



Grassroots Turmoil in China's Cultural Revolution: A Half-Century Perspective

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Almost exactly half a century ago, starting in the middle of 1966, Mao Zedong unexpectedly launched the Cultural Revolution, and China became wracked for two years by violent grassroots struggles between armed groups of students, workers, and farmers. The turmoil lasted up into the latter half of 1968, when the Chinese army, obeying Mao's orders, suppressed the conflicts and restored order. Thereafter, repressive order prevailed up through Mao's death eight years later.

This Morrison Lecture focuses on that extraordinary two-year period from mid-1966 to mid-1968. Back when I was in my twenties, along with a few other young researchers I felt curious about the reasons for the turmoil. As a result, starting in the mid-1970s, when I was a PhD student interviewing Chinese emigrants in Hong Kong, I began to ask questions about what they personally had experienced, and about their attitudes during those years. My wife Anita Chan, who is also a China researcher, did the same, and I have had access

to her interviews. From the mid-1970s into the early 1980s, we amassed well over two hundred interview transcripts that relate to what interviewees had personally experienced and what they knew about grassroots Cultural Revolution allegiances in their local area. Even later, when I travelled through Chinese villages interviewing about rural life, I sneaked in questions, when I could, with older farmers.

I also have had access to lots of the newsletters of student Red Guard groups and worker groups, but early on I discovered that the newsletters largely deliberately hid the authors' personal interests and grievances. People during that period were not *supposed* to be concerned about their personal interests, and so when they wrote they pretended they were just loyal followers of Chairman Mao with no personal interests at stake. Consequently, back in the 1970s and 1980s we largely relied on interviewing people, to hear from their own lips what their and their mates' attitudes, grievances and motives had been.

What we discovered was that the Cultural Revolution fighting provided a window into the hidden tensions and antagonisms in Chinese society in the years leading up to the Cultural Revolution. Socio-economic groups who were disgruntled with their pre-Cultural Revolution situations came into conflict with groups that wished to preserve the *status quo*. In almost all societies such tensions normally remain submerged and never surface. But in China they exploded into open conflict in 1966 and 1967 when Mao called on people to rise up to defend his political line by attacking others locally who supposedly were opposed to Mao's wishes.

There were a substantial number of different types of upheavals in different sectors of society—and violence erupted *within* each for somewhat different reasons. So my topic this evening needs to be addressed separately for each of the sectors.

Upheavals in Urban High Schools

Let us first examine the famous student 'Red Guards'. I did the most interviews in the 1970s with émigrés who had been high school students when the Cultural Revolution began. What I learned from them was that years of growing tensions at their high schools had boiled over in the first half year of the Cultural Revolution. [1]

The government had laid down three types of criteria for determining who would win admission to university. One, of course, was academic achievement, since the government wanted bright very well-prepared experts for China's economic development. The children

of the educated professionals generally performed the best academically; but letting so many of the university places go to such children would have gone against the Party's principle of redistributing opportunities in favour of the previously deprived classes. Therefore, not only academic achievement had to be counted, but also a student's so-called 'class origin'.

Inherited "Class" Labels

Red Class

Children of Party officials

Pre-1949 blue-collar workers and poor peasants

Middling Class Origins (*yibandeng jiejie chengfen*)

Pre-1949 peddler, clerk, middle-peasant etc. families

Educated white-collar & professional families

Bad Class

Capitalist, landlord, Rightist, criminal, etc. family origins

As can be seen here, each family had an official 'class' label, based on the father's occupation before the Communists had come to power. The families of pre-1949 industrial workers and poor peasants were labelled 'good class' or 'red class'. At the very top of the red classes were family heads who had participated in the revolution as Communist army officers and officials. The idea was that they had the greatest devotion to the revolution, and that their children had inherited this.

The families of the pre-1949 professionals, white-collar workers, peddlers, and peasants who had owned their own land were labelled as middling-class, neither entirely to be trusted nor discriminated against. And the so-called 'bad-class' labels were held by the families of former capitalists and landlords and the families of people who had been officially condemned and punished in previous decades for opposing the Party. Since these 'class' labels were inherited, to a certain degree China had become a **caste** society.

The inherited 'class' labels were examined for university admission, in the equivalent of a strong 'affirmative action' program that favoured the red classes.

Importantly, there was also a third criterion for admission: a student's personal commitment to the revolutionary cause, expressed through a student's so-called 'political activism' at school. And this was judged in terms of whether a student had been accepted into the classroom's Communist Youth League branch (Shirk 1982; Unger 1982).

Academic success was determined solely by a nation-wide university entrance examination, so cooperate with each other when preparing for the national examinations. And 'class labels' were fixed at birth, so students could not compete to improve their own label. But each classroom was given a limited quota as to how many classmates could be admitted to the Communist Youth League each year; and by senior high school the choice was largely held by the students in the class who were already League members. Ambitious students therefore tried to curry favour with their classmates who already belonged, while competing against the other classmates to get admitted. That entailed acting out their political devotion. The intense competition usually led to hypocritical trivialised efforts, such as writing a diary filled with expressions of revolutionary devotion and leaving the pages open for others to glimpse. Interviewees said they had felt embarrassed by their own and others' efforts, and many of them yearned for an opportunity to prove their sincerity and devotion to the revolution in a *grand* way. The eruption of the Cultural Revolution would provide them with that grand opportunity, sometimes at risk to their own lives.

The tensions were particularly great at the elite high schools. These schools used the same criteria as the universities to admit students, and they contained a disproportionate number of the sons and daughters of Party officials and the brightest children of university-educated middling-class people. At these schools, when the students from the educated families tried to highlight their political devotion, red-class classmates often scoffed at them, saying that as middling-class people they had no reason to be grateful to the Party, and that they should be rejected by the classroom's Communist Youth League.

The students of middling-class families were disturbed by policies introduced in the mid-1960s that gave increased priority in Communist Youth League admissions to students of red-class origins. They were becoming frustrated about both their career prospects and—also important to them—their chances of ever proving their political devotion. In these

circumstances, amid rising tensions among students, the official policy in 1965 swung again, in the realisation that millions of students of non-red family background were becoming discouraged at their chances of ever proving their activist political devotion. The new policy in 1965-66, on the very eve of the Cultural Revolution, was to give increased chances again for the middling-class students to enter the Communist Youth League. This in turn angered the red-class students.

When Mao launched the Cultural Revolution in May 1966, the initial thrust of it attacked so-called 'reactionary bourgeois authorities' and 'white experts'. The high-school students of red-family origin took advantage of this. They began attacking and even beating up teachers of bad-class origin and school principals who had prioritised academic achievement. [2] These red-class kids formed groups that were called Red Guards, and they excluded non-red-origin students from joining these, as being untrustworthy.

Mao Zedong soon decided, in the autumn of 1966, that his campaign was becoming mired in the attacks against powerless low-level teachers and people of bad-class background. So Mao suddenly shifted his Cultural Revolution campaign to instead largely attack so-called 'capitalist roaders in the Party': that is, Party leaders at all levels whom Mao held suspicions against. The middling-class high-school students were delighted at this turn of events. They formed their own Red Guard groups and launched charges against *local* Party leaders—a group that, not coincidentally, included many of the parents of their red-class schoolmates. Violent clashes between the opposing Red Guard groups erupted, and in particular at the elite high schools where students had most vigorously and antagonistically been competing to get into a university.

Anita Chan, Stanley Rosen, and I conducted a survey in the mid-1970s. We collected extensive data in Hong Kong from 74 former high school students from the city of Guangzhou. We asked each of them to recall the backgrounds and Cultural Revolution affiliations of all of their classmates, amounting to some two thousand two hundred high school students in all. Our 74 respondents tended to be very familiar with the circumstances of their classmates. They had all been together year after year in the same classrooms, and when the Cultural Revolution erupted, the students had retained links with the school during the next two years of combat, with some of their classmates as comrades-in-arms and some as enemies.

	Rebel Red Guards	Loyalist Red Guards	Non-participants	Student nos.
Red Class				
Children of Party officials	19%	73%	8%	285
Pre-1949 working class	34%	40%	26%	537
Middling Class Origins				
Pre-1949 peddler, clerk, & professional families	40%	10%	50%	302
Educated white-collar & professional families	61%	7%	32%	664
Bad class				
Capitalist, landlord, Rightist etc. family origins	36%	4%	60%	399

The figures in this Table have been calculated for the Morrison Lecture. They derive from the same survey data used in Anita Chan, Stanley Rosen, and Jonathan Unger, 'Students and Class Warfare'.

The data in the Table is striking. As can be seen, the children of the officials overwhelmingly participated in what became known colloquially as the Loyalist or Conservative Red Guard faction (73 percent), while the middling-class students from educated families gravitated overwhelmingly into the Rebel Red Guard faction (61 percent).

As can also be seen, the blue-collar working-class kids split down the middle in their factional allegiances, with 34 percent in the Rebel camp and 40 percent Loyalists. One reason was that at the mediocre high schools in working-class neighbourhoods, fewer students were competitively trying to climb up into higher education. Most had given up any hopes. The split among students in these working-class schools often was between their classroom's Communist Youth League members, who had stood over their classmates in positions of authority, versus many of the other students, who resented them. But it should also be noted that the working-class students who became Rebel Red Guards tended to form their own groups separate from the Rebel Red Guards of less politically-correct class origins.

It is noticeable in the Table that, compared to middling-class and bad-class students, fewer teenagers of red-class background stayed at home as bystanders. Only 8 percent of the officials' children and only 26 percent of the red-class working class teenagers did so, whereas a higher proportion of middling and bad-class students declined to participate in the factional turmoil. Good-class students realized it was safer for them to participate, as their class labels would help protect them from official retribution if their groups ultimately lost out in the Cultural Revolution.

Half of the blue-collar middling-class students simply stayed at home. Their academic performance usually was no better than the red-class working-class students—and their chances of getting into higher education were worse, since they did not have a good class label. Less ambitious at school before the Cultural Revolution than the children from the educated middling class, a lower proportion of the blue-collar middling-class students were now willing to risk all in the Cultural Revolution violence.

As can also be seen in the Table, *most* of the bad-class high school students similarly stayed at home. Many of them realised from experience that they ultimately would be vulnerable if they participated and would eventually suffer for it.[3]

Many of the ambitious students who did participate not only felt antagonistic toward the opposing students. After the earlier trivial, hypocritical efforts to show their 'political activism' at school, they felt a need to prove to themselves and to others the sincerity of their devotion to the revolution; and in line with Maoist teachings, they also convinced themselves that they were fighting in a black-and-white struggle against an evil cause.



The words on the red banner read: **Revolution is No Crime. To Rebel is Reasonable.** The book that the student Red Guard holds aloft is titled *The Selected Writings of Mao Zedong*.

On the Rebel Red Guard side, as the Rebel students attacked the local Party hierarchy, some of them developed a belief in what they called 'big democracy' (*da minzhu*). It meant that in China's future there should be a right to criticise *local* Party leaders and to help decide local policy through the discussion of ideas.[4] Rebel students felt that this belief marked them off from their enemies, the students in the city's Loyalist faction, who believed more in rule by a top-down Party hierarchy. The students in both factions wanted to think that they were engaged in a sacred cause, in which they themselves were the

defenders of Mao's beliefs. Caught up in such thinking, the students' ardour was all the greater and their resistance stronger against ending the civil war without a victory for their own side.

As these events are about half a century old, they may seem part of a distant history. But that is not the case. They are part of the living memory of the people who today control China. The high school students who participated in these emotional violent clashes are today all in their sixties, and they retain memories of their beliefs and actions of this earlier time. One example is Xi Jinping, the current leader of China, who's the son of a high Communist Party leader. Some of Xi Jinping's views probably were shaped by those two years of Cultural Revolution fighting in his childhood. He and his friends had favoured the Loyalist faction of Red Guards that sought to protect the Party, for which fellow teenagers were shedding blood. It is no surprise that Xi today glorifies Communist Party traditions, is determined above all to preserve Party control of China, and pre-emptively is jailing civil-liberties lawyers and cracking down on dissidents and NGOs.

So, too, many of the heads of China's large companies and China's university professors are often in their sixties and for almost two years fought on one side or another, and they have their own distinct memories.

Even those who were old enough to be university students at the time are today in their late sixties and early seventies. They are still around, and still retain memories from their formative years.

What, then, occurred at the universities?

Universities



This photograph is from Qinghua University, an elite university in Beijing, showing a scene from the very earliest months of the Cultural Revolution. As can be seen, to a dramatic extent the students competed initially to write posters praising Mao or attacking one or another university policy or university leader, or a fallen higher-up leader. In that month it was still a war of words.

In the posters at universities, and later on in the Cultural Revolution, the 'class label' issue that divided the students at elite high schools was never much of an issue. After all, the university students were already 'winners' in the competition to advance through education. They did not need to worry about the same issues of class preferment and tightening university admissions that troubled ambitious high-school students. From the very beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Mao and other top leaders of China personally intervened repeatedly in what occurred at Beijing's universities, and many of the students reacted to these political contingencies of the moment when choosing factions to join. A book by Andrew Walder shows this clearly (Walder 2009),^[5] and several of my own interviews with former university teachers and students from Beijing are in accord with this scenario.

But elsewhere in China, at the universities for which I have information through my interviews, the main divide was between, on the one side, students who were political activists in the Communist Youth League or who had joined the Communist Party, and who had been happy with the pre-Cultural Revolution grassroots *status quo*, versus ordinary non-activist university students. Generally speaking, the activist students became the

Loyalist faction and those with grievances against political activists became the Rebel faction (Unger 2010).

For instance, in the late 1970s I separately interviewed two former university students from Kunming, Yunnan's capital city. They had attended different universities that were located close to each other. The former student from the Yunnan Teachers-Training University told me:

'Before the Cultural Revolution, some students felt they had been 'persecuted'—that is, they'd been afraid of being reported on—while other students were part of the established power as political activists: that is, opportunists who were betraying others in order to climb up. Within their own classroom group, the activists became the Loyalists and the others became the Rebels.'

At his university, the non-activist student group came together in an attack on the university's Party leadership for having discriminated against them. At the nearby university, the opposite occurred: the politically activist students launched an attack on the university leaders for being insufficiently 'red' in outlook.[6]

Factories



The poster's caption reads: Proletarian Revolutionary Rebel Faction, Rise Up United!

There were two different types of causes for the upheavals in China's factories. The first of these reasons is similar to universities—that is, antagonisms that were shaped by the favourable position that had been given prior to the Cultural Revolution to workers who had been 'political activists'. Under Mao, when Chinese factories hired someone, that person was a member of the factory for the rest of his or her life. Workers were dependent on the factory for getting assigned a flat, for getting access to desirable products that were in short supply, such as a bicycle, and even for getting their own children a job. The factories had used this dependency to pressure workers to work harder. They did so by cultivating some workers to become protégés of the factory Party branch, who then set an example by working faster and harder and by volunteering to do free overtime work. This put pressure on the other workers to follow in their wake. The activists were resented, and the fact that the activists got priority access to flats, goods, and promotions was also resented.[7] Also, as a few former factory workers told me, a duty of the political activists was to make reports on other workers.

The resentments of the workers couldn't be expressed—until the Cultural Revolution. When it erupted, factory leaders at all levels came under attack from below, and the

factories' political activists normally rallied to protect the factory heads.[8] Some of the disgruntled workers formed a Rebel faction and fought these Loyalists.

A different cause of upheaval was that some groups of workers had been discriminated against in their pay and work conditions. Some of the most militant members of the rebel worker organisations were temporary workers, apprentices, and the unskilled workers at the larger factories.[9] Notably, the apprentices and temporary workers had the lowest wages, did the most undesirable tasks and, unlike most other workers, were entitled to few or no perks. Many of the temporary workers had been brought in from villages, and had no job security. Within their own factories such groups were desperate for better conditions.

In addition, the *entire* workforces of some factories had very low pay and low status, and the workers there joined the Rebel side *en masse*. According to interviewing that I conducted about the situation in the city of Changsha in Hunan province, the Rebel strongholds among factory workers included the small neighbourhood firms of handicraft workers that had been collectivised in the mid-1950s. These were poorly capitalised operations that, by deliberate government policy, paid particularly low wages. Another group comprised construction workers, also then a low-paying trade, and where traditional wage bonuses had been suppressed in the 1960s. Yet another militant Rebel grouping was composed of transport coolies who hauled freight through city streets. A sizeable percentage of them reportedly had previously been released from labour camps, and they performed this tough very low-paid coolie labour because no one was willing to hire former political and criminal convicts in other lines of work (Unger 1991).

Ranged against the Rebel grouping were much of the workforce from the large factories in heavy industry. Modern heavy industry was viewed by Communist Party ideology as more advanced and glorious than light industry or handicraft industry, and as a result these large factories had been favoured by the government in terms of wages. The Party was also better organised there, and had nurtured more political activists. During the Cultural Revolution upheavals, the Loyalist faction normally predominated in such factories.[10]

At a small liquor distillery in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, where my wife and I interviewed many dozens of workers and retirees during 2002-2004 (Unger et al. 2007), the *entire* workforce had belonged to the rebel faction. The distillery was a very labour-intensive traditional type of factory, with very low wages, very poor housing, and low social

status, to the extent that the young men who worked there had found it hard to get married. *Everyone* there turned to the Rebel faction.[11]

For some of the distillery workers, it was a liberating feeling to participate. One of these, who today is an elderly retiree who was about thirty years old when the Cultural Revolution erupted, looks back at that period with nostalgia. What he told me is the type of statement that I also heard from interviewees in other social sectors:

‘Before the Cultural Revolution there were hidden problems. When our factory leadership said something was one, not two, we could say nothing in response but just had to work more. You could only talk about good things and never about the bad things. In the Cultural Revolution, people talked about anything, without restrictions. People said things they dared not say before. Many things were exposed. If you wanted to say something you said it. Nothing could stop us. It raised people’s thinking. When we talked with each other, we could feel a sense of relief.’

Repeatedly, interviewees who had been high-school Rebel Red Guards recalled a similar strong and at times exhilarating sense of release and freedom from the pre-Cultural Revolution tensions and conformity that they had endured.

Most of the distillery workers, though, had a different type of recollection. Married, with families to look after, they recall that during that period they simply tried to get through the daily grind of life as best they could. In particular, all of the women interviewees looked back at a time of chaotic violence in the streets, constant worries about their children, and personal bafflement. Such feelings are nowhere to be seen in the grassroots newsletters of the Cultural Revolution, nor do they crop up in interviews with former active participants. But these distillery workers’ views presumably were shared by many tens of millions of ordinary middle-aged people across China.

Villages

Let us turn to the villages, where the majority of China’s people lived. All in all, talking to emigrants from China in Hong Kong in the 1970s and from inside China later on, I was able to gather information for 31 villages (Unger 1998).



The caption reads: The Peasant Revolutionary Movement is Terrific!

Only a third of the villages of my interviewees rode out the Cultural Revolution without any serious disturbances.[12] Among the two-thirds of the villages that did experience conflicts, a portion were of a traditional nature. Many villages traditionally had been on bad terms with neighbouring villages over access to irrigation water, over control of nearby forests, and so forth. When higher levels of government collapsed in the early months of the Cultural Revolution, these disputes between villages revived, culminating sometimes in renewed violent feuding.

More often, though, the conflicts lay *within* villages. The village leaders had had a strong hold over peasants' lives, as this was a period of collective agriculture, and the village leaders were often overbearing. That was particularly so during the Great Leap Forward of the late 1950s, which had ended in hunger and often starvation. The village heads had controlled the rationing of food, and were deeply resented by households who felt they had not received their fair share. In a campaign mounted shortly before the Cultural Revolution, called the Four Cleans (*si qing*) campaign, they had a chance to exact revenge. The government encouraged peasants then to criticise and condemn village leaders who had taken advantage of their posts, and some were toppled. When the Cultural Revolution broke out, these toppled leaders often tried to use their remaining bases of support within a village to climb back up;[13] while in other villages, leaders who were still in charge came under renewed attack from below from the households with grievances against them.

There was sometimes a traditional element even to this. Inside villages, traditionally there had been rivalries between different lineages of relatives, which are sometimes referred as clans. Even in the Communist period, village leaders normally built their support and power base from among their own lineage members, and favoured them in turn. They now came under attack largely by farmers from other lineages. This type of conflict got played out in a third of the villages of interviewees, often involving struggles between the lineages to capture a village's leadership posts.

During the Cultural Revolution, the farmers realised they needed to justify their attacks as being in support of Mao and the revolution. So even the traditional rivalries and antagonisms often were expressed in a harsh Maoist rhetoric that encouraged an exaggerated, uncompromising stance and a recourse to violence. This extreme politics of the Cultural Revolution period meant, quite realistically, that losing out in a struggle was

likely to entail political persecution. For instance, if you had a leading role in a group that failed, you and your family might even be branded with an inheritable “bad class” label as a reactionary or counter-revolutionary. Thus, fears of losing fuelled mounting cycles of violence and counter-violence—in cities as well as in the countryside, among worker and student groups as well as among farmers and the self-interested contenders for rural political power.

A second form of rural violence was also common. As the Cultural Revolution began to seep outwards from the cities, many commune officials and village officials began to organise farmers to persecute the villages’ bad-class households. It was a way of diverting the Cultural Revolution onto a path that was safe for themselves. Across China, they organised public meetings at which bad-class people were “struggled against” and in some cases killed.^[14] [sta_anchor id=”note14a”] In fact, in some places a *lot* of bad-class people died.

County Towns

In rural China, many millions of people did not live in villages but rather were residents of county capitals and commune market towns. These places, too, witnessed violence, but for a different set of reasons.

Most of the people in the towns worked in urban-like enterprises such as small factories that paid regular salaries. Economically, socially, and politically, their lives more closely resembled that of urban residents rather than villagers. It’s not altogether surprising that the factional conflicts that embroiled many of the county capitals and commune towns were similar to what wracked the cities.^[15] This is clear from interviews that I conducted with several former residents of towns. One interviewee, for instance, related that in his own town, which was a commune headquarters and market centre, the poorly paid commune clerks organised their own Rebel group.

Two aspects of how the Cultural Revolution conflict affected county towns should be flagged. One is that the conflict there, including the treatment of enemies who were captured, tended to be even more brutal than in the cities.

Second, during this time, in a large number of counties the rural militia commanders became far more visible; as rural officials fell or stepped back behind the screens, militia

commanders often informally assumed power at the commune level.[16] Rural militia were supposed to be backups to the Chinese army and also had been responsible for local law and order. The rural militia commanders in the rural communes were part of a network of officials that were directly linked to the county Party apparatus, and they were fearful that a victory by the county-seat or urban-based Rebel factional alliance would jeopardise their own hold on power in the countryside. And so the militia corps of farmers were sometimes dispatched to come to the aid of embattled county town leaders.[17] When the rebellious forces there were crushed, violence was exacted against the losers. In several provinces, the rural militias moved onward and upward toward the provincial capital, entering some of the cities to bloodily crush urban Rebel organisations.[18] In Guangxi and Sichuan provinces, for instance, after rural militias crushed urban resistance, terrible massacres of urban Rebel activists ensued.

One puzzle is why the brutality perpetrated under the direction of leaders based in the countryside and in rural towns tended to be greater than the brutality that city residents engaged in. In the cities, there *weren't* widespread massacres of members of the losing faction, with the exception of cities stormed by rural militia.[19] What was the psychology that rendered the county town combatants and rural militias more brutal in their treatment of prisoners? Had pre-Cultural Revolution grievances, animosities, and tensions been greater in towns than in cities? If so, why? And among the rural militias, was there a murderous animus toward cities and towns? I have no answers.

Ethnic Minorities



This photo, taken by **Tsering Dorje** on 24 August 1966, shows a bonfire of wooden Tibetan Buddhist statues and religious writings looted from a temple in Lhasa. The Han are the people we think of as the 'Chinese', and the crowd here is dressed like Han people and probably are Han. About 10 percent of China's populace are *not* Han. The available evidence from areas inhabited by non-Han peoples strongly suggests that during the Cultural Revolution, Han officials interpreted such people's non-conformity to the majority Han Chinese way of life as deviations from Chairman Mao's teachings. Efforts were often made by officials and mobs alike to impose Han mores by destroying the ethnic people's religious sites and enforcing Han social practices. Some young people from the ethnic groups also participated in these onslaughts. In addition, many of the ethnic communities split into factions caused by internal tensions, as occurred elsewhere in China.[20]

Worst of all, during these two years of the Cultural Revolution, brutal persecutions were carried out against a few ethnic groups whose loyalty to China was considered suspect. The worst reported persecutions occurred in the Chinese province of Inner Mongolia, where Mongols were accused of conspiring to betray China. The accusations apparently were completely false, based on rumours of a non-existent separatist movement among Mongols. Hundreds of thousands of Mongols, many of them from the countryside, were

arrested in a witch hunt, and twenty-three thousand were killed while in detention (Jankowiak 1988, 273-88; Woody 1993; Zheng 1993, 285-292; Wu 2002).

Conclusion

What is evident in my Morrison Lecture is that a complicated mix of pre-existing grievances and animosities got played out and amplified in the strife of the Cultural Revolution. In different types of work places and communities across China, one or the other form of antagonism and conflict took precedence. Even so, several of these causes of tension usually were operating at one and the same time among the same groups of people, contributing to a dangerous brew of escalating violence.

In particular, as we have seen again and again this evening, these schisms revealed the fierce tensions at the grassroots in society not only in this extraordinary period but also for the years preceding the Cultural Revolution. More than that, some of the same tensions persisted throughout the 1970s, after the mass upheavals were suppressed in 1968 and after the system of political hierarchy and social repression was re-imposed.

In short, studying the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, and the Pandora's box that opened up then, provides us with a window into understanding more about almost the whole sweep of the Maoist period. And understanding this two-year period of the Cultural Revolution also provides us with a window into the formative years of the leaders of China today, and an aspect of their mindset.

Endnotes:

[1] Most of the published research from the 1970s and 1980s has been on the origins of high-school Red Guard factionalism: see Lee 1975 and 1978; Chan, Rosen and Unger 1980; Rosen 1982; Chan 1982; Chan 1985; Unger 1982; Andreas 2002.

[2] A large number of shocking cases are described in Wang 2004. On this period of 'class' persecution in Beijing, also see Wu 2014, chapter 3.

[3] David Raddock, through interviewing in Hong Kong in the 1970s, produced a good book (Raddock 1977) on the bad class students' pre-Cultural Revolution predicament and the psychological and social burdens they were forced to bear. An essay by a bad-class youth, Yu Luohe, on the unfairness of the 'class line' and discrimination, was very widely read by Rebel Red Guards. The essay is reproduced and analysed in White 1976.

[4] My own interviews and those of Anita Chan with former Rebel Red Guards from Guangzhou reveal this belief. But it was not confined to Guangzhou. In an excellent book, a Chinese scholar, Yin Hongbiao, examines Red Guard beliefs across China, and he discusses 'big democracy' two dozen separate times as a commitment among various student Rebel Red Guard groups spanning the country (see Yin 2009).

[5] A book by Joel Andreas that focuses on Qinghua University disputes this scenario. Andreas writes: 'while many followed the lead of the revolutionary cadres' children in the Red Guards, others formed their own fighting groups. The campus split into two factions, defined by their stand toward the work team [of Party officials sent to Qinghua by China's top leaders]—the Red Guards, led by the cadres' children, defended the work team and their opponents [whose leadership came from peasant and working-class families] attacked it' (Andreas 2009, 108).

[6] Within a matter of a few months the students at both universities who had attacked their own university leadership became allies—even though the group from the teachers training university consisted of non-activist students who disliked activist students, and their new ally, from the neighbouring university, consisted of politically activist students. They did so in order to resist and defeat their immediate local enemies from within their own university. This type of manoeuvring in seeking allies made the later stages of the Cultural Revolution fighting quite confusing.

[7] My several interviews on this with former workers are in line with the findings of Andrew Walder, who conducted far more interviews about this. See his interesting findings in Walder 1996.

[8] Andrew Walder also has reported this, in a paper on how officials (including factory officials) during the Cultural Revolution upheaval made use of such trusted clients to defend themselves from rebel attacks; see Walder 2000, esp. pp. 178-183.

[9] A newsletter published by a group of temporary and contract workers in Shanghai was quite explicit that they were Rebels because they saw themselves to be exploited: 'The purpose of hiring temporary workers and contract workers is to make maximum profit with minimum investment. This involves exploitation of the labor and surplus value of temporary and contract workers, [who] are kept out of such organizations as the Party, the [Communist Youth] League, and the militia'. Quoted in White 1989, 247.

[10] Based at least partly on his knowledge of Guangzhou, Liu Guokai noted these differences in Loyalist and Rebel strength in the large vs. small factories in Liu 1987, 75-76. Notably, in some other cities, for reasons particular to the scenarios there as the Cultural Revolution unfolded, the great majority of the workforces at practically all of the factories, large as well as small, joined the Rebel camp. An interesting first-hand account of the situation in the city of Guilin, Guangxi Province, by a former student Rebel Red Guard, is Hua 1987, 120-135. According to my own interviews about Changsha, Hunan, the outnumbered Conservative faction there fled the city and joined compatriots in Xiangtan, an armaments manufacturing centre whose workers thereby enjoyed a higher political status and better conditions than other workers. Warfare broke out between this Loyalist city and Changsha's triumphant Rebels. When the warfare died down, Changsha's Rebel faction split into two hostile camps, between the haves and have-nots. The conservative Rebel groups, based on the red-class workers from large enterprises, allied themselves with red-class student groups and fought the radical Rebels of the small ill-favoured factories and trades and the non-red-class secondary-school students. In some other cities, unlike Changsha, the distinctions between the warring camps became quite clouded by 1967, as the alignments of various subgroups and organisations shifted and split and re-coalesced in accordance with the vagaries of local repressions, desperate efforts to secure vengeance and to end up on the winning side, and subsequent alliances of convenience. One example is Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang province (Forster 1990). A second, according to my interviews, is Kunming, Yunnan. The city of Beijing could be considered a third example, though there the confused alignments at the grassroots originated in the groups' links to varying high-level Party leaders.

[11] Nevertheless, during 1967 the distillery director was locked up by the workers, as were the two leading foremen, who were seen as too strict. The latter, ironically, were principally accused of having been members of a *working-class* secret society, the Gelaohui, before the revolution. Such flimsy pretexts for toppling superiors seem to have sufficed during the Cultural Revolution upheaval.

[12] When I write that a third of the villages did not experience Cultural Revolution turmoil from below, I am not including persecutions mounted from above by officials, nor orchestrated movements to struggle against and physically abuse bad-class people. The latter occurred almost everywhere, and was not confined to the Cultural Revolution of 1966-68: such persecutions were commonplace throughout most of the period of Mao's rule.

[13] The Four Cleans campaign in a village and the manoeuvring of a fallen village Party secretary to regain power during the Cultural Revolution are discussed in detail in Chan, Madsen and Unger 2009, Chapters 2-4.

[14] Notably, during the Cultural Revolution nothing was more dangerous to a *non*-bad class person than to be depicted and denounced in bad-class terms. In the horrific accounts of the Chinese author Zheng Yi about the murders of overthrown local officials and factional enemies in rural Guangxi, again and again such victims were beaten and slaughtered alongside bad-class people in a single orgy of killing, treating them as one and the same, as if to cement this linkage in the minds of both onlookers and perpetrators. A substantial number of such incidents are described in Section One (pp. 2-116) of Zheng 1993. One particularly chilling example is on p. 25.

[15] There has been some confusion over this important distinction between the urban-like towns and the rural villages. This is exemplified by an article by Andrew Walder and Yang Su titled 'The Cultural Revolution in the Countryside', which largely focuses not on the countryside but rather on what occurred in the county towns, on the factional fighting that originated there, and the mass killings that were directed from there. The major events within each county that it examines are 'an attempted power seizure by a mass organisation; an armed battle between two factions; and the establishment of a [county-level] revolutionary committee' (Walder et al. 2003, 83). Cultural Revolution mass organisations and factional fighting were both urban and county *town*-centred phenomena. An interesting account of the events in a county town is Gao Yuan's memoir, *Born Red* (Gao 1987), though Gao Yuan was a boy at the time and the events are portrayed from that perspective.

[16] This information derives from several interviewees. The assumption of authority by the militia heads can also be observed in county gazetteers and Zheng Yi's volume. Again and again in these published sources, the leaders in the county Revolutionary Committees and

at commune level who ordered massacres in 1968, or instructed villages to do so, are identified as militia commanders.

[17] The militiamen often received remuneration for doing so. As a Jiangsu provincial radio broadcast of August 1967 complained, 'In some regions they practice counter-revolutionary economism and give supplementary work points, money and grain to commune members to take part in fighting... all to incite the peasants to enter the cities to fight the revolutionary mass organizations in factories, mines, administrative bureaus, and schools'. [Quoted in *China News Analysis*, no. 679 (September 29, 1967), p. 2]. In two of the villages in my interview sample, ordinary villagers were paid in work points for attending, in massed groups, vast struggle meetings that the commune authorities organised at the commune market town.

[18] In Guangxi province, in Guilin, in the provincial capital of Nanning, and in other cities, county militias aligned to the Loyalist camp ultimately surrounded the cities and perpetrated massacres. On this, see Hua 1987. Liu Guokai lists six other provinces where such assaults on cities were also widespread, and he writes, 'Whereas urban residents, workers, students, and other members of the 'conservatives' [loyalists] still held back a little in fighting the rebels for fear of accidentally hitting good people, out-of-town peasants had no such inhibitions; they went all the way, killing, burning, looting. Many cities were under siege, forcing non-partisan city-dwellers to guard the cities together with the rebels to prevent their fall into the hands of the peasants, whose barbarity made no distinction between rebels and ordinary citizens' (Liu 1987, 97-8).

[19] In the city of Guangzhou, which was never invaded but where the Rebel faction was suppressed by the city's army command in August 1968, the top several leaders of the city-wide high-school Rebel Red Guard alliance were neither killed nor beaten by the victors. While the top commander of the Rebel Red Guards was imprisoned for two years, almost all of the other high-school Rebel leaders, including the deputy commander, were simply assigned in 1968 to work in villages alongside most of their schoolmates of both factions. On this, see Chan 1985, pp. 157, 163, 191, 194.

[20] The anthropologist Erik Mueggler provides evidence from one village, an Yi community in Yunnan province, showing that such a split did occur there. During both the preceding Socialist Education (Four Cleanups) campaign and the early Destroy Four Olds period of the Cultural Revolution, local officials and political activists who were themselves Yi ridiculed and violated some local religious practices as 'superstition'. But by early 1967,

the village government was overthrown, and two rival Red Guard groups emerged, which battled each other. The village's political establishment lost out, and vengeance was exacted against all those who had been in charge of the village during the hated Great Leap Forward. They were beaten mercilessly during nightly 'struggle sessions' attended by most villagers. The village's Party secretary committed suicide, and his wife, who had been among those responsible for violating a sacred reliquary box, soon also died. By late 1969, the period of the Cleansing of Class Ranks campaign, the tables were turned, and upstart Red Guards and village shamans and diviners were in turn beaten in struggle sessions. See Mueggler 2001, 258-263.



Jonathan Unger

Jonathan Unger, a sociologist, is a professor in the Australian National University's Political and Social Change Department and Co-editor of *The China Journal*. He has published fifteen books and more than seventy refereed journal articles and book chapters about China. His books include *Education under Mao: Class and Competition in Canton Schools* (1982), *The Transformation of Rural China* (2002) and, as co-author, *Chen Village: Revolution to Globalization*(2009).