



Reverberations of Collective Traumatic Memories from a South Korean Movie to June Fourth and Jiabiangou

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ARTICLE



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ABSTRACT

This article begins by probing why *A Taxi Driver*, a South Korean film banned in China, received high accolades from so many Chinese netizens and why Chinese websites suddenly deleted all mention of the film—including user comments—on October 3, 2017. This incident reveals a stark contrast between two countries: the democratic South Korean government has created and maintained the collective memory of the 1980 Gwangju Democratization Movement and reconciled past injustices, whereas the authoritarian Chinese regime continues to erase the memory of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Pro-democracy Movement and June Fourth Massacre and to forbid any discussions and investigations into the truth. After discussing the movie's transnational reverberations of collective traumatic memories, this article suggests that the taboo on discussing June Fourth has driven some concerned authors to write about past disasters caused by Mao Zedong and the CCP (Chinese Communist Party). Examining writer Yang Xianhui's (1946–) strategies to both dodge censorship and unearth traumatic memories from inmates of the Jiabiangou labor camp between 1957 and 1961, this article argues that Yang's stories, along with works by other authors and filmmakers on Jiabiangou, will create reverberations of traumatic memories, contribute to collective memory, and indirectly resist the state violence that represses memory of CCP-manufactured tragedies.

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INTRODUCTION

The South Korean film *A Taxi Driver* (*Taeksi unjeonsa*; directed by Jang Hoon and released in South Korea in August 2017) was well received in Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. However, it was banned by the PRC (People's Republic of China) government. Nevertheless, a good number of mainland Chinese managed to access the film through unofficial channels and praised it highly online. Mysteriously, though, all comments from netizens on and information about the film suddenly disappeared from Chinese websites by the end of the day on October 3, 2017. What happened?

To answer, I begin with an examination of the transnational resonances generated by this South Korean movie on Chinese websites. Then, I highlight the reasons that mainland Chinese audiences might be inclined to admire and comment enthusiastically on the film. Through a discussion of memory, I argue that while the South Korean government has worked to reconcile past injustices in the bloody suppression of the 1980 Gwangju Uprising (a.k.a. the Gwangju Democratization Movement, May Eighteenth, or Kwangju Uprising) and has encouraged the collective memory of this event, the PRC government refuses to acknowledge its violent crackdown on the 1989 Tiananmen Square Pro-democracy Movement and forbids any discussion and memory of the event. I then suggest that the PRC regime's cover-up, strict censorship, and enforced amnesia regarding the 1989 traumatic event have awakened a number of writers to an awareness of state brutality and to the urgent need to investigate and preserve historical truth and memory.

One such author, the morally courageous Yang Xianhui (1946–), brought back buried traumatic memories of the little-known Jiabiangou labor camp through interview-based stories published between 2000 and 2003. Numerous innocent people were wrongly condemned as “rightists” and persecuted through the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957–58) that was launched by Mao Zedong. From October 1957 to late 1960, over three thousand “rightists” were incarcerated in the Jiabiangou camp in the northwestern region of Gansu Province. Many perished from hard labor, hunger, cold, and mistreatment. By January 1961, only a few hundred survived. In order to reclaim the long-covered-up Jiabiangou tragedy for the collective memory, Yang Xianhui first excavated its buried past and then employed various strategies to both evade censorship and represent the specific realities of the traumatic event. By contrast, in shooting his film, *A Taxi Driver* director Jang Hoon enjoyed the resources, support, and freedom afforded by a democratic country.

While written on a different traumatic event and under a very different political context from that of *A Taxi Driver*, Yang Xianhui's stories similarly adopt a grassroots perspective—by which I mean the point of view of

innocent, ordinary people—and focus on the physical details in the daily lives of people suffering under state violence. Despite working in different media, both Yang and Jang emphasize human relationships and feelings under extreme circumstances and encourage the reader or viewer to assume the role of an empathetic witness. Jang's film is an outstanding addition to South Korea's well-developed “cultural memory” and “memory industry” surrounding the Gwangju Uprising, while Yang's work lays the foundation for the construction of an informal type of cultural memory of the Jiabiangou labor camp.

TRANSNATIONAL RESONANCES: A SOUTH KOREAN MOVIE AND THE BRIEF RETURN OF A TRAUMATIC MEMORY IN CHINA

Why did the PRC government ban this South Korean film? Why did the PRC internet censor all mention of and comments about the film? Directed by Jang Hoon, *A Taxi Driver* is loosely based on actual historical events and some real-life figures. It depicts events taking place during the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, as General Chun Doo-hwan's troops blockade the city, cutting off communications and forbidding foreign reporters from entering. Against this backdrop, a taxi driver, known as Mr. Kim, inadvertently helps the German journalist Jürgen Hinzpeter (1937–2016) sneak into Gwangju to film, document, and eventually report abroad on the military suppression of the pro-democracy movement.¹ Initially an impoverished and simple-minded widower concerned only with making enough money to support himself and his daughter, the driver changes his views, from being unsympathetic to sympathetic toward the student demonstrators, and he later decides to help the demonstrators. The turning point for Mr. Kim occurs as he witnesses the military junta's bloody crackdown on peaceful student demonstrators and the suffering of innocent citizens. And he then becomes aware of the junta's blocking of the truth, its cover-up, and subsequent false reporting. Without this driver's change of heart and courageous assistance, the truth could not have been made known to the outside world. The Gwangju Uprising inspired other movements in the 1980s, finally leading to democratization in South Korea in 1987. The movie ends with Hinzpeter returning to a democratized South Korea to receive an award in 2003. For an authoritarian regime such as the PRC that has cracked down on all democratization movements, a film that exposes Korean military suppression and cover-up of a significant democratization movement is clearly anathema.

The movie was an instant sensation in Korea. Released on August 2, 2017, it attracted over ten million moviegoers in less than three weeks (Kim J. 2017).

Released in April 2018 in Japan, *A Taxi Driver* was the highest-grossing (“the no. 1 greatest hit”) Korean movie in Japan for that year.² As reported in the Japanese newspaper *Yomiuri Shimbun* on September 7, 2018, as of that date, the movie was “still being screened in various places. The total number of movie theaters [screening the movie] has increased from fourteen at the beginning to more than one hundred, and the box office revenue has exceeded 100 million yen, making it an exceptional hit for a Korean social drama film.”³

The movie was similarly popular in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Its popularity owes not only to its great acting and entertaining qualities but also to its political message and impact. Dramatizing the uprising and criticizing the military suppression of civilians, it also offers hope by highlighting South Korea’s eventual democratization. When shown in Hong Kong in 2017, the film’s title was rendered as *Niquan siji* (A driver that defies the authorities). This rendition was particularly meaningful since Hong Kong had witnessed a series of protests in 2014 (known as the Umbrella Movement) against the CCP’s (Chinese Communist Party; a.k.a. CPC, the Communist Party of China) increasing control over Hong Kong’s electoral system. According to informal reports, many Hong Kong audience members could not refrain from tearing up and could be seen wiping away tears while watching this film (Chen and Xiao 2017). The movie was also shown in Taiwan, a democratic country, under the title *Wo zhishige jichengche siji* (I’m merely a taxi driver). As reported in *Yazhou zhouban* (Asia weekly) on October 9, 2017, many among the Taiwanese audience compared the Gwangju Uprising with the 2/28 Incident (a.k.a. 2/28 Massacre, on February 28, 1947) in Taiwan, concluding that democracy is difficult to obtain (cited in Shi 2017). The 2/28 Incident—when the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, or KMT) government brutally cracked down on a Taiwanese uprising—was followed by four decades of martial law. Since the lifting of martial law in 1987, however, Taiwan has developed into a free multi-party democracy, and it has started to confront, commemorate, and redress the 2/28 Incident and seek justice (Horton 2017).

Despite its popularity in East Asian democracies and in Hong Kong, *A Taxi Driver* was banned in mainland China, with the apparent reason being its positive depictions of how ordinary South Korean citizens fought against state violence and how the quashed uprising eventually led to the country’s transition to democracy. Despite the ban, a good number of mainlanders managed to watch the film, which they knew as *Chuzuche siji* (A taxi driver), through other venues (Gao 2017). The film reportedly attracted a huge number of fans and drew accolades on Chinese websites. On the movie-centric online platform Douban, where the entry for *A Taxi Driver* was established in August 2017, *A Taxi Driver* received an average rating of 9.1, a high rating, from over 30,000 netizens, many of whom

“praised South Korea for its courage to confront history” (Yu 2017). Numerous Weixin (WeChat) and Weibo (Sina microblog) users praised the excellent performance of the lead actor, Song Kang-ho (Yu 2017).

The film apparently touched and resonated with numerous Chinese people, triggering many to associate the bloody suppression of the 1980 Gwangju Uprising with the 1989 Tiananmen Square Pro-democracy Movement and subsequent June Fourth Massacre (a.k.a. June Fourth Incident, or Tiananmen Square Protests/Massacre/Incident) in China, and to post their own enthusiastic comments online (Gao 2017). When discussing the plotline of this movie in light of the contemporary Chinese political situation, many netizens invoked the taboo topic of June Fourth (Shi 2017). From some of the common themes that emerged from the numerous posts, we can detect these netizens’ critical reflections on their own government and the Chinese people. One user posted that “The Koreans have the courage to shoot a film exposing their own scar. While the Gwangju Uprising has already been represented on the screen, China, by contrast, still strictly prohibits any discussion of June Fourth.” Another user posted that “The Koreans and their entertainment industry harbor a special feeling for the Gwangju Incident, whereas our TV dramas have so far been hovering around love stories.”⁴ These two comments are representative of the views expressed by many of the posts.

Clearly, many Chinese netizens liked *A Taxi Driver* because it illuminated memories of June Fourth. Perhaps inspired by such discussions, Badiucuo, a Chinese political cartoonist and human rights advocate residing in Australia, drew a collage cartoon entitled “A Taxi Driver in 1989” that ran in *China Digital Times*, demonstrating the close connection between the movie and June Fourth (**Figure 1**). Using the world-famous “Tank Man” photo (which shows an unidentified young man temporarily blocking a column of tanks with his body) as the background of the cartoon, Badiucuo replaced the column of tanks with the green taxi from the movie, while printing the movie title “A Taxi Driver” on the road.

Indeed, in ways strikingly similar to the Korean junta’s May 1980 violent repression and blockade in Gwangju, PRC authorities in 1989 controlled domestic media, suppressed foreign media coverage, and later distorted the truth, falsely claiming that the peaceful demonstrators were violent rioters—and that the soldiers of the CCP’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) were victims—and calling the demonstration a “counter-revolutionary rebellion.”⁵ Furthermore, in both events, some Western democracies (Germany and the United States, for example) intervened to some extent and ensured that the truth came out—at least to the outside world. As Karen Eggleston (1991) points out, there were many parallel patterns in both the mass protests themselves and the government crackdowns and subsequent cover-



Figure 1 “A Taxi Driver in 1989,” by Badiuca0 (2017), which ran in *China Digital Times*.

ups in Gwangju in 1980 and Beijing in 1989.⁶ In the cases of both Gwangju and June Fourth, the tragedies were caused by internal state violence against each nation’s own innocent people, and the inflicted trauma became worse due to the second-stage state violence of distorting facts, covering up the truth, silencing people, and efforts to erase memory.

However, the similarities end here. South Korea has emerged as a true democracy since 1987. As Eggleston declared in 1991, “re-evaluation of the [Gwangju Pro-democracy] movement and accounting for the massacre have to a large extent already taken place” (36). Enacting a special law to commemorate the Gwangju Uprising in 1995, the government began holding national ceremonies in 1997.⁷ As the government has reversed its verdict on Gwangju, the Koreans have become aware of the true history of the 1980 suppression and have been free to discuss it publicly, investigate it, write about it, reflect on it, and represent it in various media. As Kyung Moon Hwang points out, a “memory industry” has already developed around the Gwangju Uprising: “A measure of Gwangju’s epic scope and standing is the enormous number of academic studies, seminars, testimonies, documentaries, novels and dramatizations in popular culture dedicated to commemorating its historical impact” (2019, 196). *A Taxi Driver* is merely the latest in a number of cinematic dramatizations that have been produced to date.

The South Korean government’s eventual reversal of its verdict on Gwangju can be seen at the end of the

movie, as *A Taxi Driver* shows Hinzpeter returning to Korea twenty-three years later to receive an award and express his gratitude to the unidentified taxi driver who helped him. It has been reported that the current South Korean President Moon Jae-in has “highly evaluated” (R. Kim 2017) the uprising and attended its commemorations. After watching *A Taxi Driver* together with Hinzpeter’s widow, President Moon was quoted as saying “The truth about the uprising has not been fully revealed. This is the task we have to resolve. I believe this movie will help resolve it” (R. Kim 2017). Moon apparently acknowledges the useful function this movie can serve in the truth-finding endeavor he strongly supports. Furthermore, this movie has helped to uncover truths and details in unexpected ways. Interestingly, in assuming the unusual perspective of a largely anonymous taxi driver who happened to play such a crucial role in a momentous historical event, the movie inadvertently led to the discovery of the historical driver’s true identity (Bae 2017).⁸ In commenting on Moon’s belief about this film’s ability to deliver “a lesson on a historical event,” David Shim observes, “popular film not only (apolitically) entertains people, but also (politically) educates them about certain issues and events” (2020, 4).

By contrast, the CCP regime’s political repression has continued even to the present day. Following its brutal massacre of thousands in June 1989, the regime exhibited further violence not only in mass arrests and severe punishments for the protesters but also in strictly prohibiting any discussion, publication, or

representation of its atrocities. It has also forbidden any commemorations of the 1989 Pro-democracy Movement and the June Fourth Massacre in order to ensure that the truth remains unknown and that the massacre will be forgotten over time. When writing in 1991, Eggleston seemed hopeful that the CCP might reverse its verdict on the 1989 Pro-democracy Movement in the not-too-distant future (36). However, even after thirty-two years, such a reversal does not appear to be in sight. Instead, the PRC government has adhered to the false narrative it had manufactured about the Tiananmen Square Protests from the start—that the “Tiananmen Incident” was started by hooligans and that the government was correct in suppressing it in order to maintain peace and stability.

Meanwhile, the PRC government has forcibly censored and erased any mention of the 1989 Pro-democracy Movement or June Fourth Massacre and the regime’s brutality toward the demonstrators and innocent citizens. The amnesia about June Fourth created by these actions most closely falls into Paul Connerton’s “repressive erasure” category of forgetting, which “appears in its most brutal form ... in the history of totalitarian regimes” (2008, 60). In this case, we can say the CCP has committed a “mnemocide”—to borrow a term from Aleida Assmann—a murder of memory (2011, 321). State violence committed against the memory of June Fourth has been so powerful and pervasive as to intimidate many people into silence and amnesia—and to turn some into cynics. As revealed in Louisa Lim’s 2014 investigative report, *The People’s Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited*, authorities have engineered collective amnesia fairly successfully. Based on interviews she conducted, Lim found that people who knew about the 1989 crackdown would not dare to talk about it, while the younger generation in China hardly knew about it.⁹ A reporter similarly observed in 2017 that the CCP has, from the beginning, tried to make people forget the 1989 June Fourth Massacre, even though many people overseas commemorate it each year; as a result, numerous college students in China today know nothing about June Fourth (Shi 2017). In order to indefinitely hold onto their authoritarian power without challenge, Chinese leadership has consistently silenced calls to reverse their verdict on the massacre or to reveal the truth.

Indeed, the sharp contrast between the Gwangju memory reconstruction and the June Fourth mnemocide is chiefly due to the diametrically opposed attitudes taken by leaders in each country. In taking the lead to honor and seek justice for the Gwangju victims, President Moon serves as an impressive role model for South Koreans as they continue to seek the truth, recover memory, and dedicate themselves to preserving their hard-won freedom and democracy. As David Shim (2020) indicates, at the May 2017 ceremony to honor

the protests, President Moon “promised to open a new investigation into the order to use deadly force against civilian protesters.” Shim also points out that “Moon was a prominent human rights lawyer in the 1980s, working to defend activists persecuted for defying the Chun regime,” while noting that “conservative lawmakers continue to describe the events of Gwangju as anti-government and pro-North Korean riots” (3–4).

More recently, on May 18, 2019, Moon participated in a commemoration of the thirty-ninth anniversary of the Gwangju Uprising. In his powerful speech, Moon apologized on behalf of the nation for the state violence, called out those who deny the truth about the uprising, vowed to “reveal the truth with regard to those in charge of the massacre,” and praised the victims for their courage to fight for democracy and urged people to continue to develop democracy:

As President, I deeply apologize once again, on behalf of the people, for the barbaric violence and massacre perpetrated in Gwangju by the state authority at that time. As a Korean, I feel tremendous shame when facing the reality of preposterous remarks denying and insulting the May 18 Democratization Movement still being uttered out loud without any hesitation. Personally, I regret that I still have not been able to keep my promise to have the spirit of the May 18 Democratization Movement included in the Preamble of the Constitution. (Moon 2019)

In stark contrast to President Moon, the current PRC leader, Chairman of the State and General Secretary of the Communist Party Xi Jinping, has tightened the CCP’s grip on media and internet censorship to a greater extent than had his predecessors since taking power in 2013, making it much harder for people to keep any memory of June Fourth. Xi’s regime has also stepped up its sharp power operations in order to aggressively export its domestic censorship abroad, pressure foreign media and even academic publishers into censoring materials diverging from the CCP’s political agenda and official narratives, and manipulate scholars and institutions into self-censoring (Wu 2019, 137). As a result, the frequency of global media reports on June Fourth as well as the number of people commemorating June Fourth outside of China has decreased in recent years. Why is it, then, that in 2017, a Korean movie awakened so many Chinese from this enforced amnesia, bring back certain long-buried and suppressed traumatic memories and emotions about June Fourth, and trigger a breaking of the silence? And even start discussion on the taboo subject, albeit indirectly? How does *A Taxi Driver* manage to do that?

The movie achieves what it does thanks to such factors as its grassroots perspective, the realistic and vivid visual

images and auditory effects employed in representing the demonstration and the crackdown, engaging plotline and characterization, and excellent acting that depicts a spontaneous human nature and complex psychology. Speaking at a VOA (Voice of America) program, one critic emphasized how moving the film was and how similar the scenes of the protesting Korean people were to scenes of mass demonstration in the 1989 Pro-democracy Movement in China (Shi 2017).

In addition, David Shim notes that when the soldiers in the film commit violent acts, their faces are hidden from the audience; Shim thus insightfully argues that by masking the troops, the film “does not tell a story of Koreans shooting at Koreans—something that would have tainted the narrative of building a ‘new’ Korea—but of soldiers firing at protesters,” and that “the emphasis on these social (soldiers and protesters) and not national (Koreans) subjectivities implies that the killings of demonstrators could also happen elsewhere” (2020, 10–11). Such a relatively “generic” representation of violent military crackdown on unarmed civilian protesters might also have helped inspire transnational associations with June Fourth.

Furthermore, the overall representational strategy of the film encourages the audience to take up the role of an empathetic witness. In discussing trauma in film and various positions of the viewer, E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang suggest that “the position of being a witness” is perhaps “the most politically useful position”, “that position of ‘witness’ may open up a space for transformation of the viewer through empathic identification without vicarious traumatization—an identification which allows the spectator to enter into the victim’s experience through a work’s narration” (2008, 10). When watching *A Taxi Driver*, the viewer is largely witnessing what the driver and the journalist are witnessing. The viewer’s witnessing of the traumatic event is mediated primarily through the driver’s focus and secondarily through the journalist’s lens. The viewer sees how the two (accidentally) witness the traumatic event, empathize with the victims, and eventually become transformed. As the viewer is gradually drawn into the driver’s experience, witnessing the horrific events he is witnessing and experiencing and observing both characters’ interactions and changes, she also becomes transformed “through empathic identification.”

As noted by the commentator Henghe, the movie’s tremendous effect on the Chinese can be attributed not only to the parallel between two historical events but also to the film’s depiction of human nature: “*A Taxi Driver* lets us find out that in fact, the Chinese people have not forgotten June Fourth. The audience cannot resist seeing the comparability between this Korean film and the Chinese reality in 1989. At the same time, exactly because June Fourth is China’s taboo subject, ordinary people can only use the discussion

of this film as a pretext to vent their pent-up feelings. Another reason that this movie touches the heart of the Chinese people is its depiction of human nature. After all, human feelings are the same universally” (quoted in Shi 2017). In watching how the driver, witnessing the bloody suppression of the protesters, turns into one who sympathizes with and helps them, ordinary Chinese people no doubt experience a resonance with their own human nature.

Since Chinese people in the PRC are prohibited from expressing their thoughts and feelings about the 1989 Pro-democracy Movement, they can only use the discussion of this film as a pretext to vent their pent-up feelings. For example, on September 29, 2017, the pseudonymous blogger known as “Poison-tongued Movie” (who had over five million followers on Weibo) wrote, “Taking the German reporter to Gwangju, he was forced to witness history, to feel doubt and surprise. But you can still see that he kept on hypnotizing himself: It’s not my business. Then Song Kang-ho tells you, all the changes were irrigated by blood and tears” (Yu 2017). Without making mention of the taboo subject, this Weibo post was poignant in its encouraging of critical reflections on June Fourth. Just as the South Korean military leadership ordered the suppression of Gwangju protesters in 1980, so in 1989 did the PRC leadership order the massacre of its own people. In the movie, the driver at first believes the junta’s propaganda, regarding the student protesters as troublemakers while trusting that soldiers will not open fire on civilians; then he awakens to reality after he witnesses the actual suppression. Just like the taxi driver at the beginning of the film, countless spectators in China in 1989 initially trusted that their government and troops would not attack their own people, and when the crackdown began, they felt doubt and disbelief, though many did not want to become involved or implicated. In the movie, when the driver’s conscience is awakened, he begins to help the protesters and assist the journalist in filming the suppression so that the truth might be broadcast to the outside world later. This post seems to implicitly propose that Chinese viewers in 2017 should learn from the driver’s example, understand that sacrifices (“blood and tears”) must be made, and persevere in the long fight to accomplish political change.

While heated online discussions about *A Taxi Driver* were still ongoing, all images from and discussions about this movie on such movie-based platforms as Douban and Mtime were abruptly deleted on October 3, 2017, and even news reports about the movie’s box-office success in Korea on such websites as Sohu and Sina were deleted (Gao 2017). By the end of the day on October 3, 2017, the entry for *A Taxi Driver* on Douban had been deleted and could no longer be found, and the Weibo post from the user quoted above was also deleted (Yu 2017). Why did these posts and comments about the

movie somehow suddenly and mysteriously “disappear” one night? Were all these websites coordinating with one another to self-censor on the same day? Later, it was discovered that these media outlets were ordered by government authorities to censor these materials.¹⁰ Thus, state violence, in the form of cyber censorship, extends even to a foreign film and any mention of this film. Because *A Taxi Driver* depicts the South Korean junta’s crackdown on protesters and South Korea’s eventual democratization, the PRC regime forbids its own people from watching, discussing, or even mentioning the film.¹¹

The authorities’ prohibition notwithstanding, Chinese netizens’ enthusiastic reactions to the movie brought hope to some civil rights activists. Rights advocate Hu Jia believes that *A Taxi Driver* “brought inspiration for the democratizing process in China,” and that “that part of history” that the CCP has expended so much effort erasing “might be reconstructed in the end by one single movie.” Hu also feels that the film “awakened the conscience of many Chinese people, especially those residing in Beijing—they experienced it. Of over twenty million people in Beijing, at least five or six million were witnesses” (quoted in Gao 2017). Hu sees great potential in such a movie, one that seems capable of awakening conscience and moral courage among Chinese people and inspiring them through such examples as the driver’s final transformation from a passive spectator into an active participant in the movement.

RECONCILING PAST INJUSTICES, COLLECTIVE MEMORY, “CULTURAL MEMORY,” AND ARTISTIC REPRESENTATIONS

Additionally, the responses of Chinese netizens to the movie and the authorities’ swift crackdown on the internet reveal two important issues: Many Chinese look for venues in which they might indirectly remember and speak about such tabooed traumatic events as June Fourth; and an effective dramatic representation of a similar traumatic event from another country can create transnational reverberations, permitting mainland Chinese viewers to appropriate the film to their own purposes. First, despite—or because of—the long-term state repression on the topic of June Fourth, many Chinese yearn for outlets to indirectly release their grievances and express their frustrated desires for truth, justice, and the right to remember and speak out about this traumatic event. In proposing a framework for societies to consider when reckoning with past violations of human rights, David A. Crocker lists “truth” at the top of the eight moral norms he suggests: “To meet the challenge of reckoning with past atrocities, a society should investigate, establish, and publicly disseminate the truth about them” (1999, 49). Crocker also suggests

that “victims or their families should be provided with a platform to tell their stories and have their testimony publicly acknowledged” (52).

Moreover, to reconcile past injustices, a society should publicly remember, discuss, and memorialize such events. When discussing collective memory, Jan Assmann defines the concept of “communicative memory” as an informal “everyday form of collective memory,” which includes “those varieties of collective memory that are based exclusively on everyday communications” and those that have a “limited temporal horizon” (1995, 126–27; also discussed in Schweiger 2015, 349–50). By comparison, “cultural memory” has its “fixed points”—“fateful events of the past”—“whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)” (J. Assmann 1995, 129).

I suggest that there is a dynamic relationship between reconciling past wrongs and creating and maintaining “cultural memory.” A country that has reckoned with its past injustices allows its people to have “communicative memory” and even helps create “cultural memory,” and a country that permits public discussion and remembrances of a past traumatic event is more likely to move toward reconciling its past injustices and national healing.

Employing these concepts and definitions, we can see that the South Korean government has made great strides in reconciling past injustices, and the 1980 Gwangju Uprising has long transitioned from being part of the “communicative memory” to being integrated into the “cultural memory,” which is maintained through “cultural formation” and “institutional communication.” As part of the Gwangju “memory industry,” this movie helps in maintaining and reinforcing “cultural memory.”

By contrast, in the PRC, the truth of the quashed Pro-democracy Movement in 1989 has never been recognized as such in official history and discourse, and it remains a forbidden topic in everyday communication and public media. Victims and their families have no “platform to tell their stories,” society is forbidden from being able to “investigate, establish, and publicly disseminate the truth,” and these past injustices remain unreconciled. This “fateful event” cannot become part of “communicative memory”—much less become integrated into “cultural memory.” It is therefore amazing and heartening to see this South Korean movie reawaken the “communicative memory” of June Fourth—however veiled and however briefly—for many mainland Chinese. The film temporarily fills the emotional void resulting from unfulfilled desires for truth, justice, and reconciliation on the part of people in the PRC due to the regime’s long-term repression of this memory.

Second, this case reveals how the affective power of a successful dramatic representation of a similar traumatic event can be so strong that it not only revives

traumatic memories among its primary target audience (in this case, South Korean filmgoers) but can also create transnational reverberations, and how another audience (in this case, the mainland Chinese) can flexibly and creatively translate and appropriate the film to their own purposes.

Aleida Assmann has emphasized the connection between cultural memory and the arts in her book, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization* (2011).¹² As she insightfully points out, the arts “are not only engaged in immortalizing persons, events, experiences, and values through their compelling narratives and images” but also “provide a continuous discourse on the potentials and problems of cultural memory” (xii). David Der-wei Wang has suggested that literature can serve as “a complementary *and* contesting discourse” vis-à-vis modern Chinese historiography in addressing “the moral and psychological aftermath of China’s violence and pain” and can do more by “resurrecting individual lives from the oblivion of collective memory and public documentation in reenacting the affective intensities of private and inadmissible truth” (2004, 2–3). Furthermore, in contributing to remembrances and truth finding, literature can also assist in the process of healing and reconciliation (Wu 2011, 22–23; Schweiger 2015, 345). In the case of Gwangju, the South Korean government’s later reversal of its verdict has enabled historiography and artistic representations to investigate and reveal truth. Many works in the Gwangju “memory industry” not only immortalize the event, but also “provide a continuous discourse on the potentials and problems” of this specific cultural memory. These serve the purposes of both complementing and contesting previous historical discourses as well as contributing to healing and reconciliation. In its focus on ordinary individuals, *A Taxi Driver* indeed addresses “the moral and psychological aftermath” of Gwangju better than historiography in the sense of “resurrecting individual lives” and “reenacting the affective intensities” of private truth. In helping to investigate and reveal truth through its representations, it contributes to the process of healing and reconciliation.

In comparison, the (non)representations of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Pro-democracy Movement and June Fourth are far more complicated. On the one hand, the event was well-known to many countries outside of the PRC, and various works about it have been published and produced overseas, thereby providing, to some extent, the effects suggested by Aleida Assmann and Wang above. On the other hand, it is still a taboo subject in mainland China, and discussions or representations about it—especially the truth of the regime’s atrocities—are forbidden. Michael Berry (2008) insightfully remarks on the dilemma of filmmakers in China dealing with the problem of depicting the Tiananmen Protest: “they faced a conundrum: *how* to portray that which it was forbidden to portray and, in the eyes of the government,

never even happened. The task was to make the invisible visible—and in a way that would cloak the true intent of the representation.” The two strategies Berry notes are “directly portraying the incident and its aftermath,” and “rendering the incident through allegory, invisibility, and the politics of disappearance” (2008, 329). However, even in a film supposedly “directly portraying the incident and its aftermath,” Berry observes in relation to Stanley Kwan’s 2001 film *Lan Yu*, “the film itself cannot directly portray the massacre” (329); and so, “For the time being, an aesthetics of invisibility still dominates cinematic representations of June Fourth” (341).

Precisely because most of the mainland audience, compelled by strict censorship, have been trained to read between the lines and look for allegorical meanings, they translate the Korean film’s political context into their own and appropriate the film by using “the discussion of this film as a pretext to vent their pent-up feelings” about June Fourth. In such a transnational translation and appropriation, the mainland Chinese audience, while paying due respect to the director Jang Hoon and to the current South Korean government, nevertheless takes over agency by imputing to the film a meaning that was not necessarily intended by Jang originally. They project their own repressed feelings onto the film, interpret the film as partially representing the Tiananmen protest and massacre, and attain a certain degree of catharsis from vicarious identification with the protagonist.

RESISTING STATE VIOLENCE AND AMNESIA

Although PRC censorship has intimidated or coopted numerous people into silence and amnesia regarding June Fourth, it has not completely erased some people’s memories. When affectively triggered by a dramatic representation of a similar traumatic event, these suppressed memories erupt and spread through grassroots connections.

I suggest that the PRC regime’s bloody suppression of the 1989 Pro-democracy Movement and its subsequent ruthless persecution, cover-up, lies, strict censorship, and enforced amnesia have in fact prompted quite a few writers to confront the regime’s brutality and to take up the responsibility of preserving historical truth and memory. Renowned author Yan Lianke (2013; 1958–) writes that he was tormented by “thoughts about the loss of memory in China on a national scale” after his conversations with two Hong Kong college teachers: they told him that their students from China had never heard anything about the June Fourth Incident or “the death by starvation of 30 to 40 million people” during the so-called “three years of natural disasters” (1959–61 or 1958–62). Yan criticizes the regime for “memory deletion”—deleting anything that is negative about the

regime—and using “state power to shackle people’s minds and block all memory channels by altering historical records, manipulating textbook content and controlling literature, art and performances in all forms.” As a result, Yan laments, “truth is buried, conscience is castrated and our language is raped by money and power. Lies, meaningless words and pretentious-sounding blather become the official language used by the government, taught by our teachers and adopted by the world of art and literature.” Yan worries that intellectuals and writers are helping the regime tell lies and enforce selective amnesia.

If even June Fourth, a relatively recent traumatic event that was well-known overseas, is being erased from the memory of mainland Chinese, how much more so would be such massive CCP-manufactured disasters as the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957–58) and the Great Leap Forward Famine (1958–62), which were hardly known to the outside world at that time? The Anti-Rightist Campaign, one of the regime’s earlier crackdowns, wrongly punished almost two million innocent people. Yet the regime still claims this purging campaign to have been “entirely correct and necessary,” while grossly undercounting the number of victims and understating their suffering (“Resolution on Certain Questions” 1981; Wu 2020). Furthermore, according to investigations by scholars, between thirty-six million (Yang J. 2008) and forty-five million (Dikötter 2010) people are estimated to have died unnaturally from starvation and torture during the Great Famine. However, the regime has never used the word “famine” to refer to the Great Famine; instead, the official history only briefly mentions the period of 1959 to 1961 as “three years’ natural disasters.” Hence, most among the younger generations in mainland China know nothing about people dying from unnatural causes, much less the appalling figure of over thirty-six million deaths between 1958 and 1962 (Yiwa 2013, 35–36). The CCP has never acknowledged its accountability in these disasters—nor has it permitted public discussion, investigation, or commemoration of them. Both of these colossal regime-manufactured tragedies remain largely taboo subjects today.

Concerned about the regime’s cover-ups of its atrocities, the distortion of historical truth, and the engineering of “selective amnesia,” some writers react to the PRC’s censorship with covert defiance, and some seek out truth and buried traumatic memories in particular. Since June Fourth is completely off-limits as a topic, some writers pushed boundaries by turning to writing about certain disasters from the late 1950s and early 1960s; some published their works in the early 2000s, taking advantage of a time when such writing was not as heavily censored and was not as likely to be immediately noticed or flagged. Some also bypassed rejections from self-censoring mainland publishers by attempting to publish their works outside mainland

China. In writing about the CCP-made disasters that differ from June Fourth in type, place, and time, these works nevertheless create reverberations of collective traumatic memories. Through such resonances, they serve as indirect reminders of June Fourth and other unspeakable traumatic events caused by state violence.

RESISTING THE STATE’S MNEMOCIDE: YANG XIANHUI’S JIABIANGOU STORIES

Yang Xianhui was determined to bring back buried traumatic memories of the little-known Jiabiangou labor camp through his stories. Before discussing Yang’s stories, I shall briefly explain the historical context of the Jiabiangou labor camp. Numerous people, wrongly labeled “rightists” as part of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, were confined in *laojiao* (“re-education through [forced] labor”) camps; many perished from hard labor, hunger, and mistreatment during the Great Famine. From October 1957 to late 1960, over three thousand “rightists” were incarcerated in the Jiabiangou camp in the northwestern region of Gansu Province—a windy, sandy, arid, and harsh area where the soil was too alkaline for cultivation.¹³

From late 1958 to summer 1960, the health of every inmate had seriously declined, and a number had already perished. The situation worsened when the majority of the remaining inmates, more than two thousand, were forced to move to the Mingshui annex within the Jiabiangou camp in late September 1960, supposedly to cultivate the barren desert into farmland. As there were no camp facilities, these debilitated inmates had to dig caves in the sides of gullies for their lodging. Meanwhile, their already low food rations were reduced further to twelve catties of unhusked grain per person per month. Suffering from extreme starvation and cold, many died. By January 1961, fewer than three hundred of those interned in Mingshui survived (Zhao 2008, 405).

However, local officials falsely claimed that half of the inmates survived and had the deceased inmates’ files falsified in order to attribute their deaths to various types of diseases, thereby erasing the real cause of their deaths—starvation and hunger-related problems (Zhao 2014b, 28–29). Due to the official cover-up, after the closure of the Jiabiangou labor camp in October 1961, the truth of this tragedy was buried and the camp forgotten (Yang X. 2002b, 356). The authorities have continued to repress this memory even now; for example, authorities refused to allow survivors to erect a memorial at Jiabiangou. Just as the physical traces of the June Fourth Massacre have long been erased from the Tiananmen Square, so too have the traces of the Jiabiangou labor camp been gradually erased, especially with the development of Jiabiangou into a resort village.

Though born in Dongxiang, Gansu Province, Yang Xianhui did not know anything about the Jiabiangou Farm (that is, the labor camp) until he started working as a “sent-down youth” as part of a “production and construction corps” in Hexi Corridor, Gansu, in 1965. During the period from 1965 to 1981, he became acquainted, by chance, with some “rightists” and *laojiao* personnel who were transferred to that corps and found out from them that “there existed in Jiuquan County [in Gansu] a Jiabiangou Farm, which, beginning from October 1957, incarcerated 3,000 rightists,” and in December 1960, when the authorities “decided to release the rightists so they could return home, only several hundred remained alive” (Yang X. 2002b, 355).

This accidental discovery jolted Yang Xianhui out of his ignorance and transformed him from a passive listener to an active researcher and writer. “The shock created by the rightists’ accounts in my mind would not cease for a long time” (Yang X. 2002b, 355). In 1997, he began to investigate the Jiabiangou case in order to “truly understand exactly what happened there”; for three years, he interviewed various survivors, consulted various materials, and visited the actual site of Jiabiangou twice (Yang X. 2002b, 355). Denied access to provincial archives, Yang decided to “take the unofficial path” (Veg 2014, 519). Yang’s Jiabiangou stories are therefore largely based on the interviews and facts he gathered.

In her study of cultural memory, Aleida Assmann (2011, 169–324) examines four types of media that carry memory: writing, images, the body, and places. Yang’s efforts in interviewing survivors, visiting the site, and consulting materials were precisely the kind of efforts to excavate memory from writings, images, the body, and places. The stories he wrote, in turn, contribute to the construction of an informal type of cultural memory.

In the case of the creation of *A Taxi Driver*, director Jang Hoon worked in a democratic country that encourages and supports public investigation, discussion, writing, and media representations of the Gwangju Uprising. Jang thus benefited from a wealth of existing resources when making the film. The film then serves as an outstanding addition to South Korea’s well-developed “cultural memory” and “memory industry” about Gwangju. By contrast, Yang Xianhui had to start from scratch and dig into the then little-known, buried memories of the Jiabiangou tragedy. Working in an authoritarian country that routinely commits mnemocide of CCP-manufactured disasters, Yang encountered obstructions in the process of his investigations and interviews. Instead of building upon existing, easily available resources, Yang’s painstaking work brings back long-lost memories and lays the foundation for the construction of an informal type of cultural memory of Jiabiangou.

Moreover, *A Taxi Driver* is about the Gwangju Uprising, a traumatic event well known to the South Korean audience and many among international audiences.

Jang Hoon enjoyed much freedom and support in making, producing, publicizing, and promoting the film. Yang Xianhui, by contrast, had to confront the challenges of writing about a covered-up, little-known traumatic event as well as government censorship.

Unlike June Fourth, which was known—though not in its true entirety—to a good number of mainland Chinese in 1989, the Jiabiangou tragedy was only partially known to a small group of people, primarily those who lived in Gansu. In order to reclaim the localized, long-forgotten Jiabiangou tragedy for the collective memory, Yang Xianhui first had to uncover its buried past and then reconstruct and communicate the memory to the public. He could not merely adopt an aesthetics of invisibility or allegory and expect readers to either figure out that he was writing about Jiabiangou or envision what the referenced traumatic events and experiences were like without direct depictions. He needed to somehow, in Berry’s words, “directly portray the incident and its aftermath.” Yang thus combines various strategies to both evade censorship and re-present the specific realities of the Jiabiangou tragedy. I discuss a small number of these strategies below.

In a bid to avoid censorship, Yang consciously refrained from directly criticizing central authorities. His stories also employ a number of strategies that include disguise and camouflage, a piecemeal approach, incremental accumulation, silence or blank, understatement and indirection, and ambiguity (in genre and meaning). In contrast, Jang Hoon’s film is able to unambiguously expose the junta’s violent crackdown on innocent citizens as well as its cover-up and false reporting. Jang’s film also has no need to resort to a piecemeal approach or much in the way of disguise, camouflage, or understatement.

For example, Yang successfully disguised his interviews as fiction in order to have them published. He refrained from using the real names of interviewees—partially in consideration of their personal needs—except in a few cases, as requested by the interviewees. The titles he chose for his earlier Jiabiangou stories also serve as camouflage. The title of his first story, “The Woman from Shanghai” (Shanghai nüren, which can also be understood and translated as “a Shanghai woman” or “Shanghai women”), appears deceptively simple and ordinary. Upon seeing this title for the first time, no reader of the magazine *Shanghai Literature* (*Shanghai wenxue*) would have imagined the horrors depicted in the story, including such scenes as Jiabiangou inmates starving to death, in addition to a scene in which a devoted wife traveling all the way from Shanghai to visit her inmate-husband only to find his naked, cannibalized, dried-up body exposed on a sand dune. Similarly, when seeing the title of another story, “A Full Meal” (Baoshi yidun, also translated as “The Potato Feast”), readers would have been unlikely to imagine depictions of a starving inmate dying from taking a rare opportunity of gorging

on half-cooked potatoes, or a hungry inmate picking out and eating bits of potato chunks from another inmate's vomit and excrement.

In addition, Yang deliberately adopted a piecemeal approach so as to skirt around censorship more easily. In an interview, Yang revealed that, knowing he could not publish his work in book form, he decided to approach the editors of *Shanghai Literature* with some short pieces. Yang explained, "Once a journal had published them, it was easier to find a book publisher" (Veg 2014, 517). Through steady, incremental accumulation, Yang published nineteen interview-based stories about the Jiabiangou victims in *Shanghai Literature* between 2000 and 2003, receiving an enthusiastic reception from readers and critics. As early as 2002, Yang was able to publish a collection of seven of his Jiabiangou stories as well as seven earlier stories on other subjects, entitled *Jiabiangou jishi: Yang Xianhui zhong duan pian xiaoshuo ji* (Accounts of Jiabiangou: A collection of Yang Xianhui's stories and novellas: Yang X. 2002a). Then, in 2003, he published *Gaobie Jiabiangou* (Good-bye, Jiabiangou), which includes all of his nineteen stories about Jiabiangou. That this complete collection was re-published in 2008 under the title of *Jiabiangou jishi* (Accounts of Jiabiangou) testifies to the success of Yang's initial incremental approach. The publication of *Woman from Shanghai: Tales of Survival from a Chinese Labor Camp*, an English translation of thirteen stories, has further spread the memories of Jiabiangou to an international audience.¹⁴

Some of Yang's strategies not only help evade censorship but also serve aesthetic and philosophical considerations—and, possibly, political and even commercial purposes. In his stories, Yang occasionally employs what Wolfgang Iser (1978) calls "blanks," which serve to create "a suspension of connectability" in order to "stimulate the reader's imaginative activity," and sometimes "breaks off just at a point of suspense" so as to encourage the reader's "participation in the course of events" (191). Near the end of "The Woman from Shanghai," the foreground narrator—the former inmate interviewee—Li Wenhan recounts his failed attempt to look for a certain woman in Shanghai from thirty years ago; even after a shop owner suggests that Li go to another store to ask about her, Li ultimately decides not to bother (Yang X. 2008, 35–37). This blank at the end of the story encourages the reader's co-writing imagination to fill in the blank—for example, to imagine what misfortune might have befallen the woman after her return from Jiabiangou, given the political situation of the time.

Another example of a blank that "breaks off just at a point of suspense" occurs in "A Full Meal." The story reads like a serial: near the end, the interviewer (the background narrator) asks the interviewee-narrator (the foreground narrator) Gao Jiyi to talk about the process of his escape

from Jiabiangou, which Gao has mentioned briefly, but Gao insists on recounting it only on the following day (Yang X. 2008, 162). The suspense created by this blank aroused readers' curiosity about what motivated Gao's escape and how it could have been successful. Yang could therefore ensure that the readers would wait anxiously for the next issue of the journal, hoping to find the continuation of the story. A later story, "The Escape," then picks up where "A Full Meal" leaves off. Aside from stimulating the reader's imagination and curiosity, these blanks encourage the reader to ponder possible deeper meanings embedded or hidden in the stories.

Yang's stories are mostly related by different foreground narrators—presumably the former inmate interviewees. Recounting and occasionally commenting on various inmates' experiences, these narrators also talk about the injustices and tribulations they suffered, their interaction with other inmates and camp personnel, and their reactions and emotions. Some of the stories are clearly framed by brief conversations between the background narrator (presumably the interviewer) and the foreground narrator at the beginning and end of each story. "A Full Meal," for example, starts with the background narrator interviewing Gao Jiyi in his flower clinic in the winter of 1999. The background narrator is identified as "Reporter Zhang" when Gao asks him for help on a question that has long tormented him: "Reporter Zhang, please tell me, had I done the right thing or the wrong thing in that incident?" (157). As he is playing the role of an investigative journalist, though, the background narrator eschews making any overt judgment, sticking to fact-finding questions and relatively objective descriptions.

As some scholars have noted, Yang Xianhui's stories give voice to Jiabiangou survivors and have relatively little praise or gratitude for *laojiao* or the regime (Huang 2007, 119; Wu 2011, 52–53; Veg 2014, 519). At the same time, however, Yang carefully refrains from directly criticizing the central government, resorting instead to understatement and indirection. Even criticism of local camp leaders and personnel or provincial authorities is often voiced by characters or foreground narrators—not a story's background narrator or interviewer. It is in Yang's representations of the treatment of the inmates by some camp personnel—for example, in "A Physician's Recollections" (Yisheng de huiyi; Yang X. 2008, 473–74)—and the inmates' extreme physical deprivations and overall degradation that we indirectly sense the serious criticism of the government's wrong-headed biopolitical policies and "campaigns."¹⁵

In, to again use Berry's words, "directly portraying the incident and its aftermath," Yang focuses on depicting, fairly realistically, specific realities—the body, places, physical objects, etc.—from a grassroots perspective. Sebastian Veg (2014, 521) correctly points to Yang's emphasis on corporeality—as opposed to

ideology. Yang provides concrete details on a range of painful experiences suffered by inmates, bodily and moral degradations that come about because of or as complications from starvation (with related events and effects including stealing, robbing, and cannibalism), escapes both attempted and successful, death, and survival.

In Mingshui, when the grain ration was reduced to about seven ounces a day, many inmates started to die (Yang X. 2008, 7). Camp authorities had to suspend labor in the field in order to keep the inmates from dying too rapidly. The hungry inmates either stayed in the cave, lying down to conserve energy, or went out foraging for anything they could eat: weeds, tree leaves, weed seeds, worms, rats, lizards, etc. A good number contracted cirrhosis of the liver or edema, the swelling of the body due to prolonged starvation. While many contracted dysentery from eating unsanitary “food,” some died from constipation.

One grotesque portrayal of prisoners suffering from edema appears in “A Full Meal.” Gao Jiyi narrates that when he saw Niu Tiande in Mingshui, he knew Niu would not last for more than three days: “I have already witnessed many deaths at Mingshui and was familiar with the symptoms of a dying person. First, they suffered from edema. It would disappear for several days and then return. When that happened, it meant imminent death. Sometimes, patients’ faces swelled up to the size of pumpkins. Their eyelids bulged like soft pears, while their eyes shrunk to slits. When they walked, they hobbled along, stopping for a few seconds between steps. Their lips were so swollen that they couldn’t close their mouths.... Their hair stood upright. When they talked, they sounded like whimpering puppies” (Yang X. 2008, 159; 2009, 219).

A painful death from constipation is related by the foreground narrator Li Wenhan in “Woman from Shanghai.” Constipation was a serious problem because inmates would eat such indigestible items as grain husks and weed seeds, and they had no oil in their diet. Out of desperate hunger, one inmate named Wen Daye hastily eats a gluey soup made from the seeds of “yellow cogon grass,” even though he knows eating the “soup” before it can cool off and become “a lump of dough” would be deadly, since the sticky broth could glue together all the fiber inside the intestine into a hardened lump (Yang X. 2008, 4; 2009, 30). Li describes in vivid anatomical detail his vain attempts to help dig out the lump from Wen’s anus and how his crude tool “caused serious bleeding,” and how Wen moaned with pain during the long process (Yang X. 2008, 5; 2009, 31–32). Wen’s bloated lower belly grows bigger and bigger, and he dies five days later.

While written in a very different socio-historical and political context from that in which Jang Hoon made *A Taxi Driver*, Yang’s stories adopt a similarly grassroots perspective and focus on physical details in the daily

lives of ordinary people suffering under state violence. Moreover, though working in different media, both Yang and Jang emphasize the relationships of family and friends, depicting, in particular, human nature and feelings in extreme circumstances.

Just as Jang’s film inspires empathic identification, so the aesthetic strategies employed by Yang encourage a reader to assume the role of an empathetic witness. When reading “The Woman from Shanghai,” for example, the reader is witnessing what narrator-participant Li Wenhan witnessed and experienced. The reader’s witnessing of the inmates’ extreme suffering and the woman Gu Xiaoyun’s visit is mediated primarily through Li’s focalization, reflections, and narration. The interactions between Li and Gu somewhat resemble the interactions between the driver Kim and the journalist Hinzpeter in *A Taxi Driver*. Initially concerned only about his own survival, Li is reluctant to help others. However, Gu’s arrival changes him. Upon hearing of her husband Dong Jianyi’s death, Gu generously gives the food she brought for Dong to Li and his fellow starving cellmates. Intent on finding Dong’s body and taking it so that he might have a proper burial, Gu refuses to eat or sleep for three days and nights. Having witnessed Gu’s love for Dong and her persistence, Li feels so touched that he helps her locate the corpse and take Dong’s remains. While observing Li’s interactions with Gu and the gradual return of Li’s humanity and empathy, the reader also becomes transformed, in the words of Kaplan and Wang, “through empathic identification.”

Although not the first to write about the Jiabiangou tragedy, Yang Xianhui was the first to bring it to the attention of many mainland Chinese. The writing, publishing, reading, and reception of these stories demonstrate the workings and creation of communicative memory. Yang Xianhui discovered this buried tragedy by accident from certain former “rightist” inmates’ conversations. He was able to interview former inmates, thus obtaining first-hand materials about the tragedy. Significantly, the reading and reception of Yang’s stories created communicative memory among the surviving victims, victims’ families and friends, critics, and a general reading audience. These stories shocked and touched many readers. The emotional effect was especially strong for the surviving former inmates and the relatives of deceased inmates. A number of the former “rightists” who originally refused to be interviewed took the initiative to contact Yang and to relate their own experiences (Sai 2002, 3). In this sense, Yang’s stories and Jang Hoon’s film perform a similar and significant function in bringing more truth to light even after their publication and release: besides generating communicative memory among the audience, Yang’s stories elicited more truth-telling from surviving victims, while Jang’s film led to the discovery of the little-known taxi driver’s true identity.

Yang's stories have also inspired a handful of other writers and film directors to further explore this tragedy. The documentary filmmaker Wang Bing's (1967–) film *Jiabiangou* (*The Ditch*, 2010)—which dramatizes some episodes from Yang's stories—and documentary film *Si linghun* (*Dead Souls*, 2018) and social activist and former professor Ai Xiaoming's (1953–) documentary film *Jiabiangou jishi* (*Jiabiangou Elegy: Life and Death of the Rightists*, 2017) are three well-known examples, though these films are banned within the PRC and thus hard to access. Nevertheless, Yang's publications of the Jiabiangou stories in magazines and then books between 2000 to 2008 have ensured that this part of history will not be completely forgotten and repressed. Along with other works on Jiabiangou (mostly published abroad and banned in China), Yang's stories help create an informal type of cultural memory about Jiabiangou.

CONCLUSION

The success of the film *A Taxi Driver* in South Korea demonstrates its affective power in reviving the traumatic memories of the Gwangju Uprising among its audience and enabling them to become empathetic witnesses. Moreover, it testifies to the fact that the democratic South Korean government has apologized for the state violence, permitted discussions and investigations into the truth, helped to create and maintain collective memory, reconciled past injustices, and moved toward national healing.

The movie's unintended triggering of the repressed memory of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Pro-democracy Movement and June Fourth Massacre among many Chinese netizens demonstrates a case of transnational reverberations of collective traumatic memories. However, the PRC government's banning of this movie as well as its subsequent sweeping deletion of all mention of and comments about the film on Chinese websites reveals that the authoritarian regime still continues its mnemocide, refuses to apologize for its violence against the innocent, and forbids any discussion of the traumatic event—let alone investigations into the truth and reconciliation of past injustices.

Since the topic of June Fourth is absolutely taboo within the PRC, some courageous writers concerned with the regime's whitewashing of its atrocities have turned to writing about disasters caused by the CCP from the late 1950s and early 1960s. Strategically dodging censorship, Yang Xianhui published stories that excavated the buried traumatic memories of the Jiabiangou labor camp inmates, who suffered tremendously during the state-manufactured calamities between 1957 to 1961.

Yang's interview-based stories—as well as works by other writers and filmmakers on Jiabiangou—help create communicative memory, and, to some extent,

an informal type of cultural memory. However, the surviving victims of these tragic events are dying out. As Arny Schweiger insightfully writes, “Time is running out for the creation of communicative memory” (2015, 365). Additionally, the banning of most such works in mainland China seriously curtails their effectiveness in serving this function. Due to the ever-stringent media and cyber censorship under Xi Jinping, it has become much harder to publish such works in Hong Kong and to use VPNs to access banned works online. In fact, the PRC government's imposition of a new national security law for Hong Kong, enacted June 30, 2020, has seriously restricted press and media freedom, freedom of expression, the right to protest, and so on in Hong Kong. Since 2020, Hong Kong authorities have also used Covid-19 as a pretext to ban Hong Kong's June Fourth candle-light vigil in memory of the 1989 crackdown and massacre. Taiwan, on the other hand, is a country in which people enjoy freedom and democracy, and it is a major publisher and distributor of banned Chinese-language materials revealing the truths about such CCP-manufactured and -masked disasters as the Jiabiangou *laojiao* camp and the Great Famine (Wu 2020, 522). In the long run, these works can be seen as something like “rhizomes,” in that they survive underground or abroad when censored in China, while continuing to be “resilient, persistent, and recurring,” and to “propagate in unpredictable ways” (Wu 2011, 41–42). Just as a banned South Korean film inadvertently triggered many mainlanders' repressed memories of June Fourth, works on Jiabiangou will continue to propagate underground or abroad and contribute to collective memory in unpredictable ways, thereby resiliently resisting the dictatorial erasure of the memories of CCP-manufactured tragedies.

NOTES

1 Earlier versions of this article were presented at the 4th Trans-Pacific International Conference at the University of California, Riverside, CA, on September 13, 2018, and in the Department of Comparative Literature and Languages, University of California, Riverside, CA, on May 1, 2019. I would like to thank all the participants for their feedback. I would also like to thank the external reviewers for their helpful comments and John D. Moore for his assistance in copyediting.

Regarding the various groups' participation in the Gwangju Uprising and the traumatic memory afterwards, see also the account and commentary in *Laying Claim to the Memory of May: A Look Back at the 1980 Kwangju Uprising*, written by Linda S. Lewis (2002), an anthropologist and eyewitness to this tragic event.

2 See the product page for the Japanese release of *A Taxi Driver* on DVD at TC Entertainment's website: <https://www.tc-ent.co.jp/products/detail/TCED-4196?prev=recently> (accessed May 27, 2021). I thank my colleague Ms. Reiko Sato for providing this reference.


3 *Yomiuri Shimbun*. “Kankoku no ‘anbu’ terasu eiga irei hitto no riyu” (The reason a movie that illuminates the dark side of South Korea is an unusual hit). September 7, 2018. <https://www.yomiuri.co.jp/fukayomi/20180903-OYT8T50127/3/>. I thank my colleague Ms. Reiko Sato for providing this reference and for her help in translation.

- 4 See the report from Radio Free Asia on October 6, 2017, included in Shi (2017).
- 5 For a detailed account of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Pro-democracy Movement and the government crackdown and massacre, see Zhang Liang (2001).
- 6 For a comparison of the Gwangju and Tiananmen Pro-democracy Movements, see Eggleston (1991).
- 7 I thank my colleague Dr. Kelly Y. Jeong for offering and confirming this information.
- 8 It was in September 2017, after *A Taxi Driver* had won box office success in South Korea, that Mr. Kim's son revealed a photo of his father Kim Sa-bok with Jürgen Hinzpeter to the media, thereby confirming Mr. Kim's identity.
- 9 See also "The Chinese Amnesia," an essay written by the Chinese astrophysicist and dissident Fang Lizhi (1990) while in refuge inside the American Embassy in Beijing in 1990. He predicted that the CCP would repeat its "Technique of Forgetting History" and that the 1989 crackdown on the pro-democracy movement and the June Fourth Massacre would be forgotten in China.
- 10 See the report (Rudolph 2017) on the leaked censorship order at <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2017/10/minitrue-delete-articles-related-korean-film-taxi-driver/>, which reads in part, "From the Beijing Cyberspace Administration Oversight Center: Find and delete all introductions, online encyclopedia entries, film reviews, recommendations, and other articles related to the August 2017 South Korean film *A Taxi Driver*."
- 11 Even as of 2021, *A Taxi Driver* is still banned and discussions about it are still censored in mainland China. According to a March 26, 2021, message from a contact in mainland China, though *A Taxi Driver* is searchable on Baidu (Chinese search engine), the film is not listed on Douban (a very popular Chinese site where netizens can review, rate, and comment on movies/music/books/plays, similar to IMDb in the West).
- 12 I thank my colleague Dr. Johannes Endres for referring me to this book.
- 13 Yang Xianhui (2002b, 355) set the figure at 3000, but another writer, Zhao Xu (2014b, 28), claimed a total of over 3,500 "rightists." See the interviews in Zhao (2014a) for more information. See Veg (2014) and Wu (2020, 504–6), for more discussions on the Jiabiangou *laojiao* camp.
- 14 Published in 2009 and translated by Wen Huang, this translation abridged and revised the original Chinese text.
- 15 See Wu (2020, 516–21) for a discussion of the biopolitics and necropolitics of Maoism in the context of the Jiabiangou camp.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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