

## **Severing the Links Between School Performance and Careers: the experience of China's urban schools, 1968–1976<sup>1</sup>**

**Jonathan Unger**

Ronald Dore's *The Diploma Disease* (1976) has described how schooling in most of the Third World countries has been distorted by the desperate desires of students to win modern sector jobs. School systems have been expanded rapidly in order to meet the students' demands for the diplomas that lead to jobs; but in a vicious circle, as the growing crowds of young people win diplomas, ever higher educational credentials have become necessary to obtain the jobs. In much of the Third World, as Dore points out, the end results can be crippling. The reputations of schools and the careers of teachers increasingly come to depend upon their students' rate of success in getting through the higher-school entrance examinations. Students spend years in rote cramming for this succession of selection examinations. Their contest to climb the school ladder implicitly teaches them to view the most common occupations of their society with disdain; and most of them are ultimately consigned to those very occupations as 'failures'.

The mass education programmes of Third World nations have come under critical scrutiny from a separate angle also. Study after study, in country after country, has shown that the children of the educated urban elites, coming from literate homes and with access to better schools, disproportionately have been able to climb the examination ladder into the coveted modern sector occupations. As one comparative analysis has observed, "Even when an educational system can stay justly selective from generation to generation, it will be governed by the children of the well-to-do, who persistently score better on examinations even when such examinations are not intentionally skewed in their favor" (Bereday, p. 131). The great expansions in the school systems of the Third World thus have not necessarily promoted a markedly greater equality of job opportunity.

### **School Admissions Before the Cultural Revolution**

In the 1960s, China's school structure resembled the educational structures of other late-developing countries in both of these respects. Entrance examinations helped determine which of the students were able to enter each higher level of education; the competition among students was tight; and many Chinese high schools, especially in the cities, competed to attain a high university entrance rate.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, mass education at the elementary school level did not mean equal opportunities to all students at the higher educational levels. Students who came from the educated households of the pre-revolution bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie tended to do better in the selection examinations than students from semi-literate working-class families.

Though the political leaderships of most countries would have been content with this state of affairs, in China it was the subject of debate among the highest leaders. National priorities were in conflict. The revolution had come to power in 1949 on the strength of two appeals that had won mass national backing: a patriotic promise to restore Chinese pride and

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper also appears in *Education versus Qualifications?* OXENHAM, JOHN (Ed.) (Allen & Unwin, 1984). Several paragraphs are borrowed from UNGER, JONATHAN (1982) *Education Under Mao: Class and Competition in Canton Schools 1960–1980* (Columbia University Press, paperback edition, 1983) with the permission of the publisher.

<sup>2</sup> The important exceptions to this 'diploma disease' competition, as we shall later observe, were China's urban vocational schools.

prosperity; and a social revolutionary pledge to increase the opportunities available to China's great majority of have-nots. From the early 1950s onward, whenever the Party leaders had to determine new policies, controversy arose over where and how to draw the balance between these two sets of goals. The moderates (the several groupings within the leadership which presently share power in China) defined the revolution more in terms of its nationalist/development goals; Mao and the radicals, on the other hand, seem to have become willing by the mid- and late 1960s to sacrifice fast development if such development meant abandoning the redistributive goals which favoured the 'proletarian' classes.

This issue of development versus redistribution had begun to focus in the 1960s on China's university admissions policies—and for a simple reason. The mass education efforts of the 1950s had allowed greatly expanded numbers of children into the secondary schools; and thus for the first time there were far more candidates for enrolment in China's universities than there were university openings available. The Chinese were facing a very common consequence of the 'diploma disease': as in the Third World experience, the provision of increased educational places at lower levels of schooling had served only to move the competition for school seats to a higher point on the education ladder.

In the Chinese case a special political tension was involved in this. Until the revolution's success in 1949, relatively few working-class children had been able to attend schools, and thus throughout most of the 1950s the secondary school graduates had come predominantly from the former upper and middle classes. But by the early 1960s the secondary school student bodies included large numbers of young people from the 'good classes' of former have-nots. Though they were offered priority in university admissions in a very strong equivalent of America's 'affirmative action' programme, this did not normally outweigh their generally poorer showings in the selection examinations. With rapidly growing numbers of these families finding their children's expectations disappointed in the tightening contest for university places—and with the revolution's commitment to its redistributive goals thereby put to the test—left-wing leaders in the Party began arguing with increasing vigour that the criteria for university admissions had to be shifted further in favour of the 'good class' youths. But until the Cultural Revolution of 1966–68, the majority of China's top leadership remained convinced that the revolution's modernisation goals precluded any policy that markedly discriminated against the chances of the most academically capable of the intelligentsia's children.

This disagreement over admissions standards came to the boil in 1966. In the Cultural Revolution's first months, to the delight of the good-class students, Mao pushed a radical decree through the Party's central committee proclaiming the abolition of the university entrance examinations and

a new method of enrolment, a combination of recommendation and selection in which proletarian politics are right to the fore. . . The old examination system is a serious violation of the Party's class line, shuts out many outstanding children of workers, former poor and lower-middle peasants and revolutionary cadres. . . and opens the gates wide to the bourgeoisie to cultivate its own successors. (*People's Daily*, [Beijing], 18 June 1966)

### The Radicals' Prescriptions For Education

By the end of the Cultural Revolution fighting in late 1968, most of the leaders who had opposed the views of Mao's disciples had been swept away or politically weakened. New leaders such as Yao Wenyuan and Zhang Chunqiao (two of the so-called 'Gang of Four'), who became Mao's representatives in educational affairs, were given a free hand to implement a new type of education.

For a start, they did not see any pressing need for the universities to prepare a corps of highly trained technocrats and experts. In part this was because the Maoist radicals wanted to

pursue a new approach to economic development. They were oriented toward an economic strategy of smaller and technically less sophisticated factories. They argued that with such industrial development it would be enough simply to educate greater numbers of politically reliable 'socialist labourers' with on-the-job resourcefulness in handling relatively simple technologies. The radicals wanted to gear the new schooling in secondary-school sciences and mathematics almost exclusively toward such low-level technical familiarity: how lathes operate, the principles of levers, etc. It was to be knowledge geared not to theory but toward the tangibly practical and the easily practised.

The radicals' preference for this type of economic strategy and this kind of learning derived partly from their perspective on China's social classes what they called the 'class line'. Since those best at handling 'expertise' and theoretical constructs were the pre-revolution bourgeois professionals and their offspring, neither the schools nor the factories were to be allowed to be arenas in which they could excel at the expense of the workers and their children. At all levels, education was to be used as a mechanism for eradicating the gaps between students from different backgrounds. No longer was it to serve as a means for sorting and stratifying students.

To meet these ends, the competitive school ladder was eliminated. In the major cities, an education was supplied to all youths through senior middle school. (Financially this was made possible by shortening the entire school curriculum by two to three years.) Then, so as to sever entirely the links between classroom achievements and upward mobility, all the young people graduating from middle school were assigned directly to jobs, with no account taken of their academic records when devising these job postings. The choice of which young people could go on to higher schooling was left to the places of work, purportedly on the basis of a young worker's performance during his or her first several years on the job. The good-class Party leaders at the work unit could be expected to take class origins strongly into account when appraising the dedication and performance of the applicants.

The radical national leaders had other reasons, too, for divorcing academic achievement from the ladder of upward mobility. The Maoists were concerned that academic competition in the classroom bred individualist and careerist values; and they were concerned, too, that if some young people entered universities direct from school on the basis of their academic abilities and subsequently moved into specialised careers with the status of experts, their life experience would have put them out of touch with the political interests of the masses. The radicals wanted to prevent the rise in power of a technocratic 'new bourgeoisie', regardless of class background. In the years after the Cultural Revolution conflicts of 1966–68, the derisory term 'bourgeois technician' became a commonplace catchphrase, referring even to technical personnel who had issued from 'red' homes. The new means of recruiting China's higher-trained personnel—chosen in reward for good *blue-collar* work—was supposed to help assure they saw themselves as 'proletarian technicians'.

This should not imply, though, that the Maoists wanted to focus education principally on vocational training. Instead it was to centre on character building, through the frequent immersion of young people in Mao Thought. The radicals were both 'redder' and more traditional than the Party's moderates. They seemed almost Confucianist in their belief that the principal purpose of schooling lay in the teaching of morals (Munro, 1977).

In light of all of the above, the re-opened schools in 1968 were to organise education along the following lines:

- (1) Schools were to play down the systematic teaching of theory and instead were to teach concepts that were relevant to industrial and agricultural work.

- (2) A student's academic excellence was no longer to be rewarded or even permitted to be an important source of informal prestige in the classroom. Among other things, learning was to be simplified and slowed, narrowing the gap between good and poor students.

(3) Overall, the shaping of attitudes was to carry far greater weight in the education system than the imparting of knowledge.

(4) Learning was to be combined with labour.

(5) Urban schooling would be shortened to a universalised nine or ten years.

(6) Selection examinations would be eliminated.

(7) School graduates would be allocated directly to jobs, and the work units would hold the right to determine which of their young personnel deserved a university or technical-school training.

Abandoning all entrance examinations and severing the links between academic success and careers were expressly intended to improve the chances of working-class children; but these two radical measures also came very close to Ronald Dore's (1976, pp. 142 *et seq.*) proposals for achieving a higher educational quality and greater efficiency in occupational selections. China's experiments provide us with a test-case of the remedies proposed by Dore, But the prescribed medicine proved unpalatable—certainly in the dosage offered to Chinese teenagers. Between 1968 and Mao's death in 1976, most of China's urban students simply stopped paying attention in class.

### 'Studying is Useless'

Admittedly, when this new structure of education was introduced in 1968, China's urban schools faced enormous problems that would have hampered any educational venture. Students had been running loose on the streets during the chaotic years of the Cultural Revolution, and the schools were having difficulty getting them readjusted to the routine of school life. The teaching profession moreover was demoralised; the textbooks were haphazardly devised; and the curriculum was subjected to exceedingly narrow ideological constraints. In fact, many of the schools initially played it safe by having their students concentrate solely on memorising Mao quotations (Unger, 1982, chapter 7).

But by the early 1970s, China could provide a somewhat better test case of whether it is feasible to divorce education from the contest for careers. Though China's schools still faced administrative problems, the turmoil and confusion of the Cultural Revolution was receding into memory; the textbooks were no longer heavily burdened with political rhetoric; the coursework was considerably better organised. Yet students continued to play truant, and many of them continued to be rowdy. It was, they felt, 'useless to study'. A former student from Canton remembers:

In class, many of the kids just chatted or slept or wandered outside to do something else while the teacher lectured. Only about half the students would even be in class. Right after the Cultural Revolution, during my first year of junior middle school in 1969, there'd been some students who wanted a bit to study. But they lost that interest by the time they reached senior middle school. Mainly because they felt it all had zero to do with their futures, that they'd just be sent out to the countryside or a factory regardless.

The same point consistently re-emerged during interviews that I conducted in Hong Kong during 1975–76 with nine former students and five former high school teachers from China.<sup>3</sup> Every one of them insisted that most students had felt it useless to study because success or failure at their schoolwork would have no bearing on their futures.

At the very same time, though, many students were worried about their futures. In China, as in many other late-developing countries, industrial expansion had not kept pace with the baby boom. To avoid high levels of urban unemployment China had begun assigning

---

<sup>3</sup> All but three of these 14 interviewees were legal emigrants. Some were Chinese from Southeast Asia who had returned to China with their families in the 1950s and early 1960s and had recently come back out again through Hong Kong. Others were Hong Kong residents whose parents had sent them to socialist China for their education.

growing numbers of the new high school graduates to work indefinitely in the countryside. But life in the villages was known to be hard, impoverished and lonely, and most of the young people tried to avoid going (Unger, 1979). Those who were selected felt, resentfully, that the peasant villages were becoming dumping grounds for the cities' 'losers'. To help dispel this feeling, the authorities decided that the system of career assignments had to become patently impartial and equitable. Each city devised its own programme, but Canton's was fairly typical.

Earlier, in the high-school class that had graduated in 1969, the teenagers selected for the countryside from Canton had been largely from the former bourgeois and petty bourgeois families. But this only had served to strengthen the feelings among Canton's young people that those sent to the villages were second-class citizens. The authorities therefore decided in 1971 that class origins should no longer determine who was assigned to a village. Nor did the leadership feel that a student's political activism at school should be allowed to affect his or her job assignment. Settlement in the countryside was something a dedicated student was supposed to *want*, not something to avoid. Nor, finally, could a student's academic record be allowed to play any part in the decision of who went. That was precisely the standard that post-Cultural Revolution education no longer was supposed to reward.

In 1971, therefore, it was proclaimed in Canton that any graduating student would be assigned to a rural job if half or more of his/her brothers or sisters were still in the city. This was indisputably an impartial method. It meant, basically, that elder siblings in each family went to the countryside, and younger siblings got the urban jobs. In 1973, Canton's leadership decided that urban job openings would become even scarcer during the coming years; and thus from 1973 onward all but the last remaining child in each family were supposed to settle in the countryside.

The 'backwash' into the schools from this job-assignment policy was profound. Once the students felt their futures were already fated by the order of their births, those destined for the countryside became even less inclined to open their books. They argued to their teachers they would only be able to utilise very rudimentary skills in the villages. Why pay attention to mathematics beyond the multiplication tables when rural accounting techniques used no mathematics beyond that? Why bother even to learn to recognise rural pests or how to plant rice when they would be learning that anyway once they were peasants? It was partly that they felt little preparation was needed for the countryside. But it was partly also, according to respondents, that students did not want to lead the hard and poor life of a peasant. They were consequently refusing to orient themselves toward such a future while still at school. In class some of them openly vented their frustrations and resentments. The final year of senior middle school was "the worst class to try to control", observed a high school teacher from Yunnan Province: "When kids are imminently facing settlement in the countryside, sometimes on purpose they'll sabotage the class period."

Students who were heading for urban postings were less obstreperous, but only slightly more prone to give any attention to their schoolwork. For one thing, few of them even contemplated going on to a university education. Word had circulated that without entrance examinations or other standardised means for selecting the new university students, Party officials had begun pulling strings and making use of 'old-boy' networks. They were getting their children out of the countryside by getting rural officials to nominate the child for a university seat. According to a former Shanghai high school teacher, the young people from other backgrounds, including the students from working-class families, no longer saw any possibility of their own further education, "just as people don't even think about whether it would be nice or not to live on the moon".

For another thing, many students, even from the intelligentsia, *only* wanted blue-collar work. In earlier times, a production-line job had seemed to many youths like the sort of work

one took only when there are no other opportunities. But now that students were faced only with the stark choice between becoming a worker or a peasant, the blue-collar urban jobs had taken on a considerably rosier image. The students were aware, moreover, that a worker in the early and mid-1970s held a relatively high political status as a member of a 'proletarian' occupation, at a time when intellectuals were politically vulnerable and sometimes harassed. Workers also enjoyed secure incomes, which stayed about the same whether or not they became skilled and whether or not they stayed workers or became technicians. The higher standing which all of this gave to ordinary blue-collar work probably attracted a fair degree of working-class support. But the adverse side-effect was that for students who were now reasonably content to be production-line workers with no career goals beyond that, most of their school subjects did indeed seem useless.

Teachers found few means to get recalcitrant students to open their books. As a final resort, some teachers turned to 'political' threats against the worst offenders. A secondary school teacher recalls:

The kids didn't worry. They knew that if they failed they'd still be promoted. So we sometimes had to use political pressure. We'd organize other kids to criticize them. This would be through a session to criticize the ideology of "studying is useless," an idea that we attributed to Liu Shaoqi.<sup>4</sup> But actually, there were still some kids who completely refused to study, and to that we had to close one of our eyes.

At the same time, though, the new desirability and improved status of industrial employment encouraged a growing interest among many of the students in hobbies involving mechanical craftsmanship. This was even true—in fact, especially true—of young people fated for rural assignments, probably because such hobbies represented the type of urban jobs they desired but would not be getting. Students who generally gave little attention to schoolwork often gravitated, out of school, towards radio building, woodworking, model plane building and the like. At the Fujian school, where these skills could be practised in 'hobby groups', the interest of students was so great that the school was able to get some of the students to behave better by denying participation to any students who were rowdy during regular classtime.

Some of the students who would be staying in the city had their own reasons for pursuing such hobbies. As part of the new school curriculum, they had engaged in work stints at factories, and interviewees say that they and their classmates had become aware of the monotony of routine production line work. In reaction, the hobbies reportedly reflected a desire for *interesting* blue-collar work, as shop floor mechanics and the like.

But the radicals who until 1976 were in charge of education had mixed feelings about encouraging these desires and hobbies. Before the Cultural Revolution, as they pointed out in newspaper editorials, a high regard for expertise had propped up the prestige and salaries of the old professionally trained petty bourgeois classes.

However, the Chinese leadership was split. The scientific and military establishments and the economic planners were increasingly alarmed at the absence of a new generation of technicians and scientific personnel. They were convinced that all of the radicals' prescriptions for secondary and higher education were endangering China's future. Increasingly as China approached the mid-1970s, education was becoming an open arena for debate between the Party's moderate and radical factions (Unger, 1980).

---

<sup>4</sup> In a school environment where 'Ideology takes command', attributing the phrase to Liu Shaoqi put the errant student in a politically indefensible position. Early on, the national mass media began claiming Liu as the author of the phrase 'studying is useless', so as to oblige students to repudiate publicly their own way of thinking. After 1971, it was revealed in the press that the author of the phrase was actually none other than Lin Biao, and in 1977 the Press discovered, *mirabile dictu*, that the Gang of Four's Zhang Chunqiao had been the originator of that same phrase.

Much of the urban population weighed in on the side of the moderates on this issue. Though the radical leaders' proposals for education initially had won some support among working-class families who thought their children's chances of upward mobility would be improved, this constituency subsequently had been alienated by the poor quality of the new schooling, the students' refusal to study, and the schools' inability to discipline them.

Parents from all class backgrounds were disturbed at the bad habits of the new teenage subculture (smoking, dating, etc.), their children's materialistic interests and cynical flippancy. By smashing the prior educational structure, Mao and his followers had hoped to erect a system that would better allow the schools to teach 'proletarian' and 'revolutionary' virtues; but, if anything, the decade of Maoist schooling had very seriously eroded the Maoist ethos among the younger generation.

In more ways than one, the radicals' tenacious and dogmatic pursuit of unrealistic educational prescriptions had become (to paraphrase a Chinese saying) a stone that they dropped upon their own feet. They had smothered the 'diploma disease' problem, but as an official recently explained to a visitor, "their remedy may have been curing the disease, but it was killing the patient" (Smerling, 1979). By providing an inadequate education for all sectors of the urban population, they built a massive constituency against their ideas. Inflexible like the Jacobins of the French Revolution, they themselves contributed most to the popular Thermidorean reaction which awaited Mao's death.

To counter the radicals' strangulation of educational standards, the new leadership which took power in late 1976 looked back in time to the school system of the 1960s. Indeed, with the momentum of a pendulum swinging back past its initial resting point, the post-Mao system has stressed academic 'talent' considerably more than the pre-Cultural Revolution schools. The middle schools, for example, have begun tracking students into different classrooms on the basis of their academic achievements. China's newspapers have acknowledged that many of the symptoms of the diploma disease have emerged stronger than ever before: after-school private tutors, rote digestion of school material, schools sponsoring weekend 'cramming' sessions, ambitious students exhausting themselves.

## Lessons

What can be learned from China's experiences? It might have been hoped that if an educational system could be divorced from the competition for careers and if the threat of selection examinations were removed, students would be better able to learn for other reasons, such as the practicality of their schoolwork for the jobs they later would be most likely to get.

But in this respect, China's experience induces little optimism about the effectiveness of such wholesale reforms. Admittedly, even in China's mismanaged school system of 1968–76, many students did focus their attention upon manual craft skills—and to an extent greater, indeed, than the schools encouraged. But it must also be recognised that the social status, political prestige and economic security of China's industrial workers were, all in all, probably higher at that time than the prestige and security of engineers and technicians. This situation was unlike that in any other country—and was temporary even in China, soon to be overthrown along with the Gang of Four. The students, in short, were interested in the skills that were associated with highly desirable jobs; the same students neglected to pay attention to the school lessons on farming. If even China, with a national political ideology that actively promoted the dignity of farm work, could not persuade urban students destined for

the countryside to pay attention to learning agricultural skills at school, how might other countries expect to promote a similar type of vocational coursework?<sup>5</sup>

Reforms to the structure of schooling, I would argue, will not succeed if they do not address students' hopes to climb into desired careers. Yet there are many partial reforms that Third World nations can employ which realistically recognise students' job aspirations but at the same time come to grips with some of the diploma disease's ill effects (e.g. Dore, 1976, pp. 152–163).

China employed an intermediate solution of this type very successfully prior to the Cultural Revolution. China's urban vocational school programme in the 1950s and 1960s was linked to the job market in a way that encouraged the learning of actual vocational skills. The vocational schools' singular advantage was their ability to channel vocational graduates directly into reserved jobs. Unlike China's academic-track senior high schools, whose graduates had to scramble on their own to find jobs, the vocational system in the 1950s and 1960s was able to *assign* its graduates to be the new book-keepers for government offices and factories, the new marine pilots, locomotive engineers, machine-shop craftsmen, etc. These vocational schools' annual enrolments were geared to the projected manpower needs of the various industries and government units; this was to ensure that there would not be any shortages of new skilled personnel.

The results of the programme were impressive. True, the most achievement-oriented urban students in the 1950s and 1960s continued to gamble on the academic-track senior middle schools in the hope of getting into a university. But notwithstanding this fact, in 1965 Canton's full-time vocational schools held fully 80% as many students as the academic-track senior middle school system; and the competition to be admitted to the vocational schools was fairly tight. Most of these vocational students were purposely made ineligible to take the university entrance examinations, so as to prevent them from turning their studies back toward examination preparation. The vocational school administrators very likely supported this regulation, since they were under pressure to supply the government organs with adequately trained personnel.

From 1968 to 1976, however, the doors of many of these vocational schools were closed.<sup>6</sup> As a newspaper editorial complained in 1979:

Ever since the Cultural Revolution the ordinary senior middle schools blindly have been allowed to expand, and the secondary level specialist schools and the various vocational schools have largely stopped operating. This type of one-sided development has (meant that) ... each year the number of senior middle graduates is extremely large, and so the ratio of students which the higher educational institutions can admit is very small. This (presently) not only has created a lot of pressure on the institutes of higher education, but also pressures on the senior middle schools to compete for favourable rates of university admissions. Even more noteworthy is that over 90 percent of the senior middle graduates will have to participate in manual labour; but they do not have vocational preparation, which gives rise to an acute ... demand for skilled labour power ... (*Guangming Daily*, 5 July 1979, p. 4).

---

<sup>5</sup> The experiences of those countries which have tried suggest that this problem has been common. Repeatedly such programmes have conic up against this difficulty: be it the village institutes of the 1930s in Turkey and Mexico; or Gandhian basic education in the 1950s in India; or the agricultural primary schools of Tanganyika and, later, independent Tanzania.

<sup>6</sup> Under the radicals' scheme, the vocational schools no longer operated as secondary schools. Instead, if a factory needed improved manpower skills of a given kind, it was supposed to select several young workers to attend the appropriate vocational programme. After graduating, the workers were to return to the factory. The municipal education departments, however, had run into great difficulties finding enough classrooms and teachers for the new universalised 10-year school programme. With this priority in mind, they converted many of the former vocational school facilities into regular schools in the late 1960s. The radicals' vocational training scheme was crippled from the start.

China's vocational programme of the 1960s is now being resurrected in its entirety.

Such an approach to vocational schooling would probably be of considerable benefit to other late developing countries. The Third World governments normally are the employers of a substantial portion of a country's modern-sector personnel: in India, nearly two-thirds of the educated labour force (Blaug, Layard & Woodhall, 1969, p. 239). Yet the personnel officers of Third World governments all too frequently operate on the premise that the less capable students are obliged to enter the vocational track, and they accordingly prefer to hire general-education graduates instead. Probably more than anything else, it is this which defeats vocational programmes. With vocational graduates so often relegated to the unemployment rolls, it is little wonder that in some countries the vocational students reportedly do not concentrate on their courses but instead 'cram' to pass the next higher regular-track entrance examinations.

If the Third World governments' regulations stipulated that specified categories of their new middle-level technical, administrative, or even blue-collar government workers were only to be hired from among the graduates of the appropriate vocational schools, their vocational students could be expected to turn their attention more toward their vocational courses.

Perhaps as important, students in the lower schools of these countries would be likely to show a greater interest than at present in learning the various skills useful for getting into vocational studies.

Both the success of China's vocational scheme and the failure of the Chinese radicals' drastic reforms provide the same important lessons to educators elsewhere—that any curricular reforms which are aimed at curbing the diploma disease must provide students with positive reasons for study, which would in most cases have to be career inducements.

## EGALITARIAN OBJECTIONS

China's vocational programmes of the 1960s did not, however, address the issue that most preoccupied the Chinese radicals. They had been unhappy before the Cultural Revolution that a disproportionate number of the young people from the urban professional classes were climbing the school ladder into the same level of occupations as their parents. The radicals were worried, accurately, that a modern occupational elite tends to perpetuate itself through precisely the sort of education structure that in most countries is flaunted as providing for 'equality of opportunity'.

From the vantage point of distributing opportunities more broadly, a vocational programme like that of China before the Cultural Revolution was, indeed, counter-productive. Most of the achievement-oriented children of China's Party officialdom and of the former middle classes had not been deterred, in the early 1960s, from their contest to enter a university even when the penalty for non-success increasingly had entailed unemployment or life-time assignments to be peasants. Most of the Chinese students who withdrew from this competition in order to enter vocational schools were from the urban working classes.

If the linkages between vocational training and job recruitments were similarly strengthened in other countries, it could be expected that there, too, the students of working-class backgrounds would be far more willing to desist from the risky contest for the top than would the children from upper- and middle-class families. The opportunities for the already advantaged classes to continue their dominance through the levers of education correspondingly would be enhanced. It is a prospect not likely to be relished by a great many educational reformers.

But there may be no completely satisfactory remedy for the diploma disease. Certainly the radical surgery of the Cultural Revolution provides no solutions whatsoever.

The Chinese vocational programme provides only a partial solution and this is coupled to potentially adverse side-effects, yet it *is* a programme that has been proved workable. In a situation where no proposed solution is free of drawbacks, it helps point one way forward.

## REFERENCES

- BEREDAY, G. Z. F. (1968), School systems and the enrolment crisis: a comparative overview, *Comparative Education Review*, 12, No. 2 (June).
- BLAUG, M., LAYARD, R., & WOODHALL, M. (1969) *The Causes of Graduate Unemployment in India* (London, Penguin).
- DORE, R. (1976) *The Diploma Disease* (London, Allen & Unwin; Berkeley, University of California Press).
- MUNRO, D. (1977) *The Concept of Man in Contemporary China* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press).
- SMERLING, L. (1979), Admissions, in: MONTAPERTO, R. & HENDERSON, I. (Eds), *China's Schools in Flux* (White Plains, N.Y., ME. Sharpe).
- UNGER, I. (1979) China's troubled down-to-the-countryside campaign, *Contemporary China*, 3, No. 2, pp. 79–92.
- UNGER, J. (1980) The Chinese controversy over higher education, *Pacific Affairs*, 53, No. 1, pp. 29–47.
- UNGER, J. (1982) *Education Under Mao: Class and Competition in Canton Schools, 1960–1980* (New York, Columbia University Press).