

“Masters of the Docks”
or
“Slaves to Work Quotas”?

**Student-Workers in Shanghai During the 1974
Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius**

by
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Abstract

In early 1974, the aging Mao launched a campaign calling upon people to study China's ancient history for lessons to help drive China's modern revolution. Workplaces became the main locus of the confrontations and the Shanghai docks became a highly publicized site for the theatrical struggles that followed. But Mao had learned from his earlier mistakes and did not want politics to threaten production. When the two competing factions were told to reconcile, old-rebels who had been sidelined earlier were promised a fifty-fifty share of Party memberships. But the hundreds of thousands of student-workers in Shanghai were further sidelined. Once idealistic Red Guards, these young people had since become deeply disillusioned. As they were enrolled *en masse* to study modern Marxist interpretations of ancient Chinese texts their disillusionment only deepened and they turned their back on ideas of revolution to live very traditional lives.

Keywords: China; Shanghai; Cultural Revolution; workers; youth; Confucius; Worker Theory Teams; Communist Youth League

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my father in remembrance of the many family dinners—and bad jokes—at Linda Mae’s Chinese restaurant in Calgary.

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I wish to thank all those people in Shanghai who were so generous in sharing their time and their memories.

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List of Acronyms

BIT	Bureau of Industry and Transport (<i>Gongjiao zu</i>)
CCP	Communist Party of China
CYL	Communist Youth League
Dongde	(undated, handwritten draft from late 1974) <i>Gongren dongde quanju, zijue guanhao luxian</i> [Workers Understand the Broad Situation: From (This) Self-Awareness (They) Are Able to Maintain the Correct Path], in SMA B 246-2-1038.
Gaoyang	Gu Gan, Li Peifu, and Mao Bo'ke, eds. <i>Gaoyang chunqiu: Shanghai gang Gaoyang gangwu gongsi lishi</i> [Spring and Autumn in Gaoyang: History of the Gao Yang Harbour Affairs Company] (Dalian: Dalian haishi chubanshe, 1994).
GJQK	Shanghaishi geweihui gongjiaozu mishuzu. <i>Gongjiao qingkuang</i> [Situation Updates From the (Shanghai) Bureau of Industry and Commerce].
GLF	Great Leap Forward
GNB	<i>Gong nong bing</i> , literally “workers peasants and soldiers,” a term normally used to designate young people from those classes who received priority in the assignment of jobs and education opportunities.
KMT	<i>Kuomintang</i> as written in the older, Wade-Giles Romanization, or <i>Guomindang</i> in the newer Romanization of Chinese characters used in the PRC. Sometimes also translated literally as Nationalist Party.
LLDW	<i>Lilun duiwu</i> (Worker Theory Team)
LLDWCZ	Shanghai shi zonggonghui xuanchuanzu, eds. <i>Shanghai gongren lilun duiwu zai douzheng zhong chengzhang</i> [Worker Theory Troops in Shanghai: Growing in the Midst of Struggle] (Shanghai: Shanghai remmin chubanshe, 1974).
NPC	National People's Congress
PLA	People's Liberation Army
SFTU	Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions
SASS	Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences
SHGZ	Zhang Yan, Wu Rongguan, Zhang Yunlong, Zhang Xuefang, and Mao Bo'ke, eds., <i>Shanghai gangzhi</i> [Shanghai Harbour Gazetteer] Shanghai: Shanghai shekeyuan chubanshe, 2001.

- SHSH Shanghai “wen’ge” shiliao zhengli bianji xiaozu, *Shanghai “wenhua da geming” shihua: ding’gao songshen ben* [Historical Narrative of the “Great Cultural Revolution” in Shanghai: Final Draft for Review].
- SMA Shanghai Municipal Archive
- SOE State Owned Enterprise
- Sunshi Wuqu er dui diaochazu, *Women bu jin shi matou de zhuren, women geng shi guojia de zhuren; guanyu wo qu benwei zhuyi zuo guai gei women jingji shang dailai da sunshi diaochao baogao* [We Are Not Just the Masters of the Docks but Also the Masters of the Nation: a Report on the Big Economic Damage Caused by Mischievous Disruptions Caused by Self-Serving Protectionism at Our Dock], August 6, 1974, 1-5, in SMA B 246-2-1038-104.
- WDGW Song Yongyi, ed. *Zhongguo wenhua da geming wenku* [Chinese Cultural Revolution Database]. Hong Kong: Xianggang Zhongwen daxue Zhongguo yanjiu fuwu zhongxin, 2002, CD-ROM.
- XXPP *Xuexi yu pipan* [Study and Criticism].

Chapter 1. Introduction

Chairman Mao's word goes out and the world is turned upside down.

On the docks, every place becomes a battleground.

Criticize with words: attack with pens.

Charge ahead like daring generals.

Be leaders in the battle.¹

Standing high on the platform above thousands of jostling workers the slender young man read out his poem in a loud voice. It was February 2, 1974, the tail end of the traditional Chinese New Year holiday and day of the formal launch of the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius in Shanghai's Culture Plaza.² Just two weeks before, Chairman Mao had personally signed off on the first Party Central document of the New Year, a document which called for people to criticize the ideas of China's ancient sage, Confucius, and to attack the behavior of his modern day followers such as Lin Biao.³ Lin Biao had once been Mao's "closest comrade in arms" and designated successor but had died in ignominy in September 1971 when his plane crashed while trying to flee the

¹ *Wenhui bao*, February 3, 1974, 1.

² In 1974, the traditional (lunar) Chinese New Year began on January 23. It was the year of the tiger.

³ *Zhongfa* [1974] 1, "Lin Biao yu Kong Meng zhi dao (cai liao zhi yi) de tongzhi ji fujian" [Notification and Supplementary Material (First Collection of Materials) Regarding Lin Biao and the Path of Confucius and Mencius], January 18, 1974, in WDGW.

country after the discovery of a purported plan to depose Mao.⁴ Over the previous decade, other political campaigns had resulted in suffering for millions, so as workers took time off to enjoy their Chinese New Year holiday, many would have worried about what this new campaign had in store for them. With their brief holiday winding down, it was time for the campaign to get started.

The slender young man who came to the stage that morning was Fang Tianlun, a worker from dock five, one of the millions of students whom Mao had been sending to work in farms or factories ever since 1968. Just a few weeks earlier, young Fang had put up a big character poster at his dock declaring on behalf of his fellow dockworkers that “we want to be masters of the workplace and not slaves to work quotas” (*yao dang matou de zhuren, bu zuo dunwei de nuli*). Reports of his bold action were quickly trumpeted on the front pages of newspapers across the country. Overnight, young Fang had become a revolutionary rock star.

The Shanghai docks held a special, if at times ambivalent, place in the popular imagination of the day. On the one hand, the popular revolutionary opera of the period, *On the Docks*, had idealized the docks as a place where highly motivated young workers toiled selflessly to advance Chairman Mao’s revolution.⁵ Whereas before the revolution, the dockworkers had been cruelly mistreated by foreign capitalists, KMT gangsters, and Japanese militarists, it was now the workers themselves who were supposedly in charge. But in late 1966 the myth of happy workers had been shattered when thousands of dockworkers in Shanghai walked off the job to protest poor pay and benefits, sparking city wide work stoppages that were later condemned as the “wind of economism” (*jingji*

⁴ Lin Biao had been an important general first in the war against the Japanese and later in the civil war against the KMT. Close to Mao since the 1920s, Lin was promoted to become the Minister of Defense in 1959 where he introduced a campaign to glorify the study of the ideas of the Chairman, a study which became obligatory for all people with the launch of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Lin’s unswerving loyalty to Mao increasingly radical policies, lead the Chairman to confirm Lin as the deputy Chairman and designated successor at the Ninth Party Congress in 1969. In propaganda of that period, Lin was frequently referred to as Mao’s “closest comrade in arms.”

⁵ *On the Docks* was one of the “eight revolutionary operas for 800 million people” that were shown over and over again to people in movie theatres. The stories and songs were well known to all people. More will be said about the role of these operas later in this thesis.

zhuyi feng). But once the Maoist radicals in Shanghai were able, with the support of those striking workers, to take power in the “January seizure of power” of early 1967 they established “revolutionary committees” that very soon forced the striking workers back to work and suppressed their call for improved pay and benefits. This call for a restoration of law and order had come from Chairman Mao himself and his charisma, backed by the presence of the army, ensured that even the most rebellious of workers was soon back at work.⁶ But in 1974, after seven years of relative harmony, Chairman Mao was stirring things up again, this time calling upon people to mobilize to criticize China’s ancient sage, Confucius, along with his modern day followers such as Lin Biao. To the average worker, this all seemed a little strange. Newspapers in Shanghai quoted workers, young as well as old, asking the clearly rhetorical question “What value is there for us in studying someone who died 2,000 years ago?”⁷ In Beijing, leading radicals close to the Chairman were secretly telling their followers in Shanghai to be ready for a “second January revolution” leading to a “second Cultural Revolution.” For ordinary people, however, this was confusing and a little scary. They had experienced too much trauma in the first Cultural Revolution. What lay ahead for them in 1974?

My thesis looks at the experience of student-workers in Shanghai during the campaign in 1974, especially those who worked on the docks, a traditionally very politicized place. In 1968, Mao had decreed that, once they reached the age of sixteen, all urban youth—girls as well as boys—were to be sent away to toil in farms or factories. He had grown tired of restive Red Guards hanging around with nothing to do. Most youth in Shanghai were sent to work in the countryside but roughly one-third were assigned jobs in the city. On the docks, these new arrivals made up the majority of the loading teams. But these were not the first school graduates to be assigned work on the docks. In the mid-1960s some high school graduates had been assigned temporary jobs on the docks

⁶ For an excellent study of the workers in Shanghai during the decade of the Cultural Revolution see Elizabeth J. Perry and Li Xun, *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997).

⁷ *Wenhui bao*, January 30, 1974, 1 and *Jiefang ribao*, February 7, 1974, 1.

and, indeed, it was their dissatisfaction with lower pay and fewer job benefits that that prompted many of them to strike in late 1966 during the wind of economism.

Even though, in many cases, there was as little as five years separating the ages of this early wave of young school graduates from the ages of the second wave that arrived in 1968, there was a huge gap in experience and outlook. Many of the first wave had been in the forefront of the worker protests in 1966 but, after order was restored, most came out on the wrong side of the power settlement. During the protests that arose during the political campaign in 1974, most of this first wave of young workers became identified with the “old rebels” (*lao zaofan*) faction. The students who began to arrive in workplaces in large numbers after 1968, however, had a very different experience and outlook. Thus, to distinguish them from the slightly older (but much more world-wise) cohort, I will refer to the latter arrivals as “student-workers.”⁸

I show that by 1974, an unceasing diet of political education had lost its effectiveness. By then, even the later arriving student-workers had seen and experienced too much to ignore the yawning gap between myth and reality. Workers of all ages had become deeply disillusioned and acted out their resentments in their workplaces. The ubiquitous “eight revolutionary operas for eight hundred million people” were still enjoyed for their entertainment value but they—like political education in general—had lost their power to motivate. This, I will argue, is why the aging and infirm Chairman Mao launched this Campaign in 1974: the jaded youth of China needed to be re-inspired to carry on Mao’s revolution after he was gone. But even as he was promoting this radical political campaign, Mao was careful to protect the seeds of economic development which he had allowed his pragmatic Premier, Zhou Enlai, to plant two years before. Thus, in a rich irony, even as Mao’s last big campaign to spur China’s advance toward modernization got lost in the dead end of thought reform, his support of economic development at home and engagement with the free markets overseas launched China on a path that was to bear rich fruit for the people and the nation.

⁸ In Chinese, the broader term “young workers” (*qing gong*) is used. However, that term obscures the very important differences in outlook and activities between these two groups.

Disillusioned and frustrated by their lives in highly regimented and artificial workplaces, most student-workers retreated into the comfort of the familiar by getting together with small groups of close friends to share news and gossip. Unlike many of their classmates who had become radicalized in their thinking and behaviour after being sent to the harsh rural settings, these urban student-workers adopted very traditional and cautious life styles, reading books, dreaming of getting a good job, and getting married to live a quiet life in the city. For most of them, politics was something to be avoided.

Some student-workers, however, followed the traditional path of career advancement by working as political activists. But they too had to adjust their youthful expectations to the new reality. In school, they had been taught to see communism as a set of scientific truths that were mediated by the dedicated and selfless individuals who represented the Party. For Party members, the guiding mantra was Mao's famous call to "Serve the People." Organizationally, the Party was presented as an impersonal machine where everyone did their best to serve others. However, to their dismay, the student-workers discovered that there was huge mistrust and factionalism in both the Party and the workplace. Even before the Cultural Revolution, things in the workplace only got done on the basis of private relationships and personal loyalties.⁹ Resentment of workplace patronage was widespread and this helped spur worker unrest in late 1966. In 1966-1968, most old cadres had been knocked down. But by 1971 more and more were called back to get production going again. Once again, the way for a young activist to get ahead was to attach him or herself to a powerful cadre-patron in his or her work unit.

In a Communist Chinese workplace, the term "cadre" (*ganbu*) referred to someone who had been promoted away from the "front-line of production" to fulfill some sort of support function, be it supervisory or technical. In the view of Marxist economics, it was only the workers who produced value. Thus, cadres were always under the obligation

⁹ Andrew Walder talks of "Party clientelism" where superiors are able to command loyalty from selected subordinates through the exploitation of "networks of instrumental personal ties." In the end, the loyalty created is to the patron and not to the higher principles which he espouses. Andrew George Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 22-26.

to show that they were really serving the people and not just holding down some soft office job. Cadres might include engineers, technicians, and accountants. Many but not all of these specialists might also be Party members as would some ordinary workers who were chosen for their “model worker” status. But in the lives of the workers, it was only those cadres who held the power over work assignments and other benefits that were important. In 1974, the Party committee in each work unit was the locus of this power. When I use the term “old cadres” in my thesis, it is to those senior Party leaders that I am referring.

I centre my thesis on events on the Shanghai docks. In 1966 and 1967 the dockworkers had played a particularly important role in the tumultuous events that brought the Cultural Revolution to Shanghai. They were also the site of the famous revolutionary opera, *On the Docks*, which mythologized the history of the docks as a sacred site in the history of the Chinese people’s fight against imperialism, militarism, and bourgeois capitalism. The historical symbolism of the docks can also be seen in the way that political ideologues tried to mine this symbolism in early 1974.

The balance of this introductory chapter contains five sections. The first section of four pages lays out the historiography for my thesis. The second section of six pages gives the historical context for the events of 1974. The third section of four pages outlines the arguments that I make in the four chapters that make up the core of this thesis (chapters two through five respectively). The fourth section of this introduction gives a four page discussion of my sources and the fifth section gives a two page outline of the main events of the campaign.

Historiography

Deborah Kaple shows that, once the CCP came to power, it was quick to adopt “high Stalinist” practices of enterprise management from its Soviet ally. Through the application of heavy doses of political motivation, such practices promised to develop the

economy quickly and cheaply. The CCP liked the idea of centrally-set targets and the total mobilization of workers through mass campaigns but were loath to follow the Soviet model completely and cede power to managers who, while they might be “expert,” perhaps lacked the idealistic vision (and undivided Party loyalty) that came with political “redness.” Thus, throughout the Maoist era, the Party inserted itself at the centre of all enterprise management.¹⁰ During the Cultural Revolution, Chairman Mao frequently attacked managers for being “too bureaucratic.” But sociologist Eddy U argues that problems of the Chinese economy were more due to the *lack* of bureaucratic order, discipline, and clear rules; thus, the incessant political campaigning that Mao relied on was actually the main cause of the problems.¹¹ Andrew Walder analyzed these problems more fully in his book *Chinese Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry*. He found that, despite the presence of scientific technical knowledge and modern equipment in the new factories, the systems of motivation and management remained very traditional inasmuch as they still relied heavily on subjective decisions by key people. With “politics in command,” the Party (or more precisely, its representatives) doled out opportunities to loyal and responsive clients by way of “principled particularism.” Well-positioned intermediaries in this system were then able to deliver favours, creating extensive networks of interpersonal ties. That, of course, led to a very calculating—and jealous—workforce.¹² Exacerbated by the political struggles of the late 1960s, these and other grievances bubbled beneath the surface, breaking to the surface during the temporary relaxation of workplace discipline in early 1974.

The brief success, and then, failure of the “wave of economism” that swept over the docks and then the whole city in December 1966 had a major effect on the events of 1974. Yiching Wu argues against the traditional interpretations of the January Seizure of Power in 1967 that only sees those events through the lens of a “politics in command”

¹⁰ Deborah Kaple, *Dream of a Red Factory: The Legacy of High Stalinism in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹¹ Eddy U, *Disorganizing China: Counter Bureaucracy and the Decline of Socialism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

¹² Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism*.

approach to history. With such a (purposely) blinkered view, the politicized Chinese media of the day argued that the economism of late 1966 was ironclad proof of the presence of political black-hands behind the scenes. And with an overly keen desire to find a logic in the political restructuring that took place following the establishment of a Revolutionary committee in Shanghai in February 1967, most western scholars have overlooked the spontaneous and uncoordinated nature of acts by hundreds of thousands of ordinary workers “on the margin.”¹³ While the voices of those workers were not to be heard in the still tightly controlled media in 1974, we can still detect loud grumblings of worker dissatisfaction by a careful reading “against the grain” of documents of the time.

In their classic study of workers in Shanghai during the decade of the Cultural Revolution, Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun show that workers were only able to rebel after their cadre-managers had their power to reward (and, more importantly, punish) removed temporarily by the impish Mao. Statements by the Chairman such as “to rebel is good” and “attack the headquarters”—followed up by instructions to the police and army to stand aside—disarmed the old cadres and left them defenceless against protesting workers. In the brief window of opportunity that followed, the workers of Shanghai became very active in politics. Perry and Li group worker involvement into three categories: the “cautious” clients who (initially at least) stayed close to their existing patrons, the “eager economists” who, once they saw the chance, agitated for improved pay and benefits, and the “rambunctious rebels” who, out of personal grievances or ambitions, were willing to take risks.¹⁴ Most of the leaders of the worker-rebels came from this last group. But they were in the definite minority. Most workers started out as cautious clients but switched to become eager economists when the chance presented itself and there was safety in numbers. In the events of 1974, we will see hints of all three personality types at play but, because the authorities still had a very firm grip on public security, there was practically no public unrest that might have given rambunctious rebels

¹³ Yiching Wu, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Perry and Li, *Proletarian Power*. I have taken some poetic license with the authors’ original terminology and hope that my simplification only underscores the power of their argument.

a chance to act. And of course, another big difference between 1966 and 1974 was the addition of over 400,000 former students to the urban workforce, a group that had come to account for roughly one-quarter of the urban proletariat. What was special about these student-workers?

Bonnin¹⁵ and Chan¹⁶ have closely examined the experiences of young people who were sent down to work in the countryside and found that disillusionment was widespread and that anti-social behaviour was common. In their study of urban life in Maoist China, Whyte and Parrish reported that during the 1970s there was a perception that petty crime and social deviance were increasing in urban centres, largely driven by the large number of young people hanging around who refused to go to work in the countryside or who had snuck back illegally.¹⁷ Brown touches briefly on the experience of student-workers at the Tianjin Ironworks during this period but, located as it was in a remote rural site, the social dynamics at that workplace were closer to those of a rural collective farm than to an urban workplace.¹⁸ Jin Dalu's *Feichang yu zhengchang* (The Ordinary in the Midst of the Extraordinary) gives a series of fascinating insights into everyday life in Shanghai during this period. Despite all the crazy stuff going on in the world of politics, most of the people most of the time got on with their lives in very ordinary ways. But while Jin explores such diverse topics as marriage and birth control, food rationing, Mao statues, Mao badges, and clothing styles, he did not look at the lives of working people, especially student-workers, as they negotiated the complexities of their public lives.¹⁹ For workers, the work unit was the centre of their lives: it was where their security file was kept, where they were educated, where they worked, where they

¹⁵ Michel Bonnin, *The Lost Generation: The Rustification of China's Youth (1968 to 1980)* trans. Krystina Horko (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2013).

¹⁶ Anita Chan, *Children of Mao: Personality Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985).

¹⁷ Martin King Whyte and William L. Parrish, *Urban Life in Contemporary China*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), chapter 8.

¹⁸ Jeremy Brown, *City Versus Countryside in Mao's China: Negotiating the Divide* (New York: Cambridge University Press), chapter 7.

¹⁹ Jin Dalu, *Feichang yu zhengchang: Shanghai "wenge" shiqi de shehui shenghuo* [The Ordinary in the Midst of the Extraordinary: Life in Shanghai During the Cultural Revolution] 2 vols. (Shanghai: Cishu chubanshe, 2011).

received their pay and social benefits, and where they saw themselves spending the rest of their lives until they could retire with a pension.

As Elizabeth Perry shows, the young Communist Party of China was very quick to package its very foreign ideology in ways that were culturally acceptable in a very traditional rural setting.²⁰ But then, very quickly, the Party was able to harness art and literature to create an inspiring vision of a very revolutionary future. Xiaomei Chen describes how, during the Cultural Revolution, these creative energies were intensified and as Jiang Qing pushed her “eight revolutionary operas for eight million people” everyone in China became not only part of the audience but also one of the actors. Art had become politics and politics had become art.²¹ For student-workers in Shanghai this was especially important. Not only were they part of the generation that Mao wanted to nurture to become revolutionary successors, but they were in the very city which had been uniquely honoured as the site of the only revolutionary opera that was set in modern day, urban China. Set in the early 1960s, the opera, *On the Docks*, told the tale of an educated young man—himself the son of a martyred dockworker—who struggled with issues of personal ambition that called him away from the path of selfless service to the people. In that tale, the docks became not only a sacred site commemorating the past struggles of the martyrs who had gone before but also the altar on which young people were called to rededicate themselves to Mao’s sacred vision for the future. Thus, during the confusing events of 1974, the image of the docks was used in varying—and often inconsistent—ways that suggested some of the political struggles that were going on beneath the surface. Indeed, everybody sensed that there were tensions in the highest levels of the Party. Nobody, however, knew when they might erupt into public.

The announcement of the Campaign to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius in early 1974 came as a big surprise to everyone. MacFarquhar and Schoenhals; Teiwes and Sun;

²⁰ Elizabeth J. Perry, *Anyuan: Mining China’s Revolutionary Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012).

²¹ Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Way: Political Theatre and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Hawai’i: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002).

and Wang Nianyi all give detailed overviews of how the campaign rolled out—and then rolled back. All present a picture of a powerful, but ailing, Mao who let his attention wander, presenting an opportunity for his wife, Jiang Qing, and her Gang of Four associates to attack the beloved and pragmatic Premier, Zhou Enlai.²² In smaller cities far distant from Beijing, such as Nanjing and Hangzhou, local elites were quick to grasp this opportunity to settle issues left over from the earlier days of the Cultural Revolution.²³ Such “bureaucratic factionalism” was also seen in Shanghai by Perry and Li. But in all the reporting of those months of struggle in 1974, the role of student-workers is missing. This seems strange because by this time student-workers made up about one-quarter of the workforce in Shanghai. Had these erstwhile “red guards” lost their revolutionary passion or did they just not see any point in the whole thing? And how did they view the propaganda that was targeted at them during the anti-Confucian campaign? As Perry shows, for decades Communist ideologues had been successful at winning hearts and minds through mining China’s cultural traditions to prove the Party’s role as the vanguard of the forces of history. I will show, however, that by the end of 1974, the student-workers were even more disillusioned and cynical than ever.

The Historical Background

On the eve of the Cultural Revolution, Shanghai was a city of youth. The end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949 had led to a baby boom in the 1950s and, as a result, by

²² Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2006); Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, *The End of the Maoist Era: Chinese Politics During the Twilight of the Cultural Revolution 1972-1976* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007); Wang Nianyi, *1949-1989 niandai de Zhongguo: Da dongluan de niandai* [China 1949-1989: The Years of Great Turmoil] (Henan: Henan renmin chubanshe, 2009).

²³ Keith Forster, *Rebellion and Factionalism in a Chinese Province: Zhejiang, 1966-1976* (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1990); Dong Guoqiang and Andrew G. Walder, “Factions in a Bureaucratic Setting: The Origins of Cultural Revolution in Nanjing,” *The China Journal* no. 65 (January 1, 2011): 1–25; Dong Guoqiang and Andrew G. Walder, “Nanjing’s ‘Second Cultural Revolution’ Cultural Revolution’ of 1974.” *The China Quarterly* 212 (2012): 893–918.

1966 four out of every ten people in the city was sixteen years or younger.²⁴ Most of these youth—nearly half of them girls—had received the new, basic nine-year public education. Many aspired to go onto vocational or academic high schools and the brightest hoped for admission to universities, graduation from which would launch them on a secure and privileged career in the service of the Party or state. But even the less academically gifted school-leavers could still hope for a secure, lifetime job in the city with ample benefits in a state owned enterprise (SOE). In the summer of 1966, however, the number of young people in Shanghai ballooned. Told by Chairman Mao that “to rebel is good” and then encouraged to go out and exchange experiences with students all across the country, over four million Red Guards flooded into the city. On November 22, 1966 the number of these young visitors to Shanghai peaked at 997,000.²⁵ Despite their energy and passion, the influence of these young Red Guards on political events in Shanghai was short lived.

Shanghai had long been the centre of China’s industry. On the eve of the Cultural Revolution it was home to nearly 1.5 million industrial workers.²⁶ In the summer of 1966, some young workers had been inspired (just like their student brothers) by Chairman Mao’s call to “bombard the headquarters” and started to criticize the leadership in their work units. Gradually, these workers began to link up with other like-minded rebels and on November 6, 1966, the Workers’ General Headquarters (WGH) was formed. On January 6, 1967 the WGH lent its muscle to the Maoist radicals to topple the incumbent leadership in the city in the so called January Seizure of Power. Later, the WGH leader, Wang Hongwen, would be promoted to Beijing and ultimately be designated as Mao

²⁴ Jin Dalu, *Feichang*, 1:17. Jin reports that in 1964, 42 percent of the population of Shanghai was fourteen years or younger. By 1973, that number had fallen to only 26 percent. During the 1960s, the State’s promotion of birth control steadily increased and by the late 1960s birth control pills and devices were widely available. See pages 38 to 43.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 65-73, 84. A group of 150,000 volunteers, mostly housewives, were organized to take care of the visitors. After registering, visiting students received food and a place to sleep.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 56. At the end of 1965, there were 1,480,000 industrial workers in the city. This was in addition to another 421,000 people working to distribute food, clothing and other consumer items; 304,800 working in the area of “science, technology, education and the arts”; 166,000 working in transportation, postal and communication services; and 100,700 working in basic construction. Along with some other smaller sectors, at the end of 1965 the total workforce in Shanghai—including that in the collective as well as in the larger state owned as sector—was reckoned to be 2,721,300.

Zedong's successor as head of the Party. Back in Shanghai, his close associate in the WGH, (Ms.) Wang Xiuzhen (no relative) became part of the troika of leaders that shared power in the revised municipal Party committee. A second secretary, Xu Jingxuan, came from the propaganda wing of the old administration. He had close connections with the Maoist radical in Beijing, Yao Wenyuan, who had risen from the propaganda wing of the old administration in Shanghai to direct Chinese media nationally. The third secretary, Ma Tianshui, was an experienced old bureaucrat who was brought in to make sure that industry and commerce continued to function well.²⁷

The student Red Guards were left out of this new power-sharing arrangement. In February 1967, Mao decreed that they were should stop travelling around the country “to share revolutionary experiences” and to return to their schools. Most did, but in Beijing several university campuses continued to be roiled by factional conflict and, in some cases, even violent fighting. Finally, in June 1968, Chairman Mao lost patience with these unruly youth and sent in teams of workers to restore order. In Beijing, the workers suffered some casualties in the violent—though short-lived—fighting.²⁸ But in Shanghai an “army of 100,000” workers occupied the schools and government institutions without resistance. Nevertheless, the students were not happy about being ordered around by rough and uneducated workers. Mao soon made sure that the young people did not have much time to sit around idly moping.

In August 1968, Mao ordered that all urban youth over the age of sixteen should be sent to work in either the countryside, a village, the frontier, or a factory as part of the “four towards” (*si ge mian xiang*) movement. Assignments to rural areas became known more famously as the “up to the mountains, down to the countryside movement” (*shangshan xiaxiang yundong*). The movement was launched with great fanfare. When the first group of 120 students was sent out from Shanghai, it was reported that 1.2 million people came out to see them off.²⁹ The scale of this program was enormous.

²⁷ Perry and Li, *Proletarian Power*.

²⁸ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 239-52.

²⁹ Bonnin, *The Lost Generation*, 73.

Before it was finally canceled in 1979, a total of 16,470,000 young people were sent out from Chinese cities. Shanghai led the way, sending out 18 percent of its population versus the national average of 10 percent. By the end of June 1975, the city had already sent out 1,730,856 of its young people.³⁰

Working on the docks still carried a very negative connotation. Even in the 1960s, most people in Shanghai imagined the docks as a dangerous place inhabited by uneducated peasants from “north of the river” who were naturally prone to violence.³¹ Most of the violence on the docks, however, was not a result of the workers’ innate disposition but because of political campaigns launched by ideologues far away in Beijing. In the early 1950s, the Party had orchestrated struggle sessions to remove the gang bosses who previously organized and exploited the workers. For a while there was great fear amongst the workers about what lay ahead. In 1953, workers were quoted as saying that: “The work team is a poisonous snake. It sees us a frog and wants to swallow and eat us up.” But in 1954, the workers’ anxieties largely evaporated after the docks were designated as a State Owned Enterprise (SOE) and the workers were confirmed as permanent employees and given wage increases.³² After this, politics became ever more intrusive in the workers’ lives. During the Great Leap Forward (GLF, 1958-1960), political exhortation was used to drive the dockworkers to near exhaustion as the tonnage of goods handled soared (66 percent, 35 percent, and then 15 percent in each of those three years). But as the national economy collapsed the work pressure eased as the tonnage of goods handled on the docks fell by 27 percent in 1961 and then 18 percent in 1962. As for the quality of the work done during the GLF, an internal report at Number Five dock lamented that “If it was apples, they would be rolling all over the place. If it

³⁰ Jin Dalu, *Feichang*, 1:399-406.

³¹ Emily Honig, *Creating Chinese Ethnicity: Subei People in Shanghai, 1850-1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 125.

³² Gu Gan, Li Peifu, and Mao Bo’ke, eds., *Gaoyang chunqiu: Shanghai gang Gaoyang gangwu gongsi lishi* [Spring and Autumn in Gaoyang: History of the Gaoyang Harbour Affairs Company] (Dalian: Dalian haishi chubanshe, 1994), 124-6.

was miscellaneous manufactured goods, they would be stuffed in wherever they would fit. If it was sacks of grain, there would be grain spilled all over the floor!”³³

In the wake of the GLF, politics at Number Five dock cooled temporarily but heated up again in 1964 when Mao began to push new political campaigns, starting with the Five Antis Campaign in 1964 and following it up with the Socialist Education Movement (SEM) in 1965. In both of these campaigns, dock five—laying just downriver from the head office of the Harbour Bureau on Shanghai’s picturesque Bund—was the key point for the struggles. As the official history of Number Five dock remarks tersely, this was a period of “great anxiety for workers as well as cadres.”³⁴ In 1966, things only got worse. Following Mao’s call in June to write big character posters to condemn “cow demons and snake spirits,” the beleaguered leaders at got workers to write 8,096 posters targeting the SEM work team from Beijing that had been making their lives so miserable. But the target of criticism was not restricted to outsiders: 521 individuals, or roughly one in every five employees at the dock, were criticized by name.³⁵ The number and intensity of the criticisms were only going to grow.

In August 1966, Mao increased the pressure when he called upon people everywhere to “bombard the headquarters.” At dock five, a few disgruntled workers responded by putting up posters condemning their leaders. Dissatisfaction was especially strong among younger workers, many of them high school graduates who had been hired after the retrenchment in the wake of the ambitious GLF but who had only been given temporary employment at lower wages. But the incumbent cadres at Number Five dock were still powerful so by early December only 4 percent of the workers had joined. Later that month, however, rebel-workers at another dock found a secret document that revealed that for years their leaders had been systematically underpaying temporary and apprentice workers. Enraged by what they discovered, angry workers besieged their

³³ *Gaoyang*, 148.

³⁴ *Gaoyang*, 197-203.

³⁵ *Gaoyang*, 206.

managers, winning payment of 14 million yuan in back wages and bonuses.³⁶ This was an enormous amount, averaging roughly one year's wage for each of the 15,000 dockworkers in the port. This news spread like wildfire and within days the majority of workers in Shanghai also walked off their jobs.³⁷ Under huge pressure, the local authorities quickly caved in, paying 21 million yuan to other workers for a combined total of 35 million.³⁸ But once the Maoist radicals who rode to power in Shanghai on this wave of protest had taken control of the Party and government, they quickly followed the direction of their radical Maoist patrons in Beijing and forced the workers to repay all of their swag.³⁹ Riding their wave of success, many rebel-workers also grabbed leadership roles in their workplaces. The good times, however, were not to last.

From 1966 to 1967, the worker-rebels were on top and the old cadres were “knocked down” and persecuted. Between 1968 and 1970, however, Mao gradually turned things around, first telling the military to step in to restore public order and then allowing more and more old cadres to return to their old jobs to help get the economy going again. Andrew Walder shows that state-sponsored terrorism during this period was much bloodier than that caused by the students and workers in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁰ Up to the end of 1968, a total of 169,000 people were placed under investigation in Shanghai, 5,000 of who committed suicide. For ordinary workers, this atmosphere of violent recrimination was very stressful. The “old rebels” who survived

³⁶ Shanghai Party committee, *Yiyue geming zhenxiang* [The True Face of the January Revolution], Shanghai, 1982. Cited in Elizabeth J. Perry and Li Xun, *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 115.

³⁷ Raymond F. Wylie, “Shanghai Dockers in the Cultural Revolution: The Interplay of Political and Economic Issues,” in *Shanghai: Revolution and Development in an Asian Metropolis*, ed. Christopher Howe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 91-124.

³⁸ Li Xun, *Da bengkuai: Shanghai gongren zaofanpai xingwang shi* [The Great Collapse: The Rise and Fall of the Worker Rebels in Shanghai] (Taibei: Shibao wenhua chuban qiye youxian gongsi, 1996), 285.

³⁹ Wylie reports that in December 1973, the manager at Number Five dock had been locked in the toilets for seven hours before finally agreeing to approve the original disbursements. But by January 14 most of this money had been paid back. Wylie, *Shanghai Dockers*, 118.

⁴⁰ Xu Jiangang, “‘Siren bang’ pohuai Shanghai ganbu qunzhong sanchang yundong” [Three Campaigns of the Gang of Four to Persecute Cadres and the Masses in Shanghai]. *Shanghai dangshi*, 1999, 18-25. Cited in Andrew G. Walder, *China Under Mao: a Revolution Derailed* (Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 273-77. Walder estimates that about 600,000 to 800,000 people died during the Cleansing of the Class Ranks Campaign, or roughly half of the total deaths during the whole of the Cultural Revolution.

this house cleaning came away with deep grievances that were to boil to the surface during the campaign in 1974.

The anger of the dockworkers was, however, never seen by the public. The public image of dockworkers remained what was presented in the revolutionary opera, *On the Docks*. The story revolves around an educated young dock worker who, because he aspires to be more than just a “stinking coolie,” is tricked by a hidden class enemy. But thanks to the patience of his elders and the wisdom of his Party Secretary, the young man repents his errors and is brought back into the proletarian fold.

Fang Tianlun was one young man who never wavered in his commitment to the revolution. In high school he had been a class leader and political activist and when he arrived at Number Five dock he continued to work hard to serve his new masters.⁴¹ Although physically unprepossessing, he had a quick mind and a sharp tongue and soon became one of three student-workers who took turns working in the propaganda team (*zheng xuan zu*) after their work shifts were over. In early January 1974, Fang attended a routine meeting at his dock to study changes to work methods that had been made at the smaller Yangshupu dock. As a result of what was being touted as the “cooperative spirit of communism,” turnover at Yangshupu had soared by an incredible 34 percent in the previous year. But the workers at Number Five dock were not impressed. Without all the soft-soap that had been applied so publicly at Yangshupu, the workers at Number Five dock were probably feeling tired and a little underappreciated after their 35 percent increase. Young Fang duly wrote up his summary of this study meeting and passed it up the line as he had done countless times before. Imagine his surprise then when a couple of days later he was told to write up a big character poster. Thus, on January 7 he put up a big character poster “We want to be masters of the docks and not slaves to work quotas” on the wall outside the cafeteria for all his workmates to see. This was still no big deal. In those days lots of people put up lots of big character posters.⁴² However, to the great surprise of the workers who had attended the original meeting, the story was suddenly

⁴¹ Interview with SZY, a younger schoolmate of Fang.

⁴² Interview with a workmate, Cai, who attended that meeting.

splashed across the whole front page of the two local newspapers a week later under the headline “We want to be masters of the docks and not slaves to work quotas.”⁴³ Then on February 1, the story was featured on the front page of the *People’s Daily* and, all over China, the story of the brave worker at Number Five dock was discussed and studied. Suddenly, young Fang was famous.⁴⁴

Chapter Outlines

My arguments are set out in five chapters. In the next chapter (chapter 2) I look at the experiences—and reactions—of student-workers as they settled into the strange new world of their work units and came to see for themselves the often yawning gap between myth and reality. More than in any other urban workplace, the Communist Party had used what Elizabeth Perry calls its ability to create and exploit cultural patronage, to build a revolutionary mythology around the Shanghai docks.⁴⁵ In the well known revolutionary opera, *On the Docks*, young people were presented as selflessly struggling to increase production to advance the revolution at home and abroad. But what the student-workers discovered was jarringly at odds with what they had been told. And soon the student-workers became infected by much of the unmotivated, passive-aggressive behaviour that they saw exhibited by the older workers. Very quickly they came to learn the “arts of resistance” that James Scott credits to people who appear to be otherwise weak and powerless.⁴⁶ These student-workers were part of the most educated generation that China had ever seen. Living in the city, they were at the centre of widely connected networks of friends and family among which rumour, conjecture, and complaints flowed “faster than the wind” (*kou bi feng kuai*). I show that by 1974, student-workers were already cynical

⁴³ *Wenhui bao* and *Jiefang ribao*, January 14, 1974, 1.

⁴⁴ SHGZ, Appendix 3, “*Dazibao “yao dang matou de zhuren, bu zuo dunwei de nuli” chulong qianhou*” [An Examination the Events Leading Up To and Following From of the “Big Character Poster ‘We Want to be Masters of the Docks and Not Slaves to Work Quotas’”], 621-26. The usual production run for the *People’s Daily* was 10 million copies including overseas as well as domestic markets.

⁴⁵ Perry, *Anyuan: Mining China’s Revolutionary Tradition*.

⁴⁶ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

and that the high blown political rhetoric of the campaign only added to their sense of disillusionment.

Andrew Walder observed that in the highly politicized and often fractious atmosphere that permeated work units during the Cultural Revolution, most workers adopted a passive-defensive attitude.⁴⁷ In chapter 3, I show that this was also true of the newly arrived student-workers who felt extremely vulnerable in their new settings. Thus, after work most of them sought comfort in the familiarity of “hanging out” with groups of old schoolmates and childhood friends. However, unlike the fighting, stealing, running away, premarital sex and other rebellious social behaviors that Chan and Bonnin saw amongst students who had been sent to work in the countryside,⁴⁸ the student-workers in the city were more restrained and traditional in their private lives. When their parents warned them that sex, like politics, was dangerous, most student-workers heeded their advice. With a wider social network and lots of reading material at hand, many student-workers retreated into worlds of escapist literature or private study to ease their feelings of ennui.

Chapter 4 looks at how active-competitive types of student-workers fared before, during, and after the Campaign to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius. Up to that point they had done pretty well. In 1969 Mao had called for “new blood” to be admitted to the Party and—to the recently restored cadres who had once again become the “gatekeepers” in this process—these young newcomers were clearly the preferred candidates: not only were they idealistic and energetic, but they promised to be loyal. Most importantly, they were not tainted by the animosities created in the tumultuous early days of the Cultural Revolution. Following the admonition to “attack with words and defend with force,” these young activists served their new patrons primarily as “pen warriors” (*bi ganzi*) crafting and delivering propaganda, and putting a softer, kinder face on Party’s

⁴⁷ Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism*.

⁴⁸ See Bonnin, *The Lost Generation*; and Anita Chan, Richard Madsen, and Jonathan Unger, *Chen Village: Revolution to Globalization*, Third Edition (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009); Anita Chan, *Children of Mao: Personality Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985).

relationships with the wider body of workers. However, in 1974 the student-workers' preferred status came under challenge. At first, it looked like the young activists might be called upon to become real "fist warriors" like some of them had been back in 1966. Then things cooled down and they were allowed to continue working as before, wielding their pens and tongues to protect their patrons. But then, in June 1974, the real bad news hit. After the old rebels were promised "double breakthroughs" to Party membership and workplace promotions in return for their support in restoring harmony—and productivity—in the workplace, the preferred access that the student-workers had been enjoying was suddenly restricted. But as one door closed, another one—or in this case two—opened. A restored Communist Youth League (CYL) was beefed up and paired with newly established Worker's Theory Troops (*lilun duiwu*, LLDW). The goal of this last organization was especially novel. Expanding rapidly to 200,000 members by the end of 1974 (and 300,000 in 1975), these LLDW were instructed to mine the cultural depths of China's ancient past to prove the specific historical legitimacy of Mao's modernizing revolution. To accomplish this, young people were assigned the daunting task of reading the classics of philosophy, literature, and statecraft from China's ancient past. In this endeavor, ambitious and well educated student-workers were at a big advantage.

Chapter 5 looks at how the political turmoil of early 1974 only increased the disillusionment and frustration of ordinary workers. According to both Marx and Mao, workers are the masters of the state and so should not quibble about wages and benefits. But as controls loosened in the early days of the campaign, many workers showed their frustration in this area, leading Party Central to declare on July 1 that "once the current campaign reaches its later stage" a comprehensive review would be undertaken in this matter. Of course, such a review was deferred until long after Mao was dead. But in the meantime, the Shanghai docks had a little secret: my interviews revealed that, since 1972, dockworkers had been receiving incentive payments to spur extra production. In that year, Mao had approved the purchase of \$4.3 billion of machinery and equipment from the west to upgrade China's industries: a huge amount at the time. Suddenly Shanghai's antiquated docks became a huge bottleneck as workers struggled to handle not only the

growing import of foreign goods, but also the growing export of Chinese goods to pay for them. With limited goods-handling equipment, labour productivity suddenly became a critical issue on the docks and the question of how to motivate it became key.

Workers, young and old, were very sensitive to who got paid how much for doing what and they were not afraid to express their opinions through words and discreet actions. Thus the fact that, even during the height of the 1974 campaign, Maoist radicals did not dare to publicly attack these “secret” incentives as examples of “revisionism” on the docks shows how strongly Mao was committed to getting the economy growing. It also reinforces my argument in chapter 4 that at this time Mao was more concerned with establishing the deep, cultural legitimacy of “his” revolution. To the Chairman, protecting his legacy was a strategic matter of the utmost importance. Thus, allowing some limited material incentives was merely a tactical concession.

In chapter 6, I draw some conclusions as I circle back to answer the question in my thesis title: were the dockworkers in any way “masters” of the docks at this time? Or were they merely “slaves” to a shifting Party line? Who was driving events on the docks and why? The official history of these events claims that, in the three years following this campaign, turnover at Number Five dock fell while operating costs and damage to goods both increased. This, they claim, is clear proof of the poisonous influence of the Gang of Four.⁴⁹ Those events lay beyond the scope of this study but things seen in 1974 suggest some likely answers. This concluding chapter will also step back and look at some of the ironies of power arbitrarily exercised and look at several cases of unintended consequences. And, oh yes, the young man who “started” all the fuss with his “masters of the docks” poster, Fang Tianlun. This chapter will discuss what happened to him and what it tells us about the beliefs and actions of student-workers in general at that time.

⁴⁹ SHGZ, 623.

Sources

The primary sources for my research include interviews as well as documents. Both sources have weaknesses as well as strengths and all must be used carefully. The Shanghai Municipal Archive (SMA) has an extensive collection of official documents but, unfortunately, many documents for the first five months of 1974 still remain off-limits. However, an unpublished, official history of Shanghai during the decade of the Cultural Revolution gives a very good overview of events, albeit one with an obvious political bias that tries to fit everything to a Manichaeian narrative of how the evil Gang of Four was trying to subvert the Party and seize power.⁵⁰ But of course, all the many documents that I read in the SMA were themselves guilty of a one sided boosterism. Nevertheless, after carefully peeling away these obvious biases, many documents still yielded not only facts and figures but also interesting insights into the lives of ordinary people.

In trying to get to the “truth” in a historical document, it is always important to try to identify—and correct for—the author’s biases. However, in trying to extract this “truth,” it can be very useful to look at sources that make no attempt to describe events as they actually happened but which simply describe how people *should* behave. During the Maoist period, the use of art and literature to present normative models reached new peaks in terms of pervasiveness and technical quality. As a historian, knowing how people were supposed to think and behave can illuminate “deviant” behaviours that might otherwise be overlooked. For example, the more we are told about bright-eyed workers running around the docks sweeping up spilt grain, the more we start to wonder why the propagandists had to make such a big deal out of this. Was the spilling of all this grain simply accidental or was it done on purpose to show frustration? Maybe something was going on below the surface. The monthly theoretical journal, *Xuexi yu pipan* (Study and Criticism, XXPP) and the monthly literary journal, *Zhaoxia* (Aurore) were very good at

⁵⁰ Shanghai “wen’ge” shiliao zhengli bianji xiaozu, *Shanghai “wenhua da geming” shihua: ding’gao songshen ben* [Historical Narrative of the “Great Cultural Revolution” in Shanghai: Final Draft for Review], 1992.

modeling politically correct behaviour in a very readable—and in the latter case—a very entertaining form. Daily newspapers such as the *Jiefang ribao* and the *Wenhui bao* combined both the normative and the descriptive aspects of storytelling. The *Wenhui bao* is an especially useful source as it is available online at the Shanghai Public Library and has a searchable index. While all these newspaper stories and editorials were all written with political goals in mind, they often used dozens of facts and figures to add scientific credibility and, despite their very selective nature, were sometimes very enlightening.

Yiching Wu argues that, in seeking the deeper historical meaning of events, we should look beyond the dominant, state-centred narrative and look for fresh insights on the margins of society.⁵¹ Paul Thompson writes that “oral history can be a means for transforming the content and purpose of history . . . it can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place.”⁵² This is especially important in a place like China where the official narrative of history has been—and continues to be—tightly controlled. Approaching this from another angle, Andrew Walder points out that oral history can also be very useful in orienting the researcher in the social setting of his subjects and in developing, testing, and refining conceptualizations.⁵³ However, unlike the situation with Walder’s research, all of my interviewees were unpaid volunteers who had been introduced to me by one of several contacts. Most, therefore, had little interest in sitting through long, closed-question interviews. Nevertheless, this type of spontaneous, open ended interview had the advantage of allowing my interviewees to speak of what they recalled as being important at that time.

In all, I interviewed fifteen people, including six important, second-tier radicals in the Shanghai government at that time including Ye Changming, the head of the SFTU; Huang Jinhai, head of the Bureau of Commerce and Trade; and Zhu Yongjia, the head of

⁵¹ Wu, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins*, xv-xviii.

⁵² Paul Richard Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 153.

⁵³ Walder, *Neo-Traditionalism*, xvi.

the Writer's Group attached to the municipal Party committee. However, while extremely interesting, most of the information I gathered from them was not directly relevant to this thesis and has mostly appeared in footnotes. Of the ten student-workers I interviewed, four had worked on the docks; their memories, augmented by the memories of other student-workers, make up the main part of my thesis. I also made extensive use of the social history cum literary memoir of life in 1970s Shanghai written by the Shanghai writer, Wu Liang.⁵⁴ Jin Dalu's thought provoking essays about social life in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution were also a valuable source of information.⁵⁵ The Shanghai Harbour Gazetteer provided a wealth of facts and figure on the harbor and a limited edition history of the Number Five dock written in 1994, *Gaoyang chungiu*,⁵⁶ provided tantalizing tidbits of information about the tumultuous social and political history of what came to be known as dock five. An article by Raymond Wylie based on his interviews done in March 1967 of workers from Number Five dock gives a detailed and fascinating look into the events there in the early days of the Cultural Revolution.⁵⁷ But before we turn from the events of 1967 to look at the role played by the student-workers in the events of 1974, let me first give a brief, high-level outline of those events.

The Events of 1974

The Campaign to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius rolled over Shanghai in 1974 like a tsunami. Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, and his recently designated successor—the one time rebel-worker from Shanghai—Wang Hongwen, knew of Mao's growing interest in the history and politics of ancient China and so suggested that he formally issue an academic criticism prepared by a radical think tank in Beijing that tied the treasonous betrayal by Lin Biao in 1971 to the latter's secret worship of the China's ancient sage, Confucius. This most curious document was duly issued on January 18 as the first Party

⁵⁴ Wu Liang, *Wode Luotuosì: Shanghai qishi niandai* [My Luotuosì: Shanghai in the 1970s] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2011).

⁵⁵ Jin Dalu, *Feichang*.

⁵⁶ SHGZ.

⁵⁷ Wylie, *Shanghai Dockers*.

Central document of the new year. Acting in her unofficial role as the Chairman's wife (and presumed spokesperson), Jiang Qing was quick to push the campaign into action. Despite the fact that January 23 was the first day of the traditional Chinese New Year holiday and normally a time for relaxing with family and friends, Jiang Qing summoned top bureaucrats in the central military command (on January 24) and then the central government structure (on January 25) for "ten thousand people" meetings at which she laid down the law: even worse than the "revisionism" of Liu Shaoqi back in 1966, the "restorationism" (*fu bi*) of hidden enemies who, like the disgraced Lin Biao, drew their inspiration from the poisonous thinking of Confucius was a growing danger.⁵⁸ After their tongue lashing, the senior officials in Beijing probably had little appetite for a big holiday meal but, back in Shanghai, Wang Hongwen's closest comrades from the early days of the Workers' General Headquarters had just finished their meal and so gave their old boss a phone call. Wang told his rebel-worker pals that this campaign was to be a major event and that their new umbrella organization—the Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU)—was to take the lead. After obtaining high level confirmation of this, the troika of municipal Party Secretaries in Shanghai fell into line and backed the leader of the SFTU, Ye Changming, as he organized the formal public launch on February 2. After that one or the other of the municipal Party Secretaries would accompany Ye or one of his close associates as they went down work units to "light fires and fan the flames" (*dian huo, shan feng*).⁵⁹

While the purported aim of the campaign was to criticize the Confucian-like thinking of unidentified people who had ideas of "restoring" the reactionary and exploitative ways of olden times, the more practical aim of the rebel-workers who formed the main constituency of the SFTU was to simply "knock down" their old cadre nemeses

⁵⁸ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* 366-373; Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, *The End of the Maoist Era: Chinese Politics During the Twilight of the Cultural Revolution 1972-1976* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 146-158; Wang Nianyi, *1949-1989 niandai de Zhongguo: Da dongluan de niandai* [China 1949-1989: The Years of Great Turmoil](Henan: Henan renmin chubanshe, 2009), 351-353.

⁵⁹ SHSH, 698-706. Usually Ma Tianshui or Wang Xiuzhen went along. The third municipal Party Secretary, Xu Jingxuan, was ill at that time.

and take back power for themselves.⁶⁰ The confrontations that erupted in workplaces all across Shanghai were very vocal but, unlike those in years past, surprisingly non-violent. Very quickly, these struggles were shunted off the shop floor and into the conference rooms. But disruptions to the economy soon made themselves felt. The harbour became backlogged and supplies of coal for electricity and steel production became tight. Finally, in the late spring, Mao issued a number of Party Central decrees that told workers (and cadres) to stop arguing and get back to work. Thus top leaders in Shanghai quickly decreed that a “reconciliation” was to happen between the two contending factions. Leaders from each side were then made to confess their errors and ask for forgiveness. To make this bitter pill go down easier, the old cadres were confirmed in their current positions while the leading old rebels were given “double breakthroughs” (*shuang tu*): admission to the Party and assignment to better jobs. Then, with the leaders of the two factions now supposed to feel happy and secure, Mao called for everybody to get back to work and, once again, push production. At the same time, workers were called upon to pore over ancient texts to discover what Mao claimed were the historical-cultural roots of a dynamic and progressive China. For the workers—especially the young, single ones—life had seemingly become a lot simpler. No need to fret or struggle. Just work hard at your job and study hard in your free time and all would be well.

That was the view presented from the pyramids of power in each of the 20,000 odd work units in Shanghai. Pretty neat and tidy. But from the view point of the nearly 450,000 student-workers at the base of the pyramid (not to mention the million plus other workers), the situation was not so satisfying.⁶¹ It is to that topic that we now turn.

⁶⁰ Perry and Li, *Proletarian Power*, 177-82.

⁶¹ Jin, *Feichang*, 1:395-96. At end of 1973, a total of 435,803 student-workers had been assigned urban jobs in Shanghai. In 1974, another 20,983 were added for a total of 456,786.

Chapter 2. The Thrill is Gone

Arriving late? That's no shame,

First to lunch? That's the game!

"Study?" I'm just too tired,

I'd rather "hang out" to be inspired.

On the work floor, I drag my ass:

But "hangin' out," I'm first-class!⁶²

Students arrived on the docks in the fall of 1968 full of enthusiasm, determined to take Chairman Mao's political and economic revolution to a new level. Young women were just as keen as young men and all tried to prove themselves worthy of the trust that had been put in them as "revolutionary successors." But their enthusiasm soon waned. All around them they saw petty factionalism and nasty ambition that often led to violence. Workplace discipline was broken. Absenteeism, "goofing off," pilfering, and willful damage to goods seemed widespread. And, even worse, revered authority figures were soon revealed to be selfish in their ambitions. Gradually, young people started to sense a big gap between what they had been taught in their schools and in the media and what they now saw in the real world. Interest in compulsory political education waned and student-workers soon followed the older workers in devising ways to act out their disillusionment. The Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius of 1974 was, in an important sense, an attempt by Mao to re-inspire young people to his vision of a truly

⁶² Shanghai yibiao jingti yuanjian chang dang zhibu, "Lianxi shiji pi miulun, bu duan xi qing 'si ren bang' liu du" [Connect Theory (with Practice), Criticize Ridiculous Theories, and Eradicate the Poisonous (Influence) of the Gang of Four], *Yibiao Ju, gongye xue Daqing huiyi jiaoliu fayan cailio zhi yi* (April 1978): 6.

revolutionized China. Despite a massive effort to engage the intellect and energies of youth, he failed. At the end of the campaign, the student-workers were no less disillusioned with their condition than they had been before.

The Students Enter, Stage Left, Script in Hand

If, back in 1968, the aim of sending the students to work had been to build socialist character through hard work, then the docks were an ideal place. With ninety-six berths, Shanghai was China's largest port but most berths were small and the equipment inadequate. Before the Cultural Revolution there had been talk about installing more machinery and equipment but, with all the unrest, those plans had been put on hold.⁶³ Thus, of the over 15,000 workers on the docks, roughly half of them were still involved in physically handling the goods.⁶⁴

Number Five dock was the city's oldest and best equipped dock. Located just downstream from the Shanghai's famous Bund, it had been at the heart of Shanghai's tumultuous history ever since the day that British merchants first built a dock there in 1845 following their country's victory in the so called Opium War (1839-42). had seven berths including five that could handle large, 10,000 tonne ships and was the main facility in Shanghai for handling goods to and from foreign countries. The dock ran 920 meters along the river bank, reached 150 metres inland, and was dotted with warehouses. Like all large SOE, it had its own clinic, day care, recreation rooms, cafeteria, and showering facilities.⁶⁵ In 1974, Number Five dock had roughly 2,200 workers. Roughly half worked on the "front line" as loaders while half worked in some sort of support function including machine operators, goods counters, warehouse attendants, accountants,

⁶³ *Gaoyang*, 197.

⁶⁴ Wylie, *Shanghai Dockers*, 92. Wylie reports that in 1965-67 there were roughly 12,000 to 15,000 workers on Shanghai's docks. I use the later number as, by 1974, the tonnage of goods handled had increased by almost 50 percent (see chapter 5).

⁶⁵ *Gaoyang*, 138.

technicians, and managers.⁶⁶ There were eight loading teams that rotated the kinds of work they did, with seven teams working in the ships' holds and one working in the storage areas.⁶⁷ A loading team would typically have about 140 workers, divided amongst seven or eight smaller "work groups" (*banzu*) of about seventeen to twenty workers each.⁶⁸

In 1968, a total of 6,121 students were sent to work on the docks. Approximately 20 percent of that first cohort (or 1,255 individuals) were young women. Under the progressive gender policies of the new People's Republic of China, women were encouraged to go into all sorts of jobs previously held by men only. In this regard, the docks had been made a model of upward mobility for women, with the lead role in the revolutionary opera, *On the Docks*, cast as a woman. In that drama we see the heroine, Fang Haizhen, having worked her way up from a child labourer shoveling coal under foreign bosses to become the Party Secretary on the docks, leading the fight against hidden enemies. Reflecting back on her days working on the docks over forty years ago, one woman recalled that at that, as young women, "we wanted to work extra hard to prove ourselves." Her first job had been breaking up large lumps of coal that the bigger and stronger male dockworkers carried out of the ships' holds and placed on the dockside.⁶⁹ But these young women were also valued for their ability to understand and follow written procedures and their fine motor skills. As a result, there were often trained as equipment operators. At least on one dock, there had been problems of rambunctious young men taking lift trucks for unauthorized "joy rides" on the dockside.⁷⁰ But if the

⁶⁶ On the eve of the Cultural Revolution, Number Five dock had a total of 2,285 workers. *Gaoyang*, 206. However, the fact that there were only 115 Party members at the dock (a mere 5 percent of the total employees) suggests that a large number of those workers were "temporary" and therefore did not require the normal degree of political oversight. In a work unit with permanent workers, a 15 percent ratio of Party members was more common. In 1971, all temporary workers who had been at the docks in 1966 were granted permanent employee status.

⁶⁷ Interviews with Cai and MBK.

⁶⁸ *Gaoyang*, 199.

⁶⁹ Interview with Feng.

⁷⁰ Wang Huazhi, "Kao zanmen zhehao ren jiu neng ban hao matou!" [Depending Upon People Like This We Can Certainly Manage the Docks Well!], *XXPP*, (December 1973): 14-20.

young men were suffering from an excess of youthful energy, there were excellent ways on the docks to put it to good use.

When the students started arriving in the fall of 1968, most of the young men were sent to work as loaders where they soon came to make up more than half of the teams. One man recalls that on his loading team at dock six, 80 percent of the workers were student-workers.⁷¹ Their workdays were long and tiring. Loaders laboured around the clock in eight hour shifts, 365 days of the year with shifts starting at 6:00 a.m., 2:00 p.m., and 10:00 p.m. Every two days, the loaders would move on to a new shift. Thus, for example, after finishing their morning shift at 2 p.m. the loaders would take a twenty-four hour break (instead of the usual sixteen hour break) and then start on the afternoon shift the next day. And to make sure that the workers were in the proper frame of mind to do their jobs, each shift was preceded by a one hour session for political study and work planning.⁷²

Work in the ships' holds was dark, dirty, and dangerous. Handling cargo was divided into a number of stages: moving the goods from the corners of the ship's hold and placing them into slings on the floor; lifting the slings by crane and setting them down on the dockside; unloading the slings and stacking the goods onto wagons; moving the wagons into the warehouses and unloading them; and then, eventually, moving the goods out of the warehouses and onto trucks for delivery to the importer. The most difficult step in the whole process, however, was the first one: manhandling the goods from out of the dark, jumbled corners and into the sling on the floor of the ship's hold. Such work, however, was not unskilled. Loaders carried long sashes to wrap around the goods and carry them on their backs. With a quick snap of the hips, they would hoist up the load and then stagger over to the centre of the hold beneath the open hatch where they would drop it into the sling. Despite the fact that student-workers made up more than half

⁷¹ The material that follows is based on the recollections of my interviewee, MBK, supplemented by the recollections of Cai, Feng, and FZN.

⁷² Before the Cultural Revolution, political study seems to have been done on company time. The practice on the docks of having study sessions daily seems to have been exceptional as most units only had them weekly. (Interviews with XWG and SZY).

of most loading teams, the experienced older workers were still the keys to productivity. As one former student-worker recalled “those old guys could leverage their strength in amazing ways.”⁷³ At the end of each shift, the tonnage moved by each work group would be recorded on a blackboard to inspire—or shame—the workers on the following shifts to greater efforts.

A normal load was fifty kilograms but could reach one hundred, or even two hundred kilograms or more, in which case the workers would have to work in teams. Moving large bundles of rubber, for example, would take six men working together with carrying poles. In summer, one very unpopular job was moving one hundred kilogram sacks of alkali. The worst part of the job, however, was not the weight but the sting caused by the chemical when it got into the workers’ sweaty pores. The most unpopular job, however, was carrying bags of carbon powder. If the powder got onto the workers’ skin they would be stained black for weeks. So, before going into the holds, the workers would first cover their bodies from head to foot with petroleum jelly.⁷⁴ At the end of their shifts the student-workers were sometimes so tired that they could not even pedal their bicycles home.⁷⁵ Thus, especially in the hot weather, they would often sleep over in the workers’ dorm where they had the simple luxury of an old fashioned fan flapping back and forth overhead.⁷⁶

With all this hard work, these young dockworkers should have been filled with a great sense of accomplishment and a hunger for even more revolutionary challenges. Jiang Qing had invested great personal effort in revising, casting, and directing the revolutionary opera that was set on the Shanghai docks.⁷⁷ In *On the Docks*, we see the young workers—having unmasked a hidden class-enemy and then working through the night to meet the loading deadline for an important cargo of seed rice to help a fraternal

⁷³ Interview with MBK.

⁷⁴ Interviews with MBK, Cai, and FZN.

⁷⁵ Interview with FZN.

⁷⁶ Interview with MBK.

⁷⁷ Paul Clark, *The Cultural Revolution: A History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 40.

socialist nation in Africa—rejoicing in the challenges that Chairman Mao still has in store for them.

Everywhere rise fires against imperialism . . .

We dockers follow our Communist Party,

Militantly we do what we say,

(With) Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought in our minds,

We march on towards communism.⁷⁸

In reality, however, by 1974 the mood of the student-workers was not quite so buoyant. Almost immediately upon their arrival on the docks they realized that they had thrust into a world that bore little relationship to what was modeled in the opera. And in this fractious—and sometimes violent—workplace, their idealism soon started to wane.

Just as the students arrived on the docks in the fall of 1968, the vicious Cleansing of the Class Ranks campaign was reaching its peak across the nation. Ostensibly, the campaign was undertaken to remove undesirable elements from local Party organizations and the leadership of work units but, in reality, it was frequently used by a dominant faction to persecute its enemies. As confessions obtained under torture implicated more and more people, an unplanned escalation process kicked in. From January 1968 and April 1969, between 600,000 and 800,000 people died nationwide in the campaign, accounting for roughly half of the total of deaths over the decade of the Cultural Revolution.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ *On the Docks*, 41. In this final scene, the stage directions for the workers read “They take a stance. A red sun slowly rises. It illuminates the banks of the Huangpu River.” The red sun is, of course, the metaphor commonly used for the person and thought of Chairman Mao.

⁷⁹ Andrew George Walder, “Revolution and Repression in China, 1966-1971,” *Social Sciences History* 38, no. 4 (September 2014): 513-541.

In Shanghai, a total of 169,000 people were arrested during the Cleansing of the Class Ranks campaign, of whom 5,000 died “unnatural deaths.”⁸⁰ Number Five dock was soon swept up in the witch hunt. Whereas in the revolutionary opera *On the Docks*, only one hidden class enemy had been found, this time dozens were exposed. But then these enemies were hardly “hidden,” all being employees from before the Communist takeover in 1949 who had been “exposed” and persecuted in 1964 and 1965 when Number Five dock had been made a high profile test site for the implementation of in the Socialist Education Campaign in Shanghai. Thus, for leaders on the dock in 1968 who were eager to show their higher ups that they were implementing the latest political campaign vigorously, these unfortunate old people made easy targets. Under harsh interrogation, thirty-four people at Number Five dock “confessed” to a wide range of crimes including wasting financial resources, numbing the people, stirring up the masses, bombarding the headquarters of the proletariat, gathering intelligence, and counter-attacking the revolution. In all, eighteen people were placed in solitary confinement and five people were harassed to the point of committing suicide.⁸¹

For some student-workers, the effect of seeing such violence (and injustice) up close was deeply disturbing. One young worker recalled how some radical workers at his electric cable factory turned on one of their own when he inadvertently committed an act of *lesé majesté* toward Chairman Mao. The man had been one of the “army of 100,000” sent out to bring order to schools and government offices. But once, when he returned to his factory to pick up his pay, he absent mindedly scribbled his signature on the back of a handbill with Chairman Mao’s photo on the reverse as a makeshift receipt for his monthly pay. Such an act was seen as counterrevolutionary in the extreme and the man was promptly arrested and locked in a cage. Told to guard the man overnight until he could be interrogated the next day, the nervous student-worker grew very anxious.

⁸⁰ Andrew George Walder, *China Under Mao: A Revolution Derailed* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 277.

⁸¹ Number Five dock had been a model work unit during the Great Leap Forward and then the “test site” for the Socialist Education Movement from 1964 to 1965. At that time 73 percent of all workers were forced to make some sort of confession as part of the move to get people to “wash their hands and feet, and put down their burdens” (*xi shou, xi jiao, fangxia baofu*). *Gaoyang*, 197, 203, 205, 206.

Concerned that the older man might commit suicide, the young man got word to his daughter and together they kept an eye on him through the night. Years later the daughter bumped into the student-worker and thanked him. Yes, she said, her father had indeed wanted to commit suicide that night but the young man's intervention had saved his life. That young man came from a "good," working class family but in those days that no longer provided much security. He had an uncle who "disappeared" during this period despite being a twenty year Party member and a hero of the revolutionary war.⁸²

For many young people, such personal and public tragedy began to eat away at their belief in the justice of what they saw happening around them. But the biggest blow to their idealism came in the wake of the big campaign to smear the reputation of Marshal Lin Biao after his airplane crashed on September 13, 1971. Lin had been the Chairman's "closest comrade in arms" and designated successor until he lost the favour of the Chairman in the summer of 1970. Feeling that his family was threatened, Lin's son began plotting to overthrow Mao but, after the plot was discovered, he, his mother and father tried to flee China but their jet plane ran out of fuel and crashed, killing all the occupants. To explain what had happened, the stunned Mao had the Party Central issue a series of reports from the fall of 1971 through 1972. But, for some reason, the Chairman felt compelled to include in those reports statements by the plotters that were, to say the least, very unflattering to him. Did he do this out of remorse for past mistakes or was he simply making a bold bet that his seemingly open-handed response would undermine the credibility of the plotter's charges? In any case, the critique made by the plotters was dynamite:

Over the last ten years the national economy has stagnated . . . The leaders of the current ruling group are not only corrupt but incompetent . . . They have changed the machinery of state into a "meat grinder" for killing and destroying their enemies . . . They rely upon a feudal, dictatorial, quasi-familial style of decision-making that has seriously degraded the functioning of the Party and state . . . A small group of literati is acting in an arrogant manner and making enemies everywhere . . . Which of Mao's close comrades has not been praised and promoted but later given a political execution? . . . He is paranoid... if there are

⁸² Interview with SZY.

mistakes he blames them on others. All of his followers who fell from grace were made scapegoats for his mistakes.⁸³

Mao lost his gamble. Soon word of mouth ensured that nearly everybody knew what the plotters had said. And too many people saw too much truth in the charges for them to be quietly swept aside. The effect on the national mood was profound. In the popular mind, “the Cultural Revolution was transformed from a crusade for ideological rectitude that would give birth to an egalitarian and collectivist society into a power struggle.”⁸⁴

Suddenly, not only the second-tier leaders who huddled in Mao’s shadow but also the Chairman himself lost their aura of omniscient sanctity. Doubt crept into people’s minds and disillusionment began to spread in society.

Don’t Forget to Grasp Production!

After Lin Biao’s death, Mao became ill and depressed.⁸⁵ While he rested and pondered his next moves, he gave more authority to his ever faithful Premier, Zhou Enlai. As will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5, Zhou then undertook a number of pragmatic moves with Mao’s support to revitalize the economy including convening national conferences to cut wastefulness at SOE, increase capital investment, and expand international trade. In early 1973, plans were made to upgrade plant and equipment on the Shanghai docks. As a result, it was announced that at the end of “three years plus a bit,” Shanghai would be able to increase its annual cargo handling by over half, from 45

⁸³ Zhongfa [1972] 4, “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu zuzhi chuanda he taolun ‘fencui Lin Biao fan dang jituan fan geming zhengbian de douzheng (cailiao zhi er),’ Mao Zhuxi pishi” [A Report Issued by the CCP Central Office Regarding The Transmission and Discussion by the (Party) Organization (of the document) “The Struggle to Smash the Political Threat Posed by Lin Biao’s Anti-Party, Counter-Revolutionary Group (Second Collection of Documents)” issued with the approval of Chairman Mao], January 13, 1972 in WDGW. These criticisms of Mao were contained in a document reportedly prepared by Lin Biao’s son, Lin Liguo.

⁸⁴ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 339.

⁸⁵ Mao’s personal physician, Li Zhisui, later wrote that after Lin Biao’s defection Mao became depressed and took to his bed suffering from insomnia, high blood pressure, congested lungs, and swollen limbs. Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, trans. Tai Hung-chao (New York: Random House, 1994), 542, cited in MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 339.

million tonnes in 1972 to 70 million tonnes.⁸⁶ But most of those improvements would not be seen until 1975. In the meantime, strict new guidelines called on SOE to do more work with the same—or fewer—workers. So, until the new equipment arrived, the dockworkers would just have to work harder, faster, and smarter.

In 1973, total turnover on the Shanghai docks shot up by 13 percent to 50.3 million tonnes. A big jump. Moreover, hidden in that number was the fact that foreign trade had shot up by 47 percent to 11.8 million tonnes. Thus, dock five, which handled mostly foreign trade, recorded a whopping 35 percent increase in tonnage that year.⁸⁷ To accomplish such growth, the cadres had to push the workers hard.

In this “war” to increase production, workplace safety was an early casualty. To get credit for the maximum tonnage on their shift, some small work groups would burrow down into the hold to extract the heaviest goods first. And by concentrating on one type of goods, they could save time by not having to switch back and forth between different types of pry bars, hooks, and straps. But this led to the danger of “digging a well and leaving the mountain” (*wajing liushan*) where the convenience of an early shift might mean danger for a later shift. In one case, an early shift used a mechanized conveyor belt to remove a base load of sand that had been supporting a pile of logs. But this unbalanced the logs and made their removal not only more difficult but also more dangerous.⁸⁸ As one former loader recalled, all the teams disliked that way of doing things but many of them still did it. And with such careless work habits, accidents were common. “I saw

⁸⁶ Shanghai shi geming weiyuanhui zonghe jihua zu deng, 1973 nian 8 yue 17 ri, *Guyanyu baosong* “Shanghai gang 1973 nian dao 1975 nian gaizao he jianshe guihua” de baogao [Regarding Submission of the Report “Plans for the Upgrading and Construction of the Shanghai Harbour Over the period 1973 to 1975”], 2-3, in SMA B257-2-831. The Shanghai docks achieved these goals only a few months behind projections, reaching 60.9 million tonnes in 1977 before jumping to 79.6 million tonnes in 1977 and 83.4 million tonnes in 1978.

⁸⁷ Compared to the year on year growth that Number Five dock recorded during the crazy days of the Great Leap Forward, a 35 percent was still pretty modest. In 1958, tonnage jumped an incredible 61 percent and in 1959 it increased by 30 percent. Of course, in the early 1960s those gains were totally reversed as the economy collapsed. *Gaoyang*, 153 and 163.

⁸⁸ Yangshupu zhuangxiezhan yi ci xuexi zuotanhui jiyao, “Matou shang de zhengzhi jingjixue” [The Study of Political-Economics on the Docks], XXPP, (December 1974): 21-26.

workers crushed in front of me” recalled one worker.⁸⁹ Or, as another recalled, “In the year and half that I was there, I was injured nine times and almost died once.”⁹⁰ Statistics on workplace safety at Number Five dock for 1973 are not available but in 1974 the dock reported 1,137 minor accidents, 27 major accidents, and 3 deaths.⁹¹ As one former accountant recalled from the days of central planning “the leader got all the credit for achieving the targets: the accountants got all the responsibility for the (financial) costs.” (*lilun gui lingdao, chengben gui kuaiji*).⁹² In human terms, however, the real costs were always borne by the workers.

The Voice of the Voiceless

Workers could express their frustration in a number of ways. The most effective—but most risky—way was to write up complaints in big character posters. From past experience, the cadres had come to fear such posters, especially if the complaint could be linked to a political issue. But the workers also knew from past experience that such written critiques could boomerang back and hurt them. An easier way for the workers to vent their frustrations was through sarcasm and the use of double entendre expressions. With the relaxation of workplace controls following the launch of the new campaign in 1974, the circulation of “poisonous proverbs and expressions” became such a problem in workplaces that it was discussed at a special meeting at the Bureau of Industry and Transport in June 1974. Dock three was praised for setting up five groups to criticize and come up with ways to eradicate such scurrilous talk. One rhyme that was going around was a not too subtle criticism of overeager cadres who interfered in the workers’ lives: “Eat your third bowl of rice (and) do not mess around in

⁸⁹ Interview with Cai.

⁹⁰ Interview with FZN.

⁹¹ *Gaoyang*, 209.

⁹² Interview with HN.

unimportant matters” (*fan chi san wan, xian shi shao guan*).⁹³ But, while some matters might indeed be unimportant, matters of political line were not.

The report went on to stress that matters related to the political line had to be implemented in a serious way. Take, for example, the role of women in the new China. Had not Mao declared that women should hold up half of the heavens? And was not the hero of the revolutionary opera, *On the Docks*, a woman? Thus another one of the study groups at dock three addressed a particularly scurrilous rhyme making the rounds that might even have been targeting Chairman Mao’s unpopular wife, the 1930s era Shanghai theatre star, Jiang Qing.⁹⁴ “When a woman climbs on top of the house, the house will fall; when a woman boards a ship, the ship will certainly capsize” (*nǚ ren shang wu, wu yao ta; nǚ ren shang chuan, chuan zhun fan*). Such misogynistic thinking, the worker-critics at dock three concluded, was typical of the feudal thinking of Confucius and his modern day followers. As proof of the correctness of Mao’s political line, were there not already many young women working as equipment operators at the dock, climbing narrow ladders up into the cabs of cranes five stories above to fearlessly shift around tonnes of cargo?⁹⁵

The easiest (and safest) way for a worker to express his dissatisfaction, however, was simply to “goof off” (*mo yang gong*). As the writer and social commentator Wu Liang recalled, the older guys in the small welding rod factory where he worked had this

⁹³ GJQK [1974] 163, “Bufen gongren lilun xiaozu renzhen xuexi Zhongyang shi qi hao wenjian: jianli yi zhi hongda lilun duiwu” [Some Workers’ Theory-Study Small-Groups Resolutely Study Zhongfa [1974] 17 and Establish Large and Robust LLDWs], June 1, 1974, in SMA B 246-2-1028-41.

⁹⁴ Jiang Qing was born in 1914 to the second wife of a poor carpenter in Shandong province. In her late teens, she moved to Shanghai where she entered the theatre and changed her birth name, Li Shumeng, to the stage name, Lan Ping (literally, Blue-Apple). In late 1937, after spending four years in Shanghai and achieving some fame as second rank movie star, she left the city—and her left-wing husband—to travel to Yenan. In the austere setting of Yenan, she stood out for her big-city style and quick wit and she soon attracted Mao’s attention. The following year, Mao divorced his own wife and married the newcomer. Later he gave her the name by which she was to become famous by, Jiang Qing (literally, River-Clarity), taken from a poem which he liked. From the early 1940s until the launch of the Cultural Revolution, Mao kept his wife out of politics but brought her in the mid 1960s as his personal emissary. From that time on, Jiang Qing became widely disliked by people who resented what they saw as her overbearing and scheming nature. See Roxanne Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ching* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977).

⁹⁵ Shanghai geming weiyuanhui gongjiaozu mishuzu, “Gongjiao xitong gongren lilun duiwu de qingkuang” [The Situation of LLDW in the Industry and Transport system], June 21, 1974, in SMA B 246-2-1028.

down to an art. Their classic ploy was simply to take extended toilet breaks where they would smoke and read the strips of old newspaper that had been saved for use as toilet paper. But for young Wu and some of his contemporaries, the preferred way was to hide in the air raid shelter to tell stories and sing songs. And if the cadres were not around to push, then things would totally grind to a halt. One day, when all the cadres at his factory were called away to a big political meeting, “gentle anarchy” erupted in his factory:

We turned off the machines, switched off all the lights, and put away our tools. Some of the women washed their hair or had a shower while others just washed their clothes. As for the older guys, they just wandered off and did their own things.⁹⁶

If workers did not like a new work assignment from their bosses, they could be very creative in expressing their displeasure. On the Yangshupu docks, an attempt to get the equipment operators to work more cooperatively with the loaders—under the threat of demotion back to manual labour for those operators who did not improve—backfired and had to be scrapped.⁹⁷ And at dock five, a new policy requiring all loaders to come to the tool room at the beginning of each shift to personally sign out the tools that they would need and then, at the end of each shift, come back to personally sign them back in resulted in a “near anarchic situation” when the loaders simply dropped their tools wherever they were at the end of their shift and went home, creating chaos for the guys coming on shift.⁹⁸

This lackadaisical attitude toward work—along with a heightened (though, as we will see, generally perfunctory) attention to political study—contributed to what was humorously referred to at the time as “the two shortages and the one plentiful”: too few workers on the job and too few products in the stores—but lots of big character posters in

⁹⁶ Wu, *Luotوسي*, 124.

⁹⁷ Wang Huazhi, “Kao zanmen zhehao ren jiu neng ban hao matou!” [Depending Upon People Like This We Can Certainly Manage the Docks Well!], *XXPP*, (December 1973): 14-20.

⁹⁸ *Gongren dongde quanju, zijue guan hao luxian* [Workers Understand the Broad Situation: From (this) Self-Awareness (they) Are Able to Maintain the Correct Path], (n.d., probably late summer 1974), 6-7, in *SMA*, B 246-2-1038.

the streets.⁹⁹ Student-workers generally did not feel motivated to upgrade their skills. With wages levels frozen and material incentives scrapped at the start of the Cultural Revolution, it was now common to hear young people say things like “Study or not, I still get a job; work hard or not, I still get paid.” Or “The simpler the job the better; the easier your life the better off you will be.”¹⁰⁰

If a worker wanted to goof off, then the docks were a pretty good place. Whereas factory workers were clustered around machines or placed cheek to jowl along a production line, dockworkers were usually dispersed in dark corners out of sight of their higher ups. One team leader even went so far as to underreport the number of workers who reported for work so that they—and he—could get away with doing less work that shift.¹⁰¹ But, in summer 1972, turnover on the docks started to ramp up and so the pressure on the workers really increased. To increase productivity, many of the weaker, less productive student-workers were re-assigned to lighter work at the Shanghai Instrument Factory and were replaced by other student-workers whose muscles—and revolutionary ardour—had been tempered by several years working on nearby collective farms. But even then, there were still many student-workers who preferred to goof off.

We students brought a lot of energy to the docks . . . But there were still a few rascals in our midst that would make trouble, steal and eat fruit from the shipments, or just throw stuff around in the hold . . . There was nothing we could do. If you said something to them they would just ignore you. In the time that we

⁹⁹ Shi ge hui caimao zu, *Canyue qingkuang, di san qi*, 1974 nian 1 yue 5 ri, *Caimao ge ju xuexi “yuandan xian ci”* [All Sections in the Bureau of Commerce and Trade Study the New Year’s Day Editorial], January 5, 1974, 4, in SMA B 248-2-626.

¹⁰⁰ Shanghai yibiao ju Jingti yuanjian chang zongzhibu, “Lianxi shiji pi miu lun, bu duan suqing ‘si ren bang’ de liu du” [Uniting with Practice to Unceasingly Eradicate the Poison From the Gang of Four], *Yibiao ju gongye xue daqing huiyi, jiaoliu fayan cailiao zhi yi*, April 1978, 7, in SMA B 103-4-950. These words were spoken by an unnamed cadre at the Shanghai Radio Crystal Factory in April 1978 during a meeting held to criticize the harmful influence of the Gang of Four on industrial production. While the polemical purpose of these remarks is obvious, they nevertheless reflect the generally dispirited mood of the workers in 1974. That is not, however, to imply that the Maoist radicals were against technical innovation. Indeed, during the campaign in 1974, innovation was a major sub-theme. Emphasis, however, was made on “made in China” solutions contributed by the workers themselves.

¹⁰¹ Yangshupu zhuangxiezhan yi ci xuexi zuotanhui jiyao, “Matou shang de zhengzhi jingjixue” [The Study of Political-Economics on the Docks], XXPP, (December 1974): 21-26.

more active guys would move six bags those slack-asses would only move two bags.¹⁰²

Another way that workers could express their frustration was through willfully damaging goods or equipment. Mao famously said that revolution is not a tea party. While the dockworkers did not dare bite the hand of the man that fed them, at Number Five dock they might at least break a few of his tea cups and rice bowls.

The Costs Add Up

As permanent employees of an SOE, dockworkers enjoyed the security and benefits of what was known colloquially as the “iron rice bowl.” As discussed in chapter 5, this gave a young, journeyman worker a salary that was about half again larger than that given to an employee at a collective enterprise, or roughly 36 yuan versus 22 yuan each month. Nevertheless, on the docks there was literally “no free lunch.” Meals cost a modest 0.10 yuan and usually included a piece of fatty pork or other protein product along with a vegetable and rice. With over 3,000 employees to feed, dock 3 had installed several labour saving devices including an automated dish washing machine and a machine that rolled out dumpling skins.¹⁰³ But while this improved kitchen productivity, it apparently did not do much to improve the taste. Or perhaps the dockworkers over at Number Five dock were protesting other things.

In the early spring of 1974 the problem of damage to broken chopsticks, tea cups, and food warming equipment at Number Five dock was considered so serious that a worker-investigation team was formed to look into the matter.¹⁰⁴ But for big, strapping

¹⁰² Interview with FZN.

¹⁰³ Gangwujū sān qū, 1973 nián 11 yuè 31 rì, “Chongfēn fādòng qúnzhōng, dà gāo jìshù gāizào” [Release Fully the (Creative Energy of the) Masses; Greatly Increase Technical Improvements] (November 31, 1973): 6, in SMA 246-2-946.

¹⁰⁴ Wūqū èr duì diào chāzū, *Women bù jīn shì mǎtóu de zhǔrén, wōmēn gēng shì guójiā de zhǔrén; guānyú wǒ qū běnwēi zhǔyì zuò guāi gēi wōmēn jīngjì shàng dàilái dà sūnshì diào chāo bào gāo* [We Are Not Just the Masters of the Docks but also the Masters of the Nation: a Report on the Big Economic Damage Caused by Mischievous Disruptions Caused by Self-Serving Protectionism at Our dock] (August 6 1974): 1-5, in SMA 246-2-1038-104.

dockworkers there were more satisfying ways to let off steam than breaking tea cups. As worker-investigators at Number Five dock were to write in the summer of 1974, “in the ships’ holds we can often see cans thrown around like they are shot puts, glass products tossed as if they were volleyballs, and handicraft products kicked around as if they are soccer balls!”¹⁰⁵

Such “anarchic” behaviour was, of course, the polar opposite of what was modelled in *On the Docks* where workers worried over every grain of spilt rice and went around with needle and thread at the ready to sew up split bags. Over at the Yangshupu docks the workers had confronted the idea that in such a large facility, some damage to cargos was unavoidable. After visiting the Shanghai Number 31 Textile Plant they learned that every 25 kilograms of polypropylene pellets that they spilled would mean 450 metres less of nylon filament and so they set up three recycling bins to hold pellets which they would sweep up with brooms. As the workers explained, “Every item that we import from abroad is a crystallization of the victory of Chairman Mao’s victorious foreign policy line. If we do not handle them properly then we are betraying the Chairman’s trust in us.”¹⁰⁶ Over at dock five, however, this message was not going down well. Angry—or perhaps just exhausted—about having to meet growing work quotas, the “masters of the docks” were making their dissatisfaction clear. As a worker-investigation report was to later reveal,

On May 1 (1974) the vessel *You Lian* arrived at Number Five dock to unload 50,400 bags of oxidized aluminum. But the leaders at the dock did not care about quality and only sought tonnage. As a result, so many bags were broken during unloading that it looked as if it was wintertime: everything seemed to be covered in a layer of snow. When the trucks drove off through the city to deliver their goods, so much white powder was leaking from the bags that the trucks seemed to be leaving behind a trail of smoke. Finally the police made the trucks stop. When the importers of the goods asked the leaders of dock Number Five dock to pay attention to the quality of their handling the leaders of dock Number Five dock retorted “if you are not going to have it unloaded, then leave the docks.” As a

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Wang Huazhi, “Kao zanmen zhehao ren jiu neng ban hao matou!” [Depending Upon People Like This We Can Certainly Manage the Docks Well!], XXPP, (December 1973): 14-20.

result, on May 14 the ship was ordered to move downriver to Wusongkou. Only on June 1 was the vessel allowed to return for unloading. This resulted in big delays and costs.¹⁰⁷

By the early summer of 1974, the seriousness of damage and delay on the docks had become so clear that the Bureau of Industry and Transport sent out a news report to the leaders of the 20,000 odd enterprises under its supervision. Earlier in the year, workers—as the “masters” of their work units—had been encouraged to look into problems of enterprise management. At dock five, this resulted in a series of ten reports. While none of the gritty details from these worker reports were provided, the official summary only commented that over the last three years “600,000 yuan has been thrown into the river at dock five.” To make this more understandable to ordinary workers, the report stated that these losses represented the value of three months total wages at dock five, the cost of two new warehouses, or the price of twenty-five new goods handling trucks.¹⁰⁸

How much older workers cared about these macro costs is questionable. But the student-workers must have been moved at least a little: if not by frustration at the enterprise system that seemed to be breaking down around then, then perhaps by their own guilt for betraying their earlier ideals. In their disillusionment and frustration they too had become part of the problem. And the macro costs kept mounting. Another unpublished report by the worker-investigators stated that in 1973 the foreign currency equivalent of 2,840,000 of foreign currency yuan had been paid in insurance claims for damage or loss of goods exported from Shanghai. And another report revealed that, in recent months, China was having to pay out 10 million plus yuan every month in so-called demurrage, or late handling fees, to foreign ship owners: with the great increase in trade, there were not enough Chinese ships to be had and so foreign ships had to be

¹⁰⁷ *Sunshi baogao*, 1-5. This document probably refers to events during spring 1974 when the harbour was experiencing serious backlogs.

¹⁰⁸ GJQK [1974] 176, “Gongren canjia guanli de yizhong hao xingshi: dui Shang gang wuqu gongren diaochazu de diaocha” [Good Results From Letting Workers Participate in Management: a Report on the (Findings of the) Workers’ Investigation Team at Number Five Dock] (June 14, 1974): 2, in SMA B 246-2-1028.

contracted on commercial terms. As one young worker lamented in an unpublished report, “when I see all this waste, it really breaks my heart.”¹⁰⁹ To an ordinary worker, the situation really seemed out of control.

Education is the Answer

But of course, blaming the workers for all the damage and delay would be grossly unfair. In seeking the root causes, Party ideologues were more generous, blaming it not on objective constraints in the physical world but on subjective mindsets in the metaphysical world.

As a result of the victory of Mao’s foreign-policy path, imports and exports are continuously increasing but our harbour cannot keep up. As a result, ships have been backlogged and goods have been delayed. (Recently) the highest number of vessels has been ninety-one and the lowest has been twenty-six, with an average of seventy-five. On average, each day that a ship is delayed costs 6,500 yuan in demurrage. Thus, on average, every day our country has to pay between 300,000 to 400,000 yuan of total demurrage charges. This delay has several objective reasons: certainly there are not enough berths, warehousing space is tight, and there’s not enough machinery and equipment. But are there not subjective reasons as well? We believe that ideology of “self-serving protectionism” (*benwei zhuyi*) is one of them.¹¹⁰

This elevation of problems from the messiness of the world-as-it-is to the rarified realm of the world-as-it-should-be meant that the first step in solving such problems lay in the clarification of people’s thinking. In February 1974, just as the political Campaign to Criticize Confucius and Lin Biao was heating up, the important, Shanghai based theoretical journal, *Xuexi yu pipan* (Study and Criticism) tackled these problems head on. Acknowledging the widespread problems caused by “delaying actions while bickering over non-essentials” (*che pi*), “passing the buck” (*ti piqiu*), and “avoiding responsibility by going through the motions” (*da taiji quan*), the article went on to frame the problem in moral rather than political terms. “Character is not some abstract concept. Rather it is a

¹⁰⁹ *Sunshi baogao*, 4.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

manifestation of the thinking, outlook, and actions of the class that one belongs to.” The answer to all the aforementioned problems, therefore, was to manifest a Communist character.¹¹¹ Another article in the same edition was even more blunt, directly addressing the ethical dilemmas facing workers and cadres at that time by using a catchy subtitle, “whoever tries to live a life of character will end up screwed” (*shei fayang feng ge shei daomei*). But the writer quickly goes on to assure his readers that “even though such erroneous thinking currently enjoys a broad ‘market’ (*shi chang*), the ‘false’ can never overcome the ‘true’” (*xie bu sheng zheng*). To secure victory in this existential struggle, it is therefore necessary to mobilize the masses to understand—and live out—these simple truths.¹¹²

Workers had long ago become resistant to such “education” and had become adept at faking their enthusiasm during endless political meetings. One former student-worker recalled (with a laugh) that “During political meetings I would stand up and shout out slogans for as long as I could. It was always better than going back to work.”¹¹³ And, of course, saying the wrong thing at the wrong time could always come back to haunt you so it was best to keep your own thoughts to yourself.¹¹⁴ This type of passive compliance was not restricted to just workers. In 1974 cadres were constantly being chastised for not being active enough and “leading from the front.” Leaders who tried to be all things to all people to avoid criticism were criticized as “good old boys” (*lao hao ren*). And as the new period of “reconciliation” began, cadres were warned to avoid thinking that now that

¹¹¹ Shu Ren, “Lun feng’ge” [Discussing Character], XXPP, (February, 1974): 62-64.

¹¹² Zhou Cheng and Wang Hua, “Zhuahao shengchan lingyu nei de sixiang douzheng: Shanghai di er fangzhichang jixiechang pi pan ‘shei fayang feng’ge shei daomei’ de cuowu sixiang chao de diaocha baogao,” [Grasp Firmly the Intellectual Struggle in the Productive Sector: a Report from the Number 12 Textile Machinery Factory Criticizing the Popular Idea that ‘Whoever Tries to Live a Life of Character Will End-Up Screwed’], XXPP, (February 1974): 56-61.

¹¹³ Interview with HN.

¹¹⁴ Charles Cell remarked that as the topics of political study became more and more obscure—and the punishments often more and more severe—people developed a very calculating mindset. In a setting where the rule was often “grab or be grabbed,” people’s attitudes would range from committed compliance to ritualistic conformity. Charles P. Cell, *Revolution at Work: Mobilization Campaigns in China* (New York: Academic Press, 1997), 145-153.

the period of sharp criticisms was over they could simply revert to their slack old ways and ignore political study.¹¹⁵

On the docks, political study was especially unpopular because, unlike most work units where study was only held once a week on company time, dockworkers now had to come in every day one hour early on their own time for political study.¹¹⁶ Thus, during these study sessions the dockworkers were very quiet and withdrawn.¹¹⁷ Sometimes, however, these education sessions stepped out of the theoretical and into the realm of the practical and seemed—in the short term at least—to have great effect. A case in point was the ongoing effort to inculcate a proper, socialist respect for property that belonged to “the people.”

Pilfering and selling goods to the black market was a widespread problem. But it went beyond factories and permeated every corner of society. For disillusioned workers, it was an easy way to make some quick money. And for hard-up consumers, it was an easy way to get things that were not available in the state controlled markets. A report in spring 1974 by the Second Commercial Bureau criticized people who put “profit in control.” The state food supply system was a system that touched everyone’s lives and rationing and occasional shortages provided many opportunities for people to use “the back door” for personal—albeit usually petty—benefit. Delivery men were criticized for diverting goods for private sales while butchers were criticized for using spoiled meat to make dried snacks (*rou song*) that they could sell on the side. Some enterprising butchers were even discovered to have tried to turn donkey skins into traditional Chinese medicine to sell on the side. Sometimes, however, the cost of these small indiscretions would add

¹¹⁵ GJQK [1974] 399, “Tieluju yi 26 hao wenjian wei qianga dongli juexin jixu zhua hao jiguan de pi Lin pi Kong yundong” [The Railway Bureau Takes Central Party Document 26 as Great Motivation to Continue the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius] (October 1, 1974): 2, in SMA B 246-2-1032. Specifically, they were told not to think that “having gone through the motions of studying and criticizing that they could now simply go back to their old ways” (*xueguole, piguole, chabuduole*). Instead, workers and cadres were told to study the positive examples of the Yangshupu docks and the Number Five Steel Plant.

¹¹⁶ At his coke factory, interviewee XWG used to study once a week for one hour after work. At his electric cable factory, interviewee SZY used to study once a week before work. Both disliked it immensely.

¹¹⁷ Interview with MBK.

up as when collusion by state appointed buyers with private pig farmers added over 2,000 yuan to the cost of pigs feet purchased. There were, however, also examples of what the authorities considered as positive behaviours. The leaders of the Second Commercial Bureau praised the staff at the Changshu Road vegetable market for making change in onions and ginger whenever they ran out of small coins.¹¹⁸ Mao's call to "Serve the People" did not allow short changing! For durable consumer goods, there were a number of grey markets in the city. For example, in the large Yangshupu district there were six well-known grey markets for radio parts which operated with impunity because the police were too busy investigating political crimes to bother with economic crimes. Many of the sellers were young workers who had stolen parts from the factories where they worked.¹¹⁹

A much more serious problem, however, was the theft of production materials and equipment from factories, usually for sale to small factories outside of the city which did not have sufficient allocations from the state. Criminal gangs preferred to target small factories that did not have good security or inventory control. Many of the thieves were young people who were hanging about in the city illegally after they had snuck back from their harsh lives in the countryside or simply refused to leave in the first place. By this time, only counting the number of young people who chose to register their transitory status, there was a floating population of around 200,000 young people in Shanghai.¹²⁰ For such disillusioned—and often desperate—young people, the attraction of a quick

¹¹⁸ 1974 nian Shanghai shi shangye gongzuo huiyi, jian bao, di ba qi, 1974 nian 5 yue 23 ri, *Xuexi xianjin, zijue geming; shangye er ju bufen danwei xue xianjin, zhao chaju qingkuang* [Study Progressive Models, Come to a Self-Awareness of (the Need for Revolution): Some Units from the Second Bureau Study Progressive Models to Look for Shortcomings in Their Own Work] (May 23, 1974): 1-3, SMA B123-8-992.

¹¹⁹ Shanghai shi caimao ju, "Caimao qingkuang di 141 qi," June 3, 1974.

¹²⁰ Jin, *Feichang*, 1:4.

buck was strong but even more attractive was the promise of a legal job in the city if the young person, or his parents, cooperated.¹²¹

Commercial inspectors complained that while the number of such thefts was increasing, the support of other government agencies was actually decreasing. The police, they complained, were more focused on investigating political crimes and so economic crimes received little attention. Based on their own investigations, the Commercial Bureau reported that in many cases a cadre inside the factory was involved in the theft of materials and equipment and that, often, the re-sale was to small factories back in his home town. If caught, such out-of-towners were usually returned to their home town where, it was complained, they were often just released by the local authorities. And the residential committees in Shanghai were no longer as keen as they used to be in reporting unauthorized visitors.¹²²

Frustrated by the tension and monotony in their work spaces, many workers sought to escape into private spaces through the use of “sick leave.” And it was not just a few workers either. One student-worker recalled that at her huge power equipment factory, “apart from young activists like me, most workers would wrack their brains to get sick days off. And not just workers but many leaders too!” In fact, the problem became so serious that the leaders at her plant instituted a policy to deduct a worker’s pay if the number of sick days exceeded five each month.¹²³ But for the higher ups, the problem was not so much loss of productivity as theft of materials. In the report about the radio parts black market that was cited above, the investigators found that most of the sellers were young workers who had taken “sick leave” to sell their goods. Thus, it was

¹²¹ The criminal middle-man had targeted a technician in the Shanghai Number One Sock Knitting Factory whose daughter had been sent to work in the countryside and told the worried father that “If you don’t cooperate with me then your daughter will never be able to return to the city and she will have a life of bitterness in the countryside.” Shanghai shi geweihui bangongshi er zu bian, jian xun, di 218 qi, 1974 nian 8 yue 17 ri, “Weishenma daomai gongye shengchan ziliao de huodong de bu dao youli de zhizhi he daji” [Why Cannot the Theft and Re-Sale of Industrial Production Materials be Prevented and Attacked?] August 17, 1974, 3, in SMA 248-2-686.

¹²² Ibid., 9-10.

¹²³ Interview with LX. On the docks, however, sick leaves seem to have been controlled more tightly: (interview with MBK).

argued that the simplest way to cut off the supply of stolen goods was to cut down on sick leaves. And the best way to do that was through political education.

By the summer of 1974, the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius had passed from confrontation to reconciliation and workers and cadres were all enjoined to come together and work hard to increase production. Pilfering was no longer to be tolerated. In August the Bureau of Industry and Trade triumphantly reported the results of a scientific study that showed that where “deep and detailed” thought work took place (including frequent home visits and expressions of concern for the worker’s families) the absenteeism rate was cut in half, from 10 percent to only 4.9 percent.¹²⁴ But the last half year had been a period of deep and detailed thought work for all workers. As we have seen, at the beginning of the campaign, the workers had been dispirited and sullenly resentful. The student-workers, in particular, had lost much of their starry eyed idealism. Had the recent campaign changed the outlook of the student-workers? Were those changes for the better or the worse?

“How Can Some Long-Dead Guy Still Be Relevant Today?”

When the campaign broke onto the scene in early 1974, newspapers frequently used the voices of unnamed workers to raise the (hopefully) rhetorical question, “what relevance does someone who lived 2,000 years ago have to life today?”¹²⁵ The stock answer, of course, was that “modern day Confucianists” are trying to “restore” (*fubi*) the exploitative old system. But who, an intellectually curious mind might ask, is that modern

¹²⁴ GJQK [1974] 278, “Liang’ge chang queqin de duibi kan lingdao de sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo” [Using Worker Attendance Figures at Two Factories to Compare the Political Education Work of the Factory Leaders], (August 20, 1974): 1-3. With approximately 20,000 work units under its control, it would not be difficult for the authorities to find two units that could “prove” any hypothesis they put forward. In this case, they chose a 121 person machine parts factory and a 332 person clothing factory. Pilfering on the docks, however, was probably not quite as big a problems. For one thing, with so many goods coming and going on the docks, the temptation to pilfer goods was ever present so each loading or unloading was closely monitored by a goods-counter, a university educated technician of some status. Also, since the importer of the goods was sure to count them upon receipt, any shortage would be discovered quickly and pressure brought to bear on the work team involved.

¹²⁵ See, for example, *Wenhui bao*, January 30, 1974, 1 and *Jiefang ribao*, February 7, 1974, 1.

day Confucianist? Was not Lin Biao already dead and his supporters in jail? And what did it mean when the workers were told to “use ancient wisdom to solve new problems” (*gu wei jin yong*)? The Maoist radicals were plugging the example of the ancient emperor, Qinshihuang, (260-210 BCE) but once again, under their breaths, the workers were asking themselves the same old question, “what relevance does someone who died 2,000 years ago have with life today?”

As for the motivation behind the quick roll out of the campaign, scholars in the west and in China all agree that Jiang Qing had a deep, personal enmity towards Premier Zhou Enlai and wanted her radical associates to take more power in the Party and government.¹²⁶ Mao was quite ill at this time. Thus, whatever his intention had been when he issued *Zhongfa* [1974] 1 on January 18, it was his wife’s energy and ambition that drove the campaign forward so fast and so hard. Indeed, it was she and Wang Hongwen that brought the whole matter to the Chairman’s attention in the first place when they gave him the study materials that had been prepared by the radical think-tank on this issue. But while insiders in the capital might have guessed that Jiang Qing was targeting Premier Zhou Enlai, even well-connected leaders in Shanghai were not aware of this. In an interview with the writer, the then head of the radical affiliated SFTU, Ye Changming, strongly denied any intention to attack or embarrass Zhou. Similarly, Huang Jinhai, the head of the Bureau of Finance and Trade, and Dai Liqing, a high official in the municipal supply bureau both strongly denied the idea of a plot against Zhou Enlai. All three of these men were old rebels from the early days of the WGH and were very close to one another (and to Wang Xiuzhen in Shanghai and Wang Hongwen in Beijing) so it is not surprising that they all had the same recollection. But rejection of the idea that Maoist radicals everywhere were gunning for Zhou Enlai was confirmed by Zhu Yongjia, the head of the Shanghai Municipal Writers’ Group, a radically aligned think tank that had close relationships with both Yao Wenyuan and Zhang Chunqiao in Beijing.¹²⁷ Zhu claimed no knowledge of such a plan and, like the other radical leaders in Shanghai,

¹²⁶ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 371-72; Teiwes and Sun, *The End of the Maoist Era*, 158-64; Wang Nianyi, *Da dongluan de niandai*, 351-68.

¹²⁷ Interviews with Dai Liqing, Ye Changming, Huang Jinhai, and Zhu Yongjia.

claimed great respect for Premier Zhou.¹²⁸ A student-worker from Number Five dock who was working in the Writers' Group during the campaign also insists that at that time no one in his group had ever heard that Zhou Enlai was a target.¹²⁹ This then leaves the possibility that the between-the-lines anti-Zhou propaganda that occasionally seeped into the media in Beijing was targeting high level readers in that one locale.¹³⁰ But so much for the high and mighty. What sense did common workers make of all the ancient philosophy and arcane arguments? Apparently not much.

In September 1974 the Bureau of Industry and Transport issued a directive to its 20,000 odd work units with a cautionary tale about how some dockworkers had fallen prey to the old Confucian ploy of “inviting guests and giving presents” (*qingke, songli*). Apparently, eight months of political campaigns and “deep and detailed education” had failed to inoculate the workers against Confucian chicanery. On July 11—in the midst of Shanghai’s blisteringly hot summer—a Chinese ship had arrived at dock three carrying bananas from Guangzhou. To make sure that the fruit was unloaded quickly, the Chinese shipping agent gave watermelons and soda pop to the thirsty dockers to get them to work through their lunch break. Then, after the unloading was finished, the shipping agent took the seventeen loaders out for beer and peanuts to thank them. For most of the loaders, that was the end of the story but later a few of the younger guys went back to the ship with the shipping agent to drink some more beer. Who squealed on them is not clear. The thirsty workers were subsequently subjected to public criticism and forced to write a letter of apology to the shipping company. Then, to show that crime doesn’t pay, they were forced to reimburse the public purse the 8 yuan that they had “stolen” to pay for their good times

¹²⁸ These individuals were sentenced to anywhere from 8 to 12 years in jail during which time they were given a thorough political re-education. However, 20 plus years after their release and rehabilitation, it is unlikely that they would still find it necessary to excuse themselves from having attacked Zhou Enlai if their innocence on this point was not true.

¹²⁹ Interview with FZN.

¹³⁰ For an easy to read overview of the radical “brain trusts” (nearly all in Beijing) and the various pen-name that their writers employed see Ye Yonglie, “*Si ren bang*” *xing wang* [The Rise and the Fall of the Gang of Four] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2009), 2:1154-55.

(5 yuan for ten bottles of beer and 3 yuan for 3 catties of peanuts: hardly an extravagance for seventeen thirsty men who worked through their lunch hour on a hot summer day.)¹³¹

By 1974, most workers had seen and experienced too much to take political education seriously. Added to this was the ideological disillusionment that the many workers—especially the super-idealistic youth—suffered from the revelations following Lin Biao’s death. After that, recalled one student-worker, “we started to question everything.” And the political campaign of 1974 only made this worse. As Wu Liang recalled:

In 1974, there was a flood of documents from Party Central . . . After we finished our shift, the Party Secretary would go over those documents (with us) word by word and then sentence by sentence emphasizing they had been “personally read and signed off by Chairman Mao.” Then he would transmit the “thinking of our municipal leaders”: what “old Ma” had said, and what “old Wang” had added, and what “A-da” had done. Yeech! The formalism. The stilted way they talked. I still recall it to this day!¹³²

During the campaign, desperate ideologues repeatedly invoked the name of the disgraced Lin Biao to try to divert public dissatisfaction. But the more they did, the more that reflective student-workers could see through the propaganda. Time and time again, Lin Biao was charged with having cast aspersions on the program of sending-down youth to work in the countryside by saying that it was really only a disguised form of labour

¹³¹ GJQK [1974] 358, “Pi Lin pi Kong yundong zhong chuxian de you yi jian xin shi” [Another New Thing Arises in the Midst of the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius] (September 27, 1974): 1-2. As discussed earlier, on June 21 that same dock had been praised for cracking down on counter revolutionary slogans. At that same time, it had criticized the custom of demanding gifts for favours, claiming that was a corrupt Confucian practice. Interpreting the character *li* to mean “gifts” instead of the original “propriety,” they cited the Confucian expression *fei li wu jian, fei li wu ting, fei li wu yan, fei li wu dong* to mean that people in power would not look at, listen to, talk to, or act for the good of common people unless they were first given “gifts.” Refer to Shanghai geming weiyuanhui gongjiaozu mishuzu, “Gongjiao xitong gongren lilun duiwu de qingkuang” [The Situation of LLDW in the Industry and Transport System], June 21, 1974 in SMA B 246-2-1028.

¹³² Wu, *Luotuosu*, 22. “A-da” was Chen A’da, a particularly rough and uncultured rebel-worker who rose to become the number two man in the large Bureau of Industry and Transportation, the organization that produced the frequent GJQK reports used to update the 20,000 odd enterprises (including the docks) that were under its supervision. As discussed in Chapter 6, the secretariat office for this agency was said to have played a critical role in the roll out of the 1974 campaign. For a short but very informative biography of Chen and other high placed rebel-workers, see Perry and Li, *Proletarian Power*.

reform.¹³³ But—as we will see in chapter 3—that blunt assessment was very near what the student-workers heard all the time from friends and family who had been sent down.

More and more, Lin Biao was being charged with having cast aspersion on the revolutionary fervour of China's workers by saying that politics did not interest them and that they only cared about making more money. But this was exactly what the student-workers saw all around them. In the words of one student-worker who ended up working on the docks for fourteen years, “all the older workers really cared about was working a little bit less and eating a little bit better.”¹³⁴ It was not only older workers who wanted to tune out the din of politics and enjoy the simple pleasures of life but also disillusioned student-workers.

For many student-workers, idealism had died, the present was hard, and the future bleak. But once a month a young man could still drown his sorrows in a cup of self-pity.

On payday on the fifth of each month, we would eat and drink in a small restaurant. We were good friends so we would “go Dutch” and would eat dumplings and drink strong liquor. We wouldn't talk about politics, only about friendship, love, and all our friends who had been sent down to the country. We were consumed by sadness. We all felt we had no future. We would spend half a month's ration tickets on just that one binge. Fortunately, I did not earn much money at the time otherwise I would have spent even more to relieve my frustration.¹³⁵

Tossed into work settings that were roiled by deep under currents of resentment amongst their elders, newly arrived student-workers soon lost their youthful innocence. Then just as their eyes were being opened to the combative realities of their workplaces, the official smear campaign that followed the death and disgrace of Lin Biao—combined with word back from friends and family who had been sent down to work in the

¹³³ As discussed in the Historical Background section in chapter 1, during the decade of the Cultural Revolution 18 percent of Shanghai's population was sent out to work in the countryside. As discussed in chapter 2, most of these “sent down” youth became very disillusioned by the hard work, the lack of support from the state, and the often less than enthusiastic treatment they received from the villagers.

¹³⁴ Interview with Cai.

¹³⁵ Wu, *Luotوسي*, 130.

countryside—stripped away the student-workers’ previously blind faith in Mao and his revolution. Adrift in sea of apathy and resentment at work and without the north star of ideological certainty to inspire their way forward, most student-workers retreated into private worlds with close friends to find solace and comfort. It is to that subject that we now turn.

Chapter 3. Private Spaces, Private Lives

Coming off shift I'm a soaring gull,

A horse that has slipped its tether...¹³⁶

As the curtain rises on scene three of the revolutionary opera, *On the Docks*, we see young dockworker Han Xiaoqiang singing joyfully as he anticipates his time away from work.¹³⁷ The son of a martyred dockworker, young Han represents the generation of revolutionary successors that Mao wants to carry on his revolution. But after completing twelve years of schooling, young Han is unhappy: he does not want to work as a “mere coolie” and longs to work on a big, Chinese-made ship sailing the seven seas. But such bourgeois individualism is exactly what the Party wanted to discourage. Thus, in the opera we see young Han go through a cycle of arrogance, downfall, and remorse before he finally repents and is lovingly brought back into the socialist fold. But by 1974, the gap between theatrical myth and lived reality had become too big and most young people were indeed looking forward to “slipping the tether” that bound them so tightly in public spaces and retreating into private worlds where they could relax and act freely. James Scott has shown how people who are repressed and denied a voice in the public discourse still find ways to express their dissatisfaction.¹³⁸ In the previous chapter we saw much behaviour that spoke loudly of the dissatisfaction of the student-workers and their workmates on the job: goofing off, inattentiveness during political study, absenteeism, pilfering, and willful damage to goods and equipment.

¹³⁶ *On the Docks*, 12.

¹³⁷ The young man's personal name, Xiao Qiang, translates literally as “youthful strong” while his family name Han is a homonym for China.

¹³⁸ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

In this chapter we will look at how these young people used private spaces and private time to seek meaning in their lives. Many of the resulting behaviours were collective in nature: hanging out with close friends, exchanging gossip and rumours, sharing a simple meal, listening to music or singing, or socializing in groups with young people of the opposite sex. However, an important part of those behaviours was still individual: reading escapist literature, listening to forbidden shortwave radio broadcasts from abroad, or studying in private. But most of this private behaviour still followed traditional norms for educated, urban youth. Whereas youth who had been sent to work in the countryside were often pushed by the harshness of their environment to acts of social rebellion such as fighting, theft, running away, or sexual experimentation, the social and economic situation of their schoolmates who had jobs and legal residency in the city was much less desperate. Thus, in seeking to escape the disillusionment that they felt in the public world, most student-workers sought comfort in private worlds in ways that were surprisingly traditional. Be it sex or political thinking, most played it safe. Perhaps that is not surprising given the way that the young people had been socialized in their schools.

Atomized Networks of the Disillusioned

In school, young people had been socialized to subordinate the self to the group and to align the aspirations of the group to the attainment of the national goals of political revolution and economic development. However, those feelings of unity came under great pressure in 1966 when students began to split into Red Guard factions that competed in often very violent ways.¹³⁹ By the time those intramural conflicts ended in 1967, the old sense of shared purpose and mutual trust had been shattered. The conflict had laid bare what Wu Liang referred to as the phoniness and dissimulation that had been necessary for students to survive in the highly regimented and highly competitive world

¹³⁹ Suzanne Pepper, *Radicalism and Educational Reform in 20th Century China: The Search for an Ideal Development Model* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Susan Shirk, *Competitive Comrades: Career Incentives and Student Strategies in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Eddy U, *Disorganizing China: Counter Bureaucracy and the Decline of Socialism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

of school.¹⁴⁰ But in 1968—the same year that students sixteen years and older were sent off to work in the fields and factories of China—changes were made to the secondary school system that, as an unintended consequence, facilitated the creation of private spaces where small groups of high school students could get together and honestly and safely share their thoughts and feelings with close friends. Prior to that, China had had a twelve year school system in the cities: six years primary, three years middle, and three years high school. But in 1968, that was changed to a ten year system with a five year primary and a five year high school component. Many schools in Shanghai went even farther, adopting a system whereby students only had to go to school in the mornings and were given afternoons off to get together in each other's homes to (hopefully) study in small groups. Wu Liang was one of those students and recalls with great fondness the close friendships that he built up within his small group, where he and his schoolmates could share freely their feelings and thoughts.¹⁴¹ The members of these small groups had all grown up in the same neighborhood and they and their families were well known to the officials of the residence committee who were responsible for detecting and reporting potential troublemakers. Thus, later when they finished school and were sent off to work, it was easy—as well as very comfortable—for them to get together to talk about the problems that they were facing in the crazy world of adults. One of the main topics of conversation was what other classmates were doing, especially those who had been sent off to work in the countryside.

Many sent-down youth were frequent letter writers. While these letters were usually written in the highly stylized manner of the period, they still managed to convey a

¹⁴⁰ Wu, *Luotوسي*, 86-87.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

good sense of the hardships.¹⁴² But even more compelling were the stories told in person by returning students. By the mid-1970s, there was a floating population of over 200,000 young people in Shanghai who had come back from their rural assignments for visits of varying durations and who were more than willing to tell of the sufferings that they—and others—had experienced.¹⁴³ Usually these stories simply described personal suffering. Sometimes, however, they implied political criticisms.

Wu Liang recalls the shocking conclusion reached by two of his former classmates who had been sent to work in poor rural Anhui province. Moved by the desperate condition of the peasants, they resolved to look into the causes of the great famine that had devastated that area during the Great Leap Forward (GLF, 1958-1960).¹⁴⁴ In undertaking such a study, they used as their model the investigation work done by the young Mao Zedong in the 1920s to seek the roots of the plight of the peasants in his home province of Hunan. But to the young students' horror they concluded that it was the Chairman's very own policy failings that caused this famine in which tens of millions of people died. And, pushing their analysis even farther, they concluded that Liu Shaoqi had been correct to criticize Mao's economic policies at that time.¹⁴⁵ During the Cultural

¹⁴² The hardship of sent-down youth became a highly publicized issue in the spring of 1973 when a small town school teacher, Li Qinglin, wrote Chairman Mao to plead for better conditions for young people like his son who was not even able to get enough to eat in his remote rural assignment. In a move that was widely reported in the national press, Mao sent 300 yuan to father Li and said that he was deeply concerned about the matter. Feng Xianzhi and Jin Chongji, eds. *Mao Zedong zhuan* (1949-1976) [Biography of Mao Zedong (1949-1976)] 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 2: 1,658; Elya Zhang, "To Be Somebody: Li Qinglin, Run-of-the-Mill Cultural Revolution Show Stopper," in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*, ed. Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 211-239.

¹⁴³ Jin, *Feichang*, 1:4. The number of registered returnees peaked in 1973 at 277,600 before dropping to 224,700 in 1974 and 190,010 in 1975. Up to the end of 1973, a total of 809,966 youth had been sent to work in the countryside (including roughly one-third to nearby collective-farms). Thus, the number of reported returnees in 1973 would represent about 34 percent of that number. This number, however, only recorded people who registered their returns. Since illegal returnees would want to avoid the hassle of dealing with the authorities, the actual number may have been much higher.

¹⁴⁴ Scholars put most of the blame for this famine on the Chinese government, either for implementing impractical policies in the first place or for failing to adjust them when problems occurred. Estimates of the number of deaths range from 18 million to 42 million. See, respectively Cormac O' Grada, *Great Leap Into Famine*, UCD Centre for Economic Research Working Paper, series 8, (2011), 9; and Frank Dikotter, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-62* (New York: Walker & Company, 2011), xii.

¹⁴⁵ Wu, *Luotuosì*, 70.

Revolution such thinking was dangerously counterrevolutionary. In the moral universe of Chinese communism Mao Zedong was the all-knowing and loving god and Liu Shaoqi was the scheming and backstabbing devil. To young Wu, cocooned in his comfortable world in Shanghai, his friends' critique was shocking:

I too had read Marx, but I had never gotten beyond the clever logic and the impressive jargon. Never had I thought about actually using his theories to examine the political situation in China or to analyze the factional fighting in the Party. It is not that I didn't have the ability to do so: it is just that it never occurred to me to do so.¹⁴⁶

Slowly but steadily, the minds of young people were awakening to new questions and new ideas.

In such a highly controlled society, gossiping and sharing rumours with trusted friends became a common—and highly cathartic—way of coping with the ambiguities and disillusionment of life. As one student worker recalled, in those days, rumours spread “faster than the wind.”¹⁴⁷ As stories began to leak back of the hardships experienced by sent-down youth, the Party tried to squash them by claiming that that such mistruths were based on a lie spread earlier by Lin Biao that “sending youth to work in the countryside was just another form of thought reform through hard labour.” But the more the media spun such stories, the more sceptical the young people became and, as a result, the rumour mills just ground on faster and faster.¹⁴⁸ One student-worker recalled hearing a rumour in late 1974 that an official banner had been defaced to embarrass a leading Maoist radical. According to the rumour, a big banner had been hung in downtown Shanghai calling for Zhang Chunqiao to be made Premier in place of the very popular, but ailing, Zhou Enlai. But somehow (according to the rumour) the character “NOT” had been added to the banner. If true, this was an extremely treasonous act. But when the

¹⁴⁶ Wu, *Luotusosi*, 71.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in an interview with SZY.

¹⁴⁸ The degree of credibility that people assigned to these stories can be seen from the terms they used to describe them. Thus, they were not referred to as *yao yan* (a term best translated as “unsubstantiated talk”) but rather *xiao dao xiaoxi* (“things heard in the back streets”). The distinction here was that while *yao yan* might be false, *xiao dao xiaoxi* were probably true.

student-worker and his friends finally got over to where this had allegedly happened to check it out, nothing was to be seen. Had the banner been quietly removed or had it ever existed in the first place?¹⁴⁹

Another rumour heard in summer 1974 by at least a few students in Shanghai did, however, turn out to be true. And it was a real blockbuster! For months, Jiang Qing and her radical allies had been attacking Premier Zhou Enlai through obscure literary references in the Beijing press.¹⁵⁰ But by the summer of 1974, Mao apparently felt that their attacks had become too disruptive. So, on July 17, 1974 during a Politburo meeting the Chairman put his arm around Zhou Enlai and, looking at his wife, announced to the room that “she does not represent me” and then went on to warn the radicals in the room to “be careful of forming a ‘gang of four.’”¹⁵¹ Following the arrest of Jiang Qing and her radical allies in October 1976, that statement became widely publicized. How, then, could an ordinary student-worker in Shanghai in the summer of 1974 hear the gist of a conversation held in a closed meeting of the Politburo thousands of kilometers away in Beijing? Is this merely an example of the memory playing tricks?

The interviewee who shared this memory is, however, very insistent. As a historian, he is familiar with the vagaries of human memory and claims that a member of his social circle had a relative working in the household of high level official in Beijing from whence that rumour came.¹⁵² Coincidentally, that official—general Su Yu, part of the famous Fourth Army that liberated Shanghai in 1949 under the leadership of general

¹⁴⁹ Interview with SZY. This probably took place in the spring of 1975 when Zhang was speaking out against Zhou’s policy of “experience-ism” (*jingyan zhuyi*) and trying to raise his own profile. See Ye Yonglie, “*Si ren bang*” *xing wang*, 3:1182-90.

¹⁵⁰ Wang Nianyi gives the standard Chinese interpretation of the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius as a veiled attack on the pragmatic Premier Zhou Enlai in Wang Nianyi, *Da dongluan de niandai* [A Decade of Great Upheaval] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2009), 347-373. Ye Yonglie gives a detailed and highly readable summary of the how these literary attacks were prepared and delivered in his book “*Si ren bang*” *xing wang* [The Rise and the Fall of the Gang of Four] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2009), 3:1154-1161. Leading western scholars also see Zhou Enlai as the prime target of this campaign. MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 366-373; and Teiwes and Sun, *The End of the Maoist Era*, 158-163.

¹⁵¹ Teiwes and Sun, *The End of the Maoist Era*, 189-191.

¹⁵² Interview with SZY.

Chen Yi—was at that time on assignment to the Ministry of Transportation to oversee the upgrading of the Shanghai harbour and so was closely identified with the pragmatists who looked to Premier Zhou Enlai for leadership. More will be said in chapter 5 about how those plans came to effect the lives of the dockworkers. At his point, however, suffice it to say that as a pragmatic leader with a long list of deliverables and a very tight time table, Su Yu would have been very keen to know which way the political winds were blowing. Were they going to be headwinds or tailwinds? Thus it can be easily imagined that this news would be shared within his household.

Women: Holding Up Half of Heaven?

But most rumours and gossip had less to do with the political lives of the high and mighty and more to do with the personal lives of ordinary men and women. In this respect, it is important to first understand the greatly improved status of women in the People's Republic. Indeed, the first law to be promulgated in the new republic had been the Marriage Law which declared, as its basic principle, that in all areas of private and public life, women should have the same rights as men. Thus, in addition to the right to free, personal choice in marriage, women were also given the right to chose their own careers, take employment, and participate in all aspects of social life.¹⁵³ By 1965, women already made up 38.5 percent of the working force in Shanghai and accounted for a whopping 73 percent of the of the 1,271,400 workers that were added to the urban workforce during the decade of the Cultural Revolution. Thus, by 1976, the number of women in the workforce had climbed to 42.3 percent.¹⁵⁴ Women were also active in politics though there seemed to be a “glass ceiling” that prevented large numbers from progressing to higher levels. In interviews done with 133 Chinese emigrants in Hong Kong, Whyte and Parrish found that while 62 percent of the woman had belonged to the

¹⁵³ *Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China*, promulgated on May 1, 1950.

¹⁵⁴ Jin, *Feichang*, 1:60. Hidden in those numbers, however, was the fact that most of the women's jobs were in collective enterprises which paid only about two-thirds of the wage at SOE. Thus, in 1965 the number of women workers in collectives and SOE was 70.0 percent and 29.7 percent, respectively. By 1976, however, those numbers had improved to 65.9 percent and 35.7 percent.

CYL, only 12 percent had belonged to the Party.¹⁵⁵ But while men still held most of the top jobs in the Party, it was not uncommon to also see well-qualified women at the highest levels. One of the three municipal secretaries in Shanghai, a tough rebel-worker who used to work at the Number 17 Textile Plant, Wang Xiuzhen, was a woman.

To popularize the idea that women were able and ready to “hold up half of heaven,” Maoist arts and theatre showcased women leaders. Thus, despite (or perhaps because of) the docks traditionally being an all male world, the lead character of the revolutionary opera *On the Docks* was cast as a woman. And even as her male deputies are confused by the tricks of the hidden class enemy, we see the Party Secretary, Fang Haizhen, clear headed and confident. In real life, the top leader at dock five, Yang Shukai, was a man: a hard-driving old guy who had grown up on the docks and knew how to get the men to work hard. But the number two person, Zhang Yaqing, was a woman. Amongst other things, she was responsible for the Party secretariat on the dock that organized political study. Madame Zhang was a strong and capable cadre but not without her touch of vanity, taking pleasure when people kidded her about her physical resemblance to the heroine-leader in the opera.¹⁵⁶ But, in real life, the use of art to promote women’s rights was not without its critics. When encouraged to talk freely about their hopes for the New Year, one unnamed man in the Bureau of Commerce and Finance joked that while he looked forward to more movies being produced in 1974, he hoped that the directors would not give all the lead roles to women.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Whyte and Parrish, *Urban Life in Contemporary China*, 203.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with FZN.

¹⁵⁷ This report contained a number of very frank questions and comments from staff in the Finance and Trade Bureau. To cover himself from possible political criticism, the compiler of the report started his summary by noting that “some of these ideas exhibit some confused thinking” (*hutu sixiang*) and then left out the names of the speakers. The comment about “too many female leads” may have even been a hidden swipe at Jiang Qing who was generally unpopular in the city. Shi ge hui caimao zu, *Canyue qingkuang*, di san qi, 1974 nian 1 yue 5 ri, “Caimao ge ju xuexi ‘yuandan xian ci’” [All Sections in the Bureau of Finance and Trade Study the New Year’s Editorial] (January 5, 1974): 3, in SMA B 248-2-626. Actually, his remark was a bit of an exaggeration. While women played important roles in all the revolutionary operas, the only one where a woman played the lead role was in the opera set in Shanghai, *On the Docks*. See Clark, *Cultural Revolution*, 52.

In official media representations, women were shown to be strong emotionally as well as physically. Nothing should distract them from their ascetic devotion to Chairman Mao and the revolution. No mention is made of love or marriage, husband or children, family or friends. Thus, the first actress cast for the part of Zhang Yaqing in *On the Docks* was rejected by Jiang Qing because she was too feminine. Solidly built and square jawed, the woman who was ultimately cast in the role certainly looked like a stereotypical dockworker. Her singing was powerful but her movement on stage lacked the grace and beauty of women cast in the other revolutionary operas.¹⁵⁸

In addition to policies promoting their participation in society, there were also strict laws to protect women—especially unmarried urban women—from sexual harassment. In his memoir, Wu Liang recalled the chilling impression made on his adolescent mind by the sight of several dozen convicted rapists being driven through the streets of Shanghai on the way to their execution.¹⁵⁹ He recalled too that parents often warned their kids that sex, like politics, was dangerous and best avoided.¹⁶⁰ These were lessons that the cadres at the young people's new work places—in *locum parentis*—were keen to underline.

On the docks, young women were usually organized into their own team. Popularly known as “iron girls” (*tie guniang*), these young woman tried to work just as hard as the men. “We wanted to prove ourselves,” recalled one woman of her days breaking up coal on the dockside. But young women were not allowed to work in the ships' holds. Not only was the work there especially heavy and dangerous, but it often took place out of the sight of supervisors. “Sexual harassment of a woman” (*wan nong nüren*) was a very serious matter. At dock six an eighteen year old girl became pregnant by a twenty-eight year old man. When interrogated, the man confessed that he had transferred from his old job in the warehouse to the dockside specifically to meet girls. The question thus became: was this merely an indiscretion in his personal life or the

¹⁵⁸ Ye Yonglie, “*Si ren bang*” *xing wang*, 2:530.

¹⁵⁹ Wu, *Luotوسي*, 99.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 190.

serious crime of sexual harassment? Paraded in front of an all-workers meeting, the man humbly confessed his errors. He was lucky. After much public criticism, he and the girl were allowed to keep their jobs, get married, and have the baby. But this very public interference in people's personal lives angered at least one student-worker. Recently admitted to the Party and promoted to the position of deputy Party Secretary in his large work team, the student-worker knew very well how the Party tried to educate and motivate the workers. But this public shaming over a private matter was going too far. Later, he commented bitterly that in those days, "Sometimes the Party got involved in matters that were none of its business while other times it ignored issues that it should have addressed!"¹⁶¹ As the handling of this case showed, a high level of moral rectitude was demanded of young people in the workplace. Did this also apply to the older generation?

Given the very conservative norms that were applied to the student-workers, many of them were shocked to discover the bawdy behaviour of older workers in their new workplaces. And what was especially shocking was the casual attitude of many of the older women. One young man recalled his shock and embarrassment when a middle aged woman made the life of her husband a living hell by cavorting with a series of other men at the small factory where they all worked.¹⁶² Wu Liang recalled that when, as a high school student, he was sent to a small factory to "learn from the workers," it was common to hear salacious gossip shared over the factory public announcement system. And, to his horror, the debauchery seemed everywhere: "There were practically no pretty women in the thirty to forty age bracket at that factory who were not subject to such salacious rumours."¹⁶³ Indeed, during this period—with many families split apart by class struggle or physical separation due to distant work assignments—marital infidelity was not uncommon.¹⁶⁴ In one neighbourhood, a number of women maintained early morning

¹⁶¹ Interview with MBK.

¹⁶² Interview with SZY.

¹⁶³ Wu, *Luotuosì*, 99.

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, Yang Kuisong, "How a 'Bad Element' Was Made: The Discovery, Accusation, and Punishment of Zang Qiren," in *Maoism at the Grassroots*, ed. Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015).

liaisons with the attendant at the local bathhouse. Later, when that location became inconvenient, the bathhouse attendant started to rent rooms from an old woman for after-hours trysts, only getting caught after he began to pinch coins from the pockets of regular bathhouse customers to pay the rent on his love nest. Unlike cases involving young people, the authorities did not make a big deal of it. After the bathhouse attendant paid back the small change that he had pinched, he and his paramours were left alone.¹⁶⁵ Thus, while the state had no compunction about intruding into the private lives of its adult citizens, it had little interest in what went on in their bedrooms.

Sex in the City

While older people often exhibited a *laissez faire* attitude toward sex, younger people tended to be very perplexed by this issue. In school, the youth of urban China had been socialized into what Michel Bonnin calls a Communist-Confucian morality. It was communist in the sense that—apart from its obvious political goals and terminology—it projected a revolutionary asceticism that sought to subordinate immediate physical pleasures for future metaphysical rewards. This puritanical ethos, as political scientist Neil Diamant argues, had been an important part of youthful idealism in urban China ever since the modernizing May Fourth movement of 1919.¹⁶⁶ But, as Michel Bonnin points out, this ethos was also very much Confucian in as much as it encouraged educated

¹⁶⁵ Story from Jin Dalu in conversation: to be included in his upcoming sequel to *Feichang yu zhengchang*.

¹⁶⁶ Neil Diamant argues that urban intellectuals—including young people who aspired for higher education as a means to career advancement—had a conservative, almost puritanical, view of human sexuality. By and large, their thinking reflected traditional Confucian values including the role of the educated man in upholding public propriety. Neil Diamant, *Revolutionizing the Family: Politics, Love, and Divorce in Urban and Rural China, 1949-1968*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

young people to be moral exemplars to the less educated masses.¹⁶⁷ Thus, most young boys were probably like Wu Liang, whose youthful sex life consisted of daydreaming, leafing through an old medical text book, and writing up descriptions of pretty girls whom he had shadowed in the street. Once, when visiting a female classmate with whom he had a platonic relationship, he was horrified to come across her mother having sex with an older boy in the back room. By the mid-1970s, the suppression of public pleasures had relaxed and “boys and girls resumed dating, reading poems, eating ice cream, watching movies, and walking hand-in-hand in the park.”¹⁶⁸ But even then, the behaviour of most educated urban youth was still very constrained, following norms that would have pleased their parents. As two young men who had been sent to work in the traditionally rough and tumble world of the docks recalled, “we young people were pretty conservative in those days.”¹⁶⁹

While well-educated young men might not mess around, there were “bad boys” who did. On the margins of society there were two categories of juvenile delinquents: on the one extreme there were tough hoodlums (*liu mang*) and on the other fancily attired dandies (*a fei*). These frustrated youth seemed to go out of their way to call attention to themselves. With “cigarettes hanging from their lips, mouths humming a song, (and) wearing weird clothes,” these juvenile delinquents were not hard to spot.¹⁷⁰ One student-worker recalled that in the early days of the Cultural Revolution many of the youth in his neighbourhood (where many families had overseas connections) affected long, slicked back hair and tight pants, styles that got them into fights with the more puritanical Red

¹⁶⁷ In chapter 9 of his book, Michel Bonnin describes the low morale of the sent-down youth. In his conclusion, he states that “the children of the revolution were sacrificed on the altar of power.” Bonnin, *The Lost Generation*, 453. Whereas students with jobs in the city had the security of an (albeit, often low) monthly income and the support of family and friends, the youth who had been sent-down to the countryside often felt betrayed and abandoned. This, combined with the harshness of their new environment, led many into “anti-social” behaviours such as fighting, stealing, and sex. In the area of premarital sex, the sent down youth were surprised to learn that norms in the villages were much less inhibited than they had been in their schools back in the city. Premarital sex seems thus to have much more common among sent-down youth than among classmates back in the city.

¹⁶⁸ Wu, *Luotuosu*, 184-189, 114.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with MBK and FZN.

¹⁷⁰ Un-credited quotation in Jin, *Feichang*, 1:201.

Guards.¹⁷¹ As for songs, two of the most popular were *Red River Valley* and *The Song of the Sent-down Youth* (*zhiqing zhi ge*), both of which spoke of the sadness of leaving friends and family behind.

The golden days of my student days have all been written down and recorded in the story of my lost youth, the road ahead is so long and difficult, the foot prints of my future will all lay in a strange and distant land, going out with the sun and returning with the moon, my “glorious” fate will be to silently plow the earth.

This song, however, was considered subversive by the authorities and it was rumoured that the author had been imprisoned.¹⁷² Singing it was thus not only an act of personal catharsis but also a political protest.

For young rebels, non-conformity was more than a matter of clothing and hairdos and sad songs. Wu Liang recalled a slightly older boy in his neighborhood, A-Long, who had smooth talk—and quick hands—around the ladies.

A pretty young woman had just married into our residential complex. One day, when she had just finished washing her hair, she was standing in her doorway slowly combing the snarls out of her hair. Her blouse was sleeveless and fit tightly across her breasts. Her trousers were made of very thin material with a flowery pattern. A-Long called over to her. Looking up, the girl asked “what’s up?” “Those are lovely trousers you are wearing” he quipped. “Is that all that’s lovely?” she responded demurely. “No, you’re lovely too, especially your *derriere*.” And with that, A-Long reached over and ran his hand over her backside. Not only did the young woman not pull back, she even reached up and touched his face.

Later, A-Long confided to his young friend that he could “make” any girl he wanted to and offered to show him how to do it (*hua núren*). The terrified young Wu demurred. Just

¹⁷¹ Interview with SZY.

¹⁷² Wu, *Luotuosì*, 132-33.

as well, because shortly thereafter, A-Long was arrested as a juvenile delinquent and disappeared from the neighbourhood, never to be heard of again.¹⁷³

Just as there were “bad boys” on the margins of society so too there were “bad girls.” Such girls were known colloquially as “*la-san*,” a term derived from the English (Scottish) word *lassie* that had originally been used to denote a young, unmarried woman. One man recalled two *la-san* who were a couple years ahead of him in his junior high school. To the prepubescent eyes of him and his pals, the physical blossoming of these young women was extremely disconcerting. One day, when one of these *la-san* was passing underneath their window, the younger boys spit down and yelled out rude comments. Unfazed, the young woman looked up, flipped them the bird, and yelled “hey, you little twerps ... why don’t you come on down ... but first check to see if you have any hair on your balls!” Stunned, the boys retreated in terror. As for these two *la-san*, despite their proto-delinquent tendencies, they were able to stay on the right side of the law for the rest of their school days before graduating and being sent off to work.¹⁷⁴

Gradually during the early 1970s, the private lives of young people became less controlled. But, as the more confrontational stage of the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius wound down in the later summer of 1974, the authorities began to worry that perhaps young people had become too free and easy in their thoughts and actions. A speech at an official meeting held to discuss the education of youth and young adults outlined the dangers that impressionable youth were subject to from hidden, but ever present, enemies:

We must realize that the bourgeoisie and other exploiters will never accept their destruction willingly and that they will always seek to exploit the political and social inexperience of young people and use the reactionary ideas of Confucius to corrupt young people through whatever channels they have. A small group of

¹⁷³ Ibid., 190. Criminal sentences were publicly posted to inform society at large (and warn other anti-social characters of what lay ahead of them). If such a poster had a check mark on it, it meant the offense was a capital one and that the execution had already taken place. Wu watched for news of his disappeared delinquent friend but never saw or heard any news.

¹⁷⁴ Zhou Dake, “Ling yu xiu de hongse fengqing” [The Redness of Collars and Sleeves], *Hua Cheng di si qi* (2006), quoted in Jin, *Feichang*, 1:220-224.

class enemies promote the bourgeois idea of “eat, drink, and be merry.” Some young people still subscribe to the idea of early dating and early marriage.¹⁷⁵

The senior municipal Party Secretary, Ma Tianshui, underlined this danger when he scolded the militia for becoming lax and called upon them to pay more attention to “seizing counterrevolutionary posters and striking down hoodlums and dandies” (*zhuyi pohuo fandong biaoyu, daji liumang afei*).¹⁷⁶

One of the first, and most public, things that the authorities did was crack down on what they called lewd clothing. In September 1974 the first lady of the Philippines, Imelda Marcos, paid an official state visit to Mao Zedong and the newspapers were full of photos of the former beauty queen wearing a dress that exposed her bare shoulders in a most provocative manner. Within days, a young Shanghainese woman had made her own copy of the dress and, when she paraded down the street with it on, quickly gathered a crowd of curious gawkers. But the excitement was not to last long for the police soon swept in to arrest her for “lewd public behaviour.” But then the rumour mill kicked into high gear. According to the most popular story, the young woman was really the illegitimate daughter of a powerful official who was going to sweep down and free her from prison. Who the young woman really was and what really happened to her were never revealed. Nevertheless, the rumour mills ground on for weeks.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ “Zai qingshaonian jiaoyu jingyan jiaoliuhui shang de jiang hua” [A Speech Given to the Meeting to Exchange Experiences on Educating Young Adults and Youth], (n.d., though probably sometime in late 1974), in SMA B 246-2-28-41.

¹⁷⁶ “Ma Tianshui tongzhi zai Shanghai minbing, renfang gongzuo huiyi shang de jianghua” [The Talk of Comrade Ma Tianshui Given to the Workers’ Militia and Civil Defense organizations],(n.d.), 3, SMA B 74-1-305.

¹⁷⁷ Shanghainese women were famous for their fashion consciousness. In the spring of the same year that this young woman dared to wear her low cut dress on the streets of Shanghai, Jiang Qing had been promoting her own style of revolutionary clothing for female cadres. Nicknamed the “Jiang Qing dress” (*Jiang Qing fu*), the style tried to evoke a sense of national pride by modeling itself on dresses worn by court women in the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE). However, with a tight collar, loose sleeves that reached to the elbow, and a billowing skirt that fell almost to the ankles, it was not popular with the fashion-conscious women of Shanghai. The plan had originally been to produce 80,000 of these dresses but, when demand failed to materialize, only 18,000 were made. And of those, only 2,000 were actually sold, mostly to women involved in the arts and theatre sectors. Jin, *Feichang*, 1:207-209, 223.

Since the early 1970s, the fashion for young women steadily shifted away from baggy trousers and shapeless Mao jackets towards stylish skirts and form fitting blouses. In the summer of 1975, officials from the state owned clothing company made a survey of what women were wearing on Nanjing Road, Shanghai's most fashionable thoroughfare. After two hours of discreet observations, the officials were horrified to learn that over the last two years the number of women wearing "short or very short skirts" had jumped from less than 3 percent to over 70 percent (including 16 percent whose skirts had been raised to a scandalous three to four inches above the knee!). Even more worrisome, however, was the fact that a large number of these skirts were distressingly tight across the young ladies' bottoms!¹⁷⁸

Nevertheless, despite their increasingly stylish appearance, most of these young women were still very conservative in their relationships with young men. For them, as for their male counterparts, it was more common to socialize in small groups with relationships with the opposite sex kept on a platonic level until it was possible to get married. Thus, hanging out with small groups of friends to chat and gossip became a common way to socialize. On special occasions, the intimacy could be deepened by sharing a simple meal. One young man, recalls that once a month or so he would get together with a couple of old friends for a simple meal of dumplings and just chat.¹⁷⁹ Another young man who worked in a carpentry shop recalled how he would do little odd jobs for friends who would invite him for a big dinner to show their thanks. But for him, it was more about sharing intimate thoughts with close friends than about the food.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Jin, *Feichang*, 1:214. The term "inch" (*cun*) used in the original report probably refers to the traditional Chinese measurement popularly called the "market inch" (*shi cun*) which equals 3.333 centimeters or 1.312 "western" inches. The shortness of these dresses is thus even more scandalous than it appears on first reading!

¹⁷⁹ Interview with MBK.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with HN.

Worlds of the Imagination

Another important way for student-workers to escape the *ennui* of life in the public world was to retreat into the solitary world of the imagination. For most young people this started with reading revolutionary-romantic novels. For some it was through private study. And for a few daring souls, it was through listening to outlawed foreign radio broadcasts. Radio sets were pretty common in Shanghai. If a new one could not be purchased, then a second hand one might be found in a second hand store on Huai Hai Road.¹⁸¹ For handymen, it was also possible to buy radio parts at one of several grey markets in the city and assemble them on one's own.¹⁸² The quality of the radio programs, however, varied widely: one student-worker recalled that while the American and Japanese programs were pretty good, the Soviet programs were really lousy. That young man had acquired the habit of listening to shortwave radio from his father, a former radio operator in the KMT army. But his father had once been caught listening and had been severely criticized, so his son—his curiosity and determination only heightened by his father's experience—was especially careful to avoid detection.¹⁸³ Being caught listening to a foreign broadcast could be a very serious offence. The case would not be turned over to the police or law courts, but would be handed to the authorities at the listener's workplace for disposition. If the cadres in charge at your work unit did not like you, you might be

¹⁸¹ Wu, *Luotuosì*, 148. During the Cultural Revolution, all behaviour that hinted of a selfish bourgeois motivation, even the buying or selling of old personal goods, was condemned. To avoid criticism, the former second hand goods store in downtown Shanghai was renamed the Huai Hai Road State Run Store for Adjusting Old Goods where “adjusting” (*tiao ji*) was the euphemism used instead of “selling” and the state's hand in controlling the market was made clear.

¹⁸² See the references in the previous chapter.

¹⁸³ Interview with HN.

sent for a long stint at a labour reform camp.¹⁸⁴ Therefore most young people sought out less risky diversions.¹⁸⁵

As several interviewees recalled, at that time it seemed that everybody read everything they could get their hands on.¹⁸⁶ The selection, however, was limited by the fact that in the early days of the Cultural Revolution private and public book collections had been largely cleansed of “poisonous weeds” (*du cao*). Revolutionary-romantic novels, especially French and Russian ones, were extremely popular. Their stories of idealism, self sacrifice (and often tragically unrequited love) were usually set in an exotic foreign locale that added to their escapist allure. Such books were lent and re-lent amongst friends on three day loans. Especially popular was *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexander Dumas. With its story of betrayal, hardship, escape, redemption—and, ultimately, revenge—the book reflected many of the feelings of young people in those days.¹⁸⁷

In the early 1970s public libraries began to re-open and, gradually, the selection of non-fiction books increased. One student-worker recalled that while there were still many empty spaces on the library shelves, the seats were always full. For him and many of his friends, going to the library opened up new windows on life. Every day after work he would head straight to his neighborhood library. Arriving at three o’clock, he would take only a short break for dinner before going back to stay until closing time at eight o’clock. To his delight, he discovered many of the classics of western thought translated

¹⁸⁴ Michael Dutton, *Policing Chinese Politics* (Duke University: Duke University Press, 2005), 238-9. Dutton states that, despite very harsh interrogation techniques, the number of criminal cases (as opposed to so called “political” cases) that were solved in the 1970s dropped to a little over 50 percent. He quotes a well placed (but anonymous) informant as telling him that because of the breakdown of normal police and court procedures, by 1972, a “massive penal gulag” had been built up by arbitrary arrests and punishments. Of the more than 846,000 prisoners held, over half had never been formally charged with any crime.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with MBK.

¹⁸⁶ Interviews with LX, SZY, and HN. See also Wu, *Luotousi*, for lists of the most popular titles.

¹⁸⁷ Wu, *Luotousi*, 151. In *Mao’s Last Revolution*, page 349, MacFarquhar and Schoenhals report that in the mid 1970s, a tattered copy of this book could cost up to 50 yuan in Shanghai, or the equivalent of two months wages for an apprenticing worker.

in the late nineteenth century by the famous translator Yan Fu.¹⁸⁸ Wu Liang recalled his great excitement as he explored the writings of such diverse authors as Kant, Fichte, Darwin, and Huxley. He was so struck by the writing of Adam Smith that he copied long sections into his notebook.¹⁸⁹ And soon more and more classics of Chinese fiction and non-fiction began to re-appear. In 1972, such recently banned classics of Chinese fiction as the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Dream of the Red Chamber* were re-printed.¹⁹⁰ Then, in 1974, with the launch of the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius, more and more of the classical texts of Chinese philosophy and history began to appear. Unlike the “old” classics of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, most of these “new” books were received with great interest.¹⁹¹ Several interviewees commented that even though the classics of communism were on every shelf, few people read them.¹⁹² When the voracious bibliophile Wu Liang started to borrow such books from his factory library, he had to explain to his incredulous co-workers that he was reading them to satisfy his own intellectual curiosity and not to impress the cadres.¹⁹³

When it came to reading, urban youth were at a great advantage over their schoolmates labouring in the countryside. When asked by the head of the Maoist propaganda machine, Yao Wenyuan, what was the greatest need of the sent-down youth, the head of the influential Writers’ Group in Shanghai, Zhu Yongjia, replied that, without a doubt, it was for those rusticated youth to have more books so that they could acquire practical knowledge to assist in the development of their host communities. Zhu, whose own children were working in the countryside, then spearheaded an effort to print up more easy-to-understand technical books for sent-down youth. At the same time, Zhu

¹⁸⁸ Interview with SZY.

¹⁸⁹ Wu, *Luotوسي*, 30.

¹⁹⁰ In February, 1972 an irritated Zhou Enlai reportedly asked why only foreigners in China could buy these classics of Chinese literature and so, a few months later, a re-print of 200,000 copies hit the shelves. MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 348-349.

¹⁹¹ One interviewee, SZY, recalled with pleasure how he began to read ancient Chinese histories at this time. Wu Liang, however, complained that it was hard for him to get interested in the Chinese classics as there were too many characters that he could not understand. Wu, *Luotوسي*, 175.

¹⁹² Interview with LX and SZY.

¹⁹³ Wu, *Luotوسي*, 33.

also increased the budget for the Shanghai Municipal Library to import and translate foreign language books so that local scientists could follow international developments in their fields.¹⁹⁴

To add some spice to their dreary lives, some young people studied foreign languages secretly. At the start of the Cultural Revolution, the authorities viewed such activity with extreme suspicion but after President Nixon visited Beijing and Shanghai in February 1972, the study of English suddenly became acceptable. But with universities largely closed, opportunities for formal language training were extremely limited. Thus, out of the 1,730,856 young people in Shanghai assigned jobs over the decade of the Cultural Revolution, only 1,800 were assigned to language schools, only beginning in 1972.¹⁹⁵

Other practical—and politically irreproachable—topics of study were mathematics and sciences. One of the student-workers at Number Five dock had excelled at mathematics in high school, but after he became politically active at his new job, he had no time left to study. More will be said about him in the next chapter when we talk about ambitions and careers. Another student-worker, however, had lots of time to study. Zheng Weian had not been so lucky in his work assignment, ending up at a low-status, low-paying job in the maintenance shop at his housing cooperative. The good news, however, was that with such an undemanding job, young Zheng had lots of time to pursue his passion for mathematics, time which (as we will soon see) he put to very good use.¹⁹⁶

In 1974 it was announced that universities would once again start admitting students. Admission, however, would be not be on the basis of academic scores but on

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Zhu Yongjia.

¹⁹⁵ Jin, *Feichang*, 1:395. Of this total, 33 percent were assigned work in the city and 67 percent were assigned work in rural areas.

¹⁹⁶ Xue Baoqi, *Guangming de gushi: yi wei pingmin de Shanghai sheying shi* [A Glorious Story: a History of Shanghai Through the Photos of an Ordinary Citizen] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenxiu wenzhang chubanshe, 2010), 118-125.

the basis of “outstanding political performance” plus the “recommendation of the revolutionary masses.” As Wu Liang, who had just turned nineteen, recalled bitterly “Me? Enter university? It was an impossible dream. (Those entry requirements) loomed over me like two mountain peaks. How could I ever hope to reach their summits!?”¹⁹⁷ Indeed, by that time, so many people had become disillusioned with a system that seemed to allow well-connected people special privileges through the “back door,” at the start of the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius, Jiang Qing strongly suggested to Chairman Mao that the upcoming campaign should also target this problem. Her husband, however, chose to side-step the issue.

This is a big issue. It involves millions of people, all the way from the lowest levels of the Party right up to the top levels here in Beijing. Sometimes good people get in by the backdoor. And sometimes bad people get in through the front door . . . If we combine this issue with the criticism of Lin Biao and Confucius it will only weaken the campaign.¹⁹⁸

So an official critique of back-door admissions to university was off the agenda. Nevertheless, in the early days of the campaign, there were several newspaper reports of conscientious young people publicly renouncing the university placements that their parents had arranged for them.¹⁹⁹ But as the media campaign to promote the anti-Confucius campaign shifted into high gear, this issue quickly disappeared from the press. And, as we will see in the next chapter, soon there was so much material for the student-workers to study to keep up with the new anti-Confucius campaign, that they had no free time left to think about what they might be studying in university.

¹⁹⁷ Wu, *Luotوسي*, 91. Wu may have his dates off for on March 27, 1974 the *Jiefang ribao* was celebrating the graduation of the first group of Worker-Peasant-Soldier (*gong nong bing*, or GNB) university graduates from Beijing’s Tsinghua University and on March 30, 1974 the front page of that same paper announced the graduation of the first group of GNB students from Shanghai’s Fudan University.

¹⁹⁸ Feng Xianzhi and Jin Chongji, eds. *Mao Zedong zhuan* (1949-1976) [Biography of Mao Zedong (1949-1976)] 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 2:1,686.

¹⁹⁹ See, for example, *Jiefang ribao*, February 12, 1974, 2. Yu Annuo, a female student at Shanghai’s Tongji University, was so moved by the example of Zhong Zhimin dropping out of Nanjing University in December 1974 because his father had pulled strings to get him in that she did the same. Both cases received a lot of publicity in the press.

Four years later in 1978, after a twelve year hiatus, entrance exams were reinstated as the criteria for university admittance and millions of young people lined up to take the test. No longer did your class background nor the comments of your Party Secretary matter. Now it was based totally on ability—and luck. The student-worker activist at Number Five dock whom we saw earlier was one of the fortunate ones. As we will see in the next chapter, he had been promoted to a radical think-tank in Shanghai where he kept his mind sharp studying and writing about the historical dialectics of ancient Chinese history. This, added to his natural intelligence, was sufficient for him to win admission to university to study mathematics. And the young handyman in the housing collective, Zheng Weian, made it too. In his spare time, he had scoured scrap paper markets where he was able to scrounge old textbooks in five foreign languages. Studying on his own, he had not only mastered the basics of university mathematics but also written a series of research papers that, along with his test results, were sufficient to get him straight into graduate school. But the brilliant success of the few only made the disappointments of the many even darker.

Both of these young men came out of the decade of the Cultural Revolution as big winners. Their natural abilities, hard work—and luck—had given them opportunities for a future that most of their generation had given up on. But their subsequent choice of career paths only underscores the depth of disillusionment experienced by their generation. From amongst young people like them, Mao had dreamed of finding revolutionary successors to carry on his vision to radically transform the Chinese people. But the young people who came out on top in this first free and open examination were the first to turn their backs on his dream. After getting his masters degree from Shanghai's prestigious East China Normal University, the young handyman headed off to Cambridge University before emigrating to the United States where he lived and taught for the rest of his life. As for the activist dockworker, he too ended up doing graduate studies in applied mathematics in Shanghai before starting to work for the government. But he was unhappy and soon left to work in the in the growing private sector. "I got so tired of that government job," he recalled, "they were always having meetings to talk

about this or that.” The real tragedy of his generation, however, was seen in the career paths of his classmates. Out of a graduating class of fifty-two, a total of seventeen graduates had emigrated, causing one of their Chinese professors to lament, “when we were young, our generation gave up our foreign careers to come back to help build a new China, but now your generation is all running away!”²⁰⁰

Disillusioned as most student-workers had become, the number who could actually “run away” to foreign lands was still very limited. Indeed, during the decade of the Cultural Revolution, some student-workers had worked hard on building careers as loyal servants of the Party. They were quite happy with where they were. It is to an examination of those young people that we now turn.

²⁰⁰ Interview with FZN.

Chapter 4. Getting a Leg Up

*Study without ceasing and never stop looking for ways to advance
(Haohao xuexi, tiantian xiang shang).*²⁰¹

—a popular slogan in school before the Cultural Revolution

In their student days, many of the young people who ended up working on the docks had been idealistic, free-spirited, and—sometimes—reckless Red Guards. But a few years working in the real world had taken much of the edge off their enthusiasm. Nevertheless, for serious and ambitious student-workers, the early 1970s was a good time to get a leg up on their careers by joining the Party. The gate keepers for Party admission were mostly the old cadres who, despite being “knocked down” by radical workers in 1966 and 1967, had since recovered their leading positions in their work units. When looking to recruit new members to the Party, besides personal loyalty, what these old cadres valued most was the ability of their young clients to use the written and spoken word to defend the interests of their patrons in the ongoing war of words. During the campaign in 1974 it looked for awhile that “fist warriors” might once again replace such “pen warriors” as the storm troops of the campaign. But very quickly both sides—constrained by political figures higher up—rejected physical confrontations in favour of intensified wars of words. During this period, student-workers were pretty much absent from the stories carried in the press and in official documents. This largely reflects the fact that on the ground in Shanghai the campaign was pushed by less educated “old rebel-workers” (*lao zaofan*) who made up the leadership of the SFTU and the in-house unions in every workplace. Nevertheless, many student-workers did yeoman service during this period, writing posters, arguing in workplace meetings, and digging up facts and figures

²⁰¹ This was a mantra that was drilled into young school children in pre-Cultural Revolution China. See, for example, Wu, *Luotوسي*, 58.

to support their patrons. But—when it came time to hand out rewards at the end of the confrontational period of the campaign—the student-workers were largely shut out. By the late spring of 1974, reconciliation became the order of the day after Mao made clear his unhappiness with disruptions to production. Old cadres were told to apologize for marginalizing the old rebels in the past and old rebels were told to stop attacking the old cadres in the present. In return for acknowledging the leadership of the old cadres, the old rebels would be given priority for so called “double breakthroughs,” first to membership in the Party and then to improved work assignments. For loyal student-workers, this meant that the door for membership and promotion within the Party had suddenly been swung shut.

But, as one door closed another one—or, in this case, two—opened. The first door was that of the *lilun duiwu* (LLDW, or Worker Theory Troops) which quickly enrolled 200,000 mostly young workers to study the classics of Chinese history, philosophy, and statecraft. This, it was hoped, would allow impressionable young minds to discover for themselves the perfidious nature of Confucius and the negative effects of his thinking on the development of modern China. In this push to establish LLDW, we gain a new insight into why Mao approved the distribution of the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius back in January. It had not been to embarrass Zhou Enlai and certainly not to help old rebels in Shanghai get better jobs. Those were the aims of a disparate group of radicals standing in his shadow. Mao’s aim, rather, had been to ensure that the people of China—especially the younger generation—would value his contribution to making China a united and strong nation and carry on his vision for transforming the dominant social ethos from the humanistic liberalism of Confucius to the legalistic, rules-based governance style of his hero, the second century BCE emperor, Qinshihuang.²⁰²

For ambitious young people, the other door that opened in 1974 was the Communist Youth League. Since the 1920s, the CYL had served as an arm of the Party

²⁰² Qinshihuang is famous in Chinese history for uniting eight warring states into one nation. However, he was later vilified for burying alive three hundred opposition scholars (all of whom were Confucianists!) and then burning their books.

for indoctrinating and mobilizing young people. In 1966, at the start of the Cultural Revolution, it been shut down and was only allowed to resume activities in work units in the summer of 1973. Too weak to play an organized role during in the early stage of the 1974 campaign, it only came into its own after the “reconciliation” was declared in the spring of that year. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao constantly enjoined people to “unite theory with practice” (*ba lilun lianxi shiji*). In his mind, the tension created by trying to reconcile these two things would trigger a dialectical overdrive that would propel Chinese society toward a Communist paradise. From the summer of 1974 on, the LLDW and the CYL thus became linked together in a dynamic partnership with the LLDW representing the reflective, theoretical side of the relationship and the CYL representing the active, practical side of the relationship. And for the student-workers who filled the ranks of both organizations, there was the hope that loyal service to their Party patrons would someday bring them benefits. And, indeed, when most of the old rebels who won “double breakthroughs” after the “reconciliation” in the summer of 1974 were turfed out following the downfall of the Gang of Four in late 1976, it was the loyal student-workers of the CYL and LLDW who took their place.

The Early Years: On the Fast Track

In 1969, shortly after he started to allow fallen cadres to return to their old work units to get production going again, Mao called for transfusion of “new blood” to invigorate the battered Party. Thus, over the next five years, 51,337 workers were admitted to the Party in Shanghai.²⁰³ But with the newly restored “old cadres” standing as gatekeepers for this process, there was little chance that the worker rebels who had made so much trouble for them back in 1966 and 1967 would be given the nod. With the hiring of temporary workers from the countryside closed off, the only large source of new

²⁰³ Perry and Li, *Proletarian Power*, 180.

candidates was the 435,803 student workers who were assigned urban jobs up to the end of 1973.²⁰⁴

But not all young people were keen to get into the Party. When they first arrived on their new jobs in 1968, many young students were kept busy writing up big character posters. As one former student-worker at an electric cable factory recalled, “When I arrived at my factory, the Party Secretary would often ask me to write up big character posters. It was nice to get time off work. But I wasn’t a strong worker and had no political aspirations so I soon stopped volunteering.”²⁰⁵ But for young people who had ambition and drive, these were good years.

At end of 1973, as the docks finished off a record breaking year, the newspapers were quick to point to the contribution of these young Party members. The Yangshupu dock in particular was praised for exhibiting the “cooperative spirit of Communism” and accomplishing a stunning 34 percent increase in tonnage handled. With only about 1,000 employees in total, twenty-seven student-workers had already been accepted into the Party. Eighteen of these young Party members were also work team leaders. The energy and enthusiasm of these young people was reflected in the much publicized story of “Little Chen” who was so inspired by the increased quotas that his leaders had set that he got his team to do just one more load before lunch and then another load before dinner, inspiring all the other teams to do the same.²⁰⁶

Once a young person became a Party member, however, his workday only got longer. Not only would he or she have to spend extra time preparing for meetings but he or she would also have to visit workers at home (*jia fang*) to have heart to heart talks (*tan xin*) about problems that were affecting their performance at work. As one student-worker cum junior cadre recalled of that time, “The older workers were always

²⁰⁴ Jin, *Feichang*, 1:395-96.

²⁰⁵ Interview with SZY.

²⁰⁶ Wang Huazhi, “Kao zanmen zehao ren jiu neng ban hao matou!” [Depending Upon People Like This We Can Certainly Manage the Docks Well!], XXPP, (December 1973): 14-20. The numbers of workers in each group varied slightly. These are average sizes.

complaining that the cadres didn't care about them. Many of the older workers were still living in really poor housing. Some had such large families that the worker himself didn't get enough to eat." Sometimes the young Party member would buy little gifts for the worker's family. And despite the fact that the workers were often the same age as the young cadre's father, the older men still showed great respect to their young visitors, in large part because of the latter's education.²⁰⁷ Despite over two decades of Communist propaganda, it seems that even rough old workers had inherited a Confucian respect for the educated man.

Sharpening the Weapons of Young "Pen Warriors"

In the early days of the Cultural Revolution, Mao had praised the spontaneously formed and self-directed Red Guards as "daring young generals," but without coordinated direction and control they had ended up as loose cannons. By the spring of 1967, Mao had become very unhappy with the disruptions caused by uncontrolled actions of these students and ordered them to dissolve their organizations and return home. Young people were told to continue the fight, not with fists but with words. Physical violence was to be used only as a last resort. Now the popular slogan was "attack with words (and, only when necessary) defend with force" (*wen gong, wu shou*). In this new field of battle, "pen warriors" (*bi ganzi*) were to be the front line troops.²⁰⁸ As Red Guards, these passionate young people had been like individual guerilla fighters. Now they were to be like soldiers, subject to the command and discipline of their leader.

The ideal of a pen warrior fit well with the education that these young people had received back in school. Parents and teachers alike had all repeated the very traditional nostrum that one should "study unceasingly and never stop looking for ways to advance"

²⁰⁷ Interview with MBK.

²⁰⁸ The term "pen warrior" was a play on the words of an earlier statement made famous earlier by Mao that power comes from the "barrel of the gun" (*qiang ganzi limian chu zhengquan*) where the word *ganzi* is used for both the barrel of the gun and the shaft of the pen. Of course, at the same time that Mao was telling young people to "attack with words" he was also authorizing the PLA to suppress disorder with physical violence.

(*haohao xuexi, tiantian xiang shang*).²⁰⁹ Although the content of the study might shift with the political winds, study was always the key to advancement. On this, Mao and Confucius could both agree.

Writing essays was an important way for ambitious student-workers to show their understanding and mastery of current political themes. One of the greatest honours for an aspiring “pen warrior” was to get an essay, short story, or poem published under his or her own name in the media. To sharpen communication skills, the municipal Writers’ Group (*xiezuozu*) would frequently hold short seminars where ambitious student-workers were invited to come and criticize each other’s essays under the tutelage of a senior person from the Writers’ Group. Even though it lay outside of the formal structures of both the Party and the SFTU, the Writers’ Group still had a lot of power because of its close links with radical Maoists in Beijing. The head of the Writers’ Group, Zhu Yongjia, was a former lecturer in ancient Chinese history at Shanghai’s prestigious Fudan University.²¹⁰ But his early involvement with politics brought him very close to Yao Wenyan, whose critical writing skills caught the eye of Jiang Qing and her husband long before the Cultural Revolution and who had been promoted to Beijing in April 1969 to head the Party’s media and propaganda arm. With 40 core members and about 300 ancillary members, the Writers’ Group provided a powerful voice in Shanghai for the ideas of the Maoist radicals in Beijing. Amongst ambitious student-workers, the Writers’ Group had a very high reputation because it played to their aspirations as budding intellectuals.²¹¹

In November 1973, the Writers’ Group started to organize year-long worker’s study classes (*gongren xuexi ban*). Once again, the focus was on studying canonical texts and

²⁰⁹ Wu, *Luotuosu*, 58.

²¹⁰ Zhu Yongjia came from a formerly very wealthy, capitalist family. On the eve of the Communist takeover, he was attending a high school in Shanghai run by American Baptists. When a classmate was expelled for participating in a Communist backed parade, young Zhu became so angry that he secretly joined their underground organization. During the anti-rightist campaign of 1957 when he was a lecturer in Ming Dynasty history at Fudan University, he narrowly escaped persecution for some of his outspoken comments through the intervention of an influential senior professor. Interview with Zhu Yongjia.

²¹¹ Perry and Li, *Proletarian Power*, 22.

developing the literary skills of exegesis and rhetoric. Students were channeled into one of two streams: literature or history. Famous professors gave lectures. Admission to this elite program was, however, very limited. Of the approximately 400,000 student-workers in Shanghai at that time, only sixteen were chosen: eight from amongst the workers and eight from amongst the peasants in Shanghai's suburbs. In one sense, these students were the cream of the crop. But the selection probably reflected more the strategic importance of the worker's industry than the brilliance of the student himself. As will be discussed in chapter 5, in 1973 the docks were beginning to play a key role in the economic development plans of the whole nation. Furthermore, the movie version of Jiang Qing's revolutionary opera, *On the Docks*, had come out the year before and the Party had a huge cultural—as well as economic—investment in the docks that it wanted a good return on.

With the mass promotion of the revolutionary opera *On the Docks*, first as a stage play in the 1960s and then as a movie in the 1970s, the CCP had turned the Shanghai docks into a shrine to revolutionary martyrs past and an inspiration to revolutionary successors yet to come. As Elizabeth Perry shows, from its very earliest days, the CCP had a genius for positioning its western political message in a traditional Chinese cultural milieu and then changing that cultural milieu from the inside through its monopoly control over art and literature.²¹² But art is not history and literature is not fact. In fact, the role of the Party on the Shanghai docks had been very brief, coming to a bloody end on April 12, 1927 when Chiang Kai-shek's forces killed strikers and wiped out the Communists' local organization. After that, the Communists were kept out of the docks by a succession of KMT police, Japanese militarists, and KMT aligned gangsters. Nevertheless, this did not stop Jiang Qing from mining the imagined history of the docks as the emotional backdrop for *On the Docks*. Her aim, however, was much more forward looking: how to inspire the upcoming generation of student-workers to become dedicated

²¹² Perry, *Anyuan: Mining China's Revolutionary Tradition*. Approaching the relationship of politics with culture from a different angle, Xiaomei Chen had earlier remarked that the CCP became very adept at using theatre to build its narrative of Chinese history. Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Way: Political Theatre and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 80.

“revolutionary successors” to Mao’s vision of a constantly revolutionizing society. And for a young person inspired by this revolutionary opera, there was no more exciting career path than joining the lower ranks of the vast propaganda machine that spread such a vision. In Shanghai, the key part of this machine was the municipal Writers’ Group. Getting in was hard, but for some like young FZN from dock five, it was almost impossible.

Like the head of the Writers’ Group, FZN came from a formerly rich capitalist family. Bright and outgoing, he had been his class leader in junior high school and a member of the prestigious Communist Youth League (CYL). After Mao began to emphasize class conflict in 1962, he was suddenly shut out of all formal activities in his school. Possessing an active personality, FZN threw himself into many informal activities to prove his worthiness. During the Campaign to Emulate Lei Feng (1963-64), he would dress up in patched old clothing and go up and down the streets looking to do random acts of kindness.²¹³ One day, while helping push a “honey wagon,” he was splashed from head to foot with human feces. Despite all his efforts, he was still shut out of activities at his school.

When the Cultural Revolution started, no one wanted FZN in their faction so, to keep busy, he would hang around the school and write up posters for the teachers. Later, when Red Guards started searching people’s homes for evidence of counterrevolutionary thinking, he gathered up his family’s bank records ahead of time to make it more convenient for the searchers. But eventually his positive attitude was rewarded. After labouring on a nearby collective farm for four years, FZN was transferred back to the city in January 1972 to work on the docks as part of a plan to replace weaker student-workers

²¹³ Lei Feng was an orphan who found a “new family” and a new vision for life when he joined the PLA. After he died in an accident, his diary was “discovered” and stories of his selfless service to others were featured in an intense, nationwide campaign to re-motivate people after the hardship and famine of the Great Leap Forward period (1968-60).

with students whose muscles—and revolutionary ardour—had been tempered through hard labour on the farms.²¹⁴

Happy to be back in the in the city, FZN once again threw himself into his work, becoming one of the star performers on the “tiger team” that constantly set loading records at dock five. “The target for our team was four tonnes in eight hours . . . I worked so hard because I wanted to transform myself.” His hard work and positive attitude soon caught the eye of Party leaders and he was invited to join the propaganda team (*zhengxuan zu*) at the dock. After hours, he and two other student-workers (including Fang Tianlun, about whom we will learn more about shortly) would take turns as “pen warriors” for the Party Secretary. Finally able to shine without the shadow of his class background hanging over him, it was thus only natural that young FZN was admitted to the Party in 1973. But that was only the beginning. In June that year, he was asked to join the prestigious municipal Writers’ Group where he was assigned to study and write polemical essays based on the Marxist interpretation of history.²¹⁵ So when the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius broke over Number Five dock in early 1974, FZN was safe from the storm in his new work unit. But his old colleague on the propaganda team at dock five, Fang Tianlun, was front and centre during all the action. Reminiscing on Fang’s meteoric rise—and eventual fall—he laughed that, if fate had not led him down a different path, Fang’s tragic end could have been his.

1974: Ambitions Interrupted

The launch of the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius seriously disrupted the career trajectories of ambitious student-workers. Suddenly they were told that they should eschew the passivity of pen warriors and become real warriors in a struggle to protect Mao’s revolution from the “restorationism” of modern day Confucianists in the mold of Lin Biao. The poster boy for this active new role was the

²¹⁴ More will be said about this economic adjustment in chapter 5.

²¹⁵ Interview with FZN.

skinny young pen warrior from dock five, Fang Tianlun, who had penned the “masters of the docks” big character poster that was splashed across the front page of newspapers all across the nation. Physically, Fang did not fit the image of a rough-tough dockworker. Short and skinny, he nevertheless had a sharp mind, good public speaking ability, and lots of ambition: skills that had made him a leader back in his high school and that were prime prerequisites for a successful career in politics. Trading on his new public persona, on February 2 young Fang was invited to give a stirring address to the thousands of workers assembled in Culture Plaza for the formal launch of the campaign in Shanghai. But while an ordinary worker might be satisfied with simply shouting out angry slogans, an erudite pen warrior like Fang could do nothing less than read out a poem that he had composed especially for the occasion.²¹⁶ In this poem he spoke hard words reminiscent of the early, fighting days of the Cultural Revolution.

Chairman Mao’s word goes out and the world is turned upside down.

On the docks, every place becomes a battleground.

Criticize with words: attack with the pen.

Charge ahead like daring generals.

Be leaders in the battle.²¹⁷

Back at dock five, things heated up quickly. On February 4, senior officials from the SFTU, the municipal Party committee, and even a deputy commander from a locally-based air force unit all descended on the dock to, in the parlance of the time, “light fires and fan the flames.”²¹⁸ The dockworkers were probably in a mood to vent a little frustration. The year before they had been pushed to handle 35 percent more tonnage at

²¹⁶ The official but unpublished history of Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution describes how SFTU leaders gave individual workers “talking points” ahead of time so that all the criticisms could be properly orchestrated. SHSH, 2:679-80.

²¹⁷ *Wenhui bao*, February 3, 1974, 1.

²¹⁸ *Wenhui bao*, February 7, 1974, 1. This was the only time that the presence of military personnel in these workplace struggles was publicly reported during the campaign. While the name and rank of the civilian officials were not given in the article, the name (Xu Qiliang) and the rank (deputy commander) of the military officer were given. His unit, however, was not identified.

their dock and they were probably still a little tired. The Maoist radicals were quick to resurrect a slogan from earlier in the Cultural Revolution and charge that the Party Secretary on the dock, Yang Shukai, was “controlling, blocking, and oppressing” (*guan, ka, ya*) the workers. On February 8, a second large meeting was held at the dock. Workers from three of the nine loading teams wrote up big character posters criticizing the cadres who had pushed them so hard, using terms like “oppressive, old-style labour contractor,” “blood sucker,” “captain ‘iron and steel’,” and “tonnage commander.”²¹⁹ Party Secretary Yang was criticized for putting tonnage in command and not “uniting theory with practice” (*ba lilun lianxi shiji*). Twice the hapless secretary was publicly humiliated and told to “stand aside” (*kao bian*) but twice he survived. But this was all very disconcerting for the young pen warriors who had attached their careers to the continuing power of such patrons. If their patron was knocked down, what would happen to their career prospects? Some like Fang Tianlun seemed to have been lured away from their local patron to serve a patron higher up in the power structure. However, as we will see later, in the big scheme of things most pen warriors were not important enough to be given such opportunities (or temptations?) and so ended up sticking with their pre-existing patrons throughout the campaign in 1974.

Workers who were seen as being too closely aligned to the old cadres now came under criticism. Big character posters went up at Number Five dock criticizing workers who had been “little lambs” or “blind beasts of burden.”²²⁰ Ambitious and politically active student-workers became anxious. How could they avoid becoming targets in the campaign? Where could they look for guidance? The first source, of course, was the flood of newspaper articles and supplementary information that gushed out from the Party Central. But to position oneself correctly in what some people were calling a “second Cultural Revolution” and a second “January seizure of power” required a more subtle understanding of which way the new political winds were blowing. To give

²¹⁹ SHGZ, 2:621-626.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:681.

student-workers clear models for thinking and acting, the Party media once again drew on the emotive power of arts and literature.

Zhaoxia was the leading journal of arts and literature in Shanghai. Indeed, since all the other journals had been closed at the start of the Cultural Revolution, in 1974 it was the only one. But those closures meant that its editor in chief, Zhu Yongjia, could employ the best writers and editors to produce a monthly, eighty page collection of short stories, essays, and poems.²²¹ Sensing the new mood coming out of Beijing, the writers at *Zhaoxia* were quick to fan the flames of righteous indignation. The February 1974 edition featured the theme “Workers are the Main Fighting Force in the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius” and opened with a collection of fourteen poems written by student-workers. The martial language used by dockworker Yu Guanxiong was typical.

Dockers surge forward,

The river seethes in anger.

The crest of each wave is a fist

Smashing the restorationist dreams of Confucius and Lin (Biao).²²²

For student-workers, the message was clear: it’s time to take off the gloves and let the fists of righteous anger fly! And the readers were told not to worry about going too far. Errors may be committed but that is okay. In the end, the magic of historical materialism will make all things work out for the better.

As the current campaign surges to new levels of intensity the struggle will become sharper and more complicated . . . In these struggles, errors may be committed but we must not fear. Thinking that is constrained by the fear of making a mistake is thinking that is still held back by the ancient idea of Confucius that one should always seek to follow the “middle way.” It is also

²²¹ Interview with Zhu Yongjia. As the Shanghai-based historian later Jin Dalu commented to this writer, “I always read *Zhaoxia* and *Xuexi yu pipan*. They were lively and much more interesting than *Hongqi*” (*Hongqi*, or Red Flag, was the official journal of the CCP).

²²² “Gongren jieji shi pi Lin pi Kong de zhuli jun” [Workers are the Main Fighting Force in the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius], *Zhaoxia* (February 20, 1974): 3-5.

thinking that is deceived by the modern idea of Lin Biao that we should seek to avoid conflict. But, with our understanding of historical materialism, we know that we have nothing to be afraid of. If we make a mistake (in these struggles) we can learn from it and simply move on to do better next time.²²³

For the next two months, workplace struggles continued though they soon shifted from the shop floor to the committee rooms.²²⁴ Old cadres were charged with “controlling, blocking, and suppressing” the workers. At the end of February, the Bureau of Industry and Transportation convened a big meeting for representatives from the 20,000 enterprises under its supervision to discuss the lessons they had been learning. Cadres at one enterprise told how they came to realize the huge error that they had made in August the year before. Faced with a problem of workers arriving late or leaving early, they had started to deduct fifteen minutes of pay for every five minutes of work missed. But that, they now realized, was disparaging not only to the workers but to Chairman Mao himself. Had not the Chairman given his people the “three obediences” and the eight matters for attention” to help them govern their own behaviour? Implementing such harsh monetary penalties was clearly at odds with the Chairman’s ideas!²²⁵

Problems soon appeared in many areas of the economy, especially in the critical area of transport. By the middle of April, the situation had become so severe that the

²²³ Ye Lun, “‘Zhongyong zhi dao’ yu ‘wu chongtu lun’” [“The Middle Way” and “The Idea of Avoiding Conflict”], *Zhaoxia* (February 20, 1974): 22-23.

²²⁴ In late February the pragmatic municipal Party Secretary, Ma Tianshui, wrote an editorial in the local press calling for workers and cadres to see themselves as “fighters in the same foxhole,” that is to say, fighting on the same side. But Zhang Chunqiao scolded him and so Ma had to join his two more radical colleagues, Wang Xiuzhen and Xu Jingxuan, in continuing to criticize the old cadre leaders in the workplace. *SHSH*, 2:681-83.

²²⁵ Zhonggong Shanghai Hujiang jixie chang zongzhi weiyuanhui, *Xuexi, pipan, lianxi shiji youji jiehe ba pi Lin pi Kong yundong bu duan yinxiang shenru*, Gongjiaojiaoliu hui fayan gao [Study, Criticize, Unite Theory With Practice and Unceasingly Deepen the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius, Statement for the BIT Meeting to Exchange Ideas], February 22, 1974, 8, in SMA B 173-2-192-135. These rules were announced in 1947 to help PLA soldiers discipline themselves and were popularized for everyone in the early 1960s. The “three obediences” (*san da jilu*) were obey orders, do not take anything from the others, and turnover to the State everything that comes into your hands (originally referring to on the field of battle). The “eight matters for (personal) attention” (*ba xiang zhuyi*) were show a friendly manner, be fair in all buying or selling, return everything you borrow, compensate people for any damage you cause, do not swear at or beat people, do not damage private assets, do not mistreat women, and do not mistreat prisoners.

Bureau of Foreign Trade and Commerce was calling for soldiers to be brought in to clear off the backlog in the Shanghai harbour.

In March we handled a total of 1,093,000 tonnes of imports and exports but left another 388,949 tonnes unhandled and seventy-one vessels backlogged in the harbour . . . This means that we now have 120 million dollars of export goods that are delayed . . . (For our part) we will work more closely with exporters and importers to improve their timely delivery to and pick up of goods from the docks, and will work more closely with the docks. But we also request that the municipal Revolutionary committee liaise with the relevant units to temporarily assign 1,000 soldiers to assist in clearing up the back log on the docks.²²⁶

With all these backlogs and delays, the messaging to student-workers thus started to shift. In late March they were told that, yes, by all means they should “push revolution” (*cu geming*), but it was also emphasized that they should not forget about their obligation to “grasp production” (*zhua shengchan*). Thus the March 20 edition of *Zhaoxia* carried articles with two very different messages. The first article, entitled “A Shout of Anger,” opened with the rhetorical question “Where is the battlefield?” and then went on to tell its young readers that “Every work unit is to be fought over, every residential street committee is to be contested. Criticisms should be made in small meetings as well as in big meetings. You should even carry the struggle into your homes.”²²⁷ But the second story took a more cooperative tone. In the story set on the docks “The Harmony of the Worker’s Chant Rings Out Clearly” (*Haozi liao liang*), we read of a young heroine—aptly named Little Hero—who was so keen to increase production that she purposely ignored the explicit instructions of her well-intentioned (but rules-bound) old team leader and proceeded to overload her crane to speed up unloading. Her enthusiasm, however, ended up endangering the lives of her fellow

²²⁶ Shanghai shi waimaoju geming weiyuanhui, “Guanyu jiakuai waimao jinchukou wuzi zhuangxie de qingshi baogao” [A Request for Instruction Regarding the Need to Speed Up the Loading and Unloading of Imports and Exports Through the Docks] (April 16, 1974) in SMA B 248-1-545. The call for the PLA to be brought in would, of course, provoke uncomfortable memories of how chaotic things had been allowed to become in December 1966 when workers protesting primarily over economic issues had walked off the job and soldiers and students had to be brought in to help clean up the backlog (and force the workers back to work).

²²⁷ Duan Ruixia, “Nu hou: Shanghai gongren pi Lin pi Kong zhandou xun li” [A Shout of Anger: the Anti-Lin, Anti-Confucius Workers of Shanghai Go Forth in Martial Anger], *Zhaoxia* (March 20, 1974): 3-6.

workers and tragedy was only averted when she was forced to dump a load of steel plates into the river to avoid tipping her crane over. But Little Hero was not discouraged: she had obviously read the February edition of *Zhaoxia* and so knew that, as a good historical materialist, she had nothing to fear. Having made a mistake, she could simply learn from her experience and try to do better next time. Thus, at the end of the story, we see Little Hero, her coworkers, and the crusty old cadre harmonizing their voices to a song of socialist cooperation sung to the melody of an old dockworkers' chant, living evidence of the Marxist dialectic at work.²²⁸

In the real world, however, people needed a message from the top before they would stop their squabbling. On April 10, Party Central issued the first of several directives that were to put a quick stop to unrest. *Zhongfa* [1977] 12 stated that "Within the proletariat itself there are no basic conflicts of interest . . . (therefore) there are no reasons to split and form mutually conflicting organizations." The directive then went on to add that workers should not form "fighting teams" nor to go outside of their industry or geographic location to liaise with other workers. The Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius, it said, was to continue but, in future, its implementation must be under the unified leadership of the Party committee.²²⁹ In other words, the union or the revolutionary committee should not try to set itself up as a competing body in a work unit, something that the SFTU had been trying to do ever since it launched the campaign in early February.²³⁰

But that was not enough. A month later Party Central issued *Zhongfa* [1974] 17 on May 18 that declared that as a result of the successes of the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius, it was now possible to unite with 95 percent of the people. Individuals who had been identified with Lin Biao prior to his defection were no longer

²²⁸ Li Fenghao and Bao Yucheng, "Haozi liaoliang" [The Harmony of the Worker's Chant Rings Out Clearly], *Zhaoxia* (March 20, 1974): 36-46. At the end of the story, we see the workers diving into the river to attach chains to the submerged steel to lift it back onto the dock.

²²⁹ *Zhongfa* [1974] 12, "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu pi Lin pi Kong yundong jige wenti de tongzhi" [Notification from the Central Office of the Communist Party of China Regarding Several Questions to do with the Campaign to Criticize Lin (Biao) and Confucius], April 10, 1974, in WDGW.

²³⁰ Perry and Li, *Proletarian Power*, 177-182.

to be persecuted providing that they had confessed their past transgressions and had ceased to be enemies of the people. Readers were assured that the Party, the organs of government, and the military were all “basically good” and that Party committees at all levels should strengthen their leadership to improve their work while continuing to grasp revolution. Thus, now that everything was right under heaven, the workers could re-focus on their jobs.²³¹

To further underscore the seriousness of the issue, on July 1 Party Central issued Zhongfa [1974] 21 which reiterated in the strongest terms the need to “encourage production” while “grasping revolution.”²³²

In some areas production is down . . . (because) the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius has not been done well . . . the revisionism of Lin Biao has not been exposed . . . the political line of (some) leaders has been wrong . . . A small number of leaders fear the masses and even run away at the first hint of threat . . . Some do not insist on principles and ignore Party policies. They freely give self confessions resulting in everybody being confused . . . We must strictly control all robbers, cheats, murderers, criminal organizations, and all bad elements who try to use these opportunities to benefit themselves . . . Party leaders should encourage the ideas of . . . strictly following workplace discipline and encouraging production . . . so that we can achieve even greater victory in the area of the campaign and socialist construction . . . Party committees at all levels are . . . to mobilize the cadres and the masses to come up with effective plans to increase production and save resources.

Suddenly, the workplace was to change from being a place of confrontation and political struggle to being a place of discipline and economic production. And for student-workers, the model of the fist-warrior was replaced with the more familiar model of the pen-warrior. Revolutionary action was to be replaced by revolutionary reflection.

²³¹ Zhongfa [1974] 17, “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu pi Lin pi Kong yundong jige zhengce wenti de tongzhi” [Notification from the Central Office of the Communist Party of China Regarding Several Policy Questions in the Campaign to Criticize Lin (Biao) and Confucius], 18 May, 1974 in WDGW.

²³² Zhongfa [1974] 21, “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu zhua geming cu shengchan de tongzhi” [Notification from the Central Office of the Communist Party of China Regarding Grasping Revolution and Increasing Production], July 1, 1974, in WDGW.

Re-Focusing Youthful Ambitions

Over the years, the official New Year's day editorial in the nation's newspapers had become an important way for Party Central to laud its accomplishments and give an outline of its goals for the year ahead. But hidden in all the high blow rhetoric in the January 1, 1974 was a call to establish *lilun duiwu* (LLDW, sometimes referred to as Worker Theory Teams) whose aim was to critique the ancient ideas of Confucius. How these LLDW were to be established and run, however, was not made clear. Certainly, neither the SFTU nor the rough and ready worker-rebels who formed its main constituents had interest in such bookish activities. They were interested in the more practical challenges of seizing power in the workplace. As for the old cadres, they were distracted by the need to just survive the flames of opposition that began to flare up around them. But those old cadres were able to draw on the support of the small group of student-worker activists who were serving them as pen warriors. As the workplace struggles cooled down later in the spring, these old cadres could then retroactively describe these loyal activists as the core of the new LLDW. The report of the situation at a small electrical equipment factory is probably typical.

When the Campaign started, there were only a few comrades (in the LLDW) . . . (But after) they wrote several articles of criticism, the Party Secretary started to take notice and began to support them enthusiastically. From each small work group he chose a few comrades who had a good understanding of the current political struggles, who could work closely with the masses, and who also had the ability to write effectively.²³³

While one might question how much independence and initiative these young comrades really exhibited, it is nevertheless clear from the rest of this newspaper report that they soon became closely tied to their patron, the Party Secretary. They were his pen warriors and, like a good general, he stayed very close to his men.

In following the class line, it is important to push these writers to the front lines so that they may be tempered in the midst of struggles. The Party Secretary does this

²³³ *Wenhui bao*, May 15, 1974, 2.

in all sorts of meetings in the factory. After these meetings, he also works with those writers to analyze the situation and think of ways to further develop the struggle.²³⁴

Indeed, by the spring “analysis of the situation” had become a very important way for the beleaguered old cadres to reframe issues in their defence. To historical-materialists, nothing was more basic than investigating the productive relations in a society to look for contradictions that, following the application of scientifically sound interventions, could be resolved to the benefit of the people. Had not the young Mao Zedong himself done that in his ground breaking investigation of the problems of the peasants in Hunan? Thus, we are told that, in the early spring of 1974, an idealistic student-worker at Number Five dock was so upset by the sight of spilt grain lying around the docks that he started what ended up as a wide ranging investigation into “enterprise management,” a study with reverberations that would shortly be felt all across the city.

Lu Baoqi was one of the young men who had been brought back from the countryside in early 1972 to work on the docks. Having laboured alongside the peasants, young Lu knew how hard they worked to grow the rice that fed the people in the city. He had also been inspired by the example of the super-keen dockworkers in the movie, *On the Docks*. If they saw a split bag, they took needle and thread to sew it up. If they saw spilt grain, they swept it up and put it in special receptacle. So when the idealistic young Lu began to see lots of spilt rice lying around dock five, he became very upset. His concern was echoed by an older worker, Zhang Yuhua. Old Zhang had seen much progress in his thirty years on the docks but recently, he was sad to report, things had gotten the worse. “What you see,” he told the young man, “is only the tip of the iceberg.” Galvanized by what he heard, Young Lu came up with a bold idea: “Why don’t we get the masses to undertake a study? Then we can expose the truth, clarify basic principles, criticize revisionism, and expose the poisonous things that it has produced. That way, we can educate the workers and help our leaders.” Anyway, that was how the genesis of this

²³⁴ Ibid.

investigation work was described in the official report issued by the Bureau of Industry and Transport that summer.²³⁵

A closer reading of that official report, however, reveals the hand of a political patron guiding and directing the enthusiastic youth. Whereas, during the tumultuous month of February, workers from loading teams four, five, and six had all been on the frontlines of the struggle against the Party Secretary, Yang Shukai, the investigation work that began in March was done exclusively by workers from loading team two. Moreover, the official report clearly states that this investigation work was done under the “organization and leadership” of the unnamed branch Party Secretary of that team.²³⁶ Thus, this investigation work was not done by a bunch of keeners running off tilting at windmills. And the scope of the investigations steadily expanded from spilt rice to cover a wide range of ten topics of “enterprise management” including financial waste, wear and tear to tools, on-the-job safety, technical innovation, damage to goods, delays to cargos and ships, self-serving protectionism, and the purchase of new machines. Starting with only eight investigators in March, that number soon grew to seventeen. To make sure that other workers would not say that this was just some boondoggle to get out of doing real work, all of the investigations were done after regular working hours. And in doing their analysis, the worker-investigators were careful to avoid the mistake of simply judging facts as they appeared on the surface (*jiu shi lun shi*).²³⁷ In the highly ideological atmosphere of the time, such an approach could be criticized as leading to superficial—and most certainly flawed—conclusions. Instead, the young investigators were careful to analyze and present their observations through the critical lens of scientific Marxism.

²³⁵ GJQK [1974] 176, [Workers’ Investigation Team at Number Five Dock], June 14, 1974, 2.

²³⁶ That unnamed branch Party Secretary seems to have been an ally of the beleaguered Party Secretary, Yang Shukai. During a meeting of leaders from all docks back on January 16, he had come out in support of his boss by saying that while Number Five dock had, indeed, put tonnage in command, this was the situation found at all docks in the city.

²³⁷ *Dongde quanju*, 3.

Only then, in the words of one of the young investigators, could the “glorious flowers of political thinking bear the rich fruits of economic development.”²³⁸

With the help of their cadre-patrons, the young investigators at Number Five dock soon expanded their study to visit a total of fourteen external units including government offices, shipping agents, and various end-users.²³⁹ In addition to finding the data, the student-workers also had to analyse it, write it up, and present it to their co-workers through posters and talks. The other workers, we are told, greatly appreciated the clear and easy to understand presentations that the young investigators made. At loading team two, the commitment to this work was a major undertaking in both time and energy. A loading team only had about 120 workers roughly half of whom were student-workers. Thus, the participation of seventeen student-workers meant that about one in four of the young people were involved, a very high participation rate.

On June 14, the Bureau of Industry and Transport (BIT) praised the work of these worker-investigators at Number Five dock in a report issued to the leadership of the 20,000 odd enterprises under its supervision.²⁴⁰ For their yeoman service, the student-workers who made up the majority of the investigation teams should have been in line for big rewards. But for student-workers not already in the Party (or on the lowest rungs), entrance and promotion just got a lot harder as, according to the recently declared “reconciliation” between the old cadres and the their old rebel critics, in the future priority for new Party memberships and better job assignments would be given to old rebels as part of the so-called “double breakthroughs,” or *shuang tu*. More will be said later in this chapter about who subsequently got on the fast track and who was shunted aside (and for how long), but first we will take a deeper look at the LLDW and the

²³⁸ Shanghai wuqu gongren lilun xiaozu, “Shehui zhuyi matou de zhuren: Shanghai wuqu zhuangxie gongren yeyu diaochaozu zai pi Lin pi Kong yundong zhong chengzhang” [The Socialist Masters of the Docks: the Growth and Development of the After-Hours, Loaders’ Investigation Team at Dock Five] (undated but probably from August or September, 1974), 5, in SMA B 246-2-1038.

²³⁹ Ibid, 3.

²⁴⁰ GJQK [1974] 176, [Workers’ Investigation Team at Number Five Dock], June 14, 1974.

opportunities that it provided ambitious student-workers. For—after a fizzled launch back in January—the LLDW program was re-launched in June with great energy.

Back to the Books

Party Central knew that, in the rough and tumble early days of the campaign, searching China's ancient texts for proof of Confucian heresy had not been a priority for workers of any age. But as the Party Central directives cooled down the conflict in the late spring, that issue gained more importance. Zhongfa [1974] 17 of May 18 had contained a paragraph calling for LLDW to be expanded and supported so that activists could be “united with the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers . . . to, step-by-step, create great and large LLDW . . . that can be powerful in handling words as well as weapons” (*neng wen, neng wu*). On June 1, the Shanghai Bureau of Industry and Transport followed that up with a circular calling for all work units to establish “large and robust” LLDW.²⁴¹ But for the average worker, the importance that the LLDW were to play in reorienting the intellectual geography of the youth of China only became clear when Party Central went directly to the masses via an editorial in *People's Daily* on June 18 entitled “Lift philosophy from out of the text books and liberate it from the lecture halls of the professors; convert philosophy into a powerful weapon of the masses.” In that editorial, which was re-printed and studied extensively, readers were told that they must study the lessons of China's ancient Legalist school of philosophy and governance in order to get to the root of the problems facing modern China. Only then could they truly understand how the regressive thinking of China's Confucian thinking continued to poison people's minds today. And in case these philosophical arguments were not persuasive enough, the emotive power of nationalism was also invoked: Confucianism, the readers were told, was very popular with China's foreign enemies exactly because it worked to repress the Chinese people. Recognizing that the study of ancient history might

²⁴¹ GJQK [1974] 163, “Bufen gongren lilun xiaozu renzhen xuexi Zhongyang shi qi hao wenjian: jianli yi zhi hongda lilun duiwu” [Some Workers' Theory-Study Small-Groups Resolutely Study Zhongfa [1974] 17 and Establish Large and Robust LLDWs], June 1, 1974, in SMA B 246-2-1028-41.

not be interesting to ordinary workers, the editorial went on to say that such study was not to be an arid academic exercise but rather something that should lead to practical changes in one's workplace. The members of the LLDW were thus told to reject the traditional practice of "closing one's ears to the turmoil outside of one's library window and listening only to the words of the ancient sages." Instead, they were enjoined to unite theory with practice, and to change their own subjective worldview as a first step in changing the objective world around them.²⁴²

This editorial also made it very clear that it was the Party organization that was responsible for promoting and monitoring this study. However, in an interesting concession to the recently declared spirit of reconciliation, the SFTU was asked to mobilize the workers to participate. This made good tactical sense. The SFTU had an extensive network of union representatives in all work units (a network that it had so recently used to push for more power in the Party as well as in the workplace) and so it could reach workers quickly in a more organized, person to person way. But this was also a clever strategic move as it forced the old-rebels to work alongside the old cadres with a new sense of common purpose. In any case, the *People's Daily* editorial made it clear that the Party organization had ultimate authority and responsibility for all matters in the workplace. So, if the union representatives did not cooperate with their erstwhile enemies, they would only be hurting their chances for "double breakthroughs."

To give the union leaders in Shanghai's 20,000 odd work units some reference material, the SFTU quickly put together a sixty-eight page booklet that highlighted the best practices of study groups in some nine work units in Shanghai. But the booklet was rushed to print in only two weeks after the big editorial in the *People's Daily* and had no material relating to the new anti-Confucian themes. Instead, the articles only referred to studies of the old classics of Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought. Furthermore, while the numbers of workers involved in these study groups had been small, their output had been staggering. Over the previous eighteen months, workers at

²⁴² *People's Daily*, June 18, 1974, 1.

the Shanghai Dye Plant had produced five volumes of political criticism totalling over 50,000 characters.²⁴³ But their efforts were outdone by those of a study group at the Shanghai Barber Tools Factory which had studied 20 books, produced 120 blackboard displays, written 400 reports and essays, produced 30 detailed summaries, and visited 300 other work units to share their findings for a total of 45,000 person visits.²⁴⁴

As a cautionary warning, the SFTU booklet also described the failures of many of the small study groups that had been started earlier. Most of the study groups cited in this booklet had got their start back in 1969 when Chairman Mao called for young people to resolutely study the Marxist canon so they could raise their understanding of the theory that underlay revolutionary action. But for every group that survived the intervening years, many more had failed. Without strong support from leaders in their work units, most youth had dropped out and many study groups had simply collapsed.²⁴⁵ This time, however, Party committees at all levels were told to make the promotion of such study a top priority and Party leaders were told to schedule activities into time into their work calendars to support the activities of the LLDW. An example of this was soon to follow.

On June 28, 1974 the giant Bureau of Industry and Transportation (BIT) once again showcased the actions of workers at the docks. But this time the model was not the rough and ready lads from Number Five dock who had made things hot for the their Party Secretary back in February but a more bookish group from dock three. At small study group had already existed at dock three but been revitalized and now boasted 207 members. Most members were student-workers but 20 percent were old workers while 10 percent were “educable sons and daughters and reformed intellectuals.” The students’ main activity was organizing study classes to criticize Confucius. But they were also tasked with undertaking general propaganda to support the new things of the Cultural

²⁴³ Shanghai shi zonggonghui xuanchuanzu, eds., *Shanghai gongren lilun duiwu zai douzheng zhong chengzhang* [Worker Theory Troops in Shanghai: Growing in the Midst of Struggle] (Shanghai: Shanghai remmin chubanshe, 1974), 32-38.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 25-31.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.* Without support by the leaders in their work place, most groups went through great ups and downs with “two-thirds” (see page 15) or “many” members withdrawing (see page 32) being typical comments.

Revolution, gathering “information to answer questions which the masses themselves have raised,” and—most interestingly—mobilizing the masses to “criticize counterrevolutionary slogans and expressions heard on the docks.”²⁴⁶ Apparently, the rumours and gossip which formed such an important part of people’s private lives had spilled over into workplaces during the workplace disturbances of early 1974. To organize its members for this fight against counterrevolutionary thinking, the model LLDW at dock three split into teams specializing in philosophy, history, theatrical criticism, songs and poetry, music, and public speaking. One team also focused on the traditional Marxist category of “political-economics” (*zhengzhi jingji xue*), a theoretical concept that was very popular at the time with Maoist radicals as they wrestled with the contradictions inherent in “grasping revolution and encouraging production.”²⁴⁷

This series of high level directives made it clear that the LLDW were to develop people who were not only good fist warriors but also good pen warriors (*neng wen, neng wu*). It was not clear how good the LLDW members at dock three were with their fists, but a few months later they were praised for their erudition in critiquing one of the classics of the Confucian canon. The *Book of Odes* (*Shi Jing*) consisted of a collection of 305 poems and commentaries that originated in the tenth to seventh centuries BCE. Studying after work hours, the LLDW at dock three divided the poems into three categories. Under the category of working life they came to the not surprising conclusion that, in ancient times, ordinary people had suffered hard lives at the hands of cruel exploiters. And, under the category of struggle and conflict, the students discovered a not surprising parallel with modern events when they reported that the enemies of the emperor had used the voices of misguided soldiers to cast aspersions on their supreme leader, a not too subtle reference to General Peng Dehuai, the leader of the Chinese forces in the Korean War, who later fell from grace after questioning Mao’s policies

²⁴⁶ Though not explained in the document, the “educable sons and daughters” were probably the offspring of current workers who had free time while they awaited work assignments. GJQK [1974] 194, “Lilun zhanxian shang de yi zhi shengli jun: Shanggang san qu lilun duiwu de diaocha” [A Powerful New Force on the Theoretical Battlefield: an Investigation Into the Activities of the LLDW at Dock Three], June 28, 1974, in SMA B 246-2-1028.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

during the Great Leap Forward. But the LLDW's analysis of the poems on family and personal relationships was most startling.

On August 21, 1974 the BIT issued an unusually long circular to the 20,000 work units under its supervision praising the hard work of LLDW at dock three in analyzing the *Book of Odes*. But eight pages were hardly enough to explain the complexity of the students' findings. Most shocking was their conclusion under the category of family and personal relationships. Working on their own, the young dockworkers concluded that the poem "*tuo xi*" was not, as previously thought, an earthy rhyme about peasant sexuality but rather a lofty call to patriotism. The BIT circular reported that the study group had determined that poem should not be translated as "as the wind blows and the leaves fall, a pair of lovers roll (on the ground) in harmony." Instead, the students argued that the poem was really comparing the condition of the state to that of a branch of a rotten tree which, threatened by the winds of external aggression, was about to break and fall!²⁴⁸

As experienced Communists, the leaders in Shanghai's work units all knew the importance of thought work in motivating (and controlling) people. But what were they to make of this? Just a few months before, the BIT had been firing off messages to the work units under its supervision to light fires and fan the flames of rebellion. Why now this sudden switch? Earlier we saw earlier that Mao had become unhappy with the disturbances caused by the radicals. But once "reconciliation" had been proclaimed and the compliance of the rebel-workers had been bought through "double breakthroughs," why then did Mao—or more likely, the radicals who were close to him such as Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan—push so hard the need to study and critique these ancient texts? Could not the Maoist radicals have simply put the people back on a standard diet of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought? The answer would seem to be that the ailing Mao was deeply concerned about the future of his revolution and his place in

²⁴⁸ GJQK [1974] 280, "Shang gang sanqu gongren dui "shi jing" de fenxi yijian" [An Analysis and Commentary of the Book of Odes Done by the Workers of Shanghai's Number Three Dock], August 21, 1974, 6, in SMA, B 246-2-1030. 箨 (*tuo*) is a formal term for fallen bark or leaves and 兮 (*xi*) is a literary particle similar in meaning to that of the modern character 阿.

Chinese history. He knew that most people were unhappy with the hardships caused by his Cultural Revolution. And he also knew that, ever since his leading role in the suppression of intellectuals in the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957, people had identified him unflatteringly with the ancient Emperor Qinshihuang (260-210 BC). While that emperor was famous for uniting China's warring states into a strong, centralized state, he was also infamous for burying alive 300 Confucian officials and then burning their books, all to silence their criticism of him. In 1974, Mao was eighty-one years old and in failing health. He thus wanted the name of his ancient hero—and more importantly that of himself—to go down in history as a visionary leader who ushered in an age of power and glory for the nation. He probably did not relish the idea of being compared with a cruel, megalomaniacal tyrant. But even with hundreds of millions of people hanging on his every word, it was often hard for people to know what was really in the Chairman's mind.

Zhu Yongjia, the then head of the Writers' Group in Shanghai and himself a former professor of Ming history, commented to the interviewer that Mao's closed and calculating personality made it very difficult for people, even those in his close political circle, to know what he was actually thinking. "But we researchers knew what was important to him."²⁴⁹ Mao had been deeply upset by the "betrayal" of Lin Biao in September 1971 and his mood was further darkened by a series of illnesses that followed. In early 1972, he asked scholars to prepare annotated commentaries for him of the classics of China's past. Because his eyesight was failing, all of these were printed in large character editions. Eventually, this collection would total eighty-six titles. The first batch of twenty-three titles prepared from October 1972 to July 1973 was all ancient histories. The second batch of twenty-six titles prepared from August 1973 to July 1974 was all on Legalism, the harsh, rules-bound school of philosophy and statecraft that was favoured by the Emperor Qinshihuang. The third and final batch of thirty-five titles

²⁴⁹ Interview with Zhu Yongjia.

prepared from May 1974 through to June 1975 was all on poetry.²⁵⁰ Mao was deeply moved by what he read and would often tell people in his inner circle to study these ancient texts and he showed frustration with his wife, Jiang Qing, and his designated successor, Wang Hongwen, that they did not study—and learn—from these ancient texts. But those ancient texts were difficult to understand. Even the voracious bibliophile whom we met in chapter 3, Wu Liang, was not interested.

I simply did not know where to begin. There were so many characters that I couldn't understand. I could have asked my grandfather for help but I simply was not interested. It seemed that there was nothing there that I needed. The things described in those piles of old books belonged to a world that had long since died.²⁵¹

To popularize the study of these ancient texts with young people, the authorities once again turned to the *Zhaoxia* literary journal. The August edition told the story of yet another spunky young woman who was determined to push the envelope in her workplace. But whereas, back in March, Little Hero had been pushing production, this time Jingmei was pushing education, specifically the lessons in “political-economy” that female textile workers could learn from studying the events of the second century BCE. The story opens with the workers all excited by a talk that Jingmei had just given explaining how Lin Biao's criticism of the Emperor Qinshihuang for burning the books and burying the 300 Confucian scholars two thousand years ago was really an intentional slight on Chairman Mao. As an encore, Jingmei then promises to give another talk on the historical significance of Qinshihuang in unifying China. An old model worker, Sister Mountain, is especially encouraging to the young woman. She too is learning to read ancient characters and encourages Jingmei to continue preparing her talk despite the doubts of certain old leaders about whether young people are really up to the task of handling such difficult texts on their own. But Jingmei presses on, visiting libraries

²⁵⁰ Liu Xiuming, “Cong yinshua ‘da zi ben’ guji kan Mao Zedong wannian de sixiang he xintai” [What We Can Learn About Mao Zedong's Thinking in His Later Years from his Reading of Large Character Editions of Classical Chinese Books] in Zhang Hua and Su Caiqing, eds. *Huishou “wen ge”: Zhongguo shi nian “wen ge” fenxi yu fansi* [Looking Back at the “Cultural Revolution”: Analysis and Reflections on Ten Years of Chinese History] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1999), 1:526-548.

²⁵¹ Wu, *Luotuosu*, 175.

during her time off and borrowing materials from other LLDW to prepare. Finally, the big day comes and—to everybody’s surprise and delight—some big shots from head office come to listen. The talk is, of course, a huge success and the workers “bubble over” with enthusiasm. Now they too want to learn more about the ancient ideas of the Legalists that can help build a modern and progressive China. Stepping forward to speak on behalf of all the workers, Sister Mountain declares that “the facts are now clear: we workers are indeed fully able to organize our own LLDW.”²⁵² But then, with a simple comment, she lets the cat out of the bag: “Why don’t we expand our Communist Youth League (CYL) propaganda team to include all the workers?” When did the CYL enter the picture? Hadn’t it been ignominiously suppressed in 1966 after Mao told the Red Guards to “bombard the headquarters?” And what did it offer ambitious student-workers in 1974?

Uniting Theory and Practice

Membership in the CYL had always been an important stepping stone in the career path of ambitious youth. When the rebel-workers of the WPT entered schools in 1968 to restore order and discipline, they quickly organized the students into so called Red Brigades (*hong tuan*) to fill the vacuum formed by the closing down of CYL operations in the fall of 1966. But for the students, membership in these Red Brigades did not have the same *cachet*—or career advantage—that membership in the CYL had had. However, after the Party was allowed to resume operations in the early 1970s and the old cadres took back more of their authority in the workplace, the advantages of having a “junior partner” became apparent, especially given the large number of student-workers who had begun to arrive in work units. In late 1972, one activist from each of Shanghai’s dozen docks was transferred to the Harbour Bureau to learn how to set up and run a CYL. When the re-establishment of the CYL was formally approved in June 1973 these trainers

²⁵² Ye Li, “Jingmei,” *Zhaoxia*, (August 1974): 36-42.

were ready to start their organizational work.²⁵³ Thus by the end of the year, a model unit like the Yangshupu dock could boast that it already had 100 members in its CYL.²⁵⁴

The CYL, however, played a minor role in the early, tumultuous days of the 1974 Campaign. In late January 1974, when Ma Tianshui checked back with Zhang Chunqiao on behalf of the troika of Shanghai Party Secretaries about how the Campaign was to be led, Zhang confirmed that the SFTU was to take the lead but added that the CYL and the Women's Federation should also get involved.²⁵⁵ But this was mostly for appearances sake. From the earliest days of the People's Republic, workers, youth, and women had all been encouraged to join "popular organizations" that were to serve as adjuncts to the Party but since the fall of 1966, all of these organizations—with the special exception in Shanghai of the union—had been dormant.

The old cadre patrons of the newly re-organized CYL seemed to be caught wrong-footed by the sudden onslaught of the old rebels in early 1974 and did not seem able to use the CYL in their defense. In the days immediately following the official launch of the Campaign, when anti-Confucian "outrage" was being reported across all sectors of society, the CYL did get one brief mention in the press. On February 5, over 8,000 CYL members, high school members of the Red Brigades, and other "revolutionary youth" met in the rain at the tomb of China's greatest modern novelist, Lu Xun, to commemorate him and his anti-Confucian writings.²⁵⁶ However, it was just at that time that the struggles against the old cadres was heating up in the workplace and in none of the official documents or press reports is there mention of the CYL playing a role in the struggles. The old cadres, it seems, were so clearly on the defensive that they had no

²⁵³ The Tenth Party Congress was held in Beijing August 24-28, 1973. Amongst other things, it formally replaced Lin Biao as Mao's designated successor with the former worker-rebel from Shanghai, Wang Hongwen. See MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 361-366.

²⁵⁴ *Jiefang ribao*, December 22, 1973, 2. There were about 1,000 employees at the Yangshupu dock, roughly half of whom would have been loaders, half of whom—or about 250—would have been student-workers. Thus, assuming that none of the older (mostly married) workers had the time or interest in participating, most LLDW members would have been student-workers. Thus, at that model dock, about 40 percent of the student-workers were enrolled.

²⁵⁵ SHSH, 2:678.

²⁵⁶ *Jiefang ribao*, February 6, 1974, 1.

time to think about enlisting the support of the CYL. But fresh and untested, the organizational capabilities of the CYL at that time were probably still very weak. By the summer, however, the CYL seems to have become an important (albeit clearly subordinate) player in work units. Thus in the important July 1 Party Central directive calling for more attention to production, the Party called on all members of the Party *and* the CYL to act as models for discipline and diligence in the workplace and to unite with the mass of workers, poor peasants, revolutionary cadres, and revolutionary intellectuals to ensure greater production.²⁵⁷

Sister Mountain's simple statement—and the fact that it was being made in a short story in a popular magazine which targeted a youthful readership—shows that by the late summer of 1974 not only was the CYL back in action but it was also able to attract ambitious student-workers. Thus, as we finish reading the story we suddenly discover that Jingmei is not just an ordinary worker but actually the CYL propaganda officer at her factory. All of her study and speech making is not just a personal interest but rather a big part of her job and the key to her promotion. Doubtless, Jingmei likes to hear the commendation of her workmates. But more important for her is the approval of her Party Secretary and the Party bigwigs who have come to visit. At the end of the story, we see them standing at the back of the audience. In reality, however, they are not coincidental members of the audience but rather the authors and directors of the whole play.

From summer 1974 onward, the LLDW and the CYL became partners striving, in Mao's words, to "unite theory and practice." The job of the LLDW was to help the workers to understand the progressive truths buried in China's Legalist tradition. Older workers were welcome to join but most of the members were young people. For older workers, the material being studied was just too arcane. One older worker at the Shanghai Concrete Plant summed up his awkwardness by joking that when he studied that ancient material he felt just like a "Shanghai crab flying up in an airplane: immobilized on his

²⁵⁷ Zhongfa [1974] 21, [Regarding Grasping Revolution and Increasing Production], July 1, 1974.

back with all eight legs in the air” (*dajia xie zuo feiji, xuankong bazhi jiao*).²⁵⁸

Nevertheless, the Party pushed hard and by the end of 1974, over 200,000 people had been enrolled in these revitalized LLDW.²⁵⁹

To incentivize participation, workers were sometimes allowed time off to study, something that was rarely done before summer 1974.²⁶⁰ At the Shanghai Concrete Plant, LLDW members were allowed one day per week to study plus time off to attend periodic seminars. At dock five, workers on the front lines of production were allowed one day off every twenty-one days, while those on the back lines of production were allowed one day off every fifteen days: a huge attraction for tired workers. And, as an article in the December 1974 edition of the scholarly journal *Lishi yanjiu* (Historical Research) hinted, in the years ahead the LLDW system was going to open up attractive career opportunities for bright and ambitious young people.

In order to strengthen the ability of the proletariat to dominate the capitalists in the (ideological) superstructure of society, it is necessary to systematically select solid individuals (*gugan*) from the midst of the LLDW and assign them to work either in higher level organizations in the superstructure or in grassroots LLDW as

²⁵⁸ The saying may have had a *double entendre*. Because of the sideways walk of crabs, they were sometimes linked with the expression *heng xing ba dao* (literally “travelling sideways and acting a bully”). Moreover, three of the so called “gang of four” had been working in Shanghai before being promoted and “flying away” to Beijing. The words about being immobilized on their backs may have expressed wishful thinking of people in Shanghai who were tired of the radical policies of the Cultural Revolution. Shanghai geming weiyuanhui gongjiaozu mishuzu, “Gongjiao xitong gongren lilun duiwu de qingkuang” [The Situation of LLDW in the Industry and Transport system], June 21, 1974, in SMA B 246-2-1028.

²⁵⁹ The figure of 200,000 of 1974 year end membership is from *Wenhui bao*, January 4, 1975, 1. In that article, Number Five dock was cited as an inspirational model in the year just past.

²⁶⁰ In the nine SOE cases from before the summer of 1974 that were cited in the *Lilun duiwu de chengzhang* (LLDWCZ), only two allowed time off from work to study. A construction company allowed a half day off per week while the Amateur Speaking Team from the Shanghai Workers Culture Palace (a unit already distant from the “front lines of production”) allowed its members one day per week to study.

specialists . . . Some work units have already set out three to five year timelines to train up such people.²⁶¹

Thus, with all this official encouragement, the LLDW soon grew to over 300,000 members in Shanghai, or roughly two-thirds of the 456,000 of the student-workers officially assigned to work in the city.²⁶² In a probably typical move, in early 1975 the Harbour Bureau appointed an official in its head office to coordinate the promotion and development of the LLDW at the individual docks under its supervision.²⁶³

If the LLDW personified the reflective side of this partnership, then the CYL personified the activist side. Earlier, we read about how in early 1974, during the “fierce” days of struggle, one factory leader had chosen a few pen warriors and pushed them to the “front lines of struggle” in all sorts of meetings.²⁶⁴ Those were the kind of activists that old cadres wanted to cultivate and have ready at hand. On April 20, the Shanghai press ran an article entitled “Revolutionary Youth Want to be Bold Generals in the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius” in which members of the CYL were praised for their enthusiasm on the docks. One recently arrived student-worker thanked the CYL, along with the Party and old workers, for helping him to set down new roots on the dock. “We youths,” he declared, “will not be prisoners to old traditions but be bold

²⁶¹ “Zai douzheng zhong peiyang zhuangda gongnongbing lilun duiwu” [In the Midst of Struggles, Train Up Strong Worker Theory Teams From Amongst the Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers], *Lishi yanjiu* 1, 1974 [Historical Research] (December 20, 1974): 5-7. Later in that same article, the unnamed writer showed a curious lapse of historical memory when he recycled the phrase used by Mao in 1957 to get intellectuals to freely share their ideas—and criticisms—about how the Communist Party was doing. The line used in this article was “Allowing a hundred flowers to bloom and a hundred schools of thought to contend is the policy that will allow the scientific culture of our nation (*wo guo kexue wenhua*) to flourish.” The article then went on to say that correctly implementing this policy will be critical to the success of the work to strengthen the LLDW.

²⁶² The figure of “over 300,000” is from SFTU, ed., *Guanyu Wang Xiuzhen, Ye Changming liyong gongren lilun duiwu jinxing cuandang duoquan zui’e huodong de qingkuang* [Concerning Wang Xiuzhen and Ye Changming’s Use of LLDW to Further Their Dastardly Activity of Usurping Party Authority and Seizing Power], January 1978. Cited in Perry and Li, *Proletarian Power*, 23. The number of student-workers who had been assigned to work in Shanghai by the end of 1974 is from Jin, *Feichang*, 1:395-396.

²⁶³ Interview with MBK.

²⁶⁴ *Wenhui bao*, May 15, 1974, 2. That article referred to those young activists as coming from the LLDW. However, at that time the LLDW existed more as a name than a reality. As shown by the examples assembled by the SFTU in its July, 1974 booklet, *Lilun duiwu de chengzhang*, members at that time were really just what remained of study groups formed in or around 1969 that had mostly faded away from lack of official support.

generals in this new age.” But their enthusiasm, it turned out, was not in encouraging revolution but in grasping production, specifically in setting a new record of 52 hours and 20 minutes for unloading 32,500 tonnes of grain.²⁶⁵ And loyal and enthusiastic CYL members such as those could also help the Party present a positive face to society at large as when, during holiday rushes, CYL members on the docks would help little old ladies carry their heavy baggage up steep gangplanks. Or when the CYL could be used to mobilize young people to work enthusiastically with pick and shovel to prepare a new dock site.²⁶⁶ In fall 1974, we thus see newspaper reporting about the rapid uptake of new members into the CYL. For example, at the famous Number Five dock Steel plant 170 young people joined the CYL, greatly outstripping the number of 70 people who joined the Party at the same time. A year later, CYL at the strategic Shanghai Harbour Equipment Plant already had 14 percent of the workers as its members, almost as many as the 15 percent of workers who were Party members.²⁶⁷ Of course, an ambitious young person would always prefer to be inducted directly into the Party. But times were changing and—just like in the days before the Cultural Revolution—being accepted into the CYL was still a good step up the career ladder for ambitious youth.²⁶⁸

A Final Reckoning

Back in 1969, Chairman Mao had called for “new blood” to be infused into the battered body of the Chinese Communist Party. In a period when, according to the popular slogan, “the workers must lead in everything,” the majority of these new members were, naturally, to come from amongst the workers. Over the next four years, a total of 51,337 workers were admitted to the Party in Shanghai. But with many rebel-workers sidelined (or in jail) following the Cleansing of the Class Ranks and other movements in the early 1970s—and with the old cadres back as gatekeepers in the

²⁶⁵ *Jiefang ribao*, April 20, 1974, 2.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Feng.

²⁶⁷ *Shanghai gangkou jixie chang gaikuang*, (n.d., probably late 1975), 2. SMA B 246-2-135.

²⁶⁸ *Wenhui bao*, October 22, 1974, 2.

admissions process—most of those new Party members were recruited from the ranks of newly hired student-workers. In this regard, the 1968 cohort was especially lucky. In 1969 and 1970, no students were assigned urban jobs in Shanghai so the 164,097 who had been hired in 1968 had the advantage of a couple of years on the job to demonstrate their enthusiasm and loyalty to the Party gatekeepers.²⁶⁹

After the old-rebels won their “double breakthroughs” in the summer of 1974, however, the student-workers were largely sidelined. Following directions from the Municipal Party committee, all bureaux rushed to discover and promote “new talent” (*faxian he peiyang xinsheng liliang*). The Commerce Bureau set a target of finding twenty-eight individuals who were loyal followers of Mao, had shown a keen understanding of the recent two-line political struggle, and who had dared to “go against the flow” in recent events. Suggestions of suitable candidates were called for from mass organizations (like the unions). Specific attention was made to “old activists” who had been demoted in the past “for all sorts of reasons.” They, of course, were the old-rebels who had pushed so hard in the early days of the recent Campaign. Providing they had performed “comparatively well” (*biaoxian bijiao hao*) in the Campaign, they too would be taken care of “according to the policy guidelines.” Thus, as of early July, eleven of the target of twenty-eight candidates had already been approved by the Party. The aim of the Commerce Bureaus was to groom these successful candidates to all become the number one or number two leaders at various organizations in its various work units.²⁷⁰ Over at the high profile Shanghai Instrument Factory, the reconciliation went even further: not only did thirty old-rebels have their demotions reviewed, resulting in twelve of them being restored or promoted, but people on the “counterrevolutionary” side also had their punishments reviewed. In the early days of the Cultural Revolution, Mao Boqin had been

²⁶⁹ Jin, *Feichang*, 1:395-396. In the years 1971 to 1975, the number of urban jobs assigned to student-workers was 71,985 (1971), 100,116 (1972), 99,605 (1973), 20,983 (1974), and 110,794 (1975), respectively. The number was so large in 1968 because it included three graduating classes of 1966, 1967, and 1968.

²⁷⁰ Shanghai shi geweihui caomaozu, *Qingkuang jiaoliu*, de si qi, “Zai pi Lin pi Kong yundong zhong, bu shishi jidi, zhuyi faxian he peiyang xinsheng liliang” [In the Midst of the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius Loose No Opportunity to Discover and Develop New Talent], July 3, 1974, in SMA B 248-2-614.

caught selling pirated Mao badges and then—in an effort to destroy the evidence—had committed the ultimate crime of *lesé majesté* of throwing Chairman Mao’s sacred image into the river! But now all was forgiven and, in gratitude, the repentant man led his work team to post record production in his workshop.²⁷¹

The Party tracked the implementation this policy of “affirmative action” very closely.²⁷² Over the three years from 1974 through 1976, a total of 42,273 “workers” were admitted to the Party. Of these, it can safely be assumed that the vast majority of were old-rebels or their fellow travellers, all loyal to the ideology or personalities of the various members of the radical Maoist group that would later be identified as the Gang of Four.²⁷³ On the face of this, the Party achieved a remarkable balance in its membership. In a probably typical example, by 1978 a total of 50.2 percent of factory level leadership positions at the Shanghai Electrical Generation Equipment Bureau (“Equipment Bureau”) were held by “new cadres” while 49.8 percent of leadership positions were held by other categories, a balance that was most certainly achieved during Mao’s lifetime. As everyone knew, the category of “new cadres” really contained two very different types of people with very different types of allegiances. At the Equipment Bureau, 41 percent of the new cadres were noted as being “old rebels and people who had been recruited under the policy of double breakthroughs.” The composition of the other 59 percent was not

²⁷¹ GJQK [1974] 387, October 15, 1974, in SMA B 246-2-1032. This report also described the forgiveness extended to two people whose errors were of a less political nature. Yang Shukun from the number four workshop had been demoted during the One Strike Two Antis campaign for “improper speech and behaviour” (*xialiu hua he dongzuo*) while Fang Fengnian from the number two workshop had been punished as an accessory to murder. Fang’s punishments included having his rural house taken away. Following the reversal of their judgments, production in their work teams had increased considerably.

²⁷² By July 1974, the Bureau of Finance and Trade had already started setting quotas for “new activists” to be promoted the number one or number two leadership positions

²⁷³ Shanghai Party committee, ed., *Zhongguo gongchandang Shanghaishi dangyuan he dang zuzhi tongji ziliao huibian* [Compilation of Statistical Materials on Party Members and Party Organization of the Chinese Communist Party in Shanghai], Shanghai, May 1986. Cited in Perry and Li, *Proletarian Power*, 179-181. The percentage of new members from amongst workers had been increasing since 1962 when “workers” only accounted for 20 percent of new members with peasants accounting for 59 percent and “cadres etcetera” accounting for 21 percent. But by the early 1970s, the percentage of workers had grown to around 50 percent and cadres had grown to around 30 percent, with the big loser being “peasants” which had fallen to around 20 percent.

given but, presumably, was mostly made up of student-workers with a few older, model workers thrown in.

A new broom sweeps clean. In late 1978, shortly after the tough old pragmatist, Deng Xiaoping, took control of the Party, nearly all of the new cadres who had won their way into the Party on the coattails of the Maoist radicals were pushed aside. No details are available for the Harbour Bureau, but data from the Equipment Bureau are suggestive. Out of a total of 2,131 factory level cadres, 610 (or 29 percent) were demoted. And of those demoted, 92 percent were “new cadres.” While on the other hand, of the 291 cadres promoted; only 15 percent were “new cadres.”²⁷⁴

With a determined Deng Xiaoping in charge, this housecleaning took place at all levels, in all units, all across the country. And as the old rebels favoured after 1974 were removed, the loyal and ambitious youth of the LLDW and CYL were first in line for promotion. But not all student-workers were motivated by ideals (including the search for the ideal job). By the mid-1970s, most had already turned away from politics and were simply dreaming of making a few dollars more as a first step towards getting married and starting a family. It is to an examination of such dollars and cents issues that we now turn.

²⁷⁴ “Niandi ju limian gongchangji yishang gangbu de biandong” [Changes in the Status of Factory Level Cadres Since the Smashing of the “Gang of Four”], December 1978. This handwritten document turned up in a search through the online index at the SMA for documents related to the Shanghai Steam Turbine Factory (*Shanghai guo lun chang*). The history department reading room at Fudan University has a collection of in-house news sheets published one or two times each week at the this large work unit during the decade of the Cultural Revolution under the title *Xin Shang guo* [New Shanghai Turbine]. I had originally hoped to use some of that material in this thesis but, in the end, could not make any links. While the bureau’s name was not mentioned, I assume that it was the *Shanghai jidian gongye ju* [Electrical Generation Equipment Bureau] though I am not sure whether this is the first or second bureau in that large organization. Regardless, given the uniform nature of Party organization and behaviour across work units, the representative nature of the data is unaffected. SMA B-173.

Chapter 5. For a Few Dollars More

“If it was not for that little bit of bonus money we couldn’t have gotten the workers to work so hard”

—Former deputy branch Party Secretary on the Shanghai docks

As mentioned in chapter 1, protests in late 1966 for better pay and benefits had won the Shanghai dockworkers 14 million yuan in back pay and bonuses. But the fruits of that wind of economism were short lived. Once the new Revolutionary committee was firmly in power, it quickly recalled all payments at the behest of radical leaders in Beijing. And while the underpaid temporary workers who had spearheaded these protests were later mollified by being confirmed as permanent workers at higher wage levels, all wages were frozen and individual incentive pay was cancelled. Such material incentives, it was declared, would lead to Soviet-style revisionism of the kind promoted by Mao’s disgraced deputy, Liu Shaoqi. However, as the political tensions decreased from a boil to a simmer, operations on the Shanghai docks gradually returned to normal and by 1970 turnover had reached 40 million tonnes, up 11 percent from 1965. But big changes were in the offing. After border clashes with the Soviet Union in 1969, Mao began a strategic shift toward his capitalist arch-enemy, the United States of America. In February 1972 this geopolitical shift—heralded domestically as a “victory of Mao’s foreign policy line”—was capped by the visit of President Nixon to Beijing and Shanghai. Immediately after that, Mao approved plans to import up to \$4.3 billion of equipment and materials to upgrade China’s industry: a huge affirmation of his desire to modernize China’s

economy. Clearly, for Mao the slogan “grasp revolution *and* spur production” was more than just empty words.²⁷⁵

With all this new equipment coming and with \$4.3 billion more goods having to be exported to pay for them, China’s ports were going to become a huge bottleneck. On April 2, 1973, the State Council announced plans to totally upgrade the nation’s harbours within three years.²⁷⁶ In Shanghai, the river was to be dredged to allow the entry of larger vessels and 100,000 square metres of new warehouses were to be added. Nine new berths would be built and thirteen old berths would be upgraded. And, most importantly for the dockworkers, 580 pieces of cargo handling machinery were to be added so that, by the end of 1975, the handling of cargo would be “basically 100 percent mechanized.” After these upgrades, Shanghai would be able increase its cargo handling capacity from 40 to 70 million tonnes per year.²⁷⁷

Practical Tweaks

The impact of these technical improvements would not, however, be felt until 1975. So in 1972 Zhou Enlai convened high level, national conferences to discuss solutions to the problems facing the Chinese economy. The problems in SOE were characterized as resulting from “three excesses”: too many employees, too big a payroll, and too much food being consumed by SOE employees.²⁷⁸ On the docks, big changes were quickly made in two areas: first, replacing less productive workers with more productive ones and, second, incentivizing workers to work harder. Changes in the first

²⁷⁵ Chen Donglin, “‘Wenhua da geming’ shiqi Mao Zedong jingji sixiang tanxi” [An Examination of the Economic Thinking of Mao Zedong During the “Cultural Revolution”], in *Huishou “wenge”: Zhongguo shinian “wenge” fenxi yu fansi*, ed. Zhang Hua and Su Caiqing (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang chubanshe, 2000), 1:506-525. In the end, 92 percent of this budget, or \$3.960 billion, was actually contracted.

²⁷⁶ SHGZ, 39, 86.

²⁷⁷ Shanghai shi geming weiyuanhuui zonghe jihua zu deng, 1973 nian 8 yue 17 ri, *Guyanyu baosong “Shanghai gang 1973 nian dao 1975 nian gaizao he jianshe guihua” de baogao* [Regarding Submission of the Report “Plans for the Upgrading and Construction of the Shanghai Harbour over the Period 1973 to 1975”], August 17, 1973, 2-3, in SMA B 257-2-831.

²⁷⁸ *Mao zhuan*, 2:1622-23.

category were to be applied across all kinds of SOE in Shanghai while those in the last category were only applied on the docks.

In the summer of 1968, large numbers of workers had been sent out from their work units on Worker Propaganda Teams (WPT) to bring order and discipline to schools and government institutions in the city. Even though they were no longer doing productive labour, the workers in this “army of 100,000” continued to be paid by their original work units. An easy way for work units to increase productivity was to recall these unproductive workers.²⁷⁹ Thus, by fall 1974, over 93,000 WPT had returned to their old work units where they were thanked profusely and quickly put back to work.²⁸⁰ Before they arrived home, efforts were made to dampen any unrealistic expectations these WPT might have had about how they would be treated after their return. One official report cited the example an unnamed returnee who, reportedly, turned down a cadre job in his old factory and insisted that his old job was good enough. “We workers should be ready to move up or down as needed,” he was quoted as saying. “As members of the proletariat, (the title of the job) doesn’t affect our essential character” (*ben se*). Perhaps this old worker was cagier than he sounds. Regardless of which job he took, he would still get paid the same wage, so perhaps he was smart in wanting to avoid the political hassles of a cadre job. Amongst these returnees, however, there was still a minority who—from either ability or ambition, or a combination of both—came back to cadre jobs that took them off the front lines of production. In one large group of 6,470 at the large (and much politicized) Shanghai Textile Bureau, roughly 10 percent of the returnees were promoted to jobs at the level of workshop leadership or higher that would have made them “excused cadres” (*tuo chan ganbu*).²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Perry and Li, *Proletarian Power*, 175-77.

²⁸⁰ GJQK [1974] 379, “Gongxuandui shi duanlian gongren peiyang ganbu de da xuexiao” [Workers’ Propaganda Teams are Big Schools for Strengthening Workers and Developing Cadres], October 11, 1974, 1, in SMA B 246-2-1032. Perry and Li report that there were still 10,713 left on assignment. *Proletarian Power*, 176.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

Back in the summer of 1968, when it came time for the recently triumphant rebel-workers to decide who would do what, the leaders often sent their less gifted or less ambitious colleagues out with the WPT while reserving the plum jobs in the revolutionary committee or union back in their home work unit for themselves. Regardless of whether they went out or stayed back at their original work unit, all workers who were excused from work on the front lines of production became known as “excused cadres.”

At the very top of this huge pile of excused cadres was Wang Hongwen, the former security official at the Shanghai Number 17 Cotton Mill.²⁸² Despite being promoted to Beijing and ultimately being named as Chairman Mao’s successor, Wang continued to be paid his original salary from his old work unit. Another example of a high-rising excused cadre was Huang Jinhai, one of Wang Hongwen’s earliest rebel colleagues, who rose from his ordinary job at the Shanghai Number 31 Cotton Mill to become the head of the Shanghai Bureau of Finance and Trade. Despite filling a senior bureaucratic position, Huang continued to be paid only 65 yuan each month from his old work unit, an amount probably less than half what his bureaucratic predecessors were paid. Huang also claimed—with great pride—that in those days, officials very rarely used office expense accounts for personal use. When Nixon visited Shanghai in 1972, Huang thus spent 80 yuan from his own pocket to have a new suit made for the reception.²⁸³

In 1972, the media started to highlight stories of excused cadres doing productive work back at their old units. The was mainly for optics: an effort to show the broad mass of workers that their leaders still had their concerns at heart. Many workers were jealous of their peers who had been promoted up and away from the front lines of production. One such lucky worker later admitted that when he first was promoted the Bureau of

²⁸² Perry and Li, *Proletarian Power*, 44-47.

²⁸³ Huang was known as a very stylish dresser, standing out from his very drab comrades. See Perry and Li, *Proletarian Power*, 54-58. The story about his purchase of a suit to meet Nixon came from a personal interview. Huang, however, admitted that one of his old rebel colleagues, the scrappy Chen A-da, had been famously loose with both expense accounts and women. For a short biography of Chen (and the other rebel leaders) see Perry and Li, *Proletarian Power*, 57-58.

Finance and Commerce he had lots of energy and passion for his work, but he admitted that after awhile “my bottom became stuck to his chair, my ear became stuck to the telephone, and my lips became stuck to my tea cup.” As a result, he became too comfortable with the privileges of his new office and he lost touch with the workers.²⁸⁴ To solve this problem, the Party made it a priority for all excused cadres, including the top leaders in each bureau, to go back to their original work units to labour alongside ordinary workers. The purpose was not so much to increase production as to listen to the workers and take their suggestions to heart.

Since Number Five dock was the closest dock to the Shanghai Harbour Bureau, head office cadres would all go there on Thursdays to work together. As one junior cadre recalled, the big shots would indeed do real physical labour during these visits. However, most of this labour was moving lighter loads on the dockside instead of manhandling heavier goods in the dark and dangerous holds of ships.²⁸⁵ Each dock also had its own collection of “excused cadres.” For example dock three, with a total workforce of 3,000, had 100 such individuals. While this represented only a tiny 3 percent of the total workforce, the existence of even such a few privileged people was an ideological irritant. In the summer of 1972, the cadres at dock three committed to double their productive labour from one to two days per week. But the excused cadres at dock three went above and beyond the call, and by the middle of 1973 were labouring an average of two and one-half days per week.²⁸⁶ That year—presumably inspired by example of the leaders—total turnover at dock three increased by 13.4 percent.²⁸⁷

Though not mentioned in media reports, in 1972 significant numbers of weaker student-workers on the docks were replaced by male student-workers who had been

²⁸⁴ Shanghai shi geweihui jiguan weiyuanhui bian, *Jiguan qingkuang jiaoliu*, di wu qi, “Canjia laodong, diaochao yanjiu, cujin jiguan geminghua” [Participating in Labour, Investigate and Research, Revolutionize the Bureau], December 13, 1974, 1-6, in SMA B-102-1-10.

²⁸⁵ Interview with MBK.

²⁸⁶ *Jiefang ribao*, June 28, 1973, 1.

²⁸⁷ Gangwujū san qū, 1973 nian 11 yue 31 ri, “Chongfen fadong qunzhong, da gao jishu gaizao” [Fully Release the (Creative Energies of the) Masses; Greatly Increase Technical Improvements], November 31, 1973, 1-8, in SMA B-246-2-946.

building their muscles labouring on nearby farms. As our old friend FZN commented earlier “We young guys brought a lot of energy to the docks.” And the less robust student-workers who were replaced were lucky: they did not have to go out to work on the farms to do heavy labour but were assigned lighter jobs in town in the Shanghai Electric Instrument Company.²⁸⁸ Despite the shame of being cut from the work team at such a high profile work unit as the Shanghai docks, secretly these rejects must have been thrilled.

The real motivator for increased labour productivity on the docks, however, was cold, hard cash. In 1972, the basic wage on the dock for a young journeyman worker was secretly increased from 36 yuan to 40 yuan per month. Before the Cultural Revolution it had been 42 yuan but it had been dropped to 36 yuan in early 1967 when the triumphant radicals condemned differential pay and material incentives as revisionist. Subsequently, the starting pay for “apprentices” in all SOE in Shanghai was set at 18 yuan and slowly bumped up to 36 yuan over 36 months. For collective enterprises, however, the top pay was only in the mid-twenties range. Thus, this secret pay increase on the docks was widely envied. What was also envied was a secret bonus of 4 yuan that a hard working dockworker could earn on top of that base pay. These bonuses were available to all “frontline” dockworkers, including crane and other equipment workers as well as loaders. Thus, if a young dockworker worked hard he could earn 8 yuan more than his journeyman schoolmates working down the road at an SOE who were only earning 36 yuan a month. Or, put another way, a keen young dockworker was making twice the 22 yuan that his schoolmates working at a collective enterprises were making. And the possibility of this extra pay created a new sense of mutual accountability amongst the workers. As one former student-worker recalled, “when there was an especially hard task to do, people would turn to those workers who were getting the extra 4 yuan and say, ‘Okay, now it’s time for you to earn your pay’.”²⁸⁹ In other words, a worker was not

²⁸⁸ Interview with MBK.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

going to be paid for simply talking a good line during political education class: he actually had to earn it through the sweat of his labour.

Those few extra yuan each month meant a lot to young dockworkers. At the minimum, it gave them some spending money for cigarettes, simple snacks, and some reading material. But all these young people pooled their income with that of their parents to support an extended family which usually included siblings sent down to the countryside and grandparents and relatives back in the village. As one student-worker recalled, in those days, even 10 yuan could make a big difference in the countryside and sending money through the post office was simple and safe.²⁹⁰

If the financial situation for student-workers was tight, then for older workers it was even tighter. Many had large nuclear families and even with many spouses working (albeit at a much lower wage at a collective enterprise), making ends meet at each month end was often difficult. One middle-aged dockworker interviewed in early 1967 complained that, even after adding his wife's earnings of 37 yuan onto his own earnings of 63 yuan, supporting his nuclear family with three children was always a challenge.²⁹¹ Thus, even an extra 4 yuan could motivate extra effort. As the young deputy Secretary on one work team remarked, "without that extra money it would have been hard to motivate those dock loaders."²⁹² And when the harbour got especially backlogged, the Harbour Bureau would sometimes even pay special bonuses (*qi qian fei*) to spur the workers to extra special effort.²⁹³ Given the high cost of demurrage that foreign ship owners would charge for delays, a good Communist could always justify such "revisionist" payments as necessary to protect the national purse and uphold the national honour.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Wylie, *Shanghai Dockers*, 99. Although wage levels were frozen in 1967, older workers kept their previous pay levels. Thus, an older worker could earn up to 80 yuan a month. Interviews with Cai and MBK.

²⁹² Interview with MBK.

²⁹³ Interview with MBK and Cai.

These pragmatic adjustments yielded solid improvements. In 1973, overall turnover at the docks went up 13 percent, led by stellar performances at the Yangshupu and Number Five docks, where the tonnage handled increased by 34 and 35 percent, respectively. In Maoist China, the fruits of economic growth always had to be seen as rooted in political ideology. But just as the media started to extol the virtue of one political line, the political line suddenly angled off in another direction. And just like in opera, *On the Docks*, the gallant dockworkers were ready to play their part. All they needed was for the directors to agree on a script.

Political Packaging

The big character poster that went up at Number Five dock on January 7, 1974—“we want to be masters of the docks and not slaves to work quotas”—re-introduced into Chinese workplaces the “combative spirit of communism.” While that term was never explicitly used in the press—being quickly overshadowed by Mao’s call to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius—it nevertheless is appropriate because just one month earlier the Shanghai media were extolling what was called the “cooperative spirit of Communism.” In fall 1973, that term began to appear in correspondence between central government offices in Beijing and the cross-functional team of bureaucrats in Shanghai who were tasked with implementing the infrastructure upgrades on the ground. For some months cadres had been working on reducing barriers among workers to facilitate the great changes that were coming.²⁹⁴ In December, 1973 the local media came out with extensive coverage of the great increases in productivity that this new spirit of team work had made possible. Leading off were a series of articles in the important, Shanghai based theoretical journal, *Xuexi yu pipan* (Study and Criticism). Founded only four months earlier by the influential and well-connected head of the municipal Writers’ Group, Zhu Yongjia, the December edition broke with its usual concentration on history, philosophy, and politics

²⁹⁴ Shi geweihui gongjiaozu, shi gangkou jianshe lingdao xiaozu baogao, Guanyu jinnian gangkou jianshe de qingkuang he mingnian jihua anpai yijian baogao [A Report on Harbour Construction This Year and Ideas for Planning Next Year’s Work], November 23, 1974, in SMA B 246-1-597.

and featured a number of articles on enterprise management, several of which featured the great successes of the Yangshupu docks. Criticized twenty years later in an official Chinese history that he and his radical colleagues had written up these articles in order to stir up trouble on the docks, Zhu told the interviewer that these glowing reports had actually been written by pen warriors at the behest of cadres at that dock and that he was only helping them get their message out.

The cadres at Yangshupu were shown as models of enlightened forbearance. Whereas only two months later, the leaders at Number Five dock would be castigated in big character posters as “blood suckers, old style labour-gang masters, (or) iron and steel commanders,” the cadres at the Yangshupu were so nice that they were invisible. Whereas the cadres at Number Five dock were to be charged with “controlling, blocking, and suppressing” their workers, the cadres at Yangshupu were depicted as selfless individuals whose only thought was to facilitate initiatives that came from the workers themselves. Sure, in the past there had been some frictions between the equipment operators and the loaders at Yangshupu: the operators had felt that the loaders were always making unreasonable demands on them to overload their machines while the loaders had felt that the operators were arrogant and uncooperative, referring to them derisively as “your lordship” or “my lady” (*lao ye, da xiaojie*). In an earlier effort to help the operators become more sympathetic, the cadres at Yangshupu had rotated them into the ships’ holds to briefly work alongside the loaders. When that soft approach did not work, the cadres had tried a hard approach, threatening to permanently demote uncooperative operators to the loading teams if their attitude did not improve. But neither approach worked. Instead, the cadres tried an enlightened approach of expanding the number of operators and cross-training them so that they were qualified to operate more than just one machine. Excited (and perhaps a little threatened) by these changes, the operators then took a group oath to better serve the loaders. Inspired by the operators’ new attitude, the loaders then reciprocated with kindness, helping them get their machines filled up with fuel and water before each shift. Or so the media story went.

With this new spirit of cooperation, we are told that all sorts of things suddenly became possible at Yangshupu. Whereas in the past, work teams had always worked in isolation, now they were double-teaming their efforts to improve productivity. One time when they had to unload crushed ore for delivery to a local steel mill and then load pig iron from that same mill for shipping out, two work teams cooperated so that as one team removed the ore, the other quickly replaced it with pig iron. As a result, the ship was turned around and sent on its way in record time. Or the time when, faced with a rapidly falling tide and a backlog of three ships each carrying eighty tonnes of construction sand that needed unloading, the workers came up with the ingenious idea of first unloading half of each ship's load at high tide and then, at low tide, bringing the lightened ships back to complete the unloading.

Very soon, the Yangshupu slogan “even though our jobs are different, we are all united in our thinking” (*da jia fengong sui bu tong, sixiang ke yao yi tiao long*) was seen all over the Shanghai newspapers. And back at Yangshupu, this new spirit of cooperation and shared responsibility spread. The goods counter (*lihuo yuan*) had the important job of checking the quantity and quality of all goods passing through the dock. Such an important job was reserved for university graduates and carried a high wage of 57 yuan per month. But this status and high pay had gone to the head of the goods counter at Yangshupu. Later, he confessed that he had secretly subscribed to the old Confucian idea that “those who work with their minds should control those who work with their hands” (*lao xin zhe zhi ren*) and so had come to have a very self-important view of his role at the dock. But with the new spirit of cooperation at the Yangshupu dock, he could relax. Quality and quantity control was now a group responsibility. Thus, not only did the loading and unloading go now faster but—for the 100 odd vessels handled at Yangshupu in 1973—loss or damage to goods had been reduced to essentially zero.²⁹⁵

But while the “cooperative spirit of Communism” was certainly helpful, Yangshupu also had a few other things working in its favour. Most important, it probably

²⁹⁵ Wang Huazhi, “Kao zanmen zhehao ren jiu neng ban hao matou!” [Depending Upon People Like This We Can Certainly Manage the Docks Well!], XXPP, (December 1973): 14-20.

did not have the same, deeply conflicted history of political struggle that poisoned interpersonal relations at dock five. And with only about 1,000 workers versus roughly 2,200 at dock five, Yangshupu probably offered more opportunities for enthusiastic student-workers to display their positive new energy. Thus, as we saw earlier, by the end of 1973 twenty-seven student-workers at the Yangshupu dock had been admitted to the Party and eighteen of them also held leadership positions in their work teams. Such young Party members would have been more responsive to the Party Secretary's goals of innovation and teamwork to drive production.

The Winds of Economism Stir

The use of material incentives on the docks was hardly a secret. Although never acknowledged in the official media, many people would have heard about it through the ever active "back alley news." The special, enterprise-focused edition of *Xuexi yu pipan* in December 1973 was careful not to expose this little secret. While clearly smacking of the kind of revisionism that brought Liu Shaoqi to his untimely end in 1966, these pragmatic policies on the docks were having too obvious a benefit on productivity. Thus, even the most leftish of ideologues would not dare not criticize them directly for fear of being seen as someone who opposed a key policy of Mao. All that the leftish ideologues could do was to include a couple articles in the December issue of *Xuexi yu pipan* that detailed the problems that resulted in the Soviet Union after it moved to aggressively reduce the number of redundant employees in SOE and use material incentives to reward productivity amongst the smaller number of workers who remained. Readers were told that, sure, if you were lucky enough to still have a job in the USSR, your wage might be higher. But they were warned that in 1970 alone, 20 percent of workers in the USSR had

been laid off. Now many workers were forced to move from temporary job to temporary job and the overall unemployment rate there remained at a horrifying 12 percent.²⁹⁶

No worker in Shanghai would have opposed the idea of better pay and benefits. For most of them, that had been the big driving force for their involvement in the huge protests back in 1966 and they doubtless still felt angry that those benefits had been rolled back in 1967. The old worker-rebels who were pushing the new political Campaign were certainly out to win “double breakthroughs” for themselves in the form of Party membership and promotion in the workplace. But they too would not have minded adding a third “p” to the list: improved pay.

As the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius rolled forward in early 1974, the media was full of articles about how the workers were pushing “their” campaign on the political front. No mention was made, however, about economic grievances. Nevertheless, by the summer internal government reports were discussing the problem of a rash of “counterrevolutionary slogans and sayings” on the docks and a Party Central document even discussed the problem of workers who were duped by political black hands to stir up problems at their workplace.

Some people disseminate the ridiculous idea that “I’m not going to work for an enterprise which has an incorrect political line” and then go out and openly stir up work stoppages and production disruptions. We must resolutely reject this sort of erroneous argument. And we must mobilize the masses to expose and criticize those people who are hiding behind the scene to stir up things like this.²⁹⁷

While wildcat work stoppages may have been taking place elsewhere in China, in Shanghai things were much more tightly controlled. A couple of times, however, stirrings

²⁹⁶ Zhong Zhixian, “Guyong laodong zhidu zai Sulian de fuhuo: ping Suxiu pantu jituan tuixing de “Xiejinuofu shiyan” [The Rebirth of the Labour Contract System in the USSR: a Critique of the “Shchenko Experiment” Undertaken by the Soviet Traitor’s Clique], XXPP, (December 1973): 35-38. These reforms were based on the experience over the period 1969 to 1974 of two large chemical companies who merged and then implemented large cost cutting to improve efficiency. These moves were widely publicized in the USSR as a model of advanced, scientific management in industry. In the same issued, see also, Gong Xiaowen, “Tan tan qiye guanli” [Talking About Enterprise Management], XXPP, (December 1973): 11-13.

²⁹⁷ Zhongfa [1974] 21, July 1, 1974.

for improved pay and benefits seemed to get so big at high profile work units that the press had to report that, “after careful consideration” by the workers themselves, the work unit had, at the last minute, turned back from the slippery path of revisionism. Thus, on April 12, 1974, the Shanghai papers reported that earlier that year Number Three Steel Plant had tried out an incentive plan whereby work points would be added or deducted depending upon individual effort, probably as a means to allocate supplementary income. But after a worker was injured rushing to do a task—resulting not only in a nasty cut but also the loss of ten work points—the workers all decided against this plan.²⁹⁸ On October 22 that year, the Shanghai press also reported that some people at Number Five Steel Plant had been calling for the introduction of incentive pay but that the workers there, cautioned by the ideologically more alert members of the LLDW, had also rejected the idea.²⁹⁹

The workers, of course, were the declared “masters” of their work units and so all decisions had to be decided democratically by them or their representatives. To remind them of their leading role in politics as well as the economy, the workers were constantly reminded that the arch-traitor, Lin Biao, had regularly disparaged them by reportedly saying that Chinese workers did not really care about politics and only cared about making more money. That remark, however, was not far off the mark and in the summer of 1974 Party Central suddenly dangled out the promise of changes.

On July 1, Party Central issued 1974 Zhongfa [1974] 21 to spur the workers to increase production. To win their goodwill, Party Central held out the possibility of increasing wages and benefits. But such a move was obviously fraught with huge political implications and so had to be researched scientifically.

Economism is a revisionist way of thinking that eats away at the ranks of the proletariat and damages the current political campaign. The revolutionary masses and leaders at all levels should raise their awareness of this threat, insist upon principles, and crush the evil wind of economism . . . As for the question that the

²⁹⁸ *Wenhui bao*, April 12, 1974, 1.

²⁹⁹ *Wenhui bao*, October 22, 1974, 2.

masses raise about wages and economic policies, these must be deferred until the later stages of the current campaign at which time—after investigation, research, and analysis—a unified solution will be implemented.³⁰⁰

Coming after a very stressful half year of political struggles, this news would have been a real morale booster for workers. But when—people would be asking—might the “latter stage of the current campaign be reached” so that a “unified solution” could be implemented? Not long. Or so it soon it seemed.

On October 11, Mao stunned the nation by declaring that “The Cultural Revolution has already been going on for eight years. Now is the time for peace. The Party and the military should all come together in unity.” The Party Central directive that quoted this bold statement then went on to say that the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius had achieved considerable success. As a result, the long delayed National People’s Congress (NPC) would finally be held early in the new year.³⁰¹ Newspapers reported that the workers were jubilant. The NPC was responsible for approving the appointment of government ministers and amending the constitution. As the ostensible voice of the People, it was the perfect forum to approve the People’s call for improved wages and benefits. Or was it?

Ideology (and Technology) Carry the Day

Alas, the workers’ dreams of fatter pay packets were not to come true. Already in August of the previous year, just a month after *Zhongfa* [1974] 21 came out, workers at dock four were used to voice reservations that Maoist radicals had about increasing pay and benefits for workers. A report from the BIT told enterprise leaders how, after studying the arcane “Discussion of Salt and Iron” (*Yan tie lun*), student-workers at dock five—the same dock where workers had first rallied around the “masters of the docks”

³⁰⁰ *Zhongfa* [1974] 21, [Regarding Grasping Revolution and Encouraging Production], July 1, 1974.

³⁰¹ *Zhongfa* [1974] 26, “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu zui jinqi zhaokai di si qi quanguo renmin dahui de tongzhi ”[Announcement from the Central Office of the CCP About the Intention to Hold the Fourth National People’s Congress at an Early Date], October 11, 1974, in WDGW.

big character poster back in January—had praised the idea of subordinating the benefits that might accrue to an individual for the good of the broader society. In support of their argument, they cited the example of the progressive emperor, Han Zhaodi who had nationalized these two industries in 81 CE to bring order and stability to the national economy, a move that was opposed at the time by Confucianists. By implication, the deceptive allure of the idea of “seeking benefits for the people” (*wei min qing yuan*) was really just a ploy by modern day Confucianists to deceive the broad masses of people and harm the nation.³⁰²

In January 1975 the long anticipated National People’s Congress came and went without addressing the matter of pay adjustments. The time, it seemed, was not ready for a “thorough analysis . . . and a unified solution” for the workers’ calls for better pay and benefits. In his opening address at the NPC, Premier Zhou Enlai dutifully called for the continuation and deepening of the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius. Indeed, until Mao’s death in September 1976, that Campaign was to continue to sputter along with politics still very much in command. But, as “masters of the nation,” China’s workers did not have to worry: only “wage slaves” toiling under the heel of capitalist exploiters had to worry about such things as wages and benefits. As masters of the nation, China’s workers had greater responsibilities and privileges. As proof of that, the NPC gave them a brand new right—the right to strike—a right, that because of its very foundational nature in the People’s Republic, was enshrined in the revised Constitution.

The workers were doubtless miffed that there were to be no wage hikes and may have dreamt about exercising their new constitutional right to strike. To help enterprise leaders defuse worker dissatisfaction, the Bureau of Industry and Transport (BIT) sent out a report to enterprise leaders on February 7, 1975 describing how enlightened workers should understand their new right. The timing was interesting. The traditional Chinese New Year holiday was only days away. This was a season of the year when,

³⁰² GJQK [1974] 263, “Matou gongren du ‘Yan tie lun’: ji Shanghai si qu de yici gongren zuotanhui” [“Dockworkers Study the ‘Discussion of Salt and Iron’: A Record of a Meeting at Dock Four], August 14, 1974, 1-4, in SMA B 246-2-1030.

traditionally, money was very tight in Chinese households as families scrambled to clear off debts from the past year while trying to spend a little extra to buy food and clothes to celebrate the new year. But, as described in the report from BIT, the workers from the equipment maintenance team at dock three saw the big picture clearly. With cool, clear heads they explained that “striking for personal benefit is not really ‘striking’ but rather the shirking of one’s responsibilities as a worker. Such behaviour is anarchistic and counterrevolutionary.” In any case, as these wise workers were quick to point out, such strikes should only be taken to fight revisionism and then only under the leadership of the Party.³⁰³

For disappointed workers, the logic of the BIT report may have been a little difficult to wrap their heads around. So to assure them that their leaders really did care for them, the Shanghai newspapers carried other stories pitched directly at the workers’ hearts. Once again, the scene was set on the docks, but—unlike a year earlier—this time the story was a little more low key.

Chinese New Year was a time when workers treasured time off with their families. But someone still had to do the dirty work so in the Nanshi district a group of twenty-seven senior leaders from the revolutionary committee, militia, and Communist Youth League went to help out on the docks. This, of course, was an old theme: how “excused cadres” would come to toil alongside the workers to show their solidarity. This time, however, the theatricality was over the top. Every day, tonnes of human waste was transferred from “honey wagons” to river barges at the Nanshi docks for delivery to nearby farms as fertilizer. These dockworkers were, of course, properly humbled by all the assistance they were getting. To the reporter they confided that “in the old society, we

³⁰³ GJQK [1975] 57, “Shanggang san qu jixiedui zhigong renzhen taolun xin xianfa, cong luxian gaodu lijie gongmin you bagong de ziyou” [Employees and Workers From the Equipment Operating Team at Dock Three Diligently Discuss the New Constitution: Taking a High Level Ideological Perspective, (They) Examine the Right of Citizens to Strike], February 7, 1975, 1-4, in SMA B 246-2-1214

sanitation workers were considered the lowest of the low but in the new society we are counted amongst the masters of the nation.”³⁰⁴

But despite assurances that they were the masters of everything and that things had really improved, workers continued to grumble about low pay and benefits. An internal document prepared just a month later for a high level meeting of enterprise administrators in Shanghai observed that people were becoming increasingly distracted by dreams of higher wages, better housing, and higher status jobs. This, they declared, was the result of the corrosive influence of bourgeois thinking. The solution, the report writer maintained, was to deepen the study of philosophy and politics by the LLDW.³⁰⁵

But for the dockworkers at least, life was at least getting a little bit easier. At 1974 year end, large groups of peasants had been brought in to help clear up backlogs.³⁰⁶ With this little push, Number Five dock was able to meet its 4.15 percent growth target for the year.³⁰⁷ And then, gradually over 1975, a large number of cranes and motorized lift trucks arrived, reducing the amount of brute physical labour needed.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁴ *Wenhui bao*, February 14, 1975, 2. The article was entitled “The ‘Main Fighting Force’ on the Poop Docks” [bian matou de “shengli jun”].

³⁰⁵ Zhonggong Shanghai shi geweihui jiguan weiyuanhui bian, *Jiguan qingkuang jiaoliu*, di er qi, 1975 nian 3 yue 11 ri, “Ren zhen linghui Mao zhuxi zhishi jiduan zhongyao” [Resolutely Comprehend the Great Importance of Chairman Mao’s Directives], March 11, 1975, 2-3, in SMA B 102-1-10. The dissatisfaction with wages and benefits was probably fueled by the push by rebel-workers for the benefits of “double breakthroughs” that had been promised them after they agreed to a reconciliation with their old cadres enemies in the late spring of 1974. See chapter 4 for more on this.

³⁰⁶ GJQK [1975] 58, “Haigang zhiyuan zai shi zhong quan hui he si jie renda jingshen guwu xia, yi yue fen tuntu liang huoyun liang chuang lishi zui gao shuiping” [Shanghai Harbour Employees Set New Records for Tonnage and Cargo Transportation in the First Month of the Year Under the Inspiration of the Tenth Party Plenum and the Fourth National People’s Congress], February 7, 1975.

³⁰⁷ Shanghai wuqu gongren lilun xiaozu, “Shehui zhuyi matou de zhuren: Shanghai wuqu zhuangxie gongren yeyu diaochaoyu zai pi Lin pi Kong yundong zhong chengzhang” [The Socialist Masters of the Docks: the Growth and Development of the After-Hours, Loaders’ Investigation Team at Dock Five] (undated but probably from August or September, 1974), 5, in SMA B 246-2-1038.

³⁰⁸ GJQK [1975] 506, “Shanggang wuqu dangwei fangshou qunzhong, juexin kuzhan san nian, jiben xianshi quanqu zhuangxie jixiehua” [The Party committee at Number Five dock Has Empowered the Masses and Basically Completed the Mechanization of the Dock Within Three Years], November 23, 1975.

In a meeting attended by worker representatives in November 1975, Party Secretary Yang Shukai reflected back on the challenges of the last couple years at dock five. Back in February 1974 at the very start of the Campaign, he had been criticized for “controlling, blocking, and suppressing” the workers and twice nearly knocked from office. He apologized for being slow to grasp important and issues and, as a result, delaying the upgrading of machinery and equipment on the dock. But now he was happy to announce that cargo handling at Number Five dock was essentially 100 percent mechanized.

Thanking his erstwhile critics, Secretary Yang said that, for him, the key to success had been to “convert pressure into momentum” (*bian yali wei dongli*). What he did not say, however, was that the worker disruptions in early 1974 had only delayed technical innovation plans that had already been set in stone by agreements with the Central Government in Beijing in the second half of 1973, agreements to which Mao had given his unwavering support. So the very real “pressure” that Secretary Yang alluded to was not from the workers on the docks, but from the real “masters of the docks” in Beijing.

Chapter 6. Conclusions

Young Fang Tianlun fired the first shot in the battle to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius with his rhetorical question “Are we to be masters of the docks or slaves to work quotas?” The question thus remains: in 1974 did the workers really assert their rightful position as masters or did they sink to the level of mere slaves? The simple answer is that they ended up as both and neither.

As for being “masters,” the workers were assured that—as members of the proletariat—they were *ipso facto* the masters of the nation. But the workers knew that, in reality, it was the Communist Party that was the master of everything and that the Party was made up of people who were not always kind or considerate to the workers. Who could forget how, back in 1967, radical Communists had forced the repayment of 35 million of back pay and bonuses and then went on to persecute workers who had come out on the wrong side of the often messy political struggles? And again, at the end of the Campaign in 1974, could not the majority of workers see that the Party was enrolling the minority of scrappy workers into its ranks for its own benefit? To ordinary workers, this must all have seemed very unfair.

As for being “slaves to work quotas,” nothing had really changed. When the ships came, the goods had to be moved quickly. By the end of 1975, motorized lift trucks had come into common use in the ships’ holds but the volume of cargo continued to increase, keeping the loaders as busy as ever.³⁰⁹ As one student-worker who ended up working on

³⁰⁹ After jumping 13 percent in 1973, combined growth on the Shanghai docks slowed to a still respectable 2 percent in 1974 but then grew 9 percent in 1975 before dropping 2 percent in 1976. But despite this slight drop to 54,613,000 tonnes in 1976, that number was still a respectable 22 percent above the 44,595,000 tonnes handled in 1972. See SHGZ, 260.

the docks for fourteen years recalled, “regardless of who was in charge, we always had to work hard.”³¹⁰

But if the workers really were “slaves” could they not somehow protest their exploited status? Indeed, we saw many signs of this. After the 1974 Campaign loosened the control of the incumbent cadres, we saw a number references to counterrevolutionary slogans and sayings at the docks. But even before this we saw many reports of “anarchistic behaviour” including absenteeism, goofing off, disobedience, pilfering, and damage to goods and equipment. Indeed, the Chinese historians who, in 1992, wrote up the official explanation of the “master of the docks” incident claim that, because of the poisonous influence of the “Gang of Four,” from 1974 through the end of 1976, turnover at Number Five dock fell every year by 10 percent while costs increased 18 percent while. Moreover, on the qualitative side, the value of lost or damaged goods increased and the numbers of work accidents jumped.³¹¹ However, whatever the problems at Number Five dock really were, it is extremely unlikely that disgruntled workers were alone responsible. First of all, the leaders of the recently rebellious old-rebels had been given “double breakthroughs” and so would have been keen to see production grow as that would help their chances of promotion. Indeed, as one of the historians who helped write that article for the *Shanghai Harbour Gazetteer* commented to the interviewer, “if we were to write that story today we would certainly tell it differently.”³¹² According to him, less attention should be paid to political factors and more attention paid to macroeconomic factors such as the composition and routing of domestic and international trade. Thus, with the completion of upgrades to other docks in Shanghai, it may have made more sense to direct goods to docks that now had specialized handling facilities rather than to continue trying, as Number Five dock had been, to juggle the handling of such uncomplimentary goods as heavy steel plates and light manufactured goods.

³¹⁰ Interview with Cai.

³¹¹ SHGZ, 621-626. No data is given to support these assertions. According to a report issued in January, 1975, Number Five dock achieved its 1974 target of 4 percent growth and was recognized as a “progressive work unit.”

³¹² Interview with MBK.

So if the terms “masters” and “slaves” are not helpful for understanding what happened on the docks, perhaps we need another lens to examine them. Joseph Esherick and Jeffrey Wasserstrom have pointed how the Chinese state has traditionally used public displays of pomp and circumstance to project its power over people.³¹³ With its well-developed agitprop techniques and its unprecedented penetration into all corners of society, the CCP brought the art of politics-as-theatre and theatre-as-politics to a whole new level. A prime example of this was Jiang Qing’s revolutionary theatre, especially the opera set on the Shanghai docks, appropriately called *On the Docks*. The impact of making the theatre political and politics theatrical had a huge impact on society. In the words of the historian of modern Chinese theatre, Wang Ban, “The Cultural Revolution . . . created a life that was aesthetically driven, ritualistic, and theatrical.” In such a setting, everybody became actors as well as audience.³¹⁴ Written to show the Manichean struggles between good and evil, there was little need to vary the basic story line in these stories.

Thus, the themes that appeared in the “masters of the docks” story were really a recycling of ones that had been used nine months before when, in March 1973, the Shanghai authorities showcased the experience of workers at the Shanghai Watch Factory. In that campaign, workers all across Shanghai were told to study the new “three talks” approach that had enabled workers at the watch factory to increase production and improve quality. The “three talks” emphasized the importance of political over economic considerations, the qualifications for leadership, and the relationship between productive forces (*jiang luxian, jiang lingdao quan, jiang shengchan guanxi*). But, according to revelations by watch factory cadres after the fall of the Gang of Four, the “three talks” campaign had been launched to frustrate the pragmatic management policies that had been introduced by Premier Zhou Enlai. Thus, while the lessons of the Watch Factory

³¹³ Joseph W. Esherick and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, “Acting Out Democracy: Political Theatre in Modern China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 49, no. 4 (November 1990): 835-65.

³¹⁴ Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History*, 208-9. Cited in Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theatre and Popular Drama in Contemporary China*, (Hawai’i: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), 46.

were being praised in the press, management was facing problems in both the quantity and quality of production.³¹⁵

Just like the workers in the Watch Factory, the workers on the docks were mere actors in an ongoing drama scripted and directed by political leaders in Shanghai who took their cues from senior political figures in Beijing. And when a senior figure in Beijing spoke, things in Shanghai happened quickly as when, in mid-January, Yao Wenyuan instructed the Shanghai leaders to print the Masters story as soon as possible, and when, in late January, Wang Hongwen instructed the SFTU to push the Campaign as a “big matter,” and finally, when in late-April, Zhang Chunqiao instructed the Shanghai radicals to stop “messing up our own nest” and work out a reconciliation with the old cadres.

So, the workers of Number Five dock did not write or direct the script. But did they show independent agency in the unfolding drama? Not really. One of the loaders who was at the meeting at Number Five dock when the Masters slogan was spawned recalled that the meeting had been called by the Party committee for the rather mundane purpose of studying the lessons of Yangshupu dock. During the meeting, nothing out of the ordinary was said and young Fang merely wrote up a routine summary and sent it to his higher ups as was his job. But when the instruction came back a couple of days later for him to write up a big character poster with an emphasis on the workers’ cry for justice, the workers who had attended the original meeting were a little surprised. At the original meeting, the discussions had been wide ranging and, afterward, the attendees were a little confused about who exactly had said what. As one participant told the writer, “I forget who first talked about ‘masters of the docks.’ Maybe it was me. Back then we

³¹⁵ Gongjiaozu shengchanzu zhengli, 1973 nian 3 yue 26 ri, “Ban’ge yue lai gong’ye ge ju xuexi Shanghai Shoubiao Chang qingkuang jianbao,” [An Update on the Last Half Month’s study by All Bureaux in the Bureau of Industry and Transport of the Example of the Shanghai Watch Factory], March 26, 1973, in SMA 246-2-925. For its authority, that model in turn drew up on the *Angang xianfa* [Angang Steel Corporation “Constitution”] that Mao had approved in 1962. That document stressed class warfare, the leadership of the workers, and the need to put politics in command. See also Zhonggong Shanghai shoubiao chang, *Gongjiao jiepi “si ren bang,” jingyan jiaoliuhui cailiao zhi er*, “Cong lilun he shiji de jiehe shang shenru jiepi hei “san jiang” (n.d., probably April 1978): 1, SMA B 246-1-969.

all said things like that all the time. It was no big deal.”³¹⁶ Asked whether the contents of the original minutes might have been altered to produce a better story, the three dockworkers in the interview all laughed. One commented “Were they altered? Of course they were altered. Absolutely!”³¹⁷

As for how free and spontaneous the workers were allowed to be once the political theatre started, the comment of one former student-worker sums up the mindset of young activists: “In those days we were all pretty ‘leftwing’ in our thinking.”³¹⁸ Such worker activists were thus certainly “active,” but I found no evidence of any of their actions being independent. Rather, it seemed that all the activists were acting for some patron. But even the patrons themselves seemed trapped in a system that valued conformity, be it ever so superficial. Following the arrest and persecution of the Gang of Four, such conformist behaviour became a target of criticism for the new power holders. But was not such behaviour a direct result of the system of which the new power holders were the full heirs? For the followers of the new political line to condemn the followers of the old political line as “good old boys” (*lao hao ren*) for simply trying to avoid trouble seemed a little ungenerous.

When it comes to food, they’ll gobble down three bowls.

But when it comes to work, they’ll shirk a hundred responsibilities.

When they come across conflicts, they skirt the issue.

When they bump into problems, they keep their mouths shut.

They do everything to keep their bosses and their subordinates happy.

They take care to avoid offending people they meet.

All around them, they seek harmony.

³¹⁶ Interview with Cai.

³¹⁷ Interview with Cai. At the time, she was a Party member and a deputy leader of the CYL. Also present were Feng and SZY.

³¹⁸ Interview with MBK.

Everything must be kept peaceful.³¹⁹

Seeing what had happened to people who had tried to fight the system, anyone with an ounce of sense—regardless of whether he was worker or cadre—would thus try to keep his head down and his patrons and clients close at hand.

By 1974, the idealism of young activists was probably outweighed by more mature thoughts of personal advancement. As the door for student-workers to gain entry to or promotion within the Party closed in the summer of 1974 two other doors opened for ambitious young workers, the LLDW and the CYL. However, the fact that, by the end of 1974, the numbers of LLDW members had jumped to 200,000 and then to 300,000 soon thereafter, suggest that participation was less a matter of inspiration or ambition and more a matter of obligation.³²⁰

In any case, among political activists the number of “true believers” seemed to be small and getting smaller. The fact that, in 1974, the newspapers saw it necessary to publicly refute the widely held belief that in political activities at work “it was always the same small group of activists who get involved,” suggests that such a perception was widespread. This is echoed by one interviewee, himself a branch Party Secretary on the docks at time. “Most of the people who were politically active were those close to the Party Secretary.”³²¹ In other words, if a person did not see some personal benefit from attaching him or herself to a powerful patron, there was little point in being active. And—as shown by Wu Liang’s sarcastic remark to an activist cited earlier that he did not want to work harder as that would only detract from the latter’s chance to show what an advanced model worker he was—the ability of worker-activists to motivate their co-workers seems to have diminished by the mid-1970s. Lu Baoqi and his fellow investigators may have been genuinely upset by the wastage and damage they saw at

³¹⁹ Shanghai dianbiaochang weiyuan hui, *Gongjiao jiepi “si ren bang,” jingyan jiaoliuhui cailiao zhi san*, “Jianchi yi jiepi wei gang. Gao hao qiye zhengdun” [Make Exposing (Errors) the Key Point: Correctly Reorganize Our Enterprise], April 1978, 19, in SMA B 246-1-969.

³²⁰ Jin, *Feichang*, 1:395-96. By the end of 1975, a total of 576,580 youth had been assigned urban jobs in Shanghai with another 346,043 working on collective farms in the extensive suburbs.

³²¹ Interview with MBK.

dock five. But it was not young workers like them who were driving the investigations but rather their cagey cadre-patrons. While these old cadres were careful to declare that “politics must always be in command,” in reality they seemed more focused on meeting the ambitious growth targets that had come down from Beijing.

As Andrew Walder has observed, in Maoist China, people had learned to substitute ritualistic conformity for committed compliance. For most people, the way to survive was thus to adopt passive-defensive behaviour. Only bold (or foolhardy) people would dare to exhibit active-competitive behaviour.³²² Thus, what people thought, said, and did at that time were often very different. As a former student-worker cum activist who later helped edit the history section in the *Shanghai Harbour Gazetteer* recalled of those days,

On the docks, it was actually the old cadres who directed the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius. If they did not appear to be doing this, they would have been criticized. If they only stressed production they might have been knocked down and then they would be out of power a second time . . . Everyone had to appear to be enthusiastically following the Party line. If you did not, then you would immediately be knocked down.³²³

Seen in this light, the problems “discovered” in the spring of 1974 by the worker-investigators only served to strengthen the old cadres’ argument for more pragmatic solutions, solutions that only they could provide. But of course all this was wrapped up in the proper political packaging. Work rules had to be followed but, of course, such rules had to be rules made by the workers themselves as, after all, they were the “masters” of the workplace.

Even before the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius swept over society with its intensified and “mind numbing” political study, most workers—young and old alike—had tuned out from official political messaging. The exposé following the death of Lin Biao in September 1971 had swept away their illusions about the infallibility of the

³²² Walder, *Neo-Traditionalism*, 143-148.

³²³ Interview with MBK.

Party and its leaders. And for the student-workers in particular, their own on-the-job experiences plus news from their friends who had been sent-down to work in the countryside showed that life could be very unfair. For comfort and solace, student-workers therefore retreated into the company of close friends and family. And here a sad irony emerges. Socialized to eschew personal desires to become selfless screws in the machinery of socialism, to push honey wagons through the streets to emulate Lei Feng, by the middle 1970s, most young people had turned away from the roles that had been cast for them in the great drama of building a modern, revolutionary state and sought instead comfort and meaning in private spaces. Reading romantic literature was a common escape for young people. While books on Marxism-Leninism and the Thought of Mao gathered dust on the shelves, practically every other sort of book or magazine was eagerly read and passed from friend to friend. And for serious young people, of whom there were many, private study of non-political subjects such as English or the sciences became a popular way to add meaning to a drab and disillusioned existence.

Urban youth were much more privileged than their schoolmates who had been sent to work in the countryside. Not only did they have the creature comforts of a big city, but also the comforts of a close network of family and friends.³²⁴ But this had a surprising consequence. Whereas, in order to survive in their harsher environment, students in the countryside were often drawn into “anti-social” behaviors such as fighting, theft, pre-marital sex, or simply running away, student-workers back in Shanghai were able to seek comfort in very traditional norms of behaviour. For example, in this thesis we saw urban youth following very traditional norms of boy-girl relationships (what Diamant calls the prudish sexual morality of the urban elite³²⁵) and dreaming the traditional Confucian dream of studying hard to get a university degree to win a respected position in society. Indeed, Diamant concludes that, despite over two decades of Communist education and indoctrination, “(Most people) still believed that

³²⁴ In their study of urban life in Maoist China, Whyte and Parrish found that 90 percent of interviewees had some sort of “assistance network” while 30 percent had extensive networks. These networks, of course, were largely unavailable for youth sent-down to the countryside. Whyte and Parrish, *Urban Life*, 76.

³²⁵ Diamant, *Revolutionizing the Family*, 135.

high cultural status (viewed in traditional Confucian terms), adherence to norms of decency, civility, and good work habits were more important than good politics.”³²⁶

So if Confucian influences were still so deeply woven into China’s social fabric, maybe Mao was right to try to root them out. Were they not distracting people from focusing on the need to truly transform Chinese society? Were good work habits really more important than good politics? How else could Mao protect his revolutionary legacy? Leaving those questions aside for another conversation (merely noting here that while Mao’s revolutionary ideas have faded badly in China, his personal reputation—with a little self-serving help from his political heirs—is just as revered as ever), it is important to point out the irony of Mao’s attempt late in his life to mine a new vein of what Elizabeth Perry calls “cultural authority” to re-energize the enthusiasm of the masses for his vision of a transformed China. Mao knew that most people in China were deeply unhappy with what his Cultural Revolution had wrought. And he complained that even many of his close associates did not have a real understanding of Marxism. But had he himself come to doubt the sufficiency of the scientific “truths” of Marxism? Had Mao perhaps come to see those “truths” as perhaps a little too Eurocentric? That is, of course, impossible to answer. But it is clear from his reading and re-reading of many classics from China’s ancient past that he saw them as a source of ideas on how to guide the development of his nation going forward. The irony of this, however, is that the generation of revolutionary successors whom Mao sought to inspire could not make sense of these ancient texts because his earlier policies had deprived them of their ability to read and understand them. Their years in school had certainly made them “red,” but it had not made them “expert” enough for the challenge that now lay before them. Late in his life, Mao was telling the youth of China to study the wisdom of ancient China. But eight years before he had closed the universities and shrunk the school curriculum from twelve years to only ten years. Mao’s call to criticize Confucius and learn from the Legalists was to continue to the end of his days.

³²⁶ Ibid., 203.

The Shanghai based historian, Li Xun, describes the launch of Mao's anti-Confucius campaign a "comedy."³²⁷ But this is to overstate the importance of this movement. Most workers saw this campaign as just more political churn. Mao was right when he saw the great influence that traditional thinking still had on the modern Chinese mind. But he was wrong when he thought that, having lost the first round in the battle for the future of his revolution when he used arguments based on modern, Eurocentric ideology that he could win a second—and final—round based on ideas from China's own past. In trying to mine China's cultural traditions, all he came up with was fools' gold. For Mao, this was a huge personal tragedy.

But even as Mao's grand vision of transforming the worldview—and, indeed, character—of his people was failing, economic changes that he had approved back in 1972 and which he continued to support even during the uncertain days of 1974, began—in a good Marxist manner—to set in motion changes that would have far reaching effect on the society as well as the economy.

All his life Mao had sought to turn Marx on his head by claiming that, regardless of the stage of development in the material "base" of society, the willpower of the people—as mobilized and directed by the Party—was sufficient to not only change the means of production in the material world but also to change the way that people thought and acted. Shortly after he put the seal on China's geo-political shift away from the USSR and towards the USA by receiving President Nixon's state visit in February 1972, Mao approved a plan to import \$4.3 billion of capital equipment from the west to upgrade China's industry. But in so doing he unwittingly forced segments of the Chinese economy to get in sync with international, free-market practices. Whereas in an autarkic, command economy the costs of delays, damages, and shoddy quality could all be hidden, suddenly those costs—usually payable in scarce foreign currency—became a highly visible problem. Thus in April 1974 we see the Shanghai Bureau of Finance and Trade ringing alarm bells by reporting that \$120 million of export goods were being delayed by

³²⁷ Li Xun, *Da bengkui*, 524.

problems on the docks while at the same we see worker-investigators reporting on the huge costs of demurrage and damaged goods.

Thus, while Mao's radical wife had tried to make the Shanghai docks into a model for an autarchic brand of super-ideological Chinese communism, the Shanghai docks had actually become a model for a pragmatic, outward looking brand of Chinese communism. Desperate to improve worker productivity, leaders had quietly approved material incentives to get the dockers working faster and smarter. And even with all the political struggles in early 1974, none of the radicals dared to publicize or attack this practice. The events of early 1974 showed two important things: first, material incentives could indeed improve productivity and, second, political campaigns could indeed worsen productivity. But of course, neither of these things was publicly acknowledged. Instead, the workers were told to get back to work and work harder than ever. After all, were they not only the masters of the workplace but also the masters of the whole nation? So if you already own the whole enterprise, what is the point of giving yourself a raise?

Thus, in the end the Shanghai dockworkers were indeed "slaves to work quotas." If incoming ships were delayed by weather or if there was a sudden need to get more ships loaded with goods to pay for the import of capital equipment, then the workers simply had to work faster and harder. But if they were "slaves," at least they were "wage slaves" who could, through a little extra effort, earn a little extra money for their efforts.

In the end, Chairman Mao and his Cultural Revolution passed away quickly. Less than one month after the Chairman died on September 9, 1976 his radical followers—the so called Gang of Four—were quietly arrested. When the news reached Shanghai, a crowd of over one million people flooded onto the streets to celebrate. The 856,000 member workers' militia, which only days before had vowed to defend the Cultural Revolution to the death, dissolved without a single shot being fired.³²⁸ While most Maoist radicals in the city kept their heads down and their mouths shut, not so Fang Tianlun, the student-worker whose famous "masters of the docks" poster had signaled the start of the

³²⁸ Perry and Li, *Proletarian Power*, 184-187.

Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius back in January 1974. Of all of his peers, Fang was one of the most likely to have actually studied the ancient texts that were so dear to Mao's heart. In any case, just like the loyal minister of an ancient emperor, young Fang wrote up an essay entitled "Twelve Questions" (*shi'er ge wei shenma*) that questioned the justice of what was happening to his master's legacy.³²⁹ And, just like the loyal minister of an ancient emperor, young Fang was punished for his daring. In a sense, however, Fang was lucky. If he had been arrested by the emperor Qinshihuang he might have been buried alive. If he had been arrested by Mao's minions during the Cultural Revolution, he would, at best, be sent to a labour reform camp. But as it was, he was left to pine away while being held for interrogation until he became sick and died of natural causes. But that way the glorious memory of his meteoric rise to national fame during the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius is able to live, undimmed, in the memories of his classmates.

³²⁹ Interviews with SZY, a former schoolmate and researcher at SASS, and FZN, a former workmate and member of the propaganda team at dock five.

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