

The Structural Sources of the Cultural Revolution

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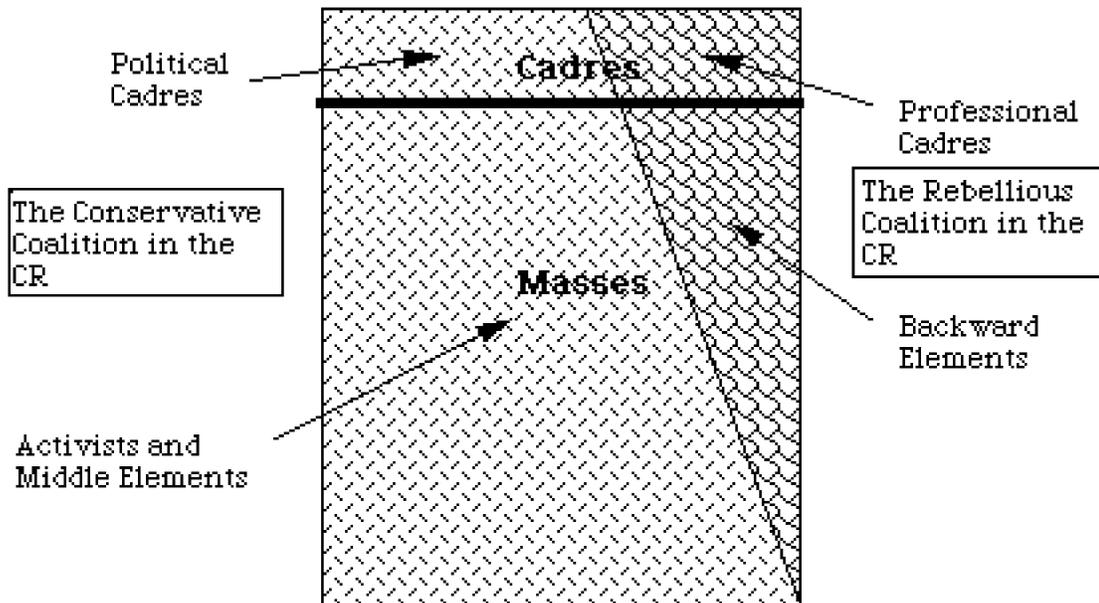
Why did millions of Chinese who claimed loyalty to Mao split into hostile factions during the Cultural Revolution (CR, 1966-1976)? To answer this question, we need conduct a structural analysis of the pre-CR Chinese society. What I intend to do in this paper is to show that the tensions and disputes that brought the CR into being did not arise overnight but were deep-seated and had developed throughout the history of the People's Republic.

This paper is based on a case study of Wuhan, an industrial city with about 3 million population located in the central China. The materials presented in this study derive from five main sources: my own recollection of those years; national and local official publications; national and local newspapers run by mass organizations between 1966 and 1969; local archives; and, finally and most importantly, interview data (N=85).

Social Conflicts in the Pre-CR China

In pre-CR China, there were three important social divisions (see Figure 1).

Figure 1



Vertical Conflict between the Elites and the Masses In 1957, the same year when Djilas published his The New Class, a young assistant professor at Beijing Aeronautical Engineering Institute, Zhou Dajue, independently developed a theory of "new class." Zhou argued that in China, the all-people ownership of the means of production existed only in name. In reality, the means of production was controlled by a minority of individuals, who were not directly engaged in production but held leading positions in productive organizations, acting as the controllers of the means of production. As a result of their control over the production process, they obtained certain economic advantages. Zhou asserted that those people were forming a class of "leaders" (*Lindaozhe jieji*) separated from mass of people and that the contradiction between leaders and the masses was a class struggle.¹

Indeed, after the completion of the socialization in 1956, although the private ownership of the means of production had been largely abolished, property is not owned in common, for the state ownership did not convey equal rights to all citizens to enjoy and dispose of property. Government ministries and various organizations were given right to use state property,

¹. Zhongguo gongren, no.17 (1957), p. 4.

and they, in turn, gave certain groups of individuals prerogatives which others did not have. The implications of the state ownership are twofold. On one hand, the incumbents of power positions did not form an ownership class understood in classical Marxist terms. Assets were not disposed of through families. Government ministers and directors of factories could not pass on their rights over ministries or factories to their children as did many capitalists in Western societies. Therefore, they did not form a ruling class as defined by Marx. On the other hand, however, though the ownership of the means of production had been changed, the process of production was very much on Western lines. Those with authority did form a special social group differing from the majority of people. They differed from others not so much in their ownership relations to the means of production, or in their income, privileges and lifestyle as in their position in the social organization of labor and in their role in production process.

Those who undertook the task of direction (management) formed part of a new hierarchy, whose common denominator was that they directed, controlled, and organized the apparatus of production and the work force at all levels. Although the state socialist society claimed to be a workers' state, the workers had no power by the mere virtue of being workers. In the extent of their discretion, the responsibility offered by the work, and the nature of the authority relationship, those with directing power occupied positions very different from ordinary workers in the production process and/or in social organizations of labor. In this sense, we may identify two social groups as the basic classes in China's state socialist system: Cadre class and working class. Because they are located in different positions in the production process, contradictions between cadres and workers were inevitable.

But in the pre-CR Chinese society, this vertical antagonism was largely obscured by the two horizontal divisions, namely, conflict within the elite and conflict within the masses.

Horizontal Conflict within the Cadre Class Unlike in capitalist societies, where the bourgeois class tends to have a similar social background

and education, the cadre class in China was not so homogeneous in the early years of the People's Republic. When the Communists came to power, most of the revolutionary cadres had little formal education, while those who were well-educated tended to be from middle- or upper-class family backgrounds. In other words, those who were competent were thought not to be fully committed to the goals, values, and programs of the new regime, whereas those who were reliable often lacked basic training for managing the social, cultural and economic development. Since there were few who were both politically reliable and technically proficient, China had to recruit some cadres for their reliability and others for their competence.

After Wuhan was liberated in May 1949, for instance, about 6,000 to 8,000 People's Liberation Army officers, soldiers, and other revolutionary activists, who then were called "military representatives," were assigned to take control of the city.² Military representatives were sent to virtually every enterprise and government agency, playing leadership roles in those units. Later, when the political situation became stable, most of the military representatives were formally appointed as Party secretaries or directors in their respective units. Until the CR broke out, leading cadres in many units were still the former military representatives.

The veteran Communist cadres alone were apparently not adequate to fill all positions of power. A great number of workers and peasants therefore were placed in state and economic positions. The massive promotion of persons of humble origin to dominant political and managerial positions produced a high degree of upward mobility China had never experienced in the past.

The general educational level of the political cadres thus was low. Up to 1958, 50 percent of China's middle- and upper-level cadres had no higher education than the elementary level. Low-level cadres' education was even

². The Editorial Commission of the Local Party History of Wuhan, ed., Zhonggong wuhan difang dangshi: shehui zhuyi shiqi zhuanti ziliao xuanbian, (hereinafter DFDS) (Wuhan, 1985), p. 3.

poorer. Only 11 percent of them had attended high school or above.³ Since the Party desired a rapid economic development and technological modernization, the skills of the specialists were indispensable.

Immediately after 1949, the urgent need to stabilize the society and to maintain basic services required considerable reliance on administrative and technical personnel of the former Guomindang government. As a result, large numbers of former Nationalist officials were retained in office.⁴

The management skills of former capitalists were also greatly appreciated by the new government. When private industrial and commercial enterprises were being transformed into joint state-private ones, the Party's policy was that all former capitalists would be assigned jobs suitable to their abilities.⁵ In four of Wuhan's major industries, textile, engineering, light and handicraft industries in 1957, for instance, among 638 managers or deputy managers of 374 enterprises, 444 were former capitalists, accounting for 69.6 percent of the total. The other 194 managerial posts were occupied by veteran communist cadres and the recently promoted workers, but they accounted for only 30.4 percent of the total.⁶

Later the percentage of managerial positions held by former capitalists declined as more and more workers were promoted to such positions.

³. Renmin jiaoyu, no. 5 (1958), pp. 3-4; and Xinghua Yuekan (hereinafter XHYK), no. 7 (1955), p. 175.

⁴. An survey of 1950 found that more than 50 percent of cadres in Wuhan were such retained officials. See DFDS, pp. 3 and 80-89.

⁵. The Central Administrative Bureau of Industry and Commerce, Siyiq gongshangye shehuizhuyi gaizao dashiji (hereinafter GZDSJ), 1957, p. 88. In Wuhan, there were 13,388 former private shareholders in 1956, among whom 6,480 were then classified as "capitalists at their posts." Many of them became administrative, managerial, and technical cadres in the new joint state-private enterprises after 1956. See DFDS, pp. 272-273.

⁶. Chanqjiang ribao (hereinafter CJRB), November 16, 1957.

Nevertheless, most of former capitalists who had been assigned to managerial positions in 1956 still held these position until 1966.

The most important source of skilled cadres was intellectuals. Even though their class background was more likely to be bourgeois than proletarian and their political ideology tended to be liberal rather than communist, the government realized that intellectuals' active participation in the process of economic and cultural development would be crucial to its success. Because seventeen years (1949 to 1966) was too short a time to train a new generation of specialists who were both technically proficient and politically reliable, the government had to permit use of the existing pool of specialists.⁷

As a result, two different types of cadres emerged in China: political cadres and professional cadres, though there was no clear-cut demarcation line between them.⁸ They had different functions, with the former directing distribution and redistribution in the society and the latter managing social production and reproductions. The two groups differed in social pedigree, education, function, and even life-style. Tensions and conflicts thus were inevitable. Indeed, they were constantly involved in a game of social closure. By "social closure" I mean the process by which social collectivities seek to maximize their own rewards by excluding competitors from access to rewards and opportunities. This entails singling out certain

⁷. Up to 1966, only 24.8 percent of Party secretaries and principals and 19.4 percent of teachers in Wuhan's high schools were from workers' or peasants' family backgrounds, all the rest were from nonproletarian backgrounds. In elementary schools, the distribution was even more skewed. Only 19.8 percent of all faculty members (including Party secretaries, principals, and teachers) were from "good" family backgrounds. See Wuhan Education Bureau, "Putong zhongxue zonghe baobiao 1965-1966," "Quanrizhi xiaoxue zonghe baobiao 1965-1966," "Quanrizhi jigong zhiye xuexiao zonghe baobiao 1965-1966."

⁸. The former might include the managers or directors of industrial firms, since under a planned economy, they operated mainly as administrators, that is, middle-level functionaries in the state apparatus.

identifiable social attributes as the basis of exclusion. Naturally every group tends to adopt criteria that will enable them to claim a special and intrinsic quality of their own.⁹

The professional cadres, by virtue of their skills or education, believed that they were best qualified for all positions of strategic social importance. Therefore, they always privately longed for, and occasionally openly fought for, political authority at the expense of those who they thought lacked necessary technical qualities. This desire found dramatic expression during the Hundred Flowers Movement of 1957. Many of the non-Party cadres, particularly the retained Nationalist cadres, former capitalists, and intellectuals and technicians, had long been contemptuous of the low cultural level and lower-class background of the Party cadres and resented the Party veterans' receiving superior positions in the government. Now they openly complained that nonprofessionals (*Waihang*) could not lead specialists (*Neihang*). Their criticisms amounted to an implicit demand for the closure of social and economic opportunities to nonprofessional cadres and for the reallocation of power in the entire society.

Such group action, of course, provoked a corresponding reaction on the part of those against whom it was directed. Political cadres reacted strongly against this challenge by emphasizing "political integrity," by which they meant mainly family background.¹⁰ While professional cadres were proud of their talents and skills, political cadres found pride in their humble but "revolutionary" origins. Many political cadres thus found family background useful as a way of reducing the competitive power of professional cadres.

⁹. See Richard Kraus, Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism (New York: Columbia University, 1981), p. 139.

¹⁰. Although personal performance was also supposed to be considered, because of the problem of vague and subjective standards of performance, in practice it was often the case that only family background was given attention.

After liberation, all Chinese were classified. In the rural areas, class labels were used as the basis for the redistribution of property during the land reform. Even though there was no land reform or comparable economic redistribution in the cities, through a series of political campaigns such as the Labor Insurance Registration Campaign (1951-1954), the Campaign for Elimination of Counterrevolutionaries (1955), the Socialist Transformation Campaign (1956), and the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957), city dwellers in all walks of life were gradually given specific class labels as well.¹¹

In studying social closure, Frank Parkin points out that one of the most commonly-used strategies for a given social group to maintain or enhance its privileges is to create another group or stratum beneath it. Class labeling may be understood as an application of such a strategy by potential and actually political cadres in contemporary China. In the 1950s and 1960s former Nationalist military and administrative officials, capitalists and intellectuals were no doubt the best educated, best trained, and best qualified for managing social, economic, and cultural affairs. Revolutionary cadres could not compete with them in ability. To ensure success in competition with those old elites, the new elites had to establish a new set of rules, ones favorable to themselves. Thus "political integrity" was chosen to take priority and class status was taken to be the prime measure of political integrity. By ranking people according to class designations, the

¹¹. Added to economic labels were the political role designations assigned to selected people: revolutionary army man, revolutionary martyr, revolutionary cadre on the one hand; and counter-revolutionary (including Guomindang agent, foreign spy, core member of reactionary parties--- Guomindang, the Three People's Principles Youth League, the Youth Party, the Democratic Socialist Party and the like; core member of reactionary secret societies such as *Yiguandao*, *Jiugongdao*, *Wujidao*, and the like; local tyrant, bandit, member of Troskian groups, and traitor), and bogus clerk (bureaucrats serving the previous government) on the other. See the Central Group of Ten Persons: "Guanyu fangeming fenzi he qita huaifenzi di jieshi ji chuli di zhengce jiexian di zanxing guiding," March 10, 1956. The group was headed by Kang Sheng.

labeling created a distributive structure of rewards and opportunities, in which revolutionary cadres' determinative position in the society was legitimate. Old elites' abilities might be used by proletariats who lacked such abilities themselves. They were still assigned to managerial or technical jobs, which made them different from masses of the working class. But old elites were politically restricted. They were forced to receive "ideological reform," which meant to criticize themselves and subject themselves to the criticism of others. Whenever there was a political campaign, they were always ready targets. They thus were living under constant social and political pressures.

As a means of social closure, class status was frequently emphasized wherever a potential challenge from old elites was likely. In work units where intellectuals constituted a large percentage of employees, such as colleges, schools, hospitals, scientific research institutions, and literature and art organizations, class status was often used as a magic weapon by political cadres for deterring intellectuals. In factories where employees were relatively more homogeneous, class status was less significant. Factory authorities employed class status mainly for reminding potential challengers of their subordinate position in the power structure.

When old and new elites conflicted with each other, competition between their children was just as keen and often even more explosive. In colleges and high schools, children of old elites were usually good at their schoolwork. Their strategy was to concentrate all their energies on their academic studies while carefully making a show of participating adequately in political activities. They tended to believe that their hope for upward advancement lay in academic achievement. Even when the "class line" was heightened, they still privately looked down on good-background classmates of poor scholastic ability. The good family students, especially the children of revolutionary cadres, on the other hand, were inclined to give greatest significance to class status. It was their desire to see their good class background rewarded with high formal prestige. Even if their coursework was as good as that of old elites' children, the class line nevertheless added

extra competitive drive for good background students to win more opportunities over those otherwise potent competitors.¹² As the official class-line rhetoric strengthened in the early 1960s, old elites' children felt a growing political pressure. The frustration was not relieved by the new "laying stress on individual performance" (*Zhongzai biao*) campaign in 1965.¹³

The class line thus worked to push students into increasingly self-aware groupings with opposing interests. As the CR erupted, students would naturally act out their competition, tensions, and worries along these various cleavages.

Horizontal Conflict among the Masses The masses in pre-CR China were anything but a homogeneous group. In pre-CR China, the working class was divided along a number of communal lines, among which the most politically relevant one was the radical cleavage between the activist and the backward element. Intra-class conflicts over the distribution of resources occurred every day.

The division into "advanced" and "backward" elements was a by-product of mobilization. Mass mobilization had been one of the most effective weapons of the Chinese communists in their struggles against the Japanese and Guomindang. After liberation, mass mobilization was again used to stabilize the new regime, to transform the society, and above all to develop the economy. For a poor country like China, one way to increase productivity was to mobilize underused labor power. But because it was poor, there were limited resources

¹². Interviewees 10, 11, 13, 14, 23, 36, 37, 38, 46, 47, 48, 49, 51, 57, 63, 64, and 69.

¹³. Renmin ribao (hereinafter RMRB), April 4, 1965; and Zhongguo qingnianbao (hereinafter QNB), Jan. 31, 1965.

A bad-class student commented:

The slogan "laying stress on individual performance" itself was discriminative. What "performance" we were urged to assume? It was to denounce, and to draw a line against, our parents. Therefore the campaign only reminded us that we belonged to an inferior social group (Interviewee 69).

to be used as rewards. The regime thus had to resort to cheap moral rewards (e.g., designations as "activist" or membership in the Party and the Youth League) to substitute for expensive material ones.

Mass mobilization, however, does not mean mobilizing all at once. It is very difficult, if not impossible, for a handful of organizers to mobilize all workers simultaneously; and not everybody is ready to be mobilized at the same time. The secret of mass mobilization lies in getting a few mobilized first.

Thus the division of the masses of people into "advanced" and "backward" categories is inherent in mass mobilization strategies of political and economic developments. Whether in political campaigns, production high tides, or everyday political and economic life, the advanced elements always functioned as task forces which the leadership could rely on and as models for their fellow workers to follow. Special campaigns were frequently launched to encourage workers to outdo each other and to be "activists."¹⁴ To be an activist one must be an enthusiastic fighter in a major political campaign or regular political activities, a rate buster in production, a natural leader in his peer group, and a friend and helpmate of his colleagues.¹⁵ But not everyone who met these qualifications was considered an activist. Whether a person was qualified to be called an activist was subject to evaluations by his fellow workers and his bosses. Every year, workers were asked to recommend "advanced workers", and, if approved by the leadership of that particular unit, those recommended would be officially given the title "advanced workers of the year." Bosses had their own lists of activists, the long-term activists. The lists were kept secret from the public.¹⁶

¹⁴. For instance, the Advanced Producer Campaign of 1956, the Advanced Producer and Advanced Small Group Campaign, 1962-1963, and "Emulate, Learn from, Catch up with, Help and in Turn Surpass Each Other" Campaign, 1965-1966.

¹⁵. Zhibu shenghuo, no. 22 (1958); Gongren ribao (hereinafter GRRB), September 15 and December 26, 1962; and QNB, May 25, 1963.

¹⁶. A document of the Wuhan Municipal Party Committee pointed out:

Activists recommended by workers and ones trusted by leaders often included the same people but were not necessarily identical. In any event, the process for selecting activists in either case was manipulated by unit leaders, who might insist that someone must be nominated for the title "advanced worker" by repeatedly disapproving those recommended by the masses until the favorite name appeared on the list. They might also choose to delete one who was on their secret list from the public list to test whether s/he could withstand all the trials of the selection process.¹⁷

Even though the secret name list was kept secret, workers usually had a fairly clear idea about who were "sweethearts" of the leaders because "sweethearts" were treated differently. The Party and Youth League branches often organized special activities such as study sessions, "voluntary labor," visiting other units, and the like, to which only activists were invited. Activists were often assigned responsibility to help busy leaders. More important, whenever there was a new central task, especially a political campaign, activists were often informed in advance what the task was about, what they were expected to do, and how to behave properly.¹⁸

The name list of activists should not be made known to the public and to activists themselves. For the purpose of having such a list is to nurture and educate activists and then through them to unite and bring along the rest of people. The Party organization should pay particular attention to those on the list, in order to temper them in daily works and political activities, to heighten their political consciousness, and to gradually recruit them into the Party.... In this sense, the name list of activists is an internal list of prospective Party members. Its leakage can land the Party organization in a passive position. Knowing the existence of the list may lead those on it to swollen with pride, and those not on it frustrated. In case of not being recruited promptly, even those on the list may become disgruntled. It is certainly harmful to the encouragement of activism and to the recruitment of Party member.

Similarly, the Youth League organization had its own secret name list. See Zhibu shenghuo, no. 22 (1958).

¹⁷. Zhongguo qongren (hereinafter ZGGR), no. 1 (1957); and GRRB, August 16, 1962.

¹⁸. For example, see GRRB, September 15, 1962; and QNB, May 25, 1963.

Activists were people who were positively oriented toward the leaders, who actively did their bidding, and through whom control over the shop floor might be extended. Only leaders might reward activists' political commitment, activism, and cooperative behavior. Both sides therefore were eager to cultivate a close relationship with each other. The relationship was essentially one of patron-client: leaders developed stable networks of loyal clients, who exchanged their loyalty and support for preference in various rewards. It would be a distortion, however, to portray leaders and activists as motivated solely or primarily by personal material or career interests. In the 1950s and early 1960s, a great percentage of cadres and activists were so committed that they internalized the state's ideology as their moral guide. For many activists, recruitment to the Party or Youth League or even promotion to a leadership post signified nothing but moral achievement. Even the most cynical of my interviewees, reported that before the CR, most political activists were sincerely committed to the Party's cause and had great prestige among workers.

In a sense, "backward element" was a political label. Leaders and workers usually had a clear idea who fell into this category in their units. But unlike other labels such as landlord, capitalist, and rightist, the label of backward element was never officially imposed on individuals so it could not be officially removed either. As long as one was considered backward by his superiors and peers, he was a backward element. "Backward" was a very ambiguous term. To be labeled as a capitalist, one had to be proved to have owned a certain amount of capital and have been involved in exploitative activities. To impose the label rightist on someone, it was essential to provide evidence that he had "attacked" the Party and socialist system, although his statements and behaviors might be misinterpreted. But one might be categorized as backward for varieties of reasons.

In the Chinese hierarchical system, each unit was always subject to periodic assessments of its performances by its superior units. What to be assessed varied as the national and local central tasks changed. Political campaigns, production, patriotic health campaigns, spare time education,

birth control, and the like all might be subject to such assessment. Like individuals, units were classified into "advanced units" and "problem units." The assessment of units was, in a sense, an assessment of those units' leaders. Leaders of advanced units were usually considered to be well qualified and were most likely to be promoted. Leaders of problem units, however, were under great pressure. They might be regarded as incompetent for their jobs and thereby might lose the opportunity to be promoted. Since a unit's reputation was so important to its leaders, the leaders naturally tended to consider those who damaged it in any way as troublemakers, or, in the prevailing term, backward elements.

In the 1950s, especially before 1957, backward elements meant primarily those who did not fulfill the production target, who did not make efforts to improve their skills, who did not give full play to their professional abilities, who often arrived late and left early, who did not observe labor discipline, and who did not respected "master workers" (*Shifu*).¹⁹

Later, when politics was said to be in command, one's political performance carried more weight. Before the CR, political study meetings and mutual criticism sessions were often scheduled after work or even on weekends.²⁰ Although there was no official requirement that everybody had to take part in those activities, it was hoped that all workers would do so. But for many young workers, such meetings were dull and dry. They thought that there were other things which were more interesting. For many old workers, such meetings were unnecessary. They held that mere empty talk had nothing to do with being a good worker. For some female workers, such meetings were an extra burden which they could hardly bear. They already had so many household duties to take care of after work that it was difficult for them to find time to take part in those meetings.

¹⁹. RMRB, May 15, 1956; and XHYK, no. 13 (1956), p. 7.

²⁰. GRRB, January 13, 1966.

Those who had failed to attend meetings regularly would sooner or later find that they had been characterized by the unit leaders and activists as "not concerning themselves with politics." Even regular participants in political meetings could not safely claim to be "advanced." Passive attendants who rarely expressed themselves in those meetings were often thought "indifferent to politics."²¹

Because it was intrinsically difficult to devise a clear and objective test of political activism, one's attitude toward, and performance in, political meetings became the most commonly used measure of political consciousness. As early as in 1956, People's Daily had criticized this practice as an inappropriate criterion to measure political activism,²² but leaders at the grass-roots were never told of a better solution. Until 1966, therefore, this practice continued.

The early 1960s saw an overall politicization of social life. Because of the difficult economic situation, the Party tried in a hundred and one ways to restrict mass consumption. All workers were encouraged to recall their sufferings in the old society and their "happiness" in the new.²³ The contrast was supposed to persuade workers that they should be satisfied with the present state of affairs. What it really produced, however, was a stronger ascetic tendency. Frugality was associated with "proletarian virtue" and extravagance with "bourgeois evil."²⁴

²¹. GRRB, March 23, 1962; July 1, August 6, September 23, and October 14, 1964.

²². RMRB, May 15, 1956.

²³. GRRB, June 21, 1963; and September 8, 1963.

²⁴. In the late 1964, for instance, a discussion was initiated in China's modernist city Shanghai as to whether it was necessary to ban outlandish clothes altogether. See GRRB, March 1 to April 12, November 14, 1964; and QNB, September 10, 1964.

As a result of the politicization of social life, the concept of backward was broadened. Now one might be considered backward for such trivial matters as neatly dressed, occasionally going to restaurant, purchasing a watch, applying hair oil after a haircut, or not buttoning up her/his jacket.²⁵ In a word, one was very likely to be labeled a backward element if some aspects of her/his lifestyle was out of the ordinary.

As the politicization of social life was intensified, more and more people were living under the shadow of the label "backward elements." Many of them were angry about the label because they had worked hard and accomplished production targets fairly well. In traditional sense, they were good workers but now became backward elements. How could they be convinced to accept the label? Such a depressed feeling was so widespread that the Party Center was alarmed. In an article published in April 1965, People's Daily declared that it was not necessarily a reflection of bourgeois ideology to wear bright-colored clothes, have a hair permanent, take pictures, go to restaurants, cultivate flowers, raise goldfish, or play Chinese chess.²⁶ The official statement might make some people feel a little bit of relief, but the statement itself was ambiguous. On other occasions, messages from Beijing were often contradictory. Therefore, the standard of lifestyle was never dropped as a measure of backward at the grass-roots up to the CR.

Since power in each unit was highly concentrated in the hands of its leaders, it was possible, and often happened that a worker was considered backward simply because the leaders did not like him. Those who raised criticisms against the leaders could easily be defined as a nuisance and silenced by the leadership's invocation of the principles of labor discipline. If they persisted, they could be tarred with the brush of advocating

²⁵. GRRB, June 20 and October 14, 1964, and January 9, 1965; and QNB, July 15 and 19, and November 22, 1962.

²⁶. GRRB, April 14, 1965.

"individualistic heroism" or accused of "always trying to pick faults in leaders' work and to cause them trouble."²⁷

For obvious reasons, leaders also would not like those who always grumbled, who scrambled for fame and gain (i.e., promotion, salary increase, bonus, and so on), and who were not satisfied with their jobs and ambitious to get better positions.²⁸ The Chinese had long been taught that the national and collective interests should be placed above personal interests. Those who apparently failed to do so were therefore often put into the category of backward elements.

Neither activists nor backward elements accounted for the majority of employees in each unit. In most cases, only one-fourth to one-third of employees could claim to be the former, and even fewer fell into the latter category.

²⁷. GRRB, March 29, 1963, and February 26, 1965. One of my interviewees was a senior worker. In the first few years after the liberation, he was very active in political campaigns and production activities and had peace of mind. Because his skill in production was recognized as first-rate by his colleagues, he felt that it was his responsibility to make suggestions to leaders about problems rising from production. Moreover, he often pointed out the shortcomings in the leader's work without mincing words. Those actions were soon interpreted as "self-important" or "regarding himself as infallible." But he continued to make suggestions or criticisms, simply because, as he said, he could not help doing so. When he found his actions continually unappreciated and misinterpreted by superiors, he became frustrated and tension grew between him and his superiors. He was considered an outstanding example of a backward element in his factory before the CR. He later became a leader of a famous radical organization in Wuhan. Interviewee 19.

²⁸. ZGGR, no.5 (1957); and GRRB, June 27, 1963; May 29, July 5, August 12, 18 and 28, September 23, October 14, 1964; July 14 and November 13, 1965; and February 20, 1966.

In between were "middle elements," who in some way were like what Lockwood called "deferential" workers.²⁹ They viewed their superiors with respect and perceived themselves to be in a legitimately inferior position. Although they were involved in all political and production activities, what they actually did was drift with the stream. For them, politics meant merely shouting prevailing slogans along with others, while production was nothing more than a way to earn one's living by meeting targets set by superiors. They were always careful and polite and rarely caused bosses trouble so they could be easily manipulated.

In the early 1960s, middle elements were also facing the growing pressure of politicization of social life. In the 1950s, it had been fine to stay middling. Middle elements were described as "falling short of the best but being better than the worst." Now a person was likened to a boat sailing against the current which must forge ahead or it would be driven back. In other words, everybody now had only two choices: to be either an advanced element or a backward element. The intermediate zone was disappearing. This development further polarized workers. A survey of Chinese newspapers in 1962 to 1966 seems to suggest that the overt and covert conflicts between activists and backward elements were becoming more widespread and serious than ever before.

Leaders of Chinese enterprises were left considerable discretion in the distribution of rewards so they could punish backward workers by refusing to exercise the discretion in their favor. Bonuses, relief subsidy, wage raise, promotion, favorable job assignments were some of means at the unit leaders' disposal to deal differentially with workers.

Take the relief subsidy for families in difficulty (*kunnan buzhu*) as an example.³⁰ In principle, relief subsidies should be given to people the per

²⁹. See David Lane, Soviet Economy and Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 162.

³⁰. Gongshanjie, no. 8 (1956), pp. 18-19; ZGGR, no. 9 (1957), p. 16; and GRRB, February 26 and July 6, 1965, and January 13, 1966.

capita incomes in whose families were below a certain figure or to those whose families encountered special difficulties at a time. Anyone who had applied for a relief subsidy was subject to evaluation of his eligibility by his peers and superiors. Since the subsidy fund was limited, competition was usually keen. Unit leaders tended to be sympathetic about activists' difficulties. Because an advanced element was supposed to "be the first to bear hardships and the last to enjoy comforts," many activists might hesitate to apply for the subsidy, even when their families had real financial problems. Leaders therefore often took the initiative in giving them subsidies even though they had not applied. However, it was often hard for a backward worker to get his application approved. Unit leaders and activists tended to think that it was a waste of money to provide backward workers with relief subsidies. Thus when backward workers encountered financial problems, their applications for relief money might be turned down.³¹

The top leaders of the Party and government, of course, hoped that there were more advanced and less backward elements in the nation. Therefore, leaders and activists at the grass-roots were always required to help backward elements become advanced elements. But in each unit, things were not that simple. Since rewards for a competitive orientation could be given to only a limited number of people, exclusion as a strategy of social closure always

³¹. GRRB, May 8, 1964. The case of the interviewee mentioned above was a good example. In 1952, he had been rated as a fifth-grade worker. Fourteen years later, in 1966, he was still a fifth-grade worker. His wage---52 yuan per month---was certainly not enough to support a family of seven members. In the early 1960s, the average monthly income per capita of Wuhan residents was about 18 yuan, and workers whose incomes were lower than 10 yuan per family member were supposed to get a relief subsidy. Accordingly, this worker was qualified to receive the highest subsidy---14 to 16 yuan per month. But what he actually got was only 8 yuan per month. Twenty years later, when I interviewed him, he was still indignant about this unjust treatment. Interviewee 19. For average monthly income per capita of Wuhan residents, see Wuhan Statistics Bureau, Wuhan: 1949-1984 (Wuhan, 1984), p. 94.

seemed necessary. Once one was considered backward, he was excluded from access to many resources and opportunities. There might be many cases in which leaders and activists had successfully helped some backward elements become activists. But the publicizing of these successful stories reveals how rare such cases were and how hard the Party had to push leaders and activists "to correctly treat backward workers."³² Activists had a vested interest in keeping the ranks of activists as selective as possible and therefore were reluctant to throw open the doors to share the distinction of vanguard status. They encouraged others to become activists but at the same time wanted to keep most of their peers firmly in place as not quite equal competitors.³³

Backward workers also possessed political capital. The fact that they were labeled as backward elements rather than counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, or the like, indicated that they were from good family backgrounds and had made no political mistakes. Backward element was the worst label they might receive. Once classified into this category, they had nothing more to lose. Unlike people in the middle, backward workers no longer had to be careful to avoid the label, because they already had it. Unlike those with political problems who were deprived of political rights, backward workers

³². RMRB editorials "The Party Organizations of Enterprises Must be Close to the Masses" (December 19, 1955), "Correctly Treat Backward Workers" (May 15, 1956), "Bring the Initiative of the Youth into Full Play" (May 4, 1965); GRRB editorials "Help Backward Workers Enthusiastically" (February 8, 1964), "The Significance of Helping Backward Elements" (June 26, 1964), "Correctly Treat Backward Colleagues" (July 3, 1964), "What Is the Correct Attitude toward Backward Workers" (July 24, 1964), "What Should Be Done if Your Effort to Help Backward Workers Turns out to have No Effect" (August 12, 1964), "How to Treat Your Friends Who Are Backward" (April 9, 1965), "It Is Advanced Workers' Responsibility to Help Backward Colleagues" (November 20, 1965); QNB editorials "How to Treat the Minority and Backward Elements" (April 19, 1962); "Look at a Person with an Eye on the Course of His Development" (July 3, 1965).

³³. GRRB, June 8, 1965.

did not have to be afraid of offending their superiors and activist peers. Although leaders of Chinese enterprises had considerable discretion in the distribution of rewards and the application of punishments, they lacked power to dismiss workers. Thus backward workers often became the boldest critics of, and strongest challengers to, the establishments within their respective units. When encouraged to learn from advanced workers, backward workers tended to think that some of so-called advanced workers were falsely advanced and nothing could be learned from them.³⁴ They specially looked down on those who tried to demonstrate their "revolutionary zeal" by flattering bosses or giving bosses critical reports of the behavior of their fellow workers but whose production skills were low and whose production targets were often unaccomplished.³⁵ What the backward workers essentially strove to achieve was an equal position in competition with the activists. It was for this reason that they deemphasized the importance of political performance and cried for more individual freedom in personal lifestyle.³⁶ Ironically, in a politicized society, apolitical actors cannot win games unless they politicize themselves and make themselves a strong political force. That was exactly what happened to many former backward elements during the period of the CR.

Obscured Division between the Elite and the Masses

Structurally, of the three social conflicts, the vertical conflict between the elite and the masses is the most fundamental. From a long-term point of view, the division between political and functional elites and between activists and nonactivists is an interim phenomenon and tends to be diminishing. But the structural division between the elite as a whole and the masses as a whole had not been realized by most Chinese on the eve of the CR.

³⁴. *Ibid.*, June 24 and July 4, 1964.

³⁵. *Ibid.*, January 1, 1964; March 26 and April 24, 1965.

³⁶. *Ibid.*, November 16, 1963; and QNB, September 10, 1964.

Rather, this fundamental social division was cut across and by and large overshadowed by the other two social divisions.

In 1965, Mao Zedong pronounced:

The bureaucratic class is a class sharply opposed to the working class and the poor and the lower-middle peasants. These people have become or are in the process of becoming bourgeois elements sucking the blood of workers.³⁷

It was a bald but wrong assertion because due to the interferential factors analyzed above, the most fundamental social division---the elite-mass distinction--had not become the most important politically relevant cleavage in pre-CR Chinese society. Rather, in day-to-day politics, the conflicts between political elites and activists on one side and functional elites and backward elements on the other were more spectacular. As victims of the practice of labeling, both functional elites and backward elements wanted to change the system. Labeling had an unexpected consequence: it gave people strong identities, breeding consciousness of group interests. People, especially the disfavored, hence could be more readily mobilized than they otherwise would have been.

In the spring of 1966, the Chinese political system seemed as stable as ever, though the diffuse and manifold tensions underneath presaged a political storm. However, the latent hostilities could have persisted for decades and never have surfaced in expressions of violence. As always, a catalyst is necessary. In this case, tight state control needed to be released. That was exactly what Mao Zedong did: he opened the floodgates. Besides, he did nothing that had not been prepared for in advance.

Factionalism in the Cultural Revolution

³⁷. Cited from Hong Yung Lee, "The Radical Students in Kwangtung during the Cultural Revolution", China Quarterly, no. 64 (December 1975): 654.

During the Cultural Revolution, people in Wuhan as well as in other cities, were grouped into two loose categories termed "rebels" and "conservatives." What was the relationship between the factionalism in the CR and the social structure in pre-CR China? My interviews and my reading of the CR documents have led me to several observations.

Generally those who had enjoyed a comparatively close relationship with the authorities tended to be conservative. This was the case not only in schools but also in industries; not only in Wuhan, but also in all other places. The personal experiences of my interviewees and their accounts about what happened in their units all confirmed this speculation. In fact, even when the CR was still going on, no one doubted that it was a rule. During the course of the CR, the conservative organizations often attacked the radical organizations on the ground that the latter were hideouts of "monsters and ghosts." The rebels, however, could hardly use the same accusation against their adversaries. The conservatives were proud of the "purity" of their family backgrounds and political performances before the CR and the rebels could not deny that the claim was well founded. Mao also noted that the Party members, Youth League members, model workers, activists, veterans, and senior workers were more likely to join the conservative groups than to affiliate themselves with the radical groups, but he attributed this phenomenon mainly to the capitalist roaders' effort to hoodwink them.³⁸ He was wrong.

With the collapse of the power structure, the CR provided an unique opportunity for Chinese to make a relatively free choice between mass organizations they wanted to join. The majority of people, especially those "good people," voluntarily joined the conservative groups and often appeared more uncompromising in dealing with the rebels than the power holders did. They made this choice not because they were afraid of, or hoodwinked by, the former officials, but because they sincerely believed that the old structure was basically sound. The economic, social, and political status of most

³⁸. Mao Zedong shixianq wansui, (Wuhan, 1968), p. 346.

workers and their families had been improved since the Liberation. In the years prior to the CR, especially in political campaigns, they had been relied upon as activists, or allies, in any case, not targets. And it seemed to them that most of the Party cadres were fairly good, because those cadres had had little economic privilege, had rarely abused power for personal gain and had been on intimate terms with most of the people and tough only with few. They therefore saw little reason to rebel against the basically healthy system and its operators. More specifically, in each particular unit, if the rebels could successfully redress their past grievances, not only the power holders but also activists in past political campaigns would be proved to have been wrong, which could jeopardize the latter's future opportunities. They, in this sense, not only chose, but were chosen, to be conservatives.

Similarly, for many rebels, being rebels was their only choice. In schools, factories and other units, people who had been alienated in the pre-CR society could not expect to have their past grievances redressed by joining organizations other than radical ones.³⁹ Thus there were with few exceptions a much large proportion of people of nonproletarian origins in radical organizations.⁴⁰ The rebels put forward a theory of "changed class relationship" to explain this phenomenon. According to this theory, the class structure had been changed since the Liberation. Many people of the good origins had degenerated into aristocrats of labor and formed new vested

³⁹. A former rebel, who was from a family of Guomindang officials, commented: "The people like me could not but be the rebels" (interviewee 69).

⁴⁰. Interviewees 13, 14, 57, and 69. Also see Liu Guokai, A Brief Analysis of the Cultural Revolution (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1987); Hong Yung Lee, The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: A Case Study (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Marc J. Blecher and Gordon White, Micropolitics in Contemporary China: A Technical Unit during and after the Cultural Revolution (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1979); and Stanley Rosen, Red Guard Factionalism and the Cultural Revolution in Guangzhou (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982).

interests, and the former semi-proletariat and petit-bourgeoisie had become new proletariats. But in the first seventeen years of the People's Republic, the latter group had been frequently targets in political campaigns. They constituted a new oppressed class. It thus was justified for them to rise against the oppression.⁴¹ It was further argued that in contemporary China the two basic classes were the "rebellious class" and the "conservative class" and that the struggle between them would continue throughout the entire period of socialist development.⁴²

It may not be difficult to explain why people from bad and middle origins became rebels, but it is sometimes difficult to explain why a large number of people with good class designations joined radical groups. In fact, those rebels who could be formally categorized as of good origins were usually not as "pure" as most of the conservatives were. An example is the members of the leading body of the Workers' Headquarters--the most radical worker organization in Wuhan.

At first glance, all of them seem to have come from good family backgrounds, and three were Party members (see Table 1). A close look at their past experiences, however, quickly revealed that they all had reasons to be discontented with the pre-CR society.

Except for three about whom we do not have enough information, all the chief leaders of the Workers' Headquarters had been more or less disciplined before the CR.⁴³ What was important was not whether or not the charges

⁴¹. Yangzijianq pinglun, June 20, 1968; Dongfanghong (Beijing), March 22, 1967; Jinggangshan (Beijing), February 8, 1967; and interviewees 61 and 62.

⁴². Wenge pinglun (Guangzhou), January 1968.

⁴³. Zhu Hongxia was found to have joined a secret society before the liberation. In 1955, he was disciplined for having been involved with a group that planned to defect to other countries. In 1957, he was charged with having echoed "rightists." At the beginning of the CR, he was branded as a member of the local "Three-Family Village" along with Jiang Shicheng and two

against them were well founded but the fact that they had been victimized. Despite their good origins, they knew they did not belong to the existing power structure.

Even those people of good origins who had never been chastised might have other reasons to affiliate with the radicals rather than the conservatives. Some might have been treated as "backward elements." Others might have relatives who had been found to be "monsters and ghosts".⁴⁴ The distrust,

other colleagues, for, as amateur writers, their works were considered to have contained "anti-Party elements."

Hu Houming was an ambitious young man. He often said: "If I cannot leave a good name for a hundred generations, I would rather to have my name go down in history as a byword of infamy." In 1961, he joined the Party. But he did not immediately become a full member after a one-year probationary period, because many people considered him too ambitious, too crafty, and too lazy. In the the Socialist Education Movement, he wanted to be the director of the factory's club, but the Party secretary and the work team prevented his election, which further nourished his resentment against the establishment. In the first stage of the CR, he, like Zhu and Jiang, was labeled as a member of a minor "Three-Family Village" in his factory.

Li Hongrong was a Party member. But in the Socialist Education Movement, when other Party members were allowed to reregister as Party members after investigation, he was required to wait one more year, which was a disciplinary action, for he was found to have had affairs with several women, illegally resold clothing and meat coupons at a profit, and practiced usury.

Yu Keshun was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for swindling in 1957.

Hou Lianzheng was labeled as "bad element" and discharged from public employment in 1958.

Zhou Guangjie was twice discharged from public employment, once for helping a capitalist make a forged tax report in 1951 and again for corruption after worming his way into another unit.

Guanyu qiangqongzong wenti diaocha baogao; Xinhuaqong, March 24, 1967; Hou Lianzheng hezuizhiyou, March 1968; CJRB, December 1 and 2, 1977; and interviewees 35 and 59.

⁴⁴. All Chinese knew that if one of their family members or relatives was found to be politically undesirable, they would never again be trusted by the Party leaders and their good origin peers. No matter how active they might

criticism, and discrimination of the political cadres and activists had long made them uncomfortable. Before the CR, they were angry but had to bottle it up. Now they could let it out.⁴⁵

Table 1 The Chief Leaders of the Workers' Headquarters.

Name	Sex	Age	Class Origin	CCP/CYL
Zhu Hongxia	M	34	Urban Poor	No
Hu Chongyuan	M	31	Poor Peasant	CCP
Jiang Shicheng	M	29	Poor Peasant	No
Hu Houming	M	29	Independant Laborer	CCP
Li Hongrong	M	39	Lower-middle Peasant	CCP
Yu Keshun	M	33	Poor Peasant	No
Liu Qun	M	23	Poor Peasant	No
Hou Lianzheng	M	33	Independant Laborer	No
Zhou Guangjie	M	34	Urban Poor	No
Li Chenghong	M	24	Staff	No

Source: Guanyu gangqongzong wenti diaocha baogao, July, 1967.

The term rebel, however, is misleading, for it implies the existence of a well-defined and relatively homogeneous group. In fact, the rebels were divided into a plethora of smaller factions, among which conflicts could be as

have been, they would henceforth belong to another category, an inferior category, and they would share a common fate with those they might have looked down on before. Among my interviewees, there were several former rebels who had been political activists before the CR. Their cases are very interesting. Interviewees 16, 20, 24, 35, 51, 71, and 78.

⁴⁵. Wuhan gongren, May 10, 1969; Jinggangshan (Beijing), February 8, 1967; and interivewees 19 and 23.

violent as those between the rebels and the conservatives. Why? The following four cases might provide some revelation.

Case 1. In a key school, the rebellious students were divided into two groups: "Red October" which was affiliated with the Second Headquarters in the city and "The East Is Red" which was the branch of the Third Headquarters in the school. The former was composed mainly by the students from nonproletarian families, whereas the latter was made up largely of people who were from good origins but had been considered backward students. All had been excluded from the original Red Guards, which admitted only political activists with good family backgrounds as members, either because of their "impure" family backgrounds or because of their bad political performances. This exclusion was the basic reason why they became rebellious. But the two groups of rebels had different targets in mind. The rebels in the Red October tended to have been good students favored by teachers and school leaders for their excellent academic achievements and well-behaved manner, so that they were reluctant to criticize the teachers and leaders. The rebels in "The East Is Red," however, attacked not only school leaders and teachers but also what they called "minor power holders within the student body," namely the former good students, for they had never developed a close relationship with all those people. Although the Third Headquarters in general was much more moderate than the Second Headquarters in the politics of the city, in this particular school, the situation was reversed.⁴⁶

Case 2. In another middle school, the teachers were divided into three groups: a conservative organization composed by former political activists with good class origins; an affiliation of the Workers' Headquarters, whose members tended to be good origin teachers who were not trusted by the school leaders; and a group calling itself "Red Teachers," whose members were mainly from nonproletarian origins. The second group was most radical because its members thought that the former school leaders had relied upon the activists

⁴⁶. Interviewee 51.

in dealing with political affairs and treated the teachers of nonproletarian origins as the backbone of academic works. Only they had been ignored. The teachers in the third group did not like the political activists, but they also looked down on those in the second group for their inadequate academic abilities. While the branch of the Workers' Headquarters concentrated its fire on the principal, who was concurrently the Party secretary, the Red Teachers had ambivalent feelings about this power holder because the secretary had treated them fairly well before the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁷

Case 3. In a hospital, there were two radical groups. One was made up mainly of good-origin odd-job men who had been regarded as backward, and the other consisted primarily of nonproletarian-origin doctors and other professional staff. Both vigorously attacked the Party committee. But the former focused its criticism on the director of the hospital, who was also a member of the committee, and the latter took the Party secretary a major target. The former believed the director had represented the interests of the professional staff and held the odd-job men, especially the backward workers, in contempt; and the latter thought the secretary should have been responsible for discriminative practices against nonproletarian-origin professionals in the hospital.⁴⁸

Case 4. A large transport company was considered to have "rotted" in the Socialist Education Movement of 1965 so that afterward a large proportion of its cadres were discharged from their posts and replaced by members of the work team who had been transferred from other units. When the CR broke out, the so-called "dismissed cadres during the Socialist Education Movement" and their sympathizers, mostly office clerks, rose against the new power holders,

⁴⁷. Interviewees 29 and 30. In another school, the division of the teachers was almost identical with the pattern found in this case, except that there the most radical group was not called the Workers' Headquarters but Red Teachers (interviewee 15).

⁴⁸. Interviewees 65 and 66.

holding those former work team members responsible for their suffering. Their action, however, did not get much support from another rebellious group, which consisted for the most part of the backward workers. The fire of the workers' group was concentrated not so much on the newly assigned cadres as on the cadres of long standing, because the former, as newcomers, had had little conflict with those workers, whereas the latter might have displeased many during the years of their service.⁴⁹

The four cases help us further explore the rebels' motives. The rebels tended to be people who had been discontented for various reason. All these cases suggest that the composition of the rebels and the internal factionalism between them were intimately connected with the principal social divisions in the pre-CR society, namely, the tensions between the cadres and the masses, between people of good origins and nonproletariats, and between the political activists and the backward elements. When the backward elements with good origins conflicted with the power holders and the activists, for instance, their suspicion about those of nonproletarian origins would not disappear. The reverse was also true. Although the two types of the rebels might form expedient coalitions briefly when facing formidable pressure from the conservatives, their different or opposing motives would ultimately lead them the battlefield.

Not only was the term rebel somehow misleading, but the application of the omnibus labels rebels and conservatives might also be tricky. It was not uncommon for people who protected the power holders within their unit to affiliate themselves with a city-wide radical organization or for those confronting with their superiors to join a city-wide conservative organization. Such cases often occurred in units in which a dual power structure had emerged in the course of the Socialist Education Movement, one led by the work team and the other by the Party committee. Thus the supporters of the Party committee were necessarily at odds with those who

⁴⁹. Interviewee 31.

avored the policy of the work team. During the period of the CR, to strengthen its own bargaining power, every local group within a unit wanted to tie itself to a city-wide organization, and every city-wide organization wanted to recruit as many followers as possible. It was a rule that groups that conflicted on the internal issues never became associated with the same outside organization. It thus was possible for the sympathizers of the Party committee to become "rebels," and for the challengers of the work team to align themselves with the conservatives.⁵⁰

Neither the rebel nor conservative seemed accurate to categorize the people in those units. What is important is not to create a new label but to realize the implications presented by those cases. First, what really mattered for most of the participants in the CR were the issues within their respective units not the grand ideological issues such as "two-lines" or whatever. Otherwise, it would have been unthinkable for internal conservatives to become external rebels, and *vice versa*. Those cases of "misplacement" suggests that the people were concentrating so much on the internal issues of their units that they often chose the "wrong" side in the city politics. Second, a local group affiliated itself with a city-wide organization primarily to deter or match the opposing groups within the unit by flaunting its powerful outside connections rather than to demonstrate its solidarity with its patron organization. Once having aligned itself with an

⁵⁰. Interviewees 6, 8, 12, 15, 19, 20, and 35. The point can be illustrate by an interesting story told by interviewee 17. Once outside "rebels" came to his unit to support the "minority suppressed by the power holders." They quickly found, however, that it was the "conservatives" there who were active in struggling against the work team, while the local "rebels" were the work team's hard-shelled loyalists. This finding made the outsiders confused so that they soon withdrew. Liu Guokai also notes that "one cannot equate the 'rebels' or 'conservatives' who were active within their own units with those 'rebels' or 'conservatives' who operated on a much wider scope in society at large." See Liu Guokai, A Brief Analysis of the Cultural Revolution, pp. 81-82.

outside organization, however, the local group shared a common fate with its patron group, which limited its options so that it had to be in agreement with the patron on issues of city politics. In other words, it was the alignment that led to agreement, not the other way around.⁵¹ We may conclude with reason that outside connections mainly served internal purposes.⁵²

In a speech delivered in December 1966, Lin Biao concluded, based on his observation in the first six months of the CR, that two types of people---the suppressed and the young---were more likely to become rebels.⁵³ Young people might be more militant than people in other age groups but they were not necessarily more radical in political orientation. As in any age group, there were probably more young people on the conservative side than on the rebellious side and the young conservatives were indeed more violent in their actions than their adult counterparts. Age seems thus to have influenced the militancy of one's actions but not one's political orientation.

⁵¹. This point can be illuminated more clearly by looking at how internal "rebels" allied themselves with external "rebellious" groups. As I have shown, the relatively moderate rebels in internal affairs often cast their lot with a hard-line radical group outside while their militant counterparts in the unit went along with a modestly radical organization in the city.

⁵². In discussing the factionalism of the CR, it had been a common practice to categorize people simply by identifying their formal affiliation with grand city-wide organizations. In Wuhan, thus, those who joined the Second Headquarters or the Workers' Headquarters were called the "rebels" and those in the original Red Guards or the Federation of Revolutionary Laborers the "conservatives". This categorization is useful but could sometimes be misleading. Some of my interviewees suggested that it might be better to categorize people into the two camps of rebels and conservatives by looking at each's stand on internal affairs of his or her unit. Although it may be impossible for researchers to do so, the suggestion nevertheless can keep us sober-minded when we use such omnibus labels.

⁵³. Lin Biao wenxuan, (Wuhan 1968), p. 274.

The conservatives (*baoshoupai*) were often called "loyalists" (*baohuangpai*), implying that they were loyal to the power holders from Liu Shaoqi down to the Party secretary of their work units. Indeed, when it was first known in Wuhan that Liu was a target of the ongoing movement, most of the people, conservatives and rebels alike, thought it was hearsay. But once it was confirmed that Liu had really "made mistakes," the conservatives were as critical of him as the rebels, and perhaps even more earnest in doing so.⁵⁴ The conservatives' attitude toward the Hubei Provincial Party Committee and Wuhan Municipal Party Committee was more interesting. At first, when the committees were leading the fight against rebellious "minorities," the conservatives were their enthusiastic supporters. Once the committees, under pressure from Beijing, made concessions to the rebels, however, the conservatives themselves became rebellious in dealing with the provincial and municipal power holders. At the grass-roots level, that is, in individual work units, the conservatives shared a common fate with the power holders. They tended to defend those leaders to the very end, for the patron-client relationship in the pre-CR period had bound them and the power holders so closely that any attack on the latter amounted to striking a blow against them. To defend themselves, they thus had to defend the power holders. That the conservatives cared much less about the fate of higher-level cadres than that of their immediate superiors also suggests that the participants in the CR were motivated not so much by their concern about grand ideological issues as by their vital interests. Essentially, what the conservatives guarded was not the individuals in power but the existing structure of power distribution personified by the power holders, from which they had benefited.⁵⁵

One's position in the pre-CR society thus was the most crucial factor in determining which side one took in the CR. A former rebel leader gave a general explanation:

⁵⁴. Interviewees 10 and 24.

⁵⁵. Yanqizijianq pinqlun, June 20, 1968.

It is a rule that as long as one still has an alternative, he will not rise up against the authorities. Only when one finds no way out will he be driven to revolt. Those who had plain sailing before the CR and had had no trouble at the very beginning of the CR, of course, would not act on the offensive against the people in power. Among the rebels, on the other hand, there were few, if any, who became rebellious simply because they were concerned with the fate of the revolution or they were eager to respond to Mao's call....Most people did not care much about how to prevent capitalist restoration, though they claimed they did in their propaganda, which was a strategy my organization consistently used those days; but they cared about their interests. It seemed that the masses of people were not really concerned with what Chairman Mao was concerned with.⁵⁶

In sum, latent contradictions in the pre-CR society was the primary reason why Chinese split into hostile factions during the Cultural Revolution. This conclusion can be carried a step further to suggest that where more such latent contradictions had been cumulated, factionalism there tended to be more explosive. In my interviews, I found three types of work units---homogeneous, heterogeneous, and polarized units---which differed in the degree of intensity of hidden conflicts from one another. In the homogeneous units, the components were to a great extent from similar backgrounds. For instance, the Party and government agencies in charge of confidential or important works and munitions factories usually employed only people of good origins and a large proportion of those employees were Party or Youth League members. Because of their purity, those units were rarely treated as focal points in the pre-CR political campaigns so that fewer internal conflicts arose than elsewhere. Even the breakout of the CR would not break their internal cohesion.

⁵⁶. Interviewee 24. My interviewees often could point out the specific reasons why each of their colleagues had affiliated with the radical or conservative side.

Therefore, the conservatives in those units tended to hold dominant position, and the movement in those units were usually fairly peaceful.⁵⁷

The polarized units drew their employees basically from two diametrically different groups. Among the best examples were cultural, educational, and scientific research institutions, most of whose staffs were intellectuals from nonproletarian origins and the rest mainly revolutionary cadres with little formal education and odd-job workers from good origins. In the years before the CR, the members of these two groups were in continual conflict with each other, especially during political campaigns. It therefore was not surprising that there were more rebels in those units than in the others.⁵⁸

The heterogeneous units lie somewhere between the homogeneous and polarized units. Most units fell into this category. Before the CR, there was less latent antagonism in them than in the polarized units but more than in the homogeneous units. As a result, neither the conservatives nor the rebels could build up absolute superiority and factional conflicts in those units were likely to be more complicated.⁵⁹

Conclusion

The CR did not spring full-blown from anyone's brow. Mao was undoubtedly an important element, but his power to determine events was limited and he did not play the omnipotent role that has been assigned to him by many observers of the CR. Although Mao did initiate the upheaval, his efforts were soon to be diverted into "emergency salvage" as the forces he unleashed created

⁵⁷. Interviewees 25, 70, 73, 74, 80, 81, and 84.

⁵⁸. Interviewees 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 26, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 49, 50, 60, 65, 65, and 67.

⁵⁹. Interviewees 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 27, 28, 31, 35, 42, 52, 59, 67, 72, and 75.

uncontrolled conditions.⁶⁰ Liu Shaoqi was right when he remarked at an early stage of the CR: "A movement has its own logic, and it will move forward according to its own logic rather than yours and mine."⁶¹ What most effectively limited Mao's power was the behavior of masses. All the participants in the CR echoed Mao's language in their fighting against the power holders and against each other, but their perceptions of the CR were more often than not incongruous with Mao's and with each other's. Deliberately or unconsciously, Mao's self-claimed followers were actually pursuing their own private interests. Mao's words were used as cloaks to hide those special interests.

⁶⁰. Chalmers Johnson, "China, the Cultural Revolution in Structural Perspective," Asian Survey 8 (January 1968): 1-15.

⁶¹. Jianjue ba Liu Shaoqi jiuhui Beijing jiangong xueyuan doudao douchou, May 20, 1967.