**Anti-Rightist Movement 1957-1961**



In the Anti-Rightist campaign from 1957-1961 300,000 to 600,000 intellectuals were labeled as rightists, their jobs were taken away and many were sent to labor camps with their candid Hundred Flowers comments used as evidence against them. Mao said later he was trying to coax snakes out of their dens so he could chop off their heads. The term "rightist"—as in the opposite of "leftist"— sometimes included critics who, ironically, saw themselves as being to the left of the government, but officially referred to intellectuals who appeared to favour capitalism and were against socialism.

In the Anti-Rightist Campaign the Communist Party went on a nationwide witch hunt for supposed liberals, reactionaries and capitalist roaders. Some of those attacked were Chinese intellectuals who expressed their opinions on national policy issues under Mao's Hundred Flowers Campaign. The aim of the movement was aimed at ‘reform’ anti-communist elements in the Party and society, which operated in disregard of the procedures, rules of law, and even the touted moral truths of the Party itself.

Oliver Chou wrote in the South China Morning Post:“Around 550,000 so-called "rightists" were accused of "launching a ferocious offensive" on the Communist Party during the fateful summer of 1957. Instigated by Mao Zedong, the campaign followed seemingly genuine calls by the leadership for criticisms that might help to "rectify the party". For nearly two months, discussions were organised at work units across the country and criticisms put on record. Then Mao pounced, calling his tactics "an overt conspiracy" that lured "the snakes out of their holes". [Source: Oliver Chou, South China Morning Post, December 4, 2012]

"The ensuing anti-rightist campaign set the tone for the young People’s Republic and changed forever the lives of all those forced to put on a "rightist hat". Harvard University professor Roderick MacFarquhar, in his three-volume series The Origins of the Cultural Revolution, argues that the 1957 campaign led directly to subsequent politically motivated campaigns, including the Great Leap Forward, during which at least 20 million people were killed, and the decadelong Cultural Revolution, in which perhaps as many died and millions more suffered. [Ibid]

The repressive politics of the Cultural Revolution was in fact honed during the 1950s during the Anti-Rightist movement. One man who was forced to denounce his father as a counterrevolutionary during the anti-rightist campaign told the Washington Post, “My mother was forced to take me to a criticizing session. She taught me several words and asked me say them on the platform. I repeated the words and got enthusiastic applause.”

Some rightists have managed to rehabilitate themselves—retired premier Zhu Rongji and former minister of culture Wang Meng, a famous writer, among them. But for most of the 10,000 to 20,000 who are still alive around the world, the scars remain raw—for them and their families, The Anti-Rightist campaign remains difficult to research because of continuing censorship. Chinese historians say this is partly because of the central role in these ideological purges played by Deng Xiaoping.

**Beginning of Anti-Rightist Movement**

In a 1957 landmark address—‘On the correct handling of contradictions among the people’— Mao urged unity among the nation’s disparate sectors was made in the wake of the Hungarian Incident of 1956, an early climax of Eastern Europe’s rebellion against the Communist yoke. In China too, intellectuals were beginning to have misgivings about the dictatorial rule of Mao and his comrades. By and large, Mao proposed reconciliatory measures to iron out differences among social groupings. He indicated that while there were signs of disaffection with the authorities, these were ‘contradictions among the people’ because even oppositionists shared ‘the fundamental identity of [all] the people’s interests.’ He recommended that the CCP “use the democratic method of persuasion and education’ to woo the disgruntled elements. [Source: Willy Lam, China Brief (Jamestown Foundation), October 8 2010]

In his 1957 address, the Great Helmsman made a distinction between contradictions among the people and ‘contradictions between enemies and ourselves.’ While Mao advocated ‘the democratic method of persuasion and education’ with regard to critics who shared the CCP’s ideals, he indicated that so-called people’s foes—unreconstructed capitalists and ‘exploiters’ as well as elements bent on sabotaging the socialist order—should be put behind bars or otherwise liquidated. It seems evident, however, that the late chairman often lumped together these two types of contradictions in accordance with political expediency. Just a few months after his ‘contradictions’ speech, Mao launched the infamous ‘Anti-Rightist Movement,’ one of Communist China’s harshest campaigns against liberal intellectuals. Victims of the movement included early advocates of free-market reforms such as former premier Zhu Rongji (Eastasiaforum.org, October 1, 2009; Washington Post, July 18, 2007).

**Anti-Rightist Campaign**

In the ensuing frenzy, half a million people were denounced and sent to labor camps. Intellectuals were stripped of their Party membership and sent to camps and farms, where they did menial labor during the day and participated in “self-criticism meetings” in the evenings for three or four years.

Jianyang Zha wrote in The New Yorker: “Most of the “Rightists” were true believers and Party loyalists, and their ordeal drove many to depression, divorce, and suicide. The writer Wang Meng underwent a period of crushing self-doubt. He convinced himself that he deserved this retribution for the privileges he had enjoyed, and worked assiduously to redeem himself through hard labor. Carrying rocks and planting trees, he wrote later, improved his health, which had been delicate since childhood.” [Source: Jianying Zha, The New Yorker, November 8, 2010]

Frank Dikötter, author of *The Great Famine* told Evan Osnos of The New Yorker: After the launch of the Anti-Rightist campaign “Ferocious purges were carried out throughout the ranks of the party. From 1957 to 1962 several million cadres in the countryside were replaced with hard, unscrupulous elements who trimmed their sails to benefit from the radical winds blowing from Beijing. In a moral universe in which the means justified the ends, many of them were prepared to become the Chairman’s willing executioners, casting aside every idea about right and wrong to achieve the ends he envisaged.

The use of the word "the enemy" comes from Mao's famous 1957speech, "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People", which instructed officials, when dealing with alleged offenders, to distinguish between two types of social contradictions: those "between the enemy and us" and those "among the people". The former were to be handled with the unremitting severity of dictatorship.

**Victim of the Anti-Rightist Campaign: Zhang Bojun, China’s #1 Rightist**

Zhang Bojun was a Chinese politician and intellectual. Zhang has been called the "China's number one rightist". Zhang studied philosophy in [Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany) between 1922–1926, and joined the [Communist Party of China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_Party_of_China) (CPC) upon becoming a personal friend with [Zhu De](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhu_De) (Field Marshal and Supreme Military Commander of the New China), his roommate at the time. Zhang left the CPC following the [doom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_March_%28Little%29) of the “August First” military uprising in 1927, and over the years, in collaboration with others, founded the third parties, known today as the [Chinese Democratic Party of Peasants and Workers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_Democratic_Party_of_Peasants_and_Workers), and the [China Democratic League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China_Democratic_League). Before the revolution, Zhang was the dean of a teacher’s college in his home province of [Anhui](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anhui) and later an English professor in [Zhongshan University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhongshan_University) (Sun Yet-sen University in [Guangzhou](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guangzhou), [Guangdong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guangdong) Province, China).

He was appointed as the vice-Chairman of the 2nd [CPPCC](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CPPCC), [National Committee](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=National_Committee&action=edit&redlink=1) of the [People’s Republic of China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%E2%80%99s_Republic_of_China) 1954–1959, and [Minister of Communications](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PRC_Minister_of_Communications) (i.e., Department of Transportation, his title should have been translated as Secretary of Transportation). Vocal during the [Hundred Flowers Campaign](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hundred_Flowers_Campaign), Zhang was removed by [Mao Zedong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mao_Zedong) from his minister's position and staged as a public enemy during the [Anti-Rightist Campaign](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Rightist_Campaign) in 1957, being labeled as ‘China’s number one rightist’.

With his political ambitions unfulfilled and reform goals unaccomplished, Zhang lived a Renaissance man’s life in his private library of ancient books and art relics after his removal from the many positions he once held. At least until the Cultural Revolution he could retreat to this last sanctuary to reflect back on his journey from an early member of the CPC and a leader in the “August First” military uprising (1927), to a high-impact power broker between the CPC and all third-party political forces (late 1940s), and on to an enthusiast of the New China. Zhang died of stomach cancer and the family believed that depression as a result of his political downfall may have contributed to the deterioration of his health. His 10,000-volume family library was destroyed during the [Cultural Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_Revolution) in the 1960s. His daughter, [Zhang Yihe](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Zhang_Yihe&action=edit&redlink=1), is a writer with censored [History](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History) books. Even several years after his death, Chinese communists still criticised him and defended the CPC’s actions.

**Victim of the Anti-Rightist Campaign: Pak Chit-Man**

Pak Chit-man, who turned 80 in 20112, was one of 550,000 so-called "rightists" accused of "launching a ferocious offensive." "Nineteen fifty-seven was the year I got married," says Pak, who made a living as a piano teacher in Hong Kong after having left Beijing in 1982. "I was 24, and Chiu Ling-ming, my wife, was three years younger. "We picked August 1, Army Day, for our wedding, because we loved the party and the People’s Liberation Army. By then I had already heard something was going to happen to me. But I believed in justice and thought I had nothing to fear," he says. [Source: Oliver Chou, South China Morning Post, December 4, 2012]

Oliver Chou wrote in the South China Morning Post: “Within days, Pak, then the principal clarinettist of the Central Philharmonic Orchestra, the country’s top ensemble, was accused of "stirring up a general strike". The charge was based on a comment he made after he posted a letter on a wall asking the orchestra’s party cell to respond to a complaint of his. "It was in the canteen and I casually said, ‘If there is no reply by next week, let’s quit.’ That turned out to be proof of my rightist deeds. To make matters worse, the person in charge of my case was an orchestra colleague whom I had turned in for misbehaviour a few years earlier. So my fate was fixed," Pak recalls. "Many marriages ended in divorce because of a rightist indictment," says Chiu. "Many people advised me to leave Pak for another man, given my young age. But I knew who I was with and stayed with him regardless."

“Pak was stripped of his orchestra duties, albeit temporarily. "I was sent to a Beijing suburb for a few months of labour in the fields," he says. "That was a relatively light sentence; I think they needed me in the orchestra because of a lack of clarinettists. The USSR State Symphony Orchestra was about to arrive, and the 10th anniversary of the People’s Republic of China was forthcoming and there were a lot of official concerts to show off the achievements of New China. [Ibid]

"But whenever a political campaign was on the horizon, we rightists would be the first to get hit. I often spent time in the fields or in the coal mines and, in 1959, refining steel, after Chairman Mao called on the nation to overtake Britain and the United States in steel production." It was while he was working at a steel factory on the outskirts of the capital that Pak and Chiu’s first child was born. "I was in my early 20s and I was all by myself in Beijing  and knew nothing about childbirth," says Chiu, who is the youngest of four siblings from a Chongqing family. "It was near dawn when I went into labour and I packed a few things and took a bus to the hospital. Ling was born a few hours later," she says. Pak wouldn’t see his daughter for a month. "I still feel very bad for not being with Ling-ming during the delivery. [Ibid]

“When I arrived home, it pained my heart to see my baby girl for the first time," Pak says, his eyes moist with tears. Pak named the child Ling, after the first character of his wife’s given name. When the couple’s second child, a boy, was born, in 1966, Pak had once again been put to work away from home. "When I arrived from Lantian, Shaanxi province [where he’d been involved in a ‘socialist education campaign’] in the summer of 1966, Ming was already three months old," he says. "Ming" came from the second character of his wife’s given name. [Ibid]

**Victim of the Anti-Rightist Campaign: Chang Wing-Tin**

Oliver Chou wrote in the South China Morning Post: “If Pak considered his A light sentence, colleague Chan Wing-tin was not so lucky. In 1957, the oboist heeded the party call and joined in the criticisms by accusing the orchestra’s general office of factionalism. "Those people were prejudiced against some of us, and I spoke on behalf of my buddies, exposing to the party the injustice we saw in the administration. After all, to help rectify the ranks is what we were asked to do," Chan, now 81, recalls. [Source: Oliver Chou, South China Morning Post, December 4, 2012]

“His comments were used to "prove" he was attacking the party and he, also, was labelled a rightist. He was downgraded by two ranks, which meant a lower salary (it fell from 98 yuan to 72.50 yuan per month) and fewer benefits. He was stripped of his Communist Youth League membership and sent to serve in the northern-most labour camp, in Heilongjiang province, which borders Russia. He would be apart from his wife and infant daughter for three years. "Beidahuang was the coldest and the most deserted part of China. The temperature could drop to minus-30 degrees Celsius and there was no heat whatsoever. There I was, at Farm 850, with more than 10,000 rightists from all sectors. There was a moment when I felt so hopeless I cried and screamed out loud, ‘Oh party, I have done nothing against you! I am innocent!’ I think a part of me died there," Chan says. [Ibid]

“When the political climate thawed slightly, in 1960, Pak and Chan were told their rightist status had been repealed and they had been reinstated to the orchestra. However, Chan could no longer play many notes because he couldn’t stop his hands from trembling, after so many years spent in the bitter cold. Worse, the stigma remained; they became known as "reinstated rightists", and their children "reinstated rightist children". "We were second-class or even third-class citizens, and were looked down on by others, even after our rightist hats were removed," says Pak. "For example, I would never get to play the best instrument, but always a substandard clarinet."

"Our children faced prejudice as early as kindergarten, although they were too young to understand it," says Chiu. "But we as parents felt very bad. "The school was worried about being accused of providing a platform for rightist children, but Ling was the school’s best violinist. That often put the school in a dilemma," says Chiu, adding that the little girl would be forbidden from rehearsing for performances in which she’d be a soloist. [Ibid]

“Ling, who would go on to become a violinist with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra for two decades, remembers little of that time."Even if there were unpleasant moments between me and the other kids, I was so little that I thought of it as normal," she says. Her brother, however, remembers. "My parents were very stern and always kept us inside," says Ming. "All we did was practise the violin and nothing else," recalls the former Hong Kong Philharmonic viola principal. "Father disciplined me in a very physical way, and I got beaten not by his hand but by the rod in his hand. Sometimes the bruise lasted a week. If the same thing happened today, someone would report it to the police," he says. [Ibid]

"I didn’t care about myself being badmouthed or despised, but not my children," says Chiu. "We kept them at home in fear that the other kids would bully them for being rightist children." "We adults were doomed and had no future, so we placed all our hopes on our children," says Pak. "That’s why, when they were lax in practising, I got very mad. But every time after I beat them, I felt very bad. "I think, without the rightist curse, I would have been more psychologically balanced." "His rightist verdict deprived him of peace of mind, and that’s why he was easily provoked and vented his anger on us," says Ming. "The lack of inner peace haunts him even now, and my daughter sometimes takes [a verbal assault] from the old man."

**Victim of the Anti-Rightist Campaign: Yang Bao-Zhi**

Oliver Chou wrote in the South China Morning Post: “For Yang Bao-Zhi, who was childless, it was his parents who would bear the brunt of his being labelled a rightist. "The year I was branded a rightist was the year I graduated from the Central Conservatory of Music, in Tianjin. My parents were senior staff there; my mother was with the primary school and my father was in charge of recordings and other reference sources at the library," the 77-year-old violin teacher and composer says. "As the eldest son and an active student---I was chief of military and sports at the student union---my rightist label came very hard for my parents. "I didn’t take it seriously at first, thinking the political wind would last a month at the most. But it turned out to be 22 years." [Source: Oliver Chou, South China Morning Post, December 4, 2012]

“Yang was lucky; he was "rescued" by a visiting official from the Chongqing Municipal Song and Dance Ensemble, who recognised his talent and offered to "re-educate" him. "So I was freed from labour in the paddy fields and worked in the Chongqing ensemble, although that meant I had to leave my parents to go to the city."

“Shortly after he left, the family was dealt a second blow. Yang’s father was also branded a rightist, and was downgraded three levels. From his role as head of the library, he was demoted to being an ordinary staff member, and his salary dropped to 96 yuan from 128 yuan. "My father was very close to the conservatory director Ma Sicong, who, like us, was from Guangdong. I think we were protected by Ma, who was under fire himself. Although my mother was not directly affected and kept her senior position at the primary school, she was heartbroken to see two of the family of four branded rightists."

“Yang believes he was responsible for implicating his father, although the quota system whereby each unit of the workforce had to yield a certain number of rightists (generally understood to be 5 per cent) would have played a part."When the party invited criticism, I, as an activist, did say something critical about my father, and reported it to the Communist Youth League, of which I was a member to show my progressive attitude. No one knew how the turn of events would unfold, but it turned out most of the active members, including the league’s chief, would be labelled rightists. After that, everyone kept their mouth shut and did not trust anyone," he says. [Ibid] His parents were not angry with him, says Yang, but they did become very careful about what they said to him. That was to prove fairly easy, however; for almost five years Yang did not see them. It was not until 1962 that the family were reunited. By then, both father and son had had their charges dropped. [Ibid]