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Rule of the Red Guards

Since last year, the Chinese official press has published little information on the radical purge of writers and artists during the Cultural Revolution. Other sources have been more generous, notably Hong Kong magazines, among which the pro-communist ones are particularly interesting. Their revelations confirm the magnitude and the atrocity of the persecutions. A true reign of terror was established at the beginning of 1966 by Jiang Qing (Madame Mao) and the new leaders of the cultural sector. Their policy comprised two complementary elements: the repression of intellectuals, who were accused of serving the bourgeoisie and labelled 'stinking intellectuals'; and the introduction of aesthetic canons which, henceforth, were to be applied to the creation of 'model' literary and artistic works.

The repression of writers and artists was in fact proportionate to the zeal of local officials and the accusing Red Guards. Though no one managed to escape 're-education by manual labour', the individual's fate depended largely on local conditions: some were persecuted to death or forced to commit suicide, others sank into the gloom of madness, the rest (probably the majority) survived 'struggle meetings' and work camps without too much harm.

On the eve of the Cultural Revolution (at the beginning of 1966), literary and artistic creation was still under the guidance of the doctrine defined by Mao Zedong himself at the Yanan forum in May 1942. The basic ideas were as follows: (i) No art or literature transcends class and political criteria must take precedence over artistic ones when evaluating a work of art. (ii) 'Proletarian' art and literature must be created on behalf of workers and peasants to replace the existing 'bourgeois' art and literature which serve only the 'decadent' classes. (iii) The relationship between popularisation and raising artistic and literary standards should be explained as follows: 'Raising standards is based on popularisation, while popularisation is guided by raising stan-

dards'. In 1968 Jiang Qing charged that these ideas had never been fully applied in literary and artistic circles since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

However, between 1949 and 1966, literary debates and 'anti-rightist' movements had indeed been based on the application of Mao's theses. A campaign of criticism was launched against the film *The Life of Wu Xun* in the summer of 1951. The film was about the life of the beggar Wu Xun in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) who sacrificed his own material pleasures in order to provide educational opportunity to the poor. The film was criticised for its neglect of the inevitability of class struggle and revolutionary violence. Three years later, in the autumn of 1954, Yu Pingbo's *Essay on The Dream of the Red Chamber* was stigmatised. Yu Pingbo, a scholar famous for his research on *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (a Qing novel), published the *Essay* in March 1954. He was accused of indulging in the study of details, in the tradition of 'bourgeois idealism'.

In May and in June 1955, the *People's Daily* published three series of documents against Hu Feng and his 'anti-party' clique. Hu Feng had presented a report to the Central Committee in 1954 in which he asked for the dismissal of Zhou Yang and other cultural bureaucrats. He was arrested on 16 July 1955 and accused of 'ferreting in the obscure corners of socialist reality and rooting about in the dustbins of history' under the pretext of 'writing the truth'. Finally, beginning in June 1957, a gigantic 'anti-rightist' movement was manipulated to suppress all those who had openly voiced their opinions in favour of the 'Hundred Flowers' movement.

The force of the repression seems to have wiped out any possible opposition to the policy of Mao Zedong and Zhou Yang and to have stifled every hint of criticism and heterodoxy. Indeed, after 1957, writers no longer dared to show their disagreement with the Party. But they were once more persecuted and martyred after the

outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. This time, nobody was spared, not even the heralds of the earlier 'anti-rightist' movements, like Zhou Yang.

On 10 November 1965, Yao Wenyuan, later known as one of the notorious 'Gang of Four', published an article 'On the new historical play *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*' in the *People's Daily*. This article triggered an enormous campaign of criticism of the play (which had appeared in the January 1961 number of *Peking Literature*) and of its author, Wu Han, the Deputy Mayor of Peking. The Cultural Revolution was launched. Soon after the downfall of Wu Han, the Maoist accusers laid their hands on Deng Tuo, author of 'Evening Talks at Yanshan' (satirical accounts published in *Peking Evening News* from March 1961 to September 1962) and on Liao Mosha, co-author with Wu Han and Deng Tuo of the 'Notes of Three Family Village' (published in *Frontline* from 1961 to 1964).

From 1967 on, all literary and artistic productions of the past were discredited as heretical to the 'thought of Mao Zedong'. The new cultural leaders were thus in a position to create an authentically 'proletarian' art and literature. They tried to achieve this by remodelling the opera, a reform which had already been undertaken by Jiang Qing beginning in 1964. Zhou Enlai later deplored this reform: 'During eight years, 800 million Chinese have had to be content with eight model revolutionary operas.'

The theoretical basis, if any, of this radical reform and of the unconditional rejection of everything written during the seventeen years before the Cultural Revolution, is still to be explored, presumably in the *Talks* of Mao. However, we may gain some idea from the vilification of the theses of 'Going deeper into realism', a theme defended by Zhou Yang, which asked writers to elaborate on ordinary subjects because 'big things can be seen through small things' and on the 'depiction of people in the middle'. In place of these theories, the 'theory of the three contrasts' was now imposed: 'Among all characters, bring out the positive characters; among the positive characters, bring out the positive heroes; among the positive heroes, bring out the principal hero.' (Presentation of the theory by Haoran, extract from *Ma plume au service du prolétariat*. Eibel, Lausanne 1976.) The necessity of creating archetypes was also asserted.

The prohibition of all literary and artistic productions of the past was followed by the disgrace of their creators. Only rarely did writers and artists resist the new policy of the regime. On the contrary, they did their best to stay out of sight. But the Red Guards and 'criticism teams' forgot nobody; they opened all files and tirelessly dragged the accused to struggle meetings. The only ones who found favour in the eyes of the authorities were Lu Xun, who had died in 1936 but whose works were still constantly cited, Haoran, and Guo Moruo. Haoran, author of *Bright Sunny Days* (which he began in 1962) and of *The Broad Road in Golden Light* (written after the Cultural Revolution) came to be considered the Gorky of China by Jiang Qing. He was unquestionably the regime's official writer who never hesitated to use his pen to criticise his 'revisionist' colleagues. One of his last exploits in this vein was the castigating in the *People's Daily* of the 'counter-revolutionary elements' involved in the Tiananmen incidents of 5 April 1976. (More recently he has turned his pen against the 'Gang of Four'.) Guo Moruo, for his part, made an abject self-criticism on 14 April 1966 in the National Assembly, in which he admitted that all his works should be burnt and promised that he would from then on submit himself to the school of workers, peasants and soldiers. He then went through the Cultural Revolution without too much trouble.

The first victims of the Revolution were the writers and artists who occupied high posts in the state apparatus. This is not surprising, as all power structures installed before the Cultural Revolution were dismantled, on suspicion of complicity in the 'bourgeois headquarters' directed by Peng Zhen, Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi. Among these writers were Wu Han (Peking's Deputy Mayor), Tian Han (vice-chairman of the All China Federation of Literary and Artistic Circles - ACFLAC), Zhou Yang (vice-chairman of the Department of Propaganda, vice-chairman of ACFLAC), Lao She (vice-chairman of ACFLAC; vice-chairman of the Union of Chinese Writers (UCW); chairman of the Peking branch of the Union), Ba Jin (vice-chairman of ACFLAC; vice-chairman of the UCW; chairman of the Shanghai branch of the Union), Ouyang Shan (chairman of the Canton branch of UCW), Cao Yu (vice-chairman of the Dramatists' Union), Mao Dun (Minister of Culture until 1965, vice-chair-

man of ACFLAC), Zhao Shuli (chairman of the Union of Chinese Ballad Artists).

An idea of the ferocious treatment inflicted on some of these writers can be gained from the *Peking Daily News*' account of the suffering undergone by Wu Han, who died in 1969: 'Every day he had to endure struggle meetings. In summer he was forced to stay for long periods under the scorching sun, so that he sweated incessantly and almost lost consciousness; they even poured steaming sand into the collar of his shirt. In winter, when icy winds blew, he was forced to sift coal, and whenever he stopped to take breath, he was beaten unmercifully. His white hair was all torn away in the prison. Often he vomited blood . . . His wife was locked in a latrine and died soon after. His daughter, a young teenager, was imprisoned in a dark gaol, her hands in handcuffs; she went mad and died soon as well. His son escaped and became a vagrant'. (See *Zhongguo Shibao* (a Taiwanese newspaper) 28 May 1979 which cites *Peking Daily News*.)

Tian Han's fate was no better. Criticised since 1964, especially by Kang Sheng (who later became one of the pillars of the Cultural Revolution Group), he was arrested in December 1966. He was first prosecuted publicly in front of ACFLAC and then dragged to a vast criticism meeting which took place in the Peking stadium. He was above all accused of being one of the 'Four Villains' of the writers' 'black gang' (the other three being Zhou Yang, Yang Hansheng and Xia Yan). This label stemmed from the time Lu Xun in the 1930s had called them 'the four villains'. Later in prison, he was repeatedly tortured and is alleged to have been forced to drink his own urine. According to the Hong Kong monthly *Zhengming* (May 1979), he died in prison in 1968 under mysterious circumstances. It was he who had written the words for the national anthem. After his disgrace, it was forbidden to sing the anthem: one could only hum or whistle the tune.

Lao She's fate was one of the most tragic. On the afternoon of 23 August 1966, he and about thirty other persons were dragged by a group of Red Guards from the Peking printing school and the drama school to the Confucius Temple, where they were beaten violently with the swords and spears used in operas. Xiao Jun, another writer who witnessed the scene, reported that Lao She was brought back to ACFLAC covered with

blood. The accusers were convinced that they were punishing a 'counter-revolutionary' and continued to beat him till midnight. On 24 August he disappeared and his body was found in a lake on the 25th. Murder? Suicide? We don't know.

Equally tragic was the death of Zhao Shuli. After his arrest in January 1967, he was accused of being a retainer of Zhou Yang and was dragged from struggle meeting to struggle meeting in the big cities of Shanxi (he was the deputy of the province) and in the surrounding countryside. He was dressed in a tall hat labelled 'counter-revolutionary' and a heavy iron plaque was hung round his neck. During one of these meetings, he was forced to climb on a platform of three piled-up tables, then to kneel and stand up successively several times. Once, when he was told to stand up, someone gave him a violent push from the back; one of his ribs was broken in the fall, piercing a lobe of his lungs. Despite this, he was brought to Taiyuan for another accusation meeting before several thousand people. Four days later, he died, most probably from the injury.

This explains why some of the 'luckier' ones who had only undergone struggle meetings and were sent to the 'reform through labour' camps without being too badly beaten up or tortured, considered their persecution as minimal despite the humiliation they were subjected to. Cao Yu says that he was 'only' sent to prison for several years and then to a 'reform through labour' camp. As for Ba Jin, his recent novel on this sad period reveals more about the suffering of his wife and children than his own. He himself was criticised only after February 1968 and he was never imprisoned. He was supervised in special lockups in the Shanghai office of the Union of Chinese Writers, where 'revolutionary rebels' could come at any time and summon him for public trials; but he could still go home every day. He was later sent to the '7 May Cadre School' for two years, during which time he could visit his family once a month.

Writers who had previously been criticised and were no longer active in the literary domain were nonetheless persecuted again, often more severely than before. Outstanding examples are Ding Ling, Ai Qing, Xiao Jun and Hu Feng.

Ding Ling and her husband Chen Ming were sent to a state farm in Heilungjiang province in the spring of 1958 after they had been denounced

as 'anti-Party' elements during the 'anti-rightist' movement just after the Hundred Flowers. During the Cultural Revolution, Ding Ling was criticised again and was beaten up before being sent to prison, where she stayed for ten months, in 1968. She was summoned to Peking in 1970 and was shut up in solitary confinement in the famous Qinsheng Prison No 1.

This prison was described by a young dissident Wei Jingsheng in an underground journal *Tansuo* ('Explorations' No 3 1979). We learn that conditions were particularly severe and torture of the detainees was practised.

Ding Ling had no news of her husband, who was also imprisoned, until five years later in 1975 when they were both released and sent to work together in Shanxi. It was only in 1978 that they were finally cleared of the 'rightist' label which they had borne for twenty years.

Like Ding Ling, Ai Qing was accused of being a 'rightist' in 1957 and was sent to a state farm in Xinjiang. The *People's Daily* suggested removing his 'rightist' label in November 1961, but this did not make his life much easier. During the Cultural Revolution, he was again maltreated and was transferred to one of the most severe spots in China, nick-named 'Little Siberia'. Again he appeared for trial before the mass and was beaten several times. However, he considered himself one of the better treated. 'I was finally luckier than those who were killed; I never considered myself banished; I never lost hope'.

Xiao Jun's plight began even before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. He was sent to work in a coal mine in Fuxun because he was at loggerheads with Zhou Yang and Zhou Libo, cultural bureaucrats of the time who later themselves fell victims to the zeal of Red Guards. In 1949, he found no work but finally managed to get published in Peking in 1952 after having written several letters to the Department of Propaganda to justify his past. When he was again disgraced after the Hundred Flowers, however, he cut himself off completely from literary and artistic circles and devoted himself exclusively to martial arts, in which he became an expert. During the Cultural Revolution, he was again caught by Red Guards, who beat him violently during the meeting in the Confucius Temple at which Lao She was also a victim. 'I was beaten until my clothes went into my flesh.' Once again

he was sent to a work camp and then to prison for two years. His wife went through the same ordeal. His son was beaten so badly that he was thought to be dead and was brought to a crematorium to be incinerated. Fortunately he regained consciousness at the last moment and was rescued.

As for Hu Feng, who was arrested in 1955, prison life began in 1956 when he became one of the first detained at Qinsheng no 1. He was to stay there for nine years, until 1965. But his freedom was brief: after the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution he was once more put on trial and sent to prison. He was freed recently.

Unlike previous purges, which had touched only writers, the Cultural Revolution affected artists as well. Their 'bourgeois' life style was constantly under attack, or, in more serious cases, they were accused of having connections with 'Soviet revisionists' (The latter were punished more cruelly. During the Cultural Revolution, it was better to be accused of being 'a spy working for capitalism' than 'for Soviet revisionism').

Zhou Xinfang, a famous Peking opera actor, was accused of playing in *Hai Rui Scolds the Emperor*. He and his son Shao Lin were arrested on 28 March 1968. Three days later, his wife died after a savage beating. Ba Jing, in 'Thinking of Xiao Shan', said that a group of Red Guards formed a circle around her and beat her severely while throwing her about from one to another. Both father and son were freed in 1969, but Shao Lin was sent to jail again the following year, condemned to five years' detention. On 8 March 1975, one month after his release, his father died.

The pianist Gu Shengying was brought before a criticism meeting on 3 January 1967. She was hit, slapped, forced to do the 'jet plane' (her hands tied behind her back, her body bent forward), pulled by the hair, paraded before the crowds, and forced to kneel in front of Mao's portrait. This humiliating experience probably reminded her of her father, who, in 1957, was condemned to twenty years of work camp in Qinghai. She was in such despair that the very night of the meeting, she gassed herself, together with her mother and her younger brother. Her house was thoroughly sacked after the suicide. She was posthumously rehabilitated on 4 January 1979, and her father has recently been released.

Han Meilin, a young painter born in 1936, was arrested in April 1968 and jailed for four years

and seven months. He was charged with being associated with Deng Tuo and Tian Han and spending his time with foreigners. In prison he was often cruelly beaten, his little finger was broken and he was starved (he weighed only 36 kilos). His wife was forced to divorce him.

These examples can only give a general idea of the persecution of the intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution. There are, of course, many more: on 3 September 1966 the famous translator Fou Lei and his wife (Fou Tsong's parents, see pp47-8) poisoned themselves; in the same year, the actress Shangguan Yunzhu jumped from her window and killed herself; historian Jian Bozan committed suicide in 1968, etc . . .

Intellectual resistance was limited. For some reason the victims were persuaded that this ill-treatment was for their own good. Cao Yu says that he was happy to sweep streets in order to pay for his past errors because he was persuaded of being a sick element in socialist society. Zang Kejia thought that work camps had their merits because participants could quickly reform their conception of the world.*

The underlying reason was that these literary celebrities, even the most courageous ones, never dared to question the fundamental premises of the socialist regime, nor to oppose the Communist Party or Mao Zedong. Ding Ling, who was ill-treated for twenty years, affirmed in a recent interview that she must not be considered as a dissident writer and that she has always had confidence in the Party and in the Central Committee, even if she occasionally voiced her own opinion on certain matters. Hu Jieqing last year revealed that her husband Lao She, on the day of his death 'was still thinking of Chairman Mao's solicitude . . . and sitting on a bench in a public

park, he read out loud the Chairman's poems'.

This explains why underground literature by reputed writers did not exist during the Cultural Revolution and why their works even after the fall of the 'Gang of Four' are so disappointing. Nevertheless, a form of underground literature did exist under difficult conditions during the Cultural Revolution. Its authors were not well-known writers, but mere youths, some of whom have become known only since. We can quote here the outstanding novel *The second hand-shaking* by Zhang Yang, which is a story about a family of scientists during the Cultural Revolution. The author, now thirty-four, was arrested in 1974 and was imprisoned for spreading 'pornographic' literature. This novel was published in Peking in 1979. Other works by young writers published after 1976 also describe the tragedy that China went through from 1965 to 1976: *The Scar* by Lu Xinhua, *The School Master* by Liu Xinwu, *A Sacred Mission* by Wang Yaping, etc. These young authors often fall into a stereotyped style, but they are much more outspoken than their elders in denouncing crimes committed during the Cultural Revolution. As Ding Ling puts it, 'these young writers dare to speak out because they have not experienced as many twists and turns as we have. The older generation is used to keeping its mouth shut. We can no longer write as they do now' (*Qishi niandai* 'The Seventies' no 115, August 1979).

Today's young dissidents and the articles they publish in unofficial journals go even further in their analysis. While some hold that democratic liberties and human rights can exist in China under a socialist regime, others have lost all trust in the Communist Party and in socialism. Many of them are behind bars at the moment. Short stories and, above all, poems, fill the pages of their journals: poems by Fang Han and Mang Ke in *Jintian* (Today), and by Huang Xiang and Li Jiahua in the more radical journals of the *Enlightenment Society* and the *Thaw Society*.

For the moment, any hope for the future of artistic freedom in China must lie with this new generation of writers. They have left behind the literary celebrities criticised during the Cultural Revolution, who have retained their timidity and are as reluctant to defend them from the repression of China's new rulers, as they were to defend themselves in the past from the injustices of the Cultural Revolution. □

* He has recently been criticised by Yao Xueyin (author of the historical novel *Li Zicheng*) who shows the coercive character of forced manual labour by taking the example of the three instructions of the Academy of Sciences: (i) the old, the ill and the handicapped must also take part in manual labour; for those who could not move, handbarrows should be used to carry them, no one can escape; (ii) for the revolutionary masses, manual labour means hardening up; whereas for the criticised, it is but a system of camps; (iii) those who have political problems must be told that they can't come back to Peking one day: the capital does not need them (*People's Literature*, Peking, July 1979.)