

4 Dealing with Victims of the Cultural Revolution

The Case of Guangxi, 1983–1987

Guoqing Song

On July 12, 1968, the local authorities summoned more than 10,000 people to attend a struggle rally held in the county seat of Fuchuan, Guangxi. At the public meeting, they watched the killing of two alleged counterrevolutionaries. The meeting was organized by the Fuchuan County Headquarter for Defending the Red Regime – a governmental institution recently established and mainly staffed by the United Command (*lianzhi*), one of the two main mass factions. A militia chief read out the charges against the two “counterrevolutionaries,” both from the April 22 (*si er er*) rival faction. Following his speech, they were sentenced to death and immediately decapitated by two female militia-men. Their heads were left on poles for public display for two nights and one day.¹ This horrific scene was by no means outlandish back in 1968. Such state-backed killings primarily targeting rival political forces had been occurring on a regular basis for a year up to that point and would reach a climax in the following month.² Official investigation reports compiled in the mid-1980s reveal that more than 84,000 people were killed in these events.³ After the killings, how to deal with those who had perpetrated these atrocities and those who were killed became a thorny issue for local authorities.

There were two rounds of redress of the killings. The first round occurred between 1972 and 1982; the second took place during the formal redress of the Cultural Revolution killings from 1983 to 1987. Like many parts of China, the local authorities in Guangxi were actually reluctant when the Party Center asked them to redress the state crimes

¹ Song Yongyi, ed., *Guangxi wenge jimi dang'an ziliao* [The Secret Archives of Guangxi's Cultural Revolution] (Deer Park: Guoshi chubanshe, 2016), vol. 5, 19–21.

² For more details, see chapter 1 in Song Guoqing, “Healing the Wounds?: Redressing State Crimes in Guangxi after the Cultural Revolution,” PhD dissertation, University of Freiburg, 2021.

³ Song, *Guangxi wenge*, vol. 13, 83.

that they had just committed. Because of their extensive implication and widespread complicity and participation, local authorities initially chose to cover up the truth on these atrocities and remained silent. Therefore, there were no breakthroughs made in the redress initiative spanning from 1972 to 1982. Guangxi's formal and comprehensive redress was initiated in spring 1983 after the central government appointed new regional leaders who were not closely connected to the violence and the two former mass factions. Over the course of the second round of the redress process, Guangxi's local governments punished and disciplined tens of thousands of culpable party members and state officials. Many of them were either purged from their former positions or banned for life from taking public office. Some of the individuals deeply involved in the atrocities were held criminally responsible and given sentences. Victims were rehabilitated and paid a token compensation. Additionally, the newly regrouped Guangxi leadership pronounced authoritative moral judgments on the historical narrative of the atrocities and constructed an official truth on the events that had transpired during the rule of its predecessors.

This chapter will explore how policies were devised and implemented to rehabilitate and compensate these victims in order to shed light on the strategic orientation of the party and its preferences in dealing with victims of the Cultural Revolution. In particular, the rectification of past wrongs mostly resulted from the state's imperative to reclaim legitimacy, the need to restore the public reputation of victims, and alleviating the hardships caused by the violence. The state was less concerned about individual rights invested in a citizenry entitled to rehabilitation and compensation for state crimes of the past. As Daniel Leese has noted, instead of overcoming the legacy of past injustices with an appeal to international humanitarian law or by granting individual entitlements to compensation, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) opted for a paternalistic approach with both judicial-political and social-ameliorative dimensions.⁴ Moreover, the comprehensive party-driven remedy program clearly had its own priorities and inclinations due to the fiscal constraints it faced, as relatively cost-free rehabilitation was prioritized while financial compensations were sidelined. This was not only apparent in the Guangxi case, but also was echoed in regions such as Inner Mongolia and Hunan, where horrendous killings also occurred during the Cultural Revolution. Thirdly, instead of introducing an actual

⁴ Daniel Leese, "The Politics of Historical Justice after the Cultural Revolution," in Maoist Legacy Database (MLD), "General Introduction," www.maoistlegacy.de/db/politics-of-historical-justice-after-the-cultural-revolution.

compensation program to repair the losses and damages of the victims, as happened in many postconflict regimes, the CCP adopted and developed traditional *shanhou* methods (literally translated as “follow-up work”,⁵ referring to the relief measures that follow humanmade disasters, natural calamities, or war) to respond to the political catastrophe. This chapter begins by focusing on the government’s implicit admissions of state responsibility for the violence and how it conferred rehabilitation to individual victims. The chapter then turns to the *shanhou* policies. Finally, it examines how these policies were deployed. Two specific measures – monetary payments and restitution – receive particular attention.

Political Catastrophe and Rehabilitation

The official response to the killings was quite protracted after they subsided in September 1968, and it gradually evolved as the authorities’ interpretation of the violence changed. Not until 1972 did the regional government begin to initiate the redress process following numerous petitions and the Party Center’s pressure. Within the party communication and the public sphere this initiative was carefully termed as “dealing with problems associated with the arbitrary killings” (*chuli luan dasi ren wenti*). The Cultural Revolution-era leadership and its supporter, United Command, imposed their narrative of the killings, which became entrenched in mainstream discourse until 1982. By downplaying the state crimes as random violence committed by both of the two mass factions – United Command and the April 22 rival faction, local authorities depicted the killings as a practical problem requiring only minor solutions. In many cases, they justified the killings as repression of counterrevolutionaries, and many of the victims were in fact still considered as counterrevolutionaries. The killings issue thus largely remained unresolved.

After Mao’s death, spurred by the change of the national political climate, more ordinary citizens from Guangxi petitioned for redress of the injustices stemming from the killings. The year 1983 was a turning point for the redress following a reshuffle of the regional leadership. A central-level work team was set up and sent to Guangxi in the spring in order to supervise solving “the problem of the arbitrary killings.” In addition, powerful task forces charged to “deal with lingering issues from

⁵ For more discussion on *shanhou* policies in China after Mao’s death, see Daniel Leese, *Maos langer Schatten. Chinas Umgang mit der Vergangenheit* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2020), 370–410.

the Cultural Revolution” (*chuli wenge yiliu wenti*) – a parlance coined to refer to the efforts toward overcoming injustices resulting from the Cultural Revolution – were established by party leadership at various levels. Including numerous case-specific investigation groups affiliated with them, these task forces mobilized more than 100,000 officials to deal with perpetrators and victims, helped to establish an authoritative version of the killings under the prior rule, and clarified accountability for the violence. This new narrative differed from the Cultural Revolution-era leadership’s and contended that what had transpired was actually a systematic suppression of the rival political forces. The former Cultural Revolution-era regional leadership was held primarily accountable for the widespread killings.

The nature of the killings, however, was still glossed over. Just as the Cultural Revolution was interpreted as a disaster and as a grave “left-deviation error”⁶ by the new party leadership, the nature of the killings was similarly defined, as it was laid out in unequivocal terms in the sentence: “In particular, the issue of factionalism and killings brought about severe after-effects.”⁷ Despite the disastrous consequences,⁸ as a whole the violence was not defined as a state crime, but rather as a political disaster. Therefore, except for specific killing incidents that were labeled as violations of laws and for which a number of direct organizers and killers were singled out for punishment according to the laws, former party leaders at all levels were not asked to assume criminal responsibility. Their complicity in the killings was depicted as political error.

In October 1983, Wei Guoqing, the top leader of Guangxi’s bureaucracy during the killings and representing the former regional leadership, made confession-like self-criticisms to the party for his role in the killings. His self-criticism couldn’t simply be construed as an acknowledgment of individual guilt for the violence in an effort to earn the party’s forgiveness and de facto amnesty. Instead, it should be considered as the authorities’ understanding of the violence and state responsibility, given the high-ranking post Wei once occupied. In his self-criticism, Wei followed the party, deeming the Cultural Revolution a great disaster. He pointed out the negative role of the killings in inflicting sufferings and promised to

⁶ Alexander C. Cook, *The Cultural Revolution on Trial: Mao and the Gang of Four* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 199.

⁷ Zhonggong Guangxi zhuangzu zizhiq weiyuanhui, “Guanyu ‘wenhua da geming’ yilai Guangxi ruogan lishi wenti de yijian” [Opinion on Certain Historical Issues in Guangxi since the “Cultural Revolution”], June 5, 1983, in MLD, item no. 38.

⁸ Nanning wanbao, “Wei Chunshu tan guanyu chuli Guangxi wenge yiliu wenti” [Wei Chunshu Discusses the Handling of Lingering Issues from the Cultural Revolution], *Nanning wanbao*, April 26, 1983, 1.

take political responsibility for the violence. This was encapsulated in the following words:

During the Cultural Revolution in Guangxi, the party was heavily damaged and people of all ethnicities and a vast number of cadres experienced a great disaster With regard to the errors that took place and the failure to prevent the random killings and beatings during the Cultural Revolution in Guangxi, I, as the person in charge of the Guangxi Revolutionary Preparatory Group and director of the Regional Revolutionary Committee since it was founded, should take the primary responsibility for my leadership failure.⁹

The former key local leader's admission of political responsibility for the killings contended that the failure of the local government to contain them was one of the reasons for the atrocities. This acknowledgment, though it still glossed over local state agents' roles in actively promoting the killings across the region, at least began to admit that the killings were a disaster rather than ignoring or even justifying them. His claim of taking responsibility amounted to an implicit or indirect admission of state responsibility.

The authorities' acknowledgment of the political disaster and implicit admission of responsibility for it were crucial preconditions for restoring the public reputation of the individual victims who were killed under various political charges through symbolic rehabilitation. Commonly viewed as a corrective method, rehabilitation is founded on the belief that the ruler determines what is politically correct or incorrect. The logic behind this kind of redressing of wrongs is that errors leading to political condemnation on the part of the ruler should and can only be corrected by the ruler.¹⁰ The use of the term "rehabilitation" can potentially extend to all individual cases in which there is a component of having been wrongly condemned by the government, and it may also be used in other cases of injustice.¹¹

An examination of the "Verdict on the Cause of Death" sheds light on how rehabilitation was gradually conferred to those who died in the killings. As early as 1974, following central policies, Guangxi authorities

⁹ Zhonggong zhongyang bangongting, "Zhuanfa 'Wei Guoqing tongzhi zai zhonggong shi'er jie er zhong quanhui xiaozuhui shang de fayan (zhaiyao)'" [Forwarding Comrade Wei Guoqing's Speech Made at the Group Meeting of the Second Plenary Session of the Twelfth Central Committee of the CCP (Abstract)], October 25, 1983, Guilin Municipal Archives (GMA), 01-04-18.

¹⁰ Eva Pils, "The Persistent Memory of Historic Wrongs in China: A Discussion of Demands for 'Reappraisal.'" *China Perspectives*, no. 4 (2007): 99–107.

¹¹ Liang Zhiping, "Shenyuan yu weiquan: Zai chuantong yu xiandai zhijian jiangou fazhi zhixu" [Submitting Grievances and Defending Rights: Building Legal Order between Tradition and Modernity]. *Er shi yi shiji*, no. 104 (2007): 11–19.

called for the formalization of two components of the redress procedure: reaching a “Verdict on the Cause of Death” (*siwang jielun*) and implementing *shanhou* programs. In accordance with the policy, verdicts were to be reached for all cadres, workers, commune members, and city residents killed during the Cultural Revolution, with the exception of the Four Types, including landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, and bad elements, who at that point were still structurally stigmatized by party policies. A formal Verdict on the Cause of Death comprised two parts: a brief biography of the dead and a cause of death. The latter was of foremost importance, since it pertained to the nature of the death and whether the person should be posthumously rehabilitated. Prior to 1983, the verdicts went through at least two rounds of revision. On both occasions, however, the authorities failed to fully recognize the innocence of the victims, branding all killings as “unnatural deaths” (*fei zhengchang siwang*) and providing ambiguous causes. The term “unnatural death” originally referred to deaths occurring due to accidents, disasters, or violence as opposed to those resulting from natural causes (such as age or disease). Using this terminology to classify these deaths was deliberate, as it reflected the abnormality of deaths during the Cultural Revolution, but the actual nature of such deaths was obscured.¹² Thus, the verdicts issued before 1983 triggered widespread resistance and dissatisfaction among the bereaved families.¹³

The policy after 1983 stood out for its promise to rehabilitate all of those who were killed during the violence, including the Four Types. Save for a small minority (about 3,312 deaths) that had died in armed battles,¹⁴ rehabilitation was conferred to almost all of those killed in the violence. Though the new Verdicts on the Cause of Death issued after 1983 varied from county to county, but the intent of restoring the public reputation of the victims was consistent. Take the following verdicts issued by two county-level governments as examples: One, issued by

¹² Tang Shaojie, “Qinghua daxue wenge zhong de fei zhengchang siwang” [Unnatural Deaths during the Cultural Revolution at Tsinghua University], in *Shui mu fengyu: Beijing qinghua daxue wenge shi* [History of the Cultural Revolution at Beijing’s Tsinghua University], ed. Qizhi (Taipei: Duli zuojia, 2014), 69–84.

¹³ Conversation with informant no. 10, March 11, 2016; Conversation with informant no. 39, January 18, 2017.

¹⁴ According to the regulations, those were designated as “unfortunate deaths” (*buxing qushi*); see Zhonggong Guangxi zizhiqu weiyuanhui bangongting, “Guanyu yinfa wo qu wenge zhong bei dasizhe yishu jingji shanhou gongzuo shouxu, baobiao shiyang yiji shuoming de tongzhi” [A Notification on Printing and Circulating the Paperwork Procedures, Sample Reports, and Descriptions of Financial *Shanhou* Work Concerning Family Members of Those People Killed during the Cultural Revolution], September 15, 1983, in MLD, item no. 829.

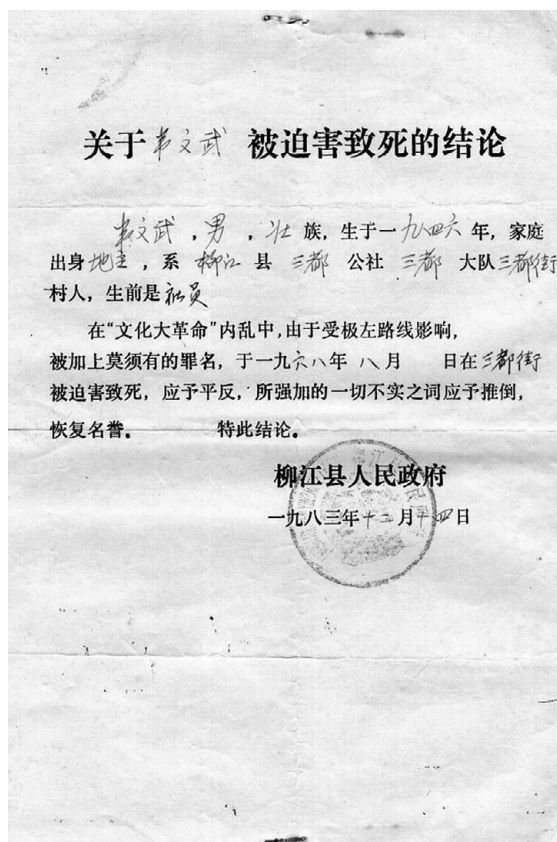


Figure 4.1 Verdict on the Cause of Death issued by the Liujiang County government. Courtesy of informant no. 29

the Liujiang County government, was titled “Verdict on Wei Wenwu,¹⁵ Who Was Persecuted to Death” (see Figure 4.1). Another, issued by the Pingle County government, was titled “Letter of Rehabilitation” (see Figure 4.2). Even though the titles and contents varied, both indicated the state’s acknowledgment of the injustice that the victims had suffered. Moreover, in spite of the subtle discrepancies between the two verdicts, several important sentences, such as “[this person] was persecuted to death,” “rehabilitation should be granted [to him/her],” “having all untrue charges [against him/her] overturned,” and “clearing [his/her]

¹⁵ For the documents presented in this chapter, I have obtained the permission from families of the victims to post original names.

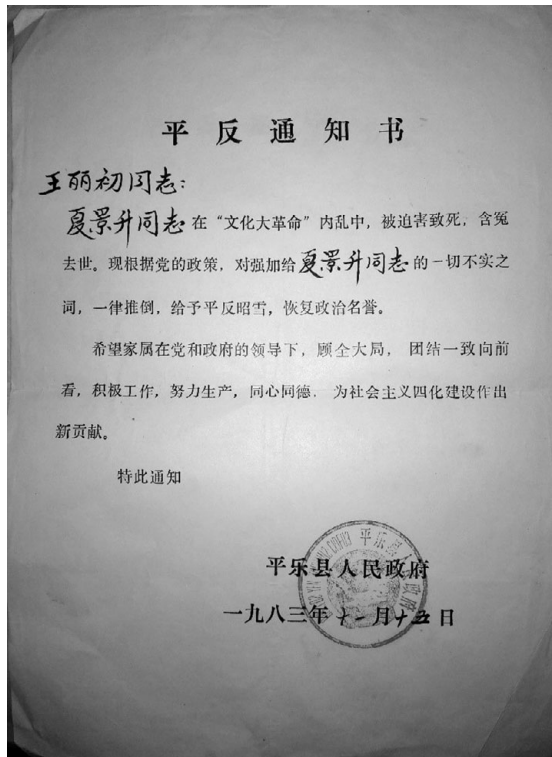


Figure 4.2 Verdict on the Cause of Death issued by the Pinglu County government. Courtesy of informant no. 10

name,” and so on, were used in both documents. Those words and expressions unmistakably revealed the political character of the deaths, which resulted from political persecution. They clearly acknowledged that the victims were not guilty, that the previous charges against them had been wrong, and that their public reputation needed to be restored (*hui fu ming yu*). For many victims, this represented the state’s official acknowledgment of the injustice inflicted upon them and the first conferral of full rehabilitation. Additionally, the rehabilitation also meant that the victims’ families would no longer face discrimination, at least in theory.¹⁶

¹⁶ During the Mao era and for a while after Mao’s death, the families of those who were convicted faced discrimination from society and the government; see Zhao Qizheng, *Ganbu renshi gongzuo shouce* [Handbook on the Work of Cadre Personnel Management] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1986), 224.

In spite of the state's acknowledgment of these sufferings and the restoration of the public reputations of the victims, the rehabilitation was in reality not considered a right to which the victims were entitled. Redressing the Cultural Revolution killings through rehabilitation was not rooted in liberal ideals of inalienable rights, but rather the authoritarian tradition of redress as an act of discretionary benevolence of paternalistic rulers.¹⁷ The CCP and party committees at all levels, in assuming the role of the ruler, not only determined whether or not to rehabilitate individual victims, but also demanded persistent political loyalty from the victims and their family members. Similar to Khrushchev's rehabilitations after Stalin's death,¹⁸ in which the rehabilitation of Stalin's victims was considered a benefit granted by the state, the victims of these killings were also expected to feel grateful rather than entitled after rehabilitation was conferred. Moreover, apart from demanding gratitude, the government also attempted to enforce closure on the killings through granting rehabilitation. This is particularly salient in the language used in the rehabilitation certificate (Figure 4.2), such as: "[The government] hopes the families unite as one and will look forward ... to make great efforts to produce and contribute to the socialist Four Modernization construction," which was typical of formal rehabilitation certificates. The state saw the conferral of rehabilitation as a significant gesture and expected the families of the victims to achieve closure by leaving the political disaster behind and focusing on the party's new agenda.

The New *Shanhou* Program

Apart from restoring the public reputation of individual victims, the authorities also had to repair the losses and damages resulting from the violence, including the confiscation and seizure of private property, house raids, forced dislocation, as well as issues relating to how to feed victims' families. These problems were by no means less significant compared with the rehabilitation of victims and punishment of perpetrators, given the extreme poverty in the population and unequal welfare system at the time.¹⁹ For a long time after the violence, with the exception of a small number of victims (such as workers or cadres whose

¹⁷ Pils, "The Persistent Memory."

¹⁸ Marc Elie, "Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union, 1953–1964: A Policy Unachieved," in Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *De-Stalinising Eastern Europe: The Rehabilitation of Stalin's Victims after 1935* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 41.

¹⁹ The labor insurance program, for instance, which was adopted in 1951, provided a comprehensive array of benefits. However, this system was highly limited, since it never reached all urban residents. For more details on how this unequal system evolved, see

families invoked national legislation on social welfare to receive payments or pensions from their original work units), most received no financial compensation. As a result, many fell into dire straits. Some victims sought to extract financial reparation through engaging in extralegal actions against those responsible for the killings. This peaked in spring 1983, becoming too widespread for the government to continue to ignore.²⁰ As a result, the authorities devised a new *shanhou* program to respond to the financial dimension of the damages caused by the killings.

In September 1983, the Guangxi Regional Party Committee and the Guangxi People's Government jointly issued *Guifa* [1983] No. 55, the "Decision on Addressing the Financial *Shanhou* Issues of the Family Members of Those Killed in the Cultural Revolution."²¹ The 1983 *shanhou* policy was more comprehensive than that of 1972–1982. It clearly dictated the nature of financial remedy and outlined the eligibility criteria for victims or beneficiary groups. Most importantly, it formalized a series of concrete financial measures that had either been employed before or newly introduced, such as monetary payments, restitution, social assistance, job assignment, and housing allocation. In addition to governmental remedy, those who had been granted de facto amnesty for their involvement in the killings by the government for the first time were formerly encouraged to offer presents, money, or labor to the bereaved families.²² For policymakers, these measures were clearly aimed at solving two problems: providing instructions for lower-level leaderships that were directly responsible for carrying out the *shanhou* program and curbing the sudden outbreak of random seizures of property or money occurring in communities. These acts, in the view of the Guangxi authorities, had impacted negatively on social security and frustrated the party's ambition to build a socialist legality following the perceived lawlessness of the Cultural Revolution.²³

Nara Dillon, *Radical Inequalities: China's Revolutionary Welfare State in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

²⁰ There were reportedly over 1,130 instances of bereaved families taking extralegal actions against alleged perpetrators between April and May 1983; see Guangxi zhuangzu zizhiq gonganting, "Guanyu yin wenge yiliu wenti yinqi yixie zhian wenti de qingkuang baogao" [Report on the Situation of Public Safety Related Cases Triggered by the Lingering Issues from the Cultural Revolution], June 4, 1983, GMA, 01-04-18.

²¹ Zhonggong Guangxi zhuangzu zizhiq weiyuanhui and Guangxi zhuangzu zizhiq renmin zhengfu, "Guanyu chuli wenge zhong bei dasizhe yishu jingji shanhou wenti de juejing" [Decision on Addressing Financial *Shanhou* Issues of Family Members of Those Killed during the Cultural Revolution], September 13, 1983, in MLD, item no. 24.

²² Ibid. ²³ Ibid.

Though the 1983 policy introduced concrete financial remedial measures, it was not intended as and actually was not a real reparation program for the losses and damages incurred by the state-sponsored violence. Instead, the policy would serve as a symbolic form of rehabilitation of the victims. As the document pointed out:

The financial assistance is intended to demonstrate the party and state's willingness to exonerate (*zhaoxue*) victims and their solicitude and concern for the family members of the victims politically, and is not a direct compensation for financial loss.²⁴

The authorities possibly knew that the financial remedy offered was certainly not enough to compensate the victims for what they had suffered. Therefore, at the very beginning, they straightforwardly defined it as financial assistance (*jingji buzhu*) rather than compensation so as to avoid potential controversy. Moreover, they expected the forthcoming financial assistance to be understood as an expression of sympathy – a tangible symbol of condolence to a person harmed by the killings – and to show that the government had actually done something besides simply conferring political rehabilitation. In such a way, it would be accurate to consider the *shanhou* program as an extension of rehabilitation rather than actual reparation or compensation.

The *shanhou* program was mostly devised to alleviate the financial hardship faced by the families of the victims. Though unable to offer actual compensation, the government believed that the ubiquitous financial difficulties among the bereaved could be addressed within a limited range or at least ameliorated. To serve this goal, besides distributing unified financial assistance, the 1983 policy also classified financial requests resulting from the killings into two categories: (1) reasonable, which focused only on demanding improvement to a dire financial situation; and (2) unreasonable, which referred to those seeking additional cash subsidies, employment, or actual financial compensation. For the former, the document asked the authorities to study the requests and come up with solutions. For the latter, however, the document emphasized the role of “thought work” (*sixiang gongzuo*)²⁵ instead of resolving the requests.

Undertaken by government representatives, thought work aimed to persuade bereaved families to accept what the government had offered and give up on requests that the government considered to be over-board.²⁶ The authorities juxtaposed thought work with the *shanhou*

²⁴ Ibid. ²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ For the development of thought work in the post-Mao era, see Daniel C. Lynch, *After the Propaganda State: Media, Politics, and “Thought Work” in Reformed China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

program to overcome the legacy of the killings: “The work of financial ‘*shanhou*’ should happen in combination with thought and political work. In order to heal the wounds ... [any act] only focusing on economic or financial issues should be avoided.”²⁷ “Wounds” here refers to the animosity caused by the killings. “To heal the wounds” (*yuhe shanghen*) was an alternative expression for reconciliation and possible closure and denoted the reduction of animosity between individuals and in society. In the view of the authorities, the *shanhou* program alone could not achieve these goals and therefore was not to be excessively highlighted. Only in combination with thought work could reconciliation be pushed forward. Apparently, the government had great expectations of this thought work when addressing these killings.

During the process of addressing the killings, the thought work included several parts. One reference document for the 1983 *shanhou* program²⁸ briefly described this. Foremost, the document suggested that officials should mainly focus on expressing the party and the government’s condolences and solicitude, explain the policies on addressing problems from the Cultural Revolution, and require the bereaved to strengthen their understanding of the laws and legality while also abiding by them.²⁹ Secondly, the document provided detailed guidelines on how these officials ought to behave when having conversations with the bereaved in order to soothe their dissatisfaction. For example, officials should appear “warm-hearted, kind, and compassionate, and the content of the conversation should be relevant and focused.”³⁰ A key role of thought work was to convince the bereaved to give up those demands deemed unreasonable or excessively high by the authorities. The document thus instructed officials to invoke established regulations and policies explaining why such demands could not be met. If the bereaved still insisted on their demands, the document continued, the officials should not quarrel with them. Instead, the officials could simply clarify the government’s standpoint and let the bereaved reconsider their demands.³¹ In this way, implementation of the *shanhou* program seemed to represent the government attempting to pacify the bereaved and ameliorate their anger through kind gestures and patient persuasion.

The eligibility criteria of the 1983 *shanhou* program had changed. Unlike those of 1972–1982, which focused only on state officials and

²⁷ Zhonggong Guangxi, “Guanyu chuli wenge zhong bei dasizhe.” ²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ For discussion on legal system education in the 1980s, see Jennifer Althenger, *Legal Lessons: Popularizing Laws in the People’s Republic of China, 1949–1989* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 171–212.

³⁰ Zhonggong Guangxi, “Guanyu yinfa wo qu wenge zhong bei dasizhe.” ³¹ Ibid.

workers, the new *shanhou* policies covered Cultural Revolution-era victims killed due to state-driven violence from a broader set of family backgrounds or identities:

The killed [whose families could be eligible for this *shanhou* program] that were referred to in this resolution are those who had been beaten to death, who died after being struggled against and injured (within half a year), who had been persecuted to death or had committed suicide, or those whose disappearance had been confirmed by their families, as well as those who had been killed in armed conflicts.³²

In other words, all of those killed, regardless of cause of death, were now in fact deemed by the state as eligible for the *shanhou* program. The former profession of the victims was not even mentioned and no longer played a part in determining their eligibility. According to this standard, families of former commune members, Four Types, and students, who had been excluded previously, were thus now entitled to the *shanhou* program.

The expansion of the beneficiary groups for financial remedy reflected a subtle change of the authorities' definitions of who qualified as a victim. The authorities no longer identified victims according to their former political identities or professions, but rather according to their experiences of suffering. Such a de-emphasis on the victims' background was a result of the diminishing importance of identity politics³³ after 1978, a key turning point for the party in overcoming a continuing legitimacy crisis in the late Mao era by starting reform and opening up (*gaige kaifang*). To promote this project, the party quickly rehabilitated a large number of cadres, intellectuals, and entrepreneurs persecuted during the Cultural Revolution but considered crucial for the national economy.³⁴ The party also gave attention to revising discriminatory policies against several social groups. A result of these developments was the fading out of identity politics, which helped the party shift its main goal to economic development, but also was significant for redefining victimization. The removal of the political label of the Four Types in late 1979, for instance, meant that the civil rights for those who had held this identity were in principle restored, and the government could no longer treat them as pariahs or continually ignore their actual sufferings.

³² Ibid.

³³ For an analysis on identity politics, see Li Xun, *Geming zaofan niandai: Shanghai wenge yundong shigao* [An Era of Revolution and Rebellion: History of the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2015), 7–11.

³⁴ For details, see Leese, *Maos langer Schatten*, 247–82.

Cash Subsidies

A key measure of the new *shanhou* program was to offer bereaved families sums of money. As noted above, there was no actual compensation program to compensate the victims of killings, since the government worried that the issue of compensation might encourage victims to make unlimited financial demands, thus straining the state's finances. According to the 1983 *shanhou* policies, satisfying compensation requests for the financial losses stemming from the killings would not be an option. In addition, the bereaved had no legal recourse before the adoption of the State Compensation Law in 1994. The policy thus proposed using cash subsidies instead. Due to Guangxi's dire financial situation, most of this money came from the central government. By the summer of 1985, the central government had allocated a fund of RMB 40,000,000 for the victims and their families. Adding the money provided by Guangxi local governments to this sum, a total of RMB 50,000,000³⁵ was distributed across the region.³⁶ This sum accounted for 2 percent of the total regional expenditure for the fiscal year of 1984. Most of this money was distributed to the direct families of victims in installments (i.e. as social assistance) or as lump sums under the supervision of the newly established governmental institutions – task forces – responsible for the redress at all levels.³⁷

The introduction of monetary payments further developed the traditional *shanhou* methods in responding to this political catastrophe. This was the first time that the government had comprehensively used cash to redress political disasters since the founding of the People's Republic of China. During the state-promoted Great Leap Forward of 1958–1960,³⁸ which claimed over 300,000 lives, victims in Guangxi did not obtain any monetary payments aside from some grain transfers from other provinces.³⁹

In principle, all groups of victims could receive cash subsidies. However, the majority of state officials and workers, who accounted for about 14 percent of the total deaths,⁴⁰ had already received some

³⁵ Based on current exchange rates, this would be roughly equivalent to USD 727 million.

³⁶ Song, *Guangxi wenge*, vol. 1, 51.

³⁷ Zhonggong Guangxi, "Chuli wenge zhong bei dasizhe."

³⁸ For a study on the failure of this movement and the resulting nationwide famine, see Felix Wemheuer, *Famine Politics in Maoist China and the Soviet Union* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2014).

³⁹ See Yi Zheng, *Scarlet Memorial: Tales of Cannibalism in Modern China* (Boulder: Westview, 1996), 151.

⁴⁰ Song Guoqing, "Healing the Wounds?" 37.

financial indemnities from their former work units before 1983. For those who had not received anything yet, through the new *shanhou* program the government promised to offer a retroactive payment worth three months' salary, funeral fees, survivor benefits, and financial assistance to the families of victims in accordance with regulations established by state organs, enterprises, and public institutions.⁴¹ The most salient feature of the new program was the provision of cash subsidies to peasants, city residents, and students, who accounted for the majority of victims and had not been eligible for any financial remedy before 1983. To this group, besides offering monthly social assistance in the form of cash to the elderly, youths, and those disabled without kin, the document granted each victim a one-time monetary payment of 220 yuan.⁴² Of the total amount, 120 yuan counted as survivor benefits and 100 yuan as funeral fees.

The measure of cash subsidies, especially the distribution of the 220 yuan, can be examined further for its symbolic meaning. As mentioned above, the *shanhou* program was used to demonstrate the party and the state's commitment to the exoneration of these victims. This can also be demonstrated by a close reading of the text of the "Notice on Distributing Funeral Fees and Survivor Benefits for the Person Persecuted to Death" (see Figure 4.3), in which the government promised to grant any bereaved family 220 yuan per victim. The local government not only declared the deaths of these victims to be unjust, but also unambiguously called for the exoneration of the victims, as shown by the title and the first sentences: "Comrade XXX, your family member XXX was persecuted to death during the decade of domestic turmoil and should be granted rehabilitation, and (the government) would like to express its condolences." Except for issuing specific certificates rehabilitating the victims, as shown above, this served as another occasion for the government to acknowledge the injustice that the victims had endured and to reiterate that rehabilitation should be granted.

Because of the symbolic meaning of the 220 yuan, the government went to great lengths to persuade the bereaved families to accept the

⁴¹ Song, *Guangxi wenge*, vol. 1, 51.

⁴² This was approximately half a year's salary of an ordinary worker. Based on current exchange rates, this would be roughly equivalent to USD 3,200. Compare this paltry amount with Argentina, where the families of those who died due to state violence were each compensated with USD 220,000, and Taiwan, where the families of deceased victims of the February 28 Incident were each compensated with approximately USD 190,000. See Jon Elster, *Closing the Books: Transitional Justice in Historical Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 63; Wu Naide, "Zhuanxing zhengyi he lishi jiyi" [Transitional Justice and Historical Memory], *Sixiang jikan*, no. 2 (2006): 10.

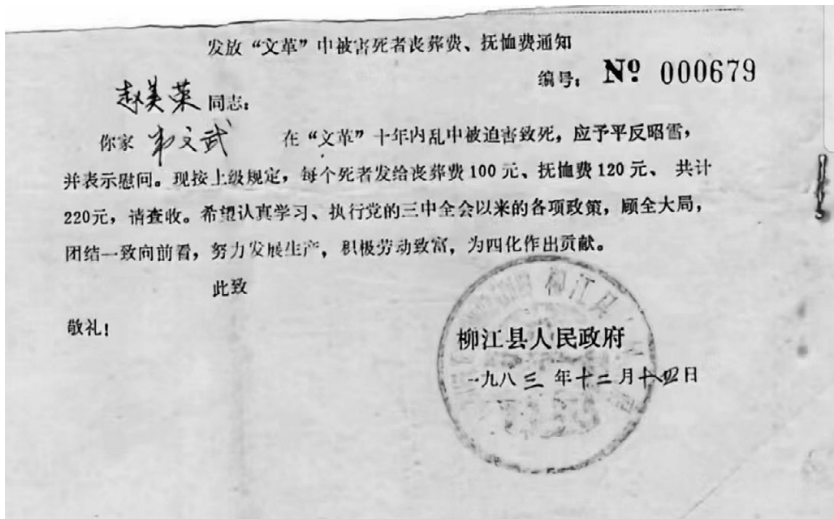


Figure 4.3 Notice on Distributing Funeral Fees and Survivor Benefits. Courtesy of informant no. 11

money. Even though there are no provincial-level data showing how many families accepted these payments, the figure is likely very high. Internal data compiled by the Yulin prefectural authorities indicate that, up to January 1984, “there were 9,417 households eligible to receive the money, and 9,357 households have received it.”⁴³ Thus, nearly every household had accepted the money. Of the sixty households that had refused, these families most often cited a failure on the part of the government to meet their needs or demands. For instance, twenty-two households stated that their demands for the arrest of the killers had not been satisfied, sixteen refused because their demands for job assignment had not been satisfied, and thirteen refused because their demands for the restitution of confiscated property had not been satisfied.⁴⁴ A family member of a victim from the first category who I spoke with explained her reasoning for refusing the money as follows: “We resolutely refused to accept [the money], we wanted [the government] to arrest the killers” because “RMB 200 was worth nothing compared to a human life” and

⁴³ Zhonggong Yulin diwei chuyi ban, “Yulin diqu chuyi gongzuo chubu zongjie” [Yulin Prefecture’s Preliminary Summary of the Work of Addressing Lingering Issues from the Cultural Revolution], January 1985, Yulin Municipal Archives (YMA), archival number unclear.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

“even though we were poor, we still refused to accept.”⁴⁵ It appears that this group of families was aware of the government’s intention to create the impression that the injustice had been redressed through offering some cash subsidies. They refused to accept because, in their view, the 220 yuan was insufficient to satisfy their requests for redressing what had happened to their families. For them, seeking criminal justice outweighed any financial remedy.

Many bereaved families saw the acceptance of the money as a compromise following government officials’ repeated visits and displays of humility rather than as a gesture representing the full redress of injustice. In fact, according to these families, accepting the 220-yuan payments was not easy for them. Initially, many completely refused to accept these payments and asked instead for the government to return their relatives. One of my interviewees, a victim’s brother, said that his mother refused the money offered by the government and asked to have her son returned.⁴⁶ When encountering such cases, government representatives continued to try and persuade the family member or gave the money to other relatives of the victim.⁴⁷ The humble attitude, friendliness, and sympathy of government representatives facilitated acceptance in the end. Several decades later, some families still clearly remembered how the government representatives had repeatedly stated that “[the victim] is not guilty,” that “the case against him/her was unjust, and he/she has to be rehabilitated,” or that “the government had committed errors.”⁴⁸ Families recalled that the attitude of the representatives was to their liking, and this likely made these families feel comfortable with eventually accepting the money.

However, many bereaved families were still unsatisfied and felt unjustly treated, even though they had accepted the money. The 220 yuan could not make them forget the past injustice and consider it fully redressed. In the case mentioned above, the victim’s brother explained his acceptance of the money as follows: “The reason why I accepted the money was to preserve evidence. They killed people, and [merely] compensated us with so little money, this is the evidence [of how little they compensate].”⁴⁹ For him and many others, the acceptance of the money did not express their satisfaction with the outcomes of the redress process. Rather, this was to prove that what the government

⁴⁵ Conversation with informant no. 29, March 4, 2017.

⁴⁶ Conversation with informant no. 11, March 10, 2016.

⁴⁷ Conversation with informant no. 10, March 11, 2016.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*; conversation with informant no. 11, March 10, 2016; conversation with informant no. 34, March 8, 2017.

⁴⁹ Conversation with informant no. 29, March 4, 2017.

had done was insignificant compared to the great losses experienced by the victims' families.

Many families of victims took the compensation largely out of helplessness. This was particularly true for families of victims who had been labeled as one of the Four Types, who suddenly had their labels removed following the abolishment of structural discrimination in late 1979. This was encapsulated in the words of a son from a former Four Types family who had lost four relatives (father, uncle, and two brothers) in the killings:

Regarding this stuff [money and rehabilitation], you can't do anything even if it [the government] had given nothing. It [the government] gave you something, this meant that they could somewhat show human kindness. But if they gave us nothing, we can't do anything either, and you can't even dare to request money. It gave you some and made you feel a little bit comfortable. [So] you can't say for sure whether or not we are satisfied [with the redress of the killings].⁵⁰

In my interviews with families of Four Types victims who were hit hard by the state-sponsored violence, I was left with the impression that some of them remained traumatized. As shown in the quote above, a state of universal dread, uneasiness, numbness, and helplessness prevailed (and continues to prevail) concerning the redress process. Four decades later, families are still not fully at ease with the contemporary political context and fear that they could be victimized or scapegoated again. For example, my informant above, an older single man, worried that probing into the past might someday endanger his eligibility for the subsistence allowance he had recently acquired from the government.⁵¹ Even though the state might consider the acceptance of money as of key importance in terms of showing that it had done something to compensate the bereaved, the money did not actually play such a role either financially or morally. Many saw the state's cash subsidies more as token acts of charity than as genuine expressions of repentance and contrition for past atrocities, let alone a recognition of the individual rights invested in its citizenry.

Restitution

Restitution constituted another dimension of the *shanhou* program. The demand for restitution primarily focused on three areas: movable goods, financial and fixed assets, and residential property.⁵² Compared to

⁵⁰ Conversation with informant no. 34, March 8, 2017.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Leese, *Maos langer Schatten*, 384.

compensation requests for losses due to Cultural Revolution violence, restitution seemed to place less of a strain on state finances. In theory, as long as the confiscated goods were still held in state depots or were well documented, it was possible to return them to their original owners.⁵³ In reality, this was only an ideal state, and the process actually was much more complicated.

The evolution of restitution policies was inextricably intertwined with the gradually changing perceptions of past injustices. The first central document on the restitution of private possessions confiscated by Red Guards was issued as early as March 1967.⁵⁴ Yet, although the authorities recognized the issue quite early, the policy they enacted was partial and discriminatory. The restitution policy prioritized the “wrongfully” targeted members of the “revolutionary masses” and “laboring people,” or those cases “belonging to contradictions among the people,” explicitly ordering the return of their confiscated property. If the goods were broken, the owners could ask for compensation. The policy rejected restitution requests from politically stigmatized groups, in particular the Four Types, because the violence against them was considered at the time just and revolutionary.⁵⁵ With the exception of basic necessities, such as clothing and utensils, this group as a whole was not entitled to restitution. A number of confiscated possessions, including antiquities, artistic works, gold, silver dollars, jewelry, and valuable old books, continued to be stored in governmental institutions or were transferred to state museums and libraries. There were also some possessions that were held by party functionaries or had been sold.⁵⁶

These discriminatory restitution policies only underwent significant adjustment in the late 1970s, as the authorities began to make great efforts to depart from the recent past and begin the economic imperative of the Four Modernizations. The damages and losses of all social groups during the Cultural Revolution were now acknowledged. Accompanied

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Zhonggong zhongyang, “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu zai wenhua da geming yundong zhong chuli hongweibing chaojia wuzi de jixiang guiding” [Regulations Issued by the CCP Center Concerning How to Handle Properly Goods and Materials Confiscated by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution], March 20, 1967, in MLD, item no. 2176.

⁵⁵ Zhonggong zhongyang, etc., “Zhonggong zhongyang zhuanfa tongzhan junguan zu dui zai jing bufen tongzhan duixiang bei chachao caiwu de chuli yijian” [Opinions Given by the United Front Department Group of the Central State Organs and Transmitted by the Central Committee on How to Deal with the Confiscated Property of Several Candidates for United Front Recruitment in Beijing], February 7, 1971, in MLD, item no. 2179.

⁵⁶ Leese, *Maos langer Schatten*, 384–85.

by other reconciliatory policies, the new party leadership called for a complete restitution of property confiscated from those social groups that had suffered. The Central Organization Department transmitted a document in July 1982, for instance, that claimed that all confiscated property, except for weapons, ammunition, drugs, and other banned items, in principle should be returned regardless of their owners' political labels.⁵⁷

Following the launch of the national restitution policy, the Guangxi authorities also laid down several general rules for addressing property confiscation that had occurred during the killings. These rules were clearly included in the 1983 *shanhou* program.⁵⁸ A general process for completing restitution was as follows: First, a careful investigation was to be conducted regarding all properties (including housing) of the killed that had been raided, confiscated, or occupied. Then, several concrete methods for addressing such cases would be introduced. For instance, if individual persons had used the seized goods, they had to either return those goods or provide compensation. If the original goods had been used by collective or state organs or had been handed over to the national treasury, then the collective, the corresponding work units, or the local bureaucracy should return those goods or provide compensation. For confiscated property that could not be traced or returned, the document suggested conducting thought work with their owners to persuade them to settle the matter. Usually, the owners would be persuaded to refrain from requesting the return of or compensation for the confiscated items.

A case from Gui County's Sanli Commune⁵⁹ illustrates this process and indicates the dilemma of relying on *shanhou* policies when addressing issues of restitution resulting from the killings. The story starts with Lin Zhiting, who was killed during the Cultural Revolution. Before his death, Lin was a rural doctor and had assumed the position of village chief during the period of Japanese occupation. It was very likely that his sons participated in the oppositional mass faction during the Cultural

⁵⁷ Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu, "Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu zhuanfa Beijing shiwei, shi renmin zhengfu 'Guanyu chuli wenhua da geming zhong chachao caiwu yiliu wenti de' qingshi baogao de tongzhi" [CCP Organization Department Transmission of Instructions from the CCP Beijing Municipal Committee and the Beijing Municipal Government on How to Handle Lingering Issues Linked to the Confiscation of Property during the Cultural Revolution], July 5, 1982, in MLD, item no. 771.

⁵⁸ Zhonggong Guangxi, "Chuli wenge zhong bei dasizhe."

⁵⁹ Guixian xianwei chuyi lingdaoxiaozu, "Guixian Sanli gongshe Wuli dadui fasheng yishu juzhong da za qiang an de diaocha chuli baogao" [Investigation and Processing Report on the Case of Bereaved Families Gathering for Beating, Smashing and Looting Occurring in Gui County's Sanli Commune Wuli Brigade], September 24, 1984, YMA, archival number unclear.

Revolution, since one of the political charges against Lin was “April 22 black nest” (*si er er heiwo*) – a humiliating expression referring to his sheltering of “April 22” sons. In late April and early September 1968, he was publicly criticized twice by his brigade and the production team, respectively, and eventually beaten to death at a struggle session organized by the production team on the evening of September 4. Before his death, he was fined 800 yuan by the brigade, according to his five surviving sons. The fine mostly was repaid by selling his house to the production team. In addition, Lin’s sons also claimed that other property had been confiscated in the context of the killing.

In spring 1983, Gui County started a new round of addressing killings. Shortly thereafter, a county task force was sent to Sanli Commune to rehabilitate and compensate the victims and punish those involved in the violence. Regarding the case of Lin Zhiting, the task force learned of the cause of his death and rehabilitated him in mid-January of 1984. Four party members were charged with responsibility for the death and were all expelled from the party. The task force claimed in a report submitted to the county authority in September that it had distributed 220 yuan to Lin’s four younger sons living in Sanli on January 12. The task force also claimed that the fine of 800 yuan, which was confirmed as 792 yuan after the investigation, had been given to the four sons over two dates: December 16, 1983 and January 14, 1984. The house was a more complicated issue. Lin had initially sold it to the production team for 650 yuan, and later on the production team sold it to four households of peasants. Lin’s four younger sons proposed to buy it back at the original selling price. Meanwhile, they insisted that the house be renovated. The task force decided to meet this request by persuading the four peasant households currently occupying the house to move out and, so as to quickly close the case, asked the four expelled party members to pay for repairs and offer labor.

However, this seemingly workable settlement ultimately failed due to the strong opposition from Lin’s eldest son, Lin Yingya, who was teaching at a college in Nanning. He refused to sign the rehabilitation certificate and complained that his brothers’ demands had been too low (*yaogiu tai di*). Instead, he proposed a new plan. On January 22, 1984, Lin Yingya sent a letter to Gui County endorsed by his four brothers. The letter laid out their new demands in detail: (1) Arrest the perpetrators and convene a large-scale rehabilitation meeting for their father and meanwhile publicize the perpetrators’ names; (2) find jobs for the younger brothers; (3) return or compensate for the confiscated property and goods, including 2 gold rings, 30 silver dollars, 2 mosquito nets, 90 yuan in cash, coupons for 30 kilograms of food, 100 yuan in

government bonds, and multiple pieces of clothing. Finally, he proposed to have the house repaired to its original style.⁶⁰ The task force, however, rejected all of these demands by claiming that they were inconsistent with existing policies and regulations. It remained suspicious of the claims of confiscated and missing possessions and goods and asserted that, after a lengthy investigation, no evidence had been found of these goods, nor did it know of their whereabouts. Moreover, the task force claimed that Lin's sons did not provide any clues as to the claimed missing properties. In March, it announced the decision to close the case.

In the context of the killings, many property confiscations were not well documented, which made it difficult to address demands for restitution. The responsible authorities would first make efforts to investigate and find evidence that could determine the financial losses or damages. After that, as shown in the above case, seized goods or possessions would be returned or a sum of symbolic compensation would be paid. However, sometimes it was very difficult to find any evidence of alleged missing property or goods. When this happened, as shown above, the task force would usually simply announce the closure of the case without providing any form of compensation.

Along with the other measures outlined in previous sections, the new *shanhou* program played a role in compensating for the losses resulting from the killings and in helping the bereaved living in dire financial circumstances. Consequently, these policies largely fulfilled the party's aim of maintaining social stability. The Yulin prefectural government's summary report in December 1984 on addressing the killings indicated a sharp decline when compared to July 1983 (when it had received an unprecedented number of petitions) in both letters (a 90 percent drop) and visits (an 80 percent drop; *lai xin lai fang*) from people asking for problems resulting from the violence to be resolved.⁶¹ Following this major and last-ditch effort to overcome the legacy of the killings, the direct impacts of the earlier state-sponsored injustices on society and the families of victims gradually faded.

Conclusion

The state primarily sought to use rehabilitation and the newly devised *shanhou* program to promote restorative justice. It dispensed nonmaterial

⁶⁰ Guixian xianwei chuyi lingdao xiaozu, "Guixian Sanli gongshe Wuli dadui."

⁶¹ Zhonggong Yulin diwei chuyi ban, "Yulin diqu chuyi gongzuo chubu zongjie" [Yulin Prefecture's Preliminary Summary on Dealing with the Leftover Problems of the Cultural Revolution], January 6, 1985, YMA, archival number unclear.

compensation to rectify the past wrongs and to restore the public reputations of victims by implicitly acknowledging state responsibility. The symbolic measures prioritized the rehabilitation of the victims. In Guangxi and elsewhere in China, victims of the killings and other forms of Cultural Revolution injustices, including those from politically stigmatized groups, were individually granted full rehabilitation. Their innocence was officially acknowledged and their reputations restored. However, the government stopped short of apologizing to the victims, instead either acknowledging the atrocities and the sufferings of the victims or forcing certain political leaders to assume responsibility. Compared to many postconflict cases, in which current state leaders, professional groups, or various state institutions often choose to offer victims explicit apologies, recognitions, or acknowledgments for the past injustices committed by their predecessors,⁶² the CCP's practice represents an implicit admission of state responsibility for past injustices.

Aiming to alleviate the financial hardships caused by the violence, the *shanhou* program was developed to respond to such financial losses and damages, including social assistance, monetary payments, job assignments, and restitution in kind. This new program was novel compared to traditional *shanhou* measures in its provision of monetary subsidies, although it did not amount to actual compensation and was largely constrained by state finances. Along with persistently stressing the rehabilitation of victims, the government attempted to transform the dispensation of financial assistance into an opportunity to compel the families of victims to stop pursuing measures to redress the violence and move on.

In the short term, along with other measures, rehabilitation and the new *shanhou* program played major roles in fulfilling the party's objectives of maintaining social stability and promoting reconciliation. In the long run, however, particularly in terms of the memory of the violence, these processes remained insufficient for those who had experienced the violence. The long shadow cast by the killings lasts until today and has a continuing impact on perceptions of the legacy of the Mao era.

⁶² Julie Fette, "Apologizing for Vichy in Contemporary France," in Manfred Berg and Bernd Schaeffer, eds., *Historical Justice in International Perspective: How Societies Are Trying to Right the Wrongs of the Past* (Washington, DC: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 138.