

## Cultural Revolution in the Media

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The decade-long political turmoil involving violence and censorship, lasting from May 1966 to October 1976, produced cultural outputs through the media where oriental perspectives and Chinese identity on the Cultural Revolution are challenged; rendering the contradictory viewpoints as differing narratives to portray one of most significantly altering events that impacts China today. Culture of the Cultural Revolution through the media is important to interpret for the reasons of the various historical narratives that are told as a consequence. How did Mao wield the minds of the masses to topple the bourgeois? Why did Mao want to ridicule the four olds, which included centuries of Chinese culture, and in what way does that affect how China views the Cultural Revolution, and more broadly, how China views themselves? How does the western view of the Cultural Revolution differ from the Chinese view? Abundant cultural outputs and even the ceasement of culture in China was the result of the Cultural Revolution in China.

Accredited historians or scholars of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution start by expressing their skepticism of the name itself “Great and Proletarian and Cultural and Revolution” (The Soviet, 1967, pg 20). Objecting like Socrates on trial, what is meant by great - big? Proletarian - the working class? Cultural Revolution - or cultural decay? The Cultural Revolution was more like a Great Bourgeois Civil War... since the only Bourgeois were those in the CCP and Mao was evidently the firestarter of the civil war against the educated, business

owners and traditional customs and architecture. The Cultural Revolution rather destroyed the culture Mao said he revolutionized.

Before western influence, Chinese identity sided with imperial tradition and Confucius thought. 1919 May the Fourth movement accelerated western ideas and was one of the first steps forwards toward the making of Maoism (Ping, 1995, pg 135). Gangs of students protested their concerns of old fashioned China holding them back from modernity of the west. Getting rid of the old and introducing new ideas like Marxism and scientific breakthroughs while demanding individual sovereignty was the core of the movement. Before long, the CCP was formed and overthrew imperialism in 1949 where Mao would lead a new democratic culture, particularly to do with the Communist Manifesto in which he believed to be the best ideas the world has produced (Ping, 1995, pg 140). During Mao's reign, he became terrifyingly obsessed with egalitarian philosophy (The Cultural, 1991, pg 95).

Colossal failures in China as a nation was the result of the Great Leap Forward from 1958 to 1962. Mao had hopes to modernize the agriculture sector and instead achieved approximately 45 million of his own citizens to perish from famine. The Great Leap Forward was the first earthquake of Maoism, which resulted in the second earth being the Cultural Revolution (Link, 2016) to reassert control from the first (Phillips, 2016) given the major losses. The Cultural Revolution resulted in 2 million deaths of Chinese citizens but the losses suffered on the second earthquake are arguably more evil, even though it is a lower death toll, for the reasons of Mao's mouthpiece being directly responsible: "1 June, the party's official mouthpiece newspaper urged the masses to 'clear away from the evil habits of the old society' by launching an all-out assault on 'monsters and demons'" (Phillips, 2016); and to "bomb the headquarters" (Link, 2016) stated on 1966 August 8. It is clear that Mao was attempting to use the masses to destroy his enemies

(Phillips, 2016) by mass producing the little red book, which is known to be one of the most produced books of all time with 1 billion copies, that reads his egalitarian thoughts. Students are seen chanting, 'a revolution is not a dinner party or work of art but an act of violence where one class overthrows another', from the little red book (Phillips, 2016) along with 'Decounce your parents! Attack your teachers! Destroy temples!' (Link, 2016) or "What must we struggle for? For the five goods. Against whom? Against three enemies. And against whom else? Against three evils. What must we strive for? For four searches. How must we live? Three times eight. What must we observe? Three disciplines. What do we achieve? Eight hieroglyphs. And what more? Four hieroglyphs. What lights our way? Three red banners" (The Soviet, 1967, pg 27). Given all of the propaganda imposed by Mao and the little red book, the Cultural Revolution is still more complicated than merely his directives, (Link, 2016) or can this be a question of loyalty in which the movement was pioneered by similar-minded-folks that started the May the Fourth movement, which could mean this was really a Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution if it was sparked by loyalty of the masses rather than Mao's directives.

If the masses do not follow Mao out of loyalty, they would nonetheless follow him out of fear. His main method of madness was to mesh politics and education together, mandating his little red book (Frolic, 1971). The Cultural Revolution was mostly initiated by the Red Guards, who were young students taken out of school and sent to the countryside to learn proletarian class consciousness (The Cultural, 1991, pg 85). These Red Guards were mostly composed of minors aged 14-18 and were oblivious to the meaning of the artists' crimes who they were punishing (The Soviet, 1967). People with bourgeois clothes, intellectuals and teachers were attacked by these Red Guards (Phillips, 2016). A new education system was thereafter established with school duration shortened, arts reduced - factories and rural areas are the real

universities, states Mao (The Cultural, 1991, pg 86). It is true that May the Fourth students and Mao loyalists were excited to hear that they would bomb the Bourgeois, given the years of oppression of imperialism, economic injustices and religious tutelage, but many had no say in being sent to the countryside to brainwash their young minds of egalitarian philosophy.



(Yao, 2019)

Mao was so persuaded by his own thoughts that any who failed to agree were opposers (The Cultural, 1991, pg 81), which included those who still identified with China's recent previous culture. As pictured above is an example of a Buddhist temple being destroyed. For centuries Chinese culture sided with Confucius ideology identity which follows the consensus that the middle kingdom is China which is the center of the earth, and in the peripheral area lives barbarians. In the early twentieth century, two main perspectives were held within the public: one is the traditional view that China is superior to the west except armory and two that China needs to replace all old ways due to the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles which shrank Chinese territory. Though much of western influence that started the May the Fourth movement shattered the bulk of the Chinese centric perspective (Ping, 1995, pg 133 - 137).

Orientalism exaggerates violence of the Cultural Revolution, CCP officials state that the revolution triumphed without bloodshed (Frolic, 1971). According to the western view, the portrayal of the Cultural Revolution is insufficient, meaning it misleads the public with propaganda and untrue claims about violence. Mayhem and death lasted from the very moment Mao Zedong was elected as chairman, and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was not a dictatorship of the proletariat but a dictatorship of the bourgeois who are those found in the CCP (The Cultural, 1991, pg 90-93). Western journalists witnessing the Cultural Revolution would also claim that all businesses were torn down, books burned, Chinaware smashed, paintings destroyed and death to a centuries old culture which was replaced by pictures of Mao Zedong everywhere. China's interests are to pollute the idea of socialism, says the Soviet journalist (The Soviet, 1967, pg 20 - 23). Among Mao's wide umbrella in which he defined evil capitalists includes shop-keepers, office workers, teachers and the educated, known as the New Bourgeois, whereas Soviet communism with its Old Bourgeois views these roles as essential elements of the regime (The Cultural, 1991, pg 5). People were viewed as black and white based trivial idiosyncrasies and felt the wrath of the red terror because of their either western or ancient Chinese political bias and were deemed as revisionalists as a consequence of this adventure. Modern day Chinese hooligan culture could be compared to revisionalists culture during the cultural revolution where 'cynics' were put into a box which included a wide range of characteristics akin to the New Bourgeois - anyone who rebels from a decent society.

Compared to how the Cultural Revolution is viewed by the west, the Chinese view is narrowed down to a pea. Mao's feudal resentment made him declare that history must be shaped by the masses but not the planners (The Cultural, 1991, pg 82); and by controlling the masses he hoped to make China the world leader of Communism. The problem with making China a world

leader, the masses must believe they themselves are justified; and in a country where history is constantly being rewritten with government censorship (Paul, 2023), China risks forgetting the Cultural Revolution altogether in a time where millions were killed and survivors left scarred. When trying to search for the Chinese perspective on the Cultural Revolution in state controlled news sources like ChinaDaily.com, nearly nothing is mentioned on the Cultural Revolution. In high schools, textbooks are reduced to a few short paragraphs (Paul, 2023). Though, after Mao's death, China slowly began to open up, particularly in the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, Deng allowed writers to explore the truth in what he called "the ten years of catastrophe" in which such writings produced from Chinese catastrophe is often regarded as 'scar literature;' which that too was later banned as Deng figured it had gone too far to shatter the Chinese reputation (Link, 2016). The narrative that the Proletariat class saved China from Confucianism and feudalism which brought China into a bright future is the consensus that wants to be preserved (Ping, 1995, pg 145). Under Xi Jinping, who was a victim of the Cultural revolution, efforts to suppress history (Paul 2023), on levels comparable to Mao, have closed off China to the world that is moving backwards from Deng. In the Chinese public, the Cultural Revolution is growing as a myth (Link, 2016): "They won't go there - it is just too damaging to the party," says MacFarquhar. "The party is guilty of three massive blows to the Chinese people: the [Great] Famine, the Cultural Revolution and the destruction of the environment which is ongoing now and may in fact be more deadly than the other two in the long run. And the last thing it wants to say is that we were the guilty ones" (Phillips, 2016).

Abundant cultural outputs and even the ceasement of culture in China was the result of the Cultural Revolution in China. From the upbringing of the revolution and reconstruction of the western ideas, China ended up just as isolated as they were during its centuries of feudalism.

The destruction of art and old ideas may have been forgotten in China, but the west still studies its ancient tutelage. Nonetheless it is sad to see that the Cultural Revolution was an attempt to undo its very own culture; and as Seneca the elder says it's more important how you view yourself than how others view you.

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