

Chapter 2

“Politics in Command”

“Politics in Command” was a popular Maoist slogan, reminding Cultural Revolutionaries that the correct political choice and the willpower to enforce it would make or break their movement. Three features in the standard kit of Chinese politics set it apart from Western practice.

First, the Communist Party ruled without serious challenge, enjoying a preeminence that muddies the tidy distinction made in the West between party and state. China lacked a head of state for part of the Cultural Revolution. It did not seem to matter. Despite Cultural Revolutionary rhetoric and state-sanctioned chaos, the Communist Party continued to expand, growing from 18 million members in 1966 to 34 million in 1976. However, fear of bourgeois influence shuttered the Party’s ancillary organizations for youth and for women, and the eight so-called democratic parties with which the Communists superficially share state power were closed.

Second, the Party frequently turned to extra-bureaucratic techniques, especially mass campaigns that were organized outside the normal government departments, mobilizing officials, activists, and ordinary citizens to achieve a specific goal. These included such disparate targets as literacy for women, land reform, eradicating schistosomiasis (an infectious liver disease widespread

in South China), writing poetry, or the building of backyard steel furnaces during the Great Leap Forward. Campaigns were good at harnessing resources but not very subtle at deploying them, as the military terminology might suggest. They were better suited for some tasks than others, but they purposely kept the bureaucracy on the defensive. In some respects the Cultural Revolution was itself an extended campaign, made up of smaller, more narrowly focused movements.

Third, the Party developed a system of labeling Chinese citizens according to their political status. The practice originated in the great land reform campaigns that accompanied the revolution, when the Party needed to be sure who was a landlord and who was a landless peasant, so that it could confiscate resources from one group to bestow to the other. The classifications became formal and bureaucratic, but with obviously important implications. After land reform, the class labels became frozen, and then were inherited by children. Subsequent political campaigns reinforced the labels, as the Party turned to “poor peasants” or their children for support, and looked askance at one-time landlords and their offspring. Other labels were added, based upon political status rather than former economic position. When the Cultural Revolution began, the “five black elements” consisted of landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries (who had resisted Communist rule), bad elements (who had committed crimes), and rightists (who had been victims of the 1957 campaign against critics of the Party).

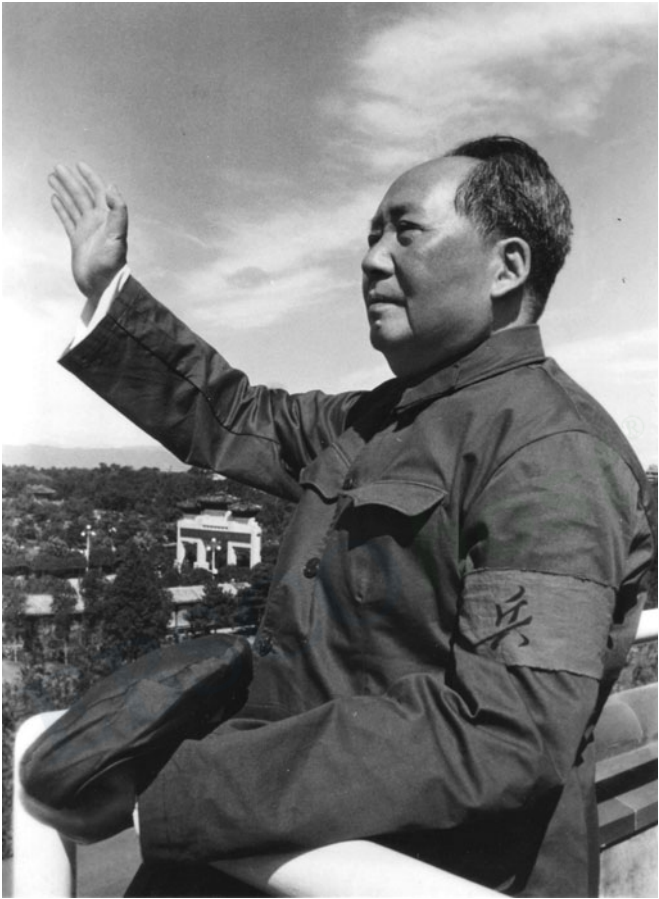
The Cultural Revolution offers an encyclopedia of Chinese politics, including idealism, mob violence, conspiracy, social networks, bureaucratic routine, political prison, petitions, bribes, pork barrel, public theater, backroom deals, and military coups. These practices exaggerated and distorted the routines of ordinary politics in China. Theatricality, the Mao cult, rebellion, discipline, and factionalism are themes that illustrate the era’s political complexity.

Theatricality

The Cultural Revolution's politics were self-consciously theatrical. The movement's public actors postured for dramatic effect on history's stage. As the movement gained traction, the seventy-two-year-old Mao Zedong emphasized his vitality and ties to the young through a highly publicized swim in the Yangzi River at Wuhan. Millions of young people quickly took to the water in emulation. After a series of carefully staged rallies of millions of Red Guards in Tiananmen Square, some young participants dramatically refused to wash the hands that had touched the Chairman. Mao called his supporters to action through grand gestures, such as putting on a Red Guard armband and writing his own "big character poster," in emulation of the tens of thousands of revolutionary declarations that young rebels pasted on public walls.

Later, when Mao wanted to rein in the Red Guards, he ostentatiously presented a gift of mangos to members of a workers' propaganda team, a new institution created to restore order by forcing peace upon warring student groups. The mangos, which had been given to Mao by Pakistani visitors, signaled that by 1968 the Chairman valued the reliable members of the working class more highly than the immature students. The organized ecstasy of the moment included well-publicized efforts to preserve the fruit so that it might be admired forever, much like medieval Christians venerating the bones of a saint.

Such theatricality had the practical purpose of disseminating broad political messages in a society with limited communications, and where Party-controlled mass media often seemed monotonous. Many of the best-staged events encouraged new forms of participation by the young, who had led orderly and passive political lives, channeled by the now-discredited Young Pioneers (for primary-age students) or the more exclusive Communist Youth League (for high school students). Red Guards reenacted the Red Army's 1934–35 Long March, tracing a



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2. Mao Zedong wears the armband of the Red Guards to show his support for young rebels.

pilgrimage that bound them ever closer to Chairman Mao and to the memory of revolution. There were rituals of public humiliation for fallen officials, who were forced to stand for long periods, sometimes wearing tall hats and placards, enduring verbal and

often physical abuse. The point was to break the power of the mighty but also to demonstrate to youthful rebels that they had been empowered.

The audience for the Cultural Revolution's dramatic gestures was not limited to young Chinese but extended to include the political elites themselves. The intensity of the performances helped convey to wavering members of the elite that they should not resist the movement. All states employ ritual, and China's political tradition is rich in the use of spectacle. Many peasant rebels against past emperors have worn opera costumes as they present themselves to supporters of their self-styled new dynasties, suggesting a porous line between staged spectacle and political action.

Yet the Cultural Revolution's theatrical side meant more than mere manipulation. The Maoist movement both reflected and spurred events that were quite dramatic by any terms—conspiracy, betrayal, rescue, and rebellion are among the great themes of any art. And many of the most engrossing episodes of the Cultural Revolution spectacle were performed with little or no direction, often contrary to the preferences of Maoist stage managers.

The Lin Biao affair, for example, was spectacular but not in ways that the Maoists desired. When Mao apparently wanted to put some limits on the military's political power, Lin, Mao's putative successor, saw his own influence sinking; either he organized an inept assassination plot and coup, or (more plausibly) his son, Lin Ligu, did so on his behalf. Lin Biao probably did not know much of what was going on and was perhaps drugged as he was put on a plane that crashed in Mongolia on September 13, 1971.

The drama lay not only in the conspiracy from Lin's camp, and in Lin's daughter revealing the plot to Premier Zhou Enlai, but also in the official handling of the incident. Mao and the Cultural Revolution group were shocked and appropriately concerned that news of the incident would break the confidence of millions of Chinese in the

Cultural Revolution. As Mao purged the top ranks of the People's Liberation Army, the level of central political disarray was revealed by the unprecedented cancellation of the October 1 (1971) National Day parade and celebration.

The spectacle became the absence of a planned spectacle, as Cultural Revolutionaries tried to concoct an explanation for how Mao's "closest comrade in arms" could betray him. Central authorities prepared documents that attempted to explain the scandal, but perhaps no more smoothly than the Warren Commission in the United States explained the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Only Political Bureau members were informed in the first week, and ordinary citizens waited for nearly a year, as the word spread throughout the nation in an elaborate and secret system of briefings. And the result was as Mao feared; enthusiastic supporters of the Cultural Revolution date their disenchantment from the Lin Biao affair. In this case, spectacle worked to depress support for the Cultural Revolution rather than arouse new enthusiasts to its cause.

At the level of elite politics, the Cultural Revolution brought personal and political ruin to three different claimants to Mao's succession. The first of these was President Liu Shaoqi, who fell from Mao's presumptive heir to a lonely 1969 death from medical neglect. Lin Biao's violent death in 1971 reminded all that China's political drama did not follow a master script, after all. The third failed successor was the civilian radical Wang Hongwen, promoted "by helicopter" at the age of thirty-eight to be vice-chairman of the Party, only to be nudged aside by the interior minister, Hua Guofeng, and later arrested as one of the "Gang of Four."

The Mao cult

As Mao Zedong's power increased, his words, actions, and image became imbued with a cultlike sanctity. Even in 1963, the army's production of the "Little Red Book" of quotations from Mao's

writings presaged something unusual. Liu Shaoqi's works had also been republished for political study, but the distribution of Mao's works became an ideological tsunami. The four-volume *Complete Works* was a popular award presentation item for model workers and, as bourgeois luxuries came under question, a gift for newlyweds. Versions of Mao's writings varied by class. The government worker edition of *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Zedong* was twice as long as the edition for workers and peasants, which had shorter articles and many more explanatory footnotes. And the Little Red Book provided pithy quotations, usefully arranged by topic to provide fodder for any political commentator, amateur or professional. Red Guards carried their Little Red Books for handy reference. Even mighty leaders waved their books at mass rallies and quoted Mao incessantly but with exemplary political nuance. The Chairman earned royalties on his works, which he apparently used as a political slush fund, self-financing some aspects of his own cult.

China's national anthem, "Song of the Volunteers," fell under a cloud along with the author of its words, Tian Han. The informal replacement was "The East Is Red," a revolutionary ode based upon a North China folk tune:

The East is red, the sun is up.
 China has brought forth a Mao Zedong.
 He works for the happiness of the people, and
 He is the great savior to the Chinese nation.

This song had dropped from popularity after 1949. Perhaps even Mao thought that it was immodest as well as unnecessarily slighting to other Communist leaders. But it returned with a vengeance in 1966, sung at open meetings, broadcast from loudspeakers on the street, and, in 1970, beamed down to the earth from China's first satellite.

The other top Cultural Revolution song was Pottier and De Geyter's "Internationale" of 1888, the radical anthem sung by

anarchists, Communists, and social democrats around the world. Qu Qiubai, head of the Communist Party in the late 1920s, translated it into Chinese. During the Cultural Revolution, no one drew attention to the contradiction between “The East Is Red” and the second verse of “The Internationale”:

There has never been any saviour of the world,
Nor deities, nor emperors on which to depend.
To create Mankind's happiness
We must entirely depend on ourselves!

Organizations competed to demonstrate their loyalty to Mao. Newspapers printed the Chairman's words in red ink, and misuse of yesterday's newspaper in ways that might suggest disrespect for those sanctified words could lead to serious political criticism. Mao badges, produced by the million, were instantly collectible and tradable, as if having lots of badges might demonstrate revolutionary conviction. “Loyalty Dances” acted out one's political position. New songs included a series that set Mao's quotations to appropriate tunes. Cries of “Long Live Chairman Mao!” resounded in public spaces. Newsreels, paintings, posters, and statues fueled the cult. China was inundated with sculpture of the Chairman. Some of these works were gigantic; even though they were not very interesting as art, their huge scale was intended to awe or intimidate. Other statues were smaller, tabletop busts of China's leader. Display of his image, whether by a city or an individual, denoted loyalty and at least outward commitment to his politics.

In 1966, Mao possessed enormous moral authority with the Chinese public. People believed that his acts were motivated for the good of China, the revolution, and socialism. The Mao cult grew from this spontaneous respect, which radicals manipulated for political advantage. Mao may well have thought this public admiration was his due. Or he may merely have recognized its utility in overwhelming his opponents. He did little to discourage or disparage even the most outrageous expressions of Mao



3. Officials pledge loyalty to Mao Zedong by waving the Little Red Book of his quotations. Premier Zhou Enlai and Defense Minister Lin Biao walk slightly behind Mao. Lin further displays his fealty by wearing a Mao badge.

worship. And when the red haze of his cult was invoked for immediate political ends, his moral authority was diminished. It was one thing for an idealized Mao to fight for an idealized revolution. It was quite another for Mao to expel a fallen Liu Shaoqi from the Communist Party as a renegade.

At the conclusion of one Cultural Revolution song-and-dance show in Xi'an, the performers were presented with a plaster bust of Mao. In those years of Little Red Books and mass rallies, this gift symbolized shared revolutionary ardor. After the performers went backstage, the bust slipped from one musician's fingers and shattered on the floor. Mao's head, the most exalted fount of revolutionary wisdom, had been smashed into a pile of plaster fragments. The performers were shocked both by the sudden destruction of the Chairman's inviolable image and by the danger of serious political charges. Without a word, they gathered into a circle and ground the shards of Mao's head into dust with their feet. They understood that they had become complicit in an unspoken compact to conceal their secret deed.

One aspect of self-restraint in the Mao celebration seems odd to Westerners. Chinese carefully avoided the formulation “Maoism (Maozhuyi).” Although Maoism and Maoist seem to capture the spirit of the times, Chinese avoided them in favor of the much clumsier “Mao Zedong thought” (Mao Zedong sixiang).” Awkward in Chinese as well as English, Mao Zedong Thought represented a kind of restraint, modestly resisting the assertion that Mao had established a new “ism” on a level with Marxism or Leninism. The more awkward expression indicated that Mao had merely inherited and developed Marxism and Leninism. But one should not see too much modesty here, for Mao Zedong thought was routinely identified as a “spiritual atom bomb.”

Management of the Mao cult formed its own political world. Lin Biao had based his personal political power upon manipulating Mao’s image. Many of the Mao statues, for instance, bore bronze inscriptions in Lin Biao’s calligraphy, praising the “great teacher, great leader, great commander, and great helmsman.” Dead and disgraced, Lin was no longer allowed to share in the Chairman’s radiance, and the inscriptions were stripped away. As the Cultural Revolution turned more conservative, “Mao Zedong Thought” was also adapted to less rebellious political needs. Mao’s ample writings could be mined for ammunition to legitimize a ruling bureaucracy as well as to support young rebels.

The cult declined in the 1970s, along with the Maoists’ effective use of spectacle. As Mao’s health declined, his words became ever more oracular, mysterious rather than inspiring. A 1975 campaign focused on *Water Margin*, a five-hundred-year-old classic novel about peasant bandits. In an offhand remark, Mao Zedong said this beloved story revealed a negative example of “capitulationists.” Mao’s words were quoted in editorials, and the nation’s intellectuals, still reeling from the early years of the Cultural Revolution, began to make tortured analyses of the novel, looking for clues as to which peasant rebel character represented which politician. Mao was not becoming senile, but he had cataracts,

which made reading difficult, and made the remark to a young academic assigned to read aloud to him. The comment was noted and used, however ineptly, by Cultural Revolution radicals.

The great Tangshan earthquake of 1976 killed more than a quarter of a million people and was another kind of unplanned spectacle. It was viewed by some as an omen and by others as a disaster, which would seem to be inauspicious. Either way, the spectacle could neither be controlled or hidden by calls to “Deepen the Criticism of Deng Xiaoping In Anti-Quake and Relief Work.”

Rebellion

However theatrical the gestures of China’s leaders, no one should imagine that Mao snapped his fingers and called up the Cultural Revolution from thin air. The Cultural Revolution released the people’s bitterness that had accumulated since 1949. Protracted tensions divided the political elite about how China should handle its revolutionary heritage and the burdens of economic development. These tensions were palpable to other citizens, if often indistinct. The social impact of political tensions was accelerated as they interacted with demographic factors. Peace and prosperity had boosted the numbers of young Chinese, and the rapid expansion of schools meant that large numbers of youth were educated and ambitious for good, non-agricultural jobs. But the 1949 revolution installed a set of relatively young leaders. Most were still in place and blocking job promotion opportunities for the younger generation. At the same time, the schools and universities were filled with frustrated and generally unhappy people, following the impact of the 1957 anti-rightist campaign that targeted teachers as “rightist elements.”

Youth were thus easy for Maoists to mobilize at the outset of the Cultural Revolution. Most young urban Chinese took part. The great majority of Red Guards were high school students. Urban Chinese today of a certain age were almost certainly Red

Guards; a sixteen-year-old Red Guard would have been born in 1950. They were not organized by the state but instead sprang up spontaneously. Maoists then extended their political patronage, enabling the movement to spread even more quickly.

One of the signature tools of the Red Guards was the “big character poster,” a poster-sized political essay displayed on a public wall. Big character posters could be polemics, exhortations, announcements, or revelations of past political behavior by officials under attack. Red Guards often turned to radical allies in the Party for leaked documents and information as they wrote. Mao Zedong wrote his own big character poster—“Bombard the Headquarters”—to underscore his support for the nascent Red Guard movement. Before long, the posters were supplemented by Red Guard newspapers and magazines, full of exposés, beyond the control of Party-run media still under conservative influence. The information revealed was generally accurate, with records of high-level meetings and ample quotations from speeches liberated from Party files. These items were often taken out of context or given the worst possible interpretation, but they were not simply fabricated.

Red Guard participation was a political act, but it was also a form of teen rebellion, opening possibilities for experiences that would otherwise have been forbidden. To facilitate the “exchange of revolutionary experiences,” China’s rail system provided free transportation to Red Guards in the autumn of 1966. “Revolutionary tourism” enabled young people to travel for the first time, visiting distant cities in the name of revolution. The initial mood was youthful exhilaration, buttressed by tough, militarized lingo as former members of the now disbanded youth league reimagined themselves as “Red flag Combat Groups” and “May 16 Revolutionary Warriors.” Such grandiose names sometimes masked only small groups of friends sharing an interest in sports or radio. They strengthened their resolve with one of Mao’s favorite quotations from the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*: “He who is not afraid of death by a thousand cuts dares to unhorse the emperor.”

Some of the mindless violence of the early Cultural Revolution flowed from the fact that the country had apparently been turned over to gangs of high school students, and no one dared rein them in for fear of seeming counterrevolutionary. August and September 1966 saw a Red Guard rampage, including a rough search for imagined class enemies. In Beijing, Red Guard teams raided more than 100,000 homes in search of reactionary materials, and they forced intellectuals and some who had earlier clashes with the regime to make self-criticisms. Some Red Guards beat people with belt buckles and tortured them with boiling water. In Beijing, 1,700 died. The Tianjin Party secretary, the commander of the East China Fleet, and the minister of the coal industry all died after criticism meetings. There were notorious cases of suicides after Red Guard beatings, including that of the celebrated novelist Lao She. Famous veteran officials were in high demand for ritual criticism meetings, in which the revolutionary masses would voice their hatred for purged leaders. The vice-premier Bo Yibo, head of the State Economic Commission, was dragged out for a hundred struggle sessions. His wife, unable to bear the strain, killed herself. Yet the majority of the millions of Red Guards were not violent, and many spoke out against violence, though with mixed effect.

Given the near universality of Red Guard participation, it is not surprising that they developed serious internal divisions. Everyone claimed to be a “revolutionary,” including the children of officials under Maoist attack. One notorious Beijing Red Guard unit, the “United Action Headquarters,” advocated a “bloodline” theory. Children of workers, poor peasants, and revolutionary cadres were said to be natural revolutionaries, while children of capitalists and landlords could never overcome the taint of their birth. The bloodline theory neatly sidestepped Mao’s calls for focusing on “capitalist roaders” within the Party by deflecting attention to the already vanquished enemies of the revolution. The bloodline theory was suppressed, but the tendency to scapegoat the vulnerable remained. For some young Chinese this meant “drawing a clear line” between themselves and family members of

bad class background or with complex political histories (such as a cousin in Taiwan, or service in the Guomindang army). For nearly everyone, it meant that members of the “five black categories” (landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists) were held at a distance, even if they were not actually abused.

The Red Guards flourished within a short time frame. “Red August” of 1966 was their heyday, when most of the violence against teachers and officials took place. The destruction of cultural property and raids on privileged households was limited to the early days of the Cultural Revolution. Horrible as the violence was, this opening rage of the Cultural Revolution burned out soon, as Maoist authorities strained to limit these public assaults. One should not imagine a decade of beatings and murders. Although most Red Guards did not beat people, those who were violent then turned their fury against rival Red Guard factions. Red Guards manufactured weapons, or seized guns from the army, including Russian weapons in transit to Vietnam. By 1968, this phase of the Cultural Revolution was over. Young urbanites were being shipped to the countryside “to learn from the poor and lower middle peasants.”

Red Guards were not the only rebels. Junior officials joined the rebel ranks in large numbers, along with many who had grievances with the policies of the Seventeen Years. Activists from the ranks of temporary workers, denied the full benefits of permanent workers, used the Cultural Revolution to demand redress. They failed, but the possibility of factory-based unrest alarmed the authorities. Later, when Maoist leaders despaired of their student allies, they cultivated a set of working-class rebels who would be politically stable.

We should not simply dismiss these rebels’ desire for radical democracy. They did not seek Western-style procedural democracy, with careful voting systems and protections for

individual human rights. It was an anti-authoritarian movement, perhaps China's greatest experiment in participatory democracy, and aspired to a democracy of results, not procedure.

Discipline

“Politics in Command” disciplines as well inspires rebellion. Mao was surprised by extent of Red Guard violence. The Red Guards were a clumsy political tool: young, unruly, and difficult to deploy with any precision.

A superior model for seizing power appeared in January 1967, with the establishment of the “Shanghai Commune.” This month-long venture to bring together Shanghai's proletarians was ostensibly inspired by the 1871 Paris Commune. It created a political base for three radical politicians: the propaganda official Zhang Chunqiao, the literary critic Yao Wenyuan, and the factory security man Wang Hongwen, all of whom were later excoriated with Jiang Qing as the Gang of Four.

Rather quickly, the Shanghai Commune model was supplanted by a second nationwide model, the “Revolutionary Committee.” Revolutionary committees applied some real heft to the problem of unity; they were organized around a “triple alliance” of mass organizations, army representatives, and veteran officials loyal to the Cultural Revolution. The army was the enforcer in negotiating these deals, and worked patiently to find agreeable radical rebel groups and acceptable veteran cadres to create a new and Maoist local government. Even with army participation, this was a laborious task, as the Cultural Revolution had unleashed social forces that proved difficult to contain. These involved local rivalries, unbridled ambition, or political vanity. In one region of Tibet, an alliance was troubled by an unbalanced nun who experienced visitations from a goddess and who commanded armed followers who, in turn, chopped off the arms and legs of their factional enemies.

The army began to restore order by negotiating a local peace in each province. The army initially preferred to be neutral. Continued violence and disorder eventually drew it more deeply into local administration. One critical moment was the crisis during the summer of 1967 in Wuhan, where a near civil war had broken out. When a Beijing leader attempted to negotiate, he was kidnapped and had to be rescued by airborne troops. Other incidents of armed battles between thousands of young civilians broke down the army's reluctance. Most provinces had new Revolutionary Committees by summer 1968.

The army had entered the Cultural Revolution gingerly, by providing armed guards for nuclear and other military research facilities, and for cultural monuments under threat from Red Guard vandals. When Red Guards began arming themselves with weapons seized from trains headed to Vietnam, the army's reluctance dissipated. By summer 1968, the army's patience turned into ferocity as it crushed Red Guard groups unwilling to bow to its leadership.

The greatest violence of the Cultural Revolution came not from Red Guard brutality but from Maoist suppression of spontaneous mass organizations. In late 1967, the Cultural Revolution Group organized an investigation into a bogus "May 16 Conspiracy." This led to the arrest of leading radical politicians, charged with a plot that never took place. As the campaign spread to the provincial level, millions were investigated and tens of thousands killed. A related campaign to "purify class ranks" between 1967 and 1969 killed even more, as political and family histories were scrutinized for political sins. It was a bad time to have Overseas Chinese connections, or a sister who had married into a formerly capitalist family. This viciousness partially reflects the tenuous hold by China's newly promoted leaders coupled with their zeal in striking down potential rivals to their new positions. The new Revolutionary Committees consolidated their own power by demobilizing mass politics,

beginning with organizations that resisted their legitimacy. Much violence took place in suburban or rural counties, where it was less visible than the early Red Guard violence. Hong Kong citizens, for example, noted bodies floating downstream to the mouth of the Pearl River. To many observers, however, violence against radicals may have seemed less noteworthy than violence against intellectuals and officials.

Discipline assumed less violent forms for most people. Political study became highly formalized, with everyone required to memorize texts, hold small group discussions, and compose public diaries of their ideological progress. Such practices built upon a long-standing culture of criticism and self-criticism in which people were expected to make ritual acknowledgement of their political shortcomings. This too became a performance art but had



4. As the faction-prone Red Guard movement was disbanded, this poster idealized two workers, staunchly urging unity through the study of Mao Zedong's works: "Overthrow factionalism, chop off the black hands! Unite the proletarian revolutionaries!"

Confucian antecedents in its disinterest in the inner soul and focus upon actual behavior.

Refuge in personal networks

Every Cultural Revolution faction waved the banner of Mao Zedong, giving a superficial appearance of unity despite a reality splintered into factional struggles of great uncertainty. Dangers arose as opportunists looked for the main chance, and citizens were persecuted for their politically questionable backgrounds.

With normal institutions disrupted, citizens at all levels turned increasingly to personal networks for security. Indeed, networks based upon kinship, shared native place, education, or work experience exist in all politics. These have long played an extraordinary role in China, despite state efforts to supersede them with “objective” and incorruptible criteria. The Cultural Revolution’s universalistic rhetoric was undermined by its distrust of regular institutions, perhaps guaranteeing that personal connections came to dominate.

Among elite insiders, personal alliances intensified after the shocks of the Lin Biao affair and Mao’s failing health. Even if personal connections (*guanxi*) are not in play, most Chinese presume they are and will explain the most mundane of local or national developments by who knows whom. For example, Jiang Qing and the Party security chief Kang Sheng came from the same county in Shandong province. Was this shared birthplace more important than any common political position? Many Chinese assume so and argue that it at least put their ideological alliance on a firmer footing.

The search for personal security was equally strong among ordinary citizens, especially in the new cynicism that followed the death of Lin Biao. Gifts and bribes rather than political zeal (or alongside the profession of political zeal) became means to

secure a “back door” advantage, from better housing to specialized medical care, or for transferring a city child away from agricultural labor and back to town.

Politics turned nasty even for committed Maoists. Anxieties brought the theme of revenge close to the surface. Alexandre Dumas’ 1844 revenge novel *The Count of Monte Cristo* found wide readership in an era when Western art enjoyed little favor. Indeed, the Chinese title (*The Monte Cristo Record of Gratitude and Revenge*) heightens its appeal to an audience hoping for security in a vicious and unreliable public world. The count, Edmond Dantès, makes his own justice, mocking the presumption that Western laws are morally superior to the East’s web of personal relationships.

Jiang Qing may have been ambitious and difficult, but Mao relied upon her because he did not fully trust anyone beyond his personal circle. For all her faults, she was loyal. As she put it at her trial, “Everything I did, Chairman Mao told me to do. I was his dog. What he said to bite, I bit.” In the 1970s, Mao also turned to a nephew, Mao Yuanxin, who became a leading official in the key industrial province of Liaoning.

At the very end of the Cultural Revolution, following repeated blows against conventional political institutions, the leaders of the post-Mao coup acted primarily because they wanted to be rid of their rivals but also from anxiety. Even though they had a majority in the Political Bureau, they feared that a majority of the Central Committee might support Jiang Qing and her allies in a showdown. And in defending their act, the conspirators posited a personal network, the “Gang of Four,” which had a somewhat shaky basis in reality. It was not much of a gang, as three of the four did not even support Wang Hongwen over Hua Guofeng to be Mao’s successor. But few were unhappy to see the imperious Jiang Qing removed, and the four, along with Lin Biao’s generals, became the public scapegoats for the Cultural Revolution.