

The Party Never Sleeps (Part 2)

Read [Part 1](#), [Part 3](#)

an excerpt from *Bearing Witness: Coming of Age in Mao's China*

by [Manyin Li](#) (May 2020)



Courtyard Story No. 8, Huang Rui, 1983

1. Refusing to Cooperate and Its Consequence

Since I was declared a member of the "small reactionary group," I got a full time "bodyguard." I was ordered to move out of my room in the dorm to another room occupied only by my "bodyguard" and me. She followed me everywhere, from the canteen to the toilet. She and I became inseparable. I lost both freedom and privacy. This marked the formal investigation of me in quarantine.

It happened so suddenly and irresistibly that I did not even have the time to figure out what was happening. From hindsight, it seemed unbelievably strange that I was not crushed or terrified to the point of collapse. Perhaps I was too busy in dealing with the accusation and had no time for fear. It was also possible that I was too naïve to fear.

We Chinese had no sense of human rights and the rule of law in the middle of the twentieth century. We never questioned the injustice of being treated as a counterrevolutionary without due process. When being interrogated in quarantine, we were usually very cooperative with the revolutionaries who purged us, even though we were not under physical torture or suffering from hunger. We were willing to answer all questions, again and again. Even now, I still wonder what magic power the revolutionaries possessed. We just took for granted the obligation to respond even when we thought we were innocent. Somehow, the title "revolutionary" itself had the supreme power in our minds.

None of the victims of political persecutions in the early days of the People's Republic protested that the practice was unlawful, because revolution knew no law. I never even thought for a minute that I should not be treated this way. On the contrary, I diligently searched in my memory the details of the innocent talks, now deemed guilt. I wished my mind had been a tape recorder able to play back every word uttered 18 months before. I truly believed that honest confession would earn leniency, and resistance would call for harsh punishment. I tried to recall and clarify all that was said at the "secret meeting." Unfortunately, no matter how diligently I tried and how willing I was to confess, I was always censured as cunning, like squeezing toothpaste from a tube, and as being the worst of the reactionary elements.

The confession centered on the so-called "secret meeting," because we did nothing other than having that meeting. I was asked to account for all the details, including what each and every one of us had said, who proposed the name "Tide Front," who gave it the implied meaning of satire, etc., etc. It had been more than a year, and what had been said had already evaporated into the air. How was I able to remember all the details? As I did not remember, I should not fabricate them. This was my principle. What I did remember was the fact that we were very satisfied with the name "Tide Front." I should even say that we were very proud of it. However, this fact had now become evidence of our being "cunning and insidious."

Sometimes, the revolutionaries gave me clues of what was confessed by others to extract my confession, which often confounded me. For instance, they asked me what C. Wu and F. Ding had discussed with me in addition to what we said at the

“secret meeting.” My answer was “nothing.” And what had the two of them discussed between them? What a question! How was I supposed to know the talks between them? As I was unable to give an answer to their satisfaction, I was again accused of being stubborn. Stubborn? Whether stubborn or not, I would not make up what was unknown to me or what had not happened.

As time dragged on and the same questions were asked again and again, however, I started to think differently. Since it was someone else’s account, I figured, probably that *had* happened; I could only say that I did not remember but could not say there was no such thing. For instance, J. Lu asked me whether anybody at the “secret meeting” mentioned writing an article recommending attacking the head of the Communist Youth League. My answer was “no.” J. Lu then said, “F. Ding has revealed it, and you still try to protect C. Wu?” Oh, my! In my memory, nobody ever mentioned to criticize anybody at the “secret meeting” or after it. For this matter, I suffered endless verbal bombardment until finally I said that it must be true if F. Ding remembered it. I explained that I said only that I did not remember, not that it was not so; it could be that my memory failed me, or I was distracted by something else when they talked about it. I even explained: “You insist that I should have remembered everything but have been unwilling to tell you. This insistence was based on your preconception that the so-called ‘secret meeting’ was of great significance to me. In fact, it was not. I was not the initiator. I did not think much about that matter afterwards. I just forgot about it.” Nevertheless, my explanation did not get any sympathy from the revolutionaries.

Since the publication of a magazine needed money to get started, the pursuit of backstage support became important. We, as youngsters, might have been less responsible for our

wrongdoings if there had been a hidden supporter. The problem is, we did not have any supporter. After a couple of days' intensive inquiry, it was found that the only support we had sought was the Students' Association of the school. C. Wu at the time was one of its leading members. He went to talk with the head of the Association and asked for support, financially and otherwise. The head then reported to the Committee of the Communist Youth League of the school. We did not get the support; instead, we were advised by the Committee not to publish anything, on the ground that it would interfere with studies. That was the very reason why we did not put our plan to practice. Looking back, I do not think we could have actually published the magazine even if we had the support from the Students' Association. As full time students, we simply did not have the ability and time to accomplish what we tried to. The ambition lived only in our imagination.

Day after day, my confession and self-denunciation seemed endless. New details were constantly exposed. There were always things I could not recall even though repeated efforts gave me headaches. Gradually, I changed my way of thinking from telling truth to a preconceived "yes" answer, because there must be such a thing, I thought, if they said there was.

I mentally visited the scene of the "secret meeting" over and over again a million times. The more I did it, the less I could distinguish between (1) what was really said, (2) what "they" said we had said, and (3) what was simply the product of analysis. The lines between the three became blurry. After a long time of focused thinking, somehow, even the unreal became real. Eventually, what was out of mere imagination or inference and what was the true memory of real happenings were all confused in my mind.

Decades later, I read a report on scientific studies of memory published in the United States. The report states that memory is unreliable because it is merely an impression left on the brain by the appearance of facts, and it could be lost or changed over time or distorted due to external interferences. For example, constantly repeating a statement may make an impression as if it was true even though the statement is false. When under persecution, the distortion of memory is unavoidable, and all forced confessions are made in the context of memory distortions. This was exactly what happened in my case.

As my memory became more and more chaotic, my thinking became very uncertain. Sometimes I accepted their brainwashing and thought that we were indeed guilty. As our society was completely led and controlled by the Communist Party, any criticism of happenings in this society must be aimed at the Communist Party, right? And whoever criticized the Party must be reactionary, because the Party was always great, glorious, and correct, as we were told repeatedly. Other times, however, my conscience would whisper to me that all this was a farce, taking a grain of sesame for a watermelon or a feather for an arrow. We, a few seventeen-year-old adolescents, were merely expressing our aspirations just as Chairman Mao did when he was young.

His Greatness thus wrote in a poem entitled "*Changsha*":

As students in the prime of life, we had our bright and graceful ways;

Filled with scholar's lofty aspiration, we brought our daring into play.

—*Mao Zedong Poems*, translated by Zhao Zhentao, Hunan People's Publishing House, 1980

This was the way all young students should have been. There was nothing wrong about it. Chairman Mao actually published a magazine and founded an organization when he was young. Why were we accused of being a small reactionary group? All right, the Party was great, glorious and correct. Of the three adjectives, "correct" is the core; without being correct, it could not be great or glorious. But could it be always correct and hundred percent correct? One who criticizes the Party was not necessarily against it. In fact, one might criticize the Party out of loving and supporting it in the hope that things could be getting even better. Not to mention we had not written a single article to criticize the Party.

Thus, I concluded that the whole thing against me was a far-fetched farce. The terminologies the revolutionaries used to denounce me, such as "a wolf in sheepskin secretly engaging in evil deeds" and "earn lenient treatment by honest confession or go to death" sounded surreal! I was unable to see any connection between the extreme rhetoric and the facts. All the interrogations and denouncements were acted out like a play, but I did not want to play my part in it any more.

The above thinking came in pieces at different times. Then gradually, the pieces came together and prevailed. One day, at the culmination of my rational thinking, I refused to write more confessions and self-denouncements. I said to the revolutionaries: "I have already written down everything I can

think of. I even admitted things that I cannot remember whether true or false. This matter is actually very simple. We just wanted to create a publication, without the slightest intention to attack the Party or the socialist system. From the perspective of freedom of speech and publication, it's not a big deal at all. Not to mention we just talked about it and never wrote anything. If, from the point of view of proletarian dictatorship, we are counter-revolutionary, you can punish me whatever way you want. In any case, I have nothing more to confess."

My remark angered the revolutionaries so much that they immediately called up a general meeting against me. They were in a combative mood of the highest level. I was ordered to stand in front of the blackboard. My classmate, J. Shan, with a livid face, announced the emergency convening in a high-pitched voice:

"The small reactionary group member M. Li not only refuses to surrender but launches a frenzied attack against the revolutionary masses. She dares to proclaim that she will no longer write any confession and self-denouncement. This is a tactic she learned from Hu Feng's counter-revolutionary tricks—holding a rubber wrapped wire whip to slash the Party and the people. Can this be tolerated?"

Being able to connect the theory with a real situation so well and so quickly, J. Shan was indeed a good student of Chairman Mao. "A rubber wrapped wire whip" is a term used by the editor of the *People's Daily* to criticize Hu Feng, meaning the wire whip was formidable but looked soft because it was wrapped by rubber. Was I so sophisticated? I had to hold my laughter.

J. Shan's performance in the Eliminating Counterrevolutionary Campaign built a solid foundation for his political and career advancement. He eventually reached the rank of a deputy director of a bureau in Beijing, the highest official position held by any of the 1955 graduates of Class 304. After 48 years, in 2003, J. Shan and I met again at a gathering. Neither he nor I mentioned the class struggle between us back in 1955. But soon after, I received a letter from him apologizing for what he did in the 1955 campaign. He said, he had thought that it was always right to follow the Party's instructions, until the end of the Cultural Revolution. His apology came too late, for he never knew what had happened to me in those 48 years. But his conscience finally woke up, though not completely, so he may still be considered a sensible person. However, back in 1955, he was a revolutionary warrior charging forward with mighty fierceness.

J. Shan ordered me to be serious. He also ordered me to lower my head. I did not move my head a bit. He was so furious that he pounded his hand against the desk and roared: "Lower your head!" I cast my eyes to the floor.

Several fellow students stood up and spoke. They were all wearing masks, ruthlessly denouncing me, the reactionary element who dared to counter-attack the revolutionaries. One of them said that I "had swallowed the leopard's gall bladder and dared to test the law with my own body;" another said that I was like "an egg hitting the stone," not knowing what "a little worm" I was; still another said that I was lifting a stone to hit my own feet. The conclusion was: "recalcitrance leads to death."

After they had said enough to threaten me, they ordered me to say something. What could I say? I thought this meeting was the climax of the farce. I even suspected whether these students were really my classmates of three long years. How did they change to heartless strangers?

I told them that I had nothing to say, and I needed time to think.

This scene of the farce ended in a burst of slogan shouting: "Down with M. Li!" "Honest confession leads to leniency; resistance leads to harsh punishment!"

After the meeting, J. Lu, talked to me alone. As often, he carried a sarcastic smile. While J. Shan played the role with a red face, he played the role with a white face, as in Chinese operas.

"M. Li, what do you want to do?" He asked, softly.

"I do not want to do anything. I just think, whatever has to be confessed has been done, and nothing more is there to be confessed. I'm tired. Whatever the punishment will be will be."

"This is a national campaign. We have unified leadership and unified procedures. Do you think we are going to act following your will?"

I did not really know J. Lu before this campaign. He spoke with a strong and fierce tone at the meetings, but he was unusually calm and even gentle today. I was not so stupid as to expect that they would follow my will, but I did not want to cooperate with them anymore.

As I kept silent, he went on: "Go back and think well. It's not to your benefit to act like this. Write a self-criticism and continue to confess and examine the ideological source of your reactionary thinking."

All Chinese know a common saying: "A smart person tries to avoid sufferings in unfavorable situations." I'd be better off to step down when they offered me the steps. They were playing a farce, but after all, they had the proletarian dictatorship machine in their hands. That was not a joke! I wrote a self-criticism and got to pass. It suddenly dawned on me that Chairman Mao was the last revolutionary in Chinese history; now that he became the ruler, whoever tried to do what he did in his youth was logically counterrevolutionary!

Meanwhile, I noticed that the male student- guards began to carry rifles. I was not sure whether it was a deliberate arrangement due to my "counter attack" or a coincidence. In either case, my fellow reactionary members and I had become real enemies of the revolution and had to be dealt with by real weapons. Our "importance" was clearly upgraded.

2. The End without a Conclusion

The Campaign continued into August. The school was empty because all non-graduating students had gone home for a long summer vacation. The graduates were still playing their roles in this political battle. The job placement every graduate had been longing for seemed to be put in the unforeseeable future.

I continued to make confessions and self-denouncements, which had been repeated numerous times, just like heating the same cold dish again and again. It was boring and unendurable. Lots of times, I had nothing to write about, but my brain never stopped thinking. Things of the past randomly paraded before my mind's vision, as if I had already lived a whole life. Among them, one incident stood out.

One day, after we came back from the field trip, I was called to the school's Personnel Department. There, a cadre with serious expression asked me: "Were you in the classroom in the afternoon of such, such a day?"

What a strange question! How was I able to remember that? He, seeing my hesitation to answer, reminded me: "It was not long ago, just last week."

I replied, analytically, "We just came back from the field trip and were busy writing the field trip report. There was no entertaining or sports activities. So, I should have been in the classroom, I suppose."

Then he asked me whether I remembered what X, a classmate of mine, was saying in the classroom. Boy, another strange, hard to answer question! About fifty students were in the same room. How was I supposed to hear what one of them was saying?

“I don’t remember. I did not hear what he said.” I answered flatly.

He said: “You were in the classroom, and he was not far away from you. How come you did not hear him say anything?” Obviously, he did not believe me.

I, trying to convince him with common sense, said: “It was noisy. Many people were talking at the same time. I could not hear all of them.”

But he became more senseless, saying: “Other people heard him. Why didn’t you?”

I tried to explain why I did not hear him: “Perhaps each person paid attention to different things. I might be so concentrating on reading or writing that I ignored other things completely. I’m capable of reading and writing in the center of a market, because I can be so focused that all the noises around me do not affect me.”

“Are you sure you did not hear what he said?” He pushed me one more time.

“No. I did not hear what he said.” This was my final answer.

The cadre said no more and opened the drawer. He picked up a big white envelope on the desk and put it into the drawer. At this point, I noticed a big black word “FILE” on the envelope. Thinking of the purpose of his questioning me, I felt a shudder. He wanted me to be an informant! Immediately, a similar scene in a movie I had seen popped up in my mind: a secret agent forcing someone to provide information of a targeted person. In this case, the secret agent was the cadre questioning me, and the targeted person was the unlucky classmate of mine who had said something he was not supposed to say. Someone had already reported to the secret agent, and the secret agent now wanted my testimony. The fact that a secret agent was working at a school perplexed me. More perplexing was why he wanted to test *me* after someone had already reported on the unlucky one.

I had been such an inattentive person that I rarely noticed what went on around me. This would be considered low political alertness by the Party’s lowest standard. But there was a higher standard. The cadre might think that I actually heard what my classmate had said but was unwilling to report it. That means I was not close to the Party.

I wondered how those students sending secret reports to the Party learned to do that. Did the Party instruct them to do it? It did not seem so. Or, did they learn it by experiencing

what I was going through that day? If they failed to send a secret report for the first time, they might have learned to do so the next time. In any case, I would not secretly report on others, except for a real crime. In all other cases, I regarded being an informant as below my ethical standard. I knew that my answer to the cadre did not please the Party. I wondered if the FILE in his hand was for my unlucky classmate or me.

After this incident, I learned three things: Number one, reporting on others would please the Party, and not doing so would displease the Party. Number two, unconditionally obeying the Party and being the Party's assistant for the Socialist cause included reporting on others. Number three, my not reporting added one more negative score to my FILE. That was an unpleasant revelation, but I could not change my nature.

It also became clear now that my involvement in the discussion of the publication of a literary magazine, though resulting in nothing, had certainly been a major negative record in my FILE. Had there been no Eliminating Counter-Revolutionaries Campaign, they would have remained there. But sooner or later, they would be used as the basis of purging when a similar political campaign took place wherever I would be.

Before the fall semester began, I found most of the graduates gone. They must have been assigned jobs and gone to their new workplaces. Only a small number of activists remained to continue engaging in the eliminating-counterrevolutionaries fight. Because of me, my "bodyguard" also stayed, but she now got paid.

Graduation is the commencement of adult life, a major happy event in any student's life. After three years of sharing the same classroom and studying together, students of the same class would normally have a farewell party in which they would express feelings of friendship, give blessings, and exchange addresses with one another. There would also be photo taking, and the images would serve as mementos for a lifetime. Those who are close to each other would no doubt have more to share and exchange. Sadly, due to the political campaign, all these beautiful things were denied to students in our class. There was no party, no photo taking, no good words, no laughter, not even a farewell. None of us left the school with a trace of warm feeling after the brutal class struggle between "revolutionaries" and "counter-revolutionaries." As for me, this campaign cut off all connections with my teachers and classmates who had been my mentors and good friends. I cannot think of a loss greater, and with no remedy, than this for a young person. I wound up a person without social support. The Party viewed me as a heretic; my family could not give me any support; the school was no longer the alma mater of a reactionary student; the teachers who used to be fond of me could no longer accept a reactionary student; no classmate would regard me as a friend. In a word, I became an outcast and lost all the social supports a young person needed to grow and prosper.

I was still in quarantine. As there was nothing more to confess, I was required to track the class origin of my reactionary thoughts. This was actually another form of self-denouncement, but its target was both myself and my family, including my parents and even my ancestors. In the beginning, it was painful. I had to censure my loved ones! I could not forgive myself for this, because for us Chinese, the respect for ancestors was the number one filial duty. It was me who courted this disaster, even though I did not know how, but now

I had to put blame on them. I could not refuse to do that, because the Party asserted that everybody's thinking had its roots in his family, and every family belonged to a specific class.

After a short period of forced brainwashing, I learned a pattern to dig out the "reactionary roots" of my thinking. It was self-proven: as my family was reactionary, my thoughts could not be otherwise but reactionary unless I underwent a process of complete transformation, which I had not. Once this pattern was formed, the contents of criticism seemed to have nothing to do with me or my family. Whatever negative words I used to degrade my family no longer bothered me, and even the painful feeling that had previously nagged me was gone. Actually, over the years since the Liberation, we had learned different patterns such as what to say at a certain meeting, what to say when we were required to criticize others, what to say for self-criticism, while the contents were untrue or twisted truth. This pattern of denouncing my parents and ancestors was, for me, only a new pattern of the same nature.

National Day, October First, was around the corner. We, the few reactionaries, were still in quarantine. To celebrate National Day, the school organized a variety of activities. Needless to say, we were excluded. The walls that isolated me, however, could not block the sound of music and songs from the loud speakers.

In the evening of October 1st, my "bodyguard" took me to a balcony to watch the National Day celebration.

The playground was brightly lit up. Red banners were fluttering, and the music was extremely loud. Young students, hand in hand, were singing and dancing. They sang: "*Sing up and dance! How happy . . .*" It seemed that they were happy, very happy, and free, too. Freedom is like the air; you don't know how precious it is until you lose it! A cliché? Not for me!

The singing and dancing students down there looked like a miniature of our society. They seemed content, happy, and even free, but it was a collective body. You must be a qualified part of it to be content, happy and free, and the qualification was thinking in unison. If your thinking was different, you would be excluded. Once you were excluded, you would no longer be happy and free. In other words, freedom and happiness came at the expense of unfree thinking. (Is that oxymoron?) Was this a necessary condition for a collective body to survive and thrive? Must an individual be in *full* compliance with the collective body? Now, an individual like me was abandoned by the collective body, somewhat like the heretics expelled by the medieval Church. But nobody ever pointed out to me that my thinking was heretical until this political campaign. I did not even get a warning before I was excommunicated.

Sadly, human beings are social animals. One cannot do without community. In the celebration of the last National Day, I had orchestrated a large scale program with singing, recitation, and modeling. I heard long and loud applause from the audience and felt rejoicing: I was proud of myself. At that time, I was an element of that collective body. A year later, at this moment, I was expelled from it. What a big change, and an unbearable change! I was stirred by the singing and dancing; a strong longing to return to the community to become one of the

members of that seemingly happy and free collective body took hold of me. My head started swirling, and I could not wait to jump over the balcony to join the collective body to sing and dance with it: *“Sing up and Dance! How happy . . . ”*

“Be careful! Don’t fall off!” Somebody grabbed my shoulders. It was my “bodyguard.”

I continued to sit all day at the prescribed small table in the same room, often not writing a single word for days. As an old common saying goes, “each day passed like a year.” And nobody ever told me how long I would remain in this state. I lamented silently for the waste of my young life, but I dared not to complain. There was a peculiar practice in ancient China: drawing a circle on the ground to serve as a jail. We were exactly following that antique tradition, in the mid-20th century.

One day, a harsh voice woke me up while I was almost dozing off: “M. Li, come out!”

I was taken out of the dormitory to an empty classroom. Three cadre students sat in front of the blackboard. I recognized none of them. They ordered me to stand in the middle of the classroom.

It was a gorgeous fall day, with the blue sky as clean as just washed. Through a big window, I saw a piece of white cloud floating leisurely. I stared at it and enjoyed it, without hearing what the cadre students saying. Something hit my face.

Startled, I looked at the little thing rolling on the floor. It was a chalk head.

"What are you doing?" fiercely asked the square faced cadre student.

"I'm not doing anything."

"M. Li! Don't think the Party's policy is so lenient that it would tolerate you without limit," another cadre student with an inverted triangle face said solemnly, with an air of authority. "You dare to despise the proletarian dictatorship? You are like a dog with the guts to bark at the sun. Do you think we have no way to punish you?"

They were making an empty show of force again! I almost wanted to laugh, but I restrained myself and said cautiously: "I have no intention to defy the proletarian dictatorship. I have been segregated for a few months and rarely have the opportunity to see such a beautiful blue sky from the room where I stay. I'm just enjoying it a little bit. That's all."

"How was your recent confession going?" The long faced one changed the subject.

"I'm now eighteen and half years old. Starting from the time I began to learn, I had written enough to include everything that had happened in each and every day in those years. There is simply nothing more to confess. Everything has been

repeated again and again.”

“What did you think about recently?” The guy with a square face inquired again, raising a question no one had ever done previously.

“Nothing . . . ” Oh, yes, I *did* think of something recently, so I added: “My classmates are gone. They are now working in various parts of the country. I think that the examination of my case will be close to an end. I’m ready to go to prison, in the worst scenario. I have two things worth some money: a Swiss Longines gold watch and a US-made Parker gold pen. I’m willing to exchange them for money if anyone wants them.”

“You think too much.” The cadre student who asked the question almost smiled, but he quickly resumed his stern expression and continued: “The decision how to deal with you is made by the leadership. It’s useless for you to try to figure it out. The decision will be based on your attitude and how thoroughly you have confessed. What you should do is completely confess your reactionary thoughts and deeds and dig deep to find the roots of your reactionary thoughts. You must now write a comprehensive account, plus your understanding of the whole incident. We give you three days. Enough? “

My understanding of the whole incident? Sounds like a conclusion. Are they going to close the case?

I had to re-write what had been written again and again and again, and then, according to the pattern I learned from this

campaign, dig deep to find the reactionary class roots and ideological roots, as far reaching as possible to elevate the level of my political sins, for that was what the Party wanted from me. Below is the last paragraph of what I finally wrote:

I am from a family of the exploiting class, which is the social base of the Kuomintang reactionary government. My father and his brothers are enemies of the people because they served the Kuomintang government. My father was so greedy for money that he later quitted his job in the Kuomintang Air Force to become a banker, a capitalist. Thus, he is a double exploiter. As his daughter, I shared my parents' luxurious life and was actually fed on laboring people's sweat and blood. It is natural that I do not share the laboring people's class feelings and consciousness. Even though the Party has taught me that my family was shameful exploiters and sinful to the people, deep in my mind and heart, I have not completed the necessary thorough transformation. My parents' reactionary views on life and the world have shaped my thoughts on an everyday basis, and as a result, I unconsciously think and act as a filial child of the exploiting class. I may even say that the reactionary nature of the exploiting class is in my blood. No wonder when my thinking and actions are at odds with the Party's teaching, I was even unaware that I was sliding down the counter-revolutionary road. The Party's policy is clear: one cannot choose the family and class he was born into, but the Party values one's political performance. Our Party has educated me and trained me with the hope that I would rebel against my reactionary family and class, but I failed to do so. I feel sorry and guilty to the Party. I used to see in myself a smart, able, and diligent student and think that I would serve the people well. Now, I realize it is impossible if my reactionary inner self is not eliminated, and, on the contrary, I will do harm to the

people and the Party. I cannot imagine what damage we would have done if we had published the reactionary magazine. I am willing to take any punishment and start all over to reform myself, as thorough as changing each and every bone in my body and each and every cell in my brain. I will reform myself to redeem my sins not only by theoretical learning but also by action.

My statement reads like a repentant person's sincere remorse, but actually, it was the standard nonsense to please the Party. The truth is, I never knew how I could redeem my nonexistent "sins." Other than the "original sin" of being born in an exploiting family, I had never done anything to harm the Party and the people. In my short life as a student, in addition to study well, I contributed more than most of my fellow students by serving them, and even the Party, in many ways, such as organizing recreational activities for both our class and the school and assisting the Party in propaganda by writing articles for the *Blackboard News Weekly*. Although my thoughts might not qualify me as a revolutionary youth by the Party's standard, they were far from reactionary. Let's assume that the above cited standard nonsense is tenable, so a child of an exploiter should feel ashamed and sinful and need thorough transformation. Then, how have most of the children of the Party's leaders, at all levels, become capitalists since the early 1980s? Are they not from revolutionary families and proletarian class? The Party had eliminated the old exploiting classes that sucked the sweat and blood of laborers but later created a new exploiting class that . . . not sucking the sweat and blood of the Chinese workers and peasants? (Another oxymoron!)

There was a long, long waiting after my last account was submitted. One day in early December, my "bodyguard" left.

She, too, was assigned to a job. No new guard came to replace her, and nobody watched me all the time.

One afternoon about a week later, I was taken to Principal Zhang's office. He sat behind a big desk. Upon seeing me walking in, he signaled me to sit down in a chair in front of his desk. Zhang was the kind of typical Party official whose personality, likes or dislikes, as well as emotions, you could never discern. I saw him as the embodiment of dogmatism.

Without any expression on his face, he opened his mouth with a cold tone: "How is your confession going?"

I had answered the same question a million times. My standard answer was: "I have confessed all I know and all I can think of."

Principal Zhang was probably used to this answer, so he did not dwell on it but proceeded to the next question: "What do you think is the nature of your problem?"

Didn't you determine long ago that we had formed "a small reactionary group?" Now you ask me? Of course, I dared not to question him. Instead, I replied equivocally: "It's very serious."

Now, Principal Zhang came to the point. He said: "It is indeed very serious. I may choose to arrest you and sentence you, and put you to a labor camp. Considering you are young, the Party

wants to rescue you. Now it is decided that you will be sent for further study. Study Marxist theory and Chairman Mao's writings, study hard and well. Theory must be combined with practice, and you should dig deeper to find the source of your reactionary thoughts. Thus, you can thoroughly transform your thinking. Make every effort to obtain lenient treatment from the Party and the people, so you can make contributions to the construction of our motherland. Do you have any questions?"

"Study" means no sentence or labor; "make contributions to the construction of our motherland" means a job. Good omen! But where are we going to study? The nearby Northern Jiangsu or the remote Qinghai near Tibet? (Both were well known for their labor camps.) How long will be the study? A year or so, or longer? Principal Zhang did not specify anything related to the questions whirling in my mind. I knew it was useless to ask if he had not told me in the first place. Anyway, I would know when I got there. But I did ask him a question: "When do I leave?"

"Right now. Go back and pack. Someone will come to take you." These were the last words from Principal Zhang.

«[Previous Article](#) [Home Page](#) [Next Article](#)»

of New York after she immigrated from China to the US in the late 1980s and later became a US citizen. She worked for the Association of the Bar of the City of New York while studying literature and philosophy and finally graduated from the Graduate Center of CUNY. She now writes freelance, mostly for Chinese language newspapers and magazines published in North America.

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](https://twitter.com/NERIconoclast)