Days of Old Are Not Puffs of Smoke:
Three Hypotheses on Collective
Memories of the Cultural Revolution*

Guobin Yang

Abstract
In the late 1970s and early 1980s, collective memories of the Cultural Revolution became a means of power struggle and a target of political control. In the 1990s, however, memories of the Cultural Revolution proliferated. This article proposes three hypotheses to explain this memory boom. A repressive hypothesis postulates that the mnemonic control in the earlier periods bred its own resistance. A market hypothesis holds that the rise of a culture industry provided a market for memory products, and cultural entrepreneurs seized the opportunity. A social hypothesis posits that while opening up spaces for alternative memories, the booming market paradoxically created social discontents, especially among the zhiqing members of the Cultural Revolution generation. Whether in China or as diaspora, they articulated a nostalgic imaginary of an alternative Chinese modernity in which the reconstruction of morality took central place.

Guobin YANG is an associate professor in the Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Cultures at Barnard College, Columbia University.

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