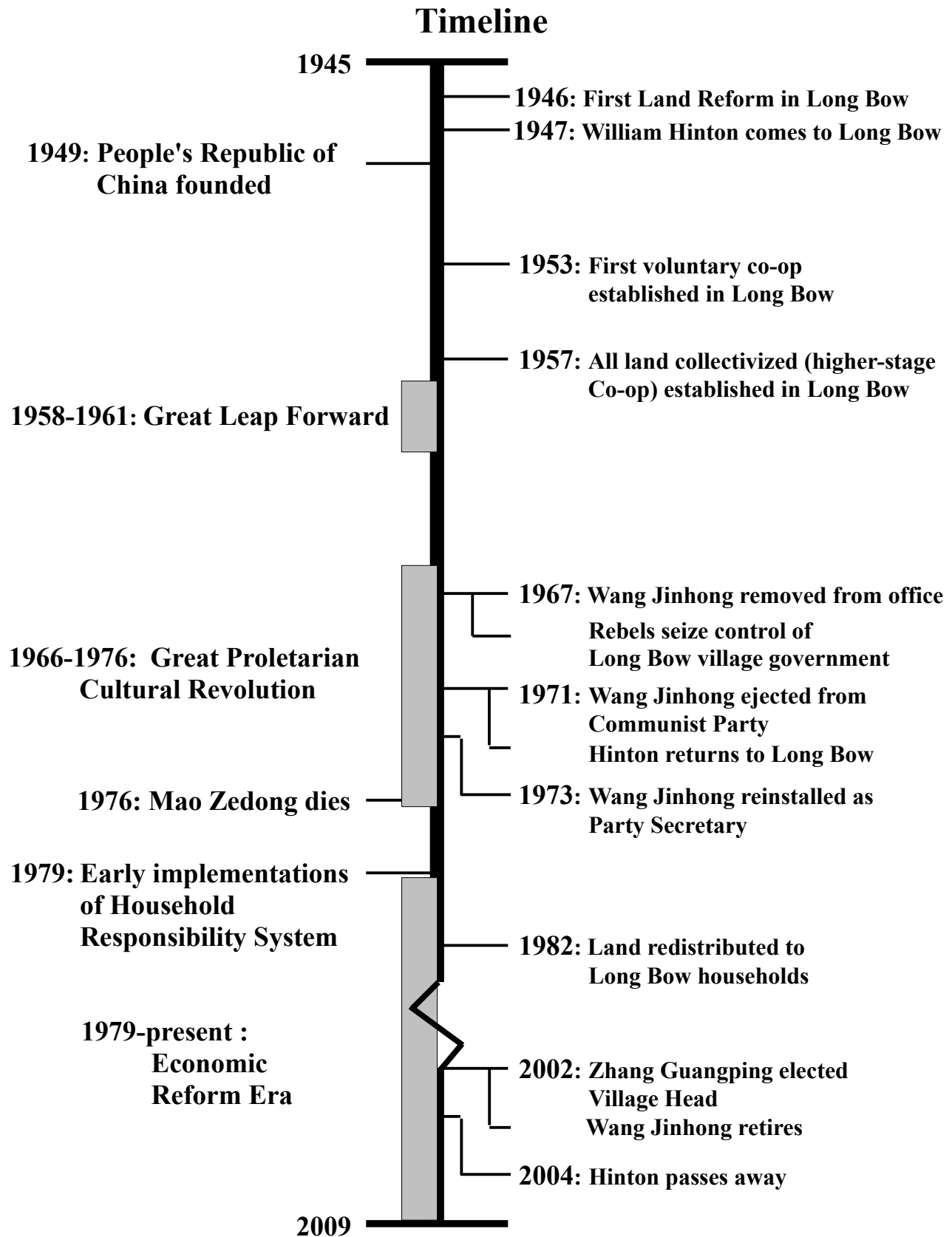
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Chapter 1 – Introduction: Memory and Politics in Contemporary China

“Only then, through the power of using the past for living and making history again out of what has happened, does a person first become a person.” - Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Use and Abuse of History for Life¹

On March 17, 2010, the National Museum of China (中国国家博物馆) fully reopened to the public after more than three years of renovation. Situated in the heart of Beijing, the museum spatially dominates the east side of Tiananmen Square, and was built originally as an architectural twin with the Great Hall of the People (人民大会堂, site of the highest level legislative and political meetings in China²) directly across the Square. The initial construction and opening of the museum in 1959 was intended to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and mark the completion of the rebuilding of Tiananmen Square, a project symbolic of national reconstruction and the advent of a “New China.”³ The recently completed reconstruction project was also originally begun with another date symbolic of national progress in mind—the 2008 Beijing Olympics—but then repeatedly delayed by conflicts over the design.

Although the museum renovation was not completed in time for the Olympics, the project stands as one among many contemporary examples of massive architectural projects built to represent China's rise.⁴ An article in the newspaper Southern Weekend (南方周末) is representative of this theme in Chinese media coverage of the museum reopening. Titled “The National Museum of China: Another Chinese Miracle” (中国国家博物馆：又一个中国式奇迹), the article opens with a description of the enormous scale of the reconstruction, which “in one leap became the largest museum in the world.”⁵ It explains that, despite the largely unchanged high-Soviet exterior of the building, the interior is completely new, a “surface layer of the old, enclosing the new museum rolled up inside.”⁶ In a later section of the article titled “Chinese Dimensions” (中国体量), the author describes the experience of visiting the new museum for the first time:

“Entering the new central hall of the museum (called the “Great Arts Gallery”) through the main door on the front side facing Tiananmen Square, the first impression is of the

1 Nietzsche (1983)

2 The most important of these are the yearly simultaneous two meetings (两会) of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (中国人民政治协商会议) and the National People's Conference (全国人民代表大会), and the every five year meeting of the National Congress of the Communist Party of China (中国共产党全国代表大会).

3 Several authors have written on the symbolism of the city plan and architecture of Beijing, centered on the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square, and its role through history in state legitimacy and national unity. See Barmé (2008)

4 Ren (2011) and Xue (2006)

5 “一跃成为全球建筑面积最大的博物馆。” Chen (2011). All quotes from the article are translated by the author from the original.

6 “走进大门才会发现，新国博的“瓢”是全新的，老国博只留下一层表皮，绕着新国博裹了大半圈儿。” Chen (2011)



The National Museum of China, post renovation. Photo copyright Christian Gahl.

hall's incredible size. The first time the Beijing TV producers of the museum's new exhibit on “The Arts of the Enlightenment” came into the hall, they had the same feeling. ‘Everyone thinks the same thing: big, so big that we didn't know how to film it. We interviewed some Germans for the piece, and without coordination the first thing they all said was “Enormous.”’ The hall is 28 meters tall, 30 meters wide, and 330 meters long, with a total area approaching 10,000 square meters. The floor area of the whole museum is the largest in the world, and the main hall is likely also the world's largest. In the whole hall there is not a single column, opening a huge expanse that adds to the cavernous feeling.’⁷

When constructed during Mao era, the original building was also designed to impress by its size. Although the new renovation was done in a very different context of global competition, there are strong parallels in the architectural discourses that informed the Mao era redevelopment of Tiananmen Square (including building the National Museum) and the projects erupting everywhere in China today. In both cases, the buildings are supposed to convey a sense of modernity and progress, demonstrating China's recovery—in the early Mao era, from decades of war and chaos, and in the Reform era, from stagnation and isolation at the end of the Cultural Revolution. They also aspirationally link China to a global context—once, the promise of global socialist revolution, now, the spectacular economic growth of global capitalism. Despite vast

7 Chen (2011)

differences in the politics and economics of the two eras, the use of monumental architecture to symbolize national pride, represented in Mao's declaration that "China has stood up," has resulted in the characteristic appearance of Beijing. Perhaps no building illustrates that better than the National Museum, a hybrid of monumental styles old and new.

The parallels between the original construction of the Museum in 1959 and the present renovation extend beyond architecture. Even more than the architecture itself, the contents of the museum were and are problematic. In 1959, the question was how to tell a story of history that conformed to Marxist orthodoxy (for example, portraying ancient China as a "slave society") and demonstrated the successful leadership of the Communist Party. Today, although the standards of political correctness have changed, the problem of how to represent history was again contentious, delaying the museum's reopening for years. Ultimately, these debates are effects of the crucial importance of developing a version of history in imagining the nation and producing the legitimacy of the state.⁸

In the present renovation of the National Museum, what were the specific problems that confronted the designers in producing a correct version of history? For one, elements of the version of history in the museum are notable both for their presence and their absence.⁹ In the exhibit on ancient history, there is an emphasis on collecting "precious objects," and the dominant narrative it tells is of China's fifty-six officially-recognized ethnic groups working together through history in harmony to create "brilliant achievements." According to the museum's head foreign affairs officer, Tian Shanting, this view of the past is a result of a decision to present history in a positive light: "We wanted to celebrate China. I think that's understandable."¹⁰

This desire to emphasize the positive is also invoked as an explanation for the lack of coverage of more recent events. The museum's exhibit on modern history, titled "The Road to Rejuvenation," tells a story of a journey from humiliation to redemption – colonization at the hands of Western powers, misery and destruction during the Japanese occupation and the Civil War, the successful leadership of the Communist Party in building socialism in the first thirty years after the founding of the PRC, and economic progress in the last thirty years. Other elements of recent history are barely represented at all: the Great Leap Forward famine, estimated to have resulted in the deaths of more than twenty million people, is mentioned only in the short phrase, "the project of constructing socialism suffered severe complications."¹¹ The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), commonly referred to as "Ten years of chaos," is represented by a single photograph and three line caption.

It is hardly unprecedented for a national history museum anywhere in the world to massage the past for present political purposes. At the same time, perhaps there is no such a thing as a "true" account of history; we might wonder if all narrations of history do not tell us more about the present than about the past. To that end, following Foucault, any inquiry into the history of the

8 Anderson (1991)

9 Johnson (2011)

10 Quoted in Johnson (2011)

11 Quoted in Johnson (2011)

present must ask, “what are we and what are we today? What is this instant that is ours? ... it is a history that starts off from this present day actuality ... to try to detect those things which have not yet been talked about, those things that, at the present time, introduce, show, give some more or less vague indications of the fragility of our system of thought, in our way of reflecting, in our practices.”¹² These issues are particularly thorny in contemporary China, where the Party tries to control public discourses and the politically correct version of history has disproportionate power. As historian Hung Chang-tai put it, “A public museum in China is seldom about the past. It is about the current image of the party and how the party wants itself to be seen.”¹³

The Past in the Present in Contemporary China

This illustration of the Communist Party's efforts to control the public version of history only scratches the surface of the problem presented by the recent past in contemporary China. The failure of official discourse to acknowledge the past is just one element in a wider ongoing crisis of historical representation. This crisis has paradoxically heightened the stakes of narrating history even while it is officially being actively forgotten, sharpening the political and ethical significance of remembering the past. Evidence can be seen in an enormous diversity of phenomena, from everyday nostalgia, to architecture, popular culture, and official political discourses. This dissertation will investigate the problem of the past and the crisis of historical representation from the perspective of one village, revealing the power of the past in the present in multiple ways. Before focusing on the particular site of this study, we should first develop a clearer picture of the wider context of representations of the past in contemporary China.

One widely recognized consequence of the problematic nature of the past in contemporary China has been the creation of a sense of rupture. A similar phenomenon has been observed in many places in the post-socialist world, where the past and present are frequently represented as separated by a sharp and sudden moment of upheaval, marking the point of a fundamental transformation of society.¹⁴ Other authors have critiqued the notion of rupture, pointing out the numerous continuities that exist between the socialist and post-socialist eras.¹⁵ However, the existence of undoubted continuities across time, if only in memories, do not negate a sense for many people of the incommensurability of the past and present in post-socialist places.¹⁶ In the case of China, a sense of rupture exists despite the political continuity of the Communist Party. As in the post-socialist world (putting aside the question of whether or not China should also be seen as post-socialist), in China a specific date is identified as the moment separating two eras of past and present: 1979. The actual experience of social change from past to present in China does not necessarily shift neatly on one date, since change has happened in a countless diversity

12 Foucault (1996), p. 411

13 Johnson (2011)

14 Although most anthropological writing on post-socialism has tended to call into question the notion of rupture by demonstrating the continuities between the socialist and post-socialist eras, or by questioning the validity of periodization itself, the symbolic importance of the moment of collapse in the retrospective conceptualization of the past is itself significant. See for example Boyer (2005), Oushakine (2009), and Yurchak (2005)

15 For example, Humphrey (2002) and Yurchak (2002)

16 Sun (2004)

of ways, and in many cases even 30 years after the beginning of Reform there may be more continuity than change. However, the official version of history that identifies 1979 as the end of the Mao era and the beginning of the Reform era has enormous power over discourses of the past in contemporary China. As we will see, the separation of the two eras also has enormous political significance, even for daily life in a small village. Regardless of the truth of picking any particular date as the moment, this sense of rupture is a crucial component of the view of the recent past that prevails in contemporary China.

Concomitant with a sense of rupture are feelings of dislocation and confusion.¹⁷ This is often expressed in the assertion that people in contemporary China have lost their moral compass, or that there is no longer a sense of life's purpose. For example, describing the reflection of this sentiment in early post-Mao literature, Helen Siu argues that “Characters in this new literature often responded to political and social situations in China's complex and changing society with ambivalence, confusion, doubt, or despair—emotions that had never been acknowledged in socialist realism because they implied less-than-total faith in the political system.”¹⁸ We might be tempted to understand these discourses as pure nostalgia, but from the perspective of the present what is important is only that this claim is made, that people believe something has been lost. This feeling inflects memories of the recent past with a sense of sadness even when people describe their lives today as fundamentally better than in the past, as did the vast majority of my interview subjects. It also contributes to a sense of generational divide, separating older generations with direct experience of collectivism from younger people who grew up under Reform. This feeling is often invoked by older people in describing their confusion about and sense of alienation from contemporary society, and by younger people in explaining the anachronistic mindset of their parents' and grandparents' generation. Importantly, as articulations of a dissatisfaction with life in contemporary China, these descriptions of dislocation, confusion, and lost meaning are themselves also subtle forms of protest against the present, and are often linked to more overt forms of protest.¹⁹

As we saw so clearly in the case of the reopening of the National Museum of China, the official version of history rests in large part on eliding certain elements of the history of the recent past, especially the Great Leap Forward (GLF) and the Cultural Revolution (GPCR). Another particularly stark example of the cautious handling of recent history is the version taught in schools, which omits nearly any mention of the suffering and chaos of those years.²⁰ The powerful influence of the official discourse has effects beyond public narrations of the recent past: it has also resulted in the suppression of memory and the impossibility of confronting the recent past. As we will see in Long Bow village, the inability to produce an account of the past that is collectively accepted and thought to be honest has driven memories underground, unable to be voiced publicly and left to fester. This, in turn, has resulted in the eruption of memories in surprising and unpredictable ways, exercising a sometimes opaque but still powerful force. Paying attention to these subtle influences of the past over the present is crucial to understanding life in contemporary China, where despite constraints on remembering, the experiences of the

17 See for example Liu (2002)

18 Siu (1983). See also Wilcox (2011)

19 Lee (2007)

20 Wang (2010)

collective era are far from forgotten.

The limitation of remembering has meant that narratives of the recent past can be mobilized in a variety of ways that would be impossible in the context of a more open and settled account of history. In this way, rather than only a constraint, the limits on memory in contemporary China are also productive. One example we will examine is the 2003 Long Bow village election, where the past was invoked as a driving force behind the unfolding of events in the present. In cases like this, the inability to confront the past openly makes memories not only persistent as an unhealed wound, but also enables their use as indirect weapons. Village politics is a particularly clear place to see these kinds of mobilization of memory, where the surface descriptions of events are thought to conceal or encode conflicts that date back to the Mao era.

In addition to the mobilization of memories, another important expression of the power of the past is the continuation of the political idiom of the Mao era. By political idiom I mean both language and logic, encompassing terminology, forms of action, and understanding of contemporary politics that reach to the Mao era for their style and rationality. In the realm of language, the continuing use of the terminology of socialism, Maoism, and revolution is the clearest example. There is no question that the meaning of that language has changed; for example, to call someone “comrade” today means something quite different than in the past. At the same time, it would be a mistake to conclude too quickly that the use of the terminology of the Mao era is therefore only ironic or cynical. In many cases, language closely associated with the collective past continues to be meaningful and persuasive in the present, and for that reason it is an essential component in determining the contours of contemporary politics. In Long Bow, appeals to collectivist values that rest on discourses of shared effort, community wellbeing, and the responsibility of leaders are still significant factors in village politics. Examining how that language is used and what it means to people today is therefore essential to understanding contemporary Chinese politics.

Similarly, characteristic Mao era political logics are still powerful. For example, at the national level there is a continuing use of the campaign as a regular feature of political mobilization. Again, although there are significant differences from the past in how campaigns unfold and are understood, the use of the campaign invokes a constellation of memories and patterns drawn from the past. In the process, new linkages are made between past and present. At the village level, one example of the continuation of Maoist era idioms is the form of local factionalism. In Long Bow, we will see how an understanding of politics that rests on the division of the village into factions that have their origins in the Mao era is at the heart of contemporary political action. On the one hand, the lines of village factionalism reflect those that were drawn in the past, so that there is often continuity not only in form but also in the people who are associated with certain factions. On the other, the relevance of the abstract idiom of factionalism is to some extent independent of the people involved, and even when the individuals have changed, the conceptualization of village politics as a contest between factions is still predominant. An analysis of a variety of forms of this phenomenon will reveal how, in the context of new neoliberal logics that have become powerful in contemporary China, the idiom of the past is not quietly fading away. The surface paradox this presents—the combination of neoliberalism with Mao era political logic—is easier to understand once we examine politics in action and see how

the two logics are not in fact incommensurable, but can be mutually reinforcing.²¹

The relationship between past and present in contemporary China also rests on another paradox: whereas there is the erasure and suppression of certain elements of the past (especially the recent past), at the same time there is a central cultural power given to history. This exists side by side with the importance of a particular narrative of Chinese history for contemporary nationalism. In these terms, although there is a feeling of rupture with the past, there is also a idea of deep continuity, especially as it is expressed in a notion of the essential character of Chinese civilization. This is one side of the case of the National Museum discussed above: the value of demonstrating the present as the end product of a grand historical tradition. The contemporary Chinese state and the Communist Party premise their legitimacy to a large degree on a claim to be the rightful and effective protectors of that tradition—ironic, in light of the attack on tradition that was a central component of political strategy and legitimacy in the Mao era.

At the same time, the notion of the central place of certain elements of cultural tradition in contemporary politics is still highly controversial and unsettled. Not long after the reopening of the National Museum, a ten meter tall statue of Confucius that was installed outside the northwest corner of the museum suddenly disappeared one night in April 2011.²² Although the culprit was not immediately identified, the statue had already provoked controversy before the theft, especially from left-wing parts of the Communist Party that used Mao era language to attack Confucius as a “feudal” representative of “superstition.” Although Confucianism has been a central resource in the reconciliation of capitalist modernization with putative Chinese tradition elsewhere in the Chinese cultural world (especially in Singapore under the influence of Lee Kwan Yew), in mainland China the rehabilitation of Confucius has been a much more fraught process.²³ The theft of the Confucius statue came less than a year after the release of a hagiographic biopic of Confucius (played in the film by action star Chow Yun Fat), not coincidentally released during the 60th anniversary of the founding of the PRC under the leadership of the Communist Party. The Chinese government in recent years has also used so-called Confucius Institutes around the world as a key part of a campaign to extend cultural influence and soft power.²⁴ There is, to say the least, something of a mixed attitude toward Confucius, demonstrating one corner of the problematic nature of the past in contemporary China.

I have noted an important distinction between the 'traditional' past, represented by 5000 years of glorious heritage, and the recent past, which in many respects cannot be confronted directly. Within the understanding of the past as tradition, remote in time but imminent in influence, there is also controversy and conflict, as in the case of Confucius. This demonstrates a division between, on the one hand, a view of the past as a resource (e.g. a storehouse of tradition), and on the other, the past as something best forgotten or overcome. Inspired by the former view, Chinese history as cultural tradition has been conceived as a solution to a variety of problems in the present, including producing political legitimacy, resolving spiritual crisis, and translating

21 Zhang (2008)

22 Jacobs (2011)

23 Ong (1999)

24 Kurlantzick (2007)



*Statue of Confucius outside the renovated National Museum, prior to his "disappearance."
Photo copyright STR/AFP/Getty Images.*

capitalist economic rationality into a Chinese cultural idiom. Drawing from the latter, the past is expunged of its meaning in a politically correct reading that avoids grappling with the most difficult elements of history. The most important effects of these conflicting views of the past include a crisis of historical representation and a schizophrenic attitude toward the past that fears its power even as it denies the possibility of an open accounting.

But of all the reasons for the problematic nature of the past in contemporary China perhaps the most important is how it lives on in the memories of the people who experienced it. The flexibility of representations of the past is easier to accommodate when the events were not directly experienced by living people. On the contrary, today the most problematic parts of the past are within the life history of nearly forty percent of the Chinese population as of 2010.²⁵ These are not mundane memories either – living through the dramatic social transformation and tumult of the Mao era, followed immediately by another period of dramatic social transformation, has resulted in a situation where grappling with the meaning of the past is an everyday reality. The significance of memory in such a context is both heightened and made

25 National Bureau of Statistics (2010), defined as the percentage of the population born in 1970 and before.

more controversial, so that, despite the pervasive sense in contemporary China of rushing toward the future, the recent past remains more powerful than is sometimes recognized. Getting past the surfaces of modern social transformation to access the deep oceans of memory that structure life in contemporary China is the main task of this dissertation.

Long Bow Village: Memorial and Historical Legacies

To study these problems of memory and the recent past in contemporary China, I conducted 11 months of fieldwork in the village of Long Bow, Shanxi. Long Bow is located in the Southeastern part of Shanxi Province, in the suburban district of Changzhi City. The English name “Long Bow” was given to the village by William Hinton, an American farmer, journalist, aid worker, and Communist sympathizer who first came to the village in 1947 and later wrote *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (see below) based on his experiences there. Hinton took the first character of the Chinese name of the village—Zhang Zhuang (张庄)—and broke it into two parts, long (长) and bow (弓), thus coining the name. Although the village name literally means Zhang (a common surname) Village, the connection to a Zhang clan is lost to history, and there is no significant preponderance of people named Zhang in the village today.²⁶ Among the population of approximately 2800 as of 2009, the most common surname is Wang (王), followed closely by Shi (师) and several others. The only extant clan temple (祠堂) in the village as of 2009 was for the Guo family (郭), but it had fallen into disrepair and was rarely visited. The population of the village also included a significant percentage (~10%) of people who were born elsewhere, and an even higher percentage whose families had migrated to the area within the last three generations. This was in large part because, aside from the occasional flood, Southeastern Shanxi very rarely experiences natural disasters, and the climate lacks the extreme winter cold of places only a few hundred kilometers north and the oppressive summer heat as near as Henan province.

The mild climate and lack of natural disasters makes Southeastern Shanxi a relatively sure bet for agriculture, although a lack of rain and mediocre soil means typical yields are unspectacular even by Shanxi standards. The main crop in the region today is corn, with significant areas of wheat, rice, and green vegetables mixed in. As of 2009 Long Bow village had 3051 *mu* of farmland (1 *mu* = .6 acre), almost all of which was farmed by individual village farmers in small plots that average 4 *mu*, mostly used for corn production (see Chapter 5). The approximately 1:1 ratio of people to farmland is a historical low for the village, falling with increasing population and the encroachment of industrial and housing construction, although the ratio has been fairly stable since the start of Economic Reform in 1979. At the time of Hinton's first visit to Long Bow in 1947, Long Bow had a population of approximately 950 people and 5588 *mu* of farmland.²⁷ After sharp rises in the early to mid 1950s and again in the early 1970s, following the implementation of new birth control policies the village population has remained relatively stable. The loss of farmland to other uses has accounted for most of the dropping ratio of acreage to people since the early 1970s, first in 1971 with the construction of the Third Railroad

26 In some parts of rural China, single-surname villages named after the dominant clan are still common. See Chun (1996)

27 Hinton (2008)



Location of Changzhi, Shanxi. Long Bow is just over 10 kilometers north of the city.

Works (铁三局, see Chapter 4), which took away nearly a third of the village's land, and more recently with a variety of industrial projects, including the village concrete plant and the Taihang Sawblade Mill. The loss of farmland originally was mostly offset by increasing productivity, which more than doubled per capita from 1947 to 1971,²⁸ but since the beginning of Reform farm productivity has been stagnant, contributing to the ongoing marginalization of farming as a profession.

Measured as a percentage of working hours or total labor force, farming is still the most common occupation in Long Bow, but calculated according to income it contributes a rapidly shrinking proportion of village wealth. Like many places in rural China, the marginalization of farming corresponds to a rise in industrial employment. Since 1979 Long Bow has had very few successful village enterprises, but many people have been able to find employment outside in

28 Hinton (1983)

neighboring villages or in Changzhi. The abundance of coal in Southeastern Shanxi has contributed to a relatively healthy economy for an interior province, as coal-fired power plants, steel factories, chemical plants, and coal mines have sprung up to take advantage of the booming national economy. A majority of people in Long Bow today aged 18-40 work outside the village, although because of the convenient location, most of those people are able to commute to work from homes in the village. Thus in contrast to much of rural China, there is not a conspicuous absence of middle- or working-age people, and the gender balance of the population is also close to the national average.²⁹

The single most important employer of people from Long Bow is the Changxin Steel Mill (长信钢铁炼厂), located in the neighboring village of Machang (马场), whose characteristic blue and yellow uniforms can be seen all over the village during breaks in the working day. Many of my acquaintances were either working full-time at Changxin, or piecing together part-time shifts there in the hopes of eventually getting a permanent position. Rank-and-file workers in Changxin and other similar factories make an average of between 1000 to 2500 RMB (~ \$140-\$350 at ~ 7 RMB to the dollar) per month depending on the number of hours, the shift, and their skills. Farming earns substantially less (an average of 1500 RMB per year per household cash income), but is still an important source of subsistence food, and it provides an outlet for the surplus labor of older people and women who cannot find outside employment.³⁰ Service work (mainly retail or food service) in the neighboring built-up area around the Changbei train station between Machang and Long Bow is also an important source of jobs. The location of Long Bow near Changzhi (approximately 10 kilometers to the south, or 35 minutes by bus) on the trunk highway connecting the city to the main provincial highway has also helped people to find outside work but still keep their residence in the village. The village's location has also contributed to the rise of a growing class of wealthy families in the village, who have made fortunes by transporting coal, in value-added steel products, or in construction. Average incomes Long Bow have increased consistently since the beginning of Reform, although at rates below those in coastal provinces.³¹ Increasing average income also conceals a widening gap between rich and poor; whereas the incomes of the richest in the village have continued to rise spectacularly in recent years, those of middle-income and poor people in Long Bow have stagnated since the early 1990s. On the whole, however, incomes Long Bow are slightly above average for the region, and subjectively most people report feeling economically better off than at any time in the past.

Long Bow is thus in many respects a fairly average Northern Chinese village. One unusual trait is the high percentage of Catholics, who made up about one-fifth of the village population in 2009. Dutch missionaries first brought Catholicism to the region in the late nineteenth century, and were more successful than in most other parts of rural China in making converts. The contemporary population of Catholics are descendants of those converts, and their numbers have basically held steady through decades of war and religious repression. Catholic practice, like mainstream Chinese religious practice,³² is today mostly open and free, although tensions

29 National Bureau of Statistics (2010)

30 See Chapter 5

31 National Bureau of Statistics (2010)

32 People in Long Bow refer to a syncretic practice of Buddhism, Daoism, and traditional belief as Mainline



Farm fields and courtyard houses near Long Bow, Fall 2008.

between Catholics and non-Catholics in the village are still important.³³ Villages all over Southeastern Shanxi have a high percentage of Catholics, including over 80% of the population in neighboring Machang, and religion was a major determining factor in the unfolding of Land Reform and other Mao era campaigns. Long Bow today has a large Catholic Church located in the south part of the village, built to replace the one that was appropriated for the first village government headquarters in 1946. As we will see, religious and geographic divisions coincided in a variety of conflicts in the village in the past, and they continue to shape the contours of contemporary conflict, memory, and identity today.

Religion (or literally Big Religion, 大教).

33 The Catholic Church in Long Bow is subject to the same restrictions on connections to the Vatican as everywhere in China, meaning the Chinese Catholic Church is technically independent of the global Catholic Church and is not permitted to recognize the authority of the Pope. See Chapter 6 for more on religious tensions in Long Bow.

William Hinton and Long Bow

By far the most unusual thing about Long Bow village is its special relationship to William Hinton. He first came to Changzhi in 1947 when he took a position as an English teacher at Northern University, a university in exile during the war against Japan that settled in the city. As a Communist sympathizer and student of Marxism and Maoism, Hinton took a great interest in the Land Reform campaign that was then unfolding across Liberated areas of rural China. As he wrote in *Fanshen*, he understood land reform to be the central project in the transformation from a feudal, exploitative rural society to one on the path to equality, one he hoped to see duplicated around the world.³⁴ The opportunity to witness parts of this process first-hand was too much for Hinton to pass by, and he began to press his superiors at Northern University to allow him to go out into the countryside to see for himself. Eventually they agreed, with the stipulation that he choose a place close enough to Changzhi that he could continue teaching a handful of classes per week, and the search was on. There were several options near Changzhi, places close enough that he could walk there, stay for a few days, and return to teach every week. The choice of Long Bow was thus accidental and arbitrary; the only thing that set the village apart was that there had been several problems in the Land Reform campaign there, requiring a Work Team to be sent from the city to oversee rectification. Conveniently, Hinton was able to travel along with the Work Team, watch, listen, take notes as they convened meetings to deal with the problems, and slowly get to know the situation in one relatively average village.

Along with the Work Team and a translator assigned to him, Hinton spent a total of approximately six months in Long Bow from the fall of 1947 to spring 1948. After leaving the village, he spent another five years in China, briefly working as a tractor driving and maintenance instructor in Hebei and then doing similar work in Beijing. According to his recollections, he grew frustrated with the limitations imposed on him as a foreign instructor when he had hoped to participate more directly in the process of building a new China, and decided to go back to the United States in 1953.³⁵ Traveling overland via Trans-Siberian Railroad to Europe, he eventually arrived in England without a valid passport, planning to book sea passage to New York. In London, representatives of the US State Department became aware of his background and political beliefs, and they met with him to negotiate his return to the US. He was granted a one-time travel pass allowing him to return to the US, but also had to surrender a large trunk containing everything he had accumulated during his years in China, including all his notes taken while in Long Bow. Returning at the height of the Red Scare, his timing could hardly have been worse, and once confiscated it proved impossible to get his possessions back until years later. As he described in his unpublished memoirs, the first years after his return to the US were marked by suspicion and harassment by the FBI that prevented him from finding stable employment, and frustration over the legal process he had initiated to secure the return of his trunk.³⁶

By the early 1960s, the Red Scare had died down to the degree that he was finally able to get his materials back. Making a living by farming a plot of land inherited from his family, Hinton

³⁴ Hinton (2008)

³⁵ Hinton, unpublished memoirs

³⁶ Hinton, unpublished memoirs

began to spend his spare time going through his old notes and writing the manuscript that became *Fanshen*. First published in 1966 by left-wing Monthly Review Press, the book was an immediate success. At the time, *Fanshen* was a very rare view by an American of the grassroots of the Maoist revolution, and it stood as one of the only such micro-level accounts of rural China by a foreigner until scholars were permitted to travel to the mainland again in the 1970s.³⁷ Hinton's highly narrative and detailed style also contributed to the book's success by inviting the reader into the story and making the personal, everyday experiences of people in the village vivid. With the success of the book, Hinton was invited to speak on the Revolution and life in the Chinese countryside to left-wing and academic groups around the US, although proceeds from speaking and book sales were not nearly enough to live on, and he continued farming in eastern Pennsylvania.

For years Hinton wanted to return to China to investigate the further course of the Revolution, but two things initially stood in his way: in the US, he was prevented by the State Department from getting a passport, and in China, the Cultural Revolution had closed the country. However, both problems fell away by 1971, when he was finally able to get a passport, and when the Chinese government embarked on a process of rapprochement with the US that included inviting



Hinton (center) eating with villagers in Long Bow, 1970s.

groups of foreign scholars back to China (a parallel of the better-known “ping-pong diplomacy”). Hinton was one of the first three people invited to China in 1971, a trip directed by Premier Zhou

³⁷ Perhaps the only comparable work on the grassroots of the revolution written by a foreign scholar is David and Isabel Crook's *Revolution in a Chinese Village: Ten Mile Inn*, although their book reads as a much more typical and less narrative academic work compared with *Fanshen*.

Enlai himself. At first only permitted to stay in Beijing, he worked to get permission to return to Long Bow. Central government officials insisted that it would be better for him to visit a “model village” instead, but Hinton pressed the issue. Eventually a compromise was reached: he could visit Long Bow briefly as long as he first went to Dazhai, the model village of model villages.³⁸ Accompanied by his adult daughter Carma (who had grown up in China and occasionally helped as a translator), Hinton returned to Long Bow for just over two months in the summer of 1971. During that visit, he gathered the information for *Shenfan*, a sequel to *Fanshen* that brought the story of the village up to the middle of the Cultural Revolution.³⁹ Starting in the mid-1970s, he began returning to Long Bow frequently, totaling more than thirty trips until his death in 2004.

This long-standing relationship between Hinton and Long Bow has had an enormous impact on the village. The success of *Fanshen* in particular created a special link between Hinton and the village, and resulted in a variety of effects on local identity, memory, and politics. One illustrative shorthand of the importance of the relationship from the perspective of people in the village is the frequency with which they refer to their hometown as “Hinton's village.” The identification of Long Bow with Hinton extends around the region—people from nearby places who do not necessarily recognize the name Zhang Zhuang immediately know the place when it is described as “Hinton's village”—and beyond, across China and the world. This dissertation will examine several elements of the connection between Long Bow and Hinton, especially local memorials and the role of Hinton's telling of village history in the production of a collective account of the past. But in addition to the explicit role of Hinton in the history of Long Bow, there are more subtle effects that his presence had on the village.

Most important among these is the production in the village of an unusual relationship to its own past. This, in turn, is mainly a consequence of the visibility of *Fanshen* and the awareness of and attention paid to the village and its history that it entailed. Long before the first official Chinese translation of the book was published, the existence of an internationally-known account of village history told by a foreign scholar marked Long Bow as an unusual place with a special relationship to its own history. In part, this meant that the state (from Changzhi up to the top reaches of the central government) paid extra attention to the village, especially in later years when Hinton started traveling there regularly, in an effort to make sure Long Bow presented a good face to the outside world.

This background also had a major effect on villagers' sense of their own history. Even before the publication of *Fanshen* in Chinese—and to this day most villagers have not read the book themselves—people in Long Bow have always known the story of Hinton and the village and the version of the past that he recorded. The influence of the existence of this written account of the past has two linked elements. First, it adds a layer of historical narrative that does not exist in most places in rural China, where local narratives of the recent past is represented predominantly through memory and oral history, or, if there are written accounts, in family genealogies or official documents such as gazetteers (地方志). As we will see, the account of history given by Hinton interacts with other sources to produce an especially complex configuration of local

38 Esherick (2006)

39 See Chapter 3

memory, in which Hinton's version has particular importance. Second, the specific content of *Fanshen* has affected the telling of local history. On the one hand, in a micro sense the story that Hinton told about particular people in the village (whose names were not changed in the original text) has been incorporated into the local story, often so seamlessly that it is not clear where Hinton's history ends and memory begins. Additionally, in a macro sense, the extent to which Hinton's telling corresponds with an officially-sanctioned Marxist theory of history and with the orthodox story of the Maoist revolution has mutually reinforced those visions of the past. In other words, *Fanshen* has gained extra currency by means of its correspondence with orthodox history, and at the same time an orthodox theory of history is inscribed more deeply in local historical consciousness because of the entry point provided by *Fanshen*.

These issues will be explored more fully in the process of an examination of specific aspects of the nature of history and memory in Long Bow. The crucial point here is to recognize the unique significance of *Fanshen* in the making of a notion of village history, and the methodological consequences for studying history and memory in Long Bow that it entails. Most clearly, the importance of *Fanshen* means that it will be necessary to engage with how the text has been received locally in order to understand how the past is experienced in the village. Also, it means that we must pay attention to Hinton's works and persona themselves as a significant force in the production of a consciousness of village history and the narration of that history today. At first, it may seem that the effect Hinton has had on a narrative of the past is a problem for studying village history and memory. Does his influence not mean that we can never disentangle the real village past from his version of it? But this question points to deeper aspects of both the methodological approach I will take and of the opportunity the unique situation of Long Bow offers for understanding the problems of memory in contemporary China.

Theories of History and Memory

My approach in this dissertation will be to view history as something produced in the present, as an outcome of contemporary practices of memory, authority, and local politics, and as negotiated in interactions between the individual and the collective. Immediately, this moves away from a straightforward vision of history as “the events of the past,” and towards an emphasis on history as an ongoing social production. Coming on the heels of the productive meeting of the disciplines of anthropology and history in the 1970s, in the last several decades studies of history and memory have focused on understanding the past as a product of the present, a retrospective vision made in the context of present forces.⁴⁰ For anthropologists interested in the social production of the past, the work of Maurice Halbwachs has been particularly indispensable. A student of Durkheim, Halbwachs was one of the first to investigate memory as a collective phenomenon. He linked a Durkheimian perspective on the collective conscience to the problem of memory, which before then had been understood primarily as the domain of the individual.⁴¹ Extending Durkheim's understanding of the production of social solidarity and collective identity through practices of “collective effervescence,” Halbwachs argued that memory provides the

40 For a theoretical exploration of these themes, see Connerton (1989). White (1975) was particularly influential in bringing a historiographical perspective on narrative into the discipline of anthropology.

41 Durkheim (1997)

crucial link that keeps the past alive in the present in the everyday, in periods of calm when the effervescent rituals that Durkheim identified are not present, but society nevertheless continues to exist.⁴² Memory is, therefore, what makes it possible for society to reproduce itself an ongoing project in the present.⁴³

Hans-Georg Gadamer made another crucial contribution to understanding the links between memory and society by demonstrating the necessity of memory for our being as a member of a collectivity. In *Truth and Method* he wrote,

“Moreover, the nature of memory is not rightly understood if it is regarded as merely a general talent or capacity. Keeping in mind, forgetting, and recalling belong to the historical constitution of man and are themselves part of his history and his *Bildung* [this term has no English equivalent, the closest sense is something like 'fashioning']. Whoever uses his memory as a mere faculty—and any “technique” of memory is such a use—does not yet possess it as something that is absolutely his own. Memory must be formed; for memory is not memory for anything and everything. One has a memory for some things, and not for others; one wants to preserve one thing in memory and banish another. It is time to rescue the phenomenon of memory from being regarded merely as a psychological faculty and to see it as an essential element of the finite historical being of man.”⁴⁴

The chief achievement of memory as an “element of the finite historical being of man” is how it makes possible what Gadamer calls the “fusion of horizons.” Gadamer wants to explain how past and present are related so that we are always situated in a tradition, a context that makes the world intelligible from a particular point of view. Memory, by making the past present, makes it possible for the horizon of the past to be fused with the horizon of the present, a process that produces understanding. Gadamer explains, “Understanding is not to be thought so much as an action of one's subjectivity, but of the placing of oneself within a process of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused.”⁴⁵ The coherent relation of the past and present that exists via memory is precisely how we live in the present; in other words, it is in memory that the present can be intelligible, as a moment with a coherent precedent. For Gadamer, memory is a condition of possibility for understanding, and the location of ourselves in a tradition linked to that store of memory is the ground of collective identity.

In light of these analyses, my emphasis will be on understanding how it is possible to *experience* the past. In the broadest sense of the word, the experience of the past *is* memory. It is important to keep a broad sense of memory, so that it can encompass a wide variety of practices that produce the past in the present. These include the material form of the built environment, tangible documents of history, and kin structures, all of which are forms of memory just as much as an individual's personal memories. All of these forms of memory taken collectively are our experience of the past as an everyday reality. And the conceptualization of that experience of the past is the form of our historical consciousness. In this way, memory, the past, and the idea of history are dynamically linked in a matrix of experience and understanding that give meaning to

42 Halbwachs (1992)

43 Durkheim (1997), Halbwachs (1992)

44 Gadamer (1975), p. 14

45 Ibid p. 258

both the past and the present.

On the other hand, although this way of understanding the past reveals its contingency, it is not therefore arbitrary. The past is a flexible product of the present, produced through the mediation of memory practices. But understanding the limits to that flexibility is just as important as showing how visions of the past can change over time and from different perspectives. This is because the production of the past is subject to power dynamics that determine which parts of the story are told, which parts are excluded, which narratives become hegemonic, and which wither away. The differential ability to narrate history and have that version heard puts limits on both the collective and individual understanding of history. Furthermore, because a vision of the past is so crucial in determining the meaning of the present (and, for that matter, the future), the contest to narrate history becomes intensely political. Existing configurations of power therefore determine how the past is described and understood by privileging certain accounts over others. Concomitantly, certain accounts of history empower certain actors, by rationalizing their own position and providing an interpretive framework that makes sense of the general distribution of power. People are always intuitively and often explicitly aware of the linkage between history and power, and this leads to battles to determine the meaning of the past and struggles over the ability to narrate history. In Long Bow, the ability to narrate history and interpret the meaning of the past are fundamental to the distribution of power in the village. We will see how to a great degree contemporary village politics revolves around these contests over the past.

This is the advantage the unique history of Long Bow offers to the study of memory in contemporary China. Because the presence of Hinton and the existence of his accounts of village history have had a very visible effect on the production of an account of the past, it has become easier to see the process of that production in motion. The symbolic value of things associated with Hinton makes it more possible to identify fissures and contests involving narratives of the past by making them particularly public; because of the importance of the connection to Hinton, many elements of the configuration of local power revolve around remembering and narrating that historical connection. In this way, the figure of Hinton, his books, and the version of history they record can be an especially useful entry point to understanding the social production of history and the configuration of local power.

It was this advantage for studying the problems of memory, history, and politics that led me to choose Long Bow as the field site for this study. Between September 2008 and July 2009 I lived for eleven months in the house of the retired former village Communist Party Secretary while I collected the life histories of sixty-two informants, representing a diversity of ages, genders, and economic backgrounds. I also did further in-depth interviews with twenty-five of these informants, observed daily life in the village, studied village government and local Communist Party branch archives, and collected demographic and economic data on the village. Making use of this data, this dissertation will explore two central themes: 1) the processes of the social production of history and memory, and 2) the interactions of those processes with village politics. I argue that the past is lived in the present via a diversity of memory practices, including oral and written narrative, architecture, and family histories. Furthermore, these memory practices are directly linked to the configurations and manoeuvrings of local politics, as memory and history are invoked in the construction of authority, and as they provide interpretive

frameworks that make sense of the present.

Studying History Anthropologically

One of the biggest challenges of doing fieldwork was figuring out how to explain my presence in the village. Nearly every day, the question was asked: why was I there? It was important to have an answer that would be satisfactory to the people that I met, an answer that would explain why someone would travel so far, choose to live in a small village, and struggle with the local dialect.⁴⁶

At first, my answers to the question became so rehearsed that the exchange was reduced to pure performance, a simple trade of pleasantries that was quickly forgotten. Some answers hardened into stock responses that left me dissatisfied with my inability to answer in a way that wouldn't bore my new friend to tears or create even more confusion. When I first got to the village, I tended to explain my presence by translating, both from English to Chinese and from social science jargon to comprehensible vernacular, a version of a research funding application's statement of purpose. "Why am I here? Oh, I'm doing anthropological fieldwork on memories, narratives, and power." Or, "I'm a PhD student working on my dissertation." Or, picking up on the vague way some people would introduce me, "I'm here doing a social survey." I found that any of these answers seemed to be good enough for a simple sizing-up that would fix me in an understandable social role, but unfortunately none of them were very interesting to the people I met.

But I started to notice there were two responses that could actually provoke a spark of interest—those that touched on Hinton and history. I was originally introduced to Long Bow as a possible field site by Professor Zhao Xudong at China Agricultural University, who had a student who had spent a few weeks in Long Bow for her Master's Degree research. In a conversation about possible sites for my project, he casually mentioned that he had a student who knew "Hinton's village." I immediately recognized the name. I had read *Fanshen* many years before, and coincidentally also brought a copy with me to China. Reading *Fanshen*, I had been drawn into the story like so many others, and was excited to visit a place where I had some sense of its recent history, and could get a first-hand feeling for the lives of the characters in the book.

Only after spending several months in Long Bow did I realize how important the connection to Hinton is to this day. I immediately knew how important it was to Wang Jinhong, the retired village Communist Party Secretary of thirty years and close friend to Hinton until his death in

46 One of the lessons of fieldwork for me was the experience of hyper-awareness of the negotiation of my social role. Certainly, this process is always occurring, no matter whether one is in or out of one's home culture. But I was always much more sensitive while in the field to the constant process of identification, negotiation, and tension that surrounds our own sense of identity and the recognition by others of one's social position. This is supposed to be one of the truths of fieldwork, that being present in a foreign cultural context makes you more aware of the taken-for-granted aspects of all social life. However much contemporary anthropology has doubted and eroded the claims of fieldwork as a method, I continue to believe that experiences of this type show the unique value of traditional anthropological fieldwork. For some interesting reflections on the mutual process of negotiation in the meeting of the anthropologist and the "native," see Rabinow (1977)

2004.⁴⁷ That much is obvious to anyone who visits Wang Jinhong's home; the central living room is filled with photographs, posters, and memorabilia remembering Hinton's life, especially his many visits to Long Bow. Wang also commissioned a statue of Hinton that stands in the courtyard of the village elementary school, and a small Hinton museum just off the main village square.⁴⁸ It was not a surprise to me that Hinton would be remembered fondly by the people of Long Bow, or that his work would play an important part in the narrative that villagers give of their history. But it was when I began to reference Hinton in self-introductions that I first realized how integral Hinton is to the people of Long Bow's presentation of self and sense of identity. As I alluded to above, it was actually during a visit to a nearby village that I first started to think about this, when I encountered someone who confused Long Bow with another place, and I resorted to describing Long Bow as "Hinton's village." Suddenly the light went on, and my new friend, along with about a dozen onlookers, all wanted to share Bigfoot-like stories of how they had seen Hinton once when they were kids, or had a relative in Long Bow who once got drunk with '*Handing*,' Hinton's transliterated name.

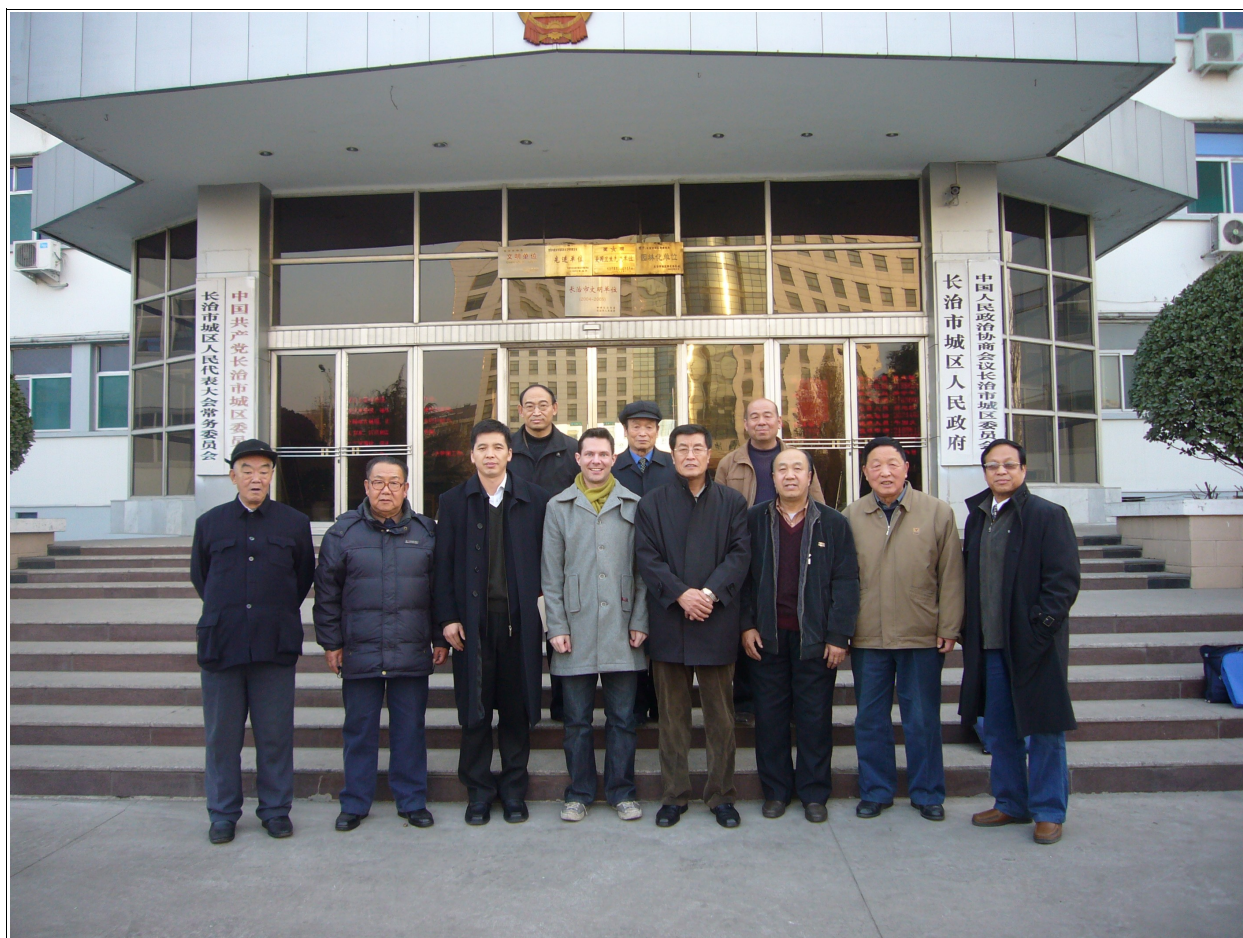
Back in Long Bow, Wang Jinhong encouraged me to play up my connection to Hinton, so I would sometimes introduce myself as "following in Hinton's footsteps." This proved to be a much more successful introduction than a dry list of academic interests. Of course, the figure of Hinton does not mean the same things to all people in Long Bow. Indeed, a central question of this dissertation will be how different people tell different stories about the same subject, and what those different tellings of history reveal about the speaker, their position in Long Bow, and about the nature of historical narratives in Long Bow in general. Ultimately, I think Long Bow can indeed be described as "Hinton's village," in ways that are important to the people of Long Bow themselves. Part of the task of this dissertation will be to explore how that story, of Hinton and Long Bow, is important to the people of the village. What I want to emphasize here is how the prominence of Hinton in Long Bow villagers' self-narrative indicates the importance of the other topic that my friends were endlessly happy to discuss with me: history.

Less than a month after arriving in Long Bow, I was invited to a meeting in the nearby city of Changzhi of the "Yandi Scholarly Society." The Yandi Society is a group of teachers, local cultural officials, and independent scholars who have come together under the rubric of studying the history, folklore, and archaeology of Southeastern Shanxi. Like nearly everyone else you meet in that part of the province, the members of the Yandi Society are proud of the idea that Southeastern Shanxi is the cradle of Chinese civilization. In particular, the region is full of folklore and local history associated with many of the most important stories in Chinese proto-history and mythology (like Shennong (神农), the story of Houyi (后羿) and Chang'e (嫦娥), and Jingwei (精卫), all of whom are claimed by locals to have lived nearby).⁴⁹ Shennong is especially claimed as a native son by Changzhi city and the surrounding region, which, among

47 In this dissertation, apart from Wang Jinhong, all names of people in Long Bow have been changed.

48 See Chapter 2

49 Shennong is the mythical first emperor who is credited as the inventor of agriculture and herbal medicine. The story of Houyi and Chang'e has many versions, but they are celebrated on the mid-Autumn Festival (中秋节) as deities of the sun and moon. Jingwei is a mythic daughter of Yandi who, upon her death from drowning, sought revenge by transforming into a bird and carrying sticks and stones to fill in the sea, hence the common Chinese idiom, usually a reference to perseverance: "Jingwei Fills the Sea" (精卫填海).



Members of the Yandi Historical Society meet in Changzhi. Wang Jinhong is in the first row, second from right.

other public symbols, led to the construction of a huge statue of Shennong in the hills overlooking the city, promoted as a tourist destination along with a nearby park and temple complex.⁵⁰

Local claims of a unique connection to a wider cultural or national history are certainly not exclusive to Long Bow—in fact, claims of this type may be so ubiquitous as to constitute a universal of the human experience of history. Naturally, these claims are also not unique within China. As anyone who has traveled within China can attest, nearly every village, town, or even neighborhood has its own history and folklore, placing the locality in a wider historical narrative. Again, while these kinds of claims are certainly not unique to the Chinese cultural context, in China there seems to be a special importance placed on feeling a connection to an overarching narrative of Chinese history. Another commonly-cited example of the same phenomenon is the

⁵⁰ The terminology referring to Yandi and Shennong is highly ambiguous: “Yandi” is used by the members of the Yandi Society to refer to the entire proto-historical period from about 3000-4000 BC, ending with the ascent of the Yellow Emperor (黄帝) to the throne. Following this terminology, Shennong refers specifically to the first emperor of the Yandi period.

mantra “5000 years of Chinese history,” a phrase that, despite a variety of twentieth century challenges to cultural continuity, has passed into the taken-for-granted. In contemporary China, the idea of historical continuity has practically become a defining characteristic of Chinese culture: what is Chinese culture if not the end product of a long and glorious past?

Importantly, this notion of continuity is of course itself not continuous. As I alluded to above, the twentieth century especially contained a variety of social movements and intellectual trends that posed powerful challenges to the perceived integrity and utility of traditional Chinese culture. Just what was meant by “traditional” culture was always shifting, and in these movements the attitude to the cultural past was not necessarily one of total rejection.⁵¹ But one might productively interpret the history of modern China through the lens of a contest between a desire to protect China’s long cultural heritage and a project to remake Chinese society from its cultural roots up.

At the same time, the notion that tradition was something that needed protecting is indicative of how much had changed by the late nineteenth century. In *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* Joseph Levenson argues persuasively that in China the idea of tradition itself was a product of the challenge posed by the encounter with the West and the rise of modernity. For Levenson, Confucianism was doomed as soon as it became a tradition in need of preservation rather than an unchallenged, timeless, and universal orthodoxy.⁵² Whatever the merits of Levenson’s claim about the fate of Confucianism, the important point is that the idea of tradition arose in China at a historically specific moment, cautioning us not to read the idea of continuity back into the same history with which continuity is claimed. It may be only modern man who has a historical sense that must establish links between present and past. Perhaps the idea of continuity is a symptom of modernity, and an outcome of the invention of tradition as modernity’s double, created in order to be destroyed. From this perspective, the claim of continuity is more important for what it tells us about historical consciousness in contemporary China than for its absolute veracity.

The important question for this dissertation is how to approach the problem of history anthropologically. An example will illustrate my point. A conceptual counterpart of the idea of Chinese historical continuity is the claim that China has a unique historiographical tradition. We can take the words of historian Pierre Ryckmans (aka Simon Leys) as representative: “On the question of the great historiographical tradition of China, and the unique awareness of history developed by Chinese culture, only one basic observation should be made here, in direct connection with our topic. It is true that China produced from a very early period a magnificent historiography. Two thousand years ago, Chinese historians already displayed methods that were remarkably modern and scientific...”⁵³ Ryckmans makes this point in an essay on the “Chinese attitude towards the past,” that begins from the premise of a seeming paradox in the lack of past efforts at preservation of physical historical landmarks in China, co-existing with a deep

51 One clear example is the debates on “national essence.” While sharing the larger goal of the “modernization” of Chinese society, there were intellectuals who argued against a wholesale adoption of the standards and ideas of Western modernity, which they claimed was an “empty shell,” and sought to preserve elements of “traditional” Chinese culture that would continue to serve as the foundation of the Nation.

52 Levenson (1968)

53 Ryckmans (2008)

historical tradition and sophisticated historical consciousness. He concludes that the characteristic Chinese historical sense is found not in the continuity of physical objects (as in the form of monuments) but by the cultural continuity of human beings, transmitted by the written word.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to evaluate Ryckmans' claim on its own terms. Nevertheless, this article is useful for us in that it demonstrates the approach of the historian. While using just this one example certainly oversimplifies the breadth and depth of historiographical approaches, this example can still provide an interesting contrast to anthropological approaches to the same problem. Ryckmans looks into history *writing* for an explanation of the Chinese historical sense. For example, he considers the long duration and early roots of Chinese historiography to be significant facts in evaluating Chinese historical thought, and maintains that the ancient development of "modern and scientific" historical methods is evidence of the greatness of Chinese historiography. This perspective is to be expected if the question is posed as an investigation into a coherent system of thought with specific traits. From that perspective, the existence of a distinct "Chinese historical tradition" is a given, and our task is to explain its unique features. Furthermore, an explanation takes the form of an inquiry into thought, an approach to Chinese historiography as a philosophical tradition that can be understood from *within*. Thus, at least for this intellectual historian, the Chinese historical sense can be analyzed by beginning from the thinking about history done by historians and philosophers grappling with their own tradition.

How would an anthropological approach differ from this? Certainly, the tools of the historian would not be out of bounds for the anthropologist interested in understanding the nature of historical consciousness. Scholars practicing "historical anthropology" have generally tried to take the best of the methods and theories of history, and combine them with specifically anthropological approaches. Although there is a great variety of thinking that resulted from the cross-pollination of history and anthropology, at the most general level what anthropology brought to the hybrid was a special attention to history as a social practice of everyday life.⁵⁴ This means to think of history as a product of essentially any act that involves an idea of the past and places the past in a relationship to the time horizons of present and future. It contrasts both with thinking of history straightforwardly as the "events of the past," and with the historiographical attitude demonstrated by Ryckmans above that takes history as an intellectual project. In other words, history is something that people *do in the present*, it is a mode of thinking about the past, present, and future, and it is something immanent in even the most mundane practices. Although this revised definition of history runs the risk of being so broad that it includes essentially every act, it has the benefit of refocusing attention on history as a living thing, and it allows access to new kinds of questions about history.

Chief among these is a new approach to the question: how does history have power in the present? This dissertation is intended to grapple with this complex question, and at this stage I only wish to highlight it in order to provide a basis for the discussion. The challenge is to think about history as something that is made in a wide variety of practices, or, in other words, how

54 Certeau (1984)

historical consciousness arises from, and is present in, our everyday ways of acting in the world. We must also investigate how this historical consciousness has power, both in terms of constituting a meaningful worldview and as a tool mobilized in social struggles. Following Marx's aphorism "The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living," the question can be phrased: how does history acquire its weight?⁵⁵

For the people I met in Long Bow, the weight of history was a topic always close to the surface. The starting point for my first interviews was the memories of older villagers of their experiences of the Cultural Revolution and the end of the Mao era, but both the content of the interviews and the kinds of people that I interviewed became more wide-ranging as I started to understand life in Long Bow better. I became more aware of the webs of social relationships in the village that conditioned people's memories, interactions, and responses to my questions, and how important it is to read people's narratives in the light of their social context. In particular, the longer I stayed in the village, the more I saw how historical narratives were, at least in part, commentaries on the present, and represented a crucial component of the teller's social being. At the same time, it would be a mistake to view my informants' narratives as straightforwardly strategic; although there are elements of people's stories that are self-consciously intended to position the teller in a specific way, in general I believe the act of narrating history is a much more fundamental process. The sense of history invoked in Long Bow peoples' narratives about the past, present, and future is a basic component of how they understand the world and their place in it. In other words, an historical consciousness is at the core of all meaningful collective and individual identities.

Although specifically Chinese cultural attitudes about history will certainly be part of the story, these should not be interpreted as essentialist claims about Chinese culture. As noted above, for the people of Long Bow, claims of unique Chinese historical continuity, the desire to connect local events to a national/cultural master story, or feelings of a deep connection to the flow of Chinese history seem to be important facts that distinguish them from cultural others. But it is important to guard against any tendency to take these attitudes *as* "their culture," and elevate them to the status of fundamental difference. Of course, this essentializing tendency is a danger commonly recognized by anthropologists, and, among other reactions, likely accounts for the reluctance of many contemporary scholars to use the word "culture" at all. But it is important to call attention to this issue at the outset, particularly since I have used words like "Chinese historical consciousness" that might easily slide into an impression of essentialism. The key is to see such concepts as active meaning-making projects in the present, not as eternal traits of

55 Marx (2005). The invocation of Marx is also apropos of a possible objection to how I have so far defined history: that it relies too heavily on the question of consciousness, and hence that it denies a materialist understanding of history. However, as I have phrased it, historical consciousness arises in a dialectical relationship with the external world, and the idea of 'practice' is intended to unite our ways of thinking about the past with our actual activity in the material and social world in one concept. In other words, practices are simultaneously ideal and material. (The word *praxis* has also been used in the Marxist tradition with the same intention.) There is still a danger in privileging the problem of consciousness at the expense of recognizing the importance of the material inheritance of the past, in particular in the physical means of production passed down to us from previous generations. However, as I hope will be evident in this dissertation, an understanding of history as a species of present practice can and must include equal attention to the material, as the world in which our practices take place, and without which historical consciousness, with no material referent, would be meaningless.

Chinese culture. At the same time, I do not think it is sufficient to simply fall back on the idea that these are “native theories” there in the minds of the people of Long Bow, that I have simply observed and recorded. The anthropologist's acts of selection, interaction, and interpretation are all active interventions that cannot be transparent. From this perspective, the only way to understand the explanations and interpretations offered here are as my own way of making sense of a huge diversity of stories, observations, interactions, and moments, that do not automatically offer themselves as a coherent statement, produced in inspiration from the “native” explanations. As such, the interpretations here should not be read as claims about an essential Chinese culture. Instead, we can approach cultural meaning and identity as living things that are always in the process of making and remaking themselves. It is the task of the anthropologist to investigate how and why cultural meaning is made, in the details of the active lives of the people being studied.

The question remains, if we wish to investigate historical consciousness as an anthropological problem, how can we capture a sense of the active nature of its construction? How can we see the form that history takes as part of the worldview that informs every meaningful act? This dissertation will constitute a possible answer to these questions.

Outline of the Dissertation

The overall organization of this dissertation will consist of a series of examinations of distinct memory practices. Traditional ethnographies tend to include chapters on economic practices, kinship, local religion, and so on, in an attempt to describe the total social and cultural context of the field site. In contrast to this approach, in this dissertation information on such classic ethnographic material will be woven into each chapter as part of the everyday background of the experience of the past in the present. As such, I envision this work as less an exercise in obtaining a comprehensive portrait of life in Long Bow and more an attempt to describe the processes of memory formation and the construction of an experience of the past in the present. In this spirit, Long Bow exists in these pages as an imagined (but not imaginary) product of the everyday work of inhabiting the flow of time from past to present.

Chapter Two deals with the figure of William Hinton and the ways he is remembered and memorialized in Long Bow. In particular, it centers on two museums devoted to Hinton that have been built in the village in the last several years. Both museum projects were spearheaded by Wang Jinhong, the now-retired Party Secretary of 30 years, who has dominated public life in the village since the Cultural Revolution. Secretary Wang was a close friend of Hinton's, a relationship solidified over many years of continued visits to Long Bow. After Hinton's death, Secretary Wang decided to officially memorialize the intertwined history of Hinton and Long Bow and celebrate what he saw as Hinton's enormous contributions to the village in the past. Examining the meaning of these memorials and their construction reveals not only the deep connection between Hinton and notions of village history and identity, but equally the ways these memories are linked to the construction of authority in the village and how they are mobilized as forms of protest against the disruptions of the Reform era.

Chapter Three describes two locally produced documents of village history that reveal the power of historical narration as a mode of interpreting the present. The first is a written history of the village by the former village government scribe Li Anhe. Keenly aware of other versions of village history, Li wrote the history in order to, as he put it in an interview, “Make sure people remember what really happened in Long Bow.” In his memoir, Li recalls how during the Cultural Revolution he was unjustly targeted in criticism and struggle sessions, and argues for the importance of a correct record of history for understanding life in the village today. The second document is a map of the village circa 1945 drawn by Zhang Lijun, with whom I conducted in-depth interviews focused on the map and his reasons for drawing it. The map records a spatial configuration of the village that describes a history of inequality – a history that many viewing or talking about the map believe is reemerging in the present. Both documents reveal the importance of material representations of history as focal points for memory practices, and for how collective representations of history coalesce around these forms in public debate.

Chapter Four deals with memory in another material, but more subtle form: in the built environment of houses. I show how it is through acts of building and inhabiting houses that people in the village come to feel a sense of belonging. Houses make an association between place and family that link people materially to their neighbors and to the village as a whole. These links in turn embed people in history, making it possible to feel the flow of time through the form of the house itself. Furthermore, by positioning one's family spatially in the village, houses also position people politically. The history of political strife in the village is closely linked to neighborhoods, especially divisions among Work Teams (the basic unit of the organization of production during the Mao era) and the division of the village into north and south halves. The south half of the village has historically been predominantly Catholic, and this spatial division has played a major role in the unfolding of politics and conflict. Houses, as the fundamental material location for people in the village, link people to this past, and provide a foundation for understanding one's place in history.

Chapter Five traces a history of the land, as primary vocation, source of prosperity, and origin of identity in Long Bow from the Land Reform to the present. In particular, I focus on narratives of agricultural production as told by people engaged in farming today. Taken together, these stories describe the fate of Long Bow farmers through a history of land redistribution, collectivization, privatization and finally marginalization. The image is one of betrayal and the destruction of the dream of collective prosperity through Land Reform at the hands of privatization and the ongoing marginalization of farming. The majority of Long Bow households continue to rely on farming for a significant portion of their income, but whereas farming in the past was at the heart of what it meant to be a person in Long Bow, today it is considered a second-class occupation of last resort. This chapter demonstrates the importance of narratives of the collectivist past in two ways: as forms of resistance against changes in Chinese society in the Reform era, and as political accusations against the current village leadership, who are portrayed as uncaring about the plight of the contemporary farmer.

Chapter Six tells the story of the village election of 2002, how it was intertwined with memories of the Cultural Revolution, and the continuing power of history in village politics. The 2002 election was a topic of much concern during my fieldwork, especially in the weeks around the

2008 election. Stories of what happened in 2002 revolve around a conflict between the retiring Parry Secretary and his successor and son-in-law, who were locked in a contest for power. This contest was interpreted by most in the village as the continuation of a conflict that began in the Cultural Revolution, and people argued that the events of the present were merely a re-encoding of the past in a new form. In this chapter I explore the parallel fault lines of village history and contemporary politics, and show how conflict is based in the intersections of personal histories and memories of the history of the collective era. The conflict exposes the politics of forgetting versus remembering, where the act of remembering itself is considered both politically dangerous and naively anachronistic. Furthermore, I argue that because politics are in part about the future direction of the village, the conflict around the election is also a contest over making the future, and what the collective past will come to mean.

My hope in focusing on this sequence of memory practices is that it will produce a picture of the construction of the past in motion, as an ongoing process that brings together elements of identity, memory, and authority. This is the sense of inhabiting the past that I try to convey, that in these diverse practices people in Long Bow construct and experience the significance of history in their everyday lives. Furthermore, I seek to show the highly political nature of the construction of the past. Questions of power, both official and unofficial, revolve to a great degree around the understanding of the past and how that understanding is invoked in political struggle.

These questions are crucially important not only for the particular field site I chose, but equally for contemporary China as a whole. Although Long Bow is certainly in many respects not representative of all of China (as if any place could be), the problematic relationship to the past is an issue that pervades contemporary Chinese culture and politics. As the example of the National Museum of China shows, the question of how to represent history is especially important – and difficult – under the specific political, cultural, historical, and economic configuration of 21st Century Chinese society. One useful way of thinking about this problem is to consider the attitude toward history represented by the two overarching ideologies that have shaped life in China in the last 60 years: Maoism and Capitalism. Under Maoism, the past became the enemy, the realm of a feudal society and its mindset that needed to be swept away to produce a new society and a new man. Capitalism, for very different reasons, also negates the significance of the past: a world rushing toward a modern future, stripping away all that is seen as tradition, recognizing endless growth as its only value. On top of this, there is a powerful entity (the Communist Party) spanning both eras that seeks to control the representation of the past and prefers to distort the picture rather than confront it openly. In such a context, history cannot but be highly problematic. However, despite these attempts to destroy the meaning of living through history, the past remains at the center of life. By examining the problems of memory and history in Long Bow, I hope to demonstrate this centrality of history, never extinguished through the vicissitudes of 60 years of social transformation.

Chapter 2: Memorial Hinton

Near the geographic center of Long Bow village, Wang Jinhong lives in a courtyard-style house, on the same site where his birth family lived before Liberation. Born in about 1942⁵⁶ to a mother afraid that having to care for another child would end in the starvation of her daughter, Wang was taken in as an infant by his aunt's family after his birth mother abandoned him in a millet field. Narrowly spared a tragic fate, he grew up in a different household, surnamed Shi (师), in a different section of the village. Wang never lost his connection to his birth family however, and when he returned to Long Bow after a few years away studying and working in the Provincial capital of Taiyuan, he moved with his new bride into the house of his birth mother. There, he would care for his mother in her old age, and eventually inherit the house, as the only male heir to his birth family's property. Thus, after returning to the village in the early 1960s, and apart from a gap of a few years while the house was being rebuilt in the 1980s, Wang Jinhong has lived on the site of his birth family's house ever since.

The house that stands today is basically the same as it was when first rebuilt over 20 years ago. Designed on a plan common for the region, it is a typical Long Bow house in most respects. It includes four buildings arranged in a square around an approximately six hundred square-foot courtyard. The main house is on the north facing south, providing maximum sunlight, and the entrance to the courtyard is opposite on the south wall, framed by an imposing gate. The (now mostly disused because of the installation of indoor plumbing) privy is in the southwest corner, and the rest of the south building was used mainly for storage while I was living in the house during my fieldwork. In the west building is a workshop, more storage, and a partially enclosed dog house for the family guard dog; opposite that on the east is the kitchen, through which close friends often enter the house, the main entrance more often reserved for formal visits. Superficially, this layout is perfectly normal for Long Bow, and even if visitors often remark that the house feels particularly comfortable, this is probably due more to the attractive grapevine that grows over a large section of the outdoor space than to anything unusual about its design.

There are, however, many things aside from the construction plan that set Wang Jinhong's house apart from others in the village. Entering the glass-enclosed veranda on the front of the main house, a visitor is immediately struck by the elaborateness of the decorating in that space, and in the main guest hall behind it at the center of the house. Looking closer, the decorations fall into three categories. First, there are things that Wang has collected on his travels inside and outside China. These include a pair of three-foot-high wooden carved elephants he bought in Cambodia, a three hundred pound section of petrified wood from Xinjiang, and a large number of other smaller figurines, models, and knick-knacks bought on one of six separate trips to the United States to visit William Hinton and his relatives. As village Party secretary for over thirty years, Wang had ample opportunities (and enough financial resources) to travel abroad, but his connection to Hinton was what motivated most of his travel and opened doors to appearances at conferences as a representative from "Hinton's village." Second, there are many plaques, banners, and gifts given to Wang as a local Party leader and representative to Changzhi City

56 As is common among people born in the tumultuous years before 1949, his exact birth date is unclear.

District People's Congress (长治市人民代表大会) and Shanxi Provincial-level People's Congress meetings (山西省人民代表大会). Well-known locally as a long-standing Party member, a strong village leader, a creative thinker, and an outstanding networker, Wang was elected several times to the city-level Congress by his peers, and then elected again to represent Changzhi at the Province level. In this respect, his long-standing connection to Hinton was also an advantage, in that it raised his profile, enhanced his credentials, and gave him a certain amount of prestige by association with a famous foreigner. Wang is intensely proud of his service as a village leader and as a Party member, a feeling that has only become stronger in recent years as his conviction that the Party is leading China in the wrong direction has also become stronger. In fact, as we will see, this conviction lies behind much of what Wang does, in ways subtle and unsubtle.

The third category of decorations in Wang's house is things commemorating William Hinton's life, the history of Hinton's connection to Long Bow, and his personal relationship with Wang Jinhong. Entering the veranda, immediately on the right there is a printed poster with text written by Joan Hinton (William Hinton's sister, resident of China since the 1940s, and also an old friend of Wang's), congratulating him on his retirement and lifetime of service to the people as an outstanding village leader. Inside the guest hall, there is a large variety of Hinton-associated memorabilia. On the right wall near the daily-use dining table there is a series of photographs taken in the 1940s of Hinton, his sister Joan (韩春), David and Isabelle Crook (卡鲁克 and 伊萨白, authors of *Ten Mile Inn*), and Sid Engst (阳早), all of whom came to China before 1949 curious and enthusiastic about the Revolution, and maintained a long connection with Long Bow.⁵⁷ On the opposite wall, there is a framed copy of Hinton's credentials from his work as a goodwill ambassador to China for the United Nations (focused on agricultural policy and rural poverty) in the 1990s, next to a photo collage depicting Joan Hinton and her husband Sid Engst. In the corner, there is a framed poster advertisement from a 1987 Bates College performance of the stage version of *Fanshen* (written by playwright David Hare), at which Hinton and Wang Jinhong both gave speeches.⁵⁸ The poster advertisement corresponds to two framed newspaper articles that are displayed on the veranda, both published in papers covering the story of Wang Jinhong's first visit to the United States—the newspapers' depictions of the story are of a Chinese villager coming to the U.S. to learn advanced agricultural methods and acquire technology that would aid development in his home village, and carry a (to my eyes) somewhat condescending fish-out-of-water subtext.

In the interest of full disclosure, and because it is a notable fact in itself, in the northwest corner of the guest hall is a large scroll poster that Wang asked me to write for him at the end of my fieldwork in July 2009. The English text I wrote reads: "Wang Jinhong has been a great friend

57 This group of friends also spawned a second generation with close ties to Long Bow, including Carma Hinton, daughter of William and documentary film producer who made several documentary films about Long Bow in the late 1970s. See C. Hinton (1986), (1987a), (1987b), (1987c)

58 I obtained a copy of the videotape that was made of this appearance, where Hinton spoke on the state of Long Bow since the events depicted in the play, explained the places where the play deviates from his own memories and experiences, and served as a translator for Wang Jinhong's speech, who came as a representative of the village and who gave his own take on progress in Long Bow since the early days of the Revolution. For the stage version of *Fanshen*, see Hare (1976).



Wang Jinhong's courtyard, February 2009.

to countless foreign scholars and travelers. Thanks to him, people from around the world have been introduced to Long Bow village, and have gained a better understanding of life in a Chinese village.”⁵⁹ Wang Jinhong has collected messages and other memorabilia from the dozens of foreign scholars who have visited his house over the years, materials which are kept primarily with the rest of his collected books and documents in the upstairs storage space of his main house. The upstairs space serves as a sort of annex to the main collections in the living spaces of the house, and visitors on the extended version of the tour that Wang Jinhong gives in his house are usually brought upstairs at the end of the tour. Probably the most interesting materials that he has collected in the storage space are a large number of documents, newspapers, publications, and posters from the Cultural Revolution, a part of the collection that he rarely shows to visitors.

This list only scratches the surface of the things that Wang has collected. What does it mean to him to have these collections? What purpose do they serve? Although it is not uncommon for

59 The Chinese version (the translation given to non-English speakers) I wrote to accompany it reads: “王金红先生是我所知道的一位传奇的中国老人、一村领袖。他促进、帮助了美国东方学界及普通民众了解上党地区乃至中国的乡村文化。他的家，是慕名而来的外国友人的第一站。无论是作为韩丁先生几十年的知己，还是作为中外交流的使者，他都是中国通向世界的友谊之桥。”

people to keep collections of meaningful objects in their houses—in fact, the presence of meaningful objects, however defined by the owner, might serve as an interesting provisional definition of what it means to make a simple “house” into a “home”—Wang's collection seems to differ in a few ways. First, the scope and organization of the collections reveals not only elements of his personality (attention to detail, desire for order, curiosity), but also serve as a reminder of his unusually important role in the history of Long Bow village. As village leader from the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (1967) to the early twenty-first century, Wang was an unavoidable and extraordinarily powerful presence. If Long Bow is “Hinton's village,” it is also (symbiotically) Wang Jinhong's village. Although we cannot simply extrapolate from his official role and assume an equal influence over other elements of village life, in my research it was clear that Wang, for better or worse, depending on who you ask, was at the center of village life for decades. Having retired as Party Secretary, his official role has been reduced in recent years, sparking a struggle for influence in the village.⁶⁰ But his role as mediator in villagers' family matters, negotiator in local business, and conduit of cultural life has not been reduced as sharply. I will have more to say about all these roles later, but here I simply want to note how Wang's house serves as a kind of monument to a life, a record of decades lived at the conjunction of his own biography and the history of the village.

Second, the museum-like quality of the house also demonstrates the importance of Long Bow's unique connection to a cohort of foreigners, with William Hinton at the center. Again, there is a kind of conjunction or symbiosis between the village's history and Wang Jinhong personally, an effect that Wang has cultivated over the years. Although these relationships have been useful for Wang, it would be a mistake to interpret them too instrumentally, at least in the sense of having been driven by a “rational” choice that calculated the benefits of being connected to a group of outsiders with a unique kind of influence. Rather, Wang understands these relationships as both his responsibility and a natural function of his role as village leader. Furthermore, he thought of cultivating these ties as a benefit to the village as a whole, in part for the economic benefits that would accrue from the extra attention paid to Long Bow by other levels of the state, and for the cultural and educational opportunities that contact with foreigners might bring. In actual fact, the record on both of these fronts is mixed; economically, Long Bow has benefited in some small ways from its reputation in the form of public works improvements designed to make the village a more comfortable and impressive showpiece for visiting foreigners and the many city- and provincial-level officials who have visited the village over the years. On the other hand, Long Bow has stagnated economically since the beginning of Economic Reform, a fact that several villagers in interviews attributed to a habit of over-reliance on outside state help.⁶¹ Culturally, Long Bow's status has made it the subject of a series of documentaries,⁶² encouraged groups of Chinese and foreign students to visit the village over the years, and led scholars to conduct

60 The formal political structure at the village level in China consists of parallel government and Communist Party offices. For example, there is a position at the head of the government named 村委员会主任 (or 村长 for short, comparable to a mayor) responsible for implementing policy and a position at the head of the local Communist Party Branch named 书记 (Party Secretary) with decision making authority. Wang Jinhong was made vice-Party Secretary in 1966 and elevated to Party Secretary in 1967, a post he held nearly continuously until 2003. See Chapter 6.

61 See Chapter 5 for more on the problems of economic development in Long Bow.

62 See Carma Hinton's documentaries referenced above.



In the main hall of Wang Jinhong's house. At right, a poster dedicated to Hinton.

research there. Whether or not any of these things have brought benefits to the village also depends on who you ask. Regardless, Wang Jinhong conceives of the record of contact with these outside “dignitaries” in his house as a record of an important element of village history, ties that he took as his responsibility to cultivate. At the same time, he has doubtless benefited personally from his position at the crux of the relationship, a point to which we will return below.

The third and most important characteristic that sets the collections in Wang's home apart from those of other villagers is their public nature. Wang's position as a village leader meant that his house was for years a *de facto* second village government headquarters, from where he would frequently conduct village business both formal and informal, and it also meant that, as the most prominent person in the village for decades, other people in Long Bow frequently needed to visit his home to pay respects on the New Year, for other family events, or for any of a huge variety of practical matters that Wang could help with. Although retired for several years by the time I lived in his house, over the course of eleven months I saw dozens of people visit the house to seek Wang's help with, for example, legal entanglements with the local police (his connections could often smooth matters over) or family disputes (where he mediated between branches of a family involved in a contentious house division). Another reason Wang's house functions as a

kind of public space is that he has explicitly designed it that way. In addition to the collections that he displays in the living spaces of his house, he has also constructed a pair of museums in a second courtyard attached to the back of his house: one devoted to Rural Life, and another to William Hinton. These museums are the central concern of this chapter. Wang Jinhong's museums are sites that can illuminate several important questions about the nature of history and memory in contemporary Long Bow. First, they lead to questions about the overlapping of personal authority and telling village history: what does it mean that Wang is in the position to be an interlocutor of village history through his museums? How is Wang's authority, both as a guardian of history and as a local leader, co-constructed with a story of the village past? A second category of questions is related to the role that the museums play in the narration of village history, and the impact they have on the picture of the past that emerges for people other than Wang. How are these museums visited by people in Long Bow, as well as by visitors to the village from outside, and what do they mean to those people? How do the museums affect the version of the past that is told publicly and privately in the village? Third, I will address an important element of the story of Hinton and Long Bow that is not explicit, but still embedded in Wang Jinhong's portrayal: how the museums function as a critique of the present. What is that critique, and how has Wang made use of the figure of Hinton and the telling of village history to make it?

Museums and the Authority of History

November 20, 2008 was an important day for the family of Fan Pengfei. Recently engaged to a woman from the nearby city of Changzhi where he worked, Fan's parents on that day hosted an engagement party (订婚酒), the first banquet in the series of wedding-related celebrations dictated by local custom. Like most other local banquet celebrations, engagement parties in Long Bow entail hosting several hundred friends and family in a courtyard house, every room crowded with circular tables surrounded by low stools. Guests are expected to contribute a sum of money called *fenzi* (份子), the amount dictated by the closeness of the relationship to the hosting family, the economic circumstances of the guest, and the guest's desire to be noticed for the size of their contribution. In return, hosts provide a plentiful banquet, lubricated with the local favorite clear ninety-proof liquor (汾酒) and cigarettes, and a festive atmosphere for socializing and celebrating. The courtyard of Fan's parents was too small to host an appropriate banquet, so they rented one belonging to a local cook, who works in the city but regularly returns to the village to host such occasions, renting out his house and providing the catering service for a total price of 2000-3000 RMB (~\$300-\$450 US).

In Long Bow, with a population of about 2800, many people who are neighbors are relatives or friends and vice versa, so these celebrations typically bring an entire section of the village together in one place. That November day was no exception; the rooms surrounding the courtyard were filled with about 250 people, mostly from the east-central portion of the village, corresponding to the area first designated Work Team 3 (三队) in the late 1950s.⁶³ The family of

63 The division of Long Bow into Work Teams, although anachronistic from the perspective of economic activity, continued to have social relevance in the first decade of the twenty-first century. For more on this topic, see Chapters 4 and 5.

Wang Jinhong was naturally invited because they are both neighbors and kin: Wang is the groom's father's sister's brother-in-law. This is normally not a kin rank that would require him to be invited, but since he is a prominent person, people in Long Bow commonly reach beyond the normal boundaries to play up their connections to him. At the time, I had been living in Wang's house for just over a month, and so I was invited both as a guest of the Wangs, and because having a foreigner at the banquet was a novelty too interesting to pass up.

The banquet proceeded as most do in Long Bow. Men and women are typically segregated in separate rooms, a tendency that most people in the village explained to me in terms of the differential intake of alcohol and tobacco; in Southeastern Shanxi nearly every adult male smokes (informally I would estimate the percentage at around 90% in Long Bow) and drinks (older men often do not drink, citing health concerns, but younger men almost universally engage in competitive drinking “rituals” at these occasions), whereas almost no women drink or smoke. To people in the village, then, it makes sense to seat the men together in rooms packed with three or four tables of seven or eight people each, and women and children in separate rooms, where they get all the same food, but none of the liquor or cigarettes, which a good host is expected to provide. Arriving with Wang Jinhong, I was seated with him in the innermost room of the courtyard house, where a portion of the table was set aside for collecting the *fenzi* money, and two trusted relations kept track of the contributions. Cigarettes, sunflower seeds, and candy were provided as pre-meal refreshments, until the food arrived and the eating began. Several courses of food followed, including fare typical of the region: stir-fried pork and peppers, egg and onion custard, deep-fried pork leg, stewed chicken, fish steamed in ginger and spring onions, finished with a course of pork dumplings.

Conversation at our table ranged over several topics I would hear again at many more banquets in the following year. Knowing I was unfamiliar with most of the people present at the party, the men at my table took turns explaining the overlapping kin relations, and interjected colorful stories about their friends and relatives. From there, conversation turned quickly to complaints about official corruption and what the men at my table saw as the betrayal of the Communist Party's promises to rural China in favor of the urban elite. As I would also discover over the course of the next year, these were favorite topics of most older men in the village, who were quite willing to voice their frustration, and pin the blame mostly on Party officials more concerned with enriching themselves than “serving the people.” Wang Jinhong was typically one of the most likely to bring up stories that he had heard about corruption cases, drawing on media reports of the most recent lower-level official to have been caught stashing cash bribes in a safe house, or other similar cases.

On that day, however, Wang's attention was turned mainly to a new addition he had made to one of the museums in the back of his house. About a month earlier, he had traveled to Xi'an to see the famous Terracotta Warriors (兵马俑), and was inspired by his visit to construct a replica in his house. “A lot of people from around here can't afford to make the trip to Xi'an, or they don't have time to get away,” he explained. “I thought I should make something so that people can still see the soldiers, because it is an important part of Chinese history. People need to be

exposed to these things so they can be more cultured (文明).”⁶⁴ It was hard to gauge the interest of the older men that were seated at our table. They were mostly old associates of Wang Jinhong, many of them friends dating back to the 1960s. As I would learn later, several of them were also associates who had been wrapped up in the attacks on the village leadership during the Cultural Revolution, lumped in together with Wang Jinhong as capitalist roaders. Still, they seemed more swayed by Wang's force of personality than a genuine desire to “be cultured,” and somewhat begrudgingly agreed to visit the museum after the banquet.

Still high from too much *baijiu* liquor and nicotine, a group of seven staggered up the narrow village lane from the banquet site back to Wang's house. All of these men were frequent visitors to his house, and so were spared the tour of the (also museum-like) main house that I discussed above that is given to most new guests. Instead, they followed Wang through the main house and into a storage room in the back. In this dark and dusty room is a large metal door, kept locked most of the time, that leads into the courtyard behind the main house. In 1999, Wang bought out this second courtyard, and attached it to his own house by adding the rear door inside his main house. At the time he bought the second courtyard, his five children were all grown and moved out, so he didn't need the space for his family. Instead, his reason for buying the second courtyard was to build a museum collecting farm implements and other artifacts of rural life. Describing his plans to me years later, he said that he wanted, on the one hand, to satisfy his own desire to preserve artifacts of a lifestyle that he thought was rapidly disappearing, and at the same time to have a place where younger people raised in an increasingly industrialized and commercialized China could have some experience of the agricultural roots of their parents' and grandparents' generations. To achieve his goals, Wang Jinhong has been continually adding to the museum since 1999, mainly by buying old disused tools from people in surrounding villages as their families either upgrade to more modern equipment or move away from farming altogether. By 2009, the museum contained over 1000 artifacts, ranging from a pre-Liberation donkey cart (complete with a replica paper-mache donkey Wang Jinhong made himself), to 1950s-era wooden seed planters, carrying baskets, and a hand-turned forced-air wheat husk removal machine.

Visiting the museum that day, the light was tinged a soft green by the opaque plastic covering the space, creating an eerie feeling of being neither indoors nor outdoors. Wang Jinhong's friends were quite familiar with the museum and most of the things collected there, so that day they passed them by and went straight to the replica Terracotta Warriors that were positioned in the middle of the courtyard. On his trip to Xi'an, Wang had purchased four half-size copies of horse statues and a chariot driver, made from plaster. He took great pride in explaining how he had assembled the rest himself from miscellaneous pieces found around his house, building it into a model of the horse and chariot statues found in Xi'an. “See these wheels here, I had collected them a long time ago, but didn't have much use for them. They are cast bronze wheels, made during the Republican Period,” he said, while pointing to writing cast into the outside of the wheel that indicated they were made in the twelfth year of the Republican government, 1923 (民国十二年). “The rest of the chariot I made from wood and metal things that I had lying around

64 Discourses of being 'cultured,' 'civilized,' or having high 'quality' (有文化, 文明, 素质高) are ubiquitous in contemporary China, and have entered everyday ethical and moral vocabularies. See Kipnis (2006).

my workshop, and then I painted the whole thing so it would look just like the real ones in Xi'an!"

Wang Jinhong's eyes glowed as he explained the chariot to his group of friends, whose expressions to my eyes ranged from polite curiosity to impatient boredom. As he explained the origins of his chariot replica, several of the men wandered off to look at other things collected in the museum. I followed one of the men as he examined a wooden seed planting device that dated from the early 1950s. "I remember using planters like this when I first started farming when I was seven or eight years old. See that picture over there, the one of the boy standing on the plow behind an ox? That was taken in the '50s. That isn't me in the picture, but I was about that size when I first started working. I would stand on the plow in the back and ride it through the fields. We worked really hard in those days!" I asked him what he thought of Wang Jinhong's collection. He replied, "That's the Old Secretary (老书记) for you, always with something to keep him busy. He doesn't run the village anymore, but now he has his museums to keep him busy. The stuff in here is old and useless now, just like us!" he joked. "But someone has to keep all these things from just being thrown away. And the Old Secretary, he likes being at the center of things, doesn't he?"

Empirically, Wang Jinhong's museum is an impressive achievement. Contained in a total space of well over 1000 square feet, it is divided into two primary collections. The main space, formerly an open-air courtyard but now covered by the thick plastic sheet roof, is dedicated to collecting farm implements, old mining tools, and wooden measures used for counting grain and measuring the size of farm fields, all dating from before the 1960s. Wang dubs this his "Rural Life Museum" (农业社会博物馆), and it was the basis for the Shanxi Provincial Government (with the sponsorship of the Changzhi Suburban Government) to designate his home an "Important Cultural Resource of Shanxi Province." This designation is important to Wang, evidenced by the plaque that he hangs outside the main gate of his house bearing the title, and it has meant that elementary and middle school groups from the surrounding area regularly make trips to the house to see the collection. Inside, visitors are guided by Wang as they pick up tools, getting a feel for what it was like to use them in the fields decades earlier.

The selection of items in this part of the museum does not, on the surface, point to any particular interpretation; Wang explains that he simply keeps an eye out locally for houses that are going to be torn down, goes to ask the homeowner if they have any old things lying around their house that they might not need anymore, evaluates the items to see if they are not already represented in his collection, and then makes a small monetary offer. Looking more deeply, the items have several things in common that are telling in terms of the underlying narrative of the museum. Most obviously, the things collected are all supposed to be "representative of rural life from the early 1900s up to the 1950s," according to Wang. Materially, this representation seems to consist in finding tools that, although in relatively good shape for their age, have a patina of age and use to them, and although evidently useful, seem primitive next to even the most basic tools in use in Long Bow today. When leading visitors through the exhibit, Wang always makes note of two qualities of farm life in the past that he claims are visible in the tools themselves: that life was difficult, and that the peasants were ingenious. The tools he displays work as neat material representations of those qualities, both rough and clever, clearly requiring difficult labor to



Inside the Rural Life Museum, Wang shows visitors the Terracotta chariot.

operate, but carefully designed. Embedded in the objects and their presentation, then, is a claim about the farming life prior to the implementation of large-scale collectivization in the late 1950s. Some might describe the claim as nostalgic, as Wang through the museum reaches back to an era, contemporaneous with his childhood, that is portrayed as simpler and more pure, invoking familiar nostalgic tropes. However, I interpret the message of the museum to be more accurately defensive, or even outraged. These emotions may dovetail with nostalgia, but even if the museum is in one sense inevitably backward-looking, I do not believe that Wang is advocating for a return to a rural idyll. Explaining why requires deeper investigation.

First, we can turn to the explicit, spoken narrative that Wang Jinhong offers visitors. The first time I heard him lead a group of visitors around his museum, it was in October 2008 during a visit by an elementary school class from a school on the outskirts of Changzhi city. Along with the teacher and about thirty nine- and ten-year-olds, the suburban television station (长治市郊区电视台) sent a reporter and film crew to film a story that would air on that night's news program. Wang's museums have been a staple of local news broadcasts since he first opened the agricultural collection in 1999, and they make for an attractive story for the local media: happy visuals of schoolchildren learning about history, generations coming together, and an old Party

cadre staying true to his roots and giving something back to the community.⁶⁵ The reporter asked me for a sound bite about the museum and what I learned about the changes in rural life since the early years of New China, and put on the spot I obliged with some vague words about “labor-saving technology allowing farmers more leisure time and an easier life,” although life in rural China today is not necessarily unequivocally better for everyone. But swept up in the narrative of the museum, I thought it was the appropriate (and diplomatic) response. Listening and watching as Wang explained the collection to the children and the reporter, he seemed to have a well-rehearsed story in mind. “Over here is the kind of plow that people used to use, before even your parents were alive, the kind of tools your grandparents used when they were young!” he explained to the kids, who seemed impressed with this old man who still had such enthusiasm. “Now people hire a tractor to plow the field, and the whole thing is done very quickly. Back then, your grandparents had to stand on the plow all day, working hard just so they could have enough to eat. People used to eat noodles only on special occasions, and now you kids can eat them any time you want, can you imagine what it was like?” He was repeating a metaphor that I heard often in Long Bow, that a perfect symbol of greater prosperity is how people in the past used to only be able to afford to eat wheat noodles occasionally, when diets mainly consisted of sticky corn dumplings in porridge (called *geda* (疙瘩) locally), but now people could eat noodles for every meal. He lifted the plow so the kids could get a better look at the mechanism used to adjust the depth of the blade, and continued, “But people in those days had to be really smart, because they didn't have all the tools we have today. All they had to work with was simple wood tools, but you can see how smart [the design of] this plow is. You should never forget how hard your grandparents worked, and how clever they were. Now all of you will grow up and go off to college and become famous! Your grandparents had a simple life, but you should be proud of how ingenious they were. Don't forget!”

Wang Jinhong has no illusions that the children visiting his museum will aspire to grow up to be farmers. Farming, in today's China generally and in Long Bow in particular, is an occupation of last resort, ranking below even the most menial manual labor. The people engaged in farming in and around Long Bow are almost universally poor and/or old, often farming just to provide a supplement to other income or to the family food store. As such, farm labor is generally labor that could not be used in any other way, for lack of skills or lack of opportunity, done by women in their spare time while their husbands work in a factory, or done by the elderly because they own a small piece of land, and it is the only way they can supplement their household's income. The reasons for the low status of farm work have been well documented in a large body of scholarly and popular literature on contemporary rural China,⁶⁶ and include the very low incomes, the social stigma attached to being a “country bumpkin,” and structural problems of the agricultural sector, among others. Wang himself holds no romantic visions of farming providing a better life than other occupations available to people today. But amid the changing priorities of contemporary China, he fears the loss of respect for a way of life that defined rural life for his generation, and a consequent loss of respect for the people who lived those lives. When coupled with a sense that the Communist Party has (irreversibly) abandoned its rural roots and betrayed a

65 The term 'cadre' (干部) is used somewhat ambiguously to refer to Communist Party members with official government authority, especially at the village level, although it is sometimes used to refer to government workers who are not necessarily Party members.

66 See for example Li (2010).

promise to the peasants that they were the lifeblood of the Revolution, this fear takes on a political dimension. In the Rural Life Museum, Wang Jinhong wants most of all for visitors to *remember*. What they should remember, what has been forgotten, is the dignity of the peasants, which he notes with great pride by explaining the ingenuity of the various devices collected in the museum. This is not a call for a return, but simply for recognition, and even if the tools are stripped of their living connection to the people who used them when they become mere exhibits in a museum, for Wang they stand for a claim to the moral center of Chinese society that properly belongs to the farmers.

An affirmation of this narrative in the museum came during my fieldwork, when Wang Jinhong had a banner printed that he hung at the entrance of his courtyard. The banner was divided into two halves. On the left was text taken from a newspaper article, published in the Shanxi Development Herald (山西发展导报) on January 6, 1998, describing his participation in one session of the Shanxi People's Representative Congress. The article explained how Wang reportedly stood up during one of the full sessions and said:

“I want to say some truthful words, speaking for the people. At present, the higher levels of government and government cadres have a big problem: that is, they always take much from the people, but give almost nothing back. Most of the time, when a cadre or government worker comes to a village, when they're not collecting taxes, they're collecting fees. In the future, would it be possible for the government to give a little more, and take a little less? I'm a Provincial Model Worker, and a Congress Representative, so things for me are easier. But for villages that don't have a Model Worker or Representative [to speak up for them], it's almost impossible to accomplish anything.”⁶⁷

The right side of the banner was devoted to an excerpt of the 2004 First Document of the CCP (2004 年中央 1 号文件), which reads in part: “According to the requirements of the comprehensive plan for the economic development of the cities and the countryside, we must support the goal of ‘Giving More, Taking Less, and Giving Space’ in order to adjust for the better agricultural production, increase rural employment, speed up technological progress, deepen rural reform, increase investment in the countryside, and increase support and protection for agriculture.”⁶⁸ Below that text, there is a picture of Premier Wen Jiabao, with a caption that reads: “On March 5, 2005, at the Third Session of the Tenth Meeting of the National People's Congress, Premier Wen Jiabao announced, ‘Next year, in every locale in the whole country, there will be a general exemption from all agricultural taxes.’”⁶⁹ In my reading, the juxtaposition of these three texts accomplishes two main effects. First, it gives voice to a political position, namely that the Party-State ought do more to help the situation in the countryside, ameliorate the

67 The Chinese text reads: “我想代表老百姓将急剧真话, 现在上边的政府部门和干部们有一个大问题, 就是向下边要的多, 给的少, 村里平时来个干部, 来个公家人, 不是收税的, 就是收费的, 以后政府对基层、对企业能不能都给一些, 少要一些。我是省劳模、省人大代表, 办点事还容易一些, 可是没有人大代表, 没有劳模的村, 办点事就真难了。”

68 The Chinese text reads: “按照统筹城乡经济社会法杖的要求, 坚持‘多予、少取、放活’的方针, 调整农业结构, 扩大农民就业, 加快科技进步, 深化农村改革, 增加弄呀投入, 加强对弄呀支持保护。”

69 The Chinese text reads: “国务院总理温家宝 2005 年 3 月 5 日在十届全国人大三次会议上作政府工作报告时说: ‘明年将在全国全部免征农业税’”



The printed banner inside Wang's courtyard.

growing gap between urban and rural China, and refocus its attention on rural areas. Although this position has been given more official attention in recent years, for example with the above-mentioned canceling of agricultural taxes, the more recent campaigns for a “New Socialist Countryside” (社会主义新农村), and other new policy directions, meaningful changes in the countryside have been slow in recent years, and there has been a concomitant outpouring of criticism and dissent.⁷⁰ Wang Jinhong's poster mirrors that criticism, and draws on its rhetoric to gain legitimacy. Secondly, in putting the excerpt about Wang next to texts produced by the central government, the banner draws on the political and moral authority of the latter to enhance that of the former; viewers are drawn to make the connection through the form of the banner itself, which is divided into two nearly symmetrical halves, and by the parallel language (多给、少要和 多予、少取). Wang is extremely proud of the banner, and I witnessed the amount of planning and effort he went into having it printed in the Fall of 2008. During several visits to a graphic designer and printer, he and the designer came up with a format that incorporates a large amount of Communist Party iconography, including an angled view of Tiananmen Gate decorated with flowers, a cropped view of the ceiling of the National People's Congress main

70 See Whyte (2010)

meeting hall centered on its large red star, a zoomed-in view of the PRC flag, and a red and yellow color scheme. Visitors to Wang's home and museum inevitably pass by the banner on the way in, and although modesty seems to prevent him from drawing too much attention to it, the placement combined with the unambiguous content means visitors are always aware of how proud Wang is of what he described to me as his "big accomplishment." In describing the moment when he stood up at the Congress meeting, he emphasized that no other representative was willing to stand up at the meeting and say something on behalf of the common people, and that there was a great commotion when a rank-and-file member like him was willing to risk himself to say something that he thought needed to be said. Fundamentally, the banner prepares visitors for the narrative that Wang advances in his museums: that he is speaking for the peasants where they have been marginalized, that this is his form of small protest against the direction of contemporary China, and that the rush to develop has meant a betrayal of the original promise of the Communist Revolution for prosperity for all.

Remembering William Hinton

As clear as this critique of the present is in the narrative of Wang Jinhong's house and Agricultural Life Museum, it may be even stronger in the second museum he added in 2004. This second museum, located in the main guest hall of the old house whose courtyard is now taken up by his collection of farm tools, is devoted to memorializing William Hinton. In the main guest room of the old house, Wang built a museum dedicated to the intertwined history of Hinton and Long Bow. After Hinton's death in 2004, Wang wanted to memorialize and celebrate his friend and frequent collaborator, who he thought had contributed so much to the village, as both a chronicler and participant in its history. In an interview in 2008, he talked about his work in opening the museum, "The people of Long Bow owe everything to Hinton. Not only did he tell the whole world about our life here, he was a peasant at heart too, and made great contributions to practical, day-to-day problems in the village. He always used to say that Long Bow was his second hometown, and all over China people know him as a great friend of the Chinese people (中国人民的老朋友).⁷¹ I was Old Han's close friend, so it was my responsibility to preserve his memory and the history of his time coming to Long Bow, and I opened the museum so that people will always remember him and know about what he did."⁷²

Since his death in 2004, remembering Hinton has been one of Wang Jinhong's main preoccupations. There are presently three primary memorial sites devoted to Hinton in Long Bow, all commissioned by and involving the direct work of Wang: a statue in the courtyard of the village elementary school, a photographic memorial built into a glass-fronted room at the corner of the old village headquarters (now the site of the village kindergarten, on the corner of the central village square), and the Hinton museum in Wang's house. Of these, the statue and the photo memorial are the most visible, as they lie in high traffic, public parts of the village,

71 In 1999 Wang Jinhong also commissioned the printing of a book titled *William Hinton: An Old Friend of Chinese People* (中国人民的老朋友), a pictorial history of Hinton's time in China and long connection to Long Bow. I will explore more on this book and other projects in the village to memorialize Hinton later in the chapter.

72 Interview, 12/06/08

although familiarity means that they seem to fade into the background for most people in Long Bow. The best maintained is Wang's museum, although that is only relative, since even that space is in a dust-covered and poorly lit back area inside one (granted, particularly well-off) villager's house. Clearly, with respect to village history, memory, and the figure of Hinton in particular, Wang is, however, not any other villager. The personal connection to Hinton is extremely important to Wang, and he has taken it as part of the culmination of his life's work to ensure that the history of Hinton in Long Bow is appropriately memorialized and publicized inside and outside the village.

The Hinton museum that Wang Jinhong constructed in the courtyard attached to his house takes up a total of approximately three hundred square feet, including an entryway, the primary exhibit space, and a storage room. Walking up to the museum by walking through the Rural Life Museum, you first come to the steps of the old main house, now converted into exhibit space. At the top of the three low steps, there is a landing that serves as a kind of entry into the Hinton museum, which is now decorated with a statue and a pair of couplet-style (对联) vertical plaques. The life-size statue was made from plaster by Wang himself, based on a photograph of Hinton taken in about 1946, as he stood in a farm field shirtless, leaning on a tractor tire. Wang took this photo and, violating local norms of discreetness when it comes to the body, made the plaster statue as a model from which a marble version was made by a sculptor in Hebei in 2004. The marble version now stands in the Long Bow elementary school courtyard, with the plaster model in Wang's museum. Flanking the museum statue on either side are two signs, the rightward of which names the museum: "Hinton in Long Bow" (韩丁在张庄), and the leftward of which was taken from the office of the now-defunct Long Bow village agricultural co-operative, reading: "Long Bow Village Economic Co-operative" (张庄村经济联合社). In Chapter 5 I explain the history of the formation of co-ops and collective farming in Long Bow; here the significant point is the relationship of this sign to the rest of the Hinton museum. As any reader of *Fanshen* or his other writings can relate, Hinton was a fervent supporter of collective farming projects, and in this sense the connection between the museum and the sign makes perfect sense. At the same time, Hinton was an equally fervent critic of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, in particular the redistribution of land and final breaking up of collective farming that took place in Long Bow in 1981-82. Using one of his favorite metaphors to describe the consequences, Hinton frequently wrote about how the countryside had been turned into "noodle strips" by the reforms, dividing farmland into long, narrow strips of less than an acre that belonged to individual farmers (or, more accurately, heads of households).⁷³

The presence of this anachronistic sign (it was removed from the exterior of the village government offices in the early 1980s, and stored away by Wang Jinhong), then, makes a fairly unsubtle connection between remembering Hinton and a critique of the present direction of rural China. Although this is a critique that Hinton himself made continually since the beginning of the Reform era, and thus is perfectly consistent with memorializing Hinton, it is nevertheless clear that Wang Jinhong placed the sign advisedly. Connecting the act of memorializing Hinton with a critique of the present is a claim on history that Wang is able to make by virtue of his position as the *de facto* guardian of publicly told village history in general, and of Hinton's

73 See, for example, Hinton (1990)



The entrance of Wang's Hinton museum.

relationship to Long Bow in particular. The memory of Hinton is a resource upon which Wang can draw, and the museum accomplishes the task of articulating his own critique in the form of celebrating a kind of local hero, a figure deeply intertwined with village history. The power of this form of critique is that it moves the position of interlocutor from Wang Jinhong himself to William Hinton, which both draws on Hinton's authority and puts the critique beyond question, at least as far as he stands in the museum only as memory and not as a living person. To make Hinton speak through the museum is to appropriate the memory of Hinton for a particular purpose, and even more, to link village history to a particular vision of life in rural China. In the museum the death of that vision, of collectivist agriculture, is simultaneously mourned with the death of William Hinton and attacked as a betrayal of the values of the Revolution that Hinton came to China to uphold.

Hinton and Long Bow: Intertwined Histories

In August of 1971, William Hinton returned to Long Bow village for the first time in twenty-three years. After leaving at the end of a six-month stay that provided the material for writing

Fanshen, events kept him from returning to see how the revolution he documented would, or would not, be carried forward into the building of a new society. Finally able to get a passport from the US government again by the early '70s, it also took the personal intervention of Zhou Enlai, China's Premier, second in power only to Mao and chief negotiator with President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, to allow Hinton to return to the village. Although no longer at the height of the violence and chaos of the Cultural Revolution, China was still gripped by uncertainty, suspicion, and secrecy, and foreigners were not allowed into the country under ordinary circumstances. Even less could a foreigner hope to travel to a rural place like Long Bow where, just a few years earlier, the village leadership had been overthrown as capitalist roaders. But as a member of the first delegation of Western scholars allowed into China in many years, Hinton first visited Beijing, and then via his connection to Zhou, was allowed to travel to Long Bow. Fortunately for Hinton, in the environment of improving geopolitical relations, the Chinese government was keen to express diplomatic good-will, and demonstrate that things were returning to normal after years of turmoil. Thus Hinton would travel with a delegation assigned by the central government, to see the progress of the revolution.

The circumstances for Hinton's return were naturally quite different than his first trip. Although in 1948 he was also accompanied by translators and a team of cadres sent by the Provincial government to the village to investigate problems in the Land Reform, their task then was not primarily to manage Hinton's visit. Many years later, Hinton remembered that in 1948 he had considerable freedom to walk around the village, speak with whom he wished, and visit other places in Lucheng County.⁷⁴ The second time, his trip was to be guided more carefully, although not only in ways of which he was aware. Chinese authorities hoped to show Hinton examples of the progress of the revolution, defined by prevailing ideology, a point made evident by the fact that before making it to Long Bow, Hinton would have a long stopover in Dazhai, the famous model revolutionary commune and centerpiece of mass propaganda campaigns. Although not credulous of the most optimistic claims of the progress of the "Dazhai model," Hinton was nevertheless hopeful for the promise of the revolution he supported.

What he did not know until the very end of his two-month stay in Long Bow, however, was that the village leadership that in 1967 had been first deposed as counterrevolutionaries, and then regained power only weeks later, was removed again on the eve of his visit. The key person in this drama was Wang Jinhong, who in 1967 was the village Party Committee vice-chair and younger brother of the Party chair, and became chair himself soon after regaining power. After maintaining his place as the most important person in village politics for more than three years, Wang was forced out again as village leader just weeks before Hinton's arrival. Although it is impossible to know exactly what drove the central government to this unusual intervention in politics at the village level, it seems clear that it was designed to prevent Hinton from forming an impression about the progress of Long Bow (and, by extension, all of China) colored by the excesses of the Cultural Revolution. In fact, Hinton was prevented from meeting with Wang Jinhong at all until the day before he was to leave the village, and even then it was only his tireless insistence that he get Wang's side of the story that allowed them to finally meet face-to-

74 Hinton (1983), p. 20

face.⁷⁵

On his first trip to Long Bow Hinton was essentially on his own to see what he would, but his second trip was much more carefully managed. This was no doubt in part due to several factors that his little to do with Hinton himself, including the general political environment, the rarity of a foreigner's visit, and the desire to show the best possible side of life in rural China. But the importance of Hinton's trip, indeed even the possibility of his visit in the first place, was just as much about who he was: the author of *Fanshen*. Such was the impact of Hinton's classic that in China in the early '70s he was one of the most famous documentarians of the revolution, arguably second only to Edgar Snow, Mao's confidant and biographer. The first Chinese translation of *Fanshen* was not published until 1980, but before that it was still widely known as the finest (and a sympathetic) account of the early years of New China produced by a foreigner. Hinton himself was considered a friend of the revolution, who had suffered personally at the hands of anti-Communist hysteria in America but continued working to educate the West about what he saw as the example that China was setting for a new path to a better future for the whole world.

The reaction locally to Hinton's return was even more sensational. Some people remembered Hinton personally, but most had only heard the stories about the tall foreigner who had spent half a year living, eating, and working with the people of Long Bow. So when Hinton insisted that he go from the nearby city of Changzhi to the village on foot, repeating the trip he made many times in 1948, the stage was set for a spectacle. The crowds did not disappoint, turning out by the thousands to walk with Hinton through the streets of Changzhi, making their way north past the end of the built-up part of the city, only slowly dropping away to return home after several miles. Arriving in Long Bow, Hinton encountered similar crowds, this time including many old friends he remembered from years earlier. One of the first was Old Lady Wang, the matriarch of the first house Hinton visited in 1948, who stopped Hinton on the road soon after he returned to the village, and said "We've been waiting for you. We thought you'd never come. Back in April when you arrived in China we saw your picture in the paper. We all said you'd come here, but it has been many months."⁷⁶

Constructing Village History

In memorial and narrative, William Hinton has been made inseparable from Long Bow's history. This legacy, borne of the historical accident of Hinton's decision to witness land reform, is by now the product of decades of accumulated choices, strategies, and claims about what the real history of Long Bow village is. The above anecdote of Hinton's return to the village shows one of the many modes of intersection among Hinton the man, Hinton the chronicler of village history, and Hinton the legendary figure. In this story, our attention is drawn to the spectacle of the return, where despite an absence of twenty-three years from the village, the power of his presence had only grown. This was made possible by what Hinton represented; he was foreign

75 Interview with Wang Jinhong, May 5, 2009. I describe this history more fully in Chapter 3.

76 Hinton (1983), p. 17



Cleaning the Hinton statue in the Long Bow Elementary School courtyard, January 2009.

and exotic, yes, but even more importantly, he was a figure totally integrated into the historical being of Long Bow village. But Hinton himself, by that point in Long Bow's history, had played only a relatively minor role in events, during his 6 months in the village in 1948 remaining primarily an (admittedly conspicuous) observer. How can we account for his hero's welcome? The answer, given the absence of the actual man, must lie elsewhere. For although Hinton was not able to visit Long Bow for so many years, a piece of him was, in the form of his "documentary of revolution in a Chinese village," *Fanshen*. This book, the account of village history that it carried, and its place in the historiography of the Chinese revolution, had enormous importance for Long Bow, even though the first Chinese translation did not appear until much later. The people of Long Bow and the surrounding area had certainly not read the book when Hinton returned in 1971. But they were already connected to it, as an inseparable component of how their history could be told. The effect was double: Hinton himself had become inseparable from the collective identity of the village, and, at the same time, the narrative of village history recorded in *Fanshen* would thereafter exert an enormous influence of the possibility of narrating and remembering the past.

In the case of Wang Jinhong's museum, we see a different kind of engagement with the figure of Hinton. There, displays of photographs, placards, tools, and other *artifacts* link the story of Hinton's life to that of the village, weaving them together in a memory of a mutual past. Given Hinton's lifelong support of the rural focus and collectivist aims that drove both the original land reform itself, and Hinton's desire to witness it, it is a cruel irony that Wang's Hinton museum is housed in the back of a museum dedicated to an agricultural way of life that is disappearing in contemporary China in the face of urbanization and commercialization. In actual fact, that irony

is key to understanding the way that Wang has mobilized the memory of Hinton as a protest against the present. Nevertheless, perhaps for most people it is only as a memory of a past time that Hinton will be remembered into the future, relegated to a museum that can only look backwards. However true, this does not detract from the significance of the existence of the museum, and of how it is experienced by its visitors. To have a museum for Hinton, as coated with coal dust and poorly lit as it is, is an intervention in the telling of history that puts Hinton at the center, with Wang as his interlocutor.

Just as *Fanshen* was both the unique work of an author (Hinton) and a larger historiographical frame (the ideology of the revolution), Wang's museum is authored by him and given interpretive context by the decline of farming as the center of Chinese society. Through the museum, its author stakes several claims. One is to the memory of Hinton, still a kind of talisman of prestige in Long Bow. As the keeper of Hinton's memory, Wang Jinhong at the same time positions himself as an authoritative teller of village history. Thus the museum is a vehicle not only for telling the story of Hinton, but also for Wang to act as the heir of Hinton's legacy. This, in turn, draws a connection to the larger context of the museum's narrative: as a protest against the death of the dream of land reform. More than anything, what drew Hinton and Wang together through their 30 year friendship was a shared belief in the ideals of the revolution and the dignity of rural life. As both have been swept away in the 30 years of economic reform, most people like Wang have been relegated to silent protest, nostalgia, or resignation. However, in this case there is a possibility for a critique of contemporary Chinese society, that takes the form of memorializing an advocate of its near-opposite. In the museum an alternative version of history is told, one that rejects the reforms of the last 30 years even as it celebrates the memory of a friend.

With these examples in mind, we are now in a position to return to the questions I posed at the beginning of this chapter. First, what does it mean that Wang Jinhong is in position to be an interlocutor of village history through his museums? The answer points to the interlocking of narrating history and the construction of authority. As a privileged teller of village history, Wang is in a unique position to produce a version of that past that corresponds with his point of view, and, even more importantly, that allows him to use the telling of that history to make a statement of protest against the present direction of Chinese society. This also sheds light on the second question, how is Wang Jinhong's authority, both as a guardian of history and as a local leader, co-constructed with a story of the village past? As an influential teller of village history, Wang gains practical authority not just over that history, but also over daily life in the village. Being able to position himself as personally intertwined with the village past grants Wang respect borne of experience, and by emphasizing his relationship to Hinton, Wang is able to borrow some of the local hero's glory for himself. As I indicated earlier, my description here should not be interpreted as a claim that Wang's acts of remembering Hinton are nefarious; whether or not it is a good thing for him personally or for the village as a whole, I only seek to explain how Hinton and village history become intertwined and how drawing on that history is an important component of building authority.

Lastly, there is also the question of what the museums mean to people in the village and how they experience visiting them. Naturally, what they mean to Wang Jinhong may differ a great deal from how others in the village see them, and his ambition for how they will be received may

not be translated in practice. Many visitors act with curiosity and politeness, but the museums' presence in the village is hardly ground shaking, and the public Hinton museum on the corner of the village square sits completely unvisited. We cannot therefore underestimate the personal influence of Wang in making memorials of Hinton in Long Bow. However, the interlocked authority of Hinton and Wang—now facilitated by the museum with Hinton gone—has been a central reality of life in Long Bow for decades. The museum is one component of how that position of authority in the village is accomplished, and its presence reinforces Wang's position as village leader even in retirement. In this way, memorials are an example of how the past, as historical narrative, becomes a resource in the present. In turn, the physical form of a memorial museum is one way that the past is lived in the present, as a material artifact that constructs a linkage between past and present by its very existence.

Chapter 3: Documenting History

In *The Temple of Memories: History, Power, and Morality in a Chinese Village*, Jun Jing considers two documents that were central in the revival of ritual performances and reconstruction of the Confucius temple of Dachuan village, Shaanxi: one a handbook of instructions for ritual performance and the other a clan genealogy. The former, cooperatively rewritten by older villagers over the course of six years in a series of “memory rehearsals,” laid out the details for ceremonies that had not been performed in a generation, but were begun again (or, reinvented) in 1991.⁷⁷ The latter, actually a collection of several overlapping genealogies of the Kong clan, the oldest of which was compiled in 1905, was the source for a large amount of information that aided in the reconstruction of the temple and was the most important piece of evidence for the Dachuan Kongs' claim of kinship with the Kongs of Qufu, and therefore with Confucius himself. As written objects, these sources were treated with extreme caution; for example, Jing relates how several of his attempts to examine or photocopy one of the genealogies were deflected, until he was finally able to copy a copy under the watchful eye of an archivist who was held responsible for its safe return.⁷⁸ In addition to their important role in the reconstruction of the Confucius temple, and the care that was taken to safeguard them, Jing shows how these two sources constitute an act of “making historical sense.”⁷⁹ In other words, the documents are attempts to narrate history in a particular way for particular purposes, with certain “deletions, evasions, and distortions.”⁸⁰ Through their existence they contribute to the work of constructing the community—the knowledge they contain is essential to local identity and their existence becomes a focal point for an understanding of collective history. As Maurice Freedman argued, a genealogy is not only a record of kin relations, it is also “a set of claims to origin and relationships, a framework for wide-ranging social organization, a blueprint for action.”⁸¹ In Dachuan this description applied to the ritual handbook and the clan genealogies, which became the focal point for the reconstitution of the community around a new identity as heirs of Confucius. Furthermore, as documents, they were treated as sacred objects whose material existence was bound up with the existence of the community.⁸²

Anthropologists have frequently been interested in the social power of documents. In the broadest sense, works by Jack Goody and Walter Ong have explored the special power of the written word and the consequences of literacy.⁸³ Many anthropological works on documents

77 Jing (1996), p. 102-3

78 *ibid.*, p. 140

79 *ibid.*, p. 134

80 *ibid.*, p. 134

81 Freedman (1966), p. 31

82 The main weakness of Jing's account is that it implies a uniformity of identity, action, and interests among the villagers. In his depiction, pressed from the outside by the state, villagers present a united front. However, he greatly underplays the contingency of this unity and the continuation of ruptures and conflicts within the village. As my investigation of Long Bow shows, the construction of collective identity (that relies to a great degree on a notion of shared history) is always fraught and incomplete. Rather than simply serving as a focal point of collective identity as in Jing's analysis, I argue that historical documents are contributors to an ongoing process of the production of a notion of collective history and shared identity.

83 Goody (1968), (1986), (1987) and Ong (1977) and (1982)

have also been indebted to Weber or Foucault. From a Weberian perspective, documents have been understood as rationalizing technologies of bureaucratic organization, “tool[s] of social control ... made potent by a number of special characteristics of the file – its legitimacy or authority, its permanence, its transferability, its facelessness.”⁸⁴ In the Foucauldian tradition, documents have been analyzed as materialized discourse that constitute the subjects and societies that use and produce them.⁸⁵ For example, several anthropologists have examined the role of documentation in the colonial context, showing how documents produce effects of control and the reification of sociological categories and colonizer/colonized relations.⁸⁶

In addition to work where the primary focus is on documents as technology (or, the effects of documentation), other anthropological writing has examined the materiality of texts. In particular, studies of ritual and religion have pointed to the special power of sacred texts and the fetishistic character of the written word.⁸⁷ This sense of the document is closest to Jing's analysis discussed above: he shows how the texts in question are significant both for their content (the historical narrative and identity claims constructed in them) and their materiality (their status as sacred objects and ritual focal points). Following this approach, in this chapter I will investigate two documents that were produced in the last several years by Long Bow villagers: the first a written history of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (hereafter GPCR) in Long Bow, and the second a map of the village immediately prior to the defeat of Japan in World War II. Just as those in Jing's work, these sources are important both for the version of history they record and as material objects that produce and orient action. Although not ritual objects in the narrow sense of religious texts, they are treated with heightened caution and respect, thereby transcending the mundane. Furthermore, the way these documents circulate in the village, how they are treated as authoritative or contestable histories that demand a response, shows their importance as objects that become focal points for action. And as narrations of history, these documents are not only the products of their author's singular perspective, but equally are effects of a collective process of historical consciousness made in the social life of the village.

By paying attention to both the content and materiality of these documents, I hope to move beyond an interest in the perspective of the author to a broader view of the role of these narratives in the village in general. Methodologically, I propose the anthropology of a document, or, in other words, an approach that describes the social life of a text, encompassing both the production and consumption of a narrative as a collective project. Another way to understand this approach is to say that it is written from the perspective of the document itself, rather than from that of an author (or authors). This allows us to see not only how an ostensibly personal narrative is actually produced by a multitude of authors,⁸⁸ but at the same time how that narrative becomes a matter of collective concern. This sharpens our ability to see history as a social product, because it demonstrates both the collective production of the narrative, and at the same time its significance in practice, as an object of practical action. Attending to the materiality of these documents is key in this respect, in that it shows specifically how people in the village

84 Riles (2006), p. 9, building on Wheeler (1969) and Goody (2000)

85 Foucault (1991)

86 Comaroff and Comaroff (1992) Thomas (1990), Voss and Werner (1999)

87 For example, Turner (1969)

88 cf. Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia*. Bakhtin (1981)

position themselves relative to historical narratives in their actions. The physical existence of a text is significant because it brings into sharp focus how people relate to history not just as an abstract concept but as a material reality, an element of everyday interaction and practical concern.

This approach brings together an interest in history as content and history as a form of social action. On the one hand, the narratives in historical documents are interesting for what they tell us about how a community understands its existence as a community. Following this understanding, historians treat “historical documents not as repositories of facts of the past but as complexly constituted instances of discourse that produce their objects as real, that is, as existing prior to and outside of discourse.”⁸⁹ From this perspective, documents tell us about the identity of a community, and how that identity is produced through an understanding of collective history. But the materiality of historical documents is an additional element of their power. Existence as an object produces a form of authority that exceeds the charisma of the individual author. Thus documents acquire a special importance in constructing historical consciousness, pointing to the necessity to understand the social life of the document itself. Writing from the perspective of the document allows us to see how both perspectives and action converge around a focal point, raising the stakes of the understanding of historical events. Grappling with these events is thus not only an ideological struggle, it is simultaneously a practical question of action.

This is closely linked to the problem of authority, both in how documents produce authority and, reciprocally, how they acquire their status *as* documents by being the products of an authority. The documents I will analyze in this chapter were both produced by villagers in Long Bow, whose claim to authoritative knowledge about the events represented stems from their first-hand experience. Both documents are also represented as in part autobiographical. Neither author can claim to be an expert, however, in the sense of being socially recognized as an authority on history. “Documents,” in the sense most of the authors listed above use the term, are closely associated with official expertise and formal authority. In other words, the word usually refers to the products of designated authorities, often with state-sanctioned claims to expertise or power. Thus, in this chapter I refer to documents in a different sense than does Weber, for example, in describing the power of written legal documents that “[rest] on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands.”⁹⁰

Primarily, I call the two sources in this chapter documents so that my analysis can proceed from the perspective of the things themselves, looking at the constellation of (personal, local, regional, and national) knowledge and action that they invoke. In other words, *as* things, these documents congeal a variety of perspectives, arguments, histories, and social positions, both in the abstract (as representations of history) and in the concrete (as physical things that require protection or special treatment.) I argue that the idea of an anthropology of the document is useful for understanding how documents combine the abstract and concrete, and for seeing how they motivate action. Furthermore, the concept of the document reveals how the problem of authority enters into the social life of a document. Specifically, their existence as material records grants

89 Axel (2002), p. 14

90 Weber (1978), p. 215

them an excess of power, a power greater than that of oral narratives in Long Bow. This power does not result from a claim of objectivity, since people with alternative narratives would deny the author's claims to truth. However, the truth claims made in these documents acquire a sharper reality as a result of their existence as material documents. We will see how this happens as a practical matter in this chapter; in general, being recorded gives historical narratives the possibility of travel outside the confines of the village, which is one important source of their special power. They also benefit from a mimesis of power, by virtue of the respect accorded to written history in Chinese culture. Lastly, although my sense of the document is different from the idea of a fetishized product and symbol of authority as in the theorists cited above, I argue that those analyses are useful for seeing how potential authority is produced by these objects, and how they enter into struggles for power in the village.

Documents of Local History: Written Narrative and Visual Representation

In 2005-06, Li Anhe, retired village government scribe, former cultural worker for the Propaganda Team, and occasional Experimental Work Team leader, wrote a twenty-four page typewritten history of events in Long Bow centered on the years of the GPCR.⁹¹ His history moves back and forth between personal recollections of local events and explanations of the larger regional and national contexts that impacted the unfolding of the GPCR in the village. Blending these elements together, Li skillfully describes his experiences as the product of local and national forces, and shows how rhetoric and politics at higher levels filtered down into the village, adapting to the specific history, conditions, and personalities of Long Bow. The tone of the document as a whole is that of frustration, both that what he saw as laudable goals were corrupted in the movement, and that he unjustly became the target of criticism from 1967 until 1973.

During those six years, Li Anhe was subjected to several instances of criticism in public struggle sessions, stripped of official posts in the village government, accused of being a counter-revolutionary and covert KMT (Nationalist Party) supporter, and suffered from low-level violence including being denied food and water for days while being held in self-criticism sessions. He was also a main participant in the village-wide struggle between the so-called 'loyalists' – the village faction supporting the pre-GPCR village leadership centered on Lu Jinjun and his younger adopted brother Wang Jinhong – and the 'rebels,' who briefly seized power in 1967 and were the motivating force behind the criticism of Li and other village leaders. The rebels, organized primarily around two groups: the Stormy Petrels (风暴海燕, named after a poem by Russian Revolutionary poet Maxim Gorky popular in China during the GPCR)⁹² and

91 The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (officially dated 1966-1976) was a nationwide campaign to revolutionize Chinese society by stripping away the vestiges of pre-Revolutionary culture and overthrow what Mao saw as ossified relations of authority. A particular target was the "4 Olds" – Old Customs, Old Culture, Old Habits, and Old Ideas – and people thought to be linked to those old ways of thinking, especially intellectuals. The early years of the GPCR was also a period of intense factional fighting and violence, primarily in the form of student Red Guard groups that struggled against each other and attacked intellectuals, class enemies, and "capitalist roaders." For a comprehensive (if one-sided) history of the GPCR, see MacFarquhar (2008)

92 Snow (1968), p. 352

Shang'gan Ridge (上甘岭战斗队, named after the site of a People's Liberation Army (PLA) victory over the United States during the Korean War), were the local manifestation of the factional struggles that swept the entire country.

Although memories of this history continue to be painful for many, today Li Anhe says he has moved on: "I remember all these things, and it is important that they are recorded, but I'm not angry. [My written history] isn't like scar literature (伤痕文学),⁹³ I didn't do it to make myself feel better or complain about the past." So why did he write it? According to my interviews with him and the content of the document itself, he felt a responsibility to record the past. His sense of responsibility stems from both a felt obligation as an educated witness and a dedication to (what he sees as) the truth. As a witness of the events, Li says he wishes to record history before those with first-hand knowledge pass away. Even more so, Li's identity as one of the most highly educated and literate members of the older generations in the village leads him to feel a special responsibility to compose a written account that will survive over time and can potentially reach an audience outside the village.⁹⁴ Li's history in this respect enters into a larger universe of historiography, a fact that adds to his motivation and sense of responsibility, and that is expressed in the text in its tone and use of genre conventions, which I describe below.

Li also wrote the document because the divisions in the village stemming from the Cultural Revolution continue to be relevant. As I describe elsewhere, the factional lines that defined politics in Long Bow in the past have persisted into the present and are expressed in village elections, everyday practices, family dramas, and many other facets of village life. In this chapter I will show how those divisions were mobilized around documents of historical representation. In the case of Li's history, it was clear that although he has moved on from the past emotionally, the lines dividing the loyalists from the rebels are still a fundamental aspect of village politics, and his writing was another volley in that ongoing struggle. In this respect, Li was concerned about revisionist versions of the past told by sympathizers of the rebel faction, and that his reputation (and that of his close ally Wang Jinhong) was being attacked by people in the village in order to build their own prestige. Li claims to now be uninterested in village politics, but as we will see, even if he has officially retired, the document is an important political intervention. This further reflects how old divisions continue to shape village politics, and in that context, Li's history would unavoidably have contemporary implications.

In the preamble of the history, describing his purpose in his own words, Li wrote:

In this new era of great Reform, the ten years of chaos of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution has already become history. Many young people who did not experience the events first hand have a strong desire to understand that time, and older people who were there feel that they must record those historical events. Thus the motive and hope in composing this document is to contribute to absorbing the lessons of that time, and in this new era of history, strengthen democracy and the rule of law, increase feelings of togetherness, mutual aid, and friendship, treasure the hard-won progress of recent years, and help in making better patriotic, law-abiding,

93 Scar literature is a category of writing that emerged soon after the death of Chairman Mao that portrays the suffering of the GPCR. See Barmé (1979)

94 Li's personal history as a university student which later led him to be the official village scribe will be described in more detail later.

and enthusiastic Party members, cadres, and citizens.⁹⁵

A final element in Li's motivation in composing the history was the publication of a new Chinese



Original Cultural Revolution documents Li consulted in writing his history.

edition of William Hinton's *Shenfan*. In 2004 when Hinton passed away, Wang Jinhong decided to commission the translation and publication of a Chinese-language version of Hinton's second major volume on the history of Long Bow (the sequel to *Fanshen*). *Shenfan* was first published in English in 1983, and it covers the history of Long Bow from the time Hinton left the village in 1948 up to his first visit back to the village in 1971. The history contained in *Shenfan* – and the story of its translation and publication after Hinton's death – will be told in greater detail later in this chapter. At this point it is only important to note that the composition of Li's history was

⁹⁵ The Chinese text reads: “在改革开放的大好形势的今天，被称之为十年动乱、十年浩劫的无产阶级文化大革命早已成为历史。一些没有经历过文化大革命的年轻人有浓厚的兴趣想了解它，经历过文革动乱的人们感到有必要把张庄文革这段历史记载下来，以便吸取其中的教训，在改革开放新的历史时期，加强民主法治建设，增强团结、互助友爱，珍惜今天来之不易的好形势、好政策、好光景，做一个热爱祖国、遵纪守法、勤奋开拓的好党员、好干部、好公民，为张庄的改革发展贡献力量，这就是写“略记”的目的和愿望。”

greatly influenced by the publication of the Chinese edition of *Shenfan*, and the dialogue between the two is an important element of the significance of Li's document.

A sense of responsibility to preserve knowledge of the past was also a major factor in the production of the other document I will examine in this chapter, a map of the village drawn by Zhang Lijun. This map, drawn on a one-and-a-half by one meter square sheet of thick paper in watercolor paint and ink, is a visual representation of the village circa 1945, when there was still a Japanese garrison stationed in Long Bow. Titled “Old View of Long Bow” (张庄旧貌, written in Traditional characters) the map is drawn primarily from an overhead view, with additional isometric-perspective drawings of the old village temples and gates, and place labels in ink. Drawn from memory, it shows the layout of streets and houses (including the names of household-heads written on the courtyard they occupied) as Zhang remembered them in 2007 (he was eight years old in 1945). Zhang was spurred to draw the map (with the help of several other people he consulted, including Wang Jinhong) by his collaboration with Guo Huiling, a student from China Agricultural University who was conducting a survey of the village as part of her Master's fieldwork on local food and leisure culture. Zhang also considered it important to preserve a record of the village from the perspective of a person who remembered it before Liberation. In an interview in 2009, he said, “There aren't very many people still alive in the village who remember the Japanese here. I still have a good memory, and I was happy to contribute to preserving some of this old knowledge. It's hard for people to imagine now who weren't there how much things have changed. I wanted to remind young people how good they have it, how hard life was in the old days. If we old people don't remind everyone, the past will just disappear because things are changing so fast!”

Beyond what this document meant to Zhang personally, the social significance of the map lies primarily in how it was received and what it represents. With respect to the latter, the map represents a mentality that is shared by many in Long Bow: a complex mixture of loss and persistence. Loss is felt in terms of the disappearing of knowledge of the past and the fading of a generation, as older people pass away or are supplanted in public and political life in the village by younger people. These younger generations are often viewed with suspicion by older people who argue that those who did not experience the deprivations or political upheavals of the past cannot see what was really at stake in the transformation of Chinese society in the Revolution, and cannot be trusted to carry those values into the future. Some of this is nostalgia to be sure, but it nevertheless reveals a generational rupture that is a significant factor in everyday life in the village. The physical changes of the village as they are recorded in the map stand for a larger sense of disruption and rapid change that is leaving not just the past behind, but, more poignantly, leaving a whole generation behind.

At the same time, the sense of loss and change recorded in the map is countered by the persistence of the past into the present via residential patterns. Many families still occupy the same location in the village today as are shown on the map circa 1945, even though the actual structures have nearly all been torn down and replaced. In addition to individual families, residential patterns in the village that cluster extended kin networks, political allies, and religious affiliations have persisted over time. For example, the north/south division of the village into

majority traditional Chinese religion in the north (大教 in the local terminology) and Catholic majority in the south is still largely true, and remained an important force in the village through Land Reform, decades of religious repression, the Cultural Revolution, and the Reform era. The map therefore also records the embedding of history in the landscape, a fact that was significant for all the villagers I spoke with who viewed it. The sense of roots that the map represents exists alongside an awareness of change, and for many in Long Bow this works as a metaphor for contemporary Chinese society.

The reception of the map also demonstrates important elements of its social significance. Because the map records a moment in the history of the village prior to Liberation and Land Reform, for some families it stands for a painful or sensitive past. In particular, the map resurrects knowledge about inequalities that determined the future course of village politics, beginning with early attacks on landlord and rich peasant families, class labels that, once affixed, formed the parameters of social life and justified violence. These are not just elements of the past or confined to the realm of memories either, since the lines that were drawn on the basis of those class labels are still explicitly and implicitly significant today. The political history embedded in the form of the map is at the same time Long Bow's political present. Furthermore, the class divisions and history of inequality that the map makes explicit are invoked in discourses of the betrayal of the revolution. Viewing the map in that context is linked to a sense that Long Bow (and all of China by extension) is returning to the old inequalities. The patterns it reveals are, in the eyes of many, reemerging in the Reform era, a new class society leaving behind the promises of socialism. The resignation expressed by many of my informants interpreting the meaning of the map was expressed in a sense that the sixty years from the time of the map to the present was lost time. Despite the contradiction of this view with the idea that things are materially better now than in the past, recognition of progress is more than tempered by a fear that the future will be a path of increasing inequality and betrayal, as a (metaphorical) new gentry rises. The map mobilizes those anxieties and hence serves as a focal point for a critique of the present path of Chinese society.

In this chapter, I will describe the social life of Li's history and Zhang's map as a means to understand the meaning of history to the people of Long Bow and its invocation in contemporary village politics. Attention to the documents' meanings, interpretations, and circulation reveals the multi-layered significance of historical sources. The following description of the constellation of action and interpretation around the documents is a means to understanding the collective production of historical knowledge on one hand, and the way it is mobilized in public life on the other.

Historical Narrative and Local Politics

Over the weekend of the 7th of July 2009, a group of university students visited Long Bow as part of a tour through Shanxi Province organized by Utopia (乌有之乡), a leftist student organization and think tank. Based in Beijing, Utopia operates a website, book press, and store, bringing together intellectuals and serving as a center of organization for students. The group's politics

are centered on strong criticism of liberal economic reforms and their consequences for Chinese society in the past thirty years, advocacy of a return to collectivist principles, and memorialization of Chairman Mao and other symbols of the Mao era. It organizes a variety of activities for students sympathetic with their politics and interested in learning more, including tours of sites associated with the Maoist revolution and fact-finding trips to rural areas to investigate the impacts of reform. That June, a group from Utopia traveled through Shanxi, including stops in the war museum and battlefields in Qinxian, important wartime headquarters sites in Taiyuan, and the model village of Dazhai. The last stop on the trip was Long Bow village.

Utopia chose Long Bow as a stop on the trip because of its famous association with William Hinton and his books *Fanshen* and *Shenfan*. Hinton himself remained a strong supporter of Maoist policies throughout his life, and his two best-known books reflect those commitments. This has made *Fanshen* and *Shenfan* important sources for leftist politics around the world, and the Chinese editions of both books are influential among people in China critical of the direction of rural society in the Reform era. The Utopia students' visit to Long Bow was a chance for them to see the contemporary village and ask questions about the economic transition in the last 30 years. To this end, a central part of their visit was a panel discussion held with Wang Jinhong and Li Anhe, and later in-home conversations with them and several other older villagers. Because of his association with Hinton, Wang Jinhong has been in contact with Utopia for many years, and his own politics, although much less critical of Reform than Utopia's, align well with the group. Utopia thus essentially knew what to expect from Wang: he would talk to the students about the benefits of collective farming, the history of the implementation of Maoist principles, and the high spirit of the time—in implicit contrast to the present.

Li Anhe, although a close associate of Wang's and a village leader in the collective era, was more of a wild card. Although sympathetic with critiques of the Reform era and concerned for the welfare of struggling farmers in the village, Li is much less nostalgic for the collective era than Wang. Privately, he is more likely to talk about the excesses of the Cultural Revolution than the benefits of collective farming, and he believes that economic reform on balance has been a positive force. Perhaps even more significantly, Li did not have the personal ties with Utopia that would indebt him to perform as the group expected. Wang Jinhong was the primary contact and sponsor for the group's visit, which included a tour of his Rural Life Museum⁹⁶ and a photo-op with the larger-than-life size Cultural Revolution era statue of Mao that Wang installed in the center of his courtyard in April 2009

Wang was thus the group's host, and, in line with cultural expectations, that meant he was responsible to provide for a good visit. For Wang's part, the visit by Utopia was also another in a wide variety of contacts outside the village that enhance his prestige locally: bringing in visitors has been an important element in Wang's legitimacy as a local leader and also has meant that he has been the *de facto* voice of the village to the outside world. Because of the association with Hinton, the expectation of the outside world for Long Bow, especially for a group like Utopia, is to serve as a symbol of the collective era. This much was clear in the panel discussion with

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Utopia, which was hosted in the village headquarters courtyard. The tone of the panel was set at the beginning when the student leaders distributed a song book with lyrics for dozens of popular Mao-era songs and led the group in renditions of *The East Is Red* and *The Internationale*. In the discussion, Wang told the students about a sense of common purpose that he said prevailed in the collective era: “There was a different spirit then, people worked together to solve common problems. Life was harder, but people’s spirits were higher. Even though we had to work hard to have basic necessities, people felt like they were contributing to a bigger project.”

During the discussion, Li mostly deferred to Wang, interjecting only when prompted to add detail about various collective projects undertaken by the village. As one-time leader of the Long Bow experimental farming plot (a small field set aside from the rest to test new farming methods) and organizer of a fertilizer production village enterprise in the 1970s, Li has detailed knowledge of collective farming and village administration in the Mao era. But other than those comments, Li spoke little about the “spirit of the time” and seemed less than nostalgic. After the panel, Li told me, “I know the students only wanted to hear the good things about that time, and Wang *shuji* (Wang Jinhong) has a romantic memory. But I don’t think life was better then. I’m glad we have moved on, and I can live a quiet life where I’m not worried who is going to attack me tomorrow.”

That afternoon, students dispersed through Long Bow and neighboring villages in groups of ten to visit individual homes and talk directly with locals. Li was one of the villagers who hosted students in his house, and I went along with the group during their visit. The conversation started out with practical questions about how much farm land he held, his household size, and their yearly income (a model I usually also followed in my interviews). From there, the students asked more specific questions about Li’s feelings about the collective era in comparison to the present. It was clear that this group of students was not aware of Li’s personal history, and were not prepared for the details that he would offer about the political turmoil of the Cultural Revolution. Some in the group seemed less invested in hearing Li extol the virtues of the Mao era, and listened intently as he described being subjected to criticism sessions and sidelined by factional struggle; the small group’s leaders on the other hand sunk in their chairs, visibly disappointed and impatient. Li continued undeterred however: “There’s no question that things are better now than in the past. All the fighting was such a waste, and it was just how things were. Putting politics before everything else, trying to figure out who the class enemies were, that led to all the problems. Farmers are practical people, and things are better when they can focus on those problems, not some abstract principles.”

To illustrate the costs of the politics of the time, Li took out a copy of his written history. “I wrote it all down in here. I was the most educated person in the village then, so I was made the village scribe. Because I am used to writing, I wanted to record the events I saw in that form. You all know the story that Hinton told in *Shenfan*, about what happened in the village during the Cultural Revolution, but he didn’t have all the details, because he only came back to Long Bow in 1971, and because the Revolutionary Committee was still in charge of the village then, and they were afraid of Hinton finding out what had really happened. And there is another problem: to this day, there are people in Long Bow telling an incorrect version of what happened. They want to change history.” Li was intuitive enough to recognize that some of the students didn’t



Students with Utopia interview a Long Bow villager. Note their Che Guevara t-shirts.

want to hear negative comments about the Cultural Revolution, which for some on China's left has been vindicated by the changes implemented by Deng and his allies under Economic Reform, proof for them that Mao was right to suspect the existence of a counter-revolutionary pro-capitalist faction up to the highest levels.⁹⁷ But he pressed forward: “Yes, there were good things about that time. But the fights weren't about principles, or about advancing the revolution. The chaos was pointless. People had their personal grudges, and their ways to try to get some power for themselves. The village was divided, and we are still paying for those mistakes today. I had to write this history down because some of the same people are still fighting the same battle today, and I want to make sure people know why.” With that, Li threw the document down on his living room table, leaned back in his chair, and lit a cigarette.

None of the students that day had a chance to read the document, or take a copy of it with them. But as a symbol of historical narrative, its presence was still a significant fact. As a talisman of the authority to tell history, the written document was an undeniable contributor to establishing Li's version of the facts. Whether or not the students came away convinced, they were

⁹⁷ Hinton shared this perspective, believing that the Cultural Revolution was a battle between true revolutionaries and those who would destroy the socialist project. See Hinton (1990)

confronted by a perspective that they could not ignore. This is not to say that the document conferred absolute objectivity on Li's memories, but still it granted them a power greater than that of purely oral narratives, a diversity of which the students encountered during their visit. This was, in part, an effect of a greater respect for Li's authority as a storyteller that he gained by virtue of being the author of a written history that conforms to norms of style and form. For example, in the document Li always refers to himself in the third person, a choice which positions his narrative in the genre of history, as opposed to memoirs or scar literature. It is also an effect of a respect for the written word in general and historiography in particular. Constructing the narrative into a written document gives his history greater weight as evidence, because it benefits from an analogical connection to the universe of written history accorded respect as the products of the sophisticated historical consciousness of a class of intellectuals.

The encounter with the Utopia students is also an example of how the document works to position Li in the field of village politics. As a symbol of the authority to tell village history, the document gives greater weight to the narrative that it contains relative to other versions of the past. The version told by Li has consequences in the present because, as he told the students, many of the same divisions that he describes from the GPCR still give shape to local politics. Li's version enters into a competitive field of historical narratives told by different sides that in part constitute the distribution of power in the village. The act of communicating a version of history to the outside world (at least in theory) alters the dynamics of that contest for authority.

But why would that history matter to this day in Long Bow? To find the answer, we must look at the content of Li's narrative.

The Cultural Revolution in Long Bow Village

In May 1966, the Politburo under the leadership of Chairman Mao inaugurated the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR), the next in a series of political and social movements that were designed to reshape Chinese society. From the perspective of Long Bow village, the first weeks of the new movement were met primarily with confusion: "The great majority of farmers only read what was happening in the newspapers, and barely understood. For the villagers of Long Bow, they watched from the sidelines as the students of Lu'an Middle School organized progressively larger and more fervent criticism sessions."⁹⁸ But before long, the importance of organizing for the GPCR became clear to village leaders in Long Bow, including Wang Jinhong (then village Party Vice-Secretary), his adoptive brother Lu Jinjun (village Party Secretary), and Li Anhe (village government scribe and key member of the village Propaganda Team). According to Li's document, all were initially supporters of the GPCR, and participated in propaganda work including song and drama performances intended to publicize the new movement. Based on the model of the implementation of recent campaigns in Long Bow, especially the Four Cleans (四清) campaign begun in 1963, the village leadership also set up a committee to undertake criticism of village leadership and begin study sessions of Mao's works.

98 Li p. 1: "广大农村农民只是看报纸而一知半解。张庄村民见潞安中学日益高涨的批判会，也仅仅是听听、看看而已。"

Concurrently, signs of factional struggle began to emerge in the village. Battles between the two key Red Guard factions in the nearby city of Changzhi (named *hongzi hao* 红字号 and *lianzi hao* 连字号) started to spill over into Lu'an Middle School, located on the grounds of the old Catholic Church in Long Bow. Although those battles did not initially involve villagers directly, before long Long Bow had its own Red Guard groups. Like those in the Middle School, the village Red Guards competed in demonstrating their dedication to the GPCR and Chairman Mao, enthusiastically “smashing the Four Olds” (in Li Anhe's description, “All kinds of old decorations on houses (like dragon-heads on rooftops and old murals on courtyard entrance gates) did not survive, smashed along with anything that people thought represented the Four Olds.”)⁹⁹ According to Li, villagers started to change their names, from anything carrying the hint of the old society (e.g. “富贵” or “满贵”) to names with revolutionary connotations (e.g. “向东”, “卫东” or “建红”).

Along the lines of these Red Guard groups, deeper factional divisions started to harden. The fault lines and origins of these divisions reflected a variety of social forces that predated the Cultural Revolution, especially personal animosities, the effects of class labels, differential experiences with Land Reform and other movements, underground religious divisions, and residential patterns in the village. Although Long Bow had a variety of small groups, fighting in the village coalesced around a division between the “loyalists,” who supported the existing village leadership, and the “rebels,” an organized coalition of groups opposed to Lu Jinjun and Wang Jinhong. In the rebel faction, the primary groups were the Shang'gan Ridge and the Stormy Petrels, led by long-standing rivals of the village leadership who had frequently been the target of attacks in previous campaigns. Most members of Shang'gan Ridge and the Petrels had family connections to former landlord or rich peasant families, and had suffered under those class labels. Others had been attacked as “bad elements,” local troublemakers, or criminals. Furthermore, supporters of the rebels were mainly residents of Long Bow's Fourth and Fifth Work teams, located in the south half of the village. This residential pattern of division reflected the concentration of Catholic families in the south part of the village, who had been viewed with suspicion by village leaders at least since the Church became a main target during the first phases of the Land Reform in 1946.¹⁰⁰ Although not able to practice religion openly, the division between Catholic and non-Catholic families continued to be an important source of tension, and social interaction in the village was still limited across that line. The north/south fault line had a further deep connection to the organization of village politics; the north of the village was commonly known as the “Lu Family Kingdom,” (the family of Lu Jinjun and Wang Jinhong), and people in the south half felt marginalized by the consolidation of official power in the north.

At this point in the narrative, Li Anhe's history shifts to a personal anecdote about his experience with factional struggle. As he describes it, during a performance by the Propaganda Team at the village Temple Festival of 1966, a group of children was fooling around near the stage, running up and down in the backstage area, and disrupting the performance. As a long-time leader of the Team, Li took responsibility for trying to stop the kids from what they were doing, and he went

99 Li p. 2 “房子上的旧屋脊、龙头正房前的天地楼、照壁上的旧式雕画，各种庙宇更不在话下，统统被认为是四旧而被砸烂”

100 See Hinton 1966 for a full account of the role of the Catholic Church in the Land Reform in Long Bow.

up on the platform at the corner of the stage. On his way up, Li accidentally pushed one of the kids off the stage.¹⁰¹ Seeing the child was injured, he left the stage and took him to the village clinic. After a check up determined the child was OK, Li started back to the stage area. On the way, a group of young people that he did not recognize came up behind him, and pushed him toward the stage, telling him to “walk faster,” and “get back up on the stage.” Once back on the stage, Wang Manxi, one of the leaders of the village rebels, jumped up on stage, pointed at Li, and said, “This little Anhe, his father was a member of the KMT, and he intentionally pushed that kid off the stage because he hates the poor and middle peasants, and wants to get revenge!”¹⁰² With that, the youth in the crowd that had pushed him back to the stage (that Li now realized were Red Guards from Lu'an Middle School) started shouts of “Down With Li Anhe!” Not knowing what was happening, village government cadres pulled Li aside, and sent him to the village headquarters to defuse the crowd. In Li's document, he then asks rhetorically: “What motivated Wang Manxi to attack Li Anhe in that way? The reason concerns a story from during the Four Cleans Movement.”

The history then describes an incident between Li and Wang from three years earlier. Because of his experience on the Experimental Team, in 1963 Li was transferred back to the First Work Team to set up new vegetable fields for chives and spinach. That spring after planting, there were several incidents of theft of vegetables, and as those most responsible for the fields, Li and his ally Migui were the main suspects. Li and Migui resolved to guard the fields and discover the real culprit. One night during a full moon, Li and Migui saw a bald head “as bright as five hundred lightbulbs” in the moonlight stealing chives.¹⁰³ Moving to surround him, they confronted the thief, who led them on a chase through the fields. When Li got almost close enough to grab him, the culprit turned and threw the stolen vegetables in Li's face, hoping to use the distraction to escape. Because Li was wearing a hat pulled down low, the vegetables were deflected, and Li was able to apprehend the thief. Just then Migui caught up to them, and taking a closer look, Li realized that he had apprehended Wang Manxi, who was then a notorious trouble-maker, longstanding rival of the village leaders, and frequent target of criticism.¹⁰⁴ Returning to the fields to guard against more thefts, Li turned Wang over to Migui. About a half hour later, Migui returned to the fields as well, telling Li that since it was late, there was nothing they could do with Wang that night, so he let him go home until they could deal with it in the morning. Li immediately realized that Wang would deny everything the next day, and told Migui that they had to go report the incident immediately. Their first step was to go find the Work Team leader and explain what happened, who then told a member of the Poor Peasants' Association to call Wang to come out and appear. Arriving in the leader's courtyard, Wang saw Li and Migui, knew why he had been called there, and proceeded to deny any involvement. As Li recalled it, Wang claimed to have been sleeping, and got up and put on clothes because he heard someone calling to him and he thought he was being summoned for work. In Li's

101 As he words it, “因舞台两边几个调皮的小孩来回乱跑影响演出效果，一直在台上主奏板胡的李安和便让这些小孩下去看，一不小心将一个孩子推下台。”

102 In Li's narrative: ““这个小马群，他爹是国民党，故意把孩子推下台是对贫下中农有仇恨，要报复” ”

103 Li's words: “一个明月夜，他俩发现地里有人偷拔韭菜，光秃秃的脑袋被月亮照得活像一盏 500 光的电灯泡。”

104 Hinton described Wang Manxi in both *Fanshen* and *Shenfan*; I will discuss his depiction there later in the chapter.

description, they could see mud and smell chives on Wang's hands. The Team leader ordered Wang to stick out his hands, and smelling them knew immediately that Wang was guilty. Unable to deny stealing the chives, Wang admitted his guilt, crying, "I'm sorry to Chairman Mao, sorry to the Communist Party, sorry to the Commune members, please let me go!"¹⁰⁵ For a time after this, Wang was frequently subjected to Commune criticism sessions, accepting his guilt with a bowed head. But, before long Wang, because of the intervention of well-placed allies, was put back into a leadership position with the Poor Peasants' Association and his name was cleared. In Li's narration, the advent of the Cultural Revolution years later gave Wang an idea for how to get even.¹⁰⁶

Li's history then shifts focus again, discussing the national and regional contexts of the GPCR. After a long aside explaining the course of the movement in Changzhi City and the surrounding region, he returns to Long Bow. In his description, by 1967 the rising tide of the Cultural Revolution began to sharpen the conflicts in the village. Factional struggle between loyalists and rebels escalated, with struggle sessions, big character posters, and slogans on both sides. The conflict reached a head in February, with the 2-8 Incident (as it is known locally). Under the leadership of Shen Qicai, the Petrels and Shang'gan Ridge formed a plan with allies from the neighboring village of Anyang to seize control of the Long Bow village government. Using the ruse of summoning the top village leadership to a meeting at the headquarters via a sympathizer who was the village accountant, the rebels surrounded the building after the leaders arrived. The village Party Secretary, Lu Jinjun, had caught wind of what was happening and escaped to a neighboring village, but the rest of the leaders, including the (then) Party Vice-Secretary Wang Jinhong, were trapped inside. The rebels forced the leaders to turn over the official village seal, possession of which entitled them to issue vouchers and, in theory, speak with the authority of the village government.

Taking control of the village government was the culmination of several years of efforts on the part of Shen Qicai to gain power by uniting rebel factions, reaching out to Red Guard groups in other villages, and mobilizing the rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution. Li's history includes several anecdotes about Shen prior to 1967, painting him as bent on acquiring power for himself by whatever means necessary. It also relates several accusations of embezzlement and misappropriation of funds on the part of Shen when he worked in the Machang Commune (the administrative level above Long Bow Village) supply co-op. Li claims that contacts developed via illegal activities in those years were instrumental in Shen gaining enough support during 1967 to take the village government. In any case, the day following the seizure of the village seal, posters appeared across Long Bow reading "Celebrate the Victory of the 2-8 Seizure of Power,"¹⁰⁷ and "The Seizure of Power from the Capitalist Leadership of Lu Jinjun by the Proletarian Anti-counter-revolutionary Forces is Great!"¹⁰⁸

Despite their victory, Li describes the rebels' control of the village government as brief and

105 Li's text: "“我对不起毛主席，对不起共产党，对不起社员……饶了我吧” ”

106 Li's text: "“时过境迁，文化大革命使他萌发了跃跃欲试的念头。”

107 "庆祝二八夺权胜利"

108 "无产阶级造反派夺取以师双贵为首的资产阶级当权派的权好得很"

ineffective. “Village production came to a halt. Without proper planning, people ignored the directives of the rebels in control of the government. ... Within a few days, some members of Shang'gan Ridge and the Stormy Petrels started to openly question the seizure of power. ... Although they had people guarding the seal in the headquarters, the rebels were already running into their first problem.” The halt in production was especially concerning to the Poor Peasants' Association, who had more practical power over farm labor than the rebels. By February 14, they had begun to set up a new Provisional Committee that would take over village administration from the rebels. Seeing that their hold on power was untenable, Shen Qicai and the other rebel leaders turned over the seal to the Provisional Committee, made up of representatives of the Poor Peasants' Association and both the loyalist and rebel factions. In effect, although the new Committee contained representatives of the rebels, it was dominated by former village government leaders, including Wang Jinhong and Lu Jinjun. Because of this, dissatisfaction with the Provisional Committee on the part of the rebels and their supporters in the Fourth and Fifth Work Teams continued to be high, and struggle continued in the village with the posting of big character posters and periodic struggle sessions.

With the continued strife in the village, Shen and his supporters maneuvered to gain more power over the Provisional Committee. Having surrendered control of the village seal and headquarters, the rebels' supply of paper and ink was cut off, jeopardizing their ability to continue to put up posters. According to Li's history, to secure a new source Shen organized a group to attack the store room of the Machang Commune and seize paper and ink. In the attack, a clerk was beaten (and, in Hinton's version of the story, held without food and water overnight,¹⁰⁹) and the Provisional Committee had to dispatch a representative to the Commune to patch up relations. In Li's document, he cites “insiders” who explained that Shen's real purpose in attacking the Commune was not just to get paper and ink, it was to put pressure on them to support him in taking more control over Long Bow government. According to those unnamed sources, this strategy backfired, leading Shen to step up his pressure on Wang Jinhong and other loyalists inside the village.

Hence, although Wang had a seat on the Provisional Committee and Li worked as his right-hand man in producing anti-rebel faction propaganda, both were frequent targets of struggle sessions and public criticism. With no clear center of power in the village, Wang and Li had no choice but to submit to these attacks. The Provisional Committee and the Red Guard factions required them to obey directives to engage in self-criticism and examine their behavior for mistakes. In his history, Li claims that despite this, most people in the village continued to support Wang and the loyalists, but were afraid to speak up at the risk of becoming targets themselves. Li writes, “Although he was willing to accept criticism and examine his mistakes, in his heart, Wang Jinhong wondered why, given his years of work on behalf of the Party and the people, he would be accused of being a “capitalist roader.”¹¹⁰ Li recalls agreeing with this assessment, and wanted to find a way to vindicate his ally. With the help of two other villagers, Li composed an “Open Letter to Wang Jinhong” (给王金红的一封公开信) and posted it around the village. In the text

¹⁰⁹ Hinton (1983)

¹¹⁰ Li's text: “但他内心感到愤愤不平，自己多年来一心想为党多做工作，为群众多办实事，为什么竟被指责为“走资派”呢？”

of the poster, Li pointed out the contributions of Wang, and called on the village to support him, especially the new leaders of the Provisional Committee. Unfortunately for Li, even if there was widespread agreement with his perspective, the posting of the letter was interpreted as an attack on the leadership of the Provisional Committee. This resurrected the accusation that Li was the son of a former KMT member and intellectual (which is, in fact, true), ended up subjecting Li to further attacks, and had no positive effect on Wang's standing.

The text of Li's document then shifts again to the broader context of events during the GPCR, especially the rivalry between the Red Guard factions in Changzhi. That battle again spilled over into Long Bow, leading to the highest tide of violence in the village and the only deaths directly attributed to the fighting. When the *Hongzi Hao* faction gained the upper hand in fighting in the city, members of *Lianzi Hao* took up refuge at Lu'an Middle School, where they had allies and could protect themselves at a distance of twenty kilometers from the city. The safety of Lu'an did not last long however, and on August 24, 1967, a group of dozens of *Hongzi Hao* partisans armed themselves with clubs and knives, and commandeered ten trucks to drive to the Middle School. Taking their rivals by surprise, the *Hongzi Hao* students attacked, "beating, smashing, and stealing." Routed, the *Lianzi Hao* group retreated into the fields surrounding Long Bow, and hid among the tall corn stalks. At the same time, a group of railroad workers, who had formed their own Cultural Revolution group at the nearby railworks and who supported the *Lianzi Hao*, decided to support their allies and counter attack. Cutting off *Hongzi Hao's* escape route, the railroad workers slashed the tires of the ten trucks parked on the road through the village. Unbeknownst to the students, the railroad workers had also armed themselves with rifles, commandeered from an arsenal in Henan. Rushing into the Lu'an School courtyard, the workers fired warning shots, causing the students to scatter. Seeing that their trucks had been disabled, they retreated to the fields as well under cover of darkness. What happened in the next several hours is unclear, and in interviews today, villagers in Long Bow describe a confusing situation where some students pleaded for villagers to hide them, others continued fighting, and some retreated even further into the fields. By the following morning, the fighting had ended, but the consequences were clear: two dead, weapons strewn around the village, and the school ransacked. Although there were no further deaths in Long Bow, this incident intensified the fighting in Changzhi city, which did not abate until the Central Government and the PLA stepped in to reestablish control and crack down on Red Guard groups in 1968.

William Hinton and a Turning Point in Long Bow's Cultural Revolution

After describing these events, Li Anhe's document skips forward in time to 1971. In his telling, the three years after the suppression of the Red Guards in 1968 were relatively calm in Long Bow, administered by the Provisional Committee under the supervision of a Work Team sent to the village by the city government to investigate events and prevent the reemergence of factional fighting. Despite this, low-level tension punctuated by struggle sessions continued in the village between the rebel and loyalist factions, and Wang Jinhong and Li Anhe were prevented from taking any public role in village politics. The city-appointed Work Team, as part of their investigation into events in Long Bow, identified Wang and Li among people who should be subjected to self-criticism and study sessions, which they endured daily after finishing their work

in the fields.

One particularly dramatic event that led to further criticism of Wang and Li was the so-called “coffin affair.” When Wang's adoptive mother passed away in 1970, he commissioned the principal of the village elementary school, Niu Longtai, to write a couplet composed by Chairman Mao on the coffin: “Never forget the bitterness of class struggle and the vengeance nurtured by blood and tears.”¹¹¹ This was reported anonymously to the Work Team, who started an investigation that led to another round of criticism of Wang and Niu. Quoting village government documents that Wang made copies of years later, Li's history explains how Wang was accused of being a counter-revolutionary, because putting Chairman Mao's words on the casket was proof that he wished to see “Mao Zedong Thought buried, if not wishing for the death of the Chairman himself!” As a consequence, Niu was forced to resign his post as elementary school principal, and was transferred to a school in Changzhi. The evidence from this affair continued to be used as ammunition against Wang throughout the GPCR.

After describing the feeling of several years of harassment, accusations of being a counter-revolutionary, and being the target of struggle sessions, Li's history moves to an event that changed the course of the GPCR in Long Bow. In the spring of 1971, at a low tide in the village strife, a stranger suddenly appeared in the village, dressed so that people could tell she was definitely not a local. As Li describes the scene, “During those days, a woman appeared in the village, looking to be about forty years old, skinny and tall, with a dark complexion. She walked up to a group of people eating lunch on the street, watching from the side and started asking questions like, were people getting enough to eat, what did they eat every day, and so on.”¹¹² As Li tells it, only later did people realize that Hinton had returned to China, wanted to visit Long Bow, and Zhou Enlai had dispatched someone to check up on conditions in the village in advance of his visit.

As it is described in Li's history, from the perspective of the village, Hinton's return meant massive preparations had to be made to ensure the visit would go as smoothly as possible. The initial fact-finding trip by the mysterious woman was soon followed by an unexpected shipment of dried noodles from Changzhi, easy to identify because a quantity of them had been singed black by fires that broke out during GPCR fighting. Within a few days, Li recalls being summoned to a meeting at the elementary school. Fearing another round of struggle sessions, he first returned home to gather two packs of cigarettes, expecting that he would be held as usual for a few days. However, arriving at the school, Li saw that the people assembled were all former members of the Propaganda Team. Gao Jinyi, the leader of the Work Team, then made the announcement: Hinton was returning to the village, and they needed to prepare a program to welcome him back. As the most educated person in the village (which is commonly assumed to be the same as being the most “cultured” person), and someone with long experience on the Propaganda Team, the Work Team had determined that Li was the best person to take responsibility for directing the various cultural performances for Hinton's visit. Li recalls

111 不忘阶级苦，牢记血泪仇

112 “这几天大街上出现了一个看上去约莫四十来岁、瘦高个、脸色微黑的妇女。她走到正在吃饭的人堆中，边看边问吃饱吃不饱，每天吃什么饭呀等等。”

hesitating, telling the group, “Director Gao, I've taken a year of criticism, I don't dare accept this responsibility. If something went wrong, I would be blamed and I could never recover.”¹¹³ In response, Director Gao made an announcement: Li was permanently excused from the punitive Study Team, and if there were any problems with the performance, he could not be held responsible. Gao told the assembled group to clap to support Li and convince him to accept the job; although unconvinced that he could trust Gao's promise, Li felt that he had no choice but to say he would try his best.

After working for several weeks to prepare the program, on August 6, 1971 the Propaganda Team was unexpectedly told to stop work. That morning, two members of the Work Team suddenly came to Li's courtyard, and started making small talk. Confused about what was happening, Li eventually realized that Hinton was likely arriving in the village, and that the Work Team had sent people to make sure to keep Li away, worried that he would use that opportunity to complain about his treatment during the GPCR and reveal the problems in the village. Li recalls that the Work Team members were too anxious to catch a glimpse of Hinton's arrival, the first foreigner to come to the area in a generation, and decided that they could go out and watch the arrival from a distance. Li describes the scene, with several village cadres accompanied by central government officials, leading Hinton, his wife, and his eldest daughter Carma into the village government courtyard.

For the most part, Hinton's visit to Long Bow was carefully managed, and he had few opportunities to speak with people unsupervised or explore the village. He stayed in the same room in the former Catholic Church where he lived in 1947-48, and only made a handful of public appearances, meeting with a huge crowd of curious onlookers that had traveled from numerous surrounding villages, and enjoying the performances of the Propaganda Team.¹¹⁴ He was, however, able to conduct numerous private interviews during his two-month stay in Long Bow, information that he later developed into *Shenfan*. Despite the careful management of the visit, he was savvy enough to figure out that he was not getting the full picture of what had happened during the height of the Cultural Revolution, and started to read between the lines to identify some of the ongoing problems in the village.

Probably the thorniest of these problems was the ongoing tension over the unresolved conflict between the loyalists and the rebels. Although the leadership of the Work Team and Provisional Committee had largely eliminated open conflict by 1971, it came at the cost of an uneasy balance between factions that threatened to break down at any time. Higher government levels were especially concerned that the arrival of Hinton in the village could reignite conflict, or be used as an opportunity to air grievances. This explained the choice to keep Li far away from Hinton, despite his central role in planning for the visit; it also led to a decision that ultimately backfired to expel Wang Jinhong from the Party. Earlier in 1971, the Work Team called a meeting of the entire village, and dropped the bombshell: on the basis of a list of ten offenses, Wang was ejected from the party. As Li describes the meeting in his history, the Work Team leaders refused to explain the content of the ten listed crimes, arguing that the decision was dictated from a higher

113 “高队长，我受了一年的批判，可不敢担任这个重要任务，要是再出点事，我可吃罪不起。”

114 See Hinton (1983) for his recollections of those performances.

level and they did not have the responsibility to explain. They then “hastily” dismissed the crowd.

During Hinton's visit months later, he heard continuously about the crimes of the former village leader Wang Jinhong, including attending village criticism sessions directed at Wang, Li, and other associates. In the political climate of the time, the most serious crimes attributed to Wang were: failure to learn from Dazhai in agriculture, running the village as his own private enterprise, associating with known counter-revolutionaries like Li Anhe, and taking the capitalist road by profiteering in trading sweet potatoes in Henan.¹¹⁵ Li's history contains a long discussion of these accusations, including Wang's counter arguments. Interestingly, this section of the history is written as a narrative of Wang's meeting with Hinton at the end of his visit in '71. Having heard so much about Wang during those two months, Hinton wanted to meet him in person and get his side of the story. Although his request for an in-person meeting was deflected for weeks, finally on the eve of departing the village Hinton was able to meet Wang one-on-one. Li's history describes this meeting in detail, and uses the recounting of their conversation as the framework to discuss Wang's alleged crimes and his self-defense. For example, Li describes how Wang told Hinton that in a meeting in 1968, concerned about agricultural production in the village, he stood at a meeting to encourage people to work harder and said, “No matter if we take the Dazhai road or the Long Bow road, whatever works to increase production is good.”¹¹⁶ In the section about associating with “bad elements,” the history claims that Wang told Hinton that he made use of Li Anhe as village scribe because his “cultural level” was the highest in the village, and one of his primary tasks was to help in the duplication of the works of Mao for study in the village. The document asks rhetorically, “If [Li] was tasked with this job, the production of good materials for the study of Mao's works, how could he be considered a bad element?”

Given that the meeting between Hinton and Wang happened just before his departure, the effect on Wang and Li's standing in the village was not immediate. However, according to Li's document and Hinton's recollections,¹¹⁷ based on what he was able to discover during his visit and what he saw of the political climate of China in general, Hinton considered Wang's account credible. Once back in Beijing, Hinton pressed for a reexamination of Wang's role in the village, raising the matter again as high as in meetings with Premier Zhou Enlai. Although there is no direct evidence of Zhou's intervention, Li's history (and Wang's description to this day) claims that Zhou personally investigated the matter and ordered the Shanxi Provincial and Changzhi City governments to resolve the situation, leading to Wang's reinstatement in the Party and as village Party Secretary in 1973.

115 The other crimes listed against Wang were: using a gun to intimidate the Work Team (by shooting at pigeons in the direction of the government headquarters), wasting a savings of 25,000 RMB that the village had accumulated, neglecting agriculture for sidelines activities, using brigade money to buy food for himself on a trip to western Shanxi to procure animal feed, causing trouble by pressing suits complaining of his treatment to higher levels, and (ironically) allowing Catholics to gain too much power in the village government. Li's document contains Wang's responses to all these accusations, and when Wang was later reinstated as village leader, he was cleared of all charges. See below.

116 “大寨路，张庄路，打上粮食就是好路”

117 Recorded in Hinton's unpublished memoirs.

Texts and Local Authority

In the description of the political history of Long Bow, Hinton thus plays a crucial role in Li and Wang's narratives. The association with Hinton, as a personal, charismatic resource, was a turning point on their paths, and they both credit that association with restoring the rightful distribution of political power in the village. Li's written history also draws on the connection to Hinton in a further sense, that demonstrates the power of texts and the importance of the appeal to historiographical conventions in constructing authority. In the course of his narrative, Li refers frequently to *Shenfan* as an authoritative source, and includes several extended quotes from the Chinese edition. Typically, Li's history includes his account of an event, and then follows that section with the description of the same events from Hinton's perspective. Without making the argument too explicit, the intention is to demonstrate the reliability of Li's version by showing its correspondence with Hinton's. At the same time, where there is a difference between Li's and Hinton's versions, Li's document implies that Hinton was prevented from knowing the real situation because of the control that local and central government leaders had over his visit, and their investment in presenting a particular vision of Long Bow to him. For example, immediately following the section discussing the preparations of the Propaganda Team for their performances in 1971, Li includes Hinton's description of watching them. Hinton's version, written as it is from his perspective, is focused on how successful the performance was, even if it shows the beginning of his reluctance to embrace the rosy picture it painted of the GPCR; however, reading that account immediately after reading of the team's preparations and especially of how participants like Li were prevented from having any unmediated contact with Hinton gives the reader the impression that Hinton's experience was not only naïve, it was also stage-managed to the point that in retrospect it discredits Li and Wang's opponents. In any case, whatever variations there are between the two descriptions, it is clear that Li's document is crucially in dialogue with *Shenfan*. Linking to the personal authority of Hinton and the influence of his telling of Long Bow's history are key to Li's document's claim to truth.

At the same time, there are several instances where Li has altered, selectively quoted, or omitted parts of *Shenfan* that go against his narrative. One of the most interesting instances of this alteration is in a section describing a struggle session held against Wang and Li, where Li was again accused of being a KMT sympathizer and Wang was accused of being a counter-revolutionary. Following Li's account of the session (where he describes being submitted to three days of questioning during which he was not allowed to sit, had his head forced down, and was slapped in the face), he quotes from Hinton's description in *Shenfan* of a similar event. However, in the process of quoting from *Shenfan*, Li blurs the lines between Hinton's narrative and his own, and transitions between the two without recognizing it in the text. This is most evident in the use of proper names, which shift back and forth between the pseudonyms Hinton used in *Shenfan* (e.g. he changed Wang Jinhong to Li Kuai-tui or "Swift Li") and the real names that Li uses. Based on my reading, it seems likely that Li was not intentionally blurring the lines. Instead, he blended the two narratives together, believing that they were perfectly consistent, and that his own editorial view would be the same as Hinton's. In that same section, when Li writes "People in the village started to wonder why the best-and-brightest among them were the ones being submitted to criticism," it is not obvious whether this is supposed to be Hinton's voice or his own. However, the effect is clear: to give authority to his account by association with

Hinton's text.

Although the content of Li's history remains debated in the village today, it has been successful in orienting the path of the controversy. On the one hand, the document sets the parameters of the debate, identifying the key historical events and applying an interpretive framework to them that highlights his and Wang Jinhong's roles in the GPCR as crucial questions in village history. In this sense, his is an unavoidable intervention in the production of a collective narrative of village history, comparable to *Fanshen* and *Shenfan*. These documents must be confronted in any telling of village history, sympathetic or hostile, and their existence as written materials gives them a central place in determining how history is told or understood. This can be seen in how Li's history has been treated in the village as a material document. Li wrote the history to coincide with the publication of the new Chinese edition of *Shenfan*, which was commissioned by Wang Jinhong in cooperation with a group of foreign scholars who convened a conference in Changzhi in 2006. Although Wang was promised financial support by the City Government authorities, he and one of the foreign scholars ended up paying for nearly the whole cost of the publication, leaving him with hundreds of copies of the book that he now stores in a room in the back of his Hinton museum.¹¹⁸ Linking his document to *Shenfan*, Li distributed copies of his history to participants in the conference. He also brings it out on appropriate occasions such as the visit by the Utopia students, presenting it as a history of Long Bow. Within the village, the document has had an important role in social life. Copies of it circulate and are kept on bookshelves alongside Hinton's books and other recognized historical classics like the *Shiji*. Circulation has been an open secret—most people avoid talking about the Cultural Revolution in public situations, but in my interviews people were willing to talk about their recollections, and would frequently ask me if I had read Li's history, and if not, if I wanted to borrow their copy. In narrating their own histories, my interlocutors would often reference Li's history, either to agree or disagree with its version, but in any case it was clear that they knew what Li had written, and that it was impossible to talk about the GPCR in Long Bow without taking account of it. Sympathizers with the rebel faction would complain that there had been no one to step forward like Li and write their own version of the history, implying that the document as an artifact had a greater power for having been written down.

The issue of competence is one illustration of how the document produces authority via its form. Writing the history required Li to be well versed in the conventions of historiography and literary production, and his document reads similarly to an academic account. The writing style is sophisticated and the tone is personal yet aspiring to objectivity (e.g. how Li refers to himself in the third person throughout). Li also draws on the political correctness of a diversity of political idioms that have been accorded respect in the last sixty years: the idea that Li was self-evidently pursuing the greater good on behalf of the village before the GPCR is implied by his claim to have participated tirelessly in the duplication and study of the works of Mao, and the phrasing of “Dazhai road or Long Bow road, whichever works is good” is an obvious play on Deng Xiaoping's famous summary of the ethos of the Reform era, “Black cat, white cat, whatever catches mice is good.” These, among other examples in the text, are cases of the mobilization of authoritative political language that lend his history an added sense of correctness or propriety.

118 See Chapter 2

The document also concludes with a near-stereotypical sentence praising the progress of Long Bow in the Reform era: “Following the advent of Reform, the continuous development of the market economy, and the deepening of principles of democracy, unity, and stability, an atmosphere of openness, fairness, justice, and harmony is beginning to appear, leading to a better tomorrow for Long Bow village.”¹¹⁹

A Visual Representation of Injustice: Zhang Lijun's Map

Parsing the narrative of Li Anhe's written history is relatively easy; not so with another historical representation that gained importance in Long Bow. Zhang Lijun's map, at first glance an objective portrait of the space of the village circa 1945, takes on added layers of significance once we connect the representation with its social existence. Depicting approximately one hundred and fifty structures, eight main streets, several small alleyways, and landmarks like the central pond and family temples (祠堂), the map is an attempt to record a moment in history from the perspective of the village's houses and households. These categories of house and household have been fundamental in the social organization of the village, from the pre-Liberation time shown on the map, through challenges in the Mao era, and again with a renewed importance in the Reform era.¹²⁰ Viewing the map from that perspective is a key to understanding its deeper meaning.

The map was produced mainly by Zhang Lijun, who was seventy-one at the time of my fieldwork in 2008-09. He decided to make the map as a result of his assisting Guo Huiling, who needed a survey of the village as part of her research project on local food culture. In the process of working with her, Zhang decided to make a more permanent record of his recollections of the village prior to Liberation in 1946. Although her research was not primarily focused on historical comparison with village life in the 1940s, as an older villager with a good memory, Zhang thought that the unique contribution he could make would be to record information about that time. “There aren't too many people in Long Bow today who remember when the Japanese were here. Although I was only about eight at the time, I remember playing around and having to be careful of the Japanese soldiers. We kids weren't afraid of them though. I never saw any of the bad things they did, I just remember riding on the back of one of their trucks when we were running around, they let us get on sometimes. Long Bow was much smaller then, and I remember exactly where almost every family in the village lived. I thought it was important that I write some of this down while I still can.”

Even if the conception of the map and the original purpose in making it was limited to a desire to capture a snapshot of a moment in time, its significance quickly exceeded these barriers. Zhang himself recognized this, remarking about the choice of that particular year to represent the village past: “Why choose a time before Liberation and not after? It's not just that the memory of that time is slipping away. It also shows what Long Bow was like before we had the new society,

119 “随着改革开放、市场经济的不断发展，民主法治、团结稳定深入人心，一个公开、公平和公正的和谐气氛逐步形成，张庄的明天将更加美好”

120 See Chapter 4 for a longer discussion of the importance of houses and households in Long Bow.



Zhang Lijun's map.

and many things changed. But a lot of things didn't change too, and in order to understand the village today, you have to go back before Land Reform.” The residential patterns that the map reveals are an embedded history that is only partly transparent if one looks, for example, at a contemporary map. But despite the difficulty of seeing these deep patterns from the outside, they continue to exist in the minds of people in the village. This is true in a purely physical sense: people are aware of the former locations of elements of village architecture like the pond, the old temple, and especially the old site of the Catholic Church, which was later converted into part of the Lu'an Middle School and is now on the campus of Changzhi Teacher's College. More deeply, an awareness of the built history of the village contributes to a sense of roots and a consciousness of a long history that exceeds the temporal boundaries of New China. This is linked to a concept of local identity premised on a feeling of connection to that past, which, although not universally shared, is an important component of the identity of older generations in the village.

The structure of generational relations is a contributor to the meaning of the map in another sense as well. By bringing a past only directly experienced by the oldest generation into the present, the map bridges those two times in a way that highlights connections outside the history of the Mao or Reform eras. By foregrounding continuity instead of change, the map represents a sentiment of resisting the dislocations of the past sixty years, a mentality that is especially important to older people in the village who feel increasingly marginalized by rapid social change.

The bridging of pre-Liberation time with the present is also both an effect and a cause of the awareness of the centrality of houses and households in village life. The map records the name of the family head (always male) of the family that occupied a given house, and although only one of the houses from 1945 is still standing in the village today, many families still occupy houses on the same site. The overlapping of family, house, and village location contributes to a consciousness of the persistence of those elements of social organization, despite a history of change.¹²¹ As one villager put it to me, “Looking at this map, it's like the last sixty years never even happened. Of course many things are different, but when you really stop and look like this, you wonder if there is anything new.”

Most importantly, the recognition of the similarity of the village in 1945 and today that is provoked by the map contributes to a critique of the Reform era for many people in Long Bow. From this perspective, one of the most important things that the map records is a history of inequality: unmistakable visual evidence of the wealth of some families and the poverty of others. This history of inequality is put in parallel with the inequalities of the present by many of my interlocutors who viewed the map. Their comments were usually framed by irony, a sense that despite sixty years of change, things in Long Bow are returning to the way they were before Liberation. Specifically, they noted cases where families that had been landlords have emerged post-Reform as some of the richest in the village. They also commented on the difference in house size portrayed on the map, and that those differentials have returned, erasing decades of efforts to produce a more equal society. One person told me, “Some families had all that space, other people were crowded together, it seems not much has changed. What was revolution for?”

121 See Chapter 4

This pointed critique of the effects of economic reform was at the center of how the map was received and understood in the village. In conversations not directly involving the map, people would frequently refer to it as evidence in support of their argument that life is getting harder for the majority of people in the village today. In an interview with a farmer tending her corn crop, I asked her opinion of a new government policy that would make it easier for farmers to lease their land to other people, intended to enhance landowners' rights to control their land. In response, she explained how what she described as “new landlords” were coming to control more and more of the village farmland, consolidating leased land into bigger and bigger plots. “It's the same as on Old Zhang's map, where some people had plenty and others had nothing. We are going back to that time. Soon everything will look like it does on that map again.” Many other conversations were inflected by the same logic, the idea that the map was a useful illustration of the direction that life in the village is going. My interview subjects were aware that I had seen the map, and drew on it as a useful shorthand to explain the inequalities that they saw reemerging in the village. This was naturally a sensitive subject for other families, who have benefited from reform and might be considered one of these new gentry. They also knew of the map, but downplayed the connections between past and present, or changed the subject when I would ask about it.

As an object, the map sharpened these responses and resulted in its special treatment. Zhang kept the map in a secure lockbox in his house, despite the fact that it was not inherently valuable or irreplaceable, and even though the knowledge that it records was widespread among older villagers. Most people in the village had not seen the map themselves, but had developed an impression of it by rumor or second-hand description. The inequality that it records was made more real by the existence of the map, in that it made that history tangible and (to many) more transparent. By existing as a document, it recorded a moral economy of the village for posterity that could outlive people with direct memories, and that could stand as a focal symbol of a contentious narrative of history.

Chapter 4: Building Houses

*“In the life of a man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and those of life.” - Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*¹²²*

“I’ll tell you, the biggest responsibility you have in your whole life is finding wives for your sons,” Old Shi emphasized during one of our many afternoon-long conversations. “But what that really means is building a new house, because no family will allow their daughter to marry your son unless you have a good place for them to live. Look at me; my third and fourth sons are both building new houses this year, because their kids¹²³ want to get married. It was that way when I got married too, my parents had to add on to our house, even though we were really poor, just to make sure I could get married. And they had an extra worry in making sure I got married and had a house to live in, since it was only after I got married that they stopped worrying that I would run back to my native village. But once I had a house and a wife here, they knew I was here to stay.”

Shi Jingrong (Old Shi) turned seventy-four in the spring of 2009, and judging only by his appearance, one might guess he was much older. There were some hard years among those seventy-four, evident in the deep creases of his face and the mismatched, uneven set of teeth, crowns, and gold fillings in his mouth—a product of a lifetime of very occasional, un-anesthetized work done by itinerant dentists on the roadside of local temple festivals. That day in 2009, he and I were on the second pack of cigarettes of the afternoon. We settled on the cheap Honghe brand since he didn’t want me buying more expensive brands to bring over, and because they didn’t give me a headache like most Chinese cigarettes. At least he wasn’t a drinker, unlike most of my interview subjects, who frequently turned interviews into a challenging combination of competitive drinking, dirty jokes, and whispered village gossip. It was always a pleasure to interview Old Shi. His energy and outstanding memory made it easy to get him talking. This time, we were in the middle of talking about why so many houses were under construction in the village that spring.

“Mostly these are people that have sons getting old enough that they are thinking about marriage. Plus you can see how much Shanxi people love their houses. People joke about it all the time, look at the houses in the village versus the ratholes all those people from north-east China (东北人) live in over in the Railroad Works.” In 1971, a new set of train tracks was laid down right through the middle of the land that had belonged to Long Bow village, dividing it into two parts: on the west of the tracks was the old village, and on the east, taking up about one-third of the village farmland, was the new Third Railroad Works (铁三局). Most of the newly recruited

¹²² Bachelard (1994), p. 7

¹²³ In SE Shanxi, the standard Mandarin word for “child” (孩子) is used generally only to refer to boys, while a separate specific word is used for unmarried female children (闺女), so that if you ask someone “How many kids do you have?” their answer typically will only count boys.

railroad workers were brought in from the north-east region of the country (东北), and housed either in work-unit owned multi-story brick apartment blocks, or left to their own devices to build houses that resembled the ones they were familiar with from their native provinces. The segregation of north-easterners from the rest of Long Bow village has continued to this day, with surprisingly little mixing or communication between the people of the village proper and the people of the Railroad Works. Indeed, when I first got to Long Bow, without knowing this history, one of the first things I noticed was how different the houses are on either side of the train tracks. On the west side of the tracks there are massive two-story courtyard-style red brick houses with elaborate front gates, and on the east side, much more modest single-story (平房) houses, made of lesser-quality brick with rickety wooden fences and perpetually leaky roofs. Long Bow people never hesitate to speculate on the cultural origins of the architectural differences. Several different people repeated to me the same explanation nearly word-for-word: “North-easterners love to eat. They take all their money and spend it on eating meat, and then they have no money left over for a house. But they don't care. Now, Shanxi people are just the opposite. They will suffer for decades, only eating meal after meal of thin millet porridge. But they save their money, because they are crazy about their houses. Then they blow it all on this huge fancy house, with tons of space that they never even use. But they have to show off: how can you build a house that is shorter than your neighbor's?”

The importance of understanding the layers of meaning in this description of the significance of houses to people in Long Bow was clear to me early on in my research. It seemed that there was more than a kernel of truth in the idea that most people in the village place enormous importance on their houses. As I noted, the physical form of houses in the village surprised me by their sheer size and the high quality of their construction. Having read *Fanshen* before first coming to Long Bow, I naively imagined houses in the contemporary village to be similar to the kind Hinton described, made of tamped-earth bricks, straw, and a thin layer of plaster. But unlike the houses in the village in the late 1940s, most houses in Long Bow today seem built to last, especially by comparison with houses built by migrants to the area from outside Shanxi, or with houses in many other rural parts of China. The houses in Long Bow and in most villages in the flat-land parts of the surrounding region are large and imposing, typically built one against the next, creating claustrophobic village lanes enclosed by continuous ten- to twenty-foot-high brick walls. The scale and fortress-like feeling that houses in the village gave me was what initially drew my attention to them.

People I knew in the village seemed to be keenly aware of the impression given by their preferred house style, and interpreted their built form as an expression of the special importance they give to their houses. This is reflected in the bit of folklore I mentioned above, commenting on the difference between the houses built by Shanxi locals versus those built by their non-local neighbors, and in Long Bow it is considered to be a common sense fact that reveals the character of Shanxi people to be essentially conservative and rooted in place.¹²⁴ It is less important

¹²⁴ A parallel story frequently related to me by friends in Long Bow described how soldiers from Shanxi have always been famous throughout China for traveling with a small bottle of Shanxi vinegar tied to their belts, said to prove their devotion to the familiar tastes of home.



Exterior view of a typical Long Bow house.

whether or not this claim is true than that people make it: although remarkable, the houses in Long Bow are certainly not unique in China, and nor is the value given houses as markers of economic and social capital. Anywhere in the world, people take pride in their houses and invest a central part of their identity in the form of their dwelling. The important point is that people in Long Bow tend to use houses as markers of social and cultural distance from both their neighbors in the Railroad Works and people in other parts of China. Marking this distance is an important way that people differentiate themselves in a process of creating a local identity and defining what it is to be a person of the village. The prevalence of the idea that houses are especially important to people in Long Bow means that houses tend to occupy a central place in people's life stories and how they understand the village's history over the last sixty years.

Talk about houses was also one of the foremost topics at large gatherings such as weddings or celebrations of the birth of a child, which, not coincidentally, usually take place in the courtyards of family members' houses. A concern with houses was prevalent in more private settings too,

where my informants were always willing to discuss their neighbor so-and-so, who was building a house but ran into difficulty with a relative who didn't want the old house torn down, or about their cousin, who was building an impressive new house that would be much more comfortable than the old one that had been the family house for two generations. I found that even when a house was not necessarily the central element in a story being told to me, an ongoing, life-long process of building, improving, and worrying over houses was always in the background: it was an essential context that rationalized events in the course of one's life and a material expression of the sweep of history as it is experienced at an intimate level.

In this chapter, I discuss houses as central figures in the life stories of my informants in the village. By approaching houses via their presence and role in individual narratives, I hope to capture a sense of the house as an *imaginary*, or in other words, as a space whose being exceeds the spatial and temporal limits of the physical object. I argue that houses play a fundamental role in a narrative process that makes intelligible connections among past, present, and future, producing a sense of historical continuity that can be experienced by human beings. My understanding of the connection between history and narrative rests on Paul Ricoeur's theory of the essentially narrative character of all experience. In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur demonstrates that the historical present – the time of experience and action – is only possible as a product of narratives.¹²⁵ To make sense of the present, and therefore be able to experience it and act in it, is to put it in coherent relation with the time of the past (past experience) and the time of the future (anticipation).¹²⁶ The kind of discourse that can accomplish this coherent relation is narrative, because through it, we articulate “strings of actions and events and their human contexts.”¹²⁷ This allows the conversion of historical time (not able to be experienced) into *human time* (the time of experience). Historical time can only become human time “to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full significance when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.”¹²⁸

Through narrative, houses work as key imaginative sites around which events can be organized, making it possible to experience time and producing historical consciousness. At the same time, houses' physical presence gives weight to the flow of time, as narratives locate the past in the present by association with the material object. Furthermore, I argue that the house functions as an essential link between personal pasts and collective history. In the narratives of people in Long Bow, a sense of the large-scale sweep of history is frequently described via the perspective of an individual history of residences, so that a concept of collectively-experienced events is bound together with the intimate experiences of inhabiting a house. Thus, the imagined space of a house serves as a boundary between the collective and the personal, and contextualizes history in a location linked to one's own life story. Fundamentally, houses *situate* a story-teller in relation to the past, making it possible to coherently place a life narrative in wider contexts. This

125 Ricoeur (1984)

126 Ricoeur's analysis here bears a strong resemblance to Gadamer's notion of the “fusion of horizons.” Gadamer (1975). See also my discussion in Chapter 1.

127 Stanford (2011)

128 Ricoeur, Vol 1 (1984), p. 52

wider context is the same as a notion of a collectivity, or in other words, the creation of a collective identity from individual identities. As Ricoeur puts it, “Man is this plural and collective unity in which the unity of destination and the differences of destinies are to be understood through each other.”¹²⁹

Houses, Kin, and Neighbors

In examining the connections between history and houses, it is also important to understand the relationship of houses to families. I have chosen to use the English word “house” rather than “home” in order to preserve some analytical separation between the house as a material object and the imagined space of a life story. This is because keeping a distinction between the physical house and the conceptual narrative can be useful for revealing the complex and constantly shifting relationships between material things and our understanding of them. In this context I believe it is useful to track back and forth between physical and conceptual poles in order to show how houses as physical things only become “homes” when and insofar as they are incorporated in narratives describing a particular kind of relationship to the space. However, it is clear that the inter-relationship of houses and families means that analytical separation of physical and conceptual space is especially difficult in this case. The pair of English words “house” and “home” already show some of this tight relationship, but Chinese terminology shows an even closer association: for example, the common word *jia* (家) refers to both houses and families.¹³⁰ I will return to a more in-depth discussion of the relevant terms used to refer to houses in Long Bow later; for now, the perhaps obvious but important point is the centrality of kinship in the telling of narratives involving houses.

During my research, every story told to me that explained the history of a house was simultaneously a story about a family, however defined by the teller. Although the imagined space of a house is emphatically not identical with the conceptualization of a family, the two overlap to the extent that it is impossible to discuss one without the other. In essence, the act of *inhabiting* a house is nearly always accomplished in association with a concept of one's family. The narratives about houses I examine in this chapter will therefore also be narratives about families, and we will see how the connection between house and family is crucial in the process of situating and inhabiting the past in the present.

The connection between house and family is not only a matter of linking past and present (i.e., historical consciousness), it is also a crucial element in the construction of identity in a wider sense. By identity here I mean both how a person is identified by others, and how they form a “self-concept,” a sense of themselves as a member of a series of hierarchical spaces, extending from the neighborhood, through the village as a whole, and beyond.¹³¹ Having a house in the

¹²⁹ Ricoeur (1986), p. 138

¹³⁰ See Liu (2000) for an extended discussion of the links between houses and kinship and the implications in language.

¹³¹ Cf. Mueggler (2001)

village defined as one's home, from this perspective, is a marker of belonging in the community in a complex sense. At the most basic level, the house is a location that physically situates the people who live there in the space of the village (generally taken by people in Long Bow to be the smallest grouping that can be considered the “community”).¹³² The significance of being physically situated, however, immediately exceeds this most basic sense, in that the location of the house brings the inhabitants into particular relationships with other people in the village, especially neighbors, whose physical proximity carries with it social proximity. Although the pattern of habitation in Long Bow is unlike some other villages in China where houses of kin tend to cluster closely together,¹³³ social networks still show a strong tendency to overlap with the geographical arrangement of houses. Even though Long Bow is a densely built village of eight hundred households that is easy to traverse on foot, people tend to associate with their immediate neighbors, especially on a day-to-day basis, where “dropping in” (串门儿) is a common pastime. This heightens the sense of identification that people tend to feel with their neighborhoods, and, by extension, with the location of their house in the village.

In sum, this chapter will be focused on understanding how the past is made present in the medium of houses: in other words, how the place of houses in the identity of people in Long Bow is directly related to houses' ability to organize, reference, and instantiate a particular relationship with the past. I investigate the central role that houses have in creating and maintaining a self-concept that is simultaneously personal and collective, and emphasize that the foundation for this self-concept is how houses make both tangible and imagined connections between past and present. In houses, people in Long Bow experience the flow of time in the form of lived space. The space of a house is not simply a container for events; it has been persuasively argued that people inhabit houses much as they inhabit a body, as a space literally and metonymically continuous with their being.¹³⁴ For houses much as for bodies, inhabiting space is a function of a complex web of personal and collective identity, past and present meaning, and historical and social forces. Of these myriad ways habitation works, here I want to interrogate how houses constitute a linkage between past and present, making it possible for the past itself to become a lived space.

Anthropologists and other social scientists have long recognized the possibility of reading space as a form of relation across time. In the discipline of anthropology, historical anthropologists have been particularly influential in looking at spaces as lenses through which the past might be seen in the present, often in ways not consciously recognized by the contemporary inhabitants.¹³⁵ Although indebted to these approaches, my analysis here will differ mainly in that I am centrally concerned with how houses are present in *narratives*, which is to say, what people say about their

132 See Chapter 5 for a longer discussion of the history of the definition and redefinition of the “village” as a political and social unit.

133 Liu (2000)

134 Although they do not explicitly discuss houses, my sense of inhabiting here is inspired by Scheper-Hughes and Lock's (1987) distinction between the individual (or phenomenological) body, the social body, and the body politic.

135 See, for example, Comaroff and Comaroff (1991)



Long Bow village lane, decorated for a wedding.

houses, especially as they produce a story of their life history. I argue that houses play a central role in these narratives, which, as noted above, both reflect the importance of houses to people in Long Bow, and reveal how the space of houses can be interpreted in connection with narratives as constituting a form of historical consciousness. In other words, the stories people tell about their houses rely on meaningful connections between past and present, which reveal how people in the village today conceptualize and experience the past as an ongoing presence.

By looking specifically at the presence of houses in narratives, I hope to emphasize how houses can be seen as *processes*, rather than only as physical objects.¹³⁶ There are two benefits to seeing houses as processes, and moving away from a static analysis of the present form of houses in the village. First, this approach can show how a house can be imagined through the sweep of time despite transformations in its physical form, including its complete reconstruction. This is

¹³⁶ Lefebvre (1991) shows how space must always be understood as a continual process of the social production of spatial structures and our understanding of those structures. See also Yang (2004)

keenly important in understanding houses in contemporary Long Bow, because there are very few structures that are more than thirty years old in the village. Despite this newness, I seek to show how even these new structures are invested with history via the mechanism of narrative. In narratives, houses are conceptualized as processes that simultaneously span and unite time, bringing contemporary structures in relationship with those that have been replaced or torn down, and visualizing the house not as physical location but as imagined universe. Naturally, these two are not unrelated, but the history of constant reconstruction of houses in Long Bow means that it is more useful to focus on the house as imaginary place if we are to see the presence of the past. Second, and following on this point, seeing houses as processes can capture the sense that people in Long Bow have of houses as objects always in flux. This is the case not only because of the complex community history of housing, but also because they tend to see houses as never fully finished objects, as things that are always in the process of being rebuilt, improved, and negotiated. Despite the material solidity of houses in Long Bow, they are ephemeral things. The real solidity of houses consists in the way they are incorporated in life stories that narrate both personal and collective history.

In particular, I want to pay attention to the narratives of house building that were so prevalent during my fieldwork. Like much of the rest of contemporary China, the built environment in Long Bow is seemingly perpetually under construction, and in recent years people in the village have come to put special importance on the act of building a house. Personally, it is seen as the responsibility of a good father, a mark of your household prosperity, a link to one's own past, and a theater for family drama. Collectively, it is taking part in a stereotypical identity of a person of Shanxi, a location in the physical being of Long Bow village, a place tied to narratives of village history, and a matter for public speculation, comment, and frequent complaint. A new house in Long Bow is an artifact of continuity in change; even as the old house is torn down to make room for the new, by rooting people in the village it instantiates the community and materializes history.

In the context of the larger problem of memory in contemporary Long Bow, this chapter contributes a specific focus on the materialization of history in motion. Houses are privileged sites for the narration of personal histories, making it possible to integrate transformations of family structure (i.e. weddings, funerals, childbirth, etc.) into a collective notion of village history. As such, seeing the house as an ongoing process allows us to see how houses contain, make legible, and enable change, and are not simply markers of new consumer tastes or static village identity. In building and rebuilding I see the repetition of a constitutive act: in each instance a new – but also situated in time – series of relationships and events are enabled, which is a reimagining of the world. Whereas there is sedimentation and historicity, there is always the possibility of growth, change, and difference.¹³⁷ These perspectives reveal more deeply how the past is experienced as a material reality in the form of a house.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Merleau-Ponty (1962), p. 130

¹³⁸ I am indebted to Larisa Kurtovic for her help in refining this framing of the chapter.

A History of Houses

In Long Bow, houses are especially useful spaces for understanding how people think about the past, because villagers have experienced a complex residential history in the last 60 years. This past, remembered by villagers who experienced it directly and referenced in nearly every comment on housing in the village today, sweeps from the expropriation and redistribution of houses during the first Land Reform campaign, the role of houses as security against the storms of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, the centrality of houses in the redistribution of land to “households” and the rise of “household production” beginning with Economic Reform, and the beginnings of houses as markers of increasing prosperity and conspicuous consumption in recent years. Before returning to the narratives that were told to me by informants in the course of my fieldwork, therefore, it is essential to first have an understanding of this background.

In the years immediately preceding the successful Communist Liberation of Long Bow, most houses in Long Bow were built from mud-and-straw bricks and in a courtyard style, typically with more than one family sharing a single courtyard. In one of Hinton's few descriptions of pre-Liberation houses, he wrote:

Both sides of [the village's] main street were lined with mud walls six to eight feet high, broken here and there by covered gateways that led into the courtyards of the people. ... Over the centuries, in spite of much new construction, the village persisted in presenting a crumbled look. Built of adobe from the earth underfoot, any neglected wall, any unattended roof soon returned, under the hammering of summer rains, to the soil from whence it came. Always there were walls that had collapsed, gates that had fallen down, roofs that had buckled. In places one could wander into courtyards directly from the street through great gaps in the adobe, and people continually found new shortcuts and created new paths along which to move from house to house. Only the rich could afford to keep their walls standing sharp and clean, capped with the lime and straw mixture that alone could withstand a few seasons of weather. Some of the gentry even built with fired brick. Such houses stood through many generations, while the peasants' huts washed out, were rebuilt, and washed out again and again.¹³⁹

Although the reader can glean a very basic impression of the physical appearance of the village in the 1940s from Hinton's description, *Fanshen* is notable for its near total lack of emphasis on houses. This is likely due to two reasons. First, Hinton argues that despite some differences in construction materials, the houses of the peasants and gentry were basically the same—simple and generic.¹⁴⁰ Since Hinton's perspective on Long Bow was guided heavily by the prism of class conflict, the fact that (to him) houses were so uniform in Long Bow when he arrived in 1946 meant that they could contribute relatively little to his examination of the fundamental conflict between peasants and landlords. Aside from a few stray comments like the one above on building materials, Hinton tended to put his emphasis on other kinds of property that he evidently

¹³⁹ Hinton (2008), p. 19

¹⁴⁰ Hinton (2008), p. 19

thought better reflected class conflict in the countryside. Secondly, Hinton likely did not write more about houses because they were not “productive” property, i.e. not land or farm implements.. Hinton's focus on the expropriation and redistribution of productive property in land was guided by his understanding of the course of Liberation and Communist ideology, which made the redistribution of land the crucial question of the Revolution. Although the question of rural housing was the subject of some Party concern in the early years of New China,¹⁴¹ Hinton saw the “land question” as the central problem of China's (indeed, the entire world's) future.¹⁴² But houses receive even less attention in *Fanshen* than personal property like blankets and clothing, probably because episodes describing the redistribution of personal property were an effective device for Hinton to depict both the poverty of the majority of the people and the bitterness of their struggle against those who had been identified as class enemies.

Despite the relative lack of coverage in *Fanshen*, the question of what would happen to houses after Liberation was an important part of the work of reorganizing life in Long Bow. Before the first Land Reform there was significant inequality in the amount of housing occupied by families, and even more so in the conditions of occupancy. Although most of my interviewees were too young to have first-hand memories, their families' housing situation before Liberation was still an important part of their stories. For example, Liu Qin, a sixty-seven year old housewife still doing part-time farming labor on her family's total of five *mu* of village land, recalled in an interview in the spring of 2009 the house she was born into in 1941: “My father's family was pretty poor, working mostly as farm labor on land for Shen Jinhe (the notorious Long Bow landlord, killed during the Land Reform movement in 1946). They didn't have their own house, but because my father's brother had enough money to buy a small house in a courtyard with another family, my father and mother lived there with my brother before I was born, crowded into a one-room building with my uncle's family. When I was born, my father started renting part of another courtyard, in the north part of the village. We shared that house with another family until my father was given part of another house in the Land Reform. But before Land Reform, we never owned a house, always moving from place to place, whoever would rent to us. It was important that we never had a house when the Land Reform happened, because it helped my father be classified as a poor peasant, and then he did really well after the Communists took over. Because he never had his own house, people felt pity for him, and some people looked down on him. Having a house for your family is really important, otherwise you're really nobody. No one good will marry your son if you don't have a decent house.” A majority of poor peasants in Long Bow were in a similar situation before Liberation: not owning a house of their own is remembered today as a significant part of their confinement in a permanent underclass in the village.

Just as it transformed villagers' relationship to land, the Land Reform movement did the same for the housing situation. In 1946 houses—private property before Liberation—were reallocated as part of the collective wealth of the village. The basic principle of the redistribution of houses was that every family should have an equal share proportionate to the number of family

¹⁴¹ Friedman (1991), p. 102

¹⁴² Hinton (2008), p. xxiv



Entryway of an old style mud-and-straw brick house.

members. Houses were measured in “sections,” defined as the distance between beams in the rafters (approximately six to nine feet depending on the house),¹⁴³ and a census taken in 1946 determined that the total stock of housing in the village was just under one section per capita. Families were distributed new housing on that basis if they had less than the average. Because most houses contained more sections than the average number of people per family, nearly every courtyard was shared by more than one family, and in some cases there was more than one family in a building. This was not unusual for the poorest families in the village, but for the wealthiest it represented a significant transformation in class relations.

In fact, according to some in Long Bow today, the leveling effect of giving every family roughly equal property in houses was just as important as the redistribution of land, especially as land was later pooled into larger and larger cooperatives. As Qin Fugui, a seventy-three year old

¹⁴³ *ibid* p. 32

retired farmer recalled, “My family got some land in the Land Reform, because we had been classified as poor peasants. But we only really got to farm it on our own for a few years, because it wasn't long before we had to join Work Teams (小队) and farm collectively. So the land didn't really belong to us then. We got some land back again in the '80s because of Economic Reform, but it wasn't as good as the land we had before, because it is a longer walk [from Long Bow]. The house we got in the Land Reform, my family eventually took the whole thing over, and it still belongs to us. In all those years this house was always ours.” His comment was especially telling in that the house to which he is referring was completely rebuilt in the 1990s, and there is nothing of the original house remaining except some bricks that were salvaged from the demolition of the old house to use in rebuilding the new one, on the same site. In the early post-Liberation period, the redistribution of land was still central in the Party's project of remaking Chinese society, and the new land policy started a process of leveling that largely erased (or, perhaps, inverted) prior economic inequalities in the countryside. But both the material and symbolic importance of the redistribution of houses should not be underestimated. Even if few in Long Bow before Liberation lived in a house that far surpassed their neighbors', from the perspective of villagers themselves, equalizing housing was a real revolution in social relations. This was true despite the poor quality of many of the houses that were newly owned by many villagers: one of the most poignant scenes in *Fanshen* is of Hinton's first visit to a poor peasant's house when he arrived in the village in 1948, and his shock at the extremely spartan quality of the house that lacked even a front door.¹⁴⁴ But the importance of owning a house, no matter how simple, was that every family could claim a place of its own, making them at least in this respect equal with every other family in the village. Both materially and symbolically, the house represented the gains made by the poorest in Long Bow, the new ideology of equality, and the reorganization of life in the village from the most basic levels.

In describing the tumultuous decades following Liberation and the Land Reform, people in Long Bow today remember their houses as shelters from the storms. The details of stories from those periods are best left to my discussion of the individual narratives themselves, but for now, in developing a background picture of housing since Liberation, it is important to note the significance that was attached to houses in during the political and social upheaval around the Great Leap Forward (GLF) and the Cultural Revolution (GPCR). A common theme in Long Bow villagers' memories of those years was how they were literally and figuratively able to hide in their houses, protected by family members and the privacy afforded by the walls of their house. The shelter was not total, naturally, as the house (and family) was not an absolute boundary between public and private, and one's behavior within the “private” domains of house and family were frequently the subject of public criticism. But in looking back today, many villagers recall how they were able to avoid the worst of the events by lying low in their houses. For example, several people related to me how they hid in their houses on the night of the worst violence in Long Bow during the GPCR, staying on the sidelines of the battle by closing their courtyard gates to the outside and refusing anyone entrance.¹⁴⁵ Houses were never collectivized in Long Bow during the Mao years, even at the height of the GLF when the village had a

144 *ibid* p. 253

145 See Chapter 3

collective kitchen and mess hall, intended to take over cooking work from individual households and in the process collectivize social life. Throughout the thirty years of post-Liberation ebbs and flows of collectivization policy, houses in Long Bow formally remained the personal property of their residents, unlike housing in urban China which was owned by work units (单位), and even some other parts of rural China that also followed the work unit model for agricultural production. Houses may have even been a more durable boundary between public and private than family itself, as various policy reforms sought to revolutionize Chinese society by undermining or altering the traditional authority structures of the family.¹⁴⁶ Through all of this, the house remained relatively untouched, providing a kind of continuity absent in nearly any other space or institution, concrete or imagined.

Long Bow residents' relationship to their houses would be changed again by the massive policy shifts of Economic Reform. Like most of the rest of rural China, agricultural land there was redistributed back to the farmers in the early 1980s, breaking up the system of collectivized fields that had existed since the 1950s.¹⁴⁷ In the case of Long Bow, land was allocated on a .5 *mu* per capita basis, and, in a decision that reinforced (or perhaps reinvigorated) the importance of the house and family as the center of village life, the *household* (户) was made the responsible unit for production. The person defined as the household head was given deed to two different kinds of land, contract land (承包田) and subsistence land (口粮田), the total amount of land determined by the number of people present in the household. According to this definition, the household was a flexible institution, not necessarily identical with the people living together in a house or with kin relations. But practically speaking, the household corresponded to a large degree with people coresident in a given house, who were members of one family. This definition of the household was also fundamentally the same as that used to determine the distribution of land and other property during the first Land Reform, that is, the “productive unit” to which redistributions were made was the household. The normative pattern was that a household head would be a father, with a coresident wife, children, and frequently a generation of grandchildren. Writing about a rural village in Yunnan, Erik Mueggler has argued that the redistribution of land back to the unit of the household represented a shift in the relationship to the state – whereas during the Mao era a great deal of state policy was designed to remove any intermediary institutions between the state and the individual, Reform produced the household as the object of state concern, which (temporarily) put relations within the family out of the state's reach.¹⁴⁸ With respect to houses, defining the household as the unit of economic responsibility made houses again the focus of much productive activity. For example, during the years of collective farming people in Long Bow would use collective facilities for drying corn, but when the household again became the unit of production, people started to use their own courtyards for drying. Reform also encouraged many people to make more use of the small plots of land in and around their courtyards for growing vegetables for household consumption, a practice that was condemned at various times in the collective past as “taking the capitalist road.” Thus, even if the collective policies of the Mao years never stripped Long Bow villagers' sense of

¹⁴⁶ Chan (1992)

¹⁴⁷ See Unger (2002) and Walder (1998) for descriptions of this process in two villages in North China.

¹⁴⁸ Mueggler (2001)



Imposing front gate of a newly rebuilt house.

identification with their houses, the beginning of Economic Reform deepened the connection, as houses, and households, became once again the center of production.

As most peoples' incomes rose in Long Bow in the thirty years since the beginning of the Reform era, a wave of building and rebuilding houses has transformed the built landscape of the village, to the extent that there are very few buildings more than ten or twenty years old. As revealed in the opening anecdote to this chapter, people in Long Bow have come to see the building of a new house as a central responsibility for a household head, essential for securing a good bride for one's son, enhancing one's reputation in the village, and demonstrating wealth. Writing about other villages in China, many authors have noted the rise of a competitive house building boom, a trend also tied to the rise of the nuclear family and ideologies of personal responsibility, privacy, and autonomy.¹⁴⁹ Some elements of these trends are also clearly evident in Long Bow,

149 Yan (2003)

as we will see in the cases examined in this chapter. The house building boom has certainly changed the kinds of houses built in the village, especially their level of ornamentation. For example, although people in Long Bow have long had a preference for grand courtyard house entrances, newly built houses in the village have larger and larger gates, decorated with more and more elaborate carvings (对联), stone animals, and landscape scenes. The house building boom has also meant that there is more than enough housing to go around in the village, so that very few people share a courtyard with another family anymore. Although I believe that the rise of the nuclear family has been overstated in the case of places like Long Bow, people in the village certainly have more living space and privacy than ever before.

A House and a Life

In the case of Old Shi, it was clear how important building a house was to even keeping him in the village in the first place. Over the course of our interviews he told me a life story marked by the dramas of twentieth century history, poverty, near-tragedy, village politics, and finally an arrival in an emotion somewhere between contentment and resignation. Through all of it, a home was always at the center.

Old Shi was not originally from Long Bow. Actually, he wasn't even from Shanxi, having come to the village from neighboring Henan Province in about 1942, when he was eight.¹⁵⁰ That year, his birth mother, on the brink of starvation, sold her children to a child trafficker. The practice was not all that unusual in Chinese history, especially in years of famine or war, and 1942 certainly qualified as one of those years. Old Shi's father had run a small inn in their native village, in north-central Henan, not far from the provincial capitol of Zhengzhou. The occupying Japanese were suspicious that Old Shi's father was covertly aiding Nationalist troops by funneling provisions to them through the inn, so they arrested him, confined him for several years, and ultimately he was never seen by his family again. Old Shi's mother was left to care for him and an older sister, which was nearly impossible on her own. "My mother got about eight taels of gold for me, which was a pretty good price, because I was only eight and in good health. I don't know exactly how much she got for my sister. All I know is that she got enough money to flee to Zhangzi county [only fifty kilometers southwest of Long Bow] where the fighting wasn't as bad, and she would be able to survive."

By sheer coincidence, the child trafficker also brought Old Shi and his sister to Southeastern Shanxi. Specifically, he brought them to Lucheng city, the county seat for Long Bow village in those days. Through various other go-betweens, Old Shi was eventually purchased by his adoptive parents in Long Bow, for eighty kuai.¹⁵¹ His sister was originally bought by another family in Long Bow, but they too eventually had to sell her off somewhere else, and Old Shi has never seen her since.

¹⁵⁰ As in the case of Wang Jinhong, his exact birthdate is unclear.

¹⁵¹ Eighty kuai was equivalent to approximately \$40 U.S. In 1942 (about \$500 inflation-adjusted for 2008), a large sum for a Long Bow peasant in those days.

“My adoptive parents were always nice to me. They were worried that I would run away. I was old enough to remember the village I was from, so they thought that I might run back to find my mother. I had no idea until years later that she had moved too, just down the road in Zhangzi!” Old Shi's adoptive parents only had a daughter and no sons, so buying him was a way to carry on the family line and ensure that there would be someone to carry out ancestor worship after they were dead. But that insurance policy was threatened by the possibility that Old Shi would disappear. “They always kept a close eye on me, and always made me stay in our courtyard. I think they never even had a good night's sleep for years, keeping one eye open all the time. Of course I had to change my name, but I still remember my original name: it was Li Jingping.”

The house where Old Shi and his family lived in those days is still standing, near the geographical center of the village. It is a typical Southeastern Shanxi old-style courtyard house (四合院), with one-story buildings on the west and east sides, a two-story main house to the north, and a wall with the main entrance gate on the south. The construction is of mud-and-straw brick, covered with a thin layer of plaster painted white, topped by ceramic roof tiles. The construction materials of these old houses require constant upkeep, since the plaster washes away over time in the rain, exposing the bricks within, eventually causing a collapse. Because of all the work required to maintain these old houses, no one in Long Bow has built in this style for around thirty years, and most of the old houses in the village are already gone. Old Shi's family home has only survived because his second and third sons lived there after he built a new house in 1985, when his eldest son got married and he, his new wife, Old Shi and his wife, and their youngest son moved together into the new house on the next village lane to the north. After the second and third sons also built their own houses and got married, Old Shi continued to rent out the old house all the way up to the present. Old Shi's third son's new house that was under construction in 2009 was immediately in front of the old house, sharing one wall.

It was to that old house that Old Shi's parents built a small addition in 1952, so that he could get married. By 1952 most families in Long Bow had at least one building in a simple mud-brick, three- or four-building courtyard house, a vast improvement from just six years earlier, when, prior to land reform, many people were still living in simple huts with straw roofs, often lacking even a front door. Old Shi's family had been largely spared the drama of the Land Reform: as middle peasants with relatively meager possessions they were mostly on the sidelines of the campaigns, neither their direct beneficiaries nor their target. The house Old Shi moved into when he was bought in 1942 belonged to his parents, a single-room, fifteen- by eight-foot building built from mud-brick. Through the years of Land Reform, the house remained theirs, housing four people: Old Shi, his adoptive parents, and his older stepsister (his parents' only biological child).

In 1952, Old Shi was eighteen, and ready for marriage. In looking for a prospective bride, his parents hit on an excellent bargain: a family in a neighboring village had a son the same age as Old Shi's still-unmarried stepsister who was looking for a bride, and a daughter who was also eighteen. In an act of almost comically perfect reciprocity, the two families traded, Old Shi taking his new bride into Long Bow, and his sister moving to Jia Village to be with her new

family.¹⁵² Part of the bargain was also home renovation – Old Shi's parents built a second, smaller building alongside the original house, where Old Shi and his new bride would live. The entire family would share communal cooking facilities and an outhouse, but the new building gave Old Shi and his wife some independence and privacy from his parents.

Building the new addition to the house was a major burden on Old Shi's parents. Although in interviews he could not recall the exact figure, Old Shi estimated that his parents used up all of any savings they had managed to scrape together since Liberation and Land Reform, and also recalled that they had to sell their half-share in a donkey they used for transporting produce to a market in Changzhi city, for hauling fertilizer, and other farming tasks.¹⁵³ But they were driven by two intertwined necessities: to perform their proper responsibility in finding their son a wife, and to ensure that Old Shi had roots in Long Bow so he wouldn't run away. As for the first, even in the years of relative poverty following Liberation, people in Long Bow and nearby villages had an aspiration that marriage would entail homebuilding. Of course this was not possible for all families, and many marriages proceeded without a corresponding new house. In part, the decision to build a new house to attract a bride was driven by a competitive market for brides: the more desirable the bride was assumed to be (based on her appearance and temperament, the reputation and prosperity of her family, and how ambitious her family was in seeking a good match for their daughter) the more pressure there was on the groom's family to build a house. At least in the recent past, there is no tradition of direct brideprice in Long Bow, with a transfer of wealth from the groom's to the bride's family. Instead, parents of daughters are thought to be responsible for setting up their daughter in a good situation by pressuring the groom's family to provide a comfortable place for the new couple to live. The groom's parents do this by building a new house or an addition, providing bedding and other household necessities, and, in more recent years, giving the couple gifts of cash or appliances like televisions, washing machines, and so on.¹⁵⁴ In 1952, it was possible for Old Shi's parents to secure a more desirable bride for their son because they had the means to add on to their house.

As for the second incentive, as Old Shi put it, it was only after he had a wife and a house that his parents could stop worrying that he would run back to his birthplace. “They were really worried that I would want to leave and go back to Henan. I used to think about my birth mother, but even if I wanted to run back there, there was no way for me to get there. But my parents always thought there was nothing keeping me here until I got married. And it was true, I wasn't really comfortable here until I had a house and a wife. Then, when I was eighteen, I was finally here to stay,” Old Shi remembered. Unlike many other rural Chinese villages, Long Bow is not a single surname or lineage village, dominated by kin from a family whose surname provides the name of the village. Long Bow, at a convenient crossroads in the basin of the Shangdang Plateau (上党

152 The typical pattern among Han Chinese is to patrilocal marriage. The Chinese words for 'marry' differ depending on if the subject is male or female: a man “takes” a wife in (娶), and a woman “marries out” (嫁).

153 Many Long Bow lower and middle peasants who did not have draft animals gained a share (counted in number of “legs”) as part of the redistribution of Land Reform. Old Shi's parents were granted two legs of a donkey they shared with one other family.

154 For a comparison with brideprice/dowry practices in other parts of China, see Yan (1996)



Old Shi at the front door of his house.

盆地), with relatively fertile and level soil for the region, more rainfall than most of Shanxi Province, and a mild climate has a long history of in- and out-migration. Documents from the Lucheng County library record many events of population migrations to the area around Long Bow in years of famine or disaster in neighboring Hebei and Henan Provinces.¹⁵⁵ Popular memory in Long Bow also includes a long history of migration to the region, and the contemporary demographics of the village show a highly varied population in terms of native place. During my research, I interviewed people originally from Hebei, Henan, Shandong, Sichuan, Jilin, and Heilongjiang Provinces, all of whom had moved to Long Bow within the last forty years. This heterogeneous population corresponds with a tendency for Long Bow people to

¹⁵⁵ Lucheng County Gazetteer (1930)

think of themselves as very accepting of those originally from outside the region, preferring to gradually integrate them rather than confine them to permanent outsider status.

Old Shi's case, while extreme in the sense of having an origin in the chaos of war and an act of child trafficking, illustrates one of the most important mechanisms of integration: the twinned practices of marriage and house building. It was only after achieving a narrative around those events that Old Shi would finally become a person of Long Bow. His identity was transformed, in his parents' eyes and perhaps most of all in his own, from outsider to insider. Old Shi still speaks Mandarin in the (much closer to standard) accent of Henan rather than the very distinct (and frequently unintelligible to people from other parts of China) dialect of Southeastern Shanxi, but no matter. He went on twice to be the leader of the Long Bow First Work Team, was always one of the most respected people in the village, and could claim as much as anyone to be a person of Long Bow, a full participant in its history and community. Through the story of building a house he was seamlessly integrated with his adoptive parents' past, a feat accomplished precisely by making a matrimonial house joined to theirs.

The typically parallel acts of marriage and house building thus play an enormous role in constituting the community and identity of Long Bow. Perhaps more than any other object, houses materialize the narratives of past, present, and future, giving those stories tangible expression and, consequently, a concrete feeling of the depth of time. At the same time, this sense of continuity seems to conflict with a real history of dramatic social change in the recent past, from the Land Reform to the ongoing effects of post-Mao Economic Reform, that have meant that homes have been, in fact, anything but permanent. But in this contradiction is a revealing truth: what gives Long Bow homes their sense of continuity is not their age, but rather the central importance they play in the stories of peoples' lives. It is as key parts of these narratives that houses are invested with meaning, and acquire a significance beyond mere shelter. In a sense, Long Bow people *are* Long Bow people through their houses, and the village *is* the village as a particular collection of homes, each with its own past, connected to a larger narrative of village history. Thus village houses both root people in a particular place and materialize memory, mutually producing continuity in change.

Building a House

During my research in 2008-2009, there were twenty-six houses under construction in Long Bow. This number only includes houses that were either being completely built anew or undergoing major renovations, defined as the destruction and rebuilding of at least two buildings in a four-building courtyard-style house. This number also does not include two large, four-story, apartment-style buildings that were under construction on village land, a project undertaken and funded by the village government. With only eight hundred households in the village, that amount of building in a geographically small space made all of Long Bow feel like a construction site. This was especially true from March through June, since people usually wait for the weather to improve, and because spring is considered an auspicious time to build. The

fates probably factored into the large amount of construction that year in another way too: one villager told me that many people who otherwise would have built in the spring of 2008 put it off because astrological signs aligned particularly well for house building in 2009.

Most construction work in Long Bow today is done by groups of four or five usually male workers, organized by a contractor who hires the group out on a project-by-project basis. A few of these construction crews are composed of people from Long Bow, but for the most part they are drawn from other, poorer villages in the region. Several villagers also told me that they prefer to hire crews from other villages because they want to avoid getting in disputes with their neighbors and relatives. Wages for the construction workers are calculated on a per-day basis, and the going rate in 2009 was 50RMB/day (\approx \$7). Workers are paid the total amount of their wages upon the completion of construction, which for a typical Long Bow home takes about two months. Work proceeds seven days a week, so the average worker receives about 3000RMB (\approx \$430) for two months' work, a relatively high wage for unskilled manual labor in the area. But the work is hard, and construction crews typically don't return to their own homes for the duration of the project, preferring to stay on site rather than spend money commuting back and forth to their own village, so despite the wages, construction work is not considered a desirable job.

Because most homes in Long Bow are built on the same site as an older existing home, the first step in the process is usually demolition of the old buildings. For this, specialized equipment is often necessary, in particular a large crane with a wrecking ball. The government of the neighboring village of Machang invested in a crane as a sideline enterprise several years ago, and that crane is typically the one hired for demolition work in Long Bow, at a rate of 600RMB (\approx \$85) per project, usually two or three days of work. Materials costs for building in Long Bow vary enormously, depending on the size and quality of the construction. As much as possible is salvaged from the demolished structures, including bricks, pieces of concrete, wooden beams, and any other usable pieces. Every house being built in 2009 was brick and concrete, all in the typical four-building courtyard style, although there was variation in the floor plans and other specific details. Materials for the average house cost 30000RMB (\approx \$4300), which brings the total cost of construction to \approx 45000RMB (\approx \$6450) including materials and the labor of five workers for two months.

Hu Jinsong, known to most villagers as Carpenter Hu, was one Long Bow villager with a house under construction in 2009. The house was completed in July, a process delayed about two months because Hu broke his foot in an accident before construction could start. This was the first time he had built in Long Bow, having moved into his wife's family's house when they were married in 1979. Like Old Shi, Hu is not originally from Long Bow; he moved to the village at the age of seventeen in 1975 looking for work. As a skilled carpenter, he was able to stay on in Long Bow at the permission of Wang Jinhong, who wanted more skilled people in the village to work on several new rural industrialization projects that were starting up in the late 1970s.

Because Carpenter Hu was already an adult when he moved to Long Bow, he did not have a

local family network that would take responsibility for finding him a wife. This was a disadvantage in the marriage market, since a man lacking local connections and a family home would not be considered a good choice by families with other options. Still, Hu was handsome and affable, always quick with a smile, and a very capable worker, so he managed to catch the eye of Shang Yanxi, two years his younger in 1980 when their courtship began.

Yanxi had her own difficulties in the marriage market, driven by historical circumstances. Her father, Shang Fuxi, who had passed away in the 1990s, was the eldest son of a poor peasant family at the time of the Japanese invasion and occupation of Long Bow in 1941. Resistance to the occupation of the village was not well organized, and the military power of the Japanese troops overwhelmed the area quickly. Still, there were sporadic acts of guerrilla warfare and sabotage, and Shang Fuxi was active in the resistance. Recalling these events years later, separated by the haze of time and the confusions of years of chaos, Yanxi said, “My father never really talked about it much, but I knew some details later on. The Japanese troops had caught him and his brother hiding in ambush, waiting to kill a Japanese soldier. When the Japanese knew who was responsible, they attacked my father's family, killing his brother and both parents, and burning their house to the ground. I think my grandparents were burned alive in the house. My father managed to escape, and ran all the way to Taiyuan.”¹⁵⁶

In Taiyuan, Shang Fuxi made the decision that would affect his daughter's marriage prospects forty years later. To participate in the resistance against Japan, he enlisted in the Nationalist (KMT) Army, serving under the notorious warlord-general of Shanxi, Yan Xishan. In 2009, Yanxi did not know any details of her father's time as a soldier in the Nationalist Army. But she recalled how in 1967, the year of the height of the Cultural Revolution in Long Bow village, that past service under the Nationalists made her father a target of suspicion. In general there was relatively little violence associated with the Cultural Revolution in Long Bow, but Fuxi was still subjected to several beatings and criticism sessions. “They attacked him even though it had been so long since the war,” Yanxi said, speaking in a matter-of-fact tone. “It didn't make any sense. His class background (成分) was perfect too, because they were poor even before the Japanese came, and then he lost everything when they burned down the house and he fled to Taiyuan. When he came back to Long Bow from Taiyuan in 1946 or 1947, he was classified as a poor peasant under the Land Reform, and so he got an old house and some land. Nobody cared about who he fought with against the Japanese. Besides, he left the Nationalist Army when the Japanese were defeated, and never fought with them against the PLA. In those years he stayed in Taiyuan working at whatever jobs he could find. He was a poor peasant, he always supported the Communist Party. But in the Cultural Revolution, people were always digging up the past to find ways to attack you. They decided that he had a “problematic background” (历史问题), so they took him and beat him. But because he had nothing to do with the two groups who were fighting it out in the village, eventually they got tired of attacking him and gave up.”

Nevertheless, he had been labeled, and once affixed, the label would take decades to fade. For

¹⁵⁶ Taiyuan is the provincial capitol of Shanxi Province, 120 miles northwest of Long Bow.



Carpenter Hu's house under construction.

Yanxi, this meant it was more difficult for her family to find her a suitable husband by the time she reached marriageable age. In 1980, although the Cultural Revolution was already repudiated to the degree that one of the central skits of the traditional village stilt-walking festival was an outlandishly comical impersonation of the Gang of Four,¹⁵⁷ the taint of being lumped with bad elements in the Cultural Revolution was still enough that other families were wary of engaging their sons to Yanxi. Why take the chance? With the hindsight of thirty years of post-Mao reform, villagers today make jokes about the power of class labels to mobilize violence and suspicion in the past. For example, I frequently heard jokes during the process of building new houses that so-and-so's house was too much like that of an old landlord's, and that "if it was still the Cultural Revolution we would take you over to the stage and have a struggle session!" But in the immediate post-Mao years, the uncertainty was still strong enough that no one was willing to take the chance of a marriage alliance with a questionable family if it was at all possible to avoid.

¹⁵⁷ Carma Hinton recorded a documentary film of the village stilt-walking festival in 1979. Attacks on the Gang of Four certainly also had propaganda value in shoring up the legitimacy of the new leadership of Deng Xiaoping.

Naturally, with no local family network and less to lose, Carpenter Hu was more willing to consider a marriage to Yanxi. They courted for just under a year, and were married in 1981.

Carpenter Hu had been living in a small room attached to the village headquarters (大队) since he moved to the village in 1975, so it was agreed that he would move into her family's house. At that time there were five people living in the house, including her two parents, an older brother, and his wife. Their house was still the one that had been allocated to Shang Fuxi in the land reform, a typical old construction mud-brick courtyard house. There was a main, south-facing building where the parents lived in one room, and another room where Yanxi would live with Carpenter Hu. To the west was a second smaller building where Yanxi's brother and sister-in-law lived in relative privacy. A wall with a gate onto the alley made up the east side of the courtyard, and the back of a neighbor's main house formed the wall on the south side. Also typical was the small outhouse on the south-west corner of the building, and a small kitchen in the building where the brother and sister-in-law lived.

Hu and his wife were still living in that old house when I met them in the fall of 2008. Both of Yanxi's parents had passed away years earlier, and her brother and sister-in-law had moved to a new house in the south part of Long Bow. Yanxi gave birth to their only son in 1982, who himself married in 2001 and brought his wife to live with his parents. Thus by 2008 there were again five people living in the house, Carpenter Hu and Yanxi, their son and his wife, and a granddaughter born in 2004. The son, daughter, and granddaughter also frequently slept in a second courtyard house that Hu used as a workshop, in the north part of Long Bow.

By 2008 Hu had saved enough money that he was finally ready to renovate the house. He told me that he had wanted to build a new house back in 2000 or 2001 when his son was ready to marry, but that he didn't have the money. In the last several years, in addition to his normal income from doing small carpentry projects around the village, he had hit on a more profitable job making six-foot tall handmade wooden replicas of the famous Yingxian Pagoda, which he worked on for two-three months and sold for 15000RMB (\approx \$2150).¹⁵⁸ The income from selling three of these pagodas allowed Carpenter Hu to save enough to build a completely new house on the site of the old house.

Demolition of the old house started in May of 2009. A team from a village in the mountains east of Changzhi city would do most of the construction work, although Hu and his wife added their labor as much as possible. The plan for the house was designed by Hu himself. He sketched out a typical new Long Bow house, made of red brick and concrete, with an imposing two-story main house on the north side of a courtyard, containing a total of seven rooms. On the main floor there would be two bedrooms, a central guest hall, and a smaller common room, and on the second floor would be another bedroom and two storage rooms. A one story building on the east side of the courtyard would house a kitchen and pantry, and a mirror-image building on the west would be used primarily for storage. A new outhouse would be built in to the southwest corner

¹⁵⁸ The Yingxian Pagoda, a 220-foot tall all-wood pagoda built in 1056 located in Ying County in northern Shanxi, is one of the most famous tourist sites in Shanxi.

of the house, directly opposite the main gate on the southeast corner. Local peoples' preference is to keep their bathrooms separate from living spaces, so that most houses continue to have outhouses in the courtyard made of a large cistern below a simple stone slot in the ground.

New houses in Long Bow, like those in most villages in the region, are most notable for their imposing dimensions and solid appearance. The first thing a visitor notices arriving at a home in the village is the main entrance, usually made of a ten- twelve-foot tall metal double door, built into a large archway in the exterior wall of the courtyard. Most doors are made off site and then installed whole, by one of several specialty companies in the built-up area near the train station north of the village. As with most courtyard houses in rural China, there is an auspicious phrase placed above the door, which in Long Bow is usually carved into a large piece of marble or concrete. Entrances are decorated with large stone lions, inlaid brick details, and paper effigies of door gods. Immediately inside and opposite the entrance there is usually a wall screen, that causes the person entering the house to have to turn ninety degrees to the right or left to enter the courtyard. The wall screen itself is an extension of the gate, and is commonly decorated with an inlaid porcelain decoration depicting a beautiful landscape, geometric design, or poem.

Inside the courtyard of most Long Bow homes, the space is dominated by the two-story main house, always built on the north to maximize south-facing exposure. Typically, there is a set of stairs in the center of the building leading to the main entrance of the house, which opens on the main guest hall. This entrance is normally only used if the courtyard is hosting a special occasion like a wedding, or if there is a guest whom the resident wishes to welcome in a formal way. Otherwise, people in Long Bow prefer to enter the house via one of the side buildings, by going in through the kitchen door, passing through the kitchen, and reaching the side rooms of the main house via a small room connecting the kitchen to the main building. Daily activity is usually concentrated in the side rooms of the main house, the small connecting rooms, and the kitchen, leaving the main guest hall for formal occasions. The elaborateness of these constructions is notable given the fairly low average income in Long Bow, and the fact that much of the space in the main house is often left empty, rarely used, or used only for storage.

Carpenter Hu's new house, largely completed by July 2009, reflects most of these trends. The main gate opens on a lane to the east, and has a large, green metal door with a four character phrase inscribed in marble above. Turning right, you face the main house to the north, and to the east there is a smaller building with a kitchen and small room with a new washing machine.¹⁵⁹ The main house is on a concrete platform approximately three-feet high, raising the house and making it even more imposing, and you enter by the main door via a five-stair flight of steps. Entering through the kitchen, you can reach the main house by going through a small room with a round table used for family meals, going up a narrow flight of steps, and entering in to a side

¹⁵⁹ Washing machines are common in Long Bow, although many people prefer to wash by hand, since the machines most people have can only wash a few articles of clothing at a time. Most houses in Long Bow today also have running water for cooking and washing, thanks to a village water project completed in 1996. A controversy erupted in 2009 over a plan by the village government to expand and improve the village water supply, a project for which homeowners would be assessed a flat fee.



A Long Bow house one month into reconstruction.

room with a television and large sofa. The main guest hall was still largely undecorated by the time I completed my fieldwork, but Carpenter Hu told me he planned to keep the space simple, with a large mural on the wall opposite the door, a central table below the mural with a large wooden chair on either side, and a large wooden sofa along one wall.

The overall layout of the house separated a master bedroom on the west side of the main floor from a second bedroom on the east side where Carpenter Hu's son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter would live, and a third bedroom on the second floor. Just as important as the spatial arrangement of the house is who would be moving into the third bedroom: Hu's brother-in-law and his wife (Yanxi's brother and sister-in-law) would move back to the old location of his father's home, because Hu's new house was considered to be nicer than their house in the south part of Long Bow, itself built only fifteen years earlier. Privacy would not be a major issue for the three couples, since the main house by itself is approximately 1500 square feet, and the bedrooms are all separated on different floors and at opposite ends of the house. The brother-in-

law, Shang Rende, also told me that he liked the idea of moving back to where his father's house had been: "This location is much better than where my house is, and it feels like coming home to move back to this part of Long Bow. There are too many Catholics in the south part of the village anyway, so I feel outnumbered there."¹⁶⁰

The first part of Rende's comment is especially telling: even in such a small place as Long Bow village, he felt a specific connection to the location of his parents' old house, even though after the construction nothing would be left of that house. As a statement about "coming home" to a particular neighborhood, his comment is consistent with a common practice of Long Bow villagers to associate themselves with a certain part of the village. For example, people will speak of being from either the north or south parts, or living in the center of the village close to the Village Government (大队) offices, the central square, and the village temple. William Hinton recorded a related tendency during his research for *Fanshen*, where villagers associated the north and south parts of the village with certain extended families, the Lu family with the former and the Fans and Guos with the latter.¹⁶¹ More recently, people began to identify with particular parts of Long Bow based on their division into six work teams (小队) which were the primary units responsible for agricultural production beginning with the first collectivization in 1957 until the privatization of land in 1981-82.¹⁶² Even though in Long Bow work teams have not played an increasingly minor role since the early '80s, villagers today continue to talk of living in the neighborhood of a specific work team, dividing Long Bow into six roughly equal geographic parts.

More personally, as a statement about a feeling of connection with his family and its past, Rende's sense of homecoming is an example of the central place of houses in life stories. At the time of his move back to the old site of his parents' house, the new house was invested with meaning by its inclusion in a story of Rende's childhood, growing up, getting married, building a new house and moving away, and eventual return to the place in the village that felt "right" to him. He elaborated on his feelings about moving into Carpenter Hu's new house: "I moved to the south side house a long time ago already, because the old house just wasn't very good anymore. The walls were drafty and the coal stove didn't keep the house warm, but in the new house things were much more comfortable. I had to move too because my wife kept putting pressure on me, as soon as we had enough money she wanted to move to a better house. This happens to everyone in Long Bow; they move away but always want to eventually rebuild a new house in the old spot where they grew up. Shanxi people are really conservative. We let Carpenter Hu and Yanxi have my parents' old house because we could move to a new one, and they couldn't afford it. We probably should have just rebuilt on the same site then anyway, but my parents were still alive and we needed more room, so it made sense to build a new house. It doesn't matter, because all these houses are still in the family anyway, even if you move out, they're really still yours. Now my son will get married and take over the south house. See how

160 Rende's house was on the lane where the village Catholic church is located, so although the total population of Catholics is no more than 20%, there is a higher concentration of believers in the south part of the village.

161 Hinton (2008), Ch. 5

162 See Chapter 5 for the history of organizing production in the village.

it happens? Now Carpenter Hu builds a new house, but it is still ours too because this is where my parents' house was, and I can come back to live here in the end.”

As Rende put it, “this happens to everyone in Long Bow”: stories that play on themes of house building, moving around the village, and the relationship between homes and families are everywhere in the village. In part this is a reflection of the ubiquity of construction: in addition to the twenty-six houses under construction at some point in 2009, nearly every dwelling in Long Bow has been built or rebuilt within the last two decades. But the physical fact of construction is probably exceeded by how central house building is in villagers' stories. Nearly every life story I heard in interviews revolved around an act of building a new house as a central moment, and in public life villagers talk about building perhaps more than any other topic. Building a new house is seen as a watershed, an event that organizes time both individually and collectively.

In part, it might be tempting to ascribe the great importance given today to building new houses to rising incomes as a result of economic reform, so that people are especially concerned with house building now simply because they have the resources. For example, Yan Yunxiang's analysis of the revolution in family and intimacy in the Reform era in large part relies on this type of explanation, that house renovation in contemporary China is primarily driven by the logic of conspicuous consumption.¹⁶³ Clearly, this must be true in a tautological sense, since if people lacked the money to build, there would not be any building happening in the village. However, in this case the local stereotype of Shanxi people in general and Long Bow people in particular placing great importance on their houses has more than a kernel of truth. Average incomes have not seen any great increase in Long Bow in recent years (in fact they have been stagnant since at least the late 1990s), and, lacking any significant village enterprises, Long Bow has not done as well economically as many surrounding villages. From the perspective of Long Bow people today, building is important simply because life revolves around house building. Their stories naturally express this self-image, organizing the drama of the twists and turns of life around leaving, returning to, building, and rebuilding houses.

It is of course not surprising that houses should play such a central role in life histories, given that they are where people in Long Bow spend most of their lives, are closely connected with kinship, and are easily metonymically connected with individuals and families. But the importance of narratives of house building is deeper, in that they produce the temporal and spatial extension of life. Temporally, it is in stories that houses are invested with a sense of connection to the past, uniting the past, present, and future in a narrative chain centered on the physical location of the house. Spatially, the narrative link made between houses and families enlarges the scope of places thought to be connected to a particular person, primarily on the lines of kinship networks. Carpenter Hu and Rende's story is a especially clear example of how intertwined narratives of families and houses create complex relationships among places in the village. Although a particular person may not occupy a given courtyard house, that place can still be considered connected to that person by the contemporary or past residence of a relative.

163 Yan (2003)

This means that any understanding of the interrelated problems of space and kinship in the village must look deeply into the stories that villagers tell about their houses, and how those stories reveal a highly extended sense of the self, family, and community.

Chapter 5 – Noodle Fields

“Chinese society is fundamentally rural. I say that it is fundamentally rural because its foundation is rural. Several variations have arisen from this foundation, but even so, these variations retain their rural character. ... [The people in the countryside] are truly the foundation of Chinese society.” - Fei Xiaotong, From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society¹⁶⁴

This claim of the essentially rural character of Chinese society is echoed in the words of another important analyst of the place of farmers in Chinese society, Mao Zedong: “In a very short time, in China's central, southern and northern provinces, several hundred million peasants will rise like a mighty storm, like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to hold it back. They will smash all the trammels that bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. ... There are three alternatives. To march at their head and lead them? To trail behind them, gesticulating and criticizing? Or to stand in their way and oppose them? Every Chinese is free to choose, but events will force you to make the choice quickly.”¹⁶⁵ The view of the peasants as the key to socialist revolution was the most important theoretical and practical contribution of Maoism, resulting in the elevation of the peasants to an equal position with workers and soldiers in forming a new society (工农兵). Although orthodox Marxism theorized the central position of the proletariat in communist revolutions, and many government policies in the Mao era systematically privileged city dwellers, the Chinese Communist revolution was, before anything else, a rural one.

Perhaps the best evidence is that the first large-scale project designed to transform Chinese society was Land Reform. Even before declaring the founding of the PRC in 1949, areas Liberated earlier had already undergone one or more rounds of Land Reform. This was the case in Southeastern Shanxi, including Long Bow village, which was under firm Communist control by 1946 when the first Land Reform campaign took place there. Answering the “rural question” was the Party's first priority, in part because it owed its legitimacy and success to the support of the peasants. Land Reform transformed rural society and changed the fates of the vast majority of the Chinese population. Thirty years later, the importance of the rural question was demonstrated again, when the Household Responsibility System became a central component of Economic Reform. The redistribution of land to households to be farmed independently under this policy has dramatically transformed the countryside, symbolized by the long, skinny farm plots that reflect farmers' adaptations to decollectivized farming.

In the past sixty years, then, rural Chinese society has undergone two fundamental transformations with respect to farming: from private ownership through redistribution to collectivization and then back again. Given the central place of farming and rural society in a

¹⁶⁴ Fei (1992) p. 37

¹⁶⁵ Mao (1961)

common concept of Chinese cultural identity, we might expect these transformations to have had a dramatic impact on a wide range of other issues, including that very question of the cultural status of farming and farmers. Farming has been increasingly marginalized both economically and culturally in the past decades of spectacular industrial growth and urbanization, becoming an occupation of last resort for many, looked down upon not only by the rising middle classes but also by formerly rural people migrating to the coasts for industrial work. From the perspective of farmers in contemporary China themselves, there is an increasing sense of being left behind, excluded from the economic gains of recent years, and relegated to second-class status, no longer at the forefront of the national or cultural mentality.¹⁶⁶

Considering this problem from the perspective of Long Bow village, there are commonalities with experiences elsewhere in rural China, but important differences as well. Although still an important symbol of the rural character of life in the village, farming has long since been overtaken by industrial labor as the primary source of income. Long Bow is surrounded by approximately 3000 *mu* of farm fields, mainly used to grow corn. Along with a cluster of fields closest to the village set aside for green vegetable production in simple greenhouses, other vegetables are grown in small plots next to homes or in courtyard spaces. Long Bow has very few remaining Village Enterprises after most failed in the 1990s, and aside from a few small stores and street vendors, there are very few job opportunities in the village itself. However, the village's proximity to Changzhi city and other industrial areas in the suburban district has allowed people in Long Bow to find work outside the village in several coal-fired power plants, steel refineries, and cement factories. Like many places in rural China, factory work has become the most important source of income; but Long Bow's location has meant that, unlike more remote places, a majority of the people who work outside still return nightly and maintain their primary residence in the village.

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, compared with other rural villages Long Bow also has an unusual relationship to its own past, and that has shaped the local experience of the changing place of farming. In particular, the key role of William Hinton and his books has foregrounded the place of farming, land reform, and collectivization in the history of the village. A farmer himself, in the 1940s Hinton trained Chinese peasants in using and repairing tractors, and thought that the Land Reform he witnessed was a key event in world history. In *Fanshen* he wrote:

“The relevance of Long Bow's history to the present day can hardly be overemphasized. The story revolves around the land question. ... But the impact of the land question on world affairs is not a function of China's specific gravity alone. Who shall own the land? Who shall rule the countryside? These are primary questions in the revolution that is sweeping the whole of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. That revolution, far from dying away, is intensifying. Sooner or later, all those countries where agricultural production is a main source of wealth—and the relation between owners and producers a main source of social conflict—will undergo great

166 See Liu (2000)

transformations.” The paramount importance of farming was evident in all his writings and in his later work in the promotion of improved farming techniques and mechanization in China, Mongolia, and the Philippines.”¹⁶⁷

Consequently, the special place of Hinton in Long Bow has also meant a special place for the history of Land Reform and collectivization. For one, Hinton remained a strong critic of the Dengist policies of the Reform era, characterizing the redistribution of farm land and the end of collectivization as a disaster for the common farmer.¹⁶⁸ This position carries weight locally by its association with the figure of Hinton, and he is invoked in a variety of discourses expressing a critique of Reform, and sometimes a nostalgia for collectivization.¹⁶⁹ For many in the village, it is a bitter irony for Long Bow to be so closely associated with the collective agricultural past, when farming, as in most of China, has become an occupation of which people are ashamed.

The contrast between the past and present status of farming highlights a tragic death: the death of the dream of Land Reform. Certainly, components of the Mao era collectivist project caused needless suffering and started poisonous political trends with consequences that have not ended. But as an expression of an ideal, as the core of an aspiration for progressive social change and a new egalitarian society, for many people collectivization (and the Land Reform that began the process) continues to be a powerful symbol of an alternative to the present. If nothing else, that project put farmers at the center of a national and even international movement—a status that dovetailed with the traditional importance of rural society in Chinese culture but now seems completely repudiated. In Long Bow, the lament is so common as to be unremarkable: “We have more money now than in the past. We can eat noodles whenever we want, and get new clothes more than once a year. But at least in the past we used to matter, at least someone paid attention to us [farmers]. Now if you don't have ten grand in your pocket, you might as well be a piece of trash.” Some variation of this statement was made to me more times in a year than I could count. And in Long Bow, the contrast between past and present is perhaps felt more keenly than in other rural places because of the heightened awareness of the collective past. If nothing else, that awareness is a filter through which the present is understood, and as such it provides a source for articulating the struggles of the contemporary farmer.

The following narratives of farming in Long Bow illustrate both the situation for farmers today and how the history of the collective past enters into the present. In many cases, memories and narratives of collectivization are invoked in expressions of dissatisfaction with the present village leadership and national policy. Mobilization of these memories thus also constitutes a form of low-level protest.¹⁷⁰ This brings memory, history, and village politics together in the form of everyday discourse, which then becomes an important force in the exercise and distribution of local power. Furthermore, the contrast between past and present is meaningful for people in exposing a rift felt between older generations who remember collectivization well (and who do

167 Hinton (2008) p. xxiv-xxv

168 Hinton (1990)

169 For example, see Wang Jinhong's mobilization of the memory of Hinton in Chapter 2.

170 Scott (1985)

the majority of the farm work today) and the younger village leadership for whom that past is at most a childhood memory (and who have different priorities for the future of the village). That rift is often conceived and defined in the context of narratives of farming, making those stories an important component of navigating village politics. In the end, people in the village today live in a space between the memory of collectivization and the stark reality of neoliberal industrialization that has begun to strip the past of its meaning.

Noodle Fields and the New Landlords

In June 2009 I walked in the fields west of Long Bow, searching among the already tall corn stalks for some villagers to interview about farming. First planting in the reddish brown soil in late March, by June most of the work on the corn fields was done for the season, freeing farmers to concentrate their work on more labor intensive green vegetable plots and on maintaining the corn with periodic weeding. Although the corn was mostly left to grow and ripen on its own, many people also cultivate long beans in the narrow spaces between corn rows, requiring more work in the corn fields but increasing the yield on their small plots. That spring rain had been sparse, so the corn crop was struggling in many places. But the transformation since winter illustrated visually the fragmented nature of the corn fields: the height of the corn varied dramatically in strips about ten feet wide and a few hundred feet long. The taller stalks were a deep green and already starting to sprout small ears, while the less healthy corn was wilted and brown. The borders between fields were otherwise barely marked, but the differences in the health of the corn made the boundaries dramatically clear. Whereas in the winter and early spring the fields of Long Bow were a flat expanse of undifferentiated red brown dirt, by summer the tops of the corn showed a topography of inequality, undulating in correspondence with the different life trajectories of their owners.

There were two main reasons for the differential health of the corn: irrigation and fertilizer. Particularly in a dry year like 2009, the amount of water that farmers can apply to their fields is a critical determinant of the crop's success. Adding the proper amount of high quality fertilizer early also makes the corn more robust, giving it a buffer against dry conditions. The amount of labor a farmer can add to the field in hoeing and weeding is also a factor in its success, but is much less important for the outcome than the other two factors. For green vegetables, solicitous tending is absolutely critical, especially because most farmers in Long Bow cannot afford herbicides and pesticides, so having the time to nurse sensitive vegetable fields is essential. In contrast, one of the chief advantages of corn from the perspective of village farmers is that it requires much less daily labor. The corn fields are mostly cleared, tilled, and planted early in the spring, weeded every other day as they begin to sprout, and then barely touched until the fall harvest. This is a relief for many, since people engaging in farm labor on their own fields in the village are mostly over fifty years old and unable to perform daily farm labor all year. The low intensity of growing corn also frees up a whole generation of younger farmers to seek work outside the village.

The most successful fields around the village in 2009 had been irrigated several times already by June, necessary because according to local farmers that spring had been the driest in recent years. Southeastern Shanxi is already a relatively arid climate, averaging just over 20 inches of rain per year. This is enough to grow a decent corn crop, but leaves little margin in a down year. The tenuousness of farming in such a climate was addressed by the village leadership during the Collective era by the construction of an irrigation project, intended to bring electrically pumped water to village fields from the nearby Zhangze reservoir (built as a Great Leap Forward project in 1959). The irrigation project coincided with an effort to mechanize village farming in the 1970s, but came to an abrupt end when collective fields were broken up into individually farmed plots in the early 1980s. Parts of the project had already been completed before it was abandoned, and the infrastructure still exists on the edges of several fields, now sitting mostly unused, slowly deteriorating with age. Irrigation today means trucking water to an individual field to be added manually by sprinklers, done carefully to apply water only to the field of the owner paying for the irrigation. When I asked village farmers why the infrastructure of the old irrigation project wasn't used for at least the fields that it could reach, they explained that the system was all or nothing: "The pumps and conduits are at the edges of these big blocks of fields, and the system was designed to run water across the entire area. You can't irrigate one field in the middle without irrigating all the other fields, and how can you get people to work together on such a project? Some people want to irrigate and their neighbors don't, so in the end no one gets water from the system, if it would even work anymore. So now if you want to irrigate, you have to pay for water to be brought in just for your field."

Trucking in water in that way is expensive: depending on the size of the field, it costs about 100 RMB (\$14) per visit, a significant cost when income from farming corn averages 1000 RMB (\$140) per year. Most people farming corn keep some of the crop for household consumption and sell the surplus as a supplement to other sources of household income. The typical pattern is, in a household with three generations, the oldest members will do farm work while their children work in outside factory work and the grandchildren go to school. For example, the Du family has five members living in one household: a married couple (fifty-five and fifty-four years old), their second son (twenty-nine years old) and his wife (twenty-seven years old, married in from a neighboring village), and their two year old grandson. The couple also has a thirty-one year old daughter, who lives and works in Changzhi city. Based on the land redistribution quota, Mr. Du has a renewable thirty-year lease on two *mu* (one-third acre) of "contract land" (承包田) and two *mu* of "subsistence land" (口粮田). On that total of four *mu*, the Du family expects to produce enough corn to make a profit of approximately 1100 RMB (\$160) per year in addition to what they consume themselves. (They also grow a small amount of vegetables on garden plots around their house, all of which is consumed by the family.) The adult son works irregular night shifts (临工夜班) at Changxin Steel Works (长信钢厂), located in the neighboring village of Machang, where he earns an average of 1000 RMB (\$140) per month, commuting from Long Bow as necessary. The adult daughter-in-law helps out with farm labor and gardening when possible, but is mostly busy with her child. The Du's adult daughter also supplements her parents' income by sending money home from her job at the Changzhi prison, where she earns

2000 RMB (\$280) per month. The expected monthly income for the five people living in Long Bow is thus approximately 1090 RMB (\$155) per month, supplemented by transfers from the daughter. The Du family thus cannot afford to irrigate their land, relying on their own work and luck to produce a good corn crop. They buy a small amount of basic fertilizer (made from nightsoil burned with coal dust) in the spring (at a cost of about 40 RMB (\$5.70)) that they apply to the land themselves. They also keep a chicken coop in their house courtyard to supplement the family diet. In the summer of 2009, Mr. Du was not optimistic about that year's corn crop, saying that the lack of water meant that he would be lucky to salvage a third of the normal crop. Even though the family finances were not centrally dependent on farming income, this would be a significant blow to their budget. To cope with the possible shortfall, Mr. Du had begun working occasional shifts cooking in a restaurant in the nearby area around the Changbei train station, for which he was earning about 300 RMB (\$43) per month, although hours were hard to come by.

The economics of farming in Long Bow today are tenuous at best, so it has become essentially an occupation of last resort. The economic marginality of farming corresponds with social marginalization, although its importance for individual families, as a source of income and as a component of their identity, varies enormously. For the wealthiest families, farming is something to do with the land they have been allocated, but is basically insignificant for their finances and they do not think of themselves as farmers. For the poorest, farming is all that stands between them and starvation, and their right to farm their contract and subsistence fields is essentially the only element in a social safety net protecting them from total poverty.¹⁷¹ People in those circumstances in Long Bow tend to describe themselves as farmers (农民) with a mix of resignation at their economic and social marginalization as well as a defiant pride in the virtue of their hard work and the traditional respect for farming. The differences in the health of the corn crops broadly corresponds to an emerging class difference: the fields owned by wealthier families, often farmed by hired labor and well-irrigated, flourish even in dry years, while those of poor families can barely produce low yields even with hard work.

There is another important element of the role of farm labor in the formation of class differences in Long Bow today. As we saw in the example of the Du family, the contribution to the family budget made by farming for even the poorest families is very low. We might wonder then, why do people bother farming at all, if the returns are so poor? Even if farming is a significant source of food for those families, if industrial work pays at least ten times as much, can't people begin making a transition away from agriculture? The problem is not that outside work is itself hard to find – although the overall economy of Southeastern Shanxi is not growing at the spectacular rates of coastal China, the booming demand for power and steel has allowed the region to take advantage of large coal deposits to build a growing industrial sector. The main difficulty is that, for most people still farming in Long Bow today, it is the only work for which they are qualified, the only work they have ever done, and the only work they feel they can do. This is the reason

¹⁷¹ Agricultural policy in China today rests on thirty-year leases to land granted to individual farmers by the state. Rural land is still legally owned by the state. See below, and Eyferth (2004)



Vegetable field bordering the village, April 2009.

for a stark generation and gender gap in the demographics of people doing farm work: the vast majority of people working the land today are either over fifty or are women. For the older generations, farming is the work they grew up doing, and they believe (with strong justification) outside employers would never give them a factory job. Most of these people rely on their children for the majority of their household income, and continue farming only as a supplement.

Although Mr. Du had enough skills as a cook to find a job other than farming, his case is an exception, and most people who came of age before the beginning of the Reform era would not be able to find work other than farming. People in these circumstances continue farming well past China's official retirement ages, without any pension or social security to depend on. On the other side of that generational divide, the majority of people in the village younger than thirty have never done any (or very little) farm work, and do not have the necessary skills. This worries older people, who wonder who will do the farm work after their generation is gone, but is definitely a positive thing from younger peoples' perspective. Gender is also a significant

dividing line determining who does farm labor, since many married wives who remain home to care for children while their husbands work outside the village also contribute their labor to the land. This is especially true for poorer families, where the added labor of the wife is essential in keeping the family finances above water. Farming in this respect is beginning to be conceived as an extension of housework, marked by gender and generation as second-class work.

Walking in the corn fields that June, I came across Zhang Xiaolong, who enthusiastically showed me around his plot while discussing the state of farming in Long Bow today. In 2009 Zhang was sixty years old, with seven people in his household: himself, his wife, his mother (eighty-one years old), his unmarried brother, his adult son and daughter-in-law, and a ten year old granddaughter. He has title to a total of approximately 5.5 *mu* (just under one acre) of land, based on the quota that distributes .5 *mu* of contract land per person to every household and a roughly equal amount of subsistence land to every household regardless of household size (about two *mu*). Additionally, he works for wages and a share of the crop on another Long Bow family's land that they choose not to farm themselves. His adult son works in the Zhangze Power Plant in nearby Anyang, and commutes back to Long Bow on weekends, earning about 1500 RMB per month. His daughter-in-law works as a hairdresser in a small shop near the Changbei train station in Machang, earning anywhere between 800-1000 RMB per month. They all live in a typical Long Bow courtyard-style house that they saved enough money to renovate in 1994. He has two fields: a four *mu* field in the large corn fields west of the village, and another 1.5 *mu* plot south of the village where they grow a variety of green vegetables, including chives, spinach, long beans, tomatoes, cabbage, and zucchini. They produce enough in the south field that they sell vegetables regularly in the open air farmers' market in Machang, and they also transport a portion of their corn to Changzhi in the fall to sell on the street. He and his wife do all of the farm labor themselves. He explained how difficult it was to make money farming:

“With what we can make from farming these small fields, it's hardly worth it to keep farming. But there's no other work I can do, it's all I know. We have enough money that I could irrigate a little this year, so the corn is doing pretty well. With this small field, we can make enough to come out ahead. With the vegetable fields, the possible profits are higher, but it takes much more work, and there is more risk. Selling vegetables in the Machang market, prices are really low and there is a lot of competition. The Machang government also charges a fee of fifty RMB per day to have a place at the market, and that really cuts into profits. We could make more by going to Changzhi, but it's too far to have to go there every day. We wait until fall, and then take as much as we can to the city and sell it.”

I asked him about the differences in the corn crops field to field: “Why is your corn healthy, but there is this long strip of corn next to it that looks too dry?”

He replied: “This field next to mine belongs to someone else who is really lazy. They never come out and work, and they don't have enough money to hire someone to do it, or to pay for water.”

Remembering a vivid phrase coined by Hinton as a critique of the fragmentation of fields at the start of the Reform era, I followed up: “These fields are like long strips of noodles! Why are



Makeshift irrigation ditch built by one farmer to carry water from his house to the fields.

they divided into these long skinny strips?”

He answered, “That’s what happened at the start of Reform when they broke up the collective fields. You have to be able to get to every field from a path, so the fields are these long thin strips connected to paths at each end. Because each family’s field is so small, they end up long and skinny like that.”

“Does that make it harder to farm?”

“It makes it almost impossible to use a tractor, because the field is too skinny for a tractor to turn around at the end without going on to someone else’s field. Some people cooperate with their neighbors to hire a tractor, but mine isn’t interested, and besides I have plenty of time and energy to do the work. You can’t irrigate very well either. It’s really different from the collective era when we worked together in the fields. Now no one wants to cooperate, because no one cares about farming, and the way the fields are makes it almost impossible to cooperate. The village government now doesn’t care, they are too busy hanging out with those rich guys and getting drunk. They want to make money on factories and things like that, they don’t care at all about

the farmers.”

After my conversation with Zhang, I continued walking north through the corn fields. Near the northern boundary separating the fields belonging to Long Bow from the village of Wangjiazhuang to the west, I came across a large area enclosed by a ten foot high brick wall. Following the wall to the west, there was a large steel gate, closed and locked but guarded by at least fifteen intimidating, semi-feral dogs. Trying to figure out what the building behind was and what the enclosed field was being used for, I peeked in the gate, agitating the dogs even more. Eventually, a person emerged from the shabby white building about thirty feet back from the gate, and walked towards the entrance. “Who are you looking for?” the man asked. “I’m a student living in Long Bow, doing a social survey of life here. I’m out taking a look at the farm fields. I was just curious what this field is for?” “Hold on, I’ll let you in.” He brought me in past the gate and up toward the building. At that point I could see that the enclosed area was very large, and divided into several big blocks of different farm fields. To the east, there was an area with the high long mounds typical of cabbage fields, but partly overgrown with weeds and sitting unused. To the west there were high A-frame trellises upon which long beans grew, already seven feet high. As I walked in, the man told me his “boss” wasn’t there, but that he could show me around. He explained that this set of fields was the former Long Bow village experimental field, set up originally in the collective era as a special field where a more highly skilled work team would experiment on different farming methods and crops with the promise of improving yields in the whole village.¹⁷² “The total area of the field is 240 *mu*,” he told me. “It still belongs to the village government of course, but they have contracted it to Manager Shen (申主任), who is the boss of the suburban district irrigation works. He hires people to work on the land and sell what is grown, and splits the profits with the village government.” Following him as he walked east, we took a look at the fallow cabbage field, and then circled back towards the west field. Several people were working in the rows of long beans, and I had a chance to ask them about their work: they explained that all five were from neighboring Wangjiazhuang village, worked on Shen’s field for eight hours per day in the summer (6am-10am and 4pm-8pm), and earned 34 RMB (~ \$4.85) per day. My host Old Qin, as he referred to himself, then walked me back towards the main building. “I live in this building, and keep an eye on the whole place for boss Shen.” I asked, “How did boss Shen get the contract for this entire field?” Old Qin explained, “He knows Zhang Guangping (Long Bow Party Secretary and Village Head) well, and because he runs the suburban irrigation district, he could guarantee that the fields would get enough water. He’s an important guy in Machang, related to the township Party Secretary and one of the richest people.”

A few days later, I returned to Zhang Xiaolong’s field to chat with him about what I found out about the experimental fields. His pleasant tone contrasted with the frustration underlying his words. “That’s how it is these days. People that have those kinds of connections and already have money can make even more money. It’s sad that those fields that used to be used for everyone’s benefit now are just making one guy rich. Of course the village leaders will say that

¹⁷² This was the field where Li Anhe worked in the early years of the Cultural Revolution. See Chapter 3.

the money from the fields goes back to the village anyway, and it's better to have someone doing a good job with the land. But we all know he [boss Shen] only pays low rent on the land, and pockets the rest of the money.” I asked him to elaborate more on the contrast with the past that he implied, and he answered, “There were problems in the past too. We were poorer, and there were bad leaders sometimes. Nowadays all that matters is how much money you have. Even when there were problems in the past, the leaders paid attention to farmers. Now they don't care, and just want to get rich like everyone else. That's how they can take a field that is supposed to belong to Long Bow and give it to someone from another village to make money, because they make money too. But what happens to the rest of us? We get no benefit from the village government, and have to get by on our own. I'll tell you, there's all these new landlords around now, it's really bad.”

The new landlords that Zhang referred to are a consequence of a different set of forces than the landlords targeted by Land Reform in the 1940s. The new landlords have emerged in part because of the increasing marginalization of farming, rather than its centrality: the low economic and social status of farming has meant that many wealthier families, their incomes derived from sources other than farming, have little interest in farming their land themselves, and instead hire people to work the land for them. As land in the PRC is still formally owned by the state and households only have leases that entitle them to farm a certain amount of land, these richer families cannot sell their land, but instead keep ownership of it.¹⁷³ More recently liberalized land policies have made it easier for farmers to sublet their land, so some richer families in Long Bow have started to rent other families' plots and combine it with their own, making fields large enough that contracting a tractor makes better practical and economic sense. State policies have therefore resulted in some consolidation of fields in larger segments, even though the primary purpose of land policy is to ensure rural people retain rights to at least a small plot as a basic safety net.¹⁷⁴ The choices of local governments are another contributor to the consolidation of farm fields, and they are frequently influenced by personal connections. In those cases, connections enable individuals to control large enough fields that farming income becomes a significant money maker. The new landlords are thus of two types: rich families that don't depend on farming (or care about it for that matter) but hire people to work on their land, and rich families that are able to group together enough land by subleasing or by connections to make farming significantly profitable.

The topography of Long Bow corn fields is visual proof of this emerging difference – long, skinny noodle strip fields intermixed with larger plots that can be economically farmed. The fragmentation and tenuousness of farming evidenced by the noodle fields is the experience of the majority, who cannot get rich from farming but nevertheless cannot but continue. For them, decollectivization has meant marginalization and isolation, but has not created a clear path out of poverty. By their side a new landlord class is emerging that have “gotten rich first,”¹⁷⁵ enabling them to further consolidate a position at the head of rural society.

¹⁷³ Eyferth (2004)

¹⁷⁴ Zhou (2004)

¹⁷⁵ Deng Xiaoping's famous phrase: “先富起来”

From Collectivization to Decollectivization

Charting a history of farming in Long Bow requires a deeper understanding of the transitions in land ownership and collective labor. The experience of the village was, in its broad outlines, similar to the general pattern of the rest of China and of north-central China in particular. As recorded by Hinton in *Fanshen*, Long Bow was under the control of the PLA and the Communist administration by 1946, the first year of Land Reform. The first Land Reform expropriated landlords and rich peasants of their property in land, houses, and personal property, and redistributed it to poor (and some middle) peasants. Another important component of the first Land Reform campaigns was the fixing of class labels that would have political and social relevance for decades, even to the present day.¹⁷⁶ In terms of farming, the redistribution of land, farm tools, and animals gave Long Bow peasants roughly equivalent amounts of household-head-owned farm property. Redistributions (and class labels) were based on the unit of the household, with the property personally owned by the household head (usually the senior male). Although the legal status of this land was still somewhat murky, individual farmers received titles to the land that they were granted in the Land Reform. The period from the beginning of Land Reform through the early 1950s was thus a shift from the concentrated ownership of land by landlords and rich peasants to more evenly distributed land ownership, but was not yet collectivization.¹⁷⁷

The first steps toward collectivization came later, when Long Bow organized an “agricultural producers' cooperative” in the fall of 1953.¹⁷⁸ Following national policy, leading Long Bow cadres were called to organize a cooperative in order to demonstrate the benefits of cooperation and collective farming to the rank-and-file peasants. The first instance of this co-op in Long Bow was initially limited in size and plagued with fighting among its members, but within a year had expanded to include a sizable minority of village farmers. The co-op called for individual farmers to pool their land, tools, and animals, and in return receive shares of the harvest equal to what they had contributed (land dividend), and earn work points (convertible into cash and/or ration vouchers) for the labor they did on the land. The main initial problems were around the valuation of members' contributions (for example, controversies over the relative value of different draft animals), and later over the apportioning of work points (especially when work points were earned for white collar work like accounting). An important element in these co-ops was that individual land holdings did not disappear: “The stone markers in the fields that divided one plot from another would remain even though peasant members pooled their fields and worked them in common.”¹⁷⁹

176 See for example Chapter 3 for more on the contemporary relevance of class labels. For a history of the political culture of Land Reform and its consequences, see Demare (2007)

177 The determination of the categories of Landlord, Rich Peasant, Middle Peasant, and Poor Peasant was based primarily on the household's relationship to the means of production, i.e. families that owned enough land that they could not farm it themselves and either hired laborers or rented the land to tenant farmers were put in the former two categories, and those who did not were in the latter two. See Watson (1984)

178 See Hinton (1983), especially chapters 17-23, for a full history of cooperatives in Long Bow.

179 Hinton (1983) p. 126

By the spring of 1955, co-op membership had increased, and the advantages of collective farming began to become more evident. Bumper crops in 1954 and then again in 1955 encouraged most people in the village to join up, and then in the fall of 1955 all Long Bow co-ops were merged into one. During the process of the expansion of co-op membership from 1953 to 1955, the relative value of land shares to work points in determining pay was reduced, with the intention of putting more emphasis on the contribution of labor and equalizing co-op members' income. Still, by 1955 the system was voluntary, with individual land and productive property ownership preserved. In 1957 the first true collective system was established, called a "higher-stage co-op." At this point, all livestock was required to be sold to the co-op and property markers were dug out of the fields. The village was organized into seven production teams (生产队, usually called Work Teams 小队), consisting of six geographically-based neighborhood teams and one skilled Sidelines Team. All co-op income was thereafter based on work points earned through labor, and private ownership of land was eliminated.

The next step in the collectivization of farming in Long Bow was the formation of the Yellow Mill Commune at the beginning of the Great Leap Forward (GLF) in 1958. Long Bow, at that point officially designated a Production Brigade, was merged with dozens of others villages in Changzhi and Lucheng counties to form the commune. Later that year, the Yellow Mill Commune was reorganized in a smaller form as the East Wind Commune, and then again in 1959 as Machang Commune. Long Bow's experience of the first two years of the GLF was similar to that of villages all across rural China: collective canteens, experiments in steel production, slogans, and enormous mobilizations of people for infrastructure projects. The organization of communes was a dramatic expansion of the collective model that (in hindsight temporarily) erased any last vestiges of private production in farming. Although the local experience of the deprivations of the middle years of the GLF (1959-1961) was not as extreme as in other parts of China, problems began to emerge, and by 1960 the most ambitious elements of the collectivization project were ended.¹⁸⁰ However, with respect to farming and property in land, collective ownership remained in place until the beginning of the Reform era, organized at the level of Long Bow Brigade.

A core policy of Deng Xiaoping's Economic Reform was the introduction of the Household Responsibility System, which redistributed land to individual farmers, again at the level of the household. The breaking up of collectivized land proceeded at different times and paces in different parts of the country. Land in Long Bow was first redistributed in 1982, based on a formula of .5 *mu* per household member for Contract Land and a set amount of Subsistence Land. There have been several more rounds of redistribution since 1982 in order to make adjustments for changing household sizes, but since the ratio of population to land in the village has remained basically stable since the early 1980s the formula is still .5 *mu* per person. The reintroduction of individual farming is based on thirty year leases to the land issued to farmers that guarantee them the right to determine what they farm on their land, and makes them solely

¹⁸⁰ The reasons for the collapse of agricultural production that lead to the Great Leap Famine and the reintroduction of markets are a matter of much scholarly debate. See Dikotter (2010) and Thaxton (2008)

responsible for production. Since the beginning of Reform, the state has experimented with different grain quotas and agricultural taxes that preserved some elements of government control over agricultural production, but by the time of my research in 2008-09 these had almost all been phased out.

On the surface, then, the situation in Long Bow today is similar to after the first rounds of Land Reform in the 1940s – land apportioned to individual farmers on the basis of household size and farmed independently. Things seem to have come full circle, through an era of collectivization and back to small landholder farming. In reality, the circle has reversed back even further than the late 1940s, to a point of the reemergence of landlords in the countryside. It is not my intention to evaluate whether or not this is a good thing. People in Long Bow themselves argue that it has had mixed consequences, with a rising standard of living (although not earned by farming) and greater independence, side by side with stagnation and the marginalization of farming. Whatever the objective reality, the important question here is how people understand these changes, and how that understanding informs social and political life in the contemporary village.

In the past fifteen years in particular, farmers in Long Bow have experienced a stagnation in incomes that has led to more questioning of the consequences of Reform. This questioning has been expressed as a dissatisfaction with village leadership and has been filtered through narratives of the collective era and the contrast it represents to the present. Many farmers in the village attribute their struggles to a new generation of village leaders who they think have turned their backs on them and abandoned the values of the collective era. Their memories of collectivization, rose-colored as they may be, constitute an important source of stories that voice frustration and register protest against changes that have largely left them behind. Inequalities they see daily in their fields and houses are contrasted with the collective past, putting past and present in a relation that structures their understanding of contemporary struggles. This understanding of village history in turn becomes a political force in the village, as it contributes to a view of village leadership as the enemies of the average farmer.

Fires and Fates

In early spring 2009 the smell of burning corn stalks was everywhere in Long Bow. It was a welcome change from the normal acrid smell of burning coal that it replaced, but the contribution to air quality was no improvement. Tracing the source of the odor was not difficult: in the corn fields west of the village everyday I could see large mounds of corn stalks and husks being burned, some smoldering and others shooting flames twenty feet into the air. Some people had cleared their field in the fall along with the harvest, but the majority left the dried out stalks standing in the fields all winter after picking corn by hand. The stalks had to be cleared to prepare for tilling and spring planting, and burning was the easiest way to dispose of them.

Walking in the fields northwest of the village, I came across Chen Zhen, who was raking cut



Uncleared field west of the village. The small building in the distance is the local Earth God (土地神) shrine.

stalks into piles to prepare for burning. Most of the time, people in Long Bow were enthusiastic about talking with me or letting me observe what they were doing, whether it was a funeral, working the fields, or preparing a meal at home. Chen was different, and I could tell he was uncomfortable even as I watched him working in the field from a distance. After an uneasy standoff of a few minutes, I approached him as he was working.

“Do you mind if I watch you working?” I asked.

He only shrugged in response. After a few more minutes, I decided to try to get him to open up.

“Why are you clearing the field?”

“You need to get rid of the old stalks to plant again,” he replied.

“Is burning the best way to get rid of them?” This question clearly made him uncomfortable.

“Who are you?” he asked.

"I'm a student, doing a social survey of Long Bow. I'm trying to understand how people live in the village today."

He continued, "You know, you're a foreigner so I don't mind talking to you. But you can't talk about me with anyone else, don't use my name."

After reassuring him I would protect his identity, I tried to understand why he was so circumspect. He explained, "It's illegal to burn corn stalks in the Changzhi suburbs. Everyone does it anyway, but you can get in trouble. A few years ago, they used to enforce it more, but now they have given up. But it's still illegal, and I don't want to get in trouble."

Chen was right that the enforcement of a burning ban was lax at best, but, like him, many people were nervous that they could get caught and fined at any time. Although burning corn stalks is certainly not the most environmentally friendly option, the irony of a burning ban around Changzhi is not lost on locals, surrounded as they are by smokestacks of coal-fired powerplants and steel factories in every direction. Unlike some other parts of rural China, coal is abundant enough in Shanxi that it is usually also burned for heat, and the trucks transporting coal from mines to local factories drive past the village all day long pumping out enormous black exhaust clouds. A ban on burning stalks seems a bit meaningless in that environment, a fact that probably contributes to the lack of enforcement.

The ban, however, was not completely unenforced. According to several Long Bow farmers I interviewed about burning waste in the fields, although the authority to enforce the ban lies with the Changzhi suburban district government, village leaders use the threat of enforcement to put pressure on their political opponents. These claims proved impossible for me to entirely verify, since village cadres I asked about it denied that the Long Bow government has anything to do with the burning ban. However, looking at the patterns of burning in the fields, it seemed clear that there was inconsistent enforcement of the ban, and that the rule was applied to some small fields while farmers of larger fields were allowed to burn unchecked. Even people like Chen, who was able to burn on his land and not be harassed by the authorities, noticed the disparity. He claimed it was widely known in the village that local cadres used the ban selectively to punish and reward, and that wealthier families that were well-connected to the leadership could avoid problems. Other farmers I asked claimed that ban enforcement was a tool to extract bribes, which wealthier families could afford while their poorer neighbors could not. Not being able to burn stalks meant much more work clearing the field in the spring, which put an extra burden on older farmers who were already barely able to keep up with the hard springtime field labor.

For most people I interviewed, this situation was characteristic of a new era and evidence of how far the status of the average farmer had fallen. The predominant emotion seemed to be resignation, that difficulties like the selective enforcement of the burning ban were the unavoidable lot of small farmers in a new era that recognizes only the pursuit of wealth. As tempting as it is to point out that the collective era was no paradise for the average villager in Long Bow, it is hard to characterize their attitude today as simple nostalgia, since they remember the problems of the past clearly. It is not that they contrast an idyllic past with a difficult present; rather, their memories record a transformation in the basic values of society that has left them



At right, an intact greenhouse.

without a place.¹⁸¹ The sense of a lost purpose and of dislocation, confusion, and marginalization is the meaning that these farmers draw from the social transformation of the Reform era. This contrast of past and present becomes an explanatory structure that they use to understand their contemporary situation and that of China as a whole. From this perspective, there has been a fundamental shift from respect for farmers to disdain, and a corresponding reemergence of class divisions in the countryside. Their personal memories of the collective era thus inform a larger context of social change, explaining not only their lot but the direction of the society as a whole.

This structuring of history and memory also constitutes a form of resistance. Although in Long Bow there has not been the kind of open conflict observed in many other parts of rural China, the recitation of memories of the collective past are an important form of protest for many villagers.¹⁸² These memories occasionally translate into open political action when they link up

¹⁸¹ Boym (2002) provides an excellent analysis of the complexity of nostalgia, particularly in post-socialist places.

¹⁸² In *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* Kevin O'Brien and Li Lianjiang record similar feelings of frustration that

with other forces of local politics, particularly the ongoing conflict between the former village leadership (who date to the collective era) and the present leaders.¹⁸³ For the most part, however, telling stories of the collective past does not lead to explicit action. At the same time, stories that encompass the shift from the collectivization to decollectivization provide a powerful explanation of the actions of village leaders that people use as the foundation of their complaints against the present direction of the village. For people remembering in this mode, the Party slogan “To Serve the People” (为人民服务) has shifted from an elusive yet respected goal in the collective era to a cruel joke in the present. Narratives of this shift are at the core of a hostility to village leadership that reflects the distance farmers feel between their needs and the leaders' goals. As an expression of a frustration with the course of social change in the Reform era, the contrast between past and present also contributes to a deepening social division in the village between poor farmers and their wealthier neighbors. Memories of the collective past are one of the few weapons that the less well-off have to resist the domination of the wealthy, since the moral value of the principles of the Mao era has not been completely rejected, even if they no longer describe an imagined but promising future.

Another kind of fire in the fields of Long Bow piled more frustration on top of this social division. In 2009 the vegetable fields southwest of the village had fifteen working greenhouses, used to grow vegetables in the late winter that could be sold for higher prices in a limited market. These greenhouses were rudimentary, with a thirty to forty foot long by seven foot high long tamped earth wall on the north side, two sloping walls at either end, all covered by a large opaque plastic sheet held up with an internal wooden structure. Individual families constructed these greenhouses, allowing them to make much more money farming early season vegetables than they could earn in the summer or if the land was used for corn. The village government also collects fees for the use of much of the land taken up by the greenhouses, since most of them lie on special parts of village land that are designated for vegetable farming and not allocated to individual families.

Alongside the working greenhouses were several others that were uncovered and crumbling, their land now used to grow corn instead of vegetables. Although the walls of these disused greenhouses looked like they had not been maintained in years, once abandoned they deteriorate within two or three years. Some of these crumbling walls were stained black, which I initially assumed was from corn stalk burning like in the rest of the village fields. However, as I investigated further, I discovered that the burn marks were actually from fires that had destroyed the greenhouses two years earlier.

According to two farmers I interviewed, the fires that destroyed their greenhouses were deliberately set. In their stories, the morning after a moonless night in the spring of 2007 they returned to their greenhouses to find them burned to the ground. The two blamed different culprits for the fires. One argued that another farm family, already making big profits from their

connect to political action in other parts of rural China. See O'Brien (2006)

183 See Chapter 6 for a full explanation of this conflict and how village memory and history are invoked in it.

own greenhouses, hired thugs from another village to burn them down to eliminate the competition. As evidence they cited village rumors and what they claimed was the bad reputation of the other family. But they also offered two other kinds of proof, both linked to the history of the collective era. They told me that the family they blamed was descended from people that had been designated landlords in the Land Reform, and thereafter they had been a consistent opponent of collectivization. In an interview, one member of the victimized family told me,

“That family have always been bad eggs (坏蛋), no matter what happened they could never be changed. In the past, there was nothing they could do, we all had to farm together and they had to work side by side just like anyone else. Nowadays bad people like that are up to their old tricks again, because they can. Now it's everyone for themselves, everyone liberates themselves (自己解放自己), so there's no stopping them. People will do anything to make money. In the past there was a way to control bad people, but now bad people are in charge. It's the whole society, if you line up one hundred cadres and shoot half of them in the head, you won't have executed an innocent person. There's really no hope for us poor farmers anymore.”

The two threads of evidence in this narrative are the personal qualities of “bad” families and the changed ethos of Reform era China. With respect to the former, the actions of the presumed culprits was explained by what was understood as the essential character of a landlord family, a class enemy that could never change their stripes. The past struggle against them personally was invoked as a reason for their present treachery, both because they wanted revenge for having been a target in Mao era campaigns and because they had always opposed the values of the collective era. The latter reason, the general social transformation of the Reform era, explained the family's motives simply because they were now free to show their true colors. From this perspective, the values of the present are on the side of the ruthless and money hungry.

The other family that had greenhouses burned down used a similar logic to blame a different culprit: the village government. According to their explanation, they had complained about a rise in the fee that the government would collect for the right to use the land, and threatened to take their case to the Changzhi suburban court. They claimed that the fee the government wanted to collect was higher per *mu* than that assessed for others, and that the reason for the difference was that they were known as allies of the former village leaders. The retired cadres had an ongoing conflict with the present leaders that dated to the 2003 village election which spilled over into other conflicts in the village and resulted in mistrust between the village authorities and people who had supported the former leaders.¹⁸⁴ According to their explanation, the village leaders hired thugs to burn down their greenhouses in retaliation for their political opposition and for resisting the fee increase. With no direct evidence and no real recourse, the family had no choice but to abandon the greenhouse unless they were willing to bend to the leaders' will. Their narrative of the burning of the greenhouse, although directed at a different culprit, broadly paralleled that of the other victimized family. They explained that officials in contemporary

¹⁸⁴ See Chapter 6 for the full story.

China are just looking to enrich themselves, and have no concern for the welfare of the average farmer. This they attribute to the loss of the core values of the collective era that have been betrayed in a change to a new kind of society. Even while describing the distance between promise and reality in the collective era, they maintain that, as opposed to the present, at least in the past there was that promise of a better future.

For many, the contrast between past and present does not stop at the collective era. One farmer, in bemoaning the drought plaguing Long Bow in 2009, explained that before Liberation, people used to pray for rain. Now, even though there has been a massive revival of religious activity in the village, he told me no one prays for rain. He said, “Now is the era of Reform, and the gods are just as free as the people. If they want to make it rain, it rains. If they don't, it doesn't.”¹⁸⁵

The sentiment behind this joke is a reflection of a sense of a lost collective purpose in contemporary China. Everyone is now free (or, at least, more free) to do as they please, which also means they are free to exploit their neighbors. Being responsible for oneself has meant rising incomes, but it has also meant rising income inequality and the reinvigoration of the fault line of class. To make sense of this rupture and its consequences, people invoke a contrast between past and present, expressed in stories of downfall, all the explanation most people need for their present struggles.

On top of the sense of lost purpose is a feeling of resignation that farmers are trapped in their fates. Whereas most people remember both the central role that peasants were supposed to play in the Maoist revolution and the traditional respect paid to farmers and farming in Chinese culture, most people believe those days are over. Perhaps in another generation, China will have made a complete transition from an agricultural to an industrial society, and the fates of these farmers will be forgotten. Perhaps such a change will be for the best. But for this generation, who remember something different and are experiencing a rapid erosion of their social and economic standing, the pain of change is present every day as they struggle to make a living on their small noodle fields.

185“现在改革开放了，神仙也像人一样自由了，求也不管用，想下就下不想下就不下”

Chapter 6: Displaced Time

In December 2008, I walked up the lane from the house where I was living to the Long Bow government headquarters to attend that year's village election. Like most villages in rural China, Long Bow holds elections for leadership positions every three years. The election that year was to fill five posts: Village Head (村委会主任, usually referred to as 村长 colloquially), two Vice Heads (村委会副主任, usu. 副村长), and two Village Government Committee Members (村委会委员).¹⁸⁶ Since it was two hours before the election was to begin there were very few people on the scene, although I recognized a few of the incumbent office-holders who I had gotten to know during the first three months of my fieldwork. One of them, the (soon to be re-elected) Vice Head, saw me taking a few pictures and cautioned me not to use my camera during the election: "See that cop over there, he's here to make sure everything goes smoothly. There shouldn't be any problems, but elections in other villages around here have had problems, so the Township authorities want to make sure that nothing looks bad. But even if there aren't any problems here, they don't want a foreigner around just in case. Don't worry, we know you so it will be fine. Just don't take any pictures." Several other people busied themselves with setting up stools, the public address system, and the front table where the delegates responsible for running the election would sit and take turns giving speeches. Jarringly loud techno music blared from speakers set up in two corners of the courtyard—strangely inappropriate and almost comical to me, but apparently wholly unremarkable to anyone else—while volunteers continued the preparations.

The Long Bow village headquarters is housed today in a large courtyard that was converted from the home of a resident who moved permanently to Shanxi's capital Taiyuan, allowing the government to relocate from the old, drafty two-story building across the street, now occupied by the village kindergarten. The open courtyard space was set up on the day of the election with about two hundred stools, arranged in rows so people coming to cast votes could listen to the requisite hackneyed speeches. Election officials prepared to lay out the rules, list the candidates, and, using the appropriate rhetoric drawn from the most current Party ideological guidelines, preemptively congratulate the people of the village for a "successful election, a contribution to building a New Socialist Countryside." However, as the scheduled hour approached, I was surprised how few people had shown up to cast their votes. Careful not to offend or touch on any sensitive topics, I tried to diplomatically ask an older villager who I had interviewed a few times there were so many fewer people than expected:

¹⁸⁶ Political administration at all levels in China is organized in parallel "State" and "Party" offices. At the village level, State offices are filled by direct popular election by all resident adults (over 18), whereas Party offices are determined by election or appointment inside the Communist Party. For example, the highest level of political authority at the village level is formally vested in an elected office of Village Head (normally called 村长), paralleled by an appointed office of Party Secretary (normally called 书记). Practically, although the authority of the two offices varies greatly by locale, the Party Secretary usually has more final decision-making power than the Village Head. Conflicts over the authority of these two offices are rife in contemporary rural China. See Liberthal (1995)



Long Bow village headquarters, set up for the 2008 election.

“It looks like there won't be very many people here today, doesn't it?” I asked.

“No one wants to come out and listen to a bunch of boring speeches,” he replied.

“But I saw a video of the 2002 election, and it looked like there were lots of people there. Anyway, you came today, didn't you?”

“I'm old, and I don't have anything to do, so I might as well come. Also, I think it's funny, watching these guys play around. It's all a joke, we all know who will win no matter what.”

Pretending to be surprised at the idea that the outcome of the election might not be in question, I asked, “What do you mean?”

“It's not like some other villages, where candidates give people a bag of detergent or flour for voting for them, and buy the election,” he replied. “But the incumbents will win for sure. They've got all their friends to support them, and they know how to put pressure on people. Didn't you notice that there isn't anyone running against the Village Head?”

“Yes, I noticed that, why isn't anyone running against him?”

“We shouldn't talk about that now. It's just, after the 2002 election, no one wanted to try to run

against Zhang Guangping.”

Deterred from asking more by his reticence, I let the question drop as more people filed in for the election. With the courtyard about half-full, the delegates responsible for running the election started their speeches. After nearly an hour of over-amplified and predictably dull speeches, another group of delegates brought out two stacks of ballots: one for Village Head and another for Vice Head and Committee Member. They also carried a large cardboard box, wrapped in red paper with a slot cut into the top; this was the Mobile Ballot Box (移动投票箱) into which older villagers who could not make the walk to the headquarters building would cast their votes. Once the delegates handed out the ballots, a free-for-all started as people jockeyed for space on the limited number of desks in the courtyard and the surrounding rooms, trying to find a flat surface so they could write down their votes. Being accustomed to principles of the secret ballot and one-person-one-vote, I was taken aback by the very public nature of the balloting, and the fact that many people were writing in and casting ballots on behalf of their family members. Some people filled in as many as seven or eight ballots, and others, mainly older villagers who didn't know how to write, asked friends to cast their vote for them. This chaotic procedure, combined with the traveling ballot box, meant that when the votes were tabulated later, the winning candidates averaged 1600 votes, even though less than 200 people actually showed up at the polling place.

As interesting as it was to watch the mechanics of the election that year, I was more curious to figure out the meaning of my friend's allusion to the 2002 election. That year, Zhang Guangping was elected for the first time as Village Head. Not coincidentally, that was also the year that Wang Jinhong formally retired from a thirty-plus-year career as village cadre. It was clear in 2008 that the legacy of the 2002 election was still strong in the minds of people in Long Bow, and if I was going to understand the current state of politics in the village, I would have to go back to the story of 2002. As I soon learned, the roots of the events around the 2002 election go back much further.

Displaced Time in the Present

The 2002 election was a bridge between the past—taking the form of individual and collective memories of conflicts spanning the entire post-Liberation history of the village—and the present in Long Bow. In other words, the past was a crucial source people drew on to make sense of the battle to become Village Head. As I pieced together the story from fragments and differing versions in the narrations of people on all sides of the election, it was clear that it would be impossible to view the contest as only about Zhang Guangping versus his rivals. Instead, the people I spoke with were convinced of the earlier origins of the events of 2002. Regardless of the objective truth of any of these narratives, the past was thought to provide a frame of explanation without which the election would be unintelligible. In interviews, my informants would frequently deny that the “surface” political manoeuvrings had anything to do with the real reasons for the conflict. Instead, they posited a subterranean origin, unknown to those unfamiliar

with the village's history, but perfectly evident to those who knew the deep roots of the story. In other words, the past was taken by many as the origin of the truth of the present. This understanding was tantamount to a claim that the combatants of the 2002 election were not actually battling over the present governance of the village. Rather, they were merely fighting the most recent contest in a war with roots that reach back to at least the first Land Reform in 1946. The victor would be empowered to tell their version of history—the primary question at stake, therefore, was who would determine the meaning of the past.

This anxiety about covering over the past, of the invisibility of historical roots, is simultaneously an effect of the post-Reform ideology of modernization and of villagers' sense of being left behind. Narratives of the 2002 election were usually animated by a feeling of resignation, a feeling that although the speaker might be aware of the origins of the problem in the past, the (in their view) pathological future-orientation of contemporary Chinese society meant that those problems could not be solved in the present. In other words, people were bound to the past, but also unable to interrogate it; aware of its effects, but powerless against its use as a subtle political weapon.

My informants' view of the 2002 election revealed a deep ambivalence about the stakes of the political process. Whereas an ahistorical perspective on village politics would point to its consequences in terms of, for example, the distribution of financial or political resources in the village, the “local” theory eschewed these explanations in favor of one that interpreted politics as unavoidably infected with the past. The people I spoke with did not believe that the outcome of that year's election, or any other election, would have beneficial effects on their lives or the collective life of the village. This is not, however, only because they lacked trust in the candidates, or thought that the government was rife with corruption, or that the wider social system made improvements in their lives essentially impossible. They believed those things passionately, and spoke of them frequently. But their pessimism was not simply driven by instrumental concerns. On the contrary, the drama of the election was evidence for them of the power of the past, which would always exceed the power of the present. Morbidly, most people maintained that the resolution of the past would finally come only when those personally involved passed away, taking with them the memories of a history that is both too powerful and too entrenched to release its grip.

In this respect, I argue that events in Long Bow reveal a more general problem in contemporary Chinese society. This problem, a sense of “displaced time,” is a consequence of repeated shifts in the meaning of the past and the mode of its narration in the past sixty years. Rapid, fundamental social changes—from the Republican period to the Mao era, accompanying the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, and most recently in the Reform era—were also shifts in the conceptualization of time and the interpretation of the past. At present, a coherent or settled sense of time has not emerged, and consequently the meaning of the past remains sharply contested. Naturally, it is not surprising to see old animosities animating present conflicts. However, reimposing order on the meaning of the past is especially problematic in the aftermath of a (perceived) social rupture; in fact, it may be the characteristic problem of all post-

socialist societies, which bear a strong resemblance to the sense of rupture pervading post-Mao China.¹⁸⁷ Chinese society is in the midst of an ongoing project to reinterpret its past, a process that is complicated by overlapping memories of radically different approaches to understanding the past that have prevailed since 1949.¹⁸⁸ In this chapter, we will see how in Long Bow this struggle over the interpretation of the past animated village politics in ways that echo problems in the larger context of contemporary Chinese society. In particular, a sense of displaced time has created an intermixing of the political idiom of the past with that of the present, so that, for example, specific language from the Cultural Revolution is mobilized alongside language drawn from the discourses of Economic Reform. These arguments exist side-by-side in a political environment driven by a need to properly account for the past, that has so far remained unsatisfied.

The Long Bow Village Election of 2002

The story of the events around the 2002 election begins with the return of Zhang Guangping to Long Bow in 1999. By that time, Wang Jinhong was nearly sixty years old, the mandatory retirement age for male Party cadres.¹⁸⁹ With an eye to his impending retirement, he knew it was time to start grooming a successor who would take over as village Party Secretary. The perfect candidate seemed to be Zhang Guangping—not only one of the most successful young people from Long Bow, but also his son-in-law. Zhang had been married to Wang Jinhong's eldest daughter Wang Yanxi a decade earlier, and soon after their marriage, the couple moved to the Provincial capital of Taiyuan, where Zhang had made a comfortable living working as a Party cadre for the Provincial power utility.

Because of the ill will that developed over the years beginning with the 2002 election, it was difficult for me to get Wang Jinhong to talk about the family history with his son-in-law. Zhang Guangping continually deflected my attempts to interview him directly, and his wife was also unwilling to be interviewed. This was doubtless because I was living in Wang's house, making them wary of the nature of my relationship with him. In the end, I had to rely on other people to fill in the story. The best source turned out to be Wang's wife, who has maintained a better relationship with her eldest daughter than Wang Jinhong has. Although usually a woman of few words, she recalled, “We thought Zhang Guangping was a good match for our daughter. He was smart and had a future, we knew he would do well in his career. I think *dadie* (our mutual term for Wang Jinhong) expected in the future he would take over as Secretary (*shuji*).”

If that was the plan when the marriage was initially conceived, for years things seemed to be going smoothly. Zhang Guangping and Wang Yanxi moved to Taiyuan, where he worked his

187 Outside the Chinese cultural context, the extensive literature on memory, history, and nostalgia in postsocialist East Europe and the former Soviet Union has documented multiple facets of this phenomenon: see, for example, Berdahl (2009), Boyer (2005), Boym (2002), Humphrey (2002), and Yurchak (2005)

188 Liu (2002) analyzes this process through the lens of shifting conceptions of time.

189 *De facto* this policy is not always applied equally. The equivalent age for female cadres is fifty-five as of 2010.

way up through the Party bureaucracy in the state-owned power utility. Then, in 1999 Wang brought his son-in-law and daughter back to Long Bow so Zhang could become village Party Vice-Secretary (副书记), in anticipation of taking over as Party secretary when Wang retired. Soon after I arrived in Long Bow, before I knew that Zhang Guangping was Wang Jinhong's son-in-law, I asked Wang casually about the what he thought of the current village leadership. Without revealing their complex relationship – a result of the intertwining of kinship and village politics – he told me, “Both the Secretary and Vice-Secretary were guys that I hand-picked.” Taken aback by his brief non-answer, I asked, “Well, what do you think of them? Are they good cadres?” His voice laden with sarcasm, he replied, “Mediocre.” (一般). But people later recalled that on the eve of the 2002 election there seemed to be no signs of the potential for a future rift. At that point, Zhang Guangping had worked for three years as vice-Secretary, acquitting himself well enough there was no question about him taking the job of village Secretary.

Although Wang Jinhong exercised a disproportionate amount of influence on local politics (and village life in general), the plan in 2002 involved more players than just he and Zhang Guangping. In a total changing of the guard to a new generation in village politics, in addition to Zhang taking over as Secretary, Li Yongpeng—the son of Wang's old friend Li Anhe—would be elected Village Head, and Gao Jianhua—the son of another old ally, Gao Quande—would take over as the head of village government enterprises. Li Yongpeng followed in his father's footsteps into higher education, and in 1991 earned a university diploma from Changzhi Teacher's University (长治市教育学院). Working first as a teacher and then as an administrator in the Changzhi suburbs near Long Bow, according to everyone I interviewed in 2008-09, he was highly respected in the village, and had a reputation as honest and intelligent. Although the position of Village Head is chosen by popular vote, Wang Jinhong and Li Anhe had good reason to believe that the election would go according to their plans, and Li Yongpeng would be elected easily.¹⁹⁰ After the election of Li Yongpeng, Gao Jianhua would then be safely appointed as manager of village enterprises.

As Li Anhe remembered the events in an interview in 2008, he, his son, and Wang Jinhong thought that everything was settled between them and Zhang Guangping, and the election would go off without a hitch. “Everything was resolved. Zhang Guangping won't admit it now, but he fooled us. He will say that his father-in-law was the one who was working behind the scenes, to keep him from having any real power after Secretary Wang retired. I can't say what Secretary Wang was thinking in his head, but I can say for sure that he thought that everything was decided, that Zhang Guangping would take over as Secretary, my son would be the Village Head, and everything would be fine. Some people say now that we [Wang Jinhong and Li Anhe] were trying to keep control, but look at me! I'm an old man, I'm not trying to tell the new generation

¹⁹⁰ As ample anthropological literature has shown, it would be a mistake to limit our understanding of these events by labeling them as a self-evident example of corruption. At this point I want only to repeat the events as my informants told them to me; at the same time, there is no question that in recalling the events years later, people who were in positions of power in the village described the election of 2002 as something directly under their control. See Haller (2005) and Yang (1994)

what to do.”

The problem started to emerge about two weeks before the election when Zhang Guangping suddenly decided to run for Village Head against Li Yongpeng. He had already been appointed a month earlier as Long Bow village Party Secretary, by decision of the next-highest levels in the Party bureaucracy (Machang Township Party Branch and Changzhi Suburban District Party Branch), and with the crucial backing of Wang Jinhong. Although it is technically illegal for the same person to hold both the village Party Secretary and Village Head posts, according to people in Long Bow the practice is not uncommon in villages in the region. Still, it was clear that Zhang Guangping was skirting the edge of what was legally possible by putting himself up for election. Gao Jianhua, the presumptive candidate to take over running the village enterprises, recalled, “We knew it was illegal for Zhang Guangping to be the Village Head, but we also knew it would be useless to try to appeal his candidacy. If you have the right connections, anything is possible. And he had the right connections. He had made plenty of friends in the higher government and party levels while he was Vice-Secretary. That guy, he really knows how to flatter those higher-ups. He lived in Taiyuan for a while, he knows how to wine and dine (应酬), and he had enough money that he could really put on a good show. You've seen his house, he's one of the richest people in Long Bow.”

The consequences for Li Yongpeng were immediate. Although he was well respected in the village, he knew there was very little chance he could beat Zhang Guangping. Zhang was well connected, wealthy, and had a bigger kin network in Long Bow. According to several people I talked with informally, even more important was that Zhang Guangping was already the village Secretary, and would continue in that post regardless of the outcome of the election. People were afraid to be on the wrong side of Zhang Guangping, since he would be the single most powerful person in the village after 2002. Whether or not that would be a determining factor in the election, Li Yongpeng decided not to test his luck, and withdrew his candidacy. Even with the support of Wang Jinhong, he expected to lose, and did not want to suffer the public embarrassment or run the risk of opposing Zhang Guangping. In a desperate move to try to salvage something from the election, Gao Jianhua decided to run for Village Head instead, since there would be no chance for him to take over as enterprise manager now that the deal with Li Yongpeng had collapsed. The election was then set as a contest between Zhang Guangping and Gao Jianhua, with the outcome already determined in most people's minds.

Because I was unable to interview Zhang Guangping directly, it is difficult to determine his motives for choosing to stand as a candidate. However, I was able to interview other people on all sides of the election, including staunch supporters of Zhang Guangping who thought it was absolutely the best thing for the village for him to be both Secretary and Village Head. Zhang's supporters generally claimed that Wang Jinhong (and Li Anhe to a lesser extent) was interested in maintaining his power over village politics after retirement, and was attempting to manipulate the process in their own interests. They argued Wang should step aside to allow a new generation to take the reins. One typical voice (who wished not to be identified in any way in my writing) told me, “Times have changed since the beginning of Economic Reform, but Wang

Jinhong is still stuck in the past. He doesn't know how to run a village except on the old collectivist mindset. Isn't he supposed to be retired? It was time for him to step down so that others could have a chance to run the village. Just look at how the village enterprises collapsed while Wang Jinhong was Secretary, unless it was farming, he didn't know how to run things. Even now, six years later, he still has his hands in everything, he just can't let it go. The only way was for Zhang Guangping to force him out, so we could move on.” Other people were not necessarily supporters or opponents of Zhang, but explained that he ran for Village Head simply because he knew he would win, and could consolidate all the official power of the village government for himself. The majority of people I interviewed, as we will see, took a longer historical view of the election, and interpreted Zhang Guangping's decision differently.

Whatever his motivations, the election ended in a landslide. The final vote tally was 1254 for Zhang Guangping to 212 for Gao Jianhua. Li Yongpeng avoided the situation entirely by taking a job as the superintendent of the Changzhi Suburban District high schools. I obtained a copy of a video taken of the announcement of the election results that demonstrates the tension of the situation. Ironically, the job of announcing the results fell to Wang Jinhong—as a respected person who technically had no special legal standing relative to the election, he had been appointed head observer of the voting process by Machang Township officials. Although he is a noted story teller with a relentless sense of humor, on official business Wang Jinhong rarely breaks from a serious demeanor, so on the video it is difficult to see at first how angry he actually was. But when it came time for him to announce the final results, he handed the tally sheet to another delegate, and quickly abandoned the stage.

Eruptions of the Past

In his book *The Age of Wild Ghosts*, Erik Mueggler describes the haunting of Zhizuo village, Yunnan Province. He argues that the traumas of the Mao era, especially those arising from state policy during the Great Leap Forward, inaugurated what local people call “the age of wild ghosts,” a time when people who died badly returned to possess or kill their descendants. Mueggler explains possessions in Zhizuo as “eruptions into the present of unreconciled fragments of the past,” and his book traces how a variety of ritual practices were used to grapple with the ghosts and attempt to heal the wounds of the past.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, he is adamant that the language of haunting is *not* a mere metaphor of the “true” history of the village; rather, haunting provides the only possible language with which people in Zhizuo can conceive of the past in a way that captures the truth of their experience of suffering.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Mueggler (2001), p. 3

¹⁹² As Mueggler puts it, “[The language of haunting] did not 'mystify' or 'misrecognize' the state by refashioning it metaphorically as the realm of the sky, from which power descends. ... Instead, this phrase participated in a very different language, with different aims. This was the language of the ritualized poetics of materials and words to which much of this book has been devoted. It was a resource for thinking *past the limits* of the vocabulary of political determinations and effects toward that which was most fundamental about state power to the lives infused by it.” Mueggler (2001), p. 316

This sense of being haunted by the past was familiar to me from the language of people in Long Bow. In explaining the present (in this case, the conflict around the 2002 election), my informants frequently invoked the language of haunting to explain why history could have such power to continue to determine events. Their usage, unlike that in Zhizuo, was ironic, in that the people they claimed were “haunting” the village were still alive, and because they did not ascribe a supernatural power to the agents of the haunting. As one villager told me, “The old cadres hang around the village government headquarters like ghosts, hiding in the shadows. There's no way to be free of their influence until they die off.” Deepening the irony, this kind of haunting could not end until the ghosts die. In contrast to Zhizuo, haunting was a metaphor in the language of the Long Bow village election. Still, the framework it provided was persuasive, because it conveyed a powerful sense of being unable to escape the past. From the perspective of the average villager, the power held by those capable of invoking the past to influence events in the present was effectively supernatural in a double sense. The first, and most simple, is that they felt powerless to resist it. More significantly, the remoteness in time of the events at the center of the conflict meant that they lay beyond any possibility of being altered. This is precisely one source of history's power: the sense that the past is given because it has already occurred. Because we cannot act in the past, if a narrative of past events becomes fixed, it draws power from the notion that one cannot change history. This contributed to a tragic sense of the past in Long Bow that motivated a feeling of resignation; because a conflict has already happened, we are trapped by its aftereffects.

However, unlike in Mueggler's explanation, the agents who brought the past into the present were themselves not beyond human understanding. Whereas ghosts in Zhizuo operated according to an inscrutable logic that could only be affected by ritual (or magical) means, people in Long Bow thought that they understood perfectly the motivations and strategies of those who invoked the past. Thus Mueggler's phrasing of the “eruptions of the past into the present” takes on a very different sense when applied to Long Bow. In Zhizuo, the word eruption conveyed a sense that the traumas of the past produced a remainder that could not be erased, and would continue to reappear, subject to the whims of supernatural powers. In Long Bow, the past erupted into the present only via the will of identifiable agents, people who were neighbors or relatives, and whose behavior was in principle understandable. To be trapped by the past in Long Bow, then, effectively meant to feel subject to the authority of certain people to narrate the past.

Thus according to this understanding, the past was something that was being actively produced by the interventions of particular people. There is a tension inherent in this sense of history: on the one hand, the past is past, and therefore cannot be altered, but on the other, people were keenly aware that there was a contest to determine the meaning of the past at the heart of village politics. The key to unraveling this tension is in the choice between memory versus forgetting. Even if the truth of past events is beyond alteration, it is not inevitable that they must be remembered. The determinant of how the past would have power in the present, therefore, was what would be remembered publicly and collectively: to be able to decide the content of a collective sense of the past, even if people privately disagreed with its narrative, was to dictate

the shared story that constitutes the framework of understanding for the present as well.

In Long Bow a sense of weariness on the part of some betrayed a desire to forget the past. However, this desire to forget was far from universal. Remembering the past was clearly most important to those who had a personal stake in mobilizing it in the present. As people in Long Bow described it, the primary stakes of the contest to determine the meaning of the past were about whose version of history could be told, and therefore who would have the moral sanction to control village politics. This reciprocal relationship between narrating the past and local authority is another source of tension in the production of a collective history. On the one hand, those with authority are empowered to tell their version of the past; on the other, the telling of a particular version of the past empowers certain people at the expense of others. In other words, (local) authority is in part built upon a particular narrative of the past, and one of the things that having authority does is enable one to tell history. In the realm of village politics, the ability to tell one's version of the past is crucial in several ways. It was a resource with which one would fight against rivals. It mobilized moral and ethical arguments in favor of one's political power. And it worked to position the teller within a shared narrative of the past and present that made sense of the distribution of power.

An examination of the narratives around the 2002 election reveals a sense of displaced time, especially in terms of the use of seemingly anachronistic political language. Stories of the election drew on a political idiom that was a product of the political history of the village and of China in general. Although sometimes inverted or distorted from their original meanings, the very language that was used to interpret events and to attack opponents in the present was taken from earlier discourses, especially those of the Cultural Revolution. In this language, the past was brought to bear on the present as the idiom through which village politics was contested. In terms of our understanding of the problems of memory and politics in contemporary China, then, this chapter contributes a specific focus on the continuation of the political language of the Mao era in the present.

Tangled Roots

“That Li Deyin, he's a real bastard. I can't even remember all the bad stories about him, there's too many. The big story though, that wasn't a secret, the whole village was up in arms,” Wang Jinhong aggressively gesticulated as he repeated a story I had already heard him tell in bits and pieces in the month after the 2008 election. Living in Wang Jinhong's house gave me the opportunity to hear his stories on a daily basis, in addition to the many other advantages it offered in getting me access to other interview subjects. At the same time, it also closed off other possibilities, other sides of the story that I would have to work much harder to put together. My approach, given my inevitable positionality in the village, was to treat each story as a narrative that could tell me something about the teller, as a living force in the village, and as something to be understood in its own right, rather than something either true or false. Ascertaining the absolute truth of the history of Wang Jinhong and Li Deyin, for example, was impossible, but

that fact is less important than how all stories of the conflict circulated in Long Bow and invoked events far outside their original scope.

If one of the advantages of living in Wang Jinhong's house was access to his stories on a daily basis—animated by his zeal for story telling and deep connection to the history of the village—the disadvantage was that I heard his stories whether I wanted to or not. Although I was in the midst of piecing together the complicated story that has become the focus of this chapter, the particular day that Wang Jinhong decided to lay out the entirety of his version of the story, I was not really in the mood. Still feeling the effects of too much *baijiu* at a wedding banquet the night before, I tried to focus on my notebook, get down as much as possible of the story, and nod my head in agreement in all the right places. “Yes, he really was a bastard, can you tell me more?” He was more than happy to oblige.¹⁹³

“It was in the 1980s, Old Li had become Village Head at the same time I was Secretary. That was before there was a real election for the position, so he was just appointed by the township government. I knew he was a bad egg already, but a lot of other people didn't know. But they found out,” Wang continued. According to his version of the story, told to me in January 2009, the animosity between these two powerful local figures started when they were serving together as village leaders. Several other people confirmed parts of the story, and I was also able to confirm some details via village government documents that I managed to read while claiming to be looking for statistics about village production in the '80s. As best I could determine, this version of the story reaches its most spectacular moment in a rape accusation and an attempted suicide in 1984.

As the story goes, sometime in 1983 Li Deyin took a liking to a woman in the village. She – only named Anonymous (无名) in all my sources – was already married and had a small child, but her husband was away from the village most days, working and living in a coal mine in the mountains just east of Long Bow. Old Li (as he was usually called by my informants) took advantage of this opportunity, sneaking into her courtyard late one night and raping her. Starting on that night, Old Li, telling his own wife that he was out late drinking and playing mahjong, began spending every available night in the woman's bed. Afraid to resist or accuse the Village Head, the woman kept the secret even from her husband. To forestall any suspicion that might arise from other villagers who noticed how much time Old Li was spending away from home, he started to befriend the husband of his victim. Whenever the husband was back in the village, Old Li made sure to go out at night with him, plying him with alcohol and cigarettes. As Wang Jinhong put it, “He really drew the husband in, always treating him like they were brothers (称兄道弟).” Eventually the husband learned of the attacks, but he was also too afraid to accuse Old Li, since it would be his word against the sitting Village Head's. Away from the village most of the time, even though he was aware of what was going on, there was nothing the husband could do.

193 Berreman (1962) describes a similar experience of “impression management.”

The situation continued for nearly a year until the woman became pregnant. Ashamed, and knowing that the pregnancy would make people suspicious since her husband was away working in the mine, the woman felt she had no solution except to commit suicide. In those days, in the center of Long Bow where the village square is today there was a small pond where people would wash their clothes (the pond was filled in in the late 1980s). According to Wang Jinhong's story, the woman threw herself in the pond, but before she drowned, a witness ran to find him. "I was at home, where we would often do village business in those days since the old headquarters building was so drafty. We [he and two other village officials] ran over to the pond, you know, it was really nearby. The water wasn't very deep, and we ran in to pull her out. We made it in time to save her life, and took her to the hospital in Changbei. Ever since then, she's been crippled in one leg." Sadly, doctors were unable to save the baby.

After the suicide attempt it was impossible to conceal the story. Led by Wang Jinhong, the village government undertook an investigation into the case that resulted in an admission of guilt by Old Li and his ejection from the village government. Before Wang Jinhong retired from his official position in 2002, he made copies of reams of village documents, which he stores in an upstairs room of his house. Among those documents, there is a copy of the official finding by the village government – including Li's signature of admission – and a copy of the document ejecting Li from the Party in 1985.

This story, mainly told to me by Wang Jinhong but also in parts by several other villagers, was offered by some as an explanation of the conflict over the 2002 village election. According to their theory, Li Deyin seized the election, perfectly coinciding with Wang Jinhong's retirement, to get revenge. One informant told me, "Those two were enemies for years. On the surface, the problem in 2002 was between Zhang Guangping and Secretary Wang, but everyone knows that there was more going on behind the scenes. The truth is that all of Secretary Wang's enemies started working on Zhang Guangping, convincing him that he should cut his father-in-law out of the deal. You know, Wang Jinhong is really controlling, it's not surprising that Secretary Zhang wouldn't want him around still telling him what to do after he was retired. So he was easy to convince. The point is, Li Deyin knew he could get revenge by stirring up trouble between those two."

But there are two unresolved questions about this explanation of the conflict. First, according to several other informants, although the animosity between Wang Jinhong and Li Deyin was no secret in Long Bow, Old Li didn't have enough allies or respect in the village to mobilize sufficient pressure to make Zhang Guangping willing to betray his own father-in-law. The second reason, related to the first, is that the conflict between Wang Jinhong and Li Deyin actually goes back much further than the 1980s.

According to the majority of the people I interviewed about the 2002 election and its roots in village history, they believed that the real source of the conflict was in the Cultural Revolution (GPCR). In Chapter 3, I detailed the history of Long Bow in the Cultural Revolution via the memory of Li Anhe as he recorded it in his written village history. Li Deyin (no relation to Li

Anhe) did not figure into that story as a central character, since he remained primarily in the background amidst the most fervent attacks on Wang Jinhong and his allies. However, Old Li was a well-known supporter of the village faction that attacked the existing leadership that included then-Vice Secretary Wang Jinhong. To recap that story in brief, during the height of the GPCR in 1967, a group of villagers organized in two factions attacked local leaders for being capitalist roaders and counter-revolutionaries. They briefly seized control of the village government by occupying the headquarters and taking possession of the village seal, which would, in theory, entitle them to control all official business, including access to ration coupons for grain and cooking oil. Although their control of the seal was very brief, thwarted by a general strike supported by four of the six village work teams, the rebel faction continued to mobilize the rhetoric of the GPCR in public criticism sessions and posters pasted periodically around the village. Open attacks continued until 1973 when Wang and his allies finally regained most of their former power.

The animosities ignited during the GPCR naturally did not die with the end of the open struggle. Driven underground by a changed political environment, problems would continue to emerge in the following decades, more or less openly, but always in a way that was understood by people in the village as a continuation from an earlier era. The conflict of the 2002 election was interpreted by my informants in that context, as a partially concealed but fully recognizable eruption of the past into the present.

But it is not enough to claim that the past was made present in some way in the 2002 election; we must go a step deeper and ask precisely how those connections were made, what arguments were persuasive, and how they made sense to the people of Long Bow. One way to begin to answer these questions is to look at how Li Deyin managed to gain the support of allies in the village. As I argued earlier, Old Li, although not without his own resources, by himself likely could not have convinced Zhang Guangping to subvert the original succession plan. He was successful mainly by mobilizing two kinds of arguments: first, claims of historical grievances, and second, accusations that Wang Jinhong and other old village leaders had led with an excessively “collectivist” mentality.

The claims of historical grievances were essential for forming an alliance among old rivals of the village leadership, especially those who had been supporters or members of the rebel faction during the GPCR. Although the ultimate victory of Wang Jinhong's group in the struggle and the subsequent decades of their control of the public sphere marginalized the rebels and prevented them from voicing their opinions too openly, in certain parts of the village the sense of historical animosity ran deep. In particular, in the south part of Long Bow originally delimited during the Great Leap Forward as Work Teams 5 and 6 (五、六队, terms that people still use today to identify those parts of the village) was home to much of the opposition. Teams 5 and 6 were the two that refused to participate in the strike in 1967 that reinstated the village leadership, and had been led during the GPCR by allies of the rebel leaders.

Those Teams were (and are) also home to a majority Catholic population. Today approximately

one-fifth Catholic, Long Bow, like many villages in Southeast Shanxi, has had a significant Catholic population ever since the quite successful evangelism of Dutch Catholic missionaries in the late nineteenth century. Religious divisions in Long Bow were a major source of conflict around the initial Land Reform and have continued to be in several other ways into the present.¹⁹⁴ Although I have found no evidence that the conflicts originating in the GPCR were motivated by religious difference, and none of the main players either in the 1960s or around the 2002 election were Catholic, according to people in the village the concentration of Catholics in the neighborhoods of Teams 4 and 5 contributes to these long-standing problems. Many Catholics in the village told me that they feel that in the past, the village leadership was always hostile to them and their religion, causing tension between the south part of the village and the rest of Long Bow. The religious and geographic division of the village was certainly a factor in 2002, since the old rivals that Old Li called on for support were with only one exception residents of the south part of Long Bow.



Easter celebration outside Long Bow's Catholic Church.

¹⁹⁴Hinton (2008) Chs. 5 and 20 detail the religious conflicts in Long Bow in the late 1940s.

In order to gain the support of this network of rivals, Old Li made use of a sense of having been wronged during the GPCR. Again, although it was difficult for me to get interviews with most of the main opponents of Wang Jinhong since they knew of our affiliation, I managed to get parts of their side of the story by interviewing other people. In particular, I gathered information by interviewing their family members and by listening in on public conversations that referenced the conflicts. The son of one of Wang Jinhong's opponents in 2002 told me, "I think this doesn't do any good, my father should let the past go. Secretary Wang is old, and his enemies are old, but they will never give up. My father is still angry because he was unfairly lumped in with the rebels, even though he had nothing to do with attacking the leaders. It was a different time in those days, things were really crazy. Who can say who was wrong? But it is really unfair, the leaders have had a grudge against my father all these years. I'm glad there is a new generation in charge now, because they leave us alone."

The story of this particular informant's father is representative of many stories that I was told of having been lumped in with the rebels, usually because of a kin tie or friendship, and having suffered as a result in the recriminations after the leaders regained control in 1971. As vice-leader (副队长) of Work Team 5, he had overseen Team production for several years starting in 1964. In 1971, he was taken into custody by the village government and held for a week on charges that he had misappropriated several loads of sand that had been allotted to Team 5 for house construction. The allegation was that he had struck a deal with a neighboring village to trade the sand – unneeded because there were no houses under construction in Team 5 – to the other village for a supply of sweet potatoes. The son told me, "Of course he did it, it was the right thing to do. These days everyone would stand up and applaud you for being enterprising if you did that. But back then they accused him of being a capitalist. In reality, the village leaders were just trying to get revenge on people that they thought were friends of the rebels, and my father got lumped in because they were putting pressure on him." It was an ironic twist, given that one of the main accusations leveled by the rebels against Wang Jinhong and the village leadership only a few years earlier was that they were "taking the capitalist road."¹⁹⁵

Another family member of one of the old rebels told me, "The 2002 election was a chance for my father to get revenge on Wang Jinhong, it was as simple as that. Old Li wanted revenge most of all, and he got all these people who had conflicts with Secretary Wang to go and talk to Zhang Guangping. He's never liked his father-in-law anyway. Old Li was the one who got it all together, and he came to people he knew still had a problem with Secretary Wang because they had opposed him in the past. Most of those things go way back, all the way to the Cultural Revolution. There's never been a way to let that stuff go, so they just keep fighting about it."

In another twist, another kind of rhetoric mobilized in 2002 by Li Deyin to unite opposition was a play on the contradictory political ideologies of past and present. The substance of this accusation was that as leaders, Wang Jinhong and his allies had done damage to the economic fortunes of the village by being excessively collectivist. In the context of the post-Mao Reform

195 See Chapter 3

era, accusations of being a collectivist resonated with contemporary political rhetoric, that, although still nominally socialist, praised flexibility and an entrepreneurial spirit as the keys to the “theory of scientific development.”¹⁹⁶ Simultaneously, the standards of Reform era ethics denigrate egalitarianism as hopelessly stuck in the past. Wang is certainly a critic of the Reforms, and is known in the village as a believer in collective agriculture. His opponents in the 2002 election seized on that reputation (as we saw in Chapter 2, built in part by his association with William Hinton), as well as his record as leader to attack him for being an anachronism. This language especially resonated with younger people in the village, who saw the old generation as represented by Wang as unable to grasp the needs of a village in contemporary China, having been trained and grown up in a fundamentally different (i.e. collectivist) system. A younger village government cadre who tried to remain neutral and navigate the conflict in 2002 said to me, “Zhang Guangping thought that Secretary Wang had no idea how to run a village anymore. He was stuck in the past, still trying to do things they way he always had. Look at how the village enterprises collapsed when he was in charge, he didn't know how to run them, because all he knew was collective agriculture. If you compare Long Bow with other villages around here, like Machang for example, why do you think we are still so poor? It's because Secretary Wang was still trying to be a collectivist, when times have changed.”

The strongest proof for most people of Wang Jinhong's “excessively collectivist” mindset was the failure of several village enterprises launched in the 1990s. In particular, one of these enterprises was started as a joint venture with William Hinton, who invested over \$30,000 of his own money. A factory was set up to produce pipe fittings and other stamped metal goods on the south edge of the village, across the main highway from the village cement factory. The exact reasons for the failure of the enterprise are complex and murky, but the significant element for the story of the 2002 election was that many people in Long Bow believed that the enterprise failed due to the mismanagement of Wang Jinhong. Specifically, they claimed that Wang had put people in positions of responsibility in the factory that had no experience and no concept of how to make the enterprise successful. According to this accusation, Wang chose people for important positions based on personal ties and their political attitude; in other words, he thought a commitment to the proper political perspective should determine the leadership of the factory. This explanation of the failure of the enterprise contains strong echoes of the language of the Mao era, especially the claim that Wang sought to “put politics first” in making practical decisions, a mindset identified now as an outdated relic of the Maoist past. During my research, several people reiterated the claim that the failure of village enterprises under Wang's watch was proof that his thinking and way of doing things was outmoded, trapped in collectivism, and should be superseded by a new entrepreneurial attitude.¹⁹⁷

The irony of this accusation was that during the GPCR the rebels had attacked Wang Jinhong precisely for not being collectivist enough, and for running the village as an enterprise, labeling

¹⁹⁶ Zhang (2008)

¹⁹⁷ See Ong (2006) for an analysis of the rise of neoliberal logics of entrepreneurialism and flexibility in post-Reform China.

him a “capitalist roader” (走资派).¹⁹⁸ In this context, the language of the Cultural Revolution was still powerful in 2002, albeit in inverted form. Having positioned themselves as rebels in 1967 by speaking against orthodoxy defined in one way, in a new political and discursive environment they rebelled again by using language that echoed that of the past, this time taking the opposite side. In effect, they revised history in the process, or at least their place in it. Wang Jinhong was recast as the representative of a bygone era and a collectivist mentality, whereas his opponents stood for the future. Again drawing directly on the political language of the Mao era, one informant sympathetic to the new village leadership explained, “He [Wang Jinhong] has a serious thought problem (思想问题很严重). His thinking is too collectivist (集体化), and he was holding back the village. He was always like that, taking to extremes to make himself look good. It's better now that we have leaders who can see the direction China is going, and know the correct way to go.” In this battle, the question of the political past and present were intermingled, making the stakes simultaneously into the definition of history and control of the village leadership.

Factions, Past and Present

The social and discursive organization of the conflict was also drawn from a legacy of the GPCR: the idea of the faction. As I described in Chapter 3, the formation of and battles between factions were widespread in China during the GPCR, and even prior to the founding of factions in Long Bow, people in were very aware that that form of political organization was sweeping the country. Students at Lu'an Middle School were also an important vector carrying the ideology of factionalism into the village both materially and discursively.

Reflecting this history, in 2002 the divisions in the village were practically identical with those from 1967-68. The same people (now involving their children) were still organized in the same groupings, even where they did not necessarily correspond with other fault lines of social division in the village. In an even stronger continuity, the same terminology was still used to describe these factions: during my fieldwork in 2008-09, people still used the terms “Defend Mao” and “loyalists” on one side, versus “Shang'gan Ridge,” “Stormy Petrels,” and “rebels” on the other, to refer to the people arrayed behind Wang Jinhong and Zhang Guangping respectively.

The persistence of these forms of organization and political idioms was perfectly logical to people in Long Bow. How else to describe a situation that was conceived in terms of continuity with the past? In the last analysis, the conflict in 2002 was just the latest instance of a historical battle, a battle that would determine whose version of the past would be told, and who would therefore come to control village politics.

At the same time, although a history of personal animosities certainly lies at the heart of this case, that reason alone is insufficient as an explanation of both the exact nature of the language

¹⁹⁸ Hinton (1983), p. 528

used and the frame of interpretation that people in the village applied to the conflict. For the individual actors, revenge might have been the most important consideration, rendering accusations into mere strategies. However, the fact that the language around the 2002 election mirrored that of the GPCR is an important marker of the power GPCR political language still holds, and of the resonance that people still feel with its forms, despite a radically different surrounding political and economic reality.

Furthermore, although the ongoing conflicts in Long Bow are not ideologically stable, they are nevertheless still centrally concerned with the (re)definition of history. The stakes for Zhang Guangping personally were most centrally about his control over the village government. But for that control to be realized, he still was inevitably embroiled in a fight that had begun before he was born. For the older villagers who remember the GPCR and its aftermath, there has been no moving on.

And yet, despite the ongoing power of that history to determine events in the present, it is in part the inability to openly and honestly confront the past that paradoxically gives it such power. I felt this keenly during my fieldwork, where although people frequently told stories about the GPCR in private, there was a pervasive sense of a black hole in history, a “lost ten years,” about which there was no possible rationalization. As we saw in the case of the opening of the new National Museum (Chapter 1), the official national rhetoric of the Reform era has contributed to this inability to cope directly with the GPCR, deeming it off-limits for public discussion or official historiography, treating it as something best forgotten. But as several scholars have argued, the act of forgetting often depends on the emergence of a corresponding settled account of the past, an account that can reduce experiential differences, rationalize the events, and put them in a more or less agreed upon interpretive framework.¹⁹⁹ According to this theory, without a persuasive settling of the accounts, the memory of the GPCR in contemporary China will continue to emerge in distorted forms in the present. On the other hand, for many with living memories of that period, forgetting is not only difficult, it is not even desirable. Both the grievances and the rhetoric of that period continue to be powerful, so powerful that many informants told me that it was inevitable that the election of 2002 would turn on the memory of events more than thirty years earlier.

199 See, for example, Connerton (1989)

Conclusion: Surfaces and Depths

Long Bow is a small place, but even after living there for almost a year, I would come across something unexpected every once and a while. Walking down a village lane that I hadn't explored much, I turned right into a cluster of nearly collapsed courtyard walls. Although the houses were still being used, it appeared they hadn't been repaired in decades. Then, above the gate of one house where auspicious phrases are usually displayed, I saw five characters I didn't expect: Long Live Chairman Mao (毛主席万岁).



"Long Live Chairman Mao."

The words were faded, stained by dirt streaming off the decaying walls, and torn at the edges.

But still, there they were, reminding anyone who happened by of the slogans that mobilized so much energy, so much hope, and so much violence only a generation ago. Eventually, the characters above the door will disappear completely. Maybe, before long, the gate will be torn down to build a gleaming new house. But change sometimes doesn't happen as quickly or as smoothly as we expect.

For the people of Long Bow village, the past is always present. For some, personal memories of collectivism, the Cultural Revolution, or other dramatic events form a lens through which they apprehend the present. For people too young to have direct memories of the Mao era, the past haunts the present by determining the contours of contemporary village politics, locking them into a struggle that predates their birth. In either case, making sense of life rests on an understanding of the past. In turn, every action contributes to a process of coming to understand the past, because the past is something made everyday by simply dwelling in a house, telling a story, or farming a field.

In the context of a problematic recent history, these everyday practices of producing the past themselves become problematic. This tension is one element of the condition of life in contemporary China, where competing memories, narratives, and interpretations lie in uneasy juxtaposition. Often, this unease causes the past to erupt into politics, sometimes in obvious forms and more often in subtle ways. On the surface, China today has moved beyond its troubled recent past. But the ability to move on is limited if the only choice in thinking about the past is forgetting. In truth, forgetting can only be a counterpart to remembering; memory will always be there, perhaps in subterranean fashion, but still exerting its power in the present.

In Long Bow, the power of the past is expressed in a diversity of forms. We saw the production of history in museums, linking the story of Hinton to the village in general and Wang Jinhong in particular. In this form, the past as memorial makes an essential contribution to the production of local authority. Exercising a different kind of authority, Li Anhe and Zhang Lijun created documents that narrate other parts of history, with different intentions. Those documents demonstrated the importance of the social life of a narrative—that is, how a story, once materialized, circulates in a new way and becomes a focal point around which other narratives coalesce. The built form of houses provided another view of the materiality of the past. In our most intimate spaces, we experience the past as the condition of possibility of dwelling. Only by linking the house to a story of the past can the space become a meaningful lived space, a process of transforming a house into a home. Working the land invokes the past in another way, by serving as a daily reminder of the downfall of farming from the collectivist past to the present. The experience of the past in that case was a function of the political, social, and economic changes that have marginalized millions. To be a farmer in Long Bow today is to live in two shadows: the shadow of lost promise and the shadow of contemporary irrelevance. The formal political arena of Long Bow demonstrates a last form of the past in the present, that of the mobilization of memories and narratives as weapons. In this case, the effectiveness of the weapon rests on the ability to conceal its sharpness. The open secret behind the conflict in village politics was cloaked in formal political language and legal structures, in the process

paradoxically ensuring the continued power of the past.

Although in less than two generations the people of Long Bow have lived through two systems that seek to destroy the significance of the past, they continue to affirm the power of history everyday. Where Maoism failed to create an exclusively forward-looking society, a new, global neoliberal capitalist China will also certainly fail. Here's hoping the people of Long Bow will nevertheless be able to find a happier reconciliation of past, present, and future.

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