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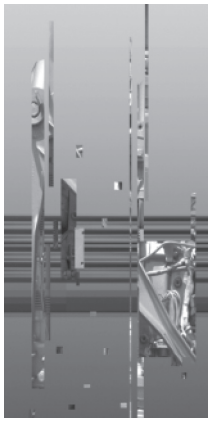

MAO ZEDONG'S IMPACT ON CULTURAL POLITICS IN THE WEST

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ABSTRACT **In China, the legacy of Mao Zedong is selectively remembered; the "late Mao," in particular is officially considered to have made a "mistake" in launching the Cultural Revolution. In the West, we remember the romantic impact of Mao's ideas on the Cold War left and on the generation of 1968, but we have little understanding of their often subterranean influence on the shape of cultural politics since the 1970s. This essay examines the historical case, and then tries to chart the path of Mao's influence on educational reform, cultural and community activism, and legislative change in a period dominated by the high-profile campaigns of the Culture Wars. It argues that Maoist precepts like self-criticism, youth revolt and consciousness-raising have had a longer and more successful career in**

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the West than in China itself. The continuing left debate between proponents of cultural justice and advocates of the primacy of social justice has also had a Maoist flavor. The essay concludes that the export of Mao's ideas – in both the Cultural Revolution and the Culture Wars – has contributed greatly to our global understanding of the changed relationship between culture and politics.

> Bouts of Mao Zedong Fever break out on each decennial anniversary of the Great Helmsman's birth. Their symptoms are incubated and then carefully doctored by China's leaders lest they spread too far and wide. In 1993, the celebrations of his centenary rounded off a massive spree of consumer uses of Mao's image; on objects like cigarette lighters, watch faces and key chains. Some of them were openly parodic. This immersal of his icon into the profane marketplace of kitsch helped to dissolve his charismatic appeal among the general population. Mao was now "off the altar," as a popular book title by Quan Yanchi put it (Barme 1996; Jinhua 2002). For those who had grown up with him, the 1993 anniversary was also seized as an opportunity, at a time of bewildering social change, to wax nostalgic for the social harmony and national stability of the 1950s. Invoking the warm glow of the embryonic socialist state (or, for the more elderly, the hard struggle for liberation itself) was a way of leapfrogging over the delicate question of the late Mao's zealous rectification campaigns.

More than a decade later, the late Mao is still a bit of a problem. For one thing, the ban on independent research about the Cultural Revolution (officially considered a "mistake" on the Chairman's part) is still more or less in force. No doubt, this helps to keep people's minds fixed on the future of China, and on the ever-ballooning GDP statistics lighting its way. But the ban's impact on national psychology is quite debilitating. As long as the topic is taboo, China cannot properly come to terms with the history of its revolution, or its modernization for that matter. It was one thing for the "sent-down generation" (educated urbanites and student Red Guards, who were shipped to the countryside for reeducation by the peasantry) to ask, rhetorically, for their youth to be returned, or to have "ten years deducted" from their age. It is quite another to have a decade surgically removed from people's history.[1]

In the winter of 2003/2004, celebrations of Mao's 110th had a more intimate focus. A rash of biographical publications and TV docudramas offered Mao as the family man or as the internally anguished leader (who, officially at least, is considered to have been correct only 70 percent of the time, in line with China's current rulers' convenient interpretation of Mao's own assessment of Stalin). Producers of a rap song tried to connect his message with youth. In today's culture of pell-mell consumerism, this was a tough call, especially since the song preached the lesson of Mao's Two Musts, originally intended "to

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preserve modesty and prudence and to preserve the style of plain living and hard struggle." Brazenly demonstrating the pervasive reach of enterprise culture within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the Central History Publishing Office issued a four-volume set of business management tips based on Mao's teachings. The books drew on Mao's writings about philosophy, politics and military strategy to offer advice on managing projects, making deals, motivating employees and incubating start-ups. On the other hand the enthusiasm of the current leadership for the anniversary was widely interpreted as a way for President Hu Jintao to further distance his slightly more populist policies from those of his predecessor, Jiang Zemin. Some of the nation's unreconstructed Maoists seized the occasion to push for the declaration of a national holiday on his birthday. They utilized a website, called "Mao Zedong Banner,"which attracted a huge volume of visitors (www.maoflag.net). Its professed aim was "to hold high the great banner of Mao Zedong and play our small individual parts in building a genuinely independent, secure, unified, democratic, civil, affluent and strong socialist China." All in all, it was a surreal eruption of attention for a figure whom I had found (in the course of a sabbatical year in China) to be otherwise almost invisible on China's daily information landscape.

In late December 2003, I was invited to speak at one of the many commemorative conferences (in Wuhan, where Mao famously swam across the Yangtze River at age seventy-three, and where he kept a second home). In the course of the event, I was struck, though not entirely surprised, by how little the younger participants knew about the Cultural Revolution. A few of them were graduate students from Wuhan itself, and when I asked them about the Wuhan Incident (a monumental struggle between rebel and conservative factions that played a pivotal role in the direction of the Cultural Revolution), they professed their ignorance of the event. No doubt, the official moratorium on that turbulent decade is partly to blame for such gaps in knowledge. But the current political climate is hardly conducive to filling them in.

Today, popular support for China's modernization policies is closely tied to the kind of materialist demands and expectations that Cultural Revolution leaders used to describe with disdain as "economism."[2] The official name for the prevailing goal is the "well-off society," and it is sustained by the belief that socialism does not have to equate to scarcity and poverty. Nothing could be further removed in spirit from the political initiatives that inspired the formation of the student Red Guards or indeed the worker rebel organizations that followed their example in ousting local CCP cadres from their positions of power. The disparity between a vision of society driven by economism and one inspired by "politics in command" can be summarized in the New Deal offered by Deng Xiaoping to the Chinese people in 1978; you can have economic freedom, but not any other kind of freedom. At a time, today, when the government's most passionately observed

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function is to issue periodic announcements of increases in foreign direct investment levels or trade volume, the poetry of Mao's edicts in favor of rebellion cannot help but stir some youthful hearts.

It is not my intention here to discuss where the youthful stirring will lead. Ever since the events of 1989 in Tiananmen Square, China's rulers have taken pains to ensure that potentially disruptive ties between students and workers are minimized. Nor do I want to reprise the tiresome role of the left-wing Orientalist who laments the disappearance of an idealized communist romance. Instead, this essay will focus on the export of Mao's ideas, and, more specifically, on the role they have played in Western thought and education. Since the term "Maoism" covers a broad spectrum of policies and tendencies over a period that spans at least three eras – the disciplined vanguardism of the Yenan years, the heroic period of state socialism and the crusade of the Cultural Revolution – it is beyond my scope here to chart the overseas influences of each of these formations. For the most part, I will restrict my commentary to Mao's innovations in the field that we broadly understand as cultural politics.

While "Mao Zedong Thought" is still a required course in the university curriculum, most of the political, economic and cultural programs that Mao himself espoused are unthinkable in China today.[3] China's development now runs against the grain of the communalism, autarky and disdain for market forces associated with Mao's heyday in the 1950s and 1960s. In the West, however, we are barely aware of the influence that Mao's ideas have had on our political cultures. Yet, several years ago, in a book published in a series I edited, Rey Chow, the US-based film scholar, suggested provocatively that the only place where the Cultural Revolution still thrived was in American literary and cultural criticism. Having grown up in Hong Kong during these years, when mainland corpses occasionally washed up at the mouth of the Pearl River, she found it baffling to encounter, among US critics, mental habits that she associated with the Red Guards and their patrons. Among these habits were a knee-jerk skepticism about all things Western, an instinct for moralistic prosecution and a belief that only victims can speak truth (Chow 1993: 10–13, 20–1). On reflection, I think Chow may have been right, though not necessarily for the reasons she cited. The rest of this essay is devoted to explaining why.

No one would reasonably dispute that Maoism was received in the West in a highly idealized version. Indeed, what we think of as "Maoism" was often far removed from how the Chinese themselves experienced the Chairman's shifting body of doctrine, at least insofar as it came to be embodied in campaigns like state collectivization, the Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolution. The conditions of reception, then, are sometimes more important to grasp than the cogency of the doctrine itself. In the 1950s and 1960s, there was no shortage of reasons or opportunities for Westerners to imagine the Wind from the East as a dynamic force that would help sweep

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away the structural rot of capitalist societies if only it were harnessed in the right way. In some respects, the dynamism they attributed to the New China was merely the inverse of Marx's concept of the "Asiatic mode of production" – a vision of static, and unproductive, feudalism stretching from Russia's eastern shore to the Arabian Sea. (In light of the historical evidence of the great prosperity, urbanity and technical advancement of China up until the 1800s, it is difficult not to conclude that the alleged stagnancy attributed to this "Asiatic mode of production" qualifies it as one of the most Eurocentric, not to mention ludicrous, of all of Marxism's founding ideas.[4]) For its Western adept, China's "awakening" by Mao was as vibrant as the slumber of Marx's Asiatic mode of production had been profound. They were two sides of the same Orientalist coin.

Even so, the novelty of Mao's appeal to Western imaginations would soon fade for those who actually tried to follow, but were understandably bamboozled by, each new spasmodic cycle of revolt and reaction – each new factionalist crosscurrent – generated as the Cultural Revolution progressed in the late 1960s.[5]

It was much easier to condense this appeal into a media-friendly image packaged for youthful consumption. In *The Dreamers*, Bertolucci's recent, bittersweet paean to the events of May '68, a protagonist speaks of Mao as a kind of genius director who was using China as a stage set for producing an epic film. Wow! The director leaves us to decide whether this is a crushing self-comment on the speaker's naïvety or a heady sample of the climate of '68.

Either way, Bertolucci's retrospective mood is broadly shared. Today, it is routinely accepted that the infatuation of Western youth with Third Worldist icons like Mao, Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh was a period fancy, in tune with the first generational rush of rock star adulation. So what does it mean to suggest (as Chow did) that, three decades after its most radical spasm, the spirit of Mao is central to the sensibility of Western literary and cultural critics? Is this just another example (though a largely underappreciated one) of what Edward Said called "traveling theory," where a body of precepts, hatched in one very specific location, takes on a quite different significance, over time, in a new place of residence? Or are there other, more enduring, lessons that we can learn from this perception about the relationship between culture and politics over the last few decades?

Let us review some of the historical context. Mao's gradual "Sinification" of Marxism, summarily reflected in his break with Moscow in the early 1960s, was saluted in many parts of the world as a fresh opportunity to redeem the communist ideal from the bureaucratic torpor it had suffered under Stalinism. His appetite for grassroots populism and his zeal for continuous revolution from below was perceived as a stark departure from the fixed Soviet reliance on urban industrialization as directed by technical elites. "I am a native philosopher, you are all foreign philosophers," he

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would say to CCP colleagues, especially in response to Moscow's often chauvinistic assumption of authority in all matters of Leninist-Marxist development. This tendency struck a chord with Westerners who were turning against their own over-processed societies, grimly administered by military-minded technocrats. So, too, Mao's focus on self-reliance, equitable regional development, and his promotion of "organic experts" arising from the ingenuity of peasant life were directly in synch with the efforts of decolonizing countries to break free not only from the old colonial powers but also from the clientist system maintained by Washington and Moscow. While Maoist politics enjoyed its most sustained run of influence in the Third World left, the alternative model of socialist development, pursued in the two decades before the Cultural Revolution, spoke directly to dissidents in the industrialized West who were themselves looking for alternatives to the Strangelovian death struggle of the Cold War.

In the West, this image of Mao as the anti-Soviet was increasingly preferred, largely because it was uncomplicated by his own lifelong tendency to embrace contradictions. Contrary to his foreign image as a committed pastoralist, Mao never ceased to encourage Stakhanovite productivity and rapid industrialization ("We must walk on two legs," he exhorted). Nor did he neglect the treaty port cities, like Shanghai, but rather sought to promote urbanization elsewhere so that cities in the interior could share the benefits. So, too, his often messianic beliefs in the revolutionary potential of the "blank" rural masses coexisted with an unyielding Leninist faith in the centralism of party leadership (Schram 2002). Ironically, it was precisely the moment in which he appeared to depart from this faith – his confrontation with the party which generated the Cultural Revolution – that rewarded him with iconic status elsewhere.

If the deviation from the Soviet economic model won him foreign admirers, it was Mao's turn to culture just a few years later that really lit beacons all across the world. The victory against feudalism and imperialism in 1949, and the nationalization of capitalist assets in the 1950s, had transformed the economic infrastructure of China. But economic change was not enough, Mao insisted. The remnants of the old system of beliefs lived on in many sectors of society – dispossessed landlords and capitalists, petty property-owning peasants, expropriated compradores, gangsters, tenured bureaucrats, teachers and other professionals held over from the republican state. Most threatening of all, in Mao's view, were the "party people in authority, taking the capitalist road," many of whom held high office in government, industry and other state institutions. In sum, the vast majority of Chinese were still inclined to shape the world according to the ideology and training of their prerevolutionary upbringing. Consequently, the decisive battle over the direction of the Chinese Revolution would likely be fought in the realm of ideas, among those who were in a position to exert influence over the next generation.

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In theory, their influence could be combated in many ways. Mao chose a particularly dramatic path – Bombard the Headquarters! – that would mobilize youthful passions. Real progress, he proclaimed, could only come about through open criticism and replacement of those whose positions in the party, educational system and other cultural institutions still allowed them to mold the minds of youth in reactionary ways. It is astonishing, in retrospect, to consider the enthusiasm with which students – many of them adolescent girls in middle schools – initially interpreted Mao's directive. In a culture where teachers are venerated to the point of blind obedience, the prospect of questioning their authority, never mind subjecting them to physical abuse (as happened in some instances), was a stunning violation of custom. By comparison, the radicalism of Western youth during this period was much more studied (though it took on many surprising, improvisatory forms), because it was able to draw heavily on traditions of bohemian dissent.

Even so, the example of the Cultural Revolution helped give Western students an additional rationale (I am not suggesting it was the only one) for turning their attention toward authorities and curricula within their own schools and universities. Bombarding the headquarters and politicizing the curriculum became the sport du jour at college campuses. The net result was to inspire serial waves of reform and revisionism that are still being played out today. So, too, the theoretical implications of Mao's cultural turn appeared to complement the rising influence of Western Marxism, most visible perhaps through the teachings of the Frankfurt School. While it was undertaken for quite different purposes, Mao's critique of Soviet-style economism resonated with Western thinkers who had long questioned the determinism espoused by reflectionist theories of orthodox Marxism. Mao's new assertions about the importance of culture seemed to be on the same wavelength as those Marxists who had moved beyond the rigidity of the base–superstructure relationship to develop more complex analyses of power and resistance. For reasons quite removed from the Chinese context, the institutions of culture and media – Ideological State Apparatuses, as Althusser famously termed them – became targets of contention and conflict.

For Mao, after all, the turn to culture was entirely strategic. In the face of creeping restorationism on the part of capitalist roaders, the shift in tendency that launched the Cultural Revolution was deemed necessary to defend the achievements that had been built out of the CCP takeover of state power. Immediate results were expected, after which the monumental effort to build a new kind of social personality, with new customs, habits and daily instincts, could then be launched. In the West, the turn to culture was shaped by quite different circumstances. It came as a call to arms against the institutions that functioned to ensure consent for established authorities in society and the state. The Maoist campaign was set in motion by a charismatic patriarch who had transcended state

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power to the extent that he could call for attacks on its citadels and bureaucratic armature. The eruption of dissent among Western youth was shaped by those who stood, at best, to inherit state power, but had no interest in accepting the job as it was defined at the time. The vast difference between these two circumstances helps, in part, to explain the subsequent divergent career of cultural politics in China and the West.

Aside from the general assault on positions of authority, many of Mao's precepts proved wildly popular in the West. The practice of self-criticism for example was taken up by liberals born into white skin privilege, and it rapidly spread to other kinds of privilege related to class, gender and sexuality. It became almost obligatory for speakers on certain political topics to publicly acknowledge, or apologize for, any such privilege that might have shaped their opinions. In time, self-criticism also became an important confessional ritual within the culture of popular therapy and self-help, demonstrating how effectively its resident spirit has passed into the mainstream. So, too, the Cultural Revolution's initial focus on youth action resonated with the generational politics of the so-called baby boomers. For youth especially it became "right to rebel," a rule that has proven quite resilient, even though it is probably more important, these days, in consumer branding than almost anywhere else, again displaying a considerable influence on the mainstream. Consciousness raising, pioneered in China's rural communes during the "speaking bitterness" campaigns, had enormous influence in second-wave feminist circles, from whence it spread to other social movements.[6] It is now taken for granted as a method for boosting esteem among members of socially disadvantaged groups. Arguably, these and other Maoist principles have had a much longer and more successful career run in the West than in China itself.

As for Mao himself, you can take your pick from several versions. The one that seduced Western intellectuals was the Mao who did his hard thinking in response to current events. The doctrine of this Mao was not one-size-fits-all, applied directly from Marxist scripture. It was a tactical creation, aimed at outflanking a succession of enemies (treaty-port colonialists, Chang Kai Shek Nationalists, Japanese occupiers, Soviet hegemons and, finally, CCP capitalist roaders), and it issued from a habitual philosopher and poet who had earned his chops as a military strategist on the ground. Even for Chinese writers and artists, it was this spirit of praxis rather than dogma that partially redeemed Maoist aesthetics from stagnating entirely into a fixed recipe for "serving the people," as it might have done after Mao's famous addresses at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art were enshrined into state cultural policy, or when model works of art (like the Yangbanxi operas) were vigorously promoted by his wife, Jiang Qing.

To outsiders (and indeed to many Chinese themselves), the Chinese context for this praxis was often quite obscure. Few were in

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a position to understand fully the intricacies of the "two-line struggle" that lay at the heart of Maoist politics, and which was often the key to deciphering the rapid line shifts. The term "two-line struggle" was used most often by Mao to describe the reflection of class conflict within the party itself, where he saw an ongoing internal struggle always being waged between socialists and capitalist roaders. But, because of its longtime debt to dialectical thinking, Maoist doctrine was often forged explicitly to explain or highlight an apparent duality or contradiction.

To choose an early example from the Yan'an period, consider Mao's utilitarian distinction, at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art, between cultural policy in the liberated base areas and in the regions still occupied by the Kuomintang. This was a more strategic differentiation than the more general guidelines offered to the gentry-literati about how to serve the people and the revolution (to which Lu Xun would later respond, "A writer serving the revolution is like a man with his feet in two boats"). A more well-known example was Mao's theory of contradictions. This was initially conceived (in the late 1930s) in response to the need to explain shifts in CCP policy toward the Nationalists – both were now part of a united front against the Japanese where before they had been at odds. After the Kruschev Report, the theory was reinterpreted in light of the growing antagonism toward Moscow, which would result in the Sino-Soviet split. From the time of the anti-rightist movement in 1957, which punished intellectuals who had "betrayed" Mao in the Hundred Flowers campaign, the theory was wielded, almost to the last days of the Cultural Revolution, to justify the national campaign to resolve "internal contradictions among the people." Thus, the core statement of dialectical materialism – summed up by Mao as "One Divides into Two" – increasingly applied only to the division between loyalists and restorationists.

With the exception of some sectarian groups who strove to understand and defend each of these doctrinal twists and turns, Western interpreters were more inclined to approach Mao's thought as a user-friendly code they could program for their own uses. Nor was the reception of Maoism in the West very unified. In the UK for example where I grew up, Trotskyism was far more influential among the student and worker political vanguards. In France, the country where the broad left was most transformed by Maoism, the character of Maoist organizations like Vive la Révolution, and Gauche Prolétarienne was most typically anti-authoritarian, anti-hierarchical and, perhaps, most detached from events in China themselves. The legacies of Rousseau, Proudhon and Sorel fundamentally shaped the context in which Maoist thought was taken up in France.[7]

By contrast, the American Maoist groups like the Progressive Labor Party, Revolutionary Communist Party and the Communist Party (ML) were quite moralistic and hierarchical. Basically Leninist in their organization, their disputes tended to reflect, or refract, ongoing

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factional struggles in China. Where the French Maoists were more true to anarchist and libertarian traditions, and thus open to cultural radicalism, their American counterparts were often at odds with the embryonic social and cultural movements of the time – such as the counterculture, the feminist and the gay movements, and race-based separatism. Indeed, the American Maoists tended to emulate what they saw as the cultural conservativism of the proletariat, and so they dressed, behaved and proselytized accordingly. Much more innovative in their interpretation of Maoism were minority nationalist groups like the Black Panthers, and their ranking cognates in Asian-American, Latino and Native American communities. Heavily under the sway of the thesis of "internal colonialism," which saw Black, Brown and Red America as underdeveloped colonies, analogous to Third World nations, they had their own selective uses for the Maoist principles of self-reliance, "serving the people," culture building, and confrontational action (Wei 1993; Jones 1998; Kelley 2002).

In the US, the strong impulse of these nationalist groups toward decentralization and community-based organization meant that neo-Maoist ideas about how to serve the people filtered out into society, becoming indigenized in the process, rather than remaining the exclusive preserve of elite intellectuals or vanguard politicos. This diffusion of ideas was much more far-reaching than the impact of the middle-class cadres who went into industry as would-be factory organizers, and who were as frustrated in their efforts as many of the educated urban youth in China who were assigned to factories, or sent down to the countryside. As in China, one of the ostensible goals of this practice, mostly undertaken by factional remnants of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), was to challenge the divide between mental and manual labor. In the US case, even the theory ran aground amid rapid sea changes in the economy. By the early 1970s, advanced Western societies were entering a long period of restructuring into post-industrial forms. Manufacturing would be hollowed out, and immaterial, value-adding labor would become more and more important. As a result, the traditional identities of workers were being eroded and were therefore too unstable to assert as vehicles for driving into a better future. It was not until the 1990s, and the dissolution of the "iron rice bowl," that a similar phenomenon occurred in China where, in any case, workerism had a much more powerful hold on state policy.[8]

In the area of education, there was a different story to tell. Largely because the Cultural Revolution disrupted the education of a whole generation, Mao acquired the reputation of being against education, just as he is now remembered as being against intellectuals. Both views are inexact. When colleges were reopened after the first two years of the Cultural Revolution, they were subject to a ferment of institutional reform, affecting everything from governance of schools and universities to the preparation of textbooks and curricula and the enrollment of workers and peasants. In general, these changes

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were guided by the elevation of praxis over abstraction. While little was achieved in the West that approached the record of the worker universities, the reform of secondary and tertiary education was greatly inspired by efforts to make curricula, teaching methods and access to learning less mandarin in nature, i.e. more comprehensible, practical and accountable to socially denied communities. Mao's ideas about education took their place alongside those of John Dewey (whose work he knew) and Paolo Freire.

More consequential yet was the entry of a generation of activists into the teaching ranks. In contrast to the cadres who went into the factories, we have the more enduring example of student protesters who made a professional career choice to take "the long march through the institutions," as it was called in the early 1970s. They decided to enter the "superstructural professions" – mostly in education, law and the arts – that are most important to the framing of national cultures. It was in the humanistic sectors of these professions (and often in their most elite locations) that neo-Maoist impulses ran their course over the next three decades, long outliving the fervor of the Cultural Revolution. Widespread in these circles was the influence of French intellectuals like Sartre, Althusser, Barthes and Foucault, each of whom had had formative encounters with Maoism. The impact of their ideas was especially pronounced among Anglo-American cultural critics, many of whom absorbed Gallicized Maoist slogans and precepts as if they were holy writ – an incredible phenomenon in retrospect.

Over the same period of time, the neo-Maoism that had filtered into community life (as I earlier described) emerged in the form of demands and claims for cultural recognition on behalf of a broad spectrum of causes and identities – ethnic, racial, feminist, lesbian and gay, environmental. Arguably, it was in these separate but cognate movements that a hundred flowers bloomed most freely. While their impact on legislation was measured, often taking decades to work its way through courts, it was more immediately felt in education reform. Again, it was cultural critics, along with historians, who were in the forefront of pushing these claims in their efforts to revise both standard and advanced textbooks. The result was a far-reaching overhaul of the semi-official canons that formed the core of the national culture. New schools of queer criticism, eco-criticism and postcolonial criticism sprang up to join those that had already substantially altered the elite white, male profile of the history books. Textbooks had to be rewritten, time after time, in order to do justice to each new paradigm of identity. The process is far from exhausted, and in some unforeseen respects has come to reflect the spirit (though hardly the letter) of Mao's idea of an "uninterrupted revolution." As with most of the Western examples I have cited here, their Maoist pedigree was only one of several geneaological influences, but I would argue that its significance has been consistently overlooked. In the self-conviction of their champions that these "superstructural"

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reforms were radical, even revolutionary, in character, it is difficult not to detect the traces of a neo-Maoist ardor.

Not everyone viewed the result as the march of progress. Indeed, some saw only a destructive exercise redolent of the dark side of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The resulting backlash came from sectors of the left as well as the right. Beginning in the late 1980s, neoconservatives in the US launched the so-called Culture Wars, which consumed a hefty portion of national political attention through the mid-1990s. In forcing a debate about the moral character of the nation, the Culture Wars offered a model for conservatives in other countries to emulate. This hullabaloo took the initial form of controversy about which literary texts were being taught in schools and universities. But it quickly spread to almost every corner of social and cultural life, fueling high-profile debates about the politics of affirmative action, sexual harassment, gay and lesbian rights, and all forms of workplace discrimination.[9] In doing so, the conflict moved from the realm of cultural politics, primarily played out in non-government institutions, to the realm of what I have called cultural justice, where citizenly rights to recognition involved state action (see Ross 2001).

Because their revisionist ideas made for sensational press copy, crude caricatures of the reformers circulated widely in the media. Some voices on the left registered their own opposition to what conservatives, in a strategic coup, had renamed "political correctness." Most of these voices belonged to white males of a certain generation, who felt dispossessed or displaced from their traditionally entitled roles as left champions.[10] Like conservative Cultural Warriors, they invariably spoke with nostalgia for an era – largely mythical – when political goals were remembered as more clear edged and constituencies more settled. The youth were commonly castigated for their shortsighted political passions. In some anecdotal accounts, revisionist students were indeed characterized as if they were latter-day Red Guards, pulsing with self-righteous zeal as they hounded hapless teachers for committing the politically incorrect sin du jour.

But if you could get beyond all the finger pointing and lazy misrepresentations, there was a weighty question to consider for those on the left. Did this fierce appetite for cultural reform siphon off energies that might otherwise have been devoted to social and economic justice? Or was it a necessary fellow traveler? Those who saw it as a costly distraction argued that politics of the "superstructural" sort was not sufficiently rooted in economic soil to change the lives of the mass of working people. Besides, they surmised, culture divides people more than it unites them. On the other side, advocates insisted that social and cultural identity is a condition of equal access to income, health, education, free association, religious freedom, housing and employment. According to this view, cultural respect is a necessary supplement to the basic human rights pertaining to freedom of speech, assembly and conscience. Many people feel this

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right to recognition almost as strongly as they seek the benefits of the social wage.

No matter which side you came down on (and I lean toward the latter – even as a pragmatic matter, it seems to me impossible and, at the very least, a waste of time to try to separate these different strands of politics), the whole debate had a Maoist flavor. Under different circumstances, Chinese critics of the Cultural Revolution made similar arguments – you can't eat culture – while its defenders insisted that their revolution should not be reduced to an economist call for wage hikes or increased material benefits. There were also those, even in retrospect, who argued that the Cultural Revolution did not go far enough, and that Mao reined it in too early (an opinion that may be incomprehensible to some readers, given how many Chinese lives were lost or ruined in factional strife). Notwithstanding Mao's opportunistic use of intellectuals as a punching bag, writers and cultural critics played a disproportionate role in the unfolding of events.[11] Though the lives of Western intellectuals were hardly imperiled like those of their Chinese counterparts had been, the Culture Wars placed cultural workers and cultural administrators on the frontlines of bitter, and often brutal, recriminations. Just as quickly, and to fit the expediency of circumstances, their voices were relegated to the sidelines.

Over time, it became customary to view the strategic use of the Culture Wars by conservatives as an example of how the right had appropriated the tactics of the left. The new right, in other words, had somehow recognized Gramsci's lessons about the power of cultural hegemony and was seizing the initiative to take back lost ground. In this scenario, it was the Cultural Warriors who were the real Maoists because they were political utilitarians, canny enough to exploit cultural issues for their own advantage. Had not Mao, after all, used culture to launch a rectification campaign (which subsequently got out of hand) that was aimed at repossessing the commanding heights of the CCP?

However persuasive, the sophistry of this analysis depends on the assumption that Mao's attitude to culture was entirely instrumental, in other words it was a useful vehicle for a power play. For those who are fixated on the desecration of cultural artifacts and institutions, and the persecution of cultural workers that marred the Cultural Revolution, there is no evidence that the late Mao's position on culture was any different from that of Goering. But the "culture" in the Cultural Revolution was not primarily about books or artists. It had more to do with the transformation of subjectivity. The effort to forge a new kind of mentality and social personality would depend on exorcizing the bourgeois within. Mao's antecedents, in this regard, were thinkers like Gramsci himself, who had analyzed the goal of socialism to create "a new type of man." Che Guevara, among his contemporaries, had a similar vision of the "new socialist man." If the path of cultural politics in the West was influenced by this epic

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Maoist aspiration, as this essay has indeed sought to argue, it has had a more restricted environment in which to do its work. Its methods have been more discrete by far. Yet the spirit of the overall project of transformation has not only been retained, but it has also been extended into areas beyond that of exorcizing the bourgeois, such as expunging the patriarch and the heteronormative, or the abolition of whiteness. With the exception of those propelled by utopian strains of Christian fundamentalism (perhaps the purest form of identity politics), the Culture Warriors had no comparable designs: they were driven, first and foremost, by the spirit of reaction.

In offering these foregoing observations, I do not intend to suggest that we can, or should, directly compare the circumstances that precipitated the Culture Wars with the Cultural Revolution in China. That would be a pointless, if not entirely pedantic, exercise. But the influence of the latter on the former was substantial, and has been somewhat neglected. To develop a comprehensive account would, perhaps, be of most value to Chinese scholars for whom the full resonance of that prohibited decade still lies in the future, when the archives are properly opened.

In this respect, it might be useful to understand how the Cultural Revolution, far from being an intra-CCP quarrel writ large but contained locally, fed directly into a worldwide current of thought that transformed our ideas about the socio-political significance of cultural affairs. In some subterranean fashion, it continues to do so, though its impact in its country of origin has been considerably muted. In China today, the official view is that these disputes about cultural politics no longer have much relevance (especially after the mini-revival generated by 1980s "culture fever" subsided). For the most part, they are regarded as the purely internal product of a nation that was closed off to the world, and the winds of globalization have long since cleared the air of them. Chinese intellectuals are most likely perplexed by the suggestion that the clamorous debates about cultural politics in the West have something to do with Mao Zedong. Yet prior to China's emergence as an exporter of most of the clothes in Western closets, its export of Maoism was working its way into our mental wardrobe. In the West, we are more likely to be using that legacy today than they are in Wuhan.

NOTES

1. From a short story by Shen Rong (1991) that imagined that the CPC decreed that everyone from the "sent-down generation" could deduct ten years from their age.
2. Strictly speaking, economism was the term given to "opportunistic" demands that arose among marginalized workers during the first flush of worker rebellion in the Cultural Revolution. These were based on the grievances of contract, temporary, or non-union laborers who were demanding back pay, the right to equal benefits and changes in household registration among other

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things. Redressing these grievances would have taken a heavy toll on state resources. See Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun's account of the emergence of economism and the campaign against it, in *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution* (1997). Perry and Xun conclude that the grievances were, in many ways, a more fundamental criticism of socialist command economy than that offered by the Cultural Revolution's ideological rebels (ibid.: 117). I also use the term here in a more generalized sense to describe today's society-wide consensus, however unevenly developed, which rests on the expectation of steadily rising incomes and material goods.

3. All Chinese undergraduates take a compulsory course, "Introduction to Mao Zedong Thought." The title was changed in 1999 from "The History of Chinese Revolution." Students expect to be tested on this subject when taking graduate school entrance examinations.
4. Andre Gunder Frank offers a sweeping critique of the concept in *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (1998).
5. In his influential essay, "Turning Point in China," from the early 1970s, William Hinton argues that, where the US left was often bamboozled by these shifts in direction, the bourgeois media was not. The editorial line in leading newspapers followed these very closely, and in his view, quite accurately. His chief example is the shift in bias that occurred when ultra-left groups, which, in his view, were rightist in essence, emerged to extend the process of overthrowing cadres in power. The US press correctly interpreted these tendencies as counterrevolutionary in nature, and, smelling the imminent overthrow of Maoism, gave favorable coverage to their efforts. Practically speaking, the editorial line went from denouncing Red Guards as "hooligans" who were "attacking all that was good and civilized in China" to praising them as "idealistic young people whose democratic dreams and aspirations had been betrayed by Mao." Hinton concludes that "this about-face illustrates how class-conscious and politically sensitive the American ruling class really is. American radicals and revolutionaries were, in the main, bewildered by the cross currents of the Cultural Revolution; they were unable to distinguish revolution from counter-revolution when the latter marched under a red flag. Not so the American ruling class. Its well-trained experts and journalists sensed very quickly which flags to support and which flags to attack and they carried a number of naive radicals with them" (Hinton 2002: 52).
6. Here, the influence of Hinton's *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (1966) was paramount. The Maoist model was not the only origin of consciousness raising – the Freedom Summer experiences of the Civil Rights movement were a more immediate inspiration – but stories about women's liberation in China helped to magnetize its attraction to Western feminists.

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7. See Belden Fields's comprehensive, comparative study, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and Practice in France and the United States* (1988); and Kristin Ross's *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (2002).
8. For reasons of social stability, the Chinese State continues to be responsive to workers' grievances. While the CCP took the most repressive steps to stifle large-scale workers' protests in the northeast in 2002, it has engaged in reconstructive policies to try to revive the industrial belt in that region.
9. The media-friendly campaign that launched and sustained the Culture Wars was carefully orchestrated. It was largely funded by conservative think tanks and foundations with close ties to the Republican Party. Chief among the ideologues were Dinesh D'Souza, Hilton Kramer, Roger Kimball, Lynne Cheney, William Bennett, John Silber, Allan Bloom, Christina Hoff Sommers and Gertrude Himmelfarb. Newspaper columnists like George Will played an important role, as did Supreme Court judges like Antonin Scalia. Right-wing politicians were encouraged to use the divisive issues to "drive a wedge" between voters. The campaign had its own academic organization – the National Association of Scholars, several journals of opinion – including the *New Criterion* and *Commentary*, and it also funded a host of campus newspapers all across the nation.
10. Some of these figures included: Paul Berman, Russell Jacoby, Todd Gitlin, Michael Jacoby, Michael Kazin, David Bromwich. For broad-ranging analyses of the place of cultural politics in the period of the Culture Wars, see Michael Denning (2004); Kelley (1998); Duggan (2003).
11. For example, The Writers Group of the Shanghai Communist Party became an indispensable ally of Zhang Chunqiao, and therefore of the Cultural Revolution Small Group (which itself included Yao Wenyuan, the Shanghainese agit-prop critic who penned the initial, all-important critique of *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* in November 1965).

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