

# “We Want to Go Home!” The Great Petition of the *Zhiqing*, Xishuangbanna, Yunnan, 1978–1979\*

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**ABSTRACT** This article examines, both in internal and international contexts, the petition of the *zhiqing* in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan, during the 1978–79 transition. It first shows how a shortage of labour on Xishuangbanna state rubber farms led to the arrival of the *zhiqing* from other regions. It then reviews their lives and sufferings of these revolutionary youths, followed by an analysis of the petition in terms of its process and result. This article proposes three key reasons for the win-win result: the extraordinary leadership and organization of the *zhiqing*, factional struggles within the Chinese Communist Party, and the Sino-Vietnamese War. Finally, it attempts to fit this event into recent literature on mass resistance in contemporary China.

*Zhishi qingnian* (知识青年), or *zhiqing* (知青), literally means “educated youth.” The term generally refers to the urban students who were mobilized from the 1950s to 1970s and dispatched to rural villages. During the Up-to-Mountain and Down-to-Village Movement (Sent Down Movement), their number swelled to 17 million.<sup>1</sup> The campaign witnessed several surges and declines and left many remaining issues that still trouble the CCP.

During this Movement, thousands of boys and girls left for rural villages and state farms (*guoying nongchang* 国营农场) in frontier provinces such as Xinjiang, Neimenggu, Heilongjiang and Yunnan. A total of 420,000 *zhiqing* were sent to these areas before and 2.4 million during the Cultural Revolution, totalling 2.9 million.<sup>2</sup> In the Cultural Revolution, state farms were organized into Production and Construction Corps (*Shengchan jianshe bingtuan* 生产建设兵团), a semi-military organization. By the early 1980s, the majority of the *zhiqing* had returned home. While the Sent Down Movement was a top-down mandate,

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1 The figure varies, depending on different calculations.

2 Zhao Fan, *Yi Zhengcheng (Recalling the Journey of my Expedition)* (Beijing: Zhongguo nongye chubanshe, 2003), p. 208.

the return home of the *zhiqing* was a spontaneous phenomenon. One key event that sparked it was the petition of the *zhiqing* in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan, in the 1978–79 transition.

This article examines the petition of the *zhiqing* in Xishuangbanna that not only resulted in the return home of over 60,000 local *zhiqing*, but also nationwide of several million people, thus ending the Sent Down Movement. It first introduces the origin of the Xishuangbanna state rubber farms and how a shortage of labour led to the arrival of the *zhiqing* from Chongqing, Chengdu and Shanghai. It then reviews their lives and sufferings on the farms and addresses their petition in terms of its origins, motives, leadership, process and result. The article then analyses reasons for the win-win result, arguably the only successful mass protest of this size in 20th-century China. Three key reasons are proposed: factional strife within the CCP, the forthcoming Sino-Vietnamese War, and the extraordinary leadership and organization of the *zhiqing*, in addition to other sporadic elements. The Cold War serves not only as a general context but is seen to have significantly affected the movement. Finally, a tentative reflection attempts to fit this event into the recent literature of social movements. McAdam, McCarthy and Zald have analysed three common factors (political opportunities, mobilizing structures and framing processes) and their roles in the emergence and development of social movements.<sup>3</sup> Such a dynamic and interactive framework has been introduced to contemporary China.<sup>4</sup> The *zhiqing* petition holds some empirical evidence and theoretical promise for this field.

The Sent Down Movement was studied even before its conclusion.<sup>5</sup> Recently, many oral histories, memoirs, popular television series, documentaries, factual novels and local magazines by the *zhiqing*, and both general and detailed studies have been produced. In contrast to mass popular concerns and consciousness, this nationwide movement, in particular the petition of the *zhiqing* in Xishuangbanna, has been given little space in official rhetoric. Many reasons account for its being forgotten, but the foremost is that this event could not be utilized to increase the legitimacy of the CCP. Rather, it could serve to remind people of a national trauma, much in the same way as does the 1989 pro-democratic movement.

Because all *zhiqing* archives in Yunnan are classified, I relied on relevant official publications, memoirs, private collections, *zhiqing* publications and interviews, in addition to scholarly works. This article does not intend to repeat or

3 Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald (eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Also see Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

4 From some studies, Jeffery N. Wasserstrom and Elizabeth J. Perry (eds.), *Popular Protest and Political Cultural in Modern China* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); Kevin J. O'Brien and Li Lianjiang, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and their many articles.

5 Thomas P. Bernstein, *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages: the Transfer of Youth from Urban to Rural China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). For the most recent English study, see Yihong Pan, *Tempered in the Revolutionary Furnace: China's Youth in the Rustication Movement* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003). Pan provides a sketchy record of the strike and points out that the war with Vietnam might have been a reason for the policy change (pp. 224–31).

add similar material to existing academic enquiry, but rather attempts to place the event in its Chinese and world context, without which it is hard to account for its astonishing success. The key issue is how a win-win situation was realized here, where other similar movements, both earlier and later and including the 1989 pro-democratic movement, failed. It may be of special significance to review this event on the eve of its 30th anniversary when China is so fraught with various mass demonstrations.

### State Rubber Farms in Yunnan

Yunnan, as a frontier region, probably received more *zhiqing* from other provinces than any other province, with some 100,000 *zhiqing* from Shanghai, Chongqing, Chengdu and Beijing working on farms in southern and south-western Yunnan. A key reason is that Yunnan had established a state rubber farm system by the 1960s.

Rubber, as a strategic material, was foremost on the Western embargo list of China. From the beginning of the 1950s, China launched its blueprint for rubber production, partially pushed by the Soviet Union. Guangdong (including Hainan) and Yunnan were the two experiment bases. By the early 1960s, the first rubber base had been established in Hainan, with a land area over 1.99 million mu.<sup>6</sup> Yunnan was chosen as the second rubber base, not only because of its tropical climate but also because of its pioneering transplantation of rubber in 1904. In 1951, the State Council decided that within five years (1952–57), Yunnan would plant two million mu of rubber.<sup>7</sup> In 1953, Soviet and Chinese experts began a survey of Yunnan to locate suitable land. Meanwhile, the ambitious blueprint was adjusted and small-scale experiments began. From 1955 onwards, various local cadres and demobilized military officers and soldiers were employed in rubber cultivation.<sup>8</sup> By 1966, the second rubber base was well established in Yunnan, with 32 rubber and tropical plant farms, including 320,000 mu of rubber trees.<sup>9</sup>

Many problems dogged the rubber industry in Yunnan. Natural features such as geographical location, low temperatures, occasional frosts and diseases affected the efforts. A lack of human resources was another key problem. Xishuangbanna was an ethnic area with few Han Chinese, and the CCP established a strict *hukou* (户口) system that forbade private migration. Between December 1959 and January 1960, to solve the labour shortage and to overcome the *hukou* issue, over 15,000 Hunanese peasants, previously driven to Yunnan by

6 Dangdai Zhongguo congshu bianjiweiyuanhui, *Dangdai Zhongguo de nongken shiye (The Cause of Agricultural Reclamation in Contemporary China)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1986), p. 46.

7 Yunnansheng difangzhi bianzuanweiyuanhui, *Yunnan shengzhi, nongkenzhi (Provincial Gazetteer of Yunnan, Record of Agricultural Reclamation, hereafter Nongkenzhi)* (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1998), p. 15. The figure was reduced to one million mu in December 1952.

8 *Ibid.* pp. 17–20.

9 Dangdai Zhongguo chongshu bianjiweiyuanhui, *The Cause of Agricultural Reclamation*, pp. 42 and 47.

the disasters of the Great Leap Forward, were hired by state farms.<sup>10</sup> Between 15 October and 6 November 1960, another 20,000 migrants arrived. In December 1962, Hunan and Yunnan signed an agreement that officially recognized these private migrants who had formerly worked illegally on farms.<sup>11</sup> In January 1966, a similar agreement was reached between the two provinces. It is said that over 11,500 Hunanese migrants were hired by state farms in Yunnan during 1965–66.<sup>12</sup>

However, it was the Cultural Revolution and Sent Down Movement together that provided a golden opportunity to solve the labour shortage completely. The Sent Down Movement originally helped relieve the employment pressure in the mid-1950s,<sup>13</sup> but later became an ideological campaign. With Mao's directive on 22 December 1968 to send students to rural areas, the Movement became the urgent task of the state and this solved the pragmatic problems of rubber farms. By September 1970, over 8,000 *zhiqing* from Beijing and over 37,000 from Shanghai had been hired by rubber farms.<sup>14</sup> On 17 November 1970, Yunnan submitted an application to the centre asking for another 50,000 people in 1971 for rubber production, and Sichuan agreed to provide this figure from the *zhiqing*; on 28 December, the State Planning Council approved the migration of 40,000 *zhiqing* from Sichuan and 20,000 from Shanghai.<sup>15</sup> These *zhiqing*, around 100,000 people, later became the main force of the great petition.

## Sufferings

In 1969, the state farms in Yunnan were militarized into the Yunnan Production and Construction Corps (army level). State farm workers then became either soldiers or military workers. This alteration in status had been a key attraction for urban youth from Chongqing, Chengdu and Shanghai, since the PLA enjoyed an unprecedented degree of prestige in this period.

These boys and girls, their imaginations fired with revolution, enthusiasm, devotion and sacrifice, had no idea of what lay ahead of them. Two elements quickly changed their illusions of life in the PLA and drastically altered their ideals. The first was the abuse of power and resources by PLA officers (promotions, recommendations for schools and universities, or work opportunities back in the cities). The second was the hardship they faced, including poor food, housing, sanitary conditions, social welfare, distance and isolation (For example, newspapers from Kunming arrived after a week's delay.)

10 *Nongkenzhi*, pp. 21–22.

11 *Ibid.* pp. 22–24.

12 *Ibid.* p. 27.

13 Yihong Pan, "An examination of the goals of the rustication program in the People's Republic of China," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 11, No. 31 (2002), pp. 361–79.

14 Yunnan *zhiqing* lianyihui, "Yunnan *zhiqing* shangshanxiang dashi ji" ("Chronicle of the up-to-mountain and down-to-village *zhiqing* movement in Yunnan"), *Yunnan zhiqing*, No. 1 (2007), p. 57.

15 *Ibid.* p. 58.

The poor administration and the inhumane management of the semi-military system brought about many conflicts between the *zhiqing* and PLA officers, and directly sparked all kinds of resistance activities. The PLA officers were often rude and little educated, and thus seldom understood the feelings and demands of these urban students. Corporal punishment was universal for minor misconducts, especially when PLA officers were unable to debate against the *zhiqing* who were masters of Mao's quotes. Trifling offences, including napping or passing wind in a meeting, swearing or verbal abuse, resulted in various physical punishments. All the *zhiqing* interviewed concurred that nobody was spared from being beaten.<sup>16</sup>

The girls suffered most. In addition to carrying out heavy physical labour, they were harassed by PLA officers. Many girls were cheated, sexually harassed and even raped, some without even knowing what sex was, given the education at that time. The number of victims is hard to ascertain, but rapes were certainly not rare occurrences, and on some farms, girls shared a general fear of rape. When some victims reported their sufferings, they were ignored or even prosecuted.

The accumulated scandals finally reached the high command. On 4 July 1973, the New China Agency reported that Regiment 18 (Division 4) abused the *zhiqing*.<sup>17</sup> Within two days, Zhou Enlai ordered immediate resolutions for “these Fascist activities,” and dispatched an investigation team to hold public interrogations; in order to prevent local military bureaucrats from shielding one other, Zhou ordered that all the reports had to be decided by the Provincial Committee before execution and that measures should be taken to protect the *zhiqing* concerned.<sup>18</sup> On 11 August, the Provincial Party Committee and Party Committee of the Kunming Military Area Command acknowledged that the abuse was even more serious than had been reported. In October, it was reported that within Regiment 18, the *zhiqing* were tied, hung and beaten on 1,034 occasions, 1,874 *zhiqing* were persecuted, two were beaten to death, and 430 girls were harassed or raped. As many as 286 cadres were involved in the abuse and 18 were arrested on rape charges.<sup>19</sup> Two days later, on 29 October, reflecting the seriousness of the situation, the Corps thought that the military system was no longer suitable and suggested the Corps be abolished and replaced by an economic organization. The General Bureau of Agricultural Reclamation (*Nongken zongju* 农垦总局) was resumed to replace the Corps on 26 June 1974.<sup>20</sup> Sexual harassment and physical punishments were much reduced, but some cases were later reported.

Surprisingly, when interviewed, the returned *zhiqing* did not talk about political prosecution or physical punishment; instead, all had the same complaint: “no dishes to eat (*meiyou cai chi* 没有菜吃).”<sup>21</sup> The typical Chinese three daily meals

16 Interviews, June 2007, Kunming and Chongqing.

17 *Nongkenzhi*, p. 32.

18 *Ibid.* p. 33.

19 *Ibid.* p. 33.

20 *Ibid.* pp. 33–34.

21 Interviews, Kunming and Chongqing, June 2007.

include rice as the staple and various vegetables or meat dishes. Rice alone does not constitute a meal. The *zhiqing* were given few dishes; often they ate “glass soup” (*boli tang* 玻璃汤), a glamorous term for a salty soup with a few vegetable leaves floating on the surface. One *zhiqing* who spent almost nine years in Puwen Laogai Farm (*Puwen laogai nongchang* 普文劳改农场) stated that what he ate there was better than on his former state farm.<sup>22</sup> A local cadre confirmed this statement.<sup>23</sup>

Driven by hunger, the *zhiqing* quickly learned from local people how to find edible wild plants and roots. Wild animals, fish and worms were trapped and consumed. Home gardens were established, but pilfering of vegetables, pigs and dogs was widespread and soon destroyed the gardeners’ enthusiasm.

Life was hard but people adapted, discontent was universal but not unified, and resistance (such as idling at work) was common but not influential. The silent majority hoped for changes, while a few pioneers made real plans.

### Ding Huimin and His Letters

1978 was a year of change. The Cultural Revolution was over; many policies were changed and previously denounced names showed up. The Sent Down Movement was in a predicament, since urban youth no longer wanted to participate. The so-called back-to-city wind (*fancheng feng* 返城风) emerged, when many *zhiqing*, especially those from cadre families, made full use of the grey rules of the *zhiqing* policy and escaped to cities. In the state farm system, about 1.3 million youths had left by the end of 1978, thanks to certain adjustments by the state that allowed the *zhiqing* to go to school or be recruited by urban units for various reasons.<sup>24</sup> Of the 100,000 *zhiqing* in Yunnan state farms, around 70,000 were still there by the end of 1978.<sup>25</sup> They fell into an atmosphere of jealousy, depression and desperation. It was at this moment that Ding Huimin publicized his letter.

Ding Huimin, the initiator and leader of the petition who joined Regiment 1, Division 1 in Jinghong in 1971, had long thought about a solution to their dilemma. Ding, himself a victim of persecution in 1973–74, was arrested, detained, punished and badly beaten, leaving him with life-long injuries. His saddened parents wrote over 600 petition letters.<sup>26</sup> Ding remained at home for nearly

22 Interviews, Chongqing, June 2007.

23 Liu Yifei, “Nanwang de 1973 – Yichang teshu de ‘fanfubai’ douzheng jishi” (“The unforgotten 1973 – a record of a special anti-corruption struggle”), in Qu Bo and Luo Xiaowen (eds.), *Jufeng guaguo yaredai yulin* (*Hurricane Having Blown the Tropical Rainforest*, hereafter *Jufeng*) (Beijing: Zhongguo shiyejia chubanshe, 2006), p. 18.

24 Zhao Fan, *Recalling the Journey of my Expedition*, p. 208.

25 Zhuo Renzheng, “Tuoshan chuli zhiqing fancheng, kaiqi zhongguo gaige zhi men” (“Appropriately handling the *zhiqing*’s urban return, and opening China’s door of reform”), Part I, *Shenghuo xinbao*, Kunming, Yunnan, 8 May 2008, p. A12.

26 Ding Huimin, “Banna zhiqing zai xingdong” (“The *zhiqing* of Xishuangbanna are acting”), in Liu Xiaomeng (ed.), *Zhongguo zhiqing koushu shi* (*An Oral History of Chinese Zhiqing*) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe, 2004), p. 397.

two years until Mao's death, seeing doctors in Hubei and Shanghai before going back to the farm where he was given monetary compensation and a new position in a farm school.<sup>27</sup>

On 16 October 1978, Ding publicized his first letter to Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping with a poster “The voice of our hearts” (*Women de xinsheng* 我们的心声).<sup>28</sup> The letter was widely read, circulated, hand-copied, discussed, commented on and signed.<sup>29</sup> By 11 November, over 1,000 *zhiqing* had signed it.<sup>30</sup> As expected, Ding became publicly regarded as head of the *zhiqing* when a revolutionary atmosphere was created.

Ding first mailed the letter to the provincial office of *zhiqing* affairs, asking for it to be passed to Deng. Learning that the letter had not reached Deng, the *zhiqing* immediately wrote to *China Youth Daily*. At the time, there was a hot debate in Beijing concerning the movement, and a second national conference on the *zhiqing* was held between 31 October and 10 December 1978. On 23 November, *China Youth Daily* responded to the letter by publishing an article, “On the correct understanding of the *zhiqing* Up-To-Mountain and Down-To-Village issue” (*Zhengque renshi zhishiqingnian shangshan xiexiang wenti* 正确认识知识青年上山下乡问题) pointing out that the Movement's problems were mounting and demanding an urgent solution.<sup>31</sup> This encouraged the *zhiqing* so much that they saw it as a signal of central determination, and organized action became a common idea.<sup>32</sup>

In his second letter, published on 18 November, Ding directly challenged the Sent Down Movement.<sup>33</sup> At the end of November, representatives from all farms in Xishuangbanna held their first secret meeting and agreed to establish a leading team to found the co-operation and organization of the forthcoming petition.<sup>34</sup> As a result, over 50,000 *zhiqing* in Xishuangbanna gained leaders representing their interests.

## Petitioning

While the *zhiqing* mobilized and organized themselves, farm leaders remained silent and never interfered, except when a Party secretary once showed up and insisted upon suggestions going through the farm organization to reach the centre.<sup>35</sup> Farm leaders probably didn't want a face-to-face confrontation, especially while they were waiting for the decisions of the *zhiqing* national conference.

27 *Ibid.* p. 398.

28 Zhuo Renzheng, “Appropriately handling the *zhiqing*'s urban return,” Part I, p. A12.

29 Official figures were over 6,000. See Zhao Fan, *Recalling the Journey of my Expedition*, p. 208. This figure was obviously underestimated.

30 Zhuo Renzheng, “Appropriately handling the *zhiqing*'s urban return,” Part I, A12.

31 *Ibid.*

32 Ding Huimin, “The *zhiqing* of Xishuangbanna are acting,” p. 407.

33 *Ibid.* p. 406.

34 *Ibid.* pp. 407–08.

35 *Ibid.* pp. 406–08. Only small skirmishes occurred on some farms.

On 8 December 1978, over 120 *zhiqing* from more than 70 farms held the second Xishuangbanna *zhiqing* representative meeting, passed many resolutions and elected the General Preparation Team for the Beijing Petition (*Xishuangbannadiqu zhiqing fujing qingyuan choubei zongzu* 西双版纳地区知青赴京请愿筹备总组), with Ding as general commander.<sup>36</sup> Ding drafted the third petition letter that documented the social injustices under the Gang of Four, and pleaded with the Party to amend the policy.<sup>37</sup>

On 9 December, after failed attempts to contact local cadres who adopted the ostrich approach, Ding decided on a street rally. Within a few minutes, a strike announcement was drafted: from that day onward, all the *zhiqing* would hold a general strike for an unlimited period, and a petition team would go to Beijing on 15 December.<sup>38</sup> In just two to three days, the whole state farm bureaucratic institution was paralysed. The *zhiqing* immediately filled the vacuum and took charge of the farms, while their donations helped to raise money for the Beijing trip.

On 14 December, a provincial work team arrived, as a strike of over 50,000 people was no small matter. In an audience with the provincial work team, the *zhiqing* emphasized that local farm leaders were responsible for the strike and that their only aim was to return home.<sup>39</sup> The work team had no authority to meet this demand, but agreed to report to provincial leaders. They also informed the *zhiqing* that the second national *zhiqing* conference was being convened and that results were imminent. Ding agreed to postpone the Beijing trip. On 15 December, the *zhiqing* conference resolutions were broadcast and this pushed the movement to a point of no return.<sup>40</sup> While the resolution seemed to relax rigid *zhiqing* policies somewhat and implied the state's intention to solve the problem slowly, it stated that from henceforward, the *zhiqing* would no longer enjoy special treatment under state policy and would be seen as ordinary state farm workers, which meant that they were deprived of their right to return to urban homes and must spend the rest of their lives on the farms. This destroyed the *zhiqing*'s common expectations and sparked mass protests and strikes.

Internal factions troubled Ding Huimin. Representatives were divided into two groups, partly because some *zhiqing* disagreed with Ding's strategic plan.<sup>41</sup> The first group decided on an immediate northern march. On 16 December 1978, with 43 people and 4,600 yuan, they left for Kunming.<sup>42</sup> On the way, their money disappeared. It was suspected that the police had done this to stop them. Ding promptly provided them with another 700 yuan.<sup>43</sup>

36 *Ibid.* p. 409.

37 "QingYuanshu" ("The petition letter"), in *Jufeng*, p. 599.

38 Ding Huimin, "The *zhiqing* of Xishuangbanna are acting," p. 411.

39 *Ibid.* p. 412.

40 *Ibid.* pp. 412–15.

41 Interview, Kunming, 22 December 2007. Factionalism accompanied the whole process, but it indeed distracted local and provincial leaders, and facilitated the final solution. While many details of the movement are still open to question, Ding Huimin as the initiator and key leader remains unchallenged.

42 Ding Huimin, "The *zhiqing* of Xishuangbanna are acting," p. 416.

43 *Ibid.* p. 418.



The second group under Ding continued to meet the provincial work team, although the team had now hardened its attitude because of the new resolution, while at the same time secretly preparing for a northern march. Ding decided that he would lead the petition group to Beijing, while the rest of the representatives stayed in Xishuangbanna to make sure the strike continued.<sup>44</sup> On the morning of 18 December 1978, in the presence of several thousand *zhiqing* and *The Internationale*, Ding and his comrades resolutely set off. Ding, exhausted by work and injuries, was carried on a stretcher by other representatives. Possibly alerted by what had happened to the first group, he divided his group into three teams. Teams one and two for Shanghai and Chongqing would publicize the aim of the movement and win public sympathy and support, while team three under Ding would go secretly to Beijing. On the morning of 23 December, teams one and two, carrying eye-catching slogans, marched to Kunming, while Ding and the other 27 people took a train to Chengdu.<sup>45</sup>

Arriving in Kunming and troubled by a lack of funding and a bureaucratic response, the first group decided to take the train to Beijing. On the afternoon of 24 December, they boarded the train; however, the authorities stopped it. In the tragic confusion that followed, the station authorities (surely under provincial leaders' orders) closed off the entry point and cornered the *zhiqing*. A fight took place and several *zhiqing* were badly beaten. Some decided to lie on the train track (*wogui* 卧轨), preventing Express No. 62 (Kunming–Beijing) from departing. Vice-Premier Li Xiannian immediately issued a three-point directive, demanding the *zhiqing*'s immediate return to the farms. With the appearance of police and soldiers, the *zhiqing* were forced to leave after lying on the track for over 20 hours.<sup>46</sup> A day or two later, a few *zhiqing* representatives were permitted to go to Beijing.<sup>47</sup>

## Beijing

The first group certainly distracted the provincial authorities and probably helped Ding Huimin. On 27 December, he and his group arrived in Tiananmen Square and displayed their slogan, “We want to meet Chairman Hua! We want to meet Vice-Chairman Deng!” and “We want to accuse! We want to sue!” They also conducted public speeches and distributed propaganda materials. That night, they were led to the Nonglin Hostel where Liu Jimin 刘济民, vice-director of the Agricultural Reclamation Bureau, appeared. Liu told them that Zhao Fan 赵凡, the bureau director, had been dispatched to Yunnan to solve the problem.<sup>48</sup>

44 *Ibid.* pp. 416–18.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 422.

46 *Ibid.* pp. 423–24.

47 *Ibid.* p. 425. Liu Tingming, a member of group one, met Ding Huimin in Beijing, but the other representatives of group one arrived about a week after Ding left Beijing on 5 January 1979.

48 *Ibid.* p. 428.

A series of talks followed between the *zhiqing* and various state departments. The *zhiqing* begged the state to re-examine the *zhiqing* issue and listed reasons for their requests. On 30 December, Liu Jimin told Ding that a draft official resolution would justify Ding's activities and required him to mobilize the *zhiqing* to resume normal order. An agreement was finally reached the following night, whereby the state would recognize the petition if Ding agreed to stop the strike. On 4 January 1979, Ding and nine followers had an audience with Wang Zhen 王震, a Vice-Premier and new member of the CCP Political Bureau.<sup>49</sup>

According to Ding, the priority for the Beijing trip was to pass the petition letter to the state leaders with the rank of political bureau membership and Vice-Premier or above. The authorities must have heard about this requirement, and it was eventually arranged. Wang was the right spokesperson, because he had long been in charge of the reclamation project. He was a lifelong staunch Maoist idealist and a key figure in the frontier reclamation movements, especially in Xinjiang. In fact, he was the one most targeted and criticized by the *zhiqing*.<sup>50</sup>

During the audience, Wang delivered a long speech. He scolded the Gang of Four and assumed that the *zhiqing* petition was mainly for the marriage issue. He enthusiastically told the *zhiqing* that he would ask Big Sister Deng (Zhou Enlai's widow) to recruit girls from Shandong,<sup>51</sup> a measure he had done in Shanghai and Hunan for the bachelors in his Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. The speech made little sense to the *zhiqing*, and showed that Wang had not understood the petition and obviously, like many other leaders, failed to realize the serious nature of the problem. That night, Wang Zhen invited the *zhiqing* to watch a film. Disappointed with Wang's speech, Ding rejected the invitation, which greatly embarrassed the authorities. To solve this dilemma, Wang's secretary telephoned Ding to say that Wang would pass Deng Xiaoping's directive, so Ding agreed to attend.<sup>52</sup>

Before the film, Wang announced that the petition letter had been passed to Hua and Deng. Afterwards, Liu Tingming 刘庭明, a recent arrival from group one, called out Wang's name, creating a sudden turmoil. Wang was very angry and warned: "You want trouble? Then watch out for me! (*Ni yao nao bieniu, gei wo xiaoxin dian* 你要闹别扭? 给我小心点!)"<sup>53</sup> Disturbed by this episode, Ding immediately dispatched a member to buy tickets. At dawn on 5 January, Ding and his team left Beijing.<sup>54</sup>

49 *Ibid.* pp. 428–29. The above is based on Ding's recollections. Also see Zhuo Renzheng, "Tuoshan chuli zhiqing fancheng, kaiqi zhongguo gaige zhi men" ("Appropriately handling the *zhiqing*'s urban return, and opening China's door of reform"), Part II, *Shenghuo xinbao*, Kunming, Yunnan, 9 May 2008, p. A13.

50 Wang Zhen was responsible for mobilizing many urban youth and the *zhiqing* to Xinjiang. As such, the *zhiqing* called him "a human trafficker (*renfanzi*)." Yang Qingliang, "Ba mianzi liugei muqin, ba lizhi liugei ziji" ("Give face to mum; leave reason to ourselves"), in Liu Xiaomeng, *An Oral History of Chinese Zhiqing*, p. 523.

51 Ding Huimin, "The *zhiqing* of Xishuangbanna are acting," p. 432.

52 *Ibid.* p. 433.

53 *Ibid.* p. 435.

54 Interview. Kunming, 22 December 2007.

## Hunger Strike

On hearing of the strike and the northern march, the State Council immediately ordered Yunnan province and the State Reclamation Bureau to tackle it. On 25 December, Zhao Fan flew to Yunnan with An Pingsheng 安平生, the first Party secretary of Yunnan.<sup>55</sup> Zhao was a revolutionary cadre and had worked in Beijing before the Cultural Revolution. He was recently freed and assigned to direct the State Reclamation Bureau.

On 28 December, a work team was established, including Zhao Fan, Liu Minghui 刘明辉, governor of Yunnan, Xue Tao 薛韬 and Zhuang Yun 张云, both vice-provincial Party secretaries, and Xu Fa 许法, vice-director of the *zhiqing* office of the State Council.<sup>56</sup> On the night of 29 December, the work team and various provincial leaders held a meeting. Gao Yun 高云 from Sichuan related that Sichuan had discussed the issue and had decided that the *zhiqing* could return there in stages and in groups (*fenqi fenpi* 分期分批). Zhang Yun pointed out that one crucial problem was Shanghai, which had sent more than 10,000 peasants from Jiading county (a suburb of Shanghai). Zhao Fan explained that if they were truly peasants, they ought to be sent back.<sup>57</sup>

At noon on 30 December, Zhao Fan arrived at Simao where the headquarters of provincial state farms was located and met local cadres. He was updated with the most recent developments: about 30,000 *zhiqing* had joined the strike during its height; the road to Mengla had been dug up and blocked and over 20 military trucks stranded; there were 64 leaders of the strike; and six *zhiqing* who had insisted on working were beaten by strikers. Zhao Fan immediately took a jeep and arrived in Jinghong that night where he talked to eight local farm leaders for three days.<sup>58</sup> Zhao Fan implied that local cadres preferred tough measures, but he shared a different message from the top: the State Council had decided to pay the *zhiqing* wages during the strike; the big principle (*da daoli* 大道理) was lenient and the state would deal leniently with the strikers (*kuanda chuli* 宽大处理); he emphasized that the government had made this decision and all should adopt this stance; he also mentioned that the use of the army was a possibility, but we “cannot do that (*buneng nayang zuo* 不能那样做).”<sup>59</sup>

In the following days, Zhao visited eight farms in Xishuangbanna and observed the miserable life of the *zhiqing*. For example, a newly wed couple living in a house on the verge of collapse had nothing to eat but three *liang* of radish daily. In Team 10, the *zhiqing* consumed only six *liang* of meat and 2.7 *liang* of oil in a whole year. Zhao was shocked and realized that the strike had deep causes and was not simply a few people causing trouble.<sup>60</sup>

55 Zhao Fan, *Recalling the Journey of my Expedition*, p. 209.

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Ibid.* p. 210.

58 *Ibid.* p. 211.

59 *Ibid.* pp. 211–12.

60 *Ibid.* pp. 213 and 215.

While Ding Huimin was elected and publicly acknowledged as the leader of the petition neither he nor his representative in Xishuangbanna had established firm control over the *zhiqing* from the different farms. Disappointed with the talks with the provincial work team, on 6 January, over 200 *zhiqing* in the Mengding 勐定 Farm started a hunger strike. Zhao Fan immediately went to Mengding, and on 10 January talked to four *zhiqing* representatives. At 4 p.m., Zhao went to the square where about 1,500 strikers sat. Catching sight of him, the *zhiqing* all cried out and knelt down. Being a parent of three *zhiqing*, Zhao appeared sincerely moved. He promised that he would pass the message to the top.<sup>61</sup>

On 13 and 14 January, back in Jinghong, Zhao shared his recent experience with local and work team cadres. He felt that it was the toughest experience he had ever had (often repeating this in his memoir).<sup>62</sup> On 16 January, Zhao returned to Kunming and discussed the final solution with other leaders.

During this period, Yunnan discussed the issue with Sichuan, Beijing and Shanghai. Sichuan agreed to take back its *zhiqing* in two years and presented its decision to the state. Hu Yaobang shared the report with Beijing and Shanghai; Beijing disagreed with Sichuan while Shanghai was in between: it agreed to take the *zhiqing* back, but not for two or three years, and without any official promise made to them. On 12 January, Yunnan presented a report on the *zhiqing* agreeing with Sichuan, and asked the state to make an immediate decision. On 18 January, Zhao Fan, representing the central investigation team, presented a report that asked the state to allow the *zhiqing*'s return, which the State Council immediately approved.<sup>63</sup> On the afternoon of 21 January, An Pingsheng made a provincial decision: whoever did not want to stay could just leave (*bu yuanyi liu de, tongtong zou* 不愿意留的, 统统走); if they wanted to stay, they were welcome.<sup>64</sup> The next day the State Council held an emergency meeting on the issue and approved the solution proposed by the central investigation team and Yunnan province.<sup>65</sup>

Ding Huimin, by then back in Kunming, was warmly welcomed by provincial leaders who expected him to control the chaos. In Jinghong on 18 January, Ding ordered his team to gather in five days' time.<sup>66</sup> None of them expected an immediate solution when the news broke on 23 January. The *zhiqing* immediately rushed to the farm office to complete all kinds of procedures (the most important being the transfer of *hukou*). Because of the crowds, some farms just left official seals on fences or doors so that they were easily available. To get home as quickly as possible, many *zhiqing* couples had to get divorced and some children were

61 *Ibid.* p. 215.

62 *Ibid.*

63 Zhuo Renzheng, "Appropriately handling the *zhiqing*'s urban return," Part II, p. A07.

64 Zhao Fan, *Recalling the Journey of my Expedition*, pp. 216–17.

65 Yunnan *Zhiqing* Lianyihui, "Chronicle of the up-to-mountain and down-to-village *zhiqing* movement in Yunnan," p. 62.

66 Ding Huimin, "The *zhiqing* of Xishuangbanna are acting," p. 437.

abandoned. By the end of 1979, over 61,500 *zhiqing*, about 94 per cent of all those on the farms, had returned to cities.<sup>67</sup>

The news of the Yunnan success quickly spread among the *zhiqing* all over the country and brought the back-to-city wind movement to its height. By the end of 1979, over seven million *zhiqing* had returned home.<sup>68</sup> In the early summer of 1980, the CCP announced the end of the Sent Down Movement.<sup>69</sup> By June 1980, only 1.5 million *zhiqing* still remained in rural areas and on state farms.<sup>70</sup>

## Xinjiang

In the wider context of national *zhiqing* protests, the Yunnan petition encouraged the *zhiqing* in Xinjiang to act immediately. The majority of those in Xinjiang were recruited from Shanghai before the Cultural Revolution. By early 1979 their counterparts in Yunnan, Inner Mongolia, Heilongjiang, Jilin, Anhui, Jiangsu and Guizhou had returned home, while they, who had suffered longest, were not allowed to leave. From February 1979 to the end of 1980, the *zhiqing* in Xinjiang followed the Yunnan example, but their movement ended with a bloody suppression.<sup>71</sup>

The *zhiqing* in Akesu 阿克苏, southern Xinjiang, pioneered and organized four petitions in 1979, but their demands and their organization were dismissed as illicit. By the end of 1979, petitions and protests in Xinjiang had reached a climax. Strikes had spread to all 21 farms. On 21 January 1980, the Xinjiang Autonomous Region government issued an announcement, ordering the disbanding of all “illegal” *zhiqing* organizations and a ceasing of all illegal activities. In November 1980, nearly 4,000 *zhiqing* rushed into Akesu and occupied government buildings. A hunger strike was held from 23 to 27 November, with nearly 1,300 *zhiqing* participating at its height. The Akesu event was soon replicated in Kashi 喀什 and Kurle 库尔勒. Facing enormous pressure, local authorities decided to let the *zhiqing* leave. Many farms gave them *hukou* cards and even a transportation allowance. This, however, was not approved by the upper authorities and Shanghai refused to accept the *zhiqing*.

On 26 December 1980, the *zhiqing* representatives in Akesu were misled: promised an audience with leaders, they were arrested in the early morning. Akesu was placed under military law by PLA forces. Some *zhiqing* leaders were sentenced and jailed and about 30,000 Shanghai *zhiqing* were forced to stay on. In the following decades, sporadic resistance, protests and petitions occurred in Xinjiang,

67 *Nongkenzhi*, p. 36.

68 Liu Xiaomeng, *An Oral History of Chinese Zhiqing*, p. 20.

69 *Ibid.* pp. 33–34.

70 *Ibid.* p. 796.

71 The Xinjiang event is a summary of the memoirs of Ouyang Lian and Yang Qingliang, both leaders of the movement. Ouyang was sentenced to four years in prison. Ouyang Lian, “Akesu shijian shimo” (“A history of the Akesu event”), in Liu Xiaomeng, *An Oral History of Chinese Zhiqing*, pp. 445–505; Yang Qingliang, “Give face to mum.”

Shanxi, Shanghai, Beijing, Shaanxi and Inner Mongolia, but their demands were mostly rejected.<sup>72</sup>

It is important to note the many similarities between the two *zhiqing* movements in Yunnan and Xinjiang: the same types of participants, comparable experiences, organizations, strategies and demands, and similar cadres in charge of equal calibre, such as Zhao Fan and Liu Jimin. Yet their outcomes contrast sharply, which raises a key question: what factors led to the success in Yunnan? Indeed, throughout the Cultural Revolution, the *zhiqing* in Yunnan, like their counterparts in other provinces, made efforts to utilize all kinds of power struggles to justify their home-return (such as accusing the Sent Down Movement of being the legacy of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping's line, or that of Lin Biao's), but they were simply rejected and suppressed.<sup>73</sup> If we look at the history of 20th-century China, almost all major mass movements were bloodily suppressed by various authorities, whether central or local, Chinese or foreign, warlords or party-states. I venture to suggest that the combination of three key reasons at this historical juncture contribute to Yunnan's success. First, the movement was well-organized<sup>74</sup> and won national sympathy. Moreover, Zhao Fan, whose wisdom and courage facilitated the peaceful ending, played an indispensable role.<sup>75</sup> Secondly, it happened at a very special and crucial moment that saw intense power struggles within the CCP. Thirdly, China was planning an offensive against Vietnam, and Yunnan, as a frontier province bordering Vietnam, was of strategic importance. Having illustrated the first point in the account of the petition above, the last two points are now discussed.

### Power Struggles in the CCP

Timing is the key reason behind the CCP's decision to allow the *zhiqing* to leave. During 1976–78, the CCP witnessed radical changes in its leadership that were characterized by factionalism. Hua Guofeng as Mao's assigned successor made efforts to legitimize and consolidate his leadership, while some returned senior cadres resented Hua's adherence to Mao's legacy. Intense factional strife occurred between the so-called What-So-Ever group represented by Hua and the returned veterans represented by Deng Xiaoping.

The 1978–79 transition period was critical in this political wrangling. It was during this time that Deng gained the upper hand over Hua and was widely

72 For some details, see Pan Yihong, *Tempered in the Revolutionary Furnace*, pp. 232–33. Indeed, many *ex-zhiqing* have now organized themselves and negotiated with both central and local governments for their social welfare and other interests. Ding Huimin remains one of the most active and prominent leaders.

73 Bernstein, *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages*, pp. 263–89.

74 This point was emphasized by Pan Yihong. See Pan Yihong, *Tempered in the Revolutionary Furnace*, p. 228.

75 Zhao might later have been criticized for his words and decisions in Yunnan. Later in the Xinjiang event, although he was sympathetic, he could not do the same as in Yunnan. Yang Qingliang, "Give face to mum," p. 522.

regarded as the power centre of the CCP, and the reform and opening-up policies emerged. A major breakthrough for Deng occurred in the Central Work Conference (*zhongyang gongzuo huiyi* 中央工作会议) from 10 November to 15 December 1978.

While the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee is publicly accredited with establishing the new guidelines, in reality the conference set the tone for them and solved major issues. The significance and difficulty of the conference is reflected in its duration of 36 days, while the Third Plenary Session lasted just five days. In fact, the Third Plenary served as nothing more than an official recognition of the resolutions passed by the Central Work Conference, when the two factions confronted one another and high-ranking officials had to choose their positions. Ultimately, the veterans dominated the political arena overwhelmingly.

It was at this critical moment that the strike broke out. The *zhiqing* in Yunnan not only were a convenient tool for this power struggle but also might have played a role in the transfer of power from Hua to Deng. The *zhiqing*'s grudges were universally shared by Chinese people, and social discontent reached such a pitch that senior leaders realized that the people had to be comforted in some way and to some degree. The veterans saw the events in Xishuangbanna as a good opportunity to put pressure on the What-So-Ever cohort to change their stick-to-Maoism position. The *China Youth Daily* clearly built such a connection between the *zhiqing* and Deng. Indeed, on various occasions, many veterans commented on the *zhiqing* event and advocated a soft line.

Zhao Fan recalled that veterans such as Ye Jianying 叶剑英, Li Xiannian 李先念 and Hu Yaobang 胡耀邦 in Beijing, and Zhao Ziyang 赵紫阳 in Sichuan were firm advocates of a peaceful solution.<sup>76</sup> While Zhao never mentioned Deng Xiaoping, other sources show that Deng kept a close eye on events. A recently published official rhetoric confirmed my speculation.<sup>77</sup> Deng was one of the earliest leaders to realize the problems of the Sent Down Movement. As early as March 1978, Deng pointed out: “We must study how to incorporate labourers within urban cities; the Up-to-Mountain and Down-to-Village was not a long-term solution; peasants do not welcome it ... Our first step is: no more urban youth to rural areas, and afterwards take people out of rural areas.”<sup>78</sup>

Throughout the situation, Deng was well informed and gave comments and instructions.<sup>79</sup> When Yunnan did not pass Ding Huimin's letter to Deng Xiaoping, *China Youth Daily* not only published an article expressing sympathy with the *zhiqing* and calling for broad and urgent attention, but also addressed a letter and passed relevant materials including Ding's letter to Deng on 25

76 *Jufeng*, p. 632.

77 Zhuo Renzheng, “Appropriately handling the *zhiqing*'s urban return,” Part I, pp. A12–A13, Part II, pp. A06–A07.

78 Zhao Fan, *Recalling the Journey of my Expedition*, p. 208.

79 Zhuo Renzheng, “Appropriately handling the *zhiqing*'s urban return,” Part I, pp. A12–A13, Part II, pp. A06–A07.

November.<sup>80</sup> This information straightaway caught Deng's attention. Within a month, he delivered five instructions or directives on the *zhiqing*.<sup>81</sup> On 1 December, apparently before he had read the letter from *China Youth Daily* and therefore did not understand the urgency of the *zhiqing* matter, Deng encouraged the borrowing of foreign experience to develop the Xishuangbanna economy and stressed that *zhiqing* work must be well handled.<sup>82</sup> The day after, he had an audience with Hu Yaobang and Yu Guangyuan 于光远 to discuss the concluding speech of the Central Work Conference. We do not know whether or not Hu mentioned the *zhiqing* issue, but that day Deng read the letter, and sent the following comments on the strike to Yunnan province: “[Comfort] work should be continued. No suppression (*yingzuo gongzuo, buying yazhi* 应做工作, 不应压制).”<sup>83</sup> Ten days later, Deng once again suggested various methods for economic development in Xishuangbanna. On New Year's Eve, speaking with Wang Zhen, Deng stated that the *zhiqing* matter concerned national peace and stability.<sup>84</sup> During his audience with Ding Huimin on 4 January 1979, Wang Zhen passed on Deng's directives.<sup>85</sup> After the audience, Wang immediately reported to Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping; he also passed a *zhiqing* petition letter to Deng.<sup>86</sup> On 23 January, Ding Huimin and his followers wrote a letter to Wang Zhen, who responded on 27 January. Wang immediately reported to Deng and Hua, and Deng read the letter just before his flight to the United States the following day.<sup>87</sup> All the available information implies that Deng played a key part in the lenient decision.

However, the CCP hardened its line with *zhiqing* policies in early February 1979, just a couple of weeks after the peaceful solution. While the *zhiqing* elsewhere were allowed to go home, organized activities or mass protests were prohibited. On 10 February, *People's Daily* published Ding Huimin's telegram to Wang Zhen. In their 23 January telegram, Ding and his followers (a tactical face-saving effort for the CCP, according to Ding) regretted their radical activities that had yielded a negative influence on peace and unity.<sup>88</sup> The publication date of this telegram not only delivered a message that criticized the *zhiqing*, but also signalled a change in policy. Three days later, *China Youth Daily* published an editorial, “The youth must correctly understand and use democratic rights,” that again criticized the *zhiqing*.<sup>89</sup> On 17 February, the CCP Central Committee

80 Zhuo Renzheng, “Appropriately handling the *zhiqing*'s urban return,” Part I, p. A12.

81 *Ibid.* p. A13.

82 Zhao Fan, *Recalling the Journey of my Expedition*, p. 208.

83 Zhonggongzhongyang wenxianyanjiushi (ed.), *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu, 1975–1997 (Chronological Life of Deng Xiaoping, 1975–1997)* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2004), p. 446.

84 Zhuo Renzheng, “Appropriately handling the *zhiqing*'s urban return,” Part I, p. A13.

85 Ding Huimin, “The *zhiqing* of Xishuangbanna are acting,” p. 433.

86 Zhuo Renzheng, “Appropriately handling the *zhiqing*'s urban return,” Part II, p. A06.

87 *Ibid.*

88 Du Honglin, *Fengchao dangluo-Zhongguo zhishiqingnian shangshanxiang yundongshi (The Ebb and Flow of the Tide: A History of Chinese Zhiqing Up-to-Mountain and Down-to-Village Movement)* (Shenzhen: Haitian chubanshe, 1993), pp. 402–03.

89 *Ibid.* p. 403.



and the State Council co-issued, “On further strengthening the peace and unity of our country (*Guanyu jinyibu jiaqiang quanguo anding tuanjie de tongzhi* 关于进一步加强全国安定团结的通知)” that rejected “all [the *zhiqing*’s] unreasonable demands (*yiqie bu heli yaoqi* 一切不合理要求).”<sup>90</sup>

The policy change was just one of the tough measures taken to deal with other pro-democratic activities and people. A close reading of Deng’s words during those few months reveals a sudden change in his attitude. Before the end of January 1979, Deng welcomed pro-democratic mass protests, petitions and speeches. On 26 November 1978, in his audience with Japanese guests, Deng stated that the Big Character Paper was permitted by the Constitution and thus “we do not have the right to deny or criticize the masses promoting democracy.”<sup>91</sup> Deng’s words encouraged over 7,000 people to gather at the Democracy Wall the following day. When *People’s Daily* published Deng’s speech on 28 November, nearly 20,000 people assembled.<sup>92</sup> Ye Jianying also welcomed the pro-democratic atmosphere and activities. In his speech in the Central Work Conference on 13 December 1978, Ye thought highly of the Democracy Wall, concluding: “The Third Plenary Session is the democratic model within the Party and the Xidan Democracy Wall is the democratic model of the people.”<sup>93</sup> Until 27 January 1979, two days before Deng’s visit to the United States, when Hu Yaobang introduced the theory meeting (*lilun wuxuhui* 理论务虚会), Deng still supported the Democracy Wall, commenting: “Full of drive! (*ke youjin* 可有劲).” Deng also showed great interest in the democracy issue and ordered a gathering of 20–30 people to write a big article on democracy.<sup>94</sup>

The turmoil of the theory meeting also resonated with Deng’s change. The original aim of the meeting was to criticize “leftist” theory and deepen thought liberation. Deng initially welcomed the theme, but soon accepted Hu Qiaomu’s opinion and launched another anti-rightist campaign.<sup>95</sup> On 30 March, at the concluding session of the theory conference, Deng surprised Hu Yaobang and liberal intellectuals by announcing the “on the four-upholds” campaign that attacked pro-democratic ideas and people. He listed some active student and worker organizations in the pro-democratic movements, accusing them of allying with international political forces, with outlawed societies, with followers of the Gang of Four, and objecting to the proletariat dictatorship.<sup>96</sup> He announced

90 Shi Weimin and He Lan, *Zhiqing beiwanglu: shangshanxiaxiang yundong zhong de shengchan jianshe binguan* (*Memorandum of Zhiqing: Production and Construction Corps in the Movement of Up-to-Mountain and Down-To-Village*) (Beijing: Shehuikexue chubanshe, 1996), pp. 420–21.

91 Ruan Ming, *Deng Xiaoping diguo* (*Deng Xiaoping’s Empire*) (Taipei: Shibaowenhua chubanshe, 1992), p. 50.

92 Su Shaozhi, *Shinian fengyu: wenge hou de dalu lilunjie* (*The Ten-Year Winds and Rains: the post-Cultural Revolution Theory Sphere in the Mainland*) (Taipei: Shibaowenhua chubanshe, 1996), p. 105.

93 Ruan Ming, *Deng Xiaoping’s Empire*, p. 50.

94 *Ibid.* p. 62.

95 *Ibid.* p. 58.

96 *Ibid.* p. 72.

that these anti-revolutionaries and their elements would be seriously dealt with.<sup>97</sup> The day before Deng's talk, Wei Jingsheng, who had warned people that Deng might have turned into a dictator in his 25 March essay on the fifth modernization, was arrested. One should bear in mind that the *zhiqing* movement not only coincided but also overlapped with the Democracy Wall Movement. To be fair, many *zhiqing* utilized and participated in the Democracy Wall Movement for their own sake. No wonder the state co-fertilized both movements simultaneously.<sup>98</sup>

The official change was clearly revealed in the conscious delimiting of the Yunnan case. Zhao Fan had intended to hold more studies and discussions on the *zhiqing* issue and a future meeting on 19 February was a good platform to address future similar problems. However, his enthusiasm met with a cold response from the top. On 15 February, Wang Renzhong, director of *zhiqing* affairs, called Zhao, stating that since the problem was resolved, no commentary or further report (probably a personal report by Zhao to some leaders) concerning the investigation on Yunnan was necessary; Wang also pointed out that the report might be discussed in the planned meeting.<sup>99</sup> His words implied that the top leaders had decided to hush the Yunnan case and prevent it from becoming a national phenomenon, with potentially catastrophic consequences. The Xinjiang tragedy was a case in point. In an audience with the *zhiqing* from Xinjiang on 28 April 1979, some leaders incidentally mentioned that the back-to-city wind had disrupted Deng Xiaoping's strategy.<sup>100</sup> Hence, it is interesting to compare the two petitions in Yunnan and Xinjiang. The *zhiqing* in Xinjiang might have been as well organized as those in Yunnan, and both are multi-ethnic and frontier regions (though Xinjiang had little to do with the Sino-Vietnamese War), but Xinjiang did not have the triple combination; in particular, it occurred after the CCP had decided on a harsh attitude to all mass protests, especially organized activities. In addition, the suppression more or less saved face for some leaders such as Wang Zhen who was considerably unhappy with the resolution of Yunnan. In December 1981, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps were resumed, the only one in China.

Thus, the change in the *zhiqing* policy was just part of a larger change in the CCP which took place between the end of January and early February 1979. After this, Deng emphasized peace and stability and attacked and suppressed mass democratic activities. Consequently, state machines were mobilized, mass movements were forbidden and many people were arrested.

97 *Ibid.* p. 62.

98 I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this point. And I agree that the Democracy Wall Movement had a greater role than the *zhiqing* movement in the CCP power struggle.

99 Zhao Fan, *Recalling the Journey of my Expedition*, p. 218.

100 Yang Qingliang, "Give face to mum," p. 524.

## The Sino-Vietnamese War

The Sino-Vietnamese War was another key factor in terms of timing and location, as Yihong Pan has noted.<sup>101</sup> By the late 1970s, the Sino-Vietnamese relationship had ended its honeymoon period. Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam were abused and expatriated. Skirmishes along the border were frequent. On 3 November 1978, Moscow and Hanoi signed a 25-year treaty for a military and political alliance, and this gave the green light for Vietnam’s invasion of Kampuchea in December 1978. Meanwhile, China and the United States were courting one another and China decided to give its former “little brother,” or “Cuba in the Orient,” to borrow an official Chinese expression, a good lesson to test the Soviet–Vietnamese alliance.

Although it is hard to know exactly when the CCP made decisions about this war, it is clear that the plan was discussed after the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea and before Deng’s visit of the United States at the end of January 1979. According to Pao-min Chang, it was on 8 January that Chinese officials for the first time used the phrase “teach Vietnam a lesson.”<sup>102</sup> This message was reiterated more clearly in Deng’s talks with the United States and Japan the following month. As recalled by Zbigniew Brzezinski, the then National Security Adviser to President Jimmy Carter, Deng requested “a private meeting” with Carter on 30 January.<sup>103</sup> In the meeting, Deng explicitly informed the United States that a limited war was on the agenda. To cite his words: “We consider it necessary to restrain the wild ambitions of the Vietnamese and give them an appropriate, specific lesson.” When politely asked to reconsider China’s decision, Deng insisted, “China must still teach Vietnam a lesson.”<sup>104</sup> Deng delivered the same message in Tokyo on 6 February.

Deng’s messages show that China had made the final decision before his departure on 29 January 1979. Given the fact that the *zhiquing* were handed the final approval on 22 January, we can conclude that the decision on the offensive was made in the middle of January or even earlier. In his audience with the *zhiquing* on 3 or 4 January, Wang Zhen mentioned that an offensive against Vietnam was being planned.<sup>105</sup> It was under such circumstances that the CCP leaders had compromised with the *zhiquing*, as a chaotic situation in Yunnan would surely have disrupted any military campaign.

The Cold War context is critical for a full understanding of the weighting of the *zhiquing*’s appeals, pushing the CCP to take a quick and soft stance. Interestingly, as previously mentioned, the Sent Down Movement and the recruiting of the

101 Pan Yihong, *Tempered in the Revolutionary Furnace*, p. 231.

102 Pao-Ming Chang, “The Sino-Vietnamese dispute over the ethnic Chinese,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 90 (1982), p. 226, n. 148.

103 Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977–1981* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1983), pp. 408–09.

104 *Ibid.* pp. 409–10.

105 See Ding Huimin’s online memoir, <http://www.cqbnzq.com/ShowPost.asp?ThreadID=853>. This, however, might be mistakenly recalled.

*zhiqing* to state farms had a lot to do with the Cold War. Through the marriage of the Cultural Revolution and the Sent Down Movement, these youth were not only expected to mould themselves into a firm proletariat generation, but also produce strategic materials for national defence and development. It is fair to argue that, both ideologically and pragmatically, the Cold War had its role.

### Some Reflections

The short period from the end of 1978 to early 1979 witnessed many crucial events both inside and outside China. The Soviet–Vietnamese alliance, the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea, the Sino-US normalization and the Sino-Vietnamese War constituted the key international changes for the Cold War. Meanwhile, essential transformations occurred in Chinese internal politics, with which the *zhiqing* movement had been intimately intertwined.

The above events served as the specific context within which the petition and similar mass movements in China broke out over a few months. Internal and international pressures pushed the CCP to allow the *zhiqing* in Yunnan to return home at that particular moment. With the establishment of Deng's power and hard line, subsequent demands from other *zhiqing* were rejected, the Democratic Wall was closed, organized activities or units were targeted, and liberal intellectuals were suppressed, silenced or even arrested. Ironically, it was the very launch of China's reform and opening-up policy that saw the beginning of the suppression of thought freedom, social organization and mobilization, and people's call for human rights.

The special win-win outcome does not preclude some comparative reflections on this petition. Pioneering studies of social movements in the West have been introduced to China. With a comparative perspective, McAdam, McCarthy and Zald have synthesized the three common factors of social movements: political opportunities, mobilizing structures (the forms of organizations, formal or informal) and framing processes (cultural dimensions), and they have used the three interactive factors to examine both the emergence and the development (including outcome) of social movements. This provides a convenient framework to reflect on the petition.

Put simply, political opportunities established the link between institutionalized politics and social movements by contextualizing the emergence of a social movement on the basis of change in the institutional structure. It serves not only as a necessary prerequisite but also as an impetus and justification for mobilization. Thus, resistance occurring “within the official discourse of deference” examined by James Scott is developed into the rightful resistance in rural China conceptualized by O'Brien and Li.<sup>106</sup> In both cases, official ideologies provide political opportunity for protesters' ethical claims. A protester in rural China

106 James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); O'Brien and Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China*.

“operates near the boundary of authorised channels, employs the rhetoric and commitments of the powerful to curb the exercise of power, hinges on locating and exploiting divisions with the state, and relies on mobilising support from the wider public.”<sup>107</sup> The *zhiqing* petition in Yunnan, although, unlike much rightful resistance, “local and regional rather than national or even transnational,”<sup>108</sup> reveals many similarities, such as rightful claims, official rhetoric and commitment, the utilization of a local-central division, the elite alliance and so on.

While its nature and features accord with rightful resistance, what most interests me is its cultural dimension in terms of its mobilizing structure and framing work that show striking similarities between it and other urban protests in 20th-century China, especially the 1989 movement. Seeing contentious politics as a dynamic process, Tilly points out that “pairs of actors have only a limited number of performances at their disposal,” which he names the repertoire of contention.<sup>109</sup> Esherick and Wasserstrom’s analyses of “political order” follow Tilly’s historically established repertoire of collective action and see the 1989 event as “an exercise in political theater.”<sup>110</sup> Indeed, the *zhiqing* provided a vivid illustration of the historical ritualization of political theatre, which people adeptly employed in 1989.<sup>111</sup>

The *zhiqing*, former Red Guards, were educated with such rituals and in such political theatres in their classrooms and in society. Having practised these numerous times before and during the Cultural Revolution, they were masters of state rituals and protest repertoires, and they knew how to organize, how to negotiate with leaders of different levels, how to behave under various circumstances, how to claim, when and where to march, when and how to compromise and retreat, when and where to chant state rhetoric, and so on. The political theatre and rituals such as audiences with cadres, work teams and the “four bigs,” public letters and lectures, posters, leaflets, channels via newspapers and mass letters, exchanges of telegrams with state leaders, and even hunger strikes and measured radical violence were all vividly displayed. As such, while the rapid change of the Cold War constituted the last straw, the *zhiqing* petition in Yunnan reveals a dynamic interaction in an authoritarian society. This fashion of negotiation has demonstrated its dynamics in recent mass protests in China, rural or urban, especially by adopting new technologies such as the internet and SMS on mobile phones.

107 O’Brien and Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China*, p. 2.

108 *Ibid.* p. 3.

109 Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 45.

110 Joseph W. Esherick and Jeffery N. Wasserstrom, “Acting out democracy: political theater in modern China,” in Wasserstrom and Perry, *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China*, p. 36.

111 *Ibid.* pp. 53–54.