

Chapter Title: CULTURAL REVOLUTION CULTURE AND POPULAR CULTURE:
THEORIZING PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCE

Book Title: A Continuous Revolution

Book Subtitle: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture

Book Author(s): Barbara Mittler

Published by: Harvard University Asia Center

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1x07z47.15>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

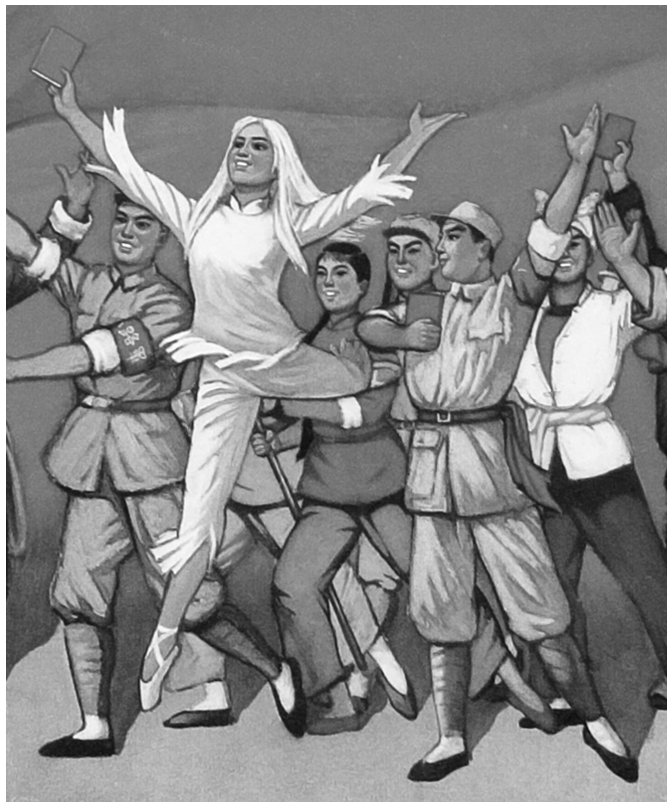
Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Harvard University Asia Center is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *A Continuous Revolution*

JSTOR

CONCLUSION



HANDS: TOUCH

How should I talk of the “culture” of the Cultural Revolution: it did not have any [没有文化]. (Huang Miaozi, 1913–)

To consider the Cultural Revolution as does the 1981 Resolution, as a cultural desert, is a view that should be rejected from my own point of view: it is not true. This definition is ideological and very simplified. We all don't think about it this way now. (Ethnomusicologist, 1940–)

We really felt very unhappy [不满足 *bu manzu*] with the restrictions of culture during the Cultural Revolution. (Journalist, 1946–)

Restrictions? Not really. . . . Even as a peasant, I could have bought the *200 Famous Foreign Songs* [外国名歌二百首]; I would have owned a radio so that I could hear all kinds of traditional theatrical forms, like dramatic ballads [弹词 *tanci*], Shanghai Opera [沪剧 *huju*], Cantonese opera [粤剧 *yueju*]. After the Cultural Revolution, on the other hand, there was no such thing anymore . . . the *Rice Sprout Song* [秧歌 *yangge*] and all that, it is all gone. All these different cultures are gone. Mine was not quite like the experience of other intellectuals, but they, too, would feel that culture now is rather more bland and monotonous [单调 *dandiao*] than before. (Musicologist, 1950s–)

The Cultural Revolution certainly destroyed Chinese culture. Very little of the traditional arts were preserved, only those few things that Jiang Qing happened to like. (Editor, 1930s–)

He: There are many different experiences, it depended on your age, for example. We were quite naïve and young. She: My older sister is a good example. Without the Cultural Revolution, she would have gone to university and been a doctor, but then the Cultural Revolution interrupted her schooling and she was sent down to the countryside and ended up a teacher. For her generation the Cultural Revolution was not a good experience. He: But on the other hand, even some of the worst things may have had good effect. She: There were victims, though. But as for people from my generation, I can say this for myself, to be sure, for me it was not that bad, I basically studied the arts. But older people who already had a family, they had a very hard time: so much work. They could just live from one day to the next. (Artist Couple; He, 1954–, She, 1959–)

Especially those old opera friends of my father's thought that these revolutionary operas were no good. They only served the revolution. (Journalist, 1946–)

At first, it appears that these years were a kind of blank [空白时期], but if we look back, there was something quite valuable in them, too. . . . In 1981, for example, I wrote a song for *pipa*. I had to rewrite it, and making use of my knowledge of mountain songs [山歌], I did. It is true that during the Cultural Revolution, one could actually learn quite a bit. Especially for those doing research on folk song and folk music, it was really very good. Every one of them had their musical outlook, and their universe of music broadened. (Ethnomusicologist, 1940–)

For me, these years were really lost and wasted [荒废 *huangfei*]. (Photographer, 1960–)

In order to live, the human being needs art and culture, just like you need bread to eat. During the Cultural Revolution, there was no real choice. You really had to find your own ways of getting things when you were hungry, and you did not always find something really tasty to eat. Whatever was offered, you would take. When you are really hungry, everything tastes good anyway. This is how we saw art and culture . . . If you compare it to before and after the Cultural Revolution, you realize there was much less abundance [丰富] during the Cultural Revolution. On the other hand, if you don't have this kind of experience, your individual experience may actually be quite rich: . . . it is like my finding Kafka during the Cultural Revolution: if I had not had the need to look for these things, I may not have found them. (Language Instructor, mid-1950s–)

The Cultural Revolution: Years of bitter happiness [苦乐年华 *kule nianhua*] (Anonymous Sent-Down Youth, cited in Davies 2007, 171)

CONCLUSION

CULTURAL REVOLUTION CULTURE AND POPULAR CULTURE: THEORIZING PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCE

My biggest mistake in trying to serve politics [为政治服务] was in rewriting the song “Socialism is good” [社会主义好]. I composed a variation on that [plays it on the piano, it is quite a parody]. They hated me for it! Those who are responsible for politics should do politics. But musicians are not politicians, so they cannot be responsible for politics either. (Composer, 1937–)

The Introduction to this book relayed a 1940s joke about Nazi Propaganda Minister Goebbels that played on the manipulative, insincere, and evil qualities of propaganda. In his study of early Chinese revolutionary art, David Holm relates to this idea and writes:

The general feeling is of course that propaganda is lies—in the words of Dr. Goebbels—and that therefore a study of propaganda will yield nothing of value except perhaps a moral lesson about the wickedness of a totalitarian regime. I would suggest that, on the contrary, propaganda is interesting—and revealing—precisely because it is an attempt to manipulate and persuade. (1984, 5)

Although cultural production during the Cultural Revolution was, theoretically speaking, an exceptionally politicized art form, in practice and experience it was not only denigrated and ignored, abhorred and feared, but liked and enjoyed as well. Much of it remains popular and relevant even today. In the Introduction, I put forth a number of tentative answers why this would be so. These were probed throughout the book. This Conclusion will attempt to touch ground again, offering, as did the Introduction, much evidence from oral history, from personal experiences, as well as some hands-on thoughts on how we could begin to theorize the experience of Cultural Revolution Culture, dealing with questions of its grammar and rhetoric, of space and of time.

Propaganda’s Grammar

Clad in red clothes,
(s)he stood on top of the cliff,
pointed in the right direction
and sang a song of praise to the Red Sun.
(Poem about the model works, from a collection of Cultural Revolution jokes)¹

When Wang Ban asks himself uneasily how it came to be that “politics can be made to look and feel like art” and how politics can “take on an intensity, passion, pleasure, and pain of the individual’s lived experience” (Wang 1997, 15), his question is based on the implicit assumption that politics

1. *Wenge xiaoliao ji* 1988, 147. The poem reads: 身穿红衣裳, 站在高坡上, 挥手指方向, 歌颂红太阳.

and art, or propaganda and art, are at antipodes, never to be reconciled. When the composer quoted above advocates a separation between (or the autonomy of) art and politics, he, too, agrees with this basic assumption. In my attempt to see with fresh eyes what I have called “**Cultural Revolution Culture**”—a phenomenon that has turned out to be much more expansive, both in space and in time, and could more aptly be called “revolutionary” or “Socialist” rather than just “Cultural Revolution” culture—I have attempted to avoid commonplace distinctions between high and “pure” art and low and “dirty” politics² but focused instead on the dynamics between these poles, which is where the experience of Cultural Revolution Culture seems to be played out.

Although Cultural Revolution Culture is indeed very political and extremely predictable, as hinted at in the poem above, and although, as one contemporary put it, the reform of Chinese opera and of other Chinese artistic forms during the Cultural Revolution had only one purpose—“We all were supposed to love Mao!” (Musician, 1930s)—it may be important to consider that propaganda as art is not an invention of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao, or the Cultural Revolution, but a long-term Chinese reality. Richard Kraus puts this succinctly:

China’s arts have long existed in greater intimacy with the state than is typical in the West. Imperial grandeur and Maoist revolution both presumed that art would serve the state; while few artists attained positions of power, emperors, ministers, and Communist officials took care to present themselves as serious poets, calligraphers, and connoisseurs of painting. Art was twinned with power in a political culture in which claims to authority could be validated by association with beauty or undermined by poor aesthetic achievement. Morality was understood to be revealed through beauty, and Chinese politicians accordingly enfolded themselves in the habiliments of culture. In imperial times, politics and society were loosely enough ordered that this tradition allowed a great deal of slack for much cultural life to thrive at some remove from the state. The Chinese revolution’s modernizing project reorganized society more tightly, so that the traditional linkage of art and morality became an intense politicization of the arts. After 1949 it became increasingly difficult for artists to stand back from the Party’s cultural policies. The Cultural Revolution (1966–76) was the climax of this trend. (2004, vii–viii)

Political art, then, or propaganda, may have been a standard more easily accepted in China than elsewhere, which may have tilled the ground to make way for the success of Cultural Revolution Culture. Even more importantly, however, it may have been the very language of Cultural Revolution propaganda, its style and grammar, that ensured its longevity in spite of all the drastic political turns that China underwent before and after this period. Within Cultural Revolution Culture, all the typical elements outlined in an *ABC of Propaganda* are present:³ the *name-calling*—for example, “revisionist,” “capitalist,” “slave-holder,” “landlord,” “aristocrat”—to stimulate hate and fear and at the same time to create “empty signifiers” into which people could project whatever they wished; the *glittering generalities* that only the sun—Chairman Mao and his representatives—know how to save the people, only they know who is truthful, what is freedom, where is justice; the *transfer* of authority, sanction, and prestige of something generally respected and revered—such as the canonized words of the sages or the Confucian Analects, or belief in the kitchen god—onto something the propagandist would have us accept—Mao Zedong Thought and the *Little Red Book*, or the Chairman’s portrait, for example.⁴ And there is *testimonial* to bolster an idea or plan by

2. See Wang 1997, 15–16.

3. The propaganda characteristics mentioned in the following lines are enumerated in a 1930s handbook for propaganda discussed in Sproule 1997, 135.

4. See descriptions in Wang 1997, 215, who also notes how the Cultural Revolution perpetuated many traditional ritual forms, an aspect also discussed in ter Haar 2002 and Landsberger 2002.

using a statement from some recognizable figure—by use of heroes who themselves agree with heroes who in turn listen to the main hero: Mao Zedong. Perhaps most importantly, ordinary, *plain folks*, by reinscribing those very heroes—Yang Zirong, Jiao Yulu, the Foolish Old Man, Hong Changqing, and even Mao Zedong—wise and good as they are, as ordinary “*wie Du und ich*” in order to court the public by appearing one *with* them by being one *of* them.

The use of *hyperbole* (depicting paradisiac, dreamlike life “on a higher plane”) and *redundancy* (elements of serialism, intertextuality, and repetition)—the cross-referential, parodic nature (practicing “repetition with a difference” by making “classical” patterns recur in ever new forms) of this multimedia art⁵ in which the Foolish Old Man might appear in many a *Three Character Classic*, Mao’s portrait in comics and operas, Mao songs and quotations from his writings in the model works, as well as *Three Character Classics* or model stories, while Beijing Opera gestures and masks are used in ballet and painting, symphonic elements in opera and so on—as well as *multiplication* (the appearance of a propageme in various materialities, which makes it possible for it to be adapted to almost all the routines of daily life, even if they are in constant flux),⁶ all of which leads to *overdetermination*, where everything has to do with very few essential contents and one of these very essential contents is Mao, the sun and savior, himself. Last but not least, the constant acts of *embodiment*—of performing, singing, painting, writing, living the propaganda message, of “acting revolutionary opera and becoming revolutionary people” as Chen Xiaomei puts it (Chen 2002, 248), i.e., the agency involved in the making as well as the receiving of this propaganda art. All of these create a mix whose power lay not so much in its educational or ideological message as in its Durkheimian “**mythical atmosphere**” and, accompanying this, its “affective aura,” which was, accordingly, permeating various fixed forms and prescribed activities—or “rituals.”⁷

Ritual may be mesmerizing and hypnotic and thus lead to conviction by consent. According to one contemporary, “Revolutionary ritualization made life an interminable round of talking, performing, singing, chanting, criticizing. In this repetitive beat, time seemed to cease to exist, for every moment was the same as the next; every act was identical to another” (Wang 1997, 218). Thus, he continued to reflect, a person’s “emotion is capable of being modified and re-educated, one’s aesthetic taste and unconscious cravings can be trained, altered, and then pushed in the service of the authoritarian order” (ibid., 217). One artist couple supported this observation:

First, it was not a question of whether you liked the propaganda or not, you just *had* to listen. But then, really, we also did not feel that opposed [反感 *fan’gan*] to it. The propaganda was actually quite successful; it was good for the majority of the people [老百姓]. Of course, the intellectuals did not like it that much, but the people generally liked it. I guess, we were very naïve [盲目 *mangmu*] then. We actually thought that to have a picture of Mao at home was quite nice. Only because we think differently now, we should not discredit [怀疑 *huaiyi*] what we did then. We quite believed in Mao then. He was like a god for us, and we also paid reverence to him in the morning and in the evening. That was what it was like. We would wish him a long, long life even before we ate [万寿无疆, 毛主席, 万岁, 万岁, 万万岁]. Not every day, perhaps, but in school, before every class we would do that. We would also sing [they get up, singing and dancing] “Our dearest Chairman Mao is the Sun in our hearts” [亲爱的毛主席是我们心中的红太阳]. We would sing and dance this and then start class. (Artist Couple; She, 1959–, He, 1954–)

5. Wang 2004 studies this in other (literary) works of revolutionary art, not only from the Cultural Revolution.

6. Cf. Wang 2004, 178 and Winter 1997, 81.

7. See Durkheim 1926; Wang 1997, 216.

By means of its grammar and style, then, propaganda is capable of intensifying existing trends of choice, to sharpen and focus them and, above all, to lead them to *action*. This is especially so if propaganda is able to fill a *need* (Qualter 1985, 88). Some, who had been cast out of the stabilizing groups such as family, home, or religious faith during the Cultural Revolution, as they or their family members were sent down to the countryside or made to labor in the factories, were “thrown back” upon their own resources and experienced isolation, loneliness, and ineffectuality. In this situation, propaganda gave them “a *raison d'être*, personal involvement and participation in important events, an outlet and excuse for . . . doubtful impulses, righteousness.” Indeed, the propagandist depends on the “intense collaboration of the propagandee” who must become a believer (Kellen 1965, n.p.). Here, social setting is extremely important. Individuals acquire many of their attitudes and values ready-made from the groups to which they feel they belong. This narrows the effective choices they make and their willingness to believe:

We actually were much more impressed by the propaganda than the generation before us. Those who had experienced the 1950s had their difficulties. They had experienced hunger and all that. But now society had already become very stable. We were quite happy, and indeed, the Communist Party seemed really great to us. They gave us a healthy and simple life. The life of the poor had been improved. It may have been similar to the early Nazi period. There was some repression, but that was not the main thing! What's more, we really thought the things they said were bad were in fact bad. (Writer, 1958–)

It is propaganda's standard desire to persuade through symbolic communication, and its grammar and style are adapted accordingly (Qualter 1985, 120–24). Yet, it does not always succeed. A propaganda message “may be ignored, discounted, misinterpreted, quickly forgotten, or simply absorbed into the existing attitude set.” If the “recipient modifies it by personal interpretation . . . the understanding and effect may not be that intended by the sender” (*ibid.*, 81). Not everyone followed the rituals enacted in Cultural Revolution propaganda. In spite of its abundant use of persuasive rhetoric, generational as well as individual differences influenced people's willingness to accept propaganda's message:

My father did not like the model works, and he would criticize Jiang Qing and her reforms at home. If this had been heard by the neighbors, it would have been very dangerous, so I always asked him to speak more softly. I myself felt that these revolutionary operas were in fact a sign of progress [进步 *jīnbù*], so I tried to moderate him. There were some children who accused their parents. I did not do that. My father was very outspoken, but he would not say anything in public. (Journalist, 1946–)

As for literature, this emphasis on class struggle, all the way into the individual psyche of the protagonists, makes for the fact that these characters are all the same and that it is quite monotonous. It seemed that if you thought something was interesting, it was sure to be criticized. I really like reading novels, but not these . . . During the Cultural Revolution, there was nothing worth looking at. In terms of music and art, Cultural Revolution propaganda was quite impressive, but not in literature. (Musicologist, 1950s–)

From these testimonies, and from the evidence presented throughout this book, we must acquiesce that “The impact and power of propaganda to produce change or maintain stability, depends less upon the professional skills of the propagandist and more on the psychological state of the audience” (Qualter 1985, 87). Propaganda is an interactive process, with response dependent upon the background of each individual. Both the audience as homogenous mass and the “omnipotent propagandist” are fictional characters in a story with unpredictable outcomes (*ibid.*, 87).

Propaganda's Space

During the Cultural Revolution, everything was controlled from above. As a student of the journalism school, I had to learn according to Mao's teaching methods; there was no question of being willing to follow or not, you just *had* to follow. (Journalist, 1946–)

The idea that the China of the Cultural Revolution was the realm of the “omnipotent propagandist,” a space completely occupied by propaganda, is paradoxical, because the onset of the Cultural Revolution brought the dissolution of the old Central Propaganda Department.⁸ Many of the art forms that spontaneously erupted, and later became emblematic of the cultural experience of the Cultural Revolution (perpetuating what was standard in official propaganda and sometimes also more), such as loyalty dances and quotation gymnastics, Red Guard newspapers and (comic) art, alike, were criticized and suppressed by the center.⁹ Propaganda art, then, can be read both as top-down manipulation and as an opportunity for agency from below, and again, this agency was not always completely “unexpected” or “accidental”: at certain, often very short-lived, historical junctures (the Red Guard movement being one example), it was in fact part of the top-down intentions, too. Complicity between “the Party” and “the People” (neither of which can be considered monolithic) is in fact much more commonplace than one would assume, and the unfolding contradictions and their resolutions during and after the Cultural Revolution also proved the Party's very flexibility.¹⁰

On the other hand, **the participatory nature of Communist propaganda** accommodates the inevitable dilution of state-initiated narratives (Schrift 2001, 7). Put differently, this also means that the Party's ability to control is far less absolute than is often assumed, and at no time is this more (and less) so than during the Cultural Revolution. The mobilizing, inspirational, energizing, and populist character of mass politics during the Cultural Revolution meant that we have many individualized and localized experiences of the spread and reach of Cultural Revolution official and unofficial propaganda. One woman, originally from Beijing, reported that when she was sent to the countryside in 1969, she had never seen a loyalty dance before: “In the countryside, I saw it for the first time, but did not know what it was. Some things really did not happen in Beijing” (Housewife, 1950s–). Another maintained that much of the official mass culture, even the model works, never reached the part of the countryside where she was staying: “That rich cultural fabric, Cultural Revolution Culture, was in fact quite elitist, an urban, city culture.” She also noted that, in the Northeast, where she was living then, people had other things to worry about: “They were occupied with much more basic things then. All the babies died in the first year I was there, for example, because of malnutrition” (University Professor, mid-1950s–). The army, on the other hand, appears to have been a stronghold for all kinds of artistic experiences, not just official propaganda:

We watched movies all the time, many of them such as *Daughter of the Party* [党的女儿], *Red Children* [红孩子], *Heroic Sons and Daughters* [英雄儿女], *Landmine War* [地雷战], from before the Cultural Revolution. We would watch them all the time. We also watched a lot of Russian films, not just *Lenin in 1918*. Watching films of almost any kind was really no problem for us. (Librarian, mid-1950s–)

8. Leese 2006, 56.
9. Leese 2006 gives many examples of such criticism from the center, which ended up being more or less ineffectual, however. This is one more sign of the anarchy that the cultural experience of the Cultural Revolution was in very practical terms.
10. It is for another book to discuss in greater detail Red Guard Art and Red Guard Media as those art forms that most clearly demonstrate the production of “propaganda art” as a self-organized, self-initiated grassroots activity. This study has not been able to do justice to this quest.

Among the relatively small sample of people interviewed for this book, most of whom came from urban areas (while many of them spent long sojourns in the countryside), memories of Cultural Revolution propaganda vary substantially with age, class, and locality. Their experiences illustrate the importance of delving deeper into the multiple Cultural Revolutions that took place in multiple spaces, geographically as well as sociologically. Most importantly, it is time to let the peasants and the workers speak for themselves. Although it is something this book has not been able to do, their voices—so often muted—have been heard in Han Dongping’s pioneering work (Han 2008) and in some of the essays collected in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History* (2006) and *Re-Envisioning the Chinese Revolution* (2007).¹¹ We need to listen more closely to these multiple voices in order better to explain some of the repercussions of Cultural Revolution propaganda in China’s cultural production today: is it the power of revolutionary propaganda that has taken hold of peasants who treasure fond memories of Mao and his times?

Their affection for Mao often appears rooted in elements that we consider integral to the official and unofficial propaganda messages of the Cultural Revolution, for example anti-Japanese resistance and the defeat of the Nationalists, both of which are immediately associated with Mao’s leadership and appear as dominant themes within many of the model artistic works discussed here (Pickowicz 2007, 46). In the 2002 Liaoyang protests involving some 30,000 workers from as many as twenty factories, workers marched down the streets carrying a huge portrait of Mao taken from one of the worker’s homes. They explained that by taking the Mao portrait (which was eventually—and somewhat paradoxically—confiscated by police), they wanted to illustrate the contrast they felt between the past and the present. Their collective memories of the Maoist era, clearly infused with propagemes from official propaganda, were at the heart of their demands for a standard of justice now lost in reform (Lee 2007, 160): “In those days, we were paid only 20 yuan, but we felt secure because we were never owed any wages. That’s the superiority of socialism” (ibid., 158–59).

These workers’ responses were not that singular, however: Maoist propaganda was not totalistic and universalized enough (can propaganda ever be?) to ensure that all workers throughout China “project the Maoist period as fairer to the working class than the present day” (Unger and Chan 2007, 133). Indeed, some argue the opposite, saying that they feel “entitled today to generous treatment by enterprises precisely because they had materially sacrificed and been deprived during the decades under Mao”; it is not a general rule that one can find a portrait or other memento of Mao hanging in a worker’s home (ibid.).

The idea, then, that the China of the Cultural Revolution was a space of total propaganda, the propagandist omnipotent, must appear paradoxical in view of the different memories it produced. It is also paradoxical in view of the astounding, yet deeply under-researched, evidence of alternative spaces (and thus experiences) of cultural life during the Cultural Revolution—those that took place behind closed doors and in undisclosed niches underground. A musicologist and a playwright, both in their teenage years during the Cultural Revolution, remember some of these alternative artistic spaces:

Yes, there were these songs by the sent-down youth [知青歌 *zhiqingge*] and there was hand-copied literature [手抄本 *shouchaoben*], too. I still have all the handwritten copies I made of this. When you look back over them, you realize that these works were not really deep, indeed, kind of trivial [流行]. They were often written in great haste, too. The songs were an important stock for later pop songs, although in the beginning, directly after the Cultural Revolution, these songs were forbidden, quite strictly. It did not matter; they were in my head, anyway. (Musicologist, 1950s–)

11. Neither of these books deals first and foremost with art and culture during the Cultural Revolution, however.

We were able to watch quite a few films that were actually only for “internal distribution” [内部 *neibu*]. Some of them were really interesting. We realized that there are worlds that are totally different to our own daily experience, which was all about “criticize this, criticize that.” So, watching these was great. But, of course, not everybody had this kind of opportunity. Then, there were these novels we exchanged. Again, most of them only for “internal distribution,” Russian, German, and Japanese stories: I even read Hitler and Goethe. Again, we were really impressed: each of them opened up such a different world from ours. . . . The influence of these kinds of books was very strong. After Nixon’s visit, when all these foreign orchestras came, this was a big change, once more. There had been so much repetition of songs during the first half of the Cultural Revolution, although, even then, we would sing some songs about love and all that, from the *200 Famous Foreign Songs*, for example, or humoristic songs. This kind of music was totally different from the mainstream, of course. And there were these popular songs, too, that were invented then. . . . The longer the Cultural Revolution lasted, the more restrictions there were. But the underground culture was extremely rich [丰富 *fengfu*]. In fact, it was so strong because there was all this repression. Of course, it was not permitted to engage in all of this, and the Security Bureau [公安局 *gong’anju*] would often come to our school and check. But we would copy that stuff nevertheless. A lot of it was about love, and of course, if you talk about love, then you don’t love Mao. . . . But anyhow, it was possible to somehow go against the tide with this literature. (Playwright, 1956–)

This book has mentioned, here and there, some of the secret reading, painting, and listening to music that took place during the Cultural Revolution. Throughout, reference to this clandestine enjoyment of works of art has served to show how the official propaganda art discussed here was unofficially contextualized. In this study, these memories of alternative cultural consumption have, however, only served as pointers. The works themselves have not actually been analyzed in detail. Future histories dealing with the cultural experience of the Cultural Revolution, however, ought to engage with this legacy of underground and alternative as well as semi-alternative/semi-official (for example, Red Guard) cultures: the hand-copied works as well as the translations from foreign literatures, literary and philosophical works from the Chinese traditional canon, foreign and Chinese music and film, as well as painting traditions, and the many compositions, texts, and artworks that were created only to be hidden for some time from the public.

In addition, a wealth of official art that did not become model art but that was nevertheless performed, read, and practiced throughout the Cultural Revolution, locally, as well as nationally, should be (re-)considered. Only by highlighting these neglected works, as well as the underground popular arts created at the local and grassroots levels, can we begin to capture the diversity and complexity that characterized cultural life in China during the Cultural Revolution; only then is it possible to understand the strong competition that Cultural Revolution propaganda was faced with and why—in spite of everything else that happened during those years—it has been able to remain popular decades later.

Here emerges one more spatial dimension of Cultural Revolution Culture that has only been mentioned in passing in this study: it is one that transcends China’s territory, as recent successful auctions in Sotheby’s and more distant responses like Andy Warhol’s *Mao* series from the early 1970s show.¹² The story of the international repercussions and transcultural dimensions of Cultural Revolution cultural experiences should be told in another book. We know that Jiang Qing loved to watch Hollywood movies, but which ones did she see and how did they influence her conception of the model works? And did they influence the many changes she suggested that, in post-Cultural Revolution polemics, eventually made the elephant look anything but like an elephant—in other words, revolutionary Beijing opera no longer Beijing opera? Chinese artists were trained on

12. See Paul 2009 for uses of the Mao portrait in contemporary foreign art.

Russian models, but which of the many Mao portraits used which models? And why? Were audiences ever aware of this? If Stalin, too, is the sun, his physical body a signifier for nature just like Mao's became, can we make out the flows between one iconographic culture and another?¹³ How did they translate into audience reception?

There were flows in both directions, as Europe, and the West more generally, have extensively used the propagemes from Cultural Revolution propaganda since the days of the 1960s student movements.¹⁴ This in turn caused a sense of competition in the Soviet Union, as one contemporary observer noted:

The deification of Mao during the Cultural Revolution was carried beyond Chinese borders to the Communist parties in Asia, Europe, Africa, Australia and other parts of the world. Mao's extreme revolutionary program appealed chiefly to a younger generation of Communists, impatient with the policy of the Soviet Union and of Communist parties acting under Soviet direction. . . . The *Little Red Book* . . . became a propaganda tool abroad affecting students far beyond the membership of the Communist political organization. In many non-Communist countries, radical Maoist student groups supported what were characteristically simplistic and sloganized expressions of their hazy revolutionary thoughts. The Soviets were naturally very concerned with this Maoist challenge which threatened the Soviet world role as the leading Communist power and even challenged the orthodox Communist system itself in an attempt to build a worldwide Maoist leader cult. In reaction, propaganda emanating from Moscow more and more maligned Mao as a "petit bourgeois fanatic," a type of anarchist who had never truly understood Marxism-Leninism. (Michael 1977, 177)

Thus, the popularity of Cultural Revolution propaganda is clearly not just a Chinese internal affair but should be reconsidered from quite a few spaces far removed.¹⁵ These transcultural flows of Maoist propaganda and people's individual experiences with this propaganda have seldom been traced and described in detail.¹⁶ The history of Maoist propaganda and its legacy beyond China, as well as its flows back into China, in turn remains largely unwritten. What appears to be crucial in future studies of Cultural Revolution Culture, then, is a focus on the international, the national, as well as the local and the personal dimensions of this experience.

Propaganda's Time

I don't agree with the term "Ten-Year Cultural Revolution" [十年文革 *shinian wenge*]. This is very simplistic and not really adequate to the situation. If you look at it objectively, there is no such thing as a "Ten-Year Cultural Revolution." (China Historian, 1957-)

Propaganda's space, although officially delineated as covering the entire nation, in actual practice still shows a lot of patches on the map. Similarly, propaganda's time, even though officially declared, must remain contested. With the 1981 Resolution, the Cultural Revolution was fixed as the decade between 1966 and 1976. Historical writing has followed in step. The idea that for ten years, the China of the Cultural Revolution was the realm of the omnipotent propagandist, a space of total propaganda, is not paradoxical to those who believe in this periodization. But it tallies not with the cultural experience of the Cultural Revolution, which was felt quite differently:

13. See HRA 2008 *The Sun*; Plamper 2003, 24–26.

14. See *Kulturrevolution als Vorbild* 2008.

15. Grossberg 1997, 17.

16. Diehl 2006 is a first work that goes in this direction.

The ten years were not always the same; the real Cultural Revolution was between 1966–68. After 1969 things were not the same. We thought it was very strange to continue to call what followed a “Cultural Revolution” [文革 *wenge*]. Later, during movements like the Anti-Confucius Campaign, the feeling was similar again, but not the general atmosphere to be sure. (China Historian, 1949–)

In the 1970s, our classical training was really not bad at all. Before, however, there had been no real teaching of this tradition: we had just read modern literature. Teaching the Classics ended with the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. So, really, the Cultural Revolution is more like two periods: in the 70s things changed a lot. (Musician, 1930s–)

Between 1966 and 1976, in these ten years—no, really, the end was really 1974—in these eight years, then, I did not play the *guqin* at all. I don’t know about others, but I simply did not have the time to play. My father continuously played, he would play these revolutionary songs like “Red Is the East,” on the *guqin*. He had done that even before the Cultural Revolution. After 1974, all earlier activities were resumed; the experts were again engaged. So, in 1975, we even went to Japan as part of a performing troupe [艺术团 *yishutuan*], and I went, too, playing both *pipa* and *guqin*. (Guqin Player, 1940s–)

During the first part of the Cultural Revolution, his experience was really cruel [残 *can*], but in the second part [the 1970s] they felt they could make use of him again, so then they asked him to come back. But they wanted him to change his art of painting nevertheless. (Cartoonist’s son about his father, born in the 1910s)

As for the “Ten-Year Cultural Revolution,” if you separate the period from the point of view of politics and propaganda, then 1966–68 was perhaps the strongest period; the next began after Lin Biao’s death in 1971. At that time, we really thought that Mao was a kind of god, but now that Lin Biao, who had preached the faith, died, there was a big change. This was a new period in the Cultural Revolution. In 1973–74 the publishers started publishing again. Zhou Enlai was strong. In 1974–75 the “Gang of Four” tried a comeback. (Editor, 1930s–)

One of the greatest problems with discussions on the Cultural Revolution and Cultural Revolution Culture is the fact that they are formulated as statements about a static ten-year period. Yet, vast differences exist in terms of cultural and artistic practice and experience between the mid-1960s and the 1970s. The mid-1960s, as the most brutal and destructive period, saw the murderous mass campaigns of the first few years of the Cultural Revolution, the unleashing of the largely self-organized Red Guard artist movement, the campaign to “Smash the Four Olds” (破四旧 *po sijiū*), and the beginnings of the Mao Cult as well as free revolutionary travel (大串联 *da chuanlian*). This was followed, beginning in 1968, by massive moves of educated youth (知青 *zhiqing*) sent down to the countryside. In the early 1970s, the tides changed as Nixon’s visit brought Ping-Pong diplomacy and paved the way for other visits by foreign sportsmen, orchestras, musicians, and more, as well as many a national exhibition, even during the height of the Anti-Confucius Campaign. The final years of the Cultural Revolution canonized the “Establishment of the Four News” (立四新) with the filming and nationwide distribution of the model works, and signaled a return to intellectual engagement with the reopening of universities and journals that had temporarily been closed since the late 1960s.

Many interviewees would contrast what they made out as two very distinct periods of cultural and artistic experience, and these experiences were reflected materially in the artworks produced and openly enjoyed (or not) during particular times:

In the mid-1960s, the piano teachers would teach variations of “Red Is the East,” for example. Chopin and other such music was not played—at least not in the open. It simply was hidden. After 1972, however, anything was free and there was no trouble at all anymore. That is when people stopped worrying about playing these things, too! (China Historian, 1957–)

My generation listened to and sang a lot of songs from Albania, for example. We also watched Romanian and Vietnamese and Korean films. Vietnamese films in particular were very good. In the

1970s we could watch them, while in the 1960s this was much more difficult. After Lin Biao's death, however, many things seemed to be possible again. (Writer, 1958–)

I think the second half of the Cultural Revolution was really the best time. During the first half, there was a lot of open criticism, but in the second half, this was much less obvious. In the 1970s quite a few really very good national-style paintings [国画 *guohua*] were produced. (Art Historian, 1940s–)

A very strong impression from the later years of the Cultural Revolution is when I was driving a car to the Beijing train station. I suddenly felt very strange. Why? Because the stores on Wangfujing [王府井] were no longer decked out as “worker-peasant-soldier stores” [工农兵商店 *gongnongbing shangdian*]. No longer were they all called “Red Sun whatever.” Instead, they used the old names again. It really gave us a feeling that things had changed. The memory of the Cultural Revolution was still very strong: of looting homes [抄家 *chaojia*] or beating people to death. But now, suddenly, this was over. (Playwright, 1956–)

Apart from these memories, which seem to suggest a split of the cultural and artistic experience of the Cultural Revolution into at least two parts, quite a few people would offer alternative periodizations, depending on what they considered the most important element in the experience of Cultural Revolution Culture. Only for some, things had immediately and drastically changed in 1976. In the memory of one housewife, for example, being able to listen to Chen Gang and He Zhanhao's *Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto* again on the radio was a clear marker of the end of the Cultural Revolution and its culture: “After the Cultural Revolution, at New Year's, there would be the *Butterfly Lovers*. This was really quite a success. So then I thought: society is changing!” (Housewife, 1950s–). Others did not feel the change was palpable until the 1980s (but had really been anticipated during the Cultural Revolution years themselves):

There was a big change in personal lifestyle after the beginning of the reform policies [改革开放 *gaige kaifang*]. This began not in 1976, but more in 1979. Or, one could also say, it really started in the 1980s, because the economic development caused many changes. Already in the second half of the Cultural Revolution, there were many connections to the outside world, however. And so one can say that many of the changes we felt later actually had begun then! But the death of Mao in 1976 made a big difference. Therefore, 1976 was a break—it's just that its effects were more clearly felt with the rise of Deng Xiaoping a few years later. Economic development was something that did not play a role during the Cultural Revolution; it was all about politics. So that is the big difference. (University Professor, mid-1950s–)

For many, then, the ten-year period might even be extended in one or the other direction: for one interviewee, the characteristic feature of his particular cultural experience in the Cultural Revolution was its restrictions on traditional Chinese culture, especially the Confucian canon. He said: “Basically, this began in 1963 and was only recovered in the 1980s” (Ethnomusicologist, 1940–). He also reckoned that his sojourn in the countryside was a distinct period of artistic experience for him, during which he (and others with the same background) were immersed in local music traditions. Yet this, too, extended beyond 1976:

From 1973–78, I was in Shandong. I learned an enormous amount about local popular music traditions [民间音乐 *minjian yinyue*]. I analyzed them, studied folk songs [民歌 *min'ge*], the local operas [地方戏 *difangxi*], and participated in the writing of their history. I also learned a lot about the storytelling traditions [说唱 *shuochang*] and percussion [打鼓 *dagu*] and all that. I also went to listen to wind-and-percussion performances [吹打 *chuida*]. There were all these very good performers. I was immersed in it and learned a lot from it! (Ethnomusicologist, 1940–)

Discussing alternative periodizations of the Cultural Revolution experience, interviewees often ended up adopting a *longue durée* approach: some would see connections with the early years of

the People's Republic, others all the way into the present. Interviewees marked changes over time while also observing the qualities of "continuous revolution" in their experience with propaganda art. **The idea, then, that the Ten-Year Cultural Revolution was exceptional and unprecedented is relativized in these descriptions, which describe it as one among so many moments during which culture became an object of political power play:**

It really depends from what point of view you look at it. In terms of culture, there was a lot of continuity between 1964 and 1978. Surely, the dispersal of the Gang of Four [四人帮] in 1976 was an important step, but then Hua Guofeng, who caught them, in fact favored the artistic styles of the Cultural Revolution, and accordingly, the art surrounding him was really quite "Cultural Revolutionary." He hoped that in terms of propaganda culture the Cultural Revolution would continue.

But if you think about it, these Cultural Revolution styles go back even further: already in 1962, there was an attack on Beethoven. Mao's call to "never forget class struggle" [千万不要忘记阶级斗争 *qianwan bu yao wangji jieji douzheng*] was immediately translated into the cultural field. There was even a drama with that title. Then came the Hai Rui pieces, and the criticism of Wu Han's Hai Rui opera, and this went on and on. (Journalist 1949-)

A kind of open situation reigned until maybe 1957; after that it was all, "You want to eat, you follow the line." The time before 1957 was actually much more open. We published a lot of translations, Keynes [1883-1946], for example, a lot of Russian things, but also Hegel [1770-1831], and a lot of Classics: Shakespeare, etc. Then, things changed . . . all the way to 1979. . . . It was not always bad, but the 1970s were even worse than the 1960s, at times; nothing had really changed. (Editor, 1930s-)

1966-1976: was that the Cultural Revolution? In reality it was just the period between 1966 and 1972, or you could also say between 1951 and 1972 perhaps, because so many cultural criticisms were going on much earlier already, and the reform of opera, too, started in 1964. (Intellectual, 1958-)

All of the model works go back to earlier times. . . . And with everything else, too, there is really no such thing as a "Ten-Year Cultural Revolution." Look at Dazhai and Daqing—we are still doing this . . . even though now it may be a bit more symbolic. Now we may also demand that even Dazhai must change. In 1974, Jiang Qing wanted to make Dazhai and Daqing her models. Deng Xiaoping did the same thing. But he changed their spirit! And so did Zhu Rongji [朱镕基 1928-]. The crazy thing is, though, that these things are still done the same way even today. (China Historian, 1957-)

There is relativization, then, of the Cultural Revolution: it need not be treated as an exception but can be compared to what came before and what came afterward. Some of its "typical characteristics," such as the destruction of traditional heritage, are also found in other periods of Chinese history. Even those who see more differences and change and emphasize them over continuities do not deny such elements of perpetuation throughout Chinese history.

Was the Cultural Revolution a special time in Chinese history? It was a very "feudal" [封建 *fengjian*] movement, if you ask me, very Chinese-style "feudal." China, the Communist Party, they are so "feudal," they don't even give you the right of speech. I have been hit three times in recent decades for political reasons, and I do not see that there is any improvement. . . . The Cultural Revolution did not come by fluke [偶然]; it could be foreseen from the first day of the Chinese Communist Party's foundation.

There is a long history of criticisms: after 1949, first in 1952 we have the movement to criticize the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, then in 1953 the film *Biography of Wu Xun* 武训传 [Wu Xun zhuan], in 1955 the movement criticizing Hu Feng [胡风 1902-85], in 1957 the Anti-Rightist Movement, in 1959 the criticisms of Peng Dehuai [彭德怀 1898-1974], then the Cultural Revolution. Really, this is all connected. And it started even earlier, in the 1930s, and was continued in Yan'an, with rectification, etc. (Composer, 1937-)

The model works are a development that goes back to the children's operas by Li Jinhui [黎锦辉 1891-1967], who was active in Republican times. Li Jinhui used the techniques from folk songs to write his pieces. He was criticized for it, because they were considered lewd songs, but his musical techniques were precisely those later used in the model works. (Musician, 1930s-)

Already in the early 1960s, culture was politicized, the dramatic ballads *tanci* performed before the Cultural Revolution were not necessarily old stories either. During the Cultural Revolution, things changed, of course, but it was not a great and big change . . . especially if compared with the early 1960s. . . . The Cultural Revolution was certainly not a “sudden change” [突变], as is always said now, either, it was a very natural development! (Musicologist, 1950s–)

Some thus held views of a long and continuous revolution in culture that went far beyond the officially prescribed years of the Cultural Revolution (and the use of propaganda language like “feudal” for one’s individual arguments here is an example of the perpetuation of much of this culture into the present). Speaking of the cultural products typically identified with the Cultural Revolution, we can make out a distinct and reductive style of heroic prominence that covers the period between 1964 (when the debate over depictions of heroes was decided in favor of Maoist prominences) and 1978 (when the era in which Hua Guofeng substituted a new sun for an old sun ended).¹⁷ Yet, within this period, constant shifts and changes took place: the resurrection of parts of China’s traditional fine arts and music in the early 1970s (which did not subside significantly with the criticisms of China’s traditional (Confucian) heritage only a few months later) is one such example; the use of unaccepted motifs (such as Piggy’s navel) in Red Guard Publications and art is another. It is the long-term view presented here that makes visible the connections between these phenomena and earlier and later occurrences of these propagemes. And it is this view that undoes the idea of the Cultural Revolution as an exceptional, unprecedented, and unrepeatable period in Chinese history.

Turning the Pages of History?¹⁸

A lot of people say contradictory things: of course, this must be so. (Intellectual, 1958–)

It is notoriously difficult to summarize the Cultural Revolution experience: no matter how one person describes it, another will say that it was not “like that”: there is no way to paint a proper likeness (ill. o.o).¹⁹ Yet, in spite of this, neither does it make sense to speak of Cultural Revolution Culture merely as the culture of an exceptional period (非常时期), as is the officially accepted manner of speech (提法 *tifa*). Such terminology is regularly used for traumatic periods, as **Rana Mitter** explains:

One way to deal with trauma is to erase it from memory, or at least separate it out from “normal life.” It is not always a good idea to transfer the psychology of individual human beings to the “psyches” of nations as a whole, but it is noticeable that nations do tend to deal with the most horrific parts of their histories by treating them as anomalous, in the way that a person claims that he did some dreadful deed while he was “not himself.” Nazi Germany, Rwanda during the Hutu genocide of the Tutsis, or Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge are just some of the prominent examples of this phenomenon which our writing of history neatly sections off with the final-sounding dates of 1933–45, 1994, or 1975–8. Something similar has often occurred with the Cultural Revolution, 1966–76. (Mitter 2004, 207)

17. Seifert (2008, 104) offers important insights in alternative periodizations for the Cultural Revolution, taking cultural production itself and its changing styles into consideration.
18. My title parodies a phrase from Wang 1997, 146.
19. See ill. o.o, “Record of Painting an Elephant” (画象记) in *LHHB* 1978.9:37 discussed at the beginning of my Introduction.

As we have seen, the Cultural Revolution experience is hardly accepted by anyone as one that can be separated off neatly from everything before and after with the dates assigned to it, nor has it been accepted as one that is entirely “exceptional” or “anomalous” except perhaps insofar as that it meant doing everything in hyperbole, on a larger scale, or, in Cultural Revolution rhetoric, “on a higher plane.” That this is the case—differently from the understanding of the Nazi experience in Germany, for example—may have to do with the fact that the experience of the Cultural Revolution is, after all, not so unanimously accepted as “trauma” by everyone. Just a few years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, individuals had already begun their attempt to reclaim what they considered their “lost past” (Barmé 1999, 319). They did so by recovering the propaganda art of this past, as art generally enables an audience both “to *feel* as well as *think* the past” (Watson 1994, 8).

In order to do justice to the cultural experience of the Cultural Revolution, it only makes sense, then, to take its contradictory and complicated nature seriously and to follow both those traces that show that it was a period of destruction and restriction as well as those that show that it was a period of continuous practice and development in the arts. It is easy to list quotations for both standpoints. The Cultural Revolution cultural experience is remembered as destructive, instructive, or constructive—indeed, some contemporaries even mention all of these elements at one and the same time (and continue to blame factors other than the Cultural Revolution, such as television, as destructive of culture just as well):

A person with a high position in the Communist Party would call the museum. He had all these precious objects at home, and he knew he could not keep them. So he asked us to go and ransack his home [*chaojia*], saving all these objects. And so we did: we put on these Red Guard things, went to his home, and took all his porcelain and other precious belongings: all of these are now in the Shanghai Museum. And indeed, he was not the only one; there were quite a lot of people, all of them with some kind of a position in society, and they would all call and do this. Of course, there was a lot of real ransacking, without anyone calling and asking for it, but this kind also took place regularly. Through the “Smashing of the Four Olds” then, quite a few very valuable objects came to the museum. Many of them were never returned to their owners, and would have been kept for the owners free of charge. Since the Shanghai Museum was never ransacked, it was able to keep many of these objects, to preserve and save them. I must say, these experiences made a very strong impression on me. (Museum Curator, 1950s–)

There was a lot of destruction. The Cultural Revolution truly was a cultural desert. It was about 99 percent destruction. Complete destruction, really. . . . Even the folk songs [民歌 *min'ge*] were destroyed, because the original words could not be sung, so now very few people remember them. They were singing folk songs behind everybody's back, but they always thought they should not sing too much. Of course, what really destroyed the folk song tradition is television, after the opening, the media. So there is no basis any more for singing these folk songs today. This is not a destruction by politics, but by these new media, then. Take the example of the folk song that was turned into the revolutionary song *To rebel Is Justified* [造反有理]. Nobody knows the original text anymore . . . Now, of course, if you are strict, this does not start with the Cultural Revolution but with Yan'an, or even the May Fourth Movement, although then they still would have a basis of culture from which they could begin. We have lost all our traditional knowledge [传统知识 *chuantong zhishi*]. And we have destroyed it. There is no appreciation of this kind of culture anymore. (Intellectual, 1955–)

Those whose memories of Maoist propaganda are positive often recall the signs and symbols of this art, the feelings and emotions it created, not its political content (e.g., Bryant 2004, 222):

The model works? Oh, I really liked to watch them! When they were played somewhere, say, in the theater [人民剧场 *Renmin Juchang*] or the stadium [北京工人体育场 *Beijing Gongren Tiyuchang*], we would stay there a whole evening . . . we would go there the night before, around nine o'clock or so, and

we would wait the whole night, not sleeping but waiting in line to get the tickets. I really liked to watch them, and the tickets were always very quickly sold out. There were lots of people who wanted to buy tickets from us. (Historian, 1950s–)

Those whose memories of the Cultural Revolution are more negative, on the other hand, remember Maoist propaganda with relation to the trauma created by its politics:

In the Cultural Revolution, really, politics was everything, that was true. It was possible not to participate, but it was really quite difficult. For example, if you were sick, ok, but only then. . . People like Lao She [老舍 1899–1966], Ba Jin were hit. Of course you could say that they, too, all had a responsibility for what happened. . . The cruelty [残酷 *canku*] committed then is a collective experience; we all have a responsibility, but people don't take on this responsibility. Many people feel they were blind then. True, they did not really think about the kinds of questions and problems that would come up later. (Journalist, 1949–)

Some would implicitly (by not really wanting to admit the popularity of propaganda art) or even openly (by stating how knotty it is, even today, to talk about it) address the difficulty of trying to assess the Cultural Revolution and its propaganda art in one way or another:

The model works are not really all that popular today. A lot of people still think they are quite objectionable. But since we have not heard them for a while, now, they can be attractive because they are still so very familiar [亲切 *qinqie*]. And really, they are very nice, they don't sound that bad [难听 *nanting*] after all, so maybe some younger people even think they are chic. Then, there is nostalgia. This is really rather complicated. Still, I think it is not common. But there are even more intricate aspects to be considered: Does China have religious music, for example? Where is the Chinese religious spirit, really? In Daoism? What about Buddhism? Can it be considered a Chinese religion after all? A national religion? No, not really, there are other religions, too, and not everybody believes in these. This is a special characteristic of Chinese culture, it is quite strange. You can even revere [崇拜 *chongbai*] a real and living person in Chinese religion. So the model works are a kind of religious music. Do people now believe in socialism, hanging up the image of Mao? This has a religious quality. Very early in Chinese history this was so: Huangdi, the Yellow Emperor, he was a real person and he was being revered, too. (Language Instructor, mid-1950s–)

While this book must leave many questions unanswered, many materials untouched, it has put its attention to one crucial aspect of the Cultural Revolution: artistic and cultural production and experience.²⁰ In shifting the focus away from politics and toward art and culture, this study attempts to conceptualize how the history of the Chinese Cultural Revolution could be reconceived and rewritten. In this endeavor, oral history has played an important role: it makes visible the contradictions in the Cultural Revolution experience as it reveals “dissonances” among people’s different recollections of the past, as it presents “fragmented memories” (Lee and Yang 2007, 5). It helps reconstruct a history full of inexplicable fissures and disjunctures, and this is perhaps the only history adequate to relating the experience of the Cultural Revolution. Many interviewees would say one thing when prompted and its opposite only moments later, sometimes even in the same sentence. The constant ruptures within and between individual memories show the immense complexity of this cultural experience (and its memory work) at hand. It is true that “once the post-Mao leadership set to work—dismantling the Maoist strategy, expunging its achievements from the public record, and forbidding anything but a negative verdict on every aspect of the entire

20. This follows Wang’s suggestion that “the word ‘cultural’ in Cultural Revolution merits fresh attention and careful inquiry” (Wang 1997, 194).

Cultural Revolution decade—everyone, willingly or not, came under the spell of the new official line” (Pepper 1991, 589). This was obvious in the beginning phase of all my interviews, too: even today, it is not easy to talk about the experience of the Cultural Revolution outside prescribed mnemonic stereotypes. Yet because it produced a propaganda art that allowed for individual agency and pluralistic reception even as it served as an instrument for maintaining power and control, the experience of Cultural Revolution Culture as a whole meant many different things in different places to different people and even to one and the same person.

The Introduction to this book invoked Jung Chang’s *Mao: The Unknown Story* and criticized it for not responding to one of the most pressing issues in China today, one formulated succinctly by Wang Ban—the legacy of Cultural Revolution Culture and the mark it has left on so many, if not everyone:

Why is it, as many have asked, that almost all of us (except a few resistant souls), including the best educated and most sober minded, engaged in these rituals with an enthusiasm that was as blind as it was sincere, as irrational as it was earnest? Why did we acquiesce in the rituals and the cult, in the modern myths, which led to the national disaster? (Wang 1997, 216)

This book has attempted to offer some tentative answers to these questions. It suggests that Cultural Revolution propaganda served and continues to serve particular needs, that it gave and gives security and vision, and that it built on a tradition of earlier art works (also propaganda), which made possible the sedimentation of its message in cultural memory. As it was ritually repeated and thus became habitual, it made use of a number of different cultural genres and forms in order to best serve distinctive groups in the population and, thus, has become popular among many.

Theorizing the propaganda culture of the Cultural Revolution, its experience as well as its practice, this book comes to an end by calling for **a more open and expansive treatment of Cultural Revolution Culture both as material practice and as experience**. In doing so, it advocates reassembling the history of the Cultural Revolution into several histories: localized and segmented, reconsidered in terms of its time and its space, on the micro and macro level of its (generational) experience—all of which must be considered from their respective individual, local, national, and international viewpoints, and scrutinized in their official, unofficial, and private facets and as an experience of the everyday and the ordinary as well as of the exceptional and extraordinary.²¹ This book does not even begin to finish the tale of art and culture in China’s Cultural Revolution. It can only end where it started—bowing in humility to the many voices of contemporaries I have attempted to make heard—with artist Huang Yongyu’s apt description: “We have to admit that the Cultural Revolution was a very interesting drama. Unfortunately, the price of the ticket was too expensive.”²²

21. On the “festive” nature of the Cultural Revolution experience, see Mittler 2006 and the theme volume of *Journal of Modern European History* entitled “Dictatorship and Festivals,” in *JMEH* 2006.

22. Huang 1990–92, 132.

