

Using the Countryside to Absorb Urban Political Youth: The Cultural Revolution, Ballet, and Discontent

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Abstract : This paper presents a case study of a historical moment in the city vs countryside relationship that is important in urban studies in China. Policies during the Cultural Revolution in China (1966-76) several times sent educated urban youths to the countryside. Initially, they were sent to “make revolution”: they were instructed to instigate powerful disruptions of established village relations. Later, they were “sent-down” to the countryside “to learn from the peasants.” Millions of urban youths “volunteered” to live as peasants did in the poverty of the countryside, thus resolving a political problem of urban unrest for the Party. Many had remained for decades before they were able to leave; others were never re-urbanized. Ballet troupes constituted a special case in both of these periods. This paper examines the differing experiences of individual “sent-down” ballet dancers on the one hand, and on the other hand, ballet troupes assigned to perform in the countryside.

Keywords : cultural revolution, reurbanized, sent-down youths, ballet

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