Life in the Cattle Yard

By Ji Xianlin

Translated by McComas Taylor and Ye Shaoyong

Translators' note: By 1966, the Cultural Revolution was in full swing at Peking University (known by its Chinese acronym of Beida). All classes had been suspended. Armed bands of students of opposing 'Red Guard' factions fought bloody pitched battles with homemade weapons. Staff and students were publicly humiliated and beaten at mass 'struggle' rallies. The author, a distinguished professor of Sanskrit, was associated with the faction known as Jinggangshan. The opposing bloc was the 'New Beida Commune', led by Nie Yuanzi (referred to as the 'Old Buddha' in this text), a lecturer in Philosophy at Beida, and a close confidant of Jiang Qing, Chairman Mao's wife. The author, and a group of other academics, students and administrators (known as the 'black gang') were being held captive by the New Beida Commune. They had been sent to work in Taipingzhuang, a village in the suburbs of Beijing, before returning to Beida, with the stated objective that they were to be 'reformed through labour'.

Professor Ji Xianlin, one of China's leading public intellectuals, died in July 2009 at the age of 98. Widely hailed as the grand old man of Indian studies in China, he was also a prolific essayist and public commentator. He received many honours and awards from the Chinese government, and in recognition of his services to Sino-Indian relations, he received India's highest honour, the Padma Bushan, in 2008. A fearless opponent and outspoken critic, Professor Ji remained a 'true-believer' and ardent patriot to the very last. This essay was originally published as 'Wo-de xin shi yi mian jing-zi', in Niu peng za yi. Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 2005. This translation by McComas Taylor (Australian National University) and Ye Shaoyong (Peking University) was made possible by the generous support of the ANU-Peking University Exchange Program.

We build the 'cattle yard'

One day we received the order to return to the university. We had not been in village of Taipingzhuang long, probably less than a month. Whether we returned to the university or not was all the same to us. We were in an equally invidious situation in either place. It was

not clear how these three weeks in Taipingzhuang fitted into our guards' program of abuse and persecution, and after we returned, we still no idea what novelties they had thought up to continue this process.

Back at the university, we got off the truck at the same old hell-hole of the coal depot. The New Beida Commune boss, who looked like a student and who had harangued just before we set out, was still carrying his spear and gave us another dressing down. The next day, our group of 'black gang' members was ordered to proceed to the three single-storeyed out-buildings behind the Foreign Languages Building and the Democracy Building. There we were set to work to construct the 'cattle yard' which was to become our prison, built with our own hands, in which we would be held.

I knew these out-buildings all too well as I used to walk past them everyday on the way from my home to my office in the Foreign Languages Building, and I had also taught classes in them. They were as shabby as could be. The roofs had holes in them and offered little protection against the sun in summer. The windows were old and broken—some had no glass at all—and did not keep out the freezing winter wind. There was basically no heating, and the single stove provided no more than a visual effect. The brick-paved floor was cold and damp. All in all, based on my experience of teaching there, it was a place without a single redeeming feature.

Nevertheless, the bosses of the New Beida Commune selected this patch of ground as the site for the 'cattle yard' in which to keep us. This was the layout of the 'reform-through-labour' compound: on the east it was bounded by one wall of the Democracy Building, and on the south by a wall of the Foreign Languages Building. To the west, where there was open ground, and to the north, where there was no pre-existing structure, a barricade of reed matting was erected to make an enclosure. The gap between the corners of the two buildings was also barricaded in with matting, and this became the main entrance of the 'cattle yard'. We 'cattle' were assigned to the out-buildings, men and women separately. There were about twenty of us to a room, and each person had barely enough room to lie down. The ground smelt damp and moldy as the buildings had been abandoned long ago. Our guards made a special announcement that, thanks to the benevolence of the 'Old Buddha', some planks of wood would be delivered and we could lay these on the ground to forestall the damp. They expected us to be grateful for this act of mercy. Of course our guards could not possibly live in a place like this. They made their headquarters in the Democracy Building, where they had an office, and some of them probably slept there as well. Just as in the past, they seemed threatened by us, even though most of our 'remnant forces' were old and weak. They opened up the rear door of the Democracy Building to give direct access into the 'cattle yard' and secured the inside and outside of this entrance with barbed wire and so on. Of course there was no shortage of spears. Everything was securely locked down at night, as if they were afraid that we

reactionaries might stage an insurrection. The entire arrangement was at once laughable and lamentable. A shed of matting was built on the western side on the ground next to the women's building. This was originally called the 'External Transfer Room', but later, because this was felt to be insufficiently 'revolutionary', its name was changed to 'Interrogation Room'. Indeed many inmates were questioned here. They were often beaten so badly that their faces were bruised and swollen. Another large shed, which later served as the prisoners' canteen, was set up behind the Foreign Languages Building. Such was the rough layout of the structures in the 'black gang' compound.

The ground was very uneven, and was covered with weeds and rubbish because it had not been maintained for years. Now that we 'special' new occupants were to move in, everything had to be tidied up, the weeds removed and the potholes filled in. Naturally we had to do the work ourselves. Our guards devised the elaborate plans for this and oversaw the effective deployment of the troops. They picked out those of us who were young or middle-aged and who looked strong, and organized us into teams, as they do in construction corps, specifically to handle these tasks. The remainder of old and weak 'remnant forces', along with a few of the female prisoners, were assigned other work. The building site buzzed with activity. The only difference between this and ordinary work site was that not a single person dared to chat or joke. We all had the untidy hair and miserable expressions of convicts. Never before and nowhere else in the world had such a construction brigade been seen.

I was originally ordered to erect some posts for the new matting barricade in front of the out-building (now demolished) on the eastern side of the present Archaeology Building. First we dug the holes with a spade, then put in the posts in position. Rails were attached to the posts to make a frame, and finally the reed matting was nailed up. As the barricade was more than ten feet high, it was impossible to climb over it. What had been an open thoroughfare was now an insurmountable barrier which no one would dare to cross.

When the barricade was finished, I was sent to the interrogation room with a shovel and a piece of wood to level the floor. None of us who had been sent there dare slacken the pace, and we all 'strived with great effort to conquer new heights', as the slogan of the day put it. This was definitely not because our political consciousness was particularly high. We were all just terrified that some new and unforeseen punishment might befall us. By this stage, our guards no longer carried spears, which was a complete change from Taipingzhuang. Perhaps this was because the village was far out in the countryside, and now that we were on the Commune's home territory, they had less to worry about. It was, however, clear in our minds that although they did not carry spears in their hands, there were still plenty of spears piled up in their weapons store in the Democracy Building, where they could be reached with minimal effort. In any case, the guards were all carrying batons

now. Their spears were of the 'non-vegetarian' variety; similarly, their batons certainly did not avoid 'eating meat'.

My concerns about these weapons were definitely not misplaced. There was an old professor from the Western Languages Department who taught French and who must have been over seventy. He had some problem with his eyes, and his mind did not seem very clear either, as he sometimes gave the impression that he was slightly demented. I don't think he had been to Taipingzhuang to undergo the great 'ablution ceremony', and in terms of being 'struggled', he had never faced really big crowds. He seemed to be somewhat out of touch with reality and was confused about simple things. He certainly lacked any real appreciation of the fact that the spears really were 'non-vegetarian'. This old professor had also been ordered to flatten the ground with a spade, but while he was working, the tool in his hands momentarily came to rest. Little did he realize that one of the guards was standing right behind him with a baton in his hand. It was only when he received a massive blow across his back that he woke from his daydream, and his spade sprang back to work. All this may be regarded as a brief intermezzo. Once it was over, the inspired and enthusiastic sounds of spades digging the earth in the little interrogation room rang out once more, just like a symphony composed by some great maestro.

Thus the 'reform though labour' compound was eventually completed. Once it was finished, this masterpiece needed only one finishing touch. Eight huge characters were daubed in white paint on the south-facing wall of one of the out-buildings in the yard: 'Sweep away all cow-demons and snake-spirits'. Each character was taller than a man. The calligraphy was exquisite, 'like dragons flying and phoenixes dancing', and gave full expression to its author's skill. Suddenly the whole compound was filled with its splendour, and moreover, it had more than enough power to overawe a group of 'cow-demons and snake-spirits' like us. This was much more impressive than even a hundred harangues from guards holding spears. Speaking personally, I deeply appreciated those eight words. I felt happy just looking at them. I personally believe their author should be added to the historical register of great Chinese calligraphers. This leads me to reflect on the fact that, during the 'Cultural Revolution', writing big-character posters improved calligraphy, beating people strengthened the wrists, 'struggling' improved one's abilities in sophistry and dissembling, and fighting instilled courage. We should always consider matters in terms of both positives and negatives—can we really claim that nothing good ever came out of that disastrous decade?

Furthermore, I also believe that Lu Xun was quite correct in saying that China is a nation of the written word.[1] This has been the case since ancient times, and is just as true today. There is a verse dating from the Han Dynasty that could be translated simply as follows: 'Unlucky dreams at night mean good fortune when you leave the house in the

[1] Lu Xun (1881-1936), writer and one of the founders of modern Chinese literature.

morning.'[2] Merely by posting these words up at the door, all calamities could be averted. Later, many varied and widespread inscriptions of this kind, such as 'Good fortune on entering the door', 'Good fortune as you wish it' and so on, could be found everywhere. In China, even ghosts fear the written word. The best example of this is the custom of inscribing 'I am a rock from Taishan' on the foundation stones of buildings to ward off evil spirits. Such attitudes did not come to an end when China entered the socialist period. The words 'Serve the People' could be seen in many places, as if simply by writing them, the task of serving the people would be fulfilled. Whether the people were actually served or not was very much a secondary concern. The words 'Sweep away all cow-ghosts and snake-spirits' which now stood before us were also in this category. Once the eight characters had been painted up it was as if we 'cow-ghosts and snake-spirits' had already been disposed of. What a simple and elegant solution! From this time forward we prisoners lived under the constant glare of this sentence.

Life in the 'Cattle Yard'

Having built the yard with our own hands, we were now to be imprisoned within our handiwork. And yet, even inside the compound there was still some life—did not some writers in the past promote the concept that 'life is everywhere'? Even now, it is very difficult to describe this existence. There is so much to be said that it is hard to know where to begin. After prolonged contemplation, however, I had a flash of inspiration. I decided draw on an approach that has been popular in the field of Chinese historiography for a long time, one which has almost come to be recognised as a golden rule: 'use a theory to introduce history'. I will, therefore, begin with a theoretical introduction. The theory that I have developed, however, is not drawn from any classical source, nor has it any foundation in canonical works. I have crafted it entirely myself on the basis of my own physical experiences, personal observations and profound reflection, and it is founded on a great mass of factual evidence. That 'it is difficult to ascend the pavilion of great elegance' cannot be denied, but I myself am firmly convinced of its validity. I now present it for public scrutiny, even though I risk criticism and accusations of self-promotion. Neither of these worry me.

What is this theory of mine? Put simply, it is entitled 'the theory of persecution'. I maintain that all actions taken by the 'little generals' from one end of the 'Cultural Revolution' to the other, irrespective of how they were justified superficially, or whether they were adhered to this or that person, or whether they supported this or that line, were all just a smokescreen. When we get to the heart of the matter, we find a single unifying theme: persecution. This theme runs from start to finish, it can be detected in all locations,

[2] The original verse, which actually dates from the Tang Dynasty, reads, 'I have had an unlucky dream and I am writing these words on the door for auspiciousness'.

at all times, and it has universal influence. As I have already touched on its psychological and ideological foundations on several other occasions, I shall not repeat myself here. From the advent of 'overthrowing' people and searching their homes, right through to 'reform through labour', there was a bewildering array of actions, and yet they all share this single essence. But persecution also underwent a process of evolution. In the early stages, although the 'little generals' applied themselves with vigour, they lacked experience, and their range of techniques was limited. These were usually restricted to a few ideas they had picked up from old Chinese novels or other miscellaneous sources. The *Jade Emperor's Treasury of Laws*, a Buddhist text on tortures in hell-realms, which I have described elsewhere, is one such source. At this early stage, their techniques of persecution were comparatively simple, primitive, inflexible and crude, and lacked both refinement and integrity. Slapping and kicking, for example, were doubtless practiced even in primitive societies, and they mastered these with little effort. This group of young people, however, applied themselves assiduously to the learning process, and displayed great capacity for assimilating new ideas. They networked far and wide, learned from their peers, and spurred one another to new heights. Just as weapons develop rapidly in times of war, so too techniques for persecution evolved during the 'Cultural Revolution', with daily innovations. The processes of advancement and enrichment never ceased. Sometimes one school would discover some new form of persecution, and as quick as a flash, it would spread all over the country. On this point, someone should have applied for a patent on the technique, first developed at Beida, of hanging large wooden plaques around people's necks. The end result was that by striving in concert, by all contributing their own energies, and by pooling their combined wisdom, 'revolutionary rebels' all over the country were able to progress from the primitive to the refined, from the superficial to the profound, from the local to the universal, and from the monotypic to the diversified. Thus, techniques of persecution came to form a system whose impact was felt everywhere. It will be very convenient to have this system already in place, if the need for it should ever arise again in future.

This, in broad outline, is my 'theory'. What kind of history will it introduce? This history has multiple strands, some of which have already been mentioned elsewhere. Let us now add something further to each strand, specifically in relation to the 'cattle yard' at Beida. As I see it, the construction of the compound for the 'black gang' arose from the union of theory and practice. In the following sections, I shall address each topic in turn.

The rectification of names

Confucius stated that 'The rectification of names is essential, for only if names are right, can language be standardised'. What should a group of criminals like us—whose homes had been ransacked and who had been 'overthrown'—be called? This was the initial task of the 'revolution'. We had been called a 'black gang', but this expression was used by ordinary

folk, and was far too poetic. We had also been called ‘bastards’, but like ‘black gang’, this was too commonplace. We had been called ‘counter-revolutionary elements’, which was actually a ‘legal definition’, but for some unknown reason, it never achieved wide currency. In addition, there were several other names, none of which proved particularly popular. Apparently the problem of rectification of names had still not been satisfactorily resolved. Now that the compound for the ‘black gang’ had been built and was in use, rectification of names had become a matter of the greatest urgency. When we first moved in, a notice entitled ‘Regulations for Reform-through-labour Personnel’ had been posted on the wall of each room. It stipulated in stern and concrete terms the detailed rules by which we were to abide, and was obviously the product of a highly refined hand. No one at that stage dared to mention adherence to any legal system. Our little ‘revolutionary generals’ were indeed leading the way in spontaneously pinning up previsions that resembled laws. In truth, how could people like us who were subject to those provisions not respect them?

‘A wise man knows a thousand things, but even he can make a slip’. The ‘little wise men’ who were guarding us foolish folk certainly made ‘a slip’—our name was not right. Only a day or two after the ‘Regulations for Reform-through-labour Personnel’ were posted up, they disappeared again, only to be replaced with ‘Regulations for Reform-through-labour Criminals’. The transformation from ‘personnel’ to ‘criminals’ was a change of a single word, but it was like converting iron into gold. How clear is the word ‘criminal’! How just in its meaning and forceful in its enunciation! As soon as we saw it, we understood our legal position with perfect clarity, and appreciated unambiguously that we had been ‘overthrown’. The only thing in store for us would be a thousand kicks in the guts, and the knowledge that we would never be able to redeem ourselves. We were a group of academics who had never dared to oppose anything, but from this point forward we would wear the label of ‘rebel’. We would proceed with extreme caution both day and night, as if we were on the brink of the deepest chasm or walking on the thinnest ice. Our entire bodies, especially our brain-cells, would be stretched to the very limit. This is how we were ‘reformed through labour’. I have composed this little rhyme:

Our yard was built.
The boundaries fixed.
Our name is right.
Now the world is at peace.

Accommodation

As I have already touched on accommodation above, I will mention it only briefly here. We ‘criminals’ were assigned the three single-storied out-buildings as our living quarters. They were very poorly constructed, and were probably only ever supposed to be temporary structures. They were only marginally better than the flimsy matting sheds. Whenever there

was heavy demand for teaching spaces in the university, these buildings had served as emergency classrooms. By this time, however, all classes in the university had been suspended for nearly two years to enable us to 'carry out revolution'. Even Beida's most magnificent classrooms had been abandoned, let alone these shabby little spaces. As a result, they were filled with dust and cobwebs, the floors were sunken and damp, and the smell of mold pricked our nostrils. We shared them with rats and lizards, and probably some scorpions as well. The floor was crawling with beetles, insects and hosts of other little creatures. In sum, the full spectrum of fauna that would be expected on low, damp ground was found here. It was unfit for human habitation, but by then we had been struck off the register of 'humans'. We were 'criminals', and giving us anywhere to live at all was an act of the most sublime mercy, so what could we expect?

For the first few days, we just slept on mats spread on the wet brick floor. The thin layer of grass under the matting did nothing to stop the damp. During the day, there were clouds of flies, and there were mosquitoes at night. We were all completely covered in bites that itched most terribly. Later, we spread the mats on top of some planks of wood that had been brought in. Each room was given several strips of material to hang on the wall. These had been dipped in insecticide and were supposed to repel mosquitoes. We almost felt grateful for these 'humanitarian' gestures.

By this time, the work-team of 'criminals' was very much larger than it had been at Taipingzhuang, and had probably doubled in size. We did not know the reason for this, nor could we think of one. What business of ours was it anyway? I had noticed at first that several high-class 'criminals' including Lu Ping had not been held with us. There were probably smaller 'reform-through-labour' compounds elsewhere, but I knew even less about these. There were a few fresh faces, some I had seen before at one or other of the big 'struggle' meetings. Others whom I saw for the first time had probably just been 'dragged out' as a result of the deepening development of the 'class struggle'. In fact, from the time we first entered the compound, right up until the whole scheme was disbanded, new 'criminals' were always joining us. Our big family just kept growing.

Daily Routine

The 'Regulations for Reform-through-labour Criminals' were like a constitution for the 'cattle yard', and although there were occasional later supplements, these were all made verbally, rather than being committed to writing. There were no mass meetings of 'reform-through-labour criminals', so there was nothing we had to 'pass through'. Fortunately, whatever was said by our 'reform-through-labour supervisors'—I do not know if this was their official title—was both the law and the 'truth'.

Governed by the legal stipulations of the 'constitution' and its verbal supplements, our existence in the 'cattle yard' was highly structured. We got up at six in the morning;

earlier or later was not permitted. When the bell rang, we got dressed and went outside. First thing every morning, we had to run around the compound while the guards stood in the middle shouting orders. They rarely held spears, as I recall, probably because they felt that the site was secure. Is running considered physical exercise? Usually it is, but in practice, since our group of 'reform-through labour criminals' did nothing but physical labour everyday (no one was permitted to do any reading), we already did more than enough exercise. Why add this extra stint? To reiterate, our 'pack of bastards' had already been warned that there were rock-solid cases against us, and that none of us need ever hope for a reversal of the verdict. Our crimes already warranted death, but even death would not expatiate our sins. Whether or not we kept physically fit was entirely irrelevant. The only rational explanation lies in my discovery: the 'theory of persecution'. The morning run was yet another way of persecuting 'criminals', in order to exhaust our physical energy even before the full day of labouring had begun.

After the run, we washed our faces and rinsed our mouths at a tap in the compound. Next, we lined up to proceed to the No 2 Staff Canteen for breakfast. Walking along the road, this vast mass of over one hundred individuals, all with their heads down, looked as forlorn as if they were going to their mother's funeral. According the verbal stipulations, no one was permitted to look up while walking, and no one dared to try. Anyone who disobeyed would be hit on the back or would get a kick. Once we reached the canteen, we were only allowed to buy corn-meal buns and pickled vegetables. Any 'luxury items', such as the deep-fried batter-cakes called *youbing* were absolutely forbidden. At that time, 'reform-through-labour criminals' received a monthly living allowance of 16.5 *yuan*, while their dependent family members received 12.5 *yuan*. Even if we were permitted to buy such luxuries, we could not afford them in any case. How could we possibly live or even survive on such a tiny sum? Of course there were tables and benches in the canteen, but those were for 'humans'. Since we no longer qualified to use them, we sat under the trees outside or on the steps, or simply squatted on the ground to enjoy this sumptuous repast. The idea of meat at midday or in the evening was even more foreign to us. All we had was a little salted cucumber, boiled vegetable greens or something similar. We did a whole day of strenuous physical work without a single drop of oil for energy in our stomachs. All we could do was try to eat as many corn-meal buns as possible, and in any case we had no ration-tickets for wheat flour. Following my experience of hunger in Germany and during the so-called 'three difficult years' of 1959-61, this was the third time that I had fallen into the Realm of Hungry Ghosts. But this time was qualitatively different. On the first two occasions, I merely had to contend with an empty stomach, but now added to hunger were physical labour and sporadic corporal punishment. Looking back on those two earlier stints, they now seemed like a distant paradise that I could see, but could never reach.

After breakfast we returned to the ‘cattle yard’ and waited to be assigned our jobs. By now we had all become beasts of burden. Not a single worker on the whole campus did any work—they had all become our supervisors and warders. If there was work to be done, no matter how filthy or arduous, they would simply come to the ‘reform-through-labour compound’, and request an assignment of ‘criminals’. This was just like requesting draught animals from the team leader of a village production brigade. Once they had received their assignment of labourers, the workers could just stand around with their hands in the pockets and shout instructions from the sidelines. After liberation, the working classes at Beida truly became the masters of their own destinies.

There is still one extremely important matter that I must not forget to mention. Before we were sent out to work, we were required copy down from a blackboard hanging on a tree-trunk the ‘supreme directive’ that we were to memorise that day. These quotations from Chairman Mao were often quite lengthy, yet every ‘criminal’, irrespective of the nature or location of the work to be done that day, was required to memorise them to the highest level of perfection. Any of our guards could demand that we recite them at any time. A single error would result in at least a slap on the face or some more serious punishment. If we had been summoned to the office, we would first shout, ‘Reporting!’ then stand respectfully with heads bowed. The guards might then give us the first line of a quotation and we would be required to recite the rest by heart. A single mistake would be punished as above. There was an old professor of geophysics, who, partly because of his advanced age, and partly because his head was already full of mathematical formulae, had no room for anything else, not even for these ‘supreme directives’, whose authority was said to be paramount. I often saw him being beaten mercilessly and he had two black eyes. I always felt sorry for him.

What was the purpose of memorizing these quotations? Some people believed that since we ‘criminals’ had skulls as thick as granite, the usual techniques of reform would simply not work. The ‘revolutionaries’ therefore borrowed from the Christians the technique of reciting scriptures which were thought to have to boundless supernatural power. I am ashamed to say, however, that I never actually experienced any benefits from this. I have my own explanation, which is, again, based on my innovative creation, the ‘theory of persecution’. Until this very day I continue to maintain that this is the only logical explanation. Even our guards themselves did not believe that the ‘supreme directives’ had any special powers, nor did they manage to remember even a few of them. Sometimes even they made mistakes when reciting the opening line for a ‘criminal’. On occasions the guards would recite the first line, and I would recite the rest from memory, but because of the stress I made one or two mistakes, which they did not even notice. At that time, I was not so naive that I would ‘confess’ my mistakes, and managed to bluff my way through. If I had been foolish enough to ‘confess’, the guards would lose face, and the consequences of that

do not bear contemplation. From then on I spent my time simultaneously labouring and memorizing quotations, with the result that both my body and mind were stretched to breaking point.

I did many different kinds of work, but there were several places where we worked for longer periods. As I recall, the main place was the North Supplies Depot. Most of the workers there belonged to the New Beida Commune faction and were all supporters of the 'Old Buddha'. There were factional distinctions even among the 'reform-through-labour criminals': as criminals, we were all equal, and yet under certain circumstances , some were more equal than others. I had 'dual citizenship': first, I was a 'reform-through-labour criminal', and second, I was a member of Jinggangshan faction. I received some special treatment on this account, and there were rather more opportunities verbal abuse. Our first job there was shifting firebricks from inside the depot to the side of a small pond where we stacked them up. They had to be stacked very carefully or the whole pile would collapse. Firebricks are very heavy and could crush a person to death if they fell on someone. We 'criminals' were all aware of this, and everyone worked very cautiously. After we had moved all the bricks, the next job was pulling nails out of posts and old wooden planks. We were permitted to do this job sitting down on a block of wood, and as the work itself was not arduous, we regarded ourselves as blessed by Heaven. When we had finished working inside the depot, we were sent outside to a pile of construction sand to shift it from one place to another. I worked at the North Supplies Depot for several weeks in all. I need to add a word of explanation: only a small fraction of the 'criminals' worked here. The rest were organized separately, and as I know nothing of the circumstances, I shall say no more.

From the North Supplies Depot we were sent to the student dormitories to carry coal. By this stage it was summer, and the coal, which had been delivered to the university from elsewhere by truck, had simply been dumped on the ground. It was our task to fill baskets with coal and to carry it from these smaller heaps to make a single large pile that would take up less space. This job was by no means easy, being both exhausting and filthy. We two old men had to carry baskets of coal, a mixture of lumps and dust, weighting fifty kilograms or more. Sometimes we also had to carry it to the top of the heap, which was extremely difficult. Whenever there was a gust of wind, our faces and bodies were covered in coal dust. Under normal circumstances, we would avoid even walking near a place like this, but things were different now and we simply got used to it. Whether or not it was a health hazard is not hard to guess. One of the people with whom I carried baskets of coal for a long time was an old Muslim comrade who had risked his life before liberation to take part in the underground network at Yanjing University. Once, when the workers who were overseeing us were out of sight, he whispered to me, 'It looks like our fates have been decided. We have no option but to spend the rest of our lives doing 'reform through labour'

in some remote location.' Such thinking was quite representative, and I cannot claim that I was thinking otherwise myself.

Later, I did all sorts of different work. As part of a large labour team I was sent to shift rocks and work the soil in the old paddy fields where the main Shaoyuan building now stands. Once I was sent with an old professor from the Western Languages Department to accompany a worker to the east side of Student Dormitory No 35 to repair an underground water pipe. While this master-craftsman did the job himself, we two old men could only be considered his 'assistants', and carried the occasional bag of cement and passed the spade. Although he pouted a bit and said little, he did not harangue us at all, for which I shall always be truly grateful. After the disastrous decade of the Cultural Revolution, I often saw him on campus, riding past on his bike, and I always watched his receding form with an appreciative gaze. I was also sent to other places as well, for example, to work on construction sites, to do the weeding, and so on. I need not describe these individually here.

Since it was called 'reform through labour', labour naturally occupied most of our daily routine. Whether we were working or doing something else, it was always difficult to avoid contact with the guards. Whenever we saw them, irrespective of the location, we were never permitted to look up—this was a golden rule. Sometimes we did not recognize the individual who standing and speaking in front of us, but as soon as they opened their mouth, that person would shout one of our 'standard Chinese insults'. This was just like Americans saying 'Hello' when meeting someone, but in our case only one person was permitted to speak. Our guards had a very rich vocabulary: apart from 'Motherf***er!', they might shout, 'You mongrel!', or 'You bastard!', and so on. They certainly had a copious store of phrases at their disposal. If a guard failed to use one of our 'standard insults' at the outset, it would seem very strange, and I would feel most disconcerted.

The Evening Parade

First, I have an important announcement: the single most important and most brilliant innovation on the part of our 'reform-through-labour' guards was the evening parade.

When describing our daily routine above, I mentioned the many creative solutions that our guards came up with for controlling 'criminals'. Apart from individual functionaries and a handful of workers, the majority of the guards were students. I know nothing about these students' usual levels of academic achievement, but as a teacher, I would have to give them top marks for the way in which they managed the 'reform-through-labour'compound. In the past, our university had become somewhat divorced from practical work. This was largely because the education system was complex, but we, the faculty members, cannot be absolved from all blame. In the 'reform-through-labour' compound, however, the students were deeply involved in practical work, and the talents that they displayed were truly multifaceted: they showed great aptitude for organization, management, haranguing,

distorting the truth, falsifying arguments, twisting logic to infer criminality and so on. Their abilities simply defy enumeration. Add to this the determination and courage that they displayed: if someone needed beating or someone needed kicking, there was never the slightest delay or hesitation. In truth, they were far more advanced with regard to practical experience than teachers like us.

However, the one area in which their gift for innovation was really most apparent was in the evening parade. What was this? Every evening after our meal, we 'criminals' would assemble as usual in the space between two of the out-buildings, and one of the guards would stand in front of our formation to harangue us. This was always someone who came from higher up, not one of the people we usually saw in the compound, and was probably one of the bosses of the Beida Commune. The person chosen to berate us was always changing, but I cannot say how this was arranged. The content of the harangue varied every night. It was not their goal to expound on any grand principle, and there are not that many general principles anyway. If this had been their intention, then there certainly would have been some repetition each night. These harangues were a branch of 'persecution science' and were, in fact, the applied aspect of this particular discipline. The speakers' main technique was to seize on some petty offence. We were all guilty of some trivial misdemeanor, and even if we were not, they could simply make something up. In broad outline, petty offences arose in two areas: the first were trivial things that happened while we were working during the day, the other was the so-called 'problems' arising in the written reports on our 'thought' that we had to compose each day. We were extremely conscientious about our labour, certainly not because our political 'consciousness' was high, but because we feared being beaten or kicked. However, it was always possible to pick a fault, and we never knew which of our fellow inmates would be unlucky enough to catch the guard's eye on any given day. The guard would settle accounts at that evening parade. Writing the 'thought-diaries' was an important daily task. No matter how careful, no matter how punctilious the author, in China, a nation of the written word, this land of 'master-scholars whose pens cut like swords', finding a little mistake is as easy as lifting a finger. Chinese history abounds with cases of this kind. The Yongzheng emperor of the Qing dynasty once put a minister to death because, in order to give his composition a touch of novelty, he wrote that the emperor was 'diligent in the evening and conscientious in the morning', instead of 'conscientious in the morning and diligent in the evening'. They meant exactly the same thing, and both were in praise of the monarch, but Yongzheng was so enraged that the minister lost his head. Our guards' IQs must have been much higher than any feudal emperor's, because they could pick out a slip in some criminal's report everyday. It did not matter who that person was, but once he had been chosen, he would be in for some rough treatment at the evening parade.

The procedure for the parade was roughly this: the ‘criminals’ would line up and wait respectfully. Because the compound was not large, we stood in four rows. First, a guard would call the roll. I have experienced roll-calls like these many times in my life, but they never made much of an impression. There was just one very small incident that I will never forget as long as I live, and which will stay with me until I come face to face with the Lord of the Underworld. There was an Overseas Chinese professor who had returned to China to teach in the Western Languages Department. He was well over sixty, and being in poor health, was confined to bed, but somehow or other, they managed to carry him into the ‘black gang’ compound. He seemed on the point of death, certainly he was past laboring, and he could not even get up for meals. He had to do his ‘reforming’ lying down. The place where the ‘criminals’ lined up for the evening parade was just outside the door to his building. At every roll-call, when his name was called, we could hear from the room where he lay his old, weak, miserable, quavering voice replying ‘Present!’ Every time I heard his voice, I wanted to weep. It shook my very soul.

The other ‘criminals’ stood outside the door of this building, each heart beating furiously. No one knew whose name the guard would bawl out. Then, without waiting for the person to step forward, two strong young guards would walk up to that person, and using the technique usually employed at ‘struggle’ meetings, they would cross his two arms behind his back, and forcing his neck down with their two hands, they would march him out of the line, while slapping him above and kicking him below. The sharp sound of slaps would ring out into the night air. An even harsher method was to throw the person to the ground, where he could be held down by one or two feet. There is no way he could be ‘trampled under a thousand feet’, as the expression goes. There is simply insufficient space for so many feet—this expression is obviously just an exaggeration for rhetorical purposes, and is another example of my discovery, the ‘theory of persecution’.

In all likelihood, scenes like these could only be witnessed during the decade of the Cultural Revolution. We all love the biggest and the best of everything in China, don’t we—even though some of these claims are rather debatable. But here, I believe, is an example that cannot be disputed. The fame of the evening parades in the ‘reform-through-labour’ compound spread like rapidly and before long they were attracting large crowds of spectators. They became biggest and indeed the best spectacle in Beida. Frankly, they compared favorably with the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace. Every night, standing in line, I was on the one hand terrified that my name would be called. On the other hand, even though my head was bowed, by taking an occasional surreptitious sideways glance, I could see vaguely and indistinctly crowds of people on a little rise outside the matting barricade in the darkness under the electric light standing in the gaps between the trees and clumps of bushes. Obviously it was impossible to count them, but as they were many rows deep, there must have been quite a crowd. All had hurried hither to enjoy this

unique and richly stimulating spectacle. Actually, it was much better than the Changing of the Guard with all those busbys and big horses, which had been taking place in England for hundreds of years. This spectacle, on the other hand, could only be seen in the most illustrious institution in the Chinese capital, and only for a few months. Regrettably it all came to an end, otherwise it would have provided a great financial boost for our travel industry.

The most lamentable aspect was that the spectators of our evening parade who stood outside the matting barricade lacked the stamina to stay very late into the night. Had they possessed such staying-power, they would have witnessed a far more somber sight, a vision that even some of the residents of the compound had never seen. One night, I went outside to relieve myself, and in the darkness, I saw under each of the trees in the compound a human figure standing perfectly upright with two arms stretched forward as if embracing something. Actually, they were not embracing anything, just empty space. I had no idea how long our fellow inmates had already been standing there embracing the air. I have no practical experience of this myself, but I feel that this little routine is not unlike the 'jet plane' position. If it were me, I know I could not last fifteen minutes. I had no idea how long the inmates had been standing there, and even less idea of how much longer they had to go. We residents of the 'cattle yard' all knew that at times like these it was best not to say anything or to make a sound. I hurried back into my room, but even in my dreams I could still see these figures hugging the air.

Some curious regulations

In the 'black-gang' compound, apart from the 'Regulations for Reform-through-labour Criminals', which was our constitution, there were also some unwritten, verbal rules. I have already touched on these above, but here I will select two typical examples for further discussion. These are: 1. It is not permitted to raise the head while walking; and 2. It is not permitted to sit with the legs crossed.

Although law is outside my area of academic expertise, I have lived in many countries overseas and I have perused several legal texts, yet nowhere have I seen or heard a law that prevents a person from raising his or her head while walking. Unless for some physiological reason one has a deformed spine, the head is naturally raised. In the 'reform-through-labour' compound at Peking University, however, the warders ruled that 'criminals' were not permitted to do this. I have no idea how they thought up this very strange regulation. It seems unlikely that they found it in any arcane traditional treatise, or that they discovered it on any stone inscription of the kind mentioned in *Tales of the Water Margin*. Perhaps it was the brilliant product of their own genius. I have been unable to get to the bottom of this, but in any case, raising the head while walking was not permitted. Such was the rule and we had to obey it.

Raising the head was strictly forbidden in all locations both inside or outside the compound, except in our own cell-rooms. We were most definitely not allowed to raise our heads to look at the warders when we were being addressed by them . If a 'criminal' dared to look up, the consequences were dire. The lightest possible punishment was a slap, but heavier retribution included punches and kicks. In extreme cases, the 'criminal' would end up on the ground. For this reason, whenever I was standing in front a warder, I always kept my eyes on the ground or on his feet, as any higher would be risky. I made some very thorough observations of the kinds of shoes that they wore, but I am quite vague about our guards faces. We were allowed to raise our heads when we were labouring, for example, when carrying the baskets of coal, for the simple reason that it would be impossible to do the job otherwise. On one occasion we were walking in line to get a meal, and for no particular reason, I raised my head ever so slightly for no more than a tenth of a second. Immediately, the guard who was escorting us to the canteen roared, 'Ji Xianlin, behave yourself!' I instinctively expected a slap on the face or a kick in the shins. Fortunately, I got neither, but from then on I never dared to 'misbehave' again.

The habit of crossing the legs is almost universal because it enables the muscles of the leg to relax. In the 'reform-through-labour' compound, however, this was also strictly forbidden. I remember reading somewhere a reference to Yuan Shikai,[3] which stated that he never in his entire life crossed his legs, and whenever he sat down, he always kept his legs together in a most dignified and stately manner. Perhaps he could sit like this for his whole life because he was a military man, but we 'reform-through-labour criminals' were ordinary folk, not the Hongxian Emperor, so it was very difficult for us.

There is another matter of moderate significance that I should raise at this point. I have already mentioned above that we 'criminals' had lost the ability to laugh. Laughter is originally a human instinct—how can it be lost? This 'loss' was nothing to do with the 'Reform-through-labour Constitution', nor was it the result of one of our guards' elegant pronouncements, but was, rather, entirely 'voluntary'. We may ask, who, when constantly threatened with physical and verbal abuse, has anything to laugh about? The sound of laughter was not absent from the compound, but when we heard it, it was the warders laughing. A little occasional laughter in the compound, which was normally as quiet as a tomb, should have been like music to our ears, and for a moment it might have brought the place back to life. However, what sorts of feelings did this laughter evoke in our hearts? I do not know about the others, but in my ears and in my heart, this laughter was like the screech of an owl in the middle of the night, and hearing it made me shudder.

[3] Yuan Shikai (1859-1916), general and politician, was the first president of the Republic of China. He attempted to revive the Chinese monarchy with himself as Emperor.

Secret agents

Our youthful warders had discovered for themselves, or had learned from some foreign organization like the Gestapo and the KGB, or perhaps even from the Nationalists' 'Central Control' or 'Military Control', how to employ secret agents to consolidate their regime. Of course they could not call them 'secret agents' publicly, so they called them 'monitors'. One person in each cell was appointed monitor by the warders. On what basis were these 'monitors' selected? How were they given their instructions by the warders? To the rest of us, this was all a great mystery. Based on my own observations, the 'monitors' enjoyed some special privileges. For example, they were allowed to go home every Sunday, and they were allowed to stay at home for a longer time. I should add a note of explanation here: some 'criminals' were not allowed to go home at all, some could so do only after a very long time, while others could go home every Sunday. This was called 'preferential treatment'. Ultimate authority was of course still in the hands of the warders, but since the monitors had special privileges, and since 'friends are at the service of friends', they were obliged to repay the favour. They did this by taking charge of monitoring everyone else. Every trivial thing, down to a 'chicken's feather or a piece of garlic peel', had to be reported, and the more diligently the better. Some monitors sided with warders, and if any 'criminal' fell out of favour with the warders, the monitors would hasten to add to his misfortune and 'drop rocks on him even after he had fallen down the well', in the hope of winning some greater reward. One day, I noticed the monitor from one of the rooms, head down and bowed at the waist, making a report to a warder. Immediately afterwards , a 'criminal' from this monitor's cell-room room was ordered out and was dragged off to the room that was especially set aside for beatings. I did not witness the outcome myself, but I can certainly imagine what happened.

'External investigations'

'External investigation' is a specialist term which was used when an outside organization from another location questioned a 'criminal' from the 'reform-through-labour' compound with regard to the 'crimes' of a third party in their own location or organization. (Were they also called 'criminals' elsewhere, or had this been patented by Beida?) At that time, external investigators were everywhere. No organization spared any effort or resources in dispatching investigators to the four corners of the land, and deep into the countryside, to hunt up incriminating evidence relating to troublesome individuals in their own institutions. The aim was to frame up cases against them, to beat them to the ground, and to leave them no hope of ever clearing their names. Take myself as an example. As soon as I had been brazen enough to sin against that 'Old Buddha', her disciples regarded me as an irritant that must be removed, and they expended a great deal of energy inquiring in all directions after evidence of my 'crimes'. Years later, when I returned to the village where I was born, an old

childhood friend told me that people sent from Beida had tried with great determination to make out that I was a landlord. He gave them (there were probably two) a real dressing down and told them, 'If you are looking for people who can speak about the bitterness and suffering of the past, then Ji Xianlin should be No. 1 on your list!' After the first time, they ran off with their tails between their legs, but from the sound of it, they even came back a second time. As I mentioned above, when they ransacked my home in Beida, they especially took away my address book. It appears that they used the addresses that they found there to conduct their 'external investigations'. If this is what happened at Beida, then other organizations would have done likewise. External investigators seemed to be everywhere in those days.

I often had to deal with external investigators when I was locked up in the 'reform-through-labour' compound. They were of every social background and type. Some just left the name of the person under investigation. After I had written something, I would hand it to the guards and they would pass it on. Some wanted to talk face to face, but their attitude could be quite civil, and certainly not all fire and brimstone. There were some, however, who were utterly brutal. One day, two investigators sent by Shandong University demanded a face-to-face meeting. Accordingly, I was taken to the interrogation room to be questioned by these people from my home province. They were looking into the links between myself and a professor of Chinese at Shandong University who was registered as a resident of Beijing. I knew from this that my friend was also in trouble. If I had not been classified as a member of a 'black gang' at the time, I might perhaps have been able to assist him. But I was finding it hard enough to save myself, and so, despite my affection for him, there was little I could do to help. A 'criminal' in the eyes of the New Beida Commune, I had suddenly also become a 'criminal' at Shandong University. My two 'honoured guests' thumped the table and glared at me, grabbed me by the hair, and beat and kicked me. They had very strong Shandong accents, which brought to mind Wu Mi's line, 'A rural twang like this really grates on my ears'. Hearing that coarse and somewhat slurred Jinan intonation and seeing their cruel, rough faces, I truly felt sick at heart. The 'standard curse' in Jinan consisted of three Chinese words meaning 'I'll f*** your mother', and was slightly different from the one used in Beijing. These two fine fellows made such extensive use of the Shandong phrase that they not only forced me to confess, but even though I was a sophisticated 'criminal' who had gone through many battles, I was frightened and did not know how to deal with them. I was sweating all over. They interrogated me without a break for two hours. It looked as if they not even begun to run out of energy, but it was already long past meal time, and even the Beida guards were getting bored. They thought that the visitors were over-doing it, so they stepped in. My two fellow Shandong provincials reluctantly called off the battle and retreated in a huff. Even though persecuted beyond the point of complete exhaustion, I

never thought of myself, but only of that friend of mine, and how unbearable his life must be, having to endure such cruel and brutal fellows who were wholly devoid of humanity.

Continuous 'struggle'

Every day, when we were imprisoned in the 'cattle yard', we would head off somewhere to work under the supervision of the warders or the workmen who came looking for labourers. I immediately recalled the scene in the villages at the time of collectivization or the people's communes, when the leader of the production team would assign the draught animals to the farmers every day. Now, we were not very different from those animals. They had to tolerate being led around by others, they could not speak, they could not think. We also had to put up with being led around, and although we could speak, we dared not say a word.

At this stage, however, labour was certainly not the only thing in our lives, or to put it another way, it was not the only means by which we were 'reformed'. Don't we always speak of 'reform through labour'? Right up until the present day, although I have endured many years of extremely difficult experiences, I still maintain that this 'reform through labour' can only reform the body of a 'criminal', and cannot reform his mind or his soul. It can raise welts on the 'criminal's' body, it can make his smooth skin bleed , it can leave scars, yet it can never still the anger that rages in his soul. And if labour cannot achieve this, what is to be done? Labour must be supplemented with 'struggle'. Before 'reform through labour' there was just the 'single track system' of 'struggle'. After 'reform through labour', with addition of 'struggle', a 'dual track system' came into existence. I have already addressed 'struggle' elsewhere. But all that 'struggle' can achieve is to bring more rabid and more vicious techniques to reform the body of the 'criminal', and is much the same as 'reform through labour'.

And yet there is a distinction between 'reform through labour' and 'struggle'. If 'criminals' like us had to choose, we would all prefer the former, but unfortunately we never had the choice. For this reason, although we were physically located in the 'reform through labour' compound, we had to be prepared to cope with either at any moment. Even after we had been assigned to accompany a worker to go and labour somewhere, we never felt at ease. You would never know when, and you would never know who, but for some reason (and amusement cannot of be excluded from possible reasons), there would always be someone who wanted to 'struggle' one of us 'criminals'. A Red Guard from the Commune, wearing a red armband, would immediately be sent to escort someone from the 'black gang' compound. They would arrive, as a rule, brimming with heroism and valour, looking for the 'administration section' of the compound. The 'struggle' would be approved by someone in the 'administration'. After a longer or a shorter interval, the person who had been 'struggled' would be brought back, invariably with their heads hung low and wearing a

miserable expression, their hair in a terrible mess, and their faces sometimes battered and bruised.

I have no way of estimating the number of people taken away and 'struggled' in this manner, but it happened every day. When I was in the compound, from their perspective, I was a 'criminal'. I had been an 'official' of the original Jinggangshan faction, I had committed the unpardonable crime of opposing the 'Old Buddha'. There were therefore very many grounds on which I could be dragged from the compound and 'struggled'. Every day after breakfast, I would be anxious that I would be kept back instead of being sent out to work. I would be truly unable to sit still and the minutes seemed like years. I could find no peace either sitting or standing in the cell. I would think of my fellow inmates, at that moment, contentedly laboring somewhere. They really seemed to live the life of gods, while I was waiting for some terrible storm of an unknown nature to burst over my heard. As soon as the Red Guard who had come to collect me strode into the compound, the guards would summon me to the front of a reed-mat screen that had been set up facing the main gate of the compound. Something was written on the screen, but I have forgotten exactly what. With head down, and bowing at the waist, I waited for my orders: 'Ji Xianlin, prepare to be struggled', just like parents telling a child before he or she goes out, 'Be good, and do as you are told!' At that time, I was taken to all sorts of places to be 'struggled', and I need not go into details. In any case, every occasion followed the same ritual. First, slogans of 'Down with…!' shook the heavens. Then would come the so-called 'struggle' speeches consisting of all kinds of wild accusations and trumped-up nonsense. When things had reached fever-pitch, there would be some slaps to the face. Finally, in the middle of howls of 'Down with…!', there would be one final cry, 'Take Ji Xianlin away!' That was it. The great ritual would be over. I would return to the compound, or to my own home. I too would be hanging my head and wearing a miserable expression, and doubtless my hair was also in a terrible mess.

The great 'struggle' rally of 18 June 1968

I have described the history of the 'Cultural Revolution' at Beida elsewhere. The first time a 'demon' was 'struggled' was 18 June 1966. I did not qualify for the 'demon's platform' because I had not yet been classifies as such at that time. All I could do was lie around at home listening to the terrific roar of the crowd in the distance. By 18 June 1967, this date had already recognized as an important 'anniversary' and was marked with a large-scale 'struggling' of 'demons'. Because I still did not qualify as a 'demon', I fortunately managed to avoid any trouble.

By 18 June 1968, however, I had become a 'demon', and I had already been living in the 'black gang' compound for a month or more. This year I finally qualified and could be brought out to be 'struggled'. This was a serious calamity, one that I had not experienced for

a long time. Early in the morning, the warders were bustling about in the compound. For some unknown reason they had chosen to 'optimise personnel' and not every inmate would receive the rare opportunity to appear at an event which was only held once a year. When we lined up to leave the compound, I discovered that only a handful of us would be attending. There were two 'representatives' from Department of Oriental Languages, myself and that old professor. Our escort was not from the compound, but had been sent by the department. He was an old worker by the name of Zhang, who had been in charge of our audio-visual services. From this we deduced that the persons to appear at the 'demon-struggle' session had been selected by the various faculties, units and organisations. This old colleague Zhang saw us, but unlike the others who had been in the same position and who usually would have greeted us with 'Motherf***er!' and followed this with 'You bastard', he shot us a friendly glance. This was so unexpected that I even gave little shiver. Our group of criminals, or at least myself, had not regarded ourselves as human for a long time. Now that someone had treated us as fellow humans, it felt most peculiar. I will remember this old colleague for the rest of my life.

Those bent on 'struggling the demons', however, were completely different. I do not know who these people were. I did not dare to raise my head. I could not see the people beside me clearly either as I did not dare look around. I did not even see which route we took. I was vaguely aware of being lead out of the 'black gang' compound, and I could see that the road in front of us passed the Linhuxuan Building and the Russian Language Building and then went up a slope. This was well before the present Main Library had been built, and there was only a road leading to the Yannanyuan and the Philosophy Building. We were probably going along the shady avenue to a place near Philosophy. I don't remember where or how I was 'struggled', but after an interval, I was led back to our 'stately home'. I could not remember how long I'd been forced to sit in the 'jet plane' position, nor could I remember the 'struggle speeches' with which people had attacked at me. My sole impression was one of complete disorder. I only heard a great commotion of shouting, interspersed with the words, 'Down with…!' Perhaps all of the faculties, units and organizations were conducting their own 'struggle' sessions simultaneously. Disoriented, I felt as if I were wandering in a dream, as I continued to walk forward, head down and bowed at the waist. I could not see the people in front of me or behind me. I was simply aware that there were people all around me. They even seemed to be above and below me filling the sky and the earth. They were everywhere, but all I could see were shoes and trousers. On the way back to my 'stately home', I felt that there were even more the people crowding around. Their cries were even harsher, and even more pieces of brick and tile struck my body. I was by now already quite numb, and I hardly felt the punches. It was only after I got back to the 'black gang' compound and took off my shirt, that I noticed that some had written 'I'm a bastard' on my back. The back of my jacket had been bunched up, and

someone had tied a branch of a willow leaves to it. I later found out that this was probably supposed to represent the tail of a dog. The compound, which usually felt like a living hell, now seemed extraordinarily peaceful and relaxed. There was almost something likeable about it.

After the pain had subsided, I reflected on the events of this day's big 'struggle' session. Why was it so filled with excitement and solemnity? Small 'struggle' sessions were a daily event that one could witness anywhere. To offer a psychological explanation, the more often we see something, the less interesting we find it. The small sessions were commonplace, but today's big 'struggle' session was like a grand ceremony that was only held once every year. That is why it caused such a stir all over the campus.

Snippets from the 'Cattle yard'

What I mean by 'snippets' is quite different from the sort of social notes that one usually sees in the newspaper. But because I could not immediately think of a more appropriate title, I have temporarily borrowed this one. My 'snippets' will cover some of the particularly notable experiences of a few of my fellow sufferers in the 'cattle yard', with the addition of a few trifling incidents that have left an indelible impression on me. Although these are trivial matters, they reveal important truths, and it is possible to glimpse some of the unique features of life in the yard from them. For reasons that everyone will understand, I have suppressed all the personal names. Those familiar with the events will immediately recognize the individuals, so there will be no need for scholars to write anything like '*Life in the Cattle yard*'s Secrets Revealed' in the future.

A professor from the Faculty of Library Science

This professor, who was head librarian at Beida, was a nationally and internationally recognised expert in library science and on Dunhuang.[4] We had known one another for a long time and could be regarded as old friends. It would have been very difficult for someone like this to have escaped the disastrous decade of the Cultural Revolution, which was to be predictable. I do not know what sort of imaginary crimes he was accused of, nor do I know how he was 'struggled' for, but somehow we met up in the 'cattle yard'. By now, however, we had all become virtually mute, and no one said a word to anyone else. Fortunately I had not become blind as well, so I could still see what was going on.

In the 'cattle yard', we 'criminals' had to write a report on our thoughts every day. One day at the time of our renowned 'evening parade', quite unexpectedly, this old professor was called out of the lineup. He took a terrific ringing slap across the face, followed by a volley of punches and kicks. He was knocked to the ground, where he was

[4] An important historical site in Western China.

made to kneel. Apparently he had written his 'thought report' on a rough piece of toilet paper and had presented this to the warders. At that time, in that gloomy environment, there was absolutely nothing to raise one's spirits, but an occurrence like this truly did something to bring a little joy. I don't know whether this old professor was simply confused and had nothing else to write on, or if he had experienced a sudden burst of courage and was purposely mocking this pack of arrogant warders, who thought that they alone in the world were worthy of respect. If it were the latter, then he obviously regarded this band of vile creatures, who held our lives in their hands, with total contempt. An incident like this would have been included in the sort of popular heroic tales that circulated in the old society. I was truly worried for him, and I admired him in secret. He was a hero in the 'cattle yard', who had earned some credit for his fellow prisoners.

A professor from the Law Faculty

This professor was an old revolutionary cadre who had joined the Communists before the war against Japan. I do not know much about this early life, but as soon as he was sent to Beida, he especially sought me out to ask me to translate the famous ancient India legal classic, 'The Laws of Manu'. We first became acquainted at that time, and we often met at events on and off campus. As an individual, he was easy-going and kind-hearted, having all the excellent qualities one would expect in an old cadre, and we got on very well. Who would have foreseen that during the 'disastrous decade', we would be sharing the 'cattle yard'.

Inmates of the 'black gang' compound were never permitted to converse with one another except under highly exception circumstances. When acquaintances met in the compound, they just went on their way with heads down, without batting an eyelid. This type of contact between me and this professor was in no way exceptional.

One day—it was a Sunday —the 'criminals' who had permission from the guards to visit their homes for the afternoon were returning to the yard. I was sitting in my cell-room, when I suddenly saw this old professor being led around by one of the guards. In his hands he held a wooden board with his name written on it. He was being marched from room to room, and at every door, he cried out, 'My name is Such-and-such. Today I came back later than the permitted time. I have been ordered to make a self-criticism. I acknowledge my guilt and request appropriate punishment.' I don't know how other people felt, but this made be shudder, and I just stood there not knowing what to do.

A female lecturer from the Asian Languages Faculty

This lecturer in Mongolian in the Department of Oriental Languages was upright, honest, sincere, and incapable of falsehood. When the 'Cultural Revolution' began, someone falsely accused her of having been a hard-core member of the Nationalists' No 3 Youth League. This

was complete fabrication, for which there was not a single piece of evidence or substantiation. These unwarranted 'accusations' gradually became 'crimes', probably because she was not sufficiently reverential towards Beida's leading female opportunist, the 'Old Buddha'. On one occasion I had been sent out to labour with the old professor from the Asian Languages Faculty. At first, it was just the two of us on a rather remote patch of ground outside the East Gate of the campus, picking up pieces of brick and rock, under the supervision of a worker. One day, this female lecturer unexpectedly joined us. This seemed quite odd to me, and I asked her if she had been ordered here by the Departmental Revolutionary Committee. She said no. 'In that case, why have you come of your own volition?', I asked. She replied, 'Someone said that I was guilty of something, and that made me feel as if I really was guilty, so I volunteered for reform through labour.' This logic was unfathomable, and it seemed to be the epitome of foolishness, or so I thought at the time. I always regarded this way of thinking, like the Christian idea of 'original sin', as very strange, and I utterly failed to comprehend it. In any case, from this incident you can easily tell what sort of a person she was. However, in those circumstances and at the time, when one had to behave and speak with great circumspection, what could I say?

Things went on like this for a while, but when we were taken to work at Taipingzhuang, she was not among the ranks of the 'criminals'. This was to be expected, but ever since ancient times it has been known that disasters never occur singly. We did not see her when we first returned to the university from Taipingzhuang, built the 'cattle yard' and moved in. This was also to be expected, or so I thought. However, one day, late in the afternoon, a new inmate was unexpectedly pushed and shoved through the entrance of the 'black gang' compound. Keeping my head down, I took a sideways glance—it was that female lecturer. This was a real shock because I assumed that she had already 'got through' safely. There was no need to for her to 'throw herself into the net' again, and be tossed in with us. Why was she here now? How had she ended up in this hell-hole? This time, it definitely did not look as if she had come voluntarily, as she was being dragged in. All kinds of thoughts ran through my mind, but I did not say anything or even look her way.

One of the guards asked her name. She replied, 'X X-hua'. 'Which *hua* is that?' 'The *hua* in *Zhong-hua Min-guo* —The Republic of China'. This was way over the limit! How dare a 'counter-revolutionary criminal' even mention the Nationalists' 'Republic of China' in broad daylight in front of everyone within the sacrosanct 'reform through labour' compound, which represented the authority of the Beida Revolutionary Committee, subsidiary of Nie Yuanzi Incorporated? This was completely intolerable. It was simply an act of extreme arrogance and wanton presumption. How could this pass without punishment? They immediately branded her as an 'active counter-revolutionary element', and punched and kicked her to the ground. One of our ingenious guards suddenly had a brilliant idea, and led her to a tree. This tree grew in a slightly peculiar way—one branch sloped down from

the main trunk. She was ordered to stand with her back to the trunk under this branch. At first her head touched its underside, but a guard shouted 'Step forward!' and did as she was ordered. Because the branch approached the ground lower, her head was forced back, 'Step forward!' he shouted again. As the branch got even lower, she had to tilt her head even further back, and her whole body bent back as well. 'Step forward!' came the order for a third time. By now the branch was already very low. She was no acrobat and could lean back no further. At this point, the orders ceased, and she just stood there her body bent backwards. She could not hold this position for a single minute, and sweating profusely, she collapsed on the ground. There is no need for me to describe what followed. In my opinion, this guard had elevated the art of persecution to a new high, but this lecturer certainly suffered for it.

I don't know how they tormented her during the night, but the next morning when I got up, I noticed that her face was swollen and that she had two black eyes.

The Party Secretary from the Faculty of Life Sciences

I did several decades of administrative work at Beida, during which time I attended many meetings on campus. As a result I met this Party Secretary very early on and you could say that we were old friends. Once the 'Cultural Revolution' got under way, it was impossible for him to avoid trouble. He was a natural target as a person 'on the road to capitalism'. Accordingly, he was dragged out during the first great maelstrom of attacks against such 'capitalist roaders'. He was inevitably a 'guest of honour' at the first mass 'struggle' meeting on 18 June 1966. In this sense, he could be considered an 'old-timer'.

For some unknown reason 'rebels' who supported the 'Old Buddha' were particularly numerous in the Faculty of Life Sciences. Consequently the great majority of the guards in the 'black gang' compound were students from this faculty. However, I was surprised that after the compound had been built, that so few 'capitalist-roaders', who had been so vehemently attacked for a period, ended up in here together with our group, the majority of whom were 'cow-ghosts and snake-spirits' of the ' reactionary bourgeois academic authority' species.

He seemed to 'benefit' from the fact that so many of the guards were students from Faculty of Life Sciences, and as a result, received some 'special treatment'. I don't know the details, nor do I wish to say anything out of order, but I myself witnessed one incident which was truly shocking.

One day, at noon—it was around July or August, the hottest time in Beijing—the glare of the sun was at its most 'poisonous', as we say in Shandong. I was walking across the compound when I noticed a person standing out in the sun—it was the Party Secretary. His eyes were wide open and he was staring into the sky at the blazing disc of the sun, while a

guard, who a student from Life Sciences, sat comfortably in the shade of a nearby tree. I was completely stunned. Later I found out that this was the guard's punishment for the Party Secretary: to stare at the sun with his eyes open. He was not allowed to blink, or he would be punched and kicked. When I heard about this, I shuddered. When or where, may we ask, in ancient times or modern, in China or abroad, from primitive societies up to and including socialist societies, has there ever been such a punishment? If anyone were to try this, I can guarantee that he or she could not endure it more than half a second. Surely this would make anyone go blind.

Apart from this, I heard, but did not witness myself, that two 'cow-ghosts and snake-spirits' from among the teaching staff in Life Sciences had committed some crime in the eyes of their students. The students from this faculty who were acting as guards ordered these two old lecturers to stand in the middle of the compound. They were facing away from one another, and both were forced to lean over backward so that their two heads pressed together, or to put it another way, the only thing that held them up was pressure on the back of one another's head.

We need not describe in detail any more little vignettes of this kind, but there are quite a few. In short, the 'art' of persecution was progressing rapidly towards to a new peak. I regret that I have never seen a specialist monograph on the subject. It would be a great disappointment if in the passage of time such skills are lost.

A female teacher from Beida Primary School

I don't know exactly which organization this teacher belonged to. I did not know her beforehand, and I don't know why she was locked up in the 'cattle yard'. Based on several months of observation in the yard, the guards seemed to have some form of 'division of labour' when it came to beating or persecuting inmates. Each had his own specialization, as if there was some system and distinct areas of responsibility. The guard responsible for beating this female teacher was always the same individual. One morning I noticed this woman wrapping her arm in a bandage and tying this around neck with a strip of white cloth. Several days earlier I heard a vague report that she had been beaten so severely during the night in the interrogation room, that they had broken her arm. In spite of this, she was still ordered to take part in the labour. I did not know the details even then, much less so now. At that time, a principle among the 'black gang' was 'mind your own business', and right up until the present, I have never discovered what really happened to her.

An 'old rightist' student from the Faculty of European Languages

This student's surname was Zhou. I did not know him, nor had I ever heard of him. I only noticed once he arrived in the compound. Because he was branded a 'rightist', and an 'old' one at that, it was apparent that he had a long history. The peak year for labelling people as

'rightists' was 1957. It was hard to believe that Zhou could have been branded that early. By the time he arrived in the 'cattle yard', he had already worn the 'rightist' label for nearly a decade. I have no idea how he managed to survive all these years. By the time I saw him, his face was sallow, waxy and swollen, and he had lost a lot of hair. He looked like an elderly invalid. I had heard that he had been an acute and intelligent student, but now he looked like a half-wit, and there was something not quite right about the way he moved. We can only assume that all this was the result of some atrocious mental and physical persecution. It was a human tragedy. Even though I was also in a very difficult situation—my life was in someone else's hands, and I was perpetually anxious, fearing that I would be bitten by those 'non-vegetarian' spears—in spite of all this, when I saw this 'old rightist', a half-crazed simpleton, I felt so sorry for him that I could not help secretly shedding a tear.

But in the eyes of the guards, who lacked any form of conscience, he was an amusing plaything that could be arbitrarily humiliated, beaten and cursed at will. Where else could such a two-legged animal be found? In accordance with their principle of division of labour, a very young and perfectly intelligent-looking worker was assigned the task of persecuting him. I never saw this young worker beating any of the other 'criminals', only this simpleton, whom he would randomly kick and punch. Walking in line to the canteen, he was always the one this guard would scream at, he was the one he would hit and curse. Every night, the sounds of beating and the cries of someone being beaten coming from the interrogation room always seemed to have something to do with this simpleton. I had a rule for writing these memoirs: I would never abuse anyone. I will, however, make an exception in this case. I want to curse that young worker and his accomplices. You are contemptible animals. You are worse than pigs and dogs!

One day, I noticed that the simpleton had 'Bastard' written in white paint on his back. He did not seem to have any family or anyone to look after him. The tattered clothes that he wore were covered with oil stains, and had not been washed at least since he arrived in the compound. But the word 'Bastard' written in white stood very clearly and could be read even a long way off. If some 'free' person, who still had the right to laugh, saw this, they would certainly have found it very amusing. We 'criminals', who had lost this right, felt nothing but sympathy for him and swallowed our tears.

A lecturer from the Faculty of Physical Sciences

This lecturer was the son—probably the only son—of an old professor of psychology at Beida. For some reason, one of his legs was slightly shorter than the other and he walked with limp. I had not known him beforehand, nor did I notice him when we first went into the compound, or when we were at Taipingzhuang. We had already been 'reformed through labour' in the 'cattle yard' for some time, when one day a little after midday… (I need to insert a few words here. In the 'cattle yard', no one ever had a nap after lunch. One day, the

guards caught the old professor from the Department of Oriental Languages dozing in the afternoon, and made him stand in the sun in the middle of the compound for an hour. He may also have been forced to look at the sun)… when from my cell-room, I suddenly heard from the direction of the entrance of the 'cattle yard' the sound of someone being beaten. It was the sound of wood or a bicycle chain wrapped in rubber striking a body. This was a common enough occurrence in the 'black gang' compound, and could happen many times a day. Our senses had already been numbed, and such events did not evoke any particular emotion. But this time, the cries were especially loud, and continued for an unusually long time. Even my numbed senses jumped when I looked out the window towards the compound gate. I saw that this disabled lecturer had been knocked to the ground and that several 'heroes' were continuing to beat him with the weapons in their hands. I could not see if he had already been 'trampled by a thousand feet' as the slogan put it, I only saw that this person, who already walked with some difficult, was lying in the mud, his face covered in blood.

Why did he only arrive at the 'cattle yard' at that late stage? Why was he sent? Had he only just been 'dragged out'? I did not know the answer to any of these questions, and I still don't know the answers today. Although, like Dr Hu Shizhi, I am somewhat addicted to ferreting out trivial details, I do not intend to exercise this skill here.

From that time on, whenever we walked in line to the canteen, there was one more of my 'cattle yard' companions who limped along out of step on lame legs in the otherwise neat rows.

If I really wanted to cover all 'snippets' relating to other people in the 'cattle yard', I could extend this account several times over. But I am not in the mood to write any more now. In fact, I cannot bear to write any more. These few cases serve to exemplify the whole, and I trust that readers will gradually come to understand the situation for themselves.

'Special Delux Accommodation'

I had already descended into Hell, but because my senses were dulled, I did not realize for a very long time that Hell had different levels. Doesn't Buddhism hold that there are eighteen levels in the Hell-realms? I should explain this from the beginning, so this might take a little longer. There was a student from the Faculty of Life Sciences by the name of Zhang Guoxiang. I don't think I saw him when the 'cattle yard' was first set up; he only appeared later. As to how and why he came, these matters were decided by Nie Yuanzi Incorporated's Beida Revolutionary Committee. We 'criminals' had no right to enquire, nor did we dare to. As soon as he arrived in the compound, he immediately stood out 'like a crane among chickens'. He did not seem to be one of the bosses, but was more like some kind of underling. He was, however, involved in a huge number of matters and had wide influence. I

often saw him on a bicycle which had been confiscated from the home of some ‘criminal’. All of the ‘criminals’ possessions ended up in the hands of the warders. They could go to the home of a ‘criminal’ and take anything they liked. ‘Criminals’ did not even own their own lives. In the sight of him riding round in circles to pass the time in the joyless, terrible and silent ‘cattle yard’ was a truly striking spectacle that held the inmates’ gaze.

On several occasions, at night, after the evening parade, and even after the ten o’clock bell when the ‘criminals’ were supposed to go to sleep, a light was still shining under one of the big trees in the compound. This Mr Zhang would be sitting there on a chair with his right leg drawn up and his foot on the seat, scratching between his toes. In front of him stood a ‘criminal’ with head bowed. He would be questioning the ‘criminal’, or haranguing him in a loud voice, or cursing him angrily. I was already accustomed to the dressing down and the cursing, but to see someone sitting in that way was totally new to me and left an enduring impression. Even more memorable was the fact that one evening, standing before him with head bowed, was the former President and Party General Secretary of Beida, one of the leaders of the ‘Ninth of December’ Movement, and former Deputy Minister for Rail Transport, Lu Ping. He was the main person attacked in name by the ‘Old Buddha’ in her first ‘big character poster’. When the ‘black gang’ compound was first set up, he was the main ‘high-class criminal’, and was confined elsewhere. He did not join us in the ‘cattle yard’, but was only transferred to the compound some time later. I do not know what Zhang Guoxiang was asking Lu Ping, how long he questioned him, or what the end result was. I just felt that this was a very peculiar situation.

I never expected that this same misfortune would descend on me just a few days later. One evening, the bell for lights out had already been rung when I suddenly heard a shout from the back corner of the Democracy Building: ‘Ji Xianlin!’ At that time, our nerves were perpetually on ‘highest battle alert’, and as soon as I heard this, I dashed out into the courtyard in front of the building at double my normal speed. There I saw Zhang Guoxiang sitting as described, scratching between his toes with his right hand.

‘How did you keep in touch with the Nationalists’ secret agents?’, he asked me.

‘I wasn’t in touch with them.’

‘Why did you say that Comrade Jiang Qing gave the New Beida Commune a shot of morphine?’

‘It was just a figure of speech.’

‘How many mistresses do you have?’

This really gave me a start, but I answered respectfully, ‘I don’t have any mistresses’.

This ‘conversation’, with him asking questions and me answering them, continued for some time. Then he said, ‘I have been very kind to you tonight.’ Yes, I had to admit he was right. I had not been punched or kicked, nor had I been bombarded with the ‘standard Chinese curse’. How could this not be regarded as the greatest ‘kindness’? I never had the slightest

suspicion that this last statement was loaded with a terrible threat. ‘I have been very kind to you tonight’ —but what about tomorrow night?

The next night after lights-out I was just getting ready to go to sleep, when I suddenly heard the sound that I least expected, ‘Ji Xianlin!’ I rushed out of the cell-room door, even more quickly than the night before, but I saw that this ‘Mr Zhang’ was not on the other side of the compound, but was standing in a fit of rage at the very corner of the two out-buildings: ‘Why didn’t you come when I called? Are you deaf?’

I knew that things did not look good, but before I could think any further, my face and my head felt as if they burst in to flame, and barrage of blows from bicycle chain wrapped in rubber came crashing down on me. Filling heaven and earth, lashes rained down on my body—not the lower part, but the most vulnerable part—my head. My ears was ringing and I could see stars, but I did not dare try to escape. I just stood there, stiff as a board. At first I felt pain, but before long I began to go numb. All I could feel was stroke after stroke and a terrible searing sensation on my head, eyes, nose, mouth and ears. It was not pain, but a sensation much worse than pain. I must have been about to lose consciousness and collapse to the ground, but somehow, instinctively, I kept standing. The image of the whip flashed before my eyes. I did not hear the shouts of abuse—if there were any. I was dazed and confused. I don’t know how long he beat me. The inmates in the cell-room on the corner later told me that it went on for a long time. They were all shocked, and blanched when they recounted the story. I myself had become like a block of wood or a lump of rock; I had become an object devoid of senses, and did not experience the same terror as those who looked on. Some time later—I don’t know when—I vaguely heard, as if in a dream, a shout: ‘Scram!’ I began to come to, and realized that this evil sadist had been ‘kind’ to me again. I quickly retreated to my cell-room with my tail between my legs.

Once I had fully regained consciousness my whole body was wracked with pain. The first thing to was to do a ‘physical examination’. This ‘physical examination’ would be of the external kind. First I checked my five sense organs and four limbs to see I they still functioned. My eyes were swollen, but I tried and succeeding in opening them. This was sufficient to demonstrate that at least my sight was still functioning. My face, nose, lips and ears were all bleeding, but I could open my mouth and none of my teeth were missing. As to the bleeding from other places, none of it was life-threatening, so I simply had to put up with pain.

Imagine—was I still able to sleep that night? Lying on the wooden board, I tossed and turned, but every movement was painful. The places that were bleeding felt sticky, and I just had to let them bleed. The parts of my body that hurt, I just had to let them hurt. I did not have a mirror, so I could not examine my face. In the past, my fellow victims like the old geophysics professor, or the female Oriental Languages lecturer, reappeared after a night of persecution with swollen faces and black eyes. My heart always missed a beat when I saw

them. Now my face was not just swollen and bruised, but I could not see it myself, so there was nothing I could do about it.

The next morning, as usual, I was sent out to labour and to memorise the daily quotation. At that time, our task was screening sand at the side of the road near the North Supplies Depot. How did my body feel? How did my heart feel? I cannot really say. I was in a complete daze—so dazed that I could not even contemplate suicide.

The old saying is right: disasters do not occur singly. This stretch of hardship was not yet over. At noon the same day, that same Mr Zhang walked into our room and ordered me to 'move house'. My 'house' did not consist of much: I just rolled up my mattress and quilt and shifted it into the room outside the door where I had been beaten. During the day, I did not notice anything special, but that night I suddenly realized that this was 'special luxury accommodation', where 'serious offenders' were overseen by other prisoners. The lights blazed all night, and inmates took turns in the room to keep watch and were not permitted to sleep. I never understood what they were 'keeping watch' for. Were they afraid we would escape? Impossible. These intellectual 'criminals' were too timid to attempt anything like that. It is more likely that they were afraid we would kill ourselves, perhaps by hanging. I only realized after receiving this severe beating that my position in the 'black gang' compound had been elevated, and I had received a promotion. Lu Ping, a 'criminal who had offended the Emperor', was also in this room. To draw a comparison, I had entered the Buddhist hell-realm of Avici, a place akin to an execution chamber in human terms.

My troubles were not yet over. It was that Mr Zhang again. He ordered me and a Professor Wang from the Chinese Faculty to pull the hot-water cart. Every day we had to make three round-trips to the boiler to get boiling water for all the inmates to drink. As far as I know, Professor Wang had never been a member of Jinggangshan, nor had he ever committed any earth-shattering crime, so there was no reason that he should be punished like this. Delivering the hot water was by no means an easy job as we had to make three trips a day in addition to our usual laboring and memorization. While the others ate, we looked on. When it rained, we got soaked. Even if it had been 'raining knives', we still had to deliver the hot water regardless. It was an additional form of suffering that defies description. Professor Wang, however, was able to find some pleasure amid the pain: he would secretly grab a cup of tea at the boiler and have a quick smoke of his pipe, which brought him a little solace.

The 'Special Class'

These warders had a deep understanding of policy. Having gathered all the 'criminals' together, they subjected us to more than six months of 'reform through labour', which consisted of a combination of 'listening to the scriptures and receiving the teachings' on the one hand, and slaps, kicks and punches on the other. They seemed to think that some of us

had made a certain amount of ‘progress’, so it was time to separate us into groups. This is how the ‘Special Class’ came about.

I don’t know what criteria the warders used, but they picked out a few ‘criminals’ to join this group. A space was set aside for the classes in the Foreign Language Building. They could not use either back or the front doors, so they had to run a long plank of wood up to the window from the outside, and they used the window as the entrance. You could walk up the plank and climb through the window to get into the building, where you would find yourself in a small classroom. What was this classroom like? How was it equipped? I don’t know. Although it was only a few feet, it could have been ten thousand miles away as far as I was concerned.

I was very envious of the members of this class. I felt that the days of suffering, the beatings, the abuse, the hunger and thirst that stretched out before us must eventually pass, if we just gritted our teeth. But looking ahead, I was not always so confident. When would the day of our emancipation come? A vast fog-shrouded ocean seemed to spread out before my eyes. I had no boat and I had no oars. I could see no island ahead. I just kept hoping that something would appear. These days that I spent peering out across the water passed like years. But now that we had the Special Class, I hoped that this might be the boat to carry me over the ocean.

Members of the Special Class enjoyed some enviable privileges: they were permitted to wear badges of Chairman Mao on their lapels. They were permitted to make requests to the warders in the morning and report to them in the evening, and so on. Communist Party members in the ‘cattle yard’ had been stripped of the right to pay party dues. Was this privilege restored to Special Class members? I don’t know. Every time I heard the swelling sounds of songs in praise of Chairman Mao or songs consisting of his quotations set to music coming from the Special Class room, my spirit soared. Seeing these and some other privileges (I am not sure if they were formally conveyed or not) which were enjoyed by members of the Special Class, I was insanely jealous. For example, they dared to cross their legs in the cell-room. They raised their heads ever so slightly while walking, something I never dared. How I yearned to be able to walk up that plank into the Foreign Languages Building! Later, for reasons that I do not understand, members of the Special Class were never really able to improved their lowly status, right up until the compound was dismantled.

The Indonesian Lecturer from the Department of Oriental Languages

This lecturer, who was originally from an Asian languages specialization in Nanjing before 1949, transferred to Beida to study Indonesian, and joined the staff after he graduated. He was very bright, an excellent student, and his scholarly writing was of an exceptionally high standard. He was a person of rare ability. His family experienced some financial hardship

when he was studying in Indonesia, and I was able to offer them a little support. As a result we shared an excellent relationship and he was always polite and respectful towards me.

But people change, and when Beida split into factions during the 'Cultural Revolution', he joined the New Beida Commune which had had the upper hand. Everybody has his or her own ambitions, and there is nothing terribly wrong with that. However, this individual exhibited an unusual degree of hostility once he turned against me.

After I had been 'dragged out', he always joined in on the occasions that I was interrogated in the Foreign Languages Building, yelling angrily, thumping the table, and throwing the furniture about more aggressively than any of the other participants. By the look of it, he was worried that he could not give sufficient expression of his loyalty to the 'Old Buddha'. Could it be that the enthusiasm he now exhibited was an attempt to assuage himself of his anti-Soviet and anti-Communist actions in the past? I often wondered about this. Furthermore, the usual explanations that people's affections often swinging from hot to cold, and that some people experience the urge to kick another person when he is down—these do not adequately account for his behavior. Political struggles, however, pay no regard to personal feelings.

One day, I was walking out of the compound, with my head held down as usual, and right there beside the road, I saw a slogan in huge characters that read, 'Down with the counter-revolutionary element XXX!' This was a big surprise, as not long before, at a meeting held to interrogate me, he had been a 'super-activist', his face aglow with revolutionary fervor. How could he suddenly become a 'counter-revolutionary element'? Someone had apparently dug up some secrets from his past. That night, he killed himself using the 'capitalist' method,[5] and 'severed his links with the people' as the slogan put it.

In relation to this affair, I find take no pleasure in the misfortunes of others, nor do I rejoice in their woes. I simply feel that human life is very complex and sometimes very frightening.

Surrender to Depravity

I had spent some time in the 'cattle yard', my nerves were becoming more frayed by the day and my emotions more numbed. This place was not a hell, but was worse than a hell. I was not a 'hungry ghost', but worse than a 'hungry ghost'. If I still had any perceptions left, then my perception of myself would have been this: I was not a human or a ghost, but was both at the same time. The way people see you tends to be the way that you regard yourself. Being not wholly one thing or the other, I will borrow a popular term from philosophy: I was 'alienated'.

[5] In a dark satire elsewhere, the author described overdosing on medications as 'capitalist' suicide.

In the past, when I was regarded as a human, I naturally behaved like a human. I do not wish to sound presumptuous, and I have some understanding of my own strengths and weaknesses. If I were to divide people into good and bad in the way that children do, I would put myself in with the 'good' people without any hesitation. Take, for example, the question of money. I am not miserly, nor do I worship money, and in this regard, I will give some a couple of example. When I was about ten years old and living in Jinan, I was sent to the pharmacy to buy some medicine. The cashier made a mistake with the account and gave me one silver dollar too many. In those days, in the eyes of a child, a dollar was a huge amount. But I immediately returned it to him, which made him blush. It was only much later that I understood his emotions. In 1946, when I returned to China from abroad, I sold my gold watch and sent the money to my family. I converted the remainder of the 'legal tender' into gold bullion. Here too the clerk made a mistake with the calculation and gave me an extra *liang* of gold. At that time, one *liang* was by no means an insignificant amount, but I returned it to him on the spot. In the case of some great or noble personage, these trifling matters would hardly be worth mentioning. But in the case of an ordinary person like me, one could not say that they were insignificant.

In 'cattle yard', I had suddenly become a ghost. At first, I was most uncomfortable with this, and tried to resist it, but as more and more time passed, I gradually grew accustomed to it. The dividing line between man and ghost, good and bad, kind and cruel, beauty and ugliness, gradually blurred. I was already degraded, and so further degradation did not seem like an issue, or to use a very apt proverb: 'it was like chipping a pot that was already broken'. As my life had no future and I was not considering suicide, I was both a human and a ghost. My only option was to resign myself to the situation.

I also faced practical problems. The 'living' allowance graciously bestowed on me and the two old women I supported by Nie Incorporated's Revolutionary Committee was quite inadequate to for survival, much less to 'live' on. It was not even enough for a daily meal of corn-meal scones and salted vegetables. Doing strenuous physical labour every day, without a drop of oil for energy, my stomach was always growling for food. Several times, walking along behind the warders, I even contemplated begging for some of the left-over liquid in their jars of bean-curd, so that I could dunk my cornmeal bun in it. For a while I was assigned to work in the vicinity of Building 28 and 29 of the student residences. My job was to clean out the rooms that had been destroyed during the battles between the two factions, and gather up the bricks and rocks on the ground. I remember one big room at the southern end of Building 28, which was piled full of garbage. It was a terrible mess and was covered with all sort of rubbish. In a broken old cooker used for steaming buns, I unexpectedly discovered several lumps of moldy, desiccated bread. What a wonderful discovery they were! I thrust them into my pocket, and later, in some quite spot, when the worker who was supervising me was not watching, I secretly devoured them. Whether this

was hygienic or not, whether they carried bacteria or not, as far as a 'ghost' is concerned, these sorts of concerns are completely irrelevant.

I also learned to tell lies. When we were laboring outside the compound, I became so hungry that I could not go on, so I told the overseer that I was ill and needed to go hospital for a checkup. I got his permission to leave, and by carefully choosing a little-used side path, I sneaked home like a rat. There I found two steamed buns with sesame paste. I wolfed them down, and went back to work—that was my checkup. Anything like this was extremely risky. Had I bumped one of the guards or monitors on the way, I need not describe the end-result.

On one occasion I found a small sum of money on the road, mostly one and two *jiao* notes. In great excitement, I stuffed them into my pocket. From then on, I made use of the fact that we had to keep our heads down while walking. I would watch out for these sorts of things that 'free' people with their heads up would never see. In this manner I managed to find a few coins, which were a unexpected bonus. I also discovered an important principle: the best place to look for coins was on the ground near the toilet in the 'black gang' compound. From then on, I always enjoyed going to the toilet, even though most other people disliked it.

If I had not described these wretched incidents here, no one would have thought them possible. Had I not experienced them myself, I would never have imagined them either. But they are all true, and we would all agree that they are repugnant. By that stage, however, I had completely lost any sense of repugnance, and did not consider them wrong. Thinking back on this now, it makes me shudder. I was always interested in the psychological process by which a person becomes depraved. Subconsciously I partly believed that it was a natural process. But, now, taking myself as an example, my earlier view appears to be incorrect. Who, then, should take the responsibility for depravity?

'Persecution theory'— a brief conclusion

Life in the 'cattle yard' was very complex. I have only selected some of the more salient features for brief description above. Applying the principle of 'basing history on a theory', I opened by proposing a 'theory of persecution'. I fear that at first there may have been many skeptics, but now, having read my account of the situation in the 'black gang' compound, I imagine that no one will still doubt the veracity of my theory.

What did the 'little revolutionary generals' hope to achieve from this persecution? They will certainly never reveal the sordid secrets of their hearts, nor can anyone else do this for them. Their lofty formulation was 'reform through labour', but as I have said before, this technique of persecuting people, while waving the banner of 'reform through labour', could only 'reform' people's bodies, but could never 'reform' their souls. If it achieved

anything at all, then my own depravity is the evidence. Persecution can only ever degrade people. It can never elevate them. This is the brief conclusion of my 'theory of persecution'.

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