

**Document 14.5: Excerpts describing the personal experiences of Nathan Hu during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, written in 2006–2007**

I was born in Xi'an<sup>1</sup> in 1951 into a big family of nine: my grandmother, father, mother, and six children. I am the fourth child. My grandfathers from both my father's side and my mother's side were big landlords before 1949. My *yeye*, grandfather from my father's side, enjoyed gambling very much. He lost almost everything before 1949. It seemed that my *yeye* was very unfortunate because of his bankruptcy. But a Chinese saying says, "Happiness leans against misery, and misery hides within happiness." Who could have known that my grandfather's bad luck turned out to be good luck after all?

**Assigned to a class**

Mao Zedong's revolution emphasized class struggle. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) relied on poor and lower-middle peasants. Landlords were one of the four enemies, which also included rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries, and "bad elements." In 1950, my grandfather was labeled as middle peasant, a neutral class between the rich and the poor, because of his bankruptcy. Therefore, my whole family was not discriminated against as an enemy in the CCP's regime for the following thirty years (1950–1980).

**Attacks on school personnel**

The Cultural Revolution began in 1966, when I was fifteen years old. Students began to attack their teachers, school administrators, party leaders and even their parents. I witnessed one incident. It's hard for me to forget it. The person attacked was the dean, a man of about fifty. The dean was the person in charge of students' studies. In some ways students were nervous about that kind of person. When the Cultural Revolution started, it seemed natural that that person would be a target. One day I heard noise near the administrative office. The dean was surrounded by a group of Red Guards. People yelled at him; several beat him and kicked him with their feet. There was blood on his face and

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<sup>1</sup> China's capital during several dynasties, Xi'an was also the end point of the silk routes trade. It is in Shaanxi Province.

saliva on the side of his mouth. He looked very sick...had no dignity at all. Very sick... I was very uncomfortable seeing something like that. Something so very violent. At that time it was very hard. You could not know. I witnessed it for a while, and then I could not continue and I left.

Attacks like this happened quite often in China during this time. Red Guards would beat someone, and then they might say, "Go back to your office and write a self-criticism to tell about your crime." Something like that. I don't know exactly what happened to the dean. But they had really humiliated him. Students at that time, well they were teenagers. And everybody thought they were following Mao, following Mao's teachings. So they thought of this as a revolutionary action. Nobody questioned that kind of violence.

And in another situation, my Chinese language teacher was a victim. She was a wonderful teacher, a very learned person. Soon after the Cultural Revolution started, they called her a counter-revolutionary, a member of the *bourgeoisie*. They wrote a Big-character Poster on her and pasted it over the window of her dorm room. She was a very dignified person, and she could not bear that humiliation. I don't know how many people committed suicide, but she was the first one of which I knew. Tragic. Terrible.

### **Other Red Guard activities**

Mao encouraged Red Guards to bring revolutionary zeal to different schools, factories, and governments at all ranks. We could go to any city through free transportation. Our boarding and food were all free. Mao's purpose was to paralyze all the party and government administrations and put power into those people who would follow his political ideology.

I left the middle school when classes were no longer being held, and I returned to my home at my father's university. Children like I, we followed the college students whom we called Big Red Guards. We helped them to print brochures, to write Big-character Posters. Students from the school were divided into two parts. One we called the revolutionary part. The other was called the conservative part. The revolutionaries

followed Mao's teachings exactly. They wanted to act against the school leaders. The other side—the conservatives—they tried to protect school leaders. In almost any institution, universities and schools, people divided into these two factions. Sometimes even into three, four, five factions, but generally speaking the two. "Rebellion" was considered a very good word. We called the other group, "protect the emperor group." I was on the side of the revolutionaries, the radicals. I followed the older students.

With the help of the Red Guards, Mao destroyed the old bureaucratic apparatus. Pretty soon, Mao felt that his political movement was out of control because different Red Guards organizations start "civil war" among themselves. Therefore, Mao decided to dispatch all the students to go to the countryside in the name to receive re-education. It might have been Mao's sincere intention to create a new generation who would carry out his proletarian cause out to the end.

Source: Hu, Nathan. Unpublished memoir; interview with Liz Nelson, June 2007.