Hsia-Fang: The Economics and Politics of Rustication in China

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For almost twenty years, with occasional slight pauses, China has been implementing a policy which both in the depth of its human drama and the sheer size of the population movements has no precedent in the history of industrializing nations.* From 1961 through 1963, some 20 million urban dwellers in China were sent down (hsia-fang) to the countryside in a mass movement of reverse migration. From 1966 through 1973 more than 8 million urban youths alone had been "plunged into the battle to build a socialist countryside." Some estimates put the number of urban youths rusticated during that time at between 10 and 15 million. The movement, which assumes different interrelated forms, has a variety of objectives. Among the political aims are the following:

1. Ideological Rectification and Remolding. Those who harbor (or are accused of harboring) incorrect thoughts, or in their actions violate the canons of socialist morality and deviate from the mass line as currently defined, may have their thoughts and behavior corrected by physical labor in the countryside and contact with poor and lower-middle peasants.

*I wish to thank Miss Kathleen M. Shelton, a student in political science, for assistance in locating bibliographical sources for this article.


2 Union Research Service (USR), Hong Kong, Vol. 73, No. 22 (December 14, 1973), p. 288. "Within the past year [1973] millions of junior and senior middle school graduates have gone up to the mountains and down to the villages—four times as many as those who went during the five years preceding the Cultural Revolution [1961-65]." Jen-min jih-pao (JMPF), Peking, editorial, May 4, 1970. The figure of 10-15 million is from Pi-chao Chen, "Overurbanization, Rustication of Urban-Educated Youths and Politics of Rural Transformation," Comparative Politics, Vol. 4, No. 3 (April 1972), pp. 367-368. In his report to the 1st Session of the 4th National People's Congress (January 13, 1975), Chou En-lai mentioned the figure of "nearly 10 million school graduates" who have gone down to the country, but he did not say since when (presumably since the end of the Cultural Revolution).

3 I do not agree with Pi-chao Chen (op.cit., p. 365) that a distinction must be made between hsia-fang (temporary "downward transfer" for re-education) and hsia-hsiang shang-shan yun-tung (permanent rustication of urban educated youths; the "down to the country and up to the mountains" movement) described below. The latter is a form of hsia-fang. It is intended to be permanent, but does not always turn out that way. Its objectives are mainly economic, i.e., prevention and reduction of intellectual unemployment in the cities, but it contains strong elements of ideological re-education and punishment—forced labor, as Lin Piao allegedly put it. It is better regarded as a particular and currently important variant of hsia-fang.
overt goal here is education in the correct ideology by getting one's hands dirty and one's feet wet in the fields. The learning process may range from a relatively mild form of struggle-criticism-transformation, all the way to corrective (forced) labor (lao kai).

2. Ethnic and Military Strategies. The transfer of large numbers of people of Han origin into national minority areas may be seen as a component part of the strategy of Sinicization of non-Han peoples. The policy has reportedly been quite successful in Inner Mongolia, Sinkiang, and Southwest Yunnan, at least in terms of numbers and the ratio of Han settlers to indigenous inhabitants. Connected with this is the policy of filling border regions (especially those contiguous to the Soviet Union) with young people of Han origin, some of them demobilized soldiers. The aim is to have a reliable reservoir of manpower in the event of war.

3. Shifting Allegiances away from the Family Unit. The sending-down movement involves the separation of numerous families for longer or shorter periods of time. Such physical separation and sometimes genuine or dictated moral alienation (witness the widely publicized denunciation of parents by some rusticated youngsters) is counted on to further the regime's goal of having individual loyalties shifted from the family to an organized and controlled basic social group unrelated by blood, e.g., the rural production team.

Among the main economic aims is that of relieving actual and preventing potential urban unemployment. The Chinese communists do not publish employment statistics and if pressed, would in all likelihood deny both the possibility of unemployment and its actual occurrence in China's socialist society. The problem, therefore, largely eludes measurement. Partly because of this, there is disagreement on the subject among Western students of the Chinese economy. Joan Robinson says flatly that "in China there is no problem of unemployment." Audrey Donnithorne, on the other hand, argues that "for most of their years in power urban unemployment has been a problem to the Chinese communists," and Dwight Perkins holds that "even among long-term residents of cities there has been at least some unemployment during most of the period since 1949."

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E.g., the girl who at harvest time (1971) "Stood on the side of the poor and lower-middle peasants and of the militia and attacked her kulak mother who was recalcitrant against the surveillance under which she was kept." Shensi People's Broadcasting Station (PBS), April 27, 1972, in China News Analysis (CNA), Hong Kong, No. 881 (May 19, 1972), p. 4.


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In developing countries the process of industrialization, especially its early stages, is typically accompanied by large migrations of people from rural to urban areas. Rural inhabitants, particularly the young and the more venturesome, are drawn toward the towns both by the comparative attraction of general conditions of urban living and by earnings differentials, especially those between the lowest wage of industry and the highest income obtainable from manual work on the land. In addition to the pull of the city, rapid institutional and technical changes in agriculture may exert a push on potential migrants. Post-1949 China is no exception. In addition to the general attraction of city life, the “pull” factors in China during 1953-58 included relatively attractive rates of pay in such industrial jobs as were available (the wage differential between town and country was large), labor insurance, accelerated recruitment of workers in 1958 in response to stiffly increased industrial production targets, and the presence in the cities of relatives who had migrated earlier and who could provide the new arrivals with at least temporary shelter and sustenance. The “push” factors included the difficulty experienced by many peasant families newly endowed with land deeds in making ends meet, the collectivization of land in 1955-56, recurrent unpaid or low-paid labor schemes in the countryside (especially the mammoth water conservancy campaigns of 1958), and drastic curbs on private plots, household subsidiary activities, and private marketing at the beginning of the Great Leap. More generally, the push came from the persistent labor surplus in the countryside which manifested itself in widespread underemployment and very low productivity.

More or less spontaneous migration of rural labor to towns was significant during the First Five Year Plan (1953-57) and phenomenal during the first year (1958) of the Great Leap Forward. From 1953 through 1957 China's urban population increased by about 20 million. During the same time industrial (especially heavy industrial) development produced only about 2 million new jobs in modern urban industry, mainly because productivity advances in modern industry, particularly in the favored heavy branches, precluded increases of employment in proportion to output. In 1958 alone urban population rose by 15.6 million, of which about 10 million are thought to have resulted from migration from the countryside. Total industrial employment in 1958 rose by 16.6 million, according to official Chinese

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8 My own survey made in China in 1974 shows that the lowest wage in urban modern industry was about 30 yuan a month (about U.S. $15). The highest income of a worker on an exceptionally successful suburban commune was roughly 34 yuan ($17).

9 Chen and Galenson, op.cit., pp. 131-132.

10 Donnithorne, op.cit., p. 183. Between mid-1958 and mid-1960, 20 million peasants are believed to have migrated to urban areas. Pi-chao Chen, op.cit., p. 373.
However, a large part of this increase consisted of jobs in workshop-type, labor-intensive rural industry. Nevertheless, modern urban industrial enterprises sharply increased their labor intake in response to pressures for higher output. Even assuming that the 10 million migrants were absorbed in urban industrial employment, the economic value of such employment is questionable. There must have been considerable overstaffing (labor hoarding) and consequent underemployment. The situation became critical in 1959 with the onset of the post-Leap recession and the accompanying shrinkage of industrial employment. According to Hou, unemployment rates among urban males ages 15-59 years in 1957 were between 19.5 and 29.0 per cent. In 1958 they dropped to an estimated 0.3-12.5 per cent, rising to 12.4-22.3 per cent in 1959. These estimates for nonagricultural urban workers are tentative, the lower figures being the more credible. In all three years (1957-1959) unemployment rates among urban males ages 14-16 years were higher than for the 15-59 bracket. The unemployment situation around 1957, the last year of the First Five Year Plan, was complicated by the fact that at that time middle schools and higher educational institutions had become crowded. In 1957 the schools and colleges began to reduce their enrollments while the number of teenagers was rising.

In today's China spontaneity rooted in the individual or household is equated with atomistic anarchy. It is desirable and constructive only when centrally inspired, organized, controlled, and embodied in a mass movement. Between 1950 and 1957 many instructions were issued, the purpose of which was to control the "blind outflow" of rural labor to the cities. The network of administrative controls over labor mobility came to include (a) local authority permission to leave the farm, (b) permission from city authorities to stay (without such permission the migrant could not legally settle in the town or receive food ration coupons), and (c) the imposition in 1961 of a ban lasting three years on recruitment of rural labor for urban industry.

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13 Donnithorne, op. cit., p. 185, note 4.

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intent of all these measures was to make labor allocation as much as possible an administrative function of the planning authorities. To lessen the impact of earnings differentials, the lowest wages in urban industry were reduced in 1958. It is difficult to say how effective these physical controls in fact were. Perkins believes that permission from local rural authorities to move was not difficult to obtain when it was not altogether bypassed by those wanting to leave, and that even in the cities control (including control over the issuance of food ration coupons) tended to be quite lax.\(^\text{14}\) It is reasonable to presume that the effectiveness of controls over labor mobility varied from period to period and possibly also by locality. It was probably quite ineffective during periods of organized turmoil such as 1956, 1958-60, and 1966-69.

In 1955 administrative measures aimed at stemming the outflow of rural labor were for the first time supplemented by an attempt to reverse the flow. In that and the following year many urban unemployed, especially the more recent arrivals who still had family ties in their villages of origin, were "urged" and "helped" to move out of the cities back to the countryside.\(^\text{15}\) The skill qualifications of these recent migrants were in many cases quite low. Beginning in 1961, however, the hsia-fang movement was increasingly focused on middle-school and university graduates who were expected to settle permanently in the countryside and not just stay there temporarily. Large numbers of them were resettled in the countryside in the following years. The movement was disrupted and at least temporarily reversed during the Cultural Revolution, when many rusticated youth seized the opportunity provided by Mao's call to "exchange revolutionary experience" and by the disarray among public authorities, to filter back to the cities. In 1969, with help from the People's Liberation Army, the hsia-fang movement was resumed and is still very much alive.

What is the rationale behind what looks like the shifting of unemployment from town to country? First, unemployment in the cities, especially joblessness among the young, is concentrated, highly visible, and inclined rapidly to generate social ills, including crime. By resettling the unemployed in the countryside, the problem is not only diluted but partly solved. There is always some work to be found in the countryside, however low the individual worker's productivity. In addition to field work, there are endless water management and land melioration schemes, and—at least since 1958—numerous highly labor-intensive local industries. Given the extremely modest capitalization of Chinese agriculture, vast quantities of labor can

\(^{14}\) Perkins, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 141.

be and are being absorbed in a large variety of farm and semi-industrial tasks. Second, hitherto under-utilized and potentially unutilized labor can thus be put to work creating capital where it is needed most. The marginal productivity of such rusticated labor, while quite low, is higher than it would have been if hoarded in urban employments, especially since consumption is not allowed to rise too fast or even at all. The disguised saving potential of disguised unemployment is tapped. Third, additions to urban population are the responsibility of municipal and other governments. Not only must food, clothing, shelter, and other basic necessities be provided through rather elaborate procurement and distribution networks, but much investment has to be made in such social overheads as sanitation, education, transportation, public security, and so on. In the countryside these costs are shifted in considerable part to the individuals concerned and the families with whom they live, and expenditures on social overheads are much more modest than in the cities—as are the facilities. For example, instead of being the consumers of education (as they would have been in the cities), rusticated young people become at least part-time “producers” of education in the villages.

Transfer of know-how constitutes another objective. Many rusticated workers are young and relatively well educated, mostly graduates of junior and senior middle schools. Their transfer to the countryside can raise the level of technical and other skills there and contribute to agricultural modernization. Proper handling is, however, crucial: should there be deep and widespread frustration and alienation among the young, the objective of promoting the modernization of the countryside would be imperilled. One difficulty consists in reconciling two apparently conflicting desiderata. On the all-important ideological and political plane the educated young people are to learn modestly from the poor and lower-middle peasants, most of whom are just a scratch away from illiteracy. This is in conformity with Chairman Mao’s call of December 22, 1968 that “intellectual youths must go to the rural areas to receive their re-education by poor and lower-middle peasants.” On the level of agricultural and other techniques the learning process is to be mutual: the rusticated youth are both to learn from the peasants’ practical experience of farming and contribute to their mentors’ technical formation. They have to “walk on two legs,” as the slogan has it: acquire traditional and introduce modern techniques. Although most rusticated youth appear to be engaged in regular field and rural workshop labor side by side with the peasants, some have moved into various political and functional leadership positions. Of 5,000 Peking and Tientsin educated youth sent down to Pao-chi county 70 miles east of Peking, 314 are reported to have become activists (lower level cadres), 80 are members of revolutionary
committees at different levels, 292 are accountants, supervisors, and labor-
point recorders, 23 serve as agricultural technicians, 60 are machine operators,
80 teach in village schools, 80 are “barefoot doctors” (paramedics and health
workers), and 7 operate local radio stations. The remaining three-fifths
presumably work alongside the peasants at manual tasks.

Hsia-fang assumes different forms, related to the often overlapping ob-
jectives of the movement. The typology outlined below is admittedly not the
only one; it is, however, the one I personally find the most suitable. The
oldest form is re-education through manual labor and contact with the poor
and lower-middle peasant masses, intended primarily for established intel-
lectuals (writers, professors, etc.), and cadres. The duration of such downward
transfer varies from short stints in the countryside to relatively extended
sojourns of several years. Despite the nobility of the objective of learning from
the masses and raising the level of one’s political consciousness, there has
always been considerable humiliation attaching to the process. Intellectuals
and officials with their hands dirtied by the muck and the nightsoil they
spread over the land suffered a profound shock to their status and a loss of
face. The system, inaugurated in the days of Yenan, was administered to such
revolutionary and fellow-traveling writers as Wang Shih-wei and his col-
leagues, and the poet Ai Ch’ing. In 1942 Ai Ch’ing was sent to the coun-
tryside to reform himself through labor and learn the folk songs of the people.
The same medicine was subsequently given to countless intellectuals and
officials of the Party and government.

The most recent and widely publicized form of downward transfer for
intellectuals and cadres consists of the so-called “May 7th schools” set up to-
ward the end of the Cultural Revolution. At the present time some of these
schools have become largely ritualized cadre retreats, good for one’s career,
but in the early days of their existence they were quite rough labor re-
education institutions. By spending a time in such institutions a cadre now-
adays documents his willingness to improve the level of his political con-
sciousness by a period of rustication, an exchange of ideological experience,
and a stint of manual labor.

Elements in society judged unrectifiable are banished to labor re-education
(lao-kai) farms—in effect concentration camps—in the more climatically in-
hospitable areas of the country. Few ever return from such banishment. This

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18 [IMJP], March 30, 1970. Of the 20,000 Peking youths settled around Yenan, 2,600 are
village cadres, 1,000 are barefoot doctors or village teachers. The rest (16,400) presumably work
in the fields, on water conservancy and land amelioration projects, and in commune and brigade
workshops. Ibid.

17 Merle Goldman, Literary Dissent in Communist China (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard
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is a form of hsia-fang applied to "people outside the people," to non-people, that is, including the "Five-Black Classes": counter-revolutionaries, rightists, bad elements, landlords, and rich peasants (and/or their unrepentant descendants). Somewhat milder, but still very hard on the person involved, is the practice of being sent down to the countryside to reside there under the "supervision of the masses." Even when such supervision is not specified, merely being sent down and having the wrong social origin can be very painful for the victim. Many young people sent to the villages do, in fact, come from socially outcast families. They are divided into two groups: those who can be reformed and those who cannot. Those who can, must show themselves exceptionally zealous in their re-education efforts and in renouncing their class origin.

At the other extreme, there is a very temporary, almost vacation-type hsia-fang. As in some other communist countries (e.g., the U.S.S.R., Cuba), students, office employees, factory workers, and others are mobilized for short periods to help out with the harvest or aid in the execution of other projects in the countryside.

Then there is the practice of sending back (hui hsiang) to their villages high school and university students whose education in the cities or near-by towns has been completed (sometimes perhaps before completion), and rural workers who had been recruited for temporary service in urban industry under a contractual scheme known as ho-t'ang. There are many types of contract work. For example, young girls from the country are hired by textile mills for a specified number of years, on the understanding that they will return to the countryside on the completion of the given period of service. Some contract workers are given leaves of absence during the busy farm seasons. The contract normally specifies that the worker gets board and lodgings from the employing enterprise or local urban authority, a specified wage (part of which is remitted to the production team from which he comes), and that the worker's family remain in the village. Prior to the Cultural Revolution, contract labor was often a cause of resentment among urban workers. Contract laborers were seen by the regular workers as rate-busters: they came in at lower than regular wages, did not get the social security component of the wage, and were perceived by the regulars as making an already tight urban labor market even tighter.¹⁸ A third type of

¹⁸ The contract labor system was introduced in 1962 as an exception to the rule of not recruiting unskilled labor from the countryside for three years. In many cases the worker-peasants replaced regular urban workers who were sent down to the countryside upon arrival of the rural recruits. See my The Political Economy of Communist China (Scranton, Pa., and New York: Intext Educational Publishers, 1970), pp. 377-378; and Colina MacDougall, "Second Class Workers," Far Eastern Economic Review (Hong Kong), May 9, 1968, pp. 306-308.

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sending back consists of the forcible return to the countryside of illegal entrants or re-entrants into the cities. Finally, whole regiments of demobilized soldiers originally recruited from both town and country are sometimes settled on state farms in border regions for reasons noted earlier.

Today the most important form of hsia-fang, however, is the transfer of unemployable urban youths with middle-school education, a transfer in most cases intended to be permanent. The youths are “inserted” into communes, state farms, or the army’s Production and Construction Corps (PCC), and are “settled” there, which means inserted for life. The movement is known as “down to the country and up to the mountains” (hsia-hsiang shang-shan yun-tung), and despite its heavy economic component and intended permanence, is part of the general tendency to shift problems to the countryside for solution. Insertion in the Production and Construction Corps of the People’s Liberation Army is among the relatively more desirable alternatives. Service in the Corps, which now has branches in all eleven Great Military Areas, can lead perhaps to a career in the army and to comparatively easier access to Communist Party and Communist Youth League (CYL) membership—both important avenues of upward mobility. In Inner Mongolia in 1972 only 0.7 per cent of rusticated youths who had been inserted into the people’s communes, production brigades, and production teams, had become Party members, and another 8 per cent joined the CYL. In the same area, 3.8 per cent of Production and Construction Corps members were admitted to the Party and 28 per cent to the CYL. Although PCC members work on army farms and under military supervision, they are not part of regular PLA formations. As on state farms and people’s communes, the rusticated youth on army farms include both boys and girls.

In mid-1974 the strategy of inserting urban-educated young people into the countryside began to show a definite pattern. Four types of settlement “stipulated by the center” are in vogue: insertion of rusticated youths in groups of not more than ten into existing, “regular” production teams; establishment of production teams composed exclusively of rusticated youths, but under the leadership of an existing production brigade or commune; creation of special farms, away from the established communes, composed exclusively of rusticated young people led by “outstanding cadres,” some of whom are to be sent down on a rotating basis from the cities together with the youths (thus combining re-education through manual labor with hsia-hsiang); and settlement of urban-educated youths in state agricultural, livestock, forestry, or fish farms. Of the variants, the third appears to be

19 Inner Mongolian PBS, December 22, 1972 in CNA, No. 610 (February 16, 1973), p. 3.
20 Hubei PBS (Wuhan), July 29, 1974.

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currently most favored by the authorities. The army's Production and Construction Corps are not much mentioned any more. The present official preference rating reflects a desire on the part of the authorities to lower tensions between regular commune members and the migrants by a policy of segregation which is not quite in tune with the goal of the youths' acquiring political awareness from the masses of poor and lower-middle peasants. Some of the young people's farms are to be specialized in the sense that their population will be drawn from families whose parents work in the same or roughly similar trades or professions. The rotating cadres in charge of such farms are also to be recruited from similar professional and trade backgrounds as their charges' parents.

How does one move millions of educated young people from the cities to a countryside which, by and large, is still very backward? The methods do not differ substantially from those used in carrying out other mass projects in China. The whole process is marked by considerable compulsion, mainly moral and partly internalized through a long drawn-out process of education.

The first step is to lower the young people's level of expectations. This is done in two ways. First, throughout their school and pre-school years young people are taught that the noblest aspiration of youth in New China is to become peasants and workers, especially the former. Inversely, all personal desire to become officials and avoid manual labor must be extirpated. How effective this process of indoctrination is cannot really be ascertained, but there must take place at least some lowering of the average level of aspirations. Second, since the Socialist Education Campaign of 1963, and particularly after the Cultural Revolution (1966-69), the content of education at all levels has been restructured to match the officially promoted aspirations. Education in China today, from kindergarten up through the university, consists of one-third each of manual labor, moral upbringing in the maxims of the Chairman, and theoretical work. Most students are trained to be somewhat modernized peasants. Moreover, since the Cultural Revolution, under the stern cultural regime of Madame Mao, the glitter of the cities has been considerably dimmed and the cultural fare of the towns is not much different from that of the countryside, thus lessening the attraction of city life.

Still, the worst that Shanghai has to offer is often better than the best that Inner Mongolian villages can provide. Attempts are made, therefore, to narrow the cultural gap by sending traveling theatrical troupes, encouraging local cultural events on revolutionary themes, opening libraries and rural

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21 In Heilungkiang two rusticated middle-school graduates on the Shanho farm wrote a short play about the breeding of new soybean varieties. The play was included in a theatrical
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clubs equipped with the approved reading matter, and so on. Nevertheless, one often hears the complaint that rusticated urban youths listen to “feudal, capitalist, revisionist jokes and stories,” and read “poisonous novels” and “bad books” by, among others, the “four scoundrels” (four leading pre-Cultural Revolution Party writers). Lately, ten institutions of higher learning in Shanghai (including the radicalized Futan University) have offered correspondence courses lasting six months to a year to some 30,000 rusticated youths in five provinces. These courses comprise three major categories: political and language studies, agricultural technique, and medical treatment and public health. To be eligible for the course, the applicants have to be recommended by the masses and receive permission from the leadership.

The second step is to put enormous, organized, peer-group pressure on school-leavers to move to the country. Various mass organizations, including the Youth League, are harnessed to this task of persuasion. Parents are urged to attend mass meetings with their children during which the desirability of rustication is explained to them. For example, the Wuhan Municipal Revolutionary Committee organized in April 1973 a “meeting of mobilization” for current senior middle-school graduates to go to the countryside. Present at the event were responsible comrades of the Hubei Province Revolutionary Committee, the Wuhan Municipal Party Committee and Municipal Revolutionary Committee, all current senior middle-school graduates and their parents, representatives of students from all Wuhan middle schools, representatives of various factories, commercial stores, government offices, representatives of neighborhood associations and residents, responsible persons of Youth League organs at various levels, and leading comrades of various middle schools and departments concerned—in all more than 30,000 people. At the meeting, Wang Han-wen, secretary of the Party's Hubei Province Committee and First Secretary of the Party's Wuhan Municipal Committee, urged all Party organizations in rural areas seriously to implement the rustication policies and treat correctly those children who can be educated. As regards class enemies trying to undermine the movement of sending


22 Report on rusticated youths in Kiangsu province, JMJP, May 14, 1970, p. 3. Another group of young people "collected fertilizer, but also engaged in improper games; they did their good deeds, but at the same time they read bad books," JMJP, April 9, 1974, p. 4.
young people to the countryside, “we must give them a telling blow and handle such cases seriously.”

Some young people think that, having reached the socialist society, everything should be good and they should enjoy the existing happy life without wasting any of their strength,” said a New China News Agency report of November 15, 1974. “This is an unrealistic way of thinking. To build socialism is absolutely not easy.” Leading Party and government cadres were reminded to set a good example by sending their own children to the villages. The pressure is irresistible; there are really no options. During summer vacations, middle-school students interview their rusticated seniors as part of “investigation and study” assignments. Exhibits are held in towns to inform future recruits of the nobility of the cause and the revolutionary significance of being rusticated.

Lin Piao is alleged to have said that rusticking the young was a disguised form of corrective labor (lao kai), and sending cadres to May 7th schools was “unemployment in disguise.”

To sweeten the presumably bitter pill of rustication (and in the case of rural repatriates, to save the migrants’ face when they turn up back in their villages), mass farewell meetings are held at the point of departure and welcome gatherings are organized on arrival in the country. In May 1972, for example, some 200,000 revolutionary masses lined the roads to see off the first group of Harbin educated young people sent down to the countryside. A month later 300,000 participated in the send-off while “a great welcome” awaited the arrivals at the other end.

Presumably transportation costs are covered, at least in part, by the sending authorities. Shortly after the Cultural Revolution there were reports that subsidies were paid to rural authorities charged with absorbing large numbers of youths in the local economy. Industrial workers sent down were often given severance pay based on length of employment.

How do those who are sent down to the countryside and up to the mountains respond to their lot? How do peasants respond to the prospect and reality of having large numbers of outsiders settle permanently in their midst? The official answer is that the migrants welcome their lot most enthusiastically, with only minor backsliding here and there, and that the peasant masses receive city youths in their villages with equal enthusiasm and warm fraternal feeling. While this may express the regime’s ideological fantasies, it probably does not accurately describe the young people’s and

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peasants' actual behavior. There are enough oblique references to obstrepe-
erous responses and "evil winds" whipped up by enemies of the movement
to make one question the accuracy of the officially reported reactions.

The responses themselves are in two stages: pre- and post-rustication. On
the deportees' side, hsia-fang means separation from family and friends, and
a quasi-permanent canceling of all but the most modest and menial career
objectives. In most cases it also means an immediate and sharp reduction
in living standards and a deterioration of cultural environment. Unless the
education effort mentioned before has been totally successful, there is bound
to be resentment among the recruits and some effort to beat the system.
Despite the reported effectiveness of indoctrination, it is highly unlikely that
all personal ambition and individual striving can be erased and replaced by
massive abnegation, denial of self, and a single-minded desire to serve the
people.

On the side of those marked for downward transfer the pre-rustication
response will comprise two steps. First, there will often be an effort, usually
unsuccessful, to avoid being sent down. Second, an attempt will be made
to minimize the private damage of rustication. Thus, being sent down can
be turned to one's personal advantage. An attitude of fired-up willingness
to go to the countryside and the mountains and a demonstrated desire to
spurn self and merge with the people can earn good points toward one's
future career, just as nowadays volunteering for a stint in a May 7th school
is helpful to a cadre's record. One must not overdo it, of course. There is
much fuming in the press about the need to be vigilant and resolutely refute
the fallacy of "going to the countryside for gilding." It remains true never-
theless that in the present context of values, a stay in the countryside can
be useful to one's future place in society, provided it can be kept from
becoming permanent. "Lin Piao nonsensically said: 'Learn properly and gain
enormous profit out of small capital investment.' It is possible that the
temptation to turn historical necessity to personal advantage is most com-
mon and likely to succeed among the higher placed cadres and their
children.

Then again, if one has to be rusticated one tries to get a soft assignment—
for example, in a commune near a big city, preferably the city in which one

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21 KMIP, May 14, 1974 in SPRCP, No. 5639 (June 20, 1974), p. 152. "Liu Shao-ch' i and
other swindlers like him spread such reactionary fallacies as 'go to the countryside and gild
oneself' and 'face the latrines' in their vain attempt to make the young people depart from
realities, from labor, and from the masses, and become tools for the restoration of capitalism."
p. 208.

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lives at present. The impression conveyed by many reports is that quite a few high-school leavers are rusticated in the suburbs. Here again, a parent's position in the Party or governmental hierarchy will certainly be an asset. If an assignment near a city cannot be procured, one can try to avoid being sent to places such as Sinkiang or the wild northeast. If this is not feasible, one tries to get into the PLA's Production and Construction Corps, which is better than being rusticated on a people's commune or state farm.

Pre-rustication responses from the recipient rural units (communes, state farms, etc.) are more difficult to pinpoint. It would not be unreasonable to argue that for many rural authorities the intake of large numbers of young people from the cities involves sizeable immediate costs: housing and training have to be provided, food has to be procured locally. There will be frictions between regular residents and the newcomers if only because of educational distance (this despite the lowering of academic standards in the schools since the Cultural Revolution). If there are subsidies, they are probably insufficient to cover the short-run expenses of absorbing the migrants. Provincial and central government subsidies to communes which receive urban-educated youths under the hsia-hsiang program have probably been raised since 1968; this is suggested by the increased food and clothing rations and better housing facilities allocated by some communes to the migrants in recent years. The increase in such subsidies, needed to help commune authorities absorb young people from the cities, is no doubt one of the reasons which enter into the decision to stress rustication away from established communes.

But still, the countryside is saddled with a cost item which it has to meet as best it can from local sources. In the long run the presence of educated young people in the countryside may produce payoffs in the form of higher productivity and better cultural standards. For the rural responsible persons, however, what matters are the shorter-run costs. So they will try to evade them, and if they cannot, will try to minimize them once the youth are down on the farm.

The migrants' post-rustication responses include, no doubt, attempts to make the enforced stay as bearable and short as possible. This involves finding channels of upward mobility through either Party or Youth League membership or "getting out honorably." The latter includes recruitment by a factory or an institution of higher learning. To enter a university a complex procedure is nowadays required. The method of enrollment is called the "Four Links": voluntary registration (by the candidate with the workplace authorities), mass recommendation (recommendation by the registrant's fellow workers), leadership approval (approval by the revolutionary committee and Party committee of the candidate's place of work), and
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school re-examination (review by the university authorities). In this obstacle course it helps to have as ally someone with influence in the right places. In recent years a number of articles decrying the continued existence of influence-peddling in their particular area have been given wide publicity. If one cannot get out through factory or university recruitment, one can try to reduce the manual nature of the assignment by becoming a rural schoolteacher, an accountant, a mechanic in a local workshop, a tractor or truck driver, or a barefoot doctor.

There have been many complaints in the press about the persistence of the Confucian-Lin Piao idea of "studying to become an official," which means essentially studying to get out of manual work. Rusticated city girls have been known to leave by marrying city workers. In a brigade in Kwangsi province, according to the People's Daily (October 16, 1972), rusticated city girls "think only of going back to the cities and towns; some have love affairs at an early age, and they marry early." One gets the impression that rural authorities are not averse to seeing the girls depart as soon as they can manage it. It has been reported that in Kwangsi province leading comrades in some production brigades did not take good care of the rusticated city girls, arguing that they will marry and leave. These leading comrades also thought "in the old way"—they neglected to give the girls proper accommodation, failed to assign the weaker ones to lighter work, and apparently discriminated against the girls in the matter of labor-point allocation.

One can also try to arrange something during home leave. If all else fails and life becomes unbearable, one can try and filter back into town illegally, hoping that one's relatives will help. Some areas have reportedly

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28 KMJP, July 15, 1974 in SPRCP, No. 5662 (July 26, 1974), p. 188.
29 E.g., the case of the Nanking University student Chung Chih-min who was admitted "by the back door." In his letter of resignation (published in JMP on January 18, 1974, p. 1) Chung says: "... it is only natural for dependents of cadres to receive a little special treatment." He cites the case of a cadre relative who gets out of his manual labor assignment in three months while others toil for five or six years. For other examples see K. P. Gupta, " Corruption in China," China Report (Delhi), Vol. X, Nos. 1-2 (January-April 1974), pp. 8-11.
30 JMP, October 16, 1972, p. 4 in CNA, No. 910 (February 16, 1973), p. 6. The same issue of CNA also has a Szechuan PBS, November 5, 1972 report on the corruption of city girls by class enemies in the countryside. On November 23, 1974, Radio Peking announced that Party organizations at all levels in Haicheng Hsien, Liaoning Province, now paid equal attention to female educated youths, married and unmarried, who settled in the countryside. The change in policy seemed to have occurred after a young woman the previous autumn complained that the cadres in her brigade no longer treated the married educated youth as educated youths, that married educated youths were no longer asked to take part in theoretical study and political activities in the youth community, and that her brigade seldom paid attention to the married youths' education and wellbeing. The new policy was clearly expected to serve as a model for emulation. This item has been brought to my notice by Professor June Dreyer.
adopted severe measures to discourage families from hiding young deserters from the countryside. Door-to-door checks by special cadres are made and deserters caught have been paraded through the streets. Since the deserters have no city residence registration, they are not allotted food and clothing ration-cards. Nor can they legally be employed by any city enterprise. If they stay undetected, they have to be fed and provided for by their families or engage in petty crimes, including black market activities. Hsia-hsiang dodgers, that is, youths who obstinately refuse to be sent down by resorting to all kinds of evading maneuvers (e.g., deliberately failing their final school examinations so as to stay on in school for another year), are reportedly deprived of their residence registration and face the same problem as the deserters.

The general impression is that there must be a great deal of dissatisfaction and frustration among the rusticated youths, some of whom are not so young any more. The shifting of potentially unemployable intellectuals or semi-intellectuals to the countryside may indeed lessen pressure on the cities, but it does not resolve the psychological problems implicit in the move. In fact, breaking up families may have made the problem worse. Many parents apparently found their own financial situation worsened as a result of their children's being sent down to the country. In mid-1973 a document issued by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party for study by cadres included a letter purportedly written by a teacher in Fukien Province to Mao and the Chairman's answer. The teacher recounted the hardship for the family of having to send a sum of money every month to their rusticated elder son, without which he could not make ends meet. Another son was awaiting assignment to the countryside. In his return letter the Chairman enclosed 300 yuan and promised that the problem, shared by many other families in China, would receive the Party's and the government's attention. The majority of youths sent down to a county in Hopei Province were reportedly unable to live on their earnings from work in the commune. Among the complaints noted were "irrational remuneration" of rusticated youths (they were allegedly awarded fewer work-points than regular commune members for equivalent work), fewer working days accumulated during the year by the youths than by regular peasants, and inability to earn extra income from sideline occupations because of lack of needed skills. An already unsatisfactory situation is aggravated by the

81 A few reports indicate that "some rusticated youths [probably those who have given up trying to get out] have sent for their parents to live with them, and some have sent their brothers and sisters to join them in the battle," KMJP, May 14, 1974 in SPRCP, No. 5639 (June 20, 1974), p. 152.
spectacle of young people with connections getting out or securing soft assignments, while those without influence or with an incorrect class background are stuck in the wilderness. There is surely bitterness among the former Red Guards and Revolutionary Rebels who had fought during the Cultural Revolution for what they were told and believed was the cause of socialism, and who today are still being rectified by semi-literate peasants and herdsmen.

“Some time ago, intellectual youth Wang Chih-ming was very unhappy and wanted to look for a more ‘ideal’ job. After several intimate talks, he still had misgivings in thinking. . . . Wang Chih-ming came from a working class family.” Despite his correct class background, Wang’s obstinacy in feeling unhappy in the countryside made him a candidate for the old reliable remolding medicines, the purpose of which is to eliminate bourgeois “fragrant wind” from the minds of the young. After what was described as a heart-to-heart talk with the Party branch secretary and a stint with the rear services squad “which called for much harder work,” Wang became very enthusiastic about rustication.32 Ah-er-szu-lang is a responsible person of the Secretariat of the Communist League’s Political Department in the Mongolian Autonomous Region. His wife hoped that her daughter would be sent down somewhere near and the daughter also wanted to settle down in a nearby production team. But Ah-er-szu-lang made them study Chairman Mao’s works and the daughter thereupon “reaffirmed her determination to settle in a remote pastoral area and sink roots there. Thus she gladly left for the Cha-lu-te Banner in the remote north [of Inner Mongolia].”33

“When Ma Kun-lin, a young girl, first came to the countryside, she was very enthusiastic about her work. After some time, however, she thought that there was no future in working in the countryside and she went back to the city.” [a relatively rare admission of illegal reverse migration.] The peasant masses “tried to help her by repeatedly accompanying her to study Chairman Mao’s works and criticize vigorously the ‘theory of studying to become an official.’” Having enhanced her thinking she returned to the production team. We assigned her to raise pigs at the pig farm. At the beginning she did quite well. But later she began to think that pig raising was a dirty, labor-consuming job not suitable for a girl. Hence, we again persuaded her to study Chairman Mao’s works. The poor women peasants who worked with her at the pig farm strove to do all the heavy and dirty work and showed her with practical action that old ideas which sneak into our minds

32 KMJP, August 9, 1972 in URS, Vol. 69, No. 3 (October 10, 1972), pp. 37-38.
33 KMJP, August 22, 1972 in URS, ibid., p. 39.
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were dirty and stinking rather than pig dung that smeared all over our clothes. From then on she began to do the heavy and dirty work."34

Then there was the son of a Party Committee Secretary in a county in Kwangsi Province. "At the time of his graduation [from the middle-school in Psi-se town] some of his schoolmates said: 'Young Chang's father is the secretary of the Communist Party Committee. He would be given special care and assigned to work in the city.' When [the son] Chang Chien-yeh heard this, he had the feeling of superiority over others. His father summoned him. 'Chien-yeh, now that you graduated from senior-middle school, what plans have you got in mind?' 'I want to be a worker. I heard that our school intended to send me to a factory.'" His father helped him overcome "the superiority complex of being the son of a cadre." The story has an instructive ending: a year later the boy "was gloriously admitted into the Communist Youth League and also appointed deputy platoon leader of the militia."35 He was well on his way back to town. In revolutionary work, as they say, "there is only division of labor, not differentiation of status."36 But the young people also know that in revolutionary work "politics can wash away everything."37

These vignettes hint at personal difficulties, sometimes tragedies that proliferate under the surface of unanimity and collective optimism. Many rusticated youths apparently say that "the scent of rice plants in the villages is not as attractive as the electric lights in the cities," and that "learning from Tachai is fine, but too hard to do."38 As usual such sentiments are attributed to only a "handful," and their source is traced to concealed criminals of the Lin Piao and Liu Shao-ch'i stripe who work hard to spread such apparently appealing counterrevolutionary fallacies.

It may be questioned, of course, how representative of the overall situation are the cases cited in the press. The frequency with which teaching by negative example is resorted to and the growing number of positive hsia-fang heroes suggest that the collective virtue of spurning self and serving the people is as yet not very widespread. There is truth to Gupta's reflection that "if 'virtue' had become commonplace, there would have been no need to drum up virtuous heroes worthy of emulation."39

34 KMJP, July 27, 1972 in URS, ibid., p. 33.
35 KMJP, August 16, 1972 in URS, ibid., pp. 41-42.
37 Kweichow PBS, November 18, 1972 in URS, Vol. 69, No. 19, p. 262.
38 Nan-fang jih-pao (NFJP), Canton, August 13, 1972, p. 3 in URS, ibid., p. 265.
39 Gupta, op. cit., p. 11. "Thus when Mao asks people to send their sons and daughters to the countryside, the picture of backward villages which desperately need input of city skills does not automatically figure in the process of ordinary decision-making at the cognitive level of the masses. Mao's call provides only an unquestionable norm. This norm is subverted in the
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What conclusions can be drawn from the now almost twenty-year-old program of transferring large numbers of people from city to country? First, it cannot be denied that the Chinese countryside badly needs the input of city talent that is apparently being supplied on a large scale. Massive flight from the land, typical of many other developing societies, is not occurring in China; rather the reverse is true. Second, visual impressions tend to confirm that there is little unemployment in the cities (although underemployment is probably quite common). This has beneficial repercussions on the social life of the cities. Although difficult to document, crime rates in Chinese cities are probably comparatively low. Third, the transfer of large numbers of people to the countryside has surely reduced the strain on state finances. Residential housing in the cities continues to be extremely short and sanitary and other public services are rudimentary but adequate from the standpoint of public health and hygiene. An uncontrolled flow of peasants into urban areas would have changed a difficult but manageable problem into one of crisis proportions. The cases of Calcutta and Bombay are there to remind one of this. A rapidly swelling urban population would also have necessitated larger grain imports, with a concurrent drain of China’s foreign exchange reserves. One of the reasons frequently adduced to explain China’s food grains import program is that the imports are used to feed the large coastal cities, a procedure which reduces the strain on and is less costly than inland transport.

Fourth, the transfer of intellectual underemployment and potential unemployment from town to country does not resolve the psychological tensions involved in a trained person’s doing a job well below his qualifications. There must be millions of young people in China today in this position. Although their previous moral-political training has no doubt lowered their level of aspirations and raised their desire to serve the people at the expense of personal advancement, the desire to better oneself in an agreeable cultural environment has surely not been eliminated altogether. The existence of widespread resentment among the rusticated youth is bound to affect the quality and quantity of the input of talent which the authorities count on to raise the economic and cultural level of the countryside.40 Similarly, even where willingness exists to make a contribution, it seems to be hampered by the ideological postulate that the poor and lower-middle peasants are wiser the very process of its actualization insofar as it implies personal sacrifices from the people.” *Ibid.*, p. 10.

and politically infinitely more mature than the young intellectuals. There is an element of punishment in being sent down to the countryside and up to the mountains, which is likely to dampen such enthusiasm as some may have for battling feudal and bourgeois survivals in the rural areas. Press reports of youths throwing down tools, general negligence, and knocking off from work early are quite common. So are reports of what amounts to class incompatibility between the educated young people from the cities and the peasants. In the last analysis the youths' contribution to the modernization of the countryside has to be set against the physical and social damage they do on the way.

The whole system continues to be, as in the past, precariously poised. In times of political trouble at the top, the flow of migrants reverses itself. This has happened and may occur again whenever financial and administrative-economic controls are relaxed. Even at the best of times, illegal, semi-legal, and legal reverse migration must be quite substantial.

*Pennsylvania State University, February 1975*