

they left us alone and this suited me fine. You know, an oilfield isn't like life. It's a special place and politics aren't that important.⁷

After Qaidamu I came back to Peking, got reacquainted with my wife, and lived a good life for about a year. Then they sent me to Maoming, where they were working on oil-shale production. I stayed there a few months, enjoying the warmth and fresh fruit and vegetables of the south. After that, I was sent to Fujian where we had discovered oil. We knew there was lots of oil offshore, in the Taiwan Straits, but we couldn't begin any serious exploration there because of the security problem. How could China hope to defend any oilwell located in the middle of the Taiwan Straits? I worked there for nearly a year before being recalled suddenly to Peking. My wife had applied to leave China. She was an overseas Chinese who had come to China in the forties and now wanted to be reunited with her family. I had to decide whether to stay in China as an oil man or go with her to an uncertain future outside my homeland. I finally decided to go with her and, once the authorities learned of my intentions, my days as an oil man were over. I stayed in Peking doing nothing for another year before they finally gave me my exit visa. The day I left was the most difficult in my life because I loved my work, my life, and my country, and was suddenly giving it all up for an unknown future.

[In 1975 the Oil Man was reunited in Hong Kong with his wife and was living with her relatives. He had not found a job. He was depressed because his background as an oil-drilling specialist was not of much use to him in Hong Kong. He hoped to emigrate to a nearby Southeast Asian country to work in the oil industry, but he was experiencing difficulties securing a visa.]

Down with Stinking Intellectuals

INTELLECTUALS ARE A PROBLEM in any political system, but in China the relationship between the authorities and the intellectuals has been especially difficult. In the fifties, Chairman Mao asked intellectuals for their criticisms in the Hundred Flowers campaign. They responded with a vengeance, convincing Mao and other leaders that letting loose the reins on intellectuals had been a grievous error. During the Cultural Revolution, a major thrust of the Maoist group was against intellectuals and the policies associated with them. Jiang Qing, Chairman Mao's wife, personally presided over a massive purge of artists and writers. China's new "revolutionary culture" consisted of a few carefully edited operas and plays that expressed the prevalent political view of the Maoist group. The same principle was applied to China's communications media, which were purged of people who opposed the policies of this group.

In education, a "revolution" also occurred. The universities were shut down for three years while political battles raged over the type of educational system that China ought to have in the future. Students were encouraged to join the Red Guards and to help Chairman Mao in his struggle to reform the educational system. Professors and teachers were criticized and confronted by students; some were beaten to death. There was fierce fighting among the students themselves, and the central leaders were deeply involved. By 1970, universities were reopening, with new curricula and a changed student body and teachers. Education was now heavily politicized and more polytechnic. Higher spe-

cialized education was deemphasized. Courses were shortened to three years. The new student body initially was drawn from workers, peasants, and soldiers. Examinations were abolished. Some reeducated teachers returned, but others were not allowed to resume teaching. By the mid-seventies the first classes of these new Cultural Revolution students were being absorbed into China's work force.

This story takes place at Amoy University in Fujian province. The confrontation between students and teachers was so violent that one professor committed suicide by jumping into boiling water. Later, the violence subsided and the process of institutionalization of the new policies began. We see how the new changes in curriculum occurred, and what happened to theory in practice. By 1975 the narrator's own revolutionary commitment was altered by events in a way that he would not have expected back in 1966.

Today in China the elite component of education has been restored. The emphasis again is on quality rather than on mass education. Examinations have been reintroduced, and the chances of workers, peasants, and soldiers reaching university have been significantly reduced. China has thus moved away from the radical educational experimentation of the Cultural Revolution to a system resembling the one that existed before 1966.

WHEN THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION BEGAN, I was twenty-three years old, a third-year chemistry student at Amoy University in the city of Amoy, my hometown. I had a natural aptitude for my studies and was doing well. My political record was clean and I was an active member of the Youth League. I had fallen in love with a classmate, and we planned to get married as soon as I graduated and the state assigned me a job. That was still a year off, however, so in the meantime I was indulging myself in the pleasures and excitement of youth, spending time with my girlfriend and being fully caught up in university life. When the first big character poster¹ appeared in Peking, we didn't really know what to do. Peking seemed a long way off, and so we waited cautiously for the provincial Party leadership to respond. Who could have predicted that a few months later we would be toppling these leaders and

dragging the powerful Ye Fei and his wife out to face mass public criticism in the streets of Fuzhou?²

All classes were stopped, and the university was in confusion. What was going on in Peking? What were we supposed to do? Who were the targets? Who would take the lead and strike the first blow? The safest course was to attack the most visible targets — the teachers, especially those who had a known bad class background. Party and Youth League members put up big character posters like those in Peking, using the same words and themes. We attacked a few professors and lecturers who should have been criticized long ago, either for their poor attitudes or their zealous worship of foreign things. Some posters merely observed that "Professor Wang has more books published outside China on his bookshelves than Chinese books," and then asked the question "Why?" Others referred to "Jiang, who has never mentioned Chairman Mao's Thought in any of his lectures," and added that this poster was a "solemn warning to Jiang to change his ways at once or face the wrath of the masses." Another poster referred to "the dozens of teachers who have been hiding their reactionary backgrounds from the masses who want to criticize them."

Between June and November 1966, we locked up almost every university department head, deputy department head, professor, and lecturer. Every day we rounded them up and read them quotations from the works of Chairman Mao. We marched them off to the student dining halls to eat the same food that the students had to eat. No more fancy meals for them in the special professors' dining halls. No more getting fat on meat and fish while students were eating grain and leftovers. Every day they had to clean the lavatories and carry out the night soil. At night we made them write confessions "asking Chairman Mao for punishment." If we didn't like what they wrote, we made them do it again and again until they clearly showed how they had demeaned the Party and Chairman Mao in their lectures, how they had ignored socialism, and how they had deliberately spread the bourgeois life style at the university. Once every three days we had a small struggle meeting, maybe with a few hundred persons, and once a week we mobilized a large struggle meeting with over a thousand people in attendance. That's when we really gave it to them. By that time, covered with honest dirt and night soil, fancy clothes and leather shoes looking no better than a peasant's

clothing, their once-proud voices stilled by the fierce criticism of the assembled masses, they were a sorry spectacle indeed.*

Most of them deserved their fate. Chairman Mao was right when he warned us always to be on guard against intellectuals. You can't trust intellectuals. They resist the Party line, become arrogant, develop a bourgeois way of thinking, and worship foreign things. Take old Wang, for example. When the Red Guards went to his place and took it apart, it was full of fancy scrolls and feudal Chinese art. Must have been worth a fortune. We dug out foreign coins and books, and you should have seen the furniture! He had closets full of leather shoes, fancy clothes, and junk like that. He even had a servant living in that apartment doing the cooking and cleaning. How can a socialist society tolerate people like that teaching the young? True, he was a leading specialist in physics and we needed his skills, but was it worth the cost, to keep this stinking bourgeois remnant alive to infect students with his rotten way of life? Students who took Wang's classes never liked him. He treated us with contempt and barely noticed us. All he ever did was show up to lecture and then leave abruptly. We could never talk with him, never ask questions. There were many others who were arrogant like that. Old Jiang taught mathematics as if feudalism had never left China. We had to repeat theorems and equations endlessly; examinations were thrust upon us without warning; we could never talk out in class. It was just the way education used to be in the time of the Manchus. We tolerated Jiang because he was a good mathematician, but was it worth perpetuating a feudal relationship in order to learn mathematics?

The most pernicious of the teachers actually were the younger ones who lived a proletarian life style on the surface, but underneath yearned to be even more bourgeois and feudal than the "old" intellectuals they allegedly scorned. I could forgive most of the old intellectuals for the way they lived and thought. After all, can you discard the habits of a lifetime? Is it possible to hide one's class background? Can a tiger hide his stripes? But that

*Struggle meetings were an important aspect of the Cultural Revolution at all levels, in all organizations and units. At these sessions individuals were singled out for mass criticism. It was a way to fix blame, to focus attention, and to maintain revolutionary spirit. For more details see "Kill the Chickens To Scare the Monkeys," "Return to the Motherland," and "My Neighborhood."

group was dying out and was being replaced by a new generation of scholars loyal to socialism and to Chairman Mao's Thought. At least that's what I thought. In fact, a lot of the newer, younger teachers began to act just like their older bourgeois colleagues. Deng, in the chemistry department, was one such example. Only thirty-three years old, from a working-class background and a Party member, you'd think he'd be a model for all to follow. So it seemed on the outside, but his students noticed otherwise. You could see the repressed arrogance in him, and it was clear he was a Liuist* through and through. For him, being a Party member and an intellectual was a double chance for personal gain. He was a perfect example of what Chairman Mao calls "a fish swimming with the current," actually worse than that because he already had become an out-and-out bourgeois in his work style and thought. Maybe it wasn't always that way with him. Maybe at the beginning he had truly wanted to "serve the people" and had only become corrupted along the way by the Liuist spirit of the times, which bred complacency, material acquisitiveness, and spiritual decay.

You see, I fully agree with Chairman Mao's analysis of intellectuals, that you have always to be on guard against them and that you must strive to remold their outlook and build up "an army of proletarian intellectuals which can serve the proletariat." At Amoy in 1966 none of this was happening. Not only were the old bourgeois intellectuals still in command, but they were gaining supporters from the so-called new army of proletarian intellectuals. The whole educational system needed changing because the way it was then reinforced the old feudal gap between teachers and pupils, theory and practice, elite and masses. In fact, education had become elitist all the way down the line. I had a friend who attended the elitist Fuzhou Number One Middle School, one of China's Red Banner schools. Although probably 20 percent of China's senior middle school graduates managed to get to college, I'm told that over 70 percent of the graduates from Fuzhou Number One School went to universities. That school stressed academic performance over anything else. Politics were a

*Follower of Liu Shaoqi, China's number-two leader in 1966, who was criticized and purged by Mao. In the "struggle between two lines" during the Cultural Revolution, those who opposed Mao were defined as Liuists—following the bourgeois and revisionist policies of Liu, who was branded "China's Khrushchev."

low priority. If you failed to keep up, you were expelled. Every day you had homework in five subjects and there were weekly and monthly tests. When the time came to prepare for the university entrance examinations, the school went to unbelievable lengths. At the beginning of each new school year, in the fall, the director of the Fujian Provincial Education Department (the wife of Ye Fei, first Party secretary of Fujian) would give a report at the school, to the senior grade-three students. She would say: "Fuzhou's Number One Middle School has been a Red Banner school for five successive years, and this year you must not let the Red Banner fall down. You must make your finest effort at all costs and I will offer my personal help."

The university entrance exams started on June 20, but already after the New Year (January-February) the senior grade-three students began to prepare for them. They moved right into the school and lived there until the exams were over. The school gave them a daily food subsidy. Homework was greatly increased and the students were issued a variety of study cribs and outlines to supplement their regular materials. Three months prior to the exams, the entire school launched a campaign of "performing good deeds." The lower-grade students were mobilized to do something each day for those students who were preparing for the entrance exams, such as washing their clothes and blankets or going to the dining hall to get them their food so they wouldn't have to take time from their studies. That was about the only "collective" part of the whole enterprise. With such special treatment, no wonder so many graduates wound up each year at such famous universities as Qinghua or Peking. Jiang Nanxiang, the Minister of Education at that time and a real Liuist, highly praised the school and the Fujian Provincial Education Department, especially for the way in which students prepared for the university entrance exam. I remember seeing Fuzhou Number One Middle School written up in provincial and national papers and journals. The school's deputy principal was even elected to the National People's Congress. Representatives from other schools came to visit Fuzhou, to "learn from its experience," and Ye Fei himself wrote a special inscription for the school: "Already at the top of a pole a hundred feet high, but still striving further ahead."

With schools like that serving as models for the rest of China,

no wonder our universities were so badly in need of revolution. Schools like Fuzhou Number One Middle School perpetuated and enhanced elitism, the worship of expertise, and careerism. If you were an ordinary worker or peasant, you had little chance of getting admitted to such a school. The vast majority of students in Fuzhou were the sons and daughters of urban cadres. Here was one way in which the elite and its hangers-on could keep on top. Students in such schools cared little about politics. To them, the correct political line was something you had to know and be aware of, to make sure your career would not be harmed by any political miscalculation. No one took Marxism-Leninism very seriously at that school because, as my friend put it, "What mattered on the university entrance exams was how well you had prepared your subject and how you compared with other candidates. Of course you needed to know what was going on politically, but that was easy enough to learn, in comparison with trying to memorize a physics text."

At Amoy one could see the results of such a system in the increasing number of elitist and careerist youth who cared little for political work and did their utmost to avoid dirtying their hands. These were the students who let the professors dominate them, practically in a feudal relationship, and who didn't object to their arrogance or their blatant bourgeois practices. You see, these students had been trained to put good grades and careerism ahead of everything else. They would have sacrificed the very Revolution itself, I'm sure, for a good job in Amoy or Fuzhou. But the Cultural Revolution came just at the right time to put a stop to these practices. Chairman Mao's message to students like myself was clear enough: we needed a thoroughgoing revolution in higher education, and if the current Party leaders could not do the job, then let the students do it for them. The only way to get rid of careerism and elitism in higher education was to destroy the old system and rebuild it on revolutionary principles. So that's what we tried to do.

Of course it wasn't easy. There was plenty of opposition. First of all, the entrenched elite didn't want to give up any power. They were afraid that big changes would unhorse them, and they were right. At the outset they tried to deflect the criticism onto others. This was a brief period when their interests and those of the radicalized students coincided, because they made the bour-

educational changes that were necessary to make the system "serve the masses" and prevent elitism from entrenching itself again?

The army moved into Amoy to take over. I was one of the luckier Red Guards. Since I wasn't a member of the 516 group, they didn't get me for being an ultraleftist. I expected to be sent down to the Fujian countryside along with most of my peers, but to my surprise I was assigned to the city of Fuzhou not far away to work at Fuzhou University, to help them in their campaign of "cleaning up the class ranks." This campaign was different from the struggles that had taken place in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. This was no blind struggle, but a well-organized, well-planned, and systematic classification of the university teachers, in all departments, according to their family background, personal history, and performance and attitude during the Cultural Revolution. Such classification was done by the Party branches of the various departments. So, because I was a chemistry graduate, I was assigned to the chemistry department and spent the next year sorting out class backgrounds and exposing and criticizing those who had landlord, rich-peasant, counterrevolutionary, bad-element, and rightist backgrounds. While we were busy with the clean-up, we also were discussing the future form and content of China's higher educational system. The curriculum was going to be radically revised; more emphasis would be placed on practical education; the examination system would be abolished, and university entrance would now be biased in favor of workers and peasants; the old professors might be allowed to teach again but under the strictest supervision, after they had first been reeducated through political study and hard physical labor.

The year passed and, because of my good political record and strong academic achievements, I had high hopes of staying on at Fuzhou to help in the transition to the new university system. Instead I was sent down to teach in a rural school in Shanxi, thousands of kilometers from home. It was a primary school which also had two classes of junior middle school. I taught mathematics there. This type of school was a product of the Cultural Revolution. Attaching junior middle school classes to local primary schools made it more convenient for peasant children to attend school. They didn't have to walk long distances to get to

school anymore, and so they were encouraged to stay in school for a longer period of time. My students were commune children from several villages within a radius of three kilometers. We had no real textbooks since the old ones had been discarded and replaced by "draft" texts compiled by the Shanxi provincial educational reform group. I gave no exams and my students were required to do almost no homework. Aside from attending classes, students had no other responsibilities. School discipline here was quite different from what I had known in the city. The children frequently left in the middle of classes to do agricultural work. Some used to bring their little brothers and sisters along, baby-sitting them during lessons while the rest of their household worked.

I didn't have to prepare very much for such teaching, and actually all I had to do was to read from the draft textbook and then repeat what I had said several times until the students understood. The level of learning was really low, and it was my first big disappointment since I had been caught up in the Cultural Revolution. It wasn't that the conditions were that bad in the countryside; we all know how backward the rural areas are, especially when it comes to middle school education. And it wasn't the primitive living conditions either, because I was used to all that. Nor was I homesick for my family and my girlfriend. I missed them, but we had been separated several times over the past four years. What really bothered me was the huge gap between what we had been talking about in Amoy and Fuzhou and what in fact was going on in China's villages. There I was, with a new curriculum, in a "revolutionary" educational setting, and the students weren't learning anything. I could hardly get them to add and subtract, let alone do junior middle school mathematics. They'd never stand a chance of getting to senior middle school, not to speak of university. The draft texts were shallow and abridged. If this was the outcome of so much struggle and bloodshed—apathy and mediocrity at the local level—what would it be like at the top, in China's universities?

I soon had a chance to find out because in 1970 Fuzhou University had officially reopened, admitting its first large group of new students since the Cultural Revolution. There had been a number of trial student intakes as early as 1969, when two hundred were admitted to the departments of physics, chemistry,

electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, and education. These were special two-year experimental classes, and all these students had graduated by 1971. By then it had been decided to set the length of university courses at three years. The student body numbered seven hundred, about 20 percent of the old enrollment, but it was to increase regularly in the following years and now there are several thousand. The university had a staff of six hundred, including four hundred teachers and over a hundred administrative cadres. They needed more teaching staff, and so I was reassigned from Shanxi to Fuzhou to work in the chemistry department as one of the new revolutionary teachers. Actually I was only a lab assistant who was supposed to be on lab duty six days a week, eight hours a day, and was paid 40 yuan a month (compared with the average professor's salary of 150-200 yuan a month). I never worried about the salary, since housing and food together only cost me 20 yuan a month. I couldn't spend it anyway. It made me wonder how those professors managed to spend all their money.

Leaving Shanxi wasn't easy. I had grown fond of the slower pace of rural life and had made some good friends. Actually I had fallen in love with another sent-down youth, a girl from Fujian province who was also teaching, and we were reluctant to part from one another. (As it turned out, we never did see each other again.) It had been good to be away from the political struggles in the cities, to get down to basic rural life and understand it better. I came away with a better appreciation of the difficulties of peasant life, but I headed back to Fuzhou with some misgivings about the kind of educational revolution we had accomplished. In Shanxi, at the bottom, the fruits of the Cultural Revolution had seemed meager. Would it be any different at the top, in a big urban university?

Returning to Fuzhou was an odd experience. Professors whom I had earlier struggled and criticized and called stinking intellectuals were now my colleagues and greeted me affably enough, almost as if nothing had ever happened. Others had simply vanished into thin air, to be replaced by young staff like myself, or not at all. There was a stiffness about the place, an air of uncertainty as to what was going to happen. The euphoria of three years past seemed to have been replaced by a kind of wariness. What would the new system be like? Could the "reeducated"

teachers get along with those who had purged them and were now either their colleagues or in political command? What would the new curriculum be like, and what kinds of students would be admitted? The answers to most of these questions came quickly enough: the new system was a disappointment because it ultimately failed to provide a better educational system, and it didn't eliminate the abuses and problems of the old system. The reeducated and struggled old professors did not get on well with their revolutionary colleagues. In their hearts they burned for revenge, and our relationship with one another was only minimally formal. Who could trust them to follow the Party's revolutionary line in the future?

As for the new curriculum, I had mixed feelings about that. After my experience in Shanxi I wasn't surprised at what I found at Fuzhou. The old texts had been repudiated, but the new study materials had not yet been produced because the teachers in each department were supposed to compile the new texts themselves. Since most of these teachers had been struggled and criticized during the Cultural Revolution, they weren't about to make any more mistakes in print. They didn't intend to be accused of taking the old bourgeois road again. The political activists themselves couldn't compile textbooks; after all, they weren't chemists or physicists or mechanical engineers. Furthermore, they themselves weren't exactly sure what should be in the new texts, except (to be safe) a lot of politics. The teachers played it safe by compiling materials of a very general and shallow nature to avoid any controversy. In this they followed the lead of the middle schools, where the new teaching materials resembled political tracts. For example, the old history texts had been abolished and replaced by drafts that consisted almost entirely of the works of Chairman Mao and Lu Xun's articles. All foreign names had been removed from texts in physics, chemistry, and mathematics, resulting in such absurdities as the renaming of Mendeleev's periodic system of elements as simply "the periodic system of elements." Newton's universal gravitation became "universal gravitation." Such kinds of "revolutionary change" caused amusement and resentment, and people didn't know whether to laugh or cry. One of my colleagues, another lab assistant, broke his usual deliberate silence about such matters by asking me one day, "Is this what we spilled our blood for, to remove Mendeleev's name from a university text

that has now been diluted to middle school level? What's so revolutionary about that?" In truth, I could not answer him.

But we were excited about the new students who were selected from among the workers, peasants, and soldiers, from the progressive class elements that had been loyal to Chairman Mao. The education section of the Fujian provincial revolutionary committee had assigned quotas to all organs in Fujian. These organs then recommended students to be sent to the designated university (Amoy, Fuzhou, Fuzhou Normal, and so on). In selecting successful candidates, the local Party committee emphasized personal class status, social relations, and political performance. Age and educational level initially were not important factors. As a result, the first groups of students were politically strong and the most mass-based group that had ever attended Fuzhou. They were willing to learn and many of us, especially the younger teachers, really tried to teach them. But unfortunately it soon became clear that enthusiasm and the right political line just weren't enough to produce competent mathematicians, physicists, or chemists. Chairman Mao's Thought can move mountains,⁵ but you also need preparation and native intelligence to get specialists. The worker-peasant-soldier group, by and large, had good intentions but lacked everything else. We tried to build them up academically and to teach them as much as possible, but they were only at the university for three years, and over half of that time was spent in political study and practical work, in factories or the fields. The practical work was important and necessary — it's just that they needed about three more years after that in the classroom just to get up to a decent university level. We were reduced to giving university students remedial instruction, at a middle school level. Great for equality, but what were we accomplishing? The new worker-peasant-soldier groups were ill-equipped to go out and teach others; yet they were going to be sent to rural schools just like the one I had taught in, to become permanent teachers, thus only perpetuating the relative backwardness of the rural areas.

At the same time, the old urban-bourgeois-elitist students began to reappear at Fuzhou. How this happened is typical of the way in which the privileged groups manage to find a way to stay on top. First, an increasing number of the worker-peasant-soldier students actually turned out to be the sons and daughters of ur-

ban cadres who, after being sent down to the countryside, had managed to be selected by local communes to go to university in the city. This was, of course, carefully arranged by the cadres involved. So scratch a "peasant student" and you might find the son or daughter of a local city cadre underneath. Second, a few bright students became exempt from being sent to the countryside and were admitted directly to Fuzhou, usually students gifted in mathematics or the sciences. These exceptional students thus could gain admittance to the university by special means. Third, after it became clear that the worker-peasant-soldier student group was of too low an academic level, an unofficial quota system was established, allowing more children of other classes to be admitted to Fuzhou. This was a face-saving decision which helped to raise the academic level of the student body and at the same time once again gave official access to the elite for its sons and daughters to attend university. By 1975 at least half of the Fuzhou student body were the sons and daughters of urban cadres and intellectuals, even though statistically it was claimed that less than 20 percent were from that group.⁶

With elitism creeping back in, and with the apparent failure of mass-based higher education, my disappointment turned into disillusionment. Many of my former Red Guard colleagues had either been killed or exiled or had themselves become careerists. The old bourgeois intellectuals were by no means dead; actually they had only been waiting for the wind to change. It was also clear that those of us who had wanted a new system of education were still a minority, and the feeble results of what we tried to attain had limited our power and credibility. In truth, I had no power, despite my record of loyalty to the Party and to Chairman Mao. Others, far less revolutionary than I, had taken over the key command posts. I was suspected by some because I had been too much the revolutionary when there wasn't any revolution any more. "Be careful!" one of my friends used to say to me. "One day you'll wake up as a 516 element, an ultraleftist for sure. That's the way things are going in China now." I couldn't imagine that happening because I seemed to be moving away from radicalism the longer I taught at Fuzhou. Disillusioned with the effects of Cultural Revolution policies, I turned inward to my work and found a research project that occupied almost all my time and energies. Ironically, I gradually became the intellectual I had

once scorned, buried in my work and avoiding any commitment to the political struggles of the mid-seventies. In early 1976, when a poster appeared criticizing me for having become a stinking intellectual, I knew it was time to go.

[In 1973 the narrator married an overseas Chinese woman, the daughter of an engineer, despite strong objections from the Party organization. He simply said that he loved this woman and intended to marry her, regardless of the cost to his career. Maybe he had no ulterior motive and did not then realize that he was, in effect, buying a one-way ticket out of China with this marriage; in 1975 his wife applied for an exit visa and he decided to leave with her. Did he have any regrets about his decision? "No, for me it didn't matter any more. I had fought for an idea and seen it fall to pieces. I had been naive, thinking I could change the world so easily. Also, I found there was more to life than politics. I'm sorry for all those who were killed, but you have to fight for what you think is right at the time." He doesn't mind life in Hong Kong, works for a drug supply firm, and has two children.]

Little Brother's Wedding

TRADITIONAL CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES play a major role in peasant lives. In the Chinese countryside the majority of peasants still follow the traditional lunar calendar with its large roster of festivals. One such holiday is New Year's, and then even the poorest peasant will try to put his affairs in order, eat a bit of meat, and think about his ancestors. Funerals are still conducted in the old style, with coffins and burials in the hills nearby: the Communists have persuaded few people in the countryside that cremation is a better system for honoring the dead. Despite the Cultural Revolution and the "Criticize Confucius, Criticize Lin Biao" campaign, many peasants still think in terms of ancestors and household gods, ghosts and superstitions, and even clan loyalties.

Still it appears that, just as with Stalin's decision to let the Russian family alone, the Chinese leaders have made a number of compromises with tradition. Only the most blatantly feudal practices, or those in direct conflict with official policy, are being discouraged. A country wedding is an example of such compromise. The Party in principle opposes the concept of wasting resources on a large wedding but does little to stop it, knowing that the families involved are determined to have one. Large sums of money are spent (although if you have an equal number of sons and daughters, the costs of the weddings are eventually canceled out). Marriages are still arranged by matchmakers, but the bride and groom can decide, after they have met, whether they wish to proceed with the match. The woman is clearly inferior through-

My Neighborhood

CLOSE CONTROL over community organization and neighborhood life has been a characteristic of the Communists' urban policy. Building on a pre-1949 legacy of small-group control (the *bao jia* system), the Chinese have tried simultaneously to monitor the activities of residents while developing socialist urban communities. The residents' committee serves as an ideal expression of these goals because at the grass roots it is an arm of higher-level political control and yet a means by which the community can administer itself, solving small day-to-day problems on the spot. In large cities such as Peking and Shanghai resident's committees have become fairly effective in the solution of selected problems of daily life, and foreigners are frequently taken to visit urban neighborhoods to see how these committees function.

In this story we learn about the structure and functions of a residents' committee in Shanghai, and the various problems it encounters in its daily work. The narrator, a middle-aged woman, typifies the average member of a residents' committee: female, unpaid, middle-aged, and no longer in the work force. She is usually not a Party member, but she has a good record of community work and relates well to her neighbors. As is evident from this story, committee work is the equivalent of a full-time job. She is always on the go, organizing people, checking on them, solving their problems. She is a combination of building superintendent, PTA leader, and off-duty policeman, a multiplicity of roles that can be exceptionally taxing at times. When the unexpected occurs, such as Widow Wang's defiance of the

housing authorities, the residents' committee can exert little influence and has to turn to higher authorities. Even the combined pressure of the police, Party, and the district housing authorities fails to move the determined widow, who successfully defies the bureaucrats by "squatting" in an empty apartment. The residents' committee mediates but cannot solve this problem, mainly because it is such an unusual defiance of authority. The committee is better equipped to settle disputes among the residents, such as the quarrel between Country Bumpkin and Two-Face, although here too the committee ultimately fails in its goal, that of trying to bring the unhappy couple back together.

The story only briefly touches upon the economic activities of large city neighborhoods. These are organized by the neighborhood or street committees, the basic local level of government, of which the residents' committees are a smaller part. Unemployed youth, housewives, and pensioners in the past have often been employed in small workshops located in the neighborhood and under neighborhood jurisdiction. The production of these workshops usually feeds larger economic enterprises in the city. As China now pushes its industrialization campaign, neighborhoods may be encouraged to expand their economic functions, along with the tasks of political control and of fostering socialist community consciousness.

I AM FIFTY-TWO YEARS OLD and have three children, all of them married. My husband is a machine tool operator and makes a good salary, 78 yuan a month. I used to work in a textile factory when I was younger, but I stopped in 1963 because of my health. I suffer from high blood pressure and got dizzy while working at the machines. Also the noise was affecting my hearing. Luckily my two eldest children were already working, so the loss of my income wasn't a burden on the household. Only one of them was still living with us. The others had their own families, and my number-one son lived far away in Xian, where he was a teacher. After I retired from work (I had been working since I was twelve years old), the Party decided to recommend me for membership in our local residents' committee. I'm not a Party member, but that doesn't matter a bit. Actually most members of the residents' committee are just housewives like myself or pensioners.

I guess they chose me because I had lived in that neighborhood, in the same building, since 1956. I knew most of the people in our building by name and all about their personal backgrounds and problems. Not that I'm a snoop or gossip, mind you, but I like to talk with people and find out about them. When the Party first asked me about becoming a member of the residents' committee, I was hesitant; I replied that I wanted to wait a while to see about my blood pressure and also to catch up on a few household matters. I also expressed concern that I was almost illiterate—I really could only read a few slogans that I knew by heart and could only draw a few simple characters. "Never mind," the Party cadre said, "it's not your fault that you can't read and write very well. You've worked hard for thirty years and when you were little, you didn't have the chance. Now that you've retired, the Party will help you, so don't worry." His words were reassuring because I was embarrassed about my illiteracy. The Party cadre did ask me to make up my mind soon, because the woman now responsible for our building was in bad health and couldn't continue much longer. Well, after three months I decided I wanted the job, and within a month it was mine.

For the next nine years I was a member of that residents' committee, and it was like a full-time job. There were eighteen members on the committee and I was responsible for my building, containing forty-seven households and totaling over two hundred people. You can imagine that with this many people there were always things to do and problems to settle—there were many days where I was so busy that I didn't have time to take care of my own household. Fortunately my husband was a modern man and was willing to help out. Many days after his shift ended at 4:00, he did the afternoon shopping and helped prepare the evening meal. My daughter-in-law (second son's wife) also helped occasionally, but she worked the evening shift at her factory and slept in the dormitory there. So she usually only stayed with us one or two nights a week. It wasn't so bad, really, and I loved my new work. At the beginning I wasn't sure whether my friends in the building would change their feelings toward me, now that I was a member of the residents' committee. It was no secret that the people didn't always welcome our presence. We had called my predecessor Old Snoop, Meddler, and other such nicknames behind her back. Most residents felt that the committee spent

more time poking its nose into personal business and prying into people's lives than in acting on behalf of the residents. One of my neighbors asked me bluntly before I took the job, "Do you really want to do this? Your relations with your friends won't be the same anymore. They'll never speak their minds when you're around. They'll always think of you as someone who is going to cause them trouble. You know how people feel about the residents' committee: it's like a little policeman always checking up on us."

Actually the job turned out better than I had expected. True, my neighbor was right: my relations with old friends had changed. Nothing I could point to with any certainty, mind you, but they were more reserved in my presence now and we didn't do much gossiping together anymore. On the other hand, I was so busy that I didn't have much time to bring out my little wooden stool and sit around gossiping. Now I was either at meetings, organizing some sort of activity, or solving a problem. With over two hundred people in one building, I just couldn't keep an eye on everything, and I had help from four activists who were each responsible for one of the entranceways into which the building was subdivided. These activists weren't members of the residents' committee, but they were our eyes and ears in each of the entranceways. You know that in Shanghai, as in other large cities, the four-storey apartment building built in the fifties is really a separate housing unit with four separate entrances and staircases. People don't just have an address such as "No. 10 building, such and such neighborhood," but you must add, "No. 10 building, No. 2 entranceway" as well as the neighborhood and street. Each entranceway has twelve apartments, divided into one, two, and three bedrooms (the three-bedroom apartments are only on the ground floor, and they are the most desirable). The activist in each of these entranceways was an older woman, who was either widowed or retired and who enjoyed organizing and checking on residents. Three times a week I met with my activists at my place to discuss problems and to assign them their duties. I got on well with them, although I knew that the residents didn't care for them because one of their main duties was to check up on illegal residents and to settle household arguments. The activists were the ones who showed up at night with the local police, not me, so the residents didn't like them. I had some problems for a while

with the residents of No. 3 entranceway because the activist there, a retired worker, was too zealous in her job. But eventually she was right: through her vigilance we caught two illegal residents, one of them a bad element, and during the Cultural Revolution she was one of the leaders in the neighborhood struggle against revisionism and class enemies.

In fact most of the work of the residents' committee had little to do with snooping on other people's affairs or with looking for class enemies. We devoted a large part of our time to public health and sanitation. For example, we conducted campaigns to get rid of flies, cockroaches, rats, and mice. In June and July we gave everybody powder to burn in their apartments. I think it was called 666. This smoked up the apartment and killed all the pests. We made sure people did it properly and that they stayed out of their apartments for six hours afterwards. We ran campaigns to tell parents to get their children vaccinated against chicken pox, small pox, measles, and scarlet fever. Sometimes it took a lot of persuasion—many parents were still reluctant to trust vaccinations and others simply had no time to spare. So we knocked on doors and held special meetings and hung up posters that told residents about vaccinations. In the summer we warned everybody about encephalitis, what its symptoms were and how you could catch it from mosquitoes. We urged people to report any serious sickness like that at once so it wouldn't spread. Once we had three cases of encephalitis in one entranceway. We sprayed the place with disinfectant and got rid of all the mosquitoes. Then we inoculated all the children at the local clinic with a special encephalitis vaccine.

In 1964 we began a major birth control program, holding meetings in which we talked about the need to plan family growth. Actually it wasn't much of a problem in our neighborhood, since families weren't that large. Mine was one of the largest, but then I had my children before Liberation. We were mainly trying to get younger couples to postpone having children for a while, so that the wife could work longer and there would be fewer children per household. This wasn't difficult to do in Shanghai because families weren't as large as in some other cities, and certainly much smaller than in the countryside. We talked to the women and gave information about contraception, what devices to use and how to use them. During the Cultural

Revolution, we dispensed birth control pills free of charge to all married women. First we held a mass meeting, usually of all women in a building, to explain about birth control and the possibilities involved. Then the entranceway activists visited individual families to talk with them, especially with the husbands who, though fairly enlightened, didn't pay much attention to our efforts. We often brought along the doctor from the local clinic to explain birth control methods. We didn't talk much about vasectomies because the men didn't want to listen. Abortion was available on demand, however. Also, for 5 yuan you could get fitted with an IUD. We persuaded one woman to have her tubes tied after she had her fourth child, despite preventive methods. I think our efforts were successful because over the next decade the number of children in our neighborhood did drop.

The residents' committee kept the neighborhood clean and secure, and that was an important duty. I went around personally from time to time on inspection trips or on special clean-up campaigns. Each entranceway had to be swept up, and any garbage had to be put away daily. We checked for fire hazards and in the winter made sure residents remembered to keep a supply of fresh air coming into their rooms while they had the stove on. Each year hundreds of careless people in China are asphyxiated because of the fumes from their coal stoves. We tried our best to make the neighborhood look nice and clean; that wasn't always so easy, however, because the city Housing Administration was responsible for maintaining and repairing the buildings and they wouldn't give us any money for painting or repairing. Sometimes we used extra supplies from political campaigns to do some painting or patching. When there was a real emergency and the Housing Administration refused to come (for example, if a ceiling had fallen down), we put pressure on the street committee to get the Housing Administration to do something. We weren't always successful, but at least we tried.

We also kept a sharp eye out for unwelcome strangers lurking around our neighborhood. If you didn't do that, you'd find sooner or later that something important was missing. I remember that in 1969 a bicycle was taken from the courtyard. It just happened that the activist who normally kept an eye on that courtyard was at a meeting. Someone had seen a young man passing through from the street entrance. It was probably a

"black youth" who stole the bike for cash so he could survive a bit longer in the city.¹ That bike wouldn't stay for long in Shanghai; it would quickly be sold to a gang of thieves, who would then resell it in the countryside where second-hand bikes didn't have to be licensed.

We locked our doors when we were away and at night cleared the courtyard of personal belongings. The activist on duty always called out around 10:00: "Come and take in your bicycles. It's ten o'clock." Only a fool would leave anything out after that. When we were at home around the building, however, we didn't lock our doors and even left them wide open while we were outside talking, doing the laundry, or eating on the stoop. We wouldn't steal from each other, but you had to be on guard against "outsiders," and I don't mean class enemies either, but just ordinary thieves and bad people (*huai ren*). During the Cultural Revolution you had to be particularly vigilant because you couldn't be sure that a so-called revolutionary wasn't simply a thief in disguise. Between 1966 and 1971 we were especially careful about people coming into the neighborhood from outside. Once a group of Red Guards burst in looking for trouble, but we managed to send them on their way since we didn't have any class enemies living in our building and most of us were factory workers or pensioners. So after we read each other quotations from Chairman Mao's Thought, we sent them on their way to continue "raising high the banner of revolution."

During the Cultural Revolution I had plenty to do. The residents' committee was constantly relaying the latest instructions to the neighborhood, mobilizing people in support of new policies, and organizing political study sessions, sometimes two or three a day. So much political pressure soon took its toll: my health deteriorated and I had to stay in the hospital for several weeks. Luckily my daughter-in-law had given up her dormitory room and was now living with us, so she helped out with the cooking and shopping. I recovered quickly, however, and was soon back at my job. What I especially remember about those days were two events: the institution of the *qingshi* and the episode of the "substitute class enemy."

The *qingshi* ceremony began in 1967 and lasted for several months. We called it "qingshi" (asking for instructions), but its full name was *xiang Mao zhuxi qingshi* (asking Chairman Mao

for instructions). Each day at 9:00 a.m. and at 6:00 p.m. we assembled the residents together in front of their respective entranceways and we "confessed" our thoughts to Chairman Mao—or, more precisely, to his color portrait, propped up on a window sill outside the building. Each entranceway activist was responsible for her picture of the Chairman which she kept in her apartment for safekeeping. Some decorated the portrait with ribbons and flowers. The activist from No. 2 entranceway always had three red paper carnations pinned to the Chairman's portrait. *Qingshi* was run by the activists, and it was their job to get people to read quotations from the little Red Book and to confess their thoughts about politics. In this way we could all memorize the contents of the Red Book while purifying our own class standpoint. A few took the thing seriously and earnestly searched their hearts each morning to see if they had followed the Chairman's teachings since the day before. These people would confess such sins as: "I didn't sweep up the entranceway last night because I thought I was too tired. Actually I was just too lazy"; or "Yesterday I shouted at my children and even hit them. I must learn to be more patient and reasonable"; or "I was too busy to help Old Li with his bundles. That is not the way to serve the people. I promise to follow the Chairman's teachings more closely in the future." And so on. Most of the assembled housewives and pensioners didn't volunteer any confession. They sang the revolutionary songs and repeated the quotations, but that was all. The activists were happy if three or four confessed each time, and if everybody at least turned up for *qingshi*. It was a useful device at the time: it gave housewives and pensioners, many of whom were not too politically active, a sense of what was going on in the factories, bureaus, and other units throughout China. Some residents complained that they felt funny confessing to a picture, and the older residents said it was too tiring to stand around for such a long period (thirty to forty minutes). Sometimes there was so much noise from children running around, or machines nearby, that you couldn't hear what was going on. Still the local Party unit was pleased and so was the residents' committee. Our building managed to get almost full attendance every time, and we even won an award as the most active in confessing to the Chairman.

In 1968 we had a bit of a problem. The authorities were concerned that people weren't getting involved in class struggle,

especially at the neighborhood level. So they instructed us to hold a public struggle session on a Sunday in front of all the local residents. The problem was that at the start of the Cultural Revolution we had a few genuine "landlord/KMT" types, but they had either died, moved away, or were too sick. Efforts to find a genuine class enemy in our midst were not too successful. We had one fellow in mind—he wasn't really a class enemy, and as a matter of fact his father had been a worker and he himself had been a sailor. But he had become mentally unbalanced and used to go around talking about all the foreign places he'd visited in his younger days and how he'd like to go again. He used to sing "Sailing the Seas Depends on the Great Helmsman" all day long, and he'd change the verses around so that he and Chairman Mao were sailing around the world together, making revolution in all the foreign ports he'd once visited. At first the residents' committee decided to make him our choice to be struggled, but then we had second thoughts because he was too old and silly for something like that. What if he had a heart attack in the middle of the event? Or if he started singing and wouldn't stop? We decided to find someone else but didn't have a suitable candidate. Finally, the chairman of our committee said, "Why not borrow a class enemy from the adjoining neighborhood? It doesn't really matter if he lives here or not, just as long as he's a genuine class enemy. We can have a first-rate struggle session, everybody can participate, and the leadership will be pleased."

So we "borrowed" a class enemy from next door and had our struggle session. He was a veteran of such struggle sessions, about fifty years old, a known collaborator with the KMT. We built a platform, assembled the masses, denounced him for his crimes, and shouted revolutionary slogans for most of a Sunday afternoon. Then we returned our borrowed class enemy, none the worse for wear (we had promised we would avoid any physical violence and would return him unharmed), and everybody was satisfied.

Life in our neighborhood settled down after the Cultural Revolution. Less of my time was spent on political campaigns and we all gratefully forgot about such ceremonies as qingshi. The residents' committee again was doing a lot of public hygiene and sanitation work, as well as maintaining the security of the neighborhood. We also spent a great deal of time in settling disputes

among residents. As a matter of fact, it seemed as if our building was always erupting into quarrels and arguments. I remember two such incidents in which I was closely involved, since they both took place in my entranceway, and I confess that I didn't resolve either of them very well.

One of the disputes concerned the illegal occupation of an empty apartment in our entranceway by Widow Wang, who lived on the second floor in a one-bedroom apartment, with her son, daughter-in-law, and grandson. What happened was very embarrassing to the authorities. Widow Wang had applied for a larger apartment to the Housing Administration two years previously, after her son had married and was living with his new wife together with Widow Wang in her one-bedroom apartment. Widow Wang had to give up her bedroom and she slept outside on the balcony in summer and in the kitchen in the winter. She didn't seem to mind this until the grandchild was born, but then she became impatient and kept after the housing authorities to get her a larger apartment. Their reply was always the same: "Sorry, comrade, we have no empty apartments and there is a long line of people ahead of you; you'll just have to wait your turn." She asked the residents' committee to put in a good word for her, but there was little we could do because we had no power in this matter, and the Housing Administration heard all kinds of pleas from countless residents' committees all the time. Well, it was just one of those situations where a deserving citizen had to suffer until things could change. At least that's what we thought, but Widow Wang had other ideas. One day she went across the hall to the empty two-bedroom apartment right opposite to hers, ripped off the seals, broke open the door, and moved herself in, with all her furniture and possessions. We didn't even know it had happened at first, but there she was and we couldn't get her out. She refused to leave, saying that her family would not budge until she had been given a larger apartment. Her argument was that the apartment had been empty for five months and why shouldn't it be occupied by someone who was in need of it? She said she'd refuse to move unless the Housing Administration found her another apartment. Otherwise she would squat in the apartment forever.

As soon as I found out about it, I hurried back home to persuade Widow Wang to move back to her old apartment. But

when I tried to talk with her, she wouldn't let me in. Her son had already fixed the broken door and put in a new lock. The activist in my entranceway, Elder Sister Chao, was nearly in tears, wringing her hands in despair. She had tried to reason with Widow Wang through the door, but after an hour the Widow seemed even more determined to stay in the apartment. I tried to tell Widow Wang that it was wrong to occupy that empty apartment, that she had violated socialist laws and established procedures. What would happen if citizens did whatever they pleased all the time? Life would be quite impossible. Where was the Widow's political consciousness? Didn't she know that her action was against the interests of the collective and in violation of socialist principles? I told her that I would do my utmost to help her get better housing—but first she had to move back into her old apartment.

The Widow refused to leave. She said she didn't care any more about procedures and the interests of the collective. She had her own family and herself to think about. "I'm a widow who has served the revolution well. For many years I worked in a factory. Then after my husband died, I've been doing embroidery and home sewing. No one can say that I haven't done my share. For two years I've been waiting patiently while others get more space and I get nothing. I've been to the Housing Administration countless times. They don't bother about me because I'm not important—just an old widow who complains. But when I sleep in the kitchen, I can't close the door and my feet stick out into the hall, and in the summer when I sleep on the balcony there's hardly any room either. I know others suffer too, but when there's an empty apartment right across the hall, three meters away, and it's been there empty for several months and the Housing Administration keeps saying they need to keep that apartment in reserve for an emergency—well, after five months, where's the emergency? It's just a bunch of people sitting in an office making rules and shuffling papers without regard to the people's needs. You talk of being a good citizen and respecting the collective—well, Chairman Mao also says we should fight against bureaucrats and injustices, and that's what I'm doing. I won't budge and neither will my family until they agree to solve my housing problem. So leave me alone!"

It was clear to me after listening to Widow Wang that no

mere words could move her now. I told the entranceway activist to keep a close eye on things and especially to settle down the other residents while I went to report to the head of the residents' committee. There wasn't very much the residents' committee could do. We decided to send the policeman over that night, together with the entranceway activist, to tell the Widow that her occupation of the apartment was illegal. We also got the street committee to contact the Housing Administration to see what could be done. The head of the residents' committee said he would get the local Party organization to work on the problem. Meanwhile, I was told not to use force or threats of any kind to dislodge Widow Wang from her stronghold.

We had to be careful because the majority of residents were in sympathy with the Widow's case. Any harsh reprisal against her would be sure to create ill will in the building and neighborhood. Secretly (and even not so secretly) many residents applauded her courage in standing up to the local housing authorities and the entire system of housing distribution. Many others had been waiting years for better space and had seen others pass them by or, as in Widow Wang's case, watched as certain apartments stayed empty for months without adequate explanation. To use force against the Widow would be a serious error on the part of the authorities, and the Widow knew this all too well. She had even told me through the locked door that she could stay there as long as she liked, because no one would dare to use force to get her out. The residents in our entranceway actually organized themselves informally to help the Widow in her "fight against bureaucracy." They volunteered to keep an eye out for the police and any strangers that might come around, and they helped her daughter-in-law with the shopping and other chores so that the Widow wouldn't have to stay alone in the apartment too long. One neighbor even took her place from time to time so she could get outside to the local workshop to pick up and deliver her sewing. They seemed to relish the idea of confronting the housing authorities; everyone seemed to have a grievance and here was a chance to sympathize.

I was put in an awkward position because it was my job to organize residents to do what was correct. Furthermore here I was, having a rebellion against authority in my very own entranceway and I couldn't do much to stop it. I tried to persuade

residents that what the Widow had done was not outright defiance, but a theoretical violation of socialist laws and procedures; most people just smiled and nodded at me. One woman told me: "Never mind. I know you have to say the Widow is wrong because of your position. But in your heart I know you sympathize with her, only you can't reveal your true feelings to the people." Maybe I did, secretly, feel admiration for the Widow's actions, although I never admitted it to myself at the time. It was somehow gratifying to see someone challenge the people in the Housing Administration, which had always given us trouble, never providing enough money to maintain our buildings and always acting in an arrogant manner.

But we had to do something to get her out. First the police arrived together with Elder Sister Chao and tried to persuade the Widow, but she wouldn't even let them in. For most of us, a visit from the policeman was a threatening experience, since the local police had control over our dossiers and when anybody got into serious trouble it was the policeman who always came and took you away. The Widow, however, just ignored them and the policeman went away shaking his head. Then the Party sent activists around to try to pry her out, but she just kept replying that Chairman Mao had said we had to fight against injustice and bureaucratic arrogance and that was what she was doing. The Party activist reminded her that she hadn't been that zealous in following the Party's line in the past—indeed, she used to fall asleep at political meetings, never talked about politics, and never quoted the Chairman's words before. The Widow replied: "That was before I became politically conscious. Now I understand what the Party has been trying to teach me for years—as the Chairman once said, 'It's time to stand up and fight for revolutionary principles.'"

The Party put pressure on her son through the Party organization where he worked, but he just replied, "Look, it's my mother's apartment. There's nothing I can do. It's a problem of the residents' committee and not this factory committee. I can talk with her but, as you can see, she's a stubborn woman and won't listen to your arguments anymore." I received much the same answer from her daughter-in-law, whom I took aside one day for a heart-to-heart chat. She agreed that the situation was awkward and that no one liked to live that way. They were getting tired of

the pressure and wanted this matter settled. She said, however, she would support whatever her husband and mother-in-law decided, and that she had no influence over their decision except to support them in their defiance, "because at least now we can live like human beings, not all squashed together like beans in a *doufu* pan." The Housing Administration finally sent someone over to persuade the Widow to leave. He was a young man, slightly bewildered by all the fuss. He just refused to believe that the Widow would continue to defy the authorities. We explained to him that she had no intention of leaving, and that her case was a popular one. He told us that their office was getting pressured from all sides to kick her out. "She's setting a bad example for the rest of Shanghai," he said. "Who knows where it will stop—people will just break down doors and take over state property. The longer she stays there, the worse it will get."

Finally, after an "occupation" of two months, the Housing Administration gave in or, more precisely, the district Party organization put pressure on them to settle the matter in favor of the Widow. One day at a residents' committee meeting, I was told that the matter had been settled, that the Widow and her family would be allowed to stay in the occupied apartment, which would become legally hers. By this time the hubbub had died down, and even the entranceway residents had turned to other matters. Widow Wang had long ceased locking the door to the occupied apartment. As a matter of fact, the apartment often was empty and unlocked as members of her family went about their normal daily affairs. The Widow had won and the Housing Administration had lost much face, although they made it clear that this did not constitute a precedent and that Widow Wang was "responsible for properly fixing the broken door." In the future, it would be unlikely that the Housing Administration would allow a flat to be unoccupied for long, and I noticed after the Widow incident that a special large, thick wooden sheet was being nailed over the doors of other empty apartments, making it unlikely that another squatting episode could occur so quickly.

Not long after the Widow Wang matter had been settled, a second problem arose that involved our entranceway. This was a simmering quarrel between husband and wife that suddenly erupted into days and nights of shouting, upsetting everyone in the entranceway because it went on for hours at a time. The

yelling, easily heard by everyone, became so intense that people began to take sides with the quarreling parties—the men with the husband and the women with the wife. Frankly, neither was a prize citizen. The wife was fresh from the countryside and had no idea of city life—we nicknamed her the Country Bumpkin. The husband was one of those types who treated his women as if they were still in feudal times. When the Country Bumpkin no longer suited him, he simply found a girlfriend nearby. He thought no one knew, but we all did and we called him Two-Face. They were a mismatched couple, one that should never have married in the first place. He had gone to the countryside (to a suburban commune, actually) where he was temporarily “implanted” in her village. At that time Two-Face was very attentive to the Country Bumpkin and her family. He hauled water for them and swept their courtyard, and her family decided that since he was a citydweller he’d be a fine catch for their young daughter. The Country Bumpkin was pretty and she liked him. She knew that he liked her and it wasn’t long before they were married. It was a cheap wedding for Two-Face. He didn’t give any gifts to his wife’s parents because everyone knew that when a peasant girl marries a city youth, it’s like getting ten bride prices in return. So everyone was happy, including the young couple—and every young couple is happy at the beginning.

Through her husband’s family, a way was found to switch her suburban residence permit to Shanghai, and her husband got a good job in an iron works factory. They were assigned an apartment in my entranceway and moved in without fuss. All went well, it seems, for two years and then the problems started. The Country Bumpkin was slow to adjust to city ways and had kept most of her country habits, such as talking too loudly or eating her meals outside on the stoop while squatting. She had become sloppy in her personal habits, regularly wore dirty clothes, and their apartment was always a mess. With two babies to look after, she was just not able to cope with her duties. Back home she had a grandmother who could do many of these things, or at least share in the burden. Here she had to do it herself, and her husband no longer seemed as attracted to her as he was earlier. She wanted to “get out of this concrete prison” in which she felt entombed, if only for a few minutes each night. He wanted a pretty, young wife who provided a meal every night and with whom he could talk about “city affairs.” She was always surrounded by

babies or duties so it was hard for her to do all these things. Sometimes she was so eager to get outside that she would go downstairs to talk with the other housewives, leaving him alone in the dirty apartment. She would come out into the courtyard, squat down, and let her kids run around the courtyard. She didn’t seem to care that her two-year-old son was rolling around in the dirt and was filthy, and if the baby started crying, she’d just open her blouse and stuff her breast into its mouth, no matter who was around. She did that because that’s how they did it back home.

We figured that our Country Bumpkin would eventually get used to city ways, and we didn’t go out of our way to reeducate her, although we did constantly try to improve her attitude concerning public hygiene. But it was slow going. She never seemed to have the time to listen, and no one knew how to get her to be less sloppy at home and in her appearance. She never attended political study meetings, saying that she was only an ignorant country girl and wouldn’t understand what was going on. We told her she should just come and listen but she was always busy, it seemed, with her children. The only thing she took a special interest in was in learning how to ride a bicycle. Whenever she had time she would take her husband’s bike and wobble around the courtyard trying to master the knack of riding. She was a slow learner and kept falling down, even after many weeks. It was a man’s bike, too high for her, and she was always off balance.

Anyway, the quarreling began to build up over one long summer. The husband, self-righteous in his complaint that she didn’t always have his food ready when he came home and that the flat was a mess, began to shout at her more and more. She replied that he didn’t care at all about her and was only interested in food and sex. She wanted to get out of the place—see the city and go to the parks, to a movie, or to visit people. He just wanted to stay at home after a long day’s work. I guess it’s a familiar story to most of us, but in this case the argument got out of hand. He began to go out after supper without her, saying that he couldn’t stand the nagging and complaining. She shrieked and cried and ran after him cursing, waving the baby nursing at her breast like a stick with which to beat him. The more he complained the less she did, and often he’d come home and find no supper at all. So he took to staying away even more, and that’s when he found a girlfriend in another neighborhood not far from ours. She was a worker in his factory and he began to have an affair with her.

This made him all the more irritated and angry when he came home, because he was guilty about having begun a secret liaison.

So they quarreled all the time, and it began to create serious problems in the entranceway. As I said, people had taken sides in the quarrel—the men supporting Two-Face and the women siding with the Country Bumpkin. Then, too, the racket was getting on our nerves. On those nights that Two-Face came home for supper, all would be quiet for awhile. Then you'd hear voices rising, doors slamming, and finally a few thuds and smacks. There was no doubt that he hit her, although you never saw marks and she denied it. But they'd spend hours yelling and cursing at each other. The activist would run up and try to get them to stop, but they always locked the door and you couldn't get in to quiet them down. Neighbors would come into the hall muttering and cursing, and it used to end with the husband suddenly bursting through the door and out the building, with his wife's shrieks and curses following behind.

We tried everything to stop the quarreling. During the day when her husband was away, I and other activists talked with her and tried to get her to change her ways, but she wouldn't listen. She just said she was tired of being locked up at home with never a chance of getting out. She was ready to go home to her parents, but she didn't want to take the chance of losing her precious Shanghai legal residence. She'd make him pay for his treatment of her, and she would make life for him as miserable as he was making it for her. The Party tried to reason with both of them, especially with the husband. He was told to stay away from his new girlfriend and to uphold the principles of socialist morality. He said he would try, but after a few days of vicious yelling and screaming, off he went to see his mistress. There was little we could do, and other neighbors fared no better. One woman, a transport worker, lived next door and tried very hard to help the Country Bumpkin. She told her that she needed to free herself from the past and try to become a modern woman. She said, "Look at me. No one dares to yell and shout at me or to beat me. My husband helps with the household and I have an equal relationship with him. You can do the same if you wish." The Country Bumpkin, surrounded by her squalling children and her messy household, replied: "If you'll lend me your mother to look after my children as well as yours, and if you'll lend me your

husband too, then maybe I could become like you. Right now, it's impossible for me to hold up half the sky,² as you suggest. There's too much here that keeps me down."

The outcome of the affair was no testament to the work of the residents' committee or to the ability of the people in the entranceway to settle their own problems. Two-Face and the Country Bumpkin stopped quarreling, but only after he had given her a real beating one day, which led us to convene a special meeting to warn him that he would be brought before the authorities the next time it happened. After that the quarreling stopped, but that's because he didn't spend much time at home anymore. He was always at his mistress' place and sometimes even spent the night there. It wasn't long before it was clear that the only solution to our unhappy couple's problems was a divorce, and that's where they were heading when I left the neighborhood in 1974. So that's one time where we failed to solve a problem that we should have been able to settle. Maybe we should have worked harder with her at the beginning. I don't know, but it just shows you that where people's lives are concerned, you don't always know what to do even if you live so closely together.

In thinking about my work as a member of the residents' committee, I would say that I enjoyed it a lot. What I lost because my former friends no longer trusted me, I gained in understanding how different people behave and how they respond to authority. I left China feeling that we try too hard to control people's lives and we keep too tight a rein on what they do after work in their homes. Here in Hong Kong, however, neighborhood life is so impersonal that I wonder if my Shanghai experience couldn't somehow be applied here. Maybe we should try to organize some type of Hong Kong residents' committee—not to snoop on people or to mobilize them politically, but just to help them keep the place clean, to take pride in their surroundings, or simply to get them to know one another. What's missing in Hong Kong is people in the neighborhood feeling part of some group. In Hong Kong almost everyone is a stranger. As a result there is dirt and chaos, and people don't care about each other. In China there's too much control and in Hong Kong there's not enough; at least that's how I feel right now after a year of living in Hong Kong.