

## A Survey of “Printed” Sources for Researching the Early Maoist Period

Steven Pieragastini

This essay will discuss on the availability and utility of printed, published sources for studying the early years of the People’s Republic, up to the Cultural Revolution. “Printed sources” here includes physical copies of printed sources as well as printed sources that have been scanned or transcribed and made available in databases. This category also includes both items from the Maoist period itself as well as those compiled since the start of Reform and Opening Up. While the resources discussed below are not a comprehensive list of printed sources, they are reasonably easy to locate and access and should provide at least a starting point for a wide variety of research topics.

Sources produced during the Maoist period itself range from well-known and widely available sources such as *People’s Daily*, which is fully digitized and searchable for anyone to use<sup>1</sup>, to more obscure and rare sources, or sources with a deliberately limited circulation. In addition to *People’s Daily*, regional and local newspapers can often be found on microfilm at major research universities, and some have been digitized and made available in databases accessible in mainland China. Additionally, relevant newspapers from Hong Kong<sup>2</sup> and Taiwan<sup>3</sup> are readily available online for the public or through several major research institutions. Many periodicals from the Maoist period have been digitized and are available as part of major Chinese databases like CNKI and Duxiu. Beyond newspapers and periodicals published for mass consumption, there are a range of government periodicals from the Maoist period that detail provincial and local government activities and orders (政报) or focus on specific areas of work, either periodical reports like 政讯 and 简报, or published collections of documents with phrases like 参考资料 or 文件汇编 in their titles. One of the best starting places for research on the 1950s and early 1960s is the *Internal Reference* 《内部参考》 a limited-circulation publication for high-level cadres that offered frank descriptions of major problems. Many of these have been transcribed and included in the excellent Databases on the History of Contemporary Chinese Political Movements<sup>4</sup> edited by Song Yongyi and managed by the Chinese University of Hong Kong. CUHK’s Universities Service Centre for China Studies has scanned copies of the full run of *Internal Reference*; unfortunately, with the closing of the Centre, the future of this resource is uncertain. Additionally, there are a range of published sources with some sort of *neibu* designation that are nonetheless available to researchers today. Taking, for example, a research topic dealing with land reform in Yunnan, a researcher could employ various individual publications in the large series 少数民族社会历史调查 as well as compilations of materials on land reform at the local level that were published

during the campaign itself, such as 《德宏傣族地区和平协商土地改革文件汇编》. It is worth noting that, while the *Internal Reference* contains information that can be difficult to obtain elsewhere, *neibu* designations were used widely and not all *neibu* publications are particularly revealing to scholars of PRC History.<sup>5</sup>

When it comes to sources published since the start of Reform and Opening Up, perhaps the most voluminous are collected archival documents put out by provincial and municipal archives and Party history offices. These include collections of important documents on various matters from provincial and municipal party committees, as well as collections of documents dealing specifically with major campaigns in the Maoist era, such as Liberation, Land Reform, Co-operativization and collectivization, the Great Leap Forward, and the Four Cleanups/Socialist Education Movement (though not the Cultural Revolution). Local Party histories are often little more than wearisome lists of individuals and the positions they held, along with their deeds in service of the Party, but they occasionally can be of tremendous value (and include primary documents if part of a 党史资料 series). Similar collections of documents include major directives by the Party Center (including 《中共中央文件选集》 and 《建国以来重要文献选编》, which is available online)<sup>6</sup>, speeches and writings of Party leaders (which can be thematic, such as 《周恩来外交文选》), collections of documents pertaining to or originating from particular regions or administrative units (for example, 《中共中央西北局文件汇集》), thematic collections relating, for example, to foreign relations (such as 《现代中越关系资料选编: 1949. 10—1978》 and 《中国与苏联关系文献汇编: 1952年—1955年》), or collections that include documents from various geographic locations and levels of the Party-State bureaucracy, often focused on a particular area of Party work (for example, 《农业集体化重要文件汇编: 1949—1981》 and 《中国共产党与少数民族地区的民主改革和社会主义改造》). The documents included in such collections can vary widely, from reproductions of articles from *People’s Daily* and major speeches of Mao and other Party leaders that are available elsewhere, to very local, low-level reports from Party cadres that would only otherwise be available in the archive itself. There are a number of issues with such collections of documents, the most obvious being the likelihood that documents have been edited to exclude certain information. Moreover, the published documents do not include identifying information indicating their provenance or order in a group of documents, nor do they include marginal notes.

Another extremely useful source for scholars of the post-1949 period are the "new" gazetteers (地方志), distinct from gazetteers published in the imperial or Republican eras. For provinces, prefectures, and larger municipalities, dozens of dedicated thematic volumes (专业志) have been published on a wide range of subjects (these also often exist for smaller municipalities and counties, but can be difficult to locate). The "new" gazetteers are widely available outside of mainland China and in many cases have been digitized, available either on dedicated websites (such as <http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/index.html> and <http://www.gxdfz.org.cn/>) or as part of the Wangfang Data gazetteer database (<http://fz.wanfangdata.com.cn/>). Unfortunately, a number of websites that had digitized copies of the provincial-level gazetteers are now defunct, while the Wanfang database appears to have not included, or included and then removed, a number of volumes or sections of gazetteers dealing with "sensitive" topics. The status of these websites and databases can change quickly, and it is worth checking to see if resources have been reconstituted in a different form (for instance, the site with digitized copies of gazetteers for Jiangsu<sup>7</sup> went offline, and later came back online with a different URL and a requirement to register). Aside from accessibility, as a source of information, gazetteers have some obvious problems relating to their production and approval by Party-affiliated offices (often local branches of the 政协). Nevertheless, they can be surprisingly revealing and are especially useful for raw data. There are also village gazetteers 村志, which range from semi-official to unofficial publications, and are increasingly available outside of mainland China (the University of Pittsburgh has an especially large collection, some data from which has been collated for researchers' use).<sup>8</sup>

Another very large collection of sources that is worth any researcher's time to examine is the *Compilations of Important Historical Documents of the CCP* (中共重要历史文献资料汇编), published by the Service Center for Chinese Publications (中文出版物服务中心). The collection is divided into 35 series (辑), each composed of dozens or hundreds of parts (分册), which themselves are often several volumes. It is difficult to overestimate the breadth and depth of this collection; while much of it focuses on high-level Party politics as well as the internal organization and administration of the Party, many volumes also deal with the grassroots implementation of and reaction to political campaigns, especially the Cultural Revolution. There are also series dedicated to military affairs, public security, borderlands and *shaoshu minzu* policies, and economic policy. The chronological range of the sources stretches from the Party's revolutionary phase before 1949 nearly down to the present. Major research libraries (including UCLA<sup>9</sup>, Harvard<sup>10</sup>, and Princeton<sup>11</sup>) house large portions of this collection, and much of it has been digitized by Harvard's Yenching Library and Hathitrust. A number of the volumes in this collection have also been transcribed and included in the aforementioned CUHK Databases on the History of Contemporary Chinese Political Movements.

The above types sources may not be equivalent to easy access to the archive, which appears unlikely for the foreseeable

future, but used carefully and in conjunction, these sourcebases can serve as a great alternative. In particular, *neibu* sources and compilations of primary sources can be exceptionally rich sources of information.

With all of these considerations in mind, where should a researcher look for sources when embarking on a new project? Perhaps the best place to start is WorldCat ([www.worldcat.org](http://www.worldcat.org)), which allows searches in both *hanzi* (simplified or traditional work, regardless of the format of the title) and pinyin (aside from proper nouns, individual syllables must be separated as is conventional in library cataloging; so, for example, "Mao Zedong xuan ji" instead of "Mao Zedong xuanji"). WorldCat is especially useful because it is tied in with Interlibrary Loan, which allows for sources to be shipped or scanned from other libraries to one's home institution, even internationally in some cases. Another great resource, if your institution has access, are Chinese databases such as CNKI, Duxiu, and Chinamaxx, which have scanned periodicals from the Maoist period and some primary source collections, along *wenshi ziliao* (文史资料), memoirs, oral histories, and secondary scholarly works. It is also worth looking at the enormous and freely-accessible 抗战文献数据平台 (<http://www.modernhistory.org.cn/>), which, despite its name, contains digitized (and mostly searchable) newspapers, periodicals, archival documents, photographs and more from the entire Republican era and into the early 1950s. The platform also includes scanned copies of primary sources compiled and published since 1980, including those pertaining to the early PRC (some examples: 《湖南和平解放接管建政史料》, 《苏州城市接管与社会改造》, and the periodical 《广州市政》).

Book buying sites, like the well-known [www.kongfz.com/](http://www.kongfz.com/) may not have quite as many sources as a decade ago, but they still do include a tremendous amount of contemporary and recent compilations of sources that would be difficult if not impossible to locate outside of mainland China (and generally do not entail the same ethical problems associated with buying deaccessioned or perhaps stolen archival documents). Especially due to the pandemic, shipping can be extremely slow and expensive, but some sellers are willing to scan sources if you contact them. There are also a number of buying agents that can purchase materials domestically and then ship them internationally for a fee. Although it would have been more fruitful several years ago, a simple search on Baidu or Google may yield sources that have been scanned and uploaded, especially into a cloud service like Baidu *wangpan*. Similarly, though many posts dealing with sensitive issues have been taken down, blogs can still be a great way to access primary sources, which are often extensively reproduced or scanned. Recently, private WeChat groups have emerged as a valuable means for accessing materials, but depend on an invitation or at least the approval of group administrators, highlighting again the importance of networking and information-sharing.

Finally, it is worth thinking critically about the nature of printed sources and access to them. Their very existence and reproduction by government offices and publishers reflects the fact that this was information that the state deemed worthwhile

to document and propagate. Moreover, despite their apparent fixed and permanent nature as printed words on paper, these sources are in fact dynamic; ink fades, paper decomposes, scans and photographs can be blurry, web links "rot" over time or are deliberately broken, and documents can be selectively excised from digital collections.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the pandemic has highlighted pre-existing issues like the difficulties of researchers who are not affiliated with or living near major research libraries for East Asian Studies. Libraries and research institutions have responded to the pandemic by expanding

access to their digitized collections; these allowances would improve the quality of research and allow for a more diverse range of perspectives if they were made permanent in some fashion.

<sup>1</sup> Available at <http://data.people.com.cn/rmrb>, <http://www.laoziliao.net/rmrb/>, and elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> Old Hong Kong Newspapers (<https://mmis.hkpl.gov.hk/old-hk-collection>) and

<sup>3</sup> 台灣新聞智慧網 <http://tnsw.infolinker.com.tw/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://ccrd.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/>

<sup>5</sup> See Nicolai Volland, "Clandestine Cosmopolitanism: Foreign Literature in the People's Republic of China, 1957–1977" *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 76, Issue 1 (Feb. 2017), 185 – 210; Wen-hsuan Tsai, "A Unique Pattern of Policymaking in China's Authoritarian Regime: the CCP's Neican/Pishi Model" *Asian Survey*, Vol. 55, Number 6, pp. 1093–1115; and Michael Schoenhals, "信息、决策和中国的'文化大革命'" in 朱佳木 (Ed.), 當代中國與它的外部世界 (當代中國出版社, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/209963/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://58.213.139.243:8088/FZJS/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.chinesevillagedata.library.pitt.edu/> Also see Kristen Looney, "Village Gazetteers, a New Source in the China Field." *The China Journal* 60, 135-47.

<sup>9</sup> <https://bit.ly/3kPa3Gs>

<sup>10</sup> [https://guides.library.harvard.edu/ld.php?content\\_id=23588005](https://guides.library.harvard.edu/ld.php?content_id=23588005)

<sup>11</sup> [https://catalog.princeton.edu/catalog?utf8=✓&search\\_field=all\\_fields&q=中共重要历史文献资料汇编](https://catalog.princeton.edu/catalog?utf8=✓&search_field=all_fields&q=中共重要历史文献资料汇编)

<sup>12</sup> Even something as minor as the collective abandonment of Adobe Flash Player by most web browsers at the end of 2020 can cause tremendous headaches for researchers, since many Chinese websites still use Flash Player to display documents.