

received. For the same reason, Chen also accused Tan Lifu, the student theorist of the blood lineage theory, of opposing the Cultural Revolution. However, Chen conveniently forgot two important historical facts: 1) It was Mao who gave vital support to those radical young militants during the earlier months of the Cultural Revolution; and 2) It was the Party's longstanding class line that gave rise to the Old Red Guards. On Mao's instructions, Chen's speech was distributed to every campus, giving opponents of the blood lineage theory a great opportunity to strike back at the Born-Reds.

Mass criticism of Tan Lifu on campuses across China was one of the main characteristics of the second stage of the debate on blood lineage theory. Thousands of big-character posters denounced Tan, but the main focus of the criticism was on his "reactionary political behavior," such as defending work groups and the Liu-Deng faction. Articles attacking Tan's promotion of blood lineage theory were strikingly similar in their logic and approach to the campaign they purported to oppose. For instance, some tried to prove that Tan's family background was not "Red" but "Black," which caused him to oppose the Cultural Revolution.³⁶ Ironically, the theoretical basis for most of these writings was the Party's class line, which was in itself a more subtle version of the blood lineage theory.

During this stage, the criticism was limited to school campuses and led not by the victims of the theory but mainly by the Rebel Red Guards, a great many of whom had supported the blood lineage theory to varying degrees. This significantly limited the scope and extent of their criticism of Tan.

Reeling from their abandonment by Mao and the CCRG, the children of former senior CCP officials began to respond and act. On December 15, they organized their own resistance organization, known as the United Action Committee (*lianhe xingdong weiyuanhui*), to openly defend blood lineage theory in defiance of Mao and CCRG. It was the United Action Committee's unflinching position that led to the next round of debate.

Calls for equality and human rights

It was Yu Luoke's essay "On Family Background" that characterized and dominated the final stage of the debate from January to May 1967 with its demands for equality and human rights. This monumental essay inspired a new and larger response from both sides of the debate, enjoyed the widest circulation, and gained an enduring influence. In the course of the debate, Yu wrote about ten essays building up systematic theories on this significant subject.

Yu was a young apprentice at the People's Machine Factory of Beijing when the Cultural Revolution erupted. Yu's father, who had trained as an engineer in Japan and returned to China in the 1930s, was branded a "Rightist" in 1957. Because of his family background, Yu was denied college education despite his outstanding academic performance.

During the Red Terror in August 1966, Yu witnessed members of the Old Red Guards justifying their torture and murder of innocent people on the basis of blood lineage theory. In the absence of any serious challenge to the theory, Yu employed his profound knowledge of Western philosophy and Chinese history to write "On Family Background" as a means of clarifying

The Scars of Youth

BY SONG XIAOYING

A woman who grew up during the Cultural Revolution recalls how the events of that period shaped the person she became.

The social and historical environment of a person's early years can leave an indelible impression that lasts a lifetime.

I was born in the 1960s, so from my earliest childhood my spiritual growth was influenced by the Land Reform Movement, the Cultural Revolution and other political movements of that time.

At that time, my mother, who had been working in a match factory in the city, was sent down to my father's village to work the fields. The village was engaged in a heated struggle against landlords. My grandfather was subjected to all-day struggle sessions at the village elementary school because his family once owned a few mu of land, and also because while he was a teacher he had supposedly signed some document related to the Young Men's Three Principles Association.¹ For the same reason, an uncle who was working in Beijing at the time was also sent down to work in the village.

The revolutionary groups liked to stir up conflicts between family members, and even some descendants of landlords became caught up in the notion that "profit is criminal, revolt is reasonable." At the end of one struggle session, my uncle climbed onto the stage and hit his father, leading to my grandfather's tragic suicide. I remember that my dad came back from the city, but it turned out that people classified as both landlords and counterrevolutionaries were not allowed a proper burial ceremony. I remember that the shroud my grandfather was wrapped in was a bit short, exposing his thin, white toes. This was how he was buried, and those of us in his family couldn't cry, because he had been charged with a new crime of "alienating himself from the people, deserving of 10,000 deaths."

At that time, I was in the village elementary school, and every day I would pass by a forest of big-character posters, some of which were about members of my own family. Everyone in my family had hated my grandfather, and no one would bring him food. Because my mother was a city dweller, she didn't understand the countryside, and she had twice let my younger brother bring my grandfather food, for which she was labeled a "counterrevolutionary element sympathizer." I also saw a cadre hang another big-character poster stating something to the effect that "counterrevolutionary family member XXX (my mother's name) always sings coun-

terrevolutionary songs in the middle of the night, disregarding the warnings of cadres and the masses.” In fact, it was a “revolutionary cadre” who late one night had come to our door, and my mother had let her and me sing songs together, thinking no one else could hear. My mother’s missteps became grounds for argument with my father, who had returned to the city to work, but who came back to the village once a week. My father was a very cautious man, and during the Cultural Revolution he had destroyed all of his beloved books. Every day I would pass by the big-character posters on my way to school, my tail between my legs, every day I listened to the criticisms of the children of poor peasants, and then on the weekends, late at night, I would be awakened by the sound of my parents arguing; those were the sounds of my youth.

The revolutionary tide quickly engulfed me as well. In those days, children of rightists or traitors weren’t allowed to advance in school, even though I was only advancing from “early primary” to “advanced primary.” I was a child who loved to sing and dance. The teacher who led the propaganda unit saw me following along with her troupe, and called my mother over. Even though she wanted to let me lead the singing and dancing, she advised my mother to convince me to drop out. At that time I was still with the unit. The teacher told the members to count off, and there were thirteen, but I wasn’t among them. Once I started middle school, I studied very hard. When our middle school established a small group for raising pigs, I was the most enthusiastic, but when it came to entering the group, I was not allowed in. This time my father came to speak to the teacher, but there was nothing the teacher could do.

My family’s misfortune meant that almost from birth I developed a feeling of inferiority that made me obsequious, quick to agree and easily hurt. My three uncles were even more miserable. The fact that their household had been labeled counterrevolutionary meant that they couldn’t find wives, and they were subjected to constant bullying and humiliation in the village. Whenever my father returned to the village, he was either getting into arguments with people or was being asked by officials to use his connections in the city to procure additional “planning quotas.” After the Cultural Revolution was over and I was in college, one day my dad happily said to me, “Child, our family’s ‘household status’ has been changed from ‘landlord’ to ‘rich peasant.’” Thinking about it now, I can find it both tragic and ludicrous, but all the same, my records still include the term “family status,” and I still have to fill out countless forms every year for various organizational bureaus. The depiction in “File Zero”² is no exaggeration.

Even today, many people, the “dowagers of Marxism-Leninism” with their “red roots,” still lord their political class advantage over others. Others like myself are left with what Zhang Xianliang³ refers to as “the burden of guilt,” which goes to show how sick our ideology is. In any society that recognizes the equality of all people, once a guilty

person has mended his ways, he is the same as everyone else. But we divide people up into classes and strata in which Party members, the organizational bureau and the propaganda department are the highest authorities in the land.

Such deep-seated feelings of inequality are the cause of social phenomena such as official bullying, cynicism, “thick skin black heart” mentality⁴ and emulation of anti-heroes such as Ah-Q and Wei Xiaobao.⁵ Not long ago, I heard a senior cadre with an intellectual upbringing make the following observation: “Intellectuals have a lot of serious shortcomings, we can’t let them strut about.” This isn’t a statement from a decade ago; it’s from last year. Sitting next to her was a cadre of worker-peasant background who also nodded and agreed. Actually, describing her as a “worker-peasant” cadre isn’t very accurate; years ago she received a Ph.D. at the Chinese Communist Party School as part of the Party’s efforts to become “more knowledgeable and youthful.” If someone 50 years old can be considered youthful, that is.

I don’t know if it’s because of the psychological “burden of guilt” from those early years, but even now I can’t seem to recover my self-confidence in front of other people, and continue to walk around with my tail between my legs. And my bureaucratic department still regards me as a person whose “level of political consciousness” is not high enough. The influence of those childhood years is just too heavy to shake.

Translated by Tom Kellogg

1. The *San Qing Tuan* was a youth organization established by the Kuomintang in 1940 in accordance with Sun Yat-sen’s Three Principles of the People.
2. *File Zero (ling dang an)* is a poem by the avant-garde poet Yu Jian (born 1954) presented as the official life history of an individual under China’s social control.
3. Zhang Xianliang is a writer in the modern school of “wounded” literature who has written extensively on his experiences as a prisoner in the Chinese gulag. He is best known for the semi-autobiographical work, *Half of Man is Woman*.
4. Known as *hou hei xue*, this philosophy stresses a ruthless pragmatism and exploitation of the weakness of others.
5. Ah-Q, the protagonist of Lu Xun’s eponymous short story, exemplifies moral cowardice and self-deception. Wei Xiaobao, the protagonist of Jin Yong’s martial arts novel *The Deer and the Cauldron*, is the son of a prostitute, raised in a brothel, who survives by sycophancy and trickery.