

Chapter 4

Influences of the Cultural Revolution on Chinese Literacy Instruction

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4.1 Introduction

At the first session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in Beijing in 1949 that proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), combating illiteracy was recognized as one of the goals of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and was included in the Common Program of the CPPCC (Houn 1973). Thus, from the beginning of the New China, literacy was an important concern of the CCP in order to achieve their twin objectives of transforming the state into a socialist and an industrial society. It is difficult to spread a new social philosophy or ideology without the written word, but it is even more difficult to create an industrial society without a certain degree of literacy in the population. With a literacy rate of only about 20% in 1949, the CPC had a major task set out for itself (Houn 1973).

Wang (2003) identified three phases of educational reform from 1949 to 1976. The first phase involved copying Russian educational models. During the second phase from 1958 to 1965, Mao Zedong (also known as Mao Tse-tung), the Chairman of the Communist Party of China Central Committee (CPCCC), abandoned the Soviet model and encouraged the establishment of an educational system that would be characteristically Chinese. The third phase occurred at the time of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 when "a whole generation experienced a disrupted education" (Meng and Gregory 2002).

This chapter focuses on Chinese literacy education during this third phase. We explore changes to literacy instruction and the functions of literacy during the years

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of the Cultural Revolution and describe reading materials used for Chinese literacy instruction at that time, including political propaganda materials and textbooks. We highlight several forms of literacy that became important both in the spread of Maoist ideology and literacy across China during the Cultural Revolution: “Two Newspapers and One Magazine” and Big Character Posters (*Dazibao*). It is important to note that many of the literacy and general educational practices common during the Cultural Revolution did not originate during that 10 year period. Therefore, whenever possible, we also try to place these practices in a historical context for our readers.

4.2 Beginnings of the Cultural Revolution

In May 1966 the Politburo issued a document, the “May 16th Circular,” in response to an academic debate about a historical play that led to “sarcastic writings” Mao thought were criticizing him in the media (Hsü 1990, p. 698). The circular announced a “great Cultural Revolution. . . led personally by Comrade Mao Tse-tung.”

Our country is now in an upsurge of the great proletarian Cultural Revolution which is pounding at all the decadent ideological and cultural positions still held by the bourgeoisie and the remnants of feudalism. Instead of encouraging the entire party boldly to arouse the broad masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers, and the fighters for proletarian culture so that they can continue to charge ahead, the outline [published about the play]. . . obscures the sharp class struggle that is taking place on the cultural and ideological front. (Mao 1966b)

The May 16th Circular also reported that the Central Committee would dissolve the Group of Five, created in January 1965 when Mao first approached the Politburo about a cultural revolution, and would establish a new group to replace it (Hsü 1990). Thus, under Mao’s leadership, the Central Cultural Revolution Group (CCRG) was set up before the end of May. This group included Mao’s secretary Chen Boda, Mao’s wife Jiang Qing, Premier Zhou Enlai, and five others. This “Left Alliance” led the early stages of the Cultural Revolution (Lin 2009).

The Cultural Revolution was officially launched in August 1966 with the convening of the 11th Plenum of the 8th Chinese Communist Party Central Committee in Beijing (Lin 2009). On August 8, the CCPCC adopted its *Decision of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Concerning the Great Cultural Revolution* (also known as the Sixteen Points) that laid out the aims of the “current great proletarian cultural revolution. . . a great revolution that touches people to their very souls, representing a more intensive and extensive new stage of the development of socialist revolution in our country” (CCPCC 1996b, p. 263). This revolution would center on class struggle and educating the masses. “Reforming the old educational system and the old policy and method of teaching is an extremely vital task of the great proletarian cultural revolution” (p. 272). Education, literature, and the arts would be reformed “to facilitate the consolidation and development of the socialist system” (p. 264).

The CCPCC reaffirmed Mao's thesis that the first stage of a cultural revolution involves work in the "ideological sphere." The "Four Olds"—old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits—were still being used by the "exploiting classes to corrupt the mind of man and conquer his heart." Consequently, "the proletariat must squarely face all challenges of the bourgeoisie in the ideological sphere, and use its own new ideas, new culture, new customs and new habits to transform the spiritual aspect of the whole of society" (CCPCCb 1996a, p. 264). Schools were "dominated by bourgeois intellectuals," so "it [was] necessary to completely change the situation" (p. 272). Education must serve "proletarian politics" and academic education must be "integrated with productive labor" (p. 273).

The *Decision* of the 11th Plenum directly affected Chinese language and literacy education since it specified that "teaching material must be thoroughly reformed" (p. 273). The CCPCC called for complex reading material to be replaced by simplified readings related to proletarian politics, and students and teachers should participate in the "cultural revolutionary struggle for criticizing the bourgeoisie" (p. 273). Ancient Chinese texts, including the Confucian classics that had been used for centuries as instructional material, became targets for destruction because they belonged to the Four Olds. Teachers of Chinese classics were targeted for re-education.

In the summer of 1966 at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Mao encouraged the young generation to be Red Guards for his revolution. Red Guards quickly formed among high school and college students. They wrote Big Character Posters to expose and criticize crimes and excesses of those thought to be bourgeois anti-revolutionaries, including teachers who taught them old ways of thinking. Many schools and universities closed so students could dedicate themselves to revolutionary struggle. Some Red Guards went to people's homes and ransacked private property, burning or destroying Western objects and anything related to traditional Chinese culture, including ancient Chinese texts and works by Confucius (Hsü 1990). People sometimes were injured during raids on homes or struggle sessions, or committed suicide as a result of public humiliation. Different groups of Red Guards formed and sometimes had conflicts with each other (Lin 2009). Two years into the Cultural Revolution in July 1968, with violence escalating in major cities, Mao met with leaders of the five major revolutionary groups in Beijing to officially end the Red Guard Movement and to inform them order would be restored (Cleverley 1991; Hsü 1990; Langley 2008).

4.3 Political Content of Chinese Language and Literacy Instruction

From the beginning of the PRC, proletarian ideology was integrated into materials to teach Chinese. During the Great Leap Forward beginning in 1958 when the nation experimented in communal living, textbooks included more political content than previously because the party used political exhortation to motivate workers to

increase agricultural and industrial output (Cleverley 1991). However, during the Cultural Revolution “political content entered schooling as never before” and was included in lessons in all subjects (Cleverley, p. 186). The *Decision* of the 11th Plenum (CCPCC 1966b) specified, “In carrying out the cultural revolutionary mass movement, it is essential to combine the dissemination of the proletarian world outlook, Marxism-Leninism and the thought of Mao Tse-tung with the criticism of the bourgeois and feudal ideologies” (p. 273). These political ideologies became the content of materials to teach Chinese. The 11th Plenum also emphasized in its *Communique of the Eleventh Plenary Session* (CCPCC 1966a) that “the intensive study of Comrade Mao Tse-tung’s works by the whole Party and the whole nation is an important event of historic significance” (p. 285).

4.3.1 Two Newspapers and One Magazine

On June 1, 1966, *People’s Daily* published an editorial “Destroy All Evils” to gain the support of the nation in carrying out a proletarian Cultural Revolution (China Media Project 2007/2012). The media played a vital role in informing the public of the latest Communist Party policies. During the Cultural Revolution Mao Zedong Thought was adopted for education of the masses, and re-education of the bourgeois, through three influential media publications referred to as Two Newspapers and One Magazine: the editorials and lead articles in *People’s Daily*, *People’s Liberation Army Daily* (*PLA Daily*), and *Red Flag* magazine (*Hong Qi Magazine*). *People’s Daily* was, and still is, the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, and *PLA Daily* was the official newspaper of the Central Military Commission. *Hongqi Magazine* (*Red Flag*) published theoretical pieces on Communist party ideology and began publication during the Great Leap Forward in 1958 (CMP, para. 7–9).

Chen Boda, Mao’s secretary, set up these media as a “propaganda machine” to deliver Mao’s ideological messages to the Chinese people. The three publications published the same editorials, which were “regarded as the loftiest guides for Communist Party behavior and the unification of public opinion” (CMP 2007/2012, para. 1). Two Newspapers and One Magazine was the mouth piece of the Communist Party through which Mao’s latest speeches and ideas and the latest political trends were published in editorials, feature articles, and columns. Quotes from Mao’s *Little Red Book* and political slogans also were published in Two Newspapers and One Magazine (CMP, para. 4). Almost everyone was expected to learn and understand the most current political situation through various reading groups in cities, rural areas, and schools across the nation. Mao’s instructions were studied in school as language and political education.

The editorial “Destroy All Evils” had an immediate effect on Chinese literacy instruction in schools. From the beginning of June, formal teaching was disrupted at some schools. Students studied *People’s Daily* editorials and daily columns of Mao’s quotations, such as “Chairman Mao is the red sun in our hearts!” Articles from

Two Newspapers and One Magazine became one type of reading material used to teach Chinese Yuwen (language and literacy) during the Cultural Revolution.

4.3.2 *Big Character Posters*

The writing of Big Character Posters was another literacy practice promoted during the Cultural Revolution that also was used in Chinese Yuwen education at that time. The posters were large wall-mounted displays with large hand-written characters. Chinese calligraphy was written with brushes on large sheets of paper that were later mounted in public places and on classroom walls. Big Character Posters originated in Imperial times but were more common in China after the 1911 revolution when the literacy rate increased (Library of Congress 2012). During the Great Leap Forward when Mao initiated a reform of the education system, Big Character Posters attacking the old style of education appeared on the walls of college and university buildings. Mao praised these posters and saw them as an effective propaganda tool (Cleverley 1991).

In the early days of the Cultural Revolution, Nie Yuanzi and some of her colleagues at Beijing University introduced Big Character Posters as a way to expose and criticize the crimes and excesses of those thought to be bourgeois anti-revolutionaries (Cleverley 1991). On May 25, 1966, they posted Big Character Posters in the dining room of Beijing University to expose crimes of the administration. Students at Shanghai University posted similar Big Character Posters on their campus (Cleverley 1991). Those who were attacked could respond with other Big Character Posters. Mao approved the content of Nie's poster, calling it "China's first Marxist-Leninist big character poster," and it was published with a commentator's article in *People's Daily* on June 1 (Cleverley 1991; Mao 1966a, para. 1).

Also in late May 1966, Red Guards appeared in Beijing, first at the middle school affiliated with Qinghua University (Lin 2009). Students from the middle school wrote two Big Character Posters on May 25 and June 2 and signed them Red Guards (Chesneaux 1979). Over the summer there was much revolutionary fervor throughout the country and many schools and universities closed (Cleverley 1991). Mao was known for his calligraphy and on August 5 created his own Big Character Poster, "Bombard the Headquarters" (Lin 2009; Mao 1966a). The CCP Central Committee considered Big Character Posters an effective way to support the revolution. The *Decision* of the 11th Plenum of the CCPCC adopted on August 8 noted the use of Big Character Posters by "young revolutionaries" and supported the use of these posters for "exposing and criticizing in a big way, firmly launching an attack against those open and covert bourgeoisie representatives" (CCPCC 1966b, p. 264). Big Character Posters were referred to several times in the document to emphasize that

Full use must be made of such means as big-character posters and large-scale debates so that views and opinions may be aired and the masses helped to elucidate the correct viewpoints, criticize the erroneous opinions, and uncover all demons and monsters. Only in this way will it be possible to make the broad masses heighten their consciousness in the midst of struggle, increase their capacity for work, and distinguish between the right and wrong and the enemies and ourselves. (p. 267)

Big Character Posters became part of the Chinese Yuwen curriculum in schools in the summer of 1966 after the CCPCC circulated the Sixteen Points of the 11th Plenum (He 2002), along with newspaper editorials and Chairman Mao's instructions. "China was full of posters, like a huge bulletin board: school walls, shop windows, buses, staircases, public restrooms and any other blank spaces were filled with revolutionary slogans and announcements of chastisement meetings" (He, p. 309). Students in elementary and secondary schools read from Big Character Posters mounted on school walls and produced their own posters. Creating Big Character Posters gave students opportunities to practice Chinese calligraphy.

4.3.3 *Mao's Little Red Book*

Some regions in the PRC used *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, also known as *The Little Red Book*, and articles from Two Newspapers and One Magazine as the primary Chinese Yuwen reading material or as transitional material until new textbooks could be published. *The Little Red Book* was compiled in an office of the *People's Liberation Army Daily* for use first with the army (Han 2012). It went through several versions beginning in January 1964, including a version in 1966 for the new revolution.

The Little Red Book was widely circulated throughout the country in the early days of the Cultural Revolution. *Peking Review* published an article on August 12, 1966 on the mass publication of Mao's works:

The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party has decided to speed up the large-scale publication of Chairman Mao Tse-tung's works in order to meet the urgent needs of the broad masses of the people in studying Mao Tse-tung's thought. It has called on the broad masses of cadres and workers and staff members of publication, printing and distribution departments throughout the country to mobilize immediately, make all-out efforts and take the publication and distribution of Chairman Mao's works as their foremost task. Following the speed-up in the mass printing of Chairman Mao's works this year and next, these works, for which there has been a pressing demand by the broad masses, will gradually come to be in plentiful supply throughout the country. (para. 2)

The CCPCC planned for 35 million sets of the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* to be printed and distributed in 1966 and 1967 (*Peking Review* 1966, para. 3). The Ministry of Culture held a national conference in Beijing to "urge printing, publishing and distribution organizations throughout the country to take immediate revolutionary measures" to increase the publication of Mao's works for the masses (para. 5). Under the leadership of Communist Party leaders at various levels, publishers were asked to "mobilize all printing houses, where conditions permit, to undertake the glorious political task of printing Chairman Mao's works" (para. 6). While the original intent was to increase publication of the *Selected Works*, the party's goal shifted to publishing *Quotations of Chairman Mao*, and 720 million copies were published by the end of 1966 (Han 2012).

School children were each given a pocket-sized copy of *The Little Red Book* and told to cherish it. They chanted passages from it over and over again in unison and recited quotations. The repetition acted as a form of indoctrination. However, through memorization and repeated reading, the students learned to read Chinese characters. This was also one practice used to teach peasants and factory workers to read. Recitation and repeated reading were techniques used from ancient times to teach the reading of Chinese logographic characters (see Chap. 1 of this book).

4.3.4 Chinese Literacy Textbooks

Established in December 1950 under the leadership of the Chinese Ministry of Education, the People's Education Press (PEP) was responsible for curriculum research and compiling and publishing teaching materials for the PRC (PEP 2007). The role of the PEP was to interpret and implement state policy through developing syllabi and textbooks for different subjects, including Chinese Yuwen (Language and Literacy). The PEP acted as a bridge between state policy and implementation of curriculum in the schools (Adamson 2004). From 1966 to 1972, however, the PEP was forced to close, along with other educational organizations (PEP 2007), and staff were sent to work on farms or in shops in rural towns (Adamson 2004). Curriculum development work of the early 1960s was completely disrupted.

In 1967 the CCPCC called for old textbooks to be destroyed and new ones to be developed by local teams of textbook writing groups (Adamson 2004; Shen and Sun 2010). Some editorial teams said they consulted with students, revolutionary groups, workers, peasants, and soldiers, but it may not have been a “genuine consultation process” (Adamson 2004, p. 112). Large cities had their own People's Press that published textbooks. Chinese Yuwen textbooks varied in different provinces, cities, and counties since textbook editorial teams made their own selections of material for inclusion in their textbooks. However, reading material and exercises in all textbooks had to conform to the central government's ideology.

Agencies of education management issued guidelines for literacy education, including selection criteria for textbook content (Shen and Sun 2010; Nie 2009a, b). The guidelines for literacy education in Shanghai stated textbook content had to “actively promote Mao Zedong Thought, relentlessly criticize the capitalist class, and strenuously fight for the elimination of the people-exploit-people system on earth” (Nie 2009a, p. 21). Selection criteria should be “politics first, artistic merit second” (p. 21). The majority of published textbooks across the PRC contained articles by political leaders and material about the Cultural Revolution. Writings by Marx, Engels, and Lenin, originally published in German and Russian, were translated into Chinese. The only texts translated from French were *The Internationale* by Eugène Edine Pottier, which was the anthem of the International Workman's Association, and poetry of the Paris Commune (Hong 2012).

Nie (2009a, b) and Shen and Sun (2010) analyzed the content of some Chinese Yuwen textbooks published between 1968 and 1972. In the preliminary Chinese

Yuwen textbook published in 1968 for 7th graders at Shanghai Middle School, 9 of the 22 lessons were Mao's poems, essays, speeches, and quotations (Shen and Sun 2010). About half of the 1972 textbook edition for Shanghai Middle School was writings by Mao and other Communist leaders. This edition also included scenes from Model Plays that focused on modern revolutionary themes, family histories, and a few classical essays and poems (Nie 2009a, p. 21).

The 11th grade Chinese literacy textbook used in Guangzhou contained critiques on ideology and culture written by Marx, Engles, Lenin, and Mao; theoretical pieces on strengthening proletarian control of the country; articles on class struggle and criticism; short stories on uniting the Chinese people against their enemies; and revolutionary stories (Nie 2009b, p. 23). Volume 1 of the 1969 edition of the preliminary middle school textbook published by Zhejiang People's Press had similar content, plus study guides and drills based on Mao's writings. Essays from *People's Daily*, *Zhejiang Daily*, and *Wenhui Daily* also appeared in this edition (Shen and Sun 2010). Volume 2 of the 1971 preliminary Chinese Yuwen textbook for middle schools in Anhui Province adopted essays from *People's Daily & PLA Daily* (Shen & Sun).

Revolutionary plays had been initiated as an educational source during the Socialist Education Movement that Mao had instituted in 1962. Under the auspices of Jiang Qing, Mao's wife who became a member of the Central Cultural Revolution Group, "new forms of revolutionary art" appeared in 1964, including the ballet *The Red Detachment of Women* and the play *The Raid on the White Tiger Regiment* (Hsü 1990, p. 696). The Central Cultural Revolution Group engineered the writing and performance of Model Plays promoting class struggle. Segments of these plays were included in some local textbooks.

4.3.5 *Revolutionary Diaries*

In addition to practicing writing through creating Big Character Posters, students developed writing skills by keeping personal self-reflection diaries. This instructional activity became a common practice in some schools when the school day became more regular with the use of the new Chinese Yuwen textbooks. As students reflected on their thoughts and actions, they remembered Mao's instructions and tied their reflections to quotations from his works. Selections from a 3rd grader's Anti-Selfishness Diary show how in the process of connecting her thoughts to the teachings of Mao, the student learned to critically reflect in writing on her actions.

May 13, 1970 – Today our class held a "Combating Selfishness" meeting. The teacher said that the Young Pioneers should take the lead in articulating their thoughts. I was initially reluctant to say anything, but upon remembering Chairman Mao's admonition to "combat selfishness and condemn revisionism," I immediately made a statement.

May 21, 1970 – Earlier today while I was playing at a classmate's house, I happily answered the call of another classmate to go and sweep the floor. However, when my pants were dirtied in the process of cleaning, I wanted to quit. At that moment, the sound of

Chairman Mao's words enabled me to overcome my selfishness, and I continued my cleaning task. Afterwards we went home, singing a revolutionary song along the way. I had a stomach ache after returning home, but I believe that my ideology became redder despite the physical discomfort. (Shen and Sun 2010, p. 10)

4.4 Connecting Mental and Manual Labor in the Countryside and Cities

The *Decision* of the CCPCC at the 11th Plenum in 1966 at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution articulated the position of the Chinese Communist Party that schooling should serve the needs of proletarian politics and should integrate book learning with productive labor.

In schools of all types, it is imperative to carry out the policy, advanced by Comrade Mao Tse-tung, of making education serve proletarian politics and having education integrated with productive labor, so that those who get an education may develop morally, intellectually and physically and become socialist-minded, cultured laborers. (CCPCC 1996b, p. 273)

After the initial stage of the Cultural Revolution when schooling was disrupted, productive labor on farms and in factories became a critical part of education. By sharing hardships with peasants, factory workers, and other manual workers, students would learn to relate theory to practice, and class barriers could be broken (Cleverley 1991). During the Great Leap Forward, work study programs had been initiated in primary, junior middle, and senior middle (high) schools, and “productive work was taken more seriously in schools than at any time since 1949” (p. 144). The CCP extended this earlier experience with work study programs to the whole of China in the late 1960s.

In December 1968, the CCP announced the Down to the Countryside Movement and ordered some of the Red Guards and other older urban students “sent up the mountains and down to the countryside” to learn from peasants (Lin 2009). During the height of the Red Guard Movement, students and recent graduates had traveled throughout China interacting with local populations, but the new movement would relocate youth to rural areas to learn about manual labor.

In 1962, Mao had instituted another movement, the Socialist Education Movement, to stress class struggle. The movement included sending party officials and intellectuals to the countryside to learn from peasants (Hsü 1990) and drafting teachers and senior students for investigative teams to go to rural areas and check for corruption and feudal practices (Cleverley 1991). Those referred to as educated peasants were secondary school and university graduates who were sent to the countryside to learn from peasants and work the land during the Social Education Movement, but they had remained in rural areas after the movement ended (Hsia 1972). During the Cultural Revolution's Down to the Countryside Movement, educated peasants were recruited as teachers if they had completed a minimum of 2 years in production work and had politically acceptable class affiliations (Hsia 1972).

There was little opportunity for youth sent to the mountains and countryside during the Cultural Revolution to learn academic subjects. They learned to cultivate

food crops, raise livestock, and participate in other types of manual labor carried out by local peasants. Mao also sent intellectuals to the countryside to be re-educated by poor and lower-middle peasants who not only taught them how to work but how to study articles and political writings for “ideological rectification,” such as the Three Great Treatises: “In memory of Norman Bethune,” “Serve the People,” and “How the Foolish Old Man Removed the Mountain” (Chen 1970, p. 198). Dr. Norman Bethune was a Canadian physician who is said to have saved the lives of thousands of soldiers in the People’s Liberation Army during the Japanese invasion (Cleverly 1991).

At primary and lower and upper middle schools in urban areas, students attended schools half day to study and the other half day to work in order to learn from the real world of production. It was rather common that in the morning they studied Chairman Mao’s instructions, read newspaper editorials, kept revolutionary diaries, and participated regularly at self-criticism meetings. Shortened lesson times caused students to have limited education and limited time to learn and understand.

After the re-opening of schools in Beijing in 1968, *China Pictorial* reported on the progress made in the revolution in education “to transform the old educational system and the old principles and methods of teaching” (China Pictorial, para. 1). Peking No. 23 Middle School was used as an example of a school embracing class struggle as its main educational goal.

The revolutionary teachers and students of No. 23 Middle School concluded that. . .students must be infinitely loyal to Chairman Mao and to Mao Tse-tung’s thought. They must set up a proletarian world outlook, share the feelings of the workers and peasants and establish a firm proletarian stand. To achieve this aim the school took as its main course the class struggle. They made arrangements with factories and people’s communes to allow students to come to learn industrial work and farming. Teaching methods and subject matter were transformed accordingly. Some courses were dropped, some combined, and others concerning knowledge of industrial and agricultural production were added. . .Chairman Mao’s works are the basic teaching material for courses in politics and Chinese. (China Pictorial 1968, p. 22)

In many cities, teachers revolutionized their teaching methods by inviting former poor peasants, soldiers, and workers to deliver lectures and provide guidance on revolution. These guests told stories about the horrible treatment they had received from landlords and capitalists in the old society, and they told students they should appreciate and love the New China (He 2002). Factory training schools were set up for workers with junior middle school education and 5 years of work experience. Textbooks were especially prepared for these schools and included Mao Zedong Thought. Students participated in manual labor and military training (Cleverly 1991).

During the Cultural Revolution barriers holding back children from worker and poor and lower-middle peasant families from attending school were broken and more children were able to attend school (Fraser and Hawkins 1972). New educational policies favored decentralization and local control of schools. Primary schools in rural areas were often managed by production brigades and middle schools by communes, giving peasants more voice in the selection of teachers and curriculum material and in adapting the curriculum to meet local needs (Meisner 1977).

Age limits for school attendance, tuition fees, and entrance exams were abolished making it easier for children of the Red Class to receive formal education. Alternative formats of schooling introduced during the Great Leap Forward, such as part-time schools, half-study and half-work or half-farming schools, and winter schools for adult peasants, “were revised and [became] an established feature of rural life” (Meisner, p. 349).

4.5 Summary

Educational standards across China varied enormously before the Cultural Revolution, and gaps existed between educational opportunities for urban and rural youth (Cleverley 1991). Educational policies instituted during the Cultural Revolution strived to improve educational opportunities for the children of workers and peasants. The mass movement of educated youth to the countryside raised the literacy levels of rural areas when these youth were integrated into the local populace. The writing of Big Character Posters for political campaigns provided opportunities for peasants and urban workers to learn character writing and practice calligraphy (Ebrey 2012).

While widespread literacy was not yet achieved by the end of the Cultural Revolution, changes to educational practices were far-reaching. Larger numbers of students in rural areas were able to receive basic education. However, students who had attended traditional schools in urban settings found their education disrupted and levels of instruction less advanced, especially in the areas of science and technology. Curriculum materials for Chinese Yuwen instruction were politically charged, and literacy acquisition involved learning political propaganda. The Cultural Revolution was a unique period of Chinese History with unique literacy practices. Numerous lessons can be learned from this chaotic period in China so that it will not be repeated again.

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