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'Long Live Chairman Mao!' The Cultural Revolution and the Mao Personality Cult

Angelica Maldonado
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‘Long Live Chairman Mao!’
The Cultural Revolution and the Mao Personality Cult

By Angelica Maldonado

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"Had Mao died in 1956, his achievements would have been immortal. Had he died in 1966, he would still have been a great man. But he died in 1976. Alas, what can one say?"[1]
- Chen Yun

Despite his celebrated status as a founding father, war hero, and poet, Mao Zedong is often placed within the pantheon of totalitarian leaders, amongst the ranks of Mussolini, Stalin, and Hitler. Mao is widely known for being at the helm one of the most murderous regimes, with millions of deaths caused by classicide, famine, and political rivalry. One of the deadliest eras under his reign was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, in which millions were persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, disgraced, led to suicide, maimed, and killed. During this tumultuous decade, Mao's personality cult reached its climax, and thousands wreaked chaos in his name, resulting in a factionalism-fueled civil war that ravaged the nation, stunting the nation's economic, educational, political, and artistic growth for years. Although generally discouraged and hindered by the powerful single-party state, Chinese historiography has been largely defined by its interest in Mao's legacy – namely the excesses of the Cultural Revolution and how his personality cult shaped those events.

Although the Cultural Revolution ended over 40 years ago, the historiography of the Cultural Revolution has been rather meager in comparison to other recent historical events. However, since the centennial of Mao's birth, there has been a steady stream of literature on both Mao and the Cultural Revolution. Sinologists have found the Cultural Revolution to be an inexhaustible topic, ripe with discussion and debate. However, in mainland China, discussing the Cultural Revolution is still highly discouraged. Following Mao's death, dialogue about the Cultural Revolution became increasingly more public and readily available, especially in the form of former Red Guard memoirs and "scar literature" (*shanghen wenxue*). Scar literature was

[1] Philip Short, *Mao: A Life* (New York, NY: Henry Holt & Co, 2000), 629.

a cathartic form of literature in which writers described the suffering and persecution of cadres and intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution. Although Deng Xiaoping refused to outright denounce Mao, similar to Khrushchev's secret speech, the moderate liberalization that occurred immediately following Mao's death resulted in such exposés being widely published and circulated. Beyond being cathartic, the scar literature of the "Beijing spring" of 1978-1979 was also a means to criticize the Communist Party under the guise, and through the means, of placing blame squarely on the Gang of Four and criticizing Mao.

Before the Cultural Revolution even occurred, prominent American journalist, Edgar Snow, was one of the few Westerners to document the infancy of Communism in China and the Chinese Communist Revolution. Snow and Mao developed a lifelong mutual rapport, and Snow's *Red Star Over China*, published in 1937, which chronicled the Long March and the ensuing events, not only glorified Mao but also presented the emergence of Communism in China for the first time to an international, notably Western, audience. Snow interviewed Mao several times, and despite presenting a romanticized version of Communist China, in one of his later works – *The Long Revolution*, published in 1972 – Snow is the first to report the nascent personality cult.

Although the earliest works on the Cultural Revolution were written before it *technically* ended, the majority of the historiography of the Cultural Revolution exploded on the scene immediately following the centennial of Mao's birth in 1993, and since then, there has been a consistent outpouring of several publications a year for the past ten years. The Cultural Revolution has been a relatively unexplored pocket for most historians, and the majority of works are being written by the same handful of prominent sinologists. In 1974, the first volume of *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution* by Roderick MacFarquhar, the leading expert on the

Cultural Revolution,[2] was published. The second and third volumes of the trilogy were published in 1983 and 1997, respectively. In 1987, Lowell Dittmer's *China's Continuous Revolution* was published. Prominent Swedish sinologist Michael Schoenhals' *China's Cultural Revolution, 1966-1969: Not a Dinner Party* was published a few years later in 1996. That same year, *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution* by Jiaqi Yan and Gao Gao was also released. In 2006, Schoenhals and MacFarquhar published what is now considered the utmost seminal work of the Cultural Revolution – *Mao's Last Revolution. The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* by New Zealander sinologist Paul Clark was published and Mobo C.F. Gao's treatise, *The Battle for China's Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution*, were both published in 2008. In 2011, *The Cultural Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* by Richard Kurt Craus and *Heaven Cracks, Earth Shakes: The Tangshan Earthquake and the Death of Mao's China* by James Palmer were published. Other prominent sinologists include Jonathan Spence, Jonathan Unger, Lucian Pye, Richard Baum, and Maurice Meisner.

The majority of the aforementioned histories on the Cultural Revolution have been largely concerned with detailing the "history" of the events, which, to this day, are largely shrouded in official secrecy by the Chinese Communist Party. However, besides being concerned with dates, facts, and events, the historiography of both Mao and the Cultural Revolution has also been largely influenced by other interdisciplinary texts, such as biographies, memoirs, and art theory pieces. Published in 1999, *Mao: A Life* by Philip Short chronicles Mao's ascension to prominence and how this former peasant became the revolutionary Communist leader and "secular deity" he is today. In the same year, *Mao: A Biography* by Ross Terrill was published. While Short was more concerned with Mao's ideological standpoint, Terrill is interested in

[2] Helen Gao, "Q. and A.: Roderick MacFarquhar on the Cultural Revolution and China Today," *New York Times*, May 3, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/04/world/asia/china-cultural-revolution-macfarquhar.html.

examining Mao's less savory habits, such as promiscuity, and how the myth and humanity of Mao were largely irreconcilable and yet beneficial to his legendary status. Lee Feigon's largely sympathetic work, *Mao: A Reinterpretation* was published in 2002. The most prominent of these biographies has been Jung Chang and John Halliday's scathing biography, *Mao: The Unknown Story.* The vehemently anti-Mao work, which names Mao as the greatest mass murderer in human history, was published in 2005.

Until the beginning of the twenty-first century, the majority of the scholarship on the Cultural Revolution has been overwhelmingly focused on the "facts:" What was the Cultural Revolution? How did it come about? Who is to blame? How many victims were there? Unlike other historical topics, the historiography of Mao has not been in line with contemporaneous historiographical trends, nor have the historiographical lens progressed in a linear fashion. Within the narrow frame of historiography, many works on the Cultural Revolution have failed to go beyond the "great men" historiographical approach and have focused much of their attention on Mao and his actions. The discourse of the Cultural Revolution has been largely centered around Mao's culpability – namely that Mao was in fact culpable and that he purposefully cultivated is own personality cult. However, recent literature has been less critical of Mao and acknowledges that Mao was but one piece of the puzzle – after all, it was Liu Shaoqi who is considered the main architect of the personality cult, who ordered the publication of the revered *Little Red Book*, and who elevated and deified Mao to the party cadres as a means to secure his own political legitimacy.

A very recent trend in the Mao historiography has been going beyond trying to articulate what the Cultural Revolution was and trying to examine the everyday experiences of the ordinary people who were involved. This scholarship has utilized the "bottom-up" perspective of social

history, granting greater agency to Mao's followers. This shift is visible within works such as *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis* by Wu Yiching (2014) and *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History* by Frank Dikötter (2016). In *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins*, Wu analyzes how the movement was originally orchestrated from above, but quickly evolved into a grassroots movement, and would ultimately leave the most faithful of Mao's followers cynical and disillusioned. In *A People's History,* utilizing previously classified party documents, such as secret police reports, and in-depth interviews, Dikötter gives a voice to the voiceless and unearths how ordinary people "buried Maoism," thus undermining the pervasive image of conformity that is often taken for granted and unequestioned in most of the scholarship on the Cultural Revolution. In a similar vein, recent scholarship has also been interested in analyzing more localized stories instead of grand sweeping, all-encompassing histories. In 2017, *The Killing Wind: A Chinese County's Descent into Madness During the Cultural Revolution* was published. The work by Hecheng Tan examined what is now known as the Daoxian massacre – the mass killings of more than 4,000 "class enemies," including children and the elderly, over the course of 66 days in 1967. Rather than attempt to present a singular truth on what the Cultural Revolution was or what it represents, these more localized works can uncover the multiplicity of realities that occurred.

While the historiography of the Cultural Revolution has been largely concerned with facts and dates, the historiography of the personality cult of Mao has been mostly framed within similar personality cults of other totalitarian leaders. An exemplary work in this vein is Paul Hollander's *From Benito Mussolini to Hugo Chavez: Intellectuals and a Century of Political Hero Worship*, published in 2016. Although Western historiography places Mao within the ranks of other dictators, Chinese historians are more inclined to place Mao within the cultural context

of Chinese leaders. For example, while Hollander aligns Mao's cult with those of other leaders, Xuezhi Guo positions Mao and his cult amongst a lineage of other Chinese political leaders in *The Ideal Chinese Political Leader: A Historical and Cultural Perspective*, published in 2002. A similar work is *When Heroes Pass Away: The Invention of a Chinese Communist Pantheon* by Dachang Cong, published in 1997.

Beyond social history, there has also been a rather substantial amount of scholarship regarding both the propagandistic art of the period, and contemporary artistic production that is both influenced and critical of art from the Cultural Revolution. Published in 2012, Barbara Mittler's *A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture* is similar to other predecessors who discuss both the art of the Cultural Revolution and how its influences can still be found in modern-day China. In August 1968, Mao gifted a crate of mangoes he had received from the Pakistani foreign minister to factory workers who had helped quell the factional violence between Red Guards at Qinhua University, thus marking the transition of Mao's faith in the Red Guards to the proletariat. Named after the eponymous exhibition at the Museum Rietberg in Zürich, *Mao's Golden Mangoes and the Cultural Revolution* by Alfreda Murck (2013) traces the history of this momentous event, the spontaneous "mango cult" that blossomed shortly afterwards, and how its legacy has resonated in subsequent artworks. Other works interested in the propaganda artwork of the period include: *Cultural Revolution Posters and Memorabilia* by James and Victoria Edison (2005); *Chairman Mao Badges: Symbols and Slogans of the Cultural Revolution* by Helen Wang (2008) – based on the titular exhibit at the British Museum; *Art in Turmoil: the Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976* edited by Richard Kang (2010); and *Museum Representations of Maoist China: From Cultural Revolution to Commie Kitsch* by Amy Jane Barnes (2014).

Within China, the scholarship and public discourse on the Cultural Revolution has been largely constrained by the marked silence of the Chinese Communist Party. Following Deng Xiaoping's death in 1997, there was a period of liberalization and relaxation. However, what is most difficult about covering the Cultural Revolution, or any event since the beginning of the reign of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, is that the party is still very much in power. As such, what is released, discussed, and debated is at the mercy of official party rhetoric. Even in 2018, half a century after the outbreak of the Revolution, an official state-endorsed school textbook has been accused of heavily censoring text on the Cultural Revolution, as well as omitting key elements, and condensing the already short text.[3] There has been notable silence on the issue – the Communist Party has been notably reluctant to open any discussion concerning the Cultural Revolution, and the victims have never been allowed to mourn considering many cemeteries which hold the victims of the Cultural Revolution are considered off-limits and are protected by surveillance cameras and barbed wire.[4]

What appears to be happening is a blatant contradiction – Mao's popularity is evident in every media of art, Cultural Revolution-themed restaurants[5] proliferate, and every market stall hawks commodities and relics from the period, and yet the public discourse is relatively mum on the topic, the party frowns upon discussing the events, and commemoration is largely nonexistent. In 2011, the 90th anniversary of the Communist party ushered in a new resurgence

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[3] Mandy Zuo, "Controversy over Chinese textbook's Cultural Revolution chapter as state publisher denies censorship," *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), January 11, 2018, http://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2127817/controversy-over-chinese-textbooks-cultural-revolution-chapter.

[4] Chris Buckley, "Chaos of Cultural Revolution Echoes at a Lonely Cemetery, 50 Years Later," *New York Times*, April 4, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/05/world/asia/china-cultural-revolution-chongqing.html?mtrref=undefined.

[5] Jamie Fullerton, "This Restaurant Celebrates a Brutal Era in Chinese History," *Munchies* (*Vice)*, May 15, 2017, https://munchies.vice.com/en_us/article/pg73jb/this-restaurant-celebrates-a-brutal-era-in-chinese-history.

of "Red Culture,"[6] further inspiring works on the tumultuous period. Despite its initial rocky release of Feng Xiaogang's film, *Youth*, a love-story set to the backdrop of the turbulent era, was the top-grossing film in China when it was released two months after its initial release date, amassing $44.4 million its opening weekend.[7] Red Guard memoirs are still tremendously popular, and with the Internet they have become even more accessible to the general public. Within the past few years, former Red Guards have chronicled their experiences through blogs,[8] issued public (potentially state-orchestrated) apologies to their victims,[9] and become popular school-assigned books in the states, likened to *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *I Am Malala*.[10]

Overall, the Cultural Revolution is largely ignored, or at least not openly spoken about, in China, representing a mass form of public amnesia. Whether this is due to lack of interest, or due to stringent censorship, remains to be seen. As such, within China, "the domestic story remains tightly controlled, and in any realm the unofficial history of the PRC cannot yet be written."[11] However, the relatively scant historiography in the West is not due to lack of interest, but more so an effect of the "archive gap." Beyond the sanctioned study of "Party history" (*dang shi*),[12] access to documents from the Cultural Revolution are largely unavailable for obvious reasons.

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[6] Louisa Lim, "Chinese Reopen Debate Over Chairman Mao's Legacy," *National Public Radio*, June 22, 2011, https://www.npr.org/2011/06/22/137231508/chinese-reopen-debate-over-chairman-maos-legacy.
[7] Matt DeButts, "Cultural Revolution movie 'Youth' tops China's box office as Pixar's 'Coco' continues its surge," *Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 2017, http://www.latimes.com/business/hollywood/la-fi-ct-china-box-office-youth-20171220-story.html.
[8] Tom Philips, "Fifty years on, one of Mao's 'little generals' exposes horror of the Cultural Revolution," *Guardian*, May 7, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/07/mao-little-general-horror-cultural-revolution.
[9] Anthony Kuhn, "Chinese Red Guards Apologize, Reopening a Dark Chapter," *National Public Radio*, February 4, 2014, https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/01/23/265228870/chinese-red-guards-apologize-reopening-a-dark-chapter.
[10] Ji-li Jiang's *Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997). A new edition is being released January 30, 2018: http://www.bankstreetbooks.com/book/9780064462082.
[11] William C. Kirby, "Archives and Histories in Twentieth-Century China," in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, eds. Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 440.
[12] Kirby, "Archives and Histories in Twentieth-Century China," 440.

In 1981, the Chinese Communist Party passed the resolution, "On some questions regarding the history of the Party since the founding of the PRC," which famously declared Chairman Mao as "70 percent right and 30 percent wrong." In this same resolution, the Party declared that the Cultural Revolution was "responsible for the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the country, and the people since the founding of the People's Republic." This disavowal maintained Mao's legacy and left the culpability of the violence in those who could no longer defend themselves – Mao and the Gang of Four – while simultaneously absolving the following administrations and legitimating their history. After all, if the Party completely disavowed Mao, it would naturally follow that the Party itself would come under scrutiny. Six years later, in an effort to present at least a semblance of transparency, the CCP attempted to make historical archives more accessible. After the passage of the Archive Law of 1987, it was decreed that diplomatic and other archives are to become open after 30 years. However, despite the lessening of restrictions on Chinese archives, the majority of archives are largely unavailable to historians. There are notable exemptions of act that, in effect, render the law useless and ineffectual for anyone besides official historiographers. These exemptions include: matters of state, public security, national defense, and foreign relations, not to mention, in the case of foreign scholars, matters unsuitable for foreigners.[13] These exemptions obviously present giant loopholes in which Chinese officials can argue that pretty much any archival material that doesn't coincide or corroborate the official party line is off-limits. The available archives were purposely curated to expose only what was permissible and would serve the party – while the party has openly encouraged historical materials on Japanese atrocities in

[13] Kirby, "Archives and Histories in Twentieth-Century China," 440.

China, "the massacres of Chinese, by Chinese, during the history of Chinese Communism and of the People's Republic," have been carefully omitted.[14]

With all the obstacles, perhaps the secrecy and censorship surrounding the Cultural Revolution has been an enticing provocation for sinologists rather than a deterrent. This paper will trace the efforts of these persistent sinologists within the historiography of the personality cult of Mao, and in particular, its intensification during the Cultural Revolution. I will be tracing historiographical trends within and between the following works: *Revolutionary Immortality: Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Cultural Revolution* by Jay Lifton (1968); *Children of Mao: Personality Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation* by Anita Chan (1985); *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader* by Geremie Barmé (1996), *Biography of a Chairman Mao Badge: The Creation and Consumption of a Personality Cult* by Melissa Schrift (2001); *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual* by Daniel Leese (2011); and *The Art of Cloning: Creative Production During China's Cultural Revolution* by Pang Laikwan (2017). Each title has been published approximately eight years after the prior one. These works cover a span of nearly fifty years and encompass a wide variety of historiographical lenses, ranging from psycho history to political history to cultural history.

Boasting the status of being the world's most populous nation, and closely following the United States with the world's second-largest economy, the People's Republic of China is simultaneously revered for being one of the world's earliest civilizations and for being one of the most rapidly-advancing nations, leading the way in infrastructure, ecommerce, and renewable energy initiatives. Between thousands of years of rich history and its status as a burgeoning global power, Chinese culture and society is defined by both its past and future. After thousands

[14] Kirby, "Archives and Histories in Twentieth-Century China," 439.

of years of dynastic rule, the Republic of China was founded in 1912 following the Xinhai Revolution. Political and ideological strife between the ruling Nationalist Party of China, or the Kuomintang, and the Communist Party of China fueled the Chinese Civil War that lasted from 1927 to 1949. Briefly interrupted by a momentary truce during the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937-1945, the Chinese Civil War ended with the Chinese Communist Party seizing control of mainland China and the Kuomintang retreating to Taiwan. The communist revolutionary, Mao Zedong, proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic in China on October 1, 1949. Formerly the commander-in-chief of the Red Army, Mao became a dominant figure and de facto leader of the Communist Party. The founding father of the PRC, Mao served as the Party Chairman until his death in 1976.

Initially popular with the peasantry through a violent system of land reform in which thousands of landlords were killed, Mao attempted to solidify his popular support during the Great Leap Forward. The disastrous economic campaign aimed to rapidly transform the largely agrarian and rural nation into a socialist society through collectivization and industrialization at break-neck speeds. The campaign resulted in the deadliest famine recorded with an estimated 30 million deaths. After the catastrophe of the ill-fated reform movement, which killed millions of and disillusioned those who suffered and survived, Mao and the CCP ushered in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution as a means to strengthen what appeared to be the weakening of Mao's grip on his people and his influence within the party. Although widely disputed, with a range from the minimum of 400,000 casualties upwards of several millions, countless lives were destroyed, with widespread torture, "struggle sessions," imprisonment, public humiliation, murder, and even instances of cannibalism.[15] The period of intense political upheaval affected

[15] See *The Killing Wind: A Chinese County's Descent into Madness During the Cultural Revolution* by Hecheng Tan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

every aspect of Chinese society – schools and universities were shut down for students to criticize teachers, spouses reported each other, children spied on their parents, and the state halted many of its functions until 1969.

One of the earliest works on Mao's culpability and the Cultural Revolution was published only two years into the decade of chaos in 1968. Dr. Robert Jay Lifton's *Revolutionary Immortality: Mao Tse-tung* and the Cultural Revolution is one of the, if not the, earliest works that analyzed Mao's role in the revolution, as well as his personality cult.[16] Lifton's work differs from later scholarship in a very significant manner – Mao was still alive while his work was written. While later scholarship had the benefit of viewing at the events in retrospect, Lifton wrote *Revolutionary Immortality* at the height of the revolution. This is significant considering the lack of information available to Western historians, much less anyone outside of China at the time, on the events of the revolution. Also, Lifton is one of the only historians, or perhaps the only historian, who has approached the topic through the controversial lens of psychohistory. Despite Lifton's unique psychohistorical perspective, he falls within the trap early historians of the Cultural Revolution found themselves in by being solely interested in finding Mao's culpability for the Cultural Revolution, ignoring the spontaneous, popular nature of the movement.

Revolutionary Immortality utilizes a psychohistorical framework to construct a proposed analysis on what exactly happened during the Cultural Revolution and how it came to be, mainly focused within the bloody first two years of the period. Lifton attempts to address how the period of violence was even possible. Refuting those who put forth a simple explanation of "power struggle," Lifton contends that the Cultural Revolution was not a power struggle between

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[16] Robert Jay Lifton, *Revolutionary Immortality: Mao Tse-tung and the Cultural Revolution* (New York: The Norton Library, 1976).

opposing factions, but rather a struggle for "power over death."[17] Even in recent scholarship, the causes of the Cultural Revolution have been largely ascribed to Mao's desire to purge untrustworthy cadres, or those who opposed them.

A violent and cathartic "human experiment," Lifton views the revolution as a symbolic grasp for immortality. Written while Mao was still alive, Lifton views the revolution as a dying, or at least aging and/or ill, heroic figure's attempt to preserve the fervent passion of Communist China against a symbolic death. This desire to construct something that will live beyond oneself is a universal theme in human history for Lifton. Mao's ardent call, or at least condoning, of violence during the Cultural Revolution is interpreted by Lifton as representative of Mao's fears that the revolution and the party would take the "capitalist road" after his death; a "symbolic death," not physical death. While Mao had previously been motivated, and sensitively affected by deaths, including those of his siblings and the execution of his first wife and comrades under the Kuomintang, Lifton explains Mao's "loss of confidence in his claim to immortality," marking his transition from great leader to despot in an attempt to repeatedly enact the deaths of his enemies to perpetually become an "eternal survivor."[18]

Lifton utilizes a variety of sources, including endless quotations from Mao; Mao's written works, including essays and poems; and interviews with the Chairman. Notably, Lifton does not engage with other historians on this topic, but this makes sense considering Lifton was one of the first historians to write on the subject, considering his work was first published immediately following the violent excesses of the revolution, which some would contend extended until the book was re-published in 1976. Known as the foremost psychohistorian, or as he prefers, "a historically minded psychiatrist," Lifton has frequently examined the

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[17] Lifton, *Revolutionaru Immortality*, 8.
[18] Lifton, *Revolutionary Immortality*, 93.

psychological causes and effects of wars and political violence and the concept of thought reform throughout his works. The psychohistorical lens Lifton utilizes is carefully used as merely a framework, rather than an attempt to singlehandedly assign a cause/culprit to the Cultural Revolution. Lifton does appear to speak in conversation with other psychiatrists and psychologists, for instance, drawing upon Erik H. Erikson's concept of ego psychology, and visibly makes use of his formal psychiatric education and experience.

Although psychohistory has often been criticized as mere speculation due to lack of evidence,[19] Lifton preemptively refutes these claims by noting that he has actively avoided the frequent error in psychohistory of "viewing large historical events as nothing but manifestations of someone's individual psychopathology."[20] Lifton utilizes his psychohistorical framework to suggest that the Cultural Revolution "can be understood as a quest for revolutionary immortality."[21] Lifton does not attempt to pathologize or diagnose Mao, but merely attempts to understand him and the role the man, his legend, his Thought, and his cult, took part in for the "historical discontinuity" of the Cultural Revolution. The revolution is regarded as ultimately being cannibalistic and self-destructive in nature to the power and longevity of the Chinese Communist Party, which, of course, has since been proven incorrect.

In 1985, *Children of Mao: Personality Development and Political Activism in the Red Guards Generation* by Anita Chan was published. As its title suggests, Chan takes an intimate look into the personality cult by examining several case studies of some of Mao's most devoted youthful followers.[22] Chan characterizes the personality cult, namely the widespread and fervent

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[19] John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods, and New Directions in the Study of History* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2015).
[20] Lifton, *Revolutionary Immortality,* xviii.
[21] Lifton, *Revolutionary Immortality*, 7.
[22] Anita Chan, *Children of Mao: Personality Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1985).

participation of Chinese youth, as a product of the concept of the "authoritarian personality," as conceptualized by the Frankfurt School. This personality is namely a product of the "political socialization" found in the formal education system in China. Chan derives her assertion through a series of interviews with former Red Guards who were teenagers during the Cultural Revolution, conducted in Hong Kong between 1974 and 1976. Chan herself is a Hong Kong native and found herself fascinated with her friends' tales of their former exploits, and how passionate the former Red Guards once were, and how disillusioned they had become. While Chan interviewed fourteen former Red Guards, *Children of Mao* focuses on four specific case studies. Although these former Red Guards all came from a bourgeois background, and were all active Red Guards in one manner or another, they all had different experiences. Through these four case studies, Chan outlines four principle types of activists: the conforming activist (who was, coincidentally, the only female of the group); the purist activist; the rebellious activist; and the pragmatic activist. [23]

Although the title would suggest the focus would be on the decade of the Cultural Revolution, Chan's study begins in the 1950s and concludes post-revolution. Chan begins by chronicling the group's primary school experience, in which character formation and political education were considered paramount. As the children entered adolescence, the demands of political socialization became increasingly demanding, and their education shaped the behavior of the students through peer pressures and a strictly controlled social environment. The students expressed their loyalty in differing manners, resulting in the different categories of activists.

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[23] Romer Cornejo Bustamante, review of *Children of Mao: Personality Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation*, by Anita Chan, *Estudios de Asia y Africa*, April-June 1986, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40313010.

Although education and upbringing had once been largely familial, by the 1950's, the authority of the family was superseded by the authority of the state and school-learned socialization.

Children of Mao is an outlier amongst the early scholarship of the Cultural Revolution, and is more concerned with how Red Guards became so zealous and agitated during the tumultuous period, rather than immediately pointing blame at Mao. Chan asserts that the Chinese youth were indoctrinated by a carefully curated and centralized state education, rather than placing blame on the families. This assertion is noteworthy considering the fact that much of the previous scholarship viewed the Cultural Revolution as a "specifically Chinese" phenomenon. However, Chan aligns with later scholarship which argues that this feverish personality cult can be found in any society, not just China, and not even just in totalitarian nations.

The "authoritarian personality" is defined as someone who 'admires authority and tends to submit to it, but at the same time… wants to be an authority himself and have others submit to him.'[24] Erich Fromm, a prominent member of the Frankfurt School, found that the authoritarian personality could be found in both Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany. While the concept of the authoritarian personality was originally conceived by Erich Fromm, Theodor Adorno, also amongst the humanist Marxist Frankfurt School of philosophers, refuted Fromm's earlier assertions, and argued that the authoritarian personality was a "latent character structure" that could be found anywhere, "not only in countries experiencing authoritarian convulsions."[25] On the other side of the spectrum, political scientist and sinologist Lucian Pye, and former ambassador, Richard Solomon, argued that such authoritarian personality characteristics were commonly found in China due to the traditionally authoritarian family structure, as well as Chinese culture. However, Chan directly refutes this contention, instead arguing that it is the

[24] Chan, *Children of Mao*, 204.
[25] Chan, *Children of Mao*, 205.

school and not the family who mainly socializes Chinese children.[26] Overall, Chan uses the four case studies of former Red Guards to demonstrate the political socialization of Chinese youth, which was enacted by the centralized state education, not the family. Chan also refutes Orientalist perspectives, and argues that the authoritarian personality was neither an inherently Chinese quality, nor is it only found in authoritarian states.

Published in 1996, *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader* chronicled the resurgence of Mao's popularity in the late 1980's and early 1990's.[27] This resurgence of popularity, known as *Maore*, or "Mao craze," was largely influenced by the impending centenary of Mao's birthday in 1993. Influenced by his experiences as an exchange student at Fudan University in Shanghai during the last few years of the Cultural Revolution, including several direct experiences with "criticism sessions," Barmé traces the ironic revival of interest in Mao during the late 1980s and early 1990s in China. Particularly popular with the youth who had never lived under Mao, the unique "MaoCraze" of this period was marketed in distinctly capitalist ways – ranging from trendy, Cultural Revolution-themed restaurants where cosmopolitan diners would "eat Mao," to cheaply mass-produced Mao badges, reminiscent of the original "object of passionate devotion during the Cultural Revolution." Despite "the vacuum created by officially-enforced silence," all throughout the country, propagandists, commentators, and academics, were now passionately reaffirming, condemning, or questioning Mao's legacy, with a surprising frankness not found, or perhaps possible, during Mao's heyday. Unlike the personality cult of the Cultural Revolution, this newfound obsession with the late Great Leader was devoid entirely of its original class, ethical, and political dimensions. Despite Deng Xiaoping's extended repudiation of both Mao's legacy and the Cultural Revolution, Deng lived

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[26] Chan, *Children of Mao*, 211.
[27] Geremie Barmé, *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996).

to witness not only the decline of his own popularity, but also the resurgence of the legend of the man he tried so fervently to disavow and erase from China's past. Barmé analyzes this revival through a rich and diverse collection of news articles, memoirs, poetry, fiction, and Communist Party documents.

Barmé traces the evolution of the original personality cult to its revival in the 1990's through memoirs, poetry, fiction, and Communist Party documents. In this anthology of translations, Barmé is attempting to demonstrate the contradictory attitudes of ordinary people towards Mao in the posthumous cult, thus attempting to grant agency similar to later historians. Barmé also offers valuable insights to the scholarship on the Mao cult, continuing the history from the end of the Cultural Revolution to present day. Barmé found that the resurgence of popularity within those who lived through the Cultural Revolution was largely representative of both the deep dissatisfaction of the status quo and a nostalgia for the power and leadership of Mao. For youth, however, Mao represented a "homebred luminary,"[28] a powerful symbol of China that took on new youthful forms outside of the carefully curated persona that had been devised by the CCP in earlier years.

Published in 2001, *Biography of a Chairman Mao Badge: The Creation and Consumption of a Personality Cult* details the "biography" of the heavily commodified, envied, and potentially subversive Chairman Mao Badges that proliferated during the Cultural Revolution.[29] Melissa Schrift traces the history of Mao badges, from the crude, rudimentary ones created by students in the 1930s, to the increasingly complex and ornate ones fought over at the height of their popularity during the Cultural Revolution, to the precious but few sought-after

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[28] Barmé, *Shades of Mao*, 47.
[29] Melissa Schrift, *Biography of a Chairman Mao Badge: The Creation and Mass Consumption of a Personality Cult* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

badges that proliferate now in Chinese markets catered to Westerners and badge collectors. Schrift categorizes the badges chronologically – Yenan badges, during the Yenan period of the Chinese Communist Party; postliberation badges, following the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949; and Cultural Revolution badges, from the early period of the Cultural Revolution. Although Schrift also delineates the Cultural Revolution as occurring from 1966 to 1976, the "Cultural Revolution" period of the badges ends at 1969, following the excesses and violence of the early period when the badges began to be recalled and melted down by the government. The badges would later be recalled again following Mao's death in 1976.

Although Schrift's main focus is during the height of the Cultural Revolution, she traces the badges and the personality cult to contemporary China. Published at the turn of the millennium, Schrift is influenced by her firsthand experiences of Mao's "iconic reemergence in contemporary China following the *Maore* (Mao craze) in the early 1990s,"[30] which marked the centenary of Mao's birthday. Influenced by her personal experiences in China in which she witnessed first-hand the resurrection, or at least the resurfacing, of the personality cult, albeit in a much more openly satirical and "tongue-in-cheek" manner, Schrift details the myriad ways Mao's image has been repurposed and represented – from sacrilegious pop art, to wildly popular Cultural Revolution-themed restaurants.

Schrift draws upon a wide variety of sources, notably numerous anecdotes from those who lived during the Cultural Revolution, including former Red Guards. These anecdotes are utilized to gain an understanding of the variegated nature of the personality cult and how people maneuvered these relationships. Asserting that there exists a "dialectical relationship between centralized propaganda and public consumption," Schrift "examines the scope of propaganda

[30] Schrift, *Biography of a Chairman Mao Badge*, 155.

strategies and the people's ability to mediate national forces through the consumption of Mao badges." Schrift maintains that "Mao badges provided a way for people to define themselves and to internalize and negotiate a dogmatic nationalist ideology during the Cultural Revolution." Mao badges were initially intended to symbolize the people's devotion to and support of Mao Zedong. However, despite their original intentions, Mao badges, and how they were worn and perceived, took on a life of their own and expanded into other arenas of meaning.[31] Both the nature of her sources, and her ability to cast doubt upon the homogeneity of the personality cult that so many other scholars insist upon, Schrift demonstrates attention to the agency and autonomy of Chinese citizens otherwise unseen in other scholarship. Schrift grants agency to those who wore these badges, and participated in the Cultural Revolution, not as crazed personality cult members, but as historical actors who worked within, often confining, boundaries of acceptable political behavior and display. This analysis demonstrates Schrift's antithesis to the rigid distinctions between official and popular culture, which she instead views as symbolic exchange.[32]

Influenced by her anthropological background, Schrift's first work, *Biography of a Chairman Mao Badge*, could be well defined as cultural history. If "cultural history attends to meaning and representation,"[33] Schrift's historiographical inclination is evident through the analysis and history of the Mao badges, and not only what they represent in their iconography, but also what they represented to both the wearers and the, often envious, spectators. Beyond representation, Schrift's work is representative of cultural historians' interest in the sheer nature of the *type* of object she analyzes. Schrift attempts to fill the void in discussion of propaganda

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[31] Schrift, *Biography of a Chairman Mao Badge*, 4.
[32] Schrift, *Biography of a Chairman Mao Badge*, 7.
[33] Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 205.

medium during the Cultural Revolution, noting the baffling absence and omission of Mao badge analysis in Western scholarship. Although Schrift notes two Chinese scholars, Li Xuemi and Zhou Jihou, whose work have been tremendously influential in her research, she clarifies that "both [texts] are primarily descriptive, without any lengthy critical analyses of the political implications of badges… and [are] often couched in praise of the Communist regime," which "reflect the difficulties of doing work on Mao propaganda in China."[34] Despite the obvious limitations presented to Li and Zhou, Schrift is unfettered by fears of censorship, and is able to expound the significance of these badges in both Cultural Revolution propaganda and Chinese material culture. Cultural history "coincided with the rediscovery of sites and objects which have considerably enlarged the repertoire of historical documents,"[35] and Mao badges are now amongst the "many objects previously considered as mere curiosities or unimportant souvenirs [which] became the subject of historical research."[36]

Exploring the iconography, or "the reading of art in relation to the intellectual world in which it was commissioned and created,"[37] of the badges, Schrift also connotes the significant art history influence upon cultural history. This influence upon cultural history is also evident in Schrift's analysis of the badges as a propaganda medium; cultural historians have also been interested in examining "art in the service of the state or its opponents."[38] Also telling of Schrift's historiographical inclination is her interest in contemporary museums, whether official or ad hoc, which display precious collections of Mao badges. "The museum reinforces the trend towards according a new importance to objects, the organization of which in space creates its

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[34] Schrift, *Biography of a Chairman Mao Badge*, 30.
[35] Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 28.
[36] Winter and Prost, *The Great War in History*, 28.
[37] Tosh, *The Pursuit of History,* 207.
[38] Tosh, *The Pursuit of History,* 208.

own narrative,"[39] and Schrift examines how the desire to place Mao badges in museums is an attempt to professionalize and standardize badge collecting, as well as celebrate it.

Daniel Leese asserts *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in China's Cultural Revolution* as the first work to "scrutinize the cult of Mao and the massive worship that was fostered around him at the height of his powers during the Cultural Revolution."[40] Published in 2013, *Mao Cult* distances itself from other scholarship by "analyzing previously secret archival documents, obscure objects, and political pamphlets." Despite Leese's access to formerly unavailable resources, Leese presents the same, rehashed opinion found in most Western scholarship – Mao was to blame for the emergence of the personality cult, and thus for the factionalism-fueled violence of the Cultural Revolution. The problem with this assertion is clear – it raises Mao as some omnipotent and impenetrable being, absolves other party members of any culpability, and largely erases the autonomy and agency of those who participated in the chaos. Although Leese may assert that his argument deviates from other scholarship, really Leese is only confirming and falling within the acceptable boundaries of official party rhetoric.

Unlike the other scholarship, Leese utilizes a transnational approach and likens Mao's personality cult to those of other totalitarian leaders, pointing to Fromm's scholarship that Chan was attempting to *refute* back in 1985. While Leese is overwhelmingly concentrated on Mao and his personality cult, the closest Leese ever approaches to considering autonomy within the Cultural Revolution is dubbing the ensuing chaos as "cult anarchy."[41]

Perhaps the most fruitful analysis of the Cultural Revolution, Pang Laikwan's *The Art of Cloning: Creative Production During China* (2017) is one of the few works to take a more

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[39] Winter and Prost, *The Great War in History*, 28.
[40] Daniel Leese, *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in China's Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[41] Leese, *Mao Cult*, 87.

realistic stance falling somewhere in the middle between the agency of the Mao cult and Mao's power and grip over the party and his followers.[42] According to Pang, the Cultural Revolution was not simply "pure top-down control, but an alternative model of cultural economy, enabling people to engage in the political participation through the production and consumption of the artwork."[43] In this statement we see the progression of autonomy outlined in earlier works. Although largely concerned with artwork and cultural production, it is clear that Pang's narrative of autonomy is largely different than the majority of scholarship which is overwhelmingly focused on Mao.

The Art of Cloning is most similar to Melissa Schrift's *Biography of a Chairman Mao Badge: The Creation and Mass Consumption of a Personality Cult*. Despite being published nearly two decades before Laikwan, Schrift was one of the few scholars taking interest in the autonomy of Red Guards and Mao cult followers during the Revolution. Perhaps what is most interesting about the two works is their shared focus – Laikwan views the Cultural Revolution through the myriad of different art works that proliferated during the period despite the official condemnation against such bourgeois interests, and how artistic endeavors were a means to exercise some degree, albeit limited, of agency in an aggressively conformist society. In a similar vein, Schrift's focus is on the endless varieties of badges that were created during the revolution and how their adornment represented different meanings for different people in different contexts, often as a means to outwardly proclaim loyalty and devotion to Chairman Mao without having to resort to other displays or rituals.

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[42] Pang Laikwan, *The Art of Cloning: Creative Production During China's Cultural Revolution* (London, UK: Verso Books, 2017).
[43] Yanping Guo, review of *The Art of Cloning: Creative Production During China's Cultural Revolution*, by Pang Laikwan, *China Review*, October 2017, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/676372.

Pang utilizes a tremendous variety of sources, including author-conducted interviews of those who lived and participated in the Cultural Revolution. While Chan focused her attention on former Red Guards, Pang is interested in those who created and produced propagandistic artwork during the period of the Cultural Revolution. Pang also employs Chinese newspaper articles, biographies, first-person accounts, and the art and propaganda itself. Pang draws upon a wide array of scholarship, from classic sinologists, such as MacFarquhar, Schoenhals, and Maurice Meisner, to sinologists with more localized interests, such as Emily Honig, who was interested in the role of women during Cultural Revolution. Pang draws upon very recent scholarship, including both *Mao Cult* by Leese, and *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis* by Yiching Wu. Pang also utilizes a work similar to her own – Barbara Mittler's *Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture*, which examines the popularity and contining legacy of artwork created during the Cultural Revolution. Other diverse sources include primary documents by Jiang Qing, Mao, and Zhou Enlai, as well as Althusser, Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Half a century later, China still lives within the shadow of the Cultural Revolution and Chairman Mao. Even with the *Maore* of the 1990's, and the resurgence of "Red Culture" in 2011, there is still a palpable silence regarding China's recent violent history. The founding father of the People's Republic of China is perhaps still just as ardently venerated as he is abhorred. Even Xi Jinping, the current president of the People's Republic of China, has been unable to evade comparisons to the former leader. Of all of Mao Zedong's accomplishments and failures, perhaps the most well-known aspect of Chairman Mao's legacy is the Cultural Revolution. But as the decade fades from public memory, many of those who lived during the

Cultural Revolution are passing away and there exists a larger chasm between them and youth who are disconnected and uninformed on the tumultuous period.

In a field dominated by Western scholars, often through a narrow, simplistic, and Orientalist lens, the personality cult has been left largely unexplored by Chinese historians in the mainland. Mao's legacy remains as compelling and as divisive as ever, despite, if not fueled by, state-sanctioned censorship, secrecy, and silence. Despite the many obstacles being presented, there doesn't seem to be any indication that Western fascination with the Cultural Revolution will end any time soon. Hopefully, perhaps in the near future, there will be greater autonomy to publicly discuss and analyze the Cultural Revolution within China. Although openly discussing Mao and subverting his legacy is a critical first step, it is not the only nor most significant action that needs to be taken. This theoretical scholarship has the capacity to both heal the decades of painful silence but also grant a voice to those of the past who persecuted and were persecuted. With conversation, analysis, and transparency, the historiography of the Cultural Revolution can undermine the non-truths of conformity and compliance and reveal how ordinary people maneuvered within the period of cruelty and repression.

Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung:

Designer: Shanghai Fine Arts Academy Work Propaganda Team, Revolutionary Committee collective work (上海市美术学校工宣队, 革委会供稿)
1970, October
Long live chairman Mao! Long, long live!
Mao zhuxi wansui! Wanwansui! (毛主席万岁！万万岁!)
Publisher: Shanghai renmin chubanshe (上海人民出版社)
Size: 53x77 cm.
Call number: BG E13/701 (Landsberger collection)
https://chineseposters.net/posters/e13-701.php

Originally published in 1964, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, popularly known as the "Little Red Book" due to its appearance, was widely distributed during the Cultural Revolution. The original publication consisted of 200 quotations covering 23 topics, such as "Women" and "Communists," compiled by the *PLA Daily*, but was later revised to include an endorsement by Mao's appointed successor at the time, Lin Biao. The finalized edition would ultimately include 33 topics and 427 quotations. By the time the CCP ceased publication in February 1979, at least one billion copies had been printed. In this propaganda poster, a group of people are at Tiananmen Square in Beijing waving "Little Red Books" during what appears to be a rally lead by Chairman Mao. The group at the forefront of the poster consists of young men and a woman in People's Liberation Army uniforms and a young peasant woman in the front; notice the Chairman Mao badge on the shirt of the young woman to the right of the image.

Chairman Mao Badge:

British Museum
Circular badge (57mm)
Obv: Profile of Mao in silver (head and collar) on red sunray background.
Inscription in gold below.
Rev: Hollowed out form of Mao's head and collar.
Inscription (obv): 敬祝毛主席万寿无疆 (Jingzhu Mao zhuxi wan shou wu jiang) Respectfully Wishing Chairman Mao an eternal life Inscription (rev): 毛主席万岁 (Mao zhuxi wansui) Long live Chairman Mao
Note: The inscription on the reverse is in Lin Biao's calligraphy. CM 1990,0204.17

Although the first rudimentary Chairman Mao badges were created in the 1930's, and helped foster the Mao Cult in the 1940's, their popularity soared to epic proportions during the Cultural Revolution. At the height of the Cultural Revolution, badges were feverishly traded, gifted, sold on the black market, and even stolen. An estimated 3 billion badges were produced. At the end of the revolution, badges were officially ordered to be turned in to be melted or destroyed, but many hid their most precious badges, and to this day, there are collectors who boast tens or even hundreds of thousands of badges in their collection. Although the badges usually featured Mao's profile (purposely to the left), rarer ones also depicted landscapes, revolutionary leaders, and other communist leaders. Together with the Little Red Book, badges (worn on the left breast) were the most visible way to display loyalty. The highly-coveted badges were primarily distributed to workers, soldiers, and students, so badges could often be traded for services and other goods, as they were expressly forbidden to be bought or sold.

Chairman Mao swims across the Yangzi:

Designer unknown (佚名)
1969, July
Closely follow the great leader Chairman Mao and forge ahead courageously amid great storms and waves - Celebrate the Shanghai movement to swim the Yangzi river to commemorate the third anniversary of Chairman Mao's good swim in the Yangzi river on July the sixteenth.
Jingen weida lingxiu Mao zhuxi zai dafeng dalang zhong fenyong qianjin - Qingzhu Mao zhuxi 7.16 changyou Changjiang san zhounian Shanghaishi changyou Changjiang huodong (紧跟伟大领袖毛主席在大风大浪中奋勇前进-庆祝毛主席7。16畅游长江三周年上海市畅游长江活动)
Publisher: Shanghai 1969 Swim the Yangzi River headquarters (上海市一九六九畅游长江指挥部)
Size: 77x53 cm.
Call number: BG E15/289 (Landsberger collection)
https://chineseposters.net/posters/e15-289.php

In 1956, Chairman Mao, a lifelong ardent advocate of the benefits of swimming, swam across the Yangzi River for the first time. On July 16, 1966, an event was organized in Wuhan to commemorate the event. Mao joined the throngs of people swimming, exchanging jokes and pleasantries. The swim, widely covered by the media, demonstrated that Mao was still physically fit, contrary to rumors suggesting otherwise, and was still able to lead the revolution. This demonstration was beneficial in Mao's struggle to regain power during the Cultural Revolution. Mao's swim became a major annual event in which thousands of eager swimmers would swim in the sea, and rivers and lakes across the country emulating Chairman Mao's impressive swim.

Bombard the Headquarters:

全国第一张马列主义的大字报和人民日报评论员的评论，写得何等好呵！请同志们重读这一张大字报和这个评论。可是在50多天里，从中央到地方的某些领导同志，却反其道而行之，站在反动的资产阶级立场上，实行资产阶级专政，将无产阶级轰轰烈烈的文化大革命运动打下去，颠倒是非，混淆黑白，围剿革命派，压制不同意见，实行白色恐怖，自以为得意，长资产阶级的威风，灭无产阶级的志气，又何其毒也！联想到1962年的右倾和1964年形“左”实右的错误倾向，岂不是可以发人深醒的吗

Translation: China's first Marxist-Leninist big-character poster and Commentator's article on it in People's Daily are indeed superbly written! Comrades, please read them again. But in the last fifty days or so some leading comrades from the central down to the local levels have acted in a diametrically opposite way. Adopting the reactionary stand of the bourgeoisie, they have enforced a bourgeois dictatorship and struck down the surging movement of the great cultural revolution of the proletariat. They have stood facts on their head and juggled black and white, encircled and suppressed revolutionaries, stifled opinions differing from their own, imposed a white terror, and felt very pleased with themselves. They have puffed up the arrogance of the bourgeoisie and deflated the morale of the proletariat. How poisonous! Viewed in connection with the Right deviation in 1962 and the wrong tendency of 1964 which was 'Left' in form but Right in essence, shouldn't this make one wide awake?

“Bombard the Headquarters – My Big Character poster” was a short document written by Mao Zedong on August 5, 1966 and publishedin the Communist Party’s official newspaper, *People’s Daily*, a year later on August 5, 1967. The poster is believed to have been directly targeting and criticizing President Liu Shaoqi and senior leader Deng Xiaoping, notably for attempting to contain the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. After the publication of the poster, even greater violence and chaos spread throughout the countryside, resulting in the death of thousands of “class enemies,” including President Liu Shaoqi, who died in 1969 after two years in prison, of mistreatment, abuse, and failing health, which was further complicated by being denied medication.

Mao Pop Art:

LAST BANQUET
Laser prints, pages from the Red Book and acrylic on canvas
60 x 168 inch, 1989
Zhang Hongtu
http://www.momao.com/

After decades of artistic suppression, during the "era of Deng Xiaoping" there was a period of relative liberalization and greater political and artistic freedom. In the early 1990's, which marked the centenary of Mao's birthday, the personality cult resurfaced, albeit in a much more openly satirical and "tongue-in-cheek" manner. During this period, known as *Maore* or "Mao craze," Mao's image had been repurposed by a myriad of artists into sacrilegious pop art. In this image, we see a pastiche of Leonardo da Vinci's mural, *The Last Supper*. Instead of featuring Jesus and the twelve disciples, however, we just see multiple Maos. One of them is holding a Little Red Book, and instead of bread, they have bowls with chopsticks. The painting is made of pages from the Little Red Book as well, which would have been unheard of and considered traitorous and blasphemous during Mao's reign. Notice the chamber pot and the bowl of rice spilling over.

Textbook Critique:

Based on the 10th grade global history textbook, *World History: Patterns of Interaction*, Mao Zedong, and China in general, is mentioned quite briefly. The majority of the chapter on China is focused on the Chinese Civil War and the founding of the PRC. Mao is first mentioned in the context of Marx and the Communist Manifesto:

> Published in 1848, *The Communist Manifesto* produced few short-term results. Though widespread revolts shook Europe during 1848 and 1849, Europe's leaders eventually put down the uprisings. Only after the turn of the century did the fiery Marxist pamphlets produce explosive results. In the 1900s, Marxism inspired revolutionaries such as Russia's Lenin, China's Mao Zedong, Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh, and Cuba's Fidel Castro. These revolutionary leaders adapted Marx's beliefs and arguments to their own specific situations and needs. (p. 649)

I thought this little excerpt was interesting considering Mao is usually aligned with Stalin rather than Lenin in terms of their *execution* of communism (no pun intended), but here Mao is aligned with Lenin, Ho Chi Minh, and Castro ideologically. In the final sentence of the excerpt, it is made clear that these different leaders applied communism differently in their respective countries. I thought this was interesting because it seems to be distancing these leaders and their practices from communism – maybe hinting that there is indeed some merit in Marxist principles? I also thought it was interesting that Mao is defined as a "revolutionary," that may have a positive connotation, which reminds me of Crane Brinton's, *Anatomy of a Revolution* and his examination of the different actors found in revolutions.

The next section Mao is mentioned in is in a section about Stalin and the Soviet Union. In this section, there is a table on totalitarianism:

Patterns of Change: Totalitarianism	
Key Traits	**Description**
Dictatorship and One-Party Rule	• Exercises absolute authority • Dominates the government
Dynamic Leader	• Helps unite people toward meeting shared goals or realizing a common vision

	• Encourages people to devote their unconditional loyalty and uncritical support to the regime • Becomes a symbol of the government
Ideology (set of beliefs)	• Justifies government actions • Glorifies the aims of the state
State Control Over All Sectors of Society	• Business • Family life • Labor • Youth groups • Housing • Religion • Education • The arts
State Control Over the Individual	• Demands total obedience to authority and personal sacrifice for the good of the state • Denies basic liberties
Dependence on Modern Technology	• Relies on mass communication, such as radios, newsreels, and loudspeakers, to spread propaganda • Builds up advanced military weapons
Organized Violence	• Uses force, such as police terror, to crush all opposition • Targets certain groups, such as national minorities and political opponents, as enemies

After this table, Mao is mentioned in the following excerpt:

> Other totalitarian governments besides the Soviet Union emerged in the twentieth century. In the 1920s and 1930s, two other European dictators – Hitler in Germany and Mussolini in Italy – were shaping their visions of a totalitarian state. After Communists formed the People's Republic of China in 1949, Mao Zedong used tactics similar to Stalin's to establish totalitarian control. The North Korean dictator Kim Il Sung ruled over a totalitarian Communist state from 1948 to 1994. (p. 776)

Although in the later section on the Cultural Revolution, the personality cult isn't explicitly mentioned, the section, "State Control Over the Individual," could perhaps be comparing it. However, as we know now, it isn't as clear cut as merely stating that the state "demands total obedience to authority and personal sacrifice for the good of the state." As analyzed by scholars such as Melissa Schrift and Daniel Leese, the Mao cult was a largely grassroots phenomenon that surpassed the original expectations of party leadership. Here we see the more common association with other totalitarian leaders.

The passage entirely devoted to the Cultural Revolution is very short – only two paragraphs long. The passage bolds "Red Guards" as a key word, which is quite important, and notes that the militia units comprised high school and college students. Perhaps it'd be interesting if they had noted that even middle school students were quite active in other youth leagues during the Cultural Revolution. The passage states: "The goal of the Cultural Revolution was to establish a society of peasants and workers in which all were equal. The new hero was the peasant who worked with his hands." I thought this sentence was interesting since this is not how I would necessarily describe the goal of the Cultural Revolution. In much of the scholarship concerning the Cultural Revolution, it's stated that the Cultural Revolution was both a political endeavor for Mao to purge non-radical comrades, as well as an effort to drum up popular support after the failures of the Great Leap Forward left many feeling disillusioned. The passage also states, "The life of the mind – intellectual and artistic activity – was considered useless and dangerous." Although the Cultural Revolution was largely anti-intellectual, it was predominantly ambitious in purging "capitalist roaders," and persecuting class enemies.

However, in regards to the peasantry, they could have mentioned the "Down to the Countryside Movement," as a means to quell the violence of the youth. There is also no mention of how many turned their backs on not only communism but also government in general, and the events signaled a turning point for the Chinese Communist party that paved the way for China to become the global power it is today. In this passage, they also fail to mention the results of the Cultural Revolution. They could have cited how agricultural production stagnated, as well as the "Lost Generation," who suffered from years of not having any formal education, or how ideas and different products spread throughout the countryside when Red Guards traveled around the country.

Interestingly enough, there is no mention of the Little Red Book, or Chairman Mao badges, or anyone other than Mao – squarely placing all the blame on Mao's shoulders. No mention of the Gang of Four, or the Lin Biao incident, or Mao's right-hand man, Liu Shaoqi. There is no mention of struggle sessions, as well. The sentence, "Civil war seemed possible," is also pretty interesting considering many have defined the factionalism that ripped apart the country during the time as a civil war. There's also no mention of factionalism at all, or of the infamous Tsinghua University incident.

Next to the section on the Cultural Revolution, there is a little excerpt titled "Daily Life: The Cultural Revolution." This little excerpt is an anecdote of what a man named Chihua Wen witnessed when he was eight years old during the Cultural Revolution. Wen recounts his neighbors' home being ransacked by Red Guards, who sacked books and lit them on fire, and insinuates that the couple and their child were killed by the Red Guards:

> [The Red Guards] returned to the apartment and emerged carrying two heavy sacks. As they raced off with the sacks in the back of the truck, Wen heard sounds of gagging. "No one ever saw the couple or the child again," he said. And Wen never forgot what he had seen.

Although I am not necessarily calling the authenticity of the passage into question, I think it would be important to have included a citation – who conducted this interview? When was it taken? Also, perhaps it would be interesting to have included an excerpt from a former Red Guard instead.

New Textbook Entry:
[Assuming section before is on the Great Leap Forward, the Sino-Soviet split, and the period of moderation in economic policies]

After the catastrophic failures of the **Great Leap Forward**, resulting in the greatest famine in history of the world, Mao Zedong stepped down as State Chairman of the People's Republic of China in 1959. Mao's successor, **Liu Shaoqi**, and senior official **Deng Xiaoping** began to move the government away from Mao's radical policies. As a result, Mao lost his prominence within the party.

This period of moderation troubled Mao, and fearing that he was losing power in the Chinese Communist Party, Mao proclaimed the beginning of the **Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution** in May 1966. In the "**May 16 Notification**," Mao called for an effort to purge the remnants of bourgeois and feudal elements in both the Chinese Communist Party and in society.

The Cultural Revolution quickly escalated after the publication of Mao's big-character poster "**Bombard the Headquarters**" in August 5, 1967. Mao's call for a purge within the Chinese Communist Party instigated the Cultural Revolution by accusing people within the party of being influenced by bourgeois elements, creating a "bourgeois dictatorship," and subverting the Chinese Revolution.

Millions of high school and college students responded to Mao's call, forming militia units called Red Guards. The radical youth rampaged throughout China, ransacking homes and pillaging libraries, terrorizing civilians, torturing, beating, and executing people, especially teachers, principals, intellectuals, and those with bourgeois backgrounds. Many "**class enemies**," including former President Liu Shaoqi and senior official Deng Xiaoping, were subjected to humiliating and painful "**struggle sessions**" – a form of public criticism, humiliation, and torture

to shape public opinion intended to persecute, sometimes execute, supposed class enemies who were forced to confess to a series of crimes in the guise of "self-criticism."

The young Red Guards were swept up into the personality cult of Chairman Mao, and there was even violent rivalry between rival Red Guard groups who would fight over who was more "red," and more loyal and faithful to Chairman Mao. The factionalism between Red Guard Groups, reached critical mass in the spring and summer of 1968 at **Qinhua University** in Beijing, when a "war" broke out between factions where they bombed rivals' dormitories, burning several students alive.

While Chairman Mao initially supported the feverish violence enacted by the Red Guards, when the nation was ultimately threatened with the prospect of anarchy, Mao suppressed the widespread violence with the "Down the Countryside movement." During the campaign, the rampant violence and anarchy was eventually calmed down when thousands of students were sent to the countryside in an effort to re-educate the intellectual youth through forced labor. These students were deprived of a college education and taken away from their homes and families, and as a result they became disillusioned and cynical, losing faith in both Mao's leadership and the Chinese Communist Party.

The period of violence ended with the death of Mao Zedong on September 9, 1976. Soon after, the political group known as the **Gang of Four** was arrested, thus officially ending the Cultural Revolution. This political faction consisted of Chairman Mao's wife, **Jiang Qing**, and her cronies, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen. The Gang of Four, threatened by the power struggle concerning who would become Mao's successor, further radicalized the Cultural Revolution, censoring and defaming their enemies, such as Deng Xiaoping and Zhou Enlai. Ultimately, they were arrested and put on trial, and were blamed for the excesses and

atrocities that occurred during the Cultural Revolution. Although Mao ushered in the revolution, the Gang of Four were condemned as responsible, serving as scapegoats.

In an effort to put the Cultural Revolution in the past and move forward, the Chinese Communist Party published the "**Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the PRC**." The resolution was developed in the summer of 1981 by 4,000 party leaders, including Deng Xiaoping, who had been slandered and purged during the Cultural Revolution. The party felt it was important to preserve Chairman Mao as a symbol of both revolutionary and nationalist legacy, despite his failures. The resolution praised his success in the revolutionary struggle against the Guomindang and economic successes at the beginning of the creation of the PRC. However, the resolution criticized Mao extensively for the mistakes during the Great Leap Forward; his disregard for Leninist principles by supporting the Maoist cult; and the grave errors of the Cultural Revolution, which were condemned as largely his fault.

It would take decades for China to recover after the Cultural Revolution. The period of intense political mayhem affected every aspect of Chinese society – millions were persecuted, hurt and killed; schools and universities were shut down for students to criticize teachers; spouses reported each other; children spied on their parents; and the state halted many of its functions until 1969. During this tumultuous decade, Mao's personality cult reached its climax, and thousands wreaked chaos in his name, resulting in a civil war that ravaged the nation, stunting the nation's economic, educational, political, and artistic growth for years.

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