

Tempered in the  
Revolutionary Furnace

*China's Youth in the Rustication Movement*

YIHONG PAN



LEXINGTON BOOKS

A division of  
ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, INC.  
*Lanham • Boulder • New York • Toronto • Plymouth, UK*

## LExINGTON BOOKS

A division of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.  
A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.  
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200  
Lanham, MD 20706

Estover Road  
Plymouth PL6 7PY  
United Kingdom

Copyright © 2003 by Lexington Books  
First paperback edition 2009

*All rights reserved.* No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pan, Yihong, 1953—  
Tempered in the revolutionary furnace : China's youth in the rustication movement /  
Yihong Pan.  
p. cm.


Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Youth—China—History—20th century. 2. China—Rural conditions. 3. China—  
History—1949– I. Title.  
HQ799.C5 P363 2003  
305.2670951—dc21

2002014805

ISBN: 978-0-7391-0433-0 (cloth : alk. paper)  
ISBN: 978-0-7391-4092-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)  
ISBN: 978-0-7391-4093-2 (electronic)

Printed in the United States of America

 The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

## Contents

Abbreviations	vii
Explanatory Notes	viii
Acknowledgments	ix
Table	xi
Introduction	1
1 Before the Countryside	9
2 Why Was There a Rustication Movement? An Examination of the Goals of the Government	35
3 Why Did I Go to the Countryside?	62
4 Life on the Army and State Farms	86
5 Life in Rural Villages	112
6 Tempered in the Revolutionary Furnace	138
7 Reeducation in the Vast Land	165
8 Love and Marriage	181
9 The “Back to the City Wind”	204
10 “We Want to Go Home;” “We Want Human Rights”	221
11 No Regrets for Our Youth? or Youth Sacrificed in Vain?	238
Epilogue	266
Bibliography	269
Index	279
About the Author	283

## Abbreviations

- BJRB, *Beijing Ribao* [Beijing Daily].
- HQ, *Hong Qi* [Red Flag].
- RMRB, *Rimin Ribao* [People's Daily].
- ZGQNB, *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* [China's Youth Daily].
- ZGYYNJ, *Zhongguo Jiaoyu Nianjian 1949-1981* [China's Yearbook of Education 1949-1981] by Zhongguo Jiaoyu Nianjian Bianji Bu. Beijing: Zhongguo Da Baike Quanshu Publishing House, 1984.
- ZGZQSD, *Zhongguo Zhigong Shidian* [Encyclopedia of China's Educated Youth] by Liu Xiaomeng, Ding Yi-zhuang, Shi Weimin and He Lan. Chengdu, Sichuan: Sichuan Renmin Publishing House, 1995.

## Explanatory Notes

In Chinese, the word for the middle school graduates sent down to the countryside is *zhishi qingnian*, or educated youth, often referred to in China by the abbreviation, *zhiqing* (pronounced "jerch'ing;" er as in her). I use *zhiqing* without italics throughout the book.

Pinyin system is used for the Romanization of Chinese places and names, except Hsinghua and Peking Universities since this is how these universities refer to themselves in English.

Chinese names are written in the Chinese way: surname first and given name after it.

Measurement conversions:

1 *yuan* = 100 *fen*

1 *li* = 0.5 kilometer = 1/3 mile

1 *jin* = 0.5 kilogram = 1.1 pounds

1 *mu* = 0.067 hectare = 1/6 acre

## Acknowledgments

In offering this account of the experience of myself and my generation growing up in China during the Maoist era I need to thank the many people who generously helped to make the book possible. My heartfelt gratitude goes first of all to those who were willing to share with me their own experiences in the rustication movement, to Dr. Liu Xiaomeng, an ex-*zhiqing* and a historian, for his advice on sources, and generous sharing of ideas, to Qu Zhe for his reflective interview and agreement to use his name openly, to my *zhiqing* sister for her kind help in many ways, and to my friends, Sun Jingtao, Huang Ce, Zhang Jianxin, Lu Min, Wang Qiansheng, Zhang Tong, and Zhang Yaya, for their inspiration and their help in writing this book. The book is dedicated to them. It is also dedicated to all those I interviewed. Because I have promised anonymity I cannot mention their individual names, but those long hours we shared in reflecting on the past experiences, their faces, and their voices remain with me. Their stories are in the book, which is our history.

For their consistent encouragement from the very beginning to tell the story of that past and to see the deeper meaning in it, I also owe great thanks to my dear friends Ted Pulleyblank, Eva Tai, and Teresa Yu. Thanks particularly to Ted, whose intellectual queries, scholarly vigor, and patience in careful reading of various versions of the manuscript persisted throughout the long process. Other academic colleagues have also been a source of unfailing support. I owe debts of gratitude to Michael O'Brien, Allan Winkler, Judith P. Zinsser, Laifong Leung, and Andrew Cayton for reading the manuscript at different stages, for their sharp and challenging questions and meticulous comments that made me explore deeper for answers, and searching clarity in thinking and writing. I also benefited greatly from many informal conversations with other colleagues at Miami University.

Miami University provided me with academic leave in 1994-1995 and financial support from the Hampton Fund and the fund for Small Research Grants that enabled me to travel to China, and to libraries in North America, for which I am much obliged.

Part of chapter two has appeared as "An examination of the Goals of the Rustication Program in the People's Republic of China" in the *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 11 no. 31 (2002), 363-381. I thank the journal and its publisher, Taylor & Francis ([www.tandf.co.uk](http://www.tandf.co.uk)), for permission to include the article.

Thanks also to the editors of Lexington Books and Rowman & Littlefield for their careful work in editing and overseeing the production of the book.

**Table 1.**  
**The Number of Urban Educated Youths**  
**(Unit: 10,000 persons)**

Year	Total	Rural village	Collective farms	State farms
1962-80	1791.98	1282.21	203.08	291.19
1962-66	129.28	87.06		42.22
1967-68	199.68	165.96		33.72
1969	267.38	220.44		46.94
1970	106.4	74.99		31.41
1971	74.83	50.21		24.62
1972	67.39	50.26		17.13
1973	89.61	80.64		8.97
1974	172.48	119.19	34.63	18.66
1975	236.86	163.45	49.68	23.73
1976	188.03	122.86	41.51	23.66
1977	171.68	113.79	41.9	15.99
1978	48.09	26.04	18.92	3.13
1979	24.77	7.32	16.44	1.01
1980	15.5	?	?	?

Source: Gu Hongzhang and Hu Mengzhou, *Zhongguo Zhishi Qingnian Shangshan Xiaxiang Shimo* [A history of China's educated youth going up to the mountains and down to the villages] (Beijing: Zhongguo Jiancha Publishing House, 1996), 301; Liu Xiaomeng, *Zhongguo Zhigingshi—Dachao (1966-1980)* [A history of China's educated youth: The great waves, 1966-1980] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Publishing House, 1998), 863.

## Introduction

From 1949, the Chinese government under Mao Zedong engaged in a series of mass movements for socialist transformation. The most famous and most devastating was, no doubt, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Related to it, however, was the movement of "up to the mountains and down to the villages" (*shangshan xiaxiang*), otherwise known as the "rustication" movement. Longer-lasting than the Cultural Revolution, the rustication movement meant sending urban and rural middle school graduates to settle as peasants in the countryside. It began in 1953. In December 1955, Mao wrote: "All intellectuals who can go to the countryside should go there happily. The countryside is a vast universe where there is plenty to be done."<sup>1</sup> Mao Zedong had poetic, romantic ideas about going to work in the countryside, which was poor and less developed, with deeply rooted Chinese traditions, where 80 percent of China's population resided, and where, as Mao believed, Chinese youth could exert all their abilities to make great accomplishments. Mao's words "a vast universe where there is plenty to be done" became the mantra of the rustication movement. The movement reached its height during the Cultural Revolution, and ended only in the post-Mao era in 1980, when it had proved a financial disaster, and when China under Deng Xiaoping was undergoing a series of drastic economic reforms, moving away from the discredited concept of central planning toward a market economy.

At its height from 1967 to 1980, the movement sent over sixteen million urban middle school graduates to the countryside.<sup>2</sup> This, plus another million from 1962 to 1966, amounted to 10.5 percent of China's non-farming population in 1979.<sup>3</sup> Even more school graduates of peasant families became peasants in their home villages.<sup>4</sup> Collectively, these students were known as educated youths (*zhishi qingnian*), often referred to in China by the abbreviation, *zhiqing* (pronounced "jerch'ing"; er as in her).<sup>5</sup> In principle, the movement intended these youths to remain permanently in the rural areas. In practice, the government assigned many from urban areas to urban jobs after a few years in the countryside, whereas most of the youths of rural origin had to remain as peasants.

I was a *zhiqing*, one of the millions sent to the countryside. Born and raised in Beijing, I was just preparing for the highly competitive entrance

examinations for middle school in the summer of 1966 when the Cultural Revolution broke out. The Cultural Revolution changed everything. Without much schooling three years later, at the age of sixteen, under the government's urging, along with many others, I left the city to work as a farm laborer near the Yellow River in Inner Mongolia. We were determined to make achievements in the "vast universe," and apply ourselves to being "tempered into steel in the revolutionary furnace," as the popular slogan chanted. For three years, I planted rice in that cold climate without much harvest. Then I moved to a small village on the northern Huai plain, working in the fields with peasants, and studying at night, hoping that one day I could leave the countryside to go to college. In 1974 after five years of life as a farmer, I had the great good fortune of being admitted to a university in Beijing. In 1976, Mao Zedong died, thus ending the Cultural Revolution. China was open once again to the outside world. In 1984, I left Beijing to go to a Canadian university for a Ph.D. degree in Chinese history. Life has changed so much, yet memories of those rural days have never left me. I went back there so often in my dreams. After becoming a history professor at Miami University, I decided to tell the story of the rustication movement and my generation's part in it.

I first wanted to understand how this urban to rural migration originated in the context of China's socialist reconstruction at a time when elsewhere urbanization was a worldwide trend. It became clear to me that the government intended the rustication movement to serve a variety of goals. From the beginning there was a twofold economic purpose of developing rural and frontier areas and of providing employment opportunities for secondary school graduates who could not be readily absorbed in the cities. In 1958 as a part of the Great Leap Forward, mobilization of Han Chinese youths to the ethnic minority regions was intended to help integrate China's ethnic minorities into the modern economy. An additional socialist revolutionary goal of the rustication movement, especially from around 1963, was to bridge the three major differences, between urban and rural China, between peasant and worker, and between mental and manual labor. In 1968 during the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong issued a directive, adding a political goal of making Chinese urban and rural students receive reeducation from the peasants, as he believed that the students had been spoiled by their elitist education. This directive of Mao pushed the rustication to its height. Finally, when there was danger of war between China and the Soviet Union from the late 1960s to early 1970s, there was a military goal of strengthening frontier defense by sending young people to farms on the borders with the Soviet Union, Mongolia, and Vietnam. By the late 1980s, the majority of the urban educated youths had returned to the cities and regained their urban household status, bringing the urban-rural migration round in a complete circle. Why had such a movement been undertaken? While the various goals of the rustication movement intermingled, and varied in importance at different times, was there a consistent and fundamental goal? What sustained the movement for so long? In the process of industrialization in

other countries urbanization has been the dominant pattern. Why was this reversed in China?

In writing this book, however, my focus is not primarily on government policy. What I want to do is to bring to life the story of my generation, how we lived through and responded to our experiences in this movement. Mostly born from the late 1940s through the 1950s, we were a unique generation, the first to be brought up in the People's Republic of China, known as the generation "born in the new China and growing up under the red flag." Every stage in our lives was affected by the Party and Mao Zedong as they experimented at building a socialist nation. The history of the educated youths sheds important light on the political, economic, and social history of the People's Republic of China. From elementary school onward, our education instilled in us communist ideals and moral values, a sense of mission to build socialism, and a collective and self-sacrificial spirit. In our teens, many became rebellious Red Guards who, during the high days of the Cultural Revolution in 1966-1968, attacked Party and government officials as well as their own teachers and parents for not "following the Maoist line" with the conviction that they could change the world.

In the next stage, former Red Guards and other middle school graduates joined the ranks of zhiqing or educated youths going to settle in the countryside. Some went to the farms. From 1962 to 1980, about 2.91 million, or 16 percent of urban zhiqing, settled on army or state farms.<sup>6</sup> As farmworkers, they enjoyed the so-called iron rice bowl of economic security: a fixed monthly wage and food supply guaranteed by the government, medical coverage, and paid holidays. Collective farms received about 11 percent of urban zhiqing. The rest became peasants in the people's communes. Like peasants, those zhiqing had to depend on the annual income of the production teams earned from the crops and other produce. Lack of economic security and self-sufficiency was a common problem. But whether on the farm or in the people's commune, life was hard for all. All the zhiqing encountered there a reality utterly at odds with the official propaganda and their previous education. Like millions of peasants, they had to face not just back-breaking physical labor, constant hunger, monotonous life but also abuses of power by the leadership and political persecutions. Some suffered rape. Some committed suicide, and many died in accidents.

This book is not, however, intended as a political protest against a system. It is not just a history of victimization in Communist China. Based on interviews and reminiscences, including my own, I present a detailed analysis of richly varied, often perplexing, experiences of our zhiqing generation, showing the diverse responses of complex individuals. I want to emphasize that in spite of the various challenges that they encountered, members of this generation searched for meaning in their lives. Most survived because they were still young with hopes and dreams. Their lives still had laughter, poetry, and songs. They were not alone. And they chose to be strong. More, they received warm care and trust from the peasants. Along with what they saw as depths of backwardness and ignorance among the peasants, millions of zhiqing also found great purity

of spirit, simple kindness, and warm sympathy. It was from the peasants and from sharing with them the struggle to win a living from the stubborn soil that the children of Mao learned about humanity. Under an oppressive regime, people could still make their own choices, and many learned to maintain their dignity; many awoke to their individual minds. In this hard life, the first generation of Communist China came of age. These youths came to understand how the socialist system had failed. Life in the countryside transformed them from innocent, ignorant, yet often passionate believers in the Communist Party. Many became disillusioned and began to question the authorities and to take control of their own lives. Following the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, in the winter of 1978-1979 when the whole of China was beginning to undergo drastic changes, the zhiqing who were still in the countryside rose in nationwide protests against the rustication through petitions, strikes, hunger strikes, and demonstrations. These protests marked the beginning of China's human rights and pro-democracy movement. The protests and the general change in the economic reforms eventually made the government abandon the rustication policy in 1980.

Throughout the book I ask these questions: how did the movement succeed or fail in its many goals? how did the rural experience in the movement affect the educated youths? what did we achieve in the countryside? what have we gained and lost? I wish to examine these questions from a variety of perspectives, and recapture as many voices as possible.

Among the academic studies of the rustication movement and education of Mao's China in English, the most comprehensive so far has been Thomas Bernstein's *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages* published in 1977. Some of his analyses remain convincing but they need updating since the book was completed before the end of the movement. Anita Chan's *Children of Mao* focuses on the negative effects of China's education before 1966, and describes how their education gave members of the Red Guard-educated youth generation a distorted and fanatical "authoritarian personality."<sup>7</sup> She presents a picture of an ugly generation. Laifong Leung's *Morning Sun* is a collection of interviews with some zhiqing-turned-writers, a small group of intelligentsia whose points of view are important but not necessarily representative of the whole body of the zhiqing.<sup>8</sup> A recent collection of interviews by Jiang Yarong and David Ashley, *Mao's Children in the New China*, records voices of the first generation growing up in Communist China, with focus on their experience in the post-Mao era rather than their experience in the countryside.<sup>9</sup> There have also been books and articles focusing on particular aspects of rustication.<sup>10</sup> Among the memoirs by members of the Red Guard generation published in English from the 1980s, most, except in particular Yang Rae's *Spider Eater*,<sup>11</sup> were written to expose the dark, negative qualities of their experience in China and the Chinese countryside, focusing on suffering and oppression.<sup>12</sup> Influential in the West, they have reinforced the negative concepts of a China full of persecutions and tragedies.

In China, scholarly study of the rustication movement was only possible after the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976. Since the late 1980s and especially in the 1990s, with the relaxation of the political climate, a dozen books on the subject have appeared, and numerous articles have been published exploring China's employment and urbanization issues that had direct bearing on the rustication movement. Huo Mu's *Guangrong yu Mengxiang* (Glories and dreams) (1992) provides a scholarly and judicious analysis of the movement.<sup>13</sup> The most important publication so far has been a sourcebook, *Zhongguo Zhiqing Shidian* (Encyclopedia of China's educated youth) (1995), which cites internal government documents, surveys, and reports, archival materials, and newspaper articles on the movement.<sup>14</sup> Although it does not provide a comprehensive list of sources, through personal contact with Liu Xiaomeng and Ding Yizhuang, two of its four authors, I learned how, in writing the book, they could access archives, and that most documents in the book were cited directly from primary sources. All four authors were zhiqing, and having gone to universities and graduate schools, they have become historians. They have also published other books on the rustication movement.<sup>15</sup> Three former cadres working in the Office of Educated Youth under the State Council, the highest leading office on the movement during the Cultural Revolution, have compiled two short books that make use of speeches by central leaders and selective internal documents, although they provide no footnotes or bibliography.<sup>16</sup>

An obvious value of these studies in Chinese lies in the insights of the authors from their direct involvement in the movement. Even more important, these works provide rich archival sources, otherwise inaccessible to scholars outside China. In August 1994, in my research, I visited an archive office in one city in north China.<sup>17</sup> The official regulation posted on the wall stipulates that one must obtain the permission of the government to read archives dated after 1949; that foreigners must obtain permission from the municipal government. Initially through personal connections, I was permitted access to the archives of the former office of educated youth, and was shown a well-organized catalogue of materials, including one category on rapes and persecutions of educated youths in the rural district of the city. When I went back to begin my reading the next day, I was denied access. The authorities of the office had decided that a historian from an American university should not be allowed to read these materials. In the writing of this book, I have used the archival materials made available in the Chinese works.

The most important source for this study is, of course, the recollections of zhiqing themselves. After the end of the movement, when the majority of the zhiqing had returned to the cities, they began their own self-examinations. During the 1990s especially, ex-zhiqing organized review exhibitions, reunions, associations, revisits to the countryside, and published collections of reminiscences. The topic of zhiqing broke out of the confines of literary works and academic discussions. It appeared everywhere, in the bookstores, bookstalls on the streets, in newspapers, on radio, TV, in films, and all kinds of magazines, scholarly works, and forums. There emerged a phenomenon of zhiqing



"obsession" (*qingjie*). In all this "obsession," the ex-zhiquing remember their past with various feelings, from realistic, sincere, and passionate to vivid, romantic, and sentimental to humorous, sarcastic, or contemplative, analytical, and philosophical. Because they were of different age cohorts, family backgrounds, regions, education, and present occupations, because they had gone to settle in different areas, on farms or in the people's communes, in the rural interiors, on the frontiers, or among the ethnic minorities, their memories of the past were not monotonous, or monochromatic, but full of rich human drama, and diverse points of views. At one end of the spectrum many hold on to the conviction of "no regrets for our youth" because, although they were thrown into something over which they had no control, yet at the time they believed in what they were doing, and they take a positive view, remaining convinced that they made a contribution. At the other end are those who feel that their youth was sacrificed in vain, for an unworthy cause and who argue that blind belief in the Party's doctrine was the tragedy of their generation. Most, however, share the tendency to be philosophically positive. They hold that their rural life was of great meaning to them. It made them tough, and it made them understand China. "You would not know China if you had not lived in the countryside," is their conclusion. Further, their self-examination goes beyond the rural experience to confront their idealism, collectivism, disillusion, their roles as Red Guards, and the responsibilities they should assume for their part in history.

In capturing the voices of zhiquing for the book, I conducted interviews with over sixty ex-educated youths, most in China and some in North America, also with some of their parents, and a few cadres. These interviewees vary in their age, family background, settlement areas, education, and present occupation. Most agreed to be recorded on tape. Several declined my request to be interviewed, as the past was too painful or too complex. One former cadre refused, telling me frankly: I had children sent to the country and they suffered, but I do not want to provide information to you to write a book in English published in the United States. For him, to expose the darkness of China to Western readers amounted to disloyalty to his nation. For those who had agreed to talk about their past, they welcomed the opportunities to reflect and reexamine their zhiquing experiences. They did not want to and could not forget those days, and talking about the past provided a closure. Although almost all requested to remain anonymous as they still remained cautious about being openly quoted in a book that would be published in English, in those hours when we talked, they were frank, and open, and some kindly let me read their diaries and letters of the zhiquing days. In writing about these people, moving through time and tying the narrative together is my own experience. While this is a historical account of an important episode in Mao Zedong's China, it is also a personal, truthful tale of a difficult and equally important period in my own past.

## Notes

1. Mao Zedong, *The Writings of Mao Zedong 1949-1976*, Volume I, September 1949-December 1955. Edited by Michael Y. M. Kau and John K. Leung (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1986), 728.
2. See Table 1.
3. The urban population was 161.86 million in 1979. Guojia Tongjiju, *China Population Statistics Yearbook 1994* (Beijing: Zhongguo Tongji Publishing House), 409. The number of urban middle school graduates sent to the countryside before 1962 is not available. By any estimate it was small, perhaps no more than half a million.
4. Thomas Bernstein, *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages: The Transfer of Youth from Urban to Rural China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 22-24.
5. In a broad sense, China's rustication program included also government cadres, technically skilled personnel, workers, and jobless city dwellers. The focus in this book is on the middle school graduates, particularly those from urban China, since they were the major targets of the rustication program, and their experiences reflected more closely the changes in the movement.
6. See Table 1.
7. Anita Chan, *Children of Mao—Personality Development and Political Activism* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1985).
8. Laifong Leung, *Morning Sun: Interviews with Chinese Writers of the Lost Generation* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994).
9. Yarong Jiang and David Ashley, *Mao's Children in the New China: Voices from the Red Guard Generation* (London: Routledge, 2000).
10. See for example, Judith Banister, *China's Changing Population* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987); John Philip Emerson, "Urban School-leavers and Unemployment in China," *The China Quarterly* 93 (1983): 1-16; R. J. R. Kirkby, *Urbanization in China: Town and Country in a Developing Economy 1949-2000 AD* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Laurence J. C. Ma, "Counterurbanization and Rural Development: The Strategy of Hsiao-hsiang," *Current Scene* 15: 8-9 (1977); 1-12; D. Gordon White, "The Politics of Hsiao-hsiang Youth," *The China Quarterly* 59 (1974): 491-517, and works cited in chapter 2.
11. Rae Yang, *Spider Easters: A Memoir* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).
12. See for example, Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); Liang Heng and Judith Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983); Luo Zi-ping, *A Generation Lost: China under the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Henry Holt, 1990).
13. Huo Mu, *Guangrong yu Mengxiang: Zhongguo Zhiquing Ershiwunian Shi* [Glorious and dreams: The twenty-five year history of china's educated youth] (Chengdu, Sichuan: Chengdu Publishing House, 1992).
14. See ZGZOSD.
15. Ding Yizhuang, *Zhongguo Zhiquingshi—Chulan (1953-1968)* [A history of China's educated youth, the early waves, 1953-1968] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Publishing House, 1998); He Lan and Shi Weimin, *Mo yan Qing: Neimenggu Shengchan Jianshe Bingtuan Xiechen* [Attachment to the south of the Gobi Desert: A true record of the construction group in Inner Mongolian] (Beijing: Falu Publishing House, 1994); Liu Xiaomeng, *Zhongguo Zhiquingshi—Dachao (1966-1980)* [A history of China's educated youth: The great waves, 1966-1980] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Publishing House, 1998); Shi Weimin and He Lan, *Zhiquing*

*Beiwanglu: Shangshan Xiayang Yundong zhong de Shengchan Jianshe Bingtuan* [Memorandum of the educated youth: The production and construction army groups in the movement of up to the mountains and down to the villages] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Publishing House, 1996); Shi Weimin, *Zhiqing Shuxin Xuanbian* [Selected letters of educated youth] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Publishing House, 1996); Shi Weimin, *Zhiqing Riji Xuanbian* [Selected dairies of educated youth] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Publishing House, 1996); Ding Yizhang's and Liu Xiaomeng's works are of better quality with footnotes, providing the authors' own analyses, and citing internal sources. Besides these scholarly works, there are works of a popular nature. See Du Honglin, *Fengchao Dangluo—Zhongguo Zhishi Qingnian Shangshan Xiayang Yundongshi* [The ebb and flow of the tide: A history of the movement of China's educated youth going up to the mountains and down to the villages] (Shenzhen: Haitian Publishing House, 1993); Du Honglin, *Hunduan Mengxing—Zhongguo Zhiqing Shangshan Xiayang Fengyun Jishi* [Broken souls and wakened dreams: The life experiences of China's educated youth in the countryside] (Ningbo, Zhejiang: Ningbo Publishing House, 1996); Wang Mingjian, *Shangshan Xiayang* [Up to the mountains and down to the villages] (Beijing: Guangming Ribao Publishing House, 1998).

16. Gu Hongzhang and Hu Mengzhou, *Zhongguo Zhishi Qingnian Shangshan Xiayang Shimo* [A history of China's educated youth going up to the mountains and down to the villages] (Beijing: Zhongguo Jiancha Publishing House, 1996); Gu Hongzhang and Ma Kesen, *Zhongguo Zhiqing Shangshan Xiayang Dashiji* [Chronicle record of major events in China's educated youth going up to the mountains and down to the villages] (Beijing: Zhongguo Jiancha Publishing House, 1996). For a brief introduction of the authors and their books, see Zhang Hua, "Huishou Wangshi Hua Zhiqing" [A look at the past and a discussion on zhiqing], *RMRB* 4 November 1997: 9.

17. For protection of my connections I omit the name of the city.

## Chapter 1

### Before the Countryside

The majority of the generation of zhiqing, or educated youth, were born in the late 1940s through the 1950s. The early fifties were a time when the whole of China under Mao Zedong was optimistic, looking forward to a peaceful and prosperous future. Most Chinese welcomed the founding of the Communist regime in 1949, as the Party freed China from the constant wars and interventions of foreign imperial powers, which had devastated the nation in the previous century. For many of the members of this first generation of new China, even their names reflect the enthusiastic spirit of the time: Jiefang (Liberation), Guoqing (National-Day), Jianguo (Build-the-Country), Aiguo (Love-the-Country), Yuanchao (Aid-Korea, referring to the Chinese participation in the Korean War), Yuejin (Leap-Forward), or Chaoying (Surpass-Britain). People had confidence in the Communist Party that had promised to build a socialist, egalitarian society.

I am the sixth and youngest in my family. After their fifth child was born, my parents decided to have no more, but in the early 1950s when the whole nation seemed to be caught up in hopeful enthusiasm, and when the government was encouraging child-bearing, and had introduced the Soviet concept of heroine mother, my parents wanted to make their contribution. They had me. I was born in 1953. So the new society gave me my life. Mother named me "Hong," meaning "red," the color of revolution as well as having an auspicious connotation in Chinese tradition. Little did they know that babies born in the early 1950s brought a tremendous increase to China's population, and that when we reached marriage age in the 1970s, we would have to be subject to the policy of one-child per family in the government's efforts to bring the huge population under control.

## Growing Up in the New Society

Growing up under the red flag, from elementary school onward, our generation was given a thorough and uniform education in communist morality. School education was administered by the government from the top down. It played an important role in shaping the views of our generation. Beginning at the age of seven, elementary school lasted six years, followed by three years for junior middle school and three for senior middle school. All regular middle and elementary schools followed a similar curriculum and course schedule.<sup>1</sup> Before 1966, to enter each higher level of school, students had to pass selective admission examinations. From a tender age at elementary school, we were told that we were extremely lucky to live in a new, socialist China. The old society before 1949 was miserable, with all sorts of evils of a feudal past, of exploitation of working people by landlords, capitalists, bourgeoisie, and foreign imperialists. The Communist Party and Chairman Mao had liberated all the working people and were leading the people to build a socialist society, in which the people were masters, government officials were servants to the people, and all were equal, men and women, Han Chinese and other ethnic groups—the Mongols, Uighurs, Tibetans, Dai, Miao, and so on. Socialism would eventually lead to communism, which was the best social system that humans could ever hope to achieve. Every youth should devote himself or herself to the realization of communism. "Our era and our society are the best time and place for the establishment and realization of noble ideals," says an essay in a senior middle school reader. The noblest and greatest ideal, it explains, is the realization of communism not only because it is communism and only communism that can liberate human beings from the yoke of private ownership, and enable them to live the most joyful, perfect, and happiest life, but also because it is possible to realize this ideal.<sup>2</sup>

Lucky as we were, we had a mission to liberate all the working-class people elsewhere in the world. "Do not forget that two thirds of the world's population are living in 'deep water and scorching fire,' and it is your mission to liberate them." In a closed environment before 1978, our world knowledge was painfully simple in a black-and-white picture: the capitalist West was evil, with the rich exploiting the poor, workers going on strike, and minorities being discriminated against. There were slums as well as skyscrapers; the dogs of the rich lived a better life than the poor and the unemployed. The people in Asia, Africa, and Latin America were struggling against their former colonial powers for independence and freedom, while the Soviet Union, a big brother of China in the early 1950s, had become the number one enemy from the late 1950s onward as it went on the road of revisionism away from socialism.

## A Class Society

In this new society of ours, however, all were not equal. People were differentiated by a government-implemented class system, which made China of the Mao's era (1949-1976) a highly classified society. The Party began a systematic classification of the populace prior to 1949 in the course of rural land reform, and in urban areas during the early 1950s, which gave each individual a designation of class status (*jieji chengfen*), determined by the source of one's economic support in the three years preceding 1949, landlord or capitalist for example,<sup>3</sup> or by one's current occupation, for example, Communist Party cadre, soldier, or student. In urban areas, class designations included worker, petit bourgeois (peddler, small shopowner, small factoryowner, office employee, and liberal professional), and capitalist. In rural areas they consisted of six major ones: hired agricultural laborer, poor peasant, middle peasant (upper middle, middle, and lower middle), rich peasant, small land lessor, and landlord.<sup>4</sup> The classification helped the Party identify enemies, supporters, and friends. It provided information about individuals' property for rural land reform and for urban socialist transformation.<sup>5</sup> Each individual was also designated by family origin (*jiating chushen*), determined by one's father's class status. For example, if one's father was labeled landlord, one's family origin would be that of landlord. Each person would have a designation of family origin and class status, and would have to carry it in one's dossier.<sup>6</sup>

Such a classification favored the good classes and discriminated against the bad ones. The good classes included what were later popularly known as the "five red categories" (*hong wulei*): revolutionary cadre, revolutionary soldier, revolutionary martyr, worker, and poor and lower-middle peasant. At the other end of the spectrum were the bad classes, later known as the "five black categories" (*hei wulei*): landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionaries (including those who worked for the Nationalist regime before 1949), bad elements (criminals), and rightists, who were thus labeled during the anti-rightist movement in 1957 for their open criticisms of the Party.<sup>7</sup> The capitalists also belonged to those "blacks." Those in between the five reds and five blacks were the "middle classes."

Both of my parents had a university education. During their university days in the mid-1930s, they met, fell in love, and married. My father joined the Party in the mid-1940s and my mother in the early 1960s. Both worked as research staff members in a research institute under a government ministry from 1949. My family origin was therefore "revolutionary cadre." Neither of my grandfathers, however, had a "glorious" class status. Before 1949, one was a landlord in a southern village, and the other a bank manager in a northern city, thus labeled "bureaucratic bourgeoisie." As both had died before the founding of the People's Republic of China in October 1949, they did not have to see how their exploitative class would be persecuted. I did not know them at all, not even from photos, nor did I know much about my grandmothers; both died in

the 1960s. In those days my parents were prudent not to talk to us much about our grandparents, and I tried not to think about them. The topic of family history, the families that belonged to the exploitative class, seemed taboo. It was not until after the Cultural Revolution when the political climate was more relaxed and class status was no longer a serious issue that I finally got to hear a lot more about the family histories.

The class designation and family origin developed into almost a caste system in Mao's time. The opportunity for upward mobility was unequally applied to different classes, especially from 1962 onward when Mao Zedong further advanced his theory of class struggles. This theory claimed that in the socialist society class struggles still existed between the proletariat and bourgeoisie because the overthrown reactionary ruling classes were always attempting restoration. New elements of capitalism, Mao insisted, were constantly and spontaneously generated in the petit-bourgeois atmosphere, and class struggles and revisionism would emerge within the Party.<sup>8</sup> Children of the "five reds," especially of the senior revolutionary cadres, had better opportunities. They were given priority for membership in the Communist Youth League and the Party. Only they could join the army and work in leading positions to ensure the purity of the army and the Party. They were given special consideration when applying for admission to universities from the early 1960s.<sup>9</sup> They believed that they would succeed their parents in carrying out the revolutionary cause, that is, to become Party and government officials.

Children from bad classes were subject to discrimination even though they were born around or after 1949, having hardly lived a day of the life of the privileged. The Party cadres saw them as being under the negative influence of their reactionary parents. It was difficult for them to join the Communist Youth League, and even more so to join the Communist Party. From 1962 onward, although they could take university entrance examinations, they were often rejected, in some cases more than once (reapplication was possible up to a certain age) because of their family origin. In some cases, they could only opt for less desirable majors, such as agriculture, mining, geology, and teacher training, which offered jobs of heavy work-load with hard working conditions. Or they could go to universities in less desirable places, such as the frontier areas of Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, or Xinjiang. They did not qualify to join the army, nor to work at politically sensitive jobs. It was not uncommon for children of bad family origins to be looked down upon and to suffer verbal abuse from their schoolmates or neighbors, and people of good family origins tried to avoid intermarriage with them for fear of hurting their own political status.<sup>10</sup> To win over the children of bad classes, the Party insisted that one could not choose one's family origin, but one could choose one's road, and that one's political performance was more important than family origin. It encouraged the children of the bad classes to draw a line between themselves and their parents, and to reform themselves into true revolutionaries. In reality, though, for administrative cadres it was obviously safer to give preference to people of good family origins and to discriminate against those from the bad classes. If a cadre was faulted for

paying too much attention to political behavior rather than family origin, it was equal to the crime of "lacking a firm class stand."<sup>11</sup>

In the face of such discrimination, children of bad family origins had either to accept it silently or to work hard to follow the Party's line to prove themselves. Going to work in the countryside was certainly a way to prove loyalty to the Party. In the rustication movement before the Cultural Revolution it was those from bad family origins who were most likely to be sent to resettle in the countryside.<sup>12</sup> Through forceful education, many children of bad family origins shared the belief in a new, socialist China, at least before the Cultural Revolution. Hu Ping, now a political dissident living in the United States, had a father who had worked for the Nationalist government and was executed in 1952 in the campaign for the suppression of counterrevolutionaries. Hu Ping was only five years old at the time. In response to the suggestion that he must have had a miserable childhood, he replied that he did not feel particularly bad because his mother protected him. She concealed the story of how his father had died, and she suppressed her own sadness in order to give a peaceful childhood to her children. Hu Ping commented on his early school years, "we were told that we were the flowers of the motherland, and that we were the happiest children, and therefore we indeed felt happy. Happiness is a subjective feeling, and many happy feelings come from ignorance of one's own sufferings."<sup>13</sup> Like many others, Hu felt that the Party's education was so successful that for a long time "we never thought that the words of the Party could be wrong."<sup>14</sup>

### Communist Morality and Revolutionary Heroism

School education instilled in our generation a set of communist moral values. This morality as defined by the Party was composed of approved attitudes as well as behaviors. The regulations for both elementary and middle schools in 1952 listed "five loves": love of the motherland, the people, labor, science, and public property.<sup>15</sup> In 1958, Mao Zedong put forward the concept of "red and expert," red referring to high political consciousness and superior academic knowledge.<sup>16</sup> "To be both red and expert" became a goal for all students. In the early 1960s, the Party further stipulated that the objective of education was for the cultivation of communist ideals and ethics. It was "to make students acquire the spirit of patriotism and internationalism, acquire communist morality, support the leadership of the Communist Party, support socialism, and be willing to serve the cause of socialism and serve the people."<sup>17</sup>

School readers played a very important role in introducing these moral principles to the students. In China, the Ministry of Education supervised the compilation of textbooks.<sup>18</sup> Morality and good behavior were a dominant theme in stories, prose pieces, and poems in elementary school readers.<sup>19</sup> Once in middle school, students received more formal moral education. For example, in an essay entitled "The Spirit of the Pine Tree," the author Tao Zhu, the Party secre-

tary of Guangdong, discussed how the spirit of the pine tree represented the communist spirit. The pine tree could take root anywhere, Tao said, and it had the spirit of self-sacrifice because every part of it had productive usefulness, and the tree was full of optimism, being afraid of neither harsh conditions nor cold. Tao called on the youth to learn from this pine tree spirit. More specifically, he claimed that the communist spirit was one of self-sacrifice for the people; it meant to be willing to die for the revolution; and in the time of socialist construction, it meant "working hard day and night with blood and sweat to speed up our socialist construction, disregarding personal loss or gain or one's own health, and forgetting food and sleep."<sup>20</sup>

To illustrate communist morality in action, the Party publicized heroes and heroines for youth to emulate.<sup>21</sup> To the members of the zhigqing generation, the glamorous were revolutionaries, portrayed in school textbooks and the government-controlled mass media—newspapers, radio (TV was not common until the 1980s), and all art forms—literature, film, music, drama, and painting. A war hero was Dong Cunrui, a young soldier in the Communist army who died in 1948 during the civil war against the Nationalists. In order to blow up an enemy bunker, he used his body as a support to hold up the explosives. The bunker was smashed and the battle won, but the young hero sacrificed his life. His story was included in elementary school readers.<sup>22</sup> In the black-and-white movie *Dong Cunrui* (1955), the battle scene was exciting, with bayonet-fighting, but the deepest impression was the image of the hero with a boyish face holding up explosives in the smoke of gunfire. Another famous hero was a Canadian communist, Dr. Norman Bethune, who went to China to work as a medical doctor during the War of Resistance against Japan, and died of blood poisoning in November 1939. His story was told in elementary school textbooks.<sup>23</sup> He exemplified the spirit of internationalism. Mao Zedong's essay, "In Memory of Bethune" (1939), was included in the Beijing junior middle school reader. Mao's words in praise of Bethune's spirit, "utter devotion to others without any thought of self" became a motto of the zhigqing generation.<sup>24</sup> The spirit of devotion to the public good without any thought of self could mean to die gloriously for protecting the public interest. On November 18, 1959, a member of the Young Pioneers, a peasant boy named Liu Wenxue, only a fourth grader in elementary school in Sichuan province, was killed while struggling to stop a former landlord from stealing peppers that belonged to the commune. The landlord was executed by the government. Liu became a hero. A poem in the fifth year school reader of Beijing entitled "The Torrential Waves of the Jialing River" told his story. It praised Liu as embodying the spirit of placing collective property above everything else: "Regardless of whether it is a cow, a pig, or even just a handful of peppers, no bad people should be allowed to touch them, not even a single bit! Liu Wenxue, what you were defending was not just a basket of peppers but was the happy life of the people's commune and the priceless treasure of socialism!"<sup>25</sup> We had to memorize the whole long poem by heart as homework.

The stories of heroic people and their spirit of self-sacrifice had such a powerful hold on the imagination of impressionable young men and women that many even regretted that they had been born too late to fight in the revolutionary wars. It was common for them to contemplate the meaning of heroic death.<sup>26</sup> Speaking on the subject, Guo Xiaodong, a zhigqing-turned-writer, lamented in the 1990s: "When they had not yet understood the glory of life, they dreamed of the greatness of death."<sup>27</sup> When going to the countryside, many zhigqing hoped that life there would provide opportunities for them to realize their heroic dreams. It was natural that people aspired to cultivate a noble spirit and to do good things that would make them morally superior.

In socialist China when peace prevailed, the government promoted another type of hero who might not do extraordinary deeds, but who embodied highest loyalty to the Party and the utmost spirit of serving the people. A quintessential example was a young soldier of the People's Liberation Army, Lei Feng. Born in a poor peasant family, he joined the army, and died of an accident in August 1962 at the age of twenty-two. His life seems ordinary, but it was made extraordinary in that he demonstrated the communist spirit, the Lei Feng spirit. This was, first of all, undying loyalty to the Party and Chairman Mao, through his willingness to be nothing more than a small but essential "screw" in the collective engine of the revolution. In his diary entry on April 17, 1962, Lei Feng wrote:

The function of an individual in the revolutionary cause is like a screw in a machine. The machine becomes a strong unit, can move smoothly and exert enormous power due to the joints and fixture of many screws. A screw is small, but its function is beyond measurement. I am willing to be a screw forever. Screws have to be maintained and cleaned often so that they will not get rusty. A person's mind is the same; it has to be examined often so that it will not have problems.

I will reinforce my study continuously, increase my ideological consciousness, listen to the words of the Party and Chairman Mao resolutely, and have criticism and self-criticism often to correct erroneous ideas, and will be a screw that never gets rusty in the great revolutionary cause.<sup>28</sup>

The Lei Feng spirit also meant serving the people wholeheartedly. Lei constantly did good deeds for others. He spent his holidays sweeping the floor of the train station, washing for his comrades, repairing his truck in freezing weather. He helped others whenever and wherever he could. In 1963, after his death, Mao Zedong called for "learning from comrade Lei Feng," initiating a nationwide mass campaign. His diary was published.<sup>29</sup>

In this mass movement, we went to exhibitions and movies about Lei Feng. We read stories about him and studied his diary. We sang songs to praise him, and to voice our determination to learn from uncle Lei Feng. We did good deeds for others. Students began writing diaries of self-criticism to banish any selfish ideas from their minds. Some schools organized group self-criticism,



like confessions of sins, to eliminate the selfishness in one's heart; no individualism should be permitted. The spirit of the screw exalted collectivism over individualism and individuality. Recalling his feelings at the age of twelve, one former Red Guard reports: "Compared with uncle Lei Feng, my heart was too dirty. For some time I often examined myself deeply for selfishness and individualism. Later I simply quit all my extracurricular activities and spent most of my spare time helping classmates in their work, writing for school blackboard newspapers, and helping others to clean the classroom so as to cultivate my collectivist spirit."<sup>30</sup> The Lei Feng screw spirit was taking deep roots.

### Political Education

Closely related to moral education was political education. In elementary school, this was carried out through the class meeting (*banhui*), one hour every school day (Monday till Saturday), which was devoted partly to moral instruction but also to teaching about current Party policies and political affairs. In middle schools political education was much more intense. There were formal courses on political affairs. In the teaching outline of 1959 prepared by the Ministry of Education, political education for junior middle schools included communist morality, a brief history of the development of socialism, socialist revolution and construction, and correct thinking. Senior middle school students had courses on "general political knowledge," "general economic knowledge," and "general knowledge of dialectical materialism." Political studies took up three hours per week for the first two grades, and four per week for the rest. From 1961, the Ministry of Education provided standardized textbooks for political education that included Mao Zedong's essay, "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party" (1939), *Education on Moral Character, A Brief History of Social Evolution*, and *General Knowledge of Dialectical Materialism*. A set of more systematic textbooks on political knowledge appeared in 1963-1964. In 1964, the Central Party Committee added more works of Mao Zedong to the middle school curriculum.<sup>31</sup> Political affairs was a subject in the entrance examinations to senior middle school and to college. While some students may have had little interest in it, several of my interviewees took the classes seriously because they knew that, if they wanted to achieve good academic records, they needed to have good grades in all subjects, and because some were highly motivated to acquire all kinds of knowledge.

The nation's mass campaigns were also part of political education, for example, the anti-rightist movement in 1957, the Great Leap Forward in 1958, and the Learning from Lei Feng. From 1962 onward, when Mao Zedong's theory of class struggle became a dominant Party line, school education had a theme on "recalling the bitterness and contemplating the sweetness" (*yiku sitian*). Schools organized frequent meetings to have invited guests recall how they had suffered under the cruel and inhuman exploitation in the old society,

and to contemplate how happy they were in the new society. Education was to cultivate proletarian feelings, and vigilance against any sabotage by class enemies.<sup>32</sup>

In their memoirs years later, ex-zhiqing relate how they felt confused and conflicted and saw contradictions between the Party's teaching and realities. Sometimes, they had to learn "to live with contradictory thoughts and realities."<sup>33</sup> On the whole, however, the political education was successful. It made school children feel grateful for the Party and the new society. Liang Xiaosheng (born in 1949 in a worker's family in Harbin), an ex-zhiqing sent to the Great Northern Wilderness in Heilongjiang province, and now a well-known professional writer, recalls his feelings in the early 1960s, shared by many:

I and our Republic together were closely watching the development of proletarian revolutionary movements and anti-imperialist and anti-revisionist struggles all over the world. I did not mind at all that our Republic gave me a coupon of only five liang of meat per month; our Republic set my monthly grain supply at 28.5 jin, although not enough for me; I did not mind that the dried corn pellets and corn flour we bought from the grain shop were often infected by worms and were moldy; I did not mind that sometimes I had to do my homework by candle light because electric bulbs were in short supply; . . . our house was cold as an icebox in winter with all four walls frosted; it leaked in the rain in summer so that the inside walls were wet. I did not mind all this. "Recalling the bitterness and contemplating the sweetness" had a successful effect on me. Looking at the clay sculptures in the exhibition "the Rent Collection Courtyard" (that shows the miseries of peasants before 1949), the suffering was graphic and poignant. From this and other occasions for recalling bitterness and contemplating sweetness, I had no single excuse to complain about our nation, and no doubt that we were happy being born under the red flag and growing up in the new China.<sup>34</sup>

The teaching of class struggle insisted that one's class determined one's political attitudes. Whoever belonged to the former exploiting classes was bad, and whoever belonged to the working-class was good. Neither love nor hatred could transcend class. A former Red Guard recalls:

Our initial concept of class enemies was the stereotyped spies and bad elements in the movies; then landlords, rich peasants, and capitalists who had hidden their old account books, hoping for a restoration; then were added the rightists, alienated elements and capitalist-roaders who were hiding under the cover of Communist Party membership. In the 1960s, almost all the plays, novels, films, and literary works on contemporary society would have class enemies sabotaging socialism. Till this day, the image of the landlord's wife in the movie *Huazhishu Zhuang* (Locust tree village) (1963) has remained a deep impression in me.<sup>35</sup>

## “Be Prepared, Strive for the Communist Cause”

The fundamental goal of education was to bring up successors to the revolution and the communist cause. This instilled in the zhiqing generation a serious sense of mission that socialism and communism was for them to build. The historical mission was arduous and the road was difficult as China was poor and backward, but because of all the difficulties, China's youth could exert their ability to the full. Mao Zedong spoke poetic, lofty words that aroused an almost religious belief among the zhiqing generation in the mission. Most still could recite his inspiring words:

Apart from their other characteristics, the outstanding thing about China's six hundred million people is that they are “poor and blank.” This may seem a bad thing, but in reality it is a good thing. Poverty gives rise to the desire for change, the desire for action and the desire for revolution. On a blank sheet of paper free from any mark, the freshest and most beautiful characters can be written, the freshest and most beautiful pictures can be painted.<sup>36</sup>

It was China's youth who would write the characters and paint the pictures. Mao also told the youth: “The world is yours, as well as ours, but in the last analysis, it is yours. You young people, full of vigor and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning. Our hope is placed on you. . . . The world belongs to you. China's future belongs to you.”<sup>37</sup> These words were put to music and broadcast all over China.

To strive to be successors to the communist cause meant, in one sense, the membership in the Young Pioneers, then the Communist Youth League, and eventually the Communist Party, the leading Party in society, that offered the opportunity for high political status, the possibility to be a cadre, and the way to political upward mobility. The Young Pioneers was a mass organization for children between nine and fifteen years of age, selected at first on the basis of good behavior and academic records but gradually extended so that by the end of elementary school all would be accepted. Members of the Young Pioneers wore red scarves, made of cotton, even silk before the use of synthetic materials became widespread, to distinguish themselves from nonmembers, and the Pioneer leaders had insignias pinned on their left sleeves to indicate which of the three ranks they held. The Communist Youth League was an auxiliary to the Communist Party. Its members distinguished themselves from nonmembers by wearing a League badge on the chest. While the Young Pioneers was open to all, one had to work much harder to demonstrate political activism and good academic performance to be accepted by the League. Members voted on applications for membership under the direction of the leadership. The oath ceremonies to join these organizations were solemn, conducted like an initiation or coming of age that marked stages in one's political life. Newly accepted members took

an oath before the flags of the Young Pioneers or the Youth League, declaring their undying determination to fight for the communist cause for the rest of their lives. The Young Pioneers' weekly activity usually began with a ceremony of repeating the oath. A leader called: “Be prepared, strive for the communist cause,” and all responded: “Be prepared every second.” When a hundred voices shouted together, emotions ran high and the determination seemed overwhelming.<sup>38</sup>

From the early 1960s onward, the education of striving to be worthy successors became more intense, especially in the middle schools. Mao Zedong had several reasons. After Khrushchev's attacks on Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956, disagreements between the Chinese Communist Party and the Soviet Communist Party increased, convincing Mao Zedong that the Soviet Union was becoming revisionist. Mao believed that revisionism could emerge within the Chinese Communist Party as well. He was also concerned that China's education was bringing about an elitist class that enjoyed special privileges. He was afraid that “China's socialist mountains and rivers would change color”—from red to black. In 1964, Mao laid down five requirements for those who were worthy successors to the revolutionary cause: they must be genuine Marxist-Leninists; revolutionaries who served all the people; proletarian statesmen capable of uniting others; models in applying the Party's democratic centralism; modest and prudent. The *People's Daily* published these imperatives.<sup>39</sup> A former Red Guard recalls that at middle school, students devoted a lot of time to reading about the debates between the Chinese Communist and the Soviet Parties, and: “All in our classroom could recite (the five requirements) even from the end back to the beginning. We often organized discussions, exchanged views and moreover, we constantly examined ourselves against these criteria for improvement.”<sup>40</sup> Another recalls that from 1964, when political heat was high, many students who had wished to become writers, aeronautical engineers, doctors, or teachers had then realized that these careers were not revolutionary enough; a true revolutionary should let the Party decide one's occupation. To some, the definition of successor to the revolutionary cause meant a position as a Party cadre.<sup>41</sup>

To be worthy successors to the communist cause meant not only devotion to the socialist revolution of China but also to revolution throughout the world. “Have the motherland in mind and the whole world in view” was a well-known slogan. Students learned about current world affairs through the highly controlled media of the Party. They believed that people in capitalist society were suffering from cruel exploitation by the rich, and it was their mission to liberate these oppressed and exploited peoples. Students, especially those in the middle school and universities, were concerned about world affairs and paid close attention to them. In the words of a former Red Guard:

Even when the feeling of hunger as a result of the three-year difficulties (1959-1962) was still there, we shouted: “Do not forget that two thirds of the world's population are still suffering.” Although we were naive then, we

did our best to learn about the changes on the five continents. From newspapers and over the radio, we were following the struggles of the people in Congo, and the killing of Lumumba<sup>42</sup> enhanced our hatred for imperialism and colonialism. We were sad over the persecution of the American blacks at the hands of the K.K.K. and the lack of food and clothes of the blacks. . . .

In short, we were trying hard to understand our historical mission: "overthrow imperialism, revisionism, and counterrevolutionaries," and "emancipate the whole human race."<sup>43</sup>

### To Become a Laborer with Both Socialist Consciousness and Education

A worthy successor to the communist cause could be an ordinary peasant or worker. Love for manual labor was a socialist virtue. Education promoted the attitude that physical labor was glorious, in direct opposition to the still prevalent Confucian idea that "those who labor with their minds govern others; those who labor with their strength are governed by others."<sup>44</sup> In 1957, Mao Zedong, in defining the goals of China's education, claimed: "Our educational policy must enable everyone who receives an education to develop morally, intellectually and physically and become a worker with both socialist consciousness and culture."<sup>45</sup> That education must be combined with productive labor, and must serve proletarian politics became the guideline,<sup>46</sup> under which all schools were required to have physical labor as a part of the curriculum. In 1959, the State Council decided that elementary pupils from the age of nine were to engage in physical labor for four to six hours per week. For junior middle school students, physical labor took up six to eight hours, and for senior middle school students, to ten hours.<sup>47</sup> In 1963, the hours stipulated by the Ministry of Education were: the fourth graders and above in elementary schools were to participate in physical labor for half a month every year. The length for middle school students was one month every year.<sup>48</sup> Students were to take turns cleaning their own classrooms. They also had to sweep the schoolyard or help peasants in the rural suburbs.

Many of my interviewees did not mind such work. One believed that the labor in the rural communes brought students in touch with soil, grain, vegetables, and with rural people. "It was fun," he got excited talking about the labor, "and it was great because we were seldom set free like this. Working in the commune, I liked it very much. We worked hard. The peasants prepared good meals for us; we ate, lived, and worked with the peasants, and we paid some money and grain coupons to them. Sitting in the classroom day after day I was really happy to be set free. I learned about crops." He nevertheless did not think of becoming a peasant. An excellent student with straight A's, he was hoping to go to university until the Cultural Revolution ended his dream. Others, however, were not so thrilled about the labor. In her memoir, Yang Rae writes how

she hated the physical labor class in her junior middle school in Beijing: "I found the course terribly boring. For an entire afternoon, all we did was carry coal cinders from one corner of the schoolyard to another. A few weeks later we might be carrying it all back. What a waste of time. . . . Looking back on it, the class only taught me to dislike physical labor." Similarly, she saw laboring in the commune as a total waste, causing only troubles for the peasants.<sup>49</sup>

School textbooks were full of stories that glorified manual labor. They presented the life of ordinary workers and peasants as the most desirable occupation.<sup>50</sup> An editorial in the *People's Daily* on April 8, 1957, entitled "On the Questions of Middle and Elementary School Graduates' Participating in Agricultural Production," was adapted for grade one of Beijing junior middle school and given a new title, "To Be a Revolutionary Fool." The essay observes that those who had sacrificed themselves for the revolution were often looked down upon as "fools" by "smart" people who were concerned only with self-interest and their own futures. During the period of socialist construction, the essay continues, the youth should learn from the "fools;" they should not be afraid of eating bitterness, and should cultivate themselves with the ideal: "to be concerned for the world before all others; to take one's enjoyment after all others,"<sup>51</sup> a motto by Fan Zhongyan, a Confucian scholar of the eleventh century.

In their education before the Cultural Revolution, students read about rural China in textbooks and in a large body of literature. Most romanticized the hardships and glorified the spirit to overcome all challenges. The hardships provided a test to the will and determination of China's youth. Eating bitterness was the spirit; any dislike of hardship was cowardly, weak, and selfish. An essay for grade four entitled "The Development of the Yanwo Island" (in the Great Northern Wilderness, Heliangjiang province) portrays the frontiers as beautiful, wild, and fertile, waiting for human beings to explore and to transform them. It describes how the discharged soldiers of the People's Liberation Army were determined to open up the island with the spirit that "could make the high mountains lower their heads and the rivers change their courses."<sup>52</sup> This positive spirit made any hardships and difficulties seem trivial, while human sacrifice appeared heroic and worthwhile. The hard, monotonous manual labor in the fields became an extraordinary cause of conquering nature. The novel, *Bianjiang Xiaoge* (Morning song of the frontiers) (1965), presents a picture of the beautiful subtropical frontiers in Yunnan, the southernmost part of China, with jungles in deep mountains, virgin land, birds, and wild flowers. It tells the story of how the optimistic spirit and comradeship among the young members of the land reclamation team triumphed in their efforts to build socialism.<sup>53</sup> The book was once the most influential among many. A popular song, "There Exists a Beautiful Place" [*You yige meili de difang*], sang of the small bamboo houses of the Dai ethnic minority people in Yunnan, the golden colored Lancang River at sunset, and beautiful peacocks, further enhancing the attraction of the place to the young.



The government promoted as role models those educated youths who volunteered to settle in the countryside as farmers. Many individual zhiqing "stars" were "discovered" by the Party.<sup>54</sup> In 1964 at his birthday's (December 26) banquet, Mao Zedong invited two zhiqing models, Xing Yanzi and Dong Jiageng, to sit beside him. The two were attending the Third National People's Congress. Xing Yanzi had both parents working in the city of Tianjin, but in 1959, she had decided not to take up the opportunity for an urban job, but to go to work in her grandfather's village as a peasant. She organized women in agricultural labor, and herself became a production team leader.<sup>55</sup> Dong Jiageng was from a peasant family in Jiangsu. In 1961 upon graduation from senior middle school, he chose to become a peasant instead of going on to university education.<sup>56</sup> An equally famous model was Hou Jun. Hou's father was an engineer in Beijing and her mother a cadre. In 1962, she graduated from senior middle school. An excellent student, she could have passed the highly competitive university entrance examination, thus securing a chance to have a good job in the city after graduation, but she decided to become a peasant. Through a writer, who was collecting material in the county where Hou settled, Hou's deeds became known to Premier Zhou Enlai. Zhou expressed his concern and encouragement to Hou. News media publicized her as a revolutionary youth. When a senior cadre in the central government thought that she should go to study in a university, Zhou Enlai did not approve. He hoped that Hou's permanent settlement in the rural area would encourage more educated youth in the rustication movement. She remained in the rural area till the end of the rustication movement in 1980.<sup>57</sup> The stories and achievements of these zhiqing models became widely publicized in newspapers, radio, pamphlets, and by the Youth League. Most of them became Party members, and they were promoted to be leaders of the Youth League at various levels. They were a great inspiration to many Chinese youth.

### The Cult of Mao Zedong

Among all heroes, Mao Zedong was the most perfect to many of the zhiqing generation. Love and reverence for Mao began with their early childhood. Upon entering elementary school, pupils were taught to be good children of Mao, and to pledge their loyalty to Mao: "Chairman Mao, we revere you and obey your teaching; 'study hard and make progress every day.'" This was a lesson for grade one pupils and the required homework for the lesson was to copy down and recite the text.<sup>58</sup> Soon the pupils learned the lyrics of the famous song, "The East is Red," which presents Mao Zedong as the red sun and the great savior of China.<sup>59</sup> Mao was looked upon as a god, the sun rising from the east. In an essay for extracurricular reading for elementary students entitled "Voluntary Soldiers and Chairman Mao," a young Chinese soldier on the battlefield in the Korean war, before lunging into the enemy with two hand grenades, took out a

photo of Mao, looked at it, and shouted: "Comrades, look, Chairman Mao! Chairman Mao is here, is beside us. To win glory for Chairman Mao!" He died and his comrades won the battle.<sup>60</sup>

Students were taught to develop an emotional commitment to Mao, but these feelings were not simply forced upon them. Mao's guidance in the long, arduous Chinese revolution established him in their hearts as a truly great leader. To the majority of the Chinese in the 1960s and still to many after his death, Mao was a great savior, who rescued millions of poor people from the miseries endured under the severe exploitation of the rich; who led the Chinese to drive out the foreign imperialists and made the Chinese free from the earlier oppression. Mao had founded the new China that promised an egalitarian society. Mao was the great helmsman who was directing the Chinese toward communism, the perfect society. At the same time, Mao was also presented as a kind, wise father figure, caring for the common people, always showing respect for them.<sup>61</sup> In learning Mao's poems and essays,<sup>62</sup> students saw Mao as a romantic revolutionary and a visionary poet, as a great teacher and a philosopher able to apply theory in transforming reality. From Mao's essays, the students received moral education. They were impressed by Mao's works not only for their revolutionary ideas but also for their vivid language, historical allusions, and concise, straightforward style.

In particular, Mao's appeal came from his image as a rebel against Chinese tradition and against authority, including Party authority. His criticisms of school education seemed so inspiring and refreshing. From 1964 onward, Mao criticized China's education, attacking its elitist tendency, despite the government's efforts to promote social equity. School education was too long, too impractical, Mao complained; it had too many regulations and gave too much emphasis to grades. Teachers regarded students as enemies and gave them "sudden attacks," unannounced quizzes and tests. Mao held that students should read novels or fall asleep in class if the lectures were boring. In conversation with his niece, he encouraged her to rebel against school regulations.<sup>63</sup> Widely circulated through informal channels, these comments resonated strongly among students in universities and middle schools.<sup>64</sup> Zhang Chengzhi, one of the founders of the Red Guard organization in the Affiliated Middle School of Tsinghua University, the birth place of the Red Guard movement, recalls that in his school days before 1966, students strongly resented education, which had an overemphasis on academic achievement. This was, he claimed, "a fundamental reason for the Red Guard Movement," and it was Mao's idea of rebellion that inspired students in their total denunciations of the establishment.<sup>65</sup>

### Indoctrination Was Not All

Indoctrination did not dominate all aspects of children's lives. In those days when there was no TV and not many movies, children and youth played games

together outside school, and they read books other than textbooks. For young children, there were illustrated picture-books, through which they became familiar with not only contemporary works but also stories of traditional folk heroes in classic novels, *Sanguo Yanyi* (Three Kingdoms), *Shuihu Zhuan* (Water margin), *Xiyou Ji* (The journey to the west), and *Honglou Meng* (A dream of red mansions). There were books written for children containing stories of famous historical figures and events. They included folklore of the Han Chinese, the Tibetans, and other ethnicities of China, foreign stories such as *Pinnocchio*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Robinson Crusoe*, the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen and the Grimm brothers, and the *Arabian Nights*. Later, as teenagers, students would begin reading "real" books, science fiction, detective stories, literature of various kinds, traditional, contemporary, Chinese, and foreign novels by such writers as Dickens, the Brontës, Cervantes, the older and younger Dumas, Balzac, Hugo, Tolstoy, Gorky, Mark Twain, and Jack London.

As in any society, family had a great influence on children's upbringing and temperament. Their life was not just one of dogmatic communist indoctrination. In their memoirs and reminiscences, the zhiqing often recall their childhood with tenderness and warmth, and tell how they had parental guidance, care, and family support in time of crises.<sup>66</sup> Still a sixth grader in the elementary school in the summer of 1966, I did not feel too much pressured by moral, political or labor education. Yes, I wanted to be a good pupil, selfless idealism was appealing, and I liked doing good deeds. I did not, however, worry much that I had to constantly overcome my selfish ideas in order to serve the people. What I worried about was whether or not I could get good grades and pass the entrance examination for a good middle school, or whether I could be good at sports or dancing or singing, and whether or not I was liked by others. After a whole morning and two hours of schooling in the afternoon, I would do homework and play games in the neighborhood with kids of various ages. There were many of us. We went swimming in the summer or on outings in the beautiful parks in Beijing. Like many others, I spent a lot of time reading. Classmates often borrowed books from one another. I was hoping to go to a good middle school and then university.

### Schools during the Cultural Revolution

From the spring of 1966, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was beginning to affect the whole nation. Mao Zedong initiated this movement to purge Party leaders, Liu Shaoyi, Deng Xiaoping, and many others, who, in his eyes, had become his political rivals. Mao also claimed the revolution as a way to inculcate all the Chinese people with communist values and ideas. In response to Mao, on May 29, 1966, some students from the Affiliated Middle School of Tsinghua University in Beijing formed their own organization to participate in the Cultural Revolution. They named it the Red Guards.<sup>67</sup> Inspired

by Mao's slogan, "to rebel is right," these Red Guards launched attacks against their school authorities for over-emphasizing academic records and not following Maoist thought. Claiming "Revolution is rebellion, and the soul of Mao Zedong's thought is rebellion,"<sup>68</sup> they rebelled.

To me as well as many others, the Cultural Revolution began on June 2, 1966, when the *People's Daily* printed the big-character-poster by Nie Yuanzi, an instructor in the Department of Philosophy, and six others in an attack on Peking University authorities. On that day at eight in the morning when our class began, our teacher came in and told us that there would be no regular class. Instead, we should listen to the broadcast of the poster and the commentator's article in the *People's Daily*. The school then organized us to walk to Peking University, not too far away. Not yet thirteen years of age, and not very much into political affairs, I could hardly comprehend what was going on. I only remember the exciting, highly charged atmosphere. The campus was full of people, who gathered at various assemblies, shouting slogans, listening to speeches. Big-character-posters were posted on walls. From that day, regular school in Beijing discontinued. We no longer needed to prepare for entrance examinations for middle school. Students in middle schools and universities threw themselves into making the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution." They formed Red Guard organizations. Radical Red Guards, aged mostly between thirteen and early twenties, engaged in actions against Party cadres, government administrators, their own teachers and school authorities, and their parents for being "feudal, capitalist, and revisionist." In my elementary school some formed a Red Guard organization. I applied but was rejected. "Your father belongs to the black faction," I was told, and "your father did not join the Party early enough." So I became just an observer. I and other neighborhood children spent a lot of time going swimming, playing basketball, and watching the Revolution in action.

The Revolution did not leave any one out. In the summer, the Red Guards of middle schools in Beijing initiated the attacks on the "Four Olds": old ideas, old habits, old culture, and old customs—everything they believed to represent feudalism, capitalism, and revisionism. They ordered women to cut short their long hair; people to tear up their trouser-legs if they were too narrow. All these, they claimed, were bourgeois. My mother burned her wedding photos. In these black-and-white photos, she was in her white gown, and my father in his black suit. The photos were definitely bourgeois. With the simplistic view that everything should be judged by class, many students claimed that flowers, decorative grass and plants, and pets were bad because they represented bourgeois decadence. Vegetables were good. Beautiful clothes were bad; simple clothes were good. Green army uniforms became the fashion of the day.

The Cultural Revolution intensified the concept of class struggle and class labels. During the early days of the Cultural Revolution, some radical Red Guards of the "five reds" advanced a theory of the family origins, making it more oppressive to the "five blacks." This was reflected in a popular couplet:

When the old man's a hero, the son's a good chap;  
When the old man's a reactionary, the son's bad eggs;  
This is basically the case.<sup>69</sup>

Later one last line was added: "When the old man's the middle, the son's a fence-sitter." These Red Guards promoted this "family origin theory" to argue for their redness, and their correctness in suppressing those of "five blacks" and the middle classes, who, in their eyes, were favored in schools due to their good academic performance. Those discriminated against by the "reds" formed their own Red Guard organizations to show that they too could make a revolution. Ironically, however, the line soon blurred as the mass organizations in government units, schools, and factories labeled many Party cadres from the high ranks down to the grass roots as "anti-Party and anti-socialist elements," or "capitalist roaders." Their children, formerly of the "reds" became "blacks." Also under attack were intellectuals who had formerly belonged to the middle class, but now were labeled "bourgeois reactionary academic authorities," or "representatives and spokesman" of the bourgeois class. Added to the "five blacks" were more categories: traitor (*pantu*), the Communist Party members accused of betrayal before 1949), spies (*lewu*), "capitalist roaders" who refused to reform (*sibu gainhui de zouzhipai*), and intellectuals who were popularly referred to as the "stinky number nine." Those of the middle classes and those who had relatives in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas now belonged to the "problematic" category.<sup>70</sup>

From August 1966, the Red Guards demanded that all "bad elements" leave Beijing. My maternal grandmother, already in her late seventies, had to go because my grandfather's political status was "bureaucratic bourgeoisie" and so she was "bad" too. Mother sent her away to live with a relative in a village in north China. I went to the railway station to see her off. The dark waiting room at the station was so crowded that we could only sit on her luggage while waiting. The air was dirty with a mixed smell of sweat and cigarettes. I do not remember whether grandma said anything when she left. This was the last time I saw her, as she died a few months later in the countryside. I dreamt of her. I remember that when I was little, she played cards with me and tucked me in, but she was not well in her mind; often she just stayed in her own room, mumbling. It was many years later that I learned a bit about her life. Without bound feet and with education, she was able to keep a career as a school teacher and principal for several years after her marriage, but she suffered the loss of three baby boys. When her husband obtained a steady job, she quit her job at school. Then at the age of forty, she had to arrange personally for her husband to take a concubine. It was her duty to ensure that her husband would have an heir. She must have felt so bitter that she became depressed and withdrew into her own world. Now in 1966 more than twenty years after her husband's death, she still had to suffer the consequence of her marriage.

This was a time of red terror. I can still feel the fears and pains I felt back then when I saw a friend of mine beat up a cadre; when I heard a neighbor lock

herself up in the bathroom, and saw an adult smash the bathroom window only to see that she was hanging there. She committed suicide because her husband was accused of being a counterrevolutionary. One evening I saw my father paraded through the street in our neighborhood for public humiliation. Fortunately, he was subjected to this only once. When he returned home, he lay in bed without a word. We did not talk about the episode until almost twenty years later. The most haunting memory was at the very beginning of the Cultural Revolution. It was in early July 1966. That day, four girls and I, aged eleven to fourteen, went out to the Fragrant Hill in the Western Mountains of Beijing. After a tiresome climb, we got to the top. It was a hot day; there was no one around except for a lonely looking man in his late forties or early fifties. Sitting on the rock, he was drinking and eating. We chatted, and he offered us some tomatoes to eat. As we were about to leave, he told us that he had a relative somewhere and asked us to take a hand-bag down for him. "What about you?" "I will stay up here," he replied with a bitter smile. Why? No explanation, he was walking toward the cliff. "He wants to kill himself!" the thought flashed in my head. I shouted "run" to the other girls. We heard him shouting: "Long live Chairman Mao! Long live the Communist Party!" Without taking the bag, we dashed down the hill and reported this encounter to the local police. Two policemen went up, and found that he had already died by jumping off the cliff. They took down his bag with his suicide notes. I still remember one line: "I have done nothing wrong, and I am loyal to the Party." For all these years, I have kept on asking myself: could we have saved him? Should we have tried to pull him away from the edge of the cliff? Why didn't I have the courage to stop the desperate man?

Could anyone stop the craziness of the Cultural Revolution? The nation was caught up in the revolution called upon by Mao Zedong. The cult of Mao Zedong reached its peak. Mao was the red sun which would never set; one of his sentences was worth ten thousand others, whatever he said was right, and his words were the most supreme instructions. *The Quotations of Chairman Mao*, the little red book, became the Bible. Mao was God. For Mao, the youth of China would "climb a mountain of knives. Jump into an ocean of raging fire. Face a forest of rifles and charge forward into a shower of bullets."<sup>71</sup> "Revolution was not a dinner party," and revolution was violence, said Mao Zedong. We believed in him. He had answers to everything. Mao Zedong encouraged the Chinese youth and all the people to rebel; Mao gave the people the "four great freedoms," the rights to speak out freely, air views freely, hold great debates, and write big-character-posters. Now people had opportunities to assert their own independence and voice their own opinions. Mao empowered them with a strong sense of their own importance and freedom, so people used these rights to fight the upper authorities and fight their own personal rivals. Many students were inspired by the young Mao's passionate search for a way to save China. They imitated the young Mao in physical exercise, hiking, swimming, taking cold baths, to strengthen themselves in a Spartan way of life, and to go down to the countryside to inquire into social conditions.<sup>72</sup> Zheng Yi, now a

political dissident was once a fanatic worshipper of Mao. In August 1966, Zheng Yi was labeled a "dog bastard" of the enemy class and "counterrevolutionary" by the Red Guards in his school, the Affiliated Middle School of Tsinghua University, and he was deprived of the right to wear Chairman Mao's badge. To prove his loyalty to Mao, he pinned the badge into the skin of his chest. While doing it, he said, "I felt a rare pleasure. Blood was coming out; tears running down. Chairman Mao, they can never take you out of my heart! Never!" He wore the badge until the wound got infected and he had to take it out. The scar remained.<sup>73</sup>

From August 1966, in what was called "the great revolutionary exchange" (*geming da chuanlian*), the Red Guards and students traveled free of charge and with free accommodation all over China to "spread the fire of the revolution," to mobilize people all over China to rebel. This was also an opportunity for them to see more of the country. With two neighborhood girls, aged thirteen and fourteen, I traveled too in the fall of 1966. We went as far as Guangzhou, where in its exotic, semi-tropical climate, we ate bananas and sugarcane. In Hunan, we made pilgrimages to Shaoshan, Mao Zedong's home village, and his school in Changsha. In Wuhan, we visited universities. Later, with my sister and her classmate, the three of us walked to a village in a rural county of Beijing to see its famous underground tunnels built in the war against Japan. From there we hitchhiked to Tianjin and went on Qingdao. In the beautiful coastal city of Qingdao, I saw the sea for the first time in my life. Those free travels away from my parents gave me a sense of independence and freedom.

Yet I missed school. I tried for a while to study math on my own but motivation and interest soon disappeared. I read novels, both Chinese and foreign. My brother borrowed many from his girl friend's home. During the early days of the Cultural Revolution when a great many books were burned, sold as wastepaper, and banned, some people managed to preserve them. So in my small bedroom, day and night, I read the stories of Sherlock Holmes, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Anna Karenina*, *Resurrection*, *Les Misérables*, novels by Balzac, or poems by Byron or Pushkin, all of which were deemed nonproletarian by the Cultural Revolution leadership. My parents did not forbid me.

On March 7, 1967, the *People's Daily* published an editorial calling on students to resume their classes while continuing to carry on the Cultural Revolution. It published Mao's directive: "The period of schooling must be shortened, education must be revolutionized, and the domination of our schools by bourgeois intellectuals must not be allowed to continue any longer." On October 14, the central leadership issued another notice, urging the resumption of classes in all universities, middle and elementary schools in an effort to restore some order to the chaos nationwide.<sup>74</sup> Gradually, as elementary and middle schools in cities began to resume classes students returned to schools; however, those in cities did not have any regular classes. Students either continued their Red Guard activities or they were organized to undergo military drill and to work in factories or communes.

I entered a local middle school in late 1967; there was no need for an entrance examination, all eligible could go. We had courses in mathematics and even English at the beginning, but soon these were abolished. All we had to learn were newspaper articles and Mao Zedong's poems and essays. From Mao's poems in classical style, I learned the names of various poetry forms in regulated verse or *ci* lyrics, rhymes and tones. Much energy went into frequent meetings for revolutionary criticisms or recalling the bitterness of the old society. At one meeting, an elderly peasant woman was telling us how before 1949, the landlord had bullied her. As she started to cry in the tone of mourning song typically required for women in Chinese tradition, "I want to go and jump into the river," we all laughed. The song was funny! When I was in elementary school, stories of bitterness made me feel terribly sorry for the poor, but now I was losing my innocence. I was exhausted also by constant physical labor organized by our school in the nearby rural communes. I tried to avoid the labor by asking for sick leave. Sitting in the classroom, I got bored and wished that time would go faster. It seemed to me then that people like us had so much time that we could afford to waste it. When we were asked to go to settle in the countryside, many of us were excited in looking forward to starting a new life.

From 1971 on, senior middle schools in cities also resumed enrollment. In the zhiqing generation, the cohorts after the 1969 graduating class received some academic education, but the education during the Cultural Revolution was drastically different from that before 1966 in several respects.<sup>75</sup> The school authorities were now composed of workers, peasants, and soldiers sent to work there with school cadres and teachers. They became the administrators. In elementary schools, the Little Red Guards replaced the Young Pioneer organization. Members still wore the red scarf. The government restored the work of the Youth League in 1970 following a temporary paralysis in the early days of the Cultural Revolution. The school leadership reshaped the Red Guard organization: one should become a Red Guard before one could apply for a membership in the Youth League. The length of school at each of the three levels from elementary to university was reduced. Regular examinations, if implemented at all, no longer had much importance. Entrance examinations were abolished altogether in secondary education. Starting from 1970, when universities gradually resumed enrollment, students were recruited from among the workers, peasants, and soldiers rather than high school graduates. All middle school graduates had to work for several years before they could be enrolled into universities on the basis of political performance through recommendation of the local leadership, and approval of the universities.

School education greatly increased emphasis on political studies over academic learning. Even though all the school textbooks compiled before 1966 were imbued with the principle of cultivating communist morality, the radical Cultural Revolution leadership in the central government did not think them revolutionary enough. All were abolished. From 1968, local leadership began the compilation of new textbooks, which often combined political knowledge, Chinese language, and literature into one subject, and made physics, chemistry,



and biology into "basic knowledge of industry" and "basic knowledge of agriculture." Mao Zedong's works, Mao's poems, and newspaper articles became the basic teaching materials.<sup>76</sup> Students at all levels had to spend much more time in physical labor in factories and rural villages to learn from the working people. In 1973, the central government required that the local leaderships reform their curricula so as to prepare middle school graduates to participate in agriculture.<sup>77</sup> The moral education of young people before the Cultural Revolution was, to a large extent, successful in bringing about a generation of believers in the Party and Mao and believers in communism. School education during the Cultural Revolution was still able to stimulate idealism and political activism, but to a much lesser extent.<sup>78</sup>

Today, ex-zhiqing like to tell their children stories of what happened to them in the countryside. Most children enjoy these stories. To them, they are fascinating, amusing, or absurd, things that happened in such a remote and distant past that they are almost like fairy tales. Did you truly wish to die for the Party? How could you still laugh and have fun when your life was miserable? Why were you so caught up with some kind of ideals when you could not even support yourself? Part of the answers may be found in the education the zhiqing had received before going to the countryside. An interviewee told me that on hearing an old song popular among the zhiqing generation in the 1960s titled "The red sun which will never set rises over the grassland," her son, at the age of five or six, was puzzled: "How come the sun never sets?" He did not realize that his mother, like many other zhiqing, loved the song and had absolutely no doubt about the brilliant sun—Chairman Mao—that would never set.

The zhiqing generation and their children were born and grew up in two different eras. For the zhiqing generation, revolutionary and traditional heroes were glamorous, and the sacrifice of self and personal love in the search for truth and fulfilling ideals was romantic. Their children, in contrast, grew up in the reform era that began in 1978. This was a time when China was moving away from Maoist theory and practice toward a "capitalist" way of modernization. It has been an era more relaxed in its government control, becoming more diverse and pluralistic in culture and in political climate, and open to the outside world. The children of the zhiqing have grown up and lived in a much more affluent China. Not only do they enjoy more material goods, they have a better education. Their world is much enlarged and enriched by satellite TV, foreign movies, books, and arts from the West and other parts of the world. They have love songs and rock 'n roll. They find their idols in the pop singers of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the U.S.A., in sports and movie stars, or in billionaires like Bill Gates, and Li Ka-shing from Hong Kong. They have the Internet. Most are single children of their families, born after the implementation of the state policy of one child per family. They are the Me Generation. More individualistic, open-minded, they no longer worship Mao Zedong, and they do not necessarily believe only in communism. To them, their parents in their youth lived in another time, a different world.

## Notes

1. China's education from 1953 followed the pattern of six years of elementary school whereas some schools had a five-year pattern. ZGJYNY: 129-30; 729-30.
2. The essay is entitled "Chonggao de Lixiang" [A Noble ideal] written by Tao Zhu, the Party Secretary of Guangdong province. See Beijingshi Jiaoyu: Beijingshi Gaoji Zhongxue Shiyong Kebin, *Ywen 4* [Beijing senior middle school provisional textbook: Chinese 4] (Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 1962), 106-7.
3. Gordon White, *The Politics of Class and Class Origin: The Case of the Cultural Revolution* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1976), 2-4; Richard Curt Kraus, *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 20-26.
4. Kraus, *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism*, 52, 185-87; Lynn T. White, *Politics of Chaos: The Organizational Causes of Violence in China's Cultural Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 10.
5. Kraus, *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism*, 20-21, 57-58.
6. Based on my personal knowledge. See also White, *Politics of Chaos*, 88-89.
7. White, *The Politics of Class and Class Origin*, 5-6; Liu Xiaomeng, "'Xuetong Lun' yu Zhiqing Shangshan Xiaxiang Yundong" [The "blood lineage theory" and the movement of educated youth's going up to the mountains and down to the villages], *Qingnian Yanjiu* 1995 no. 2: 33.
8. Mao elaborated his theory on class struggle in his "Speech at the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee (24 September 1962)." See Mao Zedong, *Chairman Mao Talks to the People: Talks and Letters: 1956-1971*. Edited by Stuart Schram. Translated by John Chinnery and Tietun (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 188-96; Kraus, *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism*, 69-79.
9. White, *Politics of Chaos*, 200-2.
10. Kraus, *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism*, 132-39; White, *Politics of Chaos*, 200-2; interviews.
11. White, *The Politics of Class and Class Origin*, 14-15.
12. ZGZQSD: 15-16.
13. Hu Ping, "Xiezai Shiji zhi jiao" [Written at the turn of the century], part 1. *Zhongguo zhi Chun* 1992, no. 9: 24-26.
14. Hu Ping, "Xiezai Shiji zhi jiao," part 3. *Zhongguo zhi Chun* 1992, no. 11: 50
15. "Draft Temporary Regulations for Elementary School" and "Draft Temporary Regulations for Middle School" by the Ministry of Education (18 March 1952) in ZGJYNY: 444, 729.
16. Mao's instruction on 31 January 1958. See Theodore Hsi-en Chen, *The Maoist Educational Revolution* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 218-19.
17. See the "Temporary Work Regulations for Full-Time Middle Schools" issued in 1963 by the Ministry of Education in ZGJYNY: 702. For an English translation, see Susan Shirk, "The 1963 Temporary Work Regulations for Full-Time Middle and Primary Schools: Commentary and Translation," *The China Quarterly* 55 (1973): 528.
18. From 1958, local authorities were permitted to compile their own teaching materials and textbooks following the guidelines of the Ministry of Education. See ZGJYNY: 489.
19. Charles Price Ridley, Paul H. B. Godwin, and Dennis J. Doolin, *The Making of a Model Citizen in Communist China* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1971). This work provides a detailed analysis of the elementary school readers published by the People's Education Publication House in 1963-64.

20. Beijingshi Jiaoyuju: Beijingshi Chuji Zhongxue Shiyong Keben, *Yuwen 3* [Beijing junior middle school provisional textbook: Chinese 3] (Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 1962), 91-95.
21. For more discussion on the emulation of heroes, see Mary Sheridan, "The Emulation of Heroes," *The China Quarterly* 33 (1968): 47-72.
22. Beijingshi Jiaoyuju: Beijingshi Gaoji Xiaoxue Shiyong Keben, *Yuwen 1* [Beijing senior elementary school provisional textbook: Chinese 1] (Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 1961), 39-43. For an English translation of a similar text in the edition of the People's Education Publishing House, see Ridley, Godwin, and Doolin, *The Making of a Model Citizen*, 305-6.
23. Beijingshi Jiaoyuju: Beijingshi Chuji Xiaoxue Shiyong Keben, *Yuwen 4* [Beijing junior elementary school provisional textbook: Chinese 4] (Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 1961), 93-95. For an English translation of a similar text in the edition of the People's Education Publishing House, see Ridley, Godwin, and Doolin, *The Making of a Model Citizen*, 285-86.
24. Beijingshi Jiaoyuju: Beijingshi Chuji Zhongxue Shiyong Keben, *Yuwen 1*, 91-93. The essay "In Memory of Norman Bethune" is in Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Volume II (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 337-38.
25. Beijingshi Jiaoyuju: Beijingshi Gaoji Xiaoxue Shiyong Keben, *Yuwen 1*, 92-97. For an English translation of an essay on Liu in the edition of the People's Education Publishing House, see Ridley, Godwin, and Doolin, *The Making of a Model Citizen*, 297-99.
26. Anita Chan, *Children of Mao—Personality Development and Political Activism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), 66-67.
27. Lu Jimin, *Lishi Wei Pingfan Zuozheng* [History as the witness for the ordinary] (Guangzhou, Guangdong: Lingnan Meishu Publishing House, 1993), 9.
28. Lei Feng, *Lei Feng Riji Shiwenzuan* [Selected diaries and poems of Lei Feng] (Beijing: Zhanshi Publishing House, 1982), 77.
29. ZGQNB 5 March 1963: 1, Sheridan, "The Emulation of Heroes," 48, 51-53.
30. Mi Hedü, *Hong Weibing Zheyidai* [The red guard generation] (Hong Kong: Sanlian Shidian, 1993), 84.
31. ZGYNN: 433-35.
32. For descriptions of such an activity, see Jonathan Unger, *Education under Mao: Class and Competition in Canton Schools, 1960-1980* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 87-88; Chan, *Children of Mao*, 55-56.
33. Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 265.
34. Liang Xiaosheng, *Yige Hong Weibing de Zibai* [A monologue of a red guard] (Hong Kong: Yiyuan Press, 1992), 7.
35. Mi Hedü, *Hong Weibing Zheyidai*, 75.
36. Mao Zedong, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), 36. Quotation from "Introducing a Co-operative (15 April 1958)."
37. Mao Zedong, *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, 288. Quotation from "Talk at a Meeting with Chinese Students and Trainees in Moscow (17 November 1957)."
38. For a descriptions of the ceremony for the Young Pioneers, see Beijingshi Jiaoyuju: Beijingshi Chuji Xiaoxue Shiyong Keben, *Yuwen 5*, 30-31. On the Young Pioneers, see also Chan, *Children of Mao*, 11, 28-29.
39. Mao Zedong, *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, 277-79; Chan, *Children of Mao*, 73-74.
40. Mi Hedü, *Hong Weibing Zheyidai*, 72.
41. Mi Hedü, *Hong Weibing Zheyidai*, 73.

42. Congo became independent from Belgium in 1960. Patrice Lumumba was the prime minister of the new Congo state, killed in the civil war in 1961.
43. Mi Hedü, *Hong Weibing Zheyidai*, 69.
44. The Ministry of Propaganda, "The Outline for Propaganda on Elementary and Junior Middle School Students' Participation in Labor Production," RMRB 29 May 1954: 1-2.
45. Mao Zedong, *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, 165. Quotation from "On Correctly Handling Contradictions among the People" (27 February 1957).
46. Lu Dingyi, "Jiaoyu Bixu yu Shengchan Laodong Xiang Jiehe" [Education must be combined with productive labor], HQ 1958: 7: 1-12.
47. "Regulations on the Schedule of Teaching, Labor and Life in Full-Time Schools" issued by the State Council in 1959, see ZGYNN: 472.
48. "Draft Plan for Full-Time Middle and Elementary School Curricula" by Ministry of Education, see ZGYNN: 472.
49. Rae Yang, *Spider Easters: A Memoir* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 94-95. For more examples, see Chan, *Children of Mao*, 36.
50. Roberta Martin, "The Socialization of Children in China and on Taiwan: An Analysis of Elementary School Textbooks," *The China Quarterly* 62 (1975): 252-53, 256-57.
51. The editorial was based on the speeches by Liu Shaoyi in 1957. Beijingshi Jiaoyuju: Beijingshi Chuji Zhongxue Shiyong Keben, *Yuwen 2*, 151-53.
52. Beijingshi Jiaoyuju: Beijingshi Chuji Xiaoxue Shiyong Keben, *Yuwen 7*, 119-22. For an English translation of a similar text in the edition of the People's Education Publishing House, see Ridley, Godwin, and Doolin, *The Making of a Model Citizen*, 357-59.
53. Huang Tianming, *Bianjiang Xiangge* [Morning songs of the frontiers] (Beijing: Zuofa Publishing House, 1965).
54. For their short biographies, see ZGZQSD: 704-849.
55. ZGZQSD: 719-24.
56. ZGZQSD: 735-39.
57. ZGZQSD: 731-35.
58. Beijingshi Jiaoyuju: Beijingshi Chuji Xiaoxue Shiyong Keben, *Yuwen 1*: 109.
59. For an English translation of the lyrics in the edition of the People's Education Publishing House, see Ridley, Godwin, and Doolin, *The Making of a Model Citizen*, 244.
60. Fujian Jiaoyu Xueyuan, *Xiao Xuesheng Kewai Tuedu Wenxuan*, v. 1 [Selected outside readings for elementary school students] (Fuzhou, Fujian: Remin Jiaoyu Publishing House, 1964), 3-7.
61. These concepts can be seen through Beijing school readers. See also an analysis of the elementary school readers published by the People's Education Publishing House in Ridley, Godwin, and Doolin, *The Making of a Model Citizen*, 110-14, 174, 201.
62. The Beijing middle school readers included at least sixteen essays based on excerpts of Mao's works and six poems by Mao. See Beijingshi Jiaoyuju: Beijingshi Chuji Zhongxue Shiyong Keben, *Yuwen*; Gaoji Zhongxue Shiyong Keben, *Yuwen*.
63. See for example Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong Sixiang Wansui*, volume 2 [Long Live Mao Zedong Thought, vol. 2] (Tokyo: Shoso Publishing House, 1969), "Remarks at the Spring Festival" (13 February 1964), 458-65; "Talks with Comrade Wang Harong" (24 June 1964), 526-31; "Speech at Hangzhou" (21 December 1965), 625-26.
64. Mi Hedü, *Hong Weibing Zheyidai*, 113-15.

65. Laifong Leung, *Morning Sun: Interviews with Chinese Writers of the Lost Generation* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 219-21.
66. See for example, Chang, *Wild Swans*; Yang, *Spider Easters*.
67. Mi Hedu, *Hong Weibing Zheyitai*, 105; Leung, *Morning Sun*, 220-21.
68. "Long Live the Proletarian Revolutionary Rebellious Spirit" written by the Red Guards of the Affiliated Middle School of the Tsinghua University on June 24, 1966. Reprinted in HQ 1966: 11, 27.
69. The English translation is from White, *The Politics of Class and Class Origin*, 73.
70. Liu Xiaomeng, "'Xuetong Lun"; ZGZQSD: 135.
71. These were popular sayings of the days. See Yang, *Spider Easters*, 113.
72. Chan, *Children of Mao*, 69, 102-3; Ding Yizhuang, *Zhongguo Zhigingshi—Chulan (1953-1968)* [A history of China's educated youth, the early waves, 1953-1968] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Publishing House, 1998), 443-44.
73. Zheng Yi, *Lishi de Yibufen* [Part of history] (Taipei: Wanxiang Tushu Gongsi, 1993), 170-72.
74. "Zhongxiaoxue Fuke Nao Geming" [Middle and primary schools reopen classes and make revolution], RMRB 7 March 1967: 1. For translations of these two documents, see Chen, *The Maoist Educational Revolution*, 239-41.
75. For a detailed study of education during the Cultural Revolution with translation of documents, see Chen, *The Maoist Educational Revolution*; Unger, *Education under Mao*, chap. 7, chap. 9, chap. 10.
76. ZGJYNI: 489.
77. ZGJYNI: 470.
78. Unger, *Education under Mao*. My interviews of those who went to middle schools during the Cultural Revolution also support this generalization.

## Chapter 2

# Why Was There a Rustication Movement? An Examination of the Goals of the Government

## The Beginning Stage, 1953-1961

### Rural Educated Youth Became Peasants

In the early 1950s, when the newly founded People's Republic of China faced severe urban unemployment problems, the government directed the unemployed to rural areas. For rural development as well as to provide employment, it sent discharged soldiers to Heilongjiang and Xinjiang, thinly populated areas with potential for agriculture, and it mobilized migration of peasants from the interior to the less populated frontier provinces.<sup>1</sup> In 1953, the government began to encourage rural school-leavers to become peasants in their home villages, rather than going on to a higher level of education or seeking urban employment, thus beginning the rustication policy. The *People's Daily*, the mouthpiece of the national government, on December 3, 1953, published a special report on Chaoshui township, in Penglai county, Shandong province, stating that for the last three years, 65 percent of elementary school graduates in the township had been unable to pass the entrance examinations to middle school or to find employment in nonagricultural sectors. The township had therefore persuaded them to return to their villages to become peasants. The editorial called on other rural youth to follow this example because, it explained, China's countryside needed educated people. Since the government was unable to set up more middle schools, "guiding elementary school graduates in the rural villages to participate in agricultural production was a basic way to solve their employment problems." From 1954, it became a principle that school-leavers of farming households should participate in agriculture.<sup>2</sup> For them, the government claimed, there was no "employment problem."<sup>3</sup>