

Baoding Hua tragic fate, as described by Xingsu Shen, his colleague and widow.

The original text in Chinese can be found at memorial web created by Prof Youqin Wang from Chicago Univ: https://ywang.uchicago.edu/history/hua_baoding.htm

This text was translated by Prof Jun Huang from Forschungszentrum Jülich

****Hua Baoding****, a researcher at the "Metal Corrosion and Protection" Laboratory of the Changchun Institute of Applied Chemistry, Chinese Academy of Sciences, graduated from the Department of Chemical Engineering at Tsinghua University in 1952. During the 1968 "Cleansing the Class Ranks Movement," he was accused of being a "spy," subjected to brutal "investigation," and was to be "dealt with severely" by being arrested and imprisoned. On the morning of November 28, 1968, he died by electrocution at home—an apparent suicide. He was only 37 years old. He left behind a 14-year-old daughter and a two-year-old son.

The "Cleansing the Class Ranks" campaign at this research institute claimed five lives. The other four victims were Hua E, Lü Youlong, Zheng Shaoji, and Yu Bainian. The last three were implicated in the same so-called "spy case" as Hua Baoding.

The "Cleansing the Class Ranks" movement was a nationwide campaign launched on Mao Zedong's orders and was one of the most brutal campaigns of the Cultural Revolution.

Hua Baoding's wife, Shen Xingsu, wrote the following article to document this dark and cruel period of history and to express her deep sorrow and remembrance of her loved one. Let us pay tribute to this family, who endured suffering with love, loyalty, and courage.

****Qingming Festival, 2008****

Some Memories and Accusations About the "Cleansing the Class Ranks" Movement

****By Shen Xingsu****

The "Cleansing the Class Ranks" movement (abbreviated as "Qingdui") during 1968–1969 led to three deaths at the Changchun Institute of Applied Chemistry, Chinese Academy of Sciences: Hua E, Hua Baoding, and Yu Bainian. If you include Lü Youlong (recently transferred to the Institute of Semiconductors, then being established in Beijing) and Zheng Shaoji (transferred to the Changchun Institute of Optics and Fine Mechanics), the death toll should be five!

Despite the ferocity and scale of the campaign at the institute—loudly proclaimed as a great success at the time—it eventually faded without any real resolution. Although Chairman Mao issued a directive in early 1969 stating that the campaign was "triggered by causes, but lacked conclusive evidence," bringing the movement to an end, the authorities never explained to the public, the victims, or their families what the "causes" were. As for the "lack of evidence," the investigations were halted. In 1978, a public meeting was held to rehabilitate the wrongly accused—thanks in part to Hu Yaobang, then General Secretary, who resisted internal party resistance to accomplish this good deed. However, all they did was remove the false accusations from official archives without providing any explanation or documentation of the reasoning behind it. Victims were expected to "understand" this on their own, with no apology or further explanation.

In the mid-1970s, as Hua Baoding's widow, I was once summoned by the Accounting Department of the institute to collect a 300 yuan compensation (about two months of my salary at the time), with no explanation offered. Was a human life worth just that? I refused to accept it. After his rehabilitation, I eventually accepted it and also began receiving a 20 yuan monthly subsidy for our youngest child until he turned 18 in 1985. Absurdly, the Party Secretary of my department (a demobilized soldier with only a junior high education, responsible for ideological work in our department of about twenty people) even told me I should "thank" the Party for clarifying Hua Baoding's case!

I always regarded the "Cleansing the Class Ranks" campaign as equivalent to the "literary inquisition" of the Qing Dynasty. At that time, the foreign rulers, in fear of losing power, invented enemies out of nothing through forced confessions, resulting in countless wrongful deaths. One man was executed just because his poem said, "The breeze knows not how to read, why then flip the pages?"—interpreted as a veiled critique of the Qing's cultural ignorance.

The authorities tried hard to bury this historical injustice, destroying records and documents. As a result, many people today know little or nothing about it. For example, a commemorative album published in 1998 for the 50th anniversary of the institute—printed with exquisite care in Hong Kong—did not mention the "Cleansing the Class Ranks" at all. Nor was there any mention of Yu Bainian and Hua Baoding, who played important roles in founding the field of "Metal Corrosion and Protection" in China in the 1950s. Their contemporaries were included, even with photos, making it obvious that there was a deliberate attempt to erase this shameful chapter from institutional history.

I've long wanted to write down what I know of this tragedy. Though my knowledge is limited, it still reveals the absurdity of the movement. Those who led the investigations, claiming to be loyal to Chairman Mao's revolutionary line, could act outside any legal bounds to extract confessions and create wrongful cases—yet bore no responsibility for the consequences. What happened at our institute was a microcosm of what was happening nationwide. Across the street, at the Changchun Institute of Optics and Fine Mechanics, things were reportedly even worse. During the post-reform rectifications, Wang Daheng, the director and a member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said at a public meeting that torture methods such as the "tiger bench," forced ingestion of used machine oil with steel shavings, hanging and beating, and electric shocks were used in their "Cleansing" campaign—resulting in more deaths than at our institute.

We should record as much as we can while some of the people involved are still alive, to preserve original materials for future generations studying this painful history.

The next day he came back and said to me, "They said if I don't confess, they'll send me to the Public Security Bureau tomorrow. Once I'm there, I'll be tortured—beaten until I confess, even if there's nothing to confess." He was in extreme pain and despair. At that time, he couldn't sit or lie down properly because of the severe prolapsed hemorrhoids. The mental and physical torment was unbearable.

He didn't go to work on the morning of November 28, 1968. Around 10:30 AM, our downstairs neighbor knocked frantically on my door, shouting, "Something's wrong! Come quickly!" I rushed home, only to find his lifeless body on the floor. One hand was gripping the electric socket, and the other still held a metal conductor. He had electrocuted himself. He was only 37 years old.

Our 14-year-old daughter had gone to school, and our two-year-old son was at the nursery. I was alone, completely stunned. I didn't cry, didn't scream—just sat there in shock. Someone must have reported the incident. Soon, military control committee members and local police came and sealed off the area. The "Special Case Group" that had interrogated him came too, shocked and panicked. One of them, a young woman, sobbed, "We didn't mean for this to happen!" Another person shouted, "Quick, cover him with a blanket!"

What they feared most was that news of his death might cause trouble. They wanted to suppress it. The people from the military committee took the lead in the investigation. When I asked to see the autopsy report, they said it was classified. Later, I heard that the coroner concluded: "Suicide by electric shock."

But it was not an ordinary suicide. It was the culmination of unbearable psychological and physical torture, humiliation, and character assassination. He was driven to death. He was murdered by a system that no longer treated people as human beings.

After his death, the atmosphere in the research institute became even more terrifying. Everyone became more silent, more obedient. The "Special Case Group" claimed he was guilty and had taken his own life because he couldn't bear the weight of his crimes. But quietly, many people were shaken.

Our daughter stopped speaking for a long time. Our son was too young to understand. I was interrogated many times, accused of "suppressing" his confessions or helping him conceal the truth. I was emotionally numb. I often stood by the window at night, holding back tears, trying not to cry in front of the children.

Only many years later, after the Cultural Revolution ended, were the injustices officially overturned. In the late 1970s, a public assembly was held, and Hu Yaobang, then General Secretary, led the effort to redress such wrongs. My husband was finally declared innocent. The official explanation stated: "There was no factual basis for the accusations."

But by then, what did it change? He was long dead. His youth, his contributions, his family—all destroyed. His children grew up without a father. And the perpetrators? They were never punished. Some even got promoted. No apology. No responsibility. No record of guilt. Only silence and forgetting.

In 1998, when the Institute published a lavish commemorative album for its 50th anniversary, not a single word was mentioned about the "Cleansing the Class Ranks" campaign. Neither my husband's name nor that of his colleague Yu Bainian, who also died tragically, appeared in the album. It was as if they had never existed, as if their contributions to the founding of "metal corrosion and protection" as a scientific discipline in China had been erased from history.

That's why I am writing this today—not just for my husband, but for all those who suffered, who died, and whose stories were buried. We must not forget. This is part of our collective memory, and it deserves to be told.

Let this be a small tribute to those who perished in silence. May history remember them truthfully and honorably.

— Shen Xingsu, April 2008, Qingming Festival