# Political generations: memories and perceptions of the Chinese Communist Party-State since 1949

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# Abstract

In this dissertation, I examine the three political generations that took shape during the rapid social changes and historical transformations in China since the mid 20th century. Drawing on Mannheim's social-historical definition of generation, I identify these generations by the three major transformative events/processes each experienced during late adolescence and early adulthood: the founding of the PRC in 1949, the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, and the Tiananmen Crackdown in 1989. I address two research questions: how have the historical events and the Party-state shaped the life trajectories and generational habitus of each political generation, and how the concept of "political generations" can help analyze distinct views and narratives about "*Guo Jia*," the state, and perceptions of state legitimacy.

To answer these questions, I rely on two data sources: historical archives of official documents and 56 in-depth interviews in Beijing across the three political generations. I adopt an interpretive approach and use textual analysis to provide the historical contexts of the formation of political generations and their explicit views and implicit beliefs towards their past lived experiences and the Party-state.

In general, I find that the historical events that happened during each generation's formative years had a relatively more prominent and lasting impact on their moral values and worldviews, including their political and emotional engagement with the state and their perceptions and expectations of state legitimacy. The generation of the "Liberation" benefited from the educational and job opportunities provided by the newly established Party-state and embraced the construction of a socialist "New China," but their expectation of a stable and prosperous life was undermined during the Great Famine and the Cultural Revolution. The generation of the "Cultural Revolution" had a sense of ownership towards the Party-state and were first mobilized by Mao Zedong to

overthrow the newly established bureaucratic system and then forced into different life trajectories during the Rustication movement. The majority of this generation was deeply influenced by the personality cult of Mao and the "great democracy" of the Cultural Revolution and expected a parent-children relationship between the Party-state and the individuals. The generation of the "Tiananmen," however, matured during the "New Enlightenment" era in the 1980s and gradually lost their close relationship with the Party-state during the Tiananmen Crackdown in 1989 and intensive marketization and privatization in the 1990s. Their ideal relationship with the Party-state was to be treated fairly as citizens with rights being respected by the Party-state.

In addition to inter-generational transformations, I also lay out intra-generational specificities. As Mannheim argued, people from the same political generation often have different responses to the same historical events or destinies, which separate them into different generation units and endow them with somewhat different views towards the Party-state.

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# Chapter1

# Introduction

In February 1949, a 16-year-old boy, Simian, who was from a poor village of Hebei Province. signed up to join the People's Liberation Army of the Communist Party as he was constantly starving at home, not to mention not having a solid education. The ongoing civil war between the Communist Party (CCP) and the Nationalist Party (KMT) was about to finish, and he made his bold decision to join the army at such a young age to yearn for a better future, which turned out to be a success. The army not only provided him food but also enrolled him in night school to study from the elementary level when he was not on duty. He soon came to Beijing following the CCP's peaceful takeover and later became a state cadre in the new regime, joining the Party in 1953. Simian's legendary journey from a poor uneducated rural boy to a prestigious state cadre was only possible because of the drastic social changes and the regime transition. He was very grateful for the CCP and referred to joining the party as "having a home." As a loyal party member, he directly said that "all what I have now is given by the Party," and "I had no other thoughts but to follow the Party. I would do whatever the Party asked me to do."

Different from Simian's journey from the village to the city, Mengyun was born in Beijing one year after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Coming from an intellectual family with her father being both a professor and a party-member, she had received a good education and enjoyed a carefree childhood. However, her promising and smooth life trajectory was suddenly interrupted by the Cultural Revolution launched in 1966, when she had just graduated from middle school and could no longer go to high school. After the first three years of the frenetic Red Guard Movement and social chaos, millions of young middle- and high-school graduates were sent to remote villages and state farms to be "re-educated" by the poor peasants which was called the Rustication Movement. Mengyun was one of those sent to a state farm in "Beidahuang" (the Great Northern Wilderness) in Northeast China in 1968, and she became a peasant doing hard manual labor on the farmland with no expectation of coming back. After years of hard work on the farm, she finally returned to Beijing in 1973 with the excuse of sickness and became an unregistered "black" person dependent on her parents for two years. Only after the end of

the Cultural Revolution and the resumption of the college entrance exam in 1977, could Mengyun continue her pursuit of higher education and bring her life trajectory back to its normal track to a certain extent. Mengyun's tortuous journey from the city to the state farm and back to the city was not uncommon for people of her age whose life trajectories were interrupted and twisted by the Cultural Revolution and the Rustication. Unlike her father, Mengyun didn't join the Party. Her sufferings during the Cultural Revolution resulted in her deeper reflections on the Party-state. She sincerely supported the Reform and Opening of China and said it was irresponsible to be nostalgic to Mao's era while ignoring the poverty, starvation, political persecutions and sufferings it had inflicted.

Different from Mengyun whose life trajectory was interrupted by social movements, Jinghui, who was born in 1964 in a suburb near Beijing, was too young to have any traumatic memories of the fierce struggles during the Cultural Revolution. When he reached his teenage years, the Reform and Opening started, and he was able to take the college entrance exam right after high school and was admitted to a vocational school in 1981. Moreover, he had no worries about a job after graduation since all college and vocational school graduates were guaranteed job assignments by the state at that time. He was assigned to a big state-owned factory in Beijing after graduation and worked as a low-rank cadre in the factory. The socialist *Danwei* (work unit) system not only provided him a job but also healthcare, housing, and other welfare benefits. Holding an "iron rice bowl" in hand, he was prepared to work there for his lifetime. However, this "iron rice bowl" was no longer stable with the deepening of the economic reform in the late 1990s. When the factory was about to go bankrupt, he took the initiative to leave the state-owned factory and start his own business in the private sector selling bedding. Although he had made some money in the market, he felt highly insecure in the private economy. After being refused multiple times by the state banks to get a loan, he was deeply disappointed by the lack of state support for small- and medium-size private companies and the low credibility of the government. As a private business owner, Jinghui felt powerless in front of the state-owned enterprises and the government and pessimistic about the private economy in the future. He even started to miss the good old days of the socialist *danwei* (work unit) system when the Party-state was still an amiable caregiver.

Simian, Mengyun and Jinghui, born at very different historical times, have distinctive personal biographies. However, their biographies are not just personal choices and idiosyncratic experiences,

but representative of their generation who have experienced similar historic turning points and social movements. In other words, their life trajectories are deeply shaped by crucial historical events and the changing roles of the Party-state. As Mills(1959) has insightfully pointed out, personal biographies can only be understood and interpreted against the broader historic backgrounds and social contexts. Since the mid-20th century, China has experienced a regime transition, the socialist construction, and the Cultural Revolution as well as the Reform and Opening in a relatively short period of time. This quick "tempo of social change" gives rise to three political generations represented by Simian, Mengyun and Jinghui respectively, who have distinctive historic experiences and collective memories. Based on their different relationships with the Party-state, they have also developed somewhat different political views toward the Party and the state. For example, Simian's strong emotional attachment and gratefulness to the Party-state was no longer an issue for Mengyun, whose political enthusiasm and idealism were mostly disillusioned by the sufferings on the state farm. Different from Simian and Mengyun, Jinghui took a journey from the state-controlled socialist system to a private sector lacking in state protection. His disappointment and distrust toward the Party-state and nostalgia toward the "good old days" are also popular among his generation whose security and certainty of life were smashed into pieces by the economic reform in the 1990s. Therefore, in China, generational difference is not just a buzzword on media but a real cultural phenomenon which requires serious academic attention and a useful thinking tool to capture social transformations and classify different political views and perceptions.

In addition, since the Chinese Communist Party-State has played a predominant role in transforming the social structures and shaping people's life trajectories, the word 'state' (which is called "*Guo Jia*"[1] in Chinese), is constantly brought up by people from different generations in

[1] "*Guo*" refers to the political state, and "*Jia*" refers to the family. Therefore, "*Guo Jia*" as a word which actually reflects the Confucian idea of the homology of the patriarchal structure between the state and the family in imperial China (Rowe 1998).

their narratives about the past and present. Sometimes, it is used as an exchangeable word with the government, the party-state, the public or the CCP which is powerful to shape the social structure, allocate various resources and direct people's life trajectories. Other times, it is adopted to refer to a cultural community or a nation-state to anchor their national identity and to contrast with other countries in the world. Therefore, "*Guo Jia*" covers a wide variety of meanings and connotations in different contexts for different generations. For instance, Shuying (1958, female), who grew up during the Cultural Revolution, vividly put it like this: "When I say society, I mean the public, the government, the state. From my impression, whenever you go out of your family, it is the state (*Guo Jia*)…So our generation has only two ideas in mind, one is the family, the other is the state (*Guo Jia*) led by the Communist Party." Shuying's confounding of the state with the society, the government, the public and the party-state was in fact a product of Mao's era with the Party-state encompassing everything in public and leaving no separate space for the society. However, with the Reform and Opening policy in the post-Mao era and the transformation of a totalitarian state to an authoritarian state, the word "*Guo Jia*" is more likely to be referred by people to contrast with other countries on an international platform. Therefore, generational studies are not only about collective memories or generationally differentiated life trajectories, dispositions and values, but also narratives and perceptions about the state as well as individual relationships with the state.

In sum, in a country such as China which has a strong state presence in almost every domain of social life, personal biographies and generational memories are more comprehensible when being related to the transforming role of the state. Moreover, different political generations are useful thinking tools to capture changing relationships between the state and the individual and classify different views toward the state. Therefore, in this research, I ask the following question: how the quick tempo of social changes in the mid and late 20$^{th}$ century in China gave rise to political generations which had developed distinctive moral values and political views. More specifically, how the views and narratives about "*Guo Jia*," the state, were differentiated based on historically

formed political generations. This study not only provides an in-depth historical description of each political generation formed by crucial historic turning points and social movements, but also uses political generation as an interpretive tool to account for different views toward the state. It helps "bring the state back in" not from a top-down perspective which views the state as an organizational apparatus or autonomous actor (Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985), but from a bottom-up perspective which pays attention to how the state is narrated and experienced by people from different generations in discussing their lived experiences, memories and identities, as well as their relationships with the state.

# 1. State of knowledge

In order to answer the above questions, I draw mainly on sociological studies of generation derived from Mannheim (1952), the "idea of the state" conceptualized by Abrams (1988), as well as the theoretical traditions of hegemony and legitimacy of the state derived from Gramsci (1971) and Weber (1978) respectively.

## 1.1 Generation

### *1.1.1 Defining generation and generation units*

Karl Mannheim's (1952) seminal work "The Problem of Generations" (originally published in 1928 in German) laid the foundation for sociological studies of generation. Mannheim's theory of generation was embedded in his broader concern of the sociology of knowledge. He proposed the concept of generation as an addition to Marx's theory of class to illuminate the "existential basis of knowledge" (Edmunds and Turner 2002). Therefore, his concept of generation is analogous to the concept of class in that "both endow the individual sharing in them with a common location in the social and historical process" (Mannheim 1952: 291). For class, this common location is based on an individual's position in economic and political structure whereas for generation, the location

is based on shared social and historic experiences of people with similar birth years (Mannheim 1952: 290-91).

Mannheim further differentiates "generation location," "generation as actuality" and "generation unit" in his theory to delineate the social historical process of generational formation (Pilcher 1994). *Generation location* is broadly shared by people born around the same year and also within the same historical and cultural region which endow them the common "handicaps and privileges" inherent in time and space (Mannheim 1952: 303). While generation location only requires co-presence in the same historical time and space, *generation as actuality* forms a concrete bond between members of a generation who consciously identify themselves as a generation. If generation location represents the generation *in itself*, then generation as actuality indicates the generation *for itself* (an analogy to Marx's class theory). Mannheim further develops the idea of "generation entelechy" to indicate the common destiny shared by members of an actualized generation (Bolin 2014; Mannheim 1952: 303-304). Therefore, the generation location only has "potential significance," since not every generation location or age group will produce conscious generational identities with distinctive patterns of lifestyle or influential ideas to interpret the world. Whether a generation can realize the potentialities and become a generation as actuality depends on the "tempo of social change", or the "trigger action of the social and cultural process" (Mannheim 1952: 290, 310; Pilcher 1994). Increased pace of social change, transformative events or collective traumatic experiences can facilitate the actualization of generation and develop a conscious generational identity with a common destiny (Mannheim 1952: 303-304; Pilcher 1994; Spitzer 1973). For instance, the Red Guard Movement at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution had engaged millions of students and shaped the generation of the "Red Guards" in China who had developed a conscious generational identity based on their similar historical experiences at the frenetic era (Xu, B. 2016; Yang, G. 2016). However, generation as actuality only captures inter-generational transitions; Mannheim has developed another concept of g*eneration unit* to further

differentiate intra-generational differences. Generation unit is even more concretely bonded between members who not only participate in the common destiny but also share similar responses and views to the destiny. Therefore, the actual generation can contain different generation units based on specific ways "they work up the material of their common experiences" (Mannheim 1952: 303-304; Hart-Brinson 2018: 16-7). For example, for those teenagers who had experienced the Red Guard Movement, those who came from "red" class backgrounds, such as poor and lower-middle peasants, revolutionary soldiers and revolutionary cadres had very different memories and views of the movement compared to those who came from "black" class origins such as landlords, rich peasants, capitalists, etc. While they were both included in the generation of the Cultural Revolution, or generation of the Red Guards, they definitely belonged to different generation units (Xu, B. 2016; Yang, G. 2016). Instead of assuming homogeneity of each generation, generation units provide a helpful perspective to capture intra-generational differences.

Therefore, Mannheim's conceptualizations of generation and generation units are contextualized in particular historical time and space, and are able to facilitate not only the study of the inter-generational transformations resulting from the tempo of social change but also the intra-generational differences and specificities. As for the formation of generation and generation units, Mannheim stresses on the crucial historical experiences during one's formative years.

*1.1.2 Generation Imprinting: Formative years of generation*

Mannheim has argued that "early impressions tend to coalesce into a natural view of the world. All later experiences then tend to receive their meaning from this original set, whether they appear as that set's verification and fulfillment or as its negation and antithesis" (Mannheim 1952: 298). Therefore, experiences of events and formation of historical consciousness are dialectic processes rather than simple chronological accumulations. The early impressions of the world are the starting point of this process which are directly related to the "fresh contact" during the "formative years"

of individuals; that is, the period of adolescence to early adulthood (around 17 to 25 years old). It is a period when the youth start questioning and reflecting on the world and a critical time for value destabilization and construction. That's why Mannheim argues the youth is more "up-to date" and closer to the "present" problem (Mannheim 1952: 300-301). Experiences and memories as well as world views and values of this formative period tend to have long-term impact which may orient the meaning of later life experiences. Thus, the formative years of individuals play a key role to characterize the views and styles of a new generation.

Many scholars have developed a "generational imprinting" hypothesis based on this idea. Life course studies, although they examine lifelong developmental processes enabled and constrained by certain historical time and space, specifically emphasize the importance of early life experiences during the "formative years" which tend to influence later life choices and values (Elder 1974; Macmillan and Copher 2005; Mortimer and Shanahan 2003). Schuman and his colleagues have applied "critical year hypothesis" to the study of generational effects on social memories over the past 50 to 80 years in the US and eight other countries including Russia, Germany, Japan, Israel and so forth (Corning and Schuman 2015; Schuman and Corning 2000; Schuman and Scott 1989; Schuman and Corning 2012). They argue that the events and memories of this critical period (adolescence and early adulthood) are more likely to be mentioned and regarded as important by individuals than events of other periods indicating a generational effect; critical historical events influence different generation cohorts differently based on particular life stages; and later life experiences can be better understood by taking into account youth memories and experiences (Corning and Schuman 2015; Schuman and Scott 1989; Schuman and Corning 2012). Following this tradition, Larson and Lizardo (2007) test the "generation imprinting" hypothesis on memories of Che Guevara and argue that other social forces such as cultural industry and left-wing social movements may complicate the process of remembering and generational imprinting. Besides, they

also find not all members in a generation remember Che similarly; some specific "generation units" who identify with the political left are more likely to recall him (Larson and Lizardo 2007).

Although the idea of generational imprinting has shed light on the formation of generation by focusing on the enduring influence of historical events and memories of early life on individuals, it is not clear how these historical events and collective experiences actually shape the values and dispositions of each generation and how these values persist or change in their later life. In order to address these problems, I now turn to the concepts of generational habitus and political generation.

*1.1.3 Political Generation: generational habitus and social change*

As stated before, the formation of a generation largely relies on experiences and memories of crucial historical events during one's adolescence and early adulthood and what those experiences and memories have shaped is termed by scholars as the "*generational habitus*" (Eyerman and Turner 1998: 93). Habitus for Bourdieu is defined as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures; that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representation" (Bourdieu 1990: 53). Borrowing from the concept of habitus, scholars develop the concept of "generational habitus," meaning the shared culture, dispositions, emotions, attitudes, preferences, and embodied practices of particular generations (Eyerman and Turner 1998: 93). The shared habitus of a generation implies generational codes of possible and proper conducts such as self-presentation, speaking, clothing and body language etc. (Kansteiner 2014: 117). Bourdieu has examined the generational competition and succession of artists in his work by referring to the commonly shared habitus of an artistic generation (Bourdieu 1993). He has also theorized generational conflicts not as simply differences of natural properties between age groups but of habitus produced by "conditions of existence which, in imposing different definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable,

cause one group to experience as natural or reasonable practices or aspirations which another group finds unthinkable or scandalous, and vice versa" (Bourdieu 1977: 78). While an individual's habitus is cultivated based on his/her positions in the social structure, the influences of family upbringing, education, and early life experiences (particularly the formative years of adolescence and early adulthood), the generational habitus develops based on historical time and locations, crucial historical events and social changes as well as collective experiences and memories of these historical events during the "formative years" of a generation. Like the individual's habitus, generational habitus is also relatively stable and has a lasting impact on the social and political orientations of a generation.

Therefore, based on the concept of generational habitus, scholars further develop the concept of political generation which is generally defined in two ways: one refers to the age groups which are mobilized for political changes and social movements such as the Nazi generation of Europe, the generation of 1968, and the "Red Guard" generation of Cultural Revolution in China, etc; the other refers to the age groups who have experienced critical historical events which have lasting impacts on their lives such as the "lost generation" of 1914, generation of the Great Depression, generation of Vietnam War, etc. (Braungart, R. G. 2013). The former definition implies active historical agency of a generation which produces history and changes the political and social status quo while the latter exists mainly on the basis of distinctive culture and memory, not necessarily involving active political actions (Kansteiner 2014). Therefore, some scholars identify the active and passive political generations in history who play different roles in social transformations (Edmunds and Turner 2002; Turner 2002). However, no matter whether political generations are actively promoting the historical change or passively involved in the historical events, they have developed distinctive generational habitus through rapid social changes and are influential to social reforms and revolutions, nation building, inter- and intra-generational conflicts, youth movement

and youth culture (e.g., Braungart, M. M. and Braungart 1991; Eisenstadt 1956; Henseler 2012; Whittier 1997; Wohl 1979).

In sum, political generation and generational habitus are useful thinking tools to conceptualize social changes. Political generations differentiate themselves based on distinctive generational habitus which is formed through shared experiences and memories of crucial historical events. Although some scholars have criticized Bourdieu's concept of habitus as better to address social reproduction than change (King 2000), it is the relative stability of habitus within each generation which enables the formation of different political generations which may play active or passive roles in social changes. However, to fully address the generational differences on habitus, it is necessary to view habitus in relation with the field; that is, the social structures give rise to habitus (Grenfell 2014: 60). There are different types of fields in Bourdieu's empirical studies - the field of economy, education, art, bureaucracy, politics, as well as the field of power consists of multiple social fields indicated above (Grenfell 2014: 70-71). Bourdieu argues that although the fields structure the habitus and the habitus contributes and constructs the fields, they evolve with their own logic and history, and do not match each other perfectly (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 127). Rapid social changes and crises tend to result in mismatches between fields and habitus, which are defined by Bourdieu as the "hysteresis effect," indicating the habitus lagging behind the objective conditions which gave rise to it (Bourdieu 1990: 59). Therefore, inter-generational differences on habitus in fact reflect rapid historical changes of social structures and political environments that are highly likely to lead to a hysteresis effect for older generations. Furthermore, the mismatches between generational habitus and the field may arouse power struggles in relevant social fields and enable further social transformations.

*1.1.4 Generational studies in China*

The studies of generation in China have focused on generations of art and literature (Clark 2005), generations of the Communist leaderships (Finkelstein and Kivlehan 2003), or particular generations formed by tremendous historical changes and social movements. For example, many scholars have studied the life and memories of the "Red Guard generation" and the "Sent-down youths (*zhiqing*) generation" of the Cultural Revolution (e.g., Chan, A. 1985; Xu, B. 2016; Yang, G. 2016; Zhou and Hou 1999). The sent-down youth generation is termed by some scholars as the "lost generation" due to their early experiences of being sent down to villages at teenage years during the Cultural Revolution and their later experiences of "Xiagang" ("stepping down from the position," which is regarded as "hidden unemployment") during the market reform era (Bonnin 2013; Hung and Chiu 2003). Cherrington (1997) has studied the young intellectuals of China who matured in the 1980s and called them the "Deng's generation." Scholars have recently explored the narratives and identities of the "post-80 generation" in urban China who have grown up during the economic reform and booming era of the 1990s and the 2000s and been deeply influenced by the One Child Policy (e.g., Constantin 2013; Sabet 2011).

Besides the studies which mainly focus on one particular generation in history, there are also some studies which delineate inter-generational differences. Many scholars have examined the first and second generations of rural migrant workers in China on their differences of life chances, self-expectations, identity constructions and so forth, with a particular interest on the adaptation and frustration of the second generation toward the globalized economy. (e.g., Chan, J. and Pun 2010; Ngai and Lu 2010; Pun and Chan 2013; Xiaomin and Yi 2008). Another study from Jennings and Zhang (2005) replicates Schuman and his colleagues' studies in the US and other countries (Schuman and Corning 2000; Schuman and Scott 1989), and examines the rural villagers and cadres' collective memories based on their self-reports about the most important events since 1945. They find that the generational effects; that is, the lasting impact of events happening during the

formative years of adolescence and early adulthood, are particularly significant for the villagers while the cadres are more likely to bring up state- and party-related occurrences. At the same time, the prolonged experience of the Reform and Opening made generational differences less prominent for memories of this Reform era (Jennings and Zhang 2005).

Although most of these studies adopt Mannheim's historical-based conceptualization of generation, when they focus only on one particular generation in detail, generation is not used to account for inter-generational differences on values and dispositions, but examined as an object of certain social-historical contexts. In this case, intra-generational differences and categorizations are more salient than inter-generational transformations. When they study two or more generations, the inter-generational differences are associated with social transformations and changing state policies to a certain extent, but the importance of political generations in interpreting different views of the state and perceptions of the state legitimacy has not been adequately emphasized and systematically analyzed. Therefore, before delving into the empirical study of political generations and their views of the state in China, I first lay out the theoretical traditions of the state and legitimacy.

## 1.2 State and legitimacy

### *1.2.1 Visions of the state*

Derived from the Marxist or Weberian traditions of the state theory, many political scientists and sociologists have engaged in debates about whether the state is a material entity or an ideological illusion (Abrams 1988; Althusser 2006[1971]; Miliband 1969; Poulantzas 1975). Abrams (1988) has pointed out the difficulty of studying the state lies in the fact that "the state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is" (82). However, unlike earlier scholars who proposed to abandon the ambiguous concept of the "state" altogether and replace it with "political system" (e.g., Almond, Cole, and Macridis 1955; Easton 1953: 110-12), or later scholars who urged to

"bring the state back in" and viewed the state as an autonomous actor or subjective institution of decision-making (e.g., Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985; Skocpol 1979), Abrams (1988) suggested to take the "idea of the state" seriously and examine the ideological power of the state to legitimate domination (75). As Nettl (1968) has insightfully put it, "the state is essentially a sociocultural phenomenon" whose existence relies on its population's "cultural disposition" to recognize "the conceptual existence of a state" (565-566). The most important part of this "cultural disposition" refers to the extent that "notions of state have become incorporated in the thinking and actions of individual citizens" (Nettl 1968: 566, 577). That is to say, no matter whether the state is a real entity or a mere illusion at a theoretical or ontological level, if the idea of the state exists as a powerful concept among a population in the society, it should be examined seriously by scholars to reveal how this concept has taken shape through public discourses, organizational arrangements and historical transformations. This is what Mitchell (1991) termed as the "state effect," which stresses the mundane historical processes and practices which make the "structural effect" of the state appear as real (94).

Many anthropologists and cultural sociologists have taken this trajectory and examined the discursive construction and symbolic representations of the state within a certain population. Aretxaga (2003) directly argues that the state cannot exist without a "subjective component," which refers to "performances and public representations of statehood, and discourses, narratives, and fantasies generated around the idea of the state" (395). Thus, she differentiates the "state form" from its content, with the former referring to "a powerful state devoid of content", whereas the latter indicates the ideas, images, and ideologies of the state which is not predetermined or taken for granted, but the very object of inquiry (395). In order to research the specific contents of the state, earlier scholars focus more on the spectacles or public rituals and ceremonies that symbolically represent and constitute the state (Berezin 1999; Geertz 1980) as well as the epochal shifts of popular culture and cultural institutions which transform the state and patterns of

relationships between the state and society (Hall 2006[1986]; Steinmetz 1999). However, for recent anthropologists, those studies above have failed to illustrate the effect of the state in mundane life and quotidian practices (Gupta 1995). Therefore, some of them resort to the sites of everyday life to study the discursive production and reproduction of the state through routine encounters with local bureaucrats and state officials as well as the representation and imagination of the state through public culture on media (Auyero 2012; Gupta 1995; 2005; Navaro-Yashin 2002; Yang, S. 2005). This bottom-up perspective successfully elaborates ordinary people, especially some poor and marginalized people's imagination and reproduction of the state and domination through their daily discussions of corruption, their submissive waiting of bureaucratic processes of granting welfare benefits or acquiring ID cards, as well as their routine activities of watching TV or reading the newspaper (Auyero 2012; Gupta 1995; Yang, S. 2005).

Nevertheless, focusing only on concrete settings and everyday practices has its own problems. First, it is sometimes too specific and limited to daily interactions with state agencies and media. Although some views of the state did come from these interactions, people usually adopt the concept of the state at an abstract level with strong moral connotations beyond everyday practices (Xiang 2010). Ordinary people may not be clear about what the state or bureaucrats have done specifically but they have developed an idea of what a state should do and how people should face the state based on their lived experiences (Xiang 2010). In addition, the daily interactions of ordinary people with the state bureaucrats usually demonstrate the banality of state power and the reproduction of domination passively which downplays people's active resistance and anger toward the state. Scott's (1985; 1990) studies of "weapons of the weak" and the "hidden transcripts" of subordinate groups are exceptions in which he has vividly demonstrated how subordinate groups engaged in "everyday forms of resistance" through "foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander and sabotage" (1985: 16) and developed backstage discourses and critiques of the dominant (1990: 12). Aside from the "everyday forms of

resistance" which are specific, informal and diffused, Yu (2009) has described the "abstract angry" of Chinese people toward the state and society when social realities do not match with their moral views of the state. It means people are not just dissatisfied about a particular social incident or violation of personal interests and rights but develop a form of abstract grievance or resentment against the state due to the long-term accumulated inequality and injustice (Yu 2009). A little of this abstract angry is expressed openly when some unjust social incidents happen but most of it is hidden underground. If it is accumulated to a certain extent, it may erupt as a volcano and lead to social revolution (Yu 2009). Lastly, ethnographic studies of daily bureaucratic practices and public discourses are usually limited to particular time and space and lacking depiction of a historical transformation of the idea of the state over time. For example, some scholars describe the Chinese state during Mao's era as a "totalitarian state," "mobilizing state" or "theatrical state," during which people were completely dependent on the state to get living resources and mobilized to participate in consecutive social movements (e.g., Xiang 2010; Zhang, L. 1998). As for the post-Mao era, the state is labeled by scholars as a "post-totalitarian or authoritarian state," "rational state," "neo-traditionalist state," etc when the state loosened the social control to some extent and brought it back to the track of bureaucratization and economic development (e.g., Oi 1995; Walder 1988; Xiang 2010; Zheng 2004). Even though the above conceptualizations of the state come from scholars' theorizations of the Chinese state rather than directly deriving from the ideas of the state of ordinary people, it seems reasonable to assume that people's ideas and views toward the state also have a historical transformation in China due to the drastic social changes over the past 80 years.

Therefore, in order to demonstrate a historical transformation of the ideas or visions of the state while reserving the merit of the bottom-up perspective, I examine the life trajectories, collective memories, and public discourses of ordinary people from different political generations in China which take shape in the drastic social changes in the late 20$^{th}$ century. As I have argued before, the

Chinese Communist state has played an indispensable role in shaping the life trajectories of different generations in China during the second half of the 20th century so it is tenable to assume different political generations have developed somewhat different moral views toward the state based on their lived experiences and collective memories. Thus, the ideas of the state are differentiated along generational groups and are not always unconsciously reproduced through daily routines but subject to contentions and even public debates. In that case, ordinary people's visions or ideas of the state turn into a problem of the legitimacy of the state.

### *1.2.2 Problem of the State legitimacy*

When Abrams (1988) emphasizes on examining the "idea of the state," he also indicates the idea of the state is an "ideological project" whose first and foremost task is to legitimate subjection and domination which is intolerable and unacceptable if being presented without the mask (122). His arguments hark back to Gramsci's theory of hegemony and the state's role as an "educator" that elicit consent among the dominated and provide moral directions to its population (Gramsci 2006[1971]: 77-78), as well as Weber's (1978) theory of legitimacy which relies on people's subjective belief of the acceptability and justifiability of an authority or domination. Therefore, the problem of the state legitimacy incorporates both the state's legitimation efforts to win over the consent from the population and ordinary people's perception and reception of these efforts.

As Xiang (2010) has argued, ordinary people usually develop a moral view of the state based on their lived experiences which provide a normative perception of a justifiable state and an ideal relationship between the state and the individual. If the social realities depart too far from the moral view of the state of the majorities, the legitimacy of the state would be challenged. However, unlike Xiang's (2010) argument that this abstract and moral view of the state is generally similar among ordinary people in a given society, many scholars have implied the idea of the state is usually distinctive among various social groups of class, gender, race and ethnicity, etc. (e.g., Scott 1990;

Brown 1995; Laitin 1999). Besides the social groups mentioned above, I argue that the most important differentiation of political values and moral views in China appears among the political generations shaped by drastic social changes and historical transformations in the late 20th century. To a certain extent, even the class groups are endogenous to the generational framework because the definition and application of "class" in China since the founding of the Communist state has greatly transformed with the consecutive social revolutions and reforms (e.g., Andreas 2009; Goodman 2014). For instance, the class designation during Mao's era is largely a political and ideological project which created a quasi-caste system that privileged the poor peasants, workers, revolutionary cadres and soldiers and discriminated against the old social elites such as intellectuals, capitalists, landlords, and rich peasants whereas the class status formed in the post-Mao era downplays the political and ideological perspective and revives the traditional economic standards (Goodman 2014). That is to say, for different political generations, the class status is defined and adopted differently which deeply influences and changes the individual's relationship with the state. Therefore, to study ordinary people's views of the state and the problem of state legitimacy in China, it is necessary to incorporate the generational perspective.

Existing literature on state legitimacy in Communist China since 1949 focuses either on the historical transformation of the legitimation efforts of the Party-state or popular support and public opinions of the state, party and government. The first approach usually involves historical analysis of institutional transitions and discursive analysis of official documents and public discourses. For example, many scholars have noticed a decline of the ideological-based legitimacy and a rise of performance-based legitimacy, especially economic performance, during the Reform and Opening era (Laliberté and Lanteigne 2008; Zhao, D. 2004; Zhao, D. 2009; Zhu 2011). Thirty years of high-speed economic growth seems to have saved the Chinese Communist State out of the legitimacy crisis generated in the Tiananmen Crackdown of 1989 and confirms scholars' argument of the "authoritarian resilience" (Nathan 2003; Schubert 2008; Shambaugh 2008). However, scholars

have also pointed out the illusion of constant economic growth is untenable and the extensive mode of economic growth has also generated severe problems such as the rising inequality, social injustice, corruption, and environmental pollution etc. (Shue 2004; Zhao, D. 2009). Therefore, some scholars incorporate the idea of "benevolence" or "good governance" into the performance matrix, examining the state performance of maintaining social stability for economic development, alleviating social inequality, reducing corruptions, increasing bureaucratic efficiency, and implementing of village level elections (Kennedy 2009; Schubert 2008; Schubert 2014; Shue 2004; Tong, Y. 2011; Zhao, D. 2009; Zhu 2011). But this governance-oriented performance is far from stable, not only because of the uncertainties during its implementation, but also because the CCP's attempts to avoid deeper political reforms which may make the above goals unachievable.[2] Due to the dilemma of performance legitimacy, the CCP starts to resort to nationalism or patriotism and Confucian culture since the late 1990s as new sources of legitimacy in the official and public discourses (Barmé 1995; Billioud, Sebastien 2007; Billioud, Sébastien and Thoraval 2007; Gries 2004; Holbig and Gilley 2010). However, in recent years, political ideologies are re-emphasized as an indispensable tool to sustain the party-state's legitimacy (Holbig 2008; 2013; Zeng 2015). The ideologies no longer refer to the Marxist dogma of socialism or communism but stress innovative party theories which are adaptive to changing social contexts combining with more market-friendly and high-tech methods of mass persuasion (Brady 2009; Holbig and Gilley 2010). These studies have elaborated the transitions of legitimation discourses and techniques but not paid enough attention to their influences and receptions among ordinary people except for a few ethnographical studies on village elections and urban community construction (e.g., Min 2007; Schubert 2009).

[2] There are also debates among intellectuals on whether China is exceptional. Some scholars argue for the "China model" which develops the rule of law without liberal democratization whereas others are more skeptical on this issue (see Zhao, S. 2006).

The second approach on popular support of the state, party, and government did adopt the bottom-up perspective to examine ordinary people's perceptions of the state legitimacy but these studies are mostly survey-based public opinion research using World Value Survey, Asian Barometer, and national or local surveys. They have found a relatively higher level of popular support toward the Chinese Communist regime compared to most democratic countries in the world (Chen, J. 2004; Gilley 2006; Gilley 2008; Lewis-Beck, Tang, and Martini 2014; Li, L. 2004) and a declining of trust from the central state to local governments (Chen, J. 2004; Gilley 2008; Li, L. 2004). Although these quantitative studies provide a general picture of public opinions, they are not able to answer the questions of why people hold particular political attitudes and opinions toward the state and where these views come from. Moreover, with limited ranges of indicators and choices in survey questionnaires, these studies can hardly demonstrate the contradictions and ambiguities in personal beliefs and practices relevant to the state. Therefore, I turn to a qualitative study of collective memories and life trajectories of different political generations in China to examine where their views of the state and perceptions of the state legitimacy come from and how they have been transformed within drastic social changes. State legitimacy is not a once-for-all achievement but a continuous process which can be historicized and contextualized with a generational perspective.

In sum, as I have argued in the previous section, political generations and generational habitus are useful thinking tools to capture drastic social changes in China in the late 20$^{th}$ century. Moreover, due to the strong presence of state in shaping the generational habitus and life trajectories of each generation, it is indispensable to examine the historically-shaped ideas of the state and perceptions of state legitimacy during the study of political generations in China. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following questions: 1) How did the quick tempo of social changes in the mid and late 20$^{th}$ century in China give rise to political generations that had developed distinctive generational

habitus? and 2) How are the views and narratives about "*Guo Jia*," the state, and perceptions of state legitimacy differentiated based on historically formed political generations?

## 2. Data and Method

### 2.1 Identify the political generations

In order to answer the research questions above, I first identified the political generations formed since the founding of the Communist state in China. Although mass media and public discourses often use popular tags of post-XXs, such as post-50s and post 60s, to describe each generation, it is problematic to directly use cohort years to identify generations in academic research. Those birth years in decades are arbitrary separations which did not necessarily reflect the "tempo of social changes" or shared experiences of historical events (Mannheim 1952: 290, 310; Pilcher 1994). For example, people born in 1969 and 1970 may not be that different from each other in life trajectories compared to people born in 1952 and 1959 who have experienced changing state policies on rustication and may end up with completely different life trajectories. Therefore, instead of using birth years in decades, this research adopts Mannheim's definition of generation, focusing particularly on crucial social processes and historical events which happened during the "formative years," i.e., late adolescence and early adulthood, of a generation (Mannheim 1952: 300-301). It is a period when the youth start questioning and reflecting on the world and a critical time for value destabilization and construction. The historical events and social changes happening at this critical period would help shape the "generational habitus" which indicated generationally differentiated dispositions, memories, emotions, attitudes, preferences, and embodied practices that have a long-term impact in orienting the meaning of later life experiences (Eyerman and Turner 1998: 93; Kansteiner 2014).

Among the numerous historical events and social changes happening in the mid and late 20$^{th}$ century, I single out three key historical events or transformative periods which have great impacts

on both the generational formations and state legitimacy; that is, the founding of the PRC in 1949, the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989 to the market reform in 1992. Then I identify three political generations who have experienced these transformative periods at their late adolescence and early adulthood and term them as the generation of the "Liberation," the generation of the Cultural Revolution, and the generation of the "Tiananmen." It is a rough differentiation of political generations based on their shared experiences of historical events and social movements. There are definitely more nuanced distinctions within each generation based on their specific responses and choices in those movements and events. Therefore, in the analysis of each political generation, I introduce Mannheim's (1952) idea of the "generation unit" to capture intra-generational differences and complexities. In order to study the life trajectories and collective memories of each political generation, I have conducted 56 in-depth interviews in Beijing across the three generations. I choose Beijing, the capital city, as my field site because it is the political, economic and cultural center of China and also the place where the most important historical events started and developed, especially the events I've chosen to differentiate the political generations. Table 1 shows the number of interviewees within each generation and the gender distributions.

Table1: Political Generations

| Historical events and transformative periods | Generations | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1949-51 End of civil war and the Founding of PRC | Generation of the "Liberation" (Born from 1921-1937)[3] | 8 | 6 | 14 |
| 1966-76 Cultural Revolution and Rustication | Generation of the Cultural Revolution (Born from 1946-1959) | 12 | 10 | 22 |
| 1989-92 Tiananmen Crackdown and resumption of Market Reform | Generation of the "Tiananmen" (Born from 1964-1977) | 9 | 11 | 20 |
| Total | | 29 | 27 | 56 |

[3] The years in the bracket indicate the actual birth years of my interviewees, not the cut-off point for each generation.

It is worth noticing that Beijing had a population of around 22 million in 2017 with people migrant from all over China. This large population in Beijing provides enough diversity for sampling on one hand but makes it necessary to control for some variations to highlight the generational effect on the other. Firstly, there have been many under-educated rural migrant workers coming to Beijing to make a better living since the Reform and Opening policy. Much sociological research on work and labor has examined the experiences and generational transitions of those rural migrant workers (e.g., Chan, J. and Pun 2010; Ngai and Lu 2010; Pun and Chan 2013), but their distinctive rural backgrounds endow very different collective memories and experiences of the past compared to the urban grown-ups. Therefore, in order to control the urban-rural differences, I have left out the rural migrant workers in this project and focused on urban citizens in Beijing. Secondly, there are also a group of super-rich and powerful elites in Beijing. Since they are usually influential in the decision- and policy-making processes, many of their views are reflected through government documents and newspapers. Although it may be interesting to examine the off-stage opinions and power struggles among elites, it directs attention away from the ideas of the state and perceptions of the state legitimacy among ordinary people. Therefore, in order to highlight the effects of generation and the practices and perceptions of ordinary urban citizens, I limited my sample to the current middle- and lower-middle-class residents of Beijing, mainly consisting of people who have an average educational degree to their generation, enjoy an average standard of living and/or identify themselves as middle class.[4] Thirdly, within the middle- and lower-middle class urban residents, the occupational differences (especially those who work for the state or "in the system" (*tizhinei*) and those who work "out of the system" (*tizhiwai*)) may also

[4] Both scholarly studies and mass media have noticed the rapid growth of the middle class in China with the economic development, although they may disagree on how to define middle class (Ravallion 2010; Unger 2006). The rise of middle class also gives rise to research on political attitudes of the Chinese middle class, since many scholars concern about whether the growing middle class will be a major force for democratization in the future (Chen, J. and Lu 2011; Tang 2011; Unger 2006). Most findings indicate the conservative nature of the Chinese middle class who are not necessarily pro-democracy.

interact with the generational effects on the ideas of the state and perceptions of state legitimacy. Moreover, the occupational distribution of each generation is not even. The oldest generation of the "Liberation" was incorporated into the total state system since the mid-1950s and could only work "in the system" as state cadres or state workers while the generation of the Cultural Revolution and the generation of the "Tiananmen" usually worked "in the system" at first and then some of them were voluntarily or forcefully transferred to occupations in private sectors or "out of the system." Therefore, among the oldest generation I have interviewed, 9 of them are state cadres and 5 are state workers, for the generation of the Cultural Revolution, 17 work in the system and 5 work outside the system, and for the generation of the "Tiananmen," 14 work in the system and 7 work outside the system. Lastly, party membership is also a crucial factor which represents a person's political attitudes and values and I included both CCP party members and non-party members in all three generations. The distributions are presented in Table 2.

Table2: Party membership of Political Generations

| Generations | Party Member | Non-Party member | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Generation of the "Liberation" (Born from 1921-1937) | 7 | 7 | 14 |
| Generation of the Cultural Revolution (Born from 1946-1959) | 13 | 9 | 22 |
| Generation of the "Tiananmen" (Born from 1964-1977) | 11 | 9 | 20 |
| Total | 31 | 25 | 56 |

Since in-depth discussion of political topics is still sensitive in China, I rely on trustworthy networks to recruit interviewees from the three generations. In order to avoid the homogeneity of networks, I reach out for new interviewees through existing ones and limit the number of interviewees introduced by one person from 3 to 4. My goal is not to find a statistically representative sample but a theoretically representative one which is able to facilitate the examination of the relationship between political generations and views of the state (Luker 2008).

All in all, this study mainly draws on in-depth interviews of the 56 people from the three generations. Interviews last from 1.5 - 6 hours and generally include two parts. The first is a self-narration of life history with an opening question and minimal interruptions in between while the second part is a semi-structured interview with a list of open-ended questions asking about more specific experiences and opinions of the historical events and social transformations they have experienced and their views toward certain state policies and ideological discourses. Besides the in-depth interviews, I also rely on official reports and resolutions of the CCP National Congresses and plenums, newspapers such as the *People's Daily,* and historical studies of Communist China to lay out the historical backgrounds and official and public discourses over time.

## 2.2 Analytical approach

The interviews are transcribed and coded with Atlas.ti. The first-round open coding focuses on the narrative arcs of life trajectories such as family background, childhood experiences, education processes and job searching, marriage and children, etc., and key historical events emerging in the interviews such as the anti-Japanese War, the Civil War, the "Liberation," the Great Leap Forward, the Great Famine, the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guard Movement, the Rustication, the first Tiananmen Incident, the death of Mao and fall of the "Gang of four," the Reform and opening up, the Tiananmen Crackdown, and the resumption of economic reform, etc. The second-round coding identifies political views, moral values, and personal beliefs and focuses particularly on major patterns of narratives addressing the party and the state.

I adopt an interpretive approach and textual analysis to examine the interviews in order to capture both explicit opinions, values and beliefs through articulated expressions and implicit views, visceral reactions and feelings through the way of speaking, laughing, crying and murmurs (Pugh 2013). The coding and reiterative memoing focus mostly on how the narrative is organized, which and how historical events are brought up by the interviewee, how the state and party are referred to

in the narratives, what is included and emphasized, and what is missing. The analysis concerns not only explicit attitudes and opinions but also implicit beliefs and visceral feelings. I have paid special attention to metaphors or tropes adopted in the narratives as well as laughs, cries and murmurs during the interview.

In addition, archival studies of official documents, important newspaper articles and existing historical literature on Communist China are used to outline major historical events, changing state policies, the state-imposed discourses and ideologies over time. These archives provide historical contexts in which political generations have developed their generational habitus and learned what is socially desirable and politically permissible and what is the party and the state and how to interact with them. Moreover, archival studies have depicted legitimation sources and efforts of the Party-state over time and laid the foundation for generational analysis of the interview transcripts.

## 3. Roadmap

The life trajectories of each political generation are deeply influenced, shaped and even interrupted by historical events and social transformations happening at the same time. Therefore, the narratives of personal experiences and life histories are closely intertwined with the broad historical transformations, social revolutions and political movements. Furthermore, historical events and social movements occurring during the adolescence and early adulthood period of a person did have a deeper influence on one's life chances, beliefs and values which would impact the person's later trajectories, evaluations of social problems and views of the party and the state. People from the same political generation share some historical experiences and political and moral values but also have bifurcations in life trajectories which separate them into different generation units. The findings of this study are organized into three chapters and each political generation takes up a chapter.

Chapter 2 focuses on the generation of the "Liberation," the oldest generation who had experienced the Second World War and the Civil War before the founding of Communist China in 1949 and had a strong hope to end the long-term wars and an expectation to live a stable and peaceful life in the promising "New China." The regime transition they had experienced during the adolescence and early adulthood had formed their initial impressions on the Communist State and greatly changed their life trajectories later. Most of my interviewees from this generation received new opportunities of education and job assignments and were soon incorporated into the socialist state system as state workers or cadres in the post-Liberation period. The state promised them a relatively equal and stable life by constructing a socialist *Danwei* (work unit) system while the individuals were educated into socialist men and women who would devote themselves to the Party and the state. After a series of social restructuration, the nation-state was transformed into a Party-state which promoted total control over Chinese society. However, this short-lived stable life was soon interrupted by gradually escalated social movements such as the Great Leap Forward and the Great Famine, and the Socialist Education Movement, etc which finally led to the Cultural Revolution. The Red Guard Movement launched by Mao Zedong overturned the newly established bureaucratic system and subjected most of his political rivals into fierce struggles and persecutions. Many people from this generation were in their mid-30s or 40s and prepared to make contributions to construct a socialist country but suddenly received a heavy blow from the Cultural Revolution and became targets of the movement. The idealistic hopes toward the "New China" turned into a disillusion. Even the faithful Party members started to question the correctness of the CCP at this time when they saw their admirable CCP leaders, their colleagues and friends being persecuted to death. Most of my interviewees from this generation learned to stay away from politics and became quite cynical after the Cultural Revolution. The lost confidence in the Party was recovered to a certain extent by the rehabilitation of persecuted cadres and redress of wrong cases after the fall of the "Gang of Four" as well as the public refutation of the Cultural Revolution and

acknowledgement of the mistakes of Mao in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. However, most people from this generation gradually retired in the 1980s and early 1990s and cared more about their own pensions and health care than the Party-state and politics. Occasionally, some of them would bring up the nostalgic memory of the short-lived stable time after the "Liberation" when people at their age joined the CCP with genuine belief of the Communism and devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the socialist construction.

Chapter 3 discusses the most complicated generation of the Cultural Revolution, born in the late 1940s and 1950s, educated by stories of revolutionary forerunners and heroes, ideological propaganda of Socialism and Communism, and political discourses of class struggle and the personality cult of Mao. They had experienced different stages of the Cultural Revolution and were pushed into different life trajectories which greatly impacted their later life experiences and political and moral values. In general, I lay out five generation units from this generation based on their differentiated life trajectories. The first generation unit refers to the "old five classes" of graduates who were in college at the outburst of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 and had participated actively in the Red Guard Movement from 1966 to 1968. When the Red Guard Movement finally died down, they were assigned to under-matched work units in small cities or suburban areas. The second generation unit is the early sent-down youths of the middle and high school graduates from 1966 to 1969 who were also actively involved in the Red Guard Movement and were sent down to poor villages or state farms during the Rustication Movement with no expectation of coming back. Their revolutionary zeal and romantic imagination of the rustication life were quickly broken into pieces by tough living and working conditions in the villages or state farms. The third generation unit includes the late sent-down youths who were middle or high school students in the 1970s and were sent to nearby suburban villages for an expected length of 1 to 2 years and recruited by different work units after returning to the city. The fourth generation unit refers to those lucky "stayed youths" who managed to stay in the city or join the army and escaped

the Rustication movement. The limited chances to stay in the city or join the army not only depended on family backgrounds and parents' social-political status but also on numbers of siblings, graduation years, and the ever-changing state policies. The last generation unit is the most selective group of "worker-peasant-soldier students" who were recommended from factories, production brigades, state farms and military camps to receive a college education during the Cultural Revolution. Those lucky few were able to study in college while their classmates or workmates were doing manual labor in factories or on the farm. This recommendation system was originally designed to reduce education inequality and allow more workers and poor peasants to receive higher education but, in fact, it favored children of state cadres and those with personal connections with leaders. Among the five generation units, the early sent-down youths are the most distinctive ones since they had suffered the most and the longest during the Cultural Revolution. What they had experienced, witnessed and suffered also intrigued their reflections on the CCP's ideological propaganda, the Rustication and the Cultural Revolution. During the "thought liberation" period of the late 1970s and early 1980s, most of the early sent-down youths had relatively deeper reflections and critical views toward the Cultural Revolution and even the Communist regime compared to other generation units. The late sent-down youths, the stayed youths and the "worker-peasant-soldier" college students didn't suffer too much during the Cultural Revolution and did not experience the moment of debunking and collapsing of the revolutionary idealism so their reflections on the Cultural Revolution were not as deep and critical. Some of them even kept a romantic imagination of the "great democracy" of the Cultural Revolution and brought up a nostalgic memory of Mao's era as an egalitarian, respectful and morally pure time despite of the poverty, suffering and political persecutions it had inflicted. The short "Enlightenment" period in the 1980s and the Tiananmen Crackdown in 1989 only influenced a few intellectuals and students and some early sent-down youths. For the majority of this generation, the personality cult of Mao, the "red" education of Communism and Socialism, and the ideological propaganda of selfless

sacrifice for the greater collective were still deeply engraved in their mindset. Therefore, during the Reform and Opening era, most of them were reluctant to leave the socialist *Danwei* system and viewed the market as a representation of disorder, uncertainty and immorality while the state as parents who should take care of its people. As the economic reform intensified in the 1990s and 2000s, most people from this generation criticized the moral degeneration, rising social inequalities and corruptions and the concentration of power and wealth to the state. However, aside from the early sent-down youths, most of this generation's political and cultural repertoire directed them to a romanticized reconstruction of Mao's era.

The next generation of the "Tiananmen" is discussed in chapter 4. This generation was born in the 1960s and early 1970s, and matured in the 1980s. Compared to the previous two generations, the generation of the "Tiananmen" had experienced a much smoother life trajectory which was not disrupted by wars or revolutions. They were too young to be involved in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, so it did not leave traumatic memories on this generation but had impacted their initial views toward the Party and the State with Mao's ideological legacy. When they reached their adolescence, the college entrance exam was resumed, and the Reform started. This generation was fortunate to enjoy the fresh air of the "thought liberation" during the 1980s and at the same time benefit from the socialist *danwei* (work unit) system which assigned them jobs and houses after graduating from schools. However, the early reform and the "thought liberation" were suddenly interrupted by the Tiananmen Crackdown in 1989 which was still a political taboo in China. Among those who shared their memories of this event, the crackdown was a turning point for them which marked the end of idealism and political engagement and the start of cynicism and pragmatism. The late reform period since 1992 had divided the generation of the "Tiananmen" into three trajectories which formed three generation units. The first one refers to those who *Xiahai*, meaning to take the initiative to leave the *danwei* system to pursue more monetary gains and career achievements on the market. The second one refers to SOE (state-owned enterprises) workers who

*Xiagang*, meaning to step down from working positions at bankrupted or reorganized state-owned factories and have to struggle to make a living on the market. The third one refers to those who stayed in the original work units and still benefited from the *danwei* system in the late Reform era. For those who voluntarily jumped into the private economy, the Party-state never provided them enough support as it had done for the SOEs (state-owned enterprises). Most of them were anxious about the uncertainty of state policies on private enterprises, disappointed on low government credibility and very pessimistic toward the Chinese economy. For those who were forced to cut their connections with work units in the wave of *Xiagang*, the Party-state broke its promise and discarded them halfway. They used to be privileged SOE workers and the "master of the state", but in the late Reform era, they suffered the most and were also the most nostalgic group. For those who managed to stay in work units and continuously benefit from the *danwei* system, the Party-state never left them behind. They mostly came from government offices, public institutions or monopolized SOEs and benefited a lot from economic reform and the recent development of state capitalism. The first two generation units had lost the protection of the socialist *danwei* system voluntarily or forcefully in the late Reform era. The state was turned from an amiable caregiver in the late 1970s and 1980s to a formidable predator and profit seeker on the market in the 1990s and the 2000s. The social injustice and growing inequality they have experienced and witnessed triggered their nostalgic memory of the lost paradise of the early 1980s and even a romanticized imagination of Mao's era. However, for the third generation unit who stayed in the *danwei* system, the state was still a caregiver for them which would provide endowment insurance, health insurance and many other welfare benefits. They were more conservative in political and economic views compared to the other two groups and more in line with the political propaganda of the CCP. Even though they did acknowledge corruptions and social inequalities of the Party-state, they would more likely find excuses to defend the Party and the state policies in front of criticisms.

In short, from chapter 2 to chapter 4, I focus on one generation at each time, describe the historical contexts and life trajectories of each generation in detail, and differentiate several generation units to demonstrate the intra-generational differences. In the last chapter 5, I return to the research question brought up at the beginning and make a cross-generational comparison in terms of their historical experiences, political engagement and views of the Party and the state. In general, each generation started to form their moral views of the state during their formative years, and key historical events and transformations occurring at the same time have left indelible marks on their views. Simply speaking, the three political generations' moral views of the state were shaped by the "Liberation" process, the Cultural Revolution, and the "Tiananmen Crackdown" and the economic reform respectively. These idealistic moral views of the state constitute their normative perceptions of the state legitimacy and an ideal relationship between the state and the individual. If we set aside the intra-generational differences and focus on general views of the state for each generation, the generation of the "Liberation," who grew up during the wartime, expected an independent and strong state which could provide a stable and peaceful life as the CCP had promised at the founding moment. The generation of the Cultural Revolution who were deeply influenced by the "red" education of Mao imagined a pure, selfless, egalitarian society with a caring and paternalistic state. The generation of the "Tiananmen," however, was more nostalgic toward the "enlightenment" period of the 1980s when they could enjoy limited "thought liberation" while benefiting from the socialist work unit system which guaranteed jobs, housing and other welfare benefits. All those idealistic views of the state are hard or impossible to be realized, especially with intensification of the economic reform in the 1990s, the rising of social inequality and corruption, and the concentration of wealth and power within the Party-state. The three political generations have all demonstrated their dissatisfaction toward the current social problems and the Party-state to some extent but much of their political repertoire makes it hard for them to imagine a state

without the CCP. The popular fear of chaos and hope for a stable and prosperous life still largely upholds the legitimacy of the Party-state.

# Chapter2

## Generation of the "Liberation": "New China" idealism

> Mao's voice was soft, almost lifting, and the effect of his speech was riveting. "The Chinese people have stood up," he proclaimed, and the crowd went wild, thundering in applause, shouting over and over, "Long Live the People's Republic of China!" "Long Live the Chinese Communist Party!" I was full of joy, my heart nearly burst out of my throat, and tears welled up in my eyes. I was so proud of China, so full of hope, so happy that the exploitation and suffering, the aggression from foreigners, would be gone forever. I had no doubt that Mao was the great leader of the revolution, the maker of a new Chinese history.
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> ----Li, Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of Mao's Personal Physician* [5]

This vivid description of the founding ceremony of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the ebullient crowds on the Tiananmen Square came from a 29-year-old doctor, Li Zhisui, who became Mao's personal physician in 1954 (Li, Z. and Thurston 1994). His emotional expressions of joy and hope toward the newly-founded state were shared by many young people from the generation of the "Liberation" who experienced this regime transition during their adolescence and early adulthood. This generation was born in the 1920s and 1930s and spent their childhood in the shadow of the Sino-Japanese War (which later became part of the Second World War) and the Civil War. Having experienced the cruelty of the wars, they had a strong expectation to restore a peaceful and stable life. The war was finally terminated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) who defeated the Nationalist Party (KMT) and founded the People's Republic of China on October 1st, 1949. According to the CCP's propaganda, the process of taking over the rule of the KMT and seizure of the state power was called the "Liberation" which implied the CCP was the "savior" or

[5] This quotation is from Li, Zhisui and Anne F Thurston. (1994) *The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of Mao's Personal Physician*. New York: Random House: pp52.

"liberator" of the Chinese people and would save people from exploitation and suffering in the "Old China" and lead them to freedom and happiness in the "New China" (Mao, T. 1977). This propaganda had won over a lot of support from left-leaning intellectuals and students for the CCP during and after the Civil War, but for most ordinary people who were unclear about the ideological differences between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party, the real benefits of restoring a peaceful life and opportunities in education and work provided by the new regime were more effective to win over their support and consolidate the rule of the CCP. For the generation who experienced the "Liberation" during their adolescence and early adulthood, the newly-founded state not only ended the war and brought a long-desired peace but also opened up new opportunities of education and job assignments. Although this peaceful and stable life only lasted for a short time and was soon disrupted by consecutive social and political movements afterwards, this generation's experience of the founding moment of the Communist State had lasting impacts on their perceptions of the state and their relationships with it.

In this chapter, I elaborate on the experiences, memories and political perceptions of the generation of the "Liberation" mainly from three historical periods: the period of the anti-Japanese War which gave rise to a sense of patriotism toward the nation-state among this generation, the period of the "Liberation" that ended the Civil War and provided hope for a stable life and opportunities for a better future, and the period of the post-Liberation including class designation and socialist construction which consolidated the Party-State and incorporated everyone into a totalistic system, the Great Leap Forward and the Great Famine that brought the unexpected starvation to the "New China," and the Cultural Revolution that led to 10 years of upheavals and sufferings until being recovered during the Reform. My interviewees of this generation were selected from Beijing and the surrounding areas and could generally be divided into two groups at the time of the "Liberation." The first group was ordinary residents of Beiping (former name of Beijing from 1928 to 1949) who lived in the city before the "Liberation," and had mixed feelings

of fear and hope toward the CCP and the new regime; the second group referred to people who came to Beijing with or following the CCP army either as occupiers, rural migrant workers, or recent college graduates who were assigned to positions in the new regime or found jobs in the new capital city. If the first group held an ambiguous feeling toward the CCP, the second group benefited directly from the newly-established state and supported the CCP wholeheartedly. This distinction was a little obscured by the class designation after the "Liberation" in that no matter whether they were original urban residents or newcomers, people with good class origins (poor and lower-middle peasants, revolutionary cadres, revolutionary soldiers, etc.) could enjoy better work and educational opportunities than those with middle or bad class origins whereas people with bad or black class origins (landlords, capitalists, etc.) were constantly suspected and easy to subject to political persecutions. Fortunately, the class struggle in the 1950s and early 1960s was not as severe as in the Cultural Revolution, so most of these young adults in the generation of the "Liberation" still benefited more or less from the newly-established socialist state and being incorporated into the state system as state workers or cadres based on their different levels of education and political performance. Most were grateful toward the educational and work opportunities provided by the state and were sincerely supportive of the rule of the CCP. However, the Cultural Revolution overthrew the newly-established bureaucratic system of the state and plunged China into 10 years of chaos. The generation of the "Liberation" who reached their late 30s and 40s at that time were suddenly turned into the targets of the revolution, especially for those who were medium- or high-rank cadres or had bad class origins. The Cultural Revolution had greatly eroded the legitimacy of the CCP among this generation who suffered the most in the struggle sessions and political persecutions. Even some loyal CCP members in this generation started to question the correctness of Chairman Mao and the Party. The image of the CCP was restored to a certain extent after the fall of the "Gang of Four," the official refutation of the Cultural Revolution and the personality cult of Mao, and the rehabilitation of those being wrongly accused and persecuted. However, in order

to survive from the consecutive social movements - especially the Cultural Revolution - most of my interviewees from this generation learnt to stay away from politics and became quite cynical in the Reform era. They gradually retired in the 1980s and early 1990s and cared more about their own pensions and healthcare than the Party-state and politics. Occasionally, some would bring up the nostalgic memory of the short-lived stable time after the "Liberation" when people of their age joined the CCP with genuine belief of Communism and devoted themselves wholeheartedly to socialist construction. This recollection of the past was usually used to express their disappointment toward rising corruption and social inequality in the Reform era.

## 1. Anti-Japanese War: the rising of patriotism and initial contact with the CCP

Wars and revolutions, poverty and sufferings defined the childhood of the oldest generation in my study. Most of them were born right before the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 which merged into the Second World War since 1941, the outbreak of the Pacific War. Japan launched a full-scale war against China since the Incident of July 7th in 1937 (also known as the Lugou Bridge Incident) which happened near Beiping (Dorn 1974). Most parts of North, East and South China soon fell to the Japanese armies in one year. The Nationalist Government relocated the capital city from Nanjing to Chongqing in 1937 after being defeated in the Battle of Shanghai and Nanjing. Following the government relocation, there were huge waves of refugees running from the Japanese-occupied areas to Nationalist-occupied areas in the South and West (Hsiung and Levine 1992). The Communists' Red Army was saved from being completely eliminated by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist army due to the Japanese invasion as well as the mediation of the Soviet Union. The CCP's Red Army was reorganized into the New Fourth Army the Eighth Route Army to fight in alliance with KMT against the Japanese. While the nationalist armies were defeated in the frontline, the Chinese communist armies made use of the opportunities to expand their troops and influences in the rural areas of North China (Harrison 1972). Some of my interviewees in this

generation who lived in Beiping or rural areas around Beiping recalled their first memory of childhood during Japanese occupation as a time of "slavery" and suffering. What's more, some of those who lived in the rural areas experienced their initial contact with the CCP and its ideology.

## 1.1 Life in Beiping: Japanese occupation and inflation

Chuoyun (1921, female) was born in a well-educated family in a county near Beiping and her father worked as a Chinese teacher and doctor in a preliminary Normal School in the county during the war. Her two elder brothers were enrolled in college at that time and moved to Nationalist-occupied areas in Southwest China with their universities after the relocation of the Nationalist Government.[6] In order to receive a good education during the war, Chuoyun's father sent her to a Methodist mission school in Beiping for secondary education and she was later admitted to Fu Jen Catholic University (located in Beiping) in 1943. The missionary schools enjoyed a relatively higher autonomy in the curriculum compared to civilian-run schools during the Japanese occupation for a short time. However, with the outbreak of the Pacific War between Japan and the US, the Methodist mission school could no longer shelter Chuoyun from the forced Japanese education. She recalled that,

> In my third year in high school, the Pacific War broke out. Japan not only fought us, but also fought against the US. We had to teach Japanese now. Our school was closed for a month. When the school reopened, Japan sent officers to our school to monitor our classes. Missionaries used to teach us English while other private and public schools had to teach Japanese. But now, we also had to learn Japanese.

When she was enrolled in Fu Jen Catholic University, Chuoyun recalled they could no longer talk to each other freely in school and learn knowledge freely in class.

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[6] During the Second Sino-Japanese War, Peking University, Tsinghua University and Nankai University co-founded a National Southwestern Associated University in Kunming (near Myanmar) to stay away from the war and continue the education of college students. For more details about the National Southwestern Associated University, please see Israel, John. *Lianda: A Chinese university in war and revolution*. Stanford University Press, 1999.

> Our classes were severely disrupted during my third year in college. The Japanese gendarmerie was strict in control. Three professors in our Education Department were arrested, our Chair, a professor teaching educational philosophy, and a professor teaching secondary education. There were also professors from other departments. Seven to eight professors in total were arrested by the Japanese gendarmerie. Our classes were greatly impacted. The university had to ask the teaching assistant to teach the classes or invite someone from other places to teach us.

Besides the disruption of study, Chuoyun also recalled one of the most irritating scenes she experienced during the occupation.

> I lived in a county near Beiping, but I went to school in Beiping. I went home every Saturday on a bus. When the bus approached the city gate, Beiping had a city wall at that time, everyone had to get off. The empty bus passed the gate but people had to walk to the gate and bow to the Japanese soldiers on guard. You had to bow when you entered the gate. You also had to bow when you exited the gate. Our classmates tried to avoid bowing by not leaving the city. Even ordinary folks felt aggrieved, not to mention educated students like us. This was the biggest irritation to us. There was a deep feeling of indignation and resentment toward the Japanese.

The ritualized bowing was viewed by Chuoyun as a humiliation to Chinese people living under the Japanese occupation. These disruptions in studies and everyday life were the most impressive memories to Chuoyun. She directly stated that, “This period had the greatest impact on me—a person living in a state without sovereignty would have no freedom at all. Neither freedom in study, nor freedom in life.” The suppressive environment gave rise to a sense of nationalism and patriotism for Chuoyun. This patriotic emotion, from her own narrative, “was much stronger than the patriotic education promoted today,” because “it was stimulated under the rule of the enemy…generated naturally, no need to say or promote.”

Moreover, the war also brought economic difficulties to a lot of families during that time. Price inflation was very high during the Japanese occupation era in Beping. Chuoyun recalled eating medley flour with chaff during her college years. Most families, even previously well-off and

middle-class families, suffered from the decline of life standards during the Japanese occupation, not to mention poor families.

Junbai (1928, male) also lived in Beiping during this time. His father was sold to a Peking opera troupe by his grandpa at a young age due to poverty and famine and came to Beiping with the troupe to learn to perform Peking operas and he later became a famous opera singer and manager. During the Japanese occupation, his father refused to perform operas for the Japanese soldiers and fled to Shanghai with his friends. Junbai stayed in Beiping with his mother and siblings, living off his father's savings from previous performances. He recalled that:

> My father thought he had saved enough money to live through the war. But since 1939 and 1940, the inflation was so high that the banknotes were worthless. Our family had eight children, four of us got tuberculosis. Some got it in bones, some in lungs. I also got tuberculosis because we didn't have enough to eat. The life was so difficult … (chocked with sobs).

Hunger and sickness were fraught with Junbai's memories during this period, and they still hurt whenever being recalled. Junbai was lucky to survive through that time and was admitted to Peking University in 1944. However, life in the city area of Beiping was far from miserable. The rural areas suffered even more.

## 1.2 Life in rural and suburban areas: Japanese atrocities and the CCP's infiltration

"Paofan" was a phrase only remembered by Northern Chinese people aged 80 and above. It was literarily translated as "running away and coming back" which was commonly used by Northern Chinese villagers during the "Anti-Japanese War"[7] to describe people running away from the Japanese army before they passed through the village in order to survive raping, pillaging and killing. They would wrap some of their properties in a cloth and run to a direction away from the

[7] The Anti-Japanese War was the word used by Chinese people to refer to the Second Sino-Japanese War.

armies, sometimes to another village, or a grove, or caves on a hill. It was the old men and women (sometimes with bound feet) as well as the children who suffered the most in "Paofan" because they could not run quickly. When the armies had passed, the survivors would go back to their villages and wait until the next "Paofan."[8]

Simian (1932, male) was born in a village of Hebei Province, near Beiping. He recalled young and middle-aged men's "Paofan" in his village to run away from being captured and enslaved by Japanese soldiers to do coal mining. The villagers also dug tunnels to connect villages nearby to fight with or escape from the Japanese. Most of these rural areas of Central Hebei Plain were infiltrated or controlled by underground CCP members and guerillas. Simian recalled a well-known movie, *Tunnel Warfare*, shot in 1962, which depicted the life of villagers near his hometown during the Anti-Japanese War and glorified the underground CCP members. Japanese armies were extremely harsh on villages with underground CCP members and the "Three all Policies," i.e., burning all, killing all, looting all were primarily targeting on these villages. Simian's first memory about the war was the burnt-down primary school of his village.

> I was illiterate at that time. Why? The Japanese came and burnt our primary school in the village. It was 1937. I still remembered I was about to go to school and got all my books, such as *Baijiaxing* (The book of family names) and *Qianziwen* (Thousand-character classic). The Japanese came and burnt the school. Therefore, I had no school to go to for four or five years.

Simian did go to temporary primary school several years later. He recalled some teachers in primary school were underground CCP members and would secretly teach them CCP's mimeographed textbooks. Whenever the Japanese soldiers came to the village, the students would bury the CCP's

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[8] For some detailed descriptions of "Paofan," please refer to these articles: Liu, Yutang "Pao fan de gu shi" (the story of Paofan) *Dazhong Daily*, 2006-05-24, http://dzrb.dzwww.com/dazk/dzfs/t20050805_1147150.htm (accessed by Feb 3, 2019). Wang, Shouren "Kou shu li shi: Wo jing li de pao fan" (Oral History: The Paofan I have experienced" *Mei Ri Tou Tiao (Daily Headlines)* 2016-6-18, https://kknews.cc/history/mazkj9.html (accessed by Feb 3, 2019).

textbooks underground and pretend to learn the stereotyped Japanese textbooks. Simian said he didn't learn anything solidly during the war. When he turned into a 10-year-old boy, he was forced to dig trenches for the Japanese army with other old men in the village because all the young and middle-aged men had run away. Siman recalled that:

> My grandpa was in his 70s, and I was only 10. We had to build the defensive tower and dig trenches for the Japanese every day. They required us to dig two big trenches alongside the railway. They wanted to blockade the communists and their controlled areas. We had to bring our own food. No flour or rice to eat, only hard buns made of white potatoes…A Japanese soldier was there to watch us. If he disliked you, he could easily kill you. It was very often to be whipped… They didn't treat you as a human being. A man in my village had smallpox before. He had got some marks on his face. I didn't see this. I heard from another person. The Japanese saw his pock-marked face when he was digging trenches. They were afraid that his smallpox was contagious, so they killed him. How could they treat a human being like this?

Simian described himself as "a slave of the Japanese." He also started to run away from Japanese soldiers during his adolescent years as other young men did. If not, he would be forcefully taken to do coal mining for the Japanese which, in his words, would be "a real slave that could never go home or have enough food." He used a metaphor to describe the Chinese people during the war: "Chinese people were like ants. They could step on you and kill you at any time. Human rights? You had none."

Different from Simian, Tanqiu (1933, male) was living in a suburban area nearer to Beiping. He recalled the underground CCP members were not active in their village because it was too close to the city. He had seen the Japanese soldiers and Collaborationist Chinese soldiers (also called Japanese "puppet solders" by Chinese people) in their village but seldom interacted with them. It was on the east side of his village crossing a bridge where the underground CCP members were active. Tanqiu had heard from his parents that the Japanese would go to the east side to "cleanse the villages" (*Qingxiang*), killing people and arresting underground CCP members.

After huge losses of life and property, Chinese people finally saw the victory of the Anti-Japanese War in August 1945. The next day after Japan's formal surrender ceremony on USS Missouri on September 2nd 1945, Chinese people celebrated the victory by parading the streets with national flags, slogan banners and big portraits of the four leaders of Allies, Truman, Attlee, Stalin and Chiang Kai-Shek in big cities around China (Mitter 2013).[9] Chiang's personal popularity peaked at the end of the war among Chinese people, mostly in the cities, whereas the CCP was mostly active in rural areas. By witnessing the cruelty of war and experiencing poverty and suffering during their childhood and early adolescence, the oldest generation in my study started to develop their first view of the Chinese state—a weak and poor state that had not enough power and sovereignty to protect its people from being invaded, humiliated and enslaved by another country. The Japanese invasion thus gave rise to their sense of patriotism and nationalism as well as a yearning for a strong, independent and better-off state.

However, the peace was short-lived. The Civil War between the Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Communist Party (CCP) soon ignited due to their fighting for the right to accept Japanese surrender and the left properties in Northeast China with the involvement of the Soviet Union. The outbreak of a full-scale Civil War started in 1946 after the failure of the US mediation and lasted for four years until the CCP defeated the KMT and seized the power of the state in 1949 (Pepper 1999).

[9] For photos and descriptions of the Japanese surrender, please see "Li shi jin ri: Ri ben tou xiang, Min guo zhao pian ji lu sheng li yi ke (Historical today: Japanese surrender, photos of the Republic of China recorded the victory moment)" (2015-8-16) http://www.epochtimes.com/gb/15/8/16/n4505034.htm (accessed by Feb 3, 2019).

# 2. From the Civil War to the "Liberation": the founding of a new Communist state

In the parlance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the Civil War between the KMT and the CCP was termed as the "Liberation" War; the defeat of the KMT and occupying of city and rural areas by the CCP was called "Liberation"; the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 was addressed as a turning point to separate the "New China" from the "Old China" (MacFarquhar 2009). The word "Liberation" used in the CCP's terminology actually implied the Communist Party as the "savior" or "liberator" of the Chinese people, saving them from endless wars and life of "slavery" in the "Old China" dominated by the so-called "imperialism, feudalism, bureaucratic-capitalism" as well as their general representative, the Kuomintang (KMT) Government (Mao, T. 1977). However, for the generation of the "Liberation" who had experienced the Civil War and the process of "Liberation," memories of this period were less about ideological differences but more about the political and social results brought about by the regime change. The "Liberation" signified the end of the Civil War and the founding of a new Communist State. What's more, it also shaped people's first impressions of the new regime and had lasting impacts on their views of the state. In general, their views toward the "Liberation" and the newly-founded state could be divided into two groups: those who lived in the city of Beiping before the "Liberation" and those who came to Beijing with or following the CCP.

## 2.1 Residents of Beiping: mixture of fears and hopes

During the years of the Civil War, severe inflation and corruption almost exhausted the people's patience to the Kuomingtang (KMT) government. Chinese people had never been so eager to restore a peaceful and stable life. At the same time, the CCP proposed a peaceful, democratic and egalitarian future to Chinese people in its propaganda: it promised workers jobs, peasants lands and intellectuals democratic rights (Dikötter 2015). As the People's Liberation Army (PLA, the

name of the CCP army used during the Civil War and afterwards) marched from the north to the south and the "liberated" areas expanded nationally, many Chinese people viewed the CCP's sweeping victory with mixed feelings of fear and hope.

Zhiyi (1933, male) came to Beiping with his father and elder brother at a very young age from Shandong Province. His father was a manager of a store and his elder brother was an apprentice there. Zhiyi was sent to missionary schools for his primary and secondary education. Right before the PLA's besiege of Beiping, his father and elder brother went back to their hometown and left Zhiyi alone in school. It was because his elder brother had a certificate from the Bureau of Investigation and Statistics (BIS, commonly known as *Juntong*), a military intelligence agency of the Republic of China before 1946, in order to avoid the draft during the war. Zhiyi recalled that:

> My brother got that certificate from Juntong because he was afraid to be drafted and sent to the battlefield. Someone told him that if he filled out the form, he could be free from military service. He just completed it, didn't think too much about it. He didn't really do anything for them. He was just an apprentice, there was not much he could do. But when the Communists came, my father and brother were so scared. They were afraid that the Communists would suspect them as hidden spies of the Nationalist government. So they just left Beiping and went back to our hometown in Shandong. I was all alone in Beiping since then.

Their fear toward the CCP was actually not unfounded. Even in their hometown, Zhiyi's elder brother was harshly criticized and persecuted due to this certificate in the consecutive social and political movements after the "Liberation." However, at this moment, Zhiyi was still a middle school student and his education in missionary schools didn't prepare him to fully understand the differences between the CCP and the KMT. He just continued his school work in Beiping while enduring the loneliness.

Similar to Zhiyi, Luming (1935, male) also came to Beiping with his parents and young sister. They had not enough land to feed the family in their home village, so they came to Beiping to make

a living. His father was a small peddler selling daily necessities to residents. Luming recalled that they came at a very bad time since the city was besieged by the PLA soon after they came.

> The city was besieged. You could not go out if you were inside. No buses or trains at all. People were scared. One of the gate towers was bombarded by the artillery of the PLA. People were panicky about it. The streets were in a mess. I didn't understand what happened. Even my father didn't know exactly. No one told us. I just knew that Beiping was peacefully taken by the CCP finally.

Luming and his families were terrified by the possible battle between the KMT and the CCP in Beiping. They had no idea about the differences between the KMT and the CCP or the meaning of "Liberation" at that moment. It was a great relief for them as well as many residents that the battle was avoided by the peaceful takeover.

While Luming felt he was trapped in the city during the siege, Caiping (1935, female)'s family fled into the city gate in order to stay away from the upcoming fire of the war. Her family moved to Beiping from her grandparents' generation. Her grandpa made a long and difficult journey from Shandong Province to Beiping due to a big famine. Working as an accountant of a rich man, her grandpa finally bought a quadrangle courtyard and a few acres of land for his four sons outside the city gate of Beiping. Each son lived on one side of the courtyard where Caiping had spent her childhood and adolescence. However, their life was disturbed by the PLA's siege of Beiping. She recalled that:

> Right before the liberation, my father carried our bedclothes in a cart and drove us to my aunt's house inside the city wall of Beiping… Our house was located outside the city wall. The battle was about to start so we were so afraid to live outside. It was as if the wall could keep off the CCP armies. Actually, how can the wall stop them? Later, a young neighbor found us in the city and told us that the CCP had come to our neighborhood and it was liberated. People living in the city also talked about the liberation. I didn't understand why they beat the drums and gongs and what exactly happened. He told us that the CCP would not beat people or kill people. My father then drove us back to our old house with a

> cart. My parents didn't allow me running around on the street. They said Beiping was liberated now. But I didn't know what they meant by "being liberated." They said that there would be battles, but finally there was no battle. It was over!

Caiping was confused about the meaning of the "Liberation" at that time as did Luming and many other Chinese people who were uncertain about their future under the rule of the CCP. Except for the underground CCP members in Beiping, most residents viewed the PLA as another military force that could be threatening to their lives and properties. The "Liberation" just fell upon them despite their personal willingness. Nevertheless, both Luming and Caiping soon started to benefit from the free schools of the new regime soon after the "Liberation." Luming was admitted to a spare-time school and studied from elementary to high -school level courses outside his worktime. He later became a teacher in that school to teach literacy classes for working class people. Caiping was admitted to a better primary school in the city gate after the "Liberation" and continued her education without paying any fees. Finally, she got into a prestigious university in Beijing and was assigned a research job by the state after graduation. As a primary school student at that time, Caiping was organized by the school to parade on Tiananmen Square on the day of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 1st, 1949. She vividly recalled her experience on that day:

> We waited on the east side of Tiananmen. They delivered us a piece of bread. I didn't eat the bread. You know why? Because my mom had never eaten bread before. I wanted to bring it home and let her taste the flavor. I put it in my small bag and was afraid of being found out by others… We started to walk to Tiananmen before dawn and sat on the east side of the square to wait for the ceremony (which started at 3pm). At the beginning, we had no food. Only in the morning, everyone got a piece of bread. I ate nothing that day, starving through the whole process.

It was very revealing that Caiping's memory of that day focused more on the free bread rather than the ceremony itself. She did talk a little bit about the ceremony but still expressed her confusion about the political and symbolic meanings of the ceremony.

> Mao declared the founding of the People's Republic of China in the afternoon. I didn't know what the People's Republic of China was. I didn't get what he said exactly. His southern accent was too strong for us to understand. After his speech, we started to parade. I had no money to dress myself prettier. I just had my white shirt and dressed tidy as a student. We got a piece of bread on Tiananmen. We also brought self-made wreaths. Our teachers delivered the color papers and taught us to make wreaths before the parade… I remembered that I walked with others in a wide queue and everyone was looking up toward the Tiananmen gate to see Chairman Mao. While looking upward, I gradually walked outside the queue. There was someone standing on the side to push me back to the queue. We walked in a queue to Xidan[10] and then we were dismissed.

Caiping mentioned the bread once more as well as her lack of money to dress prettier for a parade she didn't quite understand fully. She did show some curiosity about Chairman Mao and looked at him during the parade but the founding of the PRC was more about the free bread for Caiping than a symbolic start of a new state. Similar expressions were also found in Luming's recollection. He cared more about the security of food than the political transition. He also stated: "Life was so hard [before the Liberation]. We ate cornmeal a lot and only saw wheat flour once or twice in a month. Our life was getting better a little bit after the Liberation, at least more secured in food." For those poor residents living in Beiping, food security and educational and work opportunities might be more effective ways to win support to the new regime compared to ideological propagandas.

Although many residents of Beiping were unclear about the differences between the KMT and the CCP, and uncertain about the future, college students and intellectuals in Beiping had been more strongly influenced by ideologies propagated by the CCP. The underground CCP

[10] Xidan was a place on the far west side of the Tiananmen Square.

organizations and members infiltrated universities, newspaper offices, as well as government organizations in Beiping, especially among college students and teachers. Junbai (1928, male), who was admitted to Peking University in 1944 and switched to Tsinghua University in 1946, was deeply influenced by the underground CCP members in school. When he recalled the "Liberation," he said that:

> I was not afraid at all. I had read about the CCP's books in our library. We used to have a '121 Library' at Tsinghua. It was to memorize students and teachers killed by the Kuomingtang in Kunming on December 1st.[11] This library stored all kinds of books related to Communism. I had read Mao Zedong's *On New Democracy* there. I knew their policies and propaganda.

Junbai had even participated in some of the propaganda work for the underground CCP members but he didn't join the CCP personally. He said Tsinghua's underground CCP students were divided into two cliques. They accused each other as "San Qing Tuan" (Youth League of Three People's Principles) which was the youth league of the KMT. "But neither of them was (San Qing Tuan)," said Junbai. He paused for a while and continued, "I didn't join them." He didn't state clearly, but struggles between the two factions might have stopped him from joining the CCP. Nevertheless, Junbai's familiarity of the CCP's ideology well prepared him for the regime transition. He also expressed his gratitude toward the CCP since his family's living standards were clearly improved after the "Liberation" and his father's social status was highly promoted under the new regime. His father was a Peking opera singer and troupe manager pre-liberation which was regarded as a despised profession in the old society. But under the rule of

[11] December 1st Massacre happened on December 1st, 1945, at the National Southwestern Associated University in Kunming. It was a student movement and an anti-civil war rally, which resulted in four students and teachers got killed by some mobs related to the local authorities. For more details about the massacre and the student movements, please see Israel, John. *Lianda: A Chinese university in war and revolution*. Stanford University Press, 1999, pp 366-380.

the CCP, his father became a salaried opera troupe manager for the state. Junbai also graduated from the university right after the "Liberation" and was assigned to a state department for work.

Similar to Junbai, Chuoyun also saw the CCP's influence in college while attending the Fu Jen Catholic University.

> Because of the environment, there were more opportunities for students to participate in the revolution. After the victory against the Japanese, the thought of "Liberation" was spread among universities. It also existed in Fu Jen. Some students went to the "liberated" areas to deliver messages and some became real underground CCP members. They had organizations and did some intensive work to spread the Communist ideologies.

Chuoyun didn't participate in those activities so her understanding of the CCP was very superficial at that time. Her real knowledge of the CCP came from her witnessing of the 'liberation" of Tianjin where she found her first teaching job. She was impressed by the discipline of the PLA when they occupied the city after the victory.

> They (the soldiers) were all standing on the street without occupying any residential houses. They were unlike other troops. Troops of the warlords would take over the best houses when they occupied a place. The PLA soldiers were not like that. They slept on the street, making no sound at all. You could hear nothing.

Chuoyun recalled that people's fear for the CCP was first relieved by the good discipline of the PLA, then further relieved by the quickly resumed social order. Chuoyun recalled that:

> We resumed class only in one week. Our schoolmaster and department chairs were sent to study groups. There were two CCP members coming to our school; one to organize students, the other to organize teachers. They held meetings and taught us the situations of the "Liberation." ...The stores and factories soon reopened and school classes resumed. The quickly recovered social order greatly comforted most people and stabilized our emotions. We were afraid at the beginning because of the uncertainty. Would we still have our jobs? But only after one week or two, everything was back to normal. We just needed to attend

> more meetings and study the revolutionary histories of the CCP. They also taught us the progress of the negotiation of the peaceful takeover of Beiping.

As Chunyun has said, "the biggest merit of the 'Liberation' was its quick recovery of social order" which was helpful to stabilize people's nerves and arouse their warm feelings toward the new regime. Those meetings held by the CCP members also started to instill a legitimate discourse on the CCP's revolution and "Liberation." When Chuoyun took a train back to Beiping for the Spring Festival, the peace negotiation was settled and the PLA was prepared to enter the city. Chuoyun had met two PLA soldiers visiting her family in Beiping before the "Liberation."

> One night, we heard someone knocking on our door. It was two PLA soldiers, in their uniform, but they didn't bring any weapons. They were very polite. They asked how many people lived in the household, and what we were doing. I told them I came from Tianjin and talked a little bit about the good phenomena after the liberation of Tianjin. They were not intimidating, just politely talked with us for less than 15 minutes. They were not in big groups, just in pairs visiting residential houses to tell us they would enter the city soon and collect some basic information from residents.

This polite visit might have relieved some fear of Chuoyun's families toward the CCP. At least, Chuoyun expressed her good impression on the process of "Liberation" especially on the restoration of social order and normal life. However, she was still cautious to fully embrace the ideology of Communism. As a history teacher in middle school, Chuoyun said she had to learn a new perspective of history—historical materialism—based on Marx's evolutionary views of historical development. The school started to use new textbooks on history soon after the "Liberation." Chuoyun had to relearn the history from this new perspective. She stated that, "They had to educate you first. In this way, they reformed your thoughts." Chuoyun had received many years of education from missionary schools so this gentle thought reform after the "Liberation" only imbued her halfheartedly. Nonetheless, as an unusually highly educated woman at that time,

she was still promoted to the dean of students after the “Liberation” and later assigned as a vice president of a middle school in Beijing.

In general, residents of Beiping viewed the CCP’s takeover of Beiping with mixed feelings of worry, hope and resignation (Dikötter 2015). Some were intimidated by the KMT’s demonized portrait of the CCP on newspapers or scared by the PLA’s siege of the city, while some, especially students and left-wing intellectuals, had been influenced by communist ideologies from underground CCP members or attracted by the democratic and egalitarian utopia proposed by the CCP propaganda. The quick recovery of social order after the “Liberation” did relieve most people’s anxieties of the uncertainty but the CCP still needed to rely on study sessions and meetings to educate people with revolutionary histories and communist ideologies and instill a legitimate discourse into their mind.

## 2.2 New comers of Beijing: hope for a better future

Different from the residents of Beiping, those who came to Beijing (Beiping was renamed Beijing in September 1949) with or following the CCP’s takeover were more wholeheartedly supportive to the new regime because they directly benefitted from this transformation. As I introduced in the first chapter, Simian was one of those who sought the opportunity at the moment of regime transition and changed his life trajectory by joining the PLA at the age of 16. He was born in a northern village of Hebei Province that was deeply influenced by underground CCP members during the Anti-Japanese War and started to learn the CCP’s textbook at primary school with underground CCP teachers. Therefore, he had very good impressions of the CCP.

> The Communists always stayed with peasants. They wore what peasants wore and worked in the fields with peasants. They would hold meetings at night and taught us how to fight with enemies. They stayed with us and ate with us. When they picked up a gun, they became guerrillas. When they put the gun down, they blended into peasants. The large CCP troops seldom came to our village but when they came, they didn’t live at your

> house. They slept on the streets and didn't bother you at all. So why could the CCP achieve victory? They had nothing. They didn't have any cities, neither could they produce guns. It was because they cared about people. People also supported them.

Simian's gratitude toward the CCP was further developed when the CCP saved his uncle's life after the "Liberation" of a nearby city. He recalled that:

> Soon after we defeated the Japanese, the Liberation War started. The Kuomingtang and "Huan Xiang Tuan" (Home returning corps, usually constituted by landlords) besieged our village. I heard the gun shots, so I ran away. But they caught me on the way and held a gun toward me. They took me to my uncle's house. He was a head of the village at that time and his son was a CCP soldier. They arrested my uncle and released me. My uncle was taken to a prison in a nearby city and tortured in prison. He was not a CCP member. Our families wanted to bail him out but they asked for 3800 yuan.[12]We had a big family so we couldn't gather that much money even if we sold all our 40 acres of farmland, as well as the waterwheel and stone mill. We were completely helpless. Before the Spring Festival of that year, the PLA besieged the city, and took the city by force in one week. My uncle was released from prison.

"Liberation" for Simian was not just propaganda, but a literal experience. He sincerely viewed the CCP as the "savior" and "liberator" of his family. That was also one reason he decided to join the PLA after they "liberated" his village. He "participated in the revolution" in February 1949, right before the "Liberation" of Beiping. He was only 16 years old and assigned to be a safeguard of the leading cadres of North China University which was established in 1948 by the CCP to educate and cultivate their own cadres and renamed the Renmin University after the founding of the PRC. The university enrolled him at night school and he studied from the elementary level with other lower educated soldiers, model peasants and workers selected from "liberated" areas. He entered Beijing with the university after the founding ceremony of the PRC and stayed in Beijing since then. Joining the CCP army was a turning point in Simian's life trajectory. He recalled that:

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[12] Legal tender used by the Republic of China.

> When I signed up to join the PLA, someone thought I was too young and persuaded me to go home. I said no. If I stayed at home, I could not go to school, neither did I have enough food to eat. Twice a day with cooked millet in the army! I could barely have thin gruel at home. I also would be able to go to school. I just followed the CCP. If I sacrificed my life on the battlefield, that was fate. If I did not die, they would not ask me to be a safeguard for a lifetime.

Aside from the influence of underground CCP members on him during the childhood, Simian was actually risking his own life to fight for a better future. It proved to be a successful bet in that the CCP not only provided him food and education, but also good jobs, high social status and privileges in his lifetime. He was very grateful to the CCP and directly said that "all what I have now was given by the Party." This emotional attachment to the CCP dominated his lifetime perceptions of the Party and the State.

Meijin (1931, female) was a similar age to Simian. She grew up in a big city in Northeast China and was able to come to Beijing after the "Liberation" for a good job because of her father who was an underground CCP member and revealed his real identity after the "Liberation." Meijin recalled that:

> My father admitted he was a CCP member only after 1949. We didn't know before. He must have been an underground party member. He was in charge of a railway station so he helped me apply for a job in Beijing in 1949 in the railway system. I was successfully admitted and started to work in Beijing since then.

Meijin was among the first few female crew members in charge of a whole train and was promoted to the Railway Ministry later on. Unlike Meijin who came to Beijing for work with the help of her father, Linghua (1932, female) was assigned to the Railway Ministry directly after her graduation from college. She lived in a Northeast city that was "liberated" in 1948 and had volunteered to go to the battlefield of the Korean War in the summer of 1951 to visit soldiers with

her classmates. After graduating in 1952, she was directly assigned a job by the state in the Railway Ministry in Beijing and worked up the system.

Besides the CCP members who came to Beijing as occupiers and those assigned jobs to Beijing by the new state, there were also a large group of peasants who came to Beijing after the "Liberation" to find better jobs and opportunities for a living. Tanqiu (1933, male) and his families, and Xuelan (1930, female) and her husband were among them. The construction projects for the new capital city as well as some newly-founded state-owned factories in Beijing required a large amount of labor from outside which provided these rural migrant workers a chance to work and settle in Beijing. Usually it was the men who came to find jobs in Beijing first and then brought their wives and children later on. Their wives first came as housewives and were later employed by collectively-owned factories founded by the communities or by state-owned factories during the period of socialist construction. Since most people were incorporated into the state system after the Socialist Transformations in the mid-1950s, the life of ordinary residents in Beijing did become more egalitarian and stable. Moreover, these peasant workers were usually poorly educated or illiterate so they were ready to accept whatever the CCP told them in the propaganda and be obedient to the new state without a doubt.

In general, compared to the residents of Beiping, people coming to Beijing with or following the CCP had no hesitation to fully embrace this new regime. The CCP members and their families, college graduates, and peasant workers I mentioned before were all beneficiaries of the newly-founded Communist state who provided them good jobs, higher social status and better living standards. For the CCP members and their families, the "Liberation" of China was a great victory of the long-term revolution and they deserved it because of the blood of their comrades shed during the arduous process. For college graduates and peasant workers, the "Liberation" and founding of the PRC brought new hope and opportunity for life and they felt lucky to seize the chance to work

for a better future. Therefore, it was not hard to imagine all those people were highly supportive of the new state.

In short, for the first time, after a series of wars and social upheavals, Chinese people saw hope for a peaceful life in the process of "Liberation." No matter old residents or newcomers of Beijing, the people I interviewed in the first generation were still very young and energetic at that time. Their values and views were relatively easy to be shaped and reshaped with education and "thought reform." Their good impressions on the new state were further developed with better education and work opportunities as well as slightly improved living standards the first few years after the "Liberation." However, it was too soon to consider the "Liberation" as the end of the communist revolution. A short-term breeze was followed by a large hurricane. A series of socialist revolutions were awaiting ahead in the "New China" to fully transform people into new socialist or communist men and women and incorporate them into a total system controlled by the CCP.

## 3. From social restructuration to Cultural Revolution: illusions and disillusions of the Party-State

To restore social order and keep old things intact was only a temporary means to appease people's anxiety in the transition period of the "Liberation." When the "New China" was founded, the CCP soon started its new agenda of socialist movements and revolutions to consolidate the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and transform the society into a socialist/communist state from its economic bases to its superstructures. Since 1950, Chinese people were involved in consecutive social movements and political campaigns which finally led to ten years of Cultural Revolution. First, the Land Reform in 1950 designated class origin for every person in the new social system based on their personal and family background and established a quasi-caste system (Strauss 2007). At the same time, the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries was launched during the Korean War to target remnants of the KMT government, such as bandits and secret agents, and

arrested and executed around 2 to 5 million "counterrevolutionaries" (Yang, K. 2008). In 1951 and 1952, the Three-anti Campaign and Five-anti Campaign were launched respectively. The former targeted corruptions of bureaucratic officials within and outside the Party while the latter targeted behaviors of fraud and bribery of wealthy capitalists (Chen, T. H. and Chen 2017). From 1953 to 1956, the CCP carried out and completed three big socialist transformations on agriculture, handicraft, and capitalist industry and commerce. Both agriculture and handicraft were collectivized from private to public ownership while the capitalist industry and commerce were transformed to joint state-private ownership (MacFarquhar, Fairbank, and Twitchett 1987). This socialist transformation successfully eliminated private-ownership and constructed a crude form of a socialist state but it did not stop at this stage. After the Anti-Rightest Campaign in 1957 which purged 550,000 intellectuals and dissidents who criticized the rash advance in socialist transformations and the dictatorship of the CCP, no one could really stop Mao Zedong from launching the Great Leap Forward to Communism in 1958 (Chen, T. H. 1960; Jin, G. and Liu 1997). It resulted in the Great Famine from 1959 to 1961 with about 16.5 to 30 million people, mostly peasants, starving to death (Kung and Lin 2003; Yang, J. 2012). The recovery of the economy after the Great Famine was interrupted by the Socialist Education Movement also known as the Four Cleanups Movement started in 1962 which re-emphasized the class struggle within the bureaucratic system of the state (Baum and Teiwes 1968). However, the Socialist Education Movement didn't achieve what Mao had expected so he finally launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966 which led to 10 years of social turmoil and economic stagnation until his death in 1976 (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2009). It was since 1978 that the CCP switched its focus from the class struggle to the economic development and China started the Reform and opening up policy.

The severity and violence of these movements and revolutions were beyond the imagination of any Chinese people who might have embraced the "Liberation" wholeheartedly or halfheartedly. The interviewees in my first generation were only those who were lucky enough to survive through

these consecutive social movements and political persecutions which also made them an interesting group to look at. Did their views toward the State and the Party change or persist with their experiences in those movements? What were their surviving logics? These questions were reflected in their recollections vividly.

## 3.1 Class designation and Socialist Transformation: being incorporated into a total system

Class designation was the first and foremost event happening after the founding of the PRC that influenced the life trajectories of everyone in China. It started from the nationwide Land Reform in 1950, continued during the Socialist Transformation in the mid-1950s, and lasted until the end of the Cultural Revolution. Initially, every person was assigned a class origin based on their family background and wealth, previous occupations, and current social status. However, the class label sometimes could be revised in consecutive social movements based on one's political attitudes and performances. The "good" or "red" classes included poor and lower-middle peasants, workers, revolutionary soldiers, revolutionary cadres, and revolutionary martyrs whereas the "bad" classes contained landlords, rich peasants, and capitalists which were later expanded to five "black" categories during the Cultural Revolution; that is, landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists (MacFarquhar, Fairbank, and Twitchett 1991: 545; Sullivan 2011: 104). The class designation was the first step to incorporate everyone in China into a new socialist system and was of great importance during Mao's era when the idea of class struggle prevailed. The class origin set up a quasi-caste system in society and greatly impacted a person's life chances and opportunities in the first 30 years after the "Liberation." People from "good" class backgrounds could enjoy better social statuses, educational and occupational opportunities as well as social privileges whereas people from "bad" class backgrounds lived like second-class citizens who were always politically suspected, socially isolated, and deprived of chances to receive a good education and higher working positions. It was worth noticing the class designation was not a once for all process. Those people from middle or "good" class backgrounds were also likely to fall into "bad"

classes if they became targets of social movements whereas those from "bad" class backgrounds might work even harder in their workplace to demonstrate their political loyalty and hope to be included into the group of "the people" instead of "the enemy."

While class designation determined one's class origin, the Socialist Transformations (1953–1956) in agriculture, industry and commerce aimed at eliminating private ownership and the exploiting classes and finally incorporating everyone in China into the new total system of the Socialist State. In the city of Beijing, there were only two general categories of occupation remaining in 1956: either state workers or state cadres.

Luming and his father were the first two in his family incorporated into a state-owned company. He recalled that:

> My father was a small vendor and his small stall was incorporated into a state-owned metal company after the 'Gong Si He Ying' (Socialist Transformation with joint state-private ownership). He became a salaried worker in the company and so did I. You could register the number of people running this vendor stall and they would pay salaries to you. We registered my father and I so we had to go to work since then. You had to do whatever they asked you to do. It was 50 yuan per month. Our living conditions were improved to some extent. Our income was more stable. No matter what, they would pay salaries to you.

At the same time, Luming continued his education in the spare-time school when he was off duty. He also volunteered as a teacher in that school and taught literary classes to working class people. Luming's sister was in school at that time. Luming said:

> My sister was in a good time. Girls could go to college but my family was too poor to support her living expenses. She was admitted to a nursing school later on because nursing school provided food and rooms for free.

Luming's sister was assigned to a public hospital after graduation and also became a state worker. For Luming's family small business, the Socialist Transformation of ownership actually helped improve their living conditions a little bit by providing them with more stabilized salaries and

working positions. Although his family was still poor, he and his sister received some opportunities for free education and job assignments.

Experiences of Luming's family were shared among many rural immigrants coming to Beijing either before or after the "Liberation." Tanqiu moved to Beijing in 1951 and first worked in a small shop as an apprentice then the privately-owned small shops were turned into state-private joint ownership during the Socialist Transformation in 1956. Tanqiu became a state-employed salesman working in a larger store on a famous commercial street of Beijing. His wife came to join him in 1954 from the village and worked at the district-level collective factory at first and was later recruited by a state-owned glass factory. Tanqiu had a bad class origin. He recalled:

> We had a very big family. There were 43 people eating together at most. Because these people needed to be fed, we had a lot of land and we needed to hire 7 to 8 people to work together with us on our land.

Hiring labor to work on their land categorized Tanqiu's family into a rich peasant at first and then recategorized into a landlord in 1957. He felt unfair about the class designation but at the same time he felt lucky to come to Beijing early. He said,

> When I came to Beijing, there were not many restrictions to children of landlords and rich peasants yet. Later, children of landlords and rich peasants were no longer allowed to move to cities because the production brigade in the village would not give you the reference letter any more.

Tanqiu was lucky to get his wife and sister out of the village in 1954. His sister was admitted by a nursing school and assigned to a public hospital after graduation. However, the influence of his class origin gradually became bigger and heavier. He recalled bitterly:

> If you had poor peasant origin, you could be a director or store manager. If you had a rich peasant or landlord origin, they didn't want to use you or trust you on important things. After my class origin was recategorized in 1957 (into landlord), the manager came to talk to me because I had joined the labor union and the Youth League of the CCP already. He

> said it was impossible for me to be promoted in the store. He said he wanted to use me but I had such a bad class origin.

Tanqiu's participation in the labor union and the Youth League at his workplace actually showed his career ambition in his early adulthood. He said he was elected as the "advanced worker" almost every year and his manager offered him a chance to join the Party in the early 1950s. "I filled out the application form but I didn't turn it in. Because of my family background, I was afraid to speak publicly." Tanqiu recalled with a sigh. Although the class background held him back, Tanqiu still felt lucky to be able to stay in the capital city and provide his children a better place to live.

As for those college-educated students, CCP members and their children, many were directly assigned to government positions or public institutions and became state cadres in the post-Liberation period. Although many college graduates received education before the "Liberation" and did not come from poor families, the scarcity of those highly-educated youths required the CCP to incorporate them into the state system and make the most of them to serve the state.

Chuoyun was a middle school teacher during the "Liberation" and was promoted to the Associate Dean of students in 1953. Although her family class origin was designated as rich peasant, her personal history was quite simple. "I never left school since I left home." said Chuoyun. As an unusually highly educated young woman, she was selected to participate in a training course for educational administrative work in Beijing. After two years of training, she was assigned to a newly-founded middle school in Beijing as Associate Dean first and Vice President since 1960. She was also asked to participate in the district-level Political Consultative Conference in 1962 as a representative of the educational branch. Although Chuoyun had been promoted under the new regime, she never joined the Party. She said:

> There was someone asking me to join. I thought I was willing to work hard but not necessarily become a Party member. I felt a Party member was in strict control by the organization so I always made some excuse. I told them my thoughts had not been fully

> reformed yet so I was not eligible to be a Party member. I could work hard and well outside of the Party. In fact, I didn't want to take the Party classes.

Chuoyun said she was also influenced by her father who told her two elder brothers to stay away from political parties when she was very young.

> My father used to tell my two brothers to study hard and work hard, do not be corrupted and lazy at work, do not do bad things, help other people when you can, and do not participate in any parties in politics. The responsibility of a student should be study.

Chuoyun had seen the KMT, the CCP, the Youth Party, the Democratic Party and many other political parties before the "Liberation." She kept her father's words in mind and stayed away from political movements or parties during her school years. She further said, "I could work for any organization as long as it was decent. No matter who you are, if I think you are correct, I would work hard for you, but I would not participate in your party." Since Chuoyun never joined the Party, she was not able to be promoted to the President of the school. However, Chuoyun felt lucky to not to join any parties, because those who did were actually harshly persecuted during the Cultural Revolution afterwards.

In short, even though previous social elites and upper classes were designated into "bad" classes and their properties and businesses were confiscated or incorporated into the Socialist State, they were still a monitory group of people in China. The majorities were poor and middle-class people who struggled to make a living during and after the Civil War. For those poor and middle-class people living in the city, they actually embraced the Socialist Transformations to a certain extent because being incorporated into the socialist system as salaried state workers or cadres provided them a more stable income, social welfare and relatively higher social status. However, the dream of a better and more stable life was soon interrupted by the Great Leap Forward and the Great Famine.

## 3.2 Great Leap Forward to Great Famine: unexpected starvation in New China

The Socialist Transformations rashly turned China into a socialist state by eliminating private-ownership across the country but the highest leader Mao Zedong was not satisfied with the current achievement. After the Anti-Rightest Movement in 1957 that persecuted 550,000 intellectuals and dissidents, Mao was ready to wave the "Three Red Flags" in 1958 which included the General Line for socialist construction, the Great Leap Forward, and the People's Commune. With the "Three Red Flags" being nationally implemented, Mao dreamed about realizing Communism in China within a couple of years. The fever brought by the "Three Red Flags" finally led to a Great Famine which was referred as "Three years of natural disaster" or "Three years of difficulties" by the CCP's propaganda to downplay the responsibility of itself (Dikötter 2010). Most of my interviewees clearly remembered the crazy enthusiasm to build a communist society with their own hands and had participated in various construction projects themselves. However, they also could not forget the hunger and disease they experienced following the Great Famine.

In 1958, residents of Beijing also began to organize Communes in their neighborhood. Men were organized to make steel out of backyard furnaces while housewives were driven out of the household and worked in the district-level collective factories to produce various industrial products. Many women came to Beijing from villages following their husband and got a chance to participate in the labor force to be a state worker. Luming's mother was one of them. Luming recalled that:

> My mother did not work outside at the beginning, but after the "Three Red Flags," the subdistrict office organized them to work in the factory. Young women could not stay at home as housewives only. They had to work for the district factories. The slogan said: "We also have two hands. We should not eat the bread of idleness."

Tanqiu's wife also worked at the district factory at first and was recruited to a state-owned glass factory later. Xuelan (1930, female) came to Beijing with her husband in 1950 from a nearby village.

Her husband worked at a state-owned machine tool factory while she was a housewife at the beginning:

> I came to raise kids and cook for my husband. But during the Great Leap Forward, they organized us to work in a collective factory to produce accessories for machines. Workers were all housewives from villages. Most were illiterate, as was I, but I worked very hard.

She had been elected as an "advanced worker" several times and was also a group leader of the women's team in her factory. Although Xuelan didn't say directly, her tone and facial expressions demonstrated she was proud of her achievements as a worker in the factory. It was worth noticing that the Great Leap Forward to industrialization at that time gave rise to numerous district-level collective factories which provided many housewives the chance to participate in the labor force and be incorporated into the state system. However, we could not overlook the fact that these women were also forced to do the "double shift", taking care of kids and most of the housework after their daily jobs.

Aside from the district-level collective factories, a lot of male workers and newly-admitted college students were sent to construction projects near Beijing to contribute to the rapid industrialization process. As a salesman with a bad class origin, Tanqiu complained:

> There was no good work for you to do, all dirty and tiring work for children of landlords or rich peasants. I had done all that type of work. In 1958, I was sent to the West Mountain of Beijing to plant trees for half a year and then built two roads with other workers. I suffered a lot during this time. It was December and the ground was completely frozen and congealed. When you wave the pickax with all your strength, you only got a shallow white mark on the ground. We made a competition. Workers were separated into several groups and competed for a red flag every day. If this group built 2 meters, and that group proceeded for 3, your red flag would be taken by them. We sweated a lot doing this work, so we took off our cotton-padded jackets. We were so young and energetic. Can you imagine? We really competed for that red flag every day.

Tanqiu's narrative of this difficult and energetic time was told in a mixed tone of pity and ridicule of his youth. Different from Tanqiu, Xiuwen (1937, male) was a newly-admitted medical school student in 1958 and was sent to a mine the first year in school. He worked extremely hard to earn more political performance to join the Youth League of the CCP. He recalled sarcastically:

> At that time, I really wanted to join the Youth League of the CCP so I worked longer hours to punch holes in the mine. My classmates did half an hour each shift and I did 45 minutes each shift. As a result, I got tuberculosis. I was forced to take a year off from 1959 to 1960. My father was stunned to see me back home. He said to me, "Why are you home at this time? What can you eat? We have nothing to feed you. How can you cure your disease without food?"

Xiuwen's hardworking performance didn't earn him any rewards but left him with tuberculosis and a year off school. That year was also the first year of the Great Famine. His family was poor in the village and when he went back during that time, his father was in despair to see him home. He had not enough food to eat in the village which made it even harder to recover from tuberculosis. In order to continue his college education, Xiuwen took courage to write a letter to a doctor and professor in Shanghai and asked for his help with his disease. He recalled:

> This professor was a medical textbook editor. I didn't know him personally. I just wrote to him and said I was a poor rural student and got tuberculosis by working in the mine. I hoped to get better soon with his help and continue my education. I sent my medical records and lung scans to him. He was so nice to write a letter for me to school and certify that I was able to go back to school. There were 21 students diagnosed with tuberculosis and I was the only one who passed the re-examination and returned to school after a year. After I returned, the school planned to send us to build a water reservoir. I talked to my teacher and said I could not do this hard labor again. If I got sick once more, I would lose my chance to finish my college. My teacher agreed and sent me to a farm to raise chickens and ducks for half a year. I got the chance to eat some eggs and my body recovered at that time.

Xiuwen was the lucky one among the 21 students and finally got his medical degree in 1964. He studied extremely hard in school and got the highest grades in class. After graduation, he was

assigned to the public disease control center in Beijing originally but was replaced by a child of a CCP cadre. Instead, he was assigned to a small clinic in the suburban area of Beijing and worked there for 7 years until being transferred to a hospital of a university in Beijing due to the lack of college-educated doctors at that time.

Even after returning to college in 1960, Xiuwen still suffered from hunger. He still remembered pretending to be not hungry when the leaders came to visit the college. He recalled:

> We only had sorghum buns to eat in school in 1960. They should be eaten hot. Kang Sheng,[13] and some leaders in the Health Ministry came to our school and we were sitting around the dining table to wait for them. The buns were getting cold. Kang Sheng came to our table and asked us how well we ate and whether we had enough food. We said yes, we were full. Female students said they were too full to finish the buns so they gave the extra buns to male students. Those were all lies. We never got enough food. They taught us to tell lies from this young age.

Similar to Xiuwen, Caiping also starved during her college years in the Agricultural University in Beijing. She was a newly admitted student in 1958 and suffered from hunger and disease during the Great Famine. She recalled:

> I got edema disease in school during the 'Three years of natural disaster.' We had not enough food in school. They gave us 18 *jin* (9kg) of food ration tickets every month. They said that female students ate less so we should give some of our food ration tickets to male students. They asked us to eat less and save food for male students. I always felt hungry. Later, we went to the rivers to find some water weeds and dig out roots of cabbages. We took them back to school and asked the staff in the dining hall to cook for us. I ate those and got edema disease. My body was swollen. I was sent to the hospital in school and given a little bit of milk. I recovered after several months but I missed one semester of my classes.

[13] Kang Sheng was a powerful leader in the Central Committee of the Cultural Revolution following Mao and Madam Mao. More detailed study of Kang Sheng, please see Byron, John, and Robert Pack (1992). *The claws of the dragon: Kang Sheng, the evil genius behind Mao and his legacy of terror in People's China.* Simon & Schuster.

Caiping was not alone to get edema disease because of starvation and malnutrition. Edema disease was widely spread in China during the Great Famine, influencing the poor working class and peasants the most. Even after Luming's mother worked in the factory and brought home some money, the food was still not enough for his growing family. Luming also got edema disease during this time which impacted his health for a lifetime.

> The food was not enough at all. My family had many mouths to feed. I had four younger brothers and four younger sisters. Oh, 1960, what can I say? (Sigh)... My illness could not be cured until now because of the edema disease, because of that time. I ate very little, the corn starch was distributed by the work unit in ration, not enough, no food.

While life for workers and poor students was hard at that time, it was a little bit easier for the state cadres since they had higher salaries to buy high price food on the black market. Linghua and her husband were both state cadres and saved some money before the Great Famine. Linghua recalled one vivid scene during this period:

> It was difficult in 1960. My elder son was five years old. My father visited us from hometown. My husband bought some rice from the black market and we cooked some porridge. My elder son finished his bowl and looked at the bowl and cried. I asked him why. He said he was still hungry so I gave him my porridge.

Linghua and her husband were only lower-rank cadres. For cadres above the level of 17, the state would provide an additional food subsidy. Based on their ranking levels, there were "sugar-soybean cadres" and "meat-egg cadres" (Yuan 2002). There were 30 levels of state cadres in total, for those at level 17 and above, they could receive 500g sugar and 500g soybeans every month. For those at level 13 and above, they could receive 1kg meat and 1kg eggs per month in addition to the sugar and soybeans. The CCP introduced this food subsidy to protect those higher-rank cadres or what they called "the great properties of the state" (Yuan 2002). However, this inequality on food supply and subsidy aroused a lot of dissatisfactions and grievances among lower-rank cadres and state workers who were the majority of Beijing residents and suffered more during the Great Famine.

In short, the three years of the Great Famine led to devastating results in China and resulted in about 16.5 to 30 million of Chinese people, mostly peasants, starving to death (Kung and Lin 2003; Yang, J. 2012). It was the first significant and nationwide setback of the New China after the "Liberation" and an extremely expansive lesson learned from the Great Leap Forward at the expense of thousands and millions of lives. However, this setback didn't shake the legitimacy of the rule of the CCP that much since most people living in the city were not fully aware of the severity of the famine in the rural areas due to the lack of media coverage and, at the same time, the CCP propaganda successfully ascribed the responsibility of the famine to "natural disasters" and repaying the debts of the Soviet Union (Dikötter 2010). For example, Caiping referred to it as the "three years of natural disaster" in her narratives and other respondents referred to it as the "three years of difficulties." None of my interviewees directly referred to it as the "famine" and few of them reflected on the manmade calamity and the responsibility of the totalistic state system.

Since 1961, the Great Famine forced the CCP to readjust the national economy and life was getting better a little bit afterwards. However, the recovery did not last long. The Socialist Education Movement, also known as the Four Cleanups Movement started in 1962, rebranded the class struggle within the bureaucratic system of the state which finally led to the launch of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 (Baum and Teiwes 1968).

## 3.3 Cultural Revolution to the death of Mao: sufferings and self-protection

The Great Famine signified the failure of the Great Leap Forward and Mao's "reckless advance" toward Communism. The critique of the "Three Red Flags" in the Seven Thousand Cadres Conference ("*qi qian ren da hui*") in 1962 had greatly weakened the authority of Mao among the central and local state cadres and led to Mao's temporary retreat from the central position in the Party (MacFarquhar 1974: 137- 181). However, he didn't prepare to hand over power to his colleagues directly. In the following years, Mao first rebranded the Socialist Education Movement

in 1962 and 1963 and then launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966 which successfully purged his political rivals and promoted his personality cult to an unprecedented level. The generation of the "Liberation" just lived through the Great Famine and were soon dragged into a more severe and violent movement, the Cultural Revolution. People being persecuted were not limited to those with bad class origins who were easy targets or scapegoats in any social movements but also those state cadres who took the leading positions in their work unit or who had connections with the central CCP leaders that Mao would like to get rid of. Only a few of my interviewees from the first generation were directly persecuted and tortured during the Cultural Revolution which also explained why they survived this movement. However, most of them witnessed the sufferings of their friends, colleagues, neighbors, and strangers, etc.

The salesman Tanqiu was recategorized into landlord in 1957. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, the class struggle became more and more intensive, Tanqiu and his wife were asked to leave Beijing and go back to their home village by the cadres in charge of their residential community. Tanqiu turned to his work unit for help. He recalled that:

> They asked us to leave Beijing before October 1, 1967. I went to my work unit for help. I was a good worker there. Our manager didn't know about this thing so he went to talk to the director of the Revolutionary committee who was a rebel from our work unit. He asked us to wait and see. The cadres of the residential community came to our houses every day and asked us to leave. Since I had a word from the director of the Revolutionary committee, I argued back. "Why should I leave? My work unit didn't ask me to leave. I have no economic problems, nor moral issues. My class origin is bad, but it has nothing to do with you." I refused to leave for several days and the policy became loosened, so I stayed.

Tanqiu tried to keep himself low-profile in the workplace and work harder than others to win over support from his manager. He felt that he "didn't suffer much during the Cultural Revolution." He talked about his surviving logics with a bad class origin in the work unit.

> When we had meetings, I never talked about bad things. I just said good things, but not too much. I always came first when there was dirty and tiring work to do. Whenever there was a movement, I just did my best to be closer to the requirements of the CCP.

Tanqiu didn't join the CCP for his lifetime and he said it was because he was "afraid to speak in front of other people" which was largely due to his bad class origin. As an ordinary worker with a modest and prudent manner in the workplace, Tanqiu successfully survived the severe Cultural Revolution.

This surviving logic was also adopted by other interviewees. Chuoyun decided not to join any party from her early age and thought that decision saved her life in the Cultural Revolution. She recalled:

> Since I was not a Party member, I was never promoted to the President of the school. If I was the President, I would be criticized harshly. The Party Secretary in our school was switched to another school before the Cultural Revolution. He was persecuted to death during the Cultural Revolution. A principal position would be accused as the capitalist roader but a deputy position faced much less pressure. They asked us to write big character posters to criticize other leaders but I was not beaten or imprisoned.

Chuoyun felt that staying outside of the Party organization had saved her from being harshly persecuted. Nonetheless, Chuoyun's salary was significantly reduced and her house was raided by the rebels (Red Guards) who took all her properties away and drove Chuoyun out of her house.

> I lived with my mother at that time. There were many households in our neighborhood. I remembered a professor from Peking University. The rebels in Peking University plastered his windows and drove his family out of the house. Then most of the households were raided completely. A capitalist, a cadre of the National sports committee, a friend of the Mayor of Beijing and some others had lived there. They were all criticized and sent to the cowshed becoming 'five black classes.' I was also driven out of my house and lived in a small shabby house for 14 years. My mother had passed away before the house raid. Her death was partly because of the Cultural Revolution. I was locked in study sessions in school and could not go home to take care of her. She worried about me.

Chuoyun described her mother's death with sorrow but thought she was lucky to be spared from struggle sessions compared to other CCP cadres and intellectuals who were later sent to labor camps or imprisoned in the "cowshed" (Ji 2016), and persecuted to death. However, her life in the small house was still not easy. She recalled:

> The room was so small so I had to cut my bed smaller to fit the room. All my clothes and boxes were taken away by the rebels. I had no clothes to wear in winter so I asked the military leader in school whether I could take my winter clothes back. They asked me to go to the local police station. I went there and only took one box of clothes back. The other one with sweaters was empty. Someone might have taken my sweaters but I could not do or say anything. I just took the rest of my clothes home.

In addition, Chuoyun's father had left her four porcelain vases and two of them were highly valuable antiques from the Ming Dynasty which were all raided by the rebels. She recalled being asked to take back her vases after the Cultural Revolution but just got the two recent ones. The real valuable Ming Dynasty antiques disappeared. She said, "They asked me to take these two back, so I did. If you refused, they might suspect your motivation." She never thought about asking for the two missing valuable antiques or requesting compensations even after the Cultural Revolution. She said that "This was the Cultural Revolution. I was a single woman, and my life was simple. I lived through the difficulties one by one and was 'educated' by them during this process." In those years of the social movement, Chuoyun learned to be docile and quiet, and most importantly, stay away from political struggles within the Party.

Like Chuoyun, Junbai also didn't join the CCP. As we described earlier, he was assigned to work in a state department after graduating from Tsinghua University in 1949. He was relatively active in the workplace and organized workers to sing Peking operas in their spare time. However, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Junbai was criticized by the Red Guards because of his opera singing activities that promoted the so-called 'feudalistic' culture. Junbai's father, the famous Peking opera troupe manager, had passed away right before the Cultural Revolution. He recalled:

> My father passed away in January of 1966. He was lucky to die early and didn't need to experience the Cultural Revolution… Before the Cultural Revolution, I organized workers to sing Peking operas in our workplace and many of them were opera fans. When the Cultural Revolution started, I was the first to be dragged out by the Red Guards for a public shaming parade. I was lucky to be saved by several workers who were also opera fans. They used their bicycles to barricade the road and spoke to the Red Guards. Industrial workers were very prestigious and powerful at that time. They asked, "Why do you take him? What is his problem? What is his class origin?" Those Red Guards could not answer clearly. The workers said, the revolution was supposed to overturn the capitalist roaders in the Party. I was not a Party member so I shouldn't be paraded. Then, they released me.

Junbai was lucky to be saved by his opera fans from a public shaming parade but he was still marginalized during the Cultural Revolution. He vividly said, "Previously, I was the one who pointed a finger to others. For the first time, I became the one being pointed at by others." It was a big contrast for Junbai. He used to attend struggle sessions and criticize the targets with the crowd but, all of a sudden, he became the target. He was saved by those workers partly because he was a popular opera singer among them and partly because he was not a CCP member. Junbai sighed cynically, "I don't like politics in my whole life. I stayed away from it. I cannot understand it." It was understandable why Junbai was so disappointed toward the politics and struggles within the Party. He had witnessed the factional infighting between two underground CCP student organizations before the "Liberation" and experienced the fierce Red Guard Movement by himself. For Junbai, politics was like a burning flame and whenever he attempted to get closer to it, he got himself burnt.

Different from the relatively lucky ones above, Linghua's husband was severely persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. Linghua's own class origin was poor peasant but her husband was from a rich peasant background. She recalled that:

> There were two factions of rebels fought in his work unit and they smashed the workplace. He was on duty that day and was accused to be responsible for the event. He

> was taken by them from home another day. We didn't know whether he could come back again. I couldn't see him. I was sent down to do manual labor and my husband was locked up, so my two children were left alone at home. My younger daughter was only 10 years old and had to cook with her 12- year-old brother by themselves. Fortunately, he was back at last. He never told us anything about what had happened inside and what he had suffered. I saw injuries and bruises on his body. He must have been harshly beaten by them. He never returned to his original work unit afterwards. My husband was lucky to come back alive. He told me that he had thought about committing suicide, but worried about us, so he endured.

Linghua described this story with a relatively calm tone but the scar of sufferings never went away. She further said, "He was tortured partly because of his family origin and partly because of his temper. He talked straight and was easy to offend other people." By ascribing the suffering to some personal reasons, Linghua could still save part of her previous belief toward the CCP. She was actually a promising state cadre at her young age who was assigned to the Railway Ministry after graduation from college and joined the CCP soon. She said, "I actively pursued progress in my work and thoughts." With a poor peasant class origin, she was also trusted by her leaders and was promoted in her workplace. Her husband also had received a good education and worked very hard in his work unit. He was promoted to the team leader despite his rich peasant class origin before the Cultural Revolution but he didn't join the CCP at that time. Both of them had dreamt about their bright future but the Cultural Revolution gave them a heavy blow and broke the dream into pieces. It was only after the Cultural Revolution that they seemed to see a future again. Linghua said her husband joined the Party after the Cultural Revolution in 1980 when they redressed his case and rehabilitated him.

Linghua's colleague, Jiegang (1934, male), who was also a lower-rank state cadre in the railway system at that time, witnessed the event of two rebel factions that Linghua had described as well as other persecutions happening during the Cultural Revolution.

> There were two factions of rebels in the railway system. One was called the Iron Union and the other the Grand Union. They had a big debate one day and were called to participate in the debate. I had heard about super violent words from them. I was afraid there might be some bad things happening between them. I knew it was unsafe. When I saw two young girls sitting there, I asked them to leave. I meant well. I worried about their safety. I said, 'don't come here, go away." They used this to accuse me and write big character posters against me after the smashing of the workplace happened on that day. They said I knew there would be a smash and I was part of the conspiracy. It was ridiculous!

Jiegang recalled this past with a feeling of anger and betrayal. His good intention didn't give him a good return. He was reported by these two girls to the authority. Unlike Linghua's husband, Jiegang was not persecuted because he had a good class background. His father was a worker and he had joined the CCP in 1956. He said: "I was lucky that I didn't have a high position in the work unit, neither did I have bad class origin. If you had a high position, you might be accused as the 'capitalist roaders in power.' If you had a bad class origin, you might also be persecuted." After the first few years of factional infightings, Jiegang was elected into the Revolutionary Committee in his work unit. Some of his colleagues would stay at his house to escape from political struggles.

> People were so frightened. They dared not to go home. They were afraid that the rebels from the opposite faction would come to their houses and take them to struggle sessions and even lock them up. Sometimes they stayed on the street and sometimes they came to my house. Maybe my house was safer than theirs. They were so scared.

When his own name appeared on the big character posters as the target of criticism, Jiegang was fed up with those factional disputes and conflicts so he decided to stay away from them. He recalled:

> I couldn't change anything so I talked to the representatives of the military control commission to allow me to leave my workplace and do some manual labor. They sent me and some other colleagues to clean a railway station. We became cleaners. I didn't need

> to participate in their gatherings anymore. We wanted to be independent from the two factions. The Grand Union called us the capitulators.

Jiegang was lucky to be able to stay away from the factional conflicts and persecutions during the Cultural Revolution but he still witnessed a lot of sufferings and deaths of his colleagues and friends at that time. He recalled:

> Many people had committed suicide during the Cultural Revolution. They had to endure tortures physically and psychologically. Some could not stand the beating so they killed themselves. I knew one from our work unit. He usually came to my house. He was harshly criticized during the Cultural Revolution. It was a summer afternoon, he was exposed to a 100 watt light bulb with two heavy iron boards hanging over his neck on a thin wire. The wire cut into his flesh and he could no longer sustain the torture. He committed suicide but didn't succeed. Another man I knew was a good doctor from Kuomingtang's army. He was also tortured during the Cultural Revolution. He tried to commit suicide but could hardly find any possible means. There was no electric switch nor ropes. Finally, he broke a glass cup and used one piece of glass to cut his wrists and bled to death.

Jiegang later told me he heard those stories from others but he described them as if he was there. He finally said, "Many higher-rank officials were persecuted to death, jumping from a building and the like. Under those circumstances, you couldn't understand, many people felt hard to get through. They were all afraid to be criticized by the Party and the public. The mental shackles imposed on you were hard to accept. A large part of them were beaten to death and another large part committed suicide."

Simian had similar experiences compared to Jiegang. He joined the CCP army before the Liberation and viewed the CCP as his life savior. He became a Party member in 1953 and said it was a feeling of "having a home" and "devoting all of your life to the Party." He said that

> I had no other thoughts but to follow the Party. I would do whatever the Party asked me to do. Our jobs were assigned by the Party. We had the slogan that "Only allow the Party to pick you. Do not allow you to choose your job."

Even as a loyal follower of the CCP, Simian felt frustrated about the Party leader during the Cultural Revolution when he saw many high-level CCP cadres he had worked with were harshly persecuted only because they said something true. He talked about several central state cadres he had worked with in the University. Some of them wrote letters to Mao Zedong to question the Dazhai agricultural model,[14] and some were persecuted because of their connections to other leaders in the Central government. He lamented that:

> They were all loyal Party members, and very good cadres. They believed in the Party but were finally persecuted to death… I really admired them, their loyalty to the Party, their concern about the people… They were all dead with families ripped apart.

Simian recalled one of the CCP leaders who had deeply influenced him at the workplace:

> I drove him home after he was criticized on grounds. He said to me, "I was over." I tried to comfort him and said, "Don't be so sad. Please trust the mass and trust the Organization (Party)." His house was raided by the rebel students. He sat on the sofa and said to me, "They took away many stuffs from my house, I have no worry about other things except for one document. It is a military meeting minute, a confidential document. Please help me to find it and get it back." These were the last words he spoke to me. Before long, he was persecuted to death.

Simian used to work with him during the Socialist Education Movement and saw him giving his salary to a poor rural family. He was deeply touched by this loyal CCP leader who worried more about a confidential document of the Party than his personal safety at the time of being persecuted.

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[14] Dazhai agricultural Model was set up by Mao Zedong in 1963 as the exemplar of developing agriculture in China despite of difficulties. It was hailed as the single model for agriculture during the Cultural Revolution. More detailed research please see: Zhao, Jijun, and Jan Woudstra. "'In Agriculture, Learn from Dazhai': Mao Zedong's revolutionary model village and the battle against nature." *Landscape Research* 32, no. 2 (2007): 171-205.

However, the only comforting words Simian could say at that time was to "trust the mass and trust the Organization." On the one hand, his personal observations and emotional attachment to these CCP leaders made it hard to believe they deserved to be persecuted. On the other hand, his long-term belief toward the correctness of the Party made it hard to think that the Party could make such big mistakes. He looked up to these CCP cadres and respected their deeds and he also talked about his own experience of protecting confidential documents during the Cultural Revolution.

> I was in charge of the key to the confidential department. Three to four Red Guards circled me around a table and asked for the key. I refused. I said that it was not my key. It was a key the Party asked me to preserve. I had to take the responsibility. It was the property and secret of the Party. I had no key to give you even if you killed me.

Simian finally successfully protected the key and those confidential documents. Thanks to his low-rank position and good class origin, he was not harshly persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. In 1978, he was assigned the job of redressing the mistakenly criticized and persecuted cases in his workplace during the Cultural Revolution. Although the deaths of his colleagues and admirable leaders made him reflect on the mistakes of the Party, Simian ascribed most of the mistakes to the "Gang of Four." His confidence toward the Party restored after the fall of the "Gang of Four" and the official refutation and criticizing of the Cultural Revolution. Despite all bitterness and complaints about the suffering during the Cultural Revolution, Simian finally returned his gratitude toward the CCP. "The CCP loves the people and wants to serve the people, so it can lead our state to current status."

With these sufferings they experienced and witnessed, interviewees from the first generation were quite calm or even indifferent to Mao Zedong's death in September 1976. They showed more of their sorrow to the Premier Zhou Enlai who died in January 1976. Zhou's death triggered the April 5$^{th}$ Movement on Tiananmen Square in the same year which was a non-violent protest of Beijing residents toward the central authority, particularly the "Gang of Four," expressing their

grievance and dissatisfaction toward the Cultural Revolution (Heilmann 1993; Teiwes and Sun 2004).

Simian had personally seen Zhou Enlai when he was a bodyguard of a high position CCP leader. He recalled:

> Chairman Mao's death was not impressive for me. I just knew that he passed away. It was Premier Zhou's death which triggered conflicts between two factions. I was confused why the government did not allow us to commemorate him publicly. Premier Zhou cared for the people deeply. He worked very hard. We were so discontent that they did not allow us to commemorate, neither could we wear white followers or black armbands.

Simian's grievance toward Zhou's death was widely shared by many Chinese people at that time. Luming also recalled:

> We thought Premier Zhou was a good person. People had a deep attachment to him. We all cried. Many people went to Tiananmen Square to commemorate him on the Tomb-Sweeping Day of 1976 (April 5$^{th}$). I didn't go. My wife did. Many people gathered there with many funeral wreaths.

Luming further recalled the death of Mao:

> Chairman Mao died after Premier Zhou. People had a deeper feeling toward the Premier than the Chairman. When he (Mao Zedong) died, every work unit was required to set up a mourning hall to commemorate him. It was different from mourning the Premier which was voluntary and a spontaneous action by people. The feeling was different.

Unlike the suppression of commemoration after Zhou's death, everyone was required to perform sadness and sorrow after Mao's death but most interviewees in my first generation didn't sincerely feel them. They quickly switched to a feeling of relief and delight with the fall of the "Gang of Four" one month after Mao's death which signified the end of the Cultural Revolution as well as Mao's era.

In general, the 10 years of Cultural Revolution dragged most Chinese people into a slew of fierce political struggles and persecutions fraught with anxiety, uncertainty, grievance and suffering. The most mentioned surviving logic from the first generation was "to stay away from politics as far as possible" although it might be hard to achieve for those involved. Class origin became more deterministic for one's life trajectory due to the prevailing class struggle at that time, especially for those who had a bad class background. Moreover, for the first generation, joining the Party put them in a more precarious position during the Cultural Revolution which targeted "Capitalist Roaders in Power." The ruthless purge of CCP leaders and high position state cadres during the Cultural Revolution made the most loyal CCP members and followers in the first generation start to question the righteousness of the Party which severely impacted the legitimacy of the CCP. However, the lost confidence in the Party was soon restored by the rehabilitation of cadres and redress of wrong cases after the fall of the "Gang of Four" as well as a public refutation of the Cultural Revolution and acknowledgement of the mistakes of Mao from the late 1970s to the early 1980s. The interviewees in the first generation who were in their 40s and 50s at the end of the Cultural Revolution could finally enjoy a relatively stable life that they had been longing for since the "Liberation."

Although the Reform and Opening up after 1978 had greatly changed the economic and social structure of China, the first generation was no longer economically and socially active during the booming years of China. They usually retired from positions of state workers or cadres in the 1980s and 1990s and lived off the pensions distributed by their work units. Even if some of the state-owned work units bankrupted during the market reform in the late 1990s, these retirees could still receive their pensions from the state-controlled welfare system. Therefore, the process of marketization and capitalization did not influence them deeply and their views of the State and the Party were largely shaped during the wartime and the first 30 years of Communist China. In the last part of this chapter, I will elaborate in detail on different views of the State and the Party for

my first generation and how those views shaped in their early adulthood had lasting impacts on their values and beliefs in their lifetime.

## 4. Discussion: from Nation-State to Party-State

The initial view of the state for this generation was generated during the Anti-Japanese War in the early 1940s. By experiencing and suffering the Japanese invasion and enslaving, the first generation born before the war saw the weakness and poverty of the state that was not able to protect its people. As Chuoyun had said, "a person living in a state without sovereignty would have no freedom at all. Neither freedom in study, nor freedom in life." Simian also used a metaphor to describe the Chinese people during the war: "Chinese were like ants. They [Japanese invaders] could step on you and kill you at any time. Human rights? You had none." Therefore, the Anti-Japanese war gave rise to a sense of patriotism and nationalism toward the Chinese state among youngsters, especially students. The "State" referred to by my interviewees at this historical period was mostly the nation-state in that their feelings of humiliation and grievance in front of a Japanese invasion directly aroused the nationalistic emotions and patriotic attachment toward the state. Moreover, there had been a lasting yearning for a strong, independent and democratic state during and after the war which was effectively incorporated by the CCP in its propaganda to win over support from intellectuals and students during the Civil War or in CCP's terminology, the "Liberation" War.

As the only generation in my study who had experienced the Civil War by themselves and witnessed the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the process of "Liberation" formed their first impression of the newly-founded state which had lasting impacts on their views toward the state later on. Although most people at that moment were unclear about the ideological differences between the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) and the Communist Party, the quick restoration of social order and the curb of the price inflation after the "Liberation" did win over a

lot of support from urban residents. Furthermore, the opening up of educational and work opportunities with the establishment of a new state also provided the generation of the "Liberation" chances to strive for a better future. Many of my interviewees in this generation benefited from the political transition and felt grateful to the life-changing opportunities provided by the CCP. In addition, the study sessions or thought reform following the "Liberation" successfully promoted the CCP's ideological narratives of the revolutionary history that was devoted to saving the Chinese people from the oppression of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic-capitalism, and preventing the state from being divided (Mao, Z. 1967). The bloodshed and sacrifice of its members during the revolution added more weight on the CCP's legitimacy discourse that depicted itself as the "savior" of the Chinese state and the Chinese people and the leading "representative" of the general proletariat including the poor working class and peasants. The dictatorship of the proletariat thus was translated to the dictatorship of the Communist Party which not only ruled the state, but became the state itself; that is, the rise of the Party-State. The first generation received this ideological education right at the moment of their late adolescence and early adulthood and was easily attracted by radical egalitarian idealism and the communist utopia. Since the "Liberation," interviewees in the first generation referred to the Chinese state less as a nation-state in relation to other countries at an international platform, but more as a Party-State acting as an omnipotent resource controller and distributor. However, it didn't mean that the idea of patriotism toward the state disappeared. On the contrary, the Party-State required a more selfless sacrifice of personal interests and wholehearted dedication of individuals to collective interests represented by the Party as well as the State.

## 4.1 Party-State as the omnipotent resource controller and distributor

The "Liberation" and the founding of Communist China was a turning point for both the Chinese state and the Chinese people but it was far from the end of the revolution. Shortly after the "Liberation," the CCP continued its social revolution through class designation and the Socialist

Transformations. At the end of the first five-year plan (1953-1957), every Chinese person was incorporated into the total system controlled by the Party-State, especially urban residents. Since then, nearly every aspect of their life fell into the hands of the state, including education, job assignments, salaries and pensions, food and clothes rations, housing, healthcare and childcare, etc. When the first generation reached the age to participate in the labor force, they were either assigned as state workers or state cadres and worked up their ranks within the state-owned work units. For those living in the cities, no one could survive outside of the total system. Therefore, the Party-State became an omnipotent resource controller and distributor.

My interviewees from the first generation were not only embracing this socialist transformation but were also eager to be incorporated into the state-controlled system. For those lowly educated rural migrant workers who came to Beijing before or right after the "Liberation," being recruited to state-owned factories provided them stable salaries, housing, healthcare and childcare that were not available for rural residents. Furthermore, becoming a state worker greatly elevated their social status, since the working class was portrayed as the master of the state in the CCP's propaganda.[15] For those who participated in the CCP's army before the "Liberation" or received education from junior college or universities, the state would directly assign them to relevant state departments or work units as state cadres and they would enjoy even higher social status and more privileges. What's more, although the salaries and privileges were differentiated among different levels of workers and cadres, social inequality was not very obvious or visible. Most people from the first

[15] The internal migrations from rural to urban areas were soon controlled by the state with the Household Registration Regulation ("Hukou" system) written in the law in 1958. The rural-urban dual structure was formed based on this system. Resources were extracted from rural areas to support the industrialization and development in urban cities. Urban residents also enjoyed more opportunities and better social welfare compared to rural residents.
For more detailed research on Hukou system, please see Chan, Kam Wing, and Li Zhang. (1999). "The hukou system and rural-urban migration in China: Processes and changes." *The China Quarterly* 160: 818-855. As well as Solinger, Dorothy J. (1999). *Contesting citizenship in urban China: Peasant migrants, the state, and the logic of the market*. University of California Press.

generation enjoyed living in the illusion of an egalitarian society during Mao's era, and they viewed the Party-State as a caregiver that would take care of them and their children.

However, this state-controlled system did not always work properly, since the consecutive political campaigns and social movements increased the uncertainty and instability of the system. The Great Leap Forward and the Great Famine signified the first failure of this total system at the expense of 30 million deaths nationwide whereas the Cultural Revolution turned this system into chaos and finally led to its reformation in the post-Mao era. The failure of the total system impelled the first generation to reflect on the mistakes of the CCP but they usually ascribed the disasters to several central leaders such as the Gang of Four and Mao Zedong. When the CCP acknowledged the mistakes by arresting the Gang of Four, refuting the Cultural Revolution, and redressing and rehabilitating the persecuted people, it soon restored the image of justice and correctness among the first generation, some of whom even joined the CCP after their rehabilitation in the early 1980s. When China was proceeding to a market-oriented reform in the 1980s and 1990s, the retired first generation could still receive their pensions and healthcare from the state while recalling their golden ages of the 1950s.

## 4.2 Party-State as the ideal object for personal sacrifice

The establishment of a Party-State didn't mean that people's patriotic attachment to the nation-state disappeared. Quite the opposite, the maintaining of the Party-State required a more selfless sacrifice of personal interests for the sake of the collective interests represented by the state. Everyone was assigned to a position to serve the state purposes and devoted themselves in their work without complaint. Simian had put it in a short sentence: "Only allow the Party to pick you. Do not allow you to choose your job."

Interviewees in the first generation were educated to be selfless and pure in thoughts and sincerely believed in those words when they were young. Caiping was assigned to a research

institution outside of Beijing after graduation. The education she received told her that "the state's needs should be your personal will" and they should be readily assigned to wherever the state needed them the most. Jiegang directly said, "As a young man, I had no selfish idea and personal considerations. I joined the party because I wanted to serve the state, not because how much money to make or high position to get." He further talked about how he would report his ideas and thoughts every week to the Party leader in his work unit. Simian described his feeling of joining the Party as "having a home," and he was ready to devote his life to the cause of the Party. In his words, it was a "pure attachment" to the Party and he would follow the Party to do whatever he was told to do.

However, their idealistic beliefs toward the Party and the State were disillusioned in real life to some extent. Under the guise of selfless dedication, they saw people's pursuit of self-interests through political performances, leverages on *guanxi* (connections and networks), and even corruption. For instance, Xiuwen was supposed to be assigned to a public disease control center in the city of Beijing after graduating from medical school, but he was replaced by a child of a high position CCP cadre. Instead, he was placed in a small suburban clinic near Beijing. A similar scenario also happened to Caiping. As a Beijing resident, she was assigned to work in a less developed province after graduation mainly because she didn't want to fawn on the teacher who kept his favorite students in Beijing. After being assigned to the research institute, Caiping soon found that she was not actually "needed" by the workplace. She had to again "fawn on the leaders to get research funds." Since she thought that "fawning on people was bad," she had little funding and no important work to do. "You cannot rely on your abilities only," she said sarcastically, "After I retired, I thought I should have done it (to fawn on the leaders) to get a chance to start at least."

Even for those loyal followers of the CCP, witnessing those admirable and respectful CCP leaders being persecuted to death during the Cultural Revolution had put them in deep suspicion of the correctness of the Party-State. As a faithful Party member, Simian lamented for those people,

"I knew many good state cadres. They were loyal and devoted, abiding by the arrangement of the Party and believing in the Party. They were all persecuted to death." He talked about his personal encounters with them in detail and finally ended with a long and heavy sigh. Similar to Simian, Jiegang joined the CCP with pure admiration but now he talked about his early idealism with a teasing tone, "I was a child, simple-minded and silly. I admired the Communist idealism, but I didn't know that Communism was too hard to realize. I just wanted to be a student of the Party and listen to the Party." After experiencing and witnessing ruthless political struggles in consecutive social movements, Jiegang said, "Now I look back on those ideas. They are laughable. I would never have these kinds of ideas anymore." Many interviewees from the first generation became cynical and detached from politics during and after the Cultural Revolution but the emotional attachment to the Party-State and the idealism of selfless sacrifice for the collective interests still resided deeply in their minds. When they saw the increasing of inequality and corruption in the Chinese society during the Reform era, this idealism was again brought up to criticize the current state.

All in all, the dispositions and perceptions of the generation of the "Liberation" were shaped by their experiences and memories of the wars in the "Old China", the fears and hopes in the "Liberation," as well as the illusions and disillusions in the "New China." Particularly, the regime transition they had experienced during the adolescence and early adulthood had formed their initial impressions on the Communist State and greatly changed their life trajectories later on. Growing up in wartime, they held a strong expectation for an independent state that could provide them with a stable life with dignity. The process of the "Liberation" and the founding of the Communist state fulfilled this expectation to a certain extent. Most people from this generation received new opportunities of education and job assignments and were soon incorporated into the socialist state system as state workers or cadres in the post-Liberation period. The state promised to provide them with a relatively equal and stable life with conceivable resources and welfare while individuals

were educated into socialist men and women who would devote themselves to the Party and the state. However, this short-lived stable life was soon interrupted by gradually escalated social movements which finally led to the Cultural Revolution. The fanatic rebels mobilized by Mao overthrew the newly-established bureaucratic system and the fierce struggle sessions rendered many people from this generation as targets. Even the faithful Party members started to question the correctness of the CCP at this time which was only recovered after the rehabilitation of the wrongly accused people after the Cultural Revolution.

# Chapter 3
# Generation of the "Cultural Revolution:" the Children of Mao

Sixty years flew by,
Leaving quite lot perceptions of life.
Growing up in the fifties,
The ignorant child only expected more food.
Encountering the Cultural Revolution at teenage,
The youngster was banished to Inner Mongolia one day,
With desert, cold moon, and hunger surrounded by.
Returning to Beijing with no stable job,
The man in forties came across with the Reform.
Whenever he recollected the past,
It was like to strike a chill into his heart.
----Zhiheng, *Po Zhen Zi-- Reflections on the Sixtieth Birthday*[16]

This was a poem written by my interviewee Zhiheng (1952, male) at his 60th birthday using a traditional Song Ci format. This poem described his sixty years of traumatic life history which reflected not only his personal living experiences but also a shared generational memory which would resonate with most children of Mao. Zhiheng was born in 1952 in Beijing in a poor working-class family. As the youngest son in his family, he had two older brothers and an older sister. The first memory of his early childhood was the lack of food during the Great Famine (1959-1961) and his oldest brother joining the army in 1960 in order to relieve the burden of the family. When he prepared to enter middle school at age 14, the outburst of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 suddenly cut off his normal life trajectory. In the first three years of the Cultural Revolution, he witnessed fierce struggle meetings, overwhelming big character posters and the factional armed fights in

[16] The poem was written in Chinese and translated by the author.

Beijing. He admired his older brother and sister who were old enough to join the Red Guards and participate in the nationwide "Great Link-up" (*Da Chuan Lian*) which was meant to take public transportation for free across the nation to spread the revolutionary fire and exchange revolutionary experiences (Yang, G. 2000). In October 1967, school was resumed and Zhiheng finished middle school education halfheartedly in 1969. Soon after his graduation, he was sent down to Inner Mongolia Production and Construction Corps[17] as one of the educated youths and stayed there for eight years accompanied by "desert, cold moon, and hunger." When he finally came back to Beijing in 1977, it was hard for him to find a stable job at a work unit. Therefore, he worked at several places for 1 yuan per day and finally was assigned to a collective factory. In his 40s, the economic reform struck the old state-owned factories and he became the first of a few who left the collective factory to make a profit in the market economy.

Zhiheng's life trajectory was in general representative of millions of early educated youths sent down in the late 1960s to remote villages or Production and Construction Corps in Shaanxi, Shanxi, North East, Inner Mongolia, Yunnan, etc. They were part of the Red Guard generation who had participated or witnessed the Red Guard movement from 1966 to 1968 and were then involved in the Rustication movement launched by Mao to relieve the employment burden in the cities (Yang, G. 2016).[18] They settled down in remote and poor regions of China with no expectation or hope of coming back. Therefore, they suffered the longest in the Rustication movement but were only one of the generation units coming of age during the Cultural Revolution. The Red Guards who

[17] The Inner Mongolia Production and Construction Corps was one of the para-military state farms established during the Cultural Revolution to receive sent-down youths. More detailed study please see: Pan, Yihong. (2006) "Revelation of the grassland: The Han sent-down youths in Inner Mongolia in China's Cultural Revolution." *Asian Ethnicity* 7.3: 225-241, and Wang, Yanru (2013) *Neimenggu sheng chan jian she bing tuan zu jian bei jing ji che xiao yuan yin yan jiu* (*Research on the Background of the Establishment and Revocation of Inner Mongolia Production and Construction Corps),* Inner Mongolia Normal University, Master thesis.

[18] The Red Guard generation also included college students who would not participate in the Rustication Movement. See Yang, Guobin. (2016) *The Red Ruard Generation and Political Activism in China*. Columbia University Press, 2016: p6.

were already in college constituted another generation unit and were mostly assigned to factories, villages and public institutions in less developed cities or towns after the Red Guard Movement. They were the last group of college graduates recruited through exams during the Cultural Revolution. In addition, for those middle and high school urban students sent down to villages in the 1970s, their destinations were located much closer to the cities, usually suburban areas and nearby villages with an expected rustication time of two years. They would return to the city afterwards and wait to be assigned to state-owned work units. Those younger sent-down youths constituted the third generation unit of the Cultural Revolution who were too young to be part of the Red Guard Movement and didn't suffer as much in the short-term rustication experience. In total, there were about 17 million educated youths, middle or high school students in China sent down to rural villages or Production and Construction Corps during the Rustication movement from 1968 to 1980 (Bonnin 2013). In addition, besides the majority of sent-down youths, there were a few who joined the army or were recruited by schools or factories right after graduation from middle or high school, and thus luckily stayed in the city. Those educated youths escaped the Rustication and constituted the fourth generation unit who possessed a very different memory of the Cultural Revolution. Lastly, there was a more selective group of people (about 940,000 in total) who were recommended to college from 1970 to 1976 and were called 'worker-peasant-soldier students' (Chen, Y. 1999). While the college entrance exam was abolished during the ten years of the Cultural Revolution, they were the luckiest few being recommended from factories, production brigades, Production and Construction Corps and military camps across the nation to continue their education in universities. This turning point in their life trajectory differentiated them from other sent-down or stayed youths and therefore made them the fifth generation unit.

These five generation units constituted the generation of the Cultural Revolution who were born in the late 1940s and the 1950s, growing up with stories of revolutionary forerunners and heroes, ideological propaganda of Socialism and Communism, and political discourses of class

struggle and the personality cult of Mao. In the following part of this chapter, I elaborate on their life experiences and memories of crucial personal and historical turning points chronologically, mainly focusing on the periods of the Cultural Revolution and the Reform and opening up. The Cultural Revolution had several stages which pushed or selected people of this generation into different life trajectories which greatly impacted their later life experiences after the Cultural Revolution as well as their perceptions of the Party and the State. The early-stage Red Guard Movement involved thousands and millions of students and young adults in the frenetic revolution against the "Capitalist roaders and revisionists in power," presenting them the "great democracy" of the mass movement. With the Red Guard Movement fading away, these adolescents and young adults were called to devote themselves "to the villages, the borderlands, the most needed places of the state" during the Rustication movement. Their life trajectories were divided at this time based on their class origins, family connections, ever-changing state policies on different cohorts and limited personal choices. These differentiated trajectories shaped five generation units in this generation that had different levels of reflection on the Cultural Revolution and the Party-State in the post-Mao era. The start of the Reform and Opening up era was a turning point for many people of this generation, some of whom resumed their disrupted education, while some returned to the city from rusticated villages or state farms to be assigned to different state-owned work units. They had hopes and expectations for a better future for themselves and the state. However, the Tiananmen Crackdown in 1989 crushed many people's idealism and political passion and dragged them into cynicism and pragmatism in the 1990s and 2000s. A few of them left the original work units to start their own private business in the market, while some were forced to be laid off during the economic reform of the state-owned factories, but the majority of them still stayed in the socialist *Danwei* system and enjoyed the iron rice bowls provided by the state. In response to the rampant corruption and rising social inequalities, different generation units provided different ways out. Those who suffered less during the Cultural Revolution were more likely to refer back to a

nostalgic memory of Mao's era with a romanticized reconstruction whereas those who suffered the most proposed a more thorough political reform in China.

## 1. The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)

### 1.1 The Red Guard Movement: a violent carnival

The outburst of the Cultural Revolution was officially attributed to the issuing of the May 16 Notification prepared under the supervision of Mao which set up the target of the revolution—the *revisionists* sneaked into "the party, the government, the army, and various cultural circles" who betrayed the proletarian revolution and secretly harbored the capitalist road.[19] In other words, it was a purge within the party that targeted on the "Khrushchev nestling beside us," or more clearly, those political rivals got in the way of Chairman Mao.[20] However, this notification was a confidential document circulated among cadres above rank 17, and only got published in the *People's Daily* on May 17, 1967 (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2009: 41). Therefore, most people's memory of the Cultural Revolution actually started from the first Big-Character poster put up in Peking University (Beida) at the end of May 1966, the suspension of all classes in June, as well as the burgeoning of the Red Guard Movement in the summer of 1966.

On June 1st, 1966, the *People's Daily* published the editorial "Sweeping away all monsters and demons" to call upon the masses to carry out the "Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution" under the guidance of Mao's thoughts, more specifically, to demolish "all the old ideology and culture and all the old customs and habits" of all exploiting classes, and cleanse "capitalism, imperialism, modern revisionism and all reaction" on the Chinese soil.[21] The next day, the Xinhua News Agency

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[19] From *May 16 Notification* or *Circular of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.* See:
https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/cc_gpcr.htm, accessed by July 6, 2018.
[20] Ibid.
[21] "Sweep Away All Monsters", *People's Daily,* editorial, June 1st, 1966. Translated by *Peking Review*, Vol. 9, #23, June 3, 1966, pp. 4-5. See:
https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/peking-review/1966/PR1966-23c.htm, accessed by July 6, 2018.

broadcasted the first Big-Character poster of Peking University written by Nie Yuanzi et al, condemning the party authorities of the university as a "bunch of Krushchev-type revisionist elements" (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2009: 57). Nie's big-character poster was enthusiastically hailed in the *People's Daily* on June 2 and praised by Mao as "the first Marxist-Leninist big-character poster" (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2009: 58).[22] The endorsement of the big-character poster by Mao intrigued the revolutionary passion of Beijing and greatly mobilized the masses, especially college, high school and middle school students. Hundreds and thousands of students visited Beida to view the big character posters and apply the same 'revolutionary method' to their own schools.

Jiefang (1949, male) was a middle school student at that time who had just finished his final graduation exam. He wrote in his memoir about this experience.

> We went to Beida to see the big-character posters. Our schoolmates followed the example of Beida and criticized our school as "ruled by 17 years of revisionist education line," "teachers were culprits who poisoned the students." We wrote big slogans, big-character posters to criticize teachers, and the revisionist education line… Same words also dominated the newspapers and radios. Before long, colleges and secondary schools cancelled all classes. "Suspending the classes for revolution" was an irresistible trend spreading to all schools in Beijing.

As Jiefang described, the classes of all schools were suspended in June 1966, and students were supposed to devote to the revolution full time. Like Jiefang, Mengyun (1950, female) was also a middle school graduate in Beijing at that time and waiting to take the entrance exam for high school while the Cultural Revolution disrupted her education and life trajectory. She recalled:

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[22] Mao Zedong, "Bombard the Headquarters – My First Big-Character Poster," People's Daily *August 5, 1966. Translated by Peking Review*, No. 33, 11-3-1967. See: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_63.htm, accessed by July 6, 2018.

> The Cultural Revolution began after the first Big-character poster in Beida. Then Peng Xiaomeng wrote a letter to Chairman Mao and said, "To Rebel is justified." The name of the "Red Guard" was first used by students at the middle school attached to Tsinghua University. The original social order was completely overthrown. The authorities all became capitalist roaders and were harshly persecuted. Good students who were close to teachers were also criticized as "Royalist."

As Mengyun recollected, the first Red Guard organization was established in the middle school attached to Tsinghua University on May 29, 1966, four days after the first Big-character poster put up in Beida (Yan and Gao 1996: 57). Then the big-character posters as well as the Red Guard organizations were widely spread to all colleges and secondary schools in Beijing. Peng Xiaomeng mentioned by Mengyun above was a 17-year-old girl in the high school affiliated to Peking University, a leader of the Red Guard organization at her school. She had given a speech in front of Jiang Qing in late July in public to restate the idea of "rebellious spirit" of the revolution brought up by Tsinghua middle school Red Guards in their big-character posters before. Jiang Qing brought those posters and Peng's speech to Mao Zedong as a letter written by the Red Guards. Mao replied with his approval and support of the Red Guard organizations (Wang, Youqin 2001). Since then, the idea of "To rebel is justified" (*Zao fan you li*) ignited the flames of rebellious movement in the first three years of the Cultural Revolution (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2009: 87-89). The most radical students of the Red Guards started to call themselves the "Rebels" (*Zao fan pai*) claiming to rebel against the bourgeois and revisionist authorities and accuse others as "Royalists" (*Bao huang pai*), who were criticized of being close to authorities (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2009: 87-89).[23]

At the beginning, Red Guard organizations were established among students with elite backgrounds whose parents or grandparents took high-ranking positions in the government, party

[23] The Rebels were not limited to Red Guard students, but also applied to workers, peasants outside schools, who dominated the Cultural Revolution after the Red Guard movement faded away in 1967.

or military. They only allowed children of revolutionary cadres, revolutionary soldiers, revolutionary martyrs, poor and lower middle peasants and industrial workers; that is, the "Five Red categories," to join the Red Guard organizations whereas many students not from those "red" class origins were discriminated or excluded (Sullivan 2011). Jiefang's father was a worker, but his grandfather was a middle peasant, and he was a class cadre before the Cultural Revolution and had good relationships with teachers so he was excluded from the original Red Guard organization. He recalled:

> Many students lived in the military compound started to establish the Red Guard organization. They thought themselves as deriving from the red root. Their mantra was "If the father is a hero, the son is a good fellow; if the father is a reactionary, the son is a bastard (*lao zi yin xiong er hao han, lao zi fan dong er hun dan*)."[24] … They had a sense of entitlement and superiority. Their fathers were revolutionary cadres or revolutionary soldiers, and they often showed off their revolutionary achievements to us… The Rebels denied the participation of previous class cadres and accused us as "Royalists". Therefore, we could join in their Red Guard organization.

The idea of a revolutionary pedigree was developed out of Mao's stress on class origins and class struggle and dominated the Red Guard organizations at the initial stage (Yin 1996). Those elite students with a military background wore military suits to mimic their fathers or grandfathers and were excited about carrying out a real revolution with their own hands. Jiefang described the outfit of the Red Guards with an envious tone. "A military cap, a green military uniform, a red armband, and a military waist belt, this was the image of the Red Guards. It was enviable at the time!" This Red Guard outfit was the fashion trend of that time among the youth. In order to join this revolution advocated by Mao, many excluded students formed their own Red Guard organizations. As a student cadre, Jiefang and some of his classmates established the "Beijing Red Guards XX Middle

[24] It is a slogan widely used during the Cultural Revolution indicating major idea of the blood lineage theory. See Song, Yongyi. (2004) "The Enduring Legacy of Blood Lineage Theory." In *China Rights Forum*, vol. 4, pp. 13-23.

School Red East Fighting Team." They followed the trend of writing big slogans and big-character posters on the wall to further promote the revolution.

Different from Jiefang, Mengyun's father was an underground CCP member before the "liberation" and a professor in a research institution at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Although she categorized herself into the five Red categories, she was not welcomed in the Red Guard organization at her school due to her father's intellectual status.

> When my school established the Red Guard organization, I thought I should belong to the Red Guard rebels because my father was an old revolutionary, underground CCP member. I was a child of the revolutionary cadre. Therefore, I participated in the Red Guard but they didn't allow me to join and wanted to squeeze me out. They said the real revolutionaries were the Eighth Route soldiers, or poor peasants. Those who had graduated from college didn't count because only rich people could go to college at that time. They said my family must be a landlord, but actually it was not. They didn't know the college my father attended was free. They tried to drive me out but on August 18 I insisted on staying in the group to go to Tiananmen Square. I participated in the rally of reception.

Mengyun's father soon became a target of the revolution and she was excluded from the original Red Guard organization. But before that, she was still proud of participating in the rally of August 18, 1966, the day Mao Zedong first received one million Red Guards in Beijing which boosted the Red Guard Movement to an unprecedented level. Jiefang recalled the rally in his memoir:

> On August 18, 1966, Chairman Mao wearing a green military uniform with a Red Guard armband, received the Beijing Red Guards on Tiananmen... When Chairman Mao greeted Song Binbin, a representative of Red Guards from the high school attached to Beijing Normal University on the top of Tiananmen, he asked her for her name. She replied, Song Binbin. Chairman Mao humorously said, "Revolution should not be suave, be martial!" Song Binbin returned to school and changed her name to Song Yaowu.[25] It was

[25] Song Binbin's original first name "Binbin" meant being suave, while her changed name "Yaowu" meant being martial. She was the student who put a Red Guard armband on Mao's arm at the first rally of the Red Guards on Tiananmen Square. See Langley, Andrew. (2008) *The Cultural Revolution: years of chaos in*

> a name changed by Chairman Mao. She must feel glorious and proud, not to mention how envious of others!... The Red Guards from our school were standing on the west of Tiananmen, very close to Chairman Mao. We saw him waving at us. He had a big stature, a kindly face. Students who had seen Chairman Mao in person were super excited. They shouted "Chairman Mao is our Red Commander! We are Chairman Mao's Red Guards!" "We will follow Chairman Mao to carry the revolution to the end!"

In the fall of 1966, Mao held a mass rally on Tiananmen Square eight times and met about 12 million Red Guards coming from all over the country (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2009: 106-07). Millions of Red Guards traveled to Beijing to worship their idol—Chairman Mao - and listen to the instructions for proceeding the revolution. Mao viewed those rallies as excellent ways to mobilize the masses and encouraged Red Guards to come to Beijing to meet him. He also promised that expenses of traveling and living would be paid by the government. Making use of Mao's personal charisma, the mass rallies successfully pushed the Red Guard Movement to a new height, giving rise to the Great Link-up as well as the Red Terror.

*1.1.I The Great Link-up: unprecedented political tourism*

In the fall of 1966, with Mao's approval and advocation, tens of millions of Red Guard students engaged in an unprecedented political tourism across China. Red Guards from other places traveled to Beijing to meet Chairman Mao and exchange revolutionary experiences while Beijing Red Guards traveled to other places to spread the revolutionary fire. Moreover, their transportation and accommodation were all covered by the central and local government, setting up hundreds and thousands of Red Guard reception centers to accommodate Red Guards from all over the country (Jian, Song, and Zhou 2015: 105-07; Yang, G. 2000). This was called the "Great Link-up" or the "Great Networking" (*Da Chuanlian*) which both Mengyun and Jiefang had participated in. Jiefang recalled his link-up experiences with his friends.

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*China*. Capstone: pp 13-15. MacFarquhar, Roderick, and Michael Schoenhals. (2009) *Mao's last revolution*. Harvard University Press: pp108.

> Students were soon divided into different factions and participated in the Link-up across the whole country. We were grouped based on our family class origins. Workers' children with workers', military cadres' children with cadres'. They went to Xinjiang together. We went to Yan'an first, then to Shanghai and Guangzhou. There were many special trains for Red Guards. These were all free. Beijing students needed to bring their national food ration tickets to other places. Red Guards from other places came to Beijing for free.

Major cities and revolutionary sites of the CCP became preferred choices of the Link-up destinations. Since the travel was all free for Red Guards, the public transportation system faced extremely heavy flows of passengers. Jiefang recalled the unbelievable crowded trains he took.

> We got a boarding pass to get onboard for free, no matter whether the train was specifically for Red Guards. Trains were severely overloaded. The compartments, corridors, even the bathrooms were all taken. People slept under the seats, on the baggage racks. However, there was no stealing, robbing, quarrels or fights. People were full of revolutionary ideals, running to the revolution with enthusiasm.

Jiefang and his classmates went to Shanghai for two weeks then decided to go further south to Guangzhou to "ignite the revolutionary fire."

> We lived in Guangzhou No.1 middle school, sleeping on the desks, eating brown rice and greens, carving stencils, printing and passing out leaflets. After several days, our national food ration tickets were running out. We only ate one meal per day. If we got hungry, we would buy cheap bananas for food. We stayed seven to eight days in Guangzhou before coming back to Beijing.

Jiefang was proud to show they had overcome difficulties to propagate the revolution. He recalled:

> Whenever we got to a place, we would carve stencils, reprint materials, pass out leaflets to propagate the revolutionary trend and spread the revolutionary fire, full of passion. We were very simple and naïve. We thought this was revolution, this was an expression of loyalty to Chairman Mao. Everyone should be like us.

As Jiefang had depicted, students with similar political status were grouped together in the Great Link-up. Mengyun's experience directly reflected this division.

> The Rebels in our school excluded me. I could not join their team to link up. There was another classmate whose father was a worker and a senior technician. They said she was not from the real working class so they also excluded her. She and I became good friends and we went to the link-up together…We didn't take my previous best friend who was my neighbor and went to primary school with me. She was from a purely intellectual family and her father was a direct descendant of Confucius. I thought my class origin was better than her so I didn't link up with her. I went with the other classmate who had a similar status with me. We two went out to travel, no, to link up. We didn't take her.

Mengyun abandoned her best friend based on the class origin during the Great Link-up. She recalled this past with a teasing tone. She called the link-up as "travel" first then switched back to the formal and political term of "link-up." She said that when the mania of the revolution gradually calmed down, she made it up with her previous best friend.

Nevertheless, the massive political tourism brought a high financial and logistical burden to central and local governments. Many young students viewed it as a good chance to travel around the country freely which they could hardly imagine before. As Zhiheng recalled:

> It was not linking-up. It was tourism. They took buses and trains for free and ate for free. At the beginning, you needed a Link-up certificate. I preserved one from before. It read "Carrying out the Revolution to the end!" and "To rebel is justified." Taking this to get onboard, you could go anywhere you wanted… The state's transportation was paralyzed. Later some students no longer had the certificate. No one dared to kick them off. If you dared to stop them, you were against the "igniting of the revolutionary fire"… At last, the freight transport all gave way to passenger transport.

In order to relieve the burden of public transportation, the *People's Daily* published an editorial on October 22, 1966 which was titled "Red Guards Are Not Afraid of Expeditions" and encouraged

Red Guards to link up by foot.[26] The Great Link-up dragged the whole country into chaos and resulted in unbearable expense for local governments. It was finally called to an end in March 1967 by the "Notification of the Communist Party's Central Committee on Stopping the Nationwide Great Link-up."[27] All the free accommodations for the Red Guards were abolished which effectively put an end to the trend of linking up. Moreover, after one and half year's suspension of classes, all primary, secondary schools and universities resumed in October 1967.[28] Students were called to return to the classroom to continue the revolution.

*1.1.II The Red Terror: From destroying the "four olds" to factional infighting*

Aside from the Great Link-up, the Red Guard Movement also stirred up the Red Terror against existing authorities and people with bad class origins. The initial-mobilized students chose their teachers and headmasters as their first targets of the revolution. Suddenly, these teenagers and young adults turned into ruthless devils and invented various ways to torture those who taught them knowledge. After Mao publicly said "be martial" on the first rally on Tiananmen, the level of violence was further escalated. Red Guard students followed the call to destroy the "four olds"—old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits, generating the "Red Terror" when carrying out the revolution. August 1966 was termed as the "Red August" by people (Wang, Youqin 2001).

Jiefang had recalled how teachers were being persecuted in his school:

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[26] "Hong wei bing bu pa yuan zheng nan (Red Guards Are Not Afraid of Expeditions)," *People's Daily*. Oct 22, 1966. *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database*, https://ccradb.appspot.com/post/3398, accessed by July 12, 2018.

[27] "Zhong gong zhong yang guan yu ting zhi quan guo da chuan lian de tong zhi (Notification of the Communist Party's Central Committee on Stopping the Nation-wide Great Link-up)," March 19, 1967. *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database*, https://ccradb.appspot.com/post/192, accessed by July 12, 2018.

[28] "Zhong gong zhong yang, guo wu yuan, zhong yang jun wei, zhong yang wen ge xiao zu guan yu da, zhong, xiao xue xiao fu ke nao ge ming de tong zhi (Notification of the Communist Party's Central Committee, the State Council, the Central Military Commission, and the Central Cultural Revolution Group on the resumption of classes in colleges, secondary and primary schools to continue the revolution)," Oct 14, 1967. *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database*, https://ccradb.appspot.com/post/359, accessed by July 17, 2018.

> Some leftist students forced teachers to pull up weeds and clean the school, so called to reform them through labor… Some shaved half the long hair of female teachers, leaving the other half to humiliate them. They gathered teachers every day, hanging a board on their necks and asking them to stand in front of the school. They shouted at them and asked them to lower their heads and admit their crimes. Then they would assign teachers to do labors in school. Sometimes, they used leather belt to beat those so-called "dishonest" teachers.

Jiefang referred to those persecutors as "they and them" because he was excluded from the Red Guard organization at the beginning due to his class cadre status before the Cultural Revolution. He said he could hardly understand how those mischievous students suddenly became the revolutionary Rebels and lost their compassion. While he was traveling to Shanghai and Guangzhou during the Great Link-up, the headmaster of his school was buried alive by the Rebels in school. He heard about this event from other students.

> Our headmaster was an underground CCP member before the Liberation. She was in her 40s at that time. She was strict with students, so some students hated her. Teachers were persecuted and reformed with labor. The headmaster suffered more severe abuse. One day, the Rebels forced her to confess to her problems, beating her up with a military waist belt. They forced her to admit she was a traitor, a latent agent. She refused firmly. The Rebels kept beating her until she fainted. They dragged her to the back of the school building, dug a sand pit and buried her alive. They told other teachers, "Your string-puller refused to plead guilty, and pretended to be dead, so we buried her behind the building." Several teachers immediately ran to the back of the building and saw a mound of sand. They uncovered the sand with both hands and found the face of the headmaster. They put a hand near her nostrils and found she was still breathing. They dug her out, lifted her to the classroom and washed her face. She gradually revived.

Jiefang said that beating and burying the headmaster alive became big news in that district of Beijing. He was further shocked when he found that those Rebels acted as if nothing had happened. "They were crazy!" said Jiefang. The headmaster in Jiefang's school survived with luck but some

teachers and headmasters were persecuted to death, including the headmaster of the above-mentioned Song Binbin's middle school, Bian Zhongyun, the first headmaster being tortured to death by students in Beijing (Wang, Youqin 2001).

Yuxiu (1954, female) was from a family of the state cadres. Her parents came to Beijing after the Liberation and worked in the Railway Ministry. She recalled a female teacher in school being harshly persecuted.

> There were people being criticized every day, especially teachers. They were beaten up and their hair was shaved. I saw a female teacher, a little bit crippled. Every day after school, they would force her to repeat "I'm a reactionary" all the way on the walk home. It was inhumane.

By witnessing the inhumane persecution of teachers, Yuxiu followed her mother's words and didn't join the Red Guard when her neighbor upstairs instigated her to participate.

> My neighbor asked me to join in the Red Guard many times and gave me an armband for free. My mother asked me to return it that night and forbade me to participate. She said those people were beating, smashing and looting on the street so I should not participate. I was still young, in my fourth grade. So I didn't participate in anything.

As Yuxiu's mother said, the Red Terror was not limited to school teachers. During the first rally of Red Guards on Tiananmen Square, Lin Biao called on the Red Guards to engage in smashing the "four olds"-- old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits of all exploiting classes.[29] The Red Guards started to march on the streets, raiding houses of those from bad class origins, cutting people's long hair and traditional clothes, burning old books and paintings, smashing cultural relics and antiques, as well as persecuting and humiliating clerics, traditional opera performers, and people from bad class backgrounds (Jian, Song, and Zhou 2015: 70-72; Yan

[29] Lin Biao, *Talk on the Mass Rally of Celebrating the Great Proletarian Culture Revolution* (August 18, 1966), http://marxistphilosophy.org/Hongqi/66/196611-13.htm, accessed by July 13, 2018.

and Gao 1996: 65-71). The military wear of the Red Guards, while being admired by some children and teenagers, became the nightmare for some others.

Shuying (1958, female) was in her primary school at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. She was not old enough to join the Red Guards but they had left an unforgettable memory with her. She recalled:

> My neighbor was an old couple. The man was a chef working in a cafeteria. Someone said he was designated as a landlord. They never came out in the daytime and used newspapers to cover their windows and doors…One day he was dragged out by the Red Guards. I saw them in front of the door. Some older children surrounded him. A boy with big eyes and bushy eyebrows wore a military suit. His father must have been a soldier. He wore a belt on his waist and took another leather belt in his hand, a military belt, dark brown. It was thick and had a steel buckle. He used that belt to frighten the old man, deliberately pulling the belt back and forth to make noise. Behind those older children were some smaller children. I saw them in the distance. The boy used the belt to strike him several times. The old man said nothing. He was fat in his fifties with little hair. The boy hit him with the belt and the man was still silent, just lowering his head. Then the boy used the steel buckle to hit him. The old man's clothes were soaked with blood. That was the only time in my childhood, except for scenes in the movies, that I saw this. I felt so disturbed that I walked away (cried). If criticizing people was like that, I would rather never see it again.

Upset by the bloody scene of the public denunciation, Shuying was shocked by the cruelty of the movement and lost her interest about the revolution. Similar to Shuying's age, Jianhong (1959, female) was also pretty small during the Red Guard Movement. However, she could still recall the fear of her families during the Red August of Beijing.

> My aunt was a Catholic nun. She was a target for destroying the "four olds." The Red Guards raided her house, cut her hair in a mess and took her to parade on the street, hanging a big board on her neck. I had memories of all these. My family origin was middle peasants and my families believed in the Catholic faith. Although my father was a kind person at the work unit, such an origin could be a threat. My aunt was persecuted and our families

> were very nervous. We hid things away, fearing that Red Guards would come to raid our house. My father ran away to his cousin's house in the suburb. My mother took us to the park every day, not staying at home. The door was always locked. It was one particular week that we were very stressful.

Fortunately, Jianhong's house was not raided but she said that her families dared not talk about their religious belief even after the Cultural Revolution. Fanghua's (1954, female) family was not that lucky. Her father worked in a Peking opera troupe in Beijing. She recalled:

> Our family lived in the same Hutong with Mei Lanfang.[30] Many houses were raided during the Cultural Revolution. I just remembered that in our Hutong, a girl reported her grandma as a believer of I-Kuan Tao,[31] and her grandma was persecuted to death. I was so scared…Our house was raided and confiscated. My father was criticized and sent down to a troupe in Northeast China while we were still in Beijing. I didn't see how he was criticized but he passed away very early, before his 60th birthday.

The Red August in Beijing was only a prologue of the violence in the Cultural Revolution. Through the Great Link-up of Red Guards across China, the violence against the "four olds" also spread to every corner of the country. Furthermore, with the encouragement of the 'Red Commander' –Mao Zedong, multiple rebellious organizations sprouted at every school, work unit, and village. Many students who were excluded from the old Red Guard organizations founded their own and started to turn against each other in the factional infighting. Although these organizations all claimed to be loyal to Chairman Mao and fight for him, they represented different group interests at the local level. The old Red Guard students soon discovered the revolutionary flame backfired their fathers and grandfathers in high socio-political status whereas new "rebels" from more grassroots levels stepped onto the stage to vie for power. Since the spring of 1967, armed fights among different Red Guard organizations and rebellious groups were gradually escalated with the fanning of Mao and his followers (Walder 2009; Yang, G. 2016). Shuying stayed at home at that

[30] Mei Lanfang was a famous Peking Opera singer and artist.
[31] A folk religion.

time and was scared by the cruelty of the Red Guard Movement but she could not help hearing the sound of factional fights in the Children's Palace near her house. She recalled:

> There were armed fights (*Wu dou*) for months in the Children's Palace. They had an amplifier, broadcasting every morning about the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution, this and that, cultural propaganda team, armed fighting team, so and so. Then it would say the revolution had started. You could hear metal sticks clashing with each other. The fighting sound would last for a whole day. When my father got off work, the amplifier would say, "Today's revolution is over. Everyone takes a rest and we will continue the revolution tomorrow." I thought it was ridiculous. I couldn't understand what the revolution was. I thought it was something done by the old revolutionaries continuously. Why was this revolution like going to work every day? You could do revolution for a while and rest for a while. I went to the Children's Palace one time to see them during their rest time. It was silent with nobody. It was clean with no blood or traces of fighting. It was like two worlds, so strange and weird. I was very scared.

In the eyes of a 10-year-old girl, the jarring fighting sound and the intermittent revolution were like an absurd drama of the adult world. Two years older than Shuying, Qingfeng (1956, male) witnessed the fierce struggle sessions of central leaders and bloody armed fights between Red Guard organizations himself. He recalled:

> The Cultural Revolution started in my fourth grade. I lived at Xizhimen near the Beijing Exhibition Center where most big criticizing and struggle sessions happened, including criticizing Liu Shaoqi and Yang-Yu-Fu (Yang Chengwu, Yu Lijin, and Fu Chongbi[32]). Those were all people who had contributed a lot to the [Communist] revolution. The Rebels criticized the so-called "Capitalist headquarters" at the center. At that time, the Red Guard Organizations fought against each other at this place. I witnessed bloody scenes. They used big shovels and pickaxes to fight. I stayed at home for two years, muddling along without an aim.

[32] Yang Chengwu, Yu Lijin and Fu Chongbi were three high-ranking generals in the military. For more details about the Incidents of Yang-Yu-Fu, please see Geng, Zao (2013) "Retell the 'Incident of Yang-Yu-Fu' (Chong Hua "Yang Yu Fu Shijian")," *Shiji Fengcai*, 9: 30-38.

What Qingfeng had witnessed and experienced during that time had a traumatic impact on him. He further talked about his feelings on those experiences.

> Our generation experienced a fracture, from such a carefree childhood to what we saw in the Exhibition Center, all fierce battles, bloody scenes, and people being killed. It was a huge blow in our young minds. Whenever I recalled, I thought people were terrible. I didn't quite agree with ancestors' words that people were born with a good nature. I had a feeling that I was surrounded by evil people. If everyone thought the same as me, it would be terrible. There was a feeling of estrangement deep down in people's minds.

As Qingfeng had expressed, the Red Terror of the Cultural Revolution left a permanent scar on people's hearts and minds. He further said that "the biggest harm that the Cultural Revolution brought to people was not economic, political or artistic losses, but the corruption of people's minds." Material losses could be made up for in one decade, whereas the loss of mutual trust and kind hearts was hard to be made up for in one or two generations.

Fierce factional infighting caused massive killings in many places around China (e.g., Kwong 1988b; Su 2011). The mobilized Red Guards and rebels were gradually out of control in the process of taking over power of the local institutions or governments. In summer 1968, Mao started to use military forces to mediate the armed fights and restore social order. A military propaganda team (*Jun Xuan Dui*) and workers' propaganda team (*Gong Xuan Dui*) were sent to schools and other cultural institutions to stop factionalism and take over the Revolutionary Committees (Walder 2009: 241-9). The Red Guard Movement finally came to an end in the fall of 1968 but its influence on people, as Qingfeng had said, lasted until today.

### 1.2 Differentiated destinations: sent-down to villages, joined the army or stayed in cities

From 1966 to 1968, most Chinese people were devoted to or involved with the Cultural Revolution. At the same time, high schools and universities stopped admitting new students and work units stopped recruiting new members. When the Red Guard Movement died down in 1968, 5 to 6 million middle and high school graduates as well as 550,000 college graduates were waiting for job assignments (Bonnin 2013: 87). In order to relieve the employment burden of the city and

to fulfil the political purpose of "eliminating the differences between urban and rural areas, mental and manual labors, and industrial and agricultural workers", most of those college graduates were assigned to factories and grassroots work units and schools in less developed cities whereas most of those high and middle school graduates (which were ten times larger than the college counterparts) were involved with the Rustication Movement (Bonnin 2005). This movement lasted from 1968 to 1980 and ultimately sent 17 million urban educated youths (middle and high school graduates) down to villages and Production and Construction Corps to be re-educated by poor peasants (Bonnin 2013: 84-5). The first 6 million of them sent down in the late 1960s settled in poor villages and remote state farms with no expectations of return whereas the later sent-down youths who graduated in the 1970s were usually sent to nearby suburban areas with an expected time of coming back. Besides, during the long term of the Rustication Movement, a few middle and high school students managed to join the army and a few others were recruited by factories or schools through various means, constituting the lucky educated youths who stayed in the city. Moreover, a more selective group of educated youths were recommended to college from 1970 to 1976 as "worker-peasant-soldier students" and received shortened length (three years) of college education.

*1.2.I College graduates: "Old Five Classes"*

College students took the leading roles in the Red Guard Movement but when the climax of the revolution faded away, they suddenly discovered that as young adults, they still had no jobs to support themselves. To solve the job assignments of those college graduates, the Central Committee of the CCP issued a notification on June 2, 1968 which indicated the job assignment for college graduates should "face the rural areas, the borderlands, the industrial and mining factories, and the grassroots," breaking the old rules that college graduates could only be assigned as cadres not

workers or peasants.[33] Therefore, most college graduates were assigned to factories and grassroots work units in less developed cities and towns. They were usually called the "old five classes" (*lao wu jie*) who graduated from 1966 to 1970.[34] However, compared to the high and middle school graduates, they still enjoyed state salaries and had more opportunity to transfer to bigger cities to become state cadres later on (Bonnin 2013: 86-7).

Chirui (1943, male) was a medical school student in Beijing at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. His older brother followed an underground CCP member to come to Beijing before the Liberation and participated in the communist revolution. His brother and father were both criticized and persecuted during the Cultural Revolution so Chirui was not active during the Red Guard Movement. He started to be an intern in hospital in 1965. When others engaged in the Cultural Revolution, he tried hard to stay away. He recalled:

> I went to the hospital of Peking University for internship. Other people were not willing to work. They wanted to rebel. I didn't want to rebel, so I went to work. I graduated in 1968. They said the focus of health work should be placed in the countryside. Therefore, we were sent to villages to be "barefoot doctors." [35] I became a doctor of a People's Commune near Beijing.... Our entire class was assigned to villages, to the most grassroots level. My roommate was a smart boy, studying very hard. The director originally wanted him to stay in the hospital after graduation but his class origin was capitalist. The Cultural

[33] "1968-6-2, Zhong yang dui gao xiao bi ye sheng fen pei zuo chu xin gui ding (June 2, 1968, the Central Committee's new regulations on the allocation of college graduates)," http://www.people.com.cn/GB/historic/0602/6445.html, accessed by July 25, 2018.

[34] For more detailed descriptions and memoires about this group, see Lu, Dafu. "The Old Five Classes of College Students", from http://mjlsh.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/Book.aspx?cid=4&tid=2030, accessed by July 26, 2018. Also see Xi, Xueyao, Zhang, Cong and Sun, Lanzhi, ed. (2013- 2014) *Gao bie wei ming hu: Beida lao wu jie xing ji (Farewell to Weiming Lake—Trajectories of Old Five Classes of Peking University).* Jiu Zhou Publication, Vol1 and 2.

[35] "Barefoot doctor" was designed to increase the rural coverage health care in the 1960s. Most barefoot doctors only graduated from secondary schools and received a short-term training at local hospitals. Formal college graduates from medical schools were still scarce at that time, so they were usually assigned to large and formal hospitals after graduation. More detailed research please see Zhang, Daqing, and Paul U. Unschuld. (2008) "China's barefoot doctor: past, present, and future." *The Lancet* 372, no. 9653: 1865-1867.

> Revolution started, and he was sent to a production brigade to be a barefoot doctor. He got married in the village and never managed to come back to Beijing.

Admittedly, for rural areas that were in dire need of good doctors, Chirui and his classmates had contributed to reduce the inequality of health care coverage between the urban and rural areas. However, as a student graduating from formal medical school and with ambitions for a personal career, Chirui sighed for the job assignments for himself and his classmates. He was a little luckier than his roommate. After working as a general doctor in the People's Commune for 11 years, he successfully returned to Beijing in 1979.

> Beijing had a notification at that time. It said those who had received a higher education could transfer back to Beijing first. There was an outbreak of epidemic diseases in 1979 so the Central Party decided to call back the medical school graduates. The worker-peasant-soldier college students were not competent enough. At that time, it was already a trend to bribe the cadres in charge. I sent him a bottle of Maotai (an expensive liquor brand). He was pleased, so he let me go. It was a dozen bucks per bottle. Not very expensive for today but the salary was very low at that time.

Those "old five classes" of college graduates were not a very large group compared to the sent-down youths and not widely studied by scholars or depicted by writers and artists. Nevertheless, they constituted a special generation unit who were usually under-matched during job assignments after graduation and their career ambitions were largely restricted by their workplace. Moreover, they often struggled between their identities of Red Guards and intellectuals and reflected deeply over the Cultural Revolution.

*1.2.II Early sent-down youths: those suffered the most*

i. Life of rustication: Romantic imagination vs. the ruthless reality

High and middle school graduates of 1966, 1967 and 1968, i.e, the "Old Three Classes" (*lao san jie*), adding the class of 1969, constituted the early sent-down youths who were mostly sent to poor and remote villages or paramilitary Production and Construction Corps in the borderland of

China. Influenced by ideological propaganda, many of these sent-down youths were full of dreams and ambitions and determined to go "to the villages, the borderlands, the most needed places of the state" to make their contributions. However, the ruthless reality always quickly cooled down the revolutionary zeal.

Mengyun was among the first to sign up for rustication and was sent to the Northeast Production and Construction Corps, a paramilitary state farm. She recalled:

> I was the first group of students going to Beidahuang (the Great Northern Wilderness).[36] The amplifier of school broadcasted a list of names that would be sent down. I was not included originally but my best friend was on it. I ran into the broadcasting room and asked the teacher to include me. My friends were all gone and I would be so bored to stay here. I didn't really understand what the rustication was at that time. Just wanted to join my friends. My teacher included me. From June 27 to 30 in 1968, we took trains for three days to the place. The next day was July 1st, the day I started my sent-down youth life… We were turned into peasants, doing hard labor every day.

Not driven by the ideological propaganda, Mengyun signed up for the rustication voluntarily only to join her friends. These 17 to 18-year-old students went to the remote state farm together as if they were going to a "summer camp," but were far from ready for the upcoming hard life.

Yuanchao (1950, male) was sent down to the same Corps as Mengyun but he was among the last in his class. Yuanchao's family origin was small capitalist and his father was criticized at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, he deliberately stayed away from the Red Guard Movement, idling around Beijing to play with friends with similar status. Many of his classmates were sent down to villages in Shanxi and Shaanxi in 1968 and he didn't sign up for either of them because he heard from a teacher that those places were too poor. In 1969, the last group of his class was sent down to the Northeast Corps, including Yuanchao. It was not a bad choice for him because

[36] It is the place where the state farm was located.

he could get enough food and a little bit of salary there. His 9-year rustication life started in a cold winter.

> I put on a cotton coat as soon as I arrived in the Northeast. I also bought a leather hat. It was damn cold. If you didn't wear a hat, your ears would be frozen in a minute. There was a big kang (a heatable brick bed) in a room. 30 people lived in one room. I was not too tired to do the manual labor. I worked in the construction team for several years. Then I went to the mountains to cut trees. The lowest temperature was 42 degrees centigrade below zero at night which froze the trees. But we earned a little more. Our salary was 1.25 yuan per day and 32 yuan per month. Then I worked on the farm with ex-prisoners.

The Corps was administered by a paramilitary system. Some educated youths were promoted to be platoon leaders. Yuanchao had switched several working teams during his rustication life. He had also worked in the water conservancy team for a year and the coal mining team for three more years. Gradually, he learned to use personal connections (*guanxi*) with leaders to switch to positions with better working conditions. He recalled:

> I was assigned to the tunnel to dig coal. At that time, the mine always had accidents so I was so nervous in the tunnel. Whenever I heard something wrong, I ran away quickly … They would deliver our food down the tunnel. It was clean when being delivered, but by the time you ate the food, it was all covered with black ashes…I just worked in the tunnel for two days. My family knew a leader of the mine and helped me switch to the security office, doing some lighter work on the ground. After three to four years, I transferred to the dining hall. You know why I went to the dining hall? Because I could eat well. Meat and vegetables, you could eat freely. It was not just based on your wish to work there. You needed to find someone to allow you to work there. I worked there for another three years.

His life in the Northeast was getting better with his switches through personal connections. It seemed the only thing he was concerned about was to make the rustication life as comfortable as possible.

Unlike Mengyun and Yuanchao, Yuxiu's older sister Yulan (1952, female), gave up her chance to stay in a factory in Beijing and went to a poor village in Shaanxi with her classmates. Yuxiu recalled:

> My sister graduated from middle school in 1968. She did not have to go to rustication. She could have been assigned to a factory but she insisted on going, no matter what. My father was sent down to a nearby village by his work unit. My sister insisted on going, so my mother agreed. My father was not happy that my sister transferred her household registration away without telling him. I remembered clearly the day we saw her off at the train station. It was a vigorous scene. Some people were beating drums at the station. The train was full of students. My sister was particularly exuberant. She went away happy.

In Yuxiu's narrative, her sister seemed to be deeply motivated by the ideological propaganda and excited to go to a remote village with her classmates to make their contributions at the "most needed places of the state." However, the poverty and tough life conditions at the village soon ruined Yulan's health. Yuxiu recalled:

> The life there was extremely hard. The water was not good so people suffered from endemic diseases. One of my classmates got hepatitis. My sister was already in a poor health condition so she was infected by her classmate. She also got hepatitis and her level of transaminase was particularly high. She returned to Beijing to see doctors. I also remembered clearly the day we picked her up at the train station. She wore a white shirt which looked pale yellow. She had jaundice, extremely severe. We sent her to the hospital immediately. She was hospitalized for a long time and her condition was not stable. My grandma took care of her at home for several months and her level of transaminase was finally normal. She was always in poor health after that.

The dramatic and pitiful contrast of two scenes at the train station Yuxiu recalled about her sister vividly reflected the disillusionment of the propagated Rustication.

Unlike the "Old Three Classes," who had a few choices of where to go for rustication, Zhiheng graduated from middle school in 1969 but had no choice any more. His class was all sent down to Production and Construction Corps. He was sent to a newly-founded Production and Construction

Corps in Inner Mongolia where the land was not suitable for farming at all. As the youngest son in his family, Zhiheng's mother did not want him to go. Zhiheng recalled:

> The school teacher first came to our house to persuade my parents to allow me to go. My mother insisted on keeping me at home. Then they went to my parents' work unit and asked them to stop working. They were sent to study sessions and someone would come to persuade them every day. After one week, my mother gave up. Rustication was Chairman Mao's great call. The great man waved his hand so we had to go. You had no other choice. Not even thinking about it.

Zhiheng's mother was not successful in trying to keep her youngest son in Beijing. Zhiheng packed up and got on the train to Inner Mongolia with his classmates. His romantic imagination of the place was broken into pieces the first day he arrived at the state farm.

> I was only 17 years old. When people talked about Inner Mongolia, they described the prairie, the galloping horses, and the white sheep. We were longing to see the scenery. But when we got there, we were shocked. It was endless yellow sand. When we arrived at our Corps, it was all saline-alkali land, yellow and white. If you stepped on it, it was like stepping on snow.

There was nothing on the land, not even a real house for them to live in. Zhiheng recalled living in the ground pit at the beginning:

> Some people dug a pit in the ground, 80 cm in width by 90 cm in length, and 1.9 m deep. They put some grass on the bottom, mixed with mud, and covered the top. This was a ground dwelling. We lived in this first then we started to build houses on our own. We had no bricks, so we could only use mud…I worked in the construction team first to build houses.

After two years of house construction, Zhiheng finally lived in a real house and started to farm on the saline-alkali land. But first they needed to improve the soil.

> We had a slogan at that time that we would rather have the socialist weed instead of the capitalist seedling. It was all sand and saline-alkali soil. We needed to remove 25-30

> cm of soil and refill the land with sheep manure we got from the herdsmen on the prairie…We had no horses so we pulled the big carriage with manpower. Three men using a big shoulder pole to pull the carriage like horses. We picked up the manure once each day. It was 7.5 km away and there was no road, only sand. One carriage carried 40 loads of manure. We would pull it back to the land and unload it…We were close to the Yellow River so we used water to irrigate the ground to suppress the salt and alkali. Then we mixed sheep manure with the soil. After all these preparations, we started to grow rice on the land. It was like a joke. The land could not even grow weed. How could we grow rice? The first year, we used 8,000 kg of rice seed and only got 8 kg in return. The Corps' commander said these were golden rice, about 100 yuan per jin (0.5kilogram). They didn't think about the cost at all, just to find a place for the sent-down youths to labor.

Farming on the saline-alkali land took a lot of effort but could not provide enough food to eat. Zhiheng said everyone had 45jin (about 22.5 kg) food ration per month and a 5 yuan subsidy provided by the state. It was still not enough for a young adult man like him. When Zhiheng felt hungry, he also ate voles on the prairie. He recalled:

> There were not many hares, but a lot of voles. The voles collected grass seeds before the winter. After we went there, their life was also improved and they started to gather rice. I had seen people pumping air into the voles' cave and dug out their gathered seeds to feed pigs and chickens... I got an air gun from a friend in Hohhot to shoot voles. We were hungry so we usually shot 20 to 30 voles one time and used boiling water to blanch them. Then we ate their back legs, very delicious. We didn't eat all parts, just the back legs. There were so many of them.

Despite the hard labor and poor living conditions, Zhiheng still worked like a horse on the farmland. However, his hard work didn't earn him a good impression in front of the political instructor of his team because of his hidden books and diary.

> Our platoon leader was very bad. He wanted to be promoted, so he needed active performance. He drove us out to labor and searched our living places. I sometimes liked to write things. He took them to the political instructor and I was almost criticized publicly. I remembered I wrote five to six pieces of self-criticism and barely passed. They didn't say

> I was reactionary, just said that my thoughts were unhealthy. I left this impression to the company commander and political instructor. That was it. You deserved to work like a dog. Since then, I no longer worked very hard.

They returned the diary to Zhiheng after he submitted the self-criticisms. He burnt all his diaries he wrote in the first few years in Inner Mongolia which recorded his daily life during the rustication and his personal reflections. Besides the diary, Zhiheng's *Dream of the Red Chamber* hidden under the bed was also searched out and confiscated. The political instructor accused him of reading 'dirty' books in front of the whole company. Zhiheng argued this was a classical novel, not a dirty book. The political instructor further said, it was a feudalistic, bourgeois and revisionist book and was not in line with the proletarian ideology. Since then, Zhiheng lost all his enthusiasm in doing hard labor and started to muddle along.

The rustication life in poor villages and remote Production Corps presented a ruthless reality in front of the eyes of the sent-down youths. This was the first blow to their belief of the Cultural Revolution and the Rustication. The second blow came from a political event which happened in 1971; that is, the Lin Biao Incident. It was about Mao's designated successor Lin Biao who fled on a plane on September 13, 1971, and crashed at the Mongolia Öndörkhaan. He was later nationally condemned as the leader of a "counterrevolutionary clique" who had tried to subvert Mao Zedong's rule (Jin, Q. 1999: 163-199). For many sent-down youths, this incident was an awakening moment for them to start questioning the correctness of the Cultural Revolution and Chairman Mao. Mengyun recalled:

> Lin Biao's September 13 incident was a shock for me and for many people in China. He was written into the Party constitution and national constitution in the 9th Central Committee of the CCP. He was Mao's successor and a good student. He was called the Vice-Chairman, standing beside Mao on Tiananmen. You could not justify yourself. Mao was like a god and should be omniscient. But how could you not tell a traitor was beside you? How could you explain to the people and justify yourself? Although we were young,

> we could see through something. Many educated youths discussed in private, especially children of high-ranking cadres. Since then, we hardly believed in the CCP again. It was a big blow to its legitimacy.

Mengyun might exaggerate a little on her extent of reflection on the CCP at that time, since she first applied to join the Party at the end of the Cultural Revolution. Yet for many educated youths, this event sowed a seed of suspicion in their minds which would sprout and grow bigger as they suffered more in the rustication life.

The early sent-down youths were told to settle in villages and borderlands permanently to make their contributions on a "boundless stage."[37] Their romantic imagination of the rural life was quickly broken into pieces by the tough living and working conditions in the villages or Corps and their revolutionary idealism was gradually replaced by pragmatic concerns about whether the food was enough to eat and the work too exhaustive to do. What's more, since the 1970s, some educated youths with a military background left the village or Corps first to join the army and some were switched to places with better working conditions through their family's acquaintances and networks. The morale of the sent-down youths was greatly impacted.

ii. Going home: a tough journey back to the city

In 1972, the state first allowed sent-down youths with severe sickness and family difficulties to return to the city. Since then, sent-down youths were no longer wholeheartedly devoted to the hard work on the farmland, beginning to find every possible way to return to the city. Family background and personal connections played crucial roles in this fierce competition of future life opportunities.

[37] "Vast Land and Great Accomplishment (*Guang kuo tian di, da you zuo wei*)" A slogan during Cultural Revolution derived from Mao Zedong's early instructions. It was used to propagate the rustication to the educated youths. See Pan, Yihong. (2003) *Tempered in the revolutionary furnace: China's youth in the rustication movement*. Lexington books: pp214.

Yuxiu's sister Yulan returned to Beijing in 1970 due to severe hepatitis. After she recovered, she didn't return to the poor village in Shaanxi but was brought to the May 7 Cadre School by her mother. Those May 7 Cadre Schools, established around 1968 following Mao's May 7 Instruction in 1966, were actually state farms in suburban areas of Beijing for the cadres from the Central Party and government organizations and intellectuals from scientific research and education institutions could be 'reformed' and 're-educated' through hard manual labor (Fen 1986). Yulan's parents were both state cadres in the Railway Ministry and were sent to the May 7 Cadre School near Beijing during the Cultural Revolution. The May 7 Cadre School allowed cadres to bring one or two children with them so Yuxiu's mother brought her sister to the farm which had much better living conditions compared to the poor village in Shaanxi.

> My mother brought my sister to the Cadre School which was full of cadres' children. These kids could be taken care of by their parents, unlike in remote villages with a few classmates. My sister asked her classmate in the village to mail her stuff to the Cadre School. She stayed there. Later, my mother managed to help her enroll in a technical secondary school. After she graduated, she was assigned to a work unit in the railway system in XX (a city in southwest China).

After recovering from illness, Yuxiu's sister was supposed to return to the original village in Shaanxi but her mother's cadre status successfully helped her stay in the state farm near Beijing and even continue her secondary education later on. These privileges were only enjoyed by children of state cadres.

Similar to Yuxiu's sister, Mengyun returned to Beijing in 1973 with the excuse of sickness, earlier than most of her friends. It was also closely related to her father's resumption of a position in the research institution in Beijing. However, even with her father's network, she could not register her Hukou in Beijing for two years. Mengyun recalled,

> You could leave for two reasons, sickness or family difficulty. Family difficulty usually applied to a one-child family. I had a little brother. Therefore, I could only use the

> excuse of sickness. I did get arthritis due to the coldness of the Northeast. I used this excuse to return to Beijing in 1973. However, when I brought my Hukou back, I could not register in Beijing. You need to go through the back door in order to register. Thus I became a black household, keeping my Hukou by myself. I was in Beijing since 1973, unemployed, fed by my parents. In 1975, Deng Xiaoping was back on the stage and the economy recovered a little bit. Factories started to recruit workers. Many more sent-down youths returned to cities…Returned educated youths could not go to factories owned by the whole people (*Quan min suo you,* which is state-owned factories). Instead, we could go to those owned by the collective and the street-level factories. I went to a collective factory and became a worker.

Mengyun and Yulan's family backgrounds were not shared by most of the sent-down youths. For those with no strong family networks, they also tried to build their personal connections with doctors and cadres of the sent-down villages and Corps through bribing. Zhiheng made friends with a conductor working at Baotou station near the Corps. He helped the conductor buy things in Beijing such as vinegar, soy sauce and sausages that were in short supply in Baotou. Every time Zhiheng went back to Beijing for a short visit, the conductor would give him a shopping list to buy. In return, he could get train tickets for free. The conductor's wife was a doctor in Baotou and could provide a diagnosis for sent-down youths to prove their sickness. Zhiheng recalled the policy that allowed sent-down youths with severe sickness to return to the city had triggered a trend of faking illness among them. Doctors were aware of the tricks so the sent-down youths had to bribe them through friends' introductions. Zhiheng's acquaintance with a doctor in Baotou made him an intermediary between the doctor and other sent-down youths in the Corps. He recalled:

> At the beginning, those returned sent-down youths actually had family difficulties. When it was allowed to return with sickness, people all started to seek personal connections to get diagnoses. Those were all fake. You needed three similar diagnoses, one from the clinic of the Corps, the second from the Second Hospital of Baotou, and the third from a hospital in Beijing. Most people were diagnosed with hypertension, but this was not enough. We could not have enough food. How could we have hypertension? You needed to get a

> diagnosis of primary hypertension, meaning it was an inherited disease. When we were rechecked at the hospital, someone would tell you the tricks. When you measured blood pressure, you could put your tongue against the palate and tighten your muscles and toes, using as much strength as you could, but could not let others notice. You could use these methods to make your blood pressure rise. Another disease was vasculitis which could not be examined directly. There was a symptom of the disease that your feet were cold in winter. When they were re-examined in the hospital, people took off their shoes and socks in winter to freeze their feet and then showed the doctor in a hurry that they had the disease. Gallstone was another often-used diagnosis. Our food was not clean. It was always windy. When the wind blew, the sand came in. The rice and vegetables we ate always contained grit. The gallstone or kidney stone could not be seen from the outside so you asked the doctor to make a diagnosis. You had to find doctors you knew. The price was a carton of Yonghong cigarettes. It was 2.3 cents per pack and 2.3 yuan per carton.

Zhiheng said he was the most capable person in the Corps. Many sent-down youths came to beg him for a diagnosis. There were hundreds of them and the doctor could not take that many. So only those who had a closer relationship with Zhiheng could get the diagnosis. Zhiheng himself returned to Beijing in 1977 with the excuse of sickness. Like Mengyun, he also faced the difficulty of finding a job. For half a year, he was unemployed. At first, the street office introduced him to pull weeds, 1 yuan per day. Then he found temporary work to fire the boiler in a hospital through a friend but soon was replaced by another person with connections. He had also worked in a hotel of the Central Organization Department of the CCP to fire the boiler for a while. Finally, after being a temporary worker for two years, he was assigned to a factory to be a regular worker at the age of 27.

As more and more sent-down youths returned to the city with personal connections and the transformation of the political atmosphere in the late 1970s, those early sent-down youths who were left in remote villages and Corps were more and more anxious about their future and dissatisfied about their living conditions. In the winter of 1978, 50,000 sent-down youths at Yunnan Production and Construction Corps went on a big strike to petition for returning to original cities (Yang, B. 2009). This petition resulted in the ending of the Rustication and triggered a big trend of sent-down

youths returning to the cities from 1978 to 1980. Yuanchao returned to Beijing around this time and worked as an auto mechanic at a vegetable station. Then through his father's network, he transferred to a state ministry to work as a driver for the leaders.

In short, the early sent-down youths were sent to villages and Corps with the most difficult living and working conditions and suffered the longest (range from 5 to 10 years on average) in the Rustication Movement. They originally settled in "the most needed places of the state" with no expectations of return but their revolutionary zeal and political naivety were soon crushed by the ruthless reality they witnessed and experienced. They gradually understood the importance of family networks and personal connections, learned to bribe useful people or leaders to get personal opportunities, and some even started to reflect on the previous ideological propaganda and the Cultural Revolution. They spent their most precious youth time on the farmland and generated unforgettable memories mixed with grievance, suffering and nostalgia.

*1.2.III Late sent-down youths: those with expected time of coming back*

Quite different from the early sent-down youths, those middle and high school students graduating in the 1970s were sent down to villages much closer to Beijing with an expected length of time. Usually after two years of rustication, they would be assigned to different work units back in the city.

Hongmei (1956, female) was a high school graduate in 1975. Her parents were workers in a logistic department of a university in Beijing. She was sent to a production brigade in Changping, a suburban district near Beijing. She recalled:

> I worked there for a year and a half. My work was to carry loads of rice seedlings with soil. It was pretty heavy. My work team were all male students except for me. I worked with them and didn't want to fall behind. Therefore, the leader had a very good impression of me. Later, there was a national sports meeting and the bread factory could not produce enough bread. They picked a few people form our production brigade to work in the factory

> as temporary workers for half a year. We had to return before the autumn harvest. I was picked to work with them to produce cookies and wrap candies... I worked in the brigade until December 1976. Then the university my parents worked in came to our brigade to recruit workers. There were a lot of university staffs' children at our brigade. I was one of them so I was recruited by the university to work in the lab.

As Hongmei depicted, those late sent-down youths were sent to nearby production brigades to work for one to two years in the village and wait for recruitment from different work units. Usually work units would prioritize children of their employees. Similar to Hongmei's experience, Liren (1957, male) graduated from high school in 1976 and was sent to the suburban area of Beijing. His father was a small cadre in the Food Bureau and was criticized at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. He recalled:

> If you could not join the army, you had to go to rustication. It was hard to join the army because many people competed for the opportunity. I didn't make it, so I went to the village. At that time, we just needed to go to suburban areas near Beijing…We were different from earlier sent-down youths. We knew when we could come back. Some people returned in one year, and some in two years. I returned in two and a half years. It was planned. The industry was gradually recovering so the employment rate was getting better.

Liren returned to Beijing in 1978 and was assigned to a work unit. The short-term rustication helped alleviate the employment pressure of new graduates for the state but shifted the burden to the poor peasants in villages. Liren deeply sympathized with the peasants' miserable life he witnessed and experienced in the village.

> I worked in the village to earn work points. The state gave you 10 yuan per month the first year. Then the second year, you relied only on your work points. People in rural areas lived a really hard life, no good food to eat…I felt that we ruined the peasants who were already very poor. They took on the heavy burden of the educated youths and we took away food from them. The production of a village was just this much… The peasants were miserable.

The rustication policy continued even after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. Yuejin (1958, male) graduated from high school in 1977 and he was in the last two cohorts that required to go to rustication. He recalled:

> Our class of 1977 and the class of 1978 were the last two classes that went to rustication. It stopped at the class of 1979. We didn't go far, just to Changping and stayed for two years. I was doing farm work there, building the pigsty, harvesting wheat, planting potatoes and corn. It was a precious experience.

Yuejin's parents were workers in the railway system who were not powerful enough to directly find him a job after graduation. He returned to Beijing in 1980 and worked at several places as a temporary worker until being recruited by a work unit in the railway system as a regular employee in 1981 through his parents' connections.

Similar to Yuejin, Tiexin (1957, male) also graduated from high school in 1977 and was sent down to a nearby village. Tiexin's father served in the army in Beijing for a dozen years and was transferred to a civilian work unit later on. Tiexin rusticated in the village for a year and was drafted by the army in 1978. He recalled:

> I went to the rusticating village by bike, carrying my books and a quilt covered with plastic cloths. After a year, recruiters came to draft in the village and I joined the army. My classmates returned to Beijing in two or three years and were assigned to factories and shops.

After three years of service in the military, Tiexin was transferred to the same work unit his father was in and worked there until retirement.

The class of 1978 was the last cohort sent down to villages in Beijing. The National Educated-Youths' Rustication Working Conference held from October to December in 1978 decided to continue the Rustication Movement but gradually reduce the number of students participating in it and finally end it. Most newly graduated students could stay in the city and be assigned to a work

unit but the government had limited its ability to provide enough jobs for all sent-down youths. Therefore, the early sent-down youths who were still stuck in remote villages and state farms protested and petitioned the central government and Party committee to come back home (Pan 2003: 54).

In short, the late sent-down youths were very different from their earlier counterparts. They were only sent down to suburban areas near the city and stayed for two years before coming back. Some were recruited by the same work units of their parents while others were assigned to collective factories through personal connections. Most of these sent-down youths viewed the rustication experience as a natural part of their life trajectory instead of a rupture or traumatic experience as most early sent-down youths did. Therefore, their views and reflections on the Cultural Revolution tended to be less critical compared to those who suffered the longest during the Rustication Movement.

*1.2.IV Stayed youths: who could escape the rustication?*

Besides the educated youths who were sent down to villages or state farms, there were also a few students who joined the army or were recruited by work units in the city after graduating from middle and high schools and became the fortunate "stayed youths" who escaped the rustication. The chances to stay in the city not only depended on the family background and parents' social-political status but also on numbers of siblings, graduation years, and the ever-changing state policies.

Students who graduated from 1966 to 1969 were particularly hard to stay. Those who joined the army were mostly children of PLA leaders whereas those recruited by work units were either powerful at the Revolutionary committee themselves or had good relationships with teachers in charge of the allocation of students. Jiefang, who founded his own Red Guard organization during

the Red Guard Movement, was one of the lucky few "Old Three Classes" recruited by a factory. He recalled:

> Most students in our school were children with a military background. They directly joined the army. Children of workers and peasants and other class backgrounds were waiting to be sent to Production and Construction Corps. I also signed up for it because I was a Youth League propaganda cadre. I should take the lead. My family prepared my clothes to go to rustication. One day, my teacher asked whether I would like to work in a factory in Beijing…My teacher was criticized at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution but he treated me very well. He told me only three people in our class were assigned to work in the factory and those with difficult family conditions were prioritized…Our family had seven children and only my father was working, so the economic pressure was high. As the eldest son, I wanted to start working early… My teacher said if I wanted to work there, he would add my name. I replied "Yes" immediately. Therefore, I started to work in the factory from May 30, 1968 and joined the working class. It was a milestone in my life!

Jiefang's family condition and his good relationship with his teacher both facilitated him to gain the rare opportunity to stay in the city. He was very grateful for this chance and proud to be an industrial worker. Unlike Jiefang, his sister who graduated from middle school in 1969 was sent down to Northeast Production and Construction Corps.

Zhiheng's second older brother was also a lucky stayed youth among the "Old Three Classes." He graduated from high school in 1966 and was a Red Guard leader incorporated into the revolutionary committee of his school. While Zhiheng was sent down to Inner Mongolia Production and Construction Corps and his older sister was sent down to a military horse-breeding farm in Gansu, his second older brother managed to stay in school. Zhiheng recalled:

> My second older brother was a leader of the Rebels. When they established the revolutionary committee in school, he was incorporated into the committee and put in charge of student allocation. He sent down all students to villages and state farms except for himself. He assigned himself to a primary school in Beijing to be a teacher.

Zhiheng's second older brother's position in the revolutionary committee helped him stay in Beijing but, as one of his siblings stayed in the city, Zhiheng and his older sister were required to be sent down.

Since 1970, the changing state policy provided more opportunities for educated youths to enter factories, join the army, rusticate to nearby villages, or even enroll in high schools. If a student having brothers or sisters were sent down to villages, he or she could have a higher chance to stay in the city. Fanghua (1954, female) was the lucky one in her family. There were seven children in her family and she was the sixth. Her brothers and sisters who graduated in 1968 and 1969 were sent down to Inner Mongolia so she could stay in the city. She graduated from middle school in 1970 and was recruited by a state-owned big factory in Beijing. Some of her classmates were sent down to villages near Beijing for two or three years and assigned to collective factories afterwards.

Hongjun (1954, male) was luckily drafted into the army in December 1969 before he graduated from middle school. He came from a family of working class. His older sister was in the class of 1968 and was sent down to a village in Shanxi and returned to Beijing in 1979. His younger sister was sent down to a nearby village of Beijing for two years and assigned to a factory. He recalled his experience of being drafted:

> I was lucky at that time. I was proud to join the army. People didn't value money. They valued political performance more. I was drafted in December 1969. I had to pass the political investigation first, then the body check, and finally the face-to-face interview. There were two soldiers coming to our class. They called me out and asked me several questions. Then I was selected to join the army.

Hongjun served in the army for five years and was proud to be the first batch who joined the Party in 1973. After being demobilized in 1975, he was assigned to a state-owned hotel and worked there until retirement.

In 1971, high schools resumed to admit new students after five years of hiatus. At the beginning, only a selected group of middle school graduates of 1971 (10%) and 1972 (20%) were admitted to

high schools while their classmates were sent down to nearby villages (Liu, Y. 2005). Since 1973, the proportion of students entering high schools was growing bigger. The majority of middle school graduates would finish their two years of high school education (Liu, Y. 2005). After they graduated from high school, some were directly recruited by work units in the city or drafted by the army, while more were sent down to nearby villages for one to two years and assigned to factories afterwards. That's why most of the late sent-down youths after 1975 were high school graduates.

Changgeng (1955, male) graduated from middle school in 1972 and was luckily selected to go to high school. He recalled:

> Those who were recruited by factories had no interest to go to high school. Only students who prepared to go to rustication had interest. You also had to study well. Many people in those days were reluctant to study because the notion that "study was useless" was quite popular. I also didn't want to study any more although my coursework was not bad. I thought if I rusticated, my younger sister could stay in the city. But my parents said that I should worry about myself first. They worried that I was only 16 years old and was not mature enough to do farm work and take care of myself in the village. They insisted, so I went to high school.

Changgeng's parents were both state cadres who graduated from vocational schools and they had only two children, a son and a daughter. As the only son in his family, Changgeng's parents had put more hopes on him. They helped Changgeng make up his mind to continue his education which changed his whole life trajectory. Changgeng graduated from high school after two years and was directly recruited by the high school as a chemistry teacher to teach students not much younger than him. Unlike his classmates who were sent down to nearby villages or assigned to factories, this teaching job allowed him to stay in school and continue his studies. In winter 1977, he participated in the first resumed college entrance exam and was admitted to a top-level university.

Similar to Changgeng, Yunlan (1955, female) was also selected to go to high school in Beijing in 1972. She was from a family of a revolutionary martyr. Her grandfather was a CCP soldier and died in the war against the Japanese invasion and her family received a state subsidy after the Liberation. She was very excited to be able to continue her education in school and determined to go to college after high school. Her love for study was quite exceptional in her class. She recalled:

> We were in middle school for three and a half years. We extended a half year to prepare for the exam to enter high school. No one studied better than me. I was so excited to be admitted to high school. I loved study. I thought study could change my fate. I was born 3 jin (about 4 pounds) less than the others and I was not in good health since childhood. I could not do hard labor so my best choice was to go to school and find a suitable job.

Both Changgeng and Yunlan cherished the hard-won chances of education and studied very hard in high school. They were told they might have a chance to be admitted to college after high school. However, their hope for receiving higher education was interrupted by the movement of "going against the tide" (*fan chaoliu*) in 1973 (Jian, Song, and Zhou 2015: 173).

The movement of "going against the tide" was represented by two people, Zhang Tiesheng and Huangshuai. Zhang Tiesheng was an educated youth who settled down in his hometown village in 1968 following the state's appeal. He was elected to be the team leader of his production brigade in 1971 and recommended to college in 1973 as a "worker-peasant-soldier" student. At that time, exam scores were still taken into consideration for those recommended students. When he took the physical chemistry exam, he turned in a nearly blank exam and wrote a letter on the back. In the letter he wrote about how the busy farm work left him no time to review exam materials and he didn't want to sacrifice the collective production for his personal study. He asked the leaders to reconsider his situation and allow him to enter college. This letter was revised and published by Mao Yuanxin, the nephew of Mao Zedong, to attack the "revisionist education line" represented by Deng Xiaoping and Zhou Enlai. Zhang Tiesheng became a "hero of the blank exam paper" and

a representative of the anti-intellectualism (Jian, Song, and Zhou 2015: 391-2). Besides Zhang Tiesheng, Huang Shuai was another created "hero" of "going against the tide." She was just a fifth-grader in Beijing in 1973 and felt wronged to be criticized by her teacher. She wrote a letter to a newspaper and complained "Are our young people in the Mao Zedong's era still slaves under the old education system of 'teacher authority' (*shi dao zun yan*)?" Her letter was republished by central newspapers and used as a weapon to "sweep the bourgeoisie's restoration power" and "criticize the revisionist education line." Huang Shuai was propagated as the "revolutionary pathbreaker who dared to go against the tide" (Jian, Song, and Zhou 2015: 141-2; Lampton 1978).

This movement of "going against the tide" reflected the fierce power struggles within the central Party and government but the influence was widespread to the newly resumed educational system. The newly admitted high school students lost their chances to be admitted to college whereas the recommendation of worker-peasant-soldier students to college was based solely on political performance, with no consideration of their exam scores.

Yunlan was very disappointed when she heard she could no longer go to college after high school. She recalled:

> During my first year in high school, Hung Shuai and Zhang Tiesheng came out. Zhang Tiesheng was the "Mr. blank exam," going against the tide. Huang Shuai was used to criticize Lin Biao, Confucius and Zhou Enlai. They were the vanguards to criticize the so-called "restoration of the bourgeoisie." Our two classes of selected high school students were sent down to the village again after graduation. Thanks to my teacher. I didn't go to rustication. She asked me to stay in school as a teacher. I was too shy to speak in front of the class, so I talked to her. She then helped me enter a work unit in Beijing.

Yunlan still had a dream of going to college, so she kept studying in the work unit and refused to be promoted from worker to cadre because only workers could have the chance to be recommended to college. Later she was recommended to a short-term program in Peking University. At her age of 33, she passed the civil service exam and became a civil servant in the local government.

Different from Yunlan who entered a work unit after graduating from high school, Qingfeng, with a good class origin of poor peasant, was drafted to join the navy after high school.

> After graduating from middle school, some classmates went to rustication, and a few were selected to go to high school, including me. After I graduated from high school in 1976, I was drafted to the navy. There were hundreds of students in our school and only seven were selected, six boys and one girl. It was the will of Heaven. People asked me whether I got in through the backdoor. I didn't do anything. I was chosen to join the navy. In the navy, I was lucky to be picked by the base commander to drive for leaders. I didn't suffer in the navy at all. I learnt the skill of driving. Drivers were very popular at that time.

Qingfeng was luckily selected to join the navy and when he was demobilized after three years of service, he was assigned to one of the Central Party Committees as a medium-ranking state cadre.

In short, the stayed youths were those lucky educated youths who either joined the army or entered work units in the city after graduating from middle or high schools. Before 1970, the chances of staying in the city were really rare and closely related to family backgrounds and personal connections. Compared to the early sent-down youths who suffered in poor and remote villages and state farms for five to ten years, those stayed youths before 1970 enjoyed an enviable life trajectory and possessed a very different memory of the Cultural Revolution. After 1970, the changing state policy provided more opportunities for educated youths to stay in the city. In particular, those who had older brothers and sisters in rustication had a higher chance of staying. Furthermore, the resumption of high schools enabled many middle school graduates to continue their education instead of going to rustication. However, the movement of "going against the tide" in 1973 interrupted the trend of pursuing higher education for those high school students and forced them to rusticate to nearby villages after graduation. There were still some students who got chances to be recruited by schools or work units or who were drafted to join the army. Compared to the late sent-down youths, the stayed youths after 1970 enjoyed relatively better job assignments and smoother life trajectories. Although the late sent-down youths only rusticated to nearby villages for

a short time, they still had a deeper understanding of the miserable lives of peasants compared to the stayed youths.

*I.2.V Worker-Peasant-Soldier College students: the luckiest few*

Among the sent-down youths and stayed youths, there were very few (about 940,000 in total) being recommended to college from 1970 to 1976 as the "worker-peasant-soldier students" who could receive the precious higher education during the Cultural Revolution (Chen, Y. 1999). Colleges had stopped admitting new students since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. In 1968, Mao Zedong had an instruction on higher education on July 21 in which he said "the science and technology universities should be resumed but the academic term should be shortened, the education should be revolutionized, and the proletarian politics should be in command…It is necessary to select students from the workers and peasants with practical experience. After studying in school for a few years, they should return to their production practices" (Jian, Song, and Zhou 2015: 159-60). Mao's instruction reflected his idealistic view of leveling the educational inequality between the urban and rural areas, as well as different class backgrounds, by allowing more workers and peasants to receive higher education. At that time, the college entrance exam was regarded as a bourgeois education line and was replaced by a recommendation system in 1970. Young workers and peasants, including educated youths, were recommended to college by local leaders based on their political performance in their workplaces. It was not hard to find that, instead of reducing the education inequality, this recommendation system favored children of state cadres, and those with personal connections with leaders.

For the early sent-down youths, being recommended to college could be a life changing opportunity in that it could help them leave the poor villages and state farms immediately and receive higher education in the city while their classmates suffered from hard labor. None of my

interviewees of early sent-down youths had been recommended to college but they recalled those they knew being recommended. Zhiheng said:

> In order to be recommended, you had to have a good political performance and leaders in the Corps favored you. In addition, you had to send gifts to leaders…My two friends were recommended to college, one went to Beijing Normal University, and the other went to Tsinghua University. They were both worker-peasant-soldier students. Our company had recommended a dozen students. It was just a word from the company leaders, letting you go or others go, no meeting or vote.

Many of the recommended worker-peasant-soldier students were primary or middle school graduates with not enough secondary education. They soon found it was hard to keep up with the coursework in college, especially those majoring in STEM. Zhiheng's friend who was recommended to Tsinghua studied nuclear physics and could hardly understand anything in class. Zhiheng recalled:

> Unlike the high school graduates of 1966 to 1968, the middle school graduates of 1969 didn't finish their primary school at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, we just learnt arithmetic. He stared at the professor and couldn't understand a thing, as did many of his classmates. The professor sighed and started to teach them middle and high school maths. The professor became a middle school teacher.

Although it was hard for the worker-peasant-soldier students to keep up with the coursework, they cherished the learning opportunity so much, and studied extremely hard. Due to the lack of college students at that time, most of them stayed in the city after graduation and became state cadres at different public institutions or state ministries.

Compared to the sent-down youths, those stayed youths who were assigned to factories had more chance to be recommended to college. Jiefang was included in the recommending list in 1974 at his factory, but he was promoted by the factory leader and didn't manage to go. Jiefang recalled:

> Our workshop had recommended me to go to Tsinghua University. My master was recommended in the first group in 1970 and graduated in two years. He became a technical director of the factory afterwards. I was recommended in the second group in 1974. However, our Party branch secretary said I could not go. He wanted to promote me from worker to cadre and took charge of the political work of young workers. I said I would like to go to college to learn some skills. From my view, if I went to college, I could get a degree for myself. Doing political work left you nothing. But he said I should obey the decision of the organization and do the work based on the factory's needs. At least, I didn't go to Tsinghua. They recommended someone else.

Jiefang still felt bitter about missing the chance of going to college. He later transferred from the factory to another work unit and got his engineering degree by taking courses from the China Central Radio and TV University[38] in his 40s.

Unlike Jiefang, Dongmei's (1954, female) process of being recommended to college was much smoother. Her grandfather was an underground CCP member in Northeast China and became a state cadre after the "Liberation." Dongmei's love of study was deeply influenced by her grandpa. She recalled:

> My grandpa was an educated man. He learnt Japanese in Northeast China and worked as a translator when he was young. Later he was recruited by the CCP as an underground party member. I used to live with him when I was young. He told me to study hard and he would support me to go to school. I loved study. I was not quite influenced by the idea of "studying is useless" during the Cultural Revolution.

After Dongmei graduated from middle school in 1971, she was recruited by a factory and stayed in Beijing. Two years later, her good class origin and good performance in the factory enabled her to be recommended by the factory to study Chemistry in Peking University. After graduating in 1977, she was assigned to a research institution of chemical engineering.

[38] It is an open university established in 1979 that provided higher education through radio and television.

Yuxiu was the same age as Dongmei and was also recommended to college from a factory, but her trajectory was much more complicated. As mentioned before, Yuxiu came from a family of state cadres and her older sister rusticated to Shaanxi in 1968 and returned with hepatitis. Yuxiu graduated from middle school in 1971 and was among the 10% of students who were selected to go to high school. However, due to the movement of "going against the tide" in 1973, she was sent down to a nearby village after graduation and assigned to a factory back in Beijing at the end of 1975. She recalled:

> I was in charge of the propaganda work in the factory and thus was close to the leaders. I wrote materials for them. In the last year of recommending students to college, I was selected. We only had a quota for a chemistry major. I didn't like chemistry. I preferred literature. But our factory produced coatings which was related to chemistry. At first, I didn't want to go but my families persuaded me to take the precious chance. I didn't know that the college entrance exam would be resumed the next year. If I had known, I would not have gone. I would have taken the exam and chosen a preferred major.

Yuxiu was recommended to college in 1976, only one year before the resumption of the college entrance exam, but no one could have foreseen the future at that time. Even though it was not a preferred major for Yuxiu, the college degree still enabled her to be promoted and transferred to a better work unit later on.

This recommendation system ended in 1976 and had recommended 940,000 worker-peasant-soldier students to college during the Cultural Revolution. This system was a rebel against the exam system and designed to reduce the education inequality between different social classes, especially allowing more grassroots workers and peasants to receive a higher education. However, except for a few real workers and peasants, the actual operation of the recommendation system particularly favored children of state cadres and political elites and gave rise to corruption and nepotism. No matter whether these children were sent down to villages or Corps or stayed in factories, they could take advantage of the recommendation system to be lifted from the hard labor work and receive a

higher education. The college entrance exam was finally resumed in the winter of 1977, those sent-down and stayed youths who still had a dream of going to college but never got a chance to be recommended were so excited to embrace the exam system. However, only a few of them finally passed the exam and entered college with their own ability. After the Cultural Revolution, the degrees of the worker-peasant-soldier students were not fully recognized in society due to the shortened academic years and poor academic performance of these students. Some worker-peasant-soldier students continued to attend graduate programs in the post-Mao era to consolidate their education degree. Nevertheless, the worker-peasant-soldier students were still the lucky few during the Cultural Revolution who received a higher education while their classmates were doing manual labor. Furthermore, the degree enabled them to stay in the city, switch to better work units and get promoted to higher positions. Most of these people were medium- and high-ranking state cadres during the Reform and Opening era and held powerful influence in the politics of China.

In short, different historical experiences and life trajectories divided the generation of the Cultural Revolution into five generation units as depicted above. Their narratives and memories of the Cultural Revolution were shaped both by phases of social movements and political campaigns and their lived experiences and feelings in those movements. In 1976, the tenth year since the outburst of the Cultural Revolution, the growing fatigue of class struggles and grievances toward stagnated economy and life standards finally led to the first Tiananmen Incident, the last political event before Mao's death.

## 1.3 The April 5th Movement: Tiananmen Incident

The death of Premier Zhou Enlai in January 1976 and the official constraints of honoring him after his passing triggered a collective mourning on the traditional tomb sweeping day, Qingming, of April 5th on Tiananmen Square. Millions of people gathered on Tiananmen Square, bringing

wreaths and mourning poems, to express their sorrow as well as grievances toward the Cultural Revolution (Teiwes and Sun 2004).

Yuejin and Tiexin were both in high school at that time. They both witnessed the Tiananmen Incident themselves. Yuejin recalled:

> I went to Tiananmen, not as committed as others, just as a bystander, to watch them. Mourning for Zhou Enlai gave people a chance to vent grievances. Not only the dissatisfaction of the Cultural Revolution, but different people had different grievances. Children of cadres had a view; children of those being criticized had another view. Various conflicts were intertwined. No one was satisfied. Many people vented their emotions through this movement. I walked to Tiananmen to see. There were poems.

This non-violent protest was soon labeled as a "counterrevolutionary incident" by the Central Politburo led by the so-called "Gang of Four" including Jiang Qing (Mao's wife), Zhang Chuiqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen, as well as Mao's nephew and liaison, Mao Yuanxin. They accused the Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping as the long-term planner and organizer of the incident and removed him from all his positions in the Party and the central government (Teiwes and Sun 2004). At the same time, they sent militia and policemen to clear the square and drive people away from the area. Tiexin recalled:

> At the beginning, it was just for commemorating Premier Zhou. Ordinary people were not aware of the power struggle. It was used by a group of people and turned into a turmoil. The workers' picket team brought big clubs and batons to beat people. There were a few casualties but not very severe. Old Mao was still alive. I was in school and we sent a wreath to Tiananmen. Some people used this movement to protest against the Gang of Four. We ordinary people didn't really know what the Gang of Four had done or how they were evil. We just heard from others and mobilized by them. They said the Gang of Four had mistreated Premier Zhou and Chairman Mao.

As a high school student, Tiexin didn't fully understand what he had witnessed on Tiananmen and how it was related to the power struggle of the central authorities. He just followed other people to

participate in the event. Different from Tiexin, Jiefang was a 27-year-old man at that time and had worked in the factory for eight years. He sensed the changing political atmosphere of that time. He recalled:

> I heard the April 5 Incident on the broadcast which said there was a counter-revolutionary incident on Tiananmen. I was not in Beijing on that day. When I returned, I also went to Tiananmen. It was like white snow. White flowers were still there, so were poems to mourn Premier Zhou, so many! I felt touched after reading them. Those were from people's hearts and not organized by anyone… I talked to our security director at that time. I asked him how this event could be related to Deng Xiaoping. We didn't believe that [accusation].

Being surrounded by big character posters fraught with ideological slogans for years, Jiefang first felt the genuine emotion expressed in the poems on Tiananmen. He believed those words expressed people's true feelings possibly because they also resonated with his own emotions. He also started to suspect the official accusation of Deng Xiaoping as the string-puller of this event. He further recalled the big search and arrest after the movement. Those who had participated in the April 5$^{th}$ Movement or copied the poems on Tiananmen square were criticized and even arrested. Yunlan was a 21-year-old worker at that time and also went to Tiananmen on that day but she kept it secret. She recalled:

> Many people went to Tiananmen, as did I. I also saw many people from our work unit, but I never told others who I had seen. I didn't tell them I was there. We were asked to report each other. Someone came to me and asked, "Did you see this person on Tiananmen?" I said I didn't go myself nor did I see anyone. Actually, I saw a huge crowd of people on the square, and poems everywhere. Those poems all referred to someone in power, who they cursed and who they praised… People felt so depressed at that time. Who would like their state to be like this?

One of the most famous poems Yunlan mentioned was "In my grief I hear demons shriek/ I weep while wolves and jackals laugh/ Though tears I shed to mourn a hero/With head raised high,

I draw my sword" (Xiao 1979: 29). In the poem we could clearly see the commemoration of Premier Zhou Enlai was turned into an open expression of grievance. The official suppression of the April 5th movement only fostered more feelings of resentment and dissatisfaction of people toward the "Gang of Four" and the Cultural Revolution (Yue and Wakeman 1987). In the final period of Chairman Mao, power struggles among political elites became more and more intense which finally led to the downfall of the Gang of Four and the end of the Cultural Revolution.

## 1.4 The Death of Mao and the Downfall of the "Gang of Four"

The absolute leader of the Party and the state, Mao Zedong, finally passed away on September 9th, 1976 which was a big shock for many Chinese people who regarded Mao as a god at that time. Within a month, the "Gang of Four" and their followers were arrested by Mao's successor Hua Guofeng and other senior CCP leaders (Myers et al. 1986: 40-1). The Cultural Revolution finally came to an end.

People's attitudes and feelings toward Mao's death varied based on their different experiences during the Cultural Revolution. The most commonly mentioned feeling was not sorrow but fear. Tiexin was still in high school at that time. He recalled:

> We were harvesting crops in a village in Daxing (near Beijing). We heard that Chairman Mao had passed away and we all returned to school. At that time, we felt the sky was falling. Many people had similar feelings. The mainstay had gone…He was like a god, the mainstay of a family. When he died, we didn't know what to do.

The long-term propaganda of the personality cult of Mao elevated Mao Zedong to an altar whose words were recited and worshiped like a divine revelation and whose instructions and decisions could change the fate of thousands and millions of people. When he suddenly passed away, many people were scared about what was coming next. Shuying was a high school student at that time. She recalled:

> I saw two policemen wearing black armbands on my way to school. Everyone in school was mourning in front of Chairman Mao's portrait. People were emotional and everyone was crying. I was scared myself. I didn't know who would be his successor…I was not interested in daily life, but very sensitive to big social change. I worried the American Imperialists or Soviet Revisionists would come to overthrow us. Those were descriptions used at that time.

Shuying's worry toward America and the Soviet Union were clearly shaped by the propaganda language at that time but, through these words, she expressed her own fear about the future uncertainty and possible social instability.

For those sent-down youths who were more mature and critical in terms of their political views, the death of Mao was an event that could be celebrated. Zhiheng was still rusticating in Inner Mongolia when he heard the news of Mao's passing. He recalled:

> I didn't know what it looked like in Beijing. In the Corps, actually, we talked in private that Mao should have died earlier. We set up a big mourning hall for him and everyone stood there in silence. What did we have in mind? He died so late. He should have passed away earlier. If he passed away in 1950, his contribution to China would have made him the greatest man. He died at this time, our generation hated him so much in our hearts. Old Mao launched the Cultural Revolution and the Rustication Movement at the expense of the educated youths. Our grievances and hatred were concentrated on Mao…What we had suffered could not be expressed by words.

Many sent-down youths, especially early ones who suffered the most, had so many grievances and resentment toward Mao. Some of them were indifferent to Mao's death while some were happy about it. Different from Zhiheng, Liren was a late sent-down youth rusticated at a nearby village when he heard Mao's death. After participating in the April 5$^{th}$ Movement and witnessing the miserable life of peasants with his own eyes, his idea toward Mao had been changed. He recalled:

> When he passed away, I thought oh, he finally died. There was an April 5th Movement on Tiananmen before his death. I also went to Tiananmen because I was unhappy about the

current situation. Since then, I no longer had any admiration toward Mao. My thoughts were changed at that time.

For those stayed youths and those who joined the army, they didn't suffer that much during the Cultural Revolution and still regarded Mao as a great leader. Their attitudes toward Mao's death were more in line with the official discourses. Jiefang, for example, was a stayed youth and worked in a factory when he heard about Mao's death. He had even competed for the opportunity to build the Memorial Hall for Mao.

> We were in the factory when we heard the news. Our old workers wailed so hard. They had experienced the old society. They knew how the working conditions had been improved in the New China. They were all in deep sorrow. At that time, every workshop would organize mourning and set up a mourning hall. Then we were selected to build the Memorial Hall on Tiananmen. We all wanted to go because it was such an honor. But you had to pass the political integration first. They drew workers from our factory and we took turns to participate in the construction. There was a professional construction team and we were selected to do some simple work. It was an honor to contribute to the construction of the Memorial Hall for Chairman Mao.

Hongjun was another example of stayed youths. He joined the army after graduating from middle school and was assigned to a state-owned hotel in 1975. When he heard about Mao's death, he felt the sky was falling.

> Chairman Mao was our belief. He was definitely a great man. During the Cultural Revolution, whenever we heard about Chairman Mao's new instruction, we would put aside everything to listen to it…When Chairman Mao passed away, I heard the broadcast at my workplace. I felt the greatest man had passed away, and the sky would be falling. I was really sad.

The sky didn't fall after Mao's death but many people sensed the changing of the political atmosphere. The death of Mao Zedong finally led to the downfall of the "Gang of Four" a month later.

Mengyun had returned from Northeast Production and Construction Corps in 1973 and worked in the factory at the time of Mao's death. She recalled the process of hearing about the downfall of the "Gang of Four" through top-down networks.

> It started with Mao's death on September 9th... In the next 20 days, various rumors began to spread in Beijing. It was circulated from high to low. The high-ranking cadres and military leaders got access to confidential information first…My father's friend was a high-ranking cadre. His son walked a long distance to our house to tell us the news that Jiang Qing fell from power and was arrested. My father was on a business trip. After this person left, my mother and I started to talk about it again and again. We were ecstatic and couldn't believe it was true. In a moment, we were so happy that our bitter life could reach an end. After a while, we were afraid this news might not be true. We didn't sleep for the whole night, just tossing and turning thinking about it.

The official notification of the downfall of the "Gang of Four" was released on October 18 but the arrest of them happened on October 6 which had already circulated among people with connections to high-ranking cadres (Yan and Gao 1996: 524-8). The mourning of Mao was soon turned into parades and rallies to celebrate the downfall of the "Gang of Four." It was a crucial turning point for the Chinese Communist state and Chinese people. Mengyun felt "being liberated after the long-term repression," so did many Chinese people who suffered in varying degrees during the Cultural Revolution. At that time, Mengyun wrote her first application to join the Communist Party but her application was not approved.

This event also made Yuejin, a young high school student, start to develop his own view toward the world. He recalled,

> It was at that time that I started to have my own thoughts to view the world. It was the biggest political event, equivalent to the end of a dynasty. I was in high school and started to observe and understand the world. But I couldn't see very clearly and couldn't understand fully. It was like the changing of a dynasty (*gai chao huan dai*). An era was over.

Yuejin might be too young to fully understand the meaning and influences of the downfall of the "Gang of Four," but he definitely sensed some crucial change of the political atmosphere. When Yuejin looked at the event retrospectively, he could claim that "an era was over." This era was the era of Mao.

Although the Cultural Revolution finally came to an end after the downfall of the "Gang of Four," the influence of the Cultural Revolution and Rustication on this generation was engraved on their differentiated life trajectories and memories. What they witnessed, suffered and learned during the Cultural Revolution would shape their values and personalities for a lifetime. These varied views and values were well reflected in their following life experiences.

## 2. Reform and Opening up (1977 till now)

Soon after the fall of the "Gang of Four," Deng Xiaoping returned to his position in 1977. As a Vice Premier in charge of science and culture, he first resumed the college entrance exam in the winter of 1977 which changed the fate for many sent-down and stayed youths (Vogel 2011: 200-207). At the same time, millions of sent-down youths strived to return to the city, adding a lot of pressure on the job assignments for the state. During this transitional period, the Maoist ideology of class struggle was in its last gasp and was finally replaced by the focus of economic growth in 1978, on the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. This crucial conference finally made Deng Xiaoping the new core of the leadership and marked the start of the "Reform and Opening up" policy for China (Vogel 2011: 229-240). Since then, a top-down economic, political and socio-cultural reform was gradually carried out with trial and error, ups and downs, progressions and retrogressions. Nevertheless, a decade of "opening up" policy did liberate many people's minds and open their eyes to the western world, not only about their economic achievements and technologies, but also their social systems, cultural goods and political ideologies. However, by the mid 1980s, the economic reform resulted in huge inflation and severe

corruption (Baum 1996). Furthermore, the sudden death of the resigned General Secretary Hu Yaobang, a representative of reformers in the Central Committee, triggered the student protest on Tiananmen Square on April 15, 1989 which finally ended with a tragic and bloody crackdown on June 4th (Calhoun 1989; Vogel 2011: 595-639). The decade of "enlightenment" and reform in China was suddenly terminated with guns and tanks. To many people's surprise, the Communist regime in China survived the collapse of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and reinstated economic reform in 1992 with Deng Xiaoping's south tour. Since then, the CCP was devoted to a more intensive economic reform to build a socialist market system while maintaining the authoritarian political control (Vogel 2011: 664-88). However, economic growth in the next 30 years was accompanied by rising social inequality and widespread corruption in society. The generation of the Cultural Revolution which originally saw some hopes for life at the beginning of the 1980s became more and more disappointed with social inequality, moral degeneration and uncontrollable corruption in the late years of the reform era. Moreover, the disappointment toward the reform gave rise to different levels of nostalgia of Maoist education and "Red China."

## 2.1 Resumption of college entrance exam

Many educated youths were extremely grateful for Deng Xiaoping who resumed the college entrance examination in the winter of 1977. Their dream of going to college buried by the Rustication Movement and the recommendation system was revived again with the new state policy. For the generation of the Cultural Revolution who were successfully admitted to college after 1977, the resumption of the college entrance examination was a life-changing moment for them to switch to a completely new trajectory.

However, the first year's college admission still took political backgrounds into consideration aside from exam scores. Mengyun was one of the early sent-down youths who took the first

resumed college entrance examination in their late 20s and early 30s. She recalled the difficult process of being admitted.

> I participated in the first college entrance examination in 1977. At that time, the admission not only looked at your exam score but also your political conditions. The full score was 400 and I got 306. The admission line in Beijing was 260. They preferred fresh high school graduates, those with better class origins, Party and Youth League members. Many old sent-down youths, old high school and old middle school graduates had higher grades, but they were not admitted. The first year's exam scores were not published. Some people with personal connections went to the admission office to check their scores. Some old high school graduates in their early 30s, sent-down youths who were married, and those with bad class origins were not admitted despite their high scores. After many had found this out, they complained to the admission office and Deng Xiaoping. Finally, Deng instructed that those with 300 points or higher should be admitted regardless of any conditions. I met this admission condition and was admitted in the second batch. I got my admission notice on March, two months later than the first batch. Deng Xiaoping had provided me a life-changing opportunity to transform myself from a worker to a college student.

Mengyun was grateful for Deng Xiaoping who helped her realize the dream of entering college. Driven by the joy of being admitted to college, she wrote her second application to join the CCP. As I mentioned earlier, her first application written after the downfall of the "Gang of Four" was not approved. These two applications were both written at a time when she saw hopes for the future. However, her second application was once again not approved by the Party branch in college. She recalled:

> I wrote the application because the Communist Party at that time was the only organization in China that absorbed elites. All the best people surrounding me were in that Party… Yet, I was a sloppy person, not very disciplined. When the Party branch in college discussed my application, they evaluated me as lacking the spirit of struggle and fight. Who should I fight with?

Mengyun was attracted to the Communist Party largely because she also wanted to join those excellent party members she met in school. But she was denied by the Party twice due to her lack of political performance. She might have been a little bit disappointed at the time, but the educational life in college was more attractive and colorful. Therefore, she not only finished her bachelor's degree but also continued to get a master's and a PhD. As a result, she spent her entire 1980s in pursuing knowledge in school. After graduation, she stayed in the university and became a professor. Mengyun got through this tortuous journey from a sent-down youth in the state farm to an unemployed and unregistered "black" person in the city and from a worker in the factory to a professor in the university. She worked extremely hard to pull herself back to her desired life track. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Mengyun was from a highly educated family background with her father being a professor. The family network and cultural capital also enabled Mengyun to continue her education after years of manual labor on the farm and in the factory.

Unlike Mengyun, Changgeng was a lucky stayed youth after graduating from high school. He was recruited by the high school to be a teacher of physics and chemistry so that he had more advantages to take the college entrance examination than his classmates who were sent down to nearby villages or recruited by factories. He recalled his experience of preparing and taking the first exam in 1977.

> I heard about the news of the resumption of the college entrance examination on the radio. People could sign up for it. I hesitated a little bit about whether to take the exam because it was just a month away from the exam time. Teachers in my school thought I should take it and my parents also persuaded me. I was 22 years old. I finally decided to take the exam no matter what.

Changgeng had received two years of high school education himself during which the movement of "going against the tide" went viral and thus his knowledge was not solid enough for the college

entrance examination. In order to prepare for the exam, he received help from his colleagues and parents. He recalled,

> When Zhang Tiesheng came out, we stopped studying hard. I didn't learn enough math, so I lived in the house of the best math teacher in our school for a dozen days to catch up with math. I taught myself physics and chemistry so these were my strengths. I was not sure what would be tested in politics. My father collected some propaganda material from his work unit for my reference. I also recited some newspaper articles. With the rushed preparation, I took the exam, together with the high school students I taught… My score was not bad, more than 300. The admission rate was very low, about 3% to 4%. I could get into the top universities but we had no idea about good or bad universities at that time; I just wanted to go to the nearby one.

Changgeng's teaching job did greatly facilitate his preparation of the exam. He was finally admitted to a top-tier university and majored in mechanical engineering. Among the 35 newly admitted college students in his cohort, four of them were high school teachers. Besides, Changgeng was very active in college, first being the Youth League branch secretary in class, then the chair of the student council in the department, and the vice chair of the student council in the university. He successfully joined the CCP in 1980 and finished his bachelor's and master's degree in the university. After graduation, he stayed at the university as an instructor and later became a professor.

There were 5.7 million people who took the college entrance examination in the winter of 1977 across China but only 0.27 million were admitted. The admission rate was as low as 4.8%.[39] Many sent-down and stayed youths had spent their most precious adolescent and early adult time doing manual labor on the farmland or in the factory. When they heard the news of the exam one to two months before, most of them rushed to the exam with very little preparation. Mengyun and Changgeng were definitely among the lucky few being admitted to college. Some of those who

[39] "Statistics on the number of people participated in college entrance examinations and the number of admissions at national level over the years," http://edu.people.com.cn/n/2013/0503/c116076-21359059.html, accessed by 08/15/2018.

were not admitted in 1977 took the exam again in the summer of 1978 which 6.1 million people participated in, and 0.402 million (7%) were admitted.[40] College students admitted from 1977 to 1979 were particularly popular after graduation due to the lack of highly educated personnel in every work unit. They were quickly assigned to the best state ministries, public institutions, state-owned enterprises as cadres and enjoyed rapid promotion in their workplaces. Therefore, the idea of "Knowledge changes fate" replaced the old slogan of "Study is useless" becoming the new catchphrase in society (Wang, Huiyao and Miao 2017; Zhou and Hou 1999).

However, there was only a very small portion of sent-down and stayed youths who managed to change their fate through the college entrance examination. The majority of them did not have enough educational resources or family support which allowed them to take the exam and pass the admission line. Moreover, most sent-down youths were still desperately waiting to return to the city and to be assigned a formal job. At the same time, newly graduated high school students were also competing for working positions. Some sent-down youths, such as Zhiheng, returned from villages or state farms around this time and worked as a temporary worker first and waited several years to get a formal position. Some returned educated youths and new high school graduates succeeded their parents' positions in the work unit while their parents were allowed to retire earlier to pass down the iron-rice bowl to one of their children which was called the "offspring succeeding (*Jie ban)* and replacement (*Ding ti*) employment system" (Wang, Aiyun 2009). [41] Jianhong was one of them. She graduated from high school in 1978 and succeeded her father's position in a big state-owned factory. She recalled:

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[40] ibid.

[41] For the state documents about the employment system, please see: State Council Circular on Issuing "State Council Temporary Measures on Providing for Old, Weak, Sick, and Handicapped Cadres" and "State Council Temporary Measures on Workers' Retirement, Resignation" (Chinese Text), February 24, 1979, https://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/state-council-circular-on-issuing-state-council-temporary-measures-on, accessed by 08/16/2018.

> In my middle school, we were told to learn from Zhang Tiesheng, who turned in the blank exam paper, and Huangshuai, who rebelled against her teacher's authority. Intellectuals were despised as the "stinky old ninth." I didn't have any thought about going to college. In my second year in high school, we were told we could take the college entrance examination after graduation. Only then, I knew the importance of study but my coursework was not good enough and it was hard to catch up in a short time. I prepared for the exam for a while but I didn't participate. I finally replaced my father and entered his factory. We were the last year that still had to go to rustication if you were not admitted by college or assigned to a work unit. I didn't want to go to rustication, so I succeeded my father's working position.

Jianhong's father, an administrative cadre in the factory, thus retired before 60 to save the spot for his daughter. Jianhong therefore successfully avoided rustication and got into a big and profitable state-owned factory. Soon, she was promoted to the central office of the factory and joined the Party.

The "offspring succeeding and replacement employment system" was widely used in China at the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s to relieve the burden of employment for millions of recently returned educated youths and fresh high school graduates. However, when they succeeded the iron-rice bowl from their parents' hands, they never expected that one day, the iron-rice bowl would be broken into pieces in their middle age with the heavy blow of market reform in the late 1990s.

## 2.2 Official Repudiation of the Cultural Revolution and limited "liberation of thoughts"

The power struggle in the central authority didn't stop with the downfall of the "Gang of Four." Mao's successor Hua Guofeng was the nominal supreme leader of the state at that time who wanted to continue Mao's instructions and ideologies and was reluctant to redress the verdict of the April 5$^{th}$ Movement on Tiananmen. To combat these ideologies, Hu Yaobang, Minister of the Organization Department of the CCP, approved the publication of an article "Practice is the sole criterion for testing truth" on an internal journal of CCP in May 1978 which was republished by

*Guangming Daily*, the *People's Daily* and the *PLA Daily* over the next few days and triggered a nationwide truth criterion controversy (Baum 1996: 58-60; Schoenhals 1991). This article was a challenge of the long-term deification of Mao's words and instructions and stressed the importance of practice for seeking the truth and determining the future which was in line with Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic approach. This theoretical and ideological controversy paved the way for Deng Xiaoping to take over the leadership from Hua Guofeng at the 36-day Working Conference of the Central Committee, decisions of which were officially confirmed at the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP in December 1978 (Schoenhals 1991). This plenary session was a historical turning point for China in that it redressed the April 5th Movement as a "revolutionary event," speeded up the rehabilitation of the wrongly persecuted intellectuals and cadres during the Cultural Revolution and Anti-Rightest Movement, repudiated the ideologies of class struggle and continuous revolution as well as the personality cult during the Cultural Revolution, and switched focus to economic development (Baum 1996: 48-65). All in all, the plenary consolidated Deng Xiaoping's power at CCP and signified the start of the "Reform and Opening up" era in China.

The official acknowledgement of Mao Zedong's mistakes, the repudiation of class struggle and the personality cult of the Cultural Revolution, as well as the rehabilitation of persecuted intellectuals and cadres, all helped dissolve the red curtain and provided people, especially the generation of the Cultural Revolution, a chance to reflect on the past and develop their own critical thinking. In addition, the release of previously banned books, the imports of music and movies, and newly translated books from the western world, further facilitated the liberation of people's thoughts, or the process of the "new enlightenment" in the late 1970s and the entire 1980s which had an indispensable influence on student protests in 1986 and 1989 (e.g., Xu, J. 2000; Xu, L. 2002; Zha 2006). Many of my interviewees from this generation recalled being able to read previously banned novels and listen to love and rock songs from Hong Kong and Taiwan. These new cultural products opened their eyes to the world outside.

However, the "thought liberation," although officially promoted to support the top-down economic and political reform of the era, was not without its limitations. On the contrary, throughout the 1980s, CCP took various steps to put a shackle on the thought liberation in order to shield its own authority and legitimacy from being overtly challenged (e.g., Baum 1996; Vogel 2011: 249-65). For example, the Xidan Democracy Wall developed in the late 1978 for people to paste big-character posters to express political views was outlawed in 1979 when people started to petition for human rights and democracy. Wei Jingsheng and many representative petitioners were arrested and sentenced (Brodsgaard 1981; Vogel 2011: 250-7). In response to the Democracy Wall Movement, Deng Xiaoping put forth "the four cardinal principles;" that is, upholding the socialist road, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leadership of the Communist Party, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought (Baum 1996: 66-93).[42] In addition, grievances and reflections toward the Cultural Revolution among returned educated youths gave rise to the "scar literature" in the late 1970s and early 1980s which depicted tragic stories of the sent-down youths, persecuted intellectuals and state cadres, and revealed the historical wounds and traumatic impacts caused by the Cultural Revolution (Chi and Wang 2000: 124-136; Hong 2007: 293-314). This type of literature received "massive repercussions" among Chinese people at that time and facilitated their own reflections on the Cultural Revolution and the Communist regime (Hong 2007: 293). Yet, in order to take control of the extent of the reflection and criticism, the CCP issued the "Resolution on certain questions in the history of our party since the founding of the People's Republic of China" in 1981 which made official evaluations on a series of historical events since 1949, especially the Cultural Revolution and the role of Mao Zedong. The Cultural Revolution was officially repudiated in this document as follows:

[42] Deng, Xiaoping "Uphold the Four Cardinal Principles" (excerpts) March 30, 1979, http://academics.wellesley.edu/Polisci/wj/China/Deng/principles.htm, accessed by 08/21/2018.

> History has shown that the “cultural revolution". initiated by a leader laboring under a misapprehension and capitalized on by counter-revolutionary cliques, led to domestic turmoil and brought catastrophe to the Party, the state and the whole people. [43]

This document further acknowledged Mao's mistakes on the Cultural Revolution but ascribed a lot of onus on Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four,” reaffirming that Mao’s historical role in the CCP and his contribution to the Communist Revolution and the Socialist construction outweighed his mistakes. This official document attempted to unify the public discourses of the past and control the depth of reflection and criticism on the Party and Mao Zedong (Vogel 2011: 357-8, 365-73). One of my interviewees, Liren, had said, “The state set the tone for the Cultural Revolution, so we no longer reflected on it.”

Furthermore, to curb the influence of imported western humanism and liberal ideas, the conservative factions in CCP launched the “Anti-spiritual pollution campaign” in 1983 which impacted the academic, art and literature circles the most (Baum 1996: 143-63; Gold, Thomas B. 1984). With more and more college students influenced by the ideas of freedom of speech and democracy, their dissatisfaction on the inflation, corruption and lack of academic freedom and political rights led to the student protest at the end of 1986, spreading from Anhui Province to Hubei, Shanghai, Beijing, etc.(Baum 1996: 189-204; Kwong 1988a). This movement was suppressed in early 1987 and resulted in the resignation of Hu Yaobang, the General Secretary of CCP, who showed sympathy to students and the start of the “Campaign against Bourgeois Liberalization” (Baum 1996: 206-24; Tong, J. 1988). Finally, rampant corruption and high inflation in 1988 led to the Tiananmen protest in the spring of 1989 which ended with an armed crackdown and a large-scale purge of political dissidents (Baum 1996: 225-310). Looking back on the period

[43] “Resolution on certain questions in the history of our party since the founding of the People’s Republic of China” *(Adopted by the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on June 27, 1981)* https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/history/01.htm, accessed by 08/19/2018.

from 1978 to 1989, some scholars summarized these years as "anti-leftist in the even years, and anti-rightest in the odd years,"[44] which vividly reflected the swings of state policies and the ideological struggles between the conservatives and the reformers in the central Party authority.

## 2.3 The Tiananmen Crackdown in 1989

By the end of the 1980s, people's grievances and dissatisfaction mounted with uncontrollable inflation and severe corruption. The sudden death of the General Secretary of CCP, Hu Yaobang, on April 15, 1989 triggered the initial students' gathering on Tiananmen Square. At the beginning, it was commemorating Hu and expressing their dissatisfaction but later it developed into an unprecedented student prodemocracy movement in Beijing and across China which was regarded by the conservative factions in the CCP as a threat to overthrow the regime and resulted in a bloody crackdown on June 4th (Calhoun 1989; Vogel 2011: 595-639). Most people of the generation of the Cultural Revolution were already in workplaces at this time and not major participants of the protest but they had witnessed the movement from the beginning to its tragic end. Although it was the most censored topic in China, some of my interviewees from this generation shared their memories of this event and expressed their sympathy to the students.

Zhiheng was working in a state-owned factory at that time. He recalled the day before the crackdown.

> I was on Tiananmen Square on June 3rd with my friends. A Peking University student was lying on the ground as a hunger strike. He was sick at the time. I touched his forehead, he was very hot. He had a fever. I couldn't take him away, so I took off my coat and covered him… I kept two cigarettes for myself and left the rest of the whole pack for the students. They also smoked. I deeply sympathized with the students.

[44] Chen, Kuide. (1999) "Zhong guo zai ba shi nian dai de zheng zhi feng yun (China's political situation in the 1980s)," *Radio Free Asia*, Sep 2. https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/pinglun/16-19990902.html, accessed by 08/19/2018.

The hunger strike of students started on May 13 which won a lot of public sympathy and support (Zhao, D. 2004: 163). Jiefang also recalled many companies and work units donated food and drinks to support them. Tiexin and his mother brought food to the students. When I asked him whether he had seen the protest on Tiananmen, he replied: "I went to Tiananmen not to 'see' them but to 'support' them. My mother cooked a pot of porridge for the students but they were surrounded by soldiers. My mother sent porridge to them. It was all voluntary. We all sympathized with the students."

Although many interviewees showed their sympathy to the student protesters, they also thought the students were too naïve to win the protest, lacking struggling experiences to fight against the powerful Party. Shuying was a worker in a collective factory at that time and her little cousin was a college student on Tiananmen. She tried to persuade his mother to call him back. She recalled:

> I went to Tiananmen to see posters people put up. I heard there were volunteers from Hong Kong and foreign countries. The next day, martial law was announced. My aunt's son was still on Tiananmen. I asked my aunt to call him back. I told her the college students had no chance to succeed. Did you remember what Chairman Mao had said? Political power came out of the barrel of guns. How could you succeed just with your mouth? My aunt's son finally came back. He had participated in the hunger strike.

Furthermore, Shuying had watched negotiations between CCP leaders and the student delegates on TV which confirmed her judgement on the movement.

> They were on TV to negotiate with leaders. Their political propositions could not persuade me at least… They didn't have a clear set of political opinions nor did they say why they wanted to do this and what they wanted to achieve. I still remember one of the student delegates who negotiated with Li Peng (the Premier at the time). He leaned on the sofa like Wang Hongwen (one of the "Gang of Four"). I still remember that scene on TV. His posture and tone looked exactly like Wang Hongwen. I didn't have any theories, just looked from the appearance. I thought he was going to fail.

Shuying's pessimistic view toward the student movement finally came true on June 3rd and 4th when armies marched toward Tiananmen Square to enforce martial law. It was hard to believe for many people that the People's Liberation Army now directed their guns toward the people. Zhiheng recalled:

> I knew the process of the final crackdown... They deployed the 38th Army first to Beijing. The army didn't know what to do at the beginning. Later when they approached Beijing, the commander of the 38th Army knew they were coming to suppress students. They were soldiers of the people. How could they fight the people and suppress the students? So the commander hesitated and was quickly replaced. You guys didn't have any attachment to the Party. From our perspective, it was hard to believe how a Communist Party could do this. They also dressed some PLA soldiers as students and burned cars and tanks to take photos then they had the excuse to accuse the students as mobs.

The Premier, Li Peng, and other conservatives in the CCP persuaded Deng Xiaoping that the student movement was like the Red Guard Movement in the Cultural Revolution and would plunge China into chaos. The central Party leaders finally decided to take a hard line toward the students and Li Peng declared martial law on May 20th (Nathan and Link 2001: 223-43).[45] About180,000 to 250,000 soldiers and armed police were ordered to march toward the capital city to enforce martial law.[46] Many people tried to set up roadblocks on the way to Tiananmen to prevent troops from moving in (Nathan and Link 2001: 237-8). Jiefang recalled:

> Till now, people didn't agree with this tough approach. Many students and ordinary people living in the suburbs wanted to prevent the troops from moving in by blocking the

[45] Wu, Renhua (2011). "89 Tiananmen Shi Jian Da Shi Ji: 5 yue 19 ri, xing qi wu (Memorabilia of the 89 Tiananmen Incident-May 19th, Friday," http://blog.boxun.com/hero/201105/wurenhua/19_1.shtml, accessed by 08/26.2018. "89 Tiananmen Shi Jian Da Shi Ji: 5 yue 20 ri, xing qi liu (Memorabilia of the 89 Tiananmen Incident-May 20th, Sunday," http://blog.boxun.com/hero/201105/wurenhua/20_1.shtml, accessed by 08/26.2018.

[46] Wu, Renhua (2009). "Liu Si Beijing Jie Yan Bu Dui de Shu Liang he Fan Hao (Military Units Enforcing Martial Law During the June 4 Incident)," http://blog.boxun.com/hero/201004/wurenhua/10_1.shtml, accessed by 08/26/2018.

> road. When the army entered the city, people didn't lead them in the right direction. They finally fired the guns and hurt a lot of people. It was hard to say.

The final crackdown started on the evening of June 3rd and lasted until the morning of June 4th. The army received instruction that they could take any means to clear impediments and take over the Square so they opened fire toward defenseless people on the streets (Zhao, D. 2004: 200-7). Tiexin recalled:

> Beijing TV called white black and the *People's Daily* published nonsense. They really shouldn't use guns, killing so many people. The tanks crushed on people. How many people died? Officials said there were 2000. I saw some at our places. No matter what, they shouldn't use guns. People were so scared.

The official death toll was about 200 civilians including 36 college students, in addition to 2000 wounded, whereas wounded soldiers were reported as more than 6000 with several dozen deaths (Calhoun 1997: 150; Oksenberg et al. 1990: 364). But these figures were challenged by many witnesses, documentary records, and researchers, whose estimations of the civilian death toll ranged from several hundreds to several thousands (e.g., Calhoun 1997: 150-1; Che 1990).[47] The recently declassified cable from the British government estimated about 10,000 deaths based on information sent back from the previous British ambassador to China.[48]

However, specific information of the crackdown was kept secret by the government whereas the public media collectively propagated the official discourse that labeled the student movement

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[47] Kristoff, Nicholas D. (June 21, 1989). "A Reassessment of How Many Died in the Military Crackdown in Beijing," *The New York Times*, https://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/21/world/a-reassessment-of-how-many-died-in-the-military-crackdown-in-beijing.html, accessed by 08/26/2018.

[48] See "Ying Guo Jie Mi 'Liu Si' Zhen Ya Xi Jie, Cheng Yi Wan Ren Si Wang (Britain declassified the details of the 'June 4th' Suppression and said there were 10,000 deaths), December 24, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/chinese-news-42470602, accessed by 08/26/2018. Also see, Lusher, Adam (24 December 2017), "At least 10,000 people died in Tiananmen Square massacre, secret British cable from the time alleged," *The Independent*, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/tiananmen-square-massacre-death-toll-secret-cable-british-ambassador-1989-alan-donald-a8126461.html, accessed by 08/26/2018.

as a "Counter-revolutionary riot" and denied the crackdown as a "massacre" (Calhoun 1997: 151; Lim 2014). Zhiheng recalled:

> When the crackdown was over. the Chang'an Street and the surrounding areas were cordoned off for washing and cleaning. The Beijing News said the army didn't fire a gun. In the documentary I watched, there were many holes in nearby houses. Even the granite wall was blown up. People dared not say anything, but the truth is the truth.

After the crackdown, martial law lasted until January 1990 and public discussion of the crackdown became a highly censored political taboo. Like Zhiheng had described, "people dared not to say anything." However, there were still some people who believed the truth would be revealed in the future. Chirui said, "At that time, tanks and machine guns were directed toward students pursuing democracy. History will be eventually revealed." Liren also insisted, "They termed the June Fourth Movement as 'riot' or 'insurgency.' I never called it like that. It was not respectful. It was a democratic movement."

Besides making the crackdown a political taboo, the CCP also started a large-scale political purge of those who had participated in or supported the protest in Beijing and across China (Miles 1997: 25-31). Mengyun was a PhD student at Peking University during the movement and had participated in several parades. She recalled being interrogated by department leaders.

> After the crackdown, the leaders interrogated us one by one. They asked us whether we had gone to parades. I said I went there with you. I went there, so did you. Our university in general protected most of the students. I stayed in school.

Since she had written two applications to join the Party before, the Party secretary of the department tried to persuade her to join the Party after the June 4$^{th}$ crackdown. She recalled:

> Our Party secretary came to ask me to attend Party lectures. I replied with an absolute no. I used to write applications because I genuinely wanted to join. Now I just wanted to withdraw my application. The front page of the *People's Daily* published how many students and teachers in Peking University applied to join the Party after June 4$^{th}$. It was

> used to show that college students and teachers still supported the Party. Why would I do this for them? They were now enemies of the people. Even if they allowed me to join, I would never do. They were executioners.

Mengyun's hope for the future and confidence in the Party evaporated with the bloody crackdown of the movement. Similar to Mengyun, Qingfeng, who was a secretary of the Youth League Committee in a state ministry at the time, also lost his interest in doing politics. He said, "After June 4th, I completely gave up the idea of pursuing a political career in the system. I had a bunch of old friends who were already bureau-level cadres at that time. They were removed after June 4th and went to the US and France." Although a lot of active protesters were arrested during the purge, most people of the generation of the Cultural Revolution were not major participants of the student protest, thus they were not greatly impacted by the political purge. Nonetheless, most of them regarded the Tiananmen Crackdown as a watershed of the reform era which laid the foundation of the political apathy, moral degeneration and money worship in the 1990s. Tiexin bitterly sighed:

> The June Fourth changed many people's minds. People no longer had faith any more… Beijingers used to care about politics. They were concerned about state issues and political affairs. They would not take advantage of others. Money was secondary. After 1989, people's minds, thoughts and ideas were all changed. People could do whatever to make money. The restraining forces and the bottom lines of society all disappeared.

The 1989 Tiananmen Crackdown suddenly terminated the "new enlightenment" era of the 1980s and put the economic and political reform to a halt. Moreover, the political purge afterward drove out most reformers within the political system and arrested and deported many political dissidents outside the system (Miles 1997). For the generation of the Cultural Revolution, who had experienced and witnessed the Red Guard Movement, the April 5th Movement and the 1986 student protest, it was a big shock for them to see the Communist Party using tanks and machine guns to suppress student movement. It conflicted with the revolutionary histories they had been brought up with, and severely eroded the legitimacy of the CCP among the people. As a result, this generation's

hopes and confidence toward the state and politics revived in the 1980s were reduced to pragmatism and cynicism in the resumed economic reform since 1992.

## 2.4 Construction of the socialist market economy and the surge of social inequality

The Tiananmen Crackdown had received global condemnation and economic sanctions from the US and Europe. Moreover, at the time of the collapse of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the CCP further tightened its social and political control to avoid the "color revolution" and slowed down the pace of economic reform. The half-opened door seemed to be closing again. In order to reinstate economic reform, Deng Xiaoping took a south tour in the spring of 1992 and used his personal influence in the Party to push the incumbent central leaders to bring China back on the track of the Reform and Opening policy (Perry 1993; Vogel 2011: 664-89). Since then, the Communist state took up a rapid economic reform to build the so-called socialist market system while preserving a conservative political stance. For the generation of the Cultural Revolution, economic reform did improve their life standards and provide opportunities to make money on the market. Nevertheless, the rising of social inequality and widespread corruption also greatly disappointed them which intrigued different levels of nostalgia of the past.

At the beginning of the economic reform in the early 1990s, "*Xiahai*" (Jumping into the sea) became a catchphrase to describe those who chose to resign from their positions in the state-owned work units and join the trend of the market economy to do private business (e.g., Liu, X. R. 2001). However, most of those from the generation of the Cultural Revolution hesitated to lose their iron rice bowl and jump into a market full of uncertainty. Only a few who were dissatisfied with their low working salaries and had some social networks did join the trend to engage in private business. Zhiheng was one of them. He described himself as "restless and audacious" who dared to do anything new. He left his factory in 1990 and first joined his friends to do border trade with Russia then he returned to Beijing and opened a restaurant. Finally, he joined his friends to work in a

private company. Although Zhiheng was among the first few who dared to swim in the sea and benefit from the market economy, he also clearly saw and complained about the unfair game in the process of privatization and the marketization process. He said,

> Why do people hate the rich? Deng Xiaoping allowed a group of people to get rich first. Who were those people? They were children of state cadres. They ruled and controlled state-owned enterprises which were mostly monopolistic. The state-owned enterprises were contracted to individuals. The money earned which used to belong to the state was now put into individuals' pockets. Other people could not get into the field. Besides, some state officials, who had resources and networks, used their resources gained from the state to run their own business. The reform and opening, in the end, brought fewer benefits but more inequality. My salary was higher than before but, compared to those big bosses, I was dissatisfied. The biggest drawback of the reform and opening up was to widen the gap between the rich and the poor.

As Zhiheng had described, ordinary people did increase their salaries, and even started some small business to earn more money at the preliminary stage of the economic reform. However, as the reform proceeded to a deeper level, only those with certain social networks and resources were capable of cutting a share from the privatization and marketization process. For example, Yuanchao who worked in a state ministry as a driver didn't follow the trend to *Xiahai* but he had witnessed a lot of his colleagues in the state ministry who did. He recalled:

> Many major leaders' secretaries *Xiahai*. They made a lot of money. They didn't fully resign but took a long-term unpaid leave. Their positions were still kept for them. They became big bosses later on and the positions in the system were no longer important. They had personal connections to do business. I found many secretaries of the leaders had great influence.

As Yuanchao had described, many state cadres didn't fully resign from their positions in the work unit when they first went into business but took advantage of their social networks and resources developed in the work unit to develop their own business.

Moreover, some previously non-profit public institutions also started to develop business sectors or establish companies to make money on the newly developed market economy. Jiefang was appointed as the manager of a newly established company affiliated to his work unit. In his words, he was "walking along the seaside" to do some business based on services provided by the institution. Tiexin also participated in the business sector developed by his work unit. He first contracted a restaurant from his work unit and then joined a new company established by the work unit to sell water purifiers. He said he was not very good at doing business and didn't make a lot of money. After two to three years, the company could no longer deliver profits to the work unit, so it was dissolved. Tiexin thus returned to his original working position in the work unit to wait for retirement.

As for most people lacking enough networks and resources, and those who worked in relatively stable work units, they were more reluctant to leave their working positions and give up the welfare provided by the work unit. For instance, Yuejin who worked in a work unit of the railway system said, "I was not tempted to *Xiahai*. I was relatively conservative. It was not whether you wanted it or not. You had to have some conditions such as personal connections, resources and personal capabilities." Hongjun who worked in a state-owned hotel also said, "I didn't *Xiahai* because our work unit had a good environment and good economic returns." Jianhong also described a similar trend in her factory. "My work unit was stable and I got promoted gradually, so I didn't *Xiahai*. Very few of my colleagues did. Our salaries were good, and our factory earned good profits at that time. If the work unit didn't have good economic returns, there might be more people *Xiahai*. Besides, if you resigned, the work unit would take back your house. It was a big limitation for us. You need a lot of courage to *Xiahai*." Moreover, Jianhong also mentioned the influence of the Communist education on her decision. She said, "The Communist education was ingrained in my mind. I wondered whether this trend could last long at that time. Wasn't this the restoration of capitalism?"

However, with the deepening of the economic reform, especially the SOE (state-owned enterprises) reform in the late 1990s, many of those who were assigned to state-owned factories as workers were forced to "*Xiagang*" (Stepping down from the working post) and were thrown into the market to struggle for a living. SOE reform allowed unimportant insolvent state-owned factories to bankrupt and greatly reduced the financial burdens of the state while *Xiagang* was an auxiliary strategy in this process to get rid of those redundant workers and further lighten the welfare burdens of the SOEs. As a result, tens of millions of SOE workers were laid off during the late 1990s and early 2000s (Hung and Chiu 2003; Lee 2000).

Most of my interviewees of the generation of the Cultural Revolution didn't get laid off during the SOE reform itself but they had families, classmates, or colleagues who experienced *Xiagang*. Jiefang's wife was one of them. She was born in 1948, and was a sent-down youth of the Northeast Production and Construction Corps. When she returned to Beijing in the late 1970s, she was assigned to a construction team of a street office. However, the team was dissolved in the early 1990s and she was assigned to a state-owned storage company which went bankrupt very soon after the SOE reform. Jiefang said,

> She had no work unit since then. She was not like me. My work unit would take care of me after I retired. It would send me some gifts during the holidays or give me subsidies if I had difficulties. She had nothing. The company bankrupted. Younger people took the buyout money for their working years ("*Mai duan gong ling*") and found new jobs in the market. My wife was about to retire so she used the buyout money to pay her endowment insurance until retirement age.

Jiefang's wife stayed at home watching her grandchild after being laid off. As long as she kept paying the endowment insurance, she could get her pension after she reached the official retirement age. For some younger workers in their 40s, the life after *Xiagang* would be more miserable, since the buyout money was far from enough to pay the endowment insurance until their retiring age or support their families in the transition period. In Jiefang's narrative, it was such a pity to lose the

protection from the work unit in that the person was like an abandoned child of the state and had no place to turn to when facing life's difficulties.

Jianhong also shared similar ideas with Jiefang. As mentioned before, she was reluctant to *Xiahai* at the beginning of the reform but the large state-owned factory she worked in was no longer profitable in the late 1990s. She recalled, "Our factory used to have multiple branches and every branch had about 10,000 workers. With the development of the market economy, our factory faced a big downturn and we merged into one corporate." As a result, most workers were forced to *Xiagang*, and some of her classmates internally retired ("*neitui*") in their 40s and found jobs in the market. Internal retirement was another choice for workers in addition to receiving buyout money for their service years in the *Xiagang* process. They still affiliated to the work unit and received minimum living allowances from the factory every month until they reached their official retirement age. These workers were not counted as unemployment workers but in fact were unemployed and had to search for job opportunities in the market to make ends meet (Hung and Chiu 2003). Jianhong was luckier than her colleagues in that she was able to stay in the reorganized corporate and worked in the office as a medium-rank cadre.

For the generation of the Cultural Revolution, being incorporated into the state-controlled *danwei* (work unit) system in the city had been their life goal since their late adolescence and early adulthood. Those who were sent down to the villages or state farms envied those who joined the army or stayed in the city recruited by factories or other work units whereas the sent-down youths who returned to the city were eager to be assigned to a state-owned enterprise to hold an iron rice bowl in their hands. For this generation, the newly emerged market in the 1980s and 1990s represented disorder, uncertainty and immorality which was in contrast to the Maoist education and the collectivist or socialist system they had been brought up with. Although they acknowledged the improvement of living standards during the Reform era to a certain extent, they were more

disappointed toward rising social inequality and rampant corruption. Many interviewees in this generation reflected on the Reform and Opening up policy from very critical perspectives and some also referred back to the "good side" of Mao's era to express their dissatisfaction.

The first critique frequently mentioned was the "cat theory" of Deng Xiaoping during the reform. The "cat theory" claimed "a cat, whether it is white or black, is good as long as it is able to catch mice" (Zhao, S. 1993). It was used by Deng Xiaoping to set aside the ideological debates between socialism and capitalism within central Party authority and support the development of a market economy under the socialist regime. However, this pragmatic and utilitarian approach was regarded as the beginning of ideological confusion and moral degeneration in the Reform era by many interviewees from the generation of the Cultural Revolution. Zhiheng commented,

> Although Deng Xiaoping was called the chief designer of the reform, he didn't really know how to reform and open up. He claimed to "cross the river by feeling the stones." He also invented a "black cat and white cat" theory that messed up people's minds and their economic and moral consciousness... The black or white cat catching mice is in fact money. As long as you can catch money, improving the economy, you can use any means. We opened the gate of the country, and good things and bad things came in together. In my opinion, 70 percent is bad, and 30 percent is good.

He criticized Deng's pragmatic and utilitarian approach of the reform as a major cause for the trend of money worship in China. People took every possible means to make money which further widened the gap between the rich and the poor and increased corruption in every aspect of society. This view of moral decay was widely shared among this generation. Jiefang also said,

> People's minds are confused by Deng Xiaoping's cat theory which only focuses on the economy, and not on people's ideas and beliefs. Now people can only recognize money. Social morality is decaying and the bottom line is breaking. These are all due to a lack of faith. People have no faith nowadays.

What's implied in Jiefang's statement is that Deng's cat theory not only suspended ideological debates but actually deconstructed the faith of Communism or socialism and promoted a materialistic value that placed money before everything. This economic-centered reform, in Tiexin's perspective, was a total failure. He bluntly said that the development was not solid. "China looks like a *bao fa hu* (nouveau riche), whose economy depends heavily on real estate." However, in Tiexin's opinion, the economic problem was not as severe as the ideological problem. He further said, "The key problem is the changing of people's minds. If people's beliefs have been corrupted, you cannot reverse them in one generation… Everybody is oriented toward money now. How could you say it is a success?"

Aside from moral degeneration, another critique of the Reform derived from the surge of social inequality and concentration of power and wealth of the state that did not benefit the general public equally. Qingfeng said,

> What are the results of the reform and opening up? A big government and small people. The wealth is concentrated and the state power is strengthened to the extent that frightens the world. However, nerve endings are very weak. The national treasury is full but the taxes are not reduced. People are required to pay more for the "five insurances and one fund." Whenever you go out of the door, you have to pay. Many public services have disappeared. If you want to test the quality of a government, you just look at whether it brings actual benefits to the people.

As Qingfeng had commented, during the economic boom in the reform era, the state had developed strong extractive capacity and accumulated a large amount of wealth but the general public only benefited a little from this economic growth. This view was also shared by Tiexin, who said,

> In another country, the people get rich first then the state gets powerful. In our country, the state gets rich, and takes all the money away… The money comes from the people, from various taxes. Even if people have made some money, the state can take it away at any time with various means. If you have a house, the state can tax it and take it back after 70 years… Our state's capacity is to calculate its people. It calculates its own *chen min*

> (subjects) who have already lived a hard life…It should be like parents. If your children are sick, you should find a way to cure them. If your children live a difficult life, you should take care of them. Family is like that, so is the state. The state should be like parents.

Tiexin's view toward the state in the Reform era reflected many people's anxiety and insecurity about their properties and earnings. The formidable state has various means to tax people and concentrate the wealth to the government. In Tiexin's imagination, the ideal relationship between the state and the people is the parent-children relationship that the state should take care of its children when they have difficulties. Not surprisingly, this imagination is in line with the socialist *danwei* (work unit) system that prevailed in urban China during Mao's era and the early Reform era. However, in the late Reform era, the state was no longer a caregiver but a predator on the market that viewed its "subjects" as tax sources or crops ready to be harvested.

Therefore, in order to express their dissatisfaction toward the moral degeneration and the surge of social inequality in the Reform era, many interviewees of the generation of the Cultural Revolution brought up nostalgic memories of Mao's era to a different extent. Jiefang was a stayed youth recruited by a factory. When he stated that people had no faith nowadays, he compared it with his youth time of Mao's era when people enthusiastically devoted themselves to the Communist idealism selflessly. He said,

> We used to have faith. The Party promoted the Communist idealism and the ordinary people were pursuing this goal selflessly. Now people only think about themselves and think about money. At that time, money was secondary. Our life conditions were difficult. I only earned 18 yuan per month as an apprentice. But we had no complaints to work overtime. Whenever the Youth League asked us to speed up production, 90 percent of us would come. It was because of the faith of selfless contribution to the work, the factory and the state. It was a sense of honor that dominated us. There is no such thing now.

This contrast of the past and the present was a common tactic in this generation, but it didn't mean they would like to return to Mao's era. The past was reconstructed through a romanticized lens to

reflect the deterioration of the present. For instance, Yuxiu, who was a stayed youth being recommended to college, had said,

> I don't know if I should say it. I think China is really in degeneration now, especially in the aspect of morality. I'm not saying I miss the past. The economy and society were backward at that time but people's minds were different. Now society is developed, but the gap between the rich and the poor is growing larger. The society is unfair and unstable so people are dissatisfied and have no trust among each other. It was much better at our time, when people had dignity and respected each other relatively. Now people can take any means to make money. I experienced this personally. How can a society turn into this?

When Yuxiu talked about dignity and respect of the past time, she seemed to set aside the persecutions she witnessed in the Red Terror and the sufferings of her older sister who got severe hepatitis during the rustication. The past was selected and reconstructed from a nostalgic perspective to contrast with the present. This type of narrative also appeared among other interviewees of this generation.

Shuying, a stayed youth recruited by a factory who had turned away from the beating and smashing of the Red Guards was nostalgic about the pure and selfless "Red" education of Mao's era. She said,

> The Cultural Revolution advocated for pure red spirit. I don't know whether you can understand the "red." Do not use the Western idea of red. In China, red is pure, kind and the most beautiful thing. The state advocated for this kind of red… Our education told us that we shouldn't love ourselves first. We should love the collective, the state and the people around the world. It was selfless.

Brought up by this pure and selfless "red" education, Shuying was fascinated with the idea of devoting herself to something larger and greater. However, when she started to work in the factory in the late 1970s, she was particularly disappointed at the disconnection between social realities and the propagated ideals. She said,

> At the beginning of the Reform and opening up, Deng Xiaoping said that allowing a group of people to get rich first and driving other people to achieve common prosperity… The leaders have changed many times since then, and I'm now retired. They still haven't achieved common prosperity. I have no confidence in them now. If they follow Chairman Mao's collective road, I may believe in them. But now, they want to build a market economy in a socialist country. I think it is impossible. I don't believe in them anymore.

While Shuying's nostalgia of the past derived from the mismatch of ideological propaganda and the social reality in the reform era, Yuejin's recollection of the past was directly targeted on the rampant corruption of the present. He was a late sent-down youth who spent two years rusticating in the suburb of Beijing and was recruited by the railway system later on. He was too young to be directly involved in the Red Guard Movement but had a romanticized imagination about the "great democracy" of the Cultural Revolution. He said,

> The Cultural Revolution was in turmoil, but it was only one aspect. Were there any right parts of it? Many. At least, it touched the soul of the cadres, no matter whether you were the State Premier or Provincial Party Secretary, or ordinary cadres. They were under the supervision of the people. You dared not to do anything wrong, otherwise you would be harshly criticized and denounced. Now, who can touch the ruling class? None. Officials shield one another. The rule of law is to protect the interests of the ruler. The law is used to constrain people. Those corrupted ministers and bureau directors only got sentences for several years. Not to mention touching their souls, it did not even touch their flesh. The Cultural Revolution had done it. No one dared to be like an emperor above the people.

Yuejin's belief of mass mobilization in dealing with corruption was also shared by Tiexin, who was a late sent-down youth recruited by the army in 1978. He was the only one of this generation I had interviewed who directly said, "We should have another Cultural Revolution now."

> I also hope the state can turn better, but it is useless to rely on the laws or institution. Laws are good on paper, but no one can implement them. If the state wants to get better, it should have a change like a Cultural Revolution, a bottom up mass movement. "The eyes of the masses are bright." This is Chairman Mao's word. Whoever did something wrong in the work unit would be found out and severely criticized. The officials would not like

> this now. The police are also useless. You have to rely on the mass movement like the Cultural Revolution. Only in that case, the state can turn better.

Tiexin's calling for another round of Cultural Revolution was a little bit extreme but not uncommon in the revival of Maoism recently in China (Zhao, S. 2016). He was deeply disappointed at the laws and institution in dealing with the severe corruptions and social inequality in the Reform era, but his cultural and political repertoire obtained from past experiences and education could only induce him to the "great democracy" in the Cultural Revolution. Furthermore, coming from a family of good class origin, he had no traumatic memory about persecutions and sufferings during the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, he had no historical burden to bring up the mass movement of the Cultural Revolution as an effective way to subjugate the high-ranking cadres to mass supervision.

However, for my early sent-down youths who suffered the longest during the Rustication Movement, returning to Mao's era was never a way out. Mengyun directly said,

> China's retrogression to the past has no way out. In the era of totalitarian dictatorship, people were poor and starving and China was far behind the world. For the entire nation to live a life like that, the CCP had to take responsibility…During the Cultural Revolution, wife reported husband, son criticized father. Many people committed suicide and I knew people who were jumping from buildings. Young people now listen to the New Leftists talking about the past colorfully. Have they ever lived that life for one day?

For Mengyun, it was irresponsible to bring back Mao's era while ignoring the poverty, starvation, political persecutions and sufferings it had inflicted. No matter how problematic the Reform was, it had at least improved people's living standards and opened some people's eyes to the outside world. Zhiheng also stated,

> If China wants to get rich and strong, and improve the life of all Chinese people, this system is not suitable. If it was not the CCP, but the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang)[49] ruling China, would it be better? I think so. Many people are telling lies in front of the truth. Is a capitalist system worse than socialist? If you look at Taiwan and then look at the mainland, your living standards, social conditions, popular support and people's quality are not as good as theirs. In other words, if it was the Nationalist Party ruling the country, it must be better than the CCP. Secondly, are you really a socialist system? No, you are neither socialist, nor capitalist. It is termed as socialism with Chinese characteristics but in fact it is grotesque with power being highly concentrated and highly corrupted.

For Mengyun and Zhiheng, their past sufferings intrigued their reflections on the Communist regime in both Mao's era and the Reform era. In response to social inequality and corruptions in the Reform era, they were not proposing to return to Mao's era, but going forward to reform the political system.

Similar to the early sent-down youths, Chirui, a college student at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution who was sent to a suburb village near Beijing as a "barefoot doctor" after graduation held very critical views toward the Cultural Revolution and Mao's era. In direct contrast to Tiexin who called for another round of Cultural Revolution, Chirui said,

> If China underwent another Cultural Revolution, it would be completely destroyed. In the past, if the CCP didn't reform, it would collapse. The situation forced the reform. But when the reform started, society became unstable. So the CCP tried to maintain stability… I just want to live in the time to see the change…Why could Taiwan be one of the four little dragons in Asia? It was due to Chiang Ching-kuo's lifting of martial law. China's previous reform has been external. The real internal reform has not started yet.

What Chirui implied here was a real political reform of China that would lead to a democratic future like Taiwan. However, this view was not widely shared among the generation of the Cultural Revolution. Despite their dissatisfaction and grievances toward the Reform and the corrupted

[49] The Nationalist Party (Kuomingtang) was the ruling party of the Republic of China and lost the Civil War in 1949 and retrieved to Taiwan.

government, most of them were afraid that China would be plunged into chaos with democratic elections or color revolution. Qingfeng even said, "I hope this regime will be stable for another hundred years because I want a safe and peaceful environment. If the Communist Party cannot lead the country, no one can. There must be chaos, and I would have no good life." For most people from this generation, maintaining social stability was their common ground with the CCP either because they were beneficiaries of the reform and the political system or they were scared by the propaganda of a chaotic future with democracy.

## 3. Discussion: From a politicized revolutionary state to a capitalized authoritarian state

The generation of the Cultural Revolution captured those who reached their late adolescence and early adulthood during the ten years of the Cultural Revolution. In fact, there were at least five generation units identified within this generation based on differentiated trajectories during and after the Cultural Revolution. The first generation unit referred to the "old five classes" of the college graduates who were part of the Red Guard Movement and were assigned to work in remote cities or suburban villages after graduation.[50] The second was the early sent-down youths of the middle and high school graduates from 1966 to 1969 who also actively participated in the Red Guard Movement and were sent down to poor villages or Production and Construction Corps during the Rustication Movement with no expectation of coming back. The third generation unit was the late sent-down youths who were sent to nearby suburban villages in the 1970s for about two years and assigned to different work units after returning to the city. The fourth was those lucky ones who managed to stay in the city or join the army and consequently escaped the Rustication movement. The last generation unit was the most selective group of "worker-peasant-soldier

[50] Due to the lack of enough interviewees in this generation unit, I focus more on the other four units in this discussion. However, for most of the college graduates, the outburst of the Cultural Revolution messed up their normal career trajectory and placed them into lower-rank work units and positions. Therefore, they were more likely to hold a relatively critical view towards the Cultural Revolution and the Mao's era.

students" who were recommended from factories, production brigades, Production Corps and military camps to receive a college education during the Cultural Revolution. These five generation units experienced different stages of the Cultural Revolution in distinctive ways which shaped their political views and perceptions of the State and the Party differently.

The early sent-down youths were the most distinctive units among the five since they had suffered the most and the longest during the Cultural Revolution. At the beginning, they were mobilized and supported by the supreme leader Mao Zedong and had enthusiastically devoted themselves into the Red Guard Movement, rebelling against their teachers and headmasters, marching on the street to destroy the "four olds," writing and posting big-character posters and revolutionary slogans, traveling around China to link up with other Red Guards and communicating with each other about revolutionary experiences. For these young Red Guards, the movement was like a violent carnival that allowed them to mimic the heroes and heroines described in the revolutionary movies and stories and cast themselves as protagonists of the current revolution against the 'capitalist roaders' and the 'revisionists.' However, the Red Guard Movement gradually died down after three years of upheaval and the majority of those urban students were suddenly sent down to remote villages and Production and Construction Corps to make their contributions in the "most needed places of the country" and to be re-educated by the poor and lower-middle peasants. These middle and high school graduates brought their housing registrations and their revolutionary zeal to settle down in rural areas and borderlands with no expectation of coming back. However, the ideal imagination about the rustication life was soon broken into pieces with the ruthless realities and difficult living and working conditions in the impoverished rural areas or remote state farms. The long-term sufferings during the Rustication Movement pushed them to use any means, such as their family connections, bribes, fake illness diagnoses, and petition strikes, to return to the city. What they had experienced, witnessed and suffered also intrigued their reflection on the CCP's ideological propaganda, the Rustication and the Cultural Revolution. During the

"thought liberation" period of the late 1970s and the early1980s, most of the early sent-down youths developed relatively deeper reflections and critical views toward the Cultural Revolution and even the Communist regime compared to other generation units. It is worth mentioning that none of my interviewees from the early sent-down youth group joined the CCP. Mengyun had attempted to join twice when she saw some hope after the downfall of the "Gang of Four" and the resumption of the college entrance exam but her hopes were soon crushed by the crackdown of the student protest in 1989. Moreover, when facing increased social inequality and corruption in the reform era, the early sent-down youths among my interviewees didn't refer back to a nostalgic memory of the Maoist past but proposed a more thorough political reform in China.

Unlike the early sent-down youths who settled in rural villages or state farms with no expectation of return, the late sent-down youths who rusticated during the 1970s were only sent to nearby villages and suburban areas with an expected length of two years then they would be recruited by or assigned to different work units in the city. Most of them viewed this short-term rustication life as a transitional period from school to work unit. Although some of them had experienced poverty and difficulty of rural life to some extent, most of them didn't suffer that much compared to the early sent-down counterparts. In addition, the late sent-down youths were too young to be directly involved in the Red Guard Movement or political persecutions. Therefore, they didn't experience the moment of debunking and collapsing of the revolutionary idealism as the early sent-down youths did, so their reflections on the Cultural Revolution were not very deep and critical. For example, one of the late sent-down youths, Liren, had said, "The state set the tone for the Cultural Revolution, so we no longer reflected on it." What's more, some late sent-down youths such as Yuejin and Tiexin, were so disappointed at the corruption within the CCP and the government in the Reform era that they referred back to the "great democracy" of the Cultural Revolution. Tiexin even called for another round of Cultural Revolution in China to subjugate high-ranking cadres to mass supervision and curb the rampant corruption in the political system.

Different from the previous two generation units who were involved in the Rustication Movement, the stayed youths were either recruited by work units in the city or joined the army during the Cultural Revolution. They were the lucky ones who managed to escape the rustication either relying on their family backgrounds and personal connections, or because of the number of siblings in their family and the ever-changing state policies on different cohorts. This generation unit included those older students who had participated in the Red Guard Movement, as well as those younger ones who had only witnessed some struggle sessions and political persecutions during childhood. Although there were some age differences within this generation unit, those stayed youths were grouped together because they shared a commonality that they had a relatively smoother life trajectory during the Cultural Revolution compared to the early or late sent-down youths. If the early sent-down youths had felt abandoned by the state during the 5 to 10 years of rustication life in poor villages or remote state farms, the late sent down youths had strived to be incorporated into the *danwei* (work unit) system and return to the city as soon as possible; the stayed youths had never been left behind by the state system. Some were directly incorporated into the *danwei* (work unit) system after graduating from middle or high school and some joined the army first and were assigned to a good state-owned enterprise later on. Aside from the iron rice bowl they received from the state system, staying in the city also provided them more chances and resources to be recommended to college or continue their education after the resumption of the college entrance exam in 1977 compared to the sent-down youths. Therefore, most of them were very grateful for the work and education opportunities provided by the Party and the State and were relatively conservative in terms of political and economic views. Moreover, most of them joined the CCP in their early adulthood and truly believed in the "red" education of collectivism, personality cult of Mao and selfless contribution to the work unit and the state. Therefore, in facing the surge of social inequality and corruption in the Reform era, this generation unit was more likely to bring up a nostalgic memory of Mao's era and selectively refer to the past as an egalitarian,

respectful and morally pure time despite the poverty, fierce struggle sessions, factionalism and political persecutions it had inflicted. They did criticize the rampant corruptions within the CCP and the government but this criticism, as Hongjun had said, "should not be too harsh." As beneficiaries of the Communist regime, most of them genuinely believed that without the leading of the CCP, China would be plunged into chaos and they would have no good life any more, and thus they were in line with the Party to maintain social stability.

As for the last generation unit, the "worker-peasant-soldier students" recommended to college during the Cultural Revolution, they were the lucky few who were selected from villages, Production Corps, factories and military camps to continue their higher education when others were forced to engage in manual labor. This recommendation system mostly favored children of high-ranking cadres and people with good class origins and active political performance. Although the shortened college education was not as solid as the higher education prior to or after the Cultural Revolution, it still provided those recommended students a big advantage over the others, enabling them to stay in the city, switch to better work units and get promoted to higher positions. This generation unit cut across early and late sent-down youths as well as the stayed youths in factories or in the army. Some of them might have suffered in the early rustication life or worked in a factory for a while but being recommended to college was a life changing moment for them and paved their way to a better future than their classmates and co-workers. Therefore, most of them showed their gratitude for the life-saving opportunities and were highly identified with the Communist regime and the Party-state. Some of them even occupy highest-ranking positions in the state system nowadays. Therefore, their political views were quite similar to the stayed youths and sometimes were even more inclined to accept the CCP's propaganda and changing policies.

In sum, the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976 but its differentiated impacts on these generation units lasted in the Reform era. The short-term "thought liberation" of the late 1970s and early1980s

only “enlightened” a very small group of intellectuals and some of those who suffered the most during the Cultural Revolution, such as a few early sent-down youths. For the majority of this generation, the personality cult of Mao, the “red” education of Communism and Socialism, and the ideological propaganda of selfless sacrifice for the greater collective were deeply engraved in their mindset. Even though many of them were shocked by the Tiananmen Crackdown in 1989, this event didn’t deprive the legitimacy of the CCP altogether. For the early sent-down youths such as Mengyun and Zhiheng and the old college graduates like Chirui, this event confirmed the brutality of the CCP toward its people and eroded almost all their confidence and hopes for the Party and the State. But for people from other generation units, they either viewed the event as a setback during the Reform that could not outweigh the economic achievements or as a continuation of the “great democracy” of the Cultural Revolution that could be used in the future to cure the rampant corruption in the regime. What should be remembered was that due to the sensitivity of this topic, many interviewees in this generation just kept silent on this event and never mentioned it. As the economic reform intensified in the 1990s and 2000s, most people from this generation criticized the moral degeneration, rising social inequalities and the concentration of power and wealth to the state. However, aside from the early sent-down youths such as Mengyun and Zhiheng and the old college graduates like Chirui, most of this generation’s political and cultural repertoire directed them to a romanticized reconstruction of Mao’s era. Their ideal relationship between the state and the people were a parent-children relationship which was well reflected in the socialist *danwei* system that would take care of a person from cradle to grave. Therefore, most of them were reluctant to leave the work units to *Xiahai* during market reform and lamented for those who were forced to *Xiagang* and cut off their ties to the work units.

# Chapter 4

## Generation of the "Tiananmen:" the Paradise Lost

> It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.
>
> ----Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Book the First, Chapter I.

For the generation born in the 1960s and early 1970s, matured in the 1980s, the above paragraph from Dickens best captured their fortune and frustration of the time. Most of this generation only had vague memories of the Cultural Revolution which taught them the first political lessons during childhood. When they reached teenage and early adulthood, those revolutionary songs and movies were quickly replaced by imported popular culture in the 1980s such as western movies and pop songs, clothes and hairstyles as well as newly emerged poems and literature. When they graduated from high school, the college entrance examination had resumed and there was no obstacle for them to receive higher education except their exam scores. Moreover, both college students and technical school students were guaranteed job assignments to state controlled work units ("*danwei*") after graduation at that time. When they got married, their work units also assigned them a house for living. As Minzhi (1962, female) had said, "Our generation had a smoother trajectory compared to the older and younger ones. The older ones were sent down to villages and suffered while the younger ones no longer had assigned jobs and houses." Therefore, this generation was fortunate to smell the fresh air of the "thought liberation" during the 1980s and at

the same time enjoyed the benefits of the socialist *danwei* (work unit) system which provided them an iron rice bowl for living. [51]

However, this generation was also frustrated in that the "thought liberation" was suddenly interrupted by the Tiananmen Crackdown in 1989 and some of their iron rice bowls were smashed into pieces by the rapid economic reform in the late 1990s. For those state workers who didn't receive higher education, the SOE (state-owned enterprise) reform in the late 1990s got millions of workers laid off from factories where they prepared to work for a lifetime. As a result, they not only lost their jobs but also associated health care, social security and the dignity of being a state worker. All of a sudden, they were forced to face severe competition on the job market in their late 30s and early 40s. Worse still, the rising educational and health care expenditures for their families added more burden on their shoulders. Finally, the social injustice and growing inequality they experienced and witnessed triggered their nostalgic memory of the lost paradise of the early 1980s and even a romanticized imagination of Mao's era.

In this chapter, I elaborate life experiences of this generation from three historical periods. The first was the final stage of the Cultural Revolution which occupied their childhood and primary school time and left a vague memory for them. Nevertheless, the "red" education and ideological propaganda of the personality cult of Mao still had some impact in their later life. The second period was the early reform era when this generation matured and benefitted both from the socialist *danwei* system and the short-term "thought liberation." However, this period was suddenly terminated by the "Tiananmen Crackdown' in 1989 which was singled out because it signified a turning point for this generation in terms of their political engagement and even life trajectory. The third period was the late reform era since 1992 which divided the generation of the "Tiananmen" into three

[51]For detailed analysis of the "danwei" (work unit) system, please see Lu, Xiaobo, and Elizabeth J. Perry, eds. (1997) *Danwei: The hanging Chinese workplace in historical and comparative perspective*. Me Sharpe. Also see, Bray, David. (2005) *Social space and governance in urban China: The danwei system from origins to reform*. Stanford University Press.

trajectories or generation units: those who *Xiahai* or took the initiative to leave the *danwei* system to pursue material gains or career achievements in the market, those who *Xiagang* or were laid off by the bankrupted or reorganized state-owned factories and were forced to make a living in the market and those who managed to stay in the original work units and kept benefiting from the *danwei* system in the late Reform era. These three generation units held distinctive political views toward the state and the Party. The first two groups who lost the protection from the state were most critical to the current social inequality, corruption and the government's lack of credibility while the third group who still benefited from the state system were more conservative and in line with the Party.

## 1. Cultural Revolution: the first political lesson of the childhood

This generation was too young to experience the Red Guard Movement and the Rustication Movement but those born in the early 1960s did have a vague memory of the struggle sessions and political campaigns in the late years of the Cultural Revolution, especially the movement of "going against the tide" in 1973, the "Counterattack of the Right-Deviationist Reversal-of-Verdicts Trend" launched in 1975 as well as the death of Premier Zhou Enlai and the supreme leader Mao Zedong in 1976. Although most were still children in primary schools at that time, the Maoist education they received as well as the political campaigns they participated in shaped their initial views of the world and had a lasting impact on their political perceptions in later life.

### 1.1 "Going against the tide" in 1973: the first movement experienced in school

The first political movement that some of them participated directly in primary school was "Going against the tide" (*fan chaoliu*) in 1973. As I introduced in chapter3, this movement was an anti-intellectual movement represented by two constructed "heroes" – Zhang Tiesheng and Huang Shuai. Zhang Tiesheng was the "hero of the blank exam paper" who turned in a nearly blank exam in the test he took before entering college as a worker-peasant-soldier student whereas Huang Shuai

was the first "primary school hero" who wrote a letter to a newspaper to complain about being enslaved by "the old education system of 'teacher's authority'." As a fellow primary school student, Huang Shuai was widely propagated as the "revolutionary pathbreaker" to criticize the "revisionist education line" and "go against the tide" (Jian, Song, and Zhou 2015: 141-2; Lampton 1978). Coming from a military family, Aihong (1964, female) was in primary school at that time and recalled changes in school brought by the movement.

> "Going against the tide" meant to fight against the teacher's authority. Teachers were accused to turn us into bourgeois little sheep. We were told we should grow horns on the head, and thorns on the body. If you studied hard, you were a little sheep…Teachers at that time dared not to teach us too many things. They were afraid to be criticized. If they worked students too hard, the students would rebel them…We just recited Chairman Mao's words every day.

Teaching and studying hard were criticized as not revolutionary so teachers dared not to teach, and students cared less about study. Aihong bitterly said, "We hated Huang Shuai when the college entrance examination was resumed in 1977. She made us not study, but she herself passed the examination with a high grade. I was not saying that she was bad, but she got used by powerful people." Aihong herself didn't manage to get into college but she was admitted by a vocational school at last and assigned to a state-owned work unit. This movement of "going against the tide" lasted until the end of the Cultural Revolution and influenced a lot of school children at that time, especially those from working class and non-intellectual families. When the college entrance examination was resumed in 1977, many students fell behind on their coursework and failed to enter college after high school.

### 1.2 "Counterattack the Right-Deviationist Reversal-of-Verdicts Trend" in 1975

This was the last large-scale political campaign launched by Mao during the Cultural Revolution in 1975 which was fully termed as "Criticize Deng, Counterattack the Right-Deviationist Reversal-of-Verdicts Trend (*pi Deng, fanji youqing fan'anfeng*)." It reflected Mao

Zedong's dissatisfaction towards Deng Xiaoping's attempts to tactically rectify the Cultural Revolution and resulted in the removal of Deng from his position (Jian, Song, and Zhou 2015: 54-5). Although the primary school children could hardly understand a word of this political campaign, they were still actively involved in writing big character posters and criticizing materials.

Xiuying (1964, female), who grew up in the suburb of Beijing, recalled writing big character posters in her primary school during the movement.

> I was constantly writing big character posters, something like "The east wind is blowing, and the war drum is beating." I remembered writing many materials to criticize Deng Xiaoping at that time. When we finished writing, we posted them on the wall. Teachers didn't teach us knowledge. We just read Chairman Mao's quotations and posted hand-written posters to criticize Deng. I didn't know why he was criticized.

In the same age of Xiuying, Aihong was selected by her teacher as a student representative to give a speech about criticizing Deng Xiaoping at the school assembly. She recalled:

> The teacher asked me to write a speech on "Counterattack of the Right-Deviationist Reversal-of-Verdicts Trend." I was only in second or third grade. I said I didn't know how to write. The teacher said I could ask my parents for help. So my father wrote one for me. At the school assembly, a teacher helped me stand on a chair on the stage to read the speech in front of the whole school. I didn't understand why the teacher selected me instead of a senior student. Did they do this deliberately? I don't know. I guess they might not be very serious about the movement.

Looking back from an adult perspective, Aihong started to doubt her teacher's real intention for choosing her to give a political speech. But at that time, she was just a little school kid who would do whatever the teacher asked her to do. Many children of a similar age of Xiuying and Aihong were organized by teachers to participate in the political campaign. They first learnt to read and write by reciting Mao's quotations and writing big character posters. It looked like an absurd game for them to take on adult roles, speaking adult words and using propaganda phrases. They were not

bothered by the meaning of those words or slogans, just mimicking what adults were doing and what the political propaganda was saying.

At the same time, they also learnt to be cautious on what they said and wrote, since saying and writing things wrong at the highly politicized era would lead to severe punishment even for a young child. Aihong recalled a girl in her primary school being publicly criticized for the "reactionary slogan" she scribbled on the wall of a restroom.

> We knew that kids could not say things wrong and write things wrong. Some kids scribbled on the wall of the toilet, which became "reactionary slogans." I remembered a girl who was often dragged to the front stage and criticized in front of the whole school. They said she had written reactionary slogans but I was not clear what she had written. She always cried on the stage during the struggle sessions.

The public criticizing of the primary school girl became an unforgettable scene for Aihong and constantly reminded her to watch her mouth and follow political propaganda closely. These children learnt their first political lesson through the struggle sessions, consecutive political campaigns and various political slogans before they truly understood the meaning of them.

However, even under this highly politicized atmosphere, most people found their childhood during this time simple and happy. There was no pressure to study and teachers organized them to participate in different political activities every day. The education they received and the news they saw all told them they were the luckiest and happiest children in the world. For example, Aihong recalled:

> Our minds were simple. The education told us there were two-thirds of people suffering in the world, and we would liberate them one day. We saw news and photos about people living in Africa. It was like other people in the world were in miserable conditions, and we were the only happy ones. The life was fulfilling at that time, and you really had a strong sense of happiness.

The political propaganda successfully created a bubble of unreality for these children. As long as they followed what the propaganda said, they could enjoy life as simple-minded children. Although some had parents being criticized and elder siblings being sent down to villages or state farms, they didn't experience the early stages of the Cultural Revolution by themselves, nor were they directly persecuted during the movement. Therefore, this bubble of simple, happy and passionate childhood became their memory of the late years of the Cultural Revolution.

### 1.3 The death of Zhou and Mao in 1976

The death of Zhou Enlai in January 1976 triggered the April 5th Movement on Tiananmen, and the death of Mao Zedong was followed by the downfall of the "Gang of Four". These events finally led to the end of the Cultural Revolution (Myers et al. 1986; Teiwes and Sun 2004). Children born in the 1960s didn't really understand the political struggles or historical meanings behind those events, but they were influenced by the gravity of the social atmosphere and emotions of adults.

Minzhi was in middle school at that time. She recalled seeing off Zhou Enlai's coffin on the Chang'an Street to Babaoshan Revolutionary Cemetery. She said, "We all went to Chang'an Street. The scene was very touching. There were so many people there. We waited on the street after lunch until the evening." Baosheng (1962, male) was the same age as Minzhi. He remembered buying white paper to make flowers to mourn for Zhou Enlai. He recalled,

> We felt very sad when Premier Zhou passed away. I bought a sheet of white paper to make white paper flowers myself. I also made a black armband and pinned the white flower on it. At that time, many people pinned their flowers to the chains of the monument on Tiananmen. There were also white flowers pinned on the trees. I also pinned my flower on a tree on Tiananmen. Many people were crying like their own families had passed away. It was a true feeling.

As for the April 5 Movement following Zhou's death, most of these children were kept at home by their parents and some saw copied poems brought back by their parents or elder siblings. Aihong recalled her elder sister going to Tiananmen.

> I was very little. My elder sister went to Tiananmen and placed a wreath to mourn Premier Zhou. She copied some poems and I saw them. Later, they started to criticize people who participated in the movement, so my mother burnt those poems.

Minzhi was two years older than Aihong but she didn't go to Tiananmen either. She remembered seeing those poems brought back by someone's parents. She recalled, "The adults passed the copies along. We really didn't know about the 'Gang of Four.' The information was blocked." At that time, most adults were not aware of the political struggles happening in the central authority, not to mention these school children. Minzhi further said there was a good side of it. "People were simple and ignorant, so they had no worries."

Soon after the April 5th Movement, the supreme leader Mao Zhedong passed away in September. For adults who either worshiped or hated him, this news was a big shock in good or bad ways. As for the school children who were imbued with the personality cult of Mao since they learnt to speak and read, Mao's passing had elicited their true feelings of sorrow. Minzhi recalled,

> We set up a big mourning hall in school. We were asked to attend the wake. Maybe due to the propaganda at that time, we had a deep faith toward Chairman Mao. It was like the state lost a captain and we truly felt that the earth would not turn around without Chairman Mao.

This feeling was also shared by Wenli (1963, female) and Xiuying. Wenli was from a suburb of Beijing and she was in middle school when Mao passed away. She recalled, "I felt that the sky was falling. I truly felt that way as a kid. What could I do? There was no Chairman Mao anymore." Xiuying was still in primary school and she said they learnt to read and write "Long life Chairman Mao" the first day in school. When Mao passed away, the students felt so sad and wore small white

flowers to mourn him. She recalled, “We never saw Chairman Mao in person, but he was our big savior who saved us from sufferings. Children were simple and naïve. We were educated that way. Everyone said this, so I thought it should be true.”

Brought up by political propaganda and Maoist education, these children sincerely believed in Mao at that time. This belief was challenged to some extent during the “thought liberation” period in the late 1970s and early 1980s when the CCP acknowledged Mao’s mistakes of the Cultural Revolution, but it never completely faded away. Moreover, this generation didn’t suffer during the Cultural Revolution like the previous one, so most of them never fully reflected on the disasters brought by the Cultural Revolution and Mao Zedong. On the contrary, when they faced the rising social inequality and corruption in the reform era, their belief of Mao and memories of happy childhood life revived and gradually generated a romanticized imagination of the Maoist era. For example, Wenli said,

> When Chairman Mao launched the Cultural Revolution, he didn’t mean to beat, smash or rob. Later, people refuted the Cultural Revolution. It was not Chairman Mao’s fault. Those people who implemented it took advantage of the revolution for their personal interests and revenges. No matter what, people had a sense of collective interests at that time and thought they should not scrabble for personal interests.

Wenli’s narrative shed Mao’s responsibility of the Cultural Revolution which was deeply influenced by the official discourse. Furthermore, she brought up the selfless ideas and behaviors during Mao’s era to contrast with the individualistic and selfish society in the reform era. This kind of narrative was widely shared among this generation. Jinghui (1964, male), one year younger than Wenli, used to work in a state-owned factory after graduating from a vocational school. When he mentioned the Cultural Revolution, he seemed to be unhappy about refuting it altogether. He said,

> Wasn’t the atomic bomb exploded at that time? Wasn’t the hydrogen bomb exploded at that time? Wasn’t the Chinese satellite sent to the space? Why did Chairman Mao launch the Cultural Revolution? We could not fully understand his aim. But those people they

> criticized. Were there no bad people at all? There must be some. Now you see those experts, elites, who had more destructive power than ordinary people like peasants and workers… I was not saying that Chairman Mao had no mistakes at all, but at least, at that time, working class was the big brother. Whenever people said I was a worker, they were proud. Now workers can only lower their heads.

Jinghui was mainly bitter about the social elites and experts who delivered irresponsible remarks on media and wielded their power to exacerbate social inequality and injustice. Moreover, by imaging the master status of the working class during Mao's era, he lamented the losing dignity and pride of workers in China in the Reform period. This romanticized imagination of the collective spirit, selfless contribution and working-class domination during Mao's era was developed among this generation in recent years with rising inequality and social injustice in the reform era.

In short, the Cultural Revolution did not leave too much trauma in the minds of this generation born in the 1960s and 1970s but it had taught them the first political lesson in school and shaped their initial views toward the State and the Party. The Cultural Revolution ended with Mao's death and the downfall of the "Gang of Four," but Mao's ideological legacy continued to influence them in their later life.

## 2. Early reform: socialist *danwei* system supplemented by newly emerged market

With the resumption of the college entrance examination and thought liberation in the late 1970s, the Chinese Communist Party refuted the Cultural Revolution and the personality cult of Mao and switched gears from class struggle to economic and political reform (Vogel 2011: 200-207, 229-240). However, the reform was carried out step by step with trials and errors. Each step taken had involved fierce ideological debates and power struggles between reformers and conservatives within the central authority (Baum 1996). Some scholars summarized the period of

1978 to 1989 as "anti-leftist in the even years and anti-rightest in the odd years."[52] As for the generation who matured in the 1980s, they were fortunate enough to experience the "thought liberation" in high school and college while still benefiting from the socialist *danwei* system that guaranteed them job and housing assignments after graduation.

## 2.1 From school to work unit: beneficiaries of the *danwei* system

Many interviewees from this generation recalled beginning to study hard after 1977, the year of the college entrance examination being resumed. They were also grateful for this policy change since education provided them a way to be incorporated into the *danwei* system in the city and secure an iron rice bowl. For example, Jinghui was from a suburb of Beijing. He recalled,

> I participated in the college entrance examination in 1981. It was hard to be admitted by college…If your score passed the line, you would be admitted to a college that matched your score. Moreover, schools also guaranteed your job assignments. I was from a village of Beijing, and I didn't have food ration tickets or oil ration tickets like citizens in Beijing. I was admitted by a vocational school, not college, and moved from village to city, and started to enjoy the food and oil ration tickets of citizens.

The inequality between rural and urban citizens in China was ingrained in the state system since the 1950s. Rural dwellers were treated like second-class citizens in China compared to their urban counterparts who usually enjoyed better educational resources, healthcare and welfare benefits. As a rural dweller, Jinghui envied the food and oil ration tickets enjoyed by "citizens," and worked hard to enroll into a vocational school. After graduation, Jinghui was assigned to a big state-owned factory as a cadre and first worked as a technician and then switched to the sales department. Wenli had a similar experience. She was also from a suburban village of Beijing and admitted by a vocational school in 1981. She recalled,

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[52] Chen, Kuide. (1999) "Zhong guo zai ba shi nian dai de zheng zhi feng yun (China's political situation in the 1980s)," *Radio Free Asia*, Sep 2. https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/pinglun/16-19990902.html, accessed by 08/19/2018.

> We were admitted by the school particularly for my current work unit. The work unit told the school how many people they needed, and the school admitted students from Beijing directly for this work unit. After graduation, we were directly assigned to this workplace.

Wenli was assigned to a public institution as a cadre after graduation and worked there since then. Aside from vocational schools, a few students were admitted to four-year colleges and were very popular in job assignments. Minzhi was one of them. She was admitted by a medical university in 1980. She recalled,

> Many young people got good opportunities at that time. You grasped the opportunity by your own ability to pass the college entrance examination. The admission rate in Beijing was only 3%. There were 16 students admitted by college in my school that year. I was admitted by a university in Nanjing… When we graduated, three of us from Beijing were assigned back to Beijing. Some of my classmates from other places also got assigned to Beijing. It was very easy for college graduates to find jobs at that time. We never worried about jobs. I was directly assigned to this research institution after graduation.

The institution Minzhi worked in was affiliated with a state ministry so she was pretty satisfied with her job. She worked in the institution since then and was promoted to a medium-rank cadre later.

In addition, there were also many students who didn't go to college or vocational school, but directly participated in the work force after high school. At the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, many state-owned factories allowed high school graduates to succeed their parents' positions in the factory and their parents were allowed to retire earlier than usual which was called the "offspring succeeding (*Jie ban)* and replacement (*Ding ti*) employment system"[53] as I have discussed in

[53] For the state documents about the employment system, please see: State Council Circular on Issuing "State Council Temporary Measures on Providing for Old, Weak, Sick, and Handicapped Cadres" and "State Council Temporary Measures on Workers' Retirement, Resignation" (Chinese Text), February 24, 1979, https://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/state-council-circular-on-issuing-state-council-temporary-measures-on, accessed by 08/16/2018.

chapter 3 (Wang, Aiyun 2009). Baosheng's father was in a very big state-owned factory and he decided to succeed his father's position instead of pursuing higher education. He said, "I graduated from high school in 1979. I succeeded my father's position in the factory right after graduation, so he retired early. If I didn't succeed his position at that time, I would lose this chance to get this job." Compared to taking the college entrance examination, being able to work in a big state-owned factory as a worker was a more attractive choice for many working-class families. Therefore, many of them made use of this policy to pass their own iron rice bowls to their children.

Xiaohong (1969, female) also participated in the workforce after high school, but her situation was a little different from Baosheng. She was from a military family and was admitted by a local street office as a government official after high school. She said,

> There was a chance for me to work here. The quota for recruitment was highly limited and only Beijing residents were allowed, so I started to work here after high school in 1986. We were allowed to release from regular work to study in the first six years, so I went to the Central Party School to study economic and administrative management.

The Central Party School provided undergraduate and graduate level courses to cultivate CCP cadres and government officials. Xiaohong was allowed to have one day off each week from her normal work days to study in school and she successfully got her bachelor's degree after six years.

Furthermore, no matter whether people had been assigned to state-owned factories, public institutions or government offices, as long as they belonged to a state-controlled work unit, they could enjoy a whole set of social welfare attached to their working positions, including housing assignments, education for children, healthcare for themselves and for families. As Baosheng recalled,

> We did not need to buy houses at that time. The work unit or the housing management bureau would assign houses to us. Even if you had money, you had no place to buy a house.

> You had to wait in line. Our salaries were just used to buy life necessities, food and clothes. People used to be not much different from each other. Everyone was similar.

Houses used to be welfare benefits distributed by work units rather than commercial products to be bought or sold on the market. In the early 1980s, the socialist *danwei* system guaranteed a not very rich, but relatively equal and relaxed life among people with iron rice bowls in hand. The benefits covered not only employees but also their families. Jinghui was assigned to a state-owned factory in 1984 after graduating from vocational school. He said,

> I definitely prepared to work here for a lifetime. It was an iron rice bowl. The state-owned work unit had all types of labor insurances. Both my wife and I worked here. My son's medical expenditures used to get full reimbursement.

When employees got married, they could get an assigned house from one of the couples' work units with very little payment. Most work units also had affiliated hospitals and schools that provided services mainly for their employees and their families at a very low price. Therefore, people were highly dependent on their work units (*danwei*) to get all conceivable economic, social and political resources to live a decent life and they also had a strong sense of belonging to their work units which provided them the most crucial identities in society (Bray 2005: 157-8).

## 2.2 Emergence of market: marginalized "pioneers" and official speculators ("*Guan dao*")

In general, the *danwei* system, established in urban China since the 1950s, was still a dominant system for social control and resource allocation in the 1980s (Li, H. 2008). The emergence of market outside the planned economy during the early reform didn't shake the status of the socialist *danwei* system that much. Most people in cities were incorporated into the *danwei* system except for a few marginalized groups such as jobless people, released prisoners, etc. These people outside the *danwei* system became the "pioneers" engaged in the market economy in the reform era. Jinghui recalled,

> Deng let some people get rich first. Who were those people? They were mostly those being released from prison. No state-owned or collective factories wanted them so they were jobless. They started to sell peanuts and sunflower seeds to make money. These things needed ration tickets to buy in store. Therefore they carried bags of peanuts and sunflower seeds from Northeast villages of China to sell in Beijing. They would also carry clothes from Guangzhou to sell here. They made a lot of money.

In the eyes of those who worked in the *danwei* system, people who were released from prison were already deviant from the normal life trajectory. Being excluded by the *danwei* system, these people had to take more risks to make a living in the market compared to those who relied on their iron rice bowls. Weidong (1964, male), working in a newspaper office after college, had said, "People released from prison dared to do anything, while the urban dwellers didn't." Moreover, those who sold small things on the street were regarded as inferior to people in the work units in terms of social and political status. For example, Baosheng recalled,

> The reform let a group of people get rich first. Since we were in a state-owned factory, we didn't catch up with this trend. We just felt happy when we started to get bonuses in the work unit. Some people, such as my jobless neighbor, came out to sell sunflower seeds in front of the cinema. They used newspapers to make small bags of sunflower seeds and asked for 2 to 3 cents per bag. It would be too embarrassed for us to do this. We were from a big factory. How could we put our faces to do this? However, we earned 30 yuan per month while they could sell sunflower seeds or sugar-coated haws for several hundred yuan per month. It was unimaginable for us.

As Baosheng had described, people in the *danwei* system were deeply influenced by the long-term criticism of capitalism and speculation so they looked down upon those marginalized "pioneers" of private business but at the same time envied the quick money they made in the market.

Aside from the marginalized and jobless people who had to rely on the market to make a living, there was another group of people with power and resources taking advantage of the dual-track pricing system in the economic reform to reap high profits and accumulate large amounts of wealth

for themselves. This group of people was called "*Guan Dao*" (official speculation) who caused severe corruption and power rent-seeking in the early reform era which constituted one of the major reasons for student protests in the late 1980s (He 2000). Jinghui recalled,

> We had a dual-track pricing system at that time. There was a planned price and a market price. The market price was much higher than the planned. Many commodities were in shortage at the beginning of the reform. If I could find a cadre to grant an approval for me to buy goods with a planned price, I could sell them on the market for double. This was "Guan Dao." The cadres' approval documents were money.

What Jinghui mentioned was the dual-track pricing system adopted in the early 1980s which allowed some prices of goods set by the state plan and others adjusted to market force. This policy was supposed to gradually relax state control over prices and "let the market take over" (Zhao, Z. 2009: 130). However, the state-set or planned price was much lower than the negotiated or market price which greatly encouraged corruption and speculation. State cadres who had the power to grant approval documents to buy goods at the planned price could easily turn their power into money whereas people who had connections with these cadres could quickly accumulate wealth by reaping high profits between the planned and the market price (Wu and Huang 2008). Jinghui recalled himself engaging in this speculation a little bit at that time.

> People speculated on steel, cars, color TVs, etc. at the time. When I got married, I bought an 18-inch ball type color TV with a ration ticket. The planned price was 2000 yuan and I sold it on the market for 3600 yuan. I needed some money so I sold it. It was hard to get a TV ration ticket to buy a TV with a planned price at that time. I had also bought a fridge through a friend for 1650 yuan. It was not good quality, frozen inside and outside when I plugged it in. I got it fixed and sold it for 2300 yuan right away in the market.

Unlike Jinghui who just did this kind of speculation occasionally for some extra money, those people with powerful connections and stable access to approval documents, started to quickly accumulate large amount of wealth in this period which resulted in severe corruption in the state system.

In order to solve various problems brought by the dual-track pricing system, the CCP decided to take a "breakthrough of price reform" in 1988 by raising the planned price to a certain rate and eliminate or reduce the difference between the planned and market prices. This policy triggered a public panic on price increases before it was truly implemented which led to bank runs and huge inflation (Zhao, Z. 2009: 129-31). The uncontrollable inflation and corruption finally resulted in the student protest in 1989.

## 3. The Tiananmen Crackdown: a turning point of political engagement

The slogan of "thought liberation" and the official repudiation of the Cultural Revolution indeed relaxed the political and ideological control to a certain extent in the 1980s. The imported western culture, and the revived traditional culture as well as the economic and political reform all greatly changed people's ideas and values developed in the Cultural Revolution. On one hand, people saw hope for the Chinese state to reform toward a better future. On the other hand, they also felt frustrated about the corruption, inflation and social injustice emerging in the reform era. Most people, especially college students and intellectuals, were actively engaged in political discussions and activities due to their deep concern about the fate of the nation and the future of the people. The corruption and inflation, as well as the slow pace of political reform in the mid-1980s, first triggered a student protest at the end of 1986 which led to a suppression in early 1987 and the resignation of Hu Yaobang, the General Secretary of CCP and a representative of reformers in central authority (Baum 1996: 206-24; Tong, J. 1988). In 1988, the failure of the "breakthrough of price reform" caused even higher inflation and rampant corruption further aroused resentment from people. The public dissatisfaction on the reform and the sudden death of Hu Yaobang on April 15, 1989 finally led to the largest student protest of the 1980s and the tragic crackdown on Tiananmen in the end (Baum 1996: 225-310).

The generation of the "Tiananmen" did not necessarily participate in the protest themselves but the political event which happened in the spring and summer of 1989 left an unforgettable trauma on their memory during their late adolescence and early adulthood and deeply shaped their views toward politics and the Party-state and even changed some people's life trajectories. Since this topic was still a political taboo in China, only a few interviewees shared their memories of this event with me. Most of them were not direct participants of the protest but had witnessed the process of the event from different perspectives.

The start of the student protest was ascribed to anti-corruption. Wenli said, "Why people went to Tiananmen? It was because of anti-corruption. Cadres with power used their power to do things for themselves. Many children of high-ranking cadres made a lot of money by doing business." Wenli further recalled the protest lasted for several months and many people from various work units actively supported the students at the beginning. Jinghui recalled, "We also went to Tiananmen. The students were there, no police, but there was no traffic jam. The students maintained the order themselves. People were pulling together. Even thieves stopped stealing."

However, things changed after the April 26 Editorial on *People's Daily* which characterized the protest as a "planned conspiracy and a disturbance" to "negate the leadership of the CPC and the socialist system."[54] This editorial was an official warning to protesters and supporters and greatly enraged students as well as the general public. It also didn't bode well for the future of the movement. Many students protested against the April 26 editorial and took great efforts to require a revocation of the editorial and a conversation with the party leadership (Zhao, D. 2004: 155-6).

[54] "It is necessary to take a clear-cut stand against disturbances," *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*) editorial (printed April 26, 1989), Beijing Domestic Service reported 0930 GMT, April 25; Foreign Broadcast Information Service, April 25, pp. 23-24. http://tsquare.tv/chronology/April26ed.html, accessed by 09/20/2018.

Under these circumstances, the students' hunger strike started on May 13th and, six days later, Li Peng, the Premier of the state at the time, finally agreed to have a meeting with student leaders (Nathan and Link 2001: 202; Zhao, D. 2004: 162-3). Jinghui recalled watching the meeting on TV.

> Corruption was brought up at that time by students. Wang Dan and Wu'erkaixi were negotiating with Li Peng on TV. Wu'erkaixi talked with an oxygen tube. Many people felt that Li Peng was not capable enough. Students spoke straightforwardly. You should let them talk. It was like a debate. But Li Peng's reply was childish. He just replied that his families didn't do business and there was no corruption in his family.

This meeting between students and the party leadership finally broke down. Two days later, on May 20th, Li Peng declared martial law in Beijing, which indicated the CCP was prepared to take a hardline stance against protesters (Nathan and Link 2001: 223-43). Just after martial law was declared, the army started to advance toward the city. Many people recalled seeing military trucks and tanks and trying to persuade PLA soldiers to retreat (Nathan and Link 2001: 237-8). Chaoying (1961, female) worked on the railway system at the time of the 1989 protest. She recalled,

> I remembered 1989, a big upheaval. The army entered the city and cars got burnt. Now people all said they did not participate in the movement. My child was only two years old. I was still working several days before the crackdown. Then the army's truck entered. We could no longer go to work. Many residents came to the truck to talk to soldiers, persuading them not to do this. They said they had to obey orders. I rode a bike with my colleague to go to Xidan but we could no longer pass. At that time, some cars got burnt on the street. You could not get through the street. The PLA soldiers drove tanks on Chang'an street, carrying guns. We were near Chang'an street. When they passed by, we closed the door. When they went further, we reopened the door to see. We were afraid of the guns. It was scary. They carried guns toward you. At the beginning, many people persuaded the PLA soldiers but they didn't listen and didn't speak.

The residents' persuasion and blocking of the army didn't really stop them. The final crackdown started on the night of June 3rd. Jinghui was living near the street of the army's marching route. He also recalled,

> Our street was a famous one with turmoil. There were four armored vehicles destroyed on this street. Later they arrested many people. This road was narrow then. When the army entered the city, they took this road. The old building over there was the international trade center. The restroom was ruined by a tank. The big gunshots were on the wall.

On the day of the crackdown, Wenli was working temporarily in a hospital in Beijing. She recalled,

> I was switched to a hospital temporarily. On the day of the turmoil, I saw a truck in the hospital, the glasses were all broken. The driver was sent to the hospital. He was shot by guns. The leader of the hospital didn't want to take him… Several days later, I returned to my original work unit and I saw gunshots near the subway… There must be a lot of people who died. My colleague's son died that night. He went out to see them and was shot by a gun. He was bleeding too much but the hospital didn't take him. They said he was a mob. It was a pity. Later my colleague received a certificate which said her son was dead. There were two colleagues of mine whose son died in this event. They were so heartbreaking.

Jinghui also talked about the death during the crackdown.

> This movement, how to say, each side had their arguments. The official media characterized the movement as a riot and students as mobs at that time. From a historical point. it was definitely problematic to shoot students. If you said that no one had died, it was nonsense. There were two people from our factory who died by watching them. If you said blood flowed into a river, we didn't see it and could not say it. As for whether there were deaths of soldiers, I didn't see myself. It was reported in the newspaper but politics were a deception. You could not believe in them.

The student protest of 1989 finally reached a tragic end with armed suppression. Neither the direct participants nor bystanders expected the CCP would actually open fire toward defenseless students and ordinary people.

The bloodshed on June 3rd and 4th deeply traumatized most Chinese people who had participated or witnessed the movement. The fear toward the Communist regime extinguished people's enthusiasm in political participation since then. As Aihong recalled,

> In fact, Beijingers used to really like to participate in politics. They were no longer like that because of June 4th. After that, they dared not participate in politics any more. People

> just wanted to make more money. They were aware that it was useless. Beijingers used to pay special attention in political issues. Everyone, no matter whether they were driving a tricycle or doing something else, could talk about politics. The political atmosphere was really thriving then. It had been changed.

Many people buried their idealism and naivety after the crackdown and switched their attention to making money in the market. Weidong was one of them. He used to work in a newspaper office after college but the newspaper closed down after the movement.

> I was still young in the work unit. During the June 4th period, someone reported to the secretary that I had written a board on Tiananmen. The secretary reported it to the director of the bureau. Our newspaper office was dissolved after the movement and we were assigned to different work units. Many young people didn't understand anything. They came to Beijing to join the disturbances blindly. What was their appeal? They didn't know. Those who really had an appeal were small pawns of the interest groups. I was afraid of the environment. It was really a mess. Our leader said it was not me who wrote that board. But our newspaper still closed down and we were scattered and placed in different work units. I took several months' leave and went to Shenzhen later on to *Xiahai*.

Weidong was still upset and scared about being embroiled into the political purge after the crackdown and also disappointed in the political naivety of student protesters. After his original work unit was dissolved, he left the system to pursue material gains on the market in Shenzhen. Unlike Weidong who left the *danwei* system after the movement, Chaoying stayed but she lost her passion in political engagement and never discussed the Tiananmen Crackdown with her child.

> My daughter didn't know this. I never told her this. In the old time, people dared to think and dared to say. Now I don't know. It is hard to say. Children today were more pragmatic. They just cared about their own stuff. At our time, we were more like hot-blooded youths, worrying about the state and the people. In fact, it was proven to be useless. Wasn't it? No matter what, just live your own life and make your own money.

While many idealistic young people like Weidong and Chaoying were reduced to cynicism toward politics after the movement, Weimin (1968, male) chose a different way out. He was from

a Manchurian family living in Beijing since the Qing Dynasty and had studied Chinese classics with famous scholars and also went to art school to learn western culture in the 1980s. During the student protest in 1989, Weimin recalled bringing drums to Tiananmen Square to support students. He had also witnessed deaths of people he knew. After the crackdown, he switched his focus from western culture back to traditional Chinese culture which is his spiritual anchor. He started to promote and spread classical Confucian culture since then and held numerous reading groups, educational seminars and outdoor activities with students and adults who are interested in traditional Chinese culture. At the post-Tiananmen era when the Communist belief collapsed, and democratic values were generally suppressed, Weimin's advocation of traditional Confucianism did attract a lot of followers.

In general, the Tiananmen Crackdown was a turning point that marked the termination of political reform and "thought liberation" in the 1980s and stamped out people's passion in political engagement and pursuit of idealism. Disappointed in politics, the generation of the "Tiananmen" switched their attention from the fate of the nation and the people to more pragmatic personal interests and material gains.

## 4. Late reform: Rapid marketization to state capitalism

The Tiananmen Crackdown was followed by the collapse of the communist regime in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union which pushed the CCP to further tighten its social and political controls to curb the "color revolution." Only after Deng Xiaoping's south tour in 1992 did the economic reform get resumed and start to take on at unprecedented speed (Perry 1993; Vogel 2011: 664-89). The next 20 years of reform witnessed the economic boom of China which relied first on rapid marketization and the rising private economy but gradually leant toward state capitalism.

For the generation of the "Tiananmen", some of them voluntarily left the *danwei* system in the 1990s and 2000s to join the private economy to make more money while some were discarded by

the bankrupted state-owned factories in the late 1990s and were forced to make a living in the market. There were also some others who managed to stay in their original work units and preserved their iron rice bowls during the reform period. As mentioned in chapter3, those who voluntarily left the *danwei* system to work in private-owned enterprises or start their own business were called "*Xiahai*" (jumping into the sea) (e.g., Liu, X. R. 2001) while those who were forced to leave the bankrupted state-owned factories were called "*Xiagang*" (laid off from working positions) (e.g., Gold, Thomas et al. 2009; Hung and Chiu 2003; Lee 2000). As for those who stayed in the *danwei* system, most came from public institutions or government offices that were not deeply influenced by the rapid marketization.

### 4.1 *Xiahai*: took the initiative to leave the *danwei* system

Compared to the previous generation of the "Cultural Revolution," the generation of the "Tiananmen" were generally more open to the market economy and willing to take on the risks and uncertainties in the market to pursue a more fulfilling career.

As mentioned before, Weidong was assigned to another state-owned work unit in the media system after his original newspaper office was dissolved after the Tiananmen Crackdown but Weidong took several months' leave and went to Shenzhen to *Xiahai*. He said, "I started to sell watches and make advertising plans for people. It was fairly easy to make money as long as you were brainy. I made a lot of money in those years." Weidong did not resign from his working position altogether; he was affiliated with his work unit for several years while running his own business and the work unit paid his endowment insurance. Later he started his small company in Beijing and transferred his personal archive to the street office and the state paid 80% of the endowment insurance for him as a policy to encourage small businesses.

Unlike Weidong who left the work unit quite early, Jinghui resigned from his factory in 1998 when the state-owned factory was about to go bankrupt. He used to be a technician, then a sales

manager in the factory, and prepared to work there for his lifetime at the beginning. But the market reform finally turned the state-owned factory into a money-losing enterprise. The declining economic returns and the foreseeable future of bankruptcy finally pushed him to make this decision of resignation. He deliberately separated his choice of *Xiahai* with those who got laid off from the factory; that is, *Xiagang*. He recalled,

> I did not *Xiagang*. I resigned before that. No one asked me to *Xiagang*. I just felt bad and resigned. I got a license to do business. It was called an Industrial Trade company. I started my business in 1998 to sell bedding. It was easy to make money at that time…I had a factory to produce bedding and I sold them to supermarkets in Beijing. Very few people, especially Beijingers, came out to do business at that time.

Although Jinghui left the work unit, he still preserved his dignity as a former employee of a state-owned factory and disdained those cheating behaviors in the market. He recalled,

> Our generation had fewer frauds. You cannot rely on cheating to do business. I had some business with some southerners. They would give you 99 centimeters for 1-meter cloth, or some even gave you 87 centimeters. I couldn't do that. We came from the state-owned factory, so the standard was the standard. Their bedding was always cheaper than mine. I could not compete with them. I discovered this later, but I couldn't do anything.

As a former employee of a state-owned factory, Jinghui refused to follow his competitors to cheat on the products but his products could not beat those cheaper ones in the market. Therefore, Jinghui was disappointed in the business environment that didn't reward honest trading behaviors. He further complained about the lack of state support for small and medium-size companies, especially the formidable barriers to get a loan from state banks. All these difficulties and helpless moments Jinghui experienced during the process of running a private business made him very pessimistic about the political and economic future of the state.

Like Jinghui, Wenge (1966, male) also resigned from his original factory right before its bankruptcy. But unlike Jinghui, who preserved nostalgic memories of the good old days of the

state-owned factory, Wenge never truly adapted to the working environment in the factory. As a college graduate from an intellectual family, he was assigned to a state-owned steel factory outside Beijing. He felt the factory was conservative and the skills and machines were outdated. Many of his colleagues were middle or high school graduates and did not share his ideas and values. He felt held back at the factory and could either be an angry youth or a person drifting with the flow. He said,

> After five years in the factory, I could see my future in 20 years. Only one of us in the same cohort could be a chief engineer in the factory. That would be the highest possible position we could get. It was a hopeless future. I could not accept it. I didn't know what the outside world would look like but this road was definitely not the one I wanted to choose.

Around 1996, some of his colleagues were recruited by some private-owned steel factories as engineers or technicians and made triple the salary compared to the state-owned factory. Wenge also thought about going out but he didn't want to stay in the small city. In 1999, he took a month's leave from his working position and participated in a job fair in Beijing. He recalled,

> I have ambition. I think the world is open. We were no longer limited by food ration tickets and the state policy was more open. Many people went to Shenzhen to *Xiahai*. I was also young so I wanted to strive for a better future, no matter successful or not. I went to a job fair in Beijing. Many people from state-owned enterprises went there to find jobs. I was employed by this private company since 1999.

Soon after he found a new job in Beijing, the original steel factory started the wave of *Xiagang*. He could choose to resign, be bought out for his service years ("*mai duan gong ling*") or affiliate with the factory ("*gua kao*"). He recalled,

> If I chose to be bought out for the service years, the factory would give me some money and I would have to pay the endowment insurance myself. If I chose to affiliate to the factory, the factory would pay half my endowment insurance per month. These two choices needed more time to process. I had worked in the private company for a while so I chose

> the fastest one, which was the resignation. The bureaucratic work finished in one day. I didn't ask for anything from the factory. I resigned directly and got a one-year salary, about 8000 yuan. Many people said I was audacious to take this step. Most didn't want to throw their service years away. I also had 13 years' working experience in the factory, but I didn't care anymore.

Wenge left everything in the state-owned factory behind without hesitation and started his new life and career in Beijing. He was recruited by a private company in 1999 and has worked there since then.

Among the generation who left the *danwei* system to *Xiahai*, Qilin (1974, male) was the most successful private entrepreneur I interviewed. He was from a province in the central region of China and participated in the workforce after high school. He got a position from the sanitation department of the county through family connections but didn't want to work on cleaning and greening the county for the rest of his life. He took the college entrance examination once more and managed to get into a junior college. After graduation, he went back to the original work unit and prepared to pursue a political career in the system. However, in 2000, he received a notice of criticism from his work unit because of a small mistake which impeded his future promotion in the system. In addition to his hopeless political career, his father's high debts also pushed him to leave the work unit and come to Beijing to find the chance to make money in the market. He first worked for his friend to sell goods on Yabao road, an international trade market which attracted many traders from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Later he worked for companies producing outsourced programs for TV stations. After several years, he started his own company to make commercial TV programs. At the beginning, he lost a lot of money and his company was on the verge of bankruptcy. He recalled the most difficult time

> It was before the Spring Festival. I distributed salaries to my employees and just had 600 yuan left. I lived in the office and an old lady asked me why I didn't go home. I said I was on duty. I boiled 12 eggs and put them on the balcony, a natural fridge. When I ate

> them, I used some boiled water to warm them up. I spent Spring Festival alone in Beijing without dumplings. I just reflected on myself and why I lost money. I told myself that I had to persist.

Fortunately, Qilin's persistence saved his company and he received new orders the first week after the Spring Festival holidays. But his company could barely make ends meet and he had to find ways to make more profit. In order to find financing opportunities, he went back to his hometown and turned to a friend, an investor of real estate. They successfully organized an association for private entrepreneurs to build social networks and get more chances in the market. With the help of the association, Qilin caught up with the skyrocketing of commercial housing prices in the early 2010s in Beijing and accumulated a large amount of wealth through investment in real estate. He said that, "When I started a business, I was making a living. But now, I'm investing."

In general, most of those who took the initiative to leave the *danwei* system to *Xiahai* in the Reform era lost their hope toward the original work units and would rather take risks in the market to strive for a better future. However, surprisingly, the more they were involved in the private economy, the more critical they would be toward the political and economic system of China. Most were anxious about the uncertainty of state policies on private enterprises, disappointed on the low government credibility and very pessimistic toward the Chinese economy.

As mentioned before, Jinghui faced a lot of barriers when he ran his own business. Firstly, it was impossible for him to get a loan from a state bank. Aside from the lack of state support, he was also disappointed at the lack of regulations in online stores whose counterfeit products and tax evasions disrupted the market order and eroded the real economy. He also started to invest in the stock market since 1994 but just found the stock market was only a speculative place for the state to rip off the savings of ordinary people, usually the middle class. He said, "To say it was encircling money was just a nice saying. It was in fact a pure scam. Last year, adding leverage on the stock market ruined tens of millions of people in the middle class." In addition, Jinghui sued the

government once for the quality problem of a condominium he bought which was developed by the local government. This experience of a law suit with the government was quite traumatic. He recalled,

> The apartment block was reconstructed from the old dormitory of my original work unit. All the condominiums had problems of water leaking. It damaged my decorations and furniture. It was definitely a quality problem. The building was developed by the government who contracted it out to a construction company. The company had sent workers to repair the leaking problems for all the residents but the time and economic losses were not compensated. Therefore, I sued the government directly. The government sent a lawyer and said they had not sent workers to repair my condominium and the building had no quality problem. The judge just dismissed my appeal. My tears were coming down. I would never deal with these bastards anymore. I could not imagine a government would lie through its teeth. It was disappointing and despairing.

For Jinghui, this law suit further destroyed the government's credibility in his mind and he even suggested his son, who was now working in a private company, should avoid doing business with the government or state-owned enterprises. He said,

> I think that common people should live the life of common people. Do not petition the government because you can never win. In the end, you will lose and get yourself sick… Man's heart is like an iron and the official law is like a furnace. You will be burnt. Even if you get a bargain by suing the government, you will be not far from death.

His grievances and dissatisfactions toward the untrustworthy and corrupt government revived his nostalgic imagination of Mao's era. Even though he had not experienced the Cultural Revolution fully by himself, he had a romanticized reconstruction of the past and placed some of his hope on the current president Xi Jinping and the anti-corruption Campaign. He said,

> The central government sometimes set policies without practical experiences at the grassroots level. In Mao Zedong's period, they asked to be re-educated by the poor and lower-middle peasants. Leaders came from the grassroots and followed the instruction of

> "from the masses, to the masses."[55] … Xi Jinping had been sent down to the village so he had contact with the peasants and understood living conditions of people in the bottom…I think 10 years were not enough for him to be president. It was hard to correct those problems in the system even for 20 years.

Jinghui didn't experience the Rustication himself but he had belief in the current president who did. Ironically, he further said the political and legal environment in Mao's era was better than nowadays. In Mao's era, from Jinghui's perspective, people had higher political consciousness, the society was more equal and fairer, and leaders dared not receive bribes. As Jinghui said, "the Communist Party members used to bear hardship at first and enjoyed benefits last. But now, they enjoyed everything first, and were corrupt without a bottom line." This might be the reason why Jinghui didn't join the Party. He had a written application to join the Party when he worked in the state-owned factory but was denied by the Party secretary.

> They didn't want me. I used to be a foreman in the factory and was also politically active... You must get along well with the Party secretary. Besides, you must not say strange or bad things about leaders. I'm a straightforward talker. I can't do that… Later, the Party membership began to sour, I think.

Jinghui's romantic imagination of Mao's era was largely a response to the severe social injustice and corruption nowadays. It might be an illusion but what he really expected was to be treated fairly and equally by state policies and have a credible government that would be responsible for what it said and did. Jinghui's anxiety was also shared by Wenge but he was not nostalgic to the Maoist past. He also felt the state provided little support to private companies. He said,

> Bigger and more famous private companies may receive some support to develop their intellectual properties. Smaller ones like us just live and die on our own. My boss had said,

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[55] Mao, Zedong, "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership" (June 1, 1943), *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p. 119.

> science and technology were productivity and policy was also productivity. You could only develop with the support of state policies.

As Wenge described, in China, state policies were more powerful than the laws in that policies directly influenced market opportunities for private enterprise. But most of the time, state policies were leaning toward the state-owned enterprises. Wenge used to think about getting a share from state-owned enterprises after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He recalled,

> People also yearned for freedom in China. Later, Gorbachev divided up state assets and the Soviet people got their own share at least. We said our factories were owned by the whole people, and we were the masters, so we should have a share. But we have never seen the share…At that time, I thought the state could divide assets into shares and give each of us a share. GDP would give us dividends every year. Wouldn't that be nice?

Wenge's imagination was never realized. Instead, state-owned enterprises were controlled by a small group of people and gradually took over the space of the private economy in the 2010s. Aside from the limited living space of the private company, Wenge was also pressured by economic burdens to settle in Beijing. Without the welfare benefits and housing assignments from the *danwei* system, he had to pay everything out of his own pocket. Buying a house was the first concern, He said,

> The housing price was far beyond ordinary people's ability to pay. In order for the younger generation to settle down in the big city, the older generation would sacrifice their enjoyment and put money in the house which was also a contribution to the state… The elders no longer left money for their pension and healthcare. When I bought my house, it was also very expensive… I think it was a state behavior and could not be controlled by ordinary people.

Aside from that, Wenge still didn't get his household registration in Beijing after 20 years because he worked in a private company which meant he could not enjoy a lot of welfare benefits offered to registered Beijing residents. Facing so much stress and anxiety in private business, he didn't expect his only child to go through the same route. He said,

> My daughter could not bear the hardship as I did. She just found an iron rice bowl in a state bank. Her housing registration in Beijing was also solved by the work unit. It was the best result for her. We were all relieved… I just wished her to find a stable work unit. I didn't think she could withstand the stress and hardship I had experienced… Private commercial banks also had risks. They could fire you if they no longer needed you one day. It was better to stay in the state bank.

While Wenge left the original work unit to pursue his own career ambition in the market, he preferred his only daughter to find a stable job in a state bank and live an easier life on the iron rice bowl.

Even as a successful and relatively wealthy entrepreneur, Qilin was no less anxious than Jinghui and Wenge who were just middle class in terms of economic status. He was also very pessimistic about private business in the future. He said,

> Many young people come out to start up their businesses nowadays but the generation of the 60s and 70s are just trying to preserve their companies. I estimate there will be 40% of private enterprises going bankrupt this year, mostly in the real economy. Who is the master of financing? The government. It releases a policy and the bank will implement… The living conditions of private enterprises are getting worse. The state-owned enterprises are very large, spending the money of the state. They play with politics and can destroy you at any time…The government cannot let its people be too strong and wealthy.

As a private business owner, Qilin sensed a survival crisis for private enterprises in China and felt more and more insecure in front of expanding state-owned enterprises. The heavy taxation on private companies, lack of financial support from the state and the bubble of the virtual economy all greatly squeezed the living spaces for private business in the real economy. He separated the first 30 years of Reform into three phases.

> The first 10 years were an upstart period when a few people made some money and the planned economy was under reform but the whole economy was not stimulated to change too much. The second 10 years were the period of private enterprises when the

> private economy developed rapidly. The third 10 years were the period of reorganization and combination of state-owned enterprises. The next 10 years will be a difficult period.

As Qilin described, the golden development period of private enterprises of the 1990s and early 2000s had passed. Since the mid-2000s, state-owned enterprises revived with the development of state capitalism. The bankruptcy and reorganization of state-owned enterprises in the late 1990s and early 2000s were just strategies to get rid of burdens of redundant workers and bad assets and to concentrate and generate even larger state-owned enterprises to monopolize important areas such as electricity, railway, petroleum, and communication etc. Qilin further said, "After CCP lived through so many years, no one was satisfied with the government…The official media also had very low credibility." Unlike Jinhui who referred to the past in dealing with the social problems in the present, Qilin directly pointed at the one-party dictatorship in China which had no incentive for the government to reform for the sake of the general public whereas the election system in the US was more influenced by public opinions and interests.

### 4.2 *Xiagang*: the state no longer kept its promise

Different from those who voluntarily left the work unit to pursue more monetary gains or personal achievements, workers who got laid off from state-owned factories during the wave of *Xiagang*, were forced to leave the socialist *danwei* system and make a living in the market. They usually didn't have a college degree and had limited skills to find a good job in the market. Aside from the loss of working positions, they were also deprived of a lot of welfare benefits they had enjoyed in the *danwei* system such as low-price health care, children's education, fully covered endowment insurance, and an assigned house. For most SOE (state-owned enterprise) workers, when they first participated in the labor force and held the iron rice bowl, it was a lifetime promise between them and the state. However, with the rapid marketization and SOE reform, this promise was unilaterally broken up by the state and these workers were suddenly rendered redundant. They were not directly fired, but offered several choices. Two mostly mentioned ones were *mai duan*

*gong ling* (to be bought out for their service years) and *nei tui* (internal retirement). The former gave them a lump sum of money and cut their connections with the work units completely while the latter allowed them to retire internally in their 40s and gave them a minimum living allowance every month with endowment insurance paid by the work unit until the official retirement age (Gold, Thomas et al. 2009: 69-70).

Since the lump sum buyout money was far from enough to pay endowment insurance until the retirement age, it seemed to be better to choose the internal retirement. However, not all workers got the chance to choose. For example, Jinghui's wife was forced to be bought out for her service years at that time.

> My wife was forced to *mai duan gong ling*. 20 years of service just exchanged for 60 thousand yuan. Then no one would take care of you anymore. You were left alone to pay your insurance. From 2002 to 2012, you had to pay insurance by yourself until retirement. The money you got was not enough to pay off the insurance. Some people found other jobs but it was hard… Those laid off from the factories had no skills. People who were 40 years old restarted from the beginning, from zero. The *Xiagang* workers suffered a lot.

Jinghui said he was fortunate to have his own business. Many of his colleagues and couples in his factory got laid off at the same time from 1998 to 2003 and lived a very hard life to make ends meet. It was hard to find good jobs, especially for those in their late 30s and 40s. Jinghui knew a couple who went to watch a carport and bicycle shed for people for only 2000 yuan per month. Jinghui said,

> They had to pay endowment insurance by themselves until 60. Their child was your age, and needed money to get married. They didn't even have a house. Our work unit used to assign dorms to workers with three families sharing one kitchen and one restroom. The dormitory was rebuilt into an apartment block in 2006. I bought this rebuilt condominium with 200 thousand yuan. I could afford it because I had my own business. He and his wife only got 60 thousand buyout money per person. He could not afford the condominium so he became a "nail household," who refused to move out the old dorm and wanted to pay

> less to get a house. However, the condominiums were soon sold out by property developers. There were so many corruptions involved in the process. It was hard to say.

This couple didn't manage to get a cheaper condominium and just received some compensation and could only rent a small apartment to live. With the skyrocketing of housing prices in the past 10 years, they had no hope to buy a house for themselves.

Baosheng, who succeeded his father's working position in the factory after graduating from high school also didn't expect the iron rice bowl would be smashed into pieces one day. His original factory was reorganized and sold to a private company and moved to a place far away from his home in the early 2000s. Many workers got laid off and were forced to be bought out and cut their connections with the work unit altogether. Baosheng actually could choose to stay in the private factory but every morning he had to spend three hours to get to the new workplace. He finally chose to get the buyout money for his service years and find new jobs in the market. He later found some of his colleagues retired internally (*nei tui*) and got endowment insurance paid by the work unit until official retirement age. He said, "If I knew that earlier, I would also choose that. I had to pay the insurance by myself." Some of his colleagues found similar machining jobs in private plants but there were not so many private machining factories that could hire that many laid-off workers. As Baosheng recalled,

> A skilled worker like me, having left the machine tool, would be half disabled. We could hardly sell ourselves in the market. But you got laid off, and only received 200 to 300 yuan subsidies per month. You had a kid at home and needed money to go to school. It was too difficult. I got several electrician certificates for high voltage and light current and worked at several places in the past 10 years.

Baosheng started to learn new skills and get new certificates in order to sell himself in the market. He was relatively luckier than his co-workers in that his wife worked in a stable and well-paid public institution and wasn't influenced by the wave of *Xiagang*. In the most difficult years, his wife took up the economic burden of his family.

Moreover, *Xiagang* was not the only reason that made the life of many working-class families miserable. The wave of *Xiagang* was accompanied by the marketization of education, health care and housing. While these workers lost their working positions and welfare benefits from the original work units, they had to take on increased economic burdens of education of their children, health care and housing. These previously privileged SOE workers suddenly felt they were abandoned by the state and left to drown by the ruthless market. They used to be the "master of the state" and proud of their status but now they were deprived of dignity and turned into deplorable and vulnerable groups in society. Therefore, it was not surprising to find their nostalgic memory of the past and grievances about the present.

## 4.3 Stayed in work units: relying on the Party-State

Aside from those who took the initiative to leave the *danwei* system to *Xiahai* or were forced to be laid off during the wave of *Xiagang*, there was another group of people in this generation who managed to stay in the state-owned work units and preserve their iron rice bowls in the Reform era. They mostly came from government offices, public institutions or monopolized enterprises such as railway, petroleum and electricity or they were medium to high-ranking cadres in the SOEs and did not have to *Xiagang* as normal workers.

Government officials held the most stable iron rice bowls. Very few of them in Beijing resigned from the position to *Xiahai* in the early 1990s. Xiaohong worked in the local street office since graduating from high school. She said that very few government officials of her age or older were influenced by the trend of *Xiahai*. She further talked about the conservative nature of her work.

> As civil servants, we must be well-behaved and follow instructions step by step. We must not have our own big ideas or innovations. There were only a few innovations in the work mode but you cannot break through a lot of things.

Working in the local street office provided Xiaohong a stable and peaceful life. Although the work in local government was busy and the payment was not very high, she was still satisfied with her work and prepared to work there until retirement.

People who worked in public institutions were another group less influenced by the market reform since public institutions were directly funded by the government and had no worries about economic returns such as SOEs (state-owned enterprises). For instance, Wenli was assigned to a public institution after graduating from a vocational school. She said, "The Reform and opening up didn't influence public institutions (*shiye danwei*), like our work unit, that much. We had stable funding despite the economy." Yuemei (1961, female) was also assigned to a research institution in the railway system after graduating from college. It was originally a public institution funded by the Railway Minister, whereas in the late 2000s, the institution was transformed to a state-owned company responsible for their own profits and losses. Since then, Yuemei started to feel the pressure of the market reform. Fortunately, the company received projects from the railway system and profited well with the support of state policies, and she also earned more than before. Yuemei's husband worked in a state-owned petroleum company as a medium-ranking cadre so he was also not highly influenced by the SOE reform in the late 1990s. Moreover, with more support from the government on large state-owned enterprises, such as the railway, petroleum and electricity companies, these SOEs were expanding and growing more rapidly after the mid-2000s and gradually taking over living spaces of private enterprises.

In addition, some people did not have to leave their original work unit to swim in the sea of the market economy. Some state-owned enterprises or public institutions also established some affiliated companies during the Reform to make more profit in the market. Yiwei (1963, female) was appointed as the manager of an affiliated company at her work unit. Yiwei's father

was a PLA soldier who had participated in the Korean War. She started to work after graduating from high school through her father's connection at a state-owned stadium as a service worker. Then she got her bachelor's degree from a Television college and master's degree from a commercial school on-the-job. The stadium had established many affiliated companies in the late 1990s and early 2000s such as a hotel and a taxi company. Yiwei said "It was easy for us to establish companies. Unlike private companies, we had a state-owned enterprise to back up." The state-owned enterprises had a lot of policy favors in loans and taxes. When the stadium opened a travel agency in the 2000s, she was appointed as the manager. Recently, Yiwei was about to retire so she started her own travel agency with her experience and networks in the field. She still kept her original working position and salary and waited to retire officially.

In general, those who stayed in the state-owned work unit might not get very rich but were guaranteed stable income and welfare benefits which were enough to render them the beneficiaries of the Party-state and the Reform. Their salaries and benefits in the state system increased with economic development, and at the same time, they did not have to take on the pressure of private business owners or laid-off workers. Therefore, most of them soon set aside or suppressed the memories of "Tiananmen Crackdown," and spoke at the stance of the Party and the state. Some of them also pushed their children to enter state-owned enterprises. For instance, Aihong was assigned to a public institution after graduating from a vocational school. She said, "My daughter just graduated from college this year. I instilled the idea in her that she should go to a state-owned enterprise." Moreover, Aihong joined the Party since her father had said, "Children in our family should all be Party members." Although she admitted the corruption within the CCP, she further said,

> If you live in this country, you should love it. The CCP is the ruling party. Can you say that other parties would do better than the CCP? Not necessarily. It is not easy to rule such

> a large country and provide everyone a stable life. The living standards have been improved a lot. You should not scold the Party while relying on it to eat and drink. It is not grateful.

Aihong's opinion to the Party and the sense of belonging to the *danwei* system were not uncommon among those who benefited a lot from the state system. Minzhi was also assigned to a research institution after graduating from college. She asked her son to return to China after finishing his master's degree in the US to work in a state-owned company in the railway system. Her son joined the trend of the development of high-speed trains in China in recent years and earned a relatively high salary in the work unit. Minzhi said,

> He had worked in the US for 8 months. I asked him to come back. The railway company was recruiting at that time. I thought the railway had developed very fast in recent years so I asked my son to come back to take the opportunity.

Moreover, the rapid development of high-speed trains in China also pushed Minzhi to think about the merit of the Chinese political system. She said,

> China's centralized system has its own merit I think. The high-speed trains could not develop so fast without centralized decisions and state investment. It would be too difficult to pass the project in a democratic system… Sometimes I think an authoritarian system may not be bad. The high-speed trains have benefitted the general public so we should not only think about the profit. The state can provide some subsidies for the deficit.

Minzhi's view was not surprising given that all of her families were now working in state-owned public institutions or enterprises and relied on the state system to live a comfortable life.

Similar views were also held by government officials. For example, Zhiguo (1963, male), a medium-ranking cadre in a ministry, stated *Xiagang* workers didn't see the larger picture of the Reform when they expressed their grievances. He said he could understand the dissatisfaction of the laid-off SOE workers but they "only saw their own sacrifice, and didn't see the benefits of the Reform in general and the development of the state-owned enterprises in the future." Furthermore,

though he admitted that the US had fewer corruptions than China because of the democratic system, he insisted that the democracy was not applicable to the complex Chinese society.

In short, most of those who stayed in the state-controlled work units during the Reform era were relatively conservative in political and economic views and more in line with the political propaganda of the CCP and sometimes even more likely to defend the Party and state policies in front of criticisms.

## 5. Discussion: the Party-State from an amiable caregiver to a formidable predator

Compared to the previous two generations, the generation of the "Tiananmen," born in the 1960s and early 1970s, had experienced a much smoother life trajectory that was not disrupted by wars or revolutions. They were too young to be involved in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, the Cultural Revolution didn't traumatically influence this generation that much but had impacted their initial views toward the Party and the State with Mao's ideological legacy. When they reached their adolescence, the college entrance examination had been resumed and the Reform had begun.

Most of them were incorporated into the *danwei* system in the 1980s and those who earned a degree from college or vocational school would be assigned to better work units as cadres. During the early reform period in the 1980s, they enjoyed the benefits of the socialist *danwei* system that guaranteed them an iron rice bowl and all conceivable welfare benefits to live a decent life while experiencing the "thought liberation," the relaxation of political control, and the emergence of a market economy. Many of these young adults recalled being enthusiastically involved in daily political discussions and debates with friends, colleagues and even strangers and sincerely cared about politics and the future destiny of the Party-state. This vibrant and diverse period was suddenly terminated by the "Tiananmen Crackdown" in 1989 which was still a political taboo in China. Among those who shared their memories of this event, the crackdown was a turning point for them

that marked the end of idealism and political engagement and the start of cynicism and pragmatism. As Jinghui had said, "Previously when you got in a taxi, the driver would talk to you about politics. Beijingers liked to talk about politics. But after June 4th, Beijingers cared less about politics and were not willing to bring this up either. Many things are not allowed to say."

The late reform period since 1992 divided the generation of the "Tiananmen" into three trajectories or generation units. The first unit referred those who *Xiahai*, meaning to take the initiative to leave the *danwei* system to pursue more monetary gains and career achievements in the market. The second unit referred to those who *Xiagang*, mainly the workers from bankrupted or reorganized state-owned factories whose iron rice bowls were smashed into pieces and were forced to make a living in the market. The third unit referred to those who stayed in the original work units and still benefited from the *danwei* system in the late Reform era.

Firstly, for those who voluntarily jumped into the private economy, the Party-state never provided them enough support as it had done for the SOEs (state-owned enterprises). Most of them were anxious about the uncertainty of state policies on private enterprise and felt discriminated compared to large state-owned companies. Moreover, they were disappointed in the decline of government credibility and very pessimistic toward the Chinese economy in the future. Jinghui learnt from his own failed law suit with the government that ordinary people should not mess with the government. In facing social injustice and corruption, Jinghui referred back to a romanticized imagination of Mao's era and called for a thorough cleansing of the political system. Although he put some hope on the anti-corruption campaign launched by President Xi Jinping, he also pointed out the anti-corruption was selective and Chinese officials were not selected based on merit but on family background or blood lineage. Jinghui's cynical attitudes toward the Party-state was not uncommon in this generation. Wenge and Qilin also expressed their anxieties toward the expansion of state-owned enterprises and the reducing of living spaces for medium and small private

companies. Qilin directly said that government was the master of financing and could screw up private business owners at any time. He further pointed out the one-party dictatorship In China had no incentives to reform for the sake of the general public and implied a democratization of the system that could protect private business owners. Not surprisingly, most interviewees in this generation unit were not Party members. As joining the Party turned more and more instrumental for most people in China in the late Reform era, those who worked in private sectors had no incentive to join the Party because Party membership was irrelevant to their business and promotion.

Secondly, for those who were forced to cut their connections with work units in the wave of *Xiagang*, the Party-state broke its promise and discarded them halfway on the road of Reform. While the media described *Xiagang* as a necessary sacrifice for the SOE reform and the collective interest of the state, laid-off workers were deprived of working positions and associated welfare benefits and almost got drowned by the ruthless market. They used to be privileged SOE workers and the "master of the state", but in the late Reform era, they suffered the most and were also the most nostalgic group of the early 1980s. Furthermore, some people in this group, like the wife of Jinghui, were Party members and some like Baosheng were not, but the Party membership didn't save them from being inundated by the waves of the SOE reform.

Thirdly, for those who managed to stay in the state-controlled work units and continuously benefit from the *danwei* system, the Party-state never left them behind. They mostly came from government offices, public institutions or monopolized SOEs and benefited a lot from the economic reform and the recent development of state capitalism. Moreover, most of them were Party members because the Party membership was closely related to their promotion in the system. Many of them, such as Minzhi and Aihong, also wanted to get their children into the system to keep benefiting from it. The state official, Zhiguo, showed some sympathy toward *Xiagang* workers but

criticized them as not seeing the bigger picture of the Reform when they expressed their own grievances.

In short, the first two generation units lost the protection of the socialist *danwei* system voluntarily or were forced in the late Reform era. The state was turned from an amiable caregiver in the late 1970s and the 1980s to a formidable predator and profit-seeker in the market in the 1990s and the 2000s. In addition, government credibility declined sharply with rampant corruption, increasing social inequalities as well as ever-changing state policies. In response to these social problems, some of them referred back to an imaginary Maoist past and some of them implied a democratized future. But no matter which approach they chose, they expected to be treated fairly and equally by state policy and provided equal opportunities to live a decent life. However, for the third group who stayed in the *danwei* system, the state was still a caregiver for them that would provide endowment insurance, health insurance and many other welfare benefits. They were more conservative in political and economic views compared to the other two groups and more in line with the political propaganda of the CCP. Even though they did acknowledge the corruption and social inequalities of the Party-state, they would more likely find excuses to defend the Party and state policies in front of criticism.

# Chapter 5

# Conclusion: generational memories of the Party-state

Rapid tempo of social changes and historical transformations in China since the mid 20th century gave rise to several political generations with distinctive historical experiences, life trajectories and collective memories. The three major transformative events or processes singled out in this study are (1) the founding of the PRC in 1949 to the consolidation of the rule of the CCP in the early 1950s; (2) the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 and (3) the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989 to the market reform in 1992. As previous chapters have suggested, the three political generations have experienced these historical events during their late adolescence and early adulthood and were actively or passively involved in these revolutions and social movements. As a result, their life trajectories were largely shaped by these historical transformations as well as the omnipresent Party-State. In addition, the historical events that happened during their formative years had a relatively more prominent and lasting impact on their moral values and world views, including their political and emotional engagement of the state and perceptions and expectations of the state legitimacy. Coming of age during the "Liberation," the "Cultural Revolution, or the "Tiananmen Crackdown" endowed each political generation with a specific political repertoire and world views which would orient the meaning of their later life experiences. As Mannheim argued, "All later experiences then tend to receive their meaning from this original set whether they appear as that set's verification and fulfillment or as its negation and antithesis" (Mannheim 1952: 298).

What's more, when facing the same historical events, people from the same political generation sometimes have different responses and views. Therefore, within each political generation, I further distinguish several generation units to demonstrate intra-generational differences. Generation units were defined by members' similar responses and views to common historical events or destinies

(Mannheim 1952: 303-304). Some generation units developed conscious identities that were re-articulated in various memoirs, novels, studies and media coverages such as the "Red Guards" and the "sent-down educated youths" during the Cultural Revolution and the "*Xiagang* (stepping down from the working position) workers" during the late Reform, while others were more passively identified by specific life trajectories and choices such as the "newcomers" to Beijing during the "Liberation," the "stayed educated youths" during the Cultural Revolution and the "*Xiahai* (jumping into the sea)" people during the Reform. The generation units I listed within each political generation were not mutually exclusive or exhaustive but just suggestive meaningful groupings based on interviews in the Beijing area. For example, the generation of the "Liberation" was separated into those old residents of Beiping and newcomers of Beijing; the "worker-peasant-soldier" students during the Cultural Revolution cut across the sent-down youths and the stayed youths. In addition, some generation units had the potential to be further differentiated into more specific units. For instance, the sent-down educated youths could be differentiated into early and late sent-down youths based on their different rustication experiences. The merit of distinguishing generation units is to identify and categorize similar and different political views and moral values within each political generation. However, focusing too much on the intra-generational differences also tended to obscure inter-generational distinctions and transformations. Therefore, after detailed examination of the three political generations and their generation units in previous chapters, I now turn to a cross-comparison of the three generations in the last chapter and explicitly address how their views and narratives about "*Guo Jia*," the state, and perceptions of state legitimacy were different.

## 5.1 Political generations and levels of political agency

Political generation is defined by previous scholars either as active age groups mobilized for political change and social movements or passive age groups involved in critical historical events (Braungart, R. G. 2013). The active political generation implies a higher political agency to produce

social change and challenge the status quo while the passive political generation assumes a lower political agency and exists mainly on the basis of distinctive culture and memory (Edmunds and Turner 2002; Kansteiner 2014). The three political generations included in this study also had different levels of political agency in facing historical transformations. In general, the generation of the "Cultural Revolution" was the most active political generation while the "Liberation" generation was the most passive one. The generation of the "Tiananmen" fell in between.

For the generation of the "Liberation," born during wars and revolutions, the Communist state happened to them. They did not have much agency to control what happened or decide whether to be involved or not. Before they could fully understand the meaning of the "Liberation," they were designated into different class origins and incorporated into a total system of the socialist state which promised a stable and prosperous future. Despite the ensuing social movements and campaigns in the early and mid-1950s, many of them still enjoyed educational and job opportunities provided by the new regime and had hopes and expectations for their future life and career. However, their vision of the New China was largely disillusioned by the Great Famine and the Cultural Revolution. During the Red Guard Movement at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, many of my interviewees as well as their families and colleagues suddenly, in their middle ages, became targets of the revolution and were harshly criticized by the mobilized young Red Guards and Rebels. Most of my interviewees in this generation - including loyal CCP members - started to question the correctness and righteousness of the Party but felt powerless to make any change. Therefore, many of them became apathetic to politics and tried to stay away from political struggles in order to survive new social movements and campaigns.

Unlike the first generation that was mostly passively involved in the regime transition and social movements following the "Liberation," the generation of the "Cultural Revolution" was born into the socialist state with a sense of ownership of the state. They were brought up listening to

Mao's words which rendered youths as the "sun at eight or nine in the morning" which was "full of vigor and vitality," and "the world belongs to them" and "China's future belongs to them."[56] Inspired by these words, they genuinely felt they had the agency to make a difference and the launch of the Cultural Revolution provided them such a chance. For the first time, those young Red Guards cast themselves as protagonists of a revolution and mimicked the revolutionary heroes and heroines in textbooks and movies. Following the call of Mao Zedong, they deployed their political agency to participate in the Red Guard Movement with revolutionary zeal and ideal, writing big character posters, brushing slogans on the wall, marching on the street to destroy the "*four olds*," and traveling freely around China to exchange revolutionary experiences. The so-called "great democracy" in the Cultural Revolution was like a violent carnival for the young rebels that elicited their fanaticism and even cruelty while reasserting their sense of self-importance. However, the Red Guard Movement gradually died down after three years of upheaval, and their revolutionary enthusiasm was cooled down by the ruthless realities of the Rustication Movement.

Their political agency was greatly reduced and limited during this time and they suddenly found out they were not only unable to build a state based on their revolutionary ideal but also incapable of deciding their own life trajectory. However, these constraints in the late years of the Cultural Revolution pushed this generation, especially those who suffered the most, to think deeply and reflect more on the revolution, the Rustication, and the Party. They then became major participants and witnesses of the April 5th Movement on Tiananmen in 1976, a collective expression of dissatisfaction and grievance toward the Cultural Revolution which finally led to the downfall of the "Gang of Four." Furthermore, this generation also greatly contributed to the "thought liberation" during the early Reform era in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They not only participated in the

[56] Mao, Zedong, "Talk at a meeting with Chinese students and trainees in Moscow (November 17, 1957)," https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch30.htm, accessed by March 4, 2019.

resumed national college entrance examination to change their personal fate but also actively promoted the Democracy Wall Movement to change the fate of the Party-state and initiate the trend of "scar literature" to reflect on the trauma caused by the Cultural Revolution. Most people from this generation were proactive in political movements and many of them also supported or sympathized with the student protest in 1989. Although many people retreated from the political sphere after the Tiananmen Crackdown, they still held very critical views toward Reform policy and some even called for another round of Cultural Revolution or a similar mass movement to combat rising social inequality and rampant corruption.

Unlike the process of "Liberation" and the Cultural Revolution that involved almost everyone in China passively or actively in the movement, the Tiananmen Crackdown in 1989 happened in Beijing and mainly engaged students and intellectuals as well as some workers and ordinary residents around the capital city. Although the student protest received national and international attention and wide support from all over, direct participants and activists in this movement were only a small group. Most people from the generation of the "Tiananmen" were bystanders, witnesses, supporters or sympathizers of the student protest who did not directly participate in the event themselves. Nevertheless, the Tiananmen Crackdown in 1989 was definitely a critical historical event for this generation in that it greatly changed their views toward politics and their willingness to engage politically. This generation spent their early childhood during the Cultural Revolution, with only a vague memory of Mao's era. They matured during the period of "thought liberation" that repudiated the Cultural Revolution and reflected on the mistakes of Mao and the Party, at least to some extent. In addition, benefiting from the Reform and Opening up policy in the 1980s, this generation was able to access imported western culture and ideas as well as reviving traditional culture. Therefore, this generation was vibrant and active in thinking and enthusiastic in political engagement in the 1980s. However, the tragic crackdown of the student protest in 1989

suddenly terminated the period of "thought liberation" and stamped out people's enthusiasm for political engagement.

Aside from a few political dissidents, many people from this generation were scared by the CCP's military suppression and became cynical toward politics. Since the late Reform in 1992, they switched their attention to materialist gains in the market. Some people left the socialist *danwei* system voluntarily to make money in private sectors, some were laid off by the reformed state-owned enterprises and forced to make a living on the market, while others stayed in the *danwei* system and continued to benefit from the system. This generation transformed their agency to the economic field and to improving their lives. Politics became a topic they would like to avoid or keep silent on in daily life. Therefore, the generation of the "Tiananmen" fell between the first and second generation in terms of its level of political agency.

In short, different levels of political agency for the three political generations were products of their specific social and historical contexts. In addition, the levels of political agency were related to each generation's relationship with the Party-state and shaped their views on and perceptions of the state and state legitimacy.

## 5.2 Generational narratives and perceptions of the Party-State

Due to the strong presence of the Party-state in shaping the generational habitus and life trajectories of the three political generations, it is indispensable to examine the ideas of the state and perceptions of state legitimacy across generations. Previous scholars theorized the historical transformation of the Party-state from a "totalitarian state," "mobilizing state," or "theatrical state" in Mao's era to an "authoritarian state," "rational state" or "neo-traditionalist state" in the Reform era (e.g., Oi 1995; Walder 1988; Xiang 2010; Zhang, L. 1998; Zheng 2004). However, these were all topdown conceptualizations of the Party-state by scholars. From the bottom-up perspective, the three political generations have experienced different relationships with the state which were

clearly reflected in the narratives when they referred to the State and the Party. As previous scholars have argued, people tend to develop a moral view of the state based on their lived experiences which provide a normative perception of a justifiable state and an ideal relationship between the state and the individual (Xiang 2010). Since the lived experiences for the three political generations with the Party-state went through some transformations as well as continuities, their moral views toward the Party and the state were also differentiated to some extent.

For the generation of the "Liberation," the construction of the Party-state happened in front of their eyes during the CCP's "Liberation" and socialist transformation processes. The "state" used to be referred to mainly as a nation-state that elicited nationalistic emotion and patriotic attachment during the anti-Japanese war. After the founding of the "New China," the Communist Party not only stabilized the economy and opened up new educational and work opportunities, but also started to educate people in its revolutionary history and socialist and communist ideology emphasizing a discourse of legitimacy that described the CCP as the "savior" of the Chinese people and the leading "representative" of the general proletariat including the poor working class and peasants. Therefore, the dictatorship of the proletariat was translated to the dictatorship of the Communist Party which not only ruled the state but became the state itself; that is, the rise of the Party-State. The first generation that benefited from these new opportunities provided by the new regime and received ideological education during their late adolescence and early adulthood, was easily attracted by the radical egalitarian idealism and the communist utopia in the propaganda. Furthermore, the socialist transformation in the 1950s incorporated all urban residents into the state-controlled total system as state workers or cadres which was embraced by most people from this generation in that it promised a stable and promising future. The Party-State became an omnipotent resource controller and distributor as well as a socialist caregiver that established an intimate relationship with its people and blurred the boundary between the public and private life. As a result, people relied exclusively on the state system to make a living and to realize their self-

value in the society. However, this total system failed during the Great Leap Forward and the Great Famine and was further destroyed by the Cultural Revolution which made people from this generation start to doubt their beliefs in communist ideology and the undisputed correctness of the Party. The image of the Party and confidence toward the state were only restored to a certain extent after the downfall of the "Gang of Four" and rehabilitation of persecuted people. Even though many people from this generation tried hard to stay away from politics after incessant social movements, their initial gratitude toward the Party and the idealism of constructing an egalitarian and prosperous socialist state still resided deeply in their minds. When they saw the increase of inequality and corruption in the Chinese society during the Reform era, this idealism again resurfaced as criticism of the current state.

For the generation of the "Cultural Revolution," the Party-state was no longer a deliberate construction but a taken-for-granted reality. Compared to the generation of the "Liberation," the generation of the "Cultural Revolution" was more deeply indoctrinated by the personality cult of Mao and the central idea of class struggle and continuous revolution. Unlike the generation of the "Liberation," who were incorporated into the state system to serve as the cogs and wheels of the socialist apparatus, the generation of the "Cultural Revolution" was first mobilized by Mao to overthrow the newly-established bureaucratic system of the Party-state and replace it with revolutionary committees which lauded Mao's personal authority. They were then called upon by Mao to go to rustication "to the villages, the borderlands, the most needed places of the state" to make achievements and contributions. Therefore, for the generation of the "Cultural Revolution," the Party-state served less as a caregiver and more as a vehicle to make meaning of themselves. Through writing big character posters, criticizing people in authority and attending collective struggle sessions, their experience of the "great democracy" during the Cultural Revolution left a rebellious spirit which despised authorities and established institutions. However, it should be kept in mind the rebellion was undertaken by the order of the supreme leader Mao Zedong, who was

fanatically worshipped by many people from this generation during and even after the Cultural Revolution. Aside from a few early sent-down youths who had a deeper reflection and criticism of the Cultural Revolution and the Party, many people from this generation were nostalgic toward Mao's era and some even referred to the mass movement and the "great democracy" to combat the rising inequality and rampant corruptions of the Reform era. In addition, some people from this generation were also inclined to portray the ideal relationship between the state and the individuals as a parent-children relationship which partly reflected their expectations and desire to be incorporated into the socialist *danwei* system during and after the Rustication movement, and to be protected by the Party-state in the face of difficulties and uncertainties.

Different from the previous two generations, for the generation of the "Tiananmen," the Party-state gradually lost its intimate relationship with individuals as a socialist caregiver and turned into a formidable repressor and predator during the Tiananmen Crackdown and the late Reform period. Members of this generation used to be beneficiaries of the socialist *danwei* system which guaranteed their job and housing assignments, and at the same time enjoyed the "thought liberation" and the emergence of the market economy in the early Reform era that allowed them to access cultures and values from the outside world and to increase their earnings and life standards to a certain extent. Despite the swings of policies to the left (conservative) or right (liberal), the Party-state was in general an amiable caregiver and a diligent reformer that encouraged trial and error and political participations in the 1980s. However, the Tiananmen Crackdown in 1989 suddenly terminated the "New enlightenment" period and turned the Party-state into a ruthless repressor of the student movement. The tragic military suppression of student protest surprised most Chinese people and largely silenced them. Since then, the generation of the "Tiananmen" has become cynical and detached from politics. During the late Reform era, the socialist *danwei* system went through intensive market reform and reorganization and many people from this generation left the state system voluntarily or were forced out and struggled in the private sectors to make a living or

realize their career ambitions. These people no longer saw the Party-state as a socialist caregiver, but as a powerful predator in the market. They feared the Party-state would take advantage of policies to out-compete the private sector, reaping the profits of economic growth and concentrating the wealth and power of state-owned enterprises. Similar to previous generations, many people from the generation of the "Tiananmen" were disappointed at the rising social inequality and corruption, the declining credibility of the government, and the state's excessive extraction of wealth from common people in the late Reform era. But different from the generation of the "Cultural Revolution" that expected a parent-child relationship between the state and individuals and called for mass movements to deal with the social problems, the generation of the "Tiananmen," generally more open to western cultures and values, perferred being treated as citizens with equal rights rather than burdens to be abandoned or crops to be harvested. They expected the Party-state to provide public services and fair social policies to improve people's life standards and balance the development between state-owned and private enterprises which became more urgent during the expansion of state capitalism in the 2010s.

In short, the three political generations in this study had distinctive experiences and relationships with the Party-state and developed somewhat different moral views and imaginations of a justifiable state. The generation of the "Liberation" was the only generation alive who experienced the construction of the Party-state after years of wars and revolutions. They viewed the state as a beacon for a peaceful, independent, egalitarian and prosperous future. The establishment of a totalistic state system that controlled all conceivable resources and incorporated everyone in fact implied an intimate relationship between the Party-state and individuals from a bottom-up perspective because every aspect of personal life was subject to state control. This intimate relationship between the Party-state and individuals was taken-for-granted by the generation of the "Cultural Revolution" who was, ironically, mobilized to overthrow the "capitalist roaders" and "revisionists" in the state system and almost paralyzed or destroyed the bureaucratic

system. As a result, many people from this generation were banished to rural villages and state farms since the revolutionized Party-state had not enough job opportunities and resources in urban areas to take care of those students. These people then strived for years to be reincorporated into the *danwei* system and receive care and protection via the paternalistic Party-state. As for the generation of the "Tiananmen," the intimate relationship between the Party-state and the individuals gradually faded away with the bloody crackdown and intensive marketization and privatization. For those who worked outside the state system, their ideal relationship with the Party-state was no longer to return to the intimate parent-children relationship, which was also untenable, but to be treated fairly as citizens with rights being respected by the Party-state. My discussion of the transformation of moral views and perceptions of ideal relationships between the state and the individual across generations is only a suggestive trend sketch based on my limited interviewees in Beijing. I did not intend to exclude intra-generational differences and continuities.

## 5.3 Social problems through the lens of inter-generational conflicts

The study of generational memories, narratives and perceptions of the state was not only helpful to present a historical transformation of people's moral views toward the state but also to account for some part of the current social problems in China through the lens of inter-generational conflicts. China just celebrated its 40th anniversary of Reform and Opening in 2018 but many Chinese people are confused about the future direction of China. Since the Chinese state is still an authoritarian Party-state, the central CCP leaders' perceptions and decisions will largely determine the direction of the future of the state which would influence the fate of every Chinese person.

Current central leaders of the Party-state mostly come from the generation of the "Cultural Revolution" who were deeply influenced by the personality cult of Mao and the utilization of mass movement in social governance. At the same time, most people who are active in the workforce come from the generation of the "Tiananmen" and younger. Their perceptions of the ideal

relationship between the Party-state and individuals are different from older leaders. The increase of ideological control and expansion of state-owned enterprises reflects the central leaders' efforts to restore a parent-child relationship between the Party-state and its people to some extent. In this paternalistic relationship, the Party-state treats adults as immature children who cannot make a correct judgement on various information on their own but need ideological censorship and controls from the parent. By the same token, individuals' economic and political activities in private spheres are also subject to state interventions, regulations and even suppression in order to avoid social chaos. However, for the generation of the "Tiananmen," this revival of ideological control and expansion of state-owned enterprises doesn't reinstate the Party-state as an amiable caregiver. On the contrary, the laid-off state workers and private business owners feel severely discriminated against by the state policy. They would rather be treated as equal citizens with equal opportunities to live a decent life and realize their career ambitions. This discrepancy in the perceptions of a justifiable state between different political generations partially accounts for the dissatisfaction and grievances of ordinary people toward the current Party-state. As I have stressed before, this generational explanation is only suggestive and should be further examined with other social factors.

Moreover, besides the three political generations mentioned in this study, there was a younger "Olympic" generation which took shape in China that was also the major labor force and active participants in the society. They were born in the 1980s and 1990s and overlapped with the one-child policy. Therefore, most of them were the only child in their families and enjoyed much better living standards and educational resources provided by their parents. They grew up during the late Reform period and had no direct memories of the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Crackdown so there was much lighter historical baggage on their shoulders compared to previous generations. Furthermore, they experienced the Olympic Games in their late adolescence and early adulthood which was a symbolic representation of the rise of China on the world stage. Therefore,

their moral views toward the state and perceptions of the state legitimacy are worth closer examination.

Finally, this study of three political generations aimed to capture the quick tempo of social change in China since the mid-20$^{th}$ century. It not only treated political generations as historical productions and examined them one by one with detailed descriptions of their historical trajectories and intra-generational differences but also used political generations as tools or independent variables to account for transformations of moral views of the state and perceptions of state legitimacy. The interviews were concentrated in the Beijing area so the findings are only theoretically suggestive, not statistically representative to political generations in China. This study mainly focuses on generational effects and highlights the intra-generational differences and transformations and hopes to take the historical conceptualization of the generation seriously. Many social factors, such as rural-urban differences and provincial differences, were not included in this study. Class and gender factors were only tangentially mentioned in some examples so not explicitly analyzed. These social factors could be taken into consideration in future studies and would be helpful to portray a more nuanced and colorful picture of generations in China.

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