

# Tan Lifu: A “Reactionary” Red Guard in Historical Perspective\*

Andrew G. Walder

**ABSTRACT** Tan Lifu was a Red Guard leader whose August 1966 speech in defence of the Party’s class line and his university’s work team has long been considered key evidence for social interpretations of Red Guard factionalism. New documentation – including the complete transcript of the original speech – shows that Tan’s case deviates sharply from the reputed profile of “conservative” students. Tan in fact espoused a version of the Party’s class line that did not differ from the one advocated by those who denounced him; his “rebel” opponents at Beijing Industrial University were also organized and led by students from revolutionary cadre backgrounds; and Tan supported the (second) work team sent to his school because (unlike the first) it conducted a ferocious purge of a Party leadership against whom Tan harboured strong grievances. The case illustrates the ways that the politics of the work team period split students from similar backgrounds into opposing camps rather than sorting them into factions based on differences in family background.

Of all the political activists who attained fame during the Cultural Revolution, no one was more notorious, or more reviled, than Tan Lifu. Tan was an early Red Guard leader at Beijing Industrial University, an obscure municipal polytechnic in the Chaoyang district, at the opposite end of town from the hotbed of student activism in Haidian. He was catapulted to national fame – indeed infamy – by a rousing speech he made during a debate at his college on 20 August 1966. In this speech Tan, the son of a ranking Party official who had died five years before, forcefully defended the militant re-assertion of the Party’s class line that accompanied the beginning of the Cultural Revolution – that family background influences a person’s political loyalties – and he also defended the conduct of the Party work team sent to his school.

The speech was soon denounced by top officials, who threw their weight behind the student factions opposed to Tan’s position in the debates of August. The controversy surrounding the speech has long been considered key evidence for a social interpretation of Red Guard politics that links group interests based on family heritage to the formation of opposed factions. In these analyses, Tan Lifu is portrayed just as he was in Cultural Revolution polemics: as a conservative from a privileged

\* An earlier version of this paper was presented at a conference at the University of California-San Diego, 8–9 June 2003. I would like to thank the participants in that conference for their suggestions, especially Joel Andreas, Joseph Esherick, Stanley Rosen, Yang Su and Xiaowei Zhang. As always, I am deeply indebted to Michael Schoenhals for his intense critical scrutiny of the manuscript and for generously sharing his unparalleled mastery of documentary sources from the period.

background who expressed the vested interests of the Party elite and whose actions defended the status quo.<sup>1</sup>

Few who participated in the Cultural Revolution were unfamiliar with Tan Lifu's name and the reactionary ideology he was said to represent. After Mao's death, popular revulsion against the leaders who launched the Cultural Revolution and manipulated Red Guards for their factional ends has not altered opinion about Tan Lifu, who was among the first students to be victimized by these same politicians. Despite his official rehabilitation in the late 1970s,<sup>2</sup> Tan continued to symbolize the arrogance of offspring of high officials, an enduring source of resentment among members of the Red Guard generation who remained politically engaged in the 1980s.<sup>3</sup>

Although Tan was a stock figure in studies of Red Guards, very little was known about him. His speech was circulated nationally in 1966, but it was not widely available outside China until 1997.<sup>4</sup> For the entire first generation of Cultural Revolution scholarship, the contents of the speech were known only through brief quotations in essays by his critics.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, nothing was known about events at Beijing Industrial University, the factional conflicts there, the reason for the debate or Tan's actions as a Red Guard leader.

It is now possible to fill much of this void. Tan's speech is now widely available, along with several other speeches and essays, and detailed

1. The definitive work is still Hong Yung Lee, *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), chs. 2 and 3, esp. pp. 91–93. An early version was Hong Yung Lee, "The radical students in Kwangtung during the Cultural Revolution," *The China Quarterly*, No. 64 (December 1975), pp. 645–683. See also Gordon White, *The Politics of Class and Class Origin: The Case of the Cultural Revolution* (Canberra: Contemporary China Centre, Australian National University, 1976). Brief counter-arguments were offered by Stanley Rosen, "Comments: the radical students in Kwangtung during the Cultural Revolution," *The China Quarterly*, No. 70 (June 1977), pp. 390–99, and Keith Forster, "Political and sociological bases of mass organizations in the Cultural Revolution," *China Information*, No. 6 (Autumn 1991), pp. 44–50. An alternative argument is in Andrew G. Walder, "Beijing Red Guard factionalism: social interpretations reconsidered," *Journal of Asian Studies*, No. 61 (May 2002), pp. 437–471.

2. On 20 November 1979, the Beijing Bureau of Public Security declared that Tan had been framed by Chen Boda and Jiang Qing to force him to implicate members of the revolutionary generation as conspirators. See Tan Bin (Tan Lifu), *Chizi baihua (Empty Talk of an Innocent)* (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 1996), p. 391.

3. The enduring influence of the 1966 denunciation of Tan is evident in the retrospective essay penned by a former Guangzhou Red Guard, which uncritically accepts these denunciations. See Liu Guokai (ed. Anita Chan), *A Brief Analysis of the Cultural Revolution* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1987), pp. 40–41. Liu was one among many former Red Guards who became active in the democracy movements of the late 1970s. See Stanley Rosen, "Guangzhou's democracy movement in Cultural Revolution perspective," *The China Quarterly*, No. 101 (March 1985), pp. 1–31.

4. Song Yongyi and Sun Dajin, *Wenhua da geming he ta de yiduan sichao (Heterodox Thoughts During the Cultural Revolution)* (Hong Kong: Tianyuan shuwu, 1997), pp. 92–105.

5. The discussion of Tan Lifu's speech in Lee's study was based on a Red Guard article denouncing it. See *Hongweibing (Red Guard)*, 16 November 1966, p. 3, reprinted in Center for Chinese Research Materials, *Red Guard Publications* (Washington DC: Association of Research Libraries, 1975) (hereafter CCRM 1975), Vol. 8, and Lee, *Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, pp. 91–92. The most extensive treatment of Tan's speech in library reprints before 1998 was a hand-cut and almost illegible stencil of explanatory notes to the speech. See CCRM 1975, Vol. 19, pp. 6112–17.

explanatory notes compiled by his opponents.<sup>6</sup> A complete run of the newspaper published by Tan's opponents at Industrial University is now available in a reprint edition.<sup>7</sup> Tan himself published a short retrospective piece in *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*) in 1978, and a longer memoir in the 1980s that detailed his subsequent arrest, interrogation and imprisonment.<sup>8</sup>

These additional materials considerably alter the image of Tan Lifu and his politics. Tan's actual statements regarding the "theory of natural redness" were more nuanced than his detractors admitted, and in fact were not substantially different from the position later enunciated by Chen Boda, Jiang Qing and others who chose to make a political example of him. Moreover, the school political context in which Tan made his speech reveals unexpected complications in a story-line that links family origin to the issue of the work teams and the formation of Red Guard factions. These complications raise questions about certain tenets of social interpretations of Red Guard politics that were widely accepted in the first generation of Cultural Revolution scholarship, and indeed by much of the subsequent Red Guard movement itself. They suggest, instead, that factions formed when students from similar social backgrounds were pitted against one another over their political experiences in the work team period – and the consequences that flowed from them.

### *Tan's Speech in Cultural Revolution Politics*

It is easy to see why many Red Guards found Tan's speech so objectionable. Tan poured scorn on the claim that youth from revolutionary and proletarian households were not more prone to political loyalty than students from bourgeois or landlord backgrounds. He ridiculed classmates who opposed him, portraying them as cowardly and devious, and hinting that they were disloyal. Moreover, Tan defended the conduct of the work team sent to his school during June and July, even though

6. Six pamphlets compiled by Tan's opponents have been reprinted by the Service Center for Chinese Publications. A volume issued in 1998 contains two pamphlets of note: *Dongfang hong* (*chedi pipan Tan Lifu fayan di san ji*) (*East is Red – Thoroughly Criticize Tan Lifu's Speech*, No. 3), Beijing gongye daxue "dongfang hong" gongshe bianjibu, October 1966, 24pp. (hereafter "Industrial University reprint"), and *Pipan Tan Lifu fayan zhuanji – pipan zichan jieji fandong luxian* (*Special Collection on the Criticism of Tan Lifu's Speech – Criticize the Bourgeois Reactionary Line*), Qinghua daxue Jinggangshan hongweibing zongbu, Mao Zedong sixiang hongweibing linshi zongbu, Mao Zedong sixiang hongweibing ba ba zongbu lianhe zhu ban "Jinggangshan" bao, 22 pp. ("Qinghua reprint"). A second volume issued in 1999 contains *Xiang zichan jieji fandong luxian menglie kaihuo* (*chedi pipan Tan Lifu jianghua zhuanji*) (*Violently Open Fire on the Bourgeois Reactionary Line – Special Edition on the Thorough Criticism of Tan Lifu's Speech*), Vols. 1 and 2, Beijing gongye daxue 'dongfanghong gongshe' Wuhan lianluo zhan, November 1966 ("Wuhan reprint").

7. Center for Chinese Research Materials, *A New Collection of Red Guard Publications*, 20 vols. (Oakton, Virginia, 1999) (CCRM 1999). Volume 2 contains the entire run of all 50 issues of *Dongfanghong*, from March 1967 to April 1968.

8. Tan Lifu, "Tantan wo zheige lao hongweibing de zaoyu" ("My misfortunes as an early Red Guard"), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), 17 May 1978, and "Fasheng zai dangnian de yichang bianlun" ("A debate that occurred back in those days"), *Sanyue feng* (*March Wind*), No. 5 (1986); in Tan Bin, *Empty Talk of an Innocent*, pp. 382–391.

work teams had been withdrawn from all schools for errors in line that were clearly specified in the 16-point circular issued by the Central Committee only nine days before.<sup>9</sup> Tan's rousing and emotional speech was carefully transcribed by both his supporters and his opponents. It was reprinted and widely circulated, earning praise from like-minded Red Guards who were trying to defend their positions against factional challengers in their schools.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately for Tan, however, he made his speech just as Mao and his collaborators intensified their drive to purge Liu Shaoqi. The new charge against Liu was that he conspired against the Cultural Revolution by using work teams to protect power-holders and suppress rebel students. Tan's speech, reprinted in large numbers and articulating a powerful argument against the latest shift in the Maoist line, could not be ignored. His villainy became official on 16 October 1966, when Chen Boda, chairman of the Central Cultural Revolution Group, denounced him (though not yet by name) at the Central Party Work Conference. Chen charged that Tan's speech espoused a "reactionary bloodline theory" of "natural redness." He tied this ideology to the interests of a privileged stratum in the Party and a conspiracy to subvert the Cultural Revolution that linked top officials, work teams and student activists from privileged backgrounds.<sup>11</sup>

These charges formed the political catechism of the subsequent Red Guard movement, and they were parroted in "rebel" publications well into 1967.<sup>12</sup> Tan became the villain in an official morality play that portrayed his opponents – loyal to the Central Cultural Revolution Group and willing to do their bidding without question – as true revolutionary rebels. The week before Chen's authoritative denunciation, Tan's speech began to circulate nationally in booklets of criticism materials.<sup>13</sup> His short period of activism ended with his December arrest.

9. "Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" (8 August 1966) in *CCP Documents of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, 1966–1967* (Hong Kong: Union Research Institute, 1968), pp. 42–54.

10. For example, the Qinghua University Preparatory Committee was said to have printed 20,000 copies of the speech, and the one at Beijing Normal University printed 10,000 copies: "Yan Changgui yu Wuhan diqu shaoshu pai zuotan jiyao" ("Transcript of Yan Changgui's discussion with a minority faction from Wuhan"), 15 November 1966, in *Chinese Cultural Revolution Database* (CD-ROM) (Hong Kong: Universities Service Centre, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2002).

11. Chen Boda, "Chen Boda zai zhongyang gongzuo huiyi shang de jianghua," 16 October 1966, in *Chinese Cultural Revolution Database*.

12. Mao heartily approved of the speech and on 24 October ordered it reprinted as a small pamphlet in numbers large enough that "every Party branch and Red Guard group will have at least two copies." *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao (Mao Zedong's Post-1949 Manuscripts)*, Vol. 12 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1987), p. 141.

13. In addition to those cited above, I have obtained similar pamphlets issued in Chongqing, Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Harbin and Shanghai.

### *Tan's Background*

In 1966 Tan Lifu was a 24-year-old student in the Radio Department of Beijing Industrial University, and a Party member. Born in Yan'an in 1942, he had the most impeccable of family revolutionary credentials. His father, Tan Zhengwen, had joined the Party in 1927 at the age of 17.<sup>14</sup> Before 1949, he worked in the internal security and intelligence apparatus under Kang Sheng in Yan'an and nearby base areas. From 1942 to 1948, he held a series of leading security and intelligence posts in the Jin-Sui base area.<sup>15</sup> During part of this period young Tan Lifu was reportedly cared for in the household of Kang Sheng.<sup>16</sup> In May 1948, Tan Zhengwen became the deputy director of the Social Investigation Bureau of the Party centre, directly under Kang. In November he became the Party's first director of the Beijing (later Beijing) Bureau of Public Security, but served in that post for only one year. He was on the Standing Committee of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee from 1949 to 1956, at which point he was dropped. From 1954 to 1959 he served as Deputy Chief Procurator of the Supreme People's Procuracy (*fu jianchazhang, zuigao renmin jianchayuan*), a relatively marginal post.<sup>17</sup> He died in 1961 at the age of 51. Tan Lifu's mother, Jiang Tao, was a section chief (*chuzhang*) in the Beijing Bureau of Public Security.<sup>18</sup>

Tan Lifu attended the elite Beijing No. 8 Middle School in Xidan. As his opponents described him, he was not the kind of character one would have imagined for a future Red Guard leader. According to a former classmate, he wasn't interested in "progressing," said he "didn't want to go into politics" and hung around all the time with characters with "serious ideological problems."<sup>19</sup> Tan did not enter an elite national university or even ministry-run institute. Instead, he enrolled in a new

14. Tan Lifu, "A debate that occurred back in those days."

15. Tan Zhengwen's pre-1949 posts are listed in *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao 1921–1997 (Materials on the Organizational History of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921–1997)* (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2000), Vol. 5, pp. 137–38, and Vol. 7, pp. 42, 153 and 155.

16. "Kang Sheng tongzhi shi jiangding de wuchan jieji geming zuopai." ("Comrade Kang Sheng is a staunch proletarian revolutionary leftist") *Ba'ersan zhanbao (23 August Battle News)* (Kunming), 22 February 1967, p. 3. The article admitted these connections, but sought to dispel persistent "reactionary rumours" that Kang was a backstage supporter of Tan's speech when it initially appeared.

17. *Zhongguo gongchandang Beijing shi zuzhi shi ziliao 1921–1987 (Materials on the Organizational History of the Beijing Municipal Communist Party, 1921–1987)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1992), pp. 242 and 482, and *Materials on the Organizational History of the Chinese Communist Party 1921–1997*, Vol. 15, pp. 42 and 69. Tan's post-1949 career seems curiously stunted, considering the important post he once held. But his career mirrored that of his apparent mentor, Kang Sheng, who was dropped from the Politburo and shuffled off to Shandong province in 1949. See Zhonggong Zhejiang shengwei dangxiao dangshi jiaoyanshi bianyin, "Wenhua dageming" shiqi ziliao xuanji (*Selected Materials on the "Cultural Revolution" Period*), December 1984, pp. 73–75.

18. Tan Lifu, "A debate that occurred back in those days."

19. Qinghua daxue ba.ba dongfanghong gongshe Mao Zedong sixiang hongweibing zongbu, "Beijing gongye daxue diaocha baogao" ("Report on an investigation at Beijing Industrial University"), Qinghua reprint, p. 19. The writer, who claimed to be a high school classmate of Tan's, was ill-disposed towards him, but this portrayal is consistent with Tan's placement in a less prestigious institution.

technical college established in 1960 by the Beijing city government.<sup>20</sup> Reflecting its non-elite status, only 20 per cent of the student body were from “red” category households, and 30 per cent were from the “black” categories that included former exploiting classes.<sup>21</sup> It was the kind of institution to which academics condemned as “rightists” in the 1950s were consigned as punishment.<sup>22</sup> The student body contained a large contingent of overseas Chinese, many from Indonesia.<sup>23</sup> Tan was not an especially diligent student. Despite majoring in a technical subject, he had a reputation as a “famous literary type.” He claimed to have read many foreign books, had views on literary theory that he loved to share, and “was gifted with a silver tongue.”<sup>24</sup> Tan himself said, “of course I had shortcomings of my own; I was lazy and indolent.”<sup>25</sup>

Tan’s political activism was motivated by grievances against the school Party organization. His Party superiors were so displeased with him that, according to Tan, they “had everybody seize on my shortcomings,” and “turned me into an example of the way that high cadre kids were changing.”<sup>26</sup> Tan charged that the Party committee instead showered praise on students from exploiting class backgrounds who became models in study and politics. It was particularly galling to Tan that they selected as chairman of the student association a classmate descended from the imperial nobility, who was also put on a delegation to meet national leaders.<sup>27</sup>

Tan knew that his Party superiors thought little of him, but he did not know that they almost reported him to the Bureau of Public Security. In early June, the first group of students to challenge the school Party committee uncovered evidence of such discussions, which labelled Tan as having a “revisionist viewpoint.” Tan was still in the Beijing suburbs, participating in the rural Socialist Education Movement as a member of

20. The university opened in 1960 and reached its full size of 3,400 students just prior to the Cultural Revolution. See Li Rongfa, *Beijing gongye daxue zhi 1960–1998 (Beijing Polytechnic University Annals, 1960–1968)* (Beijing: Beijing gongye daxue chubanshe, 2000), pp. 1–2.

21. “Tan Lifu 9 yue 7 ri zai nongji xueyuan de jianghua” (“Tan Lifu’s 7 September speech at the agricultural machinery institute”), Wuhan reprint, Vol. 2, pp. 27–30, at p. 27, and “Tan Lifu jianghua zhushi” (“Explanatory notes to Tan Lifu’s speech”), Wuhan reprint, Vol. 2, pp. 23–26, n. 30.

22. “Tan Lifu’s 7 September speech,” p. 27. Tan refers to the faculty as “other schools’ used goods, rightist elements.”

23. “Overseas Chinese were especially numerous, and you could see all manner of strange clothing worn in our school,” *ibid.* p. 27. Discrimination against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia generated a steady stream of emigrants to China in the 1950s and early 1960s. A ban on retail trade in 1959, for example, led to the emigration of more than 100,000 to China the next year. See Charles A. Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 36–37.

24. “Report on an investigation at Beijing Industrial University,” p. 19. The silver tongue is evident in the transcripts of his speeches, especially the one that made him famous.

25. “Tan Lifu’s 7 September speech,” p. 27.

26. *Ibid.* p. 27. Tan’s Party superiors were in a position to know him well. It was a new organization that had yet to recruit significant numbers of students. There were only 36 students in the Party in 1964, and 82 in 1965 (*Beijing Polytechnic University Annals*, p. 532). A student with impeccable revolutionary heritage who did not live up to the expectations placed on Party members would therefore be noticed relatively quickly by top school officials.

27. *Ibid.* p. 27.

a Party work team. When he returned to the city on 9 June the campus was in an uproar, with a militant group of students challenging the school's work team. It was then that Tan discovered the full depths of his persecution by the Party organization.<sup>28</sup>

### *Tan Lifu as a "Conservative"*

A key element of social interpretations of Red Guard politics is that students from privileged backgrounds formed alliances with work teams sent to schools, because those work teams blunted criticism of school power holders, diverting attacks to lower-level cadres, ordinary teachers and those already stigmatized in past campaigns. "Conservative" students, according to this argument, were willing to tolerate only limited attacks on school power structures, and defended them (and the work teams) against more militant accusations of "radical" students from different social backgrounds who did not have the same kind of stake in the political status quo.<sup>29</sup>

Because Tan Lifu has long been seen as a conservative archetype, it is interesting to discover that this scenario does not describe the conflict in his school in the summer of 1966, or Tan's role in it. Tan, indeed, vociferously defended the school's work team in his 20 August speech, but the work team he defended was the *second* one sent to his school – one that reversed the moderate stand of the first work team and conducted a militant purge of the entire school power structure.

The first work team arrived at Beijing Industrial University on 2 June.<sup>30</sup> It was headed by Fang Zhixi, a cadre from Chinese People's University.<sup>31</sup> This work team behaved in the moderate fashion described in prior scholarship. Upon arrival, they announced that they would "assist in

28. The date of his return to the campus is in "Explanatory notes to Tan Lifu's speech," n. 25. That Tan was a victim of a revisionist "black gang" in his school created a logical problem for those who denounced him later as an arch-revisionist. Qinghua University investigators put a clever spin on their presentation: the school's revisionists had "compiled materials on comrade Tan Lifu's revisionist viewpoints, and used this as a pretext to attack the offspring of workers, peasants, and revolutionary cadres. This was a counter-revolutionary incident. However, as far as Tan Lifu himself was concerned, his classmates at Beijing Industrial University reported that he in fact did have revisionist views; they were so revisionist that even a revisionist Party committee could sniff them out." "Report on an investigation at Beijing Industrial University," p. 20.

29. Lee, *Politics of the Cultural Revolution*, pp. 36–59 and 78–93, esp. pp. 49 and 53.

30. Unless other citations are given, this account of the work team period is based on a report published by the "East is Red" faction that opposed Tan Lifu and held power in the school until 1968. See "Guanyu Beijing gongye daxue gongzuozu zai ganbu wenti shang shixing 'daji yi dapian, baohu yi xiaocuo' diaocha baogao" ("Investigation report on the Beijing Industrial University work team cadre policy of 'attacking many to protect a few'"). *Dongfang hong (East is Red)*, 13 April 1967, pp. 1–2. See CCRM 1999, Vol. 2.

31. Industrial University's low status in the bureaucratic hierarchy is evident in the remarkably low rank of Fang Zhixi. When the Cultural Revolution began, she was an ordinary member of People's University's Party Committee and Vice-Chairman of the Economics Department. See *Renda sanhong (People's University Triple Red)*, 8 June 1968, p. 2, in Center for Chinese Research Materials, *A New Collection of Red Guard Publications, Part II: A Special Compilation of Newspapers in the Beijing Area*, 40 vols. (Oakton, Virginia, 2001), Vol. 28, p. 10892. By contrast, the heads of work teams sent to Beijing, Qinghua and some other universities had ministerial rank.

revolutionizing the Party committee.” They permitted Party secretaries at each level to lead criticism sessions in which Party and youth league members were to offer self-criticisms and criticisms of their peers. They also reportedly declared that criticism of one of the university’s four Party vice-secretaries was off limits.

This work team lasted less than two weeks. Like the majority of those sent to Beijing colleges, it encountered such serious resistance that it was withdrawn shortly after arriving.<sup>32</sup> Tan’s speech after his return on 9 June made clear that he vastly preferred the radical policies of the second one, which arrived on 16 June.

The school’s Party apparatus was directly implicated in the purges that launched the Red Guard movement. Song Shuo, one of three officials denounced in Nie Yuanzi’s “first Marxist-Leninist wall poster” at Beijing University on 25 May, was Party secretary of Beijing Industrial University as well as deputy head of the University and Science Work Department of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee. He had strongly opposed Nie Yuanzi and her allies in the controversy over the Socialist Education Movement at Beijing University in 1965.<sup>33</sup> Song was purged within days of the publication of the wall poster in *Renmin ribao*, along with the Party secretary and president (Lu Ping) and vice-president (Peng Peiyun) of Beijing University.<sup>34</sup> Song’s leadership of Industrial University suggested that there were serious political problems in the school. Yet the first work team was satisfied with a mild rectification campaign.

The second work team did not make the same mistake. Led by Du Wanrong, a cadre in the Beijing Party apparatus, it declared that “if Song Shuo was bad, then the entire Party organization here is rotten.” He announced that *every* cadre in the university should step down from their posts, be put in isolation and write self-examinations. In effect, the work

32. This sequence was common: reports from the period state that work teams in 39 out of 54 Beijing colleges were withdrawn by mid-June after meeting strong student opposition. See “Li Xuefeng tongzhi daibiao Zhonggong Beijing shiwei guanyu zai wuchan jieji wenhua da geming zhong suo fangxiangde, luxiande cuowu jiancha tigang” (“Comrade Li Xuefeng’s self-criticism on behalf of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee regarding its errors of orientation and line committed during the Cultural Revolution”), in Center for Chinese Research Materials, *Red Guard Publications Supplement II*, (Oakton, Virginia, 1992), Vol. 4; Zhonggong Beijing shiwei dangshi ziliao zhengji bangongshi, “Beijing shi ‘wenhua da geming’ dashiji” (“Chronicle of major events during the ‘Great Cultural Revolution’ in Beijing”), *Beijing dangshi ziliao tongxun* (*Materials on Beijing Party History*), supplementary issue 17, May 1987, p. 21.

33. Born in 1923, Song had attended Yanjing and Beijing Universities in the early 1940s, joined the Party in 1945, and taught at Beijing University’s School of Engineering from 1945 to 1949, during which time he served as the underground Party secretary of the university faculty and helped mobilize the student movement against the Nationalists during the civil war. He held a series of posts in higher education departments of the municipal bureaucracy after 1949, and added the post of Party Secretary of Industrial University in 1964. See *Beijing Polytechnic University Annals*, pp. 597–98.

34. At the time of his purge on 6 June, Song was an alternate member of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee and vice-head of its University and Science Work Department. *Materials on the Organizational History of the Beijing Municipal Communist Party, 1921–1987*, pp. 248 and 257. The wall poster was reprinted in *Renmin ribao* on 2 June and the purge of Song Shuo was announced in the same paper on 7 June 1966. Song died in prison in 1969 at the age of 46 (*Beijing Polytechnic University Annals*, p. 598).

**Table 1: Work Team Verdicts on Cadres at Beijing Industrial University, June–July 1966**

<i>Rank of Cadre</i>	<i>Total number of cadres in rank</i>	<i>Categories 1, 2 (Good, relatively good)</i>	<i>Category 3 (major errors)</i>	<i>Category 4 (anti-Party)</i>
Top university officials	5	0	1 (20%)	4 (80%)
Department/section heads	36	4 (11%)	18 (50%)	14 (39%)
Teaching section heads	29	12 (41%)	9 (31%)	8 (28%)
Ordinary cadres at above 3 levels	17	2 (12%)	7 (41%)	8 (47%)
Teaching office cadres	31	6 (19%)	16 (52%)	9 (29%)
Total	118 (100%)	24 (20%)	51 (44%)	43 (36%)

*Source:*

Beijing Industrial University East is Red Commune, *Dongfang hong*, 13 April 1967, p. 1.

team suspended the entire Party organization and took over the school. The school's power structure was decimated by the subsequent campaign.

Any suggestion that the second work team appealed to "conservative" students by seeking to protect school officials from denunciation and purge is flatly contradicted by the evidence. Work teams typically evaluated cadres by sorting them into one of four categories: good; comparatively good; those who committed serious mistakes but are not anti-Party, anti-socialist rightists; and anti-Party, anti-socialist rightists.<sup>35</sup> A later investigation conducted by the faction formed by opponents of the work team compiled comprehensive statistics on its purge (See Table 1).

These figures reveal a drastic purge of the leadership. Only 20 per cent of the school's cadres were judged to be "good" or "relatively good," while 36 per cent were "anti-Party." The purge hit high cadres the hardest: none of the top school officials and only four section and department heads were judged to be at least "relatively good," fewer than 10 per cent. Lower ranking cadres were treated more leniently: 26 per cent were at least "relatively good." Over half the middle level cadres

35. The categories are defined in "Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," 8 August 1966, point 8, "On the cadre question."

were subjected to struggle sessions, along with 20 per cent of the basic level cadres.<sup>36</sup> This work team did not protect any power holders.

Tan's motivation in supporting this work team clearly was not to protect vested interests in shielding the Party organization. The opposite was the case: Tan's animus towards the Party organization stemmed from their poor treatment of him, and his devotion to the second work team was a *betrayal* of his erstwhile Party superiors.<sup>37</sup> The many Party members, youth league leaders and students from revolutionary households who allied themselves with Tan were also betraying the leadership – more striking because no more than a few of them could have harboured the grievance that animated Tan. If “conservative” Red Guards supported a radical work team that decimated their Party organization, then the student faction that opposed them must have been motivated by something other than a desire for a more thorough attack on the status quo. What, then, divided student factions in the school, and why, specifically, did some students oppose the second work team?

The opponents of the second work team never accused it of being too mild in its attack on the power structure. Their complaint was that it refused to reconsider the “rightist” charge levied against them by the first work team before it fled. They also complained that despite their role in driving out the first work team, they were treated not as loyal activists but as potential troublemakers. Another complaint was that the second work team's struggle sessions against top cadres weren't large enough or militant enough. They complained, for example, that Song Shuo was never dragged back to the school for a struggle session.<sup>38</sup> These frictions mounted until some began to criticize the second work team in wall posters. As in other schools in Beijing, the work team in turn accused these students of being “rightists” who interfered to protect revisionists in the school power structure.<sup>39</sup> This created a new grievance among students that hardened into a factional divide. The subsequent struggle for victory by the opponents of the work team was motivated by the urgent need to ensure that this label was not lodged permanently in their files.

The second work team departed shortly after the Municipal Party

36. *Dongfang hong*, 13 April 1967, p. 1.

37. Tan's position in the politics of the period in fact parallels that of Nie Yuanzi, famous “rebel” leader from Beijing University who harboured strong resentment against her Party superiors.

38. *Dongfang hong*, 13 April 1967. However, when Tan Lifu's Red Guards proposed a struggle session against Song Shuo in mid-August, his opponents objected, apparently because it made Tan look revolutionary and would divert their movement to target the former work team and vindicate themselves: “Don't you want to hold a meeting to struggle the black gang? To struggle Song Shuo is Liu Jing's great plot; to struggle Jin Jun is Tan Lifu's great plot; he (the previous speaker) says this is because you want to change the masses line of vision. [But on the other hand] If you don't struggle the black gang, he says you're blocking the main avenue of attack!” “Bianlun hui Tan Lifu fayan jilu” (“Transcript of Tan Lifu's speech at the debate”), 20 August 1966, Wuhan reprint, Vol. 1, pp. 26–32, at p. 27.

39. The “anti-interference campaign” that counter-attacked such students accused them of trying to protect power-holders by obstructing work team efforts – a baseless and distorted charge that served only to deepen these students' sense of injustice.

Committee ordered their withdrawal on 28 July.<sup>40</sup> Before leaving, they implemented the measures specified in that order, which were later ratified in the “16 points”: they set up a Cultural Revolution Preparatory Committee to plan for open elections to a Cultural Revolution Committee of activist students and teachers. Liu Jing, a Red Guard classmate in Tan’s own department, headed the preparatory committee and was also appointed to the temporary Party committee. Tan was put in charge of the Cultural Revolution group in his department, and headed the university’s Red Guards.

### *The Political Context of Tan’s Speech*

The split between Tan’s Red Guards and his opponents began at this point. It was not rooted in different views about the Party apparatus; Tan’s group was fully in favour of a deep purge. The split originated in the differing experiences of students during the work team period. Activists labelled after challenging the second work team pushed for guarantees that this would not subsequently harden into official verdicts. To achieve this aim, they required official recognition that they were “revolutionary” by appointment to leading positions in the school’s new power structure. They immediately confronted Liu Jing and Tan Lifu. They argued that the second work team was simply carrying out the black line of the first: the first “protected the black gang” at the university and the second unjustly labelled them as “rightists.” The students whom they left in charge were therefore continuing the same conspiracy of suppression against them, the only true revolutionaries in the school. Like many other militant students in a similar situation, Tan Lifu began his stint as a Red Guard leader with an outspoken minority of students already accusing him of obstructing the Cultural Revolution.

In the face of such opposition, Tan’s group proposed to move forward with elections, such as had already been completed at Beijing University, a celebrated model.<sup>41</sup> The opposition, however, objected, arguing that they would not stand a fair chance. The “lingering poison” of the work team still tainted the university, and Tan’s Red Guards had unjustly benefited from their ties with the work team and had the support of a large majority of students and faculty. Instead, the opposition wanted to hold a debate about the work teams’ conduct, which they hoped would strengthen their position and undermine Tan. Tan and Liu Jing argued that this would divert the movement by dragging up past issues no longer relevant, but they nevertheless agreed to a week of debate. The opposition

40. “Zhonggong Beijing shiwei guanyu chexiao ge dazhuan yuanxiao gongzuo zu de jue ding” (“Decision of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee on the withdrawal of work teams from institutions of higher education”), 28 July 1966, in *Chinese Cultural Revolution Database*.

41. The membership of Beida’s Cultural Revolution Preparatory Committee was published in the inaugural issue of *Xin beida* (*New Beida*), 22 August 1966, p. 2, where it was explained that the elections had in fact occurred on 28 July. On 9 September, a second election was held for a permanent Cultural Revolution Representative Assembly. The results were announced in *Xin beida* 13 September 1966, p. 2. See CCRM 1999, Vol. 15.

then complained about the conduct of the debate, especially Tan's insinuations that the arguments of his critics would provide evidence that they really were rightists after all. After it was over they still objected to elections, claiming that the debate had been unfair.

Tan's famous speech was made in this context. He vigorously defended himself against the accusations of his opponents. But he failed to sense quickly enough the latest shift in the official line. Tan not only defended – indeed praised – the second work team. He continued to intimidate students who opposed him by insinuating that they might actually be rightists and class enemies, and showed little interest in dwelling on the issue of the labels given to students by the work team. He continued to use the leftist language of class purity pushed by members of the Central Cultural Revolution Group in their initial charges against the school leaders at Beijing University in early June. These same errors were made by student leaders in similar situations throughout Beijing, but Tan's great misfortune was that he was a powerful orator, and that his speech was transcribed and widely circulated. For that reason he had to be crushed.

#### *The Political Content of Tan's Speech*

Tan's point of departure was that the school leadership was tainted by its association with Song Shuo. He refers several times to the school as "rotten": "this rotten old nest of a university." Its leaders promoted revisionism, using a "red millstone" to "force down the heads of the many students from worker, peasant and cadre families."<sup>42</sup> The proletariat was an oppressed minority at Industrial University, not permitted to take their rightfully prominent role, and told that performance (*biaoxian*) was of primary importance, not class origins. Tan shows no trace of sympathy for the former leadership of the school; in fact, he argues that the work team's job was not yet done. Revisionism had dominated the school for the previous seven years, and there was a lot of cleaning up to do. This was the same as the stance taken by Nie Yuanzi at Beijing University at the outset of the Cultural Revolution.

In the face of accusations against him, Tan adopts the work teams' earlier defence against critics: they sound like rightists who oppose the Cultural Revolution, and they use arguments taken directly from Peng Zhen.

Some say, "The lingering poison of the work team hasn't been eliminated," "the work team's hidden remnants haven't been scattered"; in my view it's the lingering poison of revisionism that hasn't been eliminated, the hidden remnants of Peng Zhen who haven't been scattered! ... Some people don't hate the black gang; Peng Zhen's "emphasize *biaoxian*" has left such a sweet taste in their mouths, how can they hate him! However, regarding the work teams, regarding these old revolutionary comrades, they hate them down to their very bones. They are still interested in the work

42. See his wall poster with Liu Jing, "Cong duilian tanqi" ("Regarding the couplet"), 12 August 1966, Wuhan reprint, Vol. 1, pp. 24–25.

team and struggling the black gang. When they find out some cadre has made a mistake, they're happy as can be, they jump for joy. What are you happy about when a communist Party cadre makes a mistake! Damn it! [someone yells, damn right! warm applause]<sup>43</sup>

In Tan's view the second work team had got it right. They were not tools of any black gang, they were old revolutionaries who did their jobs properly and deserved respect:

On the first day Old Du entered our school he gave us a very deep and lasting impression [applause]. I'll tell you all truthfully, that day a lot of comrades cried. How can those sons of bitches possibly understand? That day for the first time we heard at Industrial University the kind of talk that we can only hear at home, for the first time we felt like Industrial University was like home.<sup>44</sup>

Having defended the line taken by the second work team, Tan went on to defend the class line pushed at the outset of the Cultural Revolution:

As soon as you bring up the class line, we're people with "vested interests." Comrades, I'll give you an example, a very simple one. How can the son of a poor peasant who has stood up, and the son of a landlord who has been the object of struggle, possibly have the same feelings about land reform? [warm applause]. Comrades, this is what is called "being branded by your class."<sup>45</sup>

The real source of his opponents' criticism, Tan argued, was that *they* had vested interests to defend:

Those people who have been overthrown, those who felt that from this point on they faced an uncertain future, those people who felt that from this point on their own younger brothers and sisters, their own families had no political future, how can they have the same feelings, how can they speak the same language as us?<sup>46</sup>

Some people don't like to speak the plain truth. "The sons of reactionaries are bastards." When we say "reactionary father," we don't expand "reactionary" to include all non-proletarian families. You say, "this is meant to put us off guard." If this isn't an obvious attempt to create disagreements, then what is? We have to expose this! [applause]. Some people make big speeches about "equality" and "fraternity." In a class society, where is there any "equality" or "fraternity"? We have a lot of brothers and sisters who are cruelly murdered by the enemies as soon as they are born; it's called cutting up the weeds and digging up the roots! [Silent hall: someone yells a slogan, "always remember class bitterness! don't forget the blood hatred!"] Now, we exercise dictatorship over your parents, and exercise the policy of doing everything possible to remould them, giving them repeated opportunities to become upright people. Their children can attend school, and if they perform well can enter the youth league, and the Party. What else do they want?<sup>47</sup>

Tan argues that those who oppose the Party's class line have ulterior

43. Wuhan reprint, Vol. 1, pp. 28 and 31.

44. *Ibid.* p. 29. "Old Du" – Du Wanrong – had served as a political commissar in the eighth route army in the early 1940s, according to *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun zuzhi yange he geji lingdao ren yuan minglu (Chinese People's Liberation Army Organizational Evolution and Leadership Personnel of Various Levels)* (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1990).

45. *Ibid.* p. 29.

46. *Ibid.* p. 29.

47. *Ibid.* p. 30.

motives. They are trying to reverse the verdicts on their families, trying to restore the situation under the revisionists where the militant “left” class line was not being followed, trying to escape from the consequences of their opposition to the left earlier in the Cultural Revolution, and trying to twist Mao’s thought to suit their purposes. “The fact is, the Cultural Revolution is indeed a class struggle, why can’t we talk about class struggle? The way I see it, this is Peng Zhen’s “openness”! This is only allowing the rightists to spread their poison, without allowing the leftists to disinfect it!”<sup>48</sup> The real problem, Tan argued, is that these people don’t really want revolution:

As for reforming the system of university examinations, some people hide under their covers and cry, their beautiful dreams about job assignments smashed, and say “if you carry out the class line my future is finished, my family’s future is finished!” After 17 years of excessive lenience, your family’s still not finished? You damn well should have been finished off long ago!<sup>49</sup>

Instead, those who long for the good old days of revisionism, who now obstruct the school’s Cultural Revolution, refuse to get up on the stage to speak:

If we have a debate, you don’t want to debate. If we don’t have a debate, you want to debate. You just send a few lackeys up here to tremble and whine ... some people don’t speak, they say their materials are not fully prepared ... There are people who are always looking through books searching for regulations, they all wait for instructions from the centre; how are you going to be the “vanguard” of anything? I think it’s only the children of workers, peasants and revolutionary cadres who have that kind of guts, that kind of ability; who among all you others dare to? [warm applause]. It seems that “the son of a hero is a real man” (*laozi yingxiong er haohan*) [Masses: “The son of a reactionary is a bastard – its basically like this!” (*laozi fandong er hundan, jiben ruci!*) warm applause].<sup>50</sup>

Tan also heaps scorn on his opponents’ reverence for Mao’s quotations.

Others say, we are all intellectuals, we are all petty bourgeois, and moreover quote from the classics and say that this is Chairman Mao’s “class analysis.” Take something that the Chairman said in the 1920s and apply it to the 1960s! How can this work? The living application of Mao Zedong Thought is in concrete matters, concrete analysis.

Besides, Tan argued, Mao’s thought itself is not some dead classic, but a guide to practical action:

Nowhere in the world is there anything that is 100 per cent correct. Mao Zedong thought itself is still developing continuously, and necessarily must still make new discoveries, inventions, creations, and advances! ... These people taking Mao’s book and simplifying it down into horseshit just doesn’t make sense.<sup>51</sup>

48. *Ibid.* p. 26.

49. *Ibid.* p. 28.

50. *Ibid.* pp. 27 and 31.

51. *Ibid.* p. 29.

Tan's style, of which he was proud, was to shoot from the hip, regardless of the consequences:

Some people say the speeches that I and Liu Jing made yesterday committed great crimes; they violated the 16 points and restricted the masses. We were thinking, whether we spoke up or not we would still be criminals, so we simply spoke anyway. ... Just now a comrade passed me a note that said that some people are furiously taking down what I'm saying. Comrades, it's not important, let them take notes. I'll still speak out just the same. Communist Party members are open and above board.<sup>52</sup>

### *The Aftermath of Tan's Speech*

The students taking notes would publish a transcript, and within weeks it was widely circulated throughout Beijing. Two months later, it became officially approved study material for a campaign against the "plot" by Liu Shaoqi to send out work teams to protect power holders and suppress student rebels, and obstruct the course of the Cultural Revolution. Tan was caught pushing a line that was being reversed as he spoke. The 16 points, published in *Renmin ribao* on 9 August, stated clearly: the work teams were all opposed to Mao's plans for the Cultural Revolution; they all sought to obstruct its progress and protect the black gang; under no circumstances can such things as class origins be used to divide the masses and divert the course of struggle; no threats of "rightist" labels can be used to silence one group of students or to suppress criticism from the masses. Tan's speech clearly violated each of these new definitions of the correct course. On top of that, Tan denied that Mao's thought was an eternally correct guide for all ages and ridiculed "simplifying it all down into horseshit" – a sentiment that cut too close to the heart of things in the autumn of 1966.<sup>53</sup>

Tan's opponents at Industrial University, as if intent on justifying his accusation that they were slogan-chanting sectarians, expressed shock and outrage that Tan could even suggest that Mao's thought was not perfect in every respect and a complete guide to all possible situations in the present day. Tan's heresy sent his opponents into fits of exaggerated praise of Mao: "Today, we must overthrow all words and deeds that violate Mao Zedong Thought, and must resolutely establish popular trust in Mao Zedong Thought, with utmost courage defend Mao Zedong Thought, and whoever dares disturb a single hair of Mao Zedong Thought we will resist them to the end!"<sup>54</sup>

Tan's speech briefly carried the day. He and Liu Jing won election to the school's Cultural Revolution Committee, which they called a Revolutionary Committee, and they conducted a purge of the school that was just as militant as the second work team's. During August and September,

52. *Ibid.* pp. 27–28.

53. It did not help that his speech referred in passing to "comrade Shaoqi" – entirely correct for mid-August but seditious after Liu's subsequent purge.

54. "Zhu kou! Buzhun cuangai weida de Mao Zedong sixiang" ("Shut your mouth! It is forbidden to distort the Thought of Mao Zedong"), Industrial University reprint, pp. 20–21.

more than 100 people were labelled members of the “black gang”; 140 were placed in a “labour reform brigade,” put under supervision, confined to the school, and pressured to confess and expose others. Some 70 per cent of all cadres were placed in this position, which included violent struggle sessions. One session of note was on 28 August, when large numbers were reportedly cursed and beaten, and half their heads were shaved.<sup>55</sup> During this fleeting period Tan travelled to meetings in the Party’s committee’s sedan, wearing a green military uniform, and “waving to his classmates to call attention to himself.”<sup>56</sup>

### *The Question of Social Cleavages*

There remains the central question: was the dividing line between Tan Lifu’s Red Guards and his opponents a cleavage that divided students from “revolutionary” households – those with vested interests in the status quo – from others? Did Tan’s supporters applaud his position in the debate because they were from similar backgrounds and therefore implicitly might benefit from the Party’s class line, while his opponents were from different backgrounds and had an inherent interest in refuting such an emphasis on revolutionary heritage?

This is clearly not the case. What distinguishes Tan from his opponents is not family background but experience with the work teams. The work teams split students from all manner of backgrounds, and the split was most evident among Party members from revolutionary households. Two prominent leaders of the opposition were from virtually identical backgrounds to Tan’s. Tan’s leading opponent in the debate, Bai Zhiqi, was a full Party member and the son of a revolutionary martyr. A second prominent leader, Zhang Jinmin, was a student from a revolutionary cadre background.<sup>57</sup>

Several of Tan’s other leading opponents were indeed from non-“red” households, but all of them, like Bai Zhiqi and Zhang Jinmin, shared a common history of having been labelled by the work team. Zheng Zhiqiang, a teacher from an office staff background, had been labelled “anti-Party” for his opposition to the first work team. Wu Zhao, a student from a “high intellectual” family, opposed the first work team and was labelled a “rightist.” Qu Zhongyuan, a student from an office staff background, had been accused of leaking state secrets and was kicked off a Socialist Education Movement work team in a Beijing factory the year before.<sup>58</sup> Whatever their interests may have been based on family heritage, students from different backgrounds were united by a common experience of conflict with the work teams.

Two prominent Tan allies were from the same background. Liu Jing’s parents were revolutionary cadres, as were Wang Minghuan’s, from the

55. *Dongfang hong*, 13 April 1967, p. 2. I have found no evidence to suggest that East is Red Commune curtailed these activities when they took over in late September.

56. “Report on an investigation at Beijing Industrial University,” p. 20.

57. “Explanatory notes to Tan Lifu’s speech,” nn. 2 and 10.

58. *Ibid.* nn. 8, 9 and 13.

same department.<sup>59</sup> Unlike Bai Zhiqi and Zhang Jinmin, however, they and Tan decided to support the second work team, splitting them irrevocably.

Tan's opponents had a revealingly cynical view of the work team's class line. To them, the emphasis on family heritage was nothing but a rhetorical smokescreen for a policy that rewarded their supporters, whoever they were:

As for Du Wanrong's class line... [the] standard was: whether or not you obeyed what the work team said. (At the 21 June speech to worker, peasant and revolutionary cadre offspring, he said) if you don't listen to what the work team says, even if you are from a worker, peasant or revolutionary cadre background, you'll be attacked just the same, and be expelled ... On the other hand, those from bad class background, the so-called "leftists" who obey what the work team says, will be relied upon.<sup>60</sup>

Outraged that students from bad class backgrounds were being accepted as revolutionary activists by Tan Lifu, while Tan justified his position with the Party's class line, "East is Red" replied: "We are from worker, peasant, and revolutionary cadre families; we have incomparably deep feelings of affection for the Party and Chairman Mao."<sup>61</sup>

On 29 August, shortly after "East is Red" was founded, Tan Lifu expressed exasperation about the split with revolutionary cadre classmates who were leading the opposition:

Before, worker-peasant-revolutionary cadre kids stunk so much, but now 13 of them are advertising for followers. It's said that some of the people in "East is Red" are saying to people of bad class background, "You don't dare to speak, we'll speak on your behalf." Scabs! In reality, ten or so worker-peasant-revolutionary cadre kids are acting as loudspeakers, with the phonograph in the back ... We say our contradiction isn't with this group of worker peasant revolutionary cadre kids; they don't represent us, but another group of people.<sup>62</sup>

And on 5 September: "Our two organizations are fairly opposed to one another, [but] in the beginning we didn't want this. Somebody wrote a really good poem, 'Our split with "East is Red" is truly unclear'... Most of them are from non-proletarian classes, but they still want revolution; we have a lot of red comrades in arms."<sup>63</sup> Was Tan's group composed primarily of students with revolutionary parentage? In a 7 September speech in which he acknowledged the growing strength of his opposition, he said:

Another group of people opposes those on the revolutionary committee, and they

59. *Ibid.* nn. 7 and 15.

60. *Ibid.* n. 21.

61. Dongfanghong zhandouzu, "Xiao wenge fangxiang de luxian de cuowu – chu ping Tan Lifu fayan" ("Errors of orientation and line of the school Cultural Revolution Committee – an initial criticism of Tan Lifu's speech"), 24 August 1966, Wuhan reprint, Vol. 1, pp. 5–7, at p. 7. This is the first leaflet issued in the name of the small fighting group that would shortly found East is Red Commune.

62. "Tan Lifu de jianghua" ("Tan Lifu's speech"), 29 August 1966, at a meeting of all Red Guards in the Industrial University meal hall. Industrial University reprint, pp. 22–23.

63. "Tan Lifu de jianghua" ("Tan Lifu's speech"), 5 September 1966, at a meeting of all Red Guards in the Industrial University meal hall. Industrial University reprint, p. 23.

have made some gains in all-out mobilization. The revolutionary committee still has a certain amount of prestige, because after all it was elected by everyone. And it has the ironclad support of *a group of worker, peasant, and revolutionary cadre kids (yi pi gongnonggegan zidi)*(emphasis added).<sup>64</sup>

Tan had never refused to admit students from other backgrounds into his camp. He defended the orthodox version of the Party's class line: while students from revolutionary households were the natural leaders of a movement to rid the Party of revisionism, others who exhibited their revolutionary credentials in the course of the movement were welcome. In their 12 August wall poster, Liu Jing and Tan Lifu wrote, "we must resolve to rely on the revolutionary left to unite firmly with all forces that can be united. Like the children of workers, poor and lower middle peasants, revolutionary cadres, revolutionary martyrs, revolutionary intellectuals, and all revolutionary teachers and students ..." This formula emphasizes "red" classes, but explicitly excludes no one, and specifically includes students from intellectual backgrounds. And near the end of his notorious speech, Tan declared, "We believe that the vast majority of the people in our school want revolution, and can be revolutionary. I say this earnestly and sincerely; only in this way can we carry out the Cultural Revolution."

If factions formed based on individual experience under the work team, and not due to the Party affiliations or family heritage of students, then why was the question of class origins thrust into such a central position in this debate, and why did it play such a key role in the denunciation of Tan Lifu? The answer lies in the texts that document the debate itself, when put into the context of university politics: Tan's opponents did not dispute the class line, but Tan's way of expressing it, and the way that he used it in seeming violation of the latest Party directives.

Recall that the 20 August debate was about the work teams and plans for elections in the school, not about the Party's class line. The class line was dragged into the debate because in their 12 August wall poster, Tan and Liu commented on the high school Red Guard couplet, "If the father's a revolutionary, the son is a hero; if the father's a reactionary, the son is a bastard – its basically like this." Tan and Liu approved of the couplet, but said it was too one-sided – they proposed that it be modified to admit that students from bad class backgrounds can rebel against their fathers and become revolutionary themselves. Tan's 20 August speech was a defence of his own position against mounting accusations that he and Liu Jing had committed errors in line that merited expulsion from their posts. The real issue was not the Party's class line – the basic content of which was agreed by both sides – but its implications for the struggle between the two factions. Tan used it to defend his position; his critics cited his *use* of it to claim that he violated the 16 points. The issue

64. "Tan Lifu's 7 September speech," p. 28. In the same speech (p. 29), he said, "some people want to organize an association of worker, peasant, and revolutionary cadre kids, but I don't see much need for that; what we've already organized is a class organization, you can read this in our school's Red Guard proclamation ..."

was power in the school, expressed as a doctrinal argument over the correct wording of the Party's class line and the 16 points. Tan's speech was not made in the context of a struggle that pitted students from different social backgrounds into "conservative" and "radical" camps with regard to the status quo.

*From Student Militant to Symbol of Reaction: Tan as Scapegoat*

Tan's period of ascendance was fleeting. His opponents in the 20 August debate quickly formed a new Red Guard organization called "East is Red Commune" (*dongfanghong gongshe*), and sought support from similar "minority" factions at other universities, and from the Central Cultural Revolution Group. When "majority" Red Guard factions like Tan's pulled out of the city-wide Red Guard headquarters to form their own "Second Headquarters" on 5 September, the minority factions formed their own "Third Headquarters" the next day. Prominent leaders attended the founding rallies for both organizations. Liu Jing and Tan Lifu immediately issued a proclamation to the entire school at 11 that evening, disbanding their Revolutionary Committee and turning it into a "logistics department" for the school's many Red Guard organizations and "fighting groups."<sup>65</sup> In his 7 September speech at the Agricultural Machinery Institute, Tan tried to put a brave face on things: "We have participated in the Headquarters, and in the end the non-revolutionaries have been flushed out; the leftover revolutionaries can unite, they're different. Splits among Red Guards aren't important, comrades, our struggles will accomplish something in the end."<sup>66</sup>

During September the First and Second Headquarters quickly fell apart, as national officials threw their full weight behind the "minority" factions of the Third Headquarters, of which East is Red Commune was a founding member. Zhou Enlai delivered the fatal blow in his speech at a mass meeting of Third Headquarters activists on 26 September, in which he stated emphatically that the work teams' actions and their defenders were in violation of central policy and Mao's intentions, and that the central leadership all agreed that the minority faction's stance was correct.<sup>67</sup> The next day, Tan Lifu and Wang Minghuan made final speeches to their Red Guards, who had already lost control of the campus and were on the verge of being disbanded. Tan accepted responsibility for their failure, criticized his stance in the August speech as insufficiently respectful of the "power" of Mao's thought, "left" in form but right in essence, serving only to divide the masses.<sup>68</sup> In a 1 October proclamation,

65. "Tan Lifu's 7 September speech," p. 28.

66. *Ibid.* p. 30.

67. Zhou Enlai, "Zhou zongli zai shoudu dazhuan yuanxiao hongweibing geming zaofan zong silingbu suo zhaoji de dahui shang de jianghua" ("Premier Zhou's speech at the mass meeting convened by the Capital Universities Red Guard Revolutionary Rebel Headquarters"), 26 September 1966.

68. "Tan Lifu de jianghua," ("Tan Lifu's speech"), 27 September 1966, Industrial University reprint, p. 24.

Tan resigned the Red Guard leadership, citing his repeated errors beginning with his first wall poster. He admitted to every error of orientation of which his opponents accused him. However, he still denied that his group and the work team were counter-revolutionary.<sup>69</sup>

### *Tan's Fate*

Shortly afterwards, Tan and several comrades slipped out of Beijing. It soon became clear that national leaders had further uses for him. Tan was criticized by name by a series of leaders at mass rallies and small receptions with Red Guard delegations. From 4 October until the end of the month, Tan was criticized by Zhou Enlai, Xie Fuzhi, Yang Chengwu, Zhang Chunqiao, Qi Benyu, Jiang Qing, Wang Li, Tao Zhu, Guan Feng and others.<sup>70</sup> Chen Boda's speech to the October Party Work Conference on 16 October began a campaign of vilification that tied him to the intensifying attacks on Liu Shaoqi. Tan was about to be charged in a conspiracy to oppose Mao. In his summary of the Cultural Revolution up to that point, Chen Boda said:

Although the work teams have been withdrawn, those who don't approve of Chairman Mao's line can still use their powers of office ... in some schools and government agencies ... they completely violate the principles of the Paris Commune ... and in advance, manipulating in secret, establish so-called "Cultural Revolution preparatory committees," "Cultural Revolution small groups," "Cultural Revolution committees," or some other organization ... On 8 August, the centre passed a resolution regarding the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, but some 12 days later, at one university, some "member of the Cultural Revolution Preparatory Committee" jumped out and issued a speech that opposed the 16 point resolution of the Party centre, distributing it widely. There are those who are not at all interested in a Central Party resolution personally advocated and passed by Chairman Mao, but who treat a speech that opposes a Central Party decision as a treasure, and are terribly busy reprinting it and broadcasting it ... Many high cadre children are good or relatively good, and after becoming hardened in the winds and waves along with the masses can become successors to the proletarian revolutionary cause. There are also those who aren't so good, or who are very bad, to the point to taking the road of revisionism .... Why must someone wield power simply because they are the child of a high cadre?<sup>71</sup>

What, then, is the proper understanding of the Party's class line? Chen's version is almost identical to Tan Lifu's:

In our revolutionary ranks, Chairman Mao and our Party have always given special emphasis to class status and class origin. At the same time, they have also opposed "class status only" (*wei chengfen lun*) ... To fail to emphasize class status and class

69. "Gao quanxiao geming tongzhi shu" ("Proclamation to revolutionary comrades of the entire school"), Wuhan reprint, Vol. 2, pp. 32–34.

70. For a representative sampling of excerpts, see *Tongda loushui gou (you guan Tan Lifu jianghua cailiao zhuanji)* (*Beat the Dog in the Water – Special Collection of Materials on the Criticism of Tan Lifu's Speech*), Beijing gongye daxue "dongfanghong gongshe" bianji bu, 20 November 1966, pp. 4–6, bound with Wuhan reprints.

71. Chen Boda, pp. 200–201. Tan would later write, "I never imagined that Chen Boda would pull a knife on a college student," "A debate that occurred back in those days," p. 384.

origin is very mistaken. Sole emphasis on class origin, and not emphasizing political performance, is also very mistaken. These mistaken viewpoints must be criticized.<sup>72</sup>

How to determine in practice the difference between Chairman Mao's "special emphasis on class status and class origin" and "class status only"? Evidently this depends on one's "political performance," which can only be judged by an authoritative organization or political figure. Tan Lifu's error was not that he "solely" emphasized class origin: he, like the work team, welcomed those from ordinary backgrounds who agreed with them, and denounced those from revolutionary backgrounds who opposed them. His error was that he used the Party's class line to justify actions that opposed the new direction that central leaders wanted to take.

Tan, meanwhile, was still travelling in the provinces. A group from East is Red Commune tracked him down, and caught up with him on 2 November in Chongqing. They urged him to return to campus to debate his viewpoints further and especially the ideological errors in his "Proclamation" of 1 October.<sup>73</sup> Tan returned and issued a more severe self-criticism on 7 November, in which he inflamed matters by acknowledging that his opponents were "*also* revolutionaries."<sup>74</sup> This was unacceptable, because Tan was now deemed a counter-revolutionary. The national campaign to denounce him was gaining momentum, as East is Red Commune compiled several editions of "criticism materials" and circulated them via "liaison stations" that suddenly popped up nationwide.

One evening in November Tan was summoned to Zhongnanhai for a "chat" with two members of the Central Cultural Revolution Group, Guan Feng and Qi Benyu. He thought he would get a chance to explain himself, but he was cut short and told that his case had already been decided. He was to be interrogated about the conspiracy in which he was implicated. They asked whether he knew the daughters of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, and the son of He Long, all of whom were Red Guard leaders of "majority" factions at other schools. Throughout the interrogation, Tan maintained that he took full responsibility for his own words and that nobody had put him up to it.<sup>75</sup>

Tan was arrested on 18 December 1966 in a city-wide sweep of students charged with opposing the Central Cultural Revolution Group. He was accused of participating in a conspiracy against Mao headed by Liu Shaoqi, for propagating the reactionary bloodline theory, and for "possibly" participating in the "December black wind of bombarding the

72. Chen Boda, pp. 206–207.

73. "Zoufang Tan Lifu zhuiji," ("Notes on an Interview with Tan Lifu"), 2 November 1966, in *Xiang zichan jieji fandong luxian menglie kaihuo (pipan Tan Lifu jianghua cailiao di si ji)* (*Violently Open Fire on the Bourgeois Reactionary Line (Tan Lifu Criticism Materials, No. 4)*), Shoudu hongweibing nanxia geming zaofan jun, 17 December 1966 (bound with Wuhan reprints), pp. 19–20.

74. Tan Lifu, "Hui dao Mao Zedong sixiang de dadao shang lai – wo de jiancha," ("Return to the great way of Mao Zedong Thought: my self-criticism"), 7 November 1966, *ibid.*, pp. 2–7.

75. Tan Bin, "A debate that occurred back in those days," p. 387.

Central Cultural Revolution Group.” He was held in solitary confinement on short rations, and interrogated repeatedly about his connections with Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping and other “black backstage supporters.” On occasion, he was taken outside to serve as the object of public struggle sessions.<sup>76</sup>

Tan was released from prison on 29 May 1967, only to be seized the next day by members of East is Red Commune who went to his home, tied him up and marched him back to campus to be paraded in front of his classmates. He was locked in a basement cell, repeatedly cursed and subjected to struggle sessions, and paraded in the streets along with his mother, siblings and fiancée. Red Guards searched his family’s home on several occasions. In his basement cell he was beaten regularly, “in an organized fashion.” In 1969 he was sent to a military reclamation camp, and in 1970 he was assigned office work in a provincial army base. He spent a total of three-and-a-half years with the military before returning to Beijing. He changed his name to Tan Bin in 1970, but he could not escape his reputation. Wherever he worked thereafter, rumours circulated that he was *that* Tan Lifu. After Mao’s death, Tan published an article about his experiences in *Renmin ribao*.<sup>77</sup> He achieved formal rehabilitation in November 1979, but is still resented by many veterans of the Red Guard movement.

### *Conclusion*

A closer examination of Tan Lifu raises questions about interpretations of the Red Guard politics long accepted by scholars in the field. In particular, it raises questions about what it meant to be a “conservative” or a “rebel” at this stage in the Cultural Revolution; what were the sources of factional divisions among university students; and whether these divisions were related to family heritage or affiliation with Party organizations such that factions can be seen as interest groups that pursue the ends of identifiable constituencies.

First, however, there is one way in which this re-examination of Tan Lifu reinforces the emphases of past scholarship. Tan indeed articulated a version of the Party’s class line that was highly congenial to students from revolutionary cadre households. He did wield this interpretation of the class line to intimidate students who accused him of political errors – regardless of their family background. The entire debate that surrounded this issue in August 1966, and the rhyming couplet that served as the focus of what would eventually be denounced as the “theory of natural redness,” was a clear indication of inequalities generated by China’s political system that were prominent in the minds of many students.

This debate revealed much about political dimensions of inequality in Mao’s China, but it does not follow that factions among university

76. *Ibid.* p. 387.

77. *Ibid.* pp. 382, 387–390, 391.

students formed based on common family origin, or that the motives for the split were inherently opposed interests that flowed from family heritage. In the case of Beijing Industrial University, it is not even clear that the divisions among students at that time can be characterized as pitting “conservatives” versus “rebels” in any politically meaningful sense.

The distinction between “conservative” and “rebel” derives from a depiction of different views among China’s elites about how to conduct the Cultural Revolution. The contrast between Liuist work teams that wanted to keep control of the movement, and Maoist radicals bent on giving student militants (temporarily) freer rein, serves to distinguish standpoints among China’s leaders in July 1966.<sup>78</sup> This distinction, however valid, was not central to the perceptions and motivations of teachers and students as they embarked on courses of action that served within a few weeks to create antagonistic factions. What *later* served to define “conservative” in the Red Guard movement was the student faction’s relationship to the work team, and whether they were in a dominant position relative to a faction led by individuals who had opposed the work teams. *At the time factions were forming*, however, students had to observe their work team’s behaviour and decide whether to support it.

This decision depended crucially on the behaviour of the work team. A work team that limited debate, restricted criticism and exempted officials from criticism would appeal to students loyal to that Party committee and who identified it with the status quo and, presumably, with their personal interests. Students dissatisfied with school officials were more likely to chafe at these restrictions and clash with the work team. This scenario describes the *first* work team at Industrial University. However, if the work team relieved the Party organization of power, made all cadres step aside and conducted a radical purge, student perceptions and decisions about obedience to it would be very different. Students who had benefited from their allegiance to the Party committee would be presented with a choice: betray their Party superiors and accept the work team as representatives of the Party centre and Chairman Mao, or defend the Party committee and risk becoming a victim themselves. This was the situation at Tan’s school under the second work team. Students’ positions in the status quo provided no clear guide in making this unprecedented choice.

The irony of Tan Lifu as a “conservative” is that he harboured a strong motivation to denounce school officials. He was not selective in his criticism and he did not distinguish the good from the bad: he wanted the entire apparatus thoroughly cleansed. He accepted from the beginning that the revisionism of his school’s Party was linked to conspiracies by even higher-level officials. Although a Party member, he had a bad relationship with his leaders and a strong motivation to overturn their

78. See Lee, *Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, ch. 2.; and Lowell Dittmer, *Liu Shao-ch’i and the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 78–94.

negative assessment of him. Had Tan not been absent from the school until shortly before the first work team's departure, one can easily imagine him siding with the opponents of the first work team, who uncovered new evidence of the leaders' suppression of him. But Tan decided to support the second work team as a vehicle to pursue his aims, while the opponents of the first work team clashed also with the second. In that era, a negative political evaluation in one's file was a clear threat to one's future. It provided the strongest of motives for the anti-work team "rebels" to challenge the leaders left behind after the work teams departed, and they immediately challenged Tan and Liu Jing. If Tan won, the leadership of the opposition would go through life with "rightist" labels; if the opposition won, Tan would be branded as an agent of an anti-Mao conspiracy. In short, the work teams split students from similar backgrounds and created urgent new interests that overrode whatever they had in common based on family origin.

The work team ignored student heritage when it came to the question of loyalty. Tan's group was led by students from revolutionary households, but it included large numbers of students from non-red households as well – it was, after all, the "majority" faction. The "East is Red" opposition was initially organized by students from revolutionary cadre households who were outraged that the work teams had given them rightist labels while accepting students from "bad" class backgrounds as part of the revolutionary camp. And the famous debate over the Party's class line was not over the content of the class line but whether Tan's use of it violated the 16 points. Torn from its political context, the debate leaves a false impression: that factions formed based on students' family heritage and their presumably different stakes in the Chinese political system.

This is a study of one famous Red Guard and one obscure university. What are its broader implications for the study of Red Guard politics and the Cultural Revolution? The answer will require similar reconstructions of the political context in other universities. If there were similarly radical work teams at other institutions, or if the second work team sent to the 39 colleges where the first was driven away also reversed the policies of the first, then students from similar backgrounds are likely to have split in ways observed at Industrial University. If so, interpretations of student factions as a conflict between two structurally defined interest groups – at least for Beijing's universities – will no longer appear viable. This would suggest, instead, an analysis of politics that does not move directly from social background to political orientation, but instead recognizes a crucial intermediate step in which factions form based on the consequences of individual decisions made at certain crucial turning points. This kind of analysis will demand much more evidence about the school-level contexts in which student conflicts and debates can be meaningfully interpreted – information that has not been available until recent years. One conclusion, however, is clear: the case of Tan Lifu is not what it once appeared to be.