

Lives, Deaths, and Afterlives:  
The Memory Politics of Martyrdom in the Chinese Adaptation of French  
Resistance Last Letters, 1950-1990

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## Introduction

It is reasonably assumed that last letters are telling of their writers' lives—in the extremity of near-death situations, what one chooses to convey as their last thoughts to the outside world is an extremely intensely personal and private matter. However, the situation is perhaps complicated when these letters were written by political prisoners, who were executed for a political cause, or people who are colloquially known as martyrs. One is tempted to ask of these people who have made the sacrifice: How much do they retain their interiority as private persons instead of political actors? Are the personal and the political necessarily at odds with one another? Additionally, as the letters acquire historical significance over time, the words in them are translated, understood, and applied to different contexts, as if acquiring a life of their own through historical narratives and geopolitical interests that revolve around them.

The subject of inquiry here is a specific set of last letters: the last letters of the French Resistance, during the Nazi Occupation of France in World War II. These letters not only contain narratives in their very content but also acquire added meaning, embodying the changing narratives of resistance in the postwar order. Recently, the letters have attracted much interest and inquiry from scholars of multiple disciplines, mostly surrounding the writers themselves and their lives before they crystallize into ink on paper, and some around the polemics of translations and censorships. For example, multiple anthologies of the last letters have been published over the later half of the past century, while other scholarships have explored various aspects of these poignant documents, offering a rich foundation for further inquiry. To be specific, scholars have examined the historical, psychological, and literary dimensions of these letters, shedding light on the experiences and motivations of the resistance fighters: David Diamant's *Combattants, héros et martyrs de la Résistance* (1984)

seeks to restore the role of Jewish resistors, whose contributions and last letters had been whitewashed from memory following earlier editions, thereby addressing gaps in historical memory and recognition. In *La vie à en mourir: lettres de fusillés 1941-1944* (2003), edited by Guy Krivopissko, the letters are restored to their original, non-edited forms, presenting a more authentic representation of the resistance fighters' final thoughts and emotions. In Mercedes Camino's article "*War, gender, and lasting emotion: letters and photographs of Masha Bruskina and Olga Bancic, 1941-44*" (2023) the focus was on the gendered dimensions of last letters, particularly those of female resistors like Olga Bancic. Additionally, Emmanuel Debruyne and Laurence van Ypersele's *Je serai fusillé demain: les dernières lettres des patriotes Belges et Français par l'occupant, 1914-1918* (2011) applies psychological theories, such as the Kübler-Ross model of grief, to understand the psychological processes experienced by letter writers facing imminent death. This study highlights the diverse emotional responses to impending execution, ranging from denial to acceptance. François Marcot's work, including his statistical study in *Lettres des fusillés. Derniers écrits. Documents d'histoire* (2011), seeks to identify common themes and content in last letters, exploring whether there exists a genre of last letter writing.

Yet, despite the extensive scholarship on last letters, one significant gap remains: the study of translations of these letters. My research aims to fill this gap by examining the Chinese localization of last letters from the French Communist Resistance, exploring how ideological and cultural contexts shape the presentation and interpretation of these poignant documents. By doing so, I hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the transnational dimensions of resistance narratives and the politics of martyrdom.

To fully understand the Chinese translations, one must first explore the historical context of the French original during and after World War II, and then examine China's reception and reinterpretation of the translation in the early 1950s. This essay differs from previous scholarship and attempts to trace the specific Chinese translations of these French letters, of which there are two: One published in 1950, titled 血的紀錄, and another in 1990, titled 他们热爱生活. By a comparative study of these two letters within their respective historical context, I attempt to investigate the tension between the private and the public: How are convictions and emotions narrated in different contexts, and toward what ends are they being instrumentalized? How might this illuminate the larger historical and political landscape in the postwar period, especially in China as it grapples with its own communist identity and its position in the postwar order? How do political and ideological convictions express themselves in private letters, and how are they subsequently instrumentalized by across space and time? How do performativity, emotional mobilization, and the cult of martyrs construct historical memories in Maoist and Post-Maoist China and how does that reflect its domestic tensions and geopolitical relations?

I argue that the translations of these last letters of the French Communist Resistance in China provide fascinating insights into how China negotiated its identities and positions in the world, particularly during the significant shifts from the Maoist 1950s to the Post-Maoist 1990s. Additionally, these translations were part of the broader politics of war memory, specifically regarding the Second World War, which continues to shape the ways contemporary countries narrate their international relations and national identities. Lastly, the localization of these French Communist last letters offers intriguing insights into the role of language and translation in shaping the politics of affective historical memories.

### China in the Early 50s: A Historical Background for “*Testments of Blood*”

Both the French and the Chinese editions of the letters entail rich historical contexts. Although this essay focuses on the Chinese translations, the contexts of the French originals are crucial to our discussion of their Chinese translations: During World War II, the French letters were reportedly read on Radio London, as well as Radio Moscow, and in this way broadcast to France during the war. The first post-war edition was published by the French Communist Party (*Parti Communiste Français/ PCF*) in 1946, titled *Lettres de Fusillées*, and contained 71 letters. During the Nazi occupation, the PCF was a leading force, intensively committed to the cause of the underground resistance, *La Résistance*. Ideologically motivated by anti-fascist sentiments, which had been briefly frustrated during the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and with extensive experience working underground due to previous bans, the communists played a significant role in the Resistance. This role was heavily emphasized and even exaggerated as the PCF sought to solidify a memory politics that heightened their moral authority and political leverage in the formation of a newly liberated French Republic: 2 years after the liberation from Nazi Occupation in 1944, the first edition of the letter was published during a time of active memory construction in postwar France, and was an essential part of it. The French Communist Party claimed itself to be “the” party of resistance through a particular cult of the martyrs (*culte des martyrs*) that heightened its loss and sacrifices for the sake of the resistance, terming itself the “party of those shot dead”.<sup>1</sup> To highlight such sacrifices, the French Communist Party largely exaggerated the number of communist martyrs for resistance as 75,000 deaths, which were later proven to be around 4,500-15,000.<sup>2</sup> Building monuments for its martyrs and their words was therefore a fundamental part of the PCF's campaign to embed itself in the national consciousness as the foremost defender of French liberty and values. The inclusive selection of 71 letters, whose

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Martelli, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow, *One Hundred Years of History of the French Communist Party: The Red Party*, Marx, Engels, and Marxisms (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 85.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

writers' death were still fresh at the time of their publication, preserved the final words and sentiments of executed resistance fighters to evoke emotional resonance and a deep sense of injustice, thereby rallying public support for the communist cause. This form of political theater, where the ultimate sacrifice of the martyrs was dramatized, helped to galvanize the working class and other segments of society under the communist banner. In other words, the PCF was acutely aware of its triumphant position emerging from the liberation and sought to actively commemorate their martyrs' sacrifices and final words while constructing post-war legitimacy from them.<sup>3</sup> By doing so, the party not only honored its past but also laid a robust foundation for its postwar political endeavors, leveraging the heroism of the resistance to cement its role in shaping the new French Republic.

In 1949, the Soviet Union published the first Russian translation of these French last letters, which included only 24 martyrs, a sharp contrast to the 71 martyrs in the French edition. This discrepancy reflects an ideological transition and the evolving role of the martyrdom image within that transition. While the specifics and significance of selecting and excluding certain names will be discussed in a later section, it is crucial to contextualize the Chinese edition published one year later by recognizing the central role the Soviet Union played in guiding the direction of the Communist world. At that time, the transition was moving from the broad postwar popular democracy to the campist politics of the Cold War. As early as 1947, Andrei Zhdanov, the Soviet "propagandist in chief" and Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian SFSR, stated that "the world was divided into two camps: the war camps under the domination of American imperialism and the camp of peace and democracy."<sup>4</sup> This trend of a hardening bipolar world, divided between the Communist camp and the Liberal Democracies, continued to escalate from 1947 to 1950, paving the way for the Cold War. For our purposes, this context implies two key points: Firstly, the aura of

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<sup>3</sup> Brunstetter,

<sup>4</sup> Roger Martelli, Jean Vigneux, and Serge Wolikow, *One Hundred Years of History of the French Communist Party: The Red Party, Marx, Engels, and Marxisms* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 126.

inclusivity present in 1946 shifted to stricter control over the communist narrative through the management of wartime memory. Secondly, the reaffirmation of the Soviet Union as the headquarters for communists worldwide was expressed through this Soviet republication and selective inclusion of the last letters, which was then mirrored by the Chinese translation of the Soviet version.

The Soviet Union was also the key to the otherwise puzzling question as to why the People's Republic of China would publish letters of the French martyrs in the early year of its founding. At its conception, the PRC fostered a close alliance with the Soviet Union ideologically, geopolitically, and soon culturally. This ideological alignment between the Soviet Union and the PRC was underscored by the signing of the Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty in February 1950. While the main focus of the treaty was an alliance between China and the Soviet Union against potential Japanese aggression, the return of former Russian-controlled areas back to China, and a loan of \$300 million credit from the USSR to the PRC, the Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty was also a largely cultural phenomenon, which was from its preparation to its influences a public phenomenon that reaffirmed the ideological supremacy of Stalin's USSR. As a result, numerous Soviet literary and technical works were translated into Chinese; Soviet films were shown, plays were performed, exhibitions were held, and Russian language classes were organized.<sup>5</sup> According to S.A. Smith, "By November, the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association had 38.9 million members—mainly in the cities—making it the largest mass organization in the PRC".<sup>6</sup> Thus, It was during this period of burgeoning friendship that the Chinese were likely introduced to these French last letters, among the many Russian language works that were translated into Chinese to consolidate the alliance between China and the USSR, playing a key role in shaping the nascent CCP cultural political identity.

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<sup>5</sup> Jeffery Wasserstrom, ed., *The Oxford History of Modern China* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 215.

<sup>6</sup> *The Oxford History of Modern China*, 214.

As aforementioned, the first Chinese edition adhered to the Soviet selection of last letters in the Russian-language edition. Titled “*Testaments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*” (血的紀錄:被槍殺的法國共產黨人底書簡), contained only 24 authors like its Russian predecessor, and was published in July 1950 in Shanghai by Xinqun publishing agency. It was republished under the same title in October of the same year and again in the years of 1951, 1953 and 1954. In 1950, the newly founded People's Republic of China (PRC) urgently sought to solidify its economic, social, and political structures, with an ideological apparatus being crucial to the legitimacy and stability of the nascent republic. However, like many newly established political orders, the PRC's situation in 1950 was deeply unsettled. The economic and social infrastructures had been severely impaired by the wars that had raged on the Chinese continent, necessitating reconstruction. Meanwhile, the Nationalist Government, though retreated to Taiwan, was determined to reclaim the mainland through military campaigns. A glance at publications in the *People's Daily*, the Chinese Communist Party's official news outlet, reveals that the PRC faced serious and continuous armed revolts in many areas within mainland China for the next two years. Nevertheless, despite the many difficulties and threats, the mood of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was relatively positive, “one of relentless determination to break with the past and set about building a more just and equal society”.<sup>7</sup>

For my purpose here, this essay will focus more on the ideological apparatus that was under construction at the time and needed solidification through various ideological campaigns and historical narratives. In this context, the French letters can be better understood as they were not only instrumental in reinforcing the official narrative but also served to educate and mobilize the masses, instilling a sense of shared purpose and identity in the face of internal and external threats. As will be argued later, this struggle within mainland

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, 208.



China mirrored the broader international communist revolutions of the time, which the French letters provided crucial insights into.

Historians describe the years between the establishment of the PRC in 1949 to the ratification of the first constitution in 1954 as a period of “new democracy”.<sup>8</sup> However, “new democracy” differed significantly from the Western definition of liberal democratic institutions, rather, it is defined as forming a broad alliance under the leadership of the communists, to remove power from the old elites—traditional feudal orders or foreign imperialist controls—so that the power would be released into the hands of the people. Ideologically, it meant the establishment of a broad alliance that allowed for a more gradualistic and inclusive definition of the “people”, especially when compared to the idea of “the dictatorship of the proletariat” that would come dominate the political language of the late 50s. It is important to note that strategies similar to “new democracy” are not unique to China but in synergy with the broader, Comintern-guided call to promote a broad alliance of democratic and patriotic alliances against fascism in World War II: At the 7th Congress of the Communist International, Georges Dimitrov announced the new orientation for the communist world by praising the French Communist Party, which had been championing a domestic “united front” strategy,<sup>9</sup> “France is the country where, as we know, the working class gives the whole international proletariat an example of how to fight fascism. The French Communist Party provides all sections of the Communist International with an example of how the united-front tactic must be carried out”.<sup>10</sup> After the defeat of Nazi Germany, Eastern

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<sup>8</sup> Felix Wemheuer, “New Democracy and the Making of New China (1949–1952),” in *A Social History of Maoist China: Conflict and Change, 1949–1976, New Approaches to Asian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 51.

<sup>9</sup> Roger Martelli, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow, *One Hundred Years of History of the French Communist Party: The Red Party, Marx, Engels, and Marxism* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-07827-9>, 45.

The French Communist Party coined the term “united front” but that was soon changed into “popular front” in the communist world. The French Communist Party’s official newspaper *l’Humanité* had headlined the orientation, “At all costs, beat fascism. For a large antifascist popular front”.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

European post-war states were founded as people's democracies rather than one-party dictatorships—Although the communist parties indisputably had de facto authority in these countries.<sup>11</sup>

By defining the newly established PRC as a “new democracy” where the people could be liberated and empowered by struggling against old elites, the question of what constitutes “the people” gained central importance and was to be defined and redefined repeatedly. According to Mao Zedong, the people were constituted of 4 allied classes: the working class, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie; while the enemies were of 3 groups: landlords, bureaucratic capitalists, and counterrevolutionaries.<sup>12</sup> Despite this seemingly clear delineation, the boundary between “the people” and “enemies of the people” was constantly shifting and often applied arbitrarily, frequently justifying the party apparatus's persecution of its political foes. The situation was further complicated by the immediate post-war context, in which loyalties had been complex, shifting, and often not defined by class lines. Additionally, the defeated Nationalists Government who retreated to Taiwan posed a constant threat of ongoing war, adding a sense of urgency and the need for discipline within the Communist leadership. In essence, internal and external enemies needed to be purged or defeated, whether real or imagined.

The definition of ‘the people,’ whose will was supposedly embodied by the Chinese Communist Party, and the dialectical narrative between them and their enemies were central to the political language of the time. This narrative embedded certain theatrical qualities, as commoners were taught to articulate their miseries in class-conscious terms, dramatizing their struggles as conflicts between good and evil—such practices were called “speaking bitterness” (Suku). Suku was the public and performative airing of an individual's grievances

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<sup>11</sup> Felix Wemheuer, “New Democracy and the Making of New China (1949–1952),” in *A Social History of Maoist China: Conflict and Change, 1949–1976*, New Approaches to Asian History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 48–84, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316421826.003>, 54.

<sup>12</sup> Zedong Mao, “Lun renmin minzhu zhuanzheng 論人民民主專政 [On People's Democratic Dictatorship],” in *Mao Zedong Xuanji* 毛澤東選集, vol. 4, 1412–1413.

aimed at garnering sympathy for the speaker and generating outrage against those responsible for their suffering.<sup>13</sup> As a primary strategy employed by the CCP since its early land reform mobilizations to shape the revolutionary consciousness of the masses, its main goal was to instill new collective identities in the population that aligned with the Party-state's ideology of class struggle through emotional mobilization. By evoking outrage and sympathy, this approach aimed to foster hostility towards an outgroup of class enemies and build solidarity among an ingroup of ordinary villagers. These were often intentionally theatrical and carefully moderated sessions, as historian Javed has noted: "To heighten the efficacy of their storytelling, cadres coached speakers on their dramatic delivery, and even arranged the lineup of speakers to frontend those who were the best storytellers, had the most pitiful stories, and had the most damning and colorful evidence against their targets. As one eyewitness remarked, speaking bitterness at struggle sessions was 'ordered and methodical' and 'rich in theatricality.'"<sup>14</sup> These specific narrative structures, tones, and vocabularies were etched into the narrative of the CCP, which are evident in the translation of the French last letters in "*Testaments of Blood*", which will be further explored in later sections. By examining these translations, one can see how the CCP used these narratives to reinforce its ideological campaigns and mobilize the masses, creating a vivid portrayal of class struggle and revolutionary zeal.

Furthermore, it is crucial to understand the internationalism of communist ideology, which at that historical moment was taken seriously into geopolitical considerations. Immediately after the Second World War, the postwar states were most split between the victorious communist and liberal camps: the former led by the Soviet Union while the latter by the United States and other Western European countries. In the communist narration of the

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<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey Javed, "Speaking Bitterness," in *Afterlives of Chinese Communism: Political Concepts from Mao to Xi*, ed. Christian Sorace, Ivan Franceschini, and Nicholas Loubere (ANU Press, 2019), 257–62.

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Javed, "Speaking Bitterness," in *Afterlives of Chinese Communism: Political Concepts from Mao to Xi*, ed. Christian Sorace, Ivan Franceschini, and Nicholas Loubere (ANU Press, 2019), 258.

Second World War, this was part of the historical process in which the elimination of fascism and imperialism would bring about eventual peace and prosperity in a just society, thus embarking on the road that would lead to socialism. The continuation of inequality and injustices both in Western countries and conducted by Western countries are thus portrayed as the vile and capitalistic elements that are counterrevolutionary to the coming of the socialist revolution. Specifically, for example, the *People's Daily* would repeatedly report on the racial disparity in the United States, and the U.S. occupation of Japan, which the PRC thought was both too lenient in overlooking the Japanese war criminals' atrocious war crimes and a sign of America's imperialistic and military ambition in Asia.<sup>15</sup>

This was further exacerbated by the escalations in the Korean peninsula that would eventually lead to the outbreak of the Korean War, which was reported in China as “frantic actions by American imperialism” in collaboration with “the puppet regime of Syngman Rhee”.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps nothing could be more evident to communist China's conviction to the international communist struggle than its participation in the Korean War since October 1950, committing the still scarce national resources to form the Chinese People's Volunteer Army to aid communist Korea against American and UN forces. The Korean War was termed by the PRC as “War Against America and in Aid of North Korea” (抗美援朝), a name extremely telling of the Chinese narrative: It is a war between the allied communist internationalism against the imperial and military expansion of the United States. The South Korean government was referred to as the puppet government, while the UN's support of America's intervention in Korea was seen as illegal and illegitimate.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Tianmo 林天摩 Lin, “Chi meidi dui riheyue de beiwanglu 斥美帝对日和约的备忘录 [Memorandum Denouncing the US-Japan Peace Treaty],” *People's Daily*, January 16, 1951, sec. 4, People's Daily Database.

<sup>16</sup> Chao 邓超 Deng, “Meidi zhanlueshang de ruodian 美帝战略上的弱点 [the Strategic Weakness of American Imperialism],” *People's Daily*, November 2, 1950, sec. 5, People's Daily Database.

<sup>17</sup> “lianheguo anlihui zai meidi yapo xia feifa tongguo meidi guanyu chaoxian de ti'an meiyou zhongsu daibiao canjia xianjian jueyi weifan xianzhang chaoxiangongheguo shenming foun anlihui feifajueyi 联合国安理会在美帝压迫下 非法通过美帝关于朝鲜的提议 没有中苏代表参加显见决议违反宪章 朝鲜共和国声明否认安理会非法决议 [Under the Pressure of American Imperialism, the United Nations Security Council Illegally Passed the American Proposal Regarding Korea without the Participation of Chinese and Soviet Representatives,

This model of labeling any factions of the government who ally with the Western liberal order and refuse to stand in the communist camp as “puppets”, traitors of “the people” and of “national interests” is emblematic of the CCP’s diplomatic rhetorics, which as will be discussed later, grounds the Chinese preface to the 50s translation. One specific and intriguing example of this was how the PRC commented on postwar Japan. On January 17th, 1950, *People’s Daily* published an article titled “The Path to the Liberation of the Japanese People” (日本人民解放的道路) in which it stated, “Japanese imperialism was and still is the enemy of the Chinese people, but the Japanese people are friends of the Chinese people. The Japanese people and the Chinese people share a common enemy, which is Japanese imperialism and its supporter, American imperialism. The Japanese people and the Chinese people have common friends, which are the socialist Soviet Union, the people's democratic countries, and all the proletarians and oppressed nations worldwide who are fighting against imperialism. The liberation of the Japanese people is something that the Chinese people are very concerned about. The liberation struggle of the Japanese people is now in a complex and difficult situation. Like West Germany, Japan is being turned into a reactionary stronghold against democracy, against socialism, and for plotting new wars by the occupiers of American imperialism. For this counter-revolutionary purpose, the American occupiers want to preserve Japan's militaristic forces, launch a brutal attack on the fundamental rights of the Japanese people, and turn Japan into a colony”.<sup>18</sup> This excerpt effectively illustrates the way the PRC framed all conflicts internationally: as a struggle between the communist party who represented “the people” against the American imperialists and their puppets, who were “enemies of the people”. It is paramount that “the people” is both a national and an

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Clearly Violating the Charter. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea Declares Its Rejection of the Security Council’s Illegal Resolution],” *People’s Daily*, June 28, 1950, sec. 1, *People’s Daily Database*.

<sup>18</sup> “Ribei renming jiefang de daolu 日本人民解放的道路 [the Path to the Liberation of the Japanese People],” *People’s Daily*, January 17, 1950, sec. 1, *People’s Daily Database*.

international identity, which was intentionally constructed as a broad category of people who under the Marxist framework have been exploited and demands liberation.

It is under this context that one should approach the relationship between France and China in the early 1950s. France was frequently covered in *People's Daily* for two reasons: the first is its colonial presence in Vietnam, and the second is its domestic postwar political struggle. The colonial cruelty in Vietnam generated regular reports and condemnation from the CCP, who had both a geopolitical concern for security in Asia free from Western interventions—as aforementioned when discussing the Korean War and Japan's postwar U.S. Occupation—and an ideological interest in anti-imperialism. Nevertheless, the previously observed pattern was once again at play as the CCP divided France into the Western imperial power and fascist collaborationists versus the PCF-led French “people”. To be specific, In the first postwar election, the PCF emerged victoriously as one of the tripartite governing alliance along with the Socialists (Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière) and the Republicans (Mouvement républicain populaire) while gaining the most seats, largely thanks to its active contribution to the Resistance.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the reconstruction efforts remained slow and ineffective until the United States offered aid through programs such as the Marshall Plan in 1947, which sought to help rebuild its Western European allies in preparation for the upcoming Cold War. The PCF vehemently protested against the Marshall Plan, along with many other U.S. aid and re-armament programs—indeed, the U.S. financial assistance often came with the precondition of ousting the communists from the ruling government.<sup>20</sup> This political maneuvering was closely reported by *People's Daily*, declaring that “The so-called American ‘aid to Europe’ plan is in fact aims to subordinate the European economy to the

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<sup>19</sup> Roger Martelli, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow, *One Hundred Years of History of the French Communist Party: The Red Party*, Marx, Engels, and Marxisms (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 93.

<sup>20</sup> Roger Martelli, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow, *One Hundred Years of History of the French Communist Party: The Red Party*, Marx, Engels, and Marxisms (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 112.

United States' expansionist agenda".<sup>21</sup> In addition, the *People's Daily* also intensely covered the waves of communist-led strikes in France since 1947 that contested a variety of issues from postwar wage stagnation to France's imperial presence in Vietnam, "Due to the French government's continued exploitive policies towards Vietnam, and especially its recent domestic economic measures and wage restriction policies, there has been strong opposition from Communist ministers and progressive cabinet members, leading to a serious political situation in France".<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the repression of these strikes by the French government was characterized as Robert Schuman abiding the orders of American imperialism: "The ambitions of American imperialism to openly interfere in French domestic affairs have become apparent. Following orders from American imperialists, Schuman...declared he was 'prepared to use force as a last resort' to end the strike".<sup>23</sup> This narrative reinforces the CCP's dichotomy of the oppressed "people" around the world led by communist parties versus the imperialist aggressors, thereby justifying international communism as an ideological stance by situating them within a broader, ongoing global struggle against imperialism.

In other words, "the people" of France, as led by the French Communist Party, were the only true revolutionary force legitimate in leading the nation of France as part of the international communist revolution: A portrayal repetitively affirmed by their consistent anti-imperialistic, anti-fascist stance and working-class base. However, while this essay deals with the last letters of the French resistance, it should be mentioned that this publication was

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<sup>21</sup> "Shehuidang Youpai Fenlie Yinmou Zao Daji Fagong Zai Zonggonghuindi Huosheng Tongguo Lianhe Quanti Gongren Yizhi Xingdong Jueyi Fandui Meidi 'Maxieer Jihua' 社会党右派分裂阴谋遭打击 法共在总工会内获胜 通过联合全体工人一致行动 决议反对美帝'马歇尔计划' [The Right-Wing Faction of the Socialist Party's Split Conspiracy Was Struck down. The French Communist Party Won within the General Confederation of Labour, Passing a Resolution to Unite All Workers in Unanimous Action against the American Imperialist 'Marshall Plan]," *People's Daily*, November 20, 1947, sec. 3, People's Daily Database.

<sup>22</sup> "Fandongpai jianchi xianzhi gongzi faguo zhengju quyue yanzhong gongren zengzi yundong kuoda 反动派坚持限制工资 法国政局趋于严重 工人增资运动扩大 [Reactionaries Insist on Wage Restrictions; French Political Situation Worsens; Workers' Wage Increase Movement Expands]," *People's Daily*, May 7, 1951, sec. 3, People's Daily Database.

<sup>23</sup> "Shuman Tingming Meidiguozhuyi Jingtu Wuli Zhengya Bagong 舒曼听命美帝国主义 竟图武力镇压罢工 [Schuman Obeys American Imperialism, Attempting to Suppress the Strike with Force]," *People's Daily*, December 2, 1947, sec. 1, People's Daily Database.

already one selected by the French Communist Party, thus all the people included were communists. Of course, it would be far from the truth to say that the French Resistance was made up of an entirely communist membership, as it in fact included people from a variety of backgrounds and resisted for a variety of reasons. The selection of these martyrs and the French Communist Party's portrayal of the resistance as a predominantly communist endeavor reflects an attempt to manipulate historical narratives. By choosing specific letters and authors, and by censoring or omitting others from the collection, one can observe the elusive definition of "the people". This selective inclusion highlights the Party's efforts to shape the memory of the resistance to fit its ideological agenda, emphasizing a communist-centric view of the struggle and its heroes, which was urgently needed in the historical context of the 50s: The solidification of communist leadership through the memorial of communist martyrs serve to legitimize the communist struggles to come, by displaying them as always on the right side of history.

Such were exactly the sentiments expressed by the Chinese Communist Party in regard to the publication of "*Testaments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*", evident in a piece published in *People's Daily* that directly recommended "*Testments of Blood*" to the public. In January of 1951, the *People's Daily* featured a piece titled "*Books Written in Memory of Those who Achieved Eternal Life through Fire and Blood*", where three editors recommended three books on communist wartime resistances, sacrifices, and martyrdoms.<sup>24</sup> Recommended together with "*Testments of Blood*" were "*Shangrao Concentration Camp*" (上饒集中營) and "*Notes from the Gallows*" (绞索勒着脖子时的报告): The former is a compilation of accounts from Chinese communist survivors of Kuomintang camps in Shangrao, Shanxi, detailing torture and resistance, while Czech

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<sup>24</sup> Kejun 李克俊 Li, Xiang 彦祥 Yan, and Lvquan 趙履寬 Zhao, "Wei jinian 'zai liehuo yu rexie zhongdedao yongsheng' de renmen er xiedeshu 为纪念'在烈火与热血中得到永生'的人们而写的书 [Books Written in Memory of Those Who Achieved Eternal Life through Fire and Blood]," *People's Daily*, January 14, 1951, sec. 6, *People's Daily Database*.



communist journalist Julius Fučík wrote the latter during his Nazi imprisonment in Prague before he was hanged in Berlin.<sup>25</sup> It is clear by this pairing that the Chinese Communist Party considered this compilation of last letters and survivor accounts to be a genre, a glossary of testaments and memoirs from communist resistance warriors grouped together to prove a point: “As we read *Testaments of Blood*,” we seem to hear the staunch voices of the warriors...” wrote the editor concerning the French last letters, “The book *Testaments of Blood* convincingly tells us that no matter in which country, there is only one of the same truth: communism is irresistible! Anyone concerned with the communist struggles worldwide should read this blood-written testament and prophecy”.<sup>26</sup> Importantly, these “blood-written” letters were both testaments and prophecy: words crystalized into a medium that bridges the temporal realms of past and future to create a narrative continuity, linking the heroic actions of those who had fallen with the present and future efforts of the communist cause. This bridging reinforced the idea that the struggle was both a historical necessity and a prophetic vision of an inevitable victory. The letters thus functioned as a source of moral and ideological strength, ensuring that the legacy of martyrdom remained a potent and motivating force within the communist movement. Furthermore, this temporal bridging emphasized the cyclical nature of revolutionary sacrifice and triumph. By presenting the martyrs' words as timeless truths, the letters underscored the ongoing relevance of their sacrifices. They were not merely historical documents but living testaments that continued to speak to and shape the experiences and actions of contemporary and future communists. This dynamic interplay between past sacrifices and future aspirations solidified the ideological foundation of the communist movement, making the legacy of martyrdom an enduring and unifying element in the narrative of resistance and liberation.

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Kejun 李克俊 Li, Xiang 彦祥 Yan, and Lvquan 趙履寬 Zhao, “Wei jinian ‘zai liehuo yu rexie zhongdedao yongsheng’ de renmen er xiedeshu 为纪念‘在烈火与热血中得到永生’的人们而写的书 [Books Written in Memory of Those Who Achieved Eternal Life through Fire and Blood],” *People’s Daily*, January 14, 1951, sec. 6, People’s Daily Database.

The title of the *People's Daily* piece itself is worth noting: The phrase “Achieving eternal life through fire and blood”, or “在烈火與熱血中得到永生” was in reference to a famous poem from Ye Ting, a celebrated and mythologized martyr of the Chinese Communist Party. According to CCP narratives, Ye famously wrote the poem on the wall of the prison cell after declining to collaborate with the Kuomintang authorities in exchange for release, declaring that he'd rather die in honor than live an undignified and unprincipled life.<sup>27</sup> “I hope to attain eternal life through fire and blood” was the poem's final line and its climax, embodying the defining aesthetics of the cult of the martyrs. Martyrdom was portrayed as a means to transcend the secular temporal realm through an extreme conviction to political beliefs, extending even to death. The imagery of fire and blood is a common element and a recurring subject of inspection in the discourse around martyrs and fallen soldiers. While in Europe, it is often studied as an aesthetic reference to Christianity, the sacredness of the flesh and blood, and the spirituality of death,<sup>28</sup> the Chinese context warrants a different interpretation: Evidently, in the Chinese communist lexicon, fire and blood imply worldly and material testaments to suffering and struggles. As analyzed by the *People's Daily* editor, “Each piece of writing is filled with blood and hatred... The reactionaries were convinced that these cruel methods could make the revolutionaries submit and extinguish the flames of the revolution. On the contrary, our revolutionary fighters, though suffering through the ordeal of intense flames, only became more tempered and resilient”.<sup>29</sup> In other words, the

<sup>27</sup> “为人进出的门紧锁着，为狗爬出的洞敞开着，一个声音高叫着：——爬出来吧，给你自由！我渴望自由，但我深深地知道——人的身躯怎能从狗洞里爬出！我希望有一天，地下的烈火，将我连这活棺材一起烧掉，我希望在烈火与热血中得到永生！” [“The door for people to enter and exit is tightly locked, The hole for dogs to crawl out of is wide open, A voice calls loudly: —Crawl out, and you will be free! I long for freedom, But I know deeply—How can a human body crawl out of a hole meant for dogs? I hope that one day, The underground fire, Will burn me along with this living coffin, I hope to attain eternal life through fire and blood!”]

“叶挺：我希望在烈火与热血中得到永生 [Ye Ting: I Hope to Attain Eternal Life through Fire and Blood],” 人民网, accessed June 2, 2024, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/34136/2543718.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Mabel Berezin, “Chapter 6: Dead Bodies and Live Voices: Locating the Fascist Self,” in *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 196–244.

<sup>29</sup> Kejun 李克俊 Li, Xiang 彦祥 Yan, and Lvquan 趙履寬 Zhao, “Wei jinian ‘zai liehuo yu rexie zhongdedao yongsheng’ de renmen er xiedeshu 为纪念‘在烈火与热血中得到永生’的人们而写的书 [Books Written in Memory of Those Who Achieved Eternal Life through Fire and Blood],” *People's Daily*, January 14, 1951, sec. 6, *People's Daily Database*.

testaments of blood were not only the testament of memory, but also the testament of the vileness of the enemies and the struggle of the communist warriors—a brutalized and militarized language that was then extrapolated to the current communist struggle. This incorporation of “fire and blood” imagery reinforced the physical and ideological resilience of communist fighters, while elevating their struggle into both a material and spiritual battle, intertwining their personal sacrifices with the broader historical and ideological conflict. Combined, these imageries help frame the martyrs' deaths not just as individual losses, but as integral parts of a larger, ongoing fight against oppression and for the ultimate triumph of communism.

Last but not least, publication in the early PRC largely inherited the publishing agencies and practices from the Republican period, though the state place had a much more centralized media control than the Nationalist Party ever attempted. Informed by both late imperial China's didactic cultural leadership and Soviet propaganda control, the state would either eliminate, restructure, or absorb private publishing companies.<sup>30</sup> Coming under state oversight, the private-public joint publishing agencies adhered to the cultural authority of the state, while tailoring their publication to state projects: For example, by heeding the demand for books about and from the Soviet Union and on Marxist-Leninism. During this process, elite intellectuals still retained privileged status for their knowledge and skill and were thus valued as vital contributors to the new cultural apparatus. The publishing agency for *Testament of Blood* was a private agency called Xinqun Publishing Agency, which was later merged with Shanghai Wenyi Publishing Agency, an example of the private-public joint management model.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, as Robert Culp had declared, the early PRC was not only a propaganda state, but also a pedagogical state, that actively supported and facilitated the

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<sup>30</sup> Robert Joseph Culp, *The Power of Print in Modern China: Intellectuals and Industrial Publishing from the End of Empire to Maoist State Socialism* / Robert Culp., Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 188.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Joseph Culp, 228.

production and dissemination of knowledge to promote economic development, preserve national culture, and cultivate its citizenry.<sup>32</sup> *The Testament of Blood* was included in a collection of "*Selected Writings on the Ideological Cultivation of Youth*" by the Education Bureau of Tianjin City, which was an apparent example of such state-led pedagogy, by attempting to transform its people via education in intellectual, ideological, and moral terms.

It is in this context that we could begin to understand the publication of 血的紀錄, which could be read as an attempt to form an extraordinarily significant and urgent narrative. They provided a means to consolidate the ideological foundation of the new regime, articulate the lived experiences and struggles of the “people,” and dramatize the ongoing revolution. The urgency was palpable as the new government sought to stabilize its rule, define its enemies, and legitimize its authority through a compelling and emotionally resonant narrative framework.

### **China in the Early 90s: A Historical Background for the Second Translation**

In 1985, a fourth edition of the last letters was published in France, compiling 4 martyrs' final words under the title *Ils Aimaient la Vie: Lettres de Fusillés (They Loved Life: Letters of the Executed)*. Étienne Fajon, the long-time director of L'Humanité and a former elected deputy of the French Communist Party, edited this edition and wrote its preface. A quick investigation into the various publications and republications of these last letters reveals that they were never re-published randomly: the bygone voices of these martyrs were always invoked at particular times for specific reasons. This 1985 French edition was no exception. At the time, the rapidly declining French Communist Party was embroiled in a controversial scandal regarding the last letters and the memories of the Resistance.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Joseph Culp, 256.

<sup>33</sup> Brunstetter, unfinished manuscript.

Specifically, the early 80s saw a significant decline of the PCF in the French political landscape, which they have been an important part of for the nearly 4 decades of postwar years.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, in 1985 a documentary named *Des Terroristes à la retraite* (the Retired Terrorist) was aired in France. The film dealt with the status of the FTP-MOI (Francs-tiers et partisans-Main-d'œuvre immigrée), a sub-group under the communist resistance comprised of foreign communist resisters, mostly Jews—this focus had been mostly absent due to Gaulist myths and Communist purges. The controversy arises as the film explores one of the martyr's last letters: Missak Manouchian, an Armenian poet and communist resister, who in his letter wrote “I forgive all those who have hurt me or who wanted to hurt me, except the one who betrayed us to save his own skin and those who sold us out”.<sup>35</sup> The unforgivable, the film hypothesizes with the backing of Manouchian's widow Mélinée Manouchian, was the top brass of the Communist Party who, with liberation near, wanted the foreign resisters purged in order to francisé, make French, the communist story of Resistance.<sup>36</sup>

While the controversy came to no definite conclusion on whether, how, or by whom Manouchian was betrayed, a retroactive search would reveal that this controversy-stirring line was deleted in the 1946 edition. Moreover, the Russian edition—used as the source for the 1950s *Testaments of Blood*—did not even include Manouchian nor many other foreign or Jewish names in their selection. The 1985 French edition was a response to the controversy. By reintroducing an inclusive selection of names and restoring the previously deleted letters to their full lengths, the declining PCF, along with a sentimentally written preface by Fajon, invited readers to revisit the letters themselves for answers.

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<sup>34</sup> David Bell and Byron Criddle, “The Decline of the French Communist Party,” *British Journal of Political Science* 19, no. 4 (1989): 515–36.

<sup>35</sup> “Je pardonne à tous ceux qui ont fait du mal ou qui ont voulu me faire du mal sauf à celui qui nous a trahis pour racheter sa peau et ceux qui nous ont vendues”

Étienne Fajon, ed., *Ils avaient la vie: lettres de fusillés* (Paris: Éditions Messidor, 1985).

<sup>36</sup> Brunstetter, Unfinished Manuscript

In June 1990, the letters reappeared in China in a dramatically more inclusive and humanist manner than they did in 1950, under the title of 他们热爱生活: 法共烈士遗书---a direct translation of the French title, meaning “*They Loved Life*”, as opposed to the self-created title *Testaments of Blood* in the 50s: Even a glance at the title suggests dramatic differences, the martyrs, once seen as testaments of their suffering and the basis of communist legitimacy, is now nostalgically placed as the subject “they”, entitled to their own verb and object: love and life. Of course, this is not where even the most apparent differences end: The *They Loved Life* was printed in a horizontal manner with simplified Chinese, while *Testaments of Blood* was in a vertical manner with traditional Chinese. All these observations are telling signs of the way 40 years of turbulent history in the People’s Republic China, now a rapidly developing country, has changed from its early infrastructural days. In fact, the change in printing from vertical to horizontal, and the promotion of simplified characters were part and parcel of the CCP’s early literary drives which made cultural artifacts as well as propagandas more readily accessible to the previously illiterate masses, which took place mostly in the 50s, soon after *The Testament of Blood* was published.<sup>37</sup>

Unfortunately, however, while ample traceable events led to the republication of the last letters in France, no direct reason for the Chinese publication had been found: judging by the content of the Chinese translation, it is even doubtful whether the publishers were aware of the scandal that enveloped the PCF and resulted in *They Loved Life*. Nonetheless, attempting to situate the Chinese republication in 1990 is essential. The historical significance of this transition point, marking the beginning of a new decade, provides crucial context for comparing the two Chinese translations. It highlights shifting narratives and tones influenced by historical developments and offers plausible reasons for the renewed interest in these letters. Understanding the broader historical and political shifts in China during this

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<sup>37</sup> Susan Biele Alitto, “The Language Issue in Communist Chinese Education,” *Comparative Education Review* 13, no. 1 (1969): 43–59.

period helps explain why the Chinese publication adopted a more inclusive and humanist approach, reflecting a broader trend toward reevaluating and humanizing historical figures. This section will thus attempt to offer such contextualization and potential explanations by surveying the changes in China in 1990, with the Tiananmen Massacre as an anchoring point.

It is nearly impossible to discuss China in the 1990s without addressing the haunting and enduring images from Tiananmen Square in the spring and summer of 1989 when the CCP deployed military forces to brutally crack down on student protesters advocating for various pro-democracy reforms, an event that is hard not to describe as a massacre. Such was an event that had garnered international coverage, attention, and soon condemnations: The protestors walked right into the international media stage that Beijing had set up to cover the monumental visit of Mikhail Gorbachev, which was the first visit from a Soviet leader since Khrushchev's in 1959—when translations of *Testaments of Blood* was circulated in the Chinese publication sphere, China and the USSR were at the peak of its relationship with the Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty, but since the times of Khrushchev their relationship had grown strained, with a perilous border war in the late 1960s.<sup>38</sup> Globally, the communist bloc had gone through many changes over those 40 years, and we now know from hindsight that the fall of the Soviet Union was near, though at the time the economic reforms, perestroika, were only newly introduced. Aside from the technical reason that was Gorbachev's visit, the Tiananmen protests also received international attention for ideological reasons: The students' call for fairness, equity, and transparency, which “democracy” was a general term for, the West mostly interpreted as a political call for liberal electoral politics. “Perhaps China would lead the socialist world in making ‘communism with a human face’ a reality, creating a truly democratic socialist order”---western observers have hoped, linking the movement with

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<sup>38</sup> Timothy Cheek, *Living with Reform: China since 1989* (London, New York: Zed Books, 2006), 3

other popular movements in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany, and sensing a time ripe for changes.<sup>39</sup>

But a search behind such expectations and frustrations might reveal more to the course that the CCP perceived itself to be on, and help with a better understanding of the course it would take after Tiananmen. In 1978, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China departed from the Maoist policies that had dominated its early years and announced its “Reform and Opening Up” (gaige kaifang) policy that allowed for de-collectivization, market incentives, and foreign investments. Economically this had marked China’s transition into a de-facto Capitalist state, though ideologically the matter was much more complicated: China had insistently called this capitalism “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, reflecting a tension between the contrasting realities of a socialist state and its increasingly capitalistic economy.<sup>40</sup> The students of 1989 Tiananmen Square experienced such disillusionment first-hand, who first and foremost demanded more job opportunities and against corruption in various economic, political, and personal spheres: The rapid market reform had brought unequal consequences, with wealth accumulation for some and loss of job security and inflation for others.<sup>41</sup> As historian Timothy Cheek summarized, the diverse Chinese view on Tiananmen could be tied with the theme of an unfinished business: “Tiananmen serves as a reminder to people across China of the unfinished business of reform, of the promises of development with equity that have yet to be fulfilled”.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, the military crackdown that finally came after much inner-party struggle and the justification for it spelled the CCP’s official solution to such tension. After violently resolving the Tiananmen protests, Deng established an official verdict to what has happened

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<sup>39</sup> Timothy Cheek, 4

<sup>40</sup> Xiaoping Deng, *Build Socialism with Chinese Characteristics*, trans. The Bureau for the Compilation and Translation of Works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin Under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1985).

<sup>41</sup> Timothy Cheek, *Living with Reform: China since 1989* (London, New York: Zed Books, 2006), 7

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*



that stands till this day: The demonstrations on Tiananmen Square were labeled “counter-revolutionary disturbance” and the use of force was justified as restoring order and saving Beijing from the hands of street hooligans.<sup>43</sup> Deng’s response marked a sharp contrast to the Maoist glorification of chaos and struggles under the famous slogan “It is Right to Rebel”,<sup>44</sup> as a witness and a victim of the Cultural Revolution chaos himself, Deng and the post-Mao society deeply resented the terrifying images of youthful chaos and revolutionary struggles that had dominated China in the 1960s. Therefore, despite the Tiananmen demonstrators’ great effort to pledge their loyalty to the Chinese nation, socialism, and the Chinese Communist Party, the *People’s Daily* insistently described it as “[plunging] the whole country into chaos” and “[negating] the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the socialist system”.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, such a response indicated the CCP’s prioritization of stability and economic development over the revolutionary course. As historian Maurice Meisner had suggested, Deng’s China learned from other “neo-authoritarians” such as Meiji Japan, Singapore, and Taiwan had demonstrated, that “the imperatives of modern economic development, especially the need to tame the masses and discipline the working population, demanded a strong state and a powerful (and enlightened) ruler”.<sup>46</sup> In other words, the Tiananmen massacre reflected the CCP’s hardened conviction to pursue economic prosperity and social stability at the cost of ideological consistency.

One year after Tiananmen, in June 1990, the letters were re-introduced to Chinese audiences. Possible explanations vary for this reappearance, as the first two years after the crackdown witnessed a period of political and intellectual freeze while the leaders searched for a new way forward: Many efforts were, instead, dedicated to maintaining order and

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> “造反有理”

“Mao Zhuxi Yulu 毛主席语录 [Quotations from Chairman Mao],” *People’s Daily*, August 26, 1966, sec. 1, *People’s Daily Database*.

<sup>45</sup> Maurice Meisner, *Mao’s China and After: A History of the People’s Republic*, 3rd Revised ed. edition (New York, NY: Free Press, 1999), 501.

<sup>46</sup> Maurice Meisner, 493.

stability. The immediate aftermath was marked by repression of dissident voices and the search for those who had participated in the protest. As a scholar on Chinese politics, Suisheng Zhao remarked, “The first 2 years after the ‘Tiananmen Incident’ were some of the most politically repressive years in China since 1949”.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, upon a reflection on the “Tiananmen incident”, many party leaders thought the decline of the communist ideological foundation in the post-Mao reform era might be a cause for the perceived anti-government sentiments in 1989—Following the onset of post-Mao reforms in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Deng Xiaoping launched a campaign aimed at critiquing or "reassessing" Maoism. Initially intended to remove ideological and psychological barriers to economic reform, this effort unexpectedly led to the collapse of the official ideology. This collapse was accompanied by a profound "three belief crises" (sanxin weiji): a crisis of faith in Marxism (xinyang weiji), a crisis of confidence in socialism (xinxin weiji), and a crisis of trust in the party (xinren weiji).<sup>48</sup>

To counter the loss of legitimacy once provided by Maoist orthodoxy in an era of secularized and disenchanting politics, and without resorting to popular elections, the CCP initiated a wave of "patriotic education" (aiguo jiaoyu). This initiative was highlighted on the front page of the *People's Daily* on January 1, 1990, in an editorial titled “Welcome the 1990s with Full Confidence,” which reflected on the achievements of the 1980s and set the agenda for the 1990s.<sup>49</sup> In this editorial, among the applauded achievements of the 1980s was the CCP’s success in “pacifying the counter-revolutionary terrorists last year,” a successful struggle against capitalist liberalization that reinforced the belief that “only socialism could save China, only socialism could develop China.” The article emphasized the paramount

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<sup>47</sup> Suisheng Zhao, “A State-Led Nationalism: The Patriotic Education Campaign in Post-Tiananmen China,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 31, no. 3 (1998): 287–302.

<sup>48</sup> Jie Chen, “The Impact of Reform on the Party and Ideology in China,” *The Journal of Contemporary China*, 1995, 22–34.

<sup>49</sup> “Manhuai Xingxin Yingjie Jiushi Niandai 满怀信心迎接九十年代 [Welcome the 1990s with Full Confidence],” *People's Daily*, January 1, 1990, sec. 1, People’s Daily Database.

importance of stability: "...stability overrides everything... We need stability this year, next year, throughout the 1990s, and even into the next century. The highest interest of China is stability, and every person who hopes for a strong country should always remember this".<sup>50</sup> This underscores the CCP's prioritization of a stable political and social environment as a cornerstone of their governance strategy. Additionally, the editorial stressed that such "material" development brought by the lucrative economic reform must be met with spiritual and ideological development: "We must persistently educate the entire nation, especially the youth, in patriotism, collectivism, socialism, communism, and self-reliance, diligence, as well as the revolutionary tradition, to promote the spirit of selfless devotion. We must strive to improve the overall quality of the nation and cultivate new socialist individuals with ideals, morals, culture, and discipline. When people's ideological awareness and overall quality improve, they will become a great material force for realizing the Four Modernizations and rejuvenating China".<sup>51</sup>

The first plausible explanation for the publication of *They Loved Life* after Tiananmen can be seen as part of this broader ideological development effort of the early 90s patriotic education campaign. The last letters of the French communist martyrs, as discussed earlier, align with the need for education on "patriotism, collectivism, communism" and reinforce "the revolutionary tradition" by drawing on the historical Resistance movement foundational to this tradition. The imagery of martyrdom in these letters exemplifies "the spirit of selfless devotion," thus serving as a powerful tool for ideological education and reinforcing the CCP's narrative of revolutionary sacrifice and collective effort. By reinvoking the imageries of historical communist martyrs, the CCP sought to reinforce its ideological foundation and ensure that the spirit of devotion and collective struggle remained central to the Chinese people's consciousness. This approach underscores the party's strategy of using historical

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<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> "Manhuai Xingxin Yingjie Jiushi Niandai 满怀信心迎接九十年代 [Welcome the 1990s with Full Confidence]," *People's Daily*, January 1, 1990, sec. 1, People's Daily Database.

narratives to bolster contemporary ideological education and maintain its legitimacy amidst evolving political and economic landscapes.

However, some tension exists within this explanation: the patriotic education campaign of post-Tiananmen China was not merely a return to the early 50s Maoist orthodoxy discussed in the previous section. Unlike the 1950s rhetoric exemplified by the *People's Daily*, which consistently called for international solidarity with the proletariats worldwide and anticipated a global communist revolution, the post-Tiananmen rhetoric shifted focus. The explicit Cold War dichotomy of distinguishing between vanguard communist parties and the capitalist Western liberal countries they operated in became less pronounced—For practical reasons, the Reformists could not revert to Maoist dogma, as it would both be ineffective and undermine the ongoing market reforms. Instead, they shifted towards a more nationalistic narrative, prioritizing domestic stability and ideological unity over global revolutionary aspirations. Thus, the CCP's alternative ideological foundation became de facto nationalism, although the party intentionally refrained from using this term, opting for “patriotism” instead.<sup>52</sup> This patriotism represented state-led nationalism, positioning the CCP as the paramount patriotic force and guardian of Chinese national pride, both historically and continuously. By shifting the focus from aligning communism with the will of an international “people” to associating the CCP with the pride of the Chinese nation, this newly revived nationalism took on a distinctly anti-Western mentality. This sentiment was rooted in the long century of humiliation under Western and Japanese imperial powers and was intensified by the international condemnation of the Tiananmen crackdown, particularly from the U.S. and France.<sup>53</sup> Hence, re-introducing a set of foreign letters might

<sup>52</sup> Suisheng Zhao, “A State-Led Nationalism: The Patriotic Education Campaign in Post-Tiananmen China,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 31, no. 3 (1998), 290.

Zhao points out that “nationalism” was a contested term in the Chinese political discourse, as it had historically been labeled a chauvanistic and reactionary element in the Marxist-Leninist ideology. Additionally, China was acutely aware of the many national uprisings that have challenged communist states in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and even more aware of its over 55 ethnic minority groups latched together under the term “Chinese”.

<sup>53</sup> Timothy Cheek, *Living with Reform: China since 1989* (London, New York: Zed Books, 2006), 2.

seem contradictory to such a rising, anti-western nationalism. Admittedly, it is also possible to incorporate these last letters into a paradigm of nationalism: portraying patriotic French resistance militants fending off foreign invaders—but the tension and the uncertainties remain. The tension within this explanation lies in balancing the legacy of international communist solidarity with the emerging emphasis on nationalistic pride and anti-Western sentiment, and the complexity of the post-Tiananmen ideological landscape and the multifaceted nature of the CCP's strategic objectives suggest that this might be only one of several possible interpretations.

Another plausible explanation revolves around the complex narrative of martyrdom immediately following the Tiananmen Crackdown. This theory suggests that the CCP, in an effort to justify the military crackdown and demonize the protestors as violent counterrevolutionaries, sought to portray the People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers sent to enforce martial law in Beijing as sacrificial victims. Already in May, the *People's Daily* reported extensively on the soldiers who were said to be injured while carrying out their mission of enforcing the martial law in Beijing, sending high-ranking officials to “[visit] the 29 officers and soldiers who were injured and hospitalized while carrying out martial law duties in certain areas of the capital...hit by stones and bricks thrown by unidentified individuals... the reporter saw that some soldiers had six or seven injuries to their heads and hands, and despite treatment, some wounds remained red and swollen”.<sup>54</sup> If this was not explicit enough to highlight the soldiers and officers as victims in this largely peaceful gathering on Tiananmen Square, the premier Li Peng-led State Council wrote a letter of condolence to the soldiers of the martial law troops, published on the front page of *People's Daily*, which commended the soldiers for their hard work in carrying out martial law duties to

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<sup>54</sup> “Hanhuazhizhi Zhouwenyuan Zongshunliu Daibiao Junwei Hesanzongbu Kanwang Beidashng Zhuyuan de Zhizhanyuan 韩怀智周文元宗顺留代表军委和三总部看望被打伤住院的指战员 [Han Huaizhi, Zhou Wenyuan, and Zong Shunliu, Representing the Central Military Commission and the Three Headquarters, Visited the Officers and Soldiers Who Were Injured and Hospitalized],” *People's Daily*, May 26, 1989, sec. 1, *People's Daily Database*.

stop unrest and restore order. The soldiers were portrayed as highly disciplined and skilled and had “endured hardships without proper meals, sleep, or rest, yet maintaining high morale throughout. When faced with obstruction by uninformed crowds and assaults by a few lawbreakers, you have remained disciplined, not retaliating against insults or attacks, showing great restraint and upholding discipline, fully reflecting your love and loyalty to the people... you are worthy pillars of the People's Republic, loyal to the Party and the people, embodying the virtues of our army. The Party and the government thank and trust you! The people understand and support you!”<sup>55</sup>

Victimhood and conviction collaboratively spell the image of the PLA soldiers: able, dedicated, disciplined, and attacked. This imagery finally culminated after the crackdown, when the dutiful soldiers became the martyrs. In one of the only official press conferences from CCP addressing what happened when they tried to clear the square, the spokesperson Yuan Mu gave the official statistics on the casualty of the military operation, “More than 5,000 PLA officers and soldiers were injured; In the local areas (including lawless rioters and onlookers who did not know the truth), more than 2,000 people were injured; As for the death toll, preliminary statistics show that nearly 300 people in total, both military and local, were killed. This number includes soldiers, deserving criminals, and accidentally injured civilians. In addition, up to now, 400 military officers and soldiers are still missing, with their fate unknown. Some may survive once the situation stabilizes, while others may have been martyred”.<sup>56</sup> The official verdict also included a witness from the PLA, Zhang Gong, who told in graphic detail how PLA soldiers were attacked with “still rods, large sticks with

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<sup>55</sup> “Lipeng Zongli Zuotian Qianshu Guowuyuan Gei Jieyanbudui Quanti Guanbing de Weiwenxin 李鹏总理昨天签署 国务院给戒严部队全体官兵的慰问信 [Premier Li Peng Signed a Letter of Condolence from the State Council to All Officers and Soldiers of the Martial Law Troops Yesterday],” *People's Daily*, May 26, 1989, sec. 1, People's Daily Database.

<sup>56</sup> “Guowuyuan Fayanren Yuanmu Juxing Jizhe Zhaodaihui Jielou Fangeming Baoluan Zhenxiang 国务院发言人袁木举行记者招待会 揭露反革命暴乱真相 [State Council Spokesperson Yuan Mu Held a Press Conference to Expose the Truth about the Counter-Revolutionary Riots],” *People's Daily*, June 8, 1989, sec. 1, People's Daily Database.

nails”, “burned alive with gasoline” and how the rioters “threw them off high bridges”, “hung their burned corpses publicly”, and “pulled out their intestines”.<sup>57</sup>

It needs to be emphasized that these accounts were largely CCP attempts at fabricating the imagery of the martyred soldiers and legitimizing their military crackdown, and had been countered and proved false by various reliable sources detailing the nearly armless civilians massacred indiscriminately by the PLA with tanks, machine guns, and AK-47s: While it was true that PLA soldiers were injured and died during the operation, it was actually an extreme minority when compared to the deaths of many innocent protestors and onlookers.<sup>58</sup> However, the CCP fiction of PLA martyrdom was powerful rhetoric for the contemporaries who lived far from the killing center as well as anyone eager to believe in this myth.

It is not an impossible, though admittedly somewhat unlikely explanation for the republication of *They Loved Life* a year later. Not impossible because the tale of the PLA martyrs was still fresh and the CCP was still recovering from the blow on their legitimacy due to the international coverage and local witnesses on their ruthless crackdown, yet unlikely for the CCP soon suppressed any discussion regarding the “Tiananmen Incident” instead of trying to further justify it with new rhetorics or fabricated evidence: The “Tiananmen Incident” would remain a topic of extreme sensitivity, if not censorship, in the PRC. And it was largely believed that with the regeneration of the nation coupled with the steady growth of economic prosperity, amnesia should be easy to achieve. Though unlikely, this explanation is intriguing and worthwhile in highlighting an extremely sinister use of martyrdom as a political tool.

The last explanation views *They Loved Life* as a relic of pre-Tiananmen China, a period marked by the policies of “reform and opening up.” This era not only ushered in

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<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic*, 3rd Revised ed. edition (New York, NY: Free Press, 1999), 510.

economic reforms and foreign investments but also saw a greater openness to foreign ideas, publications, and media. This cultural flourishing was exemplified by the emergence of films, TV series, and foreign literature that offered critiques of Chinese society. One notable example was the TV program *River Elegy*, which portrayed Chinese civilization as conservative and orthodox compared to the vibrant liberalism of the West.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps it was under this liberalizing and opening up the cultural atmosphere that the translation of *They Loved Life* went into work, for the French edition was published in 1985, allowing ample time for a decision to translate on the Chinese part, and was only ready to publish after the catastrophic event in 1989. This explanation would account for the highly humanistic language and sentimental tone employed in this new Chinese translation, which, as will be further examined later, contrasts sharply with the militant language of *Testament of Blood*. Unfortunately, the timeframe for the publication could not be found, and this remains only a plausible speculation that sheds light on the cultural context in which the translation may have occurred while offering a more nuanced perspective on the work's significance in pre- and post-Tiananmen China.

Ultimately, The reappearance of *They Loved Life* in China in June 1990 marks a significant shift in the narrative and presentation of the martyrs' last letters. This transition from the 1950s to the 1990s mirrors broader historical, political, and ideological changes within China and its relationship with the world. While the exact motivations behind the publication remain unclear, the context of post-Tiananmen China and the CCP's efforts to navigate its ideological foundation and maintain legitimacy amidst rapid economic and social changes offer compelling insights. By situating this re-publication within the broader historical backdrop of 1990s China, we can better understand the evolving narratives and the shifting tones in the portrayal of these martyrs.

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<sup>59</sup> Jeffery Wasserstrom, ed., *The Oxford History of Modern China* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 287-288.



With these understandings of the Chinese historical contexts that enabled these publications, we now shift our focus to the publications themselves. The remaining sections will examine the writers of the letters, the prefaces to the publication, and lastly, a comparative analysis of the letters themselves.

### **The Included/ Excluded Writers of the Last Letters**

As discussed previously, one crucial aspect of the difference between *The Testament of Blood* in 1950 and *They Loved Life* in 1990 was their selection of the martyrs and their last letters: the number of the names included in the 90s almost doubled that in the 50s, from 24 to 41. This section will provide a list of the martyrs along with biographical information about each one. The amount of information available varies for each individual, as some were more prominent members of the PCF with abundant information, while others are still being excavated and researched by scholars. The information presented here is primarily drawn from the brief introductions provided for each letter-writer in the publication, supplemented by data from the French-language site Maitron Fusillés, which archives information on individuals executed or massacred on French territory or in action between 1940 and 1944.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, by mapping out the names included or excluded from the respective publication, this section will argue that these changes reflected both a shift in postwar memory politics and a shift in modern geopolitics.

*The Testament of Blood* featured only 24 martyrs, a significant reduction from the 71 martyrs included in the 1946 French edition. This selection was largely based on the Soviet-endorsed, Russian-language edition published in 1949. The limited selection highlights the Soviet Union's centralized control over the communist bloc during the early Cold War era. It also emphasizes the need for purity and strength in wartime memories: the

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<sup>60</sup> “Le Maitron: Dictionnaire Biographique Fusillés Guillotinés Exécutés Massacrés 1940-1944,” accessed June 11, 2024, <https://fusilles-40-44.maitron.fr/>.

chosen martyrs expressed extreme conviction in the communist cause, often pledging loyalty to the Soviet Union and Stalin in their final moments. Notably, many omitted martyrs were foreigners or Jewish, suggesting that the selection process may have been influenced by ideological purges. The list of martyrs whose last letters were included in the 50s edition is as follows:

Jean Alezard, Pierre Corre, Paul Camphin, Louis Caron, E.L. Champion, Eugène Clotrier, Eugene Cas, Jacques Decour, Joseph Delobel, Roland Delval, André Delmas, André Diez, André Durand, Robert Hamel, Julien Hapiot, Felicien Joly, Maurice Lacazette, Henri Martel, Gabriel Peri, Maurice Priolley, André Rebière, Jean Robert, Pierre Semard, and Edgar Tarquin.<sup>61</sup>

In the 90s editions, however, included 42 martyrs. Jean Alezard, Celestino Alfonso, Pierre Benoit, Marcel Bertone, Rose Blanc, Tony Bloncort, Paul Camphin, Jean Catelas, Etienne Cariou, Danielle Casanova, Charles Debarge, Jacques Decour, Joseph Delobel, Joseph Esptein, Spartaco Fontano, Francine Fromond, Jean Grandel, Desiré Granet, Julien Hapiot, Maurice Lacazette, Pierre Lamandé, Michel Manouchian, Aimable Martel, Germinal Martel, Edouard Maury, Guy Môquet, Gabriel Peri, René Perrouault, Pierre June 44, Roger Pironneau, Jean Poulmarch, Maurice Piroolley, André Rebière, Jean Robert, Lucien Sampaix, Pierre Semard, Edgar Tarquin, Jean-Pierre Timbaud, Jules Vercruysse, Georges Woldi, and Fernand Zalkinov.

## **Prefaces**

One of the most crucial aspects that allows direct insights into the ways these letters were narrated was the prefaces. Included in the beginning of the publications, the prefaces are the first thing readers engage with and effectively convey the interpretation of the letters that

the publications endorse: including what specific historical and political contexts are deemed worth-highlighting and how should the authors of the letters be understood. Hence, by first studying the prefaces, readers are better prepared to approach the intentions behind these publications through a detailed analysis of the content and tone that narrates these letters. An analysis of the prefaces reveals a shift in narrative and ideological emphasis from the 1950s to the 1990s, shaped by the aforementioned historical contexts. This shift is significant as it complements a more nuanced understanding of how the words in these letters and the idea of the martyrs fit into the evolving socio-political landscape. Specifically, The prefaces of *They Loved Life* reveal a significant shift in narrative and ideological emphasis from the 1950s to the 1990s, shaped by evolving historical and political contexts. This shift, from a starkly ideological and militant tone to a more personal and inclusive one, highlights the dynamic nature of historical memory and its role in shaping contemporary interpretations of the martyrs' sacrifices and lives.

The two Chinese prefaces differ drastically in both content and tone, although it is important to highlight that neither of the prefaces was written in Chinese, but rather translated into Chinese. The 50 edition preface was written by 斯塔爾切瓦<sup>62</sup>, whose name's precise English translation and identity could not be found. The 50 edition was marked by a dramatically aggressive and masculine tone, and its content heavily focuses on the sacrifices that the French Communist Party had to make during the war, with polemical arguments accusing the French postwar establishment of sidelining the PCF. The diction and tone of the Chinese translation are archetypal, brimming with familiar phrases of class struggles, proletarian revolutions, imperialist puppets, and national traitors.<sup>63</sup> Such brutalized and polarized language was a product of a time, as aforementioned, when Communist orthodoxy and its lexicons, slogans, and rhetorics animated popular conceptions and expectations. The

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<sup>62</sup> Si ta er qie wa

<sup>63</sup> “階級鬥爭”，“無產階級革命”，“帝國主義走狗”，“賣國賊”。

employment of similar catchphrases in repetition at the time have profound implications for its effectiveness in emotional mobilization: The use of a same word to describe the struggles underwent by French communist resistance in European soil against its Nazi German enemy, and struggles fresh on the Chinese soil creates an instant bond via such lingual association. This brutalized and polarized language was a product of its time when Communist orthodoxy, along with its lexicons, slogans, and rhetoric, animated popular conceptions and expectations. The repetitive employment of such catchphrases had profound implications for emotional mobilization. Using the same language to describe the struggles of the French communist resistance against Nazi Germany and the contemporary struggles on Chinese soil created an instant bond through linguistic association. This linguistic strategy served to universalize the resistance narrative, linking the international communist movement with local Chinese experiences. By framing both contexts within the same ideological lexicon, the translation not only reinforced the legitimacy of the Communist cause but also fostered a sense of solidarity and shared purpose among readers. The familiar rhetoric of class struggle and revolution resonated deeply, making the distant European resistance relatable and emotionally compelling to a Chinese audience living through their own revolutionary upheavals. For example, phrases such as “class struggles” were popularized through the “Speaking Bitterness” campaigns where the Chinese masses learned to narrate the injustices they have suffered in Marxist-Leninist terms, while phrases such as “national traitors” instantly spark the Chinese readers’ memories of collaborationist governments during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Logistically, by limiting the variance in word choices and syntax structures, the writings are rendered more accessible to a mostly illiterate or newly literate Chinese audience. Ideologically, this strategic use of language thus played a crucial role in aligning the French resistance with the broader narrative of global communist struggle, enhancing its emotional and ideological impact on Chinese readers.

The preface opens as such: “The French communist party, in the years of war and occupation, had been the foundational power in guarding the French national interests. It had carried on its shoulders the main responsibility of fighting against the enemies of the French people, both internal and external. In protecting their motherlands’ independence, it has provided the utmost sacrifice”.<sup>64</sup> Immediately, the emphasis was put on the French communist resistance’s struggles in the resistance and highlighted their death as the “utmost sacrifice”. The highly nationalistic language here is worth noting, as that would remain prevalent throughout the entire preface: The resistance’s struggles and sacrifice were understood first and foremost as nationalistic efforts of fending off the invasion of another nation. However, this should not be understood as a simple advocacy for nationalism, for the preface soon delved into those within the French nation but were national traitors and Nazi Collaborators—”They deceived the French people and persecuted the excellent individuals, French Communists, who embodied the interests of the French people, and meanwhile carried out treacherous policies”.<sup>65</sup> The positioning of the French Communist Party here is twofold: First, they underwent suppression and betrayal from all sides, and were thus lonely in their resistance; and second, they were the only true embodiment of the interest of the French people.

It is interesting to note the curious lack of concrete principles and values that the PCF was supposed to fight for: Common values such as humanism, democracy, or liberty are rarely mentioned, and when they are, they take the form of abstracted communist aestheticization, “The letters of the French communists who were shot showed us the image of an idealist fighter for communism. These are the firm believers of Marxist-Leninism. These are the people loyal to the communist party and the people, who never surrendered to and

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<sup>64</sup> Fen 羅焚 Luo, ed., *Xie de jilu-bei qiangsha de faguo gongchandangren di shujian* 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 2nd ed. (Shanghai: 新群出版社, 1950), 1.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

never appeased the enemies. These are the people with great foresight and mighty hearts. On the way to fight for mankind's bright future, no torture could shake their spirits".<sup>66</sup> It is clear, through the firm descriptions in this quote that there is, in fact, no need for articulated principles or values, as the PCF were supposed to embody the will of a people, and through it bring about "mankind's bright future", whatever that might entail. Conviction, embodied by their ultimate sacrifice through death, provides an interplay between "myth" described by abstracted languages and "faith" shocawed by bloodied martyrdoms—Myth qua faith is self-validating.

Unsurprisingly, the Soviet Union played a crucial role in this preface, being positioned as the only true ally during the anti-fascist front, as opposed to other Western allies such as the United States and Britain. The Soviet Union was repetitively highlighted as the spiritual center of communism, and the French Communist Resistance's conviction were seen as derived from not just communism generally, but the USSR specifically: "The Soviet army had demolished the myth of the invincibility of Hitler's Germany. The victory of the Soviet army had fed the morale of the French patriots who fought against the invaders and traitors";<sup>67</sup> "The Soviet Army's decisive victory had encouraged French patriots' anti-nazi actions".<sup>68</sup> This emphasis on the Soviet Union as the primary inspiration and support for the French Communist Resistance served multiple purposes. First, it reinforced the narrative of the USSR as the leading force in the global struggle against fascism, elevating its status as the vanguard of communism. By highlighting Soviet victories, the text aimed to legitimize and glorify the Soviet Union's role, fostering a sense of admiration and loyalty among readers. Furthermore, this framing strategically diminished the contributions of other Western allies,

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<sup>66</sup> Fen 羅焚 Luo, ed., *Xie de jilu-bei qiangsha de faguo gongchandangren di shujian* 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 2nd ed. (Shanghai: 新群出版社, 1950), 10.

<sup>67</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists], trans. Fen 羅焚, 4.

<sup>68</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists], trans. Fen 羅焚, 12.

subtly positioning them as less reliable or committed to the anti-fascist cause, especially general Charles De Gaulle, who rose to prominence in postwar French politics, “A small faction of the parties’ supporters’ “participation” in the resistance was to help the agents of De Gaulle disband the democratic forces fighting against the fascist occupiers in occupied France. While they were undertaking De Gaulle’s tasks, they accepted the weapons that British and American air forces parachuted from their planes and piled them in hidden places to “stock” them up, so that they could use them to torture the democratic groups after the German armies left”<sup>69</sup>.

This, of course, ignores many complexities within the French Communist Party and the Resistance, as well as regarding its relationship with the Soviet Union. By categorizing the French Communists as inspired solely by victories of the Soviet Army against Nazi Germany on the Eastern front, it ignores the long history of underground resistance within Western Europe before the start of the World War II, such as the fact that many of the French communist have voluntarily fought in the Spanish Civil War. Perhaps more importantly, it omits the awkward past of Nazi collaboration that the Soviet Union itself has: Specifically, the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939, also known as the Soviet-Nazi non-aggression pact, only broken after Hitler’s invasion of Poland. The pact had disappointed and alienated many communists who suddenly found themselves categorized as allies of Nazi Germany, who they had been resisting against. Ultimately, nuances and complexities that requires accountability were plastered over with ideological correctness in this preface, wherein the sole purpose had been to prove that the communists had always been under the lead of the USSR, and had always been on the right side of history.

The result of such ideologically didactic language for our subjects of inquiry—the martyrs and the writers of these last letters—is a form of abstraction that borders on

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<sup>69</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists], trans. Fen 羅焚, 10.

dehumanization. The martyrs are stripped of hesitations and contradictions, becoming the living and dying embodiments of communist ideals. The preface does not highlight the letters where the resisters addressed their lovers, parents, and children, carrying a last thought of tenderness. Instead, it spotlights their professions of loyalty to the party, to communism, and to the Soviet Union. In other words, martyrdom in the 50s edition is elevated above worldly desires and sorrows, transforming into the essence of communism, characterized by static and everlasting conviction. This abstraction serves to create a powerful, albeit one-dimensional, image of the martyrs. By omitting personal and intimate expressions, the text crafts a narrative where the martyrs' identities are fully subsumed by their ideological commitments. This selective portrayal amplifies the ideological purity and heroism of the martyrs, making them symbols of unwavering dedication to the communist cause.

The preface of *They Loved Life* in 1990 was the stark opposite, and this time the author was not hard to identify. Étienne Fajon, himself a member of the PCF before, during, and after WWII wrote the preface in his old age of retirement. As previously mentioned, the 85' French edition from which *They Loved Life* was translated from was published largely as a response to a scandal over the legacy of the French Resistance—therefore, the compilation of letters this time display an aura of inclusiveness, especially by highlighting Jewish and Foreign communist resisters who had often been excluded from previous editions, as well as by restoring the content of the letters themselves back to their entirety. Fajon's preface in the 1990 edition is marked by nostalgic sentimentality. As an aging veteran, he implores readers to delve into the lives of these martyrs by reading their writings. In doing so, the preface attempts to re-humanize the martyrs, presenting them as individuals who "loved life" and restoring their last letters as personal expressions of people who once lived. This shift from a purely ideological portrayal to a more personal and inclusive narrative reflects a broader



effort to acknowledge the diverse contributions to the resistance and to honor the individual lives behind the collective struggle.

“Incorporated into this book are letters that I've read and reread for 40 years, countless times! It's hard for me to imagine that today's men and women readers would remain indifferent when reading these letters”---opened the preface to this new edition.<sup>70</sup> An immediately apparent comparison was the presence of “I”, a first-person narrator, namely Fajon himself, as opposed to the authoritative voice in the preface of *Testaments of Blood*. Aside from the often discussed use of bridging the gap between the author and the reader, the use of first person pronouns here also exposes Fajon in a position that borders vulnerability, or at least presented as so. Frankly, Fajon composed the preface almost in the form of a memoir, as he recalls the lives of his comrades, “I was a close friend of some of them, and they will always live in the depths of my soul”.<sup>71</sup> He recalled “the ‘contagious and noisy laugh’ of Pierre Semard, the ‘elegant humor’ of Gabriel Peri, and the ‘optimism’ of Guy Moquet”.<sup>72</sup>

This personal and intimate tone would continue to color the rest of the preface, “These farewell letters make the martyrs vivid in my mind. Like everyone else, they were human, and often more human. They loved all kinds of joys and the happiness of life”.<sup>73</sup> By emphasizing that they were “like everyone else” and even “more human,” Fajon breaks down the abstract and idealized images often associated with martyrs, bringing them closer to the reader's own experiences and emotions. This approach contrasts sharply with earlier depictions that primarily highlighted ideological convictions and heroic sacrifices, often stripping away the personal and emotional dimensions of the martyrs' lives.

<sup>70</sup> Étienne Fajon, ed., *Tamen Reai Shenghuo: Fagong Lieshi Yishu* 他们热爱生活: 法共烈士遗书 [*They Loved Life: Last Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Boxiang 陈伯祥 Chen, 1st ed. (Beijing: 世界知识出版社, 1990), 1.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Brunstetter, Unfinished Manuscripts

<sup>73</sup> Étienne Fajon, ed., *Tamen Reai Shenghuo: Fagong Lieshi Yishu* 他们热爱生活: 法共烈士遗书 [*They Loved Life: Last Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Boxiang 陈伯祥 Chen, 1st ed. (Beijing: 世界知识出版社, 1990), 4.

Moreover, the phrase "they loved all kinds of joys and the happiness of life", presumably where the title comes from, serves to reframe the martyrs not just as fighters or symbols of resistance, but as individuals who experienced and cherished everyday pleasures. This acknowledgment of their humanity and their capacity for joy enriches the narrative, providing a fuller, more nuanced portrayal of their lives and sacrifices. This personal and intimate tone aligns with the broader inclusiveness of the 1990 edition. By restoring the content of the letters to their entirety and highlighting previously excluded groups, the preface not only honors the diversity within the resistance but also invites readers to connect with the martyrs on a more personal level. This approach enhances the emotional resonance of the letters, making their stories more accessible and impactful.

Importantly, an attempt was also made to acknowledge the complexities within the French Communist Party as well as within the Resistance. "Firstly, the differences between the deceased heroes have left a deep impression on me. They were fighters of the same party, united by common ideals and hopes. However, like the diversity of France itself, they were also different", wrote Fajon, remarking on the varied occupations and backgrounds that had formed the Communist Party, one that reads both like an acknowledgement of complexities and a legitimization of the PCF for embodying the will of such diverse demographics. The other acknowledgement, however, was perhaps even more remarkable and unthinkable in the 50s. Namely, the acknowledgement of other factions' participation within the Resistance, "Men and women citizens of various opinions and social classes in France have chosen the path of struggle for themselves, many of whom have sacrificed their lives for it. We commemorate them with the same respect".<sup>74</sup>

In essence, Fajon's preface transforms the martyrs from distant, idealized figures into relatable, multidimensional individuals. This shift in tone and focus contributes to a deeper

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<sup>74</sup> Étienne Fajon, ed., *Tamen Reai Shenghuo: Fagong Lieshi Yishu* 他们热爱生活: 法共烈士遗书 [*They Loved Life: Last Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Boxiang 陈伯祥 Chen, 1st ed. (Beijing: 世界知识出版社, 1990), 5.

understanding of their experiences and sacrifices, fostering a more intimate and empathetic connection between the martyrs and contemporary readers.

Ultimately, examining these prefaces provides a richer context for interpreting the letters themselves. It allows us to see how the narratives around these martyrs were tailored to fit the shifting needs of the state and society. This evolution in portrayal underscores the dynamic nature of historical memory and its role in shaping contemporary ideological discourses. By understanding these shifts, one gains deeper insights into the complex interplay between personal expressions of sacrifices, emotions, and convictions, and state narratives, adding complexities into the aestheticization of martyrdoms.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Chinese translations of French resistance letters offer a fascinating lens through which to view the complexities of postwar Chinese communist identity and geopolitical positioning. The 1950 and 1990 translations, with their different historical contexts and ideological underpinnings, reveal how convictions and emotions were narrated and instrumentalized to serve specific political ends. The shift from a more instrumentalized and ideological narrative in the 1950 translation to a more personal and inclusive approach in the 1990 translation reflects broader changes in Chinese society and politics, as well as China's geopolitical relations during and after the Cold War.

Moreover, the translations highlight the tension between the private and public spheres, showing how personal convictions were intertwined with political ideologies and nationalistic fervor. The use of performativity, emotional mobilization, and the cult of martyrs

in constructing historical memory in Maoist and Post-Maoist China further illustrates the complexities of navigating political ideologies and personal experiences.

Overall, this comparative study of the Chinese translations of French resistance letters adds nuance to our understanding of how historical narratives are constructed and reshaped over time. It underscores the importance of language and translation in shaping cultural and political identities, and invites further exploration into the intersection of private emotions and public ideologies in shaping collective memory. By comparatively surveying the role of a same subject matter across different time and space, one gains added comprehensions of the ways historical discourse gets constantly re-interpreted, highlighting the interrelated characters between history and politics.

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## Appendix

**Appendix 1: The 50s edition of the letters was included in a collection of "Selected Essays on the Ideological Cultivation of Youth" by the Education Bureau of Tianjin City.**

青年思想修养文集  
第四集  
为 了 幸 福  
天津市教育局编

天津人民出版社

### Appendix 2: Catalogs to the 50s and the 90s editions:

Jean Alezard, a metal worker and mechanic, FTPF resistor.<sup>75</sup> He joined the Resistance in 1941 as a sniper and the Lieutenant of the Clandestine, and as an organizer. He was arrested, beaten and interrogated in 1943. Finally, he was convicted by German court martial and shot in April 1944, in the Mount. Valérien, at age 28. He addressed his last letter to his brothers and his sister, proclaiming that: “as I die, I cry out to you: long live Liberty! Long live the France that the Communist Party taught me to love”.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Francs-tireurs et partisans français, an armed resistance organization created by leaders of the French Communist Party during World War II.

<sup>76</sup> Fen 羅焚 Luo, ed., *Xie de jilu-bei qiangsha de faguo gongchandangren di shujian* 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 2nd ed. (Shanghai: 新群出版社, 1950), 84-86.

Pierre C,<sup>77</sup> a worker from Bretagne, he was executed in 1943. He wrote 2 letters addressed respectively to his wife and his parents. In the former he talked about the two children he would left behind and their education and their friends, while in the latter he wrote, “I did not expect for myself to die at the age of 27, but what options are left?...My dear, have you ever thought in that past that your son would be executed some day? But you must know, remember firmly and tell all my comrades, our neighbors, that I have bravely went to my execution with my head held high. I have worked for the cause of Communism and for the salvation of France.”

Paul Camphin, born into a family of communists, he joined the Communist Youth in 1935 at the age of thirteen. He assisted his brother René who led the communist department of Arras during the Popular Front period. He devoted himself to clandestine work of the Communist Youth in 1938 and the FTPF led by Charles Debarge in 1940, participating in multiple operations. He was arrested in October 1942 and executed in November 1943. His brother Maurice Camphin was also captured and shot in 1943. Sentenced to death in Arras by the German occupation tribunal, he recounted the brutality inflicted upon him during his captivity and interrogation, and that “Despite everything, I continued to laugh and sing...I remain a French communist to the end, I regret nothing, except not having done enough; If I had to start my life again, I would start it again the same as the first...I will go to the execution singing ‘*La Marseillaise*’ and ‘*L’Internationale*’ out loud”.<sup>78</sup>

Louis Caron,<sup>79</sup> hung in Cuincy in July 1943 at the age of 21. His older brother was shot dead not long before his own execution. According to Maitron Fusillés he wrote a letter to his family and another to his comrades, but *Testament of Blood* only included the one to his comrades, in which he asked his comrades to seek revenge for him “without mercy and

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<sup>77</sup> He did not re-appear in the 90s edition.

<sup>78</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 69-74.

<sup>79</sup> He did not re-appear in the 90s edition.

without pity against the common enemy, international fascism, against the collaborators in the service of Germany, starvers of the French people”.<sup>80</sup>

E.L. Champion,<sup>81</sup> one of the first soldiers in the FTPF clandestine, arrested in June, 1942 and shot 2 months later after interrogation. He wrote his last letter to his lover and their newborn son, confessing that, “When I die, I think I have worked justly for the future of our children, of the working people. I have fought against barbarism and slavery. This is a condolence, even for when you are losing the one you love deeply...My Anita, my dear son, I love you most in this world”.<sup>82</sup>

Eugène Clotrier,<sup>83</sup> train conductor and communist activist, FTPF resistor shot after interrogation in 1944. He was awarded the honorary captain of the clandestine military group posthumous. He has written three letters, all addressed to his wife and his childrens: One after he has been sentenced to death along with 20 comrades, one after his appeal for clemency had been rejected, and one on the day of his execution. In his letters he repeatedly bid farewell to them, “Kiss all our families and all those who I will always love for me. I hold you close to my heart before saying the final goodbye. I kiss you a thousand times”.<sup>84</sup>

Eugene Cas,<sup>85</sup> born in Marseille where he joined the Young Communists. He became the regional manager of the FTPF in late 1943, and was shot in Paris in 1944 along with other 15 people in the resistance in Paris. He was named FFI candidate posthumously.<sup>86</sup> He wrote two letters one addressed to his parents and his little sister, the other to his wife and his young child, “Like many, I fall as a soldier for my country, France. I have nothing to regret. My dear

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<sup>80</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 75-76.

<sup>81</sup> He did not re-appear in the 90s edition.

<sup>82</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 118-122.

<sup>83</sup> He did not re-appear in the 90s edition.

<sup>84</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 81-83.

<sup>85</sup> He did not re-appear in the 90s edition.

<sup>86</sup> Forces françaises de l'intérieur, Charles de Gaulle used as a formal name to identify Resistance fighters, especially in the latter stages of WW2.

ones, you who will suffer so much, I tell you, have courage. Do not cry too much for me, for I am not to be pitied and you are more to be pitied than I am”.<sup>87</sup>

Jacques Decour, French underground writer and scholar of German, editor-in-chief of the journal *Commune* (1938-1939), clandestine founder of *L'Université libre* (November 1940), *La Pensée libre* (February 1941) and *Lettres françaises* (1942). After the creation of the National Front, Decour was responsible for regrouping all resistance writers in the occupied zone. In liaison with Jean Paulhan and Jacques Debû-Bridel, he set up the first National Committee of Writers and the first issue of *Lettres françaises* which contained his manifesto of writers from the occupied zone. But he was arrested in 1942 before the issue's publication, and shot at the age of 32 after three months of interrogations and torture. His last letter was only published in fragments in *Testament of Blood*,<sup>88</sup> in which he wrote to his parents, “You know that I have been expecting for two months what happened to me this morning, so I had time to prepare for it, but as I have no religion, I have not sunk into the meditation of death; I consider myself a bit like a leaf that falls from the tree to make compost. The quality of the soil will depend on that of the leaves. I want to talk about French youth, in whom I place all my hope...If you have the opportunity, tell my first year students, through my substitute, that I have thought a lot about the last scene of *Egmont* by Goethe”.<sup>89</sup>

Joseph Delobel, a member of the Communist Youth, an organizer of the Resistance in Noyelles-Godault (Pas-de-Calais), arrested while participating in a miners' strike in 1942 and shot with his brother Louis Delobel. He detailed the cruelty of the interrogation he underwent in his last letter addressed to his family, the party, and the Communist Youth, and at last declared, “My dear comrades, be sure that we have done our duty and that we have no

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<sup>87</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 65-68.

<sup>88</sup> It was restored in full in *They Loved Life*.

<sup>89</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 43-44.

regrets. We have been the good soldiers of the Party and of France. Let this example not be useless, because France must live and our great Party must make its place in a better regime where the working people must impose their will".<sup>90</sup>

Roland Delval,<sup>91</sup> joined the Young Communists of Carvin in 1938. He continued his action in the clandestine organization of the Communist Party under the Occupation by organizing the writing and printing of leaflets. Roland Delval was then appointed head of Carvin. He took charge of collecting weapons, then participated in numerous actions. Arrested on May 8, 1942 and shot to death in Arras in July, 1942, at the age of 21. Only a small fragment of his letter to his parents survived, addressed to his parents, "Death does not scare me, my dear mother, be courageous, as your son always was. I will be strong and calm; I always have been, but I still want to tell you that I am proud to have fought for my great Party, the only one of tomorrow".<sup>92</sup>

André Delmas,<sup>93</sup> hung to death in 1942. His last letter was found in the files of the German prison, addressed to the PCF, he first professed his loyalty to the party and his confidence in its victory, and then asked that, "when the circumstances permit, please tell my wife, 'he loves you, and, when the final moment of his life approaches, he went to eternal sleep thinking about your endearing image, and your clear, beautiful eyes'".<sup>94</sup>

André Diez,<sup>95</sup> joined and was active in the Communist Youth since 1939, a chemistry student and an important organizer in the Latin Quarter. He was arrested in 1942, underwent interrogation and torture, and at last shot in Ménilmontant at the age of 21. He wrote two separate letters, one to his friend Charlot, in which he detailed the brutality he went through

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<sup>90</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 45-49.

<sup>91</sup> He did not re-appear in the 90s edition.

<sup>92</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 50.

<sup>93</sup> He did not re-appear in the 90s edition.

<sup>94</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 52.

<sup>95</sup> He did not re-appear in the 90s edition.

that he did not want his mother and aunt to see; and another to his parents on the day of his execution, “Today I have to tell you a very bad news. My darling mother; You are going to need a lot of courage. I'm sure you'll have as much as me...Mother, please, be brave, remember that I am not dying alone. I kiss you tenderly”.<sup>96</sup>

André Durand,<sup>97</sup> joined the Resistance in May, 1943 and was arrested in December of the same year. In 1944 he was shot at the Mont-Valérien fortress. He addressed the last letter to his parents hours before the execution, “Dear father and mother, in this final letter I want to tell you how I loved you, although I have not always shown it...the only two things I regret are that: I am guilty, dear mother, for I have caused you pain and even tears from time to time. And father, I have not respected you enough all the time...I have to bid you farewell now, for the paper is running out; I kiss you as deeply as I love you”.<sup>98</sup>

Robert Hamel;<sup>99</sup> a taxi driver, fitter, and a trade unionist. A member of the Communist Party since 1925, he served as secretary of his cell until he joined the International Brigades in Spain as a volunteer and later became the FTPF military manager of the P2 region. He was shot at the Mont-Valérien fortress in 1943, at the age of 40. His last letters were addressed to his wife, which she received in the lining of a garment that he sewed it in. In the letters he started writing after being sentenced to death by the court, he wrote to his wife almost daily, bidding farewell to all his friends. Although *Testament of Blood* significantly deleted his last letters, mostly segments where he repetitively expressed his love for his wife, “My last thoughts belong to you, my dear...I will try to give you a few words from time to time; This way you will know that I will be with you until the last moment. But I am being very closely monitored...I'm almost certain I'll hear from you this week. Visit or package or, better, both.

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<sup>96</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 53-56.

<sup>97</sup> He did not re-appear in the 90s edition.

<sup>98</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 57-58.

<sup>99</sup> He did not re-appear in the 90s edition.

Hope I'm not disappointed again”<sup>100</sup> Robert Hamel was shot the next day, without seeing his wife again.

Julien Hapiot, a miner. He left for Spain to fight with the International Brigades; appointed lieutenant of the “La Marseillaise” brigade, he was seriously injured in the lung on the Ebro front, returned to France and was subsequently discharged. But after Nazi Occupation in 1940, he went underground again and was head of the clandestine PCF for Pas-de-Calais. He was shot in 1943 in Arras. He addressed his last letter to the PCF and the Communist Youth, “I believe that none of our sacrifices are in vain, the oppressor will be punished. I am prepared to add my name into the long list of people who have suffered for the cause of national liberation. Long live the great Communist Party! Long live the French Communist Youth! Long live the Soviet Union! Long live the Red Army!”<sup>101</sup>

Felicien Joly,<sup>102</sup> teacher, organizer of the first FTPF clandestine in the North of France, participated in many operations. Arrested in 1941 and interrogated in Loos and Lille. He was sentenced to death and addressed his last letter to his parents and sisters, “Soon the harsh winter, soon also the beautiful summer; me, I am going to laugh at death because I am not going to die, they are not going to kill me, they are going to make me live forever. My name will ring after my death not like a death knell, but like a surge of hope in the morning sun”.<sup>103</sup>

Maurice Lacazette, metalworker, communist, and trade union activist; resistant FTPF, interregional politics; arrested in May 1942 where he was interrogated and sent to the prison hospital. He escaped from the hospital to return to clandestine activities. In 1943, Lacazette ensured the reorganization of the Brittany area of Francs-tireurs and partisans, taking

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<sup>100</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 37-42.

<sup>101</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 29-32.

<sup>102</sup> He did not re-appear in the 90s edition.

<sup>103</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 61-64.

leadership roles. He was rearrested and sentenced to death in August 1943. He wrote long letters to his wife, of which only excerpts were published, yet they are still at considerable length, “Farewell, darling wife, farewell to all my life, reread the beautiful books that you chose for me and which excited me so much; when you walk around this old Paris, say hello to her for me, I miss her so much, too. I hold you with all my strength. My last thoughts are for you”.<sup>104</sup>

Henri Martel,<sup>105</sup> son of the Communist deputy Martel, was shot in 1942 along with his comrades. All the 13 martyrs last letters had been destroyed by the Nazis, and the only thing left was Henri Martel’s short note to his father,” Like you I will be courageous...I am certain that those who survive, that future generations will be happy thanks to our sacrifice. We chose our route well. I have strong confidence in the future...”<sup>106</sup>

Gabriel Peri, a prominent communist journalist, editor of l’Humanité and deputy to the French National Assembly in the 1930s. He was known for his expertise in diplomatic and international relations, and had strongly advocated for anti-colonialism and anti-fascism when Italy invaded Ethiopia and during the Spanish Civil War. He was shot by the Nazis in 1941 at the Mont-Valérien fortress. His last letter was not explicitly addressed to anyone but seems addressed to his communist comrades, “No doubt it is because Marcel Cachin was my good teacher that I feel strong to face death. Farewell and long live France!”<sup>107</sup>

Maurice Pirolley, joined the Resistance in 1942 as sergeant of the clandestine. Arrested on August 24, 1943. He wrote his last letters to his wife and his mother, “Take care

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<sup>104</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 84-98.

<sup>105</sup> He did not re-appear in the 90s edition.

<sup>106</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 99.

<sup>107</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 17-18.



of our dear daughter, and tell her in the future, that her father had died like a real communist. For when I die I am satisfied for having worked for such a great cause”.<sup>108</sup>

André Rebière,<sup>109</sup> restaurant worker, blacksmith; political commissioner of the International Brigades; alternate member of the central committee of the Communist Party. He was involved in many operations and successfully assassinated a German officer in Bordeaux. He was arrested in December 1941, interrogated and tortured, and finally shot dead in October 1942. He wrote many last letters, which *Testament* only published in excerpts. The last of his letters were severely censored and its content crossed out by the Nazi authorities, in the end he wrote “I have so much to tell you that there are too many to even begin to tell. I kiss you all very much”.<sup>110</sup>

Jean Robert, joined the Resistance in March 1942, hung in April 1943. He addressed his last letter to his grandparents and his friends, telling them his conviction and some treatments he had endured under imprisonment, “Yes, my dear families and friends, I bid you farewell forever. I will miss you when I die. Courage and hope—that is our slogan, let it also be yours. I hold you tightly and wholeheartedly”.<sup>111</sup>

Pierre Semard, a trade unionist, secretary general of the Federation of railway-workers and leader of the French Communist Party (acting as its secretary general from 1924 to 1928), was shot in prison by the Nazi occupiers in 1942. As of 2020, 348 roads in France were named after him. He wrote his letter to the workers of France and his comrade railway workers, “Farewell, dear friends, the time to die is near. But I know that the Nazis

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<sup>108</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 100.

<sup>109</sup> He did not re-appear in the 90s edition.

<sup>110</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 19-28.

<sup>111</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 102-105.

who are going to shoot me are already defeated and that France will continue the good fight. Long live the Soviet Union! Long live France!”<sup>112</sup>

Notably, despite mostly complying with the 49’ Russian selection of martyrs, *The Testments of Blood* added one martyr that was absent in the Russian edition: Edgar Tarquin, who was referred to as only Edgar at the time of *Testments*’ publication due to a failure to identify his last name, “last name of this letter’s writer remains unclear. which court announced his death? where was he executed? Judging from the notes in the letter, Edgar didn’t know who to trust before his death. He might have found someone to trust amongst the prisoners who were released, and that person completed Edgar’s last wish and brought his letter to his family”.<sup>113</sup>

### **Appendix 3: English translation of the Chinese preface to *Testaments of Blood***

The French communist party, in the years of war and occupation, had been the foundational power in guarding the French national interests. It had carried on its shoulders the main responsibility of fighting against the enemies of the French people, both internal and external. In protecting their motherlands’ independence, it has provided the utmost sacrifice.

The pre-war French authority had the specialty of systematically cooperating with foreign invasion forces, and attacking domestic proletariats and the people’s rights and democratic accomplishments. The Daladier regime once refused to organize collective security to defend against German invasion, allowing Hitler’s Germany to invade and instigate its invasion of the Soviet Union—French Munich collaborator’s foreign policy is as such. In fact, this is an anti-French policy, as it primarily sells out the French’s own interests. The French rulers, in order to benefit the “200 families” that hold the country’s most wealthy

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<sup>112</sup> 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 15-16.

<sup>113</sup> Fen 羅焚 Luo, ed., *Xie de jilu-bei qiangsha de faguo gongchandangren di shujian* 血的记录-被枪杀的法国共产党人底书简 [*Testments of Blood: Letters from the Martyred French Communists*], trans. Fen 羅焚 Luo, 2nd ed. (Shanghai: 新群出版社, 1950).

selfish, and greedy interests, had disrupted the foundation for common peace. They deceived the French people and persecuted the excellent individuals (French Communists) who embodied the interests of the French people, and meanwhile carried out treacherous policies. In order to dodge being revealed by the publications of the Communist party, the Daladier regime had shut down the French communist press —” Humanite” before the outbreak of war. In 1939, on September, 25, the French authority declared the Communist party to be outlawed; on October 5th, it passed the decision to arrest Communist party members and trialed in court. They attempted to eradicate communist organizations and murder communists. This is their real war. Yet in their war against Germany, they not only didn't exhaust all the possibilities but also sold out their own country. Hitler's “manipulating certain countries' internal class tension and these countries' conflict with the Soviet countries”-- that Comrade Stalin pointed out in his report on “The 24th Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution”, is showing its effect in France. This country's rulers had intimidated themselves by the shadows of the revolution, hastily gave up their resistance, and placed their country under Hitler's feet.

The communist party used to be the unique party in its fearless revelation of the French ruler and their stooges' treasonous policies and its guarding of the French people's interest. When the France of “200 families” is hailing the return of Daladiar after the signing of the Munich Agreement, Morris Thorez was in making speeches in the winter bicycle race plaza, revealing that Munich is “the peak of the evil that had begun under (Pierre) Laval”. The French Communist party opposed the Daladier and Chamberlin government's policy of surrender in Munich. It had once organized resistance to collective security, the protection of the treaty with the Soviet Union, and revealed the hypocrisy of the French rulers—during the negotiations between the British, France, and the Soviets, they had not given up their attempt to cooperate with Hitler on all fronts.

During this dangerous time, the French communist party displayed immense flexibility in its political actions. 2 days after the “Humanité” was shut down, it was republished again secretly. After the Communist Party was outlawed, communist members formed the **Workers and Farmers (?) committee** and petitioned the parliament to publicly discuss the topic of war and peace. Despite all the cruel oppressions, the communist party is still a party strong in its organization and continues its fight underground. In the “Worker’s Daily” paper of British on 1940 January 1, it says, “In just one district of Paris, the Humanité has sold 20,000 copies. On average there are 100,000 to 150,000 workers reading the newspaper per day. The newspaper is the center of unity for all the revolutionary factions.” On May 24, 1940, the underground French communist party’s central committee passed the declaration to fight foreign enemies and domestic traitors. In June of that same year, the French communist party’s central committee hoped to prevent the approaching French military collapse and petitioned to organize a civil army and fight the war in the name of national liberation. Yet, the government feared its own people and neglected this petition.

As the third republic fell, Pétain declared himself the head of the nation and government. The central committee declared to the public that, whether it’s the defeated generals, the merchants, or the notorious politicians, could reignite France—they would only sell it out. Only the people themselves could realize the virtuous goal of social and national liberation, only under the leadership of the proletariats would there be established a “free, independent, and revived France front.”

The French communist party’s central committee encouraged and mobilized its members with the documents. The French communists simultaneously evoked the people’s courage and devoted themselves to the construction of freedom, independence, and national revival.

Regardless of the tens and thousands of sacrifices of the communists, the French Communist Party had cultivated bunches of new fighters, leading the public to continue its anti-nazi and anti-Vichy efforts. Surrounding the communists and the proletariats, were the united people from all classes people who fought for the liberation of France. Due to the efforts of the communists, there was gradually a formation of a resistance movement.

The Soviet army had demolished the myth of the invincibility of Hitler's Germany. The victory of the Soviet army had fed the morale of the French patriots who fought against the invaders and traitors.

When the occupying forces and the Vichy status quo saw communist activities as a threat to their rule, they declared a state of emergency to torture and execute the whole armed forces in order to oppose the communists. The cruelty and disgust of these measures are one more than the other.

In July 1941 the Vichy government, in order to strengthen the oppression against the patriots, nominated (Pierre) Pucheu as the head of interior affairs, an active participant in the communist resistance, and the congressman Jean Catelas as one of the first to be sacrificed.

The loyal son of the communist party who had devoted all his forces to the service of his own country, Jean Catelas had been harmed by the government before. Before the Germans invaded, he was sentenced to 6 years in prison. In 1941, Jean Catelas was captured under the order of the Vichy government. On 9, 26, 1949 he was hung in the Paris prison of La Santé

On September 30, 1941, the occupying government declared an order that made all the French prisoners and inmates of concentration camps hostages. This order allowed for execution without trial and was abused by the government to demolish the patriots. On October 22, 1941, In Chateaubriant the first large group of hostages were killed by shooting, amongst which were (Jean Pierre) Tienbaut, (Jean) Grandel, (Jean) Poulmarch, and many of

the communists. In December of that same year, the German occupying forces came to the Valerien mountain and shot another bunch of hostages. Amongst them were the congressman and the editor of “le hunanite” Gabriel Peri.

Gabriel Peri had dedicated his entire life to the workers’ movement. In the mother country’s toughest days, he had never lost faith in the lower-class people’s victory. Peri made a speech on October 10th, 1940, in front of the grave of (O), which served as the first open protest in Paris. Vichy traitors and invaders dared not trial this representative of the people and instead executed Peri as a hostage.

In the same year of 1941, the Vichy joined forces with the invaders to kill the head of the central committee of the French communist party, the leader of the Federation of Railworkers, and the member of the Workers International: Pierre Semard

Pierre Semard would be a passionate friend of the Soviet countries. In 1922 he was received by Lenin. Semard had tirelessly worked to establish a newer party dedicated to uniting the proletariats to fight against fascism. The French status quo had persecuted Semard. In 1939, the military court had once charged him 3 years in prison for being a communist. After their surrender, the Vichy transferred him to the Gestapo. The Vichy government had wanted to unit force to make Semard surrender. He had suffered cruel and inhumane torture and inspection but never surrendered. “My last thoughts long for you, my comrades,” he wrote a few minutes before his execution, “longing for our great party and all the members, all the patriotic fighters of France, the courageous red army soldiers, and the great Stalin.”

“Ever since now, we can tell French person who wants to know how to liberate Franch from its nightmare,” wrote Andre Marti<sup>114</sup>, “tell all those foreigners who want to know where France is going: go read Pierre Semard’s last letter.”

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<sup>114</sup> Wrote a book called Pierre Semard in 1942/ 1945

The communists had reached solidarity among all resisting forces through their resilience. The liberation of France approached. The Soviet Army's decisive victory had encouraged French patriots' anti-nazi actions. The occupiers feared rebellions and destroyed entire villages. De Guelle was in North Africa at the station of British and American forces, not helping the organization and struggle of the resistance movement. And—he obstructed their liberation struggles. The leaders of the French Socialist Party, which had been bankrupted and organizationally destroyed ever since the early period of Hitler's occupation, such as the intimate friend of general secretary and (Léon) Blum, Paul Faure, are now working for German fascists. The others (莱特洛克, André Philip) turns to depend on De Guelle, helping him realize the plan to establish an anti-democratic system in postwar French.

The status quo in France right now does not include parties and members that had fought among the brave snipers of the guerilla fighters. A small faction of the parties' supporters' "participation" in the resistance was to help the agents of De Gaulle disband the democratic forces fighting against the fascist occupiers in occupied France.

While they were undertaking De Gaulle's tasks, they accepted the weapons that British and American air forces parachuted from their planes and piled them in hidden places to "stock" them up, so that they could use them to torture the democratic groups after the German armies left. The snipers and the Guerillas are mostly armed with the weapons they snatched from their enemies. "We see in France: the lone and brave snipers and guerilla fighters don't get weapons, yet those who do nothing get weapons"....Cachin wrote in the *Humanité* secretly published on November 15, 1943.

During the period of French liberation, the French communist party's actions had special meanings. When the British and American allies learned that the Soviet Union had the power to occupy the entire Germany and liberate France, they employed a massive army to land on Normandy. However, the British and American authorities have no intention of

supporting France's democratic struggles. "Try our best to restrict the active efforts of guerilla fighters"----London ordered the military leaders of the resistance movement on June 14, 1944. Contrary to the legends they spread, the British and American authorities not only did not send arms to aid the fight of the French patriots but also tried to stop those who had already formed a "French domestic army (??)" from confiscating the occupiers' weapons. Hence, they are directly colluded with the Hitler criminals. When the struggle for Paris' liberation was heated, the staff department of De Gaulle signed an agreement with Hitler's general Von (?), that allowed the German army to withdraw their fully armed army from Paris without resistance. The French patriots protested this sly policy that was not only of the enemies but also of the British and American allies and liberated their motherland's city, so as to destroy this treacherous condition. The resistance groups funded and led by the communists had played a deciding role in each city's liberation. Many communists displayed their genius as organizers and military officers in the French people's liberation struggles. And so some of these communists, such as the leader of the guerilla fighters who encouraged millions to join the resistance, 夏爾吉昂; such as the hero of the battle of Paris and a former worker Fabien (?), etc.---all become household names.

During the years of war and occupation, 75,000 communists died in their struggles against the Hitler invaders and national traitors. They are the proof of what kind of leaders the French communist party used to cultivate.

The letters of the French communists who were shot showed us the image of an idealist fighter for communism. These are the firm believers of Marxist-Leninism. These are the people loyal to the communist party and the people, who never surrendered to and never appeased the enemies. These are the people with great foresight and mighty hearts. On the way to fight for mankind's bright future, no torture could shake their spirits.



“If I could start my life anew, I would choose the same road,” Gabrielle Peri wrote before he was shot. His words spoke the hearts and minds of many other comrades who had sacrificed themselves for the cause.

The communists who were sentenced to death got strength from the depth of their thoughts and faith in their career’s eventual victory. “The moral characters that the party has cultivated in me supported me and made me die in peace,” Jean Alazer wrote in his last letter. 安德烈·列比葉爾 announced that his loyalty was because he has unshakable faith in the party, in the truth of Marxist-Leninism. “I have no doubt that our cause will end victoriously,” 莫列士·拉卡熱特 wrote before he was shot. “The cause that I so cherish...how great a support it had been!”

The men who were sentenced to death felt that their morals were incomparably higher than that of their executioners. “When I die, I am satisfied that I have served such a great cause,” 莫利士皮諾里 wrote.

The executed communists’ last letters were sunk with their deep loyalty to the party. “We should hold our heads up high in pride, and clench our fists, yelling ‘long live the great communist party’ when we die,” 岳瑟夫·戴洛貝爾 wrote in representation for the 30 people sentenced to death, “just like what my last thoughts are longing for, all my thoughts long for the for our beloved party, long for the brave liberation struggles of people in all countries, long for our beloved Stalin...”

The communists were proud of the greatness of their venture, and the loyalty of their comrades. “I am proud of you, my great communist party, I am proud of your loyal sons—the enemies are murdering them every day, but the enemies can’t torture anything out of their mouths.” 保羅·康芬 who had gone through the cruelest torture wrote before he was shot. “I am proud that I had served for the great party, proud that I will serve for that one and only party.” —戴萊瓦羅 announced.

At this moment, the French ruling class continues policies that sell out their people's interests. When the French reactionary excluded the communists from the government and tried to make them illegal again, France had turned into the muppet of American imperialist policies under the right-wing socialist leaders.

The last letters of the French communists who were shot are a warning to not return to pre-war policies. French communists said in their last words to strictly punish the national traitors and continue the grueling fight against fascism. They gave their lives to fight for a bright future for the working class. "Let this example not be ignored without a noise," 岳瑟夫 戴洛貝爾 wrote the shared minds of all those communists who were shot. "Because France should live, and our great party should occupy its own position in a system willed by the working class."

The last letters of the French communists who were shot revealed French and foreign imperialist forces and the henchmen of De Gaulle and Blum who attempted to oppress the communist party.

The last words tell that France's sincere sons will selflessly fight for the victory of the great cause of the French working people.

#### **Appendix 4: English translation of the preface to *They Loved Life (1990)***

Incorporated into this book are letters that I've read and reread for 40 years, countless times! It's hard for me to imagine that today's men and women readers would remain indifferent when reading these letters.

The authors of these letters were martyrs who were either shot or publicly hanged. They wrote these farewell letters in the hours or even minutes before their executions. At such moments, who could carefully choose their words, or seek the poetic beauty of language? The writers understood in their hearts that they would never be able to write

another letter. They bid farewell in a simple way, expressing what they considered to be the most important things in their lives and the meaning of their sacrifice. Therefore, profound authenticity leaps off the pages. The farewell letters collected in this book are a great and noble testament to heroism.

I use the term "testament" because here we celebrate the lofty thoughts of thousands of martyrs. We must select from the existing letters, a task that inevitably carries subjective elements. Moreover, the precious materials we have gathered are very limited; many heroic letters were undoubtedly burned, thrown away by executioners, or blown away by the wind. This is especially true for the countless common people who were deported to distant lands, who could not leave a single word for their loved ones, comrades, and descendants before their tragic deaths. Of course, not to mention the countless revolutionary martyrs who fell on the battlefield, were tortured to death in prison, or never returned from grim death camps...

The men and women martyrs who wrote this book on the threshold of death were all members of the Communist Party. We would have liked to select letters from heroes belonging to other ideological currents and include them in this book, but we have not collected any.

Moreover, confirming that the majority of those shot were Communist Party members is not a biased statement. The characteristics of World War II -- the liberation of nations meaning the defeat of fascism -- largely reflect the attitudes of all social classes in society. The Catholic writer François Mauriac once pointed out, "Only the vast working class remains faithful to the ravaged homeland." Therefore, the working-class party is at the forefront of the struggle and pays the heaviest price, which is by no means accidental.

However, Communist Party members do not monopolize the right to resist and the spirit of sacrifice. Men and women citizens of various opinions and social classes in France

have chosen the path of struggle for themselves, many of whom have sacrificed their lives for it. We commemorate them with the same respect.

Of course, readers will read the moving chapters of this book on their own, and the author of the preface does not need to remind readers how to evaluate "Martyrs' Farewell Letters." I just want to share my personal feelings with the readers.

Firstly, the differences between the deceased heroes have left a deep impression on me. They were fighters of the same party, united by common ideals and hopes. However, like the diversity of France itself, they were also different. Among them were workers, clerks, teachers, outstanding intellectuals, active union members, or representatives elected by the people; there were young people in their prime, courageous women, and immigrants born outside our country who chose to fight and sacrifice for our country. At the moment of generous sacrifice, they abandoned all stale modern clichés and expressed themselves in their own language and distinctive ideas. Each of them was different from the others. Are male and female members of the Communist Party all cast in the same mold? That is an absurd prejudice!

Since it is undeniable from now on--the reason is self-evident--the astonishing number of Communist heroes, the shameless and absurd acts of Hitler's executioners and their accomplices, such as Bédard, in vilifying the heroes are even more ridiculous. They depict the "worst" among the Communist heroes as bloodthirsty criminals, and the "best" as either fanatics yearning for martyrdom or simply cynical ascetics. These farewell letters make the martyrs vivid in my mind. Like everyone else, they were human, and often more human. They loved all kinds of joys and the happiness of life.

I was a close friend of some of them, and they will always live in the depths of my soul.

Pierre Sébard, who often laughed heartily and infectiously, Gabriel Péri, dashing and

humorous, and Guy Môquet, who was optimistic and supported his father at the trial of Communist deputies just a year before his sacrifice! How could I forget all this?

"The Last Letter" expresses the various concerns of the martyrs in the last moments of their lives, which belong to the common feelings of humanity. Of course, what they were concerned about was not themselves, but their families: their beloved wives who hoped for happiness after them, their children who would inherit their aspirations, and their elderly parents who would shed tears of sorrow for them...

Among the many examples, isn't the following passage from the hardware union leader Maurice Lacassagne particularly touching? "Farewell, my dear... Farewell to all the little corners where we once loved each other. I do not have the courage to leave you to another man, but once you have a child, my dear, if you wish, take my name. Yes, of course, you know, the bond that connects you to me is not demanding. I mean, if you wish, and if it does not hurt others. Farewell, my beloved wife..."

Yes, like our comrades and others, they too were flesh and blood, longing for love and happiness, having their own worries, virtues, and faults. But in a sense, they were also special people, who did not waver between death and abandoning their obligations. They had a high sense of responsibility as Communist Party members, patriots, and revolutionaries. They clearly knew that, at the turning point of the revolution, arrests, persecution, and death awaited them at any moment, but they decisively left their families and loved ones, throwing themselves into political or military clandestine operations to rebuild banned party organizations, edit and publish newspapers and distribute "illegal" leaflets, organize combat groups, destroy railways and bridges, and fight enemy forces in the face of vastly disparate weapons. Julien Abeille wrote, "Death is much better than betrayal." They would rather die than surrender, because they believed that death was inevitable in the development of the struggle, and their death would inspire new fighters to join the battle. In this sense, their

deaths were meaningful. "I have fought all my life for a better tomorrow for humanity... My blood will not be shed in vain." (Jean-Pierre Thibaud) "Of course, I also want to live, but I sincerely hope that my death is not a meaningless sacrifice." (Guy Môquet) "I hope my comrades will always remember not me personally, but my loyalty to our great party; I hope this loyalty will inspire them to persevere in difficult times." (Francesca Frumon) All martyrs, whether they sacrificed in the midst of victory or in times of bleak prospects when everything seemed to have failed, shared a common steadfast belief in victory: "I have fought all my life for the oppressed people and the working masses... For Alsace! For France!" (George Wodli) "Victory is certain and undeniable; Nazism and fascism are on the eve of final destruction." (Joseph Delobel) "I will die for a bright future." (Gabriel Péri) As for Pierre Sémard, the General Secretary of our party, a seasoned leader of railway workers, his farewell message has a directive significance: "Please tell our railway worker comrades not to take any actions that would help the Nazis. The railway workers will understand me, they will listen to me, they will definitely act! I am deeply convinced of this."

What a clear mind! Our heroes did not confuse Hitler's dictatorship with the German people. They believed that Hitler's dictatorship was on its last legs, while the history of the German people would continue. Missak Manouchian wrote, "At the moment of death, I want to declare: I do not hate the German people." And Pierre Tibo, facing the soldiers aiming at him before his execution, shouted his final slogan: "Long live the German Communist Party!"

In short, the blood of our brothers has not been shed in vain. Their sacrifices did not produce the terrifying effects that Nazi elements and traitors hoped for; on the contrary, it boosted the morale of the heroes, strengthened the ranks of the French resistance forces, stirred up increasing support from the people for their struggle, enabled our party members to

effectively carry out their work; in persistent and enthusiastic efforts, the prestige of the party soared; under the banner of the National Resistance Movement, the various patriotic organizations were united. Thus, when Hitler's Germany surrendered, France finally took its rightful place at the victors' table.

I do not want to come down from the peak reached by the martyrs and point out that their generous blood will cleanse--if such a thing is needed--the abominable and stubborn slanders. According to this nonsense, the Communist resistance movement only began after Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, that is to say, purely out of non-national motives! I just want to cite the example of the martyrs murdered in Châteaubriant. They were arrested in 1940. Their party organization was the first and only one to join the fight. Among them was a man named Charles Michels, a Communist, and the underground leader of the resistance. In January 1940, the Chamber of Deputies voted to disgrace him. And it was this Chamber of Deputies that later actually groveled at the feet of the traitor Bédard. He made a sarcastic comment in his farewell letter to his wife: "Dear, you see, life is so strange! Once someone accused me of being a 'collaborator' with the Germans, saying that I had fallen, and now I die under the knives of German soldiers."

Above, I have only listed some excerpts from the letters. Naturally, readers should read the full text, without skipping a line, and should read it several times. Each reader will be deeply moved by one letter or another, according to their different feelings. Of course, I believe that overall, this book will leave male and female readers with a kind of excitement that is rarely experienced, as well as a noble and extremely beautiful impression. "Martyrs' Farewell Letters" is published at the right time because decades have passed, and the most glorious epic in our national history - the resistance movement - is often shrouded in shadows or blatantly distorted. Some streets and schools are named after some of our heroes, but sometimes the men and women citizens living on these streets or studying in these schools do

not even know who these heroes are, nor do they know how the heroes fought and sacrificed.

It's simply unbelievable!

However, no one can blame them for this, because this is the consequence of history being wantonly distorted.

For the benefit of France, this book adheres to the principle of respecting facts. I hope it will help educate a new generation, assist them in receiving compulsory education, and help cultivate their moral character.

Étienne Fajon