

Contemporary Chinese Society featuring Bin Xu – Chairman Mao's Children: Generation and the Politics of Memory in China, March 22, 2022

– [Moderator] Hello everyone, and welcome to this afternoon's talk. We will get started momentarily after we give another minute or so, for people to log on to the discussion. We thank you very much for joining us.

– Good afternoon everyone, and thank you for joining the Fairbank Center's Contemporary Chinese Society Series. My name is Ya-Wen Lei. I'm an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at Harvard University. I'm also a faculty member at the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies. Today it's our great honor to have Professor Bin Xu, and Dr. Xu is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at Emory University. His research interest include cultural sociology, political sociology, and Chinese studies. He's the author of "The Politics of Compassion: The Sichuan Earthquake and the Civic Engagement in China." And this award-winning book was published by Stanford University Press in 2017. It examines the huge wave of volunteering in the wake of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, and how the volunteering is intertwined with the political relation between the state and the civil society. And today, he is going to give a talk based on his forthcoming book, entitled "Chairman Mao's Children: Generation and the Politics of Memory in China." Which will be published by Cambridge University Press this year, and I wanna congratulate Professor Xu for the publication of this important book. And just a little housekeeping before we get started, if you have any question during the presentation, please type them into the question box in your Zoom control panel. We will have time for Professor Xu to answer questions at the end. And now, without further do, I'm going to turn the time over to Professor Xu. Welcome, Professor Xu.

– Thank you very much, Ya-Wen. Thank you all for coming. So, the book has already been published. It was published last year, 2021, by Cambridge University Press in hard cover and ebook. Of course, there's a ridiculous price tag on the hard cover, if you don't wanna pay a \$110 then you can find eBooks, online in your libraries. So let me just briefly introduce the background for this book. I assume many of our listeners know this program, so I keep it very brief. So I started with the five Ws; who, what, where, when and why. And who were the Zhiquing, the educated youth generation, which is the main character of this book. And those people were the 17 million secondary school students and graduates mostly born in the 1940s and 1950s. So they were equivalent to the baby boomer generation in the United States. And what, what is the "Send-Down" program? So the "Send-Down" program's official name is "Up-to-the-Mountains and Down-to-the-Villages." In Chinese, but in English literature, we usually say it's "Send-Down" program, or, re-uh re-education program. And where, where they were sent down to? And they were sent down to villages, and

farms, and quasi-military farms, which is usually called Production and Construction Corps, bingtuan. And when? Historians have a consensus about the formal program of "Send-Down" that is from the early 1960s to the late 1970s. So here's a timeline of this program. So before early 1960s, there is small scale migration programs on the voluntary basis for people to voluntarily go down to the countryside and to become peasants. Some of the model Zhiqing were from that period in the 1950s, for example, later were used as model to mobilize people to go down to the countryside in 1960s and during the Cultural Revolution. So sometimes people have the misconception that the "Send-Down" program actually started in the 1950s. But the formal program of "Send-Down" actually started in the 1960s. So the first wave of this program, was from 1962 to 1966 before the Cultural Revolution and most prominent group of this "Send-Down" Zhiqing, were those Shanghai Zhiqing, who went down to the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. The second wave, also the biggest wave, also the most known one is from 1968 to 1970. You can actually see here Liu Xiaomeng's book. There's a chart about the number of the people who went down to the countryside. So you can see the big wave of the second one. And the third wave is from, in the 1970s, and it ended in the late 1970s and early 1980s. And why would the Chinese government decide to send so many people down to the countryside? There's a debate among historians about, you know, what's the purpose? I don't think the debate is particularly productive because many reasons could be existing at the same time. For example, one of the biggest reasons is that the Chinese government used the "Send-Down" to solve the urban unemployment problem. Because this is a baby boomer generation, there's a huge increase of the youth in the urban centers, but the command economy at the time cannot absorb so many people at the same time, and then this is one of the ways to solve this problem. And also there's an ideological goal, that is, at the time, top leaders of China believe that, you know, some people, some youth born in this generation, were born under the red flag, so called. But they were contaminated by those bourgeois in the education system. So they need to be re-educated, by those revolutionary poor, and the lower peasants. So, you can see the poster here. The vast universe is out there in the rural area, and the educated youth can make a huge difference in the countryside. So that was the mobilizing slogan for this huge mobilization program. And also another goal is to develop some of the rural areas, particularly the frontiers, in some of the provinces and also ethnic regions. But the programs later were believed to be a failure. And in the late 1970s, almost everyone knew that the program didn't go well. And it caused a lot of socio-economic and human costs, various groups involved in this program. For example, peasants are not happy about that, because in most of the rural villages, there was no shortage of labor. And then you have huge group of people who come down from urban centers, who are young and hungry, and didn't do field work well, and this actually exacerbated food shortage problem. And also the parents of the youth were certainly not very satisfied, because a long time separation from those teenager people. And also

the Zhiqing themselves were not satisfied because they didn't see their future, and their education was delayed, and so on and so forth. So it cost a huge cost on pretty much everyone, and also the government paid a lot of money for this program. So in the end of the late 1970s, and early 1980s, and particularly in 1970s, there were several large scale protests, particularly in Yunnan and Xinjiang, in which the Zhiqing petitioned to the government, to demand to go back to urban centers. In responding to the protest, the Chinese government decided to end this program gradually and allow the Zhiqing to go back to their hometowns. So Michel Boninn, who was one of the most prominent historians on this topic, and called this generation as the lost generation. Of course, this phrase is borrowed from World War I, but he used this term to describe the feeling of this generation when they return to cities, no job, no education, didn't know where their future is, so they're lost in their hometowns. So you can see the painting here, which is in stark contrast to the first poster, propaganda poster that I just show. And also there's some long-term impacts, which are studied by sociologists. For example, lots of delays in life course, on pretty much everything such as education, jobs, and marriage, and child birth, and so on and so forth. And also, when they already absorbed into labor force in the cities, in the 1990s, there's another wave of difficulties for those people. That is when they become SOE workers, if they were lucky, in the 1990s, there's a huge SOE reform, Many of them were laid off in this period. And which was, according to some of our interviewees were even more difficult than the "Send-Down" years. And this long-term impact still persists today. If you now are able to go to China, in Shanghai, and every Wednesday morning, you go to, there's a labor bureau office, which is letter and visit office there. You see a small crowd of elderly people, petitioning to the government. They're asking for policy adjustments on many of the issues related to their pensions and health insurance, because of the regional differences, all the details, if you're interested, you can see in the books and also my published articles, but for the sake of time, I'll skip them. But anyway, the point is that the long-term impacts are still existing today. But not everyone in this generation is in misery as those people. Some people are so-called winners. For example, the biggest winner we know now is President Xi Jinping, who went down to Shaanxi at the time from Beijing and spent seven years there, before he went to Tsinghua University as a student. And so there was a book, I recommend everyone if you're interested in this topic and you can read, it's a Chinese book published by, which is a narrative about his experience in the countryside. So in the book, the narrative pattern in the book is an interesting one, that it's more like upbeat and also upward story. In other words, the tough years in the countryside, are depicted as the sort of a test, and also exercise, and a character building experience for leaders, so as you can see in this quote, "The tough life of the seven years of going 'Up to the Mountains and down to the villages' built my character." So the past suffering has been redeemed into today's success, and also, as you can see in this

narrative, it's not just by himself, but also it's about China, right? China is at a low point, and now because everybody has been working so hard, making a lot of efforts and becoming a superpower in the world. So that kind of a personal and world history narratives are weaved into one, in this narrative about this leader, who is the member of the generation. Not only Xi Jinping, but also other important leaders of this generation, are from the "Send-Down" youth. For example, Li Keqiang pretty much all of them in this age range were "Send-Down" youth. But this generation also is facing an identity issue. Because the "Send-Down" program is heavily overlapping with the Cultural Revolution, so they have an identity issue because many of them, not all of them, many of them were Red Guards. And if you ask someone who is not from the generation, what do you think of those people? You probably get an answer that those people are just a bunch of Red Guards. So that kind of perception, or if you prefer, you can call it a misconception, is something that troubles this generation, they have this identity issue, and trying to stay away from this stigma. But at the same time they ask themselves, "Are we victims, or are we heroes, or are we something else?" So this is the identity issue, is becoming part of what we call the Difficult Past. So the term Difficult Past is not just a random, loosely used term. It comes from one of the classic essays in collective memory research by Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz. The essay itself is about Vietnam war. So in the essay, both authors talked about Vietnam war, and this sentence I quote here, "The event," which refers to the Vietnam war, "is swallowed as it were, but never assimilated." Of course, I believe, those sentence can be applied to the "Send-Down" program as well. It's there, it's difficult, it's very tough for this generation to come to terms with. More specifically, I think there are three kinds of problems pertaining to their difficult past. One is the political problem. How to politically evaluate this program? Is it a failure, or is it just success, or just something else? And also how to evaluate the events related to this "Send-Down" program. For example, the Cultural Revolution. And there's also social problem as I already mentioned, that long-term impacts on this generation are basically all these social problems. And the government, and also the generation need to solve those social problems. And the last one is the cultural problem. In other words, how to commemorate the past? How to commemorate this difficult past? This is the focus of the book. In other words, the book is not a historical study of the "Send-Down" generation, what happened in the past and so on. It is a social study of collective memory, of the Zhiqing generation. So I spent quite a lot of years on this book. So for example, also I have different layers of memories, included in the book. In chapters one and two, I talked about individual memory and life stories. Here in the picture I'm interviewing people, I went to people's homes and so on, to talk about their past. And also I look at literary works, but the purpose is not to do a literary study, but to examine how people remember the past through literary works. In other words, how people remember the past through writing literary books, and reading literary books, and discussing literary books. So it's

literary memory instead of literary words. In chapter four, I talked about so-called the sites of memory, including exhibits and museums. For example, these two pictures are the museums in Heilongjiang, the other one is in Shanghai. And of course this is a very typical memory topic. So I examined the very complex cultural and the political processes, revolving around these two museums and other museums, and exhibits as well. So over the years, I also participated in a lot of the commemorative activities. Many of the people in this generation, organized many, many commemorative activities ranging from dinner parties, to performance, as you can see here, and to some revisiting trips to their "Send-Down" places. Sometimes you feel that this is just basically expression of nostalgia, but the things are more complicated than nostalgia. Or I can say that nostalgia is a sociological phenomenon that actually needs lots of sociological insights to look into the complex processes. So it's also political, it's very economic and money plays an important role in all these commemorative activities. That's in chapters five and six. So I want to achieve three goals in this book. The first one is to understand how Zhiqing generation comes to terms with their difficult personal and their collective past. What can explain the variations of their memory. And more generally, I want to speak to the literature, which is already established as a sub-field, that is the "Mao legacies" in the post-Mao era. I believe some of the faculty members, or graduate students at Harvard are interested in this topic as well. But the second goal of the book is more theoretical. I want to advance the theory of memory and the generation. And memory and generation is an important topic of course, we were born into different time points of history, and our growing up experience always is with some historical events. And how do we look at our personal past, is a way to think about, how actually to think about history and other big issues. So memory and the generation, is a way to understand another very essential topic in sociology. That is the intersection between personal biography and the history, which is what C. Wright Mills calls sociological imagination, in other words, the ability to understand the larger historical scene, in terms of its meaning for the inner life and external career of a variety of individuals. This text actually shows up in pretty much every introduction textbooks, but people rarely do something that directly talked about those issues in terms of memory. The third goal is to talk about some of the issues related to the Zhiqing generation and also the Mao years. For example, social inequality and also historical responsibility. So these are the three goals of the book. Today's talk, for the sake of time, I only focus on individual memory and life stories, in other words, chapters one and two. If I have time, I probably will briefly talk about other chapters related to individual memory. So over the years, I sat down with the many, many individuals from this generation, and listening to their life stories. So sometimes they cried, and sometimes they're very excited. So it's a very valuable experience for me, to learn about their past, how they perceive the past. So gradually I found that, in the life stories I listened to, in every life story I

listened to, there are two components. One is their view of the personal experience, and the second is their historical evaluation of the event they experienced. In other words, when they remember their past in the Zhiqing years and they talk about themselves, and also they talk about the event, they have evaluative views of both. So these two components actually correspond to what I just mentioned, named Mills's sociological imagination, that is the intersection between personal biography and the history. So for each component, people have their opinions, either positive or negative. So if we put the two dimensions together, you have a variety of narrative patterns. For example I list it here, some patterns are pretty straightforward, and self-evident. For example, this person. If this person believes that his life actually benefits from the "Send-Down" years, it's more positive. And also he has, positive views about historical evaluation. But if the person believes that his time, for seven years were wasted, and with no education and it ruined his or her life, and that was basically a negative view about, personal experience. And this person will have very negative historical evaluation. So these are pretty commonsensical. But some other narrative patterns are not so much. For example, the person could say, the "Send-Down" years, have this character building function. But at the same time, the person believes that, this is not a life we chose. We were forced to go down to the countryside and the whole event was wrong. So this narrative pattern, if you can see here, is the one, at the top corner on the right, that is the success despite suffering. Or what didn't destroy me, makes me stronger, that kind of suffering narrative. So I have all these narrative patterns and also vivid life stories, which are recorded in my books. And if you're interested, you can read every life story. But I could have stopped here, but I tried to ask myself, what can explain this variation of the narrative pattern? What are the factors, the most important explaining factors? So I found in my research that, there's one factor that stood out in my theorizing process, that is class. And I divided class into two components. One is class in the present, in other words, the person's class position in post-Mao era, particularly today, and class in the past, which is the class position in the Mao years, in their growing up years. So class in the present is more like a normal class concept, that includes several types of capital, which some of the sociologists in the audience might be very familiar with, that is economic capital, cultural capital, social capital. So the class position in the present is linked to personal experience, in other words, when they're talking about or evaluating their personal experience, they actually evaluate the experience through their class positions. So the correlation is very strong, between the present class position and the memory of the personal experience. For example, those people who have higher class positions today, tend to tell redemptive stories. In other words, suffering to success. Hardship built characters, because they already, so called "made it," right? But the people who are at the lower level of class positions tend to tell sliding down stories. Total ways to go down to the countryside, and so on and so forth. So in this theorizing

process, I feel like Bourdieu's idea, Pierre Bourdieu, French sociologist, on theory of class, it makes a lot of sense. In Bourdieu's theory, it was the aesthetic taste that is this cultural signal or the constitutive part of a class, that expresses and justifies class position. Memory functions like aesthetic taste here, memory justifies and expresses class position. In other words, when they're talking about their personal past, they are actually talking about their present, the present class position. So you have winner's stories and loser's stories and totally different stories, as you can see. So far so good. But I later found the other component, historical evaluation of the events in the Mao years cannot be explained by the class in the present. It's simply just no correlation at all. You have high class people who actually are very negative about Cultural Revolution and the "Send-Down" program. And then you have lower class people who have a huge variation of explanation as well. So I was thinking about, is class just one of the factor? Can it only explain part of their memory? Or is class, that can be a effective factor that explains both components. And later I found that, well, this generation of so-called Chairman Mao's children, they grew up in a period when class was very central, was very important. But that class was different. That class was political class, mostly based on their chushen or interchangeably used concepts. Of course there are nuances, they're not really identical, but I use chushen here just to simplify everything. So class is very essential to their coming-of-age experience. For example, if you're born into a bad class chushen, you probably would not get some of the critical opportunities to move upwards in class mobility. And so on this topic actually, Bourdieu's class theory makes sense again, because Bourdieu's class concept is multi capital concept. In one of his capitals, for example, the social capital, there's a sub-category of class, that is a sub-category of capital, that is political capital. In other words, political capital is a subtype of social capital. So his concept can cover both Mao and post-Mao class systems. In other words, it's just the different configuration and also different weights, that the different capital carry in the Mao and post-Mao era. Another thing is that Bourdieu's concept of class is not really a structural determinism, he uses another concept that is habitus. So for those of you who are not sociologists, habitus mainly means the disposition to act and think in some ways. And that habitus is formed, and structured, and also shaped by the class position you were born into, and that you grew up within. So there's a theoretical tongue twister, habitus is structuring structured structure structure, which means that it is structured by the class position, and also is structuring your action and also schema of perception. So habitus concept, nicely theorizes, what we usually call the imprint of the Mao years or the class politics on this generation of people, particularly on their coming-of-age experience. In other words, they form this habitus in their coming of age years, and also this habitus concept is not structural, entirely structural. It forms in a person's interaction with the structure. So there's agency there, it depends on how you interact with the

structure. And also Bourdieu talks a little bit about habitus change, but not much, but he leaves room for habitus change. So put all these together, we have this table, which is at the heart of the chapters in chapters one and two. So in this table, the columns are the political capital that a person has, from good chushen to middle and bad chushen, right? And the rows are this person's political performance types. For example, this person, if a person has good chushen, and also actively participating in political performance, this person is the faithful red. But some people who have good chushen, but are totally indifferent to politics, not interested at all, and those people will tell you that, in my growing up experience, I don't care about politics at all. But if you look at it on the other side of their experience and narrative, you find that being not interested in politics is a privilege, because they had good chushen. So they were protected by their good chushen, from political persecution and other troubles, right? So they become indifferent red. So something that is similar to what we conventionally understood as the economic capital in class. For example, if a kid from a wealthy family said, "That I don't care about money at all, I only care about arts and other things." That is because you have enough money, you don't have to worry about money at all. So the same rationale here. But for the people who were born into middle-to-bad chushen, it's almost impossible to be indifferent to politics, because politics is everything in that period. Some of them try to participate in political performance very actively, those people are aspirants. In other words, they try to outperform the good chushen people, by proving that I'm also a revolutionary, more revolutionary than you are, not just by birth, also by performance. But other people, I wouldn't say many of them from middle-to-bad chushen family, and they will say like, "I'm gonna stay away from politics and stay away from trouble." Don't get into trouble because of my bad chushen. So these people are withdrawers. So I found that these habitus types actually nicely correspond to their historical evaluations. So here is one example, that is the "Winners" stories. In other words, those people who have higher socio-economic status today. And all of them have pretty positive views about personal experience. Some say, "The "Send-Down" years, certainly are very tough, but I got a lot of benefits from that." Building characters and so on and so forth. But their historical evaluation varies, and also varies across their habitus type. The faithful red has positive historical evaluation, the indifferent red, because they're indifferent, they have neutral, to unconcerned, that kind of attitude toward a historical evaluation, and aspirants, if their habitus was not changing later and they still remain positive about historical events and pretty much the same as faithful red. And withdrawers are the people who are actually very negative about historical evaluation. For example, I have one example here. Mr. Yuan who's a university professor in Shanghai, and he was born into a family, whose father was an editor of a newspaper in the KMT period. And as you can imagine, that was very bad chushen. So he was sent down to a farm in Chongming Island, in Shanghai, and he found

out most of the Zhiqing in that farm were basically the same category, in the black or not so good category. So he had pretty successful career, of course. And he talked about, the benefits of the tough years for his later success. But he said that this "Send-Down" program is definitely a waste. If someone still says the program was good, okay, and an easy way to test it, is that you send your children to the countryside. And so that's basically the idea, the narrative pattern that we can say, success just by suffering. What didn't destroy me, made me stronger, that kind of a story. But you probably would ask, did people's habitus change? Particularly given the sea changes in Chinese society since the Mao years. The answer is yes. So habitus change usually happened at the moments of awakening, self-analysis, and disillusionment. And all these habitus change actually going toward the direction of a negative evaluation of the program. And among the habitus types, aspirants are more likely to change, if we can go back to the table here. So the aspirants performance has some opportunistic elements because they mostly rely on the rewards they got from the system. If I performed very well, still didn't get rewards from the system, didn't get into college, and didn't get opportunities to be recruited as workers in the factory, all these kind of important opportunities, and I got disillusioned, and this started to question whether the system is fair? Or is the system just, is just problematic. And also what is interesting about habitus change is that for this generation, their habitus change happened at several very important historical moments. So this is where we can see the intersection between personal biography and also history. For example, after the Lin Biao's death, that's one big moment for many people in this generation, because Lin Biao before this incident was a semi-God figure. Now Lin Biao was a traitor, and so does that mean, what Lin Biao said before, was basically a lie and how many lies told to us and things like that. And another moment is in the end of the Cultural Revolution, particularly after the first Tiananmen movement, and also the "thought liberation" movement in the late 1970s, and also a few years later, the so-called "cultural fever" in the 1980s. I have one interviewee, whose aspirant habitus was pretty stubborn, and he didn't experience awakening moment even after the Cultural Revolution. Not until in the 1980s. He actually was sent by his Danwei to two colleges, to become so-called training teachers. Where he listened to a lot of lectures at the time, Chinese colleges was experiencing a very dramatic moment. Students are reading social scientific books, and the philosophy books translated from Western languages and poets become rock stars and so on and so forth. So that was a "cultural fever" period. And he started to think about his life and also all these things, and they suddenly realized that he was actually cheated by the system, and he used to blame himself, and also his family for all his troubles, Why I had a bad chushen? That's what I'm guessing. At that time, in those colleges, he was aware that the problem is with the system, instead of himself or his family. So this is just one of the many habitus change stories. And again, aspirants are the people who are more likely to change their habitus. And also just very

briefly, those with lower class positions also their memories can be explained by the habitus. But one of the most interesting categories is the faithful red, and those people who actually experienced the downwards mobility from worker's families, usually worker's families in the Mao years. And then to worker's family in the post-Mao years, but got laid-off or had lots of other troubles because of their Zhiqing years. So their personal experience was very negative, but what about their historical evaluation? The dilemma for them is that, they believe they were the loyal people. They were the people who were passionate about the ideology in the Mao years. But how come they ended up being in such a miserable place. So you will imagine those people probably have some many, many grievances about the Mao years, but actually it's not. Many of them were so-called "Grassroots Maoists." In other words, in their view about the Mao era, their blame were put on the present government instead of Mao government. So basically the narrative goes like this, in the Mao years, workers enjoyed a very high position, one of my interviewees I quoted here, and his father got hospitalized and his Danwei paid for the medical bill and his Danwei's leader visited hospital, to see him. But this person had trouble paying his own medical bills after the Cultural Revolution, and also he had trouble because he went to Xinjiang and all kinds of trouble as well. So he's blaming the current government because he believes that the current government is corrupted, and also there's a huge alliance between big capitalists and the government officials and so on and so forth. So this is more like a nostalgia story people are telling, to solve this dilemma between the past and the present. So I put all these stories together and encode the stories by quantifying some of the key elements, so you have these regression tables. I'm a sociologist, sociologists always like, more like an astrologers, to now looking for stars. If there's one star, you got really interested and you got significance, right? Two stars is huge significance, and then you got extremely excited. So you have all these stars here. But this is just to confirm some of the findings from qualitative research. They test the theory, which certainly pass the test, which is very interesting. If you are interested in those technical details, you can read the book and particularly appendix part, boring details are always in appendix, right? So the big picture is that, in the intergenerational differences in individual's memory are very important to understand generational memory. So let me just use a metaphor to talk about the generational memory. So in Chinese, there's a expression that is called, which means, our times is more like a tidal wave, a huge tidal wave. And the people who were born at a certain time in this generation, were the people who were involved in this tidal wave. Some people were able to, riding the wave, other people were tossed by the wave to the beach, and also other people were drawn into the wave. So when the tidal wave has already passed and actually in the different locations, when they look at a past, they're looking at the tidal wave, looking at their past, from their different locations. So this is a metaphor I use to talk about generations. In other words, generation is not a homogenous entity. It

is an entity with various kinds of people, but they experience the same event, and then they have different views about the event. And I try to explain their memories by looking at their class positions. And in other words, I look at class position in the present and in the past, and I also use Bourdieu's concept of habitus, in this case, more political habitus. And also habitus can change, as a response to dramatic social transformation, in China, from Mao period, to reform period. So you have the synchronization, or sometimes it's not synchronization, it's a mismatch between personal views and also the historical changes. So I use "Chairman Mao's children" in the title deliberately because I believe, this is also a metaphorical understanding of this generation. Children were born into a family, siblings born into the same family. They share the same parents and they have the imprints from their parents, but they grew up very differently, and they have different life paths. So they have this variation in their memory of their family, and in this case, they were all "Chairman Mao's children." They were born into a period, there's very strong political socialization, they carried the imprints throughout their life. But they walked their life paths in a very different way and also have very different views of their memory. So I skipped the other parts of the book. If you're interested, you can actually looking into that. So overall I'm just wrapping up. One is, the books goal is empirical, I try to provide a fine grained multilevel analysis of this generation who are caught between past and present, and also use multiple methods from interviews, to participant observations, and also literary works, textual analysis, museums, and memorials, and so on and so forth, to tell a story of this generation. And also I try to make some theoretical contributions to the literature, I pointed out intra-generational differences in memory are also very important. And the class, which is ignored in this literature of collective memory, is one of the major explanation factors. Of course, there are other factors in the book as well, such as group, and also production of cultural products, and museum, and so on and so forth. And also the normative goal is, I provide some thoughts about some political-ethical problems related to those seemingly apolitical narratives, such as, suffering into success, and point out class is something you cannot avoid. The winners tell their stories, but sometimes the winners of this generation, tend to ignore this continuing suffering, of the people who still suffer from the long-term impacts of this generation. I'll stop there and also welcome thoughts, and comments, and questions.

- Oh, thank you so much Bin, for the great talk. Now we will go ahead and take some time for questions. So just a reminder, please be sure to type your questions in the question box in your control panel. And now we have, I saw three questions. So the first question is about, like a similar initiative today. So Chong yi asked what can the story of Zhiqing tell us about contemporary state initiatives to send university students and graduates to volunteer in the countryside. For example, And do you think these 21st century programs are likely to

produce similar socio-cultural consequences? And since you have also studied youth volunteers and civic engagement in contemporary China, I wonder if you think the state led youth mobilization programs from these two different eras are an appropriate comparison to make.

- Thanks for the question, and also thanks for mentioning my previous work on the Sichuan earthquake volunteering. I think this comparison makes sense on some points, for example, the students and also youth were mobilized to contribute to the construction in the frontiers, particularly in Sibiu. But I also want to point out several things that are very important for us, when we are making this comparison. One is that most of the Zhiqing program at the time were forcible migration. So I wanna say that a state led forcible migration is one of the accurate definitions of Zhiqing, the "Send-Down" program, with some exceptions. For example, before the Cultural Revolution it's voluntary, and after the Cultural Revolution, particularly in the second wave from 1968 to 1970, in Shanghai it's called , which means all red, that everyone should go down with some exceptions. For example, if you are sick, or you are disabled, or other exceptions. But most of the people have to go down to the countryside. So this is one key difference. Today's mobilization programs rarely are forcible. Nobody would be forced to go down to countryside, and also another way is that, the "Send-Down" program was used as a way to solve the unemployment problem, while the volunteering probably is not a major solution, but there's linkage in terms of some of the rhetorics and the narratives that the state used to mobilize people. For example, contribute to the construction and also the contribution to the nations big programs. And also weave your own youth into all these state led programs, is a way to realize your values and things like that. Which is something that the state is interested in. This is why in the post-Mao era, the Chinese state did not actually suppress memory of the "Send-Down" program, even if it is a failure. And they want to utilize some of the ideological elements from the program, such as, patriotism, contributing your youth to the frontiers, and use that for ideological purpose, but at the same time, the state didn't want you to talk about event itself. So in other parts of my book, I talked about when the memory becomes public memory. It converged into a pattern that is called, talking about people, but not talking about the event. Highlighting people's contribution and their characters, but not really talking about the event itself, whether it's a failure or something like that. Don't debate it over it., and just talking about the people. So this is the linkage I see.

- Yeah, so, and Bin there is a related question.

- Sure.

- So there is attendee who ask overall, how would you say the younger generation views the Zhiqing today? And what are the views shaped by?

- I ask the same question. I ask my interviewees, almost every interviewees, the same question. Are your children interested in your past? So guess what? Almost all of them said that, "No, they're not interested at all. They don't want to listen to our stories." One of the interviewees said that, "You know, my daughter said that this is just a story from ." Which is before 1949. So that was the one way to think about, how the generational transmission of memory. Another way to think about all these lack of interest in their parents' past, is to understand this generation's dilemma. In other words, they are facing the reality that their cultural influence in the public sphere is going down very quickly. Nobody cares about their memory. Nobody cares about their past. When they keep talking about their suffering in the countryside, leading to a lot bitterness, but younger generations just don't care. And the older ones believe that you are just a bunch of red guards. So they have to face this kind of conceptions and understanding all the time, trying to prove that, we are the worthy people, we are the people who deserve respect, so this is why their voices are really loud, and to let everyone know that, our life experience is something that you need to respect, and we can tell good stories and stuff like that. So this is also why they organize so many activities, they're so active in promoting their memory, because of this amnesia, or if you want to say, lack of interest in the past.

- Yeah. So I just want to remind the audience that when you type your question, just make sure that you explain what do you mean in the question, because sometimes the speaker cannot really understand a short sentence. So it'll be very important for you to really explain to us your question, so that I can actually read a question to our speaker. And there are two questions about the countryside. So the first question is, did the experience reinforce or challenge the anti-rural, and anti-peasant views of the urban youth? And did you do your research mainly in cities, in China?

- Very good questions. These questions are talked about in the book. So let's think about this issue in this way. So most of the memories, are the Zhiqing's memories, right? They were the urban youths, and went down to the countryside. and they certainly suffered a lot. And then they came back to cities. Eventually most of them came back to cities, right? And then they talk about their past suffering. But from another point of view, let's say from a peasant point of view, 17 million hungry, young people coming down from urban centers and try to compete with us for the food and grab our food, stealing our chicken, and sleeping with our daughters, and so on and so forth. You are not suffering. People who actually are suffering, are us, peasants, who lived this kind of life for thousands of years. And what's the point of talking about suffering there. So I guess there's one big issue, in the memory of the Zhiqing generation, which I talked about, particularly in the last chapter and also the literature chapter as well, is the class. And the class bias and the class blindness. Most

of the Zhiqing really don't care about how peasants remember them, and how peasants also suffer at the time. And the peasants also are victims of this wrong policy as well, and how much difficulties they caused to the local community as well. So in the 1990s, there was a literary debate between some writers, like , and also other Zhiqing writers as well. So and other people raised the point that, the Zhiqing memory is very self-centered and also Zhiqing did not really do serious self-reflections of what they did during the Cultural Revolution, not only to the peasants community in the rural areas, but also to their teachers, and to the people they struggled, so-called struggled in the Cultural Revolution. So it's a memory lack of self-reflection, And was a kind of maverick in the literary memory because she was probably the only one who actually did this kind of reflection, and then he was hated by most of the Zhiqing, according to my interviewees, particularly those people who went to Heilongjiang, because Zheng Hong went to Heilongjiang as well. So yeah, to answer your question, the city-urban divide is another way to talk about class divide. This is why class is so essential, and it's not only essential because it shaped people's memory, but also essential, it actually created some blindness in their memory. And so in the last chapter of my book, I went a little bit normative, to sort of criticize this kind of a self-centered memory. And also the second question, yeah, because most of the Zhiqing, returned to cities. I did my research in cities, but I participated in quite a lot of revisiting trips to their "Send-Down" places as well.

- And there is a methodological question. So Robert Walker ask, is there a methodological challenge, in that all your material is based on memory, and all memory is contemporaneous. And you compare the past and the present, yet both memories are shaped by the present, and only class may be considered objective, but even that is described from the perspective of the present.

- Good. That's a good question. Yeah, exactly. That's why my focus is on contemporaneous memory. In other words, the purpose is not to examine the past, to tell you what had really happened in the past, but you think about, how they think about past. In other words, the focus is on memory. How the present positions shape their memory is exactly my focus. And as for class, it's as you said, that is an objective category, which can be relatively easier to identify. So I guess this is one of the distinctive feature of collective memory research. We are interested in not only the past, but also the past in the present. In other words, we are looking more at the present, instead of just the sheer history of the past.

- Yeah, and there is a last question. There is an audience who is interested in the relevance of your research to U.S today.

- Sure.

- So he thinks the U.S, is undergoing some kind of Cultural Revolution. So he wonder whether, the implication of your study on how we understand the American society today in terms of cancel culture.

- That's a big question. First I'm not sure what you mean by U.S is experiencing a Cultural Revolution today. And second, what I can see the relevance of my study is actually on some part of the book, but is not really the part of today's presentation, but I briefly mentioned that it's the pattern, people but not the event. In other words, that in some of the memories, even in the United States and other places, people try to highlight themselves, instead of talking about the event. So for example, Vietnam Veterans Memorial. And being there, you note that, it's all the names on the two marble walls and then nothing about the event at all. Why? Because the event itself is so controversial. So highlight the people without talking about event is one of the ways to avoid those issues, but at the same time, providing a way for people to interact and talk with each other about the past. So this is one of the things that we can talk about, whether this people but not event is justified, and also since Emory is in the American south, that in Civil War memory, there's also people, but not event narrative pattern. For example, highlighting some people, Robert. E. Lee, and highlighting their gentlemanship and stuff like that, but not talking about what the event actually is. So that's one of the ways, again, the people and not event is a way that people invented, to solve the memory dilemma problems in various contexts, including the United States.

- Okay. Thank you so much Professor Xu for the great and insightful talk, we run out of time and we still cannot answer all the remaining questions. And thank you everyone, we appreciate you being here, and our next lecture will be on April 14th. Professor Rachel Stern from UC Berkeley will give a talk entitled, "Performing Legality," and we hope to see you next time. And so I want to emphasize that at Harvard and also at the Fairbank center, we don't censor any speech. But I want to make sure that our speaker understand the question. Sometimes, so I will, for example, this person who asks question about Cultural Revolution in the U.S, because I don't really understand that sentence. So I ask the audience to actually clarify the question so that I can read a question to Professor Xu, and I just want emphasize, we appreciate, we value a lot academic freedom and that's our responsibility. And thank everyone, and we hope to see you next time. Bye

- Thank you very much.