

Revisiting Cultural Revolution

[The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) in China, from 1966-1976, involved one-quarter of the world's population and took humanity to unprecedented heights in the struggle for liberation. But today, what people mostly hear about the Chinese Cultural Revolution is lies and slander.

Dongping Han grew up during the GPCR and is the author of the book, 'The Unknown Cultural Revolution-Life and Change in a Chinese Village'. His story is a very welcome contribution to the struggle to get the real story out about the GPCR. In December 2008, Dongping Han participated in a very significant symposium in New York City, "Rediscovering the Chinese Cultural Revolution: Art and Politics, Lived Experience, Legacies of Liberation," which was sponsored by Revolution Books, Set the Record Straight Project, and Institute for Public Knowledge-New York University. On December 12, 2008, the opening night of the symposium, Dongping Han was at Revolution Books. 'Revolution' spoke with Dongping Han about GPCR. Excerpts :]

Question: Why during that time, during those 10 years of the Cultural Revolution, was there no effort made to purge the Communist Party of the right-wing capitalist roaders? Why was nothing done to purge the different apparatus of the Party of the capitalist roaders?

Dongping Han : That's a very good question. This question has been asked many times. The Cultural Revolution was not to purge people, it was to educate the people. Many of the capitalist roaders had fought for the revolution and made important contributions to the Chinese revolution. It was an accepted traditional idea that those who fight for the revolution should enjoy the privileges when the revolution succeeded. It was not enough to purge these people. The problem was the old traditional ideas. So the Cultural Revolution was to do away with the traditional ideas and educate the people through mobilizing the farmers and the workers. I think if there was no coup in 1976, I doubt that this government apparatus would have changed by itself. It happened because there was a coup. But I don't think to purge people is a solution either. I remember during the Cultural Revolution there were some high officials in my county who encouraged their own children to work with the farmers and to ask for the most difficult assignments and tasks to build their character. It seemed that these high officials did change with the change of social climate during the Cultural Revolution years. But when the social climate changed, they changed back.

Most people were not aware that there was a coup in 1976. Mao's wife and three other important leaders were arrested. And there was a very extensive purge throughout China. Hundreds of thousands of people who supported the Cultural Revolution were arrested right away. Some people argue that Mao should have killed Deng Xiaoping and a few others to prevent the arrest of the Gang of Four. Maybe he should have, but he did not.

Question: Could you paint a picture comparing what the average daily life was like for you and your family during the Cultural Revolution compared to, on the one hand communism before the Cultural Revolution, and then compared to your family now in capitalist China?

Dongping Han: The Cultural Revolution was launched because the Great Leap Forward* failed. It failed partly because there was a 100-year natural

disaster on the one hand. On the other hand, it failed because communist officials in the villages were not really socialist yet. They ordered farmers to do too much and they themselves didn't want to work hard. There was not enough to eat during the Great Leap Forward because of the natural disasters on the one hand and mismanagement on the other. So the reason I think the Cultural Revolution was launched by Mao was that he realized at the time that the Chinese officials needed to be educated and that the Chinese people needed to be educated through a socialist movement. That's why he mobilized the Chinese farmers to criticize the officials in the village. And of course, I was too young, I don't remember too much about the Great Leap Forward. But during the Cultural Revolution, I remember very well. I was working in the fields with the farmers and at that time in the rural areas, each village had a production brigade, and each brigade was divided into several production teams. In my village there were eight production teams. Each production team had about 40 families. We elected five production team leaders each year. We had a production team head, a woman leader, an accountant, a cashier, and a store keeper. Before the Cultural Revolution these people were appointed by the village leaders and the village leaders were appointed by the commune leaders. It was not democratically elected. During the Cultural Revolution years, these production team leaders were elected by the farmers.

We worked in the fields together. Everybody came out and worked together. And at the end of the day the cashier would record how many people worked that day. And at the end of the year, when the harvest came in, the village accountant, together with the production team accountant, would develop a distribution plan. Seventy percent of the grain was distributed according to how many people you had in your family. Thirty percent was distributed according to how much you worked in the collective. So if you did not work in the fields, you were still entitled to 70 percent of the grain from the collective. That was the distribution on the production team level. There was also distribution at the production brigade level. The village owned many enterprises. After putting away money for a welfare fund, money to purchase new equipment and so on, the village would distribute its income according to how much you had worked in the collective. The collective also produced vegetables, fruits, peanuts and we also raised pigs. These would be distributed to villagers regularly according to the same distribution schedule as grain was distributed. We also purchased fish, wine, cigarettes collectively with the money earned by the village enterprises, and this was distributed to each family on important occasions like Chinese New Year and other holidays. We got almost all our supplies from the collective.

After the Cultural Revolution years, I went to college and my two sisters who used to work for the village found jobs in a state-owned factory in the early '80s. Now the factory has been sold and my two sisters have been unemployed since 1996. My younger sister is still working in the village, as the village cashier now. My village is doing well compared with other villages. Life has changed dramatically in the countryside. I think for most working class people, life has changed for the worse. Even though they may get more money, they have lost benefits like free medical care and free education of the socialist past. They now have to pay for their education. They have to pay for their medical care. Most farmers cannot afford the medical care. If they are sick for a small problem, they just endure the problem. If they are sick for a big problem, they

just wait to die. Many of them say they do not want to leave a big debt for their children by going to the hospital. The medical care is very expensive now and it is beyond the reach of most farmers and working class people in urban areas?
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