INSTITUTIONALIZED REBELLION:
GOVERNING TSINGHUA UNIVERSITY DURING THE LATE YEARS OF THE CHINESE CULTURAL REVOLUTION*  

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The Chinese Cultural Revolution has been the subject of a great deal of academic discussion, but most attention has been focused on the first years of the upheaval. Scholars have been attracted, quite naturally, by the dramatic and violent convulsions of this period, which began in 1966 when Mao Zedong called on students, workers and peasants to form “rebel” organizations and attack Communist officials in their schools, factories and villages. After the ensuing factional fighting brought China to the brink of civil war, Mao authorized the suppression of those who had heeded his call to rebel. During the second period of the Cultural Revolution—from the suppression of freewheeling factional activity in 1968 until Mao’s death in 1976—Party and state institutions were gradually rebuilt, but reconstruction was carried out within the constraints of Mao’s radical agenda, which continued to spur tremendous political and social turmoil. The institutional experiments of this period have received far less scholarly attention and deserve more careful scrutiny.

This paper examines the peculiar system of governance implemented at Tsinghua University in Beijing during the late years of the Cultural Revolution. Tsinghua is China’s premier school of technology and the alma mater of many of the most powerful members of the current leadership of the Chinese Communist

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During the Cultural Revolution, the university became a bastion of the radical faction of the Party, which harshly denounced elitist education and the Party bureaucracy. This makes Tsinghua atypical, but also makes it an especially interesting case. Because the radicals stridently championed Cultural Revolution slogans about curbing the bureaucratic power of Party officials, it is of particular interest to examine how they organized power in an institution where they held sway.

The system of governance at Tsinghua during this period can be seen as an attempt by Mao and his radical followers to institutionalize rebellion. Power at the university was divided between a “workers’ propaganda team”, composed of workers and soldiers drawn from outside the school, and veteran university officials. The propaganda team was charged with mobilizing students and workers to criticize their teachers, supervisors and university officials. The result was a tumultuous system of governance very much at odds with the conventional practice of ruling Communist parties (including the CCP before the Cultural Revolution), which had been guided by ideals of monolithic unity and a clear hierarchy of authority. I will examine how the system at Tsinghua functioned in practice and suggest reasons that it continued to reproduce familiar problems of political tutelage and clientelism. I will then consider how this system fitted into wider patterns of governance around the country during this period, which I suggest fostered a division of power between administrators and rebels.

Institutionalizing Factional Contention

Between the summer of 1966 and the summer of 1968, Tsinghua University, like other schools around the country, was in the hands of contending student-led factions. The “radical” faction at the university opposed the erstwhile leadership and called for a fundamental break with the past, while the “moderate” faction defended the status quo. Both were ad hoc coalitions made up of “fighting groups” formed by students, teachers, staff and workers at the university. In April 1968, increasingly violent confrontations between these factions led to a “hundred-day war” in which at least a dozen people were killed. On 27 July, Mao dispatched some 30,000 unarmed workers to the campus to put an end to the
fighting. This watershed event ushered in the systematic suppression of factional fighting throughout China, marking the end of the freewheeling political struggle that had characterized the first years of the Cultural Revolution.

In August 1968, Mao sent a Workers and Soldiers Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team to take control of Tsinghua University. The arrival of the workers’ propaganda team (gongxuan dui), as it was called in shorthand form, was heralded in the national press as the first step in a new era in which the working class would take charge of education, and the moment was consecrated with a basket of mangoes, Mao’s personal gift to the team. The workers and soldiers dispatched to Tsinghua became a model for similar teams sent to supervise schools around the country. The first tasks assigned to the propaganda team were to re-establish order, suppress the contending factional organizations at the university and create new leadership bodies. The team established its authority by harshly suppressing all potential opposition, creating a tone of fear that characterized its eight-year tenure at the university. The team’s authoritarian style was reinforced by team members’ understanding that they were charged with occupying and transforming an institution that had been under the domination of “bourgeois intellectuals”.

The two contending student-led factions were unceremoniously dismantled. Covert efforts to sustain factional networks were suppressed and many factional leaders and activists were investigated and punished. After a period of required political study, most students were sent to military-run farms for a period, and then assigned permanent jobs, typically in factories. Teachers and administrators at the university were subjected to a wider effort to gain quiescence—the campaign to “clean-up class ranks” (qingli jieji duiwu). The propaganda team re-examined the personal histories of faculty members and university cadres from before the 1949 Revolution through the Cultural Revolution. Of some 6,000 Tsinghua employees, 1,228 were investigated and 78 were declared to be “class

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4 In many places, this was the most violent period of the Cultural Revolution, as radical organizations resisted demobilization and military units and local Party leaders used brutal methods to re-assert their authority. See Andrew Walder and Su Yang, “The Cultural Revolution in the Countryside: Scope, Timing and Human Impact”, The China Quarterly, No. 173 (March 2003), pp. 75-99.

5 The most harrowing moment for former activists came during a protracted investigation of “May 16 elements” in 1971, which was directed primarily against former members of the radical faction. The investigation at Tsinghua was abruptly called off after a student killed himself.
enemies”. According to a semi-official history of the school, during a two-month period at the height of the campaign, ten people died as a result of persecution. In 1969, most Tsinghua cadres, teachers and staff were sent to work on a rural “May 7 cadre school” in Jiangxi Province, returning only after a new cohort of students arrived in 1970.

**Divided Power**

The workers’ propaganda team was led by two young military officers, Chi Qun and Xie Jingyi, both of whom had close ties to Mao Zedong and his radical followers. Chi had been deputy leader of the propaganda department of Division 8431, the unit that protected Zhongnanhai, the central Party and state headquarters. Xie had served as one of Mao Zedong’s personal secretaries for a decade and she had close ties with his wife, Jiang Qing. Initially, the propaganda team was a huge group, composed of 5,147 factory workers and 105 military officers, but its size was substantially reduced after a few months. Most of its top leaders, like Chi and Xie, were soldiers, although several factory workers also played key roles. The vast majority of team members were ordinary workers from local factories. Most were Party members and all had been active in Party-led political organizations in their factories. With the exception of the very top leaders, members of the team rotated in and out of the university, returning to the factories or military units from which they had come. They were at Tsinghua to help supervise the administrators of the university, but not to become administrators themselves.

The workers’ propaganda team “rehabilitated” most university cadres and many were appointed to positions similar to those they held before the Cultural Revolution, but they worked under the supervision of the propaganda team. Soon after the team arrived, it established a “revolutionary committee” to administer the university and in 1970 the university Party organization, which had largely ceased to function in 1966, was rebuilt. Liu Bing was re-appointed deputy Party secretary and charged with handling the Party’s organizational affairs. He Dongchang, who before the Cultural Revolution had been in charge of academic affairs, was again given this role, although his formal title was deputy director of the university “teaching reform committee”, the top position being

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8. A prominent exception was former university Party secretary Jiang Nanxiang, who had also served as Minister of Higher Education before the Cultural Revolution. For several years Jiang was assigned to work in a factory on the Tsinghua campus; after Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978 he was appointed Minister of Education.
reserved for a representative of the propaganda team. By 1972, the standing committee of the school Party committee—the center of power at the university—was made up of nine members of the propaganda team and eight Tsinghua veterans. Chi and Xie, the leaders of the propaganda team, were secretary and deputy secretary, respectively.

While the leaders of the workers’ propaganda team at Tsinghua were closely associated with the radical faction of the CCP, veteran university leaders, including Liu Bing and He Dongchang, were closely associated with more conservative leaders in the Party. Although divisions and alliances at every level were complicated, Chinese politics during this period was largely animated by the polarization of the Party into radical and conservative camps. The battle lines between these factions were defined by a series of radical policies associated with the Cultural Revolution. The very existence of the radical faction was tied to the Cultural Revolution and they championed its program vigorously, while conservatives sought to constrain or reverse policies associated with the Cultural Revolution. The radicals were led by Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan and Wang Hongwen (who after their downfall would be known derisively as the “Gang of Four”) and their main base of support was made up of the remnants of local radical factions which had emerged during the early years of the Cultural Revolution. Deng Xiaoping became the standard-bearer of the conservatives, whose main base of support was made up of veteran cadres.

Chi Qun and Xie Jingyi both played key roles in national politics. In 1970, Chi was appointed deputy leader of the State Council’s Science and Education Group, and Xie became a deputy-secretary of the Beijing Municipal Party.

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11 When the radical faction was ascendant nationally, so was the power of the workers’ propaganda team at Tsinghua, and when conservatives were ascendant nationally, the power of the veteran university cadres also rose. Neither the propaganda team nor the veteran cadres, however, were politically homogeneous—some veteran cadres aligned themselves closely with the propaganda team leadership, while a number of propaganda team leaders ended up siding with the veteran university cadres.

12 Factional conflict was complicated in the early years of the Cultural Revolution decade by the power of Lin Biao and other military officers who had gained great influence as a result of the upheaval and who did not fit into either the radical or conservative camps. The polarization between radicals and conservatives took shape more clearly after Lin’s fiery death in September 1971.

13 The terms “radical” and “conservative” are appropriate in relation to the Cultural Revolution program, which set the political agenda for the 1966–76 decade, because the radicals championed the program and the conservatives opposed it.
Committee and was elected to the Party Central Committee in 1973. Both Chi and Xie were invited to attend enlarged meetings of the Political Bureau, the center of national power, and they helped initiate and lead the most important radical political campaigns during the late years of the Cultural Revolution. They bypassed the regular Party hierarchy and reported directly to radical leaders Jiang Qing and Zhang Chunqiao.

The veteran university cadres and the members of the workers’ propaganda team at Tsinghua each derived their power from different kinds of qualifications. On one side, the veteran cadres had both strong cultural and political qualifications. They were among the best-educated people in the country and many ranked higher in the Party hierarchy than did the propaganda team interlopers. Moreover, Tsinghua was their territory and they had built the university Party organization that the propaganda team leaders now—tenuously—commanded. On the other side, the power of the propaganda team was based solely on political qualifications, as its members typically had little education. Moreover, their political qualifications were of a distinctly Cultural Revolution variety. Even the top leaders of the team did not originally rank high in the Party hierarchy; their political authority stemmed not from their position in the Party, but rather from their assignment by Mao to run the university.

Mai Qingwen, a high-level university cadre, recalled that during this period Mao’s authority was much greater than that of the Party organization. Rebel attacks had by then undermined the Party’s weixin, a term that can be translated as prestige, popular trust or authority.

During the early period of the Cultural Revolution the weixin of the Communist Party and the Communist Youth League fell sharply. All the leading cadres were criticized, and whether or not the criticisms were correct, the conclusion was that they were all bad. Corruption, graft, womanizing—all leaders were bad. Because the propaganda team had been sent by Mao, Mai explained, its authority outstripped that of the university Party organization.

The workers’ propaganda team used the Party organization, but the Party itself had no weixin. The workers’ propaganda team led the Party, not the other way around. Chi Qun was first of all the head of the workers’ propaganda team, and then the Party committee secretary.

Chi and Xie attempted to control university affairs tightly, but their control was hampered by the fractured state of the university Party organization. The orderly mechanisms of decision-making, the normal chain-of-command and the conventional systems of promotion, seniority and rank had all been disrupted by the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, while members of the propaganda team had taken

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14 See Ding Shu, “Jinru Zhonggong zhongyang hexin de yidianyuan” (Telegram decoder who entered the center of power in the Chinese Communist Party), Huaxia wenzhai, Wenge bowuguan tongxun [China News Digest, Cultural Revolution Archives Correspondence], No. 65 (1 May 2000) (www.cnd.org/CR/ZK00/zk210.hz8.html), accessed 12 January 2006; and He Chongling, Qinghua jiushi nian, pp. 279, 284.
control of the Tsinghua Party organization, they did not entirely trust it and they created a network of power that largely bypassed the formerly all-powerful Party hierarchy.

**Supervising Cadres and Teachers from Above and Below**

During the tenure of the workers’ propaganda team, Tsinghua was administered very differently from previously. Before the Cultural Revolution, the university was run by a highly disciplined Party organization under the direction of Jiang Nanxiang. Jiang, who served as both Party secretary and university president, had demanded the absolute loyalty of subordinates and had built an efficient administrative bureaucracy organized around Party committees at all levels. There had been a very clear, one-way, top-down hierarchy of authority. At the bottom of this hierarchy, students were expected to submit to the authority of their teachers, and workers in university-run factories were expected to submit to the authority of their supervisors. The system of tight political control became the prime target of student rebels during the early years of the Cultural Revolution. A characteristic article published in the newspaper of Tsinghua’s radical faction criticized university officials for being both subservient and repressive:

They always stick to convention (kuangkuang duo) and have a slave mentality (nuli zhuyi); in their work they are only responsible to those above them, and they care more about following the regulations than about right and wrong. Towards those above them they are subservient yes-men (weiwei nuonuo), while they exercise a bourgeois dictatorship over those below them and suppress divergent opinions.

During the early years of the Cultural Revolution, student rebels hauled Jiang and other Communist cadres up on stages to be criticized and humiliated by their subordinates. Criticism of officials from below was known in Cultural Revolution lexicon as “mass supervision” (qunzhong jiandu), which was intended to be an antidote to the bureaucratic concentration of power in cadres’ hands. The declared aim was to prevent the emergence of a “bureaucratic class” by giving rank-and-file members of work units the power to “supervise” their supervisors. After the arrival of the workers’ propaganda team at Tsinghua, the violent and chaotic “mass supervision” of the early years of the Cultural Revolution gave way to more institutionalized efforts to check bureaucratic power. The one-way,

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15 Like other Chinese engineering schools, Tsinghua had built a number of factories, which were intended to combine education, research and production.


17 Criticism and humiliation of Communist cadres during mass meetings had also been a feature of previous “open door” Party rectification campaigns, but criticism had been organized by the Party organization. For a dramatic account of this practice during the civil war, see William Hinton, Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village (New York: Vintage Books, 1966).
top-down hierarchy of authority that had prevailed at Tsinghua before 1966 was replaced with a system in which the propaganda team supervised university administrators and teachers from *above*, while at the same time mobilizing students and workers to criticize them from *below*. The diagram presented in Figure 1 illustrates, in simplified fashion, the nature of the change in supervision regimes at Tsinghua, comparing the lines of supervision before the Cultural Revolution with those during the tenure of the workers’ propaganda team.

**Figure 1: Supervision Regimes at Tsinghua University**

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<th>Before the Cultural Revolution</th>
<th>During the Late Cultural Revolution</th>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>University Cadres</td>
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<tr>
<td>Factory Supervisors</td>
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<td>Students</td>
<td>Factory Supervisors</td>
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*Students Supervise Teachers*

During the late years of the Cultural Revolution, university classrooms were filled with students who had been recommended by factories, rural communes and military units. The workers’ propaganda team considered these “worker-peasant-soldier students” (*gongnongbing xueyuan*) to be more politically reliable than university cadres and faculty members (the great majority of whom were from pre-revolutionary élite families). The new students were, according to a contemporary slogan, not only supposed to attend the university, but also to administer and reform it. At a mass meeting held to welcome the first cohort of worker-peasant-soldier students to Tsinghua in 1970, Zhu Youxian remembered that university leaders told him and the other new students: “You come from the ranks of the workers, peasants and soldiers. Tsinghua is a dominion controlled by intellectuals (*zhishifenzi yitong tianxia*), so you have to get involved in politics”.

The organization of the university was changed so that students could participate in the management of their departments. Before the Cultural Revolution, both students and teachers had been highly organized, but separately. While students managed their own affairs (study, recreation, welfare, and so on), faculty members had handled teaching and academic affairs. Departments were
run by faculty committees (and parallel Party committees, which had the real power), and majors within departments were managed by faculty “teaching and research groups”. During the Cultural Revolution, in contrast, students and teachers were integrated into the same organizations and students took direct part in managing teaching and research.

As they had before the Cultural Revolution, a class of about 25 students lived and studied together for the entire time they were at the university, but now a group of teachers was permanently assigned to each class. These classes became the basic organizational units for both students and faculty members. Classes in the same cohort and major made up a “small teaching group”, which included students, teachers and a representative of the workers’ propaganda team. Each major, composed of three small teaching groups (one for each cohort), was run by a “teaching reform group” made up of a “three-in-one combination” of representatives of the faculty, students and the workers’ propaganda team. Departments, made up of several majors, were run by “revolutionary committees”, which also included representatives of the faculty, students and the propaganda team. The organizational integration of teachers and students was further cemented by the fact that nearly half the students were already Party members and students and teachers typically belonged to the same Party branches. In fact, students led some of these student–teacher Party branches.

This cellular structure certainly limited the variety of instructors and courses available to students, but it facilitated student participation in decision-making. Students participated in designing curricula and solving teaching problems, and the small teaching groups met fairly often to discuss academic, organizational and political affairs. According to Fang Xueying, she and other students were hardly passive participants in these groups.

The teachers would report and we would comment; sometimes we rejected the entire report, and sometimes we would agree with some parts and reject other parts. The students’ enthusiasm for education reform was very high. We would discuss the direction of our major—ultimately, what kind of people should we be training?

The content of these discussions was highly circumscribed by the ideological and political orientations established at the top levels of the CCP. “There were debates at the meetings and big character posters expressed different ideas”, recalled Wei Xuecheng, a veteran teacher. “But generally they followed the fundamental points set by the center”. Nevertheless, the debates were far from meaningless. They involved education policy issues that were at the center of the radical–conservative factional conflict, including how to implement “open door” teaching at work sites, how much emphasis to place on basic theoretical as opposed to practically oriented curricula, how to evaluate student learning, etc.

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18 University education was typically cut to three years during the Cultural Revolution decade.

19 Big character posters, an important form of political discourse in China since 1957, were written by individuals and small groups and posted in public locations.
whether or not to divide students into fast and slow classes, and so on. As a result, both students and teachers were placed on the front line of debates that defined Chinese politics during this period. As the influence of radical and conservative factions ebbed and flowed and central policy guidelines swung from Left to Right and back again, some individuals attempted to defend deeply-held conservative or radical positions, while others shifted nimbly with the prevailing winds. All of this political activity, Fang Xueying said, trained worker-peasant-soldier students how to write, speak and organize.

We were supposed to attend, administer and reform (shang, guan, gai), to criticize the teachers and the old education system. Every evening we had political meetings, we discussed issues, and we wrote big character posters ... Our vocational (yewu) knowledge was not as good as that of students today, but our writing ability was better.\(^{20}\) We had to write posters, engage in debates, and speak, so we had very strong organizational and social activity skills.

As the small teaching groups discussed how to implement education policies handed down from above, some students inevitably pushed for the most radical interpretation, often with the support of the workers’ propaganda team representative, while many teachers found themselves in the position of arguing to preserve aspects of conventional teaching practices. Teachers were handicapped in the debates, especially if they called for moderation, because they could easily be accused of “wearing new shoes, but walking on the old path”. Luo Xiancheng, a peasant youth who began studying at Tsinghua in 1970, recalled:

[When] we had meetings to debate education problems, the students and the workers’ propaganda team representative spoke openly, but the teachers didn’t—they were the objects of reform. It was not an equal discussion ... The teachers were more cautious—it was not that they didn’t dare talk, but they were more careful.

While in the past students had often been intimidated in the presence of teachers, now the situation was reversed. Wei Jialing, a veteran teacher, described the changes as a harmful inversion of conventional teacher–student relations.

Before the Cultural Revolution, teacher–student relations were traditional Chinese teach-and-be-taught relations, so relations were pretty good. Students respected their teachers and teachers cared for their students. During the Cultural Revolution, things changed—teachers became the objects of supervision and students became the masters of the school.

\(^{20}\) During this period, Tsinghua students, in addition to engaging in politics, diligently studied practical aspects of engineering, but little abstract theory. Moreover, because many of the worker-peasant-soldier students had not completed middle school, in three years at Tsinghua they could not possibly master the more complex science and engineering curricula that had been taught before the Cultural Revolution. The radicals were clearly more concerned about avoiding educational elitism than about training highly qualified engineers.
Under the workers’ propaganda team, criticism of teachers and university officials from below became routine, rather than extraordinary, as in the past. The difference was noted by Yang Yutian, a veteran teacher:

At that time, [the workers’ propaganda team] asked students to criticize bourgeois intellectuals, but it was not like the [1957] Anti-Rightist campaign. Then, they called some people Rightists and treated them like enemies. But during the worker-peasant-soldier student period, they didn’t put hats on people. There were no enemies—they would criticize intellectuals in general. It made you uncomfortable, it made you careful when you spoke, but they didn’t give you a hat. We got used to being criticized.

Yang’s testimony should not be interpreted as an indication that political repression in the 1970s was mild. It certainly was not. Rather, Yang’s words express his understanding that for most teachers and cadres, criticism from below had become a mundane, everyday activity. In the past, criticism from below had usually been limited to campaigns, it had been directed against a relatively small number of individuals, and it meant serious consequences.

Traditionally, teachers had been expected to conduct themselves in a severe and strict fashion so as to evoke the proper deference from students. Even laughing or joking with students was seen as undermining a teacher’s dignity and authority. During the Cultural Revolution, these ideas were criticized as the “teacher’s code of dignity” (shidao zunyan), a term that mockingly referred to Confucian codes of conduct for men in positions of authority. Some students relished the opportunity to diminish the eminent social position of senior professors. Long Jiancheng, a foreign student in the water conservation department, remembered the daily trials faced by Zhang Guangdou, a Cornell-trained hydraulic engineering professor who had led the team that designed the huge Miyun Reservoir in 1958. “Students used to treat him badly”, Long recalled. “A female student would hit him all the time—she wouldn’t hurt him, but she’d just go up and hit him”.

Before the Cultural Revolution, Zhang had been one of Tsinghua’s most powerful and respected professors; now he had to maintain good humor while fending off student taunting. “They made fun of him, and he made fun of them”, Long said, adding, “[But] he wasn’t beaten down, and the students respected him”.

Despite the tensions produced by the harsh inversion of authority between students and teachers, a number of students and teachers reported that they developed very close relations during this period. Fang Xueying, a student during the early 1970s who now teaches at Tsinghua, compared student–teacher relations today with those thirty years ago. “Then the teachers’ status was not high like it is today—if anything, the students’ status was higher”, she told me.

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21 To “put a hat on a person” (daishang maozi) meant to make that person a target for criticism by giving a label such as “counter-revolutionary”, “rightist”, “bourgeois academic authority”, or “capitalist roader”.
“The teachers agreed they had been trained under the old system and needed to be reformed, so they were willing to be together with the students. They didn’t have as much authority as teachers have today, but the relationship between teachers and students was closer”. Liang Yousheng, who studied at Tsinghua in the 1950s and began teaching at the university after he graduated, made a similar observation when he compared the relations between students and teachers before and during the Cultural Revolution.

Before the Cultural Revolution … students were very respectful of teachers; the hierarchy was very clear—it was a relationship between lower and higher. [During the Cultural Revolution.] most of the worker-peasant-soldier students were very grateful to the teachers, but it was not a hierarchical relationship because we lived, ate and worked together. Their feelings towards the teachers were very close and strong. If the teachers made a lot of effort to teach them, they really appreciated it.

Fang, Liang and others noted that students and teachers became closer especially during the periods they lived and worked together in factories, as was required by the “open door education” (kaimen banxue) policies of the late Cultural Revolution. “When we were at the factory, I lived together with my students, eight to a room”, Liang recalled. “We shared everything; we could talk about anything”.

Workers Supervise Cadres

The management system at Tsinghua’s campus factories also underwent great changes during the Cultural Revolution years. Like other Chinese engineering schools, Tsinghua had built a number of university-run factories that were designed to combine instruction, research and production; by the early 1970s over 1800 people worked in these factories. Before 1966, shop-floor production had been organized through small groups, which were led by rank-and-file workers. Thus, factory workers—like students—had also been highly organized, but beyond these small production groups their role was very limited. This changed dramatically during the early years of the Cultural Revolution. “Before the Cultural Revolution, the workers were supervised by others (bei guanli)”, recounted Hong Chengqian, a manager in a university factory. “At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, the workers became the masters”. During the period when the university Party organization had ceased to function and student-led factions were fighting for control of the school, workers elected temporary committees to run the campus factories. Chen Jinsui, a veteran worker, described what happened in Tsinghua’s Equipment Factory. “All the leaders in our work unit were overthrown, including the factory manager, the deputy manager, the Party secretary, and the deputy Party secretary”, he told me. “We

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22 Li Hongru and Jiang Xihua, “Qinghua Daxue xiaoban chanye fazhan guocheng chuyi” (A modest proposal regarding the development process of Tsinghua University school-run productive enterprises), Qinghua Daxue jiaoyu yanjiu (Tsinghua University Research on Education), No. 1 (1994), pp. 82-87.
elected a new leadership group ... Four were workers and one was a technical employee ... The group changed—if someone was no good, someone else was elected”.

At the time, employees in Tsinghua’s factories were also split into contending factions, but voting did not simply follow factional lines. Chen recalled:

Factions were important, but they were not the most important thing. The most important thing was whether or not you trusted the person. Whether or not they were honest (laoshi), had the ability to get things done (banshi), and had good relations with the masses. After working together for a number of years, you pretty much know what people are like.

In the summer of 1968, when the factional conflict at Tsinghua turned violent, workers abandoned the campus factories. After the workers’ propaganda team took over the campus in August, it organized new revolutionary committees to run the factories, headed by representatives of the propaganda team. Veteran managers were typically brought back to assume leadership roles, but rank-and-file workers, including some of those who had been elected to the temporary leadership bodies, were also appointed to serve on the revolutionary committees. Even after the old managers were reappointed, workers retained substantial influence over factory affairs. The Cultural Revolution had made the relationship between managers and workers an issue of mass discussion. “[We criticized the managers for] being divorced from practice, for subjectivism”, Chen recalled. “We criticized bureaucratism—if you don’t understand something, you should ask those below you, otherwise it won’t work”.

Hong Chengqian, the factory cadre who had been overthrown, became the top manager of his factory under the propaganda team’s supervision. Hong recalled the period with ambivalence. “Then the workers rebelled against the rules—there was a tendency towards absolute egalitarianism, towards anarchism”, he recounted. “The workers would say, ‘Why is it that when you become a cadre, you don’t work anymore?’ With that kind of thinking, it got very chaotic”.

At first, mass meetings were called to make many decisions. But this, Hong argued, was not practical. “One hundred people can’t lead”, he told me, offering an example he said he often used to explain the problem to workers:

Right after the workers’ propaganda team came, they called a big meeting to discuss working times—when to come to work in the morning, when to break for lunch, when to go home in the evening. The entire workforce met and discussed the question all day, but couldn’t come to any decision. The problem was that some lived at school, some lived in the city, some were single, some had children—so they all had different ideas. In the end, they couldn’t decide, so they just followed the school rules.

Gradually, the number of big meetings decreased. “The meetings became more of a formality. To tell the truth, the workers weren’t really that interested in attending”, Hong reported. Despite the decline in enthusiasm for mass meetings, however, workers continued to play a role in management.
Meetings were held to coordinate the production tasks of the various workshops, with each workshop sending three representatives.

We had to discuss everything with the workers. They were enthusiastic about discussing production. Of course, the aim then was to criticize intellectuals, and that’s what the workers did. The common expression was: “It’s easy for an intellectual to draw a line on paper, without considering the difficulties encountered by the workers in actually producing it”.

Rank-and-file workers were also promoted to serve on leadership bodies at the workshop and factory level, and at the departmental level as well (during this period, campus factories were combined administratively with related academic departments). In fact, a few ordinary workers were co-opted to serve on university-wide leadership bodies.

The policy of promoting rank-and-file workers into leadership positions was described as “mixing in sand” (can shazi), a reference to the practice of adding sand to break up dense soil. On the one hand, this metaphor referred to integrating workers and peasants into bodies composed of intellectuals, and the contrast was between those who did mental labor and those who did manual labor. Under the same rubric, however, rank-and-file teachers were also promoted to serve as members of the main leadership bodies at Tsinghua. In this case, the idea was to introduce non-leaders into leading bodies, and the contrast was between leaders and led. In both meanings, which overlapped, the idea was to break up a dense and uniform body by introducing outside elements.

Undermining Ranks and Privileges

Efforts to organize supervision of cadres from below and to bring rank-and-file employees and students into management were part of a wider array of measures designed to reduce the gap between leaders and led and between mental and manual labor. Leaders were required to “live, eat and work” together with subordinates, a requirement that included mandatory stints of manual labor. “I worked one day a week in production, on Friday or sometimes Saturday”, Hong Chengqian recalled. “I had specific duties—to run a specific machine at a specific time. When there was an especially big, or heavy, or dirty job, I was expected to take the lead. You see—I’m not a very big guy, but I also did the hard, heavy labor”.

The distribution of material goods and services was also altered, with the aim of reducing the gap between those who received the highest and the least compensation. Although after 1949 the Communist regime distributed goods and services in a manner that was much more egalitarian than in the past, some people received significantly more than others. In the 1950s, all state employees were assigned a professional rank based on seniority and professional accomplishment, and the allocation of wages and other goods and services, including housing, were based on rank. Teachers were divided into four basic ranks (assistant teacher, lecturer, associate professor and full professor), and workers were divided into eight numbered ranks, with each rank subdivided into grades. In the mid-1960s, workers’ monthly salaries ranged from 16 yuan to 107
yuan, while faculty salaries ranged from 46 yuan for newly-hired assistant teachers to 360 yuan for the most senior professors.

During the Cultural Revolution decade, the system of ranks was viewed as a violation of Communist principles, and the ascetic and egalitarian ethics of the insurgent Communist movement were revived. “The idea was that everyone should live at the level of the workers and peasants”, recalled Hong Chengqian. In 1971, salaries were increased for the first time since before the Cultural Revolution, but only for those with low wages. Those with monthly salaries over 55 yuan were excluded, which meant that the great majority of teachers who had been hired before 1966 and many senior workers did not get a raise. Most workers, on the other hand, received a one-grade wage increase and the main beneficiaries were younger workers with less than ten years on the job, many of whom had young children and were most in need of increased income. After 1971, employees began receiving routine promotions and corresponding raises, but the only ones eligible were those at the lower wage levels. Thus Cultural Revolution wage reforms left intact huge disparities, but the egalitarian direction was unmistakable. While high salaries were not cut, it seemed that in the future there would be no raises over 55 yuan. Since most workers could attain wage grade two (42 yuan a month) within a few years of starting work, the range of wages among the younger generation would soon be quite narrow.

Among teachers, professional rank became a living ghost. Before the Cultural Revolution, one's place in the rank hierarchy, starting with assistant teacher, and progressing through lecturer and several grades of professor, was an elemental characteristic that defined identity, set life goals, established social status and determined material well-being. This hierarchy of ranks was now replaced by the generic term “instructor” (jiaoshi), which was used to refer to all faculty members. During the Cultural Revolution decade, referring to professional rank among teachers would invite criticism, and rank-specific terms were only mentioned in past tense, to note what rank a person had held before the Cultural Revolution. The influence of rank lived on, however, not only in references to the past, but also in very real salaries, which had been set in the past and were now frozen in place.

Privileged access to medical care based on rank also became a casualty of the Cultural Revolution. Like many larger work-units, Tsinghua provided medical care for its employees and students through a campus clinic, and the clinic sent patients with more complicated problems to Beijing hospitals. In the 1950s, the university had established a special program that allowed the highest-ranking professors and university cadres to avoid waiting in line for care and, if need be, they were likely to be referred to the best hospitals in the city. After 1966, the special program was eliminated and they waited in line like everyone else.

The most dramatic change, however, was in housing allocation. As a well-endowed work-unit with a large campus, Tsinghua’s goal was to provide housing for all of its employees. Campus housing, however, was always in short supply and before the Cultural Revolution apartments had been allocated by rank.
Workers lived in five “workers districts” (gongqu), composed of blocks of old, cramped single-story apartments, while teachers and cadres were given new apartments in high-rise buildings, each building constructed to specifications of size and comfort suitable to a specific range of ranks. After 1966, this kind of segregation by occupation and rank was no longer acceptable. Using a slogan borrowed from the days of land reform, “Overthrow the landed tyrants, and divide the land” (dadao tuhao, fen tudi), the radical student faction presided over the redistribution of housing at the university. High-ranking cadres and professors, who had been living in better quality apartment buildings and townhouses, were forced to move to smaller, less well-appointed apartments, or to share their accommodation, and the vacated apartments were taken over by families of workers and young teachers. In 1968, the workers’ propaganda team ratified this redistribution and then organized an intensive effort to build new apartments. Workers and teachers were assigned to the same buildings and priority was determined by family size instead of rank. Since workers typically married earlier than teachers, they were often first in line for new apartments.

The implementation of egalitarian and ascetic policies at Tsinghua was facilitated by the supervisory role of the workers’ propaganda team. The workers and soldiers who made up the team continued to receive their regular—usually quite humble—salaries from their own factories or military units (to which they would return after their stints at the university). Many members of the team—who often had experienced harsher working and living conditions in their factories and military units—eagerly took the lead in projects that involved manual labor and difficult living conditions, especially during extended visits to villages, construction sites and factories. Their enthusiasm, endurance and abilities in these areas shored up their authority at the university, helping compensate for their educational disadvantages vis-à-vis university cadres and teachers.

The Resilience of Political Tutelage and Clientelism

During the years that the workers’ propaganda team ran Tsinghua, university cadres and teachers were actually subjected to supervision from both above and below. The workers’ propaganda team itself, however, was not. In principle, the propaganda team was not supposed to be above criticism by subordinates. Its leaders had sharply criticized the previous university leadership on this score and they set high standards for themselves.

We must be modest and prudent, guard against arrogance and impetuosity, humbly learn from the broad masses, listen to the opinions of the broad masses and accept the supervision of the broad masses … Since we are in the leading position, we can never stay aloof and put on bureaucratic airs. There are people who can only criticize others but are not able to dissect themselves, have ears only for flattering words, but not for unpleasant ones, and look upon themselves as the bottom of the tiger that could not be touched … We must consciously put ourselves under the supervision of the broad masses, and the
propaganda team members who shoulder major leadership work should in particular take this course.  

Despite this rhetoric, however, in practice the propaganda team was no more positively disposed to criticism from below than the Jiang administration had been. Few members of the Tsinghua community dared to criticize the leaders of the propaganda team in public, and those who did suffered consequences designed to dissuade others. “What the workers’ propaganda team said, went”, recalled Chen Jinshui, the Tsinghua factory worker. As a result, during the tenure of the propaganda team, the culture of political tutelage and clientelism that had been cultivated by the university Party organization before the Cultural Revolution re-emerged, but in a different form.

The Shadow of “The Spirit of Rebellion”

After the revival of the Party organization in 1969, radical leaders, hoping to shore up their weak position in the Party, pushed for massive recruitment of new members. At Tsinghua, for instance, the workers’ propaganda team presided over the recruitment of 3,271 new members between 1969 and 1976, and the size of the university Party organization more than doubled during this period. For the radicals, however, the point was not simply to increase the size of the Party but to fill its ranks with new members more sympathetic to their aims. They therefore insisted that the main criterion for selecting new members should be a “spirit of rebellion” (zaofan jingshen). In so doing, they were trying to import the insubordinate political culture of the rebel factions that had flourished during the early years of the Cultural Revolution into a highly bureaucratic Party organization that had long prized compliance with authority. This project was fraught with contradictions.

The height of the radical recruitment drive coincided with a new radical political offensive that followed the Tenth Party Congress in August 1973. During this offensive, the radicals stressed the need to revive the “spirit of rebellion” of the Cultural Revolution, encouraging their followers to “go against the tide” (fan chaoliu), that is, to resist what they saw as a retreat from the principles of the Cultural Revolution over the past several years. In the national press, the radicals encouraged Party branches not to recruit “obedient tools” (xunfu gongju) who obeyed their superiors without question, but rather to seek out young activists who displayed “rebel spirit”, who “thought independently” (duli sixiang), who had “horns on their heads and thorns on their bodies” (toushang zhang jiao, shenshang zhang ci), and who would not shy away from

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23 Renmin ribao (People’s Daily), 27 July 1975.

24 The number of Party members at the university increased from 3,287 in 1965 to 7,021 in 1976, and then fell sharply after the radicals were removed from power in late 1976, reaching a low of 3,414 in 1982. See Fang Huijian and Zhang Sijing (eds), Qinghua Daxue zhi (Annals of Tsinghua University) (Beijing: Tsinghua University Publishing House, 2001), p. 819.
raising criticisms of the leadership. They stridently warned against the tendency of the Party to become conservative, referring to this tendency with the pejorative terms, *haoren dang* and *yewu dang*. *Haoren* in this context elicited the image of *laohao ren* (“old good guys”), that is, uncontentious souls who value getting along over sticking to principles. *Yewu* referred to economic and technical work (as opposed to political work), and the term *yewu dang*, or “Party of technical work”, criticized the tendency to focus on managing society, rather than transforming it. The job of the Communist Party, in their view, was to lead the ongoing revolution, not consolidate the existing order. Communists, therefore, were to be fearless revolutionaries, not compliant careerists.

Not surprisingly, local Party leaders often were not eager to recruit new members who had “horns on their heads and thorns on their bodies”. To urge them in this direction, the national press was filled with articles that recounted model experiences in which Party branches finally recruited individuals who previously had been considered “troublemakers”, “argumentative”, and “unable to take leadership”, after recognizing that these individuals had the kind of fighting spirit needed to combat capitalist tendencies in the Party. It is not difficult to imagine that in most Party branches this was an uphill battle. Most rank-and-file Party members, not to mention Party leaders, undoubtedly continued to prefer uncontentious, career-minded *laohao ren*. Hong Chengqian, the Tsinghua factory manager, explained how averse the Party culture was to people who raised criticisms:

> During all periods, most of those who joined the Party had good moral character (*pingzhi*)—they were honest and well behaved (*laoshi*) and they did good work. But during the Cultural Revolution, a few of those recruited liked to criticize people. We called them “verbal revolutionaries” (*koutou geming pai*). They could talk well, but they did not do good work ... But rebels (*zaofan pai*) still had difficulty getting into the Party. They had to be voted in—the Party [branch] members had to agree. Most Party members had joined before the Cultural Revolution and they looked down on rebels.

In Hong’s estimation, good Party members worked hard and were well behaved, while rebels did not work hard and only liked to criticize people. In this duality, there was little room for rebels to be good Party members. It was clearly difficult to try to impose “rebel” political criteria that grew out of the period of freewheeling factional contention during the early years of the Cultural Revolution on a Party steeped in a culture of hierarchically organized discipline.

**“Sycophantic Rebellion” at Tsinghua**

In work-units where adherents of the radical faction were in the opposition, efforts to resuscitate the “spirit of rebellion” perhaps retained some of the original insubordinate meaning of the term. At Tsinghua, however, where ultimate power was in the hands of radical leaders, the meaning of “rebel spirit” was distorted by the actual power relations at the university. The propaganda team mobilized students and workers to criticize representatives of the old pre-Cultural Revolution establishment. These veteran cadres were responsible for organizing
teaching, research and production, and they were criticized mainly for promoting intellectual elitism and favoring technical competence over political activism. The language for criticizing bureaucratic authority was available (tirades against the bureaucratic ways of Party officials were a staple of the national press), but this kind of criticism was not often heard at the university and rang hollow even when it was raised, because real political power was concentrated in the hands of the propaganda team, and they were largely exempt from criticism. Under these conditions, the power dynamics of “supervision from above and below” at Tsinghua gave rise to the style of political activism that I call “sycophantic rebellion”, which involved criticizing old leaders to curry favor with new leaders.

The leaders of the workers’ propaganda team paid tribute to the heroic image of rebel fighters during the early years of the Cultural Revolution, and aspiring activists were exhorted to emulate them by displaying their own “rebel spirit”. But the contemporary meaning of the term, in its permutation under the propaganda team, can be seen in the way one student remembered how “rebel spirit” was considered when applications for membership were discussed in her Party branch. “Formally, the process [of recruiting Party members] was the same as it is today, but the standards were different”, recalled Fang Xueying. “During the Cultural Revolution they looked at whether or not you had rebel spirit ... [That is,] whether or not you criticized the teachers and cared about politics—whether or not you were active in criticizing people”. I asked Fang whether criticizing the workers’ propaganda team would have been seen as an indication of “rebel spirit”. “Actually, the leaders always said they wanted people with rebel spirit”, she replied, “but in fact they wanted people who would listen to them and criticize others—criticize the old leaders. Whoever becomes a leader likes those who are obedient (tinghua)”.

Thus, displaying “rebel spirit” at Tsinghua during this period meant complying with the authority of the workers’ propaganda team. This clearly had little in common with the “rebel spirit” celebrated during the early years of the Cultural Revolution, the chief hallmark of which was a willingness brazenly to challenge the authority of Party officials. Indeed, sycophantic rebel activism had more in common with the activism of Party and youth league members (and aspiring members) before the Cultural Revolution, when, as Andrew Walder argued, the requirement that activists demonstrate their loyalty to the Party facilitated the development of a system of dependence based on loyalty to immediate superiors. Before the Cultural Revolution, however, Tsinghua had been run by a unified Party organization and compliance with authority was

25 Helen Siu pointed out that the zealous anti-authoritarian stance of Cultural Revolution rebels was even more paradoxical in that they ardently pledged their loyalty to Chairman Mao (Agents and Victims in South China: Accomplices in Rural Revolution [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989], p. 240). The rebels used their loyalty to Mao as a means to legitimately challenge the authority of local Party officials.

relatively straightforward. Now the lines of authority at the university had been
greatly complicated by the introduction of the workers’ propaganda team and its
insistence that students and workers criticize their immediate superiors.

Sycophantic rebel behavior did not prove very popular, at least not among
Party members in Fang Xueying’s class. She described how members of her
Party branch rejected the application of one student who was seen as too eager to
criticize others in order to please the workers’ propaganda team representative.

Actually, it was also very important that you had good relations with the other
students. This was not formally discussed, but we all considered it. For
instance, one student had rebel spirit, he was very active in criticizing, but we
refused to let him in. He had very good relations with the military
representative [a workers’ propaganda team member] and the military
representative promoted his application—he told us to admit him. But the
students didn’t like him, so they refused to vote him in ... We thought he
wanted to curry favor (pai mapi), that he would do anything to please the
leadership.

This peculiar combination of servility and rebellion could alienate many
people for different reasons. Many students and workers did not like people who
catered too much to those in positions of authority. At the same time, the culture
of the Party remained largely conservative, much more amenable to
uncontentious laohao ren than to rebels of any kind.

It would be wrong to say that everyone who raised criticisms of people and
phenomena identified with the pre-Cultural Revolution order at Tsinghua was
simply currying favor with the workers’ propaganda team. Many people were
sincerely committed to advancing the education reform agenda of the Cultural
Revolution. Nevertheless, supervision from above and below created conditions
in which all criticism of this type could be interpreted as currying favor, and it
was no doubt difficult even for those raising criticisms to sort out their own
motivations clearly.

**Bureaucratic Character of Radical Mass Mobilization at Tsinghua**

During the late years of the Cultural Revolution, the radicals sought every
opportunity to launch new movements against conservative Party officials, and
won Mao’s support for major mass campaigns in 1974 and 1976. Both campaigns
were initiated at Tsinghua. In late 1973, Chi and Xie mobilized students and
teachers to criticize He Dongchang’s implementation of more conventional
teaching practices at the university, a campaign that paved the way for a major
nationwide movement to “Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius” in 1974. Then, in
the fall of 1975, a “Great Debate on the Education Revolution” was initiated at
Tsinghua, with Liu Bing as its main target, and it was converted the following
year into a nationwide campaign to oppose Deng Xiaoping and the “Right-
Deviationist Wind to Overturn Correct Verdicts of the Cultural Revolution”. In
both cases, education policies were the initial focus of campaigns that were later
extended to include all of the major issues that divided the radical and
conservative factions.
By this time, the radicals were advancing a trenchant critique of the concentration of political power in the hands of Communist cadres, who they claimed were becoming a bureaucratic class. Among the most elaborate treatises were some penned by writers at Tsinghua and at neighboring Peking University. An article in the Tsinghua newspaper, for instance, suggested that the social position of Party officials made it inevitable that some would want to “take the capitalist road”:

Capitalist roaders are a product of the historical period of socialism. It is inevitable that the conditions that give rise to them will be here for a long time. After the proletariat takes power, the result is state capitalism without the bourgeoisie … [The capitalist roaders] want to expand … the power the people have given them, and turn it into the privileged right (tequan) to rule over and oppress the people. They turn their Party and state leadership positions into a commodity and enjoy material privileges.27

This theme was echoed in a Peking University journal.

[The members of the bureaucratic class] invariably try to transform their authority into capital, turn their managerial and service functions into authority to oppress and exploit people. They’ll do everything in their power to exclude the laboring people from management and planning work, seize the right to manage and use the means of production and the product of labor, thus nullifying the socialist public ownership system.28

During the anti-Deng campaign, the national press—under radical control—featured increasingly inflammatory rhetoric, denouncing Party officials in language that was even stronger than that used in the early years of the Cultural Revolution. Then, unofficial rebel newspapers had described their enemy as a “privileged stratum”; now the country’s leading newspapers were calling on people to do battle with an entrenched “exploiting class”. The methods of mobilization used, however, bore little resemblance to the freewheeling factional contention of the early Cultural Revolution years. Instead, the radicals largely relied on the kind of top-down bureaucratic methods of mobilization that Communist Parties in power had conventionally employed. In 1966, Mao had encouraged students, workers and peasants to form their own “fighting groups” (zhandou dui) and to “link-up” (chuanlian) with other fighting groups; in 1976, in contrast, students and workers were instructed that the struggle was to be conducted in an orderly fashion, under Party leadership. Early in the 1975–76 campaign, when the focus was still on education issues, the Party committee of

the Tsinghua civil engineering department described how the campaign was organized in the department:

The current big debate on the education revolution has been conducted step by step, under the leadership and according to the unified arrangements of the Party committee. We do not have “link-up” inside and outside the department and inside and outside the university. We have no “fighting groups”. We build no mountain strongholds, and we do not stop work or stop classes. “All actions are taken as they are ordered”. This has insured the smooth and healthy development of the movement.29

The contrast between the ends and the means of the campaign could not have been more dramatic: people were called upon to rise up against the domination of bureaucratic officials by participating in a movement under the direction of the local Party committee.

Although contemporary press reports described the movement as filled with “vitality and vigor”, students who experienced the campaign at Tsinghua remembered it as considerably less lively. Zuo Chunshan, a worker-peasant-soldier student, emphasized the compulsory nature of participation. “We were ordered from above to attend meetings”, he recalled. “You had to participate actively otherwise you’d be accused of only being interested in studying your vocation, so you had to speak up actively in meetings and you had to follow the line”. Long Jiancheng, a foreign student studying at Tsinghua in 1976, remembered political meetings as boring. “They were like Bible classes—we would start by singing a song, then we would read Engels or Lenin and discuss how to apply their ideas, then we would sing another song, and that was the end”, he recounted. “There was not much enthusiasm”. Even Chi Qun and Xie Jingyi, speaking to a study meeting in the Tsinghua electrical engineering department in the spring of 1976, admitted that morale in some units was low and that people “appear war-weary and sullen”.30

Although the 1976 campaign was in many ways a continuation of the assault on Party officialdom that Mao had launched in 1966, it lacked the rebellious energy of the early years of the Cultural Revolution, when the Party organization was paralyzed, and students, teachers and workers formed their own fighting groups. Then, tens of thousands of people poured onto the Tsinghua campus to read the latest big character posters, and they crowded into meeting halls, hanging on every word of the contentious debates. In 1976, thousands of people also came to Tsinghua to read big character posters, but this time they were


30 Chi Qun and Xie Jingyi, “Chi Qun, Xie Jingyi zai Qinghua Daxue jixie xi xueyuan he ganbu xuexi 1976 nian 5 yue 16 ri liang bao yi kan shelun zuotanhui shang de jianghua (yuan jian)” (Chi Qun, Xie Jingyi speak to a meeting to study the commentaries published by the two-newspapers-and-one-journal on May 16, 1976 with students and cadres of the Tsinghua University Mechanical Engineering Department [primary document]) (Beijing, 1976), p. 3.
bussed and trucked to the university by their work-units, and the content of the posters was orchestrated by the workers’ propaganda team. The campaign not only lacked the unruly energy of the early years of the Cultural Revolution, but it could expect little support from the Party apparatus, which was largely in the hands of unsympathetic officials. The result was a feeble campaign doomed to failure.

The Limits of Institutionalized Rebellion

The introduction of the workers’ propaganda team into Tsinghua University created a system of divided power, in which the propaganda team, aligned with the radical camp, was authorized to supervise the veteran university cadres, who were largely sympathetic with the conservative camp. This division of power created the conditions for organizing supervision of cadres from above and below, which the propaganda team developed into an elaborate model of administration. In terms of the anti-bureaucratic goals of the Cultural Revolution, this model was not without accomplishments. The combined effects of mass supervision, organizational integration and more egalitarian distribution significantly reduced the gap between cadres and non-cadres, and altered the distribution of power between the two groups.

This model of governance prevented the re-establishment of conventional bureaucratic lines of authority. Before the Cultural Revolution, university officials, teachers and supervisors, operating through a unified Party hierarchy, had exercised unilateral supervision over students and workers. Now, officials, supervisors and teachers found themselves in relations of mutual supervision with students and workers, and the latter were involved in decision-making to an unprecedented degree. It was not only possible for subordinates to criticize their superiors, they were expected to.

The fact that no one could criticize the leaders of the workers’ propaganda team, however, fundamentally truncated the significance of mass supervision. As a result, the main target of mass supervision was cultural power, rather than political power. Because in practice leaders of the propaganda team were exempted from criticism from below, fundamental aspects of the longstanding culture of political dependency survived. Supervision from above and below, as practiced at Tsinghua, only reinforced—in a distorted form—longstanding patterns of political tutelage and clientelism. Efforts to transform the university under the heavy-handed leadership of the propaganda team ended up producing “sycophantic rebel” activism and lackluster political campaigns.

While the radical faction was developing an increasingly lucid theoretical critique of the concentration of power in the hands of Communist cadres, it remained inextricably bound up in the culture it was criticizing. At least this was the case at Tsinghua University, where the model of governance the radicals put in place ended up reproducing fundamental features of the culture of political dependency they were criticizing.
Wider Patterns of Institutionalized Factional Contention

In Mao’s waning years, members of both factions sought to win his favor, and he first supported one faction and then the other. This ambivalence has long puzzled scholars. As I investigated the contentious politics of these years, I began to discern a pattern that made sense of this ambivalence. At every level, it appeared, factional contention was being institutionalized within Party and state organizations. Overthrown Party officials were rehabilitated, but members of the rebel groups that had proliferated during the early years of the Cultural Revolution were also given positions of power. Moreover, the pattern of appointments seemed to indicate that these two types of individuals were charged with distinct tasks: veteran cadres were put in charge of running the political and economic bureaucracies that allowed the country to function, while rebels were given institutional means to mobilize political campaigns against these officials, pressing Mao’s radical agenda. This division of labor seemed to indicate the deliberate construction of a system of governance that pitted rebels against administrators. This scenario places the factional rivalry that dominated political life in China during this period, which has conventionally been treated as a struggle for succession, in a different light. Perhaps this contention was not simply a means to an end, but an end in itself.

I observed this type of political set-up—institutionalized rebels vs. administrators—at close range at Tsinghua. The entire educational system, however, also seemed to be organized in a similar fashion (and indications of this kind of logic were plentiful outside of the realm of education as well).

In 1970, the State Council (China’s top administrative body) convened a Science and Education Group to revamp education policy. Chi Qun, the head of the workers’ propaganda team at Tsinghua, was named deputy leader of the group and, with the backing of Vice-Premier Zhang Chunqiao (who was charged with overseeing educational affairs for the State Council), he quickly became its most influential member. Chi steered the group towards advocating radical policies that eschewed elite education and focused on practical education for workers and peasants. As part of this effort, it promoted the development of model schools, including the July 21 University attached to the Shanghai Machine Tools Plant, and the Chaoyang Agricultural University in Liaoning Province. The Science and Education Group, however, did not have administrative authority over the school bureaucracy; it could only exhort school officials to implement its initiatives.

When the Ministry of Education was finally re-established in late 1974, replacing the ad hoc Science and Education Group with a formal administrative bureaucracy, Mao rejected the entreaties of Jiang Qing and Zhang Chunqiao to appoint Chi Qun as Education Minister and instead supported Zhou Enlai’s more conservative nominee, Zhou Rongxin. The latter promoted more conventional education policies through the ministry and the formal education bureaucracy,

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while Chi Qun and Xie Jingyi—with the support of their radical patrons at the center—promoted ever more radical policies, continuing to use Tsinghua and the other schools under their control as models.

The same type of division—between administrators and institutionalized rebels—could be seen at the provincial, local and school levels. At each level, the administrative bureaucracies were filled largely with rehabilitated veteran cadres, but radicals were appointed to serve as “mass representatives” on the new revolutionary committees that nominally supervised the work of these administrative bureaucracies. As Party committees were restored at every level (and once again became the actual locus of power), a number of radicals were also selected to join their ranks, and many local radicals were nominated as delegates to the Tenth Congress of the CCP in 1973. As Lowell Dittmer and Maurice Meisner have pointed out, however, radicals were seldom given regular administrative duties.\(^{32}\) Many were not assigned any duties at all, outside of occupying seats on revolutionary committees, which were large deliberative bodies that typically commanded little bureaucratic power. On the other hand, they were often given responsibility for organizing campaigns of study and criticism.\(^{33}\)

Within schools, power was further divided by the introduction of workers’, soldiers’ and peasants’ propaganda teams. These teams usually had far less authority than Chi and Xie and their subordinates had at Tsinghua, and in primary schools the corresponding positions were typically assigned to a single worker or peasant representative, who in practice was often relegated to the functions of ombudsman and community liaison.\(^{34}\) Nevertheless, their nominal duties included supervision of school officials, and while the latter were ordered to carry out the more conventional policies handed down through the formal education bureaucracy, the radicals attempted to mobilize the former to back their initiatives, with varying degrees of success.

During this period, education policy swung first Right and then Left in cycles. Mao insisted that conservative officials administer the education bureaucracy and supported their efforts to “regularize” education, but he then supported a series of radical political campaigns against education officials and


\(^{34}\) See Dongping Han, *The Unknown Cultural Revolution* (New York: Garland, 2000).
their policies. As a result, conservative power was firmly based in the administrative bureaucracy, while radical power depended largely on Mao’s charismatic authority. Organizational ties among the radicals were mainly informal, existing parallel to—and often in formal violation of—the regular Party bureaucracy. Thus, although the radicals were ensconced near the centers of power, their authority—which was considerable—relied more on Mao’s support and the understanding that they were torchbearers for his charismatic mission than on bureaucratic power. Their exhortations were broadcast widely and bore the seal of the “Great Helmsman”, but implementation of their initiatives depended largely on the success of political campaigns, because they had little direct administrative power.

This sketch of the institutional arrangements underlying political conflict in the education sphere during the late years of the Cultural Revolution decade suggests that the type of factional contention I found at Tsinghua was one manifestation of a wider pattern. Other scholars have proposed, in a similar vein, that Mao was seeking to maintain a balance of power between factions. In an insightful account of factional conflict over agrarian policies, for instance, David Zweig suggested that “Mao often played the great balancer, preferring to let the modernizers and the ideologues fight, intervening only if one side’s dominance threatened to lead the ship of state too much in any one direction”. Others have suggested that the factional conflict during this period was a continuation of divide-and-rule tactics that Mao had long pursued within the CCP, or reflected

The interpretation I am advancing here contains two contentions that do not contradict but rather build on these previous accounts. First, Mao’s political maneuvering during this period was creating a peculiar system of governance based on institutionalized factional contention, and, second, this contention depended on a functional division of labor that deliberately pitted rebels against administrators.

To sustain and develop such an hypothesis, it would be necessary to carefully examine the situation in other basic-level institutions and at higher levels of the political hierarchy. (Where I have seen deliberate construction, other scholars may simply see a series of improvisations, struggles for power, and compromises, all of which were certainly part of the messy history of this period).

Tsinghua was far from typical, and this limits the extent to which one can rely on this case in developing generalizations. The university was located very close to the center of national power, both geographically and politically. Because leaders of the workers’ propaganda team at Tsinghua had close ties with radical leaders at the center, and veteran university cadres had close ties to powerful officials in the conservative camp, the radical–conservative rivalry at the center shaped politics at the university more directly than it did in more remote places. Moreover, the prominences of Chi and Xie in national politics gave them tremendous power \textit{vis-à-vis} veteran university officials. Propaganda teams at other schools lacked this kind of power (and they also were not necessarily as committed to the radical agenda). For this reason, it should not be assumed that the power dynamics at Tsinghua were typical. Studies that have documented conflicts in other schools, factories and municipalities during this period have presented highly diverse accounts which include strikes, protests, wall poster campaigns against Party leaders, violent skirmishes, arrests and local political coups and counter-coups.\footnote{See Anita Chan, Stanley Rosen and Jonathan Unger (eds), \textit{On Socialist Democracy and the Chinese Legal System: The Li Yizhe Debates} (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1985); Keith Forster, \textit{Rebellion and Factionalism in a Chinese Province: Zhejiang, 1966-1976} (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1990); Keith Forster, “Spontaneous and Institutional Rebellion in the Cultural Revolution: The Extraordinary Case of Weng Senhe”, \textit{The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs}, No. 27 (January 1992), pp. 39-75; Goran Leijonhufvud, \textit{Going Against the Tide: On Dissent and Big Character Posters in China} (London: Curzon Press, 1990); Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun, \textit{Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution} (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).} These studies reveal that in many work-units radicals
were relegated to an opposition role and they mobilized criticism of administrative cadres from below. This was a much more hazardous proposition than the kind of sycophantic rebellion that took place at Tsinghua (and it required the kind of seditious bravado characteristic of insurgent social movements).

If Mao was constructing an elaborate factional arrangement that set rebels against administrators, it was ultimately very fragile and did not survive his death in 1976 (after which radicals were systematically purged from positions of power at all levels). It would, nevertheless, be worthwhile to examine carefully the results of this peculiar effort to curb bureaucratic power. Based on the evidence presented in this paper together with that presented in the handful of other investigations into local conflicts during this period, I would offer the following initial observation: where rebel opposition was organized from below, it was weak and precarious, and where it was organized from above, it had traces of the sycophantic character evident at Tsinghua.