Performative Politics and Petrified Image –
The Mao Cult during China’s Cultural Revolution

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“This land so rich in beauty
Has made countless heroes bow in homage
But alas! Qin Shihuang and Han Wudi
Were lacking in literary grace,
And Tang Taizong and Song Taizu
Had little poetry in their souls;
And Genghis Khan,
Proud Son of Heaven for a day,
Knew only shooting eagles, bow outstretched.
All are past and gone!
For truly great men
Look to this age alone.”

Snow, Mao Zedong
(Translation in Mao Tsetung Poems, 1976)
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Preface

The present dissertation is the product of an unlikely combination of factors. It is a historical work on modern China written completely from Chinese sources at an institution without a single Chinese book. The topic it deals with like no other is associated with the Cultural Revolution and yet has sparked only marginal scholarly interest. The original idea resulted from an e-mail exchange with Michael Schoenhals (Lund University, Sweden) in early 2003 about a number of obscure documents relating to the veneration of Comrade Men He, one of the Cultural Revolution’s foremost model heroes. As no predefined body of texts existed or, to put it differently, not even the type of sources from which to draw evidence on the cult could be clarified in the first place, the initial research for this PhD thesis has consisted of literally digging through stacks of old documents, stencilled drafts, and obscure objects on flea markets, private collections, and finally archives. Many people have contributed to this work by sharing their ideas, comments, and criticism. I explicitly thank my Dissertation Committee members, Professors Johannes Paulmann (Universität Mannheim), who encouraged me from the earliest stages to pursue the project and offered help in all situations, Nicola Spakowski (International University Bremen) for her helpful advice on various issues, and finally Jürgen Osterhammel (Universität Konstanz), who agreed to join the committee despite an incredible workload. I would further like to thank Jean Hung and Ruth Kwok at the Universities Service Center in Hong Kong that hosted me for several months, Roderick MacFarquhar, Nancy Hearst, and the participants of the Sixth Annual Conference on International History at Harvard in March 2006, and the Historical Department at Beijing University that provided me with valuable support. Thanks further to my colleagues at Munich University, especially Professor Hans van Ess, who enabled me to finish this dissertation while taking on the duties as assistant professor. Michael Schoenhals incessantly encouraged the ongoing work through generously sharing his personal archive of Cultural Revolutionary sources and, even more importantly, his unparalleled knowledge of the period. Financial support was granted continuously by the German National Academic Foundation (Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes) and International University Bremen. The largest debt, however, I owe to my family, my wife and daughters, who supported me throughout the whole process of research and writing, and endured my frequent absences and absent-mindedness.

Munich, 30 September 2006
Abbreviations

CCP   Chinese Communist Party

CCRG  Central Cultural Revolution Group

CMC   Central Military Commission

CPSU  Chinese Party of the Soviet Union

CCRD  Cultural Revolution Database

GMD   Guomindang

GPD   PLA General Political Department

HPA   Hebei Provincial Archives

NRGM  New Red Guard Materials (Song Yongyi, ed., 40 vols.)

PLA   People’s Liberation Army

PRC   People’s Republic of China

RGM   Red Guard Materials (Zhou Yuan, ed., 20 vols.)

TASS  Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union
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Introduction

At the turn of the twentieth century the Confucian reformer Kang Youwei set out to describe an ideal future world order in his *Book of Great Equality*. Kang envisioned a society in which emotional bonds had been reduced to a minimum. The creation of a global state was to be realized by overcoming the boundaries of nation, class, or gender, even the distinction between man and animal. Marriage was to be replaced by short-term contracts between individuals while the care for infants and elderly persons was to fall under the duty of specific state institutions. The assignment of work should follow a standard pattern according to age, covering all types of labour within a lifetime. In the Age of Great Equality there would be no personal property or family structures. The differences between the races would have vanished over time through constant crossbreeding, the white and yellow race having proven to be superior. By eliminating all racial, social, and national segregation, Kang hoped to circumvent the dangers of emotion and irrational behaviour which had prevented the rule of peace and harmony in the world so far. Among the few things he feared to have a disruptive impact on the state of perfect harmony were both continuing competitiveness among citizens for individual profit and overt laziness given the privileges of the ideal society. But what Kang Youwei feared the most was the rise of “single worship” (独尊), the building of a cult around a religious or secular leader. This kind of worship would threaten the very foundations of the world-state by arousing the passions the new order had tried to overcome. The worship of powerful leaders bore the danger of throwing the world back into the previous turmoil and was to be prevented at all costs.

“If some leaders are idolized, inequalities will gradually return, they will gradually develop into autocratic institutions and slowly lead to strife and murder, until the world relapses into the state of disorder. For that reason, everyone who leads large masses of people and is excessively idolized by them must be vigorously opposed, however enlightened or holy he might be, irrespective of his office or profession, and even if it is the leader of a party. For if someone wishes to become emperor, king, prince, or leader in such a time, he sins against the principle of equality and becomes guilty of the most serious breach of morals. For these worst of all crimes, the public council should incarcerate him.”

Roughly seventy years after Kang wrote his tractate on the ideal world order the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was to be found amidst the struggles of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) after having failed to accomplish a different utopia by leaping from socialism to communism during the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961). Everything Kang Youwei had feared when outlining the catastrophe beyond words measure

seemed to have come true. The state bureaucracy and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), though surely not representing the ideal state Kang would have had in mind, had been attacked at its very foundations. Books and other objects considered to be embodying feudal traditions had been smashed to smithereens and millions of Chinese citizens had fallen prey to political persecution and physical abuse. China had indeed relapsed into a state of utter disorder with innumerable political factions carrying out warfare against claimed agents of revisionism or simply competitors for local power.

It was during these first years of the Cultural Revolution, which has been regarded as one of the greatest miracles in twentieth century world history, that the leader cult around Mao Zedong, Chairman of the CCP, reached its climax. In the autumn of 1966 some 12 million Red Guards, middle and high school students from all over the country, celebrated the Chairman during eight mass rallies in Beijing and set out on their iconoclastic mission to destroy old culture and replace it with a new, Maoist vision of society. Yet the aims of the movement remained shrouded in mystery to observers and participants alike. The proclaimed targets of criticism and the goals of the revolution kept changing and turned the claim to Mao’s infallibility into the only unwavering constant. But his cult did not remain static. By late 1968, the “Great Helmsman” of the Chinese Revolution not any longer welcomed students on Tian’anmen square; instead his meetings with “Study-the-important-works-of-Chairman-Mao-activists” received supreme coverage in the media. Simultaneously, nearly every Chinese had to demonstrate revolutionary conviction by means of engaging in ritualistic modes of veneration. The daily study of the Little Red Book, the “Mao Bible”, became a proof of revolutionary loyalty and by means of “asking for instructions in the morning and reporting back in the evening” the concordance of all actions during the day with Mao Zedong Thought had to be testified. “Loyalty dances” and “Quotation gymnastics” sprung up, while during “remembering bitterness” sessions the participants had to contrast the hardships of the past with the sweetness of the present. The celebration of “eating bitterness food” quite literally fulfilled a sarcastic prediction the novelist and critic Lu Xun had made as early as 1925 about the “cattle mentality” of the Chinese:

“At this point, the only wish of the population is to find a Master, a Master who would deign to accept them as his people - no, not even that – who would deign to accept them as his cattle. The people would be ready to eat grass if necessary; all they ask is that the Master point out what direction they must trot.”

The absurdities and “miracles” of the Mao cult during the Cultural Revolution led to an inflationary increase of model heroes and a unique rhetoric of worship that has long since been subjected to ironic reappraisal in China. They are taken as the most extreme examples of the fanatical and irrational nature of the whole period, thus placing the phenomenon of the cult outside the realm of the knowable. The CCP’s restrictive archive policies and the resulting lack of primary sources have further contributed to the domination of narratives about the Cultural Revolution written by victims of the regime that relied on the cult’s excesses to portray the inhumanity of the CCP dictatorship. The cult thus has commonly been portrayed either as a craze for which no one seems to be accountable or as a crude tool of intoxication and brain-washing. Such views based on a totalitarian concept of CCP rule, fail to account for the internal dynamics and changes of the cult during the decade of the Cultural Revolution. They do not answer the rise of new forms of worship, the close linkage between worship and formalism, the power of symbolic representations, and the ways of transmission between state, Party, and populace.

It is the aim of this dissertation to disentangle the complex processes of shaping and sustaining the Mao cult during the Cultural Revolution with a primary focus on the importance of its rhetoric and rituals. The thesis sets out to explore the cult by looking at the interactions between elite politics, the intermediary provincial level, and grassroots implementation. By highlighting the different periods of staging and controlling the cult, the cult is to regain the historicity that is all too often neglected. Before outlining the method and questions of the thesis in detail, a few remarks shall be made concerning the notion of “cult of personality” and its role within Marxist theory. The development and influence of the first Mao cult in the 1940s, which has already been analyzed in great historical detail and with enormous theoretical sophistication, will briefly be recapitulated before assessing recent scholarship on the Mao cult. Finally, the methodology and structure of this thesis will be presented as well as the different types of sources on which it relies.

Modern Personality Cults

The notion of “cult” has become notoriously elusive. It has become a “weasel-word” as the economist and staunch defender of a liberal market order Friedrich August von Hayek once remarked when referring to the usage of the term “social”.

For a recent account see Chang, Jung/Halliday, Jon, Mao. The Unknown Story, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005, 268f, 423f.

swallowing all contents from a hen’s egg through two tiny little teeth holes, its accustomed meaning had been obscured. The classical usage of the term “cult” is closely related to the religious sphere, denoting rather formal, ritualistic elements of the liturgy. Nowadays it has come to include a far broader field of meanings, ranging from sectarian, leader focussed groups over the veneration of persons or objects to fashionable trends and commodities. The latter meanings witness the merging of the terms cult, idol, and fetish, hinting at practises of idolatry and worship of material objects that seem to take on lives of their own.\(^5\) They all are invoked to explain the strange existence of purportedly irrational behaviour associated with alien or religious forms of worship in modern societies.

In a recently published collection of essays on personality cults, Jan Plamper provided a short genealogy of the term “cult of personality” within Western and Russian traditions. He traced the concept back to the early nineteenth century and hints at the decisive influence of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution for the possibility of linking former religious terminology to secular referents.\(^6\) In China the terms referring to the “cult of personality”, *geren chongbai* (个人崇拜) and later *geren mixin* (个人迷信), were transliterations from the Russian expression *kul’t lichnosti* and did not appear in the Chinese media prior to Stalin’s death.\(^7\) While the terms as such were neologisms, they combined previously used expressions for the elevation of a member within the Party like *geren tuchu* (个人突出) with the classical notions for worship/reverence (*chongbai*) or superstition (*mixin*). In modern usage the terms *xiejiao* (邪教) or *zongpai* (宗派) have become the most common translations when referring to religious or sectarian groups like Falun Gong. Yet the existence of earlier expressions such as Kang Youwei’s “single veneration” indicates that the phenomenon of leader cults was by no means new.

The worship of religious or secular leaders is not limited to the twentieth century. In China, the emperor had been worshipped as the Son of Heaven. But besides strict regulations of behaviour, rituals, and ceremonies conducted at the imperial court, the ordinary populace came into little contact with the sphere of the cult. The emperor did not have temples erected in his name or cities named after him during his lifetime, since his legitimacy as a ruler was

\(^5\) For an excellent review of the concept of fetishism and the existence of supposedly archaic or primitive forms of material worship in modern societies see Böhme, Hartmut, *Fetischismus und Kultur*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2006. While this thesis confirms Böhme’s findings in many aspects, the Mao cult differs from his proto-typical description of the Stalin cult (p.155-181), especially regarding the aesthetisation of politics through an elaborate architecture of power supplementing the leader cult.


\(^7\) In Taiwan, the phrase does not seem to have found a similar impact, as a recent study on the Chiang cult claims that there is no Chinese equivalent for the Russian term; see Taylor, Jeremy E., *The Production of the Chiang Kai-shek Personality Cult, 1929-1975*, in: The China Quarterly 185 (2006), 98, n.10.
deeply intertwined with the concept of a mandate of heaven, the worship of ancestors, and ritual offerings to various deities that restricted the glorification of the emperor himself. Besides certain taboo-words and prostration rules, the cult was confined to a small circle of people in the emperor’s immediate surrounding. Within the Chinese popular tradition, on the other hand, there are numerous examples of rebel leaders cultivating excessive personality cults, like the twelfth century “patriot-robber” Zhong Xiang, who during the warfare between the invading Jurchen and the Song-Dynasty was worshipped as “father” by the masses.8 Another prominent example was the messianic cult of Hong Xiuquan. Hong considered himself to be the incarnation of Jesus younger brother and was worshipped as the “sun” during the Taiping Rebellion (1853-1864).

However, it was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that China witnessed the first truly “modern” personality cult, the cult of Sun Yat-sen that came to provide legitimacy for both Chinese states. During his lifetime already, Sun had come to represent the Chinese Revolution as such and consciously drew on symbolic devices to strengthen his leadership,9 yet to scarce political avail. Although China remained fragmented by the time of Sun’s death in March 1925, his physical remains and image as “father of the nation” (国父)10 came to serve as symbols for a new and united China, and formed the nucleus of the Guomindang’s (GMD) claim for power. Sun’s mausoleum on Purple Mountain in Nanjing, to which his body had been transferred in 1929 after having been temporarily placed to rest in the Temple of Azure Clouds in Beijing’s Western Hills, sought proximity to the tomb of the founder of the last Han-Chinese dynasty, the Ming, and resembled the traditional architectural style of the emperor mausoleums. Little is known yet about the ways in which the burgeoning Lenin cult in the Soviet Union after 1924 influenced the proceedings in China, besides the Chinese request for a huge casket that turned out to be “tasteless”11 and was therefore discarded; the forms of honoring the deceased Sun bore both foreign and distinctively Chinese characteristics. Besides massive media campaigns eulogizing the importance of Sun’s teaching, broadcastings of Sun’s speeches in public parks, and obligatory weekly remembrance meetings in schools, factories, and GMD offices, Sun’s portray was even displayed above the former emperor’s throne in the newly established Palace Museum.
on the first anniversary of his death\textsuperscript{12} and he continued to be honored during the following decades. Both Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong were to rely on the Sun cult to legitimize their own position as heir of the Chinese Revolution.

The cult of Sun Yat-sen is the primary Chinese example of what in the wake of Nikita Khrushchev’s secret speech in 1956 has been termed “modern” personality cults, the “godlike glorification of a modern political leader with mass medial techniques”\textsuperscript{13}, often accompanied by excessive demonstrations of public worship. The main difference between modern and traditional forms of leader cults is therefore not to be observed with regard to the cult’s content but with respect to its intensity and reach. The advent of mass society with the institutions of the modern state like schooling, military, and infrastructure enabled a much more profound influence on the life of every citizen, not least by means of mass media. The rise of the communist movement in China was highly intertwined with state building, literacy campaigns, and the construction of medial networks providing the possibilities of centralized communication and the distribution of national symbols such as the image of Sun Yat-sen and his “Three People’s Principles”. The development of the leader cult in the state media and cultural production has consequently assumed paramount importance in research on leader cults.\textsuperscript{14}

It remains an interesting paradox how the socialist leader cult could develop despite the Marxian emphasis on scientific and rational state building as historian Stephen Kotkin has remarked with respect to the Russian Revolution: “Understanding how an Enlightenment ethos of scientific social engineering and accompanying modern practices of government mixed with a theocratic party-state structure and quasi-religious systems of dogma is probably the principal challenge facing interpreters of revolutionary Russia.”\textsuperscript{15} The personality cult is positioned at the very center of this problem. Kotkin’s observation is applicable to China as well and has been discussed within the Marxist tradition since the days of Karl Marx himself. In his attack on Stalin’s legacy, Khrushchev drew on examples of opposing the elevation of individual leaders by adding a number of quotations from works and letters of Marx, Engels, and Lenin to substantiate their aversion against popular worship. The most famous quote that had already been made public in 1953 when denouncing Stalin’s former aide and head of the

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. 316.
\textsuperscript{14} Besides the aforementioned volumes, see the contributions in Apor, Balázs et al. (eds.), \textit{The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships. Stalin and the Eastern Bloc}, Houndmills, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
detested People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs, Lavrenty Beria, was taken from a private letter Karl Marx had written in 1877:

“[S]uch was my aversion to the personality cult that at the time of the International, when plagued by numerous moves—originating from various countries—to accord me public honour, I never allowed one of these to enter the domain of publicity, nor did I ever reply to them, save with an occasional snub. When Engels and I first joined the secret communist society, we did so only on condition that anything conducive to a superstitious belief in authority be eliminated from the Rules. (Lassalle subsequently operated in the reverse direction).”

Khrushchev could easily have pointed out further references by both Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx directed against the bourgeoning worship of Ferdinand Lassalle within the General German Worker’s Association (Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverband), especially after his premature death in 1864. But as no direct reference to the cult could be found in the major publications of Marx, Engels and Lenin the quotes had to be taken from private letters instead. How to explain the historical phenomenon of the cult conceptually within the Marxist “science” of history therefore remained a major problem for Marxist theorists and historians alike.

Although Marx and Engels expressed contempt for the “lick-spitting” and “insufferable” cult of Lassalle both recognized its enormous potency and public appeal. The same was true for the German social democrat Eduard Bernstein. While his fellow socialist Karl Kautsky blamed leader cults and the ensuing dogmatism for having reduced Marxism “to the status not only of a state religion but of a medieval or oriental faith”, Bernstein in his account of Lassalle’s life conceded that the socialist movement had greatly benefited from the cult’s cohesive power and stressed the modernity of its approach.

“It would, however, be altogether a mistake to deny the fact that this cult for the personality of Lassalle did, for a long time, greatly help the movement. […] Most persons like to see a cause, which, the more far-reaching its aims at any given moment, must seem the more abstract, embodied in one individual. This craving to personify a cause is the secret of the success of most founders of religions, whether charlatans or visionaries, and in England and America it is a recognised factor in political party-struggles.”

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The most penetrating analyses of the leader cult from within the Marxist tradition were proposed from the margins of orthodoxy, as the case of Bernstein reveals. Attention shall be given here to two diametrically opposed Marxist philosophers, Ernst Bloch (1885-1977) and Louis Althusser (1918-1990), who offered highly original explanations for the rise of leader cults. Hitler’s ascendency stimulated Ernst Bloch in the early 1930s to develop a conception of the parallel existence of different layers of temporality or, as he called it, the “contemporaneity” of the “non-contemporaneous”: “Not all people exist in the same Now. They do so only externally, through the fact that they can be seen today. But they are thereby not yet living in the same time with the others.”\(^{22}\) Bloch’s conception of non-contemporaneity encompassed a chaotic assembly of past mentalities and imaginary formations, older class cleavages, spatial differences, i.e. between rural and urban areas, and archaic relics within the sphere of the subjective unconscious. He specifically singled out youth, peasants, and the impoverished middle strata as carriers of non-contemporaneous mentalities, therefore being especially susceptible to the Nazi’s mythical agitation of a Third Reich in order to compensate for their feelings of powerlessness and decline, or the hope for the retrieval of a golden past. This projection of an “illogical space”\(^{23}\) full of unlived wishes and romanticism had through the Nazi agitation been channelled against the Jews as the perceived agents of world-capitalism and had lead many of the sinking strata to abandon “the thin layer of reason of the ‘modern age’”.\(^{24}\) Yet the concept of non-contemporaneity enabled Bloch to hope for a revival of the positive elements of German culture after the fall of the Nazi dictatorship by emphasizing the importance of both the unresolved past and all kinds of utopian thoughts, unrealized dreams, lost possibilities, and abortive hopes. This chaotic assemblage did not merely vanish from the cultural heritage but retained a potential reservoir for future action because “[h]istory is no entity advancing along a single line, in which capitalism for instance, as the final stage, has resolved all the previous ones [contradictions]; but it is a polyrhythmic and multi-spatial entity, with enough unmastered and as yet by no means revealed and resolved corners.”\(^{25}\)

While Ernst Bloch wrote his book *Heritage of our Times* in the early 1930s as a string of fragmented explanations about the historical phenomenon of Hitler’s rise to power, Louis Althusser’s critique thirty years later was directed against the “pseudo-concept”\(^{26}\) of the personality cult as proposed by Khrushchev and particularly against its consequences both

\(^{23}\) Ibid. 102.
\(^{24}\) Ibid. 59.
\(^{25}\) Ibid. 62.
within politics and Marxist philosophy. In a number of essays published between 1960 and 1972, Althusser repeatedly attacked Khrushchev for having failed to distinguish between phenomenological observations and scientific concepts. Khrushchev’s mere description of certain facets of Stalin’s reign had given rise to a tide of right-wing criticism, mostly by re-invoKing notions taken from Marx earlier work like “alienation” and “human rights” instead of emphasizing the role the masses. While it could subjectively be understood that many intellectuals turned to such concepts of “bourgeois ideology” given the ordeals many of them had been through, the dominant trend had according to Althusser diminished the intellectual rigour of Marxist philosophical analysis. Althusser perceived this kind of criticism to be ideological in the Marxian definition of the term, as a “screen” veiling the reproduction of class interests. The occurrence of abuse and probably crimes during the time of the Stalin “deviation” should not blur the fact that the non-concept of the cult of personality did not provide an answer to the causes and conditions which had made their appearance possible in the first place. Instead of restricting analysis to the “violation of Socialist legality”, Althusser proposed to link the phenomenon to superstructure and infrastructure as a whole. A revolution did not necessarily eradicate the existing superstructure at one blow for it had sufficient consistency “to survive beyond their immediate life context, even to recreate, to ‘secrete’ substitute conditions of existence temporarily”. Furthermore, and here Althusser comes very close to Mao’s own considerations at the eve of the Cultural Revolution, “the new society produced by the Revolution may itself ensure the survival, that is, the reactivation, of older elements through both the forms of its new superstructures and specific (national and international) ‘circumstances’.”

Despite the different vocabulary, Althusser’s analysis bears a certain likeness to Bloch’s concept of non-contemporaneity. Both grappled with the existence of supposedly non-rational forms of conduct and singled out the relative independence of the superstructure as the reason for the existence of the seemingly contradictory. The consequences drawn from this insight, however, differed fundamentally. While Bloch hoped to rescue positive elements of the German tradition from the Nazi perversion, Althusser argued for the necessity of increased class struggle. The reasons for Stalin’s mistakes should be detected in the internal contradictions of Stalin’s thought because he had solely emphasized the development of the forces of production as a way of achieving the transition to socialism, without realizing that

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27 Ibid. 55f.
28 Ibid. 80.
29 Ibid. 75.
31 Ibid. 115f.
there was no such thing as a socialist mode of production, only mixtures between capitalist and communist forms. The generation of specialists and bureaucracy for the management of the evolving institutions thus tended to produce a new privileged stratum of experts and ultimately counterrevolution. The internal contradictions accordingly necessitated a perpetuation of class struggle that could not be restricted to what Stalin had perceived to be his primary enemies: imperialists and the old exploiting classes. Instead, class struggle was constantly reproduced from within the system itself. The proximity of Althusser’s conception of the fundamental problems having caused the rise of the personality cult and Mao’s own views on the subject is striking. Althusser accordingly perceived the Cultural Revolution to be an attempt to overcome exactly the reasons that had caused the “Stalin deviation” instead of portraying the movement as a utopian or humanist project, as many other French intellectuals at that time did: “[W]hat ever it was, it was not that.”

“An Annoying Spectacle”

Explanations of the Mao cult, in China and the West alike, usually refer back to two interviews Mao’s long time friend and veteran journalist Edgar Snow conducted with the Chairman shortly before and after the Cultural Revolution’s most violent phase. Snow had first visited the communist “liberated areas” in northern Shaanxi after an adventurous journey in 1936 and had conducted a series of interviews with Mao Zedong that through their publication in Snow’s famous book *Red Star over China* exerted a tremendous impact on the image of Mao in the West and in China as well. The first Chinese translation of the book appeared only four months after the English edition with the Shanghai *Fushe* Publishing House. The most famous chapter “Genesis of a Communist”, retelling Mao’s version of his childhood, appeared even earlier as a separate edition. The image of Mao that Snow depicted in *Red Star over China* was a highly favourable one. Despite Mao’s incredible influence on the communist movement, Snow noted that “while everyone knows and respects him, there is – as yet, at least – no ritual of hero-worship built up around him. I never met a Chinese Red who drivelled ‘our-great-leader’ phrases.”

Upon his return to China in 1965, Snow witnessed a completely changed situation that contrasted unfavourably with his earlier characterization. He explicitly commented on the signs of Mao’s “immoderate glorification” after having been witness to the staging of the

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revolutionary epic *The East is Red* (*Dongfang hong*) in Beijing together with King Zahir Shah and the Queen of Afghanistan.

“Giant portraits of him now hung in the streets, busts were in every chamber, his books and photographs were everywhere on display to the exclusion of others. In the four-hour revolutionary pageant of dance and song, *The East is Red*, Mao was the only hero. As a climax of that performance […] I saw a portrait copied from a photograph taken by myself in 1936, blown up to about thirty feet high.”

The play had been staged by over 2000 actors and was to travel a number of major Chinese cities during the following months. Its central image was the rising red sun associated with communism and Mao Zedong personally, along with innumerable sunflowers which bowed their heads to whatever direction the sun was turning. However, Snow noticed the parallel existence of other leader cults, especially around State Chairman Liu Shaoqi. While watching the mass parade on 1 May 1965, Snow discussed the subject of the cult again with his Chinese hosts, vice-ministers of foreign affairs Gong Peng and Qiao Guanhua. Their explanations highlighted the popular origins and demand for the cult. Three thousand years of emperor worship could not be wiped out in an instant because the peasant mentality still lingered behind: “It takes time to make people understand that Chairman Mao is not an emperor or a god but a man who wants the peasants to stand up like men.”

Snow’s hosts told him about special guards that had been employed in the early years of the PRC at the time of the anniversary parades in order to prevent peasants from prostrating themselves before Mao’s portrait that before the Cultural Revolution had only been used on 1 May and 1 October to decorate Tian’anmen Gate. The level of worship permitted by the authorities and the Chairman himself should thus be considered as a very mild variant, given what it might look like if it had not been restricted.

Five years later Edgar Snow returned to China for a last time. The most chaotic period of the Cultural Revolution had just passed. Mao commented on the publication of Snow’s impressions during his prior visit that had included the portrayal of the burgeoning cult:

“[You] say, I am [fostering] a personality cult. Well, you Americans really are [cultivating] a personality cult! Your capital is called Washington. The district in which Washington is located is called Columbia. […] Disgusting! […] There will always be people worshipping! If there is no one to worship you, Snow, are you happy then? […] There will always be some worship of the individual, you have it as well.”

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36 Ibid. 69.
During Snow’s long conversation with Mao, the argument returned frequently to the topic of the leader cult. Mao in retrospect justified its need at the outset of the Cultural Revolution by claiming that he had been unable to control the Party machinery.

“At that time I said I did not care about personality cults, yet there even was a necessity for a bit of personality cult. The situation now is not the same anymore; the worship has become excessive, resulting in much formalism. Like those “four greats”: ‘Great Teacher, Great Leader, Great Supreme [sic!] Commander, Great Helmsman’ [English in original], annoying! One day these will all be deleted, only keeping the ‘teacher’ [English in original].”

Mao divided the motifs of the cult supporters into three categories: true believers, opportunists, and fake supporters. He admitted that during the period of anarchy in 1967/68 the distinctions had become hard to discern. While a CCP decision of March 1949, forbidding the naming of cities, streets, and places after political leaders was still being followed, the attacks of the Red Guards had brought forth new forms of worship such as signboards, portraits, and statues, which according to Mao’s description had taken on a systematic character, only marginally controlled by the state. “This has developed during the past few years, as soon as the Red Guards stirred up trouble and attacked, it was impossible not to conform to it! Otherwise they would say you are against Mao, ‘anti-Mao’ [English in original]!” In his account of the conversation, Snow concluded his observations by underlining the crucial importance of the cult and its manipulation for understanding the Cultural Revolution. “In one sense the whole struggle was over control of the cult and by whom and above all ‘for whom’ the cult was to be utilized.”

The formation of the Mao cult first started in the late 1930s, when after the disastrous Long March Mao Zedong had gained slowly supremacy within the CCP in the base area of Yan’an in northern Shaanxi. Despite his being among the founding members of the Communist Party, Mao did not hold any important posts within the Party hierarchy until the Long March. At the famous Zunyi politburo meeting in January 1935, Mao became a member of the Secretariat of the Politburo and the Military Council. But his ascent to power was by no means inevitable. There are only sporadic instances before 1942 that hint at a public display of a leader cult. During the struggle with his Soviet-trained and supported rival Wang Ming in mid-1937, a woodcut portrait of Mao Zedong was published in the Communist Party newspaper Jiefang (Liberation) that, as Raymond Wylie observed, already embodied symbols of the later cult: moving masses, flags, and sun-rays as opposed to the static portrayal of other

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
CCP and military leaders.\textsuperscript{41} It closely resembled the photograph taken by Snow the previous year and is thus a first proof for the interrelation between the national and international dimensions of the cult.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure1.jpg}
\caption{Mao woodcut in the Party newspaper \textit{Liberation} (解放), 22 June 1937}
\end{figure}

The cult as a combination of rhetorical flattery and omnipresent imagery only rose to full prominence during the so-called Rectification Campaign in 1942-43 that witnessed the unyielding acceptance of Mao’s status as leader and theoretician of the Chinese Revolution. The campaign consisted of a series of consecutive study and (self)-criticism sessions during which the participants were supplied with a common perception of the present development and the revolutionary goals, as well as with the suitable terminology to describe it. David Apter and Tony Saich have coined the term “exegetical bonding”\textsuperscript{42} for the creation of an integrated vision of the revolutionary process, a “sinified” version of Marxism-Leninism to be officially termed “Mao Zedong Thought” after 1942. While Mao’s writings clearly dominated the study schedule and Mao trustees organised festivities in his honor like the “Zedong Day” on 8 February 1942,\textsuperscript{43} the Rectification Campaign was not the only factor contributing to the rapid increase of the cult. Besides the internal factors its rise was owed to a number of “interrelated domestic and international conditions”\textsuperscript{44} that developed in the winter of 1942-43.


\textsuperscript{43} Compare the detailed history of the Rectification Campaign by Gao Hua, \textit{Hong taiyang shi zenyang sheng qilai de. Yan’an zhengfeng yundong de laolong qumai}, Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2000, 606.

\textsuperscript{44} Wylie, Emergence of Maoism, 194.
After the battle of Stalingrad and the dissolving of the Third Comintern in 1943, the victory of the Allies over Germany and especially Japan had become a matter of time. The enmities between the Guomindang (GMD) and the CCP, which under external pressure had formed the Second United Front against the Japanese invasion in 1937, broke forth again with a vengeance. Both sides intensified their efforts of constructing a vision for China’s future that was at once “distinctly Chinese and undeniably modern”. Simultaneously both political parties championed their respective leaders and the deceased Sun Yat-sen with all means available. In March 1943, Chiang Kai-shek’s book China’s Destiny was published with a massive nationalist campaign portraying Chiang as the only possible national saviour and “leader of nationalities”, as the only person capable of rescuing China from the ruins of factional warfare and foreign aggression. The Communists, who had been closely monitoring the development, reacted by boosting the image of Mao Zedong as the supreme leader of the CCP and eminent Marxist-Leninist theoretician. The elevation of Mao was not only to provide the Communist Party with a powerful symbol to rally around during the campaign but to send a signal to the public beyond the confines of the Yan’an Loess-caves and to attract new followers among China’s mostly illiterate populace. The cult could therefore not have been propagated nationwide without sufficient backing from within the CCP leadership.

The change in the rhetorical style from treating Mao as first among equals towards advocating a full-blown leader cult is best to be seen in a number of speeches and editorials published in the name of high-ranking political and military leaders in the Party newspaper Liberation in early July 1943. Liu Shaoqi, the CCP’s main organizer of resistance against the GMD in the nationalist dominated “white areas”, set the tone by declaring that the Party had finally found its own leader in Mao Zedong, who possessed “unlimited loyalty to the Chinese working class”. In his article Liu consciously took up the term “Mao Zedong Thought” that had come to refer to the writings of Mao and provided it with authoritative backing. All high ranking members of the CCP and the army including Zhu De, Zhou Enlai, Zhang Wentian, and Deng Xiaoping followed with similar eulogies during the next days and proved both their acceptance of the designations and their loyalty to Mao Zedong. Liu Shaoqi’s motives for praising Mao’s genius have been subject to much speculation. He immediately afterwards assumed the position as Number Two within the Party hierarchy, but it seems plausible that along with other Politburo cadres he perceived the necessity of fabricating Mao’s glorious

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45 Ibid. 199.
46 On the propagation of the Chiang cult see Taylor, Chiang cult, 96-110.
48 Wylie, Emergence of Maoism, 206.
49 Gao, Hong taiyang, 608-614.
image in order to counter the GMD claims of representing Chiang as the sole heir to legitimate rule in China,\textsuperscript{50} even against his own conviction that the emulation of individual heroes was counterproductive for the communist cause. That the image of Mao’s infallibility he helped to create would be instrumental in securing Liu’s own downfall two decades later is an irony of history. The political expediency of countering Chiang Kaishek’s claims to national leadership as well as securing inner-Party unity by establishing a larger than life image of Mao Zedong thus from the outset played a crucial role in the formation of the Maoist leader cult. Mao himself offered a similar description of the cult’s origins in a conversation with Edgar Snow in 1970 when being confronted with Snow’s opinion that the cult’s objective had been to personalize power in order to end the factional infighting:

“It has been [a measure] to oppose Liu Shaoqi. In the past it has been [instrumental] to oppose Jiang Jieshi [Chiang Kai-shek], afterwards to oppose Liu Shaoqi. They set up Jiang Jieshi. Therefore we had to set up someone as well. [Should we have] set up Chen Duxiu, impossible; set up Qu Qiubai, impossible; set up Li Lisan, impossible; set up Wang Ming, impossible as well. What to do? [One] had to set up someone to topple Wang Ming. If Wang Ming had not been toppled, the Chinese Revolution would not have been successful. How desperate, how difficult is she, our Party.”\textsuperscript{51}

The process of “setting a person up” by means of mass medial propagation and inner-Party acclamation was thus only one side of the medal. Cult-building was always conceived of as a means of what with regard to Bismarck’s politics against the perceived “state enemies” (\textit{Reichsfeinde}) has been called “negative integration”\textsuperscript{52}, the singling out of a potential or only perceived foe, who did not present a real threat to power but served as a symbol to strengthen the bonds within the ranks of the Party or populace. The example set by Liu Shaoqi’s speech inspired the rise of enormous activities of praise and the composition of panegyrics and hymns, most notably the transformation of former peasant love song into the unofficial hymn of the CCP, \textit{The East is Red}, in 1943:

\begin{quote}
The east is red, the sun is rising,
China has brought forth a Mao Zedong.
He is devoted to the people’s welfare.
Hu-er-hai-yo, he is the people’s great saviour.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{51} Mao, \textit{Huijian Sinuo}, CCRD.
\textsuperscript{52} For the first analytical mention of the term see Sauer, Wolfgang, \textit{Das Problems des deutschen Nationalstaates}, in: Politische Vierteljahrsschrift 3 (1962), 159-186.
The epithet of Mao as “saviour of the people” (人民的救星) was taken up by Gao Gang, the administrative leader of the Yan’an base area, during a congress of labour activists in November 1943 and through the publication of a photograph of the activists presenting Mao with a wooden inscription of the slogan in Liberation on 21 November 1943 the phrase became firmly associated with Mao Zedong. By the time the CCP celebrated its Seventh Congress in 1945, the dual glorification of Mao Zedong and his thought had been well established. Mao’s portrait assumed center stage in the meeting hall and the frequent references to his invincible thought in the delegates speeches demonstrated the outstanding position Mao Zedong had acquired as leader and theorist within the Chinese communist movement. His image as saviour of the Chinese people had been firmly rooted and was to find further nourishment after the successful defeat of the GMD forces and the proclamation of the founding of the PRC on 1 October 1949. The birth of the New China had become inextricably linked with the image of Mao Zedong.

The Mao Cult: State of Research

Leader cults have always played a prominent role in research debates about modern dictatorships. The heavily debated paradigms of totalitarianism, political religion, and charismatic rule have provided frameworks for interpretation. 53 Recent studies of socialist and fascist leader cults have further broadened the spectre by employing interdisciplinary methodology. Especially the improvement of archival research opportunities in the former Soviet Union has prompted a substantial number of works dealing with the Soviet leader cults. Jan Plamper in a recent overview distinguished three different trends among the approaches aiming at an explanation of personality cults: First, universal approaches mainly employed by sociologists and anthropologists relying on the works of Max Weber, Edward Shils, and Clifford Geertz; second, socio-historical explanations focussing on the functional aspects of the cult as a means of integration, and third, the reappraisal of the notion of political religion and sacrality especially in the works of Emilio Gentile. 54 The Cultural Revolutionary cult of Mao Zedong on the contrary, which by its sheer extent surpassed every other twentieth century leader cult, has remained virtually unattended to as subject of a monograph. It has remained a topic that is frequently mentioned in general terms but seldom has been researched in detail. The existing studies have only marginally been affected by the general debates on leader cults and even less have they created any relevant impact on theoretical debates about

53 For a synopsis of the different arguments see Schmiechen-Ackermann, Detlef, Diktaturen im Vergleich, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002, 22-62.
leader cults themselves. In the following, a brief overview about the state of research on the Mao cult shall be provided. The approaches are divided into two categories according to the main focus of explanation: First, structural approaches focussing on long term determinants, and second, actor-based approaches that highlight the functionalist and utilitarian aspects of the cult. As most explanations refrain from strict monocausality, the lines between the different rubrics cannot always be drawn strictly. This overview does not claim completeness but rather aims at highlighting important modes of interpretation by way of providing characteristic examples. Besides attempts trying to explain the cult phenomenon in general terms there are numerous works dealing with specific facets of the cult or cult objects such as cultural relics, badges, and propaganda posters that cannot be treated in detail at this point.

Structural explanations usually refer back to the influence of traditional modes of religious or emperor worship in China, although few have ventured so far as to claim the identity of both. According to Mayfair Yang, the fundamental difference between the traditional emperor worship and the Mao cult as a product of Chinese modernity rested with the cult’s role in dealing with the loss of traditional hierarchies on the level of the collective psyche: “The Mao cult was the product of a culture that had failed to introject, through mourning rituals and verbal acts, the loss of a traditional order in which roles, social relationships, and rank were clearly laid out in a hierarchy that was ritually anchored and centered in the pivotal person of the emperor”. Yet anthropologist Göran Aijmer by analyzing the Cultural Revolutionary symbolic design even proposed that the Mao cult should be seen as a crucial feature of a “millennial attempt to re-establish the way of the ancestors - the traditional centralized Chinese bureaucratic state - using syncretistic rituals.” Early studies of the cult and in fact the only monographs on the Cultural Revolutionary Mao cult included the dissertations of political scientists Robert Rinden and James T. Myers in the late 1960s. Both relied primarily on the official media as sources and emphasized the structural

60 Rinden, Robert W., The Cult of Mao Tse-Tung, Ph.D. dissertation: University of Colorado, 1969, 8ff (unpublished) and Myers, James T., The Apotheosis of Chairman Mao. Dynamics of the Hero Cult in the
similarities between traditional emperor worship and the Mao cult linked by the veneration of Sun Yat-sen. By citing quasi-religious practices and rhetoric such as the all-pervasive metaphor of the “red sun”, analogies between the Mao cult and traditional modes of worship were pointed out. Both works strongly emphasized the political character of the cult but due to the contemporary lack of sources were unable to provide insights into the workings of the cult beyond the confines of official rhetoric. Apart from the early monographies, a number of essays and book chapters have been published on the subject, amongst which Maurice Meisner’s essay is the most revealing. After providing a short genealogy of the term in official Chinese discourse and tracing the rise of public worship in the 1960s, which he described as “patently manufactured product, deliberately contrived from immediate political ends”, Meisner discussed the social origins and functions of the cult. According to Meisner, Mao unlike Stalin was the hero of a national liberation movement and thus commanded enormous prestige especially among the peasants. The cult therefore did not have to be deliberately created but could rely on popular support. Yet during the later stages of the Cultural Revolution the political instrumentalization of the cult was turned into an extreme example of alienating the people’s social power into fetishized political authority, finally leading to the worship of the self-created icons of power. The cult according to Meisner was thus irreducible to political instrumentalization, since its origins and forms were strongly linked to the Chinese peasants.

The rural origins and forms of worship have been prominent in analyzing the Mao cult, for example in articles by Wang Yi and Stefan Landsberger. Both pointed out various relations between religious worship and the Mao cult, ranging from structural features of primitive religion to taking up observations made by Western journalists in the 1940s and 1950s that Mao had come to assume the role of the kitchen god in rural areas. Zhou Qun and Yao Xinrong compared the Cultural Revolutionary Mao cult with the “Mao fever” of the 1990s and reached the conclusion that the cult of the 1960s should be interpreted in line with

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62 Ibid. 183.
traditional ancestor worship, while the Mao craze three decades later rather mimicked the worship of folk ghosts and deities. The hybridity between classical forms of emperor rule and modern state-building has been the subject of numerous works of Stuart Schram on Mao Zedong and his thought. Schram described Mao’s way of governance as oscillating between “Chairman and true ruler”. Arguing against a description of Mao’s role solely in terms of charismatic rule, Schram referred to the growing influence of traditional political culture in Mao’s thought but warned against the drawing of too simple analogies between the emperor worship and the Mao cult. The cult thus remained strangely vague amongst the discussants, unclear of how to define this strange phenomenon reminiscent of the past and yet enacted through the medial infrastructure provided by a modern state supposedly founded a scientific worldview.

Marxist historians have tended to invoke the relative independence of the superstructure in order to explain the recurrence of traditional modes of worship. A recent example is the *Short History of the Cultural Revolution* published by Jin Chunming and Xi Xuan. They explicitly point out the feudal origins of the cult: “The cult of the individual is a rotten relic that has been inherited from the old society. To oppose the cult of personality is the clear line of Marxism-Leninism.” Yet without the corresponding political circumstances these remnants of emperor worship rooted among the peasants and the petty bourgeoisie could never have come to exert such a devastating impact. The political situation, the consent of Mao Zedong himself and the utilitarian motives of a number of “careerists” and “intriguers” within the Party that used the cult for own objectives should be taken into account. Their explanation thus combined a structural element with the strategic employment of the cult for political purposes.

The second large group of approaches can be characterized by the focus on individual actors. Actor-based models emphasize the role played by Mao Zedong himself and highlight questions of legitimacy, charismatic rule, and manipulation. The most elaborate interpretations of the Mao cult as a source of charismatic rule are to be found in Frederick Teiwes’ book *Leadership, Legitimacy, and Conflict in China* and Wang Shaoguang’s *Failure of Charisma*. Teiwes unfolds an analysis of recent Chinese politics based on Max Weber’s distinction between traditional, rational-legal, and charismatic rule. According to Teiwes,

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69 Ibid. 32.
Mao’s rule changed between all three concepts over time, as especially charismatic rule during the early Cultural Revolution turned out to be inherently unstable and was subject to increasing routinization, just as Weber had predicted. Mao’s legitimacy according to Teiwes rested on the interrelation of personal traits, such as Mao’s aloofness and strategic brilliance, and suitable circumstances, amongst which the incompetence of Chiang Kai-shek and many of Mao’s rivals within the CCP turned out to be most important. Since the acceptance of the leader’s legitimacy among the Party elite, according to Teiwes, represented “the crucial factor for survival in Leninist systems”, the demonstrations of unquestioning loyalty during the Rectification Campaign in 1943 through the CCP top echelon provided the background against which the propagation of a personality cult became possible in the first place. By interpreting the cult as a “synthetic” form of charismatic rule basically aimed at the lower level Party members and the populace, Teiwes underlined the constructive character of personality cults, the creation of a myth to serve political ends in which the CCP leadership not necessarily believed. The cult was thus not to be confused with the underlying acceptance of Mao’s legitimacy through his fellow leaders.

Wang Shaoguang, on the other hand, in his case study on the Cultural Revolution in Wuhan pointed at the popular dimension of the cult. Relying on rational choice theory, Wang did not contest the emotional efficacy of the cult in securing support, but he differentiated between an emotional and a cognitive aspect of charismatic rule to demonstrate that the symbols of the cult were not accepted unambiguously. Instead, he emphasized how they became subject to constant reinterpretation. Despite their emotional affection to Mao Zedong, the Chinese during the Cultural Revolution remained “rational true believers”, who placed their personal gains above the interests sketched out in Mao’s nebulous directives. The armed confrontations between various groups therefore continued despite Mao’s call for abandoning factionalism. The “people’s rational calculations seem to have eclipsed their affective attachment to their charismatic leader.” In similar fashion Lynn White in his summary of the organizational causes of the Cultural Revolution described the Mao cult therefore as an index of anxieties rather than as a cause of the Cultural Revolution, and pointed out that the phenomenon is “something to be explained more than something useful for explaining further

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70 Ibid. 45.
71 Teiwes, Frederick C., Leadership, Legitimacy, and Conflict in China. From a Charismatic Mao to the Politics of Succession, Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1984, 46.
effects.” By looking at the different ways symbols and especially class labels came to function, he emphasized the necessity to analyze the historical contexts rather than single expressions of the symbolic language alone, as the availability of symbols revealed nothing “because their opposites were also available.”

The differences between the “dialectic” cult fostered during the Great Leap Forward and its successor during the Cultural Revolution have been taken up by Michael Schoenhals, who characterized the Mao cult during the Great Leap Forward as a kind of novel “emancipation by proxy”. By combining the integrative function of the cult with a higher objective, the Mao cult at the outset of the Great Leap Forward thus could be described as an attempt of what Karl Popper termed “utopian social engineering”. Helmut Martin in his reconstruction of the development of the Maoist canon pointed out the cult’s changing nature and the different goals “served by the use of this instrument”. He distinguished three main functions of the cult: the provision of a coherent ideological orientation for all of China, Mao’s wish for revolutionary immortality, and the cult’s role as a weapon in inner-Party power struggles. Yet he perceived the role of the Maoist writings, the establishment of Mao as an original thinker within Marxist orthodoxy, to be more important than the decorum of the cult. In most functionalist accounts, however, the cult is portrayed basically as a tool serving immediate political purposes. Li Xuekun and Zhang Peihang thus have described how Party members like Kang Sheng manipulated the cult deliberately for own purposes, while recent accounts have accentuated the totalitarian thesis again and explain the cult as the outcome of terror without any popular appeal.

In the early 1980s, Anita Chan, Jonathan Unger, and Richard Madsen produced a series of detailed studies on the local characteristics of the cult by relying on refugee

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74 Ibid. 271.
80 “It was through the Yenan Terror that Mao accomplished another most important goal: building up his own personality cult. […] This worship had nothing to do with spontaneous popularity; it stemmed from terror. Every step in the construction of his cult was choreographed by Mao himself”, see Jung/Halliday, *Mao*, 268f., 423f. For a classical totalitarian description see Michael, Franz, *Mao and the Perpetual Revolution*, New York: Barron's & Woodbury, 1977, 143.
interviews conducted in Hong Kong immediately after the end of the Cultural Revolution.\textsuperscript{81} By tracing the development of the cult in the rural setting of Chen Village from its propagation in 1964 all the way through the end of the Cultural Revolution, the authors described the many facets of the Mao cult and ways of local implementation. The cult thus gained a historical dimension by revealing its changes over time. They showed that “people in rural communities […] play down certain themes in their original culture and emphasize others that fit their contemporary social situation and that they do the same for the modern themes of the official ideology”.\textsuperscript{82} Richard Madsen, in particular, traced how the Mao cult mixed with the existing, predominantly Confucian moral discourse and finally “exploded into absurdity”\textsuperscript{83} during the Cultural Revolution, when the supposed bearers of the doctrine attacked each others violently and thus extinguished the faith in the viability of the cult’s message of selflessness and obedience.

**Interpreting Modern Personality Cults**

The present study has in many been shaped and informed by the results of the aforementioned scholarship. Yet it does not take up the question of legitimacy again in detail, which has been discussed so profoundly in the works of Frederick Teiwes, but looks at the different institutional and individual factors constituting the personality cult as such. The modern personality cult is analyzed as a phenomenon of political communication, the basic characteristics of which are not restricted to communist dictatorships. Quite the contrary, it will be argued that the employment of personalized symbols serving as a focus of loyalty in many ways resembles a rudimentary form of what in modern business parlance could be termed “branding”, the creation of a powerful image to represent a vast organization. If we shortly recall the basic distinguishing features associated with leader cults, the public attribution of all successes to one person, omnipresent flattery, domination of the leader within public imagery, and bodily actions like massive parades or ritualized worship, it seems obvious that we are dealing with a phenomenon of symbolic power embedded in expressions of verbal, visual, and bodily communication. The crux of Khrushchev’s secret speech lies with the fact that while citing examples of public flattery and irregular communication channels, he equated the cult with Stalin’s opposition to collective leadership. The cult of


\textsuperscript{83} Ibid. 241.
personality thus seemed to be a singular Stalinist phenomenon that could be overcome by a well-functioning collective organ such as the Politburo. Khrushchev's criticism was directed against legal defects, against the purges, trials, and the rule of terror, instead of linking the cult to the specific mode of political communication based on the assumed vanguard role of the Party in charge of adapting the “universal truths” of Marxism-Leninism to specific practice.

The emotional potency of personalized politics can be found under whatever rule, irrespective of its democratic or authoritarian nature as Eduard Bernstein remarked in the early 1910s already. In the world of business, brands are employed to generate emotional bonds, possibly even loyalty to a specific firm. Resonant images come to represent large entities and are to secure support through customers or voters. Present day marketing strategists therefore consider brands to be “the most important and sustainable asset”\(^{84}\) of any kind of organization, commodity, or even nations. While mass medial techniques can be applied to propagate all of the aforementioned categories, the branding of a certain commodity that has to justify specific needs is much easier than the branding of a huge organisation or even country. The multitude of tasks associated with a government complicates the building of trust in the veracity of the claims, which can only be gained over time. The failed efforts of the US government after 9/11 to “brand America”\(^ {85}\) by means of PR techniques in the Middle East are just one example. The success of a brand in systems of competition is not determined by propagation efforts alone but by the level of acceptance enjoyed among the populace. The product associated with a certain brand has to satisfy a certain need and to keep in touch with changes through constant service or product innovation. The power of brands thus ultimately lies with the customers, as they only continue to buy the firm’s products if their expectations are constantly exceeded or at least met. The branding of a commodity within a market system or the campaigns to boost the image of a political candidate in an electoral competition thus differs in important aspects from the CCP dictatorship. Once power had been assumed by the Party there was no way of opting for a different competitor. The question therefore remains, why an all-powerful Party-state should employ personality cults after all and not stir up public emotion by way of relying on impersonal national symbols.


\(^{85}\) Asked on why the US government shortly after 9/11 had employed PR specialist Charlotte Beers to sell American foreign policy, Secretary of State Colin Powell replied: “There is nothing wrong with getting somebody who knows how to sell something. We are selling a product. We need someone who can rebrand American foreign policy, rebrand diplomacy. [Besides] she got me to buy Uncle Ben's rice”, see Klein, Naomi, *America is not a Hamburger. President Bush's attempts to rebrand the United States are doomed*, in: The Guardian, 14 March 2002. Further Risen, Clay, *Re-branding America*, in: Boston Globe, 13 March 2005.
The answer to this question involves several layers of explanation. The Mao cult in the late 1930s and early 1940s was created amidst a situation of internal and external competition as argued above. The constant battles with the better-equipped GMD forces of Chiang Kai-shek and the ensuing propaganda warfare necessitated the creation of an image that could compete with the cult fostered by Chiang Kai-shek. The rise of the early Mao cult in many ways was a mirror image of the Chiang cult, itself built on the cult of Sun Yat-sen. Yet the CCP methods of exegetical bonding were a unique blend of Soviet model and practical experience. Unlike for example Joseph Goebbels, the CCP propaganda elite had no access to Western literature on influencing mass opinion. The cult was thus no previously conceived strategy of the Party leadership but one means amongst others that turned out to be especially effective in securing loyalties and was exploited as long as necessary. Once Mao’s legitimacy had been firmly established, the cult could gain certain aloofness without interfering with day-to-day politics. Its sphere was basically confined to commemorative events and ritualized formulae. This equilibrium could become insufficient, i.e. through the influx of a rapidly increasing Party membership, a split within the Politburo, or dramatic policy failures like the Great Leap Forward that contradicted the officially proposed view through lived experience. At such times of crisis, the need to strengthen the emotional bonds could become necessary again by comparing the present situation favourably with the past or by relying on renewed waves of rectification and exegetical bonding that had to be strictly supervised. It thus functioned best in hierarchical organizations like the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).

Yet the branding dimension is just one aspect of communication that came to sustain the cult. Another important factor contributing to the rise of personality cults in communist dictatorships was posed by the party system’s structural deficit to provide formal rules of political ascent and succession. As Graeme Gill has shown in his analysis of Soviet leader cults, individual success within the Party bureaucracy depended to a large extent on networks of vertical and horizontal loyalties. In this context, the leader cult served a dual function. By promoting the cult of an important leader, cadres on the lower level could signal their loyalty and effectively created a system of patronage. Political leaders vying for power within the Politburo thus recruited a number of loyal followers, who would support their policy lines as long as they could in turn hope for political ascendancy or at least for protection during inner-Party struggles. An important ingredient of the cult besides providing a common symbol to represent the CCP organizational apparatus was thus its function as a “non-bureaucratic form
of communication between apex and lower-rungs of the bureaucratic hierarchy”. The emergence of these patron-client relationships not necessarily had to be restricted to the top level but could instead result in plural cults flourishing at the same time for example on a provincial level. The danger posed by such factional development for the Communist Party later resulted in the restriction of any kind of affiliations based on geographical or educational background.

Irrespective of the personality of the leader itself, the political system thus encouraged asymmetric types of communication between apex and lower rungs of the Party hierarchy and eased the formation of what M. Rainer Lepsius following Max Weber has called “charismatic relationships”. He singled out personal devotion among the followers, the dissolution of normative standards, and the creation of a community based on emotion and loyalty rather than on formal rules as main criteria of such charismatic relationships. The result could be the fostering of plural cults around various prominent members of the leadership or a single cult around just the leader of the Party-state. Both phenomena can be witnessed in the history of the PRC as we shall see in the following chapters, depending on the political situation. By defining Max Weber’s ideal type of charismatic leadership not solely through individual traits of character but through the structures of charismatic relationships the leader was able to maintain, the dynamics of the leader cult are brought into focus. Personal charismatic qualities were no necessary constituent of a leader cult although it could greatly enhance its acceptance. The creation of a leader’s superior cult image relied on numerous personal and institutional interests and only seldom worked as unambiguously as the outward manifestations of the icons of power made believe.

This finally leads us to a third aspect related to the cult. The representation of the CCP through the image of Mao as saviour of the Chinese nation proved instrumental in increasing internal cohesion and external appeal, yet unless the image remained petrified and under Party control it always bore the danger of being hijacked for contradictory purposes. This threat was counterbalanced through various measures, most importantly through the reliance on a “directed public sphere” controlled by the Central Propaganda Department and the Ministry of Culture that discouraged the discussion of controversial political issues in public and was to prevent alternative readings of the official state symbols. The effectiveness of transmitting

88 Ibid. 175.
the cult through newspapers, schoolbooks, and radio broadcasts was only possible within a
highly regulated media apparatus and by means of employing a strictly regulated language.
The uniformity of expression granted through the monopoly of the state media enabled the
regime to imprint its hegemonic interpretation of reality to dominate the public sphere in ways
inconceivable of in a democratically constituted setting. The character of the Chinese
broadcasting apparatus during the Mao period thus can be characterized as a device to provide
an integrated, “correct” worldview with a ritualized meaning. The CCP paid enormous
attention to the control of the works and image of Mao Zedong and repeatedly intervened
against the unauthorized print and distribution of his speeches and pictures. Mao himself was
highly aware of his symbolic power and was furious about quotations being made out of
context. The choosing of the right words and phrases was a highly political matter in the
PRC, as the Party had to demonstrate its legitimacy by adapting quotes from the Marxist-
Leninist canon and simultaneously reduce ambiguous meanings. After all, the CCP had to
secure a uniform implementation of its policies through roughly twenty million Party
members in a state with a populace of more than 745 million at the outset of the Cultural
Revolution. The doctrinal authority of the CCP thus resulted in enormous attention being paid
to words and symbols, irrespective of the personal role of Mao Zedong. Furthermore, it
sharpened the readership’s awareness of the equation of changes in vocabulary with changes
in power relations.

The advantage of such a formalized system of language for the researcher lies in the
possibility of using quantitative research methods to search for breaks within the semantic
web. Formulations like “cult of the individual” were subjected to continuous revision and if
no longer considered to be embodying the Marxist-Leninist truths would vanish within a day
from public discourse. The highly restricted mode of political communication underwent a
dual change during the Cultural Revolution. On the one hand, the official media acquired a
uniformity and formalization of expression that exceeded all previous periods. By 1968 the
number of articles in the People’s Daily had been drastically reduced, equalling roughly 40% of
the number of articles published in 1960. Of the remaining 9364 articles published in 1968 in the
People’s Daily more than half directly referred to Mao Zedong Thought. There was
little choice except publicly backing the cult rhetoric, even if the divergence between altruist

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rhetoric and experienced practice became overwhelming. Otherwise one risked the danger of being excluded from the ranks of the “people”. Fear and terror strongly contributed to the rise of the mode of communication distinctive of the cult of the individual. On the other hand, non-official media and uncensored documents began to circulate during the tumultuous period between 1966 and 1968 that contested the officially proposed views. In order to control and limit the impact of Mao’s image, which the Party leadership had helped to create during a situation of external threat and internal competition in the 1940s, public references to Mao Zedong were reduced after the founding of the PRC; Mao Zedong Thought was redefined as collective sum of the revolutionary experiences of the Chinese Revolution. The dissolution of the image from the person, however, was never completely achieved. A slow erosion of trust posed a second danger. If the image of the omniscient, unmoved mover was contradicted by either practice or the failure to control the public image, the CCP was in a position to enforce its view to obtain a ritualized recognition. The loss of public belief in the message of the cult and its imagery, however, did not necessarily hamper its effectiveness as a means of rule, as the cynical leader cults of Saddam Hussein, Kim Il-Song, or Hafiz al-Assad reveal.\(^93\)

There can be no doubt about the utilitarian motives or personal vanity that drove Mao and his sycophants in fostering his personal image as a tool for political ends, but a strictly functionalist definition fails to account for the variety of the cult phenomenon. The Cultural Revolution is probably one of the best examples to show that the sphere of the political cannot be reduced to an analysis of certain structures or the intentions of political leaders alone. With the implosion of the Party apparatus claims to power had to be negotiated according to their proximity to Mao Zedong Thought. Therefore a multitude of actors employed the symbols and rhetoric of the cult for different purposes as Wang Shaoguang has pointed out for the case of Wuhan and thus permitted the participants in the Cultural Revolution to “validate their private interests in altruistic rhetoric.”\(^94\) The boundaries between the political and a-political, between public and private underwent continuous changes and spread the cult to areas never intended to by the Party leadership. The “communicative space”\(^95\) of the cult, sustained by the factors mentioned above, was thus constantly in flux during the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, the period is an excellent example to show the capacity of the cult symbols “to


\(^94\) Wang, *Failure of Charisma*, 280.

\(^95\) The term has most prominently been employed by the German research project “The Political as Communicative Space in History”, see www.uni-bielefeld.de/geschichte/sfb584 (last accessed 4 December 2005).
take on non-ordinary meaning, to function in contexts where it has not belonged” and demonstrates the importance of historical contextualization.

This prompts the epistemological question about what effectively constitutes the force of language to perform “social magic”, the production of binding social consequences. Among the numerous views on the subject, two opposed stands have received especially great attention. Pierre Bourdieu argued that the success of language to actually achieve results and thus of performative acts in general relies on convention and institutional power. “[T]he efficacy of the performative utterance presupposes a set of social relations, an institution, by virtue of which a particular individual, who is authorized to speak and recognized as such by others is able to speak in a way that others will regard as acceptable in the circumstance.” Not the discourse as such provided the power to speak with authority but the social context of the speaker. The fact that the speaker has to be endowed with power external to the linguistic realm according to Bourdieu revealed that language “at most represents this authority, manifests and symbolizes it.” However, with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution the recognition of who was authorized to speak or rather interpret Mao’s works turned out to be disputable. Quotations of the Chairman were employed in social and semantic contexts for which no prior rules existed and involved a large number of actors claiming legitimacy for their own standpoints. Jacques Derrida interpreted this power to break with former contexts, the “force of rupture”, as a structural feature of every mark and claimed it to be irreducible to semantic polysemy. In order to function properly, performative utterances like the Chairman’s quotations intended to trigger action thus had to be constantly repeated and conventionalized. But the “iterability” of every sign already forecasted a necessary future failure, as every repetition brought forth changes, even if only of the slightest degree that provided a reservoir for future action. While Derrida’s argumentation is valuable to oppose overtly functionalistic views of rhetoric and rituals, it neglects the importance of the sedimented historical usage of terms and the necessity to back up language with socially exercised power in order to become authoritative. The participants of the Cultural Revolution were highly aware of the generative capacities of language and on a number of occasions explicitly referred to the imposition of new content within old forms to transport the message of socialism. When analyzing the Cultural Revolutionary Mao cult, all three dimensions

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98 Ibid. 109.
100 Ibid. 15.
constituting the cult as communicative space have to be dealt with: the authoritarian branding, the flattery owing to the existence of charismatic relationships, and the iterability of cult symbols that came to take on lives of their own beyond the confines of Party control. To integrate these different spheres has been one of the most complicated tasks of the dissertation, owed to the intricate situation of sources.

Sources and Structure
Given the continuing sensitivity of the topic in China and the restrictive archival policies of the CCP, the availability of sources on the Cultural Revolution still imposes grave limitations on research. The situation, however, has been rapidly improving during the past decade. In his introduction to an anthology published thirty years after the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1996, Michael Schoenhals characterized the state of research as to be in limbo. Up to that point, research had for the most part been conducted by political scientists. After the advent of China’s era of reform, attention refocused on economic and societal changes under the aegis of Deng Xiaoping. Most political scientists therefore “exiled Mao, together with his Cultural Revolution, to the academic turf claimed by the historians”\(^\text{101}\), where it was not received with open arms, however, due to the assumed lack of sources. While the Chinese archives remained closed for independent research, heaps of materials were being sold on flea markets. These included materials from disbanded local archives, copies of central directives, leader’s speeches, and collections of Red Guard newspapers. But the lack of consistency of the material hampered research among a younger generation of scholars, since a profitable assessment required enormous background knowledge, which could hardly be acquired from the existing literature.

In the last few years, research opportunities have greatly improved and this dissertation would not have been possible without these changes. This thesis relies on six types of sources that have been made use of to a varying extent in the different chapters: First, contemporary print media to assess the regime’s self-presentation. In order to facilitate quantitative research, the editions of the People’s Daily, Liberation Army News, the Beijing Daily, and Beijing Evening News have been accessed as CD-ROM versions at the Beijing National Library, the Universities Services Center (USC) at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and the People’s University in Beijing respectively. The second type of sources includes quasi-archival material that has been purchased or copied in the years 2003-2006 on

various flea-markets, second-hand bookstores, or through private channels in northern China, especially Beijing and Tianjin municipalities and Hebei province. The materials consist amongst others of reports about the local application of study campaigns and cult rituals. Whenever possible these sources have been crosschecked and used to compliment the official version of the events. Third, the slow but steady thaw in Chinese archival politics has allowed for a substantial amount of archival sources from the Hebei Provincial Archive in Shijiazhuang to be included in this thesis. Other local or provincial archives that have been approached during research denied access to post-1949 sources. The archival material mainly consists of state directives, investigation reports about the successes of certain campaigns, and speech scripts. As most items from the Cultural Revolution turned out to be off limits, the materials used here basically cover the period of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Despite the high degree of restriction and supervision (not to mention the astronomical fees charged on foreigners) the archival sources provide new insights into the workings of communication between CCP center and periphery. The fourth category of sources is made up by the Red Guard tabloids, newspapers, and handbills produced at the time by the innumerable mass organizations. In 1999 and 2001, the Center for Chinese Research Materials in Washington D.C. published a total of 60 large-scale volumes of Red Guard Newspapers. It replaced the older 20-volume set from the mid-1970s (and its 16 volume supplements), which due to the poor quality of the reproductions and the enormous gaps in the publication runs had been difficult to access. With 40 volumes focussing on Red Guard tabloids published in the Beijing area, most of the examples in this thesis accordingly derive from the capital. The Red Guard compilations have been accessed at Lund University in Sweden, the Harvard-Yenching Library and the Fairbank Center Library at Harvard, and finally the USC in Hong Kong during different stages of research. The fifth and most important single source has been the CD-ROM: Chinese Cultural Revolution Database (CCRD) published by the USC in 2002 and updated in 2006. This database contains more than 10,000 documents on the Cultural Revolution, many of which had prior not been accessible. Although the database does not live up to the standards of a critical text edition, it provides the best general collection of texts on the Cultural Revolution for a wider audience. The texts have been compared with printed sources as far as possible. References, however, have been made directly to the CCRD to ease discussion about the sources and results of this thesis. Finally, local and provincial annals collected at the National Library in Beijing and the USC have despite the scarcity of their content on the cult provided important clues about the timing and intensity of the campaigns in different parts of the country, and further added a substantial number of important details.
on how the cult was enacted in different provinces. As the quality and quantity of the sections on the Cultural Revolution varied according to the provincial or local level of censorship, most examples given in this dissertation derive from annals of Shaanxi province that turned out to adopt the most liberal stance towards publishing information on the Cultural Revolution.102

The thesis is divided into three parts following a roughly chronological order. The first part traces the evolving concept of the “cult of personality” in the decade from Khrushchev’s secret speech in 1956 until the outset of the Cultural Revolution. By showing how the CCP on different levels tried to grapple with the consequences of the secret speech, the interdependence of international developments and national policy initiatives as well as the transnational nature of the discussions on the personality cult and the phenomenon itself are revealed. The second part covers the emergence of the Cultural Revolutionary Mao cult and depicts how the cult came to assume its specific forms. The focus is therefore directed at the rise of the cult rhetoric and rituals, first in the military and after 1964 within society at large. It provides a short history of the cult’s primary token, the Little Red Book, and analyzes the multiple instrumentalizations of the cult images and phrases during the high tide of the Red Guard Mao cult in 1966/67. The third part deals with the employment of the cult as means of securing discipline between 1968 and 1971. Following the destruction of the CCP apparatus the cult was instrumental in enforcing the submission to state authority either through military training or “Mao Zedong Thought Study Classes”. The chapter concludes with the first attempts to cool down the cult and sketches the further development of the personality cult up to Mao’s death and beyond. As the archival holdings on the Cultural Revolution itself with a few exceptions remained sealed for historical research and, furthermore, the available material has been made use of in a number of excellent studies on the posthumous cult, it will be dealt with only in brief. By way of conclusion, finally, the specific characteristics of the Cultural Revolutionary Mao cult are discussed and related to other contemporary leader cults. Thus the by and large neglected Mao cult shall be linked to the growing body of historical research on modern personality cults. Numerous aspects of the cult that would deserve closer analysis cannot be covered here, such as the influence of the cult in the sphere of artistic production, music, theatre, and literature, but hopefully these topics will be explored in more detail, as China’s archives allow for a historical assessment of this turbulent period.

PART I

Coming to Terms with the “Cult of the Individual”
In the late hours of 5 March 1953, Joseph Stalin died. The official announcement drafted in the name of the CCP Center expressed the enormous grief his death had inflicted upon the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the course of world revolution. For the CCP it was likewise “a loss whose tragic consequences could not be fathomed”. The Chinese public had been well informed about the changing health situation of the “great leader of the world revolution”, since the CCP Center had regularly published accounts in the media and ordered to post daily bulletins about Stalin’s condition on major public places. During the official commemoration ceremony, Mao Zedong himself laid down a wreath of flowers in honor of the deceased at the Gate of Heavenly Peace, which had been decorated with Stalin’s portrait, and called upon the Chinese to turn their grief into renewed strength for the revolutionary cause. For three days, all of China was to commemorate the dead. All flags were to be lowered, all public institutions closed. The leader of world communism had died and despite his frequent quarrels over the correct path of the Chinese Revolution with the Chinese leadership and Mao Zedong in particular, his commemoration could leave no doubt about the importance and influence Stalin had exercised on the communist movement.

The enormous consequences of Stalin’s death for all socialist countries did not only reflect within the Party leadership but led to discussion among the lower ranking cadres and the populace as well. Doubts were uttered, whether the Soviet-Chinese alliance could carry on the way as before and questions were asked, how the socialist states could continue to attract further members without the personality of Stalin. By means of frequent propagation and regular study sessions the local Party committees were to counter the rising tide of sceptics and to stop the spreading of rumours about what would happen now that the helmsman of the world revolution had died. The death of Stalin facilitated a new trajectory in the history of the communist movement. As Stalin had failed to install an eminent successor, the Soviet Union’s leading role in the world communist movement came to be questioned from various sides. Long-standing communist Party leaders and successful state founders like Mao Zedong were not to be easily impressed by figures like Stalin’s interim successor Georgi Malenkov. That it was to take only a decade, however, until the widely celebrated bloc unity would fall

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1 The designation refers both to the Party leadership, and thus basically Mao Zedong himself, and second to the geographical location Zhongnanhai, where most of the high-ranking CCP cadres live or work.
2 Zhongyang guanyu quandang he guanguo renmin daonian Sidalin qushi de zhishi, 7 March 1953, HPA 855-2-266.
3 Zhongyang guanyu you guan Sidalin tongzhi chuanbing qijian de xuanchuan ying zhuyi de zhishi, 5 March 1953, HPA 855-2-266.
4 Hebei shengwei guanyu zhengque xuanchuan Sidalin qushi dengqing ge zhong hunlun sixiang de zhishi, 19 March 1953, HPA 855-17-158.
5 The state-owned Xinhua (New China) bookstore for example started a large scale commemoration sales of Stalin’s Collected Works, see Hebei sheng Xinhua shudian (ed.), Hebei tushu faxingzhi, vol. 2, (unrevised manuscript), 1990, 170.
apart and the Soviet Union and China openly rivalled as leaders of world communism was only possible against the backdrop of Khrushchev’s secret speech. The assault on Stalin’s inheritance and the impact of its national and international reverberations on the question of the cult of the individual presented a major turning point in the history of CCP and CPSU alike.
Chapter One: The Secret Speech and its Impact

Three years after Stalin’s death, the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU was convened in Moscow. The secret speech that First Party Secretary Nikita Khrushchev delivered on 25 February 1956 shattered Stalin’s image as omniscient and wise leader of the communist movement and revealed the crimes committed during his rule. The Soviet Central Committee’s attitude towards Stalin and his legacy had by no means been straightforward after his death. Only in late 1955 it had been agreed upon to form a commission to investigate Stalin’s role in the Great Terror of 1936-37, when Stalin had consolidated his monocracy by having millions of potential opponents killed or sent to work camps. The commission’s findings were incorporated into a long report which the Central Committee after a controversial dispute decided to read out at the last day of the Twentieth CPSU Congress to the Soviet delegates only.  

Neither the Chinese delegation (headed by Marshal Zhu De and further including Deng Xiaoping, Tan Zhenlin, Wang Jiaxiang and the Chinese ambassador to the Soviet Union Liu Xiao) nor representatives of other communist parties had been given prior notice about its content. Khrushchev’s four-hour speech combined the prepared report with a number of impulsive impromptu remarks. He set out by fiercely attacking Stalin for having elevated himself above the Party:

“[I]t is impermissible and foreign to the spirit of Marxism-Leninism to elevate one person, to transform him into a superman possessing supernatural characteristics, akin to those of a god. Such a man supposedly knows everything, sees everything, thinks for everyone, can do anything, and is infallible in his behaviour.”

Without elaborating on the theoretical notion of the cult within Marxist philosophy, Khrushchev mainly dealt with individual cases and post mortem rehabilitations of old cadres killed during the Great Terror. Despite his great services to the Party, Khrushchev exclaimed, Stalin had failed to differentiate between enmity towards the exploiting classes and diverging opinions among communists. He had credited himself with having played the decisive role in all victories of the Soviet Union while fostering an image of utmost modesty in public. Khrushchev demonstrated this by quoting changes Stalin personally had made to the manuscript of the obligatory *Short Course on the History of the CPSU [Bolsheviks]*. He had alienated himself from both the Party and the people and finally come to rely solely on pictorial or cinematographic representations of reality. Khrushchev’s speech equated the “cult

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of the individual” with breaking the principle of collective leadership, despotism, terror, and mass repressions along with omnipresent flattery to the genius of Stalin. He called upon the Party to abolish personality cults once and for all, although caution would have to be taken. The Soviet populace had become accustomed to read the semiotic displays of power in terms of leadership struggles. Should all kolkhozes named after current Party leaders be renamed, this would incite negative consequences. Khrushchev tried to ensure that no word of the speech leaked out to the Western press: “We should know the limits; we should not give ammunition to the enemy; we should not wash our dirty linen before their eyes”, but given the attendance of 1500 Soviet delegates and the massive reprint of the speech in the following weeks for study purposes all over the country, this hope turned out to be illusionary.

National and International Reverberations
The secret speech has been called the most daring and reckless action Khrushchev took in his entire life. Its national and international repercussions, however, proved to be disastrous for the unity of the communist movement. By combining personal assaults with misgivings mainly in the legal sector of the Soviet system, Khrushchev did neither provide an authoritative narrative of how to evaluate Stalin as a person nor did he sketch out the systemic changes that would have to be taken in order to overcome the defects of Stalin’s legacy. These inadequacies were soon voiced as the speech was read out to Party members all over the Soviet Union. The Soviet Presidium had upon Khrushchev’s request sent the speech on 5 March, the third anniversary of Stalin’s death, to all Party committees for study purposes. The red-covered booklets imprinted with “not for the press” were read to more than seven million Party members during the following weeks. While some hesitant criticism of the cult was voiced, reports and letters from the provinces rather revealed popular support for the “traditions ‘invented’ by the cult”. In some provinces, the author of the secret speech was heavily accused for dismantling the cult and even called a cretin and a moron.

Rumours about the content of Khrushchev’s speech soon spread in the Western media. One of the earliest accounts was given by the French ambassador to Moscow, Maurice Dejean, on 12 March 1956. The massive reprint of the speech, first in the Soviet Union and then within the Polish Worker’s Party in Warsaw from where parts of the speech leaked out to the

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8 Ibid. 83.
10 Jones, *From Stalinism to Post-Stalinism*, 135.
Western media, turned out to be of far greater importance. The First Secretary of the Polish Worker’s Party in Warsaw, Stefan Staszewski, remembered his unauthorized print and distribution of the speech’s full text in late March 1956: “I personally handed a copy hot of the press, to Philip Benn, the Le Monde correspondent, and to [Sidney] Gruson from the Herald Tribune and to Flora Lewis from the New York Times”. The Chinese delegation according to the remembrances of Wu Lengxi, head of the Xinhua News Agency, had been informed by a member of the Soviet Liaison Office about the speech’s content two days after the congress had ended. The report had been read to them once in a verbal translation. They had not been allowed to copy it down and therefore it left only a vague and distorting impression on the delegates. The impact of the speech and the beginning of de-Stalinization became obvious as well during an embarrassing visit Marshall Zhu De as head of the Chinese delegation paid to Stalin’s hometown in Georgia on 7 March 1956 amidst massive protests to commemorate Stalin’s birthday as usual on 5 March.

The Chinese response to Khrushchev’s speech was published on 5 April 1956 and has been regarded as extraordinarily late, indicating either disapproval of its content or at least tensions within the Chinese Politburo about the way to reply. Recently published accounts, however, reveal that the article was not only written within a very short span of time but also that the CCP leadership unanimously supported its content. According to the remembrances of Wu Lengxi, it was not until parts of the speech were published in Western newspapers in mid-March that the Chinese leadership received a complete version of the speech. On 17 March, Mao Zedong convened a meeting of the Central Secretariat in the Yinian Hall

13 The Chinese chief interpreter at the congress, Shi Zhe, however recalls that immediately after the speech a copy was handed out to the Chinese delegation but does not provide further details, see Shi Zhe/Li Haiwen, ZhongSu guanxi jianzheng lu. Shi Zhe koushu, Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, 2005, 207.
16 Wu Lengxi remembers that the Chinese version of the text was translated from a reprint of the speech published in the New York Times on 10 March. The New York Times however did not print the text until 5 June, after the US government had released the text the previous day. It seems rather possible that the Chinese attained a copy of the internal Soviet reprint directly or through one of its Eastern European embassies, see Wu Lengxi, Shinian lunzhan - 1956-1966 ZhongSu guanxi huiyilu, vol. 1, Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2000 [1999], 4.
17 The Central Secretariat up to the Eighth Congress was the highest political body of the PRC. In 1945, Mao Zedong, Zhu De, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and Ren Bishi (died 1950, replaced through Chen Yun) had been chosen as permanent members. All of the aforementioned were simultaneously members of the Politburo that consisted of 13 persons (Lin Biao and Deng Xiaoping in April 1955 replaced the deceased Ren Bishi and Gao Gang). Because many Politburo members participated in the meetings of the General Secretariat upon invitation as well, the distinctions between both bodies were floating. After the Eighth Congress in September 1956 the former duties of the Central Secretariat were taken over by the re-established Politburo Standing Committee. The Secretariat thus was reduced to supervising the everyday work below the aegis of the Politburo Standing Committee.
adjacent to his living quarters in Zhongnanhai. The translation of the speech had been distributed to the members of the Secretariat the previous day through the institution in charge of the Party’s paper flow, the CCP General Office. Upon Mao’s request, a number of other high ranking cadres had joined the discussion, among them Yang Shangkun (head of the CCP General Office), Hu Qiaomu (Mao’s former political secretary and deputy head of the Central Propaganda Department), the former ambassadors to the Soviet Union Zhang Wentian (vice-minister of foreign affairs) and Wang Jiaxiang (in his capacity as head of the CCP Liaison Department in charge of handling affairs with other communist parties), finally Wu Lengxi himself. As most of the participants had not yet been able to read the translation completely, it was only agreed upon the urgency of responding to it in an appropriate way.

Mao summarized his impression of the speech as having “removed a lid” by proclaiming that not everything Stalin or the Soviet Union had done in the past had always been correct. On the other hand, Khrushchev had “poked a hole” into the armour of the communist movement as the report contained great mistakes both in form and content. Within the next week, Mao twice convened enlarged meetings of the Politburo and added the experience of the Party’s foremost propagandists Lu Dingyi (head of the Central Propaganda Department), Deng Tuo (chief editor of the People’s Daily), Mao’s former secretary Chen Boda (director of the CCP Political Research Office), and Chen’s deputy Hu Sheng to the aforementioned group in order to discuss the impact and appropriate answer to Khrushchev’s speech. As far as Wu’s recollections reveal, Mao seems to have dominated the meetings by sketching out the content of the reply and settling for the form of an article. An official resolution would have carried too much weight given the ongoing impact the speech had caused in capitalist and socialist countries alike. Furthermore, the CPSU had not yet made the speech public. Chen Boda was assigned to draft the article with assistance of the Central Propaganda Department and the Xinhua News Agency, which collected all major articles on the subject from foreign news agencies. Chen finished the first draft on 29 March 1956 and upon request from Deng Xiaoping discussed it with Lu Dingyi, Hu Qiaomu, Hu Sheng, and Wu Lengxi.

Meanwhile the Twentieth Congress had become a lively topic among local cadres as well. With the exception of the secret speech, the proceedings of the congress had been made public through translations from the CPSU organ Pravda. By mid-March, however, the question of what effectively constituted a cult of the individual had through non-official communication channels become a frequently discussed subject. A secret cable sent by the

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Hebei Provincial Propaganda Department to the Provincial Committee and the Central Propaganda Department on 26 March stated that most Party members supported the congress’s decisions, yet a number of specific problems and questions had arisen which the Provincial Propaganda Department had not been able to answer. Especially the differentiation between the cult of personality and a correct estimate of the role of individual leaders in history remained complicated. The report quoted a section from Anastas Mikoyan’s speech to the Twentieth CPSU Congress that had been cited by local cadres for failing to provide a clear criterion:

“‘Lenin’s genial expression about the laws of the development of the society is an extraordinarily precious source for a correct understanding of many present phenomena. Without Lenin, it would be impossible to understand them’ […] This sentence in itself is already worshipping the individual. Its standpoint is not historical materialism.”

While the ideological situation among cadres grew more complicated, the provincial and local propaganda departments signalled their strong need for a definite answer on these questions. On 30 March 1956, the People’s Daily published a translated Pravda editorial entitled *Why does the cult of individual run counter to the spirit of Marxism-Leninism?*, which made the topic of the secret speech for the first time an open debated issue. With 35 references to the “cult of the individual” the article firmly rooted the translation *geren chongbai* in Chinese political discourse.

As a quantitative survey of major Chinese newspapers reveals, the phrase had first appeared three years earlier on 11 July 1953 in a translation from a Soviet article accusing Stalin’s former security chief Lavrenty Beria of being an imperialist spy and of having tried to destroy the Party’s principle of collective leadership by fostering a cult of the individual. During the following years, the term had only seldom appeared in the media, mostly with reference to the work style of lower level cadres or an unduly emphasis on the role of individuals as opposed to the masses within the sphere of the arts. Among the CCP top leadership the expression had first been used during the affair of Gao Gang and Rao Shushi in early 1954. The “Gao-Rao anti-Party alliance” had presented the largest internal crisis the

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21 See Zhou Yang, Wei chuangzao geng duo de youxiu wenxue yishu zuopin er fendou, in: People's Daily, 9 October 1953, 3 and Hong Yu, Jiazhang dangyuan de jilü jiaoyu, in: People's Daily, 1 July 1954, 3.
22 The term had first been officially used in a Resolution concerning the Strengthening of Party Unity during the Fourth Plenum of the Seventh Congress on 17 March 1954: “Strictly comply to the principle of collective leadership, […] oppose the placing of individuals above the organization, oppose unsuitable stressing of the role of individuals, oppose complacency and arrogance and the cult of the individual.” Cited after Feng Jianhui, *Zouchu geren chongbai*, Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 2001, 5.
CCP experienced during the early years of the PRC. Gao, a former commander of the Red Army, had attained the positions as Party secretary and military commander of the Northeast Region in unison. Due to his extraordinary powerbase he was unofficially referred to as “King of the Northeast” (东北王). He frequently propagated the “special character” and advanced nature of his territory in the media and thus tried to single out his unique leadership capabilities. Gao furthermore spoke Russian and fostered a good personal relationship with Stalin, who even presented him with a car as a gift. Gao resented the influence of cadres who had previously worked in the nationalist “white” areas like Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai and seemed to have gotten the better share in the new Party-state than the cadres from the former communist “red” areas. In late 1952, he interpreted Mao Zedong’s attitude as conducive to a reshuffling of the Party hierarchy. Shortly before he had been promoted to the position as Chairman of the State Planning Commission, a measure aimed at detaching him from his former powerbases. Yet the attempts to secure support from other major regional leaders within the Party and PLA turned out to be insufficient after Mao’s personal intervention against a demotion of Liu and Zhou. At the National Party Conference in 1955, Deng Xiaoping used the case of Gao and his aide Rao to warn the attending cadres against the dangers of individuals trying to place themselves above Party supervision:

“The struggle against the Gao Gang-Rao Shushi anti-Party alliance has also enabled us to see the harmful effect of those taking a liking towards arrogance and complacency and the danger of thoughts [hampering with] the cult of the individual. […] They set themselves up as sacred idols and promoted blind obedience among their followers. […] In places where self-complacency and a style [conducive to the] cult of the individual have emerged, the principled stand of the Party will be weakened and may even completely disappear. [All Party] comrades and particularly the [whole Party’s] high-ranking cadres must keep this lesson firmly in mind.”

While the speech itself did not become publicly accessible until after the Cultural Revolution, the media reports on the conference made the reasons for Gao and Rao’s exclusion from the Party known and gave the notion of the cult a clearly pejorative turn.

The term had therefore been well established by the time Chen Boda sent the revised answer to Khrushchev’s secret speech to Mao Zedong on 1 April 1956. Mao ordered it to be

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24 Fang Zhu refers to this incorporation of military elites within the administrative apparatus as “civil-military blending” that strengthened the identification with the Party and loyalty to the Chairman, and thus decreased the risk of a military coup, see Ibid. 47ff. The abolishment of the six large administrative regions and the successive integration of its top leaders within the central Party bureaucracy by April 1954 further strengthened centralized power and was devised to counter centrifugal tendencies as posed by the Gao-Rao affair.

distributed to the rest of the Politburo and sketched out the proceedings until the proposed publication on 5 April in detail. Upon Mao’s request, the Politburo discussed the article on 3 April under Liu Shaoqi’s guidance and added a few further corrections. Liu pointed out that not all of Stalin’s mistakes should be interpreted as an effect of the “cult of the individual” but rather along the lines of failing to distinguish between subjective views and objective circumstances. The term *geren chongbai* did not seem to be very appropriate to Liu in conveying the meaning of religious superstition associated with the Russian *kul’t lichnosti* due to its neutral indication of worship in general. Liu advocated the term *geren mixin* instead with its clearly pejorative connotation of superstitious belief in an individual leader. As everyone had become accustomed to use the first translation, however, a change in vocabulary did not seem mandatory. Deng Xiaoping insisted on adding more analysis about the reasons for the emergence and continuing influence of the cult. After all, Khrushchev’s speech had failed to explain whether the cult had been the reason or the consequence of Stalin’s actions. Deng further advised to point out the precautions taken by the CCP against the rise of similar phenomena in China. After a final discussion Mao decided upon the headline *On the historical experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat* and added the subtitle *Written by the Editorial Department of the ‘People’s Daily’ on the basis of the discussion which took place at an enlarged meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China*. Even the title was thus to express that China did not have to cope with the problem of a personality cult. The article was broadcasted by Xinhua News Agency the same evening and appeared in print in the *People’s Daily* the following day. Only one day later Xinhua broadcasted the article in Russian as well, after chief translator Shi Zhe had supervised a rapid translation prepared by the staff of the *Sino-Soviet Friendship Paper*. Despite the hurried circumstances of its compilation and distribution, the editorial presented the first attempt to historicize the cult as a political phenomenon and to explain its emergence with recourse to historical materialism.

**On the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat**

Given its background, the editorial presented much more than a comment on Khrushchev’s secret speech. It was the authoritative Chinese position on the question of how to deal with the heritage of Stalin and his deviation from socialism. The article focussed on three main

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27 Wu, *Shinian lunzhan 1*, 20f. Wu is mistaken in pointing out that *geren mixin* became the standard translation after December 1956. This did not happen before mid-1958.

28 Shi/Li, *ZhongSu guanxi jianzheng lu*, 209f.
topics: First, a limitation of the speech’s doctrinal damage caused by lifting the discussion to
the level of Marxist-Leninist theory; second, the attempt to preliminarily evaluate Stalin’s
historical role, and third, to outline the preventive measures taken by the CCP in dealing with
the problem of the cult. The discussions at the Twentieth Party Congress were interpreted as
courageous self-criticism despite the ferocious attacks it had incited in the Western media, as
the CPSU, in analogy to the Communist Manifesto, was said to have nothing to lose “except
their errors”. 29 This unique honesty of the dictatorship of the proletariat should not be
interpreted as weakness but rather as strength. Since the Soviet Union had been the first state
in the world to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, it had not been able to benefit from
the experiences of any predecessors. But “whatever the mistakes, the dictatorship of the
proletariat is, for the popular masses, always far superior to all dictatorships of the exploiting
classes, to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.”30 The role of Stalin was to be analyzed in a
comprehensive way. His merits as successor to Lenin, military leader in the Second World
War, and proponent of industrialization and agricultural collectivization had gained him a
status as “outstanding Marxist-Leninist fighter”.31 Unfortunately, the enormous success had
dizzied Stalin’ mind. He had failed to further engage in criticism and self-criticism, lost
contact with the masses, and violated the principle of collective leadership. Stalin had fallen
victim to subjectivism and one-sidedness, allowing the cult of the individual to take hold of
him.

“The cult of the individual is rooted not only in the exploiting classes but also in the small
producers. As [it] is well known, patriarchy is a product of small-producer economy. After the
establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, even when the exploiting classes are
eliminated, when small-producer economy has been replaced by a collective economy and a
socialist society has been founded, certain rotten, poisonous ideological survivals of the old
society may still remain in people’s minds for a very long time. ‘The force of habit of millions
and tens of millions is a most terrible force’ (Lenin). The cult of the individual is just one such
force of habit of millions and tens of millions. Since this force of habit still exists in society, it
can influence many government functionaries, and even such a leader as Stalin was also
affected by it. The cult of the individual is a reflection in man’s mind of a social phenomenon,
and when leaders of the Party and state, such as Stalin, succumb to the influence of this
backward ideology, they will in turn influence society, bringing losses to the cause and
hampering the initiative and creativeness of the masses of the people.”32

By interpreting the cult as an outgrowth of patriarchy, as a “foul carry-over from the long
history of mankind” the Politburo tried to overcome the major weakness of Khrushchev’s

29 Editorial Department of the People's Daily, On the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat,
30 Ibid. 4f.
31 Ibid. 7.
32 Ibid. 9.
speech, the failure to root the cult in Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy and to provide an answer to the questions about the reasons for its development as well as the consequences for the Soviet system. Without explicit references to the *Collected Works* of Marx and Engels the article invoked the relative autonomy of the superstructure vis-à-vis the economic base. The cult could therefore be interpreted as an outgrowth of the practise of former emperor worship. Yet it derived its specific potency by a mirror-reflection of a social practice into Stalin’s mind. This twist explained the importance attached to psychological aberrations and legal deficiencies in the following argument, which no longer dealt with the historical setting or limitations of the leadership’s unrestricted power but rather with strategies of avoiding the alienation between leaders and populace.

In order not to give a wrong impression about the ongoing importance of leaders within the revolutionary movement, Mao Zedong himself inserted a section into the revised draft. Stalin’s deviation from the right path of socialism should not result in the downplaying of the role of leaders or in major changes within the socialist system, but rather in a return to the methods of leadership that had been laid out by Mao in 1943 by advocating the principle “from the masses, to the masses”.

“This means summing up (i.e. coordinating and systematizing after careful study) the views of the masses (i.e. views scattered and unsystematic), then taking the resulting ideas back to the masses, explaining and popularizing them until the masses embrace the ideas as their own, stand up for them and translate them into action by way of testing their correctness. Then it is necessary once more to sum up the views of the masses, and once again take the resulting ideas back to the masses so that the masses give them their whole-hearted support [. . .] and so on, over and over again, so that each time these ideas emerge with greater correctness and become more vital and meaningful. This is what the Marxist theory of knowledge teaches us.”

By consequently employing this method, as it had been arguably been done in China since the Zunyi conference in 1935, the force of habit could be overcome through repeated education within a long span of time. The article supported the CPSU in its struggle against the cult of Stalin in order to destroy blind faith in dogmatist standpoints. Yet it made abundantly clear that the CCP had taken over the explanatory task expected from Moscow before introducing a

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33 “Every difference in men’s concepts should be regarded as reflecting an objective contradiction. Objective contradictions are reflected in subjective thinking, and this process constitutes the contradictory movement of concepts, pushes forward the development of thought, and ceaselessly solves problems in man's thinking”, Mao Zedong, *On Contradiction*, in: *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 1, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967, 317.

34 Most of the sentences Mao himself added to the draft stressed the importance of correct leadership, see *Mao wengao 6*, 61f.


36 Editorial Department of the People's Daily, *Historical Experience*, 12f.
novel theoretical concept without informing the rest of the communist camp. The existence of a personality cult due to ideological remnants was an argument that seemed to make sense within the newly founded, largely rural People’s Republic of China but not necessarily in the case of the Soviet Union nearly 40 years after the Russian Revolution. The speech had indeed “poked a hole” and the CPSU’s failure to provide an interpretative framework led to a questioning not only of Stalin’s role but also of Communist Party rule in general as Mao had foreseen.

The CCP Center ordered all local Party committees to circulate and discuss the article within and outside Party circles in order to obtain a correct knowledge about the cult of the individual and the Stalin question.\textsuperscript{37} In a complimentary circular the Central Propaganda Department advised the localities on the method of study and how to deal with possibly encountered problems.\textsuperscript{38} The provincial Party committees passed the circulars on to the district and city committees with even more information about the temporal extent of the study period and the exact content. The study was to be terminated at the end of April 1956 and to focus on the article itself, leaving \textit{Pravda} editorials for additional self-study. The local cadres were advised to schedule reading times for Party members and to decisively guide the following discussions in order to secure the outcome. Individual self-criticism was not deemed necessary. Study for non-Party members was to be arranged according to local conditions. By early May, the local and city committees were requested to submit a concluding report to the provincial propaganda departments about the progress of study and the difficulties encountered.\textsuperscript{39}

The study of the article brought forth a number of problems. In a concluding report sent by the Hebei Provincial Propaganda Department to the Provincial Party Committee and the Central Propaganda Department on 25 May, the primary goal of sharpening the cadres’ awareness of the dangers of the personality cult had been “basically fulfilled”. Yet the discussions had made clear that due to the “limits imposed by the cadres’ intellectual level” (由于干部思想水平所限) a number of problems had arisen, which had not been answered satisfactorily so far. The report specified six main areas of problems encountered and asked for a central directive about how to answer them correctly.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Zhongyang guanyu xuexi he taolun si yue wu renmin ribao ‘Guanyu wuchan jieji zhuanzheng de lishi jingyan’ yi wen de tongzhi}, 4 April 1956, HPA 855-18-509.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Guanyu xuexi ‘Guanyu wuchanjieji zhuanzheng de lishi jingyan’ yi wen de buchong tongzhi}, 6 April 1956, HPA 855-18-509.

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Hebei shengwei guanyu xuexi he taolun ‘Guanyu wuchanjieji zhuanzheng de lishi jingyan’ yi wen de tongzhi}, 8 April 1956, HPA 855-18-509.
“1. [How are we to] correctly estimate the importance of a leader [without] aggrandizing the individual? [How are we to] distinguish between love for the leader and a personality cult? For example, some cadres from Zhangjiakou didn’t dare to shout ‘Long live Chairman Mao’ during the 1 May parades, afraid of committing the fault of worshipping the individual.

2. Concerning the question of Stalin, [many cadres] think that the other members of the Soviet Party Center definitely share responsibility, therefore why are Stalin’s faults exposed in public while the others do not make public self-criticisms?

3. Those cadres who haven’t heard the secret speech always request to be informed about Stalin’s actual faults. Some cadres say that unless [we] come out with actual evidence, [we] won’t be able to convince them.

4. Are Stalin’s works still considered to be part of the canonical works, [and] what is the criterion for works to be part of the Marxist-Leninist canon? At what place is the viewpoint of worshipping the individual to be found within the ‘Short Course on the History of the CPSU’ (especially in chapters seven and eight)? Further, is the ‘Short Course on the History of the CPSU’ still to be used as teaching material until new materials have become available?

5. Can Stalin still be mentioned alongside Marx, Engels, and Lenin?

6. What is the correct viewpoint concerning the question of a peaceful transition of capitalist countries to socialism and the question of the inevitability of war in this respect?”

The questions were aimed at the very heart of the problem and sharply revealed the ambiguity of the definition employed by characterizing cults as rotten relics of feudal heritage. The implementation of Marxism-Leninism had so far been based on the claim of representing a scientific theory. The emergence of personality cults, however, showed the continuing existence of elements of rule that could not be justified by recourse on rational governance but were based on genuine faith in a proposed dogma.

The struggle of the CCP and all other communist parties to come to terms with the cult of the individual was thus owed both to systematic defects of vanguard Party rule and the non-reflected application of powerful imagery to increase internal unity and external appeal. Although the cult’s dangerous potency had been recognized by cadres like Liu Shaoqi, who was principally opposed to the employment of personal images to represent the abstract truths of Marxism-Leninism, the immediate gains of implementing Mao’s image in the propaganda warfare against Chiang Kai-shek and inner-Party rivals had been considered to be of greater value. The emergence of the modern personality cult as historical phenomenon in China had thus been an offspring of immediate political manoeuvring and not the consequence of theoretical elaboration. It was to take another two years until Mao Zedong himself came to grasp the crucial importance of supplementing his own cult theoretically.

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40 Hebei shengwei xuanchuanbu guanyu xuexi he taolun ‘Guanyu wuchanjieji zhuangzheng de lishi jingyan’ yi wen de baogao he qingshi, 25 May 1956, HPA 864-1-157.
Public Imagery

The question of the cult of personality did not only disrupt the education of cadres but became a relevant subject in the preparations of Worker’s and National Day. The parades on 1 May and 1 October had always been of great importance to the CCP’s public display of power. After the founding of the PRC in 1949, the decisions about the scale and organization of the festivities had been subject of central documents (*Zhongfa*) giving meticulous advice on the correct order of slogans and the arrangement of public imagery. A week after the establishment of the PRC, the CCP had first announced a general guideline on where to display the images of state leaders. In all Party buildings the portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao should be on display. In the offices of state organs and organizations the portraits of Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong were to be placed, although the portrait of Sun Yat-sen was not deemed mandatory. In the PLA, the portraits of Mao Zedong and PLA commander Zhu De that had been the common decoration prior to the founding of the state were to demonstrate the unity of civilian and military leadership. Besides the public imagery, Party members were free to hang “whatever pictures they want to hang” in private rooms. Yet in public a careful examination of the local conditions was deemed necessary. In the three northeastern provinces, the placing of portraits according to the guidelines had been “inappropriate and already incited condemnation through democratic persons; and these condemnations have been justified”. The situation in the Northeast was complicated due to both the enormous power wielded by Gao Gang and the existence of Soviet forces and citizens in Port Arthur (Lüda) and other cities. The lowering of Soviet portraits that had prior to the founding of the PRC been on display was thus to be conducted in a fashion not conducive to “its instrumentalization through bad people”.

All major celebrations were awarded different imagery. On 1 July, the traditional founding date of the CCP, the Central Secretariat members Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and Zhu De appeared in all newspapers while on public places the gallery of the Marxist founding fathers, including Mao, was considered appropriate. On 1 August, the day commemorating the founding of the Red Army, the portraits of Mao and Marshal Zhu De were printed side by side in the newspapers. During the public celebrations, however, the pictures of Mao and Stalin were to be displayed “slightly higher” than the pictures of the

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42 *Zhongyang guanyu xuangua lingxiu xiang de guiding*, 7 October 1949, in: Ibid. 1.
43 Ibid. 2.
44 *Zhongyang guanyu xuangua lingxiu xiang buchong guiding*, 9 October 1949, in: Ibid. 3.
45 *Zhongyang guanyu ‘qi yi’ jinian jie baozhi kandeng lingxiu xiang de zhishi*, 26 June 1950, in: Ibid. 89.
respective ministers of defense. On 1 October, the Chinese National Day, the CCP Center announced that the only picture to be displayed on the podium itself was to be the image of Mao Zedong. But not simply any kind of Mao portrait:

“[All localities] should use the picture that has been published in the newspapers on 1 August, [showing Mao] looking leftwards. The picture is already being manufactured in large quantities by the Xinhua bookstores. Portraits that have previously been used in different localities showing [Mao] open-mouthed or looking downward are all to be done away with and not be displayed again.”

Worker’s Day was the last of the four major events that achieved official standardization. The 1952 guidelines as to what and how Worker’s Day was to be celebrated listed the following order of portraits to be carried by the crowds: “The first row from left to right: Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin; the second row Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De” to be followed by the leaders of various other countries. Ten days later, however, the order was significantly changed. An additional circular now placed Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong in the first row, Liu, Zhou, and Zhu in the second line and the Marxist founding fathers in the third row followed by other communist leaders.

The question of how to display the portraits had thus by 1954 been continuously standardized. Yet the meticulous orders relayed through central documents were of limited impact for cities without national or regional importance. In institutions of cities with a population below 500,000 people, for example, it was considered to be sufficient to place Mao’s image in public places and parks, schools, cinemas, and traffic hubs as a symbol for the new state. In order to ensure that the leader portraits were not “manufactured in a rough and slipshot way” the distribution had been exclusively assigned to the state-owned Xinhua bookstores because the print through private publishing houses had posed numerous problems of quality both in terms of form and content. Not only had traditional calendar paper and floral designs been used for printing, but often the correct order of the portraits had been mixed up and communist Party secretaries had been included in collections with non-communist state leaders. The titles of the portraits, a matter of great political

46 Zhongyang guanyu qingzhu ba yi gua lingxiu xiang de guiding, 22 July 1950, in: Ibid. 102.
51 Ibid.
importance, had sometimes been flawed especially when printing the names of foreign communist leaders. Kim Il-sung thus had been wrongly assigned the non-existing position of “Chairman of the North Korean Ministerial Assembly” (朝鲜部长会议主席) and occasionally even the names of Lenin and Stalin had been confused!\(^\text{52}\)

Until Stalin’s death, his portrait had usually been displayed alongside Marx, Engels, and Lenin during the parades of 1 May and 1 October. But the slogan “Long live the great leader of the people of the world, Stalin!” had always assumed the final and most important position. Mao Zedong as leader of the Chinese Revolution had even during the celebrations of Chinese National Day conceded this honor of the superior position to Stalin as a question of principle. Stalin’s death disrupted this equilibrium. During the preparations for Worker’s Day 1953, portraits and carry-able posters of his successor Malenkov had to be produced in a hurry.\(^\text{53}\) But Malenkov was not awarded the same honors as Stalin and assumed the position as first among equals among the ranks of the foreign communist leaders.\(^\text{54}\) Instead, the images of Mao Zedong as the most experienced leader of the world revolution now assumed the central position.\(^\text{55}\) The changes within the Soviet leadership during the following two years further aggravated the problems. It both weakened the credibility of a strong communist leadership in the eyes of the Chinese Politburo and presented the provincial and local committees with enormous difficulties when trying to organize the parades. The correct order of the portraits of foreign leaders kept changing, and along with it the print of the respective images. Finally, local committees in Hebei were ordered to refrain from handing out portraits of any foreign leaders to the marching crowd.\(^\text{56}\)

After Khrushchev’s secret speech, the question of public imagery had to be reviewed under the aspect of the cult of personality. On 13 April 1956, in a central document approved of by Liu Shaoqi, the Central Propaganda Department transmitted the orders of the CCP Center on how to celebrate Worker’s Day. Besides the organization of parades in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Shenyang, Wuhan, Guangzhou, Chongqing, and Xi’an, it gave precise

\(^{52}\) Zhonggong zhongyang pizhuan Zhongxuanbu guanyu yinhua he faxing lingxiu xiang wenti de baogao, 31 July 1953, HPA 855-2-266. During the first years of the PRC, private publishing houses that had been founded since the late Qing dynasty continued to exist and, for example, in Hebei province increased their sales by 65% to 12,240 Yuan in 1953. This equalled 8% of the overall book trading volume. In April 1954 the integration of all private publishing houses into state-owned enterprises was announced and implemented by 1956 with the merging of the last 50 private publishers in Hebei, see Hebei sheng Xinhua shudian (ed.), Hebei tushu faxingzhi 2, 116f.

\(^{53}\) Hebei shengwei guanyu jinian ‘wu yi’ jie de tongzhi, 18 April 1953, HPA 855-17-158.

\(^{54}\) Zhongyang guanyu ‘wu yi’ jie xuanchuan yaodian he jinian banfa de tongzhi, 10 April 1954, HPA 855-17-255.


\(^{56}\) Hebei shengwei qingshi guoqingjie taixiang shunxu wenti, 30 August 1955, HPA 855-3-787.
instructions about which slogans had to be used. “Long live Chairman Mao” retained the final position. The question of the leader portraits proved to be more complicated. A separate document was circulated on 18 April, interdicting the carrying of any hand-held posters. It further listed the portraits that were to be hung and carried during the parades. Besides Marx, Engels, and Lenin the portrait of Stalin was still to be on display. The pictures of Mao Zedong and Sun Yat-sen as representatives of the Chinese Revolution were to remain prominent but should be separated both from another and the gallery of the founding fathers of Marxism-Leninism. During the parade, the portraits of other foreign and Chinese politicians were to be shown as well, including Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, and Chen Yun. On 27 April, a complimentary directive interdicted the display of any kind of portrait on Worker’s Day, either on the meeting place itself or as portraits carried by the crowd. Only in places such as Tian’anmen square, where portraits had already been put in place, they should be kept as the public would interpret a change non-favourably. Again the demand for clarification from provincial and local Party committees grew overwhelmingly. As the symbolic display of power was by no means an arrangement that could be taken lightly, various petitions and questions were sent to the Center asking for a new regulation. On 25 June the CCP Center announced:

1. From today on, there will be no uniform rule regarding the display of portraits in institutions (including Party, government, and people’s organizations) or on public places. Whether or not to hang portraits and which person’s portrait should be decided individually by the local authorities according to the local conditions.

2. As for the problem of placing portraits during activities connected to foreign policy, a separate decision will be made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs according to local conditions.”

Never had the former meticulous arrangement of portraits been liberalized in similar fashion. While the directive was not to be interpreted as a call of being free to exchange the Mao portraits with capitalist leader’s portraits, it loosened the former extremely tight regulations on where to display what picture. The extent to which the CCP Center decided to liberalize its control over the symbolic display of power has so far been severely underestimated or even

57 Zhongyang guanyu 1956 nian ‘wu yi’ jie xuanhuang neirong he jinian banfa de tongzhi, 13 April 1956, HPA 855-9-3983.
58 Zhongyang guanyu jinian ‘wu yi’ jie huichang gua xiang he youxing shi naxiang banfa de tongzhi, 18 April 1956, HPA 855-9-3983.
59 Zhongyang guanyu ‘wu yi’ jie gua xiang de buchong tongzhi, 27 April 1956, HPA 855-9-3983.
60 Zhongyang guanyu gua xiang wenti de tongzhi, 25 June 1956, HPA 855-9-3983.
been righteously rejected. Yet liberalization became obvious in the attitude towards the regulation of the state media in general. A case in point is the reduction of Party supervision of the People’s Daily. On 1 August, the CCP Center approved of the circulation of a self-critical report submitted by the editorial staff of the People’s Daily drafted on 20 June 1956. Circulated as Central Document Zhongfa [56] 124 it stated that the People’s Daily had so far been regarded solely as the paper of the Party and therefore had neglected the views of the masses. Representing the official view “in every word and sentence” was not only deemed “impossible in reality but as well carries a negative influence on the politics of the Party”. The circular explicitly encouraged the printing of articles with opinions contrary to the official view and called upon provincial and district newspapers to pay more attention to local politics in their coverage.

The report further revealed statistical data on staff, organization, circulation numbers, and readership of the People’s Daily that up to that date had been kept as a state secret. In May 1956, a total of 879,000 copies had been printed, of which less than 1% (6,800 copies) was sent abroad, mostly to the Soviet Union. The report further listed the news items the readership was especially fond of, according to the opinion expressed in letters from its readers. In May 1956, the average number of letters received by the editors had been roughly 800 letters a day. According to this feedback, the readership especially liked good written editorials, critical reports about model units, reports relying on actual work experiences, short stories, and comics while standard formulae about Party meetings, highly complex reports stemming from the Party administrations, and mere statistical reproductions of articles published by the Telegraphy Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS) were held in low esteem. The internal report concluded by offering information on major foreign papers. These included The Times (London), the New York Times, the Japanese Asahi Shimbun, and the French Communist Party’s newspaper L’Humanité, all of which were presented as models for the Chinese Party press to learn from.

62 See especially Jung/Halliday, Mao, 416ff.
63 Zhongfa [56] 124, Zhonggong zhongyang pizhuan renmin ribao biansheng weiyuanhui xiang zhongyang de baogao, 1 August 1956, HPA 855-9-3983.
64 Ibid. 1.
65 In May 1956, the editorial staff of the People’s Daily included all in all 373 persons, 102 cadres ranked editor or above, 33 local journalists, 5 foreign correspondents, 79 assistant editors, and 144 translators, secretaries etc. Among the staff were 182 Party members and 73 Youth League members, see Ibid. 8f.
67 Zhonggong zhongyang pizhuan renmin ribao, 8f.
68 Exactly 24,861 letters had been received in May 1956, see Ibid. 8f.
69 Ibid. 9f.
Given the general trend of liberalization, the issue of the cult became a frequently debated subject in local and provincial newspapers. In the summer of 1956, more than 100 articles were devoted to different aspects of personality cults. Furthermore the China Youth Publishing House edited short booklets on the *Dangers of the Personality Cult* for educational purposes with a print run of 100,000 copies each.\(^70\) In the Party newspapers the cult featured prominent as well with some 70 articles mentioning the subject in the *People’s Daily* in 1956 and about 20 in the newly founded *Liberation Army News*.\(^71\) Most of them were translations of how the CPSU and other communist parties dealt with the consequences of the cult. But among the articles were a few which reflected upon the Chinese consequences in particular. On 3 July 1956, the *People’s Daily* published a short article on its last page entitled *On Independent Thinking*.\(^72\) It pointed out two principal dangers for independent thinking, both of which were closely linked to the means of education: dogmatism and the cult of the individual. It linked dogmatism to the traditional style of education through emulating classical scripts, denying any validity to own or new thoughts. While this was a thinly veiled critique of blindly following the experiences of the Soviet Union, the second danger dealt with the tendency to mistake “thinking about oneself” with independent thinking. The author pointed out that this trend of thought might lead to the promotion of a personality cult around high-ranking leaders and sycophancy among the followers. While the first danger was said to have been eliminated, the second was implicitly recognized as the more dangerous at present.

The fact that such criticism could be published in the Party’s leading newspaper in mid-1956 is a clear indication for the thorough going impact of shaking off the blind folders imposed by a strict following of the Soviet model. The summer and autumn of 1956 witnessed a period of liberalization and opportunity that might have resulted in the creation of a unique communist public sphere. Lu Dingyi, head of the Central Propaganda Department, in a speech on the role of science in the socialist system advocated the strengthening of intellectual exchange with capitalist countries and proposed to learn from their experiences to advance the situation of the Chinese sciences.\(^73\) Chinese scientists should be allowed to attend conferences abroad and make themselves a name through their intellectual achievements. The political climate seemed favourable for such a turn. But the Eighth Party Congress, widely recognized as a congress of moderation, already bore the core for a renewed strengthening of

\(^{70}\) See for example Sun Changxian, *Fandui geren chongbai*, Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1956.
\(^{71}\) See Figure 1.
\(^{73}\) *Xuanjiao Dongtai* 20 (no.157), 26 October 1956, 1-4.
the vanguard role of political leaders, and it’s staunchest defender was no one else than the newly elected Secretary-General Deng Xiaoping.

The Eighth Party Congress
In September 1956, the Eighth Party Congress was convened in Beijing, eleven years after the triumphant Seventh Congress in Yan’an. In a preliminary outline for the media coverage of the event, the CCP Center explicitly restricted the printing of congratulatory telegrams, cadre interviews, or other “welcoming news”. Furthermore, no photos of individuals were to be made public besides the official picture of the old and new members of the Politburo Standing Committee. Liu Shaoqi delivered the political report and made frequent references to Comrade Mao Zedong but not to Mao Zedong Thought. Instead Liu stressed the principle of collective leadership. The high prestige Mao enjoyed as helmsman of the Chinese Revolution, according to Liu, derived from the fact that he knew how “to integrate the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with the actual practice of the Chinese revolution, but also […] that he firmly believes in the strength and wisdom of the masses, initiates and advocates the mass line in Party work, and steadfastly upholds the Party’s principles of democracy and collective leadership.”

The only speaker to comment on the question of the cult of leadership in detail was Deng Xiaoping in his comments on the revision of the Party constitution. Deng emphasized the importance of the Twentieth CPSU Congress. It had shown the serious consequences deriving from the deification of leaders, a phenomenon that due to its long history could not be uprooted in a short period of time.

“The Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has thrown a searching light on the profound significance of adhering to the principle of collective leadership and combating the cult of the individual, and this illuminating lesson has produced a tremendous effect not only on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union but also on the communist parties of all other countries throughout the world.”

But while such tendencies were not to be avoided, the CCP according to Deng had already taken appropriate measures against the public glorification of individual leaders. He reminded the audience of a resolution passed at the Second Plenum of the Seventh Party Congress in March 1949 suggested by Mao Zedong himself that prohibited the celebration of leader’s

74 Zhongfa [56] 133, Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu dang de di ba ci quanguo daibiao dahui xuanchuan baodao gongzuo de tongzhi, 3 September 1956, HPA 855-9-3893.
76 Ibid. 202.
birthdays and the naming of streets, towns, and enterprises after individual Party leaders. “The Central Committee has always been against sending to the leader’s messages of greetings or telegrams reporting successes in work. Likewise, it has been against exaggerating the role of leaders in works of art and literature.” Nevertheless the CCP should remain alert against tendencies of individual worship given the dangerous and longstanding influence of leader worship. As a first measure, the congress delegates adopted the revised constitution in which the two references to “Mao Zedong Thought” had been dropped. Instead, the Party was to be “guided by Marxism-Leninism [and] Comrade Mao Zedong’s writings”.

There is no indication that Mao at this point objected to these changes as it was later alleged during the Cultural Revolution. He had himself on a number of occasions deleted the phrase “Mao Zedong Thought” and replaced it with “writings of Mao Zedong” during the early 1950s. He had furthermore voted against the sending of gifts and the construction of statues in his name. The omission of the references from the constitution did not signal a weakening of Mao’s position, as the Politburo failed to provide a clear indication of how to distinguish between heartfelt love for the revolutionary leader and a personality cult. Instead Deng Xiaoping officially sealed the ambiguity as a dialectic principle: “Love for the leader is essentially an expression of love for the interests of the Party, the class and the people, and not the deification of an individual.” The limits of liberalization were thus posed by critical comments about the CCP leadership, representing the will of the people. The Leninist vanguard Party along with Mao Zedong’s long grown pre-eminence in the CCP’s governing bodies thus provided the structural foundations for the renewed rise of personal worship that was further aggravated through Mao’s appraisal of the international situation in the wake of Khrushchev’s secret speech.

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77 Ibid. 211.  
78 Ibid. 228.  
80 In order to commemorate the first anniversary of the founding of the PRC, a non-Party assembly at Shenyang had approached the local authorities with the proposal to erect a monument with a bronze statue of Mao on top. Mao agreed to the building of a monument but refused to have his statue displayed, as it would carry a bad influence: “It only has satirical meaning” [只有讽刺意义], see Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao, vol. 1 (1949.9-1950.12), Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1987, 362.  
82 Deng Xiaoping, in: Eighth National Congress, 211.
Chapter Two: The Dual Nature of Commodities

In mid-October 1956, the Central Propaganda Department reorganized its internal documentation of national and international developments for the CCP top leadership. The establishment of a highly regulated public sphere had resulted in the necessity to rely on Party-internal journals reflecting both international developments and the national situation. The publication of the Propaganda Department’s journal on international affairs, the Propaganda Work Bulletin, was terminated and the relevant news items from now on integrated into the Trends in Propaganda and Education that formerly had been a platform for national developments only. From now on it was to cover important developments “within and outside the Party, national and international” for its readership, ranked provincial secretary or above. The Trends were usually published two or three times a week and contained highly diverse items reflecting the input from the provincial and local propaganda departments.

In its issue of October 26, 1956, the Trends published a report about the reverberations of the Eighth Congress based on survey data provided amongst others by the local propaganda departments in Shanghai and Tianjin municipalities. The general perception of the congress among cadres had the public had been excellent, probably even too good as many Party members boasted the Chinese level of Marxism-Leninism to have surpassed the level of the Soviet Union. Commenting on the leadership within the communist movement, remarks had been made like “in the past it’s been with Stalin as principal, from now on it should be with Chairman Mao as principal.” Opinions had been split about questions of introducing a system of free markets and mutual supervision between Party members and outsiders, which Mao had announced earlier that year, but especially critical comments were made about the handling of the question of the personality cult. Deng Xiaoping in his political report had claimed that the CCP had always opposed the cult of the individual. Some cadres remarked that this had simply not been the case. Even now, whenever a large meeting was convened one had to send a “gratulatory telegram” to Mao Zedong, not because of the Chairman’s vanity but due to requests of the local leaders eager to demonstrate their allegiance with the Center. The Trends quoted CCP members who claimed it would have been more adequate to

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83 These internal publications, usually entitled Dongtai (动态, to be translated as Trends, Developments, or Platform) provided the Party top leadership with information about current events and public opinion. They were assembled and distributed by the propaganda departments on the different administrative levels.

84 Xuanjiao Dongtai 20, 1. The journal continued to be published until 18 May 1966. With the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution and the dissolution of the old Central Propaganda Department basically all former internal publications were terminated.

85 Ibid. 4.
admit, that “in the past this kind of wrong thinking existed [within the Party]; now it has already been changed.”

At the same time, the reverberations of Khrushchev’s secret speech within the international communist movement became visible as demands for greater autonomy from Moscow resulted in upheavals in Poland and shortly afterwards in Hungary. The Chinese position towards both countries varied considerably. The newly chosen Polish Gomulka government was perceived as loyal to the communist cause and its goal of searching for a national way of building socialism was a viewpoint the CCP had argued for ever since the days of the Third International. Upon hearing of Moscow’s plans to intervene with military means in Poland, China’s leadership reacted swiftly. Mao on October 20, 1956, summoned the startled Russian ambassador Yudin to his bedroom and made him dispatch the Chinese disapproval of the Soviet measures to Khrushchev. He further was to hint at the possibility of Chinese assistance to Poland in case of armed conflict. During an enlarged Politburo meeting the same afternoon, Mao Zedong after having received a Soviet report that indicated the possible use of force, strongly opposed Soviet “big power chauvinism” and upon Soviet invitation sent a Chinese delegation, headed by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, to circumvent the danger of armed conflict by means of shuttle diplomacy.

The situation in Poland was settled without the use of military force, but Gomulka’s example had stimulated demands for greater autonomy in Hungary. The resistance of the regime under the leadership of Ernő Gerö to any kind of liberalization led to conflicts in Budapest and the unofficial replacement of Gerö with Imre Nagi on 23 October. Under direction of the Soviet Politburo member Anastas Mikoyan, the Hungarian Worker’s Party chose Janos Kadar as official successor the following day and ordered the suppression of the growing wave of strikes and demonstrations with military means. The Chinese leadership perceived a fundamental difference between the developments in Poland and Hungary. In the case of Poland, a modification of socialism according to national conditions was seen as justified. But the Hungarian uprising was perceived as an attempt of capitalist resurrection, triggered by intellectuals like the “Petöfi Circle” with the assistance of Western espionage agents and media. The CCP Center therefore called upon its emissaries in Moscow to opt for continuing military influence of the Soviet Union in Hungary.

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86 Ibid. 6.
87 Wu, Shinian lunzhan 1, 39.
88 Patron of the circle had been Sándor Petőfi (1823-1849), the Hungarian national poet and key figure of the 1848 revolution.
89 Wu Lengxi claims that the Soviet decision not to withdraw its troops from Budapest had been the consequence of the unrelenting Chinese position; see Wu, Shinian lunzhan 1, 52f.
The events in Eastern Europe and the simultaneous Suez crisis caused Mao Zedong to re-evaluate his views on the Twentieth CPSU Congress. Khrushchev’s speech had not only led communist parties to destroy blind faith in the Soviet Union in search for their own way of building socialism, but it had also fuelled a worldwide trend of criticism. This trend had to be opposed by analyzing the changes that had occurred within the international communist movement in the light of recent developments. Wu Lengxi was ordered to supervise a two-volume collection of all statements or articles from other communist parties pertaining to the problems raised in the secret speech. Thus the CCP leadership was to gain an overview about the most pressing questions that needed to be answered. Special notice was given to Tito’s scathing critique of the Soviet handling of the Hungarian uprising and Stalinism in general, which he had delivered in Pula on 11 November while the CCP was holding the Second Plenum of the Eighth Congress. Mao demanded a full translation of the speech besides the press reports he had received in the Xinhua News Agency’s internal Reference Materials (参考资料), a large scale collection of all relevant items from internal and foreign observers edited twice daily by the Xinhua News Agency for the Party’s top leadership only. The reports derived from the large web of correspondents that provided the leadership not only with official news items:

“Simultaneously, as the correspondents of the Xinhua News Agency are relatively wide spread, one can still make use of their advantageous positions to relay certain work problems and defects, as well as the current state of opinion among the masses, in order to present the leading comrades with these materials for reference purposes.”90

During the plenum the change in Mao’s perception of the general situation became more pronounced. He characterized Lenin and Stalin as the two swords of socialism, the latter of which had already been discarded by Khrushchev. Given the recent developments in Eastern Europe, he sensed a fundamental danger for all communist states that the other sword, Leninism and the Leninist Party organization, was about to be discarded as well.

The public discussions in the meantime dealt with similar questions. A lengthy report in the Trends in Propaganda and Education, relying on intelligence gathered by the Beijing Party Committee, mentioned more than 50 different opinions among cadres, intellectuals, workers, and students concerning the events in Poland and Hungary. The Party media had in

90 Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu Xinhuashe jizhe caixie neibu cankao ziliao de guiding, July 1953, in: Zhongyang xuanchuankan bangongting (ed.), Dang de xuanchuandan gongzuo wenjian xuanbian, vol. 1 (1949-1966), Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1994, 138. The international news media were covered by the Reference Information (参考消息) that comprised the most important messages broadcasted by news agencies all over the world.
conformity with the TASS articles branded the upheaval as a “reactionary riot” (反动暴乱), but some observers had asked: “If its nature has been reactionary, why did so many people join in the protests”?91 According to the internal intelligence, the nature of the conflict remained unclear but simplistic explanations blaming imperialist traitors or spies were rejected as unsatisfactory. Few people claimed that the Soviet intervention had been a necessity; rather bewilderment about the developments after Stalin’s death was mentioned. “How come that as soon as Stalin is dead, so many accidents happen one after another, just like having released all air from a car’s wheels?”92

The Trends further mentioned the influence of the Twentieth Congress as a source of the upheaval, because it had enabled democratic organizations to raise their heads again, and possibly had led to a wrong evaluation of government leaders. “Opposing the cult of personality”, according to one cadre, had become “a bit overheated.”93 The most frequently expressed criticism, however, was directed against the coverage of the events in the Chinese media. The lack of reports preceding the events had made them seemingly appear out of thin air. As no official explanations about the developments were provided, individuals sent letters to the Central Propaganda Department and other CCP institutions to demand a more detailed and rather objective coverage of the current events. “Khrushchev’s report at the Twentieth CCP Congress concerning the question of Stalin has been made public in capitalist countries, while quite a number of [Chinese] cadres and Party members still don’t know [what he said].”94

Yet criticism of the CCP remained the exception. The intelligence reports by early November 1956 rather revealed a differentiation between the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe that had been imposed from above after World War II, and the specific Chinese situation, were CCP rule had been the result of a successful fight against the Japanese invaders and the Guomindang. There are only a few cases mentioned in the Trends, which reveal an immediate correspondence to the Hungarian upheaval. One example is provided by the actions of a student at the Beijing Iron and Steel Institute, who had written a number of slogans like “Support the struggle of the Hungarian People”, “We want democracy, freedom”, or “Oppose the present socialist system” on the dormitory walls, and further left a number of

91 Xuanjiao Dongtai 25 (no.161 [sic!], the issue should be labelled no.162), 4 November 1956, 1.
92 Xuanjiao Dongtai 26 (no.163), 7 November 1956, 3.
93 Xuanjiao Dongtai 25, 2.
94 Ibid. 5. See further Xuanjiao Dongtai 26, 4. A week later, members of an unidentified Christian church interpreted the recent developments in Eastern Europe and the French-Anglo invasion in Suez as indicator for the approaching Armageddon, see Xuanjiao Dongtai 27 (no.164), 11 November 1956, 2f.
somewhat rebellious sketches in the university canteen, “seemingly a pistol”. In most other cases mentioned, the Hungarian crisis was employed to remind the CCP leadership of improving material conditions like food supply, housing, and wages, without calling for an overthrow of the present system. Generally speaking, by late 1956 the internal intelligence provided by the propaganda institutions offered no indication for the Party leadership that fundamental dissent or cleavages among the masses comparable to the Hungarian situation existed. Quite to the contrary, the reports could serve to augment viewpoints calling for a liberalization of the public sphere, as the CCP could seemingly count on broad support among the masses. But the discursive framework of how to deal with events in Eastern Europe would still have to be staked out under the correct leadership of the CCP.

More on the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

In a series of consecutive Politburo meetings after November 25, 1956, the CCP Politburo discussed recent trends within the communist movement. Most of the meetings were held in the “Chrysanthemum study”, Mao’s private bedroom in the Fengziyuan compound at the CCP Center in Zhongnanhai. Three members of the Politburo did not, or only seldom, take part in the discussions. Due to his advanced age, Red Army veteran Zhu De did not attend the meetings, which according to Mao’s irregular sleeping habits were convened until late in the night. Chen Yun and Lin Biao did not attend the meetings either; Chen because of his focus on economic issues and Lin due to a peculiar long-term illness. Yet even the formal arrangement of the meetings imposed restrictions on a critical assessment of personality cults, as the remembrances of Wu Lengxi reveal:

“When the meetings were convened in Mao’s bedroom, Mao often wore his pyjamas, half leaning on the head of the bed and half lying on it. The rest of the Politburo’s standing members formed a half-circle around the bed. Usually Comrade Xiaoping would sit on the right end of the bedside, near Mao’s tea table, as he was a little hard of hearing; he thus sat close to hear the Chairman speaking. The others, from right to left, normally were: Peng Zhen, Shaoqi, the Premier, Wang Jiaxiang, Zhang Wentian, Chen Boda, Hu Qiaomu, and me sitting on the left edge near the small book table at the foot of Mao’s bed.”

During the four Politburo sessions convened in late November 1956, the national paths of achieving socialism, the role of Stalin, and a differentiation of the contradictions in present world affairs were debated. Mao emphatically claimed that Stalin’s policies had generally been sound. While Stalin’s faults, like disrupting parts of the legal system and the constitution

95 Xuanjiao Dongtai 25, 6.
96 Xuanjiao Dongtai 29 (no.166), 15 November 1956, 4.
97 Wu, Yi Mao zhuxi, 17.
but “not all of it”, were to be criticized, the dictatorship of the proletariat was to be exempted. Attempts to weaken communist Party rule or to question the superiority of the communist system like in Hungary should swiftly be circumvented and, if necessary, suppressed.

The situation thus differed considerably from the immediate aftermath of the secret speech and called for a new official appraisal to provide guidance for the CCP members. Mao again opted for an editorial. This time Hu Qiaomu was to prepare a first outline. Hu finished his task within three days and after a discussion with Wu Lengxi and Mao’s secretary Tian Jiaying on 3 December 1956 prepared the first draft of the article. Mao had proposed two possible titles for the article. Either Proletarians of all countries unite!, in order to demonstrate the primary goal of unifying the different factions that had emerged after the secret speech, or More on the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, thus strengthening the continuity with the argument taken up in the previous April editorial. The latter argument prevailed. Mao was closely involved in the process of editing the draft and advised Hu even in terms of rhetorical strategy. The treatment of Tito should follow the maxim: “What you want to repress, you should first raise”; indicating that a reunification of all communist parties still was the supreme goal. In the case of Stalin, it was to be done the opposite way: “Criticize first what you want to raise later”. Since criticism of Stalin was overwhelming at present, the article was to assess Stalin’s faults first and to discuss his achievements towards the end. Otherwise, it would be unacceptable to most foreign readers in the present situation. The article was to make clear that Khrushchev’s criticism had given rise to a wave of right-wing revisionism, trying to denigrate the achievements of the October Revolution. This criticism had not only blasted the image of Stalin as omniscient leader of the communist movement but as well endangered the crucial role of Leninism for the stability of the communist system. The Politburo discussions about the article continued in another six sessions until the end of the month, with Mao setting the agenda. Finally, on 27 December, the last corrections were made to the draft. Mao proofread every single page before finally announcing it ready for print at 9 a.m. on 28 December. The article was made public via the Xinhua News Agency the same evening and appeared in print in the People’s Daily the following morning.

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98 Ibid. 19.
100 Wu, Shinian lunzhan 1, 64f.
The editorial was considerably longer than its predecessor and set out to explore four major topics: the political situation of the Soviet Union, the role of Stalin, the dangers of dogmatism and revisionism, and the need of maintaining unity among all communist parties. All of the arguments were closely linked. By proving the general line of the CPSU to be basically correct, Stalin’s mistakes had to be explained without discrediting the Soviet Union or socialism as a whole. The editorial thus set out to claim that the mistakes Stalin had committed in his later years were no indication of the Soviet system being outmoded as it had been argued in the Western media. Quite the contrary, the mistakes had been committed despite the correctness of the system:

“Systems are of decisive importance, but systems themselves are not all-powerful. No system, however excellent, is in itself a guarantee against serious mistakes in our work. Once we have the right system, the main question is whether we can make the right use of it; whether we have the right policies, and right methods and style of work. Without all this, even under a good system it is still possible for people to commit serious mistakes and to use a good state apparatus to do evil things.”

Again, Stalin’s blind faith in his personal wisdom was criticized, but in general terms his achievements outweighed his shortcomings. Attacks on the “so-called Stalinism” or “Stalinist elements”, as recently made by Tito, should therefore be interpreted as referring back to communism and Marxism-Leninism itself. The change in outlook between the arguments presented in the April and December articles becomes most obvious in the section on dogmatism and revisionism. Dogmatism had previously been defined as a blind following of the Soviet experiences and been named the gravest fault of the CCP. It now came to play a much smaller role. Differences between the national applications of socialism according to given circumstances were still claimed to be necessary in order to built powerful party-states. But these differences should not justify an attack on the universal truths of Marxism-Leninism itself on the pretext of criticising dogmatism. Yet this had precisely been the effect of Khrushchev’s speech.

“Because Stalin and the former leaders in some other socialist countries committed the serious mistake of violating socialist democracy, some unstable people in the communist ranks, on the pretext of developing socialist democracy, attempt to weaken or renounce the dictatorship of the proletariat, the principles of democratic centralism of the socialist state, and the leading role of the Party”.

102 Ibid. 47f.
The dictatorship of the proletariat should not be confused with Western democratic models or the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The concentration of power at the top within the dictatorship of the proletariat was deemed necessary in order to fight against the enemies of communism and to eradicate counterrevolutionary remnants. “If there is a kind of democracy that can be used for anti-socialist purposes and for weakening the cause of socialism, it certainly cannot be called socialist democracy.” The communist countries should stand united against the danger of frictions deriving from a misuse of the attacks against Stalin and dogmatism.

While the article as such presented a much more sophisticated argument about the present situation and the role of Stalin, the “cult of the individual” did no longer appear as part of the explanation. Structural deficits of the system were played down in favour of a primarily psychological explanation that emphasized Stalin’s personality. The danger of a split within the communist movement due to the inapt handling of Stalin’s heritage came to assume primary importance. Collective leadership and democratic centralism were to provide a safeguard against the rise of similar phenomena in China. Yet the reactions from lower level Party members to the secret speech had proven that cult-building did not derive from the aberrational psyche of the supreme leader only, but perpetuated itself through the fostering of charismatic relationships within the Party apparatus and the specific mode of Party rectification the CCP had come to rely on since Yan’an days. The prior elevation of Mao Zedong and his works as a means of negative integration to fight off inner-Party contenders for power now proved to be a major obstacle in overcoming the defects associated with the cult of the individual.

Contradictions among the People and within the Party

Although the internal intelligence reports did not give the CCP reason to fear losing power, retaining tight organisational and ideological control proved to be difficult due to the large increase in numbers of the CCP. By June 1956, the membership had crossed the nine million divide. The common way of fostering a united ruling stratum had been the rectification campaigns, the organized group-study of canonical texts. Rectification had been a regular part

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103 Ibid. 49.
104 Kang Sheng in an internal meeting in March 1957 pointed out this crucial difference: “‘On the historical experience’ [yilun] and ‘More on the historical experience’ [zailun] are basically the same. But there is one difference, the first mentions the problem of opposing the cult of the individual, the second does not invoke that phrase,” Li/Zhang, Dangnei geren chongbai de lishi kaocha, 23. See further Pu Guoliang, Zou xiang bingdian - ZhongSu da lunzhan yu 1956-1965 nian de ZhongSu guanxi, Beijing: Guoji wenhua chubanshe, 2000, 203.
of Party life in the early years of the PRC, especially in the wake of the campaigns against counterrevolutionaries. Thus it was not uncommon that in commemoration of the upcoming 15th anniversary of the Yan’an Rectification Campaign the CCP Center on June 17, 1956, circulated a document concerning the renewed need to fight subjectivism and dogmatism within the Party. The document, approved of by Liu Shaoqi personally, heralded the Yan’an campaign as a glorious achievement that had managed to establish a link between the universal truths of Marxism-Leninism and Chinese practice. But unlike the original campaign, the document not even once referred to the influence of Mao Zedong, who prior had been praised as the symbol and mastermind behind the “sinification” of Marxism. Just like the contemporary instructions on the placement of leader imagery or the media coverage of the Eighth Party Congress, down-toning the leader cult remained a prevailing issue in 1956 and took place within a general climate of press liberalization.

Demands calling for a liberalization of the media had been strongly voiced in China in the aftermath of the Twentieth CPSU Congress, and the complaints had been relayed to the CCP leadership through the internal intelligence reports. Given the leadership’s impression that CCP rule enjoyed popular support, Mao had opted for a relaxation of the regulations governing the strictly controlled public sphere and even allowed for critical viewpoints to be published in the Party media. In August 1956, along with the distribution of a self-criticism of the People’s Daily’s editorial staff for having failed to incorporate the wishes of the readership, the CCP encouraged the individual subscription of newspapers instead of the former unit-based regulation. This caused significant changes within the medial landscape. The circulation numbers of the 41 most important central and provincial newspapers had only risen by 1.9% between August and October 1956, from 4,417,074 to 4,502,257 copies, but there had been drastic alterations in terms of relative circulation numbers. While the circulation of the People’s Daily had remained nearly constant with about 800,000 copies, the Guangming Daily, a paper mainly directed at intellectuals, had gained 31.4% in two months. Similar gains of market share were reported from papers directed at a young readership like the China Youth Daily with an increase of 28%; simultaneously, most worker- and peasant newspapers experienced an over proportional decline. The most dramatic decline

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106 Zhongyang guanyu xuexi ‘Gaizao women de xuexi’ deng wu ge wenjian de tongzhi, 17 June 1956, HPA 855-9-3983.


108 The previous balance between unit and private subscription had been 80:20. Within two months it had nearly changed to equal numbers, 50:50, see Xuanjiao Dongtai 21 (no.158), 30 October 1956, 7.

109 Its circulation number had been 71,665 in August 1956 compared to 94,142 in October, see Ibid. 6.
had been experienced by the *Sino-Soviet Friendship Paper*, which lost 23.4% of its former 153,315 subscribers in just three months. A pronounced liberalization of the media was thus clearly noticeable and affected the formerly cemented structures of the press landscape. Critical comments against Party policies or against individual leaders, however, remained the exception.

Another liberalizing move taken by the CCP shortly afterwards, was to widen the scope of persons entitled to read the Xinhua News Agency’s internal publication *Reference Information (Cankao Xiaoxi)*, which carried items from capitalist news agencies. As the articles featured by the *Reference Information* were often considered to be blatantly wrong, there was no way of placing them in the regular Party media. Instead, the circulation numbers of the formerly strictly classified news digests were enlarged to numbers of more than 400,000 copies,\(^\text{110}\) despite the growing shortage of paper.\(^\text{111}\) An official Party directive issued on December 18, 1956, highlighted that cadres down to the county level should be able to critically assess the wrong nature of the capitalist viewpoints themselves. The reason for widening the scope of the readership rested with the CCP’s positive assessment of the present situation. “Following the basic completion of socialist remolding [社会主义改造] and the basic destruction of the exploiting classes […], the political awareness of our intellectuals and cadres has already been raised greatly. Most of them already have obtained a relatively strong ability to distinguish right from wrong.”\(^\text{112}\) Soon afterwards, the Xinhua News Agency’s department in charge of compiling the relevant news items further specified the envisioned content. The nature of the articles would range from “reactionary” to “progressive” and be confined to news and commentaries to guarantee a minimal overlap with the public media. Not to be included, however, were items with “extremely negative”\(^\text{113}\) content, or materials that might give rise to “rumours”.\(^\text{114}\) On 16 January 1957, the Central Propaganda Department circulated complimentary directions from the Xinhua News Agency in order to specify the

\(^{110}\) See Zhongyang xuanchuanbu pizhuan Xinhua she guanyu kuoda cankao xiaoxi faxing fanwei de jidian buchong yijian, 16 January 1957, HPA 855-4-1045.

\(^{111}\) Zhongfa [57] 11, Zhonggong zhongyang pizhuan wenhuabu dangzhu guanyu anpai 1957 nian xinwen chuban yongzhi de tongzhi, 3 February 1957, 1. The shortage of paper had led the CCP Center to crush down on the ever growing number of low quality internal journals, see Hebei shengwei bangongting guanyu “Cankao xiaoxi” jingji wendu de chuban wenti de tongzhi, 16 January 1957.

\(^{112}\) Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu kuoda ‘Cankao xiaoxi’ dingsi fanwei de tongzhi, 18 December 1956, in: Zhonggong zhongyang xuanxuanbu bangongting/Zhongyang dang’anguan bianyuanbu (eds.), *CCP xuanxuan gongzuo* 3, 1198.


\(^{114}\) The scope of the *Reference Information* was further increased during the Great Leap Forward to included even High School students, see Zhongyang pingzhuang zhongyang xuanxuanbu guanyu jin yi bu zuo “Cankao xiaoxi” yangfa fanwei de baogao, 10 October 1958, in: Ibid. 119f.
actual proceedings. As the only way to obtain the Reference Information was via mail subscription, the local Party committees were to select the local institutions that were to be added to the circulation list. Yet, while the reach of the paper was to be broadened considerably, precautions had to be taken by the local committees that the newly added institutions complied with the prescriptions of the CCP Center and did not make the contents available to the general public.

The most important stimulus for a liberalization of the public sphere, however, was provided by Mao’s famous speech “On the correct handling of contradictions among the people”, which he delivered before an enlarged Supreme State Conference meeting on 27 February 1957. The speech drew together several threads Mao had been pondering about since Khrushchev’s secret speech, and mirrored a significant change in outlook. Mao set out to explain, why even after a successful socialist revolution and the extermination of most enemies, opposition to Party policies remained. Mao proposed to differentiate between “antagonistic” contradictions between friend and foe, and “non-antagonistic” contradictions among the people. While antagonistic relations tended to disappear in a socialist society with the extinguishing of its enemies, non-antagonistic contradictions remained due to one main reason: the continuing differences between the slow-changing superstructure and the economic base. Mao pointed at phenomena rooted in feudal and capitalist ideology such as the accumulation of wealth, as well as problems arising from the process of socialist transformation. Here the formation of new privileged strata such as the economic experts or possibly even the CCP itself could be thought of. The nature of the contradiction thus had to be clearly determined in order to understand the present situation. For example, the Hungarian uprising had been characterized by antagonistic contradictions between a small number of counterrevolutionaries aided by foreign intelligence and the socialist system supported by the broad masses. The riots had been aimed at the overthrow of the system. Recent criticism and strikes that had occurred in China, however, should not be treated the same way. Although they mirrored strands of capitalist ideology, i.e. a supreme interest in material gains, the main thrust, according to Mao, had been directed against the overarching bureaucratism, and thus was clearly of a non-antagonistic nature. Therefore, no military suppression of these contradictions among the people was to take place. The only way of overcoming the gap

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115 See Zhongyang xuanchuanbu pizhuan Xinhuashe guanyu kuoda cankao xiaoxi faxing fanwei de jidian buchong yijian, 16 January 1957, HPA 855-4-1045.
116 For a translation of Mao’s speaking notes, as opposed to the highly edited print version published by the People’s Daily, see MacFarquhar et al. (eds.), Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao, 131-180.
between the prevailing capitalist mentalities and the economic reality rested in continuing persuasion and education, or rather intellectual “remolding”.117

In Mao’s opinion, Stalin’s failure to distinguish between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions had been his greatest fault. After having secured his power, Stalin thus had no longer adhered to the basic principles of dialectics as laid out by Lenin in 1915,118 and instead implemented a rule by fiat and dogmatic one-sidedness. He had proposed a static and “metaphysical” view on social developments, resulting in a biased perception of contradictions, thus proving himself to be “30% bourgeois, 70% Marxist.”119 But not only Stalin had failed to grasp the importance of dialectics. The same could be said with regard to his successors and their treatment of the Stalin question or recent events like the Hungarian uprising.

“Do you think the Hungarian Incident was good or bad? I say [it] was both good and bad. Of course it was bad, since they had disturbances. But Hungary did one very good thing; the counterrevolutionaries really helped us. Since the end of the Hungarian Incident, things have become more secure than before. Hungary now is better than the Hungary of the past when there were no disturbances - all in the socialist camp have learned [from Hungary’s experience]. Thus I say the Hungarian Incident has a dual character, both good and bad. An anti-Soviet, anti-communist current has arisen in the world. […] How do we look on it? Naturally, I think it’s not good. Secondly, [it] is good; this is a good thing. Because imperialist anti-Sovietism and anti-communism steels the Communist Party. […] How should we look on the criticism of Stalin? We [humans] are also commodities of dual character. The criticism of Stalin has a two-sided nature. One side has real benefit, one is not good. To expose the cult of Stalin, to tear of the lid, to liberate people, this is a liberation movement; but his [i.e., Khrushchev’s] method of exposing [Stalin] is incorrect; [he] hasn’t made a good analysis, clubbing [him] to death with a single blow. On the one hand, this provoked the Hungarian and Polish incidents. But he [Stalin] had his incorrect side.”120

Mao’s idea of a “dual nature of commodities”, which even included humans as symbols of a certain movement, was no genuine scientific concept derived from Marxist theory. It rather shifted the focus of attention to the differentiation between theoretical concepts and the political exploitability of historical events. By anticipating the aspect of international and domestic reaction, political manipulation came to the fore. From here on it was only a small intellectual step to interpret the “cult of personality” as a commodity of dual character itself, which could become useful not only as a medium of integrating the Party as in the past, but as well as a way to circumvent the Party institutions by appealing to the masses directly. What

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117 “Some people become afraid as soon as they hear the word remolding. We have such people. This thing, remolding, the Americans call it brainwashing. We call [it] remolding. I think the Americans are the real brainwashers, Americans can really do a good job of washing [brains]. We here are a bit more civilized,” see Ibid. (eds.), 155.
119 MacFarquhar et al. (eds.), Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao, 173.
120 Ibid. 177f.
made the original version of the speech so exceptional was the fact that Mao did not exempt Party members from harbouring feudal or capitalist thoughts, especially on economic issues. Mao therefore stressed the necessity of letting different views, “flagrant flowers and poisonous weeds”, be voiced publicly in order to ferret out the correct from the incorrect perceptions. The need to harvest the poisonous weeds would arise once in a while, but only by the endless dialectical process of criticism and temporary unity would Marxism be able to advance further. “Dogmatism is anti-Marxist”. Mao thus envisioned non-Party members to take an active public role in determining the correct path to communism, and not to restrict rectification of the CCP members to internal Party institutions.

In April 1957, the CCP Center had drafted a circular that announced the start of a rectification campaign in early 1958, after a year of preparation. Due to obscure reasons, the document was not released though. Provincial and local Party committees therefore faced difficult situations as they struggled to make sense of Mao’s speeches of 27 February and a follow-up on 12 March before the CCP’s National Conference on Propaganda Work with a similar emphasis of allowing for critical opinions to be voiced in the public sphere. Without the detailed announcements that usually defined the timing and scope of the campaigns meticulously, anticipating the next step became guesswork. While many high-ranking cadres had been witness to Mao’s speech, no official print version had been distributed and the state media did not disclose further information either. The Hebei Party Committee convened a Provincial Propaganda Conference in mid-April, in order to sum up and clarify the most pressing issues that had arisen since Mao’s speech. The discussions revealed a complete disagreement about the effective meaning of the speech and the scope of applying it in day-to-day politics. Most questions that were brought up by the conference’s participants dealt with the nature of antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions. How was the main contradiction within the superstructure to be defined properly after the basic end of antagonistic relations? Was it the contradiction between socialism and capitalism, between advanced and backward elements within society, or rather the contradiction between the objective circumstances and the subjective consciousness?

Most cadres had welcomed the distinction between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions; but the application according to local conditions proved to be next to

121 Ibid., 170.
122 Ibid., 170.
123 Mao wengao 6, 422, n.2.
124 Mao later was to criticize the People’s Daily heavily for not having complied with his wishes to immediately publish his March 12 speech, see Wu, Yi Mao zhuxi, 41f.
125 Zhonggong Hebei shengwei bangongting you guan sixiang gongzuo de yixie wentie de huiji, 14 April 1957, HPA 864-1-187.
impossible. A large number of rural cadres reported about the recent growth of contradictions due to the shortage of grain. A cadre from Feng County (Hebei) reported 89 cases of violent clashes between rural cadres and brigade members within the last three months only. Sharp contradictions had further arisen over the question of the treatment of prisoners. Since prisoners were legally entitled to get 63 pounds of food per month, a number of people had on purpose violated the law “because in detainment one still eats better than at home.”

But what kind of contradiction did this imply? The questions of how and where to let people “bloom” or “contend”, as Mao had termed his policies referring to the classical expression to “let a hundred flowers bloom and hundred schools of thought contend”, remained highly unclear. The same applied for the question of who was to lead the movement.

“Chairman Mao’s utterance of [you should] lead and at the same time not lead, is a very dialectic expression, and very profound as well, but in the concrete situation of a unit, three possible scenarios may occur: the Party takes the lead, people outside the Party take the lead, or no one assumes leadership.”

When the rectification campaign, commonly known as the “Hundred Flowers Campaign”, finally got under way on a nationwide scale during a five-week period between May and June 1957 the problems of specifying its exact aims and methods remained unanswered. Mao speech had been made available to the Party committees as broadcast, but as the Hebei Provincial Propaganda Department reported, a number of local cadres either had not made it public because they believed there were no contradictions within their legislation, or because they feared “if we make it public and the masses know about it, anarchy will result [出大乱子].”

The cult of the individual and the international debates that had shaped Mao’s own perception so much were not among the main topics of criticism during the rectification campaign, in fact, in most local discussions the cult was not even mentioned. During the end of the fourth week of criticism, a part translation of Khrushchev’s secret speech from the New York Daily Worker was posted at Beijing University’s “Democratic Plaza” and stimulated criticism against the Party, dogmatism, and the attitude of local cadres pretending to be “born saints”.

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126 Zhonggong Hebei shengwei bangongting, Quansheng xuanxuan gongzuo huiyi fen zu taolun de wenti huiji 1, 16 April 1957, HPA 864-1-187.
127 Ibid. 5.
128 Zhonggong Hebei shengwei xuanxuanbu guanyu dangqia n dangnei wai ganbu yixie xiangxu qingkuan xiang shengwei ji Zhongyang xuanxuanbu de baogao, 24 May 1957.
communication between intellectuals and cadres, as they “shared no common language”.

It was in this context that minister of food Zhang Naiqi mentioned the personality cult in one of the few People’s Daily articles referring to the subject. Zhang criticized the gap separating Party from non-Party members by explicitly referring to a remark Stalin had made on Lenin’s funeral: “We members of the Communist Party are people of a special character. We are made of special material [特殊资料].” This “unscientific” statement according to Nai had led to a tendency of confusing Party and state apparatus especially at lower levels and fuelled the separation of Party members and ordinary citizens by giving rise to a trend of unprincipled praise and personality cults. The argument was contradicted by an article published in the Shanghai Daily News on 29 May, which claimed that Stalin’s statement had not referred to a privilege of Party members depending on birth, but to their role as the moral avant-garde and the preparedness to sacrifice their own life for a lofty ideal. Stalin’s notion of a “special material” was not to be taken literally but to be understood in the sense of “wholeheartedly serving the people”.

Criticism of high-level cadres or of Mao himself remained the exception during the Hundred Flowers Campaign, but the bitterness expressed by intellectuals against Party leadership and the disadvantages of the socialist system, as well as the mounting tide of institutional havoc in local Party cells, caused Mao to change his evaluation regarding the urgency of combating dogmatism and revisionism. In a speech on 25 May at the Communist Youth League, which according to Mao contained among its new members a considerable number of revisionists, he emphasized, “the Chinese Communist Party is the core of leadership of all Chinese people. […] All words and deeds departing from socialism are completely wrong.” Although Mao acknowledged the ongoing danger of dogmatist or simplistic “leftist” standpoints, he now claimed the real danger to be consisting in efforts of revisionist and capitalist elements to overthrow the Party: “Now we should start paying attention to criticize revisionism.” The article criticizing Zhang’s views was reprinted in the People’s Daily on 8 June 1957, the very day the end of the Hundred Flowers Campaign was announced. The reasons for the termination after only five weeks time have been subject of many debates and its understanding is indeed crucial for the Chinese political development in

131 Zhang Naiqi, Cong “qiang” he “gou” de sixiang jichu shuoqi, in: People’s Daily, 14 May 1957, 2
132 Xiao Ya, Guanyu “tewei cailiao zhicheng de” - He Zhang Naiqi xiansheng shangque, in: People's Daily, 8 June 1957, 8.
133 Mao wengao 6, 470.
134 Ibid. 488.
135 Ibid. 469.
136 Mao Zedong wengao 6, 489.
the following two decades. Mao Zedong himself defended his policy of blooming and contending against a mounting rise of inner-Party critics as a device to “lure snakes out of their holes”. Shanghai Party secretary Ke Qingshi, known for his loyalty to Mao Zedong, even claimed that similar campaigns would from now on be conducted on a regular basis.

Most works relying on a totalitarian conception of CCP rule have tended to substantiate this theory as expounded by Mao himself after the actual event and described the Hundred Flowers Campaign as just another example of the Chairman’s viciousness. The analysis of multilevel inner-Party documents as conducted here, however, leads to a contrary understanding. The Hundred Flowers Campaign was only the culmination of a 15-month process of liberalization that had started with Khrushchev’s secret speech and led to a pronounced stance towards enabling critical discussions in the media. As far as the internal top-level intelligence reports reveal, the CCP leadership in the mid-1950s had no reason to perceive that its rule was widely unpopular, although cleavages based on class background, job status, and residential location existed. The failure of the Hundred Flowers Campaign was mainly due to its incompatibility with the system of top-down communication encouraged by the Leninist Party organization. The experienced repression of those declared to be opposing the state had cautioned the intellectuals and could not be easily dismissed by a series of incoherent speeches that were even contradicted by the slow response of Party newspapers to relay the messages to a wider audience. While Mao commanded enough prestige to voice opinions contrary to the established system of bureaucratically instituted communication, his voluntaristic approach to liberalization placed those in responsible offices in a difficult position, as they had to transform his reasoning into political directives without a clear sense of direction as the local responses reveal. The Hundred Flowers Campaign was no preconceived coup to root out counterrevolutionaries, but a failed attempt of a uniquely liberalized communist public sphere.

The Anti-Rightist Campaign
The failure of the rectification campaign, owing to its indecisive preparation and vaguely defined object, led to a self-generated political crisis of faith in the ability of the CCP’s governance and the responsibility was clearly to be placed with Mao. He thus faced two “credibility gaps” as the campaign had tarnished his image as omniscient helmsman of the Chinese Revolution among Party members, and the indecisive enactment led non-Party

139 MacFarquhar, *Contradictions among the People*, 278.
members to question his authority over the CCP. By subduing all sources of resistance, Mao’s claim that the Hundred Flowers Campaign had been a well-arranged trick to reveal the true identity of counterrevolutionaries and vaguely defined “rightists”, who had managed to slip the net of the CCP cleansing in the early days of the PRC, was to be substantiated. The Anti-Rightist Campaign set out with demonstrating the antagonistic nature of certain criticism that had broken forth in the previous five weeks. The state media therefore republished especially those comments that had been directed against the CCP, in a few cases even against Mao himself. A number of articles made lengthy quotations from discussions held by representatives of the few formally existing Chinese democratic parties in the preceding weeks. The most critical public account of Mao Zedong had been provided by members of these democratic splitter parties, such as Chen Mingshu, who had publicly attacked Mao’s “Bismarckian temper” and “one-sided judgements”.

It remains questionable, however, whether the reprint of these verbal assaults should be interpreted as a subtle revenge instigated by cadres like Peng Zhen and Liu Shaoqi, who had previously opposed Mao’s approach of letting non-communists rectify the Party and now saw their estimates to be correct. Red Guard sources indeed reveal a number of harsh remarks for example Beijing First Secretary Peng Zhen made about Mao’s approach to liberalize the Party press, yet the publication of rightist word crimes in the state media was no singular phenomenon born from personal grudge during a period of disorder. In an official circular from 1 August 1957 the CCP Center (and thus Mao himself) explicitly encouraged the reprint of assaults on the Party, the people, and socialism as a pedagogical means to expose the counterrevolutionary word- or thought-crimes of the bourgeois rightists by “displaying their ugliness in front of the masses.” Furthermore, only two weeks before the bulk of articles appeared in the *People’s Daily*, Wu Lengxi upon Mao’s request and under his close supervision had taken up the post as the paper’s editor-in-chief. His task had been to strengthen the “class character of the news” by confirming to the standpoint that only the CCP

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140 *Chen Mingshu gongran wumie Mao zhuxi. Minge zhongyang xiaozu yizhi tongchi Chen Mingshu kuangwang wuchi*, in: People's Daily, 15 July 1957, 2. However Chen did not slander the cult as such. Instead the metaphors of Mao as the sun and saviour of the Chinese people were invoked as signs of Mao’s high popularity among the people.

141 MacFarquhar, *Contradictions among the People*, 283ff.

142 According to Red Guard sources, Peng Zhen in a speech before senior Party officials in Beijing on 7 June 1957 stated: “Stalin considered himself perpetually and absolutely correct. The result was, that he was seized by the Twentieth Congress and smashed to smithereens, and in many places of the world his pictures were taken down and even torn up. As one can see, all men make mistakes; what differs is the size and nature of the mistakes. […] The cadres in our Party are all tools of the Party. The problem is how should a tool like Comrade Mao Tse-tung be better used.” Ibid. 270.

represented the interests of the people and therefore was entitled to voice them publicly. Mao clearly pointed out that there was no such thing as objective news coverage: “Capitalist papers publish only items that are beneficial for them, nothing that would be harmful to their interests. […] Khrushchev’s secret report accusing Stalin has been covered extensively by the capitalist papers, but in our papers not one single character was published.”

The right to utter criticism from now on came to depend solely on the relative position of the author vis-à-vis socialism. Only the correct class standpoint, the standpoint of the Party representing the interests of the people, allowed for criticism from within the system.

The failed rectification campaign led Mao to rephrase his conception of the present situation of contradictions among the people. At the Third Plenum of the Eighth Congress in October 1957, he defined the main contradiction in the PRC to be the struggle between the two roads of socialism and capitalism. The struggle against persons having committed crimes against “the Party, the people, or socialism” expanded the original timeframe from expected four weeks to nearly a year. Among the offenders were mostly intellectuals, but the campaign gained force within the CCP as well. On 29 June 1957, the CCP Center estimated that all in all 4000 rightists would have to be dealt with. By mid-1959, the official statistics reported more than 450,000 persons who had been branded as rightists, among them high-ranking Party members like Pan Fusheng, First Secretary of Henan province and Wang Jing, Secretary of Liaoning province.

The social background was no longer the sole determining factor of whether or not a person could be defined as socialist or capitalist as it had been in the past, but rather the attitude taken towards the Party, the people, and socialism. From now on, the enemy could loom everywhere, hidden within the populace. Only a critical observation of conduct and speech of every individual was to reveal clues about a person’s true nature.

Against the background of the crackdown on alleged rightists and the reassuming of strict control over the media, praises of the Party as representative of the people appeared more frequently. A justification for praising the Party was provided in a People’s Daily article

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144 Wu, Yi Mao zhuxi, 36.
146 His revised speech had been published on 19 June 1957 in the People’s Daily.
147 “According to the reports and statistics [supplied by] the provincial and municipal public security organs, all in all 463,812 Rightists have been exposed (not including the military sector) during the Anti-Rightist struggle in the whole country”, see Muqian quanguo youpai fenzi de gaizao qingkuang, in: Zhongyang gong'anbu (ed.), Gong'an gongzuo jianbao 67, 20 September 1959, 2. Thanks to Michael Schoenhals for providing me with this source! The official number given by Party historian Hu Sheng three decades later is 550,000, see Hu, Sheng, Zhongguo gongchandang de qishi nian, Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1991, 387.
entitled *On “Praising virtue” and “Opposing the status quo”*. The author analyzed the different meanings certain expressions could assume, depending on the speech context. Under feudal rule “praising virtue” had referred to the acquiescent and loyal subject of the ruler, singing the praises of his oppressors. Opposition to the status quo therefore had acquired a positive connotation. Under socialism, however, the terms had come to take on the opposite meaning. “Why is this? It is because the standpoint is different. [...] Now the status quo has been created by the people themselves, it is principally good; moreover now there are numerous things that deserve to be praised.” But a true communist should still despise the praises publicly accorded to him, as he had to be aware that one had to distinguish between the truly felt praise of the Party as the “benefactor” (恩人) or “saviour” (救星) of the people and “sugar-coated bombs” (糖衣炮弹) of mischievous rightists.

In October 1957 Mao made his second and last trip abroad, when taking part in the festivities to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution. The question of Stalin was not among the major topics. Mao, in high spirits, followed Khrushchev’s announcement of overtaking the United States in steel production within 15 years by claiming the same for China in regard to Great Britain. In his three speeches to the conference, Mao called the Soviet measures against the cult “wise” and made a number of flattering references to Comrade Khrushchev, all of which were deleted in the published version of his speech. But Mao’s last rhetorical demonstrations of communist bloc unity could not mask the fact that he had become increasingly dissatisfied with both the Soviet handling of the Stalin question and Stalin’s concept of socialist development itself with its primary focus on industrialization. Mao instead delved into the search for a uniquely Chinese way of building communism by advocating an economic policy of “leaps”, as Lenin had laid it out in his treatise on dialectics that deeply influenced Mao’s own understanding of economic development. It provided Mao with a rationale to do away with the model of the Soviet Union and to experiment with the forces of “self-movement” by revoking the theory of the mass line that had been a

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151 “The two basic [...] conceptions of development are: development as decrease and increase, as repetition, and development as a unity of opposites. [...] In the first conception of motion, self-movement, its driving force [...] remains in the shade (or this source is made external -- God, subject, etc.). In the second conception the chief attention is directed precisely to knowledge of the source of ‘self’-movement. The first conception is lifeless, pale and dry. The second is living. The second alone furnishes the key to the ‘self-movement’ of everything existing; it alone furnishes the key to the ‘leaps’, to the ‘break in continuity’, to the ‘transformation into the opposite’, to the destruction of the old and the emergence of the new”, see Lenin, V.I., *On the Question of Dialectics (1915)*, in: Lenin, V.I., *Collected Works*, vol. 38, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972, 360.
hallmark of Yan’an days. By summing up the experiences of the masses in economic production, the vanguard Party was to distinguish the correct path and to boost the morals of the population. And the cult of the individual was to play an important part in this increasingly utopian search for a uniquely Chinese path of development.

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Chapter Three: Redefining the Cult

The first half of 1958 was a period of constant travel, examinations of local production sites and consecutive conferences for the CCP leadership. In his speeches during this period, Mao repeatedly returned to the topic of dogmatism. He emphasized the necessity to overcome slavish respect for the Soviet model and “experts” in general. Instead of placing supreme attention on the cultivation of heavy industry that had shaped the Chinese understanding of economic development in the early years of the PRC, policies were shifted in the direction of agricultural collectivization. By means of instigating a “Great Leap Forward” based on the experiences of the mass line and the creation of people’s communes, China was to skip the period of socialism (and capitalism) in most parts of the country and set out to find its unique path to communism by relying on a strategy of leaps in production made possible through the “emancipation of thinking and destruction of superstition” (解放思想，破除迷信), one of the most prominent slogans of the Great Leap Forward.

In March 1958 the Politburo met in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province. In a series of speeches, 153 Mao stressed the priority of spontaneously acquired truth over arduously accumulated knowledge by invoking a pantheon of religious leaders, scientists, and philosophers ranging from Jesus over Buddha to Marx and Darwin. According to Mao’s reasoning, they all had made their path breaking discoveries at an early age, unspoilt by long years of education. Furthermore, they had persistently clung to their insights once they had discovered truth. The same had been true of the CCP in the past, at least since Mao’s rise to power at the Zunyi conference in 1935. The Chinese Revolution had succeeded against Stalin’s advice and been denounced by him as a fake revolution. After the founding of the PRC in 1949, Soviet help had been necessary to build up heavy industry, but it had also fostered dogmatism and bureaucratism; it had stifled creativeness and the ability to think comparatively. After destroying superstition in foreign models, Mao claimed that there could be only one object worth worshipping in future: Truth itself. Returning to the subject of the dual nature of commodities, he criticized the influence of a dogmatist cult.

“Whenever heroes appear on stage they look extraordinary; Stalin is that kind of man. Chinese people used to be slaves and it appeared that they would continue that way. Whenever a Chinese artist painted a picture of me with Stalin, I was always shown shorter than Stalin. [The artist] was blindly subdued under the spiritual shadow of the Soviet Union.” 154

153 Three of the speeches Mao made at Chengdu have been made public in the Red Guard publication “Mao Zedong sixiang wansui” (1969). Yet Mao made an explicit reference to a forth speech on 9 March. Wu Lengxi, a participant of the conference, even reports six speeches of the Chairman, probably a final speech and closing remarks on the 25/26 March respectively, see Wu, Yi Mao zhuxi, 60.

But while Mao was adamant about Stalin’s culpability for serious mistakes in his estimates concerning the course of the Chinese Revolution, he detested Khrushchev’s criticism of Stalin as being one-sided and having failed to distinguish between the correct and incorrect aspects of Stalin. A number of Stalin’s thoughts had been “comparatively correct or basically correct” and the worship of his person therefore should not be condemned. “They don’t hang his portrait, we hang it.” After all, the cult’s main objective did not rest with the worship of a person but in worshipping the embodied truth. Mao therefore advanced his own theory of personality cults, which again made use of his conception of the dual nature of commodities:

“There are two kinds of personality cults. One is correct, for example we have to worship the correct things of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin and worship them forever. Not to worship them is not possible. Truth is in their hands, why shouldn’t one worship them? We believe in truth as truth derives from objective circumstances. Members of a squad must worship their squad leader. Not to worship is not possible. Another kind of cult is incorrect, without adding own analysis, blindly obeying, this is just not right. […] The problem does not rest with the cult of the individual but in whether it represents the truth or not. If it represents the truth, it should be worshipped. If it does not, even collective leadership won’t work.”

Mao’s distinction between two types of personality cults has led Party historians to wonder how this seasoned dialectician could have come up with a crude theory like this. However, the report also included a different, mainly functional aspect of personality cults, amalgamated within Mao’s meandering reasoning that pointed at the political foundations of his argument. Mao defined Khrushchev’s secret speech as mainly driven by political purposes. Khrushchev accordingly had come to understand the political potency of the cult as an additional source of power, which did not rely on its recognition within the Party elite. But, as Mao later told Snow, Khrushchev never really managed to foster a sufficient cult himself and thus could be purged all too easily by his Politburo comrades. At Chengdu, Mao further revealed that the attempts of cult-building by the “Northeastern King”, Gao Gang, and his close association with Stalin had been an eighth degree earthquake. By fostering his own power base in Manchuria and establishing immediate relations with Stalin, Gao had threatened China’s political stability. The dictatorship of the proletariat therefore had to

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156 Ibid. 97f.
157 Mao Zedong sixiang wansui, n.p.: 1969, 162.
159 Mao himself had been furious when the People’s Daily in an editorial in early 1956 had quoted him publicly out of context in order to make their point in opposing Leftism, see MacFarquhar et al. (eds.), Secret Speeches, 395 and Wu, Yi Mao zhuxi, 46-58.
160 Mao, Hujian Sinuo, CCRD.
remain firmly in the hands of those representing truth. Mao asserted the correctness of his own position by quoting Lenin: “Some people opposed Lenin, saying that he was a dictator. Lenin replied flatly, it is better for me to be a dictator than it is for you.”\textsuperscript{161} Mao’s speech thus presented a warning not to take the secret speech as pretext for an attack on his authority by way of arguing against personality cults in general.

> “Some people are very interested in opposing personality cults. […] There are also two aims behind opposing personality cults: one is to oppose incorrect cults, and one is to oppose the worship of others, demanding own worship instead.”\textsuperscript{162}

Mao’s conception of personality cults thus operated on different levels. While on the theoretical level he was willing to concede the existence of “feudal remnants” and to implicitly acknowledge similarities between CCP rule and the traditional mandate of the emperors, the impact of the secret speech had provided him with ample proof about the dangers of debunking prominent symbols. The emotional expediency of the cult in stirring up public support and enthusiasm for his own policy directives made it a non-dispensable tool, if he wanted to retain the powerful link to the masses outside the regular channels of the Party bureaucracy. Furthermore, the cult had proven its functional importance within internecine Party struggles more than once in the past and should therefore not be done away with too easily, because by 1958 Mao perceived different lines of struggle to take shape, forecasting future contradictions during which the correct line would have to be proven through unremitting class struggle.

**The Great Leap Forward**

With the shunning of the policy to emulate the Soviet experiences there was no longer a commonly recognized model of development. Besides the vague repository provided by the “general truths” (普遍真理) of Marxism-Leninism, no clear indicator existed on how to proceed towards future communism. A perpetuated system of trial and error on the local level and the propagation of successful model experiences through the mass media were to circumvent the dangers of going it alone. But the experiences of the mass line needed to be analyzed and distinguished by a vanguard Party under a constantly correct leadership. There can be no doubt that Mao, as he later admitted in his talks with Snow, believed himself to be the only person within the CCP capable of mastering the task as helmsman of the Chinese Revolution. His call for a vehement criticism of those in offices of power, “to dare to take the

\textsuperscript{161} *Mao Speeches at Chengdu 1*, 97.  
\textsuperscript{162} *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui*, 1969, 162.
risk of being cut to pieces so as to pull the emperor from the horse";\textsuperscript{163} therefore operated under certain constraints. Mao repeatedly emphasized that the correct views on present developments did not automatically derive from the tenure of high-level Party offices like that of the CCP Chairman.

"An individual is sometimes right and sometimes wrong. Follow him, when he is right and do not follow him when he is wrong. One must not follow without discrimination. We follow Marx and Lenin, and we follow Stalin in some things. We follow whoever has the truth in his hands. Even if he should be a manure carrier or a street sweeper, as long as he has the truth he should be followed."\textsuperscript{164}

Distinguishing truth in retrospective, however, proved to be much easier than during day-to-day political work. Mao would often joke about his own intellectual odyssey from classical Confucianist viewpoints to Marxism-Leninism and thus acknowledge that he himself had not been immune against holding wrong opinions. But by 1958, Mao was no longer prepared to accept criticism from his Politburo comrades if it presented a threat to his personal authority, as minister of defense Peng Dehuai was to experience a year later at the Lushan Plenum after having placed the blame for the excesses of Great Leap Forward at Mao’s feet. Power politics for Mao ultimately remained superior to questions of theoretical consistency.

Among Mao’s followers the semantic subtleties and distinctions between different types of cults were clearly seen as referring to the deceased forefathers of communism or future communist leaders, and not to Mao Zedong himself. Mao as early as 1956 had proposed to step back in the second row of leadership and to enable his potential successors to gain firsthand experience in running the Party-state. The position as state and Party chairman thus should not be seen as eternally tied to Mao personally. The promulgation of a correct personality cult at the Chengdu conference nevertheless brought forth the first wave of massive flattery within the Politburo. Ke Qingshi, the First Party Secretary of Shanghai municipality and a major proponent of the steel drive during the Great Leap Forward proposed to follow the Chairman blindly, even to the point of superstitious belief.\textsuperscript{165} In the same year, Kang Sheng, Mao’s former security chief from Yan’an days and by 1958 alternate member of the Politburo, announced that Mao Zedong Thought should be regarded as the “apex” (顶峰) of present day Marxism-Leninism. A few months later at the Second Plenum of the Eighth Congress in May 1958, a cadre was quoted with the following stanza:

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{163} Mao Speech at Chengdu 2, 111.
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“We have to completely eradicate superstition and achieve a true liberation of thought, a great revolution of thought [思想大革命]. With respect to Mao Zedong Thought, the problem of superstitious belief does not exist. In the past, particular stress has been placed on the study of the original works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin while the study of Mao Zedong’s works has remained insufficient; from now on, the cadres have to read them and should primarily study them. This is living dialectics, living Marxism. Mao Zedong really developed Marxism-Leninism further.”

All phraseology dealing with the notion of superstition was semantically closely linked to a blind acceptance of the Soviet model. The study of Mao Zedong Thought therefore a priori ruled out the possibility of bearing resemblance to any kind of “superstitious belief in the individual”. The small group from Mao’s home province Hunan at the Second Plenum expressed this equivalence in clear terms:

“[F]ollowing Mao Zedong from the bottom of our hearts is no worship of the individual or superstitious belief in the individual but the worship of truth; the decades of revolution and construction have proven that Chairman Mao is the representative of truth.”

Mao had repeatedly requested to raise the political consciousness of the populace and advocated the publication of communist magazines for both a Party-internal readership and the general public to stimulate thinking about the harmful impact of bourgeois influences in the superstructure. Even after the failure of the Hundred Flowers Campaign, Mao searched for ways of encouraging public criticism against bureaucratism and decadence at lower Party levels. It seemed necessary to “create a kind of atmosphere” that would make people dare to “talk and act big”. A correct personality cult could help to foster this kind of lively, emotional climate in which everyone, given his proletarian standpoint, would dare to attempt to move mountains like in story of the foolish old man that was to become one of the “three constantly read articles” (老三篇) of the Cultural Revolution. But without belief, without the recognition of the fundamental truths of Marxism-Leninism and the destruction of the ideological remnants of the old society, communism would never be achieved. Therefore a blind belief in and staunch defense of communism should arm the populace on the uncertain road ahead. In high spirits, “cherishing every minute” as Mao had expressed in one of most often quoted poems, the Chinese were to destroy the depressing atmosphere of blindly following the Soviet model and to sketch out their own path to communism.

166 Lin Yunhui, Ershi shiji liushi niandai geren chongbai de qiyuan, in: Dangshi bolan 11 (2005), 36.
167 Ibid.
168 Mao Speech at Chengdu 2, 111.
169 Ibid. 110.
170 Mao Tsetung Poems (Chinese-English), Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan chuban, 1976, 92f.
On the central level, the publication of the theoretical magazine *Red Flag* under Chen Boda’s guidance was to set the pace of intellectual development during the Great Leap. All provinces were to contribute to the publication by sending six to ten articles every year and to take care of publishing similar Party newspapers on the provincial level.171 This initiative placed in the hands of the provincial propaganda departments brought forth an ever-growing stream of poems, songs, plays, and articles glorifying the Great Leap Forward and the Three Red Banners: the Great Leap itself, the people’s communes, and the mass line. Just like in the agricultural sector, where production teams and brigades could win a “sputnik” (卫星) and become models of emulation when overfulfilling the state targets, in the realm of culture a similar drive ensued. In a brief chronicle of major propaganda campaigns compiled by the Hebei Provincial Propaganda Department in early 1966, the bureaucratic nature of the procedure becomes obvious. During a conference on proletarian culture and theory in mid-July 1958, the Propaganda Department laid out a plan of production for the cultural sector in order to “greet” the decennial founding of the PRC in October 1959. Up to that date, a specific number of cultural products had to be created: 200 distinguished pieces of literature, 500 plays, 1000 songs, 1000 works of art, and five motion pictures. Furthermore, every administrative region should bring forth two sputnik counties, 10 sputnik communes, and 1,000,000 “poetry workshops” (诗车间) as an “offering to the CCP Center and a [measure of] competition with other provinces”.172 Within a few months the numbers had become completely spurious. On 4 November, the Hebei Provincial Propaganda Department announced a campaign entitled “100 million”. For the occasion of the “decennial offering” the province was to form an army of ardent theoretical students, numbering at least 10 million members and produce 1 million “red and expert study activists” (红专学习积极分子).173

The drive of enthusiasm Mao had envisioned rooting out the causes of dogmatism and bureaucratism had resulted in a competition of producing completely fictive numbers of cultural artefacts in order to signal the adherence of the provincial cadres to the central directives. Consequently, cult-building resumed on a large scale during the Great Leap Forward. Examples are to be found both in the mythical language employed when describing Mao’s visits to model communes and the difficulties of the CCP Center to keep the localities from reviving “bourgeois” forms to express their gratitude. In late 1957 already, the CCP Center had been obliged to confirm its previous policy forbidding the naming of places,

171 Mao Speech at Chengdu 2, 109f.
173 Ibid. 5. For a similar account of frenzy within agriculture, see the list of claimed output per square mu (666.7 square meters) in Lin Youyu, *Quzhe tansuo (Zhongguo ershi shiji quanshi*, vol. 8), Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2001, 146.
streets, and factories after present leaders. An examination of painted wall-slogans in villages on behalf of the Hebei Provincial Government in June 1959 had revealed the existence of numerous incorrect and boasting slogans that had to be amended. Mao Zedong himself at the Shanghai Conference in April 1959 heavily criticized the all-pervasive tendency of lying and later warned against the reappearance of the “five styles” (egalitarianism, commandism, blind leadership, pomposity, superior attitude) among Party cadres. He even called for a binary compilation of exemplary good and bad persons, who during the first year of the Leap had either given in to the boasting or withstood the tides. The signs were clearly in favour of trimming the excesses of the Great Leap. The CCP Central Document Zhongfa [59] 557, announcing the convention of the Twentieth National Propaganda Conference in late June 1959, explained the lack of reports on economic issues during the first half of 1959 by claiming that “at that time the situation still was not very clear”. Therefore a greater emphasis was to be placed on the importance of market allocation. The tendency of “empty boasting” as evidential in the reports on the sputnik communes was thus to be replaced by a description according to the facts.

By the time the Lushan Plenum was convened in July 1959, Liu Shaoqi had attained the position as head-of-state. The decision had been adopted at the Sixth Plenum in August 1958 and the delegates of the Second National People’s Congress had chosen Liu as state chairman in April 1959. By 1959, China thus officially claimed two chairmen. Mao retained the much more powerful position as chairman of the CCP. Liu’s new position thus did not effectively alter the Mao-centred politics, as the Lushan crisis in July 1959 was to reveal. The sharp criticism of the Great Leap Forward as presented in a personal letter by minister of defense Peng Dehuai to Mao on 14 July 1959 had a dramatic impact on the further development of the cult. The letter evaporated Mao’s conciliate attitude towards correcting his mistaken policies. Peng’s status as the leader of the People’s Liberation Army and the danger of losing the army as power base, a threat that has to be seen against the backdrop of the affair around Soviet minister of defense Zhukov, led Mao to take a drastic response. He accused Peng and others of having formed a “military club” trying to usurp power and had him

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174 Zhongfa [57] 39, Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu jinzhiyong geren mingzi zuo diming, jieming, he qie deng mingzi de tongzhi, 20 November 1957, HPA 855-4-1045.
175 Hebei sheng xuanhuaibu (ed.), 1958-1965 Dashiji, 9. A similar examination in 1955 on behalf of the Central Propaganda Department had revealed the existence of numerous outdated (“The People’s Liberation Army will soon arrive, let us prepare their welcome”) or incorrect slogans (“Rearm West-Germany!”), see Hebei shengwei pizhuan ‘Zhongyang pizhuan Zhongyang xuanhuangbu guanyu jiancha biaoyu de baogao’, 4 June 1955, HPA 855-3-787, 4. The central directive is to be found in Zhonggong zhongyang pizhuan zhongyang xuanhuangbu guanyu jiancha biaoyu de baogao, 13 April 1955, in: Zhongyang xuanhuaibu bangongtong (ed.), Dang de xuanchuan gongzuo wenjian 1, 251f.
stripped of his command. The crisis provoked by Mao’s anguish, reinvigorated the policies of the Great Leap that had been about to be corrected. Their continuation ultimately caused millions of Chinese peasants to die an agonizing death of starvation.¹⁷⁷

As Peng had enjoyed high respect within the armed forces, Mao had to replace him through a commander of similar prestige on whose personal loyalty he could count. Marshal Lin Biao proved to be the ideal choice for Mao. He was the youngest of the ten marshals of the PLA, known for his military genius and absolute loyalty to Mao. Due to health reasons of uncertain nature Lin had kept a low profile during the first decade of the PRC but had been elected member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo and CCP vice-chairman in February 1958. Lin’s decision to take over the responsibilities of such a crucial office despite his initial reluctance was to a large part due to Mao’s constant requests. As soon as he had been installed in his new position, Lin Biao immediately set out to overcome any signs of doubt in Mao’s authority by re-invoking the Yan’an style rectification of troop morals through exegetical bonding and the public championing of Mao Zedong’s works. Liu Shaoqi joined him in the renewed efforts of cult-building. At a conference on 9 September 1959, Liu accused a number of Party members like Peng Dehuai of having tried to follow the example of the Twentieth CPSU Congress¹⁷⁸ and to oust Mao Zedong. Again, like in 1943 when his support had been crucial for the acceptance of the Mao cult as brand symbol of the CCP, Liu now portrayed himself as staunch supporter of the cult:

“I have always advocated the ‘cult of the individual’, but one can argue whether the term ‘cult of the individual’ is appropriate or not. What I mean is that I have always advocated Mao’s leadership authority. […] I am still advocating it and I will continue to build the “personality cults” of comrades Lin Biao and Deng Xiaoping. If you don’t agree with me, I will continue whatsoever; I don’t necessarily have to rely on other people’s support.”¹⁷⁹

The cult of the individual in Liu’s opinion was an awkward synonym for the prestige of Mao Zedong as symbol of the Party and thus the Chinese Revolution. The creation and nurturing of the powerful image had to be advanced in the interest of the Party. Given the difficulties of ascertaining the correct path to communism and the danger posed by factional warfare, the cult remained important and had to be substantiated through minor cults around possible successor figures. The unanimity of the CCP leadership was best to be presented by means of a strong and positive depiction of collective leadership in the press, while possibly religious

¹⁷⁸ According to Red Guard sources, Peng Dehuai later admitted to have proposed to drop the two references to Mao Zedong Thought at the Eighth Congress. At Lushan he had further opposed to the signing of the “East is Red” and other performances of the cult.
¹⁷⁹ Cong. Quzhe fazhan de suiyue, 305f.
overtones or similarities between CCP and emperor rule would be declared to be ideological remnants and vanish over time. With the dismissal of Peng Dehuai the sustaining of a “correct” cult within the Party steadily gained ground. In September 1960 the fourth volume of Mao Zedong’s collected works was published, accompanied by a great study campaign.\(^\text{180}\) But the question of the cult had not yet been settled on the international stage. It turned out to be one of the main ideological reasons for the increasing rift between China and the Soviet Union.

The Sino-Soviet Rupture and the War of Words

The Sino-Soviet relationship had been steadily deteriorating since Khrushchev’s secret speech. The rift had two principal reasons: The first reason was based on matters of policy line. The CCP and a small minority of other communist parties including Albania, North Korea, and Indonesia objected to Khrushchev’s concept of peaceful coexistence and advocated unremitting struggle against imperialism and its “running dogs” (走狗). Ideological differences further existed about the question of the cult, the existence of which according to the CCP had weakened the socialist camp due to its backward influence. Finally, the Soviet criticism of the Great Leap Forward and the proposed neutrality in the Indo-Chinese border clashes in the autumn of 1959 had deepened the animosities. The second reason was of more personal nature and linked to the role played by Khrushchev himself. Communication in foreign affairs, as Pierre Bourdieu once remarked, has to retain a high degree of codification given the risks involved in the case of failure.\(^\text{181}\) Khrushchev however, not quite the diplomat, frequently criticized others personally with his sharp impromptu remarks. At a Party conference at Warsaw in February 1959 he had in a private talk referred to Mao as “an elderly, crotchety person, rather like an old shoe, which is just good enough to put in a corner to be admired”\(^\text{182}\) and at Bucharest in 1960 he had even proposed to hang a portrait of Peng Dehuai instead. The strained personal relationship between Mao and Khrushchev made a cessation of the enmities unlikely as long as both parties retained their leading personnel.

The breach became clearly visible with the publication of the article *Long live Leninism* in the journal *Red Flag* in April 1960. The commemoration of Lenin’s 90th birthday

\(^\text{180}\) Unlike the process of compiling the first three volumes in which Mao himself had taken the primary role, a small group comprising Hu Qiaomu, Tian Jiaying, Xu Liqun, Xiong Fu, and Wang Zongyi completed the draft. Mao only corrected the final draft before publication. Kang Sheng’s involvement, despite other claims, was only marginal as he confessed himself: “The worthy moves the mouth not the muscles” [君子动口, 不动手], see Feng Xianzhi, *Mao Zedong he ta de mishu Tian Jiaying*, in: Dong et al. (eds.), *Mao Zedong he ta de mishu Tian Jiaying*, 43.


\(^\text{182}\) MacFarquhar, *Great Leap Forward*, 268.
was taken as opportunity to attack the Soviet failure to grasp the continuing importance of Leninist theory, especially class analysis and class struggle. In August 1960, the Soviet-Union withdrew their technical experts from China, and ideological clashes continued at conferences in Bucharest and Moscow during the following year. The question of the cult became virulent after the 22nd Congress of the CPSU was convened in Moscow in October 1961. It decided upon the removal of Stalin’s sarcophagus from public display and the burning of his remains. During his speech to the congress on 17 October 1961, Khrushchev sharply criticized Enver Hoxha, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Albanian Party of Labour, for his failure to live up his former agreement to the policies of de-Stalinization. The remarks were simultaneously a thinly veiled attack on the rising cult of Mao Zedong since the Lushan Plenum. Hoxha replied with a vehement, highly personal criticism of Khrushchev on November 7, 1961. He emphasized the Albanian Labour Party’s continued commitment to opposing the “sickening belief” in personality cults or other violations of the legal sphere. But this was not to diminish the “love and respect” for the legitimate leaders of the masses. Hoxha gave the interpretation a further twist by claiming that ulterior motives lay at the bottom of Khrushchev’s secret speech. In fact, Khrushchev was “using the so-called critique of Stalin’s cult of the individual […] to achieve non-Marxist goals” by propounding revisionist theories that weakened the awareness of continuing class struggle among the working class. The “so-called combating the cult of the individual” had been turned into a bugbear to threaten leaders of communist parties not complying with Khrushchev’s revisionist course. Furthermore, while propounding to fight against Stalinist excesses, Hoxha accused Khrushchev of deliberately shaping his own personality cult in the Soviet Union as “great military strategist” and “architect” of the victory over fascism. The single aim of the empty talk on personality cults should thus be seen in Khrushchev’s efforts to install revisionist and even imperialist “elements” in positions of leadership in order to carry out his destruction of Leninism.

Most of Hoxha’s lengthy speech was published ten days later in the People’s Daily, including the crucial section on the “so-called opposing the cult of the individual”. A highly

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183 Lenin zhuyi wansui, in: Red Flag 8 (1960). Translations were published the same month in the Beijing Foreign Languages Press.

184 At the Moscow conference in November 1960, the Chinese delegation after long discussions formally signed the conference communique that included a positive reference to the secret speech and its attack on the cult: “Marxist-Leninist Parties […] work indefatigably for the strengthening of their bonds with the Party membership […] and do not allow the cult of the individual, which shackles creative thought and initiative of Communists”. See Appendix Q in Gittings, John, Survey of the Sino-Soviet Dispute. A Commentary and Extracts from the Recent Polemics 1963-1967, London: Oxford University Press, 1968, 367.

185 Enwei’ er Huocha tongzhi de jianghua (zhi yi), in: People’s Daily, 17 November 1961, 5

186 Ibid. 5.
restricted internal circular pointed out that the CCP would currently refrain from making a public statement on the issue but would continue to reprint the views of both sides in the Party newspapers. In small group discussions within the Party cells, the basic unity of the socialist camp should be emphasized. The political instructors further were to differentiate between the CPSU leadership and the Soviet populace in general, as towards the latter a much more cordial attitude should be adopted. To express the basic correctness of the Albanian standpoint, a commentary was to be published under the pseudonym of a single author in the People’s Daily: “To do it this way is effective in unmasking the errors of revisionism, to sustain the correct standpoint in order to educate the people.” An increased level of Marxist-Leninist education had become necessary as the 22nd CPSU Congress and its proceedings had incited “vivid attention” among the populace according to internal intelligence bulletins. Especially students were reported to have been discussing the matter all night. They further had sent letters to the CPSU Central Committee and tried to convince foreign students of the correctness of the Chinese standpoint.

The abridged TASS version of Khrushchev’s speech to the congress had been reprinted in the People’s Daily on 20 October 1961, supplemented six days later with the full text of his remarks against Albania. Yet the speeches content, which had been relayed to CCP members in internal news organs, had already become widely known. The internal Party publications, however, were not treated with sufficient secrecy: “Sometimes [the reports] are first read by the mail correspondents, the cleaning and the delivering staff before they finally reach the designated reader. Some people furthermore just leave their Reference Information anywhere so that they can be read by anyone.” The local cadres were requested to pay more attention to matters of secrecy and to prohibit “unprincipled” discussions regarding matters of foreign policy, especially with foreigner residents and visitors. All questions should be answered by relying on the formulations that had been employed by the leading Party comrades.

The breaking point that was to finally seal the Sin-Soviet rupture was the signing of the nuclear test-ban treaty between the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain in July 1963. The situation had already been tense in the previous months despite a short period of rapprochement during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The criticism had not ceased, but it had been focussed on Albania and Yugoslavia serving as proxies. The consequences of an open

189 Ibid.
schism for the international communist movement and the loss of the Soviet Union’s nuclear shield for China in particular restrained public rhetoric on both sides to a certain extent. The mutual communication during a series of communist Party conferences, however, took on ever more rigid, even comical forms. The Chinese side proved to be more apt in employing quotes from the Marxist-Leninist canon to bolster their arguments, leading Khrushchev to exclaim at the Sixth Congress of the German Socialist Unity Party (SED) on 16 January 1961: “These people imagine that to engage in endless swearing and cursing at imperialism is to do what will best help the socialist countries. This is a sort of voodoo belief in the power of curses and incantations.” Both sides had clarified their standpoints in an exchange of letters preceding a possible meeting in mid-1963. The CPSU Central Committee in a letter of 30 March 1963 emphasized the importance of peaceful coexistence and a growing living standard as well as the danger of a thermo-nuclear war as opposed to the theory of unremitting class struggle. The growing care for the well-being of the Soviet populace, however, should not be interpreted as a sign of going soft on imperialism. The CPSU took a clear stand against capitalist politics and possible Trojan horses carrying bourgeois ideology into the Soviet system while simultaneously engaging in further cultural contact with capitalist countries. The CPSU requested the CCP to eliminate the personality cult in order to show how the bonds and viewpoints shared by the fraternal parties had already been strengthened. A unified communist bloc would be the only way of preventing the dangers ahead.

The Chinese side took more than two and a half months to prepare their response. Unlike in the Soviet case and similar to the process of writing the other editorials mentioned above, Mao Zedong as Chairman of the CCP personally supervised the process of drafting the answer to the Soviet letter. Other high-ranking leaders like Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping were all deeply involved in the discussions. A collection of materials was prepared to facilitate a profound refutation of the Soviet claims to represent the true inheritance of Marxism-Leninism. The quantitative output of the scholarly undertaking was truly astounding. The collections of materials that served as background for the writing of the open letter and the following nine polemics included indices of quotations from all major works of the Marxist-Leninist canon as well as Mao Zedong’s own works, totalling more than

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four million characters.\(^\text{193}\) The letter was drafted by Chen Boda and the leftist “scholars scribes” (秀才) Wang Li, a former *Red Flag* editor who was to play a major role in the first years of the Cultural Revolution, and Fan Ruoyu, deputy chief editor of the *Red Flag*.\(^\text{194}\) The draft was finalized on 14 June 1963 and published three days later in the *People’s Daily*. The answer, twice as long as the Soviet letter, listed 25 specific problems that set the agenda for a meeting between both sides. It presented a scathing critique of the CPSU’s standpoints:

“If one avoids a concrete class analysis, seizes at random on certain superficial phenomena, and draws subjective and groundless conclusions, one cannot possibly reach correct conclusions with regard to the general line of the international communist movement but will inevitably slide on to a track entirely different from that of Marxism-Leninism.”\(^\text{195}\)

Section twenty dealt specifically with the question of the cult and invoked Leninist Party principles to substantiate the claim that the CPSU was about to subvert the relation between leaders and masses, a practice Lenin had called “ridiculously absurd and stupid”.\(^\text{196}\) The only aim behind the frequent mentioning of the cult was to be seen, just as Hoxha had argued, in its function as a tool to topple disobedient leaders of fraternal parties while simultaneously fostering their own worship around Khrushchev at home. The Soviet reply in form of an open letter dropped all diplomatic niceties and declared the CCP to be incapable of dealing with the realities of a changing world. By clinging to orthodox viewpoints expressed in a completely different context, the Chinese verbal “camouflage”\(^\text{197}\) seemingly ignored the fundamental issues at stake like questions of war and peace, colonialism, or the overcoming of the cult ideology. In fact, the Chinese case should be seen as the first example of an open proclamation of a leader cult within the communist movement.

“It is hard fully to ascertain the Chinese comrades’ motivation in upholding the personality cult. […] It should be observed that even at the height of the personality cult in our country, Stalin himself was forced, at least in words, to reject this petty-bourgeois theory, saying that it stemmed from the Socialist-Revolutionaries.”\(^\text{198}\)

Given the hostile attitude on both sides the failure of the meetings between high-ranking delegations held in Moscow in mid-July was predictable. The bilateral talks were adjourned without date and the polemics resumed immediately. Four days after the return of the Chinese delegation to China, the Soviet Union signed the partial test-ban treaty on 25 July 1963 with

\(^{193}\) Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan* 2, 591.  
\(^{195}\) *Polemic*, 7.  
\(^{196}\) Ibid. 40.  
\(^{197}\) Ibid. 539.  
\(^{198}\) Ibid. 563.
the United States and Great Britain that had been discussed parallel to the CCP-CPSU talks in a much more cordial atmosphere. China had become completely isolated with the exception of a few loyal allies such as Albania and been kept out of the nuclear club.

The open rupture between China and the Soviet Union spurred enormous propagandistic activities. Unlike the CPSU, the CCP had published all critical remarks in the *People’s Daily* and even reprinted the Soviet Union’s open letter in full on 20 July. The refutation of the Soviet arguments had thus become a question on which the credibility of the CCP rested at home and abroad, and was accordingly treated as a matter of ideological principle. While both sides during extensive visits lobbied for support among developing countries, the war of words was conducted on the Chinese side by a large group of the Party’s most gifted scribes, which had been formed *ad hoc* and been divided into different sections that drafted the famous “Nine Comments” (九评) to refute the intellectual contents of the open letter of the Soviet Union. The comments were published between 6 September 1963 and 14 July 1964 in the *People’s Daily*. The small group in charge of the supervision of the different sections under the leadership of Kang Sheng and Wu Lengxi first discussed the drafts with Deng Xiaoping, who would then send them to Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, and Zhou Enlai. After their remarks had been included, each article was scrutinized in a Politburo session before it was admitted to distribution via print media and radio stations.

The second comment *On the Question of Stalin* provided the final Chinese statement on the cult up to the outset of the Cultural Revolution. Mao Zedong personally corrected the draft three times before it was published on 13 September 1963. The comment rejected the allegations voiced in the CPSU letter as non-argumentative pathos and preceded in dialectical fashion to prove the correctness of the Chinese standpoint. In its first argument, the CCP tried to prove that the criticism of Stalin was not only directed at the person of Stalin himself but as well about the attitude towards the dictatorship of the proletariat in general. By claiming a thirty-year period of the personality cult, Khrushchev had left the impression that the Soviet populace had not been liberated from serfdom through the October Revolution, but continued

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200 The main four divisions were arranged according to the units concerned: The Internal Liaison Office, the Central Propaganda Department, the *People’s Daily*, and the *Red Flag*. The “anti-revisionism” groups continued to exist until the eve of the Cultural Revolution, see *Zhongfa* [66] 121, *Zhongyang guanyu biansheng Mao Zedong tongzhi zhuzuo de tongzhi*, 21 February 1966, HPA 855-20-1336.

201 Wu, *Shiniun lunzhan* 2, 538f. Wu claims that Mao supervised the drafting of all nine comments. In the Mao manuscripts however only remarks on the Comments number 2, 5, 7, 8, and 9 are to be found. The frequent propagation enabled even elementary school children to recite passages of the commentaries by heart, see Qian, Gang, *Hongse ciyu de boxing he liubian*, 4 (unpublished manuscript).
to live under an even worse threat than feudalism. Instead, Stalin’s mistakes should be interpreted as formalism or subjectivism and were belittled by his achievements. The second main argument dealt with the inconsistency of Khrushchev’s own position. Not only had he been part of the system (“In the position of an accomplice to a ‘murderer’ or a ‘bandit’? Or in the same position as a ‘fool’ or an ‘idiot’?”), but had continuously praised Stalin himself. Worst of all, while openly denouncing the personality cult of others, Khrushchev had even at the twenty-second Congress been entitled as “cosmic father”, a clear indication of the doubletalk involved on his side. What had been his motivations for delivering the secret speech therefore?

“To put it bluntly, it is nothing but the following:

1. On the pretext of ‘combating the personality cult’, to counterpose Stalin, the leader of the party, to the party organization, the proletariat and the masses of the people;
2. On the pretext of ‘combating the personality cult’, to besmirch the proletarian party, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the socialist system;
3. On the pretext of ‘combating the personality cult’, to build themselves up and to attack revolutionaries loyal to Marxism-Leninism so as to pave the way for revisionist schemers to usurp the party and state leadership;
4. On the pretext of ‘combating the personality cult’, to interfere in the internal affairs of fraternal Parties and countries and strive to subvert their leadership to suit themselves;
5. On the pretext of ‘combating the personality cult’, to attack fraternal Parties which adhere to Marxism-Leninism and to split the international communist movement.

The ‘combat against the personality cult’ launched by Khrushchov [sic!] is a despicable political intrigue. Like someone described by Marx, ‘He is in his element as an intriguer, while a nonentity as a theorist.’

By quoting other revisionists who had been critical of Stalin and his cult, most notably Trotsky, the implementation of the cult as an instrument of political intrigue was to become obvious. The CCP argued that a final verdict on how to evaluate Stalin would probably not be reached in the present century. But the attempts of Khrushchev to slander Stalin’s memory would be futile. “Khrushchev was able to utilize his privileged position to remove the body of Stalin from the Lenin Mausoleum, but try as he may, he can never succeed in removing the great image of Stalin from the minds of the Soviet people and of the people throughout the world.”

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202 Mao himself inserted the sentence that Stalin’s mistakes had a historical lesson for the Chinese and would prevent them to commit them or at least “to a smaller extent”, Mao wengao 10, 371.
203 Polemic, 126.
204 Ibid. 134.
205 Ibid. 133.
206 Mao wengao 10, 369.
207 Polemic, 137f.
Worship and Superstitious Belief: A Quantitative Survey

A quantitative survey of articles published in the People’s Daily and the Liberation Army News that mention the cult of the individual precisely mirrors the national and international reverberations of the secret speech. The data reveals a drastic bifurcation. The term *geren chongbai* (个人崇拜) first used as translation for the “cult of the individual” in 1953, steeply rises in public usage after Khrushchev’s secret speech. With the end of the Hundred Flowers Campaign in June 1957, however, it declines in similar fashion and vanishes nearly completely from public discourse by 1959. Mao’s differentiation between two types of personality cults at Chengdu had left newspaper editors and Party propagandists with a semantic problem. As *geren chongbai* now referred to both a correct and an incorrect variant of cult, one of both had to be renamed. In an article published in the People’s Daily on 25 December 1958 the question of correct translations from the Russian vernacular was made explicit. The author, Lin Ling, singled out a number of expressions that did not exactly match the Russian original and thus failed to denote their exact object of reference, sometimes causing considerable harm. The original meaning of the Russian *kul’t lichnosti* was declared to be “transforming an individual into a worshipped icon” *[把个人当偶像尊拜]*. Therefore the translations *geren mixin* [个人迷信, superstitious belief in the individual] or *geren mobai* [个人膜拜, prostration before an individual] were said to capture the quasi-religious meaning much more precisely than the term *chongbai*, indicating reverence in general.208 In future, the expression *geren mixin* should therefore be made use of in order not to negate the veneration of eminent and respected persons owing to “an unfortunate result of a lack of thoughtfulness during the time of translation”.209

The following years witnessed the rise of the new translation *geren mixin* especially since 1961 and during the fierce debate accompanying the split in Sino-Soviet relations in 1963/64 that was compared by the CPSU itself to a scholastic dispute. As noted above, superstition became closely linked to the incorrect cult and a dogmatic following of the Soviet model. The notion *chongbai*, on the other hand, retained its ambivalent status and would be revoked massively during the Cultural Revolution when “boundless veneration” *([无限崇拜]*) and “eternal veneration” *([永远崇拜]*) came to be part of the standard vocabulary.

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209 Ibid. 8.
The new translation *geren mixin* was seldom used in its positive form. Most common was the negative usage “opposing the so-called cult of the individual” first adopted by Enver Hoxha in his 1961 speech. The polemics on the general line of the communist movement in 1963-64 resulted in roughly 60 articles mentioning the topic per year. But by the time of the Cultural Revolution, when the cult of Mao Zedong was just about to get started in a way that would even dwarf the Stalin cult in its heyday both terms referring to the cult by and large disappeared from CCP discourse. The cult as historical phenomenon was not dependant on its theoretical explanation in the media but gained force through a variety of new mechanisms that shall be dealt with in more detail in the following part. The constant redefinition of the cult had succeeded in eliminating its original pejorative connotation and had turned it into a dialectical means to promote the destruction of superstitious belief in foreign models. Praise of the Party and its leaders was no longer propagated as harmful but as a necessary means to promote unity and to attract followers in the global fight against imperialism. After Khrushchev’s demotion within the CPSU Central Committee on 14 October 1964, the term nearly vanished completely from Chinese discourse. The cult around Mao Zedong on the other hand became ever more extravagant.

The fifteenth anniversary of the PRC on 1 October 1964 was celebrated with lavish décor. For the first time during a National Day Parade in Beijing, a Mao statue, ten meters
high, was carried along Chang’an Street in the midst of a 16,000 man strong guard of honor. Monstrous models of hogs, ducks, and cabbage were displayed to symbolize the success of the PRC’s economic policies just like during the Great Leap celebrations in 1959. Huge technical replicas of for example a “36,000kw […] vertical propeller-type hydro-turbo generator set”\(^\text{211}\) were to show China’s advanced technological status. China’s first nuclear bomb detonated simultaneously with the public announcement of Khrushchev’s demise. The explosion in the desert of Lop Nor on 16 October 1964 massively enhanced China’s power in world politics as it no longer depended on the Soviet Union for nuclear protection about the extent of which Mao had remained sceptical throughout.\(^\text{212}\) The same evening that the bomb detonated, Mao, Zhou Enlai, and other Party leaders in the Great Hall of the People celebrated the CCP’s dual fortune, the successful explosion of the nuclear bomb and Khrushchev’s purge by attending the third public staging of the song and dance epic *The East is Red* (东方红). The production had been meticulously supervised by Premier Zhou Enlai himself and was to present the “unification of politics and art, of form and content”.\(^\text{213}\) It started with a recital:

“In the Mao Zedong era, the Chinese people are happy, the land is beautiful. But how can we forget the sufferings of the past? How can we forget our Long March under the guidance of Chairman Mao!”\(^\text{214}\)

By presenting Party history in the form of a heroic epic centred on the symbol of Mao Zedong Thought, the performance reinvigorated the image of Mao Zedong as the radiating sun that had been the earliest element of Mao’s self-chosen depiction in the Party journal *Liberation* back in June 1937. The epic, portraying Mao as the source emanating revolutionary truths, was restaged in all major Chinese cities during the following years and the televised version produced upon Zhou Enlai’s request gained enormous attention.\(^\text{215}\) The sunflower costumes of the dancers, bending into whatever direction the sun radiated its warming ray’s of light, came to be a standard iconographical feature of the Mao cult in the following years. Up to this day, sunflowers and not dragons or other traditional signs of the emperor’s court decorate the golden roof tiles on top of the Gate of Heavenly Peace.

By late 1964, China had become a nuclear power and the CCP had self-confidently claimed its doctrinal authority within the Sino-Soviet dispute. International prospects thus

\[^{211}\] China Pictorial November 1964.

\[^{212}\] Especially famous has become his cynical remark in 1958 pondering that even in the case of a nuclear explosion, China due its large number of people would still retain a populace large enough to remain an important political factor, see Martin, Helmut (ed.), *Mao Zedong Texte*, vol. 3, München: Carl Hanser, 1982, 212.

\[^{213}\] *Zhou Enlai nianpu* 2, 668.

\[^{214}\] China Pictorial, December 1964.

\[^{215}\] Zhou continuously supervised the cinematic production of the film, see *Zhou Enlai nianpu* 2, 677, 700, 756.
seemed to be promising, although the critical situation in Vietnam triggered the build-up of a massive relocation of industry towards the so-called “Third Front” that was to provide the communists with a safe industrial power base in case of an invasion. The main danger Mao perceived thus was internal. In numerous speeches after Khrushchev’s demise he warned local cadres about the possible rise of revisionism at the CCP Center, carried forth by a “Chinese Khrushchev”. If even the motherland of socialism had fallen prey to revisionism after the death of Stalin, similar incidents might occur in China as well. Mao therefore closely watched the moves of his potential successors and pondered about new possibilities of immunizing China against the revisionist threat. The biggest anti-revisionist insurance in Mao’s opinion was provided by the political training in the PLA under Lin Biao’s supervision, which was based on the constant heightening of vigilance to unmask hidden enemies and wrong thoughts. The PLA work style and thus the cult were therefore advocated as a model for the whole nation in 1964 and spread the Mao cult in every part of society. The campaign to “Learn from the PLA” prepared the grounds for Mao’s all-out attack on his own Party two year later, when guarded by the “spiritual nuclear bomb” (精神原子弹) of Mao Zedong Thought, China was to delve into the Cultural Revolution.

216 The first public mentioning of the term had been in the Liberation Army News editorial recalling the thirty-third anniversary of the founding of the PLA on 1 August 1960.
PART II

Rites and Recitation
In the first part, the interrelatedness of national and international events in the process of legitimizing a Maoist cult in China has been analyzed by showing the difficulties in dealing with the concept of the cult of the individual. The organized worship of Mao Zedong had started prior to the founding of the PRC and had developed in close rivalry with the projected image of Chiang Kai-shek as the sole legitimate national Chinese leader. Yet only after Stalin’s death and Khrushchev’s secret speech was the cult turned from an unquestioningly employed device of rule into a “scientific” concept, the validity of which had to be re-assessed. The difficulty of how to evaluate Stalin and his cult contributed to the deterioration of the Sino-Soviet relationship and resulted in the need of a theoretical elaboration to justify the worship of the Party’s leading personnel. Rather than chronicling the interchanging debates on the personality cult that provided the rhetorical framework, the second part deals with the actual form and content of the cult between the 1959 Lushan Plenum and the high-tide of the Red Guard cult in mid-1967, when the cult was turned from a mobilizing into a disciplinary instrument of rule.

While the roots of the first Mao cult traced back to the Yan’an Rectification Campaign in 1942-43, the Cultural Revolutionary Mao cult was primarily shaped by the forms of worship developed in the PLA under the auspices of the new minister of defense, Lin Biao, as a measure to counterbalance the disruptive impact of the disastrous Great Leap Forward. No longer was the content of Mao’s main essays being discussed as it had been done at Yan’an. Instead, short passages, sentences, or even single words were learned by heart and applied in day-to-day work. The recitative style of invoking the authority of the Chairman had a huge impact on the further development of the cult. By having non-contextualized fragments studied in piece-meal fashion, the political instrumentability of the cult was enormously increased. Specific targets could be singled out for having opposed certain directives of Mao or for having failed to always and everywhere propagate Mao Zedong Thought. By abandoning the comprehensive study of Marxist-Leninist texts as an intellectual fundament that had to be adapted according to local conditions, and concomitantly elevating the recitation of simple truisms, ritual modes of study came to the fore. But along with the simultaneous destruction of the “directed public sphere” at the outset of the Cultural Revolution, formerly controlled by the Propaganda Department and the Ministry of Culture, the aims of employing the cult came to vary increasingly. The ensuing cult anarchy revealed the multiple ways in which out-of-context citations could be invoked and the futility of steering a revolution through the manipulation of symbols alone.

The following three chapters deal with the establishment of the specific style of veneration during the Cultural Revolution. The “living study and application” (活学活用) of Mao’s works, as first developed in the PLA, provided the basic patterns on which the later cult rested. Its creation, however, followed no master plan but took shape amidst the turmoil of the Great Leap Forward to guarantee the emotional stability of the soldiers. One of the by-products was the Little Red Book, the Cultural Revolution’s primary token. Commonly attributed to Lin Biao, chapter five provides an overview about the complex creation of the “Mao bible” and reveals the unsystematic fashion of its emergence. Finally, the performative politics of the CCP leadership and the Red Guards alike are scrutinized to show the importance of staging requests through invoking the cult and its symbols. This part sets out to empirically substantiate the claim that the communicative space characteristic of the cult is irreducible to the scheming of individual actors alone and that there is more to a history of the Cultural Revolution than elite politics. The specific forms of the Mao cult resulted in the staging of revolutionary loyalty for contradictory purposes that ultimately could only be contained through military force, thus turning the cult from a popular into a cynical device of rule.
Chapter Four: Living Study and Application

The major difference between the “correct cult” advocated by Mao at Chengdu in 1958 and its successor after the first Lushan Plenum the following year lies with respect to the object of referral. At the Chengdu conference Mao had advocated a worship of truth that postulated a dialectical relationship between the cult and intellectual emancipation.\(^2\) The propagation of the “Three Red Banners” was to destroy superstitious belief in the Soviet model and to stimulate activities aimed at discovering a uniquely Chinese path to communism. It was thus quintessentially an attempt of “utopian social engineering” as characterized by Karl Popper. The cult itself was regarded as a means to attain a greater good and not implemented as a device of rule in the first place. Up to the ousting of Peng Dehuai, the Party media had not spread a worship of the CCP Chairman himself but had relied heavily on Mao’s writings to create a suitable “political climate” (政治气候) to encourage the “destruction of superstition” in the Soviet model. After Lushan, references to Mao Zedong Thought and his works skyrocketed in the Party media. Instead of propagating an identity of opposites, of worship and intellectual emancipation, the cult even by Mao’s standards was turned into an “incorrect cult” by asking for the worship of an individual at the expense of others. Its primary function was no longer intellectual emancipation, but securing loyalty, Party unity, and control over the army. Peng Dehuai’s occasional resistance against the public leader cult was taken as a proof for his factional activities. His successor Lin Biao therefore came to champion the cult whenever possible for reasons both of avoiding the fate of Peng and to make use of the cohesive power of the cult to curb the devastating impact of the Great Leap Forward on troop morals.

Lin Biao (1907-1971) remains one of the most enigmatic politicians of modern day China. A widely acclaimed military strategist and hero of the anti-Japanese war, Lin had after the communist victory in Mainland China withdrawn from public stage under the pretence of curing the consequences of an injury he had suffered back in 1938.\(^3\) After having been re-elected as member of the Politburo in 1956,\(^4\) Lin became CCP vice-chairman in 1958. Given his extraordinary revolutionary credentials as youngest of the ten Chinese marshals, Mao’s choice of Lin Biao as successor to Peng Dehuai was not questioned among the Party’s top

\(^2\) Schoenhals, Saltationist Socialism, 177, n.6.
\(^3\) Lin had received medical treatment during a prolonged stay in the Soviet Union (1939-1942) but resumed his military offices after his return to China and was in charge of the successful communist campaign against the GMD forces in north-eastern China.
\(^4\) Credible evidence suggests that during the election of the CCP Chairman at the Eighth Congress in 1956 Mao Zedong cast a highly symbolical vote for Lin Biao instead of himself, see Hu Zhefeng/Yu Huamin, Mao Zedong yu Lin Biao, Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1998, 462.
leadership. Lin had proven to be of outstanding loyalty to Mao Zedong in the past and Mao’s choice was a clear indicator of trying to guarantee the political stability of the PLA.

In most works about the Cultural Revolution, Lin Biao is credited with being the mastermind behind the Mao cult and with having invented its most prominent symbol, the Little Red Book, for reasons of personal ambition. These viewpoints have also been enshrined as official Party line by the 1981 CCP Resolution on Party History. Recent scholarship, based on memoirs and interviews with Party historians, has contested the portrayal of Lin Biao as a plotting careerist trying to usurp power. Instead he is described as a neurotic tactician, rather disinterested, probably even incapable of engaging in regular political work. In her study on the influence of gerontocratic family feuds during the Cultural Revolution, Jin Qiu, daughter of one of Lin Biao’s closest paladins, Air Force Commander Wu Faxian, has highlighted Lin’s ambivalent character as well. By taking on a number of real and faked symptoms of illness, including the fear of heat, wind, and rain, Lin Biao secluded himself from the power politics within the Party elite in the first decade after the founding of the PRC. His Chinese biographer Feng Zhijun has related an anecdote about an utterance Lin is to have made in the early years of the PRC: “Military strategy is my profession, politics my hobby. I have to study Mao Zedong, as no one is as successful in politics as he is”. While the veracity of the utterance remains unclear, there can be no doubt about Lin’s recognition of the fundamental mode of communication in the period during which he rose to political offices. Frederick Teiwes has aptly termed the reality of collective leadership even in the 1950s, which are commonly described as a golden age in present day CCP publications, as “court politics”. The discussions conducted in Mao’s bedroom on whether China harboured the problem of a personality cult are a telling example. There is ample proof about Lin’s rejection against being awarded high-level Party offices and his hateful campaign against a physician sent by Mao Zedong to find out whether he was fit to assume new assignments further confirms the argument, since the doctor testified that no physical reasons prevented Lin from taking on such duties. After assuming political offices, Lin tried to keep away from the pitfalls of politics by minimizing the number of contacts with other members of the CCP leadership, by taking long recreational breaks, and by refraining from proposing any policy directives without Mao’s explicit consent. Even if he had personal opinions on a subject matter, i.e.

about the importance of physical and military training to ensure the PLA’s readiness for combat, he would modify his standpoint as soon as word about a definite statement of Mao was heard. “Closely following” or “keeping in step” (紧跟) with the Chairman thus became Lin’s primary political strategy during the following years.

Despite of Lin Biao’s prominence in basically every work on the Cultural Revolution, his role in propagating the Mao cult has seldom been given adequate attention. Fragmentary bits and pieces of his speeches pre- and post-1966 are taken at random to illustrate his character as a “hypocrite, careerist, [and] intriguer”.9 In order to understand the rise of the Mao cult during the Cultural Revolution and its specific forms, a closer analysis of the “living study and application” of Mao Zedong Thought in the PLA is necessary. It will be argued that Lin Biao effectively employed the cult within army internal conflicts and used it as a symbolic medium to signal his loyalty to Mao Zedong. However, he was neither the only one trying to strengthen the charismatic relationship with the Chairman nor was he specifically apt at manipulating phrases.10 The skilful art of political manoeuvring was no sphere he commanded with similar ease as military tactics.

Political Education in the PLA
The task of political education in the army after 1949 had been appointed to the General Political Department (GPD), one of the three main units below the Central Military Commission (CMC) besides the General Staff and the General Logistics Departments.11 The implementation of policy directives was supervised through a joint leadership of both military unit leaders and political commissars that headed the political committees established on all levels. The earliest campaigns of political education were mostly aimed at the consolidation of the regime against continuing resistance, especially in south and southwestern China. Besides increased efforts to raise the cultural level of the often illiterate soldiers and cadres,12 a period of intense study of the Soviet military experiences ensued in order to detect a suitable way of merging Soviet theory with Chinese realities. Soviet advisers were instrumental in

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10 According to Lin’s own statement, he was a rather inarticulate man; see Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words*, 4.
11 The GPD was formally established in October 1954 during a major reform of the army structure. In the following years, five other general departments were established temporarily but disbanded during the Great Leap Forward, see Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu/Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi/Zhongyang dang’anguan (eds.), *1921-1997 Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhi shi*, Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2000, 10f.
12 According to official statistics, illiteracy rates within the PLA had decreased from estimated 67.4% in 1951 to just above 30% in May 1953, see Dangdai Zhongguo congshu bianshengbu (ed.), *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun zuzhi* (1949.10-1997.9), Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2000, 10f.
laying the foundations of the modern Chinese Air Force, Navy, and weaponry. In the early 1950s, a number of military academies and institutes for education and military research were established to provide training for the political commissars and other high-level military cadres. The most important institute in the founding period of the PRC was the PLA Military Academy, established in Nanjing under the directorship of Liu Bocheng in January 1951.\textsuperscript{13} Five years later on 16 March 1956, the Nanjing PLA Political Academy headed by Marshal Luo Ronghuan replaced its predecessors and became responsible for the education of the PLA’s leading personnel. Its objective was to familiarize high-level military cadres with the basics of political work,\textsuperscript{14} to strengthen the Party spirit, and to advance the modernization of the Chinese forces. By 1958, the Political Academy had educated more than 170,000 cadres in CCP history, CPSU history, political economy, and theory and thus continued the influence of the Soviet model.

The reverberations of the secret speech and the ensuing alienation from the Soviet Union led parts of the PLA leadership to question the former model. Slavishly following the Soviet experiences was declared to be an expression of dogmatism hindering the creative power of the Chinese military tradition. After returning from the Chengdu conference, Lin Biao was informed about controversial opinions on how to deal with dogmatism in military training at a conference convened by the Central Training Supervision Department (训练总监部).\textsuperscript{15} Some participants like Liu Bocheng’s successor in the capacity as head of the Training Supervision Department, Xiao Ke\textsuperscript{16} and his deputy Li Da advocated the continuing importance of systematically studying the Soviet military experiences and not to confuse critical assessment with dogmatism. Xiao Ke adhered to the correctness of his position even after Mao at the Chengdu conference had shunned the Soviet model. Xiao Ke’s views were relayed to Lin Biao, who in turn alerted Mao about dogmatist tendencies in the PLA. Lin urged Mao to place the topic of dogmatism high on the agenda of the upcoming enlarged meeting of the CMC in May that had been decided upon at Chengdu. At the meeting, Lin Biao in his the first available speech after 1949 proclaimed the necessity to destroy superstition in foreign models and bookish worship of the Marxist classics. He further

\textsuperscript{13} Junshi kexueyuan junshi lishi yanjiubu (ed.), Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun liushi nian dashiji (1927-1987), Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1988, 501f.
\textsuperscript{15} The Supervision Department had in 1955 replaced the former “Training Department” (训练部), which had been erected under the auspices of the General Staff. Liu Bocheng came to act as principal with Xiao Ke as deputy, see Cong, Quzhe fazhan de suiyue, 277.
\textsuperscript{16} Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu/Zhonggong zhongyang dang’anguan (eds.), CCP zuzhi ziliao, suppl. vol. 2, 20.
emphasized the importance of uniting the universal truths of Marxism-Leninism with the practice of the Chinese Revolution, as Mao Zedong had done it in the past.

“Our country has a rich historical heritage of its own; 600 million people have an unlimited creative wisdom. [...] Some people say only foreign things are scientific; this expression is incorrect. Why should all foreign things be scientific and our own things unscientific? Everything that has been abstracted from practice and that has been proven correct through practice is scientific, and thus is the truth. [...] The military works of Comrade Mao Zedong are military science; they have creatively developed the theories of Marxism-Leninism in the military realm and we should therefore study them well. Yet we should not only study but should create; only when these two aspects are linked together, the study has succeeded.”

The army units were to look beyond their immediate work, to strengthen the basic class standpoint, and to engage in local political activities under the supervision of the Party committees for the general interest of the people. Peng Dehuai as concurrent minister of defense and Mao Zedong as Chairman of the CMC provided the key speeches to the assembly that lasted from 27 May until 22 July 1958, and by early June had been enlarged to include 1000 military cadres from the top echelon down to the division level. Mao Zedong elaborated on two kinds of dogmatism present within the military: capitalist and Soviet military theory. By requesting to investigate the possible occurrence of dogmatism, Mao took a softer stance on the issue than the official closing report that accused a number of cadres in charge of military training and education like Xiao Ke and Li Da, but implicitly Marshals Chen Bojun and Ye Jianying as well, of having harboured dogmatist thinking. The report heaved the issue on the level of theory by equalling the existence of dogmatist thinking in the military with a line struggle between capitalism and socialism. Xiao Ke and others in the following months were subjected to heavy criticism for having advocated a “capitalist military line” and for having engaged in “anti-Party sectarian activities”.

In the following years, political consciousness and loyalty to the Party were thus placed above the aspects of “regulation” and “modernisation” in the armed forces, which had been the main objectives of the “dogmatists”. By alerting Mao about the presence of dogmatism, Lin Biao had strengthened his image of unwavering loyalty to the line of the Chairman. By adopting the strategy of “raising high” (高举) the banner of Mao Zedong Thought and publicly signalling his unanimous support for Mao’s policies through speeches and articles, Lin tried to circumvent the danger of being retrospectively held accountable for

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18 Dangdai Zhongguo congshu bianshengbu (ed.), Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun 1, 169.
19 Yu, Gongheguo lingxiu, yuanshuai, jiangjun jiaowang shilu, 10.
20 Cong, Quzhe fazhan de suiyue, 292.
independent policy lines that at the time had been sanctioned or at least tolerated by Mao, as it frequently had happened and was to happen in CCP history. Lin was an astute observer of Mao’s ruling techniques. In 1949 already, Lin had written in a private note: “First he will fabricate ‘your’ opinion for you; then he will change your opinion, negate it and refabricate it – Old Mao’s favourite trick. From now on I should be weary of it”. However, he was not simply mimicking Mao rhetorically but he knew how to instrumentalize the Mao cult to outmanoeuvre political rivals in the military as well.

All occasions of rhetorical extravagancy that are commonly cited to expose Lin’s viciousness are taken from contexts of immediate conflict. A good example is the quarrel about the direction of political study with Tan Zheng, who had taken over Marshall Luo Ronghuan’s responsibilities as head of the GPD in December 1956. At a military conference in May 1959, Tan had argued that Mao’s opposition to dogmatic study was not coterminous with abandoning the study of theory altogether, very much along the same line as Xiao Ke. Debating current problems without having established a theoretical fundament, according to Tan, bore the danger of “intellectual confusion”.

He thus remained reluctant to propagate a series of formal innovations Lin Biao had introduced like the “Three-Eight working style” (三八作风) named after two inscriptions Mao had made for the Anti-Japanese Military and Political University in Yan’an back in 1939, whose director Lin had been for a couple of months. The quotations were made up of three sentences and eight characters and had first been brought up by Lin Biao in January 1960: “Firm and correct political orientation”, “Persevering and simple style of work”, “Flexible tactics and strategy”, as well as four adverbs made up of two characters each: “united”, “alert”, “earnest”, and “lively”. The slogans were to convey Lin’s recourse on the uniquely Chinese methods employed during the Anti-Japanese war. Tan Zheng’s main point, however, was directed against bridging difficult concepts with simplistic slogans or to neglect the importance of changed circumstances. He therefore advocated the systematic study of Mao Zedong Thought instead and continued to emphasize the ten-year education plan which had been approved by the GPD in January 1959. The ten-year plan envisioned all military cadres to attain a middle school equivalent education within three to four years and a possible specialisation thereafter. With regard to the “Three-Eight working style” Tan even ridiculed Lin Biao’s formulation by referring to the

21 Yu, Gongheguo lingxiu, yuanshuai, jiangjun jiaowang shilu, 4.
22 “Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun tongjian” biansheng weiyuanhui (ed.), PLA tongjian 2, 1800.
23 Lin Biao, Zai dang zhongyang huiyi shang guanyu guofang wenti de baogao (January 1960), in: Yi Lin futongshuai 1, 298f. The formulation “Three-Eight working style”, like most of the formula later ascribed to Lin Biao, was not coined by himself but by others in his coterie, often Air Force Chief Wu Faxian.
24 Junshi kexueyuan junshi lishi yanjiubu (ed.), Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun lushi nian, 578.
coterminous “Three-Eight”-Day (8 March), International Women’s Day: “Is this kind of simplified formulation good or not? If we call it ‘Three-Eight working style’, is there going to be a ‘Three-Eight-Day’ next? It is easy to get confused.” The phrase was thus not immediately accepted as part of the “scientific” terminology of Marxism-Leninism. But what angered Lin most was that Tan even sought Mao’s opinion on the matter while asking for guidance on a related issue. By establishing separate ways of communication with the Chairman, Lin had to fear that his publicly fostered image as closest student of the Chairman would be contradicted.

Tan’s opposition, however, did not last very long. By May 1960, the GDP announced the start of a “Three-Eight Campaign” in the whole army. The decision was based on a telephone conference held by the GPD leadership during which Tan gave in to the overwhelming support for the campaign by the other army officers. In the following months, the campaign was implemented in most army units. In Beijing, 90% of the armed forces took part in the movement. The content changed according to different aspects of political work in the units. The most prominent goal remained the fostering of a spirit of unity and servitude towards the leadership’s directives and the people in general along with the cultivation of model soldiers. Although the campaign had been implemented, Lin remained sceptical about Tan’s reliability because he had proven to place matters of content above personal loyalty. Lin was unwilling to risk the impression that factionalism existed within the army and that the PLA was not boundlessly loyal to the political line of the Chairman. After all, his own fate had become closely intertwined with the image of the PLA soldiers as ardent students of Mao Zedong Thought.

The removal of Tan Zheng from the GPD remained a difficult task since Tan had powerful supporters like Luo Ronghuan. During an enlarged meeting of the CMC in September/October 1960 at the eve of the campaign to celebrate the publication of the fourth volume of Mao’s Selected Works, the political climate had become expedient enough to criticize anyone on grounds of hindering the advancement of Mao Zedong Thought. In his speech to the conference Lin Biao elaborated on his concept of a correct working style and

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25 Yu, Gongheguo lingxiu, yuanshuai, jiangjun jiaowang shilu, 19f.
27 “Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun tongjian” biansheng weiyuanhui (ed.), PLA tongjian 2, 1827.
28 The relation between Marshals Lin and Luo had previously been sound. Luo had acted as Lin Biao’s political commissar in the Fourth Field Army. The seed of dissent had probably been a comment Luo had made when being informed by Beijing First Secretary Peng Zhen in a phone call about the substitution of Peng Dehuai with Lin Biao as minister of defense. Luo advised Peng, to spare Lin the duties of ministerial routine given his record of bad health and proposed Marshal He Long to act as minister instead, see Hu/Yu, Mao Zedong yu Lin Biao, 483.
criticized those who had opposed his idea of a “living” application of Mao Zedong Thought by claiming the necessity of “comprehensive” and “systematic” study. He raised the stakes of Mao Zedong Thought even higher by apostrophising it to represent the “peak [顶峰] of modern day thought”. All those who had not complied with his working style were thus placed under the Damocles sword of having opposed Mao Zedong and the Party. Tan was accused of having come closely to harbouring an “independent kingdom” (独立王国) and of having formed a sectarian group. By elaborating on the danger of capitalist restoration and the necessity to raise class-consciousness through political education, Lin catered to Mao’s idea of a return to the frugal, politicised military style advocated during the Yan’an period. Tan was demoted to deputy rank but would later be incarcerated for nine years during the Cultural Revolution for his “counterrevolutionary crime” of opposing Mao Zedong Thought.

A Shortcut to Marxism

As Tan’s case reveals, the unsystematic character of Mao’s Selected Works and their limited use for day-to-day politics presented cadres in charge of political education with difficulties. The two basic ways of circumventing the restrictions imposed by the writings themselves were either to widen the spectre by including other works of the Marxist-Leninist canon or to emphasize the study of certain key concepts only and to adapt them through constant repetition. Lin Biao took the latter approach to extremes. While he was not the inventor of the “living study and application” of Mao Zedong Thought, he was determined and in a position to carry it further than any other person amongst the CCP’s top leadership. In his first speech as minister of defense before an assembly of high-ranking military officers in September 1959, Lin Biao dealt at length with the question of political study. He acknowledged the importance of the Marxist-Leninist classics (“if we don’t study Marxism-Leninism this is tantamount to a doctor not studying medicine”), but instead of arduously reading through the whole canon with its references to foreign names and places he pledged for a theoretical shortcut:

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29 Lin Biao, Zai quanjun gaoji ganbu de huiyi shang (October 1960), in: Yi Lin futongshuai 1, 322.
31 Junshi kexueyuan junshi lishi yanjiubu (ed.), Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun liushi nian, 588.
33 The name of the campaign had been brought up by Xu Rongxin, a squad leader of unit 159 as a method to improve the quality of military training during the Great Leap Forward, see Wang, Jining, Zhanshu dongzuo yao huoqiao huoexue huo Yong, in: Liberation Army News, 11 July 1958, 1.
34 Lin Biao, Zai quanjun gaoji ganbu huiyi shang de jianghua, in: Yi Lin futongshuai 1, 276.
“How should we study Marxism-Leninism? I propose to you, Comrades, to mainly study the works of Comrade Mao Zedong. This is a shortcut to studying Marxism-Leninism. Comrade Mao Zedong comprehensively, creatively developed Marxism-Leninism. We study Comrade Mao Zedong’s works because [they are] easy to study and can be applied as soon as we have studied them. To study well is an extremely useful thing.”

By early 1960, the shortcut to Marxism was reduced even further as Lin proposed to study Mao’s works by way of learning to recite some of Mao’s most important quotes.

“In my opinion one should learn a few things by heart; first of all, one should learn to recite the most penetrating and important passages from Comrade Mao Zedong’s works. The brain can just remember a few phrases. Dialectics are just a few phrases, but the changes are infinite. How can you use something you don’t understand? One definitely should learn by heart the most important sayings.”

The advice, derived from a personal habit of collecting quotations of important Chinese philosophers on flash cards and to memorize them for later usage, was to have a profound influence on the development of the Cultural Revolutionary Mao cult. Instead of achieving systematic knowledge of Mao’s works or even of the Marxist-Leninist canon itself, fitting quotations came to be employed as a means of ultimate persuasion by invoking the authority of the CCP Chairman.

The methods employed under the aegis of Lin Biao reveal continuity with the policies of his predecessor in many aspects except for the style of political study. Lin’s notion of studying theory was based on the premise that theory was not necessarily to be understood by cognitive means but in a ritualized fashion through a process of habitual action. In April 1961, while inspecting troops, Lin Biao had distinguished between education by means of performing examples to be emulated by others (身教) and by means of verbal instructions (言教), both of which should be practised on a regular basis like playing table tennis. Verbal education was to supplement the physical training by providing the soldiers with an intellectual compass, with fitting quotations applicable under any situation. The dual education was to develop into a natural habitus of the soldiers in order to prevent a future rise of revisionism. If using the notion of ritual to explain Lin’s style of political education, one should distinguish between the aforementioned types of habitual action that came to be increasingly formalized, and transcendent notions of ritual that are often employed in

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35 Ibid. 276. The third of the famous three adverbs (“comprehensively, creatively, and with genius” [全面的, 创造性的, 天才的]) was added at the outset of the Cultural Revolution.
37 The card boxes, written by a history professor on Lin Biao’s demand, and a number of short entries in dictionaries and books provided the intellectual base for the campaign to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius in the later stages of the Cultural Revolution, see chapter nine.
38 Lin Biao, Shicha budui shi de zhishi (jielu), in: Yi Lin futongshuai 1, 373.
anthropological usages of the term. Even during the Cultural Revolution rituals in the sense of religious worship remained the exception.

Lin was highly aware of the formative power of habitual action and the close interdependence of form and content. In a speech about the drill of troops in 1944, he had already argued for the importance of achieving a spirit of unanimity in the PLA by standardizing successful experiences of drill, ceremony, and military order. The working style of an army should not be disregarded as empty formalism. In October 1960, Lin again re-invoked the importance of a certain style of conduct:

“An army always has to resemble an army, one should not think that the army style is only a question of form and not important. The Marxist point of view is a different one […]. If content has no form, it cannot develop and thus not exist. If form has no content, it as well cannot develop or be sustained. Both of them are at all times linked together.”

The emphasis on political study originated from a sharp assessment of the present situation characterized by the catastrophic situation in the countryside and Mao’s endorsement of cult-building to circumvent separatist trends. The dismissal of the highly respected Peng Dehuai had severely undermined the prestige of the Party and Mao Zedong personally. The dramatic consequences of the Great Leap Forward in late 1959 were noticed even in the Central Garrison, the unit entrusted with the guarding duties of the Party leadership. The internal Bulletin of Activities (工作通讯) recorded “unrest in thought and instability in feeling”, as well as criticism of the Party’s agricultural policies among the young soldiers, most of whom had a rural background themselves. Reports about the dramatic food situation reached the recruits via correspondence with their families or trips to relatives. For example, a soldier had been deeply troubled by a visit of his mother. He had been told about the sharp decrease in food supply and the reliance of village cadres on brute force. Discussions with his superiors had not solved his dilemma as “[t]he words of my superiors were reasonable but the words of

39 “One cannot unconditionally oppose any kind of form, in this respect the army is just like any other thing. Irrespective of whether you oppose it or not, it always has its form. If its not good form, it’s a bad form. It is not that we do not want any form, but that we do not want a bad form, a form that hampers us to increase the fighting power”, Lin Biao, Jinnian zenyang lianbing (18 October 1944), in: Ibid. 92f.
40 Lin Biao, Zai quanjun gaoji ganbu huiyi shang de jianghua, in: Ibid. 338.
41 Bulletin of Activities 1 (1 January 1961), in: Cheng, J. Chester (ed.), The Politics of the Chinese Red Army. A Translation of the Bulletin of Activities of the People’s Liberation Army, Stanford: The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, 1966, 13. The Bulletin of Activities had published its first edition on 1 January 1961 and replaced the First August Magazine that had developed into a publication for a general readership and thus duplicated much of the reports from the Liberation Army News. The restriction of circulation was owed to the need of establish an internal organ that could carry reports with sufficient precision to advise the regimental political commissars and political committees on how to conduct the multitude of education campaigns. The eligibility for cadres to read the bulletin was restricted to the regimental level, see Bulletin of Activities 6 (27 January 1961), in: Cheng, Politics of the Chinese Red Army, 176f.
my mother were reasonable as well. To whom should I listen?” Other soldiers quoted commune members from their home villages with “[a]l most present what the peasants eat in the villages is worse than what dogs ate in the past” or rhetorically asked whether “Chairman Mao [is] going to allow us to starve to death”.

These trends potentially endangered the stability of the PLA if ideological work did not catch up. In order to avoid the potentially disastrous consequences of the Great Leap and Peng’s dismissal, Lin Biao developed two basic strategies: The first was a codex of general conduct, the aforementioned “Three-Eight working style”, mainly aimed at easing the top-down communication to have his orders carried out “vigorously and speedily” (雷厉风行). The style of conduct was to prevent the dangers posed by an undisciplined and slow response under conditions of a nuclear threat. The second approach was termed the “Four Firsts” (四个第一), by which was meant placing the human factor, political and ideological work, and living thought above military weapons, non-political and non-ideological work, and dogmatism. Given the lack of advanced technology, the PLA had to rely on the resources available in abundance, human labour force. By transforming Mao Zedong Thought into a “spiritual nuclear bomb”, a loyal and politically stable army was to be secured through constant remolding. Lin’s thus subscribed to Mao’s modified view of the interaction between super- and infrastructure:

“Marxism-Leninism is materialism, but this materialism is a dialectical materialism. It accepts the primary nature of matter and the secondary nature of the mind. But here some people often make the mistake of equalling the primary nature with primary importance. This is a big error. […] Under certain conditions spiritual things surpass material things, surpass the power of matter. Spiritual things can also transform into material strength […] like after the explosion of a nuclear bomb, it releases an enormous power”.

The details of implementing Lin Biao’s “invention”, however, remained vague and provided political commissars with possibilities to come up with model soldiers or units that had

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43 Ibid. 13.
44 Lin Biao, Zai quanjun gaoji ganbu huiyi shang de jianghua (February 1960), in: Yi Lin futongshuai 1, 301.
45 David Shambaugh has pointed out the difference between the image fostered by Lin and the actual military spending that continued to rise continuously under his aegis, Shambaugh, David, Building the Party-State in China, 1949-1965. Bringing the soldier back in, in: Cheek/Saich (eds.), New Perspectives, 144f. This confirms to Lin’s habit of closely following the Chairman’s wish for political study in public, while even in October 1960 he declared that 60-80% per cent of time should be spent with military and not political training in order not to transform the PLA into a “fake army”, see Lin Biao, Zai quanjun gaoji ganbu huiyi shang de jianghua (October 1960), in: Yi Lin futongshuai 1, 330f.
46 Lin Biao, Zai quanjun gaoji ganbu huiyi shang de jianghua (October 1960), in: Yi Lin futongshuai 1, 326f.
excelled in the application of the abstract maxims. The ensuing campaign of “living study and application” was thus characterized by numerous exchanges between the central and local levels. Successful model were taken up by the Liberation Army News and through the redistribution via the medial networks circulated in the whole army as worthy of emulation. The wider significance of the campaign to study and apply Mao Zedong Thought in the military after 1959 lies with respect to the strategies that were devised to secure its success amidst the turbulences of the Great Leap Forward. All of them were to retain their importance though on a much larger scale during the following Cultural Revolution. The most important strategies consisted of restricting access to unofficial sources of information possibly contradicting the prescribed views, of unifying perception and description of the present situation by means of exegetical and emotional bonding, and finally, of implementing a system of incentives that awarded eager students of Mao’s teachings publicly through the propagation of political model heroes.

Information Control and Exegetical Bonding

Due to the rural background of most of its recruits the PLA was especially vulnerable to the effects of the famine. Although only the military top leadership, entitled to read the Xinhua News Agency’s Internal Reference (内部参考), was informed about the scale of the starvations, the news about people dying in the villages and the behaviour of local cadres trying to keep the peasants from rebelling with brute force reached the soldiers by a varied range of communication channels. The most frequent way of transporting information, as mentioned above, was via family letters or visits from relatives. According to somewhat cryptic statistical data provided by a survey in one company of the Central Garrison, 79.8% of the company’s soldiers had been informed about the disasters in their villages through family letters. Other sources of information included local news organs that tended to be less severely controlled than the central media organs. In mid-1960 therefore all Hebei provincial Party cadres were specifically addressed to start secret examinations of the local publishing

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48 A good example is the campaign of the “More than sixty what to do’s” (六十多个怎么办) that was developed in the Guangzhou military region and spread through the whole army in 1965. It provided answers to sixty detailed questions, characteristic for the cultural level of the PLA, including answers to questions like “why shouldn’t we be afraid of ghosts?”. Lin Biao three times praised its practical approach between November 1965 and March 1966, see Dui tui Guangzhou junqu moutuan zhua huo sixiang de liushi duo ge “zenmeban” de zhishi, in: Yi Lin futongshuai wei guanghui bangyang wuxian zhongyu weida lingxix Mao zhuxi, vol. 2, Beijing: n.d., 480f.

49 The circulation number of the Internal Reference in mid-1959 was about 2400 and was further reduced due to the ongoing number of failures to return the copies after a specified period of time, see Zhongyang pizhuang Xinhuahe bianweihui guanyu suxiao “neibu cankao” yueling fanwei de qingshi baogao, 25 May 1959, HPA 855-18-657.

organs and to pay more attention to the supervision of local newspapers and broadcasting units. Furthermore, the “ever growing successes of the Great Leap Forward” and its stimulation of the “creativity of the masses” according to the internal report had led foreign intelligence agencies to focus their interest on an analysis of local newspapers and radio stations. Occasional reports related to the famine, diseases stemming from malnutrition, or reports on unsuitable sources of food in provincial level internal Party organs were criticized in similar fashion.

As a first measure, the influx of non-censored information via family ties and personal networks was restricted. All army units and especially those stationed in disaster areas were to pay adequate attention to letters and visits, and to “take the initiative in preventing the soldiers from being harmed by bad influences”. The prevention, however, was not to proceed by means of restrictive measures like the confiscation of family letters or the rejection of visiting relatives, as it had occasionally been done in the past. Rude action was deemed to be incapable of exerting a long-term positive effect on the behaviour of the soldiers or to improve the declining image of the PLA among the general populace. Instead of using force, the political committees were to proceed by way of turning critical situations into examples of living education. Visiting relatives were to be warmly welcomed and given thorough political education in order not to tarnish the attitude of the soldiers or the reputation of the army. Family letters and the sentiments expressed in them were to be taken seriously. Some soldiers would hopefully share their personal letters with the political commissars and thus make them available for public explanation. Through repeated education the political committees were to ensure that no one failed to grasp the correctness of the Party measures. The situation was to be explained by blaming the famine on the harmful influence of natural disasters and the deviations of a number of local cadres from the correct line of the CCP Center. By convincing

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51 Hebei shengwei xuanchuanbu guanyu zai xinwen chuban bumen kaizhan banbian de jiancha he jinxing renyuan shencha qingli gongzuo de tongzhi, 19 July 1960, HPA 864-1-229.
52 Among the 83 internal publications circulated in Hebei province in 1960, 68 were abolished due to paper shortage, redundancy, or the leakage of state secrets. A prominent case was the Substitute Food Bulletin (代食品简报) that in its eighth issue had covered the situation in Yu County near Zhangjiakou (Hebei) where 80% of the county’s roughly 13,600 sick people had suffered from the coarse ingredients of the “substitute” foodstuff, see Hebei shengwei xuanchuanbu guanyu zhengdun shengji neibu kanwu de qingkuang he yijian xiang shengwei baogao, 25 March 1961, HPA 864-1-249. The designation “substitute food” according to an army report on how to produce substitute food itself, included all kinds of herbs, artificial glutinous flour, artificial meat essence and various other materials, Bulletin of Activities 6 (27 January 1961), in: Cheng, Politics of the Chinese Red Army, 171.
53 Cheng, Politics of the Chinese Red Army, 15
55 The Bulletin of Activities lists a substantial number of cases during which PLA members had been reprimanded for harassing and molesting common citizens, see Bulletin of Activities 5 (17 January 1961), in: Ibid. 146f.
56 Ibid. 478ff.
the common soldiers of these views, ambiguous thinking was to be replaced through a uniform and positive evaluation of the Three Red Banners and their passive acceptance to be turned into active and self-conscious propagation.

The New Year’s break 1960/61 presented a great challenge for the effectiveness of the self-conscious study. Units with a high number of soldiers coming from parts of the country that had been worst hit by the famine, such as Henan or Shanxi, organized work teams to visit the soldiers’ homes in order to turn personal tragedy into living material for education which could be relied upon after returning to the respective units. The work teams sent by the 131st Regiment for example visited Xincai district near Xinyang in Henan province. The teams reported about recent improvements and the gratitude expressed by villagers about the loving care of the Party and Mao Zedong. They explicitly linked the consequences of the famine to natural calamities and thereby explained the abnormal number of deaths. By working together with the villagers to improve the irrigation systems, the soldiers strengthened both the plausibility of their argument and the ties between populace and army that had been deteriorating since the Korean War. The raising of self-awareness among the cadres and the methods of winning over the soldiers by way of exemplary teaching proved to be ten times more effective than the usual frontal classroom lectures.

The instruments by which the communist conversion was to be achieved were manifold and specified according to the different ranks within the army. While the military leadership was to continue with self-study and small group discussions, the search for effective models for the military rank-and-file brought forth new forms of exegetical bonding that emphasized the emotional aspect. The Lanzhou Military Region had, after conducting a rectification of working styles among Party cadres in July 1960, employed a method to strengthen the proletarian class stand that was commonly referred to as “two remembrances, three investigations” (两忆, 三察). Lin Biao was impressed by the effectiveness of the method and enthusiastically propagated it as a way of educating the common soldiers. The report of the Lanzhou Military Region had upon Lin Biao’s request been promoted

57 For the work report see Bulletin of Activities 7 (1 February 1961), in: Ibid. 209ff. On the necessity to foster a better relation between Party and populace see Zhonggong zhongyang, Zhongyang guanyu chunjie qianhou jinxing yongjun youshu he yongzheng aimin de xuanchuan tongzhi, 17 January 1957, HPA 855-4-1045.
59 For a discussion of the methods of peer pressure in small group discussion see Whyte, Martin King, Small groups and Political Rituals in China, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974, based on systematic interviews with PRC refugees in Hong Kong.
60 Jiazhang liandui sixiang gongzuo de yi ba yaoshi - ji Lanzhou budui de yiku yundong, in: Liberation Army News, 28 September 1960, 2. The method of employing comparisons and remembrances to justify present policies had been previously used within the military, see i.e. Junshi kexueyuan junshi lishi yanjiubu (ed.), Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun liushi nian jiejing shi jiang, 564.
61 See the instructions made during an inspection of troops in October 1960, in: Yi Lin futongshuai 1, 342.
throughout the army in a number of trial spots. Liu Zhijian, deputy director of the GPD since October 1957, during a telephone conference on 7 January 1961 described the experiences in the trial spots as highly satisfying. Within a short period of time (usually three to four weeks) the educational movement had raised the soldiers’ class awareness and fuelled “fervent love” for the socialist cause. The participants, according to the report, had compared their present situation with the bitterness of the past and come to feel gratitude towards the Party, despite the present hardships. Guided by Mao Zedong Thought and armed with Mao’s writings, the soldiers “were able to overcome their numb feelings for peace, further corrected their attitude towards duty and […] have become more united”. Based on the experiences of 412 trial units, the emotional bonding was implemented as the core of political work in all army units in the first months of 1961.

A report of the Beijing military region describes the highly theatrical performances and the necessary preparations in detail. The subordinate companies and platoons were first to understand the situation within the unit, to analyze the specific grievances, and to search for trustworthy models with flawless work record and good verbal expression. Because the success of the movement rested to a large extent on the credibility of the employed models, they were not to be “manufactured or simulated for the occasion” but to be nurtured with care. The general guidance was to be provided by the army’s political committees while the political and administrative personnel in the military regions remained responsible for the training of the lower level cadres. A few short writings of Mao Zedong, most notably In memory of Norman Bethune and Serve the People, both stories about martyrs for the socialist cause, became the key texts of the movement. “To combine study with application, to answer concrete problems with Mao Zedong Thought, to aim with the ‘arrow’ of Mao Zedong Thought at the ‘goals’ in work and mind, this is a good method.”

The campaign itself proceeded in three basic steps. The first phase was to arouse passions by remembering the hardships of the proletarian class and to use the historical experiences of the CCP to remember the oppression of the Chinese nation. As the success highly depended on the setting and the choice of models, the cadres were advised to employ a solemn decoration, distinguished models, and to look after the material well-being of the participants. The meetings were to be an occasion of great sadness and thus to take place in a

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63 Ibid. 97.
disciplined manner; however, cadres were not to insist on formalities such as the weeping of the participants as demonstration of their sincerity.

“[T]he atmosphere of remembering hardships should not seem compulsory. However, since remembering the hardships is a serious business, there must be a certain atmosphere (such as writing and shouting slogans) but this should not be overdone, such as eating “hardship rice”. It would also be a mistake if during the meeting of “remembering the hardship” no one were allowed to wear shoes with nails, to come in and go out, and to be excused to go to the lavatory. Neither should there be any excessive stress on “weeping”. Weeping is quite natural, if it arises from emotional stress but it should not be used as a standard; there should be no regulation such as ‘no dismissal of the meeting until the weeping stage is reached.’”

From the stage of remembering hardships, the political commissars were to channel the hatred towards the imperialist aggressors and internal class enemies. Popular means included oral presentations, the study of Mao writings dealing with class analysis, and recent newspaper articles. By “taking revenge”, the participants were to be enabled to realize the two major reasons behind the past oppression, capitalist exploitation and private ownership. After tracing the reasons back to the regime of Chiang Kai-shek and his US supporters, the soldiers were to uproot the sources of hardship by unmasking capitalism and US imperialism as the “big boss of all the world’s reactionaries”. The catharsis, finally, was to be reached by comparing the past favourably to the present, based on the reading of Mao articles on frugality and proletarian solidarity.

This living education was to lead individuals to find the “source of sweetness” in the correct leadership of the CCP and Mao Zedong. Slanderous references to the Great Leap Forward like “each year is worse than the last” were thus to be circumvented. To achieve this goal, local instructors were to employ all possible materials. Movies, comics, big-character posters or performances like the “white-haired maiden”, invited talks by workers who had suffered during the old regime, exhibitions, or on the spot inspections of model communes presented legitimate forms of persuasion, depending on the audience. In a final step, everyone had to investigate his own class standpoint, fighting spirit, and work record, and try to model his own life on the given examples. The employment of specific concepts of enemies on which the hatred could be channelled presented a possible outlet for the experienced frustrations and thus a source of releasing aggressions. But Lin Biao himself quickly realized the destructive potential aroused through the comparisons. In January 1961,

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68 Ibid. 111.
he therefore interdicted to project the generated class hate onto individual cadres for their personal wrongdoings or to grant permission for criticizing them publicly by making them wear political “hats” (戴帽子). The violent language that was employed to achieve the emotional bonding was not to result in destruction but to be transformed into fervent love for the Chairman and the CCP. Only five years later, there would no longer be a shielding hand over intellectuals and cadres. Instead, the generated hate was publicly encouraged to crush the Party organization and all feudal remnants, resulting in widespread violence. The disciplinary and clearly functional character of the “two remembrance” movement reportedly did not hamper its efficiency, even within companies were the majority of the soldier’s families had been affected by the famine. The success of the campaign according to the acting Chief-of-Staff Luo Ruiqing was to be seen in linking day-to-day military problems with Mao Zedong Thought as he reported to Mao and Lin Biao after an inspection of several provinces in March 1961. Luo observed, however, that most comparisons of the present sweetness referred back to the land reform, while remarks about the Three Red Flags were “inclined to be abstract and without substance”. Luo’s observations revealed the limits of propagandistic activities and the necessity to root the exegetical bonding in genuinely positive experiences in order to stimulate popular feeling.

In the final report that was endorsed and transmitted by the CMC on 30 March 1961, the campaign was described as the “turning point” on the way of implementing living education among the troops. The movement had been successfully accomplished in 90-95% of the primary units and had reminded the young soldiers, born in hardship and grown up in the “sweetness” of socialism, of their class origins. Only a small number of persons according to the reports still did not realize the superiority of the present living conditions and would have to be remolded over time. Among the examples chosen to substantiate the success of the campaign and to show the unrelenting hatred of the class enemies was the example of a young soldier named Lei Feng. Born to a poor peasant household in Wangcheng district in Hunan province, Lei’s father was said to have been buried alive by the Japanese, the brother been persecuted to death by GMD capitalists, and his mother had committed suicide after being assaulted by a landlord. Lei Feng’s story moved the audiences and instilled fierce hatred against the numerous enemies. He was to rise to nationwide fame after his premature death

73 Ibid. 413. According to the official Lei Feng memorial website Lei Feng’s father, Lei Mingliang, died from the consequences of injuries received from beatings handed out first by GMD forces and later by Japanese invaders. However, he was not buried alive, see www.leifeng.org.cn, (last accessed 2 December 2005).
the following year, aged 22. By mid-1961, the remembrance campaign had been successfully completed and the army entered a new stage on the path of political education: the cultivation of model units and soldiers.

Emulating Individuals and Collecting Experiences

The emotional bonding had been effective in countering the immediate impact of the famine on the morale of the soldiers, but it was no instrument that could be employed continuously without harming its impact. A well managed, repeated socialist education therefore had to rely on a multitude of techniques to achieve its objectives. With the end of “leaning to one side” after the break with the Soviet Union, the search for national traditions and models worthy of emulation was encouraged. The works of Mao Zedong presented a natural choice for a successful model of adapting Marxism-Leninism to Chinese conditions. The relics of the cult of Mao Zedong in the early 1940s and his acceptance among the Party leadership now proved to be crucial for the emergence of the new Mao cult. By offering an alternative to the Marxist-Leninist classics, the works of Mao Zedong came to assume a natural immunity against the accusations of dogmatism and book worship. Yet a state with over 700 million inhabitants could not be governed the same way as the small region of Yan’an. While Mao’s works provided the intellectual framework, an intermediary stratum took up the search for models of development, the local and provincial Party organs that had to search for model experiences with a possibly nationwide appeal.

Campaigns to elevate certain individuals above the rest could rely on a number of earlier traditions in the PRC, most notably the cultivation of different kinds of “activists” in state factories, the PLA, or the Youth League. The distinguishing of activists had been one of the main instruments of the CCP to secure a stratum of like-minded successors that both provided information on local conditions and helped in taking over responsibilities from the chronically understaffed Party secretaries, especially in the early years of the PRC.74 Other sources were the frequent public competitions and assemblies in the PLA or the Youth League, awarding trophies for excellence in military training, theoretical study, or the displaying of communist morals. Most prominent in the years leading up to the Cultural Revolution was the so-called “four good/five good” competition in the PLA. In January 1956, the Liberation Army News had published an article that described the life of Wang Jie,75 a

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74 Peiyang, shiyong jijifenzi, zuohao tuan de gongzuo, HPA 896-1-41.
75 The soldier is not identical with the model hero Wang Jie, who was to rise to nationwide fame after November 1965. A native of Dongjin County in Shandong, Wang Jie died in an attempt to shield others from an irregular
worthy model soldier, who had been called “five good” soldier, referring to good in study, work, caring for state property, obeying the leadership, and integrating new comrades. The designation “five good” was taken up by minister of defense Peng Dehuai during the Third National Youth Meeting on 17 April 1958. He called upon the youth to be good in ceaseless study, loving care for military weapons, public goods, preventing accidents, thrift production, and physical exercises. Shortly afterwards, the GPD ordered the start of a “five good” campaign in all companies, as a way of establishing a set of criteria by which to stimulate “communist morality, the glorious [army] tradition and a spirit of servitude” in the army corps.

Given the disruptive impact of the famine, the “five good” campaign was reinvigorated as a measure to set examples in discipline and a good working style within a self-perpetuating merit-based system of incentives. The five categories were adjusted to suit the idea of living education: good in politics, military training, style of work, fulfilment of tasks, and physical education. The task of individual modelling in early 1961 was made subsidiary to the parallel “four good” company campaign that called for political work and unbookish ideas, a good work style, military training, and a good life style. Although the twin campaign was advocated throughout the army in 1961, the exact criteria of how to measure the success of individual units or the approximate numbers of units and individuals to be rewarded remained vague. The specific criteria for awarding the designations were to be developed by the units themselves and to ensure that they could be achieved after several attempts. The campaign was therefore taken as an umbrella term for all kinds of propagandistic activities strengthening the officially approved view of the situation. A good opportunity for imprinting the official viewpoint was provided by the oath-taking rallies during which the successful units and soldiers were presented with certificates of their merits issued in the name of the Ministry of Defense. As the coverage of such events in the Liberation Army News was of limited impact, especially successful model soldiers were asked to give lectures on their experiences and work style in various other military or civilian units by means of “passing on experiences” (传经). In April 1962, the GPD announced the results of the “four good” campaign in 1961. In the whole army over 5800 “four good” companies and local level units had been chosen, 520,000 individuals had been awarded the title of “five

76 Ibid. 1758.
77 Ibid. 1760. See further Junshi kexueyuan junshi li shi yanjiubu (ed.), Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun liushi nian, 568.
good” soldier along with 185,000 soldiers who had been awarded titles as distinguished gunmen, grenadiers, or technical experts. In the following year it was to be implemented within all units on a regular basis and titles to be awarded according to a standardized system of rating provided by the GPD.

The campaign to emulate Lei Feng, the most famous of all Chinese model campaigns, evolved against the background of these trends within the army. Lei Feng’s prominent role in the “three remembrances” movement had already granted him a high media profile before his premature and tragic death on 15 August 1962 after being accidentally run over by a truck. The early perishing of the model soldier caused the leadership of his former unit in Shenyang to prepare a study campaign to learn from Lei’s experiences on 18 January 1963. Three days later, the Ministry of Defense awarded the title “Lei Feng unit” to his former company. The same day an exhibition about the glorious live of martyr Lei Feng was officially opened in the presence of Chief-of-Staff Luo Ruiqing, who had dedicated a short verse “The great soldier Lei Feng will never be forgotten”. The Liberation Army News on 8 February printed an editorial entitled “[Let us] become good soldiers of Mao Zedong Thought like Lei Feng” and by early March the civilian Party press, most notably the China Youth, were to spread the example of the selfless soldier throughout China. Selections from his diary, authentic or not, were published by the People’s Press along with a number of verses in his memory written in calligraphy by all of Chinese top leaders. Other model soldiers were to follow up on Lei’s medial coverage and on 25 April, the “Good Eighth Company on Nanjing Road” became the first collective to be awarded nationwide attention for its model character.

Ritual as Habitual Action and Contemporary Criticism

Even after Tang Zheng’s demise, Lin Biao’s style of political education was not unilaterally appraised. Instead, the defects were sharply pointed out by senior Party and army leaders. The destruction of superstition in foreign models and overarching awe of Western military theory had been a near consensus among the military leadership. The acceptance of Lin’s working style, however, was not unanimous. The formulation and supervision of political work within the PLA had formally been the prerogative of the GPD and the Political Academy under the leadership of Luo Ronghuan, upon whose loyalty Mao placed enormous trust. Luo had in a

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79 “Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun tongjian” biansheng weiyuanhui (ed.), PLA tongjian 2, 1866.
81 See his comment to Wang Li in 1963 that the three people he trusted most were Luo Ronghuan, Deng Xiaoping, and Chen Yun, quoted in: Jin, Culture of Power, 60.
talk on revising work methods in April 1958 already argued that regardless of whether the study documents consisted of CCP Center directives, Chairman Mao’s works, or classical Marxist-Leninist writings, the important fact was to develop the spirit of the work and not just being able to recite a few fitting quotes. The danger of an overt stress on application, as Luo argued, derived from the potentially wrong application if the basic truths of Marxism-Leninism had not been understood. Especially after the demotion of his long time trustee Tan Zheng, Luo, who had taken up the responsibility as head of the GPD again on 3 January 1961, opened a salvo of criticism at Lin’s proposed style of study and the impression that the development of Marxism-Leninism had reached its peak with Mao Zedong Thought. The most dangerous aspect in his opinion remained the purely rhetorical enactment of for example the “Four Firsts” without being able to relate them to the spirit of Mao’s works. Luo especially criticized Lin’s directive of “studying with problems in mind” from late October 1960:

“If we study with problems in mind, this way we have to look for answers in Mao’s Selected Works. This is not very appropriate. If for example two people have a disagreement and a problem occurs, how shall we find an answer from Mao’s Selected Works? We should continue to study standpoint, viewpoint and, method.”

Within the Beijing civil administration, Deng Xiaoping and Lu Dingyi voiced similar criticism. In a speech before a Party meeting in Tianjin on 25 March 1960, Deng specifically addressed the question of “How to correctly propagate Mao Zedong Thought” by listing a number of problems in current propaganda work:

“First, the main problem at present is that Mao Zedong Thought is being used in a vulgar fashion. Everything can said to be Mao Zedong Thought. For example, if the [numbers of] customers in a shop increase slightly, one calls it a development of Mao Zedong Thought; practising table tennis has likewise been called an application of Mao Zedong Thought. Second, Marxism-Leninism itself is very seldom being talked about. [...] Why should we address this problem? Because according to our correct understanding of Mao Zedong Thought, on the one hand, one has to support and defend Marxism-Leninism; on the other hand, we have to develop Marxism-Leninism. Mao Zedong Thought supports the universal truths of Marxism-Leninism and has added a lot of new content to the treasure trove of Marxism-Leninism. Therefore one should not try to separate Mao Zedong Thought from Marxism-Leninism, like as if they are separate things. […] Of course one can refer to Mao Zedong Thought only but under no circumstances should one forget Marxism-Leninism. One should not drop this basic

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82 Huang (ed.), Luo Ronghuan niupu, 780.
83 Ibid. 816.
84 Ibid. 816.
85 Deng Xiaoping here specifically referred to a directive of 12 January 1960 that had criticized a decision by the Communist Youth League to start a “study Mao Zedong Thought campaign” instead of adopting the correct phrasing “study Marxism-Leninism, study Mao Zedong Thought”, see Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanban bangongting/Zhongyang dang’anguan bianyanban (eds.), CCP xuanchuan gongzuo 4, 184, n.1.
most thing. […] If one speaks of Mao Zedong Thought and does not mention Marxism-Leninism, it appears to be an appraisal of Mao Zedong Thought but in reality it means diminishing its effectiveness.”

Deng’s criticism was thus specifically directed against Lin’s advocating a shortcut to Marxism and the formulaic appraisal of Mao Zedong Thought. Here two fundamentally different ways of approaching the theoretical heritage of Marxism-Leninism collided. While Deng Xiaoping held steadfast to the principal truth of Marxist theories and genuinely searched for ways of adapting reality to the communist model, Lin Biao’s approach was much more instrumental. Marxism-Leninism presented a general framework of abstract truths, but Lin had come to understand the strategic advantages Mao Zedong had gained in the past by selectively modifying certain concepts and thus eliminating other sources of legitimacy except himself. Deng’s pondering about collective leadership in his speech at Tianjin provided another example for his insistence of how things should be according to theory without taking into account the modus vivendi that had come to dominate CCP politics:

There further exists the problem of collective leadership; this should also be mentioned during certain Party meetings. We practise collective leadership. Mao Zedong is a representative of this collective leadership. He is the leader of our Party. His rank and position is different from normal members of the collective leadership, but under no conditions can Comrade Mao Zedong be separated from the CCP Center. Instead, one should look at Mao as a member of the Party’s collective leadership and thus speak about his position within our Party according to the facts. Comrade Mao Zedong respects collective leadership. Yesterday he said that phrases should conform to realities, for if they do not conform to reality they stand on feet of clay. We should adopt this kind of spirit in order to succeed in the propagation of Mao Zedong Thought.”

Without doubt Deng’s efforts to halt the excessive growth of the Mao cult in the months following the Lushan Plenum were aimed at curbing the defects of de facto one-man rule. What Deng did not consider, however, but what Lin Biao implicitly had come to take as primary truth was that not the phrase “collective leadership” was standing on feet of clay but collective leadership itself.

Lu Dingyi took up Deng Xiaoping’s characterization of Mao Zedong Thought in two speeches in April 1961 and specifically addressed the possible “vulgarization” of Marxism-Leninism mentioned by Deng, a phrase that without quoting its source came to be the cardinal accusation against the former Department of Propaganda and the Ministry of Culture during the Cultural Revolution. Lu warned of teaching the younger generation a highly simplified view of difficult matters. The phrase “Mao Zedong Thought” was not to be freely attached to

86 Ibid. 184f.
87 Ibid. 184f.
all kinds of phenomena, \textsuperscript{88} “seemingly if we attach this label, anything can be ‘Mao Zedong Thought’. […] placing labels resembles the Boxer movement, [who thought] after reading a spell that no knives could harm them.”\textsuperscript{89} At a CMC meeting on 30 April 1961, Luo Ronghuan directly confronted Lin Biao by pointing out that the sentence “studying Mao’s \textit{Selected Works} with problems in mind” should be reconsidered as “this sentence has a shortcoming [有毛病]”.\textsuperscript{90} Upon Lin’ inquiry what was to be changed specifically, Luo answered that the focus should be directed at the content and spirit of Mao’s works and advised that the sentence should be dropped from the discussed document. Unable to take up the dispute with his long time political commissar, Lin Biao declared the meeting to be over and stormed out even before Luo had finished his answer, advocating the classical Maoist triad of standpoint, viewpoint, and method. The enmity that Lin’s failure to stand up to Luo at the meeting engendered, ended two years later when Luo Ronghuan prematurely died, aged 61, on 16 December 1963. Mao Zedong the same evening praised Luo’s outstanding loyalty, integrity, and his indomitable spirit of straightforward criticism instead of rumouring behind the back. Thus even during the Cultural Revolution, Luo was not posthumously criticised. After Luo’s death however, Lin did no longer have a matching adversary in the PLA and started to build a network of loyal cadres that would back his political views and try to materialize Lin’s directives on political study. Thus it was no coincidence that merely a month after Luo’s death the first internal version of the Cultural Revolutionary Mao cult’s primary token, the Little Red Book, was compiled and distributed.

\textsuperscript{88} Among the most discussed articles had been a report on the influence of Mao Zedong Thought on raising pigs published in Issue No. 1 of the magazine \textit{Chinese Women} (中国妇女) in July 1958. Although it was shortly after declared to be forged by the All China Women’s Union, it continued to be reprinted in various regional newspapers and editions until it was officially banned by the Ministry of Culture in 1961, see Tongzhi bu yao zhuanzai “Mao zhuxi lai dao women de yangzhuchang”, 5 January 1961, in: Chubang gongzuo wenjian xuanbian (1958-1961), Beijing: Wenhuabu chubanshi guanliju bangongshi, 1961, 48.


\textsuperscript{90} Huang (ed.), \textit{Luo Ronghuan niambu}, 835.
Chapter Five: The Little Red Book and the Rise of the Red Vocabulary

The history of the Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung is probably the most astounding publishing event ever. The estimated amount of official volumes printed between 1966 and 1969 ranges just over a billion, second only to the Holy Bible in terms of circulation numbers and even excludes local prints, foreign language editions, internal army volumes and innumerable stencilled or handwritten collections.91 Up to Lin Biao’s death in September 1971, the Little Red Book was translated into 36 languages, including Braille script, and was published 110 million times abroad. Besides the official versions of the Quotations, up to 440 local editions have been distinguished. During the decade of the Cultural Revolution roughly 10.8 billion Mao texts or posters were printed by the state, making Mao the best-selling author ever, especially when adding the 783 million Mao items published between 1949 and 1965.92 The stunning success of the works of Mao Zedong and most importantly the Little Red Book, termed “Mao bible” in the West, plays a crucial role in the unfolding of the Cultural Revolution and the rise of its specific rhetoric. Based on empirical research, this chapter provides a short history of the compilation and distribution of the Little Red Book against the background of political events up to the Politburo meeting in May 1966. The chapter further examines the rise of the specific rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution, the “red vocabulary”, and discusses the question of communist morality. All of these issues were closely intertwined in the shifting of loyalties from the Party towards personal loyalty to Mao Zedong.

Compilation

The compilation of Chairman Mao’s Quotations traces back to a comment Lin Biao made during an inspection of troops in April 1961. “In order to facilitate that every soldier at any time, under any condition can immediately receive guidance from Chairman Mao’s Thought [sic!], the Liberation Army News should frequently publish suitable quotations of Chairman Mao.”93 From 1 May 1961 onwards, Mao quotations started to appear daily in the army newspapers headlines.94 The task of retrieving a suitable Mao quote to supplement the main

91 San Mu, Guanyu “Wenge” qianhou Mao Zedong zhuzuo de chuban shimo, in: Shehui kexue luntan 1 (2004), 89. The estimated circulation number of the Bible according to the Guinness Book of World Records (2006) is 2.5 billion since 1815.
92 The estimate is based on the numbers published in the Ministry of Culture’s internal news organ Culture Trends (文化动态), see Liu Gao/Shi Feng (ed.), Xin Zhongguo chuban wushi nian jishi, Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1999, 97 and San, Guanyu “Wenge” qianhou, 89.
93 Lin Biao, Shicha budui shi de zhishi (jielu), in: Yi Lin futongshuai 1, 373.
94 Occasional quotes had started appearing in the Liberation Army News from November 1960 onwards, after the CMC had passed the Directive on ideological and political work in October. The citations were taken from
gist of the editorial rested with the *Liberation Army News* Reference Material Department and especially the 30-year old mother of four Tian Shaoguang in charge of the card collection of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao quotes. The usage of specific formulae to render an argument authoritative had been a universal feature in Marxism-Leninism, but the necessity to come up with a suitable Mao citation on daily issues presented the editorial board with great difficulties. The text corpus to choose from encompassed the authoritative and published volumes one to four of Mao’s *Selected Works*, covering the period of civil war and resistance to the Japanese invasion between 1927 and 1949. Besides general remarks on the style of work or study, the need for selfless perseverance to Communist ideals, a frugal lifestyle, and constant vigilance the texts could hardly provide guidance for the questions posed by de-Stalinization or the economic havoc caused by the Great Leap Forward.

As no concordance or general index of Mao Zedong’s works had been compiled to that date, Li Yimin, general editor of the *Liberation Army News*, on behalf of his staff asked Luo Ronghuan in his capacity as head of the GPD about how to deal with the necessity to strictly follow Lin Biao’s requests, especially on how to come up with a suitable quote on issues Mao had never officially been on the record with. Luo’s answer was pragmatic. He advised to study the spirit of Mao’s directives on newspaper work, most importantly his *Talks to the Editorial Staff of the Jinsui Daily*, instead of expecting to find solutions for any kind of problem within Mao’s writings by turning them into Holy Scripture.\(^95\) The editor, however, did not dare to adopt a standpoint as independent as the old marshal. The deputy editor-in-chief Tang Pingzhu ordered to study the experiences of other newspapers faced with the same dilemma and was delighted to hear about a method employed by the editors of the *Tianjin Daily*. They had copied the most famous passages of all four *Selected Works* volumes and arranged them thematically in a card box.\(^96\) Finding a suitable quote thus proved to be much easier. Tang ordered four persons of his staff to copy the whole catalogue. The task was completed within a week and eased the search for fitting sentences of the Chairman considerably. The arrangement according to topics in the card boxes imported from Tianjin provided the fundament of the later compilation of the Little Red Book.

The frequent changes of policy line may explain the enormous popularity the quotes enjoyed not only in the PLA but among Party cadres as well. If a local report could be justified by invoking the authority of a quotation of the Chairman, the danger of being

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\(^95\) Huang (ed.), *Luo Ronghuan nianpu*, 836.

exposed as having fostered an “independent kingdom” or having followed an incorrect line was reduced considerably. The “Learn from the PLA” campaign, unique within the socialist camp in urging the Party to learn from the army, further fuelled attempts in the civilian realm and the state bureaucracy to model themselves after the examples of military study activists. The Daqing oilfield and the agrarian production brigade of Dazhai were the first civilian units that rose to nationwide fame for their success in adapting the study methods within a new field. The provincial propaganda departments were therefore especially keen on tracking successful examples of study in counties or local brigades and stepped up the efforts to raise the Marxist-Leninist knowledge of Party members and populace. The Hebei Provincial Committee had in March 1964 decided upon study guidelines. Cadres above prefecture secretary’s rank were to start with the first five books of the thirty-volume collection of selected Marxist-Leninist works, edited by the Central Propaganda Department, plus a number of Mao texts. County level secretaries were advised to finish the reading of Mao’s Selected Works in two years time. Many counties therefore had reinvigorated the Mao works reading groups established during the Great Leap Forward and meticulously listed the reading progress of every member. Cadres below county level were to read a collection entitled Classes, class struggle, oppose revisionism, and prevent revisionism edited by the Hebei Provincial Committee that consisted primarily of short Mao texts and newspaper articles. Among the general populace the situation varied according to the efforts of the local cadres in taking the lead in study. The increased knowledge of Mao’s writings among the masses had raised the intellectual stakes for many cadres. If villagers discovered that their behaviour deviated from the basic guidelines laid out in Mao’s works, they were to be “put in an awkward position” (下不了台). The knowledge of Mao quotations could thus indeed prove to be empowering the populace in correcting the behaviour of local cadres. Because the Selected Works were not accessible to everyone, the quotation excerpts from the Liberation Army News were frequently copied in personal notebooks and supplemented through

97 The translations had been revised and printed in large format due to the advanced age and cultural background of many high-ranking Party members. The collection that was published by People’s Press in May 1963 included eleven volumes of Marx and Engels, eleven volumes of Lenin, five of Stalin and three of Plekhanov, see Liu/Shi (ed.), Xin Zhongguo chuban wushi nian jishi, 86.
98 By April 1964, for example, among the 12 members of the Central Study Small Group of the Nangong County Committee (Hebei), two had managed to read all four volumes of Mao’s Selected Works, five had read volumes one and two plus the most important essays from the volumes three and four, and the remaining five cadres had concentrated their studies on the most important essays Nangong xianwei zhongxin xuexi xiaozu xuexi Mao zhuxi zhu zhuo de qingkuang (chugao), 3 April 1964, HPA 864-1-335.
99 Hebei shengwei xuanchuanchu, Guanyu dangqian ganbu, qunzhong xuexi Mao zhuxi zhu zhuo qingkuang de huibao, 19 April 1964, HPA 864-1-335, 1.
100 Ibid. 8.
individually found Mao “treasures” not cited in the press. The media assumed an important role in setting examples of successful study. Simple squad leaders like Liao Chujian rose to prominence through their continuing efforts of propagating Mao Zedong Thought with innovative means. In Liao’s case it was the transformation of the army’s instructional blackboards into “Quotations boards” that could be carried along when conducting marches or training sessions. Others compiled collections on specific topics like Methods of Study or Mao on Politics. The idea to compile an official collection of Mao quotations thus followed deliberately from the recitative style of study. There is no hint that Lin Biao himself ordered the print of a compilation as it has been commonly alleged.

The project was first made subject of discussion at GPD work conference in December 1963 when Tang Pingzhu presented the idea of his editorial staff to publish Mao quotations in book form for inner-army use. The proposal was greeted with great enthusiasm and Tang ordered his staff to come up with an exemplary work before the end of the conference. Within two weeks time the first printed issue entitled 200 Quotations of Chairman Mao was handed out to the conference participants on 5 January 1964. As a result of the discussions, the project was accepted. The number of subject areas was enlarged to twenty-five, and sixty-seven quotations were added to the final conference volume that appeared on 10 January with a short preface issued in the name of the GPD. During the following four months, the first draft version was revised upon the suggestions of study activists like Liao Chujian and other military specialists in the field of Mao Zedong Thought. The draft was then sent to the CMC and found unrelenting approval. The book was ordered to be distributed to all military cadres, plus one exemplar for every squad. On 16 May 1964, the first regular print edition of the Quotations from Chairman Mao appeared, classified as “internal” military reading. Its size had according to feedback from study activists been reduced to neatly fit into the pockets of the military uniforms. The quotations appeared, like in many other cases, in two print versions: an ordinary edition with a white paper cover imprinted with red characters for the ordinary readership and a special edition clad in a red plastic covering. Party leaders including Mao Zedong, Zhu De, and Zhou Enlai got hold of their private copies through their secretaries. The GPD preface had been updated to read 1 May 1964 and was further supplemented by an inscription of Lin Biao. The Liberation Army News had requested him to write four short phrases from Lei Feng’s diary: “Read Chairman Mao’s books, listen to Chairman Mao’s

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104 Liu/Shi (eds.), Xin Zhongguo chuban wushi nian jishi, 91.
words, act according to Chairman Mao’s instructions and be a good fighter for Chairman Mao.” Lin Biao, however, for reasons unknown stopped short after the third sentence and was not to be moved of adding the last sentence. Tang Pingzhu finally gave instructions to publish the calligraphy as it was. Only after the book had been distributed, a number of letters from different readers alerted the editors that Lin Biao had not only skipped a sentence but also misspelled the character 听 by adding a superfluous dot. As the books had been distributed to every squad already, the mistake was only removed in the second edition in 1965.

In the meantime other collections of Mao texts had been made public. In July 1964 the People’s Press had published a two-volume edition under the title of Chairman Mao Selected Readings aimed at Party cadres, while the Youth Press simultaneously published a one-volume collection under the same title for a general readership. The volumes included four Mao texts that had previously remained unpublished, amongst them Mao revised speech before the National Propaganda Conference in February 1957, Oppose book worship, one of his earliest texts written in about 1930 that only recently had been recovered,105 and the famous Where do correct ideas come from?. The texts proved important in revising the first edition of the Quotations according to a large number of commentaries that had been sent to the Liberation Army News editorial board by its readers. Most requests dealt with pleas to add specific topics. Zhou Enlai’s wife Deng Yingchao thus requested to include a section on women. Only in a few cases deletions were asked for, like in the case of Kang Sheng and Mao’s secretary Tian Jiaying, who alerted the editors about three quotations that despite having originated with Mao, had been published under a different name and therefore were to be dropped in subsequent editions.106 Tian Shaoguang as the editor in charge of the quotation compilation even conducted fieldwork in the Beijing Garrison to consult famous study activists and learn about further modifications brought forth at the grass roots levels. The deputy political commissar of the Eighth Company and Mao Zedong Thought activist Kong Xiangxiu advised Tian to add a section on its relevance within present world affairs by adapting phrases from the 1960 CMC resolution and Lin Biao’s speeches.107 As a result of the fieldtrip, the foreword was revised to include an evaluation of Mao Zedong Thought:

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105 The decennial festivities in 1959 included the construction of the revolutionary and the military museum in Beijing. In an attempt to recover historical revolutionary items from all over the country, a lithographic printing of the text had been discovered by the Longyan district committee in Fujian province. Mao according to his secretary Tian Jiaying was delighted about the retrieval of the text, which he deemed to be among the few of his writings that he liked reading himself, see Feng, Mao Zedong he ta de mishu Tian Jiaying, 64.
106 See Mao, Zedong, Zai shicha ge difang gongzuo shi de jianghua, November 1965, CCRD.
107 Wei, Hongqiang neimu, 8.
“Comrade Mao Zedong is a great Marxist-Leninist of our time. Mao Zedong Thought is creatively developed Marxism-Leninism in the era in which imperialism is heading for total collapse and socialism is advancing to worldwide victory […]. Mao Zedong Thought is the highest and most lively Marxism-Leninism.”

The last sentence was upon Luo Ruiqing interference omitted later, a “crime” that during the Cultural Revolution was taken as primary example of Luo’s opposition to Mao. The revised draft, now encompassing 33 sections and 427 quotations, found the approval of the GPD leadership and Marshals Lin Biao, He Long, Nie Rongzhen, Liu Bocheng, and Ye Jianying. Mao Zedong himself seems to have been rather fond of the edition as well. In a talk with local cadres in November 1965 he compared its scope with the short but influential works attributed to Laozi and Confucius. On 1 August 1965, commemorating the thirty-eighth anniversary of the founding of the PLA, the second edition of the Quotations was published. Again its circulation was restricted to inner-military use only. All volumes had been covered in red plastic, given the book its distinctive appearance; the size had been reduced even further to fit the needs of the soldiers. With a slight modification in the foreword, most notably its attribution to Lin Biao and the interchanging of numerous the numerous elatives with superlatives, the Little Red Book was to be reprinted in December 1966 and to spread in every corner of China.

The success of the army volume stimulated the compilation of quotation editions within other institutions. But only two others had the necessary institutional background to rival the army volume. With the approval of the CCP Secretariat, the Central Propaganda Department, the Ministry of Culture, and the People’s Press started collaborating on an own version of the quotations in April 1965. Finally, according to a notice from Luo Ruiqing’s successor as Chief-of-Staff Yang Chengwu to Liu Zhijian, deputy head of the GPD, Mao Zedong himself requested Chen Boda to produce an authoritative collection of quotations with the help of his editorial department at the Red Flag journal. While Chen sent his draft for consideration to Lin Biao and leading military personnel, the CCP General Office in early 1966 submitted all three volumes to provincial committees in order to consult their opinion. The army volume, already known to all cadres was commonly referred to as the “small volume” (小本), the final proof version of the People’s Press due to its larger size as “middle volume” (中本) and the untitled manuscript written under Chen Boda’s aegis with more than

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108 Wei, “Mao zhuxi yulu” bianfa quancheng xunzong, 16.
109 A fourth version aimed at readers with little reading abilities entitled A Hundred Quotations of Chairman Mao had upon the Central Propaganda Department request been compiled by the People’s Daily in November 1965 but never appeared in print. A small booklet under the same title was published later as inner-PLA reading during the Cultural Revolution, Ibid. 19.
110 The quoted document is said to be in possession of Tian Shaoguang, dated 28 December 1965, see Ibid. 20.
30,000 characters as opposed to the 8,800 of the army volume came to be known as the “large volume” (大本). The replies emphasized the enormous popularity the *Quotations* enjoyed. Some people had been able to get their copies from the army; others had fabricated their own versions. The main benefit according to the reports was its practical format that allowed workers and peasants to carry it with them to work and to consult it whenever necessary. Furthermore, the short citations could easily be remembered and allowed even those unable to read whole essays of Mao Zedong to understand some of his key points.

The Hebei Provincial Committee in its reply encouraged the print of an authoritative quotations edition and favoured a split publication aimed at a different readership: A comprehensive volume based on a revised version of Chen Boda’s script as reference material for all institutions and Party cadres above county level, and a second, shorter volume for local level cadres and the populace in general, based either on the large or middle volume. Yet it should also include the strong points of the small version, most importantly the foreword and the practical size. The committee further advised to include more quotations from recent speeches of Mao Zedong until the fifth and sixth volumes of *Mao Zedong’s Selected Works* were to appear in print, especially on the necessity of opposing revisionism, the ten great relationships, and class struggle as many of Mao’s recent speeches had already been distributed as study documents and thus had become “part of the common language of cadres and masses”.

Even before all reports had reached the CCP General Office, Deng Xiaoping and Peng Zhen called a meeting on 29 January 1966 at the Diaoyutai guesthouse compound to discuss the question of which edition of the quotations should be regarded as authoritative. The participants included the leadership of the Central Propaganda Department: Lu Dingyi, Xu Liqun, Yao Zhen, further Mao’s former secretary Tian Jianying, and Shi Ximin, a former secretary of the Shanghai Party Committee, who had just been appointed to running the day-to-day business in the Ministry of Culture under its new head Lu Dingyi. After a critical review of the strengths and weaknesses of the three versions, Deng Xiaoping decided to start revising the People’s Press edition for print. It never appeared though. The purge of high-ranking officials that had started with the fall of Yang Shangkun as head of the CCP General Office in charge of the Party’s paper flow in November 1965, followed a month later by the dismissal of Luo Ruiqing as PLA chief-of-staff, and was to continue until the demotion of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping at the Eleventh Plenum of the Eighth Congress in August 1966.

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111 Zhongguo gongchandang Hebei sheng weiyuanhui guanyu taolun ‘Mao zhuxi yulu’, 3.
112 Ibid. 7.
113 Liu/Shi (eds.), *Xin Zhongguo chuban wushi nian jishi*, 96.
left the top leadership busy with other issues than the compilation of Chairman Mao’s *Quotations*. The huge excess demand, however, did not cease. Reprints therefore had to rely on the existing printing moulds of the army volume and thus secured its further dissemination despite the vote of the Central Propaganda Department leadership.

**Distribution**

The first edition of the *Quotations* had been based on an estimate print number of 4.2 million books. The demand among the soldiers, however, necessitated a tripling in numbers and the setting up of a separate structure to distribute the books within the army. By the time the second edition appeared in August 1965, the book had been printed 12.1 million times and the demand kept adding pressure on the Liberation Army Publishing House, whose workers had already come to work in shifts around the clock. To release some pressure, GPD deputy Liu Zhijian approached Luo Ruiqing to consult the possibility of distributing paper moulds to local printing plants. Luo accepted the proposal, as did Central Propaganda Department head Lu Dingyi, Kang Sheng, and Marshal He Long in separate decisions of local requests during September 1965. On 19 November, the CCP General Office phoned the *Liberation Army News* to communicate Mao Zedong’s approval of handing out paper moulds to the Anhui Party Committee.\(^{114}\) In numerical terms the *Selected Readings* still assumed the most important position in the Ministry of Culture’s calculations for 1965. By February 1966, some 75 million copies had been printed and according to the ministry’s statistics and basically settled the needs of the targeted groups. The situation concerning the *Selected Works*, however, remained far from satisfying. Since the founding of the PRC, roughly 10 million sets of Mao’s *Selected Works* had been distributed as well as 610 million single speeches and texts.\(^{115}\) According to the Ministry of Culture’s internal news organ *Culture Trends* (文化动态), in the sixteen years since the founding of the PRC the total number of printed Mao texts and books had been 783,567,000.\(^{116}\) With the beginning of the study campaign to learn from the PLA and the increasing effect of the Socialist Education Movement in the countryside, however, the demand for the four-volume set exceeded the supply provided by the state owned Xinhua bookstores, especially in rural areas.

The distribution of books in rural areas had been an issue of longstanding difficulty for the CCP’s publishing organs. The Xinhua bookstores had in 1953 extended the reach beyond

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\(^{114}\) Wei, “Mao zhuxi yulu” bianfa quancheng xunzong, 18.


\(^{116}\) Liu/Shi (eds.), *Xin Zhongguo chuban wushi nian jishi*, 97.
their own branches by creating a “double-track” (双轨) system, requiring department stores and local sales and marketing cooperatives to sell books on a commission basis of 8%.117 These so-called “commission agents” relied on a newly created supply chain and proved highly successful in widening the spectre of customers. By 1956, 147 cooperatives had been established in Hebei province that through their local branches reached 82% of the populace and increased the book sales by 56% in first six months of 1956 alone. The situation in remote villages, however, remained difficult. In July 1957, mobile sales units were established in 118 districts leading to further increases in sales. These structures were revived after the Great Leap Forward, when, after 1962, mobile sales personnel were trained for this task. The distributional structures facilitated rising sales numbers during the early 1960s but were unable to cope with the demand engendered by notice posted by the Xinhua Head Office on 10 July 1964 announcing the publication of Mao Zedong’s Selected Readings.

“Beginning at dawn and continuing the whole day, the stream of phone calls and customers in the bookstores of Tangshan, Baoding, Shijiazhuang and Zhangjiakou did not cease. In Baoding, the shop served more than 1000 customers a day. Some readers from villages walked more than a dozen kilometres to buy their books. In front of many sales departments readers would start queuing at 6 a.m.”118

The situation in other parts of the country was similar. In 1965, over 2500 letters were sent to the People’s Press of which 63% had tried unsuccessfully tried to order the Selected Works. According to the demands sent in by the local branches of the Xinhua bookstores and investigations conducted in four cities, the supply fell short at least another eleven million copies just to supply the most important units like Party organs, schools, and workplaces.119 As it seemed impossible to print the same number of Mao volumes in one year that had been printed since the founding of the PRC, the Ministry of Culture fixed five million sets as goal for 1966 that were to be published in two tranches.120 It further advised the bookstores to serve the most important customers first, simultaneously urging the local printing factories to keep up the high standard of quality. Temporarily unsatisfied customers should not be alienated by referring to the internal distribution of Mao works but were to be alerted about the general situation to understand potential inconveniences.121

118 Ibid. 172.
119 Zhongfa [66] 118.
120 The distribution proceeded according to the number of provincial cadres. The largest part of the first tranche of 29.5 million books with 1.9 million was to remain in Beijing, while provinces such as Ningxia required only 130,000 copies, see Zhonghua renmin gongbeguo wenhuabu, Guanyu “Mao Zedong xuanji” faxing gongzuo de tongzhi, 3 March 1966, HPA 1030-2-325.
121 Ibid.
On 13 March 1966, the Ministry of Culture sent a preliminary report to the Central Propaganda Department and the CCP Center about the state of print and distribution of the *Quotations.* The liberalization engendered through the spreading of printing moulds to local plants, while leading to an increase of 28 million exemplars in total, had not been able to cope with the demand of Party cadres and the populace. The Central First Light Industry Ministry had supplemented another 5100 t of paper, equalling 51 million copies but still the excess demand remained drastic. The reaction to local print requests not according to plan had led to inefficiencies in allocating the copies, as some units were receiving their examples both through local and central channels, thus further reducing the limited resources. To solve the problem, a sharp distinction between the central units to be supplied by the Beijing Municipal Party Committee and local units was made that should receive their share according to the schedules of the respective ministries of culture. Sales and distribution were to be controlled by the Xinhua bookstores and the prices to be adjusted according to local conditions, but not to exceed 3-4 Jiao. To curb the disruptive impact of the mechanisms of a free market allocation on the planned economy, there should be “no notice within the papers, no advertising, no public displays, and no sale to foreigners. A small amount may be used for outlet sales.” The CCP Center approved of the report ten days later.

Meanwhile the State Council’s Foreign Affairs Department issued a circular to make all foreigners return their *Quotation* copies because it did not represent a comprehensive collection of Mao Zedong Thought and was to be considered for internal education only. According to the State Council, the Little Red Book therefore was not be read in the presence of foreigners or mentioned in conversations, yet collecting the copies that had already been given to foreigners turned out to be difficult. A student of Nankai University in Tianjin had for example donated his volume to a Vietnamese exchange student planning to translate it upon his return home. It took the intervention of the University president to regain the copy. On 20 April, the Central Propaganda Department loosened the tight regulations considerably. It had been nothing but impossible to regain all copies and the efforts occasionally had resulted in tarnishing the image of Mao. In future, therefore, all “foreign experts and exchange students can request to borrow or possibly buy a copy of the

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123 Ibid.

124 See the local reprint of the directive from 5 March in Hebei sheng wenhuaju pizhuan sheng renwei waiban guanyu lin bu xian waiguoren zengsong “Mao zhuxi yulu” de tongzhi, 21 March 1966, HPA 1030-2-325.
'Quotations from Chairman Mao’ at their respective units’. Copies already handed out should not be recollected, but the book should be distributed only following an explicit request. Furthermore, while handing out the copies, the local staffs were to make sure to explain the special nature of the book as “internal study material”.

To facilitate a unified process of distribution, the People’s Publishing House on 22 April contacted the small group revising Mao Zedong’s writings under Kang Sheng’s leadership and obtained the permission to take over the responsibility for supplying the local printing plants with paper moulds. It thus took over the monopoly from the Liberation Army News after having failed to secure the supremacy of the Central Propaganda Department’s own version of Mao quotes. The Quotations continued to be distributed only as internal reading. However, whether to print the frontispiece or to include a Mao portrait as well as the exact price and local distribution methods were still to be decided by the local Party committees. The material requirements were defined in detail and the prices were calculated at 0.6/0.32 Yuan for the respective editions, slightly above the manufacturing costs. After transferring the task of allocating the resources efficiently to the local Party committees, the provincial leaders of the People’s Publishing House and the printing factories were to decide upon targets and print numbers, which were then fixed by the local ministries of culture and divided among the different cities within a province. Due to the lack of sufficiently modern printing facilities and the solemn political task of publishing the works of Mao Zedong, up to July 1966 they had only been printed in twelve provinces. In Hebei and Tianjin, the estimated number of Quotation copies added up to 12 million. Production was divided among 13 printing plants according to local capabilities. Since the enormous amount of books required additional labour force, especially to help with the binding, 835 temporary workers were employed, each one expected to handle 50 books a day.

The increase of paper supply, given China’s continuing shortage of paper, was to be handled by reducing the allocation of resources to the printing of other books and newspapers. The printed copies were to be delivered straight to the provincial Xinhua bookstores from where the distribution within the different regions was to proceed. For county level bookstores this meant that they

126 Ibid.
127 Renmin chubanshe guanyu zongzheng ban “Mao zhuxi yulu” fuzhi gongxing shi, 22 April 1966, HPA 1030-2-322
128 No spot whatsoever was to appear on the page with Mao’s portrait, see Hebei renmin chubanshe guanyu “Mao zhuxi yulu” de yinzhi guige he yinzhuang zhiliang yaoqiu, 1 May 1966, HPA 1030-2-322.
129 Mao zhuxi yulu shiwan chengben jisuan dan, April 1966, HPA 1030-2-322.
had to hire additional personnel to supply the many villages and smaller townships without a proper bookshop. During 1966, the Xinhua bookstores in Hebei hired additional 1049 workers to help with the sale and distribution of Mao works throughout the province.\textsuperscript{131}

The huge excess demand of especially the \textit{Quotations} had been triggered by various factors. The increase of political study campaigns, like the Socialist Education Movement to reinvigorate communist morals in rural areas or nationwide campaign to learn from the PLA provided the political background without which the demand could never have evolved on such a large scale. But other factors contributed as well. By providing the populace with a point of reference, the \textit{Quotations} turned out to offer a possibility of empowerment for non-Party members. The secretive nature with which the book was published, the difficulties of obtaining it, and the design shaped by rudimentary market research all worked together in creating a cult object, whose demand could not be satisfied by the existing plans within the printing industry. The enormous popularity of the book enhanced the glorious image of Mao Zedong despite the fact that in the early 1960s his mentioning in the \textit{People’s Daily} had sharply decreased since the days of the Great Leap Forward, paralleled by a modest propagation of the new State Chairman Liu Shaoqi. What had started as a demand driven movement was to change its character during the second half of 1966, after the attacks on the old propaganda and Party elite. The towering publication numbers of the Little Red Book that skyrocketed in mid-1966 therefore were no longer the result of an excess demand but increasingly performances of revolutionary conviction and loyalty to the Chairman.

\textbf{On Communist Morality}

Between 4 and 26 May 1966, the CCP Politburo met for an enlarged session in Beijing to discuss the cases of the prior Chief-of-Staff Luo Ruiqing, the head of the CCP General Office Yang Shangkun, Beijing First Secretary Peng Zhen and Lu Dingyi, head of the Central Propaganda Department. During the meeting, the carefully orchestrated purges that had started with the fall of Yang Shangkun in November 1965 for having bugged the Chairman’s personal carriage during the Great Leap reached its temporary apex with the debunking of the whole leading body of the departments in control of the state media. Since Khrushchev’s fall in October 1964, Mao had occasionally pondered about the danger of a coup d’état. The reasons for Mao’s doubt in the reliability of the Party apparatus had first been incited by his public clash with his long-term successor Liu Shaoqi at the 7000 Cadres Conference in

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about the relative percentage of manmade faults vs. natural calamities causing the fatal outcome of the Great Leap Forward, for which Mao did not want to be solely held accountable. He thus re-emphasized the importance of class struggle at the Beidaihe working conference in August 1962 after having secluded himself from state leadership for half a year. By reinvigorating the primacy of political factors over economic issues, Mao tried to shift the discussion away from the field of economics, in which he was a self-professed amateur, back to the terrain that was solely his prerogative: the distinguishing of correct and false “lines”. At the Tenth Plenum in September 1962 due to Mao’s insistence the importance of unremitting class struggle featured prominent on the agenda. To prevent youth and cadres from turning revisionist like in the Soviet Union, the dangers posed by capitalist influence should be talked about “every year, every month and every day”.133

The rural populace was the first strata to be confronted with socialist re-education. While the emotional bonding and model campaigns turned out to be effective within the hierarchic army organization, its impact on society in the early 1960s was limited. The situation especially in the countryside, worst hit by the famine, remained a major area of concern for the CCP and a potential source of civil unrest. Investigations conducted in mid-1963 at the outset of the so-called “Socialist Education Movement”, the Cultural Revolution’s immediate predecessor in rural areas, revealed a devastating picture of Party morals and further clarified the extent to which Party rule had been discredited. The internal intelligence bulletin *Pulse of Class Struggle* edited by the Hebei Provincial Propaganda Department recorded an alarming situation in June 1963. Especially among the younger generation the prestige of the Communist Party had suffered drastically and the rise of superstition, gambling, and “unsuitable behaviour” was regarded as a consequence. Cases of hooliganism were recorded,134 but far more alarming for the CCP was the open defiance to the proposed views of Marxism-Leninism on religion and superstition. In rural areas, the peasants had flocked into re-emerging Daoist sects. The provincial statistics of Hebei registered that over 200 sects had established their network in more than 30,000 villages. The sects had recruited more than 1.8 million followers in Hebei province alone135 sometimes even with active participation of

132 During the so called 7000 Cadre Conference in Beijing in September 1962, Liu had reversed Mao’s statement that 30% of the Leap’s negative impact had been generated by insufficient knowledge, while the remaining 70% should be attributed to natural calamities. His open defiance gained the assembly’s approval and only after Lin Biao immediately afterwards opposed this view by attributing the failure of the Great Leap to its alienation from Mao’s basic plans, the question was settled to Mao’s favour.

133 Mao Zedong, *Zai ba jie shi zhong quanhui shang de jianghua*, 24 September 1962, CCRD.

134 *Jieji douzheng dongxiang 1*, 9 June 1963.

local CCP cadres. The strongest activities had been recorded during the years of the famine in 1959-61, when in Hebei seven leaders of Daoist sects had tried to establish themselves as new “emperors” (作皇帝). The doctrinal authority of the CCP had further been disrupted by rise of other suppressed religions like Buddhism and Christianity. Arranged marriages based on financial transactions and other “feudal customs” had re-emerged. Thus numerous religious rites involving imagery like door-gods or the distribution of “holy water” to cure illnesses caused by the famine were reported. The “fight with reactionary and backward forces to corrupt our youth” and the reinvigoration of the communist high grounds of interpretation demanded the full attention of the CCP and PLA leadership.

The drastic increase of local cults and Daoist sects that in internal Party journals in 1963 were described as being of pervasive influence led to the enactment of the Socialist Education Movement to root out the causes of capitalist and feudal thinking. Differences with Liu Shaoqi on how to conduct the movement according to Mao’s own testimony made him realize by early 1965 that he had aimed at the wrong strata for re-education. Not the peasants, numerous but powerless as long as they remained politically unorganized, but the Party bureaucracy itself turned out to be the primary breeding grounds for a capitalist restoration, including the CCP Central Committee. In an informal talk with local Party leaders on 13 January 1965, Mao alerted them about the possibility of revisionism to appear in the Central Committee. He brought up the topic again during a central work conference of the CCP in September and October 1965, renewing the emphasis on the continuing existence of classes and antagonistic contradictions within socialism, as long as capitalism prevailed in other parts of the world. Mao’s growing paranoia about the possibility of a purge, similar to Khrushchev’s fate a few months earlier, strengthened his belief in the necessity to replace his successor. Like back in 1959, when the Zhukov affair had prompted Mao to pay sharp attention to the reliability of the PLA leadership, the influence of Khrushchev’s purge once again revealed the interdependence of foreign and domestic politics. In the early 1960s the Soviet Union thus retained an important influence on Chinese politics. However, it was no longer in the position of an admired model of development but as a negative mirror image, revealing the dangers of revisionism that had come forth in the first country to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat. In order to avoid the fate of Stalin, Mao considered ways of securing his revolutionary heritage by rendering a new generation of communists immune

137 Jieji doucheng dongxiang 3, 10 June 1963.
139 Jieji doucheng dongxiang 4, 11 June 1963.
against the lures of capitalism.\textsuperscript{140} This would only work by changing the present system of education and to replace it with a new mode that was to rely on physical work and active class struggle as opposed to book worship and the generation of specialists.

The question of why Mao did not simply rely on Stalinist methods of show trials to purge his perceived enemies has been subject to frequent debates. Despite Mao’s unrivalled status within the CCP, the majority of the Party’s high ranking cadres still placed loyalty to the Party and the ideals of Marxism above personal loyalty to the Chairman. The First Secretary of the Beijing Party Committee, Peng Zhen, known for his frankness and tight organizational control, was especially outspoken on these matters of principle. During a meeting of the Ministry of Culture on 23 September 1965 he committed his most serious political “crime” by explicitly stating “in the face of truth, everyone is equal, even if you are the Chairman of the CCP Center.”\textsuperscript{141} The CCP in 1965 thus still did not resemble the CPSU during the mid-1930s. Completely spurious claims could have resulted in the alienation of a considerable faction within the Central Committee, a risk that Mao was not yet prepared to take. The purges thus had to be conducted with inner-Party support. The case of Luo Ruqing is a revealing example. He had been relieved of his post as chief-of-staff during a Politburo meeting in mid-December 1965 although he was known for his unremitting service to Mao. Based on evidence submitted by Lin Biao and his coterie, Luo was accused of having obstructed Lin’s “placing politics in command” and to have aimed at a replacement of Lin Biao as minister of defense. Especially Lin’s wife Ye Qun engaged in shuttle diplomacy, travelling back and forth between Beijing, Hangzhou, and Shanghai trying to convince Mao Zedong and other CCP leaders of Luo’s faults. Mao finally conceded to Lin that Luo had “opposed you, but still he hasn’t opposed me”.\textsuperscript{142} Luo was charged with having failed to trust Lin Biao in putting politics in command and of having failed to report on important issues to Mao personally.\textsuperscript{143} Luo’s opposition to exaggerating claims about the theoretical status of Mao Zedong Thought, especially his omission of the phrase “with genius” from the second edition of the Quotations, was taken as evidence for his stubborn and conspirative attitude.

When preparing the distribution of three documents incriminating Luo, Premier Zhou Enlai changed their designation from CCP central documents to internal reading materials drafted in the name of the GPD. He further summoned his secretary to locate the origins of three prominent phrases stressing the interdependence of politics and the military like

\textsuperscript{140} See his comment to Edgar Snow in their conversation in 1970, Mao, \textit{Hujian Sinuo}, CCRD.
\textsuperscript{141} Zhongfa [66] 267, \textit{Zhongguo gongchandang zhongyang weiyuanhui tongzhi ji yuanjian yuanjian zhi er}, 16 May 1966, CCRD.
\textsuperscript{142} Shao Hua/You Hu, \textit{Lin Biao de zhe yi sheng}, Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1994, 216.
\textsuperscript{143} Mao Zedong, \textit{Guanyu Luo Ruqing de tanhua}, 2 December 1965, CCRD.
“military and politics are equally important” to possibly substantiate Luo’s contribution to the propagation of Mao Zedong Thought. All three phrases, however, had originated from speeches of Lin Biao. Luo, while discussing similar topics, had not succeeded in coining a specific term for public usage. The continuing assaults on his integrity led Luo to attempt suicide on 18 March 1966, but the attempt failed. His verdict was finally passed during the enlarged Politburo session in May 1966 in Beijing, when Luo was held accountable for his “extreme hostility towards Mao Zedong Thought”. His opposition to Lin Biao’s ritual style of emulation was taken as proof of having taken on a capitalist standpoint, of having opposed the Party and the masses.

The search for incriminating passages from speeches to reveal capitalist sprouts in the CCP and PLA leadership proved to be a viable instrument in outmanoeuvring the defenses of the communist bureaucracy. Mao himself fostered this trend by acting upon a divide-and-rule strategy. He increasingly circumvented the formal communication channels to achieve his goals and instead relied on extra-institutional groups and individuals like Kang Sheng, Chen Boda or his own wife Jiang Qing, all whom solely depended on his personal favour, to facilitate his directives. Mao’s physical absence from the capital shrouded his opinions in mystery even to the cadres in the Politburo Standing Committee and required them to take on responsibility in delicate issues that Mao often had provoked himself. The field of culture turned out to be the most ambiguous field and thus was predestined for the detection of hidden sentiments and class standpoints. Mao encouraged and three times personally revised the attack of a radical Shanghai intellectual, Yao Wenyuan, on a theatre piece about an upright Ming dynasty official, Hai Rui, written half a decade ago on Mao’s behest by the vice-mayor of Beijing and famous historian Wu Han. Yao Wenyuan’s polemic attacked the portrayal of Hai Rui as defender of peasant rights against the arbitrary cruelty of the feudal system. Historical materialism, according to Yao, did not allow for individuals to transcend the restrictions inflicted upon them by their class background. Hai Rui had opposed arbitrary cruelty but remained a “loyal servant” of his feudal authorities. The play should therefore be considered as a “poisonous weed”, as a vivid expression of the necessity to continue class struggle in the superstructural realm.

145 Zhongfa [66] 268, Zhonggong zhongyang pizhuan zhongyang gongzuoyi xiaozu guanyu Luo Ruiqing cuowu wenti de baogao, 16 May 1966, CCRD.
147 Yao Wenyuan, Ping xin bian lishiju “Hai Rui ba guan”, in: Wenhui bao, 10 November 1965.
Yao’s polemic served a number of related purposes. It expressed Mao’s dissatisfaction with his potential successors and especially their failure to implement policies according to his wishes. Although the CCP leadership still bestowed Mao with the necessary honors and kept him meticulously informed, he complained about being left out of the loop on important decisions. He further expressed his dissatisfaction with the Party bureaucracy in general and the handling of propaganda in particular, since it lacked vividness, theoretical content, and class character. The polemic provided a welcome opportunity to attack the stronghold of the Beijing Party circle around Peng Zhen and Lu Dingyi, responsible for the dissemination of the CCP’s propaganda. The article was first published by the newspaper *Wenhui bao* in Shanghai on November 10, 1965, but did not receive major attention in other parts of the country.\(^{148}\) The Shanghai People’s Publishing House on Mao’s request turned the article into a small brochure to be distributed by the Xinhua bookstores before the *People’s Daily* on 30 November finally printed the article along with a commentary revised by Peng Zhen and Zhou Enlai that encouraged differing opinions to be voiced within the sphere of culture. The resistance to the reprint of the article provided Mao with the proof needed to step up the attacks, mainly through scribes formerly employed in the CCP anti-Revisionist Writing Group. The attacks on leading intellectuals gained force in the spring of 1966. Mao Zedong himself at an enlarged Politburo meeting in Hangzhou outlined the dangers posed by the continuing influence of “reactionary academic authorities” (反动学术权威):

“At present, the largest chunk of high, middle, and elementary school children are being monopolized by intellectuals with capitalist, small producer, landlord, and rich peasant background. […] Now it is time for revolution. We should preserve some people like Old Guo [Moruo] and Old Fan [Youlan], others don’t have to be kept. [We will] mobilize the youth to challenge them, to criticize by name. Let them first rise to attack. We will fight in the newspapers.”\(^{149}\)

The scholarly discussions mainly focussed on the possible inheritance of feudal and capitalist elements within a communist moral system. Guan Feng and Wu Chuanqi, two theoreticians associated with the *Red Flag* and the Academy of Sciences respectively, published the most elaborate article on these issues in the monthly journal *Philosophical Studies*. In their article on *Reviewing Comrade Wu Han’s Moral Theories*, republished by the *People’s Daily* on 19 March 1966, the authors in a highly sophisticated argument argued for the necessity to eradicate all notions of classical moral culture in order to prevent capitalist restoration. Guan and Wu proceeded by means of a two-stage rhetorical strategy: They first scrutinized the

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\(^{148}\) Up to the official reprint in the *People’s Daily* on 30 November 1965 only seven regional newspapers had published the article.

\(^{149}\) Mao Zedong, *Zai Zhongyang zhengzhiju kuoda huiyi shang de jianghua*, 20 March 1966, CCRD.
difference in content between certain key terms proposed by Wu Han and their true communist meaning. In a second step, they lifted the debate to the theoretical level and drew conclusions for necessary action. As the article is one of the few documents that provide a philosophically grounded argument about the necessity to conduct a Cultural Revolution in the superstructure (a phrase that had appeared in public discourse earlier already) its basic assumptions shall be discussed in some detail.

In a number of essays written in the early 1960s, historian Wu Han had argued for the “critical absorption” of traditional moral concepts like loyalty (忠), righteousness (义), benevolence (忍), and integrity (节) by the CCP. A new set of morals would otherwise have to be produced from scratch due to the prior non-existence of a proletarian class, an option Wu did not deem feasible. According to Wu Han, a distinction between capitalist morality and other capitalist viewpoints had to be made. Among the traditional values, “loyalty” came to play a supreme role for the conduct of Party members. Wu Han stressed the difference between the classical notions of loyalty associated with unquestioning obedience of the commoner to the Confucian authorities and the present loyalty towards the people, the nation, and socialist construction. “‘Being loyal to the Emperor’ is the former view on morals. With the exception of a few old diehards, no one speaks about this anymore; should we therefore abandon the character “loyalty” as well? I don’t think so.” Wu’s critics therefore detected a presumably non-Marxist standpoint in his theory, the failure to root class consciousness in the changing material conditions. Wu Han’s proposition to simply drop the phrase’s content and retain some original, untainted meaning of the term was taken as tactics of deceit. Some persons without sufficient alertness would fall prey to the classical notion of loyalty and Wu Han would succeed in his scheming to reintroduce values of the landlord class “through the backdoor”.

According to Guan Feng and Wu Chuanqi no one had ever considered replacing the character “loyalty” so there was no necessity for Wu Han’s intervention. As for the linkage between the two notions, Guan and Wu argued quite the opposite. Being loyal to the people

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150 Although the phrase predates the PRC, it had not been in common usage up to the Cultural Revolution. Yet, a telegram sent by a number of “socialist construction activists” to the Chairman on 27 May 1960 explicitly described the change in the superstructure during the Leap as a “high tide of a great cultural revolution” (文化革命的高潮). “Acting according to the directives of Chairman Mao will result in a hundred victories within a hundred battles […] in the creation of glorious achievement without precedent in history. […] It makes us feel deep from the bottom of our hearts how lucky, how proud it is to grow up in the era of Mao Zedong”. Xiang dang zhongyang he Mao zhuxi de zhijing dian (caogao), 27 May 1960, HPA 919-1-43.
151 Quoted in Guan Feng/Wu Chuanqi, Ping Wu Han tongzhi de daode lun, in: People's Daily [reprint from: Philosophical Studies 1/1966], 19 March 1966, 5.
152 Wu Han, Xuexi lishi zhishi de jige wenti, quoted in: Ibid.
153 Ibid.
required the destruction of all previous loyalties and could therefore only be built upon the complete erasure of old culture and habits. Other examples included the traditional notions of piety and moral integrity. Wu Han emphasized that the concepts had not been means of exerting oppression but expressions of moral conduct within society. Not everything inherited from the past should therefore be neglected as corrupt and harmful. Quite the contrary, correctly understood the concepts of integrity and loyalty provided the basis for a number of cardinal traits of character that remained worthy of communist appraisal. The same, according to Wu Han, applied to the classical terminus *li*( 礼) referring to the wide spectre of customs, habits, and rites. Especially polite behaviour should not too easily be dismissed:

“Li in the sense of the four social bonds [propriety, righteousness, honesty, and a sense of shame] is still valuable today; if there is no politeness in interpersonal relationships, [some people] walk with bare torso into the cinema, this is not suitable. There are some youths, who do not care about their appearance; their hair is quite long, the clothes extremely filthy and of foul odour [臭烘烘的]. If this is what one calls ‘frugality’, I fear that the education in politeness has not been very successful.”

Wu Han’s insistence on critically inheriting rules of conduct from the past met with the unrelenting criticism of Guan Feng and Wu Chuanqi. Wu Han’s failure to relate every social phenomenon to class struggle in their opinion revealed the continuing existence of non-proletarian ideas like intellectual freedom or democracy among the Party’s intellectuals. All thoughts and terms, they argued by invoking Mao Zedong’s dictum, could only be applied under concrete circumstances and not in the abstract. “If there is capitalist democracy, there cannot be proletarian worker’s democracy.”

Wu Han had sought legitimacy for his theory of moral inheritance by distinguishing between reactionary and popular culture. He referred to Lenin, who had characterized proletarian culture as a product, which had developed continuously, even during the suppression through the feudal landlords and capitalists. Guan and Wu attacked his premise because of the failure to correctly situate morals in the superstructural realm. They argued that according to Marxism-Leninism the establishment of a system of communist morals had little in common with the role of culture and thus could not be equated with it. Philosophy and economic thought were defined as abstractions of social realities, while the role of culture was to mirror social realities in artistic form. Morals on the other hand, like the codifications of law, should be interpreted as the summation of man-made systems of justification, although none that was to be implemented and enforced through state institutions but rather by means

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154 Ibid.
of public discourse: “Morals restrain people’s behaviour based on the dominant public opinion.” Given their man-made character, law and morals of the dominant class clearly repressed the less powerful strata and therefore had to be completely exterminated after the demise of the old order. What, the authors rhetorically asked, was for example the present relevance of the Tang dynasty law codex? Not inheritance but complete abolishment of the former morality should thus be propagated along with the destruction of all cultural and philosophical trends championing non-proletarian standpoints. The danger of Wu Han’s argumentation according to Guan and Wu was presented by his technique of masking his real purposes by using characters with multiple notions. His insidious crime of a capitalist restoration brought forth under the guidance of moral inheritance would have to be countered by a radical destruction of old value systems. Without their extermination, the new proletarian morals of selfless service for the goals of communist world revolution and the proletarian class could not be firmly established. The “temporary economic disturbances" of the Great Leap had brought forth a reactionary trend to champion traditional values and especially Confucian morals that would have to be rooted out completely through continuous revolution.

Of special interest is the role attributed to language by Guan and Wu. Unlike the classical Leninist conception of language as a mirror reflection of social realities, they pointed out the possible instrumentalization of language to create an impact on the material basis through masking traditional value concepts. Words therefore had to be rigorously separated from their “historical meanings” and “semantic roots”, and instead had to be firmly attached to the values of class struggle. “This means that the content certain characters and language in general carry in different periods and under different class conditions is not identical. The same phrase, the same character in respect to his meaning and [reference to] social realities […] can be diametrically opposed.” The most important aspect therefore was to distinguish whether the old phrases were employed to enrich and substantiate the proletarian dictatorship or whether they were employed to oppose it. The authors held up none of Mao Zedong’s writings to provide a positive example of enriching the modern vernacular with classical quotes. Instead, they referred back to Liu Shaoqi’s treatise on the How to be a Good Communist, a long speech Liu had held in 1939, which had been reprinted in large numbers since July 1962. It was to become the primary target of accusations against Liu during the following years. What the criticism of Guan and Wu attempted and the larger movement of the Cultural Revolution was to succeed in, was to replace commonsense understandings with

156 Guan/Wu, Ping Wu Han tongzhi de daode lun, 5.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
definitions fixed in relation to the overarching concept of class struggle. On the semantic level, this approach was mirrored by the rise of what Qian Gang has called the “red vocabulary.”\(^{159}\) The Cultural Revolution was thus aimed at solving a problem Stalin had failed to cope with sufficiently both linguistically and politically. It was to destroy the intellectual fundamentals for the rise of revisionism at its most basic root: language. Here a totalitarian vision of thought control through language impoverishment becomes visible as a theoretical construct. But as the reference to Liu Shaoqi revealed, the ultimate arbiter of the rhetoric of revolution remained external, depending on the twists of the Chairman’s policies. Nevertheless, the correct employment of words or symbols came to assume crucial importance in distinguishing between the real and the bogus revolutionaries.

**Red Vocabulary**

Given its peculiar character, the language of the Cultural Revolution has incited a remarkable amount of attention.\(^{160}\) While contemporary analyses were mostly focussed on explaining the new terminology or offered insights into the semantic origins of different phrases,\(^{161}\) in the past decade scholarship has turned to the question of how language shaped political and personal realities. A good deal of attention has been poured into the analysis of the Red Guard vocabulary, songs, and poetry\(^{162}\) while others have focussed on the impact and consequences of what has been called “linguistic engineering”.\(^{163}\) Returning to Hayek’s notion of “weasel-words”, quoted in the beginning, the similarities between his conception and the reasoning of Guan Feng and Wu Chuanqi in their discussions of communist morality became obvious. Single words or characters could take on multiple meanings due to the usage in different

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\(^{159}\) The term is employed by Qian, *Hongse ciyu de boxing he liubian*, 1.

\(^{160}\) Unfortunately many recent works have been written without consulting the substantial body of primary sources, see for example Lu Xing, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The Impact on Chinese Thought, Culture, and Communication*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004.


contexts and the enormous historical ballast accumulated over time. The non-definite content of single characters made them possible tools for a capitalist or feudal restoration. According to Guan and Wu, words were like empty containers that could be filled with different meanings. Jiang Qing emphasized this view during a speech on 28 November 1966 at a meeting discussing the role of culture.

“An important aspect of our Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is to sweep away all remainders of the systems of exploitation, to sweep away every part of the old thoughts, old culture, old customs, and old habits of the exploiting classes. Although we continue to use some [of their] vocabulary, the content is completely different. Like for example the character ‘loyalty’; the feudal landlord class had been loyal to the emperor, loyal to the state of the feudal classes. We are loyal to the Party, loyal to the proletarian class, loyal to the broad masses of the working people. Or for example the character ‘moral integrity’; the so-called integrity of the feudal classes, pertained to the emperor and kings, to the state of the feudal classes. What we are talking about is revolutionary proletarian integrity; this means we should have unwavering belief in the cause of the proletarian class and communism. Under no conditions should we succumb to the minority of enemies suppressing and exploiting the people. Therefore, while we still continue to use the same characters ‘loyalty’ and ‘integrity’, their class content is completely different.”

A fixation of the interchangeable content could therefore only be obtained by providing a firm relation to man-made systems of law or morals along with the thorough denigration of the former meanings. Single characters accrued their meaning only in a chain of references. Not the characters themselves offered proof for the class standpoint of the author but the works from which the author quoted or the attitude adopted towards workers, peasants, and above all Mao Zedong Thought. A text thus neither was self-explicative nor did it immediately reveal the intentions of the author. Instead it had to be scrutinized by a number of (self-) proclaimed experts in the exegesis of Mao Zedong Thought in order to stand the test of true communist conviction.

In their classical analysis *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have provided a theoretical foundation for the analysis of socialist language that is highly revealing for the linguistic phenomena witnessed during the Cultural Revolution. They singled out concepts that assumed primary importance for socialist discourse as a whole, like the concept of “class struggle” during the Cultural Revolution or “peaceful coexistence” during the era of Khrushchev. These “nodal points”, a term borrowed from Jacques Lacan, came to act as general points of reference within public discourse and provided a framework for meaningful communication. The creation of such a communicative space with features more or less rigid presented a temporary fixation of the permanent change of single meanings.

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164 Jiang Qing, *Jiang Qing zai wenyi jie dahui shang de jianghua*, 28 November 1966, CCRD.
by aligning them under an overarching concept. Two aspects were necessary to succeed in fixing the terms within a new discourse: a centrally controlled public sphere incessantly repeating the ever same semantic connections and a rigid system of social control that caused the implementation in virtually all aspects of life for example through small group study. Both ingredients were given in the case of the PRC.

In the years leading up to the Cultural Revolution the notion of class struggle had become the main discursive arbiter after Mao had brought up the issue again in the autumn of 1962. By 1968, when the formalization of public speech reached its apex, one third of the articles published in the People’s Daily and Liberation Army News explicitly referred to class struggle, while most other articles implicitly invoked its consequences.

![Figure 3: References to class struggle in the People’s Daily (RMRB) and Liberation Army News (JFJB) 1956-1980](image)

Under the overarching concept of class struggle, there was no longer room for intermediate stances. Either one displayed boundless loyalty to the Chairman or the danger of being considered an enemy of the people loomed large. Those considered to be enemies of the proletarian classes were denied all human qualities while addresses to the Chairman vied for the most exaggerating notions of deep felt love and emotion. The phrase “red vocabulary” therefore refers to the Manichean rhetoric of good and evil associated primarily with the official discourse of the Cultural Revolution. Phrases like “raising high”, “with Mao as principal”, “invincible Mao Zedong Thought”, or “placing politics in command” had already risen to prominence in the early 1960s, but the absolutization of Mao Zedong Thought resulted in the influx of an even larger number of superlatives and elatives referring to the Chairman.
The rhetoric of worship and class struggle only achieved full prominence after August 1966. Depending on the means of coercion available, the designation of linguistic relationships could come to constitute boundaries of behaviour obligatory for all. Being designated a member of the “five black” or “five red” classes was not only a method of labelling but fundamentally affected the status and relative chances of their bearers within society. Yet while within the official media the standardization and repetitiveness of language came to increase in previously unthinkable ways, the destruction of Party rule was followed by the rise of new forms of media that often contested the official reading. Laclau and Mouffe therefore placed supreme emphasis on the temporary nature of all fixations and point at the constructive character of the nodal points. The unfixable nature of every sign and its past meanings could not simply be eradicated but continued to provide a potential for subversion, for example by invoking words in non-ordinary contexts.

The binary differentiation between “red” and “black” lines in support or opposition to Chairman Mao appeared first as a harsh critique of the CCP cultural establishment in the draft of a military conference on culture convened by Jiang Qing and “entrusted” by Lin Biao in February 1966. A first draft about the results of screening movies and theatre plays for nearly three weeks was prepared under the guidance of GPD deputy Liu Zhijian but did not find the approval of Jiang Qing.\textsuperscript{166} Zhang Chunqiao, Chen Boda, and Mao Zedong himself therefore revised the draft repeatedly until it was submitted as central document on 10 April 1966 along with numerous letters emphasizing the importance attached to the issue of culture by Mao and Lin. The draft presented a drastic revision of the results reached by the Cultural Revolutionary Five Man Group that had been formed in February 1966 around Peng Zhen to investigate the Wu Han affair and had delegated the discussion to the realm of scholarly debates. Jiang Qing’s conference summary instead detected a “sharp class struggle”\textsuperscript{167} to have permeated CCP cultural policies since the founding of the PRC.

“\textquoteleft In the past 15 years [Mao’s guidelines] have not been applied within the sphere of culture. Power has been monopolized by an anti-socialist black line diametrically opposed to Mao Zedong Thought. This black line is a coalescence of the cultural ideas of capitalism, modern revisionism, and the so-called culture from the 1930s.\textquoteright”\textsuperscript{168}


\textsuperscript{167} \textit{Zhonggong zhongyang pifa “Lin Biao tongzhi weituo Jiang Qing tongzhi zhaokai de budui yishu gongzuo zuotanhui jiyou” ji fujian}, 10 April 1966, CCRD.

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
Unremitting struggle against the proponents of this “black line”, most notably the Department of Propaganda and the Ministry of Culture, should therefore be conducted in an all-out attack to destroy the enemies of the Party and Mao Zedong Thought. The summary further aggravated the already tense situation within the CCP. With the stepping up of criticism against high-ranking Party officials, Mao’s ultimate aims remained a mystery to the CCP leadership and criticism among the Party’s leading peer group remained the exception. During a Politburo meeting on 22 April 1966, Mao therefore commented on the necessity to widen the spectre of attacks. “I don’t believe that Wu Han is the only problem of the Cultural Revolution [文化革命] […]. The Cultural Revolution is a revolution that touches the people to their very souls [触及人民灵魂]. It is a struggle of consciousness.”

Questioning Loyalties

The events finally culminated during an enlarged Politburo meeting held in Beijing in May 1966. Due to Mao’s absence from the capital, the meeting was presided over by Liu Shaoqi, who had only recently returned from various trips abroad in his capacity as head of state. Chen Boda and Kang Sheng sharply criticized Peng Zhen and the other members of the Cultural Revolutionary Five Man Group, which was deemed responsible for shifting the focus of criticizing Wu Han’s play on “scholarly disputes” instead of issues of class struggle. The Politburo on 16 May 1966 passed a harsh verdict on Peng Zhen’s handling of the affair. The Five Man Group was accused of “fundamental errors” in policy line and of having expounded capitalist viewpoints like the equality of man before truth, instead of differentiating between communist and capitalist equality. They were further held accountable for having misused Marxist-Leninist quotations on purpose for reactionary goals, of “having waved the red flag to oppose the red flag” (打着红旗反红旗) with the ultimate aim of conducting a coup d’État to restore capitalism. Two days later, Lin Biao took up the notion of “coup d’État” and delivered an extraordinary speech to his Politburo comrades by reminding his audience about the importance of retaining power and to secure the continuation of the proletarian dictatorship. He invoked recent coups (“eleven coups per year have been the average”) and warned not to feel too secure once power had been wielded from the hands of the capitalist classes. The cases of Khrushchev in the Soviet Union and Imre Nagy in Hungary should be taken as vivid examples of a possible re-occurrence of

169 Mao, Zedong, Wenhua geming shi chuji renmin linghun de geming, 22 April 1966, CCRD.
170 Zhongfa [66] 267.
171 Ibid.
172 Lin Biao, Zai zhongyang zhengzhiju kuoda huiyi shang de jianghua, 18 May 1966, CCRD.
revisionism. Therefore, control over “gun-holders” (枪杆子) and “pen-wielders” (笔杆子), over the army and the propaganda apparatus, remained important to prevent the rise of revisionism.

According to Lin, the Five Man Group had presented itself as defenders of Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought, a sinister tactical manoeuvre to conceal their true aims. The power of the immaterial superstructure to transform into material reality, as demonstrated by the revolutionary practice of the CCP under Mao Zedong’s guidance, should alert everyone about the danger posed by capitalist elements having “infiltrated” the CCP ranks. A thorough revolutionization of thought and unremitting class struggle in the superstructure thus had become inevitable. Lin drew examples from astronomy to microbiology in order to substantiate his premise of struggle as the founding principle of life. “If you don’t beat them, they will beat you; if you don’t kill them, they will kill you.” China should thus beware not to “change color” like the Soviet Union after the rise of Khrushchev. Lin did not provide factual proof for his accusations against his former comrades. Instead, he postulated the unquestioning recognition of the supreme role of Mao Zedong, his thought, and the vivid propagation of both to be the watershed between real and fake communists. All of the accused, according to Lin, had at one point or another obstructed the propagation of the Chairman’s thought in order to wield this “mighty weapon” from the hands of the masses. He thereafter presented himself as stoutest supporter of Mao Zedong by setting out with a eulogy that surpassed every claim that had previously been made and was to set the standard for the rhetoric of worship during the Cultural Revolution.

“Chairman Mao is the founder of our Party, the creator of our national revolution, the great leader of our country and Party; he is the greatest Marxist-Leninist of present times. Mao Zedong creatively, comprehensively, and with genius has inherited, defended, and developed Marxism-Leninism and elevated Marxism-Leninism to a new stage. […] The sayings, articles and the revolutionary practice of Chairman Mao show his great proletarian genius. There are people who do not admit genius. This is not Marxism. One cannot negate genius.”

To oppose the constant propagation of the teachings of Mao Zedong was thus considered a heinous crime and the final proof to detect non-Party elements that had infiltrated the CCP. The latent danger the Mao might one day share Stalin’s fate was made immediately clear in

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173 Ibid.
175 Lin, Zai zhongyang zhengzhiju kuoda huiyi shang de jianghua, CCRD.
176 Ibid.
the frequent allusions Lin made to Mao’s health and the threat with which he ended his four-hour speech.

“We now support Chairman Mao and a hundred years after Chairman Mao we will still uphold Chairman Mao [sic!]. Mao Zedong Thought will continue to be passed on forever. [...] Mao Zedong Thought is the lighthouse of mankind; it is the sharpest weapon of the world revolution, it is a general truth that is valid everywhere. Mao Zedong Thought can change the mental outlook of a person; it can change the face of our nation. It has made it possible for the Chinese nation to stand up in front of the whole world and to stand up forever. [...] Until the day that Chairman Mao lives, ninety years, over a hundred years, he will always be the highest leader of our Party. His words will always be the guideline of our actions. Whoever opposes him, the whole Party will punish him and the whole nation will suppress him. If someone should ever deliver a Khrushchev style report behind his back, this person clearly is an intriguer, a great bastard and the whole Party will punish him, the whole nation will suppress him. Mao Zedong Thought will be a general truth forever; it will always remain the compass of our actions. It will always be the common treasure trove of the Chinese people and the revolutionary people of the whole world. It will always radiate its glory.”

Lin’s speech narrowed the definition of the correct class standpoint down to a single criterion: the adherence to and propagation of Mao Zedong Thought. Those who had failed to display a sufficiently supportive attitude towards Mao or even had criticized aspects of his writings were placed under the suspicion of treason. By declaring Mao Zedong Thought to be sacrosanct, anyone who ever had been on the record with a critical remark of Mao, his writings, or the style of study as advocated by Lin Biao had become a potential traitor and usurper. The search for incriminating materials in old speeches and articles such as phrases critical of Mao Zedong thus became the single most important source for attacks in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. As the class standpoint “materialize[d] in the words and deeds of a person”, speech acts and deeds were closely monitored for deviances from the canon of Mao’s works and gave rise to Manichaean distinctions between “red” and “black” lines either supporting or opposing Mao. The cleavages that were brought forth by these distinctions shattered the unity of the CCP to the foundations and placed personal loyalty to the Chairman above loyalty to the Party, the nation, or Marxism-Leninism.

It has remained a mystery, why Liu Shaoqi and other CCP leaders watched and presided over the demise of the Beijing Party leadership. Although none of the accusations was based on factual evidence, the Politburo in the absence of Mao Zedong obeyed to supervise its own destruction as the new flexible criteria brought forth by Lin Biao could be applied to nearly anyone if wielding the power of interpretation. A temptative answer is provided by the example of Premier Zhou Enlai who jumped the train three days later by

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177 Ibid.
completely endorsing Lin speech in his own address to the meeting. Not only did he accept the attribution the notion of class struggle but echoed the praise of Mao’s genius. He further credited Lin Biao with having detected the opposition to the study of Mao’s works to be the primary evidence of distinguishing true from fake supporters. In the last part of his speech, Zhou added a further viewpoint that is probably most revealing for the attitude of a large faction among the long-standing CCP members. By elaborating on the necessity to keep the revolutionary integrity, Zhou invoked Party discipline even to the point of obeying to preside over the organization’s self-destruction.

“We shall follow Chairman Mao. Chairman Mao is our leader today and he will be our leader in one hundred years. Those who did not uphold their integrity in their later years and are guilty of treason shall be liquidated with one stroke [晚节不忠, 一笔勾销].” 179

Zhou’s words were primarily directed at the former CCP leader Qu Qiubai who had recanted communist doctrines. Zhou advised to remove Qu’s ashes from the martyr’s cemetery at Babaoshan near Beijing. His invocation of moral integrity and unwavering loyalty to the CCP echoed the argumentation Tao Zhu 180 had made in his capacity as official Party emissary at the Lushan Plenum in 1959 when trying to convince the former Chief-of-Staff Huang Kecheng to give up his stubborn resistance to negate the existence of a “military club” around Peng Dehuai:

“You and I have both read some so-called ancient oracle books, [about] the way an individual should behave itself within society; not to advance personal integrity is very sad. Especially for Party members like us, the loyalty expressed towards the Party has to be equal to that of a married woman [to her husband] in the old society. One has to be “faithful to one’s husband to the end” [从一而终], under no circumstances could she “change feelings and part love” [移情别恋], otherwise she would not be called a woman of ‘chastity’. “ 181

The preservation of communist moral integrity, genuine conviction in the continuing legitimacy of Mao Zedong as founder of the PRC, or simply fear may have propelled the majority of the CCP leadership to delve into the Cultural Revolution, but with Lin Biao’s speech and its acceptance by the Politburo, Mao’s doubtlessly strong position had become virtually unassailable. As Lin Biao put it, of Chairman Mao’s words “every sentence is the truth; one sentence [of his] surpasses a thousand of ours.” 182 To indulge in the performances

179 Zhou Enlai, Zai zhongyang zhengzhiju kuoda huiyi shang de jianghua, 21 May 1966, CCRD.
180 First Party Secretary of Guangdong province, shortly after to become Lu Dingyi’s successor as head of the Central Propaganda Department.
182 See Lin, Zai zhongyang zhengzhiju kuoda huiyi shang de jianghua, Lin Biao at a military conference on political work in January 1966 made first use of these phrases, see Lin Biao, Zai quanjun zhengzhi gongzuo huiyi shang de baogao zong de zhongyang zhishi, 24 January 1966, CCRD.
of loyalty and revolutionary integrity thus came to be necessary, if one did not want to find oneself being excluded from the ranks of the people.
Chapter Six: Performative Politics

The proceedings of the enlarged Politburo meeting in May 1966 were not made public immediately. Instead, the attacks on Wu Han and the “Three Family Village”, a pen-name which Wu Han, Deng Tuo, and Liao Mosha had adopted when writing a witty and occasionally critical daily column for the Beijing city newspapers *Frontline* and the *Beijing Evening News* back in the early 1960s, were stepped up. Provincial broadcasting stations such as the Hebei Television Station amended their schedule by including a specific program criticizing the Three Family Village as well as a five-minute Mao-quote section every morning at 6:20 a.m. Throughout May 1966, however, the Party media remained slow in their response to the political changes. Although Mao had on numerous occasions voiced his discontent with the leadership of the Central Propaganda Department and the Ministry of Culture, as well as the Party journals edited under the aegis of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee, opinion was divided among the remaining Party leadership regarding the question of how far the criticism would be allowed to proceed. In a meeting with the leading personnel of the *People’s Daily*, the Xinhua News Agency, and the Central Chinese Television (CCTV), Deng Xiaoping explained the changes that would have to take place in future. But, most importantly, he detailed the possible impact of not conforming to the Politburo decisions and a slow response of the Party media.

“Where are the roots of the problems of the *Beijing Daily* to be found? The answer is easy. You can tell the readers it is [the problem] of the city committee, you can write about the ‘former city committee’ and the question is settled. What about the *People’s Daily*? It is the organ of the CCP Center. If the *People’s Daily* is to be found in such state, does this mean there are problems at the CCP Center?”

If compared with issues published in the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward, the *People’s Daily* had already come a long way in the direction of emphasizing the importance of Mao Zedong and his thought. Mao’s profile had by no means been low since the start of the campaign to learn from the PLA in 1964 but up to this point the propagation had mainly been confined to advocating new ways of studying and applying Mao Zedong Thought. Revolutionary activists and martyrs like Lei Feng, Ouyang Hai, and Wang Jie had received lavish attention in the media for displaying the basic characteristics of the “new communist man”: the replacement of selfishness through communal lifestyles, selfless duty, and unwavering determination. Personal praise of the Chairman had been confined to the reprint

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183 *Hebei diantai diyitai guangbo jiembiao*, HPA 1032-1-350.
185 *Deng Xiaoping dui “Renmin ribao” deng xinwen danwei fazeren de tanhua*, 31 May 1966, CCRD.
of letters and poems that were usually introduced into the Party discourse by quoting foreign enthusiasts and their efforts to follow Mao Zedong. By early 1966, references to Mao Zedong Thought in the *People’s Daily* had already increased tenfold compared to the situation three years earlier. Internal campaigns aimed at self-censorship of content and a remodelling of appearance based on the example of the *Liberation Army News* had been conducted in various broadcasting units, as for example an internal investigation of the *Beijing Daily* in May 1965 reveals.  

Yet the attention paid to the activities of other state leaders and especially the choice of photographic material partly counterbalanced the verbal dominance of Mao Zedong. Liu’s numerous state-visits abroad in the first half of 1966 were prominently covered and showed amongst others his wife Wang Guangmei during a visit to Indonesia in the traditional *Qipao* dress at the side of the state chairman. The following chart reveals the dramatic increase of references to Mao Zedong and Mao Zedong Thought between Khrushchev’s secret speech and Mao’s death, with the *Liberation Army News* taking the lead after the Great Leap Forward. It further reveals the growing importance of cherishing Mao’s works as opposed to a coherent system of thought once Mao had started to intervene against the cult in 1968.

![Figure 4: References to Mao Zedong’s works and thought in the *People’s Daily* (RMRB) and *Liberation Army News* (JFJB), 1956-1976](image)

On 23 May, the CCP Center announced a change at the top of the Central Propaganda Department.  

Lu Dingyi as head of the Party’s propaganda apparatus was replaced with Tao Zhu, who simultaneously came to supervise the CCP Secretariat and the Ministry of Culture.

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186 In the report, the relative percentage of articles dealing the Mao Zedong Thought and its application are compared, *Beijing ribao bangongshi, Kan Jiefangjun bao xiangdao de jige wenti*, 28 May 1965.

Li Xuefeng, secretary of the CCP North China Regional Bureau and political commissar of the Beijing Military Region, was appointed as the new head of the Beijing Party Committee, while Chen Boda by the end of May assumed the lead in the major refashioning of the People’s Daily. The high media profile enjoyed by Liu now drastically changed. The new print-layout featured daily Mao quotes on the title page. The overall number of articles was sharply reduced, as was the coverage of international events. The propagation of Mao Zedong Thought and the successes of the Cultural Revolution on the other hand were placed at the fore, both visually and in terms of content. Photographs of Mao, editorials printed in large font, and Mao quotations, soon to be printed in red color, dominated the front page. The new appearance and changes in content made the People’s Daily along with the Liberation Army News the model again, upon which local newspapers would recast their publications.

There was no law comparable to the Nazi “Gleichschaltung” in 1933 at the outset of the Cultural Revolution to synchronize the media. Instead, self-censorship and what in the German case has been called “working towards the Führer” presented the common reaction. The danger of being exposed as “fake communist” and being struggled against as a consequence, resulted in an increasing radicalisation. Newspaper editors like everyone else now tried to outdo another in the propagation of Mao Zedong Thought. Immediately after Chen Boda assumed his new office, a series of People’s Daily articles set the tone for the new movement. On 1 June 1966, the editorial Fiercely sweep away all ox ghosts and snake demons was published, calling for a purge of all persons representing feudal or bourgeois culture. The following day the paper published a big character poster that had been written by a number of radical teachers at Beijing University’s Philosophy Department with the implicit encouragement of Kang Sheng, who had sent his wife Cao Yi’ou to kindle the flames of protest at Beijing University on 14 May. The poster accused the university leadership by name for “suppressing the revolutionary masses” and advocating a “revisionist Party line” detached from the policies of the CCP Center around Mao Zedong. For Mao, the publication of the poster proved crucial in widening the spectre of action. It contributed to rising tensions among the capital’s middle and high school students. Teachers and Party cadres came to be targets of public criticism fostered by personal grievances and inequalities within the

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education system that mirrored inequalities stemming from class background. Thus children with a “red” family background (poor and lower middle peasants, workers, soldiers, revolutionary cadres and martyr’s) not only gained easier access to the Party’s recruiting pool, the Communist Youth League, but were favoured as well when entering universities and middle schools with outstanding reputation.

Up to the Cultural Revolution, the role of class background in the educational system had been based on two conflicting strategies. While political heritage de facto played a major role, the formal recognition of political and academic performance had been emphasized by the respective departments and ministries after the Great Leap Forward. The changes were of supreme importance, as they decided upon the possibilities of upward mobility. Otherwise, the newly privileged stratum consisting of the Party elite and its offspring would have been cemented. The CCP did not come up with a unanimous answer on this issue. The question of whether “red” or “expert” was to be considered as decisive factor changed according to the shifting policy lines. The failure of the Great Leap Forward that had been conducted under the premise of placing additional importance on revolutionary consciousness led Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister Chen Yi to re-emphasize the necessity of skilled knowledge as foundation of political loyalty in a speech to the capital’s university graduates in 1961.191 Beijing Party Secretary Peng Zhen became a prominent supporter of placing the emphasis on academic and political performance (重在表现) as opposed to solely relying on class background. By singling out Peng Zhen as central target in the early stages of the movement, the “emphasis on performance” came to be criticized as well and enabled the rise of what later came to be called the “bloodline theory” (血统论) of “natural redness” (自来红) amongst the children of high ranking cadres.

By early 1966, the situation had not been solved and angered both the offspring of revolutionary cadres, who had been raised in the confidence of being the legitimate revolutionary successors, and the better performing students with bad family background, who despised the situation of being held accountable for the wrongdoings of their ancestry. To solve the mounting tide of criticism the CCP Center deployed work teams to all of the capital’s high schools and universities to investigate the charges made against individual cadres. While in high schools the work teams usually consisted of low-ranking cadres of the Communist Youth League, the work teams sent to prestigious universities were mostly headed by cadres from national ministries or provincial Party committees. As Andrew Walder

191 See Xu Youyu, Xingsheng se de zaofan. Hongweibing jingshen suzhi de xingcheng ji yanbian, Hong Kong: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 1999, 27.
has shown, the behaviour of the work teams played a crucial role in the formation of factional alliances among the student body. Unlike the argument set forth by the dominant social interpretations based on case studies from Guangdong province, the work teams did not necessarily align themselves with the old leadership and were supported by “conservative” students with a cadre family background. The situation turned out to be much more complicated. The first work teams in Beijing were driven away in 39 cases and came to be replaced by new work teams. These second work teams mostly started out by investigating all files, even those of cadres and students with a revolutionary background. At the same time they refrained from immediately reversing the verdicts upon students that had opposed the first work team and been labelled “rightists”, a designation that could possibly ruin a life if hardening into official political entries in the personal files kept by the work unit. The lenient treatment of the former university leadership was furthermore taken as an affront by students who relied on the tactics described in Mao’s *Hunan Report* to justify the employment of dunce caps and public humiliations of convicts as a means of education. The dunce caps had further been shown prominently on stage in the 1964 performances of the epic *The East is Red* and the following movie version. The complete lack of clear instructions for the work teams led to highly diversified strategies of coping with the local situations and in many cases resulted in the splitting of the student movement into a larger camp of students supporting the work teams and smaller factions advocating self-government. Based on the performance of the work teams, students from similar political background now found themselves on different sides of the divide, thus rendering the contemporary designations as “rebels” and “conservatives” politically meaningless up to the formation of large-scale student organizations from late August 1966 onwards.

A twentieth century Zhong Kui

While the work teams struggled to get the situation under control, Mao Zedong in the meantime did only briefly comment on the recent developments and travelled amongst others through his home province Hunan. Here he continued to receive the daily intelligence reports and observed the evolving conflicts in Beijing, on which he would briefly comment. Meanwhile Mao pondered about ways to stimulate revolutionary fervour in order to carry out

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194 Walder, *Beijing Red Guard Factionalism*, 446f.
the most daring action he had ever envisioned: the destruction of the Party-state in the creation of which he himself had played a crucial role. There is little evidence on the relative percentage of *vabanque* gambling and strategic calculation on Mao’s part in the unfolding of the Cultural Revolution. One of the few documents in which Mao presented a few basic thoughts on the coming movement was a letter to his wife Jiang Qing, which he showed only to Hunan Party Secretary Wang Renzhong and Zhou Enlai, who would later inform Lin Biao about its contents. In the letter to his wife, Mao reflected not only about the ultimate aims of the Cultural Revolution to stimulate “great chaos under heaven, to attain great order”, but furthermore dealt with the possible consequences of utilizing the personality cult to stir up support for his policies. Mao set out by commenting on the speech of Lin Biao, whom he fondly called his friend, about the possibility of a coup d’état and especially about the cult rhetoric Lin had employed.

“There are some of his formulations that make me feel uneasy. I have never believed that my few little books have such great magical powers. Now, once he started boasting, the whole Party, the whole nation started boasting. It’s really like that old woman Wang selling melons, praising the goods she sells. I have been forced by them to climb the Liang Mountain; it looks like it’s impossible not to compel with them. This is the first time in my life that I have conceded to other people against my own will regarding matters of principle.”

Mao’s sudden display of modesty was congruent with his criticism of exaggerated linguistic veneration that he had repeatedly uttered since the founding of the PRC and has been interpreted by CCP historians as an example of Mao’s continuing objection against Lin Biao’s strategic employment of the cult for private gains. But Mao was too shrewd a politician not to have understood the crucial importance of employing his image in the efforts to strike down those communist cadres he claimed to harbour revisionist tendencies. Mao’s willing acceptance of being employed as symbol of the movement and thus for the first time after the founding of the PRC to merge his personal prestige with a political campaign in public made him ponder the possible consequences should the movement turn out to be a failure.

“I guess that their basic idea is to scare away the ghosts by revoking [the demon fighter] Zhong Kui. I will thus be the Zhong Kui of the Communist Party in the 1960s. Things always arrive at their opposite, the higher the rise, the harsher the fall. I am prepared to be shattered to pieces. Among the more than hundred political parties in the world, the majority does not believe in Marxism-Leninism; Marx and Lenin have as well been shattered to pieces by the people, why shouldn’t we meet the same [fate one day]? I advise you to keep this problem in mind and not to let victory blur your brains. One should often think upon one’s own soft spots, about one’s shortcomings and faults.”

196 Mao, Zedong, *Gei Jiang Qing de xin*, 7 August 1966, CCRD.
197 Ibid.
198 Ibid.
The letter presents Mao at his best, as the political grand-seigneur offering advice to his wife known for her rash temper and alienating views. Despite his non-chalant attitude, Mao had sufficiently proven that he was only prepared to accept criticism as long as it did not entail political consequences. In a passage of the letter that is usually neglected, Mao further commented on the potentially subverting impact of his critical stance on the cult of personality and the similarity of his standpoint with criticism of the cult that had been voiced most prominently by the purged Peng Zhen.

“Among the [sentences] written above, there seems to be some black language; after all, haven’t some anti-Party elements said similar things? But their objective is to strike down the whole Party and me personally. I only comment on my personal contributions and think that some formulations are not appropriate. This is the difference between me and the black gang. These things cannot be made public at present. The whole Left and the broad masses speak this way. [If this document] would be made public, it would mean pouring cold water on them and to help the rightists; the main duty at present is to strike down basically all rightists (it is unlikely to destroy them completely) in the whole Party and the whole country. In seven or eight years, there will be another campaign to swipe away the ox ghosts and snake demons, and thereafter again and again. Thus my seemingly black language cannot be made public at present. At what time it can be made publicly available is hard to say, because the Left and the broad masses do not like me saying such things. Maybe after my death, at a time when the rightists have taken over power, they will make it public. They will probably try to use my words and attempt to raise the black flag forever. But as soon as they try this, they will fail. After the demise of the emperor in 1911, reactionary rule in China has never lasted long. […] At the same time that the rightists may be using my words to gain influence, the Left will surely use other words of mine to organize themselves and strike down the rightists.”

The cult according to Mao was a nuisance, but it was necessary to stimulate action and to offer the masses a common symbol to centre their loyalties. He was clearly aware of the instrumental value of his public prestige and that no other symbol than his own image would result in similar outbursts of activity. Yet many of the old cadres and the generation that had come to endure the great famine during the “three bitter years” were not compelled too easily to boost the image of the Chairman. When Mao had tried to reinvigorate the Great Leap Forward after the fall of Peng Dehuai the result had been a massive propaganda campaign; but it had no longer generated the kind of mass enthusiasm like two years earlier in 1958. The peasants in many cases had even reacted by not responding at all. At the center of Mao’s concern was therefore a new stratum of successors, the revolutionary youth.

There is no evidence that suggests Mao acted upon a master plan in the unfolding of the Cultural Revolution but whatever his motivations, the education system lay at the heart of Mao’s concerns. During many of his private talks in the early and mid-1960s, he had brought up the issue of reforming the traditional model of education. On 7 May 1966, in a

199 Ibid.
200 Schoenhals, Saltationist Socialism, 170.
commentary written on the back of a draft sent by Lin Biao on the experiences of sideline agricultural production in the PLA General Logistics Department, Mao laid out his plans for a future education system. The commentary, circulated as Zhongfa [66] 271 on 15 May, was to gain fame as the so-called “May Seventh Directive”. Along with the letter to Jiang Qing written two months later, the directive provides a basic understanding of Mao’s plans for the Cultural Revolution. In his comment, Mao sketched out a model of education that aimed at the attainment of numerous basic skills in politics, military training and tactics, industry, agriculture, and culture. Depending on the class background, each individual was to specialize in one of the five disciplines but to retain a basic knowledge of the others as well. Thus all units would gain increased autonomy in case of the coming of a Third World War, which Mao deemed possible. The army once again was to become a “great school” for the nation.

At the same time, the education system was to undergo major changes. The time of study was to be shortened and revolutionized by adding practical experience. The stimulation of criticism against the leadership of the nation’s most prestigious places of higher education like Beijing University therefore neatly fitted Mao’s aims of stirring up critical activity among the youth. What Mao did not anticipate, however, was the inertial force of both the fear of a continuing influence of political verdicts fostered by the system of personal files and the political outcome of his ambiguous employment of the cult legitimating contradictory standpoints. Although he pondered about a possible failure of the movement in his letter to Jiang Qing, Mao welcomed the Cultural Revolution as “a rehearsal on a national scale, the Left, the Right and the middle-roaders will all receive their lessons. Summarizing: The future is bright, the road is winding. It is still these two old sentences.”

After the founding of the PRC, Mao had only seldom appeared on the political stage in public with the exceptions of the parades on 1 May and 1 October. His continuing high prestige among large parts of the populace thus had not only been the effect of propaganda campaigns but as well owed to being shrouded in mystery due to his seclusion from public view. During the Cultural Revolution, however, Mao made full use of his reputation by staging a series of media events that carried the image of the vigorous and healthy CCP Chairman into every household. After having pondered about the fate of the Chinese nation in the Dishui cave in Hunan in July 1966, Mao briefly stopped in the city of Wuhan before returning to the capital. On 16 July, he conducted his famous swim in the Yangzi River during

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201 Mao Zedong, Dui zong houqinbu guanyu jinyibu gaohao budui nong fuye shengchan baogao de piyu, 7 May 1966, CCRD.
202 Mao, Gei Jiang Qing de xin, CCRD. Mao decided to circulate the letter in the Party after Lin Biao’s death in September 1971, see chapter nine.
the city’s “Eleventh Rivercrossing Competition”. Mao swam for 65 minutes and reportedly passed a distance of roughly 15 km. He had on numerous occasions publicly demonstrated his physical strength through swimming in the past, but the last time the by now 72-year old Mao had resorted to staging his continuing vigorousness had been back in August 1959. However, his activities were not immediately broadcasted. After having returned to the capital Mao was informed by Jiang Qing and Kang Sheng about the situation in Beijing and in a series of consecutive meetings heavily criticized the Party leadership for employing work teams to quell student criticism. Mao’s arrival changed the former near consensus to have the work teams assume control of the situation completely. A month earlier, Chen Boda had submitted a written proposal to the Politburo in which he called for the work teams to withdraw from the local units and to form steering committees on the spot. This suggestion, however, had been rejected by both Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi and led Chen Boda to question his own authority, a trait of character that Chen was to display on several occasions during the following years.

Mao’s standing within the CCP leadership, however, enabled him to question the validity of the work teams straight away. In his opinion, the work teams had failed in their task due to their insufficient knowledge of the local circumstances, which even he himself would have been unable to cope with. The Party should dismiss the standpoint of “fear” and dare to let the masses carry out the criticism themselves, as only they would be able to ferret out possible hidden contents in scholarly works and capitalist tendencies within each unit. The possibility of ensuing anarchy due to the lack of centrally controlled power was not to be perceived as a threat, but as a test of whether the 17 years of rule had led to an alienation of the Party from the populace. Mao allowed the state’s executive organs to seize those elements that spread arson, poison or even killed people, but otherwise the Party was no longer to restrain the actions of the populace. “Who is opposed to the Cultural Revolution? [It is] the American imperialists, the Japanese revisionists and the reactionaries.” Given Mao’s dictum, all those in favour of controlling the movement faced the charges of having parted from the mass line or even become “enemies of the people”. Now that the revolution returned upon the heads of those who had been propagating the values of continuous revolution, the

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203 According to the memoirs of Mao’s personal physician Li Zhisui, Mao was unable to perform any type of standardized strokes and instead resorted to floating on his back with the current, see Li, Private life of Chairman Mao, 158.
206 See Mao Zedong, Guanyu san gongzuozu de jianghua, 21 July 1966, CCRD.
207 Mao Zedong, Zai hui jian daqu shuji he wenge xiaozu chenyuan shi de jianghua, 22 August 1966, CCRD.
208 Mao Zedong, Dui zhongyang fuzeren de jianghua, [25 July 1966], CCRD.
mass line, and a frugal lifestyle for decades, many cadres seemed to fear the exposure of their own wrongdoings. But what was there to fear, Mao asked rhetorically, at least for those who had followed the mass line? Mao’s message made absolutely clear that neither rank nor top-level patronage would save individuals who had committed errors in line against the unleashed forces of revolution. The revolution was to return to its origins and to train a new generation in the methods of mass criticism against an increasingly rigid Party bureaucracy.

To understand the present situation, Mao called upon the Party leadership to leave their offices once in a while and to learn from the big character posters in order to familiarize themselves with the situation. “The life of sitting on sofas and [enjoying the cool] breeze of a fan is not suitable”. Although Mao himself never went to read the posters himself, he read transcripts and became an avid reader of the Red Guard tabloids. The members of the newly formed, extra-constitutional Central Cultural Revolution Group (CCRG) that included Mao’s wife Jiang Qing and a number of radical theoreticians like Yao Wenyuan and Zhang Chunqiao under the formal leadership of Chen Boda, took up Mao’s advice instantly. While in the early stages of the movement basically the whole remaining leadership including Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping made speeches at different schools and universities, the CCRG members and Zhou Enlai soon turned out to be most apt in using the direct communication channels with the students to influence the situation. Mao’s word, however, remained the ultimate restraining limit, and if he at times shifted his weight from one faction to another the results for those no longer favoured were devastating.

On 25 July, three days before the abandonment of the work teams was formally announced, the Mao cult received a considerable elevation within the Party media as the People’s Daily published a long report under the headline Chairman Mao leisurely swims in the Yangzi River. With the nationwide publication and visual coverage of Mao’s swim in the Yangzi, the cult reached a new dimension. No longer was the creative adaptation of Mao’s theoretical formulations propagated, but Mao actively employed his own image to demonstrate his continuing strength and ability to lead the country. The language chosen to convey the atmosphere in Wuhan thus assumed a nearly epic quality when describing the outbursts of public delight upon discovering the presence of Mao Zedong.

“Just about the time the competition had started, from the eastern side of the river where the sun had started its ascent, a speed boat approached, breaking the waves. At this moment, one of the athletes (it remains unknown who) first spotted Chairman Mao. He immediately forgot everything else and called out: ‘Chairman Mao has come! Long live Chairman Mao!’ […] On

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209 Ibid.
210 Zhonggong Beijing shiweiyu guanyu sanxiao ge dazhuan yuanxiao gongzuozu de jueding, 28 July 1966, CCRD.
both sides of the shore innumerable pairs of eyes gazed into the direction of Chairman Mao! Innumerable people expressed the same wish: Eternal health for the great Chairman Mao! […] The welcoming calls and the sirens melted into one sound, filling the skies of Wuhan. […] Among the troop of swimmers was the militia member Nie Changshen from the Hankou Huoli Power Plant. As he saw Chairman Mao, in his excitement he forgot that he was swimming. He raised both arms and shouted loudly: ‘Long live Chairman Mao! Long live Chairman Mao!’ Immediately afterwards he sank in deep [into the River] and swallowed a couple of mouthfuls of water. He had the impression that the Yangzi River water was very very sweet. It was just like this, when 5000 athletes swam past Chairman Mao and under constant shouts of ‘Long live Chairman Mao’ victoriously reached the finishing line.”

The following day, the People’s Daily published an editorial that took Mao’s physical activity as an allegory for the path of the Chinese Revolution. Just like the Yangzi River with its swift currents, bends, and waves the socialist revolution had never been running smoothly. It was no undertaking that could be carried out from an office desk but only by sharing the plight of the populace. Armed with Mao Zedong Thought, the philosophy of class struggle, the revolution was to be re-enacted to weed out capitalist sprouts and to train “revolutionary successors”.

### Spreading word and image

The immediate consequence of Mao’s unleashing the forces of rebellion against the Party-state was a power vacuum. The stirring up of public sentiments, especially among the youth, proved effective in raising revolutionary spirit, but the abundance of jubilant articles could not hide the lack of any clearly marked goals of the movement. As Mao’s own vision of communism had been shattered by economic realities a decade earlier, now the mass line was to provide the direction once it had been freed from bureaucratic restraints. Mao’s “last revolution” was indeed one of the most remarkable events in the history of communist rule, as the dying Mao himself stated when he named the victory against Chiang Kai-shek and the Cultural Revolution his greatest legacies.

With the withdrawal of the work teams and Mao’s attack against the remaining CCP leadership in his so-called “big character poster” Bombard the Headquarters, a draft he had written during a session of the Eleventh Plenum on 5 August 1966 and distributed to the participants two days later, the reversal of the former repression of protests became clearly discernible. The Eleventh Plenum decided upon the demise of the cadres responsible for the “errors in line”. Liu Shaoqi was reduced from second to eighth rank while Deng Xiaoping remained ranked sixth. Lin Biao came to fill the vacancy.

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212 Ibid.
214 Quoted in Jin, Culture of Power, 1.
215 See MacFarquhar/Schoenhals, Mao’s Last Revolution, 88.
at the top and was soon hailed as the Chairman’s “closest comrade-in-arms”. With the replacement of the established chains of command, the only point of reference in steering through the waves of the revolution had become Mao Zedong Thought with the Chairman as its living source. It was indeed the “sole criterion of truth” as Zhou Enlai remarked in a letter to a Red Guard organization in August 1966.

The Eleventh Plenum cemented Mao’s position as living source of the revolution and made his authority virtually unassailable, yet the direction of the movement remained unclear. Choices for action among the Red Guards therefore had to be made upon guesses or upon the answers received at the reception offices of the State Council, the Party Center at Zhongnanhai, or the CCRG that were established around 1 August 1966 and provided the students with tentative answers about pressing issues. Common questions included the role of the work teams, the specific conditions under which the Party was to act out its leading role, but as well whose directives the movement was to follow. Zhou Rongxin, secretary-general of the State Council and a close confidant of Zhou Enlai was thus for example confronted with the question of students from the Beijing Aviation Institute whether asking the authorities for instructions constituted rebellious behaviour after all. The direct channels of communication through “liaison stations” (联络站) established at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution through members of the CCRG and the state bureaucracy provided a certain level of influence on the direction of the movement, yet on the other hand they complicated the situation for those cadres faced with political responsibility. According to the remembrances of Wu De, deputy head of the Beijing Municipal Committee at the outset of the Cultural Revolution, the committee even had to move to different hotels in order to keep a basic workflow as over 100 liaison stations had been established in the proper government building. As the factional disputes became increasingly complicated, the communication channels proved to be inefficient in rooting out the foundations of conflict that had emerged due to the different behaviour of the work teams. The lack of specified aims or goals of the Cultural Revolution, with the exception of the vague resolution passed by the Eleventh Plenum (known as the Sixteen Points), could temporarily be bridged by singling out enemies who at one point or another had opposed Mao and his cult. But apart from this means of negative integration, destruction proved to be much easier than construction as the growing

216 Schoenhals (ed.), China’s Cultural Revolution, 27.
218 Zhou Rongxin he Beijing hangkong xueyuan tongxue zuotan jiayao, 3 August 1966, CCRD.
violence against anything associated with the “four olds” (old culture, thought, habits, and customs) and the diverging attempts to establish a new Maoist culture based on the cult were to show during August 1966.

The image that in public memory is most closely associated with the Cultural Revolutionary Mao cult is probably the “Great Helmsman” standing on top of the Gate of Heavenly Peace reviewing millions of students from all over the country. Despite the prominence of the image in historical scholarship and memoirs about the Cultural Revolution, neither the specific circumstances of the eight mass receptions nor the incredible logistical background necessary to accommodate more than eleven million visitors within a period of three months in Beijing have been subjected to closer examination. The same could be said with regard to the nationwide movement to “exchange experiences” (串连) and the striking differences between the parades and, for example, the Nazi rallies at Nuremberg. In recent years, a number of primary sources, memoirs, and other evidence have appeared that provide the basis for a tentative outline of the characteristics, organization, and impact of the Red Guard Mao worship.221

The dominant actors in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution were the Red Guards, spontaneous organizations of middle and high school students that had first appeared in Beijing in late May 1966 at the Qinghua University Middle School222 and quickly spread to other institutions. Their unprincipled organizational character made Liu Shaoqi on 13 June characterize them as “illegal” and “secret”223 organizations according to the standards of the CCP and called for their disbandment. The Red Guards therefore remained a marginal phenomenon until Mao’s return to Beijing. By reminding his Politburo comrades to strengthen the bonds with the masses, Mao increased the opportunities for a direct encounter with top level leaders, especially after Jiang Qing in a speech at Beijing University on 25 July had repeated a Mao dictum from 1957 about the Chinese youth and addressed the Red Guards as the “morning sun”.224 Only three days later, during an assembly of the Haidian district

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220 The restrictive archival policies are only one factor for this negligence. The main problem is posed by the fact that due to the temporary and non-official nature of the movement, local and provincial archives hold only few items of relevance. Evidence thus has to be drawn from a variety of oral and written sources.

221 The name had first been employed in a poster written by Zhang Chengzhi in class 651 of the Qinghua University Middle School during the campaign to criticize the “Three family village” and had then been adopted by his classmates who formed the first Red Guard organization.

222 See Bu Weihua, Hongweiying yundong de xingqi, in: Guo Dehong (ed.), Shiniian Fengyu, 59ff.


224 Jiang’s comment was a reply to a speech of Beijing University middle school Red Guard leader Peng Xiaomeng, who called Mao Zedong “the red sun in our hearts”. Jiang Qing hereupon intervened and in order to emphasize the creativeness of the masses: “You [students] are the sun, you are the morning sun at eight, nine a.m.”, see Bu, Hongweiying yundong de xingqi, 68, n.1. For the original quote see Quotations from Chairman
universities in the Beijing Exhibition Hall to criticize the work teams, Qinghua Red Guards handed Jiang Qing two transcripts of their own big character posters along with the request to pass them on to Mao. They further added a short letter in which they asked the Chairman to evaluate the content of their posters, as the former school authorities had condemned them as being too violent and superficial. The posters singled out class struggle and the right to rebel as the foundations of Mao Zedong Thought and emphasized the necessity to guard its basic contents against concurrent tendencies of revisionism and appeasement.\(^{225}\) Mao instantly realized the instrumental value of the student organizations in building a mass base that would not have to rely on the Party bureaucracy. He officially returned the letter and expressed his “unrelenting support”\(^{226}\) of the Red Guards, thus providing them publicly with a sign of his approval. He further encouraged the formation of similar organizations nationwide and on 10 August caused a major publicity event by appearing at the public reception desk outside the Party center at Zhongnanhai, where he advised the crowd of students to “concern yourselves with state affairs, and carry the Great Proletarian Revolution through to the end”.\(^{227}\)

On 18 August 1966, a large “Assembly to celebrate the revolutionary masses of the Cultural Revolution” was to take place at Tian’anmen square hosted by Chen Boda. It was the first celebration of the Cultural Revolution to be held on the square and to present the newly chosen members of the Politburo to the public. The assembly was to include roughly one million students and citizens from Beijing and other places, as many students had travelled from different provinces to the capital to learn about the experiences of the Cultural Revolution. As word spread among the students that Mao was to participate in the assembly, a large crowd gathered during the night already and at dawn witnessed a scene, which a journalist in the People’s Daily described in following words:

“Today morning at five a.m., as the sun had just spread its first beams of light from the Eastern horizon, Chairman Mao informally appeared on Tian’anmen square amidst the masses that [stood] like an ocean with red flags resembling a forest to meet the revolutionary masses that from far and near had already assembled on the square at this early hour. Chairman Mao wore a grass-green army uniform. On the Chairman’s military cap glistened a single red star. Chairman Mao crossed the Goldwater Bridges in front of the Gate of Heavenly Peace and walked directly amongst the masses. He shook hands with many of the surrounding people and further waved his hand as a salute to the revolutionary masses on the square. At that moment, the square boiled over, everyone raised their hands over their heads and jumped in

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\(^{225}\) Mao Tse-tung, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966, 288. The title has been taken up in the Cultural Revolution film and website of the Long Bow Corp., see [www.morningsun.org](http://www.morningsun.org) (last accessed 2 December 2005).\(^{225}\) Qinghua daxue fushu hongweibing, Wuchanjieji de geming zaofan jingshen wansui, 24 June 1966, CCRD. and Qinghua daxue fushu hongweibing, Zailun wuchan jiejie de geming zaofan jingshen wansui, 4 July 1966, CCRD.


the direction of the Chairman, loudly calling and clapping their hands. Many people clapped their palms until they turned red; many people shed tears of excitement and gladly expressed: ‘Chairman Mao has come! Chairman Mao has come among us!’ On the square, ten thousands of people loudly called: ‘Long live Chairman Mao! Long live! Long, long live!’ One wave of hurrahs surpassed the other, shaking the sky above the capital.”

Accustomed to the exaggerated formulations and the splendour of communist parades, one does not immediately realize that despite the jubilant rhetoric Mao’s early appearance on Tian’anmen square presented nothing less than a disaster for the organisers and security staff of the assembly. Zhou Enlai had as always conducted the task of arranging the proceedings meticulously. But unlike the parades on 1 May and 1 October, Mao’s appearance on the square on 18 August did not proceed according to schedule. His attendance had only very briefly beforehand been communicated to the organizing staff. Premier Zhou Enlai, relying on the capacities of the “Capital Work Team” (首都工作组) that had been established under the command of Marshal Ye Jianying (reporting to Zhou) immediately after Lin Biao had hinted at the possibility of a coup d’état, had set up a command center in the western part of the Zhengding Hall within the Gate of Heavenly Peace to guarantee the safety of the Chairman. Yet Mao appeared much earlier than it had been anticipated. He had not slept the whole night and according to his bodyguard Chen Chanjiang upon hearing that Red Guards constituted the majority of the crowd requested to wear a military uniform while attending the parade. As Mao had not worn a uniform for decades, his staff had to search for a member of the Beijing Garrison with a similar physique. Finally, a cadre named Liu Yuntang was apparently found whose uniform fitted the Chairman rather well. Around 4 a.m., Mao in his new outfit set out to the square. By the time he arrived, most of the security staff arranged by Zhou Enlai had not yet made it to the square as the parade was not to get started for hours to come. Mao nevertheless climbed the Gate of Heavenly Peace shortly past five a.m. and after having been welcomed with ferocious applause decided to greet the masses in person. The worst nightmare of his security staff thus started to unfold. Mao’s appearance

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229 On the Capital Work Team see MacFarquhar/Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 49f. Its specified aims included securing the Party center in Zhongnanhai and other important working and living places of leading CCP cadres in the capital. Further objectives had been to resettle members from “black family households” and to deal with the persecution of those foreign residents who did “not find approval”, see Zhou Enlai, *Zhou Enlai jiejian gongjiaokou geming zaofanpai daibiao de jianghua* (3), 27 January 1967, CCRD. The massive resettlement of the “five bad elements” that was to take place after August 1966, when as a consequence 85,198 persons with bad class background were expelled from the capital.

230 Zhou would even himself doublecheck the elevator every time Mao was to appear on Tian’anmen Gate, see Gu Baizi, *Kuachu Zhongnanhai. Hongqiang nei zhongguo zhengyao miwen*, Beijing: Zhongguo funü chubanshe, 2006, 253f.

among the masses caused a tumultuous havoc and only due to the quick action of his staff members, who shoved Mao on a viewing stand surrounded by a metal fence near the Goldwater Bridges, the Chairman was saved from being squashed by the jubilant masses. Under tremendous efforts the reluctant Mao was guided back to the Gate of Heavenly Peace and waited for the formal opening of the meeting at 7.30 a.m.

The assembly itself passed smoothly but the Chairman’s sudden appearance had exhilarated the masses to an extent that the speeches of Chen Boda (who referred to Mao for the first time as “great leader, great teacher, and great helmsman”), Lin Biao (adding the “great supreme commander”), and Zhou Enlai were incessantly interrupted by calls of “Long live Chairman Mao!” Lin Biao took up the radical rhetoric of the Eleventh Plenum and in his coarse voice called upon the students to smash capitalist mentalities and to establish a new proletarian culture by “changing the people’s souls and implementing a revolutionization of thought” under the guidance and command of the “greatest genius of the world”, Chairman Mao. To bridge the gap between the rather quiet atmosphere among the Party leadership on top of the Gate and the roused masses, Zhou Enlai with Mao’s consent had the commander of the Beijing Garrison, Fu Chongbi, select 1500 of the most prominent Red Guards and after a security inspection allowed them to climb the Gate. They were arranged on the eastern and western side of the platform and after an instruction through Zhou Enlai, Mao with a cordon of security personnel and media staff to document the scene, arrived to greet them in person. The prospect of seeing the Chairman up close and even shaking hands with him resulted in tumultuous scenes. Mao like a pop star had to sign numerous red books with his autograph while different Red Guards breached the security cordon, wielding ribbons imprinted with the names of their organizations. At least two students managed to attach their armbands to the Chairman’s left arm. After removing a ribbon imprinted with “Mao-Zedongism Red Guards”, Mao accepted the ribbon of a Beijing Normal University Girl’s Middle School student, Song Binbin, who for this act and the following short discussion with the Chairman about the appropriateness of her name unwillingly was to become a media star. After over six hours of mainly waving hands to the masses, the Party leadership finally left the rostrum.

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233 Lin Biao, Zai qingzhu wenhua da geming qunzhong dahui shang da shang de jianghua, 18 August 1966, CCRD.
234 Ibid.
235 Ibid.
236 Zhang/Ye, Wo suo qinli de Mao zhuxi ba ci jiejian hongweibing, 33.
237 An article reprinting Mao’s acceptance of the ribbon and the short dialogue with Song Binbin, in which he changed her name to the more martial Song Yaowu, appeared in the Guangming Daily on 20 August, see Song Yaowu, Wo gei Mao zhuxi daishang hong xiuzhang, in: Guangming Daily, 20 August 1966.
Soon after, parts of the Red Guards set out on their mission to destroy anything that presumably represented capitalist or feudalist influences, as Lin Biao had called for in his speech. Instead, Beijing was to become an “extremely revolutionarized, extremely militarized” capital. The most visible consequence was the alteration of all slogans, street- and shop names that could be associated with feudalist or capitalist culture. Most major streets were renamed either with reminiscence to the communist past or with revolutionary imperatives like “The East is Red Avenue”, “Oppose Imperialism Street”, or simply “Cultural Revolution Street” which included the former Baishiqiao, Zhongguancun, and Southern Haidian Streets. Not only were the street names and nameplates of big stores and restaurants removed and destroyed, even the branches of the Public Security Bureau received new names like “Yan’an branch” instead of Chongwen District Bureau. A loosely knit alliance between students from Beijing Middle School No.34 and other schools even requested to change the name Beijing into “The East is Red City” and to replace the ornamental columns and lions in front of the Gate of Heavenly Peace with copper statues of the Chairman. The Mao cult came to dominate public space thus less on behalf of orders from the state bureaucracy but developed to a large extent from grass roots organizations, although a few regulations through central documents remain noteworthy such as the renaming of all “chairmen” (主席) into “directors/heads” (主任) to emphasize the uniqueness of Mao’s position, and the order to replace all other public imagery with Mao’s picture on 27 August 1966. The Red Guards did their best to determine what the new revolutionized culture of Mao Zedong Thought was to look like. During public oath taking rallies they swore their unquestioning loyalty to Chairman Mao and promised unceasing efforts to liberate the suppressed classes from the yoke of capitalism. The Red Guard organization “Red Flag” at

238 “非常革命化, 非常战斗化的无产阶级革命派”, see “Hongqi zazhi” bianshengbu, Wuchanjieji wenhua da geming de ganglingsxing wenjian, in: Red Flag 10, 9 August 1966. There are numerous contemporary reports on the early Red Guard activities in Beining and the provinces alike. Some have at the time been translated by the Union Research Service (URS) in Hong Kong monitoring the mainland media. See for example the transcript of an announcement made by the Guizhou People’s Broadcasting Station on 24 August 1966 on changing street and shop names in the provincial capital Guiyang. See URS, vol.44 (1966), 303ff.  
239 On the situation of renaming Dongjiao Minxiang where previously the Russian embassy had been located see Chen, Shaomin, Chen Shaomin zai Shandong dazhuan yuanxiao geming shisheng zuotanhui shang de jianghua, 16 October 1966, CCRD.  
241 Zhou Enlai nianpu 3, 70. Zhou Enlai via the State Council’s Liaison Station told the Red Guards that only the state leadership could adopt such far-reaching decisions.  
242 Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu ge renmin tuanti ‘zhuxi’ gaicheng ‘zhuren’ (zhaiyao), 26 August 1966, CCRD.  
the former Middle School No. 26, now called “Mao Zedong-ism School”, presented a list of 100 examples of how to destroy the old and establish the new culture, including the following:

“1. It is the duty of the resident committees to oversee that every street and lane sets up quotation boards, that every household and family puts up Mao portraits and quotation posters. 2. In public parks there should be more quotation boards; the foremost duty of every bus driver and train attendant should be to propagandize Mao Zedong Thought and Mao’s quotations. […] 5. Every person should have a Quotations volume, always carry it, constantly study it, and always act according to it. […] 7. The existing bicycles and pedicaps have to attach quotations plates; on cars and trains Chairman Mao’s portraits have to be hung and Chairman Mao’s quotations have to be lacquered [on the sides].”

But besides Mao quotes and imagery, little consensus was to be found as to what effectively constituted the new culture. The militarization of conduct and speech was followed by a new dress code, making worn-out green army uniforms sought for insignia of revolutionary conviction. Besides the adornment with military caps, red ribbon straps, and broad buckled leather belts, red colored books were a necessary requisite of the new, solemn army style. As the Quotations had remained an internal army publication so far, most students had to put up with a copy of Mao’s Selected Readings or the Selected Works in the early stages of the movement as can clearly be distinguished on newspaper photographs of the early parades. Nevertheless, the Quotations quickly became one of the most effective weapons of the Red Guards. By setting up temporary “inspection offices” in the streets, pedestrians could be questioned about their knowledge of Mao’s works and in case of failure to come up with sufficient quotations were harassed at will. Many units compiled lists or internal memos that provided suitable Mao quotations for frequently encountered problems and included page numbers from the Quotations or the Selected Works. The Cultural Revolution Battlefield Report edited by the Institute for Foreign Languages on 29 September, for example, included a list of 100 questions that presented answers for problems such as “What to do if orders are not followed? (See Quotations p.220)”; “What if one encounters problems in life? (See Quotations p.160, 204, 210)” ; “What if one does not dare to admit selfish ideas and miscellaneous thoughts or lacks determination? (See Quotations p.208, 230)”.

The destruction developed on an even greater scale. On the evening of 18 August, the day of the first mass reception, Zhou Enlai had to call a battalion of the Beijing Garrison to

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244 “Mao Zedong zhuyi xuexiao” (yuan ershiwu zhong) hongweibing (hongqi), Po jiu li xin yibai lie, August 1966, CCRD. A slightly different translation of the whole list can be found in Schoenhals (ed.), China’s Cultural Revolution, 212-222.

stop students from breaking into the Forbidden City.\footnote{Zhou Enlai nianpu 3, 50.} During an iconoclastic period of roughly three weeks, the Red Guards with the backing of the Party press destroyed 4922 of 6843 relics in the capital alone that had been classified by the state authorities as cultural heritage in 1958.\footnote{Chen Donglin (ed.), \textit{Neiluan yu kangzheng – “Wenhua da geming” de shi nian (1966-1971)} (= \textit{Zhonghua renmin gongheguo shilu}, vol. 3/1), Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 1994, 150.} But not only precious art relics were destroyed. The unfocused violence could be directed against any kind of object, even against a plantation of apple trees on the pretension of “removing revisionist roots”.\footnote{According to the local chronicle of the Beijing Fengtai district, unknown culprits on 13 September 1966 felled 213 apple trees before leaving the message quoted above; see Beijing shi Fengtai qu difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (ed.), \textit{Beijing shi, Fengtai qu zhi}, Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2001, 49.} Besides material objects, ranging from classical paintings to religious imagery, the main thrust was directed against representatives of the “five bad elements”, (landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements and rightists) that had served as scapegoats in most political campaigns since the founding of the PRC. In Beijing, some 33,695 house raids were conducted to find proof for the continuing reactionary standpoints of these “enemies of the people.”\footnote{Among the victims 32 persons had lived within units formally protected by the state security, plus additional 42 suicides of which 34 had succeeded, see Beijing shi gong’anju Chongwen fenju, \textit{Chongwen gong’an shiliao} 2, 675.} According to the annals of the Public Security Bureau branch in Beijing’s south-eastern Chongwen district, between 24 August and 2 September 137 persons were beaten to death in their district alone.\footnote{According to the Public Security annals, the following items were confiscated during the raids of 5835 households in the Chongwen district: “13,069 liang [1 liang = 50g] of gold, 44,108 liang of silver, 264,538 silver dollars 4,483,055 yuan in savings, 16,771 yuan in foreign currencies, 1,058,081 shares, 27,145 items of jewellery, traditional toys, jade and calligraphy, 18,577 books printed in the Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing dynasties, 5868 clocks, 4122 bicycles, sewing machines, radios, TV sets and pianos, 45,000 items of clothes and embroidery, 132,000 hidden chambers. In the hidden chambers 7 rifles, 952 bullets, 1054 knives and sabres, 25 flags of imperialists, Jiang [Jieshi] and Wang [Jingwei], 4529 deeds of ownership, 454 items of Daoist [ritual] property, 1015 gambling toys, 57 drug pipes”, see Ibid. 677.} Another 735 persons were brought by Red Guards to the Chongwen branch in order to be taken into custody, mostly on the pretext of possessing capitalist items.\footnote{The continuing influence of the Red Terror is to be seen in the numbers of memoirs dealing with the personal tragedies during the rule of anarchy. The emphasis on the Red Guard terror, however, results in a distorted image compared to the killings in later stages of the Cultural Revolution. Chen Donglin et al. estimate more than 1700 death victims during August and September 1966 in Beijing, see Chen, \textit{Neiluan yu kangzheng}, 154f. The worst excesses happened in Daxing County, where between 27 August and 1 September alone 325 persons were killed, the oldest victim being 80 years, the youngest just 38 days old.} The detainment of “bad elements” and “fake Red Guards” had been one of the aims of the newly formed “Western District Picket Corps” (西城纠察队), an elite Red Guard
organization that been established in an assembly of 31 middle schools on 25 August. The tradition of picket corps in assisting the local steering of mass movements had been a frequently employed measure of the CCP, even during the period of the work teams. The Western District Picket Corps encompassed roughly 1000 members with a core of some 200 activists, most of them teenage students from the Middle Schools No.4, 6, 8 and the Girl’s Middle School No.3. In their founding proclamation that was edited and printed in 15,000 copies with the assistance of the Petroleum Department and the Worker’s Daily facilities, the Picket Corps presented itself as the “nucleus force” of the Red Guard movement. The propagation and defense of Mao Zedong Thought was stated to be the main goal of the elite Red Guard force. Their special status was even to allow for the detainment of “fake Red Guards and hooligans” and any items incongruent with Mao Zedong Thought. The establishment and increasing influence of the Picket Corps would not have been possible without the support of the state bureaucracy. The tumultuous outrage of destroying old culture had led the State Council and the “Capital Work Group” in charge of the city’s security work to ponder about institutionalized options of gaining influence on the Red Guard movement. Two days after the first parade at Tian’anmen square, Yong Wentao of the Beijing Municipal Secretariat and Political Commissar of the Shenyang Military Region, approached Wang Renzhong, vice-chairman of the CCRG and former first secretary of the Central South Bureau, with the question of how to establish a closer supervision of the Red Guards. As a result, 600 PLA soldiers were provided with the duty of helping the Red Guards with the establishment of liaison stations. As most of the Picket Corps students originated from high-ranking cadre families, they seemed to provide the state bureaucracy with a welcome possibility to guarantee the safety of Party leaders and central institutions while linking up with the perceived vanguard of the Cultural Revolution. The State Council and especially secretary Zhou Rongxin provided the Picket Corps therefore with material resources like cars, phones and armbands, and secured a material superiority over other student organizations, most notably the so-called “minority faction” (少数派) of university students that had opposed the
work teams and on 6 September had withdrawn from the general Red Guard Assembly to form their own “Third Headquarters” (三司). The Third Headquarters around Zhu Chengzhao of the Beijing Geological Institute and Qinghua leader Kuai Dafu quickly became the main opponent of the Picket Corps and gained the support of the CCRG, who in turn provided them with information and material subsidies. But the factional disputes reached their climax only after November 1966. During the first months of the Cultural Revolution, the invitation of revolutionary masses from all over the country to visit the capital and learn from the experiences of the Cultural Revolution shook the organizational capacities of the state at its foundations and kept the students busy with travelling all over the country in order to foster rebellion and raise the flag of Mao Zedong Thought.

Exchanging Revolutionary Experiences

The parade of 18 August and its medial coverage in print and film had been a huge success in terms of encouraging the formation of Red Guard organizations nationwide and kindling revolutionary activism. The instrumental value of staging mass receptions of the CCP Chairman in Beijing, the “center of world revolution”, was made evident further through the large number of students that upon their own initiative had travelled to the capital in order to get a glimpse of Mao. On 5 September, the CCP Center officially invited students and revolutionaries from the whole country to travel to the capital according to certain quota. During an average period of four days, the visitors should get acquainted with the situation in different key institutions like Qinghua University in organized fashion, participate in the Cultural Revolutionary activities, and receive a reception by “leading cadres of the Party Center”. Travel and accommodation were to be provided for by the state and provinces. The instigation of free travel to exchange experiences caused a massive change in China’s transportation schedules. Up to November 1966, some ten million “revolutionary successors” visited the capital and had to be fed and accommodated. Even after the official termination of the free travel on 20 November and its repetition in frequent proclamations between February and September 1967, roughly 500,000 travellers arrived on foot as well as 600,000

258 The popular phrase was declared unscientific through Zhongfa [68] 72, Zhonggong zhongyang, zhongyang wenge guanyu “shijie geming de zhongxin” lun de zhongyao tongzhi, 18 May 1968, CCRD.

259 Thus, for example, all high schools students, except for the sick ones, were asked to visit the capital accompanied by one revolutionary teacher per 50 students, see Zhongfa [66] 450, Zhonggong zhongyang, guowuyuan guanyu zuzi waidi gaodeng xuegao geming xuesheng, zhongdeng xuegao xuesheng daibiao he geming jiaozhigong daibiao lai jing canguan wenhua da geming yundong de tongzhi, 9 May 1966, CCRD.

260 Ibid.
representatives of different revolutionary communes asking for official guidance.\textsuperscript{261} At the same time, large numbers of Beijing students travelled throughout the country to kindle the flames of revolution, enjoy revolutionary tourism or to establish communications with other organizations. Furthermore, child crusaders with Mao pictures and banners set out on their heroic missions to re-enact the Long March or to visit the “sacred places” (革命圣地) of the communist revolution.

During eight mass receptions (two of the gatherings spread over two days) Mao Zedong reviewed approximately 12 million people.\textsuperscript{262} The arrangement of the parades changed constantly and was aimed at reducing the reception time to keep Mao from fatigue, while simultaneously providing a maximal number of revolutionaries with a close look at the Chairman. Due to criticism that Mao had not been distinguishable by the crowds in the far parts of the square,\textsuperscript{263} the second parade on 31 August was arranged differently. Mao set out in an open car from the Great Hall of the People and only appeared on top of the Gate of Heavenly Peace after this \textit{tour d’honneur} through the masses. The Picket Corps received preferential treatment as 27 members were allowed to climb the Gate of Heavenly Peace. They even managed to make Lin Biao wear their armband, the imprint of which was later “technically removed”.\textsuperscript{264} The main concern of the organisers, however, remained Mao’s safety. After the fourth parade on National Day had resulted in considerable chaos, when Mao’s convoy had been brought to a stop by the masses on its way to the Great Hall of the People, the fifth parade consisted of a 25 km drive along the stretch of the present day eastern and northern third ring road. Thus 1.5 million Red Guards could be reviewed in just one hour. Despite its effectiveness, Zhou Enlai kept experimenting to find ways of reviewing the masses, without posing a danger to the safety of the Chairman. As a stretch of 25 km length was hard to control and it was impossible to staff the whole route with the three layered safety cordon of PLA soldiers and selected Red Guards, the sixth parade was conducted again at

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{261} Yuan zhonggong Beijing shiwei waidi geming shisheng jiedai weiyuanhui (ed.), \textit{Beijing shi jiedai lai jing chuanlian de geming shisheng he hongweibing gongzuozongjie}, September 1967, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{262} Compare \textit{Xuexi ziliao}, Beijing, 1969, 190-194.
\item \textsuperscript{263} According to one of the daily reports of the Shanghai Public Security Bureau Cultural Revolution Office on the present situation, compiled on 31 October 1966, the city committee had been accused in a big character poster of having betrayed the masses during the first mass parade in Shanghai on 19 August, one day after the first parade in Beijing. The responsible Party members, according to the big character poster, had taken the opportunity of nightfall and heavy rain to withdraw themselves inside the building, while “they arranged roughly ten persons of the guarding corps in two groups, which then took shifts in climbing the reviewing stand and on behalf of the leadership waved to the parading troops”, see Shanghai shi gong'anju geming zaofanlianhe zhihuibuzhengzhibu zaofandui (eds.), \textit{Chedi jielu shi gong'anju ju dangu yangong yangju - jiu wenge bangongshi de taotian zuixing}, 2 - gongbu shi jiu wenge bangongshi di er pi heicailiao, September 1967, 16.
\item \textsuperscript{264} The expression \textit{技术处理} was commonly used for the manipulation or removal of unwished for items or pictographic contents. On Lin’s wearing the Picket Corps armband, see Zhang/Ye, \textit{Wo suo qinli de Mao zhuxi ba ci jiejian hongweibing}, 33.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Tian’anmen square. This time, two million Red Guards were paraded past the Gate of Heavenly Peace in 6000 trucks. The advantage of the trucks was posed by the fact that the outbursts of excitement would not lead to casualties among the weakest participants that occasionally had been squashed amongst the feet of the jubilant masses. But again unexpected difficulties turned up, since unlike during the practice session the Red Guards when passing the Gate all scrambled to one side of the trucks to get a better view of Mao, forcing the drivers to reduce speed in order not to risk an accident. Therefore, the traditional style of parades was revoked in the two last huge assemblies at Tian’anmen square and finally at the airport in the western suburbs.

The whole movement to exchange experiences, which like no other factor contributed to the spreading of the Mao cult and the nationwide attacks against old culture and from October 1966 onwards against “people in power taking the capitalist road”, ironically would not have reached similar dimensions without the extreme efficiency of the state organs in charge of its organization. Immediately after the first parade, Zhou Enlai with the aid of the State Council Secretariat discussed the creation of a new body to facilitate the reception of the masses. The result was the formation of the “General Reception Station” (接待总站) under the leadership of Lü Hong, a member of the National Defence Institute. Different work groups were placed in charge of the traveller’s material well-being, while roughly four thousand “reception points” (接待点) in all major units and travel hubs of the city conducted the practical implementation. The Picket Corps was employed to supervise the correct behaviour of incoming students. On a number of occasions, however, they denied access to students with a “black” class background, championed slogans like “Welcome red classes, get lost black classes!”, and started torturing opponents in temporary prisons or even killing those who refrained from obeying their orders. But from late September onwards, the Picket Corps became increasingly marginalised although they still fulfilled symbolic duties like guarding the Goldwater Bridges at the National Day parade.

265 Lü, Wo reng hongweibing jiedai congshan zhannan de rizi, 46.
266 Zhang/Ye, Wo suo qinli de Mao zhuxi ba ci jiejian hongweibing, 35.
267 Lü, Wo reng hongweibing jiedai congshan zhannan de rizi, 44.
268 Yuan zhonggong Beijing shiwei waidi geming shisheng jiedai weiyuanhui (ed.), Beijing jiedai gongzuo zongjie, 4. See further the complaints of handing out even shorter visit approvals for only two or three days as well as the occasional non-acceptance of Quotation volumes presented in Ba fangeming zuzhi “Xijiu” nachulai shi zhong, Xicheng jiuchadui zuixinglu, in: Dongfanghong bao (Beijing dizhi xueyuan dongfanghong bao), 15 March 1967, reprinted in: NRGM 9, 3239.
Accommodating the incoming masses posed the next great difficulty. The first tent city was built on the grounds of the Altar of Heaven. It was erected within 17 days on 280,000 m² and provided shelter for 400,000 people. But especially around National Day the numbers grew exorbitantly. Between September and November 1966 on average 130,000 students arrived at Beijing Railway Station daily, while some 120,000 people left from Yongdingmen that had been assigned to departing trains.\(^2\) In October, the numbers doubled and at its most extreme 3 million people had to be accommodated at the same time. To solve the problem, all citizens were required to help via the street committees by taking in groups of students. Zhou Enlai even opened the Party compound of Zhongnanhai to lodge 100,000 persons temporarily. The departments in charge of food and supplies contributed large sums of material, approximately 50 million kg of food alone, as well as clothing and medical services; they furthermore organized travel within the allotted four days in the capital.\(^2\) All in all about one million people were involved in providing accommodation and service during the high tide of exchanging experiences in the capital.\(^2\)

While the chance of being received by Mao Zedong made Beijing clearly the main attraction, cities like Shanghai witnessed a steadily growing amount of incoming students as well, though comparatively late. The influx of students in Beijing reached its apex in the first weeks of October, especially around National Day. The student numbers in Shanghai on the other hand started to rise drastically only from mid-October 1966 onwards. The city therefore did not establish an organization similar to Beijing’s general reception station until 18 October, when the students could no longer be accommodated by the provisional liaison offices of the Shanghai Student Federation and the Railway Department. The Shanghai Party Committee finally created an organizing small group to cope with an estimated total of 300,000 to 500,000 students. Within two weeks, the estimates were already outdated, as the growing restrictions of accepting students in Beijing and Guangzhou made Shanghai an attractive haven.\(^2\) Yet despite its late establishment, Shanghai’s reception work proved to be very effective, unlike the barren area of the Jinggangshan where Mao had first established a Soviet area back in 1927 and that came to be one of the main spots of revolutionary travel.

\(^2\) The regular train service was conducted from Xizhimen station and drastically reduced from 45 to 13 trains a day, see Yuan zhonggong Beijing shiwei waidi geming shisheng jiedai weiyuanhui (ed.), *Beijing jiedai gongzuo zongjie*, 26.
\(^2\) Ibid. 10.
\(^2\) Ibid. 2ff.
\(^2\) On 15 October, the State Council announced a temporary reduction of student numbers entitled to visit the capital but to no avail. Therefore, the CCP Center and the State Council in a directive of 31 October 1966 declared that between 1-5 November 1966 all student trains in the direction of Beijing would be terminated, in order to bring relief to the chaotic situation within the railway schedule that had led to endless delays in public transport, see Chen (ed.), *Neiluan yu kangzhen*, 173.
Here like in Shanghai the numbers of travelling students reached the peak in November, when an estimated number of 200,000 students stayed in the immediate vicinity of the mountains based on rumours that Mao Zedong would make a reception at Jinggangshan.\textsuperscript{274} The coming winter and the growing scarcity of food had to be relieved through military grain transports and a part evacuation of the mountains that caused the surrounding military districts major difficulties as many Red Guards refused to be driven away.\textsuperscript{275} Another of the so-called “five holy sites” (五圣地) of the revolution that included Jinggangshan, Ruijin, Zunyi, and Beijing was the small town of Yan’an, where the Communists had consolidated their power in the 1940s and which had been the cradle of the first Mao cult. Over 200,000 travelling students visited Yan’an between October 1966 and March 1967, resulting in an estimated cost for accommodation and food of 102,080 Yuan.\textsuperscript{276} But in absolute terms, the numbers were small compared to the influx of students in big cities like Shanghai.

The maximum of incoming students in Shanghai was reached shortly after the official termination of the movement to exchange experiences. On 22 November 1966, according to the statistical data provided by the Shanghai Reception Office, exactly 997,692 students stayed in Shanghai, many of them making a stop-over on their way to their home-provinces, others hoping to spend the winter. An investigation of four trains arriving in Shanghai on 25 November revealed that over 70\% of the students violated the central directive to return immediately to their study units. Many students had simply not gotten of the train in time or traded their tickets to facilitate their travels.\textsuperscript{277} Others simply refused to leave the city according to schedule and enjoyed playing basketball and cricket in their host units. In order to offer the students an incentive to get their return tickets, the Shanghai Reception Small Group on 27 November came up with the ingenious idea to present every student willing to return with a “Chairman Mao quotation-stele” made of glass with a golden-red inlay. The same day, 240,000 students got their return tickets and most students were soon to follow.\textsuperscript{278}

In mid-December, Shanghai had by and large been relieved of the pressure of incoming students. Three months later the reception facilities were completely disbanded.

\textsuperscript{274} Zhao Feng, “Zhong"zi xia de yinying, n.p: 1993, 28f.
\textsuperscript{275} See Hu Ping/Zhang Shengyou, Lishi chensilu - Jinggangshan hongweibing da chuanlian ershi zhounian cha, in: Zhou Ming, Lishi zai zheli chensi - 1966-1976 nian jishi, vol. 5, Taiyuan: Beiyue wenyi chubanshe, 1989, 43. Furthermore, a number of students during their travel went astray in the woods, their corpses only to be found months later, Hu/Zhang, Lishi chensilu - Jinggangshan hongweibing da chuanlian ershi zhounian cha, 53.
\textsuperscript{276} Yan’an shizhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (ed.), Yan’an shi zhi, Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1994, 825.
\textsuperscript{277} Jin Dalu, Shanghai jiedai waisheng hongweibing de wu ge jieduan, in: Qingnian yanjiu 9 (2005), 45.
\textsuperscript{278} Ibid. 46.
<table>
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*Source: Shanghai shi jiedai gedi geming xuesheng bangongshi (ed.), “Waidi xuesheng lai Hu qingkuang fanying” jianbao, Shanghai 8-12.1966

The instigation of exchanging revolutionary experiences resulted in an unparalleled widening of the revolutionary activities on a nationwide scale. Many students displayed much more revolutionary fervour in distant places than at home, were they had to consider other interests involved. Compared to the fascist spectacles of power or parades in comparable communist or fascist countries, the Mao worship in the early Cultural Revolution is characterized rather by its anarchic quality. The organized leader cult of the Nazis relied heavily on rhetorical devices and decorum to create an atmosphere conducive to render the individual willing to serve the leader to the very end. Clear-cut aims and a stringently racist worldview provided certain coherence to the speeches that Hitler or his chief propagandist Goebbels would carefully practise before going on stage. The leader as charismatic orator played a fundamental role in the fascist leader cult, an element that is completely missing in the Cultural Revolutionary Mao worship. The Mao cult was characterized by the basic absence of rousing speeches or the conveyance of any kind of meaning on the side of the Chairman. Mao never addressed the masses in public besides short couplets later relayed by the media. The short greetings and speeches at the mass rallies usually presented by Lin Biao, Zhou Enlai, or Chen Boda were not prone to incite public adoration either. Lin Biao usually wore huge rimmed glasses when

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279 Quoted in Ibid. 42-49.
280 See Böhme, Fetischismus und Kultur, 266.
reading his self-prepared “slips of paper” (条子) and did not convey the image of a popular orator, especially as Mao often benevolently gazed over his shoulder. Zhou Enlai was well versed in charming his audience, but his short addresses from Tian’anmen Gate lacked mesmerizing qualities. The barely comprehensible Chen Boda, Kang Sheng, or Jiang Qing made use of certain devices like frequent rhetorical questions to strum up a response from the audience, but none of them was a gifted speaker. The reasons for Mao’s unwillingness to directly address the audience may have been that the integrating effect of his cult image would have been greatly diminished by actually hearing his high-pitched voice with the heavy Hunanese accent. His image as omniscient unmoved mover could thus have been contradicted. Mao had in the past delivered a great number of speeches in Yan’an, but the audience could not be compared with the millions of spectators watching on Tian’anmen square. The late Mao had come to exert his influence primarily in small group meetings or through written comments instead of performing the strenuous task of strumming up public response through rousing speeches. Instead, additional to his omnipresent works, television and mobile movie theatres distributed the image as helmsman of the Revolution by broadcasting coverage of Mao’s mass receptions all over the country. The silent presence further added to Mao’s mystery and aloofness and eased to attributing all kinds of personal qualities to “the Chairman”. Mao effectively became the supreme but empty symbol of the movement upon whom everyone could project his own ideals and wishes.

“Waving the Red Flag to knock down the Red Flag”

Between 9 and 28 October 1966, the CCP central and regional leadership met in Beijing to discuss the current situation and prospects of the Cultural Revolution. The conference, called on short notice upon Mao’s decision, gave the Cultural Revolution a new turn by shifting attention from the destruction of old thought and culture towards the uprooting of “power holders within the Party taking the capitalist road”. It was Chen Boda who came to define the new direction of the Cultural Revolution in his report on the continuing line struggle. For the first time, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping were criticized by name for having suppressed the masses. Concomitantly, Chen warned other representatives of the capitalist Party line who had come to put on airs. “[T]hey used the high and unlimited reputation of Chairman Mao and the Party amongst the masses, and mobilized a small number of persons without sufficient

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281 Due to his thick Fujianese accent most of Chen’s speeches had to be translated for the audience by members of the CCRG, usually Wang Li. See for example the transcript of his speech at the Broadcasting Institute on 24 July 1966 in: Hebei Beijing shifan xueyuán “douzheng shenghuo” bianshengbu (ed.), Wuchan jieji wenhua da geming ziliao huibian, n.p. 1966, 83.

282 On the employment of rhetorical questions see especially the early speeches in Ibid. 85ff.
knowledge of the situation to protect them."\textsuperscript{283} In order to shift the focus of criticism from the accustomed bad elements towards those cadres within the CCP that, according to Mao’s own words at the conference, had failed to implement anti-revisionist policies while working in the “first line”,\textsuperscript{284} class background as defining criterion of legitimacy had to be dumped. Chen therefore explicitly criticized a slogan that had first appeared at the Beijing Aviation Institute Middle School in late July 1966 and had incited a wide-spread controversy about its content: “The son of a revolutionary is a real man, the son of a revolutionary is a bastard – it’s basically like this” (老子英雄儿好汉，老子反动儿混蛋，基本如此). The vanguard of the early revolution, the middle school Red Guards and especially the Picket Corps, were denounced as having proclaimed a “reactionary bloodline theory” of “natural redness”\textsuperscript{285} incongruent with the Party line of placing a “special emphasis” on class background but not to rely on it solely.

Chen did not elaborate further on how these strains of “capitalist” or “feudal” thinking had emerged from the midst of revolutionary students and cadres. Neither did he provide clear criteria on what distinguished the emphasis on class background taken by the middle school Red Guards from the “special emphasis” of the Party line. He rather singled out student leaders like Tan Lifu, who had used the couplet in their respective units to bolster their authority, and accused them of having tried to obstruct the Cultural Revolution.\textsuperscript{286} Lin Biao again provided the most comprehensive speech. He did not comment on the bloodline theory but by discussing the restraining effect of an unreformed superstructure on the already changed infrastructure, Lin restricted the emergence of old thoughts and habits to feudal and capitalist remnants like in the case of the personality cult. According to his argument, the basic distinction between old and new culture should be seen in abolishing selfishness and private interest as the dividing lines between capitalism and “commune-ism” (“公社主义”).\textsuperscript{287} But besides these highly general remarks, neither Lin Biao nor Mao Zedong, who presented the last speech to the audience, further commented on the Party’s class line. Mao instead accused the leadership of fearing the masses. Yet in his opinion, the only way of conducting the Cultural Revolution was to rely on the mass line. According to Mao’s estimate, the movement had roughly past half of the allotted time and should carry on for another five


\textsuperscript{284} Mao wengao 12, 143.

\textsuperscript{285} Chen, \textit{Liang tiao luxian}, 31.

\textsuperscript{286} See Walder, \textit{Tan Lifu}, 983f.

\textsuperscript{287} A translation of Lin’s speech can be found in Schoenhals (ed.), \textit{China’s Cultural Revolution}, 9-26.
months or longer until he could feel safe that the country would remain on track and he himself would not share Stalin’s fate once he went to “see Marx”. 288

A rigorous analysis of the Party’s class line would have had to reconsider its past consequences during the first 17 years of communist rule in China, as it was done in stringent fashion by Yu Luoke in his *Treatise on Family Background*, first published in November 1966 and republished in January 1967 under the pseudonym of “Beijing Small Group on the investigation of Family Background”. Yu questioned the superior influence of class background as opposed to societal factors on the individual and argued that the divide between revolutionary and anti-revolutionary intellectuals was presented solely by their attitude towards the masses. 289 Yu demonstrated with a number of examples that class status at birth and later political performance were not immediate related and emphasized that Mao Zedong Thought placed a supreme emphasis on performance. Thus he asked rhetorically where the notion of class was to be found in Mao’s “five conditions for revolutionary successors” or whether the deeds of model hero Wang Jie, born to a middle peasant family, did no equal those of Lei Feng, the orphan of revolutionary martyrs. But Yu even went a step further by stating that the turn of the movement towards persons in power taking the capitalist road presented the best argument against an inborn innateness of the so-called proletarian classes against revisionism. Why should class status be awarded such a high profile, when the main opponents were to be found amongst those with an impeccable revolutionary background? After all, had not the greatest heroes like Marx, Lenin, and Mao himself been born with an unfavourable class background? “The crucial point of the problem is not to be found in class background but in the remolding of thought”. 290 The reason for the Party’s and the Red Guard’s reliance on class status as fundamental category according to Yu was rather its political operability. One could simply go up to a person and inquire about his family background and thus place a verdict on the “heaven born sinners“. 291 A consideration of the political performance on the other hand would require a much more complicated process of evaluation. This, however, did not relieve the communist state of his duty to reconsider present policies. Otherwise, Yu asked rhetorically, what difference remained between the communist class society and the Indian caste system or racial segregation in the United States?

Yu Luoke’s viewpoints were to receive harsh criticism and the author ultimately was to pay with his life for his outspokenness and intellectual brilliance. He was charged with

288 *Mao wengao* 12, 143.
290 Ibid. 95.
291 Ibid. 100.
having made advantage of the situation to expound capitalist theories, with trying to vindicate the fate of the regime’s enemies and, even worse, with having “waved the red flag to knock down the red flag” by incessantly quoting Mao Zedong. The exposure of the techniques of power, the employing of simplified categories for administrative and propagandistic usage was a standpoint that even during the Cultural Revolution found no approval and thus revealed the crucial reason of why the movement was to result in exactly the opposite of what Mao had intended with his aims of securing constant socialist revolution. By fostering the public cult of personality, Mao could secure a certain degree of public backing based on which he could charge his colleagues with negating the mass line themselves. But what to do if parts of the masses no longer attacked those specified by the leadership and started addressing the inequalities and insufficiencies inherent in the Party-state’s foundational principles like the pre-given existence of classes? The dissemination of large numbers of internal communications and unpublished Mao texts opened an emancipatory chance of addressing the fundamental problems. By failing to take on the intellectual challenges presented by Yu’s treatise and a fair number of others daring to protest against the system’s injustice while still keeping their emotional attachment to the Chairman, the Cultural Revolution and the Mao cult had to turn into a cynical tool of power and provoked widespread distrust in the aims and sincerity of the movement.

In the late autumn of 1966, however, the point of cynicism was not yet prone. Instead, the public disapproval of the former elite Red Guard organization through the CCRG and their favouring of the Third Headquarters resulted in increased factionalism among the Red Guards. In late 1966, a number of middle school students mainly from Beijing University Middle School, Qinghua University Middle School, 1 August School, and the Capital Construction Institute Middle School formally established the so-called “Capital Red Guard United Action Committee” (首都红卫兵联合行动委员会) or short “United Action” (联动), the last stand of what now came to be referred to as the “Old Red Guards”. With the termination of the movement to exchange experiences in late November, many of the former

292 See for example the letter of Wang Rongfen, a German major at the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute, who in her big character poster “Dearest Chairman Mao, what are you doing” questioned the goals of the Cultural Revolution while referring to Mao with utmost politeness, for a translation see Schoenhals (ed.), China’s Cultural Revolution, 149f.

293 No exact numbers are known so far. A contemporary “list of crimes” committed by United Action singled out the “16th column” (十六纵队) with roughly 1000 members as most important constituent with a nucleus of about 100 activists, see “Liandong” zuixing lu, in: Hongweibing Shanghai silingbu (hongshangsi) (ed.), Polan “Liandong”, Shanghai: neibu duwu, 1967, 6. In early 1967 about 150 members were arrested by the Public Security Bureau.

294 The contemporary designations of “conservatives” or “old red guards” were thus posited against the “rebelfaction”.

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Picket Corps members that had travelled through China returned to the capital. Unsatisfied with the change in direction in October that had brought the former university students minority faction assembled in the Third Headquarters to the fore of the leadership’s attention, the middle school students were angered by the lack of support through minor members of the CCRG such as Qi Benyu and Guan Feng that had come to take on most liaison work responsibilities. The criticism of the current situation voiced during an assembly on 13 November by the old marshals and vice-chairmen of the CMC, Chen Yi, He Long, Xu Xiangqian, and Ye Jianying therefore incited wide spread reactions.

The first visible consequence of the growing disenchantment of the Old Red Guards with the CCRG and the course of the Cultural Revolution were a number of big character posters critical of the present situation. The criticism was mainly directed at the open support of CCRG members such as Qi Benyu in case of the Third Headquarters. Students at the Beijing Mining Institute thus established a “Criticize Qi Benyu Liaison Station”, others openly questioned Qi’s revolutionary credentials: “What does Qi Benyu count for? He is fat and wears glasses, does that resemble a leftist?”295 Li Hongshan, a student at the Beijing Forestry Institute gained fame by his daring call to cut ties with the CCRG and to act out the revolution without protection from above. He further was involved in the painting of huge slogans on the viewing stands at the northern end of Tian’anmen square on 2 December that read “The Cultural Revolution Small Group enacts a reactionary capitalist line”.296 But the CCRG was not the only body coming under attack. Liu Zhenzhong and Zhang Licai, two students of the Beijing Agricultural Institute Middle School, publicly questioned the validity of Lin Biao’s style of rendering Mao Zedong Thought sacrosanct. In an open letter posted at Qinghua University on 15 November under the pseudonym Yilin Dixi, they challenged the replacement the Marxist-Leninist canon with Mao Zedong Thought through the “dear Comrade Lin Biao, our deputy commander-in-chief and Chairman Mao’s single closest comrade-in-arms and successor”297 by heavily quoting Stalin and Mao Zedong himself in support of their position.

The different strands of criticism merged in the formation of “United Action”, which in its founding declaration of 5 December revoked Mao’s dictum of the right to rebel against

295 “Liandong” zuixing lu, 9. Other common denominations of CCRG members included references to Chen Boda as “black guest” and Jiang Qing as “actress”, a reference to her bourgeois past as B movie actress in 1930s Shanghai”, see Shoudu hongweibing chedi cuihui “liandong” geming lianluo weiyuanhui/Beijing gangyuan fuzhong kanglianjun (eds.), Liandong fan Mao Zedong sixiang zuixing 50 lie, May 1967, 4.


“a new type” of capitalist-roaders that intimidated and suppressed the masses. Its members swore to be loyal to the Party and Chairman Mao and “to prepare measures immediately to crush down on all acts opposing Mao Zedong Thought”. The best way to prove organizational capacities through the various Red Guard groups was the arrangement of large-scale assemblies, usually in the “Worker Peasant Soldier Stadium” or other prominent venues.

To prove their unquestioning loyalty to the Chairman, United Action members planned their first large scale event to take place on Mao’s birthday, 26 December. Back in Yan’an in the 1940s Mao had forbidden to celebrate his birthdays. The date thus had never been of particular prominence up to the Cultural Revolution. Now, however, United Action by holding a convention in the assembly hall of the Beijing Exhibition Center under the motto of “eradicating self-interest and fostering devotion to public interest” (破 私 立 公) instrumentalized the date for the staging of their own loyalty to Mao. Despite later allegations, the meeting was no intended to produce far-reaching criticism of the CCRG. It was an attempt to display the organization’s continuing relevance as well as the willingness to engage in discussion with the CCRG, possibly even to conduct a self-criticism. As none of the CCRG’s scheduled speakers turned up and thus publicly demonstrated their opposition to United Action, the atmosphere grew tense. Former Picket Corps members recalled the experienced brutalities when being detained by the Ministry of Public Security. Others publicly declared, “Some leaders of the CCRG should not become too presumptuous”. The screening of two specific movies further boasted their confidence. The first, Mao’s reception of the Red Guards in August 1966, recalled the high tide of the Middle School Red Guards influence while the second movie, “District Committee Secretary” (区委书记), showed a meeting during which the appearance of CMC members was greeted with ferocious applause while the CCRG members received a rather hostile reception by the audience. The assembly on Mao’s birthday thus turned out to become the first large-scale opposition to the politics of the CCRG.

In the following days and months, United Action members started attacking the CCRG, the Public Security Bureaus, and members of the Third Headquarters either with brute force

298 Shoudu hongweibing lianhe xingdong weiyuanhui (ed.), Shoudu hongweibing lianhe xingdong weiyuanhui xuanyan, 5 December 1966, CCRD.
299 Ibid.
300 Translation taken from a contemporary Chinese-English dictionary, see Beijing shiyuan waiyuxi “Guo da jiang”/Hebei Beijing shifan xueyuan “Hongqi” (eds.), Wuchan jieji wenhua da geming changyong cihui shouci (han-ying duizhao), Beijing: n.d., 232.
301 Xu, Xingxing sese de zaofan, 188.
or by way of employing symbolic devices like slogans, chants, and rumours. When breaking into an assembly of the Third Headquarters on 4 January, United Action members seized the microphone and claimed, “The Chairman has returned to the capital…The CCRG has split into two factions, 6 a.m., Instruction of the Chairman”\(^{303}\) and thus caused great disturbance by invoking the Chairman’s authority. The “Six o’clock instruction” had been invented by United Action members at Beijing University Middle School immediately after the 26 December meeting and spread along with other rumours like “Mao Zedong has criticized Jiang Qing” throughout the city.\(^{304}\) The employment of symbolic devices to denigrate their opponents even included songs that due to the custom of representing tone intervals with numbers were composed on homophonous syllables like “7434” that could be read as “infuriate the Third Headquarters” (气死三司) or “543488” with the possible meaning of “I am the father of the Third Headquarters” (我是三司爸爸).\(^{305}\)

The criticism of the CCRG by United Action members did not incite a wider response among the populace, although they kept their attacks up until the summer of 1967 and staged further protests against their criminalization. The large share of responsibility that rested with United Action members for the violence against perceived class enemies during the Red August of 1966, as well as the continuing importance of class background within its organisational hierarchy alienated a wider audience.\(^{306}\) The political leadership condemned United Action as “reactionary group” in a *Red Flag* editorial in February 1967 and many of its leaders were detained by the public security organs to be released only upon Mao’s intervention on 22 April. Despite their efforts to reorganize or to regain the support of the CCRG,\(^{307}\) United Action was marginalized and in one of its strongholds, 1 August Middle School, a permanent exhibition entitled “Strike down United Action” was established. On display were numerous items to reveal the viciousness and reactionary standpoint of the self-acclaimed “blood noblesse” (血统高贵). The enormous importance that came to be attached to the exhibition rested less with the organization itself than with the political

\(^{303}\) Liandong neimu, 6, reprinted in: NRGM 10, 3980.

\(^{304}\) Shoudu hongweibing chedi cuihui “liandong” geming lianluo weiyyuanhui/Beijing gangyuan fuzhong kanglianjuan (eds.), 50 lie, 6.

\(^{305}\) Lianhe xingdong weiyuanhui zuixing lu, in: Dongfeng bao (Shoudu zhongxue hongweibing silingbu), 8 February 1967, 3, reprinted in: NRGM 11, 4007.

\(^{306}\) Besides the clear class standpoint of their manifestos, United Action members furthermore conducted public oath taking rallies in mid-April a the “Monument of heroes” on Tian’anmen square, where some 800 students swore to “strike down the five black classes”, see Hongdaihui zhengfa gongshe wenge jianxun bianshangb (ed.), Polan “Liandong”, in: Wenge jianxun zengkan 53, 18 April 1967, 6.

\(^{307}\) Thus on 26 April 1967 about 100 members gathered at CCRG liaison station at the Palace of Culture and by signing the protest with their own blood requested to be received by the CCRG members, yet to no avail, see Hongdaihui zhengfa gongshe wenge jianxun bianshengb, Liandong dongtai, in: Wenge jianxun zengkan 62, 6 May 1967, 4.
instrumentability of United Action as examples of Liu Shaoqi’s and Deng Xiaoping’s “reactionary capitalist line” (资产阶级反动路线). With the fall of United Action the attacks on the “backstage bosses” Liu and Deng were stepped up. Thus when the CCRG collectively visited the exhibition on 8 March 1967, Kang Sheng upon wandering through the spacious garden and exquisite architecture remarked, “Here one can see at one glance from which divide United Action and revisionism have emerged.”

The case of United Action thus presented the CCRG with the possibility of publicly criticizing the “biggest person in power taking the capitalist road”, State Chairman Liu Shaoqi and his representatives on local and provincial levels.

A Red Ocean

United Action, however, was not the only organization that employed the cult for its own purposes. The Beijing Aviation Institute Red Flag, an organization that fostered a close relationship with CCRG members, in December 1966 called for the beautification and revolutionization of the cityscape by turning the whole country into a “Red Ocean” (红海洋).

While Mao portraits and quotations had already become omnipresent items, within a few days in late December 1966 houses and walls vanished under thick red oil paint, causing a severe lack of red paint by the end of the year. Mao, however, was not very pleased by these cult extravagancies. On 30 December, the CCP Center therefore passed a directive forbidding similar activities as they had resulted in the opposite of praise to the Chairman.

“According to different reports from the populace, lately a number of Party organs and departments in the city on the pretext of ‘writing Chairman Mao quotations’, and ‘beautifying the city’s appearance’ etc. have in a large fashion conducted the so called ‘Red Ocean’ by which is meant the use of red oil paint to color the great doors and huge wall sections all in red, sometimes even forcing the populace, household by household, to come up for the costs. In a number of villages apart from the ‘Red Ocean’ large memorial archways have been erected. Furthermore, a number of persons in power taking the capitalist road and others supporting the reactionary capitalist line have tried on purpose to use this method to prevent the populace from sticking big character posters due to lack of space and thus [tried] to hide their crimes of opposing Mao Zedong Thought. This kind of method does not only completely violate the style of hard work and plain living advocated by Comrade Mao Zedong since the very beginning but presents an evil act of preventing big character posters and opposing the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.”

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308 A description of the exhibitions content can be found in Shoudou dazhuan yuanxiao hongdaihui/Cuihui fan geming zuzhi “Liandong” zhanlanhui (eds.), Cuihui fan geming zuzhi “Liandong” zhanlanhui. Neirong jieshao, August 1967.
309 Zhongyang wenge canguan ba yi xueixiao “liandong zuixing zhanlan” shi de jianghua, 8 March 1967, CCRD.
310 Yan Fan, Da chuanlian. Yi chang shiwuqianlie de zhengzhi lüyou, Beijing: Jingguan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1993, 156f.
311 Zhongfa [66] 629, Zhonggong zhongyang, guowuyuan guanyu zhizhi dagao suowei “hongse haiyang” de tongzhi, 30 December 1960, CCRD.
Up to this point, the instrumentalization of symbolic power had remained a local phenomenon, for example by writing Mao quotations on historical artefacts in order to save them from being destroyed. By the end of 1966, however, the constant twists in policy line as well as the growing rivalry for political support and power among the mass organizations resulted in a drastic change in the character of the cult. The cult was increasingly instrumentalized to justify the attacks on opposing organizations or to purge high-ranking communist cadres. Stimulated by CCRG members, special groups were formed to investigate past speeches and actions of CCP leaders in order to produce incriminating evidence. While the first collections still had the form of previous criticism articles, committees made up of various Red Guard organizations from late January onwards started to compile quotes from texts and speeches under specific headlines. The most heinous crimes were assembled under the first rubric “Opposing Mao Zedong” followed by a section entitled “Opposing Mao Zedong Thought” before leading on to opposition to Lin Biao, the CCRG, the Cultural Revolution, the Great Leap Forward and other topics. By printing the “correct viewpoints” of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and Lin Biao quotations in opposition to the incriminating evidence, every deviation from a sentence Mao had been on the record with thus potentially could be interpreted as a counterrevolutionary crime. Jubilant articles and graphic images of Mao and his thought therefore still continued to appear in the Red Guard tabloids but the medial cult increasingly came to function as a kind of aesthetical façade. As any critical word previously voiced with respect to Mao or his thought now presented a political time bomb that could decide about the future fate of an individual, the active expounding of the cult and its employment in factional struggles as a safeguard against possible accusations replaced the former pop-star like craze around the Chairman.

In Red Guard tabloids that in terms of publication numbers came to reach their peak in the first half of 1967 when in Beijing alone 575 new tabloids started publishing compared to 120 tabloids that had appeared the previous year, the content came to be dominated by internal discussions and feuds with other organizations based on information gathered through nationwide alliances and independent Red Guard intelligence networks. Within these internal publications, usually entitled Trends (动态) or transcripts of higher level Party

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315 Thanks to Michael Schoenhals for alerting me about the importance of this source type.
committee meetings, the cult rhetoric as such played nearly no role at all. From 1967 onwards, the cult came to be used by local groups for their own purposes, ultimately resulting in cult anarchy. The purge of Party committees that had started with the establishment of the short lived Shanghai Commune in January 1967 came to destroy the organizational foundations of the Party-state: the local Party cells and committees. The steering of the Cultural Revolution therefore had to rely even more on symbolic devices like speeches and study meetings to communicate the newest directions at the CCP Center to a wider audience. With the call to seize power from all capitalist-roaders within the Party, China delved into the most chaotic period after the founding of the People’s Republic and the cult was to play an ever more important role.
PART III

Cult and Discipline
The first months of 1967 witnessed a drastic widening of the impact of the Cultural Revolution. While middle and high school students had played a dominant part in the early stages of the movement, it now spread within production units and the countryside after lifting the official restrictions on forming independent organizations in December 1966.¹ The CCP leadership de facto allowed for the creation of rivalling organizations that resulted in violent clashes about resources of power such as Party institutions, propaganda devices, and military equipment. At the same time, the Red Guards were to participate in short term military training to secure the concordance of their thoughts and actions with the aims of the Cultural Revolution. The parallel trends of employing the cult for disciplinary functions through the PLA and the increasing lack of state control fostered multiple ways of staging and instrumentalizing the image of the Chairman for different purposes. While up to the Red Ocean campaign in December 1966 the main way of expounding the cult had been its rhetoric, the physical presence of icons of power in form of statues, badges, and posters now grew indomitable despite the efforts of the CCP Center to restrict the spreading of what was referred to as “formalism” (形式主义). The non-definite content of the revolutionary symbols invoked in different settings came to be displayed with increasing clarity from April 1967 onwards when factionalism among the masses grew ever more pronounced. In order to regain control over the factionalized patchwork of revolutionary groups and to quell the growing civil unrest, the CCP returned to the methods of emotional and exegetical bonding re-invoked since 1959 in the PLA. But this time it was to take place on an infinitely larger scale. Basically every Chinese citizen had to take part in the guided study of Mao texts that was organized from central study classes for the provincial top leadership down to household study classes within families. This third part demonstrates the disciplinary function the cult assumed during the re-establishment of the Party-state, when the Cultural Revolution turned from a mass movement into “moving the masses”.² After tracing the measures to end the nearly complete cult anarchy in the first half of 1967 by way of relying on military force, the forms of the everyday worship and its rituals will be placed in historical perspective. Finally the most important stages of the slow process of curbing the cult between the Ninth Party Congress and Mao’s death shall be described.

¹ MacFarquhar/Schoenhals, Mao’s Last Revolution, 143f.
Chapter Seven: Re-establishing Political and Symbolical Order

The silent appearances during the eight receptions of the revolutionary masses had elevated the image of Mao Zedong as the “great helmsman, great leader, great commander, and great teacher” of the Chinese Revolution to previously unfathomed heights. But simultaneously, Mao’s image had become devoid of content. Mao had not provided the movement with a blueprint of how the Cultural Revolution was to be conducted, nor had he delivered any speeches in public that would have offered a coherent vision of his aims. The remaining Party cadres and members of mass organizations thus could only rely on the often vague official guidelines published in the Party press and either risk an own interpretation or wait for the seldom impartial exegesis conducted by members of Mao’s camarilla. During the course of the movement, the instrumental character of the cult serving as a means to arouse the masses and strike down holders of Party offices came to be widely recognized. The raids of high Party official’s homes had further supplied Red Guard organizations with original texts of Mao that had not been censored and reworked by the Party authorities. The access to highly restricted internal materials provided the rebel organizations with large numbers of original Mao speeches and texts that were published in various editions entitled “Long Live Mao Zedong Thought” between 1967 and 1969. By publishing Mao’s often coarse and musing comments, usually deleted in the official versions, a number of new aspects were added to the sacrosanct image of Mao fostered in the Party media and provided the base for new interpretations, most of which, however, were not aimed at deriving a stringent philosophical system but at immediate political instrumentability. The loss of the Party’s monopoly to define the exact nature of Mao Zedong Thought had led to the emergence of contradictory and conflated usages of Mao’s image through different groups, of “waving the Red Flag to knock down the Red Flag”. Regaining control necessitated the re-establishment of authoritative guidelines about which texts and policy lines should be studied. With the Party organizations rendered by and large defunct, the only way of establishing order was the reliance on the organisational capacities of the PLA.

“Three Supports, Two Militaries”

The first measure to unify the perception of the present situation and to regulate the behaviour of the Red Guard organizations was presented by the instigation of short-term military training through Central Document Zhongfa [67] 2. Mao Zedong in a short comment to Lin

3 Zhongfa [67] 2, Zhonggong zhongyang/Guowuyuan guanyu dui da zhong xuexiao geming shisheng jinxing duanqi junzheng xunlian de tongzhi, 31 December 1966, CCRD.
Biao in mid-December 1966 had requested to strengthen the principles of the “Four Firsts” and the “Eight Rules of Discipline” among the students. During a period of 20 days, advanced military activists in the study of Mao Zedong Thought tried to refashion the outlook of the Red Guards in congruence with the newest Party directives. As a result, between 20 January and 10 February 1967, 4105 military cadres conducted military training for some 22,685 students in five of the country’s most prestigious universities. The study activists had not been specifically trained for the task and started out according to the modus of inner-military political education. A short booklet compiled by an “East is Red Institute” in December 1966 and republished for military training in January 1967, provides a clue on how political education work was conducted. In a series of stream-of-consciousness like texts and graphs the primary contents of Mao Zedong Thought and political education were taught along with general rules of correct behaviour. Furthermore, the military cadres made use of the whole arsenal of techniques of “living study and application” that had been refined over the years and ranged from comparisons between past and present, visits to revolutionary model communes, to cultural performances. Military training became popular for a short time among middle school students, while leaders of large university factions like Kuai Dafu soon criticized the restraining behaviour of military cadres and accused them of behaving “even more like work groups than the work groups themselves”.

Mao approved of the unifying effects of political education through military training. He had a report about the experiences of the Tianjin Yan’an Middle School distributed nationwide, where the establishment of study classes through the military had been used as groundwork for the unification of the contending factions. The scope of military involvement was thus widened considerably. In April 1967, no less than 53,000 PLA cadres were daily involved in conducting military training in altogether 3091 educational units. In his comment on the Tianjin experiences, Mao had advised to proceed by means of establishing trial units first and then to implement the “Three-in-One combination” made up jointly of

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4 Zhonggong zhongyang pizhuan Mao zhuxi guanyu yuanxiao he dang, zheng, jun, min jiguan junxun de zhishi ji liang ge fujian, 19 February 1967, CCRD.
5 Dongfang hong zhanxiao, Xuexi jiefangjun zhengzhi gongzuo jingyan, December 1966. A translated version of an identical edition published by the Industry and Transport Political Department of the Beijing East City Temporary Party Committee can be found in Schoenhals (ed.), *China’s Cultural Revolution*, 65-75.
6 In a discussion with students from Beijing Normal University Middle School No.1 Chen Boda received requests from the students to send military cadres in order to help with the training, see Chen Boda yu Beijing shifan daxue yi fu shifan daxue yi fujian, 6 February 1967, CCRD.
7 Zhou Enlai nianpu 3, 151.
8 Zhongfa [67] 85, Zhonggong zhongyang zhuanfa Mao zhuxi pizhuan de “Tianjin Yan’an zhongxue yi jiaoxueban wei jichu shixian quanxuan da lianhe he gonggu, fazhan hongweibing de tihui” ji fujian, 8 March 1967, CCRD.
representatives of revolutionary cadres, the PLA, and the masses as the new guiding principle in all units. Mao’s short comment, made public on the first anniversary of the report’s internal circulation on 8 March 1968, was retrospectively declared to be his “great strategic plan” [伟大的战略部署] on how to successfully unite the contending factions. But as the need for re-publication after one year revealed, proclamation and implementation varied greatly.

The military training was only a small part of the importance the PLA assumed in early 1967. The call for power seizure in the first days of January had made the political situation increasingly desperate. During the first three weeks of January 1967, unchecked power seizures through competing factions occurred all over the country. The main objects of struggle were naturally resources of power: political institutions, broadcasting networks, military equipment, monetary institutions, and storage facilities. The official Party line remained vague. On 8 January, Mao Zedong in a discussion with the CCRG members had approved of the power seizures at the Wenhui bao and the Liberation Daily in Shanghai and allowed for making the seizures public. As a consequence, political actors on the central and local level hurried to organize trusted factions to assume control. The fights for power at the Tianjin Broadcasting Station are a good example for this situation in flux and the different networks trying to secure power. On 11 January, the CCP Center had officially approved of seizing power from capitalist-roaders in broadcasting stations but simultaneously ordered mass organizations to leave the stations and to hand over control to the local military. The circular reached the Tianjin Broadcasting Station on 13 January, one day after power had been assumed by the “Rebel command” (造反指挥部), a minority faction among the station workers. On 14 January the local military district dispatched a military unit to take over control. Yet no agreement was reached and a series of conflicts and clashes between both parties ensued. Meanwhile in the capital, CCRG member Qi Benyu on early 17 January met with representatives from rebel organizations and liaison personnel from various Red Guard organizations in the Great Hall of the People to discuss the question of power seizures. At the end of the discussion, Qi upon answering the query of the liaison representative of the Tianjin University “13 August” organization stated that part of the Tianjin City Committee seemed to be involved in conspirative activities and should be purged. He advised to form alliances among the mass organizations and to seize power. Qi’s “directive” was relayed the same day by phone to the “13 August” headquarters and was followed by a number of hurried

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10 See Mao wengao 12, 250f and Mao zhuxi guanyu wuchanjieji wenhua da geming de weida zhanliu bushu de zhishi, in: People's Daily, 8 March 1968, 1.
11 Zhongfa [67] 18, Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu guangbo diantai wenti de tongzhi, 11 January 1967, CCRD.
12 Qi Benyu jiejian gongren zaofanpai daibiao shi de jianghua, 17 January 1967, CCRD.
meetings and the formation of alliances in Tianjin. The final decision to seize power was taken during a meeting on 19 January 1967, after a member of the “13 August” liaison staff in Beijing had by phone reported on a recent number of power seizures in the capital and relayed the message that most partner organizations were convinced that action should be taken in Tianjin as well. A comprehensive plan to assume control of the city committee, the local Public Security Bureau, the official newspaper, and the broadcasting station was quickly agreed upon. The task of seizing power at the broadcasting station rested with the “13 August” organization. The following day, “13 August” members reached an agreement with the commanding military officer and were allowed to enter the station on the condition that they would not enter the broadcasting room, not destroy any machinery and, most important, not interrupt the “Chairman’s voice” in order to broadcast “own stuff.” According to the recollections of the commanding officer during a revision of verdicts four years later, the agreement between both sides worked well. Unlike the “Rebel Command”, the Red Guards followed the instructions of the military and tried to achieve a unified command between all involved parties, just as they had assured Qi Benyu during the discussion. Yet, although the “Rebel Command” and “13 August” had previously cooperated on other issues, no agreement was reached, and the rebels were removed from power with the aid of the military. On 24 January, the rebels again assumed partial power before finally being defeated by a large coalition under the leadership of “13 August” on 26 January. After securing power for the second time, the Red Guards handed over power to the local commanders who exerted military control the following day according to Zhongfa [67] 29. The rebel forces on 29 January in a telegram directly appealed to the CCRG to clarify the “counterrevolutionary incident” but to no avail. Only four years later would the power seizure of “13 August” be declared counterrevolutionary as it had been conducted on behalf of the “black backstage boss” Qi Benyu, who had been incriminated and arrested in February 1968.

One day after the Tianjin University “13 August” had seized power for the first time on 20 January 1967, a request was sent by a rebel faction in Anhui province asking for PLA support to securely convene a criticism session against the head of the provincial revolutionary committee Li Baohua. Mao redirected the appeal to Lin Biao with the comment that the military should support the revolutionary masses. “Hereafter, whenever a truly

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14 You guan “1.20” duoquan de yuanshi cailiao, December 1971.
16 Zhongfa [67] 29, Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu guangbo diantai wenti de buchong zhishi, 23 January 1967, CCRD.
17 Tianda wuxian dianxi zhuan'anzu, “1.20” duoquan diaocha xiaojie.
revolutionary [organization] requests the assistance and support of the PLA, it should be granted. The supposed non-intervention is a fake; [the PLA] has long before become involved.”\textsuperscript{18} With Lin Biao’s approval, the CCP Center on 23 January issued a directive, which called upon the PLA to assist the revolutionary masses in seizing power.\textsuperscript{19} Distinguishing the “truly revolutionary” masses from the “conservatives”, however, created a nearly impossible situation for PLA commanders as the Tianjin example revealed. Because no definite orders had been issued which faction was to be supported, the choice of local commanders was basically restricted to the “freedom of choosing which error to commit”.\textsuperscript{20} In Qinghai province, Vice-Political Commissar Zhao Yongfu was made responsible for the “23 February Incident” during which at least 169 civilians and 4 soldiers died in a clash for power over the provincial newspaper \textit{Qinghai Daily}.\textsuperscript{21} In Shandong province, the local army had to switch its support from one faction to another because the latter found the approval of the CCRG as was communicated to its leader Wang Xiaoyu through Kang Sheng’s son Zhang Zishi.\textsuperscript{22} Support through the military presented local factions with the ultimate support needed for power seizure. In cases were the local PLA commanders openly came to support a majority faction like in Heilongjiang, Shanxi, or Guizhou province, revolutionary committees headed by military personnel were established within weeks. The early established revolutionary committees considerably varied in size from the one’s to be formed post-1967, as they could accommodate a larger number of members from competing factions. Thus the Heilongjiang Revolutionary Committee consisted of a working staff of 1470 members while the Hubei Committee established a year later received only the approval for 200 of the proposed 1500 staff through the CCP Center.\textsuperscript{23}

The growing chaos did not remain without criticism from within the Party. On 16 February 1967 during a meeting of the occasional caucus that had come to replace the Politburo in the Huairen Hall, veteran cadres like Tan Zhenlin, Chen Yi, and Ye Jianying sharply attacked the policies of the Cultural Revolution and especially the tactics of the CCRG to purge old cadres one by one. Yao Wenyuan and Zhang Chunqiao relayed minutes

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Mao wengao} 12, 197.
\textsuperscript{20} Li Ke/Hao Shengzhang, “\textit{Wenhua dageming} zhong de renmin jiefangjun”, Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi ziliao chubanshe, 1989, 243.
\textsuperscript{22} Li/Hao, “\textit{Wenhua dageming} zhong de renmin jiefangjun”, 235.
\end{footnotesize}
of the meeting to Mao Zedong the same night. Mao’s reacted brusquely. He called a meeting of the Politburo, which de facto turned out to be its last formal gathering before it came to be replaced by the informal “Central Caucus” (中央碰头会议) and made clear that whoever attacked the CCRG, criticized him personally. Like many times before Mao called upon his perceived opponents to assume power and try their luck to rule China while he himself and Lin Biao, represented at the meeting through his wife Ye Qun, would once more climb the Jinggang Mountains and build a new army.

Meanwhile the CMC between 26 February and 25 March met in Beijing to discuss the impact of the new tasks of the PLA. On 19 March 1967 a directive was passed that defined the tasks as “Three supports, two militaries”, namely the support of the Left, workers, and peasants, as well as military training and control. After the crushing of the Party-state, the PLA had to assume regulatory functions in all parts of society. While supporting the Left clearly caused most political trouble, assisting workers and peasants in the process of production required by far the largest amount of men and resources. In March and April 1967 over 100,000 soldiers joined civilian units to supervise industrial production and even more soldiers were deployed to help with sowing and ploughing. Securing agricultural production remained one of the main concerns of Zhou Enlai. Central document Zhongfa [67] 58, published in form of an open letter on 20 February, called upon the whole rural populace to mobilize sufficient personnel for the spring ploughing, but still up to 739,000 soldiers had to assist the rural production brigades in early 1967 in order to secure an adequate amount of food. Simultaneously, military control was to be established in all important units including broadcasting stations, transportation units, and military research institutes, leading to the obscure situation of military control in military institutions such as the GPD. By May 1967, military control had come to be extended to 7752 units and special protection had been granted to another 2145 units. Without the PLA’s omnipresent efforts to restore order, the PRC would have no longer been able to keep up even the basic most state functions. Until the disbanding of the campaign in 1972, all in all 2.8 million soldiers came to take part in the “three supports, two militaries”. In his concluding speech before the CMC conference Lin Biao on 20 March contrasted the Cultural Revolution with previously fought wars or major epidemics. Despite the present unrest and seemingly chaotic situation, Lin asserted, that the

25 Zhongfa [67] 58, Zhonggong zhongyang gei quanguo nongcun renmin gongshe pingxia zhongnong he geji ganbu de xin, 20 February 1966, CCRD. The letter was distributed via airplane in the whole countryside. 170 planes of the Air Force dropped some 13,390,000 copies see Li/Hao, “Wenhua dageming” zhong de renmin jiefangjun, 239.
27 Ibid. 176.
losses had been the “tiniest, tiniest, tiniest” compared to previous campaigns and the success been the “greatest, greatest, greatest”. 28 The violent phase of the Cultural Revolution, however, was just about to get started.

Monuments of Belief and Cult Anarchy

In early April 1967 the experiences of the military involvement were re-evaluated. The call upon the PLA to support the Left had resulted in numerous appeals from mass organizations, which had previously been suppressed like the Tianjin “Rebel Command”. On 1 April, the CCP Center announced that no military unit was entitled to label mass organizations as “counterrevolutionary” or to favour one faction at the expense of others. 29 Instead of “supporting factions” the PLA was to “support the masses”. The new directive effectively returned the situation to the previous state of flux since again it became completely unclear who had the power to define Left from Right. CCRG members Jiang Qing and Chen Boda in a meeting with high and middle school representatives on 3 April took up the new spirit and criticized the PLA for failing to correctly support the revolutionary masses. 30 Open criticism of the military had up to this point not been feasible. Now military leaders, i.e. in the autonomous region of Inner Mongolia, were replaced for having falsely supported one faction. Attacks on military district headquarters and robberies of weapons became increasingly common. By August 1967, some 1175 cases of theft had been reported and the stolen items included 21,600 rifles and 78 anti-aircraft guns. 31 In Hunan, 28 tons of gunpowder were stolen from a military factory and the PLA had little chance of countering the attacks because the use of any kind of weapon against the masses, except the Little Red Book, had been strictly forbidden.

The immediate consequence of the change in line was the re-emergence and strengthening of factions, this time no longer between “conservatives” like United Action and rebel organizations but among the rebel factions themselves. In Beijing, middle school students formed a radical “3 April” faction the same night as Jiang and Chen had announced their criticism. The following day others established the rather moderate “4 April” faction. Among Beijing high school students, two large alliances emerged, the “Heaven” and “Earth” factions along lines of personal and institutional linkages. The period between April and

28 Lin Biao, Zai jun yishang ganbu huiyi de jianghua, 20 March 1967, CCRD.
29 Zhongfa [67] 117, Zhonggong zhongyang zhuanfa zhongyang guanyu Anhui wenti de jueding ji fujian, 1 April 1967, CCRD.
30 Zhongyang shouchang jiejian dazhuan yuanxiao he zhongdeng xuexiao daibiao de jianghua, 3 April 1967, CCRD.
31 Deng, Renmin jiefangjun de “sanzhi liangjun”, 183.
September 1967 accounted for the high tide of publishing and information-gathering activities on the side of the mass organizations. The volatile situation made the employment of the cult to prove a faction’s adherence to the Chairman’s line an important instrument. While in the past declarations had been the most important form of demonstrating allegiance, the upcoming anniversary of the Cultural Revolution and numerous of its important directives provided the background for commemorative activities. From May 1967 onwards, the first large scale Mao statues were erected, without initial support or funding from the state leadership. Built on behalf of the large student organizations, usually on campus, the statues were an important means of demonstrating loyalty by way of celebrating the longevity of the Cultural Revolution’s success and the Chairman’s unquestioned authority.

The first statue was unveiled on the campus of Qinghua University on 4 May 1967. It had been built upon the decision of the Qinghua Jinggangshan Headquarters within little more than four weeks. The Jinggangshan announcement to erect a Mao statue of 25 March placed a similar emphasis on the nobility of its objective and the determination of its builders:

“We Jinggangshan people love the great leader Chairman Mao the most! We want to eradicate the old revisionist Qinghua and construct a new communist Qinghua! We precisely want to greatly enhance Mao Zedong Thought and establish the absolute authority of Chairman Mao in a big way!”

Despite the fact that most of the students had little knowledge of how to erect a 7.1m high statue made of concrete, its builders heavily quoted from Mao’s works on the superior influence of the human factor. The chosen height was not arbitrary of course. “7.1” could be read as both an allegory of the Party’s traditional founding date, 1 July, or of the homophonous word for “uprising” (起义). The work was made a test of political determination and relied heavily on the help of other students, teachers, and workers numbering up to 5000 altogether, not all of which took part in construction work though. Cultural performances like singing quotation songs, liaison work with other organizations, especially those skilled in art work, and searching for relevant photographic source material (which finally was provided by the Photography and Collection Department of the Great Hall of the People) were other ways of supporting the progress and kept the crowd busy. Lin Biao contributed an inscription of the “Four Greats” (teacher, leader, commander, and helmsman)

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32 Employing revolutionary commemorations for political ends had a long tradition in revolutionary China and been specifically listed among the items of the CMC “Resolution on political work in the PLA” from 1960, see Zhonggong zhongyang junwei kuoda huiyi, Guanyu jiaqiang jundui zhengzhi sixiang gongzuo de jueyi, 20 October 1960, 14.

33 Mao zhuxi yongyuan liushuai women qianjin! Ji Mao zhuxi quanshen juxing suxiang de luocheng, in: Jinggangshan, 6 May 1967, 5f.
that was copied down as an engraving in the monument’s socket. The most difficult task for the construction team, however, remained to make the model resemble all four characteristic features of Mao Zedong that usually were referred to only semantically. The statue itself was finished on 1 May 1967 as scheduled. It showed Mao in standing fashion, wearing a military cap with a red star and clad in a long army coat, moved by strong winds blowing towards him. The Chairman’s right arm was outstretched to sketch out the way of the revolution. The whole location was finished three days later. The link with the student movement of May Fourth in 1919, which the ceremony invoked, was arbitrary and mostly owed to the fact that the site had not been finished as planned on 1 May. Representatives from many other mass organizations attended the celebrations but not from the CCP Center or the CCRG.

The instrumental value of establishing statues as a symbol of firm belief in Mao Zedong Thought was often directed against immediate rivals of power within the universities. In the case of Qinghua University it was the “14 April” faction that contested the supremacy of the Jinggangshan Headquarters and which finally resulted in armed conflicts during the “Hundred day armed struggle” until order was restored on campus in mid-1968. The example of employing statues to demonstrate loyalty, however, spread rapidly among other universities. The adjacent Beijing University on 1 June unveiled its own statue just inside of the West Gate, surpassing the Qinghua statue by one meter. Within weeks, factions all over the country started to build their own statues. The already existing statues provided models that were scrutinized in great detail by special delegations. Most organizations, however, tried not simply to copy the models but to single out their own statue through various means. The first statue cast with aluminium at the Beijing Mining Institute for example was considered a huge innovation. It was unveiled on Mao’s seventy-fourth birthday, 26 December 1967, and presented the ultimate combination of revolutionary numerology. The statue itself was 7.1 m in height and thus combined the previously mentioned allegories. The socket on which it was placed was exactly 5.16 m in remembrance of the “May 16” directive that had ultimately presented the starting point of the Cultural Revolution. Yet the final clue was the combined height: 12.26 m, an acronym for Mao’s birthday. Due to its ingenious construction, its measures were taken up during the second wave of building Mao statues in mid-1968 in the name of the newly established revolutionary committees, resulting in the standard height of 12.26 m of most statues.

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34 Tang, Yi ye zhi qiu, 1-32.
Given the examples of the Kim’s in North Korea or Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the construction of leader statues is commonly understood as an expression of totalizing state power and cherishing personal vanities. In the Chinese case, however, the circumstances are more complicated. As mentioned before, Mao Zedong had in the early stages of the PRC on a couple of occasions interdicted the setting up of statues and other visible phenomena of a leader cult. The cult in Mao’s opinion was rather of instrumental value. It could be employed to attract followers and to oppose rivals within the CCP, but he did not indulge in its aesthetic representations. Even after he had effectively legitimated a “cult of truth” as a non-bureaucratic form of rule in 1958 and thus valued personal loyalties above constitutional restraints, he remained aware of the differences between true loyalty and mere performances. In a talk with Ho Chih-minh in mid-1966 he proudly claimed that unlike in Vietnam, were everyone had grown accustomed to call “Long live” in Ho’s presence, the same held not true for China.

“I advise you, not all of your subjects are loyal to you. Perhaps most of them are loyal, but maybe a small part only verbally wishes you “long live”, while in reality they wish you a premature death. When they shout “long live”, you should beware and analyze [the situation]. The more they praise you, the less you can trust them. This is a very natural rule.”

Just a month later, Mao in his letter to Jiang Qing had expressed mistrust in the use of the cult terminology employed by Lin Biao, but he had refrained from making the criticism public, aware of its instrumental expedience. In his opinion, Lin had employed the cult as a tool to unleash the emotions of the masses against revisionist influences, and open criticism would have resulted in strengthening his opponents. If he conducted the kind of private analysis he had advised Hu to undertake in the face of the exaggerated praise, his conclusion in May 1966 must have been that he could count on Lin’s personal loyalty irrespective of his public utterances. By mid-1967, however, the reliance on Mao’s inflated prestige by various parties had already been rendered beyond the Chairman’s immediate control. He seems to have taken notice of the new trend to build statues only in early July 1967. On 4 July, the Briefings on letters and complaints during the Cultural Revolution No.280, an internal publication compiled by a section of the CCP General Office Secretariat that relayed general trends within the public opinion as mirrored in letters, phone calls, and complaints to the CCP leadership, reported about the wave of establishing Mao statues among the masses. Mao reacted on the recent phenomenon by commenting on the back of the report: “This kind of phenomenon wastes manpower and money; what is useless, is harmful. If it is not stopped, it

37 Mao Zedong, Zai Hangzhou tong Hu Zhiming tongzhi de jianghua (jielu), 10 June 1966, CCRD.
will stir up a proneness to boasting and exaggeration.” He furthermore encouraged stopping the issuing of his previously unpublished speeches that had amongst others been conducted several times by students from the Beijing Mining Institute. Even after they had been reprimanded, they had continued to edit their “Long live Mao Zedong Thought” collections by sending staff to Changsha, the capital of Mao’s native province Hunan to have it printed there. Upon Mao’s comment Zhongfa [67] 219 was drafted in a meeting of the Central Caucus on 12 July and issued the following day:

“The strongly voiced request of the broad revolutionary masses to erect Chairman Mao statues truly derives from their unlimited hot love towards the great leader Chairman Mao. But, creating Mao Zedong statues is a grave political question. Every statue has to guarantee a high political and artistic quality in order to be passed on to the following generations. This is only possible, if it is carried out at the right time and place under the united supervision of the CCP Center. The current hectic activity of numerous mass organizations is inclined not only to produce economic losses but political losses as well. […] Furthermore, in various places previously unpublished speeches of Chairman Mao have been published, even comments to other persons and poetry have been included. The CCP Center reaffirms: All speeches, articles, documents, and poems of Chairman Mao that have previously not been made public, shall not be reproduced, printed, and distributed without the previous permission of Chairman Mao and the CCP Center.”

Interestingly, Lin Biao had shortly beforehand assessed the present situation as well and had come to quite different conclusions. Upon witnessing the upsurge of activities to construct statues of the Chairman, he perceived the military to be lacking behind in public worship and thus sensed the danger of losing the PLA’s avant-garde role in extolling the Chairman as well as his own status as best student of Mao Zedong Thought. On 28 June, Lin advised the GPD and the General Logistics Departments to follow the recent trend of constructing large Mao statues. “All representative military institutions that have a large courtyard or square should act accordingly”.

Preparations had already begun after the instruction had been sent to all units on 1 July. While Lin usually sent all of his decisions to Mao for approval beforehand, he this time waited another ten days before he submitted a draft to the Chairman, maybe hoping to present him with facts already. Mao returned the document to Lin with reference to the forthcoming central document. While Lin usually was highly astute in anticipating Mao’s judgement, this time he failed to sense accurately that the commodification of the cult had gone too far in Mao’s opinion.

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38 Mao wengao 12, 368.
39 Ibid. 369, n.1.
40 Zhongfa [67] 219, Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu jianzao Mao zhuxi suxiang wenti de zhishi, 13 July 1967, CCBD.
41 Mao wengao 12, 376, n.2.
The mechanisms brought forth by a system that had come to solely rely on personal loyalty and reliance on Mao Zedong Thought rendered CCP control over the cult ever more difficult as even Lin Biao was to experience. Shortly before advising the building of Mao statues within the PLA, Lin had tried to cope with the increasing worship of himself that had grown more pronounced since May 1967. In a personal letter to Zhou Enlai and the CCRG, Lin Biao on 16 June referred to recently staged performances during which not only the accustomed “[We] wish Chairman Mao eternal life” [祝毛主席万寿无疆] had been voiced but as well “[We] wish Vice-Chairman Lin good health forever” [祝林副主席永远健康]. Lin claimed that to “establish the absolute authority of Chairman Mao” was entirely correct but that his own person should be kept out of the public worship in order to “conform to objective reality”. Lin called upon the support of the CCRG and State Council in seeing to it that similar phrasings would not be tolerated in public documents or plays. He further requested to draft an official document to relay his opinion down to the county level. Michael Schoenhals has pointed out that Lin’s request was unusual, as he, being vice-chairman of the CCP and minister of defense, could have easily ordered the GPD to draft a similar directive. Zhou and the CCRG members did not grant him the favour, being aware of the fact that the public worship of Lin was an asset that at a later point could be turned against him. Thus Lin Biao in December 1967 again wrote a letter, this time resembling an official document but issued in Lin’s own name. In the letter, which he personally handed out to conference participants, Lin specifically interdicted the compilation of Quotations, plays, memoirs, and selected writings in his name, as well as the slogan to “establish the eminent authority of Vice-Chairman Lin”.

These early attempts to curb the cult did not result in the termination of all construction activities or the ending of slogans related to Lin Biao. The only tangible result was the implementation of a bureaucratic routine to grant official permission before construction work could be started. Fostering the prestige of powerful patrons within the

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42 Lin Biao, Gei Zhou zongli he zhongyang wenge xiaozu de yi feng xin, 16 June 1967, CCRD.
43 Schoenhals, Doing Things with Words, 41ff.
44 Lin Biao, Guanyu xuanchuan gongzuo de yi feng xin, 13 December 1967, CCRD. A substantial number of editions published under Lin Biao’s name had been witnessed since 1967, see for example Xi'an Jiaotong daxue geming weiyuanhui zhengzhibu ziliaozu (ed.), Lin Biao fu zhuxi yanlun zhai lu (gong neibu xuexi yong), Xi'an: [1969?]. Amongst them was a quasi-official edition, which according to a report compiled during the campaign to “criticize Lin Biao and Confucius” in 1974 had been compiled at the PLA Political Academy on request of Huang Yongsheng and was distributed as study material amongst others in the Navy by Deputy Political Commissar Zhang Xiuchuan, see Junzheng daxue pi Lin pi Kong bangongshi (ed.), Chedi pipan Lin Biao yi huo paozhi “Lin Biao yulu”, “Lin Biao jinianguan” zuixing dahui pipan fayan huiji, Beijing: Junzheng daxue, 1967, 1f.
45 A number of statues thus were interdicted due to the lack of artistic quality, for example at the Beijing Aviation Institute, see Zhou Enlai jiejian guofang kewei daibiao shi de jianghua, 20 April 1968, CCRD.
CCP leadership retained its value, not necessarily by gaining support from above this time, but by legitimizing oneself in the face of the masses that had come to take the attitude towards Mao Zedong and his thought as crucial criterion of loyalty. Utterances to cool down their respective cults by Mao or Lin could thus be interpreted as an expression of modesty on behalf of the leaders. In a long discussion, conducted in the middle of night by, amongst others, CCRG members Qi Benyu and Chen Boda with representatives from various Tianjin mass organizations on 8 September 1967, the question of whether the center approved of the construction of statues or would possibly even assist by providing raw materials was brought up. Qi answered by quoting from Zhongfa [67] 219 but was interrupted and asked whether he personally supported the building of statues. Qi replied that his personal attitude had nothing to do with this.

“If you ask me, I am only satisfied if I see Mao statues everywhere; but the Chairman does not approve of it. [We] should act according to the sayings of the Chairman. One sentence of Chairman Mao surpasses 10,000 [of our] sentences, we should always act according to the Supreme Instructions.”

The question of statues, however, had only been a minor aspect of the discussion, brought up by one of the many pretenders for political power. According to numerous letters sent directly to the CCRG, the situation in Tianjin had become anarchic. Frequent robberies and open sexual assaults had been reported to the authorities without resulting in any kind of consequence. During the often harsh discussion, the instrumental value of employing the sayings and image not only of the Chairman but of other leaders as well became a subject of debate. Chen Boda harshly criticized a Tianjin representative for violating the original meaning of one of Chen’s own speeches. At other times, representatives would interrupt the CCRG members’ speeches and read from the Quotations to prove the correctness of their standpoint. Chen Boda was particularly annoyed by attempts of different groups to establish “brand names” (名牌) for their organizations, thus trying to render them true Leftists in public perception, irrespective of the matter at hand. “‘Brand names’ are just like trademarks. Has the proletarian revolutionary faction been turned into a trademark?”

The difficulties of securing the CCP Center’s authority over the reproduction of its most crucial symbolic devices, namely Mao’s image and sayings, grew more pronounced during the following months and were by no means ended with the issuing of Zhongfa [67]

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46 Zhongyang shouzhang di liu ci jiejian Tianjin fu Jing daibiaotuan tanhua jiyao, 8 September 1967, CCRD.
47 Ibid.
219 and its renewal in September. The informal networks established by rebel organizations had by mid-1967 spread far enough to have assembled large amounts of unpublished speeches and works of Mao Zedong that continued to be distributed in separate volumes to bolster the Chairman’s “absolute authority” and concomitantly strengthened the position of their own organizations. In some cases, local reprints of Mao’s works would even carry slogans like “Strike down the revolutionary committee” or bear accusations against specific factions (“‘27 January’ stinks repugnant”) on the title page. Until the end of the year, the CCP Center alone issued another two circulars to restrict the reprint of materials and photographic representations not approved of by the Party. In Shanghai, a “clique of profiteers” was ousted that had published some 200 restricted Mao speeches in editions entitled *Important Documents* for pecuniary reasons. In other units “everyday life pictures” of Mao had been printed that were apt to contradict the Chairman’s petrified public image. The symbols of the cult thus had become part of ideological, political, and monetary interests. To illustrate the ways in which the cult symbols were employed in local conflicts, an example shall be provided from the southwestern province of Guizhou.

The Dafang Incident

The mountainous province of Guizhou had been one of the first to establish a provincial revolutionary committee. On 13 February 1967, power had been assumed under the leadership of Li Zaihan, a former vice-political commissar of the Guizhou Military Region and member of the Guizhou Cultural Revolution Leadership Small Group. Li had behind the back of the provincial leadership sent 18 telegrams to the CCRG and Lin Biao which had been critical of the local situation but were received favourably in the capital. Mao Zedong had given his *placet* upon a convention of “trustworthy” leaders of the military region, the

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48 Zhongfa [67] 298, Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu renzhen guanche Zhongyang “7.13” zhishi de tongzhi, 13 September 1967, CCRD.

49 See the examples from Ningxia province mentioned in Zhongfa [67] 222, Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu yinshua Mao zhuxi zhuzuo bishun yansu de tongzhi, 18 July 1967, CCRD.

50 Zhongfa [67] 321, Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu Shangh ai shi geweihui chahuo yi ge feifa bianyin, fanmei Mao zhuxi zhuzuo de touji-daoba jitian de tongzhi, 20 October 1967, CCRD.

51 Zhongfa [67] 357, Zhonggong zhongyang/Zhongyang wen ge guanyu yan jin zi fanyin wei gongkai fabiaoguo de Mao zhuxi zhaopian de tongzhi, 27 November 1967, CCRD. While control over the spread of the Chairman’s words and image by April 1969 had by and large been re-established, non-official printing kept worrying the CCP until the Chairman’s death. In 1972, an additional circular about the unauthorized print of Mao works in Shandong and Shanxi declared that “those who fabricate rumours and mislead the people to achieve counterrevolutionary objectives” would be severely punished, see Zhongfa [72] 37, Zhongyang bangqiongting guanyu zhongshen jinzi shan zi fanyin, chuanchao shang wei gongkai fabiaoguo de Mao zhuxi he zhongyang fuze tongzhi de wenzhang, jiuhua, shici, zhaopian de tongzhi, 12 September 1972, HPA 855-11-9.

former city committee, and mass organizations in the capital.\textsuperscript{53} He even turned the modus of having the potential future leadership assemble in Beijing first to negotiate the specific terms of provincial governance into the standard procedure of accepting later revolutionary committees. The CCP Center formally approved of the provincial leadership only on 20 December 1967, but Mao’s open support for Li Zaihan, whom he even mentioned by name in the short directive, presented Li with enormous revolutionary credit and he did his best to instrumentalize this symbolic capital. Li missed no occasion to display the utter devotion of the Guizhou Revolutionary Committee to Mao Zedong. In the congratulatory telegram sent by his government to the CCP Center the day after the revolutionary committee had been established, he added no less than four superlatives when addressing the “most, most, most, most beloved great teacher, great leader, great commander, and great helmsman Chairman Mao”.\textsuperscript{54} But while Li proved to be apt in displaying his faithfulness, he made use of Mao’s prestige for securing his own position to an unusual extent and resorted to harsh measures to sort out potentially disloyal cadres. By 1968, he had his own quotations studied along the quotes of Mao and Lin, and the inclusion of “We wish Comrade Li Zaihan relative health” after the common “We wish Chairman Mao eternal life” and “We wish Vice-Chairman Lin eternal health”\textsuperscript{55} was to display his modesty while simultaneously being part of the triumvirate.

Immediately after the establishment of the Guizhou Revolutionary Committee, Li Zaihan was accused of suppressing factions that did not conform to his policies. Aided by the provincial government, a united Red Guard Congress (红代会) had been established on 10 April without distinguishing between “conservatives” and “rebels”. As a consequence, a number of rebel organizations attacked the meeting and during a large protest march the following day established the so called “11 April Combat Team”.\textsuperscript{56} Tensions between “11 April” and the “Support Red Faction”, which emerged as its major counterpart, quickly manifested themselves in a series of fights and insults. “11 April” lodged their complaints of

\textsuperscript{53} Mao wengao 12, 194.
\textsuperscript{54} Guizhou sheng geming weiyuanhui chengli shishi dahui, Gei Mao zhuxi de zhijing dian, 14 February 1967, in: Geming weiyuanhui hao, Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1968, 49. Only the telegram of the Heilongjiang revolutionary committee managed to add more superlatives in the title by addressing Mao as “Our most, most, most, most beloved great leader, the reddest, reddest, reddest red sun in our hearts, Chairman Mao”, see Heilongjiang sheng hongse zaofanzhe dalianhe duoquan shishidahui, Gei Mao zhuxi de zhijing dian, 31 January 1967, in: Geming weiyuanhui hao, Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1968, 55.
\textsuperscript{55} See the criticism voiced by members of the Beijing Aviation Institute, which had been sent down to factories in Guizhou province, in an open letter to Li Zaihan, see the reprint in Guizhou sheng gongdaihui changshe weiyuanhui xuanchuananzu, Guizhou sheng ge ji geming weiyuanhui bu duan gonggu he fazhan, in: Shancheng chunlei 27 (1968), 9.
being suppressed by the government by sending 20 of its members to Beijing in order to obtain support from the CCRG. The failure to even schedule a meeting with the busy Party leaders not only led to further vilifications from the side of the government-supported organizations, but as well to public advice from an anonymous “Warrior of the Geo-Chemical Institute”. In a letter from 15 May 1967, posted ten days later by the government in the Red Guard Committee’s mouthpiece “Red Guard”, he advised the rebels to “discard their juvenile thoughts and prepare for struggle”. By comparing the situation in Guizhou with Sichuan province where similar tendencies of employing “white terror” on the side of the state had been observed, the anonymous writer insightfully sketched out the ways of how to gain the CCP Center’s attention. As long as no major incidents were reported from Guizhou, the leadership would not consider the situation a problem and thus busy itself with solving urgent conflicts in other provinces. A significant change in the center’s perception of the local situation could only be brought about by uniting the rebel forces, by concentrating on a few major issues that would force the provincial government to display its real nature, and by establishing special propaganda forces to display the rebel’s organizational power in order to gain public support. Although the patronizing attitude of the author did not find unrelenting approval, the sketched out means were quickly adopted. The provincial government unintendedly multiplied the letter’s impact by publishing it as an example of counterrevolutionary conviction.

Between late May and August 1967 the factions became interlocked in a series of fierce battles during which they employed the Mao cult for contradictory objectives. In early July, the first wave of hostile activities reached its climax. A widely published incident took place in the small town of Dafang, located roughly 150 km northwest of the provincial capital Guiyang. Despite the official banning of free travel to exchange experiences, 38 members of the Guiyang Teacher’s University 11 April faction on 30 June 1967 set out on the pretext of celebrating the anniversary of the Party’s founding date with a partner organization in the city of Bijie. The “Mao Zedong Thought Revolutionary Committee of Guizhou” under Li Zaihan’s leadership, however, did not perceive their endeavour to be simple propagation of Mao Zedong Thought but to spread violence and factionalism in rural areas, thus violating

three of the Chairman’s supreme instructions “grasp revolution, promote production”,\(^{59}\) “return to study to conduct revolution”, and “end the exchange of experiences”.\(^{60}\) The government therefore informed the local Party organs about the rebel group’s arrival. As the bus approached Dafang city, a heterogeneous crowd organized by the local Party leadership intercepted it. According to “11 April” members, they were forced to a halt by a hostile mob that surrounded the bus, threw stones, and, after a worker had bruised his hand when smashing the glass of the driver’s window, started harassing the rebels. The depiction of the incident in tabloids assembled by organizations supportive of the government side varied considerably. The bus accordingly had not been stopped deliberately but forced to a halt because it had “failed to comply with local traffic regulations”.\(^{61}\) As the driver failed to stop at the local parking lot, the heavily damaged bus was pulled on the main street crossing of Dafang by a tractor.

During the ensuing five-day siege of the wrecked bus on the street crossing both factions staged propaganda activities to justify the correctness of their claims by reading sections from the *Quotations*. The “11 April” propaganda troupe invoked Mao’s dictum that “the basic truth of Marxism all goes back to one meaning: To rebel is justified”.\(^{62}\) Instead of attending the festivities of the Party’s founding anniversary in Bijie, they performed songs and rhymes in praise of the Chairman in the vehicle but were infuriated by the theft of a picture of “the reddest, reddest red sun in our hearts, Chairman Mao” and several “glistening” *Quotations* volumes, “one of the hoodlums even destroyed a copy”.\(^{63}\) The leadership of the surrounding crowd placed a propaganda car on the opposite site of the road and blasted Mao’s supreme directive “Return to study to make revolution” against their adversaries and advised them not to meddle with the business of local peasants.\(^{64}\) Besides rhetorical warfare, a few peasants, who had flocked into the city to join the spectacle every night after work and according to the rebels “had no clue about the real situation”,\(^{65}\) did their best to render the stay of the “11 April” members in Dafang uncomfortable. They would blast instruments to keep the rebels from falling asleep; open the busses top windows to let in the pouring rain or even urinate in it, and sexually harass the female team members through public surveillance when using the rest-rooms. As both factions could mount sufficient authoritative instructions, the


\(^{61}\) Ibid.


\(^{63}\) Ibid.

\(^{64}\) “411” xuyi zhizao “Dafang shijian” de zhixiang, 4.

\(^{65}\) Ibid.
situation turned into a stalemate until after four days the local groups won a decisive edge. On 3 July at noon, a “lower middle peasant” discovered that the Mao image on one of the “11 April” flags had been printed in black and faced the stick, while the organization’s name had been printed in bright red. To display the image of the Chairman in the color of revisionism was interpreted as a heinous crime that revealed the true conviction of the rebels. In an attempt to hide the flag, the students placed the flag “under their bottoms”, which according to the official statement, was the final straw to unleash the anger of the masses, resulting in physical confrontation.

As the situation was becoming tense on the spot, the news about the siege reached Guiyang, where immediately rescue forces were mustered. On 3 July, 400-500 “11 April” members captured twelve public buses with the assistance of a few workers, just to face a similar fate in the township of Huangnitang. A third rescue squad, consisting of only seven rebels plus two dozen peasants, who had been offered free transportation, capsized while crossing the Yachi River on 10 July, resulting in 22 death casualties. In the provincial capital Guiyang in the meantime, students from the “11 April” stronghold at the Guiyang Normal University staged their protests in front of the provincial revolutionary committee’s seat and read aloud an ultimatum to solve the Dafang Incident; otherwise “revolutionary activities on an even greater scale” would be taken into consideration. After being unable to schedule a reception with the leaders, the “11 April” members broke into the government courtyard, despite the efforts of the PLA guards that tried to keep them from smashing the doors by reading quotations from Chairman Mao, and started to conduct a silent hunger strike. It was continued the following day on the main traffic crossing of Guiyang. During the 78-hour “sit-in”, students from the capital and other sympathizers, totalling up to 5,000 persons, joined the local rebels. Ordinary citizens presented the protesters with “several hundred volumes of Mao’s Selected Works and Quotations” to express their support. The strike was finally ended on 10 July, after the provincial government had dispatched staff to

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66 Ibid. 4.
70 “Si yi yi” chongji sheng geming weiyuanhui, 3.
71 Similar forms of protest took place in many localities in August 1967 and have been recorded in some local annals, see for example the account of Zengcheng County in Guangdong province (Zengcheng shi difang zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (ed.), Zengcheng xian zhi, [Canton]: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1995, 566) or Gangquan County in Shaanxi province (Gangquan xian difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (ed.), Ganquan xian zhi, Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1993, 487).
investigate the Dafang affair and granted a safe return. The violence, however, did no cease. On 13 July, the rebels stormed the broadcasting station of the “Sixth June Combat Force” at the Guiyang Teacher’s College, destroyed the equipment, and assaulted the female working staff.\textsuperscript{73} Similar incidents continued without cessation.

Between July and September 1967, the situation in China was indeed beyond the control of the state, as Mao Zedong himself was later to profess. The PLA, the only force that commanded sufficient personnel to contain the anarchic situation, had been reprimanded for unduly favouring the “conservative” faction and thus was not to interfere with the movement unless ordered to from above. As the Wuhan Incident in mid-July revealed, when two CCRG members were captured by a “conservative” mass organization supported by local military commander Chen Zaidao, even the control over the PLA was beginning to fade. Mao Zedong himself pondered the thought of “arming the Left”. Mass organizations considered to be trustworthy like the Beijing Aviation Institute Red Flag were therefore presented with rifles by the Beijing Garrison.\textsuperscript{74} Just like the overall situation, the control over the image and works of Mao Zedong had by and large been lost by the CCP Center in mid-1967, resulting in cult anarchy as the Guizhou example reveals. All of the contending factions championed different quotations from Mao’s works, which due to the separation from their original contexts could be invoked in contradictory ways. CCRG member Wang Li, one of those captured by the Wuhan “million heroes” and to be purged shortly after as a scapegoat for the increasing attacks on the PLA, in a talk with representatives from the Sichuan “26 August” faction sharply renounced rumours that the movement should be conducted without the leadership of the CCP Center. He considered the establishment of the “absolute authority of Chairman Mao” to be the primary task of the movement by purging everyone who had contradicted Mao at any time. But establishing the universal rule of Mao Zedong Thought had become increasingly difficult due to the different connotations associated with it. Wang Li explicitly criticized the contradictory usage of Mao’s quotations.

“Recently a bad habit has arisen. Studying Chairman Mao’s works has been turned into a war of quotations with the aim of cursing people. Chairman Mao has repeatedly emphasized that the propagation of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought should be conducted by grasping its content and intellectual essence. When applying Mao Zedong Thought to solve problems, the field of vision should be broad and not be narrowed down to the tiny problems immediately a hand”.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{73} See the special edition of the \textit{Sixth June Battle News}, 17 July 1967, reprinted in: RGM 10, 4789-4792.
\textsuperscript{74} Schoenhals, Michael, \textit{Why Don’t We Arm the Left?}’ Mao’s Culpability for the Cultural Revolution’s ‘Great Chaos’ of 1967, in: The China Quarterly 182 (2005), 289f.
The fragmented political situation had to be resolved in one way or the other. But solving the factional disputes continued as long as the question of who would turn out to be the main beneficiary of Mao’s policies remained unclear. Different factions among the top leadership therefore vied for Mao’s support and political gains. Although supplied with nearly absolute power, Mao even during the high tide of the Cultural Revolution did not resort to a rule by fiat. He would watch a situation unfold and after having come to a decision would make use of the high-level power struggles to implement his policies, carefully trying to preserve a precarious balance between the factions. Given the anarchic situation, measures to regain control over both the political situation and the Party’s symbols of power presented no easy task. If Mao was to rely on brute force by ordering the PLA to restore order, the whole undertaking of the Cultural Revolution, which he had linked with his own fate in the most thorough fashion, would be rendered a farce. On the other hand, letting the masses educate themselves through constant struggle had not resulted in the formation of a commonly accepted new form of rule and thus endangered the governability of China. To learn from local experiences and get an overview of the situation himself, Mao Zedong conducted a three-month inspection tour through central and southern China between July and September 1967 to find a way of finally rendering the Cultural Revolution a success.

Positive and Negative Integration

Travelling to different localities had been a frequently employed measure of the CCP leadership prior to the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. By visiting local communes and speaking to the populace, the trips ideally were to provide the Politburo comrades with an impression of the situation on the spot and to strengthen the ties between center and localities. Naturally, local leaders would choose only favourable surroundings on such occasions, but Mao was well known for his impulsive alterations of the scheduled plans. Impromptu visits had become much more difficult during the Cultural Revolution than before. As Mao travelled under heavy protection, his sources about local conditions were mostly representatives of the provincial and county level committees and military regions. Mao on a number of occasions explicitly resented the caution with which Zhou Enlai would try to keep him out of trouble, especially during the Wuhan Incident, when Mao stayed in the city at the time without the knowledge of the local leaders. While a number of remarks Mao had made off the record during the tour were published by various mass organizations, the official assessment of the situation was presented by Central Document Zhongfa [67] 313 and
described the situation as “excellent, not simply good”. It further described Mao’s plan to make the situation even better in a few months time by revoking the heritage of the Yan’an style rectification campaign. Students, cadres, and leaders of mass organizations were to be organized in study classes in order to give up their erroneous, self-centred activities. Through continuous political education the participants were to grasp the essence of Mao’s dictum that no antagonistic contradictions existed among the working class and to finally achieve the great alliance of all revolutionary forces. The measures that had proven effective in the past thus were to be revoked. But this time, it was not simply the population of a small town like Yan’an or the members of a hierarchical organization like the PLA that were to receive guidance from the Chairman’s works in small group study, but the whole populace. Exegetical bonding under military supervision thus came to be conducted on a gigantic scale.

Mao’s decision developed out of a series of reports that were sent either by PLA units conducting military training or personal staff. Mao had increasingly come to distrust other channels of information than members of his staff or the Central Guards Regiment (中央警卫团), known as unit 8341, which he deployed to act as his eyes and ears. Although reports were sent in from all over the country, most influential were those compiled by units of the massively enlarged Beijing Garrison or the Central Guards that stood outside the military line of command and was directly responsible to Wang Dongxing, successor to Yang Shangkun as head of the CCP General Office and Mao’s security chief. On 15 June, the People’s Daily published the experiences of the military training conducted in the former elite middle school Shijingshan in the suburbs of Beijing. It listed the usual means of persuasion like study groups, comparisons between past and present but was especially outspoken about the ways of employing the Mao cult. Reunification functioned along a binary mode of distinguishing between good and evil. Liu Shaoqi was turned into a negative mirror image of Mao. By criticizing Liu’s evil misdeeds the students were to project their “insurmountable hatred” on the real enemy and to understand the pettiness of their own quarrels. Other media followed the same pattern of negative integration by blaming a common scapegoat. The Hebei Television Propaganda Small Group thus for example in its internal Reference Materials republished a number of guidelines issued by the Central Television Station in Beijing on what contents should be granted greater prominence and which formulations to use.

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76 Zhongfa [67] 313, Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu Mao zhuxi shicha ge di jianghua de tongzhi, 7 October 1967, CC RD.
77 MacFarquhar/Schoenhals, Mao’s Last Revolution, 49ff.
On 24 April 1967, a report based on survey data recorded how the recent directive of the Central Television Station to increase the medial attacks on Liu Shaoqi had been implemented. The report pointed out that many units were so busy conducting warfare that in the meantime only very few big character posters attacking Liu had been put up.

“Therefore, we should give greater prominence to criticizing Liu in our propaganda work and through criticism advance unification […]. Only if we engage in great revolutionary criticism, only if our direction is consistently spearheaded against the Number One Party person in power taking the capitalist road, Liu Shaoqi, we can even better carry out the revolutionary great unification and the revolutionary ‘Three-in-One’ combinations”.

The constant building up of “class-hatred” had, on the other hand, to be combined with public expressions of true “proletarian class feelings” towards the correct leadership of Mao Zedong. One way of demonstrating affection was to learn a number of important essays by heart and many of the Cultural Revolutionary reports mention the exact numbers of students able to recite the “Three constantly read articles”.

But the “dense political atmosphere” found other expressions as well like the construction of statues mentioned above, the printing of Mao works or badges, and daily rituals of loyalty. At Shijingshan Middle School for the first time the ritual of “asking for instructions in the morning and reporting back in the evening” (早请示, 晚汇报) was “invented” by the masses.

“[I]n the morning, they take the problems accruing from the struggle of two lines and consult Chairman Mao’s works for instructions. In the evening, they compare the thoughts and problems encountered during the day with the teachings of Chairman Mao and carry out a self-criticism.”

Just like the newly established military control committees had to report to the CCP Center before taking major decisions by establishing a “system of asking for instructions and reporting back” (请示报告制度), the students had to pay ritual obedience to Mao’s works and try to model the whole day’s thoughts and action upon the instructions of the Chairman. In mid-1967, such attempts to achieve the “Mao Zedong Thought-ification” (毛泽东思想化) of the entire day still remained the exception. But as the situation continued to deteriorate, the formal measures of assuring physical compliance assumed greater importance. Negative integration by way of singling out national and local scapegoats and positive integration by
rallying the students around the core symbol of Mao Zedong thus went hand in hand in the undertaking of restoring order.

Of much greater impact than the trial unit at Shijingshan proved to be a team of the Central Guards Regiment which Mao had sent around the same time with special instructions to the Beijing General Knitting Mill to achieve an alliance between the factories two contenting factions. The factory, founded in 1952, had over the years become a showcase of socialist production and been frequently visited by delegations from other communist countries. Mao personally instructed the roughly eighty team members under the leadership of the Central Guards Deputy Political Commissar Sun Yi and Long March veteran Gu Yuanxin about their tasks. They were to conduct political education work in a “profound, meticulous, and arduous” fashion and only come to their conclusions after an overall account of the situation and the involved problems. By considering the specific situation of the Knitting Mill, famed for its export of nylon stockings, Mao advised to mainly dispatch female comrades and to gain the trust of the workers by providing medical care and offering help in everyday life problems. It was the first time that the Central Guards Regiment had to get involved in the army’s efforts to “support the Left”. Just like within the PLA, therefore, a “Support the Left Office” was established to oversee the activities of the team. Despite Mao’s comprehensive reasoning, uniting the two factions turned out to be a major difficulty for the team members. Among the factories 2183 workers some 800 had joined the “The East is Red Revolutionary Committee” and about 1200 the “Red Rebel Command”. The frequent misuse of Mao’s authority led the workers to distrust the announcement of the team leaders that they had been sent by Chairman Mao personally. Mao, however, had deployed his personal physician Li Zhisui to the Knitting Mill as well in order to finally take active part in the Cultural Revolution. Only after a few members had trailed Li’s carriage back to the CCP Center in Zhongnanhai the worker’s were convinced that Mao Zedong really had sent the staff personally.

In general terms, the procedure of employing military teams to “support the Left” did not present a fundamentally different approach than to deploy work teams. Differences, however, existed in the participants’ background and their justification. All subtle distinctions had been rendered defunct. Adherence to Mao Zedong Thought presented the sole criterion

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82 Mao wengao 12, 366.
83 Li’s engagement is mentioned in a talk by Mao on the question of convening the Ninth Congress, see Mao, Zedong, Guanyu “Jia da” he zhengdang wenti de jianghua, 5 November 1967, CCRD. In his memoirs, Li Zhisui gives a brief account of the situation (chapter 64) which provides a good starting point but clearly reveals the limited reliability of memoirs for historical research as most of the dates and numbers do not correlate with contemporary documents, see Li, Private Life of Chairman Mao, 482-487.
upon which to judge the remaining cadres. After having proven their special background, the Central Guards Regiment members immediately started with a thorough propagation of Mao Zedong Thought, just as Mao had requested. The way of studying, however, owed much to the previous experiences of other military units. The concluding report, sent by the Central Guard members to the Chairman on 17 November 1967 listed the propagation measures in detail.

“We greatly built up a studious momentum, organized studies [within] a sound study system, and decorated the study surrounding. We made use of different forms [of study] like asking the Chairman for instructions when going to work and reporting back to the Chairman after finishing work (by collectively studying quotations). We organized Mao Zedong Thought propaganda teams, established study groups as well as sharing experience in application meetings [讲用会] in order to propagate Mao Zedong Thought comprehensively among the workers and their relatives. Thus within a short period of time we aroused a high tide of studying and applying Chairman Mao’s works in a living way.”

The study system employed relied on numerous precedents but elevated them considerably. At Shijingshan, instructions in the morning had been derived from Mao’s works. At the General Knitting Mill the revolutionary wisdom still emanated from the same source, yet Mao’s texts not any longer played the main part but his graphic representations. The report described the new style of the Mao cult in following terms.

“Before work we ask the Chairman for instructions in order to see and think clearly and gain a sense of direction;  
After work we report back to Chairman Mao and review our work and thoughts.  
During production we look at the mirror in front of the workshops (the Quotation tablets) to derive a mighty increase in work enthusiasm;  
When trading shifts, we exchange quotes as a way of showing concern and offering help.”

The report is the only official document issued in the name of the CCP Center during the Cultural Revolution that effectively propagated the Mao cult in a ritual fashion. The daily conventions before Mao’s picture to reconsider a day’s work and deeds in the light of Mao Zedong Thought added a new quality to the cult, aimed at physical and intellectual submission. The actual task unit 8341 achieved in the General Knitting Mill, however, had much less to do with abstract worship of the Chairman, but the ritual worship provided the

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85 Zhongfa [67] 350.
necessary conditions to unite the factions that had split upon the question of how to staff the revolutionary committee. The team made use of different methods according to the subjects that were to be re-educated: the cadres, the rebel leaders, and the masses. While the masses according to Mao did not wish disorder and thus could easily be united by studying certain key texts, the rebel leaders had to give up their egoistic views hindering a unification of the factions through special study sessions. The main problem, however, rested with the cadres that were still needed to organize and supervise production. Most cadres had become “angry, discouraged, and unconvinced” due to the series of struggle sessions and refused to take part in the new system in an exalted position. To reintegrate them into the movement by making them both except the criticism of the masses and understand how grateful they should be to live in the age of Mao Zedong, to receive a chance to correct their mistaken views of placing production numbers at the fore instead of politics, turned out to be the main task of the cadre study classes.

On 11 November 1967, finally, after a complicated process of choosing representatives first on the level of the workshops and then for the whole factory, the Beijing General Knitting Mill Revolutionary Committee was established, made up of seven representatives of the “conservative” faction, six former “rebels”, and two members of the faction of “by-standers” (逍遥派). They sent a congratulatory telegram to Mao the same day, exalting him in the most exuberant fashion. Mao replied to the telegram and the accompanying report of unit 8341 by adding a comment “I’ve read this, it is very good, thank you Comrades!”, and had both documents distributed in 20,000 copies to all military and civilian units down to the county level as Zhongfa [67] 350. The factory workers were delighted about the sign of attention from the highest command. The note was first posted on the factory black board where everyone defiled past it. Afterwards it was photographed and displayed in enlarged form above the factory’s entrance. The Beijing General Knitting Mill thus became a nationwide celebrated model unit and along with five other factories, the New China Printing Plant, the North Lumber Yard, the Second Chemical Plant, the Nankou Motor Vehicle Plant, and the February 7 Motor Vehicle Plant, received lavish attention in the media. The People’s Daily between 1967 and 1971 published over a 100 articles on the experiences

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86 Ibid.
87 The selection of the revolutionary committee in the Knitting Mill came to assume great importance as a model for the provincial committee’s as well, as it had been approved of by Mao Zedong. The procedure of selecting suitable members for the revolutionary committees in the absence of the prior voting procedure among Party members as propagated in April 1968 therefore had to include representatives of famous state factories, mines, and farms, members of rebel organizations with nationwide importance, members of rivaling factions, female members in factories with a high percentage of women, and worker heroes, see Huang, Geming weiyuanhui jigou qingkuang, 32f.
88 Zhongfa [67] 350.
of the Knitting Mill. The enormous publicity was owed to the instalment of a special corps of journalists from the capital’s most important news agencies in the factory in late 1967. Just like Li Zhisui, the journalists were to join the everyday life and work of the factory staff, reform their own thinking, and in the meantime produce model reports in praise of the factory’s success.\(^89\) The reports served to popularize Mao’s abstract instructions by providing detailed examples of how local units and production plant were to proceed in order to end the anarchic warfare. The enormous attention paid to the experiences of the factory led different members of the CCP top echelon such as Lin’s wife Ye Qun try to gain influence on the now famous unit by deploying own staff in order to be able to influence the direction and take a share in its glory. Mao Zedong himself took pride as well in the apparent success of his model units that on various occasions would be referred to as his “spots” \([\text{点}]\) by other leaders like Jiang Qing, who would go to great lengths to come up with own points of special attention.\(^90\) After deploying “Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams” to Qinghua and Beijing universities in late July 1968, largely staffed with workers from the six factories under the leadership of the Central Guards, the “Six Factories, Two Universities” \([\text{六厂，二校}]\) became a synonym for the successful reunification of the contending factions and continued to be propagated well into the mid-1970s.\(^91\)

Mao’s evaluation of the present situation and the reports of unit 8341 in October and November 1967 presented the starting point for a massive rectification movement to which basically the whole nation was subjected. From October 1967 onwards, editorials called for the establishment of Mao Zedong Thought study classes on all levels of society.\(^92\) Leaders of provincial factions that up to this point had failed to achieve the formation of revolutionary committees were assembled in the capital to negotiate the conditions in so-called central study classes \((\text{中央学习班})\). The character of the study classes, however, clearly revealed the disciplinary impetus behind it. Prior to that date, representatives of mass organizations or military regions had been accommodated in star-rated hotels and received free transportation. Sometimes they had even ordered saloon cars as Kang Sheng angrily remarked in a discussion.

\(^{89}\) Fang/Ning/Chen (eds.), *Zhongguo xinwen shiye 3*, 350-354.

\(^{90}\) One of the few “spots” that had received scholarly attention is Xiaojinzhuang village in Hebei that was lifted to model status by Jiang Qing in 1974, see Brown, Jeremy, *Staging Xiaojinzhuang. The City in the Countryside, 1974-1976*, in: Esherick, Joseph/Pickowicz, Paul/Walder, Andrew G. (eds.), *The Cultural Revolution as History*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006, 153-184.

\(^{91}\) A greatly publicized event in 1970 was for example the “invention” of the “Seven character classic” \((\text{七子经})\), a new modus of reviewing work and thought during the day that included “observing, thinking, questioning, exchanging views, applying, writing [reports], and investigating [results]” see *Huoxue huoyong Mao Zedong sixiang de hao fangfa. Beijing zhengzi zongchang yunyang “qizijing” xuexi Mao Zedong sixiang de diaocha baogao*, in: Beijing weishuqu sanzhi liangjun bangongshi (ed.), *Gaoju Mao Zedong sixiang weida hongqi renzhen xuexi 8341 budui zhizuo xianjin jingyan*, vol. 5, Beijing: 1970, 121-132.

\(^{92}\) *Quanguo dou lai ban Mao Zedong sixiang xuexiban*, in: People’s Daily, 12 October 1967, 1.
with representatives from Ningxia province on the need of establishing a frugal lifestyle.\textsuperscript{93} The central study classes were held in military compounds, often in the Beijing vicinity, to increase the pressure on the delegates to come up with tangible results. The daily routine was strict. Group study of Mao texts was followed by reappraisals of the provincial situation guided by the studied maxims. The central study classes were only concluded upon sealing an agreement, some of which had to be renegotiated or changed later.\textsuperscript{94} A major incentive for the delegates, however, was the prospect of being received by the Chairman in person during a reception in the Great Hall of the People, an equivalent of the symbolical power bestowed on the Red Guards during the mass parades of late 1966.

The star of the Red Guard organizations slowly began to dwindle after Mao’s return from his inspection tour. \textit{Zhongfa} [67] 313 included a new supreme instruction that emphasized the necessity to subject the Red Guards to education and study. “Chairman Mao teaches us: [...] [We] have to tell the leaders of the revolutionary rebel organizations and the Red Guards little generals that now it is just about the time that they perhaps commit mistakes.”\textsuperscript{95} Simultaneously, the public security apparatus under Xie Fuzhi, head of the Beijing Revolutionary Committee, started to crack down on independent news networks and nationwide associations to resume central control of the public sphere. Although it was to take about another year until this task was finally accomplished, accompanied by the rustication of most Red Guards, the change in public discourse became abundantly clear. The \textit{Wenhui News} had on 30 September on it title page declared that all orders from the CCP Center had to be followed, irrespective of whether the exact content was understood at the present moment or not. It thus quoted from a speech Lin Biao had delivered at the Politburo meeting at the outset of the Cultural Revolution on 13 August 1966 that came to be one of the most frequently employed justifications of military governance in 1968. In his talk, Lin Biao had dealt with the problem of understanding Mao’s aims in unfolding the Cultural Revolution and conceded that even he did not always fully comprehend the new turn of the movement. But irrespective of personal opinions

“[W]e have to persist in following the Chairman’s instructions. We shall carry out those we understand, as well as those we do not understand. I do not have other qualities than to rely on the Chairman’s directives. I do not have other qualities than to rely on the wisdom of the

\textsuperscript{93} Kang Sheng Li Tianhuan dai Ningxia junqu ji Ningxia zong zhihuibu daibiao de tanhua, 6 September 1967, CCRD.

\textsuperscript{94} The Guizhou central study class was for example only established in the process of purging Li Zaihan between 25 November 1969 and 17 April 1970, see Zhonggong Guizhou shengwei dangshi yanjiushi (ed.), \textit{Zhongguo gongchandang Guizhou sheng lishi dashiji}, 426.

\textsuperscript{95} Zhongfa [67] 313.
masses. [...] We should trust the Chairman’s genius, trust the Chairman’s brilliance, and trust the Chairman’s wisdom.”

Although Lin’s sentence was slightly modified by adding the adverb “temporarily” don’t understand [临时不理解的], there could be no mistake that unquestioning obedience and loyalty to the directives of the CCP Center came to be the main focus of Party propagation until the establishment of the last provincial revolutionary committees in September 1968. The request for unconditional loyalty brought forth the most bizarre forms of worship that have often been quoted to highlight the Cultural Revolution’s quasi-religious character. The rituals of worship, however, flourished only during a very short time span and developed from very different backgrounds and for different aims.

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96 Lin Biao, Zai zhongyang gongzuo huiyi shang de jianghua, 13 August 1966, CCRD.
Chapter 8: Everyday Cult

By the time Mao returned to Beijing in late September 1967 to announce his seemingly optimistic appraisal of the situation, revolutionary committees had only been established in seven of China’s 29 provinces and municipalities. Despite Mao’s promising rhetoric, the situation was bleak. Physical confrontations between contending factions continued well into 1968 and took on ever more extreme forms. It was to take another year, until 5 September 1968 that the last provincial leaderships resumed power in the autonomous regions of Tibet and Xinjiang. Only with the convention of the Ninth Congress in April 1969 a new Party leadership was officially sanctioned. Measures of both positive and negative integration were therefore employed to a maximum during this third year of the Cultural Revolution and resulted in Manichean rhetoric of good and evil that left innumerable physical traces as well. The death toll during the Cultural Revolution has never been higher than during the re-establishment of power between 1968 and 1970. Yang Su and Andrew Walder in a study based on statistical data drawn from local annals have estimated that at least 750,000 people were killed during the so called campaign to “Cleanse the class ranks” [清理阶级队伍] that started in May 1968, and a horrific number of up to 36 million people were persecuted. The available data from county annals corrected the mistaken impression that the victims of the Cultural Revolution had mostly been urban intellectuals beaten to death by Red Guards. Instead, many of the killings were part of an organized revenge that old elites took especially in rural areas for their own humiliations through the rebels in the previous two years.

The ritual worship of Mao Zedong reached its apex during this phase of uncertainty about who was to emerge victorious from the rubble of the factional disputes. Fostering the cult came to assume a crucial role in trying to maximize the individual profits in the struggle for power on the side of the leadership on the different levels of society. But for most of the Chinese populace the public worship was a crucial element of surviving within a completely volatile situation dominated by witch hunts against supposed counterrevolutionaries. The rhetorical and ritual demonstrations of loyalty to the Chairman that came to dominate everyday life can not be understood without taking into account this frenzied atmosphere, during which people were sentenced to death because they had unintendedly misspelled a

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97 In a few counties of Guizhou province, members of a minority faction that had been declared counterrevolutionary were even cannibilised, see Zheng Yi, Hongse jinian bei, Taibei: Huashi wenhua gongsi, 1993. A part translation is to be found in Zheng Yi, Scarlet Memorial. Tales of Cannibalism in modern China, Boulder: Westview Press, 1996

98 Walder/Yang, The Cultural Revolution in the Countryside, 94ff, especially table 11.
In this chapter, the cult rhetoric and rituals in the continuing process of re-establishing political and symbolical power are analyzed by way of looking at their employment in everyday life. After a discussion of the role of the omnipresent Mao Zedong Thought activist congresses and the characteristics of the cult language, the most pronounced campaign of worshipping Mao Zedong, the “Three Loyalties” (loyalty to Chairman Mao, to Mao Zedong Thought, and Chairman Mao’s revolutionary line), shall be examined in detail before finally turning to the multiple intersections of ritual and power in the staging of the leader cult.

Mao Zedong Thought Activist Congresses

The establishment of Mao Zedong Thought study classes provided the fundament for overcoming the omnipresent cult anarchy and proved to be instrumental in embedding the cult within everyday life. Study meetings or rallies to “remember hardship and think [of] sweetness” [忆苦思甜], a variant of the PLA’s “three remembrances” movement, came to fill most of the vacant time. Assemblies were literally held every night and everyone was forced through collective pressure to actively contribute by reviewing the own deeds in the light of Mao Zedong Thought. The daily routine of opening and closing every assembly with the collective singing of the “East is Red” and “Sailing the seas, depend on the helmsman” along with the omnipresent group study of Mao quotations has continued to be one of the most widely shared remembrances of the Cultural Revolution by victims, opportunists, and supporters alike. The vivid commemoration has to be explained by the incredible extent to which the study classes that were established in the fall and winter of 1967 came to interfere with everyday life. Just like the previous reliance on small groups through the CCP, the study classes were to unify the different viewpoints on the Cultural Revolution through exegetical bonding based on recent newspaper articles, Mao works, and leader speeches. Usually, the military “three supports” offices took the lead in organizing and guiding the study progress. But the development of accepted models of study had been weakened due to the open call to “pull out the few power holders in the military taking the capitalist road”. To overcome these

99 A peasant in Ankang County (Shaanxi province) was executed on 29 June 1970 for having claimed not to have had space in his small hut to put up a Mao poster and for having doubted the fact that Mao was to live for 10,000 years literally, see Ankang shi difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (ed.), Ankang xian zhi, Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1989, 908. In the same province, Yanchuan County, a middle school teacher was persecuted for having burned an old newspaper carrying Mao’s image. A physician in the same county was thrown into jail for three years, after having drawn a knife and some kind of animal on a piece of paper, which was interpreted as an assault on the working class and peasants by drawing a “purposefully planned murder of an old ox loyal to the revolution”, see Yanchuan xian zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (ed.), Yanchuan xian zhi, Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1999, 827. Similar absurdities can be found in autobiographical writings on the Cultural Revolution in abundance.
defects, different parts of the PLA resumed the tradition of the “Four good/five good” campaigns to emulate outstanding individuals or units that had by and large been disrupted after the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. In late 1966 a number of military regions had continued with the choosing of model soldiers under the name of “Study the important works of Mao Zedong activist congresses”. Based on these experiences, Xiao Hua, head of the GPD, announced the convention of an all-military study activist congress in the second half of 1967. The assembly never took place though because the GPD just like its CCP counterpart a year before came under heavy attack for having propounded revisionist views. Xiao Hua was purged and the GPD’s tasks were incorporated into the temporary antecedents of the “Military Affairs Commission” (军事办事组), established on 24 September 1967 that by March 1968 effectively replaced the CMC as the PLA’s highest governing body. From November 1967 onwards, the number of activist congresses, now commonly termed “living study and apply Mao Zedong Thought activist congresses”, came to multiply. The purposes for revoking this tradition were manifold. On the one hand, the development of activists first in the Party and later in the army had proven to be an exceptionally valuable tool to exert control within the units, to offer models of identification, and to foster a stratum of like-minded successors. The constant need of the Party media to propagate new models and especially the function of the activists as multipliers in study classes or during invited talks further contributed to the resuming of the congresses. The compilation of model talks and the circulation of experiences that usually appeared either in the press or in separately published volumes provided common ground for discussions of how to correctly apply the newest directives of the CCP Center.

The activist congresses, however, would have remained a minor phenomenon had not Mao Zedong made use of them to demonstrate the conclusion of the phase of destroying the old superstructure and the entering into the reconstruction of the state power structures. Just like back in 1966, when he had publicly bestowed his authority on the Red Guards by

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100 By 1970 the activist congresses de facto merged with their predecessors into so called “Two/Three delegates conferences” (二代会/三代会), among the earliest was the “Two delegates” convention of the Beijing military region, see Beijing junqu di wuci huoxue huoyong Mao Zedong sixin jijifenzi di sanci shao liandui daibiao da hui mishuchu (ed.), Beijing junqu “shuangdaihui” cailiao huibian, 3 vols., August 1970.

101 Xiao Hua dui zong zhengzhibu zhi shu danwei de baobao, 21 March 1967, CCRD. Shortly before the demise of the General Political Department, the all-PLA activist congress was rescheduled for Spring 1968 but was not convened either, see Zhonggong jingwei di yi shi weiyuanhui, Guanyu gongche zongzheng "guanyu zhaokai quanjun xuexi Mao zhuxi zhuozuo jijifenzi daibiao dahui de tongzhi" he junqu dangwei "guanyu zai liangtiao luxian douzheng zhong by huoxue huoyong Mao zhuxi zhuo zuo de quanzhong yundong tu xiang xin jieduan de jueding" de cuoshi, 19 July 1967, 1.


103 The group had been formed on Zhou Enlai’s initiative in June 1967 due to the absence of the acting Chief-of-Staff Yang Chengwu, who accompanied Mao on his inspection tour; see Jin, Culture of Power, 110.
reviewing them on top of the Gate of Heavenly Peace, Mao Zedong chose to display his change in attitude by publicly meeting with the delegates of the Beijing Garrison Study Congress during a reception on 13 November and with representatives from other study classes the next day. Mao’s support for the disciplinary measures provided the revolutionary committees and preparatory small groups with increased public legitimacy. Lin Biao added further public attention by presenting the 4000 delegates of the First Navy Study Congress on 29 November with the personal inscription “Sailing the seas depend on the helmsman, enacting revolution depend on Mao Zedong Thought”. While the measure turned out to be effective in spreading the impact of the congresses, the requests for personal inscriptions grew exorbitantly and even led to violent struggles over a Lin inscription in Qingdao. As a consequence, Mao expressed his discontent with the habit of writing inscriptions in mid-December and thereafter similar requests were generally turned down. But Mao further encouraged the convention of activist congresses by continuing his meetings with study activists that were mostly held in different rooms of the Great Hall of the People, where Mao had come to spend most of his time.

The congresses followed a standard pattern, starting out with the selection of trustworthy individuals or groups on the unit level, based on a catalogue of criteria drawn up by the local preparatory committees. A typical case are the criteria established by the “Support the Left office” and the local Armed Forces Department in the Tumote Left/Right Banners in Inner Mongolia presented upon choosing the delegates for the first living study and application Mao Zedong Thought activist congress in January 1968. In a circular, the local revolutionary committee presented the target number of 1000 delegates for the seven-day congress and added a detailed allocation formula on how many activists each region and department was to select. The circular further presented ten criteria upon which the local committees were to choose local models, amongst them a clear historical background, the swift adaptation and application of Chairman Mao’s directives, and the complete reliance on the masses. Based on these criteria, the selections started within each unit or region and after having been approved of by the local revolutionary committee, the activists on the

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104 Liu Zhenyang, Dahai hangxing kao hangshou, gan geming kao Mao Zedong sixiang, in: People’s Daily, 1 December 1967, 2. Lin had previously on a number of occasions drawn up similar inscriptions, for example for the Beijing Garrison study congress in August 1967.

105 Tumote zuo/you qi renmin wuzhuangbu/Tumote qi zhu jun zhizuo bangongshi, Guanyu renzhen guanche zhixing Nei Meng, Wumeng geming weiyuanhui ”guanyu jin chun zhaozhai quan qu xuexi Mao zhuxi zhuzuo xianjin jiti he jijifenzi daibiao huiyi de jueding” de tongzhi, 18 January 1968, 3f.
predefined date were sent to check into the banner’s guesthouse with “Chairman Mao’s important works, luggage, and eating coupons”\textsuperscript{106} and commence their studies.

The first measure in Tumote and other localities upon hearing about the necessity to convene an activist congress was to review the recent performance of previous activists and model heroes, and to check whether they could be reactivated and “take a stand” (可以站出来) in the process of forming revolutionary committees.\textsuperscript{107} The activist congresses usually lasted for a period of about two weeks, during which the experiences in the unit were reviewed in the light of recent directives. While in the early stages form and content of the congresses still varied, the proceedings became increasingly standardized. It included the setting up of an organizing secretariat comprised of different small groups in charge of organisation, reports, newspaper work, and drafting documents for both internal and public use. The delegates were informed about the current proceedings and the focus of propagation through short conference bulletins (简报) with a red Mao quotation as headline, usually edited several times a day, depending on the number of small groups. The model reports and publicly accessible documents were compiled by a separate group and contained only the speeches themselves.\textsuperscript{108}

The meetings usually started out with an opening ceremony, followed by the study of documents and model speeches that were to be discussed and transformed into a concluding report on how to apply the insights in day-to-day work. Finally, the written experiences were circulated and accompanied by a “proposal” (倡议书), listing the most remarkable successes and suggestions of the assembly.

While in the beginning meetings were held every night, the later congresses resumed a much more relaxed approach with only eight hours of study, plus additional group excursions on the weekends.\textsuperscript{109} The contemporary importance of the activist congresses is testified by the sheer amount of sources collected in local archives.\textsuperscript{110} In many cases, the convention of the

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid. 4.
\textsuperscript{107} See for example the case of Hebei province at an earlier stage in Cankao ziliao (3). Ge diqu xianjin renwu zai wenhua da geming zhong de qingkuang, 26 April 1967, HPA 1032-5-2.
\textsuperscript{108} The outer form of the model reports changed over the years, following the cult’s tuning down. The early reports were printed with a standardized red Mao head and Lin’s inscription of 29 November below. After the Ninth Congress, Mao’s image vanished from the copies; instead Lin’s red inscription was placed in front. In 1971 finally, the inscription was replaced with changing quotations, one of Mao on top and one of Lin Biao below, before the whole phenomenon of the activist congresses ended with Lin’s fall in September 1971.
\textsuperscript{110} Similar documents on the background of the activists, the organisation of the meetings, and copies of the model speeches make up a huge portion in local Chinese archives in 1968. All materials made use of here, however, derive from unofficial collection channels, due to the investigations into the historical background of each individual during the process of drawing up lists. No personal names are given here in order not to violate personal rights.
congresses and the simultaneous checking of the political background of hundreds of possible candidates constituted the first formal action of the revolutionary committees on different levels. The congresses came to provide the study classes with both competent training personnel and model reports that could be studied from the central down to the household study groups. But beside the synchronization of public perception, the activist congresses came to assume a highly performative function as the questions of who would be among the profiteers of the movement had not been solved yet.

Plural Cults

The state of flux was to continue until a new leadership had been approved of by a Party congress. After all, the last Party congress had been held back in 1956. The activist congresses, especially those convened by institutions of national importance, provided a platform for its participants to display their preparedness to take on responsible positions in the new order. As formal rules of ascent were by now lacking completely, the search for possible patrons, enabling individual promotion, led to a vast increase of the cult rhetoric. Mao Zedong clearly remained the ultimate arbiter of the ensuing cult discourse but below his meta-cult, several sub-cults came to emerge in praise of important figures either within the top leadership or at the local level. The trend of employing the cult as a vehicle to establish patron-client relationships was made extraordinarily clear in a number of speeches by high-ranking military cadres that were aimed primarily at showcasing Lin Biao and shaking of potential rivals within the respective units. Cases in point are the speeches delivered by the Political Commissar of the Navy, Li Zuopeng, at the First Navy’s Activist Congress. Li’s speech entitled “With Vice-Commander Lin as glorious example, always loyal to Chairman Mao” presented a new twist to the Mao cult, which had thus far not been made equally explicit. While seemingly extolling the supreme status of Mao Zedong, the speech went great lengths to present Lin Biao as natural successor in the tradition of the leader cult by quoting his unwavering loyalty to Mao Zedong throughout China’s revolutionary history. The main part of Li’s speech consisted of constructing an intellectual pedigree aimed at presenting Lin Biao as the “most comprehensive, most correct, and most scientific” interpret of Mao Zedong Thought, as a model for the nation and guarantor for the prevention of revisionism. Lin was described as having “creatively established the absolute authority of the great

111 Li Zuopeng, Yi Lin fu tongshuai wei guanghui bangyang, yongyuan zhong yu Mao zhuxi, 30 November 1967, CCRD., 16. The semantic construction is a parallelism to the famous three adverbs mentioned in correspondence with Mao Zedong’s merit of having “comprehensively, creatively, and with genius” developed and inherited Marxism-Leninism.
commander Mao Zedong in a big way” and as having displayed the four cardinal revolutionary virtues “unlimited hot love, unlimited loyalty, unlimited belief, and unlimited worship” towards the Chairman. In Li’s case, the display of loyalty proved to be effective as he came to be one of the core members of what later would be referred to as the “Lin Biao anti-Party clique”. The group included a number of leading military cadres, amongst them the responsible leaders of Navy, Air Force, Logistics Department, and by March 1968, the principal members of the Military Affairs Commission. All of them owed their promotion primarily to Lin’s protection, and in return they did their best to boost the image of Lin Biao. From 1968 onwards, a number of non-officially approved publication types so far reserved for Mao, such as life accounts and quotation volumes, started to appear. By 1970, even an exhibition commemorating Lin’s revolutionary successes was planned by supporters within the PLA. These activities of cult-building, however, did not necessarily have to find the approval of the honored person as Lin’s two letters advocating the termination of his cult revealed. Another example is the case of Marshal Nie Rongzhen, whose authority was invoked by a number of subordinates to outrival a different faction. The organizing committee of the Second Activist Congress at the National Defence and Science Commission had included the criterion “firmly support the correct leadership of the National Defence and Science Commission’s Party Committee with Comrade Nie Rongzhen as nucleus” for choosing loyal activists, yet without soliciting the opinion of Nie who at the time was recovering from an illness. The added criterion caused a political scandal and had to be solved through Zhou Enlai’s intervention and a self-criticism of Nie Rongzhen.

Although most of the sub-cults were quickly curbed, they continued to hover above public rhetoric because the structural political deficits were not resolved until Mao’s death. Quite to the contrary, the political structures based on loyalty instead of codified rights were highly conducive to the rapid development of the communicative space characteristic of the personality cult. The dawning of the Ninth Congress thus sharply revealed the weaknesses of

112 Ibid. 18.
113 Ibid. 19.
114 This holds especially true for Qiu Huizuo, head of the General Logistics Department. He had been subjected to heavy criticism and violence by a rival faction within department and only upon intervention of Lin Biao and Chen Boda retained his position which he had one in the aftermath of the purge of Luo Ruqing, see Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun zong houjinbu di er jie xuexi Mao zhuxi zhuzuo jijifenzi daibiao dahui, Gaoju Mao Zedong sixiang weida hongqi, shi ba zonghou liang tiao luxian douzheng jinxing daodi, duoqu wuchanjieji wenhua da geming de quanmian shengli, January 1968, 14ff. On the background of the inner-military conflict between “conservatives” and “radicals” in the military see further Jin, Culture of Power, 107ff.
116 See Nie Rongzhen, [Ziwo piping], 24 April 1968, 1. Zhou Enlai stressed the difference between Nie’s case and Yang Chengwu’s employment of a similar slogan, which Yang reportedly had “enjoyed [and] imposed on others”, see Zhou Enlai jiejian guofang kewei daibiao, CCRD.
the Chinese body politic amidst the institutional havoc brought about by the Cultural Revolution. Irrespective of the personal role of Lin Biao, his image as Mao’s closest comrade-in-arms and successor made him a primary target of adulation by those judging their chances for high political offices after Mao’s death. Yet Lin’s public elevation presented an obvious danger for him as his efforts to curb public phrases wishing him eternal health revealed. Under no conditions was his own cult to signal a growing ambition to prematurely replace the Chairman. That Mao remained suspicious about the ways his “authority” was invoked for various purposes was revealed by the publication of a People’s Daily article that appeared in the name of the acting Chief-of-Staff Yang Chengwu on “establishing the absolute authority of Chairman Mao in a big way”. The formulation had originated from the diary of a revolutionary martyr and had subsequently been employed by Red Guards and various CCP leaders alike. As long as the phrase was instrumentalized in ways congruent with Mao’s views, Mao did not take offence or immediate action. But as publications in the Party’s “two papers, one magazine” (两报一刊, referring to the People’s Daily, the Liberation Army News, and the Red Flag) were considered as expressions of the opinion of the CCP Center and thus Mao himself, he rejected the employment of the phrase within the “scientific language of Marxism”. Mao’s reaction to Yang’s article followed the same pattern he usually chose when dealing with disliked drafts that were submitted to him beforehand: he ignored it by writing “I won’t read it” on its back.

On 17 December, Mao received a report sent by the Hunan Revolutionary Committee Preparatory Group. The report asked whether Mao would send an inscription for a newly constructed Mao statue that was to be unveiled during a celebration of Mao’s seventy-fourth birthday in his native village Shaoshan, which had just been connected to the national railway network. Mao took the opportunity to add a few thoughts on propaganda work. He reminded the local comrades about the decision of the CCP rejecting the celebration of birthdays, as well as the refusal of writing further inscriptions. His main gist, however, was directed against specific formulations:

“(1) The formulation “absolute authority” is not suitable. There never has been a sole and absolute authority, all authority is relative; everything absolute only exists within the relative. Likewise, the absolute truth is the summation of all innumerable relative truths, and therefore the absolute truth similarly exists only among relative truths.

117 Yang Chengwu, Dashu teshu weida tongshuai Mao zhuxi de juedui quanwei, dashu teshu weida de Mao Zedong sixiang de juedui quanwei - chedi qingsuan Luo Ruiqing fandui Mao zhuxi, fandui Mao Zedong sixiang de taotian zuixing, in: People’s Daily, 3 November 1967, 22.
118 See further Zhou Enlai on the same subject in Zhou Enlai jiejian guofang kewei daibiao, CCRD.
According to Mao, authority had to be established through constant practical approval, just like a “relative absolute truth” had to be dissected from amongst other “relative relative truths”. Through a process of application and repetition a certain authority would be established naturally and thus exert its influence without having to be boosted otherwise.

The passage reveals Mao’s constant awareness about the power of formulations once they had been officially sanctioned and come into heavy rotation in public discourse. The enormous attention paid to single words by the CCP leadership is a hint to the close interrelation of language and power. Allowing for the usage of phrases like “persons in power taking the capitalist road” or even simply “establishing the absolute authority of Mao Zedong in a big way” presented much more than interchangeable semantic phrases. By defining the angle of how to approach and judge reality, the Party discourse turned words into tangible objects that unless revoked by a change in line would come to govern people’s everyday lives and determine the fate of those marginalized by the revolutionary rhetoric. Three months later, Yang Chengwu was purged during the so-called “Yang-Yu-Fu Incident”, during which the concurrent PLA Chief-of-Staff Yang, the Deputy Political Commissar of the Air Force Yu Lijin, and the Commander of the Beijing Garrison, Fu Chongbi, were relieved of their positions. Mao’s criticism of the phrasings published under Yang’s name had rendered him vulnerable and enabled a coalition of inner-army opponents to take advantage of the situation.

In his accusations against Yang, Lin Biao on 24 March 1968 claimed that Yang had failed to display sufficient loyalty to the Chairman and the CCRG. Lin thus added even further emphasis on the necessity to display loyalty in every word and deed to avoid criticism and harassment. The frequent changes in line since the outset of the Cultural Revolution and the lack of transparency about the official sanctioning of certain phrases had come to endanger the governability of China as a whole. Along with the re-establishment of political power through study classes, congresses, and revolutionary committees backed by the military force, control had to be regained in the semantic realm as well. The year 1968 therefore witnessed the peak of language formalization and the near merging of public and private speech.

119 Mao wengao 12, 455.
120 Lin Biao, Zai jundui ganbu dahui shang de jianghua, 24 March 1968, CCRD. Other factors for Yang’s purge included conflicts with other military leaders, partly on family issues (see Jin, Culture of Power, 111ff), and possibly his championing of the cults of both Lin Biao and Jiang Qing below the supreme Mao cult, very much to Lin’s dissatisfaction, see Wang Nianyi, Da dongluan de niandai, (=1949-1989 nian de Zhongguo, vol. 3), Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1988, 288ff.
The Language of Flattery

Rana Mitter has recently remarked that the Cultural Revolution probably was the period in twentieth century history during which “language was most separated from meaning”.\(^{121}\) While the formulation itself seems like an attempt to revive notions of an identity between denoting terms and object, Mitter pointed at the strategic employment of the infinite capacities to reinterpret single characters in different contexts. Ji Fengyuan has referred to this phenomenon as “linguistic engineering”\(^{122}\) in analogy to Popper’s notion of utopian social engineering. The term implies the conscious employment of language to transform traditional worldviews by altering content down to the level of single words or characters, for example by placing them in unaccustomed contexts. By changing the semantic chain of references, commonsense meanings were to be substituted with revolutionary contents and thus, as Jiang Qing remarked, to subvert the impact of traditional value systems. By denigrating the traditional moral concepts and simultaneously taking single key words as reason for defining political standpoints, the possibilities to attack others on grounds of revolutionary impurity were widened \textit{ad libitum}. The undermining of formal meanings and hidden allusions by means of using homophonous characters, metaphors, or allegories had a long tradition in Chinese history, but usually these means had been employed as strategies of resistance by critical individuals against the state and not vice versa.

Even a superficial analysis of Cultural Revolutionary media reveals the frequent employment of terms in unaccustomed semantic contexts, highlighted by the contemporary placement of the characters in quotations marks.\(^{123}\) “Application”, “selfishness”, or “loyalty” had to be set apart in order to alert the readership about its special denomination. Another characteristic feature of the Cultural Revolutionary language was the excessive verbalization that suggests action by adding the suffix “hua” (化) behind the most unlikely combination of words.\(^{124}\) A striking contrast to the formal pretension of movement and change is presented


\(^{122}\) Ji, \textit{Linguistic engineering}, esp. chapter 1.

\(^{123}\) “Being ‘loyal’ to Chairman Mao means to exchange ‘fear’ with ‘courage’, to change [the interest in] ‘self’ with [interest in] ‘public’, and to replace ‘belief in oneself’ with ‘belief in the masses’”, see Beijing Daily, 8 May 1968.

\(^{124}\) Frequent examples are “proletar-ization” (无产阶级化), “loyalty-fication” (忠诚化), or even “Mao Zedong Thought-fication” (毛泽东思想化). In 1970/71 the verb suffix -hua did not even need a nomen anymore in some of the activist congress speeches and was directly used in quotation marks, see for example Yang Luqi, \textit{Zai qunzhong zhong "hua", zai shixian zhong "hua"}, \textit{ba lingdao banzi jianshe cheng geminghua de, miqie lianxi qunzhong de zhandou zhihuibu}, in: Beijing junqu di wuci huoxue huoyong Mao Zedong sixiang jijifenzi di sanci sihao liandui daibiao dahui mishuchu, \textit{Beijing junqu "shuangdaihui" calliao huibian}, vol. 1, Beijing: 1970, chapter 18, 1-11. Similar observations have been made about the language of the Third Reich; see Klemperer, Victor, \textit{LTI. Notizbuch eines Philologen}, Leipzig: Reclam, 1975 [1957], 162ff.
by a closer content analysis of public discourse during the period of re-establishing order. Whether one looks at the minutes of the millions of study classes, the speeches delivered at the activist congresses, or the daily editorials and comments published in the Party media, the necessity to frame the content within the overarching concepts of class struggle and Mao worship exerted formal restrictions that heavily influenced the content of the media items. As a consequence of the cult anarchy of 1967, the re-establishment of symbolical order went hand-in-hand with a drastic reduction of the number of printed articles and the variety of issues covered. Until the last revolutionary committees had been established and thus order had by and large been restored in September 1968, the increased emphasis on loyalty to the Chairman led to the superimposition of a near static cult discourse onto all spheres of private and public life. Its implementation was secured through hundred thousands of PLA soldiers conducting the “three supports, two militaries”, local members of the revolutionary committees or simply fellow citizens watching for concordance of their neighbours utterances with Mao Zedong Thought.

The cult discourse has in the beginning been defined as a specific variant of the PRC’s directed public sphere. Both variations of the same communicative space were based on imposing a theoretical framework with an ultimate truth claim: Marxism-Leninism as defined by the collective leadership of the Party in the one case and the absolutization of Mao Zedong Thought in the latter case. The difference between the patterns of communication before, after, and during the Cultural Revolution was thus a question of the degree of formalization rather than of fundamental difference. By looking at formalization at its peak in mid-1968, distinguished features of the cult’s communicative space become apparent. The ultimate arbiter, the point de capiton in Lacanian parlance, of the Cultural Revolutionary rhetoric was the notion of class struggle. It is characterized through sharp distinctions between friend and foe, the always correct Mao Zedong Thought one the one hand and the vicious “Chinese Khrushchev” as representative of the evils of revisionism and capitalism on the other hand. While the aspect of class struggle provides the red line of public discourse throughout the Cultural Revolution, the relative importance attached to negative integration and struggle or the integrative role of Mao Zedong Thought changed according to circumstances. The cult discourse of 1968 basically revolved around two major clusters of content. First, expressions of loyalty to Mao, and second, reports about practical implementation of Mao Zedong Thought. The characteristics and functions of both shall be discussed below.

Like the Invocatio in medieval documents, most texts and speeches delivered during the period of re-establishing order start out with formally wishing the Chairman (and Vice-
Chairman Lin) eternal life and eternal health. In many cases the invocations of loyalty take on a lyric component, resulting either in the print of poems and songs or emotional prose full of superlatives and expressions of utter devotion. Yet, as the examples of elevating Lin Biao during other activist congresses revealed, there is more to employing the rhetoric of worship than simple adoration. The strategic employment of the cult as way of establishing patron-client relationships played an important role in many of the most extravagant pieces of extolling Mao or Lin Biao. Primary examples for the latter case are the opening speeches and closing addresses or telegrams at the activist congresses. The type of language employed thus depended to a large extent on the occasion and medium. The following excerpt is taken from the gratulatory telegram sent by the first “Lively study and apply Mao Zedong Thought Activist Congress” of the Beijing Garrison in August 1967:

“Chairman Mao, oh Chairman Mao. You are the greatest leader of the whole Party, the whole army, and all of our people. You are the most pre-eminent teacher of the international proletariat. You are the reddest, reddest red sun in our hearts! Chairman Mao, oh Chairman Mao, your loving compassion is deeper than the ocean and we are filled with unlimited hot love towards you! Thousand songs, ten thousand melodies cannot express our unlimited hot love for you. Thousand words, ten thousand characters do not even closely unbosom our unlimited worship of you. The unrestrained sea and the empty sky are not enough to contain our unlimited belief in you. A shaking earth and tumbling mountains are unable to shake the unlimited loyalty of every red heart to you!”

While instrumental reasons and the specific occasion played an important role in producing such statements, the standards of worship set by such prominent examples of study like the Beijing Garrison Activist Congress increased the pressure for other congress convenors to at least live up to the formal standards of the cult rhetoric. A cursory reading of the above quoted sentences may deliver the impression of uniquely expressed emotions, but a thorough exposure to the stacks of similar material kept in archives or sold at flea markets reveals a high degree of uniformity down to the level of single phrases. Not to conform to the most recent expressions of worship bore the danger of being accused of not having created a sufficiently “dense political climate” or, even worse, of having proven to be “disloyal” to Mao Zedong. Thus especially the few remaining prominent personalities in the realm of culture like the literat-politician and president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Guo Moruo, had to excel in the praise of Mao Zedong and his thought in order to be spared the fate of being sent to conduct manual labour and undergo thought reform. Guo in his greeting address to the academy’s first activist congress employed a variety of metaphors to characterize the insuperable impact of Mao Zedong Thought that still retained a slightly individual touch:

“Mao Zedong Thought is rain and dew, is air and sunshine. Only with the moisture and nourishment of Mao Zedong Thought [can we] look upon thousands of doubling waves of rice and beans. Mao Zedong Thought is the soul, is wisdom, and is strength. Only [if we are] armed with Mao Zedong Thought there will be heroes arising without cessation. This is the new heaven and new earth of the Mao Zedong period, new people and new things, our whole academy, all of China is like this, and in the future the whole world is going to be like this too.” 126

Paragraphs like these have usually been denied attention by scholarship due to their lack of positive content. Yet, their function never was to transmit any kind of raw and unprocessed information but to demonstrate personal loyalty by relying on the indefinite capacity of language to produce statements that are linguistically flawless but semantically empty. The massive flattery employed during the Mao cult is an extreme example of language serving a ritual instead of a transmissive function. It is thus the demonstration of a social skill rather than the relaying of messages. In his Phenomenology of the Spirit, Hegel devoted a short section on what he called the “language of flattery”, which he characterized the following way: “It “has for its content the form itself, the form which language itself is, and is authoritative as language. It is the power of speech, as that which performs what has to be performed.” 127

Long before John Austin was to become famous for his characterization of certain speech acts as “performatives”, of utterances that in saying something actually constituted an act of doing something, 128 Hegel here hinted at the importance of a certain type of speech, flattery, which performed a different function than the transmission of content. The demonstration of loyalty as ultimate end of the language of flattery has seldom become as explicit as during the so-called “Three Loyalties” campaign in the first half of 1968. During this period, references to loyalty reached an all time high in Chinese Party media. In 1968, nearly every fifth article published in the People’s Daily made explicit reference to the phrase “loyal to Chairman Mao”. The phrase, which since the very beginning of the Cultural Revolution had played an important role in the linguistic musings of the CCRG members, had gained enormous prominence through the campaign to emulate Li Wenzhong and members of his platoon, unit 6011, which had sacrificed their lives to save a number of Red Guards from drowning. 129 But only in March 1968, after publishing the experiences of the second PLA Air Force Study Congress, did the phrase achieve its overpowering status. Editorials like Determining loyalty

by looking at action, Forever display the character ‘loyalty’, or Being loyal to Chairman Mao necessarily requires the concordance of study and application were published by all major Chinese newspapers in the first days of March 1968.\textsuperscript{130} Loyalty to the Chairman from now on was to be proven through visible actions and not rhetorical invocations alone. To fulfil this task, the local military districts and revolutionary committees had to be given examples on how to judge loyalty.

![Figure 6: References to loyalty in the People’s Daily, 1964-1972](image)

The second big cluster of the cult discourse consists primarily of examples of how to apply Mao Zedong Thought in different situations. The wide range of topics held together by the notion of “application” (用) can be broken down to three subheadings: role models, methods of studying and applying Mao Zedong Thought, and finally practical results, inventions, or “miracles” of Mao Zedong Thought. Interestingly, the antonym of loyalty in most cases was not directly defined to be “disloyalty” but through using the character 私, meaning “self” or “selfishness”. A widely published editorial in the Liberation Army News stated, “The character ‘selfishness/self’ of the capitalist class is the great enemy of the character ‘loyalty’”.\textsuperscript{131} Loyalty to Mao Zedong thus came to merge with the common good (公) and indeed both phrases were interchangeably used during this period.\textsuperscript{132} As a section of martyr Li Wenzhong’s diary defined it: “If one embodies the character ‘selfishness’ and does not fight it that means being disloyal to Chairman Mao. The determination to fight selfishness is the


\textsuperscript{131} Liberation Army News, 17 February 1968.

\textsuperscript{132} When reading through contemporary diaries, one often stumbles across unintended interchanges of the two characters.
watershed between the real and the bogus revolutionaries.” The propagated role models usually first appeared during local activist congresses. Individual stories with a possibly nationwide appeal were forwarded to the Military Affairs Commission or the CCP Center, which after evaluation would decide upon its instrumentability.

The most prominent figurehead of the loyalty campaign in 1968 was doubtlessly Comrade Men He, a deputy political instructor from Qinghai province, who had died when shielding his fellow citizens from the explosion of a malfunctioning rocket. On 23 April 1968, Central Document Zhongfa [68] 65 was issued jointly by the CCP Center, the CMC, and CCRG in form of a command to posthumously confer the title “A good cadre boundlessly loyal to Chairman Mao’s revolutionary line” upon the deceased. Men He was to be the first individual cadre to be conferred a similar honor and thus raised the prestige of a social group that had been a primary target of the Cultural Revolutionary violence. Along with the conferral of the title, the CCP Center provided all recipients with background information on Men He’s life in order to facilitate a unified portrayal in the media. In the following five weeks, all revolutionary committees reacted by announcing specific study campaigns to emulate Men He. In concerted fashion the state media from May 29, 1968, onwards started a major publicity campaign that included multi-page articles in all newspapers, reports on television, and radio broadcasts, as well as small booklets, artistic performances, and an exhibition displaying the relics of Men He’s frugal lifestyle. By differentiating between different types of media for different types of audiences, the CCP tried to achieve a maximum outcome of its measures. For Men He’s hometown and work unit the bestowal of honor through the CCP Center meant a mighty increase of attention. Men He’s wife and parents came to be sought after guest speakers at activist congresses nationwide. The Qinghai Revolutionary Committee along with the Qinghai Military District leadership organized a “sympathy and solicitude delegation” (慰问团), including high-ranking cadres to visit Men He’s birthplace in Hebei province, to “report about the miracles of Men He, and stage cultural performances in praise of Men He.” The delegation was given high political priority and most of the provincial leadership either welcomed the delegation at the station or took part in activities during their visit.

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133 Wuchan jiejie zhuanzheng xia jixu jinxing geming de wuchan jieji xianjinfenzi de tuchu daibiao Li Wenzhong, in: People's Daily, 31 December 1967, 1.
134 Zhongfa [68] 65, Zhonggong zhongyang, Zhongyang jun wei, Zhongyang wenge xiaozu zhui shou Men He tongzhi “wuxian zhongyu Mao zhu xi geming luxian de hao ganbu” chenghao de mingling, 23 April 1968, CCRD.
135 A few provinces like Shaanxi ordered to conduct a Men He study campaign prior to the publication of the article on 29 May, but most provinces like Hebei or Qinghai combined the dates.
136 Hebei shengwei zhengzhibu guanyu jiedai Qinghai sheng weiven Men He tongzhi jiaxiang weiwentuan de yijian, 12 June 1968, HPA 919-1-21.
The campaign to emulate Men He is a good example as well for the second body of topics relating to the application of Mao Zedong Thought, mainly articles and reports describing ways of implementing the exhibited qualities of selflessness, public service, and unlimited loyalty to the Chairman. The character of the depicted experiences varies greatly, depending on the source type. Reports published in the state media reveal little about the remarkable efforts to relate the study campaign to problems encountered in everyday work. In Shijiazhuang, capital of Hebei province, as a result of the campaign to study Men He different kinds of study groups had been formed to solve problems of everyday life. A report from a visiting delegation from the Nanjing Financial Department Revolutionary Rebel United Committee that had travelled to Shijiazhuang to learn of how to conduct the Three Loyalties campaign, describes the discussions and methods employed to increase loyalty to the Chairman in detail. One of the study groups made up of both peasants and merchants had come to focus on the issue of selling groceries. In fact, it had been the idea of the rebel group in the grocery store that by way of sharing their views with the peasants tried to work out the defects that had resulted from “having received the poisonous influence of the counterrevolutionary revisionist line of the Chinese Khrushchev.”

According to the report, the meetings started out with rapprochements from the peasants, who took the study campaign as just another attempt of the merchants to exploit their good faith and had only agreed to participate after the meetings were to take place at the work brigade. This way the PLA had to repair the local meeting room as a precondition. The merchants had decorated the newly renovated room with Mao pictures and quotations, but even that had engendered the suspicion of some peasants: “We should not pay too much attention to what they say at the moment, for in the end it will be us who will have to come up for it.” In order to investigate the reasons for this deep-rooted suspicion, a number of controversial issues were debated. The peasants had been greatly enraged by the “Chinese Khrushchev’s policies of ‘seizing the peasants by the throat’”, such as the establishment of norms and standards for grocery articles. Criteria of size, color, and form had been defined and products not meeting these demands were considered to be of lower value or had not even been accepted at all by the merchants. Attempts of the peasants to straighten differently sized cucumbers with paper wrappings had failed and furthermore resulted in unwelcome side effects: Under the wrapping all cucumbers had turned yellow due the lack of sunlight.

137 Jiangsu Nanjing caimao xitong geming zaofan lianhe weiyuanhui, Guanyu xuexi Shijiazhuang shi kaizhan "san zhongyu" huodong qingkuang de huibao (xuanchuan gao), 1 June 1968, distributed on 28 June 1968, 8.
138 Ibid. 9.
139 Ibid.
Criticizing the local representatives of the revisionist line in person and abolishing the former rules, according to the report, established a harmonious working relationship again between peasants and merchants. No longer were arbitrary factors like cucumber size or the amount of money earned to play the most important part. Instead mutual understanding was to be developed and fair prices were to be decided upon.

If the abstract discourse of class struggle and proletarian class feelings could be related to specific situations like the rejection of cucumbers due to their size, the campaign to champion Men He and the “Three Loyalties” gained enormous appeal. In most cases, however, the study groups and meetings had difficulties in filling the abstract moral guidelines with suitable examples. At the Beijing General Foodstuff Factory, the propagation of Men He’s life record and deeds had been disseminated in several meetings after which the workers of the different branches had “transmitted the news to workers of the night shift; everyone started writing big character posters and statements of resolution, determined to learn from Comrade Men He.” Yet besides propagating the experiences to other shifts, the food factory workers did not come up with major innovations except the compilation of “bold remarks and impressive words” [豪言壮语] in the spirit of Men He. The short phrases usually took the form of rhyming couplets or alliterations, like

“Closely follow Chairman Mao, perpetually carry out revolution; Closely follow Chairman Mao, turn the world into a red [ocean].”

In the Second Beijing Cotton Mill, the local Mao Zedong Thought study class even compiled a thirteen-page set of “greeting addresses” to the Chairman, which could be recited in prayer-like fashion before, after, or during work. Besides the recitations as a choir, the phrases could as well be practised in pre-given dialogues (对口词), a form that had been employed to spread the teachings of the Chairman since the very beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Each partner thus had to complete the sentence of the questioner by adding the fitting quotation. By propagating the concordance of every deed and speech act with Mao Zedong these couplets came to be employed in everyday speech as well. The emphasis on “loyalty-ficating” every sentence reached its extreme by employing short quotations of Mao, Lin Biao, or revolutionary martyr’s like Men He as code words at the most different occasions. When selling goods, changing shifts, or even answering the phone, semantic performances of loyalty

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140  Beijing shipin zongchang geming weiyuanhui zhengzhii bangongshi, Beijing shipin zongchang huoxue huoyong Mao Zedong sixiang 5, 13 June 1968, 2.
141  Ibid. 1-7.
142  Jing mian er chang Mao Zedong sixiang xuexibian (ed.), Zhu ci, 23 April 1968, 1ff.
came to formalize even the most basic speech acts. The following excerpt from the local chronicle of Mei County in Shaanxi province, describes the common practices in a working office:

“1. The first time using the phone, wish Chairman Mao eternal live!
2. From the second time onwards, the first sentence when making a phone call is ‘Serve the people’; the recipient answers ‘comprehensively’, ‘thoroughly’.
3. When answering the phone before leaving work, the first sentence is ‘Serve the People’; the recipient replies ‘we should fight selfishness and repudiate revisionism’.
4. When receiving guests, first ask Chairman Mao for instructions; then proceed with the study of the Supreme Instructions according to the content of the questions; before leaving, report back to Mao Zedong.”

Using stereotyped formula to demonstrate loyalty can be observed as a way of exerting power under many authoritarian and dictatorial regimes. One only has to think of the use of “Heil Hitler!” in Nazi Germany. But no other of the twentieth century leader cults took the matter to similar extremes as the Mao cult, when quotations of the leader came to replace even the most profane speech acts during a period ranging roughly from May 1968 to April 1969, though the extent of implementation varied greatly. Yet, nearly every local chronicle with a slightly more detailed section on the Cultural Revolution mentions the phenomenon, though seldom by providing exact dates or examples.

Finally, attention shall be paid to the genre of texts describing so-called “miracles” of Chairman Mao. Most of these reports dealt with specific innovations in the natural sciences, especially developments in modern weaponry and the sector of health and hygiene. The best known medical phenomenon of the Cultural Revolution, which came to be propagated massively from June 1968 onwards, was the education of so-called “barefoot doctors”. The emphasis on health work had developed from Mao’s harsh criticism of the policies of the Ministry of Health in June and July 1965. Mao had accused the ministry of advocating treatment for 15% of the populace only, mainly the elite of old cadres and the wealthy strata, while the rural medical care deteriorated. He advocated that students and doctors should temporarily be sent to the countryside instead, the students equipped with some basic medicaments and later a little red book on healthcare, acupuncture, and moxibustion, the doctors with a more varied knowledge. Although the medical training for the students ranged from three to six months only, they knew how to cure basic ailments and could thus immediately engage in work on the spot. By proving their knowledge through immediate success, ideally the barefoot doctors could foster the prestige of the Party, very much along

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143 Mei xian difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (ed.), Mei xian zhi, Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 2000, 583. See as well the list of couplets reprinted in MacFarquhar/Schoenhals, Mao’s Last Revolution, 266.
144 Mao Zedong, Guanyu weisheng gongzuo san ci tanhua, 26 June 1965, CCRD.
the lines of what Mao had advised unit 8341 to do in the Beijing General Knitting Mill: winning over the masses by way of offering help in everyday problems and the health sector.

During the Cultural Revolution, especially between mid-1968 and the Ninth Congress, the medical discourse came to serve as one of the primary examples of how Mao Zedong Thought advanced scientific knowledge and skills. The basic layout of all stories remained identical. An incurable ailment such as cancer or deafness was declared to have been overcome through the creative application of Mao Zedong Thought and the denigration of the policies of the Chinese Khrushchev. Although similar successes were claimed in other scientific disciplines during the Cultural Revolution, especially in weaponry and construction work, they did not develop into a genre like the medical discourse. The story that received most medial coverage in 1968, but has been completely forgotten nowadays, is the story of Zhang Qiuju, who was to experience one of the many “miracles” of Mao Zedong Thought. Zhang Qiuju, a 37-year old woman of “lower middle peasant” descent, had been brought to the Military Health Department of unit 4800 in Beijing by her husband in a pedicab with a womb swollen like a balloon. After listening to the odyssey of the couple and the failure to treat the illness through well known “specialists”, the PLA surgeons on 23 March proceeded with the operation.

“In the operating room, today all four walls were covered with Chairman Mao posters and Chairman Mao quotations thus destroying the old regulations of the capitalist medical health work line, making the room appear especially bright.”

Muttering Mao quotations, Zhang entered the room, weighing 214 pounds at a height of 1.57m. After a ten-hour operation, the surgeons removed a ninety-pound tumour from her belly. This victory of Mao Zedong Thought was turned into a major publicity campaign, as Zhang had not only survived the operation but also recovered remarkably well. The PLA unit was awarded the title “Wholeheartedly serving the people advanced Health Department” by the Military Affairs Commission. The newspapers covered the story nationwide and even a special exhibition was opened that consisted of the preserved tumour itself in the first

145 Compare the list of technical innovations since the founding of the PRC in one of the many Newspaper Reader’s Handbooks published in 1968 or 1969, see for example Du bao shouce (neibu cankao), Nanjing: Nanjing nongxueyuan geming weiyuanhui zhenggongzu/Nanjing wuxiandian gongyexiao geming weiyuanhui zhenggongzu, 1969, 1071-1099.
148 See Du bao shouce 1969, 525.
In the following months, several other miracles were reported, including the coverage of how deaf mute children had come to understand and recite certain Mao quotes through a special acupuncture method developed by a PLA unit. The miracles of Chairman Mao just like the language performances in Beijing and Shijiazhuang reveal the performative character of the language of flattery common to the Cultural Revolution. The Party media took an active part in spreading the cult rhetoric but differences have to be noted as to the degree of worship employed in official news items that were often cross-checked by Mao himself and local speeches or articles. While Mao at the outset of the Cultural Revolution had given in to stirring up emotions through advocating the cult, from mid-1967 onwards Mao’s critical remarks and deletions of passages referring to his own glory increased steadily. When reading a draft of the resolution to place the Xinhua News Agency under military control in December 1967, he cut out a number of “unsuitable adverbs”:


On other occasions, he would request to end the use of certain “empty phrases”, but not even the “Chairman” could single-handedly curb the communicative space based on structural deficits in the political apparatus he had himself exploited. As the re-establishment of order continued to last well into the autumn of 1968, the cult came to display an increasing bend towards commodification and ritualization in the months leading up to the Ninth Party Congress.

Cult and Commodities
The efforts of the CCP leadership to regain the power of interpretation over the Chairman’s image and ambiguously quoted works had been intensified continuously since mid-1967. Directives reclaiming the right to publish Mao items for the CCP Center remained of limited impact as the CCP Center’s stand towards the cult were highly ambiguous. Mao’s critical utterances concerning some phrases of Lin Biao, which he had voiced in the letter to Jiang Qing in July 1966, had remained a secret shared by only very few members of Mao’s

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149 One of the earliest accounts of Zhang’s fate along with a picture of hear tumour is to be found in Xin Guizhou bao, 26 May 1968, 3. See further Yunnan Daily, 10 December 1968.
150 See the report in Sichuan Daily, 16 December 1968. Short passages of the film on the curing of the deaf can be viewed under www.morningsun.org (last accessed 2 December 2005)
151 Mao wengao 12, 457.
152 Zhonggong zhongyang bangongting yinfu Mao Zedong guanyu dai wai xuanchuan gongzuode pishi (1967.3 - 1971.3.), 12 July 1971, CCRD.
innermost circle. Likewise, Mao’s deletion of certain exaggerating phrases in drafts of articles and directives was only known to those involved in the formulation of documents issued in the name of the CCP leadership. The deletions had furthermore concerned only the most euphuistic expressions and not the cult rhetoric as such. Yet the cult had proven to be hard to control and always contained the possibility of being overdone and of being turned into a cynical device of rule. But given the political situation in 1968 there was no other option. As the Party leadership had no other alternatives to exert control except military force and the symbolic power of the cult, the latter could only be tuned down to the pre-Cultural Revolutionary modus of a “correct” worship of Marxist-Leninist truths after order had been restored. Until that point, the cohesive powers of rallying around the core symbol of the CCP and New China had to be extended to a maximum. Publicly, the CCP Chairman thus continued to rejoice in the worship of the masses, and exuberant accounts of his meetings with Mao Zedong Thought activists were published well into 1968.

In December 1966 the CCP Center had interdicted the so-called “Red Ocean” campaign, aimed at merging semantic content and outer forms of the worship. A year later, however, priorities had shifted. Although activities termed to be merely formalistic were still not encouraged by the CCP leadership, they were tolerated as long as they produced the results wished for. The formal institutionalization of the cult through either the PLA soldiers enacting the “Three supports, two militaries” or the newly elected revolutionary committees came to take on two predominant forms: the establishment of ritualized modes of study and the employment of decorative measures as performances of revolutionary loyalty. The most common study ritual came to be the aforementioned “Asking for instructions in the morning and reporting back in the evening” that had been “invented” by students at the Shijingshan Middle School during the short term military training in the spring of 1967. As the report of the Beijing General Knitting Factory revealed, by autumn 1967 the PLA had turned the ritualized study into a formal system.

The establishment of a “asking for instructions and reporting back system” (请示, 汇报制度) had been a common measure of the CCP leadership since the days of the civil war. It had been a measure to assume control in areas where the situation had become especially precarious and the local leadership thus was to report back on the situation before implementing policy initiatives of its own. Similar precautions had as well been taken

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153 On 7 January 1948, Mao Zedong himself had written a draft that was submitted to all civil and military regions “on establishing a system of reports”, see Mao, Zedong, Mao Zedong xuanji, vol. 4, Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1968 [1960], 1169-1171. Shortly after the notion “asking for instructions and reporting back system” appears in CCP documents, see for example, see Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu xuanchuan gongzuo zhong
during the Gao-Rao affair and in most provinces during 1968. The PLA political instructors thus adapted measures previously employed to supervise political bodies and used them to control individual behaviour. Their main impetus was of disciplinary nature, but due to the request of displaying unlimited faith in the Chairman it could take on quasi-religious traits under certain conditions. In various reports of PLA soldiers the ritual of asking for instructions in the morning is specifically mentioned, like in the following passage taken from a report of Mao Zedong Thought activist Liu Xuebao. Liu had lost his left hand when discharging a bomb aimed at a newly constructed bridge, a fact that had made him a widely acclaimed socialist hero. In late 1967, Liu was conducting “support the Left” work in a scarcely inhabited area of Yongdeng County near the provincial capital of Lanzhou in Gansu. Upon having been informed about the serious extent of oppositional utterances among the “hoodwinked masses”, the soldiers set out with their backpacks to “illuminate the remote mountains and hidden forests” with the rays of Mao Zedong Thought.

“There first we helped the masses to lively study and apply Mao Zedong Thought, established daily reading, and asking in the morning reporting back in the evening systems; we organized sharing experience in application meetings, taught how to sing quotation songs, and stirred up a thick political climate. By working, living, and discussing together with the working populace, we instructed them on how to conduct the Cultural Revolution in the realm of forestry.”

There are numerous other documents relating to this system, or photographs showing peasants in different provinces offering their morning greetings to the Chairman’s portrait (“First, we wish the reddest, reddest red sun in our hearts, our most most beloved great leader Chairman Mao eternal life! Eternal life! Eternal life!”) before setting out with spades, Quotations, and banners to the fields. But in most cases, few things could be reported to the Chairman except for questions of individual morals. The daily asking for instructions thus was soon complemented by all kinds of confessional activities conducted before the Chairman’s cult

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154 In Hebei province, for example, the local revolutionary committee issued two instructions to all units on establishing similar systems that were to report back to the CCP Center in brief every two months in case of normal workflow and immediately in case of “serious problems”. The reports were to be written by the “leading comrades personally” and not by simple working staff. In case of criticism regarding the leading provincial cadres, local units were to report to the Center directly, see the draft version Hebei sheng geming weiyuanhui, Guanyu jianli qingshi yu baogao zhidu de qingshi (caogao), 3 June 1968, 1 and the final circular Hebei sheng geming weiyuanhui, Guanyu jianli qingshi yu baogao zhidu de qingshi, 22 June 1968, 1.


156 Ibid. 97.

157 Mei xian difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (ed.), Mei xian zhi, 582.
symbols. If an incongruence between the own behaviour and the dominant interpretation of Mao Zedong Thought could be proven, or even worse, if some type of thought or action could be claimed to have violated Mao’s supreme authority, the Chairman was to be asked for forgiveness and penalties were impended through the small groups. The ritual enactment of worship therefore always bore the danger of either quasi-religious confessions or endless repetitions of the outer form, which in the case of the “daily reading” ritual led army and Party authorities to request closer attention of their subordinates in enacting the cult rituals and not to regard their implementation as a mere formality.  

Although the slogan “Determining loyalty by looking at action” (忠不忠, 看行动) was only to be coined in March 1968, the general trend of placing physical demonstrations of loyalty above the omnipresent verbal statements had become unmistakably clear after the publication of Mao’s newest directives emphasizing unity in October 1967. Asking for instructions in the morning presented one way of demonstrating loyalty, but the “creativity of the masses” in inventing new forms of worship was indeed unlimited. In Shanghai, the broadcasted morning gymnastics that had become part of Chinese everyday life since 1951 was turned into “Quotation gymnastics”. Like every other type of activity it was to be developed into an occasion of praising the Chairman and destroying his enemies, of “thoroughly eradicating the revisionist sports line and establishing a revolutionary Mao Zedong Thought sports line”, instead of fostering private health or other selfish objectives.
The quotation gymnastics relied heavily on the dramatic style of performances common to the “Mao Zedong Thought propaganda groups” that were aimed at presenting the basic foundations of the Party line especially in rural areas by means of non-script based activities. The gymnastics were quickly copied and installed as official morning activity until immediately before Lin Biao’s fall.

Another famous way of expressing physical loyalty to the Chairman was the so-called “Loyalty dance” (忠字舞). Its specific origins remain unknown, but by early 1968 it spread like a prairie fire throughout all of China. The dance, which could be performed both alone and in groups, continued to flourish for roughly a year and consisted of the attempt to artistically transform the body into the Chinese character “Loyalty” (忠) by using outstretched arms and kicking feet to liken the body to the written character. Just like the gymnastics, the loyalty dance was no device implemented by the CCP Center but a grassroots invention aimed at physically demonstrating loyalty. The physical demonstrations took on a dynamic of its own and soon it spread to regions, were public dancing was no part of the common culture like in parts of southern China and thus led to considerable public embarrassment.

According to an official report of the Tianjin Municipal Revolutionary Committee published in May 1969, in a number of factories members of the local revolutionary committee had taken up the habit of dancing and had made a twice daily “loyalty dance break” a mandatory part of daily production. The knowledge of the dancing moves had in some factories been made part of the criteria upon which the “Four/five good activists” were selected. Furthermore, students had skipped classes to practice their dancing skills and in one factory seven instructors had been employed to teach those workers without dancing abilities the correct moves. The dancing skills, however, were not the most important aspect behind the performance, although child prodigies like Kang Wenjie received great attention: “Dancing well or not is a problem of technique, but dancing or not dancing is a question of standpoint.”

Besides the physical demonstrations of loyalty, the decoration of housing and environment with Mao symbols came to assume ever more importance. In a report submitted

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162 Guowuyuan, zhongyang junwei guanyu zai quanguo shixing xin guangbo ticao de tongzhi (jiyao), 31 August 1971, CCRD.
163 Chan et al., *Chen Village*, 169ff.
in late November 1967 to the Hebei Provincial Revolutionary Committee on the situation in Qian’an County near Tangshan City, the local revolutionary committee still went beyond the common conduction of study classes or remembrance meetings by advocating a “revolutionization of the surroundings”\(^{167}\) (环境革命化).

“In order to thoroughly eradicate the four old things and establish the four new things, to foster the proletarian feelings of the broad masses, and to let the invincible Mao Zedong Thought capture every position, to let the limitless radiance of Mao Zedong Thought illuminate every corner, and to promote the development of the mass movement to lively study and apply Chairman Mao’s works, [it has been] advocated widely to have ‘four [things] enter the room’ [四进屋] (the precious red books, the Quotations, Chairman Mao posters, and quotation banners) and to take “five [things] to the fields” [五到田] (Quotations, red flag, quotation boards, newspapers, and gathering experience in application meetings) in order to implement the revolutionization of the surroundings, in order to see to it that everybody, anytime, everywhere, during every type of work can receive the education and nurturing influence of Mao Zedong Thought, to establish the absolute authority of Mao Zedong Thought in a big way and develop the whole county into a glistening red school of Mao Zedong Thought.”\(^{168}\)

The outward cult demonstrations culminated during the aforementioned “Three Loyalties”\(^{169}\) campaign that developed after the publication of the Second Air Force Activist Congress report in early March 1968. There never was a central document calling for its organization, rather the general trend of interpreting personal loyalty to the Chairman as the key element of revolutionary behaviour led to the necessity of actively expressing loyalty somehow. The campaign started in industrial units and the PLA “three supports” staff played a major role in developing the specific forms of worship like in the case of the Beijing General Knitting Mill. In provinces that only very recently had established revolutionary committees, such as Hebei or Guangdong, the campaign was especially strong since the provincial leadership was in need of proving their revolutionary standpoint. Thus in cities like Shijiazhuang, Hefei, or Guangdong the medial echo was extremely vivid in the first months. But as revolutionary committees in other localities did not want to leave the impression of lagging behind, the campaign quickly spread.

\(^{167}\) Qian’an xian zhua geming zu shengchan di xi xian zhihuibu, Gaoju Mao Zedong sixiang weida hongqi, xiangqi da xuexi, da xuanchuan, da faxing Mao zhuxi zhuzuo xin gaochao, dashu teshu Mao Zedong sixiang juedui quanwei, November 1967, HPA 1030-6-321.

\(^{168}\) Ibid.

\(^{169}\) Loyalty oaths with similar phraseology had been used by the Red Guards in mid-1966 already, and Lin Biao during his speech on 15 September 1966 had officially sanctioned the expression. By late 1967, however, different versions ranging from three to six loyalties were in public usage, see for example the expression “four unlimited” in Ibid.
During the “Three Loyalties”, the verbal, physical, and decorative aspects of the Mao cult merged and resulted in attempts to achieve the “loyalty-fication” or “Mao Zedong Thoughtification” of the entire day. Factory workers not only discussed their loyalty but also demonstrated their revolutionary conviction publicly by having the character “loyalty” printed in red on the working aprons. The commodification of the cult is mentioned in most local annals but seldom is a reliable timeline given. The aforementioned directive on current problems in propaganda work published by the Tianjin Municipal Revolutionary Committee in May 1969 is among the most detailed contemporary accounts edited by an official state organ to describe the scope of the loyalty-fication movement:

A present day stroll over Chinese antique markets still reveals the scope of the massive drive towards commodification of the cult. Large metal shields engraved with loyalty-characters or Mao portraits came to be attached to locomotives, motorcycles, and cars. For a short time, the habit of carrying large framed Mao pictures around the neck came to be regarded as the

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172 See the front-page picture in Shijiazhuang Daily, 16 March 1968.

173 Tianjin shi geming weiyuanhui, Jin’ge [69] 082, 3f.

174 Interestingly, not only in the Soviet Union but also in Taiwan as well similar “propaganda trains” carrying the image of the respective leader in front of the locomotive were used, see Taylor, Chiang cult, 101. In the days of the PRC founding, propaganda cars like public meeting places were still decorated with the portraits of both Mao and Zhu De.
ultimate expression of loyalty.\textsuperscript{175} The loyalty-ification campaign mobilized all traditional handcrafts ranging from embroidery works of PLA soldiers (“Every pinprick is an expression of our heartfelt love for the Chairman”), paper cuts, and porcelain ware. Kitsch products like red plastic hearts imprinted with the Chairman’s portrait and the character “loyalty” or porcelain lustres with a red “loyalty” inlay flourished the same fashion like special plastic boxes for the \textit{Selected Works}. Fancy red plastic-bound briefcases were available for the study of Mao texts and quotation cards could be collected in red plastic folders. Even traditional silk bags, previously used for Buddhist sutras and now imprinted with the character “loyalty” were handmade to contain Mao’s “precious red books”. Mao quotes virtually came to be printed on every type of object,\textsuperscript{176} which would then be sold at a price below manufacturing costs or even be distributed as gifts to others in order not to give the impression of harbouring ulterior motives of gaining money. When trying to purchase a Mao portrait in shops thus no longer the character “买” for buying would be used but the polite expression “请”, previously used to acquire sacrificial objects. The commodification of the cult went hand in hand with its sacralization.

Mao badges played a special role among the commodities in spreading the cult. Badges were the only cult item besides Mao’s works and pictures that were manufactured by the state itself.\textsuperscript{177} Mao badges had come to be increasingly common after July 1966 when many factories or private organizations issued badges in commemoration of specific events or as a proof of having visited a certain revolutionary site. In the PLA, the wearing of two buttons became mandatory after the GPD had come to issue a five-star Mao badge along with a rectangular badge carrying the slogan “Serve the people” to all PLA soldiers from May 1967 onwards.\textsuperscript{178} By August 1967, according to the minutes of a meeting on the situation of distributing Mao buttons in Hebei province convened by the Second Light Industry

\textsuperscript{175}“Recently, another fad has occurred: [Mao] pictures are carried in plastic or glass frames before the chest”, see Tianjin shi geming weiyuanhui, \textit{Jin’ge} [69] 054, Guanyu zhizhi zai qing “jiu da”, ying guoqing deng huodong zhong chuxian de fukua langfei xianxiang de jueding, 24 March 1969, 2.

\textsuperscript{176}Peasants in Guizhou were even reported to shave the skin on the fronthead of the biggest pig in form of a loyalty character and send these “loyalty pigs” as a gift to Beijing. The local newspaper reports are mentioned as well in Cheng Shi/Wang Xiaoling/Kai Zheng, \textit{Wenge xiaoliaoji}, Chengdu: Xi’an caijing daxue chubanshe, 1988, 18.

\textsuperscript{177}The history of the Mao buttons has probably become the best-researched subtopic of the Mao cult, because many collectors and scholars have published accounts on the different variants and value of the items. There even is a heavily frequented website dealing with badges only, see \url{www.maobadge.com}. For further readings in English see for example Schrift, \textit{Biography of a Chairman Mao Badge} and the online article by Bishop, Bill, \textit{Badges of Chairman Mao Zedong}, 1996 \url{http://museums.cnd.org/CR/old/maobadge/} (last accessed 31 July 2006). Further Benewick, Robert/Donald, Stephanie, \textit{Badgering the People. Mao Badges, A Retrospective 1949-1995}, in: Ibid. \textit{Belief in China}, Brighton: Green Center for Non-Western Art and Culture, 1996, 29-39. In Chinese, a good overview is provided by Li Leiming, \textit{Lishi de jiyi - Mao Zedong xiangzhang shangxi}, Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2006.

\textsuperscript{178}Xu Ren/Xu Miao/Xu Ying, \textit{Mao Zedong xiangzhang wushi nian}, Xi’an: Shaanxi lüyou chubanshe, 1993, 12.
Department and the Trade Department, “basically every urban worker, student, soldier wears Chairman Mao buttons”.\(^{179}\) By the end of the year, in Hebei province alone 10 million badges had been manufactured by the state and an influx of at least 9 million badges from other provinces had been reported. Thus on average roughly half of the 44 million inhabitants had been provided with Mao badges.\(^ {180}\) Yet even according to the results of the Hebei investigation teams, most urban citizens owned up to a dozen or more Mao badges while in the countryside only the youth that had been exchanging experiences was in possession of Mao buttons. These numbers, however, were tiny compared to the production of badges in Beijing or Shanghai. Between May 1966 and December 1967 the 15 official units entrusted with the production of badges in the capital had manufactured a total of 207 million badges of over 200 different kinds, private producers not included.\(^ {181}\) The overall estimates for the Cultural Revolution range well over 2.5 billion produced badges. In the countryside the efforts to distribute buttons and Mao works through mobile sales personnel or PLA soldiers were accordingly stepped up. By early 1968, the wearing or not wearing of badges had become a question of loyalty as well. Many cities thus had to establish specific offices dealing with the requests of local factories to manufacture sufficient badges.\(^ {182}\) As a greater size came to be associated with greater loyalty to the Chairman, aluminium, plastic, and porcelain badges with a diameter of 30 cm and more came to be produced.\(^ {183}\) Smaller badges in some cases were even retracted and used to produce larger sized ones\(^ {184}\) as the enormous demand led to a substantial reallocation of resources, mainly aluminium, into the production of badges. The question of how to carry the badges to prove one’s loyalty was another topic of frequent discussions. The common pattern was to wear the badges on the left hand side, slightly above the heart. But a number of rural residents took pride in displaying their loyalty to the Chairman by attaching the buttons to their skin directly.\(^ {185}\) As the loyalty campaign spilled over into the countryside thus it changed its forms of expression yet again.

Unlike the urban phenomena of commodification, in most rural production brigades the three loyalties campaign led to a rapid increase of ritual modes of worship. Many brigade

\(^{179}\) *Mao zhuxi xiangzhang shengchan, faxing bufen diqu zuotanhui xiao jie*, 11 August 1967, HPA 957-6-5.


\(^{182}\) The Beijing Municipal Revolutionary Committee on 3 April 1968 established a special office in charge of the manufacturing of badges, see “Beijing gongyezhi” biansheng weihui (ed.), *Beijing gongye zhi - yinshua zhi*, Beijing: Zhongguo kexue jishu chubanshe, 2001, 25.

\(^{183}\) Tianjin shi geming weiyuanhui, *Jin’ge [69]* 082, 3.

\(^{184}\) Hebei sheng shangye ting/Hebei sheng er qing ting, *Guanyu Mao zhuxi xiangzhang lianhe diaocha baogao*, 5.

\(^{185}\) *Baishui xian xianzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui* (ed.), *Baishui xian zhi*, Xi’an: Xi’an ditu chubanshe, 1989, 459.
headquarters established so-called “loyalty-chambers/halls” (忠字屋/堂), which were decorated with pictures of the “red sun” Mao Zedong and large-scale quotation boards. Fresh flowers would be placed before Mao’s picture and his works be put on display on “precious red book platforms/altars” (红宝书台). Similarly, down to the production team level “instruction platforms/altars” (请示台) were established, usually on the village square or in front of the most representative building. According to a survey conducted in Taibai County in Shaanxi province, no less than 1242 “Instruction altars” and 3149 “Precious red book altars” had been established by January 1969. The setting up of special stages resulted in quasi-religious activities of displaying unlimited faith in the Chairman and in many cases the worship did not remain of disciplinary nature but Mao was effectively incorporated into the local pantheon by replacing the former deities on the house altar, a custom that has continues until the present. But even in Shanghai citizens could be observed conducting the rituals of the “Three Loyalties” alone.

The loyalty campaign reached the countryside with a certain delay, in many remote regions it only got fully started in the autumn of 1968 and therefore merged with the call to “cleanse the class ranks” aimed at sorting out spies and counterrevolutionaries. To a much greater extent than in urban areas therefore the performances of loyalty were accompanied by a violent dimension in defining revolutionaries from counterrevolutionaries. The complete confusion about what effectively constituted counterrevolutionary behaviour had made violations of Mao symbols or insufficient displays of loyalty a criterion that was after all understood by most. Yet sometimes the alienation of accustomed meanings proved too fast for the rural populace, like in the case of a peasant Yang XX who had confused the homophonous expressions “loyalty” (忠) and the Hebei dialect phrase for “ok” (中) and was punished for his negligence. Everyone who with intention or not misspelled Mao quotations or vilified the cult symbols, for example by mistakenly using an old newspaper with Mao’s image as toilet paper, would either be subjected to struggle sessions or sentenced as “active counterrevolutionary” (现行反革命). In Baishui County in Shaanxi

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187 Landsberger, Deification of Mao, in: Chong (ed.), Master Narratives, 139-184
188 The religious worship of Mao or other communist leaders as deities had already begun prior to the Cultural Revolution, especially in times of natural disasters, see the sources quoted in Schoenhals, Saltationist Socialism, 203f., n.63. The CCP undertook a series of half-hearted attempts to curb the religious worship. Thus following Mao’s 100th birthday in 1993 it closed down temples that had been erected in Mao’s honor, see Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, Susanne, Mao-Zedong-Ideen und Mao-Kult, in: Staiger, Brunhild (ed.), Länderbericht China. Geschichte, Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Kultur, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000, 273.
189 White, Policies of Chaos, 303.
190 Yang, XX, Qingzui shu, September 1968, 1.
191 Ibid.
province, a member of the medical team was sentenced for having written a big character poster on an old newspaper and having placed the character “bad” (坏) exactly on the reverse side of a Mao picture as could be proven when holding the paper against the light.\(^{192}\) All in all, 517 persons were struggled against in Baishui due to their “word crimes” (言论罪), 98 of which were convicted as “active counterrevolutionaries”. While the Mao cult especially in rural areas came to take on religious and quasi-religious forms, one should thus not negate the importance played by the simple fear of being harshly sentenced for having opposed the Chairman.

Mango Worship and the Economy of the Gift

In late July and early August 1968 the cult allowed for by the central authorities reached its probably most obscure phase. Despite the rhetorical promises of unification and the fight against “multi-polarity” (多中心论) the struggles between different factions had not subsided but instead resulted in heavily armed conflicts. The fights were especially violent in Guangxi and the north-western provinces including Shaanxi, prompting the CCP Center to issue two commands in July 1968, Zhongfa [68] 103 and Zhongfa [68] 113, which criticised the present state in unusually sharp words and called for an immediate end to all armed hostilities. In the capital meanwhile, Mao Zedong experimented with the formation of “Worker Peasant [Soldier] Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams”, made up primarily of members of model factories like the Beijing General Knitting Mill under the order of Central Garrison commanders to enter those units that were still conducting armed struggle. The first of Mao’s trial spots was Qinghua University were members of the “Jinggangshan” and the “414” faction had been fighting without cessation for roughly three months. The team, made up of roughly 30,000 members that had been assembled the night before in the Beijing New China Printing Factory, entered the campus of Qinghua University on 27 July rather badly prepared, carrying Mao pictures and propagating the necessity to cease fire.\(^{193}\) Only after heavy resistance of the Jinggangshan faction under Kuai Dafu, who was unaware of the fact that Mao had given the order himself, did the propaganda team win over the campus building by building. At the end of the day, five team members had been killed and 731 been wounded by grenades, bottles, and stones that had been hurled at them by the remaining roughly 600 to 1000 students.\(^{194}\) The following night, Mao received the five main student leaders in the Great

\(^{192}\) Baishui xian xianzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (ed.), Baishui xian zhi, 460.

\(^{193}\) Mao’s personal physician Li Zhisui was part of the team as well, for his tragicomic account see Li, Private Life of Chairman Mao, 499-503.

\(^{194}\) Tang, Yi ye zhi qiu, 31.
Hall of the People and declared that he himself had been the “black hand” behind the dispatching of the propaganda teams and thus ended the already waning importance of the Red Guards, most of whom would be sent down to the countryside by the end of the year to conduct thought reform through physical labour.

Mao’s endorsement of the propaganda team’s actions was further substantiated symbolically by presenting its members with a couple of mangos that had been a gift of Pakistan foreign minister Mian Arshad Hussain. Mao had given the roughly three dozen mangos to his security chief Wang Dongxing, who with Mao’s consent had sent the fruits to Qinghua University as a sign of Mao’s appreciation of the propaganda teams efforts. For the team members and students the mangos were the first tangible objects they had received from Mao. Many of them had seen the Chairman in person either during the 1966 parades or during one of the activist meetings, but very few had had the chance to actually get in touch with his physical presence. Mechanical reproductions of Mao which like the famous picture “Chairman Mao goes to Anyuan”, published the month before, had been celebrated with enormous pomp and been carried to the furthest corners of the country were readily available, but items that had been given by Mao himself were endowed with a completely different aura. The mangos were first draped on a table covered with red cloth at Qinghua University. According to a *People’s Daily* report, workers were quoted with near biblical rhetoric when actually seeing the fruits: “These are not simple mangos, they are rain and dew; they are the sunshine.” The fruits were shared among the institutions that had been part of the propaganda team and were carried in processions to the respective working units, where great ceremonies were held to great the arrival of the “precious gift – the mango” (珍贵礼品 – 芒果). Li Zhisui reports about the efforts to preserve the mango in Beijing General Knitting Mill by covering it in wax and placing it on an altar in the factory auditorium were everyone could defile past it and pay his respects until it started rotting and had to be replaced by a facsimile.

The demand for the mangos as tokens of the Chairman’s appreciation grew exorbitantly. Requests for receiving one of the mangos were sent along with gratulatory notes

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197 Li, *Private Life of Chairman Mao*, 503. Due to the incredible importance attached to the mangos, the government of Pakistan on 31 August presented China with a selection of 100 kinds of mangos and 100 mango-seedlings, see *Ba zhengfu xiang wo guo zhengfu zengsong mangguo he mangguo shumiao*, in: People's Daily, 8 September 1968, 6. As the attention paid to the fruit had been based on Mao’s act of presenting the fruits to the workers rather than on their symbolic value as sign of the Chinese-Pakistan friendship, the medial echo was minimal.
to the propaganda team units and the Beijing Municipal Revolutionary Committee. Provincial organizations with good connections to counterparts in the capital possessing more than one mango were lucky to receive an original. But quickly replicas produced in the name of the Beijing Municipal Revolutionary Committee came to replace the rotting fruits and provided a reservoir for those provinces which otherwise would have received none. After manufacturing a series of official replicas in glass caskets with an engraved Lin Biao quote, the mangos were sent to the different provinces in mid-September. Thus on 19 September 1968, 500,000 people greeted the arrival of the mango-replicas in Chengdu. 198 Three days later, the first plastic mangos reached Chongqing municipality. The same day at 12:31h a special train delivered the mangos to Guiyang, the provincial capital of Guizhou province. On 28 September finally, the Yunnan Daily reported about a welcoming crowd of 100,000 to celebrate the arrival of the mangos in the provincial capital of Kunming. The symbolic power provided by the possession of the mango was exemplified by the attendance of high-level officials of the revolutionary committees in welcoming the gift from Beijing. In Guiyang, no one else but Li Zaihan, head of the Guizhou Revolutionary Committee, took charge of the mango himself. Standing in the back of a pickup truck he held the mango glass case the whole way of the drive from the train station to the revolutionary committee’s seat, which due to massive crowd of around 200,000 people lasted for several hours. 199

The episode of worshipping mangos represents the most bewildering example of the symbolic expressions of power created during the Cultural Revolution. They served multiple functions in a complex web based on personal favours, obligations, and loyalties. The fact that commodities such as buttons or mango replicas could take on a life of their own and function in ways never intended to by the CCP leadership was due to a fundamental erosion of the communist political system. The charismatic relationships between CCP center and periphery at expense of formal bureaucratic routines had resulted in an increasing reliance on social networking or “guanxi” relations. 200 The importance of gifts and performances of loyalty in demonstrating political allegiances thus led to a resurgence of an economy based on gifts and personal obligations. 201 By sending gifts or signalling allegiance through various

199 Shoudu gongren jieji ba Mao zhuxi zeng de zhengui liwu zhuan gei wo sheng jieji he quan sheng geming renmin, in: Xin Guizhou bao, 24 September 1968, 1.
200 On the importance of guanxi-relations in Communist China see Yang, Gifts, Favours, and Banquets.
201 The role of gifts has been gained wide attention after Marcel Mauss’ inquiries into the nature played by gift-giving in archaic societies in the early 1920s, see Mauss, Marcel, The Gift. Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies, Glencoe: Free press, 1954. Although there has been ample criticism of Mauss’ views on the
means, revolutionary committees and political factions thus tried to outsmart their opponents. The gift economy of the cult functioned both as a medium of signalling loyalty to one’s superiors and as a device of securing followers below.\(^\text{202}\) The structural deficits of legitimate succession had not been a phenomenon of the Cultural Revolution solely but rather of the Leninist Party organization as a whole. The CCP Center therefore had in the years prior to the Cultural Revolution, especially during the Great Leap Forward, issued a number of directives interdicting the sending of presents or other goods to the CCP Center on occasions like the PRC’s founding anniversary.\(^\text{203}\) The sole revoking of Mao’s dictum on “practising economy while conducting revolution”, however, often proved to be insufficient to curb the sending of presents that in most cases consisted of self-grown fruits or other agricultural products. Yet on the occasion of the nineteenth founding date of the PRC in October 1968 a number of highly expensive objects were among the gifts from the provinces, such as a tiny X-ray machine sent by the Guizhou Revolutionary Committee which was presented in a silver box with the inscription “always loyal to Chairman Mao”.\(^\text{204}\)

The demonstrations of revolutionary conviction and loyalty assumed enormous proportions in the last months of 1968. A widespread phenomenon was the construction of revolutionary monuments and Mao statues by revolutionary committees as a visible sign of the Cultural Revolution’s success and the own committee’s legitimacy.\(^\text{205}\) On the occasion of the PRC’s eighteenth anniversary in 1967, an exhibition of more than 200 large-scale photos showing Mao during different stages of the communist revolution had been on display in the capital with the consent of the CCP Center. Lin Biao on 9 October had added a personal inscription: “Long Live the Victory of Mao Zedong Thought”. Plans to copy the exhibition in different localities had been harboured by many provincial governments in September 1967 already,\(^\text{206}\) but only during the process of consolidating power in the autumn and winter of

\(^{202}\) On the eve of the Ninth Congress the personal in a number of factories in Tianjin was for example bestowed with *Quotations*, badges, or small Mao statues to “welcome” the congress worth “ten Yuan and more”, see Tianjin shi geming weiyouhui, Jin’ye [69] 049, Guanyu “jingli” Mao zhuxi suxiang, jingzhi Mao zhuxi xiangzhang he xiong guaxiang deng wen ti de tongzhi, 19 March 1969, 3.

\(^{203}\) For example Zhongfa [67] 360, Zhongyang wenhua geming xiaozu guanyu bu yao gei zhongyang wenhua geming xiaozu song li de tongzhi, 28 November 1967, CCRD.

\(^{204}\) See the photographs in Xin Guizhou bao, 27 September 1968.

\(^{205}\) The form of the monuments varied according to local customs. In Hami, a city in the province of Xinjiang located on the Silk Road, a Chairman Mao pagoda was erected, 14x14m in diameter and 19,75m high with colored Mao portraits on all sides, see Zhang Rengan/Yusufu Yunusi/Lu Huaying (eds.), *Zhongguo gongchandang Hami shi (xian) lishi dashiji*, 1949.10-1998.12, Wulumuqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 1999, 278f.

\(^{206}\) The Preparatory Small Group in Sichuan province on 27 September 1967 had already announced the determination to stage the exhibition in Chengdu, see Lin Li, *Suiyue de jianzheng - Sichuan sheng zhanlanguan ji Mao zhuxi suxiang xiujian shimo*, in: Sichuan dang’an 3 (2004), 25.
1968 and 1969 did the plans become reality. The result was the construction of so-called “Long Live the Victory of Mao Zedong Thought Halls” (毛泽东思想胜利万岁馆) or short “Long Live Halls” (万岁馆) to shelter the exhibitions, each with a huge Mao statue in front. In the city of Handan in southern Hebei the construction of the exhibition hall started in mid-July 1968 after the Hebei Revolutionary Committee had announced that permanent exhibitions were to be held in the five largest cities of the province. The whole building area, which included the “Long Live Hall” itself, two minor exhibition halls, a huge square, and a Mao statue, was finished after only five months work on Mao’s birthday in December 1968. The plans and layout for the new hall were impressive and incorporated a whole array of symbolic devices. The “Long Live Hall” itself resembled the character “loyalty”. It was the largest building in town by far and along with the square covered an area of 67,746 square meters. The main entrance faced east, towards the rising sun. The Mao statue was based on the model of the Beijing Mining Institute and measured 12.26 m in height. All structures had been made of the best materials available. Based on the premise of having to preserve the victory of Mao Zedong Thought for eternity, the hall had been built earthquake-proof and contained the highest standard of technical equipment. The costs that had been invested by the local government for a project, which one has to remember did not take place in the nation’s capital but in a minor provincial city, according to an estimate of the CCP Handan District Committee in 1982 added up to the enormous amount of 2.55 million Yuan. The invested amount of money and the actual worth of the building in terms of labour force and raw materials, however, according to the CCP report varied greatly.

“[T]he actual costs for the building of the hall range between 4.2-4.3 million Yuan. Yet, a large amount of manpower, resources, and technical expertise has been offered without compensation from the whole district […], the government departments, the military, factories, universities, street committees, and rural production teams.”

The construction work would not have been able to proceed with such a rapid speed if it had not been supervised by the responsible departments. Yet most work units’ mobilized workers who would participate in the ongoing work for a few days without pay. Others simply joined on their own initiative. In Handan, an estimated number of 260,000 people took part in the construction work over a period of five months, not all of them helping out with

207 The name derived from Lin Biao’s inscription and led to the changing of earlier variants like “Wishing Chairman Mao eternal life exhibition hall” (请朱毛主席万寿无疆展览馆) in the case of Sichuan, see Ibid.
209 Ibid. 36.
210 Ibid.
211 Ibid.
construction work though. Just like back when constructing statues on university campuses in mid-1967, propaganda troops would perform plays and songs to strengthen the work spirit, others would look after the material well-being of the workers as a different expression of “offering/displaying loyalty” (献/表忠). Peasants joined with their horse-carts and transported “loyalty-stones” (忠字石) or “loyalty-wood” (忠字木) to the construction site. The building of the Long Live Halls was to result in nothing less than creating a physical “crystallization” of loyalty, as a report from Nanchang, the capital city of Jiangxi province, put it:

“At this place, every brick and every tile, every grass and every tree, every picture and every landscape all radiate the glowing shine of ‘loyalty’; every window and every door, every room and every chamber, every step and every ledge are crystallizations of ‘loyalty’. To achieve this, the heart has to think of ‘loyalty’, the energy has to be employed for ‘loyalty’, the sweat has to flow for ‘loyalty’, the blood has to surge for ‘loyalty’, [while] striding the path of ‘loyalty’, creating deeds of ‘loyalty’, and climbing the high peak of ‘loyalty’. The people gather under the sign of ‘loyalty’, they fight under the sign of ‘loyalty’, and march forward under sign of ‘loyalty’.”

This second wave of materializing the gains of the Cultural Revolution through creating monuments of victory varied from the Red Guard phase of building Mao statues in several important aspects. The Red Guards had not been able to command similar resources as the revolutionary committees. Thus Mao Zedong statues for example had by and large been confined to university campuses. In late 1968, nearly every locality after careful examination of different models had built its own Mao statue. According to still incomplete statistics from the Tianjin Municipal Departments of Finance, Industry, and Culture, by early 1969 a total of 970 huge Mao statues had been built in the Tianjin area, some of them despite previous orders to prevent “phenomena of thriftlessness”. A branch of the Tianjin Steel Plant had even demolished six of its production sites to make room for their statue. Other units without sufficient practical knowledge of how to build a statue had resorted to “inviting guests and offering presents, secure advantages through illegal measures, and relied on

212 See the reports compiled by the “Long Live Hall” Preparatory Small Group in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, "Mao Zedong shengli wansui" guan Jiangxi sheng choujian weiyuanhui bangongshi (ed.), Huoxue huoyong Mao Zedong sixiang jingyan jiaoliushuo cailiao, 5 November 1968.
214 The official preparatory small group in charge of presenting a model for a statue in Chengdu between 3 June and 6 August 1968 visited no less than 22 different Mao statues or socialist exhibitions like the “Rent collection courtyard” to find inspiration. Most of the visited sites were located in the capital, but the group also travelled Tangshan, Jinan, and Xi’an before casting their own 12.26 m high model in white marble, see Lin Li, Suiyue de jianzheng - Sichuan sheng zhanlanguan ji Mao zhuxi suxiang xiujian shimo (stu), in: Sichuan dang’an 4 (2004), 44.
personal connections”\textsuperscript{216}. Such criticism, however, could only be voiced after the convention of the Ninth Party Congress, when the balance of power had temporarily been restored and the cult and its multifarious materializations were slowly reduced after having served its purpose.

\textsuperscript{216} Ibid. 2.
Chapter Nine: Curbing the Cult

The second wave of building monuments as symbols for the victory of the Cultural Revolution took place at a time, when the Party media had already started reducing the omnipresent reprints of Mao pictures, Mao quotes, and the most exaggerating phrases of worship. After the last revolutionary committees had been formally established in early September 1968, the overall number of articles slowly started to increase again and covered a greater spectre of topics. Certain phrases like “unlimited worship” or “supreme instructions” vanished completely from the official discourse, while general references to “living study and application” continued until Lin Biao’s fall in 1971. The diminution of the rhetorical veneration had been made possible after Mao Zedong at the Central Caucus on 25 September had approved of dropping a slogan in praise of the CCRG from the official list of slogans for the National Day celebrations.\(^\text{217}\) Previously, Mao had deleted a number of flattering references from draft articles but not on matters of equal importance. Zhou Enlai, well versed in interpreting Mao’s general mood, during a central propaganda conference that took place simultaneously with the Central Caucus, carefully advised the leading personnel of the Party media to tone down the cult. Responding to a question posed by a member of the military command in charge of the Xinhua News Agency on having failed to mention the sending of a congratulatory telegram to the Chairman, Zhou remarked: “At present, congratulatory telegrams are sent to the Chairman for all kinds of important and unimportant issues. This unhealthy tendency should be terminated.”\(^\text{218}\) Zhou further advised the media staff to pay more attention to content rather than form. He even praised a few capitalist news media, which unlike the general capitalist trend of “making a living from selling rumours” tried to stick to the facts. Zhou therefore advised the editors: “Our communist newspapers should proceed accordingly”.

There had been ample criticism of the “inventions” and “miracles” of the cult prior to Zhou’s discussions with media representatives in September 1968 by members of the CCP Center. While both the remaining CCRG core and a group of military leaders loyal to Lin Biao in public advocated the correct study of Mao Zedong Thought, they had strongly criticized a number of unauthorized “living applications” of Mao Zedong Thought like in a talk with military representatives held by the Central Caucus in early April 1968:

\(^{217}\) Zhou Enlai nianpu 3, 260.
\(^{218}\) Ibid. 261.
“Jiang Qing: Have you received authorization for conducting the quotation gymnastics? How can [such things] evolve if it has not been authorized? No formalism or vulgarization should be conducted. The Chairman’s thought should not be debased or distorted.

Huang Yongsheng: Everywhere the Chairman’s quotations are being shouted.

Premier [Zhou Enlai]: Even the traffic police use the Quotations as baton, how should this work? [...] Revered Kang: I heard that you even study the Quotations before eating.

Lin Biao: The CCP Center should investigate these problems and pass a resolution.”

Yet the task of tuning down the cult was highly sensitive. Neither was the official image of the Chairman to be tarnished, nor should the “cold water” of cult-criticism stifle the partly fabricated mass enthusiasm as Mao had argued during the Great Leap Forward. A resolution on restricting the physical demonstrations of loyalty was therefore only passed after the Ninth Congress had officially approved of the new power structures. This final chapter traces in fast motion the slow process of curbing the cult during the last seven years of Mao Zedong’s life. It adds a few new facets to the well-researched circumstances of Lin Biao’s fall and its impact that fundamentally undermined the credibility of both the Chairman and his cult. It reveals the thin line between strategic praise and implicated treachery once Mao started criticizing the cult in public. Yet the fundamental mode of communication remained remarkably stable, despite the drastic failures presented by the defection of Mao’s chosen heir. The cult as disciplinary instrument could thus be revoked anytime as the intermezzo of Mao’s short time successor Hua Guofeng revealed, although with varying results.

The Ninth Congress

According to the Chinese constitution passed in 1956, national Party congresses were to be held every five years. The convention of the CCP’s Ninth Congress in 1969 was thus eight years overdue. The question of when and how the congress was to take place had been a topic of frequent discussions. At the Eleventh Plenum of the Eighth Congress in August 1966, Mao had vaguely hinted at a convention the following year. Yao Wenyuan and Zhang Chunqiao in October 1967 had therefore solicited the opinion of representatives from revolutionary committees, Red Guards, the military, and rebel organisations and had presented their findings in Central Document Zhongfa [67] 322. The most commonly voiced proposition

219 Lin Biao, Jiejian XX, XX jun shi de zhishi, 6-9 April 1968, CCRD.
220 Zhongfa [67] 322, Zhonggong zhongyang, zhongyang wenge guanyu zhengxian dai “jiu da” wenti de tongzhi, 21 October 1967, CCRD.
had been the convention at an early date. The tumultuous situation, however, delayed the
decision further. After the formal institutionalization of the last revolutionary committees, the
preparations for the Party congress were discussed among the remaining Politburo cadres
during the Twelfth Plenum that took place in Beijing in late October 1968. Mao’s highly
unspecific *Fifty Character Directive*\(^\text{221}\) that had been coined for the reconstruction of the
Party organization in units with newly established revolutionary committees was decided
upon as basic criterion for the choosing of congress delegates. Thus no formal procedure as in
the past was used to determine the trustworthiest representatives, but the nominees, some of
whom were not even Party members at all, were decided in discussions of the revolutionary
committees.

The Ninth Party Congress took place in utmost secrecy. The 1512 delegates were
flown in with special Air Force planes to the military part of the Beijing airport in the city’s
western suburbs and were secluded from the public in three of the capital’s hotels without
permission to contact the outside world.\(^\text{222}\) There had been no prior announcement about the
congress convention and the public was only informed about the event taking place in the
Great Hall of the People after the opening ceremony on April 1, 1969. A monumental picture
of Mao Zedong above the stage of the congress presidium dominated the venue and although
the portraits of the founding fathers of Marxism-Leninism were prominently on display in the
Hall’s lobby, it was Mao’s presence that excited many of the newly chosen delegates. Mao’s
short opening speech was interrupted by the chanting of slogans in his praise after basically
every sentence.\(^\text{223}\) Lin Biao presented the political report as wished for by Mao. But due to
political controversy after Mao had rejected a draft prepared by Chen Boda with a primary
focus on strengthening economic production, Lin had not taken part in the preparation of the
final draft through Zhang Chunqiao. Jiang Qing was therefore later to criticize Lin for the
poor presentation of the report and the stuttering pronunciation, because the text had been
completely unfamiliar to him.\(^\text{224}\) The congress passed a new Party constitution that included
Lin Biao’s status as Mao’s successor and chose a new Central Committee consisting of 170
full (and 109 alternate) members, only 53 of which had been members of the previous body.
Mao received the votes of all 1510 delegates present. Zhou Enlai came next with 1509 votes,

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\(^{221}\) “The Party organization should be composed of the advanced elements of the proletariat; it should be a
vigorous and vital organization of vanguards which can lead the proletariat and revolutionary masses in
struggling against the class enemy”, translation taken from the contemporary Beijing shiyuan waiyuxi “Guo da
djiang’/Hebei Beijing shifan xueyuan “Hongqi”. *Wenge changyong cihui shouce*, 4f.
\(^{223}\) The officially published version of the speech encompasses mere 639 characters, see *Jianguo yilai Mao
\(^{224}\) Jin, *Culture of Power*, 118.
followed by Lin Biao (1508) and Jiang Qing (1502).\textsuperscript{225} The only other person besides Mao to receive the full number of votes was Wang Baidan, a completely unknown worker from Harbin, who through random chance had been voted for by all congress members. He simultaneously had missed the importance of displaying modesty himself, thus eventually even surpassing Zhou and Lin.\textsuperscript{226}

The cult itself was no object of official discussion but nevertheless omnipresent. In many small group discussions, Mao Zedong Thought activists retold their experiences of praising the Chairman. While casting the votes on 24 April, a young congress delegate after having walked over to the ballot box took advantage of the situation, jumped on the podium and shook hands with Mao, Zhou, and Lin. Others quickly followed the once-in-a-life-time chance of actually touching the Chairman. Only after bodyguards had emerged from behind the curtains and formed a human \textit{cordon sanitaire} in front of the podium could the formal voting procedure be carried on.\textsuperscript{227} A safer option of getting in touch with cult objects was the collection of Mao or Lin memorabilia. As the organizing committee had emphasized the frugal character of the congress and not supplied the delegates with any badges or other presents, as soon as the congress was declared over and the Party leadership had withdrawn from the stage, all moveable items from the congress presidium including cups, pencils, and draft papers were quickly snatched as trophies.

Nationwide activities celebrating the convention of the congress witnessed the last outburst of massive financial investment in the symbolic displays of the cult. In Tianjin municipality special broadcasting cars were decorated with silk to live up to the solemn political event. In another Tianjin unit, a traditional drum with a 2 m diameter was bought to strum home the messages of the congress.\textsuperscript{228} A week before the congress, while the final meeting of the National Planning Conference was being held, Zhou Enlai had heavily criticized the spending of enormous amounts of money and the waste of precious resources to produce badges.\textsuperscript{229} He had advocated that instead of manufacturing new badges, city dwellers

\textsuperscript{225} To display one’s modesty vis-à-vis the Chairman, most high-ranking CCP leaders did not vote for themselves. Jiang Qing, however, was enraged about the eight missing votes and later summoned the organizing secretariat to investigate who had dared to cross out her name on the voting sheet. The investigations ended on 10 May, when Zhou Enlai with Mao’s consent declared: “What does it matter that some names have been crossed out with an X?” \textit{Zhou Enlai nianpu} 3, 294.
\textsuperscript{226} Chi, \textit{Zhonggong “Jiu da” neimu suoyi}, 49.
\textsuperscript{227} Ibid. 46.
\textsuperscript{228} Tianjin shi geming weiyuanhui, \textit{Jin’ge} [69] 054, \textit{Guanyu zhizhi zai qing “jiu da”, ying guoqing deng huodong zhong chuxian de fakua langfei xianxiang de jueding}, 2. The use of drums and other musical instruments had come to be a common way of announcing the publication of a new Mao directive in 1968. As most of the instructions were broadcasted late at night, each broadcast was greeted with massive celebrations in order not to have them “pass the night” (过夜) unnoticed.
\textsuperscript{229} \textit{Zhou Enlai nianpu} 3, 287.
should share their own collections of up to 100 badges with the rural populace. Indeed a kind of charity campaign to donate badges and superfluous *Collected Works* to poor peasants in barren mountain regions was conducted soon afterwards. But while Zhou was mainly concerned about the economic losses engendered by the rampant worship, the CCRG core members were much more unsettled by the unauthorized usages of the cult’s symbolic power. In an enlarged meeting of the Ninth Congress Presidium on 16 April at 1 a.m., the Central Caucus members discussed the organization of cultural activities for the delegates in the evenings. But from pointing out various inappropriate films and operas, Kang Sheng (commonly referred to as 康老, “Revered Kang”) brought up the topic of recent forms of worship. This time it was not the Quotation gymnastics, which had enraged Jiang Qing the year before, but the omnipresent loyalty dance that came to be the subject of intense criticism.

“Revered Kang: At present, the loyalty dance is being danced everywhere. It is something completely normal. [They] say it is loyal [to] Chairman Mao, but in reality it is opposing Chairman Mao. In the streets of Beijing the loyalty dance is also being danced. [They] say it is loyal [to] Jiang Qing, in reality it is opposing Jiang Qing. It is even said that there are instructors, who teach it. Comrades, consider for a while what kind of problem this is. Is this loyal to Chairman Mao []? This is opposing Chairman Mao []! Some comrades, who have witnessed such phenomena, did not dare to bring up the topic afraid of being accused of opposing Chairman Mao. (Premier: In some places private homes have been demolished to build exhibition halls). At present, everywhere private homes are demolished to construct some kind of exhibition halls and to construct Mao statues. The Center has repeatedly issued instructions, but they don’t listen. This equals opposition to the Center. This is aimed at amassing personal political capital. What does it have to do with reverence or love for Chairman Mao? It is completely aimed at amassing personal political capital. The loyalty dance vulgarizes politics. It is opposing Marxism-Leninism. Loyal [to] whom? It is loyal [to] Liu Shaoqi. Loyal [to] whom? A few comrades place the character ‘selfishness’ at the fore. Not to pay attention to it made them fear that people would say they are opposing Chairman Mao, but this is simply disloyalty. If the Center calls not to do it and you still do it, isn’t that opposing Chairman Mao?

Jiang Qing: Thirty years ago the Chairman strictly opposed the celebration of birthdays, the sending of gifts, to name [things after him], and strictly opposed that some artworks [should be] written [in his honor]. I have always adhered to Chairman Mao ['s guiding principles]. The present loyalty dance has been completely stripped of class content. It is loyal [to] whom?

Revered Kang: There further exists loyalize this, loyalize that; wasting the nation’s wealth. This is loyal [to] oneself, giving oneself political capital.

Yao Wenyuan: The masses say: Determining loyalty by looking at action.

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231 As it is the most detailed discussion of the subject of high-ranking CCP members and was published in a highly restricted source, the passage is translated in full.
Revered Kang: Let the masses get to know the Center’s directives and the masses will definitely agree.

Jiang Qing: Some demolished a large number of private homes; doesn’t that mean they placed the blame on the Chairman?

Revered Kang: [We] daily propagate that we oppose multiple centers, but these kinds of things are not being reported.

[Zhang] Chunqiao: In the past Liu and Deng used the restriction of printing Chairman Mao’s works to oppose Chairman Mao. Now one uses these kinds of methods to oppose Chairman Mao.

Revered Kang: I heard that some delegates danced the loyalty dance beside the Chairman: Doesn’t that mean throwing mud in our faces. It is a kind protest against the Center!

Premier: Please all of you investigate these things, including the comrades from Beijing. Where it has already been conducted, restrict it. Clarify these things yourselves first and then report to the Center. A few performances solely display enthusiasm and fanatically boast [Mao Zedong Thought], but completely lack rhythm.”

Besides the straightforward arrogance of power expressed in the utterances of veteran intelligence officer Kang Sheng the criticism is noteworthy for pointing out the allegedly strategic use of the cult through others. That the thought of amassing “political capital” (政治资本) by instrumentalizing the cult was not unfamiliar to the CCRG members had after all been proven amply before and during the congress. The merging of fiscal and political reasons thus prompted the CCP Center to take first steps to diminish the displays of worship.

The main reason why the cult could be cooled down after the Ninth Congress was twofold: it had served its mobilizing function and after having installed new power structures the necessary bureaucratic means existed to replace the cohesive powers of the cult, which had been a crucial device to legitimize the presence of the temporary military “three supports” personnel. The new members of the Central Committee and the revolutionary committees alike had been chosen on grounds of their political reliability and loyalty to Mao. Given the formation of new political bodies on all levels of society based on personal loyalty, the extra-constitutional mobilization of certain strata against the former Party establishment through instigating personal worship was no longer necessary. Furthermore, the already overstretched integrative powers of the cult had clearly resulted in adverse trends. The impact of the
quotation wars and the sometimes quasi-religious outward displays of worship had heavily tarnished the claims of Mao Zedong Thought to represent a scientific theory and not a faith-based dogma, yet astonishingly Mao’s personal reputation had not suffered likewise. Two months after the convention of the Ninth Congress, the CCP Center on 12 June issued a central document that was to curb the most rampant forms of worship. The directive Concerning some Questions which should be taken care of when propagandizing the figure of Mao Zedong was not directed against the cult as such, it rather aimed at interdicting “formalistic” activities and at regaining the interpretative high-powers of defining the content of Mao’s image in public. The short document listed seven topics, without adding further explanations:

“1. Leading personnel on all levels should positively guide the masses in the study of Mao Zedong Thought, to successfully proceed with thought-revolutionization, to achieve actual results, and not to pursue formal aspects only.

2. Repeating the Center’s ‘Directive on the problem of constructing Chairman Mao statues’ of 13 July 1967: From today on, modelling images of the Chairman has to be strictly conducted in concordance with this directive.

3. Unless authorized by the Center, there should be no more manufacturing of Mao badges.

4. Newspapers should no longer employ Chairman Mao’s image regularly in their headlines.

5. Chairman Mao’s image should not be printed on every kind of commodity and wrapping; the usage of Chairman Mao’s quotations should be handled accordingly. It is forbidden to print Mao’s image on porcelain wares.

6. ‘Loyalty’ has got a class character and should not indiscriminately be attached to anything. There should be no ‘loyalty-fication’ campaigns and no feudalistic style architecture should be erected. Were such things have been done in the past it should be dealt with in appropriate fashion.

7. There should be no formalistic activities like ‘asking for instructions in the morning and reporting back in the evening’, readings of quotations before having lunch, or salutes towards the Chairman’s portrait.”

The circular presented the most detailed criticism of the outer cult forms the CCP was to produce but completely failed to provide reasons for the development of the cult, let alone investigate possible consequences in terms of policy lines or constitutional amendments. The cult remained too precious a tool to completely discard it. Yet Mao’s changed stand on the public displays of worship had consequences on Party-internal communication as well. The issuing of the central document on curbing the outer forms of the cult was a first step in enabling the building of cases against those who had “distorted” the true meanings of Mao.

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234 Mao wengao 13, 50.
Zedong Thought for personal motives. A year later, the Second Plenum of the Ninth Congress was convened on Mount Lushan. Here the question of how Mao’s “genius” was to be referred to or possibly instrumentalized culminated in a sequence of events that were to have drastic consequences for both the goals of the Cultural Revolution and the credibility of the cult.

Genius loci: The Second Lushan Plenum
The Second Plenum in August and September 1970 is one of the most controversial episodes of the Cultural Revolution. It has incited great scholarly and public attention as it is commonly interpreted as the first clearly discernible sign of a rupture between Mao and Lin Biao. The plenum was to discuss a revised state constitution to be adopted by the Fourth National People’s Congress later that year. It was the issue of whether or not to abolish the office of a “state chairman” (国家主席), who was to act as formal state representative and symbolic figure head as Liu Shaoqi had done since 1959 that provoked a major confrontation between the two power groups that had emerged successful from the rubble of the Cultural Revolution, the PLA and the former CCRG. On the one hand, the military had massively enlarged its influence by coming to staff the majority of the local and provincial revolutionary committee’s. The leading personnel of all major army branches had furthermore been selected according to their immediate loyalty to Lin Biao as the flattering addresses at the activist congresses had clearly shown. The second major group were the radical theoreticians around Jiang Qing, whose influence had been waning after the CCRG had by and large been disbanded on 12 September 1969. Nevertheless, the remaining core group of Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, and Yao Wenyuan retained extra constitutional power through their backing by Mao. The fragile working relationship between both groups had been strained by a number of personal grievances like the humiliation of General Logistics head Qiu Huizuo through the hands of a Shanghai military rebel faction supported by Zhang Chunqiao and diverse family feuds. But Mao had made ample use of the competing groups to foster his own agenda.

The first sign of Mao’s growing discomfort with the military dominance had been the issuing of the so-called “Vice-Chairman Lin’s first order” through Chief-of-Staff Huang Yongsheng on 17 October 1969. The diminution of the cult, which had been based on denigrating the line of the “Chinese Khrushchev”, had been replaced after the Ninth Congress through a stepping up of the external threat posed by a Soviet attack. While Mao had been the one to define the danger, he was enraged by the passing of a far reaching order moving the

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whole Chinese military apparatus without his prior consent, although Huang probably acted upon the assumption that Mao had been informed. The feeling of having been left out of the loop of information did not rest lightly with Mao. He had purged Deng Xiaoping and the Central Propaganda Department leadership for having fostered “independent kingdoms” and was to react harshly on other occasions. The de facto power wielded by Lin Biao and his loyal followers probably strengthened the perceived necessity to counterbalance the military stronghold through a re-establishing of the civilian Party organization and the elevation of military cadres on whose loyalty he could count.

The issue of whether or not to abolish the position of the state chairman had been placed on the agenda when Mao’s security chief Wang Dongxing, as head of the CCP General Office in charge of the CCP’s paper flow usually extraordinarily well informed about Mao’s present mood, on 8 March 1970 relayed Mao’s views on the subject to the Politburo. Mao, who was resting in Wuhan at the time, had reacted upon a written request of Zhou Enlai on how to proceed with the section on the office of the state chairman during the revision of the state constitution. According to Wang Dongxing’s memoirs and the traditional CCP evaluation of the events, Wang informed the Politburo about Mao’s objections against establishing the office and especially against assuming it himself. Wang’s report is crucial for the unfolding of the following events, given Mao’s unwillingness to further discuss the matter and the fact that Lin’s later insistence that Mao should assume the office would have been a fundamental alteration of his previously displayed behaviour of remaining closely in step with all of the Chairman’s directives.

Yet the reasons why Lin would press the issue that Mao should assume the position of state chairman are not satisfyingly explained unless taking into account the possibility, often employed in Chinese memoirs, to distort historical events not by means of forgery but through strategic omissions. There seems to be no dissent about the relegation of Mao’s denial to assume the office through Wang Dongxing, but according to the memoirs of Air Force head Wu Faxian it was

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238 Teiwes/Sun, The Tragedy of Lin Biao, 137ff, and especially 167: “Lin Biao’s essential tragedy was that he found himself at the center of a totalizing political system at its most extreme, where pervasive politics allowed no honorable exit”.

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only half of the message. The second part, according to Wu, was made up of an offer that Lin Biao should assume the vacant position, which Wang not only relayed to the Politburo but also repeated again during a meeting the same evening with Lin Biao’s entourage.\textsuperscript{239} Lin himself had gone to bed early. If Wu’s version of the events is to be trusted, Lin’s insistence that Mao should resume the office and not he himself, who hated representative functions more than anything else, becomes understandable. Yet it brings into question Mao’s motives in advancing the issue. The account of Wu’s daughter Jin Qiu mentions that in late April 1970 Mao’s secretary, Xu Yefu, called Lin’s office and proposed that Dong Biwu, the last remaining founding member of the CCP besides Mao, should assume the office along with several younger vice-chairmen who would of course be potential successors and thus a threat to Lin’s authority. Being highly dissatisfied with the Lin family’s nepotism and especially the airs put on by Lin’s son Lin Liguo and a small group of supporters in the Air Force, Mao advised Lin to name a successor as well and dropped the name Zhang Chunqiao. Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals in the first “post-revisionist” account of the Lin Biao affair have therefore advanced the interpretation that Mao probably tried to entrap Lin by showing his ambition to take on the position and thus to topple the military dominance.\textsuperscript{240} Lin’s constant denial to accept the offered title himself, however, forced Mao to look for a different opportunity to discredit his closest-comrade-in-arms.

The issue of establishing the office of the state chairman was not resolved until the convention of the Second Plenum. In the discussions of the small group entrusted with the preparation of the revised constitution, comprising Kang Sheng, Zhang Chunqiao, Chen Boda, Wu Faxian, Li Zuopeng, and alternate Politburo member Ji Dengkui, the only agreement on the issue of the state chairmanship was that no agreement could be reached. The question of whether Mao Zedong Thought should be written into the constitution as the country’s guiding principle incited even more conflict. Given the omnipresent Mao cult of the preceding years with its campaigns against anyone who had opposed the Chairman and his thought, as well as the example of the Eighth Congress during which the two references in the Party constitution had been deleted, the army generals and Chen Boda insisted on continuing to use the phrase. Zhang Chunqiao and Kang Sheng on the other hand had noticed Mao’s growing repugnance with the rhetoric of worship. During the Ninth Congress he had dropped the “three adverbs” (“comprehensively”, “creatively”, and “with genius”) commonly used with reference to his thought from the CCP constitution. The cause for the clash at Lushan, however, was provided by a remark of Zhang Chunqiao to Wu Faxian during a small group meeting on 13 August

\textsuperscript{239} Manuscript quoted in Jin, \textit{Culture of Power}, 121.
\textsuperscript{240} MacFarquhar/Schoenhals, \textit{Mao’s Last Revolution}, chapter 19, esp. 326f.
1970 who is reported to have said that “some people mention Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought all the time but it does not mean that they are real Marxists. Someone claimed that [Mao] ‘creatively’ developed Marxism, but even Khrushchev had ‘creatively’ developed Marxism.”\textsuperscript{241} Wu strongly objected to Zhang’s views and later received Lin’s backing as the criticism no doubt was directed against Lin Biao himself, who while not having invented the phrases, had become regarded as their main exponent due to their reprint in the foreword of the \textit{Quotations}. Sparked by Zhang’s remark, the question of how to describe Mao’s genius therefore came to be a battleground of displaying loyalty to the respective leaders.

Ten days later, on 23 August 1970, the plenum was officially opened. A few hours before the convention, the Politburo Standing Committee members met with Mao. Lin Biao used the opportunity to take up the issue of the quarrel between Zhang and Wu, probably both to gain Mao’s support for the continued usage of the cult rhetoric and at the same time to shield his supporter Wu Faxian against criticism, thus fulfilling his part in the patron-client relationship. In his unprepared speech, Lin avoided the issue of state chairmanship by calling Mao “principal of the proletarian dictatorship”\textsuperscript{242} (无产阶级元首) instead but defended the use of the adverbs and the mentioning of Mao Zedong Thought in the constitution, as he had always done in the preceding decade.

“[It] has to be confirmed that Mao Zedong Thought is the guiding thought for the whole nation’s populace, that it is the nation’s guiding principle in every type of work. This point is extremely important, extremely important. To use the form of the constitution to secure this [guiding thought] for the future is extremely good, extremely good! One can say that it is the soul of the constitution.”\textsuperscript{243}

Encouraged by the high-level backing and the repeated listening to a recording of Lin’s speech the following day, the issue of Mao’s “genius” became a hotly debated topic in the different small groups, arranged according to administrative regions. The criticism became especially lively, as it was being recognized that the real target was Zhang Chunqiao, whom many cadres perceived as being co-responsible for the Cultural Revolution’s violent excesses. Chen Boda and Wu Faxian in their respective speeches before the North China Group and Southwestern Group heavily quoted from Lin’s foreword to the \textit{Quotations} and drew on historical examples from the writings of the Marxist-Leninist canon mentioning the existence

\textsuperscript{241} Jin, \textit{Culture of Power}, 122
\textsuperscript{242} Lin Biao, \textit{Zai Zhongguo gongchandang di jiu jie er zhong quanhui di yi ci quanti hui shang de jianguhua (jielu)}, 23 August 1970, CCRD. The authenticity of the source is not completely clear as most other works refer to the phrase “national principal” (国家之元首), compare MacFarquhar/Schoenhals, \textit{Mao’s Last Revolution}, 330.
\textsuperscript{243} Lin, \textit{Zai Zhongguo gongchandang di jiu jie er zhong quanhui di yi ci quanti hui shang de jianguhua (jielu)}, CCRD.
of “genius”. Certain people were said to have taken advantage of Mao’s modesty to “debase Mao Zedong Thought” \(^{244}\) and to negate the existence of genius altogether. Even Wang Dongxing, the Chairman’s security chief jumped the train and emphasized the support which the request to choose Mao as new head of state and Lin Biao as his deputy had enjoyed among the enormously prestigious Central Guards unit 8341. \(^{245}\) The summary of the speeches at the North China Group in *Bulletin No.6* emphasized the rhetoric of class struggle again in a style reminiscent of the Eleventh Plenum in 1966, yet rendering the designations completely void of any specific meaning:

> “These kinds of people are careerists, intriguers, and extreme reactionaries; they are dyed-in-the-wool counterrevolutionary revisionists, representatives of the reactionary Liu Shaoqi-line in the absence of Liu Shaoqi, and running dogs of the imperialists, revisionists, and counterrevolutionaries: they are bastards, counterrevolutionaries that should be dragged out and publicly exposed; they should be expelled from the Party, be struggled against until the end and criticized harshly; they should be torn to ten thousand pieces by a thousands daggers; the whole Party will punish them, the whole nation condemn them.”

The sharply worded *Bulletin* found great support among the delegates and Mao’s was faced with the choice of either accepting the office of state chairman and thus allow for a potentially drastic wave of criticism against the former CCRG members or to negate the concept of genius and the whole personality cult on which Lin Biao’s public reputation was founded. The image of Mao invoked by the Lin loyalists was thus greatly at odds with Mao’s suspected aims of luring Lin Biao into the trap of cupidity. For the first time Mao Zedong was faced with making a crucial decision on how to further handle his public cult and with it the acclaimed successes of the Cultural Revolution.

Mao decided for the second option. The loss of the CCRG members would have greatly diminished his extra-constitutional powers of favouring different factions to achieve the wished for results. Yet a straightforward criticism of Lin Biao would have been impossible in 1970 given the public prestige he commanded. Instead, Mao chose Chen Boda, the weakest link in the Lin Biao entourage, as target against which he vented his anger. On 31 August, Mao circulated a personal letter entitled “Some opinions of mine” \(^{247}\) in which the “genius theoretician”\(^{247}\) Chen Boda was attacked on highly vague grounds, disregarding the longstanding services and the important role Mao’s former secretary had

\(^{244}\) *Chen Boda zai Zhongguo gongchandang jiu jie er zhong quanhui Huabei zu de fayan*, 24 August 1970, CCRD.


\(^{246}\) *Zhonggguo gongchandang jiu jie er zhong quanhui di liu hao jianbao (Huabei zu di er hao jianbao)* 24 August 1970, CCRD.

\(^{247}\) *Mao Zedong, Wo de yi dian yijian*, 31 August 1970, CCRD.
played in the process of writing many important essays that came to constitute the basis of Mao Zedong Thought. Chen Boda’s fall from grace and the following campaign to criticize him led to a further estrangement between Mao and Lin, who would withdraw from public life nearly completely in the following months, rejecting even to meet Edgar Snow during his visit in December 1970 when Mao Zedong publicly ridiculed the cult and its rhetoric for the first time, as mentioned in the introduction. Yet it was to take another year until Mao during an inspection tour aimed at re-establishing his charismatic relationship with important local cadres in the civilian and military realm hinted at a larger scheme behind the Lushan controversy. By claiming that Lin and his clique had engaged in an organized “surprise attack and underground activities”248 aimed at splitting the Party and usurping power, Lin Biao himself came under attack for the first time. Mao further ridiculed the cult rhetoric again.

“I have discussed the issue with Comrade Lin Biao that some of his formulations are not quite appropriate. […] [Phrases] like ‘peak’ or ‘one sentence surpasses ten thousand sentences’ have been used to excess. One sentence is just one sentence, how should it surpass ten thousand sentences. […] I have told them six times I would not act as state chairman. One time probably equals one sentence that would make sixty thousand sentences. They still did not listen. It did not even surpass half a sentence, [its impact was] tantamount to zero.”249

The growing disenchantment and Mao’s announcement that Lin would have to shoulder some responsibility upon his return probably led a small group around Lin’s son, Lin Liguo, to panic and consider Mao’s assassination, yet without implementing any of the conceived options. Instead in a hectic escape, Lin Biao, probably against his will, along with his wife, son, and a few loyal attendants boarded a plane in Beidaihe where Lin had been curing his ailments and set of northwest, though changing direction later again. The plane crashed in the early morning hours of September 13, 1971, in the Mongolian steppe near Undur Khan, killing all nine passengers. The reasons for the crash have never been completely clarified but technical problems or shortage of fuel remain the most plausible explanations.250

For the credibility of the Cultural Revolution’s agenda the death of Mao’s chosen successor was a fatal blow. The images of Mao and Lin Biao had become so closely intertwined that communicating the alleged betrayal and coup attempt of Lin was an event that proved to be nearly inexplicable within the confines of the Cultural Revolutionary discourse. After all, every official publication since the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution and even the new Party constitution had confirmed Lin Biao’s status as best student of Mao Zedong Thought and chosen successor to the Chairman. It took two years until Lin was

248 Mao Zedong, Zai waidi xunshi qijian tong yantu gedi fazeren tanhua jiyao, August/September 1971, CCRD.
249 Ibid.
250 Compare Jin, Culture of Power, 194f.
openly criticized in the media. Up to that point he was referred to as “political swindler of the Liu Shaoqi-kind” (刘少奇一类骗子), thus setting him on the track to replace Mao’s former public bête noire. Simultaneously, the CCP Center from 18 September 1971 onwards issued a flood of internal documents to an ever-widening readership\(^{251}\) exposing the crimes committed by the “Lin-Chen anti-Party clique”. The fear of possible disturbances had even led to the cancellation of the National Day festivities in 1971, an act without precedent in the history of the PRC. The documents compiled by a newly established Special Case Examination Group including Zhou Enlai, Kang Sheng, and eight other members of the CCP Center\(^{252}\) mainly focussed on the alleged crimes committed during the Second Plenum and, starting with Zhongfa [72] 4, on the alleged plan to assassinate the Chairman and stage a counterrevolutionary coup, the so-called “Project 571”\(^{253}\) Only after the convention of the Tenth Party Congress in August 1973, during which Lin was publicly criticized, did the somewhat esoteric campaign to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius in early 1974 provide an attempt to explain the fall of Mao’s heir theoretically.

**Lingering poison: Criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius**

By the time of Lin Biao’s fall from grace, a functioning state- and Party-bureaucracy had by and large been restored. Instead of the former Central Propaganda Department, the task of supervising the public media now rested with the Central Propaganda Group around Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, and Yao Wenyuan that had been established shortly after the Second Plenum of the Ninth Congress. Although the radicals had been the victors of the destruction of Lin Biao’s power base in the army, the task of criticizing Lin bore a considerable danger for them as well. If Lin were to be held accountable for the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, it would have to be interpreted as an “ultra-left” error in line and thus engender simultaneous criticism of the radicals as well. Thus a description of Lin’s deviation as “left in form but right in essence” deemed to be the best circumscription.\(^{254}\) Zhou Enlai as representative of the state apparatus on the other hand had an interest in labelling the excesses “ultra-left” to secure a moderate refocusing on economic issues and a slow rehabilitation of old cadres. The designations used to circumscribe the line of the “political swindler” Lin

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\(^{251}\) By 24 October 1971, only foreigners and “bad elements” were excluded from listening to the reports while everyone else was to be informed prior to November, see Zhongfa [71] 67, Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu xiang guanguo qunzhong chaanda Lin Biao pandang panguo shijian de tongzhi, 24 October 1971, CCRD.

\(^{252}\) Zhongfa [71] 64, Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu chengli Zhongyang zhuang’anzu de tongzhi, 3 October 1971, CCRD.


\(^{254}\) See MacFarquhar/Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 354f.
therefore came to cause considerable confusion in the regulated Party discourse until Mao settled the issue by defining the deviations to be “ultra-rightist”. Given the personal stakes involved, the Central Propaganda Group despite its revolutionary impetus in many respects proceeded along the traditional lines of the former Central Propaganda Department in dealing with the inexplicable betrayal of high-level Party members that can be summarized by three steps: First, carefully deleting references to the persona non-grata in the public media; second, clearing the material remains hinting at a prior existence of factionalism; and third, defining a new master narrative to be expounded through heavy rotation press campaigns and small group discussions at the end of which open criticism in the media became possible again within a fundamentally changed discourse. References to Lin Biao in the public media came to an abrupt end in September 1971. On 12 September 1971, just a day before Lin’s death, the People’s Daily on its front-page still published an article about the distribution of a set of fifty color photos remembering the fiftieth anniversary of the CCP founding. The set included multiple pictures showing

“Chairman Mao and his closest-comrade-in-arms Vice-Chairman Lin Biao together, letting the spectator intimately experience how Comrade Lin Biao always raises high the red flag of Mao Zedong Thought […] and serves as a shining example of study for the whole Party, the whole army, and the whole nation.”

Until National Day another half dozen articles appeared in the People’s Daily mentioning Lin Biao or his directives along with a number of congratulatory addresses from foreign visitors that “reported their greetings to Chairman Mao Zedong, Vice-Chairman Lin Biao, and Premier Zhou Enlai”. But after the greeting addresses of China’s last remaining allies including Albania, Romania, North Korea, Vietnam, and Prince Sihanouk were published on 1 October, 1971, Lin Biao’s name and pictures completely vanished from the official media and only reappeared with the convention of the Tenth Party Congress in late August 1973 that deleted his name from the Party constitution, where it still had been prominently on display even two years after his death.

257 In some localities, for example Zhejiang province, Lin’s picture was still printed in October 1971, see Zhongfa [72] 16, Zhonggong zhongyang pizhuan jiejue Zhejiang wenti huiyi de “Guanyu jixu shenru kaizhan fundui Lin Chen fandang jitian douzheng de qingshi baogao”, 25 April 1972, CCRD.
Simultaneously with the vanishing of Lin’s name in public discourse, all linguistic references of the Mao cult associated with Lin Biao came to be completely terminated. The following graph showing the rise and fall of a few characteristic phrases of the red vocabulary below the overarching concept of living study and application between the early 1960s and Lin Biao’s death in 1971, most importantly the obligatory “Long live Chairman Mao”, “boundless loyalty”, and “closely following”.

Eradicating the material imprints of Lin Biao and his specific work style turned out to be more difficult than adopting new regulations of official speech. While new morning gymnastics had been propagated by the State Council and the CMC on 31 August 1971,
immediately before Lin’s death, the “Four good/Five good” campaigns, and the sharing experience in application meetings that had continued up to that date were interdicted by a central document in November 1971. At the same time, copies of the Party constitution and other collections of the Ninth Congress were to be “turned in to the central authorities for disposal”. Works about Lin Biao, epitaphs, and portraits had to be returned to the local authorities. The attempt to eradicate all visual references to Lin Biao was a major logistical undertaking. Few books published after 1966 did not at some point refer to Vice-Chairman Lin or carried his quotations and picture. His inscriptions had been chiselled into most Cultural Revolutionary monuments, exhibition halls, and the sockets of Mao statues alike. Art works or commodities carrying Lin’s image ranged in the millions. The approach adopted down to the small groups therefore aimed at minimizing the economic losses by implanting a wide array of techniques including “crossing out, washing, scraping off, plating, ripping out, cutting out, dyeing, gluing, exchanging, and painting”. Millions of Chinese thus set out to scrupulously wipe out the “Lin poison” from all written and visual documents. Whole books would be crosschecked for references to Lin, meticulously blackening all characters hinting at his prior existence. Pictures showing Lin Biao alone could simply be ripped out, but those showing Mao and his former successor together could only be handled by marking a cross in the face of Lin Biao.

Given the enormous amount of goods to be handled, some provinces still had items with Lin Biao’s image on sale the following years or at least had them stockpiled in warehouses and magazines. According to a statistic provided by the Liu’an County Department Store in Anhui province, it was discovered during an inventory in July 1973 right before the upcoming Tenth Party Congress that there were still 117 product categories bearing the images of Lin Biao’s handwriting, quotations, or picture with a total number of 292,000 pieces. Amongst them 184,900 pieces could be “technically amended” and thus be resold on the market, while the rest would have to be “dealt with accordingly”. Similar successes

258 Guowuyuan, Zhongyang junwei guanyu zai quanguo shixing xin guangbo ticao de tongzhi (jiyao), CCRD.
259 The only reference to the central document is to be found in Kau (ed.), The Lin Biao Affair, 76f. The designation as Zhongfa [71] 64 (maybe 74?), however, is wrong as the document refers to the establishment of the Special Case Examination Group against Lin.
260 Ibid. 76.
262 Ibid. 1416.
263 If one nowadays purchases a Cultural Revolutionary publication that has not been manufactured (often in a “rough and slingshot way”) by private entrepreneurs for pecuniary reasons, the deletions and crossing outs have become a trademark of authenticity.
264 Shangyebu (ed.), Shangye caiwu huiji 2, 1415.
were reported from Shanghai municipality were naturally the variety of products imprinted with traces of the “hypocrite Lin” surpassed the provincial counterparts. The First Trade Department of Shanghai thus singled out 211 product types worth 7.08 million Yuan that in some way related to the former CCP vice-chairman.\textsuperscript{265} Furthermore, the clearance had not been conducted in all units so far:

“In a number of units there still exists insufficient knowledge about the importance of clearing the ‘Lin poison’; […] until today, there has been no cleansing [work] or it has been conducted in a very incomprehensive fashion. Some units even take paper used to award prices with Lin Biao’s handwriting, enamel mugs, and other products for open sale; others distribute picture frames carrying Lin’s image […], resulting in extremely bad political influence among the masses.”\textsuperscript{266}

Yet by August 1973, the removal of the linguistic and material remains of the Lin style Mao cult was perceived as having been conducted thoroughly enough to allow for the reappearance of Lin’s name in public discourse, this time within an opposite semantic context by replacing Liu Shaoqi as the Cultural Revolution’s primary object of negative integration.

The difficulties posed by categorizing Lin Biao as either “ultra-leftist” or “ultra-rightist” had been overcome through Mao’s favouring of the latter. Yet there was little credential evidence to substantiate the claim itself besides the fact of Lin’s death, the discussion surrounding the genius and head-of-state issues, and the nepotism fostered in the Lin family. The personality cult presented the most formidable object of criticism, but Mao’s open involvement and the former CCRG’s reliance on similar strategies complicated its instrumentalization. Mao’s letter to Jiang Qing had naturally been among the main items circulated internally to demonstrate Mao’s opposition to the cult,\textsuperscript{267} but the criticism focussed less on the Mao cult as such than on the elevation of Lin through proposing a “genius theory” with ulterior motives.\textsuperscript{268} A number of newspaper articles in 1972 had tackled the issue of the role of heroes by referring back to Mao’s theory of the mass line, according to which heroes appeared necessarily during any mass movement but as products and not as creators of history.\textsuperscript{269} The veneration of leaders was thus justified along the very same lines as it had been argued during the criticism of the secret speech. Yet the credibility of the argument had been weakened considerably through historical experience. Thus the CCP leadership was in

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{266} Shangyebu (ed.), \textit{Shangye caiwu huiji 2}, 1416.
\item \textsuperscript{268} Compare the “top secret” internal Party material reprinted in Tianjin shi geming weiyuanhui zhengzhibu, \textit{Geming da pipan}, vol. 10, 2 June 1972, 1-13.
\item \textsuperscript{269} Yun Gang, “Yingxiong” shiguan de yige xin bianzhong, in: People's Daily, 11 June 1972, 2.
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need of further proof to demonstrate Lin’s attempt to exercise a “landlord-comprador-bourgeois fascist dictatorship based on the landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists.”

Mao Zedong himself had according to the remembrances of his physician Li Zhisui been physically shaken by the death Lin Biao and the resulting loss of credibility, but he had not been too much involved in the details of the criticism campaign as he was busy with other issues, including the opening up to the US in foreign relations, the question of who would replace Lin Biao as successor, and how to secure the successes of the revolution after Lin’s fall. When discussing the agenda of the Tenth Congress, Mao refocused the direction of ideological struggle by singling out Confucius and Confucianist thought as representatives of a slaveholder society and called for a reappraisal of the first Chinese emperor Qin Shihuangdi and the school of legalism instead. Mao explicitly brought up the topic again during a discussion with his short-time heir apparent Wang Hongwen and Zhang Chunqiao on 4 July 1973, and mentioned that Confucius had been worshipped by both GMD and Lin Biao, thus for the first time linking the unlikely pair. The foundation of the accusation had been a number of items including calligraphy scrolls and the infamous flash cards with excerpts from classical works that had been found during searches of Lin Biao’s residence in Maojiawan. For the time being, both campaigns were continued separately. Yang Rongguo, professor at the Zhongshan University in Guangzhou, started the public criticism with an article exposing Confucius as stubborn representative of the feudal slave system in the People's Daily. In the meantime, a number of high ranking scholars mainly based at the Beijing and Qinghua universities had been organized by the Central Propaganda Group to produce a combined criticism, linking Lin Biao and Confucius that resulted in the production of Central Document Zhongfa [74] 1. The document, which was distributed by the CCP General Office on 18 January 1974 in 122,000 copies, circulated a report that had been revised numerous times by the scholar group that had adopted amongst others the name “Liang Xiao” (Two Schools) and was entitled Lin Biao and the Way of Confucius and Mencius (Documentation I). Just like the campaign to criticize Hai Rui at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, the criticism of

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270 Zhongfa [72] 24, Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu zaochu de tiaohu “Fensui Lin Biao fandang jituan fangmeng zhengbian de douzhezheng (cailiao zhi san)” de tongzhi ji cailiao, 2 July 1972, CCRD.
271 Li, Private Life of Chairman Mao, 542.
272 He had at the Twelfth Plenum of the Eighth Congress in October 1968 already criticized the positive views held on Confucius amongst even CCP literati like Guo Moruo, and explicitly included the criticism of Confucius in a circular on the Tenth Congress agenda, see Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu dang de shi da daibiao de chansheng de jueding (jiyao), 20 May 1973, CCRD.
273 Mao Zedong, Tong Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao de tanhua jiyao, 4 July 1973, CCRD.
275 Zhongfa [74] 1, Zhonggong zhongyang zhuanfa “Lin Biao yu Kong Meng zhi dao (cailiao zhi yi)” de tongzhi ji fujian, 18 January 1974, CCRD.
Lin Biao and Confucius served multiple purposes. It was to reveal the dangers of instrumentalizing traditional concepts of virtue and propriety to sneak counterrevolutionary ideology into public discourse. Again like nearly a decade before, the disputable class content of certain characters like “loyalty” or “propriety” played a prominent role by discussing the possible contamination of the revolutionary superstructure through hidden meanings. The campaign further served as a thinly veiled attack on Premier Zhou Enlai by criticizing his namesake the Duke Zhou, whom Confucius had characterized as ideal statesman. In his discussion with Wang Hongwen and Zhang Chunqiao, Mao had immediately started out with criticizing China’s recent foreign policy for delivering the image of going soft on the Taiwan issue and drastically appraised the outcome of violence like after World War I and II, “the worse the better”, because it led people to rebel against their oppressors. Especially Jiang Qing tried to instrumentalize the allegorical meanings of the campaign and to shift the emphasis from criticizing Lin Biao to singling out “present day Confucians”. But the campaign could as well be interpreted as being directed against the Lin style cult of personality and its consequences for the political system.

The basic layout of Zhongfa [74] 1 resembled the collections of word crimes in the early Cultural Revolution, with the difference that Lin’s utterances were not contrasted with “correct” citations from Mao but arranged to match the content of selected quotations from the Confucian classics. Several passages dealt with Lin’s views on genius, exemplified by the mythological figure of the “Heavenly horse” capable of moving around without earthly restraints, which Lin had referred to in several of his calligraphies. The genius issue was linked to Confucius’ category of being “born knowledgeable” (生而知之) mentioned in the Jishi chapter of the Confucian Analects, which was said to have provided the intellectual fundament for the expounding of the genius cult. The most important topic, however, was a sentence taken from the Yanyuan chapter of the Confucian Analects commonly translated as “To subdue one’s self and return to propriety” (克己复礼) that like most other issues had already been brought up in Yang Rongguo’s article. In the original semantic context, the character li (礼) most certainly referred to ways of personal conduct as laid down in the classical rites codices and thus to propriety. The meaning of the phrase in script roles over Lin

276 Mao, Tong Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao de tanhua. See further MacFarquhar/Schoenhals, Mao’s Last Revolution, 370ff.
277 Chen Boda had presented Lin furthermore with two personally dedicated inscriptions on the “Heavenly horse”, see Zhongfa [74] 1, 6ff.
279 See Ibid. 250.
Biao’s bed probably too was a guide of personal action under the system of Mao’s court politics, very much along the same lines as a number of short entries from his wife’s work diary in 1961 quoted in the collection, most prominently three personal does and don’ts: “Don’t interfere […], don’t criticize, don’t report bad news”, instead “one should respond, one should praise, and one should report good news”. Indeed this had been the basic scheme of Lin’s actions after 1959 and given the lack of public utterances critical of the Chairman, the material for the campaign had to be culled from personal annotations made in dictionaries or flashcards inaccessible until today. The character *li* in the context of *Zhongfa* [74] 1, however, referred to more than questions of personal propriety. According to the official guidance material offering interpretative help on how to explain the classical text passages to an often semi-literate audience, *li* was to be understood as “ceremonial rites” stabilizing gentry rule over the rest of society held in serfdom. Although the material did not further elaborate on the issue except referring to Lin’s sinister aim of restoring capitalism and establishing his clan as gentry, the question of how to interpret *li* could well be understood as a reference to the communicative space characteristic of the personality cult around Mao and Lin. Lin Biao and Confucius could thus be seen as exponents of a slave-society held together not through religious rites but through a strict system of formalized speech acts and deeds serving to strengthen the authority of its ruler and privileged classes.

The thin line between exposing Lin’s crimes while maintaining the Mao cult advocated for political purposes in the central document provided the intellectual groundwork for a fundamental criticism of the present system of rule that was not lost among the audience. The most erudite answer was published in form of several big character posters that were made public in Guangzhou in late 1974 by three former Red Guard rebels writing under the pseudonym Li-Yi-Zhe. In their well known poster on *Socialist legality and democracy* that went through several drafts over a process of more than one year, they singled out the erosion of legal principles and democracy to have been the most devastating

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280 Amongst the short entries were the following: “Who doesn’t speak falsely, will be purged. Who doesn’t speak falsely, won’t accomplish great deeds” or “Close the eyes and nourish the spirit – act according to [the instructions from] above”, see *Zhongfa* [74] 1, 30f.


282 Little is known about the actual procedures on the *pi-Lin pi-Kong* campaign on the local level, although due to the functioning bureaucracy there are heaps of restricted documents in the local archives. In many cases, the seemingly esoteric campaign was used to settle local feuds and prompted the CCP Center to issue two directives calling upon local authorities to refocus on the main target, see Heilmann, Sebastian, *Sozialer Protest in der VR China. Die Bewegung vom 5. April 1976 und die Gegen-Kulturrevolution der siebziger Jahre*, Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 1994, 22f.

consequence of what they referred to as the “Lin Biao system” ( 林彪体系).

This system was said to be grounded in the absolutization of Mao Zedong Thought, threatening to knock down everyone with different, not even necessarily opposing views. By taking up Yang Rongguo’s phrase of “rule through rites” ( 礼治) they immediately related the system to the living study and application campaigns and activist congresses, which they described to be “imbued with religious sentiments”.

“We have not forgotten the replacement of everything else through (empty headed) politics, rewarding the diligent and good, and punishing the lazy and bad; the holy script like ‘daily reading’, the increasingly hypocritical ‘sharing experience in application’ talks, the ever more absurd ‘conducting of revolution in the deepest recesses of mind’, the ‘demonstrations of loyalty’ favouring political opportunists, the nondescript ‘loyalty dances’, the tedious formalities of the rites of loyalty and piety, pestering beyond endurance – morning prayers, atoning for one’s crimes in the evening, during assemblies and brigade meetings, at the start, end, and exchange of shifts, when buying or selling goods, writing letters, picking up the phone, even before having lunch etc., every occasion was covered and smeared with an intense climate of religious flavour. Generally speaking, to have loyalty-fication account for hundred per cent of the time, and hundred percent of the space, or some kind of ‘this good’ or ‘that good’ movement, all this has been a competition of ‘Left! Left! Left!’, a rivalry of being the ‘…most…most…most’, enacted during countless ‘activist congresses’ which in reality were fairs of falsehood, vice, and ugliness, gamble halls with ‘little investment and huge profits’.

What made the arguments of the authors a threat for the present ruling elite was its combination with the call to establish a basic legal framework to once and for all abolish emergence of a privileged Party stratum and the roots of the “social-fascist dictatorship of feudal character” ( 封建性的社会法西斯专政). Without explicitly mentioning a possible death of the by now eighty-year old Chairman, the authors warned before the rise of future leaders claiming to impersonate the revolutionary line of Mao Zedong Thought, who again would be deemed above popular criticism.

The three authors were detained for their views but the possible consequence in case of Mao’s death had been pointed out only too correctly. The endless changes in line, which the ruthless Chairman had sanctioned to prevent any faction from becoming strong enough to present a threat to his power, lingered over the last years of his rule. The cult had been tuned down by replacing overt worship with indirect praise of the Chairman’s “line” but

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284 Li-Yi-Zhe, Guanyu shehui zhuyi de minzhu yu fazhi, 7 November 1974, CCRD.
285 See Yang, Kongzi, in: and especially a number of consecutive speeches Yang held before representatives of the Navy, the prior stronghold of Lin Biao supporters Li Zuopeng and Zhang Xiuchuan, Haijun zhengzhibu xuanchuanbu, Yang Rongguo tongzhi guanyu pi Lin pi Kong de baogao, 5-7 February 1974, 2. “Li is not at all about rites only (although it included ritual action), it furthermore had an important political content.”
286 Li-Yi-Zhe, Shehui zhuyi de minzhu yu fazhi, CCRD.
287 Li-Yi-Zhe, Xiangei Mao zhuxi he sijie renda, 7 November 1974, CCRD.
288 Li-Yi-Zhe, Shehui zhuyi de minzhu yu fazhi, CCRD.
fundamentally the Mao-centered politics remained stable. What prevailed among the populace was an ever-growing cynicism and open acts of symbolic defiance especially during the spontaneous expressions of veneration and esteem expressed in poems, letters, and big character posters on Tian'anmen square after the death of the long ailing Zhou Enlai in early January 1976. Although Mao’s death on 9 September 1976 was followed by elaborate ceremonies of mourning, there were no comparable spontaneous expressions of grief. The Mao cult, however, was not over with the demise of Mao’s physical body, but was resumed during the Diadochian wars following the death of the dictator.

Preservation and Transformation

Up to the very end, when different members of the Politburo had watched carefully around the clock, that no one tampered with the medical instruments preserving Mao’s life, it had been the late Chairman’s presence that had kept the shambles of the CCP together. While the basic Party institutions on the different levels had been re-established in the early 1970s, the fundamental political cleavages between the three main remaining political factions: radicals, loyalists, and survivors had been quelling beneath the surface and easily erupted as the reinvigoration of the Cultural Revolutionary politics during the campaign to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius had revealed. Members of all remaining factions thus presided over the festivities to honor the deceased, and the only questions the Politburo agreed upon in the immediate aftermath were decisions aimed at offering a last tribute to Mao Zedong and demonstrating personal loyalty even beyond death. The remaining radicals in the Politburo Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen that could not count on institutional backing except for the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee and had no sympathizers among the old elites without doubt held the weakest stand. A mere month after Mao’s death, the “Gang of Four” as they came to be termed, were arrested in a military coup carried out by a members of unit 8341 on the orders of acting premier Hua Guofeng, Wang Dongxing, and Ye Jianying. Information was only sparsely released to the provincial committees to prevent uprisings. Instead important leaders of CCRG strongholds like Shanghai were requested to travel to Beijing in person and were not arrested on the condition

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289 Compare Heilmann, Sozialer Protest in der VR China, 140ff.
291 Heilmann, Sozialer Protest in der VR China, 22f.
of guaranteeing the stability of the new order.\textsuperscript{292} Only two days after the purge on 6 October, the construction of a memorial hall for the deceased was decided upon,\textsuperscript{293} despite Mao’s repeated invocations not to be put on display like Stalin. Concomitantly, the publication of the fifth volume of Mao’s \textit{Selected Works} was announced that had been ready for print since 1968 already but due to Mao’s reluctance had not been published.\textsuperscript{294} Both projects were to be conducted under leadership the Politburo “headed by Comrade Hua Guofeng”.\textsuperscript{295} Within the fluid situation after Mao’s death, it was Hua who nominally emerged as his successor. Hua had previously been First Party Secretary of Mao’s home province Hunan and had proven his loyalty to the line of the Chairman since the days of the Great Leap Forward. By 1973, he had become full member of the Politburo and after Zhou Enlai’s death, Hua had been appointed acting Premier in January 1976 due to Mao’s growing dissatisfaction with the capabilities of handling political affairs through Wang Hongwen and the briefly returned Deng Xiaoping. Mao had died without having accomplished the most basic task he had set himself when embarking on the crusade against revisionism, the choosing of a capable successor to avoid the fate of Stalin both personally and in terms of policy line. Given the lack of formal political rules to choose a successor, Hua drew his political legitimacy from a short notice Mao had scribbled with reference to his decisive handling of the second ousting of Deng Xiaoping in April 1976. It read, “With you in charge, I’m at ease” (你办事, 我放心).

Hua was publicly announced as Mao’s successor during a rally at Tian’anmen square on 24 October 1976 by taking over the offices as CCP Chairman and head of the CMC.\textsuperscript{296} He

\textsuperscript{294} The fate of volumes five and six still remains shrouded in mystery. On 16 March 1967, Mao in a letter to the CCRG had due to the lack of time requested to postpone the publication for another year. Without Mao’s prior consent, however, the CCRG on 9 December 1967 had informed the “Chairman Mao Works Publication Office” to investigate the situation concerning the estimated publication numbers during January and February 1968 and ordered to channel all resources into the print of volumes five and six, interrupting even the print of the \textit{Quotations}, see Liu/Shi (eds.), \textit{Xin Zhongguo chuban wushi nian jishi}, 105, 108. The Xinhua Headquarters on 20 April 1968 issued a directive entitled “Remarks concerning the preparatory work for the allocation and distribution of the ‘Selected Works of Chairman Mao’ volumes five and six” to its provincial branches, asking them to specify the estimated number of required volumes. After careful considerations of the situation in all counties, the Hebei Xinhua branch on 21 June returned the document with an estimate number of 8.12 million copies needed, see Hebei sheng xinhua shudian, \textit{Guanyu “Mao Zedong xuanji” di wu liu quan fenpei faxing zunbei gongzu o yijian de qingshi baogao}, 21 June 1968, HPA 1053-3-3. Buttons were manufactured to congratulate the publication of Mao’s post-1949 writings, but obviously Mao intervened again sometime in the summer of 1968 and stopped the running print machineries. On 24 September 1969, Zhou Enlai informed the Mao Works Publication Office about specific print details of volume five, but it did not appear until 1977.
thus combined the institutional powers of the offices of the state executive, the Party, and the military leadership. Not even Mao had been invested with equal formal powers. Yet after Mao’s demise, Hua remained unsure about the consequences to be drawn from his predecessor’s political heritage. He had risen through the ranks by displaying loyalty to Mao and the policies of the Cultural Revolution, and he continued to do so after becoming Party Chairman. The red vocabulary was once more reinvigorated on a massive scale, the announcements of Mao’s fifth volume of the *Selected Works* were printed completely in red, like in the Cultural Revolution’s heyday, and after only ten months of construction the remains of Mao could be transferred into the monumental “Chairman Mao Memorial Hall” in the center of Tian’anmen square. Although Hua did not adopt Lin Biao’s aggressive stand towards displaying his status as best student of Mao Zedong Thought, he fostered his image as loyal servant to the ideals of Mao and developed a nascent cult as “wise leader Hua,” even physically trying to liken his resemblance to his predecessor by adopting Mao’s hairstyle.

Hua’s policies came to be subsumed under the heading of the “two whatever’s” (两个凡是), referring to the correctness of all directives and instructions issued by Mao, even announcing the reoccurrence of movements similar to the Cultural Revolution in future. But Hua underestimated the resistance, which the latter announcement engendered among the pre-Cultural Revolutionary elites. Despite Mao’s efforts to reshuffle the leadership bodies, the highest prestige and the largest personal networks were still commanded by the generation of Long Marchers, many of whom had suffered and survived the turmoil. Although Hua’s status and image was bolstered through both institutional titles and the media, his power was increasingly counterbalanced by the third rise of Deng Xiaoping based on his backing in Party circles and the military alike. By July 1977, Deng was effectively restored to his offices and although formally outranked by Hua, he came to be the grey eminence of Chinese politics, revealing again that “officials counted for more than institutions in China”. Hua continued to hold his offices until being sent into semi-retirement in 1981, but Deng Xiaoping at the Third Plenum of the Tenth Congress in 1978 emerged victorious. The manipulation of symbols and images as well as political offices had proven to be insufficient to secure Hua’s political fate. By announcing the re-enactment of the Cultural Revolution, he had estranged the faction of the survivors for which factionalism and the attack of non-Party persons had become a nightmare to be prevented at all costs. As Mao had predicted, the establishment of

“fake authority” not backed by charismatic relationships spun over decades did not automatically result in political authority but ultimately had to fail.

Deng Xiaoping was much more cautious in dealing with Mao’s legacy. He had been deeply involved in refuting Khrushchev’s secret speech and been a witness to the consequences brought forth by the attack on Stalin’s legacy. While criticizing the excesses of Mao’s rule, Deng admitted having been an accomplice in the early stages of the Mao cult, as without top-level backing it would never have been able to evolve on such a large scale. Yet he remained vague about the extent to which the effects of the Mao cult on the public sphere should be curbed. He firmly supported the replacement of the omnipresent reliance on Mao’s words, because the gap between original context and later usages had given rise to various manipulations. Instead he advocated the slogan “practice is the sole criterion of truth”, based on an article written by a group of theoreticians associated with the Central Party School Deputy Head and later Secretary-General Hu Yaobang. The so-called “truth criterion controversy” presented the first open contest of the primacy of championing words of Marx, Engels or Mao Zedong over their visible results. It was the most powerful attempt to replace the former “nodal points” of class struggle and the omnipresent references to Mao’s writings with the criterion of “practice”, which was supplemented yet again with a Mao quote from 1941 on “seeking truth from facts”. The reasons for Deng’s action, however, were not solely based on philosophical stringency but as well on strategic observations because he would not have stood a chance, given the number of not exactly flattering remarks Mao had made about Deng, if legitimacy was to be accounted for in terms of championing Mao quotations solely.

Amidst the struggles for succession, the question of the personality cult became once again subject of discussion in the Party media and in public. In March 1977 under the leadership of the “whatever” faction, the tradition of accusing every ousted Politburo member with having opposed Mao Zedong Thought was still reinvigorated. Yao Wenyuan was denigrated on grounds of having called for “weeding out all personality cults” in an article published back in 1956 and was denounced as “Khrushchev’s echo”. Even a year later, in an obituary of Guo Moruo, the former president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences was

302 See for example the announcement of studying the “Hard-Boned Sixth Company”, a designation awarded to one of the first collective models of emulation back in 1964, in *Kaizhan xuexi “Ying goutou liu lian” de quanzhong yundong*, in: Liberation Army News, 24 February 1977, 1.
lauded for his opposition to Khrushchev’s intrigue of denigrating other communist leaders by claiming “I worship Chairman Mao”.

CCP discussions shifted from attacking the Gang of Four on traditional grounds of opposing the study of Mao Zedong Thought towards opposing its vulgarization, which Deng Xiaoping had emphasized since 1960. Most authors of critical articles that appeared in the Party media were associated with the Central Party School under Hu Yaobang. Thus in August 1977 already Sun Changjiang and Liu Mengxi attacked the “formalism” and “opportunism” of rendering Mao Zedong Thought absolute through Lin Biao and the Gang of Four prominently in the People’s Daily. And by early 1978, attacks on formalism and the rituals of the cult featured prominent in numerous articles and front-page editorials.

“Lin Biao and the ‘Gang of Four’ are fake Leftists and true Rightists. Lin in order to suppress [the masses] on a large scale with ulterior motives enacted formalistic activities [that could be termed] ‘never putting the quotations out of the hands, and never letting eternal life be separated from one’s mouth’. The masses were seriously opposed to this type of asking for instructions in the morning and reporting back in the evening, loyalty dances, and quotation gymnastics enacted by Lin Biao. It therefore was rather easy to be destroyed. The ‘Gang of Four’ developed a much more intelligent method than Lin Biao, never to forget ‘politics’, ‘lines’, ‘theory’. They advertised a sheep’s head and sold dog flesh, attaching capitalist politics, counterrevolutionary lines, and revisionist theory under the title of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought […]. By conducting these activities they made it easy to first of all deceive the populace and, second, to scare people. Who dared to have slightly opposing views was immediately labelled counterrevolutionary.”

The medial discussions mirrored the change of argumentation within the CCP and given the relaxation of restrictions on the public sphere from mid-November 1978 onwards until the following spring posters appeared at what became known as the “Democracy Wall” at Xidan in Beijing, which dealt in various ways with the issue of the personality cult. Simultaneously, a large number of petitioners flocked into the capital to have their unjust cases of the Cultural Revolution re-evaluated. As the CCP had not yet announced an official verdict on how to evaluate Mao Zedong’s involvement in the Cultural Revolution, the first public criticisms were daring actions. Yet it soon became obvious that highly different evaluations of Mao existed among the populace, only few of which were as explicit as Wei Jingsheng, a former Red Guard, who declared Mao to be a feudal despot. With his call for democratization Wei attacked the continuing prescription of correct standpoints through the CCP dominated public

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sphere as resembling a “religious cult”. These arguments were to be one of the reasons for sentencing Wei to fifteen years in prison.

The mounting tide of criticism that mostly contained backing for Deng’s policies but in a few cases developed into calls for an abolishment of the Party dictatorship necessitated both an official evaluation of the Chairman’s legacy and a consideration of its effects on the stability of Party rule. The restoration of order and the pre-1957 modus of CCP governance were the priorities of the new leadership body and an all-out attack on the personality cult would invariably have led to the criticism of the concept of the vanguard Party. While renouncing the infallibility of individuals, Deng reverted to his standpoint expressed at the Eighth Party Congress in 1956 and distinguished between exaggerated praise for the individual and heartfelt veneration for the collective leadership of the CCP, as well as between Mao Zedong Thought, defined as the collective wisdom of applying Marxism-Leninism within the context of the Chinese Revolution, and its distortions.

“Without Chairman Mao there would be no New China, this is no exaggeration to the slightest degree. […] If there would be no Mao Zedong Thought there would not be the CCP of today, this [too] is no exaggeration at all. Mao Zedong Thought will forever be a spiritual treasure trove for our whole Party, the military, and all Chinese ethnicities. We should comprehensively and correctly understand and grasp the scientific basics of Mao Zedong Thought, and further develop them under new historical conditions. Of course, Comrade Mao Zedong was not without shortcomings and faults. Requesting that revolutionary leaders should be without faults and shortcomings is no Marxism-Leninism. We should guide and educate all Party members, all political instructors in the military, and all members of the different nationalities to scientifically and historically apprehend the great contributions of Comrade Mao Zedong.”

The consequences of a Khrushchev-type secret speech on the legitimacy of CCP rule thus had to be circumvented by carefully historizing Mao Zedong and his role in the Chinese Revolution and by blaming the outgrowths of the personality cult on the Lin Biao and Jiang Qing “anti-Party cliques”. In a huge Nuremberg-style trial, held between November 1980 and January 1981 that was to demonstrate the success of implementing legal structures, the incarcerated radicals and the remaining circle of Lin Biao’s loyal followers were sentenced for a large number of crimes, most importantly the scheming to usurp power and the persecution of loyal Party members. The cult featured prominently in the coverage of the process and listed the individual fates of various victims that had come to be labelled “modern counterrevolutionaries” for having opposed Lin Biao or the CCRG. “They turned the feelings

308 Deng, Deng wenxuan 2, 149. See further Ibid. 171.
of the masses towards certain leaders into tributary services of a modern superstition.”³⁰⁹ The cult thus came to be explained along the old lines of feudal remnants and its instrumentalization through the Lin Biao and Jiang Qing anti-Party cliques, who were said to have attempted establishing a “feudal-fascist dictatorship“, built on the traditions of the patriarchate and “one word rule” (一言堂).³¹⁰ Mao’s subtle distinctions between the correct phrasings geren chongbai and geren mixin were replaced by an indiscriminate usage, sometimes complemented by references to “modern superstition” (现代迷信) or “god-building activities” (造神运动).

After further discussions at the Fourth Plenum of the Eleventh Congress in September 1979 and a year long preparation of various drafts, the Sixth Plenum on 27 June 1981 finally passed the Resolution on certain questions in the history of our Party since the founding of the People’s Republic of China that was to present the CCP’s official assessment of Mao’s legacy. The Cultural Revolution was defined as the most severe setback since the founding of the PRC in 1949 and the main responsibility rested with the Chairman, who “confused right and wrong and the people with the enemy”.³¹¹

“Comrade Mao Zedong’s prestige reached a peak and he began to get arrogant at the very time when the Party was confronted with the new task of shifting the focus of its work to socialist construction. […] The result was a steady weakening and even undermining of the principle of collective leadership and democratic centralism in the political life of the Party and the country. This state of affairs took place only gradually, and the Central Committee of the Party should be held partly responsible.”³¹²

Mao according to the Resolution had been a tragic hero, who steadfastly held on to his ideas, even if they turned out to be false like in his later years. 1957 came to be the watershed in defining right from wrong in terms of policy line, as Deng Xiaoping added to the draft of the resolution that had been prepared by veteran Hu Qiaomu under the auspices of Hu Yaobang.³¹³ Just like 25 years earlier in the discussions about the impact of the secret speech, the novelty of the communist movement was taken as an excuse for allowing certain errors and deviations to appear. The prominent role of leaders was emphasized yet again, while singling out the consequences of feudalism and centuries of “feudal autocracy” that had been instrumentalized by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four. Inner-Party democracy and collective leadership were to prevent similar failures in future. Although the document did not explicitly

³¹¹ Schoenhals (ed.), China’s Cultural Revolution, 299.
³¹² Ibid. 303.
³¹³ Deng, Deng wenxuan 2, 294f.
refer to the 70:30 per cent formula that had been applied to Stalin, the aim of preserving Mao and Mao Zedong Thought for the stability of Party rule had remained the most important task, as Deng Xiaoping had added in one of his corrections to the draft resolution.

“The most crucial point of the resolution, the most basic problem still is that we hold on to and develop Mao Zedong Thought. Within and outside the Party, domestically and internationally we have to add emphasis, description, and explanation to this problem.”\(^{314}\)

For this reason, the most prominent examples of the cult like Mao’s portrait on Tian’anmen were to remain in place “forever”,\(^{315}\) as Deng told his Italian interviewer Oriana Fallaci in August 1980. Even the mausoleum, although it had not been “appropriate” to build it in the first place against Mao’s own directives only for the sake of stability, should not be torn down in order not to give rise to rumours.\(^{316}\) Dealing with the physical remains of the Mao cult therefore proceeded in a much more secretive fashion than the huge show trial or the removal of the Lin cult items. Mao’s image remained too precious to be tarnished, and popular opinion seemed split about how to remember its deceased leader. In a series of instructions between 1978 and 1980 the elevated print of Mao quotes was ended and the stocks cleared of “loyalty” commodities that still bore witness to the high tide of the cult in 1968.\(^{317}\) Instructions were passed to decrease the propagation of individuals in the media,\(^{318}\) outdated slogans were cleared and the reverence accorded even to the stockpiled Quotation volumes in Beijing was diminished by allowing for their disposal in case of damage.\(^{319}\) Yet the huge Cultural Revolutionary monuments presented the CCP with difficulties. Most of the former “Long Live Halls” were simply renamed, just like many city squares, and were turned into provincial or city museums due to their superior material quality.\(^{320}\) The Mao statues were addressed in a separate central document on 6 November 1980. In accordance with the Party’s policy of retaining a positive image of Mao, it was decided against a renewed wave of iconoclasm.

\(^{314}\) Ibid. 296.
\(^{315}\) Ibid. 344.
\(^{316}\) Ibid. 350.


\(^{319}\) Barmé, *Shades of Mao*, 9f.

\(^{320}\) For the case of Sichuan see Lin, *Suixuye de jianzheng* 2, 45.
“There is absolutely no need to destroy them all in concert. On the contrary, it would be a disservice to the people of China if not a few statues of Comrade Mao Zedong […] were not left standing.”

In all places, were public discussions about whether or not to remove the statues occurred, they were to be retained in order not to harm revolutionary feelings. Yet over the following decade, the statues vanished from most university campuses on the pretext of conducting renovation works. By 2006, only six university campuses in Beijing still had a Mao statue on display. In some places, such as Guiyang, the statues remained on the central city square but underwent renovation work. Thus Mao’s green army uniform was replaced with the greyish blue civil dress known as “Sun Yat-sen suit”.

By mid-1981 the CCP leadership could congratulate itself upon its attempt of having securely depersonalized Mao Zedong Thought and of having re-petrified Mao’s image. Due to Deng Xiaoping’s leniency in treating the former members of the loyalist faction, a split within the CCP had been circumvented and the adverse effects on national stability and Party rule by conducting a radical de-Maoization had been avoided. The official Mao cult had been successfully cooled down but not abolished. Thus the rise of public requests for Mao pictures led to the reprint of portraits of several prominent communist leaders, most importantly Mao Zedong, from 1983 onwards. Yet by preserving one Party rule, based on the dissemination of a controlled stream of censored information, the question of what constituted a personality cult and how to curb its effects had been suppressed and not solved. Instead of instrumentalizing the cult as a means of outmanoeuvring the Party bureaucracy as Mao Zedong had come to proceed, his successors during continuous periods of relaxing and strengthening control over the public sphere came to rely on their own moderate versions of personality cults as a means of fostering unity within the Party and the nation. The common study of leader speeches and works in all Party cells on Tuesday afternoons and the spiritual guidance that was to be drawn from an ever expanding legacy of Marxism-Leninism down to the theory of the “Three Representations” (三个代表) advocated in the name of Jiang Zemin has perpetuated these paternalistic policies. Far from being an arcane remnant of emperor worship, the instrumental value of personality cults still bears its imprints on present day CCP politics.

321 Translated in Barmé, Shades of Mao, 133.
323 Barmé, Shades of Mao, 8.
324 The most recent example is the publication of a three volume edition of the Selected Works of Jiang Zemin explicating his “Theory of the Three Representations”, see “Jiang Zemin wenxuan” zai quanguo chuban faxing, in: People's Daily, 10 August 2006, 1.
Conclusion

In the summer of 1950, Joseph Stalin published a series of seemingly obscure articles in the CPSU’s Party organ Pravda. They were to appear in book form under the title of Marxism and the Problems of Linguistics the year after his death and have puzzled generations of historians ever since.¹ In his articles Stalin repudiated the views on linguistics of the so-called Japhetite school of Nikolay Y. Marr that had dominated the past decades of Soviet language politics.² Marr had, amongst other things, tried to substantiate a materialist theory of language based on Lenin’s philosophical premise that words were “mirror-reflections”³ of objectively existing reality and not merely signs or symbols and thus the products of human interpretation as the Marxist turned social democrat theoretician Georgi V. Plekhanov had argued. Based on Lenin’s reflection theory, Marr had tried to demonstrate that language as part of the superstructure was determined by the productive base. He even adapted Pavlov’s insights into the functioning of conditioned reflexes and stimuli to postulate an idiom, which would allow for unwavering implementation of state policies. “Words as reflections of things in the real world […] were thereby convenient instruments of industrial power, levers of political control.”⁴ Stalin, however, taking into account the visible failures of employing Marr’s theories in practical language education, contradicted his views by declaring language not to be directly related to a specific economic base. Language was rather to be perceived as product of the whole course of history and had come to serve all classes, old and new. It had experienced changes in vocabulary over time, but it had not changed its fundamental role, which Stalin defined in functional terms as a “means of intercourse between people”.⁵ Language thus resembled other instruments of production like machines in being indifferent to classes and serving as a bond to coordinate and communicate between groups of people for whatever purpose. But the crucial difference between language and other means of production, according to Stalin, rested with the fact that it did produce nothing but words only. “It is not difficult to see that were language capable of producing wealth, wind-bags would be the richest men on earth.”⁶

² By referring to Noah’s third son Japhet, who was supposed to have lived near the Black and Caspian Seas after the stranding of Noah’s ark on Mount Ararat in Armenia, Marr tried to demonstrate the proximity between the languages of the Caucasus and the Semitic languages, based on which he later was to denigrate the dogma of the superiority of the Indo-European languages.
⁴ Smith, Language and Power, 87.
⁶ Ibid. 35.
The Cult as Communicative Space

Stalin’s treatise was first published in China as part of the 30-volume edition of the Marxist-Leninist canon that had been distributed for study purposes in 1963. In the following year it appeared as a separate brochure with the People’s Publishing House and again immediately after Lin Biao’s death in October 1971, although it had been translated immediately after its initial print in 1950 by the Central Propaganda Department’s Marxism-Leninism Translation Department, which at that point included Mao’s son Mao Anqing. There is no indication about the impact of Stalin’s views on linguistics amongst the CCP leadership and neither before or after its publication did the CCP come forth with a treatise of similar sophistication in dealing with questions about the nature of language. And yet Stalin’s views on linguistics in many respects were coterminous with Mao’s functional understanding of language, which he expressed in a talk on philosophical questions in August 1964: “What I had learned in thirteen years was of little use for making revolution, except for the tool – the language.”

Despite Mao’s obsession with class struggle and remarks at various occasions detailing the class character of news or the usage of the media in general as a means of exerting communist influence, he did not perceive of language itself as having a specific class character. His standpoint can rather be subsumed by a quote taken from a People’s Daily article dealing with the lack of understanding between the rightists and true communists that was published in the immediate aftermath of the Hundred Flowers Campaign:

“If the standpoint is different, trouble will always arise when discussing matters, because not only the views are different, but one even lacks a common language. This is not to emphasize that language has a class character. It rather means that even if we use the same wording or the same characters, and you use them with a good meaning, but the other one uses them with a bad meaning, one will not come to an agreement.”

The phrase “common language” thus rather referred to certain regulations of speech based on an equal world outlook, Marxism-Leninism that had been defined as representing truth. Those not adhering to the stipulations were simply neglected the right to voice their opinion in the public sphere. Yet words did matter enormously to the CCP Chairman and as long as he was capable to, he paid tremendous attention to the wording of articles and speeches. In May 1963, when criticizing present policies, Mao stated that “one single [correct] formulation, and the whole nation will flourish; one single [incorrect] formulation, and the whole nation will decline. What is referred to here is the transformation of the spiritual into the material.”

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7 Mao, Zedong, Guanyu zhexue wenti de jianghua, 18 August 1964, CCRD.
8 Ruo, Lun “ge gong song de” he “fandui xianzhuang”, 5.
9 Quoted from Schoenhals, Doing Things with Words, 3.
Quite to the contrary of Marr’s views, Mao envisioned the possibility of language to produce immediate results on the economic base. Yet the reasons for paying attention to the correct usage of words did not rest with the class character of language but with the possibility of politically instrumentalizing non-definite formulations for aims running counter to Mao’s own objectives or the premises of the “sinified” version of Marxism-Leninism. Founded upon the belief in the basic truths of the Marxist science of history, as opposed to the legal codification of certain basic rights, power over the public sphere had to be upheld through strict language formalization as well as explicit and implicit censorship. The power of language to produce material effects led Mao to come to an important deviation from Stalin’s views of characterizing language as a medium of communication only. By placing it in the immediate context of exerting power through defining right from wrong, single utterances came to be equated with deeds and thus assumed the “illocutionary” function, of in saying something actually doing something, to use J.L. Austin’s famous designation. Championing the cult through verbal, visual, or physical acts therefore achieved a performative quality of signalling personal loyalty to the Chairman. It has been against this background that the cult of the individual has been defined as a phenomenon of political communication. The manipulation of words and phrases for instrumental purposes came to characterize the movement of the Cultural Revolution as a whole. Symbols were invoked or destroyed in concerted fashion to attain immediate political goals. On the pretext of attacking Chinese characters supposedly transporting feudal blind passengers, a large part of the old CCP elites was driven from power while a number of “wind-bags”, performing the rhetoric of worship, rose through the hierarchies. By describing the cult as communicative space, the interactions between central, provincial, and local levels in shaping its different forms have been targeted in order to explain its multifarious expressions.

The high tide of the Mao cult and the specific forms it came to assume derived from many sources and cannot simply be dismissed as the aesthetical façade of a totalitarian regime. The existence of a highly centralized public sphere that allowed for the ceaseless propagation of the ever-same truths was a necessary precondition for preparing the incredible medial hype around the Chairman. But propounding the Mao cult would have been impossible without the complicity and backing of his Politburo comrades. In the early 1940s Mao and his coterie first employed the cult as a means of securing loyalties and establishing Mao as the primus inter pares of CCP politics. By expounding what after first denominations as “Mao Zedong-ism” came to be termed “Mao Zedong Thought”, 10 Mao and the remaining CCP leadership

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10 Gao, *Hong taiyang*, 607.
discovered the expediency of employing the cult as a branding strategy that served the dual goal of providing the Party with an integratory symbol that could simultaneously be used to counter the propagation of the Chiang cult. After succeeding in ending the feuds within the Party and having successfully established the Communist Party-state, the public cult was steadily tuned down, paralleling the increase of routinization through formal bureaucratic institutions.

The legitimacy of Mao’s superiority within the Politburo remained unchallenged even after Khrushchev’s attack on the Stalin cult and its consequences in February 1956. Yet the secret speech sparked off the only period until Mao’s death that witnessed critical discussions about the outer forms of the cult. The honest attempts of cadres throughout the hierarchies of coming to terms with the criticism reveals that the cult had so far been employed due to its political expediency and had not yet been elevated to the level of a “scientific” concept. The reverberations of the secret speech in Eastern Europe, however, alarmed the CCP leadership about the possible implications of shattering the myths that had served as “synthetic charisma”. But Mao did not heed the admonitions of his colleagues and adopted a strategy of inviting public criticism and opening up the public sphere, based on the estimate that CCP rule was more popular than the dictatorship of other Communist Parties in Eastern Europe. The lack of clearly communicated goals and the opposition of parts of the CCP elites in implementing the policies quickly ended this unique phase of non-doctrinary Marxism-Leninism. The failure of the Hundred Flowers Campaign tarnished Mao’s image as omniscient helmsman and, along with the shunning of the Soviet model, necessitated a renewed proof of his leadership abilities. Without external models to rely upon further, Mao legitimized a “correct” personality cult, defined as non-personal worship of truth, in the utopian attempt of leaping into communism. But only with the disastrous impact of the Great Leap Forward, which shattered the belief in Mao’s infallibility amongst many Party members and citizens yet not his legitimacy in general, did huge media campaigns to reinterpret experienced history based on an absolute truth claim of Mao Zedong Thought become necessary. Especially in the PLA thus a non-dialectical, “incorrect” personality cult as simple worship of the Chairman and his thought came to be propagated.

Up to the Great Leap Forward, Mao’s role within the CCP was clearly exceptional but still restrained by the formal functioning Party bodies and bureaucracy. Starting with the appointment of Lin Biao as commander of the PLA, Mao came to place individuals in key positions, which knew that their tenure was built on personal rather than institutional loyalties. They would therefore champion the cult as performances of their continuing commitment,
even if the correctness of Mao’s views was contradicted through policy failures or during open opposition like the 7000 Cadres Conference. At the same time, Mao came to realize that the Party bureaucracy was no longer a tool that would yield to all of his wishes. His frequent complaints about “independent kingdoms” or separate political spheres organized so tight that “not even a needle” could penetrate them, as he remarked with reference to the Beijing Party leadership at the outset of the Cultural Revolution, revealed the growing dissatisfaction with a regular functioning bureaucratic Party-state. The staging of the anti-Soviet polemics thus witnessed Mao’s increasing reliance on charismatic relationships. By relying on trustworthy individuals and extra-constitutional bodies like the Anti-Revisionist Writing Group, which directly responded and acted upon Mao’s behest, Mao tried to prevent the country from following the path of Soviet revisionism. But only with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution and the careful purges of those Party members holding posts of crucial importance at the CCP Center did the charismatic situation of what in the case of the Nazi dictatorship has been called the “dual state”, divided between the “normative state” (Normenstaat) in charge of running day to day administration and bureaucracy and the “special-measures state” (Maßnahmenstaat) acting on the immediate wishes of the leader, become a short term reality.

While the remaining State Council and departments concerned with the planning of the economy continued to fulfil their tasks and effectively secured that the Cultural Revolution did not completely drown in anarchy, the rise of extra-constitutional bodies like the CCRG, which due to the lack of formal hierarchies or clear areas of competency constantly rivalled for power with the remaining state organs and the military, increased Mao’s agency considerably. He could thus assume the role of both “referee and coordinator” and favour the political faction he deemed best in the present situation. Representatives of all factions on the other hand would try to flatter the Chairman in order to increase their influence.

The Cultural Revolution witnessed the replacement of bureaucratic routines through charismatic relationships and it is in this respect that the Chinese case offers interesting parallels with other dictatorships. The applicability of Max Weber’s ideal type of charismatic leadership has often been invoked to explain the rise of personality cults, but the attribution of personal charisma has often led to unsatisfactory results. Neither Mao nor Stalin were endowed with extraordinary rhetorical skills that would have set them apart from the masses, even less figures like Kim Il-sung. Yet they were able to forge charismatic relationships based

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on loyalty, conviction or simply intimidation. These relationships, however, were not static and catastrophes like the Great Leap increased the necessity to strengthen the personal bonds throughout the hierarchies for example through Mao’s frequent travels as well as contacts to provincial and local Party secretaries and military commanders. By personally seeing to the promotion of loyal followers, Mao continued to weave his net of social relationships that sometimes was still based on the belief in his extraordinary powers but mostly, like in the case of Lin Biao, on personal loyalty. The systematic weaknesses of the communist Party-state by failing to specify an institutionalized ladder of political ascent provided the crucial framework that allowed for the staging and sustaining of personality cults. As long as distinctive policy directives were issued from the CCP Center, loyalty could be proven through the overfulfillment of targets or advocating certain measures associated with the Politburo patron at the expense of others. But during the Cultural Revolution, the goals of which remained a complete mystery to all, rhetorical veneration came to be the most common way of expressing loyalty, once Lin Biao had raised the stakes through declaring Mao Zedong Thought to be sacrosanct on 18 May 1966. By endorsing Lin Biao’s report and the purge of leading CCP comrades at the enlarged Politburo session, Mao Zedong Thought became the sole source of the regime’s legitimacy. The words of Mao as the living fountain of truth assumed performative qualities that were constantly repeated in order to avoid the fate of being exposed as counterrevolutionary. Based on such asymmetric relationships that always made the client dependant on his patron, a similarly asymmetric type of communication evolved that brought forth ever-new blossoms of the language of flattery.

By using his incredible reputation as symbolic capital, Mao could incite enormous effects by silently receiving Red Guards or representatives of the masses. He saw to it that the meetings were covered widely in newspapers and the national broadcasting networks. Footage about Mao’s meetings with the Red Guards on top of the Gate of Heavenly Peace or his benevolent greetings of the masses was constantly provided by special film teams that covered his actions for a greater audience. Mao thus made strategic use of mass medial techniques to have images of the charismatic situation in Beijing spread nationwide in movie theatres. But aside from being linked to the “red sun”, “revolution”, and the “correct line”, the specific content of what Mao actually stood for became increasingly vague. By employing the cult to strike down the Party hierarchy and thus allowing for the development of public spaces independent of the Party’s speech regulations, the near hermetic character of the official media and its relaying of a specific image of the Chairman and his plans during the Cultural Revolution came to be contradicted. Mao’s directions for the movement, commonly
expressed in short quotations, were not self-explanatory and thus had to undergo exegesis through one of his “perception managers”, 13 which due to internal competition would occasionally give the news and interpretation an individual spin.

The unleashing of emotions through the personality cult in the early stages of the movement had been instrumental in creating the massive impact of the Cultural Revolution, but the near complete lack of communicating positive goals of the movement, as well as the decreasing number of steering capacities, led to the championing of the symbols of worship through all emerging groups and factions, while simultaneously trying to instrumentalize them for personal objectives. Mao’s aloofness resulted in an open-textured quality of the movement. The lack of a master plan for the Cultural Revolution was based on the idea of mobilizing the masses to guide themselves, and followed the logic of self-development, which Lenin had laid out in his treatise on dialectics. Wang Shaoguang in his insightful study of the Cultural Revolution in Wuhan pointed out that the cult served to mobilize and energize the masses but failed to control them: “[T]he cult of personality per se could not help to realize Mao’s will, however faithful millions of people might claim themselves to be, because Mao destroyed the social control mechanisms that were necessary for him to dictate and coordinate the popular forces”. 14 Wang’s observation implies a certain imperative on Mao’s side, a clear direction in which to move the masses. Up to mid-1967, however, there is basically no indication of Mao being unsatisfied with the course of the movement. Revolution was to be enacted by enacting revolution and the goals and actors would be defined in the process itself. In this respect, the unleashing of the Cultural Revolution was more radical in its theoretical and practical consequences than the constant accumulation of power through other dictators. Just like Althusser, Mao perceived the reproduction of class inequalities through specialisation and bureaucratisation to be the reason for the developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe after Stalin’s death. By destroying the very foundations of the Party-state itself and replacing it with a lean power structure based completely on personal loyalties, Mao tried to circumvent the fate of the slow death of revolution and simultaneously the routinization of charismatic relationships.

Yet, by mid-1967 cult anarchy and “quotation wars” had greatly diminished the expediency of providing a general direction for the movement through occasional directives depending on recent developments. The attacks on the second remaining source of power besides the cult, the material force of the PLA, increased Mao’s awareness of the necessity to retain a basic degree of control. The renewal of exegetical bonding amongst the main actors

13 Schoenhals, The Global War on Terrorism as Meta-Narrative, 12.
14 Wang, Failure of Charisma, 87.
of the early Cultural Revolution had revealed the limited cohesion provided by the group study of simplified quotations alone and evaporated as soon as the restrictive framework of the short-term military training was removed. To restore order Mao had to rely on imprinting the “correct” worldview upon the newly emerging power holders by way of relying on the PLA. The physical backing of state authority through the PLA changed the anarchic usage of the cult into an ever more elaborate system of performing loyalty through rhetorical or physical acts. The cult therefore came to assume a disciplinary quality as a credible demonstration of state authority and secured the formation of new political structures based solely on personal devotion to the Chairman. The forging of charismatic relationships thus went hand in hand with the renewed petrification of Mao’s public image and sayings into indistinct symbols of positive integration that had to be paid ritual respects.

Performative Politics and Petrified Image

It is a remarkable characteristic of modern personality cults that they are declared to be alien to the fundamental laws and principles of nearly every type of rule by their own representatives. Democratic politicians tend to relegate the phenomenon to totalitarian or at least authoritarian forms of government without noticing that certain forms of idolizing its leaders come to flourish in democracies as well, as Mao had already pointed out in his discussion with Snow about the naming of the US capital. Despite the enormous importance attached to the role of the respective leaders in Nazi Germany or Benito Mussolini’s fascist dictatorship in Italy, both types of Führer-Kult were based on identifying them as “agents of Providence”. Hitler in a talk with two leading apologists of his personality cult, Alfred Rosenberg and Heinrich Himmler, thus explicitly warned against transforming National Socialism, which he described as “a cool and highly-reasoned approach to reality based on the greatest of scientific knowledge” available into a mystic cult movement. The communist

17 Quoted from Ibid. 11.
18 From the very beginning in 1933 the National Socialist administration as well had to deal with a great number of appeals aimed at either expressing the gratitude and love for the leader through paeans, the renaming of streets, towns, and factories (some of which were granted see Heiber, Beatrice/Heiber, Helmut (eds.), Die Rückseite des Hakenkreuzes. Absonderliches aus den Akten des Dritten Reiches, München: Dtv, 1993, 119, 130, 134ff.) or even baptizing children on the name of Hitler, Hitlerine or simply Hitler (Ibid. 121, 131). During the Cultural Revolution a similar rise of variations on Mao’s first name Zedong by choosing names like Xiangdong (Towards the East) or Weidong (Protect the East) has been noted.) In other cases, the requests were of rather prosaic nature by trying to increase the sale of special products by gaining permission to name the after the Führer like Hitlercakes or Hitler shoes (Ibid. 119, 123ff).
dictatorships had to invoke feudal relics in the superstructure to explain the appearance of personality cults in their own Party-states, which were purportedly built on a scientific and rational worldview. Ideological remnants or heartfelt sentiments of the masses were therefore taken as an excuse for the public worship seemingly conducted against the leader’s own will. The cult, as Mao claimed in 1970, was an annoyance for many of those who came to be subjected to it. Saparmurat Niyasov, better known as Turkmenbashi, authoritarian ruler of Turkmenistan, was quoted in 2004 with a similar stanza: “I’m personally against seeing my pictures and statues in the streets – but it’s what the people want.”

The dimension of public worship and performances, the rituals, prayers, and monuments of belief are amongst the most vexed subjects to deal with analytically when studying personality cults. On the one hand, the role of faith and belief in the proclaimed goals of communism and the Chinese Revolution should not simply be negated, while simultaneously keeping in mind the specific dimensions of power relations during the different stages of the leader cult. By way of historical contextualization it has been tried to explain in the third part of this dissertation, how the specific rituals of worship like the loyalty dances or the asking for instructions below the Chairman’s image evolved. The results revealed the complexity of motives present in the creation of the cult’s outward performances. While buttons and posters of the Chairman had been in existence prior to the Cultural Revolution and been supplied by the regime itself, statues and other monuments only appeared during the celebrations of the first anniversary of the May 16th Circular in 1967. Despite and sometimes against the CCP Center’s explicit orders not to construct statues of Mao, the monuments were employed as demonstrations of symbolic power in factional struggles on university campuses. To at least control the construction works, the CCP Center established an authorization procedure to guarantee the aesthetic and political reliability of the statues during the second wave of institutionalizing the gains of the Cultural Revolution through the revolutionary committees in late 1968. Unlike in the case of for example the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein, the construction of leader statues developed against the professed stand of the CCP and Mao personally as a way of demonstrating allegiance and loyalty both as an exclusive measure against competing factions and as a proof of revolutionary conviction.

The CCP Center was only marginally involved in the creation of these monuments of the cult and the rise of rituals modes of worship. And yet Mao’s approval of the report from the Central Guards unit 8341 on establishing a revolutionary committee in the Beijing

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General Knitting Mill was of paramount importance for spreading the impact of rituals that had first evolved locally and then had spread through exchanging experiences and medial coverage. In case of the most famous ritual, the “asking for instructions in the morning”, it had been an adaptation of the common mode of centralizing decision-making processes in times of war through requiring the prior approval of the CCP Center before reaching important decisions and reporting back on its successes later. The military background explains its emergence during the military training conducted in the Shijingshan Middle School. By approving of the report’s circulation, Mao bestowed his blessing on ritual activities of worship that swept China with a vengeance after November 1967. The advantage of the physical demonstrations of loyalty was its non-distinct character. By going through the movements of the cult, submission to state authority was demonstrated and simultaneously the danger of being accused of counterrevolutionary deeds was reduced. Yet the radicalisation of ascribing symbolic qualities to even the smallest aspects of everyday life led to a sacralization of the images and commodities of the Chairman that especially in rural areas assumed religious facets.

The rise of rituals of worship like the “asking for instructions in the morning and reporting back in the evening” leads to wonder in how far the concept of political religion, which has been applied with varying rigidity to the Fascist dictatorships of Hitler and Mussolini as well as to communist rule provides insights for the analysis of leader cults. Emilio Gentile, who has been among the most prominent proponents of reviving the concept in the past three decades, has defined political religions as “a type of religion which sacralizes an ideology, a movement or a political regime through the deification of a secular entity transfigured into myth, considering it the primary and indisputable source of the meaning and the ultimate aim of human existence on earth.”  

In his most recent book entitled *Politics as Religion* Gentile has widened the spectre and described the process of determining the aims of human existence on earth in the modern world no longer through traditional religions but through politics, resulting in what he termed the “sacralization of politics”. He draws a clear distinction between civil religions like in the case of the American civil religion as first defined by Robert Bellah in 1967, and political religions that come in various variants including “totalitarian religions”. Gentile goes at great lengths to refute arguments claiming

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21 The phrase had been used by Gentile first as description of Italian Fascism only but has come to be the key concept of his generalized approach as well, see Gentile, Emilio, *Politics as Religion*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, XIV.

22 Ibid. 15.
metaphorical usage only for transferring the concept of religion to the sphere of politics and sets out to prove that the system of beliefs, symbols, and rituals created by political entities since the late eighteenth century was more than simply a tool to manipulate the masses.

The understanding of personality cults as a specific form of authoritarian political communication advanced in this thesis is in many ways congruent with the aims proposed by Gentile. Personality cults were not simply tools to be employed at ease but always included dimensions of worship that resisted Party control. Yet the crucial point of whether the concept of religion can be transferred to the realm of politics, as Gentile himself concedes, lies with the definition of religion. If employing a non-transcendental, anthropological approach along the lines of Clifford Geertz as described in his work on *Religion as a Cultural System*\(^{23}\) or a functionalist understanding of religion as proposed by Emile Durkheim,\(^{24}\) the application seems to be justified. But the question remains, in how far the transferral of a non-transcendental concept of religion hints at more than functional equivalents and provides us with additional analytical tools to tackle the questions of modern personality cults. Or is it rather the reoccurrence of fundamental modes of communication that may be found in politics and religion likewise? In this thesis, the latter approach has been advanced for two reasons. Analyzing modes of communication offers a wider range of comparison with phenomena relying on similar strategies, such as branding, in completely different settings than perceiving the cult solely through the lens of political religion, unless one subscribes to the infinite enlargement of the term. And, second, the concept of political religion always bears the danger, though not in the highly specified usage of Gentile, to claim simple analogies between traditional and modern phenomena of worship, “[f]undamentally there is little difference between the political religion and the traditional religion of China”\(^{25}\). In China there never was a monotheistic religion based on an absolute truth claim that was to exert a similar influence comparable to the influence of Christianity in Europe. While surely continuities between the worship of Mao and folk deities existed especially in rural areas, other factors were more important in shaping and sustaining the cult phenomenon.

There clearly are phenomena of religiosity to be observed, a category Gentile at times uses interchangeably with the notion of religion, of personal *fascinans* or *tremendum* among the Red Guards when Mao Zedong appeared on top of the Gate of Heavenly Peace at dawn of


18 August 1966 or the emergence of prayer-like rituals before lunch or at bedtime. But beyond the comparison of functional equivalents, of mythical narratives, rituals, and symbols to achieve the absolute dominance of the political sphere, the concept provides little insights for the study of socialist leader cults itself and blurs the distinctions between the different forms and functions the cult came to assume in different settings. The emergence of quasi-religious rituals of worship was a consequence of the cult’s disciplinary function once the Mao cult had ventured beyond control. Instead of hiding the crucial differences under the umbrella term of political religion, the reconstruction of the political strategies and structural limits of political communication reveals the changing character of the cult and offers comparisons with other leader cults.

The existence of personal worship, fetishism, and cults in dictatorships based on scientific truth claims should sharpen attention about the insufficient cohesive powers commanded by systems of rationally functioning bureaucracies and the integratory function provided by cults. Hartmut Böhme has therefore reversed Max Weber’s famous dictum and spoken of a trend towards “re-enchantment” in modern societies and claimed that politics, even in democracies, can’t function without some form of cult, while on the contrary cults can function “without democracy”. Kang Youwei’s future state in the Age of Great Equality would therefore have been doomed to failure as well due to its sterility, while the Maoist attempt of leaping into communism ultimately had to fail because of the incongruence of an “enlightened” cult with a command economy, given the millions of cadres who reported completely spurious harvest numbers in an effort of working towards the Chairman and securing personal gains.

The question of whether the populace actually believed in the claims of the cult was of secondary importance due to the monopoly of power commanded by the CCP. Up to the Cultural Revolution, Mao had always been able to publicly negate his responsibility for policy failures, thus damaging the image of the Party but not his own. The cult anarchy during the Cultural Revolution and the alleged treachery of the cult’s most prominent supporter Lin Biao in 1971 resulted in a profound erosion of trust in the infallibility of the Chairman, yet it did not diminish the public expounding of the cult. Instead of inciting public belief, the cult was turned from a popular into a cynical device of rule. Mobilisation efforts now resulted in a mere “acting as if” that not necessarily incited belief but made the masses more docile as

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26 Plamper, Jan, “The Hitler’s come and go...” the Führer stays. Stalin’s Cult in East Germany, in: Heller/Plamper (eds.), Personality Cults in Stalinism, 312, n.32.
27 Böhme, Fetischismus und Kultur, 23.
28 Similar cases are reported from the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, were “Wenn das der Führer wüßte...” (“If only the Führer knew that...”) became a common proverb.

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Blaise Pascal speculated in his wager on God. As soon as the communicative space of the Mao cult imploded in 1978, most loyalties were shifted and eased Deng Xiaoping’s radical transformation of China towards a market economy. The constants twists in line had long since evaporated prior existing faith in the eternal correctness of Mao’s teachings. It therefore was to take another decade of disillusionment and the violent crack-down on the protests at Tian’anmen square before Mao’s image made its reappearance imbued with all kinds of nostalgic, religious, and commercial sentiments, and thus contradicted the longstanding efforts of the CCP to petrify Mao’s image and safely relegate it along with Marxism and Leninism to the realm of the Party historians. The multifaceted posthumous cult of Mao Zedong, about which Geremie Barmé has assembled a riveting collage, could draw on a variety factors including disillusionment, nostalgia, renewed national pride, the incorporation in religious traditions, and commercial interests, all of which worked together in turning Mao into an “empty signifier” freely attached to varying trends as a kind of “EveryMao”.

The deep immersion of Mao’s image with CCP history and Cultural Revolutionary cleavages within the Party have perpetuated the necessity to control the public image of Mao and have so far kept the Party leadership from following Khrushchev’s example and to relegate Mao finally to the academic turf of the historian. After all, the CCP had no Lenin for backup. Instead of reassessing Mao’s legacy, the Cultural Revolution was declared a taboo in order not to compromise the fragile alliance between the former Cultural Revolutionary factions. The Resolution on Party History therefore presented a renewed effort to petrify the Chairman’s image and to retain the Party’s legitimacy. But until the Party finally allows for an independent assessment of Mao and open its archives, the shadow of Mao will continue to haunt his successors.

29 “You want to find faith und you do not know the road. You want to be cured of unbelief und you ask for the remedy: learn from those who were once bound like you and who now wager all they have. […] They behaved just as if they did believe, taking holy water, having masses said, and so on. That will make you believe quite naturally, and will make you more docile,” Pascal, Blaise, Pensées, Hammondsworth: Penguin books, 1966 [1670], 152f.
30 Barmé, Shades of Mao, 19.
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