

**My Heart is a Mirror
and
Life in the Cattle Yard**

by Ji Xianlin

Translated by McComas Taylor and Ye Shaoyong

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.

Part One of this translation, 'My Heart is a Mirror' (*Wo-de xin shi yi mian jing-zi*), was originally published as an appendix to a collection of autobiographical and reflective essays entitled *Random Memories of the Cattle Yard* (*Niu peng za yi*), Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 2005. Part Two is the translation of chapters 13–16 of that volume.

This project was made possible by the generous support of the ANU–Peking University Exchange Program. The brief commentarial footnotes have been added by the translators.

PART ONE

My Heart is a Mirror

When it comes to the passage of time, each person's heart is like a mirror, and, of course, I am no exception. I regard myself as a somewhat sensitive individual, having a mirror for a heart. Although I dare not claim that it shows every fine detail, it is certainly not too dull. I believe that the mirror of my heart accurately reflects the situation as it was during nearly ninety years of the twentieth century, and it can certainly be relied upon.

I was born in 1911, the year of the Xinhai Revolution. Two months and four days after I was born, the last emperor was called on to abdicate from the Precious Throne. For this reason, I often jokingly refer to myself as a young loyalist of the Manchu Qing dynasty. By the time I was old enough to remember, country people could still be heard speaking respectfully of the 'court' (which meant the emperor in the speech of rural folk), as if he was still in power. I had no idea what this 'court' was; it seemed to be a person, but also seemed to be some kind of spirit. In either case, it was a thing of great prestige and authority. Such are the lingering images of the Qing dynasty in the mirror of my heart.

My old home town, Qingping County, Shandong, is part of the city of Linqing today. It was a famously poor part of the province. Ours was an impoverished farming family. Both my grandparents died young and I never knew them, so a grandfather's affection is something that I never experienced. They left behind three sons, of whom my father was the eldest, although he was the seventh among his generation of cousins. The younger of my two orphaned uncles was adopted out to another family and his surname was changed to Diao. The two who were left behind, having no parents to look after them, were alone in the world and were dependent on the goodwill of others. It is difficult to describe the misery of their circumstances. It is unlikely that they ever had enough to eat. When they were so hungry that they had no alternative, the two brothers would go to the little grove of Chinese date trees at the southern end of the village, to collect the rotten fruit that had fallen on the ground. At least this would take the edge off their hunger. I am not at all clear about this period of history, because neither of the brothers ever spoke to me about it. Perhaps because it was too frightful or miserable, neither desired to open old wounds, nor did they want subsequent generations to retain such horrible memories.

In any case, the brothers could no longer remain in the countryside; if they had, they would only have starved to death. By some means or other the two agreed to venture out to the big city to look for work and to make a living. The only large city

within reach was Jinan, the provincial capital of Shandong, so off they went; a pair of inexperienced country lads arriving entirely without support in the hustle and bustle of the big city. They encountered untold hardships and experienced numerous setbacks. I know very little about this time as, probably for the same reason, neither of them ever spoke to me about it.

My uncle later managed to gain a toe-hold in Jinan. At best he was like a tuft of grass growing in a crack between the rocks, grimly clinging to life. The brothers then decided that my uncle would remain in Jinan to earn some money, while my father would go home to look for farm work in the hope that one day my uncle would enjoy some form of success. Even if he did not 'return to his hometown wearing silken robes', at least people would look at him with different eyes, and he would win some respect for his parents and for himself.

One needs land to farm—this is a most obvious truism. But land is exactly what my family lacked. My grandfather had probably left behind a few *mu* of land from which my father, I imagine, managed to scrape together a living. The story of what he did with the land and how he managed to start a family remain a mystery to me, but it was at about this time that I came into the world.

Fate always leaves people a way out. Just at this time, or a little earlier, my uncle lost his job in Jinan, and was wandering through Guandong. With the last *yuan* in his possession, he bought a ticket in the Hubei flood-relief lottery. It turned out that he won first prize, which was said to be worth several thousand *liang* of silver. Our family became rich overnight. My father purchased sixty *mu* of land along with a well, and resolved to build a large house in order to display his newly acquired wealth. At one point, however, there was a shortage of bricks. He announced to the entire village that if anyone was prepared to demolish his own house and sell the bricks to my father, he would pay more than ten times the normal price. 'If the reward is sufficiently high, someone will always step forward', as the saying goes. As other people's houses were torn down, ours went up. The east, west and north wings each had five large rooms, and the main entrance faced south, all of which lent the house a most imposing appearance. The two brothers had finally won that measure of respect.

This pleasant prospect was, however, short-lived, as my father was undone by his own generosity and forgot his own limits. Sometimes, when visiting the markets in other villages, he would spontaneously invite all the customers in the inn to be his guests. People say that, before long, those sixty *mu* of prime farmland had been sold off, the east and north wings of the newly built house had been demolished, and the bricks and tiles disposed of. These had been purchased as dearly as if they were pure gold and sold as cheaply as dung. The splendid illusion had ended in nothing: our family was poor once again.

From the time of my earliest memories, our family was severely impoverished. We would probably only have been able to eat 'the white stuff' (meaning wheaten

flour) once or twice a year. We normally ate flat cakes made from red sorghum meal; even corn-meal cakes were something of a luxury. In spring and summer I would cut fresh grass or break off sorghum leaves and carry them on my back to my great-uncle's house, where they were fed to his old yellow cow. Idling about there, I waited until I had eaten a corn-meal cake, which was like a little feast to me. In summer and autumn, two of my aunts from the Ning family who lived opposite us would always take me into the fields of neighbouring villages to glean ears of wheat and beans. I would hand over the miserable little handfuls of what I had found to my mother. I do not know how many of these handfuls she had to save up before she could manage to thresh out some grains and grind some flour so we could get a meal of the white stuff. Naturally, I felt as if I were consuming some fabulous luxury, like 'dragon liver or phoenix marrow'. However, I never remember my mother eating a single mouthful: she just sat there watching with misty eyes while I ate. At that stage, how could I possibly have understood my mother's emotions? I vaguely formed a resolution that one day, when I was a grown-up, I would make sure that mother also got some of the white stuff to eat, but as the saying goes, 'the tree wants peace, but the wind does not stop; the son wants to nurture, but the parent has passed on'. Before I was able to ensure that my mother ate the white stuff, she had finally departed from us. This left me with a life-long psychological scar that I have been unable to treat; this has been a lasting regret.

There were fourteen cousins in my father's generation. Driven by poverty, six left for Guandong and were never heard of again. Of the five who remained, one was adopted out, as I mentioned before. Of these remaining five, only my eldest uncle had a son, who tragically died young and I never knew him. After I was born, I was the sole male child: anyone in a feudal society naturally knows how much this implies. My uncle in Jinan had an only daughter. Once again the brothers came to some arrangement and I was sent to the city. Too young to understand the emotions that my mother must have experienced at that time, it was only many years later that someone told me what she had said: 'If I had known then that he would never return, I would have died rather than let that boy go.' I never heard these words myself, but for the rest of my life they have been ringing in my ears. How can anyone ever repay the kindness of their parents? The year that I finally left home I was only six.

No human life is immune from the twists and turns of fate. The path taken by an individual is sometimes not of that person's own choosing. Had I stayed at home in those days, my road would have been that of the impoverished farmer. Life may have been bitterly hard, but the risks would have been far fewer. What of the path that I follow today? I have broadened my horizons, come to know something of the world and of life, and enjoyed an undeserved reputation. I have travelled the broad sunny highways, but I have also walked the narrow dangerous paths—sometimes rough underfoot, at others much easier to pass—right into my nineties. If I had been

permitted to choose my own path all those years ago, which would I have chosen? It is impossible to say.

In the mirror of my heart is a lingering image of the time I left the village: a destitute rural family which, despite momentary prosperity, was immediately plunged back into poverty.

A whole new world appeared before my eyes when I arrived in Jinan. I need only give one example: when I saw the mountains of Jinan, I was both surprised and delighted. Until then I thought that mountains were simply very large pillars of stone!

My uncle naturally paid great attention to my education, as I was the sole heir of the Ji clan. I attended a traditional nursery school for about a year, then enrolled in a modern school, Jinan Normal College Primary. Everything seemed to happen smoothly. The May Fourth Movement had just swept over Shandong, and the principal of the primary school was a modernist, who immediately adopted textbooks in the vernacular language. In one of these texts was a fable, 'The Arab's Camel', which has spread through many cultures, and which treats the topic of insatiable greed. By chance, my uncle caught sight of this, and suddenly flying into a rage, cried, 'How can a camel speak? This is pure nonsense! You need to change schools.' Accordingly I was sent off to the Modern Educational Primary School. It seems that changing schools was much easier in those days, almost as if there was no need to use the 'back door', or anything of that kind. I merely had to sit a simple oral test: the teacher wrote down the character *luo*, meaning 'mule'. I recognised it, unlike my relative who was one year older than me. I was immediately placed in upper first class, but he was sent to the lower third. That one word gave me a one-year head start—such is life! At first, the texts were in classical Chinese, but later, following the trends of the time, they were replaced with Modern Chinese texts. Not only were there talking camels, but even the tortoises and toads were able to speak, so my uncle just gave up.

My uncle was a very talented man, but he had received little formal education. Living the life of a wandering vagabond, studying entirely on his own, he acquired both learning and ability. He could compose poetry in both *shi* and *ci* styles, he could write, he could carve seals, and he had read many of the Chinese classics. In view of his origins, it seems most improbable that he should have developed an interest in the rationalist schools of the Song and Ming dynasties—not only was he interested, he was uncommonly passionate about them, a fact which perplexes me even today. Whenever I saw him seated bolt upright, solemn and dignified, reading thoroughly dry books such as *Qing Dynasty Commentaries on the Classics*, I always felt that it was rather ridiculous.

Naturally, all this had a great influence on my education. Doubtless he wanted me, the Ji family's sole surviving sprout, to continue the line by means of a classical education. He regarded *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Annals of the Three Kingdoms*,

Tales of the Marshes and all the rest as 'light reading', and strictly forbade them. Probably on account of some kind of reverse psychology, these were the very books I loved the most. I secretly read dozens of old Chinese novels, including *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, *Record of the Western Chamber*, and many others. Instead of going straight home after school, I would hide among the piles of brick and tiles to read. I even read by torchlight under the bedclothes. Several years seemed to pass in this fashion.

The formal education that my uncle arranged for me was another matter. When I was at Zhengyi School, he paid a teacher of Chinese to instruct me in the classical language after school, so I also read *Zuozhuan* and other classics. After I got home and ate dinner, I immediately set off for the Shangshi English Language Society, where I studied English far into the night. Several more years passed by as I pursued this daily routine.

It is quite clear that my uncle believed that 'Chinese learning should be the base', but did he also believe that 'Western learning is for practical application'?¹ On this point, I cannot speak so definitely. In any case, in those days everyone thought that learning something Western would help one climb the ladder and make money. This was a sort of pragmatic approach to 'admiring the foreign', but not to the extent of 'coveting the foreign'. The debate over things foreign and Chinese was obviously foremost in my uncle's mind.

I graduated from Zhengyi Middle School in about 1926 and passed the entrance exam to study at the Liberal Arts Senior High, attached to Shandong University, which had been established at Baihezhuang in Beiyuan. The teaching staff in this school could be said to have been the best of their time. Among the teachers were Wang Kunyu (Chinese); You Tong, Liu and Yang (English); Wang (mathematics); Qi Yunpu (history and geography); Ju Simin (ethics, also the principal of Zhengyi Middle School); Wanyan Xiangqing (ethics, principal of No. 1 Middle School). Teaching Chinese classics was Mr 'Great Qing Empire' (his nickname had such a ring to it that I have forgotten his real name); another teacher had been a member of the imperial academy under the former Qing regime. Whenever these two gentlemen taught the *Book of History*, the *Book of Changes* or the *Book of Odes*, they never needed to bring the texts to class, as they knew by heart all the Five Classics and Four Books along with their commentaries. All these teachers were outstanding. Taking into account the school's paradisiacal environment—lotus pools all about, weeping willows spreading under the sky—it was an ideal place for learning.

It was here that I began consciously to apply myself to my studies. I am a person who is highly susceptible to the influence of the environment. When I was in primary and junior high school, my level of achievement could not be considered bad

¹ Two popular slogans of the time.

and my name was always among the best few in my cohort, but I never topped the class. I was not very concerned about this, and went fishing and prawning just as I had always done. By the time I reached middle school, however, one of my Chinese essays received unexpected praise from Mr Wang Kunyu, and I also came top of the English class. It was not particularly difficult to score well in exams in the other subjects: one could do this easily enough simply by learning a certain amount by heart. As a result, for the first time in my life I topped the exam list and was the only one in the school with a grade average in excess of 95 per cent. At that time, Professor Wang Shoupeng, who had been the top-ranking scholar under the Qing dynasty, was president of Shandong University and also Provincial Minister of Education. He composed a couplet for me and presented me with a decorative fan bearing his own calligraphy. Attracting the attention of others in this way excited my vanity. From that time I began to take serious notice of the order of names in the examination lists and ceased to be quite so lackadaisical. Accordingly, over the next two years, I won first place in each of the four sets of exams, and my reputation 'caused the earth to tremble'.

During this period, the outside world was certainly not so placid. Warlords were constantly at one another's throats, and the turmoil so endemic that 'even the chickens and dogs found no peace'. The Hubei-Liaoning War, the Hubei-Anhui War: the situation changed from one minute to the next. Successive regimes followed one another on and off the stage. One year there was a ceremony to honour Confucius at Shandong University, and all students from our senior high school were ordered to take part. The first time that I saw Zhang Zongchang, commander of the local Liaoning and Shandong armies at that time, he was wearing a mandarin's robe and jacket, while kneeling on the ground and prostrating himself respectfully. Who knows how many soldiers, how much money or how many concubines he had? These images remain with me to this day.

By 1928, under the banner of 'revolution', Chiang Kaishek, taking on the mantle of Sun Yatsen, put together some kind of new army and marched north from Guangdong. With the support of the Communists, he swept aside all before him like a tempest. As the wind sweeps away scattered clouds, his large force swept into Jinan. At this time, the Japanese militarists, seeking to gain advantage from adversity, or to 'rob the house while it was on fire', as the saying goes, occupied Jinan and fomented the Third of May Massacre. Our senior high school was closed down.

The image in the mirror from this period is a montage of feudalism, modern education and the warlords' endless battles.

The invading Japanese army occupied Jinan again, and the Nationalists retreated. As none of the schools were open, I spent the year living the life of a temporary refugee.

At that time, the Japanese army was of course the unchallenged ruling authority in the whole of Jinan. Like all immoral regimes, they appeared strong, but were in fact highly vulnerable. They were so terrified of the Chinese people that ‘the whistling of the wind and the cry of the crane, even the grass and trees, all seemed like enemies’. Every day they felt as if they were facing a substantial adversary, and they regularly carried out on-the-spot inspections and searches of private houses. As soon as we heard that the Japanese army was searching somewhere in the neighbourhood, there would be a furious debate within the family. Some would say that we should leave the front door open, but others would stridently oppose it. The latter said that if we left the door open, the Japanese soldiers would say, ‘What insolence! How dare you leave your door open!’, and then they would draw their swords. The former would say that if we closed the door, the Japanese would say, ‘You must have something to hide, otherwise you would have opened your door to welcome the glorious arrival of the Imperial Army!’, and they would also draw their swords. In the end, the door was sometimes open and sometimes shut, and we were always in a state of high anxiety, ‘like ants in a hot wok’. It is impossible to understand such a predicament unless one has experienced it oneself.

I also had one personal experience of this kind: I had no school to go to, and I was acutely aware of the depth of Japanese hatred for Chinese students, who were considered to be the ringleaders of the movement to burn Japanese goods in Shandong. For this reason, I shaved my head and dressed in the style of a shop assistant. One day, when I was walking along Dongmen Street, I came face to face with a group of Japanese soldiers who were searching pedestrians. I knew that I could not escape, so I had no choice but to stay calm or face their merciless weapons. I stepped forward as if nothing were the matter. One soldier gave me a body-search and noticed that I was wearing a leather belt. As if he had made some marvellous discovery, he said with a malicious grin, ‘You very tricky. You not shop boy. You student. Shop boy not wear leather belt.’ With this, he hit me over the head with his baton. Luckily I did not pass out, and I tried to explain that shop assistants were making money these days and some could indeed afford leather belts. He did not believe me, but as we were arguing, another soldier who was probably his superior walked over to us. Hearing what the first soldier had to say, he seemed to be a little impatient and with a wave of his hand said, ‘Let him go!’ I felt as if I had escaped with my life from the jaws of death, or that I had just turned back from the gates of hell. Only I know how much I sweated that day.

The image in the mirror of my heart for this year is of a temporary refugee who had been forced to bide his time.

In 1929 the Japanese army had retreated and the Nationalists advanced again. I was on the road in search of knowledge, and a whole new world was opening up before me. Beiyuan Senior High School had reopened by now, and Jinan Senior High School had recently been established under the auspices of the

province, and was the only advanced senior high in Shandong. I was admitted without having to take the entrance exam.

The school was run by a group of officials from the Nationalist Party, and the air was so thick with the 'Party' as to be tedious. The general intellectual atmosphere, however, was bright and fresh. This was most apparent in the Chinese classes. Gone was 'Mr Great Qing Empire', the old books were read no more, and works in classical Chinese had been replaced with ones in the vernacular. Most members of the Chinese teaching staff were better-known modernist writers of the day. My first Chinese teacher was the martyr Hu Yeping. He very rarely stuck to the syllabus, but would spend every class promoting 'contemporary art and literature' and 'popular literature', which were in fact 'proletarian literature'. Many young people, myself included, found this very exciting. We set up a table in the public space in front of our dormitory door and invited everyone to attend a Contemporary Art and Literature Workshop. We also planned to publish a magazine, for which I wrote an article entitled 'The Mission of Contemporary Art and Literature'. My essay contained a few passages on the so-called Marxist theory of art and literature liberally plagiarised from Chinese translations of Japanese works. These translations were like sacred texts to us, and although I do not suppose that I really understood them, the articles were filled with revolutionary indignation and catchcries, and were written in a most lofty style. But before my article could be published, the Nationalists issued a warrant for Mr Hu. He made a hasty get-away to Shanghai, but they caught and killed him two or three years later. My revolutionary fantasy burst like a bubble, and there was no more 'revolution' for me until 1949.

Mr Hu was followed by Dong Qiufang (also known as Dong Fen), who was regarded as a junior associate of Lu Xun. A graduate of Peking University, he had translated a book called *The Wave of the Freedom Struggle*, for which Lu Xun had provided a foreword. He had somehow seen my article and believed that I had some gift for writing, which in his opinion was unexcelled in the class, or indeed in the school. It is only natural that I was somewhat carried away with my own importance.

To this very day, in the entire long, slow passage of sixty years, irrespective of the research work I have been engaging in, I have never ceased writing essays. Leaving aside the question of their quality, I find that I am able to express my emotions in essays, to voice my joys, vent my spleen, and lift my aspirations. These benefits alone are not insignificant. I will never forget this revered pedagogue. This year, the image in my heart reveals something like a personal renaissance.

We graduated from the highest class of senior high in the summer of 1930. Several dozen matriculants travelled as a group to the capital to try for the examinations. In those days there were all kinds of universities in Beijing, or Beiping as it was known: national, private, religious—the variety seemed endless. The quality was also very uneven, and their ability to attract students varied greatly. The two national institutions, Peking University and Qinghua University, were the most

prestigious, as is still the case today. For this reason, no aspiring matriculant from anywhere in the country failed to register for the entrance examinations for these two great institutions. It was as if they had become a gate to heaven, but one whose threshold was frighteningly high. Out of dozens who applied, only one might be accepted. If the chosen one passed the examination, he would be like ‘the humble carp who became a dragon’. The year I applied for the entrance exam, there was another student from Shandong who had already sat it five times, but had failed on each attempt. That year he signed up again with us, but even on his sixth attempt he was unsuccessful. He experienced some kind of mental breakdown, and for the next week wandered around the Western Hills of Beijing in a daze before he finally came to. That was the end of his university dream; he returned to his old home town in Shandong and was never heard of again.

Naturally, I also applied for Peking University (Beida) and Qinghua, but the difference between me and the other senior-high graduates was that I applied for these two schools only, as if I had great faith in myself. In fact, at that time I had simply not considered the options very carefully and acted more or less on impulse. Other students registered for multiple universities, including schools of the second rank, the third rank and even those with no rank. Some registered for as many as seven or eight. I have sat hundreds if not thousands of examinations in my life, from primary school right up to the highest levels of academia, but I have always been lucky with exams, and have never failed one yet. This time, the God of Good Fortune smiled on me again, and I was accepted by both Beida and Qinghua. I became, for a time, the object of admiration in the eyes of some.

As far as I was concerned, however, Beida and Qinghua were like two delectable dishes—‘fish or bear’s paws’: which tantalising option should I choose? It was a most perplexing dilemma for a time. First I considered it from this angle, then from that, but I could never reach a decision as to what my next move should be. In those days, the craze for studying abroad was no less than it is today, nor was I immune to it. From the perspective of foreign study, Qinghua was one step ahead, or at least that was the popular perception of the time. Following the crowd, I finally settled on Qinghua, enrolling in the Western Literature Department, which later became the Department of Foreign Languages.

In old China, the Western Literature Department of Qinghua University enjoyed a stellar reputation, mostly because the majority of the professors were foreigners. The lectures were naturally in foreign languages; even the Chinese professors mostly taught in a foreign language (in fact, in English). This was a very attractive feature. Most of the foreign professors lacked any profound learning or particular ability; I am afraid they would not have been capable of teaching middle school in their own countries. For this reason I did not feel particularly satisfied with any of the required courses in this department. On the other hand, the two courses which I either audited or took as electives I have not forgotten to this day, and I have

derived life-long benefit from them. The one I audited was Chen Yinke's 'Buddhist Classics in Translation'. The elective was Zhu Guangqian's 'The Psychology of Art and Literature', which was effectively on aesthetics. Among the Chinese professors in this department, Ye Gongchao taught me English. His English was probably not bad, but he was conspicuously careless about his appearance, as if modelling himself on the semi-wild forest-dwelling sages of old. As a result he did not create a particularly favourable impression. On the other hand, Wu Mi's two courses, 'Comparative Poetry, East and West' and 'The English Romantic Poets' had a lasting influence on me.

In addition to these, I audited (officially or otherwise) classes from many other departments. For example, I used to listen to the courses of, among others, Zhu Ziqing, Yu Pingbo, Xie Wanying (Bing Xin) and Zheng Zhenduo, for varying periods of time. Some of my auditing activities were successful, others were not. The biggest failure was when I and a group of other male students were tactfully ejected from the lecture theatre by Bing Xin. The biggest successes in auditing were Zheng Zhenduo's courses. He was generous, sincere, and devoid of professorial airs and cliquish tendencies. Through attending his classes, several young students, Wu Zuxiang, Lin Geng, Li Changzhi and myself included, developed a personal friendship with him. Along with Ba Jin and Jin Yi, he edited the large-format *Literary Quarterly*, which was a highly influential position in literary circles at that time. He even put us—even though we were non-entities—on the *Quarterly's* editorial board and made us special contributors. Our names appeared most impressively on the cover of the magazine, which was for me the highest honour. As a result, we became close friends with Zheng Zhenduo, in spite of the difference in our ages. Our friendship continued right up until his death in a plane crash in 1958. Even today, whenever I recall Mr Zheng, I cannot help but feel a little sad.

By this time the political situation was extremely tense. Chiang Kaishek was hell-bent on 'pacifying the interior'. The Japanese army had already taken Gubeikou and was causing a great deal of trouble in the northeast, of which no more need be said here. After the September 18 Incident,² I joined the Qinghua students in blockading the railway lines and in a hunger-strike. We even travelled to Nanjing to present a petition calling on Chiang Kaishek to dispatch troops to oppose the Japanese. We were filled with fervour, but having been deceived by the dissembling Chiang, we returned crestfallen.

The attractive and placid Qinghua campus was in fact far from peaceful, as the struggle between the Nationalist and Communist students had flared up. At that time, Hu Qiaomu (whose original name was Hu Dingxin) was studying in the History Department in the same year as me. He was carrying out 'revolutionary activities', but they were in fact not particularly covert. The pamphlets lying in our wash-basins

² Also known as the Mukden or Manchurian Incident. In 1931 the Japanese military detonated a small explosion in the city of Mukden to create a pretext for the invasion of north-eastern China.

every morning were his doing. It was an open secret that he was behind it. On one occasion he came and sat on my bed in the middle of the night and tried to persuade me to join his organisation, but being of a very timid disposition, I did not dare to promise anything. I did however agree to teach in the night school that he had organised for the children of workers. This could only be regarded as a token effort, but I felt somewhat able to repay his favour of his attention.

The struggle between the Nationalist and Communist students was intense, but I am not familiar with the precise details. I was regarded as a neutral fence-sitter who leaned slightly to the left. I did not get involved, nor was I interested in getting involved, in this kind of tussle. In spite of their mutual animosity, I witnessed some collaboration between the two student factions. For example, both sides visited the villages in the districts of Shahe and Qinghe to propagate opposition to the Japanese. I took part in these visits on several occasions, and in my recollection, it seems that students who were inclined towards the Nationalists were also there. This was probably because young students tend to be very patriotic, and Chiang Kaishek was doing nothing to oppose Japan. The tradition of patriotism among Chinese intellectuals has a long and broad history, with 'deep roots and strong branches'.

In those years, my family's financial situation was far from secure. Whenever I returned to college after the annual winter and summer holidays, finding enough money for tuition fees and living expenses was always a terrible headache. As Qinghua was a national university, the tuition fee of forty *yuan* per semester was not high. These fees were more of a formality, because the university returned all the accumulated fees to the student on graduation, to underwrite post-graduation travel. There was no charge for the dormitory, and living expenses were about six dollars a month, which was enough to ensure some meat at every meal. Even in these circumstances, I found it hard to make ends meet. I was the only student from my old home of Qingping County who was enrolled at a national university, and I was therefore regarded as something of a 'county treasure'. Accordingly the county gave me an annual bursary of fifty *yuan*. In addition, I used to write a few articles for money, and could thereby substantially reduce the financial burden on my family. This is how I spent four years in these rather straitened circumstances. At my graduation, I had my photograph taken wearing a hired mortarboard, thus bringing to a close my days as an undergraduate.

At that time there was a piece of doggerel called 'The Rice-Bowl Question' doing the rounds. There was also a common expression to the effect that 'graduation equals starvation'. Except for a tiny minority who were the sons and daughters of important officials or wealthy merchants, everyone came up against the question of survival. This problem had occupied my mind ever since I had been in the third grade, and I was now facing the prospect of supporting my entire family financially. However, I had little aptitude for currying favour, and in any case I had no one to turn

to. Late at night when everyone else was asleep, my mind seemed to boil over with worry, and I could see no way forward.

Soon it was the summer of 1934 and I had to leave the university. Like timely rain in a year of drought, the principal of my alma mater, Jinan Provincial Senior High, Mr Song Huanwu, sent someone to invite me to take up the post of Chinese teacher there. The monthly salary was 160 *yuan*, which was more than double that of an assistant professor in a university. Most likely because I had published several articles, I was regarded as something of a writer, and of course any writer could certainly teach Chinese literature—such was the logic of the day. I was completely overwhelmed by this unexpected favour and my heart pounded like a drum. But I was from the Western Literature Department—could I teach Chinese literature in senior high school? Moreover, the previous incumbent had been ‘racked’ (student slang in those days for ‘drummed out’), indicating that the students might not be easy to handle. If I were to accept the position, I would doubtless be giving myself much trouble. I mulled over it, but being unable to decide, I dared not make any reply. Time, however, was pressing. The summer holidays were about to begin, and I had to leave the university. In the end, I clenched my teeth and made a decision: ‘If you have the courage to offer, I have the courage to accept.’

I started teaching Chinese literature at senior high school in the autumn of 1934. The principal treated me very kindly, and my relationship with the students was quite cordial, but my fellow Chinese teachers put me under a great deal of pressure. The three year-levels in the school were divided into twelve classes, and we four Chinese teachers took three classes each. But there was a catch: the other three staff members were much older than me; one was even of the same vintage as my own teachers. All had started off in science but were also old hands when it came to teaching Chinese, and they certainly did not need to do much preparation. Each of them took three classes in one of the year-levels, so they only had to do one lot of preparation. On the other hand, I taught the remaining classes, one in each of three year-levels, so I had to prepare for three different classes. The difficulty and mental challenge of this is easy to imagine. As a result I felt depressed, even though my income was very good that year (the purchasing power of 160 *yuan* then is equal to approximately 3200 *yuan* today). The prospect of studying abroad had evaporated; the rice bowl that I held in my hands seemed about to slip away. It is impossible to describe how I felt at this time.

But the God of Fortune (if he exists) smiled on me. Just when I seemed to have no way out, Qinghua University signed an agreement with Germany to establish a student exchange programme. I was absolutely delighted, and immediately wrote an application, which was eventually accepted. My emotions at this point were far beyond any that I had experienced on being accepted into university. ‘There was an unprecedented feeling in my heart.’ Anxieties that had accumulated over the years were swept aside at a single stroke, and the promise of

lifelong security rang out. I now felt as if I already held in my hands a golden rice bowl, my own body was covered with gold, and that I would be able to achieve success whatever I did. I was invincible, and the whole world looked rosy.

Human beings, however, can never escape reality. My reality at that time was this: aged parents, domestic poverty and young dependants.³ I had also reached the most important crossroads of my life. Which way should I proceed? It was a most difficult decision. The significance of this juncture was without parallel for me. If I did not go forward, I would be fated to spend the rest of my days teaching middle school, and even this did not guarantee secure employment. The way ahead offered a completely different prospect. 'Before my steed, the peaches were in blossom; behind us was the snow. How could any man dare to look back?'

After a painful process of trying to resolve these conflicting emotions, and after close consultation with my family, I decided to proceed. Fortunately the original arrangement with Germany was only for two years, so I simply had to grit my teeth and manage somehow.

I left home in the summer of 1935 headed for Beiping and Tianjin, where I attended to the formalities for leaving the country. I then boarded the Transsiberian for Berlin via Moscow. I felt like a second Xuan Zang, the Buddhist monk who travelled to India in the seventh century: 'in a strange land ten thousand miles from home'.

The image in the mirror of my heart from my university days, my teaching and right up until I left the country is one of great confusion and conflict: Chiang Kaishek's attacks on the Communists, the Japanese invasion, the constant turmoil on the political scene, and the polarisation of the student body.

The peaches were indeed in blossom before my steed, and from a distance they looked singularly attractive, but on closer inspection the situation was not quite so promising. I stayed in Berlin, where there were many students from China, for some months. Some took their studies seriously, but there was no shortage of individuals who spent their days idly. Many senior Nationalist figures, from Chiang Kaishek down, had sons and daughters 'studying' in Germany. These high-class 'insiders' looked down on us, and I treated this clutch of worthless individuals with even greater contempt, feeling that it was beneath my dignity to associate with them. This was clearly not the place for me. I left Berlin in the middle of the autumn for the little town of Göttingen. I was to reside in this famous seat of learning for seven years without a break.

The Germans gave me 120 marks per month, of which the rent accounted for 40 per cent or more, and food was about the same, leaving me with next to no spending money. I was much worse off than the students on government scholarships of 800 marks per month. Even though I lived in Germany for such a

³ The author married Peng Dehua in 1935. The couple had only four days before Ji Xianlin left for Germany. During this time, a son was conceived.

long time, I never took time off during the summer or winter holidays, nor did I do any travelling. One reason was my financial embarrassment, another was that I wanted to make the most of the opportunity, and I preferred to keep studying.

I had travelled all this way because I wanted to learn, but to learn what? At first I had no clear plan. I took Greek in the first semester, and it seemed as if I might study classical European literature. But I could not possibly keep up with the German students who had already done eight years of Latin and six years of Greek in middle school, and my resolve began to waver.

In my first semester, which began in the spring of 1936, I saw in the handbook an introductory Sanskrit class convened especially by Professor Waldschmidt. I was wild with excitement, because having heard Chen Yinke's lectures at Qinghua, I had always wanted to study the language. In those days, no one was teaching Sanskrit in China, and now that I had the opportunity when I least expected it, how could I not be excited? Accordingly I enrolled in Sanskrit on the spot. For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Germany, one needed three streams: one major and two minors. My major was Sanskrit/Pali, and my minors were English linguistics and Slavonic linguistics. Thus I set out on my journey along the road of higher education.

My scholarship ran out in 1937, the precise moment at which the Japanese army provoked the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and was greedily eyeing China and the rest of Asia with the intention of swallowing them whole. I could only think of my country and sigh—I had a home to which I could not return. But heaven always provides, and the director of the Chinese department, Gustav Haloun, offered me the position of lecturer in Chinese. This was indeed a welcome respite from prolonged distress. Of course I accepted immediately and took up the post at once. The lecturing was not very arduous and I continued my own research as before. My studies were still based in the Sanskrit Research Centre, and I would only occasionally go down to the Chinese department. This arrangement continued right up until I left Germany in the autumn of 1945.

The Second World War began in 1939. One would naturally expect that a conflict like this, murderous in its barbarity, with rampant slaughter and unprecedented cruelty to humankind, should by rights have reached to the very sky, shaken the entire earth, made every living thing tremble, and caused all humanity to blanch. Surprisingly, although I was by chance right at the edge of it, apart from hearing the rantings of Nazi leaders on several occasions—which was unavoidable in Germany at that time—it was as if Germany was half asleep and marched off to war without a murmur. The early victories filled the German people with wild enthusiasm, but each victory was also a blow to me. Every time they celebrated another win, I would have to take a sleeping pill in the night. With the passage of time I developed insomnia, a life-long complaint that has weighed heavily on me for decades.

At first the war had little impact on my life, but gradually meat and butter were rationed, then bread, and finally all the other necessities of life. Without realising it, the screws were tightening on our daily existence. By the time people became clearly aware of it, the screws were very tight indeed. However, apart from the odd individuals who opposed the Nazis, I never heard a word of complaint from the townsfolk. The Nazi leadership in Germany ruled very cunningly, and the Germans are a rather unique people. They simply remained an enigma in my eyes.

Later, as the flames of war burned higher and Germany was blockaded on all sides, supplies became scarcer by the day. I was hungry every day, and every night I would dream—I would dream of Chinese peanuts. Even as a child I was not very ambitious, and my taste in food was no exception. Those with heroic dispositions and stout hearts doubtless dream of swallows' nests and shark-fin soup. How could an unpromising fellow like me who dreams of peanuts compare with such individuals? When I was really famished, I truly felt as if I was in the Realm of Hungry Ghosts and that I could swallow the whole world in a single gulp.

In spite of everything, I persisted with my studies and teaching. Apart from the hunger, there was very little aerial bombing to contend with at first, and I eventually completed my doctoral thesis. Prof. Waldschmidt had been drafted into the army by this time, and his predecessor, Emeritus Prof. E. Sieg, took over his teaching. He was an internationally renowned authority on Tocharian, having spent several decades mastering it. In terms of both his age and his feelings towards me, he was the grandfather I had never known. He was certainly determined to pass down to me all his expertise in classical Indian grammar and Vedic, and he most definitely wanted to teach me Tocharian, an offer I could hardly refuse. In Prof. Waldschmidt's absence, I passed the oral examination. Prof. Braun conducted the oral exam for Russian and Slavonic, and Prof. Lauder took the English exam. After my successful completion, I continued to study under the supervision of Prof. Sieg. We would meet every day, and I would support this eighty-year-old German scholar as he made his way home through the snowy streets in the winter twilight. I forgot the war and forgot my hunger: the only thing in my mind was the old gentleman beside me.

Of course I also worried about my country and my family. The postal service had been cut off long beforehand. As Tu Fu observed in a poem, 'The flames of war have been burning for three months, and a letter from home is worth ten thousand pieces of gold.' But in my case, the flames had already been burning for three years, and a letter was worth one hundred times that amount. In fact it was impossible for any letters to get through. This greatly aggravated my insomnia, and gradually I increased the dose of sleeping medication that I took each night. Only my research work offered me any solace. By now the British and American bombers were daily visitors, but amid the hunger and the bombing, I still managed to complete several papers. The university had become a female domain, as all the men had been rounded up for military service. Before long, however, the men started reappearing,

but if they were not missing an arm, then they were missing a leg. The sound of crutches hitting the floor echoed through the main lecture building, making an eerie symphony.

By now, every battle on the frontline ended in defeat. Although the Nazi leadership continued to boast shamelessly of its prowess as before, its words were hollow and were out of step with reality, 'like the mouth of a horse on the head of an ox'. To my foreign eyes, defeat was already inevitable, and no one had the power to avert fate.

What were the German people like? After ten years of observation and personal experience, I felt that the Germans are without doubt among the finest people on earth. They had a flourishing culture; their science and technology led the field internationally; and their great writers, philosophers, musicians and scientists had no comparison in any other contemporary society. Moreover, as individuals, they were upright and trustworthy, and every one had an honest disposition. Politically, however, they were quite naïve, and the majority sincerely supported Hitler. One point puzzled me greatly: Hitler was extremely vitriolic towards Chinese people and regarded them as the enemies of civilisation. Logically, I should have met with many difficulties in Germany, but in fact I never had the slightest problem. It is said the Chinese in America find it difficult to integrate into society there, but for the entire duration of my stay in Germany I felt that I was part of German society. I lived in a German home, and my German teachers, classmates, colleagues and friends always treated me as one of their own, without the slightest hint of prejudice. This is something that I will never forget.

How did such a people view the impending military defeat? They very rarely discussed the question of the war with me. They seemed indifferent to the extreme hardship of daily life and the acute terror of the bombing, and were somewhat lost and apathetic. Right up until the spring of 1945, when the American forces took Göttingen and the Nazis were totally finished, the German people still seemed indifferent and had largely resigned themselves to adversity. In addition to loss and apathy, they seemed somewhat dazed and confused, as if they had suffered a blow to the head.

The great war which had shaken the world and had dragged on for six years was now finally over. As soon as I was able to steady my shaken nerves, I immediately thought of my homeland and my family. I had already been away for ten years, and deep in my heart I felt my country calling me home from abroad. After some negotiation, someone in authority in the American occupying forces agreed to send me to Switzerland by jeep. When the time came to part with my German teachers and friends, especially Prof. Sieg, I felt terribly sad. Seeing this elderly gentleman's forlorn expression and his shaking hands, we both knew that this would be our final farewell. I did not dare to look back as my eyes were brimming with burning tears. My landlady also wept copiously over me. Her son was away, her

husband had died, and once I was gone her house would be empty and she would be alone. She and I had truly depended on one another for the previous few years. How was she going to survive now? Nor did I look back when I bade farewell to her, but with tears in my eyes, I climbed into the American jeep. I composed a new poem, based on an old one:

I studied in Germany for ten winters.
My heart returns day and night as I recall my old country.
For no reason I cross the border into Switzerland.
Looking back, this foreign land has become my second home.

In the mirror of my heart, the image of these ten years includes the Nazi regime, the barbarism of the world war and a wanderer's yearning for home.

I reached Switzerland in October 1945. Having waited there for several months, I set off again in the spring of 1946. I sailed from Marseilles to Saigon with a British steamer that was transporting French troops. I spent the summer there before sailing back to Shanghai via Hong Kong. I had been away for nearly eleven years, and now I was finally coming home.

With an introduction from Chen Yinke, and with the support of Hu Shizhi, Fu Sinian and Tang Yongtong, I arrived at Peking University to begin work. I wrote to my old friend from Göttingen, Prof. Haloun, who was by then in charge of teaching at Cambridge University. I thanked him for his offer of a position there, but declined it, as I had decided not to return to Europe. I had already re-established contact with my family and had managed to send them some money. I felt deeply indebted to my uncle and aunt, and to my wife Peng Dehua. All had endured endless hardships while struggling through those eleven years. Soon our family would be complete again and we would happily press on together.

The Chinese civil war was raging furiously at that time. As communications were cut, I was unable to return to my old home in Jinan to see my family. Accordingly, I waited out the summer in Shanghai and Nanjing. I paid a visit to Chen Yinke in Nanjing, and went to the Central Research Institute where I called on Fu Sinian. In the mid-autumn of 1946, I sailed from Shanghai to Qinhuangdao and then travelled by rail to Beijing, which I had first left eleven years earlier. Mid-autumn was crisp and clear, and fallen leaves filled the streets. My heart rose and fell inexplicably with the joys and sorrows of life. Yin Falu met me at the station, and temporarily lodged me in the Vermilion Hall at Beida. The following day I met with Tang Yongtong, dean of the College of Literature. Professor Tang informed me that according to the regulations of Beida and other universities, academics who had qualified abroad could not be appointed to positions higher than Associate Professor. Fu Sinian had said something similar in Nanjing, but I was overjoyed simply to be at

Beida—how could I ask for anything more? Not long afterwards, however, probably as little as a week or so, Professor Tang informed me that I had been made a full professor and director of the Department of Asian Languages. I was thirty-five at the time. I think I may have set a new record for the shortest ever tenure as associate professor. This greatly exceeded all my expectations, and I made a resolution to work diligently and write actively, lest I squander all the effort that my teachers through the generations had expended in nurturing me.

The current political climate was particularly odious at that time. The Nationalists led by Chiang Kaishek had dropped all pretences and appeared to be corrupt and venal to the core. They openly gave and received bribes, ravished the landscape and generally took over where the Japanese army had left off. As the legal currency lost value by the day, they adopted the ruse of printing paper money in huge denominations, but soon this also proved to be completely worthless. People had to live in the most unenviable circumstances, and university professors were no exception. The salary that I had held in my hand lost value by the hour. Everyone furiously exchanged silver dollars for US dollars, and they would change these back into legal currency whenever they needed to make a purchase. A few silver dollars in the palm of one's hand always imparted a warm sensation, akin to a feeling of security.

Among the students, the battle between the forces of the new and the old raged on. The Nationalists were in their death throes, and the progressive students attacked them fervently. At that time there was a saying that 'Beiping had two liberated areas: one was the Democracy Square at Beida, the other was Qinghua campus.' On several occasions while living in the Vermilion Hall, I was threatened by thugs from Tianqiao, who had been stirred up by the Beiping Municipal Branch of the Nationalist Party to break in and cause trouble. We used to barricade the entrance to our building with tables and chairs at night, and we were thoroughly on edge as we prepared to do battle. We felt that this was both despicable and ridiculous.

Everything that is corrupt always breaks down in the end: such is the law of evolution that applies both to human society and to the natural world. In the spring of 1949, Beijing was finally liberated. My image of these three years is one of darkness before the dawn.

If I were to divide my life into two periods, I would usually describe them in this way: the former period was the old society, thirty-eight years in all. The latter period is the new society: how long this period will be, I cannot say. I am not yet contemplating the ascent of the Mountain of Eight Treasures,⁴ but I cannot say how long I will live.

Why do I divide my life into two periods? The contrast between the two societies is so great that they are separated by a vast chasm. Along with the middle-

⁴ Babaoshan ('Eight-Treasure Mountain') is Beijing's famous crematorium.

aged or older intellectuals who stayed behind in Mainland China and neither went abroad nor fled to Taiwan, I did not really understand the Communist Party, nor was I particularly attracted to Communism, but we knew all about the Nationalists. Accordingly, when the liberating army marched into the city, we welcomed it with great excitement. We hoped and indeed felt that the world had changed. In the period immediately following 'liberation', politics seemed honest and wise. This was like a breath of fresh air, and many of the early measures won popular support. Much of the 'polluted water and contaminated soil' left over from the old regime was swept away. We all felt that better days lay ahead, and that felicity had descended on the world.

We would, however, have to undergo a period of adjustment. I do not know how intellectuals older than myself really felt, but in my own case, at forty and just on the verge of middle age, I had many mental obstacles to overcome. At first I hardly opened my mouth to shout slogans such as 'Long live!' at mass meetings. Even small things like swapping my scholar's gown for a Mao suit felt very strange, to say nothing of bigger changes.

The adjustment period was not very long for me, and I did not experience any particular difficulties. I immediately felt as if I were a changed man. Everything seemed very positive and worthy: the sky was bluer, the grass greener, the flowers redder and the mountains clearer. The whole of China was opening up like a gorgeous rose; the Chinese people now had a splendid prospect before them. I felt ten years younger, just like an overgrown child. At meetings or when travelling around, when shouting slogans or yelling 'Long live!', my voice was no less strident than anyone else's, nor was my enthusiasm less apparent. Thinking back now, it was the happiest time of my life.

Looking inwards, however, I was conscious of numerous failings. Deep inside, I felt that I was a 'peach-picker' who merely reaped the rewards of the labours of others. The Chinese people had stood up; even I had straightened my back a little. Any thoughts of slavish subservience were swept away at a single stroke. What had I done to deserve a share in the happiness of liberation? What was my contribution? I certainly had not been a traitor, nor had I joined the Nationalists, nor had I submitted to the Nazis in Germany. On the other hand, I had cowered in a foreign land ten thousand miles away, hankering after my own fame and fortune, while the outstanding sons and daughters of China had put their lives on the line, plunged into bloody war, and heroically sacrificed themselves. Was there anything more shameful than this? I felt terribly guilty. I even felt ashamed of the little learning—if you could call it that—that I had acquired.

Racked with guilt, I turned this over and over in my mind. I felt like a criminal and regarded all intellectuals as somehow unclean. It was as if I had become a Christian who deeply believed in the doctrine of original sin, and for many, many years, this original sin left a profound impression on my psyche.

At that time, I often entertained strange ideas about turning back the wheel of time, and going back to the war years to give myself the opportunity to expunge this feeling of guilt through meritorious action. I would sacrifice my own life for the revolution, for the people. I even had a wild fantasy that if our leaders' lives were threatened, I would certainly offer up my own. I would shed my own blood and sacrifice my own life to protect our leaders.

I disgusted myself, but at the same time, I honoured and revered three types of person: old Party functionaries, the People's Liberation Army and the working class. In my mind, their stature was unrivalled and their sanctity inviolable. I saw them as 'the people most worthy of love', whom I would emulate for the rest of my life, even if I could never match them.

My original sin was a heavy cross to bear, and gradually I prepared to probe deeply into my own thinking in order to reform my bourgeois ideas, and to establish a truly proletarian way of thinking—although apart from 'nothing for myself, everything for others', I could not say what constituted 'a proletarian way of thinking', even today. I vowed to make a complete change and become a new person. Buffeted by wind and rain, sometimes the going was tough, sometimes I faced 'serried mountains and winding rivers', at others I found the 'shade of willows and bright flowers'. This was to be the pattern for the next thirty years.

The first large-scale political movements in the early days after liberation were the campaigns against the 'three evils' and the 'five evils', and the campaign for thought reform.⁵ I participated diligently and sincerely, my heart brimming with devotion. I had never in my life dishonestly taken a single cent of public money, so the 'three evils and five evils' movement did not affect me. In 'thought reform', on the other hand, I acknowledged that I had a very urgent and significant responsibility. In general, my thinking was bourgeois. In practical terms, I could discern several aspects of this. First, from my observation of the Nationalists before liberation, I had come to the conclusion that politics was dirty and that I should keep my distance from it. Secondly, I considered that Outer Mongolia had been stolen by the Soviet Union, and that the Chinese Communists were at the beck and call of the Soviets. During thought reform, I first investigated and criticised these two ideas. At that time, investigating one's own thought before the masses was called 'washing', and could be carried out in a small, medium or large 'basin'. As department head, I was 'washed in the middle basin', which meant I underwent public examination at a mass meeting of all staff and students in the department. I was not promoted to the 'big basin', which meant that I was not investigated before the entire university, because I had not roused popular animosity.

⁵ These campaigns occupied the years 1951–52. The 'three evils' and 'five evils' targeted corruption, waste and bureaucracy, and then violating the law by bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating on government contracts and stealing economic information.

Even in the middle basin, however, the water was sufficiently hot. Everyone spoke out with the greatest enthusiasm; some were motivated by honest and noble intent, others were not. This was the very first time in my life that I experienced such a situation. Every comment pierced me like an arrow aimed at my soul. But because I had become like a Christian whose breast was filled with pious notions of original sin, it seemed that the more furious the onslaught, the more relieved I became. I was so relieved that my whole body was drenched in sweat, as if I was in a Turkish steam bath. After the mass meeting when they let me pass, I was so moved that I wept genuine tears. I felt lighter and stronger, as if I had been cleansed of my bourgeois thought.

There were quite a few true believers like me, but there were also some who thought they could bluff their way through, or 'put on a mask to get over the pass'. One professor—who knows how many times he had been washed in the small and medium basins without being allowed to pass by the masses—was finally promoted to the big basin, where he made a desperate attempt to get through on his first attempt. He spoke with great eloquence, and abused himself in the most degrading terms. He even dragged in his equally bourgeois parents, saying many terrible things about them. The masses were deeply moved. By chance, however, the chairman of the rally somehow noticed that he had written the word 'weep' on the text of his speech in large red characters. Every time he got to this place, he would sob most convincingly. As soon as the chairman made this exposure, the crowd let out a terrific roar, and the outcome needs no description.

Next came the criticism of the film 'Annals of Wu Xun', attacks on the book *Research on 'Dream of the Red Chamber'*, and criticism of bourgeois academic thought, featuring Hu Shi and Yu Pingbo. Next was the exposure and criticism of Hu Feng's 'counter-revolutionary clique', which was classified as a case of 'contradiction between our enemies and ourselves'. Apart from Hu Feng himself, many others in the arts and in academia were implicated. Incidental to all this was the movement to root out historical counter-revolutionaries, and we began to hear of suicides. One driver at Beida told me that at about this time he was especially careful when driving at night. He was terrified that people would suddenly spring out of the darkness hoping to end their lives beneath his wheels.

By 1957, political movements had reached their first climax and were certainly unprecedented in terms of scale, momentum, scope and duration. At first, the new movement was said to be merely for 'adjustment of style within the Party'. Everyone was invited to make suggestions, to 'say what you think and to speak without reserve'. At that time, the reputation of the Party had never been higher, and many simple-minded people who supported the Party made suggestions for improvements in good faith. Some of their observations were not at all complimentary, but the vast majority of people acted with complete sincerity. As a result, they were 'seized by the pigtail' and branded as rightists. In the opinion of the leadership, rightists constituted

a 'contradiction between our enemies and ourselves' but should be treated as a 'contradiction among the people'. Moreover, the leadership earnestly pledged that the rightists would never be permitted to overturn verdicts made in relation to prior events.

Some of those who had been 'seized by the pigtail' promptly asked if it had not been promised at the outset that no pigtails would be grabbed, that no big sticks would be brandished and that no labels would be slapped on individuals. Was this or was this not some covert plan? Answer: No, this was no covert plan, but an overt one. But by now it was too late for any regrets. Those who had been branded as rightists, although they were 'of the people', were teetering on the brink of becoming the enemy. They were walking the fine line between humans and demons, which must have been unbearable emotionally. Some were not exonerated until twenty years later, and were by then in old age. In any case, this demonstrates that the Communist Party has the courage to correct its mistakes, and is an expression of its authority and its confidence.

I do not know precisely how many were branded rightists at that time. We heard it said that there was a quota to be met, and that this quota had been relayed down to each organisation at the grassroots level. If the target was not met, then additional people had to be drummed up. Many jokes were doing the rounds, but we can leave these aside for now. There was one point that suddenly came to my mind: this movement, like all the previous ones, was aimed at intellectuals. I still nurtured a deep-rooted sense of original sin, and therefore faithfully supported it.

By 1958, the tumultuous movement to counterattack rightists gradually drew to a close, but even 'before the carriage stopped and the horses came to a halt', a new campaign was promptly inaugurated, one that was to transcend all prior movements in many respects. It seized on both the mental and the material, as it was intended both to unleash productive forces and to eliminate bourgeois thought. The mental aspects concerned mostly university professors, and the movement was picturesquely called 'uprooting the white flags'. White stood for political backwardness, revisionism and bourgeois thought. This was the polar opposite of red, which represented progress, revolution and proletarian thought. Some 'bourgeois professors' in the universities and in the Chinese Academy of Sciences were energetically 'uprooted' for being 'white flags'.

The material aspects were expressed in the large-scale production of iron and steel. In the case of the people's communes, it appeared that both mental and material aspects applied. The most sonorous slogan in those days was 'Communism is paradise, to which the people's communes are the bridge!' The production of iron and steel was in fact a complete disaster. Everyone in the country responded to the call, collected scrap iron and melted it down. There was nothing inherently wrong with this, but eventually all the scrap had been collected, and to meet their production targets, perfectly serviceable iron goods, including cooking pots, were

broken up and returned to the furnace to be melted down again. All over the country, little steel furnaces shone like stars both day and night, as splendid as some great galaxy. What came out of furnace after furnace, however, was nothing but worthless slag.

Everyone wanted to reach that paradise as soon as possible, and to those ends, people's communes spread over the entire country overnight. Luckily, there happened to be an excellent harvest of grain, and everyone had plenty to eat. Cooking stoves in private houses were dismantled, and people ate together in communal canteens. Grain was left to rot in the fields, as there was no one to harvest it. The power of the mass movement was exaggerated to the skies, as was the human capacity to overcome nature. Sparrows were declared to be one of the four pests, and the whole country set about exterminating them. Grain production per *mu* was grossly inflated, from several hundred *jin*, to several thousand *jin*, to tens of thousands of *jin*. Districts competed with one another to falsify their statistics, and exemplary producers known as 'satellites' were launched on a grand scale. It was said that if the production of grain per *mu* really was in the tens of thousands of *jin*, then every *mu* of land would be buried under a deep layer of grain or corn, which was of course completely ridiculous.

At this time I was already forty-seven or -eight and was certainly no longer a child. I had received higher education, I had studied abroad and I was a university professor, and yet I deeply and uncritically believed all this. I firmly accepted that 'The more courageous the people, the more the earth will produce.' In my heart I secretly mocked those 'cowards' whose 'thinking had not been liberated', and felt that 'I alone was the only Marxist, that I alone was the only revolutionary'.

Then the three years of natural calamities struck. Were they really 'natural' calamities? Looking back today, this was not necessarily the case. Whatever the truth, everyone went hungry. As I had already experienced five years of starvation in Germany, this time I was not inconvenienced at all. As the poem says, 'Other waters mean nothing to me, for I have experienced the mighty ocean.' I never uttered a single word of complaint.

Taking the situation in the country as a whole, the policies of the day were already as far to the left as they could possibly be. The most pressing task for those in authority was naturally to oppose such leftism, and there were reports that some high up in the Party also considered this to be the case. Peng Dehuai suddenly came to the fore at the Lushan Conference and presented his 'Ten Thousand Word Address'. This contained some home truths which brought great wrath down upon him. What should have been an anti-leftist movement became an anti-rightist one. From the beginning of the People's Republic up until today, the person I honour and respect the most is General Peng. He was a rare and hardy individual who would rather risk his life than indulge in hollow flattery. He embodied the best aspects of the Chinese national character.

Since the authorities called for opposition to the right, that is just what they got. Having lived through several decades of uninterrupted political movements, intellectuals had all been tempered into ‘movement professionals’, and were by now all skilled players. ‘This time I rectify you, next time you rectify me’: everyone was familiar with the routine. It was also unpredictable, and could be quiet at times, tense at others; now extreme, now more moderate. This continued right up until the Socialist Education Campaign.

As I see it, the Socialist Education Campaign was actually the prelude to the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, so I will discuss the two together. Beida was a testing ground for the Socialist Education Campaign, and always took the first step. As soon as the campaign got under way, it was apparent that the campus was split into two factions: those who were to be rectified and those who were to do the rectifying. Somehow I joined the ranks of the rectifiers, but there was one thing that I could not understand or appreciate, and that was to become the first tiny sprout of ‘reactionary thinking’ in my mind since liberation. The leadership of the university had always consisted of senior Party members and experienced functionaries who were assigned to us from above. We bourgeois intellectuals played only a very minor role in the leadership. Why then did the authorities maintain that we were ‘controlling’ the university? I thought this over hundreds of times, but could never get to the bottom of it.

The Beijing Municipal Committee eventually intervened and called a meeting at the International Hotel. The verdict against the members of the university leadership who had been criticised was overturned, and the seeds of the Cultural Revolution were sown.

In the autumn of 1965, after I had attended the conference at the International Hotel, I was sent to Nankoucun in the suburbs of Beijing to promote the Socialist Education Campaign in the village. We really were the leaders here, and held complete responsibility for the Party, administration, finance and education. At the same time, the demands on us were very great: we were not permitted to cook for ourselves, but had to eat in the villagers’ homes in rotation. Even then, we were not allowed to eat fish, meat or eggs. Nor were we permitted to reveal our positions or salaries. Farmers at that time were earning less than half a *yuan* per day, but my salary was four or five hundred *yuan* per month. If this became known, the farmers would have been upset. If we were to return to the village today, thirty years on, we would be still be reluctant to mention our salaries, for fear that the farmers would laugh at how little we are paid. Looking back on all this, I cannot help but sigh.

The winter of this year witnessed the publication of the essay by the political thug Yao Wenyan, ‘Criticising the New Historical Drama *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*’, which was the opening volley of the Cultural Revolution. The three masters of the so-called ‘Village of Three Families’ were all known to me, and I casually mentioned this fact while we were in Nankoucun. One of my ‘outstanding disciples’

immediately stored this fact away in his memory. Later, during the Cultural Revolution, this 'outstanding disciple' revealed his true colours, and in order to make a name for himself behaved appallingly. For example, he personally signed the big slogans he had written, which was considered a terrible faux pas, and caused a great furore. He also added to my woes, and 'dropped rocks on me when I had fallen down the well', by accusing me of being an accomplice of the 'Village of Three Families'.

I was summoned back to the university on 4 June 1966 to take part in the Cultural Revolution. The earliest stages centred on the criticism of 'bourgeois academic authorities'. As this movement was also very obviously aimed at intellectuals, I was naturally in the firing line. Although I would not have dared call myself an academic authority, I was happy to admit that I was bourgeois, and made no complaint. Although this stage of the movement unfolded very viciously, I got through without too much difficulty.

Later, Beida set up a 'revolutionary committee', headed by the 'Old Buddha', the author of the first so-called 'Marxist-Leninist Big-Character Poster'.⁶ This individual also had her high-level supporters, and a broad network of contacts which reached, it was said, to the very top. She was also very close to Jiang Qing.⁷ She had no particular scholarly or artistic ability, and every time she spoke, she always made mistakes. She was an overbearing bully, but was regarded as a significant player by the leadership. At that time she was famous throughout China, and every day tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of 'pilgrims' came to Beida to 'receive the scripture'. Beida was reduced to complete chaos and was filled with 'dark fumes and foul vapours'.

As the campaign unfolded, the university gradually split into factions. The Old Buddha's faction, known as the New Beida Commune, was in authority and wielded the most power. Opposing it was the faction called Jinggangshan, which they sought to subdue. There was very little difference between the two factions in terms of their behaviour: both beat, smashed and stole, and neither was familiar with anything called 'the law'. Higher authorities had issued the instruction that 'revolution is not a crime; it is right to rebel', so this was their highest law.

I had weathered the first onslaught of the storm, and the nature of my political 'problem' had been determined. I was free to wander about at leisure for a time, and I passed the days in comfort. Had I continued to meander along like this, I would never have been in any particular danger, and would have lived on in security. I am a timid person—such is my normal disposition—and yet on occasions I have felt great courage. This has only occurred several times during my life, and may be called my 'abnormal disposition'. Reflecting on this today, if I have any worth as an individual, then this worth is manifest in my abnormal disposition.

⁶ Nie Yuanzi, b. 1921. Communist Party Secretary of the Peking University Philosophy Department.

⁷ Chairman Mao's wife.

This disposition revealed itself on one occasion during the Cultural Revolution. When the Old Buddha, relying on her high-level supporters, was vigorously pursuing her own ends ‘without regard for law or heaven’, acts of utter barbarity were on the rise on campus. Searches, ‘struggle’ sessions, beatings, abuse, the hanging of large wooden plaques around individuals’ necks, the setting of tall hats on their heads, arbitrary humiliation of people, brazen fabrication of rumours, even the killing of individuals with spears: these acts were not merely inhuman—even animals do not stoop to this. I believed that all this was incompatible with the mass line, and with Someone’s revolutionary line.⁸ Knowing the risks, and giving up any chance of a tranquil existence, I charged into the fray like a bull. As I wrote in my diary, ‘In order to protect Someone’s revolutionary line, though my body be beaten and my bones broken, I will never give up.’ I wrote this in all sincerity, without a trace of hypocrisy.

At the same time, I was still confident: I had no obvious shortcomings from which my enemies could benefit—I did not have ‘a plait on my head or a tail on my backside’ that they could seize onto. I had not joined the Nationalists or any other reactionary organisation, nor had I done anything to oppose the people. I knew I was taking a risk, but I trusted fate and my own self-confidence. I decided to stand up to the Old Buddha, and jumped right out into the open.

I never realised—or perhaps I had realised subconsciously—that by jumping out like this, I had headed straight for the ‘cattle yard’.⁹ I had a certain amount of influence on campus, but I had taken a terrible risk, and the Old Buddha thoroughly despised me. She would only be satisfied once I was out of the way. My home was ransacked, and I was ‘struggled’ in public. I was beaten so badly that ‘my head was cracked and my blood flowed’. My face was bruised and swollen. I am not, however, one of those forgiving or accepting people. Once, after I was beaten to the point of unconsciousness, I made the decision to end my own life. Having reached this resolution, I felt strangely calm—so calm, in fact, that it was almost frightening. I filled my pockets with all the sleeping pills and prescriptions that I had accumulated over the years, and took a final glance at my old aunt and my wife with whom I had shared so much suffering. Just as I was about to step out of the house to make good my escape, there came a thundering roar at the front door. Red Guards from the New Beida Commune had arrived to frogmarch me to the main canteen, to struggle me yet again. My life really was hanging by a thread. This particular denunciation was especially vicious and barbaric. I was beaten so badly that I could not get up, but I also experienced a sudden enlightenment: a person’s capacity to tolerate physical abuse has no limit. I could take it—I was not dead—I wanted to live!

Indeed, I did survive, but by the time I got out of the cattle yard, I was more dead than alive. I was like a half-wit. I did not know how to ask for things in the shops. I was unused to walking around with my head up. It felt strange not to hear words

⁸ The ‘Someone’ refers to Mao Zedong.

⁹ The makeshift prison erected at Peking University: see Part Two below.

like ‘motherfucker’, ‘bastard’ and ‘asshole’ being yelled in my ear. Whenever I saw someone, I would open my mouth to speak, but could only mumble. I tried to walk, but I could only stagger. I had become a living corpse. I had been transformed into a non-human.

Indeed, I did survive, but one thought has always gnawed away at my conscience. I always believed that ‘death is preferable to humiliation for a warrior’, so how could I, even today, have pushed this principle out of my mind? I had the courage to speak frankly in the cause of justice and to fight against wrong-doing. Why then did I lack the courage to lay down my life to oppose these atrocities? Sometimes I even feel that it is dishonourable to have endured the humiliation and to still be alive. This regret is not the strangest thing. Stranger still is the fact that for a long time I did not connect all these matters with the Cultural Revolution. Right up until the overthrow of the Gang of Four in 1976, I had always supported the idea of ‘a revolution every seven or eight years, each one lasting for seven or eight years’. It is obvious that my political sense of smell was not at all highly developed.

I had a dream for more than forty years. For more than forty years I harboured a feeling of original sin. For more than forty years I continually honoured the three objects of my respect (old Party functionaries, old soldiers and the working class) that I mentioned above. All these things that I held sacred were smashed by the Cultural Revolution. Do they still exist today? I would not deny that, for the greater part, the objects of my reverence are still good, and I would not like to swing from one extreme to the other. As to the Cultural Revolution, which I had faithfully supported for ten years, that is another matter. It was the most brutal, most violent, most idiotic and most absurd tragedy; one without precedent in the history of China. It brought shame to the great Chinese people. Let us never forget that!

After the fall of the Gang of Four and the conclusion of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, those at the centre of the Communist Party imposed order on chaos, and implemented policies of reform and openness which have won the approval of the whole country. It is apparent to all that even in a short time, these have been successful. In the eyes of the entire nation, and in the eyes of intellectuals nationwide, sunshine has returned, and we have hope once more.

I have described above my experiences and impressions of the forty years or so since liberation. During this period, the mirror of my heart reveals an image of campaign after campaign after campaign. It reveals my experiences and those of the majority of intellectuals. It reveals my progress from ignorance to realisation. It reveals the entire nation turning back from the brink of political and economic crisis and progressing towards a more felicitous state.

I have lived for more than eighty years in the twentieth century. In another seven years, this century and this millennium will draw to a close. This has been a century of great complexity and transformation. The events reflected in my heart naturally reveal these many changes and are dazzling in their infinite variety. It

reflects the broad bright roads and the narrow by-ways that I have travelled. It shows the 'serried mountains and winding rivers, the shade of willows and bright blossoms'. I am not prepared to guarantee that the mirror of my heart always reflects with perfect accuracy, yet I believe that it is generally reliable, and that the images it reveals are in accord with reality.

I have been carrying this mirror for over eighty years. How should we evaluate the image of the twentieth century that it reveals? How should I evaluate its image of my own life? Alas, this is too hard to express in words. It is said, 'Although you say that the weather is cold, it is a good autumn.' I would like to modify this a little: 'The weather is cold, but this is a good winter!'

There is one thing that I believe: the twenty-first century will be the century of the renaissance of Chinese culture (which is the core of East Asian culture). There are in the world today many challenges which will affect the future survival of humanity. These include the population explosion, environmental pollution, loss of ecological equilibrium, destruction of the ozone layer, the limits of food production, the depletion of water resources, and so on. Only Chinese culture can address these. Such is my final conviction.

17 February 1993

PART TWO

Life in the Cattle Yard

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' programme of abuse and persecution, and after we returned, we still had 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 us 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.¹⁰ 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 every day 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

¹⁰ 'Black gang' is the label for the group of academics, students and administrators held captive by the New Beida Commune.

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 mouldy, 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 they 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 organised 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 an 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 we 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 dared 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 realise 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-thought-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.¹¹ 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 morning.'¹² 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-demons 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-demons 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 have had a flash of inspiration. I have decided to 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,

¹¹ Lu Xun (1881–1936), writer and one of the founders of modern Chinese literature.

¹² 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.'

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 by 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 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 practised 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 provisions 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-storeyed 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 space 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 mould 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 every day (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 expiate 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 to 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 had been permitted to buy such

luxuries, we would not have been able to 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 their 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 to 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 memorising 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 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 have lost face, and the consequences of that do not bear contemplation. From then on I spent my time simultaneously labouring and memorising 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 they 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 the Jinggangshan faction. I received some special treatment on this account, and there were rather more opportunities for 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 organised 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 kilogrammes 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 have avoided 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 recognise the individual who was 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 'Hi' when meeting someone, but in our case only one person was permitted to speak. Our guards had a very rich vocabulary: apart from 'Motherfucker!', 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 organisation, 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 from night to night. It was not their goal to expound 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 misdemeanour, 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 were 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 every day. 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 labouring, 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 rapidly and before long they were attracting large crowds of spectators. They became the biggest and indeed the best spectacle in Beida. Frankly, they compared favourably 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 busbies and big horses, which had been taking place in England for hundreds of years. This spectacle, in contrast, 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 sombre 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 of 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 of 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 also was strictly forbidden. I remember reading somewhere a reference to Yuan Shikai,¹³ which stated that he never in his entire life crossed his legs, and that 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.

¹³ 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.

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.

Secret Agents

Our youthful warders had discovered for themselves, or had learned from some foreign organisation like the Gestapo or 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 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 organisation 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 organisation. (Were they also called criminals elsewhere, or had this been patented by Beida?) At that time, external investigators were everywhere. No organisation spared any effort or resources in dispatching investigators to the four corners of the land, and deep into the countryside, to hunt out incriminating evidence relating to troublesome individuals in their own institutions. The aim was to frame 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 had to 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 organisations 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,¹⁴ '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 fuck 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 collectivisation 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 the 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 it is much the same as reform-through-labour.

¹⁴ Wu Mi (1894–1978): literary critic, educator and poet.

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 be excluded from the 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 labouring 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 head. 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 classified 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 been recognised 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 the 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 ‘Motherfucker!’ and followed this with ‘You bastard’, he shot us a friendly glance. This was so unexpected that I even gave a little shiver. Our group of criminals—to speak for myself, at least—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 led 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 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 organisations 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 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 someone 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 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 daily events 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 recognise 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 on library science and on Dunhuang.¹⁵ We had known one another for a long time and could be regarded as old friends. As one would expect, it would have been very difficult for someone like this to have escaped the disastrous decade of the Cultural Revolution. I do not know what sort of imaginary crimes he was accused of, nor do I know how he was struggled, 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 line-up. 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 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 Indian 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

¹⁵ An important historical site in western China.

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 me 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 she did as she was ordered. Because the branch sloped down towards the ground, 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, so few of the 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-demons 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 the 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 was 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 for 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-demons 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 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 organisation 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

specialisation, 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 her 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 out 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 a 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 to 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 difficulty, 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,¹⁶ 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.

¹⁶ Hu Shih (1891–1962), leading philosopher, writer and intellectual.

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 Deluxe Accommodation

I had already descended into hell, but because my senses were dulled, I did not realise 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. 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,¹⁷ and former Deputy Minister for Rail Transport, Lu Ping. He was the main person attacked by name by the Old Buddha in her first big-character poster. When the black-gang compound was first set up, he was the main

¹⁷ Anti-Japanese student demonstrations from December 1935 to January 1936.

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 had burst into flame, and a barrage of blows from a 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 were 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 in 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 realised 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 do 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 if they still functioned. My eyes were swollen, but I tried and succeeded 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 sifting 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 realised that this was 'special deluxe 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 realised 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 for him to 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 labouring and memorisation. 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 Languages Building. They could not use either the 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 away, 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 improve 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 specialisation 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 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 behaviour. 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, XXX had been a ‘super-activist’, his face aglow with revolutionary fervour. 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,¹⁸ and ‘severed his links with the people’, as the slogan put it.

In relation to this affair, I 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.

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 a couple of examples. 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

¹⁸ In a dark satire elsewhere, the author described overdosing on medications as ‘capitalist’ suicide.

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 the 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 Yuanzi Incorporated's Revolutionary Committee was quite inadequate 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 corn-meal bun in it. For a while I was assigned to work in the vicinity of Buildings 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 quiet 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 labouring 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 into 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 an 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.