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# Thought Reform and Cultural Revolution: An Analysis of the Symbolism of Chinese Polemics\*

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Can it be that "national character"  
is so difficult to change?  
If so, we can more or less guess  
what our fate will be.  
As is so often said,  
"It will be the same old story."

—Lu Hsün (1925)\*\*

The weapon of criticism certainly cannot replace the criticism of weapons; material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory, too, becomes a material force once it seizes the masses. Theory is capable of seizing the masses once it demonstrates *ad hominem*, and it demonstrates *ad hominem* once it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp matters at the root. But for man the root is man himself.

—Karl Marx\*\*\*

Ten years after the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the various theories about its causes and purpose seem to have sorted themselves out into two main schools of thought: "Power struggle" and "line struggle." The former interprets the Cultural Revolution as a premature succession struggle involving factions formed on an expedient *ad hoc* basis in order to dominate positions of formal leadership. The latter interpretation views the Cultural Revolution as the outcome of a long struggle between two policy "lines" whose positions on a wide series of issues were internally consistent and mutually exclusive.

Although the Cultural Revolution certainly involved widespread "struggle" for both power and principle, both of these explanations tend to reason *post hoc ergo propter hoc* and to confuse *effects* with *intentions*, and neither provides a logically sufficient explanation. The

\*I wish to thank Tang Tsou, Nathan Leites, Susanne Rudolph, John Starr, and many others for their comments on earlier drafts. I am also grateful to participants in a China seminar at the University of Toronto in November 1974 for their suggestions on an earlier version.

\*\*"Sudden Notions," *Selected Works of Lu Hsün* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1957), vol. 2, p. 108.

\*\*\**Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right,"* ed. Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 137.

basic problem with the "power struggle" thesis is that there is still no conclusive evidence (and the Chairman himself has always denied) that Mao had been forced from power prior to 1966 and was therefore induced to mobilize forces outside the Party in order to regain his position of influence.<sup>1</sup> Power struggle among competing factions at both the mass and elite levels was clearly an *epiphenomenon* of the Cultural Revolution, but not necessarily its cause. The "line struggle" interpretation can also be discounted, except in the area of cultural policy (and particularly concerning the issue of "cultural revolution" itself), because the notion of two distinct policy "lines" within the Politburo is a largely inaccurate *ex post facto* verdict based on generalizing to the past the errors committed during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>2</sup> If the purpose of the movement were to resolve a "line struggle" that had reached a deadlock within the top leadership by airing the issues in a larger forum, one would expect a profound transformation of policy to take place as soon as the struggle had been decided; but in fact we find that the struggle was followed by the reconstruction of pre-1966 political and socio-economic institutions with surprisingly little alteration, except in the cultural and educational realms.<sup>3</sup>

This paper's assumption is that the central purpose of the Cultural Revolution was to transform China's political culture, to achieve the same sort of "revolutionary breakthrough" in the cultural sphere that had already been achieved in the military-political and socio-economic realms.<sup>4</sup> This assumption is premised

<sup>1</sup>Cf. J. D. Simmonds, *China: Evolution of a Revolution, 1959–1966* (Canberra: Australian National University, Department of International Relations Working Paper no. 9, 1968).

<sup>2</sup>See my "Theory and Practice of 'Line Struggle': The Origins of the Chinese Cultural Revolution Reconsidered" (paper presented at the 28th meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, March 19–21, 1976, Toronto, Canada).

<sup>3</sup>A. Doak Barnett, *Uncertain Passage: China's Transition to the Post-Mao Era* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1974).

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Kenneth Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development: The Case of Romania, 1944–1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

partly on the testimony of Mao Tse-tung himself, who did more than any other single person to precipitate the Cultural Revolution. "In the past you were concerned with only industry, agriculture, and communications; you have never thought of cultural revolution," he pointed out to some Central Committee colleagues early in 1966. "Now we must turn our thoughts to this."<sup>5</sup> Mao had indicated in many of his recent statements that he now considered the transformation of the socioeconomic infrastructure less important than the transformation of the cultural superstructure, either because the former had already been more or less completed or because the latter would have greater and more lasting impact on human behavior.<sup>6</sup> Thus in a speech given in the summer of 1967 he relegated the "struggle between two lines" to secondary importance, emphasizing that the goal was to "transform . . . the cultural superstructure," to "construct a revolutionary world-view and eliminate the roots of revisionism."<sup>7</sup> He was haunted by the prospect that the revolution might rigidify around the emotions of elite arrogance and complacency and mass inhibitions toward authority, a process he already saw occurring in the Soviet Union. That these were Mao's motives does not imply that he knew exactly what he was doing and how to do it and should therefore be held responsible as the purposive

<sup>5</sup>Mao Tse-tung, "Speech at a Central Committee Work Conference" (October 25, 1966), in *Selections from Chairman Mao*, translated by U.S. Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS), no. 49826 (February 12, 1970), p. 15. Emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup>In his letter to Joseph Bloch written September 21–22, 1890, Engels said: "We make our history ourselves, but, in the first place, under very definite assumptions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are ultimately decisive. But the political ones, etc., and indeed even the traditions that haunt human minds also play a part, although not the decisive one." Lewis S. Feuer, ed., *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1959), p. 398 (emphasis added). In contrast, Mao asserted: "True, the productive forces, practice and the economic base generally play the principal and decisive role; whoever denies this is not a materialist. But it must also be admitted that in certain conditions, such aspects as the relations of productions, theory, and the superstructure in turn manifest themselves in the principal and decisive role." *Selected Works* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), vol. 4, p. 336. In 1959 or 1960, Mao wrote in criticism of Stalin's *Economic Problems of Socialism in the Soviet Union*: "From the beginning to the end, this book by Stalin has never talked about superstructure and has not considered man; it sees things but not man. . . . The viewpoint of Stalin's last letter is almost completely wrong." *Mao Tse-tung ssu-hsiang wan sui* [Long live the Thought of Mao Tse-tung], 1967 edition, p. 156 (emphasis added).

<sup>7</sup>Mao, "Speech to Foreign Visitors" (August 31, 1967), in *Ming Pao*, July 5, 1968, p. 1.

agent behind everything that occurred; nor does it imply that he was successful in his vague and ambitious endeavor. On the contrary, the movement unfolded toward its objectives in a fitful and seemingly experimental way, and "developed so rapidly as to surprise" even the Chairman.<sup>8</sup> And it was quite mixed in its consequences. But if these were Mao's motives, then the Cultural Revolution must be analyzed and evaluated in a different light, for his purpose presumably inspired not only his own actions but also informed many of the events that took place in his name with a logic not otherwise comprehensible.

Given the assumption that cultural transformation was indeed the purpose of the Cultural Revolution, the purpose of this paper is to show what this transformation involved and how it took place. This is not the first attempt to analyze the Cultural Revolution as a "cultural" revolution, but earlier attempts have encountered various conceptual difficulties that I hope to avoid. Robert Lifton discarded the psychoanalytic techniques he used so insightfully in his early study of thought reform, correctly observing that "the general psychological principles governing the thought reform process could not adequately illuminate the Cultural Revolution." Yet his own attempt to formulate a method of analysis more suitable to the Cultural Revolution confines itself to an examination of Mao's personal motives for launching the movement, implicitly assuming the rest of China to be Mao Tse-tung writ large.<sup>9</sup> Lucian Pye's *Spirit of Chinese Politics* and the methodologically more sophisticated, but thematically derivative, work of Richard Solomon<sup>10</sup> also tend, in my judgment, to oversimplify the process of cultural transformation. As in Lifton, change is construed as "the effort of one highly unusual, powerful man—Mao Tse-tung—to transform Chinese society."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Mao, *Selections*, in JPRS, no. 49826, pp. 13–14.

<sup>9</sup>Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* (New York: Norton, 1961); and *Revolutionary Immortality: Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (New York: Norton, 1976), p. xiii.

<sup>10</sup>Lucian Pye, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1968); and Richard Solomon, *Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). Both of these pathbreaking studies depict a static political culture being induced to change by a dynamic political personality. I hope to show that the elite/mass relationship was reciprocal and that Chinese political culture also contains the potential for change.

<sup>11</sup>Michel Oksenberg, "Political Changes and Their Causes in China, 1949–1972," *The Political Quarterly*, 45, no. 1 (January-March, 1974), 104–106.

These conceptual difficulties in the study of Chinese political culture derive in part from certain underlying weaknesses in the theoretical conceptualizations of political culture. By conceiving political culture as the subjective perception of an objective political reality, this literature assumes a normal equivalence between the two, making it difficult to conceptualize cultural conflict or change except in pathological terms. Political culture thus appears as a profoundly conservative force, functioning to reinforce the persistence and equilibrium of the system. Moreover, the conceptual boundaries between structure and culture tend to blur, obscuring the perception of political culture as an independent variable.<sup>12</sup> Missing from these formulations is any conception of the role of *symbols* as distinctly cultural variables mediating between political culture on the one hand and collective psychology on the other.

In the following study I shall therefore begin by articulating my own model of *political culture as a semiological system*, focusing on political symbols and on their interactions within a communications network. I shall then attempt to apply this model to the Chinese Cultural Revolution, showing how the process of cultural transformation takes place symbolically via mass criticism. In the conclusion I shall attempt to assess the social and psychological implications of this process.

### Political Culture as a Semiological System<sup>13</sup>

“Semiology” (or semiotics) is the systematic analysis of meanings. A semiological system consists of relationships among two types of variables: communicative variables, and linguistic variables. Communicative variables consist of a minimum of two actors within a communications network: a speaker and a listener. Speakers and listeners communicate through signs. The linguistic components of a sign are a signifier (usually a word), a referent (i.e., the empirical datum signified), and a signification

<sup>12</sup>The seminal theoretical formulations of political culture are Gabriel A. Almond, “Comparative Political Systems,” *Journal of Politics*, 18 (1956), 391-409; Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1965); and Lucian Pye and Sidney Verba, eds., *Political Culture and Political Development* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965).

<sup>13</sup>For a more comprehensive elaboration of this model see my article, “Political Culture and Political Symbolism: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis” (paper presented to the American Political Science Association, September, 1976, Chicago, Ill.).

(i.e., the lexical meaning of the sign, a definition that applies to the entire sign class).

In the system of political culture, the relevant actors are *masses* and *elites*. They are defined here solely in terms of their communicative functions—elites manipulate symbols, masses interpret symbols and respond—and it is not necessarily assumed that elites control other values, such as wealth or even political power. Elites and masses interact through political *symbols*. Symbols are a particular type of sign, distinguished by their metalinguistic and their connotative properties. Their *metalinguistic* property is that they seem to refer to a concrete empirical datum (i.e., a “new deal” refers to a move in a card game) but actually refer to a congeries of events (i.e., a “New Deal” refers to a redistributive legislative program), which are linked by analogy or other principles of association to the original empirical datum. Their *connotative property* is that they convey value and emotion (i.e., a “new deal” represents a chance to start anew). The communicative and linguistic variables relate to one another within a political culture system in the following way:

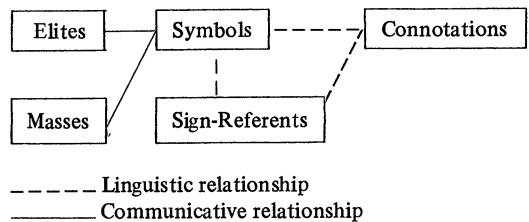


Figure 1. The System of Political Culture

This system may be analyzed on the basis of three semiological relationships among its constitutive variables: pragmatics, semantics, and syntactics.<sup>14</sup> *Pragmatics* refers to the communicative relationships between speakers and listeners in the network (in this case between masses and elites). From the pragmatic perspective the symbol has meaning *for someone*: special focus falls on the speaker’s intention to express or communicate something and on the reactions of the listener. The *semantic* relationship refers to the relationship between the symbol and the political reality to which it refers. *Syntactics* refers to the “formal” relationship among signs, abstracted from the communication event, the speaker, and the

<sup>14</sup>Cf. Charles W. Morris, *Signs, Language and Behavior* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1946 and 1950); and his “Foundations of the Theory of Signs,” in *Foundations of the Unity of Science*, ed. Otto Neurath et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), I, 77-139.

listener; it is of particular importance in projecting the connotations of the symbol. Having conceptualized the variables comprising the political culture system and defined their interrelationships, we can now apply the model to the Cultural Revolution.

### Cultural Revolution: The System

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is but one of several variants of "mass movement" that recur quite frequently within the Chinese political culture system. The Cultural Revolution takes place through "mass criticism," a type of public degradation ceremony<sup>15</sup> that projects the basic relationships of the small-group criticism and self-criticism session to the nationwide level through the mass communications media. In the process of mass criticism, elites and masses interact through polemical symbols, or "criticisms." These criticisms refer to a target, consisting of a person or group of persons. The connotations of the criticism consist of norms and repressed grievances. The norms are the obverse of the criticisms: a criticism involves a reproach to the target because a situation is not as it ought to be, and this "ought to be" is the *norm* of the criticism, while the reproach expresses normally repressed *emotions*. The process of mass criticism fits within the model of political culture described above with only minor modification:

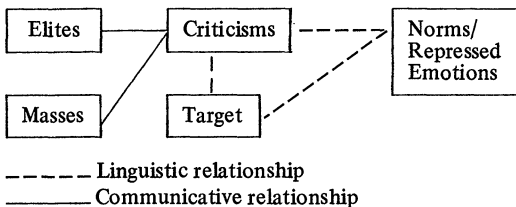


Figure 2. The Process of Mass Criticism

The basic purpose of the Cultural Revolution was to change people's ways of thinking and relating to one another, a pragmatic objective concerning the triangular relationship among elites, masses, and the target to which considerations of semantic accuracy and logical syntactic order were subordinated. By drawing the attention of the masses to the target's deviation from the norm, and by dramatizing that deviation by means of exaggerated polemical symbolism, the elites seek to per-

suade the masses to embrace and internalize the norms. At the same time, by permitting the masses to displace repressed negative emotions against the target, the elites seek to enhance the sense of solidarity within the community and increase the masses' commitment to the norms. The implications of this process for the target are that he should rectify his deviation through self-criticism and reintegrate himself within the community. Thus the target may hope to atone for his sins and become a model of the type of moral transformation expected of the masses. Having outlined the basic semiological network of cultural transformation through mass criticism, I shall now proceed to examine the network's pragmatic, syntactic and semantic dimensions in turn.

**Pragmatics.** We have noted that pragmatics focuses on the speaker's intentions to express or communicate something and on the reaction of the listener, unavoidably bringing psychological questions into play. In the mass-criticism model, the actors whose intentions are relevant are the elites, the masses, and the target. In the Cultural Revolution specifically, the national communicative elites were Mao Tse-tung and the Maoists (i.e., those who maintained personal contact with the Chairman); the masses were the "revolutionary masses" or Red Guards and Revolutionary Rebels; and the principal target was Liu Shao-ch'i, erstwhile Chairman of the People's Republic and Mao's heir apparent. To simplify somewhat, the masses' intentions may be generally characterized as "catharsis," the elites' intentions may be characterized as "exhortation," and the target's intentions as "expiation." By examining the particular motives for these intentions and showing how the intentions interacted with one another we can comprehend the pragmatic implications of mass criticism.

Catharsis consists of the expression of emotions normally repressed in China, such as resentment, vengeance, self-interest, or ambition for fame or power. Mao has long considered catharsis an integral part of his program for transforming Chinese political culture (without necessarily endorsing the content of the opinions vented), under the assumption that if emotions are pent up they acquire destructive potential, whereas their expression can unleash creative energy. Some of the grievances and demands that found cathartic expression during the Cultural Revolution were generally shared, such as resentment of authority; others were specific to a particular group or quasi-group and tended to reflect the social backgrounds and interests of that group. Those groups most actively engaged in the movement were (in

<sup>15</sup>Harold Garfinkel, "Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies," *American Journal of Sociology*, 61 (March, 1956), 420-424.

descending order of activism) students, workers, and peasants.

*Students* as a whole manifested an idealistic conception of politics, indignation about its underlying coercive aspect, and a demand for the emancipation of all disprivileged groups. Most Red Guard organizations consisted of students (whereas Revolutionary Rebel organizations usually consisted of workers), and their motives may be characterized with some confidence on the basis of a content analysis of the themes of criticism in their publications. In contrast to official publications, which showed relatively high concern with the erosion of "proletarian dictatorship" (by functional experts, the free market, etc.), Red Guard posters and tabloid newspapers evinced an intense preoccupation with issues of political persecution and repression. This was also reflected in their choice of the dates of confrontations between students and authorities as anniversaries or as faction names, as in the "May 16 group" [*wu i'liu*], "Black March," the "fifty days," etc. Their anti-authoritarian themes and eagerness to "seize power" presumably reflect the students' sense of status incongruence between their low positions on the Chinese stratification pyramid and their socially sanctioned ambitions to rise to the top of it, together with frustration over the growing obstacles to these ambitions.<sup>16</sup> Red Guard criticisms also displayed greater outrage concerning incidents of apparent irreverence toward Mao Tse-tung or his Thought than did official publications. The emotional cogency of *lèse majesté* to the Red Guards (whose primary social roles were still those of children in Chinese families) may derive from their incomplete separation of politics from the household: Mao appears as a benign father, Liu Shao-ch'i as a unfilial son, and the young rebel feels the need to deny analogous sentiments even while demonstrating his revolutionary ardor.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the policy areas selected for special emphasis by student polemicists (viz., education and cultural affairs) reflected their scholastic backgrounds.

<sup>16</sup>Most manpower studies have noted the tightening professional job market in China. Cf. John Philip Emerson, "Employment in Mainland China," in *An Economic Profile of Mainland China*, Studies Prepared for the Joint Economic Committee of Congress, Vol. 2 (February, 1967), 458-459; also Leo Orleans, "Communist China's Education: Politics, Problems, and Prospects," *ibid.*, p. 515.

<sup>17</sup>Michael Walzer, in *The Revolution of the Saints* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), pp. 13-14, considers separation of politics from the household one of the preconditions for the development of modern radicalism. It is true that the Red Guards' unconditional loyalty to Mao left them in an untenable position when Mao withdrew his support.

These themes characterized nearly all student groups, but there were also a number of issue areas in which their interests diverged or even clashed. The two primary social bases for cleavage were class origin and academic achievement. Those with "five red" class origins (i.e., children of workers, poor peasants, revolutionary martyrs, cadres, and soldiers) were generally eager to attack "bourgeois intellectual authorities" (i.e., teachers and functional experts) but had a vested interest in maintaining the existing class structure that discriminated in their favor politically, and recoiled from any determined assault on the Party or on its successor as a pillar of established authority, the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Students from "five black" backgrounds (children of counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, rich peasants, landlords, and bourgeoisie) and children of the "intermediate" classes (e.g., teachers, doctors, urban middle-class professionals), on the other hand, had previously been excluded from participation in school Youth League and Party activities; they took advantage of their enfranchisement to articulate a radical critique of the status quo that threw the entire 17-year history of Chinese Communist rule into question.<sup>18</sup>

Academic achievement tended to cut across the class cleavage, inasmuch as children from unreliable class origins tended to excel scholastically because of their culturally advantaged family backgrounds and desire to compensate for political vulnerability. Thus students from "bad" class backgrounds did not necessarily become radical activists, particularly if their academic achievements had given them bright career prospects and a stake in the status quo; and students with "good" (i.e., "red") class backgrounds did not always join in defense of the status quo, particularly if low academic achievement beclouded their futures. Work-study students (who were both underpaid as part-time workers and undereducated as part-time students) and students who had been "transferred down" [*hsia-fang*] for work in the countryside were conspicuously prominent among the radicals.<sup>19</sup>

A third basis of cleavage among students (and indeed, among all groups) was regionalism. When Red Guards fanned out across the countryside from the urban centers where the movement originated to "spread the sparks of revolution," they typically engaged in more "radical" tactics than they permitted them-

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Hong Yung Lee, "The Political Mobilization of the Red Guards and Revolutionary Rebels in the Cultural Revolution (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1973).

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

selves in their home towns, and their condescending attitudes toward “backward” native youth provoked a regional xenophobia that local elites often encouraged for their own self-protection.<sup>20</sup>

In their late response to mobilization, initial support of the local authorities, and anti-intellectual orientation, Chinese *workers* seemed to fit the profile Lipset called “working-class authoritarianism”: leftist on economic issues, but rigid and intolerant on political/cultural issues.<sup>21</sup> This posture disposed the workers to resist initial Red Guard incursions into their factories. As the “power seizure” movement of January 1967 gathered momentum, the workers joined in, grasping their chance to strike for higher wages (“the students wanted power, but the workers wanted money,” a former Red Guard noted acerbically).<sup>22</sup> As in the case of students, however, workers were internally divided by conflicts of interest. With their participation in the movement came a tendency to splinter into factions, usually based on trade or income (a tendency condemned in the official press as a “guild mentality”). The most conservative “guilds,” composed of senior, skilled, and unionized workers, lent active support to Party or PLA forces in their conflicts with radical student units. The nonunionized contract, piece, rotation, or apprentice workers received low wages and were subject to layoff on a last-hired, first-fired basis; they understandably tended to adopt more radical postures, demanding major changes in the industrial wage scale and administrative hierarchy. Workers from small handicraft industries also seemed more inclined to join radical factions than did workers in large state factories,<sup>23</sup> which can probably also be explained by relative deprivation theory.

*Peasants* did not generally become actively engaged in the movement. As victims of the disastrous aftermath of the Great Leap Forward and beneficiaries of “revisionist” recovery policies of the early 1960s that gave more latitude to private plots, domestic industries, and the rural market, the peasants seemed generally opposed to radical social programs. So they opposed the Red Guards who espoused such programs, in some cases even threatening to “encircle the cities from the countryside” and quell the radicals. On the outskirts of some

large industrial cities, on the other hand, *jacquerie*-like movements occurred. These may perhaps be ascribed to the salience of urban-rural income disparities in the suburbs, and to the rather large concentrations of rusticated urbanites in these locations, many of whom were quite ready to march back into the cities and demand redress.<sup>24</sup>

Mao long believed that his hortatory intentions were promoted rather than frustrated by permitting the masses to achieve some measure of cathartic release through mass criticism. As he put it in 1957, “What is correct invariably develops in the course of struggle with what is wrong. The true, the good, and the beautiful always exist in comparison with the false, the evil, and the ugly, and grow in struggle with the latter.”<sup>25</sup> In a chat with Andre Malraux about the Communist victory over the Kuomintang (KMT), he commented: “What was it that won over most villages to us? The expositions of bitterness.”<sup>26</sup>

The Maoists realized their hortatory intentions through mass criticism by blaming the target for previous failure to achieve the norms, thereby encouraging the masses to believe that these norms were after all realistic objectives that could now be achieved with more strenuous efforts. To the extent that the criticisms functioned effectively to fulfill hortatory objectives, they were logically impelled to accuse the target of all those moral lapses that had hindered previous realization of those objectives: thus Liu Shao-ch’i was lambasted for proposing a complete “bourgeois reactionary line” designed to lead China down the “capitalist road.” By criticizing the Liuist program, the masses would forswear its blandishments and reflexively affirm their commitment to the “proletarian revolutionary line of Chairman Mao.”

The critique of Liuist “revisionism” was comprehensive, embracing every policy area from foreign policy to agricultural mechanization, and it remained essentially consistent throughout the campaign. But as the elites lost control of the movement they began to improvise criticisms to counter various undesirable tendencies that arose spontaneously among the masses. For example, the criticisms of Liu Shao-ch’i’s alleged “economism” coincided

<sup>20</sup>Ken Ling, *The Revenge of Heaven: Journal of a Young Chinese* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1972), pp. 70–71.

<sup>21</sup>Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), pp. 87–126.

<sup>22</sup>Ling, *Revenge*, p. 243.

<sup>23</sup>Lee, “Mobilization.”

<sup>24</sup>Alan P. L. Liu, *Political Culture and Group Conflict in Communist China* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Clio Press, 1976), pp. 153–156.

<sup>25</sup>*Jen-min jih-pao* [People’s Daily] editorial, June 8, 1966 (hereafter *JMJP*); also quoted in *Hung-ch’i* [Red Flag], no. 9, 1966.

<sup>26</sup>André Malraux, *Anti-Memoirs*, trans. Terence Kilmartin (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), pp. 369–70.

with a wave of strikes by workers for higher wages in January-February 1967. The accusations that Liu had encouraged a “mountain-stronghold-mentality,” or “theory of mass spontaneity” (all quite contrary to earlier charges that he enforced excessive “centralism”) first appeared in the late summer and fall of 1967, to coincide with a Maoist drive against Red Guard factionalism. The criticisms of his Party-building policies appeared in tandem with the effort to rebuild the Party committees in the fall of 1968. All of these criticisms seemed to conform reflexively to the immediate hortatory objectives of the Maoists rather than to Liu’s actual record.<sup>27</sup>

The hortatory intentions of the elites could be most effectively promoted by symbolically enhancing the contrast between the target and the norm. The logical relationship between target and norm was thus polarized from one of contradiction (white versus non-white) to one of contrariety (white versus black). This opposition was then dramatized by a set of bipolar symbols derived partly from Chinese polemical tradition and partly from Marxist doctrine, to be analyzed in greater depth in the syntactic section. The image of the target was also simplified, depriving Liu of any chronological variability and accusing him of the same criminal tendencies throughout his career, occasionally invisible only because of his tactical shrewdness. The evident intention was to enhance commitment to the norms by avowing their absolute and eternal character, in contrast to the absolute and eternal wickedness of the target. The norms provided the guidelines for the formulation of criticisms, and the criticisms were then projected back like a spotlight into the target’s life: any incidents in Liu’s biography found to be analogous to or even tenuously associated with the errors of which he was initially accused were highlighted in polemical articles.<sup>28</sup>

The intention of the target is to atone for his sins and reintegrate himself with the community from which he has been ostracized. If he succeeds in this expiation he can contribute to communal solidarity and promote a similar moral transformation among the masses, as Liu Shao-ch’i himself pointed out earlier:

Experience proves that whenever a comrade in a responsible position seriously practices sincere and necessary self-criticism before the Party membership and the masses, . . . their internal

solidarity will develop, their work will improve and their defects will be overcome, while the prestige of the responsible comrade will increase instead of being undermined. There is a good deal of evidence, both in the Party and among the masses, to prove this. On the other hand, where a responsible comrade lacks the spirit of self-criticism, refuses or fears to reveal his own defects or mistakes, or tries to cover them up; when he expresses no gratitude for criticism and instead of being pleased to be told of his faults blushes to the ears and makes acrimonious retorts or looks for a chance to revenge himself on his critics, the result is just the opposite.<sup>29</sup>

Liu delivered at least three self-criticisms in the course of the Cultural Revolution, but each was derisively rejected by Maoist elites as “superficial and insincere.” It is difficult to devise any objective measure of “sincerity,” but my own impression is that Liu’s self-criticisms, though somewhat more defensive before a hostile Red Guard audience than before a Central Work Conference, were sincere and indeed searchingly honest. If this impression is correct, why were Liu’s self-criticisms rejected, frustrating one of the central objectives of the criticism movement?

The reason seems to be that Liu’s intention to expiate for his “crimes” conflicted with the masses’ desires for catharsis and the elites’ desires for exhortation. If the target’s self-criticism were accepted, this would remove the moral tension between target and norm that propelled the criticism movement: a penitent Liu could no longer serve as an object of catharsis, and his “negative example” could no longer be cited to inspire more zealous adherence to norms. As the Cultural Revolution became a “going concern” its participants also acquired vested interests in its continuation, particularly those symbol specialists (such as K’uai Ta-fu or Yao Wen-yüan) who showed talent for expressing the repressed emotions of the masses and the norms advocated by the elites. And it was in the interest of those who wished the Cultural Revolution to continue for one reason or another to exaggerate the incompatibility between target and norm and to build up the credibility of the *threat* the target posed to the norms. Thus the same considerations that militated against Liu’s forgiveness also prevented his purge: although he was demoted from second to eighth place in the Party hierarchy at the 11th Central Committee Plenum in August 1966 and never wielded effective power after that time (according to

<sup>27</sup>Lowell Dittmer, *Liu Shao-ch’i and the Chinese Cultural Revolution: The Politics of Mass Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 297–315.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>Liu Shao-ch’i, “On the Party” (May, 1945), *Collected Works of Liu Shao-ch’i* (Hong Kong: Union Research Institute, 1969), II, 65.



Japanese reporters, he was placed under house arrest in December 1966), he nominally retained his Party and government positions until the Cultural Revolution was brought to a close in the fall of 1968. When it was reported at one point (July 1967) that Liu was a “dead tiger,” the radicals stoutly denied this—they could not so easily dispense with the movement’s *raison d’être*. As K’ang Sheng warned in a different but analogous context: “If you strike him to death, you will lose a living target. . . . After “traveling by airplane” [a form of struggle in which the accused is obliged to respond to questions while crouching for long periods with his arms extended behind him], Lu Ting-yi is not required to make further confession.”<sup>30</sup>

Whereas in a small-group criticism and self-criticism session the personal intentions of the target might conceivably receive greater solicitude, since after all he would be a visible and articulate participant familiar to everyone in the group, when criticism was projected to a nationwide level none of the checks on aggression characteristic of face-to-face relationships were operative; the target’s existence as a person was subordinated to his functional significance as a symbol. And Liu Shao-ch’i—erect, white-haired, stern-looking, the ideal father figure—proved such an effective symbol that his power to exert an evil influence survived not only his purge but his physical death. Although his meaning became somewhat obscured in the early 1970s as a result of his utilization in the polemics against Ch’en Po-ta and the radical “May 16 Group” (who were paradoxically referred to as “people like Liu Shao-ch’i”), Liu seems to have remained a touchstone for evil in the Chinese political system.

**Syntactics.** Syntactics concerns the organization of various linguistic symbols within the message, while temporarily bracketing the question of their relationship to empirical referents—the *form*, rather than the content, of the rhetoric.<sup>31</sup> Whereas the conscious demands and grievances of the critic become manifest in the empirical content of the criticism, the syntactic form of the criticism appears to embody certain elemental but hitherto obscurely sensed wishes and beliefs latent in the political culture. In other words, syntax bears a particularly close relationship to the emotive and evaluative

<sup>30</sup>“Speech to Red Guards,” *Hsin Pei-ta* [New Peking University], January 28, 1967.

<sup>31</sup>On the distinction between form and content, see John H. Weakland, “Family Imagery in a Passage by Mao Tse-tung,” *World Politics*, 10 (January, 1958), 387–408.

*connotations* of the symbolism. In the following analysis I shall focus on the imagery and metaphor of the polemics, which literary critics have shown to be most accessible to the expression and conveyance of feeling. My analysis of this imagery and metaphor will reveal a series of sharply contrasting antinomies, or “binary oppositions”:<sup>32</sup> (1) light/darkness, (2) revealed/concealed, (3) pure/filthy, and (4) active/passive.

(1) The metaphor of light was pervasive, symbolized by the color red. The orthodox Communist “red/white” color symbolism (as in “white terror,” or “Red Army”) was even changed into “red/black” in order to conform with the light metaphor. Red denoted ideological legitimacy: “red hearts” [*hung-hsin*] stood for militance and loyalty; a “red lantern” [*hung-teng*] was a source of doctrinal illumination; “red flowers” [*hung-hua*] referred to the Red Guards and other objects of praise.<sup>33</sup> The young rebels even demanded that the “go” signals in traffic lights be changed from green to red! The following passage illustrates the frequency of this color’s appearance: “On that day, countless red flags waved in the breeze at T’ienanmen Square. Tens of thousands of Red Guards wearing red armbands and carrying red-colored *Quotations of Chairman Mao Tse-tung* sang with gusto, “Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman.” The whole square became a surging ocean of red.”<sup>34</sup>

Contrary to red was black (which in traditional Chinese color symbolism had clandestine and sinister connotations, whereas red connoted luck and prosperity). Thus “bourgeois authorities” were said to use “black language” [*hei-hua*], to write “black books” [*hei-shu*], post a “black flag” [*hei-ch’i*], and were characterized as a “black gang” [*hei-pang*], “black line” [*hei-hsien*] or “black inn” [*hei-tien*].<sup>35</sup> Anthony Grey, a British journalist held prisoner several months by Red Guards, was struck by the pervasiveness of this color symbolism upon witnessing his redecorated apartment:

<sup>32</sup>This term betrays the influence of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Cf. *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), chaps. 2, 10, 11; also *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 80.

<sup>33</sup>H. C. Chuang, *The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: A Terminological Study* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, August, 1967), I rely heavily on Chuang in this section.

<sup>34</sup>*JMJP*, September 1, 1966, as cited in Chuang, *Great Proletarian*.

<sup>35</sup>*JMJP*, July 26, p. 4; *Kuang-ming kih-pao* [Enlightenment Daily] (hereafter *KMJP*), July 17, 1966, p. 2; *Hung-ch’i*, no. 9 (1966), p. 35 (all as cited in Chuang).

Black paint ran down every wall. Every square foot had been daubed with slogans in Chinese and English. . . . Even the sheets of my bed had been daubed with Chinese characters saying "Ta-tao Gerlai!"—"Down with Grey!" . . . The bathroom mirror was covered with slogans and there was one other refinement. The bristles of my toothbrush had been carefully painted black with slogan paint, . . . The inside of the bath had been painted black too, putting it out of action.<sup>36</sup>

The primary symbol of light was the sun, which was identified with Chairman Mao or his Thought. In an inadvertent reversion to Chinese geomancy [*feng-shui*], the exhibition halls of the life of Mao that were constructed throughout the country were invariably built to face east, the source of light, just as emperor's palaces had earlier been built to face south, the source of warmth.<sup>37</sup> Like the sun, Mao's Thought radiated life: "Sun, rain, and dew nourish the pine trees, Mao Tse-tung's Thought nourishes [*pu-yü*] heroes." Thus it was thought advisable to incorporate it into the body: "Mao Tse-tung's Thought is the red, red sun in our hearts."<sup>38</sup>

A secondary symbol of light was fire: "They try everything from struggle to encirclement for attack in their vain attempt to extinguish the flames of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which are bound to become a prairie fire." "They spread the sparks of revolutionary rebellion." "They light the flames of criticism."<sup>39</sup> Again, only the wicked were assumed to be flammable; fire had an annealing effect on the righteous, "steeling . . . and maturing them in the furnaces of the great Cultural Revolutionary . . . crucible." Yao Wen-yüan was said to have lit the flames of the Cultural Revolution in his November 1965 broadside against Wu Han, and other authorities were warned that they must "not only mobilize the masses and start a fire to burn ourselves, but also take the initiative to appear and carry out self-revolution." Other-

wise, "One day, the blazing flames of revolution will burn your monster and devil group all to death." By contrast with the metaphor of fire, the enemy threatens to become a "free-flowing inundation."<sup>40</sup>

The location of the enemies with reference to the light/dark dimension is, of course, in outer darkness. Yet the most sinister danger is posed by those enemies who seek to emigrate from the world of darkness to the world of light under false pretenses: "The enemy in daylight look like men, in darkness devils. To your face, they speak human language, behind your back the language of devils. They are wolves clad in skins of sheep, man-eating smiling tigers. . . . The enemies without guns are more hidden, cunning, sinister, and vicious than the enemies with guns."<sup>41</sup>

(2) The second dimension is that of revealed/concealed, public/private. The enemies are "tigers," who must be "lured from their lair"; "snakes" who "crawl underground," hide in "holes," from where they must be "dragged out"; they "shield" themselves with "masks," or even "fig leaves," which must be "ripped off"; they are "bullets" with "sugar coats," "wolves clad in skins of sheep," etc.<sup>42</sup> "We have torn aside your filthy curtain of counter-revolution and caught you red-handed. We shall strip you of your disguises and expose you in all your ugliness."<sup>43</sup> The archetypal symbol for this imagery is that of an underworld, or Hades, which the Red Guards were also determined to assault: "Overthrow the kind of Hell and free all the little devils!"

<sup>36</sup>Anthony Grey, *Hostage in Peking* (London: Michael Joseph, 1970), pp. 104–105.

<sup>37</sup>Adrian Hsia, *Die Chinesische Kulturrevolution* (Neuwied, Germany: Hermann Luchterhand, 1971), p. 265.

<sup>38</sup>*JMJP* editorial, March 18, 1967, trans. in *JPRS*, no. 40525 (April 5, 1967). *JPRS* translations are often poor, but wherever possible I have checked them against the originals.

<sup>39</sup>*Ching-kangshan* editorial, no. 5 (December 26, 1966), p. 3; "The Struggle Against the Bourgeois Reactionary Line," *Hung-ch'i* (Peking Aeronautical Institute), no. 3 (December 26, 1966), pp. 3–4; K'uai Ta-fu, "Destroy the Liu-Teng Bourgeois Reactionary Line and Strive for New Victories," *Hung-wei-ping* [Red Guard], no. 15 (December 30, 1966), pp. 2, 4, 17–22. All are Red Guard publications.

<sup>40</sup>Wu Pin, "Struggle Firmly Against Class Enemies," *Chung-kuo ch'ing-nien* [China Youth], no. 13 (July 1, 1966), in *JPRS*, no. 39235 (December 22, 1966), pp. 46–48; Commentator, "Cast Away Three Wrong Ways of Thinking," *T'i-wu chan-pao* [Physical Education Battle News], Shanghai, in *JPRS*, no. 41450, pp. 115–116; "The Flame That Cannot Be Put Out," *Tung-fang-hung pao* [East Is Red News], May 9, 1967, in *JPRS*, no. 42503 (September 7, 1967), pp. 129–135; "Resolutely Smash the Counterattacks of the Bourgeois Reactionary Line," *Hung-wei-ping pao*, no. 15 (December 15, 1966), pp. 3, 84 (cited in that order).

<sup>41</sup>*Chieh-fang chün-pao* [Liberation Army Daily] (*CFCP*) editorial, August 23, 1966.

<sup>42</sup>At times, a castration threat seemed implicit in the threat to expose. In a *CFCP* editorial we read, "If we are mentally lazy . . . and are so afraid of being hurt and embarrassed that we will not take off our pants and have our tails removed, our minds will not be properly reformed." "Regard Chairman Mao's Works as the Highest Directive for All Works Throughout the PLA," trans. in *Survey of the China Mainland Press (SCMP)*, no. 3712 (June 6, 1966), p. 5.

<sup>43</sup>"Tear Aside the Bourgeois Mask of 'Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity,'" *JMJP* editorial, June 4, 1966, in *SCMP*, no. 3714 (June 8, 1966), p. 3.

Through the use of such images, the general impression was fostered that there was a deep cleft between the world of appearance and the world of reality, and that the apparent world contained no reliable indicators of the nature of the real world. This disjunction occasioned a sense of outrage and an ambition to reduce appearances to their underlying realities. In short, there was a general suspicion of the conventional, which predicated a correspondence between revealed/concealed and phony/real. The systematically misleading relationship between appearance and reality was more subtly indicated by the addition of inverted commas or the adjective "so-wei" [so-called] to the once illustrious title of the target, as in "hsüeh-she" [scholars], "chuan-chia" [specialists], or "so-wei ch'uan-wei" [so-called authorities].

The quest for exposure was to be undertaken "resolutely, thoroughly, wholly and completely" [*chieh-chüeh ch'e-ti kan-ching ch'uan-pu ti*], to quote one of Mao's contributions to the language,<sup>44</sup> with the ultimate intention of annihilating the sphere of "bourgeois privacy" and realizing the ancient ideal, "all public, no private" [*ta kung wu szu*]. Thus Red Guards whenever possible launched raids on the files of Party and public security offices in search of "black materials" (i.e., incriminating records or documents). "What's so terrific about secrets?" a participant in the notorious raid on the Foreign Ministry files reportedly asked. "To Hell with them!"<sup>45</sup>

This almost obsessive Red Guard concern with exposure seemed, however, to harbor an underlying ambivalence. For although Red Guards denounced authorities for hypocritically concealing their crimes and displaying only their virtues, when an authority actually made a statement revealing opposition to Mao, however obliquely (as in Teng T'o's satires of the early 1960s),<sup>46</sup> he would be condemned for "shamelessly," "audaciously shouting," "fanatically trumpeting," etc. And if he confessed, his confession was invariably rejected as "fraudulent," an "utterly absurd" fabrication.

(3) Filth, feces in particular, became one of the more popular metaphors for the enemy. He

<sup>44</sup>Mao Tse-tung *chu-hsu yu-lu* [Quotations of Chairman Mao Tse-tung], pp. 98, 143, as quoted in Chuang, *The Little Red Book and Current Chinese Language* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, 1968), p. 28.

<sup>45</sup>Ross Terrill, "The 800,000,000, Part II: China and the World," *The Atlantic*, 229 (January, 1972), 39-63, at p. 49.

<sup>46</sup>Trans. in Joachim Glaubitz, *Opposition Gegen Mao: Abendsprache am Yenshan und andere politische Dokumente* (Olten, Switzerland: Walter Verlag, 1969).

was "wallowing in the mire," a "pile of dogshit" who must be "criticized until he stinks." "Where the broom does not sweep, the dirt does not vanish of itself." The Cultural Revolution was a cleansing agent; whereas water assumed a counterrevolutionary aspect in relation to fire, here it became a revolutionary purgative. "The turbulent stream of the revolutionary mass movement has been washing away the filth left by the old society." "The roaring torrent of the great democratic movement under the command of the Thought of Mao Tse-tung is flowing on with surging waves under the bright sun, washing the whole of the old world." "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, like a mighty red torrent, is sweeping away the old," etc.<sup>47</sup> Again, the test of the true revolutionary is his willingness to submit to this overwhelming experience, under the assumption that authentic revolutionary ardor is waterproof: "If you are a genuine proletarian revolutionary . . . you will surely hail and be inspired by the rise of the hundreds of millions of people, join the masses in making revolution and throw yourselves into the torrent for criticism of the bourgeois revolutionary line."<sup>48</sup> The notion of a "test by water" appears again in a *Liberation Army Daily* editorial: "Only by following Chairman Mao's instructions and putting 'daring' and 'doing' above everything else, and courageously plunging into the practice of war—tempering ourselves in the teeth of storms and learning to swim by swimming—can we acquaint ourselves with the laws of war and master them."<sup>49</sup>

(4) In deliberate defiance of the traditional Chinese attachment to peace and harmony, the rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution stressed violent action. The Red Guards called themselves (or were called by others) "shock troops" [*ch'uang-chiang*] and "small generals" [*hsiao-chiang*], labeled their tabloids "battle news" [*chan-pao*], and referred to their factions in military terms such as "brigade," "regiment," or "garrison headquarters" (though lacking the corresponding organization). They described

<sup>47</sup>*Hung-wei-ping pao*, no. 15, p. 3; Wang Li et al., "Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," *Hung-ch'i*, no. 15 (December 13, 1966): "A Proposal by 57 Revolutionary Organizations," *Hsin-hua* [New China News Agency], Peking, January 29, 1967, in *JPRS*, no. 41202 (May 29, 1967), pp. 23-27; "Hold Fast to the Main Orientation in the Struggle," *Hung-ch'i*, no. 12 (September 17, 1966), in *JPRS*, no. 29235 (December 22, 1966), pp. 41-44.

<sup>48</sup>"Lord She's Love of Dragons," *JMJP* editorial, December 21, 1966, in *JPRS*, no. 40525.

<sup>49</sup>"Study Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War," *CFCP* editorial, trans. in *Peking Review*, January 13, 1967, p. 18.

their exploits with cataclysmic metaphors that suggested a desire to feel part of a vast, impersonal destructive force: "With the fury of a hurricane," "With the force to topple mountains and upturn seas," "With the power of thunder and lightning from the heavens, this has enveloped all China and the world."<sup>50</sup> The enemies were on the other hand accused of passive, irenic tendencies: they tried to "extinguish class struggle," sought rapprochement with the USSR or USA [sic!], fostered "inner-Party peace," a "parliamentary road" to socialism that circumvented violent revolution, etc. In public struggle meetings against prominent political figures, these respective roles would be acted out: the target would be forced into an abject, dependent position while the surrounding Red Guard interrogators would assume a questing, aggressive stance.<sup>51</sup>

In denouncing these enemies, Red Guard polemicists advocated consequential ruthlessness, renouncing what they conceived to be the characteristic Chinese tendency to develop pity for an enemy midway in the attack and to spare him, with the result that he would revive to counterattack. The contrast between the old and new attitudes toward violence may be illustrated by comparing the Cultural Revolution shibboleths, "Beat the dog in the water" [*ta liu-shiu-kou*], and "Once you start beating it, beat it to death" (Lu Hsün), "With power to spare we must pursue the tottering foe" (Mao Tse-tung)<sup>52</sup> with Mencius' dictum that if a child fell into a well it was human nature to pull him out, even if he was the child of one's mortal enemy.<sup>53</sup> Although the vehemence of such expressions was perhaps considered necessary to overcome deeply rooted inhibitions against criticism of authority, once these psychic barriers were breached the distinction between symbolic and physical violence proved impossible to maintain, and by the late summer

of 1967 the struggle began to escalate to truly lethal proportions.<sup>54</sup>

Thus the dichotomous imagery of Cultural Revolution polemics portrays two worlds: the apparent world is filled with light, purity, and publicity; but this world is suspected of being unreal. Behind "masks," or hidden in "holes," there is a real world of darkness and filth. This underworld is inhabited by all manner of savage beasts: there are "man-eating" [*ch'ih-jen*] tigers, "noxious vermin" [*hai-jen ch'ung*], "voracious wolves" [*ch'ai-lang*], "poisonous snakes" [*tu-she*], etc. As if these metaphors were inadequate to describe the dangers lurking below, the demonology of popular Buddhism is invoked: there are "bull-ghosts and snake-spirits" [*niu-kuei she-shen*, usually freely translated as "freaks and monsters"], "demons" [*kuei-kuai*], who masqueraded in "painted skin" [*hua-p'i*], spoke "ghost language" [*kuei-hua*], and practiced "black magic" [*yao-feng*].<sup>55</sup>

What divides these two worlds is a forbidding barrier, variously referred to as a "line of demarcation," "shackles," a "fortress," or "frame" [*k'uang-k'uang*]. This barrier is heavily fortified, and must remain so; those who "deliberately confuse the line of demarcation between . . . revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries" are severely denounced as "two-faced and three-sworded"—i.e., treacherous.<sup>56</sup> Yet paradoxically, it is the wish of the young rebels to shatter this barrier, an act they describe with verbs of violent penetration such as "smash," "crush," "bombard the fortress," and "break the frames." This "penetration" [*shen-ju*] is said to require courage and to occasion high excitement: "With the tremendous and impetuous force of a raging storm [the rebels] have smashed the shackles imposed on their minds by the exploiting classes for so long."<sup>57</sup>

The motives for the penetration appear mixed. On the one hand, the rebels expressed the desire to "destroy all evil winds," "sweep all demons and freaks away," etc. They also wished, however, to emancipate the repressed. An article entitled, "Don't Be Afraid of Washing Dirty Linen in Public" noted, for instance, that "Fear to discuss our shortcomings and

<sup>50</sup>"A Proposal by 57 Revolutionary Organizations," *Hsin-hua*, January 29, 1967; "Behind-the-Scenes Story of the Yielding of Power in the Seven Ministries of Machine Building," *Fei Ming Ti* [Flying Whistling Arrowhead], February 17, 1967, in *JPRS*, no. 41779 (July 11, 1967), pp. 101–105; *JMJP* editorial, June 8, 1966; in *Current Background*, no. 392 (October 21, 1969).

<sup>51</sup>Cf. "Three Trials of Pickpocket Wang Kuang-mei" (Material for purpose of criticism and repudiation), pamphlet compiled by the "South Sea Great Wall" Fighting Detachment of the "Chingkangshan" Corps, Tsinghua University, trans. in *Selected Chinese Mainland Magazines*, no. 848, pp. 2–4.

<sup>52</sup>Cited in Chuang, *Little Red Book*, p. 28.

<sup>53</sup>James Legge, trans. *The Chinese Classics, II: The Works of Mencius*, reprint of 1895 ed. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), pp. 201–202.

<sup>54</sup>Cf. John Gittings, "Inside China," *Ramparts*, 10, no. 2 (August, 1971), 10–20; also William Hinton, "Hundred Day War," *Monthly Review*, 24 (July–August, 1972).

<sup>55</sup>Cited in Chuang, *Little Red Book*, p. 18.

<sup>56</sup>*Hung-ch'i* editorial, no. 4 (March 1, 1967), in *JPRS*, no. 41450, pp. 46–53.

<sup>57</sup>"Sweep Away All Freaks and Monsters," *JMJP* editorial, June 1, 1966, in *SCMP* no. 3712 (June 6, 1966), p. 2.

mistakes actually is fear to touch our own souls and dig up the dirty things in our minds.”<sup>58</sup> It was felt necessary not only to “dig up dirty things,” but thoroughly to assimilate them: “The revolutionary young people must tumble millions of times in the mud of the masses.”<sup>59</sup> Emancipation and assimilation of the emancipated were desirable because although this hidden world was a source of danger and pollution, it also harbored an uncanny power, and by unleashing this power the rebels could exploit it to confound their opponents and cleanse the world. The effect was like that of a dam bursting:

For the sake of our country never changing color, for the sake of the complete liberation of the proletariat, you [viz., Mao] personally lighted the flames of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. . . . The billows of the historically unprecedented revolution surge and roll in an irresistible force which sweeps over the old world and which will completely bury imperialism and modern revisionism. The hearts of the revolutionary peoples boil with anger and their spirits are soaring.<sup>60</sup>

To smash the frames was to obliterate the distinction between revealed and concealed and to “drag out” those lurking in darkness into the light. The result was that “ghosts” and “men” intermixed freely without distinguishing earmarks, a situation that was termed “chaos” [*luan*]. During the movement’s initial stages (i.e., up to the “February adverse current”), chaos was deliberately fostered, in an apparent attempt to shatter the conventional barriers of shame that supported the authority structure of the status quo. As Mao told the rebels: “Do not be afraid to make trouble. The more trouble you make and the longer you make it the better. Confusion and trouble are always noteworthy. It can clear things up . . . wherever there are abscesses or infections we must always blow them up.”<sup>61</sup> And the rebels responded with enthusiasm: “We want to wield the massive cudgel, express our spirit, invoke our magic influence and turn the old world upside down, smash things into chaos [*luan-luan ti*], into

smithereens, the more chaos [*luan*] the better!”<sup>62</sup>

By dissolving various conceptual and functional distinctions into “chaos,” many realms of life that had previously been ordered by incongruent principles (e.g., medicine, science, agricultural engineering) were exposed to criticism on the basis of Mao’s Thought. The resulting expansion of the conflict arena was not sanctioned or foreseen in the 16 points of the August 1966 11th Plenum, but seems rather to have been an upshot of the rhetorical animus against “frames.”

The Manichaeic syntactic structure we have just examined seems to have served both the hortatory and the cathartic intentions of the mass and elite participants in the criticism movement, while thwarting the expiatory intentions of the target. The imagery served a hortatory function by dramatizing the opposition between norm and criticism, making Mao’s Thought look exceedingly good and the “capitalist road” look execrable. The cathartic function was served by permitting the polemical expression of repressed grievances. It is the semantic meaning of these grievances that we wish now to consider.

**Semantics.** Consider once again the structure of the symbolism: what can it tell us about political life in the People’s Republic of China? Above, we have the world of appearance, full of light, purity, publicity, and virtuous action; underground, duplicitously concealed, a world of filth, darkness, shame, and passive dependency. These two worlds are divided by a formidable barrier, which seems to arouse intense ambivalence. This symbol structure may be depicted as shown in Table 1.

I hypothesize that this symbol structure corresponds to three dimensions of experience in Chinese political culture: moral, social, and psychological. The *moral* implications are perhaps most easily apparent: the upper row represents virtue and the lower row represents evil. The barrier dividing the two rows represents social and psychological inhibitions against deviation. China is what anthropologists term a “shame” culture, in which virtue is promoted by assuring universal acceptance of a set of norms and by making behavior maximally public, so that any deviant is instantly confronted by unanimous reproof, just as any act of heroism is greeted by widespread applause. Those human impulses that conflict

<sup>58</sup>*KMJP*, March 23, 1967, in *JPRS*, no. 41450, pp. 53–54.

<sup>59</sup>“Learn to Swim While Swimming,” *JMJP* editorial, August 17, 1966.

<sup>60</sup>*JMJP*, June 7, 1966, cited in Chuang, *Great Proletarian*.

<sup>61</sup>“Chairman Mao’s Important Instructions” (n.d.), in *JPRS*, no. 49826, p. 23. For a psychoanalytic perspective on “chaos” see Richard Solomon, “Mao’s Effort to Reintegrate the Polity: Problems of Authority and Conflict in the Chinese Social Process,” in *Chinese Communist Politics in Action*, ed. A. Doak Barnett (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1968), pp. 271–365.

<sup>62</sup>Red Guards of Tsinghua Middle School, Peking, “Long Live the Revolutionary Rebel Spirit of the Proletariat” (June 24, 1966), quoted in *Hung-ch’i*, no. 11 (August 21, 1966), p. 27.

Table 1. Polemical Symbol Structure

Appearance	Light	Publicity	Purity	Activity
Reality	Darkness	Concealment	Filth	Passivity

with public norms must either be repressed or allowed some form of surreptitious or symbolically transformed expression. In such a political culture, any liberalization of normative controls would allow two distinct "worlds" to become publicly visible where only one had been apparent before, and make the barrier between them subject to challenge. Though liberalization might thus threaten moral havoc by subverting conventional controls on immorality, it may also serve a reformist function, stripping public life of the hypocritical moral veneer that often conceals private corruption.

The *psychological* dimension of the symbol structure seems to correspond to the defense-mechanism of repression, in which the world of light represents the realm of conscious freedom and the world of darkness the repressed. Public communications are of course more pervasively censored in China than in pluralistic systems, not by a secret police network but no less effectively by various social controls, and repression is therefore socially instrumental. Two impulses that had been most stringently repressed (as indeed they are to some degree in most societies) were sex and aggression. The imagery of a confrontation between two opposing (and yet strangely attracted) forces, separated by a taboo barrier, the penetration of which is destructive yet compulsory, dangerous and yet thrilling, seems too patently sexual to ignore.<sup>63</sup> This is the imagery of adolescents in one of the world's most puritanical cultures, suddenly freed from kinship and social bonds and permitted to intermix freely while roaming the country almost at will.<sup>64</sup> Notwithstanding the positive value placed on "struggle," aggression is normally prohibited in China and allowed expression only under highly regimented conditions.<sup>65</sup> Following the withdrawal of Par-

ty work teams in late July 1966 as a result of a disagreement among Party leaders, control of aggression seemed for the time being to pass from elites to the masses and to assume an openly anti-authoritarian character.

The *social* dimension of the symbolism corresponds to what Liu calls a "political culture of dualism": the Chinese masses have been persistently taught to cultivate "boundless love" and self-sacrifice for the "people" and "boundless hate" for the "enemies of the people."<sup>66</sup> "Contradictions among the people" may arise, but should be resolved through "principled struggle," which is "nonantagonistic" (i.e., nonviolent); but "contradictions between the people and the enemy" must be fought out in an "antagonistic" or "class struggle," which is violent and unprincipled. As long as these distinctions were applied by a disciplined Party organization they could be construed with some tactical flexibility, permitting the Red Army to treat KMT prisoners of war with extraordinary leniency during the Chinese civil war, for example. But when they became assimilated into the popular political culture, their application lent an implacable rigidity to escalating social antagonisms.

Altogether, then, the polemical symbolism of the Cultural Revolution had at least three semantic dimensions, which may be depicted as follows:

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lights to be turned on within minutes after they receive an order. Each of the paving stones in the T'ienanmen Plaza are numbered, so that students can be given standing orders to form great ideographs and geometrical patterns (e.g., "Fifty students from X Commune stand from A-13 to A-15."). The march routes and dispersion points are all designated in advance (e.g., "When the demonstration is over, the W Commune shall turn at the corner of X, march down Y street and disperse when they reach the buses waiting at point Z."). When certain paving stones are removed and a blue canvas tent is erected, certain parts of the road become public lavatories that can accommodate about 30 people within 10 minutes (the lavatories are directly connected with the sewage system). Since the masses become thirsty from shouting slogans and singing songs, first-aid teams are dispersed throughout the crowd, and stands serving hot water are set up, including a red-colored antiseptic solution to disinfect the cups. *Yomiuri*, February 25, 1965, trans. in *Daily Summary of the Japanese Press*, March 3, 1965, p. 16.

<sup>66</sup>Liu, *Political Culture*, pp. 24–31.

<sup>63</sup>My interpretation that this is defloration symbolism is independently corroborated by John Weakland, "Chinese Film Images of Invasion and Resistance," *China Quarterly*, 47 (July-September, 1971), 438–471.

<sup>64</sup>Ling's sensational accounts (*Revenge*, pp. 14, 31, 30, 119, 121, 146, 250, 332–333) are of dubious authenticity. But see Chou En-lai's statement in Edgar Snow, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 45.

<sup>65</sup>A Japanese reporter made these observations on a Peking rally in support of North Vietnam in 1965: The buildings in Peking along Ch'ang-an street are equipped with red flags to be hung and illuminated

Table 2. Semantic Dimensions of the Polemical Symbolism

	Moral	Psychological	Social
World of Light	Heroism	Freedom	The People
World of Darkness	Evil	Repression	The Enemy

Each of these dimensions contained an unwelcome and hitherto invisible contradiction: unwelcome because it contravened the socialist normative objective of “leveling” social differences, hitherto invisible because it was unwelcome. The polemics of Cultural Revolution called these and many other unwelcome contradictions in Chinese political life to public attention—such as the “three great differences” between mental and manual labor, between the city and the countryside, and between industry and agriculture—and proposed a method of resolving them. These contradictions found their symbolic expression in the barrier dividing the two “worlds.” By overcoming one’s fears and “smashing” the “frames,” the Maoist symbolism suggested, these differences could be surmounted, ushering in the Communist utopia.

This symbolic transmutation of reality, while it involved tremendous oversimplification, nevertheless provided a highly effective inducement for mass mobilization. The dynamics of the process that subsequently unfolded will be analyzed in greater depth in the next section, but a few of the problems inherent in this symbolism may be briefly mentioned. First of all, the three semantic dimensions were not entirely parallel. From a moral point of view, penetration of the taboo barrier would be necessary to eliminate hypocrisy and the vice it conceals, but from a psychological perspective penetration can emancipate feelings and impulses that had been repressed and reestablish contact with forbidden but fascinating aspects of the self. This repressed dimension of experience was obviously the home of some extremely powerful emotions, which motivated the young rebels to their most idealistic (as well as their most foolhardy) acts. From a social/political perspective, the symbolism legitimated revolt against oppressive authority, and yet this also meant unleashing the “ghosts and monsters” to mingle among the “people,” an intolerably confusing prospect. This ambiguity of consequence may help to account for the ambivalence about the purpose of “smashing the frames” noted previously.

Second, the specific substantive content of each dimension proved to be vague and uncertain, with no dimension more uncertain than the social. If doctrinal criteria are accepted, the “friend/enemy” distinction should correspond

to the distinction between proletariat and bourgeoisie, of course, but these class categories were based on Marx’s analysis of late nineteenth-century European capitalist industrial economies, already requiring substantial revision to make sense of a centralized bureaucratic empire with a largely peasant base, let alone the confusion that succeeded the fall of the empire. These complications were compounded by the fact that China had already undergone the socialization of its economic infrastructure in the 1950s, obviating any objective economic basis for sorting the Chinese populace into distinct classes. Inasmuch as the logic of the previous classifications no longer seemed compelling, people began to sort themselves into classes anew based on their own estimates of their relative positions on the stratification hierarchy: Party and government functionaries became conscious of their oppression and rebelled against their committee or bureau chiefs; and even Central Committee and Politburo members divided into subjective bourgeoisie and proletarians. Much of this uncertainty and confusion may be attributed to the utter breakdown of organizational discipline.

### Cultural Revolution: The Process

How did the polemical idea system affect strategy and tactics during the Cultural Revolution in comparison to more obviously political considerations? Surely much of the Red Guard strategy may be explained by reference to a “rational-choice model,” without necessary recourse to political cultural variables. In the balance of power between Red Guards and authorities, the latter had overwhelming political advantages, which they were however officially forbidden to use to interfere with mobilization or to protect their own interests; under these circumstances, it was tactically effective for the Red Guards to make maximum use of publicity to dramatize their “underdog” position and call attention to clandestine attempts by authorities to stifle them. Since they were powerless, to extort concessions from hostile authorities could only be viewed as a temporary and unreliable stopgap; the only way to ensure a permanent redistribution of values was to “seize power!”

If the ends selected by Red Guards seem intelligible in terms of a rational-choice model,

the *means* they chose to attain them were notoriously counterproductive. As cases in point, Red Guard tactics of struggle consistently tended toward factional *polarization* and *anarchy*. Although both of these tendencies are irrational in terms of rebel objectives, I shall show how each follows logically from the symbol structure.

**Polarization.** In most conflict arenas, the “free market” of numerous competing conflict groups lasted only a few months after Red Guard organizations were officially sanctioned on August 18, 1966, thereafter giving way to tendencies toward attrition of intermediate groups and polarization into “two opposing factional organizations” locked in a conflict spiral.<sup>67</sup> For example, in Peking a conflict between the Geology Institute and Peking University soon engaged all other local Red Guard organizations on one side or the other and escalated to sustained warfare between what became known as the Heaven and Earth factions; in Kwangtung, the struggle became polarized between the East Wind and the Red Flag factions; in Kwangsi, between “April 22nd” and “Alliance Command”; in Yünnan, between “August 23rd” and “Yünnan Alliance”; and in Fukien, between the “Revolutionary Rebels” and “August 29th.”<sup>68</sup> Such polarization was inconsistent with the interests of the groups as described in the first section, for pursuit of group interests would logically lead to competition among more than two factions. Polarization also militated against the revolutionary objectives common to all factions, making it impossible to “unite 95 per cent of the people and cadres against 5 per cent of the enemy”; in most arenas the two sides were so evenly matched that neither side could destroy the other, with the result that confrontation devolved into extended siege warfare broken by occasional sorties. Mao could not understand this tendency toward polarization, because he discerned no substantive issues at stake between the two factions: “There is no fundamental clash of interests within the working class,” he told representatives of two contending factions. “Why should they be split into two big irreconcilable organizations? I

<sup>67</sup>*Current Scene*, 6 (May 15, 1968).

<sup>68</sup>For analyses of the Peking and Kwangtung conflicts see Hong Yung Lee, “The Political Behavior of the Radical Students and Their Social Characteristics in the Cultural Revolution,” *China Quarterly*, 63 (September 1975); for a brief summary of Red Guard activities in the other provinces see Victor C. Falkenheim, “The Cultural Revolution in Kwangsi, Yünnan and Fukien,” *Asian Survey*, 9 (August, 1969), 580–597.

don’t understand it; some people are pulling the strings. This is invariably the result of the manipulation by capitalist-roaders.”<sup>69</sup>

I would argue that this polarizing tendency derived at least in part from the dichotomous syntactic structure of the rhetoric, which in effect denied the possibility of intermediate positions, placing all terms referring to such positions between inverted commas, indicating their nominal or hypocritical character. Within the conceptual framework that the Red Guards in both factions consistently used to order their arguments (and probably their thoughts), it became impossible to draw subtle distinctions; only a zero-sum choice between “bourgeois” and “proletariat” could be made. In a given arena, the conflict inexorably polarized to fit the participants’ two-class model of the situation:

As the two armies face each other, large posters with such slogans as “Provincial Revolutionary Rebel Joint Committee [PRRJC] is very good!” and “Sentence PRRJC to death!” are put up in the streets all of a sudden, and the whole city is resounding with such slogans as “PRRJC is finished” and “PRRJC is growing up amidst curses!” At this critical juncture every revolutionary comrade, every organization, and the political forces of every faction must clearly indicate his attitude and choose sides.

Should the PRRJC really be “Sentenced to death?”

This is a question that must be answered unequivocally.<sup>70</sup>

Although the vivid antipodal imagery indeed made this an urgent question, it contained no answer, tending rather to sustain each faction’s faith in its own righteousness and its opponent’s perfidy. The polemical rhetoric provided a set of conceptual “trenches” confronting each other, so to speak. It did not specify who should occupy which positions (this was usually decided on the basis of group interests), nor did it contain any instructions about how peace might be negotiated.

**Anarchism.** Rebel anarchic tendencies were a result of certain basic incongruities that have developed in post-revolutionary China between the ideologically legitimate criteria of stratification and its objective reality, and the consequent attempt by Red Guards to reclassify people into classes on the basis of categories

<sup>69</sup>“Chairman Mao’s Later Supreme Instructions During His Inspection Tour,” *Cheng-fa hung-ch’i* [Politics and Law Red Flag], Canton, combined issues nos. 3–4 (October 17, 1967).

<sup>70</sup>“Kwangtung Rebel Joint Committee Proclamation,” *Kuang-tung chan-pao* [Kwangtung Battle News], February 22, 1967, in *JPRS*, no. 41450, pp. 79–82.



inherent in the polemical symbolism. This attempt at reclassification more accurately reflected the emerging bases of cleavage in Chinese society, but proved incompatible with the doctrinal underpinnings of Communist authority and ultimately had to be compromised.

By the mid-1960s, at least two serious cleavages had arisen in Chinese society that the Marxist theory of class stratification could not comprehend, based as it was on economic criteria of differentiation. The first was the "class struggle" between a hereditary bourgeoisie and proletariat, a *status* distinction still legitimated in terms of an economic analysis of pre-revolutionary capitalism.<sup>71</sup> The class labels affixed during land reform had become hereditary, and certain "classes" were systematically discriminated against on the basis of bloodlines.<sup>72</sup> The second was the estrangement between the ruling elite and the masses, a *political* distinction legitimated in terms of the exclusive vanguard role of the Communist party. Mao began mooted the political cleavage as early as 1959, criticizing some of his colleagues for "bureaucratism"; and Liu Shao-ch'i apparently tried in the early 1960s to overcome the hereditary cleavage between status-groups by "extinguishing class struggle" and absorbing the most productive elements of the former bourgeoisie into the proletariat, but neither issue became a matter of extensive public controversy until the Cultural Revolution.

During the Cultural Revolution, a critique based on the implications of the psychological and moral dimensions of the polemical symbolism provided the basis for controversy concerning both unresolved cleavages. The psychological dimension implied that repression is outrageous and repressed impulses must be emancipated. The moral dimension implied that conventional taboos should be breached and clandestine evil exposed and eliminated. Translated into political terms this meant that any form of domination—whether based on economic, status, or political criteria—is illegitimate, and that any victim of repression is justified in rebelling. Any attempt by authorities to preserve their internal lines of communication intact signals covert immorality and warrants exposure. Thus did the symbolism define the enemy on the basis of his power position vis-à-vis the self, and suggest a way to

"topple" him by exposing his inner workings to the paralyzing light of public scrutiny.

The Cultural Revolution marked the first challenge to the post-1949 stratification system to meet with some measure of success, thanks largely to cleavages within the elite. Members of the Central Cultural Revolution Group initially encouraged the radical groups in disavowing the principle of class inheritance, forming common cause with them in attacking the Party establishment, which children of the proletariat had a vested interest in protecting. But the issue never really found resolution at the highest levels, apparently because the regime's doctrinal and political ties to the proletarian "estate" were so strong that this commitment could not be forsaken without a basic revision of the Marxist theory of the State. In addition, the theory of class implicit in the symbolism gave rise to excesses in rectifying the elite-mass gap that the Maoists were not prepared to countenance. Whereas for Mao, revolutionary officials could still be differentiated from "capitalist-roaders" on the basis of their unselfishness and convivial affinity for the masses, for the Red Guards, lacking sufficient information for such fine discriminations, the two classes were defined in more consistently structural terms, according to which those in authority were almost unexceptionally suspected of being "bourgeois." This not only led logically to the purge of most officials with any experience at running the country (i.e., the incumbents), but also made it impossible to establish any authority whatever. If one Red Guard group managed to "seize power" it would promptly be assaulted by another Red Guard group, which denounced the former in the same symbolism previously used against the authorities. Mao observed this development with considerable dismay: "The Shanghai People's Council offices submitted a proposal to the Premier of the State Council in which they were asked for the elimination of all chiefs," he observed. "This is extreme anarchy; it is most reactionary. Now they do not wish to refer to anyone as chief of such-and-such; they call them orderlies and attendants. . . . Actually, there always have to be chiefs."<sup>73</sup>

As the implications of the rhetoric became inescapable, the Maoists undertook a series of compromises to blunt its polarizing and anarchic tendencies. I shall confine my attention to those compromises designed to cope with the force of the symbol system, since the various organizational adjustments (e.g., the

<sup>71</sup>See Richard C. Kraus, "The Evolving Concept of Class in Post-Liberation China" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1974).

<sup>72</sup>See for example Lai Ying, *The Thirty-sixth Way: A Personal Account of Imprisonment and Escape from Red China*, trans. Edward Bahr and Sidney Liu (New York: Doubleday, 1969).

<sup>73</sup>"Chairman Mao's Speech at His Third Meeting with Chang Ch'un-ch'iao and Yao Wen-yüan" (February 1967), in *JPRS*, no. 49826, pp. 44–45.

changing percentages of Red Guards, PLA men, and rehabilitated cadres on Revolutionary Committees) have been adequately treated elsewhere.

First, the Maoist leadership decided to focus national attention on a "small handful" of capitalist-roaders as "condensation symbols" who would absorb the brunt of the critique and exempt others from further attack. Thus on February 23, 1967, *Red Flag* stressed that "the overwhelming majority of cadres at all levels" were "good or comparatively good" and that criticism should henceforth be concentrated on "China's Krushchev" (viz., Liu Shao-ch'i).<sup>74</sup> Beginning on April 1, a national criticism campaign was launched against Liu in all official media, with the proclaimed intention of deflecting criticism from secondary targets and mitigating factional conflict. This technique seems to have been temporarily successful in absorbing polemical energies, but as it became less plausible that Liu posed any real threat to Mao, Red Guard units tended to ignore Liu, or to adopt him as a symbol for their local opponents, leading to a paradoxical intensification of factionalism.

Second, a campaign was launched,<sup>75</sup> reaching particular intensity in the fall of 1967 and 1968, to transform the polemical disposition toward the taboo "barrier" from a counterphobic to a more conventionally pious one.<sup>76</sup> Increasingly, verbs of violent penetration were replaced by verbs suggesting passive appreciation of the utility of existing arrangements, such as "learn," "study," and "produce." While counterphobic verbs still appeared, the leadership now sought to turn them against the self. Red Guards were told to "dare to rebel against all the things in their minds which do not conform to the Thought of Mao Tse-tung . . . to let the proletariat seize power in their minds" and "revolutionize the self" [*ko tzu-chi-ti ming*, alternately phrased *tzu-wo ko-ming*.]<sup>77</sup> This form of revolution was compatible with a political quietism that left the incumbent hierarchy intact, a form of revolution that could even be performed by penitent cadres: "The fact that a cadre who has made errors can turn from his former adherence to the bourgeois

reactionary line, can fight back fiercely against this line and rise up to make rebellion, shows that he has changed his standpoint," a usually leftist journal editorialized. "This 'going over' is a revolution . . . against the viruses of the bourgeois reactionary line in one's mind."<sup>78</sup>

Using such symbolic techniques, the Maoist leadership gradually edged toward a more moderate position, occasionally backtracking to avoid a rightist reversal of verdicts (which ultimately occurred to a considerable extent anyhow). Those elites who remained true to the more uncompromising vision implicit in the polemical symbolism were purged; those Red Guards who continued to struggle (usually against other Red Guards) to achieve that vision were eventually subdued by Mao's Thought propaganda teams and rusticated.

The purpose of this section on process was to show how the symbols of the Cultural Revolution were used by its participants to inform their actions. I am not adopting the Whorfian argument that language is fate, that man is predestined to realize the implications of his native linguistic categories. It seems more reasonable to assume, however, that language deliberately selected for this purpose can provide general guidelines for social movement in the context of widespread uncertainty. This is particularly so if an artificially coercion-free environment is fostered by the leadership, and if the masses are provided access to a mass media network through which they may disseminate their polemics. Of course the same simplifications that make such language emotionally appealing also give rise to many unintended and paradoxical consequences. Thus we find that whereas Cultural Revolution polemics succeeded in symbolizing and legitimating the expression of the masses' repressed grievances and demands, and in bringing to light many deep moral dilemmas in Chinese political culture that had previously been ignored, it also unleashed strong tendencies toward polarization and anarchy. These tendencies, seemingly irrational and previously unexplained, made it impossible to coordinate an effective solution to the problems that the polemics disclosed.

### Conclusion

In conclusion I return to the themes heralded in the title. What contributions did polemical symbolism make to thought reform and cultural revolution in China? The first is an essentially psychological question regarding the lasting impact of the Cultural Revolution on

<sup>74</sup>"Revolutionary Cadres Must Be Treated Correctly," *Hung-ch'i* editorial, no. 3 (February 23, 1967).

<sup>75</sup>*Hung-ch'i*, no. 15, 1967; "The Great Historical Tide," *JMJP* editorial, September 22, 1967; Mao Tse-tung, "Instruction Given During Inspection Tour," *JMJP*, September 14, 1967.

<sup>76</sup>Cf. Otto Fenichel, "The Counterphobic Attitude," *Collected Papers* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), pp. 163-174.

<sup>77</sup>*JMJP*, February 8, 1967, in *JPRS*, no. 41147.

<sup>78</sup>*Wen Hui Pao* editorial, February 18, 1967, in *JPRS*, no. 41450.

the lives of its participants, whereas the second is concerned with the political cultural implications of the mass criticism movement itself.

As a form of collective thought reform, the Cultural Revolution is distinguished by its abandonment of "directive" therapy within a small-group context and other highly organized techniques, and its substitution of "nondirective" therapy operating within a communication network temporarily freed from authoritative constraints. The focus is on the transformation of symbols, under the assumption that the political culture and the individual psyche will change accordingly. These symbols are manipulated to foster the internalization of norms and the simultaneous catharsis of previously repressed grievances against targets of criticism. Through the combination of exhortation and catharsis, "norms and values," on the one hand, become saturated with emotion, while the gross and basic emotions become ennobled through contact with social values.<sup>79</sup> Without exhortation, catharsis would be illegitimate; but without catharsis, exhortation would become preachy and ritualized. In previous movements, catharsis was disciplined by the Party apparatus—targets were preselected, and expression of criticism was restricted to official media and cadre-directed small groups—with resulting tendencies toward ritualization.<sup>80</sup> The sudden relaxation of organizational discipline permitted the cathartic function to assume greater prominence than it had in previous movements, giving the Cultural Revolution its superior spontaneity and vitality.

The purpose of the process is to "learn," but in a moral-emotional rather than an intellectual sense. Catharsis seems to facilitate this type of learning by dissipating emotional resistance to new moral commitments through a scapegoat and by permitting some degree of immediate impulse gratification. According to Worsley, this is characteristic of millenarian movements:

In order to flout the old values, men have to summon up extra untapped sources of energy and resolution; when they have done the act which creates this energy, they are bound together in mutual guilt and mutual support in opposition to all those who still accept the old beliefs. . . . The role of ritual obscenity in

<sup>79</sup>Victor Turner, "Symbols in Ndembu Ritual," in *Sociological Theory and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Dorothy Emmet, p. 162; see also Turner's *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 19–47; and *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 37.

<sup>80</sup>Cf. Martin K. Whyte, *Small Groups and Political Ritual in China* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1974).

providing an occasion for the statement and the reinforcement of moral norms is well-known from many societies, but here it has a revolutionary content, the statement of a new morality.<sup>81</sup>

In Worsley's view, while millenarian movements may be successful in promoting the internalization of new norms, they are less successful in providing the participant with the authentic insight into the meaning of the process he has undergone. Conflicts and resistances are resolved, and moral lessons are learned, not because of the knowledge that the participants progressively acquire of them, but because participation in the movement makes possible a specific experience deemed to have *intrinsic* value. But this would appear to be too harsh a verdict to render on the Cultural Revolution. The movement touched off an explosion of information concerning virtually every aspect of the Chinese political system, providing the younger generation with enhanced political insight and considerable skill.<sup>82</sup> The experience was given an edge of cynicism by the movement's somewhat repressive sequel, but this is perhaps also a valuable political insight.

The most lasting and important contribution of the polemical symbolism to Chinese political culture may be to enrich and enliven the vocabulary of public controversy. Richard Wilson, in a study of Chinese political symbolism, remarked that there are no symbols "available in the Chinese cultural milieu around which forces of opposition may coalesce and which may serve as foci of loyalty."<sup>83</sup> During the Cultural Revolution potent symbols of opposition were invoked, but Wilson is correct insofar as these symbols did not invite forces of opposition to coalesce around them or serve as "foci of loyalty." They were symbols of evil whose ignominious defeat was foreordained, and everyone was anxious to avoid the roles that they "labeled." Yet just the same, this antipodal symbol structure did contribute three significant aspects of political opposition to the Chinese political culture:

<sup>81</sup>Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of "Cargo" Cults in Melanesia* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1957), pp. 250–251. The writings of Frantz Fanon may also be relevant here.

<sup>82</sup>Andrew Watson, "A Revolution to Touch Men's Souls: The Family, Interpersonal Relations and Daily Life," in *Authority, Participation and Cultural Change in China*, ed. Stuart Schram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 291–331; also Ross Terrill, *800,000,000: The Real China* (New York: Dell, 1971), pp. 51–61.

<sup>83</sup>Richard W. Wilson, "The Learning of Political Symbols in Chinese Culture," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 3 (July–October, 1968), 241–257.

First, it offered a means of resolving an elite impasse and generating support for a systematic "line" of policies, regaining popular legitimation and a sense of momentum. In somewhat the same way that a European system resolves a cabinet crisis by dissolving parliament and calling new elections, a deadlocked Chinese regime may hereafter decide to air disputed decisions before a mass forum and seek a new "mandate."

Second, it heightens expectations at both mass and elite levels that authoritative decisions may be made through conflict, thereby preparing the way for the possible future legitimation of political conflict and political opposition. At the mass level, the people have become aware that systematically articulated policy alternatives are available and that the apparently monolithic character of their leadership probably conceals intense debate about these alternatives. By taking the initiative on an ambiguous policy at the grassroots levels the masses may hope to present their undecided superiors with a successful *fait accompli* and gain elite backing. At the elite level, the polemical symbolism seems to have led to more frequent and intractable factional cleavages, at least if the record of political infighting since the Cultural Revolution is any indication. Thus even though no one wishes to assume the opposition role, the polemical symbolism does seem to have increased the incidence of opposition at both mass and elite levels.

Third, the polemics provide an opportunity for repressed demands and grievances to be openly breached without fear of reprisal. Normally, sanctions are attached to the publication of bad news, seriously compromising the statistical and journalistic reporting media. But the polemical rhetoric legitimates the manifestation of all sorts of unwelcome contradictions in socialist society, under the sole proviso that blame be attributed to the appropriate scapegoat. Not only is injustice brought to light, but the most intransigent bureaucratic impediments to its rectification may be removed by direct mass action. To be sure, like all polemics, the rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution has shown itself to be far more effective in exposing problems than in proposing workable solutions.

Perhaps the most serious defects of the Cultural Revolution as a form of cultural revolution concern the role of the target and

the lack of formal institutionalization. To what extent target selection is based on the target's cumulative voting record and to what extent on the constellation of political circumstances at the moment of his selection is still impossible to determine definitively, but in any case it seems unfair to pin the sole responsibility on one man for the myriad faults of the ruling apparatus over a long period of time. Once the target is selected, the intensity and bipolar structure of the polemical symbolism seem to press inexorably toward his political destruction and to preclude self-criticism as an acceptable *dénouement*. This is of significance not only for the target's personal career but for the outcome of the movement as a whole, which, deprived of any symbolic model of normative reintegration through expiation, tends to escalate and to polarize with absolute implacability. The polemical lexicon contained few resources for compromise, and controversy intensified unabatedly until the elites enforced *de facto* martial law.

Formal institutionalization is anathema to the polemical symbolism, with its animus against frames and barriers, and yet without some form of institutionalization the movement is, to change the metaphor, like a tide that ebbs and flows without leaving any permanent mark. As soon as the tide ebbs the bureaucrats who man the institutions may acclaim its regenerative impact but they may also start building dikes to ensure their survival when the tide flows again. Thus the Cultural Revolution set in motion a reaction that dispersed much of its mass constituency to the countryside, eliminated several of its most prominent elite supporters, and led to the renaissance of many old institutions, policies, even personnel, with little lasting institutional change.

Still, the Cultural Revolution lives on as a precedent, and its symbolism has become a part of the Chinese political culture, a public resource to be drawn upon by its people when need and opportunity arise. Mass criticism may also serve political functions for elite symbol specialists, but as long as the revolutionary transformation of Chinese political culture remains a serious objective it must contain an element of catharsis, inviting the "ghosts and monsters" of Chinese society to reemerge from their repressed oblivion in dramatic confrontation with the light of the norms.