

"Breaking With Old Ideas": Revisiting a Cultural Revolution-Era Movie to Explore the Present-Day Resonance of Maoist Educational Ideals in China

Haotian Zhang*¹, Siboluo², and Zhongkai Qian³

¹China Agricultural University, Beijing, China

²China Agricultural University, China, tironleone@gmail.com

³China Agricultural University, China, 2670923681@qq.com

*william1175306800@163.com

Abstract. The film "Breaking with Old Ideas" critically portrays the educational reforms at Jiangxi Agricultural University, embodying Mao Zedong's vision for youth as successors of the revolutionary cause and his advocacy for educational equality. Released in the 1970s, the film initially received public acclaim but was later banned post-1978, after being labeled a "poisonous weed" during China's neoliberal shift. This reflected a significant transformation in the perception of revolutionary narratives. In contemporary China, the education system grapples with severe competition, pronounced inequalities, and authoritarian tendencies. The digital age and the resurgence of social media have facilitated the rediscovery of this film, highlighting its critical and reflective qualities that provoke discussions on educational ideologies. By juxtaposing traditional and revolutionary educational leaders, the film exposes the stark contrasts between Mao's reform-minded educational ideas and the so-called "modern education system." This study revisits these contrasting educational paradigms: the "old ideas" of monopolistic discourse knowledge and Mao's practical education model. Through an analysis of key scenes depicting these ideological and practical confrontations, the paper explores, through the prism of the Maoist critique, present-day aspects and challenges of Chinese education, and assesses the potential of Mao's educational philosophy to inform and transform contemporary education practices.

Keywords: Educational Ideologies, Cultural Revolution, China

1 Introduction

In contemporary mainland China, discussions about Cultural Revolution-era films, particularly 'Breaking with Old Ideas,' have surged on Chinese social media platforms. This film centers on the educational revolution at Jiangxi Agricultural University, distills Mao Zedong's views on the role of youth as the successors of the "revolutionary cause," and also incorporates Mao's emphasis on educational equality. This phenomenon is notably observable on several prominent internet platforms in China. On Zhihu, which a popular Chinese website like Quora, discussion threads about movie reviews

of "Breaking with Old Ideas" have amassed over 5 million views, with 380 netizens sharing their opinions. The most popular view received 1,558 endorsements, on the video platform Bilibili, which is a popular video uploading website like YouTube in China; the original film has been repeatedly uploaded by users after multiple takedowns due to political censorship, demonstrating the public's resilience in preserving this piece of revolutionary cinema. A well-known leftist blogger "乌鸦校尉"(Captain Crow) produced and uploaded an analysis and critique of the film, which, despite being removed by censors within 72 hours of posting, achieved 1.3 million views and was repeatedly restored by users. Ultimately, due to persistent regulatory pressure, the film continues to circulate in the form of shared network drive links on the video platform.

Such antagonism between official and popular attitudes appeared dramatically as early as the film's release: This film received widespread public acclaim when it was first released in the 1970s. However, following China's neoliberal turn in 1978, it was officially labeled as a "poisonous weed" (meaning a film that contaminates the cultural environment and public thought) and subsequently banned, reflecting a gigantic shift in attitudes towards the revolutionary discourse expressed in the film across different historical contexts, and this film fell into obscurity after that. In the post-1978 era of modern education in China, the education system has faced challenges such as severe individualistic competition, severe inequality of opportunities, and significant authoritarianism within the system [1]. Even after a forty-year gap after the movie's release, authorities still appear to consider this movie as threatening.

Under this background, this resurgence of interest in "Breaking with the old ideas" reflects a broader public engagement with and critique of the cultural and political narratives of the Cultural Revolution, underscoring the enduring influence of Mao Zedong's ideologies on modern Chinese education and society. These discussions and the acts of reposting censored content highlight the ongoing struggle against the suppression of historical and revolutionary discourse in China. This pattern not only reveals the population's desire to revisit and reinterpret the past but also indicates a critical examination of contemporary socio-political dynamics through the lens of historical events and ideologies. Academically, the revived interest in such films offers valuable insights into the mechanisms of cultural resistance and the complex interplay between state control and public memory. Moreover, the persistent efforts to keep such content accessible despite censorship underscore a significant aspect of digital activism, reflecting a form of educational resistance that aligns with leftist critiques of current societal structures. This phenomenon provides a critical platform for exploring the transformative potential of education as envisioned by Mao, challenging the prevailing educational paradigms and advocating for a more equitable and ideologically open educational system in China. Such discourse is essential in the academic field as it provides an occasion for reflecting on historical educational policies and their implications for contemporary practices, thereby enriching the dialogue on how education can evolve to meet the needs of society while adhering to equitable and inclusive standards.

Let us go deeper in depicting the intense ideological confrontations between progressive represented by Chairman Mao's educational philosophy, and conservative factions represented by Confucian thought within the educational sphere following the

establishment of the People's Republic of China in the film. The film probes the fundamental question: Is there a class aspect to education? If so, which class should education serve? Is it for the working and peasant masses or for the landlord and bourgeois class? The conflict shown in the film crystallizes a number of critical interrogations for the politics of education: 1). What is the purpose of education? Is it to nurture talent for building socialism or to select so-called elites? 2). What type of knowledge should be pursued? Should it be learned through practical struggle or through rigid academic instruction? 3). What is the objective of acquiring knowledge? Is it to better serve society and transform the world or to chase fame and profit? As a film with a robust revolutionary ideology, "Breaking with Old Ideas" critiques bourgeois educational policies. The principal character in the film effectively addresses this schism, noting that pursuing advanced cultural and scientific knowledge without aligning it with proletarian politics can lead to a loss of direction and a detachment from productive practice.

Hence, it is easy to find out that the discussions about "Breaking with Old Ideas" serve as a form of digital activism and cultural resistance, embodying the spirit of Mao's educational philosophy that champions an education system oriented towards serving the broader societal good over individualistic pursuits. The reinvigoration of this film on modern platforms underscores its enduring relevance in debates over educational fairness, ideological openness, and the role of education in societal transformation.

The reality against which the Maoist discussions associated with this film have been confronted is the rapid transition to a neo-liberal capitalist economic model in China under Deng Xiaoping in the post-1978 era [2]. The "neo-liberal turn" in education policy has also brought thinking about education policy during the Cultural Revolution into the public eye [3]. It is worth noting that the film was introduced to the overseas film market in the 1970s and has been widely discussed [4]. Additionally, the creation of educational policy and market inadvertently led to class differentiation, and educational inequalities in China: more than half of preschool children (57%) attend private schools, compared to about one-third in OECD and G20 countries, leading to educational and outcome inequalities [5]. Authoritarian management within the educational system has led to student dissatisfaction [6], although it has played a role in fostering Chinese authoritarianism [7]. These issues highlight the necessity for further research and policy intervention in China's education system. In this context, Cultural Revolution films provide a radical leftist inspiration to address these contemporary real-world issues. Thus, re-evaluating this film helps us reflect on modern Chinese education and explore the potential of practical education under this contrast. This study aims to explore the two different educational paradigms presented in the film—the "old ideas" characterized by monopolistic discourse knowledge and the practical education model guided by Mao Zedong's educational thoughts. Through in-depth analysis of several distinctive contrasting scenes in the film, we can better understand the fierce clashes between different views and practical paths in the education field. By discussing and analyzing Mao Zedong's educational thoughts in the film, we can engage in dialogue with the many issues that have emerged in modern Chinese education since the post-1978 era.

This paper will unfold through the following structure: First, it will briefly narrate the main plot of the film and some important events, analyzing the historical background and plot based on Mao Zedong's thoughts and educational ideas during the "Cultural Revolution" period. Next, the paper will interpret the film based on critical theories and research on education and neoliberalism, including by Michel Foucault, Herbert Marcuse, and Randall Collins. In the final part, it will discuss the current social issues in China's education sector, pointing out how these issues resonate with elements from the film and Mao's era.

2 Mao Zedong's thoughts on education: Intellectual premises of *Breaking with Old Ideas*

If we are to examine the conflict between the two educational paradigms in the movie and the contemporary significance of Mao's educational thought, we must examine the context of the time as well as the content of Mao's educational thought and the problems facing education in contemporary China. Mao's educational thought was first used in China in the early 1960s. It covered almost every aspect of education, two of which are most representative: "comprehensive development" and "unity of theory and practice" [8]. Mao's idea of comprehensive development of education was first put forward in his 1917 article "Study of Physical Education," in which he criticized traditional Chinese education for emphasizing only knowledge and morality and neglecting physical development, arguing that "Physical Education completes the education of virtue and knowledge," and citing examples to show that Physical Education not only raises the level of intellect, but also improves the quality of morality. He emphasized that "the three kinds of education (physical, moral and intellectual) are equally important." Mao formally revived the idea in a major policy statement in 1957. The three dimensions of students were demanded to be able to work in science and technology, to be able to perform physical labor, and most importantly, to be able to participate in the class struggle. Regarding the "unity of theory and practice," Mao believed that "knowledge begins with practice and then must return to practice." According to Mao, the function of knowledge can only be demonstrated in the practice of production, the scientific experimentation of the class struggle and the national struggle. Without practice, theory is just an empty word. The establishment of half-working schools was clearly based on this principle of combining education and production [8].

The practice of Mao Zedong's educational ideology was mainly carried out during the Cultural Revolution, which brought with it enormous political, economic, and cultural changes. The Cultural Revolution was seen as the final stage of the proletarian revolution's destiny for the Maoists. According to the first official document adopted by the Communist Party of China (CPC) on May 16, 1966, on the subject of the Great Manifesto (often referred to as the "May 16th Circular"), it is important to note that the CPC has not yet adopted the first official document on the subject of the Great Manifesto, but rather the first official document on the subject of the Great Manifesto, which is often referred to as the "May 6th Circular."

In order to better understand the educational ideas of Mao during the Cultural Revolution, we need to look at his criticisms of the education system in pre-revolution China; on February 13, 1964, Mao made a speech on education, known as the Spring Festival Speech, in which he attacked the education system of the time: “Our educational policy and guiding principles are correct, but the methods are incorrect. An excessive number of courses cause students to suffer severe strain. The academic system, the curriculum, teaching methods, and the approach of examinations all need to be reformed.” He followed up his critique with his own suggestions for educational reform. This was Mao's first public talk on education since the founding of the nation. It can also be described as a comprehensive summary of Mao's dissatisfaction with the education system transplanted from the Soviet model in the early 1950s. Many of Mao's later ideas on education can be traced back to this talk [8].

In the May 7 Instruction, Mao emphasized that students should focus not only on learning, but also on learning skills in other areas such as industrial labor, agriculture and military skills. And that the bourgeoisie should be criticized in teaching activities. Mao's letter to the Communist Labor University in Jiangxi, known as the “7-30 Instruction,” which appears in the film, is also noteworthy; in it, Mao says: “Half-work, half-study, hard-working and thrifty, without a penny from the state, there are elementary school, middle schools, and universities scattered over the hills of the province, and a few in the flatlands. Such schools are very good indeed. The majority of young people are in the school, there are also some young and middle-aged cadres. I hope that there will be such schools not only in Jiangxi, but also in other provinces. Each province should send competent and insightful comrades in charge to Jiangxi to inspect the school, learn from its experience, and go back to run it on a trial basis.”

Subsequently, under the guidance of Mao Zedong's educational thought, colleges and universities nationwide extensively carried out reforms of the curriculum system and training programs. Universities were also opened to the countryside, providing sufficient impetus for popularizing scientific and technological knowledge and improving the scientific quality of the people. The movie “Breaking with Old Ideas” was also shot against this background, and after its release on New Year's Day 1976, it was highly praised by the then “Leading Group of the Cultural Revolution”, and the People's Daily in October 1976 named it as a “potential model theater”. However, with the death of Mao Zedong and the failure of the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping assumed leadership and spearheaded major education reforms in China, incorporating marketization and neoliberalism into education policy [3]. This shift was intended to modernize Chinese education and align it with global trends [9]. However, these changes have inadvertently fostered a utilitarian approach to education that emphasizes efficiency and market logic [10]. While this utilitarianism has contributed to the progress of education in China, it has also disrupted the order of education and caused social problems [11]. In the context of “correcting the ultra-leftist ideology in education”, the movie “Breaking with Old Ideas” was also criticized in the People's Daily on January 10, 1979 as “a poisonous weed that poisons society! ”

3 The encounter between two educational paradigms in the movie: How the “break” occurs

The movie's plot unfolds as follows. In 1958, Long Guozheng, a veteran cadre who graduated from the Chinese People's Anti-Japanese Military and Political University (CPAJMPU), was instructed by his superiors to lead the newly established Communist Labor University (now Jiangxi Agricultural University). During the course of his appointment, Long overheard two college students complaining about being assigned to work in the countryside, which set the stage for a later conflict. At the admissions office, Sun Ziqing, the head teacher, blocked the door, using the excuse that "the culture is too low, not qualified" to prevent the poor peasants from entering the school. Principal Long insisted on abolishing the old enrollment threshold and advocated enrolling students based on the calluses on their hands. This aroused the resentment of the "old intellectuals" who held the old concept of teaching. Using his own experience at the CPAJMPU as a blueprint, President Long leads the students to build their own "new university" located in the countryside.

In the classroom, Director Sun's lecture on "The Role of the Horse's Tail" is interrupted by an elderly farmer from the production team who requests assistance due to health issues affecting his family's cow. The veterinary teacher declines to provide assistance, which provokes resentment among the students. This incident serves as the basis for resentment, which is unrelated to local production. This incident prompted a debate among the students, with Xu Niuzai, a humble farmer's child, expressing his displeasure at the basic information and types of horses presented in the classroom, which had no relevance to local production, as well as the treatments used by local veterinarians based on their experience in the field. This led to an incident in which Xu Niuzai posted large-character posters criticizing the style of the instructor. The posters were observed by Principal Cao, who ordered Xu Niuzai to tear them down on the grounds that they were disrupting the teaching order. In contrast, Principal Long approves of this behavior. To illustrate his point, Principal Long held up a handful of broken rice seeds and proclaimed, "Criticize the bourgeois style of learning," and since then, the campus has been criticizing theory for being divorced from practice.

By this point in the movie, the struggle between the two factions begins to heat up. At a meeting, Principal Long takes out the old representative's two lumps of mud and proposes a new method of arranging the curriculum according to the reality of production, which is opposed by Principal Cao and Director Sun. Principal Cao accuses Principal Long of deviating from traditional teaching, while Principal Long specifies that traditional teaching is bourgeois. During the spring plowing season, Principal Long moves the classroom to the farmland, which is strongly opposed by Principal Cao on the grounds that he doesn't want the students to become "narrow-minded" in the course of their work, and the two of them debate the issue again. Principal Long countered that removing students from production would not teach them to build socialism in unison with the working people.

In order to "reform" the stubborn Principal Long, Principal Cao, together with the deputy commissioner of the prefecture, Zhao, sent Principal Long to visit "famous universities." At the "famous universities", however, Principal Long was struck by several

incidents: one student wasted the grains under cultivation for his "thesis", and another student refused to accept the "noble" status of a university student on the grounds of his "noble" status. One student wasted the grains grown for his "graduation thesis" and another refused to return to the countryside to build his hometown on the basis of his "noble" status as a university student. These two incidents triggered President Long's thoughts.

Meanwhile, at the Communist University of China, Principal Cao, who is bent on brushing off his fellow workers and peasants, intends to organize an examination. At that time, a large-scale insect infestation breaks out in the fields of the "Shanbian Dadui" (a small agricultural commune), and the students represented by Li Jinfeng, with their love for the workers and peasants, voluntarily ask for help to get rid of the insects, which is refused by Principal Cao, who expels them on the grounds that they have turned in blanks, in spite of Principal Cao's obstruction, due to their clear class consciousness. The students are furious. When Principal Long returns from his research and listens to the students' complaints, he asserts that the students did the right thing and that Principal Cao insisted on the principle that marks and standards are paramount.

Director Sun, who is gradually rethinking his previous educational philosophy in the above incident, is treating his folks' cows when he learns about the high price paid by Yu Fagan, a student of the Communist University, for neutering (castrating) pigs. His father still retains the idea of "private ownership," and eventually, after being reprimanded by Director Sun and his classmates, Yu Fagan's father forces him to drop out of school. Director Sun is touched by this incident and admits to Principal Long that his education philosophy was wrong. When Senior Bureaucrat Zhao, specially dispatched by the higher government, went to the countryside to promote the "Household Responsibility System" (a policy reform post-1978 in rural China that contradicts the logic of socialist production), he was met with strong protest led by student Li Jinfeng and the masses against the government's enforced reforms. As a result, Li Jinfeng faced government retaliation—she was labeled by the government-controlled violent power of knowledge as a bad student leader who propagated "treasonous" and "anti-party" thoughts. Under the direction of Senior Bureaucrat Zhao and Vice Principal Qian, she was detained for leading the rebellion, awaiting a public trial by a people's court, bringing the film to its climax.

As the culmination of the film, during the public trial, the previously suppressed conflicts within the school and the upper government's suppression of the people's democratic self-governance converged and were fully exposed. Principal Long righteously exposes the essence of the "Sanziyibao" policy and praises Li Jinfeng for being a good student, which is positively embraced by the public. Principal Cao's daughter also rose up to expose her father's plot to cut herself away from the University, and Yu Faigen also exposed her father's ugly behavior in making money. At the public trial, Principal Long disgraces Deputy Commissioner Zhao, who threatens to expel Principal Long from the Party and dissolve the Communist University. In the end, the old head of the group saved the college by sending Chairman Mao's July 30th instructions and the will of the peasants. Inspired by the "instructions", he broke with the existing concepts.

4 Interpreting the movie: Reflections on education in the shadow of neoliberalism

There is a contrast and competition between two different educational paradigms, the traditional one, where purely theoretical knowledge is taught in the classroom and stilted attempts at realistic practice are made (which usually fail), and the radical educational experiment promoted in the film, where the classroom is opened in the fields and the students are taught through a combination of theory and practice, oriented to the practical and realistic needs of production. For example, in the play, in order to distinguish the difference between wheat and rice, students enter the field and learn while planting. This works well and fits in with the practical part of Mao's thought. These two different educational paradigms are reflected in many parts of the play in fierce contradiction and heterogeneity.

The first educational paradigm can be characterized as monopolistic in its approach to discursive knowledge. It regulates students' practical behavior through stringent restrictions and norms and implements a rigid, top-down, syllabus-centric training. Intriguingly, this traditional paradigm is not merely a relic of pre-revolutionary educational practices but embodies a blend of both capitalist and pre-capitalist logics. The structure is inherently hierarchical, illustrating power relations that dictate the learning environment and content dissemination.

In addressing whether this paradigm is more aligned with capitalist or pre-capitalist traditions, a nuanced discussion is warranted. From a capitalist perspective, the paradigm mirrors the bureaucratic management styles typical of early industrial capitalism, where efficiency and uniformity are prized, and education is viewed primarily as a means to produce a disciplined workforce tailored to the needs of a capitalist economy. This approach is evocative of the factory model of education, which emerged during the Industrial Revolution to meet the demands of an industrializing society, focusing on time management, punctuality, and repetitive tasks.

Conversely, the pre-capitalist elements are reflected in the authoritarian control over knowledge and the emphasis on maintaining existing social hierarchies, reminiscent of medieval scholastic education systems. These systems were designed to preserve the status quo by instilling a rigid curriculum centered around classical texts and religious doctrine, reinforcing the social order without fostering critical or creative thinking.

We can easily find that the purpose of pre-capitalist education shares similarities with capitalist-oriented education, which aims to form authorities to serve the profit of the ruling class. Traditional pedagogical approaches are repurposed to serve modern economic objectives. Therefore, this educational paradigm's capitalist and pre-capitalist features suggest a complex historical synthesis, where educational practices designed to maintain hierarchical structures have been adapted to serve the economic and social demands of capitalist development. The exploration of these dual aspects offers a rich field for academic inquiry, challenging us to reconsider the foundations of contemporary educational structures and their implications for social equity and mobility.

This latter aspect ties with one of the main topics of research in the sociology of education until now - the inequality and power exchange relations in the educational

process. The implementation of education results in a division of power between students and teachers, which can lead to the isolation of students [12]. This division of power molds the student in the way the teacher or a higher authority desires, a process that Michel Foucault refers to as “discipline” [13]. According to Foucault, discipline is not about explicitly enforced rules, but rather about shaping individuals through subtle, pervasive techniques of surveillance and normalization. This shaping process, while contributing to the educational progress, also disturbs the educational order and leads to social issues. It is noteworthy that such a system of discipline has already occupied a rather important position in the contemporary Chinese education system, for example, the “whole process academic performance monitoring” model that many higher education institutions carry out on their students, which is precisely the system of discipline in the field of education in an extreme manner.

In the field of educational left cultural studies, scholars critically examine the mass production of students and the use of quantitative criteria for quality assurance. This critique aligns with Marcuse’s [14] argument that traditional education often serves as an instrument of repression, fostering social order through the development of codes of conduct and social values. Standardized testing and other forms of assessment that prioritize conformity over individual creativity are examples of these “quantitative criteria”. Therefore, a comprehensive literature review in this field requires a critical evaluation of these themes [15]. Only students who pass the “tests” are considered “qualified”, and whether students have actually learned professional skills and knowledge in the real sense becomes a moot point. Is the essential purpose of this kind of education to provide talents for building socialism or to complete the calibration of social order by a kind of academic hierarchy as a standard? The analysis from the empirical point of view is more about the latter. In the film, Yu Fagen, who has not yet awakened, obeys his father’s order to quit school after learning his skills, which can be seen from the logic of “utilitarianism” in this behavior, and emphasizes the so-called “free withdrawal” and “free market” in the process of dropping out. From this argument, it is necessary to question whether Yu Fagen’s motivation to study in this process is for the sake of socialist construction or for the money he earns from his family’s pigs under the square footage.

Drawing from Collins’ model of education [16], we can identify three distinct types: practical skills training, the pursuit of status and identity (symbolic education), and the quest for political power or control over state bureaucracy. The pedagogical paradigm under discussion aligns with Collins’ second type, often referred to as the “diploma society”. This paradigm is symbolic, signifying that those possessing these “diplomas” wield a form of power known as “exclusionary closure.”

It is possible to elaborate on Collins’s schema in the following way:

- **Practical Skills Training:** This form of education emphasizes the development of specific, practical skills rather than the acquisition of broad, theoretical knowledge. It is often associated with vocational or skills-based learning, which prepares students for specific trades or professions.
- **Symbolic Education:** This type of education is pursued for the attainment of status and identity [17]. It is often associated with the acquisition of credentials, such as academic degrees, which serve as symbols of achievement and status. In this context,

education becomes a means of social mobility and a way to secure a privileged position in society [18].

- **Political Power or Control over State Bureaucracy:** This form of education is aimed at gaining political power or control over state bureaucracy. It involves understanding the dynamics of political control over bureaucracy and the role of education in shaping and influencing political outcomes [19].

In the traditional sense, the pedagogical paradigm corresponds to Collins' "diploma society", which is essentially a symbol revealing that those who possess these "diplomas" have a form of power known as "exclusionary closure". This power allows a group to secure a privileged position at the expense of others through processes of subordination. In the movie, like the one mentioned in the play, when Principal Long goes to the "famous university" to study, and sees the village students going out from "cloth shoes" to "leather shoes". "Leather shoes are the standard for the upper class, and there is no way to work in the fields, but cloth shoes can. The children who enter the famous school to study agriculture in the play wear leather shoes, which represents the separation from the field work practice. The so-called scientific learning completely turns students into pedants, who gradually lose their critical and creative abilities in the bondage of procedural industrialization (i.e., the ideology of capitalist education) [20]. This process, often referred to as the ideology of capitalist education, can lead to the creation of what Marcuse termed "One-Dimensional Man" - individuals who have lost their "inner freedom" [21]. In essence, these individuals are molded by the system, losing their ability to think critically and independently, a phenomenon that Marcuse critically examined in his work.

The final and complete form of the students thus cultivated will be that of Sun Ziqing, the instructor who has not yet been educated by the people in the first half of the film. His classroom lecture on "the function of the horse's tail" is interrupted by an old farmer who comes from the production team to ask for help because his cattle are having health problems and the veterinary teacher refuses to help, triggering a discontent among the students based on this incident and a lesson on basic information and types of horses that have nothing to do with local production. The incident led to a debate between the student, Seo Nyu-ko, who was displeased with the class on basic information and species of horses that had nothing to do with local production, and the local veterinary treatment methods based on field experience. This led to Xu Niu cub's posting of large-character posters criticizing the instructor's style, which also led to Sun Ziqing's personal growth in class consciousness and personal awareness, and his gradual understanding of the second method of education through continuous teaching practice. In the "Yu Fagen withdrawal incident", he realized the one-sidedness of his previous understanding, and in this setback, he realized the essence of "Mao Zedong Thought." In the process of teaching, the teacher often learns something new, leading to a reversal of the traditional teacher-student identity [22]. This phenomenon aligns with Rancière's concept of the "ignorant teacher", where the teacher becomes the object of education. The teacher, in this context, is not ignorant due to a lack of knowledge, but because they choose to ignore the supposed intellectual hierarchy between themselves and their students [23]. This process signifies a shift from theory to practice, as

the teacher navigates the complexities of the educational landscape, applying theoretical knowledge to practical situations in the classroom [24]. In contemporary China, the teacher is more often than not used as a synonym for "authority", and in schools where hierarchical management is the guiding principle, there exists a huge hierarchical difference and unequal power relationship between the teacher and the students [25]. The so-called new practices in education are only found in the "public broadcasting classes" of performance and in the papers for teachers' titles [26]. As Vice Principal Qian and Vice Commissioner Zhao went to the countryside to propagate the "three selfs and one package" (i.e., the system of responsibility for joint production in the Chinese countryside after 1978), a policy that was clearly at odds with the logic of socialist production, and led by Li Jinfeng, it was strongly opposed by the general public, and Li Jinfeng was then branded as opposing Vice Commissioner Zhao and the Party. Li Jinfeng is then labeled as a bad student for opposing Deputy Commissioner Zhao and the Party, and at the behest of Deputy Commissioner Zhao and Vice Principal Qian, a criticism conference is held, which leads the film to its final climax.

The climax of the film occurs precisely when "little sister" receives a letter of introduction to a prestigious university from her father, who has "worked in the revolution for many years", in exchange for face and status as a symbolic value. "After receiving the letter of introduction, Little Sister is still determined to tear it up, making a "break" with her conservative family and this corrupt traditional education. Yu Fagen, who had been influenced by his father, rushed to the stage and smashed the jar he received money from, representing a break with the capitalist egoistic liberal ideology he had been taught. Li Jinfeng led the people for the propaganda anti-socialist policies of the break is the most fundamental break, the masses became their own masters, while the so-called special zones, commissioners are not their masters. The people chose to break with capitalism, chose Mao Zedong Thought, and chose socialism. The masses became the masters in the true sense of the word.

References

1. Cheng, T., Chen, N.: The Modernization of Education in China Over the Past Century. In: Guo, D. (eds) *The Frontier of Education Reform and Development in China*. Educational Research in China. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-6355-1_16 (2023)
2. Harvey, D.: *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. OUP Oxford. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199283262.001.0001> (2005)
3. Gong, Q., Dobinson, T. : Breaking with old ideas: Chinese students' perceptions of China's "neoliberal turn" in higher education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* **40**(3), 331–342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2017.1316704> (2017)
4. Delmar, R., Nash, M.: Breaking with Old Ideas: Recent Chinese Films. *Screen* **17**(4), 67–84. <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/17.4.67> (1976)
5. OECD. *Education at a Glance 2020*. In *Education at a Glance*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en> (2020)
6. Zhang, H., Foskett, N., Wang, D., Qu, M.: Student Satisfaction with Undergraduate Teaching in China — A Comparison between Research-intensive and Other Universities. *Higher Education Policy* **24**(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1057/hep.2010.23> (2011)

7. Perry, E. J.: Educated acquiescence: How academia sustains authoritarianism in China. *Theory and Society* **49**(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-019-09373-1> (2019)
8. Chen, X.: Mao Zedong's Educational Thoughts and China's Undergraduate Curricular um Reform —Focus on the Period of the Cultural Revolution. *Bulletin of the Graduate School of Education, Hiroshima University. Part. III, Education and Human Science* **52**, 133–138 (2003)
9. Tian, G., Chen, X.: Reform of the Education System. *China's Reform: History, Logic, and Future*, 427–447. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-5470-2_30 (2022)
10. Deng, Y. Reversing the Trend Toward Utilitarianism in Education. *Educational Research in China*, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-6355-1_1 (2023)
11. Han, D.: The utilitarian tendency of the Chinese education system | *China Labour Bulletin*. [clb.org.hk. https://clb.org.hk/en/content/utilitarian-tendency-chinese-education-system](https://clb.org.hk/en/content/utilitarian-tendency-chinese-education-system) (2011)
12. Cuervo-Vilches, T., Navas-Martín, M. Á.: Confined Students: A Visual-Emotional Analysis of Study and Rest Spaces in the Homes. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* **18**(11), 5506. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18115506> (2021)
13. Foucault, M.: *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. A. Sheridan, Translator. Vintage Books (1975)
14. Marcuse, H.: *One-Dimensional Man : Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Taylor and Francis (1964)
15. De Vitis, J. L.: Marcuse on Education: Social Critique and Social Control. *Educational Theory* **24**(3), 259–268. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.1974.tb00642.x> (2007)
16. Collins, R.: *The Credential Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification*. Columbia University Press (1979)
17. Verhoeven, M., Poorthuis, A. M. G., Volman, M.: The Role of School in Adolescents' Identity Development. A Literature Review. *Educational Psychology Review* **31**(1), 35–63. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-018-9457-3> (2018)
18. Esteban-Guitart, M.: Identity in Education and Education in Identities: Connecting Curriculum and School Practice to Students' Lives and Identities. *Cultural Psychology of Education*, 159–175. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28412-1_10 (2019)
19. Wood, B. D., Waterman, R. W.: The Dynamics of Political Control of the Bureaucracy. *The American Political Science Review* **85**(3), 801. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1963851> (1991)
20. García-Carmona, A.: Scientific Thinking and Critical Thinking in Science Education. *Science & Education*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11191-023-00460-5> (2023)
21. Marcuse, H.: *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Taylor and Francis (1964)
22. Brinegar, K. M., Harrison, L. M., Hurd, E.: Moving from theory to practice: A critical approach. *Middle School Journal* **53**(3), 2–3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2022.2047576> (2022)
23. Rancière, J.: *The ignorant schoolmaster: five lessons in intellectual emancipation*. Stanford University Press (1999)
24. La Velle, L. : The theory–practice nexus in teacher education: new evidence for effective approaches. *Journal of Education for Teaching* **45**(4), 369–372. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2019.1639267> (2019)
25. Lai, M., Wang, L., Shen, W. : Educational leadership on the Chinese mainland: A case study of two secondary schools in Beijing. *London Review of Education* **15**(2), 317–328. <https://doi.org/10.18546/lre.15.2.13> (2017)
26. Li, G., Xin, T.: An Overview of the Teacher Evaluation System in China. *Teacher Evaluation around the World*, 293–319. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13639-9_13 (2022)