

Bury Me With My Comrades: Memorializing Mao's Sent-Down Youth

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Abstract

Over the last decade or so, China has seen an unprecedented building boom of museums and memorials. One curious new genre is the museums for Mao-era "Cultural Revolution" youth "sent down" to the countryside by Mao during the 1960s and 1970s. After Mao's death, they struggled to return to the cities. Surviving returnees have recently established several museums commemorating their suffering and sacrifice, even though the topic is politically fraught and the period's history is strictly censored in official museums and histories. One museum, the Shanghai Educated Youth Museum, doubles as a memorial site and a collective cemetery for former sent-down youth who wish to be buried together. This paper locates these memorials and burial grounds in their historical and political context. It also reflects the Shanghai institutions' copying of the design and architecture of the Korea and Vietnam war memorials in Washington D.C.

Keywords

China, sent-down youth, museums, memorials, cemeteries

Introduction

I first discovered the Shanghai Sent-Down [or Educated] Youth Museum [*Shanghai zhiqing bowuguan*] on a map of the far suburbs in Fengxian district, on Hangzhou Bay, about an hour by car south of the city. This new form of institution, which combines museum, memorial, and cemetery — is run as a business, complete with a crematory service. This combinatory

arrangement may seem strange, but mixing categories that elsewhere might be kept separate isn't uncommon in today's China — compare the new Shanghai "Safari Zoo" which consists of a safari zoo, where you travel by car or bus; an old-style zoo with caged animals; plus, a circus(!) complete with trained animals that perform a classical circus show, several times a day.

The sent-down youth museum is located next to funerary offices and a cremation facility, through which the newly dead are processed on their way to burial lots in the huge cemetery, which in turn also functions as a memorial landscape, dotted with statues and other displays.

The train engine in Fig. 1, located at a memorial plaza in the middle of the cemetery, is a real locomotive named Youth, No. 1748 of the Shanghai home depot, which was used in transporting Mao's sent-down youth out to remote provinces. This engine is both an authentic museum artifact, a decorative adornment of the cemetery that surrounds it, and a memorial, here seen with a group of nostalgic former sent-down youth, now middle-aged, gathering around the iconic train during an outing.

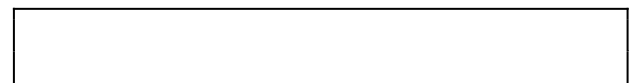




Fig. 1. Authentic 1960s locomotive, named Youth. Photo: Private source, n.d.

Historical Background: Sent-Down Youth

What is usually called Mao's "sent-down" youth in English (or, sometimes, "lost" youth), is officially called *zhiqing* 知青 (short for *zhishi qingnian* 知识青年) in Chinese, in literal translation "educated youth." These were mainly big-city youth, from Shanghai, Beijing and other major cities, urged and pressured by Mao himself to go to the countryside to help in its revolutionary transformation and to be transformed themselves through contact with "the masses." Sometimes the term is awkwardly translated as the "rustication" of sent-down youth.

To go to the countryside is traditionally known in Chinese as going "down" — based on the longstanding, common understanding of city superiority and rural inferiority, not just in terms of convenience, lifestyle, and access to education, but above all in terms of a hierarchy of prestige. One goes "up" to the city. The original Mao-era formulation tried to work around these notions with the slogan "*Zhishi qingnian shangshan xiaxiang* 知识青年上山下

乡," or, "Educated youth go up the mountains, and down to the countryside" (see e.g. Bernstein 1977). Here "mountains" carries an ambivalent meaning, including the potentially desirable (in the past, lauded for prestigious temples, as the abode of immortals, and so on). In Mao's formulation, the mountains also suggest challenges to be overcome.

Those who were there often speak of the experience as simply being "sent down" (in Chinese, *xia fang*, with connotations to older, involuntary, practices such as sending dissidents into exile in remote places). Publicly, however, they often switch to the official term *xia xiang* ("going down to the countryside") which suggests they went voluntarily. In the following, I will use the official translation "educated youth" in the official names of museums, etc., but otherwise I will call them "sent-down youth," since I think that is what they were. The authorities mounted large logistical operations to ship them out, including special trains and coordination with local authorities.

The sent-down youth were under enormous pressure to go: At the Shanghai museum, one photo shows a *People's Daily* editorial using a headline purportedly citing a youth's words: "We also have two hands. We won't stay in the city, and eat for free!" [我们也有两只手, 不在城里吃闲饭], — a kind of insidious, coercive language that would have been very difficult to argue with publicly, especially as it blames city unemployment on the unemployed youth (a.k.a. students! — "Eating for free" implies being unemployed because lazy).

The precise total number of "sent down" youth is unclear. Most estimates suggest between 17 and 20 million. The campaign started as early as 1955, only a few years after the founding of the Communist People's Republic in 1949, but peaked during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-68 before finally ending in 1980. The concept of sending youth to the countryside

originated with Mao Zedong (1893-1976), during most of this period the unquestioned Communist Party and state leader. In 1946, before seizing power, Mao is said to have sent his own son away from his revolutionary mountain base in Yan'an, to a nearby village, where he would learn from the peasants.

The notion that the youth would both bring something (such as technical, scientific as well as political knowledge acquired in the city), and at the same time learn something from the collective farmers, would be present throughout. (For more on these issues, on the sent-down youth, and the history of their "movement," see Bernstein 1977; Scharping 1981; Pan 2003, 2006; Liu 1995, 2004, 2009; Gu et al 2009; Wang 2011; Rene 2013; Martinez et al. 2013; Bonnin 2013; Honig and Zhao 2015; Yang 2003, 2016).

The phenomenon of sent-down youth partly coincided with, but was also distinct from, the Maoist "Red Guards" (红卫兵), the loyalist youth movement launched by Mao in 1966, during the "Cultural Revolution," as a vehicle of permanent revolution and as a means of assuring a loyal support base for himself. The most violent part of the "Cultural Revolution" was in 1966-69, when many people were tormented to death as counter-revolutionaries, and untold numbers of cultural heritage and religious sites were destroyed. But it was not formally declared over, until Mao himself died in 1976. (On Mao's "Cultural Revolution," there is an even larger literature. See Wang Youqin n.d.; also the 1981 classic by Simon Leys; MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006; Esherick et al 2006; Dikötter 2016; Pang 2017; also, Rosen 1981).

The high tide of sending down city youth was in 1968-69. In December 1968, Mao appealed for more youth to go out and help revolutionize the countryside, and urged peasants and cadres to accept them. At this time, massive numbers of youth were dispatched, and it was during this

time that special trains were commissioned, like that featured in Fig. 1.

There are several theories that explain why Mao wanted to send out more youth at this time. One leading theory is that it was to put an end to the violent excesses of the Red Guard gangs that had been terrorizing the cities, in Mao's name — by dispatching them to remote places. Other possible (and earlier) motivations are linked to how the movement served as a solution to under-employment in the cities cut off from international trade, under early Communist rule.



Fig. 2. Sent-down youth arriving at a rural location, celebrating by reading quotations from Mao (Jiang Shaowu n.d.). (The date is 1968, well before 1971, when Mao's onetime chosen successor Lin Biao, seen in a proudly displayed framed photo, mysteriously vanished — an event that shocked and shook many sent-down youth out of their Mao worship; cf. Ah Cheng 2017)

From early on, the movement was presented as the revolutionary re-education of city people — and in this regard, one can compare with Pol Pot's Cambodia, which was in some ways an extreme version of Mao's China. On Pol Pot's victory in 1975, based on a class calculus,

Cambodian cities were altogether emptied of people, who were marched to the countryside and forced to work, for the most part in agriculture, and for the most part, regardless of their previous profession or expertise. Money was abolished, with a view towards leap-frogging to Communism (Kiernan 2008; Tyner 2017).



Fig. 3. Arranged photo of sent-down youth taking part in hard labor (canal-building?). The sign says, "Submit to re-education by poor-lower-middle peasants; be a farmer all your life." The second part caused the greatest anxiety in the sent-down city youth (From "ST: Questions About China's Cultural Revolution Answered," 2016).

In China, the overall impression is that towards the end, almost no-one really supported the program. Many of the sent-down youth were themselves initially enthusiastic, but later lost the fervor and the powerful sense of adventure and participation that they once harbored (cf. Ah Cheng 2017). But peasants often saw them as an extra burden, people who had to be fed and had few farming skills. Party and army officials, as well as educators, saw it as disruptive (schools and universities were shut down, etc.); and so on (cf. Shirk 1978). The initiative, and the responsibility for the

movement, rests squarely with Mao himself.

After Mao's death in 1976, college education was restored and rapidly expanded, replacing a truncated vocational curriculum set up during the "Cultural Revolution." Formal entrance exams re-opened in 1977. Among sent-down youth, there was a huge surge of demand for the right to return to home cities and catch up with such educational opportunities. A series of protests took place (Yang 2009; see also Fig. 23), including actions like blockading railroads out of Shanghai, carried out by sent-down youth on New Year furlough who were demanding the right to return to live in the city. Eventually, millions were able to return. The sending-down policy was formally terminated in 1980, at which point perhaps two million remained in the countryside (Gold 1980; Scharping 1984). Some never returned.

In the aftermath of the movement, even among the returnees (most of whom were not able to resume formal study — they are also known as a "lost generation"), there were huge outpourings of regret, anger, nostalgia, and lingering pride, contributing to the 1980s so-called "scar literature" (*shanghen wenxue* 伤痕文学; Cao 2003; Wang 2011; Yang 2016).

In 1981, as a foreign student in Shanghai, I visited Chongming Island at the mouth of the Yangtze river, where some Shanghai youth had been sent (counting themselves lucky not to be dispatched to distant hard-scrabble destinations in Heilongjiang Province in the Northeast, or Yunnan Province, in the Southwest), but now were not permitted to leave. (The strict system regulating city dwelling permits that was in place under Mao was not relaxed until later, and is still partially enforced).

Meeting these short-distance sent-down youth on the state farm, I got the sense that they now suffered more than many others: the envy they felt towards my Chinese classmates was palpable. (The island today has its own

concrete monument memorializing the sent-down youth: Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. The Educated Youth Memorial Wall [知青纪念墙] in Chongming, a faraway suburban island of Shanghai, with a large inscription: 青春无愧 or "No Regrets for Our Youth" (Chongming County 2017).

Today, the remaining sent-down youth have come of age, and some have passed on. Also, in the course of China's turn to a market economy over the last few decades, many have turned to business, and some have become wealthy. There has been a stream of not only novels and stories based on their experiences, but also movies such as female director Zhang Nuanxin's remarkable 1985 feature film *Qing chun ji* [Sacrificed youth] (Fig. 5). In the film, a sent-down Han Chinese girl abandons her drab, Communist-era uniform, instead embracing the beautiful feminine clothing worn and appreciated by ethnic minority girls in her area. Because it was sparsely distributed internationally, this film is less well known than, for example, Joan Chen's *Xiu Xiu: The Sent-Down Girl* (1998), but it deserves wide attention, and earned much praise in China for

its nuanced perspective on the complex emotional world of sent-down youth (on which more below).



Fig. 5. Poster for Zhang Nuanxin's 1985 feature film *Qing chun ji* [Sacrificed youth].

The Communist regime still struggles to contain open criticism of Mao and his Cultural Revolution, which remains a major taboo. As the Communist Party's supreme leader, Mao cannot be criticized. The fear is that criticism could grow to threaten the Party's hold on power. In increasingly neo-authoritarian post-Soviet Russia, it has long been difficult to erect memorials and dedicate museum to Stalin's victims, yet a few have been established — largely because in 1990-91, there was a clear break with the Communist system. In China, however, in the absence of any open reckoning with Mao's Communism — even as the country has moved to a state-led capitalism dominated by the same Party elite — there are no memorials to the millions that perished as direct victims of Mao or as a result of his Great Leap Forward of 1958-60 or the Cultural Revolution (cf. Wang Youqin 2007; on official museums, see Denton 2014; Fiskesjö 2015).

One dedicated private Chinese museum of the Cultural Revolution was shut down in 2016 (Tatlow 2016). Some private museums still have Cultural Revolution-era art or artifacts,

including the ultra-wealthy Long Museum which has displayed a large collection of Cultural Revolution-era paintings in Shanghai as well as in Chongqing (Movius 2016), and the Jianchuan Museum Cluster outside Chengdu which is also both a sent-down youth museum and a Cultural Revolution museum (Matuszak 2012; Frank 2014; on private collections of Mao-era paraphernalia like badges, see Hubbert 2006; also Barnes 2014; see Pang 2017: 192-193 on collecting as a means of self-construction, both during and after the Mao era, at Jianchuan and beyond). The authorities keep a close watch. They have prohibited the circulation abroad of Cultural Revolution items (see e.g., Kaufman 2008), and the collective memory of Mao era and the Cultural Revolution is generally closely policed.

However, sent-down youth may have their museums! This is because of the millions of people involved as a "volunteer" force summoned by Mao, who continues to enjoy official status as a founding Communist father. For this reason, the topic of the sent-down youth and their concerns and feelings, cannot be shut down entirely. The voice-less victims can be silenced, but Mao's volunteers — even though they too often have felt victimized — cannot be entirely silenced in the same way "enemies" are silenced.

Importantly, in the current era of capitalist entrepreneurship in the service of the state, in addition to the books and movies of the 1980s and onwards there are now also TV series, websites, and even themed restaurants (Hubbert 2005) which feature the ambiance of the Mao era. Some of this entrepreneur-curated nostalgia forms part of a state "manufactured nostalgia" of Mao era socialism. This isn't necessarily related to the actual experience of the aging members of the sent-down youth generation. At times, it seems designed to harness and channel their existing, however mixed feelings in support of the government — by covering up the anguish, and

instead emphasizing the undeniable enthusiasm which also did exist at the time, at least early on. I will return to this theme in my conclusions.

The former sent-down youth feel that by "sharing the fate of the Republic," they earned the right to memorialize themselves, including to express their anguish. They think that because they never protested Mao and the regime, but sacrificed their youth for the revolution and the new state, their own experiences and feelings (including regrets) cannot be covered up in the way that the mass violence, persecution, labor camps and killings of others have been covered up and made taboo.

All these aspects form part of the complex setting in which sent-down youth have organized exhibits, museums, memorials, and even cemeteries — to which we now turn.

Glimpses of Sent-Down Youth Museums

The sent-down youth museum and memorial just outside Shanghai, China's biggest city, is probably the most substantial such museum, but there are several more around China that I have not myself visited. I list some of them in an Appendix. All of these sites offer exciting opportunities for new research.

One of these, the Ningbo Educated Youth Museum, in Ningbo city, Zhejiang Province, has embraced the digital era and includes a sophisticated web collection of artifacts on digital display (cf. Baidu, n.d.). Like the one in Shanghai, it is based in a sending city, not in a receiving rural destination.

One interesting example of a smaller museum at a rural destination is the *Zhiqing yuan bowuguan* 知青缘博物馆 "Links Between Educated Youth Museum" (Fig. 6) in Changtai County, Fujian Province (长泰县坂里乡). The "links" in the name is an emotionally charged word that suggests auspicious connections

(especially among those that happened to be sent there; but also perhaps between them and the local people).



Fig. 6. This museum building in Fujian Province preserves murals typical of the Mao era, that have otherwise disappeared almost completely from China (Changtai Tourism Network 2013).

Another much larger museum is the Heihe sent-down youth museum, in the Aihui district of the city of Heihe, in Northeastern Heilongjiang Province, where many from Shanghai were also sent. Like the one in Shanghai, this museum is a substantial investment, probably with support both from privately wealthy sent-down youth, and the local government. Accordingly, this museum is sometimes called the *Shanghai zhiqing bowuguan* — having been initiated by people from Shanghai).

In Fig. 7, we see the sumptuous opening ceremony of the Heihe museum; in Fig. 8, a bulldozer display; and in Fig. 9, an intriguing scene with visitors to the museum, representing different generations taking in a traveling exhibit (also featured in Fig. 10).

The socialist-era Soviet-model bulldozer on outdoor display was used in clearing agricultural land. But the website displaying

this (Yododo.com 2012) also shows, through a hands-on indoor diorama of life-size human figures, that the land was tilled using only human muscle power, without machinery or draught animals. This is also re-enacted by museum-goers, apparently enjoying themselves (cf. Fig. 10). For the sent-down youth themselves, the contrast between machinery and human muscle power would illustrate their shared hardship and sacrifice as well as the camaraderie this situation is often said to have involved. For a general audience, it might simply signify "Progress" at all costs, an almost-incomprehensible illustration of the poverty of the past.

A similar primitive bulldozer is on display at the Shanghai museum (alongside one of the paths in the cemetery-garden; also etched into the memorial wall, cf. Fig. 35). At Heihe, too, there is a locomotive such as that seen at Shanghai, indicating the iconic status of these imposing objects associated with the journey, and with on-site labor — despite their rarity, at the time.



Fig. 7. The 2011 opening of the museum in Heihe, Northeastern China (Zhiqing bowuguan, n.d.).



Fig. 8. Socialist-era bulldozer at the museum in Heihe, Northeastern China (Yododo.com 2012).



Fig. 9. The national traveling exhibit, "Sharing the Fate of the Republic" ["与共和国同命运"] on show at the originating museum, in Heihe, Helongjiang Province (Zhiqing bowuguan, n.d.).



Fig. 10. At one of the touring stops of this exhibit, in Tianjin, visitors don Mao era-garb, and pretend to labor the way it was done then, by human draught animals. (Zhiqing bowuguan, 2014; on the controversies surrounding this exhibit, see *South China Morning Post* 2015).

The smaller everyday artifacts on display in the Heihe museum, part of a government-approved traveling exhibit, are highly significant, and similarly would mean different things to different generations; to sent-down youth themselves, and to others. Fig. 9 shows a hot water bottle, a bag, and clothing, all of a 1960s-70s style. A grandfather appears to try to explain the significance of these items, which would hold great emotional and nostalgic value for him, as they evoke his own experiences (this type of bag was used back then — in the absence of other style choices! —but not any more). They would not mean much at all for his granddaughter, however: The bag would just be another bag. It is possible to read this picture as an indication of the wide generation gap between those whose lives were shaped by experiences in the Mao era, and those who have grown up in a very different time (and might be more receptive to official re-writing of the history). One can readily imagine the

frustration felt by the grandpa, when realizing the difficulty of explaining why a simple water bottle or a green cloth bag had been so significant — to him.

The Shanghai Sent-Down Youth Museum

The remainder of this essay focuses on the Shanghai sent-down youth museum and its setting, drawing on my own pictures and impressions as well as on other sources.

First, the museum building itself (Fig. 11): It is a substantial building, with museum exhibit spaces on two floors. In the background are administrative buildings, and, further behind, the crematory where the dead are prepared for burial.



Fig. 11. Main entrance to the Shanghai museum (Baidu 2011).

Inside the museum, the visitor first encounters an elaborate, life-size scene with a train departing the station, and people sending off the youth. This is complete with life-sized wax-figure people dressed in the garb of the day. Visitors see a station platform with relatives on one side, and the departing train on the other, full of excited youth (Fig. 12, 13).

In one picture (Fig. 12), my son Loke poses

with mannequins of the departing youth. Many visitors similarly take selfies and photographs in the exhibit space specially created here, hidden just inside the main gate, instantly transporting visitors in the know back to "that era," cleverly launching the journey into the land of the sent-down youth.

Note the pseudo-military uniforms worn by the departing youth: These were common, if not universal, and represent the symbolic, military-style de-sexualization of Maoist youth. Their use in this display instantly transports the visitors back to this era. (On the silencing of sexuality and gender inequality issues among sent-down youth see Honig 2003; Li 2010; Yang and Yan 2017).

The platform (Fig. 13) is full of parents and relatives, as well as more youth waiting to be sent down themselves. They are all cheering the departure of the train, on the opposite side. The banner says "Warmly send off the educated youth, going up to the mountains, down to the countryside, to make revolution." There may well have been an element of cheerfulness, not only because it was expected, but as the youth were fulfilling the command of Chairman Mao. At the same time, many parents, and some youth, would have been deeply worried about the fate of the departing youth. (Compare the somber faces of young women departing from Shanghai to Yunnan in the real-life exhibit photo captured in Fig. 14; as well as the sad scene rendered in statue form at the memorial wall, in Fig. 35). To me, these not-yet censored images conveying sadness but testify to the relative freedom granted to the sent-down youth in shaping the displays to reflect their own conflicted feelings and memories.



Fig. 12. The train is about to leave the station. Photo by the author, 2015.

suburbs). Photo by the author, 2015.



Fig. 14. Inside the exhibit: Somber, real-life faces of departing youth. Photo by the author, 2015.



Fig. 13. The painstakingly recreated train platform, representing the real-life Pengpu Station (in Shanghai's far

Inside the museum halls, visitors encounter a series of evocative photo exhibits tracing the experiences of the sent-down youth from city life, to the journey, their life in remote rural locations, and the eventual return of many, at least, to the cities. In addition, there are multiple life-size recreations of rural life and labor of the sent-down youth.

Fig. 15 and 16 show another train display a bit farther into the exhibit. It is an open car wagon in which visitors can sit down and relive the anxious and excited feeling of the long journey,

which often would take many days. The picture here again includes my then-11 year old son, Loke, sitting on the hard seats of this train exhibit (Fig. 15). Also visible are a series of era-appropriate museum exhibit props: army-style winter coats, a bag, and a suitcase, cooking utensils, as well as a broad wash basin for personal hygiene and laundry. Inside the carriage, a modern-day digital display has been added (Fig. 16) specifying that this is the train departing Shanghai at ten o'clock in the morning of November 13, 1969, with Sankeshu, Harbin, in distant northeast China, as the destination. From there, passengers would have continued by truck or other means, eventually reaching remote, pre-planned final destinations in rural areas.



Fig. 15. Train carriage display, interior. Photo by the author, 2015.



Fig. 16. Train carriage display, interior, with the 1969 departure time (Baidu Tieba 2011).



Fig. 17. Sent-down youth arriving at a new home. In a main exhibit hall. Photo by the author, 2015.

As a representation of the final leg of the outward journey, Fig. 17 shows several wax-figure young men riding and pushing a push-cart full of their belongings, en route to their remote destination. A hot water bottle sticks out from the pile — an essential life-line item,

again in the style that was ubiquitous then, but is rarely seen nowadays. The winter hats also suggest the harsh environment. The boys carry a banner which cites one of Mao's most frequently quoted key pronouncements: "Wide Open Land; Great Contributions" — Mao had used these phrases about the vastness of China's countryside, which the sent-down youth would help transform.

The exhibits include a number of life-size scenes that represent agricultural and other work, as well as the struggles of daily life. Fig. 18, below, shows pioneering construction and cooking in the field. This photo gives a good idea of the exhibit halls, which are spacious, rich in content, rather well-constructed, and capable of accommodating sizeable crowds.



Fig. 18. One of the main permanent exhibit halls. Photo by the author, 2015.

In the exhibition halls, contemporary visitors, often themselves former sent-down youth, can be seen taking their time to slowly absorb every memory prompted by kitchen utensils, agricultural tools and other items on display (Fig. 19, 20, 21 and 22). Sometimes, they can be seen explaining an item to a relative lacking the experience, but on the few visits I made the comments I overheard seemed more like

expressions of mutual recognition and affirmation ("Remember these?" people would say).

The question of whether these people's work pushing carts and digging ditches, farming, and the like, really was worthwhile and productive, or wasted, is probably moot. For former sent-down youth visitors, at least, the main motives for visiting are therapeutic and self-defining: To relive the memories for themselves, and for their peers.

When encountering the recreated sent-down youth outdoor cinema, in Fig. 22 many might gasp when recalling their own youthful experience of watching movies in such a setting, together with other volunteers. This exhibit, perhaps more than many others, would provoke the torn sense both of adventure, camaraderie, and sacrifice, which many seem to have come away with.

Finally, among the many aspects of the indoor exhibits, visitors also catch glimpses of the protests, or "remonstrations," made towards the end of the sent-down youth era. In Fig. 23, the caption says "Some educated youth [sent to] Yunnan went to Beijing to remonstrate; and issued a Strike Manifesto." In the photo itself, a banner reads "We want to meet [Chairman] Hua" (Mao's immediate, handpicked successor, who was quickly sidelined by other Party leaders but was briefly in charge during 1976-77). Showing spontaneous popular protests is something unusual for Chinese museums, but as mentioned, these protesters could still claim that they had followed Mao's command, and that they were not protesting Mao or the Party, but only wanted to beg the authorities to restore their city residence permits.



Fig. 19. One of many corners with tools and implements. Photo: Private source, n.d.



Fig. 21. Visitors discussing agricultural implements. Photo: Private source, n.d.



Fig. 20. Exhibit with everyday utensils in a bedroom that is authentic — except for the air purifier. Photo: Private source, n.d.



Fig. 22. Recreated makeshift cinema for rural sent-down youth. Photo by the author, 2015.



Fig. 23. Remonstrating sent-down youth. One of many displayed photos. Photo by the author, 2015.

Next, let us look again at the outdoor environs. The area (Fig. 24) is very large, and includes vast cemetery areas, parts of which have not yet been sold or allocated to new graves. Some areas farther away from those dedicated (through public art, etc.) to the sent-down youth are not even named yet; it appears that the for-profit cemetery welcomes both former sent-down youth as well as those without a connection to this cause; those hoping to be buried with their former comrades will prefer the clearly dedicated areas, in some cases with collectively inscribed tombstones.

The entire area is enclosed by fences, as is typical in China; the land is, I believe, leased for profit by private entrepreneurs licensed to carry out cremations and burials as well as

arranging museum exhibits. The vast cemetery grounds do not reach the coastline, which instead is lined by a road outside the fence, in turn buttressed by a dyke to protect against storm surges, which often occur here. In the center is a north-south axis, which takes approximately twenty minutes to walk. It begins at the museum and the crematory and funerary offices near the south end, and reaches the Educated Youth Plaza at the north end.

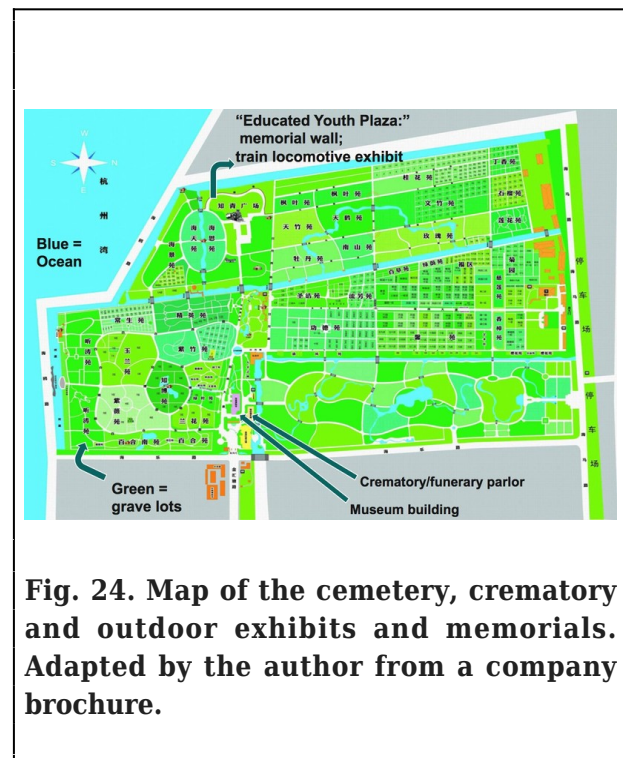


Fig. 24. Map of the cemetery, crematory and outdoor exhibits and memorials. Adapted by the author from a company brochure.

In between are numerous scattered monuments dedicated to the deceased and their generation, dotting the cemetery areas, and converging on the Educated Youth Plaza with its key centerpieces: the locomotive (Fig. 1), and, above all, the massive *Zhiqing jinian qiang* or Educated Youth Memorial Wall (Fig. 29-36).

Fig. 25-26 depict the cemetery. Statues positioned at strategic locations in the cemetery mimic the style of the Cultural Revolution, and are sure to elicit mixed feelings among those who visit. Some are generic, some specific, such as the statue of Jin Xunhua, the

Shanghai former Red Guard who was sent down to Heilongjiang in northeast China and drowned during a rainstorm, apparently while trying to prevent a telegraph pole from being lost in a torrent. After his death, at 20 years old in 1969, he was made a hero, and appeared on countless posters. On the one hand, this new installation of the statue showing Jin Xunhua's dying moment points to the tremendous waste of human life that was the entire project of sending down the youth, frequently noted by critics of the movement (who would say Jin's sacrifice was meaningless). On the other hand, for sent-down youth survivors today, and especially for the fellow Shanghainese who visit, the statue also evokes precisely the remembrance of suffering which binds them together today. It is easy to imagine the difficulty a grandfather must have, explaining the significance of Jin Xunhua's death to his grandson (Fig. 26). But for the grandfather, regardless of the overblown social-realist style and official message that may be off-putting to some (who see it celebrating a pointless, politicized self-sacrifice), the statue carries the deep significance of personal experience regardless of the official orthodoxy, and in this sense, while much more dramatic, evokes the same nostalgia as that prompted by Mao-era hot water bottles and green cloth bags.

Fig. 25. Generic statues at stone memorial to deceased sent-down youth. Photo by the author, 2015.



Fig. 26. Statue of the drowning Jin Xunhua, a sent-down youth martyred in Heilongjiang Province, in 1969. Photo: Baidu Tieba.

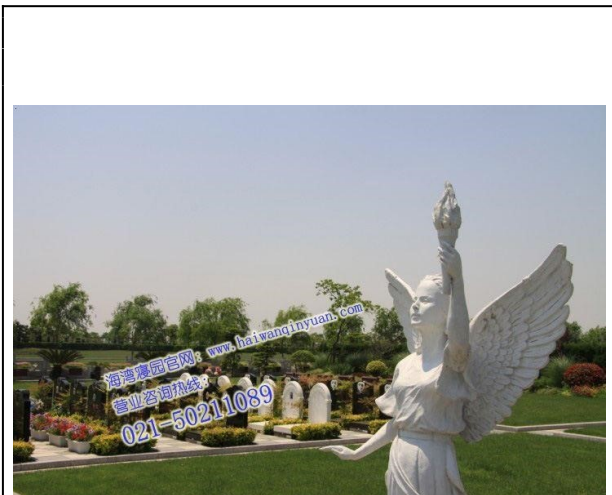


Fig. 27. Another cemetery-area statue, here evoking something generically

idealistic. Promotional photo from the cemetery-company using the image to attract customers (Sunwell, n.d.).



Fig. 28. Promotional photo illustrating both the design and expense levels of gravestones, including similar statuary, and "real views" of the site, including the Memorial Wall (Sunwell, n.d.).

The *Zhiqing jinian qiang* or Educated Youth Memorial Wall is located at the *Zhiqing guangchang*, the Educated Youth Plaza (Fig. 29-36), about a 20 minutes walk from the museum and the crematory building. The Wall appears to mimic and combine at least three different US designs. The most obvious is the Vietnam War memorial in Washington, D.C. designed by Maya Lin. It does not "sink into" the landscape in the same powerful way, but both the color and feel of the stone, and the concept of etching the names of the honorable deceased into the stone face, is similar (Fig. 29, 30, 32-35).

Another "inspiration" is the Korean War memorial, also in Washington, D.C. — most

obviously in the inclusion of portraits of human figures inlaid into the stone, combined with life-size statues walking on the side. In the Korean War memorial, those statues are American soldiers. Here they are sent-down youth — "soldiers" in Mao's army — and their relatives (Fig. 30, 32-35).

The monument also draws on that Hollywood sidewalk where famous stars leave their footprints, though here it is sent-down youth who can pay to do so (Fig. 31). The brazen borrowing (or perhaps even — for the wall designs — plagiarizing) that takes place here is striking, as is the combinatory craze using these three different American monuments as models. As in the many other cases of such borrowings around China, most Chinese visitors will be unaware of the original sources.



Fig. 29. The memorial wall. The photo is from the cemetery-company website, where it is used as part of the promotional campaign to sell cemetery lots (Sunwell, n.d.).



Fig. 30. Ageing sent-down youth marveling at their signatures, on the memorial wall. Photo from People.com.cn, 2010.

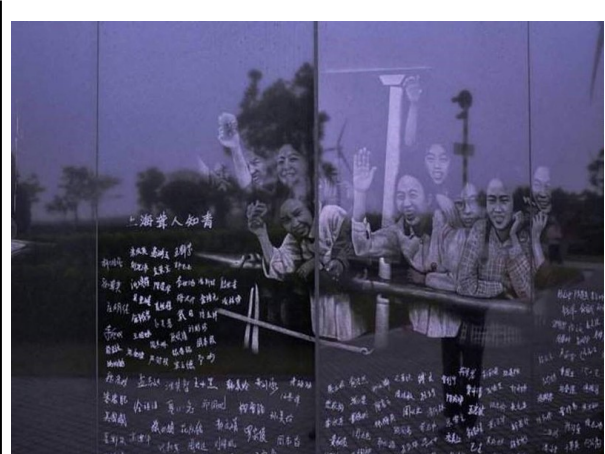


Fig. 32. The memorial wall with inscribed names of sent-down youth, plus images of departing sent-down youth inlaid in the wall, as in the US Korean War memorial. Photo: Private source, n.d.



Fig. 31. The Hollywood sidewalk-styled footprints next to the memorial wall, inscribed as "Unforgettable revolutionary era; Impressive Educated-Youth spirit." Photo: Private source, n.d.



Fig. 33. The memorial wall imagery proudly promoted in cemetery advertising (Sunwell, n.d.).



Fig. 34. One of the sculpture sets placed along the memorial wall, with visitors. Photo: Private source.



Fig. 35. Sculptures showing a sad farewell. Photo by the author, 2015.



Fig. 36. Statue at the memorial wall depicting a lonely sent-down girl perhaps reading a letter from home. Photo by the author, 2015.

Conclusion

The sent-down youth museums offer a conduit for the collective memory for a specific group of people; an arena in which the ageing generation of sent-down youth can both remember and commiserate, and also express themselves. In the case of the particularly ingenious Shanghai museum-cemetery, this self-expression even extends to shaping one's image after death. Generally these museums mainly serve to channel and soothe the complex emotions of the still living people who were made to sacrifice their youth for Mao and the Party. Indeed, Xi Jinping and a number of other national leaders were sent-down youth.

There is official tolerance and support for sent-

down youth museums and memorials — at least, there is official licensing and permission for their construction and existence, including the collecting and exhibition of artifacts, and in the Shanghai case also for the work of cremations, burials, and presentation of public art.

In contrast, there are (almost) no such museums or memorials for the actual victims of Mao and the Cultural Revolution. If the sent-down youth can have them, why not those surviving direct persecution? The answer is that because the sent-down youth can say they "gave their youth" to Mao and the Party, and present themselves as supporters of his regime, this becomes an insurance policy of sorts, which affords the former sent-down youth the right to speak — unlike those who perished because condemned by Mao. However, if and when former sent-down youth or their museums express regrets over the suffering and the real sacrifices they made (such as by exhibiting pointless hardship, or the protests by people asking to be allowed to return home, after Mao's death), official tolerance might well run out. Such tolerance is no doubt contingent on the museums not going too far with criticism of Mao, or of the Party during the Mao era. The authorities expect support for the still-standing official orthodoxy that Mao was a great leader — at least there can be no open disagreement with this, no attack on policies central to Mao or the Party in his time. Instead, Chinese officialdom promotes the notion of shared sacrifice, as in the officially-sponsored traveling exhibit "Sharing the Fate of the Republic."

In the current era of market capitalism, some sent-down youth have made enough money to support memorial sites, including the collection of artifacts, hiring staff to create wax-figure dioramas, and the like; some no doubt in the hope of also making more money, such as through the funeral and cemetery business. Much of this is driven by the lingering presence of the sent-down youth in contemporary

Chinese social life, and it may fade or vanish when they are gone, particularly the great majority who were sent down in the 1960s and are now in their seventies and eighties. But at this time, whether as entrepreneurs or as visitors and participants in memorial events, they are using these sites as instruments both for soothing their own feelings and highlighting some of their experience as victims, while also promoting their own social standing as members of the Cultural Revolution generation, based on their unassailable, loyalist contributions to Mao's project.

For former sent-down youth and their families, visiting these museums may evoke deep emotions, especially so at the unique cemetery-memorial that is the Shanghai sent-down youth museum. Here, visitors are confronted not just with the raw materials of history (as reflected in photos and artifacts evoking the era), and their emotions provoked by such assemblages, but also with their own present circumstances, and with their future death. The prospect of death and burial here, alongside one's erstwhile "comrades", cannot but provoke mixed feelings. It speaks in a curious way to the age-old conundrum of people anticipating their own death, and trying to influence what one's persona will mean to coming generations, after one's fragile body is burned and erased in the crematory and the ashes installed in a tomb. While it is possible that for some, the burial at this site is an expression of willingness to follow one's lord in death (as in ancient times; now projected towards the late Chairman Mao), I also want to propose that the reason many former sent-down youth choose this site for their eternal rest is because it can, at least potentially, convey to future visitors a critical perspective on events that shaped their lives. Here is a multifaceted site that opens for recognition their mixed feelings or even deep regrets; a sense that those buried here lived honorably and did their duty, yet also claim the right to speak and even disagree.

The danger is that this capacity of the memorial to serve as a critical space for evaluating the Mao era, might be overshadowed in the present-day increasingly totalitarian China, by new state-defined "truths" about shared sacrifice, devised once again mobilize people as the cannon fodder of future Party-State policies, and projects. As mentioned above, there is a new, officially-endorsed trend afoot to portray the legacy of Mao and his Cultural Revolution not as disasters that wrecked the lives of many, as is the truth, but as wholly necessary and worthy steps towards building today's powerful China, regardless of the "sacrifices" made. Several scholars have explored how, not least in literature and film, this new over-writing of the legacy of the Mao era is often misleading and regressive (see, for example, Gao 2013; Cai 2016; Yue 2005; and Hung 2015). The closely policed state-constructed nostalgia can serve to foreclose any critique or debate over the reasons why things went so horribly wrong — and thereby make it more difficult to prevent it from recurring in the future.

The officially-sanctioned Mao-era nostalgia not only covers up the violence and the many lives senselessly lost, but aims to shape and channel the sense of regret on the part of those who were there, into acceptance, acquiescence, and silence. This is very much on display in the present, when the post-Mao Communist Party institutions of 'collective leadership' and term limits on top posts, meant to prevent a recurrence of the Mao-era madness, have been abolished. The recent scrapping of term limits, thus permitting the current Party chief to assemble a power similar to the one-man rule that Mao exercised, provoked an unusual outpouring of popular criticism — but the formidable Party-State apparatus was able to silence it (*The Globe and Mail* 2018). This does not bode well for the future of the sent-down youth museums as potential sites for critical deliberation, breaking the taboo on discussing what went wrong. But they will continue to

carry such potential at least through the passing of the last of their generation.

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Appendix: Sent-Down Youth Museums outside Shanghai (incomplete list)

- * *Zhiqing bowuguan* [知青博物馆, Educated Youth Museum], in Aihui district, Heihe 黑河 city, Heilongjiang Province, Northeastern China, where many sent-down youth from Shanghai were sent; also called the *Shanghai zhiqing bowuguan* = initiated by people from Shanghai)
- * *Xichang zhiqing bowuguan* [Xichang Educated Youth Museum, located in a former state farm near Xichang 西昌, western Sichuan Province
- * *Zhiqing bowuguan* [Educated Youth Museum], a small museum in the Banan District 巴南区 of Chongqing City (possibly closed?)
- * *Jianchuan bowuguan* [建川博物馆, Jianchuan Museum Cluster], in Anren, near Chengdu city, in Sichuan Province (includes one section with sent-down youth memorabilia)
- * *Zhiqing bowuguan* [Educated Youth Museum] in Kunming, Yunnan Province (closed?)

* *Zhiqing bowuguan* [Educated Youth Museum] in Mengding, Gengma County, Yunnan Province (closed?)

* *Yan'an Beijing zhiqing bowuguan* [延安北京知青博物馆, Beijing Educated Youth Museum in Yan'an], in Yan'an, Shaanxi Province, in Mao's wartime base area (doubtless named because mostly Beijing youth were sent down there)

* *Zhiqing yuan bowuguan* 知青缘博物馆 "Links Between Educated Youth Museum", in Banli Township, Changtai County (长泰县坂里乡), Fujian Province

* *Ningbo zhiqing bowuguan* [Ningbo Educated Youth Museum, 宁波知青博物馆], may be similar to the one in Shanghai, since it is also based in a sending city, not in a receiving rural area (cf. Baidu, n.d.; note the sophisticated web collection of artifacts on digital display)

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