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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Blooming, Contending, and Staying Silent:
Student Activism and Campus Politics in China, 1957

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in History

by

Yidi Wu

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Jeffrey Wasserstrom, Chair
Professor Susan Morrissey
Professor Paul Pickowicz

2017

DEDICATION

To

All my interviewees, who kindly shared their time, experience and wisdom with me.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express sincere gratitude to my dissertation committee. I could not ask for a better advisor, as Professor Wasserstrom has continued to help me connect with various people in the field, and he has provided opportunities for co-authorship in several publications. Professor Pickowicz generously included me in the UC San Diego Chinese history research seminar and the joint conference at East China Normal University, Shanghai. Professor Morrissey gave me copious comments and critiques, which will help me beyond the dissertation. I believe that it is not accidental that both of us received our bachelors from Oberlin College and wrote our dissertations about students.

I would also thank several professors who have offered useful comments for chapter drafts, including Professor Joseph Esherick, Professor Emily Baum, and Professor Réne Goldman. Among friends and fellow China historians-in-training, Kyle David and Steven Pieragastini have read my dissertation in full, and I cannot appreciate more of their timely feedback. I have presented Chapter 3 and Chapter 7 in a number of conferences, and I thank my panel discussants, especially Professor Steven Smith and Professor Fabio Lanza, for their comments and the audience for their questions.

For my dissertation research and writing, I have received external fellowships from the National Academy of Education / Spencer Foundation, the American Council of Learned Society, the Association for Asian Studies China and Inner Asia Council, Harvard-Yenching library, Oberlin Graduate Alumni Association, and UC Berkeley Center for Studies in Higher Education. At UC Irvine, I have received support from Dean's Dissertation Fellowship, UC Humanities Research Institute, Humanities Commons Individual Graduate Research, Humanities Collective Individual Graduate Grant, Center for Asian Studies, and Charles Quilter Research and Travel Grant.

I would not be able to write my dissertation without the help of people who have provided sources and interview contacts. Among them, I owe tremendously to Song Yongyi, the chief editor of the Anti-Rightist Campaign Database, and Wu Yisan, manager of the 57 Association HK who gave me a list of contacts.

Finally, I thank my family and my partner for their patience and support while I finish my dissertation.

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FIELD OF STUDY

Student activism, social movement, modern Chinese history

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Blooming, Contending, and Staying Silent:
Student Activism and Campus Politics in China, 1957

By

Yidi Wu

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Irvine, 2017

Professor Jeffrey Wasserstrom, Chair

What are the continuities and changes of student activism throughout twentieth-century China? How did students carry out contentious politics during political campaigns of the Maoist era? Scholarships on Chinese student activism have concentrated on two major events: the 1919 May Fourth Movement and the 1989 Tiananmen Protests. Others have also paid attention to student protests in the Republican era, as well as the Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution. However, studies of student activism in the 1950s have been missing, a decade which was presumably dominated by Communist political campaigns, thus leaving little space for social dissent. There has been no short of research on elite politics regarding the Hundred Flowers and the Anti-Rightist Campaigns of 1956-57, though a bottom-up approach to the topic would reveal a different picture of the events.

My dissertation fills the gap by investigating the spectrum of college student participation in the political campaigns of 1957, including activists, loyalists and those who stayed silent, from Peking University, Wuhan University and Yunnan University. My sources come from declassified archival documents, digital database, documentary films, student journals, official newspapers, memoirs and oral history interviews I conducted in 2014-15 with around sixty

college students from the late 1950s. I use social movement theories to treat this episode of student activism as contentious politics, and look at student repertoire, organization and mobilization, framing technique, and political opportunity and constraint.

Overall, my dissertation argues that Chinese students in 1957 carried out and passed on similar repertoire and framing technique in comparison to other episodes of student activism, but what made it distinctive was the ambiguous political opportunity and divisions among students that consumed the brief yet intense activism. My dissertation contributes to the ongoing scholarly challenge of the 1949 divide by connecting student activism in the Republic era and the Communist reign, and sheds light on grassroots contentious politics in the Maoist era. As 2017 commemorates the sixtieth anniversary of the Hundred Flowers and the Anti-Rightist Campaigns, student activism of 1957 deserves a bright spot as it has been forgotten for too long.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: STUDENT ACTIVISM IN 1957'S CHINA

Peking University (Beida) students made posters asserting that “it is the right time” to move. They openly criticized the privilege of Party cadres, and started a journal called *Public Square*. Many observers would think that these activities happened in 1989, the year of the Tiananmen Protests. In fact, these events occurred in 1957 during the Rectification Campaign, which came between Chairman Mao’s famous speech to “let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend” and the subsequent Anti-Rightist Movement which stifled dissent. For the first time since the foundation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), 1957 saw student activists claim that they were carrying forward the May Fourth spirit of 1919, hold a movement of their own, and pay a huge price for doing so.

Drawing upon archival sources from both central and local levels, digital database of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, oral histories, student memoirs and documentary footages, my research investigates student activism and campus politics in 1957’s China. I situate China in the Communist world history after Khrushchev’s secret speech of 1956; I use social movement theories to examine political opportunity, repertoire, framing and organization of this episode of student activism; and I pay attention to variations across campuses and among students. More broadly, I consider 1957 as a crucial year of student activism in twentieth-century China by comparing and contrasting with the May Fourth Movement of 1919, the Red Guards Movement in the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1968, and the Tian’anmen Protests of 1989.

Literature Review on 1957

Studies in English on the Hundred Flowers and the Anti-Rightist Campaigns, and especially student involvement, have been thin in comparison to that of the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, many seminal works on these topics were written decades ago. One of the most important scholars on the topic is Roderick MacFarquhar, who has written *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals* (1960) and a trilogy of *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, in which the first volume was entitled *Contradictions among the People, 1956-57* (1974). The former is selected translations of newspaper articles and comments from various social groups, including university teachers and students, along with brief yet insightful introductions of each group. The latter is a meticulous study of elite politics, which exemplifies that divisions between Mao and his planned successor Liu Shaoqi emerged as early as the late 1950s.

Another early translation is Dennis Doolin's *Communist China: The Politics of Student Opposition* (1964), which is a short pamphlet with twelve articles all written by college students. It includes speeches by Lin Xiling, the most vocal and critical female student activist of the time. The pamphlet was originally to be used "as reference material for analysis and criticism," but it was sneaked out of the mainland to Hong Kong, and therefore translated and dedicated to giving people like Lin a larger audience.¹

In addition to these translations, foreign exchange students to Peking University who witnessed of the events of 1957 wrote scholarly accounts reflecting the events. One is René Goldman, a Polish student who later wrote a master thesis at Columbia University in 1962,

¹ Dennis Doolin, *Communist China: The Politics of Student Opposition* (California: Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University, 1964), 21.

which was turned into two *China Quarterly* articles.² I especially appreciate his observation on the foreign students at Beida campus, and he has provided helpful feedbacks for my dissertation since we got in touch in 2014. The other is Ghanshyam Mehta, an Indian student who finished a doctoral dissertation at University of Washington in 1976.³ His journalistic account described students in various majors at Beida. The fact that both Goldman and Mehta wrote on the topic after experiencing first hand as outsiders shows the inspiration they received from their Chinese peers, yet neither had enough information about the severe punishments that happened to student critics. It only became clear after the Cultural Revolution that those students had suffered over two decades of marginalization.

Naranarayan Das, a fellow Indian scholar, also wrote a dissertation on the Anti-Rightist Campaign and later published under the same title *China's Hundred Weeds* (1979).⁴ Das provided a summary and analysis of “rightist” views, but he did not address in detail the student voices, which were even more critical. I agree with Das, however, that the Hundred Flowers Campaign was a product of Maoist populism, and the Anti-Rightist Campaign was a prelude to the radicalism of the Great Leap Forward.

A more ambitious and theoretically sounding book on the political campaigns is Frederick Teiwes's *Politics and Purges in China* (1979).⁵ Teiwes treats the 1957 events as a case study in the history of CCP's rectification campaigns. He argues that there is a persuasive-coercive continuum in each campaign, and the Anti-Rightist Campaign was “one of the Party's

² René Goldman, *The Rectification Campaign of May-June 1957 and the Student Movement at Peking University*, master thesis at Columbia University, 1962; Goldman, Peking University Today, *The China Quarterly* (no. 7, 1961); Goldman, The Rectification Campaign at Peking University: May-June 1957, *The China Quarterly* (no. 12, 1962).

³ Ghanshyam Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China: Blooming and Contending at Peking University, Spring 1957*, doctoral dissertation from University of Washington, 1976.

⁴ Naranarayan Das, *China's Hundred Weeds: A Study of the Anti-Rightist Campaign in China, 1957-58* (Calcutta: K P Bagchi & Company, 1979).

⁵ Frederick Teiwes, *Politics and Purges in China: Rectification and the Decline of Party Norms, 1950-1965* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1979).

more coercive rectification efforts.”⁶ He also briefly touches upon student unrest, including the “little Hungarian Incident” in Hanyang, which exacerbated leadership anxiety and triggered severe punishment.

A few recent works on the topic are worth noticing. A Chinese equivalent to MacFarquhar’s trilogy would be Shen Zhihua’s *Reflections and Choices* in a ten-volume *History of the People’s Republic of China*.⁷ Shen uses provincial archives and declassified Russian documents to provide an authoritative narrative of Mao’s decisions between 1956 and 1957. Shen mentions social unrests that include students, workers and peasants, and he argues, correctly in my opinion, that Mao had changed his mind before student blooming and contending, though student actions attracted Mao’s great attention, and made a big impact on his decision to fight back against “rightists” on all fronts.⁸

Another Chinese manuscript relevant here is Chung Yen-lin’s *Deng Xiaoping before the Cultural Revolution*.⁹ Chung has a chapter on Deng’s role in the Rectification and the Anti-Rightist Campaigns, in which Chung argues that Deng was crucial in leading the execution of “rightist” purges. That helps explain why Deng insisted on the correctness of the campaign after the Cultural Revolution.

Some book chapters and journal articles have also provided insights into various aspects of the 1957 events. Eddy U has two articles in *The China Journal*, one exploring the impact of the United Front in promoting elite criticism, and the other one on three perspectives on

⁶ Ibid., 292.

⁷ Shen Zhihua, *History of the People’s Republic of China*, v. 3, *Reflections and Choices: The Consciousness of the Chinese Intellectuals and the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1956-57)* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2008).

⁸ Ibid., 584.

⁹ Chung Yen-lin, *Deng Xiaoping before the Cultural Revolution: Mao’s “Vice General,” 1956-1966* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2013).

intellectuals, including students who called for the right to help define socialism.¹⁰ Elizabeth Perry and Cao Shuji shift the focus to other social groups, Shanghai worker strikes in the former case, and “rightist” peasants in rural Henan province in the latter case.¹¹ Both Sebastian Veg and Christine Vidal explore the history and memory of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, with the book *Chronicles of Jiabiangou* as a major focus for Veg, and an overview of competing narratives from the Maoist era to the present for Vidal.¹²

Before finishing the literature review, one question is worth pondering: why have the 1957 political campaigns been relatively ignored in English-language scholarship? This comes in huge contrast with continued interests among scholars who write in Chinese, such as Ding Shu, Ye Yonglie, Zhu Di, and Zhu Zheng, who treat the 1957 events as the major watershed in the Maoist era.¹³ One explanation is that historians in the West have made the social and cultural turn since the 1970s, so that political history has fallen out of fashion. In the field of modern Chinese history, there has been an increasing interest in the early PRC period of the 1950s, but very few follow the footsteps of MacFarquhar, while more scholars are attracted to the cultural, scientific, gender and everyday aspects. Thus political campaigns of 1957 do not seem trendy,

¹⁰ Eddy U, *Dangerous Privilege: The United Front and the Rectification Campaign of the Early Mao Years*, *The China Journal*, (no. 68, 2012); Eddy U, *Intellectuals and Alternative Socialist Paths in the Early Mao Years*, *The China Journal*, (no. 70, 2013).

¹¹ Elizabeth Perry, *Shanghai's Strike Wave of 1957*, *The China Quarterly*, (no. 137, 1994); Cao Shuji, *An Overt Conspiracy: Creating Rightists in Rural Henan, 1958-1958*, in Jeremy Brown and Matthew Johnson, eds., *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China's Era of High Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 77-101.

¹² Sebastian Veg, *Testimony, History and Ethics: From the Memory of Jiabiangou Prison Camp to Reappraisal of the Anti-Rightist Movement in Present-Day China*, *The China Quarterly*, 218, 2015; Christine Vidal, *The 1957-1958 Anti-Rightist Campaign in China: History and Memory (1978-2014)*, *HAL*, 2016.

¹³ Ding Shu, *Yangmou: "Fanyou" qianhou* [Open Conspiracy: The Complete Story of the Anti-Rightist Campaign] (Hong Kong: Jiushi niandai zazhishe, 1991); Ye Yonglie, *Chenzhong de 1957* [The Heavy Year of 1957] (Nanchang: Baihuazhou wenyi chubanshe, 1992); Ye Yonglie, *Fanyoupai shimo* [The Whole Story of the Anti-Rightist Campaign] (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1995); Zhu Di, *1957: Da zhuanwan zhi mi – Zhengfeng fanyou shilu* [1957: The Puzzle of the Great Turn – A True Record of the Rectification and Anti-Rightist Campaign] (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1995); Zhu Zheng, *1957 nian de xiaji: cong baijia zhengming dao liangjia zhengming* [The Summer of 1957: From Hundred Schools of Thought Contending to Two Schools Contending] (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1998).

but as a social historian, I approach this old topic with new sources from the grassroots, and emphasize the interactions between social and political arenas.

Major Arguments

My dissertation contributes to the existing scholarship in several ways. First, I consider the 1957 political campaigns as a domestic response to international crises, in particular Nikita Khrushchev's "secret speech" and the Hungarian Revolution. I compare reactions from both Mao and the students to these events, as well as interactions between the two. Second, I have the advantage and possibility to connect episodes of student activism, and seek the continuities and changes throughout twentieth-century China. Third, I probe into the spectrum of participation among students, as well as various campuses across China beyond Peking University, in order to pay attention to student activists and non-activists alike, and pluralize the political campaigns on the ground.

1. Domestic Responses to International Crises

I agree with both MacFarquhar and Shen that the international context of 1956-57 is crucial to understand domestic political campaigns. In February 1956, Soviet leader Khrushchev gave his "secret speech" on Stalin's personality cult, which triggered a series of upheavals in the Eastern Bloc, such as the "Polish October" and the Hungarian Revolution later that year. As I show in the first chapter, Mao's Hundred Flowers policy was in response to the "secret speech," as a way to pursue a Chinese way of de-Stalinization. The Rectification came in reaction to the Hungarian Revolution, in order to prevent similar incident from happening in China.

What I investigate more than previous scholarship is to compare Mao's response to that of the students. I argue that both Mao and the students were looking for a better socialist path for

China, but neither achieved what they had intended to accomplish. Although Mao was confident that the Hungarian Revolution would not be replicated in China, he adopted an open-door rectification that invited people from outside the Party to offer criticism, which in effect encouraged Hungarian-type of unrest. Meanwhile, Chinese students were by no means aspiring for revolutionary change, but their critical opinions reminded Chinese authorities of the Hungarian students, and went far beyond Mao's expectation of criticisms that resembled "gentle breeze and mild rain."

2. Continuities and Changes of Student Activism

I adopt some social movement theories to approach the student activism of 1957. These include repertoire, framing, organization and mobilization, political opportunity and constraint, and division. Repertoire includes student journals, big-character posters, speeches and debates, and accusation letters. I argue that both students and the authorities adopted the same repertoire for different purposes. Students, those from Beida in particular, framed their movement as a contemporary May Fourth Movement, which meant democracy and freedom for them, but authorities interpreted it as anti-Party. Student organizations mostly sprung up overnight, though they were loosely organized with no support from the school authorities. Mobilization efforts helped spread information across campuses, though they were not always well perceived. The ambiguity inherent in this particular opportunity foreshadowed its closure, as inspiring freedom of discussion through a top-down campaign proved paradoxical. Various interpretations of the changing political signals led to divisions among the students, some speaking critically of the Party, some defending the Party, while the rest staying silent.

To bring things in a broader perspective, I put the 1957 case in comparison with the May Fourth Movement of 1919, the Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution of 1966-68, and the

Tiananmen protests of 1989. I argue that what has continued from 1919 to 1989 are repertoire of collective actions, such as journals and big-character posters, and framing techniques, especially the claim of carrying out the May Fourth legacies. On the other hand, what has made the 1957 case different from the other years are the ambiguous political opportunity structure and divisions among the students, the latter of which was partially a consequence of the former.

3. Students across Campuses and Political Spectrum

My research draws heavily, but not exclusively, on Beida, as its students played active roles in both the 1919 and 1989 movements, and again spearheaded the campus activism of 1957. Meanwhile, I consider variations among different college campuses in and outside Beijing, especially regarding various student concerns, types of students who became active, repertoires displayed during the Rectification Campaign, and school authorities' reactions. I choose three other schools for comparison: Beijing Normal University (Beishida), Wuhan University (Wuda), and Yunnan University (Yunda), with each school bringing a unique feature of activism. At Beishida, the faculty was just as boisterous as the students during blooming and contending, as a professor's letter probing into a school Party cadre's affair inspired the whole campus. At Wuda, students raised slogans related to of human rights. Some middle school students protested on streets, which was labeled a "little Hungarian Incident." In Kunming, a hotbed of student activism on the southwest frontier during the wartime 1940s, some university students even founded their own party organization. Paying attention to campus complexities, my research pluralizes the political campaigns of 1957.

Besides cross-campus comparisons, my project also explores the spectrum of student participation. In any social movement, participating social groups are not monolithic. When talking about student movements, we naturally focus on activists – those who speak out, lead,

and risk their careers or even lives for what they believe. However, activists are almost always the numerical minority. They tend to overshadow their followers or opponents, whose views rarely are recorded. In the case of 1957, there were not only activists who made posters and gave speeches, but also those who willingly or unwillingly followed the Party line by criticizing activists, and those who avoided airing opinions by studying in the library. School authorities helped keep records of student critiques by accident, as they used these comments as examples to be punished. At the same time, narratives of those speaking against “rightists” and those who remain silent are much more difficult to trace. Thus, I supplement written documents with oral interviews of not only those critics-turned-“rightists,” but also their classmates who survived or even benefited from the campaigns. By presenting the complex relationships between students during the politically shifting context of 1957, my research pays attention to all parties involved, including activists, loyalists and those who stayed silent.

Sources and Methodology

My research greatly benefits from the *Chinese Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*, a text-searchable digitized collection of a wide range of primary sources from the period, including big-character posters written by students, personal correspondences between students at different schools, newspaper reports, and intra-Party directives by Mao. Among them, the most crucial written sources are collections of “rightist” comments, which were compiled during the Anti-Rightist Campaign as evidence of the “rightist” misbehavior. These collections have best preserved what students discussed at the time. Many problems and criticisms that students raised in 1957 are still pertinent to contemporary China, such as criticisms of one-party leadership and socialist democracy.

Also available in the *Database* is the *Internal Reference*, which are classified newsletters written by local Xinhua journalists who reported to the central authorities. Information disclosed in these letters is considered sensitive, and therefore not published in newspapers. The contrast between the *Internal Reference* in late May and early June, when there was intense coverage of student activities nationwide, and near silence on the same topic in official newspapers, is quite revealing: the central authorities were truly concerned about the students.

Oral history interviews are another key component of my sources, and I have gained more insight into the student mentality and school atmosphere that cannot be revealed by archival sources alone. Many interviewees, especially former student “rightists,” were willing to talk about their pasts and eager to be heard by younger generations and the outside world. Meanwhile, I have collected interviews with people who either aligned themselves with the Party or remained silent in 1957. These people are less willing to talk, and very few have written reflections on their actions, or inactions, during this critical moment.

No sources should be taken at face value, and this is especially true with oral histories, which are flawed with selected memories and self-serving narratives. To better use these interviews, my solution is to cross check descriptions of the same events among schoolmates, and to compare interview transcripts with previously written memoirs. The more people I interview, the more perspectives I will gather, and the messier the picture will look like, as history should be.

Chapter Summaries

Putting the 1957 episode into a broader historical perspective, Chapter 2 draws comparison and contrast between student activism in 1919, 1957, 1966, and 1989. Despite

different political circumstances, students of the May Fourth Movement have passed on their spirit of democracy and freedom to each of the following generations. During the Maoist years, students in 1957 and 1966 claimed their agency in acting contentiously during top-down political campaigns, though their endeavors were doomed because of ambiguous political opportunities that soon turned to constraints. Students in 1989 claimed themselves as descendants of 1919 without being aware of student activism in 1957, and they refused to associate themselves with the Red Guards of 1966.

Situating China in the Communist world, Chapter 3 focuses on Chinese reactions from both Mao and college students to crises in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, including Khrushchev's secret speech denouncing Stalin's personality cult and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. I argue that Mao launched the Hundred Flowers and the Rectification Campaigns in order to prevent a Hungarian-type of incident from happening in China, and students were by no means trying to challenge the authorities, even though their words and deeds resembled their Hungarian counterparts.

After providing international and domestic backgrounds of 1957, the fourth and fifth chapters zoom into student activism at Peking University, which spearheaded protests in 1919 and 1989, and was one of the first schools where students actively engaged in the blooming and contending. Chapter 4 explores the repertoires students adopted for action, including posters, journals, speeches and debates, and accusation meetings, as well as framing techniques of both students and the authorities. I argue that the repertoires and framing techniques used in 1957 exemplified the continuities of student activism from the May Fourth Movement to the Tian'anmen Protests. Chapter 5 shifts to study the nature and student perception of political opportunity and constraint, student organizations on campus and mobilization efforts across

universities, and divisions among the students. I stress that political opportunity, organization insufficiency, and divisions made the 1957 episode distinctive from other years.

Moving beyond Peking University, Chapter 6 traces student activism on other campuses in Beijing and universities nationwide, especially at Beijing Normal University, Wuhan University in central China along the Yangtze River, and Yunnan University in Southwest frontier. I pay attention to the type of students who were more active than others, various concerns that students voiced, connection and correspondence across campuses, and relations between the students and the school authorities.

Just as campus activism seemed to go beyond control, the authorities reversed the verdict by replacing the hundred flowers policy with the Anti-Rightist Campaign that cracked down previously outspoken intellectuals and students. As shocking as people felt about the change, I argue in Chapter 7 that the authorities exploited ideological divisions that had existed among students in the Rectification Campaign as discussed in chapter three, and made the divisions political by classifying everyone into leftist, centrist and rightist categories. Such classification was not based on ideology, but political loyalty to the Party.

The Prehistory of My Dissertation

“How did you get interested in this topic?” This is the question I have received the most from my interviewees. To answer that, I would always start with my high school, when I took a semester of lectures from a retired professor Chinese literature professor Qian Liqun, a scholar on Lu Xun, one of the most influential writers in twentieth-century China. It was not until I came to the US for college that I found his 2007 book *Refuse to Forget: Research Notes of the “1957 Studies,”* published by Oxford in Hong Kong. It was probably one of the first studies that focus

on college students, especially those from Peking University (Beida), in the Rectification and the Anti-Rightist Campaigns of 1957. It turned out that Qian himself was one of the students at Beida in the late 1950s. On the cover of this book, he wrote, “I hope to inspire more people, especially young scholars, to focus on the ‘1957 incident,’ so as to establish ‘1957 studies.’”¹⁴

No dissertation topic is chosen at random, at least not in my case. Qian’s words have been a call for me to carry out his words. In 2011, I finished a senior honors thesis at Oberlin College on the topic of Beida student activism in 1957.¹⁵ In 2014-15, after three years of graduate school coursework, I conducted a ten-month fieldwork in China, including both archival research and oral history interviews. This time I push the boundaries a bit further by reaching out to students outside Beida, as well as students who did not speak out critically. I also put the 1957 students in a broader framework by comparing and contrasting their words and deeds with students in other time periods. Here presents the findings after six more years investigating the topic since 2011.

¹⁴ Qian Liqun, *Jujue yiwang: “1957 nian xue” yanjiu biji* [Refuse to Forget: Study Notes on the “1957 Studies”] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2007), front cover.

¹⁵ Yidi Wu, The Beijing University Student Movement in the Hundred Flowers Campaign in 1957, *OhioLINK*, 2011, https://etd.ohiolink.edu/pg_10?0::NO:10:P10_ACCESSION_NUM:oberlin1305601833#abstract-files; In 2014, I got to know Zhongrui Yin, who wrote a senior thesis on the same topic and in the same year as I did, at Harvard University. See Zhongrui Yin, *Threat from the Campuses: Student Dissent and the Launching of the Chinese Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957*, senior thesis, Harvard University, 2011.

CHAPTER 2

1919, 1957, 1966, AND 1989: STUDENT ACTIVISM IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHINA

Before going into great details of student participation in the political campaigns of 1957, this chapter takes a step back to look at the broader picture and discuss how student activism of 1957 fits into the overall narrative of student political engagement in twentieth-century China. I focus on two major questions: What are the continuities and changes of student activism throughout the century, and what are the features of youth movements in the Maoist era? Besides 1957, three other examples for reference are the May Fourth Movement of 1919, the Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution of 1966-68, and the Tiananmen Protests of 1989. In contrast to other major periods of campus unrest, the 1957 episode has received very little scholarly attention, even though it shares important features with struggles that preceded and postdated it.

Drawing on social movement theories and past work on other Chinese protest surges, I argue that while students of 1957 employed repertoires and framing techniques inherited from past generations with modifications to fit into specific historical context, the ambiguous political opportunity of the top-down campaigns and divisions, though not factions, among students from the beginning of the movement set them apart from the other periods of activism. I pay attention to student activism in the Maoist era, especially similar patterns of campaign development and concerns over social problems, as well as different education background between 1957 students and the Red Guards. More broadly, I join other scholars in challenging the notion of an impermeable 1949 divide, and highlight the overlaps between the Republican era and that of the People's Republic through emphasizing continuities in patterns of student activism across twentieth-century China.

Chinese Student Activism in the Twentieth Century

There has been no lack of student activism in twentieth-century China. In fact, right before the turn of the century in 1895, civil examination candidates led by Kang Youwei signed a petition to the emperor, against the Treaty of Shimonoseki after China had been defeated by Japan in the first Sino-Japanese War. This Gongche Shangshu movement, which literally means “Public Vehicle Petition,” is considered the first modern political movement in China. Though both the petition and the Hundred Days’ Reform in 1898 provoked by the movement failed, many scholars turned to support reform, if not revolution.

On May 4, 1919, a younger generation of students in Beijing demonstrated against another treaty, this time the Treaty of Versailles at Paris Peace Conference after the World War I, which would transfer Germany’s control of Shandong peninsula to Japan. Students burned down the residence of a leading Chinese official and accused the corrupt warlord-dominated government of selling out China’s interests. The protest was echoed nationwide, and resulted in the resignation of pro-Japanese cabinet ministers and China’s refusal to sign the treaty. Subsequent student protests in the 1930s and 1940s shared similar patriotic tone, most famously the December 9th Movement in 1935, in which students demanded the Chinese Nationalist government to actively resist Japanese invasion of Northern China.

With the rising power of the Nationalist and the Communist parties, student activism increasingly lost its independence. This was especially the case after the Communist takeover by 1949. The Party and its subordinate Communist Youth League were in charge of organizing and controlling all political activities. Except the Hundred Flowers episode in 1957 when the political campaign accidentally contributed to freedom of speech, there had been a lack of student protest

prior to the Cultural Revolution. To be fair, the Communist Party under Mao had earned its legitimacy after decades of wars, and many students aspired to join the Party. Thus there was no incentive to challenge the authorities.

This would all change by 1966, when students were given unprecedented freedom to form Red Guard groups to attack school officials, to freely travel across the country to make alliances, and to write big-character posters. This phase of unchecked freedom led to factionalism and violence, which spiraled out of control before Mao decided to dismantle the Red Guards by sending them to the countryside in 1968. Encountering the gap between the harsh reality of rural China and the propaganda, disillusioned sent-down youths later formed the backbone of the Democracy Wall Movement of 1978-79, during which they shared ideas through wall posters and underground journals.

Student demonstrations went on and off throughout the 1980s, with notable moments of September 1985 and December 1986, and eventually culminated in the People's Movement of April to June 1989.¹⁶ On the year of the seventieth anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, students again gathered at Tian'anmen Square holding the banners "Mr. Science" and "Mr. Democracy," slogans first raised in 1918. Within a month and a half, students and people of all walks of life from Beijing and beyond came to occupy the square, had sit-in, and even hunger strike. Common grievances included inflation, political corruption and nepotism, and social inequality led by economic reform. The movement received worldwide broadcast on color TVs, and students wrote slogans in not only Chinese, but also English and Russian, the latter during the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Beijing. In the end, the protests were suppressed

¹⁶ More details of the 1985 and 1986 student demonstrations, see Stanley Rosen, "China," in Philip Altbach ed., *Student Political Activism: An International Reference Handbook* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 79-86. See also Jeffrey Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China: The View from Shanghai* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 297-308.

by violence, activists were prisoned or exiled, and demonstrations of similar kind and scale have yet to happen again.

Literature Review on Student Activism in Twentieth-Century China

Before drawing comparisons and contrasts between different periods of student activism, I should provide a review of works that have covered students in the Republican period, as well as in the Cultural Revolution and in the 1989 protests. In comparison to the thin scholarship on students in 1957, there has been an extensive amount of research done on the other topics. I am by no means making an exhaustive list of books, but mentioning a few that have inspired my way of thinking about student activism in different eras.

1. The May Fourth Movement

One of the first overview of the May Fourth Movement in English is Tse-tung Chow's *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (1960), in which Chow defines the movement as not only a political event but also an "intellectual revolution." Later scholars have challenged Chow's over-appraisal of the New Culture generated in the era, but all agreed that student protests in 1919 and introduction of Western ideas were inseparably linked. A later, yet equally influential, book on the May Fourth intellectuals is Vera Schwarcz's *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (1986). She argues that there were tensions between nationalism and enlightenment both within the movement, and eventually the pursuit of national salvation overwhelmed the need for modernization. For comparisons between 1919 and 1957, I am interested in both the repertoires and framing techniques students adopted, and the historical background that contributed to the political opportunities that enabled contentious politics.

Two more recent publications that specifically focus on Beijing University (Beida) around the May Fourth era are Timothy Weston's *Power of Position: Beijing University, Intellectuals, and Chinese Political Culture, 1898-1929* (2004) and Fabio Lanza's *Behind the Gate: Inventing Students in Beijing* (2010). Weston reminds me that the changing role of intellectuals started much earlier than the May Fourth Movement, and a conservative undertow continued despite being overshadowed by radical voices. Lanza questions students as a category, especially how students were transformed from a sociological category into a political one, and how such political category was invented during the May Fourth era. Both books provide solid background for me to make comparisons between Beida in the Republican era and the Communist reign.

2. The Republican Era

A seminal book on the post-May Fourth students in the Republican era is John Israel's *Student Nationalism in China, 1927-1937* (1966). He argues that in the decade before the second Sino-Japanese War, students became disenchanted by the Nationalist Party's policies and attracted to the Communist Party, which timely grasped the sentiment of nationalism. Ultimately the May Fourth legacy led students to follow a new, progressive and revolutionary government.¹⁷ Considering the historical context in which Israel wrote the book, he provides an answer as to how did the Communists win and the Nationalists lose even before the official start of the war. While the Communists first captivated the minds of students in the 1930s, by 1957, however, intellectuals and students started questioning and doubting the same authorities they once fell for.

Unlike others who pay attention to student involvement in political events such as the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and the December Ninth Movement of 1935, Wen-hsin Yeh's *The Alienated Academy: Culture and Politics in Republican China, 1919-1937* (1990)

¹⁷ John Israel, *Student Nationalism in China, 1927-1937* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966), 191.

emphasizes the wide range of campus cultures and student ideological stances. Her depiction of Nationalist participation of education and the education of the Three Principles of the People draws parallels with the Communist education of Marxism-Leninism. The “penetration of state power into university administration and student life” was much more thorough in the 1950s than in the 1930s.¹⁸ Just like the liberals who had detected the Nationalist Party’s “intention to indoctrinate through the campaign of participation,” students in the Rectification raised questions about the domination of Party members in school administration and suggested making politics class optional.¹⁹

Another manuscript that also discusses the participation of education is *From Student Movement to Mobilizing Students, 1919-1929* (1994) in Chinese by a Taiwanese scholar Lü Fangshang. He observes the transformation and politicization of student movement, and argues that “once a student movement becomes a political movement, the student movement gradually loses its independence, and student organizations are reduced to appendages to political parties.”²⁰ If the 1920s saw political parties starting to intervene student movements, by the 1950s, students began to reclaim their agency of promoting a bottom-up movement even though they were entrenched in a top-down political campaign.

Using the concept of political theater, Jeffrey Wasserstrom’s book *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China: The View from Shanghai* (1991) explores the continuities and changes in repertoires and scripts of student tactics, organization and mobilization, and languages of student protests. Despite the ambition to cover the whole twentieth century, as the title indicates, the book mainly focuses on the warlord era (1911-1927) and the Nationalist period (1927-1949),

¹⁸ Wen-hsin Yeh, *The Alienated Academy: Culture and Politics in Republican China, 1919-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 178.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 174.

²⁰ Lü Fangshang, *Cong xuesheng yundong dao yundong xuesheng 1919-1929* [From Student Movements to Mobilizing Students, 1919-1929] (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1994), 327.

and briefly touches on the 1980s. It leaves out the Red Guard Movement, which Wasserstrom considers as “loyalist” and not “challenging the way ... the nation was being ruled.”²¹ My research follows a similar conceptual framework while addressing specifically the Maoist era, without which the arc of twentieth-century student activism would not be complete.

One book that covers Chinese higher education in both the Republican era and the Communist era, including the 1950s and the Cultural Revolution, is Suzanne Pepper’s *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th-Century China: The Search for an Ideal Development Model* (1996). The chapters on the Soviet model’s influence on the Chinese higher education and critiques of such model in the Rectification are pertinent here. Due to limited sources of the time, Pepper’s approach is more top-down as she is interested in the mechanics of political campaigns, whereas I am more invested in student responses and bottom-up contentious politics.

3. The Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution

Instead of reviewing literature that focuses on the Cultural Revolution in general, here are a few important works that address the Red Guards and factional politics more broadly. Several early works delve into the questions of why and how the Red Guard movement factionalized, including Hong Yung Lee’s *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (1978), Stanley Rosen’s *Red Guard Factionalism and the Cultural Revolution in Guangzhou* (1982) and Jonathan Unger’s *Competition in Canton Schools, 1960-1980* (1982). Using various case studies, the three authors suggest that social-class origin was a key determinant of factionalism. Though following a similar vein, Anita Chan’s *Children of Mao: Personal Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation* (1985) interests me because she also argues that there was

²¹ Jeffrey Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China: The View from Shanghai* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 20.

a shift from institutionalized activism to unfettered activism between 1966 and 1968.²² One can find a similar mechanism in 1957, when students were unsatisfied with speaking in organized meetings as part of the campaign script, and moved on to other more spontaneous ways of expression, such as big-character posters and journal publications.

One scholar who remains wary of overgeneralization of the cause of factional struggle is Andrew Walder. His late book *Fractured Rebellion: The Beijing Red Guard Movement* (2009) draws a more complicated picture and argues that, “individual decisions ... are not the product of prior socialization or social ties but are actively shaped by political encounters.”²³ Though students in 1957 were not as fractured as in 1966, divisions between activists and loyalists existed, and there was no single divider, be it class or Party membership.

A more recent work, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis* (2014) by Yiching Wu brings Beijing in comparison with Shanghai and Changsha. In each case, Wu seeks to understand how local actors interpreted the central pronouncements. He also challenges the 1978 divide, a boundary he pushes from 1976 to 1978, between the Cultural Revolution and post-socialism reform, as he argues that the Party bureaucratic power over society has continued, not reversed. Similar to Wu’s methodology and argument, I also choose three case studies from 1957, and illustrate the continuities of student activism before, during and after the Mao years through the lens of repertoires and framing techniques.

The most recent book on the topic is Guobin Yang’s *The Red Guard Generation and Political Activism in China*, published at the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 2016. Yang details the transformation of the sent-down youths, who were former

²² Anita Chan, *Children of Mao: Personal Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 125.

²³ Andrew Walder, *Fractured Rebellion: The Beijing Red Guard Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 13.

Red Guards, and argues that such experience laid the foundation of future activism, including the Democracy Wall movement of late 1970s and protests in 1989. Children of the Communist Revolution became its own critics and rebels, which was the case in 1957 as well as in the late Cultural Revolution. I find similar transformations among the “rightists,” some of whom have become more critical of the authorities and turned themselves into dissidents after decades working in factories and the countryside.

4. The People’s Movement in 1989

Activists, journalists and social scientists have written numerous studies of the 1989’s student protests in Beijing and beyond, but historians tend to think that it is still too soon to fully grasp the event of the recent past. Two notable exceptions written by historians are Timothy Brook’s *Quelling the People: The Military Suppression of the Beijing Democracy Movement* (1992) and Rowena He’s *Tiananmen Exiles: Voices of the Democracy Movement in China* (2014). Focusing on the military actions, the former reconstructs day-to-day events leading up to the crackdown as well as the night of the massacre, in order to “chronicle and evaluate the use of violence against civilians.”²⁴ The latter combines autobiography based on He’s own experience in Guangzhou and oral history interviews with key figures in Beijing and Guangzhou.

Besides works done by historians, social scientists have used various theoretical models to explain the achievement and failure of the 1989 protests. On the sanguine side, Craig Calhoun’s *Neither Gods Nor Emperors: Students and the Struggle for Democracy in China* (1994) explores the possibilities and open-endedness students created during the movement through organization building and identity formation. On the pessimistic side, both Teresa Wright’s *The Perils of Protest: State Repression and Student Activism in China and Taiwan*

²⁴ Timothy Brook, *Quelling the People: The Military Suppression of the Beijing Democracy Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), xiii.

(2001) and Dingxin Zhao's *The Power of Tian'anmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Movement* (2001) address the inevitable failure of the 1989 movement. Comparing Beijing students in 1989 and Taiwan students in 1990, Wright concludes that the key factor that contributes to the opposing outcomes is the political opportunity structure, in which more oppressive political environment makes reform-oriented protest nearly impossible. Instead of the political opportunity approach, Zhao uses state-society relation model by looking at the nature of the state, the nature of society, and the link between the state and society. He emphasizes "how social structures patterned people's activities" and how these activities "made the final head-on conflict between the people and the state increasingly inevitable."²⁵ As a historian, I give agency to students by emphasizing the student perception of political opportunity, and I present contingency of the historical moment of 1957 by showing voices from not only critics, but also loyalists and students in between.

Scholars have also made temporal and spatial comparisons between Tian'anmen protests in 1989 and events in other time periods or other cities. Two articles address comparisons of the Red Guards and 1989 protesters are John Israel's "Reflections on 'Reflections on the Modern Chinese Student Movement'" in *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China: Learning from 1989* (1992), and Craig Calhoun and Jeffrey Wasserstrom's "Legacies of Radicalism: China's Cultural Revolution and the Democracy Movement of 1989." Both pieces point to important parallels and major differences of the two episodes of student activism, such as state-society relation in the former, and repertoires of collective action in the latter. I am adding the 1957 events into the comparative framework and see if these continuities and changes hold water.

²⁵ Dingxin Zhao, *The Power of Tian'anmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 350.

An overwhelming number of sources and studies on 1989 tend to concentrate on protests in Beijing, whereas events that took place concurrently across China were overshadowed and barely recorded. Two important contributions to fill the knowledge gap are an edited volume *The Pro-Democracy Protests in China: Reports from the Provinces* (1991) and journalist Louisa Lim's *The People's Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited* (2014). The former covers Manchuria, the interior cities like Xi'an and Chongqing, South China Coast of Fujian, and the Yangtze delta of Hangzhou and Shanghai. The latter includes a discussion of the massacre in Chengdu. For the 1957 study, I go beyond the case of Beijing University, and reach out to students in Wuhan and Kunming.

Continuities

When looking through various episodes of student activism in twentieth-century China, historical context aside, one can find continuities in at least two aspects: contentious repertoire, or the medium students chose to adopt from historical precedents, and framing technique, or the ways students identify themselves and their actions. This section goes into details of both, with attention to journal publications and wall posters as consistent repertoire and the May Fourth legacy as a recurring framing technique.

1. Contentious Repertoire

Repertoires of collective action have developed and passed on over generations of activists, and thus it is not difficult to find consistent and recurring tactics and symbols adopted at different time periods. One of the repertoires that students in twentieth-century China were familiar with was journal publication independent to state control, which served as an important media to introduce and share new ideas. The most popular journal in the May Fourth era was

New Youth, founded by Chen Duxiu in 1915. It was critical in initiating the New Culture Movement and promoting Marxism, among other Western ideas, to Chinese intellectuals. Chief editors of *New Youth* were faculty of Beida, as Chen moved from Shanghai to Beijing in 1917 and became chair of the Chinese literature department. Inspired by their professors, students at Beida founded their own journal, entitled *New Tide*, in January 1919. Articles of the journal included critiques of traditional Chinese values and translation of Western knowledge. Editors of this student journal, such as Fu Sinian (known as Fu Ssu-nien) and Luo Jialun, were also student leaders in the May Fourth Movement.

By 1957, the Communist Party had long squeezed out the space of independent press, and all publications had to be approved and sponsored by the authorities. Given the opportunity of airing criticism, *Public Square* at Beida made an attempt to revive the recent tradition of independent journals, though it encountered tremendous difficulties (see Chapter 4). Without school funding, the editors solicited donations from students and faculty. Workers at the press refused to print the journal, as they had probably received orders from the school. Students had to mimeograph 600 copies by themselves, only to be confiscated and burned by the school soon after they distributed on campus. Nevertheless, contents of *Public Square*, which were selected essays from big-character posters, were accumulated and published by schools in the Anti-Rightist Campaign as examples of “rightist poisonous weeds” to be denounced. Ironically, through demonstrating what constituted unorthodoxy, the authorities helped preserve the counter-discourse by accident. These comments have become the major sources of my dissertation.

Control over publications began to loosen in the 1970s, and underground journals played a major role in the Democracy Wall Movement. In November 1978, the first of its kind, a

publication entitled *Enlightenment* appeared in an unlikely place: Guiyang, the capital of Guizhou province in Southwest China. It was reprinted in Beijing, where many journals followed its footsteps, including *April Fifth Forum*, *Today* and *Beijing Spring*. Many editors of these journals had been sent-down youths who came back to cities and entered universities through the college entrance exam, and later they became actively involved in the 1989 student protests. For example, the students who were backbones of the journal *Beijing Spring* were labeled “black hands” in 1989 and therefore imprisoned.²⁶

Another repertoire that had become increasingly popular during the Maoist era was the big-character posters. It was not necessarily a novel form of expression, though political campaigns promoted such repertoire, which served the function of spreading both propaganda and dissent. This was yet another unintended consequence as far as the state was concerned. When talking about the benefits of spreading big-character posters to the countryside at a Chengdu conference in 1958, Mao claimed that such posters had been in existence since the Spring and Autumn period (771-476 BC), when individuals made posters as announcements. The wall posters did not always have political connotations, and they became more common when literacy rates rose in the modern era. In the Republican era, pasting up wall posters became an activity as part of the youth movement patterns, along with drafting telegrams of complaint and holding mass meetings.²⁷

Despite previous uses, the blooming of big-character posters in the Rectification of 1957 was somewhat unprecedented (see Chapter 4). Unsatisfied with speaking out during organized meetings, students found wall posters as a medium of free expression, which allowed them to write anything they had in mind without being censored. It was the first time that posters became

²⁶ See George Black and Robin Munro, *Black Hands of Beijing: Lives of Defiance in China's Democracy Movement* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1993).

²⁷ Jeffrey Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China*, 86.

part of the campaign repertoire. School authorities hesitated whether to support such move, because it was not part of the agenda. Within a month these posters became evidence of “rightist” comments. During the Anti-Rightist Campaign, however, the authorities legitimized big-character posters in order to write denouncement of “rightists.”

Full endorsement of big-character posters came in late 1957, when Mao praised it, along with big blooming, big contending, and big debate, as “the most revolutionary, lively, and democratic form of mass struggle.”²⁸ It was widely used in the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962). The peak of big-character posters as a campaign repertoire was probably 1966 at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, when a Beida faculty’s poster was published in the *People’s Daily* thanks to Mao. Soon after that, Mao wrote his own poster entitled “Bombarding the Headquarters – My First Big-Character Poster,” which hinted at criticism of Liu Shaoqi, the number two in China after Mao. Following Mao’s lead, the Red Guards wrote posters for denunciation of school authorities and other factions, and less so for serious debates and satirical entertainment.

The kind of provocative posters seen in 1957 would only sprout again in later years of the Cultural Revolution and the Democracy Wall Movement of 1978-79. One example was the 1974 poster “On Socialist Democracy and Legislation” in Guangzhou, written by Li Yizhe, a penname of two students and a factory worker. Similar to what students had to say in 1957, this poster raised the issue of privilege among Party members, which had become more severe in the 1970s. Another famous poster was Wei Jingsheng’s “The Fifth Modernization” in late 1978 on the Democracy Wall in Beijing. Wei considered democracy on par with the four modernization goals that Deng Xiaoping proposed, and such call for democracy has been consistent since 1919.

²⁸ Mao Zedong, Zai zhonggong bajie sanzong quanhui shang de jianghua tigang [Talking points at the third plenary session of the eighth CCP Central Committee], October 9, 1957, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Scripts of Mao Zedong after the founding of the nation] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1987), v. 6, 592.

Starting in 1957 and popularized in the Cultural Revolution, the authorities coined the term “Four Big,” which included big blooming, big contending, big debate, and big-character poster. The “Four Big” was even written into the 1975 and 1978 state constitutions, as basic rights citizens should have, but by 1980 it was scraped off the state constitution. People learned through campaigns that the state support for freedom of speech would only go so far, and such freedom did not extend to criticizing top leaders or the Party system.

2. Framing Technique

Ever since 1919, generations of student activists looked up to their May Fourth predecessors as models, and framed themselves as inheritors of the May Fourth spirit. This was especially the case in 1957, as well as in 1989, as students in both times voiced critical opinions of the authorities. It was not simply a re-enactment of the May Fourth Movement, as students have continued to modify the script to fit with specific historical context. On the other hand, the May Fourth Movement has been lauded and commemorated by the Communist authorities, which consider the May Fourth as an event that contributed to its founding in 1921. Besides annual celebration, the authorities have been controlling the meaning and interpretation of the movement, and discredited those who claimed to carry out the May Fourth spirit as reactionaries.

During the Rectification Campaign of 1957, Beida student activists were the most conscious in identifying their actions with those of 1919 (as detailed in Chapter 4), whereas in other schools the May Fourth reference was rarely mentioned. At Beida, one of the earliest and most provocative posters was the poem “The Time Has Come,” partly because its last sentence referred to the May Fourth as a source of inspiration for action. It rang a bell among students at Beida, as they viewed the May Fourth tradition as democracy and freedom, both under challenge after the Communist takeover. Even though student critics in 1957 were not challenging the state

as they did in 1919, the authorities were much more nervous about such framing that put the Communist Party in parallel with the warlords who sold out China's interests. On the other hand, in the Anti-Rightist Campaign, a public letter signed by more than 6,700 Beida students reinterpreted the May Fourth tradition as "being loyal to the Communist Party and to socialism," and attacked those who took advantage of the May Fourth banner to oppose the Party and socialism as traitors of the May Fourth spirit.²⁹ This exemplified that many students were also complicit in endorsing the authorities' re-interpretation of the May Fourth Movement.

The clash between students and the authorities over the interpretation of the May Fourth legacy happened again in 1989, the year of the seventieth anniversary of 1919. Among the slogans that reappeared in Tiananmen Square were those from the May Fourth era, including "Mr. Science" and "Mr. Democracy." If intellectuals used to believe that Marxism was both scientific and democratic, now they viewed the CCP failing to live up to Marxist standard.³⁰ The most symbolic move demonstrators did was holding a rally at Tiananmen Square on May 4, 1989, the same place where original protesters had gathered, and where official commemorations were usually held. The message could not be clearer, as written on a handbill by graduate students at Beijing Normal University:

We hope you [government leaders] will act out of concern for the interests of the whole country, and recognize this pure patriotic student movement as the successor to the May Fourth Movement of seventy years ago.³¹

Nevertheless, the authorities associated students in 1989 more with the Red Guards of the Cultural Revolution, which brought chaos and anarchy to the Communist authorities, than with patriotic May Fourth students against the warlords.³²

²⁹ A letter to students of higher education nationwide, *People's Daily*, June 26, 1957.

³⁰ John Israel, Reflections on "Reflections on the Modern Chinese Student Movement," Jeffrey Wasserstrom and Elizabeth Perry, eds., *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China: Learning from 1989* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 105.

³¹ Han Minzhu ed., *Cries for Democracy: Writings and Speeches from the Chinese Democracy Movement of 1989* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 113-14.

Changes

As much as students learn from past generations and pass on certain repertoire and framing technique when it comes to protests, it would only be wise to adapt and improvise at each specific historical conjuncture. The following pages trace some of the most prominent changes in student activism across the twentieth century, including political opportunity structure, state-society relation, and divisions among the students. Besides the three, John Israel's observation of an increasing scale of student participation, as well as "a quickening in communications and a broadening arena of impact" stays true, when factoring the 1957 episode in the trend from 1919 to the Red Guards and 1989.³³

1. Political Opportunity Structure

In social movement theories, political opportunity structure, or political context, of a given society at a given time is critical to the success or failure of any social movement. I will follow political scientist Teresa Wright in specifying the concept in three aspects: "the relative openness or closeness of political institutions to opposition, the state's capacity for and propensity toward repression, and the relation of the media to the state and political parties."³⁴

Throughout the twentieth century, the Chinese state has become increasingly powerful, thus leaving less space for political opposition, and leaning more toward repression.

In comparison to post-1949 student activism, the May Fourth Movement was the only one that had an undertone of nationalism and anti-imperialism. Students were frustrated with not only foreign powers that occupied part of China, but also regional warlords that were too feeble

³² Geremie Barme and Linda Jaivin, eds., *New Ghosts, Old Dreams: Chinese Rebel Voices* (New York: Random House, 1992), 66.

³³ Israel, *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China*, 104.

³⁴ Teresa Wright, *The Perils of Protest: State Repression and Student Activism in China and Taiwan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 6.

to fight back. Ironically, because of the weak state, it was porous for opposition, had less capacity for repression, as well as less control of the media. All these conditions worked in favor of student protestors, making the May Fourth Movement a success, as pro-Japan cabinet ministers resigned and China did not sign the Versailles Treaty.

After the Communist takeover, the country was unified under one power. People no longer had to worry about foreign invasions, even though anti-imperialism was incorporated into Communist propaganda as a cautionary tale. The state also created its envisioned enemies for people to struggle against, from landlords and bourgeoisie to revisionists and bad elements. In this context, the 1956-57 Hundred Flowers and Rectification Campaigns were odd fits: a brief window of political liberalization and freedom of speech, with seemingly no repercussion. Paradoxically, a political opportunity for dissent was constructed in a top-down campaign. Some students took advantage and attempted to transform it into a democracy movement. In retrospect, it was fearless and idealistic to say the least. Once the Rectification morphed into the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the Communist authorities seemed to get back on the track of repression.

In 1957, some democratic-party-controlled newspapers could still make a different voice from other official media outlet, but it was no longer the case by 1966. Mao again launched a mass campaign to fight against bureaucratism, but this time he specifically called upon the youth, who were transformed into the Red Guards. Though activism of Red Guards was overall loyalist, it did create an atmosphere of anarchy for a while, and the anger against local cadres sometimes spilled over to top leaders or the Party system. Mao was happy to see the Red Guards rebel against their local leaders, but when the Red Guards rose to become part of the power, Mao did not hesitate to stop the movement and relocate them to the countryside.

In the post-Mao era, economic and political reforms seemed to gain momentum: woes from previous political campaigns were to be healed, if not covered; market economy was on the rise to replace planned economy; political reform was on the minds of some top leaders. As the case with the Soviet Union, the state is prone to protests not when it is under totalitarian control, but when it attempts to reform. That was what happened in 1989, and students shook the world by staging demonstrations and occupying the Tiananmen Square for over a month. Just as people were holding high hope for a successful democracy movement, nobody had expected the upcoming state brutality. The crackdown in 1989 best exemplified the continuity of an authoritarian state, which dared to use violence against its own people.

2. State-Society Relation

The state-society relation here specifically refers to the relation between students and the authorities, both local and central. How did the state treat student critics, and what did students think of the authorities? The confrontation and antagonism between the two have ameliorated over the years, but students did not seem to benefit from a better relation with the authorities.

The May Fourth Movement, along with many other protests in the Republican era, was anti-government at its core. Students targeted directly at government officials, including burning down their residence, and shouting slogans such as “Struggle for the sovereignty externally, and get rid of national traitors domestically.” Some students were arrested for their acts, but the government soon released them under pressure. In comparison to the other episodes of student activism, the 1919 event was one of the few that had achieved its goals.

After the Communist Party gained its legitimacy by 1949, students no longer “attack strong central governments except as a last resort” as Israel reminds.³⁵ In fact, between 1949 and 1976 students did not even mobilize as a group unless under Mao’s mass campaigns. In the 1957

³⁵ Israel, *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China*, 103.

Rectification, student posters and speeches had little anti-socialist or anti-Party content. As a Polish exchange student to Beida, René Goldman concludes, “Almost none had advocated the overthrow of the Communist Party and a change of regime.”³⁶ Instead, what was revealed through student comments were more about anti-bureaucratic sentiment and tensions between students and local cadres. I agree with Ghanshyam Mehta, an Indian exchange student to Beida,

On the whole, they displayed themselves as reformists. They did not negate and reject the achievements of the regime. Their protest call was for serious reexamination. In general it was not a call for rejection and negation of everything since 1949.³⁷

Unfortunately, both students and Mao misunderstood each other: Mao took students’ and intellectuals’ critiques as a challenge of his and the Party’s authority, whereas students believed that the given freedom of speech would not have consequences.

During the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards were told to rebel against their local superiors, or literally every Party cadre but Mao, who gave them the order. As described by Anita Chan, “In this rebellion against the authority of teachers, they genuinely believed they were acting in support of Mao.”³⁸ The Red Guards were probably the only group that did not speak critically of the Party or Mao in comparison to students in 1957 or 1989, but Mao eventually realized that the collapse of bureaucratic system and the rise of anarchy were not in his favor. Before the Red Guards could become the new bureaucrats, Mao decided to get rid of them by sending them away from the power center, in the name of “learning from peasants and being educated in rural poverty.”

By 1989, people were frustrated with some of the same problems from past years, such as social inequality and Party privilege, besides inflation. What was not on most people’s minds

³⁶ René Goldman, “The Rectification Campaign at Peking University,” *China Quarterly*, 152.

³⁷ Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China: Blooming and Contending at Peking University, Spring 1957*, 423.

³⁸ Anita Chan, *Children of Mao*, 127.

was overthrowing the Party or calling for revolution. In fact, the relation between students and the government could not be better thanks to some pro-reform Party leaders. Students simply would not be able to occupy Tiananmen Square for over a month in either the Maoist era or after 1989, and having a televised conversation between student representatives and government officials was a testament to their relationship. The final suppression of protests in Beijing and elsewhere came not necessarily because students had asked too much, but because the authoritarian nature of the state, which could not tolerate any challenge, no matter how mild.

3. Divisions among the students

While studying students as a social group, I argue that this group is by no means monolithic at any given time. Students are naturally split on the ideological and political spectrum, and activists are always the minorities within the group. Though difference and division exist as part of the group nature, they come in various scales at the moment of grassroots activism, when it tends to amplify pre-existing or hidden divides. Throughout the twentieth century, divisions among the students became most severe in the Maoist era, partly due to conflicting and constantly changing political orders from above.

The May Fourth Movement was probably one of the most unified, though smallest in scale, student protests, when 3,000 students gathered at Tiananmen on May 4, 1919.³⁹ Nevertheless, there were tensions between studying in classroom and protesting on streets. Before and after the movement, Beida's principal Cai Yuanpei sent mixed signals to students, emphasizing the primary responsibility of academic study on the one hand, and showing concern for the nation and taking a leadership role in society on the other. As Timothy Cheek describes,

³⁹ Israel, *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China*, 104.

“The May Fourth Movement demonstrated to [Cai] that they were in fact more difficult to balance than he had realized.”⁴⁰

In the Rectification of 1957, under Mao’s invitation, some students spoke out critically of the Party, and some were trying to defend the Party, while the largest number of students took a “wait and see” approach and stayed silent. Everyone made a choice based on their own interpretations of Mao’s policy, or under influence by their peers’ action or inaction. For a short while, no choice was considered wrong until the Anti-Rightist Campaign, when the authorities politicized people’s previous performance by classifying everyone into “leftist,” “centrist” and “rightist” categories (see Chapter 7). Various reactions to Mao’s policy were reflections of the difference between pro-reform and pro-status quo. They were by no means divisions of pro-Party and anti-Party, but they were labeled as such, and these labels had lifelong consequences.

The Red Guards movement might be the most divided and chaotic grassroots activism in comparison to the other years. Sociologists who study the Cultural Revolution have been trying to explain how and why Red Guards were so fractured among themselves, despite that they all claimed to support Mao. I agree with Andrew Walder that ambiguous politics contributed to Red Guards factions:

Student factions responded to what they perceived as political opportunities as revealed by the mass media and Maoist officials at crucial points in the evolution of the movement. Throughout the two years of the movement these signals were frequently ambiguous and contradictory, and at key points they were reversed without warning. These ambiguous and shifting signals exacerbated divisions among students and deepened their mutual antagonisms.⁴¹

Student protests in 1989 followed more of the May Fourth pattern than the 1957 or the Red Guards pattern, as it was not provoked by political campaigns, and students were more

⁴⁰ Timothy Weston, *The Power of Position: Beijing University, Intellectuals, and Chinese Political Culture, 1898-1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 181.

⁴¹ Walder, *Fractured Rebellion*, 14.

unified. One could not find another student group defending the Party or speaking against the protest; those who disagreed simply left the square. But student leaders at Tiananmen Square had disagreements among themselves, especially when it came to whether they should use hunger strike as a tactic to solicit social empathy and immediate government response, and how long should they occupy the square before announcing the movement a success.

Student Activism in the Maoist Era

I will end this chapter with some more observations of student activism in the Maoist era, especially the 1957 student participation in the Rectification and the Red Guards Movement of 1966-68. Previous scholarship has tended to jump over this period for a couple reasons: there has been a lack of primary sources on students in 1957 until recent years, and the Red Guards Movement has been considered a loyalist event, not anti-authoritarian one. I have yet to see any work that links these two events, so here I draw some similarities and differences between them.

The development of both followed a similar political campaign cycle: Mao called for mass campaigns to fight against bureaucracy, and students responded with wholehearted enthusiasm. When such passion spiraled out of control, Mao reversed the order and punished those who stood out. The moment of activism took place when things went off campaign script. Students had not planned the movement, nor did the authorities foresee what was coming. Even though students were not necessarily staging anti-government protests, the fact that the campaigns were derailed was horrifying enough for the state to call a halt.

Despite a more liberal and a more conservative outlook, the 1957 students and the Red Guards shared similar concerns, especially

In the realm of frustrated upward mobility for cadres, discontent over increasing social stratification and privilege, and contradictions between widely propagated

doctrinal principals of social organization and the limitations of actual needs and resources.⁴²

Unfortunately, these concerns only became more severe as the years move from 1957 up to the present. The 1957 students were sensitive enough to notice problems with the young republic that had been founded less than a decade ago, but their warnings alarmed the authorities, which did not solve the problems but punish the questioners. The Red Guards and later sent-down youths went through a political roller coaster, and personally experienced social stratification and contradictions between propaganda and reality. Both generations contributed to Mao's ambition, which was to blow up the bureaucrats, yet both were consumed by the political campaigns they got involved.

Differences between the two lie in the generation gap and education background. As Mehta describes, the 1957 college students "were a curious mixture of the fast vanishing breed of young people" who went through the 1949 transition.⁴³ Thus they had Western-oriented primary and secondary school education, many of which were English-speaking missionary schools, before entering Sovietized universities that required Russian language courses and trained technocrats. While in college, though politics class was not optional, they had access to foreign language newspapers and books. They dared to question the authorities, including Marxism, Mao and the Party.

The Red Guards generation grew up in a far more restricted Communist world. They were still in kindergartens, elementary and middle schools by 1957, thus they were too young to participate or understand politics. After the Anti-Rightist Campaign, libraries and bookstores nationwide were much more censored, though youths from cadre families could still have access

⁴² James Townsend, "Intraparty Conflict in China: Disintegration in an Established One-Party System" in Samuel Huntington and Clement Moore eds., *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society, The Dynamics of Established One-Party System* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 305.

⁴³ Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China*, 427.

to classified materials unavailable to the public. Russian language was no longer popular after the Sino-Soviet split, and the universities were put on hold during the Cultural Revolution.

Both the 1957 students and the Red Guards were marginalized as a consequence of respective campaigns. Many suffered through hard labors in the countryside for a decade or two, and they did not make it back to the cities until after Mao's death in 1976. When the state started to re-examine what went so wrong with Mao's political campaigns, it came to some of the same conclusions as students had pointed out in 1957, a topic I will turn to in the last chapter. Before that, with the big picture of the twentieth-century Chinese student activism in mind, I will delve into the nuts and bolts of the 1957 episode.

CHAPTER 3

FROM MOSCOW TO BEIJING: CHINESE STUDENTS LEARN FROM CRISES IN THE SOVIET BLOC

After the recent incidents in Poland and Hungary, the *People's Daily* has tried by all means to avoid reporting the negative side, and instead has covered how people are supporting the government. [Chinese] people have had to read between lines, and guess what actually happened.⁴⁴

Hu Bowei, Opinions and Questions to the *People's Daily*, November 1956

Hu Bowei, a fourth year meteorology student at Beijing University (Beida), wrote to the *People's Daily* after the Polish October and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. He criticized this Party newspaper's censorship of international events and its selective reporting on these incidents. The authorities first encouraged such critiques in the Hundred Flowers Campaign. The bulletin *Internal Reference* (*Neibu cankao*), which consisted of confidential reports compiled by Xinhua News Agency twice daily and circulated among the Party's top leadership only, confirmed Hu's opinions as important. Hu was soon invited to write for *China Youth Daily*, operated by the Communist Youth League.⁴⁵ Intellectuals did not speak out in large quantity and dimension until May of 1957 during the Rectification Campaign, when Democratic Party members, college professors and students made similar, if not more critical, comments not only on the freedom of press, but on the Party leadership and the socialist system. Universities such as Beida, where Hu was studying, were particularly boisterous, and some students even claimed that they were carrying forward the May Fourth spirit of 1919. These people would pay a huge price for speaking out. In June, their comments and speeches became evidence of their crimes, making them liable to punishment as "bourgeois rightists." And Hu was also labeled as such.

⁴⁴ Hu Bowei, Opinions and Questions to The People's Daily, *Internal Reference*, November 10, 1956.

⁴⁵ Hu Bowei, *Qingchu Beida* [Youth. Beijing University] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2006), 264.

Hu's personal roller coaster was a result of the changing political atmosphere of the time. In May 1956, Mao officially announced the Hundred Flowers policy: to encourage academic debates in the humanities and sciences and to approach the Soviet model more critically. The intellectuals' initial response was ambivalent: they welcomed the freedom, but remained skeptical of the policy's sincerity and sustainability. To push the policy further, at the end of 1956 Mao raised the idea of a rectification campaign, this time inviting people outside the Party to offer criticism. The *People's Daily* published an official call on May 1, 1957. Only then did students join other intellectuals in airing their grievances, which probably took Mao by surprise. After barely a month, on June 8, an editorial entitled "What Is This For?" appeared in the Party newspaper. It signified the beginning of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, in which all previously outspoken participants were labeled "rightists" and hence politically suspect. As the political wind shifted from liberalization to suppression in 1957, critical voices like Hu's would not resurface until after the Cultural Revolution (1966-76).

These domestic political changes, as I show in this chapter, were closely connected with the international context. In February 1956, at the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's Twentieth Congress, Khrushchev gave his "secret speech" on Stalin's personality cult. This speech triggered a series of upheavals in the Eastern Bloc, including the "Polish October" and the Hungarian Revolution, later that year. Both historian Roderick MacFarquhar and cold war scholar Shen Zhihua have detailed how these crises in the Communist camp affected domestic politics in China, and how Chinese leaders responded through political campaigns.⁴⁶ But they have not paid much attention to reactions from below, and from university students in particular.

⁴⁶ Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals* (New York: Praeger, 1960), and *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution I. Contradictions among the People 1956-1957* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974); Shen Zhihua, *Sikao yu xuanze: cong zhishifenzi huiyi dao fanyoupai yundong (1956-1957)* [Reflection and Choices: The Consciousness of the Chinese Intellectuals to the Anti-Rightist Campaign, 1956-1957] (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2008).

How did students get access to the information about the “secret speech” and the Hungarian Revolution through and beyond official newspapers, and how did they perceive these events and express their reflections during the Rectification Campaign of 1957? Student reactions mattered because they potentially exacerbated Mao’s domestic concerns, and contributed to the changing dynamics of political campaigns.

By situating the China of 1957 in the trans-national history of the Communist world, this chapter reassesses the responses of Mao and, more importantly, college students to the political crises in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. I argue that despite opposing views on the “secret speech” and the Hungarian Revolution, both Mao and the students were looking for a better socialist path for China, but neither achieved what they had intended to accomplish. Although Mao was confident that the Hungarian Revolution would not be replicated in China, he adopted an open-door rectification that intended to prevent, but in effect encouraged, similar events. Meanwhile, university students by no means aspired to overthrow the government, but were offering their critiques of the Party and socialist system in China. Nevertheless those criticisms far exceeded what Mao had expected to hear from them, and reminded Chinese authorities of the Hungarian troubles. Particularly worrisome were their comparison of Mao to Stalin and reflection upon socialism. While many students had high hope for Mao, the 1957 events seriously damaged the trust between Mao and college students. In the end, the students were quashed, Mao’s personality cult only became stronger, and there was less freedom for people to speak their minds.

Information Access

Mao had no difficulty getting first-hand information about the Soviet bloc through numerous channels: the Chinese delegation to the Soviet Twentieth Congress, embassies in Poland and Hungary, and Xinhua correspondents in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. But how did college students learn about the “secret speech” and the Hungarian Revolution through and beyond official newspapers? It is unsurprising that curious students would read between the lines of official newspapers, which is a common learned skill for people who live with censorship. Students also searched for and consulted English-language sources and people with access to outside information. The access to and interpretation of the “secret speech” and the Hungarian Revolution among college students reveals that even within a society that had no freedom of the press, the authorities were unable to completely control information flow at the grassroots level. What was unusual in this case was that the blooming and contending period served as a megaphone to circulate and discuss information about the outside world.

1. The “Secret Speech”

The year of 1956 was eventful in the Communist world, especially in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. That February, on the last day of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev made an unexpected speech entitled “On the Personality Cult and its Consequences.” He repudiated Stalin’s “personality cult” as well as his ruthless purges of military and Party personnel, highlighting his critique with vivid examples and detailed statistics.⁴⁷

Mao must have learned about the “secret speech” shortly after its delivery, though he gave no any immediate public response. No Chinese representatives had been invited to the meeting, but according to Zhu De’s translator, the Chinese delegation received a copy of the

⁴⁷ Nikita Khrushchev, *Speech to Twentieth Congress of the C.P.S.U.*, February 24, 1956, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/khrushchev/1956/02/24.htm>

speech on the following day, February 26.⁴⁸ Once Deng Xiaoping had returned to Beijing on March 3 with another copy, Mao convened several meetings in Zhongnanhai (CCP top leaders' residence) in March to come up with an official response to the Soviet Twentieth Congress.⁴⁹ Although Mao and others reached a consensus rather quickly, the leadership's response came out much later. Their conclusion appeared in the *People's Daily* editorial "On the Historical Experience of Proletarian Dictatorship" on April 5, 1956.⁵⁰

There was a noticeable change in the way the Twentieth Congress was covered in the *People's Daily* from the beginning to the end. At first, coverage simply meant including reprints from the Soviet Communist Party newspaper *Pravda*. On February 18, 1956, the *People's Daily* devoted seven pages to covering Khrushchev's work report of four days earlier, including one brief paragraph denouncing the personality cult: it "contradicts the spirit of Marxism-Leninism, and transforms a leader into a hero and a miracle creator." The popularity of the personality's cult "minimized the role of the Party's collaborative leadership, and caused severe mistakes in our work," Khrushchev wrote.⁵¹ A week later, on February 26, the Soviet delegation approved Khrushchev's report and agreed that "it was completely correct to oppose the personality cult." The Soviet delegation asked the central committee to "make an all-out effort to clear up the residue of the personality cult."⁵² But on February 28, the *People's Daily* editorial wrote that the Soviet Twentieth Congress had successfully commenced. There was not a single word on

⁴⁸ Zhao Zhongyuan, 1956 nian sui Zhu De canjia Sugong ershida [Attending Soviet Union's Twentieth Congress with Zhu De in 1956], *Zhonggong dangshi ziliao*, v. 2, 2004, 89.

⁴⁹ Waijiaobu dang'anguan ed., *Weiren de zuji: Deng Xiaoping waijiao huodong dashiji* [The Footprint of a Great Man: A Chronicle of Diplomatic Activities of Deng Xiaoping] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1998), 15. Pang Xianzhi, Jin Chongji, eds., *Mao Zedong zhuan (1949-1976)* [Biography of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, v.2, 2003), 496.

⁵⁰ Daniel Leese, *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in China's Cultural Revolution*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 30.

⁵¹ Nikita Khrushchev, Report at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, part 6, *People's Daily*, February 18, 1956.

⁵² Decision on the Concluding Report by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, *People's Daily*, February 26, 1956.

Stalin's personality cult or Khrushchev's "secret speech."⁵³ Such omission signified that there was probably something the Chinese authorities were unwilling to tell the public.

It was not until March 30, 1956 that the *People's Daily* reprinted a two-day-old *Pravda* editorial entitled "Why Do Personality Cults Violate the Spirit of Marxism-Leninism?" For the first time, the term "personality cult" was explicitly associated with Stalin. As the editorial pointed out,

Stalin did not stop others' flattery and sycophancy. To the contrary, he supported and encouraged such behaviors. ... Stalin ignored the principles of the Party's life and collective Party leadership, as he often made decisions alone, which led to distortions of Party principles and intra-Party democracy, destruction of revolutionary justice, and unreasonable suppression.⁵⁴

Criticism of Stalin's personality cult was no longer a secret, but the text of Khrushchev's speech never appeared in the Chinese press, and it was the case in the Soviet Union as well. A few days later, the *People's Daily* editorial "On the Historical Experience of Proletarian Dictatorship" only recognized the problem of the personality cult without mentioning the "secret speech."⁵⁵

On July 6, 1956, the *People's Daily* reprinted "Decision on the Personality Cult and Its Consequences" by the Soviet Communist Party central committee on June 30. The decision toned down criticism of Stalin, and stressed that "it is an absolute mistake to ... trace the personality cult's origins from the essence of the Soviet socialist system."⁵⁶ The decision attempted to prevent people from interpreting Stalin's fault as intrinsic to socialism, though such attempt soon proved to fail, as the Polish October and the Hungarian Revolution demonstrated.

The roots of personality cult became highly contested in the Rectification Campaign of 1957, a topic that Mao had not expected to come up at all. In fact, Mao seemed rather proud that

⁵³ Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Successfully Commenced, *People's Daily*, February 28, 1956.

⁵⁴ Why Personality Cult Contradicts Marxist-Leninism, *People's Daily*, March 30, 1956. Shen Zhihua, *Sikao yu xuanze*, 106-107.

⁵⁵ On the Historical Experiences of Dictatorship of the Proletariat, *People's Daily*, April 5, 1956.

⁵⁶ On the Personality Cult and Its Consequences, *People's Daily*, July 6, 1956.

the press kept the “secret speech” away from the public, as he said “Khrushchev’s secret report accusing Stalin has been covered extensively by the newspapers in capitalist countries, but in our papers not one single character was published.”⁵⁷ But he underestimated that Chinese college students could not only read between lines through various indirect reports, but also learn about the outside world through translation and foreign friends.

How was the “secret speech” leaked in China, especially among college students? It turned out there were several ways. Unlike the North Korean or Vietnamese communist parties, the CCP did not intentionally control the distribution of this explosive document.⁵⁸ Instead, the authorities decided to publish the Chinese translation of the “secret speech” brought back from Moscow as a pamphlet attached to the *Reference Materials (Cankao ziliao)*, available to high-ranked cadres, with a notice: “internal publication, please retain.” Another internal publication, *Reference Information (Cankao xiaoxi)*, was not permitted to publish the content of the “secret speech,” but did carry reactions from other communist countries. By the end of 1956, its readership was extended to county-level cadres and college students, and its subscription soared from 2,000 to 400,000 copies.⁵⁹ Besides these two sources, Beijing’s foreign language bookstore sold out every copy of the American Communist Party newspaper *New York Daily Worker* that included an English translation of the “secret speech.”⁶⁰

With the English copy, students started working on the translation themselves, especially those in science majors who had better English language skills, which allowed them to read

⁵⁷ Wu Lengxi, *Yi Mao zhuxi: wo qinshen jingli de ruogan zhongda lishi shijian pianduan* [Remembering Chairman Mao: A Few Episodes of Significant Historical Events that I Have Personally Experienced] (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1995), 36.

⁵⁸ Shen Zhihua, *Sikao yu xuanze*, 114.

⁵⁹ Leese, *Mao Cult*, 56.

⁶⁰ Li Shenzhi, “Mao zhuxi shi shenme shihou jue ding yin she chudong de?” [When Did Chairman Mao Decide to Lure Snakes out of the Hole?] Niu Han and Deng Jiuping, eds. *Liuyue xue: jiyi zhong de fanyoupai yundong* [Snow in June: the Anti-Rightist Campaign in Memories] (Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe, 1998), 117.

foreign scientific works and beyond.⁶¹ Besides Western news accounts, the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* was another source for students who could read Russian.⁶² During the Rectification Campaign in May 1957, David Chipp, the Reuters correspondent in Beijing, reported that some students complained that they “want to know about Khrushchev’s report. The United States knows it in an English version and why shouldn’t we?”⁶³ At this point two Beida mathematics teaching assistants and their student Chen Fengxiao translated the report from a copy of British newspaper *Daily Worker* in the school library.⁶⁴ Excerpts of the translation were made into a poster that received wide attention. While some criticized the translators for buying into the American newspapers’ account, others applauded them for contributing to a better understanding of Stalin.⁶⁵ According to René Goldman, the translation poster was soon removed and replaced with other posters after a day or so, which quoted Khrushchev’s remark that he had never made such a speech, and the translators were attacked as “unconscious agents of Allen Dulles,” head of the CIA until 1961.⁶⁶

School libraries provided another avenue for curious minds. According to a Beida biology teaching assistant, Yao Renjie, there were many foreign magazines and newspapers available on the bookshelves of library reading rooms. Both he and Hu Bowei remembered reading reactions to the “secret speech” from top leaders in other communist countries through library newspapers. Though the official Chinese response was missing, these various opinions

⁶¹ René Goldman, “The Rectification Campaign at Peking University,” *China Quarterly* (No. 12, 1962), 150. English majors were not particularly active in the Rectification Campaign, though it is unknown if they attempted to translate the “secret speech” in private.

⁶² Fang Lizhi, *Fang Lizhi zizhuan* [Fang Liuzhi autobiography] (Taipei: Tianxia yuanjian chuban, 2013), 165.

⁶³ MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, 134.

⁶⁴ Chen Fengxiao, *Meng duan weiminghu* [Shattered dreams at the Anonymous Lake] (Washington D.C.: Laogai Research Foundation, 2005) 345.

⁶⁵ Zhu Bin, “Beijing xuduo xuexiao de dangyuan zuoyou weinan” [Party Members in Many Schools in Beijing Face a Dilemma], *Internal Reference*, May 28, 1957.

⁶⁶ René Goldman, “The Rectification Campaign at Peking University: May-June 1957,” 149-150.

from outside provided fresh views of contemporary politics.⁶⁷ Foreign language skills limited the number of students who could consume information from outside China, but students in the 1950s were better equipped, as many of them had studied English in middle school or high school before taking Russian language courses as required.

Besides the press, news spread among close friends and family members who had connections with cadres who could see classified information. Lin Xiling was a female law student at People's University (Renda), and would later become famous during the Rectification Campaign for several public speeches at both Beida and her school. She secured a copy of the "secret speech" from her boyfriend, who was an intelligence secretary for Hu Yaobang, a leader of the CCP youth league. A physics student and Party member at Yunnan University, Bai Zushi, read a copy from his father, who was a Democratic Party member and a representative to the National People's Congress.⁶⁸ These individual cases were rare among college students, since not everyone had a privileged background, but the better-informed minority of students played a significant role in the Rectification Campaign.

At universities with foreign exchange students, mostly from other communist countries, foreigners provided another channel of information. In particular at Beida, 200 out of 8,000 were foreign students, which was probably the largest in any university across China. The school authorities blamed students from Poland and Yugoslavia who "corrupted their own students ideologically and morally."⁶⁹ René Goldman, one of the Polish students, viewed the official statement as a personal charge against him, since he had read Khrushchev's speech – the text sent from Warsaw - in the spring of 1956, and shared his negative views about the Soviet Union

⁶⁷ Yao Renjie, *Xinlu* [The Path of a Heart] (Beijing: Shidai zuojia chubanshe, 2014), 194. Hu Bowei, *Qingchu Beida*, 252-253.

⁶⁸ Bai Zushi, *Wushinian de yibaige shunjian* [A Hundred Moments in Fifty Years] (Hong Kong: Tianma chubanshe, 2008), 123.

⁶⁹ René Goldman, "Peking University Today," *China Quarterly* (No. 7, 1961), 110.

and events in Eastern Europe with many Chinese friends.⁷⁰ According to Ghanshyam Mehta, an Indian exchange student to Beida, the foreign students, especially the Hungarians and the Polish, were able to receive newspapers and letters from home, keep regular contact with their embassy personnel, and thus they were well informed about the world outside China.⁷¹

Chinese students at Beida also reached out to foreign students in exchange of information. Mehta noticed that some Chinese students became more intimate than before with students from Yugoslavia, Poland and Hungary, in hope of understanding the happenings and developments of their countries.⁷² Jiang Zhihu, a Chinese literature student at Beida, remembered chatting with a Hungarian student he met while skating at the lake on campus. The Hungarian student talked about the revolution at home with pride, which was shocking and confusing to Jiang, because all he had heard about was the “Hungarian counterrevolutionary incident.”⁷³ One should not, however, exaggerate the extent to which foreign students interacted with, let alone affected, the Chinese students. Though foreign students could take the same classes as their Chinese counterparts, they lived and dined separately, and they were not permitted to attend meetings or participate in campaigns with their Chinese classmates.⁷⁴

Availability does not mean easy access or wide circulation. In fact, most students did not read the full text of Khrushchev’s speech, though many were aware of its existence and its criticism of personality cults through official newspapers, rumors and hearsay.⁷⁵ Instead of the “secret speech,” many students remembered reading the Chinese translation of *The Stalin Era*,

⁷⁰ Email correspondence with René Goldman on July 14, 2014.

⁷¹ Ghanshyam Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China: Blooming and Contending at Peking University, Spring 1957*, 107.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Jiang Zhihu, *Yelan, taosheng yijiu – Jiang Zhihu huiyilu* [Wave as Usual at the Dead of Night: Memoir of Jiang Zhihu] (New York: Cozy House Publisher, 2007), 71.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 108-111.

⁷⁵ Yin Zhongrui, *Threat from the Campuses: Student Dissent and the Launching of the Chinese Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957* (senior honors thesis at Harvard University, 2011), 71.

printed in excerpts by the *Wenhui Daily* as part of their participation in the Hundred Flowers Campaign in the spring of 1957.⁷⁶ Written by American journalist Anna Louise Strong, who reported extensively on both China and the Soviet Union, the book revealed Stalin's devastating purges in the 1930s.⁷⁷ The most memorable quotation she cited was from the British historian Lord Acton, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."⁷⁸ Strong was well received in China, thanks to her close relationship with top CCP leaders since her visit to Yan'an, Communist wartime headquarters in the 1940s. Her book introduced a different Soviet Union from official newspapers to the Chinese audience.

2. The Hungarian Revolution

The "secret speech" triggered a series of de-Stalinization, if not de-Sovietization, in Eastern European socialist countries, where unrest was much more contentious, if not violent, than in China. In June 1956, Polish workers demonstrated in Poznan, one of the biggest cities in west-central Poland, but the government soon cracked down. Then in October, the Polish authorities appointed the reformist Wladyslaw Gomulka to negotiate with the Soviet government, thus ending the era of Stalinization in Poland, and initiating a policy of modest liberalization. More violence occurred in Hungary, where the Soviet military and political presence had been unpopular, and where the populace welcomed Khrushchev's speech.

The pivotal point came two days after the Polish October on October 23, 1956, when students and intellectuals organized a street demonstration in Budapest calling for the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the return of their reformer Imre Nagy, and democratic elections. They saw Gomulka's rise in Poland as an opportunity to air their grievances against Soviet domination in

⁷⁶ San Mu, *Jiu rizi, jiu renwu: "wenge" zhong de ren he shi* [Past Days, Past People: People and Things in the Cultural Revolution] (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 2007), <http://lz.book.sohu.com/chapter-271970.html>.

⁷⁷ Yao Renjie, *Xinlu*, 195-196. Quite a few of my interviewees mentioned this book, including Chen Yulin and Zhang Chengjue. The book was published in 1956, appeared in *Workers' Daily* in December of that year, and its Chinese translation came out in March 1957.

⁷⁸ Qian Liqun, *Jujue yiwang*, 118.

Hungary.⁷⁹ But unlike what happened in Poland, the Soviet leaders eventually crushed the opposition through force and established a new government in Hungary.⁸⁰ The Hungarian Revolution was a direct response to the “secret speech,” and it was no less shocking to the communist world: a popular revolt was potentially more threatening to the authorities than a change from above. It inspired students and intellectuals elsewhere to learn from their Hungarian counterparts, while it also warned authorities in other communist countries about the potential occurrence of similar episodes on their own ground.

In the Chinese press and common understanding among the students, the Hungarian Revolution was never a revolution, but an incident with negative connotation.⁸¹ The official newspaper’s view on the Hungarian government shifted from neutral to negative as the event developed. The *People’s Daily* first reported the event on October 27, 1956. At the beginning of its coverage on the crisis, the student protest was depicted as peaceful, but counterrevolutionaries were troublemakers who “take the chance to make an armed riot.” Under these circumstances, the Hungarian government “invited Soviet military intervention to restore order.” In the following days, according to the reports, the situation seemed to get better, as “rioters ask for negotiation, Budapest ceases fire, and the Hungarian government and people try to get back to a peaceful life.” While the Soviet military started to withdraw, the violence kept escalating, and the situation was chaotic. But things changed on November 3, when the reports turned against the reform-minded Nagy government, which “betrayed national interests, withdrew from

⁷⁹ Johanna Granville, Hungarian and Polish Reactions to the Events of 1956: New Archival Evidence, *Europe-Asia Studies*, (53:7, 2001), 1056.

⁸⁰ For a detailed account of the events, see Victor Sebestyen, *Twelve Days: the Story of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006).

⁸¹ Shen Zhihua, *Sikao yu xuanze*, 417.

Warsaw treaty and turns toward imperialism,” and counter-revolutionaries became “terrorists who kill security forces and free prisoners.”⁸²

If reports on the Hungarian Revolution were confusing, the Yugoslav communist leader Josip Tito’s Pula speech on November 11, 1956 was even more disorienting. Tito had split with Stalin and claimed independence from Moscow. In his speech, he gave his thoughts on the political crises since Khrushchev’s “secret speech.” Tito did not think of the Hungarian Revolution as counterrevolutionary, and he condemned the first Soviet intervention as unnecessary, and the second as necessary yet wrong. Considering the Polish and Hungarian incidents as the evil effects of the Stalinist system, he stated that personality cults had their roots in “the bureaucratic apparatus, in the method of leadership and the so-called one-man rule,” all of which are problems of the system rather than the person.⁸³ Though the *People’s Daily* never published Khrushchev’s “secret speech,” it reprinted Tito’s full speech on December 12, more than a month after it had taken place.⁸⁴ It is unknown as to why the Chinese authorities approved to publish Tito’s speech, which proved to be more provocative than the “secret speech,” and some Chinese students later expressed their agreement with Tito. But one day before that, as if to make sure the readers understood correctly, the newspaper printed responses to his speech from other countries. Most were critical, especially the Soviet Union’s, but some supported with reservations, such as Poland and Italy.⁸⁵ Readers had to wait for two weeks before the Chinese authorities responded to the Hungarian Revolution and Tito’s speech, because this time Mao had to re-evaluate the “secret speech” based on more recent crises.

⁸² *The People’s Daily*, October 27, 28, 29, November 1, 2, 3, 1956.

⁸³ Shijie zhishi chubanshe ed., *Tietuo zai Pula de yanshuo ji youguan de pinglun* [Tito’s Pula Speech and Related Comments] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1957), 15-37.

⁸⁴ Full text of comrade Tito’s speech at Pula, *People’s Daily*, December 12, 1956.

⁸⁵ Comrade Tito’s Pula speech and responses from communist parties in various countries, *People’s Daily*, December 11, 1956.

Official newspapers like the *People's Daily* remained the major information access for the Chinese students to learn about the outside world, and some honed their skills of reading between lines to extract news inexplicit to others. But it was not the only channel available, as shown in the case of the “secret speech.” Though most students never read the full text, some were able to secure an English version or through personal connections. But it was not until the Rectification Campaign that students publicized the “secret speech” in big-character posters on campus, and discussed the content in details.

Reactions to the “Secret Speech”

What were reactions from Mao and the students to Khrushchev’s “secret speech”? In this section, I show that while Mao expressed ambivalent views about the speech, his political move to initiate the Hundred Flowers Campaign was unambiguously linked to this crisis. As for the students, the “secret speech” not only shattered their impression of Stalin, but also started to provoke questions about Mao’s own personality cult. This critical and independent thinking touched a nerve with the authorities.

1. Mao

Mao expressed his ambivalent feelings toward the “secret speech.” As he put it, Khrushchev “removed a lid and poked a hole,” which meant that Khrushchev revealed one problem while creating another.⁸⁶ Later on, in the talk “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People” given on February 27, 1957, Mao explained further:

To expose the cult of Stalin, to tear off the lid, to liberate people, this is a liberation movement; but his [i.e., Khrushchev’s] method of exposing [Stalin] is

⁸⁶ Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan: 1956-1966 Zhong-Su guanxi huiyilu* [Ten Years of Debates: Records of the Sino-Soviet Relations, 1956-1966] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1999), 3-24.

incorrect; [he] hasn't made a good analysis, clubbing [him] to death with a single blow.⁸⁷

On the one hand, Mao acknowledged the basic legitimacy of Khrushchev's speech, which heeded that not everything Stalin had done was correct; he felt relieved that he no longer had to follow Stalin's lead. On the other hand, Mao worried about the way Khrushchev had attacked Stalin posthumously and without consulting other Communist countries. For that reason, if Mao disliked Stalin, he despised Khrushchev even more. Later Mao would criticize those who had followed Stalin wholeheartedly only to turn 180 degrees and pretend that they had never supported him as people with no sense of Marxism-Leninism or revolutionary morality.⁸⁸

Mao accepted Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's personality cult, but not of personality cults in general. According to Mao's secretary Hu Qiaomu, Mao believed himself to be China's Stalin, and criticism of Stalin could potentially equivocate a denial of Mao's legitimacy.⁸⁹ Since the late 1930s, and especially after the 1942-43 Yan'an Rectification Campaign, Mao gradually established his own personality cult, with most people seemingly endorsing the idea, and others, at the very least, refraining from questioning it.⁹⁰ The "secret speech" challenged the Chinese to distinguish Mao's leadership from that of Stalin. But it was not until the Rectification Campaign of 1957, when Mao allowed critiques from below, that the issue of personality cults in both the Soviet Union and China became a center of contention.

Mao's ambivalent view on the "secret speech" was reflected in the Party's mouthpiece.

On April 5, 1956, the *People's Daily* published an editorial entitled "On the Historical

⁸⁷ Roderick MacFarquhar, Timothy Cheek, Eugene Wu eds., *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People* (Speaking Notes), February 27, 1957, *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao: From the Hundred Flowers to the Great Leap Forward* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 178. The official version published in *People's Daily* on June 19, 1957 was very different from the speaking notes.

⁸⁸ Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong xuanji* [Selected Works of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1977) v. 5, 334.

⁸⁹ Hu Qiaomu, *Hu Qiaomu wenji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1992-94), v. 2, 147.

⁹⁰ More details on the early formation of Mao's personality cult can be found in Gao Hua, *Hongtaiyang shi zenyang shengqi de: Yan'an zhengfeng yundong de lailong qumai* [How Did the Sun Rise over Yan'an?] (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2000).

Experience of the Proletarian Dictatorship,” which was considered an official response to the “secret speech.” It took a balanced approach that both acknowledged Stalin’s mistakes and also restored to him some credit. As a western commentator described, the editorial was “to be sure that the Communist baby would not be thrown out with the Stalinist bath water.”⁹¹ It emphasized that Stalin’s errors were not due to his personality cult but to wrong methods and bad manners, and further that personality cults were not intrinsic to socialist countries alone, so that other social countries, including China, might not share the same problem. The lesson that the Chinese leadership took away from Khrushchev’s “secret speech” was to limit the Soviet influence on China and pursue a socialist path that combined Marxism-Leninism with China’s specific situation.⁹²

Thanks to Khrushchev’s “secret speech,” Mao was able to look beyond the Soviet Union and pursue socialism with Chinese characteristics. In fact, the “secret speech” led to the formation of the Hundred Flowers policy, which encouraged constructive criticism, similar to Khrushchev’s Thaw after Stalin’s death. At a closed session of the supreme state conference on May 2, 1956, Mao gave his speech with the slogan “let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thoughts contend.” Originally, the policy was part of liberalization in the cultural field and specifically aimed at reviving old polices towards drama, as the term was “let a hundred flowers bloom, weed out the old and raise the new.” But after the “secret speech,” Mao altered the slogan in the context of de-Stalinization in order to minimize China’s blind following of the Soviet Union.⁹³ Zhou Yang, the deputy director of the propaganda department, confirmed at the time the direct link between the two: “We do not deny that criticism of Stalin had generated huge

⁹¹ Donald Zagoria, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1956-61* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), 44.

⁹² Shen Zhihua, *Sikao yu xuanze*, 118.

⁹³ MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 52-53. The original term was 百花□放, 推□出新.

chaos worldwide, but now it seems as if the chaos was minor while the gain was major. We raised the ‘hundred flowers’ in this situation.”⁹⁴

Overall, Mao’s view of the “secret speech” was cautious. He was happy to get rid of the burden of Stalin, but also worried about the way Stalin was denounced. Such concern only became more serious a decade later in the Cultural Revolution. In response to Khrushchev’s speech, Mao came up with the Hundred Flowers policy, which would allow him to hear criticism before too late. But he did not expect that people would be so critical that even Mao himself became a target.

2. Students

Before the Soviet Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, most Chinese respected Stalin as much as they admired Mao. Many students were therefore saddened by Stalin’s death in March 1953 according to their memoirs. Yao Renjie, then a Beida biology student, wrote a poem “the most unforgettable day – March 6,” which was published on the front page of the school newsletter posted on campus.⁹⁵ Yao wrote that when the news of Stalin’s death was broadcasted over school radio, a lot of students wept in silence. Fan Yihao, a Chinese literature student at Beijing Normal University, also remembered that he was unwilling to take off his black armband, a symbol for mourning the death, for half a year.⁹⁶ After Stalin’s death, Hu Bowei, then a high school student in Shanghai, vowed to become a Party member as soon as possible in order to carry on Stalin’s will and fight for communism for life.⁹⁷

By 1956, Hu Bowei became a meteorology student at Beida. As an enthusiastic Youth League member, he closely followed the Soviet Twentieth Party Congress through Chinese

⁹⁴ Zhou Yang, *Zhou Yang wenji* [Collection of Zhou Yang’s Writings] (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1985) v. 2, 405.

⁹⁵ Yao Renjie, *Xinlu*, 157. Stalin died the night before on March 5, 1953.

⁹⁶ Fan Yihao, *Mingyun bianzouqu: wo de geren dangdaishi* [Variations of Fate: My Personal History] (Beijing: renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2014), 31.

⁹⁷ Hu Bowei, *Qingchu Beida*, 147-148.

newspapers. What surprised him first was that the person who delivered the political report was not head of the government, Georgy Malenkov, but Nikita Khrushchev, who ranked fourth in the Soviet leadership. More shockingly, the report replaced praise of Stalin with criticism of his personality cult, and instead raised the idea of collective leadership. As someone who was tuned to contemporary politics, Hu sensed that “something must have happened and things were changing.” But initial reactions from his surroundings seemed rather quiet, if not numb. With the exception of a few quibbles, nobody talked about the new information from the Soviet Union in public. People might feel hesitant to openly share their opinions before the official Chinese response, which took over a month to appear in the *People’s Daily* on April 5, 1956.⁹⁸

But this editorial, “On the Historical Experience of the Proletarian Dictatorship,” as discussed earlier, could not satisfy some students’ curiosity. Hu Bowei felt it was so “correct” and balanced in all aspects that it was difficult to understand. Unlike some other communist leaders, who supported the Twentieth Party Congress with passion, the official Chinese response seemed too even-handed. Both Hu and Yao Renjie noticed the contradiction between the editorial and reality, as they wondered in their memoirs: How could the Chinese authorities claim that they have avoided Stalinist mistakes while promoting songs like the “East Is Red,” in which Mao was the people’s savior?⁹⁹ The editorial generated more questions than it answered.

Besides writing to the *People’s Daily*, as shown in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, Hu Bowei wrote another letter directly to Mao and the central Politburo before the Eighth National People’s Congress meeting in September 1956. In this letter, he pointed out that a personality cult of Mao existed in China, which contradicted Marxism. In order to learn the

⁹⁸ Hu Bowei, *Qingchu Beida*, 250-251. The published version is censored, and for a complete version of the book, see Folk History, Chinese University of Hong Kong,

<http://mjls.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/book.aspx?cid=2&tid=134&pid=1822>.

⁹⁹ Hu Bowei, *Qingchu Beida*, 253. For a complete version of the book, see <http://mjls.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/book.aspx?cid=2&tid=134&pid=1822>; Yao Renjie, *Xinlu*, 191.

Soviet Union's lesson, he hoped that Mao himself would take initiative to address and prohibit such phenomena. At that time, Hu completely trusted Mao, and believed that it was Mao's followers who had done foolish things. Not surprisingly, Hu never heard back from Mao, except once at a Beida meeting with all faculty and students, when the Party secretary Jiang Longji mentioned Hu's letter as an example of wrong views of the communist crises.¹⁰⁰

The Chinese authorities probably would not have panicked as much had students restricted their comments exclusively to Stalin and the Soviet Union. But after the initial shock and confusion, some students related their criticism to similar problems at home, especially in regards to Mao's rising cult of personality. A Shanxi student observed: "In China, we hang portraits of Chairman Mao everywhere, yell 'Long Live Chairman Mao,' put the Chairman on the same level as the country, and say everything we do is for Chairman Mao; what is this if it is not a personality cult?"¹⁰¹ Two Yunnan students corroborated the idea: "No matter what kind of written works or songs, they have to mention Chairman Mao, otherwise they lack Party awareness. Even children's songs bring up the CCP and Chairman Mao here and there. ... Thus, the personality cult in China is not only widespread, but particularly severe."¹⁰² A Renmin University press editor overtly connected Mao with Stalin: "From Chairman Mao to the Party First Secretaries in every rank, they are all petty Stalins... if [Mao] says one person is wrong, the entire society cannot doubt him."¹⁰³ These observations were common during the Rectification Campaign, and they were circulated in the Anti-Rightist Campaign as "rightist" views to be

¹⁰⁰ Hu Bowei, *Qingchu Beida*, 260-261.

¹⁰¹ "Party and League Cadres Are Lords Ruling Over the People" in Shanxi Provincial Rectification Office ed., *Selected 'Criticisms'* (Taiyuan, 1957), from Song Yongyi, ed, Chinese Anti-Rightist Campaign Database, 1957- (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong University Service Center, 2010).

¹⁰² "Rightist comments of the Anti-Party clique 'firecrackers'" in Zhonggong Yunnan daxue ed. *Rightist Speeches and Acts* (Yunnan, 1957), from Song, Anti-Rightist Campaign Database.

¹⁰³ Cao Dafu, "From Chairman Mao to First Secretaries in Every Rank—They Are All Little Stalins" in *Selected Speeches by Rightists in Universities* (Beijing, 1957), from Song, Anti-Rightist Campaign Database.

criticized. At this point, Mao's personality cult had yet to reach the peak that it would in the Cultural Revolution a decade later.

With a copy of the "secret speech" in hand, Lin Xiling offered a different opinion on Stalin and Mao. She was slightly older and more experienced than other students, since she had joined the People's Liberation Army before going to Renda as a "cadre student." She studied journalism and interned at *China Youth Daily* and then went back to Renda for a law degree.¹⁰⁴ She acknowledged that Mao had made a mistake on the Hu Feng case, which was a trigger of the counterrevolutionary campaign in 1955, and that a personality cult did exist in China. But she described Mao as "mentally clear, and intrinsically different from Stalin," for which she provided two examples: "Mao did not allow others to celebrate his longevity, or report the news of him swimming across the Yangzi River."¹⁰⁵ Like many others who mourned Stalin's death, she cried for three days, but after learning about Khrushchev's speech, she realized that her tears had been for nothing.¹⁰⁶ She described her change of mind in her speech at Beida: "I used to have a very good impression of Stalin, and I was very angry about the criticism of him at the Twentieth Party Congress. But after I read this secret report, I began to see through Stalin."¹⁰⁷ Then she offered her views on Stalin's personality cult:

The cult of personality is a product of the social system. ... The problem of Stalin is not the problem of Stalin the individual; the problem of Stalin could only arise in a country like the Soviet Union, because in the past it had been a feudal, imperialistic nation. China is the same, for there has been no tradition of bourgeois democracy. ... Genuine socialism should be very democratic, but ours is undemocratic. I venture to say our society is a socialist one erected on a feudal foundation, an atypical type of socialism,

¹⁰⁴ Chen Fengxiao, *Meiyou qingjie de gushi* [Stories without Plots], 501.

¹⁰⁵ Zhou Dingfang, and Ren Jiayi, Beida de yige daxing bianlunhui [A Big Debate at Beijing University], *Internal Reference*, May 28, 1957.

¹⁰⁶ Zhu Jigong, Bu Zhaowen, *Internal Reference*, June 3, 1957.

¹⁰⁷ Dennis Doolin trans., *Communist China: The Politics of Student Opposition* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, Stanford University, 1964), 38, 41-42.

and we must fight for genuine socialism!¹⁰⁸

Lin argued that the personality cult had originated within Soviet socialism, which was both undemocratic and feudal. With the same system, China might have the same problem. Unlike other students who simply compared similar symptoms in both countries, Lin attempted to trace the roots of the problems. In a later speech, she explained that her opinions were nothing new, because she was simply agreeing with Tito's opinions on the causes of Stalin's mistakes.¹⁰⁹ By supporting Tito, Lin implicitly disagreed with Mao in terms of the origins of the personality cult. But another student disagreed with Mao explicitly. A Beida physics student, Tan Tianrong, known for his numbered posters called "My No. X Poisonous Weeds," did exactly that. He criticized Mao's idea of tracing the origins of the personality cult to people's thinking and Stalin's personal character as being idealistic, in contradiction to being materialist.¹¹⁰ For Tan, if Marxism is materialist, Mao's logic is against Marxism.

Inspired by the translation poster of Khrushchev's "secret speech," a fellow physics major Wang Shuyao wrote a poster entitled "High Concentration of Power Is Dangerous." He argued that the reason for Stalin's mistake was the Communist Party's high concentration of power, which was a systemic problem. He hoped that people should realize that they are masters and liberators of themselves, instead of attributing all merits to the Communist Party. In Wang's view, Stalin's mistake became inevitable due to the Party's absolute control of the state and

¹⁰⁸ Lin Xiling, "First Speech at Peking University," in Niu Han, Deng Jiuping eds., *Yuanshang cao: jiyi zhong de fanyoupai yundong* [Grass on Fields: The Anti-Rightist Campaign in Memory] (Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe, 1998), 151. See translation in Doolin, *Communist China*, 27.

¹⁰⁹ Zhou Dingfang, Ren Jiayi, *Internal Reference*, May 28, 1957.

¹¹⁰ Gongqingtuan zhongyang daxue gongzuobu, *Gaodeng xuexiao xuesheng zai zhengfeng zhong fanying chu de zhengzhi sixiang wenti jiqi lundian huibian* [A Collection of Political Thought Problems and Speeches by Students of Higher Education during the Rectification Campaign], June 18, 1957, from Song, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*.

people's blind following of the Party.¹¹¹ Wang posted it on the wall of a dorm building facing the dining hall, but after a night of wind and rain, the poster was tattered. Nevertheless, it received a lot of attention, both positive and negative, as the student journal *Public Square* published it in its first and only issue, and an international law professor criticized Wang's points as anti-authority.¹¹²

Khrushchev's "secret speech" not only triggered a series of reflections on personality cult in China; as Lin Xiling demonstrated, the speech also inspired Chinese students to draw their own conclusions of the international news. Fan Yihao, who took half a year to get over Stalin's death, now realized that one should never blindly follow or believe anyone, no matter how great, because a leader cannot be correct all the time. Otherwise blind followers would commit crimes turning innocent comrades into counterrevolutionaries in the name of loyalty to revolution. Thus, the Hundred Flowers policy came just at a time when the speech had freed and encouraged people to think on their own.¹¹³ Bai Zushi, who got a copy of the "secret speech" from his father, was terrified by the brutality of Soviet purges, and disappointed by the CCP's reflection on personality cults. He decided to quit his job as a chief leader of Kunming's industrial bureau in order to study at Yunnan University.¹¹⁴ Others considered it an absurd choice, but for him, school was a haven to get away from politics. Fang Lizhi, a Beida physics student, described Khrushchev's influence as giving a new life: "[Khrushchev] seemed to have given new energy

¹¹¹ Wang Shuyao, "Cong Sidalin de cuowu zhong ying dedao de jiaoxun" [Lessons Learned from Stalin's Mistake] *Yuanshangcao: jiyi zhong de fanyoupai yundong* [Grass on Prairie: the Anti-Rightist Campaign in Memories], edited by Niu Han, Deng Jiuping (Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe, 1998), 204-208.

¹¹² Wang Shuyao, *Yanyuan fengyu zhu rensheng* [My Turbulent Life and Times at Beijing University] (Washington D.C.: Laogai Research Foundation, 2007), 76, 85.

¹¹³ Fan Yihao, *Mingyun bianzouqu*, 31-32.

¹¹⁴ Bai Zushi, *Wushinian de yibaige shunjian*, 128-129.

and life to a Soviet communism that had grown stale. We hoped that our own Communist movement could get some new life, too.”¹¹⁵

In short, Mao and Chinese students reacted differently toward the “secret speech.” It was both a relief and a burden for Mao to hear Khrushchev’s attack of Stalin’s personality cult, and the Hundred Flowers policy was Mao’s reaction in the context of de-Sovietization. For the students, the “secret speech” created shock, confusion, and more importantly, independent thinking. Their concerns were not so much about Stalin, but Mao and Chinese socialism.

Reactions to The Hungarian Revolution

How did Mao and students perceive the Hungarian Revolution, or more accurately in the Chinese term, the Hungarian “Incident”? How did this uprising affect domestic political and social change? In this section, I argue that Mao accelerated the Rectification Campaign of 1957 in response to the Hungarian Revolution in order to prevent similar revolts at home. Contrary to his intentions, however, the open-door rectification enabled students to voice their criticism, often too harsh to the ears of the authorities.

There has been a long debate on Mao’s motivation in launching the Rectification Campaign. Many people, especially those who later became victims in the Anti-Rightist Campaign, tended to believe what Mao later claimed that from the beginning it was a trap to “lure the snakes out of the hole,” in other words to detect counterrevolutionaries. Mao justified himself by saying that all along the Hundred Flowers and Rectification Campaigns he had aimed to smoke out critics in order to be criticized.¹¹⁶ But Mao’s justification for his obviously contradictory decisions was hardly convincing. Instead, Mao’s confidence and optimism about

¹¹⁵ Fang Lizhi, *Fang Lizhi zizhuan*, 166-67. Translation by Perry Link, *The Most Wanted Man in China: My Journey from Scientist to Enemy of the State* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2016), 82-83.

¹¹⁶ Li Shenzhi, *Liuyue xue: jiyi zhong de fanyoupai yundong*, 113-136.

the domestic political situation before the Rectification Campaign indicated his sincerity in inviting criticism. His beliefs that China was different from Hungary and that rectification would be a method to prevent such chaos were at the foundation of this campaign. Ironically, to Mao's surprise, the Rectification Campaign fomented, rather than forestalled, similar scenarios. Mao did not foresee the storm's coming, but he could whichever way he wanted.

1. Mao

The Chinese authorities reacted differently toward the Polish October and the Hungarian Revolution based on their limited knowledge of the two incidents. They supported the Polish reform, as long as it stayed within the socialist camp, and criticized Soviet chauvinism and military intervention. While the same attitude had initially been applied to Hungary, the deteriorating situation prompted a shift in viewpoint. The Chinese leadership thus assessed the revolt as not simply aiming at de-Stalinization, but rather a de-Sovietization, which disrupted the unity of the communist bloc. Thus the Soviet intervention was no longer chauvinistic, but necessary.¹¹⁷

In response to events in Poland and Hungary, as well as to Tito's interpretation of them, the *People's Daily* published the editorial "More on the Historical Experience of the Proletarian Dictatorship" on December 29, 1956. This editorial went through eight revisions after one month of Politburo discussion led by Mao.¹¹⁸ It reaffirmed the earlier editorial that Stalin's merits outweighed his defects, though this point had been challenged and weakened in the subsequent political crises. As a rebuttal of Tito, it argued that Stalin's mistakes did not originate from the socialist system, and that it would be unnecessary to "correct" the socialist system in order to

¹¹⁷ MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 170-171; Shen Zihua, *Sikao yu xuanze*, 422.

¹¹⁸ Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan*, 62-82.

avoid these mistakes. Instead it attributed the problems to Stalin's subjectivism and incorrect working method.

More importantly, for the first time the editorial pointed out the danger of revisionism for people who are anti-Marxists or anti-Stalinists. It hinted that Tito and any of his followers in China would fall squarely into this category.¹¹⁹ In Mao's understanding, anyone who deviated from Marxism or Stalinism would be considered revisionists, and revisionism could be as dangerous as, if not more than, dogmatism.¹²⁰ If dogmatism was Mao's primary concern when launching the Rectification Campaign of 1957, revisionism loomed larger in the Anti-Rightist Campaign and ultimately the Cultural Revolution. The editorial should be treated as an early warning to those who would later speak out critically.

Despite the disagreement between Mao and Tito on the origins of Stalin's personality cult, Mao sided with Tito in defending the current regime of Hungary as a way to protect socialism against counterrevolution, even though they both expressed seemingly ambivalent opinions on the Hungarian event. In February 1957, Mao commented in his speech "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People:"

Do you think the Hungarian incident was good or bad? I say [it] was both good and bad. Of course it was bad, since they had disturbances. But Hungary did one very good thing; the counterrevolutionaries really helped us. Since the end of the Hungarian incident, things have been more secure than before. Hungary now is better than the Hungary of the past when there were no disturbances.¹²¹

For Mao, what happened in Hungary was an incident rather than a revolution. Street protests were unjustifiable disturbances, and Soviet troops ensured security more than intervention. The

¹¹⁹ Mao Zedong, *More on the Historical Experience of the Proletarian Dictatorship*, 1956, <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/reference-books/marxist.org-chinese-maoists-1956.htm>.

¹²⁰ Shen Zihua, *Sikao yu xuanze*, 437-38. Shen argues that it was Mao who convinced Khrushchev to send troops for the second time to Hungary.

¹²¹ MacFarquhar, Cheek, and Wu eds., *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People (Speaking Notes)*, *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao*, 177.

rhetoric Mao used was consistent with the Soviet Union's attitude on this event. It indicated that Mao supported, if not encouraged, the Soviet military intervention in Hungary.¹²²

At this point, the Hungarian Revolution was not just a crisis from afar, but stirred domestic concerns. Mao must have thought of the possibility of a Hungarian-type uprising in China, but he seemed to hold a conviction that similar events would not be replicated in China. He claimed that since Chinese urban and rural policies were correct, "big, nationwide riots like the Hungarian incident will not happen in China. It might be nothing more than a few people making a fuss here and there, and advocating 'big democracy,' which is nothing to be afraid of."¹²³ As Mao pointed out in his February speech, there were two types of contradictions: first between the enemy and the people, and second among the people. China had already been through various political campaigns since 1949, thus solving the first contradiction, and counterrevolutionaries had basically been eliminated. It was unlike the case of Hungary, and thus China would not experience the same revolt.¹²⁴ For the second contradiction, no dictatorship was necessary, and it could be worked out peacefully.

Despite this sanguine assessment, in the wake of the Eastern European crises, Mao had to deal with increasing domestic unrest, such as worker and student strikes in Shanghai and Wuhan.¹²⁵ He recognized the unrest as "a few small disturbances" but not "great waves like that

¹²² Shen Zhihua, *Sikao yu xuanze*, 422.

¹²³ Mao, "Second Speech at the Conference of Provincial, Municipal, and Autonomous Region Party Secretaries," in Michael Y. M. Leung and John K. Kau eds., *The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976*, vol. 2, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1986), 233; Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong xuanji*, v. 5, 330-362. The "big democracy," in Mao's understanding, was the Western style of parliamentary democracy, free press and free speech. See Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong xuanji*, v. 5, 323.

¹²⁴ MacFarquhar, Cheek, and Wu eds., On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People (Speaking Notes), February 27, 1957 and On Ideological Work (Talk at a Conference Attended by Party Cadres from People's Liberation Army Units under the Nanjing Command and from Jiangsu and Anhui Provinces), March 19, 1957, *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao*, 143-144, 329.

¹²⁵ Zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi ed., *Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian* [Selected Documents of the Central Committee since 1949] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993-4), v. 10, 154. See also Elizabeth Perry, "Contradictions under Socialism: Shanghai's Strike Wave of 1957," *Challenging the Mandate of Heaven: Social Protest and State Power in China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 206-2237.

sucked up by a force-7 typhoon.” At a conference of provincial Party secretaries from January 18 to 27, 1957, Mao mentioned that the positive effect of the Hungarian incident was to smoke out ants from their caves, meaning those who supported the “secret speech” and the Hungarian Revolution. He considered these problems as contradictions among the people that happened without international influence, and the Hungarian Revolution should not take all the responsibilities for causing disturbance in China.¹²⁶

The lesson Mao learned from the Hungarian events was the balance between coercion and compromise as an art of governing. Rather than waiting for the popular discontent to accumulate and burst into a real threat before cracking down through violence, Mao believed it better to disclose all sorts of discussions, nonsense, and contradictions before solving them through diversion, guidance, and education. Nonetheless, for the minority of people who incited counterrevolutionary acts, Mao’s solution was firm: the dictatorship of the proletariat.¹²⁷

The Hungarian Revolution actually accelerated Mao’s launching of the Rectification Campaign in 1957, as originally it had been scheduled for 1958, in the style of Yan’an Rectification Campaign and for the purpose of criticizing subjectivism, sectarianism, and bureaucratism.¹²⁸ But in a March 1957 speech, Mao argued that the Hungarian incident conveyed a sense of urgency to implement his new policy – an open-door rectification as a soft means of governance and a forestallment of similar revolts at home.¹²⁹ Mao also learned from Zhou Enlai, who had recently returned from visiting the Soviet Union, Poland and Hungary, that it would be

¹²⁶ MacFarquhar, Cheek, and Wu eds., On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People (Speaking Notes), *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao*, 143.

¹²⁷ Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong xuanji*, v. 5, 330-362.

¹²⁸ MacFarquhar, Cheek, and Wu eds., Talk at the Meeting of Party Cadres in Shanghai, March 20, 1957, *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao*, 359.

¹²⁹ Zhu Dandan, *1956: Mao's China and the Hungarian Crisis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 243.

beneficial for the communist leadership to take the initiative in correcting mistakes.¹³⁰

Ultimately, the Rectification Campaign was formally launched on April 30, 1957.

At the same time, Mao continued to assure local cadres that China had no plans to deviate from socialism and that there was no domestic equivalent to the Petofi circles, which were intellectual forums for political discussions in Hungary.¹³¹ Mao assured those who were afraid that blooming and contending might lead to chaos, that China would not have a Hungarian-type incident, and that there was nothing to worry about even if it did happen. Indeed, there would be unrest if people were not given a tiny bit of democracy.¹³² But as good as the liberalization policy sounded, Mao's experiment with small democracy had its bottom line: the communist Party's leadership and socialist system were unquestionable.¹³³ Ignorant of the bottom line because of their lack of experience, many students participated in the Rectification Campaign as if they had gained real freedom of speech.

2. Students

Unlike the "secret speech," most Chinese students learned about the Hungarian Revolution through official newspapers, which did not draw a clear picture of what actually happened. A lot of doubts remained: Why would Gomulka, the Polish reform leader, stay in prison for seven years before becoming the Party secretary, whereas Nagy, the Hungarian counterpart, be charged of treason? Who triggered the Hungarian incident, imperialist agents and domestic counterrevolutionaries or brutal Stalinists?¹³⁴ One exception came from a Northeast Normal University student who expressed a sense of superiority about China, because "the Polish and the Hungarian communist parties screwed up, whereas our great Party properly

¹³⁰ MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 180.

¹³¹ Zhu Dandan, *1956: Mao's China and the Hungarian Crisis*, 243.

¹³² Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong wenji*, v. 7, 282. Shen Zhihua, *Sikao yu xuanze*, 482.

¹³³ Shen Zhihua, *Sikao yu xuanze*, 487.

¹³⁴ Hu Bowei, *Qingchun Beida*, 269.

handled everything as a real Bolshevik Party.”¹³⁵ Overall, what university students, even those at top schools like Tsinghua University, learned about the Eastern European crises was murky.¹³⁶

Chinese students learned about multiple contradictory and discordant views on Hungary from other communist countries’ leaders before they heard from Mao. Tito’s speech on the topic generated the most discussion, as students talked about it after night curfew on campus, and while walking or eating. According to the *Internal Reference*, most students disagreed with Tito in splitting communist country leaders into Stalinists and de-Stalinists, because it ruined solidarity among socialist countries. Given the timing of Tito’s speech, students suspected him of allying with imperialists for anti-Sovietization. But a few students thought that Tito’s argument on Soviet military intervention in Hungary and personality cult as a product of socialism made sense, and a handful even admired Tito for being independent and not blindly following the Soviet Union. Aside from opposing views on Tito, everyone was anxiously waiting for a *People’s Daily* editorial. As one student asked, “Why has our Party yet to express its opinions?”¹³⁷

More than two weeks after Tito’s speech, the official Chinese response to the Hungarian Revolution came in “More on the Historical Experience of the Proletarian Dictatorship.” Seemingly a continuation of the previous editorial after the “secret speech,” this one perplexed more than clarified in some students’ minds.¹³⁸ Hu Bowei noticed the change from supporting

¹³⁵ Changchun shi gaodengxuexiao xuesheng jumin he minzhurenshi dui boxiong shijian yilun fenfen [Discussions of Polish and Hungarian Incidents among Students of Higher Education, City Dwellers, and Democratic Party Members in Changchun], *Internal Reference*, December 12, 1956.

¹³⁶ Tsinghua daxue bufen shisheng dui muqian shiju renshi mohu [Some Tsinghua University faculty and students have murky understanding of current situation], *Internal Reference*, December 12, 1956.

¹³⁷ Tietuo yanshuo fabiao hou Beijing xuesheng de yixie fanying [Beijing student responses after the publication of Tito’s speech], *Internal Reference*, December 17, 1956; Gao Zhongcan, Ren Yuanming, Qiu Wenzhong, duiwai maoyi xueyuan deng sange danwei dui tietuo yanshuo ji zhouzongli tanhua de fanying [Response to Tito’s Speech and Premier Zhou’s talk among Three Work Units], *Internal Reference*, December 22, 1956.

¹³⁸ Unlike the Chinese students, Moscow University students embraced what China had to offer in this situation. Some students said that the editorial expressed their thoughts. Despite the difference between the two Communist Parties on the issue of Stalin, they supported the Chinese conclusion. Dissatisfied with their leader, some said

the Soviet decision on anti-personality cult to emphasizing Stalin's merits and opposing Tito's argument, which made China a confirmed supporter of Stalin.¹³⁹ Yao Renjie felt that these changes were probably because the Hungarian Revolution indicated that anti-Stalinization might turn into anti-Sovietization, if not anti-socialism. Mao wanted to cut off these consequences before it was too late.¹⁴⁰

During the Rectification Campaign, discussions of the Hungarian Revolution continued, and some students held opposite views to the official Chinese narrative. Unlike the editorial "More on the Historical Experience of the Proletarian Dictatorship," which considered imperialism to be the most decisive factor that led to the Hungarian incident, some Wuhan University students thought "it was self-deceiving to blame imperialism alone for triggering the event."¹⁴¹ Rather, they argued that the bureaucratic Hungarian leadership should take the main responsibility. In other words, they justified the people's revolt as a reflection of systemic dissatisfaction, not imperial intervention.

Many students expressed disapproval of the Soviet military crackdown in Hungary. Some considered it against international law, while some agreed with Tito that it was "necessary but wrong."¹⁴² A Yunnan University student made a comparison: "when the U.S. sends troops to other countries, [we] say that this is a violation of others' domestic politics; when the Soviet Union dispatches its military, [we] say that it is offering help, but obviously the Soviet Union is

Khrushchev should study in China, and some even joked that the Soviet people should switch from a "personality cult" of Stalin, to that of the CCP. See Sulian daxuesheng shengzan renminribao wenzhang [Soviet university students applauded the *People's Daily's* article], *Internal Reference*, January 4, 1957.

¹³⁹ Hu Bowei, *Qingchun Beida*, 279.

¹⁴⁰ Yao Renjie, *Xinlu*, 201.

¹⁴¹ Wuhan daxue youpai fenzi waiqu xiongyali shijian de yanlun [Speeches that Distorted the Hungarian Incident by Students of Wuhan University], *Wuhan daxue youpai yanlun lubian* [Selected Collection of Rightist Speeches at Wuhan University], 1957, from Song, Anti-Rightist Campaign Database.

¹⁴² Wuhan daxue youpai fenzi gongji wumie sulian, wumie sidalin, pohuai zhongsu youyi de yanlun [Wuhan University Rightists' Speeches Attacking the Soviet Union, Tarnishing Stalin and Destroying the Sino-Soviet Relation], and Wuhan daxue youpai fenzi dui nansilafu de kanfa [Wuhan University Rightists' Views on Yugoslavia], in *Wuhan daxue youpai yanlun lubian*, 1957, from Song, Anti-Rightist Campaign Database.

intervening in others' domestic politics!"¹⁴³ Another student provided an alternative: "instead of sending out revolution, people should liberate themselves, and if the Hungarian people want to go on the capitalist path, we should let them go, otherwise it is intervention."¹⁴⁴

Students discussed the Chinese political situation in relation to the Hungarian Revolution, especially the likelihood of a similar event in China. Unlike Mao's prediction that similar unrest would not occur in China, some students at Yunnan University said that if such events ever happened they would definitely participate.¹⁴⁵ One of them speculated that the reason Mao allowed people to raise criticisms was that he was afraid of a Hungarian Incident in China.¹⁴⁶ On the other hand, a Northeast People's University student expressed that "a Polish- or Hungarian-like incident would not happen in China precisely because China is not democratic."¹⁴⁷

In her controversial speech at Beida, Lin Xiling claimed that the recently gained democracy in China came partly as a result of the Hungarian bloodshed: "Hungarian people's blood was not shed in vain! The tiny democracy that we have gained today is inseparable from them! The masses are not [pushovers]; to really solve problems, we need the makers of history – the masses – to take action!"¹⁴⁸ Lin believed that the Party had been forced to adopt the hundred flowers policy; otherwise it would have been endangered by its detachment from the masses.¹⁴⁹ A Beida student Wang Guoxiang further articulated the agency of people in earning democracy,

¹⁴³ "Rightist comments of the Anti-Party clique 'firecrackers,'" from Song, Anti-Rightist Campaign Database.

¹⁴⁴ Gongqingtuan zhongyang daxue gongzuobu [University Bureau of Central Youth League], from Song, Anti-Rightist Campaign Database.

¹⁴⁵ "Rightist comments of the Anti-Party clique 'firecrackers,'" from Song, Anti-Rightist Campaign Database. And Gaoxiao de youpai yanlun – yao sha gongchandang ren [Rightist Speeches in Schools of Higher Education – Kill Communists], in Zhongguo renmin daxue weiyuanhui, ed., *Gaodeng xuexiao youpai yanlun xuanbian* [Selected Rightist Speeches in Schools of Higher Education] (Beijing: Renmingdaxue, 1958).

¹⁴⁶ "Rightist comments of the Anti-Party clique 'firecrackers,'" from Song, Anti-Rightist Campaign Database.

¹⁴⁷ Changchun shi gaodengxuexiao xuesheng, jumin he minzhurenshi dui boxiong shijian yilun fenfen, *Internal Reference*, November 12, 1956.

¹⁴⁸ Lin Xiling, Zai Beijing daxue bianlunhui shang de diyici fayan [The First Speech at the Debate at Beijing University], *Zhengfajie youpai fenzi miulun huiji* [Fallacies by Rightists in the Field of Politics and Law] (Beijing: falü chubanshe: 1957), from Song, Anti-Rightist Campaign Database.

¹⁴⁹ Zhou Dingfang, Ren Jiayi, *Internal Reference*, May 28, 1957.

which, he reminded his fellow students, was not a given.¹⁵⁰ In other words, he thought the Rectification was meant to preempt revolts and was not simply a spontaneous show of leniency.

By calling on their peers to follow Hungary's lead, these active students compelled the Party to see the link between Hungary and China in the process of de-Stalinization, and the authorities responded by adopting the Hungarian script to measure events in China. Thus during the subsequent Anti-Rightist Campaign after the Rectification Campaign, authorities charged outspoken students with conspiring to incite a Hungarian incident in China, and denounced student cliques for attempting to play the role of the "Petofi Circle."¹⁵¹

One "Hungarian Incident in miniature," so dubbed by the *People's Daily*, happened on June 12, 1957 at Hanyang No. 1 Middle School in Hubei province, where more than a thousand middle school students went on a street protest against low high school entrance rates, asking for a more transparent and fair admission system. Their protest slogans even included "welcome back the Nationalist Party" and "welcome back Chiang Kai-shek." Violence occurred when students raided the local county office, and they were reported to have tied and beaten up some local cadres.¹⁵² The incident was labeled a counterrevolutionary riot, and as a result three teachers were sentenced to death.¹⁵³ By associating this protest with the Hungarian Revolution, local and educational concerns were configured into a state threat. Ironically, measures

¹⁵⁰ Beijing daxue "wuyue" bianjibu, Guanyu beida fandong xiaojituan – "baihua xueshe" de ruogan cailiao [Several Materials on the "Hundred Flowers Society" – Beida's reactionary clique], 1957, from Song, Anti-Rightist Campaign Database.

¹⁵¹ Yu Guangqing, "Guangchang" fandong xiaojituan zai xiaowai de yinmou huodong [Conspiratorial Activities off Campus by reactionary clique "Public Square"], in *Shoudu gaodeng xuexiao fanyoupai douzheng de juda shengli* [Big Victory of the Anti-Rightist Struggle among Schools of Higher Education in Beijing] (Los Angeles, CA: Zhongwen chubanshu fuwuzhongxin, 1997), from Song, Anti-Rightist Campaign Database.

¹⁵² Cao baoming, "'Mini Hungarian Incident' Led by Ma Zheming: the Truth about the Hanyang No. 1 Middle School Incident," *People's Daily*, August 8, 1957. See translation in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, 145-153.

¹⁵³ Liu Fudao, *Hanyang shijian* [Hanyang Incident] (China, 2011), 310-311.

implemented to prevent a Hungarian-style upheaval in China led to popular backlash, creating the exact problems authorities had feared.

Hungarian Revolutions on Chinese Campuses?

What did Mao think about students' critical opinions in the Rectification Campaign? What did students think of themselves, and what was the spectrum of participation in this five-week campaign? Both Mao and students had the Hungarian Revolution in mind when making their moves, but they had diverging opinions on what happened at home and abroad. If Mao's initiation of an open-door rectification was unexpected, student participation and critical voices in turn surprised Mao, and in return Mao's backtrack and reversal in the Anti-Rightist Campaign shocked everyone. The unexpected policy change and spontaneous student participation indicate that even when Mao had everything in his favor, a mobilized mass campaign could be risky for both participants and the authorities, as proved again in the case of the Cultural Revolution.

1. Mao

Mao had not expected university students' voluntary participation in the Rectification Campaign when he first called for criticism from non-Party members, but he certainly took note of their actions and comments. The *Internal Reference* reported in detail almost daily between May 23 and early June on university students.¹⁵⁴ These confidential reports included class strikes, street protests, and communication and travels among universities all over the country. Any cadre who had read the news would be concerned about the restiveness among students and the likelihood of a Hungarian-style uprising.

¹⁵⁴ Yin, *Threat from the Campuses*, 65.

Around the same time, Mao dispatched his secretaries and aides to four major universities in Beijing, including Beida, Tsinghua, Renda and Beijing Normal.¹⁵⁵ Mao made somewhat contradictory comments on the students in relation to the Hungarian Incident. On the one hand, as of June 4, 1957, Mao observed that the Rectification Campaign in universities “was not pre-arranged by Party committees and proceeded like a violent storm in schools. In fact, it had the flavor of a closed-door Hungary incident. But the campaign was initiated by the CCP.”¹⁵⁶ Mao might be a bit worried about campus activism, but he was clearly aware of the fundamental difference between Hungary and China: the Hungarian students mobilized themselves in a bottom-up movement, whereas the Chinese students were simply responding to Mao’s top-down campaign. But Mao seemed to have underestimated the autonomy and capability of independent thinking of students.

On the other hand, it would be hasty to conclude that Mao made a direct parallel between the Chinese and Hungarian students. In another reflection later on September 22, 1957, Mao seemed less concerned:

Before [I] got to the root of [the student movements] in the four universities, I dispatched personnel to read the big-character newspapers [to figure out] how significant the influence of the Hungarian incident was. Only after May 20 when [I] found out the real situation did [I] truly stop worrying.¹⁵⁷

Student participation in the Rectification Campaign exacerbated Mao’s change of mind from a liberalized rectification to a tightened Anti-Rightist Campaign. But this quote indicates that Mao might have believed that the influence of student movements was limited, and that as long as students did not make alliances with other social groups, they would pose no real threat to the Party leadership. Mao even did a calculation and concluded that “there would not be a big

¹⁵⁵ Lin Ke, et al., *Lishi de zhenshi: Mao Zedong shenbian gongzuo renyuan de zhengyan* [The Truth of History: Testimony from Mao’s Staff] (Hong Kong: Liwen chubanshe, 1995), 58.

¹⁵⁶ Lin Ke, *Lin Ke riji* [Lin Ke Diaries] (unpublished manuscript, June 4, 1957), 44.

¹⁵⁷ Pang Xianzhi, and Jin Chongji, eds., *Mao Zedong zhuan*, 696.

problem at Beijing University. ... Among the 8,000 students, there were only just over 70 rightists, and about 200 rightist supporters.”¹⁵⁸ No matter which interpretation better describes Mao’s thinking, a crackdown ensued anyway. By the end of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, over 700 Beida students, nearly ten percent of the student body had become “rightists.”¹⁵⁹

One document that signified Mao’s change of mind was “Things Are Changing,” in which he became more alert to the problem of revisionism, first raised in the *People’s Daily*’s editorial in response to the Hungarian Revolution. Mao started writing this article on May 15, 1957, originally entitled it “Going to the Opposite Side” and planned to publish it as an editorial in the *People’s Daily*. But in the end it was only circulated only to Party cadres until June 12, while Mao kept revising it based on the changing situation.¹⁶⁰ In this document, Mao’s judgment of political views of students in general was still positive,

[The Rightist elements] know that a large number of university students are the sons and daughters of landlords, rich peasants, and the bourgeoisie, and they believe that these people are the masses who will rise at the Rightists’ summons. This is possible with that portion of the students who have Rightist thought. But to imagine this of the great majority of the students is simply dreaming.¹⁶¹

Mao was partially right that “rightist” students would not be in the majority (nor were the “leftists”), but the class backgrounds of student families were not as “bad” as Mao thought. Some argue that student activism in the Rectification Campaign triggered Mao’s move onto the Anti-Rightist Campaign, but that is unlikely.¹⁶² As shown in the evidence above, Mao was trying to make light of student activism, and to convince others that the Chinese students were different from their Hungarian counterparts.

¹⁵⁸ Lin Ke, *Lin Ke riji*, May 28, 1957, 42.

¹⁵⁹ Wang Xuezheng, et al. eds., *Beijing daxue jishi, 1898-1997* [Chronicle of Beijing University, 1898-1997] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2008), 953.

¹⁶⁰ Pang Xianzhi, and Jin Chongji, eds., *Mao Zedong zhuan*, 691.

¹⁶¹ Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong xuanji*, v. 5, 425. See translation in John Leung, Michael Kau eds., *The Writings of Mao Zedong*, 549.

¹⁶² Here I disagree with Yin Zhongrui’s argument that Mao’s “change of position was prompted by the sudden escalation of the student movement’s intensity.” See Yin, *Threat from the Campuses*, 93.

Mao might not have expected students to form independent organizations and publications, and he was probably alarmed by student mobilization across the country, but students alone did not change his mind. While students staged demonstrations, there were also labor protests, especially in Shanghai, and widespread rural unrest, in which farmers withdrew from collective farms.¹⁶³ These events were not related to each other, and there was no alliance among different social groups. But all these threats resembled symptoms of earlier mobilizations in the Soviet bloc, and together they pushed Mao to finally recognize his mistake and reverse himself. In an intra-Party directive Mao drafted on June 8, 1957, he contradicted his previous conviction and intention: “In taking the initiative to launch a rectification campaign now, we are taking the initiative to [artificially] induce a potential ‘Hungarian Incident.’”¹⁶⁴

2. Students

Elite politics aside, the way the Chinese students viewed Khrushchev’s “secret speech” and the political crises in Eastern Europe reveals the failure of Communist ideological education among college students, who, despite censorship, got access to information about the outside world. Students who had grown up under Communist triumph and socialist rule now became the most critical voice in pointing out the problems of the Party and the socialist system. If there was anything that really shook the Party about the students, it was the sense that they had lost control over the youth.¹⁶⁵

From the perspective of students, however, those who offered their critical opinions did not think of themselves as promoting a Hungarian Revolution in China. The fundamental difference between student activism in China and Hungary, or even between students in the Mao

¹⁶³ Shen Zhihua, *Sikao yu xuanze*, 584-596; Andrew Walder, *China under Mao: A Revolution Derailed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 146-148.

¹⁶⁴ Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong xuanji*, v. 5, 432-33; translation in Leung and Kau, eds., *The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976*, v. 2, 563-64.

¹⁶⁵ Goldman, “The Rectification Campaign at Peking University,” 153.

era and those in the May Fourth movement, was that these students spoke out for, not against, the authorities. They viewed their critiques as a way to help improve, not overthrow, the Party and socialism in China. Even if some words in speeches and big-character posters might seem outrageous and provocative, they did not mean to challenge the authorities, but to take advantage of the rare opportunity of freedom. A China without the Party or socialism was beyond their imagination, and simply not what they wanted.

There were probably misunderstandings between Mao and the students. Just as Mao, who had not expected students to enthusiastically participate in the Rectification, most students trusted Mao's words of the Hundred Flowers policy, and did not think too much of the consequences of their own words. Students who aired critical opinions were not aware of the potential implications of their views until it was too late. Some students tried to convince the authorities that they were not imitating their Hungarian counterpart, but their critical voices made the authorities feel under attack. As one of the most active female students in the Rectification Campaign, Lin Xiling distinguished what happened at Beida from that in Budapest in her speech:

Many cadres feel Beida was in complete chaos, even worse than that in Poland or Hungary. I want to reassure those nervous leaders, that this is fundamentally different from the Hungarian Incident. ... I do not see the recent developments at Beida as dangerous. There were some radical and perhaps mistaken views, but no one intends to overthrow socialism.¹⁶⁶

As Lin pointed out, socialism was the bottom line both Mao and the students held, even though the authorities perceived students' words and deeds as challenges. Lin's words were by no means reassuring, since she herself was a critical character in the very movement that made officials nervous. But Lin was not alone, nor was she the most extreme in thinking critically of the crises.

Some 200 foreign exchange students at Beida, many from North Korea, Eastern Europe and Mongolia, might have been in a better position to see the campus events from an outsider's

¹⁶⁶ Zhou Dingfang, Ren Jiayi, *Internal Reference*, May 28, 1957.

perspective.¹⁶⁷ As reported in the *Internal Reference*, some North Korean students worried that a Hungarian Incident might happen, and planned to write big-character posters refuting “reactionary” ones, but they did not end up doing so. Some Hungarian students rephrased their domestic events from “revolution” to “incident,” and also expressed concern that similar scenarios might occur at Beida. Some Czech students were very interested in what was unfolding at Beida and took photos of some big-character posters. Some Indian students believed this Rectification Campaign would have a worldwide impact because it was larger in scale than the Soviet rectification campaign and only in China could it succeed.¹⁶⁸

In the end, the relationship between Mao and the students, or intellectuals in general, turned sour as a result of the Anti-Rightist Campaign. The 1957 Rectification was a huge beat for those who were labeled “rightists,” who would be marginalized for the next two decades. It was a lost opportunity for the nation to listen to people who truly cared about it, and to move on the track of de-Stalinization. It was also a precursor of the Cultural Revolution, when Mao mobilized students to rebel against school authorities before sending the same students to the countryside.

Conclusion

The views of Mao and those of critical students regarding Khrushchev’s “secret speech” and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 could not be more different. Mao disassociated himself from Stalin, denied the connection between personality cults and socialism, and saw little likelihood of a Hungarian incident in China. Nevertheless, students questioned and challenged all these points during the very campaign that Mao himself launched. Ultimately, both Mao and the students were pursuing the same goal – reevaluating the Communist crises in the Eastern Bloc

¹⁶⁷ Goldman, “Peking University Today,” *The China Quarterly*, 108.

¹⁶⁸ Zhu Bin, *Internal Reference*, May 28, 1957.

and looking for a Chinese socialism better than the Soviet one – but they came up with very different answers. The “secret speech” was just as liberating and disorienting to Mao as to some Chinese students, and the Hungarian Revolution offered other Communist countries an example they could either follow or prevent. Students voluntarily joined other intellectuals in airing their opinions at Mao’s invitation, and rarely did anyone think of speaking or acting against Mao. To the surprise of all parties involved, things did not happen the way either Mao or students wanted. Mao launched an open-door rectification in order to forestall Hungarian-type of upheavals, but the critiques were more than he could possibly swallow. Students participated in the Rectification and wished to help the Party improve, but instead intellectual freedom was doomed and Mao’s personality cult rose unchallenged after a brief period of liberalization.

This chapter presents the domestic and international backgrounds of the 1957 political campaigns, with particular attention to responses from Mao and students to the communist crises in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It provides a snapshot of student mentality at the time, especially their understanding of the outside world. To further explore their thoughts and deeds, the next two chapters focus on students at one of the most boisterous campuses: Peking University.

CHAPTER 4

STUDENT ACTIVISM AS CONTENTIOUS POLITICS AT PEKING UNIVERSITY I: CONTENTIOUS REPERTOIRES AND FRAMING TECHNIQUES

Introduction

“The time has come, young men
Sing, young people, open your throats and sing
Let’s put both our suffering and our love into words
Don’t feel alone in your pain, your indignation, your depression
Lay it all out—the bitter and sweet, the pungent and foul—in the light of day
...
Our verses are a torch to destroy all human barriers
They are a torch whose brightness cannot be covered
For its flame comes from the May Fourth”
-- Zhang Yuanxun and Shen Zeyi, “The Time Has Come,” 1957¹⁶⁹

The above lines come from a poem posted on the wall of a dining hall in Peking University (Beida) on the evening of May 19, 1957. It was written during the Rectification Campaign, when Mao invited all intellectuals and democratic party members to offer criticism to help the Party. May 19 was the first day when Beida students participated in the campaign by writing big-character posters. The authors of the poem above were two Chinese literature major students, Zhang Yuanxun and Shen Zeyi. Their poem “The Time Has Come” received immediate attention and heated discussions among students, especially because the authors connected themselves with their counterparts in the May Fourth Movement of 1919 despite a completely different historical contexts. The May Fourth Movement started as a student protest, led also by Beida students and was provoked by the government’s weak response to the Treaty of Versailles, which would transfer the occupation of Shandong province from Germany to Japan.

¹⁶⁹ Zhang Yuanxun and Shen Zeyi, “Shi shihou le” [The Time Has Come], in Niu Han, Deng Jiuping, eds., *Yuanshangcao: Ji yi zhong de fanyoupai yundong* [Grass on Prairie: the Anti-Rightist Campaign in Memory] (Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe, 1998), 16-17. Translation from Ghanshyam Mehta, *The politics of Student Protest in China: Blooming and Contending at Peking University, Spring 1957*, 169; Perry Link, *The Most Wanted Man in China: My Journey from Scientist to Enemy of the State* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2016), 79.

By 1957, foreign imperialism and domestic warlords had long gone, but cries for democracy under a new regime stayed.

Using social movement theories, I approach this episode of student activism as contentious politics, which as sociologist Sidney Tarrow defines, is “triggered when changing political opportunities and constraints create incentives for social actors who lack resources on their own.”¹⁷⁰ In the following two chapters, I pay attention to these aspects of the 1957 event: repertoires of contention and framing techniques in Chapter 4; political opportunity and constraint, both given and perceived, organization and mobilization, and divisions in Chapter 5. As I argue in Chapter 2, repertoire and framing represent the continuities of student activism throughout the twentieth-century, whereas political opportunity, mobilization and divisions make the 1957 episode different from the other years.

To make student activism contentious, it would be overly simplistic to present the confrontation as a binary between students and the authorities. In reality, neither students nor the authorities were monolithic entities. In 1957, divisions existed within the students. Those who spoke critically of the Party and Chinese socialism were considered activists, whereas those who actively defended the Party were deemed loyalists. Both groups were numerical minorities, while the majority of students were silent observers and witnesses. As for the authorities, at least three levels of leadership were of concern in this case: central, municipal, and institutional. Different interpretations of the campaign and various personalities of the leaders made a difference for the trajectories of campus activism. I go beyond a solo narrative, either from student activists or the authorities, by presenting tensions in historical context, and perspectives of all parties involved.

¹⁷⁰ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2.

The following two chapters focus on Beida students for a few reasons. Just as Beida students spearheaded the May Fourth Movement, in 1957 they were among the first to participate in the Rectification Campaign. Beida students employed a variety of contentious repertoires, including big-character posters, journals, speeches and debates, and accusation meetings. They actively mobilized students on campus to form organizations, and sought alliances across campuses in Beijing and elsewhere. Their actions inspired students beyond Beida follow the same, but no other peers were as articulated about their actions as Beida student activists. Thus, the Beida case is by no means representative, but quite unique. Then Chapter 6 goes beyond Beida and looks at a variety of contentious actions by college students that took place nationwide.

Contentious Repertoires

As defined by Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, repertoires of contention are “arrays of contentious performances that are currently known and available within some set of political actors.”¹⁷¹ Thus, contentious repertoires usually can be traced back to an earlier period, and are likely to pass on to the future. Jeffrey Wasserstrom has illustrated in *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China* how students from the 1920s to the 1940s learned their tactics from the past generations, history textbooks, and even state-sanctioned activities.¹⁷² Chapter 2 examines the continuities and discontinuities between student activism of the 1950s with that of the 1940s and the 1960s. For now, I am interested in the multipurpose feature of contentious repertoire, by which I mean it is adopted by both activists and loyalists for different uses, and sometimes

¹⁷¹ Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 202.

¹⁷² Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China*, 75-87.

approved by the authorities. To make this point, I explore the following forms of tactics: big-character posters, speeches and debates, accusation meetings, and journals.

1. Big-Character Posters

Big-character posters are handwritten posters with large-sized Chinese characters pasted on walls. Since imperial times, and especially since the Republican era when the literacy rate rose, this form has been used in both protests and propaganda. But in 1957, the Rectification Campaign was carried out through organized meetings among democratic party members and school faculty. As late as mid-May, students had not participated in the campaign, nor had big-character posters been adopted to openly express one's opinions.

The first big-character poster in pink-red paper appeared on the east wall of the main dining hall around 10:30 am on May 19. The authors addressed themselves as “a group of Youth League members and ordinary students of the history department, class of 1955.” They asked the Beida Youth League Committee to publicize how the Committee selected the Beida delegates to the Third National Congress of the Youth League.¹⁷³ Who were these history majors, and how they came up with the idea of writing a poster? According to memoirs written by Song Jianguo and Cai Jiaqi, two history students involved in the genesis of the poster, on that Sunday morning, *People's Daily* published an article about the opening of the Third National Congress of the Youth League and interviewed the Tsinghua delegates. While reading the newspaper, a few dorm mates in the history department realized that nobody, including their Youth League branch secretary, knew how the Beida delegates were selected. Someone suggested writing a big-character poster to inquire about the issue. Two disagreed with that method, but a class Party secretary was supportive, as long as the language was mild. After discussions, they decided to pose three questions: who are the Beida delegates, how were they selected, and where should

¹⁷³ Mehta, *The politics of Student Protest in China*, 167.

opinions be aired? The students selected Cai Jiaqi to pen the poster, due to his good calligraphy.¹⁷⁴

Responses to the first poster were relatively minor in comparison to what came afterward, but it effectively called upon others to write more posters.¹⁷⁵ Later student activists coined the term “May 19 Movement,” reflecting the first poster’s date of appearance. Some “saluted” the first poster’s writers, and credited them as “trailblazers.” But ironically, these first poster’s writers were more conservative than some activists had expected, as they replied the second day that they could not take the responsibility of “trailblazers,” and hoped other students would participate in the rectification under the school Party committee’s plan by speaking up in organized meetings.¹⁷⁶ In other words, the first student poster as a contentious repertoire was groundbreaking in 1957, for it opened a new space to offer criticism, but the impact was accidental from the authors’ view.

Another factor that contributed to the impact was the location where the first poster appeared. As a Chinese major, Ma Si remembers that the east wall of the dining hall used to be a place for notice, or posters about purchasing or selling books and other things. This place attracted the most people, not only because everyone came to eat at the dining hall, but also it was in between the dorms and classrooms so that everyone had to pass by it.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Song Jianguo, “Huiyi ‘xiang kexue jinjun’ de sui yue [Remembering the days when we ‘march toward science’],” in Wang Chunmei, Wang Meixiu, eds., *Nashi women zheng nianqing* [When We Were Young] (Beijing: Xiandai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007), 137-38; Cai Jiaqi, Beida ‘519’ canyuzhe de jieju [Consequences of Participants in Beida’s May 19 Movement], *Yanhuang chunqiu* [Chronicle of the Chinese People], no. 8 (Beijing: Yanhuang chunqiu zazhi chubanshe, 2015), 54. After the publication of Cai Jiaqi’s article, Cai got into a debate with Wang Shuyao, another Beida student, on who exactly wrote the first poster. Wang believed that it was another history student Xu Nanting, and Xu was prisoned for writing the poster. But so far Xu has not written anything to claim his involvement. So here I use Cai’s account, because it corroborates Song’s narrative.

¹⁷⁵ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan, 1953-57* [Studying at Beida] (Beijing: Qunyan chubanshe, 1999), 344.

¹⁷⁶ Song Jianguo, *Nashi women zheng nianqing*, 137-38.

¹⁷⁷ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 349.

Other big-character posters soon followed. The second one was entitled “A Courageous Suggestion,” written by a philosophy student and a Party member Long Yinghua. He recommended a “democracy wall” for people to put up posters, and asked for leaders of the Party and Youth League to support it.¹⁷⁸ It was not the first “democracy wall” on college campuses. In the 1940s, similar walls had appeared in Lianda, which was a collegiate university of Beida, Tsinghua University and Nankai University in Kunming, southwest China.¹⁷⁹ Nor would this be the last, as the Democracy Wall Movement of 1978-79 reminded us. But Long had two more outrageous suggestions that brought him under attack: getting rid of the school Party committee, and making politics class elective instead of required. These ideas encountered strong pushbacks. One poster rebuked: “What is this nonsense about getting rid of the Party committee? Do we no longer need the Party’s leadership in our school?” Another asked: “Has Fudan University not already canceled its Party committee?” A third person disproved the second by clarifying: “That was a rumor according to newspapers.”¹⁸⁰

A third poster of the day followed in the same vein as Long Yinghua, this time by four mathematics majors: Zhang Jingzhong, Yang Lu, Qian Ruping and Chen Fengxiao. As these students were all of the same major, they took classes together, lived together in the same building if not the same dorm, and naturally wrote posters together. Their poster was titled “Free Forum,” in which they raised five issues. Two of them echoed Long’s suggestions, and the other three aimed at reforming the secret dossier system to make it transparent; getting rid of internal selection of studying abroad students, and making it a merit-based public exam; establishing a

¹⁷⁸ Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China*, 167.

¹⁷⁹ I thank John Israel for pointing this out to me. See John Israel, *Lianda: a Chinese University in War and Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

¹⁸⁰ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 343.

free forum to ensure freedom of speech, assembly, publishing, and demonstration.¹⁸¹ Some concerns were directly related to schools and students, but some matters were broader.

The most controversial poster of the day was “The Time Has Come.” As quoted in parts at the beginning of this chapter, the poster was the first one to be composed as a poem. Authors of the poem were two third-year Chinese major students, Zhang Yuanxun and Shen Zeyi. According to Shen’s memoir, he got inspiration from Vladimir Mayakovsky, a Soviet poet who wrote a 3,000-line epic poem ‘Vladimir Ilyich Lenin,’ in which he repeatedly used the phrase ‘The Time Has Come.’ Thus Shen borrowed Mayakovsky’s phrase and style, and wrote 20 lines within five minutes. He showed it to Zhang, who agreed to write in the same form, and publish under the same title as a poster. They used black ink on a red paper, signed their names and student IDs, and posted it after 6pm on the night of May 19.¹⁸²

Some students did not read it until breakfast time of the next morning, when responses to the poem had already been posted. A critical response was titled “Our Song,” written by Jiang Feng and a group of Chinese majors, mostly first and second years. It was also a poem on a poster of the same size, black characters on a white paper.¹⁸³ The poem expressed disagreement with Zhang and Shen and stated loyalty to the Party, and it exemplified that both student activists and loyalists could employ the same repertoire for different purposes:

We disagree with the tone of “The Time Has Come,”
Which sounds like redressing an injustice to the white-hair girl
...
We can hardly accept the “torch” you hold

¹⁸¹ Chen Fengxiao, *Meng duan weiminghu* [Dreams Come to an End at Weiming Lake] (Washington D.C.: Laogai Research Foundation, 2005), 337-38. Dossier system was adopted in Communist countries. Every person had a personal profile that kept a record of her family background, promotion and demotion. One was not supposed to know what was in the record, but carry the dossier with her wherever she goes to school or work. Selecting students to study abroad used to be merit-based, but by the 1950s, it relied more and more on one’s class background and political reliability.

¹⁸² Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19: *Xuesheng youpaimen shi “zenyang liancheng de”* [Beijing University, May 19: How Students Rightists were “Smelt”] (Hong Kong: Tianxingjian chubanshe, 2010), 17-21, 24.

¹⁸³ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, May 19, 25.

Even though you claim the fire “comes from May Fourth”
...
We grew up under the care and education by the Communist Party
In comparison to the past, our lives are warmer than ever
We love the Party more than our mothers¹⁸⁴

It would be oversimplified, if not inaccurate, to portray the authors as being “brainwashed.” In fact, defending the Party when hearing criticism was almost a knee-jerk reaction to some people. As the poem’s last line indicated, many appreciated the Communist Party because they had been through worse times under the Nationalist government before 1949. The contrast between the two gave legitimacy to the Communist leadership, which gained popularity and trust among the people. So criticism of the Party might seem unfounded and unappreciative of historical progress.

The reference to the May Fourth Movement was the biggest contention in Zhang and Shen’s poem. Later Shen explained in a debate that he was aware of the changing nature of the May Fourth tradition after 1949, as the Communist narrative directed its attention away from democracy and science, and toward Mao and Communism. Shen wanted to bring back the May Fourth as a way to inspire democracy and science again.¹⁸⁵ For their opponents, however, the torch of the May Fourth Movement was supposed to oppose domestic and foreign enemies, and therefore it should not be used among the people, and it was improper to attack at Party and Youth League cadres in the Rectification Campaign.¹⁸⁶

Two of the authors of “Our Song” were Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian, both cadre students who had served in the military before coming to Beida. They also wrote an essay of the event, in which they viewed “The Time Has Come” as expressing an unhealthy mood and radical

¹⁸⁴ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 350-51; Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 26-29. Qian Liqun, *Jujue yiwang*, 85.

¹⁸⁵ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 44-45.

¹⁸⁶ Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China*, 170.

views.¹⁸⁷ One should not doubt the authors' sincerity. As a meteorology student Hu Bowei understood, the loyalists might not have experienced being victimized in Communist political campaigns, and thus their views of the Communist Party were rosier. Hu did not completely agree with "The Time Has Come," which sounded too emotional for him, but he interpreted it as calling people to air problems they previously were afraid to talk about, rather than promoting a Hungarian-type riot in China.¹⁸⁸

Controversy surrounding "The Time Has Come" continued, as students who supported the authors also wrote poem posters to argue against "Our Song." One was by Liu Qidi, a senior physics student, also entitled "The Time Has Come." Besides showing support, Liu also denounced unwarranted purges of students during the Counterrevolutionary Campaign of 1955:

Why is it not the time?
How much longer can our bitterness be suppressed?
Why is it not the time?
How much longer can our lips be sealed?
Why is it not the time?
Do you still want hundreds of thousands of heads to fall?
(Stalin killed honest Communist Party members.)
Why is it not the time?
Do you want a repetition of the Hungarian Incident?
(Rakosi sowed the seeds.)¹⁸⁹

Liu Qidi was mislabeled "counterrevolutionary" in 1955 because he defended Hu Feng, a pro-Communist writer who was arrested for being critical of Communist literary theories. During the blooming and contending, students re-evaluated Hu Feng and the 1955 Counterrevolutionary Campaign, and victims like Liu spoke out against injustice based on their experiences. Another supporter of Zhang and Shen was a fellow Chinese major, Lin Zhao, a talented girl adored by her

¹⁸⁷ Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian, Yaoji donghai [Letters to the East Sea] in *Zhang Jiong wencun* v.1 (Changsha: Hunan daxue chubanshe, 2011), 87.

¹⁸⁸ Hu Bowei, *Qingchun Beida* [Youth, Beijing University] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2006), 290, 303.

¹⁸⁹ Mehta, *The politics of Student Protest in China*, 170.

male classmates. She wrote a poem “What is this song,” which included a line: “Why bringing up all these terrifying terms like crazy and hysterical, and why leave out the label ‘counterrevolutionary’!”¹⁹⁰

After Lin’s poem, the writers of “Our Song” called for a truce, though the conversation went on, and so did students’ enthusiasm for making and reading posters.¹⁹¹ Ma Si observed that big-character posters started on one side of the wall, and then extended to all sides of walls, inside and outside dining halls, and even a dorm building closest to the dining hall.¹⁹² Chen Fengxiao noticed that the library used to be packed, and students would put bags there before dinner to make sure they got seats. But on the night of May 19, almost half of the seats were empty.¹⁹³ It was towards the end of the semester, and students had to take classes as usual. Thus the only time to read and write posters would be at night. By 5:20pm on May 20, the number of posters reached 162 by a campus newsletter’s account.¹⁹⁴ Within one day on May 22, the number of posters increased from 264 at 11 am to 317 by 7pm.¹⁹⁵ Posters did not always come in big characters, as the paper and characters sizes would change depending on where they were posted. A variety of forms were displayed on the posters: long-winded articles (including translation excerpts of Khrushchev’s secret speech), short essays, prose items, poetry, cartoons and serialized novels.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁰ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 31-2.

¹⁹¹ Qian Liqun, *Jujue yiwang*, 87.

¹⁹² Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 349.

¹⁹³ Chen Fengxiao, *Meng duan weiminghu*, 338.

¹⁹⁴ Zhu Zheng, *Fanyoupai douzheng quanshi* [A Complete History of the Anti-Rightist Campaign], v. 1 (Taipei: Xiuwei zixun keji, 2013), 210.

¹⁹⁵ René Goldman, Rectification Campaign at Peking University, *China Quarterly* (no. 12, 1962), 141.

¹⁹⁶ “Peking University - The ‘Democratic Wall,’” *Guangming Daily*, May 26, 1957. Translated in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, 133. Hu Bawei remembers a cartoon poster that portrayed an old Taoist priest, who owned three treasures: stand, viewpoint, and method. The priest said: “I have no other skills but these three treasures. They work at any time. They always hit the targets.” Then he threw the three things at the “enemies.” See Hu Bawei, *Qingchun, Beida*, 305.

As students embraced the opportunity to air their opinions, big-character posters as a contentious repertoire in the Rectification Campaign took the authorities by surprise. The Beida Party leaders were ambivalent about it at first. On the night of May 19, at a meeting with Youth League members, the school vice Party secretary Cui Xiongkun responded to the question about the establishment of a “Democracy Wall.” He said, “We neither advocate it nor oppose it, because it is not the best form.”¹⁹⁷ He did not specify the alternative, though previously the only form of the campaign was through organized meetings. His remark dissatisfied many students. The following night, however, the school Party secretary Jiang Longji made a clearer and more positive announcement: “Beida’s democratic atmosphere had never been so lively before. ... The Party committee welcomes criticisms in all forms, and we wholeheartedly support big-character posters.”¹⁹⁸ He also expressed regret for Cui’s response the night before. The school Party committee even set up billboards to show its support of poster writing.¹⁹⁹ What accounted for such change? Most people credited Jiang for being an open-minded educator.

After receiving the green light from the school authorities, students seemed more confident about sharing critical views through big-character posters. An outrageous-looking poster came out on the afternoon of May 20, written by a third-year physics student Tan Tianrong, who later became one of the most controversial student activists. The poster was entitled “No. One Poisonous Weed,” which invoked Mao’s differentiation of fragrant flowers and poisonous weeds in his hundred flowers policy. The former referred to healthy suggestions, while the latter indicated reactionary speeches. Within the next few weeks, Tan wrote altogether four “poisonous weeds.” In the first poster, he started by quoting the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, “All adults should die and leave the country to its adolescents to reign.” He attacked

¹⁹⁷ Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian, *Zhang Jiong wencun*, 86; Mehta, *The politics of Student Protest in China*, 174.

¹⁹⁸ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 138; Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian, *Zhang Jiong wenji*, 86.

¹⁹⁹ Mehta, *The politics of Student Protest in China*, 174-75.

editors of the *People's Daily* as having no understanding of Marxism, and called “three-good students” idiots and “little screws.”²⁰⁰ He laughed at those who automatically reacted to uncomfortable criticism as better fitting in at the zoo than at Beida. Finally, he addressed himself as a “strong and young guy that harbors malice.”²⁰¹ Later he explained the reason why he chose such provocative terms was because he wanted to attract attention, but others misinterpreted him as anti-socialist.²⁰²

Reactions towards Tan Tianrong and his posters were a mix. Some supported him despite all the problems. As Chen Fengxiao remembered, “[Tan’s] knowledge was limited, his arguments were not all correct, and his evidence was not impeccable. But the poster showed the talent of a young student.”²⁰³ Another student Ma Si had similar feelings: “[Tan] might have read some books, and thought about some questions, but he was somewhat showing off and playing to the gallery.”²⁰⁴ A third student Hu Bowei made a thorough comparison between Tan and himself, as he could identify with Tan on many levels: they were both Youth League members, both studied physics and interested in theories and philosophy because of science, and both pursued truth and independent thinking while opposing suppression of thought. But Hu made it clear that the major difference between the two was that he preferred writing letters to superiors or getting published in newspapers over writing big-character posters and mobilizing students on and off campus.²⁰⁵ Not everyone approved of Tan’s poster. As Zhang and Xie reported in “Letters to the

²⁰⁰ “Three-good students” refer to those who are good in morals, grades, and physical health, a common measurement for student performance since the 1950s. “Little screws” refer to role model servicemen represented by Lei Feng, a Communist legend and a soldier in the People’s Liberation Army.

²⁰¹ Tan Tianrong, “Diyizhu ducao” [No. One Poisonous Weed] in Niu Han, Deng Jiuping, eds., *Yuanshangcao*, 28-29.

²⁰² Tan Tianrong, “Jiujiu xinling” [Save the Soul] in Niu Han, Deng Jiuping, eds., *Yuanshangcao*, 56.

²⁰³ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 339.

²⁰⁴ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 347.

²⁰⁵ Hu Bowei, *Qingchu Beida*, 294-96.

East Sea,” they referred to “No. One Poisonous Weed” as “unhealthy,” and described it as arousing public indignation, protest, question and criticism.²⁰⁶

As shown in the follow-ups to Zhang Yuanxun and Shen Zeyi’s “The Time Has Come” as well as Tan Tianrong’s “No. One Poisonous Weed,” students had opposing responses to critical posters, both supporting and attacking the critics.²⁰⁷ It is wrong to assume that school officials arranged student loyalists to defend the Party during the blooming and contending. In fact, the Beida Party committee discouraged Party students from fighting back at the moment. As Ma Si remembered, the campus radio broadcast announced again and again an open letter suggesting that during the rectification, Party members should listen to people’s opinions, and wait to argue back even if they disagree.²⁰⁸ Despite the open letter, some student Party and Youth League members could not hold their anger and they fought back anyway, indicating that divisions among students had existed before the authorities enforced classification in the Anti-Rightist Campaign (see Chapter 7).

Besides student activists and loyalists, both vocal about their different concerns, there was also an ambivalent, or in Goldman’s term, a “wait and see” crowd, which constituted the majority.²⁰⁹ One poster that captured the mentality of this crowd said, “We want Party leadership, but we are resolutely opposed to the Party alone in making decisions and implementing them.”²¹⁰ When journalists from *Wenhui Daily*, a Shanghai based newspaper affiliated with a democratic party, interviewed Beida students and teachers, most believed that there was no need to fear that students would make things out of control.²¹¹

²⁰⁶ Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian, *Zhang Jiong wencun*, 86.

²⁰⁷ Goldman, *China Quarterly*, 149; Teiwes, *Politics and Purges in China*, 295-96.

²⁰⁸ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 356.

²⁰⁹ Goldman, *China Quarterly*, 150.

²¹⁰ Teiwes, *Politics and Purges in China*, 296.

²¹¹ *Wenhui Daily*, May 27, 1957, translated in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, 134.

It would be an overwhelming task to detail all the issues discussed in big-character posters, but as evidenced above, Beida students went beyond both complaints of individual cadres and matters of self-interests, such as selection of students going abroad or job allocation of graduates.²¹² Instead, students looked into more fundamental problems. One regarded the “three evils” – bureaucratism, sectarianism, and subjectivism – which the Rectification Campaign aimed to reveal and remove. Students probed not only the symptoms but also the origins of the “three evils.” As Zhang Xikun wrote in his poster, he considered the “three evils” not a problem of work style, but a product of socialist system.²¹³ Yugoslav Communist leader Josip Tito had come to the same conclusion about origins of Stalin’s personality cult in his Pula speech, which was well known among students because the *People’s Daily* published the full text of the speech.²¹⁴ Besides Tito’s influence, Fang Lizhi, a physics student, reasoned that science students were trained to seek the origins regardless of their support for the Party.²¹⁵

The other issue dealt with the privilege of Party bureaucrats. As Zhou Dajue described in his poster, Party cadres formed a new class, which owned the means of production in the name of public ownership and earned a disproportionate amount of money in comparison to ordinary workers.²¹⁶ In the 1950s, the privilege of Party bureaucrats was still new to people unfamiliar with the Communist hierarchy, but the problem had yet to loom large. Students who grew up with concepts of an ideal communism, however, were extremely sensitive to such emerging

²¹² “Peking University - The ‘Democratic Wall,’” *Guangming Daily*, May 26, translated in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, 133.

²¹³ Zhang Xikun, “sanhai genyuan” [Origins of the Three Evils], in Niu Han, Deng Jiuping eds., *Yuanshangcao*, 120-24.

²¹⁴ Hu Bowei, *Qingchun, Beida*, 298. See more in Chapter 2.

²¹⁵ Fang Lizhi, translated by Perry Link, *The Most Wanted Man in China: My Journey from Scientist to Enemy of the State* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2016), 81.

²¹⁶ Zhou Dajue, “lun ‘jieji’ de fazhan” [On the Development of ‘Class’], in Niu Han, Deng Jiuping eds., *Yuanshangcao*, 167.

phenomena. Thus their criticism reflected youthful idealism rather than rejection of Party rule.²¹⁷ Students were not necessarily aware of the boundaries between things that could and could not be discussed, so they brought everything on the table during the Rectification, and they gained a sense of freedom through writing posters. The freedom turned out to be short-lived, and the boundaries shrank, not expanded as a result of the Anti-Rightist Campaign.

Students' posters did not evade Mao's attention, as he initially showed great concern and dispatched secretaries to Beida to read these writings. But after hearing reports about the impact of posters, he changed his mind and started to support big-character posters as a way of blooming and contending. An early reference to big-character posters appeared in early June 1957.²¹⁸ In a draft of "Instructions on Strengthening the Rectification Campaign," Mao appraised them as more beneficial than harmful, and therefore the Party had nothing to worry about. Again on June 8, Mao recommended using big-character posters as weapons in struggles against rightist attacks.²¹⁹ From then on, big-character posters had become a multipurpose repertoire that initiated by students and endorsed by the authorities, which increased its popularity in future mass campaigns.

2. Speeches and Debates

As students gathered in front of the dining hall to read posters, it was natural to develop into debates, both in writings and through face-to-face conversations.²²⁰ The place of gathering, surrounded by dining halls and dormitories, was called "Democratic Plaza."²²¹ Speakers – usually those who had written controversial posters – argued with the crowd after dinner. More

²¹⁷ Hu Bowei, *Qingchun, Beida*, 298; Teiwes, *Politics and Purges in China*, 296.

²¹⁸ Mao Zedong, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Writings of Mao since 1949] v. 6 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1992), 491.

²¹⁹ Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong xuanji* [Selected Works of Mao Zedong] v. 5 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1977), 431-32.

²²⁰ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 343.

²²¹ Goldman, *China Quarterly*, 141.

than one observer, including Chinese and foreign exchange students and journalists, described the atmosphere as similar to Hyde Park's Speakers' Corner in London, an area for open-air public speech and debate.²²²

Because of the seeming freedom of speech, these debates were often heated and confrontational. One might say that the debates truly reflected what Mao called for: let a hundred schools of thoughts contend. At the same time, however, according to Hu Bowei, the scene reminded him of struggle sessions during the Counter-revolutionary Campaign of 1955. Many students did not step up for speech on their own, but loyalists surrounded those who put up critical posters and forced them to clarify their views. Some students talked with confidence, but some had nothing to say, which made the scene awkward.

One of the students who were surrounded right after putting up posters was Tan Tianrong. Tan was average height, looked spirited, dark skinned, a bit thin, and wore dark-framed glasses.²²³ Standing on a stool, he talked nonstop like a scholar. He liked to quote from classics, and he could give titles, recite paragraphs and even page numbers from Hegel and Engels, which impressed some followers.²²⁴ Many students argued with Tan in front of the dining hall, many against him and a few on his side. While the audience was shouting, Tan did not seem hurried, and he spoke calmly with a smile. He held both arms in front of his chest, and pretended to be elegant in manner. He was good at using specious reasoning, and with decent knowledge and a good memory, he was able to defend himself for a while.²²⁵ His opponents, however, were not satisfied. As recorded in Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian's "Letters to the East Sea," once Tan said, "right is wrong, and wrong is right." Someone happened to take a photo of him, but he declined

²²² Hu Bowei, *Qingchun, Beida*, 301; Goldman, *China Quarterly*, 141; Wenhui Daily, May 27, 1957, translated in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, 134.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 293.

²²⁴ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 351; Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 338.

²²⁵ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 355.

immediately by saying “I always refuse to take photos.” Someone in the audience replied, “According to his theory, what he opposes should be what he approves.” Everyone laughed.²²⁶

Debates became one-sided when the audience shouted revolutionary slogans, or yelled comments such as “Don’t release poison! Roll down the stage!”²²⁷ The authorities might be happy to see that the indoctrination had paid off, and it is important to point out that during the Rectification, student loyalists operated on an individual basis, as they took their own initiative to play the role of campus guards. Often times student loyalists were Party or Youth League members, or those who aspired to become one. They claimed to “protect the truth” against “anti-Party elements.” At this point, they acted out of instinct, not orders from above.²²⁸

In the audience, besides supporters of the two camps – student activists and loyalists – there were also a number of silent yet curious listeners. Ma Si was one of them. He joined friends in writing posters, but not debates, because he disagreed to air opinions in such form. Not that Ma had political instincts about what was upcoming, but he did not like making public appearances or standing out. Being sandwiched in between the two competing forces, he felt nervous and depressed.²²⁹ As another silent observer who did not choose sides, Hu Bowei noticed the rhetorical differences between the two camps. According to Hu’s memoir, student critics dared to say unorthodox things, and they spoke out of their own experiences and thinking, even though some phrases, such as Party privilege, sounded unfamiliar to others. On the other hand, student loyalists’ language was formulaic, as they repeated lines from the authorities, such as upholding Marxism-Leninism. They seemed to stand on a higher ground and started by asking: on what grounds are you talking, and talking on whose behalf? They boasted about the

²²⁶ Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian, *Zhang Jiong wencun*, 99.

²²⁷ Hu Bowei, *Qingchun, Beida*, 301.

²²⁸ Zhang Yuanxun, *Beida 1957* [Beijing University, 1957] (Hong Kong: Mingbao chubanshe, 2004), 44.

²²⁹ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 355, 359.

accomplishments on whatever problem the activists pointed out, and then judged the critiques as rumors and slanders. They learned from official newspapers, reports or political textbooks. These materials were likely to go against reality, and were full of contradictions and logical errors. Thus their words gave others political pressure, but not theoretical persuasion.²³⁰

But it remained a difficult task to challenge student loyalists, because the authorities would soon come to their side. Loyalists happily accepted when student activists called them “defenders.” They were proud of that nickname, and claimed themselves as loyal defenders of Marxism-Leninism. A group of thirty students said in a poster titled “Forum of Defenders:”

Yes, we are defenders, and we defend socialism and Marxism-Leninism. ... We uphold truth, and we oppose empty cries, or demands that confuse right and wrong. ... Our clique is open to everyone, as long as you love the Party, and want to improve the rectification.²³¹

One might wonder why loyalists could not tolerate criticisms and tried so hard to defend the Party. Were they speaking their minds, or if not, what was their motivation? Hu Bowei confessed that he used to be naïve and thought loyalists were simple-headed and had a rigid way of thinking. But gradually he sensed something different. Some students probably knew that loyalists sounded far-fetched, but they could still boast shamelessly about the Party. Some wanted to state their position, and had no fear of wrongfully accusing others. Some more experienced students were probably aware of systemic problems that had started to emerge, such as Mao’s personality cult, but they also knew that the Party was firmly in power. So they did not bother to care about rights and wrongs, as long as they stick with the Party line.²³²

Besides Tan Tianrong, another student who attracted a big audience during her public speeches was Lin Xiling, a female law student at People’s University (Renda). As introduced in

²³⁰ Hu Bowei, *Qingchun, Beida*, 301-02.

²³¹ Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian, *Zhang Jiong wencun*, 89.

²³² Hu Bowei, *Qingchun, Beida*, 302-03.

the previous chapter, Lin was a cadre student who used to serve in the military for four years. She had studied journalism and interned at *China Youth Daily* before going to graduate school in 1953.²³³ Renda accepted only cadre students, and it was known for training future Party leaders. Thus in the bastion of loyalists, Lin's sharp criticism and outspoken personality made her a "black sheep," as characterized by the *People's Daily*.²³⁴

Lin Xiling came to Beida twice during the Rectification. The first time she was invited by her cadre student friend to see posters and hear debates, at which Lin gave an impromptu speech on a variety of topics from the evaluation of Stalin and Mao to Chinese socialism. The second time Beida student activists invited her to give a talk.²³⁵ Both times she attracted a great audience, as a Xinhua journalist recorded in the *Internal Reference* that her second speech had over 5,000 students and faculty from several universities in Beijing in the audience.²³⁶ On the night of May 23, she gave her first speech at the "Democratic Plaza" in front of the dining hall. Wearing an old green military uniform and standing on a table, she talked nonstop. She had a round, slightly chubby face, two short but thick braids, and her sleeves rolled up.²³⁷ She first commented on the contrast between Beida and Renda and praising Beida's free spirit:

I am very excited today to be able to breathe the fresh air of Beida. The People's University is a great beehive of dogmatism with too heavy a bureaucratic atmosphere. Beida, after all, is Beida and inherits the traditions of the May Fourth Movement.²³⁸

Then Lin quickly switched the topic to Hu Feng, which a Beida student Liu Qidi had touched upon. Lin agreed with Liu, and said "Hu Feng's opinions were basically correct," and

²³³ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 343.

²³⁴ "Lin Xiling, the black sheep," *People's Daily*, June 30, 1957, translated in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, 140-41.

²³⁵ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 343. In Chen's account, Lin Xiling came to Beida three times, but from other records, she only gave speeches twice.

²³⁶ Zhou Dingfang, Ren Jiaqi, Beida de yige daxing bianlunhui [A big debate at Beida], *Internal Reference*, May 27, 1957.

²³⁷ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 363.

²³⁸ Doolin, *Communist China*, 23.

the Hundred Flowers policy was essentially the same as Hu Feng's proposal.²³⁹ Lin believed that Hu would not be considered a counter-revolutionary if he brought up his ideas during the Rectification. Next Lin talked about Khrushchev's secret speech and Tito's speech, as discussed in Chapter 3. After that, Lin commented on the current situation with a more realistic and pessimistic tone:

I hear the rumors that there is going to be a retraction. If someone thinks of sealing people's lips, it is the utmost foolishness. Beida is blooming, and higher intellectuals are blooming. But wide strata of people have not yet bloomed. What has been exposed is less than even 1% of real life.²⁴⁰

At this point, her audience was rather divided. Many students booed her and demanded that she should stop talking and leave the stage, but at the same time, 30 to 40 students surrounded her and wanted her to continue. They defended her by saying "this is a free discussion platform; those who don't want to listen can go."²⁴¹ When a female student in the crowd warned others, "We should be vigilant of such provocative words," she was hit by another student.²⁴² Throughout Lin's speech, there were all kinds of noises from off stage, either asking her to get off or applauding for her. She seemed to talk with confidence and no fear, as if nothing had happened.²⁴³

Before Lin could finish, she was cut off. A middle-aged man came onto the stage, and started debunking Lin point by point. He turned out to be a Renda law department lecturer, who followed Lin to Beida to criticize her.²⁴⁴ While he was on stage, 20 to 30 students escorted Lin to the door of a dormitory, where they set up another stage for her. This time they kept the stage to

²³⁹ "Lin Xiling, the black sheep," *People's Daily*, June 30, 1957, translated in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, 140.

²⁴⁰ Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China*, 181.

²⁴¹ Lin Xiling, the black sheep," *People's Daily*, June 30, 1957, translated in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, 140.

²⁴² Lin Xiling, Zai Beida de diyici fayan [The First Speech at Beida], in *Yuanshangcao*, 154-55.

²⁴³ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 362.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 366.

Lin herself without allowing other people to speak.²⁴⁵ It was more like a Q&A session, in which Lin answered questions about her experience in the military and changing views of the Party.²⁴⁶ That night, big-character posters spread all over the walls, asking to debate with her, exposing her lies, and caricaturing her. Meanwhile, there were also students praising her with slogans like “long live Lin Xiling,” or “I wish to move forward with beautiful Lin Xiling hand in hand.”²⁴⁷

On May 27, Lin Xiling gave a second speech at Beida. This time the gathering took place in the dining hall, hosted by the Student Association. People who came to hear her talk occupied over half of the dining hall.²⁴⁸ Lin wore a white navy uniform, which again showed her background.²⁴⁹ She began by acknowledging that her first speech was rash and nonsense, though she took full responsibility. Considering the chaotic scene last time, she begged the audience to be patient and listen before suing her for being a counter-revolutionary. She revealed later that, as one student confessed to her, a Party secretary had arranged students to disrupt the order at her first speech.²⁵⁰

In comparison to the first time, Lin was more than ready for her second speech. She made a list of thirteen issues, including systemic problems, contradictions within the people, the nature of the ruling class, being dissatisfied with reality, and problems within the Rectification.²⁵¹ Her old and new Beida friends became her aides, providing information about Beida, and introducing the response and impact she had from her last speech. During the speech, there were students who spoke for her and fought against her opponents.²⁵²

²⁴⁵ Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian, *Zhang Jiong wencun*, 95.

²⁴⁶ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 367.

²⁴⁷ Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian, *Zhang Jiong wencun*, 95; Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 368.

²⁴⁸ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 375-76; Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian, *Zhang Jiong wencun*, 95.

²⁴⁹ Hu Bowei, *Qingchun, Beida*, 304.

²⁵⁰ Lin Xiling, *Zai Beida de dierci yanjiang* [The Second Speech at Beida], in *Yuanshangcao*, 155, 158.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 155-58; Zhang Jiong, Xie Mian, *Zhang Jiong wencun*, 95.

²⁵² Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 375.

On the Student Association side, they also came prepared. They selected a few speakers, including faculty and students, to argue against Lin. Xu Qinghui and Cao Nianming, two Chinese major students, were among the speakers. A Shanghai girl, excellent in schoolwork, Xu had little experience in political struggle. According to Ma Si, a fellow Chinese major in the audience, when Xu came on stage, people laughed, because her Shanghai lady's dress was better suited to dance parties than debates. She was bookish, and spoke with carefully chosen words, which was far from what a debate required.²⁵³ But when Cao Nianming mentioned what Mao said that "all speeches and actions that deviated from socialism are completely incorrect," many people in the audience applauded.²⁵⁴

Though the debate ended without an apparent winner or loser, Lin attracted many followers, while loyalists had a hard time catching up with her. She gave the impression that she was knowledgeable, well read, and good at speech and independent thinking. Most importantly, from what she revealed in her speeches, she seemed to have internal sources that ordinary students would not have access to.²⁵⁵ People did not know until the Anti-Rightist Campaign that she was dating Cao Zhixiong, an office secretary of Hu Yaobang, leader of the Youth League at the time. Such a connection gave her access to Khrushchev's secret speech and internal references only available to certain levels of cadres. Nobody expected that Lin would leak classified information through public speeches and debates. The Anti-Rightist Campaign not only ruined this relationship, but Cao was fired from his secretary position, and both Lin and Cao were labeled "rightists."

In comparison to critical posters by student activists, Lin Xiling's speeches went further in terms of scope and intensity. If Zhang Yuanxun and Shen Zeyi's call for passing along the

²⁵³ Ibid., 375-76.

²⁵⁴ Zhang Jiong, Xie Mian, *Zhang Jiong wencun*, 95.

²⁵⁵ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 367, 377; Hu Bawei, *Qingchu, Beida*, 304.

torch from the May Fourth could be repudiated as “poetic exaggeration,” Lin’s speeches seemed more convincing with her access to classified sources.²⁵⁶ As a result, according to Ghanshyam Mehta who was an exchange student to Beida from India, students were increasingly polarized. If previously the majority of students were only reading posters without airing their opinions, now more students began to take sides on critical issues discussed over debates, and therefore students in the middle, or in Mehta’s words, “fence sitters,” as what Réne Goldman described as “wait and see” students, were dwindling. At this point, students who raised critical concerns had not been labeled “rightist” yet, since the authorities still encouraged their speeches and comments. Loyalists were not necessarily “leftists” either, and they had been given several names, such as gedepai (praise-singers of the regime) and weidaoshi (guardians).²⁵⁷

The role the Student Association played in speeches and debates was complicated, which exemplified the awkward position the school authorities found themselves in when responding to speeches and debates as a contentious repertoire. They announced that during the Rectification, between 5pm and 10pm every day would be time for debates. They designated two classrooms, erected platforms and installed loudspeakers on the square to facilitate debates.²⁵⁸ Such accommodation had two possible explanations, though with little evidence to support either: the Student Association might not want to be a mouthpiece of the authorities, or they probably gave in to the demands of student activists by facilitating the airing of views.²⁵⁹ But once the Student Association got involved, debates seemed to change. As Shen Zeyi observed, they appeared to contribute to a better debate, but in fact brought the debate under control.²⁶⁰ The same thing went with Lin Xiling’s second speech. Ma Si remembered that the debate went in order, unlike the

²⁵⁶ Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China*, 182.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

²⁵⁸ Wenhui Daily, May 27, 1957, translated in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, 134.

²⁵⁹ Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China*, 186.

²⁶⁰ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 47.

chaotic situation the first time. There was a lack of spontaneity and excitement, and the speakers could not speak about whatever they wanted.²⁶¹

3. Accusation Meetings

In between Lin Xiling's visits to Beida, students explored a more powerful repertoire than posters and debates: accusation meetings (*sukuhui*).²⁶² It was a popular practice during the land reform of the early 1950s, when poor peasants came together to violently attack, verbally and physically, the landlords. Now students used the same strategy to reveal the injustices of the Party. They assumed that since the authorities adopted accusation meetings in earlier campaigns, they should have no trouble replaying it in the Rectification.

On May 25, the Western language department branch of the Youth League organized an accusation meeting. Two accusers, Gu Wenxuan and Zhou Duo were both from that department. Gu used to work at the Hangzhou police bureau, where he was tortured in the 1955's Counter-revolutionary Campaign. He enrolled at Beida the year after, and talked about the brutality of the police system.²⁶³ Zhou interned at a public security bureau, where he worked hard and gained recognition. So the public security bureau did not want him to leave, and framed him to read classified documents and accused him as a counterrevolutionary.²⁶⁴

According to a Xinhua journalist report in the *Internal Reference*, the accusation meeting took place in the hall of the office building of the Western language department. It was a packed audience, both inside the hall and outside on the stairs. Some in the audience were moved to tears while hearing stories of mistreatment fellow students had suffered. After listening to Zhou and other students, one in the audience shouted: "We also want to make accusations!" Another

²⁶¹ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 375.

²⁶² Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China*, 184.

²⁶³ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 339.

²⁶⁴ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 122-23.

followed, “Righteous faculty and student Party members should stay, and we should not go to class.” Feng Zhi, the Chinese department chair, was also in the audience, though he felt the meeting was absurd.²⁶⁵

This accusation meeting turned out too threatening and unacceptable for the authorities, which responded immediately. That night, the school Party secretary Jiang Longji made a speech, warning those who adopted such methods not to get involved in things unrelated to the Rectification. As he said, “The accusation meeting technique could only be used against enemies. You cannot use it against the Party and hence it should not be employed again.”²⁶⁶ His statement indicated that the authorities were sensitive to how various repertoires were adopted, no matter whether or not they had been approved before. After Jiang’s statement, nobody organized another accusation meeting again.

4. Journals

Besides posters, another written form of contentious repertoire was student publications. While most journals were approved and funded by the school Party or Youth League authorities, a few were independent and self-funded. Some had existed before the Rectification but published special issues for the occasion, and some sprang up as a result of the campaign. In this section, I will use three journals – *Red Mansion*, *Public Square*, and *Waves Washing Sands* – as examples to illustrate the multipurpose repertoires.

I. *Red Mansion (Honglou)*

Red Mansion was a student journal sponsored by the school Youth League. The chief editor was Yue Daiyun, a cadre in the Youth League and assistant professor in Chinese department. Deputy editors were two senior Chinese majors. The first issue of the journal came

²⁶⁵ Lei Peng, “Beida seems calm on the surface, but the chaos is escalating,” *Internal Reference*, May 27, 1957.

²⁶⁶ Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China*, 185.

out on January 1, 1957. The front cover was allegorical in retrospect: it was entitled “the storm is about to come” along with an image of a shepherd walking his sheep down a hill with swaying grass and dark clouds in the background.²⁶⁷ *Red Mansion* started as a literary journal, but it could not resist politicization as the political campaigns got underway. Since its legitimacy and funding came from the authorities, it had to comply with the Party’s guidance.

The third issue of *Red Mansion* came out on May 4, and the fourth one was published on July 1st in between which many things changed dramatically. In celebration of the May Fourth Movement, thirteen poets together wrote a poem “Song of May Fourth,” published in the third issue. It had a line that drew connection between the past and the present:

I yearn for the May Fourth Movement that rocked the world/
I also admire the December Ninth that shed blood/
But I love most of all our age, a time that the Youth League is galloping.²⁶⁸

The poem was recited on the night of May 4th at a torch parade on campus. Zhang Yuanxun had a fond memory of the night. The Beida party secretary lighted the first torch on the stage, then passed it on to the first student, and on to hundreds of students, turning the gathering into a sea of fire as bright as daytime.²⁶⁹ Shen Zeyi, however, had a more somber view of the event organized by the Youth League and student union, which only a few hundred students attended.²⁷⁰

On May 19, the same day as the first big-character posters appeared on campus, students on the *Red Mansion* editorial board made a trip to the Summer Palace near the campus.²⁷¹ Among them were Zhang Yuanxun, who later contributed to the poem “The Time Has Come,” Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian, who later published “Letters to the East Sea” about student blooming and contending on *Red Mansion*, and Lin Zhao, who later felt conflicted about the Rectification

²⁶⁷ Qian Liqun, *Jujue yiwang*, 73, 77-78.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁶⁹ Zhang Yuanxun, *Beida 1957*, 23.

²⁷⁰ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 44-45.

²⁷¹ Qian Liqun, *Jujue yiwang*, 82, 98.

and became more critical of the Party after the Anti-Rightist Campaign. These friends had no idea what had happened on campus that day until they returned, and that their lives were about to end because of the campaigns.

By the time the fourth issue came out, the central and local authorities had already made their stand clear with the June 8th editorial “What Is this For?” in the *People’s Daily*, and with Beida Party secretary Jiang Longji’s report warning “rightists” on June 16. So the fourth issue closely followed the political trend. As the editors’ words stated: “We love our Party, so we need to protect her!” The editors made it a special issue on the Rectification in order to “debunk anti-socialist speeches, and fight back at rightists.” This issue also included a piece called “March to the left,” inviting people to go left in response to the Anti-Rightist Campaign. The fourth issue sold 10,000 copies, in comparison to 2,000 copies of the inaugural issue.²⁷²

It would be problematic to label *Red Mansion* as a “leftist” periodical, precisely as it was criticized for not being “left” enough. This was because the journal attempted to objectively reflect what was happening at Beida by publishing anti-“rightist” opinions along with critical, what was later considered “rightist” comments in the appendix. The intention to truly reflect the Rectification was criticized as a mistake of “bourgeois objectivism.” It meant that by presenting both rightist and anti-rightist comments, the editors took an outsider’s view, which was interpreted as closer to the “rightists.”²⁷³ One example of such objectivism was Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian’s “Letters to the East Sea,” published in the fourth issue. Both authors were Party members and cadre students, but their writing was attacked for being objective and standing on the side of “rightists.”²⁷⁴

²⁷² Ibid., 99-101.

²⁷³ Ibid., 100, 102.

²⁷⁴ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 398.

Starting on July 6, for the next twenty days, *Red Mansion* published a series of special issues dedicated to the Anti-Rightist Campaign. It included the most recent development of the campaign, written in mostly short poems, along with other verbal forms, and images. It incorporated perspectives from all sides, and did not shy from the journal's weaknesses and errors or conflicts within the editorial board. One example was an open letter from twelve other editors, including Zhang Jiong, Xie Mian and Lin Zhao, to Zhang Yuanxun, now expelled from the editorial board because of his involvement in another student journal *Public Square*, which I will discuss next. In this letter, Zhang was attacked as "a hired hack of the rightist reactionary group" and being "misguided by bourgeois individualism."²⁷⁵ The letter was more political than personal, as the editors were compelled to expel a "rightist" from their group, though some remained friends with Zhang in private.

In the end, *Red Mansion*'s editorial board wrote a self-criticism in response to criticism that it was not "left" enough. It acknowledged the following mistakes: it set up a practice ground for literature, but ignored that literature should serve as a weapon of class struggle; it considered the Party as its supporter without absolutely following the Party's leadership. To show its change, on the first issue of 1958, the editorial board wrote an article entitled "Raising the Socialist Red Flag," announcing that *Red Mansion* was a propaganda tool of the Party, and it would not deviate from political struggle.²⁷⁶ By then, all previous efforts to loosen Party control had reached its opposite: the Party's absolute power in all things, including student publications.

II. *Public Square* (*Guangchang*)

What got Zhang Yuanxun and Shen Zeyi into trouble, besides their poem "The Time Has Come," was the journal *Public Square*, which aimed to be a nationwide independent peer review

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 411, 413, 420.

²⁷⁶ Qian Liqun, *Jujue yiwang*, 104.

journal. The idea came from a group of student activists, who founded an independent organization, the Hundred Flowers Society, on May 29, 1957. They wanted to have their own journal, and the model they had in mind was *The Spark*. Founded by Lenin in 1900, *The Spark* was the first secret newspaper of the Russian social democratic party before it became the Soviet Communist Party.²⁷⁷ An independent peer review journal was a tradition of the May Fourth Movement, but such journals disappeared under the Communists' reign.²⁷⁸ Zhang Yuanxun came up with the title "*Public Square*" as a challenge to "*Red Mansion*," both of which were symbolic places at Beida during the May Fourth period, now adopted by student journals. The red mansion used to be student dorms, and the public square was where democratic forces gathered.²⁷⁹ The meaning behind *Public Square* was better explained in the editors' opening words:

Beijing University is the home of the May Fourth [Movement]. The sons and daughters of Beida are the descendants of May Fourth. In our veins flows the blood of the May Fourth. We must learn the courageous, questioning spirit so as to realize the real socialist democracy and culture! ... Our publication – *Public Square* is being born for this very reason. The implication of *Public Square* is that Beida democratic square used to be a place for the May Fourth torch, and the elder generation of the May Fourth used to gather here to light the torch and rally to pledge.²⁸⁰

Unlike *Red Mansion*, where authors sent poems and essays to get published, *Public Square* fed off big-character posters made during the Rectification. According to Chen Fengxiao, the journal was meant to present a collective voice on campus:

If I collect many people's opinions together, it will be a strong force that bureaucrats will have to pay attention to, and the masses will have the courage to support us.²⁸¹

²⁷⁷ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 379; Qian Liqun, *Jujue yiwang*, 93, 96.

²⁷⁸ Qian Liqun, *Jujue yiwang*, 91.

²⁷⁹ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 342.

²⁸⁰ Guangchang fakanci [Public Square's Opening Words], *Yuanshangcao*, 20. Translated by Mehta, *The politics of Student Protest in China*, 192.

²⁸¹ Chen Fengxiao, "Statement," *Yuanshangcao*, 215.

The poster selecting process went as follows. Wang Guoxiang, a journalism student was responsible for collecting copies of posters and doing the first round of selection. He then gave them to Shen Zeyi, a Chinese major who wrote the poem “The Time Has Come,” who did another round of selection. Shen remembered that he stayed up a whole night doing the job, during which he smoked for the first time. His selecting principle was to make *Public Square* a progressive voice, not a radical one. Thus he did not include some overly controversial posters, such as Tan Tianrong’s “poisonous weeds” and Liu Qidi’s “Hu Feng is not a counter-revolutionary.” Altogether twenty-two articles were selected, reflecting a variety of critical voices, but not one loyalist.²⁸² It did not seem to meet what the journal planned to achieve:

“Our *Public Square* is the ‘Square’ of the real ‘Public.’ It is a platform for all speeches and writings which do not depart from socialism. Only if they are for ‘truth, good and beauty’ – all kinds of songs – no matter what tune – are all welcome to *Public Square* so that they could be sung with full throat before the young people! ... Our Public Square is awaiting the coming of a socialist renaissance of the twentieth century.”²⁸³

Since *Public Square* was an independent journal without support from the authorities, it encountered practical difficulties, one of which was securing funding. According to Chen Fengxiao, one of the founders of the Hundred Flowers Society, he sold all his belongings except what he was wearing and a blanket. Other members of the Society donated as well, but it was far from enough.²⁸⁴ So on June 6, founders of *Public Square* held a fundraising event on campus. Zhang Yuanxun and Chen Fengxiao put up a banner outside the dining hall that read “Save the infant. *Public Square* is having a difficult delivery,” which for Mehta, an Indian exchange student, sounded like “a desperate, hopeless call for any contributions from a few cents to a

²⁸² Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 226, 231, 248.

²⁸³ Guangchang fakanci [Public Square’s Opening Words], *Yuanshangcao*, 20. Translated by Mehta, *The politics of Student Protest in China*, 192.

²⁸⁴ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 346.

hundred yuan.”²⁸⁵ They set up a table, on which they put a wooden box for donations and a sign-up sheet for subscriptions. Many students seemed cautious to donate, as they would rather support morally than financially. Students did not have much money, nor did everyone think *Public Square* was revolutionary, which caused a debate. Some were blunt with their criticism, as they said: “Whose child is this? It is a child of the bourgeois class. If it is having a hard time, it should die in swaddling clothes!”²⁸⁶ Some believed the journal was a “garden of poisonous weeds.”²⁸⁷ As more people joined the debate, the fundraising could no longer continue, though by then students had subscribed 1786 copies, paid 357 yuan and donated 486 yuan.²⁸⁸

Soliciting from faculty was another solution for the lack of funding, though not always fruitful. Shen Zeyi went to meet with Beida school principal Ma Yinchu in his apartment, and explained that *Public Square* was trying to carry out Beida’s democratic tradition. Ma agreed to donate 500 yuan, but he did not have enough cash at the moment, so he asked Shen to come back in a week. Within that week, the *People’s Daily’s* editorial “What Is This for?” changed everything. By the time Shen and Zhang Yuanxun went to pick up the money, Ma replied, “There was no such thing. You must have made a mistake.”²⁸⁹ Students also approached Fu Ying, whose name registered with Mao as an example of those who offered critical yet tolerable critiques. Fu said,

I support your democratic movement, but I disagree with your suggestion of getting rid of the Party leadership from the school. I am familiar with universities under the Nationalist control, and it’s better to have the Party leadership than not.²⁹⁰

In the end, the funding problem was solved thanks to a meteorology student Fan Qixiang

²⁸⁵ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 228; Mehta, *The politics of Student Protest in China*, 193.

²⁸⁶ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 387-88.

²⁸⁷ Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian, *Zhang Jiong wencun*, 101.

²⁸⁸ Qian Liqun, *Jujue yiwang*, 92.

²⁸⁹ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 228-29.

²⁹⁰ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 347.

who donated 400 yuan. According to Hu Bowei, Fan's Shanghai High School classmate and now Beida classmate, Fan lost both parents, and donated all his inheritance.²⁹¹ Chen Fengxiao was in charge of keeping all the money from subscriptions and donations. He used a small box with a lock, and put it next to his bed. He also kept a list of donors until he had to burn it when the Anti-Rightist Campaign was heated, but that did not save students like Fan from being labeled "rightists."²⁹²

When there was finally enough money to pass the script for printing, the encounter with the workers turned out to be another setback. Chen Fengxiao first planned to print 10,000 copies to be sold on campus, so he gave papers and the manuscript to the Workers' Daily press, and was told to pick it up in a week.²⁹³ When Zhang Yuanxun and Shen Zeyi went back to the print factory on June 9, they were surrounded by a group of strapping workers, who expressed anger:

What kind of students are you? You eat food made by peasants, you wear clothes made by workers, but you do not appreciate the Communist Party, and write shitty papers cursing the Communist Party. ... Your nonsense only made us angrier, and we absolutely refuse to print them!²⁹⁴

As a result, the workers confiscated the manuscript and papers, because they would not release such "poisonous weeds." After returning to campus, Shen Zeyi decided to talk to students about the encounter. At 7pm that night, he talked on stage at the dining hall. Not all students took his view, as some applauded for the workers. Shen talked for over half an hour before ending the gathering. A couple days later, the school organized a backlash, this time inviting workers to come and debunk Shen and other student activists.²⁹⁵ They claimed to have received letters from

²⁹¹ Hu Bowei, *Qingchun, Beida*, 318-19.

²⁹² Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 346.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 347.

²⁹⁴ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 235.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 236-38.

Beida students, mostly supporting them, though a few vilified the workers.²⁹⁶

The only way left to publish *Public Square* was through mimeograph. All the money left was used to buy large white papers and a mimeograph, and a few student activists made copies at Chen Fengxiao's dorm. After three to four days without sleep, by the morning of June 22, they made 500 copies despite the poor quality of printing and some unrecognizable characters.²⁹⁷ They changed the title from *Public Square* to *Selection from Beida Democracy Wall* in order to avoid the authorities' attention.²⁹⁸ Shen Zeyi felt that it was quite an accomplishment, considering that they broke the forbidden zone of self-publishing with very limited funding. That afternoon, they sold all the copies by the south side of the small dining hall. The school had previously broadcast a boycott of *Public Square*, but still students lined up for 10 to 20 meters to buy the journal. Some might have come under the school authorities' order, so they could destroy the copies afterward, but more came for the journal while ignoring the school's warning. That night, the editors of *Public Square* gathered at a restaurant and decided to dissolve the group, which lasted 23 days.²⁹⁹

Soon afterward, the school authorities spent all their efforts eliminating the impact of *Public Square*. The school Party committee announced through broadcast that whomever had purchased the journal needed to turn it in. Some were forced to oblige, and some risked being expelled from the Youth League or the Party or being labeled "rightists" to keep a copy. The school set up a fire in front of the small dining hall, and burnt copies that had been returned.³⁰⁰ On July 19 and 20, the school held a two-day campus wide meeting denouncing *Public Square*,

²⁹⁶ Zhang Yuanxun, *Beida 1957*, 135.

²⁹⁷ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 347.

²⁹⁸ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 401.

²⁹⁹ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 239, 242, 244, 248.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 243.

attended by over 11,000 students and faculty on and off campus.³⁰¹ Ironically, in the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the school published selected collections of “rightist” comments as examples of misbehavior, which included way more than *Public Square* could have imagined, and inadvertently preserved critical thoughts and minds of students during the blooming and contending period.

III. Waves Washing Sands (*lang tao sha*)

Unlike *Red Mansion*, which came out long before students’ blooming and contending, or *Public Square* that grew out of the Rectification, *Waves Washing Sands* was a product of the Anti-Rightist Campaign. Its first issue was published as mimeograph on June 19, all written by graduate students of the Chinese department.³⁰² It aimed to get rid of dirt that had deviated from socialism. For the second issue that appeared on June 24, the journal was printed with stereotypes, indicating that the authorities backed it up. Entitled “What Reality Tells Us,” the editorial emphasized taking the Party’s stand in the long-term class struggle. The journal not only criticized rightist comments but also wavering thoughts from centrists.³⁰³

Waves Washing Sands was known for published parodies of Chinese classics based on student-activists-turned-“rightists.” One used the title of the Qing novel *The Unofficial History of the Forest of the Literati* (or *The Scholars*, Rulin waishi) and changed it to *The Official History* (Rulin neishi), written by Party and Youth League members who were second year graduate students. It explored the “three evils” targeted in the Rectification, though it was later attacked as a “poisonous weed.”³⁰⁴ Another novel was called *A Story of Ah O*, a parody of Lu Xun’s *A Story of Ah Q*. Written by Zhang Zhong, a cadre student and Youth League student secretary, the story

³⁰¹ Qian Liqun, *Jujue yiwang*, 97.

³⁰² Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 395.

³⁰³ Qian Liqun, *Jujue yiwang*, 105-06.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

was based on several student activists, including Zhang Yuanxun, Shen Zeyi and Tan Tianrong. Besides changing his name, this Ah O cut his queue, wore a white board with “Beiguan University” on it as the characters looked similar, and seemed like over 20 years old. Most importantly, Ah O was a “rightist.” The story had ten chapters, portraying speeches, and a trip to Tianjin, all based on real events. A third novel was written in eight chapters by another graduate student Xiang Changhong about Lin Xiling, entitled *The Romance of Lin Xiling’s Rightist History* (Lin Xiling youshi yanyi). All these parodies were meant to expose and exaggerate student activists’ words and deeds with a literary twist.³⁰⁵

The battle between *Public Square* and *Waves Washing Sands* took place in both written and verbal forms. Shen Zeyi remembered two encounters with students who wrote for *Waves Washing Sands*. One was Zhang Zhong, author of *The Story of Ah O*, who used to work as a cadre at a county propaganda department in northeast China. Shen and Zhang ran into each other in late May on their way back to their dormitory. Zhang said to Shen, “You are making a student movement, but you know that our Communist Party started as activists in student movements!”³⁰⁶ Zhang was referring to the May Fourth Movement that partially gave birth to the Chinese communism. Shen felt that Zhang, and the authorities by large, completely misunderstood the intention of student activists, who were answering Mao’s call to fight against the “three evils,” and to improve the Party’s leadership, but not overthrow the Party. Another Chinese major classmate attempted to convince Shen to work for *Waves Washing Sands*, as he said, “Do not tangle with *Public Square*, but come to us! You are vice editor there, and we can make you vice editor too.” Shen firmly rejected him, “We have different choices, and let us do

³⁰⁵ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 53; Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 395-97.

³⁰⁶ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 53.

what we want.”³⁰⁷ This exemplified the division among students and friends, which was only exacerbated in the Anti-Rightist Campaign.

After the criticism meeting of *Public Square* on July 19 and 20, *Waves Washing Sands* co-edited with the Beida school journal on “Smashing the *Public Square* reactionary clique,” which clearly stated the journal’s, as well as the authorities’ view on several key issues. The authorities’ interpretation of the May Fourth tradition was that in order to save China, intellectuals had to accept Marxism and the socialist path. There was no question as to the CCP’s leadership in leading China to socialism. Different classes interpreted the idea of thought liberation differently. For the proletariat, it was about establishing Marxism as the guiding principle.³⁰⁸ All these principals ensured that the Anti-Rightist Campaign tightened the Party’s control even more.

Framing Techniques

Besides political opportunity, framing is another crucial element in contentious politics. According to McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, framing refers to “a collective process of interpretation, attribution, and social construction” that “mediates between opportunity and action.”³⁰⁹ More than relating to the generalization of a grievance, it “defines the ‘us’ and ‘them’ in a movement’s conflict structure.”³¹⁰ In this section, I first focus on how student activists at Beida framed their identity as descendants of the May Fourth Movement and coined their bottom-up initiative as the May 19 Movement. At the same time, it would be biased to only look at student activists. As McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly expanded their view of framing to include

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 241.

³⁰⁸ Qian Liqun, *Jujue yiwang*, 107-08.

³⁰⁹ Douglas McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 41.

³¹⁰ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 21.

“the interactive construction of disputes among challengers, their opponents, elements of the state, third parties, and the media,” I also pay attention to narratives of student loyalists, school authorities, and the state media.³¹¹

1. How student activists described themselves

Student activists at Peking University had specific framing relevant to campus events and the school’s historical role in student activism. First, Beida student activists coined their initiative as the “May 19 Movement,” in recognition of the first day that big-character posters appeared on campus, and as a way to distinguish the democracy movement from the Rectification Campaign. No student activists other than Beida’s came up with their own term of the movement in opposition to the top-down campaign. Tan Tianrong related the movement as “a reflection of nationwide rectification-democracy movement at Beida.”³¹² To further aggrandize the movement, Wang Guoxiang wrote in the “Chronicles of Beida Democracy Movement,”

On the premise of supporting socialism, this democratic movement is a bottom-up political movement fighting for expanding socialist democracy. It is an enlightenment movement that the youth try to break away from all shackles and gain thought liberation. It is a prelude to the Eastern Renaissance.³¹³

As Tarrow reminds that the framing technique includes “constructing larger frames of meaning that will resonate with a population’s cultural predispositions and communicate a uniform message to power holders and others.”³¹⁴ It is no surprise that student activists wished that their activities would have a wider impact beyond their campus, and they considered the movement to represent “the cry from rational Chinese youth.”³¹⁵

³¹¹ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 44.

³¹² Tan Tianrong, “The fourth poisonous weed,” *Yuanshangcao*, 41.

³¹³ Wang Guoxiang, “Chronicles of Beida democracy movement,” *Yuanshangcao*, 27.

³¹⁴ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 110.

³¹⁵ Yan Zhongqiang, “Insuppressible Cry,” *Yuanshangcao*, 81.

Nevertheless, not everyone approved such framing. As Liu Jisheng asked in his poster “I want to ask and ask more,”

Many people even refuse to acknowledge the title “May 19 Movement.” I do not know why. Is it because it ruins Beida’s reputation, or it is utterly incompatible with the Rectification Campaign?³¹⁶

Other students had the same question, and attempted to provide answers. For one, the Chinese term for both movement and campaign is *yundong*, though movement and campaign have different connotations: the former refers to bottom up initiatives, while the latter goes to top-down mobilization. What student activists had in mind was the former, but the authorities only meant the latter, even though they both used the same Chinese phrase. Sometimes student activists combined the two, as Tan Tianrong did, by calling it a Rectification-democracy *yundong*.

Besides the naming issue, Zhang Zhiwu had another explanation. In his “Open Letter [to Beida Party Secretary],” he speculated that “the main problem is that this *yundong* is not under the leadership of the school Party committee with a plan.”³¹⁷ It was true that school authorities acquiesced in student activism during the Rectification, but only to the extent that they expressed support for big-character posters, though they did not consider it the best form, and they denounced accusation meetings as a way to offer criticism. Thus as Liu Jisheng predicted it, “A top-down Rectification Campaign must cooperate with a bottom-up democratic movement led by the Party, otherwise nothing will be accomplished.”³¹⁸ In other words, students were aware that what they had done was beyond the Rectification’s agenda, and they would not reach too far without the Party’s leadership. As Liu Qidi described, without the authorities’ guidance, “democratic

³¹⁶ Liu Jisheng, “I want to ask and ask more,” *Yuanshangcao*, 257.

³¹⁷ Zhang Zhiwu, “An Open Letter [to Beida Party Secretary],” *Yuanshangcao*, 231.

³¹⁸ Liu Jisheng, “I want to ask and ask more,” *Yuanshangcao*, 256.

movement is not to solve contradictions within the people, but to rebel.”³¹⁹ That was certainly how the Party viewed student activists.

Despite the name “May 19 Movement,” this episode of student activism might only be considered a contentious politics, but not a social movement according to Tarrow. He uses the term social movements for those that “develop the capacity to maintain sustained challenges against powerful opponents.”³²⁰ In that case, the 1957 event not only lacked the sustainability as it lasted for barely three weeks, but also it was unclear if students really intended to challenge the authorities.

But to give it credit, the 1957 case was a combination of top-down campaigns and bottom-up initiatives. As Elizabeth Perry wrote about Shanghai workers’ strikes in 1957, she observed that,

Without the chairman’s explicit encouragement, it seems inconceivable that the strike wave would have assumed such massive proportions. ... Even so, one is hard pressed to characterize the events of spring 1957 as a top-down affair.³²¹

The same can be said about student participation in the Rectification Campaign. Students did not join other intellectuals in airing grievances until very late, but once they joined, they did more than participating in Party-organized meetings. They almost replaced the campaign with their own movement.

Second, the May Fourth Movement of 1919 came in the minds of Beida student activists in 1957, as they viewed themselves as descendants of the earlier generation and their own movement on par with the glorified May Fourth. In 1919, Beida students initiated a protest in Tiananmen Square against the Treaty of Versailles after the World War I that would transfer

³¹⁹ Liu Qidi, “On the current rectification-democracy movement,” *Yuanshangcao*, 115.

³²⁰ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 2.

³²¹ Elizabeth Perry, *Challenging the Mandate of Heaven: Social Protest and State Power in China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 211.

Germany's control of Shandong province to Japan. The protest was considered successful, as pro-Japanese cabinet ministers resigned and China refused to sign the peace treaty with Germany. More broadly, the May Fourth Movement is associated with the New Culture Movement around the same time, which called for learning from Western ideas, especially democracy and science, while abandoning traditional Confucian values.

It was the latter context that students of 1957 resonated with. As a philosophy student Long Yinghua put it, "May 19 Movement is a new May Fourth Movement, a Marxist enlightenment at the current stage."³²² A female physics student Yan Dunfu wrote in a similar vein: "Honorable Beida students deserve the title as descendants of the May Fourth generation. We again raise the flag of democracy, freedom and truth to fight."³²³ Framing "specific grievances within general collective action frames," as McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly noted, could "dignify claims, connect them to others, and help to produce a collective identity among claimants."³²⁴ By connecting themselves with the May Fourth generation, Beida student activists of 1957 found a way to justify and glorify their actions.

But at the same time, the state celebrated the May Fourth Movement for different reasons, including that it introduced Marxism and Bolshevik revolution to China, and saw the birth of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921. At its annual celebration on May 4th of 1957, some Beida students gathered at the stadium. To the disappointment of Shen Dike, a student who later wrote about the night in a poster,

I was surprised that more people were onlookers than those who actually participated, and more people watching others to sing than those who actually sang 'strength comes from being united.'³²⁵

³²² Long Yinghua, *Gaodengxuexiao youpaiyanlun xuanbian*, 487.

³²³ Yan Dunfu, "What to do – View on this movement and its prospect," *Yuanshangcao*, 263.

³²⁴ McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 41.

³²⁵ Shen Dike, "On the logic of herd boy," *Yuanshangcao*, 177.

The lack of enthusiasm to celebrate the CCP's narrative of the May Fourth Movement indicated that students had a different interpretation of the highly extolled benchmark in twentieth-century Chinese history. The discrepancy became more obvious when students put the May Fourth spirit into practice, as Shen Dike noted in another poster,

Some people often cry for the May Fourth spirit, but when youths really take up torches, those people get panic, saying they are only calling for gentle breeze and mild rain, and they want to suppress others with labels of anti-Party or counter-revolutionary.³²⁶

As MacFarquhar noted, the May Fourth Movement “provided both students and their elders with a yardstick with which to gauge the power of student agitation.”³²⁷ Nevertheless, the May Fourth reference had different effects on students and the authorities. What the authorities worried about, and what student activists ignored when identifying themselves as carrying over the May Fourth spirit, was the anti-government sentiment embedded in the 1919 event. The antagonism between students and the authorities in the 1950s was in no way similar to the warlord era. But the framing alarmed the authorities, as Mao and many top Communist leaders were themselves rioting students during the May Fourth Movement. In comparison to the warlord period, the Communist authorities in the 1950s were more powerful yet easily paranoid. By framing campus activism of 1957 as equals to the May Fourth Movement, Beida activists stroke a nerve of the Party, which was completely unprepared, and it soon responded with what the Party had been doing before the Hundred Flowers: class struggle through political campaigns.

Third, student activists and their sympathizers all insisted that their criticism was meant to help the Party's rectification “in order to reform, not to overthrow, the system.”³²⁸ In the minds of student activists, promoting democracy was connected to the Rectification, and a

³²⁶ Shen Dike, “On class in a class-less society,” *Yuanshangcao*, 176.

³²⁷ MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, 130.

³²⁸ Liu Qidi, “On the current rectification-democracy movement,” *Yuanshangcao*, 115.

bottom-up democracy movement was an appropriate way in response to the top-down Rectification Campaign. As Chen Fengxiao, the key activist behind the Hundred Flowers Society and the journal *Public Square*, “What we are doing is to help the Party’s rectification, but not just that. We also want to fight for a larger scope of democracy. These two are inseparable.”³²⁹

One might further ask, what did student activists mean by democracy? Many referred to socialist democracy, or more specifically a Chinese socialist one. As Chen Aiwen put it, “The democratic system is not copied indiscriminately from the Soviet Union or Western Europe, but grown indigenously on the socialist ground in China.”³³⁰ In other words, the pursuit of democracy did not go beyond socialist system or the Chinese context.

Student activists had expected that the authorities might not approve the way they participated in the Rectification. Wang Cunxin seemed to read the authorities’ minds,

In order to prevent incidents like May 19 Movement from happening, our national leader made a huge effort. ... But the May 19 movement still happened, which took the authorities by surprise.³³¹

The effort included Mao’s two articles on the historical experience of proletariat dictatorship to interpret Eastern European crises for the Chinese audience. But student activists sensed that the authorities did not fully predict the grassroots development of the Rectification due to the lack of enthusiasm and leadership from school authorities.

When the Anti-Rightist Campaign replaced the Rectification, that political shift took everyone by surprise. Many student activists felt they did not deserve such harsh criticism, because they were not against the Party. As Chen Fengxiao defended themselves in a poster,

We are doing group activities, but our group is democratic, not anti-Party group.
We are attacking our school Party leaders, because their bureaucratism is heavy.

³²⁹ Chen Fengxiao, “Statement,” *Yuanshangcao*, 216.

³³⁰ Chen Aiwen, “On socialist system,” *Yuanshangcao*, 101.

³³¹ Wang Cunxin, “Brief on the May 19 Movement,” *Yuanshangcao*, 83.

If they continue to act like that, it is hard to say if they still represent the Party. Attacking bad Party member does not mean attacking the Party.³³²

By equating Party cadres as the Party itself, even minor issues of personal relations escalated into class struggle, and the authorities had all the power to retaliate those who aired dissent. In the 1957 case, the Anti-Rightist Campaign affected the rest of their lives for those who were labeled “rightists.” The label itself was problematic, as Yan Zhongqiang explained,

People involved in democratic movement ask for reform of current social system in order to achieve a more perfect social system and more correct leadership. They are not asking to revive capitalism, and they should be considered leftist forces. The CCP is the centrist force, and the bourgeois class is the rightist force.³³³

Unfortunately, the Party’s ideological discourse identified itself as leftist, while its opponents, including the bourgeois class and now intellectuals who spoke out during the Rectification, “rightists.” Such classification confused comrades with enemies, and divided a predominantly pro-Party population. As Fang Lizhi, a physical science student and a Party member who barely escaped becoming a “rightist,” observed,

Among the young people I knew at the time (and this includes me), it was hard to find anyone who, when it came to politics, was not a supporter of Mao and the Communist Party. Not everyone was a fanatic, but the support was solid.³³⁴

The overwhelming support of the CCP did not stop students from criticizing the authorities. In fact, their criticism was a way to express their support. As a biology teaching assistant Yao Renjie entitled his poster, “To the Party: We criticize you because we love and trust you!”³³⁵

2. State framing of student activists

Student activists’ portrayal of themselves should be considered one side of the story. On the other side, the state along with its media apparatus depicted a very different picture. As

³³² Chen Fengxiao, “Statement,” *Yuanshangcao*, 215.

³³³ Yan Zhongqiang, “Insuppressible Cry,” *Yuanshangcao*, 81.

³³⁴ Fang Lizhi, translated by Perry Link, *The Most Wanted Man in China*, 101.

³³⁵ Yao Renjie, “To the Party: We criticize you because we love and trust you!” *Yuanshangcao*, 271.

Tarrow reminded, “States are also constantly framing issues, both in order to gain support for their policies and to contest the meanings placed in public space by movements.”³³⁶ In the 1957 case, the authorities ignored the good intentions of critics and believed that student critics were anti-Party and anti-socialism based on their posters and speeches. They justified the rightist label with family background and class origins. They provided a different interpretation of the May Fourth tradition. They suspected student activists had as little financial support as claimed.

Why would the state use malicious rhetoric to describe speeches and writings of intellectuals and students as “rightist attack”? One can argue that the authorities knew full well that the “attack” was exaggerated and in nowhere close to overthrowing the Party, and the framing was simply a strategy to identify dissent and coalesce support.³³⁷ On the other hand, even if the blooming and contending could not pose any threat to the Party at the moment, the authorities gained a real sense of grievances and discontent accumulated from the previous campaigns. If such action continued unrestrained, these criticisms might loom large and ultimately challenge the legitimacy of the leadership. With a growing concern of revisionism in both the Soviet Union and China, both Mao’s reversal of the Hundred Flowers policy and Khrushchev’s cutting short of the literature “thaw” in May 1957 might be considered solutions to the same conviction.³³⁸

The framing of the state came partly from a re-interpretation of the framing by student activists. Whereas Beida activists came up with the term “May 19 Movement,” and praised it as a new democracy movement, the 1958 publication *The Spring of 1957* considered it “neither a democracy nor a thought liberation movement, but a completely anti-Communist anti-people anti-socialist countercurrent.” The state narrative even described what happened at Beida as a

³³⁶ Tarrow, *Powers in Movement*, 22.

³³⁷ Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China*, 408.

³³⁸ Naranarayan Das, *China’s Hundred Weeds: A Study of The Anti-Rightist Campaign in China, 1957-58*, 45.

little “Hungarian Incident.”³³⁹ It also speculated “if the bourgeois class were able to stage a counterrevolutionary comeback, ‘May 19’ would claim an important chapter in their reactionary history.”³⁴⁰ There has not been a counterrevolution comeback, but Beida student activists who have survived till today certainly believe that the May 19 Movement deserves a spot in the school history.

In terms of the May Fourth tradition of student activism, a *China Youth Daily* editorial on June 21, 1957 provided its interpretation and warned those Youth League members who have been misguided,

Some Youth League members are misguided by abstract ideas such as freedom, democracy, human rights and human nature, and a small number of students thought they were passing on the honorable tradition of student movement from the past. But it is far from the truth. The tradition of student movement is the cooperation between educated youth, workers and peasants under the Party’s leadership, without which there is no tradition.³⁴¹

The emphasis on the Party’s leadership in the state narrative was antithetical to the anti-government sentiment of the May Fourth generation. It shows that even though state-society relation had fundamentally changed from the warlord period to the 1950s, the CCP was still not quite convinced that students were on their side. In an open letter published in the *People’s Daily* on June 28, Beida authorities expressed similar interpretation:

Rightists dreamed of using the May Fourth democracy flag, but our Beida students and youth nationwide will not allow them to trample on such honorary flag. We know that our parents’ generation spread the seeds of democracy in the May Fourth, but it would only blossom and bear fruits under the Communist Party’s leadership and socialist soil. Whoever uses the May Fourth flag to go against the Party and socialism will be traitors of the May Fourth, and criminals

³³⁹ Chi Liao Zhou ed., “What is the May 19 Movement?” *The Spring of 1957* (Beijing: Xuexi zazhishe, 1958), 39.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁴¹ “Communist Youth League members should consciously protect the Party and socialism all the time,” *Zai fanyoupai douzheng zhong xiqu jiaoxun – ji dang de hanweizhe he qingnian de bailei* [Learning Lessons from the Anti-Rightist Struggle: the Party’s Loyalists and Degenerates among Youth], edited by Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1957), 31-35.

of Chinese people.³⁴²

Besides re-interpreting the May Fourth tradition, the state framing also made a distinction between the goal of the Rectification, which was to remove the “three evils” (bureaucratism, sectarianism, and subjectivism), and the agenda of student activists. As described in the *People’s Daily*, one of the principles that student activists attempted to achieve through the journal *Public Square*:

Gradually shift the center of gravity to the probing for the root of the three evils, so that people may see clearly that the question at issue involves not merely the work style but also the system of the state.³⁴³

It is true that students were not satisfied with simply revealing the three evils, but probing into the origins of them, which inevitably pointed at the system. Because of that, the state concluded that the principle was anti-Party and anti-socialist. The report in *The Spring of 1957* used the same evidence to argue that “their goal was to deny the Party’s leadership and proletarian dictatorship.”³⁴⁴

One framing technique the authorities used to accuse student activists was to target group organizations, from loosely organized to those based on hearsay or confessions. At Beida, the central targets were the Hundred Flowers Society and the editorial board of *Public Square*. The authorities exaggerated the importance of these groups, as if they represented as an organized and anti-Party group, even though these students barely knew each other before the campaign, and came together with various goals in mind.³⁴⁵ In a Xinhua article on the Hundred Flowers Society, it described the group as “the first reactionary group of the right-wing bourgeoisie among the students in the institutions of higher learning in Peking to attack the Party and

³⁴² Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 407.

³⁴³ “The agitators from Peking University,” July 24, 1957, *People’s Daily*, translated in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese intellectuals*, 138.

³⁴⁴ Chi Liao Zhou ed., “What is the May 19 Movement?” *The Spring of 1957* (Beijing: Xuexi zazhishe, 1958), 41.

³⁴⁵ Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China*, 197-198.

socialism.”³⁴⁶ Implicitly the state recognized the Hundred Flower Society’s as the spearhead among all student groups of the time.

The authorities disliked the repertoires student activists adopted, even though some of them were approved and implemented in other political campaigns:

Rightists took advantage of the form of big character posters to initiate vicious attack, and they used so-called Hyde Park-like “democracy forum,” “debate,” “accusation meeting,” etc. to attack the Party.

As argued in the previous chapter, repertoires are multipurpose in the way that both the authorities and students could use for their own sake. During the Hundred Flowers, the only form of repertoire school authorities disapproved of was the accusation meeting. But in the Anti-Rightist Campaign, all repertoires became ill intended. What the authorities worried about most of all was the effort to spread activism across and beyond universities, including using the *Public Square* and the relay baton to “publicize their reactionary program in the institutions of higher learning in Beijing and Tianjin,” as well as to visit “the factories to ‘kindle fires’ and called upon the workers to rise ’to overthrow the new oppression and new injustice.’”³⁴⁷

The authorities were not just satisfied with framing student activism as anti-Party, but they traced class background of student activists, and used their tainted records in previous campaigns as proof of historical misbehaviors. Such strategy implied that these students did not become “rightists” overnight, and their class background partially justified the classification of “rightists.” As a Xinhua news agency report on July 12 described core members of the Hundred Flowers Society,

All these key members of the reactionary group are youths in their early twenties and they have spent about one-third of their life in the new society, but it can be

³⁴⁶ “The ‘100 Flowers Society,’” Xinhua, July 12, 1957, translated in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese intellectuals*, 135.

³⁴⁷ Xinhua, “The ‘100 Flowers Society,’” July 12, 1957, translated in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese intellectuals*, 137.

clearly seen from the facts described above how these rightists are still refusing to relinquish the interests of the dying class of exploiters.³⁴⁸

The Communist state gained its legitimacy in part because of the dichotomy it had established with the Nationalist Party in the wartime, and thus suspicions of progress, especially after 1949, were considered disloyal to the new regime. More dishearteningly, critical voices now came from college students who had experienced both parties, but the Communist authorities seemed to start losing them by 1957.

Soon the authorities revealed more specific numbers to support the relation between bourgeois class and rightist label. In a *People's Daily's* article on July 24 about student activists at Beida, it raised the question "What specimens of humanity are these core elements of the reactionary *Public Square* clique?" After making a list of students along with their suspicious political standing, it concluded,

As for the origin and family background of these self-styled 'democratic warriors,' eleven out of them, that is 75 per cent, came of landlord, bureaucrat and capitalist families.³⁴⁹

As I write in Chapter 7, there was a higher concentration of "rightist" students coming from "bad" class background in comparison to the other students. The Beida case was emblematic nationwide. In a 1958 publication entitled *The Spring of 1957*, a chapter introduced the May 19 Movement from the state perspective, which further investigated family members of Beida student activists behind the journal *Public Square*:

Before liberation [in 1949], the majority lived in upper class, superior to ordinary people. After liberation, their fathers and brothers became targets of class struggles in a series of political campaigns of social transformation. Among 15 rightists, 40 percent of their direct family members had been sentenced to death or executed. This is the historical and social origin of their hatred against the

³⁴⁸ Xinhua, "The '100 Flowers Society,'" July 12, 1957, translated in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese intellectuals*, 136.

³⁴⁹ "The agitators from Peking University," July 24, 1957, *People's Daily*, translated in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese intellectuals*, 137.

Communist Party and socialism.³⁵⁰

The authorities were not shy from revealing its brutality against questionable members of the society, and here they used the record as an evidence of hatred planted in the minds of student activists. During the Rectification, some students did complain about violence and mistreatment in the political campaigns prior to 1957, but hatred would be a strong word to describe their feelings of the Party.

The state narrative also questioned the lack of funding for publishing the journal *Public Square*. From the authorities' perspective, it was not a matter of numbers, but hypocrisy of student activists and suspicious support from those who donated money. As the *People's Daily's* report revealed,

The funds of this reactionary clique were ample. The following were seen from one of their disbursement memoranda: 100 yuan for propaganda in Tianjin, 100 yuan for printing pamphlets... total disbursements over 1,700 yuan.³⁵¹

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a few students in the Hundred Flowers Society made a trip to universities in Tianjin, so the money were to cover train tickets. Printing fees were most likely prepaid to workers at the print, but eventually they had mimeographed the journal by themselves. The *People's Daily* also used Zhang Yuanxun's confession as evidence, as it found that

Chen Fengxiao had altogether contributed over 700 yuan which was remitted to him by registered mail from "friends outside the school." What kinds of people were these "friends outside the school?" This must be clarified thoroughly.³⁵²

The authorities were not as interested in how much money student activists collected, but they meant to figure out those students from other schools who supported Beida activists in order to label them "rightists." When student activists reached out to democratic party members for

³⁵⁰ Chi Liao Zhou ed., "What is the May 19 Movement?" *The Spring of 1957* (Beijing: Xuexi zazhishe, 1958), 40.

³⁵¹ "The agitators from Peking University," July 24, 1957, *People's Daily*, translated in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese intellectuals*, 140.

³⁵² Ibid.

financial support, the authorities reported that the intention was not purely financial. It was likely that they learned from democratic party members who were approached by students and being told that “we [students] already have money. It does not matter how much you donate, but we hope that you will support us.”³⁵³

Besides tracing liability, the authorities also attacked the personality of key activists. In Zhang’s confession, Chen was portrayed as “an experienced and cool-headed guy who rarely loses his temper, and knows four foreign languages,” and being “impalpable and treacherous.” Based on that, the authorities concluded that Chen was “a vicious reactionary.”³⁵⁴ In Shen Zeyi’s memoir, he disputed the state narrative and defended Chen,

Public Square members were rumored to squander money we got from donation, but in fact Chen Fengxiao was in charge of all subscription and donation. He clearly separate private from public affairs, and did not squander money. Our food cost came from our own pockets.³⁵⁵

Another technique of the state framing was making a contrast between this small number of anti-Party reactionaries and a large crowd who were caught up in campus chaos. Youth League members were described as “misguided,” which could mean that the followers of student activists were “sound at heart but had been led astray” or “basically supporting the Party but ensnared by rightist schemes.”³⁵⁶ In the report “What is the May 19 Movement?” it used Peking University as an example, “Among over 7,500 Beida students, rightist students only occupied a very small portion, within which backbones are even fewer.”³⁵⁷ (More specifically, in the *People’s Daily*’s report, the number of key members of the journal *Public Square* was given as

³⁵³ Chi Liao Zhou ed., “What is the May 19 Movement?” *The Spring of 1957* (Beijing: Xuexi zazhishe, 1958), 42-43.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 43.

³⁵⁵ Shen Zeyi, *Beida, May 19*, 242.

³⁵⁶ MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, 131; Teiwes, *Politics and Purges in China*, 297-298.

³⁵⁷ Chi Liao Zhou ed., *The Spring of 1957*, 39.

15.³⁵⁸) To show the “rightists” as a minority, the report clarified that “not all posters were written by rightists, and not all posters were poisonous weeds;” to make the majority look more righteous, it emphasized that “all those who supported the Communist Party and socialism felt enraged after reading these poisonous weeds.”³⁵⁹

The best example to illustrate the contrast was an open letter published in the *People’s Daily* on June 28, 1957. The original title was “a letter to nationwide university students from Beida student association.”³⁶⁰ The subtitle added by the newspaper was even longer:

Unite students nationwide! Completely crush rightists’ attack! Carry on the May Fourth honorable tradition, Beida students call for fight, 6,700 students signed to vow: We will always be loyal to the communist party and socialism!³⁶¹

Signatures were collected the day before. According to Ma Si, a Chinese major, a few tables were set up at the door of the main dining hall, covered with a white cloth. On the cloth was the letter for students to read and sign.³⁶² Shen Zeyi, a student activist, remembered that it was the Beida Party committee that used the name of Beida student association to write the letter, so it represented the Beida authorities, even though the letter claimed to be from the majority of students.³⁶³ As Tan Tianrong wrote in his poster “Saving the Soul” on June 24, he asked others not to sign the letter, which “pretended to be written by Beida students” and which was “full of shameless lies.”³⁶⁴

The letter again portrayed student activists as the minority:
A minority of Beida rightists with a hidden agenda distorted the Beida rectification campaign. [They] used the so-called ‘democracy relay’ to spread

³⁵⁸ “The agitators from Peking University,” July 24, 1957, *People’s Daily*, translated in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese intellectuals*, 137.

³⁵⁹ Chi Liao Zhou ed., “What is the May 19 Movement?” *The Spring of 1957* (Beijing: Xuexi zazhishe, 1958), 35.

³⁶⁰ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 404.

³⁶¹ Shen Zeyi, *Beida, May 19*, 269.

³⁶² Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 404.

³⁶³ Shen Zeyi, *Beida, May 19*, 265.

³⁶⁴ Tan Tianrong, “Saving the Soul,” *Yuanshangcao*, 58.

reactionary speeches. These speeches had been debunked by students from all schools.³⁶⁵

In contrast, the majority of students stood with the Party:

Our students did not sympathize or support the *Public Square*'s editors, but workers' righteous actions. When we heard the letter from workers at the press, which said: "Socialism is our destiny, and we will absolutely protect her, and not print reactionary *Public Square*." We clapped our hands till they were red.³⁶⁶

What did the majority of students really think? Answers from student memoirs give a very different picture from the state framing. Ma Si felt the open letter was "rather bland and mundane, full of Party jargons," and incomparable to the language used by student activists in the Republican period.³⁶⁷ Hu Bowei, a student Party member, addressed the discrepancy between the feeling among students and the official narrative:

Our feelings were not as the official coverage or the letter in the Anti-Rightist struggle described, as if most students were "extreme angry at a minority of rightists' rampant attack." Many students who did not write posters expressed excitement, and I am positive that most people were not on the stand of anti-Party, and most did not think of those who were described as "rightists" were attacking the Party.³⁶⁸

If Hu's description was accurate, the 6,700 student signatures might be difficult to understand. Shen Zeyi attempted to figure out the mentality of those who signed the letter. As he estimated, probably over 100 were student loyalists, or what he called "anti-rightist heroes," while the rest were cadres students who had working experiences before going back to school, Party or Youth League members, and ordinary students. Some might be afraid of revenge from Party leaders and members, so they had to sign. Some cared little about politics, and spent most time besides studying in extra curriculum activities, so they followed the majority. Notably, more than a thousand students did not sign the letter, which indicated both a strong conviction that what they

³⁶⁵ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 404.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 407.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 408.

³⁶⁸ Hu Bowei, *Qingchu Beida*, 320.

had done in the Rectification was correct, and dissatisfaction with the Party's way of dealing with student activists.³⁶⁹

This chapter explores various repertoires adopted by student activists and loyalists, as well as framing techniques student activists, loyalists and the authorities employed. I argue that repertoires and framing techniques from 1957 showed consistency with what had been passed on from the Republican era, as well as what came afterward in the Cultural Revolution and 1989. The Rectification of 1957 was messy with voices from all sides, which was exactly what the Hundred Flowers policy had called for. Students of various political views contested the meaning of every big-character poster, journal and historical event. At the same time, divisions among the students and organizational insufficiency made students vulnerable to political change. How did Beida students perceive the political opportunity and constraint, how did they organize on campus and mobilize students across schools, and what divided students? These are the questions I will discuss in the next chapter.

³⁶⁹ Shen Zeyi, *Beida, May 19*, 270-271.

CHAPTER 5

STUDENT ACTIVISM AS CONTENTIOUS POLITICS AT PEKING UNIVERSITY II: POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY AND CONSTRAINT, ORGANIZATION AND MOBILIZATION, AND DIVISIONS

This chapter continues to explore student activism at Beida, yet with three aspects that set the 1957 episode apart from the May Fourth Movement and the Tiananmen Protests: political opportunity and constraint from perspectives of both the authorities and students, student organizations on campus and mobilization across universities, and divisions among the students in the Rectification and the Anti-Rightist Campaigns. Unlike 1919 or 1989, this time students spoke out not because of international or domestic crises, but a political campaign that seemed to guarantee freedom of speech. Students formed organizations that did not have leadership or structure, and that barely lasted. Divisions between pro-reform activists and pro-status quo loyalists were clear since the beginning of the Rectification, and the authorities politicized such divisions by classifying everyone into “leftist” “centrist” and “rightist” categories in the Anti-Rightist Campaign.

Ambiguous Political Opportunity

In social movement theories, political opportunity is crucial for the inception of contentious politics. This is especially the case in nondemocratic states, where “newly opened access is most likely to trigger contention.”³⁷⁰ The Hundred Flowers and the Rectification campaigns initiated by Mao were the opportunities that opened the floodgates.³⁷¹ But there were discrepancies between the opportunity that Mao envisioned and that school authorities and

³⁷⁰ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 78.

³⁷¹ Teiwes, 294.

students perceived. It was the gap that eventually turned the ambiguous opportunity into unambiguous constraint. This section will explore both Mao's vision and students' perception of the political opportunity during the Rectification Campaign, and then move on to the implementation and reaction toward the political constraint since the Anti-Rightist Campaign.

1. The nature of the opportunity

As I argued in Chapter 3, Mao initiated the hundred flowers policy in response to Khrushchev's "secret speech," expecting the intellectuals to speak their minds without airing any grievances. As a way to prevent a Hungarian-type revolution from happening in China, Mao further pushed the policy through the Rectification Campaign, inviting people outside to Party to offer criticism. It was a rare opportunity of liberalization in the Maoist era, and an effort to de-Stalinize China after the crises in Eastern Europe. But inspiring freedom of discussion through a campaign seems paradoxical: a top-down campaign requires following certain scripts, whereas free discussions go beyond scripts. The ambiguous nature of the Hundred Flowers policy made the political opportunity doomed to failure from the start.

I have argued previously that given Mao's judgment over domestic and international circumstances, he was sincerely offering an opportunity of discussion and critique at the beginning of the Rectification. He did not plan to use the opportunity to set up a trap or lure the snakes out of their holes later. Instead, he completely underestimated people's frustration and grievance accumulated over the years through various campaigns. But he refused to acknowledge his mistake, which had been warned by other Politburo members. So he justified his wrongdoing and pretended to show his foresight by claiming that he had planned everything ahead of time.

This move to launch a mass campaign also contradicts conventions of other authoritarian states, which usually discourage popular politics.³⁷² Yet Mao seemed to have full confidence in the people, and he attempted to take advantage of mass campaigns to achieve his political goals. But again and again, in cases like the Rectification and later in the Cultural Revolution, Mao proved to be overconfident about his ability to control popular politics. As McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly observed the ruling under the CCP in *Dynamics of Contention*,

“Historically, this system has served to constrain autonomous grassroots political activity, while affording Party elites at all levels an extraordinary vehicle for mobilizing popular support for all manner of state initiatives.”³⁷³

In 1957, the state initiative first left space for autonomous grassroots political activity for a very brief period before the initiative turned to the opposite and suppressed the exact grassroots activity it had encouraged, if not promoted.

Not all Party bureaucrats agreed with Mao’s Hundred Flowers and Rectification Campaigns, and Mao was aware of such disagreement. He heard that different ranks of Party cadres were against his hundred flowers policy, and claimed that over 90 percent of Party members did not support his report on correct handling of two kinds of contradictions, because it “lacked material basis and contradicted thoughts of a majority of comrades.”³⁷⁴ But under Mao’s insistence the campaigns moved forward.

2. Mao underestimated the students

Mao’s underestimation of intellectuals, and especially students, was revealed in the different treatments of people during the blooming and contending period. Whereas the authorities encouraged democratic party members, university faculty and other intellectuals to

³⁷² Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 84.

³⁷³ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 209.

³⁷⁴ Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji eds., *Mao Zedong zhuan* [Biography of Mao Zedong], (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 659.

speak at organized discussion sessions, they did not do the same among students at first. Instead, the Party was still thinking to strengthen political education among the students, as shown in a *People's Daily's* editorial on March 29, 1957 entitled "Strengthen Ideological Political Work in the Schools." It emphasized ideological training and labor education rather than inviting them to join the blooming and contending. It raised concerns that bourgeois thoughts still had an impact on students, especially considering that many students came from families of landlords, rich peasants and bourgeoisies.³⁷⁵ Another article on a March issue of *China Youth*, mouthpiece of the Communist Youth League, also brought up education of proletarian thoughts among youth, mostly because it estimated that over 80 percent of university students came from non-proletariat family background.³⁷⁶

Students' docile behavior in the Hundred Flowers Campaign before May 1957 and even the beginning of the Rectification Campaign misguided central and school authorities, making them believe that the Party still enjoyed prestige and standing among the students. The Rectification was conducted just as planned: criticism should be like "gentle breeze and mild rain."³⁷⁷ Before May 19, the day when the first poster appeared on Beida campus, students only voiced opinions through classroom discussions and did not bring up any critical issues. Thus the authorities had a hard time to reconcile students' outpouring criticism and departure from campaign script. The Rectification Campaign as a political opportunity was not meant to open to university students, but they voluntarily participated in the campaign and surprised the authorities with their words and deeds.

3. School authorities' reaction

³⁷⁵ "Strengthen Ideological Political Work in the Schools," *People's Daily*, March 29, 1957; Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China: Blooming and Contending at Peking University, Spring 1957*, 163-4.

³⁷⁶ Xiao Xue, "Jiaqiang wuchanjieji sixiang jiaoyu" [Strengthening Education of Proletarian Thoughts], *Zhongguo qingnian* [China Youth], no. 5, 1957.

³⁷⁷ Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China*, 165-6.

Besides the central leadership, university Party committees played a key role in making the political opportunity available to students. The extent of tolerance varied among schools, but in the case of Beida, its Party secretary Jiang Longji had an open mind about students and created an atmosphere of freedom between May 19 and June 16. As student Party members, Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian wrote in their non-fiction essay “Letters to the East Sea” about a campus-wide meeting among Party members they attended on the night of May 24.

Party secretary Jiang Longji analyzed the current situation. He thought the campaign was overall healthy. He asked all Party members to be humble and listen to the opinions of the masses. He asked us to support the blooming and contending, and not lose our composure.³⁷⁸

A Chinese major, Ma Si, remembered hearing similar message through campus radio broadcast, which announced repeatedly an open letter from the Beida party committee to all Party members: during the Rectification, listen to people’s opinions, and wait to argue back later. The open letter might be a response to the chaotic situation since May 19 with the appearance of the first poster. Two groups of contrasting voices stood out: those who bloomed and contended with criticism, and those who showed loyalty to the Party.³⁷⁹ Many Party and Youth League members instantly argued back when they heard different and critical views. The open letter did not seem to stop them, as some could not bear their anger and wrote posters entitled “forum of loyalists.” The open letter was confusing to others, as they could not figure out why the Party committee would say such thing in public, and some experienced students suspected that it might be a strategy of political struggle.³⁸⁰

Students expressed their dissatisfaction with the school authority’s silence. As a student Party member in the law department, Zhang Zhiwu wrote a poster entitled “An Open Letter [to

³⁷⁸ Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian, Yaoji donghai [Letters to the East Sea], *Zhang Jiong wenji*, 91.

³⁷⁹ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 391.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 356.

Beida Party Secretary]” on May 26. He questioned if the Party committee’s tactic of not allowing Party members to make big-character posters was a way of preventing them from blooming and contending. He consider the Party committee’s stand as a mistake, because

It assumes that this self-initiated movement was a disturbance because it went beyond the Party committee’s leadership, which did not estimate what would happen. It became panic-stricken after things started, and it could not predict the trajectory of the movement. It is afraid of chaos, and hopes to suppress things without seeing that this movement is a transformative one that is brand new and breaks through traditions.³⁸¹

Instead, he suggested the Party committee to take a pro-active position to lead the student movement:

If the Party committee could have better understood central leadership and chairman Mao’s principle on blooming and contending, had plenty estimation, and actively led the movement after it had started by calling Party members to lead the blooming and contending in all forms, it would encourage many people who had things to say to speak out without concerns.³⁸²

From Zhang’s perspective, the school authority misunderstood Mao’s intention and therefore missed the leadership position. Having the Party committee lead would not only legitimize the blooming and contending of students, but also show that students by no means attempted to get rid of the Party system. Unfortunately, Beida school authority did not follow Zhang’s suggestion, as they stood silent and passively accepted student activism for almost three weeks.

4. How students perceived the opportunity

As McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly collectively write, “No opportunity, however objectively open, will invite mobilization unless it is a) visible to potential challengers and b) perceived as an opportunity.”³⁸³ Thus, this section speaks to the visibility and student perception of the political opportunity. In the 1957 case, at the top level, Mao granted the political opportunity

³⁸¹ Zhang Zhiwu, “An Open Letter [to Beida Party Secretary],” May 26, 1957, in *Yuanshangcao*, 232.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 42.

without thinking about its potential backfire. At the intermediate level, school authorities acquiesced the political opportunity by asking Party members to stay silent. These conditions were in favor of student activism, but only if students perceived the political opportunity as such. Here is where student agency comes into play. The fact that many students actively participated in a campaign that they were not the main targets the central authorities were looking for indicates that students took the opportunity seriously.

According to big-character posters at Beida, student activists perceived the Rectification Campaign as something the Party should have done, instead of the Party's bestowal. As Yan Zhongqiang put it in his poster "Words from a 'Crazy Man,'" "

"I do not like to think that this rectification is a favor; instead, I think this is a method that any political party with decent experience would implement. In order to rule, [the Party] has to give people democracy and freedom."³⁸⁴

Another student Liu Qidi expressed a similar sentiment in his poster that "fighting for democracy is a necessary condition for and a responsibility of the Party's leadership." Students like Liu did not consider the rectification as a benevolent gesture from above, but a requirement of any legitimate leadership. To make it clearer, Liu wrote, "No one can or deserves to bestow democracy upon the people. Democracy belongs to the people."³⁸⁵ What did he mean by democracy? It was unlikely that he was seeking universal suffrage, but more likely a channel to air grievances.

Besides considering the Rectification not as a bestowal, some student activists also related the Party's action to crises in Eastern Europe. Two student activists wrote in their posters that democracy gained from the Rectification included bloodshed of the Hungarian people.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁴ Yan Zhongqiang, Words from a "crazy man," *Yuanshangcao*, 76.

³⁸⁵ Liu Qidi, "On the current rectification-democracy movement," *Yuanshangcao*, 118-119.

³⁸⁶ Wang Guoxiang, "Those who have a brain, do not think that way," *Yuanshangcao*, 149; Yang Lu, "My speech," *Yuanshangcao*, 219.

Yan Zhongqiang speculated that the Party had probably learned the lesson from Poland and Hungary, and used blooming and contending as a method to alleviate conflicts between the Party, government and people.³⁸⁷

What made Beida student activists stand out was their sense of agency in actively engaging with the Rectification, instead of passively attending organized meetings. Liu Qidi acknowledged that,

The Rectification is under the Party's leadership and targets at the Party itself. We are to help the Party's rectification, but it does not mean that the Rectification is not the business of the masses, or [the Party should] treat the masses as guests.³⁸⁸

Liu called on his fellow students to take the campaign as their own business, because, as he described, "We are the masters of the movement. We should never rely on others' faces or favors."³⁸⁹ Liu was aware that not all shared his sense of urgency to act, but he disagreed,

Some people use all kinds of excuses – course work, health, exam, unrelated to career – to not use their brains and look with folded arms without bothering to ask. We disagree with that. As a college student, an intellectual, one should closely follow social movements and national events. One should think deeply of all kinds of questions, and raise one's opinion and perspective.³⁹⁰

If some students chose to stay silent because of political apathy, some others might be suspicious of the political opportunity. One simply did not know how long the campaign would last. As one pointed out, "The blooming and contending policy can be raised, but it can also be canceled with some excuse or remain only in name by the ruling party."³⁹¹ Another student questioned the boundary of blooming and contending, and he blamed the intellectuals for being shortsighted without considering the consequence of their words,

³⁸⁷ Yan Zhongqiang, "Insuppressible Cry," July 3, 1957, *Yuanshangcao*, 79.

³⁸⁸ Liu Qidi, "On the current rectification-democracy movement," *Yuanshangcao*, 118.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 117-118.

³⁹¹ Yan Zhongqiang, "Insuppressible Cry," *Yuanshangcao*, 78.

Though you are asked to bloom and contend, you should know the boundary. How could you say whatever you want? You thought that the more critical, the more you're responding to the Party's call and being a model. But now you become a negative example.³⁹²

Zhang's foresight did not stop students and intellectuals from speaking out, and indeed their speeches later became evidence of "rightist" thoughts.

5. Pushing the Boundary

While student activists pushed the boundary, the authorities not only watched vigilantly, but in fact they remained in touch with student activists. According to Huang Jizhong, a lecturer from the Western language department who led a group of students to Tsinghua University on May 26, Beida's Party secretary Jiang Longji agreed with his action the night before. Huang felt even though the Party did not lead the action, it should take responsibility for the consequence.³⁹³ One student in the group was Shen Zeyi, a Chinese major who switched out of the Western language department. He penned the poem "The Time Has Come" that ignited campus activism. In Shen's memoir, he recounted that the same night after coming back from Tsinghua, he and Huang were invited to meet with Jiang, who quietly listened to their report. During Shen's talk, Jiang seemed very patient, not angry with what Shen said. After the talk, nobody argued back.³⁹⁴

Beida student activists were not satisfied with talking to school authorities only, and they reached out to the central authorities. On the afternoon of May 27, the same group that went to Tsinghua the day before, decided to visit Zhongnanhai, the headquarters of the CCP where Mao and other top leaders resided, and planned to talk to Mao directly about Beida's situation. They met with two staff of the State Council, He Dai and Wang Wen. He Dai assured the group, "Mao was very concerned about Beida students, and he would love to meet you students." Despite that,

³⁹² Zhang Zhiwu, "No Title," *Yuanshangcao*, 229.

³⁹³ Huang Jizhong, "Speech abstract at the May 26 meeting summoned by Jiang Longji," *Yuanshangcao*, 284.

³⁹⁴ Shen Zeyi, *Beida May 19*, 127-128.

He Dai said Mao and premier Zhou Enlai were too busy to meet them, but he would report everything they said. So Shen Zeyi made a long speech about what had happened on campus since May 19, and Wang wrote it down. Huang Jizhong also gave a long speech from a teacher's perspective about the relation between Party members and ordinary teachers. A week later, when the same group met with the same staff, the political circumstance seemed to have changed. He Dai cut off the group, and only said, "The situation is changing, you should go back to school. Critics should be willing to accept criticism."³⁹⁵ This dramatic shift in reception, from willingly taking notes of the student grievances to flatly rejecting them any audience indicated that the political opportunity was coming to an end, and soon to be replaced by political constraint.

Political Constraints

1. Initial Signs

An initial sign of political constraint appeared in *People's Daily* on May 26. In the coverage of the last day of the third National Congress of the Youth League on May 25, a sentence took everyone by surprise: "All words and deeds which deviate from socialism are mistaken." A Sichuan delegate Huang Yilong wrote in his memoir that he and other delegates who attended the meeting had no memory of such words, and speculated that Mao must have added it in the newspaper himself.³⁹⁶ Beida students also read the newspaper, and some responded with criticism: "Yes, such acts and words are mistaken – but do not blame Beida students on such score. The 'Three Evils' (bureaucratism, sectarianism, and subjectivism) are a

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 129-131.

³⁹⁶ Huang Yilong, *Huang Yilong yueshi meiwen* [Huang Yilong's essays on his view of the world] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1999), 116-117.

deviation from socialism (too).”³⁹⁷ Students probably did not take Mao’s remarks to heart at the time, though they would soon be reminded that they had gone too far.

Another sign of disapproval of student activism was the silence on official newspapers regarding campus events during the Rectification. According to Mehta, an Indian exchange student to Beida, correspondents of local as well as foreign news agencies visited the campus, but student activists were unsatisfied with the lack of coverage in local newspapers, especially the *People’s Daily*.³⁹⁸ As Lin Xiling, a female student activist from People’s University, expressed in her speech at Beida, “Now they [the authorities] censor the news. For example [blooming and contending at] Beida is boisterous, but why there is no coverage?”³⁹⁹ Some Beida students took a step further by petitioning at the Beijing municipal Party committee, asking why the *People’s Daily* would not cover Beida’s rectification. Students received response from Liu Ren, Beijing’s second Party secretary and a hard-liner,

The *People’s Daily* is our Party’s newspaper, and we have a say in what we want to cover. It is your wishful thinking to make us report your wrong views. If you want to protest on street, go ahead and take your responsibility for the consequences.⁴⁰⁰

Beida students also made a poster in front of the *People’s Daily*’s office, asking it to report Beida’s campus events, but again they received pushbacks. Similar petitions also took place in Wuhan and Nanjing, where students questions local governments as to why official newspapers did not cover their campus activities.⁴⁰¹

Two exceptions to the media censorship on campus activism were the *Guangming Daily* and the *Wenhui Daily*. Both newspapers were under the control of the democratic parties and the

³⁹⁷ Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China*, 186.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 190-191.

³⁹⁹ Lin Xiling, Lin Xiling speech, *Yuanshangcao*, 154.

⁴⁰⁰ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 344.

⁴⁰¹ Qian Liqun, *Jujue yiwang*, 217.

intellectuals, which explained their partial independence from the Party narrative, and they covered the Beida student activism on May 26 and May 27 respectively.⁴⁰² The *Guangming Daily* report was entitled “Beida launched ‘democracy wall,’” and it read like this:

The students themselves considered that in opening up the ‘Democratic Wall’ and publishing large-character newspapers they were not hindering their studies, but they thought that this was carrying on the democratic traditions of Peking University at the time of the May 4th Movement.⁴⁰³

As the *Guangming Daily* later revealed during the Anti-Rightist Campaigns, its editors had various views regarding whether to cover the Beida events. The chief editor, Chu Anping, visited Beida to read big-character posters there, and came back convinced that they “should report it as long as it is true.” One editor was afraid that such report would be inflammatory and disturb the rectification process. Another supported Chu and said, “Pressure from students is overwhelming, and we have to report,” and “the masses are running ahead, and the newspaper is falling behind.” In the end, the chief education correspondent who penned the report tried not to overly sympathize with the students, but to emphasize that rectification should not hinder studying.⁴⁰⁴

As a newspaper based in Shanghai, the *Wenhui Daily* had extensive coverage of campus activism nationwide between May 20 and June 8, including several universities in Beijing and Shanghai, as well as one in Wuhan and Guangzhou. The accounts of students were more favorable, though only to the extent of describing student activism as contributing to the rectification, which most students would agree. As a reporter wrote in the article “Peking

⁴⁰² Réne Goldman, The Rectification Campaign at Peking University: May-June 1957, *The China Quarterly* (No. 12, 1962), 149.

⁴⁰³ Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals* (New York: Praeger, 1960), 133.

⁴⁰⁴ Zhu Zheng, *Fanyoupai douzheng quanshi* [The Complete History of the Anti-Rightist Struggle], v.1 (Taipei: Xiuwei zixun keji gufen youxian gongsi, 2013), 225.

University's 'democracy wall,'” “With such lively youth, our Party can conquer whatever difficulty out there.”⁴⁰⁵

By early June, student activism on university campuses nationwide prospered under the disguise of a rectification campaign. But these events remained isolated due to a lack of coverage in the official media except the two mentioned above. As MacFarquhar described, “The fact that reports on unrest in the universities and the schools were largely suppressed until the situation was again under control is certainly indicative of official concern.”⁴⁰⁶ More ironically, the media silence was in huge contrast with information reported in the *Internal Reference* at the same period, which had no shortage of news about university students around the country. The contrast delivers at least two messages. First, the silence in the official media showed that the authorities were not only unprepared to respond to student activism or intellectuals' overwhelming participation in the campaign in general, but they also tried to control the situation by staying cool on the surface. Second, the overwhelming concerns for student activism in classified documents indicated that the authorities were truly worried, and they had been keeping a close eye on the students throughout the Rectification. As written in Chapter 3, Mao dispatched his secretaries to copy big-character posters from several universities in Beijing, including Beida, in order to get a sense of what was on the minds of students.

Media censorship made communication between university campuses difficult, but students had their own ways of spreading words through personal networks. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Beida students created a “democracy relay baton,” which inspired university students outside Beijing to follow Beida's lead. Correspondences between friends at different schools also kept students informed of things unseen on the newspapers. When the summer

⁴⁰⁵ Liu Guanghua, “Peking University's 'democracy wall,'” *Wenhui Daily*, May 27, 1957.

⁴⁰⁶ MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, 130-131.

break came, most students went back home, when they exchanged information with friends from home. That is why the authorities tried to postpone the summer break, or prohibit some students from leaving schools, in order to prevent students from connecting with people outside schools.

2. Reaction to political constraints after June 8

The signal of political shift could not have been clearer following the June 8 editorial, “What is this for,” published in the *People’s Daily*. The focus of the editorial was a threatening letter Lu Yuwen had received. Lu was a member of the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Nationalist Party, as well as a secretary assistant to the State Council. The letter accused Lu for “helping a villain to do evil” and “being extremely shameless” because of his comments at a rectification meeting, in which he supported the Communist Party’s leadership. Thus the editorial concluded that “this threatening letter is a critical incident in current political life, because it is a signal that someone took advantage of the Rectification Campaign to carry out class struggle.”⁴⁰⁷ As a result, class struggle not only came back to life after a period of liberalization since 1956, but it gained more prominence than before in political campaigns in the years to come.

The editorial made divisions on campus more apparent. If earlier students differentiated based on ideas, now it became a matter of politics. The editorial energized student loyalists, who stood out to defend socialism. According to René Goldman, these loyalists wrote the majority of big-character posters after June 8, criticizing student activists, who were soon to be labeled “rightists,” and expressing praise of and allegiance to the Party.⁴⁰⁸ Hu Bowei remembered seeing essays, poems, cartoons, and even short novels attacking soon-to-be “rightists,” though many of the stories seemed to be made up. Despite being a student Party member, Hu did not identify

⁴⁰⁷ “What is this for,” *People’s Daily*, June 8, 1957.

⁴⁰⁸ Goldman, *The China Quarterly*, 151.

with loyalists, who attempted to represent the majority of students, but from Hu’s perspective, most people did not like loyalists, or felt repelled by them.⁴⁰⁹ Another student Ma Si, however, sympathized with loyalists, as he explained in his memoir:

Like most students, the reason why they would attack ‘rightists’ was because they completely trusted the Party. [They considered] whatever the Party leaders said was right, and they listened. Once leaders initiated the Anti-Rightist Campaign, they answered the call of the Party.⁴¹⁰

The editorial was a huge blow for student activists, not only because they felt misunderstood by the authorities, but they became political suspects for things they had been encouraged to do just days ago. Some student activists stood firm on their ground, and wrote posters in self-defense. One example was Tan Tianrong. He considered the June 8th editorial as a “last-ditch effort,” as he reasoned, “If someone believes his power and prospect, why would he bother to make a big deal out of a threatening letter?”⁴¹¹ In his “fourth poisonous weed” poster, he forecasted a dark future ahead:

From the most democratic and active day onward, those soul-stirring days have ended. In the following days and years, it will be permeated with bullying and enduring, suppressing and succumbing, shouting and silencing again.⁴¹²

Another student activist, Yang Lu, looked down upon loyalists in his “final statement:” “for those sycophants who played disgraceful roles, I hope they will fly up as they wish, and I hope they will learn the concept of shame and self-respect in the near future.”⁴¹³

If some activists like Yang or Tan could not turn their heads around in a short time, some others started to reflect what went wrong with the students. In an anonymous poster entitled “political current,” one speculated that “the self-initiated democratic movement with

⁴⁰⁹ Hu Bowei, *Qingchun Beida*, <http://mjlsh.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/book.aspx?cid=2&tid=134&pid=2045> (This part is censored in the published book.)

⁴¹⁰ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 393.

⁴¹¹ Tan Tianrong, *Gaodengxuexiao youpaiyanlun xuanbian* [Selection of Rightist Comments in Higher Education] (Beijing: Renmin daxue, 1958), 549-550.

⁴¹² Tan Tianrong, “The fourth poisonous weed,” *Yuanshangcao*, 39.

⁴¹³ Yang Lu, “Final Statement,” *Yuanshangcao*, 223.

intellectuals' craving for anarchism does not suit the taste of a communist party."⁴¹⁴ Another student, Huang Youzhao was frank to admit the mistake in his "letter to 'rightist classmates' across campus:"

The reality has proved that we subjectively interpreted the current international communist movement (though our youths cannot take full responsibility), and we initiated the bottom-up democratic movement at an unnecessary time. ... We acknowledge that the May 19th people's democracy movement is unnecessary. It has anarchist tendency, so objectively speaking we are wrong.⁴¹⁵

Huang might be one of the very few student activists who acknowledged that they were wrong, and most of them considered "rightist" as mislabeling. For Huang, student activists "became political capital of rightists in the society by default" because people were not used to having contradictions within the people, and whenever they heard different voices, the instant response was to treat others as class enemy.⁴¹⁶ Another student Yan Zhongqiang differentiated the student democracy movement from the rightists, which he believed that they did exist and should be opposed. The problem was that "neither force fit with the CCP's supreme interest, and therefore the CCP took the opposite view, confused the two as one 'rightist' group, and started attacking."⁴¹⁷

Though the editorial at the end emphasized that "the Communist Party would continue the rectification, and still listen to all kind criticism from members outside the Party," now "all current phenomena must be observed from a class struggle perspective."⁴¹⁸ In reality, blooming and contending on newspapers disappeared. The rectification followed the agenda of loyalists or people who changed their minds to defend the Party or to offer superficial criticisms, including ones about cadres being too lenient on "rightists." At Beida, some students distanced themselves

⁴¹⁴ Anonymous, "Political Current," *Yuanshangcao*, 246.

⁴¹⁵ Huang Youzhao, "A letter to 'rightist classmates' across campus," *Yuanshangcao*, 261-262.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁴¹⁷ Yan Zhongqiang, "Insuppressible Cry," *Yuanshangcao*, 80.

⁴¹⁸ "What is this for," *People's Daily*, June 8, 1957.

from student activists, or claimed to draw a boundary with the Hundred Flowers Society or the ill-fated journal *Public Square*. Some might pretend to be loyalists so as to hide their real thoughts.⁴¹⁹ Many could not believe that the central authorities would turn 180 degrees to eat their words, and still held the wishful thinking that even though the Anti-Rightist Campaign replaced student activism on campus, progress would gradually take place.⁴²⁰

If the *People's Daily's* editorial on June 8 signified the start of the Anti-Rightist Campaign at the central level, it took some time for local cadres to digest the news and realign themselves with the Party. At Beida, students associated the school Party secretary Jiang Longji's speech on June 16, entitled "initial concluding report on the Rectification Campaign," as the beginning of a campus-wide crackdown on "rightists." If any students who had not detected the political shift from the June 8 editorial, they would have received the signal by now.⁴²¹ In his report, Jiang described the division among students: "Most people were on the pro-party side when offering criticism, but there were also anti-socialist speeches." From this point on, divisions among students were not just a matter of opinion, but political standing. In order to carry out the Anti-Rightist Campaign, Jiang decided to postpone final exams till the end of the month, and summer break till July 15. Meanwhile, the open letter that asked Party member to stay silent disappeared, replaced by school-sponsored student journals against "rightists," such as *Wave Washing Sands*.⁴²²

Organization and Mobilization

⁴¹⁹ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 393.

⁴²⁰ Hu Bowei, *Qingchu Beida*, <http://mjlsh.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/book.aspx?cid=2&tid=134&pid=2045> (This part is censored in the published book.)

⁴²¹ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 389, 391.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 391-92.

As students voiced their opinions through a variety of contentious repertoires, some student activists started to form organizations and mobilize students on and off campus. This section explores campus organizations, which function as “sites for initial mobilization” with the goal to “spread the views of a social actor among parts of a population.”⁴²³ I am particularly interested in the Hundred Flowers Society and its efforts to mobilize fellows in and outside Beida. Given the short amount of time, student organizations suffered from the lack of leadership, structure, and funding. Mobilization efforts at other campuses also proved difficult, because not all students shared the same enthusiasm as Beida activists.

As mentioned earlier, the journal *Public Square* was the offspring of the Hundred Flowers Society, which was the most ambitious and influential organization at Beida. The idea of having an independent organization came from Chen Fengxiao, a mathematics student, who thought that without knowing each other, students who wrote critical posters would be attacked individually. Thus, he wanted these student activists to come together and speak in one powerful voice. He shared the idea with several students from other majors, and they each approached activists from their own departments. They had the first secret meeting one night at the temple by the Anonymous Lake on campus, attended by two other mathematics majors, Zhang Jiongzong and Yang Lu, a physicist Tan Tianrong, a philosopher Long Yinghua, and a Chinese major Wang Guoxiang besides Chen. They decided to establish an organization, tentatively named “Hegel-Engels School,” a name insisted upon by Tan Tianrong. Others complied with the name because of Tan’s fame from his “poisonous weeds” posters.⁴²⁴

On the morning of the following day, May 29, the same group posted an announcement about the founding meeting for “Hegel-Engels School” at 7pm that night. The meeting was held

⁴²³ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 41; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 113.

⁴²⁴ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 341.

at a lecture theater, and attendees filled up the room. People joined the group by simply signing up their name to the list, which later became a blacklist for labeling “rightists.”⁴²⁵ Many students disliked the name, so Zhang Jingzhong suggested “Hundred Flowers Society (baihua xueshe)” since it was during the blooming and contending period. More students favored this name and applauded to approve it. At the meeting, no principles were established except the desire to strengthen contact among each other, publicize the group, and make a journal. There were no specifics as to how or in what name.⁴²⁶

The Hundred Flowers Society attempted to bring all student activists on campus under its umbrella. Thus, the founder Chen Fengxiao approached Zhang Yuanxun and Shen Zeyi, who had a huge impact on campus thanks to their poem. Zhang and Shen originally wanted to establish their own poem group, but Chen convinced them to join.⁴²⁷ At a meeting held at Chen’s dorm on the night of May 30, the Society decided to name their journal *Public Square* at the suggestion of Zhang Yuanxun. Shen Zeyi was absent from the meeting, and he was only informed later by Zhang that Shen was assigned as the vice editor. Thus, Shen felt left out by the Society, which he thought was an organization freely associated among mostly science students, and a parallel yet separate organization from *Public Square*.⁴²⁸

Another way to recruit members to the Hundred Flowers Society tried was to absorb other smaller student organizations founded at the time. One of them was a group called “Exploration.” According to Hu Bowei, a Youth League member and a meteorology student, the second day after he put up his mid-character poster, a mathematics student and a Party member Hong Yunmei talked to him. Hong said he completely shared Hu’s view, and wanted to organize

⁴²⁵ I learned this information from my interview with Bo Shengwu, a first year physics student in 1957.

⁴²⁶ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 341; Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 132.

⁴²⁷ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 341-42.

⁴²⁸ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 132-33, 222.

a group among Party and Youth League members, and make wallpapers entitled “Exploration.” This group considered themselves taking a middle path, because they did not agree with Tan Tianrong or those who attacked Tan. Instead, they supported the hundred flowers policy to bloom and contend, and also encouraged independent thinking. Altogether they had a dozen people, mostly physics and math majors, and all Youth League and Party members, showing that they were supposedly loyal and reliable. The group discussed if they should join the Hundred Flowers Society, but they did not seem to reach a conclusion.⁴²⁹

The Hundred Flowers Society mobilized students both on and off campus, which distinguished it from other organizations. The first step was to reach out to other university students in Beijing, and the closest neighboring school was Tsinghua University, a rival of Beida. On May 26, a group of 29 students from the Western language department was led by their lecturer Huang Jizhong to Tsinghua, where the citywide university sports meet was taking place.⁴³⁰ Some students were members of the Hundred Flowers Society, though Huang was not.⁴³¹ During the blooming and contending period, very few faculty at Beida joined their students, but Huang was an exception. He stood with students and participated in debates and petitions. This time the group planned to introduce Beida’s rectification to Tsinghua, where students had yet to catch up with its peers. Shen Zeyi was invited to join the group, as he used to study in the same department. Shen first went to meet with Jiang Nanxiang, Tsinghua’s principal, at his office, asking to borrow the dome hall to speak. Jiang rejected the idea. Undeterred, Shen told Jiang that they would talk in public then. So the group decided to wear their Beida badge so as to distinguish themselves from the audience. They went to the old stadium near the west gate, set up a bench and started talking there. They attracted 100 to 200

⁴²⁹ Hu Bowei, *Qingchun Beida*, 308-12.

⁴³⁰ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 378.

⁴³¹ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 344.

students, though not all supporting them. Meanwhile, some Beida loyalists also showed up to disrupt the scene. The group had to end in a rush and returned back to Beida.⁴³²

Besides Tsinghua, the Hundred Flowers Society reached out to student organizations at other universities in Beijing. Chen Fengxiao, a founder of the Society, stayed on campus most times to receive visitors from other schools, making his dorm the headquarters of the Society.⁴³³ Chen also went to Beijing Normal University to meet students who established two organizations there, Bitter Medicine Society and Voice of the Lowest Stratum. In comparison to Beida students, their Beijing Normal peers focused more on school related issues and problems of specific teachers or cadres. According to the *People's Daily*, Chen thought their concerns were “narrow-minded and short-sighted,” and suggested that they should “expand the question and dig out the root of bitterness.” Following Beida’s lead, student activists at Beijing Geological and Petroleum Institutes set up a “Hundred Flowers Branch Society.”⁴³⁴ All these examples prove the influence of Beida’s student organization and mobilization.

Members of the Hundred Flowers Society also attempted to make connections with and solicit support from democratic party members. Xu Nanting, a history student, approached the Democratic National Construction Association because of his father, Xu Hansan, secretary of that Party. Cheng Fengxiao sought help from the Jiusan Society and Democratic League, expecting that they would support the Beida student group financially. Initially, some democratic party members expressed support, yet without any action or donation. But once the Anti-Rightist Campaign started, the same people disappointed Beida student activists by avoiding them.⁴³⁵

⁴³² Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 125-27.

⁴³³ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 343.

⁴³⁴ “The Agitators from Peking University,” *People's Daily*, July 24, 1957. Translated in MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, 139.

⁴³⁵ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 344.

A more ambitious move of the Hundred Flowers Society was making alliances with students nationwide. On the morning of June 2, six members of the Hundred Flowers Society made a trip to Tianjin. Unlike what was portrayed in the *People's Daily* as the “Beida visiting group,” the six went in the name of visiting friends.⁴³⁶ They stopped at three schools: Nankai University, Tianjin University, and Tianjin Normal College.⁴³⁷ The first stop was Tianjin Normal College, where students arranged a small auditorium for the Beida group. Though the group was meant to introduce Beida’s rectification to Tianjin students, the six members had very different views, so Shen Zeyi felt that they simply took the opportunity to talk about whatever they were interested in. Tan Tianrong talked about Marx’s theory of negating the negation. Shen Zeyi introduced Beida’s May 19 Movement, the term that student activists coined for their actions, and answered questions about his poem “The Time Has Come.” Liu Qidi talked about the issue of Hu Feng. At Tianjin University and Nankai University, the Beida group did the same by giving talks, joining debates or engaging in individual conversations.⁴³⁸

Responses to the Beida group’s visit to Tianjin were a mix. Even Shen Zeyi acknowledged that some events were successful, but others not so much.⁴³⁹ On the one hand, Nankai students were inspired to raise slogans such as “carrying on the May 4th tradition of revolution” and “hold aloft the May 4th torch.”⁴⁴⁰ Tianjin University students imitated the Hundred Flowers Society by organizing eight groups, using names such as “Trumpet,” “Wild Grass” and “Spring Thunder.”⁴⁴¹ On the other hand, the group received pushbacks. The night the Beida group came back, Jiang Longji, Beida’s Party secretary made a campus-wide broadcast,

⁴³⁶ Yang Lu, Wode fayan [My Speech], in *Yuanshangcao*, 219.

⁴³⁷ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 387.

⁴³⁸ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 135-36.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴⁴⁰ Xinhua News Agency, “Nankai University and the Peking student delegation,” June 29, 1957. Translated by MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, 142.

⁴⁴¹ Xinhua News Agency, “Students wanted chaos,” June 30, 1957. Translated by MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, 143.

criticizing the trip to Tianjin. But instead of denouncing the messages student addressed, he blamed the students for missing classes for several days.⁴⁴² Jiang was considered lenient of students during the Rectification, and soon he would be removed of his position and relocated to Lanzhou University in northwest China. Besides Jiang, a poster composed in classical Chinese addressed to Tan Tianrong:

Even though you went to Tianjin, it did not work, which is sad. The Chinese intelligentsia is the minority. The head of a troop without a million soldiers is still a commander by himself. ... Why not join the workers and peasants, explain your goals and gather millions of the masses to help you accomplish your ambitious will. Hope you think about it.⁴⁴³

It was impossible for Beida student activists to visit their peers nationwide, but their posters did travel through what they called the “Democracy Relay Baton (minzhu jielibang).” The way it worked was that many Beida students made copies of posters and sent them to their high school classmates or friends outside Beijing, reaching Fudan University and East China Normal University in Shanghai, and schools in Wuhan and Taiyuan.⁴⁴⁴ Recipients were usually inspired by these letters, and without permission, they would post these letters as posters on their campuses, inviting more attention and inspiring more actions. Students who wrote these letters and their recipients never thought that later they would be punished as “rightists,” using these letters as evidence.⁴⁴⁵

Since May 29, the day the Hundred Flowers Society was founded, the political atmosphere had shifted rapidly to the left. If the *People Daily*'s editorial “What is this for?” on June 8 did not completely stop student activism at Beida, the Party secretary Jiang Longji's initial concluding report on the Rectification on June 16 certainly sent a stronger signal that it

⁴⁴² Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 138.

⁴⁴³ Zhang Jiong and Xie Mian, *Zhang Jiong wencun*, 103.

⁴⁴⁴ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 388-89.

⁴⁴⁵ Qian Liqun, *Jujue yiwang*, 218; Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 344.

was time to stop airing critical opinions.⁴⁴⁶ Then on June 21, the *People's Daily* named Beida's Hundred Flowers Society as a reactionary organization. In response to the attack, disagreements became more apparent within the Society. Some members announced their intention to protest against the *People's Daily*, some wanted to reform, some claimed to quit, and others supported the *People's Daily* and criticized core members of the Society.⁴⁴⁷ That night, Chen Fengxiao and a few others held a secret meeting in the woods by the lake, and decided to dissolve the Society. The second day on June 22, they announced the decision in public, and had no more activities as a group afterward.⁴⁴⁸ Several members had a farewell dinner that night. Yang Lu, a mathematics major and one of the coolheaded students in the group, explained the reason behind dissolving it:

Though the *People's Daily's* editorial was ridiculous, it is hard to expect it to correct itself. *Public Square* should stop, and the Hundred Flowers Society should dissolve. Otherwise no matter whether or not we had anti-socialism activities, as long as we have some democratic demands, the authorities or so-called public opinion will not let it go.⁴⁴⁹

In the following month, student activism reached an end as student activists had to make self-criticism at various meetings. As Chen Fengxiao described, debates turned into criticism sessions, arguments became attacks, and verbal attacks switched to physical ones occasionally.⁴⁵⁰ Tarrow argues that collective identity is a double-edged sword, because it “is a crucial process in the formation of movements, but it contains within it the seeds of isolation, sectarianism, and the ‘twilight of common dreams.’”⁴⁵¹ In the 1957 case, student activists as a collective identity had yet to come into shape before the authorities quickly labeled the group reactionary and individuals “rightists.” Student activists were not necessarily unified, as they barely knew each

⁴⁴⁶ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 391.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 401-02.

⁴⁴⁸ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 349.

⁴⁴⁹ Yang Lu, *Zuihou de xuanyan* [My Last Statement], in *Yuangshangcao*, 222.

⁴⁵⁰ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 349.

⁴⁵¹ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 138.

other outside the department, and they had different concerns. It was the Anti-Rightist Campaign that made these individuals a common target.

Under great pressure from the authorities, most students followed the Party line by either condemning “rightist” comments or acknowledging “rightist” behaviors. Only a handful of student activists refused to self-criticize, including Chen Fengxiao. He wrote a poster on July 5 entitled “Such Tricks,” in which he attacked Beida loyalists for denouncing the Hundred Flowers Society and *Public Square* as reactionary. He also took all the responsibilities for organizing the movement, and hoped that the authorities would not bother others, which proved to be wishful thinking.⁴⁵² Some student activists had problems with Chen’s poster. As Shen Zeyi pointed out, Chen was an organizer of the Hundred Flowers Society, and a founder of *Public Square*, but he was not an organizer of the student movement during the Rectification. In fact, no one was. Shen argued that there was no leader among students, because a movement that barely lasted a month was not long enough to generate a real leader.⁴⁵³ Wang Shuyao also believed that student activists did not want a leader, because everyone was equal and against hierarchy.⁴⁵⁴

Besides the lack of leaders, the student movement suffered from organizational insufficiency. Organized groups like the Hundred Flowers Society did not have a clear agenda other than expressing individual demands. The bottom-up student initiative had a difficult time distinguishing itself from the top-down Rectification Campaign, as their goals were not mutually exclusive, especially in terms of getting rid of the “three evils” – bureaucratism, sectarianism, and subjectivism. Student activists were able to make contacts and correspondence with students in and outside Beijing, but each school’s activities were isolated from one another. During the short window of blooming and contending, student activists appealed to a number of followers,

⁴⁵² Chen Fengxiao, “Ruci jilia” [Such Tricks], *Yuanshangcao*, 218.

⁴⁵³ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 277.

⁴⁵⁴ Wang Shuyao, *Yanyuan fengyu zhu rensheng*, 57.

but not the majority of students. Divisions among students already existed during the Rectification, and the Anti-Rightist Campaign only made the student body more polarized. Beyond students, it was almost impossible to make alliances with workers or even democratic party members.

Divisions among the Students

The Rectification at Beida was cacophonous: some students spoke critically of the Party, some defended the Party, and the rest listened silently. No one voice dominated, and such divisions were natural. But in the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the authorities exploited the divisions and classified students based on their previous behaviors. Student activists faced the choice to either comply with the Party in hope of getting a lighter penalty, or resist to be labeled “rightist” for a short while before receiving a more severe punishment.

1. In the Rectification Campaign

Elizabeth Perry wrote about divisions among the workers during the Rectification Campaign, and similar divisions existed among the students.⁴⁵⁵ As shown in Chapter 4, both student activists and loyalists voiced their opinions during the blooming and contending period. Divisions between the two were ideological: one was pro-reform, and the other was pro-status quo. Zhu Qingqi captured the two sides in his poster,

While others brought up the issue of broaden socialist democracy, and fundamentally get rid of the “three evils,” some students announced that they were defenders of socialism and Marxism, and claim to join the Party through this movement in public gatherings.⁴⁵⁶

Despite ideological differences, both held the bottom line of following socialism and the Party’s leadership, even though one was critical of the system, and the other was defending the Party.

⁴⁵⁵ Elizabeth Perry, *Challenging the Mandate of Heaven*, 216-218.

⁴⁵⁶ Zhu Qingqi, “The Art of Leadership,” *Yuanshangcao*, 268

Within the group of student activists, it was a house divided. Organizers of the Hundred Flowers Society envisioned a united front of all student activists in and outside of Beida, but everyone had different ideas about how to bring the agenda forward.⁴⁵⁷ These students came from various majors, and they did not know each other well beforehand. The trip to Tianjin was one example, as the six students had different messages they wanted to spread, and they could not reach agreement in terms of whether they represented the Society or simply themselves.

Besides the two ends on the spectrum, the majority of students did not actively participate by writing posters but they remained curious. As Ma Si described in his memoir, “most people could not study any more. They paid close attention to what was happening, and tried to hear from all sources.”⁴⁵⁸ They might not voice their concerns through posters or debates, but the development of the Rectification was unusual to say the least. Or in Ma Si’s words, “In those days, Beida was in a chaos. Everyone was thinking, talking and making actions.”⁴⁵⁹

It is hard to imagine living through a political campaign without paying attention, yet that was the case with a small crowd of students with either political apathy or incredible foresight.

Ma Si had an observation of such group:

It seemed like some people were ignorant and not moved about the spectacle. Instead, they would still go to the library with their bags in a hurry, hide in a corner to read as if nothing was happening. These people were mostly science majors.⁴⁶⁰

Did these students truly not care what was happening, or did they pretend that nothing was happening out of self-protection? In retrospect, Ma Si admired these few people who were immersed in books as usual, because it was hard to focus.⁴⁶¹ Another Chinese major, Xie Mian,

⁴⁵⁷ Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China*, 189, 194.

⁴⁵⁸ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 350.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 374.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 374.

however, looked down upon these students, because he believed that as a patriotic citizen, one should engage with the state agenda, not set oneself aside.⁴⁶²

Not all science majors stayed away from the blooming and contending. In fact, some student activists behind the Hundred Flowers Society and the journal *Public Square* were also science majors. As Réne Goldman discovered,

It might seem strange that students in physics and mathematics were the most prominent and formed the core of the leadership of the movement rather than students in the humanities.⁴⁶³

One possible reason Goldman provided was that science students had a better command of English compared to humanity majors. As Chinese higher education went through the Sovietization in the early 1950s, Russian language replaced English to become the required foreign language, though many students had learned English prior to college, especially those graduated from missionary schools. Another reason came from Fang Lizhi, a physics student. In his memoir, he viewed the conflict between science and loyalty to the Party as inevitable:

The deeper reason why intellectuals left the Party's ideology behind is that science by nature weeds out ignorance. With or without an Anti-Rightist Campaign, the split between scientists and the Party was bound to occur sooner or later.⁴⁶⁴

On the other hand, student loyalists tended to be humanity majors, many of which were cadre students. They did not necessarily have high scores in the college entrance examination, as they were recommended by their previous working unit to go to college. Despite strong political standing, many of them were not good in academics, and thus few of them went for science. As Shen Zeyi noticed, besides active cadre students, other student loyalists might fall into two categories: those who wholeheartedly believed government propaganda and rejected new ideas,

⁴⁶² Interview with Xie Mian, October 22, 2014.

⁴⁶³ Goldman, *The Rectification Campaign at Peking University: May-June 1957*, *The China Quarterly*, 150.

⁴⁶⁴ Fang Lizhi, Perry Link trans. *The Most Wanted Man in China*, 99.

and those who took the opportunity to speak the Party language in order to get better job assignment or be considered to join the Party or Youth League.⁴⁶⁵

2. In the Anti-Rightist Campaign

The authorities exploited pre-existing divisions by further drawing a chasm between student activists who were pro-reform, student loyalists who were pro-status quo, and the majority of students in the middle. Starting after the school Party secretary Jiang Longji's report was published on June 16, meetings to denounce "rightists" and begin the classification of every student at Beida gradually took place. Most students, as Shen Zeyi wrote in his memoir, were quick to express their support of the Party, though it was uncertain if these students were genuinely devoted or just simply pretended to believe what the authorities had said.⁴⁶⁶ At this time, silence or hesitation could lead to trouble. The rest of this section focuses on various stands taken by student activists, because they best exemplified the resistance to and compromise with the authorities.

Among all student "rightists," only four or five refused to make self-criticism.⁴⁶⁷ In response to school's crackdown on student activists, Chen wrote a poster entitled "Such Tricks," in which he accurately predicted how the authorities would divide and repudiate activist groups:

Conservatives try all means to fabricate anti-Party and anti-socialism charges that do not exist, and put labels on activists in the democratic movement. They behave as if they are the ones who represent the Party and socialism, and they use criticism session as a method to threaten activists and fight for the masses. ... They are interrogating some of the activists in the democratic movement now, making them confused, and threatening them to confess their anti-socialist crimes, so they could find and arrest organizers of the movement, and claim loudly that "Look! You do not believe what we said about the Hundred Flowers Society and the *Public Square* being reactionary, but there are indeed reactionaries!"⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁵ Shen Zeyi, *Beida 5.19*, 48-49.

⁴⁶⁶ Shen Zeyi, *Beida 5.19*, 247.

⁴⁶⁷ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 349.

⁴⁶⁸ Chen Fengxiao, "Such Tricks," *Yuanshangcao*, 217-218.

As the Beida public letter to students nationwide had shown, the authorities had no problem representing voice of the majority of students. Later the authorities indeed found student activists who were committed to being reactionaries.

Besides warning others of likely measures the authorities would take to crack down student activists, Chen also claimed all credits for initiating student activism at Beida:

I am the active participant and organizer of the movement. I launched the free forum, and joined the Hundred Flowers Society, and the *Public Square* editorial board as an individual. ... I am the organizer of the movement. If you hate me with all your heart, please come and find me! I know you will fabricate charges against me, but I am willing to take them, as long as you do not bother other innocent people.⁴⁶⁹

Chen explained in his memoir that he wanted to bring all the guilt of other Hundred Flowers Society members to himself, in hope of protecting the others.⁴⁷⁰ Not all student activists agreed with his approach. Shen Zeyi thought that Chen was an organizer of the student group and a founder of the journal, but not an organizer not the whole event. In fact, there was not a single leader, as the time did not allow students to generate a real leader before campus activism was suppressed. Shen was also afraid that Chen's rhetoric scared those who still favored or secretly sympathized with us, and made loyalists speak more assertively and arrogantly, especially the last sentence in Chen's poster.⁴⁷¹

Conservatives, even though it looks like you are winning, but you do not know that the seed of fire from the May 19th Movement has been planted, and it will soon turn into prairie of fire that burns you all.⁴⁷²

Chen's words intensified confrontation between student activists and the authorities, even though the antagonism was not intended. The relation between students and the authorities was not un-negotiable, and almost no student considered the Party as an ultimate enemy. Chen showed his

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 218.

⁴⁷⁰ Chen Fengxiao, *Mengduan weiminghu*, 348.

⁴⁷¹ Shen Zeyi, *Beida 5.19*, 275-277.

⁴⁷² Chen Fengxiao, "Such Tricks," *Yuanshangcao*, 218.

resolution of not succumbing to the authorities, while the latter took Chen's words literally and accused him of being a counter-revolutionary.

Tan Tianrong was another student activist who refused to make self-criticism. He continued to write eye-catching posters when the Anti-Rightist Campaign replaced blooming and contending. In "The Fourth Poisonous Weed," he highly praised the May 19th Movement as part of international anti-dogmatism movement. He referred to "rightists" as human beings with proud and unyielding characters.⁴⁷³ In "Saving the Soul," he mocked criticism sessions as rather boring and useless. He believed that "the May 19th Movement and the May Fourth Movement would clearly stay in the minds of our younger brothers and sisters, and inspire future generations."⁴⁷⁴ To Tan's disappointment, student activism of 1957 has yet to receive as much attention as that of 1919.

Similar to Chen Fengxiao and Tan Tianrong, Yang Lu also voiced his disagreement with the authorities and rejection to self-criticism in his poster "The Last Statement":

I disagree with such measure to make a mountain out of a molehill, and I keep my disagreement with the Party. The Party should not suppress socialist democratic force because of a small handful of anti-socialists. It should not use the excuse of class struggle to suppress those who clear roadblocks for socialist progress. ... In this campaign, my line has been basically correct, which does not depart from socialism. Though it has mistakes, I do not prepare to make self-criticism.⁴⁷⁵

Unlike the other two, Yang suggested that student activists should make compromise with progressive force inside the Party:

Public Square should discontinue and the Hundred Flowers Society should dissolve, otherwise no matter whether you had anti-socialist activities, as long as you ask for a bit democracy, the power and so-called "public opinions" will not let you off, unless you become a yellow press like *Waves Rinse Sands*.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷³ Tan Tianrong, "The Fourth Poisonous Weed," *Yuanshangcao*, 40-41.

⁴⁷⁴ Tan Tianrong, "Saving the Soul," *Yuanshangcao*, 57.

⁴⁷⁵ Yang Lu, "The Last Statement," *Yuanshangcao*, 221-222.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 222.

Despite dissolution of the Hundred Flowers Society and *Public Square*, their members and editors did not escape from being punished. Bending to the authorities had become almost inevitable as the Anti-Rightist Campaign went underway, though as Li Xiuyu wrote, such compromise was short-term but history was on students' side:

Dialectically speaking, the Communist Party is the only good Party. We have to bear with it without being too serious. History will help us. Stalin dictated throughout his life, but he was denounced after his death. It is impossible to reform our Party and government like Poland (though I personally like the Polish way).⁴⁷⁷

Lessons from the Soviet and Eastern Europe might seem too far in comparison to more practical concerns that drove some student activists to recant. As Liu Qidi explained his change of mind:

My self-criticism might shock you, as I was tenacious and firm in front of you, and you used to say that our biggest commonality was not doing self-criticism. But if I do not, my family would cut off the relationship, I could no longer study physics, and friends would no longer like me.⁴⁷⁸

Just as Liu, Shen Zeyi also confessed under family pressure. Shen's father, who probably heard from Shen's sister and her husband, both Beida Russian majors, or from Shen's classmates about what he had done during the Rectification, wrote him a letter trying to persuade him to admit his mistake. So did Shen's uncle, who was teaching at Beida's neighbor Tsinghua University, and who convinced Shen to confess. At the time, Shen had hoped that his confession would lead to fewer "rightists" being labeled. To the opposite, however, the school authorities used his example to isolate and dissolve rightist groups, so as to label more "rightists."⁴⁷⁹

The authorities' tactic proved successful: finding a so-called reactionary or counter-revolutionary from the Hundred Flowers Society or the editorial board of *Public Square* and making him confess in public was more convincing than verbal attacks from loyalists. No other

⁴⁷⁷ Li Xiuyu, *Gaodengxuexiao youpaiyanlun xuanbian*, 567.

⁴⁷⁸ Liu Qidi, *Gaodengxuexiao youpaiyanlun xuanbian*, 556.

⁴⁷⁹ Shen Zeyi, *Beida* 5.19, 259-260.

self-criticism made more impact than that of Shen, because he was the first to confess at a campus-wide meeting on July 20, almost a month after Beida had moved from the Rectification to the Anti-Rightist Campaign.

Before Shen was allowed to read his self-criticism in public, at the behest of the school and department Party committees, he revised it four times. Shen's class branch Party secretary returned the first version and provided suggestions for improvement:

You must dig into your thought origins, and associate with your class background and its influence on you. Besides, we communists believe the consistency between motivation and effect, so you cannot say you have good motivation but bad effect.⁴⁸⁰

By connecting class background to “rightist” label, the instruction Shen Zeyi received was exactly how the authorities framed student activists and justified the classification. For the second time, the Chinese department Youth League secretary returned Shen's self-criticism with more specific requests, including adding further criticism of Shen's involvement in *Public Square*, mentioning his trip to Tianjin, and acknowledging that one of Shen's poems was anti-Party. Shen not only complied with all changes, but also revealed his friend Zhang Yuanxun's secret plan to escape China. Shen knew that by doing so, he would have sold out his friend, but Zhang would be in bigger trouble if he put his plan into practice. The third version was again returned with one last suggestion: changing the title from “My Self-Criticism” to “I Pledge Guilty to the People.” Shen objected at first, because he did not think of himself as guilty for only speaking without acting. But the same Youth League secretary told him, “We are not saying you are guilty, but you should show that you have a sincere attitude.”⁴⁸¹ Thus, Shen rewrote the

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 283.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 289.

title and made minor changes one more time. A couple days later, Shen was told to read his self-criticism at the campus-wide criticism meeting of *Public Square*.⁴⁸²

A two-day condemnation meeting on July 19 and 20 with 12,000 Beida students, faculty and administrative staff in the name of crushing *Public Square* reactionary clique took place on campus. Also invited were some students from other universities and personnel from government organs and factories in Beijing. Such scale was almost a backhanded compliment to student activists and an acknowledgement of their potential influence during the less than four weeks of their activities on campus and beyond.⁴⁸³ As part of the meeting, on the afternoon of July 20, Shen read his self-criticism word by word without changing a word.⁴⁸⁴ Regarding Shen's class background, both Ma Si and Zhang Yuanxun in the audience remembered the following words:

As a son of a landlord, I did not hate the poisoning of the class, but I stayed with the backward reactionary stand. This is the fundamental reason why I am dissatisfied with the party and society.⁴⁸⁵

One can tell that Shen followed exactly what the Party leaders wanted him to say. As for Shen's poems, he made the self-criticism as instructed:

My thoughts had a leap during this campaign, from extreme individualistic to reactionary, and even anti-Party and anti-socialism. ... The series of poems I wrote could be considered an array of poisoned darts shooting at the party.⁴⁸⁶

Besides criticizing himself, Shen also attacked fellow student activists. He denounced his friendship with Zhang Yuanxun:

You used to be my friend, and we used to work and participate in a series of activities together. But I am very disappointed at your recent attitude. ... Even worse, you had the idea of leaving the country after graduation. I have to warn you, if you really plan to do that, then we will lose the fundamental common

⁴⁸² Ibid., 286-289.

⁴⁸³ Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China*, 202.

⁴⁸⁴ Shen Zeyi, *Beida 5.19*, 290-291.

⁴⁸⁵ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 430; Zhang Yuanxun, *Beida 1957*, 184.

⁴⁸⁶ Zhang Yuanxun, *Beida 1957*, 184; Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 430.

language: our love for the nation that raised us. You are a traitor to the country and its people.⁴⁸⁷

Shen did not include his original self-criticism in his memoir, but his friend-turned-traitor Zhang Yuanxun kept a complete record from a published version in his memoir.

Shen also spoke ill of Chen Fengxiao, who he considered as “the boss of *Public Square* and a conspirator:”

I can say for sure that he [Chen] expected a Chinese Hungarian Incident. He talked to me in person, that he would go to factories, the countryside and the military to spread the news and fan the flame.⁴⁸⁸

In Shen’s memoir, he confessed that he had made a huge mistake by misunderstanding Chen and assuming that Chen had a dark side. In fact, Chen was usually quiet in meetings, and the two did not talk too much in person.⁴⁸⁹

At the end of Shen’s speech, he added a few words not written in his self-criticism: “I will better follow the CCP and chairman Mao on the socialist path, reform my thought, study hard, and contribute my effort to socialist construction.”⁴⁹⁰ It sounded like typical jargon of the time, though Shen spoke wholeheartedly. For a few second after Shen’s speech, it was dead silent before the audience applauded for a long time. Shen was unsure if people meant to appraise his self-criticism or acknowledge his mistakes.⁴⁹¹

The reception of Shen’s self-criticism was divided. Ma Si, a fellow Chinese major in the audience, remembered that Shen’s speech was long, but Shen’s attitude seemed sincere, making others believe that he truly wanted to come back to the majority. Shen’s speech was exemplary for other “rightists,” and he became a model for people who came back to the Party line.⁴⁹² Not

⁴⁸⁷ Zhang Yuanxun, *Beida 1957*, 192.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁴⁸⁹ Shen Zeyi, *Beida 5.19*, 225.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁴⁹² Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 429-430.

all student activists followed Shen's step. For example, Tan Tianrong wrote a poster "To Shen Zeyi" in response to his speech, in which Tan criticized Shen's betrayal of ideals and attack of "democratic warriors." In a second poster entitled "What are we working for? – Again to Shen Zeyi," Tan expressed his dissatisfaction with Shen, who "humiliated our work, our ideal, our May 19th Movement, and our pure and selfless souls."⁴⁹³ It was the only public written response to Shen. Interestingly, Shen's reaction was that he admired Tan, and Shen was concerned that Tan's poster might exacerbate the situation.⁴⁹⁴

The Anti-Rightist Campaign seemed to last longer than everyone had expected. Public criticism sessions like the one Shen attended continued till the end of 1957. Shen assumed that his speech would help alleviate confrontation between student activists and the authorities, but he did not learn about the negative impact his self-criticism had until after summer break.⁴⁹⁵ The school authorities intended to divide activist groups, and Shen was a breaking point. As an exchange for acknowledging his mistake, Shen received a lighter sentence among student activists when the decision of punishment was announced in February 1958: instead of going to education through labor, he would stay in school for a year under supervision as a "rightist."⁴⁹⁶

This chapter approaches the student activism at Beida from three angles: political opportunity and constraint, organization and mobilization, and divisions. I argue that these three features distinguish the 1957 episode from either the May Fourth Movement or the Tian'anmen Protests, though they share similarities with the Red Guards Movement in the Cultural Revolution. An ambiguous and unconventional political campaign, loosely organized student

⁴⁹³ Tan Tianrong, "What are we working for? – Again to Shen Zeyi," *Yuanshangcao*, 64.

⁴⁹⁴ Shen Zeyi, *Beida*, 5.19, 293.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 294, 296.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 334-335.

groups with no leaders, and different views on the Party, all contributed to the contentious politics that seemed doomed to failure.

Once moving beyond Beida to look at other universities in and out of Beijing, we might find a different picture of student activism in 1957. How did students at various campuses participated in the Rectification, and what did students across China learn from their Beida peers? The next chapter will tackle these questions.

CHAPTER 6

VARIATIONS ACROSS CAMPUSES: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN BEIJING, WUHAN AND KUNMING

The previous two chapters have focused on Peking University (Beida), one of the most active campuses during the Rectification of 1957. Nevertheless, Beida students were in many ways exceptional in comparison to students at other universities in and outside Beijing. Previous scholarships have concentrated on Beida, thanks to relatively more abundant sources and witness accounts, while there is little in-depth study of other campuses around the same time. This chapter goes beyond Beida to present a bigger picture of student activism in 1957's China. Since the Hundred Flowers and the Anti-Rightist Campaigns took place on the national scale, university students at various localities responded in similar and different ways. I pay attention to three major schools: Beijing Normal University (Beishida), a teacher-training college not too far from Beida, Wuhan University (Wuda) along the Yangzi River, and Yunnan University (Yunda) in the southwest frontier.⁴⁹⁷ Why choosing these three? Besides the concern for geographic representation, students in all three campuses were active in writing posters and making organizations. Thus, there are a great number of records of student comments and actions available for research.

This chapter starts with some overarching comparisons and contrasts of student activism across China. Then it goes into details of campus activism in each of the three schools, especially focusing on student organizations, relation between students and the authorities, and the spread of information across campuses. Archival documents mainly come from the *Anti-Rightist Campaign database*, and the *Internal Reference*. Besides the authorities' narrative, I have

⁴⁹⁷ I thank Song Yongyi for the suggestion to look into Wuhan University and Yunnan University.

collected student memoirs and conducted interviews with students from all three schools. Unfortunately, school archives regarding this period remain sensitive and therefore off limits.

Similarities

The following comparisons and contrasts are based on case studies in Beijing, Wuhan and Kunming, as well as *Internal Reference* reports in various locales. The similarities come from the origins, the urgency, and the space of student activism, as well as relations with the faculty and the authorities. These observations follow the general pattern of student activities, and do not account for specific campus environment.

The first similarity of student participation in the Rectification was that campus activism was mostly triggered by local issues before it touched upon systemic problems related to the Party and state. At both Beishida and Yunda, students were first outraged about the exposed scandal or wrongdoing of administration personnel, but soon their posters moved on to other topics, such as mistakes in the Counterrevolutionary Campaign of 1955. The first poster at Beida also started with a seemingly trivial question about the selecting process of student representatives to the Youth League meeting, though posters after it were never shy about asking for socialist democracy. The wide range of issues raised in the Rectification showed that students cared about local and national problems, and they embodied the Confucian-type of scholars who were supposed to be “the conscience of the nation.”

The second common feature among the three universities was the urgency to participate in the Rectification, so as to follow up with peers at other schools, both in and out of town. While Beishida and Yunda students were more inspired by their respective neighbors, Wuda students looked up to Beijing and Shanghai and felt falling behind. Such feeling did not exist among

Beida students, even though they were not the first to make posters.⁴⁹⁸ Despite limited newspaper coverage and the lack of cross-school alliance, campus activism proved to be contagious. Especially in 1957, most students saw no immediate repercussion of speaking out, even though many school authorities remained ambivalent without fully endorsing student actions. Under Mao's invitation, students had a lot space to improvise, so following the lead of Beida seemed natural for students elsewhere.

The third commonality shared by most schools was that student activism stayed on campus, as debates and accusation meetings took place in dining halls and classrooms, and posters were rarely seen outside schools. In comparison to the May Fourth Movement, the Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution, and the Tian'anmen Protests, the 1957 episode might be the only case that took place exclusively on campus. Exceptions included petitions to local newspapers against media censorship, such as Beida students to the *People's Daily*, and Wuda students to the *Yangzi Daily*. In rare cases did students protested on streets for local issues, such as some Shanghai Jiaotong University students protested against being relocated permanently from the east coast to Xi'an in northwest China for security concerns. The most publicized example was that some Wuhan middle school students demonstrated against lowering high school entrance rate, which was later coined as a "little Hungarian Incident."

The fourth similarity was the separation between the faculty and students in the Rectification. Most schools had organized faculty to offer critiques in meetings before students voluntarily joined the initiative in different ways. In the Wuda case, students were frustrated that they were not invited to speak out as faculty did. Once students participated, they bypassed organized meetings and used more unscripted forms. At this time, few professors joined students

⁴⁹⁸ According an *Internal Reference* report on May 20, 1957, the first poster appeared at Beijing Aerospace Institute on May 17.

in writing posters or having debates, even though in private they admired their students.⁴⁹⁹ One can argue that college professors were more politically cautious, so they kept a distance from student spontaneous acts. It is not to say that the faculty at most campuses was inactive or uncritical in the Rectification. In fact, some Beishida and Wuda professors were known for speaking out. The point is that the faculty and students acted differently: the former stayed with the state-approved channel, while the latter explored into uncharted, though not unfamiliar, methods. The two did not act together, such as co-authoring a poster. A notable exception was Beida Western language department lecturer Huang Jizhong, who led students to Tsinghua, and met with school officials along with his students.

Despite the rhetoric of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, I found that almost no student had anti-Party or anti-government sentiment when offering criticism, which is the fifth thing in common. Students overall trusted Mao, and took the Rectification as an opportunity to make suggestions to improve, not to overthrow, the authorities. Students raised criticism out of genuine concerns for the Party and the nation, and such patriotism was shared across the board. It should not be treated as self-serving bias in the archives or memoirs. When it came to labeling, even the state made a distinction between a “rightist” and a counter-revolutionary: the former would be considered contradictions among the people, and the latter contradictions between the people and the enemies. I agree with Ghanshyam Mehta’s observation,

[T]he authorities, while at times talking in inevitably exaggerated terms of the “rightist attack” and conjuring up the specter of counter-revolutionary rule in China, knew full well that the “attack” had not reached sufficient proportions to effect any “restoration.”⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁹ Yue Daiyun, and Carolyn Wakeman, *To the Storm: The Odyssey of a Revolutionary Chinese Woman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 7-10.

⁵⁰⁰ Mehta, *The Politics of Student Protest in China*, 408.

In the case of the Chinese Party of Great Harmony by some Yunda and Kunming Normal College students, it was considered a counter-revolutionary clique, and the students involved were arrested. This was the closest example that included “overthrowing the Communist Party” in its political agenda written in January of 1958, but I believe that these students only became more critical of the Party after having been labeled “rightists.”⁵⁰¹

Differences

Following the five similarities, I offer several points that distinguish one school from another. These differences lay in the level of enthusiasm, student majors, agency in framing, and reactions from the school authorities. The composition and background of students, the school’s historical legacies, and the relation between students and the authorities all contributed to the differences at various campuses.

One might get a sense that university campuses nationwide were hotbeds of student activism during the Rectification. While this was true overall, not every school reacted at the same time, and some campuses were more active than the others. It made sense that students in Beijing and Shanghai first participated in the Rectification, as they were more tuned to politics. Then inspired by Beida peers, students in Central China, Wuhan included, played catch up. Kunming, as the capital of Yunnan province in southwest frontier, seemed to join the campaign at last. Even within the same city, not every university’s students were enthusiastic about airing grievances beyond organized meetings. For example, students at Tsinghua across the street from Beida were lukewarm about having its neighbor coming on campus to introduce a different way of Rectification. The only traceable student group, later criticized as anti-Party, anti-socialism clique, was the “Common People Society,” among a group of theater amateurs led by Sun

⁵⁰¹ Huang Changlu, *Internal Reference*, February 13, 1958.

Baocong, a third-year electrifying industry major.⁵⁰² In Lin Xiling's speech, she lamented that her school People's University (Renda) was too conservative in comparison to Beida. If there were any reason that affected the level of enthusiasm, it would be the composition of students: engineering students who were trained to become technocrats at Tsinghua and selected cadre students with guaranteed jobs in the Party at Renda were beneficiaries, not critics, of the system.

Besides the question of which school's students were more active, the second difference was what major of students got more involved in the Rectification. In the three cases of this chapter, Chinese majors played a crucial role in initiating campus activism through writing posters and journal articles, something they were good at. Nevertheless, at Beida, a large number of physics and mathematics students seemed more engaged than science students at the other three schools, while Chinese majors at Beida were just as active as the others. A similar case to Beida was Fudan University in Shanghai, where physics students also led the Rectification before Chinese majors carried on the enthusiasm. Ma Mingmin, a female student in physics, confronted the school Party secretary at a meeting, asking, "How many people were wrongly accused in Fudan's Counterrevolutionary Campaign?" Though she was not the most active in the physics department, she became a target of criticism on par with Lin Xiling in Beijing.⁵⁰³

What was truly unique about campus activism at Beida was the student agency in framing their actions not just as part of a top-down Rectification, but in their own terms as a bottom-up "May 19 Movement." Beida students not only challenged what was acceptable in the Rectification, but also branded their campus activities as grassroots democracy movement.

Inspired by Beida students, other university students followed up with posters, journals, debates

⁵⁰² Beijing Daily journalist, "Yexinbobo, wangxiang dao zhuan lishi chelun," *Shou du gaodeng xuexiao fanyou pai douzheng de juda shengli*, 296-299. I had a chance to interview Sun in 2015 before he passed away later that year. He refused to talk in details about his involvement in the Rectification period, and he did not want me to record my conversation with him.

⁵⁰³ Wu Zhongjie, *Fudan wangshi* [Things in the Past about Fudan] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2005), 46-47.

and accusation meetings, but they did not share the same consciousness to promote their own movement in response to the Rectification. No student in other schools defined themselves as participating in a movement beyond what the authorities asked for, even though these students and the authorities had very different expectations of the Rectification.

Nevertheless, it would be unfair to characterize that Beida students only cared about grand issues that related to the Party and state, whereas students in other schools solely focused on campus-wide problems. For example, Wuda students raised slogans about fighting for democracy, freedom and human rights. Yunda students brought up the problem of personality cult, and even attempted to found an alternative Party. It was true, however, Beida students were not obsessed with criticizing its faculty or administration, whereas in other schools, such as Beishida and Yunda, personnel complaints became triggers of student activism and continued to attract student attention throughout the Rectification. As a Beida student activist told his fellows from Beishida, they should aim at bigger problems instead of specific persons.

Finally, the school authority's attitude towards student activism varied. The ways student acted took the authorities by surprise, so school officials had a difficult time figuring out whether to support or to rein in student activism. On the one hand, students voluntarily participated in the Rectification that the central authorities had called for. On the other hand, students did not follow conventional scripts but adopted contentious repertoires to air their opinions. Thus authorities at some schools, such as Beida and Wuda, hesitated for a short while before expressing support for the students. Some others, including Beishida and Yunda, remained ambiguous and never fully endorsed student actions. In retrospect, the former schools were more tolerant of student activism, and left more space for freedom of speech within the limited time. The latter

universities were more conservative, which in part contributed to more intense confrontations between students and the school authorities.

Beijing Normal University (Beishida)

The first case for comparison is Beijing Normal University, another boisterous campus besides Beida, though students here had different, and more local, concerns. This section touches on the organization, student attitude toward cross-campus alliance, and relation with the authorities. As a college that specialized in education and training for teachers, it did not have as many science majors as Beida or other universities. What made Beishida stand out in the Rectification was that both students and professors were active in speaking out outside conventional channels – the organized meetings, whereas faculty on other campuses mostly stick with campaign scripts. Thus, the percentage of faculty at Beishida who became “rightists” was higher than other schools.

Unlike Beida, where a few student posters triggered heated discussions, students at Beishida traced the beginning of Rectification to an article in the *Guangming Daily* on May 22, written by a Beishida Chinese department professor Mu Mutian. The essay, “My Appeal,” brought up several complaints, most provocatively a love affair between the school Party secretary He Xilin and a female graduate student in the Chinese department. Mu originally raised criticism during an organized meeting, but some Party cadres denied his suggestions. Then he turned to the *Guangming Daily*. After the article was reposted on campus, it inspired posters and debates. Because of Mu’s accusation of He, students coined the term “He-Mu Incident.”

1. Organization

Similar to Beida, posters and student groups sprang up almost overnight after the initial trigger. The most popular space at Beishida was between the dining hall and dormitory with some date trees, very much like the “triangle area” at Beida. Students put up and read posters, and gathered for debates in this space. The Rectification grew rapidly. At first, students spent the morning for class and the afternoon writing posters. Then eight Party members from the education department proposed to cancel class to better participate in the Rectification, which gained support from other student groups.⁵⁰⁴

The first poster at Beishida, “Voice from the Lowest Stratum,” appeared on May 23. The writing was based on an interview with Mu Mutian and his wife Peng Hui, both faculty of the school. The poster was written by a group of Chinese majors who lived in the same dorm, and argued that the lukewarm participation of the Rectification was due to school Party cadres’ suppression. Later, these classmates formed a group using the same name as the poster, and their posters mostly targeted members of the school Party committee. The group grew from a dozen to over three hundred, with subdivisions in charge of posters, mimeograph and broadcast. Since participation did not require filling forms or registration, even the three students, including Luo Zongyi, on its editorial board had no idea how large the group had become.⁵⁰⁵

Some fourth-year Chinese majors started a “Bitter Medicine Society,” which produced a daily poster in the form of serial novel entitled “New Curious Spectacles of the Present and the Past” borrowed from a late Ming novel. Students got the idea from Beida student posters “New Scholars.” Besides that, they also published a series of “Record of Astounding Injustice,” which included sufferings of students and faculty during the 1955 Counterrevolutionary Campaign.

According to Li Shoushan, who was in charge of editing the latter, both series had daily updates

⁵⁰⁴ Luo Zongyi, Zai nage “bupingchang de chuntian” li [That Unusual Spring], in Yu Anguo, Lei Yining, eds., *Buken chenshui de jiyi* [Memories that Refuse to Rest] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2006), 6.

⁵⁰⁵ Luo Zongyi, *Buken chenshui de jiyi*, 2-5.

posted around 4pm at a designated poster wall, which attracted many students because of its novel form and concise language.⁵⁰⁶ Selections from the two were published in a mimeographed journal “Special Issue of the Bitter Medicine.” As a group leader Gu Xingyun remembered that members of the Bitter Medicine Society were mostly Chinese majors, and many were Youth League members. Just like the Voice from the Lowest Stratum, it was loosely organized with no accurate number of its size.⁵⁰⁷

A third student group launched by Chinese department student cadres in the Youth League and student association was “Mass Forum.” Instead of writing posters, this group provided a space for debate on campus. It was decades later that the head of the forum Li Jingchun revealed that he was under the guidance of Fang Ming, the vice secretary of the school Party committee in leading the forum, who did not disclose her connection to the group and thus avoided being labeled “rightist.”

The topic of the first forum was the He-Mu Incident. Fan Yihao recalls the setup was rather plain: a table on the stairs outside the west side of dining hall, a light bulb, and a poster. But it attracted an audience of faculty and students numbering several hundred. Among those who spoke out, some accused He Xilin of being bureaucratic, and some defended him against Mu Mutian’s accusation. The audience did not reach a consensus, and criticism of He did not seem to affect his position of leadership. A couple days later, at a campus-wide meeting, He expressed that “professor Mu Mutian’s criticism of me shows his care for me,” and he welcomed the Rectification to continue.⁵⁰⁸ At a meeting with student group leaders, Zhang Fu, a vice

⁵⁰⁶ Li Shoushan, *Wo suo jingli de Beijing shida zhongwenxi zhengfeng fanyou yundong* [My experience of the Rectification and Anti-Rightist Campaigns at the Chinese department of Beijing Normal University], *Buken chenshui de jiyi*, 18.

⁵⁰⁷ Gu Xingyun, Yiqun shenxian “yuwang” de daxuesheng [A group of college students who fell into the “fishing net”], in Xin Zilin et al., *“Yangmou” xia de beishida zhi nan* [Suffering of Beishida under the “Open Conspiracy”] (Hong Kong: Zhenxiang chubanshe, 2011), 46.

⁵⁰⁸ Fan Yihao, “Wo de maozi ji,” *Buken chenshui de jiyi*, 40-41.

secretary of the school Party committee acknowledged He's mistake, but suggested that students should shift focus to the three "evils," targets of the Rectification.⁵⁰⁹

Student attention indeed moved on to another concerning issue: the 1955 Counterrevolutionary Campaign, which became the topic for the second and third forum, hosted by Fan Yihao on May 26 and 27 at the biggest lecture theatre. Students who talked about their grievances and reflection of the 1955 campaign came from the Chinese and Russian language departments, as well as from history, political education, and mathematics. Most students shared their experiences without touching on fundamental issues, such as the Party system, or considering the problems a matter of democracy and human rights. All these speeches were denounced as "rightist attacks to the Party" in the Anti-Rightist Campaign.⁵¹⁰

2. Attitude towards Alliance

Some Beishida student activists disliked the idea of aligning with other campuses. When rumors from People's University (Renda) spread that Lin Xiling would come to speak at Beishida, leaders of several student groups reached an agreement: during the Rectification, schools should only attend to internal matters. They disagreed with cross-campus alliance or street protest, and suggested that the school should close its door and block students from other campuses. The reason was that they did not want to create troubles for the authorities, or make themselves a target. Students in 1989 had similar calculation when some activists refuse to have any connection with factory workers.

Nevertheless, Beida's newsletter "democracy relay baton" did reach Beishida, thanks to a student Yu Anguo who went to Beida, met with student activists of the Hundred Flowers

⁵⁰⁹ Li Shoushan, *Buken chenshui de jiyi*, 16.

⁵¹⁰ Fan Yihao, *Buken chenshui de jiyi*, 41-42.

Society, and brought the newsletter back on campus.⁵¹¹ Another student Zhou Shabai not only read posters at Beida and Tsinghua, but also listened to Lin Xiling's speech. Back on campus, Zhou wrote the first poster defending Hu Feng, a victim of the 1955 Counterrevolutionary Campaign, on May 26. Many students echoed his defense. Though Zhou did not attend any Rectification afterward, he became the first "extreme rightist" among peers, and he was framed as a leader of a clique.⁵¹²

In comparison to Beida, students at Beishida seemed to be occupied with local rather than national issues. When Beida activist Chen Fengxiao got in touch with the Bitter Medicine Society and Voice from the Lowest Stratum, he suggested that "they should probe bigger problems and deeper roots."⁵¹³ The Voice accepted the criticism, as its June 6 editorial "Bring our Rectification One Step Further" suggested, "We should not limit our vision to our school, but care more fundamental questions, such as socialist democracy and freedom."⁵¹⁴

3. Relation with the Authorities

Just like Beida activists who managed to talk to staff of the State Council, Beishida students also visited top leaders in Beijing. On June 3, a group of 18 students made their way to meet with Hu Yaobang, secretary of the Central Youth League. Though without appointment, Hu welcomed the students to sit in the living room, and listened to student report for almost an hour before responding. Students were most curious about the rumor of a split in the central leadership regarding the hundred flowers policy, but Hu did not answer directly, except saying that "the Party central will solve its own problem, and you students should focus on studying." Regarding

⁵¹¹ Yu Anguo, "Yunjiao huagai yu heqiu [What I can do with poor luck]," *Buken chenshui de jiyi*, 176.

⁵¹² Zhou Shabai, "Yangmou" zhizao de fengyu rensheng [A life weaved by the "open conspiracy"], *Buken chenshui de jiyi*, 152-154; Wang Chuanye, *Chenzhong de huiyi* [Heavy Memories] (Hong Kong: Xinhua chubanshe, 2011), 150.

⁵¹³ "What is the May 19 movement?" *The Spring of 1957*, 41-42.

⁵¹⁴ "Voice from the Lowest Stratum" editorial, "Bring our Rectification One Step Further," *Buken chenshui de jiyi*, 320-321.

Beida's campus activism, Hu said, "Democracy and freedom should have their boundaries. A dead person has to stay in a coffin, not to mention someone alive. There is no absolute democracy and freedom in the world." As for Beishida's Rectification, Hu confirmed that the problem with school Party secretary sounded serious.⁵¹⁵

Student loyalists also existed at Beishida. In opposition to the Voice from the Lowest Stratum, a student Party member in the Chinese department initiated a "Pravda" newspaper around June 3. At that time, debates among the students were a matter of opinions, but they would soon be politicized.⁵¹⁶ The school also sponsored a newspaper "Mars." In a Mars' editorial "Reveal the Crimes of Attacking the Party Initiated by the Headquarters Led by the Voice from the Lowest Stratum," posters and speeches became "attacks to the Party" with the goal of "seizing the power of the Party committee." Student group meetings and actions were portrayed as "secretive" and "surreptitious," and the Rectification was described as a disguise of personal attack and power struggle by "rightists."⁵¹⁷

While most student groups turned quiet after the June 8 editorial, some individuals continued to voice dissent. In response to the editorial "What is this for," Fan Yihao and his classmate Lin Xichun wrote a poster "What could this cause?" They adopted similar style as the editorial, but they argued that the editorial blurred the class distinction and politicized ideological issues, thus confusing friends with enemies and silencing the rest. The poster received instant attention, as some students copied it word by word, and some journalists came to take pictures. On the second morning, it was surrounded by hundreds of posters, most criticizing Fan and Lin, while some expressing agreement and concern. Undeterred by the *People's Daily's* editorials

⁵¹⁵ Luo Zongyi, Zai nage "bupingchang de chuntian" li [That Unusual Spring], in Yu Anguo, Lei Yining, ed., *Buken chenshui de jiyi* [Memories that Refuse to Rest] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2006), 8-9.

⁵¹⁶ Luo Zongyi, *Buken chenshui de jiyi*, 9.

⁵¹⁷ Editorial board of Mars, "Reveal the Crimes of Attacking the Party Initiated by the Headquarters Led by the Voice from the Lowest Stratum," *Buken chenshui de jiyi*, 321-327.

after June 8, Fan and Lin insisted on their viewpoints at a school-sponsored forum on June 12, but they were given no chance to fight back. After the forum, some unacquainted schoolmates walked by and quietly told Fan, “We agree with your opinion, but we cannot say it any more.”⁵¹⁸

Wuhan University

Unlike students in cities such as Beijing or Shanghai, where Rectification had started, students in Hubei province of central China were eager to catch up, as they also wanted to enjoy the freedom. Especially at Wuhan University (Wuda), the school used the excuse of upcoming exams to delay student participation in the Rectification, while the faculty and administration had been encouraged to air their opinions. Thus some students were frustrated and looking for ways to express themselves outside the organized channels. This section touches on student organizations, relation with the authorities, correspondence across campuses, and other universities in Wuhan.

Similar to Beishida, many student activists at Wuda were also Chinese majors, mostly from a few third-year students who lived in the same dorm. Among them, the most prominent figure was Wu Kaibin, who originally came from Hunan, a neighboring province of Hubei, and enrolled in Wuda in 1954. He was a major voice in a student group that wrote posters, as well as in conversations with the authorities.

1. Organization

Just like students at Beida and Beishida, Wuda students pursued the repertoire of big-character posters. The first one came on May 27, more than a week after Beida. Wu and classmates came up with the title “Flame Newspaper (huoyan bao).” In the “Letter to All Students” written by Wu Kaibin, he first mentioned that students in Beijing and other

⁵¹⁸ Fan Yihao, *Wo de maozi ji*, *Buken chenshui de jiyi*, 46-47.

universities in Wuhan have already joined the Rectification, so “they walked at the frontline.”

Then he pointed out the situation at Wuda,

Wuda has accumulated many problems, and bureaucratism and sectarianism are deeply rooted. If only relying on the strength of faculty and administration without a strong team of students, problems will not be solved.

After calling on students to act, he justified the move by saying the school Party secretary Liu Zhen had expressed support for student Rectification. At the end of the letter, he used a phrase first popularized at Beida: “Now is the time, fellow students, we should act immediately, and use the passionate flame of youth to burn all things vile.”⁵¹⁹ Wu seemed fairly familiar with what was happening at Beida, though few of his schoolmates shared the same information.

Making posters became instantly popular among the students. According to Wu, the first poster was put up at the school public notice board across a bank on campus, which attracted instant attention. The second poster came out the following day, posted in a humanities-student dining hall. Dining hall chefs even brought a bucket of glue and promised future supply. A research institute located in Wuda provided abundant poster paper. Students from second-year Chinese majors and history majors also started writing posters.⁵²⁰

Among the issues raised by Wuda students, many spoke critically of the school authorities for being bureaucratic, especially vice president and deputy at the personnel department. According to the *Internal Reference*, the authorities considered the criticism as personal attacks caused by misunderstanding of the Rectification.⁵²¹ What was more concerning besides problems with specific cadres was that by June 4, some students raised slogans such as

⁵¹⁹ “A letter to all students from the Flame Newspaper,” May 27, 1957, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from Zhonggong wuhan daxue shehui zhuyi sixiangjiaoyu bangongshi, *Wuhan daxue youpai yanlun huibian*, 1957.

⁵²⁰ Wu Kaibin, *Linglei rensheng ershinian* [A different kind of life for 20 years] (Hong Kong: Zhongguo wenhua chubanshe, 2007), 7.

⁵²¹ Sun Wangchang, Fang Di, Wuda qingshi jizhuanzhixia bushao xuesheng pianji de lihai [Wuda’s situation took a sudden downward turn, many students are rather extreme], *Internal Reference*, June 6, 1957.

“safeguarding democracy, human rights, socialist legislation, and rights given by the constitution.” Some even suggested that it was no longer enough to say “long life the PRC, and long life Mao,” but also “long life rationality, and long life democracy and freedom!”⁵²²

Besides writing posters, students at Wuda also held debates and accusation meetings. Debate topics included people’s relations after 1949, whether the Hu Feng clique was counterrevolutionary, and whether Wuda gained merit through the 1955 Counterrevolutionary Campaign. Accusation meetings also focused on the 1955 campaign, as well as job assignments for graduating seniors. Organizers of these debates and accusation meetings were one class or one student group, though participants came from various majors.⁵²³

2. Relation with the Authorities

The school authorities responded to the initial posters on the night of May 28 by holding an all-student meeting at the sports field of campus center, in which the Party secretary Liu Zhen explained again why the school insisted on having faculty and administration participate in the Rectification before students. In a letter to his friend, Chen Jiamian described that the sports field was filled with people by 6pm, even though Liu’s report did not start until 8:30pm. Students from the Chinese department brought many posters, with slogan such as “Wuda is chilling, and we need the spring.”⁵²⁴ Then Wu Kaibin went on stage refuting Liu point by point, and arguing that students should start Rectification immediately. Many applauded, but some Party members called on others to leave while Wu was talking. Wu and his classmates felt dissatisfied with Liu’s talk, and planned to talk to Liu in private. They waited on his way back home, and Wu convinced him to have a chat for less than half an hour. Liu unwillingly accepted the invitation,

⁵²² Xu Ben, Wuda raised slogans to fight for democracy, *Internal Reference*, June 10, 1957.

⁵²³ Sun Wangchang, Fang Di, Wuda qingshi jizhuanzhixia bushao xuesheng pianji de lihai [Wuda’s situation took a sudden downward turn, many students are rather extreme], *Internal Reference*, June 6, 1957.

⁵²⁴ Chen Jiamian, “A letter to xxx at Wuhan Medical School,” May 26, 1957, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Wuhan daxue youpai yanlun lubian*, 1957.

and the conversation took place at Wu's dorm. Neither side changed the other's mind, and they reached no consensus. But before Liu left, he murmured a Chinese idiom, "It is harder to shut people up than to stop river flow."⁵²⁵ Later, a Russian department student described that Liu's talk cooled off student enthusiasm in the Rectification, and mocked Liu for defending the Party committee's perfunctory nature.⁵²⁶

But on May 30, the school Party committee decided to support student Rectification, but the changing attitude failed to please students. As Wu Kaibin commented, the Party had played a leading role in the past campaigns, but this time the leadership looked weak and clueless; it trailed behind the masses, which were left free. Even after the May 30's decision, the Party committee seemed unclear about where the Rectification was heading, or any specific plans to move forward. Wu asked: "How does the Party committee plan to lead this campaign?"⁵²⁷ Though Wu was critical of the authorities, one can see that he had high expectations of the Party, and he did not mean to lead a separate student movement apart from the Party's leadership.

Student activists were not only frustrated with the school authorities, but also local press, which had not covered any campus events. On June 1, some students put posters at several off-campus sites, including the *Yangzi Daily*, the *Hubei Daily*, the people's publisher, and a Xinhua bookstore, inviting them to join a campus debate the following night on the issue of Hu Feng. Posters also included slogans such as "against media censorship," and "show your conscience, journalists." But the second day students discovered that some posters were torn apart. So a group of poster writers held a meeting that afternoon, discussing whether they should make a visit to the local press. In the end, on the morning of June 3, 41 students made their way to the

⁵²⁵ Wu Kaibin, *Linglei rensheng ershinian*, 8-9.

⁵²⁶ Li Yuantai, Zagan ji [record of random thoughts], *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Wuhan daxue youpai yanlun huibian*.

⁵²⁷ Wu Kaibin, Ping dangwei dui zheci mingfang de lingdao [Comment on the Party's committee's leadership of the Rectification], *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Wuhan daxue youpai yanlun huibian*.

editorial board of the *Yangzi Daily* and the *Hubei Daily*.⁵²⁸ Some loyalists also tagged along, so they could argue against the critics.

The meeting with the press lasted seven hours, including lunch at the press. At first, Yang Ziyi, a second-year Chinese major and the spokesman of the group, delivered a scripted speech. He explained the reasons for their visit, pros and cons of reporting on student activities in the Rectification, and made requests for the press. The key message was that students needed an explanation from local newspapers as to why they had been silent regarding students in the Rectification. Students wanted journalists to talk to university students all over Wuhan and pay full coverage of their activities. Editors of the two newspapers tried various ways to convince the students otherwise. One journalist asked students to state their views first. Another reporter compared the freedom of speech and that of press before and after 1949, as a way to show how much had improved under the Communist regime. The only one who was able to persuade the students was Guo Zhicheng, a vice chief editor of the *Yangzi Daily*. He criticized the use of “elements of three evils,” which made it a personal attack rather than criticism of certain phenomenon. He also questioned the phrase of “student movement” which seemed to separate students from the Rectification, and disapproved the act of putting posters off-campus. Guo explained as tactfully as possible, which eased the tension between students and the editors. Except three, most students accepted Guo’s explanation.⁵²⁹

Divisions among the students escalated on June 5, when the Party secretary Liu Zhen delivered another report entitled “Comments on our school’s current Rectification.”⁵³⁰ Responses to the report were divided, as loyalists and activists interpreted Liu’s words in opposing ways.

⁵²⁸ Sun Wangchang, Fang Di, Wuda qingshi jizhuanzhixia bushao xuesheng pianji de lihai [Wuda’s situation took a sudden downward turn, many students are rather extreme], *Internal Reference*, June 6, 1957.

⁵²⁹ Hai Bo, Luo Zhongzhang, Wuda student representatives visited Hubei Daily and Yangzi Daily asking why they did not cover student Rectification, *Internal Reference*, June 7, 1957.

⁵³⁰ I have not found the full text of this report, but some student responses to the report are available in the *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*.

Liu said in the report, “Each Party and Youth League member should state their attitude.” Loyalists responded with slogans such as “[we are] against exaggerated attack, and [we] support being true to facts” and “against big democracy” referring to big-character posters. Activists, however, sensed from the sentence that the political wind was about to change.⁵³¹ Liu Zhen also said, “Only Party members can endure such strong wind and rainstorm.” Loyalists echoed with “against rude slanging and pro gentle breeze and mild rain.”⁵³² Activists took Liu’s words as saying that the campaign was no longer what the authorities expected – gentle breeze and mild rain. At the same time, Liu said, “This campaign under the Party’s leadership is healthy,” which made activists wonder if Liu meant to encourage Rectification, or call it off.⁵³³ Wu Kaibin felt it was shameful that the Party committee claimed leadership of the campaign, which he viewed as a spontaneous mass movement. For Wu, it was a socialist democracy movement, which meant to extend mass participation in politics while maintain the socialist system and Party’s leadership. Wu also endorsed fighting for democracy, human rights and preserving the constitution, all slogans appeared during the Rectification.⁵³⁴ In response to the slogan of “fighting for democracy,” Liu asked a rhetorical question, “Who are you fighting against?” indicating that those who fought for democracy were against the Party. A library study major explained that those who brought up suggestions were out of care for the Party, and nobody wanted to be labeled anti-Party.⁵³⁵ Most activists considered Liu’s report as a suppression of Rectification, but

⁵³¹ Rightist Comments that distorted the Party’s principles of the Rectification Campaign at Wuhan University, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Wuhan daxue youpai yanlun lubian*.

⁵³² Torch Newspaper editorial, “Crisis of big-character posters,” *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Wuhan daxue youpai yanlun huibian*.

⁵³³ Commoner Newspaper editorial, “Asking Liu Shen,” *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Wuhan daxue youpai yanlun huibian*.

⁵³⁴ Wu Kaibin, “Comments on the Party secretary Liu Zhen’s June 5th report,” *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Wuhan daxue youpai yanlun huibian*.

⁵³⁵ Hu Jiwu, “‘Three evils’ in the anti-‘three evils’,” *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Wuhan daxue youpai yanlun huibian*.

not everyone blamed Liu alone, as the Party central as well as provincial Party committee were doing the same, as if they had received some kind of “internal guidance.”⁵³⁶

3. Correspondence across Campuses

Correspondence through letters took place among friends in universities across the country, providing an informal channel to spread information while the official newspapers were censored. At Wuda, the most prominent student activist Wu Kaibin gave speeches that somewhat resembled Lin Xiling’s talks at Beida and Renda, as both expressed their opinions on international and domestic issues, and they seemed well informed on a wide range of topics. It turned out that the two had started correspondence since mid-April of 1957. Reported in the *Yangzi Daily* in July, Lin Xiling first wrote a letter to Wu, calling him comrade Kaibin:

I heard about you at Wuda through a random chance. You and I share a lot of views, so I wanted to get to know you and sent you this letter without due consideration. ... I am not an orthodox hired hack, but a radical.

After receiving the letter, Wu wrote back right away that night. They kept frequent correspondence thereafter. Lin sent him some classified documents and student journals from Beijing, while Wu reported Wuda’s activity during the Rectification. Wu described Lin as “a heroine among female comrades, who gave him strength when thinking about her.” They had never met each other, but one can tell from their speeches that they shared many of the same concerns.⁵³⁷

Another letter exchange happened between a Beida graduate student Yu Dunkang and his friend Zhang Shouzheng, a Wuda philosophy department staff. Yu wrote two letters, on May 27

⁵³⁶ Rightist Comments that distorted the Party’s principles of the Rectification Campaign at Wuhan University, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Wuhan daxue youpai yanlun lubian*.

⁵³⁷ “Rightist Commander” Wu Kaibin, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Fanyoupai tongxun xuanji* (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1957).

and 29 respectively, sharing what was happening at Beida that could not be found or reported inaccurately on newspapers. Yu shared the secret he learned:

Bottom-up spontaneous mass movement for democracy is unwelcomed and horrifying. Promoting democracy from top-down and fighting for democracy from bottom up might be the same in theory, but different in reality.⁵³⁸

Later, Zhang gave permission to the Flame Newspapers to publish the two letters as posters for a wider audience on May 29. Using the title “Letters from Beijing,” the poster was put up at science and law student dormitory, which seemed to cause a bigger stir than the first poster.⁵³⁹ As reported in the *Internal Reference*, the situation at Wuda took a sudden downward turn after May 29 due to the influence of “Letters from Beida.”⁵⁴⁰ Students were eager to learn about their peers at Beida, and they probably copied the slogan “long life rationality” and “long life democracy and freedom” directly from Yu’s letters.

Besides receiving letters from Beijing, Wuda students also sent out letters to friends in other parts of China. Zhang Honglin, a Russian department teaching assistant wrote to his friend at Zhengzhou University in Henan province, acknowledging that the Beida student’s letters to the Wuda student made a huge influence in promoting student activism. Before that, Rectification only took place within faculty and staff, most of whom were afraid of retaliation if speaking out. But now the campaign had become, as Zhang described, “a spontaneous mass movement fighting for democracy, freedom and human rights.”⁵⁴¹ Zhang’s letter was sent out in June before the Anti-Rightist Campaign had started, thus the focus was on the Rectification. In a July 9th letter written by another philosophy major Li Junxiong to his friend, he reflected on the

⁵³⁸ Yu Dunkang, letter to Zhang Shouzheng at Wuhan University, May 27 and 29, 1957, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Wuhan daxue youpai yanlun huibian*.

⁵³⁹ Wu Kaibin, *Linglei rensheng ershinian*, 7-8.

⁵⁴⁰ Sun Wangchang, Fang Di, Wuda qingshi jizhuanzhixia bushao xuesheng pianji de lihai [Wuda’s situation took a sudden downward turn, many students are rather extreme], *Internal Reference*, June 6, 1957.

⁵⁴¹ Zhang Honglin, A letter to XX at Zhengzhou University, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Wuhan daxue youpai yanlun huibian*.

lessons learned from the Rectification, and his reaction to the Anti-Rightist Campaign. Li had a debate with Wu Kaibin and other third-year Chinese majors, and he was impressed with their passion for seeking the truth and independent thinking. Li became the first person in the philosophy department to speak against loyalists, thus “walking on the same front as the rightists,” as he adopted the official rhetoric. Li confessed that emotionally he could not accept that those who he had admired became targets of criticism, even though writing criticism was part of his job.⁵⁴²

4. Other Universities in Wuhan

Wuhan University was not the only school that saw the rise of student activism during the Rectification. In fact, it was not the first, nor the most contentious one. Since mid-May, seven other universities had canceled classes, either forced by students or schools made a proactive decision, for students to participate in the Rectification. By the end of May, all but one school had resumed class. Meanwhile, most campuses experienced a hike in student posters, and some had accusation meetings or mimeographed journals, all repertoires familiar to students.⁵⁴³

One of the schools that canceled class was Wuhan Medical College. Starting in late April, the school spent half a day of the week on studying Rectification documents, but without organizing faculty or students to participate in Rectification. On May 9, the first big-character poster appeared criticizing the school authorities for ignoring student concerns. By May 18, students put up hundreds of posters, mostly targeting school officials, but the school Party committee stayed silent. Then students wrote a poster entitled “To bureaucratist- Zhang Zesheng,” who was the Party secretary, posted in front of his apartment, and asked for class cancellation. Under pressure, Zhang held an all-student meeting on the night of May 19, when the request to

⁵⁴² Li Junxiong, A letter to a friend, July 9, 1957, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Wuhan daxue youpai yanlun huibian*.

⁵⁴³ Fang Di, A summary of Rectification at universities in Wuhan, June 4, 1957, *Internal Reference*.

cancel class was brought up again. In order to avoid a class strike, the school authorities raised three plans up to vote. More than a thousand out of 1,700 voted for class cancelation, with 500 wanting to continue classes. On the morning of May 20, the school announced the decision to cancel class for three days, during which students could focus on participating in the Rectification through discussion and making posters. Zhang insisted that canceling classes was different from a class strike because the school made a proactive choice by canceling classes, but he also admitted that if not doing so, some students would make a class strike that would cause negative impact.⁵⁴⁴

If the pressure was on the school authorities during the Rectification, it shifted to students and faculty, especially those who were on the verge of being classified as “rightists.” According to an *Internal Reference* report in late September, fifteen incidents took place among university students and professors in Wuhan, including five suicides, and ten runaways. Some of them were classified “rightists,” and some were “center-rightists,” many of whom had to make self-criticism in front of their classmates or schoolmates. The latter made the majority of students who ran away, but two who committed suicide were also in this category. As I write in Chapter 7, no one except “rightists” would know about how they were classified, so the fear of being marginalized as “rightists” forced everyone to behave in certain manners, such as informing on others to school authorities. These numbers indicated the intensity of classification and distress it caused among students and faculty. By late September, over 1,400 people were labeled “rightists” in Wuhan’s universities, including 217 “extreme rightists.”⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴⁴ Yin Ping, Luo Zhongzhang, Wuhan Medical School was forced to cancel class, May 28, 1957, *Internal Reference*.

⁵⁴⁵ Luo Zhongzhang, Fifteen suicides and runaway incidents among Wuhan’s universities within a week, September 28, 1957, *Internal Reference*.

Yunnan University (Yunda) and Kunming Normal College

Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province in southwest China, was far from any political center, and thus the Rectification seemed to sweep the city in a slower and less intense pace than in Beijing or Wuhan. This section touches on student activism in both Yunnan University and its neighbor Kunming Normal College, partly because the latter influenced the former. I pay particular attention to student organizations, besides correspondence among the students and relation with the school authorities.

1. Kunming Normal College

The first school that saw critical slogans was Kunming Normal College on the night of May 14. It was by no means accidental: Kunming Normal College used to be part of National Southwestern Associated University (Lianda) during the wartime, which was known for producing prominent academics despite hardship and student activists who protested against the Nationalist government.⁵⁴⁶ After the war, the education department, which later turned into Kunming Normal College, was the only part that had stayed in Kunming, and so did the legacy of student activism. According to the diary of Cheng Rongchang, a second-year history major at Yunnan University (Yunda) and a Youth League member, he went to check out those slogans on May 16. The two schools are neighbors across the street from each other. He saw over a dozen slogans, including “down with dictatorship!” He appreciated the writer’s courage, though he thought slogans were not very appealing. He also noticed that each slogan was surrounded by other opposing slogans, often with signatures, but he found them laughable. Cheng’s diary later became his record of “rightist” misbehaviors throughout the Rectification.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁶ For more on Lianda, see John Israel, *Lianda: A Chinese University in War and Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

⁵⁴⁷ Cheng Rongchang, selection of Cheng Rongchang’s diary, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from Zhonggong yunan daxue weiyuanhui ed., *Youpai yanxingji*, v.2, 1957.

Besides writing slogans on campus, another student from the College Jiang Zhengfu wrote an open letter to Yunnan provincial committee of the Chinese Democratic League, though he only signed as “a student from Normal College.” In the short letter, Jiang revealed that those slogans were a smoke posted under the Party’s arrangement, as well as those opposing slogans, done by third-year Chinese majors. Thus the Party could claim that freedom of speech did exist since someone was making reactionary slogans, and warn others to pay attention. Jiang criticized such trick as deceptive and shameful. Then he made six requests that looked just as provocative as those slogans, including “down with one-Party rule,” “let democratic party rule and improve people’s lives and preserve human rights,” “gain freedom of speech and religion, down with fascism,” and “democratic parties should support class strike and petition at Normal College.” In response, the provincial committee transferred his letter back to the school authorities at Kunming Normal College.⁵⁴⁸ The letter was quite confusing to others, as Cheng Rongchang asked in his diary, “What was really happening? We are outsiders!” The letter inspired heated discussion at Cheng’s dormitory.⁵⁴⁹

2. The Trigger

The first poster at Yunda did not appear until June 3, which was much later than Kunming Normal College, and it did not leave too much time for students to air their opinions before the political wind shifted. Author of the first poster was Hu Yongwen, a second-year Chinese major. He titled the poster “I want to accuse: Yunnan University is like a dark kingdom, and student section of personnel department unreasonably interrogates students.” Hu described that in 1956 the transportation bureau sent someone who pretended to be a staff at the Yunda student office to interrogate him and force him to write self-criticism. Hu was suspected of

⁵⁴⁸ Jiang Zhengfu, An open letter to Yunnan provincial committee of the Chinese Democratic League, May 16, 1957, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Youpai yanxingji*, v. 2.

⁵⁴⁹ Cheng Rongchang, selection of Cheng Rongchang’s diary, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*.

supporting his Sichuan middle school classmates, who used to work at the transportation bureau, but were not able to leave work for school, even though the central government encouraged people to do so. Over the year of being a suspect, classmates and even friends marginalized Hu, and he had nightmares about the interrogation. In the end, he was found innocent. Thus Hu lamented in the poster,

I am a university student in the New China, but I do not have the basic right of a citizen. I am not a Party or Youth League member, so I risk being suppressed and framed at any time. ... Yunda is no longer a school that educates students, but a yamen that reigns over students! Yunda has not a tiny bit of democracy, and it has become a dark kingdom.⁵⁵⁰

Ironically, the poster was put up on the wall of “three goods,” which was an evaluation standard based on student merit, virtue and physics. Hu received many sympathizers, who followed his poster lead and voiced their concerns about the student section. Among them, student majors ranged from Chinese and history to mathematics, physics and agriculture. Most comments focused on Hu’s mistreatment, but some went beyond to ask for declassifying personal dossier, or blame the school principal for being bureaucratic.

On June 10, the student section published a written explanation, which seemed to apologize for what happened to Hu, but in fact justified what the transportation bureau and the student section had done. It first recognized that student comments on Hu’s case were helpful to the Rectification, and under student request, the student section was willing to reveal the facts. In its narrative, the transportation bureau did not allow its workers to apply for high school because of their concern for productivity if short on labor. The transportation bureau suspected Wu because he encouraged his classmates to apply for school, he sent them off at the train station to go back to Sichuan, and he reviewed schoolwork with them. The reason why they dispatched a staff to play as a school cadre was because they did not want to disturb Wu, which clearly failed.

⁵⁵⁰ Hu Yongwen, I want to accuse, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Youpai yanxingji*, v. 2.

The transportation bureau concluded that Hu had no “political problem,” and his support for his friends was “completely understandable.” In the end, the student section admitted its mistake for not caring for students enough and not clarifying the situation earlier.⁵⁵¹

3. Organization

I. “Spring Thunder”

Even though Hu’s case seemed minor, it triggered Yunda’s campus activism, especially in the form of making posters after June 3. Cheng Ronchang commented on the rise of posters in his diary: “This is a good phenomenon, because it can shake the authorities.” Cheng was inspired to make a poster entitled “Spring Thunder” with fellow history majors, first published on June 6. He thought it was not too late to voice his opinion, as long as he did not make the target of criticism too broad. He explained the title in a poem:

Thunder rumbles loud.
No matter how tight a sleep,
Or how sweet a dream,
Cannot last long.⁵⁵²

Using thunder as a metaphor, Cheng’s poster was meant to be a wakeup call for others to join the Rectification. In this poster, a fellow history major Li Shouguo wrote an article on “the Capital,” not in the Marxian sense, but the benefit, or what he called “surplus value” of being a Party member. In contrast, he described ordinary people as “being discriminated” and “not getting democracy or freedom that students in developed countries do.” Thus he wrote: “We demand democracy!”⁵⁵³ This interpretation exemplified that students were using the Marxian discourse they were taught to criticize the Party.

⁵⁵¹ Student section of the personnel department, The ins and outs of the conversation between transportation bureau comrade Li and second-year Chinese major Hu Yongwen, June 10, 1957, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*.

⁵⁵² Cheng Rongchang, selection of Cheng Rongchang’s diary, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*.

⁵⁵³ Li Shouguo, On “capital,” *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from Zhonggong Yunnan daxue weiyuanhui ed., *Youpai yanxing ji*, v.2, 1957.

By June 8, even though posters continued to flourish, students gradually started to change their minds due to the *People's Daily's* editorial. Around noon, contributors to “Spring Thunder” planned to publish a second poster the following day. But by the night, one decided to quit, as the authorities seemed to have made its mind. Another one was afraid to stand out or be affiliated with the publication. Only Cheng Rongchang and Li Shouguo wanted to continue. Starting June 10, Cheng’s diary recorded meetings almost every day, denouncing “Spring Thunder” as a reactionary poster. Cheng felt extremely bored with such meetings. Facing challenge from the authorities, Cheng decided to fight back. By the sunset on June 13, “Spring Thunder” published a second poster with the following headline: “Let us sum up all the courage and challenge all ‘eternity.’ With our courage and righteousness, we will get rid of evil forces.”⁵⁵⁴ Cheng elaborated in the poster that “Only fools will be deceived, and only cowards will be terrified ... Friends, the dark prairie has seen spotted flame.”⁵⁵⁵ The last sentence reminded others of similar calls from Beida students. Also in the second poster, Li Shouguo wrote an article with the title “Being a Human Is Hard,” in which he noted that being a commoner risked being criticized any time if anything went wrong.⁵⁵⁶ On June 17, it published the third poster, which Cheng described as a rebuttal to the rebuttal. Eventually, Cheng had to bend to the authorities by announcing the suspension of “Spring Thunder” on June 21.⁵⁵⁷

II. “Firecrackers”

Another poster group at Yunda was “Firecrackers” by eight fourth-year mathematics majors and a first-year physics major.⁵⁵⁸ The group only published twice before the June 8

⁵⁵⁴ Cheng Rongchang, selection of Cheng Rongchang’s diary, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*.

⁵⁵⁵ Cheng Rongchang, Yunnan University Cheng Rongchang’s rightist reactionary comments, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Yunnan sheng gaodeng xuexiao youpai fenzi fandong yanlun xuanji*, 1957.

⁵⁵⁶ Li Shouguo, On “capital,” *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*.

⁵⁵⁷ Cheng Rongchang, selection of Cheng Rongchang’s diary, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*.

⁵⁵⁸ The members were Sha Yulin, Cui Xueyi, Zhang Shilin, Liu Linxian, Huang Jishou, Ding Guanghan, Li Xiang, Wang Zhichong, and Zhao Naide. Zhao was the only physics major.

editorial, and was soon suspended. No articles remained except some titles. Both posters had ten articles each, including “Target of Examination in Politics Class,” “The Queen that Holds Court from behind a Screen,” and “Injustice! When Can the Label Be Removed?” Most articles focused on specific Party members or misfortunes from past campaigns.

What has been kept in the school authorities’ narrative was 33 “secret meetings” of the group since October of 1956 to June of 1957, which made “Firecrackers” an “anti-Party clique” that happened to make posters during the Rectification.⁵⁵⁹ In comparison, “Spring Thunder” was labeled a “rightist clique,” but not “anti-Party.” These meetings were nothing more than friends gathering and chatting about contemporary politics, but in the Anti-Rightist Campaign, these chats became “rightist” comments.

Between October and December of 1956, the group met six times at teahouses next to Yunda campus. Topics of discussion surrounded the Eastern European crises, which I have written in the Chapter 3. Li Xiang predicted that socialism would fall sooner or later. The group seemed to agree that an incident like the Hungarian Revolution would take place in China. They were against the Soviet military intervention in Hungary. They also brought up phenomena of Mao’s personality cult from their daily life. All these speeches sounded alarming to the authorities, which labeled them “rightist” in a retroactive fashion.⁵⁶⁰

During April and May of 1957, the “Firecrackers” had three meetings discussing Mao’s “On Correct Handling of the Contradictions between the People.” Sha Yulin, head of the group, speculated that Mao asked people to make suggestions partly because he was afraid that China would have a “Hungarian Incident,” and the Hundred Flowers policy was no more than

⁵⁵⁹ Zhonggong Yunnan daxue weiyuanhui, the black curtain of the “firecrackers” anti-Party clique, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Youpai yanxingji*, v.2.

⁵⁶⁰ “Firecrackers” anti-Party clique’s rightist comments, October 1956, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Youpai yanxingji*, v.2.

ameliorating domestic conflicts. He quoted from Mao about the upcoming reexamination of the Counter-revolutionary Campaign, and encouraged others to participate in the Rectification, especially to redress injustice students suffered from that campaign.⁵⁶¹

In late May when campus activism started to gain momentum, discussions within the “Firecrackers” concentrated on the actions taken by the neighboring school, Kunming Normal College. Group members agreed with most slogans posted at the other school, and they disproved the authoritative label of “reactionary” against those slogans. As Zhao Naide said, “These [slogans] are true, and they are righteous calling. ... It is too early to make a conclusion, which should not happen. If Mao asked people to raise suggestions, and then label them reactionary, why bother saying anything?” Li Xiang followed, “So-called ‘reactionary’ means that the slogans hit the mark.”⁵⁶² If the authorities used “reactionary” as a catchall phrase to describe wrongdoings, students had a more cynical take on its meaning.

In public, however, members of the “Firecrackers” hesitated to express support. Huang Jishou reached out to their peers across the street, and suggested collaboration between the two schools at first. He said, “If bringing these [slogans] to Yunda, I bet many people would support. ... There is no need to fear since we are graduating. We can make a big chaos, and then leave!” But he soon changed his mind, as he heard that some provincial authorities went to Kunming Normal College, and the police sectioned off and took pictures of the slogans. He was afraid that it would become a counter-revolutionary case in a second Counter-revolutionary Campaign.⁵⁶³

Besides being deterred by the authorities, students in “Firecrackers” did not approve everything their Kunming Normal College students did. In particular, they had problem with the

⁵⁶¹ “Firecrackers” anti-Party clique’s rightist comments, April 1957, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Youpai yanxingji*, v.2.

⁵⁶² “Firecrackers” anti-Party clique’s rightist comments, May 21, 1957, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Youpai yanxingji*, v.2.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*

open letter that Jiang Zhengfu wrote. Despite praising Jiang as brave, they thought the letter was not very brilliant, because the words were too unequivocal and reckless. Both Zhao Naide and Huang Jishou felt it would be easy to support if the letter was less sharp, but now it was too risky. In the end, the group decided to take a “wait and see” approach, so as to avoid being “trapped.”⁵⁶⁴

Other than “Spring Thunder” and “Firecrackers,” more student groups popped up during the Rectification. One was “Bass Drum” among a few first-year chemistry majors. In their first poster, the explanation for their name was that party members were afraid to belt out a song, so they had to voice with a low pitch. Students probably did not coordinate in the naming of their groups, but all three above shared a common theme of loud noise metaphors.⁵⁶⁵ These names made sense in the open-door Rectification, when students wanted to make their voices heard. During the Anti-Rightist Campaign, this name was considered anti-Party, and members of the group were portrayed as “devils.”⁵⁶⁶ Another one was “Gadfly” initiated by several fourth-year history majors. A third one was “Tiny Democracy” led by Li Jingyi, a third-year history major. The latter two contributed many posters to Yunda’s “democracy wall,” which was inspired by the news of Beida’s “democracy wall.” When the political atmosphere shifted, “democracy wall” remained, but posters came from the other side criticizing “rightists.” By then “Gadfly” was replaced by “Dagger” led by some other fourth-year history majors.⁵⁶⁷

III. “Chinese Party of Great Harmony” (zhongguo datong dang)

One of the most outrageous student groups from the authorities’ perspective was the “Chinese Party of Great Harmony,” originally initiated in May by Wu Wenyi, a second-year

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ I thank Kyle David for bringing up this interesting observation.

⁵⁶⁶ Zhonggong Yunnan daxue weiyuanhui, Group devils in “Bass,” September 1957, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Youpai yanxingji*, v.2.

⁵⁶⁷ Zhonggong Yunnan daxue weiyuanhui, The nature and activities of “Gadfly,” September 1957, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Youpai yanxingji*, v.2.

Chinese major at Kunming Normal College. The Party's political agenda included "overthrowing the one-party rule of the Communist Party, and establishing a democratic joint government," which sounded astounding and outright subversive.⁵⁶⁸ Local police soon investigated the group as a counterrevolutionary case. As recorded in Cheng Rongchang's diary, Cheng was not familiar with any of its members, except knowing the leader's last name was Wu. When Cheng and others went across the street to look for more information, it was too crowded that Cheng did not get to see any detail except the accusation letter against the group.⁵⁶⁹

More students at Yunda probably learned more about this "Chinese Party of Great Harmony" through criticism sessions that denounced it, but not everyone was convinced that its leader Wu Wenyi was a counterrevolutionary, or the group was necessarily reactionary. Tao Youren, a second-year chemistry major, defended Wu:

Before the court makes its decision, we should not say that Wu Wenyi is a counterrevolution. Many people, especially intellectuals, share Wu's thoughts, except he fires the first shot. Many things in Wu's speech are facts.⁵⁷⁰

Another student Tang Lingyun, a first-year physics major, applied Mao's theory of contradictions among people in this case:

Problems at Kunming Normal College are contradictions among the people. Students' discontent should not be interpreted as they meant to overthrow the Communist Party. Slogans and the open letter students wrote are reflections of the school's severe bureaucratism and pressure, and they should not be described as reactionaries.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁸ Song Yongyi, *Verdicts and Internal Archives of Nearly a Thousand of Rightists* (Dear Park, NY: Guoshi chubanshe, 2015), v. 6, 21.

⁵⁶⁹ Cheng Rongchang, selection of Cheng Rongchang's diary, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Youpai yanxingji*, v.2.

⁵⁷⁰ Rightist comments that destroy Rectification and Rectification, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Youpai yanxingji*, v.2.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

Unfortunately, all students who defended the “Chinese Party of Great Harmony” were labeled “rightists,” and students involved in this group received even worse treatment as counterrevolutionaries.

While the authorities assumed that severe punishment would put an end to any more attempt to start an alternative party, some students did not follow. According to a February 1958 report in the *Internal Reference*, another “Chinese Party of Great Harmony” was labeled a counterrevolutionary group. The founders were four third-year history majors at Yunda, including Cheng Rongchang, and two Chinese majors at Kunming Normal College. The Yunda students were the same ones who were involved in the “Spring Thunder.” Even though they became “rightists” since the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the report described these students as making “fake surrender” while “secretly pledging not to expose each other.” It was not until early January of 1958 that they decided to found the “Chinese Party of Great Harmony,” joined by two other students from Kunming Normal College, who came from the same hometown as Cheng Rongchang. Cheng drafted the political agenda, including “overthrowing the political power led by the CCP through violence.” The “organization’s rules” made it clear that the recruitment targets were “those who had an awareness of the ugly essence of the Communist Party.”⁵⁷² One can argue that the Anti-Rightist Campaign triggered more confrontation between activists-turned-“rightists” and the authorities, since these students already had nothing to lose.

4. Democracy Wall

Yunda’s “democracy wall” came after those schools in Beijing, and students were compelled to catch up. Some junior faculty expressed support for students, and they also wanted their own “democracy wall,” as the other ways of Rectification were all under the Party’s

⁵⁷² Huang Changlu, “Yunnan University and Kunming Normal College Uncovered a Counterrevolutionary Clique ‘Chinese Party of Great Harmony,’” *Internal Reference*, February 13, 1958.

control. As Zhu Mingji, a Chinese teaching assistant said, “over 90 percent of the democracy wall are flowers, and the overall trend of the democracy wall is positive.” He dismissed criticism of “democracy wall” as ignoring its merits. Despite the school authorities’ negative reaction to student activism, some faculty defended student “democracy wall.” Huang Zhen, a staff at the workers’ union, appraised students for “developing independent thinking and inspiring a democratic life.” Wang Dingchang, a physics department teaching assistant, defended the negative things of “democracy wall” as “unavoidable,” because “normally people do not get a chance to speak, and once they get a chance to burst out, it is hard not to get extreme.”⁵⁷³

5. Correspondence between Friends

As mentioned before, letter correspondence between high school classmates and friends from the same hometown helped spread information about campus activism. Unfortunately, these letters also became evidence of “rightist” behavior in the Anti-Rightist Campaign. In the case of Li Jingyi, a third-year history major at Yunda, he wrote to Zhou Shilin, one of his sworn brothers who worked as a cadre at a county tax bureau. In the letter dated May 19, 1957, Li expressed his appreciation of Mao’s hundred flowers policy, and encouraged Zhou to speak out: “You are a little timid, but this time you should feel free to question anything in the past, and speak anything you are not content with.” By August, Zhou read this letter at a bureau meeting that denounced Li as a “loyal son to a feudal family, not a university student in the new China.” Cadres at the tax bureau also sent the letter back to Yunda school Party committee, along with an introduction of Li’s “landlord family background.”⁵⁷⁴

6. Relation with the Authorities

⁵⁷³ Rightist speeches that distort Rectification policy, May 1957, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Youpai yanxingji*, v.1.

⁵⁷⁴ Li Jingyi, A letter to Zhou Shilin, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. Originally from *Youpai yanxingji*, v.2.

The authorities seemed not only surprised by confrontational actions students took during the Rectification, but also the number of student Youth League and Party members who suddenly became unreliable. According to a Yunnan provincial Party committee report on the four universities in Kunming, the authorities became seriously concerned about college students around mid-May. Some Yunda students, described in this report, “had planned to bring sticks and knives to besiege the school’s Party committee, and beat the Party committee secretary.” Some collected signatures to petition for class strike, and some “surrounded Party committee’s office, threatening to burn dossiers related to the Counterrevolution Campaign and get rid of the ‘black list.’” By Yunda’s school account, about 30 percent of Youth League members at one point sympathized with those who spoke out. It was not until the *People’s Daily’s* editorial on June 8 that things started to change. An *Internal Reference* report also revealed that a number of Youth League members “betrayed” the authorities. Notably at Yunda’s Chinese department, half of Youth League members “were confused by rightist speeches.” An active participant behind the group “Tiny Democracy” was a fourth-year Chinese major, and a Party member. At Kunming Normal College, among 25 Youth League members of the third-year physics majors, five “defected to rightists.”⁵⁷⁵

Spreading Information across Campuses

As Lin Xiling complained in her speech, “We have no way to communicate with each other. No reports are available; there is a news blackout.”⁵⁷⁶ Then how did university students across China learn about Rectification at other campuses? It turns out that students pursued both official and unofficial channels to secure information not readily available.

⁵⁷⁵ Tian Lianggeng, Huang Changlu, “Some Youth League Members in Four Schools of Higher Education in Yunnan Wavered and Betrayed,” *Internal Reference*, June 25, 1957.

⁵⁷⁶ Doolin, *Communist China: The Politics of Student Opposition*, 28.

Among state newspapers, only the *Guangming Daily* and the *Wenhui Daily* covered university student participation in the Rectification. The *Guangming Daily* was affiliated with democratic parties, and its targeted readers were mostly intellectuals, including university students. After a brief period of relocation to Beijing, the *Wenhui Daily* moved back to Shanghai and resumed publication starting October 1, 1956. It covered extensively of the Rectification nationwide, with Beijing and Shanghai as the chief focuses. Beida and Fudan University received the most attention, while other schools were also mentioned, including Beishida and Renming University in Beijing, East China Normal in Shanghai, Wuhan University, and Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou.⁵⁷⁷ According to an *Internal Reference* report, Shanghai students started imitating their peers at Beida after the *Wenhui Daily* published an article entitled “Beijing University’s Democracy Wall” on May 27.⁵⁷⁸ The day before that, the *Guangming Daily* published a similar article “Beijing University Students Established ‘Democracy Wall.’”⁵⁷⁹ For these reports, Mao denounced the *Wenhui Daily* and the *Guangming Daily* in a *People’s Daily*’s editorial on July 1 entitled “The *Wenhui Daily*’s Bourgeois Direction Should Be Criticized.”⁵⁸⁰

Besides the two newspapers, most others had been silent on campus activism, which explained why some students went to petition at local newspapers bureaus. Despite censorship, many students exchanged letters with friends from hometown, high school or military training to keep each other informed. As detailed above, correspondence between students in Beijing and Wuhan played a key role in spreading activism, especially the letters between two student activists Lin Xiling and Wu Kaibin, and between Yu Dunkang and Zhang Shouzheng, the latter of who shared Yu’s letters with fellow Wuda students. In the Anti-Rightist Campaign,

⁵⁷⁷ Copies of the *Wenhui Daily* (May-June, 1957) are available at University Service Center, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

⁵⁷⁸ Ji Yin, “Some University Students Imitated Beida’s Actions After the *Wenhui Daily* Report on the ‘Beida Democracy Wall,’” *Internal Reference*, May 29, 1957.

⁵⁷⁹ “Beijing University Students Established ‘Democracy Wall,’” May 26, 1957, *Guangming Daily*.

⁵⁸⁰ Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong xuanji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1977), v. 5, 434-439.

correspondence became evidence of “rightist” misbehavior, as these letters among friends were politicized as “poisonous weeds.”

One particular example that indicated the power of network through friends was the “Democracy Relay Baton” at Beida. It was a selection of poster essays in the form of a booklet. As a female physics student Yan Dunfu remembered, she sent it to their friends in other cities, as a way to cross the barrier of censorship and to present what was happening at Beida.⁵⁸¹ The outreach of the Baton was impressive, as Mehta recorded,

It was sent to universities of Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Wuhan, Qingdao, as well as Taiyuan Industrial Institute, Northeast Normal University, Kaifeng Normal University in Henan, as also to universities in Hunan, Inner Mongolia and even Xinjiang.⁵⁸²

In the end, both senders and recipients of the Baton could not escape being labeled “rightists.”

Using Beishida, Wuda, and Yunda as case studies, this chapter draws comparisons and contrasts across university campuses during the Rectification. I find similarities in the way student activism started, the urgency to catch up, the concentrated activities on campus, the separation between students and the faculty, and the lack of antagonism between students and the authorities. I also observe differences in the level of engagement, the majors of students, the sense of agency, and the reactions of school authorities.

Once the political situation became clear after June 8, when the Anti-Rightist Campaign got underway, all school leaders could do nothing but carry out the central authority’s order: classification of everyone involved and denunciation of “rightists,” which will be the focus of my next chapter.

⁵⁸¹ Interview with Yan Dunfu, Beijing, October 17, 2014.

⁵⁸² Mehta, *Politics of Student Protest in China*, 201.

CHAPTER 7

STAND IN LINE: CLASSIFICATION OF STUDENT POLITICAL RELIABILITY IN THE ANTI-RIGHTIST CAMPAIGN

Introduction

Réne Goldman, a Polish exchange student to Peking University (Beida) between 1954 and 1958, witnessed first hand student participation in the Hundred Flowers and the Anti-Rightist Campaigns.⁵⁸³ As a foreigner, Goldman was not directly involved in the campaigns, but he was an avid reader of student posters and he was not shy of talking to his Chinese fellows about issues related to the Soviet Union and Poland. After studying in China, he went back to Poland, and eventually finished a master thesis at Columbia University in 1962 on the topic of Beida students in the Rectification. Thanks to his position as an outsider, his observation of Beida students seemed more objective than either official Party documents or student memoirs written decades later:

In [Beida], at the time of the Rectification campaign, there were students openly expressing their dissatisfaction and also some taking the Party stand (probably mainly Party and Youth League members and other activists). However, we can assume that the majority of the students stood somewhere in between, displaying a whole range of feelings from utter confusion and hesitation to semi-approval and unexpressed sympathy, an attitude which might be termed 'wait and see.'⁵⁸⁴

Official reports, however, including both publicly available newspapers and classified internal references focused attention on the outspoken ones, whether critical of or defending the Party. But Goldman reminds us that the loudest crowd was a leading minority, while the majority stayed silent.

⁵⁸³ Réne Goldman, *The Rectification Campaign of May – June 1957 and the Student Movement at Peking University*, master thesis at Columbia University, 1962, iv.

⁵⁸⁴ Réne Goldman, The Rectification Campaign at Peking University: May – June 1957, *The China Quarterly*, (no. 12, 1962), 150.

Goldman was not the only observer who attempted to understand the students. In late May 1957, at the peak of student engagement in the Rectification, Mao Zedong sent personnel to universities in Beijing to read posters and listen to debates. More specifically, he wanted to conduct a survey at each department and party branch of the People's University (Renda) in order to figure out the numbers of students, faculty, and party members who were critical, the numbers of those who defended the Party, and the number of people who did not take a clear stand. The result corroborated Goldman's observation, as the survey showed that "the people who want liberalization and who oppose it are both in the minority, and the centrists are the majority." Mao found the result reasonable and practical.⁵⁸⁵ At this point, Mao was not using terms like "rightist" or "leftist" to categorize the students, though this would all change after the *People's Daily* editorial "What Is This For" on June 8, 1957, which signaled the launch of the Anti-Rightist Campaign. It was a huge leap from the survey conducted by Mao's secretary to meticulous categorization of individuals, but one can see Mao's original ideas of classification.

Unlike the spontaneous airing of opinions, the top-down classification was not based on self-identification. It was a process of politicization. This chapter reveals the execution and participation of classification from the perspectives of both the authorities and the students. Two months into the Anti-Rightist Campaign, in August, the University Bureau of the Central Youth League conducted a similar survey about college students' "political situation" on a much larger scale. According to the bureau, by February 1957, there were overall 227 schools of higher education nationwide, and 408,017 undergraduate and graduate students. Among these students, 33,761 (8.81 percent) were Party members, and 232,393 (57.28 percent) were Youth League

⁵⁸⁵ Zeng Zhi, Mao Zedong he wo [Mao Zedong and me] in *Wo yu Mao Zedong de jiaowang* [My interaction with Mao Zedong], edited by "Mao Zedong yu wo" zhengwen huodong zuweihui, (Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1993), 105-107.

members.⁵⁸⁶ The “political situation” specifically referred to the percentage of students in “leftist,” “centrist” and “rightist” categories, all created as part of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the goal of which was not only to isolate the “rightists,” but also to unit the “leftists” and to secure the “centrists.”⁵⁸⁷ The statistics supported first-hand observations that the “centrists” were the majority, and the “leftists” and the “rightists” were the minorities, even though the former was more numerous than the latter (Chart 1). It also seemed to prove that one’s words and deeds in the Rectification correlated with one’s label in the Anti-Rightist Campaign, and it was unsurprising that a higher percentage of Youth League members fell into “leftist” category than average students. The resemblance between observation and classification, however, could not conceal the state’s agenda in classifying students on a scale of political reliability, rather than ideological differences. Disguised in all these seemingly precise numbers, the execution of classification was full of confusion and distortion.

Chart 1. Students and Youth League Members of Higher Education Nationwide Line-up

	No. of Schools	No. of Students	Leftists		Centrists		Rightists	
			No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Students	141	218,095	59,537	27.3	150, 536	69.0	8,022	3.7
Youth League members	128	106,992	33,265	31.1	70, 469	65.9	3,258	3.0

(Conducted by mid-August, 1957)

⁵⁸⁶ Youguan gaodeng xuexiao xuesheng zhengzhi qingkuang de tongjishuzi [Statistics Regarding Students’ Political Record in Schools of Higher Education], *Internal Reference*, August 1957.

⁵⁸⁷ Mao Zedong, “Zhongyang guanyu jiajin jinxing zhengfeng de zhishi,” [CCP Central Guidance on Strengthening the Rectification Campaign] June 6, 1957, in *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Mao’s Manuscripts after 1949] v. 6 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1992), 491-2

The strenuous effort of classification did not end with the three labels above. Within the “centrists,” there was a sub-categorization of students into “left-centrists,” “mid-centrists,” and “right-centrists.” Similar to the previous chart, there were more “mid-centrists” than both “left-“ and “right- centrists,” and a higher percentage of Youth League members were classified as “left-centrists” than average students (Chart 2).⁵⁸⁸ The distinctions in terms describing “centrists” might seem minor, but the treatment of each sub-category could be drastically different: the “left-centrists” were almost as reliable as the “leftists,” whereas the “right-centrists” were at a risk of becoming or being considered as bad as the “rightists.” All these labels, except publicly announced “rightists,” remained unknown to each individual, leaving them insecure about their political standing. On top of that, no one knew exactly what these labels meant, except the impact was real.

Chart 2. “Centrist” Students and Youth League Members of Higher Education Nationwide Line-up

	No. of Schools	No. of Students	No. of Centrists	Left-centrists		Mid-centrists		Right-centrists	
				No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Students	76	111,718	78,509	22,013	19.7	41,437	37.1	15,059	13.5
Youth League Members	78	70,597	47,163	17,224	24.4	22,520	31.9	7,419	10.5

(Conducted by mid-August 1957)

Besides sub-categorizing “centrists,” within the “rightists,” there was also a distinction between “average rightists” and “extreme rightists.” According to a Beijing municipal party committee’s report, by August 7, 1957, among universities in Beijing, there were 4,230

⁵⁸⁸ “Statistics regarding students’ political situation in higher education,” *Internal Reference*, August 1957.

“rightists” (3.74 percent) out of 113,213 people, in which 1,125 (26.6 percent) of “rightists” were considered “extreme rightists.” More specifically, within the “extreme rightists,” 85 were university professors, 278 were lecturers, teaching assistants and staff, and 762 were students.⁵⁸⁹ In comparison to “average rightists,” “extreme rightists” would receive more media exposure of their misbehavior, and consequently more severe punishment.

Previous research on the Anti-Rightist Campaign has concentrated on elite politics and ideas brought up by intellectuals and democratic party members. Only in recent years have scholars shifted the focus to grassroots-level politics and ordinary people. Historian Gao Hua, for example, has written an article on political classification in Chinese society between 1949 and 1965, in which 1957 started a new stage of class struggle in pursuit of a “purifying new world.”⁵⁹⁰ Other work, such as that done by historian Cao Shuji, has used archives of a rural county in Henan province to study the motivation of and differentiation within “rightists.”⁵⁹¹ As insightful as this work has been, the answer to how and why college students were classified as either “leftists,” “centrists” or “rightists” remains unclear, and that is the main question of this chapter.

To a certain degree, the Anti-Rightist Campaign was a witch-hunt, as the “rightists” were unfortunate scapegoats for all kinds of reasons, such as writings and speeches in the Rectification, family class background, relationship with Party cadres and peers, and “rightist”

⁵⁸⁹ Report on the Anti-Rightist Struggle by Beijing municipal party committee, August 12, 1957. Collected in the *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*, edited by Song Yongyi (Hong Kong: University service center at Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2010).

⁵⁹⁰ Gao Hua, “Jieji shenfen he chaji: 1949-1965 nian zhongguo shehui de zhengzhi fenceng” [Class Identity and Difference: Political Classification in Chinese Society, 1949-1965] in Gao Hua, *Zai lishi de fengling dukou* [At the Fengling Ferry Crossing of History] (Hong Kong: Shidai guoji, 2005), 320.

⁵⁹¹ Cao Shuji, “An Overt Conspiracy: Creating Rightists in Rural Henan, 1957-1958,” in *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China’s Era of High Socialism*, edited by Jeremy Brown and Matthew Johnson, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 77-101; Cao Shuji and Li Nan, “Huafen ‘you’pai: yi tongbai xian dang’an wei jichu de yanjiu,” [Classifying “Rightists:” Research Based on Tongbai County Archives] *Xueshujie* [Academics], no.140, 2010, 180-194.

quotas within the institution. But as the statistics above reveal, the authorities' effort to meticulously label and document everyone involved is astounding. What kinds of mechanisms and manipulative strategies were deployed to achieve these classifications? This chapter explores how Mao generated the categories of "leftists," "centrists," and "rightists," how university authorities categorized students, and how students complied with or resisted the process of classification. I argue that the Anti-Rightist Campaign was not simply a campaign against "rightists," but a classification of everyone into "leftists," "centrists" and "rightists" based on one's political reliability rather than one's political orientation or ideology. The criteria of classification were ambiguous and unstable, creating difficulties for local cadres to execute the classification and insecurities for everyone involved in the campaign. In the end, enforced classification as experienced during this historical juncture had a lasting effect on people's careers and lives.

The issue of ambiguity in classification was not exclusive to China alone. As research on the Soviet Union suggests, directives and categories from the central authorities were often nebulous. The actual content and meaning of each label evolved from grassroots implementation when local cadres tried to follow vague directives. The state only refined policies and provided definitions of categories as an afterthought, in part by overseeing the process.⁵⁹² The collectivization in the USSR, along with the land reform in the early 1950s, and the classification in the Anti-Rightist Campaign, all encountered similar problems.

Origins of "Rightists" in Communist China

The differentiation of left and right on the political spectrum originated from the French Revolution, when people on the left supported revolutionary change whereas people on the right

⁵⁹² I thank Susan Morrissey for bringing up this comparison.

preferred gradual reform. Since then, political rightists have been associated with conservatives, and political leftists with radicals. But in Marxian discourse, the left wing is composed of proletariats, and the bourgeoisie represents the right wing.⁵⁹³ Mao basically accepted the Marxist view, though he applied it to the Chinese society with more flexibility:

The left wing ... is composed of the Communist-led masses, which include the proletariat, the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie. ... The intermediate section ... is composed of the national bourgeoisie and the upper stratum of the petty bourgeoisie. ... The right wing ... consists of the big landlords and big bourgeoisie.⁵⁹⁴

Though Mao was referring to the composition of the Anti-Japanese National United Front, one can see the continuities between 1937 and 1957. First, there is a strong correlation between class background and political spectrum, which reinforces the categorization of proletariat and bourgeoisie. Just as in the Soviet Union, the class-based categories coexisted with more nebulous ideological labels. Second, besides the left and right wings, there is an “intermediate section” composed of people with mixed classes and ambiguous inclination. One might consider Mao’s 1937 analysis of class of Chinese society a prototype of the 1957 classification: in both cases, Mao differentiated enemies from friends, as he “placed steadfast anti-communists on the right, those who were neutral or not openly hostile in the middle, and the committed or friendly ones on the left.”⁵⁹⁵

Continuities aside, these class categories evolved to have different connotations before and after the wartime. Under the United Front, all classes and ideological orientations were included, as long as they were anti-Japanese, and no political judgment was imposed upon groups that held different views from the Communists. After the Communist victory in 1949, a

⁵⁹³ Naranarayan Das, *China's Hundred Weeds: A Study of the Anti-Rightist Campaign in China, 1957-58* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi, 1979), 46, 49.

⁵⁹⁴ Mao Zedong, “The situation and tasks in the Anti-Japanese War after the Fall of Shanghai and Taiyuan,” (Nov 12, 1937) in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, v.2, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 69.

⁵⁹⁵ Das, *China's Hundred Weeds*, 50.

series of campaigns targeted undesirable groups, such as the big landlords and big bourgeoisie, which went extinct within a few years. So the class structure, which was imposed by the Communist authorities, would look very different between 1937 and 1957.

Intellectuals as a group had been categorized as the petty bourgeoisie, which had a mix of proletarians and people in the intermediate section. This was not always a politically safe category. The Chinese authorities had the same concern as the USSR of the “petty bourgeois influence,” which could potentially corrupt actual proletarians. The intellectuals who had stayed in mainland China after 1949 supported the Communist regime with full optimism and high expectations, but through a series of though reform and political campaigns in the 1950s, they realized that the authorities did not have the same confidence in the intellectuals.

It was not the first time in 1957 that people committed “rightist” mistakes in Communist Chinese history. According to Mao, at least two cases of rightist deviation happened before the Communist victory in 1949. One was Chen Duxiu, one of the founders and the first chairman of the CCP, who was charged of right opportunism, which “led the proletariat to accommodate itself to the selfish interests of the bourgeoisie and its political party,” and caused the CCP’s loss to the Nationalists in 1927, when the one-party state took shape.⁵⁹⁶ The other was Wang Ming, director of the CCP’s delegation to the Comintern in Moscow and a political rival of Mao in the 1930s. His right opportunism was exemplified when he “appeased the big landlords and big bourgeoisie and the Nationalist Party,” and without “boldly expanding the anti-Japanese revolutionary forces and conducting resolute struggle against the Nationalist policy of opposing and restricting the Communist Party.”⁵⁹⁷ Mao even brought up the two as examples of rightism in March 1957,

⁵⁹⁶ Mao, “Introducing ‘The Communist,’” October 4, 1939, in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, 290.

⁵⁹⁷ Mao, “On Policy,” December 25, 1940, in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, 444-45.

So no matter what one thinks of them, people like Chen Duxiu and Wang Ming have been of great benefit to us. Not them as individuals, but the movement which they led and which was defeated at a certain time.⁵⁹⁸

Learning lessons from the past does not guarantee that it will never happen again. Mao reminded people that even some Communist leaders can turn from “leftists” to “rightists” if they get too close to the bourgeoisie.

“Bourgeois Rightists” in 1957

Historical cases of “rightists,” as shown in the two cases above, provide insight into the kind of people and behaviors that the authorities were supposed to look for, but the context of 1957 was completely different from previous scenarios. Without internal or external rivals like the 1930s, the Chinese Communists were in full control of the country. In May 1956, Mao raised the Hundred Flowers policy, encouraging “blooming and contending” within the arts and sciences. A year later on April 27, 1957, the Rectification Campaign started as a way to implement the policy. It was a brief period of intellectual liberalization, when Mao’s invitation to offer criticism seemed sincere. At this point, neither Mao nor ordinary people had expected what would happen after speaking out. This section details how the central authorities came to define “rightists” in 1957, and to draw boundaries and criteria for each label across the board.

As I argue in Chapter 3, Mao was not plotting a conspiracy to smoke out dissidents before punishing them as “rightists.” So the real question is: When did Mao begin to perceive the acts of blooming and contending as dangerous? Historian Shen Zhihua argues that the earliest evidence of Mao’s change of mind was from Lin Ke’s diary entry of May 12, 1957. Lin was

⁵⁹⁸ Talk at a Conference of Party Member Cadres in Tianjin Municipality, March 17, 1957, in Roderick MacFarquhar, Timothy Cheek and Eugene Wu eds., *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao: From the Hundred Flowers to the Great Leap Forward* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 281.

Mao's secretary on international issues between 1954 and 1966.⁵⁹⁹ In his diary, Lin recorded Mao's views on the issue of dogmatism and revisionism. Dogmatists, according to Mao, are "loyal to the Party and the state... They would rather be leftists than rightists, so they are revolutionary. But those rightist opportunists are more dangerous."⁶⁰⁰ Mao continued to use the term "rightist opportunists" from the earlier period, but this time their problem was revisionism, which only became prominent after Khrushchev's "secret speech." At this point, Mao probably started to worry that free speech from the Rectification might backfire. For the bottom line of airing grievances, Mao said: "It cannot backfire. Criticisms should: 1. Benefit the dictatorship of the proletariat; 2. Benefit socialist development; 3. Benefit the Party's leadership, which is decisive."⁶⁰¹

Mao's private conversation with Lin Ke was reflected in his article "Things Are Changing," which was not published until 1977. It was only circulated within the Party after June 12, 1957, after Mao had made revisions and assigned the date of writing as May 15, 1957, though many of his thoughts probably came after that.⁶⁰² In this document, Mao explained why revisionists and rightist opportunists were dangerous: because "their thoughts reflected bourgeois thoughts within the Party, they yearned for bourgeois liberalism, and they had numerous connections with bourgeois intellectuals in society."⁶⁰³ These rightists within the Party, or in other words revisionists, were not to be confused with rightists in society as a whole. The former had gained trust before deviating from the Party's agenda, while the latter was a wild card beyond the Party's control.

⁵⁹⁹ Shen Zhihua, *Sikao yu xuanze: con zhishifenzi huiyi dao fanyoupai yundong, 1956-57* [Reflections and Choices: the Consciousness of the Chinese Intellectuals and the Anti-Rightist Campaign, 1956-57] (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2008), 554.

⁶⁰⁰ Lin Ke, *Lin Ke riji* (unpublished manuscript), 37-39.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Mao Zedong, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, 476.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 469.

More importantly, Mao fleshed out his ideas on classification in this document that signified his change of mind. Assuming that “as long as there were people, there would be left, center, and right,” he asserted that the purpose of classification as to “secure centrists and isolate rightists.” Ideological divisions naturally exist in any given population, but identification with any side of the political spectrum is not the same as enforced classification. The classification process could not be justified as based on ideological differences, because it was more for the purpose of the authorities to identify political reliability.

The insidious part of classification was the intangible quota that local cadres felt the pressure to fulfill, though nobody could figure out what the exact quota for each category should be. Mao had an estimation of the percentage for each category:

There were plenty of centrists in the society, probably around 70 percent among intellectuals outside the Party. Leftists would probably take around 20 percent. Rightists would probably be one, three, five or ten percent, depending on the situation.

Mao suggested that these numbers should not be taken literally, because “it was an estimation, and the number of rightists might be more or less.” In actual practice, however, Mao’s assertion set an informal quota for each label. Many Party cadres took Mao’s words as the golden rule and tried hard to fill the quota that did not exist in official documents.⁶⁰⁴ The Soviet Union had similar practice when Stalin’s words became the rule of thumb.

In “Things Are Changing,” one can also get a sense of Mao’s understanding of college students and professors. He noticed that “rightists were most resolute and rampant among democratic parties and schools of higher education,” and rightists “assumed that college students would follow their call” because these students are “children of landlords, rich peasants, or bourgeoisie.” But Mao believed otherwise: “Some students with right-leaning thoughts might

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 470, 472, 474.

follow the rightists, but it would be dreaming if most students do so.” Besides students, Mao singled out a Beida chemistry professor Fu Ying as an example who offered critical yet reasonable critiques, different from rightist criticism, which were “usually evil-minded and with antagonism.”⁶⁰⁵ Mao brought up Fu again in the “CCP instructions on the treatment of criticism from people outside the Party” on May 16, 1957:

The criticisms from members outside the Party, no matter how critical, including one from Fu Ying, a chemistry professor at Peking University, are basically genuine and correct. Over 90 percent of criticisms are like this, which would very much benefit our Party’s Rectification and help us correct our mistakes.⁶⁰⁶

It was difficult to know how could Mao differentiate genuine critiques from evil-minded ones. But having Mao on his side, Fu Ying escaped being labeled “rightist,” as he was considered the gauge of “right centrist.”⁶⁰⁷ From Fu’s case, one can speculate that Mao might have attempted to protect those who spoke out under his invitation, even if some criticisms were harsh. At the same time, Mao also seemed clear about the demarcation between “rightists” and “right centrists:” the former misinterpreted the invitation for criticism, and the latter’s critiques were critical yet tolerable.⁶⁰⁸

In Lin Ke’s diary, on May 28, 1957, Mao even estimated the percentage of “leftists,” “centrists,” and “rightists” at Beida after he had dispatched secretaries to read posters and hear debates on campus:

There will not be a severe problem at Peking University, where 11 percent of professors and associate professors are rightists, 39 percent leftists, and 50 percent centrists. Lecturers and teaching assistants are not included. Among 8,000 students, only over 70 are rightists, supported by 200 fellows.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., 471, 473.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., 477.

⁶⁰⁷ For more about Fu Ying, see Chen Tushou, *Guguo renmin yousuo si* [Thinking by People from Their Home Country] (Beijing: sanlian shudian, 2013), 152-175.

⁶⁰⁸ Shen Zihua, *Sikao yu xuanze*, 560.

⁶⁰⁹ Lin Ke, *Lin Ke riji*, 42.

Mao's estimation before the Anti-Rightist Campaign was not even close with the actual number of "rightists" among the students, which reached nearly 700. His optimism of college students and professors indicated that many things were out of Mao's control, including both intellectuals' critical voices and the accumulated number of "rightists." Mao had to update these numbers in just a few weeks.

The first time "rightist" as a term appeared in the *People's Daily* beyond intra-party documents was on June 2, 1957. He Xiangning, vice president of the Democratic Revolutionary Party, wrote a speech delivered at the democratic party members' meeting. She brought up Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of Republican China, as someone who "often paid attention to uniting the revolutionaries (leftists), securing centrists, and isolating rightists." She warned other democratic party members: "If you think in our era, everything has the same color, and there is no longer left, center or right, you are wrong." She hoped that more democratic party members would become leftists, who "loyally followed the Party leadership, and genuinely helped guide the Party." She criticized "those minorities who only talk about socialism but long for capitalism and a western political system as rightists."⁶¹⁰ Rather than offering criticism for the Party, she alerted her audience of the upcoming storm.

The Rectification took a quick turn to repression a few days later. On June 6, Mao wrote "Guidelines on Strengthening the Rectification Campaign," in which he repeated the policy on leftists, centrists, and rightists: "We must pay attention to gain over centrists, unite leftists, so once the opportunity comes, we can mobilize them to fight against rightists and reactionaries." Mao imagined the campaign as a battle between leftists and rightists fighting for centrists, and centrists would become political suspects if they did not get closer to leftists. He also called for a

⁶¹⁰ Tongzhanbu zhaokai de minzhurenshi zuotanhui [Democratic Party Members' Meeting Led by the United Front Work Department], *People's Daily*, June 2, 1957.

more accurate statistics of classification at each work unit: “The worst reactionaries are less than one percent, and more than 90 percent are centrists and leftists. Please make a line-up of people in your unit, based on the standard of left, center and right in the campaign.” Both points confirmed that rightists were not the only targets, and the campaign was meant to classify and make use of everyone. Last, he suggested ways to handle college students before they could spread their free speech outside campuses: “Summer break is coming, so college students in Beijing, Shanghai and other places are going back home. Some of them will go around doing things, and you should take initiative and be prepared to deal with them.”⁶¹¹ In response, some schools postponed, or even canceled the summer break, so students would have to stay on campus while the classification was underway.

On June 8, while the *People's Daily* published the editorial “What Is This For,” signaling the launch of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, Mao drafted an intra-party guideline regarding “Organizing Forces to Fight Against Savage Attacks by Rightist Elements.” On the one hand, he encouraged the publication of “rightist” speeches, now considered “pernicious ideas.” On the other hand, he ordered Party newspapers to publish essays written by “leftists” and “centrists” in order to retaliate against “rightists.” In contrast to the Rectification period earlier, debates and posters in the Anti-Rightist Campaign were mostly arranged by the authorities and appeared one-sided. Mao expected the Rectification in bureaucracies and universities to last no longer than 15 days, and the anti-rightist process done within a month. He described the campaign as a battle, and if lost, “socialism would not be constructed, and there would be the risk of having a ‘Hungarian Incident.’” The last point revealed Mao’s fear of a potential challenge to the Party’s

⁶¹¹ Zhongyang guanyu jiajin jinxing zhengfeng de zhishi [Guidelines on Strengthening the Rectification Campaign], June 6, 1957, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, 491-492.

leadership, though it was him who initiated the Hundred Flowers Campaign. Now a bit of discontent shattered his confidence of control over the people.⁶¹²

So far, there was no clear definition of “rightists,” and there was even more ambiguity about who were “leftists” and “centrists.” As the Anti-Rightist Campaign got underway, more standards and criteria appeared in Party documents. On June 19, 1957, the *People’s Daily* published Mao’s speech “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People,” originally given by Mao on February 27 and revised many times as the political environment continued to change over the interim. The script was finalized on June 17, two days before publication. The most noticeable changes were six inserted criteria to differentiate between “fragrant flowers” and “poisonous weeds,” referring to opinions aired in the Rectification:

1. Beneficial to the unity of the peoples of the various nationalities of the whole country, and not divisive of them;
2. Beneficial to socialist transformation and socialist construction, and not harmful to socialist transformation and socialist construction;
3. Beneficial to the consolidation of the people’s democratic dictatorship, and does not disrupt or weaken dictatorship;
4. Beneficial to the consolidation of the democratic centralist system, and does not disrupt or weaken that system;
5. Beneficial to the consolidation of the leadership of the Communist party, and does not discard or weaken that leadership;
6. Beneficial to the international unity of socialism and of the peace-loving peoples of the whole world, and is not damaging to that unity. Of these six criteria, the most important are the two concerning the socialist path and the leadership of the party.⁶¹³

As sociologist Andrew Walder argues, “The revisions in the published version of the speech were cover for Mao’s obvious political miscalculation.”⁶¹⁴ One can also argue that the criteria were added for operational purposes, so that local cadres could have a standard to measure people’s speeches, and attach labels accordingly. But the criteria remained vague, and local

⁶¹² Mao Zedong, Zuzhi liliang fanji youpai fenzi de changkuang jingong [Organizing Forces to Fight Against Savage Attacks by Rightist Elements], June 8, 1957, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, 496-498.

⁶¹³ Mao Zedong, Guangyu zhengque chuli renmin neibu maodun de wenti [On Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People], February 27, 1957, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, 348. Translation from Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, v.1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 265-266.

⁶¹⁴ Andrew Walder, *China Under Mao: A Revolution Derailed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 150.

cadres would still have problem applying them to individual cases. The criteria could also be interpreted as an elaborated version of Mao's bottom line for free speech in the Rectification: socialism and the Party's leadership, which were not supposed to be challenged.

Many readers of the criteria still remembered Mao's lively February speech, which convinced them of Mao's genuine invitation for Rectification. Now they were shocked and confused to find that the call for liberalization had morphed into one for repression.⁶¹⁵ According to the *Internal Reference*, some college students in Beijing viewed Mao's revised speech negatively. One felt cheated: "The Communist Party is not trustworthy – originally it was not a crime for people to speak out, but now it is." Another corroborated that point: "At first, it was fine to plant poisonous weeds, but now we are told to get rid of poisonous weeds." A third sensed the changing target of the campaign: "The Rectification Campaign was originally rectifying the Communist Party, but now it came to rectify the democratic parties." Another defended the democratic parties: "Since there are petit-bourgeois political parties, why do they have to share the same opinions as proletarian political parties?"⁶¹⁶

Besides providing initial standards for "rightists," Mao did not forget the "leftist" and "centrist" categories. As the "Guidelines on Securing and Uniting Centrists" of June 29 pointed out, securing and uniting "centrists" was "a key point in achieving full success" of the political struggle.⁶¹⁷ When revising the guidelines, he added a distinction between "rightists" and "extreme rightists:" the former had only speeches but no actions, whereas the latter had both speeches and actions, and many had historically tainted records. Such distinction would be "necessary to stabilize, secure and unite centrists, and attack, isolate, and split extreme rightists."

⁶¹⁵ Hu Bawei, *Qingchun Beida* [Youth, Peking University] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2006), 317. A full version of the book, see <http://mjlsh.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/book.aspx?cid=2&tid=134&pid=2035>

⁶¹⁶ Beijing ge gaodeng xuexiao xuesheng jiu Mao zhuxi baogao jinxing dataolun [Big Discussion of Mao's Report among Students at Various Schools of Higher Education in Beijing], *Neibu cankao* [Internal Reference], June 22, 1957, 7-10.

⁶¹⁷ Shen Zhihua, *Sikao yu xuanze*, 625. Originally from Yunnan provincial archives, 2-1-2736, 71-75.

Mao added that among “rightists” and “extreme rightists,” around 4,000 people nationwide, including 400 in Beijing’s universities and bureaucratic units, should be criticized in public.⁶¹⁸ It was unclear what kind of actions would be defined as extreme.

In the July 1 editorial on the *People’s Daily*, “The Bourgeois Direction of *Wenhui Daily* Should Be Criticized,” Mao defined “bourgeois rightists” as “an anti-Communist, anti-people, anti-socialist bourgeois reactionary clique.” According to Shen Zhihua, this was the first time he equated “rightists” with “reactionaries” in public.⁶¹⁹ Mao described these people as the following:

This is a handful of people, in the democratic parties, among the intellectuals, capitalists, and young students, and also in the Communist party and the Youth League, that has come to the surface during this period of great winds and waves. ... This kind of person not only talks but also acts. They are guilty of crimes.⁶²⁰

Based on this description, one would think that these “rightists” deserved to be punished, but Mao thought otherwise, because “the people’s state is very stable and many [“rightists”] among them are known figures,” and therefore, “Calling them ‘rightist elements’ is sufficient; it is unnecessary to call them a reactionary clique.”⁶²¹ Mao seemed to face a dilemma: he was determined to condemn the words and deeds of the “bourgeois rightists” as “reactionary,” but he was not willing to label them “reactionaries.” At the end of July, in the essay “The Situation of 1957’s Summer:” Mao further explained his reasons for calling them “rightists”: “One is to secure centrists, the other is to split rightists, and make it possible for some rightists to bend.”⁶²²

⁶¹⁸ Mao Zedong, Dui zhongyang guanyu zhengqu tuanjie zhongjian fenzi de zhishigao de xiugai [Revision of the Guidelines on Securing and Uniting Centrists] June 29, 1957, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, 528.

⁶¹⁹ Shen Zhihua, *Sikao yu xuanze*, 626.

⁶²⁰ Mao Zedong, Wenhui bao de zichanjieji fangxiang yingdang pipan [The Bourgeois Direction of Wenhui Daily Should Be Criticized], July 1, 1957, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, 533. Translation from MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 280.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, 534.

⁶²² Mao Zedong, 1957 nian xiaji de xingshi [The Situation of 1957’s Summer], July 1957, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, 543.

In that sense, the creation of “rightists” might be strategic, no matter how contradictory and porous it seemed. As MacFarquhar points out,

While Mao was not prepared to see the rightists treated as counter-revolutionaries or even as reactionaries for responding to his invitation to bloom and contend, he had been compelled by the events of May and early June to revise his estimate of the political dependability of the bourgeoisie.⁶²³

I would further argue that it was not just the bourgeoisie’s political reliability at stake, but everyone involved in the campaign. This explains why the categories included not only “rightists,” but also “leftists” and “centrists,” not to mention the sub-divisions of each category. The classification process was meant to be a comprehensive evaluation of all people, with special scrutiny among the intellectuals, so the state could tell friends apart from foes.

On July 9, ten days after his initial estimation in the June 29 guidelines, Mao updated the number of “rightists:” “The accurate number of hardcore rightists has doubled. Nationwide there are 8,000 people, not 4,000. For example, Beijing has 800, Shanghai has more than 700, including student rightists.” Mao was dissatisfied with the fact that “only three percent of hardcore ‘rightists’ are mentioned and criticized in newspapers.” He suggested the percentage should gradually increase to ten percent, in which famous student “rightists” should be included.⁶²⁴ Then on July 11, 1957, CCP Central approved the United Front Work Department’s “Suggestions on the Standard of Classifying Leftists, Centrists and Rightists,” which further divided “centrists” into “left-, mid-, and right-centrists” based on one’s level of duplicity and wavering. It also added “extreme rightists” to the “rightist” category.⁶²⁵

⁶²³ MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 298.

⁶²⁴ Mao Zedong, Zhongyang guanyu zengjia dianming piping de youpai gupanfenzi renshu deng wenti de tongzhi [Notice on Increasing the Number of Hardcore Rightists to Be Criticized], *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, 537.

⁶²⁵ Shen Zihua, *Sikao yu xuanze*, 671. Originally from Jilin provincial archives, 1-5/6-1957.13, 180-189; and Yunnan provincial archives, 2-1-2738, 11-15.

The official “Criteria for Classifying Rightist Elements” did not appear until October 15, 1957, four months into the Anti-Rightist Campaign. By that point, many local cadres had been forced to interpret the meaning and standard of “rightists” on their own. Just as the USSR, the Chinese state took time to refine its policies after local authorities had started implementation based on their understanding of the vague policies. The criteria came from Deng Xiaoping’s “Report on the Rectification Campaign” delivered at the CCP’s third plenum in September. At this point, Deng acted as secretary general of the secretariat and the top leader on the Anti-Rightist Campaign besides Mao. The criteria, also coming in six, were more concrete than Mao’s revised contradiction speech that included criteria to differentiate “flagrant flowers” and “poisonous weeds.” But the language was ambiguous enough for interpretation and manipulation. A brief summary of the criteria looks like this:

Anyone with speech or action that belongs to the following nature should be labeled a rightist: 1. Oppose socialist system. 2. Oppose the dictatorship of the proletariat and democratic centralism. 3. Oppose CCP’s leadership in the state’s political life. 4. Split the unity of people for the purpose of opposing socialism and the Communist Party. 5. Organize or actively participate in anti-socialist or anti-Communist Party cliques. 6. Give ideas, make connections, or provide information about secrets of revolutionary organizations to rightists with any of the above crimes.⁶²⁶

The criteria seemed nothing new in comparison to the June publication of Mao’s contradiction speech, which might indicate that Deng was merely carrying order from his superior. Furthermore, it was just as impractical as the former to apply to specific cases. What was new, and more useful, however, was that the criteria not only included people who should be considered “rightists,” but also “extreme rightists” and those who should not be considered “rightists.” For “extreme rightists,” one should meet the following scenarios:

⁶²⁶ Deng Xiaoping, zhonggong zhongyang guanyu “huafen youpai fenzi de biao zhun” de tongzhi [Notice on the Criteria of Classifying Rightist Elements], October 15, 1957, *Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian* [Selected Collection of Important Documents since 1949] edited by Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, v.10 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1994), 615-616.

1. Careerists, leaders, masterminds, and backbones in rightist activities. 2. People who provide and actively promote anti-Party anti-socialist guiding principles. 3. People who are extremely vicious and resolute in anti-Party anti-socialist activities. 4. People who are historically anti-communist and anti-people, and who are active in reactionary activities in this rightist attack.⁶²⁷

The language was very much exaggerated in black and white fashion, though the reality was often murkier. One way to think about the difference between “extreme rightists” and “rightists” is that the former were more like activists in connecting and organizing the latter, who were dissidents, or simply people with different opinions from the authorities. At schools, “extreme rightists” were more likely to be denounced at school-wide meetings, whereas “rightists” were only criticized at department meetings.

The conditions that differentiated “rightists” from non-“rightists” were the most interesting because the authorities had probably realized that there might be an over-classification of “rightists,” and thus found it necessary to clarify the boundaries. The criteria for non-“rightists” might have saved many from being classified as “rightists,” though the distinction was almost like splitting hairs. The document made it clear that the following mistakes should be criticized and corrected, but not labeled “rightists:”

1. [They do] not fundamentally disapprove of socialism and the Party’s leadership, but only complain about part of the system or policy, working or academic issues, or specific unit or individuals in the Party. 2. Used to have rightist thought, but never published or spread anything, and already confessed one’s mistake. 3. Used to have wrong views on socialist economic or political system or the Party’s leadership, but did not actively promoted them or out of hostility, and are willing to change. 4. Used to blindly agree with rightist speeches, or deceptively joined rightist clique, but quickly split with rightists and now stand on the correct ground. 5. Used to take the reactionary stand, and have not obviously changed, but did not participate in reactionary activities during the rightist attack. 6. Suspects between rightists and right-centrists, if without enough evidence, should not be labeled rightists.⁶²⁸

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 616.

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 616-617.

The above criteria seemed to show some leniency from the central authorities, but these came too late to change those who had already been labeled as “rightists” in provincial- and municipal-level agencies and universities nationwide.⁶²⁹

This section reviews the process of which the central authorities came to define and specify what did it mean to be “rightists” as well as “leftists” and “centrists.” Mao had to constantly update the policies based on new development of the political campaigns. These policies were often vague, and they came after the local practice.

Implementation of Classification

Despite many criteria the authorities provided, “rightist” was a vague political label with little practical measure. Based on but not limited to one’s performance in the Rectification period, the classification was used to evaluate one’s political reliability to the Party rather than one’s ideology. Thus local Party cadres were crucial in deciding who in their work units should be considered “rightists.” This section shows how provincial Party officials, school Party leaders and student cadres carried out the order of classification, and their struggles to identify “rightists” themselves.

According to the CCP Central Secretariat’s “news bulletins” (*Qingkuang jianbao*) between June 15 and 25 of 1957, the focus of provincial Party cadres shifted to “line-up” (*paidui*), or classification of “leftists,” “centrists,” and “rightists.” These “news bulletins” were collections of reports from each province, which helped the central authorities to learn about development and problems on the ground. At the same time, the central authorities redistributed information to local Party cadres, who could share experiences and learn from each other.

⁶²⁹ Cao Shuji, *Maoism at the Grassroots*, 78. Cao argues, “At the local level, however, where rectification and anti-rightist movements has not yet begun, it was a guiding document.”

Several provinces shared their ways of classification. According to Liaoning province's report, they set up a profile for each individual, and collected everyone's speeches at various meetings, essays published in newspapers or posters, as well as words and deeds in private. People who were in charge of collecting and organizing these materials had to be reliable Party members. Based on these materials, the Party leaders would assign labels.⁶³⁰ Jiangsu province had a similar process, though with more specific standards. They also started with collecting materials, from meeting records and posters to personal talks and dossiers. Among these materials, they would find "fallacies" and then associate them with individuals. Each individual would be classified based on his or her attitudes toward the Party's leadership, democratic dictatorship and socialist system. Five aspects of each person would be considered: class background, historical political problem, performance in the past political campaigns, problems that occurred in this Rectification, and daily work and thought.⁶³¹

Some provincial leaders reported difficulties they encountered with classification. Liaoning province in particular brought up the issue four times in their reports. The biggest problem was the unclear boundaries between "rightists" and "centrists." Many "centrists" were afraid to speak out, as they were unsure if their speeches would make them "rightists." As a result, there were either too many "rightists" if using a loose standard, or too few "rightists" if following a strict standard.⁶³² Jiangxi province experienced similar difficulty. As the Rectification started later there, many "rightists" had yet to be exposed before the Anti-Rightist Campaign was launched. Some speeches might be considered sympathetic towards "rightists" or similar to "rightist" speeches, but it was hard to tell. Many cadres asked the superiors to give

⁶³⁰ Qingkuang jianbao (zhengfeng zhuanji) [News Bulletin (Special Issue on the Rectification)], June 30, 1957. Collected in the *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*.

⁶³¹ Shi Mei, Fanyoupai douzheng paidui qingkuang [Circumstances of Lining-up in the Anti-Rightist Struggle], *Internal Reference*, August 9, 1957.

⁶³² News Bulletin, June 30, 1957, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*.

more practical criteria of “rightists,” otherwise either they would select “rightists” among non-“rightists” by accident, or they would not be able to identify “rightists” thoroughly.⁶³³

What about the classification process among university faculty? According to Tianjin’s report, university Party leaders were in charge of classification. They studied “reactionary” comments from meetings, posters and debates held during the Rectification period, and offered Party and Youth League members ways to debunk those ideas. Student Party members asked for more time, so they could read and understand “rightist” speeches in order to criticize them. Shanghai reported that Tongji University initially came up with 3.6 percent of professors being labeled “rightists,” but Ke Qingshi, then Shanghai municipal Party secretary, thought the percentage was too low because the average in Beijing and Shanghai was about ten percent. Hence, Tongji University had to revisit its classification.⁶³⁴ This incident exemplified that the “rightist” quota was not a fixed number, but a product of peer pressure.

A more personal account of classification comes from Yue Daiyun, a female junior lecturer at Beida’s Chinese department. She was also the department faculty Party branch secretary as of June 1957. In her memoir, she recalls the tedious yet heavy task:

I spent many hours that summer poring over the records of the rectification meetings held the previous spring, trying to decide who among the department’s teachers should now be construed as enemies of the Party. We had been provided with examples, with the profiles of ‘standard persons,’ and we assiduously compared the cases of likely suspects with those prototypes.⁶³⁵

Her Party branch eventually identified five potential “rightists,” and she discussed these cases with fellow Party members. She was overruled a couple times when she was not able to convince others that someone was not really a “rightist.” She “felt discouraged and weary of such political

⁶³³ Ruhe zhengque zhangwo heading youpaifenzi biao zhun shi Jiangxi shengji jiguan dangqian pengdao de yige bijiao pubian de wenti [How to Accurately Grasp the Rightist Criteria Is a Widespread Problem Jiangxi Provincial Bureaus Encountered], *Internal Reference*, July 13, 1957.

⁶³⁴ News Bulletin, June 30, 1957, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*.

⁶³⁵ Yue Daiyun, and Carolyn Wakeman, *To the Storm*, 11.

debates.”⁶³⁶ After a few months, ironically, she herself was labeled “rightist,” which made her rethink what she had done:

Even when I had not understood the Party’s decisions, even when I had disagreed, I had felt obligated to carry out official policy. A person in my position should always act with confidence to convince others, be worthy of the Party’s trust, stifle any doubts or confusion, remembering always that the Party has greater wisdom than any individual, that it liberated all of China, that its judgment was therefore above question. Obedience to higher authority was pledged by everyone who joined the Party, and I had accepted this strict discipline willingly. Trusting in Chairman Mao and the Beida Party Committee, believing that they knew more than I, that their decisions must be necessary and correct, I had collected material that would be used to accuse five of my colleagues.⁶³⁷

Many Party cadres might share her feelings of obedience despite personal doubts. In hindsight she questioned her judgment about her colleagues, who might be just like her, “never intending to do or say anything to harm the Party.” What was more unfortunate, in her view, was “a chain of involvement and accusation, with people meting out judgment and then being judged in turn.”⁶³⁸ That points to the uncertainty of classification, in which no one’s label was stable, including those cadres who were in charge of classification at first.

Students went through a similar process of classification as the faculty: Student Party secretaries in each class were in charge of collecting and analyzing materials and then discussing and assigning labels with other student Party members. Student Party members reported that they were very busy, as they had no time to read “rightist” speeches, and asked for more time. These students described themselves as “firm in stand, yet empty in belly.”⁶³⁹ Chen Danchen was a Beida Chinese major student and the first Party secretary for his entire grade. He remembered a meeting with all class branch Party secretaries of the department, when they discussed the issue of student “rightists.” One brought up Mi Zhenzhong, asking why he was not labeled “rightist.”

⁶³⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 26-27.

⁶³⁹ News Bulletin, June 30, 1957, *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*.

Chen defended Mi by saying that his attitude toward the Party was usually pretty good. Others thought Chen's explanation was unconvincing, and classified Mi as a "rightist" anyway. Chen felt extremely uneasy and guilty about being unable to successfully defend Mi, as they were roommates and had known each other for a long time. Chen did not dare to look at Mi when he returned to their dorm.⁶⁴⁰

Announcement of one's "rightist" label took place between fellow students. Sun Jing, a Beida student majoring in Chinese, described herself as not having the power to classify "rightists," but the duty to carry out the order:

We did not know what would be the consequence after him being labeled 'rightist,' but at a time when politics was in command, the announcement was basically an end to his political life and the ruin of his future. From that moment on, we switched from friends to enemies.⁶⁴¹

Another Beida journalist major student Jiang Zhihu was on the receiving end of the classification. He recalled the night of October 13, 1957, two days before the release of the criteria for classifying rightists. He was directed to talk to his class Party secretary, also his classmate, at her dorm. There he was told: "You have been classified as an anti-Party anti-socialist bourgeois rightist. You should truly confess your anti-Party crimes since the Rectification at Beida."⁶⁴² By the end of classification process, student cadres were simply following orders from above and there was no way to revert the "rightist" label once announced.

School authorities recruited politically reliable students to collect "rightist" materials, and write essays debunking "rightist" behaviors. Wang Dehou, a Chinese major and a Youth League member at Beijing Normal University (BNU), was one of the "hired hacks:"

⁶⁴⁰ Chen Danchen, in *Kaihua huo bu kaihua de niandai: Beijing daxue zhongwenxi 55ji jishi* [The Time when Flowers Bloom and Wither: Records of Class of 1955's Chinese Majors at Peking University], edited by Xie Mian, Fei Zhengang (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2001), 314.

⁶⁴¹ Sun Jing, *Kaihua huo bu kaihua de niandai*, 286.

⁶⁴² Jiang Zhihu, *Yelan, taosheng yijiu: Jiang Zhihu huiyilu* [The Billows Sound the Same at Night: A Memoir of Jiang Zhihu] (New York: Cozy House Publisher, 2007), 77.

I was invited to participate in organizing materials. So-called “materials” were mostly complaint letters, posters, and speeches from criticism sessions. There was no fact-check, but we had to write based on these materials. We could not take these materials outside the classroom or talk about our work with others. We could not leave until after working days and nights to finish the essay.⁶⁴³

In the end, Wang wrote an essay “Bitter Medicine Society: From Falling Behind to Political Reactionary Clique,” first published in a school journal, and then collected in a widely circulated book about the Anti-Rightist Campaign in four universities in Beijing. One cannot find Wang’s name from the book, because his article was written by “BNU Chinese major 4th year class 4 and 5.”⁶⁴⁴ In that way Wang was somewhat anonymous, but in retrospect he felt ashamed of the article:

My apology does not ease my guilt, but I still want to apologize. The “Bitter Medicine Society” was progressive. Some helped, even if just in heart, and some sympathized with the group. But I was the writer who criticized the group.⁶⁴⁵

This section follows the implementation of classification by provincial officials, school leaders and student cadres. They reported difficulties in understanding the definition of “rightists.” Despite the confusion, they all made an earnest attempt to do the classification proposed by their superiors.

Singling Out “Rightists”

As asked in a *China Youth Daily*’s editorial on July 20, 1957: “Why do ‘rightists’ exist among young people over 20 years old? ... Why do some of these young people who grew up in a bright new China still have dark ‘rightist’ thoughts?”⁶⁴⁶ In this section, I focus on the reasons

⁶⁴³ Wang Dehou, “fujing qingzui ye wangran [It Is Futile to Offer a Humble and Sincere Apology], *Suibi* [Essays], issue 5, Oct. 2007.

⁶⁴⁴ *Shoudu gaodeng xuexiao fanyoupai douzheng de juda shengli* [A Big Victory of the Anti-Rightist Campaign among Schools of Higher Education in the Capital] (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1957), 397.

⁶⁴⁵ Wang Dehou, *Suibi*.

⁶⁴⁶ “What can we see from the degeneration of Ma Mingmin,” *China Youth Daily*, July 20, 1957. Selected in *Zai fanyoupai douzheng zhong xiqu jiaoxun: ji dang de hanweizhe he qingnian de bailei* [Learning Lessons from the

why some college students could be classified as “rightists,” and what factors made certain students more likely to be categorized as “rightists.” I argue that the classification could be arbitrary and random, since the policies were vague and interpretations were subjective.

As the authorities put it, the classification was based on speeches and actions during the Rectification, such as making posters and having debates to criticize the Party’s privilege, when these behaviors were encouraged, or at least not deterred.⁶⁴⁷ At that time, nobody could have foresighted the detrimental consequences of speaking out. It would be over-simplified, however, to think that those who had spoken critically in the Rectification became easy targets of “rightists,” because speech and actions were only one among many factors that ultimately contributed to one’s classification. It could not explain why some who had kept a low profile during the Rectification, or some Party members responsible for leading the Anti-Rightist Campaign initially, were also labeled “rightists” in the end.

As of September 20, a report by the Beijing municipal Party Committee provided detailed statistics for 32 universities in Beijing. It showed that a total of 3490 students were labeled “rightists,” amounting to 4.3 percent of the total student population of 80,452. The percentage was lower than that of “rightists” among professors (15 percent) or lecturers and teaching assistants (6.7 percent), indicating that the faculty, more than the students, were targets of the Anti-Rightist Campaign.⁶⁴⁸ The percentage was slightly higher than the 3.7 percent of “rightist” students nationwide, which was reasonable considering the concentration of universities in

Anti-Rightist Campaign: Safeguards of the Party and Degenerates in the Youth] (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1957), 36-38.

⁶⁴⁷ These actions will be the topic of another chapter on student activism as contentious politics, where I discuss in details about student speeches and actions that were later considered “rightist.”

⁶⁴⁸ Zhonggong Beijing shiwei guanyu beijingshi gaodeng xuexiao zhengfeng he fanyoupai douzheng qingkuang he jinhou gongzuo bushu xiang zhongyang de baogao [Report on the Situation of the Rectification and Anti-Rightist Struggle and the Future Directions among Schools of Higher Education in Beijing by the Beijing municipal Party committee to the Center], the Anti-Rightist Campaign Database.

Beijing.⁶⁴⁹ In addition, on September 4, the central authorities decided not to classify “rightists” among workers or peasants, or at least to use terms like “anti-socialists” instead of “rightists,”⁶⁵⁰ indicating that the authorities meant to search for “rightists” among the intelligentsia.

To start off the list of factors that made some students more liable to becoming “rightists,” the first was their class background. As the *China Youth Daily*’s editorial wrote:

We should not assume that this generation of youth is as pure as white papers. They are influenced by the old society, especially by their families. ... In this Anti-Rightist struggle, we discovered that almost all stubborn ‘rightists’ come from reactionary class background.⁶⁵¹

The last claim about “rightists” coming from reactionary class background was supported by statistics conducted by the university bureau of the Youth League Central. It surveyed 96,895 students from 70 universities and 1,097 “rightist” students from 20 universities, and provided the number and percentage of students in each class category (Chart 3).⁶⁵²

Chart 3. Non-“Rightist” Students’ and “Rightist” Students’ Class Background

Family Class background	Students (96,895 in 70 schools)		“Rightists” (1,097 in 20 schools)	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Landlords	17,180	17.7	297	27
Rich peasants	3,834	4.0	66	6.2
Small land owners	1,999	2.1	8	0.72
Bureaucrats	491	0.5	57	5.3
Capitalists	9,679	10.0	201	18.3
Businessmen	3,142	3.24	24	2.2
Middle peasants	16,206	16.8	123	11.2
Clerks	14,273	14.7	73	6.65
Freelancers	4,174	4.3	51	4.65

⁶⁴⁹ See chart 1 in the introduction.

⁶⁵⁰ Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu zai gongren nongmin zhong buhua youpaifenzi de tongzhi [CCP Central Committee’s Notice on Not to Classify Rightists among Workers and Peasants], September 4, 1957, in *Zhonggong dangshi jiaoxue cankao ziliao* [Reference Materials for Teaching the History of the CCP], v.22 (Beijing: Guofang daxue chubanshe), 273.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

⁶⁵² “Statistics Regarding Students’ Political Record in Schools of Higher Education,” *Internal Reference*, August 1957.

Senior clerks, Bourgeois intellectuals	749	0.8	47	4.3
Craftsmen, Vendors	4124	4.2	11	1
Poor peasant	8,270	8.5	52	4.7
Salesperson	46	0.04		
Workers	5,303	5.5	35	3.2
Revolutionary cadre/staff	129	0.13	1	0.09
Poor city dwellers	3036	3.1	22	2
Others	4,258	4.39	26	2.4

According to the survey, 78.34 percent of college students came from “exploitative class” or “petite bourgeois” family backgrounds, and 89.61 percent of student “rightists” belonged to the same category. The “exploitative class” was composed of landlords, rich peasants, small landowners, bureaucrats, capitalists and businessmen. The “petite bourgeois” included middle peasants, clerks, freelancers, senior clerks, bourgeois intellectuals, craftsmen and vendors.⁶⁵³ The survey indicated a few things. First, the majority of students came from “bad” class background in the eyes of the authorities, and the percentage of “rightist” students coming from families of landlords, bureaucrats, capitalists, and bourgeois intellectuals, was slightly higher. Second, “good” class background might not make one immune from being labeled “rightist,” which means that one’s political performance or other factors could still trump one’s class background when classifying “rightists.”

Another survey compared non-“rightist” and “rightist” students’ family and individual historical records. The survey reached 17,911 students from 49 universities and 3,649 “rightists” from 62 universities. The family’s political problems included family members or relatives being imprisoned, killed, under surveillance or class struggle, or fleeing overseas (Chart 4). The

⁶⁵³ Ibid. The original statistics included “rightist” students from poor city dwellers (2 percent) as part of petite bourgeois family background, but it did not include the non-“rightist” students from poor city dwellers (3.1 percent) as part of petite bourgeois family background.

individual historical problem referred to one’s past involvement with the Nationalist Youth League, the Nationalist Party, Communists’ rival militaries, spying or counter-revolution.⁶⁵⁴

Chart 4. Family and Individual Political Records of Students and “Rightists” at Schools of Higher Education

	Students (17,911 in 49 schools)		“Rightists” (3649 in 62 schools)	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Family with political problems	4,022	22.4	1161	31.9
Individual with historical political problems	1,858	10.4	644	12.4
Individual with administrative or criminal sanctions	186	1	97	2.7
Rascal with bad characters			107	2.9

It should come as no surprise that a little more “rightist” students than their peers had tainted historical records, or that their families had been less reliable in the past. The authorities were probably gratified to see that the classification of “rightists” correlated with one’s family backgrounds or past behavior. Or, as political scientist Ghanshyam Mehta speculated,

Statistics were dug up to prove that although “these young men of over 20 years had spent one-third of their life in the new society, (still) they never did give up the thinking of the dying bourgeoisie.”⁶⁵⁵

But at the same time, the statistics also show the majority of “rightists” did not have families involved in wrong political camps nor did they have past political problems. They had been innocent until their participation in the Hundred Flowers Campaign. For example, Tan Tianrong, a student “rightist” at Beida, was a physics major and a Youth League member. He was known

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁵ Ghanshyam Mehta, *The politics of Student Protest in China: Rectification at Peking University, Spring 1957*, 395. The original quotation comes from *Shoudu gaodeng xuexiao fanyoupai douzheng de juda shengli* (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1957), 185.

for writing a series of posters entitled “poisonous weeds.” Later, however, he admitted that throughout his life there were only two months that he cared about politics – between mid-May and mid-July of 1957.⁶⁵⁶

The second factor concerns graduating seniors. According to an *Internal Reference* report, graduates of 1957 had the highest percentage of “rightists” in comparison with other classes. Among 8,335 seniors in 18 colleges, 593, or 7.1 percent, were “rightists.” The most extreme case was Beijing Steel and Iron College’s graduates, in which 104 or 13.3 percent of 778 students were “rightists.”⁶⁵⁷ Another Beijing municipal party committee report on August 12 found that among 10,968 graduating seniors in Beijing, 668, or 6.1 percent, were “rightists.” In this report, even the party committee thought the percentage was too high and suggested to de-classify those “rightists” who were willing to repent. By doing that, the number of “rightists” would be reduced to around 300, or 3 percent, of all graduating seniors.⁶⁵⁸ A third survey based on five universities in Beijing came up with similar results. Among graduates in these five schools, six percent were “anti-socialists,” 64 percent “centrists,” and 30 percent “leftists.” Although “anti-socialists” were supposedly different from “rightists” in documents, they were treated as the same in practice. Around two percent of the Party members and five percent of Youth League members were said to have lost their footing and become “rightists.”⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁶ Tan Tianrong, “Yige meiyou qingjie de gushi” [A Story without Plot] in *Meiyou qingjie de gushi* [Stories without Plots], edited by Ji Xianlin (Beijing: Shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 2001), 564. When I interviewed Tan in October 2014, he did not want to talk in details about what happened in 1957. He did not write any memoir of his “rightist” experience.

⁶⁵⁷ “Statistics Regarding Students’ Political Record in Schools of Higher Education,” *Internal Reference*, August 1957.

⁶⁵⁸ Zhonggong zhongyang Beijing shiwei guanyu fanyoupai douzheng qingkuang de baogao [Beijing Municipal Party Committee’s Report on the Situation of the Anti-Rightist Struggle], *Internal Reference*, August 12, 1957.

⁶⁵⁹ Zhongyang guanyu chuli benjie gaodeng xuexiao biyesheng zhong you yanzhong fan shehuizhuyi yanxing de fenzi de tongzhi [Notification on Handling Graduating Seniors Who Had Serious Anti-Socialist Speeches and Actions in Schools of Higher Education], July 16, 1957. Collected in the *Anti-Rightist Campaign Database*. The five universities were Beida, Tsinghua University, Beijing Normal University, Beijing Medical College, and Beijing Agricultural University. This notification used the term “anti-socialists” instead of “rightists.”

These statistics provide a general sense that college seniors were more carefully scrutinized and generated more “rightists” than other classes. School authorities probably wanted to make sure that the students they sent off or kept at schools were politically reliable. They might have felt that they could reform the students who were staying on campus, but not those who were leaving, so it made sense to over-classify graduating students just to be cautious. But what made graduates so vulnerable? Considering that the Rectification period in May was probably the busiest time for seniors to finish exams and final projects, they should be the least likely to speak out. Some graduates were also concerned about their post-graduate job assignment, so they did not dare to voice opinions. On the other hand, seniors were the most connected in schools since they had been there the longest, and they knew their professors the best. Therefore, they could take advantage of their network with fellow students and their professors to organize student groups.⁶⁶⁰

Ever since 1957, every college graduate was subjected to the political examination, an extra procedure of scrutiny of one’s political reliability prior to job assignment. On July 31, 1957, the *People’s Daily* reported the examination at Beida. The vice president Ma Shian explained the necessity for such a process:

The criteria by which the State brings up and uses cadres are virtue as well as talent. The rightists, while attacking the Party, demanded the abolition of political criteria so that they could fish in troubled waters. But in the interest of socialist construction, we cannot ignore the political quality of cadres. We will never allow a politically questionable person to assume duties that he should not.⁶⁶¹

For graduates of 1957, the political examination consisted almost exclusively of one’s behavior in the Rectification and the Anti-Rightist Campaigns, instead of one’s political performance

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁶¹ Kui Zeng, Jingguo fanyoupai douzheng zhong de kaoyan, beida biyesheng jinxing zhengzhi jianing [After the Test of the Anti-Rightist Struggle, Beida Graduates Go through Political Examination], *People’s Daily*, July 31, 1957. Translation from Das, *China’s Hundred Weeds*, 145.

throughout college years. Many students could not fathom that decision, but they had to follow the authorities. Ma told them that the Rectification and the Anti-Rightist Campaigns were the most important lesson because students presented their political stand during this time. Thus, one's performance within this period should be the barometer of political reliability.⁶⁶² Ma Si, a Beida student majoring in Chinese, recalled the process of examination:

It started in small groups. Everyone had to make a self-evaluation first about one's performance in the Rectification and the Anti-Rightist campaigns. Then the group analyzed and evaluated it before writing a group evaluation. Then the class signed the opinions, and sealed it in one's dossier.⁶⁶³

The process seemed innocuous, but the evaluation weighed heavily in one's job assignment. In Ma Si's evaluation, he appreciated these words: "This comrade loves the Party and socialism." It indicated his fundamental political stand and differentiated him from "rightists."⁶⁶⁴

Besides scrutiny of graduating seniors, the *Internal Reference* also drew attention to two seemingly unlikely groups to become "rightists": cadre students (*diaogansheng*), who had worked for an extensive period as local cadres before going to college, and "three-good" students (*sanhao xuesheng*), who supposedly excelled in virtue, intelligence, and physical health. Among 8,591 cadre students in 64 universities, 3,431 (39.9 percent) students were "leftists," 4631 (54 percent) were "centrists," and 529 (6.1 percent) were "rightists." The highest percentage of "rightist" cadre students from one institution - Hefei Teachers College - reached 15.4 percent.⁶⁶⁵ Cadre students were usually older than others, had the most experience outside schools, and were the most politically reliable in the past. It made sense that there was a higher percentage of "leftists" among cadre students than average (27.3 percent), but the high percentage of "rightists"

⁶⁶² Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan 1953-1957: fengyu Beida* [Studying at Beida 1953-1957: Trials and Tribulations at Beida] (Beijing: Qunyan chubanshe, 1999), 432.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, 433.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 435.

⁶⁶⁵ "Statistics Regarding Students' Political Record in Schools of Higher Education," *Internal Reference*, August 1957.

was puzzling. Maybe their knowledge through working as cadres made them more aware of problems within the system, or their extensive social network kept them updated about certain classified information. One example of a cadre-student-turned-“rightist” was Lin Xiling, who had been in the military and worked as a journalist before going to People’s University, a school known for training future Party cadres. Lin was a maverick there, as she talked on stage six times at Beida and her school about Hu Feng and Khrushchev’s secret speech.

Also unexpected was the number of “rightists” among “three-good” students. Among 7,955 “three-good” students in 40 colleges, 275 (3.4 percent) were “rightists.” It was slightly lower than the percentage of “rightists” among students (3.7 percent), and higher than that of Youth League members (3.0 percent). Beijing Post College had the highest – 9.09 percent.⁶⁶⁶ These outstanding students had performed well academically, but that did not transform into political reliability in the long term. One possible explanation might be that they were politically engaged as required for being “three-good students,” so they actively participated in the Rectification before its unexpected turn. Li Shuxian, a female Beida physics student, was a “three-good” student, a Party member, and a “rightist.” She was in a study group with two other physics majors, including Fang Lizhi, who later became her husband. Inspired by fellow Beida students, on May 25 the three attempted to write a letter to the Party center about their opinions on Rectification, many of which were later considered “rightist” thoughts. They never sent out their letter once they read the June 8 editorial, but Li confessed to the Party after summer break. By December, she was labeled an exemplary “rightist” from inside the Party who had “degenerated” from a “three-good” student.⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁷ Li Shuxian, Skype interview on March 19, 2015. Email correspondence on January 5, 2016.

The four factors – class background, being a graduating senior, cadre student, and “three-good” student – were considered relevant in the University Bureau of Youth League Central’s data of classification of “rightists” among college students nationwide. It implies that the authorities were looking beyond individual political performance in the campaigns, and into the reasons behind student actions. Some results were gratifying, such as the correlation between class and classification, but some were hard to fathom, such as the high turnout of “rightists” among cadre students and “three-good” students. The classification in the Anti-Rightist Campaign, though arbitrary and even random at times, was a re-measure of people’s political reliability, in which all previous labels had to be reconsidered.

Uniting the “Leftists”

Unlike “rightists,” neither “leftists” nor “centrists” knew their classification. The information remained a secret in personal dossiers unavailable to individuals. Thus it is difficult to assess the process of classification in relation to actual individuals. This section explores the following questions: who were “leftists”? What kind of traits would be classified as “leftist”? A brochure entitled “Learning Lessons from the Anti-Rightist Struggle: the Party’s Loyalists and Degenerates among Youth” published in 1957 partially answered these questions. The brochure did not label these loyalists as “leftists” upfront, but the intention was clear: these loyalists were the models everyone should learn from. So it only made sense for the authorities to propagate the most politically reliable crowd – the “leftists” – while debunking the “rightists.”

Among the examples of loyalists, several actions were encouraged: defending the Party by arguing with “rightists” or making posters, reporting on “rightists,” and sticking with the Party line regardless of friendship or others’ opinions. One such student was Luo Jianmin, a

Youth League member at Tsinghua University. Once at the dinner table he overheard students from a neighboring table talking about the issue of Sufan, the campaign to crackdown on counter-revolutionaries in 1955 and a hotbed of dissent in 1957. When he heard that someone denied the merit of the campaign, and accused it of being completely wrong, he stood up and started debating with the other students. On June 6, he was the first to put up a poster calling all Communist Party members in the school to fight back. Some students, including some Party and Youth League members, thought his poster was too overdone, and therefore impeded the Rectification, but he did not change his mind.⁶⁶⁸

Another example was Shi Dahao, a Youth League secretary at Wuda. Shi reported to a Party secretary about the secret “Rectification committee of the Chinese department” started by Wu Kaibin, his classmate, so the Party could get a step ahead to encourage students to organize Rectification under the Party’s leadership. When condemned as someone who “shamelessly made a living on reporting,” Shi replied, “It was my job as a Youth League class secretary to report to the Party.” When Wuda students confronted personnel bureau asking for a change of leadership and opening of archives, Shi joined other Party supporters, shouting, “liars, get off the stage.” Some classmates started calling him “double-crosser” and “chameleon,” and some of his close friends started ignoring him, but Shi remained unchanged.⁶⁶⁹

Shi Daohao’s classmate Tian Di, a Youth League member, was also a loyalist. She and a few other classmates started “March 8th Society” wall posters debunking “rightists.” When “rightists” wanted a class strike and went onto the streets, she called against “big democracy,” and asked for a mild rectification. On June 5, Wuda’s university Party secretary Liu Zhen made a

⁶⁶⁸ Xiong Jin, “Youth League member Luo Jianmin resolutely opposed reactionary speeches,” *China Youth Daily*, June 21, 1957. Collected in *Zai fanyoupai douzheng zhong xiqu jiaoxun – ji dang de hanweizhe he qingnian de bailei* [Learning Lessons from the Anti-Rightist Struggle: the Party’s Loyalists and Degenerates among Youth], edited by Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1957), 33-34.

⁶⁶⁹ Guo Meini, “A Youth League secretary who stayed in his position during the storm,” *China Youth Daily*, Aug 12, 1957. Collected in 52-55.

report criticizing “rightist” students’ slogan “fight for freedom, democracy and human rights” and their claim to spread their ideas to factories and the countryside. Many students opposed the report, but Tian Di supported it. She was well aware of anti-Party activities by “rightists,” and she kept a diary recording their speeches and actions. When it was time to criticize “rightists,” her diary became crucial evidence against them.⁶⁷⁰

The last two examples were both Beida philosophy majors, and Party members. One was Liu Wenchao, who felt angry after seeing Tan Tianrong’s “A Poisonous Weed,” said it was vilifying the Party, and asked another Party member and some Youth League members to write posters to attack Tan. Among his classmates, some appraised democratic party newspapers, such as the *Wenhui Daily* and the *Guangming Daily*, for speaking out critically, whereas the *People’s Daily* was boring and dogmatic. Liu Wenchao said he could see nothing correct about the former, which only had critical titles but not content. When others criticized the *People’s Daily* for suppressing Rectification with the editorial “What Is This For,” Liu Wenchao said, “If bourgeois rightists are attacking us, why can we not speak out? The *People’s Daily* is correct.” When the *People’s Daily* reported “Hundred Flowers Society” as a reactionary clique, some criticized the newspaper for defamation and lack of evidence, and put up posters at the hall of dorm building. When they asked Liu Wenchao to sign the poster, he refused and criticized these students instead for lack of evidence and defaming the newspapers.⁶⁷¹

The other loyalist was Shi Zhongquan, who was merely 19 years old, and just about to join the Party. When his classmate Long Yinghua put up posters, Shi instantly felt it was anti-Party. He told class Party secretary about Long’s behavior, and suggested a criticism session

⁶⁷⁰ “Tian Di: Excellent female Youth League member,” *People’s Daily*, Aug. 17, 1957. Collected in *Zai fanyoupai douzheng zhong xiqu jiaoxun*, 55-57.

⁶⁷¹ “Two Party members who have a clear-cut standpoint,” *Beijing Daily*, September 2, 1957. Collected in *Zai fanyoupai douzheng zhong xiqu jiaoxun*, 74.

against Long. Shi took it his responsibility to talk to “centrists” and convince them to stand with the Party. He worked till midnight every day. In order to collect Long Yinghua’s speeches, Shi Zhongquan went to copy Long’s posters, and he convinced others to share the workload.⁶⁷²

Though both loyalists, Liu and Shi had very different class background. Liu was a peasant cadre who had graduated from a quick immersion middle school for workers and peasants before attending Beida. He said to a right-leaning Party member, “You do not have a sense of the contrasts between a dark old society, which pressured you to endure pain, and a bright new society, which provides a happy life.” If Liu was a typical loyalist from “good” class, Shi was not. Shi’s family used to work in a noodle-chopping factory, and after 1949 his family joined agricultural production, and their lives were not as good as before. He felt it natural that as the whole country was going toward socialism, the economy had to transform and family life had to change. However, he considered the change as a transformation from a life of exploitation to that of physical laborer. He was confident that life would get better, and it was better than two years ago.⁶⁷³ As shown in the examples, one could be reliable to the Party regardless of class or social background, and the authorities would appreciate one’s loyalty and turn a blind eye toward one’s previously designated labels.

This section provides several examples of loyalists, who were most likely labeled “leftists,” even though it is difficult to confirm without checking their personal dossiers. From contemporary publications, however, one can get a sense of “leftists” from models the authorities portrayed: making posters to criticize “rightist” comments, reporting on “rightists,” and defending the Party at all times.

⁶⁷² Ibid., 75.

⁶⁷³ Ibid., 76.

Gaining over the “Centrists”

Even though the authorities claimed that gaining over “centrists” would be crucial for the Anti-Rightist Campaign, in comparison to “leftists” and “rightists” both portrayed extensively in propaganda for different reasons, “centrists” seemed like the silent majority that got the least attention in newspapers. It is difficult to trace examples of “centrists” not only in archival documents but also personal memoirs, since these people had fewer memorable things to say about 1957. But “centrists” were not monolithic due to the sub-classification of “left-” “mid-” and “right-centrists,” so people within this label were treated differently. For college students, the telling moment would be their post-graduation job assignments. “Leftists” and “left-centrists” would get better jobs in big cities or research institutions, whereas “rightists” who stayed on campus after 1957 and “right-centrists” could be sent to middle schools or vocational schools in small towns.

Within “centrists,” it is fair to say that “right-centrists” were most likely aware of their classification because they were on the verge of being labeled “rightists.” As mentioned earlier, local cadres had a hard time differentiating “right-centrists” from “rightists.” It was the case with a Beida Chinese major Zhang Yumao. A student cadre in Zhang’s class, Li Deshen, was in charge of fitting the “rightist” quota designated from above. Li described that Zhang narrowly escaped being labeled “rightist,” because Li argued on his behalf and labeled him “right-centrist” instead.⁶⁷⁴ But in Zhang’s memoir, he seems to be unaware of this behind-the-scenes story. Instead, he credited himself for staying silent:

I did not say anything, not that I had foresight or knew it would be an “overt conspiracy,” but I really had no opinion to offer. I spent all my time and effort studying. I appreciated some opinions that resonated with me, and I discussed with only a few classmates, so I got a minor disciplinary punishment. ... I had to

⁶⁷⁴ Li Deshen, *Kaihua huo bu kaihua de niandai*, 66.

thank myself, because if I were not focusing on studying instead of joining the crowd, my life would be very different.⁶⁷⁵

Zhang was not the only one who had nothing to say, but staying silent was not the best strategy to get more political reliability, because one could not stay silent for long. The silence and passivity could become negative. Yang Tianshi, a classmate of Zhang, had almost the same reaction: He had no suggestions for the Party. He was only 20 years old with little social experience, and genuinely believed in the fundamental goodness of socialism and the Party. Unfortunately, he was also classified “right-centrist” because he co-authored a poster supporting some Beida students who visited their neighbor school Tsinghua University to “stir up trouble.” In Yang’s political examination upon graduation, he was described as “losing his stand and leaning towards rightists.”⁶⁷⁶

If Zhang Yumao and Yang Tianshi stayed silent for lack of ideas, Sheng Jiuchou made a deliberate choice to keep quiet after being alerted by a fellow student:

She brought me to the side, lowered her voice, and told me: “It seems like the campaign would be big, so you should stay alert, and be mindful not to get too involved. If free, you might want to read in the library.” ... Since then, I turned a deaf ear to what was going on outside the window. I went to the library with my backpack whenever I got the chance. It was boisterous outside, full of big character posters, speeches and debates. But inside the library, it was a haven of peace.⁶⁷⁷

In contrast to debates and posters during the Rectification, all criticism and denunciation meetings in the Anti-Rightist Campaign were orchestrated, and everyone had to perform their assigned roles and scripts. By then one could not hide in library or stay silent because participation was required, and passivity was no longer an option. Since political performance was crucial to the classification, people felt compelled to say certain things in hopes of staying

⁶⁷⁵ Zhang Yumao, *Kaihua huo bu kaihua de niandai*, 58.

⁶⁷⁶ Yang Tianshi, *Kaihua huo bu kaihua de niandai*, 206-207.

⁶⁷⁷ Sheng Jiuchou, *Kaihua huo bu kaihua de niandai*, 291-292. The author’s name might be wrong in the original publication.

out of trouble or getting better labels. The “centrists” were forced to take a side, and no neutrality was allowed, as warned by a Beida history department Party secretary,

The Anti-Rightist struggle is a fierce class struggle. Everyone needs to take a side: you are either on the side of proletariat, or the reactionary bourgeoisie. There is no middle path, and you cannot ride over the line. Your attitude in the Anti-Rightist struggle will show if you are revolutionary, un-revolutionary, or counter-revolutionary.⁶⁷⁸

After hearing these words, Liang Xueming, a history major, was nervous and scared. She did not dare to doubt the labeling of “rightists,” and she decided not to say anything even if she had doubts. All she could do was to align her thoughts with the Party’s principles.⁶⁷⁹

Thus, the “leftists” and “centrists” were complicit with the authorities in classifying “rightists,” not only because they agreed with the Party, but also because they had little courage to say no, for otherwise they risked being labeled “rightists” themselves. Xie Mian, a Beida Chinese major and a cadre student, reflected his internal conflict and personal guilt in a memoir:

I responded to the call of the Party, and against my will to criticize those “rightists” who were classmates and friends. ... What I criticized was exactly what I felt deeply in my soul. ... Due to my own need for self-protection, or in order to present my “determination,” I “consciously,” or more exactly, against my will, did what I was supposed to do and could do.⁶⁸⁰

Xie Mian’s narrative might sound self-serving in the present context, and he is not the only one who acknowledged a sense of guilt in his memoir, but he was probably among the “left-centrists” whose performance was more expected than required.

For “right-centrists,” however, their speeches weighed more in the Anti-Rightist Campaign, because it was their last chance to distinguish themselves from “rightists.” Qian Liqun, a Beida journalism student, was in that situation. He had expressed concerns about

⁶⁷⁸ Liang Xueming, in *Nashi women zheng nianqing: Beijing daxue lishixi xiyou huiyilu* [When We Were Young: Memoirs of History Majors at Peking University], edited by Wang Chunmei, Wang Meixiu (Beijing: Xiandai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007), 259.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁰ Xie Mian, *Kaihua huo bu kaihua de niandai*, 18.

freedom of speech as a side effect of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, and therefore he was considered unable to draw a line distinguishing himself from “rightist” thoughts and on the verge of becoming a “rightist.” Then at his classmate Jiang Zhihu’s criticism and denunciation meeting, Qian was asked to speak. He took it as an opportunity as well as a challenge to show his repentance and loyalty. He prepared his speech by checking newspapers of Nantong before 1949, where Jiang’s father used to work, so as to get a sense of what happened there under the Nationalist Party’s control.⁶⁸¹ In Qian’s speech, he related Jiang’s father to his own but also made clear that he was different from his father:

My father was also a high ranked Nationalist Party bureaucrat who escaped to Taiwan. ... Even since Shanghai’s liberation [in 1949], I have not felt discrimination. I joined the Young Pioneers, and took a leading position. While I was not a Youth League member, I was assigned to be a counselor. In our society, the Party does not discriminate against those people from exploitative classes.⁶⁸²

Qian had no recollection of his own speech until Jiang published scripts of student speeches at his criticism and denunciation meeting in his memoir. As a scholar who has researched and written about the Beida students of 1957, Qian’s obliviousness to his own performance provoked more soul-searching. As he confessed in a later piece after writing a book on the topic:

I relied on performing as a lackey so as to escape being punished. As a consequence, I saved myself by pushing my classmates, who used to share similar fate with me, into the abyss.⁶⁸³

From Jiang Zhihu’s perspective, however, he understood that his “rightist” label had nothing to do with his classmates’ speeches, which were all about performance for their own interests:

From the speeches, [I can tell that] some classmates made an effort, did some readings, and found some sources. In other words, they used their brains and tried

⁶⁸¹ Qian Liqun, *Mao Zedong shidai he hou Mao Zedong shidai (1949-2009): lingyizhong lishi shuxie* [The Mao Zedong Era and Post Mao Era: An Alternative Writing of History] v.1 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 2012), 138-140.

⁶⁸² Jiang Zhihu, *Yelan, taosheng yijiu*, 89.

⁶⁸³ Qian Liqun, “Shizhong: fanyou yundong zhong wo de liangci pidouhui shang de fayan” [Exhibit: My Speeches in Two Criticism and Denunciation Meetings during the Anti-Rightist Campaign], in *Women de shiwei* [Our Poems], edited by Kong Qingdong, Wang Lan, Ye Wenxi (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2010), 111.

to perform better in the campaign, so they could avoid also being labeled ‘rightists.’ Some used the opportunity to make their position clear; otherwise it would not be good if one stayed silent. Of course, some tried to make political benefits through their speeches. At that time, I knew my “rightist” label had nothing to do with whatever my fellow classmates said.⁶⁸⁴

As Qian Liqun reflected, the Anti-Rightist Campaign forced everyone to be victimized one way or another and to participate in the victimization of others. Just like a series of political campaigns since 1949, it triggered the dark side of human nature and led to fights between friends and fellows.⁶⁸⁵ The seemingly impartial “centrists” had their share of guilt in marginalizing “rightists” through their silence or show of alliance with the Party.

This section shows the instability of being a “centrist.” As the Anti-Rightist Campaign progressed, it became increasingly difficult to be silent, passive or neutral, all of which became negatively configured. This was exactly what the authorities hoped to achieve – gaining over the centrists so they did not stay passive. Some “centrists” indeed took the opportunity to fight for a better label, so they were implicit in the process of classification.

Ambiguity and Fluidity of Classification

Classification of “leftists,” “centrists” and “rightists” might seem superficially clear-cut in Party documents and extraordinarily precise in statistics, but in practice it was a messy business that remained ambiguous and fluid. Besides “rightists” who were publicly announced and criticized, everyone else had little idea of their own labels at the time, except knowing that they were “safe” for now. Since “leftists” and “centrists” were classified in secret, it created an illusion that there were only two kinds of people – “rightists” and non-“rightists” – but that was far from the truth. Many non-“rightists” felt extremely relieved when the Anti-Rightist

⁶⁸⁴ Jiang Zhihu, *Yelan, taosheng yijiu*, 93.

⁶⁸⁵ Qian Liqun, *Women de shiwei*, 111-112.

Campaign was finally over by 1958, as they would no longer worry about becoming “rightists” in the future. The ingenuity of withholding information regarding one’s classification was to promote constant fear of being treated like the others, so that people had to abide by the Party line all the time. Sources regarding how and why this policy was crafted are difficult to find, as most documents tend to focus on the classification of “rightists.” It was unsurprising that people and the state made a “left” turn after the Anti-Rightist Campaign that led to collective insanity of the Great Leap Forward.

The uncertainty of classification not only lies in its ambiguity, but also fluidity. As the Anti-Rightist Campaign continued to evolve, classification became a central task that work units carried out multiple times. It is understandable that people change their minds based on the current political atmosphere. For the authorities, however, such changes in classification reflect people’s political inclination and potential success of ideological indoctrination. An August *Internal Reference* reported the classification conducted twice in three classes at three universities in Shanghai, first during the Rectification period, and second at the end of the semester (chart 5).⁶⁸⁶

Chart 5. Classification in Three Classes at Three Universities in Shanghai During Rectification and the End of the Semester

	3 rd Yr Engineer major at Shanghai Jiaotong University				2 nd Yr. Economics major at Finance and Economics College				3 rd Yr Chinese major at East China Normal University			
	Rectification		End of Semester		Rectification		End of Semester		Rectification		End of Semester	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%

⁶⁸⁶ “Statistics Regarding Students’ Political Record in Schools of Higher Education,” *Internal Reference*, August 1957.

Leftist	12	34.3	19	54.3	5	21.7	10	43.5	5	18.5	8	29.6
Left-centrist	5	14.3	9	25.8	6	26.1	6	26.1	1	3.7	6	22.2
Mid-centrist	12	34.3	1	2.9	8	34.8	5	21.7	7	26.0	6	22.2
Right-Centrist	2	5.7	2	5.7	4	17.4	2	8.7	9	33.3	2	7.5
Rightist	4	11.3	4	11.3	0	0	0	0	5	18.5	5	18.5
Total	35	100	35	100	23	100	23	100	27	100	27	100

(Data Collected by mid-August, 1957)

As the statistics revealed, from the Rectification to the Anti-Rightist Campaigns, there was an increasing number of “leftists” and “left-centrists,” a result that would satisfy Party cadres. The silent majority, especially those “mid-centrists” or “right-centrists,” willingly or unwillingly, tended to side with “leftists,” or at least differentiated themselves from “rightists.” Despite all changes, the number of “rightists” remained the same, indicating that once recognized as a “rightist” in the Rectification, one could hardly escape being labeled as a “rightist” afterward no matter how they repented. But the number of “rightists” would go up after the summer break, during the process of the so-called Anti-Rightist makeup (*fanyou buke*).

Similar results came from nine universities in Nanjing, in which they conducted the classification twice by August 9. The percentage of “leftists” increased from 17.9 percent to 25.7 percent. “Centrists” were mobilized, and most were turning left and away from “rightists.” Some had even become “leftists.” All these numbers proved that the Anti-Rightist Campaign was heading toward the Party’s goal: united “leftists,” secure “centrists” and isolate “rightists.” But the process was not without problems, especially with “centrists.” The same report found that some “centrists” would first criticize “rightists” in meetings, but then tried to explain themselves

to “rightists” in private conversations. Some “centrist” professors in Nanjing University believed that they were neither “rightists” nor “leftists.”⁶⁸⁷

The two classification records above were conducted by mid-August of 1957. Once schools restarted in September, however, another round of classification ensued, in which the number of “rightists” increased. This round of classification made sure that any hidden “rightist,” both inside and outside the Party, would be captured. According to an *Internal Reference* report on September 20, many universities in Wuhan labeled more “rightists.” Central China Normal College’s “rightists” increased from over 80 to over 170. Wuhan Measurement and Cartography College’s “rightists” rose from over 40 to 103. Many hidden “rightists” inside the Party were also exposed. Overall, among 37,000 university students and faculty in Wuhan, 1,387 were “rightists.” Many schools dedicated the first two weeks of school to anti-rightist struggle, and then spent half of the school time to class and half to anti-rightist struggle. Some schools even cut down class hours in order to conduct a thorough anti-rightist struggle.⁶⁸⁸

Yue Daiyun, a junior professor at the Chinese department of Beida, remembered the changes and development of the Anti-Rightist Campaign from June 1957 to 1958. At first, during criticism and denunciation meetings, “a person would be criticized, but no one shouted or demanded that the accused stand up.”⁶⁸⁹ Jiang Zhihu, a “rightist” from the same department, corroborated that point, as he was able to sit and write down what others said in those meetings.⁶⁹⁰ On November 1st, 1957, Lu Ping, a conservative cadre, replaced Jiang Longji, Beida’s Party secretary who sympathized with students during Rectification. After Lu’s arrival,

⁶⁸⁷ Shi Mei, *Internal Reference*, August 9, 1957.

⁶⁸⁸ Luo Zhongzhang, Wuhan gaodeng xuexiao fan youqing sixiang qude henda chengji [Great Achievement in the Anti-Rightist Thought Struggle among Wuhan’s Universities], *Internal Reference*, September 20, 1957.

⁶⁸⁹ Yue Daiyun, *To the Storm*, 32.

⁶⁹⁰ Jiang Zhihu, *Yelan, taosheng yijiu*, 93.

he initiated a new wave of classification.⁶⁹¹ By 1958, the anti-rightist struggle reached a new stage with a slightly different target:

The movement had grown more intense, dedicated to the eradication of the most elusive enemies who were said to be posing as loyal Party members to evade detection. The Party had instructed that the Anti-Rightist Campaign must be conducted thoroughly, that no rightists could be allowed to escape, that a place like Beida should uncover even more rightists than the five percent expected of other work units. Accordingly, each department had searched again, going through lists of its members to see if anyone had been missed.⁶⁹²

At this point, Yue Daiyun, along with her “Modern Hero” peer review journal group, was the last to be labeled “rightists” at Beida. They were considered enemies who pretended to be revolutionaries. This news came as a shock to not only Yue herself, but also her students, including Ma Si. She taught Ma a whole year of history of modern Chinese literature. Ma had very good impression of her, and he was bewildered about the news:

She was progressive, closely followed the party, and in the position of branch Party secretary. How could she have anti-Party activities? ‘Modern Hero’ was only an idea, not a reality. Even if they made a literary journal, was that wrong?⁶⁹³

More “rightists” were labeled within days and months. On October 19, Jiang Longji, Beida’s Party secretary reported that there were 511 “rightists,” including 421 students. By the end of October in 1957, Beida classified 526 “rightists,” including 90 faculty and staff. After another round of classification, at the end of January of 1958, the number of “rightists” reached 699, including 110 faculty and staff, and 589 students when the overall student number was 8,110.⁶⁹⁴

Aftermath

⁶⁹¹ Wang Xuezheng, *Beijing daxue jishi (1898-1997)* [Chronology of Peking University] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2008), 628.

⁶⁹² Yue Daiyun, *To the Storm*, 32.

⁶⁹³ Ma Si, *Fuji yanyuan*, 461.

⁶⁹⁴ Wang Xuezheng, *Beijing daxue jishi*, 632.

The increasing number of “rightists” posed a challenge to the authorities regarding how to punish these people, for they had not committed any crime legally speaking and thus there were no precedent laws to trial them. Even the state had to admit indirectly: “Ordinary methods of persuasion and education bear no effect on these undesirable characters. Nor can the simple method of punishment be adopted.”⁶⁹⁵ The best way to transform them, as well as to provide them a way of living, was “laojiao,” or education through labor, approved by the People’s Congress on August 1, 1957. The description of people who should be considered for education through labor did not directly mention “rightists,” but only hinted at them by targeting those who “complain without reason,” and “reactionaries against socialism whose acts do not amount to criminal offences.”⁶⁹⁶ The same day when the decision came out on August 4, 1957, *People’s Daily* published an editorial entitled “Why Do We Need to Carry out Education through Labor,” in which it referred to “rightists” along with other “bad elements,” such as thieves, frauds, and rascals. It also distinguished “laojiao” from “laogai,” which literally means transformation through labor, and which targeted criminals. In practice, however, “rightists” were subjected to both punishments depending on what they had done.

More specific principles regarding punishment of “rightists” among college students came from the Party Center on January 19, 1958. It categorized “rightists” into four scenarios:

1. A very small number of “extreme rightists” should be expelled from schools. These students have abominable conduct that caused hatred among the masses, and they refuse to repent. After being expelled, they should be sent to education through labor;
2. About 30 percent of “rightists” should keep their school records, but be sent to the countryside or other places to work under supervised probation.
3. About 70 percent of “rightists” should stay at schools and continue their study either under supervised probation, or be exempt from punishment.⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁵ “Why Do We Need to Carry out Education through Labor,” *People’s Daily*, August 4, 1957. Translation from Das, *China’s Hundred Weeds*, 146.

⁶⁹⁶ “People’s Congress’s Decision on Education through Labor,” *People’s Daily*, August 4, 1957.

⁶⁹⁷ Shen Zhihua, *Sikao yu xuanze*, 686. Originally from Yunnan provincial archives, 2-1-3195, 10-11.

It is difficult to know whether local cadres followed these principles. Jiang Zhihu, a Beida “rightist,” described almost the same situations that had been applied to his fellows. One might think that physical labor was a worse punishment than being marginalized on campus, but some witnesses told the opposite. Many “rightist” students found that workers and peasants were actually less hostile toward them than their fellow intellectuals. Even though “rightist” students who stayed in schools after the Anti-Rightist Campaign could take the same classes with others, their politics class, which was more important than their major classes, would automatically receive a failing grade just because of their labels.⁶⁹⁸ Yue Daiyun, the junior faculty in the Chinese department, overheard a chat between a Beida Russian literature teacher and a nanny:

The teacher: “Don’t you know she is a rightist, an enemy of the people? Don’t be so nice to her; you must draw a line to separate yourself. These rightists want to overturn our government and make the peasants suffer again.” Yang Dama replied firmly, “I don’t know a rightist from a leftist, I don’t care about such things, and besides, she [referring to Yue Daiyun] asked me to help you, don’t you realize that?”⁶⁹⁹

Yue concluded that peasants and workers could be more humane than intellectuals when it came to class struggle. The label of “rightists,” as well as the class of “petty bourgeoisie,” was imposed by the Communist authorities, which ironically had a more difficult time to sell among “proletarians” – workers and peasants than among the intellectuals.

Besides “rightists” themselves, family members also suffered as a result. Many relationships had to come to an end, as a way to draw a line from “rightists.” If love prevailed, one had to move with the “rightist” partner to remote areas or stayed in a long-distance relationship for the next decade or so. Under social pressure, tensions occurred between “rightist” and non-“rightist” family members. Children of “rightists” were subjected to discrimination, though with little understanding of what “rightists” actually meant. Those who

⁶⁹⁸ Physics student grades of 1958-1959, Yunnan University archives, 1958.

⁶⁹⁹ Yue Daiyun, *To the Storm*, 51.

were not labeled “rightists,” but fell into similar categories, such as “right-centrists” and “anti-socialists” experienced the same, if not worse.

Treatment of “rightists” somewhat improved after 1959. On September 17 of that year, in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Communist takeover, the CCP Central Committee decided to remove ten percent of “rightist” labels among 450,000 classified “rightists” by then. At that time, the authorities stated that 20-30 percent of “rightists” had completely repented, 50-60 percent of “rightists” expressed their will to repent, but they were not convinced in heart, and 20 percent of “rightists” refused to change and stood firm on the reactionary ground.⁷⁰⁰ But removing the label had no immediate change on people’s attitude toward “rightists,” who continued to be treated as “castoff rightists (*zhaimao youpai*),” as they suffered through the Cultural Revolution.

Any benefits of the Anti-Rightist Campaign came at the sacrifice of “rightist” lives. As Mao mentioned at a talk on May 20, 1958, “to have 300,000 rightists is a good thing, because they have awakened 600 million people.”⁷⁰¹ Then on July 16, 1958, Deng Xiaoping said at the National United Front working conference, “Whatever happens, the leftists and the centrists are on the rise, and things continue to move in the right direction.”⁷⁰² “Leftists” were mostly challenged in the Rectification period, but they became judges of critics in the Anti-Rightist Campaign. Thus they were more likely to benefit from the campaign and gain more political reliability, which only lasted till the next campaign.

Side effects of the Anti-Rightist Campaign were palpable among non-“rightists.” As Mao reflected in April 1962, “when the rightists savagely attacked [us], we had no choice but to

⁷⁰⁰ September 17, 1959, *Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian*, v. 12, 572-573.

⁷⁰¹ *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui* [Long Life Mao Zedong Thoughts] (Beijing, 1969), 215.

⁷⁰² Chung, *China Quarterly*, 410. Originally from “Comrade Deng Xiaoping’s speech in the National United Front works conference,” document no. 216/1/122, Guangdong provincial archive, 4.

counterattack ... but the downside is that people did not dare to speak.”⁷⁰³ The silencing effect was particularly visible among intellectuals, as political scientist Das accurately portrays:

The accusations against the “erring” intellectuals reminded others, not caught in the campaign, of their own vulnerability, and led them to conformity in public expression and to forced withdrawal from intellectual pursuits. Intellectuals, by and large, evaded expressing their views on controversial issues; many took refuge in non-controversial Chinese classics, and younger people turned themselves away from politics to pornography.⁷⁰⁴

In conclusion, the Anti-Rightist Campaign not only targeted “rightists,” but also classified everyone into “leftists,” “centrists,” and “rightists” as a way to measure people’s political reliability. These labels had little to do with people’s ideology or self-identification, but they meant to intensify divisions within each school or work unit, and politicize personal relations as class struggles. The criteria and quota of classification were ambiguous and difficult for local cadres to figure out by themselves, which left space for manipulation and mislabeling. Certain factors, such as class background and being a graduating senior, affected a college student’s likelihood of becoming “rightist,” but no factors were decisive. Both “leftists” and “centrists” were complicit in classifying “rightists” due to their alliance, voluntary or forced, with the Party and their silence. The classification was by no means static but fluid, making everyone insecure about who would be the next “rightist” long after the Rectification period of May 1957. Ultimately, political campaigns in the Mao era not only victimized targeted group, no matter what label, but also made everyone vulnerable and complicit in victimizing the others.

While “rightists” were losing hope of rehabilitation after being marginalized for two decades, the end of the Cultural Revolution following Mao’s death seemed to provide a sign of optimism. How did the authorities re-evaluate Mao’s political campaigns in the post-Mao era,

⁷⁰³ Pang Xianzhi, Jin Chongji, eds., *Mao Zedong zhuan (1949-1976)* [Biography of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), v.2, 1214.

⁷⁰⁴ Das, *China’s Hundred Weeds*, 192. Original source from *Wenhui Daily*, January 24, 1958.

and how have the victims of Mao's campaigns been challenging such re-evaluation since the 1980s? These will be the questions for my next, and last, chapter.

CHAPTER 8

EPILOGUE: THE PAST HAS NOT PASSED

For the last chapter of my dissertation, I end with a discussion on two major questions: how student activism and the political campaigns of 1957 has been re-evaluated by the authorities and participants alike, and how that episode of contentious politics has continued to be a sensitive matter in present-day China. This chapter starts with an analysis of the Party document regarding reassessment of Chinese history under Mao from 1949 to 1976, as well as responses to such re-evaluation. Then I share my fieldwork adventure, especially my oral history interviews with college students in 1957, as a way to shed light on identity formation among former “rightists” and state suppression of such group. Last I reflect on contemporary efforts to shape the historical narrative of 1957 in the year of its sixtieth anniversary.

Re-Evaluation of the Anti-Rightist Campaign

After the Cultural Revolution, China went through a power transition period. Deng Xiaoping did not secure the top seat until after outmaneuvering Hua Guofeng in 1978. Hua was Mao’s designated successor who insisted on continuing the Maoist line. In addition to economic reform, an urgent issue Deng had to deal with was to rehabilitate victims of Mao’s political campaigns, as well as to re-evaluate the contributions and mistakes of Mao’s rule between 1949 and 1976.

After multiple drafts from March 1980 to June 1981 with Deng Xiaoping in charge, the official Party document that came out was entitled “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China.” The Resolution

made two conclusions: Mao's achievements outshined his errors, and China under socialism between 1949 and 1981 had made major progress except during the Cultural Revolution. In particular, the Resolution summarized the core of so-called "Mao Zedong Thoughts:" truth-seeking, mass line, and self-reliance.

The relevant part of the Resolution is the re-evaluation of what happened in 1957 regarding the Rectification and the Anti-Rightist Campaigns:

To start a rectification campaign throughout the Party in that year and urge the masses to offer criticisms and suggestions were normal steps in developing socialist democracy. In the rectification campaign a handful of bourgeois Rightists seized the opportunity to advocate what they called "speaking out and airing views in a big way" and to mount a wild attack against the Party and the nascent socialist system in an attempt to replace the leadership of the Communist Party. It was therefore entirely correct and necessary to launch a resolute counter-attack. But the scope of this struggle was made far too broad and a number of intellectuals, patriotic people and Party cadres were unjustifiably labeled "Rightists", with unfortunate consequences.⁷⁰⁵

This statement is worth examining sentence by sentence. First, referring to the rectification campaign as "normal steps" was because that there were prior examples, including the Yan'an Rectification of 1942-43, one in rural underground Party organizations of 1947-48 and a third Party-wide rectification in 1950. The first one was the most known, partly because it ended with many people being alleged spies, though it helped establish Mao's leadership in the Party. But the 1957 Rectification was unlike all the previous cases. What made it not "normal" was that instead of an intra-Party campaign, for the first time the rectification was extended to people outside the Party, thus involving a much greater number of people, and therefore it was named an "open-door rectification."

⁷⁰⁵ Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China, 1981, *Chinese Communism Subject Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/history/01.htm>

Second, to say “a handful of bourgeois Rightists” could be misleading. Maybe it considered that the average five percentage of “rightist” quota was small, but many work units, including universities, had much higher percentage of “rightists.” By the official account, though disputed by others, the number of labeled “rightists” exceeded 550,000 out of a population of 635 million, which was not just “a handful.” Many factory workers and peasants who suffered in the Anti-Rightist Campaign were not labeled “rightists,” but “anti-socialists.” Also, the term “speaking out and airing views in a big way (*daming dafang*)” was not only used by “rightists,” but also adopted by the authorities, as it was even considered one of the four basic rights in the 1975 constitution. I have argued throughout my dissertation that almost all students and other intellectuals were not attempting to replace the Party leadership. This was a misjudgment on the part of the authorities, and overkill against people who mostly trusted and supported the Party.

Third, asserting that the Anti-Rightist Campaign was “entirely correct and necessary” while the only problem was that the scope “was made far too broad” disregarded the percentage of people who were negatively, or what the state would acknowledge as “mistakenly” affected. In fact, more than 99 percent of “rightist” labels were considered wrong and therefore removed as late as the 1990s, leaving 96 “rightists” out of over 550,000 till today.⁷⁰⁶ Did the authorities keep the 96 “rightist” labels to prove the correctness and necessity of the Anti-Rightist Campaign? And even if this tiny number of outspoken critics deserved to be “rightists,” it could not justify the extensive number of people who were wrongly accused.

Before further questioning the state re-evaluation, one needs some perspective on the dramatic increase of “rightists.” Nationwide, the number of “rightists” after the summer of 1957

⁷⁰⁶ Guo Daohui, “Mao Zedong fadong zhengfeng de chuzhong [Mao’s Original Intention of Launching the Rectification],” *Yanhuang chunqiu* (Beijing: Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 2009), no. 2, 10.

grew exponentially. In July 1957 before the Qingdao conference, the number of “rightists” was less than 10,000. Then by October 1957 at the CCP’s third plenum of the eighth congress, the number reached 150,000. Again during winter break of January 1958, the number of “rightists” increased 100,000 among middle and elementary school teachers. By April 1958, Mao announced the number of “rightists” was 300,000.⁷⁰⁷ Then in September 1959, the guidelines regarding taking off the “rightist” hat for those who have genuinely repented indicated that there were about 450,000 “rightists.”⁷⁰⁸ Finally in May 1980, a report from the Central United Front Bureau said that there were 490,000 “rightists” in the Anti-Rightist struggle, and it gradually increased to over 550,000.⁷⁰⁹ Out of the total number of “rightists,” those who were first classified as “rightists” in the summer of 1957 were merely two percent. Over half a million “rightists” nationwide definitely exceeded what Mao had originally anticipated – 4,000 – on June 19, 1957.

Reasons for the growing number of “rightists” were not only because multiple rounds of classification within the same work units, but also because the Rectification and the Anti-Rightist Campaigns took place on different timelines at various administrative levels. It started at the central bureaucracy, provincial- and municipal-level agencies, and universities. Then it moved down the hierarchy and extended to county- and sub-county-level agencies, secondary and elementary schools.⁷¹⁰ A third explanation had to do with the nature of ideological transformation. As Deng Xiaoping’s report to the CCP’s third plenum indicated, the struggle against “rightists” would continue even after the campaign ended:

⁷⁰⁷ Shen Zhihua, *Sikao yu xuanze*, 661-662.

⁷⁰⁸ Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu zhaidiao qushi huigai de youpaifenzi de maozi de zhishi [CCP Center’s Guidelines on Taking off the “Rightist” Hat for Those Who Have Genuinely Repented], September 17, 1959, *Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian*, v. 12, 572.

⁷⁰⁹ Zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi ed., *Sanzhong quanhui yilai zhongyao wenxian huibian* [Selected Collection of Important Documents since the 3rd Plenum], v.1 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1982), 605.

⁷¹⁰ Cao Shuji, *Maoism at the Grassroots*, 78, 100.

When we say that the anti-rightist struggle has reached a certain stage, we mean that all the rightists have been exposed, criticized and isolated, and the majority of the rightists have been made to bow before the masses and admit their crimes. We do not say that the review of, and admissions by all the rightists have been carried to a state of thorough completion. There must be a portion of the rightists who will not repent, and they must bring their reactionary viewpoints with them to their graves. The majority of the rightists will also not really change themselves within a short time. But as long as they are isolated from the masses, our struggle has been successful... The ideological transformation of the intellectuals is a long-term task, likely to take another ten or more years to complete.⁷¹¹

Indeed, even after the Anti-Rightist Campaign had ended, those labeled “rightists” became constant suspects in future political campaigns. In the Cultural Revolution, “rightists” were one of the “five black classes” along with landlords, rich peasants, reactionaries, and scoundrels. It was not until after the Cultural Revolution that the authorities re-evaluated the Anti-Rightist Campaign, and most “rightist” labels were considered a mistake.

One might wonder why the state narrative insists that the Anti-Rightist Campaign was necessary but excessive despite the overwhelming number of people who were falsely accused. It turned out that Deng Xiaoping, who was head of the Central Secretariat, was directly involved in the execution of the Anti-Rightist purges. Now as someone who controlled the assessment of this controversial campaign, it was unsurprising that Deng would continue to insist on its legitimacy.⁷¹²

Though the process of removal, or what the authorities called “taking off the rightist hat,” had started in 1958, most remained “rightists” or “castoff rightists” and continued to suffer in the Cultural Revolution. It was not until 1978 that the central authorities approved to implement the removal of all “rightist labels,” and assign these “rightists” with proper jobs and benefits – many ended up in colleges, high schools, research institutes and book press. They fought hard to get

⁷¹¹ MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 309-310.

⁷¹² Yen-lin Chung, “The Witch-Hunting Vanguard: The Central Secretariat’s Roles and Activities in the Anti-Rightist Campaign,” *China Quarterly*, (206, June 2011), 391-411.

their “rightist” labels cleared, so that they could be treated as ordinary people. During my fieldwork, several interviewees showed me the document that said their “rightist” label was an error, and it deserved to be corrected. If the moment they became “rightists” was life changing, getting this piece of paper meant to bring their life back on track, except that they had already lost more than twenty years, performing labor unrelated to their professional careers. The years they had spent as “rightists” became a government mistake, with no apologies or compensations.

As I learned from my interviewees, many “rightists” are unsatisfied with the state reassessment of the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the treatment of “rightists.” Some argue that there should be not only corrections (*gaizheng*) on an individual basis, but also redressing (*pingfan*) of the “rightist” category. The former indicates that some “rightist” labels have remained because they were not wrongly placed at first, whereas the latter recognizes that the Anti-Rightist Campaign was a mistake. Others have petitioned schools, local and central authorities for redressing the Anti-Rightist Campaign and have sought compensation for the twenty plus years lost between 1957 and 1979.⁷¹³

My Fieldwork Adventure

During the academic year of 2014-15, I have collected nearly 70 interviews nationwide from college students who went through the political campaigns of 1957, as well as archival sources of classified documents and student journals. Though as a native Chinese person, my fieldwork brought me to places I had never been before. Due to the sensitivity of my subject, my fieldwork had no short of difficulty and unpredictability, though in retrospect it was exciting and productive.

⁷¹³ Du Guang, “youpai” suopei: quanli yishi de juexing [“Rightists” asking for compensation: the awakening of right awareness], 2006, <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/9940.html>; A petition letter by victims and their families, 2005, http://huanghuagang.org/hhgLibrary/july2008/pingfan_youpai.htm

In late August 2014, I started my archival research and interviews in Hong Kong for two reasons. One is that the University Service Center at the Chinese University of Hong Kong has the collection of Internal Reference, the Anti-Rightist Campaign Database, and the *Wenhui Daily*, all of which are crucial to my dissertation. The other is that Wu Yisan, the organizer of the publisher *1957 Academy* which publishes memories and works related to the topic, helped me connect with student “rightists” who were living in Hong Kong. The last day I was there happened to coincide with the first demonstration local students held as part of what later became the Umbrella Movement.

The day after I came back from Hong Kong to Beijing, my father received a phone call from the secret police, which met him later that day to warn me against interviewing Wang Shuyao, a then 78-year-old guy who went to Beida in the late 1950s. He is one of the most active student “rightists” nowadays. It is most likely that the secret police censored Wang’s email account, from which they saw my email to him back in July. The fact that they reached out to my father instead of to me directly showed not only their power, but also the patriarchal mindset they had in expecting that I would succumb to familial pressure. Originally I planned to start my interview with Wang and then move onto his schoolmates, but now I had to think of other ways, if not staying quiet for a while.

So I looked for student “rightists” who were relatively off the radar. One of my interviewees in Beijing was Gan Cui, a student from People’s University who was labeled “rightist.” He was known for being a boyfriend of Lin Zhao in 1958, when both of them were working in the school library as “rightists” waiting to be punished. Lin was a Chinese literature major at Beida, where she attracted many male classmates for her talent. Lin only became more critical of the Party after the Anti-Rightist Campaign, and eventually she was executed in the

Cultural Revolution. This one-year relationship cost Gan two decades of hard labor in Xinjiang province of northwest China, during which Gan never saw Lin. During my interview, Gan showed me his handwritten copy of Lin's blood letters from prison. As a gift, he gave me a photo of the two at Jingshan Park, taken in 1958 when they were both 26 years old. In return, I took a photo with Gan and promised to visit again with the photo.

I failed to meet my promise, because a month after I interviewed Gan, he passed away in his sleep in October. I felt obligated to attend his funeral, though I had no family connections with him and I only met him once. At the funeral, I was not the only non-relative, as a dozen "rightist" friends showed up as well. Some were curious to see a young person like me and asked about my connection with Gan. It turned out that some of Gan's "rightist" friends had been organizing monthly gatherings among "rightists" and their descendants or friends since 2007, which was the fifth anniversary of the Anti-Rightist Campaign. After hearing about my project, they invited me to their next lunch meeting.

At the first lunch gathering I went in November, I was more than happy that Wang Shuyao showed up, the person who I thought I might have no chance to meet. We shook hands for a long time, sat down together, and arranged a time for interview on the following week with no need for calls or emails. The lunch meeting became the best networking opportunity for me to secure interview contacts. I believe that there is always a way to get around, even when it comes to the Chinese secret police, which never returned long after I had done the interview with Wang. The secret police might be omnipresent, but not omnipotent.

Reflections on the Present

In comparison to the Cultural Revolution, the Anti-Rightist Campaign is much less known in the west. So one might wonder why are the political campaigns of 1957 still sensitive and controversial in China today? I can think of at least three reasons. First, the official verdict of the Anti-Rightist Campaign analyzed above has not been changed since 1981, and it does not seem like the authorities will revisit the issue any time soon. A re-evaluation of the 1957 events will put Maoist-style mass campaigns as well as leaders like Deng Xiaoping into question. Any challenge to the official narrative of history has been considered “historical nihilism.”⁷¹⁴

Second, people who were in charge of or who benefited from the Anti-Rightist Campaign tend to be in much more powerful positions or enjoy better lives than those who were victimized. Thus they have more incentive to keep the current official reassessment than to reflect on their own involvement in 1957 and acknowledge their share of victimization. In their memoirs, the Anti-Rightist Campaign was rarely mentioned, or happened in passing. An exceptional case was Zhu Rongji, a “rightist” who later served as the fifth premier of the PRC between 1998 and 2003. But Zhu refused to talk about his “rightist” experience in a 1998 press conference, and he did not mention any details in his memoirs.⁷¹⁵

Third, in recent years former “rightist” have published memoirs about their misfortunes and sufferings since 1957. They have attempted to gain more public attention to the injustice of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, as well as the continuing problems that they had raised over sixty years ago. In comparison to victims of other political campaigns that aimed at other social groups, the “rightist” group was probably the most educated, and therefore best at making their

⁷¹⁴ Nihil sine Xi, China Is Struggling to Keep Control over Its Version of the Past, *The Economist*, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/china/21709321-battle-raging-realm-historiography-china-struggling-keep-control-over-its>

⁷¹⁵ Zhao Ling, Zhu Rongji 1958nian bei dacheng “youpai” 20nian hou cai pingfan [Zhu Rongji was labeled “rightist” in 1958, and did not get rectified until twenty years later], *ifeng.com*, 2012, http://news.ifeng.com/history/zhongguoxiandaishi/detail_2012_11/08/18945210_0.shtml; Zhu Rongji, *Zhu Rongji jianghua shilu* [Records of Zhu Rongji’s Talks] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2011).

voice heard. Meanwhile, these outspoken intellectuals have become targets of the secret police, which would watch closely of their moves.

Following the last point, it is worth noting the identity formation among the “rightists” and their changing perception of being “rightists.” Back in 1957, most people who were labeled “rightists” felt they were wrongly accused, and they could not fathom why their comments would lead to such harsh punishment. Decades later, they take the “rightist” title with pride, as they believe they were on the right side of history in pointing out problems of the Party system at its early stage. Though they were not anti-Party in 1957, they have become much more critical of the authorities, and some even trace the problems to its theoretical origin - Marxism.⁷¹⁶ These “rightists” might not know each other when they were labeled, but many became friends working in the same labor camps. Student “rightists” would also see each other and their fellow classmates during school reunions. Contemporary gatherings among “rightists” in Beijing, Chengdu, Kunming and Hangzhou also contribute to their collective identity.⁷¹⁷

As for non-“rightist” students, I have to admit that my interviewees who fall into this category are very much self-selected, as not many of them are willing to talk about their experience in 1957, not to mention to reflect upon their responsibility in victimizing the others. Two interviewees were involved in writing articles that attacked “rightists,” and they not only showed me their original works, but also expressed their regret for being a mouthpiece of the authorities.⁷¹⁸ Two others were Party members and student cadres who were responsible of

⁷¹⁶ Interview with Feng Zhixuan, November 20, 2014.

⁷¹⁷ I have only been to gatherings in Beijing, but I have heard from my interviewees that similar gatherings have taken place in other cities.

⁷¹⁸ Interviews with Jin Pusen, October 10, 2014; Wang Dehou, March 1st, 2015. Jin was a student at Zhejiang Normal College, and Wang was a student at Beishida.

classifying fellow classmates. Both of them claimed to keep the number of “rightists” in their class as low as possible, and maintain a good relation with all classmates till today.⁷¹⁹

The Sixtieth Anniversary

As the year 2017 marks the sixtieth anniversary of the Hundred Flowers and Anti-Rightist Campaigns, there have been both commemorations and suppression of such initiatives. In late February in Hong Kong, there was a screening of *Jiabiangou Elegy*, a documentary about a labor camp in Gansu province of northwest China where more than 2,000 “rightists” and other counter-revolutionaries starved to death between 1957 and 1960. Its director was Ai Xiaoming, a retired Chinese literature professor who has turned herself into a documentarian. She was not allowed to go to Hong Kong for the screening, and she had been interrogated by local police several times. Some of her interviewees were also approached by the secret police.⁷²⁰

A month later in late March, and again in Hong Kong, an academic conference was scheduled for the sixtieth anniversary. Days before that, the conference organizer Chen Yulin was arrested at the Shenzhen custom, during which he made a compromise not showing the characters “Anti-Rightist” at the conference. Besides this incident, the conference location was forced to change a few times, as the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the City University of Hong Kong both withdrew sponsorship under pressure. Despite all difficulties about 50 to 60 people attended the conference, including twenty former “rightists.”⁷²¹

⁷¹⁹ Interviews with Xie Mian, October 22, 2014; Fu Dehui, November 27, 2014. Xie was a student at Beida, and Fu was a student at Beishida.

⁷²⁰ Hai Yan, Jilupian jiabiangou jishi daoyan chi gong’an saorao shoufangzhe [Director of Documentary Jiabiangou Elegy Accused the Police for Disturbing Interviewees], *Voice of America*, March 16, 2017, <http://www.voachinese.com/a/Ai-Xiaoming-Director-of-anti-rightist-documentary-harassed-20170316/3768636.html>

⁷²¹ Jiang Xue, Fanyou 60nian: baifa laorenmen yu shuobujin de gushi [60th year of the Anti-Rightist: white-haired old fellows and their endless stories] *The Initium*, April 5, 2017, <https://theinitium.com/article/20170405-notes-anti-rightist-60th/>

On May 4, 2017, Beida celebrated its 119 anniversary. On the same day, Beida student “rightists” commemorated their anniversary at one of the dining halls on campus. Under the school banner “Welcome Beida alumni back on campus,” these student “rightists” showed their own: “Commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Beida May 19 rightist democracy movement” and “Denouncing the heinous extension of the Anti-Rightist Campaign.” No school authorities deterred them from presenting the banners, nor did they stop Wang Shuyao, the student “rightist” who I was warned against interviewing, from reading a script that introduced the punishment and death among Beida student “rightists.”⁷²²

While reading the news above on the Internet, I feel personally connected with all the stories and protagonists behind. I have interviewed Ai Xiaoming in late October 2014, when she just returned from a trip to Jiabiangou and started editing the film. Her documentaries touch on a series of edgy topics, from Chinese feminists to victims of the 2008 earthquake. Chen Yulin was one of my first interviewees in Hong Kong, as he was a student “rightist” at Beijing Foreign Language College. I am happy to see that the 1957 Academy was able to host the conference in Hong Kong, which might be the only one of its kind this year. As for the Beida student “rightists” who gathered on campus, several of them were my interviewees, including Bo Shengwu, Shen Zhiyong, and Yu Qingshu besides Wang Shuyao. Their choice of the date and the wording of the banners best exemplified their agency in framing their own movement and identifying with student activism of the May Fourth generation.

All three examples above represent a continued grassroots effort to challenge the official narrative of the 1957 events, restore the history that has been suppressed, and retell the past to future generations. I hope that this dissertation also contributes to the same effort.

⁷²² Sang Zidi, Beida lao youpai fanxiao jihui, qianze zhonggong fanyou yundong [Beida former “rightists” returned on campus, denouncing the CCP’s Anti-Rightist Campaign], *DWNews.com*, May 10, 2017, <http://china.dwnews.com/news/2017-05-10/59814500.html>

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APPENDIX INTERVIEW LIST

2014

Beijing

July 31 Qian Liqun from Beida

Hong Kong

August 25 Chen Yulin (penname Shen Yuan) from Beijing Language College

August 26 Cen Chaonan from Beida

August 27 Wu Yisan, manager of the 57 Association Hong Kong

August 29 Zhang Chengjue

Beijing

September 11 "Baimaoxiangu"

September 15 Gan Cui Renda from Renda (passed away in October, 2014)

Weifang, Shandong province

October 4 Chen Fengxiao from Beida

Qingdao, Shandong province

October 5 Tan Tianrong from Beida

Shanghai

October 7 Hu Bawei from Beida

Hangzhou, Zhejiang province

October 10 Jin Pusen from Zhejiang Normal College

Beijing

October 17 Yan Dunfu from Beida

October 22 Xie Mian from Beida

Wuhan, Hubei province

October 27 Cheng Keyi from Wuda (passed away in April, 2015)

October 28 Zhou Shabai from Beishida

October 31 Zhang Lianggao from Huazhong Science and Technology (passed away in January, 2015)

Tianjin

November 7 Fan Yihao from Beishida

Beijing

November 16 Wang Shuyao from Beida

November 17 Bo Shengwu from Beida

November 19 Wang Guoxiang from Beida

November 21 Wang Chuanye from Beishida
November 21 Huang Dadi (son of Huang Yaomian) from Beishida
November 22 Zhu Yaqing from Beijing Normal
November 27 Fu Dehui Beijing Normal
December 1 Wang Xingzhi from Shandong University
December 6 Shen Zhiyong from Beida
December 9 Ji Zengshan from Beida
December 10 Huang Guanhong (son of Huang Wanli, who was Qinghua professor)
Wen Guangyan from Haerbin Military and Engineering College
December 11 Zhang Jiong from Beida
December 12 Wu Meichao from Shanghai Jiaotong University
December 13 Zhang Shufen, a high school teacher
December 18 Yao Renjie from Beida
December 22 Gao Hongfan, publisher editor
December 24 Wan Yaoqiu from Beida

2015

Hong Kong

January 10 Wang Ming from Beida

Kunming, Yunnan province

January 17 Yan Lingling's husband, a student from Central Academy of Arts

January 18 Bai Zushi from Yunda

January 19 Du Yuting from Yunda

January 21 Gao Wenjiang from Kunming Science and Technology

Yu Xiangsheng from Yunda

Zhou Lingyun from Yunda

January 22 Shangguan Danyu from Chengdu Science and Technology

Yang Wenhan from Wuda

Chengdu, Sichuan province

January 28 Yang Lu from Beida

February 1 Sun Chuanyi from Beida

Kunming, Yunnan province

February 2 Shangguan Danyu (second visit)

February 3 Chen Changchi from Yunnan Normal University

Xie Benshu from Yunda

February 4 Wan Fulin from Yunda

February 5 Li Shiwen from Yunda

Tianjin

February 16 Sun Baozong from Tsinghua, passed away in November, 2015

Beijing

February 20 Zhang Zuwu from Beishida

February 26 Huang Dadi (second visit)
March 1 Wang Dehou from Beishida
March 10 Yu Qingshui from Beida
March 19 Li Shuxian from Beida (via Skype, Li in Arizon)
March 31 Zhang Jingzhong from Beida (via Skype, Zhang in Guangzhou)

Shanghai
September 5 Hu Bowei (second visit)

Wuhan, Hubei province
September 7 Zhou Bo from Wuda
September 7 Zhang Zhenqiang from Nankai University
September 8 Cheng Keyi's classmate

2016
Los Angeles, California
January Wang Zhizeng from Beida