

Preface

The movement to rusticate China's educated youth was a fascinating experiment in Mao's China, unequalled in history, including in other Communist countries (although there was a Soviet precedent). The imprint left by that movement, which attempted to transform millions of young urban secondary school graduates into peasants, supposedly for life, certainly bore deeper into the psyche of that generation than the chaotic experience of the Red Guard movement. Despite that, outsiders are familiar with the term Red Guards whereas very few have heard of the so-called educated youth. Even among scholars, this episode in China's contemporary history has remained under-researched since the early 1980s, and many general histories of that period show a lack of knowledge and understanding about it.

This is why I did not expect to have much difficulty in publishing an English translation of this book—the more so since the French edition received very favorable reviews in the English-language academic press from a few French speaking colleagues. On the other hand, I did not expect it to be published in Chinese, and that the Chinese version would receive such an enthusiastic response. After the Chinese edition was published by The Chinese University Press of Hong Kong in 2009 (and is now already in its second printing), a pirated version appeared five months later on the

mainland (which can still be found in most large Chinese cities) as well as an authorized edition in simplified characters published in 2010 by the Encyclopedia of China Publishing House in Beijing, which is already in its fifth printing. Since it was published I have been invited to give lectures on the subject in many places in China and was surprised to see how vividly the memories of their experience (certainly the most important one in their lives) remained among the former educated youths, and the extent of their desire to understand it. I was also surprised to discover that almost half the audience was composed of their children, now approaching (or past) their thirties, who believe that their parents' experience also indirectly influenced them.

The reason for the success of the Chinese version of my book is probably its rather atypical nature. Although it is mainly based on my doctoral dissertation, it is the result of several periods of research on the topic spanning over thirty years, since the first time I met a group of Guangdong educated youths who had swum illegally across to Hong Kong in 1973, to the publication of the French version of this book in 2004 (see the Introduction for further details). The sources for this research are extremely varied and the objective is to provide a global perspective of the movement, viewed not only from the official stance but also from the people's point of view. Its ultimate ambition is to raise questions about the Maoist regime that extend beyond the movement itself. This is why it is longer than the usual monographs on specific historical phenomena.

The book's atypical nature was, I discovered, a huge obstacle in the current standardized world of English-language publishing, where even in academe the number of pages depends more on the publisher's business constraints than on scientific and didactic requirements. The translation issue was also a problem, since as one American friend put it, "publishers don't understand why you didn't write it in English in the first place." Most English-language publishers want to see the entire book in English before signing a contract and refuse to pay for the translation, whereas the Commission Nationale du Livre in France will provide an allowance to cover part of the translation fees but only once a contract has already been signed. Obsessed by this Catch 22 situation, I had a flash of inspiration one night: since The Chinese University Press of Hong Kong also publishes books in English and since CUP has already published the Chinese version, why not ask them if they would consider publishing the English one?

My deepest thanks therefore go to Gan Qi, Director of CUP, who immediately gave me a positive answer. She was ready to take the risk because she thought that this book deserved to be known outside of China as well. I would

also like to thank Lin Ying, Managing Editor, Agnes Chan, Editor in charge of the English editing, and Angelina Wong, Business Manager with whom I have already worked in friendly cooperation on the Chinese version of this book. I would also like to mention Richard Gunde, who did a wonderful job as a copy-editor. And my special thanks too, to Krystyna Horko, who agreed to translate this long book mainly for reasons of friendship and also as a way of returning to the period when she was a foreign student in China, at a time when the movement to rusticate educated youth was still underway. I was lucky to have an English translator who is knowledgeable about Chinese affairs.

Having a dual publication in Hong Kong is an honor for me. The Chinese University Press has done a remarkable job in publishing outstanding books on contemporary China, and Hong Kong remains the leading place for publications on contemporary Chinese history, especially the Cultural Revolution and the Maoist period. Even Maoist ideologues, like Deng Liqun, or Lin Biao's (and Mao's) comrades-in-arms Wu Faxian and Qiu Huizuo, published their memoirs in this "Special Administrative Region." More than that, Hong Kong is where the study of the educated youth movement began. Most of the scholarly books and articles on this topic, including Thomas Bernstein's seminal work *Up to the Mountains, Down to the Countryside*, have been the result of research carried out in Hong Kong, mainly with the help of the Universities Service Centre, now part of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. That was also the case for my own research. It is therefore only fitting that the English version of my book should be published where, in fact, it originated.

Michel Bonnin