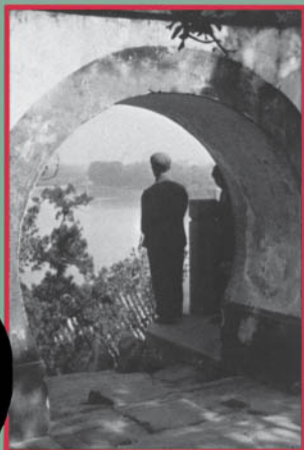

Mao's Harvest

Voices from China's New Generation

Edited by Helen F. Siu
and Zelda Stern

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Foreword

To many in the United States and Western Europe, the Chinese Revolution appears stymied. An intensely violent and visionary movement—led to victory by members of the Chinese Communist Party in the 1940s—which pushed through radical land-reform programs, expelled foreign armed forces and foreign investors, nationalized internal commerce, banking, and industry, and sought to transform the entire superstructure of education and artistic expression, finds itself now without clear direction. Inevitably, unanticipated problems complicated the solution of traditional ones dictated by China's geography, natural resources, and population, so that the newly emerging leaders, without the natural prestige of their predecessors, have to juggle and reassess their inheritance if they are to retain it at all.

Major bouts of doubt and self-questioning resulting in pressures for change, even under authoritarian regimes, have been common enough in the China of this century. As far back as the last years of the Qing Dynasty, after the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, scholars (many already in exile), applying newly acquired perceptions of Social Darwinism, sought to graft onto an archaic governmental structure foreign ideas of representative government. Then again, in the period between 1918 and 1925, warlord governments in Beijing and elsewhere were confronted by a demand for cultural change and an outright rejection of China's Confucian heritage, which was branded as sterile and self-deceptive. Another took place in the fugitive wartime universities, based in Kunming in southwest China in the early 1940s, when cosmopolitan cultural insights were used to criticize the limitations on all personal freedoms imposed by Chiang Kai-shek; yet another occurred in the Hundred Flowers movement of 1957, when the limitations of behavior and ideology of the Communist

Party of China were held up for scrutiny, analysis, and even ridicule by Chinese teachers and intellectuals.

To see some continuities between the clamors that have emerged during the years 1978 to 1981 and those of earlier periods is not to deny in any way the sensitivity or the desperation of these newest voices. The selections assembled here by Professor Helen Siu and Zelda Stern are a tribute to the range and sincerity of a new Chinese generation. In many ways "dissident," these voices are not exactly underground, for the government did let them speak in certain magazines and did let them post their pronouncements in certain areas. One can say that when permission to be spontaneous is necessary, there can be no true spontaneity—but that may be too hasty a judgment. The Chinese writers of 1978 to 1981 have seized the opportunities open to them and made of them what they can.

If sentiments that surface in these passages often seem maudlin, and the preoccupations localized, that may well be because modes of expression in China have been crimped for so long that a great deal needs to be said afresh. There is a splendid lack of self-consciousness in the desire these Chinese writers show to re-enter a world literary dialogue, where Tolstoy and Chekhov speak as individuals of genius and sympathy rather than as Russians and can be invoked in a context that includes Shakespeare, Thomas Hardy, Baudelaire, and Edgar Allen Poe. And there is extraordinary agreement among these writers about the loss of dignity that afflicts all Chinese denied privacy, in housing as in thought, forced forever to jostle and bargain and plead until the shouts become cries and the cries blows.

Throughout these selections one can find flashes of insight that illuminate the society of modern China more vividly than one might have expected. Sometimes these flashes are conveyed by the authors' depictions of objects: a tight and much darned palm-green sweater that a sister inherits, a pile of washing boards beside a railroad track, the toilet that no one can be bothered to clean, the overpass that never gets built. At other times they are conveyed by action: a young woman who vomits after her own desperate attempt to have a party and asks, "You had fun, right?" or the old worker, about to be summoned to a "struggle meeting" who shaves his skull so that no one will be able to pull his hair.

"It looks as if my generation is losing ground," writes Gu Gong of his talented poet-son Gu Cheng, and of course he is right. Those who make revolutions can never understand why their children don't appreciate the suffering their parents endured. "Between you and me stand the gunsmoke-filled / Thirties and / Forties" writes the poet Ye Wenfu of the Communist general, once so bold yet now "lamed by

the weight of honors" and Ye Wenfu is also right. The Chinese of the 1980s must adapt to a world in which old struggles are over or forgotten and new ones presented in unexpected guises. Maybe they will get their overpass, their road to the future that will make relocation possible, but as a character in the novella with that title observes, it will need "a contract with the Japanese. Their money, their designs. We do the work. Just you wait and see." But the waiting is hard and the solution ambiguous; as Gu Cheng puts it "I am willful," and Bei Dao echoes him, "I don't believe the sky is blue." Helen Siu and Zelda Stern have given us a wondrously subtle group of selections from a world in flux.

Yale University
June 23, 1982

Jonathan D. Spence

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Unless otherwise noted, all of the selections included in this anthology were translated by us. We thank Michael Crook for his superb translations of *Overpass*, "Trust," "At The Denunciation Meeting," and "Proletarian Dictatorship is a Humanitarian Dictatorship." We edited his translations to conform to our style; any errors introduced during this process are solely our responsibility.

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We thank the authors whose works we have included for the use of their material. None of them had any part in the preparation of this anthology. We are solely responsible for all introductory material contained in this book.

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Introduction

In 1979, during a thaw in which the usual political controls on writers were relaxed, a new kind of literature appeared in the pages of China's official journals. The socialist realism of the previous three decades had extolled the bright future of Chinese socialism. The New Realism of 1979–1981 suggested its darker side, portraying a society struggling with social and economic problems; a political system caught up in corruption, opportunism, and bureaucratism; and a people emotionally scarred by political disruptions brought about by their leaders.

The Chinese have a long tradition of using literature to convey moral and political messages. Lyric poems protesting the hardships of the common people appear in the *Shi Jing,* or the *Book of Odes,* an anthology compiled—by Confucius according to tradition—around 600 B.C. By the eighth century A.D., many Chinese poets considered it their duty to voice the people's grievances. The renowned Du Fu (712–770), often referred to as China's greatest poet, satirized the luxury of the emperor's court and described the suffering caused the peasants by heavy taxes and military conscription. Another Tang dynasty scholar, Han Yu (768–824), criticized the emperor and was banished. In the modern era, Chinese writers have likewise used their pens to express their concern for the welfare of the country. Lu Xun (1881–1936), revered in China as the father of revolutionary literature, wrote penetratingly of his society's ills. Many of the authors included in this anthology display a similar commitment to the use of literature as a vehicle for social change.

Since Chinese literature so often serves to express social criticism and political protest, Chinese rulers have been very sensitive to it. Chinese writers and scholars have thus traditionally relied on the use of metaphor to communicate their most critical points and such precautions historically have been well-founded. "Wenzi Yu"—the brutal

persecution of scholars (and their families) for writings that have offended emperors—is well-known to Chinese writers. In the thirty years since the founding of the People's Republic of China, debates within the leadership over certain writings have been at the heart of major political campaigns.* Sometimes a particular method of literary research has been condemned for implying dissenting ideological stands. At other times, plays and operas have been castigated by one political faction with the purpose of attacking the works' political patrons. For example, "Hai Rui Dismissed From Office," a play written by the vice-mayor of Beijing, Wu Han, was attacked by Mao's followers in 1965 for implying disagreement with Mao's radical rural policies.

This debate between Wu Han and Mao's supporters in fact marked the beginning of the political struggles of the Cultural Revolution. In the early seventies, the Maoist faction of the party launched a campaign to criticize the classic novel, *Water Margin.* The campaign was interpreted as an indirect attack on the moderate premier, Zhou Enlai. Only recently, the censure of Bai Hua's screenplay "Unrequited Love" was seen as a move by the conservative army factions in the Chinese Communist Party to suppress "bourgeois liberalism."

The New Realism literature of 1979–1981 has been particularly disturbing to the present Chinese leadership because it is extremely candid and critical—condemning not only particular events or individuals in the Republic's history, but also questioning the ideological foundations on which the socialist regime has relied. Furthermore, most of the authors of New Realism literature were members of the first generation of Chinese to grow up under socialism. Successors to the revolution that Mao and his generation had begun, they had been reared on Maoist ideology, had come of age during Mao's Cultural Revolution, and were not antagonistic to socialist ideals. Quite the contrary, more than any other force, Mao and his ideas had influenced and shaped their lives. However, their works now suggest a deep sense of disillusionment—a loss of absolute faith in the political ideals taught them in their youth. These writers are among the most educated, articulate and thoughtful members of China's younger generation, yet they look toward the future with trepidation. Though they may be temporarily silenced, the fact that theirs will be a major—if not the leading—voice of society for decades to come cannot be ignored. By 1981, New Realism was history and controls were once more imposed on China's official journals. But the literature pub-

* See "Why is China So Sensitive to Literature?," an essay written by Lee Yee for the Conference on Contemporary Chinese Literature: New Forms of Realism, May 28–31, 1982, St. John's University.

lished during this brief thaw stands as a clear window onto contemporary Chinese society, a singular view of socialist China through the eyes of its first-born.

This book is a representative collection of the stories, essays, and poems published during the 1979–1981 thaw by writers of the "Mao Generation."* Whatever their subject—romantic love, family tragedy, problems in the workplace or in the political arena—the authors in this collection use their writings to examine society and themselves—the outcome of Mao's bold revolutionary experiment. As a window on socialist China, this collection needs little explanation. For readers who wish to use this anthology to obtain a deeper understanding of the Mao Generation, however, it is useful to be acquainted with the roots of this generation's discontent. Students and scholars of contemporary China will automatically bring this information to bear when reading this literature. For those who may be unfamiliar with the background material then, we present a brief description of the political system under which the young people of the Mao Generation grew up and of the ideological education the Mao Generation received as well as a review of the most important historical events that have shaped this generation. This historical synopsis is followed by a brief discussion of some aspects of New Realism literature and of the Chinese literary scene.

Ideology and the Political System

Although the basic assumptions of Chinese Communist ideology derive from Karl Marx's dialectical view of history, it was Lenin, rather than Marx, who provided the Chinese Communist revolutionaries of the 1940s, led by Mao Zedong, with the theoretical justification for revolution in China. Whereas Marx had hypothesized that Communist revolutions would begin in highly industrialized societies in the advanced stages of capitalism, Lenin predicted that Communism would have its greatest appeal elsewhere—within those nations that were the weakest links in the world capitalist system, the impoverished, colonized countries that had been severely exploited by the imperialist powers. Pre-revolutionary China was clearly one such nation.

It was also Lenin who first suggested the value of a vanguard party of revolutionary professionals to provide leadership for such revolutionary movements. He argued that through such a group of men and

* Our term. For the purposes of this book, we define this generation as those born roughly within the decade prior to or the decade after 1949, the year of "liberation."

women, who had the political consciousness to lead and the dedication to transform society in the interests of the working class, would come the revolutionary commitment necessary to bringing about lasting political change.

Armed with the ideology of Marx and the political theories of Lenin, Mao Zedong fathered a revolutionary new society in postwar China, one that embodied and furthered the ideas and dreams of both Marx and Lenin. But even more than Marxism-Leninism, modern socialist China would come to reflect the ideas of Mao Zedong—practical strategies for creating a socialist society on China's agrarian base guided by philosophical teachings both zealously Marxist and uniquely Maoist.[1]

By 1949—the year of the Communist liberation—Mao had succeeded in bringing about this peasant revolution. He would spend the remainder of his life—nearly three decades—until his death in 1976, working to bring about a more complete socialist transformation.

In 1949, when the Chinese Communists set up their government, they established a "people's democratic dictatorship" and declared that China had embarked upon a socialist road. Today, the Chinese government still officially considers itself a dictatorship of the proletariat,* a dictatorship whose existence is required while society undergoes the transformation that will allow China to move into the ultimate Marxist stage of communism.†

The function of the state during this first, socialist stage is to protect the people from internal and external enemies—from subversion by the reactionary classes and from possible aggression by foreign powers. The methods that the state may employ to carry out its functions depend upon the object of its attention. Towards the enemy class it may employ the methods of compulsion and suppression. Towards the people, it is supposed to employ democratic methods—education or persuasion. Thus it is a "democratic dictatorship."

The backbone of the state—the administrative and policymaking center of the people's democratic dictatorship and the highest moral and ideological authority in the land—is the Chinese Communist

* The Chinese use of the word "proletariat" is ambiguous; usually it refers to the "alliance between workers and peasants."

† According to Chinese Communist ideology, the transformations that must take place during the socialist stage are 1) the elimination of inequality in society (of particular concern to Mao were "the three disparities" that lingered on from prerevolutionary China: the gaps in power, status, and wealth between mental and manual labor, city and country, industry and agriculture); 2) advances in production (economic development); and 3) the raising of the political consciousness of the people.

Party.* Guided by Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, the party leads the masses in their revolutionary activities.

While Chinese Communist ideology maintains that the success of the revolution depends on the party, it also emphasizes that the activity of the party is fruitless unless combined with the activity of the masses, who are perceived as the motive force of the revolution.† For if the party cadres become alienated from the masses, Mao argued—if they begin to formulate policies unrelated to the needs and wishes of the people, or to use their positions of power to seek privileges for themselves—the party is in danger of becoming a new ruling class. To guard against this potential for corruption and elitism, Mao and the top Communist leadership launched periodic rectification campaigns, in which criticism and self-criticism sessions, and other forms of ideological education were created to help party cadres purge themselves of "degenerate tendencies" and rededicate themselves to the cause. Mao, in fact, was unique among his peers in the international socialist community in the extent to which he concerned himself with issues of party corruption. The most famous of these rectification campaigns, as well as Mao's last before his death, was the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1969.

Education: The Training of Revolutionary Successors

Under Mao's leadership, particular attention was paid to the ideological training of the young. There were two reasons for this: first, with no (or very little) memory of pre-liberation China, the young were the least corrupted by the old society and therefore the most promising subjects for transformation;‡ and second, after the first genera-

* In theory, the state and the party are separate. For every state organization, from a local work unit to the highest government body, there is a parallel organization in the party; the party unit is supposed to guide and advise its government counterpart. In fact, especially after 1966, many parallel government and party posts have been held by the same person.

† The principle by which the party and the masses are supposed to interact and by which the party fulfills its leadership role and the masses participate in political decisionmaking, is called the "mass line." With the concept of the mass line, Mao attempted to overcome the elitist implications of Lenin's theory of the vanguard party and to break away from the Soviet model's emphasis on centralization and top-down policymaking. See Mark Selden, *The Yenan Way In Revolutionary China* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 274–76.

‡ In attempting to imbue the Chinese people with the socialist spirit, the Chinese Communist leadership had to overcome persistent remnants of Confucianism, a 2000-year-old ideology that is fundamentally antithetical to socialist goals. In contrast to socialism's insistence on egalitarianism and struggle, Confucianism fostered inequality, sanctioned class differences, and advocated the avoidance of conflict. For a comparison of Confucian and Chinese Communist ideology, see Donald J. Munro, *The Concept of Man in Contemporary China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977).

tion of revolutionaries was gone, the second generation would have to keep the flame alive.

One of the most important qualities Mao sought to foster in this generation of heirs was the "collective spirit"—a willingness to subordinate one's own interests to the good of the collective. In traditional Chinese society, the individual had also been expected to identify his own interests with those of the group—the family, the clan, the village, etc. But in Communist China, the local collective units tend to be primarily economic/political (production teams, brigades, communes, etc.) rather than familial/social, and the greatest emphasis is placed on serving the largest collective unit, i.e., the people. The pursuit of self-interest, which Western society with its tradition of individualism considers an unvarying attribute of human nature, is regarded in Chinese Communist ideology as a manifestation of a lower order of political consciousness characteristic of human beings in the (pre-socialist) capitalist stage; self-regard is considered a negative quality.

The primary responsibility for producing revolutionary successors imbued with this new socialist awareness has rested not with the family but with the schools,* where ideological transformation has been part and parcel of the curriculum. Under Mao, along with learning about the topography of their homeland in their geography texts, for example, Chinese students read about "liberating Taiwan" and "defending the coastline."[2] Mathematics textbooks were liberally sprinkled with questions asking "the distance of enemy ships from China's shore, the rate of unemployment in America, and the compound burdens on the peasantry of rents in pre-liberation China."[3] Primary school reading texts often contained illustrations of children doing good deeds for elderly representatives of the proletariat.[4]

In the literature classes, students read stories about the revolution-

* The methods of inculcation described here were used in the mid-sixties, when most of the Mao Generation were in senior middle school. Although the level of ideological content in the Chinese Communist curriculum has always been relatively high, it has fluctuated, reflecting a fundamental conflict at the top levels of party leadership. When Mao's political influence was greatest—during the Great Leap Forward (1958–60) and especially during the decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), educational policy gave priority to ideological training and the redress of traditional inequalities in the educational system. During the period of Soviet influence (1953–57), again in the very early 1960s, and at the present time, educational policy downplayed ideological content in favor of academic/technical training, concentrating resources on the most advanced students in order to promote technical expertise. The latter approach stems from the belief that the creation of a technical elite is necessary in the short term in order to bring about the rapid increases in production essential for China's modernization. See Suzanne Pepper, "Chinese Education After Mao: Two Steps Forward, Two Steps Back and Begin Again?" in *The China Quarterly* 81 (1980):1–65.

ary martyrs who had died in order that they might grow up under socialism and about the deeds of model children who had exposed the plots of class enemies to sabotage the revolution.[5] Teachers assigned essays on such themes as growing up under the party's care and encouraged students to keep diaries in which they were to record their efforts to improve their political attitudes and isolate their ideological faults.[6] And lest they forget their obligation to serve the masses, students were continually reminded how many bushels of grain produced by the labor of the peasants were required to finance their education.

During the Socialist Education Campaign of 1963–1966, the schools held "recall bitterness" sessions in which peasants recounted to the students their bitter experiences before the Communist liberation. Such sessions were supported to reinforce the correct class feelings of the children of workers and peasants and help the children of the former ruling classes dissociate themselves ideologically from their parents.

In order to be able to better identify with the proletariat, contribute to economic transformation of the country, and bridge the gap between mental and manual labor, students were also sent out of the schools to participate in production. In the cities, workshops were built on the school grounds so that the students could manufacture things: in the rural areas, they did farm work with the peasants.

Peer pressure and competition were powerful catalysts for ideological transformation. In the early 1960s, student groups were expected to hold evaluation meetings in which classmates would assess each other's political attitudes and behavior: behavior that conformed to the ideal was praised, while incorrect actions were criticized.[7] Although competition for grades was officially discouraged (as being too self-seeking), competition to prove political superiority was encouraged, and students vied with one another to do activist deeds and display the correct attitudes in order to gain admittance to the party youth organizations (the Young Pioneers, and, when they were older, the Party Youth League), which were stepping stones to membership in the party. At the same time, those who became leaders in the student and party organizations learned organizational skills.

Inside and outside the classroom, students were presented with model figures for emulation. These exemplary persons, chosen from every level and age group in society, were singled out for their outstanding contributions to production or for their advanced levels of socialist consciousness. The names and deeds of national models were described in textbooks and newspapers and known to every schoolchild. Local models, including students who displayed exemplary so-

cialist behavior, received honorary titles and certificates of merit. On the national level, negative models were sometimes presented to illustrate wrong thinking; students were advised to avoid their mistakes.[8]

Socialist culture and art reinforced what the students learned in the classrooms; under Mao, the arts became a vehicle for furthering the revolution. Posters, stories, plays, ballets, and operas presented near-perfect revolutionary heroes and, with glowing optimism, portrayed the Chinese people's march on the socialist road.

To Mao, the activist, however, correct thinking was the result of correct practice. Culture and art were important tools of ideological transformation, but experience remained the best teacher; society, not school, the best classroom. The most useful way to learn about revolution was to take part in revolutionary struggle. "Successors to the revolutionary cause of the proletariat come forward in mass struggles," Mao wrote, "and are tempered in the great storms of revolution." From 1966–69, Mao would provide the students with a Cultural Revolution in which to put their ideological education to practice.

The Conflict Between Ideals and Reality*

As Jonathan Unger points out in *Education Under Mao*,[9] it was becoming apparent well before the Cultural Revolution that the Chinese educational system was not equipped at its higher levels to meet the increased demand for higher education or professional training that the Revolution itself had sparked. This set the educational system at odds with the revolutionary goals of egalitarianism, selflessness, and cooperation, for at each stage of the educational system a fierce competition set in among the many candidates for the few spaces that existed. Even as late as the early sixties, resources set aside for education were still very limited. Only a small number of junior middle-school graduates, for example, could even think of moving on to senior middle school and an even fewer number might think of entering a university. However, the number of young people desiring to receive such specialized training at existing institutions of higher learning was increasing rapidly, because the higher a student was able to climb on the educational ladder, the better his or her chances for a prestigious, well-paid, professional career. For these reasons, at each stage in their education, students had to pass selective admissions procedures.

In general, students were admitted to institutions of higher educa-

* Much of the analysis in this and the following sections on the Cultural Revolution was provided personally by Hong Yung Lee.

tion on the basis of three criteria: academic achievement, class status, and political behavior, but the relative weight given to each changed according to the prevailing political atmosphere at a given time. School grades, the quality of the school one attended, and scores on entrance examinations determined one's level of academic achievement; over these factors, the student had some control. Students had no control, however, over their class status. Class labels had been assigned to everyone in China in the 1950s according to the occupation of the heads of household before liberation: children inherited their parents' class status. Broadly speaking, the class labels used by the Chinese Communists may be grouped into three categories: the red classes, also called the "five red kinds"; the ordinary classes; and the bad classes.* In deciding whether a student would be selected to advance in the educational system, the school authorities gave preference to those from red-class backgrounds and discriminated against those with bad-class backgrounds.

Good political behavior could improve a student's career chances. It was, however, extremely difficult for the school authorities to judge whether a student was putting on a good political performance out of selfish motives—that is, in order to advance his own educational

* Class labels were ranked more or less as follows. (Starred items are political labels, assigned according to political or criminal errors of the family's head rather than on the basis of economic standing prior to liberation.)

Red- or good-class origins also referred to in China as the "five red kinds"

a. Politically red inheritances (the families headed by pre-liberation party members, plus the orphans of men who died in the revolutionary wars):
   1. Revolutionary cadres
   2. Revolutionary armymen
   3. Revolutionary martyrs

b. Working-class:
   4. Pre-liberation industrial workers and their families
   5. Former poor and lower-middle peasant families

Ordinary-class origins

a. Non-intelligentsia middle class:
   Families of pre-liberation peddlers and store clerks, etc.
   Former middle-peasant families

b. Intelligentsia middle-class:
   Families of pre-liberation clerks, teachers, professionals, etc.

Bad-class origins

Families of former capitalists (the bourgeoisie)
* Families of "rightists" (the label denoting those who were too outspoken in The Hundred Flowers Campaign of 1956–57—usually intellectuals)
Pre-liberation rich-peasant families
* Families of "bad elements" (a label denoting "criminal" offenders)
Pre-liberation landlord families
* Families of counterrevolutionaries

Based on Unger, *Education Under Mao* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 13–14.

opportunities—or out of genuine commitment to the regime's values. Undoubtedly, many young people were hypocritical and calculating in their displays of "selfless" political dedication. Under normal circumstances, the party leadership was willing to tolerate such posturing in the belief that even the performance of the correct sentiments and actions would help the students to internalize the correct values. To a certain extent, the assumption proved to be correct. After conducting extensive interviews with students who were in the school system in the early 1960s, Jonathan Unger concludes that at least up to the time of the Cultural Revolution, the political-activist competition encouraged by the educational system was quite effective in instilling idealism in the students and imbuing them with official values.*

So long as the school authorities were not compelled to interpret the motivation behind good political deeds, all student activism was accepted without question. Whenever political campaigns made it necessary to infer real motives, however, the party leadership often relied on class background to make the distinction: if a student was from a good-class background, his or her selfless motive was accepted; the motives of students with bad-class backgrounds were viewed with suspicion. This practice of evaluating motives by class background became one of the most controversial issues of the Cultural Revolution.

The combined use of academic and political criteria for academic selection represented the regime's effort to maintain academic quality in the higher educational institutions while correcting the inequality of educational opportunity that had existed before liberation. There were political considerations behind this policy as well: the regime reasonably assumed that the children of the former exploited classes would feel more grateful for the revolution and therefore would be more loyal to the socialist road than the children of the former ruling classes, who might harbor dreams of a bourgeois restoration.

Under this system of evaluation before the Cultural Revolution, two student groups did well: the children of the former bourgeoisie and intellectuals, and the children of party cadres and military men. The offspring of the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia tended to be the most highly motivated students academically, and given their

* A few of the students Unger interviewed were bothered by the hypocrisy present in the schools. A purer idealism, rather than cynicism lay behind these students' scorn of self-seeking activism: Unger writes of these students: ". . . the net result of the party activism was that they yearned all the more for an opportunity to act out their commitment in a genuine manner—and grandly, in counterpoint to the trivialized acts at school." (Unger, *Education Under Mao*, p. 99)

family influence, were also the best prepared. If they were politically active as well, these students could look forward to being well placed. The children of the cadres and army men received preference in the selection process because of their class status, which was backed by the high social standing of their parents. Having gained enormous political power, high incomes, and a high degree of social respect, the party cadres and the army men (who were also often cadres) had become the most prestigious social group in Chinese society.

In contrast to these two groups, the children of workers and peasants did not particularly benefit from the evaluation system. Unlike the cadres and the military, the peasants and the workers held a low position in the social hierarchy, and so, although their class status as one of the "five red kinds" supposedly gave them an edge in the competition for upward mobility, these students were not in fact in a position to compete with the other students.

The student competition was made more intense by the fact that career opportunities from the time of the Great Leap Forward (1958–60) had been shrinking because of economic pressures. By about 1962, the tensions among student groups had begun to build up. The ability of the children of the bourgeoisie and the intellectuals to get ahead despite their class origins was resented by the other students, who felt that the same class that had been favored by China's traditional educational system was still rising to occupy the top positions in China's new socialist society. The higher status of the cadres' and military men's children was also resented by the students of lower status, who felt that a new, unduly privileged elite was forming. This antagonism among the children of different social groups was to have far-reaching consequences in the Cultural Revolution.

Events: The Cultural Revolution Decade 1966–76

The Cultural Revolution* that Mao launched in 1966 was a bold effort to cleanse the nation of pernicious bourgeois influences. Mao

* The Cultural Revolution was a complex social, economic, and political event that involved debates over culture and art, educational reforms, economic policies, the nature of political institutions, and, ultimately, the proper road to socialism in China. This section is not an analysis of the Cultural Revolution, but a description of some events during that turbulent decade that directly affected the Mao Generation. For a more thorough analysis of the Cultural Revolution, see David and Nancy Milton, *The Wind Will Not Subside: Years in Revolutionary China, 1964–1969* (New York: Pantheon, 1976); Hong Yung Lee, *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: A Case Study* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); William Hinton, *Hundred Day War: The Cultural Revolution at Tsinghua University* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972); Stuart Schram, ed., *Chairman Mao Talks to the People: Talks and Letters 1956–1971* (New York: Pantheon, 1975).

spoke of his concerns regarding bourgeois attitudes in culture and the arts, but what alarmed him most was the emergence of new social inequalities—in particular, the formation of a privileged social group connected with the Chinese Communist Party. In Mao's view, the revolutionary vanguard had become entrenched—bureaucratized, rigidified, conservative—a governing elite whose members had distanced themselves from the masses and were often more concerned with maintaining the status quo than with revolutionary change. Mao was also worried that the party's growing reliance on technical experts to bring about modernization would accelerate the formation of a new privileged group composed of the party cadres and experts. Claiming that his opponents had formed a bourgeois dictatorship within the party—in effect, a new ruling class—Mao called on the masses to rise up and purge the nation of "capitalist roaders" and bourgeois thinking, even if these existed at the highest levels of the party bureaucracy. The party, which had hitherto been the agent of struggle, was now to be the target. In its place, Mao designated a new vanguard: the young. In 1966, the year the Cultural Revolution was launched, a youth born in the year of liberation, 1949, would have been just seventeen years old.

As the Communist Revolution had been the definitive event of their parents' generation, so the Cultural Revolution was to become the event that politically defined the Mao Generation. China's first revolutionary successors came of age in that tremendous upheaval and the events of those years caused many to re-examine their commitment to the political ideals they had learned in school. Because of its central importance to the generation, we cover the Cultural Revolution here in some detail.

The First Phase: The Red Guards

The involvement of China's young people in what was to become the Cultural Revolution began in the early spring of 1966, when Mao asked students in the cities to participate in a campaign he was launching against some of his party critics.* The task he gave them was to write wall posters defending his political line. The students

* The first target of the campaign was Wu Han, then the vice mayor of Beijing. Wu Han had written a play in 1961 about an imperial governor in the Ming Dynasty who had been unfairly dismissed by the emperor. The play was widely interpreted as an attack on Mao for his having dismissed the defense minister Peng Dehuai in the late 1950's because he had criticized Mao's Great Leap Forward policies. In November of 1965, Mao commissioned Yao Wenyuan to write a critical attack on Wu Han's play, but had great difficulty getting the article published in party-controlled newspapers.

responded enthusiastically, forming poster-making groups that plastered the city walls with their handiwork.

In June, the campaign took a new turn as Mao hailed a wall-poster attacking the Beijing University administration. The children of party cadres in other major cities, who heard about the event, read Mao's endorsement of the poster as a sign to begin a general attack on all teachers and school authorities. Eager to show their revolutionary initiative, these red-class students began to criticize their teachers, accusing them of slighting politics and of placing too much emphasis on academic achievement.

The red-class students charged their teachers with having reinforced pre-liberation class divisions and with not showing the proper class concern toward the children of cadres, workers, and peasants. Encouraged by the schools' party committees, who hoped thereby to divert attention from themselves, the students intensified their "class-line" charges.

At this stage in the campaign, Mao supported the class-line arguments of the red-class students. At their request, he suspended all university entrance examinations and replaced them with new admissions criteria stressing class background.

At the same time that Mao was instigating the student campaign at the mass level, he was also seeking to tip the balance of political forces at the highest levels of government in order to redirect the attack against his primary target: top party "reactionaries." With the support of the army, Mao reorganized the Beijing Party Committee, the Propaganda Department, and the Ministry of Culture, placing them under the control of a group of loyal Maoists—the "Cultural Revolution Small Group,"—headed by his wife Jiang Qing and three party leaders from Shanghai (these four individuals would later be dubbed the "Gang of Four"). Mao's action effectively transferred control of the national organs of communication from the party to Mao and his supporters.[10]

In response to this step, the party sent work teams of party cadres to the schools to guide the student campaign. The work teams, under the national direction of Liu Shaoqi, represented the party's attempt to make an outward show of cooperating with Mao, while actually making sure that the campaign stayed on the class-line track. So long as the labels progressive and reactionary described one's class status and not one's politics, party cadres, as one of the five red-classes, were safe from attack.[11]

It was under the direction of the work teams that the students began to focus their attack on the older bad-class teachers and to employ systematic violence. Often one of the first steps taken by the

work teams was to release the official dossiers of the teachers to the students, giving them access to their instructors' political histories. Confronted with information that often identified their teachers as former Guomindang members, political "rightists" who had participated in the (now illegitimate) Hundred Flowers Campaign, and other types of "dangerous elements," the students began to look on these bad-class teachers as enemies of the people and therefore no longer worthy or deserving of personal respect. Students subjected these "ghosts and demons" and "stinking intellectuals" to bouts of hard labor and abusive struggle meetings. At some of the schools, the targeted teachers were jailed in classrooms converted for this purpose by the work teams. Often, it was only the red-class cadres' children who were allowed the glorious task of meting out such punishments.

By the end of July, the red-class students had firmly positioned themselves as the leaders of the student campaign. In early August, high-level cadres' children at several senior middle schools in Beijing began forming their own youth groups, to which only young people of pure class origin might belong. They called their groups the Red Guards. As soon as they received word of this development, high-level-cadre youth in other cities began forming their own Red Guard organizations.

Mobilization of the Student Masses

As the first Red Guards were forming their organizations in Beijing, Mao, realizing the party had been deliberately diverting the student campaign away from an examination of party excesses, ordered the withdrawal of the work teams from the schools. He then initiated a series of measures designed to simultaneously mobilize the students and weaken the control of the party.[12]

One of his first steps was to set forth a sixteen-point program for the Cultural Revolution that defined the principal purpose of the campaign as the overthrow of "those power holders in the party who are taking the capitalist road." The document identified a second objective as the destruction of the "four olds": the "old ideas, culture, customs, and habits of the exploiting classes," which the bourgeoisie, though overthrown, were still "trying to use . . . to corrupt the masses, capture their minds, and endeavor to stage a comeback." Previous rectification campaigns had relied on the party to reform itself, but in the Cultural Revolution, Mao called on the masses to take the lead. The Sixteen Points directive declared that the liberation of the masses could be accomplished only by the masses, and Mao desig-

nated the Red Guards—a mass organization—as the new vanguard in place of the party.

On August 18, ten days after the promulgation of the Sixteen Points as the charter of the Cultural Revolution, Mao reviewed a mass rally of hundreds of thousands of Red Guards in Beijing's Tiananmen Square and was photographed donning a Red Guard armband presented to him by the daughter of a high-level cadre. With that symbolic gesture, Mao publicly sanctioned the Red Guards' vanguard role and established his own role as their "Supreme Commander."

Further emboldening the students were the actions of the official press, which had been under the control of the Cultural Revolution Small Group since June. Under this group, a radicalized version of Mao Zedong Thought was being spread. Mao's thinking had always stressed contradictions, maintaining that socialist transformation required both democracy and centralism, enthusiasm and discipline, destruction and construction, change and order. The new Mao Zedong Thought, however, by which the young people were to judge the correctness of their actions, emphasized the disruptive, decentralizing elements of these pairs: democracy, enthusiasm, change, and destruction. The new radicalized thought, and Mao's slogan "It is justified to rebel" gave the young people almost unlimited political freedom.[13]

The Red Guards were now allowed free travel on the nation's railways so that they could meet Red Guards from other parts of the country to "exchange revolutionary experiences" and attend rallies in the capital to hear Mao. Mao encouraged them to bring their complaints directly to him in Beijing or to write to him, postage-free. In this way, Mao established a line of communication between himself and the masses that bypassed the party; in effect, he took over the party's leadership role.

The Red Terror and the Movement to Destroy the Four Olds

Despite Mao's attempts to refocus the campaign, the Red Guards, whose parents for the most part were party cadres, ignored the Sixteen Points directive to root out capitalist-roaders in the party and continued to focus on the reactionary classes. With Mao's endorsement of their red-class organization, they began turning on their classmates from ordinary- and bad-class families, as well as continuing their attacks on their bad-class teachers. During this phase of the campaign, which the Red Guards themselves titled the Red Terror,

the Red Guards subjected these students to humiliating struggle meetings, and sometimes, to physical abuse.

Towards the end of August, the Red Terror merged with the Destroy-the-Four-Olds movement, the latter referring to Mao's Sixteen Point directive to destroy the "old ideas, customs, culture and habits of the exploiting classes." In this new phase of the student campaign, anything old or foreign was considered reactionary and targeted for destruction: Confucian texts, recordings of Beethoven, Buddhist relics, translations of Shakespeare, traditional art, even Western-style furnishings and clothing. The Destroy-the-Four-Olds movement took the campaign out of the schools and into the streets. Bands of Red Guards roamed the countryside, vandalizing museums, knocking down old temples, ransacking bad-class homes to confiscate revisionist literature.[14] They were living up to the original Red Guard manifesto, in which they had vowed to "turn the old world upside down, smash it to pieces, pulverize it, create chaos and make a tremendous mess, the bigger the better."[15]

The Rise of the Rebels

Since the beginning of the campaign, the situation of the ordinary- and bad-class students had been difficult. When the party work teams had first entered the schools most of the ordinary- and bad-class students had joined in the attack on the bad-class teachers in order to prove their "progressive" class stand; some, under pressure from the red-class students, had even denounced their own parents. But because of their class status, they were never considered for any leadership role in the Cultural Revolution and, when admission to the universities became solely dependent on class standing, they were, in effect, denied the opportunity to continue their education by attending a university. Finally, during the Red Terror, the ordinary- and bad-class students became themselves the target of attack.

In the fall of 1966, however, having apparently decided that the activities of the Red Guards were no longer leading the Cultural Revolution in the right direction, Mao ended the reign of the red-class students by denouncing the class-line theory of redness as counterrevolutionary. By doing this, he shifted his support away from the cadres' children and opened the way for the ordinary- and bad-class students to take over the campaign and redirect the attack against the party. Immediately, ordinary- and bad-class students in Beijing began forming their own Red Guard units. In October, Mao closed the schools to allow students to engage in the revolution fulltime, and by the winter of 1966–67, the Rebel Red Guards (as they called them-