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Schoenhals, Michael

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00

Limitations of Transitional Justice in the People's Republic of China: the Curious Absence of the *inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*¹

MICHAEL SCHOENHALS
michael.schoenhals@ostas.lu.se
Lund University

In 2007, I was invited by the Swedish public authority The Living History Forum to participate in a project called Crimes against Humanity under Communist Regimes. My task was to contribute to a survey of the international literature and the research that had been done, up to that point, on crimes against humanity “perpetrated by communist regimes”. Specifically, I was meant to assume responsibility for leading the China-part of the project (**image #2**). What this meant, I was told, was as a historian to critically assess what the existing literature told us were all the horrors that had taken place under Mao Zedong, prior to the beginning of China’s so-called era of “reform” and “opening up” in 1979. Whereas my colleagues writing about the only other two “communist regimes” covered by our survey wrote about states which no longer existed (the Soviet Union and Democratic Kampuchea), I faced the delicate task of having to deal with one that remains very much alive. As commissioned by the Swedish authorities, I should add, the entire project was *not* to deal with Cuba, North Korea, or Vietnam, nor with the Cold War histories of any of the countries of New Europe or the former DDR.² With respect to China, it seems, the unstated assumption of our Swedish parliamentarians was that somehow in substance while not in name, the People’s Republic (PRC) had since the height of the Cold War executed just as much of a transition away from “criminal” “communism” as have Russia and Cambodia. The slightly bewildering element in all of this is of course the fact that in China, the

¹ A paper prepared for the Workshop “Justice and Accountability in Maoist China and After,” at the Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 8 March 2013.

² The research review that came out of the project is available in English here: <http://www.levandehistoria.se/english/researchreview>

Communist Party still governs unchallenged if not unchanged. There is nothing “post-” whatsoever about it.

I begin with this aside, if you wish, in order to hint at some of the limitations inherent in looking at the Mao era solely as a “past” and as a history comparable – in its relationship to China’s present – to how the Soviet era relates to present-day Russia or the brutal rule of the Khmer Rouge relates to the Cambodia of today. A historical transition from one kind of order to another most definitely takes place after the death of Mao Zedong and the official end, in 1977, of what was to have been the 1st Cultural Revolution. (Envisaged by the CCP leadership at the time were recurring “cultural revolutions,” every seven, eight years or so; but as we all know, nothing came out of these plans once “everything changed” in the wake of the 3rd Plenum of the 11th CCP Central Committee in December 1978.) Mao’s nationwide counter-revisionist revolution has since come to stand as a metonymic representation (wherein a chosen part is conveniently presumed to possess the essential qualities of the known whole) for all that was supposedly wrong with politics in China in the first three decades of the PRC. This “take” on history is one we encounter – in fact have grown to expect – in textbook history, journalism, fiction and film, Chinese and foreign. It has also by now, after yet another three decades, come to profoundly impact on everybody’s “collective memory” of what life had been like in China before the advent of “reform.” Oral historians be warned: this presumed “shared pool of information held in the memories of two or more members of a group” (the Wikipedia’s definition of “collective memory”) is actually a very unreliable source of knowledge about what actually happened in China before the Maoist present became today’s past. Shanghai social historian Jin Dalu has written a wonderfully illuminating chapter on this in his recent book *The Ordinary and the Extraordinary: Social Life in Shanghai during the “Cultural Revolution,”* about how all the residents of China’s biggest city that he spoke to in the noughties remembered (often in minute detail!) how their lives had been affected by the rationing of pork during the Cultural Revolution. In actuality, of course, pork was *never once* rationed in

Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution.³ But since not having been in a position to eat one's fill is, after all, not something likely to be remembered fondly by anyone, the *actual* rationing of pork (enforced by the Shanghai authorities in January 1955, from January 1957 to May 1964, from July 1976 to October 1979, during the first four months of 1984, and again from November 1987 to May 1992) is, one must assume, “in order to make sense” relegated by memory to that part of China's recent past that has come to stand for all that is “bad” – Mao Zedong's final decade in power, from 1966 to 1976.

This on but one minor example touching on a general problem: that, unlike in for example Eastern Europe, including East Germany (where the old “state of affairs” can be squarely said to be no more), the old “state” in the form of the CCP and the name of something founded in 1949 bearing the name “People's Republic” is still around and nobody – historians least of all – can conveniently pretend otherwise. What I want to talk about specifically today, in this context, is an in my view intrinsically interesting, albeit perhaps minor, way in which this *difference* (between the PRC case and our own European one(s)) is reflected in the cluster of issues, events, data, and choices that our conference calls “transitional justice.” Because of Germany's own post-WW2 history, I believe, while being perhaps esoteric in the eyes of historians from, say, India or Mexico, the example of the *inoffizielle Mitarbeiter* in Mao's China ought to be of some interest not the least to the comparativists among historians here in Germany.⁴ In the coming-to-terms with the Cold War past here in Germany, the iM figures prominently and profoundly on all levels, from ordinary Germans' *Alltag* to the offices of the senior politicians on both sides of the *innerdeutsche Grenze*. In the Chinese case, however, he/she is nowhere to be seen: not in social histories of the Maoist everyday, nor in accounts of high-level politics, and most significantly *not* in transitional justice, Chinese style, after 1977. There is no mention of *teqing* – which is what iM were called by the Public Security

³ Jin Dalu, *Feichang yu zhengchang: Shanghai "wenge" shiqi de shehui shenghuo* (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2011), pp. 122–48.

⁴ For more on this topic, see Michael Schoenhals, *Spying for the People: Mao's Secret Agents, 1949–1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Officers who recruited and “ran” them in Mao’s China (**image #3**) – in the court records made public from the trials of the “Gang of Four” and their associates. Professor Leese has done more work on the official “overturning of verdicts” in the late 1970s and 1980s than I have, so he may be able to correct me, but certainly in the fair number of cases that I am familiar with – of this kind or that – the *teqing* simply do not appear. I have neither seen one-time iM mentioned among the victims, nor encountered them as such among the perpetrators mentioned.

There is by now, three decades later, a substantial literature on the post-Mao transition and what it is said to have entailed. Visit any good academic bookstore in Beijing and you see works of both scholarship and fiction that attempt to deal with it, either by telling us what is meant to have happened at the highest political levels, or by providing probing insights of more private and personal kinds of what the end of Maoism meant to this or that ordinary and in some cases far from ordinary individual or family. Being more than 30 years in the past, Chinese historians are now researching and writing about it with a special sense of urgency, it seems, while the surviving participants that can be tapped for information are still out there, alive and well. For a sense of how this officially sanctioned history writing is evolving, one may as a shortcut consult the commendable new series *Writings by Younger Scholars in the CCP Central Party History Research Office* (*Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi qingnian xuezhe luncong*), a “collectana” in ten volumes, so far, sponsored by officialdom at the highest level. Less official writings on the subject have been coming out for years in the respected and widely read print journals *Yanhuang chunqiu* (*The Yellow Emperor’s Annals*) and *Bainian chao* (*Hundred Year Tide*), as well as in lesser media “under the radar” like the electronic journals *Bashan yeyu* (*Night-time Rainfall on Mount Ba*) and *Jiyi* (*Remembrance*) with their transnational internet distribution.

A popular sub-genre of sorts in the literature published in Chinese inside and outside the PRC centres on the role of the late CCP General Secretary Hu Yaobang, whose untimely death in the spring of 1989 saw public demonstrations that in turn set in motion the chain of events that culminated in the 4 June Beijing massacre of unarmed demonstrators in

Tiananmen Square. Hu had been promoted to director of the party's Central Organization Department in late 1977 and in this capacity of his acted decisively to push through rehabilitations of countless high-level victims of the Cultural Revolution and earlier political campaigns. How and why he did this will, I understand, be explained to us by the next speaker today, professor Wang Haiguang, so I will myself not touch on it any further. Historians today all highlight just how important Hu Yaobang's role was in pushing aside significant institutional resistance – ranging all the way from fierce opposition by critically positioned persons in power, to simple bureaucratic red tape – to make the “reversal of verdicts” a reality.

The number of people who after 1977 would come to enjoy transitional justice “with Chinese characteristics” was, as is the case typically in “human” affairs in China, truly staggering. In addition to those millions of people whose “cases” had originated in the Cultural Revolution, there were for example all of those so-called Bourgeois Rightists, the mostly educated elite urbanites who had been branded and stigmatized (as had, by automaticity, their children) in 1957–1958. Altogether some 550,000 according to statistics circulated by the CCP in 1979, it was in 1980 admitted at the highest levels of the Party that in reality all but a few dozen of them should either never have been branded “rightists” in the first place, or otherwise in any case had their stigmatizing label removed ages ago. In addition, there were the 160,000 curiously named “centre-rightist elements”, also from the pre-Cultural Revolution era, a majority of whom by now also were admitted to have been branded in error.

For many, the post-Mao “rehabilitation” came too late. In the published literature, they tend to be famous figures, memorialized not the least in part because of the loss to Chinese culture or to the national heritage that their tragic deaths would seem to have represented. Many of them were what we might call “intellectuals,” and even posthumously, given the common human failing of often expressing empathy first and foremost for members of one's own social “group,” it is on them and their fates that much of the existing literature coming out of China has ever since centred. Writers tend to be intellectuals, and intellectuals, let us be honest, are far more likely to write

down personal, emotional recollections of other intellectuals than about (to indulge for a moment in the exercise of stereotyping) humble illiterate peasants or crude uncultivated members of the working class. As a result, unless we take the kind of interest that entails an actual effort, in terms of time and energy, we end up seeing far less of what actually happened to those who belonged to social categories other than intellectuals (and perhaps senior politicians) that had, all the same, often been just as profoundly affected by events in the first three decades of the People's Republic. I am thinking here not only of workers, peasants, and soldiers, but of vagrants, teachers, prostitutes, and members of the clergy as well...

There is surely a risk of grave historical bias affecting our answers of the question “*Who* did Maoist China’s ‘crimes against humanity’ really affect *the most*, then?” if we foreigners simply take as our point of departure *not* actual primary sources, but a convenient corpus of secondary literature – say, the already prefigured, printed, substantial, and sometimes even indexed corpus of writings produced by our Chinese colleagues. Personally, my early private inclination reinforced in recent years by listening closely to my friend Alf Lüdtke – and drawing privileged inspiration from the work being done in China by people like Jin Dalu in Shanghai and He Shu in Chongqing – has led me to take a particular interest in the fates of “everyday people” (the kind of men and women that, coincidentally, the very month in 1969 that the obviously far from “everyday” PRC President Liu Shaoqi was tormented to death at the hands of his Cultural Revolutionary captors, Sly and the Family Stone were singing the praises of on the *Hitparade* here in Germany). I would like to create a bit of counter-bias to the focus on the already famous, next, by illustrating briefly the form that posthumous transitional justice assumed in the case of a typical “everyday” victim. All of my data, in this case, comes from a weeded-out public security file from rural Jurong county, some 300 kilometres by road northwest of Shanghai, in Jiangsu province.

My posthumously rehabilitated individual’s real name is Wang XX (**image #4**). He was born in 1900, was a school teacher most of his life, serving after the founding of the PRC in a local middle school. Beginning already in the

middle of the 1950s (*not*, as in so many of our instances of received knowledge, in the Cultural Revolution), Wang had become the subject of a behind-the-scenes investigation into his past: his file contains denunciations of him, made behind his back, by a number of individuals. Locally, the authorities decided that even though there was no solid evidence of any wrongdoing, he was to be subject to what in today's post-9.11 world in democratic societies is known as "non-intrusive" monitoring. He retired in 1964, but was not permitted to move from Jurong to Beijing where he could have joined and lived with his son (a teacher at the prestigious Renmin University), daughter-in-law, and grandchildren. On 17 October 1968, after a particularly traumatic Cultural Revolutionary confrontation – a so-called "struggle session" – in the rural People's Commune where he lived, he committed suicide by throwing himself down a well. A damning verdict on him was passed, and for a number of years hereafter his suicide was recorded locally as an unjustified attempt at making the Cultural Revolution look bad and at challenging the new revolutionary order.

The official document (**image #5**), dated 25 August 1978, announcing Wang's posthumous rehabilitation is a letter from the post-Mao Revolutionary Committee of the Commune where he had lived and died, addressed to Wang's son and daughter. The latter two would appear to have received mere copies of it: the original letter remains in Wang's file, and written along the bottom of it is a note saying "Would the [Party] organization please transmit [the contents of] this letter to Comrades XXX and XXX." The letter begins by stating "your father Wang XX's political historical problems have been resolved: for details please see attachment." It then proceeds to deal with financial restitution, and after referring to (1) a set of temporary State Council regulations from 1958 and (2) to a discussion within the People's Commune Party leadership, it states that Wang's children will receive a flat sum of 100 Yuan to cover the cost of their father's burial, as well as 318.78 Yuan (equal to six months of the pension that their father would have lifted at the time of his death) in compensation. The letter ends with a sentence declaring that the [sub-governmental] "neighbourhood committee" in the area of the People's Commune where

Wang XX had lived and died would spread word of his rehabilitation at a mass meeting “so as to eradicate the influence” of whatever negative rumours may have circulated about what kind of a person he had been, and the circumstances of his suicide.

Wang XX’s tragic fate appears to have been sealed once his neighbours turned on him. His file suggests as much. And so, you may ask, is there then not here already, buried here somewhere, a trace of the iM? No, the *teqing* was a far more complex institution than your next-door *Denunziant*, the person described by the 19th century German poet Hoffman von Fallersleben as “der größte Lump im ganzen Land.” Such cases of simply volunteering titbits of information to the local “authorities” is what is illustrated in this **image (#6)**, a page removed from the file of Nanjing urbanite, a page meant to be destroyed, yet one that somehow found its way to a flea market in the 1990s when a student of mine purchased it. It attempts to list the many occasions in 1967–68 on which a different Mr Wang was overheard listening, during his lunch break, to foreign radio broadcasts of light or – in the words of his activist *Denunziant* – “vulgar” (*huangse*) music.

As was the case of the iM in the DDR, the real domestic *teqing* “apparat” in Mao’s China amounted to a permanent institution managed directly by the state or, if you wish, by the Communist Party *by way of* its control of the state machinery. (Prior to October 1949, the *Party’s* Social Affairs Department(s) had managed security, intelligence etc. matters; with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, a change-over occurred with the Ministry of Public Security under China’s *government* run by Premier Zhou Enlai inherited this particular function of the Social Affairs Department(s).) *Teqing* were instruments of (among other things) covert surveillance targeting segments of the population deemed potentially hostile to the new order, or likely to harbour “persons of interest.”⁵ In the terminology employed by the public security organs, the latter were human

⁵ On this topic, see Michael Schoenhals, “Nebulous Nexus: Modernity and Perilustration in Maoist China,” in Michael Kim, Michael Schoenhals, and Yong-Woo Kim, eds., *Mass Dictatorship and Modernity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 53–70.

“targets” (*gongzuo duixiang*) of operational activity in the same way that in the former DDR, officers of the STASI might have described what iM were doing as “*an feindlich tätigen Personen oder im Verdacht der Feindsätzlichkeit stehenden Personen arbeiten.*”⁶

Teqing were surely now and then recruited from among the activist constituency symbolized by the “member of the masses” just mentioned, who had felt compelled to record just how often he had heard pop songs from Taiwan or Hong Kong coming from his colleague’s radio. But, as historians, it is important for us keep the *teqing* and mere zealous citizen apart. (Historians of the United States, for example, will surely know the distinction that needs to be made between a proper FBI “source” and anyone who is merely an eager participant in USAonWatch, the National Neighborhood Watch Program under to the Department of Homeland Security.) Standard accounts of the history of the PRC have long been telling us that a so-called “mass line” defined actually existing Maoism and set it apart from the other socialisms of the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe. And the fact that *in the public record* there was never any mention of *teqing* did lead some foreign observers to conclude that such people did not “actually” exist (or suspect that in terms of simple numbers they were so rare a species as to not even deserve a mention). Now we can confidently say that those of us who held this view of Mao’s China were simply wrong. The iM “dimension” of Europe’s once actually existing socialism – a dimension that since the end of the Cold War has featured so prominently in transitional justice initiatives – had been present in Mao’s China too. In the mid-1950s, we now have it from a source no less authoritative than a one-time Vice-Minister of Public Security, there had been over ten thousand *teqing* active on China’s national railroad grid alone.⁷

On the basis of reliable, once highly classified public security primary records that enterprising historians have been able to locate these past ten or so years, we now know that in the 1950s and 1960s in China, *teqing* were

⁶ Christian Bergman, *Die Sprache der Stasi: Ein Beitrag zur Sprachkritik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1999), p. 18.

⁷ Schoenhals, *Spying for the People: Mao’s Secret Agents, 1949–1967*, p. 5.

“secretly *recruited* from all social strata, and include party and Youth League members, revolutionary masses, backward elements, as well as elements of the hostile classes...” (**image #7**). The PRC’s first minister of public security, Luo Ruiqing, regarded the state-controlled operational resource (*zhenchā lilíang*) these recruited individuals made up as “a basic *means* whereby we can vanquish our enemies.” While their number did not remain constant for any length of time, and reliable macro-level statistics are still all but impossible to come by, it was never small, save possibly during a period from the end of 1967 until 1971, when as an operational instrument in the hands of the public security organs, *teqing* were associated with revisionism and seen by some as having no place in a Great Proletarian Cultural Revolutionary China.

As I attempt to show in my book *Spying for the People*, *teqing* were systematically recruited and deployed in cities (*not*, it should be noted, normally in China’s rural villages), in workplaces and in urban society at large. On average, an ordinary public security operational officer was according to regulations from the 1950s to run “at least fifteen agents,” while more senior officers were each to run “between three and five high-level agents.” (There were significant discrepancies between what was and what was meant to be, and hence we should not take operational aims as directly *corresponding to* realities on the ground.⁸) Regulations also spoke of *how many* operational officers working under cover were meant to be employed to handle agents in, for instance, a Chinese university. In a small university with a personnel section (the preferred operational cover) employing six cadres, two were to be undercover public security officers; in a large university with a personnel section of twenty-five, ten were to be officers under cover. Simple maths permit us to conclude from this that the number of *inoffizielle Mitarbeiter* in a Chinese university at any given point in time during the Mao era could have been anything from 30 to 150 or more.

⁸ On just how poorly the running of agents was in reality managed in some parts of China, see the astonishing revelations made by the Jiangxi provincial Bureau of Public Security in “1953 nian yinian lai jingji baowei fangmian de teqing gongzuo he zhuan’an zhencha jinxing qingkuang baogao” (Status report on agent work in the economic protection sector in the year of 1953 and the progress of operational case work), *Jingji baowei gongzuo huiji* (Collected Economic Protection Work), Vol. 6, December 1953, pp. 12–18.

That *teqing* had played no small role in building “cases” later deemed “unjust, wrong, and false” is something we know for a fact. As in the former DDR, there were *teqing* who had been systematically and for extended periods of time informing on close friends and colleagues. The case perhaps best known outside China is that of the actor Ying Ruocheng (**image #8**), later vice-minister of culture, and his wife Wu Ziliang. Prior to 1968 (and probably again in the second half of the 1970s), they had served in Beijing as so-called secret investigation agents (*mimi diaocha teqing*), regularly reporting to the public security authorities in the capital on what their friends and acquaintances in the foreign expatriate community were doing, saying, and thinking. Nothing would be known to historians about this, were it not for the fact that Ying wanted it to become known once he himself and his wife had both passed away. It is revealed in the English language edition of Ying’s autobiography, co-authored by Claire Conceison, entitled *Voices Carry: Behind Bars and Backstage during China’s Revolution and Reform*.⁹ In the book’s Chinese-language edition on sale in China, the relevant passages have all been removed.

A *cause célèbre* involving one or more Mao-era *teqing* became the focus of Chinese-language media (and blogger) attention in the spring of 2009. Referred to on the website of the Phoenix Television group in Hong Kong as the “Huang Miaozi Snitching Incident” (*gaomi shijian*), it involved a coterie of very prominent figures in China’s cultural circles, including the painter and calligrapher Huang Miaozi (1913–2012). On the basis of police records which she claimed to have stumbled across much later, Zhang Yihe (1942–) insisted that Miao had informed on a common friend, the essayist Nie Gannu (1903–1986), to the public security authorities in 1962–1967. Zhang even claimed to have seen a comment by Luo Ruiqing, the PRC’s first minister of public security, on what she said had been a report by Miao, Luo’s comment on it supposedly being “That bastard Nie! At some point, he needs to really be taught a lesson.” The only problem with Zhang’s allegation is of course, as many Chinese netizens quickly pointed out, that Luo had

⁹ Ying Ruocheng and Claire Conceison, *Behind Bars and Backstage in China’s Revolution and Reform* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

ceased to be minister and left the public security sector altogether (to become PLA chief of staff) long before 1962.¹⁰ For this reason, Luo's name would not have been on the list of persons who would have read or been briefed on the content of the report and he would certainly not have been scribbling comments or instructions on it.

While they both touch on the historical role of the *teqing*, neither the Ying case or the 2009 allegation by Zhang Yihe relate directly and clearly to our workshop theme of transitional justice. They may bridge the pre-Deng, post-Mao gap of the years when political verdicts like that on the poor teacher Wang XX who had thrown himself in a well in desperation were (almost) all formally overturned, but it is not as if we come across these in ways and quantities that would be familiar to us from, say, how victims and perpetrators are documented as interacting in the files of the Gauck-Behörde here in Germany. I find this curious, and I believe first of all that here is a typical case of a “missing dimension” in historical research on China (**image #9**). The dimension of the *teqing* as an instrument of how domestic politics was really being “done” in Mao's China is one that we as historians should pursue (to the extent that we are in a practical position to do so) far more aggressively than we have until now. We foreign historians should do this in the expectation of being able to rectify an increasingly obvious flaw in *our* overall “take” of what went on in Chinese society, in relations between people, and between people and the state & society, thirty, forty, fifty or sixty years ago. So far, our Chinese colleagues have not published anything on it as far as I have been able to discover, but this does not mean that they – unlike us – have not already for some time been aware of its historical significance: it simply reflects what I started out saying about the difference between researching the history *of* states that are no more, and researching and writing history *in* states that are still very much of the here and now.

Very tentatively, based on my own perusal of documents emanating with China's so-called *gong jian fa* (“public security, procuratorate, and people's

¹⁰ <http://big5.ifeng.com/gate/big5/culture.ifeng.com/special/huangmiaozi/>

courts”) sector more broadly, I would like to say one thing about what I believe to be a formal, legalistic basis for the curious absence of *teqing* in the post-Mao transitional justice process as documented by judicial or quasi-judicial organs. I raised this matter in a chapter section of *Spying for the People* called “Covert Information and the Courts.” There I cited the 1954 Arrest and Preliminary Hearing Work Temporary Statutes promulgated by China’s Central Ministry of Public of Public Security and an “opinion” (as in legal opinion, if you wish) published by the same ministry’s Preliminary Hearing Bureau in 1958. In the latter opinion, which was highly classified at the time and clearly not meant to be known to anyone without the proverbial “need to know,” the following line of reasoning was put forward:

The utilization of secret documentation as evidence has to be managed with great care. Henceforth, any evidence touching upon secrets such as agents, postal examination, technical operations, aerial (*tiankong*) [camera] surveillance, etc. may not be utilized in public, and leaking it is strictly forbidden (**image #10**). One should to the maximum extent collect public evidence such as documentation consisting of denunciations by the masses and oral admissions by co-perpetrators, and substitute such evidence in stead. However, there are cases where the secret evidence touches upon the main crimes of the perpetrator and it proves truly impossible to collect alternative public evidence. [When this is the case] one may first – through internal channels – manage the matter the appropriate way by discussing it with the leaderships of the courts and procuratorate. When documentation (the content of which may be made public) provided by agents is to be turned into denunciations by the masses, witness statements, or admissions by co-perpetrators, or when certain operational data is to be turned into reports by operational officers or operational departments, etc. the relevant procedures may be embarked upon only careful research and checking and approval by the leaderships.¹¹

¹¹ “On Present Preliminary Hearing Work and Future Tasks,” quoted in Schoenhals, *Spying for the People*, pp. 221–22.

My understanding of the underlying logic of this, given that the PRC is still the PRC, and that in our own states/countries here in Europe, when a post-election transition puts a new government into power, the Kingdom of Sweden in the same sense remains the Kingdom of Sweden, there is nothing like the readiness to go all public with just about everything (unsavoury in particular) about the *ancien regime* in the way that we witnessed after the “fall of Communism” here in Europe. In as far as methods & means, rather than aims & outcomes, are concerned, there are as a consequence serious limitations to just how far a process meant to rectify injustices in one’s own state/country ends up going.

Today, a very small number of Chinese historians are actively conducting research on the subject of the *teqing*, but they are doing this in a domestic environment that is largely adverse to open publication of their findings. Research on Mao era public security *teqing* and operational work has to be research that, as academics, those researchers conduct “on the side,” since there are no brownie points to be had from papers that must remain unpublished: one does not get tenure or ear-marked research funds in Chinese university history departments by working on topics like “the role of agents in the consolidation of CCP rule after 1949” or “unjust cases as by-products of the use of informers after 1949.” Instead, one should expect to get a lot of flak as well as strongly worded advice from ones peers – who may only mean well! – to *pick some other topic*! In the rarefied atmosphere of a university where the pursuit of the truth is held up as the ideal, this is an anomaly set to persist until the PRC has changed even more than it already has in the last three decades. Naively, perhaps, I am cautiously optimistic here. Let us not forget that the people who set the parameters for what is permissible for serious historians in China *can* be influenced: and in this case, such influence *can* be exerted in settings like this one, the collegial one of the international academic workshop or conference. One of the most crucial things that *foreign* historians of the PRC must not do today is to be intimidated. As serious historians, we must carefully develop and then stick to our own understanding of what constitutes a safe or unsafe research project in China, and not simply because we misread the stories that come

out of our own media about how dire the fates are of public intellectual A or Peking University professor B. It has been many years since I last heard of a serious foreign academic not being granted an entry visa *solely because of* his/her having researched a *historical* topic rather too well and in the process come up discovered some unpleasant truths. Our Chinese colleagues are in a different situation and we empathize with them because it is a difficult one. But surely our role is to make sure that, for example, we take the PRC's 30 year declassification rule (for example) seriously and not by default assume that it is but a worthless piece of paper. Here we must, even if we know reality is not always quite that simple, *zhuang sha*. It's an easy way for us help justice in China become what it claims to be...