

Chapter Ten

The world has run wild 砸破四旧立四新 (1966-7)

I often wondered if the old culture was so bad and was counter-revolutionary, why Mao, the leader of the Cultural Revolution wrote his poems in the traditional classical forms and his handwriting was in the old traditional Chinese characters. Even the characters of “Red Guard” that he wrote on young students armbands were in the old form. Mao did not use the simplified-form that was introduced by the Chinese Communist Party in the early 1960s. The aim of the simplification was to eliminate the illiteracy in the Chinese working class. Later, Mao answered all those questions. He asked Chinese people to “make use of the foreign art forms to serve China and to use the ancient art forms to serve the present 洋为中用, 古为今用”. I tried hard to persuade myself that if the majority people in China wanted to have the Revolution, then the Revolution must be right. I hoped that it would only target at small part in the society. At beginning, I saw some brutal violence: smashing up old objects, beating and purging the “bad” people who were the class enemy of the country. I tried to persuade myself that those actions must be “good” actions. Then I thought that even if we had smashed every old object in China, and had got rid of all the class enemies, it would still be impossible to uproot China’s history and its traditional thoughts that were planted in the mind of Chinese people for thousands of years. Just because of that very reason, Chairman Mao wanted to launch a revolution like this scale, every seven or eight years, so that he could lead China towards a true communist society.

In August 1966, Mao chaired a Communist Party Central Committee Plenary Meeting¹ to set the targets and directions for the Cultural Revolution. The meeting also passed a proceeding resolution, which was known as “16 Clauses”. It clarified and listed the enemies and allies of the Revolution. The focus of the Cultural Revolution was on Class Struggle. Anyway, at the time my choice was clear: either staying with the old dead principles or going along with the Class Struggle movement. There was no middle way. I knew that, if I was not a target, then I must quickly get onto the Revolution side and there was no time to think or to argue about. Like most young people, I wanted to be on the winning side. Although the Central Committee’s document indicated that, the Cultural Revolution must be won by arguments, there was no one knew how to achieve that and no one cared either. Watching with envy at

¹ The 11th Plenum of the 8th CCPC 中国共产党第八届中央委员会第十一次全体会议

the local working class kids joining the Red Guards and taking part in this unprecedented political movement, I was desperately looking for a right place in it.

Although the Central Government urged the nation to keep the production going while the Revolution was in processing 抓革命，促生产², the productions in factories were almost halted throughout the second half of 1966 and the early part of 1967. People went to work every day, but they engaged in the “revolutionary activities” instead of doing the normal jobs. A typical day of work in an office or in a factory might start with standing in front of a Chairman Mao’s portrait to ask for the daily instructions. It was known as “morning referrals 早请示”. After that, they would study either the *Selective Works of Mao Zedong* 毛泽东选集 including the *Three Short Essays* 老三篇 or the little Red Books of Mao’s quotations 毛主席语录. People would sit in groups with a cup of green tea in hands. (I would say the teacups were jam-jars with some sort of netting material outside to prevent the heat to escape.) Sometimes they would also read out aloud the official publications of the Communist Party 两报一刊, such as *People’s Daily*, *People Liberation Army Daily* and the *Red Flag* magazine. It was often followed by discussions of local problems or writing Big Character Posters 大字报 to criticise the local or the national Five Black Elements including the capitalists. In the afternoon, everyone would take part in the Struggle Meetings 批斗会 and shouting slogans in streets. Before going home, one would stand in front of a Chairman Mao’s portrait to report one’s activities of the day. It was known as “evening report 晚汇报”.

The revolutionary activists at a work units (work place) would consist of interrogating the targeted “bad” elements, whom we called “the monsters and demons 牛鬼蛇神” (Lit ghosts with ox’s heads and spirits with snake’s bodies). They would be locked in a dimly lit room, which was known as Ox Shed 牛棚 day and night. At that time, the technical term for this type of detainment was Interrogation in Isolation 隔离审查. They would be asked to write confessions of their “capitalistic crimes” in the past. Those who refused to do so or produced unsatisfactory confessions would be taken out to the Struggle Meetings in streets. During a Struggle Meeting, a condemned one would be wearing certain type of “costumes”, which included a tall pyramid-like hat 高帽子 and with a large placard hanging from victim’s neck, on which was written his or her name upside down and the crimes that he or she had

² *Grasping the Revolution and promoting the production* that slogan was written in the “16 Clauses”, the guidance for the Cultural Revolution.

committed. Some of them would have half-shaved hair 剃阴阳头. Then these targeted people would be taken onto a street platform with their both arms bended up-backwards by two Red Guards walking behind. It was known as “taking a homemade plane 坐土飞机”. Sometimes they would be forced to kneel down, but sometimes they would be asked to stand on some narrow stools on the platform throughout the Struggle Meetings. Questions would be asked about their crimes and about their unsatisfactory confessions. Then they would be shouted at by the interrogators and the public.



There were many temporary platforms specially erected on the street corners of Shanghai for the use of Struggle Meetings and the performances of the revolutionary songs and dances that were prepared by the “Mao Zedong Thoughts Propaganda Teams” 毛泽东思想宣传队.



Many targets of the Revolution could not face the public humiliation and the physical pain that they had suffered from the Struggle Meetings and from the Interrogation in Isolation. Because of the mantle and physical pressure, some of them committed suicide by jumping off tall buildings, hanging themselves in their cells. Even after their death, public Struggle

³ Taken from website, <http://dval.blog.techweb.com.cn/archives/191.html>

Meetings could still be held to criticise their crimes of committing suicide for avoiding their convictions 畏罪自杀. A dark cloud shrouded over the sky of Shanghai, under which there were mixed feelings of silent sorrow for the loss of lives and the bust of joy for the victorious celebration.

“Death to the bourgeoisie! 资产阶级死路一条!” “Joy to the victory of proletariats! 欢庆无产阶级的伟大胜利!” Slogans were continuously shouted in streets.

There were no school for us to attend. Similar Struggle Meetings had reached schools too and many head teachers and teachers became the targets of the Revolution. Mao was against the old Chinese education system. He said publicly that the way that schools set the examination questions was like the way we were dealing with our enemies. Unexpected and strange questions were asked in tests and examinations. Mao thought that the old Chinese learning methods were too ridged and lacked imagination. Many working class children were encouraged to join the local Red Guards. They smashed up the school equipment and targeted at those teachers who were knowledgeable and well learned. Many head teachers were brought to the Struggle Meetings in the street corners too.

After joining the Red Guards, some older children in the neighbourhood went out to travel round China. It was known as “link and unite” revolutionary ideas with the Red Guards of other places 串联. In 1966-1967 the Red Guards were able to travel anywhere in China by public transport free of charge with the provision of accommodation and food along their journeys. As the actions of the Red Guards were fully supported by Chairman Mao, the great leader of China, it was expected that these Red Guards and the Revolutionary Path-breakers were fed and treated properly wherever they went.



As the Chinese railway was overcrowded, many of my older friends who joined Red Guards had to walk to Beijing to see Chairman Mao. Mao and other leaders of the Cultural Revolution such as Lin Biao 林彪, Kong Sheng 康生 and Jiang Qing 江青 would occasionally come out of Zhongnanhai 中南海 the leaders residential places to wave at the Red Guards from the Gate of Tian'anmen 天安门 and would also go round the Tian'anmen Square on the open-top jeeps. When Mao and Lin Biao came out of Tian'anmen Gate to meet the Red Guards, they were both wearing the uniform for normal rank-and-file soldiers to send out a message that they were equal to every revolutionary guards in the country and to show their solidarity in fighting against China's class enemy.

Gradually I began to understand why those local kids dared to walk into the families of "capitalist element" to demand whatever they fancied.



⁴ Red Guards from other provinces walked to Beijing

Although the Cultural Revolution was supposed to be a class war between the suppressors and the suppressed, this concept became rather ambiguous. At the time, the capitalists in China were no longer the suppressors, because they did not have the political power and they possessed nothing, not even the space that they lived in. Their properties had been confiscated by the Communist in the 1950s. On the other hand, the Chinese proletariats were no longer exploited by the capitalists like Marx had described, because the working class people were liberated. Theoretically speaking, as I was taught at school, the Chinese proletariats were the masters of China.

However, the key word for the Revolution was “Cultural” which I understood as the ideologies. The Revolution actually was a struggle between the capitalist and communist ideologies. The real targets of the Revolution later became apparent. It aimed at those Capitalist Roaders 走资本主义的当权派, who were the members of the Chinese Communist Party with the administrative power, but they followed the capitalist ideology. The ideology of the Capitalist Roaders was very similar to the Chinese leaders who reintroduced the market economy to China in the 1980s. In other words, by launching the Cultural Revolution, Mao delayed the development of the market economy in China for about twenty years. Mao was against the idea of his communist party running a capitalist country.

There were so many types of Red Guard organisations in my neighbourhood: Shanghai City Red Guard 红卫兵上海司令部, Maoist Red Guards of North-eastern District 毛泽东主义红卫兵东北地区司令部 and Red Guards of Mao Zedong Thoughts 毛泽东思想红卫兵... Every one of them claimed that they were the true revolutionary organisations in the area. Anyway, I liked the look of the armband of Red Guards of Mao Zedong Thoughts, because it was bigger than the others were.

Many violent fights broke out between different factions: with the Red Guards and the Workers Rebel Team on one side, and those who were protecting the old administrative authorities 保皇派 on the other. The Red Guards wanted to attack the local city administrative governments and the authorities of work places, with the spirit of dragging down the Emperor from his horse, even if it might scarify one's life, 舍得一身剐, 敢把皇帝拉下马”. They often had nasty clashes with the people who were loyal to the Capitalist Roaders. There were also fights between different branches of the Red Guards over the possession of some very trivial things, such as ink-roller printers, paper for printing

propaganda leaflets and office furniture. I often heard that one branch of the Red Guard office was smashed up by another. The following day some people would be beaten up by someone else. Anarchism might be the right word to describe the situation in Shanghai. In September 1966 Mao wrote Premier Zhou Enlai to instruct him to control the situation. As a result, the Chinese Central Governments issued documents reiterating the non-violence struggle 要文斗，不要武斗 and emphasised that the Cultural Revolution was a revolution of ideologies and the battles must be fought through debates. The Red Guards were reading Mao's quotations every day: "The world is yours, as well as ours, but in the final analysis is yours⁵..." "The people, only the people, is to create a driving force of history⁶..." So many of us were encouraged, and really believed that if we wanted to make Chinese history, we must participate in the Cultural Revolution.

However, human nature is always human nature. Although at that time, possessing materialistic things was political incorrect, people still wanted to own something and wanted to show the others that they had better or more things than their neighbours did. As factories stopped normal production, they started producing aluminium badges of Chairman Mao and other leaders of the Cultural Revolution. The badges were in many shapes, forms, types and sizes. Some badges were as big as the lid of a wok. Some factories were printing Mao's red books with the size as small as a pocket matchbox. There were many street corners where people could exchange and compare their collections of the badges and the little red books with the others. Collecting these items was much better than keeping cash at home. The business of making such "commodities" was really thriving.

January 1967 the revolutionary organisations including the Workers Rebel Teams and the Red Guards seized the administrative power from the Capitalist Roaders at all the levels of work places in Shanghai and in February a Temporary City Government was formed and it was called the Shanghai Commune, which was on the model of the Paris Commune in 1871. Chairman Mao supported the revolutionary action in Shanghai but he suggested that the Temporary City Government should be called Revolutionary Committees 革命委员会, which should include workers, the People's Liberation Army and the revolutionary administrators. It was known as Three-pronged 三结合.

⁵ 世界是你们的也是我们的，但是归根结底是你们的.....

⁶ 人民，只有人民才是创造历史的动力.....

However, during the chaos, my family sensed a hint of terror looming in our street. Some of the residences in the neighbourhood thought that they had the rights to move into some bigger houses that were occupied by the families with the capitalist background 资产阶级成分. Their argument was quite logical: “Why should those with the capitalist background have more living space than us, if we are the masters of China?”

A neighbour, who lived a few buildings away, moved his family into one of Jiaqi’s flats and he threw out all Jiaqi’s possessions in the street. Many people followed his example and moved into other “capitalists’ houses including the flats that belonged to Flat Head’s family.

We worried that the paper seal strips on the south-facing bedroom windows might attract someone to have the idea of snatching our home. However, it would be a rather inconvenient room for any outsider to make it as their own home. We felt that as the flat was on the first floor, it would not be as obvious targets as the other ground floor properties. We hoped that we might be spared from that wave of the room snatching actions.

Two days after Flat Head’s home was occupied, I was coming back from visiting a friend when I saw my sisters and brother playing in Granny Wang’s flat on the ground floor. Granny Wang was waving at me frantically from her veranda to ask me to go into her home immediately.

“Don’t go up!” Granny Wang whispered when I walked into her flat. “There is someone outside your front door and is waiting to get into your flat.”

“We are waiting for your parents to come back,” Mr Wu, Granny Wang’s son-in-law explained. He looked very concerned.

“No one in your family should go back tonight, otherwise they will definitely occupy your flat,” he continued.

“Your dad should go back to his work place and ask for help,” Mr Wu was angry on behalf of our family. “How can people live like that hiding away from their own homes?” Granny Wang was a little preoccupied and said nothing, but was watching from the window where she could see the entrance of the lane. Grandpa Wang was sitting at corner, reading a newspaper, and said nothing.

Granny Wang finally got held of my parents. After having a discussion, my parents decided to take the whole family to Father's work place and to stay there until the Revolutionary Committee of his work unit solved the problem for us.

The journey to Father's work unit took about over an hour by bus. Gujing, my four-year old brother was so excited about the bus ride. He was imitating the sound of bus engine by blowing the air between his lips until he was dribbling.

The factory was located in one of the poorest industrial areas in the south-west of Shanghai. The walls by the entrance of the factory was pasted with Big Character Posters 大字报 criticising the bad elements of the society and the Capitalist Roaders of the factory. As it was late in the evening, I could not read anything of them. After talking to the factory duty officer, Father took us to his office to have a rest. We were told that the recently established Revolutionary Committee of the factory would hold a meeting to discuss the solution the following day. Mrs Wu, a female colleague of Father's, took Linlin and Duoduo to her place for the night and the rest of the family spent the night in the Father's office. As we could not go back to our flat, we did not bring anything for the night, both my brother and I slept on the benches with our clothes on, but at least the room was warm, as it was heated by a coal-burning stove. My parents hardly slept that night.

The following morning instead of looking for the responsible members of the factory, Father started his work as usual. He said that he must get the workers' salary ready for the afternoon. His approach to our problem was like that, if the factory authority noticed that the whole family was staying in the factory premises, they would do something about it. However, Mother was impatient and took an active approach. She went into the office of the Revolutionary Committee to look for someone who she thought that might take the responsibility to solve the problem for us. Not until that afternoon Mother finally persuaded one of the Committee members to find a situation for us.

Late that afternoon, three members of the Worker Rebel Team came home with us on the bus. When we approached the flat, I saw a woman sitting on a stool by our front door. She stood up when she saw us.

"What are you doing here?" one of the Workers Rebel Team members asked the woman with a no-nonsense tone of voice.

“I am waiting to occupy the room that is used by this capitalist family.” She answered very firmly and followed us into the flat.

“Oh? Really? Who said that you can do so?”

“I am a working class person and I have the right to take the room from a capitalist family.”

“What capitalist family are you talking about? This flat belongs to the Revolutionary Committee of Shanghai Number Seven Sawing Machine Factory.” The Workers Rebel Team member opened up the factory official notice and showed it to the woman.

The notice read:

“This flat is the property of Shanghai Number Seven Sawing Machine Factory. Occupation of this property by any unauthorised person or persons is a criminal behaviour. The Revolutionary Committee will take decisive actions to punish such person or persons.” At the bottom of the notice it was stamped by the Revolutionary Committee of Shanghai Number Seven Sawing Machine Factory.

“If you have problem about this flat, you don’t talk to them!” he pointed at us. “You should talk to me. Is that clear?”

“But...”

“There is no ‘but’. If you have nothing else to say, I would like to advise you to go to your own home right now!”

The women went out without a word. I was so happy that I could have jumped for joy. We were so grateful to the Workers Rebel Team. We should have celebrated for winning this battle. Although I could sense the similar feeling from everybody’s expression, we all kept very calm and quiet. Yes, indeed, we had won this battle but we were still frightened and did not know what else would happen next.

The Workers Rebel Team removed the strip paper seals from the bedroom window so that people outside would not notice that the room was unoccupied. They resealed the bedroom and pasted that notice on the door, so that even if anyone intended to occupy the room again, they would see that ferocious notice.

The following day Father came home and announced that his salary was cut from 140 to 90 RMB a month. In the past with his monthly incomes of 140 RMB, it was never enough when Mother was running the household. Occasionally grandparents in Hong Kong would send us some cash. 90 RMB a month made the family situation even more desperate. Linlin was asked to take over from running the household. After leaving the money for the rent⁷, electricity, gas, water bills and the basic rationed food such as rice, sugar and cooking oil, she could only budget about 0.5 RMB for the daily food shopping to feed a family of six people. With that amount could only buy us some fresh vegetable or pickles. The standard of living in our family was affected significantly.

One day Linlin saw Father sawing something into his jacket in the room next to the kitchen. He was in tears. Linlin had never seen Father crying. He told Linlin that he had found some arsenic in the factory and he was going to take his own life, if he could not cope with the public Struggle Meetings. However, he could not bear to think that Mother would have to bring up the four children on her own.

Before the Cultural Revolution Father was classified as a “higher rank intellectual with overseas connections” 有海外关系的高级知识分子. I did not understand the exact meaning of the classification, but we had a very comfortable life style. Our standard of living was much higher than the average Chinese. Maybe because of the privilege position before the Cultural Revolution, we became the target of the Revolution and were expected to live just like the working class people in China or at an even lower standard. Anyway, why should the “class enemies” live their life more comfortably than the masters of the country? The Cultural Revolution also taught us that the social superiority was not measured by the material superiority, but by ideologies, Chairman Mao’s ideology. A decent person in the Chinese society should not pursue a comfortable life style. I realised that we had entered a world, which was just like Duoduo summarised when she was only five: “Having a desire for eating well and dressing well is a bourgeois world-outlook.”

⁷ Although grandfather bought the flat, after 1949 the state owned the property. However, we were only asked to pay a rent of 9RMB a month.