

# Centenarian Memoirs and Vernacular History

Journal of Current Chinese Affairs

1–20

© The Author(s) 2023

Article reuse guidelines:

[sagepub.com/journals-permissions](https://sagepub.com/journals-permissions)

DOI: 10.1177/18681026231206408

[journals.sagepub.com/home/cca](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/cca)Yi Zheng<sup>1</sup>  and Stephanie Hemelryk Donald<sup>2</sup> 

## Abstract

This article examines centenarian memoirs as a popular cultural phenomenon and through it the promises of post-reform vernacular history. The argument posits that these memoirs are a genre that has been commercially successful through their transformation of self and historical narratives in the People's Republic of China, in particular, the transformation of these memoirs from vestiges of state-cultivated intellectual confessions to vernacular cultural memories in the popular print market. Focusing on celebrated centenary memoir writers centring on Yang Jiang, the study develops Chen Sihe's conception of the vernacular, emphasising its shifting intersection with the political–institutional and the intellectual elite. The popular historiography emerging from these trans-generational memory “fevers” reveals vanishing modern Chinese intellectual values percolating through the vernacular ethos in the cultural industries of the early twenty-first century. The vernacular has been the post-reform locus for contesting and retaining critical intellectual traditions.

Manuscript received 25 December 2022; accepted 20 September 2023

## Keywords

Centenarian memoirs, self-narrative, vernacular history, popular cultural industries

## Introduction: A New Genre at a New Historical Horizon

Since its publication in 2007, *At the End of Life* (走到人生边上, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*), a self-reflective essay-memoir written by Yang Jiang 杨绛 (1911–2016) at the age of ninety-six after a near-death experience, achieved 17,397 online comments on *Douban* (豆瓣), an interactive Chinese reading website and book-seller (Douban,

<sup>1</sup>School of Humanities and Languages, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

<sup>2</sup>School of Communication, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia

### Corresponding Author:

Yi Zheng, School of Humanities and Languages, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW 2052, Australia.

Email: [Yi.Zheng3@unsw.edu.au](mailto:Yi.Zheng3@unsw.edu.au)



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access page (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

n.d.a). This is remarkable for an introspective, at times brooding, personal memoir on life and times in the world of twentieth-century Chinese letters by a near-centenarian author. According to Douban, however, *At the End of Life* is not Yang's most widely read book. Readers left 303,130 comments on *We Three* (我们仨, *Women Sa* 2003), Yang's restrained yet heart-wrenching memoir after the deaths of her daughter, her only child, and her husband in quick succession (Douban, n.d.b). The book has altogether twelve editions. It is also included in the eight-volume *Collected Works of Yang Jiang* (杨绛文集, *Yang Jian Wenji* 2004) and has been translated into English, Japanese, and German. The "Yang Jiang Fever" was not only about Yang and her books. Personal memoirs became a major genre in the early twenty-first century Chinese popular book market. Memoirs of centenarian and near-centenarian writers turn into bestsellers. Zhou Youguang 周有光 (1906–2017), an amateur writer who won both critical acclaim and market popularity nearly overnight with his end-of-life memoirs is, for instance, one of the other most in-demand essayists on Douban (n.d.c).

Memoirs and familiar essays by writers who have (or had) lived through most of the twentieth century, hence the term "centenarians," began in the fin-de-siècle historical cultural reflections that marked the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and took off in the post-reform nostalgia industry (Zheng, 2013). The memoirs recollect episodes and moments in the writers' personal lives that bear witness to important milestones in twentieth-century Chinese history. Permeated by a centenarian vision, these personal historical memories of life experiences indicate discontinuities and insurmountable loss as well as survival and transcendence. In the early twenty-first century, they are enthusiastically received by a trans-generational audience who were born or came of age at the end of the last century and who are grappling with their own milestones. The popularity of the genre came precisely at a time when different kinds of popular "sites of memory" (Nora, 1989: 7) were flourishing in both public and private domains (Denton, 2014). Veg (2019) suggests that these are not only new sources for twentieth-century Chinese historians, but also indicators of a popular historiography. Pieke's (2016: 86–90) political map of twenty-first century China attributes these cultural emergences to the changing relations between society and state in post-reform China.

As a genre that gained market popularity in the early twenty-first century, the capacity of the centenarian memoirists to live through and beyond multiple historical periods with a consistent acumen that combines twentieth-century intellectual values with long-held vernacular attitudes proves a major attraction to their younger readers. The writers, who became *shiji laoren* (世纪老人, people who have lived through a century) across the new millennium, are by definition material and symbolic reminders of human survival, whose memory and vision necessarily testify to their unusual mental and psychocultural wherewithal. Born in the early 1900s, they came of age and were educated during the first half of an extraordinary and challenging century. They then continued as intellectuals of the People's Republic of China (PRC) with varying degrees of marginality and began writing personal memoirs at the century's end. These writers and their accounts of life thus become synonymous with China's modern century and its representative intelligentsia in the eyes of their cross-century readers. Witnessing the turmoils of its history, surviving

its trials and tribulations, and embodying one of its most import traditions – (五四新文化, *wusi xin wenhua*, the New Culture of the May Fourth 1917–1927) – they are venerated not only as centenarians who symbolise the endurance of life against all odds, but also preservers of century-old wisdom. Their status has been so defined against the century’s span that Yang Jiang’s passing was understood to mark the end of an era (Rea, 2011).

Centenarian memoirs are thus “lieux de memoire” par excellence for the post-reform, new-millennium China, as they are where

our interest in where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where the consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. (Nora, 1989: 7)

Centenarian denotes not only old age and consequently rare historical witnessing of *longue durée*, but also a question of bridging experiences and memories of historical transformations and cultural traditions across centuries.

### **Fin-de-siècle Recollections: From Intellectual Confession to the Vernacular?**

Yang Jiang was fêted as the longest-living woman writer, with her passing in 2016 commemorated by both PRC’s state media and *The New York Times* alike. Although the latter eulogised her as “a Chinese author, playwright and translator whose stoically restrained memoir of the Cultural Revolution remains one of the most revered works about that period” (Qin, 2016), which accorded dignity to ordinary Chinese, the former lauded her modest style and exemplary self-erasure (Yang, 2016). Yang’s celebrity grew when she began writing her fin-de-siècle memoirs in the last twenty years of her life. As she proudly declared, she was born in the same year as the Republic of China (Yang, 2018a: 218–219) and became by default a surviving witness to a century of China’s modern history. Yang was already a respected literary figure prior to the fame of her later years, known for her offbeat and ironic war-time dramas: *Heart’s Desire* (称心如意, *Chenxin Ruyi* 1943), *Forging the Truth* (弄真成假, *Nongzhen Chengjia* 1944), *Sporting with the World* (游戏人间, *Youxi Renjian* 1947), and *Windswept Blossoms* (风絮, *Fengxu* 1947) (Dooling, 2015: 14–40). After 1949, she worked as a translator of European picaresque novels, such as *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1951), *Gil Blas* (1956), and *Don Quixote* (1978), while teaching and researching at academic institutions. She is also known as the devoted and beloved half of a literary pair, wife of one of modern China’s most talented scholars (Rea, 2015). But, as Yang repeatedly asserts in her recollections, she had been in one sense or another marginal figure. It is as a centenarian memoirist that she came into her own and is venerated. Not only did notable Chinese cultural and political figures, and overseas sinologists, pay tribute to her centenary, but centenarian notes and remarks were faked in her name on the internet, requiring People’s-Net to publish a clarification.

Yang began her recollections in the early Reform era. *Six Chapters from My Life "Downunder"* (干校六记, *Ganxiao Liuji*; we take Howard Goldblatt's 1988 translation of the title here as we think it best fits the idea of the book, even though our quotations are translated directly from the 2018 version of the Chinese text so as to achieve some uniformity in the translations given that most of Yang's works are not as yet translated. There are two other English translations: *A Cadre in School Life: Six Chapters* (Geremie Barmé and Bennett Lee, trans., 1982) and *Six Chapters of Life in a Cadre School: Memoirs from China's Cultural Revolution* (Djang Chu, trans., 1986) first appeared in a Hong Kong journal in 1981. It was not the first or only exposé of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) at the time. From the 1980s, reflection and self-reflection of the era became important political and literary themes. Public debates around the appearances of the so-called literature of the wounded and the literature of reflection and of root-searching successively probed the ins and outs of this revolution, from its immediate triggers to its deep historical roots, extending the discussion all the way to traditional Chinese culture and national character. Decades later, Hong Zicheng 洪子诚 (1939–) (2010: 100) concluded that Chinese cultural inspection and historical reflection in the 1980s was closely related to the changing political and social status of PRC's intelligentsia at the time and their evolving sense of themselves in relation to their world. As they were rehabilitated by the reforming party-state back to centres of culture, their recollections of their immediate dark past simultaneously call for a more promising future. They recall the old times in order to articulate their presence in the "New Era." This way, they participated in the new era's construction of a leitmotif culture that reforms and continues a political system brought to the brink by its own continuous revolution. The history that they recollect is thus in line with the reforming official historiography. The Cultural Revolution became a nightmarish punctum in the historical narrative of the socialist republic, as much in their stories as it was in official declarations.

Yang's contemporaries Ba Jin 巴金 (1904–2005) and Chen Baichen 陈白尘 (1908–1994) are prominent Cultural Revolution memoir writers noted for their intense historical reflection and introspection. Like Yang, they were born at the beginning of the twentieth century and became notable writers in the Republic of China (1911–1949). They remained part of the cultural elite of the PRC, albeit with different levels of marginality in line with their political status and inclination. Ba Jin, like Yang, turned mainly to translation until the Cultural Revolution. Like Yang, the recollections of Ba Jin and Chen Baichen are personal, in the tradition of memoir essays, based on their individual life experiences in the midst of historical turmoil. Their recollections demonstrate an unambiguously personal and generational historical vision – that of an older generation of modern China's intelligentsia – setting them apart from collective cultural reflections as the century drew towards an end.

In 1986, Ba Jin finished his series of essay memoirs that he began in 1978, immediately after the end of Mao's death: *Random Thoughts* (随想录, *Suixiang Lu*; there is an English translation for this volume, Geremie Barmé, trans., 1984), *Musings* (探索集, *Tansuo Ji*), *Truth* (真话集, *Zhenhua Ji*), *In Illness* (病中集, *Bingzhong Ji*), and *Title-less* (无题集, *Wuti Ji*). Comprising more than 40,000 words, the series recollects

his experience in the Cultural Revolution, alongside post-traumatic delirium, lamentations, candid criticism, and self-criticism. The series reveals not only the systematic ills that caused the collective nightmare and his personal suffering, but also his subsequent search for redemption. Throughout, Ba Jin ponders and laments his (failed) social and historical responsibility as a member of the cultural elite in modern China: “I call myself an intellectual, and I am regarded by others as an intellectual. At the criticism sessions I readily admitted I was a spiritual aristocrat, while actually I was a spiritual slave” (2009: 255). Being an intellectual for Ba Jin means adherence to his civic duty, besides personal ethical conduct, the definitions of which he had to negotiate with the regime’s endless thought-reform movements and changing policies (Wang, 2012: 12–16). The sense of constant failing (falling short of the party’s demands) added to his sense of guilt and his eagerness to self-reform, until the sheer violence against everyone – elites and ordinary citizens alike – of the Cultural Revolution ended the cycle. For Ba Jin, the memoir writer, redemption comes from a refusal to self-exonerate. He concludes that in either his earlier pursuit of self-reform or his later realisation of its folly, individuals like him are not only victims of history but also its co-conspirators. Some commentators understand Ba Jin’s tragic-heroic search for personal historical redemption as an identification with the party-state, suggesting that by volunteering to shoulder the burden of a national trauma he placed himself right at the centre of the system. Ba Jin calls for his fellow intellectuals to be like Dante and burn in the inferno until their debt is paid, as both witnesses to and participants in historical trauma. Geremie Barmé notes that by making repentance a central theme of his *Random Thoughts*, Ba Jin pioneered the confessional mode in the post-Cultural Revolution historical-cultural reflection (1990: 52–99). This may be the writer’s lingering Rousseauian Romanticism or his Confucian ethical-civic sense. But as Sorace elaborates, “confession is perhaps best pictured as a Mobius strip along which power speaks through the subject and requires the subject to speak in the idiom of power.” It is more than a “political ventriloquism,” as “[C]onfessions reveal how state power and discourse imprint how the subject appears to and speaks about his or herself” (2019: 147–148). Ba Jin’s tragic-heroic pursuit of redemption through confession may not be vying for the centre of a new historical beginning in step with the reforming state as some of his cross-generational critics suggest (Wang, 2012: 33–34). He could be seen, rather, to be keeping true to the spirit of intellectual reflectivity and self-cultivation. Whilst lamenting the senseless violence of the times, he nonetheless recognised the generational failings of the elites, how the party-state has deployed them and how they in turn enabled the party-state. But his “self” and self-reflection are within the terms and modes laid out by the era and regime (Sorace, 2019: 152).

Chen Baichen is closer to Yang Jiang in language and style and in his accounting of historical trauma in great detail. As a playwright, he is not averse to the satirical and comic, even when recalling life lived under duress. In the well-known essay collection *Clouds and Dreams: Fragments of a Memory* (云梦断忆, *Yunmeng Duanyi* 1984), the author’s ire at the gap between what the Cultural Revolution proclaimed and what actually happened, especially in regard to its participating masses, is expressed through relentless satire. Like Yang in her *Six Chapters*, Chen focuses on the mundane minutiae

of his life in the so-called cadre school, where intellectuals and other cultural elites were sent down to reform themselves by learning from the peasants and engaging in manual labour. These are significant and challenging journeys from urban and institutional centres to the often harsh and underdeveloped countryside. Chen recalled his honest and unassuming landlord, the friendly ducks in his care, and back-breaking physical labour. Nonetheless, his sometimes tender, sometimes satirical narrative is premised on a sense of conceptual and moral superiority derived from an understanding and conviction of a good social revolutionary path from which the present deviates. What Chen laments is the illogicality of the Cultural Revolution and his unnecessary suffering. Memories and reflections are thus means to trace and then eradicate the ills of history. In the epilogue, no longer restrained in tone and a narrative of the commonplace, he declares:

I do not agree that we should no longer write literature that reveals our wounds. Just the contrary I think we have not done enough: we are yet to have one work that can represent the depth and width of the ten-year turmoil. As long as we do not dig deep enough to find the social and ideological roots of the catastrophe, we would be running around the same spot. There is no way for our socialist society to march forward .... (Chen, 1984: 122)

Chen's insouciance is a marker of his confidence that he is closer to truth conceptually and morally, and a superior assessor of historical direction. Persecution and suffering become in his work a waystation for self-affirmation. However, being "sent down" does have its consequences. Rehabilitation back to the centre does not completely cast away Chen's doubt. Questions that tortured him at the darkest moments of his life persist: what is the direction of history and the people's will? Besides moral depravity, are there fundamental political systematic failures in the ugliness and human degradation throughout the years? "My place amongst the people then was no better than my ducks'. But had I ever dared to rebel as a 'black kind'? I am speechless" (Chen, 1984: 94). Not knowing what to say in the final instance represents a shared sense of helplessness and uncertainty among the "returned" intellectual elites. The apparent arbitrary shift of the revolutionary cause and its fate in it makes them no longer certain of its fundamental conceptual underpinnings. In his final soul-searching in the typical self-critical intellectual confessional mode, Chen seems aware of his dependency on the shifting political and ideological rationales of an unreliable system.

These earlier fin-de-siècle memoir writers seem to have found a point of reconciliation between the party-state and themselves by reflecting upon their experiences and confessing to their own sins in what they considered the most disastrous episode of its history, one in which they were complicit as intellectual architects and cultural workers. But their lingering questions, their difficulties in reconciling conceptually the causes and implications of historical events and directions, and their inability to let go of their own role in the collective and personal catastrophe make their re-identification with the state and the party incomplete. Neither Chen Beichen nor Ba Jin could reconcile their ambivalent experiences of being "sent down" and then brought "back in."

This uneasy correspondence of opposition and interdependence is understood by Chen Sihe 陈思和 (1954–) as a historical phenomenon that began in the first half of the twentieth century, re-enacting itself in the intellectual reflections of the 1980s (2001). Chen identifies the development of twentieth-century Chinese culture along interrelated but divergent directions, which he conceives structurally in three spatial manifestations, metaphorically named *miaotang* (庙堂, the temple), *guangchang* (广场, the square), and *minjian* (民间, the vernacular) (Chen, 2001: 145–166). The “temple” refers to the political ideology promulgated by and for the state, the “square” is the transformed modern intellectual cultural space, and the “vernacular” is the all-absorbing stratum of society and culture at the margins. The latter tenaciously retains cultural memories and traditions of its own as well as those banished or eclipsed from the realm of the elites. Chen suggests that these spaces maintain certain levels of separation even though they interlock, and their contents change and reform as their structures transform. The New Culture Movement of the “square”, seen by Chen in this structural–historical perspective, is continuously critical of both the state and the vernacular society and culture, which it associates with an unwanted non-progressive tradition. Nonetheless, it depends on and appropriates both (Chen, 2001: 145–166). Chen’s three-layered conceptualisation extends the possibilities of Bodnar’s binary definition of vernacular history as that which is opposite and outside the official (Bodnar, 1994: 13–14). The thesis on the interpenetration as well as separation amongst the “temple”, the “square”, and the “vernacular” will be a point of departure for this essay as it moves from the historical reflections of the 1980s to the centenarian memoirs across the century, further developing the dynamic relation between the “square” and the “vernacular”.

The self-conscious reckonings in reform and post-reform historical reflections reminded their readers of the May Fourth intellectual tradition. The “square” as a separate elite intellectual realm is glimpsed in the new round of state and society adjustment. There followed a brief moment of enthusiastic partnership between the “square” and the new “temple”: the political ideology of economic and social reform. The May Fourth Enlightenment legacy seemed quietly to make its way back, if not to the actual cultural centre at least to public attention. “From 1985 to 1989, this intellectual tradition manifested itself conspicuously. Its trump card is similar to that used by the newly established square seventy years ago – the New Cultural Movement: humanism and modernity as defined by the West” (Chen, 2001: 148). In Chen’s account, the “square”, in its early twentieth-century formation, is a default place for the Chinese intelligentsia in its own transformation, when they were revolutionising or banished from the millennia-old “temple” of imperial political and cultural institutions. The 1980s made this modern Chinese intellectual legacy an option again, similarly on the condition of a political–cultural vacuum left by the collapse of a totalitarian regime (Chen, 2001: 150). Chen highlights the interlocking competition as well as the partnership between the elite intellectual culture and the state political–cultural institutions. The predominance of a penance-seeking confessional mode in the Reform era reflections and the lingering questions of the early centenarian memoirists further testify to the fragility of the temporary alliance, highlighting the penetration of the former by the latter. Modern Chinese intellectual

tradition understood as enlightenment and humanism proves not easily reconcilable with Maoism. Chen's spatial-structural formulation points to the possibilities of the "vernacular" as the third site. However, in emphasising the historical conflicts and alliances between the "square" and the "temple", he overlooks the equally important relation between twentieth-century Chinese intellectual culture and the "vernacular". The development of the latter relation is a crucial entry point in understanding the fin-de-siècle and twenty-first century memoir fever, as defined by the work of Yang, her predecessors, and her fellow centenarians.

The "vernacular" in Chen's delineation is a social-cultural realm that quietly conserves itself against outside threats. It is at the margins of the state and other elite institutions of power, therefore relatively independent and yet capacious and inclusive. Historically, vernacular society has always accommodated the dissenting and defeated from the political and cultural centre. Its twentieth-century incarnation served as a repository for whatever was left of classical Chinese culture after the collapse of the last empire and the remaining values and practices of the agrarian tradition, besides an evolving modern urban popular culture. One important point about the vernacular society and its culture is that it is non-discriminatory, accommodating, and resilient. The Chinese literati who chose to retain rather than revolutionise their age-old cultural tradition were able to retreat into the "vernacular", forming another intellectual tradition outside the "square" of the new orthodoxy of the New Culture (Chen, 2001: 150). The "vernacular" understood in this way is thus a multi-dimensional and multi-layered space. It sustains itself at the margins of the institutions of power and is thus relatively free of the latter's influence and control. Though its existence is only tolerated as the marginal and ruled other of the dominant, it nonetheless interpenetrates the other spaces and preserves a relatively lively form of cultural expression, creating its own history and tradition. Non-discriminating accommodation and carnivalesque abandonment are often its formal manifestations.

Although Chen accords less attention to the entanglement of the new intellectual tradition of the "square" and the "vernacular", he does point to the fact that in the 1980s the political and cultural passion of the intelligentsia is emboldened by the political passion of the masses. The "historical reflections" embodied a moment of general social disaffection and then reform optimism. The cultural elite had become familiar with the life and feelings of the vernacular society to which they were sent down (Chen, 2001: 153). But Chen and other critics see the new relation as again one of appropriation, whereby the downunder experience belongs almost entirely to the memories of the returned elites. Scenes of life in the non-elite world in which the intelligentsia was temporarily an uneasy part became their stories, although Chen noted a generational difference in the "returning" narratives, faulting mainly elite PRC intellectuals – those who are younger than the centenarians and became established in the 1950s.

Chen's perception nonetheless oversimplifies the relation between the "vernacular" and the intellectual elite. Chen never seems to fully grasp the capacity of the "vernacular" delineated in his own historical structural construction. Throughout the twentieth century, the "vernacular" became the peripheral but persistent stronghold of alternative intellectual cultures. Non-discriminating and compromising, it not only retained dissenters and



exiles – from the “temple” as well as the “square” – transforming the old and the new, the foreign, and the folksy, but it also became the repository for unorthodox cultural imaginations (Zheng, 2015: 244–260). It is by no means surprising that some post-Cultural Revolution centenarian memoirs find reverberation in this vernacular cultural tradition. Of course, generational differentiation simultaneously reveals the complexity of the historical political-cultural makeup of their participants. There are significant differences between the levels of identification with and immersion into the life and feelings “downunder.” The intellectuals who came of age in the 1950s write of their “descent” and “ascension” in tragic-heroic terms, and both found redemption in and were abhorred by their vernacular others. For them, telling stories of their own sojourn into the vernacular society and speaking for those who are always there are understood in retrospect as struggles to regain influence or membership into the reforming “temple”. The centenarian memoirists, who continue to recollect and reflect upon their life experiences and become bestsellers across the millennium, however, have a rather different relation with the vernacular world and the institutions of the “temple”.

### **Marginal Re-Encounters With History: A Centenarian Vision in the Marketplace**

Ji Xianling 季羨林 (1911–2009) was one of the earliest older-generation memoirists to gain both fortune and fame in the post-reform popular book market. *A Hundred Years of Wind and Rain* (风风雨雨一百年, *Fengfeng Yuyu Yibainian* 2009), Ji's only self-selected centenarian memoir collection, demonstrates the genre's gradual transformation from the intellectual confessional to a popular essay-memoir mode (Ji, 2016: 1–2). As Ji notes in the preface, he chose to include unedited recollections and essays written at different periods of his life, so that readers can see his “real self,” including dramatically changing attitudes and feelings towards regimes and individuals in his 100-year-old life (Ji, 2016: 1–2). Like his more internationally feted *The Cowshed: Memories of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (牛棚杂忆, *Niupeng Zayi* 1989), some of his immediate post-reform recollections are fin-de-siècle reminders to readers entering a new and prosperous century not to forget the nightmares of the last century, in which he evoked both Yang's humour and matter-of-factness and Ba Jin's brand of confession and penance-seeking (Ji, 1998). Ten years since his passing, Douban readers still rate highly both his Cultural Revolution memoirs and his subsequent recollections in which traditional and vernacular values and judgements dominate (Douban, n.d.d).

In contrast, Yang recalls and reflects upon her life and feelings at the margins of the modern elite Chinese intellectual centre from the outset. She begins her fin-de-siècle memoirs from the point of view of “an elderly intellectual that came over from the old society” (Yang, 2010a: 135). *Six Chapters from My Life “Downunder”* is the first of her essay-memoir collections, in which her experience of the Cultural Revolution is narrated from this threshold position. Commentators have noticed the evocation of a formal and generic past in the title: that it directly alludes to Shen Fu's 沈复 (1763–1825) classic *Six Records of a Floating Life* (浮生六记, *Fusheng Liuji*). In his “Preface” to the

Goldblatt translation, Jonathan Spence understands the deliberate crossing over as both political and intellectual historical:

Yang Jiang has recaptured Shen Fu's moods with uncanny skill: in her work one finds a similar gentle melancholy concerning the individual's helplessness in the face of a tyrannical society, along with similar celebrations of the tiny victories that are made possible by aesthetic sensitivity or by the strength of personal love. ... [e]ach is content to be – unabashedly – an intellectual's appraisal of how to withstand the harshness that surrounds all. (Yang, 1988: vii)

Spence's exposition underscores several essential points in Yang's memoir writing that are often unremarked: Yang's recollections are forthright intellectual appraisals of her times; a "gentle melancholy" and aesthetic sensitivity or personal love are human and cultural attributes for withstanding a harsh world. Her memoirs are surviving records and guides, like Shen Fu's long ago, for marginal individuals pitted against an oppressive society. Spence's understanding is different from that of Qian Zhongshu, Yang's husband and fellow "elderly intellectual ... from the old society," who famously lamented in his preface to the memoir's first Chinese edition that it lacks a seventh chapter of shame, in which Yang should join her reforming intellectual peers in confession and pursuit of redemption vis-à-vis their duty to the nation (Yang, 2018b: 1–2). Qian did not seem to grasp Yang's essential enterprise, despite the fact that he often features in her recollections as her perfect intellectual and marital partner.

Yang's story is not one of descent and ascension. Rather, it shows what it is like and what it means to be a marginal and often helpless individual in times of extremity. The six chapters are as much records of, as they are observations and reflections on, her time as a sent-down intellectual and are understated in their narratorial framing. Yang's writing is very distant from the hyperbolic expression and feelings of the Cultural Revolution that it records, which reverberate in Reform-era literature. When she heard that her husband was among the earliest to be sent down, for instance, she notes: "We went to our chosen eatery and ordered the pre-prepared chicken-in-clay-pot, in fact just skin and bones. I doused my half-bowl of rice with the soup, but still couldn't wash it down" (Yang, 2018b: 2). When she learnt that one of her young colleagues had committed suicide and was buried in haste near the vegetable patch that she was in charge of, she writes:

The day is short in winter. When they pulled the empty cart away, it was already dreary and dusk. There was no one else in the endless vegetable fields. I ran slowly to where they were burying him and saw there was an added flat earthy bun-shaped mound. Nobody will notice that there was a new grave on the bank of the stream. (Yang, 2018b: 29)

Understatement does not take away from her deliberated re-categorisations, however. From *Six Chapters* onwards and throughout her years of popularity across the millennium, Yang recalls and appraises the history of her times but not in its terms. The (dis)advantage of one who "came over from the old society" is repeatedly staked out as her point of observation and narration. This is a remarkable insistence as the position

is notably a politically and socially marginal one in the establishment of the PRC, signaling residue knowledge, systems of thought, and sentiments at odds with the new regime. Whilst the latter tried to uproot and transform all that is associated with it through endless thought-reform movements, Yang openly proclaims and evokes her intellectual hinterlands. Larson (2015: 133–156) suggests that Yang’s posture is one of lying low with an aesthetic distance. But Yang expressly insists on recalling her life in the vernacular world “downunder” and relating to others there as fellow marginals vis-à-vis the crushing and increasingly capricious state authorial institutions.

In the vaster and relatively uncultivated countryside that was peripheral to the centres of power, “the first thing that happened is that I got to know grandpas and grandmas, young men and young women, little girls. They did not appear as the abstract ‘peasant class,’ but severally, all different individually, just like the so-called intellectuals” (Yang, 2010a: 183–184). In due course, Yang befriended them when they were both hard-pressed to wreak a living from the land or fought with them half-heartedly when they turned vegetable thieves (Yang, 2018b: 19–28). One whole chapter of the six is devoted to her companionship and co-dependence for survival with a stray dog (Yang, 2018b: 31–41). Indeed, her select memories are often “the golden linings of dark clouds” (Yang, 2010a: 171). Personal love and compassion for all who are peripheral and small often permeate her narrative, but this pronounced humanism does not redeem what she recalls. Whilst the villagers continue to toil for subsistence, the stray dog could survive neither the institutional brutality nor the cruelty of nature itself. And she was right about her deceased friend as well: the returning academics did not notice the new grave on the riverbank.

Yang elaborates on her perception of the marginal individual in an essay on invisibility cloaks as the epilogue of her second essay-memoir collection *About to Drink Tea* (将饮茶, *Jiang Yin Cha*) first published in 1987, in which she recalls her experience in the early years of the Cultural Revolution, as well as the life and fortunes of her family members before 1949. To conceal oneself in an invisibility cloak, she asserts, should mean liberation from constraints, so one can see and feel freely whilst not being seen by others. This invisibility cloak may be obtained by refusing to join the worldly competition and taking advantage of being peripheral and insignificant. It is a disadvantaged vantage point from which, through inconvenience and even suffering, one may see past the masks of the world and acquire perception and wisdom (Yang, 2010a: 172–178). In satirical prose that is rare in PRC literature, Yang underscores the historical place of the modern Chinese intelligentsia who “came over from the old society,” stressing that the margins are the best they can and should hope for, so that they can avoid the snake pits (becoming a snake or being eaten by one) and retain visions grounded in what they sought and propagated when they were young (Yang, 2010a: 172–178). This vision underwrites all of Yang’s memoirs. The recollection subtitled *Dark Clouds and their Golden Linings* (乌云与金边, *Wuyun yu Jinbian*) and titled *Chronicles of the Bingwu and Dingwei Years* (丙午丁未年记事, *Bingwu Dingwei Nian Jishi*) (Yang, 2010a: 135–171) frames the Cultural Revolution not as the regrettable deviation of a modernising socialist nation, but as events that need to be accounted for in historical-temporal terms of *longue durée* – the classical agrarian ways of keeping and counting time as

life cycles. Whilst these historical–temporal terms were relegated to the dustbin in modern China, including socialist China, they are still in daily use in the vernacular society. Yang chronicles her experience in the early years of the Cultural Revolution as a “sideline target” (Yang, 2010a: 135). The “sideline target’s” point of view accords Yang both irony and self-irony. She watches disaster unfold on herself and others around her from first a designated and then a self-designated sideline with acuity and anger. The history thus recalled its actions, and actors appear improbable and absurd. Yang’s acuity reveals an unrelenting intellectual perception, but her anger is emphatically personal and individual:

Even though a plaque identifying me as a criminal was hung on my neck every day, and sometimes in the furious and harsh shrieking and curses of the masses and the people, I even began to believe I owed them and the party, but felt that even if it were true I was still not guilty. ... I don’t think I need to list the reasons, and would not like to. “I will remain unmoved and unmovable.” Neither beatings, curses, nor bullying could really insult me, especially considering that I only got the sideline treatment ... I could not exclaim like Miranda in Shakespeare’s *Tempest* “O brave new world that has such people in it ...!” But I did see an astonishing new world. (Yang, 2010a: 145)

Where Shakespeare is inadequate, Yang has to learn to see her new world in other terms. Her old and loyal nanny told her on the day of her forced departure that “now you can see who are good people and who are the bad – however I still think there are more good ones” (Yang, 2010a: 141). It takes a while for Yang to take stock of life in such terms:

This of course comes from her experience; she is one who survived hardships. So I began to think often: are there many good people? What kind of good people? – Perhaps “there after all are not that many bad people” is more reasonable. (Yang, 2010a: 141)

It is in these vernacular terms that Yang sees the silver lining: when neither the “temple” nor the “square” offered strategies of hope in the self-combustion of the revolution, old vernacular values took over. Yang observes that after a while persons who were designated revolutionary “people” and “masses” began resorting to old vernacular codes of behaviour, such as non-discriminatory decency and pity. Revolutionary piety was countered by ethical codes of interpersonal loyalty, and sympathy for others was once again deemed a fair means of mutual survival (Yang, 2010a: 165–171). Yang is thus able to conclude that there are indeed not that many bad people.

Yang’s essay memoirs, like that of her contemporary centenarians, expand across the whole of twentieth-century Chinese history. This is a history recollected as episodes of intimate personal life or through character sketches of family members and people she came to know (Yang, 2010b: 201–231). Many of the character sketches are of people who were born and lived most of their lives in vernacular society. Even her memoir-portraits of her father and second paternal aunt, who are both notable figures in Republican Chinese political and intellectual history, also centre on their marginalisation

vis-a-vis the political “temple” as well as the culture of the “square”. They are both rendered memorable figures not as elite leaders but in vernacular ethical terms: lauded for their integrity and loyalty to family and community despite their (especially the latter’s) faults (Yang, 2010a: 1–74). A *Douban* reader’s comment on the 2012 Sanlian (三联) edition of *We Three* shows that Yang’s memoir is read on her terms:

It not only moves me, but also compels me to reflection. Old Master Yang says that there is no pure pleasure in life, it always comes with frustration and worry. Thinking carefully about it, it seems as though Old Master Yang and Qian’s joys are almost always mixed with suffering. They did not have a rich material life, nor were they particularly romantic. But they nonetheless got used to deriving knowledge and finding the bright spot in what life they had. (Xunmi Yueding, 2013)

Chinese political and intellectual history here is indeed interpreted in everyday and familial terms. As another reader explains her epiphanies and regrets upon reading the original edition,

I also feel [agreeing with her husband who also apparently just commented on the book], that there is nothing to lament about Ah Yuan’s not becoming a real scholar. What is regrettable is that this *We Three* did not reproduce more *We Threes*. (Li Ge, 2007)

Ah Yuan (Yang’s daughter) and even Yang are appreciated mainly as women. Their reproductive prowess and familial love are valued more than their scholarship. But even this self-confessed conventional reader is able to opine:

Look at Qian Zhongshu and Yang Jiang, these two scholars in turbulent times, how they could remain modest and calm, unflustered by the madding crowd; unbending in front of the powerful; unfettered by worldly affairs; staying in their study together. It is indeed as the saying goes the best retreat is by being outsiders in your heart. (Li Ge, 2007)

Writing for a trans-generational vernacular readership and judged in vernacular terms, Yang extends “the intimate public” (Field, 2015: 180) of her memory, feelings, and judgements beyond those who share a common historical experience and realm of reference. Her centenarian memoirs rewrite turbulent modern Chinese political and cultural history as vernacular personal and familial memories, crafted for the popular readers of the new millennium who duly notice what she insists, besides her tenacity and wisdom for survival.

## **Modern Intellectual Values in the Post-Reform Vernacular World**

Essay-memoir is a classical Chinese genre, with restraint as well as suggestive and paradoxical turns that are core to its stylistic demands. After the passing of the Ming (明)

dynasty (1368–1644), Zhang Dai 张岱 (1597–1864), one of the dynasty's left-over literati, found the genre particularly germane to reminiscences of the past as reflections upon the present. He meant to redeem through lovingly remembered details of his lost world and retells how it was squandered away by the ruling elites of which he was himself a member. The traumatic catastrophes in his personal life and communal history became key to his enlightenment, helping him to grasp the vicissitudes of the human world. His essay memoirs, though intensely internal and reflective, are thus not only written for his offspring, disciples, and friends, but also for all those who survived and were to survive the new world (Zhang, 2007). Zhang's memoirs thus have greater purchase as vernacular history in that the genre serves those who survive the cross-over from one historical moment to another and bear witness. It is in this genre that Yang and other centenarian essay-memoir writers recount and reflect upon major events in twentieth-century history. Yang is more aware than her fellow writers of the potential of their centenarian accounts as vernacular memory. She sees herself and the people of the vernacular society as fellow marginal individuals existing uncomfortably in a constantly changing China. Yang's recollection consciously espouses a popular historiography where intellectual perception is coupled with vernacular codes and judgements.

*At the End of Life* is Yang's last essay-memoir collection. Aptly it seeks answers, with the sincerity, licence, and abandon of one at the end of life, for questions of finality. Her soul-searching, however, is not a confession. Yang did not seek penance for herself as an old modern Chinese intellectual. She mixes categories. She queries the existence of gods, ghosts, souls, and human nature; she explores the conflicts between body and mind, the uncertainty of fate, and the way of the world. The collection's first part contains her meditations. They evoke philosophical, literary, and ethical traditions and folklores East and West, pushing boundaries and taboos – ghosts both Chinese and foreign abound – in Yang's record of this worldly life and meditations on life beyond (Yang, 2018a: 8–22). In her terms, it is impossible to ask whether an enlightened humanist can see and fear a hometown ghost. Yang's conclusion on life and death, on the human world and beyond, is Confucian, Taoist, Christian, and modern humanist and, above all, framed in and submitted to a vernacular reverence of fate: the rightful course and destiny of all things small and sundry. *At the End of Life* is a fitting retrospection and guide to all of Yang's recollections. When asked how she reconciles her vernacular principle of tolerance and forbearance with her equally steadfast belief in May Fourth-inspired pursuit of freedom and human dignity, she declares in her centenarian interview appended to the book's 2018 edition:

I tolerate this, bear that, all for keeping my freedom at heart ... Forbearance is the helmet for self-defence, and shield against aggression. Donning my "invisibility cloak," others cannot see me, but I can see them ... this way, I can pursue freedom, uphold my personal dignity. That is why I say ... tolerance is for freedom. (Yang, 2018a: 240)

Zhou Youguang on the other hand had always been a vernacular memoirist. He had remained most of his life at the far margins of the culture of the "square" and self-identified as an amateur writer (Zheng, 2013: 21–23). Zhou's magnum corpus is a 487-page tome of

100 years of his life in twentieth-century China and beyond. *Years that Flow like Water: Zhou Youguang's Centenarian Oral History* (似水如年: 周有光百年口述, *Sishui Runian: Zhou Youguang Bainian Koushu* 2016) is a recorded oral account that Zhou completed in 1997 when he turned ninety-one and then agreed to its edited publication in 2013, at the age of 109. Like Yang's last works, *Years that Flow like Water* has resonated with a posterity far beyond his own descendants. As "an extremely valuable historical document, [...]the story begins from the narrator's family origins, recounting with great detail the dramatic historical changes from the end of Qing to the present" (Zhou, 2016 dustcover).

However, the memoir is more than a comprehensive and detailed account of people and events. Whilst Zhou's value as a historical witness is often found in his proximity to more notable historical figures and scenes, his account of his life and times passes on to his trans-generational readers more than the particular details of what is remembered. Many of the recollected episodes, like those in his fellow centenarian memoir writers, are devoted to the numerous catastrophes in twentieth-century Chinese history, both before and after 1949. Zhou recounts these not only as a survivor, but also as processes that the elites and members of the vernacular society share. These include the death of Zhou's five-year-old daughter during the second Sino-Japanese War, as well as his and his wife's persecution in the multiple political campaigns in the PRC, culminating in the Cultural Revolution. Zhou's stories affirm that the upheavals of modern Chinese history frequently link the fate of the Chinese intelligentsia with those who are always "downunder."

Zhou's anecdotal familial memoir is appreciated by historians. Yu Yingshi notes its value as an eyewitness account of the troubled Chinese twentieth century that footnotes public history with private memory (Yu, 2008). But like Yang's work, Zhou's recollections also caused feverish interest among young readers of the new millennium. Accounting for what resonates trans-generationally in the memoirs of intellectual centenarians, one blogger questions the usual wisdom that a "shallow" popular audience necessarily fails to see beyond the attraction of icons and glamour. The blogger juxtaposes this disdain for the popular and vernacular with a resurgent and increasingly dominant state nationalism and state populism and asserts the right of the ordinary person to survive with dignity and understanding (Nie, 2016). Shuyu Kong demonstrates that these interactions between ordinary Chinese and the popular cultural market are important public social practices of a transitional post-socialist China (Kong, 2014).

Celebrating Yang's centenary, Rea elaborates on the implications of "Yang Fever" across the millennium:

As a centenarian, Yang represents a near-vanished generation of intellectuals who came of age during the Republic, had first-hand experience of the Japanese occupation, saw their works largely ignored or forgotten during the Mao era, and experienced China's subsequent rapid social and economic transformations along with their own literary "resurrections" as senior citizens. ... Revered for her sheer longevity and senior standing as one of the oldest of the "old-style" (laopai) intellectuals, she has projected a humanistic ethos that,

though dismissed by some Chinese readers as outdated, many others have found estimable and comforting. (Rea, 2011)

Yang's, and likewise Zhou's, as well as other centenarians' extraordinary trans-generational resonance comes from their stoicism and resilience, which are enduring qualities of the vernacular world, when the state and society relation was shifting again in the early twenty-first century post-reform transformation. However, besides their century-old wisdom on surviving a turbulent China body and soul, what is "estimable and comforting" for their millennial younger readers is their "old-style" humanist ethos. But this humanist ethos retained by the centenarians from their May Fourth beginnings is not altogether old style – it has remained throughout the century as an intellectual tradition of the "square". It is reformed and tempered by their experiences in the vernacular world. By recollecting momentous historical events as personal and often peripheral lives understood in different terms from the categories of those times and periods, Yang and her fellow centenarian memoirists relocate a vanishing May Fourth humanism into the contemporary world. What she achieves, and to different degrees so do the others, through a popular historiography buttressed by vernacular ethics is an intellectual ideal transformed for the ordinary post-reform Chinese.

Like Zhang Dai, who survived the crashing of his own world and his privilege and then wrote it all down in a new regime for all who cared to know or share his sentiments, the centenarian memoirists not only pass down the stories of life and events of their Republican and PRC past but also their sensibilities and perspectives, lest they also vanish. What Yang Jiang insists on, for instance, is not only a self-effacing modesty in opposition to worldly advantage, but also a self-affirming individual standing extendable to all. She writes defiantly at the end of one of her Cultural Revolution memoirs:

It was clear to me that despite more than ten years of ideological reform and two years in a cadre school I still hadn't managed to get rid of my own selfishness, nor did I achieve the personal transformation that others had sought after so diligently. I was the same person I had always been. (Yang, 1989: 126)

Then, more than fifteen years later, as her parting words to her new-millennial readers concluding her last memory collection:

I am an "old master" from the old society. ... I always like to have criticisms from the young and clever, against me the old master. This collection is my first ever challenge and query to the young .... (Yang, 2018a: 116)

For Yang and Zhou and the other centenarian memoirists, acquiring a vernacular voice and self-identifying with the new vernacular culture does not mean giving up one's century-old perspective and judgement. Yang's recalled selfhood refuses all the political-cultural transformations that China's twentieth century demanded of its citizens and since 1949 especially of those who belong to the culture of the "square". She



records and reflects on the stories of this self as an unchanging marginal individual for a latter-day popular audience. In this way, she has moved away from her contemporary intellectual memoirists' propensity for confession in reflecting upon their historical experience. Deliberate and unchanging marginality is a practice that maintains one's way of being in the world according to the codes and wisdom of a historical *longue durée*. It has always been the strategy for survival and conservation in the vernacular society, whose (default) golden rule of perseverance makes it a haven not only for threatened traditions and individuals, but also for alternative visions.

Yang Jiang fever, together with other centenarian memoir fevers in China's post-reform popular print market, demonstrates the trans-generational resonance of a May Fourth humanism that originated in the modern Chinese intellectual culture of the "square", relocated in age-old but self-transforming vernacular codes. As witnesses to modern China's turbulent history, the centenarian memoirists pass on wisdoms for survival against the odds. They are also noted for their perception, judgement, and sentiments vis-à-vis that history.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests


The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### ORCID iDs

Yi Zheng  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8178-9044>

Stephanie Hemelryk Donald  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9435-7905>

### References

- Ba, Jin (1984) *Random Thoughts (Suixiang lu)*, Geremie Barmé (trans.). Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Company.
- Ba, Jin 巴金 (2009) 说真话 [*Telling Truth*]. Beijing: 中国工人出版社 [Chinese Workers' Publishing House].
- Barmé, Geremie R. (1990) Confession, redemption, and death: Liu Xiaobo and the protest movement of 1989. In: George Hicks (ed.) *The Broken Mirror: China After Tiananmen*. London: Longmans, pp. 52–99.
- Bodnar, John (1994) *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chen, Baichen 陈白尘 (1984) 云梦断忆 [*Clouds and Dreams: A Fragmentary Memory*]. Beijing: 三联书店 [Sanlian Press].
- Chen, Sihe 陈思和 (2001) 中国新文学整体观 [*A Comprehensive Study of New Literature in China*]. Shanghai: 上海文艺出版社 [Shanghai Literature and Art Press].

- Denton, Kirk A. (2014) *Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Dooling, Amy D. (2015) Yang Jiang's wartime comedies: or, the serious business of marriage. In: Christopher Rea (ed.) *China's Literary Cosmopolitans: Qian Zhongshu, Yang Jiang, and the World of Letters*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 14–40.
- Douban (n.d.a) 走到人生边上 [At the end of life]. 豆瓣读书 [Douban Books]. Available at: <https://book.douban.com/subject/2240482/> (accessed 28 August 2023).
- Douban (n.d.d) 豆瓣图书标签: 季羨林 [Douban book tag: Ji Xianlin]. 豆瓣读书 [Douban Books]. Available at: <https://book.douban.com/tag/季羨林> (accessed 4 August 2020).
- Douban (n.d.b) 我们仨 [We three]. 豆瓣读书 [Douban Books]. Available at: <https://book.douban.com/subject/1023045/> (accessed 28 August 2023).
- Douban (n.d.c) 周有光 [Youguang Zhou]. 豆瓣读书 [Douban Books]. Available at: <https://book.douban.com/author/4525220/> (accessed 28 August 2023).
- Field, Jesse (2015) “All alone, I think back on we three”: Yang Jiang's new intimate public. In: Christopher Rea (ed.) *China's Literary Cosmopolitans: Qian Zhongshu, Yang Jiang, and the World of Letters*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 179–209.
- Hong, Zicheng 洪子诚 (2010) 作家姿态与自我意识 [Writerly Attitude and Self-Consciousness]. Beijing: 北京大学出版社 [Beijing University Press].
- Ji, Xianlin 季羨林 (1998) 牛棚杂忆 [The Cowshed: Memories of the Cultural Revolution]. Beijing: 中国中央党校出版社 [The Central Chinese Party School Press].
- Ji, Xianlin (2016) 风风雨雨一百年 [A Hundred Year of Wind and Rain]. Hangzhou: 浙江人民出版社 [Zhejiang People's Press].
- Kong, Shuyu (2014) *Popular Media, Social Emotion and Public Discourse in Contemporary China*. London; New York, NY: Routledge.
- Larson, Wendy (2015) The pleasures of lying low: Yang Jiang and Chinese revolutionary culture. In: Christopher Rea (ed.) *China's Literary Cosmopolitans: Qian Zhongshu, Yang Jiang, and the World of Letters*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 133–156.
- Li, Ge 黎戈 (2007) 评论我们仨: 我们仨 [Comments on We Three: We Three]. 豆瓣读书 [Douban Books], 1 December. Available at: <https://book.douban.com/review/1110449/> (accessed 7 August 2020).
- Nie, Guang 聂广 (2016) 杨绛热意味着“小民情怀”的觉醒 [Yang Jiang fever means the awakening of a 'downunder' sensibility]. Sciencenet, 31 May. Available at: <http://blog.sciencenet.cn/blog-279293-981450.html> (accessed 1 September 2019).
- Nora, Pierre (1989) Between memory and history: Les Lieux de Mémoire. *Representations*, Special Issue: *Memory and Counter-Memory* (26): 7–24.
- Pieke, Frank N. (2016) *Knowing China: A Twenty-First Century Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 86–90.
- Qin, Amy (2016) Yang Jiang dies at 104; revered writer witnessed China's cultural revolution. *New York Times*, 27 May. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/27/books/yang-jiang-chinese-author-and-translator-dies-at-104.html> (accessed 17 July 2019).
- Rea, Christopher G. (2011) Yang Jiang's 楊絳 conspicuous inconspicuousness: a centenary writer in China's “prosperous age”. *China Heritage Quarterly* 26. Available at: [http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?searchterm=026\\_yangjiang.inc&issue=026](http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?searchterm=026_yangjiang.inc&issue=026) (accessed 17 July 2019).
- Rea, Christopher G. (ed.) (2015) *China's Literary Cosmopolitans: Qian Zhongshu, Yang Jiang, and the World of Letters*. Leiden: Brill.

- Sorace, Christian (2019) Extracting affect: televised cadre confessions in China. *Public Culture* 31(1): 145–171.
- Veg, Sebastian (ed.) (2019) *Popular Memories of the Mao Era: From Critical Debate to Reassessing History*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Wang, Shenjie 王沈洁 (2012) 知识分子, 文革反思与消费热潮 [*Intellectuals, reflections on the cultural revolution and their consumption*]. MA thesis, 北京大学 [Beijing University].
- Xunmi, Yueding 寻觅约定 (2013) 评论我们仨: 一艘船, 一个万里长梦 [Comments on *We Three: a boat, a long dream of ten thousand li*]. 豆瓣读书 [Douban Books], 29 June. Available at: <https://book.douban.com/review/6140577/> (accessed 7 August 2020).
- Yang, Jiang (1988) *Six Chapters from My Life "Downunder."* Howard Goldblatt (trans.). Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Yang, Jiang (1989) *Lost in the Crowd: A Cultural Revolution Memoir*. Geremie Barmé, (trans.). Melbourne: McPhee Gribble.
- Yang, Jiang 杨绛 (2003) 我们仨 [*We Three*]. Hong Kong: 三联书店 [Sanlian Press].
- Yang, Jiang 杨绛 (2004) 杨绛文集 [*Collected Works of Yang Jiang*]. Beijing: 人民文学出版社 [People's Literary Press].
- Yang, Jiang 杨绛 (2010a) 将饮茶 [*About to Drink Tea*]. Beijing: 三联书店 [Sanlian Press].
- Yang, Jiang 杨绛 (2010b) 杂忆与杂写 [*Random Memories and Essays*]. Beijing: 三联书店 [Sanlian Press], pp. 201–231.
- Yang, Jiang 杨绛 (2018a) 走到人生边上 [*At the End of Life*]. Beijing: 商务印书馆 [The Commercial Press], 1st ed. 2007.
- Yang, Jiang 杨绛 (2018b) 干校六记 [*Six Chapters from My Life in the Cadre School*]. Beijing: 三联书店 [Sanlian Press], 1st ed. 1981.
- Yang, Yang (2016) Renowned writer Yang Jiang dies at age 104. *China Daily Asia*, 25 May. Available at: [https://www.chinadailyasia.com/lifeandart/2016-05/25/content\\_15438902.html](https://www.chinadailyasia.com/lifeandart/2016-05/25/content_15438902.html) (accessed 17 July 2019).
- Yu, Yingshi 余英时 (2008) 周有光百岁口述试读序 [Preface: reading Zhou Youguang's centenarian oral memoir]. 豆瓣读书 [Douban Books]. Available at: <https://book.douban.com/reading/10401769/> (accessed 4 April 2019).
- Zhang, Dai (2007) *Return to Dragon Mountain: Memories of a Late Ming Man*. Jonathan Spence (trans.). New York: Viking.
- Zheng, Yi (2013) *Contemporary Chinese Print Media: Cultivating Middle-Class Taste*. London: Routledge.
- Zheng, Yi (2015) The world of twentieth-century Chinese popular fiction: from Shanghai express to rivers and lakes of Knights-Errant. In: Yingjin Zhang (ed.) *A Companion to Modern Chinese Literature*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, pp. 244–260.
- Zhou, Youguang 周有光 (2016) 似水如年: 周有光百年口述 [*Years that Flow like Water – Zhou Youguang's Centenarian Oral History*]. Hangzhou: 浙江大学出版社 [Zhejiang University Press].

## Author Biographies

**Yi Zheng** is a professor of Chinese and comparative literature at the University of New South Wales, Australia. Selected publications: *From Burke and Wordsworth to the Modern Sublime in Chinese Literature* (2011), *Contemporary Chinese Print Media: Cultivating Middleclass Taste* (2013), 《從危機詩學到地域小說: 中國現代文學論文集》 (From Crisis Poetics to Place

Fiction: Collected Essays on Modern Chinese Literature, 2018), and “1911 in Chengdu: A Novel History,” *boundary 2* (Vol. 47, No. 1, 2020: 177–203).

**Stephanie Hemelryk Donald** is a professor and Head of the School of Communication at UTS Sydney. Her book, *There's No Place Like Home: The Migrant Child in World Cinema*, was published in 2018 and re-released in paperback in 2021. Recent (2021–2022) articles on art and creativity have been published in *New Formations*, *Rural Landscapes*, and *Journal of Romance Studies*.