like serving him tea and arranging cars. My parents were now earning salaries fixed according to their civil service grades. My mother was Grade 17, and my father was Grade 10, which meant he earned twice as much as she did. Because basics were cheap, and there was no concept of a consumer society, their combined income was more than adequate. My father was a member of a special category known as *gao-gan*, 'high officials,' a term applied to people of Grade 13 and above, of whom there were about 200 in Sichuan. There were fewer than twenty people of Grade 10 and above in the whole province, which had a population of about seventy-two million now.

In the spring of 1956 Mao announced a policy known as the Hundred Flowers, from the phrase 'let a hundred flowers bloom' (*bai-hua qi-fang*), which in theory meant greater freedom for the arts, literature, and scientific research. The Party wanted to enlist the support of China's educated citizens, which the country needed, as it was entering a stage of 'post-recovery' industrialization.

The general educational level of the country had always been very low. The population was huge – over 600 million by then – and the vast majority had never enjoyed anything like a decent standard of living. The country had always had a dictatorship which operated by keeping the public ignorant and thus obedient. There was also the problem of the language: the Chinese script is exceedingly difficult; it is based on tens of thousands of individual characters which are not related to sounds, and each has complicated strokes and needs to be remembered separately. Hundreds of millions of people were completely illiterate.

Anybody with any education at all was referred to as an 'intellectual.' Under the Communists, who based their policies on class categories, 'intellectuals' became a specific, if vague, category, which included nurses, students, and actors as well as engineers, technicians, writers, teachers, doctors, and scientists.

Under the Hundred Flowers policy, the country enjoyed

about a year of relative relaxation. Then, in spring 1957, the Party urged intellectuals to criticize officials all the way to the top. My mother thought this was to encourage further liberalization. After a speech by Mao on the subject, which was gradually relayed down to her level, she was so moved she could not sleep all night. She felt that China was really going to have a modern and democratic party, a party that would welcome criticism to revitalize itself. She felt proud of being a Communist.

When my mother's level was told about Mao's speech soliciting criticism of officers, they were not informed about some other remarks he had made around the same time, about enticing snakes out of their lairs – to uncover anyone who dared to oppose him or his regime. One year before, the Soviet leader, Khrushchev, had denounced Stalin in his 'secret speech,' and this had devastated Mao, who identified himself with Stalin. Mao was further rattled by the Hungarian uprising that autumn, the first successful – if short-lived – attempt to overthrow an established Communist regime. Mao knew that a large proportion of China's educated people favored moderation and liberalization. He wanted to prevent a 'Chinese Hungarian uprising.' In fact, he effectively told the Hungarian leaders that his solicitation of criticism had been a trap, which he had prolonged after his colleagues suggested bringing it to a halt, in order to make sure he had smoked out every single potential dissident.

He was not worried about the workers or the peasants, as he was confident they were grateful to the Communists for bringing them full stomachs and stable lives. He also had a fundamental contempt for them – he did not believe they had the mental capacity to challenge his rule. But Mao had always distrusted intellectuals. They had played a big role in Hungary, and were more likely than others to think for themselves.

Unaware of Mao's secret maneuvers, officials and intellectuals alike engaged in soliciting and offering criticisms.

According to Mao, they were to 'say whatever they want to say, and to the full.' My mother enthusiastically repeated this in the schools, hospitals, and entertainment groups she looked after. All kinds of opinions were aired at organized seminars and on wall posters. Well-known people set an example by making criticisms in the newspapers.

My mother, like almost everyone, came in for some criticism. The main one from the schools was that she showed favoritism toward 'key' (*zhong-dian*) schools. In China there were a number of officially designated schools and universities on which the state concentrated its limited resources. These got better teachers and facilities, and selected the brightest pupils, which guaranteed that they had a high entrance rate into institutions of higher education, especially the 'key' universities. Some teachers from ordinary schools complained that my mother had been paying too much attention to the 'key' schools at their expense.

Teachers were also graded. Good teachers were given honorary grades which entitled them to much higher salaries, special food supplies when there was a shortage, better housing, and complimentary theater tickets. Most graded teachers under my mother seemed to have come from 'undesirable' family backgrounds, and some of the ungraded teachers complained that my mother placed too much importance on professional merit rather than 'class background.' My mother made self-criticisms about her lack of evenhandedness regarding the 'key' schools, but she insisted that she was not wrong in using professional merit as the criterion for promotion.

There was one criticism to which my mother turned a deaf ear in disgust. The headmistress of one primary school had joined the Communists in 1945 – earlier than my mother – and was unhappy at having to take orders from her. This woman attacked my mother on the grounds that she had got her job solely on the strength of my father's status.

There were other complaints: the headmasters wanted the right to choose their own teachers, instead of having them assigned by a higher authority. Hospital directors wanted to be able to buy herbs and other medicines themselves, because the state supply did not meet their needs. Surgeons wanted larger food rations: they considered their job to be as demanding as that of a kung-fu player in a traditional opera, but their ration was a quarter less. A junior official lamented the disappearance from Chengdu markets of some famous traditional items like 'Pockmark Wong scissors' and 'Beards Hu brushes,' which had been replaced by inferior mass-produced substitutes. My mother agreed with many of these views, but there was nothing she could do about them, as they involved state policies. All she could do was report them to higher authorities.

The outburst of criticisms, which were often personal grouses or practical, nonpolitical suggestions for improvements, blossomed for about a month in the early summer of 1957. At the beginning of June, Mao's speech about 'enticing snakes out of their lairs' was relayed down orally to my mother's level.

In this talk, Mao said that 'rightists' had gone on a rampage attacking the Communist Party and China's socialist system. He said these rightists made up between 1 percent and 10 percent of all intellectuals – and that they must be smashed. To simplify things, a figure of 5 percent, halfway between Mao's two extremes, had been established as the quota for the number of rightists who had to be caught. To meet it, my mother was expected to find over a hundred rightists in the organizations under her.

She had not been very happy about some of the criticisms made to her. But few of them could even remotely be considered 'anti-Communist' or 'anti-socialist.' Judging from what she had read in the newspapers, it seemed there had been some attacks on the Communists' monopoly of power and on the socialist system. But in her schools and

hospitals, there were no such grand calls. Where on earth could she find the rightists?

Besides, she thought, it was unfair to penalize people who had spoken up after they had been invited, indeed urged, to do so. Moreover, Mao had explicitly guaranteed that there would be no reprisals for speaking up. She herself had called enthusiastically on people to voice their criticisms.

Her dilemma was typical of that facing millions of officials across China. In Chengdu, the Anti-Rightist Campaign had a slow and painful start. The provincial authorities decided to make an example of one man, a Mr Hau, who was the Party secretary of a research institute staffed by top scientists from all over Sichuan. He was expected to catch a considerable number of rightists, but he reported that there was not a single one in his institute. 'How is that possible?' his boss said. Some of the scientists had studied abroad, in the West. 'They must have been contaminated by Western society. How can you expect them to be happy under communism? How can there be no rightists among them?' Mr Hau said that the fact that they were in China by choice proved they were not opposed to the Communists, and went so far as to give a personal guarantee for them. He was warned several times to mend his ways. In the end he was declared a rightist himself, expelled from the Party, and sacked from his job. His civil service grade was drastically reduced, which meant his salary was slashed, and he was put to work sweeping the floors of the laboratories in the institute he had formerly been running.

My mother knew Mr Hau, and admired him for sticking to his guns. She developed a great friendship with him which has lasted till today. She spent many evenings with him, giving vent to her anxieties. But in his fate she saw her own if she did not fill her quota.

Every day, after the usual endless meetings, my mother had to report to the municipal Party authorities on how the campaign was going. The person in charge of the campaign

in Chengdu was a Mr Ying, a lean, tall, rather arrogant man. My mother was supposed to produce figures for him showing how many rightists had been nailed. There did not have to be any names. It was numbers that mattered.

But where could she find her 100-plus 'anti-Communist, anti-socialist rightists'? Eventually one of her deputies, a Mr Kong, who was in charge of education for the Eastern District, announced that the headmistresses of a couple of schools had identified some teachers in their schools. One was a teacher in a primary school whose husband, a Kuomintang officer, had been killed in the civil war. She had said something to the effect that 'China today is worse off than in the past.' One day she got into a row with the headmistress, who had criticized her for slacking off. She flew into a rage and hit the headmistress. A couple of her teachers tried to stop her, one telling her to be careful because the headmistress was pregnant. She was reported to have screamed that she wanted to 'get rid of that Communist bastard' (meaning the baby in the woman's womb).

In another case, a teacher whose husband had fled to Taiwan with the Kuomintang was reported to have shown off to other young women teachers some jewelry her husband had given her, trying to make them envious of her life under the Kuomintang. These young women also said she told them it was a pity the Americans had not won the war in Korea and advanced into China.

Mr Kong said he had checked the facts. It was not up to my mother to investigate. Caution would be seen as trying to protect the rightists and questioning her colleagues' integrity.

The hospital chiefs and the deputy who was running the health bureau did not name any rightists themselves, but several doctors were labeled rightists by the higher authorities of the Chengdu municipality for their criticisms made at earlier meetings organized by the city authorities.

All these rightists together came to fewer than ten, far