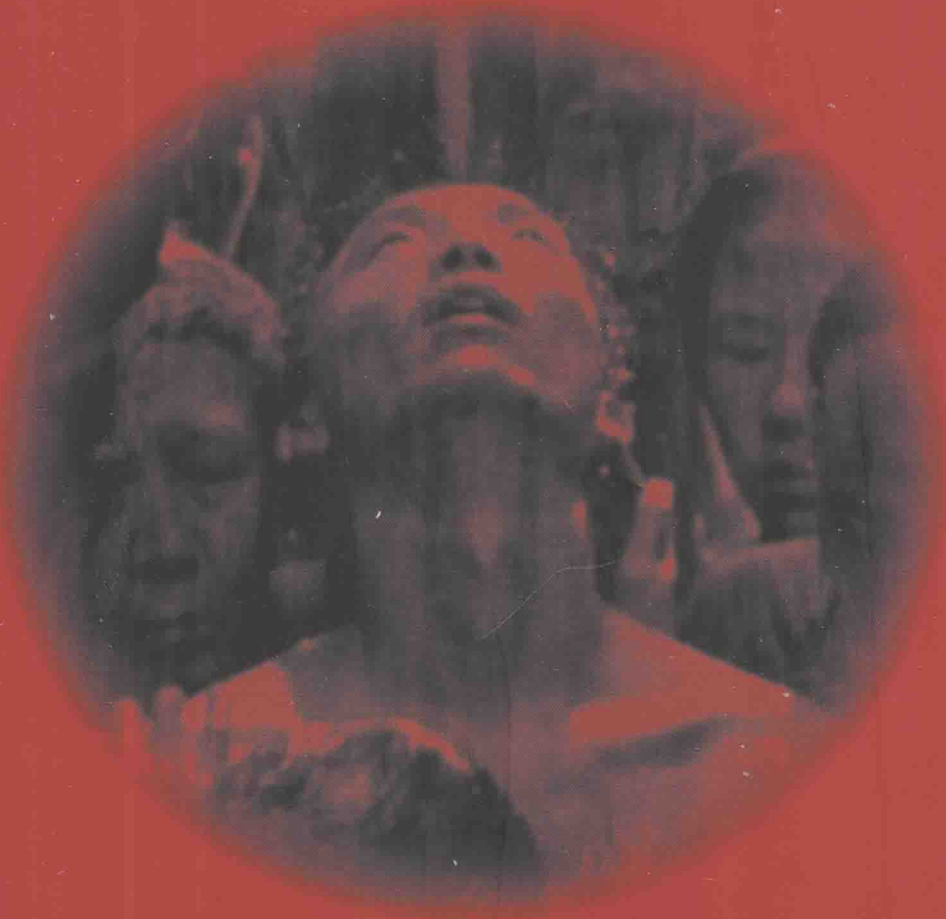
A History of Pain



TRAUMA IN MODERN CHINESE LITERATURE AND FILM

Michael Berry

A History of Pain

Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film

Michael Berry

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Twentieth-century China represents a time and a place marred by the unrelenting vicissitudes of history and the repeated trauma of violence. Struggling to redefine its position in the world after the harrowing Opium Wars of the mid-nineteenth century and a devastating defeat at the hands of Japan during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95, China entered the twentieth century only to face the collapse of its last dynastic empire in 1911. Since then, from May Fourth's violent negation of the past (1919) to the War of Resistance against Japan (1937–45), from the Civil War (1945–49) to the "great leap" into mass famine (1958–60), and from the engineered violence of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) to the televised bloodbath of Tiananmen (1989), modern China's trajectory has been one of discontinuity, displacement, social unrest, and historical trauma. Heated international disputes and armed conflicts with Japan, the United States, the USSR, and Vietnam have been interspersed with abundant examples of China's own indigenous appetite for class struggle, political movements, and violence. Looking back on China's first modern century, one cannot help but be struck by the level and consistency of brutality, especially those examples of self-inflicted barbarism. Pain has become such a crucial component of our understanding of modern China that Lu Xun's 魯迅 1918 cannibalistic vision now seems just as much a prophecy for the future as it is a commentary on tradition.

In recent years, an increasingly large body of academic monographs has focused on moments of violence in twentieth-century China. Through renewed

examinations of the Rape of Nanjing (Chang 1997; Yamamoto 2000; Yoshida 2006) and the February 28th Incident (Lai, Myers, and Wei 1991; Phillips 2003) and the proliferation of works centering on the Cultural Revolution and June Fourth, these and other events of historical violence have become important components of our understanding of modern China. Gradually, historians, military historians, and social scientists are making an effort to reconstruct lost moments of atrocity, filling in blind spots from which the facts have been suppressed, watered down, or simply erased from official histories, popular memory, and the collective unconscious. Critical appraisals of how these moments of violence and atrocity have been configured in the context of literature, film, and popular culture have been slower to appear. It was not until the early 2000s—as this study was being undertaken—that a series of monographs exploring the ways trauma and violence have been represented in twentieth-century Chinese cultural texts began to open up a series of new critical frameworks for exploring what David Der-wei Wang has characterized as "the monster that is history."

Wang (2004) and such critics as Yomi Braester (2003), Ban Wang (2004), and Xiaobin Yang (2002) have established historical trauma and the manifold responses to that trauma as a central theme in modern Chinese literary and cultural studies. Their works have begun to trace the lineage of imagining violence in modern China and flesh out the means by which writers and filmmakers have confronted the pain of a past seemingly beyond the boundaries of representation. This book continues that investigation. What sets this study apart is its focus on a series of specific historical loci that collectively constitute a temporal, spatial, and fictional mapping of how some of the most traumatic instances of historical atrocity have been imagined in modern China. This project begins with a set of concrete historical events and then, moving toward the present, examines how those historical crises have been continually renewed and re-created *not* in history, but through the lens of literature, film, and popular culture.

This study surveys how historical violence and atrocity have been presented, re-presented, and projected in contemporary Chinese cultural texts and explores what these representations tell us about history, memory, and the shifting status of national identity. What do these cultural portrayals of mass violence contribute to our understanding of ideas of modernity and the nation? How does mass population movement, which is so often intertwined with violence, affect the way we remember, reconfigure, and represent atrocity? What is the relationship between historical atrocity on a national scale and the pain experienced by the individual victims? What is the effectiveness of film and literature as historical testimony? And how do these media allow us to approach the phantom that is "history" in ways that traditional historical scholarship cannot?

This book arises from the premise that fiction, film, and other popular media play an important and fundamental role in shaping popular conceptions and imaginations of history and, in this case, historical atrocity. Inspired by pain and suffering and built out of ruins and ashes, artistic representations of atrocity collectively write their own story, from which arises a new form of "historical" narrative. It is a narrative that comes alive and articulates human experience in ways that traditional historiography is incapable of speaking. It is a history that is constructed, but, then again, the discipline we call "history" is also continually being constructed and deconstructed. The purpose of this study is not to call into question traditional historiography or historical scholarship, which plays an invaluable role in our understanding of the past, but rather to offer that there are also other ways to approach history and resurrect the past.

Just as a new political laxness provided historians at home and abroad with an opportunity to reassess China's violent past, the final decades of the twentieth century saw the opening of a new cultural space for Chinese writers, poets, filmmakers, and artists to probe previously taboo moments in their nation's history. As products of popular culture, many of the texts analyzed here prefigured, echoed, or subverted social, political, and cultural trends, ultimately having a widespread influence often overlooked by historians. In the contemporary world, it is fiction and, to an ever-increasing degree, television, film, and new forms of digital media that reach the largest audience and play a profound role in shaping the public imagination and (mis)conceptions of history—arguably more than any official political propaganda or traditional historical study.

This critical survey of textual and visual portrayals of violence and atrocity in modern China focuses on five specific historical moments. Spanning more than six decades, these primary events are, in chronological order: 1) the Musha Incident (1930); 2) the Rape of Nanjing (1937–38); 3) the February 28th Incident (1947); 4) the Cultural Revolution (1966–76); and 5) the Tiananmen Square Incident (1989). In addition, there is a final, sixth section on the Handover of Hong Kong (1997). Together, these six instances do not—and are not intended to—constitute a comprehensive history of violence in modern China; instead, they subjectively map several important events, each of which played a key role in shaping history and national consciousness through unspeakable violence. The choice to include and exclude particular historical events is also based, to a large degree, upon the existence and availability of textual and visual resources. There is, unfortunately, no shortage of catastrophic incidents in modern China, and this study could easily have expanded to include other examples, such as the aforementioned Boxer Rebellion, the Antirightist Campaign, or the Great Leap Forward. However, each of the six specified incidents is unique in its far-reaching impact, ways it has captured the imagination of different Chinese

artists spanning several generations and altered conceptions of the Chinese nation. There are also various interconnections—including direct historical connections, uncanny cyclical patterns, and allegorical restagings—that further informed the choice of events. Over time and through the process of repeated representation, all of the incidents considered have, on one level, been transformed into cultural symbols, national myths, and historical legends, their meaning and symbolic power often far surpassing their actual place in history.[1] The majority of the texts are culled from a large body of contemporary fiction (novels, novellas, and short stories) and feature-length films and, although most were published between the 1980s and the present, several earlier texts date back as far as the 1930s. Periodically, the study also considers work drawn from a wide array of other media, including poetry, art, popular music, diaries, memoirs, television miniseries, and documentary films. The grouping and juxtaposition of eclectic texts for each chapter is justified by their common focus on a single historical moment. While each respective medium or genre, like the specific historical circumstances against which it was created, may stand as unique, all are united in that, as examples of popular culture, they play a fundamental role in transforming popular conceptions of the historical incident depicted.

Part I highlights three separate historical events that took place during the first half of the twentieth century and unfolded under the shadow of the Sino-Japanese colonial relationship. In colonial Taiwan of the 1930s, the Musha Incident seems to embody the typical anticolonial struggle, displaying both the violent insurgency of the colonized and the brutal suppression by the colonizer. The crackdown on the Musha Incident also served as a precursor to the more widespread violence the Japanese imperial machine would propagate as they advanced their war to bring about a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, in which the Rape of Nanjing became but one example of the immense human toll exacted. The February 28th Incident of 1947 can, on the one hand, be seen as an act of postcolonial violence erupting in the immediate political vacuum left by Japan's surrender. On the other hand, for those Taiwanese who view the Nationalist regime that arrived in 1945 as another imperialist power, the incident becomes yet another form of "colonial" violence. Whether 2/28 is considered an "internal" conflict or the violent remnants—or extension—of Taiwan's colonial past, this key moment on the eve of the Great Divide of 1949 certainly signals a transition to a breed of indigenous, or Chinese-on-Chinese, violence that would largely dominate China during the second half of the twentieth century.

1. For instance, the Nanjing Massacre stands not only for the horrific events of the winter of 1937–38 in Nanjing, but, over time, has also come to stand for all of Japanese aggression in China—and even East Asia—during the war.

Part II shifts from incidents of historical trauma carried out under the flag of imperialist domination or haunted by the specters of a colonial past to self-inflicted trauma, wherein state violence is displayed inwardly in a effort to "discipline and punish" the subjects of a new Chinese nation. The Cultural Revolution is a key example of this new form of historical trauma. Heeding Mao's call to "continue the revolution," countless youths rebelled against their own history, culture, and society only to find themselves the new subjects of state punishment as they were sent to China's frontier land, in which Yunnan was but one destination. In 1989 a popular movement that seemed to carry distant echoes of the Cultural Revolution–era mass rallies reconvened in Tiananmen Square; again, the result was a brutal crackdown during which cries for reform were smothered under the sound of rifle fire, the weight of tanks, and the power of a political iron fist. From the Cultural Revolution to Tiananmen Square, the dark side of modern Chinese history manifested itself in Hong Kong through a culture of fear that weighed heavily as the colony approached its 1997 reunion with mainland China.

The shift from traumatic narratives centered around the shadow of colonialism to those focusing on "indigenous violence" also corresponds to a fundamental change in the way the Chinese state has been imagined and framed. While many of the texts examined in part I take colonial violence as a means for creating, articulating, or strengthening new conceptions of the Chinese nation, with part II comes a new thrust to "unimagine" or escape from the nation, which has now been transformed into a historical monster. During the first half of the twentieth century, as threats of colonialism, imperialist aggression, warlordism, civil war, and natural disasters plagued China, many of the narratives focusing on historical trauma highlighted the drive to create and cement a new modern conception of the "Chinese nation." Throughout the textual journey in part I, this "obsession with China" can be palpably felt, especially in cases such as the Musha Incident, where a conflict between indigenous Taiwanese and Japanese is appropriated as a model of Chinese nationalism and the anti-Japanese spirit. The title of part I, "Centripetal Trauma," borrows the scientific term "centripetal force," which refers to a force traveling from the outside to the center, as a metaphor for the series of traumatic events examined. For although their origins lie on the outside, they often inspire a renewed examination or articulation of the Chinese nation. But what happens after a new Chinese state is established? And how is national discourse reframed or reconsidered when the next atrocities are designed by this new nation? In the wake of the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s own tumultuous "history of pain," the driving force behind cultural representations of trauma shifts from the national imagination to a new "transnational" imagination: when the nation has failed, the only remaining alternative

is a new global vision. Hence, in part II the term "centrifugal trauma" is used to describe a radical shift in the creation of traumatic narratives, which are introduced from within, generated in the center, and projected outward into a new series of global dreams . . . and, sometimes, nightmares.

In part I, with the exception of a few key texts created relatively close to the actual event, most of the texts examined appeared years, often decades, after the event they attempt to revisit. The phenomenon of the belated response, which I argue is in the Chinese context often just as much a symptom of political suppression as of psychological suppression, seems to have undergone a transformation in the final decades of the twentieth century. The floodgates of traumatic purging and representation of the Cultural Revolution broke open in 1977 with the advent of a new form of "scar literature" a mere two years after the end of the movement; in the new media era of cable television, the Tiananmen Square Incident of 1989 inspired an array of cultural responses (almost exclusively from exiles and overseas Chinese communities) that was even more immediate; and by Hong Kong's return in 1997, the representation began to predate the event, or in this case, nonevent. The increased proximity between event and representation since the 1980s has coincided with a mushrooming of belated representations of a wide array of other historical traumas, from the Opium Wars to the Boxer Rebellion and from the Musha Incident to the Rape of Nanjing. This represents a fundamental shift in the ways traumatic experiences are culturally processed and represented in the contemporary age, an era when it seems the array of popular forms (cartoons, fiction, film, television drama, documentary, etc.) reinterpreting and representing historical atrocities has proliferated and been disseminated in ever greater volume, thanks to mechanical and digital reproduction.

In his influential essay, "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin described "centripetal" and "centrifugal" as key forces in the formation of what he termed "heteroglossia," the variety of complex conditions that influence the creation of meaning in language. For Bakhtin, every "concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The process of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity" (Bakhtin 272).

> The cultural world, Bakhtin argued, consists of both "centripetal" (or "official") and "centrifugal" (or "unofficial") forces. The former seek to impose order on an essentially heterogeneous and messy world; the latter either

> purposefully or *for no particular reason* continually disrupt that order. We stress "for no particular reason" because it is quite common among Bakhtin's admirers, especially Marxists, to misinterpret centrifugal forces as a unified opposition. Bakhtin's point, however, is that although forces of organized opposition sometimes *do* coalesce, centrifugal forces are generally speaking messy and disorganized. (Morson and Emerson 30)

Here, however, "centripetal" and "centrifugal" are not utilized in a linguistic sense, but applied in a wider context to narratives of trauma and historical violence. The centripetal force of trauma begins on the outside and converges in the center, resulting in new "official" or "national" discourses, whereas the centrifugal force originates from this new "national center" and extends outward, unleashing a multitude of destabilizing "unofficial" narratives—a true heteroglossia—that stretch, challenge, and destroy national boundaries. The latter force is akin to what Homi Bhabha (1990) has described as "dissemiNation," a process through which "Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disturb those ideological maneuvers through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (300).

While the structure of this study suggests a fundamental shift from "centripetal trauma" to "centrifugal trauma," the interlacing of these forces reveals a relationship much more complex than a crude binary. As Bakhtin has pointed out, centripetal and centrifugal forces exist as an interdependent *yin-yang*, each enmeshed within and simultaneously affecting the other. Thus, while the history of representation charted in these pages reveals macro shifts in discourse, the complexity of these forces can also be seen in various historical and narrative countercurrents in several of the texts selected—for example, in the ways the peripheral "savage land" of the Musha Incident not only inspired new discourses of nationalism but also "decentered" the nation (Japan, China, Taiwan). The 1997 Handover of Hong Kong, while appearing to be a example of Homi Bhabha's "dissemiNation"—as evidenced by the rise of dissident voices in and the massive wave of immigration out of Hong Kong—also had a profound effect on the mainland, so much so that many have argued in its aftermath that Hong Kong actually had a bigger impact on Beijing, rather than the other way around.

Although the events examined in part I took place between 1930 and 1947, the majority of the cultural representations considered are contemporaneous with texts considered in part II, which covers the period 1968 to 1997. What is fascinating is that although most of the works included in each section date from the 1980s to the 2000s, there remains a fairly clear demarcation: the

preponderance of texts from part I have an implicit national agenda (in the case of the Musha Incident and 2/28, these are often articulated in the context of pro-Taiwan independence efforts), while the examples in part II, the trauma does not seem to lead to a reimagination of the nation as much as to a symbolic negation of national boundaries. What might at first appear to be a fixed evolution from historical trauma framed by nationalism to historical trauma representing the failure of the nation is, upon closer scrutiny, revealed as a complex series of patterns of historical appropriation.

Literary History and Historical Fictions

This project begins with a short overview of how strategies for representing violence have transformed over time. The prelude serves as an overture to the chapters that follow by offering readings of a trio of texts from three distinct historical eras, exploring the interconnections between the sites of history and fiction, representation and witnessing, violence and pain. The works explored are Wu Jianren's 吳趼人 *A History of Pain* (*Tongshi* 痛史), a late imperial narrative on dynastic collapse; Lu Xun's "Preface to *A Call to Arms*" ("Nahan zixu" 吶喊自序), a complex and moving essay that recalls the author's life-changing decision to abandon medicine for literature; and Chen Chieh-jen's 陳界仁 installation re-creation of one of China's most brutal tortures in *Lingchi: Echoes of a Historical Photograph* (*Lingchi kao* 凌遲考). The chapter heading is inspired by the title of Wu Jianren's novel but also represents a "history of pain" in the way it traces the transformation and evolution of violence as it has been imagined from traditional literary discourses (*A History of Pain*) and early modernity ("Preface to *A Call to Arms*") to the postmodern era (*Lingchi*). From this exercise in violence abstracted, I move on to tackle a series of specific historical incidents, each indelibly carved into the minds of countless people by way of their barbarism and brutality.

Beginning this exploration of violence in twentieth-century China with the Musha Incident will surely incite questions and, perhaps, even objections due to the very nature of the event. The Musha Incident played out in 1930 (a Second Musha Incident occurred in 1931) as a conflict between the Atayal aboriginal group in Musha, a mountainous region in central Taiwan, and the Japanese—none of the chief players was Han Chinese. Moreover, the place of the incident was not the heartland of China, but Taiwan—an island territory with a long tradition of foreign colonization, which has made it a contested site in terms of both Chinese and Taiwanese national rhetoric and agendas. The inclusion of Musha 1930 as a key entry point into China's modern lineage of violence is in-

tended to further complicate the already complex relationship between Chinese and Taiwanese literary and historical narratives by highlighting the role of aboriginal peoples from Taiwan and their Japanese colonizers. Melissa J. Brown (2004) has used the case of Taiwan to argue that identity is foremost a construct based on social experience over ancestry or cultural ideas, and the discussion of Musha further illustrates the ways ethnic identity and historical memory have been rewritten to serve transforming political agendas. The inclusion of the Musha Incident in a series of what otherwise would be considered exclusively "Chinese" episodes of mass violence is intended *not* to provide any concrete answer to these debates, but to point to the complex set of historical and national forces that go into shaping identity and framing "national" trauma. This opening chapter is intended to not only pose an interesting counterpoint to the other chapters but also prod readers to rethink questions such as: Who is the true keeper of historical memory? At what point can the atrocity experienced by another person become one's own? And how has this brutal moment in colonial history been transformed into a national trauma? Although neither the perpetrators nor the victims of the 1930 Musha Incident fall into categories traditionally considered ethnic "Chinese," literary and visual narratives of the event have been predominantly Chinese.[2] This study is about not just Chinese atrocities but Chinese *narratives* of atrocity, and the Musha Incident provides a fascinating example of how Chinese writers, artists, and filmmakers have appropriated this brutal and disturbing massacre and reintroduced it into a variety of popular narratives.

The Rape of Nanjing was arguably one of the most brutal incidents in modern military history. The massacre was, however, just one page in a long, bloody tale of destruction, ruin, and ashes for the ancient capital. Chapter 2 examines the Nanjing Massacre, a brutal six-week killing spree whose precarious place in history has continued to stain Sino-Japanese relations all the way up to the present. Since 1987, the fiftieth anniversary of the massacre, there have also been several feature-length motion pictures set during the Rape of Nanjing. Three cinematic visions of the atrocity produced between 1987 and 1995 are the focus of a discussion on the different strategies through which national trauma is re-created in the context of pop culture. Turning then to literature, I offer an extended analysis of Ah Long's 阿壠 1939 book of reportage, *Nanjing*, the first Chinese literary work to confront the 1937 massacre, alongside a literary overview that discusses the fifty-year silence on the event and its sudden re-emergence in historiography and cultural discourse in the 1980s. Analyzed are "official"

2. There have also been several Japanese-language stories and novels that have portrayed the Musha Incident.

party-line works by such writers as Zhou Erfu 周而復 and Xu Zhigeng 徐志耕, as well as more daring approaches by contemporary writers like Ye Zhaoyan 葉兆言, whose unconventional novel *Nanjing 1937: A Love Story* (*Yijiusanqinian de aiqing* 一九三七年的愛情) places the massacre in a context never before attempted. Finally, I address the mass relocation of the Nationalist infrastructure to Chongqing on the eve of the massacre—a migration that would be paralleled by Chiang Kai-shek's 蔣介石 politically motivated migration from Chongqing to Taiwan a decade later, and a move that would result in one of the most violent insurrections in the island's history.

A confrontation between a group of government inspectors and a middle-aged Taiwanese cigarette vendor on the evening of February 27, 1947 triggered a series of violent protests that erupted throughout Taiwan. Although repressed for the next four decades by the Nationalist Party, the February 28th Incident remained an unhealed wound for Taiwan throughout its postwar period. The focus of chapter 3 is a series of literary and cinematic texts based on, set against, and dedicated to the February 28th Incident. Since the lifting of martial law in 1987, this formerly taboo subject has become the basis for a proliferation of fiction, documentaries, historical monographs, oral histories, artwork, and monuments. Through close readings and comparative studies of several key literary and visual texts, I probe the different ways the incident has been depicted and reimagined over the course of several decades. From works published in 1947 by Bo Zi 伯子 and Lü Heruo 呂赫若 to contemporary works by writers such as Yang Zhao 楊照 and Wu He 舞鶴, I juxtapose fictional works against cinematic interpretations of the incident by Taiwanese film directors such as Hou Hsiao-hsien 侯孝賢 and Lin Cheng-sheng 林正盛. Hou's 1989 masterpiece, *City of Sadness* (*Beiqing chengshi* 悲情城市), not only confronted the complexly tortured historical memory of the event but also (re)created it in the visual memories of Taiwan and the world.

In chapter 4 I turn my attention to the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), a decade-long political movement that marked the invention of a new form of engineered Orwellian violence in modern Chinese history. No longer is violence dictated by dichotomies of China vs. Japan or mainland Chinese vs. Taiwanese; instead, an indigenous atrocity emerges, one that claimed more lives than both the Rape of Nanjing and the February 28th Incident combined. From "scar literature" (*shanghen wenxue* 傷痕文學) and "search-for-roots literature" (*xungen wenxue* 尋根文學) to the avant-garde, the Cultural Revolution has been a major source of creative inspiration for many contemporary Chinese writers. As comprehensive coverage of the literature of this period would be far beyond the scope of this study, I focus on Yunnan circa 1968 and examine the phenomenon of "educated youths" (*zhiqing* 知青) sent down to