Historical Writing and Historical Memory:

Narrative and Memory Turns in Chinese and American

Oral Historiography

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Abstract

This thesis explores the changing role of oral history in writing history in China and the United States and its impact on historical memory. It mainly focuses on its use in the recording and producing of the collective memory of the September 11 attacks in the United States, of the Chinese Zhiqing group (educated youth sent to work in farms during the cultural revolution), and of traumatic memories more generally. The classic works of Herodotus and Sima Qian show that oral history has carried multiple perspectives since ancient times, transcending class and contributing to the enrichment and development of human knowledge. However, oral history was considered unreliable during the scientific phase of modern historiography. However, the social transformation of the 20th century prompted scholars to rediscover this oral tradition, especially in the United States after World War II. At that time, Allan Nevins promoted the creation of the modern discipline of oral history, which gradually became systematic and academicized by preserving personal memories and emotions through recordings.

Meanwhile, the development of oral history in China also demonstrated a unique understanding of memory, especially regarding recent events, providing life details and emotional expressions challenging to capture in written materials. Overall, the theoretical shift in oral history in China and the United States reflects an interest in the diversity of memory and the complexity of human experience, revealing that history is a record of events and a dynamic continuation of collective memory. The shift I study provides a critical perspective on how contemporary society uses oral history to achieve memory extension and bridge historical gaps in the non-oral archive.

Chapter 1 The Narrative Turns

The word "history" comes from the ancient Greek word "ἱστορία" (historia), which initially meant "investigation, inquiry, knowledge." The early meaning of the word reflects the ancient Greeks' curiosity and spirit of exploration about the world. As an inquiry into humanity's past, history focuses on the occurrence of specific events and the understanding and interpretation of these events. In the course of development, the meaning of history has gradually become richer, forming the dual meaning we understand today: on the one hand, it refers to the past experienced by mankind, including major social, political, economic, and cultural events and activities; on the other hand, it refers to the systematic recording, expression, and study of these events and activities.

From this perspective, history is a mechanical record of facts and a profound reflection on human activity. As the historian Carl Becker said, history is "the artificial extension of social memory,[1]" a series of events in human life presented by historians using literary and artistic methods, including narration, description, and comparison, and given a satisfactory meaning.[2]" Historians reveal a series of events in human life and imbue them with a satisfactory meaning by selecting and interpreting historical events. This process of assigning meaning is at the heart of historical research. By narrating and interpreting the meaning assigned, history becomes not just a record of the past but also a guide for the present and the future and a way for human beings to understand themselves and the world.

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[1] Becker, Carl L. "What are historical facts?." *Western Political Quarterly* 8.3 (1955): 327-340.
[2] Becker, Carl. "Everyman his own historian." *The American Historical Review* 37.2 (1932): 221-236.

Echoing Becker's views, German philosopher Immanuel Kant offered a more philosophical interpretation of history from a rational perspective. He believed that "history is the stage in which human reason develops its potential naturally.[3]" History is not a series of random events but a logical process that manifests human reason's continuous development and improvement. Studying history shows how human society has continuously changed its way of life, moral standards, and political systems through reason. In his view, each historical stage carries the potential for the display and development of human reason. History reflects how human beings have overcome the limitations of social injustice through the power of reason, gradually establishing a more accessible, just, and civilized society.

"Oral history is as old as history itself and is the first form of history.[4]" Long before humans mastered the written word, oral history recorded social knowledge and passed on cultural traditions and collective memories. Through word of mouth, stories, legends, beliefs, laws, and moral codes in early societies were passed down from generation to generation, providing the group with a shared sense of history and identity. Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian whom Cicero hailed as the "Father of History," recorded many battles and mythological stories orally — "partly based on what I saw myself, and partly on what others saw for me[5]" — and eventually created his masterpiece, *"Histories." "Histories"* begins Western historiography and a massive narrative spanning multiple peoples and regions. Herodotus traveled to different city-states and countries, recording as much as he could from the accounts and stories of others. His work includes an account of the Greco-Persian Wars and covers the customs and legends of different cultures, such as Persia and Egypt. This pioneering work broke free from the

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[3] Collingwood, Robin George. *The idea of history.* Oxford University Press, 1993
[4] Thompson, Paul. "The voice of the past: Oral history." *The oral history reader.* Routledge, 2002. 35-42.
[5] Ritchie, Donald A. "Introduction: the evolution of oral history." (2010).

limitations of a single perspective, and his historical narrative is full of rich details and diverse voices. The *"Histories"* is a record of war and politics and a panoramic worldview, as Herodotus sees.

On the other side of the world, "the Zhou dynasty (1122-256 BC) emperor sent officials to the people to record their words, so that the court historians could have a reference.[6]" The Chinese historian Sima Qian in the Western Han Dynasty also used a similar oral method to collect a large amount of data to write the Records of the Grand Historian. Sima Qian consulted written documents and visited scholars and ordinary people through the tradition of "collecting folk songs," collecting real stories, folk legends, and various oral materials. This method enabled him to record the details of life from different classes and construct a "human encyclopedia" that spanned hundreds of years and encompassed all classes. "This tradition is both academic and literary, but it also has political overtones, and at one point, it was even set up as a political system in response to a pragmatic need.[7]" In the *Records of the Grand Historian*, he recorded in detail the historical activities of people from emperors to ordinary people in the formats of "biographies of emperors," "family trees," and "biographies." He described in depth their thoughts, emotions, personalities, and destinies.

Herodotus and Sima Qian brought oral tradition to the heart of historiography in different cultural contexts. They recorded history with a spirit of inquiry, paying attention to every voice and every story to achieve a multi-layered history presentation. Oral historical materials became the flesh and blood of history in their writings, giving the historical narrative structure

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[6] Charlton, Thomas Lee, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless, eds. *Thinking about oral history: Theories and applications.* Rowman Altamira, 2008.
[7] Qu Yanbin. A Brief Discussion on the Connection between Oral Historiography and Folklore Methodology--Oral Historiography from the Perspective of Folklore[J]. Social Science Front, 2003, (04): 126-132.

and warmth. Their way of collecting historical materials also set a tradition of focusing on first-hand accounts and the voices of ordinary people, bringing a realistic picture of life into historical narratives. This tradition influenced the development of historiography in later generations. It set an example for future historians: to explore and write about the collective memory of humanity from a broader perspective, transcending class and geography. "Until the late 19th century, referring to oral and documentary sources still seemed reasonable.[8]"

However, with the advent of printing, the historical tradition of collecting oral historical materials underwent profound changes. The popularization of printing technology enabled information to be disseminated more efficiently, and human culture gradually "shifted from an oral form to a visually structured written culture.[9]" Knowledge and stories previously relying on word of mouth were gradually replaced by neatly arranged and systematically recorded texts. History was no longer limited to individual memory or oral transmission; it began to be widely disseminated in the form of books and entered the vision of more people. This transformation changed how history was recorded and shaped new ways humans acquire knowledge and exchange ideas, making written text the primary medium of recording and dissemination. Under the influence of positivism in later years, "history became a professional activity centered on outstanding figures, guided by the political life of the country, and dominated by the methods of criticism and textual research of written historical materials.[10]"

1. The Evolution of American Historical Narratives: from the pursuit of Scientific Accuracy to

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[8] Ritchie, Donald A. *Doing oral history.* Oxford University Press, 2014.
[9] Heesen, Anke te. "Spoken words, written memories: early oral history and elite interviews." *History of Humanities* 6.1 (2021): 163-178.
[10] Shen Guchao. "Writing history with the people - the development characteristics of Western oral history and its inspiration for us." Historical Theory Research 02 (1995): 98-107.

the Reconstruction of memory and Identity

American historiography has undergone a profound transformation from the scientificized historical narratives of the late nineteenth century to the postmodern turn of the late twentieth century. This transformation reflects changes in the discipline's methodology and reveals changes in social and cultural perceptions. From a scientific historiography that pursues the universal laws of history to a pluralistic perspective that focuses on memory, identity, and culture, historiography gradually realizes that history is a collection of objective facts and a product of social and cultural construction. By focusing on reconstructing individual memories and collective identities, historiography is transforming into a more pluralistic and inclusive discipline, which not only recounts past events but also cares about how different social groups construct their identities, identities, and social roles through historical narratives.

1.1 From classical historiography to modern historiography: the scientific accuracy and universalism of historical narratives

Throughout its long development, historiography has formed a profound academic tradition. Since ancient Greece and up to the Middle Ages, it has developed and accumulated a set of methods for collecting, verifying, and arranging historical materials and established the academic purpose of reconstructing historical truth. In the later period of ancient Rome, Christian theology tried to grasp the overall process of human history based on the manifestation of God's will. On the other hand, the philosopher Descartes rejected history as a reliable category of knowledge and believed it was chaotic, without any rules or authenticity. However, since the Enlightenment, people have gradually moved towards "freedom,"

liberation," and "reason" and have begun to view human history as a meaningful, goal-oriented, and unified whole. In the process of the gradual professionalization of history in the 19th century, various "grand narratives"[11] (a term coined by French postmodernist theorist Jean-François Lyotard, also known as "meta-narratives" or "big stories") became one of the history backgrounds to establish disciplinary norms. Ranke (a pioneer of empirical history), one of the founders of modern history, believed that "only in the archives can one write the correct history." He emphasized that "history must be told 'as it happened',[12]" that is, "our task is not to judge the false but to tell the truth as it happened.[13]" Behind his claim to "write it down as it is," there is his religious tendency towards "theism"[14] (that is, historical achievements are the result of the joint efforts of humanity, behind which is a kind of providence that forms the background of history and illuminates human endeavor), and his deep conviction that history as a whole has meaning.

From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, historians influenced by positivism maintained similar beliefs while rejecting various speculative historical philosophies. They "abandoned 'interpretation' and turned history into a science, rigorously examining the facts to establish a completely objective historical narrative.[15]" Positivists generally believed that by systematically combing through materials and rigorously examining them, they could constantly identify new facts and thus reproduce the whole truth of history. The professionalization of history has accelerated this process. Historians are committed to piecing together seemingly fragmented and separate historical fragments to create a complete historical

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[11] Lyotard, Jean-François. "The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge." *U of Minnesota P* (1984).
[12] von Ranke, Leopold. "Leopold von Ranke."
[13] Krieger, Leonard. "Elements of early historicism: Experience, theory, and history in Ranke." *History and Theory* 14.4 (1975): 1-14.
[14] Liebel-Weckowicz, Helen. "Ranke's theory of history and the German modernist school." *Canadian Journal of History* 23.1 (1988): 73-93.
[15] Becker, Carl. "Everyman his own historian." *The American Historical Review* 37.2 (1932): 221-236.

narrative and comprehensive picture of human history. More than a century ago, Lord Acton, who pioneered the Cambridge Modern History, looked forward hopefully to the day when humanity would have "the ultimate history"[16]: "Their stories are not told for their own sake, but are subordinate to a higher series—the common efforts and central actions of mankind, to which they contribute according to the time and extent of their contribution—and from which the milestones of civilization are thus extended and the forces for progress renewed.[17]" Schlozer, who declared that "the history of mankind is the' property of historians," believed that "only universality can give history scientific legitimacy: individual facts or events in the science of history are like the colored pebbles in a mosaic. The critic unearths these facts from the annals and monuments. The composition is the work of the historian. When uniformity dominates the composition, world history gains a scientific reputation.[18]" In Schlözer's view, this unity is a crucial 'universality' that gives history a holistic nature. It goes beyond a record of scattered events and becomes a "science" that can explain the collective human experience.

However, during this period, the tradition of Herodotus, which involved extensively collecting oral historical materials and using them in historical writing, was gradually abandoned. Empiricist historians tended to rely on written materials and verifiable facts rather than oral transmission. This trend reflected the academic pursuit of objectivity and accuracy emphasized by positivism because oral historical materials are often subjective and uncertain and cannot be tested as rigorously as written materials. Even so, the tradition of oral history did not wholly disappear. As historical research later diversified, oral history regained its importance in some

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[16] Timmins, Adam. "Towards an evolutionary epistemology of history." *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 10.1 (2016): 98-115.

[17] Altholz, Josef L. "Lord Acton and the plan of the Cambridge Modern History." *The Historical Journal* 39.3 (1996): 723-736.

[18] von Schlözer, August Ludwig. *Vorstellung seiner Universal-Historie...* Vol. 1. JC Dieterich, 1772.

historical fields, especially in the study of minority groups and neglected histories, where it plays an indispensable role.

1.2 From written records to sound preservation: the uniqueness and academic nature of modern oral history

Lyman Draper, the "father of oral history in the United States," conducted the first oral history project in the United States. In the 1860s, he conducted "acute interviews with pioneers, Indian fighters, and their descendants in Wisconsin.[19]" He chose three methods: "interacting with individuals of historical significance and other historians; collecting oral histories; and finding and collecting cooperative documentary evidence.[20]" The famous American historian and book collector Bancroft interviewed early pioneers in the American West in the 1860s and 1870s,[21]" "obtained a wealth of manuscript and printed sources,[22]" and created their biographies, which were then compiled into memoirs through oral history. On May 6, 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order establishing the Public Works Administration. This was part of Roosevelt's New Deal plan to help the United States emerge from the Great Depression by reforming the financial system and restoring the economy to the level it was at before the Great Depression, to help the United States emerge from the Great Depression. He promised to implement the "New Deal" for everyone. This included women, African Americans, and other groups. The Public Works Agency, through the Federal Writers'

[19] Hesseltine, William B. "lyman Draper and the South." *The Journal of Southern History* (1953): 20-31.
[20] Conaway, Charles William. "Lyman Copeland Draper," Father of American Oral History"." *The Journal of Library History (1966-1972)* 1.4 (1966): 234-269.
[21] Charlton, Thomas Lee, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless, eds. *Thinking about oral history: Theories and applications.* Rowman Altamira, 2008.
[22] Wagner, Henry Raup. Bullion to Books: Fifty Years of Business and Pleasure. United States, Zamorano Club, 1942.

Project,[23] conducted interviews on the life histories of Americans and made a significant contribution to the preservation of black culture and history: collecting interviews, articles, and notes on black life in the American South, including oral histories of formerly enslaved people.

In 1948, the famous historian Allan Nevins established the Oral History Research Office at Columbia University, and this move is generally regarded as the beginning of modern oral history. Nevins's initiative opened up new paths for historical research and a new field of study – oral history's systematic and academic development. As early as 1938, Nevins already had the idea of supplementing traditional written records with oral history. He believed that "if we want to write a better and more informed history in the future,[24]" an organization should be created to "systematically collect and record the memories of famous Americans over the past 60 years,[25]" with "the social and political elite as the main focus of questioning"[26] to "supplement existing documentary materials.[27]" At that time, he was deeply concerned about the impact of the rapid technological progress in communications and transportation because these technological developments were rapidly changing the way people communicate and may gradually weaken future generations' direct understanding and perception of social life at that time.

In Nevins's view, traditional forms of written communication, such as letters and written correspondence, were not only a way for individuals to express their thoughts and emotions but

[23] Hirsch, Jerrold. "Before Columbia: The FWP and American Oral History Research." *The Oral History Review* 34.2 (2007): 1-16.

[24] Heesen, Anke te. "Spoken words, written memories: early oral history and elite interviews." *History of Humanities* 6.1 (2021): 163-178.

[25] Nevins, Allan. *The gateway to history*. Routledge, 2018.

[26] Perks, Robert, and Alistair Thomson. *The oral history reader*. Routledge, 2015.

[27] Perks, Robert, and Alistair Thomson. *The oral history reader*. Routledge, 2015.

also valuable materials for recording history. As a private and authentic written record, letters preserved the details of the communication between the writer and the recipient and people's immediate responses to events of the times, emotional experiences, and ideas. This communication gave historians valuable first-hand information, allowing future generations to understand the microcosm of history from these records. However, with the development of technology, the way people communicate is also changing. Face-to-face communication and the rise of telephone communication have gradually made letters lose their dominant position. In particular, with the popularization of telephones and radios, traditional letter communication has been rapidly replaced. This change worried Nevins. Although technology brings convenience, it also makes some precious historical materials gradually disappear. Traditional letters cannot record conversations, daily exchanges, and the genuine emotions of the parties involved, and the immediacy and uniqueness of oral expressions are also challenging to preserve. "Technological change has resulted in major omissions in historical records.[28]" Therefore, future historians may lack authentic, intuitive, and traditional written records and thus cannot fully restore historical life in the past. "Social mobility and the lack of storage space in modern homes mean that many of the survived written records are often lost or damaged before they can be collected and preserved.[29]"

In addition, as a young journalist, he saw how painful it was to read the obituary page of *The New York Times*, "what kind of memories did that person take with them to be completely forgotten?[30]" Therefore, in the face of this trend, historians need a new way to preserve history: to preserve the voices and memories that may be overlooked and forgotten in written records.

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[28] Berger, Meyer. *Meyer Berger's New York.* Fordham Univ Press, 2009.

[29] Boyd, Lois A., and R. Douglas Brackenridge. "Oral History: An Introduction." *Journal of Presbyterian History (1962-1985)* (1978): 3-9.

[30] Hoyle, Norman. "Oral history." (1972).

This motivation drove him to use oral history to compensate for the inadequacy of traditional written records. He envisioned using modern technology such as audio recordings to preserve the narratives of participants and witnesses, "incorporating the experiences and perspectives of a group of people into historical records"[31] — "that is, interviewing members of the social and political elite"[32] — so that historical research would no longer rely solely on written materials, but would reproduce the complexity and diversity of historical events in a new way.

Therefore, Allan Nevins's oral history research is an innovation in keeping historical records and a responsibility and commitment to preserving historical memory. Oral history preserves the primary context of historical events by interviewing the people involved and witnesses and systematically recording their memories and insights. It captures human and social emotions and cultural details. This method allows history to go beyond archives and documents and become closely linked to real people, events, and their emotions. It creates a "living" history that enables future researchers to more truly perceive and understand the past's social conditions, value systems, and cultural context.

In 1948, in the Oral History Research Office founded by Nevins, researchers began to use recording technology to collect and preserve the oral data of historical figures, laying the foundation for the later discipline of oral history. Since then, more scholars have gradually accepted and recognized oral history, becoming an essential branch of historical research, and a systematic method and theoretical system have been developed. Oral history is no longer limited to its essential mission of "preserving the disappearing voice." However, exploring individual memory, group consciousness, and cultural expression has become necessary. By exploring the perspectives of ordinary people, the details of daily life, and the changes in group

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[31] Perks, Robert, and Alistair Thomson. *The oral history reader*. Routledge, 2015.
[32] Sharpless, Rebecca. ",,The History of Oral History"." *W Thinking about Oral History. Theories and Applications, red. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, Rebecca Sharpless* (2008): 7-32.

emotions, oral history has enriched historical research and compensated for the limitations of traditional written records.

Allan Nevins elevated oral history to the level of scientific research by establishing the Oral History Research Office, transforming oral history from an informal individual practice into a rigorous academic research method and promoting the widespread dissemination and application of this discipline. His vision has enabled subsequent historians to understand history more diversely, focusing on recording significant events and the experiences and memories of each individual in the historical flood. This approach to historical records goes beyond simply recording facts, profoundly revealing the interactive relationship between individuals and society and gradually making oral history a bridge connecting the past and the future. Since then, "like it or not, oral history has taken root. It has become a category of its own.[33]"

1.3 From grand narrative to memory turn: the diversification of historiography and reconstruction of identity in the postmodern context

Since the 1970s and 1980s, academia in Europe and the United States has undergone a profound transformation, and history and its theoretical forms have also undergone significant changes. At the theoretical level, the rise of postmodernist thought has brought about a "narrative turn," which means that history is no longer seen as a mere narrative of objective facts but is understood as a subjective and constructive narrative activity. It has created a unique situation: on the one hand, the variety and styles of history are more prosperous and

[33] Dixon, Elizabeth I. "Definitions of oral history." Quoted in Proceedings of the First National Colloquium on Oral History. 1966.

more diverse than ever before, with research topics covering multiple dimensions from gender, race, and class to emotion, body, and material culture; on the other hand, the number of historians and historical works has also reached an unprecedented scale. Against this background, history has become an incredibly inclusive discipline and provides various perspectives and methods for understanding the past.

1.3.1 Multiple narratives and the questioning of authenticity

The writing and understanding of history have begun to pay more attention to narrative forms, discourse construction, and the multiple meanings of texts. This shift has prompted scholars to reflect on the objectivity of historical writing and the unity of historical processes. Historians have constantly expressed their concerns and lamentations about the crisis of historiography and historical consciousness, which has triggered extensive discussions on the relationship between history and memory, history and literature, and history and power. The view that "our generation cannot have the ultimate history, but we can abandon traditional history and show the realm we have reached on the road from one history to another"[34] is facing challenges. As Becker argues, "giving up omniscience and omnipotence and acknowledging each generation is a spiritual relief.[35]" Ankersmit mentioned that "the proliferation of historical documents not only brings us a strong sense of frustration, but this overproduction also has something uncivilized about it.[36]" Johann Gustav Droysen questioned the New Rankean School of Historical Studies, which regarded objectivity as the sole purpose of historical research and

[34] Altholz, Josef L. "Lord Acton and the plan of the Cambridge Modern History." *The Historical Journal* 39.3 (1996): 723-736.

[35] Becker, Carl. "Everyman his own historian." *The American Historical Review* 37.2 (1932): 221-236.

[36] Ankersmit, Frank R. "Historiografia e pós-modernismo." *Topoi (Rio de Janeiro)* 2.2 (2001): 113-136.

believed that "objectivity can be achieved when studying primary historical sources.[37]"

1.3.2 Empowerment of Marginalized Voices

In historiographical practice, the grand narrative has gradually disintegrated, and the research model of historiography is no longer limited to a macro-narrative with a country, nation, or civilization at its core. Instead, there has been a fragmentation of historiography, with more diverse and individualized research perspectives. The previous overall historical narrative that attempted to summarize an entire era or society has gradually broken down, and a detailed study of specific people, events, or regions has replaced it. Different historical research styles and forms have emerged, marking the diversified development of the field of historiography. These emerging historical methods pay more attention to micro-level analysis and emphasize the importance of individual experience, daily life, and historical social and cultural phenomena. Historically, historical narratives, capitalized and singular history often prevailed over pluralistic history, emphasizing the dominance of masculinity, nation, the West, rationality, and objectivity. This historical discourse model suppressed certain groups and factors – such as women, locality, the colonized, irrationality, marginal groups, and subjectivity – to a position of oppression, resulting in the exclusion or marginalization of these voices and perspectives in the mainstream "capital letters history." As a plural, lowercase histories gradually replace the singular capital letters history, the focus of historical research has also begun to shift to the exploration of historical memory. Today, historians and theorists pay more attention to diverse historical memories to complement and enrich traditional

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[37] Eskildsen, Kasper Risbjerg. "Leopold Ranke's archival turn: Location and evidence in modern historiography." *Modern Intellectual History* 5.3 (2008): 425-453.

historical narratives and promote the development of historical pluralism by revealing those voices that have been neglected or suppressed.

As early as the 1920s and 1930s, the early representatives of the *Annales* school, Lucien Febvre, and Marc Bloch, "proposed to expand the scope of historical research in response to the shortcomings of traditional historiography, advocating a comprehensive and holistic approach to the study of history. They focused on lower classes and previously overlooked sources that could provide information for historians.[38]" However, despite this, the subordinate "silent majority" in history – those who could not record their history- remain disadvantaged. In response to this deficiency, as modern historiography developed, the scope of historical materials was expanded, and new research methods began to emphasize attention to previously neglected groups. In the 1960s and 1970s, a new trend in historiography emerged, centered on the "people" and known as "history from below." This trend sought to study ordinary people's experiences, stories, and daily lives and to use archives to construct a "history of the people" different from the previous "capitalized history." The memories of ordinary people have become the most natural form of expression for these "people without history." In this process, the focus of historical research has gradually shifted from the traditional narrative of nation-states to local or regional studies, from macroscopic analysis of public institutions to family life and everyday culture, and from high-level politics to the governance of the state to the subtle exploration of popular culture and daily activities. "History from the bottom up" has gradually evolved into "the history of ordinary people" or "the history of everyday life," which aims to reveal the unique experiences and real lives of the general public and to highlight the role they played and the contributions they made in the development of history. This mode of

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[38] Hunt, Lynn. *The New Cultural History.* University of California Press, *1989.*

historical writing records the unique voices of different social groups in more detail, highlighting the diversity of the grassroots and everyday life and becoming a complement and challenge to the traditional elite narrative. This transformation has made historical memory the object of scholars' research and an important source from which they can obtain historical materials. As the famous British historian Paul Thompson said, "Oral history is history built around the people. It brings history to life and broadens its scope. It believes that heroes can come not only from leading figures but also from many unknown people. The greatest role of oral history is that it allows us to restore history to the history of ordinary people and closely connect history with reality.[39]"

1.3.3 Identity and the construction of social memory

The complexity of identity is closely related to the individualization trend in postmodern historiography. The identity of each individual comes from personal experience and is deeply connected to the group to which they belong. Region, country, ethnicity, race, occupation, and life experience all play an essential role in shaping individual identity. With the globalization process advancing, especially in the late 20th century, the issue of identity has become an essential topic in European and American society. The complexity of modern pluralistic societies has led to the gradual loss of dominance of traditional mainstream identities, especially in the United States, a country known for its diversity. The intersection of race, belief, language, and culture has made identity more diverse and fragmented.

Postmodernism's focus on identity reveals the diversity of identity construction and highlights

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[39] Thompson, Paul. "The voice of the past: Oral history." *The oral history reader*. Routledge, 2002. 35-42.

the fluidity, openness, ambivalence, and multiplicity of identity. It challenges the traditional concept of fixed identity and emphasizes that identity is a dynamic and complex process constantly being reshaped and redefined. On the contrary, identity will continue to develop and transform under specific circumstances due to changes in the external environment and internal cognition. Oral history bridges this process, enabling individuals to present their unique identities within a specific historical and social context. Under the framework of postmodernism, identity is no longer a fixed essence but is constructed through storytelling and interaction. The complexity of this identity construction reflects the process of self-awareness in a multicultural, political, and social context and is closely linked to collective memory.

Social memory is how individuals understand the world and construct their identity through shared experiences and stories. An individual's identity is not only influenced by personal experiences but also shaped by collective memory. For example, specific historical events may have a profound impact on an individual's identity, such as war, immigration, and cultural change. These events become essential to collective memory and directly affect an individual's self-perception and identity construction. A group member who has experienced a wave of emigration may tell an oral history about how they repositioned themselves in a new country and felt a sense of identity with their original identity in a new culture. Through personal narratives, collective identities and historical experiences in social memory are reawakened and revealed, and this narrative process further deepens the self-awareness of individual identity.

In breaking with traditional collective narratives, the postmodernist identity issue has brought

new perspectives to historical research and profound social reflection. The relationship between each individual and the past, the group, and others is complex and multifaceted. The tension between individual and group identity has become an important research object in this network of relationships. By exploring these tensions, history can not only gain a deeper understanding of the diversity of society but also reveal the multiple faces of human history in different eras and among different groups. This understanding deepens our understanding of history and makes us more aware that history is not just a narrative of the past but also a mirror of how we understand ourselves and society in the present.

In modernity, memory and identity are inseparable. As some scholars have said, "Memory is the key to individual and collective identity...we are what we remember.[40]" Memory is the basis of individual and collective identity and becomes particularly significant when identity is disputed or in conflict. In this regard, memory has become a central issue in contemporary historical research and theoretical discussions.

2. The Evolution and mission of Chinese Historiography: from the ancient narrative of power to the contemporary pluralistic reconstruction of oral history

The development of historiography in China reflects historical changes and the changing socio-political needs of different historical periods. From the ancient narrative of power to the modern empirical historiography and then to the rise of oral history in the contemporary era, the mission of historiography has continued to evolve. In ancient times, historiography was a tool for the ruling class, shaping historical discourse and consolidating political power through

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[40] Roth, Michael S. *The ironist's cage: Memory, trauma, and the construction of history*. Columbia University Press, 1995.

official history books. Modern historiography gradually shifted towards being empirical and scientific, emphasizing objective records and multiple interpretations, opening a new chapter in historical research. In the modern era, oral history, as an essential historical method, has broken through the limitations of traditional written historical materials, emphasizing the voices of ordinary people, especially revolutionaries and marginalized groups in society, and providing a more diverse historical perspective. This transformation has not only opened up new avenues for historical research but also given history a more profound social mission – to make history not only belong to those in power but also to every ordinary person who has experienced history.

2.1 The political Function and moral Mission of historiography: the confrontation between official and private historiography in ancient China

"Out of the need to record the process of their development, to sum up, experience and to consolidate their rule,[41]" ancient Chinese historiography was highly politicized from the beginning: "historiography was subordinate to politics, and politics strictly controlled historiography.[42]" In order to consolidate the rule of the dynasty, "historiographers appeared as the entourage of the monarch.[43]" This politicized phenomenon of historiography was also reflected in the subtle power relationship. To a certain extent, the imperial historian served as the monarch's "historical recorder" and "political advisor" but was subject to the monarch's

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[41] Zhang Shifeng. "The Uncertainty between Historical Objectivity and Historian's Subjectivity: On the Influence of "Spring and Autumn Penmanship" on Chinese Traditional Historiography." *Journal of Xi'an Union University* 04 (2004): 45-49.

[42] Liu, Zhili. "Traditional Historiography and Ancient Chinese Politics." *Journal of Chengdu Administrative College (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 03 (2004): 74-76.

[43] Zeng, Xuewen. "On the Politicized Characteristics of Traditional Historiography in Ancient China." *Problems of History Teaching* 02 (1989): 16-20.

power. In practice, the imperial historian's work was inevitably influenced by the monarch and sometimes even forced to alter historical facts to cater to the ruler's demands. This situation is well documented in the history of Chinese historiography. Although ancient Chinese historiography is extraordinarily rich, it carries the apparent official color. It is more used as a "textbook" for ancient emperors and" 'courts of law' for political activities in order to judge political gains and losses and the actions of politicians.[44]" Historical records are not just a record of events but also a reflection and evaluation of the actions of rulers. This politicized function of history has given it a high degree of ethical and political significance. Out of a "fear of historical calamity, the imperial historians did not connect history with reality, did not reflect all aspects of society, and did not include the thoughts and emotions of the lower classes in official history. At best, they could only be used as material for historical novels and other works of fiction. As a result, oral history, which features the history of the lives of the lower classes, was not valued by historians.[45]"

In addition, the ancient Chinese thinker Confucius, through "history shaping reality," tried to "make history reflect moral compliance, the pursuit of meaning in life, and the maintenance of social etiquette.[46]" This is because, in Chinese history, the Spring and Autumn period—770 BC to 476 BC (during which time there were the earliest "written records of the existence and influence of oral materials, but the influence of the need for historiography to have a refined literary culture, coupled with the abuse of oral materials, hindered its development"[47])—was in

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[44] Zeng, Xuewen. "On the Politicized Characteristics of Traditional Historiography in Ancient China." *Problems of History Teaching* 02 (1989): 16-20.

[45] Shen Guchao. "Writing history with the people - the development characteristics of Western oral history and its inspiration for us." *Historical Theory Research* 02 (1995): 98-107.

[46] Zhang Shifeng. "The Uncertainty between Historical Objectivity and Historian's Subjectivity: On the Influence of "Spring and Autumn Penmanship" on Chinese Traditional Historiography." *Journal of Xi'an Union University* 04 (2004): 45-49.

[47] Kwong, Luke SK. "Oral History in China: A Preliminary Review." *The Oral History Review* 20.1 (1992):

a state of the moral degeneration of society is getting worse. The old governance order was broken – the rise of the feudal states constantly challenged the emperor's authority. Therefore, when Confucius wrote the *"Spring and Autumn Annals,"* he used "his moral standards to criticize the chaotic times and advocate and promote his political ideals.[48]" For the next two thousand years, the imperial historians of successive dynasties followed the "Spring and Autumn style" created by Confucius, which meant "using concise words to express the author's subtle meaning and using cautious words to express the author's thoughts, feelings, likes and dislikes, and praise and criticism. Although they do not directly state their historical views, the reader can understand what they mean, and they give history a powerful political and ethical meaning – praising the exalted status of the monarch and establishing the idea of national unification.[49]" This approach has made history a record of historical facts, the promotion of morality and ethics, and maintaining political order. Historians are, therefore, regarded as professionals with a high sense of social responsibility who guide public opinion and maintain social order.

However, some dynasty historians paid a price for insisting on historical truth. For example, during the Spring and Autumn Period, a minister named Cui Zhu killed the reigning monarch, and the historian recorded the event in national history. Out of revenge, Cui Zhu successively killed the historian and his brother, who had taken over his position. However, the historian's other brother still chose to record the event in the historical, and Cui Zhi had no choice but to give up the idea of killing him as well. This example shows the moral courage of historians in

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23-50.

[48] Zhang Shifeng. "The Uncertainty between Historical Objectivity and Historian's Subjectivity: On the Influence of "Spring and Autumn Penmanship" on Chinese Traditional Historiography." *Journal of Xi'an Union University* 04 (2004): 45-49.

[49] Zhang Shifeng. "The Uncertainty between Historical Objectivity and Historian's Subjectivity: On the Influence of "Spring and Autumn Penmanship" on Chinese Traditional Historiography." *Journal of Xi'an Union University* 04 (2004): 45-49.

specific historical situations and their determination to defend the authenticity of history. Despite being in the political maelstrom, historians still tried to maintain the impartiality and independence of historiography. This independence occupies an essential position in the tradition of ancient Chinese historiography and has left a profound impact on future generations.

With the many dynastic changes in Chinese history, the compilation of history not only became the responsibility of the rulers but also assumed great political significance. The founding emperors of each dynasty advocated the compilation of the history of previous dynasties and the country's history "to sum up the gains and losses of history and learn from historical experience. This practice reflects the importance and dependence of ancient Chinese rulers on history. By recording the history of previous dynasties, they could highlight their political achievements, whitewash their own rule, and explain their legitimate status in terms of historical continuity.[50]" This concept of historical continuity made historiography an essential means of maintaining political stability, and it also made historians, when writing history, not only record historical events but also provide a theoretical basis for the political legitimacy of the new dynasty. This politicized tradition of historical revisionism has made historiography closely related to the regime's stability.

However, despite the strong political influence on historiography, there was also a particular tradition of private history writing in ancient China. Unlike official historiography, private history writing was often more flexible and independent. Since rulers sometimes did not directly interfere with the writing of these private historians but instead provided them with a

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[50] Liu, Zhili. "Traditional Historiography and Ancient Chinese Politics." *Journal of Chengdu Administrative College (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 03 (2004): 74-76.

relatively relaxed political and cultural environment, this allowed some private historical works to record and interpret history more freely. Private history can put different opinions based on official history books and sometimes even challenge the authority of the official narrative, thus injecting more diverse voices and interpretative space into Chinese historiography. This makes historical narratives a tool for rulers and other social classes to understand and reflect on history.

2.2 From monarchical tools to scientific inquiry: the empirical and pluralistic transformation of modern Chinese historiography

After the Meiji Restoration, Japan became the first country in Asia to systematically accept and digest Western ideas. By absorbing European Enlightenment ideas, scientific methods, and positivism, Japan quickly emerged as the vanguard of modernization in Asia. During this period, Japan completed political, economic, and military reforms and underwent profound changes in ideology and culture, especially in history. This trend of positivism, which came from the West, gradually influenced the whole of Asia, and the Chinese intellectual community was particularly profoundly influenced.

The Wuxu Reform (also known as the Hundred Days' Reform) was a short-lived political reform movement in China during the summer and autumn of 1898, represented by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, called for reforms in the economic, military, and political spheres, to put China on the path to constitutional monarchy. Although the reform was unsuccessful, its ideological innovation profoundly influenced generations of Chinese intellectuals. Kang Youwei Liang Qichao and others, reflecting on China's traditional culture and political system,

realized that the fundamental reason for China's backwardness lay not only in the gap in technology and the military but also in the rigidity of ideas and systems. Therefore, they urgently hoped to absorb Western ideas, especially Japan's successful experience through the Meiji Restoration, to explore a path for China's modernization. After the failure of the Hundred Days' Reform, Chinese intellectuals gradually realized that traditional historiography could no longer meet the needs of a rapidly changing modern society. Historiography should be a simple record, systematically explaining the causal relationships behind these facts and providing reference and guidance for the nation's future. As a result, the perspective of empirical history was introduced to China from Japan at the beginning of the 20th century, setting off a "historical revolution." From 1901 to 1949, this period of historical views experienced a diverse development from "new history" to "empiricist history," which is known as Chinese bourgeois history or "modern empirical history."

Influenced by the leading representative of modern Japanese empirical historiography, Ukida Kazutami, and his book *"General History,*[51]*"* Liang Qichao published an article, "A Narrative of Chinese History" in the *"Qingyi Bao"* in 1901, discussing his views on national history: "Previous histories only recorded facts, and were written only by very few people and families. However, modern history should explain the relationships, causes, and effects between facts and incorporate the citizen's experiences.[52]" He used *"New Historiography"* as the title of his work, advocating that the development of history be viewed from the perspective of evolution. History is a continuous evolution and development process rather than a collection of static and isolated events. This view sounded the clarion call for "historiographical innovation" and was

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[51] Yang, Zhiyuan. "The Mirror Image of History: The Pluralistic Imagination of Liang Qichao's "New Historiography"." *Journal of Sichuan Normal University (Social Science Edition)* 49. 03 (2022): 152-159. doi:10.13734/j.cnki.1000-5315.2022.03.020.
[52] Liang Qichao, "A Narrative of Chinese History," in *The Yinbingshi Collection*, vol. 6, p. 1.

widely welcomed by the modern Chinese intellectual community. Especially after the failure of the Hundred Days' Reform, intellectuals hoped to rethink China's future direction of reform. Subsequently, he questioned whether the "law of cause and effect" in history could be explored using pure natural science and treated nature and historical science separately. In addition, Liang Qichao emphasized the importance of the two types of historical materials in historical research: "existing traces" and "oral tradition." Inspired by Bancroft's interviews with famous public figures in California's history, Liang Qichao promoted interviews as a research method. He believed that "there is an urgent need to systematically collect oral testimony from those who have participated in or witnessed major recent events in China.[53]" Although some significant past events have gradually become "old news," many of the people who participated in or witnessed these events are still alive, and the details of these events can be obtained by interviewing their oral accounts, thus forming "oral history.[54]" However, at that time, this idea did not attract much attention.

The establishment of the Institute of History and Philology of the Academia Sinica in 1928 marked a new stage in modern empirical historiography in China. This research institution was led by Fu Sinian, who gathered together China's most influential historians and linguists. Fu, who called himself the "Chinese Ranke School," emphasized the role of historical materials. He advocated making full use of scientific methods to search for, examine, and organize as many historical materials as possible (hence Fu Sinian was also known as the "historical materials school") and to conduct group research rather than narrate historical events (i.e., "writing history"): "Historical science is not about writing history, which has a somewhat

[53] Kwong, Luke SK. "Oral History in China: A Preliminary Review." *The Oral History Review* 20.1 (1992): 23-50.

[54] Liang Qichao: *"A Study of Chinese History,"* Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, September 1987 edition, p. 43.

archaic and medieval feel to it. Modern historical science is only historical science, using all the tools provided to us by the natural sciences to organize all the historical materials encountered.[55]" Hu Shi, another vital representative of modern empirical historical science in China, who had once undergone an oral history interview, was more concerned about evidence: "Two people have most influenced my thinking have had the greatest influence on me: one is Huxley, and the other is Mr. Dewey. Huxley taught me how to doubt and distrust anything without sufficient evidence. Mr. Dewey taught me how to think.[56]" At the same time, he also emphasized the reliability of evidence. "Historians need to 'make bold assumptions and carefully seek evidence'[57] to examine the source, provider, and time of provision of evidence, whether the provider is qualified to be a witness, and whether there is any possibility of subjective or non-subjective perjury.[58]" Therefore, Hu Shi also said: "History has two aspects: one is scientific, focusing on the collection and collation of historical materials; the other is artistic, focusing on the narration and interpretation of historical facts.[59]" Gu Jiegang, who accepted Hu Shi's advocacy of the "concept of historical evolution" and his approach to scholarship, paid attention to using folklore and mythology materials to study history. He attached great importance to the collection and use of oral historical materials. He also advocated writing about people's history: "The subject of historical narrative needs to be changed from the ruling class to the general public.[60]" Because oral tradition is closer to the

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[55] Fu Sinian, "The Aim and Interest of the Work of the Institute of History and Philology," *Journal of the Institute of History and Philology*, Academia Sinica, vol. 1, no. 1 (October 1928).
[56] Hu Shi. *My fork in the road* [A]. Selected materials on Hu Shi's philosophical thought: Volume 1 [M]. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 1981.
[57] Wang Dong. "Positivism and Modern Chinese Historiography." *Hebei Journal* 02 (2001): 19-23.
[58] Hu Shi. Introducing My Own Thoughts [A]. Ge Maochun and Li Xingzhi. Selected Materials on Hu Shi's Philosophical Thoughts: Volume 1 [M]. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 1981.
[59] Hu Fengxiang. "An Analysis of the Historical Methods of Hu Shi and Fusnian." *Journal of East China Normal University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)* 04 (1996): 27-33.
[60] Sang Bing. "New Historiography and Its Flux in Modern China ." *Historical Monthly*. 11 (2007): 5-28.

truth than official history, it is "more meaningful to the people and therefore cannot be ignored by new historians.[61]"

It can be said that the rise of the trend of empirical historiography in China has dramatically expanded the scope of historical materials, from the traditional primary reliance on documentary sources to a gradual expansion to more diverse physical materials, especially physical evidence obtained from field archaeological excavations, which has become an essential part of research. This has allowed historical research to go beyond written records and gain a more comprehensive understanding of history through physical objects. At the same time, the types of documentary sources have also expanded from the original historical books to include a wide range of documentary forms such as political books and poetry and prose collections, providing more historical information at multiple levels. The methods of textual research have also undergone profound changes. Historians have also drawn on modern scientific theories and methods from the natural sciences, especially evolutionary theory, to expand their understanding of historical events and evolution.

The approach to history has become more comprehensive and interdisciplinary, no longer limited to a single chain from document to document, but combining physical objects with documents to reconstruct history more comprehensively. At the same time, researchers have carried out comparative studies of the documents of different peoples and introduced theories and methods from disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, promoting the interdisciplinary integration of historical research. Through these new methods, historical research has expanded from the original focus on the political history of regime and dynastic changes to economic history, cultural history, social history, and other fields, reflecting the

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[61] Xu Guansan, *"Ninety Years of New Historiography,"* p. 1, Yuelu Shushe.

diversity and complexity of historical research themes. In addition, while new historiography emphasizes empirical research and historical material verification, it also attaches great importance to oral historical materials passed down by the people. Because these oral histories represent a wide range of social experiences, they help restore a richer and more diverse historical picture. Although oral history does not have systematic documentation or scientific verification methods, it often contains the core truth of history and is transmitted vividly.

At the same time, the purpose of history has also undergone significant changes. Historically, history books were often regarded as "the emperor's textbooks"[62] and were mainly used to consolidate the authority of the ruling class. Modern historiography, however, pays more attention to the role of "life textbooks," focusing on the lives of ordinary people and revealing the extensive connections between historical events and social life. Researchers have gradually shifted from simply seeking to restore historical events to revealing the intrinsic connections between them and exploring the laws of motion behind historical development. This shift reflects a deeper understanding of history and makes historical research more relevant in the real world.

2.3 From revolutionary memory to historical reconstruction: the rise and multi-dimensional development of contemporary Chinese oral history

Although some publications on Marxist materialist historical views began to appear in China at the beginning of the 20th century, they did not attract the attention of the academic community. After 1919, with the continuous development of the New Culture Movement (an ideological

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[62] Hou Yunhao. "Four Empirical Historical Trends in Twentieth-Century China." *Historical Monthly* 07 (2004): 70-80.

emancipation movement against feudalism initiated by some advanced Chinese intellectuals in the early 20th century, whose primary slogan was to advocate democracy and science), materialist historical views were widely disseminated. In the 1950s, the theory inevitably shifted from the previous diversity to the Marxist model. In order to showcase the significant events of different historical periods, uncover and preserve the personal experiences and accounts of revolutionaries, and use their oral historical materials to make up for the lack of written historical materials, the Chinese government launched a collection and compilation of oral historical materials from revolutionaries. Compared with general history books, these books are more vivid, rich, and exciting and have a broader readership.

Amidst the nationwide enthusiasm for participating in socialist construction,
scientifically and rationally viewing the past and learning from the development of history became essential tasks for the Chinese government and the social sciences community at the time, especially the historical community. Faced with this era's issues, people from different angles and using various methods were dedicated to exploring the development path of Chinese history and seeking the wisdom contained within.

Researching history is, of course, inseparable from reliable historical materials. However, most significant events in Chinese history, especially the Taiping Rebellion, the Boxer Rebellion, and the Xinhai Revolution during the Qing Dynasty, rely on official records. These records bear a distinct bias and political color, distorting the accurate picture of events in many ways. Such records, although of specific reference value, are difficult to meet the needs of researchers for objective and impartial historical materials due to their one-sided nature. Therefore, how discovering new historical materials and constructing a multi-dimensional

historical data system became important topics in academia at the time. Against this background, many research projects began to draw on the internationally maturing "oral history method," which in China is called "field research." This method emphasizes interviewing eyewitnesses and people with personal experience to record their oral testimony and recollections to supplement the deficiencies of traditional documents. The research focuses mainly on key events in Chinese history, such as the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom uprising, the Boxer Rebellion, the Xinhai Revolution, and the revolutionary wars led by the Chinese Communist Party. The places where these events took place have become key areas for scholars and research institutions to conduct in-depth fieldwork. Local governments, scientific research institutions, and universities have organized personnel to collect oral histories from residents. In this way, precious personal memories and unique folk perspectives have been left behind, and some unknown details and historical sites have been unearthed, enriching historical research.

The largest was a nationwide collection project led by the Research Committee for History and Culture at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.[63] From the end of the Qing Dynasty to the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Chinese society underwent drastic and profound changes. Government leaders believed that due to the complexity and volatility of history, records of many events and people were often incomplete or even missing at the time. It was necessary to collect data from multiple sources to fill these gaps. "The written records of these changes should be enriched by obtaining data from all available sources, including oral recollections.[64]"

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[63] Li-Wen, Yang. "Oral history in China." *Oral History* 15.1 (1987): 22-25.
[64] Kwong, Luke SK. "Oral History in China: A Preliminary Review." *The Oral History Review* 20.1 (1992): 23-50.

Shortly after the conclusion of the first plenary session of the Third National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Premier Zhou Enlai issued an initiative to members over the age of 60, encouraging them to record the knowledge, experience, and insights they had accumulated over decades (first-hand experience, first-hand knowledge, first-hand accounts), and "collect written and oral testimonies from people who had special or unique experiences in pre-1949 China.[65]" This initiative was quickly implemented, and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference established the Literature and History Research Research Committee responsible for nationwide data collection and work planning. Under the direction of Zhou Enlai, local historical and cultural data research committees were quickly established across the country to begin organizing and carrying out oral history and the systematic collection of historical and cultural data. The project collects data covering military, political, diplomatic, economic, cultural, social development, and overseas Chinese activities. For example, vital historical events include the Xi'an Incident and the War of Resistance Against Japan; the democratic parties included in the collection are the China Association for Promoting Democracy and the China National Democratic Construction Association. The project has compiled and published more than 150 issues of historical and cultural materials (excluding materials collected locally). These materials provide detailed historical evidence from both a documentary and oral perspective, helping people gain a deeper understanding and restore the context of many significant historical events. This project has accumulated many materials with far-reaching historical value and left behind a precious resource for future generations to study and understand history.

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[65] Kwong, Luke SK. "Oral History in China: A Preliminary Review." *The Oral History Review* 20.1 (1992): 23-50.

The famous British historian Barracklave said: "Around 1955, among both 'liberal' and Marxist historians, something was brewing that was about to emerge.[66]"

"A continuing theme in Chinese oral history. Central to these activities is the need to celebrate the revolution and its achievements on the one hand and to listen to the often silenced voices of ordinary people, especially those who have suffered from the regime's policies.[67]" In the 1960s, China carried out several political campaigns. For example, to educate people about revolutionary traditions, the "Four Histories"[68] campaign (including village history, family history, factory history, and war history) was launched in the late 1950s. This was a bold attempt at oral history in China from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s. In an editorial, the *Tianjin Daily* proposed systematically recording the history of the anti-capitalist struggles and ideological development of each factory and worker. This task emphasized the "richness, complexity and twists and turns" of the record and allowed for various writing styles, including prose, poetry, press releases, and even academic records. The aim was to present an image of the working class as proactive rather than passive and suffering. Unlike traditional literary creation, this movement emphasized the autonomy of oral and written expression. It aimed to allow ordinary workers to participate in the narrative and thus become "writers" of history.

This oral history project was influenced by Mao Zedong's Thought, especially Mao's vision of rekindling the revolutionary consciousness of the masses. After the failure of the Great Leap Forward in China, this historical project became a new educational tool to arouse people's enthusiasm and sense of responsibility for the socialist cause. By 1960, this project had been

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[66] Geoffrey Barraclough ."*Major Trends in Contemporary Historiography"* translated by Yang Yu' Shanghai Translation Publishing House' 1987' pp. 44, 53.
[67] Thompson, Paul. "Changing encounters with Chinese oral history." *Oral History* 45.2 (2017): 96-105.
[68] Thompson, Stephen, and Paul Thompson. "Oral History in China." *Oral History* 15.1 (1987): 17-21.

promoted nationwide and expanded into the "Four Histories" movement, including village, family, factory, and commune history. This new form of recording the people's history was not just a simple record of the individual or collective experiences of workers and peasants but also a way to achieve individual and national identity through collective memory construction and ideological enlightenment. Through the "Four Histories" movement in various regions, the people's historical concepts gradually shifted from relying on external "authorities" discourse to emphasizing the importance of their own experiences, local knowledge, and collective memory. This "bottom-up" model of historical writing allowed the working class to cease being passive participants in history and become active recorders and creators of history.

During the Cultural Revolution, the application of oral history methods was significantly suppressed. Many historians were deprived of the right to speak and could not freely investigate and record history. During this period, the spirit of factual historical research was wholly destroyed. Many historical research and narratives had to succumb to political pressure, and the voices of historians were forced to be replaced by political discourse. The "field research" originally used to explore the true face of society gradually lost its original academic value but was manipulated by political forces and turned into a tool to serve political ends. This situation promoted the rise of so-called "allusion history," in which historical research became an obscure form of political criticism or propaganda to meet the ideological needs of the time. Historians found it challenging to play an authentic academic role in this environment, resulting in a generation of distorted historical research.

Paul Thompson has profoundly analyzed the lag in the development of oral history in China. Despite China's profound historical and cultural accumulation, which in theory should provide

fertile soil for the study of oral history, he pointed out that although China has a rich historical heritage, oral history as a means of studying and recording history did not begin to emerge in China until the end of the 20th century. Thompson's core point is that "most of China's most famous oral history works were written by Western scholars,[69]" the most representative of which is *The Road West*, written by American journalist Edgar Snow in 1938. Through Snow's personal experiences and observations, the book details the story of the Chinese Communist Party and the Red Army at the time, showing the process of the Chinese Revolution from a Western perspective.

Thompson believes that in addition to the lack of material resources, such as recording equipment and relevant books, the deeper reason is the unique political environment in China at the time. In 20th-century China, especially during the long-term political struggle and turmoil between the Nationalist government and the Communist Party, the form of oral history was not fully utilized and promoted. The unstable political environment suppressed many historical memories and the practice of oral history. Many historical events and individuals who experienced them first-hand either did not have the opportunity to tell their stories or could not express themselves publicly for political reasons. Thompson pointed out that in a complex political context like China, oral history is a recollection of events and a manifestation of power struggles. Many historians in this situation have fallen into a state of "aphasia" and "absence," unable to effectively record and excavate the historical experiences of people from the bottom or margins of society, resulting in oral history not being able to develop as it should in China.

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[69] Thompson, Stephen, and Paul Thompson. "Oral History in China." *Oral History* 15.1 (1987): 17-21.

It was not until the 1980s, with the reform and opening up of Chinese society, that the concept of oral history was gradually introduced and gradually developed. The influence of American scholars gradually expanded, making Chinese scholars realize that oral history is a powerful tool that complements traditional historical writing. However, oral history still faces many difficulties in its promotion in China. Stave once pointed out: "Investigating the status of oral history in the People's Republic of China is not easy. Like the architecture of Beijing, everything seems to be hidden behind the city walls.[70]" This vivid metaphor reflects the hidden and complex nature of oral history in China's early stages of development. Due to political sensitivities and the particular nature of historical events, many historical figures and events have not yet been fully recorded, and much oral history can only be collected in closed or marginal environments.

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[70] Bruce Stave, 'The Chinese Puzzle: in search of oral history in the People's Republic of China', *International Journal of Oral History*, (1985) 6, 3, pp. 147-162.

Chapter 2 The Memory Turns

Against the backdrop of transformations in historiographical narratives, historical memory has suddenly become extremely important and has attracted widespread attention. Some people even use the term "memory turn" to describe this phenomenon. Apart from experimental psychology and clinical psychoanalysis, few scholars paid attention to memory until the 1970s, when autobiography, genealogy, and museums aroused great interest among the public. In particular, against the historical background of nation-states looking back to the past in search of legitimacy. Against the historical background of nation-states looking back to the past in search of legitimacy, European and American societies have shown unprecedented enthusiasm and interest in "memory."

For example, in the United States, the setting of the calendar has led to a significant increase in the anniversaries of citizens.[71] Various celebrations make people remember specific historical moments more frequently and stimulate the public's interest in the past. Through anniversaries and commemorative activities, people can re-recognize and reflect on history and enhance their identification with the national and collective identity. It can be said that since the publication of the seminal work by Halbwachs in the 1920s, memory and the study of memory have been reinvigorated in the 1980s. Academics vividly describe this period of enthusiasm for studying memory as the "memory boom." As Kerwin Lee Klein observes, "We now use memory as a meta-historical category that encompasses all these different terms—that is, where there used to be talk of folk history or popular history or oral history or public history or even mythology.[72]" Historical memory has become an increasingly important historical research and

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[71] Kammen, Michael. "Frames of remembrance: the dynamics of collective memory." (1995): 245-261.

[72] Klein, Kerwin Lee. "On the emergence of memory in historical discourse." *Representations* 69 (2000):

historiographical theory focus. As a concept closely linked to subjective experience and individual identity, memory seems naturally more sympathetic to marginalized elements. In this context, memory has become an essential tool for studying individual and collective identity and a way to counter grand narratives.

In the metaphorical image of the historian Anximith, modern historiography, under the impact of postmodernism, is no longer a cathedral pursuing a common goal but more like a diverse and intricately intertwined city[73]. Just as everyone in this city moves along their path, their connections become blurred, and historical narratives are no longer oriented towards a common goal. Postmodernism has destroyed the traditional concept of history, which once attempted to establish a grand and unified historical narrative model, and gradually gave way to a new understanding of diversity and individuality. In this context, people's relationship with the past has become highly individual and private, and the individualization of memory has increasingly become one of the core issues in historical research.

2.1 The entanglement of memory and history

As with many concepts, the meaning of history is often defined through comparison and association with other concepts. In the development of historical thought, historians have often contrasted history with science and history with nature to clarify the unique nature of history. For example, when discussing the relationship between history and science, some scholars, such as John Bury, emphasized the similarities, arguing that "history is a science, neither more

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127-150.

[73] Ankersmit, Franklin Rudolf. "Historical representation." *History and Theory* 27.3 (1988): 205-228.

nor less.[74]" Other scholars, such as G. M. Trevelyan, emphasized the opposition between history and science, highlighting the artistic nature of history and distinguishing it from science. Similarly, the opposition between history and nature is often used to explore the nature of history. R. G. Collingwood and others pointed out that the key difference between history and nature is that historical phenomena contain the ideological factors of human actors, and revealing these ideological factors is the core task of historical research.

The contrast between history and memory is even more direct. Both deal with the past experiences of individual human beings or groups of people, and history and memory are intrinsically intertwined. Without memory, there would be no history. "Memory is the fragment of the past that we can directly access,[75]" as the Greek myth depicts. In Greek mythology, Clio, the goddess of history, is the daughter of Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory. This relationship reveals the importance of memory in Western historiography. Since the birth of historiography, it has been regarded as a form of memory through which events are preserved in writing to withstand the oblivion and attrition of time. This memory function of history embodies the profound desire of the ancients to fight against oblivion and preserve collective memory so that future generations can look back on the past, understand, reflect on, and pass on essential experiences and lessons.

However, with the rise of postmodern thought and the development of critical historiography, history, and memory have gradually diverged: memory is more about identity, while history is about the pursuit of authenticity. Memory is the foundation of historiography and a way to understand history and challenge grand narratives. Memory, especially traumatic memory, as

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[74] J.B. Bury. *"History as a Science"*, in Fritz Stern ed. The Varieties of History, New York: Meridian Books, 1956, P223.
[75] Collingwood, Robin George. *The idea of history.* Oxford University Press, 1993.

an individualized and subjective form of expression, breaks through the limitations of historical objectivity and provides new narrative space for those neglected voices.

Memory is the foundation of the self and society. Memory is highly individual and directive: it tells people who they are, where they belong, and how to get along with people and society. At the same time, memory is essential for exploring collective commonalities (or characteristics). Carl Becker believes that the assertion that "history is the knowledge of past events" is too simplistic. History should be "the memory of things that have been said and done"[76] reflected in people's daily lives. He believes that "everyone is a historian,[77]" and memory is fundamental: there is no knowledge without memory. The term "event" seems too grandiose and is incompatible with people concerned with "bottom-level history." "Without this historical knowledge, without the memory of what has been said and done, people's present would be aimless and their future meaningless.[78]" For 'Mr. Common Man,' 'history works in its most elementary way': although he has not witnessed some historical events with his own eyes, through the artificial extension of memory (first recalling what has been said and done, and then searching for history again in the data, discovering, comparing and eliminating some conflicting reports), he can still form a complete picture.

2.2 The Link Between Memory and Trauma

The rise of memory as an essential way for human beings to cope with trauma is closely related to the profound traumatic experiences brought about by modernity in the 20th century. During

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[76] Becker, Carl. "Everyman his own historian." *The American Historical Review* 37.2 (1932): 221-236.

[77] Becker, Carl. "Everyman his own historian." *The American Historical Review* 37.2 (1932): 221-236.

[78] Becker, Carl. "Everyman his own historian." *The American Historical Review* 37.2 (1932): 221-236.

this period, humankind experienced unprecedented changes and shocks: the global catastrophe triggered by the two world wars, the prolonged Cold War confrontation and military conflict between the two opposing ideological camps, the tragic acts of class struggle and ethnic cleansing, the threat of nuclear weapons and the actual catastrophe, as well as the continuous deterioration of ecological environments and the extinction crisis of species. These drastic social, political, and natural calamities have not only caused far-reaching damage to the external conditions of human existence but have also profoundly invaded people's inner spiritual world and shaped the collective memory of modern society about trauma. In this context, the connection between trauma and memory has gradually become an essential topic of academic and social concern.

The primary function of traumatic memory is reflected in its ethical dimension of revealing and preserving historical truth[79]. Recording and remembering the suffering of victims and those who experienced it is an essential task of historical research and is widely recognized as an unshirkable human moral responsibility. In the face of trauma, memory becomes a tool for defending the truth, preventing individual or group experiences from being erased by the erosion of time or manipulating power. The survival of such memory offers future generations the possibility of facing the truth of history and, in so doing, counteracting the cultural tendency to forget or amnesia. By remembering the experience of suffering, memory not only defends the dignity of the victims but also serves as the basis for society to confront history and pursue justice, providing an essential basis for collective moral repair.

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[79] Eyerman, Ron. *Memory, trauma, and identity*. Springer, 2019.

Another dimension of this ethical function lies in memory's public and universal nature.[80] When an individual's traumatic memory is incorporated into a group narrative, it transcends the private realm of individual experience and becomes a spiritual resource society shares. For example, the oral histories of Holocaust survivors not only record individual suffering but also become an essential reference for reflecting on genocide on a global scale. Through collective memory, individual and group experiences are preserved to alert future generations and, in doing so, form a cross-generational community of memory.

In the framework of traditional grand narratives, history is often depicted as a process toward some kind of justice or grand goal. This view of history attempts to explain historical events in terms of holistic rationality and justification, thus treating individual suffering and trauma as unavoidable costs or collateral phenomena. However, the limitation of this narrative logic is that it tends to ignore the unique value and independent significance of individual trauma memories. Under the grand narrative, the traumas of many innocent individuals or groups are covered up or rationalized, thus losing their due historical status.

In contrast, the significance of traumatic memory lies in the revelation that the past has not really faded away but continues to play a role in the present in a hidden or visible form and is deeply embedded in people's real lives. This kind of memory is a recollection of historical legacies and an essential component of individual and social reality. Through traumatic memory, human beings can re-understand the complexity of historical events and explore the ethical significance of suffering, thus realizing a re-examination of history at the individual and group levels. This liberating effect of memory applies not only to individuals

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[80] LaCapra, Dominick. "Trauma, history, memory, identity: What remains?." *History and Theory* 55, no. 3 (2016): 375-400.

but also to the social level. By disseminating and sharing collective memory, society can reflect on its historical mistakes, rebuild group identity, and provide warnings and inspiration for future development. This will be analyzed next in Chapters 3 and 4 through the oral histories of Chinese intellectuals and U.S. 9/11 oral histories, respectively.

2.3 Interaction between memory and collective memory

The interactive relationship between memory and collective memory is a complex social phenomenon that reflects the intertwining and interplay between individuals and society in historical cognition. "Recollection is a social activity.[81]" Individual and collective memories are not entirely separate; they are intertwined and influence each other through a dynamic social construction process. An individual's memory is not just the accumulation of personal experiences but is also profoundly constrained by socio-cultural and group influences. Memory is "a collective phenomenon reflected in individuals' actions and words.[82]" French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs proposed that individual memory is permanently embedded in social relationships and group culture. This means that individual memory is not only a personal experience but is also shaped and transmitted within a specific social context and cultural framework.[83]

According to Halbwachs, forming individual memories relies on personal perception and

[81] Barnier, Amanda J., and John Sutton. "From individual to collective memory: Theoretical and empirical perspectives." (2008): 177-182.

[82] Kansteiner, Wulf. "Finding meaning in memory: A methodological critique of collective memory studies." *History and theory* 41, no. 2 (2002): 179-197.

[83] Halbwachs, Maurice. "On Collective Memory: The Heritage of Sociology (LA Coser, Trans.)." (1992).

experience and is profoundly influenced by social groups.[84] In his view, individual memories cannot exist in isolation but are always closely linked to interactions with others and groups. Therefore, the subjectivity of memory is not only expressed in the individual's personal experience but is also influenced and guided by the framework of collective memory. This concept of social memory shows that memory is not a simple personal act but a complex system that includes social relationships, cultural background, and historical context. Collective memory plays an important role in this process, influencing the content and form of individual memory through social construction and cultural transmission.

2.3.1 The meaning of collective memory

The definition of collective memory further clarifies this phenomenon. Collective memory refers to the shared memory of a society or group of past events. It is not just a simple accumulation of individual memories but a product of social interaction, cultural construction, and the interplay of power relations.[85] Individual memories are confirmed and revised through interactions, forming a complex cognitive framework of collective memory.

The formation of collective memory is a dynamic process, not just a simple reproduction of historical facts. However, it is constantly selectively reconstructed as social circumstances, power relations, and group needs change. For example, China's educated youth movement (going to the countryside) is a typical case of collective memory. This memory has been preserved through personal narratives and formalized and standardized through literary works, film and television dramas, and national education. On the surface, these memories affirm the educated youth generation's dedication to youth and social responsibility. However, in the

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[84] Halbwachs, Maurice. "On Collective Memory: The Heritage of Sociology (LA Coser, Trans.)." (1992).

[85] Paez, Dario R., and James Hou-Fu Liu. "Collective memory of conflicts." In *Intergroup conflicts and their resolution*, pp. 105-124. Psychology Press, 2011.

construction process, they ignore the coercive nature of the policy, social inequality, individual trauma, and other complex historical aspects.

Similarly, the collective memory of the 9/11 incident in the United States has also been continuously reinforced through a variety of media. From monuments and commemorative events to documentaries and mainstream media reports, the memory of 9/11 is constantly being transmitted and shaped. This memory not only records the reaction of American society to the terrorist attacks but also strengthens the narrative of national unity and security crises through emotional mobilization. However, just as the construction of the memory of the educated youth, the memory of the 9/11 incident in the United States is also selective; it emphasizes the heroic image of the victims and the legitimacy of the "just fight." However, it rarely reflects on the complex role and responsibility of American foreign policy in global terrorism.

Collective memory is, therefore, not only a recollection of the past but also a social practice of power. Through the selective emphasis and dissemination of memory content, collective memory plays a crucial role in shaping groups' historical perceptions and social identities. This social construction of memory helps to consolidate group strength and shape cultural heritage, but at the same time, it may simplify history and ignore multiple perspectives and complexity. The formation of collective memory involves multiple mechanisms of social interaction, media communication, ritual activities, and discourse of power. Together, they shape groups' historical perceptions and cultural transmission.

2.3.2 How collective memory is formed

The formation of collective memory is a complex and dynamic social construction process involving the intertwining and interaction of multiple mechanisms, including social interaction, media communication, ritual activities, and power discourse. These mechanisms jointly shape the historical perception and identity of groups and reveal the contradictory and selective nature of the memory process. In essence, collective memory is not an objective representation of history but rather the result of selective filtering, reconstruction, and representation through social forces. It reflects memory's social and shared nature and highlights its limitations and exclusivity due to power relations.

2.3.2.1 Shaping social interactions

Social interaction is crucial in forming collective memory and is how individuals participate in and construct group memory.[86] This interaction is not limited to exchanges between family members but also includes the transmission of history by social institutions such as schools and communities. In the family, parents may pass on memories related to family history through stories and photos, while at school, teachers shape students' understanding of history by explaining historical events. The community further consolidates this shared memory by organizing collective activities or social gatherings. With the development of the times, the emergence of social media has further increased the scale and scope of this interaction, becoming an important platform for disseminating collective memory. Through online discussions, blogs, and so on, individuals can share their memories, exchange ideas with others, and reshape historical memories.

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[86] Brown, Adam D., Nicole Kouri, and William Hirst. "Memory's malleability: its role in shaping collective memory and social identity." *Frontiers in psychology* 3 (2012): 257.

Under certain historical circumstances, the memories of individuals and groups will gradually converge through these interactions. For example, in China's educated youth movement, former educated youth have shared their experiences and feelings while going to the countryside through memoirs, gatherings, and social media. These personal memories have been repeatedly told and reproduced among groups, gradually forming a collective identity and becoming part of the entire educated youth group. In this way, the historical experiences of individuals are transformed into collective history, forming a shared memory of a particular historical period.

However, social interaction is not always inclusive when shaping collective memory. Although it promotes publicizing individual memory and unifies the perception of group history, it also excludes some heterogeneous memories. In constructing the memories of educated youth, mainstream memory discourse often overemphasizes youthful ideals and dedication. These memories strengthen the identification with the ideals of educated youth but rarely address the coercion, social trauma, and personal suffering that educated youth experienced during the process of going to the countryside. This selective reinforcement of memory excludes discussion of the unpleasant parts of history, leaving some incompleteness in the construction of collective memory.

2.3.2.2 Media and narrative transmission

The media plays an important role as a tool for transmitting collective memory. Through television, film, literature, news reports, and other forms, the media not only transmit individual historical experiences but also transform these experiences into memories with

group identity by constructing specific narrative frameworks. Audiovisual media such as documentaries and films use images and sound effects to evoke deep emotional resonance in the audience, transforming personal memories into collective public memories.[87] For example, in the works about educated youth, "*A Snowstorm Is Coming Tonight*" and *"Educated Youth,"* the individual experiences are closely linked to the national narrative, strengthening the image of the educated youth spirit. These works have left a deep impression on the audience by shaping the collective identity of the educated youth group and disseminating a specific historical narrative.

Through such narrative techniques, the media simplifies historical events into symbols with specific meanings. Similarly, the documentaries *9/11: The Firefighters' Story* and *102 Minutes That Changed America* about the September 11 attacks convey nationalist sentiments by focusing on heroic individuals and collective unity during the event. These works reinforce the image of American unity and heroism in the incident through media narratives. Through the combination of visuals and language, the audience remembers some details of the incident and emotionally identifies with the collective memory.

However, media narratives often oversimplify complex historical events and dichotomize them into oppositions of "good" and "evil." For example, coverage of the September 11 attacks often focused on heroic acts on the American side while ignoring the global roots of terrorism and the complexity of American foreign policy. Similar situations also occurred in the coverage of other historical events. Media narratives often reduce complex multidimensional history to

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[87] Kansteiner, Wulf. "Memory, media and Menschen: Where is the individual in collective memory studies?." *Memory Studies* 3, no. 1 (2010): 3-4.

simplified frameworks for the audience to quickly understand, sometimes leading to the neglect of historical diversity.

2.3.2.3 Rituals and commemorative activities

Rituals and commemorative activities, as important components of collective memory,[88] give historical events a sense of continuity and solemnity through the symbolic representation of time and space.[89] These activities are often about looking back at history, mobilizing emotions in the present, and strengthening group cohesion through collective behavior.[90] For example, the annual commemoration of September 11 in the United States reinforces the central position of the 9/11 incident in American history through rituals such as lowering the flag to half-staff, observing a moment of silence, and holding public gatherings. These activities emotionally stimulate patriotic sentiments and, through collective memory activities, make participants feel the unity of the country and its people.

However, ceremonies and commemorative activities may also run the risk of reducing the complexity of history. Take the 9/11 commemorative activities as an example. Their narrative often focuses on patriotism and heroism while ignoring the complexity behind the event. For example, the root causes of terrorism are not just singular but multifaceted, including social, political, and cultural factors. The US government has reduced its focus on a pluralistic understanding of historical events by reinforcing this singular commemorative approach. Similarly, the commemoration of the educated youth movement presents a similar situation.

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[88] Wertsch, James V. *Voices of Collective Remembering*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

[89] Hermoni, Gal, and Udi Lebel. "Politicizing memory: An ethnographical study of a remembrance ceremony." *Cultural studies* 26, no. 4 (2012): 469-491.

[90] Misztal, Barbara A. "Durkheim on collective memory." *Journal of Classical Sociology* 3, no. 2 (2003): 123-143.

Collective memories and group activities reinforce the spiritual identity of the educated youth group but ignore the social injustice and individual trauma caused by the movement. Although this simplified emotional mobilization helps construct group identity, it may lead to the neglect of comprehensive historical reflection.

2.3.2.4 The influence of power and discourse

Power structures profoundly impact the shaping and dissemination of collective memory. States and mainstream media try to shape public perceptions of history by controlling educational content, discourse production, and propaganda,[91] highlighting specific historical memories and suppressing those that may challenge the existing social order. In China, the official discourse has helped shape a unified perception of this historical period by shaping the memories of educated youth as a dedication of "youth without regrets." However, this official discourse often avoids issues such as social trauma, personal suffering, and institutional violence in the educated youth movement, leaving an idealized impression of history.

Similarly, in the United States, the 9/11 commemorative activities, led by the media and the government, have reinforced the narrative framework of national security, patriotism, and heroism while ignoring reflections on war policies and immigration issues. This selective memory suppresses dissenting voices, limiting the public's understanding of historical events to a specific narrative that often legitimizes existing political and social structures. In this way, historical memory has become an instrument of power, shaping the collective perception of history among society members and helping maintain the existing social order.

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[91] Knapp, Steven. *"Collective memory and the actual past."* Representations 26 (1989): 123-149.

Chapter 3 The emotional dimension and identity construction of the oral history of educated youth

1. The history of the "Up to the Mountain and Down to the Countryside movement"

In the 1960s and 1970s, China launched an unprecedented "Up to the Mountain and Down to the Countryside movement," mobilizing 17.7643 million urban youths to remote rural and border areas to participate in agricultural production as "army members or as sent-down youths.[92]"

"Educated youth is almost as old as the 20th century.[93]" As a unique social movement in the modernization of China in the 20th century, the "Up to the Mountain and Down to the Countryside movement" can be traced back to the early 1950s. In 1953, China began implementing the first five-year plan for economic construction, setting the policy of "focusing major efforts on developing heavy industry and establishing national industrialization and national defense modernization." However, industry development faced a sharp contradiction: the backward agricultural economy could not meet the needs of the people's lives, let alone the requirements of industrial development. In 1953 and 1954, agricultural production decreased, and the food shortage became a problem that hindered economic development. The gap between urban and rural areas further widened, leading to millions of peasants from poor rural areas spontaneously moving to the cities. This resulted in a significant increase in the urban population during this period and difficulties in urban employment. In order to cope with the

growing employment pressure in the rapid urbanization process and respond to the national policy of prioritizing the development of agriculture, the Chinese government sent some young urban people to work in the countryside. "However, this period did not form a large-scale political movement with extreme left-wing characteristics, and its main purpose was employment.[94]"

The Chinese government believes that only economic development can promote education. If education is developed first, it means weakening the economic foundation and strength of the Chinese economy. Paradoxically, the people urgently demanded the right to receive an education. Although the number of schools had increased significantly, they still considered it insufficient and called on the state to build more schools.

At the same time, the mass-oriented and popularized education model during the Yan'an period had a profound impact on Mao Zedong, and the education system adopted from the Soviet Union after liberation aimed to cultivate elites in industry and science and technology to send talented people from primary and secondary schools to institutions of higher learning. The simultaneous adoption of these two models led to conflicts over various issues, such as student recruitment and teaching. The result was that "When the economy was booming or the idea of universal education prevailed, the number of students enrolled increased rapidly, even exceeding the number of students already in school. When the economy encountered problems and needed to be rectified, or the idea of cultivating elites prevailed, the number of students enrolled would decrease sharply.[95]" Many young people saw going to school as their only way

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[94] Ding, Yizhuang. *The History of China's Educated Youth: The First Wave, 1953-1968*. China: China Social Sciences Press, 1998.
[95] Ding, Yizhuang. *The History of China's Educated Youth: The First Wave, 1953-1968*. China: China Social Sciences Press, 1998.

out and their future, which led to a large number of young people who were unable to go to school, facing the mental anguish of dropping out of school and the practical difficulties of finding employment. Their thoughts are confused and restless, and they also cause a ripple in society. The problem of rural primary and secondary school graduates not being able to continue their education is even more serious than in the city, so they flock to the city in search of a way out, which makes it even more difficult for the city, which is already overwhelmed by employment pressures and food shortages, to bear. Mobilizing them to return to their hometowns has become a top priority. The young people wanted to continue their studies (attend high school or university) or get a "white-collar" job commensurate with their qualifications. They wanted the state to provide for their future and happiness and for the state to respect their personal choices. However, neither economic nor educational development was sufficient to meet their aspirations. This was the conflict between the needs of the state and the interests of the individual that was often talked about back then, and it was the conflict that ran throughout the movement of educated youth to the countryside.

It was a movement motivated by economic reasons, but it first and foremost opened the way ideologically. Mao Zedong feared that the new generation educated in the cities (the future elite) no longer identified with the older generation's values. The young people had to eradicate all "bourgeois" thinking: discrimination against labor and the working class, an excessive attachment to home and city, indifference to public affairs, indifference to class struggle, and even the concept of "self." Instead, they should learn all the virtues of the proletariat: hardworking, loving labor, concerned about politics and class struggle, and incredibly selfless and courageous in sacrificing for the good of the country and the collective[96]. So, at the end of

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[96] Ding, Yizhuang. *The History of China's Educated Youth: The First Wave, 1953-1968*. China: China Social Sciences Press, 1998.

December 1968, he called on "intellectual youth to go to the countryside and be re-educated by the poor and lower-middle peasants.[97]" As a result, the "down to the countryside" movement took off on a large scale and quickly reached its climax, becoming a collective memory of a generation of young people.

From an ideological point of view, this movement was seen as an important practice for consolidating revolutionary traditions. Through "re-education,[98]" it cultivated a generation of young people loyal to the country and firmly supported the construction of socialism. An editorial in *Wenhui Newspaper* explained: "Why do educated young people have to go to the countryside? Because the bourgeoisie in the old school educated them.[99]" However, these grand goals faced many contradictions and challenges in the implementation process. The educated youth were often assigned to remote and impoverished areas, facing difficult working conditions and a life of material deprivation. There was a massive conflict between their ideals and reality. Many not only suffered physically but also endured long-term psychological pressure and emotional isolation.

From a historical perspective, the "Up to the Mountain and Down to the Countryside movement" lasted nearly 20 years, and its policy and social impact changed with the changes in the country's political and economic situation. In the late 1970s, educated youth gradually returned from the countryside to the cities with the reform, opening up, and adjustment of economic policies. A Shanghai-educated youth named Xu Ling died while giving birth in a farm hospital. This triggered educated youth from Yunnan to carry Xu Ling's body on a

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[97] http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/33837/2534842.html, Accessed December 18, 2024.
[98] Liu Jianhui. "A Preliminary Study on the Reasons for the Rise of the "Intellectual Youth Going to the Mountains and the Countryside Movement"." *Chinese Youth Studies* 04 (1991): 30-32.
[99] Tang Mingxiang. Social and Historical Events and the Life Course of Youth. 2014. Shenyang Normal University, MA thesis.

march.[100] They demanded to "negotiate with the leaders, punish the perpetrators, and improve

the living conditions of educated youth. After being dissatisfied with the local government's

response, the educated youth proposed to go to Beijing but were blocked. Subsequently, there

were incidents of people lying on the railway tracks.[101]" The movement ended with educated

youth from all over the country demanding "a large-scale return to the city.[102]"

However, the movement's profound impact on individuals and society did not disappear with

time. As one of the largest social mobilizations in New China's history, the movement reshaped

the fate of a generation of young people and triggered a "cultural craze for educated youth.[103]"

Suffering and dedication became keywords in the lives of educated youth.

2. Emotional dimension: "Regrets" and "No Regrets" for Suffering

" 'Suffering' is a recurring theme in the narratives of educated youth.[104]" It includes

"suffering for survival" due to harsh natural environments and a lack of means of subsistence,

the class education of "recalling suffering and thinking of happiness," the "spiritual suffering"

of cutting off ties with one's family, "mental suffering" from severing ties with family, and

"productive suffering" at work or in training. This section will show the complex emotional

attitudes of this generation (also known as the "lost generation"[105]) in the face of historical

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[100] Ye Xin. "On the Fall of China's Youth Movement to the Mountain and the Countryside ." *Social Science*. 07 (2007): 142-150.

[101] Pan Yi. "Exploring the Motivation of the Great Return of Intellectual Youth to the Cities." *Youth Studies* 03 (1994): 26-28.

[102] Gold, Thomas B. "Back to the city: the return of Shanghai's educated youth." *The China Quarterly* 84 (1980): 755-770.

[103] Luo Peilan. "The Ineradicable Zhiqing Complex--Thinking triggered by the Zhiqing Cultural Fever in the 1990s." Economic and Social Development 02 (2004): 145-148. doi:10.16523/j.45-1319.2004.02.044.

[104] Zhu Yaru. Individual and Collective Memory of Reclamation Youth. 2017. Harbin Engineering University, MA thesis.

[105] Bonnin, Michel. "Restricted, distorted but alive: The memory of the "lost generation" of Chinese educated

suffing through Liu Xiaomeng's edited *Oral History of China's Educated Youth.* Among these emotions, "no regrets" and "regrets" are opposing and intertwined. This multi-dimensional emotional dimension not only reflects the richness and diversity of personal life experiences but is also embedded in the historical framework of national narratives and social evaluations and has become an important perspective for studying the historical memories of the intellectual youth group. This emotional dynamic runs through the narrative of personal experiences, reflecting the interactive influence of social discourse, cultural background, and historical evaluation.

2.1 "No regrets": perseverance in hardship and reconstruction of meaning

The "no regrets" attitude of educated youth groups when recalling their hardship experiences stems primarily from their affirmation of the value of personal growth and their deep identification with collectivist ideals.

This attitude is both an emotional transcendence and a strategy for historical narrative. Educated youth actively interpret their fate by giving meaning to their suffering. This sentiment of "no regrets" has multiple connotations in the oral narratives of educated youth, involving "growth of life, persistence of ideals, and reconstruction of identity,[106]" showing a deep connection between educated young individuals and their historical background.

2.1.1. Growth of life in suffering

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youth." The China Quarterly 227 (2016): 752-772.

[106] Liu, Yaqiu. "Youth without regrets: a process of constructing social memory." *Sociological Research* 02 (2003): 65-74. doi:10.19934/j.cnki.shxyj.2003.02.009.

The core of the "no regrets" attitude is a high degree of recognition of personal growth brought about by suffering. The educated youth generally believe that the experience of going to the countryside "shaped their strong will and perseverance in the face of pressure" and is a valuable spiritual wealth in their later life development. In the harsh working environment, the educated youth not only experienced the hardship and value of labor but also gained an in-depth understanding of the actual situation of rural society by living and eating with the peasants. In a challenging environment, they learned how to cope with adversity and adjust their mentality to face difficulties in life. This experience gave them a deeper understanding of social diversity and inequality, cultivated their respect for working people, and the ability to reflect on the current state of society.

For example, Zhang Ren, a typical representative of educated youth, has the mantra "likes challenges" and realizes her value in life by taking on new challenges. After graduating from high school in 1962, she insisted on going to the countryside to participate in agricultural production, and she did so for eight years. She recalled:

Rural areas faced difficulties in the late 1950s and early 1960s. So, the government resolved to focus on agriculture and food production, with the entire party supporting agriculture. That was when the countryside needed us most, so I applied to go to the countryside while taking the college entrance exam. Should I go to university or work in the countryside? I thought I could go to university later, but there is only this opportunity to go to the countryside. (p24)

She improved the local infrastructure through hard work and promoted the development of agricultural production. Although her personal life and career development were affected, she is still proud of her contribution. Zhangren recalled:

> There is no question of regret about the decision. Moving from the bustling city to the countryside was not as painful or difficult as some people think nowadays. It was more reasonable at the time. Why? First, there was a general environment. At that time, the 17 years of education before the Cultural Revolution focused on cultivating young people's thoughts, morals, ideals, and beliefs. Although there were also limitations of that era, generally speaking, we all had a very positive attitude towards life, were full of love for life, and hoped to make a difference in the country. Second, the country needed people to go to the countryside then. After going, there was a sense of "having helped. (p23)

This positive interpretation of suffering is a process of "giving meaning" in memory.[107] Psychological and historical studies have shown that in the process of remembering, people actively associate painful experiences with later achievements, thus giving a positive meaning to past suffering. This kind of "meaning-giving" memory not only alleviates the regret of educated young people about wasting their youth but also enables them to form a unique identity in their later social lives—the image of "experiencers" and "strivers" —and gain psychological advantages and social recognition that are different from ordinary people.

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[107] Hunt, Nigel, and Sue McHale. "Memory and meaning: Individual and social aspects of memory narratives." *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 13, no. 1 (2007): 42-58.

2.1.2 Commitment to the ideal of collectivism

Another important source of the "no regrets" emotion is a commitment to and identification with the ideal of collectivism. In the political context of educated youth going to the countryside, beliefs such as "the cause of the revolution" and "the needs of the country"[108] ran throughout, and this ideology profoundly influenced the emotional identity and values of educated youth. As the representatives of educated youth also went to the frontier areas to work in agriculture. Qu Zhe said:

> I volunteered to go to the countryside in 1960, but my school did not agree. Now that I have finished junior high school, I really want to go. (P62)

In front of thousands of cheering people, Qu Zhe and the others swore an oath in front of the massive portrait of Mao Zedong in Tiananmen Square:

> For the great cause of Mao Zedong's Thought in the world, we are willing to go through the mountains of swords and the sea of fire! We have followed your excellent instruction of 'the combination of intellectuals with workers and peasants' and have taken the first step. We will follow this revolutionary path! Never turning back! (P58)

In the narratives of many educated young people, they incorporate their painful experiences into a grand national narrative, emphasizing that personal sacrifice is for the country's development and society's progress. Some educated young people even regard labor as an

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[108] Yang, Yifei. Suffering and Dedication: A Study on the Social Memory of Youth Support in Nongken. 2020. 2020. Ningxia University, MA thesis.

important part of the "revolutionary cause," believing personal sacrifice has historical significance and social value. For example, Qu Zhe recalled:

> The vast grasslands were sparsely populated along the way, and we waved excitedly to the occasional herdsmen on horseback. It was a great feeling. Even if you had all the energy in the world, you could not use it all up here. The conditions on the frontier were harsh, but we were determined to build and change it. (p85-86)

This narrative shows the high degree of convergence between personal and national narratives. It reflects the self-identification of educated youth with the "spirit of sacrifice" and their insistence on a sense of value.

At the same time, the ideal of collectivism provided a mechanism of psychological comfort for educated youth. Faced with a challenging living environment and a lonely state of mind, the support of the collective and the idea of "fighting for the greater good" gave them strength. This idealized belief became an important spiritual pillar for educated youth to overcome difficulties and persevere. Zhang Ren once mentioned:

> You ask me what I think about educated youth going to the countryside. I think this is correct, and I still think so now. Any young person with knowledge and ability must engage with the people and understand the situation in China. Otherwise, you may not be able to achieve your good intentions, let alone become a pillar of society. We talk about elites these days, and it is even more essential for elites to understand the situation in the country. (p27)

2.2 "Regret": lost youth and disillusionment with ideals

In stark contrast to "no regrets," the sentiment of "regret" is also prominent in the oral narratives of the intellectual youth. This sentiment is mainly reflected in the narration of personal losses and criticism of policy deficiencies, expressed as deep regret for the passage of youth, anger at disillusionment with ideals, and strong criticism of social injustice. "Regret" is not only an individual's profound reflection on their own experiences but also a rational re-recognition of historical limitations and policy consequences, highlighting the complex impact of the educated youth movement on personal lives and social structures.

2.2.1. Regret for the sacrifice of youth and life

In the oral history of educated youth, losing youth and sacrificing life is one of the main manifestations of the emotion of "regret." Many admit that going to the countryside disrupted their life trajectory. The prime years when they should have received an education, pursued their dreams, and developed their careers were wasted in monotonous and physically demanding manual labor. This interruption had a significant impact on their education and career development. Some educated youth believed that because they had been away from the city for such a long time, they had lost the opportunity to receive higher education and could not participate in the social progress of the times.[109] When they finally returned to the city, their age and lack of knowledge made adapting to the highly competitive job market difficult. Mr. Yang recalled:

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[109] Ai Juan. A study on the collective memory of Educated youth. 2010. Nankai University, PhD dissertation.

For me, I have no regrets or complaints. What is there to complain about (sarcastic tone)? We should not have stayed in the countryside for so long. We were deprived of the opportunity to study, which was our prime learning age.[110]

In addition, the misalignment of time also affected their marriage and family life.[111] Although the official media at the time actively encouraged educated youth to marry in the countryside, for many educated women, this did not mean a political asset to be flaunted, but rather the start of becoming a farmer. Zhang Ling went to the countryside in September 1968 as part of the movement to send educated youth to the countryside. In October of the following year, when she was just 20, she got engaged to a young man from the village. Zhang Ling had suffered a nervous breakdown before going to the countryside, and she did not want to return to Beijing. Zhang Ling recalled:

The night before the wedding, I ran alone into the fields outside the village and cried my heart out. Because this was a choice made without any way out, I had to stay in the countryside for the rest of my life. I couldn't imagine what life would be like from now on. A few days after the wedding, I discovered that my husband had a gambling habit. He denied it when I confronted him but continued with his habit. From then on, I went out to look for him whenever I found out he wasn't home late at night. Because he kept on doing it, I was so angry that I tried to kill myself. I took a bottle of sleeping pills but only managed to take four of them. I was so angry that I swallowed the remaining 96 pills. Slowly, my legs grew weak, and I could not move. Fortunately, I was rescued in

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[110] Yang Yifei. Suffering and Dedication: A Study on the Social Memory of Youth Support in Nongken [D]. Ningxia University, 2020.
[111] Zhu Yaru. Individual and Collective Memory of Reclamation Youth. 2017. Harbin Engineering University, MA thesis.

time and saved my life. After that, I did not want to die, not to mention having children.

(p140)

This description of a complete interruption of personal development profoundly reveals the long-term impact of the educated youth movement on an individual's life cycle.

From a sociological perspective, this expression of regret about one's youth is a personal response to institutional coercion. The original intention of the educated youth movement was to alleviate urban employment pressures while transforming the rural economy and society. However, implementing this policy deprived individuals of the right to choose their life direction, creating a profound conflict between personal destiny and national needs. Amid this conflict, the emotion of "regret" emerged as a genuine personal response to a sense of loss.

2.2.2. Conflict between ideals and reality

Another important source of the emotion of "regret" is the profound conflict between ideals and reality. This conflict was particularly pronounced in the early days of the educated youth movement. Many educated youths enthusiastically devoted themselves to the countryside with the noble ideals of re-educating the lower classes and forging a revolutionary will. However, the vast gap between the reality of rural life and the idealized picture portrayed in official propaganda soon put their beliefs to a severe test. This disconnect led some to describe the movement of going to the countryside as the "Eastern Crusade." Despite their fervent belief, they could not provide the necessary material support for this spiritually oriented movement.

The reality of material scarcity not only dampened the enthusiasm of the educated youth but also gradually eroded their iron will.[112]

Many educated youth remember harsh working conditions in the countryside: poor infrastructure, scarce supplies, and strenuous and repetitive work. This reality contrasted sharply with the official rhetoric of "ideological transformation" or "re-education."

> The sand was so dusty, and I had asthma, so with the dry air and the sand, I coughed all night and could not sleep.

> "I was so hungry that I took a basin and went from door to door in the village, asking for food. Eventually, I got some and was able to eat.[113]

Some educated youths even described this experience as "imprisonment in disguise,[114]" believing that it did not achieve the ideological goal of the policy.[115] In addition, the complexity of rural society further undermined their idealism. The corruption of grassroots cadres, the villagers' rejection of educated youths, and the backwardness of the rural economy all made them gradually realize that the "alliance between workers and peasants" envisioned in the propaganda was challenging to achieve in practice. This reversal of perception led many educated youths to question the original intention and effectiveness of the movement deeply, and their narratives revealed a strong sense of disappointment and indignation.

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[112] Ni Lexiong. "Zhiqing - "The Crusaders of the East"." *China's National Condition* 02 (2000): 21-24. doi:10.13561/j.cnki.zggqgl.2000.02.004

[113] Yang Yifei. Suffering and Dedication: A Study on the Social Memory of Youth Support in Nongken [D]. Ningxia University, 2020.

[114] Sun Jiawen. The Social Production of Suffering and Pain and Its Social Roots. 2010. East China Normal University, MA thesis.

[115] Liu, Xiaomeng. History of the educated youth in China: The Great Tide (1966-1980). China, China Social Sciences Press, 1998.

From a cultural perspective, the conflict between ideals and reality also profoundly reflects the cultural tension between "modern" and "traditional" among the educated youth group. Most educated youth were educated in urbanization and modernization, and they often tend towards individualism, progressive thinking, and valuing modernity. However, rural society's closed and traditional nature could not meet their personal development and future life expectations. This cultural conflict exacerbated the psychological alienation among educated youth and strengthened their critical thinking about the nature of the movement.

2.2.3. Criticism of social injustice

The sentiment of "remorse" is particularly prominent in the oral narratives of educated youths, especially in their criticism of social injustice. There were profound inequalities in the design and implementation of policies related to the educated youth movement, especially the differential treatment of educated youths based on family background. Urban youths from better-off families were often able to return to the city earlier through various channels. In contrast, youths from poorer or complicated family backgrounds were forced to stay in the countryside long, enduring harsher living conditions and work pressures. The unequal implementation of this policy exacerbated the disappointment and anger of educated young people. Many recall a distrust of the system and a deep sense of despair about their fate. Ms. Xu recalled:

> I do not hate the whole thing, but I do hate some people at the time, such as the cadres
> who suppressed me so much.[116]

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[116] Yang Yifei. Suffering and Dedication: A Study on the Social Memory of Youth Support in Nongken [D]. Ningxia University, 2020.

The idealistic propaganda at the beginning of the movement obscured the utilitarian nature of the policy.[117] The original intention of sending educated youth to the countryside was not to reform their thinking or promote the development of rural society, as the propaganda claimed. Instead, the state took an urgent measure to alleviate the pressure of urban employment. As this understanding gradually became clear, many educated youths felt they had been used as tools and even regarded this experience as "youth exile." This change in perception marked the complete disillusionment of their naive political ideals. It triggered strong emotions, causing them to reflect on their ideals and how history and the social system had betrayed their youth.

2.2 The intertwining of "no regrets" and "regrets."

Although "no regrets" and "regrets" seem to be opposites in emotional expression, in the oral narratives of many educated youth, these two emotional attitudes are often intertwined, creating a complex and contradictory emotional state. This intertwining of emotions reveals the inner conflict of educated youth when they look back on history and reflects the interactive relationship between personal narratives and grand historical evaluations. From a particular perspective, educated youth often emphasize their perseverance and dedication in their narratives, believing their suffering has tempered their willpower and character. However, they do not avoid discussing the profound loss of youth and ideals brought about by going to the countryside. This narrative affirms their struggle, criticizes historical reality, and shows the complex mentality of educated youth in the face of the past. In addition, this emotional intertwining also contains a profound dialogue between the individual and the times. Many educated youths reflect by placing their personal experiences in the context of grand historical events. They admit that going to the countryside was an inevitable choice made during a

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[117] Zhu Yaru. Individual and Collective Memory of Reclamation Youth. 2017. Harbin Engineering University, MA thesis.

particular historical period, and they are also aware that this historical movement represented the common fate of an entire generation.

3. Identity construction: from personal experience to historical narrative

In the oral history of educated youth, individual experiences are not just a retelling of personal memories but also an important part of collective memory and historical narrative. These oral histories show how educated youth used their personal experiences to reconstruct their own identities and, in the process, formed a multi-layered history and society.
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3.1 Self-positioning of historical participants

The identity construction of educated youth often transformed from "victim of suffering" to "witness of struggle" or "symbolic bearer of dedication.[118]" This reconstruction process not only helped them affirm their self-worth on a psychological level but also allowed them to gain a unique identity as "participants of the times" on a social level. In contemporary society, this positive identity has allowed the historical memories of educated youth to enter public discourse in a more convincing form, becoming historical witnesses and symbols of social significance.

When many educated youth look back on their experiences of going to the countryside, they often view it from a victim's perspective. When the movement to go to the countryside was implemented in history, many people had no rights, and they were forced to leave the city and

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[118] Shen Jie. Memory of Youth. 2016. Nanjing University, PhD dissertation.

go to the harsh countryside, thus suffering tremendous psychological and physical pressure. Many educated youth have mentioned in history that they were impacted by society, family, and even identity in their environment.

However, with the passage of time and the settling of history, educated youth have gradually shaken off the shackles of their "victim" status and, by reappropriating history, have fashioned a role as "participants in history.[119]" In oral histories and memoir recordings, many educated youth have begun highlighting their experiences of working and living in the countryside and their challenges. By telling their stories, they have striven to transform themselves from "passive executors" into "active witnesses to history" and "builders of social change." This process of identity reconstruction not only gave the educated youth group recognition of personal significance but also helped them win understanding and respect in the broader social sphere. This shift in self-positioning has become an important focus of examining the educated youth identity in historical narratives. It has secured a more positive positioning for this group in social and historical discourse.

3.2 Historical significance and social value of identity

The identity construction of educated youth involves rethinking individual destiny and reassessing collective values under specific historical conditions. During the movement to the countryside, educated youth were regarded as an important force in national construction, and their role was emphasized as promoting urban-rural integration. However, with the change in

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[119] He Yanhong. "The Identity of "Educated Youth Writers"-A Study of the Historical Origins of Intellectual Identity after the Cultural Revolution." *Journal of Nanjing Normal University (Social Science Edition)* 05 (2001): 119-125.

historical context, the identity of educated youth gradually shifted from the single role of "builder" to a more complex positioning as historical participants and cultural symbols.

This reconstruction responds to the educated youth group's questioning of their historical significance and reflects their deep understanding of social and epochal changes. In retrospect, the educated youth gradually recognized their historical mission and social value. Despite the hardships of rural life, this generation of people made a unique contribution to the historical process of China's modernization through their hard work and sacrifice. Their narratives emphasize their loyalty to the country, their pursuit of social ideals, and their identification with collectivist values. This reshaping of collective identity has profound historical significance and is also reflected in their symbolic embodiment of social change, the spirit of labor, and the concept of collectivism.

Chapter 4 9/11 Oral History: Alternating between Narrative and Silence

In the study of 9/11, oral history, narratives, and silences are not a simple dichotomy but a complex and dynamic interactive process involving the intertwining of individual traumatic experiences, social context, cultural background, and historical memory. This dynamic and interactive narrative and silence not only reflects the individual's internal response to traumatic events but also profoundly reflects the multiple influences of the external environment in the process of memory construction. As an externalized form of memory, the narrative serves the individual's emotional release and identity reconstruction. It shapes the public understanding and collective memory of catastrophic events at a broader social level. Silence, on the other hand, can be understood as a complex choice, sometimes due to the depth and unspeakability of the trauma and sometimes due to the pressure of external social, cultural, and political environments. Therefore, this chapter will use *After the Fall: New Yorkers Remember September 2001 and the Years That Followed* as an analytical tool.

1. Narrative: sharing and constructing memory

As an externalized form of memory, narrative is the process by which individuals transform traumatic experiences into expressions that can be shared with others through language, storytelling, and narrative. For survivors, witnesses, and rescue workers of the September 11 attacks, the narrative is not only a tool for remembering but also a way of understanding oneself and connecting with society. Through narrative, individuals can closely integrate their experiences of the disaster with the construction of their identity, and social and historical memories can be shared and preserved.

1.1 The content of narratives: the presentation of multidimensional memories

The narratives of the September 11 attacks reveal the situational, emotional, and physical responses experienced by individuals during the disaster and demonstrate the multidimensional and hierarchical nature of memory. Each narrative is based on an individual's perspective, reflecting the multiple facets of the disaster. These narratives not only form the core content of disaster memory but also provide oral historians with important data for studying trauma and memory formation.

1.1.1 Details of witnessed events: the core component of sensory memory

The vivid descriptions of sensory stimuli such as sight, sound, and touch in the survivors' narratives form the core of disaster memories. These sensory memories carry the real moments of the 9/11 incident and become an important cornerstone of collective memory, including the immediate physiological reactions experienced by witnesses. These reactions include intense fear, shock, disorientation, and even instinctive escape. The moment of the disaster, the drastic changes in the environment, the sudden sounds, and the crowd's panic all created a powerful sensory impact. Almost every reaction of the witnesses occurred within a few seconds, and this dual physical and psychological impact created a unique emotional experience at the moment of the disaster.

From a visual perspective, survivors often recall the huge fireball produced when the plane hit the building, the dust from the building collapsing, and the thick smoke that filled the sky. These images are powerful and impactful in their memories. From an auditory perspective, the deafening sound of the explosion, the shrill and piercing sound of the alarm, and the

screams and cries of the crowd made the horror of the disaster more vivid. It intensified the emotional tension of the memory. Roberta Galler, a psychotherapist, recalled:

> When it was initially hit, I was in bed. It was in the morning. I heard the planes roar overhead. It was shallow and sounded like the loudest sonic boom I have ever heard. And the building rocked on its foundation. I had the television on so I could see what initially happened. Like everyone, I thought the first hit was an accident. But I could see the flames pouring out of the top of the World Trade Center from my bedroom window. (p92)

From a tactile perspective, some survivors described the feeling of scorching air burning their skin or dust, causing breathing difficulties. These details vividly show the disaster's dual impact on the individual body and mind. Jay Swithers recalled:

> I cupped my hands, put them over my face, and tried to take in breaths of air. Breathing was as difficult as putting your head into the sand. Every time you went to take a breath, you felt the dirt coming into your mouth, into your nostrils, and down into your airway. You wanted to cough but could not get air to cough. (p172)

These details provide a more three-dimensional and emotionally rich sensory and emotional context for the catastrophic event. Through these subtle descriptions, we can better understand the impact of the disaster, not just the physical destruction but also the psychological breakdown and reconstruction of people. These sensory memories allow us to see the individual experiences of the disaster, not just the grand narrative of the event itself.

They allow for an understanding of disasters beyond a mere description of time and space and delve into the core experience of each affected individual. They reveal how people cope with fear, pain, loss of control, and their survival instincts in extreme situations.

1.1.2 Escape Experience: Psychological Resilience and Interpersonal Collaboration in life-and-death Decisions

Escape narratives are often full of decision-making under stressful situations, improvisation, and the dynamic elements of interpersonal interactions, showing the coping patterns of survivors under extreme pressure. These experiences not only tested the physical abilities of individuals but also challenged the limits of psychological strength and emotional regulation. In disaster situations, panic and despair are often accompanied by violent physical reactions, forcing survivors to make quick decisions in a rapidly changing environment to maximize self-protection and survival.

In extreme environments, survivors' narratives often focus on how to remain calm in the face of panic, quickly assess risks, and develop effective escape strategies. In moments when life is directly threatened, fear and chaos can lead to severe limitations in decision-making ability. Survival instincts and psychological resilience are vividly reflected in these narratives. As an evolutionary mechanism, survival instinct enables individuals to quickly make spontaneous and unconscious responses in emergencies, thereby increasing the chances of survival. Meanwhile, psychological resilience reflects an individual's ability to restore emotional balance and actively solve problems in the face of significant stress. Debbie Almontaser recalled:

I do not know where and how I got the courage to keep calm and cool and to keep going with my day. Eventually, half of my class was gone, and the kids were like, "Debbie, why is half of the class gone, and why do we keep hearing the PA system calling people to leave? And we are hearing sirens outside. Did something happen?" At that point, I could not keep it from them. I asked all of them to go to the carpet. We formed a circle, and I explained to them what had happened, how I had found out, and the importance of not panicking. Remaining in our classroom was the safest thing to do, and just to understand that something has happened, but we have to stick together as a class, as a school, and as a community to overcome this. (p139)

Interpersonal collaboration and intuitive response were two other outstanding features. Interpersonal collaboration often becomes the key to life and death in disaster. They work together to overcome the crisis through teamwork, mutual support, and encouragement. This spirit of collaboration alleviated the psychological pressure on individuals and enhanced the group's ability to cope in dangerous environments. Jay Swithers recalled:

One thing I was thrilled to see was that the woman I had been treating for asthma came wandering out of a store or crevice, wherever she was. She's still hysterical. At that point, the ambulance was full. An EMT is yelling, "We're full. Too many."And I said, "This lady is getting on." I could not lift the lady. I was weakened already, and she was very, very heavy. I told this woman, "You will have to help me. I cannot get you up on your own." She just climbed in on one knee and brought up the other knee. Her feet hung out, and everybody inside yelled, "No more. We cannot fit. We cannot fit anymore." And I said, 'Well, this one's getting on.' And I pushed the door,

and then I pushed her leg, and she just sort of flopped onto the floor of the ambulance. I just closed that door, ran to the front, and said," Get out of here. Go. Get out of here. (p175)

These accounts reveal the brilliance that shines through people in times of crisis   and reflect individuals' vitality and sense of self-preservation in desperate situations. Although crisis environments are often full of uncertainty, the stories of survivors are full of a strong desire for life and a tenacious struggle to survive. Whether through rational decision-making, calm analysis, or relying on intuition and the help of others, survivors have shown extraordinary vitality. These split-second decisions may become unforgettable memories for the rest of their lives. However, more importantly, they show us the infinite potential of human beings and their unyielding desire to survive under extreme pressure.

1.1.3 The grief of losing loved ones: a deep reflection of emotional memory

The narratives of the victims' families, with their deep emotional depth and reminiscences of their loved ones' lives, have become an integral part of the memory of the September 11 incident. These narratives not only express deep condolences for the loss of loved ones through detailed reviews and remembrances of their loved ones' lives but also explore in depth the profound impact of trauma on family structure and daily life. The emotional experience of these memories often involves a complex mix of feelings such as loss, anger, regret, helplessness, and loneliness, reflecting the psychological and social reconstruction process experienced by individuals and families after significant trauma. Through careful narration, family members not only reconstruct the image of their loved ones and their contributions. At

the same time, they are alive but also express the process of finding meaning and comfort in their grief and loss. Mary Lee Hannell recalled:

I know that for me one person was lost in the Trade Center. Her name was Debbie Kaplan. She worked for my husband for several years—very Orthodox Jew. There was no memorial service because her parents, who felt very strongly about this, felt that they were not able to carry out a memorial service until something of hers was found. And so I remember my husband—this was probably four or five days before Christmas—asked me what I wanted for Christmas. I said what I wanted was for them to find her. And they did. (p27)

These narratives reveal the deep emotional experience of traumatic memories. Trauma is not only an individual emotional event. It often triggers collective emotional responses and forms a shared memory that transcends the individual and the collective. The emotions displayed by the victims' families in their narratives transcend mere private suffering. Through externalization and sharing, they gradually transform into expressions of collective emotion, generating widespread social resonance. The families' mourning and reminiscing are not only emotional catharsis in private spaces; they have received social recognition and response on a public level, becoming an important force for collective emotional resonance and social mobilization. This process of externalizing emotions has prompted society to form a collective consciousness of post-disaster recovery and commemoration. It has promoted a shared understanding among members of society of the impact of the disaster.

1.2 The significance of narrative: psychological healing and social connection

The narrative plays a dual role in processing traumatic memories: it is an important way for individuals to repair themselves and a key mechanism for social connection psychologically.[120] Through narrative, individuals can organize and integrate scattered traumatic experiences, thereby achieving psychological recovery and adjustment. At the same time, the narrative also helps to build a sense of community at the social level. From a psychological perspective, narrative is a core mechanism for trauma healing. Traumatic experiences often lead to deep emotional conflicts and psychological trauma. Individuals must integrate these fragmented memory fragments through narrative to create a coherent framework. By telling how they survived the chaos, 9/11 survivors not only reconstructed their own identities but also helped to connect with other individuals who had also experienced trauma emotionally. Although it may be full of pain and discomfort, this process can help individuals achieve emotional recovery and psychological adaptation in the long run.

Narratives not only play an important role at the individual level but also contribute to the construction of a community at the social level. The narratives of the September 11 incident reflect the process of collective memory formation. Through emotional resonance, these narratives help society collectively face the consequences of the disaster. Through narrative, individuals make their traumatic experiences public and thus participate in a broader social narrative. The stories of survivors, family members, and rescue workers became important vehicles for collective social emotions, promoting a shared understanding of the event. At the same time, the public nature of the narratives is also a manifestation of social empathy. It helps members of society empathize with the painful experiences of others, thereby promoting social solidarity and mutual assistance.

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[120] Wigren, Jodie. "Narrative completion in the treatment of trauma." *Psychotherapy: Theory, research, practice, training* 31, no. 3 (1994): 415.

However, the relationship between narrative and social connection is not simply an interaction. In some cases, narratives may be affected by social prejudice or cultural suppression. In particular, the expression of memories of certain groups in catastrophic events may be marginalized or ignored. For example, after the September 11 attacks, the narratives of Muslim and Arab communities were often ignored or even restricted by political prejudice. In this situation, the narratives failed to achieve their social function and may also exacerbate social division. Therefore, the social significance of narrative lies not only in its emotional transmission function but also in whether it can be effectively accepted and understood in society.

2. Silence: the concealment and protection of memory

Silence, as another form of expression of traumatic memories, reveals its deep psychological and social functions. Unlike conventional forgetting or unconscious avoidance, silence is often a complex psychological coping mechanism with a profound protective and shielding effect. During the process of traumatic experience, silence not only reflects the individual's repression of painful memories but can also be the result of sociocultural pressure. Silence often reveals the depth of trauma, especially when the individual is unable or unwilling to express the trauma. It sometimes reflects the unresolved state of the trauma or the hidden, unhealed emotions.

2.1 Trauma-induced silence: an individual psychological coping mechanism

Psychological processes such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),[121] emotional repression, and psychological defense mechanisms often prompt individuals to choose silence in order to avoid facing painful memories again. "Silence about historical trauma is a common phenomenon among survivors.[122]" As a form of self-protection, silence helps individuals temporarily escape the emotional impact of a disaster or traumatic experience. This avoidance is a form of psychological shielding that helps individuals suppress excessive emotional reactions in the short term, thereby achieving emotional stability. "The internal need to remain silent may be the only remaining connection between the patient and the deceased, or it may be determined by the patient's desire to regain this connection. The emotional conflict in the traumatic experience is too intense for the individual to process and express these emotions directly, so they choose to suppress the traumatic memories in the subconscious.[123]" This short-term silence may seem to provide relief to the individual. However, if this emotional avoidance is not appropriately released or resolved, it may lead to psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, and emotional numbness in the long term.[124] The individual's emotional suppression often prevents the traumatic experience from being transformed into an acceptable and digestible experience, ultimately causing emotional stagnation and deepening the trauma of the mind.

Many 9/11 survivors chose to avoid publicly expressing their traumatic experiences in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, which is a typical manifestation of silence. Some survivors

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[121] Yehuda, Rachel. "Post-traumatic stress disorder." *New England journal of medicine* 346, no. 2 (2002): 108-114.

[122] Liem, Ramsay. "Silencing historical trauma: The politics and psychology of memory and voice." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 13, no. 2 (2007): 153.

[123] Ritter, Maria. "Silence as the Voice of Trauma." *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 74, no. 2 (2014): 176-194.

[124] Liem, Ramsay. "Silencing historical trauma: The politics and psychology of memory and voice." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 13, no. 2 (2007): 153.

refused to participate in media interviews or academic research to avoid reopening painful memories. This type of silence is not purely a form of forgetting but rather an active trauma-shielding mechanism, a silent resistance adopted by individuals for self-protection. The choice to refuse to narrate reflects the profound nature of the traumatic experience. When individuals are unable to process or are not prepared to face the trauma, silence becomes a powerful coping strategy.

2.2 Sociocultural silence: the concealment of group experiences

The socio-cultural environment plays a crucial role in the formation of silence, as demonstrated by the concealment of collective experiences, especially after the September 11 attacks. Silence is an individual psychological defense mechanism and a response to the socio-cultural and political climate. In post-9/11 societies, due to the emotional weight of trauma, changes in the political climate, and different social responses to the disaster, many groups have chosen to remain silent and avoid publicly exposing their traumatic experiences. This silence results from individuals internalizing their pain and is closely related to mistrust, fear, and exclusion factors in the social and cultural environment. Silence has, in some cases, become a self-protection strategy, giving victim groups a psychological refuge in the face of possible social marginalization or stigmatization.

2.2.1 The impact of prejudice and exclusion

The silence of Muslim communities and certain immigrant groups is particularly prominent in the sociocultural environment after the 9/11 incident. These groups often avoid discussing or disclosing their traumatic experiences in public, especially in the face of rising anti-terrorism

sentiments and social prejudice. Globally, and especially in Western countries, Muslim communities have been stigmatized as terrorists in the aftermath of 9/11 and have experienced widespread discrimination and exclusion. Due to the negative social labeling of Muslim identity, these groups often choose to remain silent in order to avoid further exacerbating social hostility and exclusion. In this situation, disclosing one's suffering or traumatic experiences may be seen as a sign of weakness or a source of hostility. Therefore, silence becomes a self-protection strategy for some groups in post-disaster situations. Taxi Driver Mohammad Bilal-Mirza recalled:

Some people are mad. If anybody killed my family, I would be mad too. I was quiet if a few people talked to me (angrily). I didn't say anything. (p126)

Like, two people jumped me on September 19. I was walking on the street, and two guys came up, and they asked me, "Where are you from?" I say, "I'm from America." He said, "No, tell me where you are from!" He used bad words and asked me, "Which country are you from? Where were you born?" I said, "I'm from Pakistan." He told me, "You are a terrorist. (p126)

A million times. I pick up thirty people daily, and fifteen ask me, "Where are you from?" I said, "From Pakistan." [One old man] yelled terrible words. He said, "You are a terrorist. You fucking Muslim. You this and that. You go back." Why did he say that? (p128)

2.2.2 Political silence as an option

In the post-9/11 context, it shows how some groups respond to social exclusion and political pressure in an extreme political environment by remaining silent. Silence is an emotional coping mechanism and a strategic political act for these groups. Facing negative social labels, political persecution, and unequal power structures, these groups often decide to suppress or conceal their traumatic experiences in order to avoid becoming the target of political attacks. In some cases, silence becomes a necessary choice for survival and safety, especially in the context of counter-terrorism policies. Groups related to ethnicity, religion, or immigration status feel widespread surveillance and exclusion from the government or society. This political silence is not only a passive defensive reaction but also may represent a profound distrust and challenge to the existing power structure.

Under the influence of counter-terrorism policies, Muslim communities, certain immigrant groups, and other minorities often become the focus of political discussions, facing high levels of attention and prejudice from the media, the government, and even the general public. Members of these groups are well aware that publicly expressing traumatic experiences and discussing the discrimination or violence they have suffered may exacerbate their marginalization and even make them targets of political attacks. Silence has, therefore, become a political strategy to protect individuals from social exclusion and legal risks. This is particularly the case when members of these groups are aware that their identity is linked to current political discourses on terrorism or national security. Publicly expressing trauma is often misinterpreted or exploited as a challenge to their political stance or loyalty. Silence, therefore, becomes an effective means for them to avoid further risks.

However, this political silence also means that individuals and groups sometimes cannot

express themselves or seek social support. Silence may cause the voices of these groups to be ignored, and even their trauma and plight to fail to receive adequate social attention and solutions. This political silence and emotional trauma form a complex interaction. While individuals may experience emotional suppression and internal conflict when they remain silent, they often suppress the urge to express themselves publicly to avoid political persecution or further social exclusion. Political silence is a forced defense mechanism and a survival strategy in a specific political and social environment.

From a broader perspective, political silence reflects social discourse's power structure and inequality. Dominant groups in society often dominate discourse and identity, while those on the margins are excluded from direct participation in political discussions or cultural construction. At this point, silence is no longer simply a personal choice but a reflection of the lack of representation of these groups in social discourse. Silence becomes a negative response to discourse power and distrust and a challenge to the power structure. Political silence is not only a response to social injustice but also a manifestation of the marginalization of these groups under the existing social structure and their powerlessness to speak.

2.3 The tension between narrative and silence

The relationship between narrative and silence is not a simple opposition but a dynamic and alternating tension. Individuals and groups often experience a complex switch between narrative and silence in a specific social context, historical situation, and cultural environment. This tension reveals the complexity of expressing traumatic memories and reflects the shaping of individual emotions and memories by social, cultural, and historical environments.

Narrative and silence are not opposites but complement and interact with each other. Silence does not mean complete forgetting. Unspoken traumatic memories still exist in the individual's subconscious and continue to influence the individual's emotions and behavior. Silence is, to a certain extent, a temporary suppression of trauma, waiting for an appropriate time and conditions for the individual to be able to complete the narrative of the memory. Narrative and silence participate in the construction of traumatic memories together. Silence helps the individual deal with emotions in the initial stage after trauma, while narrative provides the possibility for the integration and healing of traumatic memories. However, the narrative also has its limitations. Inadequacy of language, cultural suppression, and social neglect often prevent traumatic memories from being fully presented or present a one-sided perspective. The complementarity of the two lies in the fact that they shape the complexity and layering of the traumatic experience.

The tension between narrative and silence does not simply stem from the inner conflict of the individual; it is also profoundly shaped by the social context to a large extent. The social and cultural context, the political climate, and the characteristics of historical events directly influence how individuals express their memories after a disaster. Public commemorations, media reports, and political positions following the September 11 attacks had a significant impact on the narratives of survivors and victims' families. The discourse of mainstream society often dominates the formation of collective memory, while some marginal groups may face more substantial pressures to remain silent. In this case, silence may become the only coping strategy for victim groups in the face of social hostility or political oppression. Silence is no longer simply a personal defense but a social behavior at the collective level, reflecting the impact of the social environment on individual expression of trauma.

Chapter 5 A comparison of the oral history of educated youth and the oral history of 9/11

1. Memory and narrative: the dual role of identity construction

"Memory is a guarantee of identity and maintains identity over time.[125]" As a vehicle for individual and group experiences, memory helps individuals recall and construct their identities and profoundly demonstrates how society shapes individual and group identities through historical discourse. In the narratives of 9/11 survivors, memory, as an important part of collective memory, transcends the boundaries of private experience and is transformed into society's collective understanding of the disaster through emotional resonance and public expression. In this process, the individual memories of survivors interact with the collective memories of the country, shaping together the collective identity of American society after the disaster. The reconstruction of life and death moments and survival experiences through individual narratives further strengthened the formation of the identity of "survivor." This identity not only involves the survival experience of the individual but also reflects the recognition and importance of post-disaster society to the role of "survivor."

Of particular note is the fact that narratives of "losing parents," "losing children," or "losing siblings" occupy an important place in the memory of the September 11 incident. A symbolic connection is formed between family and national trauma by placing family relationships and blood ties at the center of the narrative. This narrative strategy attempts to establish a balance between the nation-state, the nuclear family, and the symbolic significance of blood ties. This narrative not only highlights the rupture of family emotional bonds but also embeds individual

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[125] Eyal, Gil. "Identity and trauma: two forms of the will to memory." *History & Memory* 16, no. 1 (2004): 5-36.

private memories in the national trauma narrative, evoking broader nationalist sentiments through the pain of bereavement. In this context, the loss of family is symbolically transformed into the trauma of the nation, forming an emotional symbiosis between family and country. This narrative model enhances the emotional power of collective memory and highlights the complex interaction between individual and group identity construction processes.

Unlike the memory narratives of 9/11 survivors, which emphasize the experience of survival and its nationalist significance, the memories and narratives of the educated youth group reveal a very different process of identity construction. During the Cultural Revolution, many Chinese urban youth were forced to go to the countryside, where they experienced extreme political turmoil, economic hardship, and social exclusion. This experience profoundly affected the lives and mental states of individual educated youth and was given very different social meanings at different historical periods.

During the early years of the Cultural Revolution and the subsequent early years of the Reform and Opening Up, society often marginalized or denied the memories of educated youth. As a "collateral result" of the policy of sending educated youth to the countryside, their experiences were once simplified as the by-product of a "political failure" or "social experiment" and rarely recognized by mainstream historical discourse. During this period, the identity of educated youth was mainly constructed as that of "political victims," and their memories were often presented as personal tragedies rather than an integral part of national history. This identity construction reflected the complex attitude of society at the time towards the history of the Cultural Revolution, as well as the selective suppression and forgetting of memories of political trauma.

However, as the historical reflection on the Cultural Revolution gradually deepened, the memories of the educated youth group were gradually accepted and entered the mainstream historical narrative. This transformation not only marked society's re-examination of the history of the Cultural Revolution but also revealed the dynamic nature and reproduction mechanism of collective memory. In this process, educated youth have re-examined and constructed their identities through personal narratives. They have constructed a unique group identity by recalling rural labor, adapting to poverty, and mutual support among peers. These narratives show the individual's efforts to find meaning in difficult situations and reflect a specific spiritual growth through a brief encounter with rural culture.

The transformation of the educated youth's identity from a marginalized "political victim" to a recognized "witness" of national history reveals the complex interaction between social and personal memory. Through intertwining personal narratives and collective memories, the educated youth's identity gradually moved from denial to affirmation and was given a richer historical significance. This identity transformation reflects the political and social nature of memory while also highlighting the central role of memory in shaping individual and collective identity.

2. The social function of narrative and identity formation

Narratives are an individual's way of expressing their memories and an important tool for groups to shape their self-identity in a social and cultural context. For the survivors and families of the 9/11 incident, the narrative not only helped individuals express trauma and restore emotional connections but also formed a collective social memory of the disaster through public commemorative activities and media communication. Survivors' narratives

were repeatedly told in memorials, literary works, and news reports and gradually integrated into the core narrative framework of "how the United States is united, resilient, and heroic in times of crisis." Through these narratives, society redefined concepts such as "terrorism," "American spirit," and "globalized terror." Narratives became the medium through which individual memories were transformed into collective memories, shaping a new social identity and providing a cultural basis for post-disaster American society to redefine its role in global politics.

In contrast, society did not widely recognize the narratives of educated youth in the early days. Due to political struggles and the singularity of historical narratives, the memories of educated youth were marginalized in the political discourse system at the time. However, with time, these memories have gradually evolved from isolated individual narratives to become part of social history. The identity of educated youth has also undergone a profound transformation from "victims of the Cultural Revolution" to "witnesses of history."

This transformation concerns how individuals express their experiences through memory and reveals how narrative promotes the intertwining and reconstruction of individual and collective memory as part of social dialogue. The social function of memory and narrative plays a dual role: it helps individuals integrate their self-identity and influences the construction of collective identity and social values through discourse reproduction. Whether it is the narratives of survivors of the September 11 attacks or the expression of the memories of educated youth, these narratives demonstrate the important role of memory as a driving force in shaping social identity and its key position in historical and cultural processes.

Conclusion

The study of memory and narrative shifts in Chinese and American oral history has revealed in-depth insights into the multi-layered complexity of individual and group identity construction and has demonstrated the multiple functions and meanings of memory and narrative in historical and social contexts. Memory is not just a passive record or a simple reflection of historical events but is actively constructed by individuals and groups within a specific sociocultural context. An analysis of the oral histories of 9/11 survivors and their families and the "educated youth" group reveals that memory and narrative are deeply embedded in the sociocultural and political framework, reflecting how historical memory is constantly being reshaped, reproduced, and given new meaning through narrative.

At the individual level, memory and narrative provide an important tool for individuals to understand and digest trauma, allowing them to give meaning to pain and hardship and reintegrate their sense of identity as they look back on their experiences. Survivors of the September 11th attacks have constructed their identity as "survivors" through the narrative of life and death moments, which not only helped them achieve psychological and emotional self-healing after the trauma but also made them the core witnesses of the public memory of the disaster. On the other hand, the "educated youth" group gradually transformed from political victims of the Cultural Revolution to historical witnesses through reflection and narrative after experiencing a historical period of marginalization and formed a profound reflection on personal experience and social change.

At the group level, memory and narrative connect individual experience with collective

memory, shaping the framework of group identity and social cognition. Through the narrative of the 9/11 incident, American society has formed a national narrative with strong emotional resonance around the identity of "survivors." This narrative not only deepens the understanding of "terrorism" and "the American spirit" but also strengthens the collective identity of American society after the disaster. Similarly, the narrative of the educated youth group has undergone a transformation from the margins to the center of the discourse of social history. It has become an important part of China's post-Cultural Revolution era's reflection and re-recognition of the history of the Cultural Revolution. This shift and recreation of collective memory profoundly reflects how a particular sociocultural and political environment interprets historical events and a group's identity recognition mode.

Moreover, reconstructing these memories and narratives is not simply an individual act but is embedded in the complex interaction of power, culture, and ideology. The selective recreation of memories is often profoundly influenced by the time's social environment and power structure. The memory and narrative of the 9/11 incident emphasize national security and the threat of global terrorism and strengthen the unity and cohesion of the country by creating heroic images of survivors. The memories of the educated youth group were suppressed by the official narrative in the early days. Still, with the opening up of society and the deepening of historical research, their narrative has gradually become accepted by society. It has become a medium for reflecting on collective trauma and changes. This dynamic change in memory and narrative affects the shaping of group identity and reveals how historical construction is realized through social and cultural practices.

Therefore, memory and narrative express individual emotions, experiences, and important practices in constructing history and forming identity. These practices reflect the profound impact of historical events on individuals and groups and demonstrate how contemporary society's selective reconstruction of history shapes the framework of social cognition and group identity. The study of memory and narrative provides an important theoretical basis for understanding the complex process of identity construction of individuals and groups. However, it also has important academic and practical significance for in-depth exploration of the interwoven relationship between history, power, and culture.

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