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### Title

The Chinese cultural revolution as history

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/71264771>

### ISBN

9780804753500

### Authors

Esherick, J  
Pickowicz, P  
Walder, AG

### Publication Date

2006

Peer reviewed

Passion, Reflection, and Survival: Political Choices  
of Red Guards at Qinghua University,  
June 1966–July 1968

*Xiaowei Zheng*

On June 3, 1966, probationary Communist Party member and first-year Qinghua University student Wang Fan spent a whole afternoon in the university amphitheater, pondering the implications of several recent provocative articles in *People's Daily*. For Wang Fan, the official endorsement of Nie Yuanzi's aggressive big character poster attacking the party authorities at Beijing University and the militant editorial "Smashing All the Ox Devils and Snake Spirits" augured the arrival of a violent political storm. Wang Fan, who came from an intellectual family and had studied at Shanghai's best high school, was a top student, an activist, and the chairperson of his class. Full of enthusiasm, he wanted to respond to Chairman Mao Zedong's clarion call to rebel against the "capitalist roaders"—the party authorities at his own university. However, the frightening notion that criticizing the party organization was equal to rightism was deeply entrenched in his mind; besides, he had just been cautioned by his department chair. Looking at the sunset, Wang Fan finally made up his mind. He persuaded several friends who were also student cadres in his class to join him, and together they drafted a big character poster for display on June 5. In the poster, Wang and his friends called the decision of the Qinghua party committee to build a separate canteen for female students a revisionist crime since no group should receive special privileges. Though the students could not, for the moment, identify any other serious errors of the school party committee, they expected that they would uncover serious faults one by one, just as the *People's Daily* editorial suggested. They believed that their poster would contribute to this exciting new campaign launched by Chairman Mao.<sup>1</sup>

Because of his bold condemnation of the school party authorities, Wang Fan became the Cultural Revolution leader in his class when an outside work team entered the campus four days later, on June 9. However, the work team's repressive and controlling style revealed over the following ten days made Wang Fan and his comrades doubt its origin and authority—did not Chairman Mao say that the masses should be entrusted with ultimate power during this movement? Without any insider information, these students inquired at the State Council's reception office and were told that the work team was sent by Mao himself. As a result, Wang apologized to the work team leaders for having doubts. To Wang Fan's surprise, the work team immediately branded him a counterrevolutionary for "organizing evil plots to damage the work team," and removed Wang and his comrades from their leading positions in the movement. Wang Fan was incarcerated and put under around-the-clock surveillance. At the time, he believed that he would be sent to a labor camp or the countryside for the rest of his life.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, Wang Fan's older classmate, third-year chemical engineering student Kuai Dafu, was also imprisoned in an isolation cell because of his brash complaints about the work team. Born into a poor peasant family in Jiangsu, Kuai was the only one of six children that his family could send to college. Also a good student, Kuai's photo had appeared in a 1963 *People's Pictorial* as a role model for peasant children hoping to go to college.<sup>3</sup> Very outspoken and with a strong sense of social justice, Kuai once spent a summer investigating the devastating effects of the Great Leap Forward in his village and reported on the exploitive behavior of rural cadres to the National People's Congress. In the movement to study the nine commentaries critiquing Soviet revisionism published in *Red Flag* in 1965, Kuai had again become a model for his active role in "exposing unreliable thoughts" (*baolu huo sixiang*) and his eagerness to thoroughly rectify "selfish thoughts." Once the Cultural Revolution began, Kuai wrote posters to criticize the school's party leaders. Like Wang Fan, he was initially promoted by the work team to lead the movement in his class, but after openly expressing his dissatisfaction with the work team, he too was labeled a counterrevolutionary.<sup>4</sup>

At this moment, Kuai Dafu and Wang Fan, two students with very different backgrounds, were in the same boat and shared the same counterrevolutionary label. After they were released from confinement, Wang joined Kuai's tiny red guard organization and became one of Kuai's best writers. Later, however, they would choose different paths. When Kuai's group ex-

panded and became dominant at Qinghua, Wang bailed out. He joined an opposing faction because he could not agree with Kuai's methods and approach in conducting the revolution. In the April 1967 ideological debate on rehabilitating the Qinghua cadres, Wang vigorously challenged Kuai's point of view, and in the bloody armed battle to come, the two fought each other at the risk of their lives.

In fact, like Wang Fan and Kuai Dafu, thousands of Qinghua students were seriously thinking and searching for what they believed would best represent Chairman Mao's cause, genuinely seeking and articulating their political ideals. The goal of this chapter is to shed light on the political choices of red guards at Qinghua University. At every crossroads of the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1968, what decisions did students make and what were their reasons? What were their underlying motives and how did these motives impel their political choices? This chapter uses fresh data—including interviews of former red guard leaders and activists—to explore why students were provoked to join the Cultural Revolution, and explain the immediate causes and longer-term origins of factional divisions among red guards.

### *Literature Review*

The red guards have been a hotly contested topic in Cultural Revolution research. The dominant sociological approach developed by Stanley Rosen, Anita Chan, and Jonathan Unger emphasizes the importance of social groups, especially official class designations, in leading students to enlist in rival mass organizations.<sup>5</sup> Focusing on secondary schools in Guangzhou, the authors assert that after the early 1960s, the increasingly difficult prospect of moving upward, along with the shifting criteria for university admission and Youth League recruitment, exacerbated the competition between students from "red" class backgrounds and "middle" class backgrounds. After 1962, the antagonism grew so strong that it became the most crucial variable affecting factional alignment in the Cultural Revolution.<sup>6</sup>

The political approach of Andrew Walder, on the other hand, posits that it was students' differing responses toward the work teams that forced them into opposing groups.<sup>7</sup> Using evidence from Beijing's universities, Walder finds that during the work team period, because of the unclear political circumstances and scarce, misleading, and constantly changing information,

students' positions and status before the Cultural Revolution provided no clear guide to their behavior during the Cultural Revolution. Red guard factions emerged when students from similar social backgrounds responded differently to the work teams. Later on, students of different factions struggled to justify their earlier actions and avoid the wretched fate of political victims—the red guards “were fighting not to lose.”<sup>8</sup>

In part, the divergence between the political interpretation and the sociological approach reflects the distinction between university and high school red guards and the different geopolitical locations of Beijing and Guangzhou. Rosen, Chan, and Unger's data are still compelling in linking factionalism to class labels in Guangzhou's secondary schools. Far away from the political center, Guangzhou's students were much less sensitive to or even unaware of the center's constantly changing political signals. Moreover, Guangzhou's secondary school red guard organizations were formed with the direct help of Beijing's secondary school red guards, who used the bloodline theory of family class status as their organizing principle.<sup>9</sup> In fact, when Guangzhou red guards Dai Hsiao-ai and Liu Guokai wrote their memoirs in the 1970s, they repeatedly stressed the importance of the bloodline theory, indicating the actual influence of class labels on students' choices in becoming red guards.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, Walder correctly argues that static pre-Cultural Revolution group interests based on class labels did not play an obvious role in universities. Indeed, different attitudes toward the work team were the direct and the most obvious basis for the initial factionalism in universities. There was no simple one-to-one correspondence between students' backgrounds and their factional affiliation, especially in a school like Qinghua, where the impact of class background had been greatly reduced in the stricter political investigation (*zhengshen*) after 1963. However, why exactly did students respond to the work team at Qinghua so differently? Why did people like Kuai Dafu and Wang Fan, despite their favored political position, challenge those in power? How do we explain the 1967 split between people like Wang and Kuai, who had no need whatsoever to justify their behavior toward the work team?

There is one early study by William Hinton of the Cultural Revolution at Qinghua. Based solely on interviews conducted under the Workers' Propaganda Team occupation of Qinghua in the early 1970s, Hinton's understanding was compromised by limited access to alternative voices while the

Cultural Revolution was still in progress.<sup>11</sup> Now it is time to look back at this important university again.

This chapter hopes to complicate the story that Walder tells about faction formation in the universities. It is certainly true that during the movement, students were constantly engaged in opportunistic speculations in unpredictable political circumstances. However, students did not base their actions solely on self-interested calculations of the center's signals. Their passions and political convictions also played a crucial role. Passion and convictions, in the extremely volatile political atmosphere of the first fifty days of the Cultural Revolution, emboldened student activists to behave according to their own thinking and offered them the much needed confidence to pit themselves against various overbearing authorities. Later, convictions were fine-tuned ideologically. It was these increasingly crystallized ideological standpoints that redefined the groupings of the Qinghua students. Such ideologies were genuine and important: they were almost the sole resource allowing the out-of-favor faction to stick to its cause. Though ideologies might have developed through struggle, they were not simply added on as rhetoric or "legitimation."

The focus here is on the experiences of student leaders and activists in the movement. In the Cultural Revolution, followers switched organizational affiliation according to which way the political wind blew; leaders and activists, who had invested much more in a particular course of action, showed greater commitment and consistency. Thus, it is mainly through the latter that one defines the different ideas and actions of the competing factions.<sup>12</sup>

*The Qinghua Dilemma: Stuck between Redness  
and Expertise, Obedience and Independence*

Qinghua University was meant to be a model institution producing graduates who were both "red and expert." Even before this slogan was officially proposed by Mao in 1958, Qinghua party secretary Jiang Nanxiang declared his intention in 1952 to build Qinghua into a "cradle of red engineers."<sup>13</sup> Mao Zedong later proclaimed that education was supposed to make students develop their morality, knowledge, and physical condition as a whole, and to create laborers with both knowledge and socialist beliefs.<sup>14</sup> Quickly, Jiang Nanxiang followed Mao's lead in drafting his concrete plan for Qing-

hua. In moral education, students should learn Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought, participate in production, and learn from peasants and workers. As for expertise, students should master calculus, basic scientific theories, experimental skills, and at least one foreign language; they should conduct research and solve problems independently. In addition, physical training should prepare students to work in good health for their country for at least fifty years.<sup>15</sup>

In large part, Qinghua achieved these goals. From 1958 to 1966, fifty-nine new laboratories were built and 4.6 billion yuan were allocated to the school.<sup>16</sup> The curriculum was rigorous: a complete undergraduate education included theory classes, discussion and problem-solving, laboratory experiments, project design, practical training, testing, and thesis design.<sup>17</sup> With a faculty made up of China's best scientists and engineers, Qinghua shaped students to become experts in their fields. In 1959, at an average age of only twenty-three and a half, Qinghua students designed and manufactured China's first nuclear reactor.<sup>18</sup> Qinghua students were red, too. In 1961, Jiang Nanxiang defined redness as "the two upholds and one obedience," that is, "to uphold the Communist Party's leadership and socialism" and "to obey the state's orders on job assignments."<sup>19</sup> This definition was clear-cut and enforceable—it put the issue that concerned students most, job allocation, completely under state control. Many interviewees reported that the political education was persuasive and successful, and each year Qinghua graduates were sent to every corner of the country, hoping to contribute to the motherland.<sup>20</sup>

On the surface, redness and expertise seemed successfully combined. The Qinghua party leadership made clear that the only way to become a student cadre was to be both red and expert. Students were stratified according to this dual standard. At the top were student cadres, with excellent academic credentials and at least fair class labels, or whose political performance was excellent while their studies were decent.<sup>21</sup> With regard to the composition of the school cadres, the Qinghua leaders also tried their best to combine redness and expertise. Since all department party secretaries and chairs were required to be full professors or at least associate professors, the best minds at Qinghua were recruited into the party machine and nominally became part of its political elite.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, beneath the surface, the tension between redness and expertise remained intense. Many students felt trapped: "The emphasis on

expertise urged us to judge people according to their true ability, while the general emphasis on class background held against this view.”<sup>23</sup> In fact, not just the students, but the entire school was suffering from the same predicament. Even though Jiang Nanxiang always claimed that the university’s 108 professors were “the most precious treasures of Qinghua” and it was true that these professors received an average monthly salary as high as 267 yuan, many were often put in a precarious position by Jiang and his Qinghua party committee.<sup>24</sup> Often, politically suspect professors and teachers became the targets and scapegoats of political movements. In the 1957 Anti-rightist campaign (*fan you*), Jiang and his party apparatus arbitrarily identified 571 rightists, many of whom were faculty members.<sup>25</sup> During the Great Leap Forward, the Qinghua leadership’s statement that “we should be too left rather than right toward the teachers” was cited by Mao as a model for all China’s schools. Again, in the 1959 Anti-rightist-tendency campaign (*fan youqing*), teachers were harshly criticized.<sup>26</sup> Thus, as one teacher later argued in the Cultural Revolution, professors who earned 200 yuan were not as privileged as cadres who earned 70 yuan. When the cadres abused their political power, they were more reactionary than the professors.<sup>27</sup> These inherent conflicts between party cadres and teachers in the Qinghua structure became so prominent that they became a focal point in the later split among red guards.

Despite Jiang Nanxiang’s attempt to balance redness and expertise, the school’s party organization was dictatorial and oppressive. Before the Cultural Revolution, the Qinghua party organization (proudly called a “leak-proof engine” by Jiang) was the school’s absolute ruler.<sup>28</sup> With frequent group study sessions held by each unit, party leaders ensured the rigorous supervision of each party member in the 18 general party branches (*zongzhi*) and 238 party branches (*zhibu*).<sup>29</sup> In order to control students more effectively, in 1953, Jiang Nanxiang initiated a political counselor (*zhengzhi fudaoyuan*) system, which selected party or Youth League students who excelled in both academics and politics to become counselors.<sup>30</sup> Political counselors were usually seniors or graduate students. Counted as half-time paid cadres, these counselors organized politically active students to attend short-course party schools, selected student cadres in each class, arranged political educational programs, and helped to identify “backward” students who had either moral or academic problems and reported them to the school authorities.<sup>31</sup> Through the counselor system, the commands of the



school authorities could reach every single student, fortifying the absolute control of the party.

Remarkably, the school's rigid political control did not prevent students' independent intellectual adventures, largely due to the school's dual emphasis on both expertise and redness. As Wang Fan eloquently put it thirty years later, "Even though the state and the school party organization forced us to be obedient tools, the academic training encouraged us to love exploring and to seek truth with an independent spirit."<sup>32</sup> The university provided a three-year course on Marxist-Leninist theory and numerous talks on domestic and international politics.<sup>33</sup> The course provided students with a sociological vocabulary to analyze society, while the various talks equipped them with a solid grasp of political conditions and fostered a strong political consciousness. Even in the dry theory course, students applied their truth-seeking spirit. They seriously discussed national affairs and diligently honed their debating skills. To a great degree, it was Jiang Nanxiang's education that empowered students to think and make their own independent judgments. Ironically, the Qinghua students, pining for a more active role in a participatory politics, made the party authorities their first political target as their passions were unleashed in the Cultural Revolution.

A left wind blew hard after 1962. Following Mao Zedong's 1962 Beidaihe speech emphasizing class struggle, Qinghua was pressured to recruit more students with "good" class backgrounds and higher political reliability.<sup>34</sup> However, because of Jiang Nanxiang's special standing in the Education Ministry, the school still had leeway in deciding quotas for each province and made its own admission decisions.<sup>35</sup> As a result, Qinghua had a disproportionately large number of undergraduates from the three places that provided the highest quality students: Beijing, Shanghai, and Jiangsu.<sup>36</sup> Though class origin became increasingly important, whenever the pressure let up a bit Qinghua would recruit academically first-tier students. For example, in 1962, when political performance was emphasized over class origins, Qinghua adjusted its original admission plan by 20 percent so as to admit more students with high scores.<sup>37</sup>

As the atmosphere outside the university became increasingly politicized, Qinghua's consistent emphasis on study made it seem revisionist. On February 13, 1964, the first day of the lunar New Year, Mao held a meeting of national educators to reform China's educational system. He harshly criticized the school system, saying that too many courses were killing students

and the tests were like ambushing enemies. He ordered that the length of schooling be shortened and the number of courses be cut in half.<sup>38</sup>

Jiang Nanxiang reacted quickly. He actively grasped Mao's directive to combine schooling with production and used Qinghua's school factory as a way to show his adherence to the Maoist line. Also, after discussing the curriculum with some trusted teachers, he changed the six years of Qinghua schooling to five and a half years, but protected the important basics. Instead of radically changing the existing structure, Jiang did his best to maintain the strict schooling by tinkering with nonessential matters and argued that Mao's words needed to be interpreted before applying them to science and technology schools like Qinghua.<sup>39</sup> However, Jiang could not save Qinghua when Mao became angrier with the education system. In his famous May 7, 1966 letter to Lin Biao, Mao alleged, "the phenomenon of capitalist intellectuals dominating the schools must not continue!"<sup>40</sup> It was now impossible for Jiang to maintain Qinghua's system by making a few minor corrections. Still, Jiang made a last attempt to defend the university against Mao's charges. In a speech addressed to Qinghua's cadres, Jiang declared he would "lead his boat of ten thousand people against the wind" (*kai wanren dingfeng chuan*).<sup>41</sup> By doing so, Jiang put himself in great danger.

By this time, Qinghua's students were agitated. The constant political study on opposing and preventing revisionism (*fan xiu fang xiu*) and the incessant calls for readiness against a possible world war made everyone vigilant. Crucially, Mao's 1964 proposal regarding the five standards for revolutionary successors pushed students even more into politics and fanned their passion for political careers.<sup>42</sup> After 1964, a group of students, distinguished by their political enthusiasm and deep concern for matters of national importance, emerged and became increasingly active. They came from different class backgrounds (both red and middle classes) and occupied different positions in the Qinghua hierarchy, but their zealotry in applying Mao Zedong Thought to everything brought them together. Some of them were student cadres, but despite their favored status bestowed by the school's party organization, they held to their strong opinions and challenged the school authorities.<sup>43</sup> Jiang Nanxiang's "against the wind" stand irritated the enthusiasts who found their school head inactive in implementing Chairman Mao's call. For these "revolutionary successors," the Cultural Revolution offered a long-awaited liberating moment to break away from Jiang Nanxiang's dictatorial control and finally pursue

political dreams of their own. Soon, everyone at Qinghua was thrown into an unprecedented political storm.

*Passion in the First Stage: June–September 1966*

On receiving the Central Committee's May Sixteenth Circular concerning the Cultural Revolution, the Qinghua party leaders found Mao's intentions by no means clear.<sup>44</sup> They understood that the Cultural Revolution was another political movement that they had to lead. But, who were the "representatives of the capitalists" and how was this group to be defined? And what was the goal of the movement?<sup>45</sup> As for the Qinghua students, most were overwhelmed by the flood of forceful editorials in *People's Daily* beginning in June 1966. The editorials incited them to take action: "Whether you truly support socialism will be judged by your activities and performance in this current Cultural Revolution."<sup>46</sup>

In this chaotic, confusing, and anxious climate, the first group of big character posters denouncing Jiang Nanxiang appeared on June 2.<sup>47</sup> Faced with criticism, the party quickly reacted. Cadres warned students not to criticize Jiang Nanxiang and equated student critics with the 1957 rightists. Furthermore, the school authorities mobilized their highly efficient party organization to orchestrate a poster-writing campaign by student cadres to counterattack the critics.<sup>48</sup> Under the direction of the party, the political counselors also ordered student cadres to work against the students who had criticized the Qinghua party apparatus.<sup>49</sup> On June 3, in one day, ten thousand big character posters allegedly appeared at Qinghua defending the Qinghua party leadership for sticking to the socialist line. The writers were the obedient student cadres. Feeling a sense of duty, they carried out their routine task of attacking those who criticized party authority.<sup>50</sup>

Classes stopped on June 3. At that moment, only the children of high-level cadres had any knowledge of what was going on. As soon as Nie Yuanzi's poster criticizing the Beijing University party leadership as a black gang was sanctioned and published in *People's Daily* on June 2, Liu Tao (daughter of China's president Liu Shaoqi) and He Pengfei (son of Marshal He Long) were summoned home by their parents, informed that Jiang Nanxiang had been labeled a capitalist roader by the Politburo, and urged to be active.<sup>51</sup>

On June 4, Liu Tao and He Pengfei each wrote a poster harshly criticizing Jiang as a revisionist. The tone of these two posters was trenchant

and condescending, but because of the special positions of Liu and He, the posters had a huge impact on campus. At the outset, in addition to these children of high-level cadres, another group of students also stood out. This was the group of political enthusiasts who were excited about the movement and eager to contribute—both Wang Fan and Kuai Dafu belonged to this group. They, together with the high-level cadres' children, provided the momentum in this very first stage of Qinghua's Cultural Revolution. Responding to Mao's instruction to fight revisionism and impassioned by Nie Yuanzi's bold poster, these students condemned their school leaders as revisionists and black gang elements.

In these first seven days of Qinghua's Cultural Revolution, those who dared criticize the Qinghua party leaders all had the credentials to participate for they all came from "good" or "fair" class backgrounds. Students of "bad" class backgrounds were silent because life had taught them not to "consider political movements as a way to achieve anything."<sup>52</sup> They had no credentials to speak out. Thus, at this moment, student activism required both decent class status and a strong motivation to join in, but the motivation could be derived either from having high-level cadres as parents or from political passion.

Jiang Nanxiang was flexible. On June 5, as soon as he noticed the strangely identical actions of the children of high-level cadres, he took a proactive tack. One day after Liu Tao and He Pengfei's posters, Jiang made an impressive self-criticism—he welcomed all the posters and swore to follow the example of the students. He again organized the political counselors to write posters, this time ostensibly to criticize the Qinghua party leadership. However, despite his best efforts to follow and control the students, Jiang could not save himself and his comrades.<sup>53</sup> Party rule at the university ended on June 9, when an outside work team comprising 513 members entered Qinghua. Under the work team regime, the former power-holders became the objects of dictatorship (*bei zhuanzheng*). In one-on-one interrogation sessions, the work team forced teachers to inform on each other. It classified the 2,450 teachers of Qinghua into twenty-seven categories. One hundred thirteen cadres were identified as capitalist roaders, sixteen professors as reactionary academic authorities (*fandong xueshu quanwei*), and fifty other teachers as ox devils and snake spirits. From June 12 to 16, 103 cadres were forced to parade around the campus to be humiliated in public. Political counselors were labeled "black lackeys" (*hei zhaoya*) and student cadres

as “black sprouts of revisionism” (*xiuzhengzhuyi bei miaozhi*).<sup>54</sup> They were removed from their positions by the work team.

The work team utilized the red class children and the anti-Jiang enthusiasts as its power base.<sup>55</sup> These students were assigned to Cultural Revolution committees at different levels to lead the movement. The work team granted students the right to humiliate their former school leaders. With the sanction of the work team, the students’ activities became violent. Teachers and party cadres were humiliated and, for the first time at Qinghua, some were beaten. Political counselors who carried out everyday party management became the direct targets of the radical students.<sup>56</sup> However, bearing in mind the out-of-control result of the Hundred Flowers movement, the work team became afraid that the movement would veer off track. It then demanded absolute control of the movement by identifying the targets and determining the format of each struggle meeting.<sup>57</sup>

Among the new beneficiaries in the work team regime, some were content with the power granted by the work team and submissive to its orders. However, the dictatorial style of the work team did not satisfy everyone. Some of the political enthusiasts, who had just been liberated from the previous rulers of the school and were eager to make revolution in their own way, felt disillusioned. They hated the work team’s overbearing manner and its “sneaky” methods of using secret inquisitions to carry out the movement.<sup>58</sup> Instead, they wanted an open revolution and wanted to lead it themselves, and they did not hesitate to express their antagonism toward the work team.

Kuai Dafu was the leading figure of this anti-work team action. Although handpicked by the work team to lead the Cultural Revolution committee in his department, Kuai challenged the authority of the work team by alleging that “it was not likely to have been sent by Chairman Mao” and that the members of the work team were actually conservatives.<sup>59</sup> On June 16, Kuai Dafu openly interrogated the work team in a poster entitled “Where Is the Work Team Going?” In this poster, he rejected the work team slogan that “we should infinitely trust the work team” and claimed that “we will struggle against those who oppose Mao Zedong Thought, no matter how high he stands or who he is.”<sup>60</sup> On June 21, Kuai commented on an anti-work team poster: “The key to revolution is power. We succeeded in seizing power from the school party. Now, we have to think whether the current power-holders really represent us. If not, we have to seize power

from them again!”<sup>61</sup> The conflict intensified on June 22 when work team member Wang Guangmei (Liu Shaoqi’s wife) failed to show up at a discussion meeting planned for Kuai’s class. Feeling fooled, Kuai reacted drastically by posting a provocative poster addressed to the work team’s leader: “Comrade Ye Lin, What Is Going On?” In this poster, Kuai and his ten die-hards questioned the work team’s political intentions and its seriousness in conducting revolution.<sup>62</sup> Kuai told the work team leader: “We can conduct the Cultural Revolution by ourselves. Before you came, we had already been doing that for a long time!”<sup>63</sup>

Kuai then asked for a school-wide debate to be held on June 24 on whether to support the work team. At the meeting, Kuai argued powerfully against the work team, lacing his speech with quotations from Mao. He accused the work team of disregarding the masses and constraining their revolutionary actions.<sup>64</sup> Outraged and humiliated, the work team decided to make Kuai their major target and started persecuting “Kuai-type people” (*Kuaishi renwu*). Hundreds of posters appeared the day after the debate, all generated by the work team to criticize Kuai. On June 26, Kuai went to the State Council and Party Central Committee to complain, but his efforts were to no avail. Kuai was identified as a counterrevolutionary and deprived of his Youth League membership. He was put into an isolation cell two days later.<sup>65</sup> Just as they treated Kuai, the work team also attacked Wang Fan, labeling him a Kuai-type person, and jailed him.<sup>66</sup>

There was something unique about these Kuai-type people. In general, they were fervent political enthusiasts who wanted to be “revolutionary successors.” Many also held a strong sense of social justice. They noticed the oppressive bureaucratism of the party organization and sincerely believed that its injustices must be fixed. For instance, as a high school student, Kuai Dafu had written a letter to the National People’s Congress, reporting the sufferings of ordinary peasants in his hometown in Binhai, Jiangsu. Believing that the local party organization had gone rotten, he exposed the cadres’ exploitive and oppressive behavior to the National People’s Congress and begged the center to send down able leaders to fix the situation.<sup>67</sup> Passionately, people like Kuai longed for a movement of their own and abhorred the work team for treating them like meek sheep.<sup>68</sup>

Importantly, Kuai-type people had strong political credentials because of their previous revolutionary activities against the school authorities and their impeccable class background; some had been put in important posi-

tions by the work team. But these students also dared to follow their own interpretation of Mao's call, no matter who the power-holders were or what they thought. While the well-informed high cadres' children were satisfied with controlling Qinghua and some academically disadvantaged students were pleased to see the downfall of the previous school leadership, these Kuai-type people kept advancing their own cause and were determined to lead the political movement in their own way. A characteristic of these students was their audacity. Most Kuai-type people were first- or second-year undergraduates at Qinghua—they had only a shallow understanding of the earlier 1957 Anti-rightist campaign and were so confident that they freely pointed out the problems of the work team. It was their political passion to lead the movement that pulled them into the torrent of Mao's plan to dismantle the party-state apparatus and push the movement on.

In its anti-Kuai movement, the work team divided the students. It made some students its supporters; at the same time, it identified fifty counter-revolutionary Kuai-type people, namely, students who opposed the work team.<sup>69</sup> Five hundred people were criticized and asked to provide drafts of their anti-work team posters and letters. Two tried to commit suicide: one died and the other was left permanently handicapped. People who had supported Kuai, signed Kuai's posters, or even applauded Kuai during a debate, were investigated, accused, and forced to confess by the work team.<sup>70</sup>

The political wind changed suddenly after July 18, 1966, when Mao came back to Beijing. Kuai Dafu and others were freed and the emphasis of the Qinghua movement switched back to attacking the Qinghua party authorities. On July 23, 25, and 26, Chen Boda, Kang Sheng, and Jiang Qing attended consecutive meetings at Beijing University, discussing the mistakes of the work teams.<sup>71</sup> On July 27, a poster by Wang Xiaoping, daughter of the Central Cultural Revolution Small Group (hereafter, Central Group) vice-head Wang Renzhong, appeared on the Qinghua campus and openly criticized the work team for following a "mistaken line" (*luxian cuowu*).<sup>72</sup> Two days later, at a meeting of Cultural Revolution activists, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping made self-criticisms for dispatching work teams. Also on the same day, the work team started to withdraw from Qinghua.<sup>73</sup>

Still, the political signals at the Qinghua campus were mixed. Even though Mao had Kuai Dafu specially summoned to attend the meeting of Cultural Revolution activists and secretly sent Premier Zhou to speak with Kuai on July 30 and again on August 1, power-holders from the

work team period were the absolute majority of the Qinghua delegates to the July 29 activists' meeting.<sup>74</sup> On the one hand, more students dared to show their dissatisfaction with the work team and display their sympathy for Kuai after Qinghua's loudspeakers broadcast the July 29 activists' meeting on July 30. On the other hand, the work team's former supporters, especially the children of high-level cadres, still held "official" power. Led by Liu Tao and He Pengfei, they dominated the Qinghua Cultural Revolution Preparatory Committee, an executive organ established by the work team as its successor. To solidify their base, Liu Tao formed an association of poor peasants, workers, and revolutionary cadres (Pinxie) on August 2. However, the association did not win widespread support among Qinghua students; rather, many regarded it as simpleminded and meaningless.<sup>75</sup>

Hence, there was a disparity between Mao's directive and the actual understanding of it at Qinghua. The work team problem remained unsolved: no work team leader had conducted a thorough self-criticism and no official rehabilitation had been granted to the Kuai-types. For the persecuted Kuai-type people, the situation was no better even after Premier Zhou's visit to Qinghua. On August 4, Zhou led a large convoy of limousines carrying central and provincial leaders to Qinghua for a meeting that supposedly rehabilitated the Kuai-type people and praised their "rebellious spirit." The premier claimed that the work team had severe faults, but he also rebuffed requests to discuss the work team's problems and directed that the Preparatory Committee left by the work team be recognized as the leader of Qinghua.<sup>76</sup> As a result, the Kuai-type people were still stigmatized by the accusations made by the work team, whereas the Preparatory Committee announced on August 7 that it would "concentrate fire on attacking the black gang and black line."<sup>77</sup>

Antagonism between students continued unabated. On August 8, a dozen students who wanted to continue discussing the work team problem and fully reinstate the Kuai-type rebels organized the August Eighth Liaison (hereafter, Eights). The cofounders, Wu Dong, Tang Wei, and Chen Yuyan, were all from "good" class backgrounds. Offended that the work team had not publicly admitted its mistakes, the Eights insisted the work team return to Qinghua to apologize so that the students with a rebellious spirit (*zao-fan jingshen*) could be truly rehabilitated.<sup>78</sup> One day after the founding of the Eights, Wang Guangmei urged the Preparatory Committee to form a



mass organization, the August Ninth Liaison (hereafter, Nines), as its power base.<sup>79</sup> As the beneficiaries of the work team, leaders of the Nines refused to deal with the work team's faults. Since the Nines were organized by the Preparatory Committee, which held power on campus, the struggle with the Eights became a fight over power. The process of organized factional division at Qinghua had begun.

The external political situation favored the anti-work team group. On the afternoon of August 8, just after the formation of the Eights, the sixteen points of the Central Committee, which clearly criticized the policies of the work team as misguided, were broadcast at Qinghua.<sup>80</sup> On August 15, Mao's poster "Bombard the Headquarters," which accused the work team of unleashing a "white terror" on campus, appeared at Qinghua.<sup>81</sup> Remarkably, however, inside Qinghua, the pro-work team August Ninth Liaison still dominated. Some children of cadres among the Nines formed a picket corps. They wore their parents' intimidating army uniforms to show off their sense of superiority and power. Ordinary students felt much safer joining the Nines because the group had been initiated by Qinghua's power-holders, that is, the Preparatory Committee, which had been sanctioned by Premier Zhou on August 4. As a result, the Nines became the overwhelming majority, while the Eights were only an intrepid minority. In promoting their agenda, the Eights decided on August 17 that they had to openly rehabilitate Kuai to affirm their "rebellious spirit." The Eights initiated a school-wide discussion on August 19 in an effort to refute what they felt were rumors about the Kuai-type people. In the middle of the meeting, the Nines' picket corps rushed into the meeting hall and beat people who made favorable statements about Kuai, shouting "Revolutions are for leftists only, and rightists should not even think of shaking the sky!" They occupied the meeting hall and ended the debate.<sup>82</sup> In this first major clash between the two groups, which was later called "the August 19 incident," the Nines trampled the Eights by resorting to violence.

Tension between the two groups intensified after Mao's August 18 red guard mass rally in Tiananmen Square, which stimulated the formation of red guards nationwide. On August 20, the Nines organized their key members into the Qinghua University Red Guards, with Liu Jufen, daughter of Liu Ningyi, chair of the National Federation of Trade Unions, as their leader. The members of this group were exclusively children of cadre background.<sup>83</sup> On August 22, the Eights formed a hard-core red guard group,

the Mao Zedong Thought Red Guards. Unlike the elitist Nines' red guards, not only did it include the children of middle peasants and professionals, but the majority were children of ordinary peasants and workers.<sup>84</sup>

The political winds encouraged the Eights to establish their own red guards. On August 22, the very day that the Mao Zedong Thought Red Guards were founded, Premier Zhou Enlai went to Qinghua a second time. During the visit, the premier officially informed the students that the work team had followed "a mistaken line" and exercised "a capitalist dictatorship." The work team leader, Ye Lin, publicly apologized to the students.<sup>85</sup> Even so, the Eights and their Mao Zedong Thought Red Guards were few in number and often in danger. Leaders of the Eights had not been persecuted by the work team; thus the formation of the Eights and their Mao Zedong Thought Red Guards cannot be reduced to self-interest. Repeatedly overwhelmed and trampled by their antagonists, the Eights still insisted on splitting from the powerful majority for they believed that they had the correct grasp of the Maoist cause of the Cultural Revolution, that the masses should be given absolute power and be the major force of the movement. As an Eights' leader articulated their position in his August 22 poster,

When truth is first discovered, it is always believed only by a minority. Being a member of a minority is enormously difficult, for one has to constantly scrutinize one's thoughts to see if they represent those of Chairman Mao. . . . A minority must have faith in the masses. They must sympathize with the masses' initial difficulties in understanding Mao and endure the pain this entails. . . . Being in the minority also requires breaking free from one's ego, because if one puts self-interest first, one will be too afraid to remain true to one's convictions. . . . The minority must have the courage to stand up for what it believes. . . . We denounce those who only follow the political wind, and we must fearlessly fight against all kinds of attacks in order to pass on Mao's thoughts!

At the end of this poster, the author titled himself "a fighter for Mao Zedong Thought," wrote down his name, address, and class background, and welcomed people to join him.<sup>86</sup>

The formation of the two hard-core red guard organizations led to even more intense antagonism. On August 24, two days after the establishment of the Mao Zedong Thought Red Guards, the pro-work team Qinghua University Red Guards launched a "red terror." Allied with red guards of cadre background from eleven middle schools, they tore down all the posters of the Mao Zedong Thought Red Guards and all that attacked the

central leaders who had sent the work team; they also savagely beat some members of the Mao Zedong Thought Red Guards. They then conducted their version of revolutionary action by beating the cadres. The Qinghua University Red Guards and their allies demolished the symbolic school gate built in 1911, and that night they forced 200 cadres out of their homes and made them carry heavy stones. The cadres were ordered to stand in a line carrying big rocks while the red guards stood on both sides, whipping them mercilessly with leather belts.<sup>87</sup>

The violence of the loyalist Qinghua University Red Guards drove many students toward the Mao Zedong Thought Red Guards. After the withdrawal of the work team, the Preparatory Committee and the Qinghua University Red Guards organized the school's former party and administrative cadres for hard, punitive manual labor. Seventy percent of the Qinghua cadres were subjected to hard labor. After the red terror, the Qinghua University Red Guards made the cadres work even harder, forcing them to labor under the scorching sun without being permitted to speak or even take a drink of water. Some cadres were put into temporary cells and interrogated.<sup>88</sup> This inhumane treatment of former cadres greatly alienated many students, especially the former student cadres, from the Qinghua University Red Guards. Moreover, the Qinghua University Red Guards' repeated assertion of the importance of class origins drove away those who were either from non-red class backgrounds or disgusted by the mindlessness of it all.<sup>89</sup> This was also the first official split involving a large number of Qinghua students—the Eights and the Kuai-type people on one hand, fighting against the Nines on the other.

Up until this point, a peculiar form of activism constantly pushed Qinghua's Cultural Revolution onward. This activism came from the political enthusiasts who had seriously participated in the movement and insisted on conducting it according to their own readings of Mao. Convinced that they had truly grasped the essence of the Maoist line, the Kuai-type people rose up since they believed that the work team was violating Mao's teaching that the masses should be given ultimate power. Also holding to what they believed to be the Maoist line, the Eights carved out their own way of fighting for a fair handling of the mistreated and a genuine vindication of their rebellious spirit, despite their overbearing and often violent antagonists. Their zeal in making revolution brought them together and led to their decision to form an anti-work team faction. Without any insider in-

formation or much thought of the consequences, they allowed their convictions, which sometimes threatened their own interests, to be the key driving force in the decisions they made. Therefore, for both the Kuai-type people and the Eights, this passion—derived from their worship of Mao Zedong Thought, their effort to understand Mao, and their yearning to put these understandings into action in what they considered a truly democratic fashion—was the main impetus of their activism.

It is true that in the first two months of the Cultural Revolution almost all the activists came from “good” or at least “fair” class backgrounds. The most prominent players—the steadfast rebels such as the peasant’s son Kuai Dafu, the ordinary revolutionary cadres’ children such as Wu Dong and Chen Yuyan, and the staunchest work team supporters such as the high-level cadre’s son He Pengfei—all came from red class backgrounds. Many of them were already party members. Thus, neither political status nor class labels decided students’ political orientation. What also needs to be noted is that in this very first stage of the Cultural Revolution, the political behavior of students was not simply a matter of deciphering political signals. Before August 8, the message that “the work team had done wrong” was too weak and vague at Qinghua to determine the anti-work team students’ political stand.

At this point, the political behavior of students was not consistently or consciously a matter of pursuing self-interest. Students had not discovered the structural reasons for their different school experiences and located their interests. It was later, through the debates on the Qinghua cadres, that students learned to identify their positions in the pre-Cultural Revolution days and developed ideas about how to behave politically in the newly volatile atmosphere. Only then would Qinghua students systematically reflect upon the social implications of the Cultural Revolution and become more aware of their positions and interests.

*Factions Redefined: Politics and Ideology,  
September 1966–May 1967*

By September 1966, the signals from the center were too clear to mistake. Though trying their best to suppress the Mao Zedong Thought Red Guards’ criticism of the work team, under heightened political pressure from Mao, the loyalist Qinghua University Red Guards shifted ground by sacrificing

Wang Guangmei.<sup>90</sup> The deepening accusations at the center against Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping led directly to the demise of the Qinghua University Red Guards. According to Mao's sixteen points, the major targets of the Cultural Revolution were the "party leaders taking the capitalist road."<sup>91</sup> This put the Qinghua University red guards in a terrible bind, for some of the so-called capitalist roaders were their parents. On September 6, the Third Headquarters of Beijing College-Level Red Guards (hereafter, Third Headquarters), made up of rebel red guards, was founded and it soon gained the favor of the Central Cultural Revolution Small Group. Zhou Enlai met with Third Headquarters representatives on September 26 and stated that they were true proletarian leftists and that the charges made against them by the work teams and the factions that opposed them were mistaken. The leadership committee of the Qinghua University Red Guards resigned on September 29.<sup>92</sup>

By the end of September, the Mao Zedong Thought Red Guards had become the biggest faction at Qinghua. Now that their common enemy was gone, the festering disagreements between the Mao Zedong Thought Red Guards and Kuai-type people came to a head. Though the Kuai-type people were supposedly rehabilitated by the Mao Zedong Thought Red Guards, they had never been able to make their own voices heard. Dependent, they could not really resume their leading position and reestablish their reputation. Moreover, many members of the Mao Zedong Thought Red Guards, especially the former student cadres (many of whom had joined the Eights relatively late) distrusted the Kuai-type people. They disliked some Kuai-type people's defiance of authority and thought they were just chasing after fame.<sup>93</sup> However, such latent and unarticulated dislike was soon buried by another onslaught of politics.

After the establishment of the Third Headquarters, Kuai Dafu became its deputy chief and, on September 24, under the direct encouragement of the Central Cultural Revolution Small Group, Kuai established his own Qinghua organization, the Jinggangshan Red Guards.<sup>94</sup> At first, Jinggangshan had only a dozen members, made up mainly of Kuai-type people, including Wang Fan.<sup>95</sup> The new group's organizational principles were noteworthy: "Political performance is the most vital criterion for recruitment; though we generally require our members to have 'good' class backgrounds, we by no means rely on class origins alone."<sup>96</sup> Anyone who "has a sincerely rebellious spirit and acts according to Mao's thoughts and the sixteen points can

join.”<sup>97</sup> Even more surprising was the ominous quality of the group’s declaration: “The two-line struggle has been intense from the outset of the Cultural Revolution. In June and July *some* party leaders at the center followed the wrong class line, and even up to this day Chairman Mao’s sixteen points could not be implemented. . . . We will dare to remove any person from his position, no matter how high, if he defies Mao Zedong Thought.”<sup>98</sup> Only one week later, the Central Group took aim at the “bourgeois reactionary line” (*zichan jieji fandong luxian*) and Kuai Dafu became one of its most stalwart vanguards.

On October 6, 1966, all the central party leaders (except for Mao and Lin Biao) attended a mass meeting to formally launch the campaign against the “bourgeois reactionary line.” At the meeting, Zhang Chunqiao announced an urgent directive from the Central Military Committee, demanding once again the rehabilitation of those labeled counterrevolutionaries by the work teams and stressed that this directive was “applicable to every school.”<sup>99</sup> This clearly showed that the targets of this campaign were power-holders like Liu Shaoqi, who was blamed for sending the work team. At this crucial meeting, it was Kuai Dafu who led one hundred thousand university students in swearing an oath to attack the capitalist roaders. Overnight, Kuai became a superstar.

Back at Qinghua, Kuai’s originally tiny Jinggangshan Red Guards soon became the largest organization at Qinghua. Kuai’s unmatched position and his group’s loose admission requirements attracted all kinds of “impure” people: the rank and file of the former Nines, and even students with bad records or family problems. All this made the former student cadres of the Mao Zedong Thought Red Guards very uneasy over Kuai’s burgeoning power. Even within the Jinggangshan Red Guards, veteran rebels such as Wang Fan could not agree with this hasty growth of his own group.<sup>100</sup> Starting on December 1, Kuai attempted to unify Qinghua’s three major red guard groups, Jinggangshan and two subsections of the Mao Zedong Thought Red Guards.<sup>101</sup> Jiang Qing and her allies greatly hastened the process of unification. On December 18 Zhang Chunqiao was sent to urge Kuai to be more vigorous in uniting all of Qinghua’s students. Zhang also informed Kuai of the Central Group’s specific target in the movement and asked Kuai to take the lead.<sup>102</sup> Just one day after Zhang’s visit, a unified Qinghua University Jinggangshan Corps was established with Kuai as its commander in chief.

Clearly, the rise and fall of red guard factions was strongly influenced

by the sponsorship of central political figures. The once-powerful Qinghua University Red Guards suddenly crashed and burned, while the formerly humbled Kuai Dafu now led the majority of Qinghua students. But even under direct manipulation by the center, differences among students and distrust of the stigmatized students by former student cadres persisted and gradually became more pronounced after the establishment of the Jinggangshan Corps.

The first “feat” of the newly founded Jinggangshan Corps was the “December 25 Great Action.” On the early morning of December 25, six thousand Qinghua students and teachers, dominated by Jinggangshaners, entered the center of Beijing via five different routes. They posted anti-Liu and anti-Deng posters, shouted “Down with the reactionary capitalist line,” and sang propaganda songs.<sup>103</sup> This was an enormously influential mass action that publicly criticized Liu Shaoqi.<sup>104</sup> Its sensational display realized the hopes of the Central Group. On December 30 Jiang Qing and Yao Wenyan personally went to Qinghua to congratulate Jinggangshan for its revolutionary enthusiasm and leadership.<sup>105</sup>

However, despite the outside recognition of the group’s accomplishments, the action aggravated the group’s inner tensions. Once the Jinggangshan Corps was established, Kuai built up his own circle, including his old dissident comrades from the work team period and others who had recently gained his personal favor. Kuai’s ego was swelling. He soon ordered a special group of Jinggangshaners to compile the *Collected Works of Kuai Dafu*, much on the pattern of eminent central party leaders.<sup>106</sup> Faced with a string of Kuai’s egotistic acts, only five days after the Jinggangshan Corps was founded, the former Eights’ founder Tang Wei and three close associates withdrew. A young man of strong opinions, Tang Wei could not agree with Kuai on the December 25 Great Action. He considered it ill-advised and shallow that Kuai, instead of criticizing the mistakes of the reactionary headquarters, focused on humiliating Liu Shaoqi.<sup>107</sup> When Kuai rejected Tang Wei’s advice, Tang resigned. In Tang’s public resignation letter, he criticized Kuai’s dictatorial work style and growing ego, the corps leaders’ factionalism, and their disrespect for the masses.<sup>108</sup>

Tang Wei’s criticism of Kuai’s showy and radical style resonated with other former Mao Zedong Thought Red Guards, especially former student cadres. Although they had supported Kuai in criticizing the capitalist reactionary line, these student cadres found the newly formed Kuai clique

too defiant and thuggish. For instance, the clique dared to ignore Premier Zhou Enlai's admonition and tricked Wang Guangmei back to Qinghua for a struggle session.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, these critics were concerned that Jinggangshan included too many people of "impure" class background and felt that the backgrounds of the Kuai clique (mainly the newcomers) were too "complicated" to be reliable. Some newcomers launched fierce attacks on the former school authorities. One person in the Kuai clique claimed that all Qinghua party members were rotten and needed to be removed because "they obtained their party membership simply by flattering leaders."<sup>110</sup> Such a raging tone perturbed many of Kuai's earlier supporters, especially the former student cadres who were drawn to the Eights and Kuai due to their revulsion over the Nines' maltreatment of Qinghua's cadres. Even Kuai's veteran allies, like Wang Fan and Sun Nutao, left him.<sup>111</sup> Resentment of Kuai and his clique was mounting. In fact, the first school-wide meeting after the foundation of the corps turned out to be a gathering to air complaints about Kuai. Many thought Kuai had gained his position too easily and that "only authority gained through real effort can be respected."<sup>112</sup>

Barely two weeks after the Jinggangshan alliance, these frustrations led to the open establishment of five regiments (*zongdui*), made up of the former Eights' leaders, which challenged Kuai's dictatorship.<sup>113</sup> Antagonism toward Kuai intensified when "his men" mistakenly attacked the Central Group advisor Kang Sheng. Kuai's core group claimed that Kang Sheng was a reactionary, which deeply irritated Jiang Qing and her Central Group allies. On January 22, 1967, Chen Boda telephoned Kuai twice, angrily ordering him to end the struggle against Kang Sheng.<sup>114</sup> Jiang Qing charged Kuai with "living off his past gains" (*chi laoben*).<sup>115</sup> The Central Group worried that as soon as the students gained power, they would slide off the track. In response to this criticism, Kuai on the one hand immediately distanced himself from the attack on Kang Sheng and warned his people away from the Kang Sheng issue. On the other hand, he stuck with his comrades, claiming that they had acted out of good intentions.<sup>116</sup>

For the anti-Kuai regiments, Kuai's blunder supplied a golden opportunity to take further action. On January 24 regiment leaders requested that the corps's headquarters be "rectified," and eight battle teams from different regiments established a liaison to rectify the Kuai clique's actions. Kuai regarded this as a personal challenge and overreacted by calling his critics Trotskyites angling for power. He then initiated a campaign against Tang



Wei and other former Eights leaders who were now in the regiments. The Trotskyite label was so vicious that it threatened to disrupt the unity of Jinggangshan, which concerned Jiang Qing. Jiang Qing ordered her secretary to tell Kuai of her position and two days later, on February 7, Kuai had to admit his mistake at a mass meeting and eventually rescinded the Trotskyite charge.<sup>117</sup> Of course, this did not quell the antagonism.

Having committed serious political mistakes and being challenged on campus, Kuai was still the golden boy in the eyes of the central leaders. On February 26 when Vice-Premier and Public Security Minister Xie Fuzhi received a Shanghai “power seizure committee,” he urged Kuai, who accompanied him, to build a stable power base at Qinghua.<sup>118</sup> After *People’s Daily* publicized the Guiyang Cotton Factory model of uniting each workshop and *Red Flag* publicized Mao’s directive calling for a “triple alliance” of revolutionary cadres, students, and soldiers, the pressure on the regiment leaders was intense and it was increasingly difficult for them to survive as separate groups.<sup>119</sup> Faced with Kuai’s demand that all groups above the level of a class (*banji*) be disbanded, the regiment leaders rolled them back into separate battle teams organized at the class level. At this point, the uneasiness about Kuai’s radical and defiant manner was strong but still not openly articulated. The leaders of the regiments had been unable to come to terms with their concerns about Kuai; they remained helpless until the contentious issue of how to deal with cadres rose to the fore.<sup>120</sup>

On March 30, 1967, a *Red Flag* article specifically condemned the work team’s reactionary policy at Qinghua and claimed that most of the Qinghua cadres were good.<sup>121</sup> The faltering regiment leaders quickly took notice, since the article resonated perfectly with their views on the former Qinghua cadres and they could finally absorb the cadres into the power center to replace Kuai’s dictatorship. They soon plunged into the debate on Qinghua’s cadres, which had been the focal point for Qinghua cadres and teachers for about a month after a March 1 *Red Flag* editorial entitled “We Must Treat Cadres Correctly.”<sup>122</sup> These Qinghua cadres, who had never been rehabilitated after being removed by the work team, began to request the restoration of their rights. But many Qinghua teachers, who had been ruled and controlled by the party cadres before the Cultural Revolution, did not want to let the cadres off too easily. During the Cultural Revolution, these teachers had been liberated from the previous school party’s dictatorship and sided with Kuai.<sup>123</sup>

The first step in the counterattack against Kuai's group was to lash out against the relatively vulnerable teachers' organization that supported Kuai. The reticence of the teachers to liberate the cadres could be interpreted as reactionary and was used to discredit Kuai. Regiment battle teams made up of former student cadres led the rhetorical assault on the teachers' organization for arguing that "all of Qinghua's cadres were rotten" and "professors who earned 200 yuan were more revolutionary than cadres who earned 46 yuan."<sup>124</sup> Shen Ruhuai, who had emerged as the most adamant regiment leader and had been the party secretary of his class before the Cultural Revolution, also turned his criticism toward the teachers' organization.<sup>125</sup> These regiment leaders had strong connections with the former Qinghua cadres. With this new national focus on Qinghua's cadres, they wanted to liberate the former cadres and at the same time discredit Kuai Dafu.<sup>126</sup>

Their chance came on April 12 when Kuai's clique made another serious gaffe, alleging that the March 30 *Red Flag* article on liberating the Qinghua cadres was erroneous.<sup>127</sup> Taking this opening, on April 14, Shen Ruhuai and other regiment leaders formed the April Fourteenth Liaison (hereafter, Fourteens) and called themselves the Liberating Cadre Liaison, a name that reflected a cause they truly cared about.<sup>128</sup> At this point, the second serious factional split among Qinghua students started.

The repercussions of this split were huge. After the divide, Qinghua cadres joined the Fourteens, which greatly enhanced this fledgling faction. On April 29, 147 Qinghua cadres posted a public letter, "To All Revolutionary Cadres and Cadres Who Want to Be Revolutionaries." In this letter, they claimed that the Fourteens followed Mao's teachings and were the most resolute group in fighting against the capitalist reactionary line.<sup>129</sup> As the former leaders of Qinghua, these party and administrative cadres were quite influential. Kuai and his followers were furious. On May 1 his group fired back, labeling the cadres' letter an attempt to restore the old Qinghua.<sup>130</sup> Such a strident stand by Jinggangshan drove these cadres and their student sympathizers to support the Fourteens, whose ranks grew rapidly.

From December 1966 to April 1967, the antagonism of the former student cadres toward the Kuai clique came into sharper relief as the movement developed. Soon, an ideological agenda was spelled out, which prepared the foundation for a powerful mass organization counteracting Kuai's corps. Starting at the end of April, ideological debates on Qinghua's cadres were passionately carried on by both sides. The Fourteens launched the first salvo,

arguing that the Cultural Revolution had now reached a new stage and, following Mao's new "triple alliance" formula, that the task of the revolution should turn to building a new regime instead of advancing continuous seizures of power.<sup>131</sup> Since the majority of cadres were good, they should be included in the new regime.<sup>132</sup> On the other side of the debate, Kuai and his fellows blasted this "new-stage argument."<sup>133</sup> They maintained that if cadres were to be absorbed into the alliance, they must be carefully scrutinized and tested. The pro-Kuai teacher's organization, composed of some who were once mistreated by the cadres, also contributed to Kuai's cause. Following Kuai's argument that the Qinghua party members were rotten, they claimed that the cadres of the old Qinghua were corrupt as well. They maintained that since Liberation in 1949, the cadres had become the new privileged class. Though the cadres did not necessarily earn more than professors, their political privileges made them overbearing and oppressive. They were the social base of the capitalist Liu-Deng headquarters.<sup>134</sup>

Because cadres represented political authority in the old Qinghua system, the discussion of their role raised questions about how to evaluate the old Qinghua of the first seventeen years of the People's Republic, which in turn decisively affected one's understanding and assessment of the Cultural Revolution. The corps gave a rather negative evaluation of Qinghua's past seventeen years, while the Fourteens gave the past more credit—they disliked the corps's iconoclastic attitude of "repudiating everything and overturning everything" of the past.<sup>135</sup> These debates stemmed from deeper contradictions in the previous Qinghua hierarchy and the sociopolitical structure of the previous seventeen years. It was through such debates that the stratified nature of the previous power structure became clearer. Many interviewees recalled that such debates led them to reflect on the early People's Republic power structure and their own positions in it, and that these reflections influenced their later decisions.

Students began to understand their positions in the past more clearly and began to switch their initial affiliations as the debates deepened. Rapidly, the Fourteens expanded from around seven hundred people in the middle of April (before the debate) to about two thousand at the end of May.<sup>136</sup> The former student cadres overwhelmingly flowed to the Fourteens: an investigation by the Jinggangshan Corps revealed that by April 26, among all the student cadres of the eight departments surveyed, over 60 percent had joined the Fourteens and less than 20 percent had joined

the corps.<sup>137</sup> According to the Fourteens, many of those who stuck with Kuai had been disadvantaged students in the past system—that is, they had either poor academic performance or “bad” class origins—and preferred a radical change.<sup>138</sup> At this point, the more articulated political analyses of the contending groups allowed students to make thoughtful and conscious political choices on factional affiliations. For the Fourteens, the ideological debates prepared a powerful foundation for the crueler organizational split to come.

Remarkably, there was a distinct group of idealist students who, despite their disadvantaged positions in the old sociopolitical structure, held strong beliefs that the first seventeen years of the People’s Republic were dominated by the “red” line and “good” people. The Cultural Revolution, they believed, should not deny everything from the past. These idealists, including the Fourteens’ theorist and key leader Zhou Quanying, played a crucial role in the group and ardently led the movement forward.<sup>139</sup>

The conflict intensified when, after May, the struggle to form a revolutionary committee became the dominant issue. A revolutionary committee was meant to represent a legitimate, formal, and long-term regime, and it was to possess the resources to eliminate any antagonistic force. Kuai took this as an opportunity to throw out the Fourteens once and for all, while the Fourteens were determined to fight back. Vice-Premier and Public Security Minister Xie Fuzhi was deeply concerned over the escalating confrontation between the two groups and he even summoned the leaders of Jingtangshan and the Fourteens and demanded they unite. But Xie was dreaming if he thought his pleas would solve anything. On May 21 Xie personally drafted a four-point document mandating an alliance. His plan allocated seven seats in the Preparatory Revolutionary Committee to Kuai and six to the Fourteens. Thus, the document actually granted Kuai control over the committee.<sup>140</sup> Naturally, leaders of the Fourteens flatly rejected the pact.

While Kuai’s Jingtangshan had already established an election committee for the new regime and was preparing to celebrate its founding on May 28, in Yuanmingyuan, the nearby former imperial park, the agitated Shen Ruhuai and his diehards held a secret meeting. The situation, Shen stated, was that “either the fish dies in the net or the net is torn to pieces. Kuai is already contracting the net. The only way for the Fourteens to survive is to break our way out!”<sup>141</sup> In the early morning of May 29, 1967, Shen and other leaders of the Fourteens announced the establishment of the April

Fourteenth Headquarters, which marked the official organizational split from Kuai. The establishment of the April Fourteenth Headquarters had a great effect. The originally planned founding meeting of Qinghua's revolutionary committee did not happen because Zhou Enlai refused to attend due to the factional divisions at the school. This humiliation deepened the Jinggangshaners' hatred of the Fourteens.

As we have seen, aside from the egos and political ambitions of some group leaders who wanted to lead the Cultural Revolution, there were deep ideological reasons for ordinary students to join the Fourteens. After teachers and cadres (who were more aware of their interests than the students) plunged into the students' debates, the previous Qinghua hierarchy became clearer. Students developed their ideas about this power structure and took sides in the better articulated debates. With an idea of how they would carry on the Cultural Revolution, though in a definitely weaker position and without any official backing from central leaders, the backbone of the Fourteens still stuck with their leaders and fought against Kuai, which required no uncertain commitment.

During these ideological debates, students gradually recognized their own interests; many switched affiliations according to their newly recognized identities.<sup>142</sup> It is true that many students' strongly held ideas were influenced by their past experience and social status in the pre-Cultural Revolution Qinghua system. However, there were idealists who chose sides according to neither status nor interests, but because of their opinions about Qinghua and socialist society in general. When red guards of both factions found that the larger discourses partially resonated with their own ideas, they believed that Mao shared their beliefs, which gave them confidence to carry on. As Ji Peng stated years later,

Both sides were confident in their ways of carrying out the revolution and both sides actually found ammunition in Mao's statements. The Fourteens depended on Mao's new directive on alliances and his earlier argument on preserving a certain part of the old regime. On the other hand, Kuai's corps utilized Mao's theory of continuous revolution, which they interpreted as justification for their radicalism.<sup>143</sup>

*Revolution in Practice: The Last Stage,  
June 1967–July 1968*

Zhou Enlai's no-show for Kuai Dafu's revolutionary committee crushed Kuai's attempt to become the absolute leader of Qinghua. It also made both factions understand the importance of central leaders' support when trying to solve their internal problems. Trying to act on the signals sent by central leaders, both factions shifted their focus to the world outside Qinghua. Such actions surged in July 1967 during the campaign to "drag out a small handful in the army" (*jiu jundui yi xiaocuo*). Soon after the July 20 incident, when the Wuhan military district commander Chen Zaidao detained Central Group members Wang Li and Xie Fuzhi, Kuai announced that he would lead Jinggangshan troops to attack the capitalist roaders in the army, "the armed Liu-Deng line."<sup>144</sup> He sent his Jinggangshan members to seize power in many provinces and their newspapers endlessly denounced army leaders. On July 29, hoping to ferret out more army reactionaries, Kuai led his red guards to search the house of Xu Xiangqian, the chairman of the military Cultural Revolution committee, and confiscated classified documents.<sup>145</sup>

In the meantime, the Fourteens also sent loads of followers to the provinces to struggle against the army.<sup>146</sup> They did not want to seem backward. Besides "dragging out a small handful in the army," both factions followed other calls from the center. They protested in front of the British embassy when Britain allegedly mistreated Hong Kong residents.<sup>147</sup> On August 22, 1967, it was the milder Fourteens who aggressively burned down the British embassy. Even though many members of the Fourteens questioned the sacking of the embassy, the competitive pressure from Jinggangshan led them to do so.<sup>148</sup> Students were stretching hard in their actions and rationalizations to over-fulfill the expectations of the central leaders so as to win their support. In this stage of the movement, students were even more open to manipulation from the center, which they were trying to please. This also led them to deviate from their main goals and political convictions.

Although the students' actions were often inconsistent, their ideologies grew to be increasingly systematic. Both factions displayed great theoretical interest in pursuing the social implications of the Cultural Revolution. By using Marxist class theory and terminology, they offered their own creative interpretations of the upheaval and the preceding seventeen years. In August 1967 the Fourteens' theorist Zhou Quanying wrote one of the most famous

polemics of the Cultural Revolution period, “The Fourteens’ Spirit Shall Win!” After being attacked by Jinggangshan’s nationally circulated newspaper for weeks, Zhou’s article influenced numerous red guards all over the country and was perused by Mao.<sup>149</sup> The article proclaimed the Fourteens’ rationale. The Cultural Revolution, Zhou stated, “was a revolution led by the proletariat, who were also the leading class of the preceding seventeen years.” As for the preceding seventeen years of the socialist regime, the overall class line “was correct and stable . . . and those who dominated were from the ‘good’ classes and the dominated were from the landlord, capitalist, and other ‘bad’ classes.” Thus, Zhou opposed the idea that the Cultural Revolution should be a reversal (*da fan’ge*) of the past and that wealth and power should be redistributed. The article maintained that although there were problems with the central political regime, changes should be moderate and must not overhaul the entire sociopolitical structure.<sup>150</sup>

On the other side were the radical Kuai supporters who called on their followers to “smash the old Qinghua completely” (*chedi zalan jiu Qinghua*). Their principle was “wherever oppression is worst, revolution is strongest.” For them, all Qinghua cadres were corrupt because Jiang Nanxiang had set up his successors among the young party cadres.<sup>151</sup> Thus, though the university leaders had already fallen, the danger from the second and the third generations of cadres persisted. In order to overthrow the past rule completely, Jinggangshan refused to give any power to the former cadres and insistently denounced the past seventeen years.<sup>152</sup> As we have seen, in this stage even though students at times acted irrationally and inconsistently in their effort to win the favor of higher-ups, and even though there was indeed a gap between their deeds and goals, they were still seriously thinking and reflecting upon the past.

By the end of 1967, Mao had backed off from supporting rampage and anarchy and the newspapers started to urge students to return to school. After the focus of the two factions shifted back to campus, the competition between Jinggangshan and the Fourteens degenerated into armed skirmishes. Jinggangshan persecuted several cadres who supported the Fourteens. In response, the Fourteens aggressively lashed out against some teachers siding with Jinggangshan. Although both sides suffered casualties, neither would stop fighting.<sup>153</sup> The trigger came in March 1968, when Nie Yuanzi incited an armed fight at Beijing University, devastating her enemy and opening the way to the establishment of her own revolutionary committee. Soon

after that, in an April 1968 *People's Daily* article, Mao called on people to “never concede” when facing class enemies.<sup>154</sup> Inspired by Nie's success and encouraged by Mao's new order, on April 26, 1968, Kuai Dafu started the famous Hundred Day War in Qinghua.

Mao could not understand why his repeated orders to Qinghua students to stop fighting had no effect.<sup>155</sup> In the end, Mao turned to the method that he had earlier so harshly criticized—he sent in an outside work team. At noon on July 27, a Workers' Propaganda Team made up of more than six hundred workers and soldiers marched onto the Qinghua campus to halt the students' armed fights. The embattled Fourteens welcomed the team wholeheartedly, while Kuai, in an overwhelmingly dominant position, ordered his troops to open fire on the intruding force that had placed his final victory out of reach. As a result, five workers died and 731 were wounded. During the fight, Kuai sent a telegram to Mao. Appealing for help, he wrote: “At the direction of an unknown black hand, a force of one hundred thousand people entered Qinghua and was slaughtering the Jinggangshaners.”<sup>156</sup>

Shocked and furious at what Kuai's group had done to his work team, on July 28, several hours after Kuai's followers had opened fire, Mao summoned five prominent red guard leaders to the Great Hall of the People and presided over a meeting that dragged on from 3:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. All the important Cultural Revolution leaders attended this meeting at which Mao made clear his determination to stop the armed battles in China's universities once and for all. At first, Kuai Dafu did not show up. Mao wondered why and asked sarcastically, “Isn't he trying to find the black hand? . . . How can he hunt it out? The black hand is me!”<sup>157</sup> For Mao, his original plan for a revolution in education was dashed by the very students he had hoped would carry it out. Mao said, “it has been two years since you vowed to struggle, to criticize, and to transform [the school system], but now, you do not struggle, criticize or transform. . . . When you struggle, you are just carrying out armed fights with each other!”<sup>158</sup> Mao had high expectations for Kuai Dafu, but the young leader had deeply disappointed him. But even at this moment, Mao still thought highly of Kuai: “In my eyes, Kuai Dafu is a good guy . . . [but] he was manipulated by some bad people around him.” For Mao, using the work team to “oppress” Kuai was his only choice. In contrast, Mao labeled the Fourteens as “anti-Cultural Revolution.” He especially resented a sentence in Zhou Quanying's famous polemic. Mao declared: “The Fourteens claim that ‘The 414 Spirit Shall Win.’ I am not



delighted. They say that the people who won power could not maintain it. Does this mean that the proletarian class gained the regime but should give it up to the Fourteens?!" But Mao never interrupted the Fourteens' growth and even ordered Zhou Quanying to be released from prison.<sup>159</sup>

At this point, Mao had certainly changed his attitude and strategy toward using the red guards. Instead of allowing students to wreak havoc at all levels of the party-state, he wanted a more stable situation and hoped to begin reconstruction of the regime. He worried that his orders would not be carried out because so many pockets of armed conflict had popped up. Jinggangshan's blunder made Mao decide to abandon the use of red guards: "Now the young revolutionary generals are committing mistakes" (*xianzai shi xiaojiang fan cuowu de shihou le*).<sup>160</sup> Following the fate of Qinghua's red guards, workers' propaganda teams occupied all the schools in China and the once shining red guards were pushed off the stage. This also ended the spectacular history of Qinghua's red guards and their factional confrontations.

As we have seen, in this brutal last stage of Qinghua's red guard movement, ideological differences between the two factions were still developing and students kept pondering the ideological meaning of their struggle. However, the intense competition between the two factions distorted their behavior. In trying so hard to win support from the higher-ups, the students engaged in actions that became increasingly detached from their convictions. Later, during the intensive armed fights, survival and helping one's group and friends to survive took precedence. When Mao decided to eliminate the red guards, students were utterly vulnerable. There was little they could do but watch as the red guard movement quickly evaporated.

### *Conclusion*

It seemed that the hatred between Jinggangshan and the Fourteens would last forever, especially after members on both sides had been killed or severely wounded. However, shortly after the Workers' Propaganda Team entered the campus, students calmed down. It was time for many students to leave school after these two intense years of Cultural Revolution. Hatred abated quickly when real-life problems—job allocations—demanded their attention. The sad and abrupt abandonment by Mao made some red guards realize the absurdity of their fights. As a red guard poem noted, "the Nines disintegrated with no gain; the Eights disappeared into nothing."<sup>161</sup>

Nevertheless, the absurdities and distortions of the students' behavior in the last stage do not mean that their choices came from nowhere or were patternless. Past studies of red guard factionalism have argued that the divisions lay in either different class labels or different relations to the work team. However, neither the political nor the sociological understanding of the red guard movement acknowledges a key characteristic of the Qinghua students during this time: they did have ideals and they did think. They did not simply develop factions based on their reactions to events or their perceived self-interest based on their situation in the pre-Cultural Revolution era. Rather, students were seriously developing their political understanding, pursuing what they thought were the right causes, and striving to realize their ideals through action.

This chapter stresses the role of passion and ideological convictions. At the opening of the Cultural Revolution, far from knowing accurately where their interests resided and acting accordingly, students tended to think rather abstractly about the correct course of action. In particular, the Kuai-type people and the Eights insisted on conducting the movement according to their own understandings of Mao. They rose up against their daunting enemies for they wanted to carry out the Cultural Revolution on their own and believed that the masses should be given ultimate power and trust, as Mao had said. It was this passion—derived from their worship of Mao, their striving to understand Mao, and their burning desire to apply this understanding in action—that led to the first division among students in Qinghua.

As the movement continued, the ideological debates about the previous school and sociopolitical structures played an increasingly crucial role in students' decision making. Starting from the debate on whether to rehabilitate the former cadres, clearly opposed political doctrines finally emerged after April 1967 and students' self-perception about what they were fighting for became clearer. Ideological standpoints were developed and clarified through struggle; they were not simply added on as "legitimation." Here, students' previous positions and experiences in the old school system tended to influence their behavior and students regrouped accordingly. Notably, it was this hierarchy of the Qinghua microcosm rather than the officially propagandized hierarchy composed of different bloodline labels that exerted more influence over students' decisions. Still, the link between their pre-Cultural Revolution positions in the school and their later factional

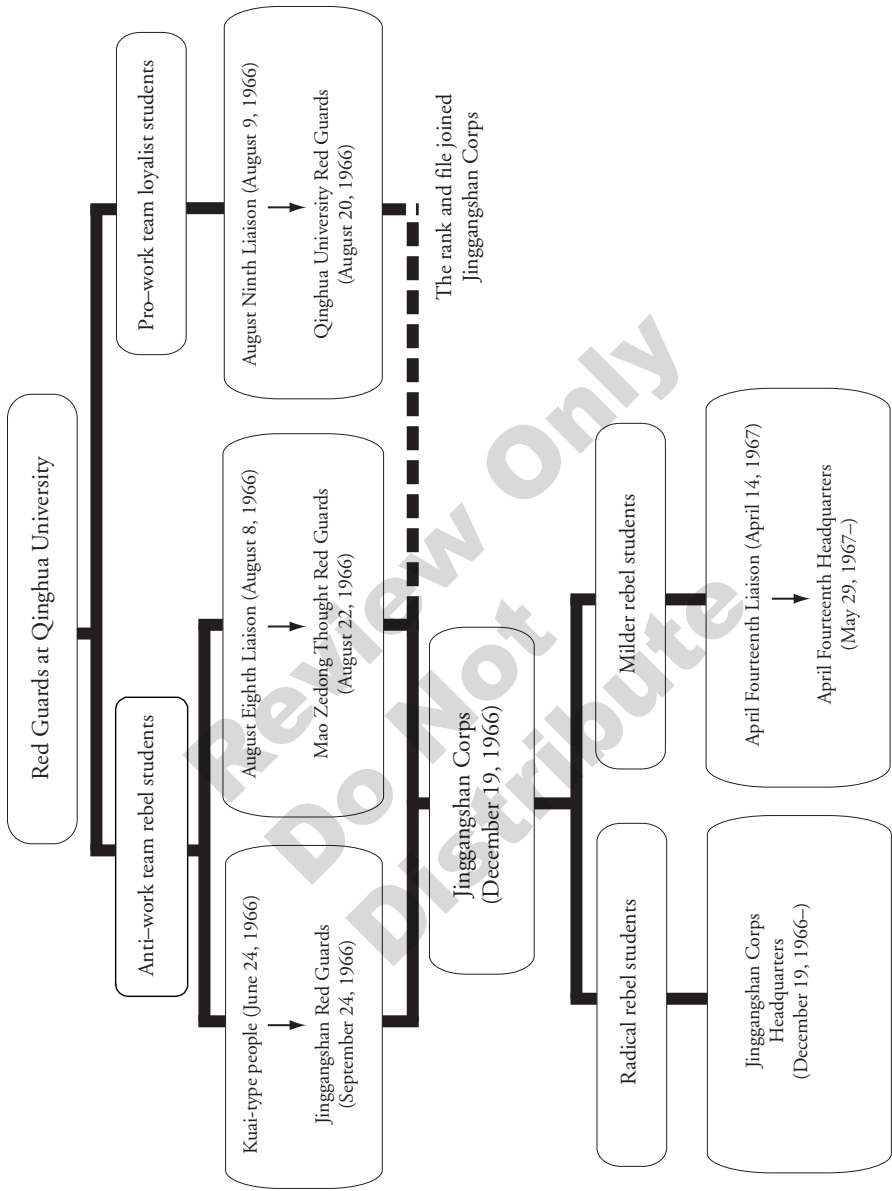


Figure 2.1 Development of red guard factions at Qinghua University

choices was not a one-to-one correspondence, as demonstrated by the political idealists.

In short, the activism and divisions of Qinghua's red guards arose from passion, political convictions, and their groups' efforts to survive; each carried varying weight in different stages. At first, the young students did not have mature and articulated political theories; later through debates they came to reflect on and understand the sociopolitical structure in which they lived and recognized their positions; and in the end, they desperately fought for the survival of their groups. Under ambiguous and changing circumstances, the reasons for factional divisions evolved through time. Nevertheless, ideals and conscious thinking were significant. Red guards at Qinghua made thoughtful political decisions in the face of unclear circumstance and did not base their choices solely on personal interests. Rather, they pursued what they thought were the right causes while struggling hard to adapt to ever-changing political circumstances.

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