

# UC Irvine

## CSD Working Papers

### Title

State Sponsorship or State Failure? Mass Killings in Rural China, 1967-68

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/72n0w235>

### Author

Su, Yang

### Publication Date

2003-05-01

# CSD Center for the Study of Democracy

An Organized Research Unit  
University of California, Irvine  
[www.democ.uci.edu](http://www.democ.uci.edu)

Students of the Cultural Revolution—the most extensive and ferocious mass movement under the communist rule<sup>2</sup>—are familiar with its violence, including the ubiquitous beating and torture against teachers, intellectuals, and government officials (e.g., Wang 1996a, 1996b), and the casualties from street battles among warring mass factions (Wang 1995; Perry and Li 1997; Xu 1999). But recently some reports have emerged that insist on the existence of mass killings, a qualitatively different phenomenon in which a large number of unarmed civilians were killed, often in a fashion of categorical extermination. These reports include a memoir by a former cadre on perhaps the earliest event of this sort in Daxin, a suburban county of Beijing. In the space of five days between August 27 and September 1, 1966, 325 family members of the “class enemy,” between the ages of 38 days old and 80 years old, were killed (Zhang 1998). The best known case to Chinese readers, and maybe the most tragic in terms of number of victims, was in Daoxian county of Hunan Province. A report published in a Hong Kong based Chinese magazine reports that in a series of pogroms spread across the county in late 1967, within two months, 4950 people were killed (Zhang 2001). Zheng Yi’s (1993) controversial book on massacres in Guangxi Province may be the best known to the Western world, thanks to its English translation and an academic recast of the tales about cannibalism (Sutton 1995). In a recent volume edited by Song Yongyi, a few more cases from Yunnan, Qinghai, Niemeng and Beijing are added to this list of atrocities (Song 2002).

Reports like these are hard to believe. First, they are suspected of exaggerating the atrocity in order to discredit the communist state. Second, the authors’ incendiary moral indignation and their penchant to graphic details may have undermined the persuasive power. Third, are their sources creditable? Finally, even if these events were true, scholars may wonder, were these mass killings just extreme and isolated cases, or were they a common phenomenon?

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on data from my dissertation project, which is advised by Andrew Walder, Doug McAdam and Susan Olzak, and supported by the Littlefield Dissertation Fellowship from the Institute of International Studies and a travel grant from the Social Science History Institute, both of Stanford University. The paper also draws data from a larger project directed by Andrew Walder with grants from the Henry R. Luce Foundation, Stanford University OTL Research Incentive Fund, and the Asia/Pacific Research Center. I would also like to thank Junling Ma, Dorothy Solonger and Wang Feng for their support and assistance. The remaining errors are mine and mine only. My apologies that some valuable comments from the above readers have to be incorporated in a future draft of this research.

<sup>2</sup> In the official discourse in China, the Cultural Revolution lasted between 1966 and 1976. While it is true that the party did not begin explicitly denouncing ultra-left party line until 1976, when Mao died and the “Gang of Four” fell, there was a discernable sea change at the end of 1971, after which violent mass mobilization virtually stopped. The failed coup by Lin Biao may have contributed to the change, and one year later Deng Xiaoping was recalled to Beijing to take charge. The state-sponsored mass activism continued, in the forms of mass rally and poster writing, but the spearhead was toward remote targets of political figures such as Lin rather than local personalities. In fact, county annals report only an extremely small number of political deaths or injuries after 1971.

I had these doubts and questions in mind when I embarked on my research project on the Chinese Cultural Revolution using the officially published county annals (*xianzhi*). What I found is that while the above cited cases may be particularly severe in one way or another, similar mass killings were by no means isolated cases, but in fact a common and widespread phenomenon across rural counties in the later part of the Cultural Revolution (months before or after founding the Revolutionary Committee, the new form of government in local jurisdictions). In fact, as I will show in this paper, the evidence is overwhelming. Bear in mind that these annals are publications compiled by local governments. The information from them can be considered as “de-classified” state secrets. In other words, there is little reason to believe such county annals would exaggerate political violence under the communist rule. If anything, we can only suspect underreporting.<sup>3</sup> This paper will document the mass killings based on county annals of three provinces, two of which (Guangxi and Guangdong) report widespread mass killings, and one (Hubei), which reports few of such events.

In addition to documenting the existence and scale of mass killings, I also explore the questions of how and why. After all, state-related mass killings such as genocide have been a familiar phenomenon in the 20th century (Lemkin 1944; Horowitz 1976, 1980; Fein 1984; Kuper 1981, 1985; Bauer 1984; Chalk and Jonassohn 1990; Tilly 1985, 1995; Jones and Tilly 1998). What can the particular case of the Cultural Revolution atrocity teach us about the conditions under which citizens turn against their neighbors with unimaginable cruelty? I will leave the question of why human beings can be sometimes so evil to the moralists, and the question of whether certain cultural groups are more bloodthirsty than others to the psychoanalysts. Following Tilly and others, I will understand political violence to be political action that is rational and even strategic (Horowitz 1976, 1980; Kuper 1981; Tilly 1985, 1995; Jones and Tilly 1998; Valentino 1998). While previous discussion on the political logic of mass killings often focuses on the strategic considerations of the central authority of the state (e.g., Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot), I treat the Chinese communist state as a system penetrating into various levels of society and therefore consider multiple actors, whose interests may sometimes conflict with one another.

When it comes to the role of the state, it would be tempting to attribute massacres of this sort to an evil state machine that can precisely carry out the central command. But in most cases, such central commands are hard to trace, or nonexistent in the first place. Moreover, the killings often involve not necessarily state army but civilian-turned situational killers. Only by looking at the hierarchical order and horizontal components can we account for the temporal and geographical variations of these killings under the same regime.

A third theme of this paper is the demobilization of the Cultural Revolution as a mass movement. Most mass killings took place in the context of demobilization. By the time Mao and the Party center called for “the revolutionary grand unity” in late 1967, the mass movement of Cultural Revolution had been mobilized in a ferocious fashion for more than one year. Local governments had been dismantled and the masses had been let loose to form organizations and alliances to contest the new power. Mass organizations were armed and street battles fought. During this chaotic time, it was an all-but-impossible task to form the Revolutionary Committee, the new form of government capable of commanding respect, sustaining legitimacy, and most of all, disbanding dissenting mass organizations. As before, social and administrative problems were attacked through the time-honored method of “class struggle”- shorthand for destroying overt defiance and hidden “enemies”. It was during this demobilization that local representatives

---

<sup>3</sup> See more discussion on this point in Walder and Su 2003.

of the state turned “class struggle” into a reign of terror and mass killings. The story of the demobilization period has been rarely told, as research on the Cultural Revolution has largely focused on the origin and development of the mass mobilization.

The remainder of this paper consists of the following sections. I first provide a general account of the mass killings in the local counties in the provinces of Guangxi, Guangdong and Hubei. Second, I discuss the political climate, at both national and local levels, surrounding the mass killings. Third, in an effort to search for explanations, I analyze the geographical distribution, the timing, the profiles of the victims and perpetrators. This is followed by some statistical analysis on the relationship between the likelihood of mass killings and the county’s social and political characteristics. Finally, I conclude by discussing the historical and theoretical implications. But before I turn to the main sections, some remarks about the data sources are in order.

### **The Data Sources**

I have compiled three sources of data that document the mass killings during the Cultural Revolution. First, I read through a three-volume compilation of key Party documents between 1966 and 1976. These are the Party center’s policy directives during the Cultural Revolution movement and editorials and reports published in Party newspapers and magazines such as *People’s Daily*, *Liberation Army Daily*, *Red Flag*, and *Wenhui Daily*. Second, I examine the political situations at the provincial capitals by drawing on one government publication (Guangxi Wen Ge Dashi Nian Biao 1995 for Guangxi) and two previous studies (Wang 1995 for Hubei, Hai Feng 1971 for Guangdong). The third is the county annals, my main source for local events of mass killings. Among these three, the last source deserves special explanation.

In 1978, the Third Plenum of the Party’s 11th Congress issued the 48th Circular that called for rehabilitation of the “innocent, false and wrongful cases.” The policy generated valuable information regarding the scope and severity of tragic events during the Cultural Revolution at the local level, most of which were then documented and published in a source called County Annals (*xianzhi*, one volume for each county). The new edition of *xianzhi*, with few exceptions, has a “Main Events” section to record, among other historic events in the county, key events during the Cultural Revolution, including death and injury statistics. Also in *xianzhi*, we are able to find information regarding social-demographic characteristics of the county, such as population, party membership, and county leaders’ background.

A Stanford data collection project directed by Andrew Walder attempts to cover all Chinese rural counties in twenty-nine provincial jurisdictions (21 Provinces, 5 Autonomous Districts, and 3 Municipals directly under the central government). The total county number in 1966 is about 2,250 (Ministry of Civil Affairs 1998). To date about 1,800 volumes of county annals are found available (one for each county). The relevant pages regarding the Cultural Revolution are photocopied from the University Services Center of Hong Kong.

As one of the first empirical expeditions into this data source, I choose three provinces with about 190 counties for the sample of this study. Table 1 shows the percentage of counties for which I am able to collect county annals information on the Cultural Revolution.

**Table 1. Percent of Counties for Which Data Are Available**

|                             | Guangxi | Guangdong | Hubei |
|-----------------------------|---------|-----------|-------|
| Counties with Data          | 65      | 57        | 65    |
|                             | 78.3%   | 71.3%     | 90.2% |
| Total Counties <sup>a</sup> | 83      | 80        | 72    |

a. Numbers in 1966 (Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 1998).

As discussed elsewhere (Walder and Su 2003), we must take great caution in using information on the Cultural Revolution from county annals. On the one hand, the details regarding the Cultural Revolution, which is a sensitive topic in Chinese political life, vary from county to county due to possible self-censorship or inadequate information gathering. On the other hand, we have to code “no mention” of an event or the consequence of the event as “none”—as “did not occur or did not have the consequence”—in order to use the data. Therefore statistics from this coding approach should be considered as an underestimate of the actual number of killings that occurred. For example, when compared with other sources, the underreporting on twelve counties that experienced severe victimization is substantial (Walder and Su 2003, Table 11). In our earlier analysis on the victimization of all forms in 1966-71, we found the numbers of victims (the persecuted, injured and dead) are correlated to the number of words devoted to the Cultural Revolution in a county’s annals. We hence adjusted our estimates by weighting the length of the record (Walder and Su 2003). For the purpose of this study, however, I will only report numbers of deaths *as reported* in the annals. This way of underreporting is my deliberate strategy to unambiguously establish the fact of mass killings.

### **The Mass Killings**

Following Valentino (1998), I define mass killing in this paper as “the intentional killing of a significant number of the members of any group (as group and its membership are defined by the perpetrator) of non-combatants” (1998:4). A few elements of this definition are worth further discussion. First, identification of the victim is based on “membership,” as opposed to one that is based on immediate threat. In the case of Cultural Revolution, the membership is based on political standards as opposed to ascriptive traces such as race and ethnicity.<sup>4</sup> Second, the intent to kill is imputable in the perpetrator. This separates mass killing from other causes of deaths in the Cultural Revolution such as death resulting from on-stage beating or off-stage beating. In on-stage beating the intention was not to kill but to convey a symbolic message and to humiliate the victims, and the main purpose of off-stage torture for confession was clearly to force a confession. Mass killing also differs from casualties of armed battles, a widespread phenomenon occurring in the earlier stage of the Cultural Revolution. Finally, the criterion of “a significant number” indicates some concentration in terms of time and space of the killing. To use a hypothetical example, we should not judge that mass killings occur if 180 villages of a county kill one person in each village, but we should do so if one of the villages kills more than ten people within one day.

---

<sup>4</sup> For this reason, I choose the term “mass killing” over “genocide.”

In this section, I first use some examples to illustrate the manner of mass killings and to show how I decide from the county annals whether a mass killing occurred. I then provide an overall picture of the extensiveness of mass killings in Guangxi, Guangdong and Hubei provinces.

October 3, [1967]. In Sanjiang Brigade, Dongshan Commune, the militia commander Huang Tianhui led [the brigade militia] to *geng-sha* [push into a cliff to kill] 76 individuals of the brigade—former landlords, rich peasants and their children—in the snake-shaped Huanguaneng canyon. . . . . From July to October, [other] 850 individuals [in the county]—the four-type elements (Landlords, Rich Peasants, Counterrevolutionaries, and Bad Elements) and their children—were executed with firearms. (Quanzhou xianzhi 1998:17)<sup>5</sup>

Quanzhou County, Guangxi, otherwise a typical county in communist China, represents one of most devastating cases of mass killings. In 1966, about 93% of its population of 485,000 was rural, governed by three levels of governments: county, commune (township) and brigade (village). In the Land Reform in early 1950s, 10,110 families were classified as landlords, 3,279 as rich peasants (Quanzhou xianzhi 1998:147). In subsequent political campaigns this rank of so-called “class enemy” were joined by others who were labeled as Counterrevolutionaries or Bad Elements. Together, this segment of population, sometimes including their family members, was known as “Four-Types” (*si-lui fen-zi*). They would not even dare to wear the same clothes as others, let alone make trouble, but whenever the “class struggle” rhetoric was whipped up, they were an instant and perpetual target for harassment and persecution. Their tragedy reached the climax in the Cultural Revolution. By 1971 when the Cultural Revolution closed its violent period, 2156 men, women and children of Quanzhou county had died of “unnatural causes” (Quanzhou xianzhi 1998:565), some in a genocidal fashion, as evident from the above account.

This quote is typical among a group of county annals that use unequivocal language to describe the mass killings. It provides information on the timing, location, victims, perpetrators and weapons. It is a major type of mass killings, which I call *Pogrom against Four-Types* in this paper. Other county annals provide less explicit information about the manners of killing. But based on the time period specified in the record and the large number of deaths, the fact that mass killings occurred is unmistakable.

In the name of “cleansing class ranks” and “mass dictatorship,” indiscriminate killings severely took place across the county. Between the mid-June and August [of 1968], 1991 people were killed as members of “Assassination Squads,” “Anti-communist Army of Patriots” and other “black groups.” Among them, 326 were cadres, 79 workers, 53 students, 68 ordinary urban residents, 547 peasants, and 918 Four-Type elements and their children. Among the 161 brigades [of the county], only Wenquan in Huixian and Dongjiang in Wantian did not indiscriminately detain and kill. (Lingui xianzhi 1996:492)

In this case the Four-Types continued to make up the majority of victims, indicating possible pogroms like those in Quanzhou County, but the victims also include those labeled as

---

<sup>5</sup> This quote and others to follow are directly quoted from *xianzhi*. Original wordings are in Chinese. Translations are mine.

members of an alleged conspiracy group. We can thus discern an additional cause of mass killings, a second type, that I call *Killings in Political Witch-Hunt*.

A third type of mass killings is what I call *Summary Execution of Captives*. Although called “captives,” the victims were not armed combatants in a factional battle. Instead, the capture and killing of unarmed civilians occurred after one alliance (or faction) already had the upper hand. The following example vividly illustrates the nature of this type of mass killing. After a joint meeting attended by public security officers of a few counties on August 18, 1968,

... the People’s Bureau of Arms in each county went ahead to carry out the “order.” About 4,400 (a number that exceeded what had been stipulated in the meeting) armed individuals of the “United Command” (*lian-zhi*)<sup>6</sup> besieged the members of “7.29” [a dissenting mass organization] who had fled to Nanshan and Beishan of Fengshan County. More than 10,000 were detained (the then county population was 103,138). During the siege and the subsequent detentions, 1,016 were shot to death, making up more than 70% of the total Cultural Revolution deaths of the county. ...After the violence swept across the county, the Revolutionary Committee of Fengshan County was finally announced established on the 25<sup>th</sup> [of August 1968]. (Guangxi Wen Ge Da Shi Nian Biao 1995:119)

The above quotes represent three major types of mass killings. These examples also show how the county annals provide information that can be used to establish the fact of mass killings in a county. At this conjunction, however, it may be important to add a few words about those counties in which I am not able to establish such facts. First, I dismiss those counties that report less than 10 deaths in a particular time during the Cultural Revolution. Second, even for those that do mention substantial deaths, I do not regard the county as experiencing mass killings in three situations.

First, although events may indicate possible mass killings, the county annals do not provide numbers of deaths, as in the following example.

In the evening of March 20, [1968], the militia of Huangqiao Brigade, Xinlian Commune indiscriminately killed people with the pretext of quelling “*Pingming Party*.” Afterwards indiscriminate killings *frequently* occurred across the county, particularly severe in Youping and other places. (Mengshan xianzhi 1993:p.27, *italic mine*)

Second, I do not include large numbers of deaths due to armed battles, not imposed upon unarmed civilians, as is shown in the next example.

March 3, [1968]. The two [mass] factions engaged in armed battles in Liantang, which resulted in 144 deaths. (Hengxian xianzhi, 1989:19)

Third, in some instances, although a large number of deaths are reported, the number is an aggregated number for the entire period of the Cultural Revolution, as a result, the manners in which the victims were killed cannot be decided. For example:

---

<sup>6</sup> One of the two major province-wide mass alliances.

During the ten-year Cultural Revolution, 2053 cadres and mass members were struggled against. 206 were beaten or otherwise caused to die. 541 were paralyzed from beatings (Tianlin xianzhi 1996:555).

As such, I use conservative standards to identify counties that experienced mass killings.

### The Scale of Mass Killings in Three Provinces

The most widespread and severe mass killings were in Guangxi province. Of the 65 counties for which I have county annals, 43 counties, or 66.2%, experienced mass killings. Among the counties that experienced the most severe repression, 15 counties exceeded 1,000 deaths (Quanzhou, Wuming, Guixian, Lingqui, Douan, Tiandeng, Luchuan, Luocheng, Mashan, Lingchuan, Guangning, Yishan, Liujiang, Chongzuo, and Luzhai). Among them, Wuming County ranks as highest<sup>7</sup> in terms of number of mass killings, with death toll of 2463. 1546 were killed in one campaign between June 17 and the early July of 1968 (Wuming xianzhi 1998:30). Guangxi also covers all three types of mass killings I described above: Pogrom against Four-Types, Killings in Political Witch-Hunt and Summary Execution of Captives.

Guangdong province followed Guangxi very closely in the occurrence of mass killings and number of deaths. Twenty-eight out of my Guangdong sample of 57 counties, or 49.1%, experienced mass killings. Six counties exceeded 1,000 deaths: Yangchun, Wuhua, Meixian, Lianjiang, Guangning and Lianxian. The most severe county was Yangchun with 2,600 deaths between the August and October of 1968. The mass killings in Guangdong belong to two categories: Pogrom against Four-Types and Killings in Political Witch-Hunt. No summary execution of captives, the third type, is reported in the province.

In comparison, mass killings were next to nonexistent among the counties in Hubei, the third province of this study. I count only 4 out of 61 counties, or 6.6%, to have mass killings. These four cases, however, all involved large numbers of killings accompanying epidemic beatings across counties in waves of political witch-hunt. No pogrom or summary execution is reported in the province.

**Table 2. The Scope of Mass Killings in Three Provinces**

|   | Guangxi | Guangdong | Hubei |
|---|---------|-----------|-------|
| Total Counties with Data                          | 65      | 57        | 65    |
| Counties with Mass Killings                       | 43      | 28        | 4     |
|   | 66.2%   | 49.1%     | 6.2%  |
| Counties with 500 deaths or more                  | 27      | 10        | 0     |
|   | 41.5%   | 17.5%     | 0.0%  |
| Median deaths (among counties with Mass Killings) | 526     | 278       | 46.5  |
| Largest number of deaths in one county            | 2463    | 2600      | 115   |

<sup>7</sup> But see Bingyang county below, footnote 13.



Table 2 summarizes the above discussion on the scale of mass killings in the three provinces. From the evidence regarding percentage of counties that were involved in mass killings and the loss of civilian lives, it is beyond any reasonable doubt that mass killings were a widespread phenomenon in Guangxi and Guangdong. At the same time, Hubei province seems to stand as a negative case with very rare mass killings.

### **The Negative Case of Hubei**

The counties in the Hubei province were by no means quiet during the period of mass killings in Guangxi and Guangdong. In fact, during this period of heightened violence (late 1967 throughout 1968) Hubei counties also experienced persecution against designated “class enemies.” Thirty-eight counties, or 60.0% of my Hubei sample, report that more than 1,000 people in the county were beaten in the persecutions, many to the point of paralysis. But unlike Guangxi and Guangdong, the epidemic in Hubei was large-scale beatings that, for the most part, stopped short of mass killings. Here is an example.

September 6, [1967]. The county seat witnessed the “September 6 Violent Event.” A group of “Rebels” paraded 22 “Capitalist Roaders” and “Stubborn Conservatives” during the daytime, and injured 32 individuals (paralyzing 8) during the nighttime. The practices quickly spread into communes and villages, where 1,015 were severely beaten. Among them 44 were paralyzed, 1 killed, and 9 others died of causes related to the beating. (Xianfeng xianzhi 1990:24-25)

Most counties that experienced similar large-scale beatings report fewer than ten deaths. In this particular case, although the death toll in a concentrated period exceeded my cutting point of ten, I do not count it as a case of mass killing, for the reason that the nine deaths were not explicitly caused by an intentional extermination. Among the 65 counties of Hubei, I classify four as having experienced mass killings due to the number of the deaths from the epidemic beatings of the time. They are Yichang (10 killed, 105 driven to suicide, 60 paralyzed), Enshi (2350 beaten, 51 killed, 314 paralyzed), Zigui (2500 beaten, 40 killed, 440 severely injured, 35 permanently paralyzed) and Yunxi (32 killed in Hejiaqu Commune, the other 512 beaten and 276 “killed or paralyzed” in the county).

The main purpose of this section is to establish the fact of mass killings, as well as to assess their scale in the three provinces. Much detail has been left out. I will come back to do a detailed anatomy later. Next let us discuss the historical background in the later part of the Cultural Revolution, when the most mass killings occurred, with an emphasis on the role of the state.

### **The Role of the State**

It is hardly in dispute that the Communist state is to blame for the political violence during the Cultural Revolution. But what motivates my discussion on the causes of the mass killings is the following question: Did the state *intentionally* kill in this manner, or, were the mass killings just an *unintended* consequence of the state’s policy? This question may sound simplistic at first glance, but it is nonetheless a useful starting point that will lead us to explore how state policies and structures were related to the mass killings. In the following discussion, a distinction is made

between the central authority and local governments. On paper, the central policy pronouncements had time and again admonished violent excesses, but they were only taken to heart by some local leaders and not by others. This distinction shall prove to be crucial as the discussion unfolds.

### **Demobilizing Mass Movement and Forming New Governments**

The Cultural Revolution, the most extensive mass movement under the communist rule, commenced in May 1966 and subsided in 1971.<sup>8</sup> Two sweeping waves of events divide the movement into three periods: the power seizure campaign in January 1967 and the installment of a new form of local government by ‘revolutionary committees’ in late 1967 and 1968 (Walder and Su 2003). The movement started in the realms of culture and education but developed into a full-blown overhaul of the governments at all levels. In the beginning, participants only included students and intellectuals, but in the later campaigns of smashing and rebuilding, the movement embroiled people from all walks of life including workers, peasants and bureaucrats. For more than one year citizens were permitted to form their own political groups, albeit they were required to be “revolutionary” in nature. The freedom and “unrestricted democracy” (*da min zhu*), however, did not produce the new order that Mao may have had in mind. Instead, citizens were divided everywhere to fight factional street battles.

By late 1967, the mass movement was to be demobilized, as Mao called for a “grand revolutionary unity” amid a divided and militant population. Mao reportedly envisioned setting up the new form of government—revolutionary committees—in every jurisdiction by February 1968, the Chinese New Year (Wang 1995:181). For local bureaucrats in the province, county, commune and brigade, however, this was no easy task. In fact, Mao’s plan failed. The last provincial revolutionary committee was not set up until September of 1968 (Xinjiang). Some revolutionary committees in lower levels were set up as late as September 1969 (Beijing University, see CRRM 1988, vol.2: 373). In Hubei, the provincial revolutionary committee was announced in February 1, 1968, and most new county governments were formed in the spring of that year. In Guangdong, the provincial revolutionary committee was found in February 20, 1968. Most county level committees were found in the months of January, February and March. Guangxi’s provincial committee was set up as late as August 20, 1968, although most county governments were formed in the months February, March and April (See Figure 1 below for the timing of the founding of county revolutionary committees).

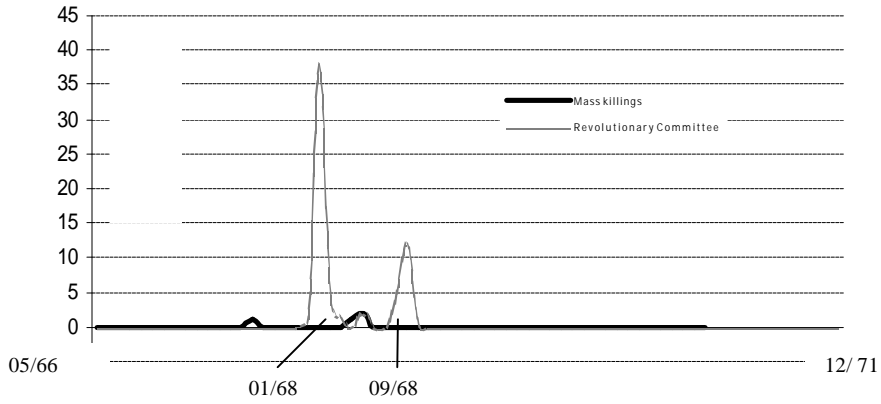
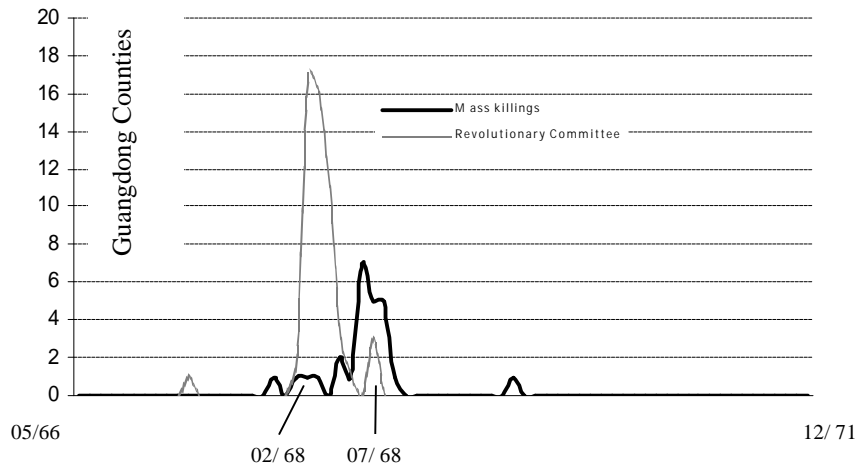
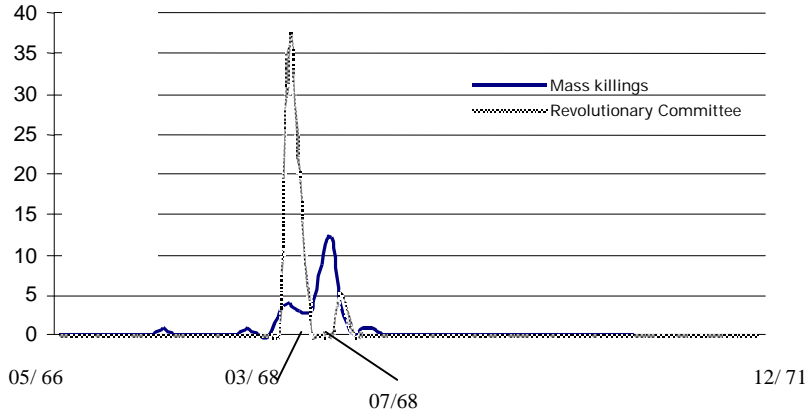
Building a new social order involved two interwoven tasks: to install an effective local government and to crack down on dissenting mass activities. The new government consisted of army personnel, old leaders in the former government, and mass representatives who had emerged from the movement. Such a form of government was particularly susceptible to movement influence. It was hotly contested as to which former leaders would remain or which mass representatives would join.

Open defiance to the new provincial government was particularly vehement. In provincial capital cities of Hubei, Guangdong and Guangxi, oppositional mass alliances continued to wage armed battles against their mass opponents who supported the new government. In Guangxi, mass armed battles plagued Nanning City and delayed the forming of the revolutionary committee until August 1968 with the Party center’s sustained intervention (Guangxi Wen Ge Da Shi Nian Biao 1995).

---

<sup>8</sup> See footnote 2 above.

**Figure 1: Comparing Timing of Mass Killings and Founding of Revolutionary Committees**



In Guangdong, Zhou Enlai (Rank 3 in the party center) advised the populace to form a revolutionary committee within one month and a half in early November 1967, but the task was not accomplished until February 20, 1968. Moreover, order did not follow immediately once the revolutionary committee was formed. The dissenting mass alliance, the Red Flag Faction (*qi-pai*), maintained its open defiance and engaged in numerous street battles in the next three months, known as Guangzhou Great Battles (*da-wu-dou*) (Hai Feng 1971). In both Guangdong and Guangxi, the so-called Conservative Faction, which had a closer relationship to the former administration, prevailed (Gangxi Wen Ge Da Shi Nian Biao 1995; Hai Feng 1971).

In Hubei, the forming of the provincial revolutionary committee was an outcome of mass factional struggle that culminated in the well-known Wuhan Incident in July 20, 1967, in which the mass alliance, with a government and military backing, took two leaders from Beijing as hostage. The so-called Rebel Faction, the oppositional mass alliance that was against the former government, emerged as a victor in the incident, thanks to the Party center's backing. Armed battles peaked in that summer. The new government was formed on February 5, 1968, with the Rebel Faction dominating the seats for mass representatives. But the Rebel Faction was to be split into two new warring factions, fighting yet a new wave of violent battles in that spring (Wang 1995).

Similar instances of open defiance were not as evident at county and lower levels. The forming of the new government, often earlier than the provincial one, was more like administrative reorganization than a movement process. Mass members were handpicked into the leadership. But the volatile situation in many provincial cities caused concern within the Party center, which responded by charting a radical policy that urged local governments to treat any opposition in "class struggle" terms. The provincial governments not only happily took the offer, but also played up the rhetoric, which would have significant implications for counties and lower jurisdictions. Many counties righteously resorted to terror, whether or not the political threat was real or imagined.

### **Defining Victim and Concocting Threat**

The call for a political solution to establish order was unequivocal. A typical passage regarding such policies was the 1968 New Year editorial, jointly penned by the Party's three flagship publications:

Chairman Mao says: "All reactionary forces will fight to the last ditch at their pending doom." A handful of traitors, spies and capitalist power-holders in the party, the demons and ghosts (i.e., those landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad-elements and rightists who have not yet been well reformed) in the society, and the walking-dogs for the American imperialists and Soviet Revisionists are bound to continue their sabotage and instigation with all possible means, including spreading rumors and planting divisions (The 1968 New Year Editorial jointly by *People's Daily*, *Liberation Army Daily* and *Red Flag*. CRRM 1988, vol.2: 3).

Hitler's Nazi state promoted a racial theory that portrayed Jews as subhuman. Stalin's communist state created a category of the "people enemy" that was subject to extermination. As such, early in the process, mass killings often involve the state propaganda machine dehumanizing a segment of the population. The Chinese equivalent of the subhuman category

was “class enemy.” What was unique during the demobilization of the Cultural Revolution is that the defining characteristics were based not so much on accretive traits (race, ethnicity, or religion) as a political standard: class enemy is whoever the local government deemed to be in the way of new social order. “Whether or not one is willing to overcome factionalism,” asserted the same editorial, “is the most important sign of whether or not one is willing to be a real revolutionary under the present circumstances.” (CRRM 1988, vol.2: 4)

As in other times, the party policy was general rather than specific. While it stressed the existence of “class enemy” and their potential threat, it did not provide criteria for identifying them. Local governments could define “class enemy” as they saw fit. To compensate for the deficiency in general pronouncements, the party promoted a series of examples of local practice. For example, four days after the above editorial, the center issued a directive praising the work of “deeply digging out traitors” by Heilongjiang Province (CRRM 1988, vol. 2:16). In the mid-year, a report on a Beijing factory’s experience of “fighting enemies” was distributed nationwide with great fanfare (CRRM 1998, vol.2: 126-130). An implication of such promotion is that local governments emulated one another to comply with the general policy.

The rhetoric of “class struggle” was not new, nor was its effect of dehumanizing certain categories of the population. For violence as extreme as mass killing to occur, there was an additional process at work: manufacturing threat. As commonly seen in other cases of mass killing in which the state not only creates a category of the subhuman but also manufactures a pending danger of inaction, the provincial and the lower-level governments concocted tangible threats to justify terror.

To put this warning into practice, local governments rushed to concoct organized activities by “conspiracy groups.” Local governments called for “preemptive attack against class enemies,” often in a manner of “waging a 12-degree typhoon.” In the Hubei province, a moderate period came to an end in late March 1968 when Beijing suddenly stopped the anti-ultraleftist campaign and switched to a so-called counterattack on rightist trends. In the provincial capital Wuhan, the self-styled mass dictatorship group turned the Wuhan Gymnasium into a large prison. Many were beaten (Wang 1995:196-97). The anti-rightist attack also swept local counties, April and May of the year witnessed a reign of terror across the province, under the banner of “Three-Counter, One-Smash” against the so-called “class enemy’s ferocious attack (*jie ji di ren de chang kuang jin gong*).”

In Guangxi and Guangdong, a large-scale conspiracy network—“Patriots against the Communist” (PAC)—was announced to be uncovered by the Guangxi Military Division and the Preparation Committee for Establishing the Revolutionary Committee on June 17, 1968. It was alleged that the Guangxi part of the networks was only the “division,” whose headquarters was based in Guangzhou, the provincial capital of Guangdong. One of the two warring mass factions, the United Headquarters (*lian-zhi*), soon used as a weapon against its rival: “The PACs are deeply rooted in the 4.22 Organization. The leaders of the 4.22 are the PACs. Let’s act immediately. Whoever resists arrest should be executed on the spot” (Guangxi We Ge Da Shi Nian Biao 1995:96-99).

There is evidence that the mobilization of terror was directly facilitated by the diagnosis of the situation by a few key central leaders. In a meeting with Guangxi mass representatives on July 25, 1968, the high-ranking leaders Zhou Enlai and Kang Sheng sanctioned the manufacture of this large-scale conspiracy network. They agreed that the PAC headquarters was based in Guangzhou and there were branches in Guangxi. More significantly, both leaders specifically

linked the PACs to two mass alliances (the 4.22 in Guangxi and the Red Flag in Guangdong) (Wen 2002).

The general climate begot palpable rumors of conspiracy and threat in the communes and villages. Not only those labels passed from above were used to signify the danger, allegations about tangible threats abounded, such as reportings of uncovered “assassination squads” and “action manifestos”. In the above cited cliff-killing case of Quanzhou county, Guangxi, the head of the commune militia came back from a meeting in a nearby county and instructed their subordinates that the Four-Types were about to act, and the first groups of victims would be cadres and party members, and second group the poor peasants (Guangxi We Ge Da Shi Nian Biao 1995:53). Information is limited in the county annals of the three provinces, but a speech by county leader in Zhang Cheng’s detailed account of Daoxian (Hunan Province) may illuminate the typical rhetoric of concocting tangible threat before the mass killings:

At this present time the class struggle is complicated. A few days ago, there appeared reactionary posters in the No.6 district.<sup>9</sup> The class enemies spread rumors that Chiang Kai-shek and his gang will attack the mainland China soon and the American imperialists will launch a new World War. Once the war breaks out, they [class enemies] will first kill party members, then probationary party members. In the No.1 district, there was this [former] puppet cornel [serving the puppet army during the anti-Japanese War during the WW II] sought out the brigade [party] secretary and the peasant’s association chair to demand reinstatement (Zhang 2001:68).

### **Admonishing Against Excess**

The understanding of the role of the state in mass killings would not be complete without noting the other side of story: the official discourse, which emanated from the center to provincial level, and constantly warned against excessive violence. No explicit wordings that endorsed large-number of killings can be found in any party document or speech. To the extent the information about severe killings could be passed upward and treated as credible, the upper-level authorities reacted with condemnation and in some cases sent in the army restore order.

As early as November 20, 1966, the party’s central committee distributed a Beijing City’s policy directive to all local governments of the nation, which prohibited “unauthorized detention stations, unauthorized trial courts, and unauthorized arrest and beating.” It warned that those behaviors were in “violation of the state law and the party discipline” (CRRM 1988, vol.1: 163). Ever since the spirit of “struggle through reason, not violence” was reiterated again and again by the center through a series of major policy pronouncements (e.g., on December 15, 1966, January 28, 1967, April 6, 1967, June 6, 1967, May 15, 1968, July 3, 24, and 28, 1968, December 26, 1968) (CRRM 1988, vol. 1 and 2).

It is a debatable point whether a provincial government such as Guangxi was genuine in its rebuke against excessive violence. But at least on paper, that was the official policy. In December 1967, about one month after a new wave of mass killings spread across the province, the provincial authorities issued a 10-point order including this policy statement: “Mass organizations should not randomly arrest, beat, or kill. All the current detainees should be

---

<sup>9</sup> District here is an intermediate level of administration between county and commune. It was not very common in China. As discussed above, a typical county consists of three levels of governments—county, commune (township) and brigade (village).

released immediately.” From this point on, a new term was coined, “unauthorized and indiscriminate beatings and killings (*luan da luan sha*)<sup>10</sup>” to label the widespread violence as a violation of social and political order. Here is a list of other actions taken by the provincial authorities (the Guangxi Military Division and the Preparation Committee for Establishing Revolutionary Committee) in relation with *luan da luan sha* (Guangxi Wen Ge Da Shi Nian Biao 1988: 58-127):

- On December 18, 1967, issued a report on *luan da luan sa* in Li Village, Rong County;
- On May 3, 1968, issued an order to stop *luan da luan sa* after an investigation in 9 counties;
- On June 24, 1968, issued the document “Instructions about Prohibiting *luan da luan sa*;”
- On September 19, 1968, confiscated firearms from the mass organizations; and
- On September 23, 1968, issued “Notice about Stopping *luan da luan sa*;”

The most significant evidence that the official policy was against excessive violence is that in many locations, when the information about such incidents could be passed upwards, the authorities would send in leaders or the army to intervene. For example, in the earliest incident of mass killings in the suburb of Beijing, the author, as a county leader, went to the Ma Cun Village five times to stop the killings. His effort involved high-ranking leaders of the Beijing city government (Zhang 1998). In the case of the most severe mass killings in Daoxian, Hunan, an army division was sent in (Zhang 2002: 71). While no detailed information is available in the county annals to find out how the mass killings came to an end, the data show that mass killings usually concentrated in a certain period of time, and in most counties the spike of the killings did not appear more than once, indicating some sort of external constraints were imposed from the above.

It is reasonable to conclude that such official policies both from the center and the provincial authorities serve to prevent mass violence from escalating even more than what I have documented above. But the severe degree of mass killings attests to the ineffectiveness of official state policies and pronouncements. There are two main reasons for this ineffectiveness.

First, the official policy did not carry any real punishment mechanism for the perpetrator. The admonishment was usually implied only as a guide for the future. In fact, there is no evidence of any punishment during or immediately after the mass killings. The following quote from a speech by the Minister of the Public Security Xie Fuzhi in May 1968 is a telling example of the leniency toward the violent perpetrators. In the same speech that was supposed to admonish violence, he seemed to suggest that no violence would be punished:

Even counterrevolutionaries should not be killed, as long as they are willing to accept re-education. It is doubly wrong to beat people to death. *Nonetheless, these things [killings] happened because of lack of experiences; so there is no need to investigate the responsibility.* What is important is to gain experiences so as to carry out in earnest Chairman Mao’s instructions to struggle not with violence but with reason (CRRM 1988, vol.2: 120. Emphasis mine).

---

<sup>10</sup> The Chinese character *luan* has multiple meanings. It means random, indiscriminate, and chaotic. It also describes actions that violate law and order, particularly against or lacking proper authorities. Here I translate *luan* into two English words: unauthorized and indiscriminate.

The persecution against perpetrators did not happen until the late 1970s, some ten years after the mass killings.

Second, it is not clear whether provincial and lower governments meant business in their warnings against extreme violence. For example, the above list of Guangxi actions regarding mass killings was concomitant with another long list of policies persecuting “class enemies.” While the province may see the *luan da luan sa* in communes and villages as unwarranted, its incentive to play up violence against the oppositional mass organizations in the cities undercut its role as social order guardian.

## **State Control Crippled**

The very nature of the Cultural Revolution movement—dismantling and rebuilding local governments—had severely damaged the vertical bureaucratic hierarchy. This included the overhaul of the public security system and the legal systems. By August 1967, the attack on these systems was called for by no less than the very minister of Public Security Ministry Xie Fuzhi:

From the beginning of the Cultural Revolution last year until the January Storm this year, the majority of apparatuses of public security, prosecution, and the court had been protecting capitalist roaders and repressing revolutionary masses. ...The situation is hard to change, unless the whole system of public security is overhauled. The old machine must be entirely smashed (CRRM 1988, vol.1: 530).

In 1967, according to county annals, the agencies of these systems ceased to function in local counties, communes and villages. Detentions and prosecutions were carried out not by any sense of law but by the political standards of the moment.

Another result of the Cultural Revolution mass movement was the clogged channels of information flow, both from top down and bottom up. Particularly germane to our discussion was the failure of bottom-up information flow, such that when bad things happened at the lower reach of the state, the upper authorities usually did not know until it was too late. When local leaders publicized their “achievements” in the movement, violence was covered up. For example, in January 1967, Beijing Municipal government submitted to the center a report about how the new administration of Tsinghua University faithfully carried out the Party center’s policy. This report painstakingly described how the people who had committed “bad deeds” were well treated and given opportunities to reform themselves. The report drew Mao’s attention and instructed it to be distributed across the nation as a model for emulation (CRRM 1988, vol.2: 275-281). Not until 1978, ten years later, another report emerged in an entirely different political climate to rebut the initial report, detailing the gruesome tales of the fate of the struggle targets at this university. According to the new report, within only two months of the class cleansing campaign, more than ten people were killed in one way or the other (CRRM 1988, vol.2: 281-283). Similarly, in local counties, due to the failure of information flow from bottom up, the upper level authorities intervened only after large numbers of people had been killed.

In this section, I have discussed the political background of the mass killings that occurred during the demobilization period of the Cultural Revolution. I imply that the origins of the mass killings have to do with the political task of setting up new local governments and demobilizing mass movements. If this is the case, we may hypothesize that the killings were



committed by actors associated with the governmental authorities, rather than other autonomous social groups. Also, by pointing out that the official policy was by and large against excessive violence, I imply that the mass killings would be more likely in the weak points of the state control. Now it is time to see whether these hypotheses are supported by empirical data. In the next two sections we will take a closer look at mass killings.

## **Anatomy of Mass Killings**

### **Timing**

The earliest event of mass killings occurred in August 1966 in the Beijing suburban county of Daxin (Zhang 1998 and Yu 2002). However, in the three provinces in this study, mass killings did not occur until late 1967 or 1968, some time before or after the establishment of the revolutionary committee. Figure 1 compares the time of the founding of the county-level committee and the time of mass killings in Guangxi, Guangdong and Hubei respectively. The data clearly show the relationship between the founding of the committee as new government and the occurrences of mass killings.

As shown in Figure 1, both in Guangxi (Panel 1) and Guangdong (Panel 2), mass killings peaked in July 1968, some time after most counties had established their revolutionary committee. It was the month when the center issued two well-publicized announcements to ban mass factional armed battles and to disband mass organizations. In Guangxi, the provincial revolutionary committee was yet to be established, the oppositional mass alliance, known as the 4.22 Faction, had been waging frequent campaigns in the major cities. The authorities therefore implanted the two announcements in a great zeal to crack down the faction, forcing some of its members to rural counties. At the same time, the newly established county governments were called to “preemptively attack class enemies.” Local governments, particularly at the levels of commune and village, committed the mass killings not so much to crack down on organized dissent as to take advantage of this climate. In Guangdong, although the provincial government had also been established since February, the organized defiance represented by the rebel faction the Red Flag was still similarly active as the 4.22 Faction in Guangxi. The provincial government of Guangdong also used the two announcements as a weapon in its face-off with the Red Flag. Similarly at the same time, the climate of terror was created in the local levels and was taken advantaged of by the local governments.

In comparison, a few cases of mass killings appeared in Hubei, not in July but about two months earlier (Panel 3 of Figure 3). The interesting point in the comparison is that Beijing’s two announcements against mass organizations impacted Hubei very differently from that felt in the other two provinces. This may indicate that the mass factional alignment in this period has a great significance in the provincial difference of mass killings. In Hubei, unlike in Guangxi and Guangdong, the Rebel Faction had been part of the new government (more discussion in the next section).

The documentation of the timing of mass killings by Figure 1 shows that the mass killings were concentrated in a few months. This is important, because it ties the mass killings to the timing of the new government and demobilization. Previously it is known that the third period of the Cultural Revolution saw the largest number of victimizations, but we do not know the specific mechanism that produced it. Some scholars loosely attribute it to a series of “later

campaigns” including “Cleansing Class Rank,” “One-Strike, Three-Anti” etc.<sup>11</sup> (Ding 2003; Walder 1996; Walder and Su 2003).

Our data show that in fact these national campaigns did not automatically translate into severe persecutions, at least not large number of deaths at the local level. County annals report that local counties selectively chose the rhetoric of some, not all these national campaigns. Just as important, the timing of adoption varied greatly across provinces and counties. Three provinces in fact generated their own campaign waves, which respectively affected the persecution for their local counties.

## Location

The mass killings tended to occur in lower levels of jurisdiction, usually in the commune (township) or in the brigade (village). If we recall the exemplar quotations cited above, specific names of commune or villages are mentioned in relation with mass killings. For example, *Sanjiang Brigade* is specified in the well-known Quanzhou (Guangxi) pogrom in which 76 family members of Four-Types were pushed in a canyon. The county of Guangxi reports that only 2 out of 161 *brigades* did not have mass killings, in the form of pogrom or political witch-hunt. Among twenty-eight counties of Guangdong where mass killings occurred, six county annals contain detailed information regarding names of the related jurisdictions. For example, Qujiang xianzhi states: “January [1968] serious incidents of illegal killings occurred in *Zhangzhi Commune*. *Thirteen brigades* of the commune indiscriminately arrested and killed. 149 were killed” (Qujiang xianzhi 1999: 36). Other examples include the following.

- “Large numbers of beatings and killings occurred in *three communes*, Chitong, Zhenglong, and Beijie, which resulted in 29 deaths” (Xinyi xianzhi 1993:52).
- “Mass dictatorship was carried out by the security office of *various communes*...” (Chenghai xianzhi 1992:57).
- “*Litong Brigade, Xinan Commune* buried alive 56 Four-types and their family members” (Huazhou xianzhi 1996:65).

The contrast between the absence of mass killings in the urban settings and their abundance in rural villages may reflect a *disconnect* between lower-level jurisdictions and the upper-level authorities, indicating the weakness of the state control at the lower level.

---

<sup>11</sup> Between late 1967 and 1971, the Center designated a wave after wave of campaigns of “class struggle” targeting different sectors of the society such as the following:

- The Great Revolutionary Repudiation, starting mid-1967, called for repudiating the “reactionary line” represented by the disgraced central leaders including Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, and finding their local representatives.
- The Struggle-Repudiate-Reform, starting in late 1967, aimed at reforming the administration in jurisdictions and working units.
- Drag Out the 5.16 Conspiracy Groups, starting mid-1968, targeted those allegedly having done bad deeds during the Cultural Revolution.
- Cleansing Class-Ranks, starting mid-1968, investigated all members of the society for possible links to enemy conspiracy.
- Rectify the Party, starting early 1969, reorganized the local party organizations by “remitting the old and absorbing the new (*tu-gu-na-xin*).”
- One-Strike, Three-Anti, starting early in 1970, targeted those with economic corruptions.

It is also worth noting that this pattern represents a departure from other Cultural Revolution phenomena with which we are more familiar. It has been commonly understood that the Cultural Revolution mass movement was a top-down diffusion process. That is, the earlier mobilization and the mass factionalism was largely a phenomenon among urban residents (including those in the county seat), which barely affected peasants in the communes and villages (Baum 1971, Unger 1998, but see Walder and Su 2003). In fact, the some 200 volumes of county annals used in this study contain rare mentions about mass factionalism or related armed battle outside a county seat, that is, below the county level.<sup>12</sup>

The observation that mass killings were more likely to occur in the weaker points of state control is supported by another consideration with regard to their geography: an examination of variation across counties. Remote counties are more likely to have mass killings. Counties with mass killings in Guangxi and Guangdong were 30 kilometers (on average) farther from the provincial capitals than those counties without mass killings (Table 3), and such a difference is robust after controlling for other factors (Table 4) (more about these two tables to be discussed in the next section).

The provincial difference between Hubei (with very few mass killings) on the one hand and Guangxi and Guangdong (both having widespread mass killings) on the other hand can also be understood in geographical terms. Hubei was a province that was closer to the national capital Beijing, while Guangdong and Guangxi were the two most southern provinces. In fact, the latter two were so-called border provinces, one adjacent to the British colony Hong Kong, and the other to Vietnam Frontier facing the U.S. invasion. (I will further discuss the importance of provincial differences below).

## **The Victims**

Most county annals do not provide detailed information regarding the victims' profiles. Where related information is available, the most frequently-mentioned category of the population is the so-called Four-Types, those previously classified as "class enemies." A detailed breakdown of victims is available in some counties, such as one cited above from Lingui County, Guangxi provides:

Total killed: 1991

- Four-Types and their children: 918 (46.1%)
- Cadres: 326 (16.4%)
- Workers: 79 (4.0%)
- Students: 53 (2.7%)
- "Ordinary urban residents: 68 (3.4%)

This breakdown appears to be somewhat typical, when compared with other counties where the victim profile is available from other sources. From a provincial document (Guangxi We Ge Da Shi Nian Biao 1995:111), we know the profile in Bingyang county is this (note the source uses a different way to breakdown):

---

<sup>12</sup> See more discussion in Chapter 4 on armed battles in Su's dissertation thesis "Tumult from Within: State Bureaucrats and Mass Movement in China, 1966-71."

Total killed: 3681<sup>13</sup>

- Rural residents: 3441 (88.7%)
- Cadres: 51 (1.4%)
- Teachers: 87 (2.5%)
- Workers: 102 (3.0%)

Lingling Special District, Hunan (10 counties including Daoxian) (Zhang 2002)

Total killed: 9093

- Four-types: 3576 (39.3%)
- Children of four types: 4057 (44.6%)
- Poor and middle peasants with historical problems: 1049 (11.5%)
- Other backgrounds: 411 (4.5%)

A few points can be summarized from the above profiles of victims. First, as noted, the majority of victims were the Four-Types. This reveals the nature of the mass killings in the Cultural Revolution: The mass killings were against the weak rather than any real threat, since, as discussed before, this group of population in fact did not constitute any real organized threat to the government (alleged conspiracy notwithstanding). They served as the convenient scapegoat for creating a reign of terror to tame the population at large. Second, the majority of victims were rural residents. In other words, mass killings mostly occurred outside the county seat. This is also important, as I argue that mass killings occurred in the lower reaches of the state where state control was particularly weak. Third, a significant number of non-Four-Types and non-rural individuals were killed. This may reflect the mass killings in the form of Political Witch-Hunt or Summary Execution of Captives. When mass killings were used to eliminate the rival faction members, the non-Four-Type victims were particularly numerous. For example, in the case of Fengshan County cited above, among the 1331 victims killed in the wake of a siege, 246, or 18.5%, were cadres or workers (both being urban residents) (Guangxi Wen Ge Da Shi Nian Biao 1995:117)

An unimaginable fact about the killings is that a large number of the victims were children of the Four-Types. This is an astonishing measure of atrocity against the weak. Some report that the perpetrator's rationale was that they might grow up to become revengers (Zhang 2002). In some cases, it was an afterthought. In Zhang Cheng's account about Daoxian, after killing the adult Four-Types, the perpetrators came back, dragged out the children and killed them, and finally looted the victims' residences (Zhang 2002). But in other cases, the children were guilty by association and killed at the same spot as their parents. The former landlord Liu Xianyan and his wife, who came from poor-peasant background, had two children, a one-year old and a three-year old. Before Liu was asked to jump to death in the cliff-killing incident in Quanzhou county in which 76 people were pushed into a canyon, Liu pleaded with the militia head Huang Tianhui: "Tianhui, I have two kids. Would the government decide that one of them belongs to my wife? How about I jump with one child but you spare the other one for my wife?" Huang said: "No!" (Guangxi Wen Ge Da Sh Nian Biao 1995:53)

---

<sup>13</sup> I did not use this number as the greatest level of mass killings in my other discussion of Guangxi province. The reason is that this number is from a different source other than county annals. This does not mean that the source of this larger number is less creditable, but that I intend to portray the mass killings primarily based on county annals as the source.

## **The Perpetrators**

The mass killings were not committed by a misguided and spontaneous crowd. Where information is available, we can find that the perpetrators were invariably organized by governmental authorities, usually militia members, members of mass organizations, or new volunteers. Without exception, available detailed accounts (about Daxin, Quanzhou, Daoxian, Fengshan) report painstaking organization meetings before the killings. In Zhang Cheng's account about Daoxian, there was a case in which the meeting took a vote to decide the individuals to be killed. One by one, the potential victim's names were read and votes were tallied. The process lasted for hours (Zhang 2002). In another district in the county, Zhang reports:

From district to communes, mobilization took place through every level, involving the district party secretary, deputy secretary, commander of the "Hong-liang"[a mass factional organization], public security head, and district chief accountants. (2002, 75)

The killings were committed in a highly organized manner. The victims usually were rounded up and killed in a location away from public eye. There were also cases in which a mass rally was held and a large number were killed, the so-called execution meeting.

The interviews with perpetrators, which took place many years later, indicate that most perpetrators carried out the killing as a political task (Zhang 2002; Zheng 1993). There is evidence that such acts were rewarded politically. In late 1968 and early 1969, the provinces and local counties began a campaign to rectify and rebuild the party organization. A large number of activists were recruited. Some official statistics tell the chilling connection between violent zeal and political reward. According to a published document by the Guangxi government, during the Cultural Revolution in Guangxi, more than 9,000 who had killed were recruited as new party members. Another 20,000 who had joined the party earlier in the Cultural Revolution through "fast-track" recruitment later committed killing. There were still another 17,000 party members who were responsible for killings in one way or the other (Guangxi We Ge Da Shi Niang Biao 1995:134).

## **Accounting for Geographical Variations**

If it is true that mass killings resulted from the Party-state's failure to constrain local leaders' propensity for radicalism, then we would expect mass killings to be most severe in places where the political control of the society was the weakest. In the last section, we have seen that this is, to some extent, the case: mass killings occurred at the lowest levels of jurisdictions—villages and township. Also, those counties who were more distant from the provincial capital were more likely to have mass killings. Along this line, we shall also expect those counties that were more sparsely populated, poorer, and had weaker party organizations to be more prone to mass killings. Therefore, I have collected the following county characteristics to test these ideas.

- Distance from the provincial capital (measured in 10 kilometer as unit)
- Population density (measured by number of residents per square kilometer)
- County government's revenue (using 1966 number, measured by Chinese *Yuan* per capita)
- Party membership (measured by number of party members per thousand population)

An alternative argument is that the severe violence may be due to grassroots cleavages, such as ethnic antagonism or leadership factionalism. Hence I collected information on two other features of a county. One is whether a county had significant presence of minority population (other nationalities rather than *Han*). Many counties of Guangxi and some in Guangdong have sizable minority population such as *Zhuang*, *Miao*, and *Li* nationalities. Some researchers have attributed the unusually severe conflict in Guangxi to its ethnic composition (Zheng 1993; Xu 1999). The other measure is to see the composition of the top county leaders in terms of their birth origin. The idea is to see if the top leaders consist of both local leaders and leaders from outside the county. According to Vogel (1969) and others (see Su 2003a for more discussion), the tension between local and outside cadres is one of the most prominent lines of elite factionalism.

- Whether the county had 30% or more minorities in the population; and
- Whether the county's party secretaries (usually around 6) consisted both of those with local origin and those with outside origin.

**Table 3. County Characteristics and Mass Killings (Guangxi and Guangdong)**

|   | Counties <u>with</u><br>Mass killings | Counties <u>without</u><br>mass killings |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| Average distance from provincial capital (10 km)      | 21.2                                  | 17.9                                     |
| Population density (per square km)                    | 139.7                                 | 219.1                                    |
| County government revenue ( <i>Yuan</i> per capita)   | 15.1                                  | 20.8                                     |
| Party members per 1000 population                     | 19.5                                  | 19.5                                     |
| Percent counties with secretaries of local origin     | 12.7                                  | 11.8                                     |
| Percent counties with significant minority population | 33.8                                  | 31.4                                     |

In Table 3, I compare counties with mass killings (Y counties) and those without mass killings (N counties) vis-à-vis the above characteristics. The bivariate relationships shown in the table between each characteristic and the occurrence of mass killing shows a very clear pattern that is mostly consistent with the above hypotheses. The numbers here do not include Hubei counties for the reason that there were few mass killings in the province.

Specifically, we find the following patterns. First, the average distance of Y counties from the provincial capital is 212 km while that of N counties is 179 km. That is, on average, Y counties were 33 km farther than N counties. Second, the difference in population density (139.7 vs. 219.1) is huge. On average, Y counties had 79.4 more residents per square km than N counties. Third, it also appears to be true that the poorer counties were more likely to have mass killings: per person county revenue is 15.1 *yaun* and 20.8 *yaun* respectively for Y counties and N

counties. Fourth, party membership *does not* seem to differ, with both types of counties having about 19.5 party members per thousand population. Fifth, potential elite factionalism in the county leadership appears to have a slight aggravating effect. 12.7% of counties with both types of county secretaries is slightly higher among Y counties than among N counties (11.8). And sixth, the presence of a significant minority population also appears to contribute to the likelihood of mass killings: 33.8% of Y counties had 30% minority population while 31.4% if N counties did.

In order to assess whether a bivariate relationship is spurious, I conduct multivariate analysis with logistic regression models. In the analysis I add two other control variables to control for the level of prior conflict and to specify provinces.

- Number of deaths from armed battles between mass factions, in most cases prior to the mass killings
- Which province the county belongs to.

I report the estimates of two models in Table 4. Model 1, or the full model, includes all of the county characteristics, and Model 2 is the so-called preferred model. In the full model (Model 1), only three measures are significant. The preferred model only retains these significant measures. Comparing the changes of chi-square ( $-2\log$  likelihood) and degrees of freedom, we can comfortably accept Model 2 as preferred model over Model 1, because with a change of 5 degrees of freedom, chi-square only changes 2.28.

Taken together, the two models indicate that only distance, county revenue and party membership account for the variations across counties, while population density, minority population, county leadership composition, prior deaths from armed battles, and provincial affiliation do not (they are not significant in Model 1). Looking at the estimate of Model 2 more closely, we find, as we expected, the remoter (distance has positive effect) and poorer (revenue has negative effect) counties are more likely to have mass killings. Based on the odds ratio, every 10 km distance add the likelihood by a factor of 1.043; or, a county that is 100 km remoter is 1.5 times more likely to have mass killings. Similarly, every increase of 1 *yuan* in county revenue per capita will reduce the likelihood of mass killings by a factor of .935, or put differently, a county that is 10 *yuan* poorer is 2.0 times more likely to have mass killings. Somewhat unexpectedly, the measure of party membership has a *positive* effect. That is, the more party members in the county, the more likely to have mass killings. The odds ratio of 1.028 indicates that a 9-member (per 1000 population) increase will double the likelihood of mass killings.

In brief, the analysis shows that the remoter and poorer counties are more like to experience mass killings and that those counties with stronger party organizations are more likely to experience mass killings. The first part of these findings about the remoter and poorer counties is consistent with our hypothesis that mass killings occurred in the weaker part of the state control. On the other hand, if we consider the local party organizational strength as an indicator of the responsiveness to the state control, the second finding- that party membership is positively associated with mass killings- is somewhat unexpected at first glance. However, if we reconsider this assumption more carefully, we can understand why this finding does in fact makes sense.

**Table 4. Estimates of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Likelihood of Mass Killing**

| Independent Variables                                  | Model 1     | Model 2               |       |
|--|-------------|-----------------------|-------|
|  | Coefficient | Coefficient<br>Ration | Odds  |
| In Guangxi (Guangdong as reference)                    | .190        |                       |       |
| Distance from provincial capital<br>(10km)             | .040*       | .042**                | 1.043 |
| Population density (per square km)                     | -.001       |                       |       |
| Significant minority population<br>(>30%)              | -.300       |                       |       |
| County government revenue ( <i>Yuan</i><br>per capita) | -.058**     | -.067***              | .935  |
| Party members per 1000 population                      | .760*       | .079**                | 1.082 |
| With party secretaries of local origin                 | -.080       |                       |       |
| Armed battle deaths                                    | .005        |                       |       |
| Intercept  | -.892       | -.953                 |       |
| -2Log likelihood (df)                                  | 136.30 (8)  | 138.58(3)             |       |
| N <sup>a</sup>   | 111         | 111                   |       |

a. This analysis is performed among the counties of Guangxi and Guangdong provinces. 13 cases are excluded as missing due to missing values of the covariates. Also excluded are all Hubei counties due to rare occurrence of mass killings in the province.

There are at least two reasons why a stronger party organization in the local level in fact may facilitate extreme violence like mass killings. First, a stronger party organization may be more responsive to the upper level authorities' call for political campaigns in "class struggle terms," while it may not be held accountable for its action, e.g., actions resulting in great human loss due to clogged information channels in the governmental hierarchy I discussed above. Second, the mass killings were committed by actors who were mobilized by the local governments. The more party members in the jurisdiction, the more organizational resources in the hand of the local authority to carry such mobilization. Other things being equal, this leads to more likelihood of mass killings.

The seemingly contradictory findings revealed by the analysis once again speaks to the paradox of state sponsorship and state failure that created the mass killings. A strong government in remote and poor areas is associated to high likelihood of mass killings because, on one hand,



the organizational strength makes it more susceptible to the call for political persecution and more resourceful in mobilization, yet, on the other hand, its relative geographical isolation enables its leaders and their followers to evade accountability.

### **The Provincial Difference**

The difference of the scale of mass killings between Hubei and the other two provinces in this study is very large. It provides evidence for my argument that the level of violence is a function of both national politics and local conditions. What accounts for this difference? While it remains for future research to account for provincial differences of this sort, I propose two tentative observations.

The first explanation focuses on the divergent paths of prior conflict leading to the founding of Revolutionary Committee in these three provinces. Earlier I have mentioned a major difference in the mass conflict between Hubei on the one hand, and Guangdong and Guangxi on the other. In Hubei, because of the Wuhan Incident in July 1967, the previous provincial government lost support from the party center and was thus entirely reorganized. The new provincial authority became one that favored the so-called Rebel Faction, who had been fighting the previous government and its supporters, the Conservatives. When it came to the time of founding the Revolutionary Committee in 1968, although mass factionalism persisted, it was mostly between two factions split from the same Rebel Faction. In the meantime, members of the Rebel Faction were well represented in the new government. As a result, the new government was relatively neutral in demobilizing the mass movement in the later part the Cultural Revolution (in comparison with Guangxi and Guangdong, see below).

In contrast, in both Guangxi and Guangdong, the Rebel Faction never prevailed and the alliance between the provincial government and the Conservatives was the dominating force in founding the Revolutionary Committee. The provincial government had had the center's support all along in their fight against the Rebels, partly because these provinces were two border provinces whose stability was of greater importance to the central government (Xu 1999). As a result, in the demobilization process, the provincial government was not a neutral agent mediating between the mass factions. Instead, it sided with one faction (the Conservatives) against the other (the Rebels). It is believed that the extreme violence in Guangdong and Guangxi was partly an act of retaliation by the government and the Conservatives against the Rebels. Moreover, the grassroots members of the Conservatives were emboldened by the backing of the government in their cruelty (Zheng 1993, Xu 1999).

If the new provincial government's backing of one mass faction may cause more severe violence in the demobilization period, we expect that counties in those provinces where the Rebels never prevailed (Type 1 Provinces) would experience more deaths than in those provinces where the alliance between the government and the Conservatives dominated in the Revolutionary Committee period (Type 2 Provinces). I test this hypothesis in Table 5, drawing data from 1530 counties, for which we have collected the county annals. According to Xu (1999), besides Guangxi and Guangdong, there were four other provinces that belong to Type 1 provinces, Jiangxi, Neimeng, Xinjiang and Tibet<sup>14</sup>, in which the Rebels never prevailed. They consist of 259 counties out of the 1530 nationwide.

The hypothesis is strongly supported by the data. As shown in Table 5, the average number of deaths per county in Type 1 provinces is 45.2, while that in Type 2 provinces is 451.0

---

<sup>14</sup> No county annals available for Tibet.

deaths per county, a ten-fold difference. Even if we exclude Guangxi and Guangdong, the two provinces that may be particularly severe, the average number of deaths per county in Type 2 provinces is still close to 2 times (70.3) as that in Type 1 provinces. Hence, we may conclude that the difference between Hubei and the other two provinces in this study represents a national phenomenon. That is, the violence is more severe in those provinces where the Rebels never prevailed and mass killings were partly attributable to the repressive action joined by the government and the Conservatives.

**Table 5. Deaths Per County in Two Types of Provinces**

|   | Deaths<br>per county <sup>a</sup> | Number of<br>counties |
|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Provinces where Rebel Faction prevail   | 45.2                              | 1271                  |
| Provinces where Rebel Faction <u>did not</u> prevail (5<br>provinces including Guangdong and Guangxi)           | 451.0                             | 259                   |
| Provinces where Rebel Faction <u>did not</u> prevail (3<br>other provinces, excluding Guangdong and<br>Guangxi) | 70.3                              | 135                   |

a. The mean comparisons with ANOVA are all significant at .05 level.

But an alternative explanation must be considered, which is based on another major difference between Hubei and Guangxi/Guangdong provinces: Guangxi and Guangdong are more remote from the national capital Beijing than Hubei. If it is true that mass killings resulted in the state's failure to constrain local leaders' propensity for radicalism, such a geographical difference should be important. In fact, at the county level, we have seen data indicating that remoter counties may be more likely to have mass killings (Table 3). Coincidentally, the six Type 2 provinces are all remote provinces like Guangxi and Guangdong, five of which are border provinces (except Jiangxi).

### Summary and Interpretation

In this study I have documented the patterns of mass killings in three Chinese provinces in the demobilization period of the Cultural Revolution. I also have also sought explanations for this historical tragedy by examining the role of the state. I have presented the findings from a few different angles. Now it is time to take a look at these findings together to formulate my central argument: The mass killings were rooted in the paradox of state sponsorship and state failure.

#### Patterns of Mass Killings

Mass killings occurred in the three provinces; in two provinces they were a widespread phenomenon. That this finding is from a published source sanctioned by the Chinese government unequivocally supports similar claims made by previous case studies. By examining the mass killings across more than 180 counties, with information from the previous case studies, I am able to uncover the following patterns.

First, the mass killings varied greatly across three provinces, while within one province, there appears to be a great degree of uniformity. This pattern indicates that the occurrence of mass killings was more germane to province-specific political conditions rather than national politics as a whole. I tentatively attribute the provincial difference to the different patterns of mass factional alignment vis-à-vis the governmental authorities in the province. In Hubei, the Rebel Faction, having had prevailed in the previous conflict, was incorporated into the new government. In contrast, in Guangxi and Guangdong, the Rebel Factions continued to be the outsider, and the two provinces were more prone to use violence as a weapon against the Rebel Factions. An alternative explanation for the difference is that Hubei was geographically, and by inference, politically closer to Beijing, hence the province tended to have more restraint against violence.

Second, the mass killings concentrate in the months after most counties established revolutionary committees, but in the time when the provincial capitals were still entangled in mass factionalism. The peaks of mass killings coincided with two announcements from the party center in July 1968 banning factional armed battles and disbanding mass organizations. The finding that historical timing was crucial factor helps us understand the nature and source of mass killings. The fact that most of them occurred after the new governments were put in place indicates that mass killings were the result of the repression by the local state rather than the result of conflicts between independent mass groups. The fact that they coincided with the crackdown of the oppositional mass organizations in the provincial capital indicates that the provincial authorities promoted the rhetoric of violence, although extreme violence in local communes and villages may not be what they intended.

Third, mass killings were primarily a rural phenomenon. In other words, they occurred not in provincial capitals or county seats, but in communes and villages. This is in stark contrast to earlier mass movements of the Cultural Revolution such as campaigns against intellectuals and government officials and the factional street battles which mostly occurred in urban settings. The imagery of top-down diffusion does not apply to the mass killings. This suggests that the class struggle rhetoric disseminated from urban centers found an expression in extreme violence in rural townships and villages, possibly due to the failure of the state to hold the action of the lowest bureaucrats accountable. This explanation is supported by another piece of evidence—the poorer and remoter counties were more likely to have mass killings.

Fourth, the perpetrators were the local leaders and their mass followers (e.g., militia members). The more party members in the local community, the more likely there were mass killings, likely because the local government in these communities enjoyed a stronger organizational base to mobilize the extreme violence.

Fifth, other things being equal (i.e., controlling for distance, county revenue, and party membership) counties with a significant presence of ethnic minority were not more likely to have mass killings. Similarly, population density, prior armed battle conflict, and the compositions of the county leadership have no association to the likelihood of mass killings. These findings to some extent eliminate alternative explanations to the argument fashioned here that stresses the role of the state.

### **The Paradox of State Sponsorship and State Failure**

What can we make of these empirical patterns? What do they say about the role of the state in the mass killings? In order to answer these questions, let me explicate my conception of the

Chinese state that has been implicitly guiding my discussion thus far. If the state is referred to as the organization with various levels of authorities and bureaucrats, I differentiate it into three levels—the center, the province and the local<sup>15</sup> governments (county, commune and brigade).

The central authorities in Beijing played up the class struggle rhetoric as its time-honored method to solve the problems of the time—to set up local governments and demobilize mass movements. In this sense, they have a sponsoring role in the mass killings. However, as evidenced in the policy pronouncements, the center saw extreme violence at the local level as an indication of unwarranted disorder. In this sense, the fact mass killings nonetheless occurred was the state's failure to influence local actors' behavior.

The provincial authorities, particularly of Guangxi and Guangdong, had an incentive to amplify the class struggle rhetoric in dealing with mass oppositions in the cities. They may have more tolerance of violence than the center due to the particularly severe challenges they faced. In this sense, the state was the sponsor of mass killings. In fact, the highpoint of mass killings was exactly when the provinces used the two July central announcements to crackdown on mass opposition. However, it is unclear whether the large number of killings in local communes and villages, mostly against unorganized Four-Types, helped the crackdown of the oppositions in the cities. It may be reasonable to believe that it was not instrumentally helpful, except that it may have helped generate the fearful climate. In other words, the provincial authorities would also see the mass killings in villages as unwarranted, an indication of state failure in the provincial level.

In comparison, the local governments (at county, commune and village levels) were clearly the direct sponsors of the mass killings, although their motives are not clear. They may have misinterpreted the policies disseminated from above (focusing on the sponsorship side) and showed their compliance with an extreme level of zealotry. Or, they may have seen terror as a convenient way to solidify their power grip in the local community. For whatever reason, it was the local bureaucrats and their followers who committed the violent act. In the time when the formal public security and court systems ceased to function and in a time when justification for violence seemed to be palpable in the air, local leaders, particularly those in the grassroots and remote areas, may find themselves totally unaccountable.

As such, when the state is considered not as a whole but as a collection of various levels of actors, the mass killings were created not by state sponsorship or state failure alone, but by both. The tragedy of mass killings in the later part of the Cultural Revolution was rooted in this paradox of state sponsorship and state failure.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

In this concluding section, I would like to discuss the findings in a larger context. I explore their meanings for understanding the Cultural Revolution as history, as a research subject and as a case of state-incited violence and genocide.

### **A Nation Soaked in Blood**

As we have seen, between late 1967 and 1968, mass killings were epidemic in two of the three provinces. Two thirds of counties in Guangxi and about half in Guangdong experienced mass

---

<sup>15</sup> The word “local” here means a lower level in a hierarchical order. This differs from another usage of the term, meaning a location that is closer to the speaker in expressions such as “local media coverage vs. national coverage.”

killings. In some cases more than 2,000 were killed in one county. By comparison, in the third province, mass killings were very rare. Only 4 out of 65 counties report large numbers of killings. What can these findings tell us about the existence and scale of mass killings in China's 26 other provinces?

While a better account of the national picture has to await further analysis on all counties' annals of about 2300 counties in China, a tentative conclusion can be drawn. That is, Guangxi and Guangdong may represent those provinces that were particularly severe in mass killings and Hubei may represent those provinces at the mild end. Most provinces may be in between, but were closer to Guangxi and Guangdong than to Hubei. This conclusion can be reached by comparing total number of deaths during the Cultural Revolution. Based on the county annals that we have collected (1530 out of 2300 Chinese counties), the national average deaths per county is 80.0. In comparison, that of Guangxi, Guangdong and Hubei is 574.0, 311.6, and 10.8 respectively. The Hubei number is far below the national average. I report this comparison in Table 6, where the numbers of injuries and numbers of persecution targets also reflect similar patterns.

Two points must be noted about these numbers. First, while the above numbers are not direct estimates of mass killings, they should result mostly from mass killings. As discussed above and elsewhere (Walder and Su 2003), the majority of the Cultural Revolution deaths were inflicted in the time surrounding the establishment of revolutionary committees in late 1967 and 1968. Second, these numbers are calculated with a conservative standard—I only sum up the numbers where specific figures are reported. Where a county mentions mass killings but gives no specific numbers, I treat it to have a zero count. In other words, the numbers of deaths reported here may be just a fraction of actual number of deaths.

The violence is known, but its degree is not. The extreme violence described here warrants a revision of our understanding of the Cultural Revolution. The violent side of the Cultural Revolution has been conveyed through two prevalent images. One was in the early period of Red Guard movements (1966-67) in which intellectuals and former leaders were dragged on stage for humiliation and beating. The other is the tumultuous street battles that began after the January power seizure in 1967 and subsided at the year's end. Violent as these images may be, the number of deaths pales in comparison with the mass killings I report here. If the first two images have prompted historians to call a nation in turmoil (*dongluan*), the widespread mass killings in fact had rendered a nation in blood in late 1967 and 1968.

**Table 6. CR Violence of in Three Provinces in Comparison with National Figures**

|                        | Deaths<br>per county | Injuries<br>per county | Persecution Targets<br>per county |
|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Guangxi                | 574.0                | 266.4                  | 12616.0                           |
| Guangdong              | 311.6                | 28.1                   | 6788.6                            |
| Hubei                  | 10.8                 | 44.5                   | 2317.5                            |
| All Provinces of China | 80.0                 | 68.0                   | 5397.0                            |

## **Cultural Revolution Research Reconsidered**

A generation of research on the Cultural Revolution mass movement has been dominated by works that search for the underlying interest-group base of “rebellion” (Lee 1979, 1981; Rosen 1982; Chen, Unger and Rosen 1982; Wang 1995; Yin 1996; Hua 1996). Missing from these studies are two features that truly define the Cultural Revolution: violence and state sponsorship.

The violence was rooted in the Stalinist doctrine of unmasking capitalist roaders and other hidden enemies. Earlier scholars often bypass this doctrine and the violence it entailed. Their research is more about the interests and idealism of the actors behind the violent means. However, “as experienced by participants, bystanders, and victims alike, it [the Cultural Revolution] is now commonly understood not as a pursuit of abstract ideals, but for what it turned out to be: an unprecedented wave of state-instigated persecution, torture, gang warfare, and mindless violence” (Walder 1991:42). The Stalinist doctrine in Mao’s China was taken to heart by all actors within the political system. It matters little whether they were for or against the status quo. Seen in this light, recent discussion by a group of Chinese scholars (e.g., Cui 1997; Zheng 1997) about the “democratic” elements in the Cultural Revolution is misguided. The approach of political witch-hunts and the bloody treatment of opponents did more to damage any semblance of democracy in social life than to advance it. “...[If] the CR [Cultural Revolution] was ‘really’ an idealistic quest for equality and a democracy or a dispute over national policy, why did it take the form of search for hidden traitors and enemies? If CR radicalism was a rhetorical mask for rational interest-group activity, why did these rational actors appear to take their rhetoric so seriously and routinely kidnap, humiliate, and fight wars of annihilation against other radical workers and students?” (Walder 1991: 46). In this study I confront the disturbing feature of violence head on. I do so by searching for explanation in state institutions and state actors.

This leads us to the second defining feature of the Cultural Revolution: state sponsorship. Previous research often set its focus on preexisting social divisions that allegedly originated and precipitated the mass movement. But as I have shown above, not only did the state lead the movement through policy pronouncements, but also local state actors took the interpretations of these pronouncements into their own hands. One of the consequences was the large-scale violence as presented here. A switch of analytical focus to the state institutions and state actors is necessary to do justice to this defining feature of the Cultural Revolution.

## **Understanding State-Incited Violence and Genocide**

State-incited violence dates back to antiquity. In the modern time since the emergence of nation-state system, large-scale killings of domestic civilians often occur when the state defines a killable category of population by ethnicity, religion or politics (Lemkin 1944; Horowitz 1976, 1980; Kuper 1981, 1985; Bauer 1984; Chalk and Jonassohn 1990; Fein 1993; Tilly 1985, 1995; Jones and Tilly 1998). Recent memories reveal a long list of terms that instantly remind us of human catastrophes: Holocaust, Stalinism, Cambodia, Indonesia, Rwanda, Burundi, Bosnia and so on and on. The Chinese mass killings described here are both similar and different.

Similarly, they are all large-scale killings of a group defined by state machine, whose membership is often extended to family members. Different, because in the well-known cases of genocide, victim membership is based on ascriptive characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, while in the Chinese case (also in other communist states such as Soviet Union and

Cambodia), membership was based on political standards *of the time*. The Four-Types had been classified for more than ten years in the Cultural Revolution, but it was up to local governments to decide whether they were to be exterminated or just called upon for humiliation and beating. Local state actors and their activists also decided whether their family members were to be subject to the same fate. Moreover, the Chinese mass killings included those who had not been determined as “class enemies” but labeled and killed to serve the political purpose of the time.

The on-going construction of victim identities by the local state actors opens the possibility for mass killings to occur absent a central genocidal policy. As shown in this study, the Chinese official policies time and again warned against excessive violence. In fact, the upper level authorities quickly intervened to stop mass killings when such information was passed upward. I have argued that the mass killings resulted from the paradox of state-sponsorship and state failure: state rhetoric to step up “class struggle” helped define unwanted categories of population, and the state failed to contain violence at the remote reaches of its rule.

This case calls for attention to state capacity in understanding state-incited violence and genocide. Research on genocide has often paid more attention of the genocidal policy and its origin. But state capacity is a dimension that should not be overlooked. In those states that are determined to carry out genocide (e.g., the Hitler’s Nazi state), deaths may not be as many as the state wishes. Often times it takes state capacity to mobilize the society to do the dirty work. An example of such an unintended outcome is the significant number of Jewish survivors from the “final solution.” On the other hand, when the state does not necessarily plan for genocide, genocide may nonetheless occur due to state failure to contain violence. This latter phenomenon is by no means unique in the Chinese Cultural Revolution. For example, it is observed that Hitler had a different plan for Czechs, Poles, Serbs and other Slav nations from that for the Jews. They were deemed to live as helots and slave laborers, working for the benefit of Reich. Some of these populations nonetheless experienced mass killings akin to genocide (Bauer 1984).

In concluding his impassioned account on the Bosnian ethnic cleansing in the early 1990s, Peter Maass compares state-incited genocide to a “wild beast.” He warns us that it could come out from its cage at any time, because our social and political institutions are more fragile than we think. He remarks that when the International Olympic Games were held in Sarajevo in 1988, any reasonable person would laugh off a suggestion of the city’s bloody scene four years later (Maass 1997). The beast has got out many times. Do we know how?

## References

- Barnett, A. Doak. 1967. *Cadres, Bureaucracy, and Political Power in Communist China*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bauer, Yehuda. 1984. "The Place of Holocaust in Contemporary History." In *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. I, ed. Jonathan Frankel. Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press.
- Chalk, Frank and Kurt Jonassohn. (eds) 1990. *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Chan, Anita, Stanley Rosen and Jonathan Unger. 1980. "Students and Class Warfare: The Social Roots of the Red Guard Conflict in Guangzhou (Canton)." *China Quarterly*.
- CRRM. 1988. *wen hua da ge ming yan jiu zi liao* (The Cultural Revolution Research Materials) Vol. 1-3. Beijing: Zhong guo ren min jie fan jun guo fan da xue dang shi dang jian zheng gong jiao yan shi.
- Cui Zhiyuan. 1997. "Mao Zedong wen ge li lun de de shi yu 'xian dai xin' de chong jian" (The Loss and Gain in Mao Zedong's Theory of the Cultural Revolution and the Reconstruction of "Modernity"). *Zhong guo yu shi jie*, Issue No.2 of 1997.
- Fein, Helen. 1993. *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Gross, Jan T. 2001. *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Guangxi Wen Ge Da Shi Nian Biao, 1995. The Service Center for Chinese Publications, Los Angeles.
- Hai Feng. 1972. *Guangzhou diqu wenge licheng shulei* (Mapping the Cultural Revolution Trajectory in Guangzhou Area). Hong Kong, China: youlian yanjiu chubanshe.
- Hua Linshan. 1996. "wen ge qi jian qin zhong xin pai xi cheng yin" (The Origins of Mass Factionalism during the Cultural Revolution). Pp.191-208 in Liu Qinfeng (ed), *wen hua da ge ming: shi shi yu yuanyuan* (The Cultural Revolution: Histories and Research). Hong Kong, China: Zhong wen da xue chu ban she, Hong Kong.
- Horowitz, Irving L. 1976. *Genocide: State Power and Mass Murder*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1980. *Taking Lives: Genocide and State Power*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- Jones, Bruce and Charles Tilly. 1998. "Genocide: Delineation, Description, and Explanation." Unpublished paper. Stanford, CA: Center for Advanced Study in Behavior Sciences, Stanford University.
- Kuper, Leo. 1981. *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Lemkin, Raphael. 1944. *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment.
- Lee, Hong Yung. 1978. *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: A Case Study*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Maass, Peter. 1997. *Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War*. Vantage Books.
- Oksenberg, Michel. 1968. "Occupational Groups in Chinese Society and the Cultural Revolution," in *The Cultural Revolution: 1967 in Review*. Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies No.2. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan.
- Perry, Elizabeth J. and Li Xun. 1997. *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution*. Westview Press.



- Rosen, Stanley. 1979. "The Origins and Development of the Red Guard Movement in China, 1960-1968." Ph. D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1982. *Red Guard Factionalism and the Cultural Revolution in Guangzhou (Canton)*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview.
- Rule, James. 1988. *Theories of Civil Violence*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Song Yongyi (ed). 2002. *wen ge da tu sho* (Massacres during the Cultural Revolution). Hong Kong: Kai fang za zhi she.
- Shorter, Edward and Charles Tilly. 1974. *Strikes in France, 1830-1968*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Sutton, Donald S. 1995. "Consuming Counterrevolution: The Ritual and Culture of Cannibalism in Wuxuan, Guangxi, China, May to July 1968."
- Tilly, Charles. 1985. "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime." Pp. 169-91 in *Bring the State Back In*, edited by Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol. London: Cambridge University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "State-incited Violence, 1900-1999." *Political Power and Social Theory* 9:161-179.
- Unger, Jonathan. "Cultural Revolution in Villages." *China Quarterly*. 153 (March): 82-106.
- Valentino, Benjamin. 1998. "Final Solutions: The Causes of Mass Killing and Genocide." Unpublished paper. Department of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Vogel, Ezra F. 1968. "The Structure of Conflict: China in 1967," in *The Cultural Revolution: 1967 in Review*. Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies No.2. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1969. *Canton Under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949-1968*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Walder, Andrew G. 1978. *Chang Ch'un-ch'iao and Shanghai's January Revolution*. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies of the University of Michigan.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. "Cultural Revolution Radicalism: Variations on a Stalinist Theme." Pp.41-62 in Joseph, W., C.W.Wong and David Zweig (eds.) *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000. "When States Unravel: How China's Cadres Shaped Cultural Revolution Politics," in Brodsgaard, K.E. and Susan Young, eds., *State Capacity in East Asia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Walder, Andrew and Yang Su. 2003. "The Cultural Revolution in Countryside: Scope, Timing and Human Impact." *China Quarterly*, forthcoming.
- Wang Shaoguang. 1995. *Failure of Charisma: The Cultural Revolution in Wuhan*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Wang Youqin. 1996a. "1966: xue sheng da lao shi de ge ming" (1966: A Revolution of Students Beating Teachers.) Pp. 17-36 in Liu Qingfeng (ed), *wen hua da ge ming: shi shi yu yuanjiu* (The Cultural Revolution: Histories and Research). Hong Kong, China: Zhong wen da xue chu ban she, Hong Kong.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996b. "da lao shi y da tong xue zhi jian" (Between Beating Teachers and Beating Classmates) Pp. 37-48 in Liu Qingfeng (ed.), *wen hua da ge ming: shi shi yu yuanjiu* (The Cultural Revolution: Histories and Research). Hong Kong, China: Zhong wen da xue chu ban she.

- Wen Yuqiao. 2003. “we ge ‘qi er wu jiang hua:’ bu jin jin shi Guangxi zao fan zu shi de zhong jie (July 25 Speech: Not Merely the Termination of Guangxi Rebel Organization).” *Hua Xia Wen Zhai* vol. 287 (supplemental issue) [www.cnd.org/cr](http://www.cnd.org/cr).
- Xu Youyu. 1999. *Xingxing sese de zaofan: hongweibing jingshen suzhi de xingcheng ji yanbian*. (Rebels with All Hues: The Formation and Evolution of Red Guard Mentalities). Hongkong, China: Xianggang zhongwen daxue chubanshe.
- Yan, Chongnian (ed.) 1991. *Zhongguo shi xian da zidian* (The Encyclopedia of Chinese Cities and Counties). China: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe.
- Yin Hongbiao. 1996. “wen ge hong wei bin yun dong de liang da chao liu” (Two Streams of the Red Guard Movement). Pp. 231-248 in Liu Qingfeng (ed), *wen hua da ge ming: shi shi yu yuanjiu* (The Cultural Revolution: Histories and Research). Hong Kong, China: Zhong wen da xue chu ban she, Hong Kong.
- Yu Luowen. 2002. “Beijing Daxin xian can an diao cha” (An Investigation of the Beijing Daxin Massacre). Pp.13-36 in Song Yongyi (ed.) *wen da tu sha* (Massacres in the Cultural Revolution). Hong Kong: Kai fang za zhi she.
- Zhang Cheng. 2001. “Daoxian da tu sha” (The Daoxian Massacre). *Kaifang Zazhi*, (Hongkong), July, August, September and December issues.
- Zhang Lianhe. 1998. “wu jin ma chun quan ting sha” (Five Visits to Ma Village to Dissuade Killings). Pp.398-404 in Zhe Yongping (ed.), *na ge shi dai zhong de wo ming* (We as in That Era). Huhehaote, China: Yuan fan chu ban she.
- Zheng Yi. 1993. *hong se ji nian bei* (Scarlet Memorial). Taipei, Taiwan: Huashi wen hua gong si.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1997. “lian ge wen ge chu yi” (On Two Cultural Revolutions). *Hua xia wen zhai*, Issue 83 (Supplement Issue): 1-14. (online journal at <http://cnd.org>)