

1 Farewell to the Huangpu River

On October 9, 1967, just before their departure from Beijing to Inner Mongolia, a group of ten students from the Beijing Number 25 High School congregated in front of a picture of Chairman Mao at Tian'anmen Square. Witnessed by a crowd of a thousand local residents, they swore allegiance to Mao, declaring,

For the great goal of spreading red Mao Zedong thought throughout the world, we would, if it were necessary, be willing to go up to the mountain of knives or down to the sea of fire. Following [Mao's] great directive to integrate intellectuals with workers and peasants, we are taking the first step. We will go all the way on this revolutionary road and never look back.¹

This event, publicized through national radio stations and newspapers, generated enthusiasm throughout the country. By the end of 1967, official media reported that 4,000 high school graduates had left Beijing for the countryside, many more following the next spring.²

In Shanghai, it was more than half a year later that idealistic students began to volunteer to go to the countryside. After several exploratory trips to Anhui and Heilongjiang in July 1968, the first delegation set off in August. "Farewell to the Huangpu River," declared the Shanghai *Jiefang ribao* on August 12, 1968, announcing the departure of forty-five of "our city's little soldiers" for remote mountain districts of China, where they would join village production teams. This contingent had secured the "glorious approval" of the Shanghai municipal government, which held a reception for them on the morning of their departure, praising them for their decision to go, and instructing them to closely study Chairman Mao's works, learn from the poor and lower-middle peasants, and participate in both production and class struggle. As they prepared to board the train that evening, the station was brightly lit and adorned with red

¹ Liu Xiaomeng, *Zhongguo zhiqingshi*, 71. ² *Ibid.*, 69–71.

flags; drums beat as the “little soldiers” said goodbye to the 10 million citizens of Shanghai.³

These voluntary departures of urban youth to the countryside took place in the context of the first years of the Cultural Revolution when, since its inception in summer 1966, student Red Guards in cities throughout China attacked educational, cultural, and administrative institutions, as well as individuals, including their own family members and teachers, whom they deemed to be counterrevolutionaries, or class enemies, or guilty of bourgeois thinking and habits. As with students from the Beijing Number 25 High School, Shanghai newspapers explained that the decision for urban youth to go to the countryside was a way of expressing their loyalty to Chairman Mao and the Chinese Communist Party as well as their commitment to revolutionary change.⁴ The emergence of these volunteers culminated in the directive issued by Mao and publicized in the *Renmin ribao* on December 22, 1968, announcing, “It is necessary for educated youth to go to the countryside to receive re-education from the poor and lower-middle peasants,” and that “rural comrades throughout the country should welcome them.” This directive signified a turning point of the sent-down youth movement, shifting voluntary initiatives by a relatively few idealistic students to a state-led nationwide campaign.

Immediately after the announcement of Mao’s directive, the Shanghai municipal government announced its policy of “uniform redness” (*yipianhong*): all the 507,000 middle and high school graduates of 1968 and 1969, along with graduates of the previous two years who were still waiting for job assignments, would be sent to the countryside.⁵ The practice of sending city youth to the countryside continued until 1978, some 1.1 million youth from Shanghai having been sent.⁶ Over the course of the decade, these youth were assigned to village production brigades, state farms, or military farms. Persuading youth to go, transporting them, and settling them required an extensive mobilization campaign, as well as the creation of new administrative structures to manage the program.

This chapter focuses on the process of mobilizing Shanghai’s urban youth to go to the countryside, as well as responses to mobilization by youth themselves, their parents, and municipal government officials during the peak years of the movement in 1969 and 1970. During this time, the mobilization campaign aimed to achieve the goal of “uniform redness”: all the graduates were required to go to the countryside. Moreover,

³ *Jiefang ribao*, August 12, 1968. ⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Shanghai laodongzhi bianzhuan weiyuanhui, *Shanghai laodongzhi* (Shanghai Labor Gazetteer) (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1998), 111.

⁶ *Ibid.*

almost all were sent to production teams and state farms in places distant from Shanghai.

Mobilization

The mobilization of urban youth to go to the countryside had its origins in the mid-1950s, when a small number of idealistic and progressive youth volunteered to go to the countryside, and newspapers publicized model volunteers such as Dong Jiageng, Hou Jun, and Xing Yanzi.⁷ Before the Cultural Revolution, the Shanghai government strongly encouraged “social youth” (*shehui qingnian*)—students who had not been admitted to high school or colleges and had not found employment—to go to the countryside.⁸ By 1962, the central government formulated policies and established administrative offices for the resettlements. From 1955 to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the Shanghai government claimed that some 164,015 youth from the city were sent to the countryside.⁹ In relation to the total Shanghai population, which was over six million in 1955 and nearly eleven million in 1966, this number, fewer than 15,000 per year, was small.¹⁰ The effort to send youth to the countryside before the Cultural Revolution, therefore, affected a limited segment of Shanghai residents.

At the same time, however, this earlier phase of sending youth to the countryside is a significant backdrop to what took place during the movement’s reconfiguration and expansion during the Cultural Revolution. During the early months of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, a large contingent of youth sent to the countryside in the early 1960s returned to Shanghai and protested their assignment, demanding that the municipal government reinstate their urban residence permits. And in the unprecedented political opening afforded by the Cultural Revolution, many of the youth returning to the city formed their own rebel groups.¹¹ This meant that many sectors of the Shanghai population became well aware of the hardships endured by the earlier contingent of sent-down youth.

The sent-down youth movement of the Cultural Revolution, therefore, was not an entirely new phenomenon, even if it was instituted in

⁷ See Liu Xiaomeng, *Zhongguo zhiqing shidian* (Major Events and Documents of China’s Sent-Down Youth) (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1995), 719–722, 731–739.

⁸ Ding Yizhuang, 47–48. For a discussion of “social youth” in Hunan sent to the countryside before the Cultural Revolution, see Yiching Wu, 162–170.

⁹ Shanghai laodong zhi bianzhuan weiyuanhui, 114; Liu Xiaomeng, *Zhongguo zhiqing-shi*, 43.

¹⁰ Jin Dalu and Jin Guangyao, *Zhongguo xin difangzhi*, vol. 4, 2205.

¹¹ See Yiching Wu, 108–110. Also see Bonnin, 63.

a completely different context than the earlier movement. The dislocation of the first years of the Cultural Revolution, particularly the disruption to schools and factories, caused the problem of unemployment in Shanghai to reach an unprecedented level.¹² Red Guard attacks on schools resulted in the closure of all academic institutions above middle school. Students graduating from middle school, starting in 1966, could not be admitted to high schools; those graduating from high school could not go on to colleges or universities. There was also a scarcity of jobs for these school graduates, as most factories curtailed production during these early years of the Cultural Revolution when Shanghai worker rebels, endorsed by Mao, seized control of the municipal government and later occupied schools and government institutions.¹³ This reduction in potential jobs became particularly acute in 1968 when, in order to restore classroom instruction, students in the middle and high school classes of 1966, 1967, and 1968, referred to as *lao san jie* (“three old classes”), would have to be graduated to make classroom space needed for new entering students.¹⁴ The first policy to deal with these *lao san jie*, announced in April 1968, was to assign them jobs according to the “four directions”: to the countryside, frontier, factories, and mines.

Although most students hoped for urban factory jobs, a large number of them were sent to the countryside.¹⁵ At this point the countryside to which most youth were sent consisted primarily of state farms near Shanghai (such as those in Chongming, Nanhui, and Fengxian) or more distant ones administered by Shanghai (such as Huangshan in Anhui and Dafeng in Jiangsu).¹⁶ In early June 1968, the Shanghai Party Committee sponsored a mass rally in Hongkou Stadium to mobilize the 1966 high school and middle school graduates to go to the countryside.¹⁷ A week later, the city established an office to oversee the mobilization.¹⁸ Still, many students did not want to go to the state farms and instead

¹² See Bonnin, 32–46.

¹³ Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun, *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

¹⁴ During the Mao era, it was the responsibility of city governments to either provide jobs for graduates from colleges, middle and high schools, and vocational and technical schools, or to send them to the countryside. Bernstein, 33.

¹⁵ Jin Dalu and Lin Shengbao, *Shanghai zhishi qingnian shangshan xiexiang yundong jishilu* (Chronicle of Shanghai Sent-Down Youth) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2014), 2.

¹⁶ Shanghai laodongzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, 185. Also see Jin Dalu and Lin Shengbao, 21.

¹⁷ Shanghai qingnianzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, 552. In 1966, there were almost 150,000 middle school graduates in Shanghai and nearly 31,000 high school graduates.

¹⁸ This “Shangshan xiexiang bangongshi” preceded the establishment of the Shanghai office of sent-down youth—Shanghai shi zhishi qingnian shangshan xiexiang bangongshi—under the State Council.

chose to wait for the possibility of a preferable assignment.¹⁹ Meanwhile, a small number of youth from Shanghai—following the example of their counterparts in Beijing—volunteered to go to distant production teams. In June, the Shanghai government dispatched two small teams to explore the possibilities for assigning youth to production teams in Anhui and Heilongjiang.²⁰

This is the context in which Mao issued his directive in December 1968. His directive added two new elements to the project of sending youth to the countryside. First, by the directive stating that it is “necessary” for educated youth to be re-educated by peasants, going to the countryside became a requirement, not one of several options. Second, it mandated that rural communities welcome the urban youth. The directive transformed what had been a relatively modest set of policies to deal with unemployed school graduates into a full-blown movement that required the participation of a far larger number of urban families.²¹

Leaders of the Shanghai government announced that all students waiting for job assignments, along with the entire class of 1968 graduates, would be required to go to the countryside. Demonstrating loyalty to Mao and formulating policies that supported him was crucial for the personal and political survival of high-ranking government officials. Although the 1968 directive was not at all specific about how youth should be mobilized and where they should be settled, the Shanghai government, like that of Beijing and several other large cities, defined the countryside as remote rural regions. During these early years of the sent-down youth movement, the Shanghai government defined the countryside as remote production teams and state farms, excluding state farms administered by the municipal government that were in closer proximity to Shanghai.

Within several weeks, the Shanghai government arranged to send youth to state farms and villages in Heilongjiang, Jilin, Inner Mongolia, Anhui, Jiangxi, Yunnan, and Guizhou. This policy was strictly implemented for two years, and impacted 507,000 middle and high school graduates, including the entire 1968 and 1969 classes as well as the remaining

¹⁹ By the end of December, about 47,000 graduates from the 1966 and 1967 classes were still waiting, making it difficult for the government to start job assignments for the class of 1968. Shanghai laodongzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, 112.

²⁰ Jin Dalu and Lin Shengbao, 3; also see “Lishi de tiankong: Zhiqing shangshan xiexiang dashiji” (The Sky of History: A Chronology of Sent-Down Youth), May 18, 2007, at www.chsi.com.cn/jyzd/jygz/200705/20070518/908609.html, accessed April 18, 2017.

²¹ *Renmin ribao*, December 28, 1968, CCRD. For a more extensive analysis of the ideological underpinning of the sent-down youth movement, see Bonnin, 19–24; Bernstein, 33–83; and Liu Xiaomeng, *Zhongguo zhiqingshi*, 36–41.

1966 and 1967 graduates who were still waiting for assignments by December 1968.²²

For the Shanghai government, the prospect of sending youth to the countryside offered a practical solution to some of its most vexing problems. As noted above, the curtailment of high school and college admissions since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution had prevented middle and high school students from graduating for two years. Until these students received job assignments and graduated, enrolling new students would be increasingly difficult. Mao's sent-down youth directive might well have seemed a much-needed, even if temporary, solution to this problem.

Mao's directive also offered a means of terminating the two years of urban violence and disorder that had erupted since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, when Red Guards trashed neighborhoods and occupied schools and some private residences. In Shanghai disorder was not only a product of Red Guard activities, but also involved gangs of neighborhood youth labeled in government documents as hoodlums (*liumang afei*). The Cultural Revolution increased the ranks and activities of *liumang*, whom local newspapers accused of engaging in gang fights, theft, assaults on women, and killing people with knives.²³ By early 1969, some districts in Shanghai were arresting *liumang* (many identified as elementary and middle school students) and also organizing them into study groups; throughout that summer, city newspapers included numerous reports on efforts by the municipal government to crack down on them.²⁴ Exporting them to the countryside became one of the most effective ways in which the Shanghai government could deal with the problem. Commenting on the negotiation conducted by Shanghai authorities with Anhui Province to accept 10,000 *liumang*, one provincial official stated that the arrangement was "to relieve the pressure of these youth on the city."²⁵ Whether such a sizeable number actually went and whether rural officials had any say about accepting these *liumang* remains unclear.

²² Shanghai laodongzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, 112.

²³ PTDOSY, Putuoqu Jiaozhou diqu Mao Zedong sixiang jiaoyu xuexiban 普陀区胶州地区毛泽东思想教育学习班, "Jiaozhou diqu Mao Zedong sixiang jiaoyu xuexiban zongjie" 胶州地区毛泽东思想教育学习班总结 (Summary of the Jiaozhou District Study Group on Mao Zedong Thought), March 13, 1969, PTDA.

²⁴ On the problem of *liumang afei*, see *Jiefang ribao*, July 20, 1969; July 24, 1969; July 25, 1969; July 26, 1969.

²⁵ Jiang Danping, "Nongnong de qingsi: Huiyi Anhui sheng shangshan xiexiang gongzuo" (Thick Affections: Recalling "Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside" Work in Anhui Province), in Zhonggong Anhui shengwei dangshi yanjiushi, ed., *Anhui zhiqing koushu shilu* (Oral History of Anhui Sent-Down Youth) (Anhui: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2014), vol. 1, 47.

24 Farewell to the Huangpu River

The Shanghai government launched a massive mobilization campaign to achieve “uniform redness.” Echoing the *Renmin ribao*, Shanghai newspapers did not refer to any of the practical rationales for launching the movement, but instead focused on its espoused revolutionary ideology and benefits: the virtues of hard labor in the countryside for urban youth, the opportunity the movement would provide them to learn about China’s social and economic problems, and the potential contributions to rural development they could make. It also glorified going to the countryside, depicting those who went as loyal followers of Mao willing to sacrifice the comfort of their urban homes for the cause of the revolution and presenting them as models of worthy revolutionary successors.²⁶

Mobilization consumed the city of Shanghai. Its streets were plastered with bright red posters proclaiming Mao’s directive about sent-down youth, depicting young students excitedly boarding trains bound for distant provinces. Newspapers published detailed accounts of mass rallies and parades celebrating those who agreed to go. The *Jiefang ribao*, for example, claimed that in early 1969 some 400,000 youth and their parents joined a parade to publicize their excitement about the movement.²⁷ Large assemblies took place every time groups of youth departed from the Shanghai train station, such as the 10,000 people who gathered to support the 4,000 urban youth leaving for Heilongjiang.²⁸ On a single occasion of 1,800 youth boarding a train for Anhui, the Zhabei district staged a sending-off parade with 200,000 participants, including both the “old and young” of the neighborhood.²⁹ The same district government also organized a “propaganda week” in May 1969, during which it commanded all work units to hang up banners and posters and stores to exhibit photos of and letters from sent-down youth in their windows. It also sent performing teams to schools, bus stations, major streets, and alleys to reach “every single family.”³⁰

In propagating the virtues of “going up to the mountains and down to the villages,” the media, particularly in the very early phases of the movement, made clear that the ideal version of going to the countryside was

²⁶ *Jiefang ribao*, January 8, 1969; January 27, 1969; February 26, 1969.

²⁷ *Jiefang ribao*, February 12, 1969.

²⁸ *Wenhui bao*, July 9, 1969, cited in Jin Dalu and Lin Shengbao, 62–63.

²⁹ Zhabei qu geming weiyuanhui 闸北区革命委员会, “Guanyu zhishi qingnian xiexiang shangshan da dongyuan de qingkuang baogao” 关于知识青年下乡上山大动员的情况报告 (Report on the Mobilization of Sent-Down Youth), January 21, 1969, ZBDA.

³⁰ Zhabei qu geming weiyuan hui 闸北区革命委员会, “Guanyu Zhabei qu kaizhan dongyuan zhishi qingnian fu Heilongjiang, Neimeng, Jilin, Anhui chadui luohu xuanchuan zhou huodong de jidian yijian” 关于闸北区开展动员知识青年赴黑龙江, 内蒙, 吉林, 安徽插队落户宣传周活动的几点意见 (Ideas Concerning Propaganda Week Activities in Zhabei District to Mobilize Educated Youth to go to Villages in Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia, Jilin, and Anhui), May 1969, ZBDA.



Photo 1.1 Holding a portrait of Chairman Mao, students from Shanghai's Putuo district bid farewell to the Huangpu river.
 Photo courtesy of He Xinhua.

chadui luohu, joining village production teams and living like villagers in poor and remote areas.³¹ The government had to confront large numbers of students who imagined they could comply with Mao's directive by going to less impoverished areas or to state farms. One district report highlighted the problematic residents who asserted that "the worst thing is to be sent to *chadui luohu*," and preferred to go to state farms instead.³² Newspapers also boasted headlines such as "You Must Be Determined to Endure the Greatest Hardships!" "Take the Path to the Production Brigades!"³³ "Joining Production Brigades Is Forever Revolutionary!"³⁴ They praised youth accepting assignments to production teams, with headlines such as

³¹ See, for example, PTDOSY, "Xiexiang shangshan bangongshi gongzuo dasuan" 下乡上山办公室工作打算 (Plan for the Work of the Sent-Down Youth Office), July 1969, PTDA.

³² Zhabei qu geming weiyuanhui, "Guanyu zhishi qingnian xiexiang shangshan da dongyuan de qingkuang baogao."

³³ *Jiefang ribao*, January 17, 1969. ³⁴ *Jiefang ribao*, December 19, 1968.



Photo 1.2 A photo released by the media featuring a happy departure of sent-down youth at the Shanghai train station. Xn-irro5qn0bv6c.com

“Spring Thunder on the Banks of the Huangpu River: Waves of Youth Are Going Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages.”³⁵

To complement these calls to join production brigades, Shanghai newspapers published accounts, often culled and reprinted from provincial newspapers, of the enthusiastic welcome urban youth received from rural hosts. The *Yunnan ribao* (*Yunnan Daily*) declared, “We welcome you sent-down youth from Beijing and Shanghai!”³⁶ The *Jilin ribao*’s (*Jilin Daily*) bold-lettered welcoming of sent-down youth was followed by an account of the careful preparations being undertaken by villagers for the arrival of urban youth: making arrangements for food, housing, fuel, and furniture; preparing to provide political education; ordering Mao’s books as a welcome gift. According to one report, “Everything is in place” in the countryside: many villages had organized residents to repair old houses, build new stoves, and paint the walls; some villagers were saving vegetables for the sent-down youth, and some others happily vacated their

³⁵ *Jiefang ribao*, February 12, 1969. ³⁶ *Jiefang ribao*, February 27, 1969.

rooms, decorating them as if for newlyweds.³⁷ *Jiefang ribao* also reported that Inner Mongolia had organized leadership committees and transportation teams to greet sent-down youth and would provide food for the youth during their journey to villages. Even local stores were reportedly prepared: they set up special counters to provide sent-down youth the commodities necessary for daily life in the region; some herdsmen made Mongolian gowns and leather boots for the arriving urban youth.³⁸ In Heilongjiang, local residents were said to have declared that their “great leader Chairman Mao” had bestowed upon them “this heavy responsibility to re-educate the educated youth . . . the greatest trust given to us peasants.” These villagers, the report said, wanted to assure urban parents that they would treat the students as if they were their “own sons and daughters.”³⁹

As soon as some Shanghai youth settled down in the countryside, newspapers began to publish accounts of their heroic accomplishments. A Shanghai youth sent to Jiayin, Heilongjiang, received lavish praise for having donated blood to save the life of a village woman who had lost consciousness during childbirth.⁴⁰ Other accounts described sent-down youth who provided medicines for villagers and who, as barefoot doctors, treated those who were seriously ill.⁴¹

Negotiations

In spite of the relentless enthusiasm propagated by the national and local media, many urban residents were ambivalent about the call to go to the countryside. A cadre from Heilongjiang sent to Shanghai to receive potential sent-down youth described the “sea of noisy people” occupying the street in front of the prestigious Jinjiang Hotel where she and delegates from other provinces stayed. Hoping to obtain information about conditions in the countryside and potentially to negotiate the best possible assignments for their own children, people crowded the entrance to the hotel. At a high school gathering, this cadre found herself encircled by students desperately asking questions such as, “The winter must be cold. Will my ears freeze off?” “If I go out to pee, do I have to break the ice to make a hole with a stick?” “Are we getting guns? Is there going to be a war?” “Is there rice to eat?”⁴²

³⁷ *Jiefang ribao*, February 24, 1969. ³⁸ *Jiefang ribao*, March 16, 1969.

³⁹ *Jiefang ribao*, February 3, 1969. ⁴⁰ *Jiefang ribao*, July 20, 1969.

⁴¹ For example, see *Jiefang ribao*, July 20, 1969. Other issues of the newspaper published many similar stories.

⁴² Liu Lianying, “Wo qu Shanghai jie zhiqing” (I Went to Shanghai to Pick Up Sent-Down Youth), *Zhiqing* (Sent-Down Youth), 2 (2013), 42–43.