

DANIELA LICANDRO
The University of Chicago
Berkeley-Stanford Graduate Student Conference 2015
Stanford University, Palo Alto

ABSTRACT

Instantiations of Jiantao: Yang Mo's Diaries (1945-1982)

This paper examines articulations of self-criticism (*jiantao*) in the diaries of the writer Yang Mo (1915-1995). *Jiantao* refers to the Communist practice of self-analysis that consisted in identifying one's ideological and/or behavioral shortcomings. People from diverse social backgrounds produced *jiantao*, oral and written, in response to accusations of rightism or other mistakes. As a technique of political re-education, *jiantao* became a popular phenomenon in China from the early 1940s. This paper argues that Yang Mo's diaries can be read as a manifestation of *jiantao*. This reading will invite a new reflection on what *jiantao*, merely known as a Communist technique of thought reform, accomplished beyond strictly defined contexts of punishment and re-education. Yang Mo's diary spans from 1945 to 1982 and constitutes a compelling document to inquire into what self-criticism achieved during and after the socialist period. By exploring Yang Mo's diary from the perspective of self-criticism, this paper asks: what qualifies Yang's diary as an instantiation of *jiantao*? What is the content of *jiantao* and what is its form? How did *jiantao* shape Yang's diary and what did it offer to Yang Mo as a creative writer? My close reading of Yang Mo's diary entries will show how self-criticism became entangled with her preoccupation with writing as a mission and a means to construct her identity as a writer. The questions of how to write, how to communicate with readers, and how to shape one's artistic persona demand, in Yang's diary, a constant labor of self-interrogation and self-criticism. The striking ways in which *jiantao* became enmeshed with issues of artistic creation suggest new possibilities of understanding *jiantao* and its relation to literature in twentieth-century China.