Resisting Modernity in Contemporary China

The Cultural Revolution and Postmodernism

GUO JIAN
University of Wisconsin–Whitewater

Ever since the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" began in 1966, its specter has haunted the field of cultural and political theories in both China and the West. First, in the heat of the revolution in the late 1960s and early 1970s, China figured in the West as a model for popular revolt, counterculture, and universal liberation. Seen as an ambitious endeavor to resist and transcend capitalism, the Cultural Revolution inspired various emerging Western theories in their critique of modern institutions and the legacy of European Enlightenment.

Then, in the 1980s, the political resonance of a decade earlier between China and the Western intellectual left gave way to unresolvable perceptual differences. First, the post-Mao Chinese government and Chinese society in general rejected the Cultural Revolution as ten years of chaos and catastrophe that had blocked China's economic development. A series of Chinese cultural trends in the 1980s reaffirmed the value of education and knowledge in general and the relevance of Enlightenment humanism in particular. These developments were part of a critical reaction to the Cultural Revolution. At the same time, most Westerners who had sympathized with the Cultural Revolution also expressed profound disillusionment when its cruelties became known outside China. This worldwide condemnation of the Cultural Revolution, however, met strong resistance from some intellectuals on the Western left, including some leading voices in postmodern critical theory. Convinced that the denunciation of that revolution was an integral part of a worldwide conservative effort to condemn the movements of the 1960s, they set out to defend Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution theory as "the foremost revolutionary

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ideology of our age" and the "richest of all the great new ideologies of the 60s" (Dirlik and Meisner, 1989: 19; Jameson, 1988: 188).

The 1989 democracy movement and its violent suppression spawned a critical assessment of the 1980s by a group of Chinese intellectuals strongly interested in postmodernism. They considered the "Tiananmen incident" to be at once the tragic end of a misguided quest for Enlightenment modernity and the celebrated outset of the "Post–New Era" in China, now finally free of modernist illusions. In their view, the enormous significance of the year 1989 was comparable to that of 1968 in the West, the moment of inception of various postmodern theories in the midst of a global cultural revolution.

With such an enthusiastic reception of Western postmodernism, which is oddly reminiscent of 1960s Western enthusiasm for China's revolution, the Cultural Revolution's world tour has come full circle. However, the fact that postmodernism carries with it the spirit of the Cultural Revolution is hardly obvious. For, first, that spirit, though its militant stance against the so-called "bourgeois" ideology remains intact, has been modified, refined, and above all meticulously theorized virtually beyond recognition. Second, its complicated relationship with Western postmodernism seems to be an unwanted political memory sufficiently repressed or conveniently ignored by China's Post-New theorists.

A critical investigation of postmodernism's "Chinese connection" is, therefore, long overdue. Central to this much-needed critique are two closely related questions. First, why does the Cultural Revolution, which most Chinese experienced as a horrifying nightmare, remain so appealing to some leading proponents of critical theory in the West? Second, given the complicated relationship of postmodernism with recent Chinese history, what political consequences might postmodernism entail for post–Cultural Revolution China? My analysis of these questions focuses on the postmodernist position in the ongoing debate over the relevance of Enlightenment modernity in contemporary China, a debate that was initiated by May Fourth intellectuals in 1919, then effectively silenced in 1957 and through the Cultural Revolution, and only recently reopened.

To avoid misunderstanding, I would like to insert an explanatory note here at the beginning. The term *postmodernism* used in this article refers to a broad spectrum of theoretical positions that, whatever

the differences among them, share a point of departure from Enlightenment modernity and acknowledge postmodernism as the defining or culturally dominant characteristic of the current epoch beyond the modern. Here I am not concerned with various definitions of postmodernism in Western theoretical discourse; rather, as a matter of convenience and convention, I adopt the term as it is commonly and often loosely used in the ongoing Chinese cultural discussion. Such usage enables the editors of a 1997 *Boundary 2* special issue on postmodernism and China to speak of the significant contribution of Fredric Jameson, a critic of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism, to "the Chinese appreciation of postmodernism" (Dirlik and Zhang Xudong, 1997: 1).

I. THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND REFORMULATION OF MARXISM

In the late 1960s, news of China's Cultural Revolution generated worldwide excitement. Maoism, largely represented by a widely translated and widely circulated small book of quotations, gained popularity not only in the industrial West but also in Eastern Europe and Third World countries. Inspired by China's great political upheaval, cultural revolts broke out in many places, and the original forms of the Cultural Revolution, such as Red Guards organizations, school boycotts, the writing of big-character posters, and even the waving of the little red book, were often imitated. Suddenly the world became a whirlpool of cultural revolutions, a turbulent spectacle envisioned by Mao Zedong himself: "Four seas seething with fury of clouds and waves;/ Five continents shaken by rage of wind and thunder" (Mao, 1976: 95).

A number of leading Western intellectuals of the time were infatuated—some only briefly—with the Cultural Revolution as well. Sartre, for instance, strongly supported Maoism. As a famed philosopher and editor of *Les Temps Mordernes*, he helped promote a glowing image of the Cultural Revolution as an inspiration for the French students' May Movement of 1968 (Cadart, 1996: 29-30). He and Roland Barthes, among others, returned from their Beijing pilgrimages carrying good wishes from the revolutionaries. In Barthes's literary

criticism, as Cornelius Castoriadis points out, "Mao's totalitarianism is hidden behind the graceful and elegant Chinese pictographs" (Castoriadis, 1996: 26). While arguing for "popular justice" (as opposed to a proposal to set up a "people's" court) as a way to deal with police brutality in France, Michel Foucault surprisingly withheld his characteristic skepticism about institutionalized power and considered China's "revolutionary state apparatus" an exemplary invention engendered by the masses and capable of educating the masses toward self-rule (Foucault, 1980: 3, 13). In the mid-1970s, when revolutionary fervor in Europe had subsided, Habermas cherished hope for the yet unfolding Revolution in China—the only country, as he saw it, that was still interested in the prospect of a "collective identity" and experimenting with "processes of norm and value formation" (Habermas, 1979: 115).

As we look back, the activities and remarks of these intellectuals seem to have done no more than contribute generally to the 1960s' global enthusiasm for cultural revolutions, whereas the enduring influence of China's Cultural Revolution in contemporary theory was largely due to the systematic and lifelong efforts of the French thinker Louis Althusser.

Althusser acknowledged that his theoretical ventures and political career started as a reaction to Khrushchev's attack on Stalin at the twentieth Soviet Congress in 1956, the same event that caused a drastic change in Mao Zedong's political vision. Althusser was disturbed by Khrushchev's "humanist ravings" and regarded such "right-wing destalinisation" and the subsequent political thaw in the Soviet Union as a clear departure from socialism and a regression to capitalism, a perception shared by Mao. Since Stalinism severely discredited the communist movement, Althusser saw an urgent need for a "left-wing critique" of the "Stalinian deviation" from Marxism-Leninism (Elliott, 1987: 15; Althusser, 1976: 81). To Althusser, Stalin's main problem was not his "violations of socialist legality" and promotion of a "cult of the personality" as Khrushchev charged; rather, Stalin treated Marxism as a modernization theory and focused so exclusively on transforming the Soviet Union's economic structure as to be utterly unprepared for a "reactivation of older elements" in "other structures" (cultural, political, and ideological). To repudiate what he believed were determinist readings that had bound Marxism to Enlightenment

modernity, Althusser offered a theory of "overdetermination" that virtually abolishes the classical Marxist economic base/superstructure division and replaces it with a structure in which various elements or multistructures (culture, ideology, economy, etc.) are asymmetrically related, copresent, and autonomous. Substituting a free-floating "structure in dominance" for the classical Marxist notion of determination by mode of production in the last instance in a social formation, Althusser's reformulation forms the theoretical basis for the evolving thesis of his "left-wing critique" of Stalinism: that revolution operates primarily on cultural and ideological levels, and Stalin's main problem is his "economism," his neglect of class struggle and failure to recognize the need for a continuous *cultural* revolution in the Soviet Union.

Now it should be clear why Maoism, particularly Mao's Cultural Revolution theory, appealed to Althusser. Throughout his career leading the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Zedong emphasized the role of ideology in revolutionary practice. After the rise of anti-Stalinism and the subsequent liberalization in the Soviet Union, Mao became increasingly skeptical about and annoyed by the "productionist" policies supposedly advocated by some of his comrades within the party. He became increasingly alert, even to the point of obsession, to what Althusser called the "reactivation of older elements" in the new society and to what he considered to be the growth of the new bourgeoisie ("China's Khrushchevs," as they came to be called) within the Chinese Communist Party leadership. To prevent a "revisionist" regression, which meant the "restoration of capitalism" to him, Mao resorted to class struggle in the superstructural sphere and launched a series of political campaigns, including, ultimately, the disastrous Cultural Revolution. This practice was seen by many Western Marxists as a positive alternative for socialism and, for Althusser, the "only *historically existing* (left)" critique of the "Stalinian deviation" (Althusser, 1976: 92-93). The Cultural Revolution inspired Althusser to argue that

> the *ideological* can be the *strategic point* where everything is decided. Hence the crossroads is situated in the ideological and the future depends on it. The fate of a socialist country (progress or regression) is

> played out in the ideological class struggle. [Althusser, 1966: 11-12, quoted in Elliott, 1987: 195]

In fact, from the vantage point of the Cultural Revolution, Mao and Althusser can be read reciprocally. As Gregory Elliott puts it,

> Althusser's suggestion that the Cultural Revolution represented the application of "Marxist principles regarding the nature of the ideological" might be amended to read "Althusserian principles." As read by him, the Chinese experience verified the theory of ideology he had advanced in 1965. [Elliott, 1987: 195]

On the other hand, considering Althusser's heavy borrowing from Mao in his reconstitution of Marxism, the phrase "Maoization of Marxism," with which Elliott characterizes Althusser's later polemic *Reply to John Lewis*, also accurately captures the Cultural Revolutionary spirit of Althusser's thought (Elliott, 1987: 273).

In the West, Althusser is generally credited with liberating Marxism from the prison of the "last instance" determinism. He deconstructed classical or traditional Marxism to such an extent that some of its essential tenets, such as economic base/superstructure division and periodization informed by specific modes of production, are dismissed as mistaken notions derived from determinist, essentialist, humanist, economist, and evolutionist readings. Centering on the idea of overdetermination and tacitly interpreting determination by the economy in the last instance as the determination by "a structure in dominance" that is not fixed for all time, he effectively decentered Marxism. And such concepts as symptomatic reading, problematic, dislocation, and specific effectivity clearly indicate the postmodern orientation of the Althusserian liberation.[1]

In this regard, Althusser's theoretical ventures seem to reach beyond Mao's. Yet, this does not mean that he leaves Mao behind. It is important to note that Althusserism not only opens up Marxism for postmodern appropriation but also invites postmodernist readings of Maoism. Fredric Jameson, for instance, drawing on both Mao and Althusser, enlists the term *cultural revolution* to capture history in its totality as "a permanent struggle between various coexisting modes of production" vying for dominance (Jameson, 1981: 97). Arif Dirlik holds, on the other hand, that the unprecedented autonomy Mao

assigned culture to carry out the task of socialism informs and clarifies the Marxist notion about the relationship between culture and the new mode of production. Dirlik also believes that Mao's Cultural Revolution theory may yet offer solutions for problems of world capitalism in the postmodern era (Dirlik, 1996: 5-6, 12-14).

In the hands of Althusser, Marxism seemed to have completed its final break from the Enlightenment legacy. After Althusser, "classical" or "traditional" Marxism became a euphemism for "vulgar" Marxism. Yet, in hindsight, the failure of China's Cultural Revolution and the more recent disintegration of Soviet socialism present enormous challenges not necessarily to Marxism itself but to the Althusserian reformulation of it, since direct construction of socialism in the economically "most backward" country in Europe or in a "semi-feudal, semi-colonial" society in Asia was never imagined by Marx and Engels. If Stalin's "economism," as Althusser saw it, ruined a chance for the Soviets to pass over bourgeois modernity under socialism, Mao Zedong's organized class struggle on superstructural levels certainly did not save that chance for China either. One cannot but wonder what has really determined or overdetermined all this in the last instance.

Furthermore, recent postmodernist assessments of China's Cultural Revolution seem to duplicate the problems in Althusser's "left-wing critique" of Stalinism. With the Old Left having already turned away from the Soviet Union in disgust and with Khrushchev attacking Stalin's violations of socialist legality, Althusser felt that only a genuinely Marxist critique of Stalinism could help amend the damages done to the communist movement. However, his critique of Stalin's "economism" is hardly sufficient in explaining the fundamental causes of Stalin's "excesses" and "crimes." Such a failure and unwillingness to confront historical reality is, I think, symptomatic of later "left-wing" critiques of China's Cultural Revolution. In fact, since the Cultural Revolution was Mao's answer to Stalinism, leftist "critiques" of China's 1960s tend to be defensive rather than critical and tend to be so preoccupied with theory and political conviction at the expense of reality as to leave little ground for serious dialogue with critiques of the Cultural Revolution that are informed by actual experience. I examine a prominent and influential example of such "critiques" in the next section.

II. A WESTERN MYTH OF THE CHINESE 1960s

Although Mao Zedong had Stalin's failure in mind when he launched the Cultural Revolution against China's Khrushchevs, China's 1960s nevertheless repeated many of the Soviet nightmares of the 1930s, often with greater horror and on a more massive scale. The differences between Mao's vision of socialism and Stalin's, as well as between political repression carried out by secret police and that in the form of a "mass dictatorship," do not alter the fact that in both countries, enormous human suffering resulted from a ruler's obsession with political power. Campaigns to purge "class enemies" discredited socialism itself. Correspondingly, different generations of Western liberals have had similar experiences with regimes they once found attractive. The profound disillusionment that the older generation of liberals experienced toward the Soviet Union after the 1930s anticipated the feeling of betrayal and regret that agonized the intellectual left as the tragedies and cruelties of the Cultural Revolution became better known outside China. Furthermore, Althusser's defense of Stalin in the form of a "left-wing critique," as well as his protest against the "humanist ravings" from both post-Stalin Russia and Western countries, is not without parallel either. In the 1980s, a similar situation presented itself as Chinese and most former Cultural Revolution supporters in the West took critical stands toward China's 1960s political upheaval. The radical wing of the Western left regarded this reversal of attitude toward the Cultural Revolution to be just another signal of the worldwide lurch to the right. As Fredric Jameson protests, the "propaganda campaign, everywhere in the world, to Stalinize and discredit Maoism and the experience of the Chinese Cultural Revolution—now rewritten as yet another Gulag to the East . . . is part and parcel of the larger attempt to trash the 60s generally" (Jameson, 1988: 189). Similarly, Arif Dirlik and Maurice Meisner find it profoundly disturbing that Mao Zedong's successors abandoned their "revolutionary legacy" so quickly, while in the West some "uncritical admirers of Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution have reincarnated themselves in recent years as the foremost detractors of both" (Dirlik and Meisner, 1989: 7).

This debate over the Cultural Revolution and other 1960s developments in general can be better understood in the context of another

debate of the 1980s in the West—a debate among prominent critics and theorists on the discourse of modernity/postmodernity and the related problem of periodization. Jameson linked the two debates and offered a global perspective from which to see the world 1960s as a significant transitional period between middle, or imperialist, capitalism and late capitalism. For culture, this means the 1960s marked the end of modernism—not its dissolution, but its loss of status as a "cultural dominant"—and the beginning of postmodernism, or the "cultural logic of late capitalism," as Jameson puts it. In light of Jameson's earlier definition, we understand that the 1960s is to him an era of "cultural revolution" *per se*: "that moment in which the coexistence of various modes of production becomes visibly antagonistic, their contradictions moving to the very center of political, social, and historical life"—that is, an overtly "transitional" moment signaled by an intensification of the struggle among various modes of production vying for dominance (Jameson, 1981: 95-97). In the 1960s, this struggle took the form of a revolution: Third World decolonization, First World antiwar and civil rights movements along with cultural revolt against the institutions of modernism, and China's Cultural Revolution against both socialist and capitalist imperialism. This struggle resulted in a momentous transformation of the relationship of capitalist powers to their colonies "from an old-fashioned imperialist control to market penetration," including the commodification of culture. In the West, it led to the waning of opposition between high modernism and mass culture followed by the ascendance of postmodern heterogeneity as a "cultural dominant." For good or ill, as Jameson sees it, the turbulent 1960s as a great moment of transition from one historical stage to another "had to happen the way it did," because it was the "Necessity" of a determinate historical situation (Jameson, 1988: 178).

The importance of China's Cultural Revolution for Jameson in his periodizing effort cannot be overemphasized. First, the Cultural Revolution was prominent among what he called "the Third World beginnings" that had provided "politicocultural models" for the First World 1960s (Jameson, 1988: 180). In his 1984 essay "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Jameson lavishes praises on

> the immense, unfinished social experiment of the New China—unparalleled in world history . . . the freshness of a whole new object world

> produced by human beings in some new control over their collective destiny; the signal event, above all, of a collectivity which has become a new "subject of history" and which, after the long subjection of feudalism and imperialism, again speaks in its own voice, for itself, as though for the first time. [Jameson, 1991: 29][2]

Here the "collectivity" certainly makes the Cultural Revolution unique among other social movements of the 1960s. Second, the Cultural Revolution was not just another Third World movement; it was a revolution informed by an original theory participating in a larger "problematic" in which cultural revolution could be read as

> the collective reeducation of oppressed peoples or unrevolutionary working classes . . . a strategy for breaking the immemorial habits of subalternity and obedience which have become internalized as a kind of second nature in all the laborious and exploited classes in human history—such is the vaster problematic to which, today, Gramsci and Wilhelm Reich, Fanon and Rudolf Bahro, can be seen as contributing as richly as the more official practices of Maoism. [Jameson, 1988: 188][3]

Such a high regard for Mao Zedong's contribution prompted Jameson's "awkward but unavoidable parenthetical digression" on Maoism in his essay "Periodizing the 60s." As he explains at the beginning of that section, "Maoism, richest of all the great new ideologies of the 60s, will be a shadowy but central presence throughout this essay, yet owing to its very polyvalence it cannot be neatly inserted at any point or exhaustively confronted on its own" (Jameson, 1988: 188).

With "Periodizing the 60s," Jameson intends to provide a corrective to two errors of the 1980s in assessing the 1960s—namely, "nostalgic commemoration of the glories of the 60s and abject public confession of the decade's many failures and missed opportunities" (Jameson, 1988: 178). He proposes to see what happened in the 1960s as a historical necessity, to see it dialectically, without sentimental attachment and without apology. What he eventually offers as the final characterization of the period as a whole is "the discovery of a single process at work in First and Third Worlds, in global economy, and in consciousness and culture, a properly *dialectical* process, in which 'liberation' and domination are inextricably combined" (Jameson, 1988: 207). In light of this dialectical perspective, the mass movement in China; the decolonization in the Third World; the antiwar, civil rights,

and counterculture movements in the West, and even the dissolution of the sign system in language theory that led to the release of the signifier from the prison of the signified, from meaning proper, can all be seen as moments of "liberation" in a process to be reversed by new forms of dominance. As Jameson writes,

> The simplest yet most universal formulation surely remains the widely shared feeling that in the 60s, for a time, everything was possible; that this period, in other words, was a moment of a universal liberation, a global unbinding of energies. Mao Zedong's figure for this process is in this respect most revealing: "Our nation," he cried, "is like an atom.... When this atom's nucleus is smashed, the thermal energy released will have really tremendous power!" The image evokes the emergence of a genuine mass democracy from the breakup of the older feudal and village structures, and from the therapeutic dissolution of the habits of those structures in cultural revolutions. Yet the effects of fission, the release of molecular energies, the unbinding of "material signifiers," can be a properly terrifying spectacle; and we now know that Mao Zedong himself drew back from the ultimate consequences of the process he had set in motion, when, at the supreme moment of the Cultural Revolution, that of the founding of the Shanghai Commune, he called a halt to the dissolution of the Party apparatus and effectively reversed the direction of this collective experiment as a whole (with consequences only too obvious at the present time). In the West, also, the great explosions of the 60s have led, in the worldwide economic crisis, to powerful restorations of the social order and a renewal of the repressive power of the various state apparatuses. [Jameson, 1988: 207-8]

This is Jameson's most conclusive characterization of the 1960s, a discovery of "our 'unified field theory,'" as he calls it, with Mao Zedong's image of atom explosion at the center (Jameson, 1988: 207). Maoism finally emerges from the shadow and asserts its paradigmatic significance. What is left of the essay is the last single paragraph in which Jameson offers a brief theoretical interpretation of the 1960s in the light of "classical" Marxism. There he proposes to explain the 1960s' sense of freedom and possibility—a momentarily "objective reality" but "a historical illusion" in hindsight—in terms of

> the superstructural movement and play enabled by the transition from one infrastructural or systemic stage of capitalism to another. The 60s

> were in that sense an immense and inflationary issuing of superstructural credit; a universal abandonment of the referential gold standard; an extraordinary printing up of ever more devalued signifiers. [Jameson, 1988: 208]

This last judgment, however, does not square with the "shadowy and central presence" of Maoism in Jameson's essay since the classical Marxist perspective as formulated by Jameson himself in the end calls, by its own logic, for a strong critique of Mao's cultural revolution theory. The powerful presence of Maoism, on the other hand, seems to me to have spoken more forcefully for Jameson's political stand and no less so for his theoretical position. The issue here is not where Mao or Jameson stands in Marxist tradition. Questions like this have become dubious ever since the Althusserian revolution. Rather, the issue that concerns me here is much more concrete: I find it profoundly disturbing, as perhaps anyone who actually experienced the Cultural Revolution would, that in the mid-1980s, when the atrocities of the Cultural Revolution were common knowledge in the West, Jameson was willing to ignore the overwhelming evidence of enormous human suffering and subject himself to a myth of the Cultural Revolution as a "genuine mass democracy."

Indeed, "great democracy" and "liberation of the masses" were among the hottest political slogans during the Cultural Revolution. Yet those terms had specific meanings in that context. From the very beginning, they were at Mao Zedong's service and functioned to obfuscate political and ideological totalitarianism. While vicious power politics betrayed people's faith in communism and their trust in the Communist Party, the delirious cult of Mao eliminated mental space for critical reflection. In characterizing the world 1960s as "a moment of universal liberation," Jameson seems to have confused Mao's shaping the masses into an army against his political enemies in China with students' spontaneous cultural revolt in the West. As a result, he unexpectedly turns the great sign "liberation" into an empty signifier devoid of its locally determinate meaning.

And, indeed, the Cultural Revolution was an "experiment" to "educate the masses" through class struggle. Yet, again, this education through struggle had little to do with "liberation" and "democracy." Anyone who participated in the Cultural Revolution is quite familiar

with this typical process: to chart the general course of the movement, Chairman Mao repeatedly issued "the highest directives." Sometimes those instructions were plain and straightforward, but sometimes they were vague yet clearly pregnant with political message (the "bourgeois headquarters," for instance, was a tacit referent to Liu Shaoqi, the head of the state and other high-ranking leaders "in his line") or enigmatic beyond comprehension (say, the political intent of Mao's comments on the classical novel *Water Margin*). The masses were required to study the most current directives meticulously and take "every word as truth." Apparently, the masses were granted opportunities to exercise their interpretive skills and then grope for and carry out specific steps of the movement on their own. Those steps, in turn, would sometimes inform and even inspire the Chairman himself. It would be a grave mistake, however, to read democracy into this dual process of political struggle and political training involving a dialogue between the Chairman and the masses. For if the masses' reading of the directives matched Mao's intent, as was almost always the case, he would nod in approval and even voice encouragement. Take, again, the case of Liu Shaoqi. Mao's tacit consent to Liu Shaoqi's denunciation and his deliberate absence from Beijing doomed Liu to a brutal death at the hands of the Red Guards. On the other hand, should anyone express dissent from Mao's directives, that person would immediately become the "target of the dictatorship of the masses." In fact, as Xu Youyu, a specialist in Cultural Revolution studies, rightly observes, most of the dissenting opinions were "genuine Marxist critiques of the irrational orthodox ideology, and some of them were intended simply to make Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution theory more thorough and more coherent" (Xu Youyu, 1996: 53). Apparently, Jameson fails to understand the intricate process of political "education" and the ingenious local forms that education took. Consequently, he again accepts Maoist propaganda. Jameson's enthusiasm—apparently without irony until the very end of the essay—for "a global unbinding of energies" is especially troubling since there is no comment at all from him on the crimes and atrocities committed in the name of the revolution, while those crimes and atrocities are closely associated with the very image of energy release in the collective memory of the Chinese people.

According to Jameson's "unified field theory" characterizing a single dialectic process, "liberation" turned into its opposite in the course of China's Cultural Revolution as it did everywhere else during the 1960s. However, since "liberation" is a myth, its reversal can hardly be reality. Jameson's view on the reversal of China's revolution at its "supreme moment, that of the founding of the Shanghai Commune," seems to be based on a superficial reading of Mao Zedong's response to mass organizations' seizure of power during the 1967 "January Revolution" in Shanghai: Mao ordered the army to "support the left" in the revolution; he indicated his preference for a new form of local government called the "Revolutionary Committee" (which was initiated in Shandong province and represented a trinity of mass organizations, the army, and the party leadership); and just with the words "Better call it Revolutionary Committee," he delegitimized the "Shanghai People's Commune." Given limitations of space, what I venture to offer here hardly approximates an adequate assessment of the January Revolution. Yet, it will suffice as a challenge to Jameson's reading of the event, which seems to me to be widely divorced from the most obvious facts.

First, the short-lived Shanghai People's Commune was never the mass democracy Jameson seems to suggest. Its leading body included Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen, all members of the "Gang of Four" whom Mao Zedong found occasionally annoying yet always useful diehard supporters of the Cultural Revolution. Zhang and Yao, then key members of the Central Party Committee's Cultural Revolution Group, made Shanghai their revolutionary base. Acting on hints from Mao, they planned all the major moves for the mass organizations there, including the seizure of power in January 1967. Clearly, the power of the Shanghai People's Commune was never people's power. Even the name "Shanghai People's Commune" came from Zhang Chunqiao himself, who obviously intended to please Mao with a name echoing both the Paris Commune of 1871 and Mao's own idea of Beijing People's Commune. Perhaps there is no better illustration of what Jameson calls the postmodern "adventures of the sign" than the complete deconstruction of political vocabulary during the Cultural Revolution: just as "liberation" could represent exactly its opposite and was hence "liberated" from meaning proper,

so the name "Shanghai People's Commune" was no more than a bitter irony of the thing it was supposed to signify. For some reason, however, Jameson misses this crucial point of relevance of Western theory to the political reality of the Chinese 1960s.

Jameson suggests that in early 1967, Mao, taken aback by the extremism of the mass movement, "called a halt to the dissolution of the party apparatus" and thus reversed the course of the Cultural Revolution. This proposition is, again, highly questionable. According to Mao Zedong himself, the major goal of the Cultural Revolution was to purge the "capitalist-roaders within the party." To shake up the party, mass participation was needed. However, Mao never intended to dissolve the party apparatus, just as he never intended to move China toward a "mass democracy." We only need to remember the first half of the very first quotation in the little red book—perhaps the most cited and recited of all his words during the Cultural Revolution: "The force at the core leading our cause forward is the Chinese Communist Party" (Mao, 1974: 1). So the purpose of the Cultural Revolution, as Mao saw it, could be reformulated as purifying the party and strengthening it toward the political hegemony of Maoism. The Cultural Revolution never significantly moved from this goal. If the January Revolution in Shanghai was in any way decisive, or "supreme," as Jameson puts it, it simply signaled a turning point in, rather than a reversal of, the course of the Cultural Revolution. That is, after the old party apparatus was dismantled, the "revolutionary left" supported by Mao was ready to take power and build a new apparatus, whose nonparty elements would soon be absorbed into the party as "fresh new blood," so that the strength of the party as the "core" of the state apparatus would be regenerated.

It should be noted that Jameson's dialectic approach to the Cultural Revolution is part of a general effort of the Western left to salvage theory from the ruins of practice and distinguish intention from the inevitable limitations of result. His reading of the movement as "incomplete," "unfinished," or "reversed" midway is consistent with a popular leftist point of view that the Cultural Revolution was a genuinely revolutionary experiment that eventually failed. According to this assessment, China's Cultural Revolution was motivated by the "human aspiration for liberation" (Dirlik and Meisner, 1989: 19). It was originally intended as a "collective experiment" to challenge

"deradicalization" hitherto manifested as the fate of all revolutions, to seek an alternative path avoiding the pitfalls of both capitalism and Soviet-style socialism, and finally, informed by Mao's own theory of Marxism against its classical, "determinist" reading, to transform a society by means of class struggle on ideological or "cultural" levels (Meisner, 1989: 341-61; Dirlik, 1996: 5-6). Yet, this experiment failed, not because the project itself was inherently faulty but because implementation strategies were flawed. Or, in Dirlik's words, "The intention underlying the Cultural Revolution was coherent; not so is practice of revolution" (Dirlik, 1989: 32).

This assessment of the Cultural Revolution as a strategic failure or a revolution running off course is in fact a tactical defense rather than an open-minded critique because it presupposes the revolutionary essence—the "coherent" intention—of the project in the first place. However, a simple question is arbitrarily excluded in this assessment: with the loss of millions of lives and the suffering of even more as a result, to what extent can the intention still be taken at its verbally articulated face value? An extreme case of almost the same kind is the Khmer Rouge's revolution in Cambodia in the late 1970s. Pol Pot and his forces articulated a Maoist vision and instigated mass murder. In assessing the legacy of the Khmer Rouge, few cavalierly divorce Khmer Rouge intentions from their barbarism, so why do so with China's Cultural Revolution? A more objective assessment of the Cultural Revolution requires that its professed intention be questioned. Dirlik considers "the possibility of arbitrary despotism," for instance, to be a result of wrong strategy (Dirlik, 1989: 31). Yet, Dirlik and critics on the Western left fail to see, just as Mao Zedong himself failed to see, though for a different reason (a point to which I will return), that the intention of the Cultural Revolution—an experiment to resist and transcend bourgeois modernity—was not even free from concerns of the kind of despotism that historically the Enlightenment meant to dismantle. So, after all, it is not incidental that from the very beginning of the Cultural Revolution, feudalism reinvented itself in such "socialist" forms as brutal autocracy, fanatical pietism, a delirious Great Leader cult, and a mad pursuit in ideological blood-typing and political witch-hunting. In a word, in resisting modernity, the Cultural Revolution did not bring China forward; it simply turned the clock of history backward to what might be called "premodern" times.

In their attempt to reassess the Cultural Revolution, Dirlik and Meisner call attention to the "ideological mystification" in current American China scholarship that "merely confirms the mysteriousness and adds to an 'orientalist' lore of China in which truths and half-truths blend with ideology and fantasy" (Dirlik and Meisner, 1989: 6). Jameson also comments on ludicrous orientalist versions of the Chinese revolution in his essay "Periodizing the 60s" (Jameson, 1988: 189). Yet, they seem to miss the very epistemological insight in existing critiques of traditional orientalism and Western essentialism. In light of this postmodern discovery, we realize that China as the "Other" of the West could be projected as a backward, exotic kingdom of the East resistant to change; yet, owing to another kind of ideological mystification, China could also be a revolutionary politico-cultural model, a site of radical political change. However, limited by his own ideological position and apparently without carefully examining the Cultural Revolution in its Chinese social and historical context, Jameson, among others, simply helps create and perpetuate another kind of orientalist lore of China.

III. THE RISE OF CHINESE POSTMODERNISM AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION COMPLEX

Concurrent with the debate in the West over the discourse of modernity and cultural revolutions of the 1960s, a cultural renaissance in reaction to the Cultural Revolution was under way in China. The movement started with what was soon to be called "Scar Literature." Works that might be loosely categorized under this label not only exposed crimes committed in the name of the revolution but, more important, revealed the profound disillusionment and guilt felt by many revolutionaries. These works exposed the deep psychological wounds left by the Cultural Revolution in the nation's collective memory. In the meantime, the ideological shackles of the Cultural Revolution were being broken, and forbidden spheres of culture opened up. The mid-1980s witnessed an unprecedented flourishing of interest, especially among young people, in cultural traditions of both the East and the West and an unprecedented enthusiasm for learning.

While this cultural revival must be understood as a general reaction to the debasement of tradition and knowledge during the Cultural Revolution, a timely interest of many intellectuals in the works of the young Marx, or the "humanist," "Hegelian" Marx, especially his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, no doubt implied a more thoughtful and more pointed criticism of the ideology of the Cultural Revolution. Soon a theoretical discussion of "socialist alienation" followed. Given China's specific political circumstances, this attempt to reassess the early Marx, formerly dismissed as the "immature" Marx, seemed to be the safest and the most effective way to reopen the question of the relevance of Enlightenment modernity in China. Since such an attempt implicitly challenged the totalitarian power structure and inevitably brought up the issues of liberalism and humanism, of freedom and democracy, it was time and again targeted and denounced by China's post–Cultural Revolution regime as a symptom of "bourgeois spiritual pollution." The party and government dismissed the Cultural Revolution as "ten years of chaos" but was far from willing to allow free discussion of certain important social and political issues repressed during the "chaos" itself.

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the yet-to-be-fully developed critique of the Cultural Revolution from the perspective of Enlightenment humanism and classical Marxism met severe challenges from a group of Chinese intellectuals under the influence of Western postmodern critical theory. For instance, Zhang Yiwu, a leading advocate of postmodern theory whose influence earned him the title "Post Master," characterized the acute interest of the 1980s in Enlightenment thought as intellectuals' "indulgence" in and "unconditional subjection" to a Western discourse, a "mad infatuation with 'modernity'" (Zhang Yiwu, 1995: 132). Seen from this postmodern perspective, the cultural mainstream of the 1980s was channeled toward a "myth of modernity," an illusion of universal rights, reason, justice, freedom, and democracy, and this misguided effort finally culminated and collapsed in the democracy movement of 1989. Therefore, the major impact of the political upheaval of 1989 was seen in retrospect by China's postmodernists as "a farewell, a baptism, an abrupt rupture, a symbolic landmark" (Xie Mian and Zhang Yiwu, 1995: 10). That is to say, it marked the definitive end of a historical period plagued by

illusions of Enlightenment modernity and at the same time signaled the beginning of a new era in which China shook off the yokes of "Western cultural hegemony" and "became an untamable 'Other'" (Zhang Yiwu, 1995: 128). In an ambitious effort to periodize the 1990s, Zhang Yiwu, along with others, borrowed heavily from the debate in the West over modernity and postmodernity and designated 1989 as the outset of China's "Post–New Era." The term "Post" was adopted to indicate its radical departure from the "New Era" of the 1980s. According to this Post-New reading of recent history, until 1989, Chinese intellectuals had mistaken outmoded ideas for oracles of the future and hence subjected themselves to an old Western "power" called "knowledge of China"—that is, China as a "backward region yet to be modernized" (Zhang Yiwu, 1995: 131-32). Only in 1989 did China's cultural forefront, represented by the "new theoretical trend" of postmodernism, finally merge with that of the West. With the help of the brand-new Post-New theory, China was finally able to challenge its Western modernist "interpretation" or "representation" and appear in its true light under the postmodern sun. As they looked further back beyond the 1980s, the Post-New critics found a situation analogous to their own in the "Western postmodern masters'" radical break from modernism during the cultural revolt of 1968 (Xu Jilin, 1995: 131). With this typological discovery, China's postmodernism seems to have finally understood itself in the course of world history and, by cross-lighting, have been assured of its critical stand against China's 1980s.

The analogy is indeed traceable. In fact, considering that China was actually a point of reference for the Western left during the cultural revolt of 1968, the connection between 1989 and 1968 is even closer than the Post-New critics are willing to acknowledge. That is, both China's newly assigned postmodern status and its old revolutionary image, however different they may be otherwise, presuppose the irrelevance of Enlightenment modernity in contemporary China. Since this shared assumption has been a crucial link between Chinese and Western postmodernism, a brief review of China's modernization process is indispensable before we are able to proceed with any meaningful discussion about political implications of postmodernism in contemporary China.

As generally acknowledged, the May Fourth Movement signaled China's awakening to democratic modernity. Intellectuals of the May Fourth generation shared a firm conviction that in order for China to stand up and become a strong nation, it must learn from the West and both inform and transform itself with the spirit of science and the ideals of democracy. Therefore, China's modernization, as envisioned by the May Fourth intellectuals, had two closely related aspects: economic development guided by science and technology and establishment of humanist values and democratic systems. This is a simple, straightforward Enlightenment project formulated without ambiguity and without evasion. Taking it out of its specific Chinese context, one could easily dismiss it, as China's postmodern critics were to do years later, as a project for unconditional Westernization. However, considering this project in the Chinese context, we cannot but see that, first, by honestly admitting China's backwardness and unabashedly proposing to borrow from the West for self-help and self-empowerment, the May Fourth intellectuals were responding critically and prescriptively to a pervasive and pathetic malady caused by China's long tradition of imperial culture and more recent Western colonization—a mentality in which conceit (of China as the most civilized kingdom) and servitude (to foreign powers—"The moon is rounder above an alien shore," as the saying went) were strangely intertwined. One would be mistaken to assume that this combination of blind national pride and inferiority complex is out of date today; clearly, current postmodernist high fashion does not transcend it. Second, May Fourth intellectuals conceived China's Enlightenment project specifically as a revolutionary process battling evils both from within and from without: they called for criticism of China's feudalism as well as resistance to Western imperialism. In other words, while affirming the values of Enlightenment thought against China's feudalism, they were not unaware of the abuses of these values in world history, and most of them never conceived of China's modernization as a mere repetition of Western industrialization.

Indeed, as Mao Zedong observed, duplicating the history of Western industrialization was no longer possible in the age of imperialism. In the early stages of China's communist revolution, Mao was partially receptive to the May Fourth legacy. The communist policies and

strategies informed by the idea of "New Democracy," which Mao supported, received favorable responses from most Chinese intellectuals. Yet, Mao eventually rejected the May Fourth project and denied the values of Enlightenment modernity for contemporary China. Mao's antimodern stance became increasingly militant in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. He considered government policies pushing for economic and technological development to be direct challenges to the ideology of socialism. He categorically denounced the voices of democracy from intellectual circles as a sign of class struggle initiated by counterrevolutionaries. In the last twenty years of his life, Mao devoted himself to a series of political campaigns based on an assumption that directly challenged not only the May Fourth legacy but classical Marxism as well. That is, he believed that a revolutionary ideology alone could determine the course of history, that organized class struggle on the superstructural (or "cultural") level could popularize such an ideology and transform China from a "semi-colonial, semi-feudal society" into socialism. He was convinced that since the task was for China to bypass capitalism, the Enlightenment as the ideology of the bourgeois revolution posed the greatest threat to China's revolution and therefore must be categorically denounced. In the late 1960s, Mao formulated his "theory of continual revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat" and considered this theory his most significant contribution to Marxism. Lin Biao called it the "pinnacle in the development of Marxism." The Cultural Revolution as a "collective experiment" was in fact a full-scale experiment with this theory.

It is gravely ironic, however, that the Cultural Revolution as an ambitious future-facing endeavor to resist and transcend "bourgeois" modernity simply created new forms of age-old feudalism and brought China backward. Mao Zedong thought or Maoism, as it was known in the West, had led China's revolution to success in its early stages with principles and strategies based on Mao's insightful analysis of an essentially agrarian society under the yoke of imperialism and feudalism. Yet, as Maoism denied the potential role of Enlightenment humanism in China's development, it now revealed its severe limitations. Mao Zedong himself repeatedly reiterated that the ultimate purpose of the Cultural Revolution was to train "successors to the cause of revolution" so as to ensure that red China would never change its color. As a significant prelude to the Cultural Revolution,

Mao issued a directive to high-ranking officials that they study the story of Chulong admonishing Queen Dowager Zhao from a history of the Warring States Period. The story had served generations of rulers with a warning that their royal legacy would be endangered if the older generations of the royal family doted on their offspring with wealth and privilege without preparing them through experience for the future exercise of power. The directive certainly indicated Mao's genuine concern with the abuse of power by postrevolution high-ranking leaders. One could hardly doubt Mao's sincerity in worrying about the future of China's revolution. However, what Mao did not see and was not prepared to see is a subterranean current running beneath the smooth lines articulating his conscious mind, a ghost of the old obsession with power inheritance that occupied the minds of Chinese rulers for thousands of years. It was an anxiety, for emperors of royal lineage and successful leaders of peasant revolt alike, over an inevitable loss over time of the "rivers and mountains" they had fought so hard to possess. This unrecognized shadow of China's past loomed even larger during the Cultural Revolution.

Given this, it is little wonder that in the early stages of the Revolution, the process of mobilizing the masses was the same process of deifying the Great Leader. The cult of personality was now pushed to extremes. Mao had become not only "the great savior of China" but "the reddest, reddest sun in our heart" whose "bounties are vaster than the skies." The Cultural Revolution was supposed to dismantle old cultures and build a new one on their ruins. Yet the newly created cultural forms virtually combined the rites of imperial worship with those of a religious cult: the little red book of Chairman Mao's quotations had become China's bible (whose popularity abroad prompted the publication of a Bantam volume titled *Quotations from Chairman Jesus*). Every new directive from Mao was greeted as an imperial edict in huge gatherings all over the country. The daily ritual of the "morning request for instructions" (from Chairman Mao) and the "evening report" (to Chairman Mao on one's activities during the day) was for quite some time performed by almost everyone in front of Mao's portrait or statue. Needless to say, disrespect for Chairman Mao, even by just a slip of tongue, would be denounced as a most hateful crime. The Cultural Revolution was supposed to purge the Khrushchevs from the party leadership. The fact is, however, it simply presupposed the

existence of many while creating a real one: for his effort to idolize the Great Leader, Lin Biao the arch-opportunist was awarded the second most important position in the party leadership and received from the masses a daily prayer for his "everlasting health," which was rhetorically just a notch below the "boundless longevity," the grand salutation reserved only for Mao himself. Upon his fatal crash after an alleged coup attempt in September 1971, Lin Biao was accused of usurping the party and state leadership with a "dictatorship of feudal fascism." The term was by and large correct, and applicable not only toward Lin Biao. Yet Mao Zedong himself remained utterly unself-reflexive.

Class struggle is the trademark of radical Maoism. Its official practice during the Cultural Revolution, however, was pathetically anachronistic. While it professed to promote the hegemony of "proletarian" ideology, it actually reactivated and reinforced the feudalist ideology of inheritance: "Dragons beget dragons, phoenixes beget phoenixes, and mice breed offsprings digging holes beneath," as an early slogan of the Red Guards went. This practice ranked people according to their "family origins" and created a rigid caste system. "Origin" generally referred to a family's prerevolution (pre-1949) social and economic status. This was taken as an accurate indicator of the family members' ideological stands as well as their personal worth for at least three generations. The original list of enemy classes, or "black categories," was supplemented to include the targets of post-1949 political campaigns, such as the "Rightists" of 1957 and the "Capitalist Roaders" exposed during the Cultural Revolution. Though Mao Zedong once expressed reservations about the most extreme, and indeed fascist, form of classification called "blood lineage determination" (*xuetong lun* or *wei chengfen lun*), he never made an effort to stop its practice. As a result, people of the "black classes" were dehumanized as "monsters and demons" (*niu gui she shen*, a term that frequently appeared in party documents and *People's Daily* editorials), while their children and grandchildren were labeled as "sons of bitches" (*gouzaizi*). Consequently, atrocities (brutal humiliation, torture, killing of "class enemies," and even downright cannibalism) were committed in the name of class struggle. Betrayal (*beipan*: children with "bad family origins" were often forced and were sometimes willing to expose and denounce their parents) was given a positive revolutionary meaning.

With human dignity so brutally trampled, the Cultural Revolution marked one of the darkest moments in China's history.

Only against this background can we understand the timely interest of Chinese intellectuals and students in Enlightenment thought in the 1980s and their recognition of the values—and indeed, revolutionary values—of such concepts as reason, justice, freedom, democracy, human dignity, and human rights in contemporary China. Only against this background can we accurately assess the significance of the modernization project proposed by the May Fourth intellectuals. Only against this background can we understand that this project, especially in its social and political aspect, is no less relevant in China today than it was 80 years ago. Yet, as Post-New theorists attacked the liberalism of the 1980s and called for a critical reassessment of the May Fourth legacy as well, all this was conveniently ignored. Also ignored was the connection of Western postmodernism with the Cultural Revolution when Post-New critics enthusiastically embraced the former in 1989 and celebrated that year as China's moment of "abrupt rupture" from modernity, comparable to 1968 in the West. Given Western postmodernism's close connection with the theory of the Cultural Revolution and its gross misrepresentation of China's political reality, the validity of postmodernism in contemporary China cannot simply be taken for granted. However, just as this issue was raised, Zhang Yiwu was unwilling to confront it face-to-face; instead, he simply dismissed the challenge as based on an "extremely ludicrous logic," "as if the Chinese had only mainstream Western ideology to choose aside from the Cultural Revolution" (Zhang Yiwu, 1996: 139-40). He did not seem to be aware of a contradiction in his own argument: he implicitly denounced the Cultural Revolution but not its legacy in a postmodernist disguise. One wonders why the subject is so sensitive and whether Post-New theorists' enigmatic forgetfulness, evasiveness, lapse of logic, and even merely silence on the subject are not symptomatic of a subconscious repression of political memory, a Cultural Revolution complex, in Chinese postmodernism.

It should be noted that Post-New critics did not act alone in attacking the cultural mainstream of the 1980s and the democracy movement of 1989. In 1989, as in the late 1960s, China again drew the world's attention, this time with a genuine, spontaneous mass movement whose goal was diametrically opposed to that of the Cultural

Revolution. Some leftist intellectuals in the West again responded, yet this time quite predictably not with enthusiasm but with dismay, disbelief, and distrust, especially in regard to Chinese students' "emotional idealism that arises from desperation and that is displaced onto a fetish like the goddess of liberty" and to their failure "to understand the history in which the ideal of 'democracy' deconstructs itself in the West" (Chow, 1988: 28).[4] These intellectuals were soon to find themselves allied with China's own postmodernist critics, and indeed, their skeptical and critical response to China's democracy movement might have partially inspired would-be Post-New critics to revolt in the first place. No wonder that in an attempt to articulate his own critical judgment, Zhang Yiwu needs to refer the reader to an English article in which the "Goddess of Democracy" that Chinese students elected in Tian'anmen Square is interpreted as the "symbolism of the white-woman-as-liberty" projecting "a naive, idealistic clamor for democracy 'American style'" (Zhang Yiwu, 1995: 131; Chow, 1988: 27).

Behind postmodernists' unease toward the democracy movement of 1989 and their enduring sympathy for the ideology of the Cultural Revolution is a remarkably simple, consistent, yet nevertheless faulty logic: in their view, since the Enlightenment project has deconstructed itself in the West, such deconstruction must be of universal significance. Upon this conviction they cannot help but read China out of its context. However, the political implications and consequences of such a reading can be extremely troubling *in* the Chinese context. Just as Western leftist interpretations of the Cultural Revolution emphasized its "revolutionary" intent while never taking seriously the atrocities committed in the name of the revolution and therefore made a virtual apology for China's dark age, so the readings of 1989, by both Western and Chinese postmodernist critics, focused on young students' "infatuation" with a myth of democracy and offered little or no protest against the government's use of force against civilians. It is all the more disturbing to see how closely the sophisticated theoretical analysis of Western critics (say, the "Goddess of Democracy" as "symbolism of the white-woman-as-liberty") and the emotionally charged accusation from Post-New critics (of intellectuals' "indulgence" in and "unconditional subjection" to "a Western discourse," for instance) resemble the Chinese government's propaganda that "spiritual pollution" from the West was mainly responsible for the "turmoil" of 1989.

This unexpected, strange, and disheartening resonance of three voices following the roars of army tanks and guns defeats the rhetoric and theoretics of Post-New critics regarding what postmodernism means in contemporary China.

IV. THE "CRITIQUE" OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION FROM THE "NEW LEFT"

As Post-New critics busily appropriated Western postmodernism for cultural and intellectual consumption in China, a "New Left" front was formed overseas by a group of young Chinese scholars who had just finished graduate training and had begun university teaching. They were sufficiently exposed to a neo-Marxist line of contemporary Western theory that had been profoundly influenced by Maoism and by Mao's Cultural Revolution theory in particular. This exposure included a "China" constructed by neo-Marxist Western intellectuals (such as Jameson's China) that underscores their criticisms of the capitalist West but distorts China's actual political reality beyond recognition. Having lived through the Cultural Revolution, these Chinese scholars had the opportunity and the obligation to set the record straight. However, those on the "New Left" preferred to give up the real thing for fiction and managed to convince themselves that theory was more reliable than lived experience, that certain Western representations of China captured the essence of Chinese revolution to which the Chinese themselves had been blind. Then, it was their turn to help perpetuate the China myth in the West by amending its flaws with a Chinese "left-wing critique."

Cui Zhiyuan, for instance, calls for a reassessment of Mao's post-1956 radical policies, including those of the Cultural Revolution. Cui seeks to separate what he calls the "reasonable elements" in those policies from the unreasonable so that the former can be "reconstructed and reproduced under new circumstances" (Cui Zhiyuan, 1994: 7). One of the "reasonable elements," according to Cui Zhiyuan, is Mao Zedong's call to "repeat the Cultural Revolution every seven to eight years." "Today," Cui proposes, "we should institutionalize [Mao's directive] into periodic national elections, and this is the real essence of the 'democratic dictatorship of the people' or the

'dictatorship of the proletariat'" (Cui Zhiyuan, 1996: 47). Nothing in Mao's writings or actions suggests he would share Cui's belief that national elections are a logical extension of his directive. This argument reduces "Cultural Revolution" to popular participation in determining who holds power. But Mao's conception of "Cultural Revolution" focused on superstructural change through ongoing class struggle, and he rallied people not against Communist Party supremacy but against a segment of the party's leadership. In attempting to extract "reasonable elements" from the Cultural Revolution, Cui works toward a partial rehabilitation of the Cultural Revolution. This effort to apply "reconstructed" Maoist doctrines to contemporary China, while certain to appeal to some, depends on a distortion of Maoist intentions and practices.

Liu Kang's more elaborate assessment of Mao's legacy is a stronger Althusserian-style left-wing critique. Althusser considered most of his writings part of a "left-wing critique" of the "Stalinian deviation" from Leninism. Althusser's real concern was not Stalin but rather the "right-wing destalinisation" and the consequent debasement of socialism in general. Consequently, his "left-wing critique" was more a defense of Stalin than a criticism, though he did chide Stalin for focusing on economic performance and neglecting class struggle, thereby failing to prevent the Soviet Union's regression to capitalism in the hands of Khrushchev and other revisionists. Liu Kang finds his 1990s situation analogous to Althusser's in the early 1960s. Liu Kang is not really disturbed by the Cultural Revolution itself but rather by current "assaults" on it, supposedly from the right, and by the popularity of "economism" that replaces the ideology of the Cultural Revolution in China and endorses a modernization project "bereft of any clear vision and goal of socialism" (Liu Kang, 1995b: 19-20). He therefore believes a "left-wing critique" is much needed. Liu Kang evokes the phrase while evaluating Althusser's "unflinching faith in cultural revolution and ideological struggle" against "today's generally negative characterizations" of the Cultural Revolution:

> It would be too hasty to assert that Althusser's enthusiasm for the Chinese Cultural Revolution is totally unwarranted. Also, it would be too rushed to declare that "Althusser's elected alternative," namely the Chinese Revolution, "collapsed" altogether. Post-Mao China's

> debunking of radicalism and class struggle in the Cultural Revolution did register certain disillusionment and pessimism in Althusser's mind (and in the minds of many on the Western intellectual left). But this does not mean the collapse of the Chinese revolutionary legacy itself; a *left-wing* critique of it has yet to come. [Liu Kang, 1995b: 9]

This "left-wing critique" is no less ambitious than Althusser's since it promises to deliver the "many on the Western intellectual left" from the disillusionment and pessimism stemming from China's denunciation of its own Cultural Revolution legacy.

In fact, Liu Kang has already initiated the "critique," starting with a delineation of what he calls the "genealogy of theory" to highlight the "vital links between Mao Zedong's thought and contemporary critical thinking in the West" (Liu Kang, 1996: 145; 1995b: 10). In this genealogy, Maoism is both an influence and the frame of reference. It radiates through Althusser's theory of overdetermination, Foucault's "radical critique of Western liberal humanism," and Jameson's notion of "cultural revolution" (Liu Kang, 1995a: 105; 1995b: 1-25; 1993: 14, 37). Of particular significance on this family tree is the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, whose concept of hegemony and Mao's theory of cultural revolution is, Liu tells us, mutually illuminating. Borrowing from Gramsci and echoing a reading of China's revolution offered by Jameson and Dirlik, Liu Kang reformulates "cultural revolution" (as uncapitalized, and hence a more broad-ranging referent not limited to the Chinese 1960s) as "a process of constructing and consolidating a revolutionary hegemony" that best illustrates Mao's project of "making Marxism Chinese" and is therefore China's most distinct revolutionary legacy (Liu Kang, 1997: 17). Following Liu's logic closely, one cannot but wonder whether Liu Kang is trying to elevate Mao by tracing the ideas of influential Western critics back to him.[5]

What, then, is the critical edge of Liu's left-wing critique? Here is what Liu has to offer: Mao's great project of transcending modernity failed because, ultimately, he himself failed to fully break away from modernity. That is to say, in battling against economic determinism, Mao carried "cultural revolution" so far during the Cultural Revolution as to lapse into "cultural determinism." This, according to Liu, simply shows that Mao was "unable to transcend the determinist and essentialist epistemology of modernity" (Liu Kang, 1995b: 22). How-

ever, compared to the failure of the Cultural Revolution, the problems resulting from the complete negation of Cultural Revolution ideology by Mao's successors seem to him far more troubling, as is the acquiescence of the Western left. Liu Kang writes,

> The silence on Mao only indicates the extent to which Western academics on the left want to distance themselves from any revolutionary tradition. Revolution now seems condemned, as the "revolutionary" regimes have collapsed one after another. However much a revolutionary tradition like China's may embody a Third-World resistance to cultural imperialism and postcolonialism through cultural revolution, it is politically unwise to evoke it at present. Silence is perhaps the best choice to avoid any necessary trouble in the messy *realpolitik.* [Liu Kang, 1997: 78]

Liu is determined to shatter this silence. His "critique" is at once a call to arms against Enlightenment modernity as the root of evil and an enthusiastic pronouncement of "alternative modernity" as the ultimate good. In his view, Enlightenment modernity not only bound Marx with its "teleological, deterministic logic" but also lured Althusser and Mao into its invisible net after they freed Marx (Liu Kang, 1995b: 20). Now it is trying to hold China under its yoke and in so doing has effectively silenced those who formerly rebelled against it with the Chinese. As for "alternative modernity," Liu Kang offers something called "nation-building through revolution" as the best escape from the trap of Enlightenment modernity (Liu Kang, 1995a: 104). According to Liu, China, more than any other country, enjoys favorable conditions for accomplishing such a historic mission since in China "cultural hegemony has not yet become history" (Liu Kang, 1996: 142). Based on the lesson drawn from the "genealogy of Gramscian hegemony and Chinese cultural revolution," Liu calls for a reconception of "systematic transformations, rather than fragmented and partial alterations or shifts from one form of determination to another" (Liu Kang, 1997: 85). Here Liu Kang proposes to rectify the missteps of Maoism to liberate the "cultural revolution" legacy from the "determinist" logic of modernity and update it for current use. While this proposition is not yet fully developed, it is still important to note that it repeats the grave errors of Althusser's "left-wing critique"

of Stalinism. Just as Althusser's analysis of Stalin's economic determinism fails to explain the show trials and the gulag of the 1930s, so is Liu Kang's diagnosis of Mao's cultural determinism far from sufficient in explaining the epidemic of feudalism and fascism that led to massive atrocities during the Cultural Revolution. At the same time, while Althusser concedes at least some of Stalin's "crimes," Liu Kang does not indict Mao for his offenses.

Liu Kang's formulation of "alternative modernity" implies a strong critique of China's Post-New discourse. With Western theory's "Chinese connection" in mind, Liu finds it "ironic when postcolonialism is introduced into the fields of China studies as a new intellectual high fashion, to debunk the very Chinese revolutionary legacy that in certain ways has influenced leftist cultural criticism in the West" (Liu Kang, 1997: 70). Despite sharp theoretical differences between the imported postmodern/postcolonial discourse and an ultra-leftist line of neo-Marxism, however, the Post-New theorists and the New Leftists have so far remained close allies.[6] Their alliance, according to Liu Kang, is largely based on a common regard for what he calls a "critical theory" (Liu Kang, 1996: 144). This theory leads them to a shared assumption about the irrelevance of Enlightenment modernity in China. The Enlightenment project, both groups argue, is not only universally outmoded but is a lie—a pure "mystification" of power relations—in the first place. Consequently, they both dismiss liberal humanist ideals of reason, justice, democracy, and individual rights as myths of Western capitalism, the last thing China needs. Yet, this line of thinking is hardly new to the Chinese since the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was conceived by Mao as a battle against "bourgeois" ideology and a challenge to world capitalism. As they embrace Western "critical theory" and plant it in Chinese soil, the Post-New critics and the New Leftists do not seem mindful of a fairly common problem in the translation of ideas: the "critical" importance of a theory, when taken out of its own context, could turn into something conservative, anachronistic, or even regressive. The complicated intellectual history of the 1960s makes the uncritical reception of Western "critical theory" in post–Cultural Revolution China especially awkward and disturbing.

The ongoing debate over Chinese modernity needs to be integrated with critical reflection on the Cultural Revolution. In fact, the current debate was initially a direct reaction to the anti-modernist, anti-humanist, and ultra-leftist ideology of the Cultural Revolution. The early 1980s critique of the Cultural Revolution from the perspective of Marxist humanism embraced Enlightenment thought as something positive and necessary against the Cultural Revolution's feudalism in the guise of a "proletarian" revolutionary ideology. This critique also raised questions about how democracy may relate to a genuine socialism. Since the May Fourth Movement, such questions have hardly ever been absent from the political consciousness of Chinese intellectuals. Yet Mao, especially in his later years, considered democratic modernity and socialism to be diametrically opposed to each other and mutually exclusive. Except for claiming democracy subservient to a proletarian dictatorship, which is self-contradictory both in theory and in practice, rigid Maoist dogma associated democracy only with capitalism while conceiving of socialism and capitalism as two closed categories. Once Enlightenment thought was labeled "bourgeois," it became in Mao's mind the most dangerous threat to China's socialism and therefore had to be denounced as "rightist" (as in 1957) and purged by means of a "cultural revolution" (as in 1966). Even though the Chinese Enlightenment project was open to socialism and even though some Western democracies adopted certain socialist measures, a dualistic logic prevented Mao from considering the possibility of a socialist democracy or democratic socialism. The post-Mao Chinese government rejects Mao's ultra-leftist dogma of class struggle and puts in its place an economy- and technology-oriented modernization theory. But apparently not comprehending the gravest lesson of China's recent history, the government still refuses to come to terms with democratic modernity while cynically evoking the fear of the Cultural Revolution to justify its repression of pro-democracy voices. The Post-New theorists and the New Leftists, on the other hand, are either helplessly trapped in Mao's original dualism or simply ignorant of it, while sharing Mao's rejection of humanism and democratic modernity. Since they insist on interpreting China in light of Western "critical theory" and are largely unwilling to confront the specter of China's recent past in that theory, one wonders what imported post-modern intellectual high fashion offers China besides theoretical

confusion, historical amnesia, and perhaps something even more unimaginable and regressive.

NOTES

1. For discussions of Althusser's influence on postmodernism, see Callari and Ruccio (1996).

2. The essay first appeared in *New Left Review* 146 (July-August, 1984), pp. 53-92, before it was revised and reprinted as the first chapter of *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). The reference here is to the page numbers of this book.

3. The quotation is from "Periodizing the 60s," which first appeared in *The 60s without Apology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 178-209, and was reprinted in Jameson (1988). The reference is to the page numbers of the latter edition.

4. The July-August 1988 issue of *Radical America* that carries Chow's essay, written in 1989, was published on September 1, 1989. For an insightful analysis of the responses of the Western left to the 1989 democracy movement, see Zhang Longxi (1992).

5. Regarding the motivation of Liu Kang's "genealogy of theory," Zhang Longxi notes the apparently "axiomatic" logic in Liu's alignment of Mao with Foucault: "Despite the apparent complexity, Liu Kang's argument seems to rest on a simple premise: contemporary western theory with its rhetoric of politics is accepted as an absolute value with the power of legitimation in literary and cultural studies, so once Mao (that is, a local political theory and practice) is seen as in conformity with, and even anticipation of, Foucault (that is, western theory), Mao's views can be thought to have been validated through this connection" (Zhang Longxi, 1993: 89).

6. For a discussion of the ambiguous relationship between China's Post-New critics and New Leftists, see my "Politics of Othering and Postmodernization of the Cultural Revolution," forthcoming in *Postcolonial Studies* (Guo Jian, 1999).

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Guo Jian earned his doctorate at the University of Connecticut. He is an associate professor of English at the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater and is presently working on a historical dictionary of the Cultural Revolution and a book on the politics of memory in post–Cultural Revolution China.