

Mao Badges: Memories Of Badge Acquisition

'Red Guards were going in and out of the pine grove on the south side of the [Tian'anmen] square. Among the trees, we discovered a brisk trade in Chairman Mao badges. Most were like Yuanchao's, the size of a one-fen coin. Some were a bit bigger, like a two-fen coin. I inquired whether anyone would sell me a badge. "We are not speculators," said one boy. "We only trade. Two small ones for a big one." What if I did not have any badges to trade? "You can use Chairman Mao photos instead. Ten photos for one badge."

I had seen youths on the sidewalk selling photos of Chairman Mao receiving the first group of Red Guards. A pack of ten cost eight mao, which seemed rather expensive. But the idea of returning to Yizhen with a Chairman Mao badge captivated me. Better yet, I should get two and give one to Yuling. I ran off to find a photo dealer, came back with two packs, and bartered them for two small badges. I pinned one on my chest and the other inside my pocket. I was sure I could feel Chairman Mao's radiance burning into me [...]

We investigated whenever we saw Red Guards conversing in little groups, for usually they were trading Chairman Mao badges. We accumulated the newest designs depicting revolutionary landmarks - Chairman Mao's birthplace, Shaoshan; the Jinggang Mountains, where the Communist Party had set up its base after Chiang Kai-shek's massacre in 1927; Zunyi, the site of a crucial Central Committee meeting during the Long March; and Yanan, the base area from the end of the Long March to the eve of Liberation.'

TITLE

Text 1 Born Red: A Chronicle of the Cultural Revolution

DATE

1987

CREATOR

Gao Yuan

PUBLISHER

Stanford University Press

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DESCRIPTION

Gao Yuan was a Red Guard who went travelling in the autumn of 1966. In these excerpts, he describes his first experience of acquiring a badge and the start of his badge collecting habit.

Source: Gao Yuan, *Born Red: A Chronicle of the Cultural Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 119-120; 166.

'In 1964, I was only three years old and, while still in my parents' arms, I was forced to go with them to the countryside. I was very sentimentally attached to Beijing and had a very deep feeling for all things from Beijing. My parents, though, were transferred from the Beijing detachment to become members of a Guizhou detachment and so we ended up in a distant outlying tableland in a small county city called Bijie in Guizhou province.

For a kid from Beijing to end up in the south of the country in a small rural mountain area was a very strange experience for here there were trees, leaves, small birds and insects, so it was a very beautiful place in its way. Hence, the leaves, the flowers, the beautiful crickets, these things all became precious to me and I would collect them all and put them in my very own 'treasure chest'.

By the time the Cultural Revolution hit, I had already begun primary school. By this time, too, my treasure chest was already getting too big and could not fit anything else in it. I had collected all sorts of stuff, from stamps, cigarette packets, matches, old coins, sweets, comics – even toys and posters came to be part of my treasure trove.

The full wind of the Cultural Revolution hit our sleepy little mountain retreat and I noticed that everyone had started wearing various types of Mao badges. In my heart, I thought of these badges as sacred and beautiful objects. I really had a strong desire to own my own. But at that time it was impossible. My father was being severely criticised as a 'capitalist roader' and would suffer criticism sessions daily, while my mother was sent to work in a canteen as a cleaner. At this time, who could even think about, let alone fulfil, these youthful desires.

In the spring of 1968, a relative from our old home in Jiangjin, Sichuan province, came to visit. On his chest he wore a beautiful glowing badge. It was red, glass covered and it had the figure of chairman Mao covered with phosphorus so that it would glow in the dark. This particularly beautiful and rare badge fascinated me and I could not take my eyes off it. When my relative left, I followed along the way until he finally decided to give me this most treasured thing. I would wear this rare Shaoshan manufactured badge wherever I went, and was very proud of it. Later, I was wearing the badge and playing with some friends in a place not far from home at a time soon after rain. We were using the mud to build up a dam when suddenly someone started throwing mud at the dam.

"Zhou Xiaoqing [the author's original name], pass over your red scarf and your badge to us. You son of a bitch, you are one of the five black elements, how dare you wear that badge!"

I raised my head and looked around and there, in front of me, was a teacher with a number of 'little red rebels', all of whom aggressively surrounded me. Their mood became really foul when I refused to submit to their demands. I would have fought to the death to protect my badge, but they came at me and carried out their 'revolutionary action'. I was pushed into the mud and they forcibly snatched my red scarf and glowing badge.

I was wet from head to foot, covered in mud, and sick to the stomach with a sense of outrage. As I walked along the road to my home, I cried and cried for my heart was heavy. When I finally got home, I told my mother and father about what had happened, but what were they to do? They could hardly help themselves. They could, of course, console their child who felt a sense of grief but what could they do apart from heave a sigh of anguish and regret? The only thing they could offer was a sense of 'comfort'. My mother's kind face consoled me in my hour of need.

After I had been beaten, I made an inner vow: I would definitely collect the badges of Mao Zedong and, what is more, I would have more than anyone else. I took this wish very much to heart and, bit by bit, I began this endless process of collection.'

TITLE

Text 2 My story From The Mystery of the Mao Badge – The Ninth Wonder of the World

DATE

1993/ 1998

CREATOR

Zhou Jihou

PUBLISHER

Beiyue Art Publishing House

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DESCRIPTION

In this excerpt, badge collector Zhou Jihou describes how he got and lost his first badge, and how he decided to become a badge collector.

Source: Zhou Jihou, *My story From The Mystery of the Mao Badge – The Ninth Wonder of the World* (Beijing: Beiyue Art Publishing House, 1993).

Translated and reproduced in Michael Dutton, *Streetlife China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 260–261.