

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Changing Cosmologies:
How the Communist Party Reconstructed State Orthodoxy
Away from Confucianist Thought 1949 – 1976

By

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June 2024

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts degree in the
Master of Arts Program in Social Sciences

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Preceptor: Alexander Hofmann

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

I would foremost like to thank Dr. Jacob Eyferth, my advisor for this process, who was kind and patient enough to have accepted me as his student. Without his help and guidance, in lectures or otherwise, it would have been impossible for me to formulate my thesis. He has proved to be an endless repository for information and source material, and I was able to expand my knowledge and understanding as a result. It was only through his class and his prompting that I had at last discovered and chosen to research this topic of interest. I would also like to thank Dr. Alexander Hofmann, my preceptor, who has been gracious enough to make edits to my thesis and provide great feedback; I am also indebted to him for being patient enough and allowing me to change my thesis topic a number of times, and gave me appropriate guidance at each step.

I would also like to acknowledge and give thanks to previous instructors, who had sparked my interest in history and were no less instrumental in shaping my thesis. I stand on the shoulders of giants, and I would not be here today if not thanks to their contributions and investment in my education. These include Dr. David S. Foglesong, Dr. Xun Liu, Dr. Pauline Lee, Dr. Sukhee Lee, Dr. Alina Shokareva, Dr. John M. McCallum, Dr. Dietrich C. Lammerts, Dr. Anthony DiBattista, Mr. Eric Yang, Mr. Brian Nash, Mr. Craig Uplinger, Mrs. Anne Altman, Mrs. Barbara Gallo, and Mrs. Virginia McDonald.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their emotional and intellectual support this year. I cannot properly express my gratitude for their love and compassion during a difficult time. I would like to thank my mother Lori, my father Michael, my son Henry, my brother Simon, my grandmother Joanie, my cousin Sinon, my cousin Alanna, and my uncle Jason. No man is a failure who has friends, and I am grateful to Brennan Radvanski, Katherine Zheng, Dan Huang, Jake Karpman, Anthony Baldes, Darshan Nagaraj, Emily Chang, Lauren Kwok, Michael Wang, Eric Wu, Chenfei Li, Hams el-Shaikh, Chloe Thompson, Oliver He, Zuzanna Kubiszewska, the staff of Churchill Junior High School, and others too many to name, for their integral support over the years, no matter how big or small.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major aims of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was not only to institutionalize socialism in China proper, but also to domineer the cultural and social dimension of daily life. Economic productivity and function was inherently linked to the prevailing social milieu. If unable to change popular attitudes, it would have been significantly more difficult for the CCP to implement its own programs for state-ownership. The CCP thus engaged in numerous campaigns to instill political consciousness into the masses for the sake of accomplishing its broader socioeconomic ambitions. This paper seeks to prove that the state deified Chairman Mao Zedong (毛泽东), instituting cult worship in order to replace existing modes of thought and convention that pervaded daily life. Mao's philosophical basis for guiding the country, explicated under the concept of "Mao Zedong Thought," relied on a syncretization of Marxist-Leninist ideology with traditional Chinese philosophical dialectics.¹ The Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976) exacerbated popular reliance on the thoughts of Chairman Mao, and the CCP repeatedly appealed to Mao Zedong Thought to garner a sense of legitimacy. With this authority, policies were endorsed which sought establish the Party as the sole interlocutor, and philosophical determinant, for the Chinese people. Specifically, the principle object of investigation will be the *Anti Lin-Biao, Anti-Confucius Campaigns* of 1974, and this phenomenon with other substantiating evidence will provide greater insight into the Party's broader political ambitions.

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¹ Steve S. K. Chin, *The Thought of Mao Tse-Tung: Form and Content*, trans. Alfred H. Y. Lin (Center of Asian Studies: University of Hong Kong, 1979), 33, 46.
Ram Naresh Sharma, *Mao: The Man and His Thought* (Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1991), 66 – 93.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CLAIMS

Of all ideologies that influence the thinking and life of traditional China none was more important than Confucianism. In fact, prior to the twentieth century the word “Confucianism” was almost synonymous with the word “Chinese.”²

Dominating the Sinitic sociocultural landscape, Confucianist philosophy served as the prevailing ideology of China and guiding doctrine for over two millennia. Living in the 6th Century B.C. amidst the turbulence of the Spring and Autumn Period (770 – 481 B.C.), Confucius (孔丘) was an itinerant philosopher who espoused ideas of ethical and proper social relations to combat the upheaval of the era. In order to achieve social harmony, it was necessary to cultivate virtue and look to the ancients for example, stressing ritual propriety and tradition.³ A blend of ritual practice, social proscriptions, ethical guidelines, and later a religious element, Confucianism was a syncretization of religion, statecraft, and ideological dogma that pervaded all aspects of society. Gradually, Confucianist thought gained traction. After a brief interruption, from the time of the Han Dynasty (202 B.C. – 220 A.D.) onward, Confucianism became a core tenet of legitimizing rule. Confucian doctrines were of particular importance to the gentry and aristocracy. Among other things, it stressed the loyalty of a subject to his sovereign as one of the five cardinal relationships (五伦), and was co-opted as a means of achieving legitimacy. Society was to be hierarchically structured; it maintained the elitist principle “*shang zun xia yu er bu yi*,” meaning that the elite are respectable, while the masses are generally considered stupid.”⁴ From the times of the Sui (581 – 618) and Tang (618 – 907) Dynasties onward, Confucian literature

² Dun J. Li, *The Essence of Chinese Civilization* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1967), 3.

³ Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius* (論語), trans. Robert Eno, 2015.

⁴ Dongping Han, *The Unknown Cultural Revolution: Life and Change in a Chinese Village* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008), 123.

would even play a central part of bureaucratic selection and social re-production of the elite in the form of the civil service examinations.⁵ Drawing on a pool of classical texts, these examinations stressed Confucian learning and virtue; successful examinees would be given access to the esteemed upper echelons of society. Examinations relied on texts such as the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics*, and required examinees to memorize 400,000 characters and numerous essays for their responses.⁶ These texts extolled tradition and reinforced values of filial piety, proper social relationships, and education. Repeatedly claimed across a variety of memoirs and cultural histories, Dun Li's excerpt in the opening epigraph is one of the best evaluations of the intertwined fates of Confucianism, Chinese imperial history, and Chinese values.⁷ Confucian values conflated with Chinese ones, and over time the two became synonymous, a key feature of the symbolic capital of the Chinese emperors and literati.

In the twilight of the imperial period, the collapsing Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1911) desperately saw the need to modernize. Their military was ill-equipped for the conflicts of the 20th Century, and the gentry's grip on the bureaucracy stifled any substantial progress or modernization efforts. Weakening imperial power, the intrigues of foreign powers in Chinese territory, and the costly Opium Wars (1839 – 1842), the Taiping Rebellion (1850 – 1864), and the First Sino-Japanese War (1894 – 1895) had drained the palace's coffers and fomented a general feeling of unrest. In an abortive attempt to salvage their rule, Immanuel C.Y. Hsü accurately concludes that the reforms of the late Qing state really sought to “redress the Chinese system in

⁵ Peter Zarrow, “Reviews of Books: A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China by Benjamin A. Elman,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 168 (December 2001): 1019.

⁶ Ichisada Miyazaki, *China's Examination Hell - The Civil Service Examinations of Imperial China*, trans. Conrad Schirokauer (Yale University Press, 1976), 13.

⁷ Li, *The Essence of Chinese Civilization*, 3.

order to implement the Western.”⁸ The classical education offered by Confucianism could not contend with the pressing realities of modernity. The content of the civil-service examinations was changed in 1898, before being altogether abolished in 1905. In spite of this, Confucianism continued to hold huge influence over the masses, and the future of China hung in the balance. The May 4th Movement of 1919 and subsequent years of the Republican period cast Confucianism in a new light. Alternating visions often differed substantially from one another. Some welcomed an age of new European and Western ideals in this period of liberalization, claiming that “the people no longer need the Five Classics and the Four Books. What they want is political reports.”⁹ Chinese historiography was reimagined; the late-Qing scholar Kang Youwei was among the first to re-envision Confucius as an early and progressive reformer, assigning a modernist strand to his thought.¹⁰ Sun Yat-sen, leader of the Kuomintang (KMT) and president of the Chinese Republic, believed the ancient sage could be viewed as a primeval advocate of democracy. Confucius revered the sage-kings Yao and Shun, who Sun Yat-sen claims to be “the most prominent exponents of ancient republicanism.”¹¹ Sun’s successor, generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, believed Confucianism was to serve as a source of national strength and unity; through cultivating traditional values and looking to the past, in turn “central guiding principles for the

⁸ Immanuel Chung-Yueh Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 490.

⁹ Harold R. Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*, 1938, 222 – 223.

¹⁰ Wei Leong Tay, “Kang Youwei, The Martin Luther of Confucianism and His Vision of Confucian Modernity and Nation,” *National University of Singapore – University Town College Programme*, 7.

¹¹ Yat-sen Sun, *San Min Chu I - The Three Principles of the People*, 1924, 57.

achievement of *li* [property], *yi* [righteousness], *lian* [purity], and *chi* [sense of shame] – which comprise the national spirit of China” would guide the nation forward.¹²

Prior to the 20th Century, most Chinese did not harbor a very strong sense of nationhood. Nationhood in the modern sense is different from imperial rule, for although China has had a dynastic history spanning 4,000 years it remains rather fractured due to residual cultural, linguistic, and geographic barriers. Not until prompted by the May Fourth Movements did a widespread sense of nationhood begin to permeate the Chinese psyche. Sailing along a river, a traveler would drift past towns with a different dialect spoken in each. Home to over 2,000 unique dialects, China is rich in its vast linguistic landscape. Attempts to unify the nation, such as implementing Mandarin as the language sine qua non for literati culture, were met with limited success.¹³ Remote towns of the interior and villages hidden amongst impervious mountains and forests made it difficult for central power to exercise firm control. Despite a strong sense of ethnic identity, throughout Chinese history the most immediate form of power was vested in local authorities, in the forms of clan associations or village institutions; any extension to broader overtones of nationhood or unity were largely not made in any meaningful way. While the emperor was at the center of power, often local magistrates were more impactful, and represented “either the delegates of the supreme authority, the obedient agents of centralized power, or the unprepossessing protectors of parochial concerns.”¹⁴ Confucianism might have been the greatest unifying force in China; even in distant and rural areas far from the center’s

¹² Frederic Wakeman, “A Revisionist View of the Nanjing Decade: Confucian Fascism,” *The China Quarterly* 150, no. Special Issue: Reappraising Republic China (June 1997): 395–432.

¹³ David C. S. Li, “Chinese as a Lingua Franca in Greater China,” *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 26 (January 25, 2006).

¹⁴ Lucian W. Pye and Mary W. Pye, *Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimensions of Authority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 183 – 184.

localized power, Confucianism held some sway over the population and was one of the only chains that linked distant provinces and peoples together. If the CCP was to be successful in their goal of re-inventing Chinese society in their own vision, they would have to build the state from the ground-up. This would begin with removing Confucian ideals as the base, replacing them with socialist values centered on Mao.

What, then, were Mao's own views on Confucianism? Where and how did the philosophy alter his vision of the socialist paradise he endeavored to create? The state had sponsored study of Confucianism as late as 1971 – 1973, on the eve of the campaigns. The study was not meant to be done in earnest, but rather was meant to view the text critically through the Marxist lens of class struggle.¹⁵ With Confucianism's status as the "*philosophia perennis*" of the East, Mao's dialectic was inherently a response to the arguments Confucius made.¹⁶ Evaluating China's historical treasure trove, Mao concedes that "China's present new politics and new economy have developed out of her old politics and old economy, and her present new culture, too, has developed out of her old culture; therefore, we must respect our own history." "However," he continues, "respect for history means giving it its proper place as a science, respecting its dialectical development, and not eulogizing the past at the expense of the present or praising every drop of feudal poison."¹⁷ Mao sees China's history both as a source of strength and as a cause of concern. Acknowledging this duality, Mao had a complicated relationship with the practice. While endorsing campaigns that criticized the philosophy, he presented Japanese Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka with the six-volume set *Collected Annotations on Chu Poems* compiled

¹⁵ Chang, *Mao Tse-tung and his China*, 49 – 50.

¹⁶ Shen-yu Dai, *Mao Tse-Tung and Confucianism: A Dissertation in Political Science* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1953), 1 – 2.

¹⁷ Mao Tse-tung, "On New Democracy," Marxist Internet Archives - Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, January 1940.

by the Song Dynasty neo-Confucian scholar Chu Hsi.¹⁸ Despite the Confucian moralism present in the stories, Mao was said to be a great lover of the Chu poems, even going so far as to quote the poems in some of his speeches. Mao hoped not only to write China's future but to re-write its past as well. He claims that "the scale of peasant uprisings and peasant wars in Chinese history has no parallel anywhere else. The class struggles of the peasants, the peasant uprisings and peasant wars constituted the real motive force of historical development in Chinese feudal society."¹⁹ Mao believed that the current socialist project was not an anomaly, but a continuity based on an abundance of historical precedent.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), however, held an altogether different interpretation. This view was not acted on to any large extent in the early years of the regime but became heavily politicized in the final years of the Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976). Confucianism by and large was antithetical to the Party's platform. Confucianism's elitist and chauvinistic tendencies contradicted the Party's socialist ideals of equality, and it was believed that adhering to Confucian tradition hindered any substantial progress for the nation. A campaign in the late Maoist years was organized to denounce Confucianism. It was later revealed, however, that this political campaign denouncing Confucianism and dissident Lin Biao was a smear campaign against Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, and other political opponents. Yet the intentions made the attacks no less important in what they represented – and what their secondary intentions were. Confucianism, which had long been a unifying principle of the Chinese people, threatened to undermine Party power and leadership. The Party's attacks were highly symbolic. After consolidating power and implementing a number of socialist reforms in

¹⁸ Chang, *Mao Tse-tung and his China*, 76 – 77.

¹⁹ Mao Tse-tung, "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party," Marxist Internet Archives - Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, December 1939.

the decades prior, the campaigns in the larger context of the Cultural Revolution are an attempt to change the masses' way of thinking and were even meant to construct a new guiding philosophy for China.

Confucianist thought stood in the way of modernity and progress through adherence to tradition and custom; it proposed an alternative center of power to the Party by posing the family as the nexus of social engagement; and it relegated women to an inferior status, against the state's promises of gender equality and women empowerment.²⁰ Wanting to imagine themselves as the guides for the future, the Party constantly insisted that “the great wheel of history is forever rolling forward,” and it was under their hand that China would be led forward.²¹ Through story-telling and reframing their shared history, the Party made an attempt to thoroughly reshape Chinese society and cosmology.²² Mao took a central role in this process, deified as his own cult-like following crystallized around him. The Red Guards, usually educated and urban youth, were his most ardent supporters. Proudly adorning Mao badges and with Mao's *Little Red Book* close at hand, the Red Guards would march through the streets chanting *Máo Zhǔxí Wànsuì* (毛主席万岁). A phrase which was formerly reserved for the emperor, the revolutionary Red Guards hoped for “Chairman Mao to live for ten-thousand years,” and sang numerous songs and chants in his honor.²³

²⁰ “Women Hold Up Half the Sky and Give the Mountains and Rivers a New Face,” 1970.

²¹ Shih Hsüan, “Oppress Following the Routine and Sticking to Old Ways,” *Survey of People's Republic of China Press*, 5808, Hong Kong: American Consulate General, March 11, 1975, 44–46.

²² David E. Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 69 – 81.

²³ *Selected Revolutionary Songs - Guang Dong Ge Ming Ge Qu Xuan* (广东革命歌曲选), vol. 1 (Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Publishing House (广东人民出版社)), 1971, 8.

Confucianism was a cornerstone of Chinese civilization. During the Cultural Revolution, however, Chinese society was comprehensively remade and reimagined by the Party. Old ideals and traditional values came under attack, particularly Confucianist content of Chinese philosophy. Kuo-sin Chang rightly concludes that Confucianism's moralism was "anathematical to communist ideology, running counter to every basic tenet in Marxism," teaching class harmony against communism's class struggle and ultimately placed a "premium on filial piety against communism's demand for party loyalty."²⁴ During the socialist years, the two philosophies were thought to be fundamentally incompatible with one another. There exists a rather robust selection of literature and publications on these topics, from the history of the Cultural Revolution to the importance of and prevalence of Confucianism in Chinese thought. A surprisingly substantial amount of work had also been done on the status of Confucianism in the Mao years, Mao's personal thoughts on the philosophy, and the overarching goals of the Cultural Revolution. Dr. Li Zhisui's *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* and Ross Terrill's *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon* were extremely rich source materials that gave personal insight into the inner-workings of the CCP Politburo.²⁵ Heng Liang's *Son of the Revolution* offers a first-hand account of what it was like for ordinary people growing up during and experiencing the Cultural Revolution and the Maoist years, from routine propaganda to rituals and personal dynamics that were shaped in light of socialist rhetoric.²⁶ Whereas the previous works are important reflections on the period, Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals' *Mao's Last Revolution* is one of

²⁴ Kuo-sin Chang, *Mao Tse-Tung and His China* (Hong Kong: Heinemann Educational Books, 1978), 48.

²⁵ Zhisui Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, trans. Hung-chao Tai (New York City: Random House, 1994).

Ross Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon* (New York City: Bantam Books, 1984).

²⁶ Heng Liang and Judith Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983).

the most definitive examinations of the events leading up to, and surrounding, the creation of the Cult of Mao. It is one of the most thorough reviews of the socialist period, and a *magnum opus* for understanding the developments of the period.²⁷ Still, there admittedly seems to be an absence on literature that explicitly examines the tension between the Communist Party's rhetoric and the actuality of these developments. Even in *Mao's Last Revolution*, I feel that there is much that can still be said on the rabid deification of Mao. Many of the secondary sources talk of the shortcomings of the Party in failed campaigns and its ideological underpinnings. These often seem to be evaluated separately, however, and not much service is given to the broader and long-term ambitions of the Party. What is omitted from important secondary source evaluations are the campaigns of 1974 and how they approached societal reconstruction, and why Confucian ideology was a pressing concern for the CCP. Even if it is a trivial episode in the broader context of the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution, it remains central to some of the Party's aims. It is emblematic of the intentions of the Party, and how power was used as a means to an end, even if it was not a successful endeavor. It is my intention that this paper could work to link the Confucian past more comprehensively to the present, and demonstrate how the Party's dialogue about the tradition is evocative of a larger struggle to reshape the ideals of a nation. Synthesizing and building upon this excellent secondary source material, I hope in this thesis to convey how Mao and the CCP hoped to redirect the sociocultural dimensions of China, highlighting this 1974 campaign, and the active cultivation of Mao's cult. Although the 1974 campaign targeting Confucianism was "a flop," nothing more than a veiled attack against political opponents with little success, the campaign gives insight into broader CCP ambitions and draws on the dialogue

²⁷ Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

from the ongoing Cultural Revolution, a testament to its central goals and ideals. This fleeting episode of a much larger development has been so captivating because of what it could have been, and what it attempted to do. Traditional values and ideals were meant to be succeeded by communist ones and society made anew; while this occurred to varying degrees of success, but nonetheless continues to have a lasting legacy in China today.

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CONFUCIAN VALUES – THE CORNERSTONES OF TRADITION AND EDUCATION

To discuss how the CCP attempted to reorient Chinese thinking, it is first important to examine what Confucian values were attacked and for what reason. The foremost reason Confucian values were so adamantly decried was for their propensity to uphold tradition. Confucian doctrine would undermine the Party’s goal of modernizing and industrializing China. It made sense, then, that the philosophy was made an easy target during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s – a decade long campaign centered around the goal of destroying the “four olds” in society; “old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits.”²⁸

Benevolence (仁) was one of the five virtues embodied in the ideal of the Confucian gentleman (君子).²⁹ It has historically been interpreted as showing magnanimity and putting others before oneself; an innocuous term connoting the outward extension of love and

²⁸ “Sweep Away All Cow Demons and Snake Spirits,” *People’s Daily* (人民日报), June 1, 1966, 1.

²⁹ Robin Stanley Snell, Crystal Xinru Wu, and Hong Weng Lei, “Junzi Virtues: A Confucian Foundation for Harmony Within Organizations,” *Asian Journal of Business Ethics* 11, no. 1 (March 30, 2022): 183–226.

kindness.³⁰ New interpretations of Confucianism arose during the communist era, which viewed the philosophy through a Marxist-Leninist lens of class struggle. Communist thought maintained that this benevolence, which “‘comes from subduing oneself and returning to propriety,’ [would ultimately consolidate] the system of slavery.”³¹ Contrasting it with the contemporary Legalist school to which the communist party held in high regard, it was now claimed that the Confucian teachings were invented to “stubbornly maintain the old force – to maintain the daily-declining system of slavery” of the Yin and Zhou Dynasties.³² In a way, the Party stood as the inheritors of China’s Legalist school. Both philosophies were totalitarian and authoritarian in nature; both necessitated total control, with the masses held in tight regimentation.³³ The despotism of China’s first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, was praised; long reviled by literati and scholars for burning books and burying Confucians alive, the Qin Emperor’s and the legacy of his draconian Legalist state was praised. The debate between the Confucian school and the Legalists had been reduced to a simple binary; it was framed as a “Party line” versus an “Anti-Party line,” and was similarly applied to other conflicts involving class struggle.

As could be seen in the previous excerpt from the *Red Flag* (红旗) magazine, the Party reconstrued the origin of Confucian teachings to appear that they were created with the intention

³⁰ Qiyong Guo et al., “The Values of Confucian Benevolence and the Universality of the Confucian Way of Extending Love,” *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 7, no. 1 (March 2015): 20–54.

³¹ Yang Jung-kuo, “The Struggle Between the Two Lines in the Ideological Realm During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods - The Social Changes During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods as Reflected in the Debate Between Confucianism and Legalism,” (reis., *Survey of People’s Republic of China Press*, Hong Kong: American Consulate General, December 1, 1972), 1–14.

³² Yang, “The Struggle Between the Two Lines,” 12.

³³ Kuo-sin Chang, *Mao Tse-Tung and His China* (Hong Kong: Heinemann Educational Books, 1978), 51.

to reproduce slavery. This was reinforced in subsequent papers, which claimed that Confucius and his disciples unscrupulously slandered and intentionally distorted the history of Liuhsia Chih, the “outstanding leader” of a large-scale slave uprising during the late Spring and Autumn period.³⁴ Numerous articles on Confucianism during the socialist period repeatedly use the motif “that history is ever moving forward.”³⁵ This could be seen in one excerpt which claims that “the Legalist school promoted scientific development in China, while Confucianism hindered it [and] pushed a political line of restoration and retrogression.”³⁶ To uphold their vision, the Party strongly criticized the fact that Confucian ethics “advocated ‘not changing the ways of the father’ in a vain attempt to pass on things from generation to generation and uphold forever their domination. However, the great wheel of history is forever rolling forward, and there is no way out for conservatism and regression.”³⁷ The communists went to great lengths praise the Legalist tradition and re-evaluate its significance in several literary publications, highlighting its practical values and structuralism. There were significant parallels between the socialist state and its Legalist predecessor, and the autocratic revival of this rule served to rebuff Confucian ideals of

³⁴ Kan Ch’ing, “People’s Heroes Cannot Be Obliterated – Criticism of Confucius Worshippers’ Distortion and Slander against Liuhsia Chih,” *Hung-Ch’i (Red Flag)*, no. 6 (June 1, 1974; reis., *Survey of People’s Republic of China Press*, Hong Kong: American Consulate General, June 1, 1974), 12–21.

³⁵ Shih Hsüan, “Oppress Following the Routine and Sticking to Old Ways,” *Survey of People’s Republic of China Press*, 5808, Hong Kong: American Consulate General, March 11, 1975, 44–46.

³⁶ “Red Flag: Legalist School Promoted Scientific Development,” *Peking NCNA*, September 8, 1974. Translated in *Daily Report. People’s Republic of China*, no. FBIS-CHI 74-176, September 10, 1974: E1-E4. *Readex: Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports*.

³⁷ Hsüan, “Oppress Following the Routine and Sticking to Old Ways,” 44–46.

governing structure.³⁸ The Party envisioned themselves as the inheritors of this Legalist legacy, and wanted to restructure the Chinese state accordingly.

If benevolence was a Confucian abstraction, it took form in the virtue of filiality (孝).

What might be the most central idea of the philosophy, filial piety is the result of the interplay between benevolence (仁), righteousness (義), and ritual propriety (禮).³⁹ Filial worship echoes in the broader overtones of social order, necessitating proper respect for parents and elders. In one story of the *Mengzi*, “Mencius was forced to seek refuge for the night with the family of Jing Chou. Jing Chou said to him, ‘The most important relationships a man must maintain are that between father and son within the family, and that between a ruler and subject beyond it.’”⁴⁰ Described here are two of the five cardinal relationships of Confucian doctrine; through organizing one’s social conduct harmoniously and conducting oneself virtuously in this proscribed relationship, this would then be reflected in social stability. Filial piety and familial reverence were essential to Confucian tradition. The CCP, however, sought to artificially restructure society in which the Party was the nexus of social reverence. Children were often called upon to criticize their parents and rebel against their anti-revolutionary inclinations.⁴¹ A published letter from a daughter sent down to the countryside to her parents reads:

[Five] years have passed, you and some other parents are eager to see your sons and daughters return to the city to join you again. Why? [...] I believe that you think this way because you do not understand the situation in the border areas and because you love yours sons and daughters too much, hoping that they will achieve great things. But these

³⁸ Steven W. Mosher, *The Devil and Communist China: From Mao Down to Xi* (Gastonia, NC: Tan Books, 2024), 51.

³⁹ Kwong-Liem Karl Kwan, “Counseling Chinese Peoples: Perspectives of Filial Piety,” *Asian Journal of Counselling* 7, no. 1 (2000).

⁴⁰ Mencius, *Mencius* (孟子), trans. Robert Eno, 2016.

⁴¹ Wang Zheng, “Call Me Qingnian but Not Funü: A Maoist Youth in Retrospect,” *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001): 9–34.

reasons are only secondary. The primary reason is that you put too much emphasis on your personal interests and do not have enough proletarian feelings toward the party. As a result, you are susceptible to bourgeois ideology, voice mistaken public opinions and are divorced from Chairman Mao's instructions on sending educated youths to the countryside.⁴²

Not only is this phenomenon fundamentally anti-Confucian, it undermines the family nexus as a whole. The party publication endorses the fact that the bond between parent and child should be of a secondary order to the relation to the Party, cultivating an ostensible suppression of emotion. Human emotions and natural feelings should be resisted, and the young girl serves as a paradigm for communist virtue by severing the emotional connection in favor of Party loyalties. The CCP not only fractured relations between parent and child, but also husband and wife. In his memoir, Liang Dian-jie recalls that when his mother was denounced during the 1957 Anti-Rightist Campaign, "Father's traditional Confucian sense of family obligation told him to support Mother while his political allegiance told him to condemn her. In the end, his commitment to the Party won out, and he denounced her."⁴³ Having divorced her to try to rid his family of the label as "Rightists," his father remarried. In a wedding presided over by the Party, the cadre presented the newlyweds with scrolls to ordain the wedding. The three scrolls, being opened, read: "YOUR THOUGHTS AGREE, YOUR WAY THE SAME, ARM IN ARM ADVANCE TOGETHER," "YOUR LOVE IS TENDER, YOUR AID MUTUAL, WHEN YOUR HAIR WHITE YOU WILL STILL BE TOGETHER," and "REVOLUTION UNTIL THE END."⁴⁴ We see that love and Party dogma was intermingled, and love seems to be transactional and commoditized; it is not simple and pure, but a means to an end, a means of furthering the

⁴² "Daughter's Letter." *Shanghai City Service*, December 29, 1973. Translated in *Daily Report: People's Republic of China*, no. FBIS-CHI-74-003, January 4, 1974: C7-C8. *Readex: Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports*.

⁴³ Liang and Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution*, 9.

⁴⁴ Liang and Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution*, 32 – 33.

Party's ambitions. Liang Heng's own sister confesses in her diary that "she wanted to renounce all family ties and let the Party be her true father and mother, because only then could she become a true Revolutionary and work for the glory of Socialism."⁴⁵ Love was no longer a sacred Confucian institution, but was inherently politicized, perverted and tied to social status and Party membership. Unwavering filial piety and family devotion was meant to be replaced with an unwavering devotion to the Communist Party.

Confucian ethics not only prized a hierarchical system of deference and family, but highly valued education. This accordingly be seen in a principle known as the "rectification of names" stipulating that "goodness is acquired because the social order is proper" and thus sought to systematize relationships between men.⁴⁶ Although not explicitly described as one of the five cardinal relationships in Confucian thought, the relationship between teacher and pupil constituted one of the core aspects of Confucian sociology.⁴⁷ Education had long been prized in China, and educators were seen as essential towards providing a moral education and instrumental to social success. Accordingly, students must afford their teachers the proper respect. In the Maoist era, flagrant attacks on education, which would have been unthinkable previously, were now endorsed and commonplace. At times, this rebuke of educators and teachers even became frighteningly violent. To wage the Cultural Revolution full-time, in the summer of 1966 "all colleges and middle schools ceased their regular curriculum, which had been accused of being a part of the 'feudal, capitalist, and revisionist educational system.' In many schools, those who verbally attacked teachers earliest drew support from the 'working

⁴⁵ Liang and Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution*, 38.

⁴⁶ Warren E. Steinkraus, "Socrates, Confucius, and the Rectification of Names," *Philosophy East and West* 30, no. 2 (April 1980): 261–264.

⁴⁷ Confucius, *The Analects*.

group' and became members of the new 'Revolutionary Committee.'"⁴⁸ Not only was education disrupted, but the relationship between teachers and students was fundamentally compromised. Teachers were verbally abused, not shown proper respect, and students were even encouraged to construct "'big-character posters' to 'expose' their teachers."⁴⁹ Educators now lived in fear of retribution, of arbitrarily being assigned a counterrevolutionary class label, and then dehumanized and subject to any violence imaginable. The front page of the *People's Daily* (人民日报) newspaper commended students for criticizing faculty, labeling university educators as being "anti-party and anti-socialist" counterrevolutionaries.⁵⁰ As the government's mouthpiece and a key organ of state-sponsored propaganda, this was high praise. Subjected to various kinds of torture and humiliation, the summer of 1966 was a period of particular episodic violence. Youqin Wang's survey of the anti-educational attacks, among ninety-six elementary, middle, and high schools, seventeen of these schools had one educator beaten to death, and at five of these schools at least two educators were beaten to death. Ultimately, twenty-seven educators were murdered outright; the number of faculty members who committed suicide, however, is difficult to fully ascertain.⁵¹

Initially, student criticism of teachers and administrators was promoted, and violent beatings were tacitly condoned. These attacks were used not only to subjugate and intimidate

⁴⁸ Youqin Wang, "Student Attacks Against Teachers: The Revolution of 1966," *Issues & Studies* 37, no. 2 (2001), 14.

⁴⁹ Wang, "Student Attacks Against Teachers," 14.

⁵⁰ "A Big-Character Poster by the Seven Comrades of Peking University Exposes a Big Conspiracy. Song Shuo, Lu Ping and Peng Peiyun, the Gangsters of 'Sanjiacun', Are Stubbornly Resisting and Trying to Hold on to the Reactionary Fortress. (北京大学七志一张大字报揭穿一个大阴谋'三家村'黑帮分子宋硕陆平彭珮云负隅顽抗妄想反动堡垒)," *People's Daily* (人民日报), June 2, 1966.

⁵¹ Wang, "Student Attacks Against Teachers," 13.

teachers opposed to the Party, but also attack schools and universities which could be the bastions of individual thought and anti-Party education. Most of the violence of the Red Guards was pardoned, and no further inquiries were made into the assaults. The police were instructed to protect and support the Red Guards; their victims were helpless against assault.⁵² Struggles and widespread violence removed historic inhibitions, and professors and scholars alike were labeled counterrevolutionaries. Mao encouraged these student movements, who denounced officials and educators “as a great victory for Mao Zedong Thought.”⁵³ More moderate members of the Communist Party, including Vice Chairman Liu Shaoqi, raised alarm; they saw it necessary to control the fervor of this campaign before it got out of hand, and Mao agreed.⁵⁴ Even after reigning in a summer of violence and issuing the campaign to “resume classes while carrying out the revolution,” constant fighting between factions of the revolutionary Red Guards continued to escalate through 1969.⁵⁵ Violence raged throughout the streets in China, and the feuds could not be stopped without direct intervention. Mao was forced to use the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to suppress some of the more fervent radical factions.⁵⁶ The Chairman even agreed to meet with some of the leaders of the students and Red Guards militia, finally pacifying them. He would say that “the masses do not want a civil war,” and admonish the Red Guards for their overzealous ideals.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, Mao was pleased with the progress of the Revolution, even if it did require some tempering.

⁵² MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 125.

⁵³ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 124.

⁵⁴ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 71 – 75.

⁵⁵ Yiching Wu, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 145.

⁵⁶ Zhisui Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, trans. Hung-chao Tai (New York City: Random House, 1994), 504.

⁵⁷ Alessandro Russo, *Cultural Revolution and Revolutionary Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 215 – 217.

Through these mass movements, the Party made it apparent that the primary support of the people, especially of the impressionable youths and the revolutionary corps of Red Guards, was to be made to the party and to Chairman Mao himself. This would be instrumental in subsequent developments in the Cultural Revolution, particularly in cultivating his cult of personality. Deference and respect to educators and parents, as well as adherence to the old ways, once prized in the Confucian tradition, was a threat to Party stability and was therefore effectively erased under the auspices of progress.

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ENEMIES OF STATE AND THE 1974 *ANTI-LIN BIAO, ANTI-CONFUCIUS* CAMPAIGN

Just as schools and universities were labeled as bastions of anti-revolutionary sentiment and accordingly attacked, campaigns were levied against key opposition figures that challenged Mao's legitimacy and legacy. These individuals were branded and linked to Confucianism throughout the Maoist period, particularly in the later years of the Cultural Revolution. Confucianism became a stand in for the enemies of the state and of Mao, and power-seekers within the Politburo used this for their own ends. Liu Shaoqi, Lin Biao, and Chiang Kai-shek were all linked to the practice; identifying these opponents with Confucian iconography was meant to foment an aversion, and even a hatred, for these figures. As we will see, these were nothing more than orchestrated attacks to varying degrees of success.

Chiang Kai-shek had long been the symbolic target of the Party's criticism. Wealthy, corrupt, violent, a borderline fascist, and the leader of the opposing Kuomintang (KMT) forces tacitly supported by the capitalist west during China's costly civil war from 1945 – 1949, the generalissimo had long been derided by communist propaganda. Despite views to the contrary, I

maintain that Chiang was seemingly an ardent supporter of Confucian tradition. Notwithstanding contradictions in his character and his actions, he seemed to be sincere in his endorsement of the practice. Privately, his diary entries would contain, and often start with, the character chi (耻), a moral Confucian concept which expressed his shame, particularly as a ruler, and was a sentiment which pervaded Chiang's thinking and leadership.⁵⁸ But Chiang also intended to capitalize on the widespread appeal of this tradition through his public facing actions as well. Chiang recognized that even well into the Republican period (1912 – 1949), Confucianism continued to strongly influence people's thinking; as a semiotic source of unity and strength, Chiang sincerely believed it still held potential answers to China's problems.⁵⁹ This was made evident when Chiang drew on Confucian rhetoric in his early days of power, claiming that the cure of China's problems could be found in its national spirit. He backed away from a push for modernization by the KMT in 1927, which claimed "the people no longer need the Five Classics and the Four Books. What they want is political reports."⁶⁰ Chiang's own vision for the future, a revitalization project known as the New Life Movement, implores China to look inward and appeals to the cultivation of "zhong [loyalty], xiaoshun [filial piety], dexing [virtue], ai [love], he [harmony], and ping [peace]." These traditional Confucian virtues should then be the "central guiding principles for the achievement of li [property], yi [righteousness], lian [purity], and chi [sense of shame] – which comprise the national spirit of China."⁶¹ Learning from the examples of fascist Italy and Japan, he claims that China must draw on its rich history in order to empower itself. This

⁵⁸ Grace C. Huang, *Chiang Kai-Shek's Politics of Shame: Leadership, Legacy, and National Identity in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2021), 3 – 5.

⁵⁹ Huang, *Chiang Kai-Shek's Politics of Shame*, 7.

⁶⁰ Harold R. Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*, 1938, 222 – 223.

⁶¹ Frederic Wakeman, "A Revisionist View of the Nanjing Decade: Confucian Fascism," *The China Quarterly* 150, no. Special Issue: Reappraising Republic China (June 1997): 395 – 432.

parallels the classic *The Doctrine of the Mean*, which dictates that “to possess the feeling of shame is to be near energy (*yong*).”⁶²

Such public facing appeals made the communist criticism of Chiang and Confucian ideology all too easy. In one criticism of particular interest, we can see how the CCP re-envisioned Chinese historiography as the origins of the Chinese state are discussed. Qin Shi Huang’s legalist state had unified China 2,200 years prior, but his efforts were undermined by Chao Kao (趙高), a eunuch who had usurped the throne in order to resume “the Confucian line of restoration and retrogression.”⁶³ Here is a conscious effort by the Party to encourage the populace to draw parallels from Chinese history and apply them to the present. The parallels that are drawn are interesting. It imagines Mao, consequently, as Qin Shi Huang and the unifier of China. Chiang, then, is meant to be both politically – and literally – an impotent saboteur who seeks to divide the country with Confucian ideology. While the Party sees Confucianism and culture as something that should be disposed of, we can also see the Party frequently appeal to these avenues for legitimacy and for political attacks.

Linking the past and present was a way in which the Party was meant to claim legitimacy, deride opponents, and undermine conflicting orthodoxies. Chiang, the salient criticism claimed, saw it was “necessary to oppose communism before resisting the Japanese aggression,” sabotaging the “anti-Japanese national united front.” The communists, as the scions of inexorable progress, meant that Chiang was nonetheless helpless and “failed to prevent the wheel of history

⁶² James Legge, *The Chinese Classics with a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes* (Taipei: Wenxing shudian, 1966), Vol. 1, 407.

⁶³ "Fukien Front: Diehards in Chiang Clique Will be Punished," *Fukien Front PLA*, May 15, 1975. Translated in *Daily Report: People's Republic of China*, no. FBIS-CHI-75-097, May 19, 1975: C4. *Readex: Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports*.

from rolling forward,” and through the leadership of Chairman Mao and the Chinese Communist Party, the Chinese people finally overthrew the reactionary rule of the Chiang dynasty, unified the motherland, and built a socialist new China.”⁶⁴ Although unifying the mainland, Chiang had nonetheless continued the “farce of worshipping Confucius” on an “island of our country,” as the Party criticized his 1974 New Year’s speech which is “only slightly more than 2,000 characters [yet] over half of the message deals with the worship of Confucius.”⁶⁵ Chiang stresses the importance of maintaining the inherited tradition, as the paper bitterly recalls how Chiang devoted time and money to the restoration and repair of Confucian temples, with the aim of “wiping out communism completely.” Communist propaganda seemed to effectively link Chiang and Confucian doctrine, given his propensity for the tradition, and painted both as divisive, regressive, and fundamentally anti-communist. Unlike Chiang, the communists viewed Confucian tradition as the source of China’s problems, not its solution.

The communists’ criticism of Chiang’s links to Confucian practice were tenable. Further criticisms, however, are made on less firm ground. Liu Shaoqi alludes to Confucius and Mencius in an early 1939 speech, writing that the good communist must follow their example; just as how the moral Confucian gentleman undergoes a process of self-cultivation, so too must the good communist cadre.⁶⁶ In the early years of the revolution, before communist thought was widely disseminated, this was seemingly a sensible way of relating their ideology to the public in references they could understand. This proposal, while seemingly innocuous enough, was

⁶⁴ "Fukien Front: Diehards in Chiang Clique Will be Punished," *Daily Reports*.

⁶⁵ "Red Flag Calls Chiang's New Year Message 'Negative Example'" *Peking*, February 7, 1974. Translated in *Daily Report: People's Republic of China*, no. FBIS-CHI-74-030, February 12, 1974: A14-A16. *Readex: Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports*.

⁶⁶ Liu Shaoqi, "How to Be a Good Communist," *How to Be a Good Communist*, July 1939.

subsequently used by the CCP to denounce Liu. One report writes that “our criticism of the counterrevolutionary revisionist line of Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao includes thorough criticism and repudiation of the reactionary doctrine of Confucius and Mencius [...] Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao worshiped Confucius. An important source of their revisionist line was the reactionary doctrine of Confucius and Mencius.”⁶⁷ It is even claimed that Liu’s proscriptions relied heavily on Confucian doctrine “in producing his sinister book ‘on self-cultivation’ in a wild attempt to use the reactionary doctrine of Confucius and Mencius to oppose the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat.”⁶⁸ This report from 1974 takes place nearly 35 years after the book on self-cultivation was published.

This was rather purposeful, however. Mentioned alongside Liu in the aforementioned article was Lin Biao, a former PLA general and Vice-Chairman of the CCP. Lin died in 1971 under mysterious circumstances and supposedly after launching a failed coup against Mao. Despite this, from 1974 until the death of Mao in 1976 there was an upsurge in campaigns against him. Numerous posters boasted slogans such as “Study the Historical Struggle Between the Confucianists and Legalists, Deepen the Criticism of Lin and Confucius” (研究儒法斗争史, 深入批林批孔) and “Wage the Struggle of Criticizing Lin and Confucius to the End” (把批林批孔的斗争进行到底).⁶⁹ One posthumous criticism even went so far as to say, “to criticize

⁶⁷ "Radio Article Says Criticism of Lin is Defense of Cultural Revolution," *Peking Domestic Service*, April 3, 1974. Translated in *Daily Report. People's Republic of China*, no. FBIS CHI-74-069, April 9, 1974: E1-E3. *Readex: Foreign Broadcast Information Service] (FBIS) Daily Reports*.

⁶⁸ "Radio Article Says Criticism of Lin is Defense of Cultural Revolution," *Daily Reports*.

⁶⁹ Cheng Guoying (程国英), “Wage the Struggle of Criticizing Lin and Confucius to the End,” February 1974; Zhou Ruichang, (周瑞昌), “Study the Historical Struggle between the Confucianists and Legalists, Deepen the Criticism of Lin and Confucius,” September 1974.

Lin penetratingly is to criticize Confucius.”⁷⁰ The papers levied the common criticism that Lin used “Confucianism and Mencianism as the reactionary ideological weapon for intriguing to usurp the party, seize power, and restore capitalism;” it was therefore necessary that the public “criticize Lin and Confucius, and link criticism of Lin with criticism of Confucius.” These attacks were later revealed to be implicitly directed against Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping, moderates of the inner circles of CCP leadership who were trying to return to positions of power after being ousted.⁷¹ This was made apparent in campaigns which criticized the Duke of Zhou, a 12th Century B.C. prince who was not only a Confucian moral exemplar, but also founder of the Zhou Dynasty. The association here, quite simply, was that Zhou Enlai and the Duke of Zhou shared a family name, and thus their names were implied to be associated with one another.⁷² It was confirmed by the party’s mouthpiece *Renmin Ribao*, in the post-Mao years, these campaigns which were ostensibly to “criticize Lin, criticize Confucius, and criticize the Duke of Zhou” were [actually] designed to criticize our esteemed and beloved Comrade Zhou Enlai.”⁷³

The linkage between Confucianism and the figures of Lin Biao and Liu Shaoqi is tenuous at best. These figures were Confucian in name alone, and the attacks were rather superficial. This was nothing more than a power play at the behest of Mao’s wife Jiang Qing. Spearheading the

⁷⁰ "Hunan Commentary Links Criticism of Lin, Confucius," *Changsha Provincial Service*, January 30, 1974. Translated in *Daily Report, People's Republic of China*, no. FBIS-CHI 74-022, January 31, 1974: D2-D3. *Readex: Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports*.

⁷¹ Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Document No. 37, and *Renmin Ribao* (RMRB) (People's Daily), April 19, 1978, as reported by Yen Chi and Chiang Ch'i-chi in *Min Pao Daily News*, September 13, 14, and May 2, 1978.

⁷² Lawrence R. Sullivan, *Historical Dictionary of the Chinese Communist Party* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 15 – 16.

⁷³ "Wang Zhen, Shanghai Representatives Discuss Educated Youths," *Beijing Xinhua Domestic Service*, February 10, 1979. Translated in *Daily Report, People's Republic of China*, no. FBIS-CHI-79-030, February 12, 1979: E1-E4. *Readex: Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports*.

attack and rallying the other radicals in the Party, this campaign was an amalgamation of any political weaponry available. Yet no matter how nominal their association with the tradition was, the label was caustic to their reputation. Confucian tradition was said to not only hamper scientific and national progress during the Cultural Revolution but was also labeled as denigrating the role of women.⁷⁴ This was made at a time when Madame Mao was trying to bolster the status of women as well, challenging her own rivals in the Politburo's inner circles as she poised herself as the successor of her ailing husband.⁷⁵ This was at a time when Madame Mao had her own designs on power, and women were given new responsibilities.

One of the reasons that these attacks were intended to be so damaging was because of Jiang's simultaneous campaigns to bolster the status of women and give them a new sense of agency in socialist China. Old Confucian precepts held little agency for women, who were viewed as inferior and only meant to fulfill their duties and serve as virtuous mothers, devoted wives, or obedient daughters and daughters-in-law.⁷⁶ New state-sponsored publications and other Party propaganda touted the equal status of women at home and in the workplace, and policies were made with the purpose of equalization of men and women. Jiang's role was integral in this development. She constantly frowned upon the societal limitations imposed on her as a woman, and moreover, Mao's wife. Burning with her own personal ambition, Jiang sought to remove the shackles which hampered her own rise to prominence. She did not want to be Mao's wife, and merely appear as a figurehead – she had her own designs on power, using her sex as a political tool. She organized her attack, exacting and meaning to obtain revenge, frustrated for years by

⁷⁴ Sullivan, *Historical Dictionary of the Chinese Communist Party*, 15.

⁷⁵ Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon*, 325 – 327.

⁷⁶ Rebecca Doran, *Transgressive Typologies: Constructions of Gender and Power in Early Tang China* (Boston: Harvard University Asia Center, 2017).

her inability to influence cultural policy in the nascent CCP; having married Mao in Yan'an in 1939, she was told by Mao's senior colleagues that she should stay out of politics for twenty-five to thirty years, instead devoting herself to her husband.⁷⁷ Even after the communists took power, in 1949, "for seven years even her name had hardly appeared in any Chinese newspaper. In the entire history of the People's Republic of China, a photo of her and Mao had never before been officially released."⁷⁸ Through her dress and her demeanor, she had masculine purposefulness mixed with feminine charm and cunning, using her "feminine skills to get where men were, to attain the posts that men attained, almost to be like a man."⁷⁹

Despite general views of social equality between men and women, Jiang wanted to push the envelope further. As a mix of political ploy and genuine views of equality, a reoccurring propaganda slogan claimed that "whatever men comrades can accomplish women comrades can too."⁸⁰ Promulgated to encourage women to enter the labor force, this was also meant to celebrate the newfound freedom of women. The "age-old oppression and enslavement of Chinese women is gone for ever," yet there remained those who schemed "to turn back the wheel of history." It was only through campaigns to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius that the old habits and leftover customs from the old society would be abolished, and women could win complete liberation.⁸¹ This, moreover, would allow Jiang to reach her own political ends.

Confucian values traditionally held the men to be superior, and there was a general inclination towards male progeny for field labor and paternal care. Women were left relegated to

⁷⁷ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 14.

⁷⁸ Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon*, 239.

⁷⁹ Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon*, 205 – 207.

⁸⁰ Hsu Kwang, "China's Women - Women's Liberation Is a Component Part of the Proletarian Revolution," *Peking Review*, March 8, 1974.

⁸¹ Kwang, "Women's Liberation Is a Component Part of the Proletarian Revolution."

the domestic sphere, and even there felt secluded; the “focus on individual compatibility and emotional needs, however, was the very concern that the Confucian familial system sought to discourage.”⁸² Beginning from the Song Dynasty (960 – 1279) onwards, some Neo-Confucian literati endorsed the practice of footbinding as a way of keeping women in the domestic realm, promoting female chastity, and as a way of solidifying an interdependent family dynamic adhering to proper Confucian etiquette.⁸³ Mid-Qing historian Zhao Yi notes that foot-binding was practiced all throughout the empire, yet “country women beyond the city gates [of Suzhou] all work in the fields in bare feet.”⁸⁴ From this, we could see that not only could bound feet be considered a status symbol, but it would also mean that the woman would be unable to work and thus dependent on her husband for support. Both reasons were abhorrent to the Communists, who criticized the ethical implications of the practice. These elitist tendencies and gender disparities were intended to be eliminated by the socialist takeover. Confucius and his disciples, they insisted, had engineered “the cruel oppression of women [which] was not due to the biological distinction between men and women, but rooted in the social system dominated by a small handful of the exploiting classes.”⁸⁵ The Party had an active interest in mobilizing women through this campaign, who “not only shouldered the work which formerly was carried out by men, but also were able to do a better job.” Not only was the Party able to promulgate a critique

⁸² Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford University Press, 1994), 179.

⁸³ Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Women and the Family in Chinese History* (London: Routledge, 2005), 10 – 12.

⁸⁴ Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2007), 131.

⁸⁵ The “Red Detachment of Women Squad” of Kuchiningjulien Plant, Inner Mongolia, “Women Can Prop Up ‘Half The Heaven’ - A Criticism of the Reactionary Thinking of Confucius and Mencius That Discriminates Against Women,” *Kuang-Ming Jih-Pao (Guangming Daily)*, January 14, 1974, (reis., *Survey of People's Republic of China Press*, Hong Kong: American Consulate General, December 1, 1972), 1–14.

of backwards enemies rooted in the ancient past, but were able to assert their own revolutionary views that progressed the status of women. Confucian critique served a two-fold purpose, then, allowing the CCP to mobilize women in these attacks while also defending their own ideology.

Although the CCP's attack on Confucianism was associated with Lin Biao and constituted a thinly veiled attack on other state enemies, the campaigns nonetheless give valuable insight into the discourse and ideals that the Party wanted to promote. Not content to handle only the more practical matters of state, the Communist Party wanted to reorient the masses' thinking and reshape society. Using these campaigns to target enemies in the bureaucracy, education, and any other dissidents that could fall into the catch-all category of "reactionary" opponents, the CCP made important assertions about their own vision for constructing the Chinese state. Mao saw the Party as the vanguard, meant to lead the state and guide the socialist revolution. The Confucian's alternative emphasis on filial piety and the family as the nexus of social relations would only undermine the unified state model which Mao wanted to promote. The Party supported gender equality and women's liberation, frowned about tradition, and saw themselves as the scions of the future; they were not merely the inheritors of the Confucian tradition, but were meant to build their own progressive society from the ground up. Mao's storytelling, drawing on popular folklore and a long collective history, relied on shared tradition and promoted a new vision for the future.⁸⁶ Meant to re-mould their nation and shape their own destiny, Mao's Cultural Revolution had the vision of once and for all shedding the yoke of China's feudal past and its ties to Confucian tradition. Mao's personal physician, Dr. Li Zhisui, recalls the effects of the campaign:

⁸⁶ David E. Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 69 – 81.

Jiang Qing's "Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius" campaign never caught on. The Chinese people had been rallied to support one political movement after another since 1949, and each movement had been more deadly and debilitating than the last. [...] The people of China became fed up, disgusted. They were coming to see the political campaigns for what they really were – naked high-level power struggles that had little to do with them. Now Jiang Qing and her faction were trying to overthrow Zhou Enlai and take control of the country – the party, government, and army. But the people refused to go along. Jiang Qing's "Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius" campaign was a flop.⁸⁷

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FILLING THE VOID – STORYTELLING AND THE CULT OF MAO

Jiang Qing's campaign failed to mobilize the people, and her power play failed. Mao reproached his wife for her persistent veiled attacks on Zhou and the moderates, and she was forced to retreat from the campaign at the end of 1974.⁸⁸ After the death of Mao in 1976, Jiang Qing and her other constituents in the Gang of Four clique were put on trial and sidelined. The leftist radicals in the Party were ousted as Deng Xiaoping took power, the Chinese economy awakened from its slumber. China re-emerged into the world anew, now a center of production and increasingly carving out its position in East Asia as a regional and global superpower.

The "Anti-Lin, Anti-Confucius" campaign is not meant to be conflated with the CCP's successful propaganda. By all accounts, the campaign was largely not successful. Rather, it is important to take note of how the Confucian tradition was replaced; the vacuum left by removing Confucian moral teachings was filled with socialist ideals. If this campaign was simply a smoke-and-mirrors tactic and was an ephemeral development in the late-socialist period, then what is

⁸⁷ Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, 578.

⁸⁸ Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon*, 325.

the purpose of studying it? What, were some of the lasting effects of this campaign? To analyze the lasting effect of the socialist period, we could look to new trends in Chinese culture:

*Sing along as the sanxian sings; comrades, please sit on the sides,
Today at Jeijiawa we have a new atmosphere,
Tap water flows well, and a wide concrete road is paved all the way from Yan'an [city].
We are so happy to see the lines of pear and poplar trees,
Villager's lives have improved as the sound of television buzzes and as a gas stove is
installed in every household.
We can make good meals easily now that tap water flows directly to the household water
pot.
Good life will last for millions of years
Under the leadership of the Party and the village committee, we will build our new
affluence in Yan'an.
Life our spirit! Believe that new life rests in the Chinese Communist Party!⁸⁹*

Seemingly a relic of its socialist past, this song was performed in 2004 in Shaanxi Province. Nearly thirty years after the end of the socialist period, the performance provides evidence of the designs and lasting effects of the Party's ambitions in the Maoist years. In the pre-socialist period, Northern Shaanxi (*Shaanbei*) storytelling was an important itinerant profession which absorbed the roles of musician, geomancer, funerary and ritual specialist.⁹⁰ The Communist Party recognized the importance of folk societies' popular practices; this cultural dimension possessed powerful symbolic value in grassroots communities. The Yan'an Period (1937 – 1947) saw communist leaders begin “to develop close links and collaboration with folk cultural practitioners as a means of building trust and legitimacy among the masses,” finding it a useful and practical way to disseminate information and propaganda to the masses.⁹¹ The subject of the traditional stories was changed, and the play was moralized along socialist lines; ordinary

⁸⁹ Ka-ming Wu, *Reinventing Chinese Tradition: The Cultural Politics of Late Socialism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 88.

⁹⁰ Stephen Jones, *Ritual and Music of North China: Shawm Bands in Shanxi* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 6 -7, 41, 55.

⁹¹ Wu, *Reinventing Chinese Tradition*, 91.

people were often given enlarged roles, allowing for clear distinctions of the oppressors and the oppressed.⁹² Plays which once revolved around the emperor or valiant general, or a love story between a scholar and maiden were to be reworked and made in line with party ideology.⁹³ In 1946, 273 of the 486 storytellers in China attended “retraining classes,” and more than 50 traditional tales were rewritten.⁹⁴ Master Xu, who had performed the song featured in the epigraph in *Jeijawa* in 2004, had received an urban hukou status in the 1980s along with five other sanxian performers in recognition by the Communist Party for their contribution in “enriching socialist life for rural residents.”⁹⁵ Master Xu referred to his trips to the countryside as *xiaxiang*, (下乡) a term from the Cultural Revolution referring to when urban youths and intellectuals were sent to the countryside for re-education, propaganda, and knowledge exchange.⁹⁶ Three decades after this exchange, Master Xu continued to see himself as a state-employed propagandist sent to the rural villages on the Party’s behalf. While his functions are not entirely in disseminating propaganda, it is a significant contribution which must be approved by the head of the village committee.⁹⁷

MacFarquhar and Schoenhals’ *Mao’s Last Revolution*, one of the seminal and most thorough works on the Cultural Revolution, highlights Mao’s vision in the introduction’s epigraphs. Plato’s *The Republic*, followed by Mao’s speech, underlines the central idea of the Cultural Revolution. Plato describes the ascendancy of tyrants, who upon taking control of the

⁹² “Comprehensive Collection of Shaanxi Story Tellers,” 延安信息大全 (Yan’an Information Encyclopedia).

⁹³ Wu, *Reinventing Chinese Tradition*, 91.

⁹⁴ Wu, *Reinventing Chinese Tradition*, 93 – 95.

⁹⁵ Wu, *Reinventing Chinese Tradition*, 95.

⁹⁶ “Educated Youth Go to the Countryside (知识青年到农村去),” *Beijing Daily* (北京日报), July 7, 1998.

⁹⁷ Wu, *Reinventing Chinese Tradition*, 96.

State, they will, “as from a table, they will rub out the picture, and leave a clean surface.” This is exactly as described, and desired, by Mao. The Chinese people, all 600 million, he writes, are poor and blank. Poverty is the agent which allows change, but being “blank” is the most fundamental necessity. Without any preconceived notions, education, or unifying identity, it is just “as a clean sheet of paper has no blotches, and so the newest and most beautiful pictures can be painted on it.”⁹⁸ So to remove Confucianism and the vestiges of old society was to start painting on a blank canvas.

In constructing this new society, Mao took a grassroots approach. Early on the Party saw value in appealing and bringing the *Shaanbei* storytellers into the folds of the Party. Mao, however, also relied on storytelling of his own. Addressing a largely uneducated and agrarian base, Mao would draw on popular folklore, collective history, and even Confucian precepts in his speeches and tales. He would, of course, give these new stories a Marxist-spin. Such is the case in his retelling of the ancient Chinese fable “The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains.” An old man, wishing for the great peaks of Taihang and Wangwu to be removed and stop obscuring his view of the heavens, commits to removing the mountains with his sons. Tirelessly digging away, the men toil day after day. Derided by his neighbor the Wise Old Man for undertaking this Herculean task that no man could undertake in a lifetime, the Foolish Old Man retorts that no task is too great, and that his sons will continue the work after he has passed away. Unshaken in this labor, the Foolish Old Man and his sons continue digging; moved by this sight and his unwavering conviction, angels are sent from the heavens to remove the mountains. So ends the tale. Mao extrapolates from this fable, moralizing it in a Marxist dimension. He claims that “today, two big mountains lie like a dead weight on the Chinese people. One is

⁹⁸ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 1.

imperialism, the other is feudalism. [We] must persevere and work unceasingly, and we, too, will touch God's heat. Our God is none other than the masses of the Chinese people."⁹⁹ In eulogizing of a fallen comrade, he recalls the words of the Han Dynasty's "Grand Historian," Confucian scholar Sima Qian.¹⁰⁰ Mao's storytelling, drawing on popular folklore and a long collective history, relied on shared tradition and promoted a new vision for the future.¹⁰¹ Meant to re-mould their nation and shape their own destiny, Mao's Cultural Revolution had the vision of once and for all shedding the yoke of China's feudal past and its ties to Confucian tradition. It was seen as an instrumental tool for fostering a sense of unity and nationhood, and would install Mao as a key figure.

During the Cultural Revolution, reverence for Mao reached new and unprecedented heights. He was untouchable, and the masses were fanatical for his support. Even after the destructive failures of the Great Leap Forward in the early 1960s that left millions dead from famine, Mao's status was continually elevated. Partially through his own maneuvering, some of his most ardent support came from his inner circle. The justification for this Cult came from Mao himself; in response to Khrushchev's criticism of the cult of Stalin, Mao stated: "The question is not whether or not there should be a cult of the individual, but rather whether or not the individual concerned represents the truth. If he does, then he should be worshipped."¹⁰² Those in the upper echelons of the Party seemed to think Mao was worthy. Seeing Mao as a source of strength, it was Lin Biao, ironically enough, who advocated for rallying around the Chairman

⁹⁹ Philippe Devillers and Tony White, *What Mao Really Said* (London: Macdonald & Co., 1969), 289.

¹⁰⁰ Devillers and White, *What Mao Really Said*, 289.

¹⁰¹ David E. Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 69 – 81.

¹⁰² MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 262.

and solidifying his legacy; even as Lin increasingly came under scrutiny from campaigns and Party internal struggle. Lin had even wanted to constitution to be amended to proclaim Mao a “genius.”¹⁰³

Worship of Mao preceded the Cultural Revolution, but the great proletariat campaign accentuated the practice to extreme ends. Confucianism, for all its emphasis on rituals, was perverted and replaced. Now new daily rituals were instituted. Organized by officers from the PLA's Unit 8341, the ritual was to consist of four separate acts, including: “(1) at the start of the working day, one turned to Chairman Mao's portrait and ‘asked for instructions’ in order to be able to ‘see and think clearly and gain a sense of direction’ [and] (4) at the end of the working day, one turned once more to Chairman Mao's portrait and by way of ‘reporting back to him’ reviewed critically one's work and one's thoughts for the day.”¹⁰⁴ Co-workers were expected to greet one another with quotes from Chairman Mao or party slogan and reciprocated likewise; to have a copy of Mao's quotes with them on hand, there was a constant influx of Party propaganda and reminders of Mao. In this sense, it was almost as if Mao was transformed into a divine Big Brother figure, who constantly monitored and surveyed the progress and work of his people. Mao's photo, the watchful eye of an all-seeing God, was ubiquitous in the homes and streets of China. In addition to, or even replacing, the patrilineal style worship of family shrines were “tablets of loyalty” dedicated to Mao.¹⁰⁵ School children would perform loyalty dances in his honor, and sing chants praising and glorifying the Chairman.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Rebecca E. Karl, *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth-Century World: A Concise History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 145.

¹⁰⁴ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 263.

¹⁰⁵ Eleanor Devens, “The Role of Confucius in Modern China, 1950 to the Present,” Rice University Library, April 1982, 53.

¹⁰⁶ Devens, “The Role of Confucius in Modern China, 1950 to the Present,” 53.

His own compilation of stories, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, borrows extensively from the Confucian legacy in format and structure. Paralleling the *Analects*, it espoused Mao's views on all aspects of social life through his quotations; views on women, the Communist Party, classes and class struggle, culture and art, and more. Unlike the *Analects*, it was not a flowery compilation of Marxist abstractions, but instead a proscriptive guide for continuing revolution and waging class struggle. It is an all-encompassing guide to the philosophical *and* the practical. It was here, according to Mao's physician and confidant Li Zhisui, that the Cult of Mao had begun.¹⁰⁷ The book would grow to obtain biblical status – “virtually every Chinese owned a copy of the little red book and could quote from it verbatim,” when taking office “people typically swore oaths based on their allegiance to Mao and his little red book.”¹⁰⁸

Swimming from shore to shore on the Yangtze River in the summer of 1966 in a record-breaking feat, the 73-year-old Mao reportedly swam the 15-kilometer course in 1 hour and 5 minutes.¹⁰⁹ This would amount to swimming at a pace of 3.846 meters per second. For context, Michael Phelps' 50-meter pace was 2.170 meters per second. Regardless of plausibility, this inspired an obsession with swimming and commemorations all across China. Mao was a prolific swimmer who had swam across the Yangtze a decade earlier in 1956, and had been doing so annually since. Yet of old age and after bouts of illness, Mao made this swim in order to prove his own resiliency to the people. In the decade after, numerous students would take part in swimming competitions and contests to emulate the Chairman, and many would brave the rough

¹⁰⁷ Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, 412.

¹⁰⁸ Christopher Marquis and Kunyuan Qiao, *Mao and Markets: The Communist Roots of Chinese Enterprise* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023), 49.

¹⁰⁹ “Chairman Mao Swims on the Yangtze River (毛主席畅游长江),” *People's Liberation Army Daily* (解放军报), July 25, 1966.

waters of the Yangtze to celebrate Mao. This was not simply a symbolic feat for the masses, but had marked the return of Mao to power. Having been away from Beijing for months, *in absentia* power was left in the hands of his deputies Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi. Mao now assumed complete power, claiming that the “Central Committee had taken a Revisionist line, stifling the Cultural Revolution while pretending to support it.”¹¹⁰ Mao consolidated his power in subsequent years, ousting political opponents in systematic fashion. In one bizarre opening speech, a Kwangtung official remarked on the fine situation of swimming across the country, and said “the important instructions of the great leader Chairman Mao on unfolding swimming activities, and the great practice of his many swims across the Yangtze, have profoundly criticized Liu Shao-chi’s and Lin Piao’s revisionist line on physical culture and encouraged the workers, peasants and soldiers and young people to persist in swimming exercise for the sake of Revolution.”¹¹¹ Over 7,000 participated in an annual swim across Kunming in 1974, “heralded by a huge floating poster bearing the slogan: ‘Carry the struggle to criticize Lin Piao and Confucius through.’”¹¹²

Indeed, Mao rose to a position of god-like status during the late years of the Cultural Revolution. Liang Dian-jie recalls in his memoir that from an early age he was taught to believe that Mao “presided over our rest and play like a benevolent god, and I believed that apples, grapes, everything had been given to us because he loved us.”¹¹³ Mao was not only a divine

¹¹⁰ Liang and Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution*, 44.

¹¹¹ "National Swimming Contest Opens in Maoming, Kwangtung," *Canton Kwangtung Provincial Service*, April 29, 1974. Translated in *Daily Report, People's Republic of China*, no. FBIS-CHI-74-083, April 29, 1974: H4-H5. *Readex: Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports*.

¹¹² "Anniversary of Mao Swim Marked in Wuhan, Peking, Elsewhere," *Peking NCNA*, July 17, 1974. Translated in *Daily Report, People's Republic of China*, no. FBIS-CHI-74-139, July 18, 1974: E1. *Readex: Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports*.

¹¹³ Liang and Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution*, 5 – 6.

benefactor, but a savior for many. Rewarding a propaganda team for their work in negotiating peace on a Beijing campus in 1968 with mangoes that were provided from Pakistan's foreign minister, the mangoes quickly became a form of symbolic capital. These precious gifts received praise in "near-biblical rhetoric." Upon seeing the fruit, a *People's Daily* report titled "Every Mango Is Full of Deep Kindness – Every Heart Longs for the Red Sun: The Time after the Incredibly Happy News Had Spread that Chairman Mao Offered a Precious Gift" claimed that "these are not simple mangoes, they are rain and dew; they are the sunshine."¹¹⁴ These mangoes which Mao presented to the workers became "sacred objects, worshiped on altars, and a sip of water in which a bit of one such mango had been boiled was drunk as a magic elixir."¹¹⁵ One village dentist, Dr. Han Guangdi, unimpressed with the fruit, remarked that it looked like nothing more than a sweet potato. Uttering such blasphemy, the dentist was put on trial and found guilty, then "paraded through the streets on the back of a truck as an example to the masses, taken to the edge of town, and executed with one shot to the head."¹¹⁶ Imbuing such mysticism into the fruit, wax facsimiles of mangoes would be mass-produced and distributed in high honor.

Despite an austere outward appearance and rejection of capitalist corruption, Mao enjoyed the pleasures of a bourgeois lifestyle in Zhongnanhai. An insatiable taste for sex meant that "even when the Cultural Revolution was at its height, Tiananmen Square in an uproar and the streets outside in turmoil, Mao continued to savor the imperial life, playing with his female companions inside the Great Hall of the People and within the walls of Zhongnanhai."¹¹⁷ Of the

¹¹⁴ Daniel Leese, *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in the Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 222.

¹¹⁵ Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, 357.

¹¹⁶ Ben Marks, "The Mao Mango Cult of 1968 and the Rise of China's Working Class," *Collectors Weekly*, February 18, 2013.

¹¹⁷ Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, 479.

many beautiful and naïve young women who entered his service, “the privileged few who actually got to shake his hand would go for weeks without washing, as friends and acquaintances came from miles around to touch the hand that had touched the hand of Mao and thus to partake of a transcendent, almost mystical experience.”¹¹⁸ So enraptured were these young women that even upon contracting *trichomoniasis* from trysts with the Chairman, numerous young women were proud to be infected and even saw it “as a badge of honor.”¹¹⁹ Many such young women were chosen by the Chairman for service, regarding it as an “incomparable honor, beyond their most extravagant dreams.”¹²⁰

Even while Mao’s inner circle set out to create a new proletariat culture, Mao continued to adhere to old ways in his private life. He still enjoyed non-Revolutionary plays and films, indulging in watching movies imported from Hong Kong, Japan, and the United States.¹²¹ From the early-1960s onward, Jiang Qing would take a central role in the CCP’s Theatre Reform Bureau. She would have a large part in approving, directing, and rewriting popular plays and cinema, yet not even she could fully persuade the Chairman to change his taste. Even against his wife’s criticism, who insisted the performing arts should either be made revolutionary or banned, Mao continued to relish certain performances.¹²² *Dream of the Red Chamber*, “revered by generations of Chinese as a harmless tale of intrigue and lust,” was critically analyzed by Jiang Qing. Taking her husband’s advice to “continue class struggle” to heart, she scoured the passages of the dirty novel. Then, at last, she realized that instead of romance the whole could be read as a manual on class struggle. Mao obliged and allowed Jiang and the *People’s Daily* to reprint it. A

¹¹⁸ Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, 357.

¹¹⁹ Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, 363.

¹²⁰ Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, 356.

¹²¹ Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, 574.

¹²² Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon*, 243.

decade later, it was revealed in conversation that Mao had read the book for the fifth time, telling his own niece that it was a novel worth reading.¹²³ While publicly Mao supported some of his wife's revisionism, privately he often held different views. The Peking Opera play *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* and the popular movie *Song of the Gardeners* (1974) were theatrical performances that Jiang would scrutinize.¹²⁴ Mao, however, enjoyed the performances, superficially seeing no issue with the content. The plays were also well-received by audiences. Ironically enough, Jiang had good reason in blacklisting these productions; both were later revealed to be implicit criticisms of Mao's extravagance and corruption. The Beijing Opera Theatre's performance of the *Red Plum* upset Mao, only because it had hit too close to home. Retelling how a beautiful young concubine who loves another had been executed, she returns from the dead to exact revenge on the Song Dynasty premier Jia Shidao, an old man reminiscent of Mao. The scene recalled Mao's own philandering, and his refusal to allow one young lover to marry; the scenery is even similar, occurring at one of Mao's favorite scenic retreats on Hangzhou's West Lake.¹²⁵ Evaluation of films and media was not systematic, and it was only at the prompting of Jiang Qing that these performances were redacted and later scrutinized.¹²⁶ The inquisition-like evaluation of theatrical performances and cultural signifiers was ostensibly done to further the proletariat revolution. In reality, the review was neither systematic nor rooted in ideology, and instead relied on the political ambitions of those in power. This could be evidenced not only by the hypocrisy of key CCP leaders, but also in the type of content which was produced and redacted.

¹²³ Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon*, 219 – 220.

¹²⁴ Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon*, 255.

Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon*, 350.

¹²⁵ Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, 402 – 403.

¹²⁶ Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, 402 – 403.

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CONCLUSION

The brief campaign of 1974, and the surrounding movements in the years adjacent, represent the culmination of CCP's ambitions for years. The campaign extended beyond attacking the Confucian practice, but confronted all facets of society; literature, education, social values, and cinema came under attack. It is the pinnacle of the moral depravity, corruption, and political destitution that encapsulates the Mao years. It represents the sole political ambition of the Party, which was to obtain power and maintain that power in perpetuity. In the country without a true democratic system of elections, the Party is the sole arbiter of the political process, and it was necessary to undermine any social force that opposes its position. The Cult of Mao quickly fell out of fashion after the death of the leader, and the subsequent "liberalization" of China in the early and mid-1980s during Deng's administration, and the marketization of the Chinese economy, had the prospect of reversing some of the more damaging changes of the socialist period. While the Party's 1981 *Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China* (关于建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议) document reaffirmed the guidance of Mao Zedong Thought and adherence to the socialist road, Deng retreated from these revolutionary policies. Careful to criticize the legacy of his predecessor, Deng ultimately concludes after much deliberation in the Party that Mao "made gross mistakes during the 'cultural revolution,' but if we judge his activities as a whole, his contributions to the Chinese revolution far outweigh his mistakes."¹²⁷ Mao was not infallible.

¹²⁷ "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China," Marxist Internet Archives - Chinese Communism Subject Archive, June 27, 1981.

But in assessing Mao's legacy, the document asserts that Mao's errors were not his alone. Instead, the blame for the failures of the cultural revolution is largely shifted to others like Jiang Qing and Lin Biao. This pair, as well as other certain career opportunists within the Party perverted policies and, harboring ulterior motives, abused their power to meet their own ends and thus cause the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution.¹²⁸ Accompanying this 1981 resolution, it has widely since been acknowledged, both by the Party and as a widely held orthodoxy, that "Mao had been 70 percent correct and 30 percent wrong" in his policies.¹²⁹

After the destructiveness of the Cultural Revolution and its misguided policies, what remains of Confucianism in China today? There is still evidence of Confucian ritual and practice in contemporary China, and the tradition continues to resonate with the population in its precepts and values. A sense of familial harmony, respect for elders, and education, which have long imbued into Chinese culture, were not so easily rooted out as the Cultural Revolution had intended. Interestingly enough, as of late there has been a reversal in Chinese politics, and Confucianism has seen a revival in China since the 1990s. Taking on the fashion of previous dynasties in China's imperial history, the Party has made attempts to pose itself as the successor of the Confucian tradition and enhance its political legitimacy. Argued by Daniel Bell in *The Dean of Shandong*, he has witnessed during his tenure in China that the CCP have now reconciled the views of Marxist-Leninism with old ideas of Confucianism, moving ever closer to officially embracing Confucianism.¹³⁰ Intellectuals have similarly revived their interest in Confucian political theories, and the tradition seems to be returning to relevance in China. While

¹²⁸ "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party," 1981.

¹²⁹ Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic*, Third Edition (New York: Free Press, 1999), 445.

¹³⁰ Daniel Bell, *The Dean of Shandong: Confessions of a Minor Bureaucrat at a Chinese University* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), 10.

the hasty and ephemeral attempts to supplant Confucianism with the institution of Maoist rationale may have not been entirely successful, it is undeniable that the philosophy no longer retains a firm hold over the populace. What remains today is a new practice, one that must blend and accommodate communist and traditional values. Confucianism, once antithetical to Maoist principles and undermining Party objectives, may now once again serve the Party's purpose by legitimating its rule.

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