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ABSTRACT

**Reflecting on the Past: Self-criticism and Collective Identity in Wei Junyi's
*Recollections of Pain***

This paper explores the intersection of personal and collective memory in Wei Junyi's (韦君宜 1917-2002) understudied memoir, *Recollections of Pain* (*Sitong lu* 思痛录, 1998). Written between 1976 and 1989, Wei's text stands out in the sea of post-Mao memoirs that have tried to come to terms with the sufferings of the revolutionary era. The effort to critically reflect on the past, personal and collective, ensures Wei's memoir a place in the large body of "literature of reflection" (反思文学). My paper engages with the "reflective" agenda of the text and asks how reflection operates, what its models are, and how it relates to the collective identity constructed in the text. I argue that self-criticism (*jiantao* 检讨)—the socialist practice of self-analysis meant to identify one's mistakes and reform oneself—provides Wei Junyi with an important model to examine the past. The logic of self-criticism is summarized by the formula "unity-struggle-unity." Wei's memoir, in its entirety, re-enacts the formula. On trial is her and other people's deviation from the original project of eliminating privileges and building a democracy of the people. In the "self-criticism" she carries out, the "self" is however not simply the individual self but a collective self. My study of the intersection of personal and collective identity in *Recollections of Pain* shows how collective narratives did not disappear immediately after the end of the revolutionary period. Moreover, reading Wei's memoir from the perspective of how it recuperates and/or departs from the *jiantao* tradition allows a better understanding not only of the place of self-criticism within the broader context of cultural and literary practices, but also of its relation to the way literature was imagined, desired, and pursued.