

# RECONSTRUCTING CHINA'S CULTURAL REVOLUTION

LOWELL DITTMER\*

Culturally meaningful historical events occur not once but many times (to parody Caesar), being subject to reinterpretation based on changing contemporary political circumstances. In the case of China's Cultural Revolution (CR), the object of memory is traumatic, sometimes even termed a "holocaust".<sup>1</sup> Yet in reference to an event that has caused more ink to flow than any other in PRC history<sup>2</sup> even this verdict is not unanimous, and motives for recurrent returns to the "scene of the crime" are quite mixed. In this essay we undertake to show how the ongoing reconstruction of the CR has intercalated with current political realities, as both cause and function.<sup>3</sup>

## Discursive Continuity and Change

Retrospective views of the CR in the post-CR era have varied in both intensity and thrust, responding to two countervailing pressures. First, a genuine psychological need to "learn from history" — to cauterize traumatic wounds in the searing light of truth, to learn from the past to avoid repeating mistakes — cannot be denied, even in the highly controlled official media. This has led to an incremental broadening and deepening of target definition, beginning with the "crimes" of the Gang of Four, moving quickly to include Lin Biao, more hesitantly to embrace Mao, then to a blanket condemnation of the "ten years of catastrophe", and finally taking on all of traditional Chinese culture for fostering "feudal despotism".

\* The author is Professor of Political Science at the University of California at Berkeley. He wishes to thank the Center for Chinese Studies of the University of California for research support, and Tak-wing Ngo for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

<sup>1</sup> Vide "Opinion" Column, "'Cultural Revolution' Has Lessons for All", *China Daily* (Beijing), 29 August 1986, p. 4: "Young people in West Germany in the 1960s once asked their parents: 'What were you doing during the Nazi years?' We, who experienced the 'CR', may ask ourselves: 'What were we doing then?'"

<sup>2</sup> Xiuyuan Lu, "A Step Toward Understanding Popular Violence in China's Cultural Revolution", *Pacific Affairs*, 67, No. 4 (Winter 1994), pp. 533-564.

<sup>3</sup> This study is circumscribed, not only to the CR's historical "fallout" (as opposed to the event itself), but to the *official* perspective. Thus we preclude from consideration the rich Western post mortem literature on the topic; indeed, even our review of Chinese accounts is partial, consisting of a relatively comprehensive sample of relevant articles in the flagship press (*Renmin ribao*, *Guangming ribao*, *Jiefang runbao*, *Xinhua*) during the 1976-1996 period, but omitting adversions to the event in literary, scholarly, and popular cultural media, not to mention the *samizdati* of domestic dissidents. Whereas this enables us to retain bibliographic control of our topic, it should be viewed as a "down payment" in the more comprehensive survey of the after-effects of the CR that is surely called for.

Second, a more pragmatic effort to "use the past to serve the present", i.e., to legitimize specific policy "lines", has resulted in periodic shifts between two distinct views of the CR, reflecting the factional balance of power at the top. The first view is that the CR epitomized factional "chaos" (*luan*) and anarchy, a view that coincides with the predilection for order and stability of the "Leftist" or more conservative wing of the reform coalition. The second view conceives the CR as a throwback to "feudal" despotism and stultifying ideological conformity — a view most compatible with the preference for political reform and economic liberalization of the "Rightist" or more radical wing of the reform coalition.

The timing of the shifts of interpretative nuance seems to have depended on a combination of the relative strength of these two broad factional groupings plus the opportunities afforded them by fortuitous political events. For instance, factional competition has tended to intensify prior to major conferences, such as National CCP Congresses, Central Committee (CC) Plenums, or NPC sessions; also of course during rumors of imminent leadership succession. Ceremonial occasions are also important catalysts — funerals or birthdates of symbolic political figures (Mao, Zhou Enlai, Ye Jianying), the 30th anniversary of the founding of the PRC, a decennial of the launching of the CR, the advent of the Hundred Flowers, or the Japanese invasion of China — any event that provides a pretext for public gathering and speech-making has explosive potential concerning issues tangentially related to the occasion being commemorated. Finally, the combination of economic conjuncture and mass movement cycle has tended to favor one side or the other; sc., periods of "boom" tend relatively to favor the radicals, periods of "bust" tend to favor the conservatives. Spontaneous mass protest tends to favor the conservatives regardless of the economic conjuncture.

Our preliminary hypothesis is that, whereas it is the need to "learn" from history that has kept the issue of the CR on the political agenda over the years, it is the need to "use" the past politically that has resulted in periodic cyclical shifts of interpretative nuance. These shifts have proceeded roughly on the following schedule:

- (1) The Hua Guofeng period, from 1976-1978, marked by tacit discontinuation and overt defense of the CR.<sup>4</sup>
- (2) The 1978-1980 period, characterized by explicit discontinuation and implicit critique of the CR.
- (3) The 1980-1983 period was one of revived controversy between explicit repudiation and implicit defense of the CR (the latter via officially sponsored campaigns against "spiritual pollution" and "bourgeois liberalization").

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<sup>4</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of this period, see William A. Joseph, *The Critique of Ultra-Leftism in China, 1958-1981*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1984, pp. 151-182.

(4) In 1984, a campaign was launched to "totally negate" the CR, coinciding with an attempt to eradicate the "roots" of the CR that paradoxically revived interest in its origins.

(5) In the post-Tiananmen period, despite an early interest (inspired by the setbacks to Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union) in reversing verdicts on the CR, the policy has remained one of total negation, no longer counterbalanced by the risky "search for roots". A continuing interest in "pop cult" artifacts of the CR (movies, memorabilia, memoirs) has met with determined official silence.

### 1976-1978: Overt Defense, Tacit Discontinuation

The Hua Guofeng interregnum was under conflicting pressure to reaffirm continuity with the regime that legitimized the succession and a need to follow up the arrest of the "Gang of Four" in September 1976 with the destruction of their popular base. From Mao's death until the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress in December 1978, the CR and its underlying theoretical rationale were rhetorically reaffirmed. Thus on 7 February 1977, Hua authorized Wang Dongxing's publication of an editorial in China's three most authoritative publications (*Hongqi*, *Renmin ribao*, *Jiefang junbao*) proclaiming the "two whatevers" ("Whatever decisions Chairman Mao makes we firmly support and whatever Chairman Mao instructs we unwaveringly follow"). In due course, he also reasserted the validity of the theory of continuing revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat, class struggle as the key link, and the necessity and possible revival of the CR.

Yet notwithstanding continuing public fealty to Mao, there was a shift in emphasis, even at the rhetorical level, to his more moderate pre-CR writings or statements. Volume V of Mao's *Selected Works*, the volume so expeditiously published under Hua Guofeng's personal imprimatur (as self-selected chair of the editorial committee and author of the Foreword) carefully stopped shy of the CR; those selections given wider circulation in the mass media, such as the "Ten Great Relationships", emphasized economic construction rather than any notion that rebellion is justified. At the policy level, it was not bourgeois right or class struggle but the Four Modernizations that took pride of place: differentiated material incentives, cost accounting, professionalization, regularization and so forth.

Meanwhile, as the rehabilitated Deng Xiaoping gained control of the campaign against the Gang of Four, account after graphic account of the wounds inflicted by the Gang appeared. The models selected for emulation during this period were usually martyrs who died in opposition to the radical leadership of the CR, such as Zhang Zhixin, a Party member whose throat was cut prior to execution to prevent her from articulating her loyalty to the revolution, or Chen Xinwen, the pilot allegedly killed by Lin Biao in the course of the latter's abortive escape attempt. The ongoing rehabilitation of Gang victims was in turn linked to demands for reversal of Mao's verdict condemning the April 5, 1976 Tiananmen demonstration, now conceived as a courageous, spontaneous act of protest against the Gang (not the CR). By supporting their demands, Deng, a fellow victim of Mao's verdict (purged for his alleged complicity

in the riots) inherited a ready mass base. After the "Four Greats" (big-character posters, great blooming and contending, great debates) were reaffirmed at the Fourth NPC in February 1978 (consistent with Hua's pro-CR legacy), those calling for a reversal of the Tiananmen verdict took to the streets, and grievances reverberated around this central theme. Finally, on December 1, just before convocation of the Third Plenum, the verdict on April 5 was officially reversed and the incident deemed to be "highly revolutionary".<sup>5</sup> Roundly condemning the Gang for fomenting chaos, separating revolution from production, practicing fascist dictatorship, turning Mao's Thought into a religious dogma, and reviving feudal thinking, the decision absolved the Tiananmen rioters for valiantly opposing the Gang, who were conceived as a renegade faction without any tie to the CCP or to its leaders (viz., Mao remained infallible).

### 1978-1980: Explicit Discontinuation, Implicit Critique

The Third Plenum of the Eleventh CC in December 1978 has subsequently been celebrated as the inauguration of the era of "reform and opening up". As far as the CR is concerned, the verdict was, however, cautious: more and more discrete CR policies were repudiated (to wit, the April 5 crackdown), yet the CR itself was tabled for further study:

The session holds that the great CR should also be viewed historically, scientifically and in a down-to-earth way. Comrade Mao Zedong initiated this great revolution primarily in the light of the fact that the Soviet Union had turned revisionist and for the purpose of opposing revisionism and preventing its occurrence. As for the shortcomings and mistakes in the actual course of the revolution, they should be summed up at the appropriate time.<sup>6</sup>

For the remainder of 1979, the official attitude toward the CR remained circumspect. Its main evil was seen to abide in factional indiscipline, requiring institutionalization and resuscitation of the Leninist Party structure (e.g., organization of a Central Disciplinary Inspection Committee, under the leadership of Chen Yun). Somehow, evil people had penetrated right into leading Party circles, where they usurped power and

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<sup>5</sup> "Long Live the People; on the Revolutionary Mass Movement in Tiananmen Square," *Renmin ribao* (hereinafter RR), 21 December 1978, as trans. in FBIS-CHI, 22 December 1978, pp. E1-E13.

<sup>6</sup> "The Whole Party Shifts to Socialist Modernization," Communiqué of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee (18-22 December, 1978).

wreaked havoc.<sup>7</sup> The concomitant focus on more vigilant screening of elites may have reflected the personnel turnover being implemented concurrent with the purge of Gang followers. Meanwhile, the rehabilitation of CR victims assumed floodgate proportions, as Hu Yaobang took charge of the CC Organization Department. Members of the "Three Family Village" group, Lu Dingyi and the former Propaganda Department, leaders of the February adverse current, Tao Zhu, Yang Chengwu, Fu Chongbi, Yang Yufu, Yu Lijin, the Li Yijie trio, Tiananmen victims, all had their reputations and (if still living) positions restored — the list ran like a who was who on the capitalist road. Yet new heroes were also found who had stalwartly resisted the Gang, such as CCP martyrs Xu Yunfeng or Yu Luo, brother of Yu Luojin and hero of her first novel.

The critique of the Gang, the CR's most articulate surviving theorists and advocates, also continued, now however as "ultra-Leftist and idealist", rather than the previous "apparently 'Left' but actually Right"<sup>8</sup> — this semantic adjustment reflexively placed political orthodoxy on the Right rather than the Left, to the advantage of the radical reformers. Thus the slogan "grasp revolution, promote production", or the radical critique of the "theory of the primacy of productive forces" could now be criticized. In March 1979, Lu Dingyi broke new ground by (tacitly) implicating Mao in Peng Dehuai's purge: "It is now very clear that comrade Peng Dehuai's proposals at the Lushan meeting in 1959 were correct. It was not comrade Peng Dehuai, but the opposition to him that was wrong."<sup>9</sup> Lu's conclusion was implicit when the verdict on Peng was reversed in December 1978, but not until then could it be voiced. Yet on the very next day, an article appeared in the same paper denying any criticism of Mao.<sup>10</sup> An editorial the following week evinced similar discomfort lest deviation from CR precepts went too far.<sup>11</sup> These zigzags may have reflected the major internal debate on agricultural policy also taking place in March 1979, ultimately leading to implementation of the production responsibility system (*bao chan dao hu*).

The general trend seemed to be one of slowly gathering courage in criticism of once sacrosanct symbols. "Any criticism, no matter how sharp, must be welcomed

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<sup>7</sup> Xi Chen, "A Great Struggle to Defend Party Principles — Revealing the True Nature of a Major Political Incident: The 'February Adverse Current' Concocted by Lin Biao and the 'Gang of Four'", RR, 26 February 1979, in FBIS-CHI, 28 February 1979, p. E19.

<sup>8</sup> Jin Wen, "Thoroughly Criticize the 'Left' Deviationist Line Viciously Pursued by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four", *Guangming ribao*, 23 January 1979, in FBIS-CHI, 2 February, p. E11.

<sup>9</sup> Lu Dingyi, "Cherish the Memory of Comrade Zhou Enlai — Good Premier of the People", RR, 8 March 1979, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Dong Ta, "The Experience and Lessons of Dealing with 'Foreign Comment'", RR, 9 March 1979, in FBIS-CHI, 22 March, p. L3.

<sup>11</sup> "Modernization Demands Powerful Ideological and Political Work", RR, 16 April 1979.

so long as it helps advance the cause of socialism and Chinese modernization."<sup>12</sup> To be sure, criticism was still far from "sharp". It continued to be focused on the Gang of Four, generally conceived in isolation from the rest of the Party leadership, with Mao remaining unmentioned or treated as an innocent bystander. The Gang had "transformed the leader of a proletarian political Party into a supreme being, an omnipotent god who could create everything".<sup>13</sup> This begged the question of how the masses could be so easily hoodwinked, which gave rise to a good deal of plaintive soul-searching. "How could Lin Biao and the 'Gang of Four' commit crimes and run amok for as long as ten years?"<sup>14</sup> Slowly the answer emerged: they had been conditioned by years of feudal superstition to obey authority blindly. Thanks to the Gang, "A situation emerged in which superstition was rampant and people's thinking became stuck".<sup>15</sup> They "desperately pushed an idealistic theory of genius in order to attain their criminal goal ...[of] turning the scientific system of Mao Zedong Thought into a rigid dogma that was divorced from revolutionary practice". The masses were mired in superstition enshrined as doctrine. The proposed solution was to "emancipate our minds", and exercise more critical, "scientific" thinking, independent from political prescriptions and taboos. "There are no forbidden areas in science".<sup>16</sup> As Hua Guofeng himself put it, "Our country has a long feudal tradition and is relatively backward economically and culturally.... In these circumstances, autocracy, bureaucracy, love of privilege, the patriarchal style of work and anarchism are apt to spread".<sup>17</sup>

Not only must critical thinking be strengthened; a socialist democracy and a socialist legal system should be implanted, to ensure that a "Gang of Four phenomenon" (i.e., a CR) does not recur. An interest in democracy was expressed only reflexively, via criticism of the ideological tyranny (*yi yan tang*, or one-voice hall) imposed by the Gang, or Mao's cult of personality. The emphasis on "rule of law" dovetailed with the initiation of legal codification by Peng Zhen's legal group (at the Second Session of the Fifth NPC, 18 June-2 July 1979), which sought to ensure that China's middle classes might thereby be more adequately protected than they had

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<sup>12</sup> Xinhua article, 12 May 1979, citing the same day's RR, trans. in FBIS-CHI, 14 May 1979, p. L4.

<sup>13</sup> Guo Luoji, "We Must Emancipate Our Minds and Be Thorough in Doing Political Work," *Hongqi*, 3 (March 1979), in FBIS-CHI, 13 April, pp. L4-L8.

<sup>14</sup> "Strengthen the Legal System, Develop Democracy, Accelerate the Four Modernizations", RR, 5 July 1979, in FBIS-CHI, 10 July, p. L6.

<sup>15</sup> "Distinguish Between the Two Ideological Lines: Uphold the Four Basic Principles", RR, *Guangming ribao*, and *Jiefang junbao*, 11 May 1979.

<sup>16</sup> "Further Promote an Atmosphere for Theoretical Research", RR, 24 May 1979, in FBIS-CHI, 24 May, p. L4.

<sup>17</sup> Hua Guofeng, "Report to the 5th NPC on the Work of the Government", FBIS-CHI-79-128, supplement 015.

been under the Gang of Four: "We must never convict anyone simply on the basis of one's thinking or theoretical viewpoint as reactionary ... They should be allowed to put forth different views on certain questions and have certain reservations on current policies so that leading comrades ... can 'hear concurrently opinions from all sides, and avoid making avoidable mistakes'".<sup>18</sup> There was also a debate (left dangling unresolved) over whether there should be a shift to the "presumption of innocence" in Chinese courts.

The most authoritative statement concerning the CR during this period was Ye Jianying's National Day speech on the 30th anniversary of the founding of the PRC. This statement (the product of a writing team reportedly led by Hu Yaobang) maintained a basically positive assessment of the CR that was, however, for the first time qualified by certain explicit criticisms:

In the ten years of the CR which began in 1966, our country went through a fierce struggle between revolution and counterrevolution. The CR was launched with the aim of preventing and combatting revisionism. For a proletarian party in power, it is of course necessary to be on guard against going down the revisionist road characterized by oppression of people at home and pursuit of hegemony abroad. But the point is that, when the CR was launched, the estimate made of the situation within the Party and the country ran counter to reality, no accurate definition was given of revisionism, and erroneous policies and methods of struggle were adopted, deviating from the principle of democratic centralism.<sup>19</sup>

Regarding Mao Zedong, again the verdict was basically positive: "The CC of the Party headed by comrade Mao Zedong led the whole Party and the people in exposing and smashing the counterrevolutionary clique of Lin Biao and in criticizing and combatting the Gang of Four." But for the first time, Mao Zedong Thought was divorced from the person. The former was seen to be "the crystallization of the universal truths of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution", whereas the latter, though not criticized in this speech, was clearly human, all too human. This opened the way for a more thorough critique of the Gang than ever before without being inhibited by their proximity to Mao: "Their conspiratorial activities were entirely different from the errors committed by our Party." Chief among their crimes were the following:

- (1) "In the sphere of ideology, they ... preached the theory that men of genius 'decide everything' and treated revolutionary leaders as omniscient

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<sup>18</sup> Li Chun and Liu Qingsen, "Counterrevolutionary Crimes Must Be Out and Out and Unmistakable Ones", RR, 24 July 1979, in FBIS-CHI, 31 July, p. L8.

<sup>19</sup> "Ye Jianying Speech at Rally in Celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the Founding of the PRC", Xinhua (Beijing), 28 September 1979, in FBIS-CHI, 1 October, p. L16.

and omnipotent deities whose every word is truth... They denied that it is the people who make history."

(2) "In the sphere of politics, they concocted the theory of 'new changes in class relations', loudly asserting that a bourgeois class had been formed inside the Party."

(3) "In the sphere of economics, they were against developing the productive forces and wanted to supplant production with their so-called 'class struggle'."

(4) "In the sphere of culture, they engaged in large-scale disruptive activities under the banner of CR...wilfully destroying our historical and cultural heritage."

(5) "In the sphere of organization, they dished up the reactionary slogan of 'kicking aside the Party committee to make revolution' ... they incited factionalism.... beating, smashing, and grabbing and large-scale armed clashes."<sup>20</sup>

The abuses Ye mentioned in his speech covered diverse areas of Chinese political and social life, and he went into considerable detail about them. His speech unleashed a new willingness to discuss publicly the excesses of the CR in the fall of 1979. The thrust of most of these criticisms was against anarchism, marking a retreat from the more liberal themes of seeking truth from facts, allowing free criticism, and "emancipation of the mind" articulated in the previous months. The leadership was no doubt aware that this was the first anniversary of the Democracy Wall movement; not coincidentally, perhaps, one of its most celebrated veterans, Wei Jingshen, was tried and harshly sentenced at this time.

### 1980-1983: Explicit Repudiation, Implicit Misgivings

The fall 1979 crackdown may have been excessive, for in January of 1980 there was the first talk of a "crisis of faith" among the youth, or a "generation gap" (*daigou*).<sup>21</sup> This stimulated a revived public emphasis on democracy in early 1980. Democracy was not "the root of all chaos", indeed: "There can be no solid foundation

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<sup>20</sup> "Ye," pp. L16-L21.

<sup>21</sup> More precisely, a crisis of *xinyang*, *xinren*, and *xinyan*, the differences among which are subtle. In May 1980, a coed named Pan Xiao wrote a letter to *Zhongguo qingnian* (China youth) asking, What is the meaning of life?, which touched off a freshet of letters to the editor by other young people with similar concerns.



for stability and unity without socialist democracy."<sup>22</sup> To be sure, this elicited the following qualification: "It can be said that without stability and unity everything would be lost under present circumstances, including democracy, the policy of 'letting 100 flowers bloom and 100 schools of thought contend', and liveliness."<sup>23</sup> The debate concluded somewhat anticlimactically on February 29, as the Fifth Plenum of the Eleventh CC deleted the "Four Greats" from Article 45 of the Constitution.

The Fifth Plenum, however, also revived the CC Secretariat, elected (relatively) young reformers Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang to the Standing Committee of the Politburo, accepted the resignations of "whateverists" Wang Dongxing, Ji Dengkui, Wu De, and Chen Xilian, exonerated former CR nemesis Liu Shaoqi, and adopted "Guiding Principles for Inner-Party Political Life" (designed to rectify the factionalism instilled by the CR and restore inner-Party democracy). Although no adverse verdict was yet rendered on Mao or the CR, the rehabilitation of Liu Shaoqi from "the biggest frameup the CCP has ever known in its history, which had been created out of thin air by fabricating materials, forging evidence, extorting confessions, withholding testimony"<sup>24</sup>, and the accompanying verdict that "It is now clear that the danger of so-called Right revisionism did not actually appear in our Party before 1966" indirectly impugned both the CR and Mao's judgment.<sup>25</sup>

The ouster of the "small gang of four" and promotion of Hu and Zhao strengthened Deng's hand, and he now forged ahead, his desire to undermine Hua Guofeng amplifying his critique of Mao's errors, sc., the CR. A new watershed was reached in July, when it was finally explicitly stated that (1) the CR was bad, and (2) Mao was primarily to blame for it. This verdict first surfaced in a Harrison Salisbury interview with Li Xiannian on July 28, in which Li described the CR as "ten years of disaster" and placed responsibility for it squarely on Mao's shoulders. The Great Leap Forward, he said, had been a joint mistake, but the CR had been Mao's decision; the "wrong" ideas embraced by the aging leader had opened the way to the excesses of the Gang of Four.<sup>26</sup> Deng Xiaoping, in an interview with Oriana Fallaci later that fall, elaborated on this indictment.<sup>27</sup> Fostering a cult of personality (later to become a leading charge against Hua) also came into critical focus, prompting a

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<sup>22</sup> Lu Zhizhao, "Stability, Unity, and Socialist Democracy", RR, 28 January 1980, in FBIS-CHI, 5 February, p. L15.

<sup>23</sup> "Develop Political Stability and Unity", RR, 21 February 1980, in FBIS-CHI, 22 February, p. L7; see also "Stability and Unity Are the Basic Prerequisites for the Realization of the Four Modernizations", *Guangming ribao*, 25 January 1980, in FBIS-CHI, 8 February, p. L16.

<sup>24</sup> Xinhua (Beijing), 12 March 1980, in FBIS-CHI, 22 March, p. L1.

<sup>25</sup> "The Distinction Between Marxism and Revisionism Should Not Be Blurred", RR, 3 April 1980, in FBIS-CHI, 4 April, pp. L1-L5.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Cheng reporting on Salisbury interview, in FBIS-CHI, 28 July 1980, p. L1.

<sup>27</sup> Reprinted in *Gongren ribao*, 29 October 1980, in FBIS-CHI, 18 November, pp. L6-L8.

wave of articles in August-September<sup>28</sup>; one particularly pungent piece mocked one of Mao's most famed allegories, "Foolish Old Man Who Moved the Mountains", as a fairy tale, while another pointedly attacked the idea that a leader could select his own successor.<sup>29</sup> In the last week of July and first week of August, most portraits of Mao in public places were removed, no doubt partly to preempt any possible rallying point on the fourth anniversary of his death (which in the event was scarcely observed). Continued soul-searching about how the Chinese people could have allowed themselves to be so misled by their leaders led to an academic revisit of Marx's "Asiatic Mode of Production". The campaign reached a climax at the Sixteenth Session of the Fifth NPC Standing Committee, where Hua Guofeng resigned his premiership, yielding to Zhao Ziyang, and the decision was made to try the Gang of Four and surviving members of the Lin Biao group.<sup>30</sup> It was at this point that the press started bracketing the term Cultural Revolution with quotation marks, thereby divesting it of any conceivable validity.

The escalating critique of the roots of Maoism was accompanied (and no doubt facilitated) by the implementation of a series of positive reforms. The most radical form of the "production responsibility system" swept the countryside during these years, devolution of accountability to enterprise management was generalized from the Sichuan model, and Deng Xiaoping made his famous Gengshen speech in August, unleashing the first wave of proposals for structural political reform.<sup>31</sup> In many ways, 1980 set a high-water mark of reformist optimism, which had however receded by fall. Devolution of accountability resulted in a loss of fiscal control and in run-away investment binges. The introduction of multiple choice candidacies in district elections allowed a resurgence of what the local leadership derided as CR-style mobilizational practices. In foreign policy, the strike against Vietnam proved costly. The response was sharp fiscal retrenchment, and the first amendments of the new electoral laws permitting the Party to maintain firmer control of the nomination process. As reform temporarily bogged down, the conservatives saw their opening. Hua Guofeng,

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<sup>28</sup> E.g., "Correctly Understand the Role of the Individual in History", RR, 4 July 1980, in FBIS-CHI, 7 July, pp. L4-L7.

<sup>29</sup> Liu Maoying, "A New Interpretation of the Story of the 'Foolish Old Man Who Moved the mountains'", *Wenhui bao*, 13 August 1980, in FBIS-CHI, 28 August, p. L2; Li Honglin, "The Leader and the People", RR, 18 September 1980, in FBIS-CHI, 22 September, pp. L1-L9.

<sup>30</sup> The "Gang of Ten", it was emphasized throughout the trial, was being tried only for its criminal activities (framing people, plotting to assassinate Mao and engineer a *coup d'état*), and not for its political mistakes (e.g., its Leftist line) — a distinction distinguishing their case from that of Mao Zedong. Though obviously presumed guilty in the press from the outset (accurately enough), the proceedings were not as tightly controlled as in the Stalinist purge trials, even allowing Jiang Qing to make a spirited defense. The trial also led to the posthumous eviction of radicals Kang Sheng and Xie Fuzhi from the CCP.

<sup>31</sup> Deng Xiaoping, "On the Reform of the System of Party and State Leadership" (18 August 1980), in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1982* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), pp. 302-326.

who had been slowly fading from the scene, dug in his heels, with the apparent support of Ye Jianying. The political representatives of the PLA launched an attack against the liberal playwright Bai Hua, inducing the Party to follow suit. A "Learn from Lei Feng" campaign was launched in the army from February through May, the first major article on Socialist Spiritual Civilization appeared, marking a retreat from the iconoclastic spirit of early 1979, while the criticism of Bai Hua mushroomed into a campaign against "bourgeois liberalization" that would continue (at varying levels of intensity) through much of the next three years. The critique of the CR continued, but stressed promoting centralism and democracy, discipline and freedom rather than the emancipation of the mind (minds could be emancipated only within ill-defined limits).

Yet this reversal of fortune proved only temporary. At the Sixth Plenum of the Eleventh CC, Hua Guofeng's resignation as Party Chair was accepted, and a "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the PRC" was approved, which contained an authoritative indictment of the CR. The CR was defined as an ultra-Leftist disaster, responsibility for which was primarily Mao's, though his errors were aggravated by China's long feudal tradition, by the Party's failure to appreciate the need to shift priorities to economic construction in the post-Liberation period, and, of course, by the villainous machinations of the Jiang Qing-Lin Biao counterrevolutionary clique. The main criticisms of the CR were (1) that it contained no valid definition of "revisionism", (2) that it confused "antagonistic" and "nonantagonistic" contradictions, (3) that it attacked the Party, and (4) that it was all critique, with no constructive program. Mao's role was still a delicate issue: while in the section, "The Decade of Cultural Revolution", his mistakes are explicitly criticized, another section of the document is devoted to (1) listing all of Mao's positive contributions to China, most of which occurred pre-CR, but some during the CR (e.g., exposure of Lin Biao, the opening to the West); and (2) expounding the "heart" of Mao Zedong Thought (as understood by Deng Xiaoping), which remains valid: viz., seek truth from facts, the mass line, and independence (formerly known as self-reliance).<sup>32</sup>

Publication of the Resolution awakened renewed interest in the CR, including a series of *Red Flag* articles on the topic. Thereafter, official concern with the issue waned until the fall of 1983.<sup>33</sup> At this point, two major events initiated by the Second Plenum of the Twelfth CC — the Spiritual Pollution campaign and the Party rectification movement — brought CR themes back into play, albeit in quite different ways. The Spiritual Pollution campaign painfully reminded erstwhile victims of the CR as cultural Procrustean Bed, with its censure of high-heeled shoes, permanent

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<sup>32</sup> *Resolution on Party History*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1981.

<sup>33</sup> While the CR was still occasionally evoked, this was usually prefatory to more immediate concern with specific economic reforms and did little more than reiterate old points and summarize the conclusions of the Sixth Plenum. The CCP was ideologically middle-of-the-road, as Hu Yaobang saw it, bounded by the CR on the one hand (the "Leftist" tendency) and by "bourgeois liberalization" (the Rightist tendency) on the other.

waves, even flower-growing. To Deng Liqun, Hu Qiaomu, and "Spiritual Pollution's" other sponsors (who had numbered among CR victims), the CR was hence something of an embarrassment. Unable to reverse verdicts on the CR, they pointed out that fighting Rightist deviation is no less important in "emancipating the mind" than fighting Leftism.<sup>34</sup> Thus the long campaign against the CR seems to have inhibited the Spiritual Pollution Campaign, partly by disarming its critical vocabulary, partly by putting its sponsors in a self-contradictory position.

The Party rectification campaign, in contrast, was aimed at destroying the institutional integument of the CR. The CR was seen to have had a "pernicious influence", in the form of a generally low political and ideological education level throughout the Party, and in the existence of the "three types of people". All three of these "types", as it turns out, were identifiable CR beneficiaries:

[The] first type, those who rose to prominence during the "CR", refers to those persons who closely followed Lin Biao, Jiang Qing and their ilk, formed factions and cliques, seized political power in "rebellion", rose to high positions and committed evil with serious consequences. The second type, those who are seriously factionalist in their ideas, refers to those who in the "CR" period vigorously publicized the reactionary ideology of the Lin Biao and Jiang Qing counterrevolutionary cliques and formed cliques for doing evil. After the downfall of the "Gang of Four", they have continued, either openly or covertly, with their factionalist activities. The third type, those who indulged in beating, smashing, and looting during the "CR" period, refers to those who framed and persecuted cadres and masses, extorted confessions by torture and seriously ruined their victims' health; it also refers to those chief elements and those behind the scenes responsible for the smashing of institutions, the seizure of files by force and the damaging of both public and private property...<sup>35</sup>

Although the instructions for implementation of the rectification emphasized that relegation of Party members to one or another "type" should be based on individual records and not on factional affiliation during the CR, it would seem from subsequent reports on the campaign that classification of the "three types" precipitated recriminatory factionalism. Many cadres resorted to CR tactics (e.g., "living exhibitions") in their zeal to eradicate CR vestiges. Even more surprising (after eight years of incessant anti-CR propaganda) were the defenses of the CR the rectification movement seems to have evoked among the "three types". To judge from the source of the reports, residual support for the CR seems to have been strongest in the PLA and in

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<sup>34</sup> "Eliminating Spiritual Pollution Is Also a Kind of Emancipation of the Mind", RR, 14 November 1983, in FBIS-CHI, 14 November.

<sup>35</sup> "Decision on Party Rectification", 11 October 1983, in FBIS-CHI, 13 October, pp. K7-K8.

certain outlying provinces (e.g., Guangxi, Yunnan). As one unusually candid discussion of the drive put it:

[S]ome people argue that the "CR should not be regarded as devoid of any merit; some people contend that the "CR" did play a positive role in "opposing and preventing revisionism"; and still others maintain that the achievements of the "CR" must be affirmed even though its mistakes should be repudiated.<sup>36</sup>

Although such viewpoints are echoed in some of the reassessments of the CR articulated in the West, they seem to have shocked the authorities, who were also upset by the reappearance in celebrity interviews of such radical polemicists as Qi Benyu and Wang Li.<sup>37</sup>

### 1984 and Later: "Total Negation" vs. "Search for Roots"

The CCP leadership responded in 1984-1986 with a major campaign (completely unattended in the West) to "totally negate" the CR. "While many things have their merits and demerits after being analyzed, others do not... A mistake is a mistake... Counterrevolutionary cliques are counterrevolutionary cliques."<sup>38</sup> This differed from previous campaigns in its broader focus, attacking all factionalism (not this faction or that faction), all Leftist radicalism (even the "three supports and two militaries" that justified PLA intervention in the CR), all "extensive democracy" and "mass criticism", everything in any way related to the CR:

We must not quibble over specific issues, because what actually happened in various units during the "CR" was quite complex: and if the right and wrong of every situation has to be debated, not only will we fail to discredit thoroughly the "CR", but we will also compel some comrades to fight to justify their stand without heeding the principles.<sup>39</sup>

As the campaign to "totally negate" the CR ran on, it gradually became clear, however, that any attempt to resolve all the issues it had raised was to reopen Pandora's Box. In the summer of 1986, as the nation commemorated the launching of the first Hundred Flowers movement, the 20th anniversary of the publication of the "May 16

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<sup>36</sup> "Questions and Answers about Thoroughly Negating the CR, Eliminating Factionalism, and Strengthening Party Spirit", *Jiefang junbao* and *Guangming ribao*, 28 July 1984, pp. 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> See *China Daily* (Beijing) "Opinion" Column, "'Cultural Revolution' Has Lessons for All", p. 4; Mu Hui, "All People Are Equal Before the Truth", RR, 2 February 1989, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Xinhua (Nanjing), 14 August 1984, in FBIS-CHI, 31 August, pp. O5-O6.

<sup>39</sup> "'CR' Must Be Thoroughly Eradicated", *Zhejiang ribao*, 11 July 1984, in FBIS-CHI, 25 July, p. O4.

Circular" (which inaugurated the CR) and the 10th anniversary of the death of Mao (which ended it)<sup>40</sup>, the attempt to "totally negate" was subverted by the simultaneous attempt to *xun gen fan ci* (review the past and seek the deep roots), which legitimated a reevaluation of the pre-CR regime that the conservatives deemed quite perilous.<sup>41</sup> In contrast to the conventional periodization in which "ten years" of chaos springs without warning from the head of Mao following "seventeen years" of unimpeachably stable progress, articles began to appear suggesting that all was not right with the "seventeen years", that there were also "dark tendencies" making something like the CR unavoidable, perhaps even necessary. Thus the ever popular but morally ambiguous Zhou Enlai could be excused for helping Mao to promote the CR, in view of the fact that "it could really help overcome and eliminate certain real shortcomings and the dark side that existed in the Party and government organs".<sup>42</sup>

But most excavators of CR "roots" chose to dig deeper, joining in the 1986 "cultural wave" (*wenhuare*) that aspired to "penetrate our minds and negate something deeply buried there — that is, to analyze and critically examine the feudal ideals lurking at the bottom of the national character, that is, the deep-rooted bad national habits". The concept of "culture" had been out of bounds for academic discussion since the early 1950s, but now it rose from the ashes. "National character", the "collective unconsciousness of the nation", and "cultural psychology" came into vogue, and there was even revived interest in Confucianism. The central polemical thrust of such comparisons was of course on parallels (and imputed causal links) between traditional feudal and contemporary Leftist dispositions, such as the strong focus on hierarchy and unquestioning obedience and on the cult of the emperor (disregarding however such Maoist departures as radical egalitarianism), or the traditional emphasis on blood ties as it resurfaced in the Red Guard (and CCP) emphasis on "family backgrounds" (*jiating chushen*). Others mixed psychocultural analysis with a more sociological approach, pointing to the impact of a small-peasant economy, rigidly hierarchical class relations, and a society historically closed to the outside world. There was also discussion in the summer and fall of 1986 of how to dispose of cultural relicts of the CR: on the one hand, there was a proposal to build a CR

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<sup>40</sup> Pointed out by Zhu Houze, in "Several Points to Ponder about Ideological and Cultural Questions", RR, 11 August 1986, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> See "Press Digest" Column (citing from *Qingnian luntan*, No. 7, 1986), "Reunderstanding the 'Great CR'", RR, 13 October 1986, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> "Zhou Enlai's Role in CR Examined", in *China Daily* (Beijing), 8 January 1986, p. 4; see also "opinion" column, "'CR' Has Lessons for All", *China Daily*, 29 August 1986, p. 4; also Luo Bing, "Dangnei yao zhongping Zhou de husheng" (The Demand for Reevaluating Zhou Enlai Within the Party), *Cheng Ming* (Hong Kong), April 1995, pp. 10-13.

museum, on the other a fairly intense debate about the revival of Jiang Qing's model operas (*yangbanxi*).<sup>43</sup>

The political implications of this renascent concern with culture at first seemed innocuous, diffusing guilt from personal scapegoats to the entire system, *chuan min gong chan hui*, as Liu Zaifu put it: "we are all guilty". But as Wang Ruoshui pointed out, if Chinese feudal culture was at fault this tended to exculpate capitalism: "We must realize that the greatest disaster of the past thirty years was the 'Great CR', which was an outcome of the evil influence of feudalism. Therefore, feudalism ideas are much more harmful than bourgeois ideas".<sup>44</sup> The search for roots thus led full circle to a sort of justification — if it was rooted in the culture, it was inevitable, even cathartic: "There is no need to regret what has happened", a former Red Guard put it, "It had to happen". The CR was a "sore that had to open sooner or later".<sup>45</sup> This paradoxical turn seems to have upset the conservatives, for at the Sixth Plenum of the Twelfth CC in September 1986, the resolution on building a socialist spiritual civilization omitted all mention of feudalism and denounced "bourgeois liberalism". It was subsequently revealed that Deng Xiaoping himself had insisted on this plank, in the face of protest from radical reformers.

Paradoxically, the campaign to "search for roots" culminated in a revival of precisely what it was meant to deter, spontaneous mass activism. Disappointed after a summer of relatively freewheeling media debate by the hardline Left's continued dominance of Party decision-making councils, the students took to the streets. For a few weeks in December 1986, students demonstrated in Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin and a few other cities, posted big-character posters, disrupted traffic, broke into radio stations, and consigned official newspapers which compared them to the Red Guards to a public bonfire (thereby confirming that stereotype). Elite assurances that despite these disturbances another CR could "never" happen betrayed their anxiety that it could.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Zhao Er, "On 'A Comeback Every Seven or Eight Years'", *Yangcheng wanbao* (Guangzhou), 13 September 1986, p. 2, as translated in FBIS-CHI, 24 September 1986, p. K8-K9. People have "lingering fears", it is noted: "Any social phenomenon having the least thing to do with the cause and effect of that catastrophe is deemed important and brought to public attention as a warning." Ba Jin suggested establishing a museum of the Cultural Revolution so that the bitter lessons could be remembered, but in a CCP directive, this suggestion was not only denied but forbidden from being mentioned again. Xiuyuan Lu, *op. cit.*

<sup>44</sup> Wang Ruoshui, "The Double Hundred Policy and Civil Rights", *Huasheng bao*, 8 August 1986, as cited in *Cheng Ming*, 107, September 1986.

<sup>45</sup> "Former Red Guards Reflect on CR", Xinhua (Beijing), 13 October 1986, in FBIS-CHI, 14 October, p. K12.

<sup>46</sup> Zhao Wei, "CPPCC National Committee Vice Chairman Lei Jieqiong Says that a Repetition of the 'CR' Upheaval on the Mainland Is Now Impossible", *Zhongguo xinwen she* (Hong Kong), 1 January 1987, in FBIS-CHI, 2 January, pp. K1-K3; An Zhiguo, "'CR' Not to Be Repeated", *Beijing Review*, 31 August 1987, pp. 4-5.

And indeed, after a three-month crackdown against "bourgeois liberalism" followed by a return to reform, history seemed to repeat itself in epic scale in April-May 1989, as students and millions of other Chinese citizens demonstrated against elite corruption and in favor of democracy. As has been too well documented elsewhere to need recounting, the elite-mass standoff culminated in the sanguinary crackdown of June 3-4. As in 1986-87, elites compared the tactics of the demonstrators with those of the Red Guards, claiming they, too, wished to create "turmoil" (*dongluan*).<sup>47</sup> The demonstrators indignantly denied this comparison, making its retraction one of their three nonnegotiable demands; indeed, one may search the voluminous protest literature in vain for any explicit reference to the CR, which was too long ago for this generation to have experienced. The express themes of the 1989 protests, like those of 1986, were ideologically antipodal to those of the Red Guards, calling for reform and peaceful liberalization rather than revolution and violent repression. Yet there were certain inescapable similarities: the spontaneous mobilization of the masses, the use of (now illegal) big-character posters, "linkups", and the tendency to personalize elite bureaucratism and corruption<sup>48</sup>, in both 1986 and 1989, were redolent of CR tactics. Although 1986, in its lapse into confrontational tactics, more closely resembled the CR than 1989, which generally tried to avoid such provocations, in its overall configuration 1989 approximated both the CR and the April 5th Incident. Whereas the 1986 marches were but a brief skirmish that the elite withstood by closing ranks, the more protracted 1989 protest resulted in a horizontal cleavage between elite and mass that cross-cut the long-standing vertical cleavage between conservative and radical reformers. The vertical cleavage juxtaposed liberal criticisms of ideological totalitarianism to a conservative critique of factional chaos, while the horizontal cleavage pitted a mass critique of elitist corruption against an elite critique of mass indiscipline ("bourgeois liberalism"). The intersection of these two cleavages split the elite consensus, as several policy intellectuals in the radical reform bloc —

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<sup>47</sup> This notorious characterization of student protest activities in the April 26 *Renmin ribao* editorial was reportedly based on an "important speech" by Deng Xiaoping the previous day. Deng drew no other such comparisons (in any of his public statements), but State Council spokesman Yuan Mu expatiated on this analogy: "Comrades may recall events several years back. Some of you may have forgiven the great CR, or may not be familiar with it because of your ages. However, comrades over thirty will still recall it ... many practices today have alarming similarities with the great CR in those years ... Now, there are big and small-character posters everywhere in educational institutions of higher learning. Another example is 'establishing ties' (*chuanlian*)." See "Yuan Mu and Others Hold Dialogue with Students" (29 April 1989), in Michel Oksenberg, Lawrence R. Sullivan and M. Lambert (Eds.), *Beijing, Spring, 1989* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe 1990), pp. 222, 229. See also "Remarks of President Yang Shangkun on May 24 at an Enlarged Emergency Session of the Central Military Commission", in Han Minzhu, *Cries for Democracy: Writings and Speeches from the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1990), pp. 303-308.

<sup>48</sup> The criticism of elitist corruption (e.g., pictures of Zhao Ziyang playing golf) is hardly new, having been a staple of CR polemics. In 1989, it was quite pervasive, including lists of "prince" appointments, luxury foreign cars, limited distribution movies, night clubs, and so forth. Han Minzhu, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-57, 277-278, 332 *et passim*.



including Yan Jiaqi, chair of the CASS Political Science Institute and Bao Tong, leader of Zhao Ziyang's Structural Reform think tank — defected to lend support to the mass critique.<sup>49</sup> The bloody crackdown confirmed the conservative view of both CR and Tiananmen, permitting the Left to consolidate their victory while coopting elements of their vision of the CR, which, however, ironically conflated erstwhile capitalist-roaders' criticisms of mass anarchism with the rhetoric of the Red Guard critique of the "capitalist road".

### The Post-Tiananmen Period: Total Denial

In the early 1990s, the combination of Tiananmen plus the collapse of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union precipitated intense elite debate over how to forestall a similar fate for the CCP, which might (according to a quotation attributed to Chen Yuan) see veteran cadres and their families hanging from lamp-posts. The conservatives at first had the edge, and the dominant slogan of 1990-1991 was that the West, having precipitated the collapse of Communism in the West, was intent upon forcing China's "historical regression" to capitalism via "peaceful evolution" (*heping yanbian*).<sup>50</sup> But the attempt by a revitalized Deng Liqun (the "underground general secretary"), with the support of Li Xiannian, Wang Zhen, He Dongchang, and other Leftists to coopt the old "capitalist-road" critique overreached itself in an early 1991 suggestion that

We must have a new assessment of the CR. Parts of the movement were correct and should be reaffirmed. Chairman Mao was right to bombard the capitalist-roaders. It was only its execution that was adulterated.

To this end, Deng Liqun reportedly had a team of writers compile a series of five textbooks (published by People's Education Publishers) that put both the Great Leap and the CR in more favorable historical light.<sup>51</sup> This paradoxical outcome of the anti-protest animus was too much for the majority of the elite, to whom factional

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<sup>49</sup> A review of Zhao's major speeches and public pronouncements during the protests does not indicate that he himself defected to the protesters' position. He was, however, attempting to arrange a compromise between Deng's position and the protesters' minimal demands, which would have discountenanced the hardliners had it succeeded. See Zhao Ziyang, "Make Further Efforts to Carry Forward the May 4th Spirit in the New Age of Construction and Reform" (3 May 1989), on Beijing Television, in Oksenberg *et al.*, pp. 244-251.

<sup>50</sup> "Li Peng's Speech" (19-20 May 1989), on Beijing Television, in Oksenberg *et al.*, p. 311.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Liu Kung, "Two Winds Stirred Up in Beijing's Political Arena", *Ming Pao* (Hong Kong), 12 July 1991, p. 33; Yu Ching, "Some People in the Highest Leadership Stratum in Beijing Attempt to Reverse Verdict on CR", *Cheng Ming* (Hong Kong), No. 165 (1 July 1991); Nan Hsun, "CCP Reverses Verdict on Great Leap Forward, CR", *Ming Pao*, 8 July 1991, p. 2; and Willy Wo-lap Lam story in *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), 18 July 1991, p. 17.

anarchy still represented the dominant thrust of the CR.<sup>52</sup> Having just imposed a costly suppression of what they thought might have been a second CR they were not about to legitimize the first one. After months of controversy, Deng Xiaoping's countervailing call to "revise" Marxism to facilitate more rapid economic modernization carried the day following his "southern voyage" (*nanxun*). The ideological results were typically modest, resulting in constitutional enshrinement of the concept of "market socialism" at the fall 1992 Fourteenth CCP Congress.

In a June 1991 Politburo meeting, it was resolved that "Any attempt to rehabilitate the CR in any way goes counter to the will of the public, the Party, and the army", as Jiang Zemin put it.<sup>53</sup> Thereafter, due to the tendency for criticism of the CR to evolve into a critique of the contemporary political scene — or, even more broadly, to touch upon such pre-CR topics as the forced pace of land reform, the regimentation of public opinion, and other vulnerable features of post-Liberation socialism — further official commentary was more or less suspended. Interest in the topic could not be totally squelched: an effluvia of pop cult commodities celebrated the centennial of Mao's birth in 1993, a club opened in Beijing to service the *lao san jie* ("three years" of 1966-1969) generation whose educations and careers had been cut short by the CR, TV dramas were screened featuring veterans of the CR generation, and books continued to appear, including many memoirs of erstwhile prominent victims of the movement and some thoughtful analytical studies. Wang Shan's best-selling *Looking at China Through a Third Eye* falls into line with the CR world-view (now held by Deng Liqun and the Left) that the restoration of capitalism in China was nigh and threatening, that CCP revolutionaries had become arrogant bureaucrats, but with the significant qualification that to mobilize the masses to rebel against the elite was a tragic blunder.<sup>54</sup> Though Wang and others noted that simply negating the CR without understanding it could be dangerously misleading, in 1993 Beijing made special arrangements to screen publications<sup>55</sup>, and in 1996, the third decennial of the movement's launching, there was a glaring discrepancy between the very few books on this topic appearing on the mainland and the revival of interest overseas.

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<sup>52</sup> E.g., cf. Qiao Shi's address to the closing session of the NPC in March 1996, in which he denounced the CR for destroying the law and leading the country into disorder. His remarks contrasted with those of Li Peng, who told some former Red Guards that the CR was not all disastrous and should be looked at from "an overall and correct perspective". See Agnes Cheung story in *South China Morning Post*, 18 March 1996, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Yu Ching, *op. cit.*

<sup>54</sup> Luoyininggeer (pseud.), *Disanzhi yanjing kan Zhongguo* (Looking at China Through a Third Eye). Taiyuan: Shanxi pub. co. 1994, pp. 48-50, 95-101.

<sup>55</sup> Mainland News Center special dispatch from Beijing, "Last Year Beijing Banned Over 1,100 Books and Magazines", *Lien ho pao* (Hong Kong), 19 August 1994, p. 10.

## Conclusions

To return to our initial premise, the Chinese people have been fascinated by the CR and have obsessively reverted to it, yet their motives have been ambiguous. On the one hand, they seem desirous of "learning" from the event, i.e., learning why it occurred, how to prevent it. On the other hand, they have been intent upon "using" such historical reconstructions to advance one political agenda or the other. This is no less true for politically interested segments of the "mass" (e.g., students, charismatic intellectuals) than for CCP elites — though the latter have structurally advantaged access to mass media. To some extent, the two motives feed on one another — surely the need to manipulate history would not arise in the absence of any desire to learn from it. But in a deeper sense, they are mutually contradictory, as the desire to learn has consistently been frustrated by the need to jump to premature, one-sided characterizations, which then give rise to unintended political consequences.

The CR itself was full of incongruent, even contradictory themes: both anti-elite (viz., sybaritism, corruption, power-mongering) and anti-mass (violent factionalism, a pack of wild horses, easily hoodwinked), both anti-traditional (down with the "Four Olds", anti-Confucian) and anti-Western (against the "bourgeoisie" or "capitalist road"). Among the political critiques of the CR, two general themes have consistently held pride of place: First, the CR as archetype of "chaos" (*luan*), anarchy, internecine factionalism, a complete breakdown of institutional order and a relapse to pervasive suspicion to which only personal ties (*guanxi*) offer refuge. Second, the CR as "feudal/oriental despotism", ideological totalism, the overgeneralization of egalitarianism to the realms of culture and even consumption, resulting in blind conformity.

Each theme has a different contemporary political "payoff", however. The critique of anarchy usually prefaces a call for "order and stability", often implying restoration of a classic Leninist Party-state. The critique of "feudalism", in contrast, leads to a call for intellectual liberation and for the political reforms necessary to facilitate the economic and cultural self-realization of the Chinese middle classes. And although both criticisms may be said to be empirically accurate, if consistently pursued their political implications are mutually contradictory. Excessive focus on the restoration of stability and unity leads to the same ideological totalism that discredited the Gang of Four, whereas excessive emphasis on "emancipation of the mind" leads to a "thaw" that has consistently eventuated in the outbreak of chaotic tendencies. The quest for the "roots" of the CR is similarly ambiguous, tending to discredit reform and opening up if traced to capitalism, but tending to weaken the bonds of traditional cultural authority if traced to feudalism.

Thus the CR is an extremely sensitive issue, one of history's live land mines. No wonder one solution to these contradictions has been to repudiate the experience *toto caelo*. After all, though the various lines of criticism may have contradictory implications, they all concur that the CR — whatever its "roots" and precise moral — is politically disastrous and must at all cost be repressed. Yet this is where the desire to avoid repeating the past has consistently stumbled on the need to "learn" from it. It is impossible to be sure one has "totally negated" the CR without knowing what caused it, yet to arrive at such insight would require more public discussion than the

system seems able to tolerate. Thus a nightmare still haunts the Chinese political elite and officialdom: that a CR could recur. Pervasive censorship, by repressing public evidence of support for the CR, can alleviate but not entirely obviate such anxiety. The worst fears were born out by the spate of protest movements that erupted in the late 1980s, which showed that even after two decades of relentless criticism, the CR still exerted a fatal attraction to the nation's youth and educated classes. At least this is self-evidently what the CCP decision-making elite inferred.

But is it true? Undeniable is the recurrence of a distinctive approach to mass mobilization, including resort to big-character posters, tabloids, anonymous character-assassination, a "breakthrough" mentality.<sup>56</sup> CR grievances of CCP elitism and corruption, CR ideals of self-sacrificial dedication to the collective interest, have all made a comeback, after a somewhat uncomfortable flirtation with the idea that "to get rich is glorious". Even the spirit of "self-reliance" has survived China's immersion in world markets, now taking the form of the nationalism visible at athletic gatherings. Yet closer scrutiny suggests that elite fears to the contrary notwithstanding, what has survived the CR has for the most part been limited to those ideals and practices so central to CCP mythology that they have eluded outright denial. Certainly, none of the CR ideological rhetoric resurfaced in the 1980s — e.g., the concept of "revisionism", or of a "two line struggle" within the CCP between a "proletarian revolutionary" and "capitalist road". Accusations of elite bureaucratism and corruption, which also made their debut in the CR, not only reechoed but formed the core of 1989 protest rhetoric — but neither bureaucratism nor elite corruption had ever been vindicated in post-CR critiques. Demands for "socialist democracy"/"bourgeois liberalization" were new, echoing the CR ideal, never flatly repudiated, that the masses have a right to communicate with their leaders. To be sure, the dominant thrust of three decades of CR criticism had not been its underlying ideological assumptions, whose reassessment might run afoul of the "Four Cardinal Principles", but procedural violations — the resort to violent "struggle" tactics, unjust and inaccurate accusations or frameups, disregard of any semblance of due legal process, and so on. Here the 1989 protests evinced substantial progress toward procedural civility, especially in Beijing (the experience of some provincial cities was less reassuring).<sup>57</sup>

In sum, the Chinese people have learned from their protracted attempt to come to terms with this painful and contradictory experience, though they have occasionally stereotyped and manipulated the lesson for political ends. They have learned that it is wrong to repress all dissident opinions and leave 10,000 horses standing mute, but that to freely mobilize the masses is heroic and dangerous — a lesson that was certainly reinforced on June 4.

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<sup>56</sup> For a more intensive analysis, see Lowell Dittmer, *China's Continuous Revolution: The Post-Liberation Epoch, 1949-1981*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1987.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Jonathan Unger (Ed.), *The Pro-Democracy Protests in China: Reports from the Provinces*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe 1991, *passim*.