

THE AFTERLIVES OF CHAIRMAN MAO: The Continuing Influence of Mao Zedong in Contemporary China

Timothy Cheek*

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High above Mutianyu and Beigou villages just beneath the Great Wall itself we can all see a sign in commanding form: 忠于毛主席 (Loyalty to Chairman Mao). Chinese and international visitor alike may well ask, “What is going on here?” Well, there’s a local answer to this, of course, but I’m going to offer today some more general answers about Chairman Mao and China today. At the end, we’ll see whether or not we have a deeper appreciation of this commanding slogan from half a century ago.

Any tourist in China today willing to poke their noses into one of the ubiquitous street markets in every Chinese city can find Mao memorabilia: images of Mao on t-shirts and posters, porcelain figurines, even embossed red lighters. In its better days, the lighter not only produced flame but also a flashing red light and cell-phone-style rendition of “The East is Red”, the anthem of Mao’s Cultural Revolution. Mine doesn’t work anymore—no light, no music, not even a spark. Is this a symbol of Mao’s fading significance in contemporary China, or just bad bargaining at the street market on my part?

* Professor and Louis Cha Chair in Chinese Research, Institute of Asian Research, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. t.cheek@ubc.ca

A few years ago a friend gave me a mouse pad for my computer. It's called "Mao's Pad" and features a wood cut print of the picture of Mao made famous in Edgar Snow's account of Mao and the Chinese Communist Party in the 1930s, *Red Star Over China*. While the cigarette lighter stands for Chinese kitsch, this mouse pad can serve for Western Mao kitsch. The pad, of course, is red. And in addition to the image of the young Mao are a half dozen selections from the Little Red Book, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung*. We get: "Who are your enemies? Who are your friends?" and "To Learn is no easy matter and to apply what you learned is even harder" and "You can't solve a problem? Well, get down and Investigate the present facts and its [sic] past history!" Sound advice from a nostalgic image from the 60s.

Finally, we have one other contemporary image of Mao. The Devil. The Monster. The Tyrant Murder of Beijing. The light version of this came in the 1990s from one of Mao's many doctors, Li Zhisui, in *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* and the most recent version has come in Jung Chang's and Jon Halliday's long biography, *Mao*. No kitsch in this book. It is straight melodrama and morality tale. Mao is bad, bad, bad, bad. Never did anything good. Always did bad things. Makes the cartoon character "Boris Badinoff" from the Cold War cartoon I watched as a kid (Rocky & Bullwinkle) look good. The book bristles with scholarly documentation, but after a year of close inspection most scholars now dismiss the book as rubbish, as rant, indeed as an ironic example of Maoist Mass Criticism turned against the "Old Man" himself. We'll come back to Chang & Halliday's book a bit later, but for now it shows a third Ghost of Mao stalking the world today.

These are Three Ghosts of Mao abroad today. One is clearly Chinese where a younger generation is pleased to sell branded Mao paraphernalia, especially at inflated prices to foreign tourists. This commoditized Mao doesn't speak to the content of his thought or the impact of his acts, but trades on his "fame", like any "star" or celebrity. The second Ghost equally does not attend to the real work of Mao. The artwork invokes old books and 1960s posters. The brash, confident revolutionary statements evoke the student

demonstrations of the 1960s and the Anti-Vietnam War movement in the US and Europe, rather than any particulars of China's experience. Only Jung Chang and Jon Halliday at least address Mao in a serious fashion. Scholars may regret their tendentious presentation and poor scholarship, but we've got to give them credit for asking the right question: what do we make of Mao and his impact on China today.

And that is my topic today: the continuing influence of Mao Zedong, his policies, and his widely distributed writings in China today. I will address this topic from three angles: what people say, what they do, and what they don't do. As you will see, I think the most powerful legacies of Mao in China today are *behavioural*. But still, people in China still talk about Mao, or pointedly don't.

Living Maoism: The Not-Necessarily-Obvious Legacies of Mao's China Today

Let me tip my hand, first and give you my conclusions: Living Maoism is the "operating system" (like the OS in your computer) that frames social life in the People's Republic of China today. It is the mental world shared across vast differences of city and village, rich and poor, Han and minority, men and women, young and old. Each distinct person and social group brings their own meanings to this mental world, and contributes to its transformation, but the tools they use to support the Party, ignore it or to oppose it are the ideas, assumptions and habits of Maoism. This is not because Mao or his Thought magically re-programmed everyone in China; rather, it is because Mao is simply the most important *example* of many main characteristics of modern Chinese thought and the *institutions* created under his rule continue to shape life and expectations in China today.¹

Maoism is an ongoing dynamic in contemporary China. Officially, Maoism is the writings and ideas of Mao Zedong, the undisputed leader of the CCP since the 1940s and the founding leader of the People's Republic until his death in 1976. It is properly known as "Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought" and remains the official ideology of both the CCP and the Constitution of the PRC.² All government policies, and much cultural and academic work, as well as formal laws and regulations explicitly invoke this ideology. It is the public doctrine of China.

Over the past fifty years political Maoism has created both social practices and profound habits of thought. These two things—official Maoist ideology and the social life of state socialism with its enduring habits of thought (assumptions, values, ways of reasoning)—comprise the living history of Maoism. That living history shapes the production of reform policies by the state leadership, the application of those policies by local government and business leaders, and the experience of these reforms in practice by ordinary people in China. The operation of this living history of Maoism is quite complex, and often surprising. The official ideology is no longer widely believed. Cynicism about Party pronouncements is rife. Yet, it defines the field of public debate, if only by providing the terms of reference. Party intellectuals, reformers of various stripes, and even dissidents all avail themselves of the language, ideas, and terms found in Mao's Thought to debate public policy. The social structures of state socialism and the lifeways they produced continue to influence life-on-the-ground even as those structures are changed. The residential passport system (*hukou*) and the work unit system (*danwei*) still shape capitalist enterprises even as the harsher aspects of these two systems have been abandoned to be replaced by the insecurities and inequalities of the market. Most fundamentally, the habits of thought and practices of public life that emerged under “actually existing Maoism”, particularly in the destructive Cultural Revolution decade of 1966-76, shape the expectations and ways of making a point among most people in China.³ Residual respect for intellectuals and the expectation that it is up to the state to fix things combines with intolerant modes of argument and illiberal public demonstrations to shape the writings and activities of even democracy advocates.

Now, lest you think you have before you today an unreconstructed Maoist, let me hasten to add: Historians have long noted that Mao Zedong, the man, was not only deeply flawed but also was not the all-powerful creator of the People's Republic of China or even of the CCP; that real history is, naturally, much more complex than the leadership of one man.⁴ Yet he was, and remains, the most charismatic and significant leader of 20th century China and both the official source of legitimacy for the CCP and a powerful

model of rebellion for generations of Chinese. The key point to keep in mind about the power of Mao today is this contradictory legacy.

This enduring contraction in Maoism can be summed up in two phrases: “leave it up to the Party” and “it’s right to rebel”. The first reflects the considerable prestige of the CCP associated with its role in China’s turbulent 20th century history. Even though various people in China today dismiss the extreme claims of revolutionary correctness or question the gaps in official Party histories, the CCP is broadly credited with saving China from imperialism, warlords, and ruinous inflation. For many in China, the greatest achievement of the CCP, for which Mao is the embodiment, is the establishment of the Chinese nation-state and the restoration of order in 1949. The many sins committed by Mao and the CCP since then have not—yet—utterly overshadowed this singular achievement.

Now, our first perspective: what people say, or rather what the government in China says.

What People Say: Let’s Not Be Talkin’ About a Revolution

The Beatles famously invoked Chairman Mao in their Rock anthem in 1968 against organized politics, “Revolution”. Mao was just one more political icon. The Beatles suggested the real revolution was somewhere else. Whatever we think of their revolution, everyone was talking about revolution in the 1960s. Indeed, scholars of China in the 1960s, 1970s and into the 1980s connected “China” with “Revolution.” Not today. Neither the leaders of China’s own Communist Party, the CCP, nor scholars in China or the US or elsewhere talk very much about “revolution.” We all talk about *reform*. If nothing else, Mao was and is fundamentally connected with REVOLUTION. So, when Hu Jintao, the current Party leader in China, stresses “harmonious society” and economic development and international scholars focus on political reform, civil society, and economic adjustment, it certainly shows that the Ghost of Mao is not honoured in Zhongnanhai or Stanford.

Yet, the CCP is wed to Mao. Maoist orthodoxy is used by the CCP to provide the legitimacy that would otherwise come from the ballot box. The story of China's modern history that it tells is central to this legitimation just as it was for Mao in his famous 1940 essay "On New Democracy": it is a story of Chinese nationalism. Whether or not various people in China believe every part of this official story, the basic assumptions or identity of China that the CCP presents is widely accepted. Thus, we need to distinguish between the specific and general claims made in Maoist orthodoxy. Today, most people in China do not claim to follow Mao's teachings nor do they think the current Party is a noble example of Mao's or anyone's ideals. Yet, most people in China appear to accept the assumptions in this story, about China's national identity, about the role of imperialism in China's history and present, and about the value of maintaining and improving this thing called China, and, increasingly, China's middle classes accept the additional story in Maoism: nationalism—China was great, China was put down, and China is rising again.

Politically, CCP orthodoxy now plays a function closer to political platforms among Western democratic political parties. It announces the policies, programmes and goals of the Party and positions the Party to look good in the broader morality of public culture by claiming to do "good things" for "the good of the country." Party orthodoxy particularly serves to announce the basic planks of policy. One of the most recent addition to the Maoist canon has been Jiang Zemin's theory of the "Three Represents". The 16th Party Congress held in Beijing in November 2002 enshrined Jiang's theory, even as he turned over the post of General Secretary—China's top political post—to his successor, Hu Jintao. Jiang's "Three Represents" (*sangge daibiao*) says that the CCP "should always represent the developmental requirements of China's advanced productive forces, represent the developing orientation of China's advanced culture, and represent the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people."⁵ While foreign observers and Chinese intellectuals alike scoff at these tortured formulations, they reflect the efforts of the still-ruling CCP to explain the massive changes of reform in terms that do not patently contradict Chinese Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. If we utterly dismiss the slogans of the Party as "political rubbish" or mere window-dressing, we will

miss the actual policies of China's leaders and, more so, fail to understand how the CCP maintains its public legitimacy without democracy.

Jiang Zemin's Three Represents, indeed, point to very important changes in the CCP's leadership and policy goals. The 16th Party congress included official Party representatives—that is Party members—who are capitalists, or in current parlance, private entrepreneurs. The phrase “represents the advanced productive forces” covers that change in Party membership. Similarly, “interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people” points to the official end of class struggle as a guiding policy of CCP rule. Finally, “advanced culture” indicates the re-welcoming of intellectuals and technical elite back into the CCP as it strives to garner public legitimacy as the Party that can deliver social peace, economic growth, and cultural florescence. It also heralds a frank elitism that is not entirely alien to the Bolshevik party. As one commentator aptly notes, Jiang's formulation suggests “that the Party will become a more elitist-oriented organization, with a new trinity of political (officials), economic (entrepreneurs and managers), and intellectual elites at its top level.”⁶

China's elite politics continues the shape, if not all of the content, of Mao period politics. In the absence of legitimization by elections, the “core leader” of the Party, that is the General Secretary of the CCP, who is also made President of the PRC and chair of the Central Military Commission, is certified by a combination of factional politics and claims to “great thought.” Thus, China's current “core leader,” Hu Jintao has to make or be seen to make his own theoretical contributions. He, and his Premier, Wen Jiabao, have, indeed set out to do so in ways that matter in concrete policy. If Jiang Zemin's “Three Represents” theory pointed to the goals of *growth* and initiative by favouring the new entrepreneurial class and the cities of Newly Industrializing China (per Madsen's model of Three Chinas), Hu Jintao's and Wen Jiabao's theoretical formulations speak to the burning issues of *equity*, social justice and social order that have come to the fore as a result of a decade or more of single-minded, more or less neo-liberal developmentalism.

The new addition to the Maoist canon is, of course, Hu Jintao's theory of "Harmonious Society" (*hexie shehui*).⁷ This spin on the Party platform focuses on the third of the Three Represents—the interests of the overwhelming majority of Chinese. It shifts the burning issues confronting the interior provinces, the downtrodden, and the losers of reform to front and centre. The new emphasis on "Harmonious society," however, will remind those familiar with Latin American history of other forms of authoritarian populism. On the one hand it draws attention to questions of social equity but on the other hand, it also signals intolerance of dissent or "disturbances" by protestors. That such ideological policy platforms have political power can be seen by the impact of Hu and Wen's focus on equity at the 10th Session of the National People's Congress in Beijing in March 2006. The usually compliant legislature has balked on approving the government's draft law to protect property rights because that law is seen as serving the rich and disenfranchising the poor (particularly over the disposal of collective and state assets).⁸

The only other major public use of Maoism endorsed by the CCP is nationalism. The 1990s saw a strong swing to official nationalism with the CCP claiming loudly to be the national saviour of China in the past and the only sure protector of national sovereignty and dignity today. This use of Maoism as a form of nationalism draws from a major part of Mao's writings, as we have seen, and it is broadly accepted by the public in China, but it is a two-edged sword. The CCP has spent as much time trying to quell popular nationalism and xenophobia in the past ten years, particularly against the US and Japan, as it has trying to promote Chinese patriotism.⁹ The problem with nationalism is its volatility. It is an effective tool for both the state and for members of the public. It works as one way to legitimate the rule of the CCP, but it also serves as the most obvious, useful, and frequently used form of legitimate public protest in China today. The state cannot be seen to oppose national dignity. Thus, protests against US affronts to China's national dignity (obligingly proffered by succeeding administrations in Washington) or against Japan's astonishing unwillingness to take seriously Chinese resentments from the Sino-Japanese War become a safe way for Chinese who are not happy with their lives today to hit the streets and protest. Nationalism in China is thus a two-edged sword: it can

make the CCP and the government look very good or it can sanction public demonstrations that are very hard to control since they appear to be patriotic.

There are ordinary people who still talk Mao talk, as well, who still find Mao's revolutionary class analysis compelling. And they don't all live in Berkeley. There are two sorts of people I see in China who still talk about Mao—and to invoke a sort of Marxist analysis we might say one is a falling class and the other is a rising class. The falling class is the elders, particularly in rural China, but also including many older urban working class people who feel they got a pretty good deal under Mao's rule, despite the disasters of the Great Leap Forward famine and Cultural Revolution terror. I know any number of Chinese colleagues who say, "My parents are rural folk in XX county, and they still have posters of Mao up at home and they think nostalgically of the Mao years, particularly as stories of corruption were rarer than and their local officials seemed more conscientious then." We also know from ethnographic research on urban workers, particularly in China's northeastern "rustbelt" of Manchuria, there is a similar nostalgia for the better working conditions and apparently more honest government in their locality under Mao. Poor peasants and some industrial proletariat did, scholars agree, get a pretty good shake under Mao—when his wild campaigns didn't turn their lives upside down. What is amazing, is that these people don't blame Mao for the disasters of his Campaigns, they blame local officials. [If time, tell the story of TK—"With these, we might mention another falling or at least dieing class—very old cadres. One octogenarian regaled me in 2004 about the "revisionism of Deng Xiaoping" and how no-one stole his bicycle in the 1970s but today it's all crass money, money, money. What he said about Jiang Zemin doesn't bear repeating.]

The rising class that talks about Mao, or the class we had better pay attention to is the 150 million migrant day labourers—the 农民工—across China. This lumpenproletariat finds continued meaning in Mao's attacks on elites, bureaucracy, and corruption and in Mao's support of the poor and oppressed. They have no way of knowing that Mao did not, for much of his life, live up to the ideals that the propaganda department popularized so successfully. As I mentioned a moment ago, the CCP has not and cannot break with Mao;

Mao is still the official representative of the CCP's legitimacy and Mao Zedong Thought is still the official ideology of the CCP and, indeed, of China. Thus, Mao's works are widely available and cannot be proscribed. It's a bit like the naughty or revolutionary bits in the Bible—the established authorities always have a hard time with the “inconvenient statements” in their scripture. Not only can Mao quotes not be repressed by the Party, but also they carry an extra weight to all listeners in China—by their very provenance, as the Sayings of the idealized “Chairman Mao”—they point up the mediocrity, the corruption, the revisionism of the current Party and government leadership in China today. Take for example, this little ditty from the streets:

“Beijing relies on the Centre,
Shanghai on its connections,
Guangzhou leans on Hong Kong,
The drifting population lives by Mao Zedong Thought.”

[Barmé, *Shades of Mao* (1996), p. 231.]

The important social fact is this: for the 150 million migrant labourers in China today, their social life mirrors the class conflicts that animate Mao's writings. Mao makes sense to them. Mao is officially legal. Mao is an ideological time bomb that this “class” of displaced workers may well pick up and use to organize and fight back. It is precisely for this reason that the PRC government works so hard to prevent intellectuals—or NGO or legal activists—from connecting with poor farmers or migrant workers: with leadership and this ideology, these millions of poor would, indeed, make revolution in “market socialism” China.

What People Do

Orthodoxy is what the state says; orthopraxy is what people do with what the state hands them. Clearly there is often a huge gap between the ideals and practices of a system—one need only think of the United States or the Catholic Church, or for that matter our local community. Yet there is a meaningful relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. In the name of state goals the government sets up or encourages social institutions and

rewards some behavior and punishes other. Whether or not a particular person actually believes in the orthodoxy, if they wish to operate in the legal society they must be seen to act in accordance with those stated goals. In China under Mao this required loyalty to the Party Line, which generally extolled the virtues of the proletariat, the wickedness of capitalists, and the salvatory role of the CCP and your local Party leaders. More significantly for life in China today, this Maoist orthodoxy also set up important *social institutions* that shaped life-on-the-ground. The three most important are the local Party committee (at each and every level of government and most large economic and residential organizations), the *danwei* work unit organization of employment, residence, and social insurance, and the *hukou* system of internal residential passports. They have shaped social life even as they have changed under the forces of market and international contact under reform.

Participation without democracy

The Party Committee system embodied the CCP's claim that the legitimate forum for public policy debate and policy formation was the Party itself, not the press, public square, coffee house, classroom or proverbial kitchen debates. This has produced a cautious reluctance to get involved in public affairs because to do so is dangerous (think of the Anti Rightist Campaign). But the heritage of Maoism gives specific actors legitimate grounds, and for those now in their forties and fifties actual social experience in the Cultural Revolution, for organizing to resist oppression and to seek redress from the Party. From the start of Maoism, some Party members used the orthodoxy to push the Party to do better. In 1942, a CCP translator and writer, Wang Shiwei, lampooned Mao in the newspapers of Yan'an and called on the CCP to live up to its ideals of egalitarianism and inner-Party democracy. In the 1980s, even after the outrages of the Cultural Revolution, the President of the Science and Technology University, and working astrophysicist, Fang Lizhi, used Party norms to argue for greater democratization. In between, brave individuals have stood up to local Party leaders to speak out against the abuses of power by using the norms and values embodied in Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.¹⁰ This inclination to work within the Party-State system, and therefore to use—and creatively extend—the ideals and norms of the state orthodoxy continues

today. Wenfang Tang finds in his surveys of both establishment and non-establishment intellectuals today the belief that “[w]orking with the party elite is probably the most practical way to bring about concrete political improvement.”¹¹

People in China continue to look to the state to solve public problems. This is an utterly sensible attitude in the face of consistent state repression of all alternate political and social movements since the 1940s. But it is a habit that shapes the assumptions of even democratic activists and frustrates efforts of those who wish to organize citizen movements. The problem for both the Chinese state and Chinese citizens today is that the state is simply not big enough nor does it have the institutional capacity to do all that must be done across that vast continent and among the huge population that comprise China. A simple story captures this public reticence. An American academic working in Beijing in the late 1980s was struck by the mess in the hallway of his apartment building that served a major research institution. The residents were all high-level intellectuals and professionals. Why not organize a simple resident’s committee and hold a “clean up day,” he suggested. His aghast Chinese colleagues replied that such matters were the domain of the authorities and to do what he suggested would be most presumptuous!

The divided heritage of Maoism in the practice of participation without democracy leaves people in China with the contradictory experiences of “self reliance” (*zili gengsheng*) and even models of more or less forthright criticism of the CCP and also, examples of the passivity and going-along that got most people through the Cultural Revolution. These contrasting models of behavior lie in the “tool box” of Chinese seeking to make their way in the more socially isolated environment of market socialism.

Eating from the Big Family Pot

Daily life in the work units and communes reinforced this political passivity and dependency. The state work unit system, or *danwei*, under Mao created a collective economy at the basic level in which ownership of everything but small personal effects was owned by the group. These *danwei* became a veritable work-related clan defined by permanent employees and their families. They shouldered the responsibility to provide

not only employment but housing, education, medical care, and other daily life necessities for their members. Elizabeth Perry summarizes the attributes of this ubiquitous organization of work and life in urban China under Mao. The *danwei* had power over personnel matters (hiring, firing, maintaining dossiers), it provided communal facilities for housing, dining, health, etc. (often in the form of a walled compound), it maintained independent accounts and budgets, it was urban and not rural, and it was public, part of the State system.¹² This work unit system created a mutual dependency in which the individual gave up a great deal of individual choice in exchange for very high expectations that the group would take care of each individual. Ironically, farmers in the collectivized organization of the Communes were not cared for nearly as much—they had neither social insurance nor pensions, for example. But, they shared the norms of collective ownership and group decision-making with their compatriots in the urban *danwei*.

This enforced passivity—from political experience and work place organization—is a major hurdle. Reformers in the state and party apparatus are actively seeking ways to mobilize various groups in China to get the work of governance and economic activity done. Yet, these reformers are constrained by the one-party state orthodoxy. They have the nearly impossible task of energizing people to act in the public arena but not to challenge the Party's monopoly of political power.

What People Don't Do: Habits from Mao's China Today

Those who lived through the Maoist system carry with them the habits of thought and expectations that made sense under Mao's rule. This population, long corralled by the rules of non-democratic participation in *danwei* and commune life does not have the habits of mind suitable to a liberal or tolerant society. These same habits and expectations even shape those who reject official Maoism and embrace of alternate political ideas and social practices. Inevitably, some part of these values and expectations have been passed along—by parents and teachers—to younger generations. Naturally, they change with time and new experiences, but these mental models still shape the experiences and reactions of people in China. Central among these hegemonic values are respect for

intellectuals, intolerant modes of argument and illiberal public demonstrations, and the expectation that suggestions should be addressed to the state. It is this mental furniture that will shape the lives of people in China long after the *hukou* passports and *danwei* work units are a thing of the past.

Intellectuals in China are the envy of Western China scholars. In China, intellectuals are taken seriously both by the State and the public. That is one reason why the CCP has always bothered to repress unorthodox intellectuals—because the Party believes what intellectuals say is influential. While this is changing, and intellectuals in reform China constantly bemoan their recent marginalization, nonetheless a residual respect for certified intellectuals remains in Chinese society that distinguishes it from all others. For example, it was this residual respect for intellectuals and students that contributed mightily to popular support for student demonstrations in Tiananmen in 1989.¹³ This deference to intellectuals continues today both in the expectation that highly educated professionals and cultural commentators in China ought to help figure out what to do and in cynicism and criticism of them for failure to do so in most cases. Respect for intellectuals has been transformed under global capital in the reform period to a broad reliance on *experts* to advise the Party and business. There is not, as of yet, a widespread acceptance that good governance can come from the democracy of “one man, one vote” in China.¹⁴

Moral extremism characterizes public debate on hot issues in China. China is not without intelligent and rational, indeed brilliant, scholars, theorists, and political reformers, but the nature of public debate has, in practice, all too quickly reverted to the moral extremism of Maoism when the going gets tough. Westerners who follow China’s relations with the US or Japan know how quickly diplomatic issues—from the Belgrade bombing of the Chinese Embassy by NATO forces in 1999 to the revival of the history textbook issue with Japan in 2005—go to rhetorical extremes. This is not the result of propaganda manipulation by the CCP, it comes from deep in the belly of ordinary Chinese. As Suisheng Zhao has shown, this popular nationalism bedevils efforts by the

CCP to promote a more predictable state nationalism or attempts by some intellectuals to advocate a liberal nationalism that speaks, as well, to domestic issues of social justice.¹⁵

Geremie Barmé notes the continuity of this intolerant language—even among the official supporters of reform and opening. He gives the example of a 1992 book that is critical of old-style Leftism in the Party. The preface praises Deng Xiaoping’s famous “Southern Tour” (see ch. 3, below) of 1992 that supported continued reform, but the preface’s style reflects the continued force of Maoist moral extremism even as it criticizes “left” resistance to Deng’s economic reforms:

At the crucial moment when the powers of extreme “leftism” and their in-house theoreticians, swollen with arrogance, had set their sights on striking out wantonly against reform, Comrade Deng Xiaoping resolutely toured the south. He issued speeches in which he stated categorically: “We must guard against rightism, but more important, we must prevent ‘leftism’!” One simple sentence, but each word bears the weight of greatness.... Oh, how fortunate the reforms! How blessed are our people!¹⁶

A vivid example of these residual habits of intolerance came in 2005 from a former Red Guard and notable author in English, Jung Chang. Her recent biography of Mao is a stunning piece of Maoist anti-Maoism, attacking Mao in very much the manner of extreme, one-sided, and hyperbolic campaigns she participated in herself in the Cultural Revolution.¹⁷ Jung Chang portrays Mao as an evil, power- and sex-hungry sadist who works for his personal advantage in the most despicable ways, relying on trickery, manipulation and terror. Mao *never* did anything for the good of anyone else; *none* of his policies *ever* worked. He was bad, bad, bad. In fact, he was the ultimate counterrevolutionary! This is the most ironic legacy of Maoism—even a former Red Guard living in London who wants to purge herself of her former adulation of Mao feels compelled to use the very methods of “mass criticism” which Mao perfected under his rule to attack Mao’s memory today. While the results are unconvincing for most readers in English, the moral extremism, the back and white judgments, resonate with many

readers in China. Thus, one does not have to be a Maoist, or in this case, to like anything Mao did, in order to carry on Maoist habits of thought and argument.

Jung Chang exhibits the fury of the apostate, but she is not alone in her moral extremism. Even China's most elite academic intellectuals—working in the major universities of Beijing and Shanghai—cannot seem to resist such “spit fights.” In the late 1990s it was an acrimonious debate between those who supported liberalism, more or less along the lines of neo-liberal policies associated with von Hayek, and those who borrowed Post-Modern critiques from the West to recast a left attack on capital. The fight between Liberals and New Left amused but disheartened observers, such as Shanghai public intellectual, Xu Jilin, who nearly despaired of finding a way to get various intellectual factions to work together instead of attacking each other. The fights have continued, leading Xu, amongst others, to bemoan the balkanization of Chinese intellectual life. The role of the Internet has, alas, been pernicious, enabling libelous exchanges and outrageous claims and counter-claims to find a ready audience. In 2000 money added fuel to the fire. Li Kai-shing, the Hong Kong-based billionaire, gave some \$60 million HK to the Chinese Ministry of Education to support research. Part of that money went to a “Cheung Kong-Reading Award” for best articles in the journal, *Reading (Dushu)*. A huge Internet brawl broke out when it was discovered that one of the winners was Wang Hui, one of the editors of *Reading*. The level of vitriol and polemical rhetoric is what stands out in this “intellectual exchange.”¹⁸

Talk to the Party The upshot, as Wenfang Tang's survey research has confirmed, is that when intellectuals or social activists are not fighting each other, they are talking to the Party-State. This is born of both habit and of pragmatism. As we have seen, the CCP will not tolerate a substantial social organization or movement outside its control, from Christian house churches to Falungong to any sort of political party. Working people assume it is up to the “leaders” or at least to the certified intellectuals to fix things. Intellectuals cast their suggestions in terms of, or at least carefully not in contradiction to, Party ideological platforms, and most work for the State in one fashion or another—in universities, academies of science or social science, or major industries. This state-

orientation of civil society has been a real challenge to Western observers, who persist in seeing sprouts of individual democratic activity. It may come, but so far lived experience, intellectual orientation, and even business practices (in which business actors survive by colluding with local political leaders in the absence of legal protections) all point to collaboration with the Party-State rather than confrontation.

To focus on working with the Party does not imply absolute passivity. There were some 100,000 violent “incidents” (demonstrations, attacks on enterprise or local leaders, even riots) last year. Rural Chinese have suffered the most, and they have acted the most. But the point to keep in mind is: they are not organizing. No peasant’s union, no local or national political party, no cross-district associations—despite the technical capabilities of cell phones and Internet. Each demonstration—even when violent—is specific in issue (back pay, compensation for land taken, redress for official abuse or the effects of pollution) and focused on local leaders. We are only seeing the beginnings of what the CCP feared in Tiananmen—intellectuals linking with working people. When a Beijing-based lawyer traveled to a small town in Guangdong to represent local farmers who had been beaten by police during a demonstration in 2004, he, in turn was detained, beaten, and driven away. Independent advocacy, so far, has not produced much in China. Hence, the continuing conversations with the Party-State.

Living Maoism is the software that runs on the hardware of China’s physical and human geography. These two systems come from history but are active and reproduced in daily life. Of course they change—population increases, people move, a housing market was created, new ideas are incorporated—but the changes are incremental.

So, when you look up at the Great Wall and see: “Loyal to Chairman Mao” (忠于毛主席), remember the living legacies of Maoism: what people say, what they do and what they don’t do.

Notes

¹ For a longer version in print, see Timothy Cheek, “The Multiple Maos of Contemporary China,” *The Harvard Asia Quarterly*, Vol. XI, 2 & 3 (2008), pp. 14-25. On line at:

<http://www.asiaquarterly.com/content/view/186/1/>

² “Preamble,” *Constitution of the People’s Republic of China* (1982, updated 2004), viewed at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html> on 20 June 2010.

³ I have coined “actually existing Maoism” to borrow from Vaclav Havel’s depiction in the 1980s of “actually existing socialism” in Eastern Europe to suggest the parallel experience of dissonance for a generation raised on the ideals of socialism but subjected to the terrors of Stalinist state socialism.

⁴ Mao studies is a thriving cottage industry in academia. Stuart Schram remains the doyen of serious Mao studies, see his *The Thought of Mao Zedong* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). A number of good biographies echo Schram’s balanced assessment of Mao’s strengths and weakness, such as Jonathan Spence, *Mao* (Penguin Books, 1999). A documentary history that seeks to make a critical assessment of Mao’s contributions and some of the scholarly literature is Timothy Cheek, *Mao Zedong and China’s Revolutions* (Boston: Bedford Books, 2002) and a new collection of essays by fifteen scholars from around the world seek to make sense of Mao and his legacies in Timothy Cheek, ed., *A Critical Introduction to Mao* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵ Original Party texts are translated and carefully analysed by Gang Lin, “Ideology and Political Institutions for a New Era,” in Gang Lin and Xiaobo Hu, eds., *China After Jiang* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 39-68, quote from p. 39.

⁶ Gang Lin, “Ideology and Political Institutions,” p. 44.

⁷ Lin Yunshan, “Strengthening, Expanding, and Innovating in Propaganda and ideological Work in Accordance with the Requirements of Constructing a Harmonious Socialist Society,” *Qiushi*, No. 19 (2005), translated in FBIS-CHI [Foreign Broadcast Information Service, US Government], 1 October 2005.

⁸ Joseph Kahn, “Sharp Debate Erupts in China over Socialism and Capitalism,” *The New York Times*, Sunday, 12 March 2006, p. 1.

⁹ Suisheng Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

¹⁰ Merle Goldman has chronicled this history in her books since 1967. Her views are summarized nicely in the chapters on ideology and intellectuals for the *Cambridge History of China* that are reproduced in Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee, eds., *An Intellectual History of Modern China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹¹ Wenfang Tang, *Public Opinion and Political Change in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 187.

¹² Elizabeth Perry, "Introduction: The Changing Chinese Workplace in Historical and Comparative Perspective," in Xiaobo Lü and Elizabeth Perry (eds), *Danwei: The Changing Chinese Workplace in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), pp. 5-6.

¹³ Jeffrey Wasserstrom and E. Perry (eds), *Popular Protest and Political Culture in China: Learning from 1989* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992, 2nd edn, 1994).

¹⁴ For example, see the interview with an NPC delegate which appears as "The People's Deputy: A Congresswoman," in Sang Ye, *China Candid: The People on the People's Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, pp. 73-84, esp., p. 79.

¹⁵ Suisheng Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction*.

¹⁶ Barmé, *In the Red*, p. 334.

¹⁷ Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005). This biography has been warmly embraced by journalists and roundly criticized by scholars. A useful array of specialist criticism appears in *The China Journal* (Canberra), No. 55, January 2006, pp. 95-139, as well as Jonathan Spence's rueful review in *The New York Review of Books*, 4 November 2005.

¹⁸ Xu Jilin, "The Fate of an Enlightenment: Twenty Years in the Chinese Intellectual Sphere (1978-1998), pp. 183-203 and Gerime R. Barmé and Gloria Davies, "Have We Been Noticed Yet? Intellectual Contestation and the Chinese Web," pp. 75-108, both in Edward Gu & Merle Goldman, eds., *Chinese Intellectuals Between State and Market* (London: Routledge, 2004).