

Linguistic
ENGINEERING

Linguistic ENGINEERING

Language
and
Politics
in
Mao's China

JI FENGYUAN



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Introduction

In the appendix to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell imagined a future society in which everyone accepted the official ideology and in which punishment and terror were unnecessary. Instead, people were kept under control because they spoke, heard, read, and wrote only a single, specially contrived language—the language of Newspeak:

Newspeak was the official language of Oceania and had been devised to meet the ideological needs of Ingsoc, or English Socialism. It was expected that Newspeak would finally have superseded Oldspeak (or Standard English, as we should call it) by about the year 2050. . . .

The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought—that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc—should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words. Its vocabulary was so constructed as to give exact and often very subtle expression to every meaning that a Party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meanings and also the possibility of arriving at them by indirect methods. This was done partly by the invention of new words, but chiefly by eliminating undesirable words and by stripping such words as remained of unorthodox meanings, and so far as possible of all secondary meanings whatever. To give a single example. The word *free* still

existed in Newspeak, but it could only be used in such statements as “This dog is free from lice” or “This field is free from weeds.” It could not be used in its old sense of “politically free” or “intellectually free”, since political and intellectual freedom no longer existed even as concepts, and were therefore of necessity nameless.

. . . A person growing up with Newspeak as his sole language would no more know that *equal* had once had the secondary meaning of ‘politically equal’, or that *free* had once meant ‘intellectually free’, than for instance, a person who had never heard of chess would be aware of the secondary meanings attaching to *queen* and *rook*. There would be many crimes and errors which it would be beyond his power to commit, simply because they were nameless and therefore unimaginable. (Orwell 1976 [1949]; 917–918, 924)

This passage is not without theoretical problems and equivocations, but it raises important questions about the relationship of language to thought. It also captures the spirit, if not the details, of the type of linguistic engineering that is the subject of this book: a centrally coordinated attempt to remake people’s minds by forcing them to speak and write, as far as possible, in set formulae—carefully crafted words, phrases, slogans, and scripts expressing politically correct thought.

Orwell’s principal models were Nazi Germany and, more especially, the Soviet Union. The Newspeak of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was his imaginative extension of the officially approved language of those societies (see Steinhoff 1976). But in the very year in which the novel was published, there came into existence a society in which the control of language was even more comprehensive—the People’s Republic of China. There, more-determined attempts were made to extend the use of politicized language into people’s private lives and to turn the whole population into “thought police” who monitored words to detect “incorrect” thought.¹ These attempts reached their peak in the last ten years of Mao Zedong’s rule, during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976. China was the laboratory in which Mao conducted easily the biggest experiment in linguistic engineering in world history, and one of the most rigor-

ously controlled.² It is an ideal case study for scholars who are interested in the practice of linguistic engineering and who wish to examine its effects on people's beliefs and ways of thinking.

In a loose sense, the term "linguistic engineering" can be applied to any attempt to change language in order to affect attitudes and beliefs. In this sense, linguistic engineering probably exists in all societies. Its current manifestations in the English-speaking world include new coinages and new applications of old words, as well as attempts to eradicate usage that is believed to underpin "offensive" attitudes. So governments gloss over and excuse the deaths of civilians in war by describing them as "collateral damage"; black Americans draw attention to their heritage by insisting that they be called "African Americans"; those who have disabilities raise their status by becoming people with "different abilities"; homosexuals escape medical or psychiatric definition and celebrate their lifestyle by becoming "gays"; prostitutes assert the legitimacy of their way of making money by referring to themselves as "sex workers"; and feminists demand a whole battery of changes to "man-made language," including stopping the use of "man" as a generic term for human beings.

In all these cases, linguistic innovation is intended to affect attitudes through what Deborah Cameron (1995) has called "verbal hygiene." In the case of disadvantaged minorities the goal is, more specifically, to introduce language that affords them respect, defined in their own terms, and to elevate their social status. As Dale Spender (1985, 6) says on their behalf, "Investing the language with one's own different and positive meanings is a priority for all oppressed groups. . . . [T]he language and its use has to be changed; there is no alternative if one seeks to throw off one's oppression."

This type of linguistic manipulation is worth serious study, but it is less far-reaching than the linguistic engineering that is the subject of this book. Even the feminist attack on sexist language is modest in its scope and minor in its consequences compared with the changes made by Mao Zedong and the Com-

munist Party in China. Linguistic engineering in nontotalitarian societies is not effectively controlled by the state, and even when it has political backing, people are free to criticize it and usually to ignore it. Linguistic change is brought about almost entirely by persuasion and social pressure, not by coercion, and it is often accompanied by heated debate and the persistence of rival usages. Deliberate attempts to tamper with language often fail completely, as with the many reforms proposed by the General Semantics movement, and even relatively successful attempts may reach only part of the population.

In China, by contrast, linguistic engineering was directed by the Communist Party, except during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution when Mao Zedong dispensed with the Party. It was an attempt to remake people's minds by compelling them to participate in a totalizing discourse—a discourse that touched all aspects of reality and expressed a single worldview to the exclusion of all others. It required people to use the “correct” revolutionary terms to say the “correct” revolutionary things, emphasizing linguistic form as well as political content.

Linguistic engineering had two aspects. The first was reform of the lexicon and semantics. This involved teaching people the numerous neologisms required for the “correct” expression of Marxism–Leninism–Mao Zedong Thought. It also involved logocide—suppressing words that were tied to “incorrect” thought; semanticide—abolishing old meanings and substituting new, revolutionary ones; and linguistic resurrection—reviving traditional terms and applying them to revolutionary contexts.³ These changes in some respects resembled those that occur as a result of piecemeal linguistic engineering in the West, but they reflected a single ideology, they were rigidly enforced, and they were on a far grander scale.

The second aspect of linguistic engineering was enforcing the habitual use, in relevant contexts, of numerous fixed expressions and standardized scripts that embodied “correct” attitudes or that had “correct” propositional content. Use of these formulae was enforced because it was believed that their message

would sink into people's brains and guide their behavior. Failure to use the formulae was taken as a sign of incorrect thought, as was any attempt to use them in inappropriate contexts. At the same time, the range of situations in which people were compelled to use the formulae was extended from public life to daily routines and private life. This reflected the Communist Party's totalitarian goals, and it made Chinese speech and writing increasingly formulaic. It went far beyond attempts by some religions to get their members to integrate religious formulae, such as prayers or pious exclamations, into their daily lives. The range of religious formulae is usually limited, and in the modern world religious leaders find it difficult to protect their members from exposure to rival discourses. Even when sects attempt to solve the problem by cutting themselves off from the outside world, they cannot usually stop people from leaving. In China, by contrast, the formulae were impossible to escape and eventually became all pervasive.

The subject of this book is the attempt to change beliefs and ways of thinking in a whole society through centrally controlled and rigorously enforced linguistic engineering. Chapter 1 examines relevant theoretical issues in the linguistic and psychological literature; chapter 2 traces the development of linguistic engineering in China down to the onset of the Cultural Revolution; chapters 3–8 examine linguistic engineering during the Cultural Revolution, when revolutionary discourse was most rigorously enforced; and chapter 9 examines the successes and failures of linguistic engineering in China.

This book has drawn some general inspiration from the burgeoning field of critical discourse analysis,⁴ but it is avowedly multidisciplinary, and its main debts lie elsewhere. It incorporates insights and theory generated by scholars specializing in pragmatics, sociolinguistics, communications, and the relationship between language and thought; and it makes extensive use of research by cognitive, behaviorist, and social psychologists. It has also sought from history and political science the skills required to trace the development of linguistic engineering in

China, to place that development in its political and social context, and to assess the effect of linguistic engineering on different sections of the population at particular times.

Such a book must use a wide range of sources on language, politics, and society in China. In a sense, my research started in my youth, for I was eighteen when Mao Zedong died in 1976. Like other students of that era I was a product—albeit an imperfectly processed one—of linguistic engineering. The contextual knowledge that personal experience gives is invaluable, and memory can be a reliable source of information on matters that were part of the daily routine over many years. Such matters, of course, include many aspects of linguistic engineering, for the repetition of revolutionary formulae, day in, day out, was fundamental to the Maoist approach to persuasion. I can still recite parts of the “Little Red Book,” I can still remember all the common slogans, I still know the words of the song that accompanied the “loyalty dance,” and so on. For me, these were like the prayers, nursery rhymes, and moral maxims of a Western childhood, and they are not easily forgotten, even by those who have abandoned the faith.

I am acutely aware, though, of the fallibility of individual memory. I have never relied upon memory for matters on which it is notoriously unreliable, such as chronology. Where I have used it, I have checked my recollections with friends and family members, mostly older than I am. On some topics—such as the language and procedure of the public criticism meeting—I conducted careful inquiries until I was satisfied that I had the details right. At most points, I have been able to supplement my own recollections with written sources. I have frequently cited the autobiographies of former Red Guards who have far richer memories than I do of the Cultural Revolution’s early years, especially the crucial period of “free mobilization” from 1966 to 1968. I have been struck by how consistent they are in their recollections of language, ritual, and the impact of the “big events” of the Cultural Revolution.

In dealing with language, I have been able to use original

sources, selected to illustrate linguistic engineering in its diverse forms: the *People's Daily*, a mass of Red Guard newspapers and leaflets, dictionaries, school textbooks, a model revolutionary opera, and (of course) Chairman Mao's own works. I have also been assisted by an excellent series of monographs on linguistic innovations in Mao's China produced at Berkeley from the 1950s to the early 1980s (Li 1956a, 1956b, 1957a, 1957b, 1958, 1962; Serruys 1962; Hsia 1961, 1963, 1964; Chuang 1967, 1968, 1970; Dittmer and Chen 1981). Empirically oriented, but with shrewd comment, they are based largely on a careful study of Chinese newspapers, which were a vital means of communicating official discourse to the literate élite and to the cadres, who in turn disseminated it to the masses. These studies frequently jogged my memory, and for the period before the Cultural Revolution they filled gaps in my knowledge. I have often given references to them even when they report linguistic usage that is familiar to all Chinese of my generation, so that readers can, if they wish, follow up the examples that they take from the Chinese press.

A study like this inevitably draws heavily on the voluminous secondary literature on politics and society in Mao's China—a literature that makes it possible at last to assess the effectiveness of the Chinese Communist Party's experiment in linguistic engineering. More-recent work has begun to grapple with the implications of the disaster of the Great Leap Forward for peasant attitudes toward collectivist discourse and the Communist Party; it can take into account the astonishing rapidity with which so many Chinese cast aside key tenets of revolutionary discourse once Deng Xiaoping achieved power and eased restrictions; and it can take advantage of the fact that Deng's rise allowed people to speak relatively openly about their experiences under Mao's rule. It is possible, at last, for those who lived through the Cultural Revolution to discover if their own experiences and their own privately held views were typical. It is also possible for scholars to go beyond broad generalities about “what people thought” and to distinguish between what particular groups thought on a variety of issues at different times. We

have finally reached a position where it is possible to say something sensible about which aspects of Maoist discourse were accepted by which groups in which periods. This clears the way for a study of the great Chinese experiment in linguistic engineering. It may also enable us to test some of the wider claims associated with Orwell's thesis that by controlling language we can control thought.

I *Prelude*

Linguistic Engineering

Theoretical Considerations

THE ORWELLIAN VISION of a society in which Big Brother controls thought by manipulating language has intrigued countless people, and seemed plausible to many of them. It is sustained by three related beliefs about language and thought: (1) the assumption that we *think* in the language which we *speak*, whether it be Chinese, English, or Swahili; (2) the proposition, associated in linguistics with Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, that the semantic categories and grammatical rules of the language that we speak determine or at least heavily influence the structure of our thought; (3) the claim that we communicate through a common linguistic code that enables speakers to pair thoughts with words according to fixed semantic and syntactic rules, then lets their audience recover the thoughts simply by decoding the message. In this chapter I will set out the theoretical framework of my argument by addressing these claims, using them as a starting point for discussing the many ways in which language can, and cannot, be used to manipulate thought.

Speech, Concepts, and Thought

In Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the totalitarian rulers of Oceania implemented a massive program of linguistic engineering to make everyone's thoughts conform to the principles of Ing-

soc (English socialism). They replaced the traditional language, Oldspeak, with Newspeak—a language that had no words for expressing politically unsound thoughts. Their intention was that “a heretical thought—that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc—should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words” (Orwell 1976 [1949], 917).

The crucial assumption—that we cannot entertain a thought that we cannot put into words—is quickly qualified by the caveat “at least so far as thought is dependent on words.” Few of Orwell’s readers have even noticed his momentary doubt, in part because a good many of them actually believe, more firmly than Orwell did, that thought really is dependent on words. That view was popularized by the founder of behaviorist psychology, John B. Watson, who asserted that when we think, we cannot do so without covert vocalization (Galotti 1994, 260). More recently, the subordination of thought to language has drawn support from structuralist and poststructuralist emphasis on the priority of language and from garbled versions of the Whorfian linguistic determinism discussed in the next section.

But what if thought is not dependent on words? What if we do not think in the language that we speak or in a language completely dependent on our spoken language? In that case, linguistic engineering will at best have an indirect influence on our thoughts, and banning people from using heretical language will not automatically lead to the slow extinction of heretical ideas. And indeed, there are compelling reasons to reject the view that we can think in “natural” languages such as Chinese, English, Oldspeak, or Newspeak—languages that we use for communication.

First, the claim that thought is merely covert vocalization has been refuted experimentally, at least in its crude Watsonian form. Smith, Brown, Toman, and Goodman conducted an experiment in which Smith was injected with a curare derivative that paralyzed all his muscles. He had to be kept alive by a respirator, and because his vocal chords no longer functioned he could not engage in covert speech. Could he still think? The answer

was a decisive yes. He remained fully conscious and reported that his ability to think about and remember what was going on around him was unimpaired (Galotti 1994, 260).

Second, if thought depends on the acquisition of a natural language, it is hard to see how we could acquire such a language in the first place. As J. Christopher Maloney has put it:

To learn a language is to solve certain problems regarding what expressions mean and how they can combine with other symbols to form complex expressions. If this is what learning a language requires, then learning a language is a matter of thinking. Hence we must already be fluent in the mental language before we learn the languages which we speak. How else could we perform the mental computations necessary for learning the target language? (Maloney 1989, xxi-xxii; for a similar argument see Fodor 1975, 55-64)

Third, there is now a mass of experimental evidence that infants totally lacking in language can use concepts to reason about the world. For example, it has been shown that children as young as two and a half months can mentally represent “objects and surfaces that they no longer perceive” and that they can “operate on their representations so as to derive information about an event they have never perceived” (Spelke, Breinlinger, Macomber, and Jacobson 1992, 606). Very young infants can also reason with concepts that relate to particular objects and classes of object and can use abstract notions of solidity, continuity, motion, cause, and support. All this happens long before they have learned the words that represent the concepts that they use. Indeed, it is because infants acquire a rich store of preverbal concepts that they are later able to attach phonetic labels to them and acquire spoken language (Spelke 1994; Bailargeon 1995; Mandler 1992).

Fourth, even after we have acquired a natural language such as Chinese or English, it is not the medium in which we think. Rather, natural languages simply influence, aid, and express our thought. There are several reasons for insisting on this distinction between thought and the natural language we use to

support and express it. One is that natural languages are packed with words that correspond to more than one thought. As a result, we are forced to express unambiguous thoughts in ambiguous words, so that our audience sometimes mistakes our meaning. This mismatch between unambiguous thought and ambiguous language could not arise if we thought in the language that we speak (Pinker 1994, 78–79).

The distinction between language and thought is also supported by the fact that we frequently use different terms to refer to the same person or thing. For example, I may mention “the room in which I teach,” then subsequently refer to it as “the room” or as “it.” The difference between the words (which are variable) and the concept (which is constant) is clear; and we think in terms of the unchanging concept, which is not tied to the variable linguistic form (Pinker 1994, 80).

Finally, the fact that thought is largely independent of any particular spoken language is shown by the fact that languages are satisfactorily, if imperfectly, translatable. As Jackendoff (1993, 185) says, “The same thought can be expressed in English, where the verb precedes the direct object, and in Japanese, where the verb follows the direct object; hence the form of the thought must be neutral as to word order.” Similarly, concepts are neutral as to the sounds used to represent them in different languages. Even when languages conceptualize the world in different ways, detailed explanation in one language can usually explain how the concepts in the other language differ; then, if the foreign concepts seem useful, they can be borrowed, with or without the foreign words to which they have hitherto been attached. None of this would be possible if our thought were tied to the sounds, the grammar, and the semantic structures of a particular tongue.

If natural language is not the medium in which we think, what is? The answer is that we think in concepts—concepts associated with particular patterns of neural activity. These concepts are mental representations of the things we think about—representations that distinguish those things from other things.

Concepts are frequently linked to words in natural languages, but often they are not. Indeed, we have many more concepts than we have words. Many words have two or more coded meanings, and every one of those words is therefore attached to two or more concepts. Moreover, we all have many concepts for which we have no words, or even any satisfactory combination of words. For example, I might have a very clear concept of a particular sort of pain I have experienced, but I might know of no words that satisfactorily distinguish that sort of pain from other sorts. Indeed, I might not even have tried to describe that pain to myself, let alone to anyone else. I just know that sort of pain, I have a very clear concept of it, because I felt it (see Sperber and Wilson 1998, 197–200).

What, then, is the relationship between natural languages, our concepts, and our thought processes? First, while we develop many concepts as a result of nonlinguistic inputs from our senses, we also learn an enormous number of concepts through language. Other people use language to explain new concepts to us, or they use it to call particular things to our attention, giving us the opportunity to distinguish them conceptually from other things. Moreover, we constantly refine our concepts through reading or talking with others, just as we refine them as a result of input from our senses.

Second, spoken language helps us to differentiate concepts more clearly. When we attach very similar concepts to words that have very different sounds, we find it much easier to keep them distinct. For example, the very different sounds of the words “force,” “power,” and “momentum” help us to differentiate the very similar concepts that these terms symbolize, and this makes it easier to remember and manipulate them (Jackendoff 1987, 323).

Third, as Jackendoff (1987, 323) suggests, when our concepts are related to the sounds and syntactical structures of spoken language, they are “thereby stabilized in memory (probably both short-term and long-term).” The more we can link our concepts to structures, the easier they are to remember, partly

because we are forced to focus on them during the linking process and partly because the structures provide cues that help us retrieve the concepts from memory.

Fourth, by helping us to stabilize our concepts, language makes it easier for us to hold them in our minds, subjecting them to introspective examination. We can much more easily classify them, combine them, recombine them, and make logical inferences from them, producing higher-order concepts. As Jackendoff (1987, 324) says, it “becomes possible to have concepts about concepts and, through language, to stabilize the resulting abstractions. In turn, phonological expression of such higher-order concepts can again be introspected, re-expressed, stabilized, and combined with other concepts.” The intellectual benefits of this are obvious, and they are greatly increased when we learn to write. Literacy enables us to stabilize the concepts still further by attaching them to visual cues as well as phonological ones. To recall a concept or a chain of reasoning, all we need to do is look at a computer screen or a piece of paper.

Because language is so useful in stabilizing our concepts, we often “think out aloud” or express our thoughts in imaginary speech. If that does not enable us to stabilize our concepts and chains of reasoning sufficiently, we may well put our thoughts into writing. Both speech and writing greatly help us to think, because they are such effective cues to the concepts that are the medium of thought. But while we think *with* them, we do not think *in* them. Our words, whether spoken or written, are very useful clues to our thoughts, but they are not themselves thoughts.

The implications of this for linguistic engineering are clear. Since we do not think in any natural language, no program of linguistic engineering can achieve direct manipulation of thought. Not having a specific word for a heretical thought might make it harder to entertain, remember, and manipulate, but it will not stop it from entering our heads, it will not stop us from thinking about it, and it will not stop us from privately

coining a new word to represent it. However, because language greatly influences the concepts in which we think, linguistic engineering has the potential to greatly influence our thought. The nature and extent of that influence is the subject of the rest of this chapter.

Sapir, Whorf, and the Categories of Thought

Some of the most far-reaching claims about the influence of language are associated with the linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. Neither quite proposed that we actually think in the language that we speak, but both were convinced that the semantic and grammatical categories of our language exercise a profound influence upon our way of thinking. In a famous statement, Sapir suggested that our perception of reality varies according to the particular language that we speak: “Human beings . . . are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. . . . The fact of the matter is that the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group” (1949, 162). Whorf took up this theme and developed it even more explicitly:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds—and this means largely by the linguistic system in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way—an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, BUT ITS TERMS ARE ABSOLUTELY OBLIGATORY; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees. (1956, 212–214; emphasis in original)

Whorf summarized this line of argument in his Principle of Linguistic Relativity:

The “linguistic relativity principle” . . . means, in informal terms, that users of markedly different grammars are pointed by the grammars toward different types of observations and different evaluations of externally similar acts of observation, and hence are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world. (1956, 221)

In other words, the differences between languages cause non-linguistic differences in perception and cognition. Whether this amounts to a full-fledged theory of the linguistic determination of thought has been much debated (cf. Foley 1997), and my own view is that probably it does not. However, Whorf has often been seen as a determinist, and we need to ask whether the type of linguistic determinism attributed to him is correct. If it is, we will have to confront the Orwellian nightmare that Big Brother could reduce us to linguistically programmed robots.

Unfortunately for Big Brother, linguistic determinism is flawed. It cannot explain how people who speak the same language can use that language to express radically different concepts linked to different worldviews; it is impossible to reconcile with the fact that groups that speak different languages can use those languages to express the same worldview (Bright and Bright 1965); and it leaves us with no explanation for the undoubted fact that we can take concepts developed in one language and translate them into another. Indeed, if linguistic determinism were true, Whorf could never have explained his views—he could never have used the English language to explain the very different concepts and worldviews allegedly linked inextricably to other languages.

If the strong, deterministic version of the Whorf hypothesis can easily be dismissed, there is a weak version that is consistent with Whorf’s ability to explain in English concepts that he first encountered in other languages. David Carroll expresses that version as follows:

[A] weak version of the hypothesis states that the presence of linguistic categories influences the ease with which various cognitive operations are performed. That is, certain thought processes may be more accessible or more easily performed by members of one linguistic community relative to those of a different linguistic community. As Hockett (1954) expresses it, “languages differ not so much as to what can be said in them, but rather as to what it is relatively easy to say” (p. 122). (1994, 378)

This form of the hypothesis has been treated seriously by linguists and has generated important research. Some of that research has revealed the existence of linguistic universals such as that all languages name the same basic shapes and spatial relations (Clark and Clark 1977). Moreover, research has confirmed that people can distinguish and remember perceptual inputs even when their language has no words with which to describe them (Heider 1972; Heider and Oliver 1972; Rosch 1973). But this does not rule out the possibility that some languages facilitate perceptions and thought processes that other languages make difficult. In fact, there is accumulating evidence that this is the case.

Several studies have shown that under some circumstances semantic categories influence cognition. For example, Kay and Kempton (1984) have demonstrated that English speakers (who have separate terms for the colors green and blue) replicate the dichotomy in their language by exaggerating the distances between colors close to the green/blue boundary. By contrast, Tarahumara speakers (who do not have separate words for the colors) are not influenced by linguistically based dichotomies and show no tendency toward exaggeration.

Other studies have shown the striking superiority in base-10 numerical reasoning of young children who speak Chinese, Japanese, and Korean—languages in which the names of numbers explicitly follow a base-10 numerical system. In Chinese, for example, the number eleven is *shi-yi* (ten-one), twelve is *shi-er* (ten-two), twenty is *er-shi* (two-tens), forty is *si-shi* (four-tens), and so on. So the very structure of the language models

the logic of base-10 thinking, and children are exposed to it from the time they learn to count (Miura 1987; Miura, Kim, Chang, and Okamoto 1988; Miura and Okamoto 1989).

Whorf was particularly interested in the effects of different grammatical structures on cognition, and a study by Bloom (1981) produced results that seemed to provide dramatic support for his intuitions. Bloom pointed out that English uses the subjunctive mood to express counterfactual conditionals—hypothetical statements positing states of affairs that never existed (“If Mao had died in 1964, the Cultural Revolution would never have occurred”). This grammatical construction indicates that Mao did not die in 1964 and that the Cultural Revolution did occur. There is, however, no equivalent construction in Chinese, so that hearers and readers must supplement the grammar with contextual clues before they can infer that the state of affairs is hypothetical. Since this involves a more complex form of reasoning, Bloom predicted that Chinese speakers would find counterfactual thinking more difficult than English speakers do. He conducted several studies that seemed to vindicate his hypothesis. His conclusions, however, were challenged by Au (1983, 1984) and Liu (1985). They pointed out methodological flaws in Bloom’s studies, but their own studies had methodological problems too (Bloom 1984; Carroll 1994, 386–387). The controversy remains unsettled.

Stronger evidence for the influence of grammatical structures on thought comes from a comparison of Navajo and English by Carroll and Casagrande (1958). In Navajo, but not in English, verbs describing the handling of objects vary according to the objects’ form (long and rigid, flat and flexible, and so on). Carroll and Casagrande hypothesized that Navajo children who spoke Navajo would pay greater attention to form than Navajo children who spoke English, and that they would therefore begin to group objects by form rather than color at an earlier age. In other words, they expected the Navajo speakers to develop more quickly the adult tendency to see greater essential similarity between a yellow rope and a blue rope than

between a yellow rope and a yellow stick. When they tested the children, their prediction was fully confirmed. Since the two language groups came from the same reservation and lived under similar conditions, the influence of language on thought is corroborated.

Finally, Lucy (1992) researched the cognitive implications of the different grammatical structures of English and Yucatec Maya. English, he pointed out, always marks the plural of discrete, inanimate objects, whereas Yucatec never does. He hypothesized that when English speakers described pictures they would be more likely to mention and remember how many such objects were present (three trees, two sticks, and so on). The hypothesis was strikingly confirmed. Lucy also pointed out that whereas the grammatical treatment of English nouns depends on the form of the things to which they refer, the treatment of Yucatec nouns depends on their referents' substance. He hypothesized that when asked to classify objects, English speakers would tend to classify them according to their form, Yucatec speakers according to their substance. This is exactly what happened: when shown a cardboard box, a plastic box, and a piece of cardboard, English speakers regarded the two boxes as most similar, while Yucatec speakers focused on the similarity of the two cardboard objects. All of this, of course, was entirely predictable on "weak Whorfian" principles.

Whorf's reputation among linguists is mixed. It has suffered because his name has been linked (rightly or wrongly) to indefensible doctrines of linguistic determinism and because the quality of his fieldwork has been questioned. He also contributed to what has been called "the great Eskimo vocabulary hoax": the snowballing estimates of the number of Eskimo words for snow—estimates that are the standard and inaccurate illustration of the way in which different languages "impose" different systems of classification on reality (Martin 1986; Pulum 1991). However, none of this should be allowed to obscure the fact that there is mounting evidence in favor of a weak, non-deterministic version of Whorf's hypothesis: that the language

we speak influences our thought, making it easier for us to entertain some thoughts and harder for us to entertain others.

The implications of this for linguistic engineering are clear. We need not fear an Orwellian world in which language is used as a technology for programming our thought, reducing us to ciphers of Newspeak. However, changing the language we read, write, speak, and hear can sometimes change the way in which we think. The grammatical structures that Whorf thought so important, however, are not the aspect of language most likely to be manipulated. Linguistic engineers usually focus on suppressing “bad” words, teaching “good” ones, and making people speak in scripts and slogans intended to encode politically correct thought. I discuss the mechanisms through which such manipulation can sway our minds in the next two sections.

Concepts, Schemas, and Worldview

Research by cognitive and behavioral psychologists demonstrates that linguistic engineering can influence our thought in ways almost entirely ignored in the debate over Whorf—a debate that has focused on the effects of semantic categories and grammatical structures. In this section, I will discuss the implications for linguistic engineering of schema theory, which has had a prominent position in cognitive psychology since the 1970s.

What is a schema? Cognitive psychologists have defined it in a variety of ways, but perhaps the most useful for our purposes is that it is a complex of concepts and beliefs associated with a central concept. So during the Cultural Revolution, a Chinese Marxist's schema for the central concept “Mao Zedong” would probably have linked it to concepts such as “the Chinese Communist Party,” “Liberation,” “wisdom,” “red,” “revolution,” “class struggle,” “Jiang Qing,” and so on. Our Marxist would probably also have held numerous beliefs related to the concept “Mao Zedong,” such as “Chairman Mao is our Great Leader,” “Chairman Mao says ‘never forget class struggle,’” and “Chairman Mao is the red, red sun in the Chinese people's hearts.”

The central concept in one schema can, without contradiction, become a subordinate concept in another. In the above example, “revolution” is a subordinate concept in the schema for “Mao Zedong,” but “Mao Zedong” would no doubt feature as a subordinate concept in the schema for “revolution,” along with such concepts as “Marx,” “Lenin,” “class struggle,” and “violence.” The schema for “revolution” would no doubt also include numerous beliefs about the nature, causes, and consequences of revolution, and about particular revolutions—the Russian revolution, the Chinese revolution, and so on.

Schemas are linked together in wider associative networks. So the schema for “Mao Zedong” is linked by its subordinate concepts and beliefs to numerous other schemas, which are in turn linked to other schemas, and so on. So when our hypothetical Marxist hears the name “Mao Zedong,” this not only activates her schema for the concept “Mao Zedong” but through a process of associative priming it puts related schemas on call. This facilitates access to their contents through a process of spreading activation along well-established neural pathways. So people who have been primed by hearing the name “Mao Zedong” are better and faster than other people at recognizing and remembering words, concepts, and assumptions linked to the concept “Mao Zedong” through an associative network. They are also better at recognizing and remembering words, concepts and beliefs linked to such a priming stimulus than at remembering those that are not linked (Anderson 1983, 86–125, 171–214; Anderson 1995, 150–154, 180–186, 220–229; McNamara 1992).

Schemas and associative networks facilitate the storage of information in memory. Material that is fitted into schemas and associative networks is much easier to remember than material for which we have no meaningful associations. For example, Bower, Clark, Lesgold, and Winzenz (1969) asked subjects to learn 112 words that had been grouped in schemas linked together meaningfully in four associative networks. They then compared the performance of those subjects with that of a control group that had been presented with the same words classified at random. At the first trial, after four minutes’ learning,

subjects who had been presented with the schematically organized material remembered an average of 73 words while those who had been presented with disorganized lists remembered only 20.6 words. By the third trial, subjects who encountered the material in schemas and associative networks all had perfect recall, whereas the control group averaged only 52.8 words.

Persuaders who can control our language are in a position to plant new concepts and schemas in our minds, thereby activating mechanisms that can transform our worldview. They can do this through a technique of linguistic engineering that has been used in all twentieth-century totalitarian societies. All they need to do is make people repeatedly use language that is schematically linked to “correct” concepts and beliefs, while at the same time forbidding them to use language that is linked to “incorrect” concepts and beliefs. Constant activation via associative networks will make the correct concepts and beliefs steadily more accessible, while incorrect concepts and beliefs will gradually become less accessible through lack of activation and through the “interference effect” that new learning has on old learning (Anderson 1995, 186–187, 200–203, 211–213).

When correct concepts and beliefs become more accessible than incorrect ones, we use them more often, and this makes them still more accessible. We also begin to see the world differently. Three mechanisms underlie such changes in worldview. First, schematically organized concepts and beliefs affect our perceptions and information gathering by encouraging us to focus on some things and neglect other things. Take, for example, someone who has easy access to the concept of “class struggle” because it is embedded in frequently used schemas. Such a person will notice, perhaps even invent, manifestations of class struggle that would be entirely missed by someone who lacks the concept or who does not have ready access to it because it is seldom activated.

Second, schemas affect what we remember, for we are far more likely to store and recall information that we organize schematically. Moreover, much of what we think we remember is not retrieved directly from memory, but inferred from

assumptions and stereotypes associated with our schemas (Anderson 1995, 211–219; Bower, Black, and Turner 1979). So by influencing what we store in memory and what we recall or inferentially reconstruct as we try to remember, schemas tend to skew our developing versions of reality.

Third, schemas affect the ways in which we categorize sensory inputs, impute meaning to them, and link them to wider interpretations. This tendency can be perfectly compatible with truth and objectivity, as when a radiologist's schematic knowledge enables her to see that shadows on X-ray pictures, which to me are merely shadows, are indications of tuberculosis. But concepts and schemas can sometimes commit us to meanings, interpretations, and evaluations that are largely ideological. For example, the Guomindang's expulsion from the Chinese mainland in 1949 is categorized, according to the value-tagged concepts and schemas of the victorious Communists, as China's "liberation," whereas Guomindang leaders have traditionally categorized it as a "strategic withdrawal."

In calling attention to these ways in which concepts and schemas influence our versions of reality, I am of course not implying that we are locked within them, seeing only what they lead us to expect. Nor am I implying that their influence is irrational. Rather, I am calling attention to what Ulrich Neisser (1976) has called the "cycle of perception," in which our existing concepts and schemas direct our exploration and interpretation of the environment and in which the environment in turn confirms some of our predictions but contradicts others—leading us, perhaps, to modify or replace some of our concepts and schemas. Within this cycle, we neglect neither the influence of top-down processing from our existing concepts and schemas nor the impact of bottom up information from the environment—whose importance has been amply demonstrated by researchers such as Gibson (1966, 1979). Moreover, within the cycle, our concepts and schemas do not cancel our rationality but direct and empower it. They classify and integrate information gained from past exploration of the environment, and they do so in ways relevant to our purposes; they facilitate the storage and

retrieval of that information; and they help to ensure that future exploration is not random, but proceeds in directions that our experience shows are most likely to be profitable.

Concepts and schemas undoubtedly introduce a bias into our processing of information, but it is, on balance, a healthy bias. It may cause us to overlook or misinterpret some information that is relevant to our concerns, but without it we would be far more likely to look in the wrong places and would lack a tool vital to rational interpretation. Even concepts and schemas fed to us by the most cynical of propagandists will almost certainly be more useful to us in encountering the world than would the blank incomprehension of a mind with no concepts and schemas at all. So concepts and schemas contribute powerfully to our rationality, even as they channel it in specific directions. And a persuader who, through controlling our language, makes us more likely to use one set of concepts and schemas rather than another, does not override our rationality but simply points it in new directions.

Linguistic engineering, then, can alter the outcome of rational information processing by affecting the conceptual and schematic apparatus through which we interpret our experience. Such engineering, however, would not reduce us to automata, and it would not be wholly effective. Concepts and schemas emphasized by linguistic engineers could still be rejected and modified because they made no sense of bottom-up inputs from our environment, and they could still be subjected to silent rational critique by people concerned about their consistency and implications. In other words, while schema theory does not justify fears that our thoughts could be linguistically programmed as in Orwell's fictional Oceania, it gives us every reason to believe that linguistic engineering could influence them through mechanisms closely linked to our rationality.

Primitive Affective and Associational Processes

Language can also be used to activate mechanisms of persuasion that have nothing to do with rationality—what Petty and Caci-

oppo (1986, 9) call “rather primitive affective and associational processes.” Eight such processes will be referred to repeatedly in later chapters and require explanation here. Let us take them in order.

Mere Exposure

According to the theory of mere exposure, the more people are exposed to something, the more favorably they evaluate it. In a classic experiment, Zajonc (1968) showed that the more frequently students were asked to pronounce nonsense words, the more they liked them. Similar results have been obtained in experiments exposing students to Chinese characters, Pakistani music, Turkish words, irregular polygons, and graduation pictures. The effect seems to be particularly strong when the target of the exposure is relatively complex, when it appears in a variety of contexts, and when each exposure is brief. Excessive repetition can lead to “wear out,” but most people still like the target better than they did at the first exposure (Bornstein 1989; Perloff 1993, 58–61).

Advertisers use mere exposure to secure brand acceptance, spending huge sums of their clients' money to ensure that we are constantly exposed to the brand names of their products. Linguistic engineers can use it too. They can make people accept and eventually enjoy a new political vocabulary by ensuring that they hear, read, and use it regularly. Mere exposure can also make people like the name of a political leader (Chairman Mao), an organization (the Chinese Communist Party), or a movement (the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution).

The Validity Effect

When we hear or read a statement two, three, or more times, we experience what is known as the validity effect: we are more inclined to think that the statement is true than we were the first time we heard or read it. The effect occurs irrespective of whether the statement is true or false, and it extends to statements that are related to the statement we originally encountered. It is not dependent on any attempt at persuasion: repeti-

tion of the statement is enough (Schwartz 1982; Arkes, Boehm, and Xu 1991; Boehm 1994).

While the validity effect bears a resemblance to the phenomenon of mere exposure, it is not the same thing. It involves increased belief that a statement is true, not a greater liking for the statement; it requires only a couple of repetitions to achieve its maximum effectiveness, whereas mere exposure requires many more; and it seems to depend on a different causal mechanism. However, like mere exposure, it has important implications for linguistic engineering. Quite simply, if we can manipulate a whole population into making politically correct statements, we can produce a massive validity effect. People who hear or read those statements will tend to accept them as true unless they have special reason to doubt them.

Higher-Order Conditioning

Higher-order conditioning is a form of classical conditioning. It occurs when we learn an emotional response to words or things through their repeated association with other words or things that have already acquired the ability to generate that response. For example, if we regularly link the word “capitalism” with words such as “poverty,” “disease,” and “oppression,” the negative connotations of those words will tend to attach themselves to the word “capitalism” itself—and to the economic system it signifies. Moreover, the newly acquired negative connotations of “capitalism” will spread to semantically related words such as “profit”—and to their referents (Staats and Staats 1957, 1958; Perloff 1993, 63–69; Bem 1970: 43–45). Such forms of verbal conditioning are a major source of our attitudes toward people and things. They are a fundamental tool of advertising and of political propaganda. They are also part of the stock-in-trade of the linguistic engineer.

Operant Conditioning

Most people have not needed modern behavioral science to tell them that there is merit in what psychologists call operant

conditioning—modifying people's attitudes through reward and punishment. What they may not realize is that operant conditioning is a very effective tool of linguistic engineering. All we need to do is manipulate people into making statements that express politically correct attitudes, then reward them with approval. This immediately increases their confidence that the statements are true. Conversely, if we punish people who make politically incorrect statements with criticism, their belief in those statements tends to suffer (Scott 1957; Bostrom, Vlandis, and Rosenbaum 1961; Insko 1965).

Modeling Theory

Research generated by modeling theory has vindicated and elaborated the age-old view that we can learn by example. Albert Bandura and his colleagues, in particular, have shown that we can learn attitudes in the absence of direct reinforcement, simply by observing or listening to others (Bandura 1971, 1977, 1986). Young people, especially, tend to adopt attitudes modeled by the speech and behavior of those who impress them. This tendency has important implications for linguistic engineering. It means that if we have the power to control people's verbal behavior, we can create a situation in which everyone models correct attitudes. It matters not at all that some people are secret heretics, for they are forced to model—and thereby to propagate—the very attitudes they inwardly oppose.

Bandura argues that successful modeling is most likely to occur when models capture our attention, when we mentally rehearse then act out the modeled behaviour, and when we see that it is rewarded. Linguistic engineers who are powerful enough to control what people say are powerful enough to ensure that these conditions of successful modeling are fulfilled. They can ensure that the verbal modeling of correct attitudes is so all-pervasive that it is repeatedly brought to people's attention; they can use the state propaganda apparatus to glamorize desirable models, so that young people, especially, want to adopt their attitudes; they can make even young children

learn and repeat the words uttered by those models; and they can ensure that people who express correct attitudes, whether in propaganda material or in real life, are praised and perhaps given other rewards, so that those who observe them learn through vicarious operant conditioning.

In Western societies, attempts to use role models to control young people's attitudes are frequently frustrated by a multiplicity of rival models glamorizing alternative values. Parents, schools, peer groups, churches, rock stars, sports personalities, and the media frequently offer conflicting models of acceptable attitudes and behavior. However, as Perloff (1993, 73) notes, "When all the socialization agents (parents, peers, schools, media, etc.) convey the same message, then the situation is rather simple: the child will probably internalize the position advocated by the different influence sources." This is precisely what linguistic engineers in totalitarian societies achieve by forcing everyone to model correct attitudes by using officially approved words to say correct things.

Reference Group Effects

We all tend to dismiss views espoused by groups we regard as uninformed, prejudiced, or unlike ourselves. However, we are heavily influenced by the views of groups with which we identify, whose approval we want, or that we regard as authoritative. These are our reference groups—groups to which we refer for cues when we are deciding what to think, groups whose frames of reference we adopt as we analyze the world (Kelly and Woodruff 1956; Bem 1970, 79–88).¹ Often enough, our reference groups agree, but in pluralist societies this does not always happen. Children can be caught between the conflicting views of parents, teachers, and friends, and adults may have to decide whether they are going to follow the lead of their church, their political party, or their trade union. In societies with totalitarian tendencies, however, linguistic engineers can eliminate such conflict, at least on politically important issues. They just need

to make every reference group address those issues repeatedly, using prescribed slogans and stock phrases to support the official view. And when all reference groups speak with a single voice, even silent dissent is difficult.

Cognitive Dissonance

The theory of cognitive dissonance, formulated by Leon Festinger (1957), has had a controversial, exciting, and extremely fruitful career in social psychology. It generates insights that at first seem counterintuitive, but that seem plausible once the theory has been grasped. It is also supported by convincing evidence and continues to generate original hypotheses and research.

Cognitive dissonance is a state of psychological discomfort that occurs when a person becomes aware of holding two beliefs that are psychologically inconsistent, or of holding a belief that is psychologically inconsistent with his or her behavior. For example, when revolutionary idealism leads people voluntarily to denounce their colleagues, they may experience severe dissonance for two reasons: because their revolutionary idealism conflicts with their commitment to traditional norms of personal loyalty or because their behavior, which is almost certain to cause terrible suffering, threatens their self-image as good and kind people.

Dissonance theory predicts that, if people cannot undo the damage caused by their denunciations, they will reduce their psychological discomfort in two ways: by intensifying their revolutionary idealism at the expense of norms of personal loyalty and benevolence and by blaming their victims—telling themselves that the victims deserve their fate, that they are hateful, that they subhuman, and so on. The theory also predicts that the most dramatic shift toward callous and hostile attitudes will occur among kind people who genuinely abhor suffering, for these are the people who experience the strongest dissonance. People who are already callous and unprincipled will experi-

ence little dissonance and little attitude change. The theory is a very powerful one, whose predictions have been confirmed in numerous experimental and real-life contexts (cf. Perloff 1993, chap. 10).

Self-Perception Theory

The theory of cognitive dissonance had an enormous influence on social psychology in the late 1950s and 1960s, but it was not without critics. One of the most effective was Daryl Bem (1965, 1967, 1970, 1972), whose self-perception theory was originally put forward as a comprehensive alternative to dissonance theory, but which is best seen as a complementary theory that offers a superior explanation of some phenomena the dissonance theorists once claimed as their own. Both self-perception theory and dissonance theory appear to be correct within their “proper domain of application” (Fazio, Zanna, and Cooper 1977).

Self-perception theory points to mechanisms that operate when we advocate a position that departs only slightly from our existing attitudes, or when our attitudes are unformed. Under these circumstances, we will probably not even become fully aware of the discrepancy between our existing views and the position we have advocated, let alone feel the discomfort associated with dissonance. Instead, our best guide to what we really think is what we have said. We are inclined to say, “I must believe it. Why else would I have said it?” As Bem (1970, 57) puts it, we infer our own “internal states” from our own “overt behavior.”

As with dissonance, self-perception is most effective in producing attitude change when the behavior is voluntary. If I am forced to say “Chairman Mao is the red, red Sun in my heart,” I won’t be tempted to infer my attitudes from my statement. I will tell myself that I said it only because I was forced to. By contrast, if I am present at a rally where other people are shouting slogans of Mao worship, and find myself shouting spontaneously along with them, I will be inclined to infer my attitudes from my behavior and conclude that I love Chairman Mao just like every-

one else. In this way, my verbal behavior can crystallize attitudes that are not fully formed, and it can shift attitudes that are slightly discrepant from the view that I have expressed. So by putting words in people's mouths, linguistic engineers can, in effect, tell them what they think—and they often believe it.

Persuasive Mechanisms and Linguistic Determinism

All of these mechanisms create opportunities for linguistic engineers. However, they give us no reason to believe that we might one day be reduced to automata programmed by Orwellian Newspeak. In the first place, while the mechanisms are effective in a statistical sense, not one of them can be guaranteed to produce attitude change in everyone. Instead, there is considerable variability in the extent to which individuals are susceptible to these mechanisms, and the mechanisms are more effective in some contexts than in others. The effects of mere exposure are much diminished when the number of exposures goes beyond a certain point (Perloff 1993, 59–61); the validity effect is greatly reduced in subject areas in which people claim little knowledge (Arkes, Hackett, and Boehm 1989); higher-order conditioning works best on people who know little about the person or thing they are being conditioned to love or hate (Cacioppo, Marshall-Goodell, Tassinary, and Petty 1992); people sometimes reduce dissonance not by changing their attitudes, but by changing their behavior, apologizing, or reminding themselves of their virtues in other areas (cf. Steele 1988); even in a totalitarian society, some people manage to find bad role models to emulate; people sometimes remain alienated from what are supposed to be their reference groups (Bem 1970, 82–83); and we have seen that dissonance and self-perception produce little attitude change when people say things under compulsion. So the mechanisms of persuasion we have discussed do not automatically produce persuasion. Whether they do or not depends on the context in which they operate and the characteristics of the individuals to whom they are applied. They are powerful weapons in the hands of linguistic engi-

neers, but they cannot produce the uniformity that Orwell feared or that some totalitarian rulers have desired.

Code, Context, and Interpretation

A full-fledged Orwellian program of linguistic engineering can work only if what Sperber and Wilson (1995) call the “Code Model” of communication is correct. According to this model, the link between the words and the message is strong and direct: if we know the conventions that link words to meanings and if we know the grammatical rules that govern the construction of sentences, we can encode and decode messages. In that case, the prospects of dictating the contents of people’s minds through manipulating language are good. If we ban the words that encode heretical ideas, those ideas cannot be communicated; and if we make people recite correctly coded political slogans, we can be sure that if they have been taught the code they will understand the slogans’ message.

There is no doubt that the coding of words plays a part in communication, but coding on its own cannot do the job. Grasping the speaker’s meaning depends not just on knowing the grammatical and semantic code, but on a wider process of inference. The meaning of an utterance is inferred not only from its grammatical rules and the coded meaning of its words, but from the contextual clues that the hearer brings to the process of interpretation. The selection of those clues is not irrational or random, but it is governed by no set of rules, no algorithm, we can learn and use. So we sometimes mistake speakers’ intended meanings because we place their words in contexts they did not expect; and people sometimes disagree about what is being said because their different knowledge and backgrounds suggest different contexts of interpretation.

When we interpret words, we generally contextualize them automatically and unconsciously, so few people realize how much interpretation depends on contextual clues. It may therefore be helpful if I spell out four ways in which contexts under-

pin interpretation (cf. Wilson and Sperber 1986; Sperber and Wilson 1995).

First, contextual clues are required to disambiguate words and flesh out their meaning. If I say, “She was too cold,” for example, the hearer must use contextual information to determine the referent of the pronoun “she,” to determine whether “cold” means “low in temperature” or “unfriendly,” and to clarify what she was too cold for.

Second, contextual clues may be required to determine what linguists call the “illocutionary force” of an utterance. If I say, for example, “You’re joining the Party,” the hearer must use contextual information to decide whether the utterance is intended as a statement, an order, or even (if the speaker is a New Zealander who ends statements with a rising intonation) a question.

Third, contextual knowledge is necessary if we are to recover what linguists call “implicatures.” For, example, if I ask my friend if she would like some ice cream, and she replies, “I’m starting to get fat,” I can recover her implied refusal (the implicature) only with the aid of two contextual premises: “my friend does not want to get fat,” and “eating too much ice cream tends to make people fat.”

Finally, context determines whether an utterance is taken literally, or understood metaphorically or ironically. So if I say, “They will fight to the death,” do I mean that someone is literally going to get killed? Or am I just using a colorful metaphor to say that two nonviolent disputants will never agree to compromise? Only the context can tell. Similarly, if I say, “You are very kind,” am I paying a compliment? Or am I being sarcastic, saying, in effect, “You are heartless and selfish”? Again, contextual clues are our only guide.

The crucial role of the context of interpretation means, as Sperber and Wilson (1995) have argued, that the Code Model of communication is untenable. This argument has important implications for linguistic engineering. First, the control of words and their conventional meanings (the code) does not guarantee control of the messages that words are intended to

convey, for the subversive contextualization of politically correct words can make them convey a politically incorrect message. All subversives need to do, if they think they can get away with it, is place the words in a context that yields an ironical meaning or that makes their use appear heavy-handed, comical, or ridiculous.

Second, control of the code does not ensure that those who shout the linguistic engineers' slogans will interpret them as intended. The coded meaning of the words is only one clue to the message the slogans are intended to convey. If people are to recover that message, they not only need to know the code, but they also have to place the words in their intended context of interpretation.

Given the importance of the context of interpretation, how can linguistic engineers help to ensure that people interpret slogans and other verbal formulae as intended? One thing they can do is pay great attention to what Sperber and Wilson (1995, 39) call the "mutual cognitive environment" that they share with their audience. An individual's cognitive environment consists of all the facts he or she can perceive, recall, or infer. When the communicator and the audience both are capable of knowing that they share some part of their respective cognitive environments, we call the part they share their mutual cognitive environment. Mutual cognitive environments enable communicators to make rational guesses about the codes and contextual assumptions to which the audience has access and about which words will activate just those codes and contextual assumptions necessary for correct interpretation. So linguistic engineers, like all communicators, need to know their audience.

Another strategy that can help linguistic engineers communicate their message is to homogenize the cognitive environments that people bring to the task of interpretation. This will not, of course, succeed completely, for each person's cognitive environment is the product of experiences, memories, circumstances, and cognitive abilities that have an inescapable element of particularity. However, a powerful and determined totalitar-

ian regime can increase the overlap between people's cognitive environments in several ways. It can supplement linguistic engineering with a program of social engineering that reduces diversity and imposes a common education system, common customs, common rituals, and common experiences on the whole population. It can also homogenize and reorient people's cognitive environments by transforming parts of their material environment. In particular, it can destroy all monuments, architecture, ornaments, and art that remind people of the diversity of past ages; and it can ensure that people are constantly exposed to monuments, statues, flags, banners, pictures, and posters linked to the assumptions of the new ideology. Under these circumstances the mutual cognitive environment enabling communication between rulers and ruled will be greatly enlarged. The result should be more accurate communication and more uniform interpretation of linguistic drills intended to program the minds of the ruled.

Effective linguistic engineering also requires totalitarian rulers to monitor and correct their subjects' interpretation of slogans and propagandistic messages. So there must be a hierarchy, in which the rulers monitor and correct the interpretations of their immediate subordinates, who in turn monitor and correct the interpretations of their own subordinates, and so on down to the grassroots level. The most effective way of doing this is probably that adopted by the Chinese Communist Party under Mao's rule. As far as possible, the population is organized into small study groups in which well-briefed group leaders get everyone present to discuss the implications of the latest slogans and study materials supplied by the Party. The leaders then detect and correct aberrant interpretations, and they supply additional information that enlarges the mutual cognitive environment they share with ordinary members of the group. This ensures a fairly high level of interpretive consistency among the various levels of the hierarchy, except that it tends to break down when applied to those at the very bottom—the illiterate and ignorant who share only a very limited cognitive

environment with their rulers. Even in their case, however, the technique is valuable, for it makes local group leaders aware that most people have only a very limited understanding of their rulers' message.

Finally, once people have been introduced to the politically correct beliefs required for interpretation, linguistic engineers can help to persuade people that those beliefs are true by using what Sperber and Wilson (1995, 115–117) call “retroactive strengthening.” All they need to do is manipulate communicators into saying or writing things that make sense only in the context of contextual beliefs that the linguistic engineers want the audience to accept as true. Every time that happens, the people addressed become aware that the communicator takes the truth of those beliefs for granted. When the communicator is trusted, this can have powerful persuasive effects, particularly when other communicators also say things based on the assumption that the beliefs in question are true. In other words, it is possible to pressure people to accept propositions that are not explicitly asserted, but whose truth is taken for granted when they are invoked as the interpretive context for utterances that would otherwise be unintelligible. This, perhaps, is the only advantage linguistic engineers can derive from the importance of the context of interpretation.

A Framework for Multifactorial Persuasion

The approach to linguistic engineering adopted in this study is not only multidisciplinary, but multifactorial: language affects cognition not through a single mechanism, but through many. This may be unsatisfactory to those who are looking for a single, overriding cause, but it is a fact. However, it may lessen this dissatisfaction if I can put these diverse mechanisms within a single theoretical framework. As it happens, there is such a framework: the “information processing approach” embodied in the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986).

The Elaboration Likelihood Model proposes that there are two routes by which persuasive messages change attitudes: a central route and a peripheral one. When people process messages via the central route, they “elaborate” or think carefully about their content. This activity involves intensive information processing that integrates the resultant attitudes and supporting assumptions into stable schemas, which are in turn linked to wider associative networks. As a result, when persuasion occurs via the central route, it will be relatively persistent and resistant to counterarguments.

When people process messages via the peripheral route, they rely on cues that are peripheral to their content (the authority of the speaker, applause from the audience, positive images that accompany the message, and so on). The messages are not processed intensively, so the resulting attitudes are only weakly integrated with supporting assumptions in a coherent framework of schematically supported beliefs. They tend to fade when the peripheral cues are withdrawn, and they are likely to crumble when attacked.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model implies that a radical, Orwellian form of linguistic engineering, which requires people to use the propagandist’s language in their daily lives, will be far more effective than media-based propaganda. When linguistic engineers teach people revolutionary slogans and scripts, get them to discuss their implications, then force them to use the new language in appropriate contexts, they are unknowingly doing exactly what the Elaboration Likelihood Model recommends. They are ensuring that people subject the revolutionary message to intensive central route processing, linking its claims and concepts to revolutionary theory and to their everyday lives. This embeds the message in supporting schemas and associative networks, making it very stable and resistant to counterargument.

Of the other persuasive mechanisms mentioned, the only one likely to involve much central route processing is the reduction of cognitive dissonance. Getting rid of dissonance does not

necessarily involve extensive elaboration, but it often does. When people are strongly motivated to change deeply held beliefs inconsistent with what they have said, they can engage in a great deal of elaboration as they talk themselves into believing that what they have said is right. Strenuous rationalization involves extensive elaboration (Petty and Cacioppo 1986, 222).

The remaining persuasive mechanisms are all peripheral route processes, which involve little elaboration. Indeed, we have seen that they are what Petty and Cacioppo (1986, 9) call “rather primitive affective and associational processes.” Higher-order conditioning and operant conditioning are effective not only on rational humans, but on slugs and snails; mere exposure and the validity effect involve no issue-relevant argument at all; the modeling effects and reference-group effects produced by linguistic engineering involve imitation rather than issue-relevant considerations; and attitude change as a result of self-perception involves only slight cognitive effort, none of it issue-relevant. The implication of the Elaboration Likelihood Model is that attitudes based on these peripheral mechanisms, and nothing more, should be relatively easy to change. This in fact seems to be the case (Petty and Cacioppo 1986, 173–195).

The Elaboration Likelihood Model does not suggest that linguistic engineers should focus exclusively on central-route processing. Rather, it suggests that they should pursue both central-route and peripheral-route strategies of persuasion. On the one hand, they should require people to discuss the implications of revolutionary formulae and use them in every appropriate context. This activity creates new schematic networks that entrench the revolutionary message and affect subsequent central-route processing. On the other hand, linguistic engineers need to recognize that people do not spend all their time talking, and that they will often be deterred by the effort (processing costs) involved in extensive elaboration. They will gratefully resort to peripheral cues as a more economical way of deciding what to think. In that case, the peripheral cues need to be carefully engi-

neered and plentiful. In information-processing terms, a dual strategy is likely to be the most effective.

All of the persuasive mechanisms mentioned in this chapter show a significant statistical effectiveness, but that does not mean that they necessarily affect all people in all circumstances. In fact, they do not. Some people, we have seen, are more resistant to them, and under some circumstances their effects are weak. This means that we cannot simply assume a certain level of effectiveness, then project it onto the particular case of Mao's China. Instead, we have to use the theory, rather tentatively, as a heuristic, combining it with solid research into the actual historical record. We need to discover which techniques of linguistic engineering were used, under what circumstances, and with what effect. In short, we need to draw on the findings and emulate the skills of the historians and political scientists who have written about China. Theory is not a substitute for research into actual historical cases, but its complement.

Linguistic Engineering before the Cultural Revolution

THE COMMUNIST VICTORY in China in 1949 marked the start of a massive, nationwide program of linguistic engineering. It involved the suppression of words that expressed incorrect thought, the substitution of new meanings for old ones, and the conversion of traditional terms to revolutionary purposes. It also required people to season their speech and writing with prescribed formulae—fixed expressions and scripts that embodied correct thought. Over time, it was hoped, the formulae would sink into people's minds, producing revolutionary beliefs and values.

Origins of Linguistic Engineering in China

The Chinese Communist Party's policies of linguistic engineering did not emerge from nowhere. Some of their features fitted easily into Chinese tradition, some were borrowed from the theory and practice of thought control in the Soviet Union, and some drew on ideas Mao had developed when working as a political agitator in the 1920s. The whole package of policies, more or less, was tested in the revolutionary crucible of Yan'an from the late 1930s and especially during the Rectification of Party members in 1942–1944.

While there were no full-fledged precedents in Chinese tradition for Mao's policies of linguistic engineering, certain beliefs

and practices made those policies easier to accept. One was the Confucian claim that many aspects of people's character were not fixed parts of human nature, but could be modified by education. This fell well short of the Maoist doctrine that when someone matures, "The kind of person he grows up to be depends entirely on the kind of education given him by his objective environment" (Munro 1977, 83, citing Wen Wei, *China Youth*, 7 May 1962). It did, however, justify the belief that intensive education was an effective means of changing people very much for the better. So people in China were less likely than people in many other countries to attach weight to unalterable features of human nature or to believe that individual temperaments and abilities are fixed by karma, by fate, or by genetic endowment. This made it easier to be optimistic about the possibility of creating "new people" by "reeducating" them through programs of linguistic and social engineering.

More directly relevant to linguistic engineering was the traditional Chinese emphasis on rote learning, not simply as a method of acquiring knowledge, but as an aid to virtue. Children in imperial China were made to recite moral maxims in the belief that "repeated memorization and chanting aloud would, with time, imprint the moral message indelibly in the mind" (Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1984, 76). This was also the rationale for testing candidates for imperial office on their ability to remember the classical Confucian texts, which were held to contain "the Truth concerning virtue" (Unger 1982, 68–70). It was believed that when magistrates educated in this way carried out their duties, the appropriate passages would come readily to mind and guide their decisions. This was a less systematic anticipation of the linguistic engineering of the communist era, when people were made to chant slogans and repeat Mao's words to make correct thought sink into their minds.

Rote learning places as much emphasis on correct linguistic form as on propositional content. This emphasis can be traced, in part, to the Confucian doctrine of the rectification of names (*zheng ming*), which might be translated more generally as "the

rectification of terms.” As John Makeham (1994, 46–47) points out, Confucius “did not regard names as passive labels but rather as social and hence political catalysts” that “could be used to prescribe, and not simply to describe, [sociopolitical] distinctions.” He therefore advised rulers to ensure that names were correct and to use them to promote correct thought and behavior (Lu 2000, 5–6, 10). In accordance with this doctrine, successive dynasties attempted to formalize language—even compiling lists of forbidden characters (Schoenhals 1992, 2).

The emphasis on correct linguistic form went to extremes under Mao, when people were not only required to say certain things but to use exactly the right words when saying them. This was simply an exaggeration of something far stronger in Chinese culture than in Western culture: the idea that many sentiments should be expressed using set verbal formulae as a mark of propriety and earnestness. “To a Westerner,” as Perry Link observes, “these formulations may seem to be clichés—indicative of unoriginality and even hypocrisy in those who repeat them. But in China, people often repeat the standard phrases with sincerity, to signal true feelings and moral commitment” (1992, 10). So the formulaic nature of Maoist Newspeak had links to a Chinese cultural trait.

While it is possible to find some traditional antecedents of the linguistic engineering forced on the Chinese people by Mao and the Communist Party, they are not an adequate explanation of the phenomenon. In imperial China, emperors and scholar-bureaucrats never dreamt of anything like the centrally directed and intensive manipulation of language imposed after 1949. Moreover, the traditional Chinese state had too little control over individual lives to implement far-reaching policies of linguistic engineering. People had substantial independence of the state even in the cities, where their existence was dominated by families, clans, and *guanxiwang*—social networks based on the reciprocal giving of favors. In the villages, people were more independent still. Indeed, as Sun Yat-sen lamented in 1924, “The Chinese people have shown the greatest loyalty to family and

clan with the result that in China there have been family-ism and clan-ism but no real nationalism. Foreign observers say that the Chinese are like a sheet of loose sand" (Whyte 1974, 1). After 1949, however, the Communist Party all but destroyed the clans, subordinated the family to the state, and extended the state's power into the most distant villages. The Chinese people ceased to be "like a sheet of loose sand" and began to act together, taking orders from the center. It was this growth of state power, not Chinese tradition, that was the prerequisite of a massive, centrally directed program of linguistic engineering.

Centrally directed programs of linguistic engineering have been practiced, moreover, in countries whose cultural traditions were very different from China's. These countries had no Confucian classics; they were less influenced by doctrines stressing the malleability of human nature; their states had no tradition of imparting virtue through rote learning; they had nothing like the Chinese imperial examination system; their scholars and rulers would have been nonplussed by the importance that educated Chinese attached to names; and they placed less emphasis on correct linguistic form. What these countries had in common with China is that they were ruled by dictatorships that had the totalitarian aim of achieving the total subordination of individuals and social institutions to the rulers and their ideology.

Within the totalitarian camp, Communist regimes generally came closest to the totalitarian ideal. In part, this was because their goals were more radical. They were determined not only to push through an economic and social revolution, but to effect substantial changes in human nature. Leon Trotsky expressed their hopes of a transformed humanity:

To produce a new, "improved version" of man—that is the future task of communism. And for that we first have to find out everything about man, his anatomy, his physiology and that part of his physiology which is called his psychology. Man must look at himself and see himself as a raw material, or at best as a semi-manufactured product, and say: "At last, my dear *homo sapiens*, I will work on you." (Figs 1997, 734)

The Marxist project of creating new people in a new society was exceptionally ambitious, and Marxists were correspondingly more inclined to believe that only drastic totalitarian controls were up to the task.

Communist regimes not only had more radical ideals than other dictatorships, but they were also generally in a better position to put them into practice. This was because they had won power by defeating the old ruling classes and established institutions, not by co-opting or appeasing them. They were therefore generally able to enforce radical social transformation—to sweep away private ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange; to bring virtually all economic activity under the control of the Party-state; to destroy or subjugate virtually all autonomous social organizations; and to make people use language that reflected the Party's distinctive political goals.

Communist intellectuals' unusually strong faith in the transformative power of words was in part a result of their philosophical materialism—a materialism that predisposed them to link thought directly with language that was neither spiritual nor purely abstract. This in turn encouraged them to think that they could change people's thoughts by making them learn and recite words, slogans, and scripts that expressed the revolutionary worldview. Words were revolutionary tools, and whenever Marxist leaders contemplated their power, mechanical metaphors came naturally to their minds. For Stalin, a writer was “an engineer of human souls,” and for Lenin and Mao, literature and art were simply “cogs and wheels in the whole revolutionary machine” (Figs 1997, 737; Mao 1942b, 271). So the term “linguistic engineering,” as a description of their attempts to manipulate language, is singularly appropriate.

Mao's linguistic engineering owed more to his totalitarian aspirations and to the example of the Soviet Union than to Chinese tradition. In Russia, the Bolsheviks were well aware of the importance of language. “People for the most part . . . don't know how to *think*,” said Lenin in 1913; “they only *learn words by heart*” (Young 1991, 208). In accordance with this dictum, the

Bolsheviks used slogans to rally revolutionary support, and the regulation of language played a central role in their systematic and aggressive attempts to remake people's minds. Lenin saw "the selection of language" as the Communist Party's most critical task, while Stalin described it as an "an instrument of struggle and development of society"—an instrument that was inseparable from thought (Young 1991, 126, 211). Their emphasis on language became Marxist orthodoxy, neatly summarized by the theoretician L. O. Reznikov: "Marxism teaches us that language reasserts itself not only as a means of communication . . . but also as a powerful tool which can be used to affect thoughts, feelings and especially behaviour, as well as, ultimately, the material reality" (Young 1991, 211).

The Soviet model was well known to Chinese Marxists, as were Stalin's views on language. Indeed, as Paul Serruys (1962, 17) has observed, "In China probably more than in any other Communist country, the articles and letters of Stalin concerning the true Marxist views on language remained the fundamental handbook of directive norms and principles for linguistics." In particular, Chinese linguists accepted Stalin's doctrine that language and thought are inseparable. Serruys (1962, 60–61) summarizes the views of the leading Chinese linguists, based on their reading of Marx and Stalin: "Language is the immediate reality of thought (Marx). Ideas cannot exist separate from language. The true nature of thought is that it is realized in and with language. Unless thought has been fixed and recorded in language it cannot exist. Pure 'naked thought' is non-existent (Stalin)." In other words, we think in the language that we speak, or at least we cannot think without that language. This view remains common among Chinese linguists to this day.¹

Long before Stalin began to make his pronouncements on linguistics, however, the Chinese Communists were learning the power of words through their own experience of propaganda work and ideological struggle. In his 1927 "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan," for example, Mao noted that Communist-organized peasants' associations had

made mass meetings and simple slogans an effective means of propaganda:

“Down with imperialism!” “Down with the warlords!” “Down with the corrupt officials!” “Down with the local tyrants and evil gentry!”—these political slogans have grown wings, they have found their way to the young, to the middle-aged and the old, to the women and children in countless villages, they have penetrated into their minds and are on their lips. . . . From now on care should be taken to use every opportunity gradually to enrich the content and clarify the meaning of those simple slogans. (Mao 1927, 47–48)

Mao also recommended that people who had committed minor political offenses be induced to write self-criticisms—a standard language-based technique of thought reform that activated counterattitudinal assumptions (cf. Mao 1927, 36). The main themes of Mao’s writings in these years are the mobilization of popular revolutionary consciousness and the rectification of ideological errors by Party members. It is clear that “he was deeply concerned with the problem of propaganda, agitation, and ideological reform, and that he was constantly experimenting with methods or techniques of political persuasion” (Yu 1964, 45).

The techniques of persuasion that Mao and his lieutenants had perfected were put into practice during the Communist Party’s long exile in Yan’an (1935–1947). Mao had become Party chairman in January 1935, and linguistic engineering was one of the tools he used to consolidate both his position within the Party and the Party’s standing among the peasants. He made Yan’an into a “student city” with some thirty-four institutions for the education and reeducation of Party, military, and government cadres, and he used these institutions to create a revolutionary “discourse community” united and empowered by a special language, uniformity of theory, and the universal acceptance of Maoist myths (Apter and Saich 1994, chaps. 3, 4, 7–9, and appendix; cf. Gao 2000, chaps. 10–11). Members of that community used the language as they learned, told, and retold carefully scripted stories that led up to Mao’s emergence as China’s

guide and savior: the story of China's imperial decline, the story of the battle between the Communist Party and the Guomindang, and the story of Mao's triumph over misguided or treacherous opponents within the Party (Apter and Saich 1994, chap. 3). At Yan'an, new recruits learned the language of Marxist philosophy—"universals and particulars," "ideas and representation," "materialism and idealism," "reflection and reality," "concrete and abstract," "theory and practice," "unity of opposites," and so on (Apter and Saich 1994, 227–228; cf. Mao 1937a, 1937b). They also learned the language of class analysis, so that they could differentiate the compradors from the national bourgeoisie, assess the revolutionary potential of the petty bourgeoisie, distinguish the proletariat from the semiproletariat, exploit the dissatisfactions of the lumpen proletariat, plot the dispossession of the landlords, reassure then betray the rich peasants, co-opt the middle and upper-middle peasants, and mobilize the poor and lower-middle peasants. (For most of this terminology, see Mao 1926, 1933.)

In Yan'an, the cadres learned the new language and the Maoist scripts through lectures, personal study, and incessant discussion, both formal and informal. Much of that discussion took place in small groups inspired by the cells Lenin had developed in the Bolshevik Party (Whyte 1974, 23–24). In those groups, the cadres went through a process of "exegetical bonding" produced by the intensive analysis in small groups of prescribed Marxist and Maoist texts (Apter and Saich 1994, chap. 8). In a process brilliantly described by Gao (2000), they learned to speak in the language of the texts, applying its lessons to their own lives and submitting to the group detailed and often humiliating critiques of their own past behavior. This whole process of criticism and self-criticism was carefully supervised: deviant interpretations were corrected, and those who stood out against the official line were isolated and attacked. Only when they confessed their errors with every appearance of sincerity were they accepted back into the group. Exegetical bonding reached a peak during the Party rectification of 1942–1944, when it was supplemented

by terror in the form of a Rescue Campaign directed at alleged spies and traitors, nearly all of them entirely innocent (cf. Gao 2000). At the end of it all, the cadres spoke the new language, they all embraced outwardly and usually inwardly the assumptions linked to that language, and they rejoiced in their acceptance as comrades by other members of the group. They felt “both a sense of relief at having ‘passed the test’ and pride at being admitted into the new order” (Apter and Saich 1994, 274). The transformation was profound:

The last reserves of individualism were wiped out, completing the conveyance of self to collectivity. . . . People felt themselves transformed from within, by their own efforts as well as the efforts of those around them. Yan'an changed drastically from an essentially voluntaristic community into something much more rigoristic, a discourse community in which structures were more highly institutionalized, norms internalized, and behaviour socialized. (Apter and Saich 1994, 263–264)

The exegetical bonding was an effective tool of persuasion partly because the Yan'anites were searching for a transcendent truth and wanted to be converted. However, its power also stemmed from the fact that the discourse generated by the texts activated the entire pantheon of persuasive mechanisms discussed in the last chapter. That discourse modeled correct thought, its universal use subjected the Yan'anites to powerful reference-group effects, it reinforced schemas that gave a revolutionary slant to the interpretation of experience, it reinforced politically desirable assumptions through retroactive strengthening, it promoted higher-order conditioning by its deployment of positive and negative terms, it created opportunities to change attitudes through operant conditioning, it led people to like the new political jargon through mere exposure, it made unsupported statements sound plausible through the validity effect, and it led people with unformed views to infer what they thought from what they said. Finally, because the whole process of exegetical bonding was so intense, so painful, it gave most who survived it a life-long commitment to the cause.

They could not bear the dissonance that would have resulted if they had concluded that all their study, all their suffering, had produced not truth, but illusion.

It was the Yan'anites who, under Mao, dominated the Party until the Cultural Revolution. They were the ones who supervised the vast program of linguistic engineering in China as a whole after 1949. They were well equipped to do this, for in Yan'an they had acquired "a meta-language embodied in key texts." This language used the grammar of standard Chinese, but it had a specialized vocabulary linked to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, and it had an extensive array of formulaic responses embodying correct thought on history, theory, the revolutionary situation, and norms of personal conduct. Its use in appropriate contexts could activate powerful persuasive mechanisms; it "provided a logical grid for the collective interpretation of experience"; and it directed "the ways in which people would encounter, mediate, and share knowledge and experience in order that identities would be redefined and the discourse community become one's primary affiliation" (Apter and Saich 1994, 265). The task of the Party leaders and veteran cadres after 1949 was to teach this metalanguage to the host of new cadres who were recruited to run the country and to translate it into simplified slogans, formulae, and narratives they could present to the Chinese masses. This was fundamental to their task of linguistic engineering.

The Institutional Basis of Linguistic Engineering

As Apter and Saich (1994, 244) have noted, "Mao knew perfectly well that his was a discourse community, and if the discourse somehow eluded his control, the leakage and erosion of power would be great." This was why he was so concerned to control those with the power to promote alternative discourses, especially intellectuals and others with access to the media. It explains why, as he consolidated his position as Party chairman after 1935, he took great care to secure control of all the media,

including the Party newspaper of the day, the *Liberation Daily* (Gao 2000, 365–372). It also explains why, when he extended the discourse community from Yan'an to the whole of China after 1949, he secured Communist Party dominance over newspapers, journals, books, radio, cultural productions, mass organizations, and the educational system. This apparatus of control was fundamental to Mao's rule. It was also a prerequisite of linguistic engineering.

As the Communist Party established effective control after 1949, the manipulation of public opinion at a national level became the special responsibility of the central Propaganda Department in Beijing, headed by Lu Dingyi. This department supervised ideological research, newspapers, journals, radio, literature, art and culture, schools and universities, and the indoctrination of cadres. It monitored and sometimes directed the extensive propaganda work carried out by other central agencies of the Party and the state, such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, the New China News Agency, the Party Press Commission, and the Publications Commission.

The central Propaganda Department was technically the servant of the Party's Central Committee and in practice responsible to the Party's highest leaders in the Politburo Standing Committee and the Secretariat (Lieberthal 1995, 158–162). It formed the apex of a massive propaganda hierarchy that was integrated with the Party organization at every level. The Party Committee in each province had its own propaganda department, and below that the Party Committee in each county and city had a propaganda department as well. At the very bottom of the hierarchy, each Party branch had its own propaganda committee. While lower levels of the hierarchy were expected to show initiative in discovering better ways of carrying out their instructions, they had no freedom to deviate from them. Local Party branches, for example, were not free to choose the slogans used during mass, nationwide campaigns, but had to make sure that people shouted slogans approved by the central Propaganda Department in Beijing (Yu 1964, 74).

It was through the hierarchy of Party committees and propaganda departments, and the media they supervised, that Party leaders controlled language. Michael Schoenhals summarizes the methods of prescribing and proscribing words, phrases, and slogans (“formulations”):

Information concerning changes in appropriate formulations . . . is constantly being communicated from higher to lower levels within the CCP. Sometimes it is merely in the form of a casual remark from a Politburo member during an inspection tour of the provinces. Sometimes it is in the form of a guidance lecture by a senior Party official. Sometimes it is in the form of special lists of new formulations, published after events like Party congresses or Central Committee plena. More often, it is in the form of intrabureaucratic Party circulars. In circulars dealing specifically with formulations, the official whys and wherefores of preferred choices and changes in wording are spelled out. (Schoenhals 1992, 31–32)

Very important linguistic directives, especially those involving major campaigns, were sometimes promulgated through circulars issued in the name of the Central Committee itself. Many, however, emanated from the Central Committee's servant, the Central Propaganda Department, or from agencies it supervised, such as the New China News Agency. Terminological matters within their own sphere were sometimes dealt with by Party-controlled organizations outside the propaganda apparatus, such as the Party Group of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions or the Military Affairs Commission (Schoenhals 1992, 32–33, 40–44).

There was clearly nothing spontaneous or mysterious about the striking uniformity of expression that developed in Mao's China. It was not simply the product of a common ideology, for that ideology could be expressed in varied linguistic forms. Nor was it just the manifestation of a widespread desire to show revolutionary loyalty, for left to itself that loyalty could be expressed in many different ways. Instead, as Schoenhals has put it, “uniformity of expression” was largely “achieved by bureaucratic means” (1992, 51–52). It was a calculated attempt

to make people use those verbal formulae that seemed most likely to produce correct thought. In short, it was the outcome of an extensive, systematic, and bureaucratically controlled program of linguistic engineering.

In the early years after the revolution, intermediate levels of the propaganda hierarchy produced “propaganda outlines” to tell Party members what they should say on particular issues. They also provided more detailed “propaganda handbooks,” which not only told propagandists what issues to stress, but also gave them background information, material for inclusion in “wall newspapers” or “blackboard newspapers,” cartoons that could be reproduced by local artists, songs for use in mass meetings, and advice on propaganda methods. From the mid-1950s, however, these handbooks were phased out, and their functions were taken over by Party newspapers, magazines, and instructions to propagandists broadcast over the radio (Yu 1964, 76–78).

In 1951, Party committees at every level set up propaganda networks consisting of Party members, members of the New Democratic Youth Corps, model workers, people in responsible positions, and revolutionary activists. These propagandists were responsible for ensuring that the people in their charge knew and accepted what the Party wanted them to believe. They organized group discussions and newspaper reading groups, kept propaganda bulletin boards supplied with new material, put up posters, encouraged people to listen to radio broadcasts and attend meetings, and engaged them regularly in propaganda-laced conversation. These propaganda networks fulfilled an important function in the early years of Communist rule, but after 1953 they atrophied as their functions were taken over by work units, neighborhood committees, village cadres, mass organizations, and teams of agitators associated with the never ending political campaigns (Yu 1964, 78–89; Liu 1971, 115–117).

In the cities, people’s lives were closely supervised. In residential areas, they came under the watchful eye of neighborhood committees, most of them dominated by middle-aged or old female cadres. The most powerful agent of Party control

over most people's lives, however, was the work unit (*danwei*) attached to every place of employment, whether it be a factory, government office, educational institution, hospital, or shop. The work unit was headed by a Party committee under a Party secretary, and it assumed all the functions of the old clans, and more. It ensured the education of the young, provided medical care and retirement pensions, controlled employment, allocated housing, arranged domestic repairs, and dispensed ration coupons. People could not travel without the unit's permission and without its cooperation in providing a letter of introduction to other units where they would require accommodation. Like the old clans, the unit was entitled to interfere in people's private lives. It could inspect incoming mail, and it arbitrated disputes, provided informal marriage counseling, and sometimes influenced the choice of marriage partner. Ideally, it was able to provide accommodation next to the workplace, and a wall could be built around the perimeter to mark the unit's identity.

Through the work units, especially, and the neighborhood committees, the Party was able to organize meetings, disseminate propaganda, monitor interpretation of the message, and supervise behavior. It was also able to set up political study groups, newspaper reading groups, and radio listening groups, and to establish processes of criticism and self-criticism in small groups (*xiao zu*). Under these circumstances, the Party had no difficulty in implementing policies of linguistic engineering—ensuring that all city dwellers learned the new revolutionary language and, at least in public, used it in appropriate contexts to say prescribed, politically correct things. It was less successful at ensuring that people used that language within the family and among close friends. As Dittmer has observed:

Language itself became bifurcated: the heroic public language was used to satisfy ever more probing demands for evidence of thought reform, whereas the private language preserved the traditional norms that kept friendship and ties alive. The two discourses were kept apart as a result of conflicting social demands, but each could be used in its appropriate context. (Dittmer 1987, 58)

In the villages, the principal agencies of control were Party committees headed by a Party secretary. Communist Youth Leagues were set up to recruit and train promising members of the younger generation, while in some periods Poor and Lower-Middle Peasants' Associations were organized to consolidate the prestige, pride, and nominal leadership of the two classes that provided the Party with its strongest support. Party organization in the villages was strong enough to enable considerable linguistic engineering, but there were difficulties: the illiteracy of many peasants handicapped attempts at instruction; cadres themselves were often illiterate or had only minimal education; the isolation of many villages created problems, especially in the earlier years; and the prevalence of local dialects meant that many peasants were unable to understand radio broadcasts originating in the major centers. Because of these obstacles, the institutional basis of linguistic engineering was weaker than in the cities. Political meetings were frequent, but newspaper reading groups, study groups, and small groups for purposes of criticism were uncommon. In some villages such groups were not organized until the Campaign to Study and Apply Mao Zedong's Thought in 1964–1966, while in others they did not appear until the Cultural Revolution entered its institutional phase after 1968—and even then only sporadically (Whyte 1974, 135–166; Liu 1971).

The Party's determination to spread its message inspired its literacy campaigns and policies of language reform. In 1952, the government set up a committee to direct reform of the language. Its first measure was to publish a list of the 1,500 most frequently used characters, urging publications intended for popular consumption to use characters from the list wherever possible. The list included many more words related to the lives of workers and peasants than earlier lists, as well as many words related to politics and class structure (Serruys 1962, 70; Liu 1971, 17). Then in 1956 the State Council set about making the written language easier to learn by abolishing some old characters and beginning the process of simplifying many

more. The initial list of 486 simplified characters showed an average reduction from sixteen strokes per character to eight strokes (Lehmann 1975, 46). A much longer list of simplified characters was issued in 1964, and the number of radicals—basic components used to classify characters—was reduced from 214 to 189. This reform caused a lot of anguish to many older, literate Chinese, and it has sometimes been interpreted as an attempt to ensure that “the Chinese classics, and to some extent all the ancient modes of thought they embody and inculcate, would therefore be inaccessible to peasants who could read only the new script” (Young 1991, 205). However, the reform does not seem to have been motivated by a desire to destroy China’s classical heritage, for in this period the Party continued to approve publication of classical works in the belief that it could teach people to detect and reject the false ideology the classics contained. It was only during the Cultural Revolution that the goal of obliterating the past, rather than criticizing it, took hold under the influence of youthful Red Guards and the more extreme Maoists.

The final aspects of language reform were the introduction of pinyin, an alphabetic form of writing, and the promotion of a *putonghua* or “common language” based on the Beijing variant of the North Chinese dialect.² The two reforms were linked, because pinyin could be used as a guide to pronunciation and was therefore very handy in teaching *putonghua* to speakers of other forms of Chinese. The development of *putonghua* was essential if people throughout China were to be able to listen to the same propaganda broadcasts and understand visiting cadres without the aid of an interpreter. It also helped centralize the manipulation of the spoken language, avoiding the need for constant translations into local dialects. Unfortunately for the linguistic engineers, older Chinese speakers of regional dialects were slow to learn the new common language, although the introduction of *putonghua* into schools produced many competent speakers among the younger generation (Serruys 1962; Lehmann 1975: 48–54; Liu 1971, 17–21).

Communication of the Communist Party's message was hindered by widespread illiteracy, estimated at 80 or even 90 percent of the population in 1949 (Liu 1986, 310). In an effort to produce a rapid turnaround, the government sponsored numerous adult literacy campaigns. Some of them claimed amazing results, which proved on investigation to be fictitious (Liu 1971, 23). More solid results came from the massive expansion of the education system, with the number of primary schools increasing from 346,800 in 1949 to 1,681,900 in 1965, and the number of secondary schools growing from 5,216 to 80,993 over the same period. As a result, illiteracy among the younger generation steadily declined, so that only 23.5 percent of the population over twelve years of age was classified as illiterate or semi-illiterate in the mid-1980s (Liu 1986, 310; Nathan 1986, 161).

Language reform and literacy campaigns were intended partly to increase the effectiveness of the system of mass communications through which the Party tried to ensure the penetration of its message into every part of the country and into all sections of society. A vital part of that system was the press, which was used to communicate with Party committees and literate minorities throughout the country. It kept people with power and influence up to date with Party policy, provided them with propaganda material, and taught them the new concepts and slogans to be used in the manipulation of language. The press played a crucial role in linguistic engineering, and under Communist Party rule it expanded rapidly, with the combined circulation per issue of all newspapers increasing from three million copies in 1950 to almost twenty-one million in 1959 (Liu 1971, 134). This circulation was still small, relative to the total population, but the number of people who were directly influenced by the press was considerably higher because work units, neighborhood committees, and some village cadres organized newspaper reading groups. In these groups stories were read aloud and then discussed, enabling even illiterates to know what was in the newspapers. These groups were more an urban phenomenon than a rural one, although attempts were

made to establish reading groups in villages during mass campaigns (Liu 1971, 139–142; Nathan 1986, 157–162).

Many newspapers were published directly by the Party at national, provincial, and local levels, and the rest were closely watched and compelled to conform. Their content and language were strictly monitored and received direct input from the center. This input came partly from the New China News Agency, supervised by the State Council, which distributed selected foreign news to all Chinese newspapers and national news to all regional and local newspapers. Direct input also came from the *People's Daily*, the official organ of the Central Committee, from the *Liberation Army Daily*, organ of the General Political Department of the Ministry of Defense, and from the official Party journal, *Red Flag*. Editorials and articles from these “two newspapers and one journal” were reprinted by publications lower in the hierarchy, and the terminology and slogans they used to discuss particular issues were copied by journalists at lower levels.

The content and language of the national media were monitored and controlled from the highest level. Between 1950 and 1957, Mao himself scrutinized 46 editorials in the *People's Daily* before they went to press, while Premier Zhou Enlai vetted another 153. They did not, of course, involve themselves in routine matters. This task was allocated to Hu Qiaomu, Mao's former secretary and a member of the Central Committee, who acted as the committee's intermediary with the paper between 1950 and 1961. He read every issue, commenting in great detail on its content, its literary style, and its language (Schoenhals 1992, 80–102).

The Party also controlled the publication and distribution of books. At the national and regional levels, People's Publishing Houses produced books on political theories, policies, and current events, while specialized companies were given the task of publishing works in other fields. By 1956 there were 40 national and 101 regional publishing houses, and the number of titles had grown from 966 in 1950 to 14,070 in 1956. The books were distributed through the Party-controlled New China Bookstore,

which had a monopoly (Liu 1971, 147–149, 197–198). Books were, of course, even less accessible to most people than newspapers until the Cultural Revolution compelled even illiterate peasants to carry a symbolic copy of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong*.

Radio was also controlled by the Party. At the top of the hierarchy was the Central People's Broadcasting Station, the voice of the Central Committee. Below that were provincial and municipal People's Broadcasting Stations, controlled by the propaganda departments of the Party committees at each level. The number of such stations increased from 54 in 1951 to 141 in 1962. At the local level, Party-controlled radio stations were established in every county seat. Because few peasants had radios, these stations were linked by wires to the villages, where loudspeakers proclaimed their message in marketplaces, workplaces, recreation halls, dormitories, and sometimes even in private homes. The number of these wired stations increased from a mere eight in 1949 to 1,975 in 1964, while the number of loudspeakers grew from five hundred to six million. By then, it was claimed, 95 percent of the counties and towns had been linked to this network, although it is not clear how thoroughly it penetrated into the villages (Liu 1971, 118–129, 187; Yu 1964, 123–136; Nathan 1986, 163–164).

After taking power, the Communist Party destroyed the existing film industry, then built a new industry under its own control. Its purpose, said the *People's Daily*, was “to educate the people in patriotism and socialism” and “to lift people's cultural standards” (Liu 1971, 159). Chinese-made feature films increased from one in 1951 to seventy-seven in 1959, while the number of newsreels and documentaries increased from 36 to 155. They were supplemented by dubbed versions of “progressive” foreign films and documentaries, many of them from the Soviet Union until the Sino-Soviet split in 1960 made them “revisionist.” The number of cinemas grew from 596 in 1949 to 2,000 in 1964, but the most spectacular growth was in the number of mobile projection teams, which leapt from a hundred in 1949 to

twelve thousand in 1964. These teams traveled from village to village, often on foot, with a horse or a donkey to carry their equipment. Since many of the films were incomprehensible to peasants who knew only the local dialect, the teams were expected to explain to the peasants what was going on. The films were supplemented with propaganda sheets and information provided over loudspeakers, and they were followed by discussion. As a result of the teams' efforts, by 1964 the average peasant was reported to see five movies a year (Liu 1971, 157–173, 199–202).

How effective was the Party in ensuring that people heard its message? Some suggestive data were collected by Paul J. Hiniker in a survey of some four hundred former mainland residents in Hong Kong in 1964 and 1965 (cited in Liu 1971, 168). National projections based on this data suggest that 96 percent of people had received political information from meetings, 70 percent from films, 58 percent from radio, and only 40 percent from newspapers. These patterns of reception are not surprising in a predominantly rural and illiterate society. Newspapers played a vital role in keeping many cadres and the literate élite in tune with the latest political and linguistic trends, but even newspaper reading groups did not make newspapers the most important direct source of information for most people. Radio had not yet achieved the astonishing coverage of the mid-1970s, when by one estimate there were 141,000,000 loudspeakers reaching into 95 percent of production brigades and teams and 65 percent of rural households (Nathan 1986, 163). The large audiences that attended films were a tribute to the dedication and effectiveness of the mobile projection teams, consisting mainly of young women. What is most striking, though, is the Party's effectiveness in reaching virtually the entire population through a never-ending succession of meetings, some large, some small, some with extensive audience participation, some dominated by speakers on a stage. This form of direct, oral communication was admirably suited to the needs of a largely illiterate population, and it was well within the capabilities of a

Party whose organizational reach touched virtually everyone. It had the advantage, too, that it brought almost the entire population into contact with the cadres and with other comrades—contact that was both political and personal.

Such personal contact and supervision made possible the Party's techniques of linguistic engineering. People were not just bombarded with propaganda and left alone to reform themselves. Rather, they were persuaded or pressured into political participation. In many contexts, they were expected to contribute, and most did so to avoid being labeled politically backward. To participate, they had to know the terminology, they had to know the oral formulae, they had to know the correct things to say. And what they knew, they had to apply. So in all political contexts—which increasingly meant all public contexts—they had to use the new language of revolution to say the appropriate revolutionary things. In this way they were drawn into active participation in the Chinese Communist Party's great project of linguistic engineering. What that meant and what effects it had before 1966 is the subject of the remaining sections of this chapter.

Formulae, Codability, and Processing Efficiency

Any government that wants to convert people to a new worldview and a new political, social, and economic order is in the business of imparting information—a great deal of information. If it is to succeed, it must try to minimize the effort of processing that information. One way of doing this, which is especially useful in a largely illiterate society, is to code the information in formulae. The formulae can be learned by heart, serving as a reminder of other information; and, once they are learned, they become a standardized shorthand that makes communication swift and economical. I will illustrate this by analyzing two types of formulae that were deliberately fostered in Mao's China: numerical terms and keyword slogans.

Numerical terms have a long history in China, being

recorded even before the Qin dynasty in the third century B.C. (Qu 1997, 94). They are used to group together maxims, virtues, ideas, or any items with qualities in common. In former times, any half-educated Chinese could identify the Four Books and the Five Classics that were the basis of the imperial civil service exams, and even uneducated people knew the Five [Most Important Human] Relationships and could recite the Three Obediences and the Four Virtues that Confucian ethics prescribed for women. These formulae served two functions. First, they were an aid to memory, for they organized information schematically, linking the individual items to a central concept that provided a clue that assisted their recall. This was particularly useful in a society with a large number of illiterates who were unable to store information in written form and had to keep it in their heads. Second, once numerical formulae had been mastered, they were an aid to communication, for they coded a number of sometimes lengthy items into two or three words, making it unnecessary to spell them out every time they were mentioned.

In Mao's China, numerical formulae were used on an unprecedented scale because never before had the entire population been expected to acquire so much new information. Many of the formulae were devised by the central Party leaders, but others were devised by local cadres and occasionally by ordinary peasants and workers as mnemonics to help people cope with information overload. Formulae developed locally were sometimes picked up by the national media and publicized throughout the country as a whole (Li 1957a, 33–49).

Numerical formulae devised by the Party leaders were often associated with national campaigns. Soon after coming to power, for example, the Party organized all Christians into the Three Selves (*san ziji*) movement, whose objective was to ensure that the Chinese Church was self-reliant in three ways: free from foreign funds, free from foreign influence, and free from Vatican control (Spence 1991, 534). Then the country was mobilized in support of two great campaigns: the Three Antis (*san-fan*) campaign, which sought to purge the cadres of corruption,

waste, and bureaucracy; and the Five Antis (*wufan*) campaign, which attacked capitalists for bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating on government contracts, and stealing state economic information for speculative purposes. In the case of all three campaigns, the numerical formulae were enriched by additional information supplied through the press, public meetings, and study groups. In this way the formulae became the skeletal structure of a much wider body of schematically linked information that was easily remembered.

In complex campaigns, numerical formulae proliferated as the Party struggled to communicate its message. During the massive Socialist Education Movement, for example, the Party promoted the Four Cleanups (*siqing*) to clean up accounting procedures, granary supplies, accumulation of private property, and abuses of the work-points system. Linked to these Four Cleanups there were Three Threes, which were the focus of sub-campaigns: promote the Three "Isms" (*san zhuyi*): collectivism, patriotism, socialism; oppose the Three Bad Styles (*san zhong huai zuofeng*): the capitalist, the feudal, the extravagant; and implement the Three Necessities (*san bixu*): building socialism, loving the collective, running communes democratically and frugally. All of these formulae had to be learned by heart and their implications explored, a process aided by their discussion at numerous meetings. To an outsider, they sound daunting, but they were built out of terms familiar to all Chinese, and they had implications for people's lives. They were not needless jargon, but an effective way of helping millions of peasants to understand the huge range of issues involved in a campaign whose mission was nothing less than the renewal of socialism (cf. Baum and Tiewes 1968; Baum 1975).

Keyword slogans became popular with the advent of the Great Leap Forward in 1958 (Li 1962, 27–37). They coded each part of a longer expression into a single, monosyllabic keyword. Recitation of the slogan had a powerful, staccato effect, and the coding reduced the processing effort involved in communication and interpretation. The slogans were frequently used to urge the people to greater efforts as they sought to increase pro-

duction and build socialism. For example, the slogan *duo kuai hao sheng* (more, faster, better, more economically) was a coded version of Mao's statement that it was necessary to work more, work faster, work better, and work more economically to build socialism (*yue duo, yue kuai, yue hao, yue sheng di jianshe shehui-zhuyi*).

Keyword slogans were also used to summarize information, with each monosyllabic word serving as a reminder of other things that had been learned. For example, Mao's agricultural policy was summarized and popularized in his famous "eight-character constitution":

*tu, fei, shui, zhong,
mi, bao, guan, gong.*

The English translation lacks the poetic rhyme and musical tones of the original:

Earth, fertilizer, water, seeds,
Density, protection, management, tools.

We learned to recite the eight-character constitution in school, and the Chinese peasants were made to learn it too, as a key to policies that were explained to them in detail—policies that Mao learned from the charlatans who helped to ruin Soviet agriculture. The peasants were told, for example, that "earth" stood for deep ploughing (sometimes so deep that it ruined the topsoil); that "water" stood for irrigation (which often led to salination or the hurried construction of dams that collapsed); and that "density" referred to close planting (which caused the crops to grow weakly or die). With the aid of the eight-character constitution, the peasants learned these policies only too well. The result, we shall see, was mass starvation (see Becker 1996).

The Language of Class Analysis

In 1951, only two years after the Communist victory, Professor Ye Chang-ting of the Chinese Catholic University was sent with other intellectuals to the countryside to reform his thought by

participating in the land reform program. He was astonished to find that the peasants used the following words easily and naturally as part of their everyday conversation (Yu 1964, 91–92):

<i>mingjue</i>	to understand clearly
<i>lingdao</i>	to guide (v.); authorities (n.)
<i>douzheng</i>	to struggle
<i>yapo</i>	oppression
<i>mubiao</i>	objective, goal
<i>sixiang</i>	ideology, view, thought
<i>taolun</i>	discussion
<i>ruodian</i>	weakness
<i>jiji</i>	active
<i>zhengce</i>	policy
<i>fengjian shili</i>	feudalistic forces
<i>tongzhi</i>	control, rule (v. or n.)
<i>biaozhun</i>	standard
<i>juewu</i>	consciousness
<i>yanjiu</i>	research
<i>zongjie</i>	conclusion
<i>chedi</i>	thoroughly
<i>renwu</i>	task, assignment
<i>boxue zhidu</i>	system of exploitation
<i>bufa</i>	illegal, unlawful
<i>wenti</i>	problem, issue, question
<i>jiancha</i>	investigation
<i>jiaoliu</i>	exchange of ideas or experience
<i>buchong</i>	to supplement
<i>kaizhan</i>	to start, develop
<i>tuanjie</i>	unity, to unify
<i>zhengzhi weifeng</i>	political prestige
<i>baobi</i>	accomplice
<i>zhuyao</i>	most important
<i>genju</i>	according to
<i>youdian</i>	advantage
<i>hefa</i>	legal
<i>heli</i>	logical

These terms were part of the technical vocabulary of Marxism–Leninism–Mao Zedong Thought, and even the more familiar ones had new connotations. When the list was shown to twelve

Chinese professors who had migrated to the United States, they said that only five of the thirty-three terms would conceivably have been used by male peasants before 1949: *yapo* (oppression), *sixiang* (ideology), *wenti* (problem, issue), *heli* (logical), and *hefa* (legal). In their view, none of the expressions would have been used by peasant women (Yu 1964, 92).

The list was far from exhaustive. We could easily add to it a host of words and phrases the new government introduced, popularized, or modified in meaning. Their selection was controlled from the top by the Central Committee and the Central Propaganda Department. These words and phrases have been surveyed by Li and Hsia (Li 1956a, 1956b, 1957a, 1957b, 1958, 1962; Hsia 1961, 1963, 1964). Many are also included in *Current Chinese Communist Newspaper Terms and Sayings*, published by the Center for Chinese Studies at Berkeley (1971). I discuss here only those terms most relevant to the themes I shall develop in later chapters.

Mao Zedong knew that mastery of the linguistic code of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought was essential if cadres were to communicate effectively with each other and teach people to think in the categories of the new ideology. In March 1949, some six months before the foundation of the People's Republic of China, he expressed his concern:

In the past some of our high-ranking cadres did not have a common language even on basic theoretical problems of Marxism-Leninism, because they had not studied enough. There is more of a common language in the Party today, but the problem has not yet been fully solved. For instance, in the land reform there is still some difference in the understanding of what is meant by "middle peasants" and "rich peasants." (Mao 1949b, 365-366)

Mao's comment pointed to the necessity for everyone to understand the language of class, for that language was vital to revolutionary transformation; it also underpinned the policies of social manipulation which Mao later used to consolidate his rule.

"Class," in the language of the Chinese Communist Party, did

not fully coincide with the traditional Marxist concept of class, or with any other concept of class known to social science. Classes in China were not necessarily economically constituted groups, let alone groups with different positions in relations of production. Rather, they were groups divided according to the perceived likelihood that they would support or oppose the Communist cause. The result was a system of classification designed to consolidate the Party's rule—a system that affected both political status and chances of success under the new regime. This system assigned each person to one of over sixty categories, known as *chengfen*, based largely on occupation, wealth, and source of income in the three years before 1949. These classifications were grouped into broader class categories (*jieji chengfen*), which were in turn ranked as “good,” “middle,” and “bad” on the basis of their presumed orientation toward the revolution. The resulting class designations, which determined people's fates after 1949, can be summarized as follows (cf. White 1976; Kraus 1981; Kuhn 1984; Watson 1984):³

“Good” classes (*chengfen hao*):

- “Revolutionary cadres” (pre-liberation Party members)
- “Revolutionary soldiers” (pre-liberation soldiers)
- “Revolutionary martyrs” (Communists who had died in the revolutionary wars, bequeathing elevated class status to their descendants)
- Industrial workers
- Poor and lower-middle peasants

Middle classes (*yiban chengfen*):

- The petite bourgeoisie
- Middle peasants
- Intellectuals (professionals, teachers, clerks, etc.)

“Bad” classes (*chengfen buhao*):

- Landlords
- Rich peasants
- Capitalists

This system of categorizing people into good, bad and middle classes almost turned the prerevolutionary Chinese hierarchy on its head. At the top were the revolutionary cadres, soldiers, and martyrs who had been branded as “bandits” by the Guomindang during the civil war. Second only to them were the workers and poor and lower-middle peasants who had been at or near the bottom of the old hierarchy. The intellectuals, formerly revered and traditionally associated with administrative power, were regarded as ideologically suspect and placed in the middle classes, where they were watched carefully. Once-wealthy capitalists were stripped of their wealth and subjected to discrimination and condemnation. And dispossessed landlords and rich peasants, the former *élite* of rural society, were ostracized and subjected to abuse. The social pyramid had been almost perfectly inverted.

In the creation of this inverted hierarchy, the new language of revolution was not merely reflective and passive: words were not simply invented and adapted to describe a new social reality imposed by force. Rather, people were manipulated into speaking in ways that helped to bring the inverted hierarchy into existence and helped to sustain it in the years to come. This was a matter of deliberate policy, adopted to bring about a revolution in attitudes—to ensure that the old hierarchy did not live on in people’s hearts. Mao and the Communist Party could simply have used cadres and soldiers to dispossess the landlords, rich peasants, and capitalists, as the Bolsheviks had done in the Soviet Union. Instead, they mobilized the workers and the poor and lower-middle peasants to deliver judgment on their erstwhile oppressors. They did this to make the “revolutionary masses” participate in their own liberation and take responsibility for the fate of those whom they condemned.

In the case of land reform, for example, Party cadres sought out people with grievances—the landless, the indebted, women, the frustrated young, or anyone wronged by a landlord or a clan leader. Their aim was to get these people to reconceptualize their experience—to persuade them that they had suffered at

the hands of a ruling class, then get them to expose the crimes of their oppressors at public “struggle meetings.” At these meetings, the accused were paraded helplessly in front of the villagers as their accusers “spoke bitterness” against them, demanding redress and punishment. The accused were threatened, made to hang their heads, and faced with demands that they confess their wrongdoing and repent. The litany of real and alleged crimes was usually enough to persuade most who were present to join the chanting of slogans condemning the accused and calling for punishment. The whole process was intended to unmask the landlords as class oppressors and to secure their humiliation and condemnation through “class struggle” at the hands of the villagers whom they had once dominated. It was only when this had been achieved that the redistribution of land took place. (For accounts of land reform, see Whyte 1974, 136–139; Vogel 1969, chap. 3; Crook and Crook 1959; Hinton 1966; Yang 1965.)

One striking feature of this process of class struggle is that for most villagers it involved little more than oral participation. The struggle was underpinned by the Communist Party's power, but speaking bitterness, shouting slogans, uttering threats, and demanding punishment were symbolically vital, politically crucial, and powerfully persuasive. Symbolically, they promoted the useful myth of the “mass line”—Mao's doctrine that the Party's leadership involved taking the “scattered and unsystematic” ideas of the masses, refining them through study, then going back to the people and explaining the new ideas “until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them, and concentrate them into action” (Mao 1943, 290). Politically, the oral theater of class struggle humiliated the village élite, establishing the inferiority of the landlords and their associates to those whom they had exploited. In terms of persuasion, the condemnations transformed the outlook of many poor and lower-middle peasants. The most powerful mechanism of attitude change stemmed from the fact that the majority of villagers had been manipulated into taking, more or less voluntarily, a revolution-

ary action: they had accused and reviled leaders whom they had previously respected and obeyed, endorsing their dispossession, punishment, and often their execution. Collectively, they had implicated themselves in the killing of up to a million or more members of landlord families and in the terror and protracted suffering of many millions more.⁴ Having legitimized all this, they were powerless to reverse it. They had to believe that their actions were justified or suffer the burden of dissonance. Words had made them revolutionaries, and words made them eager students as the cadres explained the new revolutionary doctrines that rationalized what they had done.

The same pattern occurred in the Five Antis campaign of late 1951 and 1952, which subordinated the surviving capitalists to Communist Party dictates as a preliminary to their total dispossession. The Antis that the campaign targeted—bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating on government contracts, and stealing state economic information for speculative purposes—had been common under the Guomindang, and they continued after 1949 as capitalists sought to buy protection from cadres and survive in the new environment of state control. The campaign involved the investigation of more than 450,000 businesses in China's five largest cities, and it resulted in the execution of about five hundred members of the bourgeoisie, the suicide of another two thousand, the imprisonment of thirty-four thousand, and the imposition of heavy fines on many more (Schurmann 1968, 318; Dittmer 1987, 47). During the campaign, work teams were sent into factories and offices to persuade the workers to "speak bitterness" against their employers and managers—that is, to keep accusing them of unfair treatment, corruption, and graft. The accusations then justified the work teams' having the owners and managers dragged before denunciation meetings to be attacked and humiliated by their own workers, forced to confess their crimes, and beg the revolutionary masses for forgiveness. Symbolically, this process affirmed the leading role of the workers even in capitalist enterprises; politically, it established the dominance of the Communist Party

over the workers and over the way in which firms conducted their business; and ideologically, it contributed to the transformation of workers' attitudes. In particular, it shattered the emotional ties that often connected workers, managers, and employers, especially in smaller firms. Workers had been manipulated into verbal behavior that was psychologically inconsistent with their existing values—behavior whose consequences could never be undone. The resulting dissonance could be reduced, however, if the workers accepted the new Marxist ideology, for that ideology attacked their emotional ties to employers as “false consciousness” and justified their accusations as revolutionary acts. Many workers therefore had a powerful motive for ideological conversion.

The same pattern of modifying attitudes by manipulating people into making damaging criticisms of others was followed in other major campaigns that targeted particular groups. During the Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries campaign in 1950–1951, for example, committees were set up in neighborhoods all over China to flush out spies, and people were urged to inform on friends, family, and neighbors who had been associated with the Guomindang or had opposed the Communists. This again was merely the prelude to struggle meetings at which accusers bore witness against their erstwhile associates as the audience chanted slogans and demanded confession, penitence, and punishment. Once again, people had been induced to enter into a discourse in which there was only one loyalty—to the Communist Party and its revolution. It was a discourse that served to justify the fate of those whom it condemned, who probably numbered several million, with substantial numbers executed and many more imprisoned.⁵ So words were weapons with which the revolutionary masses consigned their victims to death or misery. When kindly people uttered them, they often experienced extreme dissonance, which they reduced by accepting revolutionary ideology and convincing themselves that counterrevolutionaries deserved their fate.

Not all the campaigns were directed at members of the bad classes. Party leaders, for example, mobilized the population

against corruption, malpractice, or ideological backsliding on the part of lower-level cadres in the Three Antis campaign of 1951–1952 and the Socialist Education Movement of 1962–1965. Such mobilizations preserved the fiction of the mass line, through which the Party paid lip service to learning from the masses. In reality, they were a mechanism through which the Party center used a mass discourse of its own invention to discipline local cadres and rectify their ideology. Such discipline was essential if local cadres were to be reliable agents in teaching and enforcing other discourses.

The desire to preserve the purity of the discourse, too, explains the almost constant harassment of intellectuals under Mao's rule. The term "intellectual" in China is often used to designate anyone with an education, including secondary school graduates. However, there were also some 1.5 million "higher intellectuals" who had gained a tertiary education in China between 1911 and 1949, as well as some who had attended tertiary institutions overseas. In 1950 and 1951, most of them were subjected to intensive intellectual cleansing during the Thought Reform of Intellectuals movement, also known as the Bath movement (*xizao yundong*) (Yu 2001, 1, 201–229). They studied Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao; they were lectured on the revolution by veteran cadres; they engaged in criticism and self-criticism in small groups; the more prominent were criticized and humiliated at mass rallies (washed in a big bath); and they were all forced to write "autobiographies" in which they repudiated their prerevolutionary attitudes and actions, attributing them to their own selfishness, their sheltered existence, their class background, and the failings of their teachers and parents. As Jonathan Spence (1991, 564) has noted, "This last requirement caused profound crises for many who had been brought up believing in the strict tenets of filial piety as derived from the Confucian tradition, and in general the entire process subjected the intellectuals to severe mental stress."

Mental stress caused by conflict between old attitudes and new verbal professions is, of course, dissonance, and it can be removed by abandoning the old attitudes. In some cases, this is

precisely what happened. According to Robert Jay Lifton, a minority of those subjected to this type of reeducation became zealous converts. Most of these were very young—in their late teens or twenties—and they were seldom established scholars. Their attitudes were relatively unformed, and they were eager to identify with the new regime, which held the key to their future advancement. Another relatively small group consisted of resisters. They regarded thought reform as “suffocating,” “bad,” and “coercive,” and they “were apt to have been a good deal more sympathetic to Communism before their reform than after.” They had engaged in self-criticism purely to satisfy their reeducators and colleagues, so they were able to neutralize dissonance by telling themselves that their new professions were purely a response to pressure. The third and largest group became what Lifton terms adapters: they now knew what they were expected to say and believe, they had a better understanding of the new doctrines, and they were often more sympathetic to them. However, they did not become passionately committed to the new ideology, and they were relieved to escape reeducation and return to normal life (Lifton 1961, 400–401).

The failure of thought reform to produce genuine enthusiasm for revolutionary ideology among established higher intellectuals has a number of explanations, but two stand out. First, in nearly all cases, the self-criticisms and counterattitudinal statements were made under heavy pressure. It was therefore very easy for the intellectuals to reduce dissonance by telling themselves, “I am only doing this because I am being made to.” Second, although they were made to participate in revolutionary discourse, that discourse was usually undermined because of countervailing evidence from other sources. Those who had studied overseas could not accept everything they were told about the capitalist West; those who came from landlord, capitalist, intellectual, or Guomindang families knew that they were being fed an inaccurate stereotype of their backgrounds; experts in literature could easily pick holes in the crude analysis of Mao’s “Yan’an Talks on Literature and Art”; historians knew that

the workers and peasants had not always taken the leading role attributed to them by revolutionary propaganda; and above all, higher intellectuals of all varieties were trained to appreciate evidence and argument, not dogmatic assertions from cadres less educated than themselves. In short, the Party was quite right to mistrust higher intellectuals: they might be sympathetic in general terms to the revolution, but their existing knowledge and habits of mind made most of them incapable of accepting the simplistic view of the world expressed by the revolutionary discourse of Marxism–Leninism–Mao Zedong Thought (cf. Vogel 1969, 196–197; Yu 2001; and Wu 1993, for a personal account).

The Party knew that many higher intellectuals remained unreformed, so it was soon mobilizing university teachers and students to condemn colleagues who had dubious pasts or who dissented even mildly from current Party orthodoxy (Wu 1993, 17–23, 28–30; Yu 2001). This process reached a peak in 1955 after the veteran Marxist literary theorist and critic Hu Feng called for greater intellectual freedom. The official reaction was swift: Hu was forced to confess his ideological crimes, his confession was rejected, he was denounced by fellow intellectuals at public meetings and small-group study sessions, and there was a witch-hunt for “Hu Feng elements” throughout the country that resulted in the punishment of some 2,100 intellectuals. Soon the hysteria developed into a nationwide Campaign to Uproot Hidden Counterrevolutionaries. Some 81,000 “counterrevolutionaries” were unmasked and formally labeled, and fully 1,400,000 people were subjected to criticism and struggle (*douzheng*) (Yu 2001, 417; Wu 1993, 34–46).

The biggest disaster to befall China’s intellectuals before the Cultural Revolution, however, was the Hundred Flowers campaign and its tragic sequel, the great Anti-Rightist campaign. From May 1956 Mao called, with increasing vigor, for intellectuals to speak more freely. He asked them to criticize cadres and the Party constructively under the slogan “Let a hundred flowers bloom together; let a hundred schools of thought contend.”

Finally, in May 1957 some intellectuals began to take him at his word, and there followed a torrent of criticism of the Party's policies, personnel, and methods. Many called for greater intellectual freedom, and a few even called for democracy. Mao and other leaders were shocked at the response and crushed their critics with the Anti-Rightist campaign. "The result," according to Fairbank and Reischauer, "was to stigmatize and put out of action one-half to three-quarters of a million of China's educated elite" (1989, 496). The labor camps swelled with intellectuals, who worked to exhaustion, studied Mao's Thought, engaged in criticism and self-criticism, said all the right things, and all too often starved to death in the terrible famine that soon followed (Wu and Wakeman 1994, 73–175; Becker 1996, chap. 12).

The Anti-Rightist campaign employed the usual methods of popular mobilization, in which students and intellectuals were encouraged to prove their revolutionary fervor by informing on their teachers and colleagues, then condemning them at denunciation meetings. During the campaign the press, taking its cue from Mao, introduced a language of denunciation that matched the Party's claim that the Rightists, unlike most earlier class enemies, had operated in secret as they plotted the destruction of socialism. So they were identified with the color black, a traditional metaphor for evil involving treachery or deception. They were accused of hiding their evil natures with "painted skin" (*hua pi*), described as evil spirits who disguised themselves as humans, and likened to savage animals, especially wolves (Li 1958, 53–79). This language of vilification was greatly enriched and far more generally used during the Cultural Revolution, and I will discuss it extensively in chapter 5. At this point, it is sufficient to note that in both periods it was used to dehumanize those to whom it was applied.

What of the people who were repeatedly condemned? Did criticism, self-criticism, and saying all the right things reform the Rightists, counterrevolutionaries, landlords, capitalists, and rich peasants? There is little evidence that it did. Indeed, as Lifton has argued, "thought reform is subject to a law of dimin-

ishing conversions. Repeated attempts to reform the same man are more likely to increase his hostility . . . than to purge him of his 'incorrect' thoughts. With each histrionic show of repentance, his conversion becomes more suspect" (1961, 412). This generalization is supported by the testimony of those sentenced to labor reform and labor reeducation camps. In these institutions, the inmates were compelled as far as possible to live within the new, revolutionary discourse, saying correct things in the correct language, engaging in criticism and self-criticism, and studying revolutionary writings. It seems rarely to have worked. Extensive interviews with former inmates led Martin King Whyte to conclude that forced reeducation resulted in "negligible or negative attitude changes" (Whyte 1974, 226–227). His conclusion is confirmed by the memoirs of former inmates such as Wu Ningkun (1993), Harry Wu (Wu and Wakeman 1994), Zhang Xianliang (1994), Pu Ning (1994), and Yang Xiguan (Yang and McFadden 1997) and by the torrent of demands for redress by former Rightists that followed Mao's death. It is confirmed, too, by the later failure of May 7 Cadre Schools to reform the attitudes of the intellectuals who were sent there (He and Yang 1998). I myself have never heard of anyone who became a genuine revolutionary as a result of forced reeducation, but I do know of people who were permanently embittered.⁶

The new discourse introduced by linguistic engineering did not convert everyone, but no one could remain untouched by it. This was particularly true of the language of class and class struggle, which affected even those who were born after 1949 because of the development of what amounted to a system of hereditary political classes. Younger Chinese not only had a *chengfen* describing their own current role in society (student, poor peasant, and so on), but a class of origin or family background (*chushen* or sometimes *jiating chengfen*) inherited from their fathers. Young males would in turn pass this class status on to their children. My father, for example, who was given the *chengfen* of student in 1949 because he had not entered the workforce, inherited the *chushen* of poor peasant (*pinnong*) from

my grandfather, and he passed this class of origin on to me. We were both lucky, for people of good class origin were assumed to be revolutionary, while those who were of bad class origin were politically suspect. My father became an academic, and his *chushen* gave him a political security that his colleagues, who were predominantly from middle and bad class backgrounds lacked. For my part, I was always grateful that my class background meant that doors were not closed to me. At the same time, I knew that my mother's class origin somewhat blemished my revolutionary credentials: she had inherited the *chushen* of landlord (*dizhu*) from her father, my paternal grandfather's employer. I was also aware that while my official classification as a poor peasant by origin gave me some political safety, it conferred little prestige, despite the leading role the workers and peasants were supposed to have in Mao's China. The children of revolutionary soldiers ranked well above me, and the children of revolutionary cadres were the true *élite*, envied by us all.

This hereditary class system influenced everyone's behavior. In Chen village, for example, former landlords and rich peasants were at the bottom of the status ladder; they were banned from political activities, shunned socially, and dragged out periodically for class struggle in accordance with the slogan Never forget class bitterness! (Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1984, 16, 47, 69; Unger 1984). Their children were not regarded as class enemies and were therefore allowed to participate in political activities, but because of their *chushen* they were nearly always mistrusted. They had little chance of political advancement, and other children hesitated to associate with them.

In urban areas, the social isolation of bad-class children could be less severe. In my school, in a university village where many students had undesirable backgrounds, academically oriented children with good origins frequently made friends with similar children with bad origins. However, in the school's numerous and prestigious political activities, bad-class students were severely disadvantaged, and such students had to adjust to

some harsh realities. In periods when a strong class line was applied, political criteria often excluded them from further education (cf. Unger 1982; Lee 1978, 78–84); they had to watch less able people with good class origins get most of the desirable jobs; and their class backgrounds made them far less desirable as marriage partners, especially in the case of males who would transmit their *chushen* to their children (cf. Croll 1981, 1984; Unger 1984; Kraus 1981, 133–136). They also faced constant reminders of the crimes of their parents and grandparents.

In many contexts, the official class categories were supplemented by three other political labels. They were “counter-revolutionary” (a term popularized during the struggle against counterrevolutionaries in the early 1950s); “Rightist” (a label officially conferred on hundreds of thousands during the Anti-Rightist campaign in 1957); and “bad element” (a description applied to common criminals and other miscreants whose actions undermined socialist transformation). The official application of these labels to individuals was widely publicized and was recorded in their dossiers. However, unlike their *chengfen* and *chushen*, the labels did not appear in their identity papers and were not passed on to their children. The acquisition of such a label was nevertheless a calamity for their families, who suffered terribly by association.

From 1957, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and Rightists were lumped together with landlords and rich peasants as members of the five “black categories.” Known as *heiwulei* (“five kinds of black” or “five black categories”), they were subjected to humiliation and discrimination, and singled out repeatedly for class struggle. In this way, those who bore damaging political labels were effectively integrated with the bad classes for purposes of class struggle. In theory, they were ranked even lower than the capitalists, who were omitted from the black categories because in the 1930s and 1940s the Party had sought their cooperation in a united front against the imperialists.⁷

The black categories were contrasted with those whose *chushen* gave them elevated status as revolutionary cadres, revolu-

tionary soldiers, revolutionary martyrs, workers, and poor and lower-middle peasants. These latter five groups were known collectively as *hongwulei* (“five kinds of red” or “five red categories”). Their members cultivated a sense of their own superiority based on their “red” class origin, and they saw their children and grandchildren as “revolutionary successors” who would safeguard China’s socialist future. Pride in their family background sometimes hardened into a doctrine of “natural redness,” and they sometimes doubted the credentials of even the most ardent young revolutionaries from nonred families.

The new language of class and class struggle that the Communist Party introduced after 1949 at first promoted revolutionary transformation, but by the late 1950s its continued repetition was being used to keep old conflicts alive in people’s hearts. It directed struggle against classes that no longer had any existence outside the discourse of class and class struggle, unnecessarily alienating them from the revolution. This reflected the Party’s paranoia about potential threats to revolutionary ideals, and its need for scapegoats. It could blame “sabotage” by “class enemies” when its policies did not work, and it could claim that such enemies were the secret manipulators of every protest. The artificial perpetuation of the discourse of class struggle was also very useful to Mao himself, who could link his alleged opponents in the Party to class enemies who were planning a comeback. A fictive discourse is a powerful weapon if people can be persuaded of the fictions.

Language, Love, and Revolution

The techniques of linguistic engineering discussed in the last section shattered the allegiance of large sections of the population to the traditional social order. They made countless millions of ordinary Chinese active participants in the downfall of the landlords, the urban bourgeoisie, and counterrevolutionary elements allegedly associated with the Guomindang. They shattered traditional bonds of deference, and by setting rich and

poor members of the same clan against each other, they helped to make class, rather than lineage, the focus of poor people's loyalty. Class loyalty, in turn, was supposed to be inseparable from loyalty to the Communist Party, to Chairman Mao, and to the revolutionary cause.

This transference of loyalties was promoted also by social engineering. In the cities, the Party-controlled *danwei* assumed many of the functions of the clan and of the extended family, while in rural areas Party-controlled production teams and brigades created new vested interests and sources of solidarity (Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1984, 31–35; Whyte 1974). As always, though, social engineering was complemented by linguistic engineering, as people were pressured and manipulated into talking in ways intended to shift the focus of their loyalties.

Language had to reflect ideal revolutionary social relationships. So the terms *xiansheng* (Mr.) and *taitai* (Mrs.), which had been used as forms of address among the respectable classes in the old society, were displaced by *tongzhi* (comrade) in contexts where a title was appropriate. The new term, which meant literally “common will,” was applied to everyone except class enemies. In China before 1949, as in Taiwan to this day, a husband referred to his wife as *wo* (my) *taitai*, and a wife to her husband as *wo xiansheng*. In Mao's China, however, the standard term for a husband or a wife became *airen*, which means, literally, “love person.” This term had previously been used to refer to a lover, and its introduction in place of the obsolete *xiansheng* and *taitai* reflected the Communist Party's insistence that people must marry freely and for love, rather than having their marriages arranged to suit family interests. The term *ai* (love), however, when applied to true love between revolutionaries, signified something quite different from bourgeois or romantic love. Elizabeth Croll quotes a 1964 booklet of advice to husbands and wives:

In a socialist society love between a husband and wife is built on common political thinking and on the foundation of struggling together for the revolutionary cause. The relationship between hus-

band and wife is first of all comradeship, and the feelings between them are revolutionary. By revolutionary is meant that politically he should take her as a new comrade-in-arms, in production as well as in work, he should take her as a class sister and labour together, at home he should regard her as a life companion, besides that a couple should respect and love each other, help each other, and encourage each other so as to achieve progress together. (Croll 1984, 177)

In accordance with this, young people were supposed to assess the revolutionary commitment of prospective marriage partners. Indeed, in the early 1950s, and still in some areas in the mid-1950s, there were frequently rules preventing people of good class origin from marrying the former exploiting classes (Croll 1984, 180).

If revolutionary love was supposed to be the basis of the relationship between husband and wife, it was also supposed to characterize other relationships within socialist society. Everyone was supposed to feel “hot love” (*re ai*) for the Party and Chairman Mao; and to make sure that people knew what this meant, the Party in 1958 launched a movement urging people to “hand over their hearts to the Party” (*xiang dang jiao xin*). They were to do this by purifying their ideology and dedicating themselves to the revolution (Li 1962, 31–32). In the spirit of revolutionary love, cadres were asked to establish intimate relationships (*jiao zhixin pengyou*) with the laboring masses; they were told that they could turn for advice to comrades who were friends who know each other’s hearts (*zhixin pengyou*); and, of course, cadres were officially loved by the revolutionary masses, who were encouraged to use the language of popular love songs to call them *zhixin ren* (the person who understands my heart) (cf. Hsia 1963, 40). Most people were reluctant to do this, but the intimate language expressed an ideal. It was also a useful means of disguising reality at a time when the cadres were enforcing policies that caused mass starvation.

If the language of love was appropriated and redefined by the Party, so was the language of family relationships. Traditional

family loyalty was like traditional romantic love: it was an impediment to total revolutionary commitment. The Chinese emphasis on filial duty made family loyalty a dangerous rival to a Party that pressured children to denounce parents who were class enemies or guilty of serious political errors. In response, the Party devised strategies designed to redirect family loyalties toward itself, the revolutionary masses, and the revolutionary cause. One way of doing this was to supply many of the services formerly provided by the family and the clan. Another way was to extend the language of family relationships to the relationship between individuals and their revolutionary comrades, so that love of family was submerged in a greater love.

Traditionally, the term *“qin ren”* (relatives) was used only in its literal sense, applying strictly to blood relatives. After 1949, however, the Party-controlled media popularized figurative uses of the term, so that the revolutionary masses as a whole became one's *qin ren*. Similarly, the term *“xiongdi”* (brother, brothers) was now applied figuratively to all comrades and added as a prefix or a suffix to words denoting any groups that belonged to the revolutionary family: people of good class background called themselves *jieji xiongdi* (class brothers), while other terms included *xiongdi xuexiao* (fraternal schools), *nongmin xiongdi* (peasant brothers), and *xiongdi guojia* (fraternal nations—i.e., socialist ones). Politically virtuous young people all became *dangde hao ernü* (the Party's good sons and daughters) or *Mao Zhuxi de hao haizi* (good children of Chairman Mao), and they called members of the People's Liberation Army their *jiefangjun shushu* (Liberation Army uncles) (cf. Li 1957a, 17–22).

The extension of the language of love and kinship to the Party, the masses, and the revolutionary peoples of the world was intended to promote the transfer of emotional attachments to revolutionary objects. It probably succeeded to some extent. If nothing else, higher-order conditioning would have tended to make revolutionary objects more attractive through their association with positively evaluated words. At the same time, we should note that this tendency toward positive evaluation had

to compete with opposing tendencies, like that produced by the Party's role in causing mass starvation during and after the Great Leap Forward. In that case, the repeated application of positively evaluated terms to the Party may in many cases have done no more than soften a catastrophic decline in its popularity. It may even have made some people hate the Party more because they objected to enforced professions of love for cadres who had been responsible for so many deaths. I shall say more on this in the final section of this chapter.

We should also remember that when the language of love and kinship was applied to revolutionary subject matter, it did not evoke the same emotions as it did in other contexts. Chinese of my generation learned to say, without embarrassment, and even without emotion, that we loved Chairman Mao and the Party. What we still could not do was say *wo ai ni* (I love you) to those whom we loved romantically: uttered in that context, the words were too emotionally charged. We showed our love by looks, gestures, deeds, and allusive words, but we could not express it directly. So there were, after years of linguistic engineering, still two kinds of love, the romantic and the revolutionary. We used the word *ai* for both loves, but that simply shows that the word had acquired two meanings: its traditional, sacred meaning, which remained intact because we needed it to designate the emotion we felt; and its new, revolutionary meaning, which we needed to express the very different emotion we felt—or pretended to feel—for the Party and our hundreds of millions of revolutionary comrades. No doubt there was interaction of meanings, with romantic love adding connotations to revolutionary love and vice versa, but interaction is not identity, and the two meanings remained separate.

The Discourse of Collectivization

The language of love acquired some currency in the countryside, because most peasants were easily won to the broad thrust of early 1950s revolutionary discourse. The land reform of

1950–1952 suited their economic interests; the techniques of popular mobilization implicated them in revolutionary discourse and caused dissonance, which encouraged them to accept its message; and the new discourse elevated the status of the poor and lower-middle peasants by inverting the social pyramid and describing them as a leading class, along with the workers and revolutionary cadres. Most important of all, the discourse as yet said almost nothing about the Party's plans for confiscating the peasants' individual holdings, replacing them with vast, Soviet-style collective farms ruled by cadres.

In 1955, however, Mao insisted that the Party force the peasants to join relatively small cooperatives of thirty to fifty households; then in 1956 he decreed that they should join higher-stage cooperatives or collectives of two hundred to three hundred households. They were to pool their resources and farm nearly all the land collectively under the direction of cadres, leaving no more than 5 percent of the land as private plots under family control. Revolutionary discourse now identified new targets: individual peasants (*geti nongmin*), do-it-alone peasants (*dangan nongmin*), and do-it-alone households (*dangan hu*)—in other words, all those who stood outside the cooperatives (Li 1957a, 29–32). The discourse described the cooperatives as advanced (*xianjin*), and it condemned individual peasants as backward (*luohou*), selfish (*zisi*), and capitalistic (*zibenzhuyi de*). The poorest members of rural society often initially saw advantages in the pooling of resources, but many peasants—including my paternal grandparents—were reluctant to hand over land they had been given only a few years before. As a result, many had to be forced to join, and many slaughtered their draught animals and sold the meat rather than surrender them. The formation of cooperatives was followed by widespread defiance of the Party and a reversion to family farming. Indeed, although by the end of 1956 about 96 percent of peasants nominally belonged to cooperatives, some 20 percent had formally withdrawn from collective farming. Most of the remaining peasants put as little effort as possible into collective labor, saving their energy and

night soil for the tiny private plots from which they produced as much as 20–30 percent of all farm income. At the same time, grain yields from the collective farms plummeted, and there was widespread famine (Friedmann, Pickowicz, and Selden 1991, chaps. 7–8; Becker 1996, chap. 4; Zhou 1996, 46–48; Spence 1991, 549–551).

The Party used the Anti-Rightist campaign of 1957 to purge doubters within its ranks and to suppress what Mao described as “the counterrevolutionary activities of landlords and rich peasants”—a standard formula used to misrepresent the broadly based opposition to collectivization (cf. Friedmann, Pickowicz, and Selden 1991, 209). This political movement paved the way for the elimination of private plots and the emergence of Party-controlled people’s communes—gigantic amalgamations embracing an average of 4,600 households (calculated from Spence 1991, 579). The collectivist discourse applied to the commune was summed up in a song taught to the peasants in Rao-yang County, Hebei Province:

Communism is heaven.
The commune is the ladder.
If we build that ladder,
We can climb the heights.
(Friedmann, Pickowicz, and Selden 1991)

I learned a very similar song at school in Tianjin in the 1960s. It masked a reality of which I was totally unaware, but which the peasants very rapidly had to acknowledge: that collectivization placed Chinese agriculture at the mercy of commune-level cadres who were often ignorant or neglectful of the realities of farming, but who were anxious to preserve their own positions by obeying the ideologues at the top. Mao, the chief ideologue, was determined to maintain the discourse of collectivism at any cost. One cost was much of the goodwill of the peasants, who overwhelmingly resented the fact that they had lost both their land and the power to make decisions about crops and agricultural techniques. They now took orders on agricultural matters

from the cadres. The result was the tragedy of the Great Leap Forward—a tragedy that destroyed the remaining credibility of collectivist discourse in much of rural China.

Martial Language and the Discourse of the Great Leap Forward

The discourse of collectivization was accompanied by the popularization of a vast array of military terms among all sections of the population. This militarization of language is not surprising. After its break with the Guomindang in 1927 the Communist Party, savaged and pursued, was forced to become a Party-army. Its leaders, including Mao, were involved for more than two decades in the wars with the Guomindang and the Japanese. Their military experience left a deep impression on them, and it combined with Leninist and Stalinist influences to suggest models of mobilization and social control that they applied to the wider society. It is not surprising that the terminology they used to describe those models drew heavily upon the language of military organization and the language of war. Moreover, after 1949, when they achieved power over China as a whole, they applied a remarkable range of military metaphors to the business of everyday life. The Chinese language had been notably lacking in such metaphors, for the country had been ruled by scholar-bureaucrats, not the warrior aristocracies who for so long dominated Europe. Mao's soldier-ideologues, however, made the language of everyday life probably the most militarized in the modern world.

At no time before the Cultural Revolution was military language more all-pervasive than during the Great Leap Forward of 1958–1961, which was supposed to make China rich and lay the foundations for a rapid transition to the paradise of communism. Consider the following metaphors, ably catalogued and explained by T. A. Hsia (1961), which were applied routinely to the tasks of production: *zhanshi* (“a fighter”—a production worker), *zhandou* (“to fight a battle”—to work hard in produc-

tion), *zhanxian* ("a battle line"—a workplace), *gangwei* ("a sentry post"—a revolutionary's appointed position in society), *da jun* ("a great army"—a large group of people organized for some project of socialist construction), *qian jun wan ma* ("a great host of mounted foot soldiers"—a huge number of people engaged in production), *duitian xuanzhan* ("to declare war against heaven"—to overcome the obstacles that nature poses to production), *zhangwo diqing* ("to get hold of information about the enemy"—to secure information relevant to production, as when subjecting iron ore to chemical analysis before smelting), *ji jun* ("to stage a march"—to advance toward a specified goal), *xiaoxing yundongzhan* ("small-scale, mobile warfare"—work that can be done bit by bit, as time allows), *tuji* ("to attack by storm"—to make a concerted effort in production), *da zhanyi* ("a major battle"—a major productive undertaking), *qianmiezhhan* ("a battle of annihilation"—an important productive undertaking assured of complete success).

Such terminology was used, for example, in the great "battle of annihilation" to exterminate China's sparrows. In Beijing, according to the *People's Daily*, the battle was fought by "three million brave warriors with a single heart." Led by President Liu Shaoqi, they formed shock brigades (*tujidui*), mobile units (*jidongdui*), scattering and chasing units (*honggandui*), slingshot units (*dangongdui*), noise-making units (*yinxiangdui*), and searching and capturing units (*soupudui*). "Everywhere defence was set up, at every pace was a sentinel mounted" (Hsia 1961, 12–13, quoting *People's Daily* 24 April 1958). With so much heroism and such formidable military organization, the sparrows did not stand a chance. The unintended result was plagues of insects that the sparrows would once have eaten. These, it is said, did more damage to crops than the sparrows had ever done.

Mao was always anxious to enlist the past in the service of the present, so the Party-controlled press resurrected legendary Chinese heroes to flatter the worker and peasant heroes of modern times. An exceptionally strong and fast worker could be called a Wu Song after a fictional hero renowned for his physical prowess; a hard-working old man could be referred to as a

Huang Zhong after a famous old warrior of the Three Kingdoms period; a hard-working woman could become a Mu Guiying, recalling a mythical woman general of the Song dynasty; the heroism of women workers could be celebrated by organizing them into “Mu Guiying shock teams”; workers and peasants with knowledge and intelligence were identified with the legendary general, prime minister, and royal adviser Zhuge Liang; and when they gathered together to advise cadres, they did so at a “Conference of the Zhuge Liangs” (*Zhugeliang hui*).

The military metaphors were matched by a degree of actual military organization of society, for which there was of course appropriate military terminology. During the Great Leap Forward, some 220 million people were said to have been organized into a people’s militia, 30 million of them armed (Spence 1991, 581). Peasants marched to the fields behind red flags and took their weapons with them. They lived and worked in communes, which “were run as militarized units intended to be effective both in war and peace” (Becker 1996, 144–145, plate). Above the communes towered a chain of command centered in Beijing; below them were brigades (*lǚ*), then production teams whose workers were organized into companies (*lián*), platoons (*pái*), squads (*bān*), and other units with military styles (Spence 1991, 580; Hsia 1961, 25; Becker 1996, 108–109).

This militarization of organization and language was intended to have two specific effects. It was supposed to teach individuals both to show soldierly initiative in finding new ways to carry out commands from above and to subordinate themselves utterly to the leaders who issued those commands. It was also supposed to transfer the urgency, the discipline, and the heroism of wartime struggles to the task of building socialism in a time of peace. The attempt to use language to achieve these effects was soundly based. Higher-order conditioning can certainly achieve emotional transference from the language of war to the activities of peacetime, and there is some evidence that early in the Great Leap Forward it did exactly that. Encouraged by the militaristic and triumphalist rhetoric, a lot of people were at first willing to gamble that the Party was right in claiming that

with one herculean effort China could overcome millennia of poverty. Their spirits buoyed by a splendid diet—they had been encouraged to eat all their reserves of food in the expectation of record crops—they often worked long hours out of enthusiasm as well as compulsion (Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1984, 124–125; Chang 1992, 294–296; Friedmann, Pickowicz, and Selden 1991, 218–219, 227, 232).

As the Great Leap Forward developed, however, the peasants learned that they were being given orders originating from people who had too little knowledge of agriculture, and no amount of conditioning could persuade them otherwise. At Chen village, for example, the peasants refused to plant the next year's crops because they were compelled to use techniques that did not work and because they knew that if they produced anything it would be taken from them. They preferred to scavenge from nearby hillsides or reduce their need for food by doing as little as possible (Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1984, 25–26). All over China starving peasants came to loathe cadres who continued to enforce unworkable policies, who confiscated grain then left people to die, and who brutally punished anyone who protested (Becker 1996). The only cadres who retained the peasants' respect were those who suffered with them and, to the best of their ability, helped them to avoid the worst consequences of the policies handed down from above. There were many such cadres at the local level, but they were powerless to change the policies. Armed rebellions erupted in Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, Tibet, and Yunnan; law and order broke down in some regions; cannibalism occurred in the worst affected areas; black markets started to flourish; lineage organizations reemerged to provide necessities; the authority and morale of local cadres crumbled; and when work teams arrived to rectify the cadres, they found the peasants angry and dissatisfied (Teiwes 1993, chap. 10, 544 n. 4; Becker 1996; Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden 1991, chaps. 9–10; Chang 1992, 291–317, 555–557; Chen 1969; Whyte 1974, 144–145; Vogel 1969, 255–256).

People are easily enough persuaded by a discourse when it is consistent with their hopes and with what they know. However,

a discourse that is massively contradicted by accumulated experience begins to look misdirected at best, ludicrous at worst. By 1959, the discourse of martial enthusiasm that had inspired the Great Leap Forward had begun to look ludicrous—at least to most people in the countryside. The peasants in a particular province may, or may not, have believed the propaganda about record harvests in other provinces; but they knew that they were starving and that the Party was only making their personal situation worse. In many rural areas, people were beginning to die, and in the next three years the deaths multiplied. In all, perhaps thirty million perished as a result of the famine (Becker 1996; Banister 1987, 85). The Party retained control of the rhetoric of public life, but it subjected rural China to a trauma that destroyed its own credibility. A culture of resistance emerged, in which people spoke privately a language that expressed the realities of their lives, rather than the fictions of official discourse. In Hubei Province, a peasant jingle mocked the ignorance of cadres who pretended they knew better than the farmers:

Cadres are subjective pigs;
Wanting to change the way of farming.
For the sake of good appearances,
They would impose cotton growing on bad land.
(Zhou 1996, 48)

Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden (1991, 240, 241, 248, 253, 263) have collected some of the sayings and ditties that expressed the cynicism of peasants in Hebei Province. One expressed resentment at the way in which commune officials arrived at harvest time to make the villagers repay credit and fulfill quotas:

First round: return loans.
Second round: deliver state grain.
Commune members share the leftovers.

Another justified stealing:

Lower rations,
Squash and greens instead of grain,
Who doesn't steal gets what he deserves.

A third satirized the power of officials whom all had to please:

Higher-ups let out a fart, underlings try to look smart;
 Leaders move their lips, commune members run off
 their hips.

A fourth expressed resentment at those who played the game best:

Flatter shamelessly: eat delicacies and drink hot stuff.
 Don't flatter: starve to death for sure.

And a fifth condemned the communes:

[T]he commune is not as good as the co-op
 And the co-op was not as good as going it alone.

In the cities, the Party fared better. People there received priority in grain supplies, and while hunger and malnutrition were widespread, deaths were far less common. Moreover, the Party's control of the media ensured that most people remained unaware of the scale of the disaster in the countryside. When eventually it was admitted that there were "problems," city dwellers lacked the peasants' firsthand knowledge of the Party's role in causing them. They were in no position, either, to doubt the official explanation of the food shortage: three years of unprecedented droughts and floods, together with Soviet demands that China repay its loans immediately and do so in food. They did not know that most of the "debt repayments" were actually food exports designed to demonstrate the success of the Great Leap Forward; nor, in a vast country with many microclimates, were they in a position to doubt what they were told about the bad luck with the weather. Even today, few realize that "compared to most other years during Mao's rule, there were fewer natural disasters during the famine" (Becker 1996, 279–283).

Lies and censorship, however, could not disguise the fact that something had gone wrong. Even the inhabitants of privileged Beijing knew that the Great Leap Forward had not delivered the prosperity that had been promised when their per capita pork

production plummeted from 13.3 catties in 1958 to 2.1 catties in 1967 and deaths shot up from 320,000 in 1957 to 790,000 in 1961 (MacFarquhar 1997, 3). Martial rhetoric about productive victories that had once seemed inspiring now rang hollow. By January 1961 the situation was so disastrous that the Great Leap Forward was declared a success to mask its failure, then brought to a close. In the period of reconstruction that followed, Mao's storming approach was abandoned. Moral incentives and calls for sacrifice were emphasized less, and material incentives and rational planning were emphasized more. The communes, whose powers had been cut back, allegedly continued to advance (Hsia 1964, 73–74), but there was now no talk of imminent victory, and the more exaggerated military metaphors were quietly put to rest.

Emerging Mao Worship

The reverence for Mao Zedong within the Communist Party began in the Yan'an period. In 1940 Liu Shaoqi was already telling Party members, "Only the Thought of Mao Tse-tung is able to inspire us to go from victory to victory. . . . Mao Tse-tung is the great revolutionary leader of all the people of China, and we should learn from him" (Dittmer 1974, 22). However, it was the Rectification of 1942–1944 that consolidated Mao's power within the Party, and it was the victory over the Guomindang in 1949 that set the seal on his dominance and guaranteed an audience for his Thought throughout China as a whole.

In the early years of Communist rule, Mao shared with the Party the credit for improvements in China's condition. Indeed, as Dittmer notes, "Charismatic infallibility was to a considerable degree 'collectivized,' and the Party as a whole basked in the glow of revolutionary heroism, all the way down to the local cadres" (1987, 22). Mao was greatly revered, but he was not worshiped, and his Thought was often referred to as one part of a greater unity: Marxism–Leninism–Mao Zedong Thought. People spoke, increasingly, in political formulae, but they did not

feel compelled to quote Mao at every opportunity, to justify their every statement by citing holy writ. My own survey of the first two pages of the official *People's Daily* on the first day of every month, for example, shows that from 1950 to 1957 Mao was quoted on average only once every 5.6 pages, a tiny fraction of the rate of quotation achieved during the Cultural Revolution (see chap. 6). Indeed, in the 1950s, quotations from the Marxist-Leninist classics appeared more often than quotations from Mao.

The disaster of the Great Leap Forward decollectivized charismatic infallibility. In rural areas, especially, the Party's credibility plummeted, for people knew the role its policies had played in causing the devastation. Mao's image suffered, too, but far less than the Party's. There were three reasons for this. First, Mao's own directives had been characteristically vague, so it was easy to believe that his subordinates had misinterpreted him or botched the execution of his plans. If the policy of close planting had not worked, maybe it was just because local cadres had insisted that the peasants plant too closely. If deep ploughing destroyed shallow soils, this was no doubt the cadres' fault, because Mao had never said specifically that the policy should be implemented under all conditions. If the cadres diverted agricultural labor to steel production so that they could meet their quotas, leaving crops to rot in the fields, this was their decision, not Mao's. If dams collapsed because of poor construction, that was the fault of the cadres who insisted that they be built hastily, without proper technical assistance.

Second, Mao's remoteness helped preserve him from blame. Did Mao know that the Party was forcing peasants to persist with agricultural practices that had failed? Had anyone told him that the cadres were taking food from starving people's mouths to send to the granaries so that they could justify their boasts of record surpluses? Did he know that countless people were dying? Many people believed that he did not know these things—that his subordinates were hiding the truth from him. They thought that if he knew the real situation policies would change

(cf. Becker 1996, 268, 285; Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden 1991, 273).

Third, when at length Party leaders such as Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and Chen Yun persuaded a reluctant Mao to acknowledge the crisis and import grain for emergency relief, the Party propaganda machine gave Mao the credit. The result was that, in many people's eyes, it was Mao who had saved them from death when those lower down the Party hierarchy had caused a catastrophe. Even in 1994, when Jasper Becker traveled China conducting interviews about the famine, an old woman in Henan told him that only eighty out of three hundred people in her village had survived, and that all would have perished if Chairman Mao had not sent troops with grain to rescue them (Becker 1996, 5). My own grandmother, who lived in Anhui (probably the worst-hit province) told us the same story: half the people in her village had starved to death, and but for Mao's intervention the rest would have died too.

Mao had been the driving force behind the Great Leap Forward, although most other Party leaders were caught up in the enthusiasm as well. At first, he did not know that nervous subordinates were feeding his expectations with false reports of dramatic production increases, but later he did not want to know. When Peng Dehuai told him at Lushan in 1959 that people were starving, Mao subjected him to a savage verbal attack, dismissed him from his position as defense minister, and started a witch-hunt for Right-opportunists who sympathised with him. Then, to spite his critics, he redoubled his commitment to the policies that were causing the disaster (Becker 1996, chap. 6). This action damaged his reputation with most other leaders of the Party because they knew what was going on. However, it was the Party itself whose reputation suffered most in the eyes of the Chinese people. What was left of charismatic infallibility now resided in Mao alone.

Although the Party's standing improved as Liu, Deng, Chen Yun, and others set about restoring the economy, it could not regain its former standing. Mao's reputation, however, soared,

for the cult of China's Great Leader and his Word had begun. There was nothing spontaneous about this Mao cult. In the early stages, it was promoted above all by Lin Biao, the defense minister, for whom it was both a strategy for personal advancement and a strategy of survival. He flattered Mao outrageously, and increasingly he encouraged the worship of his Thought. Lin began the process of sanctifying Mao's Word in his own sphere, the People's Liberation Army (PLA). At his instruction, soldiers were made to learn and discuss quotations from Mao's works. From May 1961 these quotations were printed in the *Liberation Army Daily*; then in 1964 they were published in a pocket-sized book—*Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong*—which was distributed throughout the PLA (Yan and Gao 1996, 191).

Once the cult of Mao's Word was well established in the armed forces, Mao called upon the whole country to "learn from the PLA." He accompanied this call with a battery of closely linked ideological campaigns. Their purpose was to reassert the brilliance of the ideology that had guided the Great Leap Forward, and more generally to make Mao's Thought the arbiter of right and wrong and the inspiration of all action. There was the Learn from Dazhai campaign, in which the peasants were instructed to emulate a model brigade that had allegedly produced astonishing yields by adhering to strict socialist principles and following Mao's eight-character constitution for agriculture. There was the Learn from Daqing campaign, which peddled the doubtful claim that Mao's policies of self-reliance, moral incentives, and dependence on workers and peasants had been responsible for the discovery and development of the massive oil field at Daqing. And there was the Campaign to Learn from Lei Feng, a model soldier whose life of revolutionary self-sacrifice, as revealed in a fictitious diary written in his name by PLA propagandists, was based on total dedication to Mao's Thought (cf. Spence 1991, 597). The slogans Learn from the PLA!, Learn from Dazhai!, Learn from Daqing! and Learn from Lei Feng! were on everyone's lips, summarizing a host of maxims that everyone had to learn, recite, and apply.

The principle underlying all these slogans was expressed in one massive campaign that summed up Mao's strategy—the Campaign to Study and Apply Chairman Mao's Thought. This began in March 1964 and continued until the Cultural Revolution. In schools, factories, offices, neighborhoods, and villages, teachers, cadres, and special Mao Zedong Thought counselors helped people to learn Mao's words, study them, and apply them to their lives. In Chen village, for example, educated young people from the cities, who had been sent to serve the revolution in the countryside, were recruited as Mao Thought counselors. They were made to learn by heart Mao's "three constantly read articles"—essays dealing with the socialist virtues of service to the people, Communist internationalism, and perseverance in the face of difficulties. They were also instructed on how to present those essays to the peasants. Chan, Madsen, and Unger give one counselor's recollection of their technique:

We first had the peasants memorize quotations. Then we had every party member, every Communist Youth League member and every Mao Thought Counselor memorize the entire articles. After that all the peasants had to memorize the articles too. But their level of literacy was really too low. The peasants weren't able to memorize the whole thing. In other localities the people had to get up in front of others and recite the articles from memory; or whole families would have to memorize them together; or a whole production team would memorize them together. These sayings of Mao were used like the Holy Scripture! (Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1984, 76)

This rote learning was complemented with intensive study sessions during which the articles were explained and discussed, and the peasants were taught how to make self-criticisms in the light of their teaching. It was hoped that whenever they had to make a decision, they would think of a relevant Mao quotation and act in accordance with its principles. At times, this was exactly what happened. One production team head recalled, "Some peasants did use what they were taught. If some member of my team lazily stopped working, some other peasant might ball him out, 'Hey, you're selfish. Chairman Mao tells us

to work selflessly for the collective.' . . . Some peasants patterned themselves on the quotes" (Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1984, 80). Learning entire articles was less efficient, cognitively, than learning slogans that summarized important points, but it had a similar effect. Constant repetition of the essays meant that key phrases sank into the peasants' minds, and intensive discussion turned those phrases into headings for schematically organized knowledge about the essays' practical implications. Moreover, the rote learning had one other very important consequence: it set Mao's writings above all others, reinforcing Lin's message that Mao's word was sacred, an infallible guide, the arbiter of right and wrong.

Students were most susceptible to the emerging Mao worship. Unlike the workers and peasants, they spent most of their days in institutions that specialized in education and indoctrination. Moreover, except for the youngest and the slowest, they were literate, and this helped enormously when it came to learning and reciting passages from Mao's works. Most students were in fact highly motivated to learn, for the education system was deliberately geared to producing political conformists. Students' prospects of going on to senior high schools and universities depended not just on their academic performance and class origin, but on their political performance as well. And a good political performance meant doing and saying all the right things with at least apparent enthusiasm and sincerity. Emulating Lei Feng, ambitious and idealistic students looked for ways of helping others, and they willingly participated in routines that subjected them to linguistic engineering. They learned the three constantly read articles, they tried to quote Mao at appropriate times, they wrote diaries filled with stock phrases of revolutionary commitment, and they sang "Father is close, Mother is close, but neither is as close as Chairman Mao." Often the most enthusiastic were children of middle-class background, for students from the red classes sometimes took it for granted that they would be numbered among the politically virtuous, while students from the bad classes usually knew that it was no use trying (Chan 1985, chaps. 1–2; Unger 1982, chaps. 1–5).

Two quotations from Mao focused the students' activity. One was "Serve the people," a rallying cry that appealed to their idealism. The other was "Never forget class struggle!" In part, this latter slogan directed attention to the past: it kept alive the memories of people who had suffered at the hands of landlords and the Guomindang, and it evoked the sometimes fictitious stories of past injustice with which the Communist Party justified its rule. But the slogan also linked the past with the present, summoning the revolutionary masses to eternal vigilance against the reemergence of class enemies within socialist society. Such enemies included unreformed members of the black categories who were alleged to be plotting the dispossession of the workers and peasants and the restoration of capitalist, landlord, and imperialist tyranny. Most of these, of course, were outside the Party. However, from 1959, when Peng Dehuai questioned the direction of the Great Leap Forward, Mao claimed that "bourgeois elements" and "petite bourgeois elements" had infiltrated the Party. These were people who had joined the Party "organizationally," but who had not done so "in terms of their thought" (Schram 1984, esp. 40–45). Mao believed that they lacked enthusiasm for the ideals of the Great Leap Forward and were committed to preserving and extending private production and relaxing the controls on cultural discourse. From January 1965 he began to warn against "Party persons in authority taking the capitalist road," even at high levels, and he later directed the Cultural Revolution specifically at these people (see chap. 3). The emphasis on class struggle during the campaign to study and apply his Thought was an important influence on the passionate attacks by Red Guards and revolutionary workers on Party leaders during the Cultural Revolution.

The Campaign to Study and Apply Chairman Mao's Thought also prepared the way for the Cultural Revolution by making Mao's Word the sole criterion of right and wrong. Once that assumption was lodged securely and prominently in Chinese discourse, the Party's legitimacy depended upon its conformity to his Thought. It had no independent authority: its job was simply to study and apply principles and instructions emanating

from its leader. If Mao, as the definitive expositor of his Thought, attacked the Party for departing from it, then within the terms of the discourse it was impossible for the Party to deny the charge. Moreover, there were many millions of Chinese who had grudges against individual cadres or the Party as a whole. Once they had Mao's backing, they were delighted to vent their frustrations by launching attacks in his name. The discourse of the campaign to study and apply his Thought gave them total justification.

As the discourse of Mao worship developed, Party leaders grumbled privately about the "vulgarization" of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought (Dittmer 1987, 38). They could not, however, make their misgivings public, for they knew only too well that to challenge the emerging discourse was to challenge Mao—a course of action that would result in their own destruction. They probably knew, too, that among the masses, the ritualized language of Mao worship was taking hold. As we saw in chapter 1, the primitive affective and associational processes activated by a discourse are most effective when more-reliable sources of knowledge are not available. So making people read, hear, learn, and recite the formulae that praised Mao, a remote figure known only through his writings and the discourse that worshiped him, was far more effective than making them sing the praises of the Party, whose vices, no less than its virtues, were the subject of daily experience.

The language of Mao worship took root in the villages, especially among young people. They were more likely to be literate, so they found it easier to learn quotations, and they were often given the job of leading Mao-study sessions. A young peasant in Chen village recalled:

The youths truly believed in Mao's [T]hought. In their hearts they really felt this Mao Zedong was something, thought every one of the quotations made sense. Everyone felt more progressive and public spirited. [Later], during the Cultural Revolution, we felt proud hearing the rumor that our Chairman Mao was now a leader of the world, that even the foreign visitors praised and worshipped

Mao Zedong when they returned to their own countries. (Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1984, 80–81)

Most young people in the cities also responded. On the one hand, the three constantly read articles and the slogan “Serve the people” evoked an idealistic response that focused on the inspirational leadership of Mao himself. On the other, the rallying cry “Never forget class struggle,” which was constantly linked to gruesome stories of life before liberation, was used to focus feelings of intense class hatred. So uniform was the discourse of class bitterness that Jung Chang only once heard an adult say anything that contradicted it—and that adult was Deng Xiaoping’s stepmother, who before the Cultural Revolution could perhaps afford to be a little loose with her tongue. When she said that Guomindang soldiers “didn’t always loot” and “were not always evil,” her words hit Jung Chang “like a bombshell,” shocking her so deeply that she never told anyone (Chang 1992, 348–349). Most young people heard only authorized scripts detailing Guomindang atrocities and landlord oppression, and they were effective. In Anita Chan’s interviews, for example, few students felt compassion for the suffering of class enemies (Chan 1985, 107–108). If these young people later behaved brutally toward those labeled as class enemies during the Cultural Revolution, it was because they had already been taught to hate them. In its lessons of class hatred, no less than in its lessons of self-sacrifice and worship of Mao, the Campaign to Study and Apply Chairman Mao Zedong’s Thought was a school for the Cultural Revolution.

A Hegemonic Discourse

Linguistic engineering activated powerful mechanisms of attitude change. It was particularly effective when opposing ideas were not deeply entrenched, when no attempt was made to promote beliefs that were contradicted by experience, and when people had little to lose by adopting new views. By 1966, indeed,

the discourse of Maoism was hegemonic. People used its technical vocabulary as a matter of course in their daily lives; they increased their communicative efficiency by mastering its coded formulae; they shouted its revolutionary slogans on cue; they knew what to say, when to say it, and what words to use when saying it; and, just as important, they knew what not to say. People might drop the formalities of the discourse within the family and among close friends, but few people apart from angry poor and lower-middle peasants said anything inconsistent with it. In the cities, especially, errors could bring betrayal from false friends and reproof from loved ones who knew the danger. When Jung Chang told her father that her new year's resolution for 1965 was "I will obey my grandmother"—a traditional way of promising good behavior—her father shook his head: "You should not say that. You should only say 'I obey Chairman Mao'" (Chang 1992, 348). By 1965, the Mao cult was well advanced, and the discourse had room for just a single source of authority.

There are three striking pieces of evidence for the hegemonic power of Maoist discourse by the time of the Cultural Revolution. The first arises out of a comparison between the Hundred Flowers campaign of 1957 and the Cultural Revolution. In both cases, Mao told the Party to stand back and accept criticism from outside its ranks. In the case of the Hundred Flowers, the resulting criticism demonstrated that many intellectuals had not accepted revolutionary discourse: their criticisms did not, as Mao had hoped, usually arise from revolutionary premises. Instead of suggesting, say, that cadres should heighten their revolutionary consciousness by doing regular manual labor alongside the workers and peasants, they complained of Party control of what they taught and what they wrote, of their intimidation by semiliterate cadres, of the savagery of campaigns directed at alleged class enemies, of the bans on so much foreign literature, of the slavish imitation of the Soviet Union, of problems caused by collectivization, of the farcical nature of elections in which the outcome was predetermined, and even

of the Communist Party's monopoly of power (Spence 1991, 570–573). These complaints did not belong to the discourse of Marxism–Leninism–Mao Zedong Thought, but to the discourse of “bourgeois Rightists.”

When Mao launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966, however, the dominance of Maoist discourse in the public domain was absolute. The lesson of the Hundred Flowers campaign and the persecution of the Rightists that followed was that only a single discourse would be tolerated. Moreover, a further nine years of linguistic engineering had consolidated the power of the discourse among the younger generation, particularly in the cities, and focused it on the godlike image and Thought of Mao. So when in 1966 Mao again called on people to criticize the Party, the criticism was based entirely on Maoist assumptions and was expressed entirely in Maoist language. Even though the discourse was no longer policed by the Party, it remained hegemonic: people used the approved language to say things that were based on Mao's words or Maoist propaganda. We shall see in later chapters that different groups interpreted this Maoist discourse in contradictory ways, giving it startlingly diverse referents, but this in no way alters the fact that they all spoke Maoist language, based their criticisms on arguably Maoist assumptions, and defended ostensibly Maoist goals.

The second piece of evidence arises from the behavior of the Party when it was under attack. Its leaders might try to defend themselves in public or appeal to Mao in private, but they always did so within the terms of the discourse, even when it was being used to destroy them. Inwardly, they might believe that Mao was a tyrant gone mad, but they could never say this publicly. They had to accept that Mao's Word was the criterion of correct thought, and when they defended themselves they had to use Maoist language to say Maoist things. The model defense, which has become part of Chinese political folklore, was given by Chen Yi, the foreign minister. Confronted by his accusers at a public meeting, he asked all those present to open their copies of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong* at page

271. When they did so, they found themselves staring at a blank space after the last printed quotation. Looking at the page, and quoting words once spoken by Chairman Mao, Chen Yi recited, “Chen Yi is a good comrade.” His critics fell silent.

Third, there is abundant evidence that by 1966 Mao’s variant of Marxism supplied the most accessible categories of political expression and social analysis, especially among younger Chinese. Franz Schurmann, who interviewed many former mainlanders in Hong Kong, found among them a good many “anti-Communist refugees whose way of thinking and acting is still essentially the same as it was on the Mainland.” In particular, they retained the “special categories and language” of Maoist thought (Schurmann 1968, 48–49). Martin King Whyte discovered something similar when he interviewed Chinese students who arrived in Hong Kong between 1962 and 1968:

Students of various motivations and degrees of activism generally phrased much of their discourse in ideological terms. Nobody felt hypocritical about using lofty words about class struggle or serving the people to characterize and justify his ordinary daily activities. This language had become the accepted form of discourse. Whatever the alteration in students’ underlying attitudes, the fact that they at least analysed situations and actions in ideological terms must be considered an important kind of thought reform. (Whyte 1974, 124)

This matches perfectly my own childhood memories, the recollections of older friends, and the unanimous testimony of autobiographies written by those who participated as young people in the Cultural Revolution (Chang 1992; Gao 1987; Min 1993; Liang and Shapiro 1983; Zhai 1992; Bennett and Montaperto 1971; Ling 1972). Younger Chinese, and many older ones too, found that the language of revolution tripped easily off the tongue. They used it without embarrassment, whether debating theoretical questions or discussing the political implications of the details of everyday life. This situation was a direct result of the fact that they used the language day in, day out. Mere exposure made it seem natural, and even attractive, and constant

repetition ensured that the concepts and schemas to which it was linked were more accessible than any alternatives. When the Red Guards began their own newspapers during the Cultural Revolution, from the very start they applied the categories of Mao's Thought with great facility. This change in the "natural" categories of thought was one of the most impressive results of linguistic engineering.

Both the successes of linguistic engineering and its failures prepared the way for Mao's audacious assault on the Party during the Cultural Revolution. His ability to mobilize the revolutionary masses against the Party depended on two things: the success of linguistic engineering in persuading most people to revere or even to worship him and its failure to make people love or even respect the many Party cadres whose faults they knew from their own experience. As a result of investigations in the wake of the Great Leap Forward, Mao knew how deeply many cadres were resented; and he was equally well aware that most people knew him only through the adulatory myths of discourse. So he took an extraordinary gamble: he led a popular revolution against the Party that had been the basis of his power—a revolution that he attempted to direct by manipulating the assumptions and symbols of the revolutionary discourse the Party itself had created. What happened when he embarked on this extraordinary course of action is discussed in part 2.

II

*Mass Mobilization,
Language, and
Interpretation,
1966–1968*

Mao's Revolutionary Strategy, 1966–1968

Contexts, Interpretive Principles, and Capitalist Roaders

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION had its origins in the failure of the People's Communes and the Great Leap Forward. By mid-1960, Mao had finally accepted the incontrovertible evidence of disaster, and between then and January 1962 he accepted changes of course recommended by people such as his deputy Liu Shaoqi and Party secretary Deng Xiaoping. The biggest reversal of policy affected the communes, which survived in theory but with few actual functions. Local production teams now made most decisions, strengthening the link between rewards and individual effort; small plots of state land were "lent" to the peasants for private cultivation; rural free markets were allowed to reemerge; and the hated communal mess halls were finally abandoned. There were matching reforms in other sectors. In industry, realistic planning and technical expertise were suddenly back in fashion; in education, academic achievement was emphasized at the expense of ideological indoctrination; and in intellectual and cultural matters, restrictions on debate were eased. All these changes were embodied in directives from the Central Committee and endorsed by Mao himself. And their rationale was a traditional Marxist one: they were essential if China was to make an economic recovery and develop the advanced productive forces required for a transition to socialism (Teiwes 1993, 345–356, 369–371; Baum 1975, 162; Becker 1996, 242–243; Goldman 1981, 19–21; Lü 1993, 13–49; Jin 1995; MacFarquhar 1997, esp. chaps. 3–5, 7–9).

Mao was prepared to shelve some of his policies as a temporary measure to eliminate mass starvation, for he could see no alternative. But he still believed that the ideas that had inspired the communes and the Great Leap were in the main sound, and he was determined to press on with them when the time was ripe. However, in some regions officials, desperate to end the starvation, permitted practices that went beyond the Central Committee's existing directives, including even a reversion to family farming (Zhou 1996, 48–51). From February 1962, some of these initiatives gathered strong support in the Central Committee, only to be decisively rejected in August after Party leaders learned that Mao opposed them (MacFarquhar 1997, chap. 12). By then, the damage had been done. Mao had begun to view the post-Leap reforms as “the breeding ground for rampant revisionism in the Party and the precursor to capitalist restoration in China as a whole” (Joseph 1984, 76). He became suspicious of leaders such as Liu and Deng, who had supervised the reforms, and he was later to use the “right deviation” of 1962 as evidence of Liu's revisionist tendencies (Mao 1966a).

Mao's suspicions were intensified by events linked to the split with the Soviet Union. Soviet Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev attacked Stalin, advocated peaceful coexistence with the West, described the Chinese communes as reactionary institutions, failed to support China in its war with India, refused to supply a prototype atomic weapon, and withdrew all Soviet experts and advisers. His actions convinced Mao that revisionism was rampant at the highest levels of the Soviet Communist Party and confirmed his fear that “revolutions might be won by red armies, but could be lost by communist parties” (MacFarquhar 1997, 375).

It was only in December 1964 and January 1965, however, that Mao finally became convinced that the Chinese Communist Party, under the leadership of Liu Shaoqi and others like him, could not be trusted to carry through the revolution. What seems to have crystallized his suspicions was an unexpected twist in the Socialist Education Movement—a mass campaign

aimed at rooting out revisionism, capitalist tendencies, corruption, and abuse of power. In 1964, the campaign came under Liu's direct control, and until December Mao endorsed the way in which he conducted it (MacFarquhar 1997, 403–407; Teiwes 1993, xli–xliii, 411–425). He withdrew his support only when one of its work teams criticized the model agricultural production brigade at Dazhai—a brigade Mao had used to vindicate his claim that socialism, self-reliance, and revolutionary zeal could bring spectacular increases in production. The work team alleged that the Dazhai miracle was based on false statistics, that the peasants there were hungry, and that there were “woodworms in the staff of the red banner of Dazhai.” It reclassified the brigade from an “advanced unit” to one with “serious problems” (Baum 1975, 117–119).

When the work team's report was published in early December, Mao saw it as an attack on policies that sustained his vision of China's socialist future. He immediately jumped to Dazhai's defense, granting an audience to the beleaguered Dazhai Party secretary, Chen Yonggui, showering him with honors, giving his achievements additional publicity in the Party press, and reissuing the familiar slogan “In agriculture learn from Dazhai” as his own “latest instruction.” At exactly the same time, and out of the blue, he launched a series of attacks on Liu Shaoqi and other Party leaders. He accused Liu of revisionism, described Liu's formulations on the Socialist Education Movement as non-Marxist, and removed the movement from Liu's control. More generally, going beyond earlier warnings about bourgeois elements infiltrating the Party, he described Communist Party bureaucrats as “capitalist-class elements drinking the blood of the workers” and complained about “powerholders within the Party who take the capitalist road.” In short, he introduced precisely the terminology he used to indict Liu and other Party leaders during the Cultural Revolution. And all of this occurred when he was demonstrably incensed by the attack on Dazhai (cf. Baum 1975, 122–131; MacFarquhar 1997, 419–428; Dittmer 1998, 38, 46, 302 n. 88; Teiwes 1993, xlii–xliii, 431–433).

It was in January 1965, according to Mao's own account, that he resolved that Liu had to go (Snow 1973, 17), and it certainly seems that he had by then decided to remove Liu from the highest offices. But Liu was not his only target. Mao had doubts about other leaders, as well as their subordinates, and he was convinced that he had to rectify the Party as a whole. How was this to be done? How could an impure Party be trusted to purify itself? If suddenly asked to conduct a massive purge, with themselves as its principal victims, might not Liu and other leaders unite against him? And how could Mao destroy the influence of the capitalist roaders for good, when the established Party procedure was to retain the services of leaders who confessed their errors and promised reform? His solution to these problems was to take the whole reform process out of the Party's hands and turn it over to the Chinese people. He would ask the people, who had been taught to worship him, to cleanse the Party, scrutinizing the words and actions of its members in the light of his Thought. He would give the Party what he called "a shock," subjecting it to the trauma of the Cultural Revolution (Teiwes 1993, 466). And by making the masses his agents in the struggle, he would raise their revolutionary consciousness. So the purge of capitalist-roaders and revisionists in the Party would be part of a wider process of ideological and cultural transformation.

Framing Opponents

Peng Zhen and the Propaganda-Media-Culture Apparatus

Mao knew that he could declare open war on the Party only when he had secured control of three crucial sources of power: the PLA, Beijing, and the national propaganda-media-culture apparatus. With regard to the PLA, he knew that he could rely on the defense minister, Lin Biao; but he mistrusted the chief of staff, Luo Ruiqing, a member of the Central Committee Secretariat who was responsible to Deng Xiaoping and Peng Zhen. So in December 1965, as he moved toward a confrontation with the Party, he convened a Politburo Standing Committee confer-

ence that heard contrived charges that Luo had resisted Mao's revolutionary line. Luo was then suspended, subjected to savage struggle meetings, publicly vilified, and dismissed (MacFarquhar 1997, 169, 448–450).

The key to Mao's conquest of Beijing and the national propaganda-media-culture apparatus was Wu Han, a prominent historian and deputy mayor of Beijing. He had written a play, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, after Mao called for people to imitate Hai Rui—a courageous Ming-dynasty official dismissed by the emperor because he fought too vigorously against corruption and unjust confiscations of land. Mao had liked the play, which he described as “good”; he had presented Wu Han with a personally inscribed volume of his selected works; and he had defended him from criticism by cultural radicals, including his wife, Jiang Qing (MacFarquhar 1997, 253, 439–441; Teiwes 1993, liii, lxi, 461; Qiu 1998). However, Wu Han had also been shielded from attack by Peng Zhen, the mayor of Beijing, and other allies in the propaganda-media-culture establishment. This is what made him so useful to Mao, and sealed his fate.

It was probably in February 1965, just after deciding that Liu had to go, that Mao began to prepare his attack on Wu Han and his protectors. He did this by unleashing Jiang Qing—suggesting that she act on her long-thwarted desire to organize a critique of *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* (MacFarquhar 1997, 40, 646 n. 68; Teiwes 1993, 505, n. 108). She chose the Shanghai radical Yao Wenyan as the author, but the critique was a collective effort going through numerous drafts, and Mao himself read it three times. When it finally appeared in a Shanghai newspaper on 10 November 1965, it addressed Wu Han as “Comrade,” then accused him of expressing the viewpoint of the landlord class and the bourgeoisie, of allegorically criticizing collective ownership of land, and of attempting to “redress the grievances” of “imperialists, landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, undesirable characters, and rightists” (Yao 1965). The article predictably met a cold reception from Peng Zhen and Wu Han's other protectors in Beijing, but when they learned that Mao was

behind it, they immediately gave it wide publicity (Teiwes 1993, lx–lxi).

Mao set a trap for Peng Zhen by putting him in charge of the criticism of Wu Han while giving him the impression that the latter's offense was relatively minor. He let Peng think that a couple of months of academic criticism was all that was required and even assured him that Wu Han could continue as vice-mayor after the criticism had concluded. In this, he was being deliberately deceitful, and Peng felt that he had Mao's approval in trying to ensure that critics did not treat Wu Han as a class enemy. Moreover, on the basis of Peng's assurances about Mao's attitude, the Central Committee, the central Propaganda Department, the Ministry of Culture and the *People's Daily* all endorsed a mild prosecution of Wu Han, shielding him from the most serious charges (see Teiwes 1993, xliii–xliv, lx–lxi, 460–467, 505 n. 108, 510 n. 167; Lü 1993, 193–204; MacFarquhar 1997, 445–447, 452–456; Qiu 1998).

On 28 March 1966 Mao sprang his trap. He declared with his full authority that Wu Han was antisocialist, that the heroic Hai Rui represented Peng Dehuai and the right-opportunists who had been dismissed from office for criticizing the Great Leap Forward, and that the play was an attack on the Central Committee and Mao himself. He accused the Party's cultural officials of ignoring instructions to deal with people such as Wu Han and declared that the central Propaganda Department “is literally ‘the imperial court of Hades,’ and we are duty-bound to overthrow it” (Jin 1995, 149; Goldman 1981, 130). He viciously attacked Peng Zhen, falsely but plausibly accusing him of defying his wishes and of misleading the Central Committee about the correct attitude to Wu Han.

So Mao had tricked Peng Zhen, the Beijing Party Committee, the central Propaganda Department, the cultural officials, the Beijing press, and most of the national media into appearing to defy him. He had done this, moreover, using what was to become his standard tactic during the Cultural Revolution: he had “framed” his victims by using his unchallengeable author-

ity to change the context within which their words and actions were assessed. By suddenly declaring his implacable hostility toward Wu Han and by misrepresenting what he had said to Peng Zhen, Mao had sealed Peng's fate.

Moreover, by letting the Party's Central Committee off the hook, saying that Peng had deceived it, he gave the committee a chance to redeem itself. Its members believed that their best chance of avoiding Peng's fate was to cooperate in dismissing him from all his posts and to acquiesce in subsequent purges of the Beijing Municipal Committee, the central Propaganda Department, the Ministry of Culture, the New China News Agency, the Beijing press, the *Guangming Daily*, and the *People's Daily*. This is exactly what they did, and in every case Mao replaced those who had been purged with henchmen whom he judged willing to cooperate in a wider attack on the Party. He also got the Central Committee to set up a Central Cultural Revolution Group whose key members belonged to his inner circle. They included his secretary, Chen Boda; his wife, Jiang Qing; her patron, Kang Sheng; and her associate in cultural matters, Yao Wen yuan. Mao had thus gained control of the Beijing Party structure, the Beijing press, the national press, and the central organs of propaganda and culture; and he had ensured that his closest supporters dominated the small group that formulated Cultural Revolution policy. He thereby secured political dominance in the nation's capital; and he ensured that when he declared war on the Party, it would have no access to the propaganda apparatus and the media—no public voice with which to put its case or summon a counterattack.

Three-Family Village

If Mao was going to accuse the Party of ignoring his Thought, he had to create a gap between his Thought and the Party's practice. His problem was that the Party, despite his suspicions, had followed his line very closely (Teiwes 1993; Jin 1995, 84). What is more, nearly everyone believed that the Party, despite mistakes and the lapses of individual members, had tried to be

his faithful servant. So to convict the Party of wrongdoing, Mao had to change people's assumptions about what his Thought involved, then get them to reevaluate the words and actions of the Party's leaders in the context of these new assumptions.

Mao's strategy for putting the Party in the wrong involved using the Party itself to popularize a revised version of recent Chinese history. In this new account, the socialist orthodoxy of 1961–1962, which Mao himself had endorsed, was portrayed as anti-Party, antisocialist, and an attempt to restore capitalism in China. From late 1960 the Party, and Mao himself, had criticized the excesses of the Great Leap Forward and had backed the reforms that restored economic stability. But in August 1962, when the crisis had passed, Mao had reversed his position, demanding a return to many of the radical policies associated with the Leap. Such was his domination that the Party quickly changed direction, and the critics of Leap-style excesses suddenly fell silent. This did not save them when Mao's henchmen produced a revised version of history precisely in order to attack their socialist credentials.

The vehicle for establishing this revised version of the past was the great campaign against a newspaper column called "Notes from Three-Family Village." All of its authors had strong links with Peng Zhen and the Beijing Party Committee. They were Wu Han, Liao Mosha and, most prolific and prominent of all, Deng Tuo. Many of their essays were totally innocuous, but some were subtle allegories criticizing aspects of the Great Leap Forward and extreme Left policies. Even these allegories were nearly always in line with official Communist Party Policy, promulgated by the Central Committee and endorsed by Mao himself. Criticism of the leftist excesses they attacked was orthodox in 1961 and throughout most of 1962. It was only in August 1962, when the specter of mass starvation had begun to fade, that Mao let it be known that the reform process and the critique of leftism had gone too far. As far as the Party was concerned, his word was law, and Deng Tuo, Wu Han, and Liao Mosha immediately adopted the new line. They dropped their

allegorical attacks on leftist excesses, and "Notes from Three-Family Village" became almost totally innocuous. This change would not save them when Mao decided that their support of Party orthodoxy in 1961–1962 qualified them as useful targets (Cheek 1997, 229–268, 319–329; Teiwes 1993, 312–318, 325–327, 345–356, 369–373; Joseph 1984, 82–119).

The campaign against "Three-Family Village" was initiated on 8 May 1966 by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, writing under a pen name in the *Liberation Army Daily*. She described Deng Tuo as "manager of the Three-Family Village 'gangster inn' run by Wu Han, Liao Mosha, and himself." However, the most famous and influential attack was written by her collaborator, Yao Wenyuan (Yao 1966). Yao had himself conformed to the Party orthodoxy of 1961–1962 by indirectly criticizing the Great Leap Forward (Goldmann 1981, 62–63), but he did not mention this inconvenient aspect of his past. Instead, he constructed a brutal diatribe based on three false historical assumptions that summarized the revised version of Party history: that the Great Leap Forward had been a resounding success, and any criticism of it had been an attack on socialism; that the steps toward private plots of land, restoration of markets, and liberalization that occurred in 1961–1962 had been intended to restore capitalism; and that Mao and the Central Committee had consistently opposed those steps toward private plots, restoration of markets, and liberalization. Yao did not defend these assumptions, but simply took it for granted that everyone accepted them—an excellent way of telling people who questioned them that they were out of step. He used the assumptions to argue that the writers associated with "Three-Family Village," who had supported the reforms of 1961–1962, were an anti-Mao, anti-Party, antisocialist "black gang" plotting to restore capitalism. Mao let it be known that he supported Yao's article, and it was immediately reprinted in every major Chinese newspaper and magazine, and set for intensive study. Then, on the basis of that study, the Party mobilized the population in massive campaigns against "Three-Family Village"—a classic example of linguistic engineering in

which everyone had to say prescribed things that took it for granted that the revised version of Party history was true. At the same time, Yao's polemic inspired a mass of imitative journalism, as writers and editors sought to protect themselves by using the new assumptions.

So Yao, with the cooperation of the official media and the Communist Party, was able to effect a paradigm shift in the criteria people used—publicly at least—when assessing whether an utterance was pro-Party or anti-Party, pro-Mao or anti-Mao, socialist or antisocialist. These assumptions were at first used only to attack a handful of people in the cultural sector, but they could be used to attack anyone who had adhered to the Party policies Mao had approved before he changed his line in August 1962. In short, when the time was ripe, the revised version of Party history could be used to convict Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and any other top Party leaders whom Mao chose not to protect. This, we shall see, is exactly what happened.

Yao's polemic against "Three-Family Village" also popularized a technique the Party had long used whenever it seemed useful to "prove" that particular individuals were secret anti-socialists. The technique was simply to relocate someone's words to whatever context made them appear antisocialist. Kang Sheng had done this to support false accusations against thousands of innocent Party members during the Party Rectification of 1942–1944; Mao and the Party had done it to smear and convict Hu Feng and other intellectuals in 1955; and they had used it to destroy a host of alleged Rightists in 1957 (Cheek 1997, 289; Dai 1994, 146–155). Now Yao's article legitimated the technique's use on a grand scale to unmask capitalist-roaders, revisionists, and other class enemies during the Cultural Revolution.

In the essay "This Year's Spring Festival," for example, Deng Tuo had looked forward to the warm east wind, which would thaw the frozen ground. Yao pointed out that the Soviet revisionist, Khrushchev, had used the word "thaw" in his critique of Stalinism, and by ignoring the different context in which Khrushchev used the word, he was able to claim that Deng Tuo

"wished China to have a revisionist 'thaw'" like the one Khrushchev had promoted in the Soviet Union (Yao 1966, 105). Convicting people by taking their words out of context became a standard technique of denunciation during the Cultural Revolution.

Yao Wen Yuan's treatment of the word "thaw" also illustrates a crucial principle of interpretation that his essay helped to popularize: *Chairman Mao's enemies cunningly express their antisocialist message in allegories and codes, hiding it behind apparently innocent statements.* This principle, when combined with the technique of relocating words to damaging contexts, could be used to convict anyone of being anti-Mao. It was normally employed in conjunction with two principles that Yao used to unmask the antirevolutionary intentions that so often motivated revolutionary words. One principle can be expressed as follows: *When those accused of revisionism make statements that praise Mao or defend socialism, those statements are mere camouflage for antisocialist goals.* So when "Notes from Three-Family Village" praised the Maoist policy of self-reliance associated with the Great Leap Forward, Yao accused the antisocialist clique responsible for the column of praising Mao insincerely "in order to cover their retreat" (Yao 1966, 110–111). This tactic ensured that the writers associated with "Three-Family Village," like countless later victims of the Cultural Revolution, found even their most revolutionary words and actions cited as evidence that they were members of a black gang trying to camouflage their activities. As a popular slogan of the Cultural Revolution put it, they were Waving Red Flags to oppose the Red Flag.

The final principle that operated throughout Yao's essay was equally damaging to those criticized: *If those accused of revisionism make self-criticisms, then they are insincere; they are simply trying to avoid punishment so that they can live to fight another day.* Yao employed this principle freely. For example, when *Frontline* and the *Beijing Daily* attacked "Notes from Three-Family Village" and criticized themselves for printing the column, Yao denounced their recantation as "a gross lie" and a "huge swin-

dle." They were, he said, "making a fake criticism in the hope of slipping by" (Yao 1966, 91–93). This refusal to believe in the sincerity of self-criticism had important consequences later in the Cultural Revolution, for young Red Guards who took their principles of interpretation from Yao and his clones could never be convinced that those whom they accused had seen the error of their ways. As a result, their victims were denied the traditional method of securing reacceptance through the correction of their thought; they could do nothing to show that they were loyal comrades who had merely made a mistake. Their fate was to be condemned as enemies of the people, and that could sometimes mean death.

The first to die as a result of the exegetical principles disseminated by Yao and his imitators was Deng Tuo, leader of the black gang from "Three-Family Village." Yao's attack had made him a pariah. Millions of voices denounced him in unison, attributing to him views he had never held, demanding his destruction. He was misunderstood, but completely powerless to remedy the situation, for Mao Zedong controlled the principles and contexts used to interpret and judge his words. Shunned by his friends, a source of humiliation and terror to his family, betrayed by the Party he had served so well, Deng Tuo knew that as a class enemy he could expect a life of ostracism, abuse, and suffering. Eight days after the publication of Yao's article he committed suicide. Countless others would follow him, their fates sealed by retrospective switches in the revolutionary line or by principles of interpretation and judgment that could make anyone a class enemy.

Revolutionizing Education

By late May 1966, Mao was on the brink of bringing to a formal conclusion the rout of his potential enemies in the Beijing Party Committee, the central Propaganda Department, the Ministry of Culture, and the Beijing and national media. He was also in a position to extend his attack to the education system, which was especially vulnerable for three reasons. First, it overlapped with

the cultural sphere, so extension of the Cultural Revolution to educational institutions would cause neither surprise nor great alarm among senior Party leaders. Indeed, a directive written by Jiang Qing that Mao had forced through the Central Committee on 16 May had listed education, without emphasis, among the fields in which criticism should occur. Second, the students had already been extensively mobilized by the Party during the campaign against "Three-Family Village," and at a signal from Mao they could easily be directed to search for black gangs in the schools and universities. Third, the education sector had been heavily influenced by Peng Zhen and his associates in 1961–1962, adopting policies that emphasized academic performance. Mao had gone along with these at the time, but he now chose to regard them as antisocialist. And he ignored the fact that the Party had reversed the policies when he told it to.

In opening his attack on the education system Mao, as usual, acted circuitously. His initial target was Beijing University, an academically oriented institution whose leaders had close links with the disgraced Peng Zhen. The strategy to entrap them was put in train by Cao Yiou, the wife of Kang Sheng (Yan and Gao 1996, 40; Kwong 1988, 6; MacFarquhar 1997, 461). She sought out Nie Yuanzi, a radical with a record of conflict with the university's administration, and encouraged her to prepare a wall poster that linked the university's leaders to Peng Zhen and accused its Party Committee of suppressing the Cultural Revolution. When the poster went up, the university president, Lu Ping, did not guess that Mao's intimates were behind it, so he did exactly what any Chinese Communist Party leader would have done when confronted by a direct challenge to his own authority and that of the Party Committee: he had the poster torn down and then organized mass criticism of Nie Yuanzi and members of staff who had abetted her.

Lu Ping had done exactly what Nie Yuanzi and Cao Yiou must have expected. He had also fallen into a carefully prepared trap. Now all Mao had to do was change the context within which Nie's poster was judged. He authorized Chen Boda to

take over the *People's Daily* and ordered that the poster be publicized with official support. Kang Sheng read it out on the radio; then the *People's Daily* published it, endorsed it, and supplied extensive commentaries explaining its implications. The whole country now knew that the poster had Mao's blessing, and this transformed it from an anti-Party document into a revolutionary proclamation that had unmasked a black gang. So for the third time in the Cultural Revolution, Mao had used his unchallengeable authority to frame his victims by suddenly and unexpectedly switching the context within which their words and actions were judged. This sealed the fate of Lu Ping, the university's Party Committee, and all the staff and students who had criticized Nie Yuanzi.

The switch in context that trapped Lu Ping had implications that extended far beyond Beijing. The newspaper commentaries on Nie's poster made it clear that black gangs had infiltrated to the very highest level within other educational institutions, so students everywhere began to scrutinize their teachers, administrators, and Party committees. They were well prepared for the job, for they had been taught Yao Wenyan's principles of textual exegesis and his revised version of political history during the campaign against "Three-Family Village." Day after day they had heard their teachers recite official condemnations of the "gangster inn"; day after day they had studied newspaper commentaries by Yao Wenyan and others on the "poisonous weeds" composed by Deng Tuo and his colleagues; and day after day they had competed to see who could paint the largest number of big-character posters reviling the black gang that had infiltrated the country's cultural élite. Soon, they became proficient at detecting Mao's enemies themselves. At Yunnan University, for example, students scrutinizing a linguistics text written by an "old intellectual" decided that the sentence "The sun is setting behind the hill" was an antirevolutionary reference to the fall of Chairman Mao, who in revolutionary symbolism was the sun in the Chinese people's hearts (Kwong 1988, 10). In Gao Yuan's school, the breakthrough came when students cracked

the antirevolutionary code on the cover of the May 1966 issue of *China Youth*, the official magazine of the Communist Youth League:

One afternoon when we were making *dazibao* [big-character posters], Little MiHu came running into the classroom waving a magazine and shouting, "Big discovery, big discovery!" . . . He jabbed his finger at the back cover, a scene of young people carrying bundles of wheat in baskets slung on long poles. Behind them stretched a golden ocean of wheat.

"Look at the red flag in the background," Little MiHu said excitedly. "It's fluttering toward the right. On the map, right is east and left is west. So the wind must be blowing from the west. Chairman Mao says the east wind should prevail over the west, but here the west is prevailing over the east!"

That was not all. Little MiHu turned the back cover sideways and traced his finger through the wheatfield, pointing out some light-colored streaks. "Here are four characters, do you see?" "Oh my!" somebody gasped. "Long live Kai-shek!" I saw it too, the veiled message in praise of Kuomintang leader Chiang Kai-shek. The magazine passed from hand to hand. We were shocked that the enemies of socialism would be so bold as to issue a public challenge and amazed that they had figured out such a clever way to do it. Now we understood why the newspapers were warning us that counterrevolutionaries had wormed their way into the very heart of the Party's cultural apparatus. Nothing could be taken for granted anymore. (Gao 1987, 39–40)

After that, recalls Gao Yuan, "Everyone was on the lookout for fresh evidence, and every day fresh *dazibao* reported the latest findings." Some thought that a shadow in the portrait of Lenin in the classroom was a snake running down the side of his nose; others believed that a painted beam above Mao's head in a photo was a sword about to drop; and still others alleged that the portrait of Mao at the front of the classroom, which showed him facing slightly to the right, was a deliberate attempt to make him appear deformed by showing only his left ear (Gao 1987, 40). None of these interpretations went unchallenged, but students who disputed them could seem to lack revolutionary

consciousness. There was, as Anita Chan has pointed out in another context, “a built-in momentum throughout the nation towards ‘ultra-leftism’ ” (Chan 1985, 95), and even the students who argued that Mao’s missing ear was a matter of artistic realism were heavily outvoted.

As the search for revisionism spread, “nothing was immune from suspicion” (Gao 1987, 40). Taking their cues from the newspapers, students scrutinized poems, short stories, novels, plays, and movies. They began to put up *xiaozibao* (small-character posters), on which they wrote essays exposing the counter-revolutionary content of works they had hitherto regarded as entirely innocent. Many of the essays imitated, quite deliberately, Yao Wenyan’s prose style and method of analysis. And, after the publication of Nie Yuanzi’s poster on 2 June, they began to focus on the education system. Students began to look critically at textbooks and teaching methods, and at the attitudes, behavior, and backgrounds of the teachers themselves. Gao Yuan’s English teacher, for example, was condemned for the following passage in an ode to the lotus that he published in a provincial literary magazine:

Though rooted in stinking mud,
Your body is smooth and clean;
Though you drink bitter water all your life,
Your flowers are fresh and fragrant;
In summer, you please us with your beautiful blossoms;
In autumn, you wither and leave us your delicious roots.

The students concluded that the phrase “drink bitter water all your life” was “a slur on socialist society” (Gao 1987, 42). The interpretation seems ludicrous, until we realize that the students were taking as their model Yao Wenyan, who had attacked an essay by Deng Tuo on the benefits of drinking plain, boiled water as “a smear on the Party’s economic policies” (Gao 1987, 36).

Using Yao’s armory of polemical techniques, it was possible to prove, according to some arbitrary criterion, that anyone at

all was anti-Mao or antisocialist. So how did the students choose their victims before framing them in the approved Yaoist manner? In this task they received no help from Nie Yuanzi's poster and the newspapers, which simply inveighed in general terms against the black gangs who opposed Chairman Mao and his Thought. But who, precisely, were the black gangs in educational institutions? And how could revolutionary staff and students identify the bourgeois academic authorities and revisionists said to be associated with them? These descriptive terms were semantically incomplete, which means that they could be assigned referents only when fleshed out with the aid of contextual clues—a big problem because it was not clear what contextual items were relevant. So the students' choice of victims varied according to their own backgrounds and prejudices. Some regarded as revisionist anyone who valued academic excellence, while others applied the label to teachers who had bad class origins, who were linked to a counterrevolutionary, bad element, or Rightist, who adopted a bourgeois manner of dress, or who exercised bourgeois dictatorship over students by reprimanding them. Not a few students chose victims almost at random, out of simple fear that if they criticized no one they would appear to lack revolutionary consciousness and be victimized themselves.

Far worse, from the Party's point of view, was that in some schools groups of students challenged the legitimacy of the Party Committees. Their attacks led many committees to defend themselves by mobilizing support from the mainstream of Party members, Youth League members, and the children of cadres. The committees also asked higher Party units to dispatch work teams to manage the Cultural Revolution, arguing that it should not be turned into a counterrevolution by "anti-Party" forces (Lee 1978, 27–31). In some schools and universities even the students, unsure of what they should be doing, asked for work teams to direct their efforts.

Uncertain of how to respond to the situation, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping flew to Hangzhou to see Mao, who was watch-

ing events from a distance. They asked Mao to return to take charge of the Cultural Revolution but he refused, saying, "You do as you see fit." So they returned to Beijing, where an urgent meeting of the Politburo decided to send work teams to "control the movement and maintain order in universities and schools." This decision was based on earlier decisions, ratified by Mao, to send work teams to the *People's Daily* and Beijing University; but Liu, anxious to have Mao's explicit consent, sent a telex informing him of the move. Mao sent back a reply endorsing the decision (Dittmer 1998, 65–66; Zhai 1992, 61).

Once on the ground, the work teams faced the same problem of interpretation as the students. How could they identify the black gangs? The criterion, obviously, was fidelity to Mao's thought, but Yao Wenyan's principles of interpretation made it possible for them to prove that anyone was guilty of major infidelity. So what were they to do? Predictably, they acted on principles established in previous campaigns. First, they listened to complaints, then purged and humiliated people in authority who had seriously abused their positions. At the same time, they prevented wholesale attacks on cadres, which were ruled out by Mao's dictum that all but 4 or 5 percent of cadres were "good" or "comparatively good" and that they should unite "more than 95 percent of our people and 95 percent of our cadres" against the antirevolutionary few. (For this dictum, see Jin 1995, 349; and Baum and Teiwes 1968, 66, 73, 78, 84–85, 93, 111–112, 119, 123.)

Second, the work teams obediently focused most of their suspicions on the obdurately antisocialist 4 or 5 percent. But how were they to be identified? Once again, Mao's Thought supplied the answer. He had repeatedly said that they consisted of "unreformed landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionary elements, bad elements, and Rightists," and in some contexts "the reactionary bourgeoisie," "unregenerate members of the petty bourgeoisie," and "intellectuals" as well (Schram 1984, 4, 38, 45). In campaign after campaign these groups, and especially the five black categories, had been hauled out for criti-

cism, and Mao had given the practice his blessing. It was therefore entirely predictable that when the work teams went into the schools and universities they would attempt to carry out his will by “pointing the arrow downwards” at the black categories and other traditionally suspect groups. This was what Mao had encouraged them to do and what he must have known they would do. Indeed, he himself was responsible for the investigative principle on which the work teams acted: *Anything said or written by people who are from bad class or black category backgrounds is particularly likely to express reactionary sentiments.*

In accordance with this principle, the work teams sought the cooperation of students and teachers from red class backgrounds in persecuting the five black categories, the bourgeoisie, and all individuals with a problematic background. At Ken Ling's school, for instance, the work team made public the files of teachers who had “historical problems” such as past connections with the Guomindang, then told the students, “Let's see what stand you take.” Forty or fifty of the school's 187 staff were rounded up, harangued, humiliated, and tortured. The class background of their tormentors was clear:

Those who immediately took up sticks and applied the tortures were the school bullies who, as children of party cadres and army officers, belonged to the five red classes. . . . Coarse and cruel, they were accustomed to throwing their parents' weight around and brawling with other students. They did so poorly at school that they were about to be expelled and, presumably, resented the teachers because of this. (Ling 1972, 19)

In most schools, as in Ling's, the attack was led by the children of cadres. They saw themselves as a superior stratum, as the natural heirs to the Communist revolution, and they were accustomed to taking the lead in political matters. They were given privileged admission to the best schools and universities, but as a group they got worse results than the academically more committed children of the bad classes and the middle classes—especially the intellectual middle class. They often resented teachers who tried to get them to work hard or who

criticized their lapses from revolutionary virtue, especially when the teachers were not Party members or had dubious family backgrounds. They took pleasure in proving their revolutionary spirit by using Yao Wen Yuan's exegetical principles to prove that such teachers held antirevolutionary views or that they glorified academic excellence at the expense of redness (Chan 1985, 126, 135; Unger 1982, 105, 111–116). They were often supported by politically active middle class children, anxious to prove that they were red in their hearts if not in their ambiguous family heritage, and by the children of workers and peasants. At my own university and its attached schools, the staff suffered most at the hands of the children of workers who lived in the university village, where they performed maintenance and other tasks. In a highly competitive environment dominated by the sons and daughters of academics from the middle or bad classes, working-class children had always felt inferior, and now they got their revenge.

In this context, the assumption that bad-class people are especially likely to harbor reactionary sentiments was used time after time to guide interpretation. In Gao Yuan's school, for instance, the deputy principal, Lin Sheng, was the son of a landlord, and a book of essays he had written was singled out for special criticism. In one essay he recalled how his father had set him on the path of learning, but the students twisted his words to accuse him of bragging about his landlord origins. "In the old society," they said, "old people from the exploiting class, like Lin Sheng, could afford to go to school. How many workers or poor or lower-middle peasants went to school? Most of them could not even dream of such a thing!" (Gao 1987, 56). Gao Yuan himself had "rather liked" Lin Sheng's writing, but felt no urge to dispute the analysis of its reactionary nature. "The mere fact that Lin Sheng was the son of a landlord," he recalls, "was incriminating enough" (Gao 1987, 56).

The situation of members of the bad classes, which had always been wretched, became even worse during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution as revolutionary cadres' chil-

dren sought to entrench their position as leaders of the revolution by elaborating the doctrine of “natural redness” (*zilai hong*). This doctrine stated that children from red-class families were natural revolutionaries, while those from bad-class families were natural reactionaries. This would continue from generation to generation. Well-known verses with which red-class children taunted their inferiors made the point:

A dragon begets only dragons,
 A phoenix begets only phoenixes,
 A rat's descendant knows only how to dig holes.
 A hero's child is a brave man.
 A reactionary's child is a bastard. (Gao 1987, 113; Zhai 1992, 79–82; Chan 1985, 133–136)

These verses were not taught to the students by the work teams, and they were not Maoist orthodoxy, for they neglected Mao's insistence that a small proportion of bad-class people—perhaps 10 percent—could be reformed (cf. Schram 1984, 38). Rather, they were an exaggeration and distortion by self-important adolescents of an abiding theme in Mao's Thought: his prejudice in favor of the red categories and his mistrust of people with origins in the bad classes. The verses envisaged a China divided forever into hereditary good and bad classes, and they implied the dogmatic universalism of a principle that guided the thinking of many red-class students: *People with bad class origins are incapable of genuine revolutionary consciousness*. This assumption made it impossible for people with bad class backgrounds to get a hearing. No words they used could communicate their inner conviction that they were committed revolutionaries or persuade their red-class tormentors that they had seen the error of their ways. The belief that they could not be reformed contributed substantially to the violence that people with bad class origins suffered during the Cultural Revolution.

If the red-class students began by humiliating, beating, and torturing teachers with dubious backgrounds, they soon began to look for other targets. The most obvious were fellow students

who were unpopular or who were suspected of counterrevolutionary sentiments—and again this generally meant those with bad class backgrounds or links to people who had been labeled as counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, or Rightists. In many schools, these “sons of bitches” were forced to study the works of Chairman Mao while being harassed by bullying supervisors, to make repeated self-criticisms, and to denounce their parents incessantly. They were also sometimes beaten or given a “yin-yang head” with the hair shaved off one side to signify their outcast status. This “Red Terror,” as those who carried it out proudly termed it, was supported by the Party’s work teams, which sometimes gave the cadres’ children access to the official dossiers of bad-class students (Chan 1985, 134–136; Lee 1978, 57–58; Zhai 1992, 104–109, 116–117; Jiang 1994, 109).

In attacking the class enemy in the schools, most students from the red classes were completely confident that they were doing what Mao wanted. The work teams and the Party leaders, for their part, were doing their best to interpret his will. Mao had made their task a formidable one by refusing to take charge himself or to give direct instructions. Moreover, he had always described the Cultural Revolution’s targets using semantically incomplete terms such as “black gangs,” “revisionists,” and “representatives of the bourgeoisie.” Most people fleshed out their meaning and determined their referents using contextual clues provided by Mao’s own writings and by the class orientation of earlier political campaigns. These suggested that the Cultural Revolution was yet another class struggle directed principally at the usual suspects—the black categories, the bourgeoisie, aberrant intellectuals, and politically suspect members of the petite bourgeoisie. So in pointing the arrow downward, the Party and the work teams were not merely deflecting the attack from themselves, but acting upon a sincere and entirely predictable interpretation of Mao’s will. When minorities of dissident students and staff, sometimes motivated by personal or class grievances, tried to identify the black gangs with red-class educational administrators or Party Committees, the work

teams could only see this as an unprincipled attempt to pervert the course of the Cultural Revolution. And when the dissidents turned against the work teams, accusing them of defending the black gangs and persecuting the true revolutionaries, the Party's response was both predictable and traditional. It accused the dissidents of challenging its authority, and it suppressed them. And its leaders genuinely believed that such repression was what the enigmatic Mao wanted.

Liu Shaoqi and the Party

Everyone knew that Mao wanted to root out "powerholders within the Party following the capitalist road." This had been a goal of the ongoing Socialist Education movement since January 1965, and the goal was reiterated in a Central Committee directive of 16 May 1966, which said that it would be necessary to criticize "representatives of the bourgeoisie who have sneaked into the Party" (Baum 1975, 128–129; *CCP Documents*, 27–28). Most cadres probably thought that the directive implied only a limited purge of people associated with Peng Zhen, the central Propaganda Department, and the spheres of education and culture, for they took for granted Mao's dictum that most members of the Party were good or comparatively good. And, since most Party cadres had red-class backgrounds, they did not dream that they were the intended object of a campaign against "representatives of the bourgeoisie." They knew very well that in 1963 Mao had explicitly identified the "bad people" who had "wormed their way" into the Party as unregenerate members of the petite bourgeoisie, intellectuals, and "sons and daughters of landlords and rich peasants" (quoted in Schram 1984, 45).

Their world began to fall apart only after 18 July when Mao, who had been observing the Party's conduct of the Cultural Revolution from Hangzhou, returned to Beijing to spring a carefully prepared trap. He did to the Party and its leaders what he had done to Deng Tuo, Peng Zhen, Lu Ping, and all his previous victims: he introduced new criteria for assessing revolutionary virtue—criteria that transformed their attempts to promote the

socialist revolution into attempts to suppress it. He had ignored pleas from Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping that he take direct personal control of the Cultural Revolution or that he at least give explicit instructions about how to conduct it. Instead, he had let the Party leaders—desperate to avoid a false move—act as he must have known they would: in accordance with established precedents and his own previous pronouncements. And, having watched from afar their predictable attempts to please him, he now returned as their nemesis. On 19 July, he confronted Liu and Deng in a fury, comparing their behavior to that of the Qing dynasty, the northern warlords, and the Guomindang (MacFarquhar 1997, 462). He accused them of using the work teams to prevent criticism of the Party and to suppress the Cultural Revolution. And he then set about introducing new principles for assessing revolutionary virtue that were designed to discredit Liu and Deng, to destroy their power, and to turn the Cultural Revolution against the Party.

Mao made the new principles public through three measures. First, dismissing Liu's protests, he withdrew the work teams from the schools and universities. Second, he himself wrote a big-character poster for Beijing University under the title "Bombard the Headquarters"—by which he meant, of course, the headquarters of the Communist Party. The poster criticized the work teams and said that "some leading comrades . . . have enforced a bourgeois dictatorship and struck down the surging movement of the Great Cultural Revolution of the Proletariat" (Mao 1966a). Third, he pushed through the Central Committee his famous "Sixteen Points," which declared openly that "the main target of the present movement is those within the Party who are in authority and are taking the capitalist road." The document called for the dismissal of the "capitalist roaders," alleged that they had sought "every possible pretext to suppress the mass movement," and accused them of "shifting the targets for attack and turning black into white in an attempt to lead the movement astray" (*CCP Documents*, 44–46). And it left no doubt that the principal capitalist roaders were those

who had sent the work teams into the schools and universities: Liu Shaoqi and the Party leadership.

Mao's words and actions were intended to establish two principles for judging revolutionary virtue. The first was that *anyone who fears, criticizes, or suppresses the free mobilization of the masses is opposing the Cultural Revolution, attacking socialism, and following the capitalist road*. So when the Party, advancing the slogan Sweep out all obstacles to the Cultural Revolution, attacked dissident students as "freaks and monsters" (Lee 1978, 29), it was not defending the Cultural Revolution but suppressing it. It was also attacking socialism and following the capitalist road.

The second principle was equally damaging: *Anyone who fails to make capitalist roaders within the Party the main target is guilty of shifting the target of attack and following the capitalist road*. This assumption ensured that through their words and actions Liu, Deng, and almost the entire Party stood accused. They had made many statements that focused the students' attention on bourgeois intellectuals, the black categories, and the capitalists, sincerely believing that this was what Mao wanted. Now, their words were to be reinterpreted as attempts to shift the target of attack.

The Party leaders whom Mao had framed might defend themselves in private, as far as they dared, but they had no public voice. The Maoists had acquired total control of the media through the purges that followed the framing of Peng Zhen. And with a single voice the media asserted and assumed a further principle that was implicit in the Campaign to Study and Apply Chairman Mao's Thought that the Party had been orchestrating for more than two years: *The legitimacy of the Communist Party derives entirely from its faithfulness to the Thought of Chairman Mao Zedong, and Party members who say anything at variance with that Thought are attacking socialism and following the capitalist road*. In accordance with this principle, and the Sixteen Points, the Party's role in "supervising" the Cultural Revolution was largely to encourage criticism of its own record in the light of Mao Zedong's Thought. And Mao, having so comprehensively

trapped the Party by changing the context within which its actions were to be judged, no doubt believed that there could be only one verdict.

The Red-class Red Guards: Rogue Assumptions in the Context of Interpretation

To this point, Mao's Cultural Revolution strategy had worked more or less as he had planned. Now, things started to go wrong. In his big-character poster, he had called on the masses to bombard the headquarters of the Party; and he had got the Party to cut its own throat when its Central Committee, by endorsing the Sixteen Points, attacked its handling of the Cultural Revolution and invited the masses to deliver judgment. Yet for some two months the revolutionary masses, in the form of the Red Guard movement, showed little inclination to attack the Party. Instead, the vast majority continued to point the arrow downward toward bourgeois intellectuals, the black categories, and the capitalists, attacking them in what they proudly described as a Red Terror—a campaign in which some seventeen hundred people in Beijing were beaten to death. And they indulged in an orgy of cultural and material destruction in a campaign against the Four Olds—old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits. Only a few made a serious attempt to haul out the capitalist roaders in the Party who were supposed to be their main target.

Why did so few Red Guards direct their scrutiny at the Party—and especially at the dominant elements in its ranks? The reason is simple: the Red Guard movement in this period was confined entirely to students from the red classes at the top of China's hereditary class system—confined to the children of revolutionary cadres, revolutionary soldiers, revolutionary martyrs, industrial workers, and poor and lower-middle peasants. In particular, the Red Guard leaders were mostly the sons and daughters of the very group that dominated the Communist Party: the

revolutionary cadres. It was not that the Red Guards put loyalty to their families before loyalty to Mao: rather, they simply could not believe that when Mao called on them to bombard the headquarters, what he said was what he meant. Like their parents, they accepted the traditional Maoist doctrine that the black categories and bourgeoisie were the main threat to the revolution while the red classes and the Party were its guardians. They believed Mao's repeated statements that there were only a few bad cadres, and they conveniently assumed that most of them had been purged along with Peng Zhen. And if that were true, the problem of people in authority following the capitalist road had been all but solved, and the Red Guards could devote themselves largely to the congenial task of eliminating the threat from the bad classes and bourgeois intellectuals.

Mao and the Central Cultural Revolution Group were at first happy for the Red Guards to brutalize the black categories and capitalists, terrorize bourgeois intellectuals, burn books, and vandalize China's cultural heritage. But when, after two months, most revolutionaries still showed little inclination to bombard the headquarters, it was clear that the Cultural Revolution had gone off course. From the beginning of October, the Maoist leadership set about changing the revolutionaries' orientation. The *People's Daily* and *Red Flag* accused capitalist roaders within the Party of manipulating the Red Guards' campaign to deflect it from themselves, and they criticized the Red Guards who had cooperated in this strategy. They also banned use of the term "black categories"; they declared that students of any class background could become Red Guards; and they denounced the theory of "natural redness," describing the speeches of its most articulate exponent, the Red Guard leader Tan Lifu, as "poisonous weeds." In this way they directly attacked the equation of good class status with political virtue, which underpinned most red-class students' reluctance to attack the Party (Lee 1978, 110–116; Schoenhals 1992, 34–35).

Faced with this attack on their position, the pro-Party Red

Guards were incredulous, but they were told that it had been authorized by Mao and Lin Biao themselves. When they complained to Premier Zhou Enlai, he was brutally direct: "You are hoodwinked and influenced by them [the Party committees]. Get rid of their influence and rectify yourselves. Those who are influenced most deeply are you, the so-called majority faction, who supported the work teams" (Lee 1978, 116). Such attacks left them thoroughly bewildered, for they had been brought up to believe that their parents were revolutionary heroes and that they themselves were revolutionary successors destined to carry on the revolution. "Why," they asked, "are the Party and the CYL [Communist Youth League] members in our colleges mostly on the conservative side?" "How can it be possible that the sons of cadres, who constituted the creative and vital forces of the revolutionary organizations in the middle schools, are conservative?" (Lee 1978, 92). Some of them, forced to choose between the Maoist line and the Party, chose the latter. The Xicheng Inspection Team, for example, an elite Red Guard unit that policed the activities of other Red Guards, formed itself into a paramilitary organization defending the government ministries from attack. This was not the sort of free mobilization of the masses the Maoist leadership wanted, so the public security forces were used to suppress it.

Most of the conservative Red Guards did not defy the Maoist leadership openly. They remained eager to do Mao's will and reemerged under new labels to participate in the Cultural Revolution. Their class origins, however, still influenced their behavior. When they attacked the Party, they generally singled out either leaders whose downfall was inevitable because they had been identified as appropriate targets by the Maoist press or cadres who held technical positions and often had nonred backgrounds. Where possible, they ignored the red-class cadres who held most of the key political positions, and they tried to preserve the Party's organizational integrity (Lee 1978, 312-322). So traditional assumptions about the class basis of revolutionary virtue continued to influence their choice of victims.

The “Rebel” Red Guards: Attacking the Party in Mao's Name

By late 1966, however, the conservatives were not the only Red Guards. They were not even in the forefront of the Cultural Revolution. Once the Central Cultural Revolution Group had declared that students of any class background could join the movement, new “Rebel” Red Guard units had proliferated. Most were recruited mainly from the politically ambiguous middle classes, who had hitherto been relegated to the status of hangers-on in what was called the red outer circle. They resented the way in which the Party's work teams (in traditional Maoist fashion) had singled out red-class students as revolutionary leaders, they resented their exclusion from the early Red Guard movement, and they did not think that a predominantly red-class Party was beyond attack.

They were joined by a dissident minority of red-class students, most of them disgruntled or disprivileged. They included young people from working-class families who resented the arrogance and condescending ways of the revolutionary cadres' children; the orphaned children of revolutionary martyrs, whose good class status was meager compensation for poverty and lack of family connections; and the children of local cadres disciplined by higher authorities, who could now label those authorities capitalist roaders and attack them. These red-class rebels were often appointed to leading positions in rebel units for the sake of appearance, but the real power nearly always lay with their more numerous and often more able middle-class members (Liu 1976, 115–121; Lee 1978; Chan, Rosen, and Unger 1980; Unger 1982; Rosen 1982; Chan 1985).

Students with bad class backgrounds had suffered terribly at the hands of the Party, and they had been victimized by students from the good and middle classes during the Red Terror. Even when the Central Cultural Revolution Group decreed that they could become Red Guards, most were too fearful to become politically active. However, a small minority sought to get even

with their erstwhile persecutors. Ken Ling describes how in one school they took advantage of the withdrawal of the work teams to join middle-class students like himself in a vendetta against Party stalwarts:

In the new circumstances, I felt that I had to name a few power holders as “reactionary academic authorities” and “cow ghosts and snake demons.” . . . In particular I named people with peasant or worker backgrounds who had since “changed character”—abused their new authority as members of the five red classes. I did so to avenge my family—grandfather, father and uncles—who had lost their considerable property and jobs and land because of such scoundrels. Altogether I named more than twenty people. I avoided naming teachers I respected or members of the five black classes. . . . I sympathized with them because we shared the same fate, although my father was considered middle class—my father had been a bank manager. I was strongly opposed to those in my class with a “5 red” background who pointed out that this was “intentional class revenge”; but these classmates were overruled, and we kicked them out of the class on the charge of betrayal. . . . The overwhelming majority of students in our school were of the five black classes; this was one of its exceptional characteristics. (Ling 1972, 22–23)

In the hands of someone like Ling, the principles of interpretation and judgment legitimized by Mao and Yao Wenyan could be used to prove, to the satisfaction of anyone who wanted class revenge, that even the reddest five-red teachers and cadres had been following the capitalist road.

The coalition Mao recruited to prosecute his war on the Party was heterogeneous, but most of its members had one thing in common: they came from families unconnected to currently dominant groups, so they had nothing to lose if the Party crumbled. Many of them nurtured grievances, or at least a resentment of the privileges and special status enjoyed by children of the revolutionary cadres who were the main force in the Party. Some of them, inspired by Mao's critical comments on the growth of bureaucratic tendencies, even argued that revolutionary cadres and their families were a stratum of red capitalists and a newborn bourgeoisie. They were joined by underprivi-

leged groups from among the workers, who answered the call to wrest control of their workplaces from the capitalist roaders, whom they blamed for their powerlessness, poverty, and lack of secure employment.

It was this combination of student rebels and rebel workers that fought Mao's battle against the Party. They were emboldened by the support of the Mao-controlled media and intoxicated by the discourse of class war that it fostered. Their opponents had no public voice, they were demoralized, and they lacked legitimacy because they had been labeled Mao's enemies. By early 1967, with the so-called January power seizure, the Rebel Red Guards and radical workers had destroyed the Party as a functioning unit. They began to drag out top Party leaders, humiliating and assaulting them. Mao let it all happen, for it suited his purpose to indulge their savagery. Liu Shaoqi, as the number one capitalist roader, was singled out for attack and hostile investigation. Mao and his Central Cultural Revolution Group let the rebels interrogate and humiliate him. Then they kept him in seclusion while Jiang Qing and Kang Sheng supervised a search of two and a half million documents in an attempt to find proof that he was a "renegade, traitor, and scab." They found nothing, but expelled him from the Party and convicted him anyway—boasting that his exposure was one of the greatest achievements of the Cultural Revolution. He died a lonely prisoner in Henan in 1969, half naked, covered in bedsores, his serious illnesses untreated, his hair and fingernails uncut. He had not spoken a word since hearing of his expulsion from the Party almost a year earlier (Dittmer 1998, 83–92).

Mao's Loss of Control of the Context of Interpretation: The Descent into Chaos

The sequel to the January power seizure disillusioned most of the rebels. Mao had freed them from their parents, freed them from their teachers, and freed them from control by the Party. In the Sixteen Points, he had seemed to offer them a permanent say in the government of revolutionary China through demo-

cratically elected groups, committees, and congresses based on the model of the Paris Commune. The rebels foresaw a glorious future in which they—the masses—would rule, guided by the Thought of Mao Zedong. But when in the wake of the January power seizure the rebels in Shanghai actually set up a Paris-style commune, Mao had it closed down, saying, “If everything were changed into Communes, then what about the Party? . . . There must be a Party somehow; there must be a nucleus” (Chan 1985, 145). He needed a chastened and reconstructed Party to discipline the masses, just as he needed the masses to punish the Party if it “betrayed” his Thought. So, while he waited to rebuild the Party, he tried to restore order by giving power to Revolutionary Committees that had some representatives of the revolutionary masses but were dominated by the PLA and rehabilitated cadres (cf. Huang 1996, 133–134). Many of the rebels were disillusioned. Their hopes of a central role in China's future crumbled, and they began to wonder if Mao always spoke with his own voice or if he was sometimes misrepresented or subjected to pressure. They began to lose faith in the directives that emanated from the Party center in his name.

The situation was made worse by a split in the Cultural Revolution Group between moderates led by Kang Sheng and Yao Wen Yuan and radicals led by Qi Benyu, who incited agitation against Zhou Enlai, sought to intensify the war against the bureaucracy, called for a purge of the PLA, and incited the Red Guards to raid arsenals and attack regional military commanders (Lee 1978, chap. 8; Kwong 1988, 94–95). With the Party center openly divided, some directives were vaguely worded compromises, while others flatly contradicted each other. The effect of all this has been neatly summarized by Julia Kwong:

These conflicting messages, compounded by the breakdown of mechanisms of social control, increased confusion that further undermined the government's influence. Sometimes the Red Guards openly defied central directives; at other times they used whichever directives suited them and ignored the rest, then accused their rivals who did likewise of disobeying central government orders. (Kwong 1988, 106)

In this context, Mao's words, while never openly questioned, became little more than a weapon for belaboring opponents. As Ken Ling later recalled,

During the ensuing two years [from October 1966] I was never to hear my colleagues discuss how to defend Mao Tse-tung thought or the rule of the proletariat. All I heard was how to strengthen our own organization and weaken the opposing one. Sometimes my schoolmates would appeal to me: Old Ling, hurry up and find something in the Mao quotations that we can use to bat our opponents down. We'll use it a thousand times in our propaganda today. We know you remember more of them and know how to apply them. (Ling 1972, 131)

Mao's Thought could be used to prove anything at all. It was no longer controlled by Mao, who had all but destroyed the Party he had once used to disseminate his word and regulate its interpretation. Rather, it was controlled by the Red Guards—and it was they who selected, to suit themselves, the contexts of interpretation.

Repeated calls by the Party center for the Red Guards to stop fighting each other, to be tolerant of cadres, and not to attack soldiers went unheeded in the latter part of the Cultural Revolution. Every Red Guard organization paid lip service to these appeals—summed up in the slogan Great unity—then selected a context of interpretation that neutralized their intended effect. The *Middle School War Gazette*, for instance, interpreted the slogan as an instruction that revolutionary organizations—centers of great unity—should not be disbanded but rebuilt, strengthened, and supported (Kwong 1988, 111). The paper was thus able to turn the slogan around so that it became a recommendation that revolutionary organizations would gather strength for combat with antirevolutionary enemies. The power of discourse, and the effectiveness of linguistic engineering, had been subverted by Mao's inability to control the contexts within which words were interpreted.

Finally, to enforce peace, Mao mobilized the workers and the PLA against the students, sending them into the schools and universities to take charge. The Rebel Red Guards resisted,

suspecting that some “black hand” had mobilized the workers. So Mao summoned five nationally prominent student leaders—“the five heavenly kings”—and with tears streaming down his face he told them, “I am the ‘black hand’ [who has been ordering your suppression]. If you leave this meeting and try to say something different, I warn you that I am making a tape recording of the meeting and will make it public (Lieberthal 1995, 115; cf. Goldman 1981, 155). This personal appeal, with its explicit threat, was backed by the force of the PLA and by Workers’ Mao Zedong Propaganda Teams, which were dispatched to school and university campuses. Many of the rebels submitted, while others resisted but were suppressed after bloody fighting. The free mobilization phase of the Cultural Revolution—in which Mao had sought to rule by manipulating revolutionary discourse—was finally and definitively over.

In 1982, a former Red Guard leader described what had happened during the Cultural Revolution: “First the government [Mao] turned against the intellectuals, then the party members, then the students. We were all being used” (Kwong 1988, 131–132). Phrases such as “we were used,” “manipulated,” “betrayed,” and “naïve” recur time and time again in the recollections of former Red Guards. Mao had used the campaign against Wu Han to trap Peng Zhen, the Beijing Party Committee, the Propaganda Department, and the Ministry of Culture; he had used the Party to mobilize the students and to spread Yao Wenyan’s principles of interpretation and judgment; he had used the red-class Red Guards to attack the intellectuals, brutalize the bad classes, and destroy the old culture; he had used the Rebel Red Guards and rebel workers to destroy the Party’s power; and in the end he used “nonaligned” workers and the PLA to bring Red Guards of all factions to heel, describing their mentality as “basically bourgeois” (Liu 1986, 49). Those whom he had used, he condemned and cast off. Many rebels were killed or coldly executed, many others were imprisoned, and nearly all the rest were sent to the countryside to be reeducated by the peasants and serve the revolution whether they wanted to or not.

The most striking feature of Mao's strategy is that, from the beginning of the Cultural Revolution down to the power seizure of January 1967, his most effective weapon was to decree a sudden switch in the criteria used to assess revolutionary virtue—a switch that instantly transformed people who had been revolutionaries and socialists into capitalist roaders, bourgeois intellectuals, or revisionists. At first, this weapon was deadly, and Mao manipulated it with great skill to destroy the Party. However, when he continued to change the criteria after January 1967, so that even the rebels became bourgeois, the tactic lost its credibility. Mao had made too many people the victims of his carefully calculated changes in the correct line and ended up causing only suffering, confusion, and disillusionment. The outcome was the emergence of a “faction of wanderers” (*xiao yao pai*) whose members opted out of politics and gave themselves up to dissipation, and the creation of a lost and cynical generation of former Rebel Red Guards (cf. Lee 1978, 287, and chap. 9 below). So Mao's repeated manipulation of the content of terms such as “socialist,” “revisionist,” and “bourgeois” eventually undermined his goal of fashioning a society of true believers. Indeed, it subverted the predictable connection between words and meaning that effective linguistic engineering required. As a savage lesson to the Party, the Cultural Revolution's chaotic phase had worked brilliantly. As an agency of revolutionary ideological transformation it was, after the initial stages, an utter failure.

Interpretations of the Cultural Revolution

In this chapter I have advanced my own arguments, generally avoiding debates with other scholars. However, some readers may wish to relate my views to the wider literature. The following points should ease their task.

First, in one respect this chapter charts virgin territory: it is the first attempt to lay bare the exegetical principles, contexts of interpretation, and contexts of judgment that surrounded revo-

lutionary discourse in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. It helps to explain how Mao manipulated exegetical principles and contexts of judgment; how Party leaders, conservative Red Guards, and Rebel Red Guards came to interpret Mao's words in such different ways; how the Cultural Revolution descended into chaos as Mao lost control over interpretation; and how the Cultural Revolution undermined the effectiveness of linguistic engineering. Second, I argue that Mao framed those whom he wished to topple—letting them act in ways that conformed to the correct line, then decreeing sudden, retrospective changes in line that turned devoted socialists into revisionists. His repeated and calculated use of this technique adds weight to the views of scholars such as MacFarquhar (1997), who see the Cultural Revolution as, among other things, a carefully planned Maoist conspiracy against the Party.¹

Third, I show that as Mao and his adjutants set about framing Party leaders, they disseminated principles of interpretation, investigation, and judgment that could be used to frame anyone at all. This helps to explain why those accused were so powerless to defend themselves, why they were so numerous, and why they were as likely to be good socialists as those who framed them. It also makes it clear that current explanations of these phenomena let Mao off the hook too easily. It was not simply that he failed to specify his intended targets clearly or that his call for revolution unleashed dangerous tensions in Chinese society. He also placed a weapon of mass destruction in the Chinese people's hands—for the techniques he used to frame the innocent few could just as easily be used to frame the innocent many.

Fourth, my account clarifies the brilliant and unprincipled strategy Mao used to engineer the downfall of the Party. It also suggests an answer to a question that has puzzled even MacFarquhar (1997, 471): why did Liu and other Party leaders put up no resistance? The answer has three parts: (1) Mao picked off his opponents one by one, framing them in the optimal strategic order. At every stage, those who were not his current

targets believed that their best chance of survival was to cooperate in what they thought was a limited purge. They simply could not conceive, until it was too late, that Mao intended to subject virtually the whole Party to criticism by the revolutionary masses—that he intended to lead a popular revolution against the very organization through which he ruled the country. One can hardly fault them for this, because Mao's action had no precedent. (2) By the time Mao declared open war on the Party in early August 1966, effective resistance was impossible. Through Lin Biao, Mao controlled the PLA, and through the strategically directed purges of the previous few months he controlled the nation's capital, the propaganda apparatus, and the national media. His victims were left with no weapons and no public voice. (3) During the prelude to the Cultural Revolution, the Party and the PLA had mobilized the entire country in the massive Campaign to Study and Apply Chairman Mao's Thought. The discourse of that campaign, which was on everyone's lips, made Mao's Thought the sole criterion of right and wrong. Even the Party had no independent authority: its legitimacy depended entirely on its conformity to Mao's Thought. So when Mao, as the definitive expositor of his Thought, accused the Party of revisionism, it was impossible to deny the charge within the terms of the discourse. Moreover, everyone knew that to challenge the discourse was suicidal: anyone who questioned Mao's authority would not only be engulfed by the revolutionary fury of the masses, but be deserted by friends who feared a similar fate. So Party leaders whom Mao framed were invariably abandoned by their colleagues, and they always wrote self-criticisms that accepted Mao's indictment. These were the rules of individual survival at Mao's court, and Mao manipulated them to engineer the collective political suicide of nearly all his leading courtiers.

Fifth, like Teiwes (1984, 1993), MacFarquhar (1997), and recent Chinese historians (Jin 1995, Xi and Jin 1996, Lü 1993, Yan and Gao 1996, Li 1999), I reject the once dominant view—originating in Maoist propaganda—that the Cultural Revolution

was the culmination of a “two-line struggle” between Mao’s revolutionary line and the bureaucratic, pragmatic, and revisionist tendencies of alleged opponents such as Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and Peng Zhen. There was no two-line struggle in 1961–1962 because Mao, unable to suggest a viable alternative, endorsed the policies he later dubbed revisionist; and there was no two-line struggle from 1962 to 1965 because Party leaders who doubted Mao’s line were not silly enough to oppose or subvert policies he had endorsed or to advocate openly views he condemned. That is why Mao, to convict his lieutenants of wrongdoing, had to frame them.

Sixth, like Teiwes (1984, 1993), MacFarquhar (1997), and recent Chinese historians (Jin 1995, Xi and Jin 1996, Lü 1993, Yan and Gao 1996, Li 1999), I reject the view that Mao lost control of the Party after the Great Leap Forward, then launched the Cultural Revolution to regain power by mobilizing the masses against the Party. Although Mao had voluntarily stepped back to the “second line,” leaving the day-to-day work of running the country to others, his overriding authority was unimpaired. As I show in this chapter, his unchallengeable authority enabled him to decree that yesterday’s socialist line was today’s revisionism, with not even his most senior victims questioning his right to do so. Teiwes’ phrase, “Politics at Mao’s Court,” is entirely appropriate (Teiwes 1990).

Seventh, there has been debate about whether the Cultural Revolution was a power struggle or Mao’s attempt to transform the revolutionary consciousness of the Party and the masses. The power struggle interpretation has usually been linked to the erroneous hypothesis that Mao, having lost control of the Party, was trying to regain his power by appealing directly to the revolutionary masses (cf. Nathan 1973). However, if we break this link, it is possible to discern not a single power struggle, but multiple power struggles of a more general sort: Mao’s attempt to reduce the Party to an abject reflection of his will; the efforts of Jiang Qing and her coterie to ride to power on Mao’s coat-tails; Lin Biao’s endeavors to enlarge the role of the PLA and

consolidate his own position at Mao's court; the struggles of beleaguered Party leaders to preserve their positions in the face of determined assaults; and the battles between rival factions of Red Guards and workers, all fighting in Mao's name. My account gives full recognition to these contests, while recognizing that they occurred only because Mao had lifted hierarchical constraints and called for class struggle aimed at transforming the revolutionary consciousness of the Party and the people. So power struggles and the attempt at revolutionary transformation were both crucial. Mao's call for "a great revolution that touches people to their very souls" inspired millions, and those millions interpreted his call in ways consistent with their own ambitions, their own fears, their own struggles for power, and their own best chances of survival.

Eighth, in explaining the extraordinary degree of mobilization that occurred between 1966 and 1968, some scholars have given top-down accounts, which emphasize Mao's manipulation of the revolutionary masses, while others have given bottom-up accounts, which link the upsurge to deeply rooted tensions in Chinese society (cf. White 1989). In fact, as most would concede, there is much truth in both interpretations, and they should be regarded as complementary. In my account, top-down manipulation started the revolutionary upsurge and for a time significantly influenced its course; but social tensions fueled revolutionary enthusiasm, gave it a dynamic that eventually escaped Mao's control, influenced patterns of persecution, and encouraged violence.

Ninth, there is debate between those who claim that Mao plotted Liu's downfall far in advance and those who argue that he decided to topple him only when he failed the test by using the work teams to "suppress" the Cultural Revolution in mid-1966. Here, we need to distinguish two decisions that are usually conflated: Mao's decision to have Liu criticized and demoted to ensure that Liu never became China's leader, and Mao's decision to allow Liu to be destroyed politically and personally—to be dragged out by Red Guards, publicly disgraced, expelled from

the Party, imprisoned, and left to rot. I am inclined to accept Lowell Dittmer's argument that Mao did not finally decide to destroy Liu until early 1967 (see Dittmer 1998, 47, 109, 127, 129–131, 137–138), but I reject his view that Mao decided to demote him only when he failed the test through “his errors in supervising the work teams” in mid-1966 (Dittmer 1998, 62–76, 135–136; see also Lee 1978). I show that the “test” imposed on Liu was one he was bound to fail because Mao rigged the result by framing him; I show that Mao's attitude to Liu changed fundamentally in December 1964 and January 1965, when he directed at him the very terms of abuse used to indict him during the Cultural Revolution; I note that Mao himself claimed that it was in January 1965 that he decided that Liu had to go; and I point out that it was only a little later, in February 1965, that Mao told Jiang Qing to commission the critique of Wu Han that he used to launch his attack on the Party's leadership.

Tenth, I argue that when Mao turned decisively against Liu in December 1964 and January 1965, it was because an attack by a Socialist Education movement work team on the model agricultural brigade at Dazhai crystallized his suspicions that Liu and other Party leaders were betraying his socialist vision. My analysis here is at odds with earlier treatments of the topic. Most scholars attach little causal significance to the Dazhai incident, preferring to explain Mao's change of attitude by reciting his subsequent criticisms of Liu's policies during the Socialist Education movement. However, this approach founders upon the fact that, before the Dazhai incident, Liu's policies had been Mao's policies as well. So Mao's criticisms were expressions of his changed attitude, rather than explanations of it. And, because his attitude had changed, the criticisms served a purpose: they justified taking the Socialist Education movement out of Liu's control, they assisted Mao's attempt to redirect the movement toward the rectification of Liu-like powerholders, and they placed on record a catalogue of Liu's misdeeds that could be used against him at an opportune time.

Eleventh, I reject MacFarquhar's intriguing suggestion that

Mao turned against Liu because the fall of Khrushchev in October 1964 made him fearful of a coup (MacFarquhar 1997, 416–417, 431–432, 471). Mao knew that Malinovsky, the Soviet defense minister, had suggested to Chinese leaders that they get rid of Mao, but there is no evidence that he seriously believed that Liu would take the Russian's advice. Indeed, there is evidence that he did not. He was still relaxed enough to spend a great deal of time away from the capital, remote from rumors, plots, and the site of any attempt to depose him; he did not attempt merely to eliminate potential coup leaders, but engineered a confrontation with virtually the whole Party—a strategy that increased the risk of a coup;² and he was clearly obsessed not with clinging to power, but with ridding the Party at all levels of revisionism—the sort of revisionism that had reared its head when the work team attacked the model brigade at Dazhai.

The Mao who appears in this chapter is the Mao who is relevant to its theme—the leader who trapped and humbled his own Party during the Cultural Revolution. He was ruthless, Machiavellian, and ideologically driven. It goes without saying that this is not the only Mao: a full biography would reveal other sides to his character, and it would show that between 1944 and 1957, especially, he generally worked well with other Party leaders. Teiwes (1988) gives a good survey of Mao's relationship with his lieutenants over the whole period of 1935–1976.

Revolutionary Conformity, Public Criticism, and Formulae

“EVER SINCE THE COMMUNISTS came to power nineteen years ago,” wrote H. C. Chuang in 1968,

every political campaign in China has been simultaneously a semantic campaign as well, introducing or reviving a plethora of shibboleths and slogans with such determination and concentration that it sometimes borders on verbomania or graphomania. Mao strikes one as a true believer of word magic, like the earlier Greek philosophers who held that “nothing, whether human or super-human, is beyond the power of words.” (Chuang 1968, 47)

At no time was this more true than during the Cultural Revolution. Mao never made the mistake of thinking that manipulation of language was the only thing required to control thought, but he knew that it was vital. And even when, as we saw in the last chapter, he lost control of the context of interpretation, he retained mastery of the word. People wrote and spoke the language of Mao worship and revolution as never before, even as their interpretations of what that language meant diverged.

A Language after Mao: The Cult of the Word

Mao launched the Cultural Revolution partly to destroy those whom he suspected of deviating from his Thought, so it is not surprising that the central text of the Cultural Revolution was a pocket compendium of ideological essentials, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong*. It became the international symbol of

the Cultural Revolution, known to the world as the Little Red Book. It had its origin in quotations from Mao printed in the *Liberation Army Daily* and was first published in book form in August 1964 for use in the PLA. In 1965, Mao ordered the preparation of an edition for wider circulation. It was an instant sensation, with a second edition published before the end of 1966 and a further 350 million copies being printed in 1967. By the middle of that year the book had been translated into no fewer than twenty-two foreign languages as the “magic weapon” of Mao Zedong’s Thought spread throughout the world (Chuang 1968, 1–2). According to one apparently authoritative source, about five billion copies of the book—1.5 for every person in the world—were printed in over fifty different languages (Wei 1998, 657). In China itself, the book became indispensable, and many people owned several copies. It was quoted to support every point of view and every course of action, waved to demonstrate revolutionary enthusiasm at mass rallies, and clasped in the hand—often held across the breast—in displays of Mao worship and ideological rectitude.

Mastery of the Little Red Book brought prestige. Students with exceptional memories and extraordinary determination were able to learn all 270 pages by heart and recite any passage, word perfect, on demand. One star performer visited my school and gave a stunning recitation. We were sure that she must be a dedicated revolutionary. Conversely, inability to quote the book could be taken as proof of reactionary politics. Red Guards sometimes tried to catch their opponents out, demanding that they quote particular passages. When Gao Yuan was interrogated by an opposing faction of Red Guards, they told him to “recite the quotation on page ten, paragraph two.” When at first he failed, his opponents gloated, “No wonder you’re such a reactionary; you don’t even know Chairman Mao’s works. . . . We’re not going to let you stand up until you recite the quotation” (Gao 1987, 332–333). With a little prompting from a former friend, Gao eventually passed the test, but not all were so lucky. Red Guards interrogating Liu Shaoqi demanded that he recite

the first paragraph of the Little Red Book. His wife, Wang Guangmei, was sure that he could do it but Liu, “stammering and hesitating, could not get any farther than ‘the force at the core leading our cause is,’” and even then he forgot the words “at the core” (*Mainichi*, 11 January 1967, quoted in Dittmer 1974, 102). Wang Guangmei herself suffered a similar “trial by quotation.”

The Party newspapers and journals led the way in worshipping Mao's word. From about October 1965, as the Mao cult intensified during the prelude to the Cultural Revolution, the *People's Daily* began to print quotations from Mao's works at the head of each issue. Other Party journals soon adopted the practice. During the Cultural Revolution proper, almost every article was packed with Mao's aphorisms, and for a time in late 1966 the quotations were printed in big red characters.

Incessant exposure to Mao's word became an inescapable part of Chinese reality. People with a literary bent sometimes learned by heart all thirty-seven of Mao's poems, gaining prestige by reciting them on appropriate occasions. Quotation boards began to appear at intersections, street crossings, and other places where people congregated; and walls, fences, and the sides of buildings were festooned with Mao quotes. The Sixteen Points officially declared the whole country a “great school” of Mao Zedong's Thought, and from early 1967 “study classes of Mao Zedong's Thought” proliferated in which Mao's writings were discussed as sacred texts (Chuang 1968, 44). Even the illiterate had no escape. They had the texts read to them at study classes, they heard Mao's message constantly from radios and the ever-present loudspeakers, and they were taught quotation songs that made it easy for them to memorize his words.

Mao's Thought was not confined to the official media and the classroom. People were required constantly to relate it to the details of everyday life. This could be taken to comical extremes. Gao Yuan recalls how one day he heard a housewife and a vegetable seller conduct an argument in quotations:

The housewife was choosing tomatoes with great care, examining each one, since they were expensive in the winter. The displeased

sales clerk said, "Fight selfishness and repudiate revisionism." The housewife replied, "We Communists pay great attention to conscientiousness." They quoted back and forth until they were ready for a fight. Onlookers used quotations to stop them. (Gao 1987, 319)

The banality of the subject over which the two women were fighting was unusual, but the practice of using quotations to win an argument was not. Indeed the phrase "fight a quotation war" (*da yulu zhang*) became part of the Chinese language. Nor was the self-interested use of quotations unusual. Mao's language permeated daily life, even when those who used it were not motivated by revolutionary piety (see Yang 1994, 30–31).

A "revolution to touch people's souls" required revolutionary nomenclature. It started in Beijing, where Red Guards "launched a massive attack on those shop and place names that give off a foul smell of decadent feudal and bourgeoisie ideology." Their aim was to "turn our capital into a extremely proletarian and revolutionized new city," to "turn every industry, every shop, and every unit into a school of Mao Zedong Thought and into a battlefield for propagating and carrying out Mao Zedong Thought" (Red Guard Publications 19:6110). They renamed a street with many Western embassies Anti-imperialism Road, while the street in which the Soviet embassy stood became Anti-revisionism Road. All over China, streets soon sported new, revolutionary titles (see Yang 1994, 50–58).

In the same spirit, shops and theaters with unsatisfactory names had their signs pulled down and replaced with titles such as Worker-Peasant-Soldier Wineshop, Red Guard Department Store, or Sun-facing Restaurant—in which the "Sun," of course, stood for Chairman Mao. In Chengdu, a celebrated restaurant called the Fragrance of Sweet Wind was renamed the Whiff of Gunpowder (Chang 1992, 382). And in Tianjin, many establishments piously adopted the title 813—as in 813 Restaurant—to commemorate Mao's visit to the city on 13 August 1958.

People, too, sometimes took new names. Gao Yuan renamed himself Shijie Shu (Changes in the World—a phrase from Mao's poems). His less literary classmates took names such as Bao

Dongbiao (Safeguard Mao Zedong and Lin Biao), Chongmao (Revere Mao), Xiangdong (Toward the East), Jihong (Inherit Red), Yongge (Forever Revolutionary), Fanxiu (Antirevisionism), and Miezi (Liquidate the Bourgeoisie) (Gao 1987, 96). Some people whom I knew adopted names such as Chang Fanxiu (Fight Revisionism), Xuegong (Learn from the Workers), Xuejun (Learn from the PLA), and Naxin (Take in the Fresh—words from one of Mao's latest directives). This wholesale renaming caused great confusion, however, and as a result many of the new names were soon dropped. Less ephemeral were the names given to children born during the Cultural Revolution—names chosen with traditional Chinese care for their significance (Ma and Chang 1998, 61–62). Those given to people whom I knew included Weidong (Defend Mao Zedong), Wenge (Cultural Revolution), Dongfang (East), Sixin (Four News), and Yingzi (Heroic Bearing—quoting Mao's poem describing his wife Jiang Qing).

Because language was taken as a guide to thought, the consequences of linguistic error could be tragic, destroying an individual or even an entire family (Shao 1997, 7). People began to fear what was known as “one-character mistake” (*yi zi zhi cha*). One distinguished professor wrote a poster criticizing Liu Shaoqi, putting three red Xs over the name of the number one capitalist roader. Unfortunately, in one line he accidentally put red Xs over Chairman Mao's name instead and was branded a counterrevolutionary (Gao 1987, 189). A female Rebel Red Guard, while being questioned by “loyalist” opponents, was so nervous that she accidentally said that she was trying to start a revolution against the proletariat instead of the capitalists. More than ten male loyalists ripped her clothes, sexually assaulted her, and beat her so savagely that she had to be taken to the hospital in an ambulance (Ling 1972, 80–81).

People had to be very careful what they said to members of their own families, especially children, for unthinking words by a child could bring disaster to everyone (Chen 1978). My own family was lucky that no one discovered that I was the author of an anti-Lin Biao slogan that appeared on a wall while Lin

was still officially Mao's closest comrade in arms. Others were less fortunate. At Nankai University, where I grew up, the four-year-old daughter of the registrar unwittingly betrayed her own grandmother by repeating an unguarded comment. The old woman was savagely persecuted, and one day I discovered her lifeless body dangling from a noose. She had hanged herself. The girl's father, already under pressure, killed himself soon after. Searching for meaning in the devastation, the little girl became a compulsive collector of Chairman Mao badges and slowly went mad.

Under these circumstances, the safest course, and the most revolutionary one, was to speak and write in Chairman Mao's own words. Editors of newspapers and journals, fearing that the slightest deviation from Chairman Mao's revolutionary line would result in their dismissal, filled their columns with extracts from Mao's works, with articles stitched together around quotations from Mao, and with Party documents filled with phrases borrowed from Mao. This was the language of public life, and it infiltrated the language of personal communication as people resorted to safe formulae because they were uncertain about whom they could trust.

The Cultural Revolution had an immense impact on the Chinese language. It was not that people learned a new Maoist vocabulary that categorized reality in novel ways. It was not even that the language began to incorporate Mao's more distinctive personal expressions and usages. These processes were far advanced before the Cultural Revolution. What happened during the Cultural Revolution was that people began to write and speak in Mao's actual words on a grand scale. The result was a profound, if temporary, impoverishment of the Chinese language, which became repetitive, narrowly political, and cliché ridden. Newspapers and journals that had once catered to intellectuals were now written in the language of political talks Mao had given with the needs of illiterate soldiers and peasants in mind. Moreover, while Mao's original talks were often fresh and forceful, constant reiteration made even his most striking

phrases sound hackneyed. And when his words were wrenched from their original context and applied to every situation, they began to sound phoney and, to nonbelievers, grotesque. Overseas Chinese were often appalled. As Chen Ruoxi, Taiwan-born but a resident in China from 1966 to 1973, lamented, "It was not Chinese as it used to be; it was not even Mao's language, but a language of his quotations, a language after him" (Dittmer and Chen 1981, 29).

This new "language after Mao" was reinforced by changes in material culture as Red Guards went on a rampage during the Campaign to Destroy the Four Olds. Pagodas, churches, monuments, cemeteries, ornamental archways, and almost all architectural remnants of the feudal era were defaced or destroyed. They included fifty-four kilometers of the Great Wall and 4,922 of 6,843 officially designated historic sites (Yang 1994, 61). Raids on homes of the black categories and others suspected of hankering after the old order resulted in the destruction of countless pianos and violins (symbols of the bourgeoisie), playing cards and mahjong tiles (associated with gambling), traditional musical instruments, calligraphic scrolls, antiques, paintings, lanterns, incense sticks, incense burners, idols, altar tables, charms, and piles of paper money for the dead. Libraries and bookshops were sacked, and many of their nonrevolutionary holdings were burned. The damage to China's cultural heritage—the old—was irreparable.

The attack on the Four Olds was complemented by a campaign to foster the Four News: new ideas, new culture, new customs, and new habits. Instead of playing card games or mahjong or chatting in teahouses (the old), people were supposed to devote their time to revolutionary activity and the study of Mao's Thought (the new). Instead of wearing traditional or Western fashions (the old), everyone had to adopt the new proletarian appearance—except for those who, like the Red Guards, wore uniforms. There was even an attempt to purge military drill of nonrevolutionary content. "When we line up or when we do the militia exercises," said one Red Guard publication,

“we must dress left. We also suggest that the PLA should dress left, because we are the army of the revolutionary left” (Red Guard Publications 19:6111). Traffic rules, too, were in need of reform, for red was the color of revolution and progress, which made it antirevolutionary when red lights told people to stop. So Red Guards stood at intersections telling cyclists and drivers to go on the red lights. And since the left-hand side of the road was clearly the revolutionary side, people were told that they should no longer travel on the right but keep to the left. The result was several days of utter confusion on the roads in some cities until Zhou Enlai persuaded the Red Guard leaders to desist (Chang 1992, 382).

Mao, Lin Biao, and the Maoist press had not instructed the Red Guards to reform the traffic laws. Nor had they specifically said that the destruction of old culture extended to material culture—that it required them to sweep away the art, architecture, and ornaments of China’s cultural heritage. The Red Guards themselves arrived at these interpretations of what Mao wanted, and they were not undisputed. In Amoy, when they tried to destroy the beautiful Temple of the Goddess of Mercy of the Southern Seas, they were driven off by the monks, then attacked by club-wielding workers who threatened to kill them; and when they burned the looted contents of people’s homes in the city square, some older people tried to save idols, and most others stared into the fire, grieving at “the waste of it all” (Ling 1972, 56–57). Such conflicts were not usually between people who supported and people who opposed Mao’s Thought, but between people who accepted different versions of his Thought because they understood his word with the aid of different contexts of interpretation. To a large extent, these contexts of interpretation were linked to age. Consider Liang Heng’s account of a conversation between his father, an ardent revolutionary who had divorced his wife when she was labeled a Rightist, and his older sister Liang Fang, a Red Guard who had just boasted about destroying temples, pavilions, monuments, and inscriptions—“Stinking poetry of the Feudal Society”:

"How could you destroy the old poetry carved in the temples and pavilions? What kind of behavior is that?"

"What kind of behavior? Revolutionary action, that's what." . . .

"Who asked you to do these things?" Father demanded.

"Father," she answered with exaggerated patience. "You really don't understand the Cultural Revolution at all, do you? We have to get rid of the Four Olds. That includes *everything* old. Don't you even read your own newspaper? You'd better keep up with things or you'll be in trouble."

Father protested, "It's one thing to get rid of old customs and ideas, and another to go around smashing ancient temples."

"What good are they? They just trick people, make them superstitious. They're a bad influence on the young people."

"Whoever influenced you?" Father demanded. "No one in your whole life ever asked you to believe in any Buddhas."

Liang Fang didn't have an answer, which irritated her. "Well, anyway, they're all old things. Why aren't there Revolutionary poems, Chairman Mao's poems, statues of people's heroes, workers, peasants, and soldiers?"

Father despaired. "It's all over! China's old culture is being destroyed." He hit the table with his finger for emphasis. "Such precious historical treasures. All those symbols of China's ancient culture gone in only a few days. You've wronged your ancestors." (Liang and Shapiro 1983, 70–71)

The argument betrayed the contrasting interpretive assumptions of different generations. Liang Heng's father, a journalist, had been educated to value what was good in the Chinese past, and he could not believe that Chairman Mao, whose writings had many classical allusions, wanted the destruction of everything old. And indeed, semantically, the phrase "old ideas, old culture, old customs, old habits" made no clear reference to temples, pavilions, pictures, and inscriptions. Liang Fang, however, was a true child of Mao. Her education had said nothing positive about China's old order: it had subordinated every value to correct politics and taught her that all human activity was political. She could not draw a line between politics on the one hand and material culture on the other. So like many other Red Guards, she interpreted the phrase "the Four Olds" to refer

broadly to everything that conceivably reflected the ideology of feudal or bourgeois society.

Interpretation was also guided by assumptions related to social background. The Red Guard leaders during the Four Olds campaign were nearly all the children of cadres, the most privileged stratum in Chinese society. They had no idea of the implications of their actions for many poor people. When Jung Chang, the daughter of high cadres, went with other Red Guards to close down a teahouse, an old working-class man refused to leave:

I summoned up my courage and pleaded in a low voice, "Please, could you leave?" Without looking at me, he said, "Where to?" "Home, of course," I replied. He turned to face me. There was emotion in his voice, though he spoke quietly. "Home? What home? I share a tiny room with my two grandsons. I have a corner surrounded by a bamboo curtain. Just for the bed. That's all. When the kids are home I come here for some peace and quiet. Why do you have to take this away from me?" His words filled me with shock and shame. This was the first time I had heard a firsthand account of such miserable living conditions. I turned and walked away. (Chang 1992, 386)

Most red-class Red Guards shared her ignorance, but few were as polite or as lacking in determination. When Ken Ling tried to close down a factory making paper money for the dead, he told the staff that they should "no longer pay the piper for feudal superstition," but before he could finish, a young woman interrupted him in a shrill voice: " 'If we stop working, what do we eight hundred workers in this factory eat? And what of the thousands of others who depend on us to live? Do you want us to eat the northwest wind? All you people know is how to make rebellion against the dead. You don't do a thing for the living!' " (Ling 1972, 54–55). Ling was shaken. "Was this true? All my life I had known only my family and school. How could I possibly understand society?" But he persisted in his attempts to close the factory. He had a middle-class background and, like the cadres' children, he could afford to believe that the workers would

somehow cope. The workers, by contrast, could not imagine that Chairman Mao wanted them to starve, so they did not believe that the campaign against the Four Olds was directed at their factory.

The phrase “Four Olds” had different referents for people with different interpretive assumptions, but because Mao had supported the Red Guards just before their rampage of destruction it was difficult to oppose their interpretation. Mao probably did not expect that they would go as far as they did, but he said not a word to stop them. A man who in most contexts cared little for loss of human life, who contemplated with equanimity the prospect of atomic war, he did not weep over the destruction of China’s cultural heritage. What mattered was his vision of China’s revolutionary future—a future of his own creation. And in this respect the actions of the Red Guards served him very well, for they provided a context of interpretation that made it clear that his call for a Cultural Revolution was a call for a profound transformation. Even when they overstepped the mark, as in their attempts to revolutionize the traffic rules or wreck the Forbidden City, they were moving in the direction Mao desired. And when, after their rampage, he described their actions as “very good indeed!” (Chang 1992, 377), everyone understood that what he wanted was not just another rectification campaign but a fundamental revolution in ideology, customs, social organization, and culture. The varied legacy of China’s past was to be destroyed, for it embodied values that stood in the way of complete revolutionary transformation. In its place emerged the uniformity of the new revolutionary culture. So the old idols were replaced by plaster busts of Mao; traditional paintings and wall hangings were replaced by portraits of Mao; people had to seek guidance not from the varied maxims of traditional wisdom or the teachings of the world’s religions, but from Mao’s Thought; no one was to be allowed access to anything inconsistent with Mao’s Thought; and the houses in which people lived, the places where they worked, the things

they owned were in no way to express the values of the pre-Mao era. Chinese customs and material culture were purged and impoverished, bringing them into line with the new, impoverished “language after Mao,” which was the official language of revolutionary China. From now on, there would be just one culture and one language, both revolutionary. And there was to be just one god—Mao Zedong.

The Public Criticism Meeting: Discourse, Ritual, and Formulae

The language of the Cultural Revolution was highly ritualistic, with stock phrases and linguistic formulae prescribed for use on particular occasions, as well as more elaborate forms of linguistic ceremonial. Participation in linguistic ritual was essential to survival, and the nature of that ritual reflected the political and social character of the Cultural Revolution.

A crucial institution in the attack on the old order was the criticism and struggle meeting (*pi pan hui*), generally called in English the public criticism meeting. One of the central rituals of the Cultural Revolution, it was rich in oral formulae, and its carefully structured words and actions epitomized the official ideology of the Cultural Revolution. In Ji, Kuiper, and Shu (1990), I contributed to a first attempt to analyze the formulaic character of its language. The substance of that analysis still seems to me to be sound. In what follows, I build on the argument of this earlier study, extending it to new material and modifying it in detail.

Formal public criticism of political deviants had been pioneered during the Yan'an rectification of 1942–1944. However, four later developments had a more direct influence on the public criticism meeting. The first was the struggle meetings that were widely used in the early years of Communist rule to try, convict, and pass sentence on class enemies such as landlords, Guomindang agents, and people who had tried to organize

resistance to the Party (counterrevolutionaries in the narrow sense of the word). At these meetings, the accused had their hands tied behind their backs, they were formally denounced, and they were abused verbally and often physically by their interrogators and the audience. Except for the tied hands, this was very like the public criticism meetings. There was, however, one major difference: struggle meetings were aimed not only at educating the audience but at eliminating class enemies. The accused were always found guilty, and at the end of the meeting they were sentenced—often to death. If condemned to die, they were then shot (Mu 1963, 160). By contrast, public criticism meetings, for all the brutality they sometimes displayed, did not impose sentences. Their function was to educate the audience through criticism and class struggle.

The second influence was the Chinese Communist Party's tradition of internal criticism and self-criticism, in which comrades who had committed errors of thought were verbally attacked, threatened with exclusion from the group, then welcomed back into the fold once they had made sincere self-criticisms. This tradition was based on the assumption of Party unity in pursuit of the socialist ideal; the criticism was aimed at the removal of personal faults and incorrect thoughts that threatened that ideal; and the end result was supposed to be the restoration of unity on a higher level. The whole process was summed up by the formula "unity-criticism-unity" (Mao 1957a, 439–440). It influenced the public criticism meetings to the extent that no death penalties were imposed and some of those accused were not regarded as class enemies. However, confession and repentance at a public criticism meeting did not secure acceptance back into the fold. Instead, the accused were usually interrogated again, perhaps tortured, then dragged before still further meetings for criticism. The objective was to educate the masses politically through class struggle, not to reform the accused. Indeed, the public criticism meetings played a crucial role in what Dittmer (1974, 351) has called the "non-redemptive purges" of the Cultural Revolution.

The third influence was the criticism directed at intellectuals, cadres, and students during two great political movements: the Campaign to Uproot Hidden Counterrevolutionaries, which grew out of the condemnation of the Marxist writer Hu Feng in 1955; and the Anti-Rightist campaign, which created a whole new category of class enemies in 1957–1958. In both these campaigns, colleagues, friends, and students were mobilized to attack those who had called for reform or expressed independent views. However, these meetings differed from the later public criticism meetings in three ways: they were not violent, their function was ostensibly redemptive, and they lacked highly developed ritual and religious characteristics.

The fourth influence was the growth of the Mao cult during the prelude to the Cultural Revolution, and especially between 1964 and 1966. In this period, the rites of Mao worship became part of public life, and it was inevitable that they should be grafted onto the skeletal structure of the earlier struggle meetings. The result was a ritual whose individual parts and discursive structure unified the revolutionary masses in worship of Mao and symbolically crushed those who ignored or defied his Thought. This dual function can be seen from the sequence of the public criticism meeting, which we can summarize as a set of stage instructions:

Mao worship

Accused on: shout intimidatory slogans

Criticism with slogans

Accused off or silent: Mao worship

This sequence admitted of little variation, for it expressed the wider conventions of the Cultural Revolution. It will be instructive to explain those conventions, to elaborate the stage instructions and their accompanying scripts, and to analyze the meeting's discourse structure.

Mao worship. During the Cultural Revolution, nearly all formal collective activity—the commencement of the school day, a celebratory party, or even a wedding ceremony—started with

an act of Mao worship featuring China's favorite hymn, "The East Is Red." So the public criticism meeting nearly always began with the audience standing up and singing

The East is Red.
The Sun is rising.
China has brought forth a Mao Zedong.
He works for the well-being of the people.
The great emancipator is Mao Zedong.

The Mao worship sometimes also included celebratory chants. In Chengdu, for example,

a standard opening was to chant "Ten thousand years, another ten thousand years, and yet another ten thousand years to our Great Teacher, Great Leader, Great Commander and Great Helmsman Chairman Mao!" Every time the three "ten thousand's and four "great's were shouted out, everyone raised their Little Red Books in unison. (Chang 1992, 439)

This chant put Mao on a level with the Chinese emperors, who were addressed with the wish that they live for ten thousand years.

Accused on: shout intimidatory slogans. It would have been considered profane had class enemies and their associates been allowed to participate in Mao worship, or even to sully it with their presence unless they had already been ritually vanquished. For that reason, they were brought onstage only when the Mao worship was finished. As the accused were led onstage, they had placards hanging from their necks announcing their crimes, and they often wore the tall dunces' hats that the peasants of Hunan had placed on their landlords' heads as a mark of humiliation during an uprising in 1927 (cf. Mao 1927). Some of the accused had one side of their heads shaved in a yin-yang haircut, and many bore the marks of torture, beatings, and maltreatment. They made their way to the stage amid a torrent of abuse from the crowd, which shouted slogans denouncing them and calling upon them to confess their crimes. These slogans were always carefully orchestrated, usually by the chairperson,

who would shout them first, then be followed by the audience. They were drawn from the standard repertoire of Cultural Revolution slogans and many had the form *Dadao* . . . (Down with . . .), as in *Dadao Liu Shaoqi* (Down with Liu Shaoqi!), *Dadao diguozhuyi de zougou Liu Shaoqi* (Down with the running dog of the imperialists, Liu Shaoqi!), *Dadao diguozhuyi* (Down with the imperialists!), *Dadao pantu neijian gongzei Liu Shaoqi* (Down with the traitor, renegade, and scab, Liu Shaoqi!).

While most slogans that greeted the arrival of the victims were explicitly intimidatory, some meetings also featured a few pious or celebratory chants such as Long live our Great Leader Chairman Mao! or Long live the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution! (Cheng 1986, 15). Semantically, there was nothing threatening about these slogans, but in the context of the public criticism meeting they were full of menace. They were shouted to show the imposing unity of the revolutionary people as they condemned the capitalist roaders, revisionists, spies, traitors, and monsters and demons who were cowering on the stage.

Criticism with slogans. Once the storm of abuse that greeted the accused had subsided, the public criticism began. Investigators, former colleagues, friends, even relatives mounted the stage to make their accusations. The speakers had been carefully selected, they had been told what to say, and they often read from scripts written in advance. The language used was highly formulaic. For example, the first words always quoted Mao or echoed him, and they always referred, directly or indirectly, to the class struggle. Some people began with the famous quotation from the Little Red Book that was the standard justification of violence during the Cultural Revolution:

Geming bu shi qingke chifan, bu shi zuo wenzhang, bu shi huihua xiuhua. . . . Geming shi baodong, shi yige jieji tuihan yige jieji de baolie xingdong.

A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery. . . . A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another. (Mao 1966b, 11–12)

Others quoted verses of Mao's poetry that everyone understood as figurative references to revolution and class struggle:

Sihai fanteng yunshuiniu,

Wuzhou zhendang fengleiji.

Four seas are turbulent, clouds and water are furious,

Five continents are shaking, wind and thunder are violent.

Other common formulae were also taken directly from Mao's works or from Maoist newspapers that wrote in pidgin-Mao:

Bu po bu li.

Without destruction there can be no construction (a direct quotation from Mao).

Di shi di, you shi you, women bixu huaqing jieji jiexian.

A foe is a foe, a friend is a friend; we must clearly distinguish one from the other (Mao: "Who are our enemies, who are our friends? . . . To distinguish real friends from real enemies, we must . . ." [Mao 1966b, 12]).

Na qi bi zuo dao qiang . . .

Taking up the pen as a weapon I now expose . . . (a stock phrase, Maoist in spirit, taken from the opening words of a revolutionary song).

Shijie zai dongdang zhong qianjin . . .

The world advances amidst turbulence . . . (Maoist in spirit, copied from the official press).

Dongfeng jin chui, jiebao pin chuan.

The east wind blows with mighty power; news of victory keeps pouring in (Mao: "The East Wind is prevailing over the West Wind. That is to say, the forces of socialism have become overwhelmingly superior to the forces of imperialism." [Mao 1966b, 80–81]).

Guoneiwai xingshi yipai da hao.

The overall situation is glowing and excellent at home and abroad (a standard formula, referring to the situation in the class struggle, which echoed many quotes from

Mao, such as “The world is progressing, the future is bright . . .” [Mao 1966b, 70]).

Dangqian quanguo getiao zhanxian xingshi yipian da hao.

Now a good situation prevails on all fronts in our country
(another variation on the same standard formula).

The last three formulae might seem benign, but they referred to victories over class enemies and imperialists; they also set the stage for a warning that there were still dangers from people like those on the stage, who would therefore have to be crushed. These opening formulae, like all the others, created the context for the ritualized terror and humiliation to follow.

The indictments retained their formulaic character throughout. They used the canonical vocabulary of class struggle; they pinned the officially prescribed labels on those judged guilty of particular political crimes; and they employed other standardized terms of abuse, mostly taken from the official press, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Many speakers also used ancient Chinese formulae—the traditional four-character idioms—which they converted to revolutionary purposes. They did this because they wanted to invest the proceedings with appropriate formality, because use of such idioms was a traditional way of showing learning, and because Mao himself was fond of them. The idioms commonly used at public criticism meetings included the following:

bu gong dai tian

will not live under the same sky (used to indicate irreconcilable conflict with opponents)

zuiwong zhiyi bu zai jiu

the drinker's heart is not in the cup (used to indicate that the accused had ulterior motives)

zuo gu you pan

glance right and left (used by speakers to describe people who sat on the fence. The crimes of the accused were

used to convince such people to commit themselves to the revolutionary side.)

bao feng zhou yu

violent wind and gusty rain (used to describe the power and turmoil of the current political campaign)

tu zhi muo fen

smear on rouge and powder (to disguise evil with makeup)

zui da e ji

guilty of the most heinous crimes

zui gai wan si

guilty of crimes for which one deserves ten thousand deaths

zuowei zuofu

tyrannically abuse one's power

zuozei xin xu

uneasy lies the head of one with a guilty conscience

danzhan xinjing

tremble with fear

bu da zi zhao

confess without being pressed (reveal one's crimes unintentionally)

chixin wangxiang

wishful thinking (used with reference to those who thought they could oppose Mao, the Cultural Revolution, or anything revolutionary)

daoxing nishi

go against the historical trend (try to reverse the irresistible tide of revolution)

All of these expressions had been used time and again in the official media and in political speeches before the Cultural Revolution, so they were widely known even among people who

lacked traditional learning. And because they had been officially sanctioned as correct formulae, they were attractive to speakers at public criticism meetings, irrespective of their backgrounds.

Toward the end of each indictment the speaker would begin to threaten the victim with intimidating formulae. Once again, the formulae were likely to include variations on the ubiquitous 'Down with . . . !' Other favorite formulae included *Dui fangeming fenzi jue bu shi renzheng!* (Never mercy to counterrevolutionaries!) and *Jue bu yunxu jiejidiren fangong daosuan!* (Never allow the class enemy to retaliate!).

These slogans were often echoed by people in the audience, who were expected to signify their outrage at shocking revelations with appropriate interjections. This was in line with the Communist Party's tradition of ensuring that ordinary Chinese were not mere spectators, but active participants in the class struggle. It also meant that people who shouted the slogans contributed personally, and usually voluntarily, to the suffering of the accused. In some cases, the conflict with humanitarian values aroused unpleasant dissonance, which motivated changes in attitudes. Those who felt uneasy about their cruel behavior told themselves that their victims deserved their fate, that kindness to the enemy was cruelty to the people, and that the revolutionary ideology that justified their actions was undoubtedly correct. So the dissonance faded, and revolutionary callousness grew.

After the indictments had concluded, the victim was interrogated. Once again, the crowd was expected to assist with chants:

"X" bixu tanbai jiaodai!

"X" must confess his (her) crime!

"X" bixu xiang geming qunzhong ditou renzui!

"X" must hang his (her) head and admit his (her) guilt to the revolutionary masses!

"X" bixu chedi tanbai jiaodai!

"X" must make a clean breast of his (her) crimes!

Tanbai congkuan. Kangju congyan!

Leniency to those who confess their crimes. Severity to
those who refuse to!

Fan dang fan renmin jue meiyou hao xiachang!

Those who oppose the people and the Communist Party
will come to no good end!

Diren bu touxiang jiu jiao ta mie wang!

Enemy, surrender to the people or die!

All of these slogans were intimidatory. They were rituals intended to frighten the accused into confession. Many victims did confess, although not just because of what happened at the public criticism meeting. Some read their confessions from prepared statements, and this made it clear that they had previously been broken by interrogation, false promises of release, threats to their families, deprivation of sleep, or torture. They condemned themselves in terms satisfactory to their persecutors, and what they said was often untrue. They had betrayed themselves, and the result was often a permanent loss of self-confidence and self-respect.

Within the ritual formula of the interrogations, variations were possible. During the questioning of the famous pianist Liu Shi-kun, for example, the crowd not only chanted slogans such as “Down with the Soviet revisionist spy, down with Liu Shi-kun!” but also sang a song:

Liu Shi-kun you bastard,
Now you can surrender,
If you do not tell the truth,
You may quickly die. (Liang and Shapiro 1983, 121)

Singing at this point was unusual, and it was even more unusual to sing words especially composed for the occasion. However, the song was consistent with the ritual structure of the public criticism meeting. It used conventional threatening formulae and fulfilled the same intimidatory function as the slogans.

The process of criticism could take many hours, and it was

often brutal. Many of the accused had their arms forced above their heads from behind in the excruciatingly painful “jet plane” position; some were struck by their guards or had their legs kicked from under them when they refused to confess or needed to be taught a lesson; members of the audience sometimes stoned them and even got close enough to spit at them, kick them, or punch them. People were not supposed to be killed at the meetings, but in a few cases that happened too (Cheng 1986, 252).

Throughout the proceedings, the accused were forced to hang their heads down as low as possible. In Chinese tradition, this was a sign of admitting one’s mistakes and of being willing to receive criticism and punishment; it was also a sign of submission and obedience. In prerevolutionary times it was the young, the workers, and the peasants who had to hang their heads. During the Cultural Revolution the roles were reversed, for such people were the least likely to be dragged before a public criticism meeting. Those made to bow their heads were mostly intellectuals, cadres, members of the black categories, former capitalists, and people whose foreign connections led to accusations that they were spies. These people had once enjoyed prestige or power, and Mao saw them as past or present obstacles to his vision of a revolutionary China in which there were no rival sources of authority—a society in which everyone acted in accordance with his Thought. So he turned society upside down, giving power to those whom he thought could never challenge him. In the public criticism meeting, these people humiliated Mao’s old enemies (the capitalists and the black categories) and his potential challengers (the intellectuals and the cadres). The public criticism meeting crystallized the wider conflicts of the Cultural Revolution.

Accused off or silent: Mao worship. The criticizing concluded with the accused kneeling submissively before the audience—despised, humiliated, and ritually vanquished. In China, there was only one possible way to mark such victories in the class struggle: by paying worshipful tribute to the Great Helmsman

whose Thought had inspired the victory. Members of the audience stood up, chanted slogans, and sometimes recited quotations from the Little Red Book they all carried. They then ended the meeting with a stirring rendition of "Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman":

Sailing the seas depends on the helmsman,
Plants on the sun,
Crops on rain and dew,
And revolution on Mao Zedong Thought.

During this concluding episode of Mao worship, the accused were sometimes allowed to remain kneeling onstage, bowed low and silent. Their role was simply to show the fate that awaited all who betrayed the revolution, and they were not allowed to participate in the Mao worship that celebrated their defeat. More often, they were led offstage before the Mao worship began because, as Liang and Shapiro (1983, 121) put it, "the worst counterrevolutionaries had no right to listen to the sayings of Chairman Mao." In either case, they were entirely excluded from the revolutionary community and its rituals. There was no redemption.

Discourse structure. The public criticism meeting was a religious ceremony in which the godlike Mao inspired the revolutionary faithful to defeat the forces of evil. It is instructive to compare the meeting's discourse structure with that of a common form of Christian revivalist service in the West. Both gatherings, the Maoist and the Christian revivalist, brought the faithful together with an act of collective worship expressed through formulaic singing and speech; both cemented solidarity through ritual battle with a real or imagined enemy—the class enemy, the sins and sinners condemned in a sermon, or the devils cast out through the power of prayer; both encouraged the congregation to join the struggle, shouting slogans or making prayerful interjections; and both celebrated their victory over evil with a final round of collective worship in which the assembled faithful sang and chanted yet more formulaic songs and words.

Some techniques of consciousness building unite even the most antagonistic religions.

Just as the discourse structure of revivalist meetings was directed toward worship of God and the struggle against Satan, so the discourse structure of public criticism meetings was directed toward worship of Mao and the struggle against class enemies. Any significant departure from that structure was a sign that something had gone wrong. When Nien Cheng, for example, was paraded before an audience of military men in 1969, she noticed that Lin Biao's portrait was next to Mao's on the stage. Even more surprising, the speeches criticizing her were not followed by Mao worship but by speeches praising Lin Biao "in the most extravagant flattery the rich Chinese language could provide" (Cheng 1986, 248–251). The meeting was being observed by a high-ranking person, perhaps Lin or his son, and the display of Lin worship may have reflected Lin's ambition to succeed Mao. In some military circles there were now, perhaps, two gods in heaven (Yan and Gao 1996, 302–335). However, Lin's subsequent fall from grace and the failure of his apparent coup attempt ensured that any attempt to change the formula of the public criticism meetings was stillborn. In most people's eyes, Mao remained China's One True God, and all who opposed him were the enemy. This belief was fundamental to the public criticism meeting and to the Cultural Revolution.

Conflict, Mao Worship, and the Ideal World of the Formulae

Between 1949 and 1976, Mao and the Communist Party leadership built their rule on the systematic orchestration of conflict. They divided the population into opposing groups, which they mobilized in turn, getting them to attack other groups they suspected of straying from the correct line. Before the Cultural Revolution, they repeatedly mobilized the red categories and the middle classes against the black categories and the capitalists. They organized class struggle against intellectuals such as Hu

Feng, who were suspected of thinking for themselves. They mobilized those who had not spoken out during the Hundred Flowers campaign against those who had, adding the latter to the black categories as Rightists. They periodically used the prejudices of those who were merely “red” (revolutionary but without other qualifications) against those who were “expert” (scientists, technicians, and others with higher skills). And they used the Party rank and file to discipline the workers and peasants, then had the central Party organs dispatch work teams that pressured the peasants into exposing the faults and revolutionary shortcomings of local cadres.

Mao used conflict to build and perpetuate his personal power within the Communist Party and within China as a whole, and never more so than during the Cultural Revolution. He promoted attacks on intellectuals (especially Wu Han and “Three-Family Village”) in order to trap Peng Zhen and gain direct control of the organs of propaganda and culture; he trapped the Party by declaring retrospectively that its work teams had taken the capitalist road in orchestrating criticism and class struggle; he used the red-class Red Guards to raise revolutionary consciousness by attacking the black categories, capitalists, intellectuals, and the Four Olds; he used the Rebel Red Guards and workers to destroy the Party, which he suspected of betraying his ideals; and he used the PLA and loyal workers to suppress the Red Guards when he decided to restore centralized control.

It has often been pointed out that by instigating these conflicts Mao kept potential opponents divided. It has been less widely appreciated, however, that conflict provided a crucial mechanism for promoting competitive Mao worship. Every group that mobilized did so in Mao's name, while those who were attacked had to defend themselves by professing undying loyalty to their Great Leader. Moreover, the constant fear of attack led people to scrutinize their own activities, lest they be singled out during the next mobilization. This process of continuous revolution plunged China repeatedly into political and

economic chaos, but it produced ideological stability—a conflict-driven consensus that Mao was China's One True God and that his Thought was the criterion of right and wrong.

Many verbal rituals of the Cultural Revolution, especially those embodied in the public criticism meeting, expressed the unending conflicts of Chinese society. They did not, however, have the safety-valve function that Gluckman ascribes to tribal societies' "rites of rebellion," which dramatize social tensions through ritual and thereby diffuse them (see Gluckman 1963, 110–136). In Mao's China, conflict was not diffused but officially encouraged. It was the mechanism by which class enemies were suppressed and all other sections of the community were made to confront their political mistakes and errors of thought. The rituals promoted conflict, integrated it into their structure, and provided a model for the suppression of class enemies and the punishment of those guilty of errors of thought. At the same time, they reaffirmed that loyalty to Mao was beyond question. They did not, as Gluckman's (1965, 265) model would have it, "[cloak] the fundamental disharmonies of social structure," but expressed revolutionary commitment to the Great Helmsman who had ordained those disharmonies and in whose name every group fought. The rituals were vehicles of symbolic class struggle and of the competitive Mao worship of people who feared attack if they worshiped less ardently than the most extreme zealots. They were part of the system that, during the Cultural Revolution, kept the Chinese people subject as never before to a single emperor-god.

The verbal rituals of the Cultural Revolution encoded the ideal power structure of Chinese society. That structure featured just three central players. At the top, there was the Great Leader Chairman Mao, whose brilliance, wisdom, benevolence, and inspirational leadership were celebrated in countless formulae. Below him, the formulae focused on two groups: "the people," devoted to Mao and guided by his revolutionary Thought, and "the enemy," who plotted against him and resisted his message. The people and the enemy were locked in

mortal combat, and the people were sure to win because they were armed with the mighty weapon of Mao's Thought.

In the world of the formulae, Mao was the only god. Only one other individual is mentioned by name—Mao's deputy and designated successor, Lin Biao. He is referred to just once, and then only Mao's "close comrade-in-arms": Wishing our great leader Chairman Mao an infinitely long life, and his close comrade-in-arms good health forever! Lin was the high priest of Mao worship, who had won his leader's favor with sedulous sycophancy. In almost everyone's eyes, he was Mao's most devoted follower and, as he himself put it, Mao's "good student." Lin's high position was entirely conditional upon his unswerving loyalty to Mao's line.

If the formulae of praise name no individual except Mao, they pay scant attention to the Communist Party, which before the Cultural Revolution had formed a powerful intermediate stratum that interpreted Mao's word to the people. Because Mao aimed the Cultural Revolution partly at persons in authority following the capitalist road, the Party no longer served as the rallying point for his loyal followers. It still rated the occasional formulaic mention—as in the slogan Those who oppose the people and the Communist Party will come to no good end—but it was understood that this referred only to Party members who were true Communists, faithful to the letter and spirit of Mao's Thought. Most people solved the problem of the Party's ambiguous status by dropping all formulaic references to it, pledging allegiance instead to the Party Central Committee—the "Party center" for short:

Jin gen Mao Zhuxi wei shou de dangzhongyang!

Follow the Chairman Mao-led Central Committee!

Baowei dangzhongyang!

Defend the Party center!

Shisi baowei dangzhongyang!

Pledge to fight to the death in defending the Party Central Committee!

Mao was chairman of the Central Committee, and in identifying it with Mao and making it the focus of their loyalty the Red Guards were not mistaken. In August 1966 Mao had pressured the Central Committee into accepting the Party's suicide note, the "Sixteen Points," in which it gave up its power and subjected itself to the Mao-inspired masses. Thereafter, those who had opposed his stand ceased to attend its meetings; they were progressively purged, and the Committee itself for a time became moribund while Mao issued directives in its name. People whose only allegiance was to Mao could safely pledge themselves to the Party center.

In the ideal world of the formulae, there was no hierarchy that mediated Mao's Word to the people. Instead, the people had direct access to Mao's Word through his writings, his latest instructions, and a host of memorized quotations. Mao's Word in turn gave the people direct access to his Thought—the unerring guide to action, the criterion of right and wrong. Armed with the invincible weapon of his Thought, the people were certain to detect and destroy the capitalist roaders, counterrevolutionaries, revisionists, spies, and traitors in high places who quoted Mao while betraying his revolutionary cause. It was an ideal world that bore only a tangential relationship to the real world, but the vision of society it expressed spurred millions of people to revolutionary activity.

When that revolutionary vision was combined with the Mao/Yao principles of interpretation discussed in chapter 3, the combination was lethal. Revisionism could be read into the words and actions of anybody at all, and even somebody who spoke only in Mao quotations could be accused of waving the red flag to oppose the red flag. No one was safe. The outcome, of course, was that those who were victims of the Cultural Revolution were on the whole as loyal to Mao and his Thought as those who accused them. Lin Biao, who manipulated the revolutionary formulae and the Mao/Yao principles of interpretation to eliminate his opponents and win Mao's favor, was ultimately less loyal than people such as Liu Shaoqi, whom he helped to

destroy on his path to the top. In that respect, the Cultural Revolution was an exercise in futility. What it did do, however, was make people more afraid than ever before that they might be suspected of antirevolutionary thoughts or actions. So they polished their displays of revolutionary ardor and recited revolutionary formulae in an often futile attempt to keep themselves safe. Mao reaped an increased show of loyalty, but perhaps no more of its substance.

Self-Annihilation, Liberation, and the Formulae

If people could be made to speak formulaically and through that learn to think formulaically, they approached the totalitarian ideal, becoming mere ciphers of officially prescribed formulae. In the ideal world of those formulae, all individuality, all merely personal aspirations would be destroyed. It was precisely this form of totalitarian idealism that the official media preached. Self-criticism (*ziwo piping*) had been part of the Chinese Communist tradition since the Yan'an days, but from early in the Cultural Revolution it was supplanted by something far more drastic. In the pages of the official press the Chinese people were urged to proceed beyond mere self-criticism and to practice self-revolution (*ziwo geming*): "[We] should make ourselves the target of revolution, frequently engage in self-criticism, and incessantly wage revolution against ourselves" (*People's Daily*, 3 November 1966; quoted in Chuang 1967, 39). In this context "I," "the self" (*wo*) became a symbol of "bourgeois egocentrism." So everyone had to "vanquish the word 'I'" (*dou dao wo zi*) or even "smash the word 'I'" (*ya sui wo zi*), for "if one could utterly ignore *wo*, one would dare to climb a mountain of swords and jump into a sea of fire" (*People's Daily*, 2 January, 15 April, 3 June, 2 November 1966; quoted in Chuang 1967, 39). Mao had told his followers, in words they all knew by heart, "First, fear not hardship; second, fear not death," and in that spirit they recited the formulae of revolutionary self-annihilation:

Po si li gong.

Renounce oneself to serve others.

Dang de xuyao jiu shi wo de xuyao.

The Party's need is my need.

Wei renmin liyi er si, jiu bi taishan hai zhong.

To die for the people is far weightier than mount Tai.

Tou ke duan, xue ke liu, geming jingshen bu ke diu!

The head can be cut off, blood can be shed, but the
revolutionary spirit cannot be forsaken! (Dittmer
and Chen, 1981, 37–38; Chuang 1967, 40)

What gave these formulae power was that they were linked schematically to assumptions drilled into all young Chinese by their education. In the classroom, in their storybooks, in magazines and newspapers, they had been exposed repeatedly to stories about models of self-sacrifice. These ranged from the poor soldier Lei Feng, who invariably subordinated his own interests to those of other people, to heroines who died by torture rather than betray secrets to the Guomindang or the Japanese imperialists. The moral of this propaganda was that the highest form of dedication to the revolution was to die a martyr's death, and some young people found the prospect attractive. One former Red Guard, who had fought as a rebel in Guilin, described his feelings of idealistic self-renunciation to Anita Chan:

My friends and I likened life to a box of matches. If you light the matches one by one they give off only a small flame. But if you set afire the whole box it gives off a flare far bigger, even though the quantity of matches is the same. We felt that to die a hero would be like burning the whole box of matches. So we thought that if there was a grand occasion for which we could die, then dying would be transformed into a happy thing. . . . We talked about not leading a useless life. . . . It was best not to die of sickness. The best way was when surging forward on a battlefield, dying in a big way, a worthwhile cause. . . . Talking about it now, it was really mad to

look at death so lightly. But during the Cultural Revolution we thought it was for defending Chairman Mao. (Chan 1985, 141–142)

This was life lived in the spirit of the formulae: when these Red Guards pledged to fight to the death to defend Mao Zedong's Thought, they really meant it.

It would be a mistake, however, to focus simply on the role of the formulae in constraining and persuading. Catherine Bell argues that ritual constructs "relations of domination and participation," but that those relations "empower those who may at first appear to be controlled by them" (Bell 1992, 197, 207). We may doubt whether this applies to all rituals or to all who take part in them, but it certainly applies to the people who participated voluntarily in the rituals of the Cultural Revolution. Participation in public criticism meetings, for example, gave young Red Guards and rebel workers both the feeling and the reality of power as they ritually and sometimes physically subdued those to whom they had once deferred—teachers, intellectuals, technical experts, managers, Party cadres, and the old. Chanting slogans in unison, they took courage not only from their comrades who shouted with them, but from their common devotion to Mao's Thought:

Every one of us is an aweless hero. We fear neither heaven nor earth because we have the invincible weapon of Mao Zedong's Thought, because we have the never-setting red sun—our great beloved Chairman Mao—in our hearts. Mao Zedong Thought is our lifeblood. (*Shoudu hongqi chiweijun xuanyan*; Red Guard Publications 19:6084)

This quotation is, like a million others I could have chosen, a pastiche of revolutionary clichés, and it contains two stock epithets for Mao's Thought: an invincible weapon (*buke zhan sheng de wuqi*) and our lifeblood (*sheng ming xian*). In other constantly recurring phrases, that Thought was a lighthouse (*dengta*), a compass (*zhinanzhen*), a bright lantern lighting up the road (*zhilu mingdeng*), a telescope and microscope (*wangyuanjing he xianweijing*), a locomotive (*huochetou*), the best weapon (*zuihao de*

wuqi), or a spiritual atom bomb (*jingshen yuanzidan*). Most commonly of all, it was a supernatural or magic weapon (*fabao*). The term was borrowed from traditional popular fiction, where it designated “a powerful, supernatural weapon that supposedly can easily defeat any well-equipped enemy or crush a whole army outright” (Chuang 1967, 36–37). During the Cultural Revolution, news reports were filled with stories of the miracles worked by Mao’s Thought, some conveniently collected in *The Miracles of Chairman Mao* (Urban 1971). There were also repeated claims that soldiers in the People’s Liberation Army believed that “the best weapon is not airplanes, nor big cannons, nor tanks, nor atomic bombs; the best weapon is Mao Tse-Tung’s thought” (*People’s Daily*, 3 January 1966; quoted in Chuang 1967, 37). According to the acting chief of staff, “All the commanders and fighters of our army . . . take Chairman Mao’s works as the orientation for all work, the telescope and microscope for observing the world, the indispensable food, weapon and combat-wheel for life, work and combat, and the all-powerful magic weapon for surmounting all difficulties and defeating all enemies” (*Guangming Daily*, 2 August 1966; quoted in Chuang 1967, 37). So when Red Guards ritually recited quotations from the Little Red Book and shouted slogans proclaiming their faith in Mao, their words stood for concepts linked schematically to beliefs derived from a thousand reports about how Mao’s Thought had helped achieve the impossible. The power of the slogans stemmed from the strength of the beliefs to which they were linked.

The Red Guards’ feelings of empowerment and liberation were also promoted by the transformation in their position within the power structures of Chinese society. Once Mao had given them his support, few felt able to stand against them. They, under Mao, were the new lords of Chinese society. “Red Guard masters!” shrieked one of their victims as she banged her forehead on the floor in a desperate kowtow. “I swear I do not have a portrait of Chiang Kai-shek! I swear I do not!” (Chang 1992, 406). Even Liu Shaoqi had to treat them as masters,

because they acted in Mao's name. As they swaggered before their one-time superiors, their ideology and their language reflected their newfound dominance. Liu had told them that they should be the docile tool of the Party, but once so many in the Party were unmasked as capitalist roaders, this instruction was attacked as part of Liu's plan to use the Party to spread revisionism. Instead, the Red Guards relied upon a quotation from a speech Mao made in 1939, unknown until it was rescued from obscurity and published in the *People's Daily* when the Cultural Revolution made it useful: "The tens of thousands of aspects of Marxism can be summarized with one sentence: It is right to revolt" (quoted in Chuang 1967, 14).

"*Zaofan*," the term for "revolt," means literally "to cause upsets." Traditionally it had bad connotations, for it was linked to sedition and treason as well as simple revolt. After the Communist Party came to power it retained those connotations, and as late as 22 June 1966 the *People's Daily* published an article titled "Smash the Broken Trumpet That Incites the Reactionaries to *Zaofan*" (Chuang 1967, 14). With the publication of the new quotation from Mao, however, the connotations of the term were transformed. Revolt suddenly became legitimate, indeed mandatory, when directed against reactionaries. By the beginning of 1967, *zaofan* had become synonymous with *geming* (revolution) and was sometimes combined with it to form the double compound *geming zaofan* (Chuang 1967, 14).

As befitted those engaged in revolt, the Red Guards reveled in titles that expressed their courage, their independence, and their historic role. Sometimes they were termed *xiao jiang* (little generals), at other times *chuang jiang* (bold generals, daredevils) or *xin ren* (new people—a revolutionary generation uncorrupted by life in prerevolutionary China) (Chuang 1967, 10–13). Their favorite self-description, however, grew out of Mao's specification in 1957 of five criteria for *geming jiebanren* ("revolutionary successors" who would carry the revolutionary torch into the future). The red-class Red Guards, having been commissioned to create Mao's new socialist order by destroying the

Four Olds and creating the Four News, naturally assumed that they had been chosen by Mao as his revolutionary successors—an assumption reinforced by the self-serving doctrine of natural redness, which so many of them accepted. Then when the Rebel Red Guards received their commission to safeguard the revolution by purging the Party, they assumed that *they* were the chosen ones. As a result, all Red Guards, whatever their factional allegiance, gloried in the title “revolutionary successors.”

For the Red Guards, intoxicated with idealism, power, and self-importance, the formulae were more liberating than constraining. Even the demand to annihilate the *wo*, the “I,” was used to inspire action that not only served the revolution but expanded their own power as well. Such action made them feel worthy of the title “revolutionary successors,” and it won the admiration of those who wished they could be as brave. The formulae served Mao above all others, but they also served the revolutionaries who gained strength from them, who knew how to manipulate them, and who controlled their interpretation and application.

Reference Assignment, Victims, and Mao's Responsibility

Charged with the responsibility of making revolution in accordance with Mao's Thought, the revolutionary successors sought motivation from the formulae. One formula consisted of the Five Dares and the Four Unafraids: dare to think, to speak, to do, to make revolution, and to rebel; be unafraid of heaven, earth, gods, and ghosts. Of these, daring to speak—or at least to speak independently—was by far the most difficult, for the Red Guards like everyone else were afraid to say anything that might conceivably be taken as a departure from Mao's Thought. So when they dedicated themselves to the Five Dares and the Four Unafraids, they often did so in speeches based on recent editorials in the *People's Daily* and *Red Flag* (see Ling 1972, 38).

When it came to daring to do, however, the Red Guards were less constrained and often not at all formulaic. The reason was,

of course, that the formulae had no clear implications for action: they were multifaceted, sometimes contradictory, and they had to be interpreted with the aid of contextual clues, which varied from person to person. Only one thing was agreed: in the context of Mao's instructions, the formulae were rallying cries in a war against largely unspecified people in authority and class enemies. This legitimated the Red Guards' conquest of new empires and their acquisition of vast, new realms of self-determination and freedom.

For the victims of the Red Guards' conquests, the formulae had more-damaging implications. They could interpret the slogans and quotations however they wished, but their interpretations did not matter. People more powerful than themselves had named them as the capitalist roaders, the revisionists, the counterrevolutionaries, the spies, the traitors, the monsters and demons. They had become victims of the Cultural Revolution because they had been unable to control the process of reference assignment, and the formulae brought them no liberation, only oppression.

Few of those accused believed that they had said or done anything that justified the criminal labels placed on them. Some saved their self-respect by refusing to give in to their accusers, but many others confessed, under duress, to crimes they had never committed. However, after Mao's death and the arrest of the Gang of Four, nearly all those who had been victimized stopped pretending that they accepted the judgment of their tormentors. They demanded rehabilitation and compensation, they revealed the petty motives that had often led to their selection as targets, they tried to fathom the "madness" of the Cultural Revolution, and they poured out their anger in the avalanche of "wounded literature" that recounted their experiences (e.g., Barmé and Lee 1979; Feng 1991). Incessant bombardment with the formulae of the Cultural Revolution had helped to intimidate them and make them conform, but it had not convinced them that what their captors said was true.

While Mao lived, and often for much longer, few victims of

the Cultural Revolution blamed him for their fate. Instead, they pointed the finger at those who had made false accusations, at those who had twisted and misinterpreted their words, at the Red Guards, at the Central Cultural Revolution Group, at Lin Biao, or at Jiang Qing and her clique. Mao, they thought, did not know what sorts of things were done in his name. One reason they so seldom blamed him was that the Mao cult had done its work only too well. He was so remote from their lives that they knew him mainly through the formulae. They could not believe that their Great Leader, the red sun in their hearts, was responsible for such injustice.

In one very narrow sense they were right: with the partial exception of Liu Shaoqi, whom Mao identified indirectly in his big-character poster of 5 August 1966, no victim of the Cultural Revolution was publicly singled out by Mao as a capitalist roader or anything else. Indeed, only a relatively small number of very senior victims had their persecution specifically endorsed in the official press. The overwhelming majority of victims were singled out by those who bore them grudges, by those who wanted their jobs, by those who suspected them because they were intellectuals or had bad class origins, by those who detected something bourgeois in their dress or lifestyle, by those who resented the cadres as a new class, by those who hunted down people connected with those already accused, or simply by those who wanted to avoid suspicion that they themselves lacked revolutionary ardor.

Mao was directly responsible for none of these individual cases. His writings, his instructions, and the formulae of class war that echoed his words named only the categories of criminals who had to be rooted out. Moreover, as we have seen, the terms used to specify those categories were semantically incomplete, and that made it necessary for the accusers to flesh out their meaning then use their own interpretive assumptions in the process of reference assignment. Those assumptions, of course, usually varied according to the accuser's class background, personal loyalties, and individual prejudices. The

accused, however, rarely shared the assumptions that led to their identification as monsters and demons or any of the other types of criminal listed in the formulae. Most never dreamed that they were the sorts of people who were Mao's intended victims, and they blamed their accusers for maliciously pinning false labels on them. So Mao was shielded from blame because the semantically incomplete nature of the formulae and the contextual nature of reference assignment ensured that others had to make the final choice of targets.

The victims, of course, let Mao off too easily. He may not have named them, or anyone else, but he encouraged the process of persecution as a whole and sought to manipulate it for his own purposes. The witch-hunt was essential to his goal of breaking the power of the Communist Party, and it was equally essential to his attempt at bringing about a revolution in the Chinese people's values through mass criticism, the destruction of the old and the fostering of the new. If innocent people were among those accused, he simply did not care: in the words of a formula of the Cultural Revolution, he was prepared to "Kill the monkey to scare the chickens." As Dittmer has argued, the whole process of mass criticism "entailed the distortion or fabrication of criticisms . . . in order to teach lessons not always related to the views of the target" (Dittmer 1974, 314).

Mao also actively fostered many of the contextual beliefs that were used in the process of reference assignment. As we saw in chapter 3, Mao and his closest associates were responsible for promulgating the new assumptions and interpretive principles that were used to accuse Liu and many other Party leaders of betraying socialism and suppressing the Cultural Revolution. We have seen that he himself deliberately fostered beliefs that made many people search for counterrevolutionaries among the black categories, the intellectuals, the bourgeoisie, and the petite bourgeoisie. So if Mao did not determine that a particular accuser should use one set of damaging interpretive principles and beliefs rather than another, he certainly did a great

deal to ensure that there were so many damaging interpretive principles and beliefs available for use in the first place.

Similarly, while Mao did not tell anyone to make false accusations to avoid appearing deficient in revolutionary fervor, he did more than anyone else to create the system of competitive revolutionary activism that drove people to secure their own safety by exposing real or alleged class enemies. Mao may not have named the people who became the targets of revolutionary formulae during the Cultural Revolution, but he ensured that they, or millions like them, would be condemned. Formulae that reflected his Thought provided the condemnatory labels, and he himself manipulated and often created the contextual beliefs that guided the persecutors in the process of reference assignment.

Dichotomies, Demons, and Violence

THE LANGUAGE of the Cultural Revolution was a language of worship, a language of hatred, and a language of war. As a language of worship, it unified the people at the feet of the godlike Mao. As a language of hatred and of war, it drew a line between the people and the class enemy and used carefully scripted terms of abuse to humiliate and frighten the foe. It achieved all this partly through elaborating a series of interrelated dichotomies of good and evil. These drew upon the Communist Party's traditional revolutionary rhetoric, but sharpened and extended it. The result was a terrifying language of intimidation that influenced the attitudes of those who used it and devastated those who were its victims.

Linguistic Dichotomies: The Symbolism of Good and Evil

The architects of the language of the Cultural Revolution were Mao himself, who originated some of the dichotomies and whose writings were mined for imagery; his wife, Jiang Qing, leader of the cultural radicals, who launched the attack on "Three-Family Village" in 1966 and for a time influenced PLA propaganda; Chen Boda, Mao's secretary and the chairman of the Central Cultural Revolution Group, who wrote some of Mao's speeches, spearheaded the takeover of the *People's Daily* in 1966, and had heavy responsibilities for superintending the press; Yao Wenyan, whose attack on Wu Han had launched the

Cultural Revolution; and Qi Benyu, radical historian, journalist, and the main author of the attacks on the Beijing Municipal Committee and Liu Shaoqi. All of them, except for Mao himself, belonged to the Central Cultural Revolution Group. They controlled the *People's Daily* as well as the Party journal *Red Flag*, which had Chen Boda and then Yao Wenyuan as editor in chief. For a time, through Jiang Qing and Lin Biao, they also had ready access to the *Liberation Army Daily*. Through these two newspapers and one journal they exercised indirect control over the provincial Party press, which followed their lead for fear of taking an incorrect line. The provincial newspapers reprinted many of their articles and were in fact compelled to carry the title article from *Red Flag* on their front pages. As a result, the Central Cultural Revolution Group was in a position to dictate the language of the official press throughout the country. The independent Red Guard press, while impossible to control in matters of content, showed its loyalty to the Party center by adopting the common revolutionary language and ensuring that even its most original wordsmiths simply elaborated standard linguistic themes. Finally, ordinary people, like the press, knew that linguistic error could be fatal, so they protected themselves by speaking in official formulae and quoting Chairman Mao. So almost the whole Chinese population used the same centrally directed language of class war.

The rhetoric that the highly placed symbol makers of the Cultural Revolution devised was based on a series of interrelated dichotomies of good and evil. As Lowell Dittmer (Dittmer 1987, 80–90) has pointed out, the fundamental dichotomy was between the World of Light and the World of Darkness. The all-pervasive metaphor of the forces of light was the color red (*hong*), which derived its symbolic power from both traditional and revolutionary associations. Traditionally, it was the color of joy, success, popularity, good fortune, and prosperity. Brides, for example, usually dressed at least partly in red, and red decorations were customarily present at weddings or at auspicious celebrations. After the Communist victory, red acquired even more

potent associations. In the Marxist tradition, it was the color of socialism and the color of sacrifice for the revolutionary cause. In China it became as well a symbol of love for Mao and of devotion to his revolutionary Thought.

During the Cultural Revolution the cult of the color red went to extremes. As mass enthusiasm swelled, people began to paint all walls red, creating a red sea (*hong haiyang*), although the practice was banned partly because the red areas became sacred and therefore unavailable for critical big-character posters (*CCP Documents*, 146; Dittmer and Chen 1981, 57). The color red set the theme of all public functions. At a rally of “revolutionary students and teachers” in Beijing in August 1966, for example,

countless red flags waved in the breeze in Tiananmen square. Tens of thousands of Red Guards wearing red arm bands and carrying red-covered *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong* sang with gusto “Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman” and other revolutionary songs. The whole square became a surging ocean of red. (*People's Daily*, 1 September 1966; quoted in Dittmer 1977, 74)

The cult of the color red was matched by the cult of the word “red.” Mao’s revolutionary line was the red line (*hongxian*), his directives were red words (*hongzi*), the power of the revolutionary masses was red power (*hongse zhengquan*), their revolutionary action was a red storm (*hongse fengbao*) or a red torrent (*hongse jiliu*), they inflicted what they proudly called a red terror (*hongse kongbu*) on the black categories, and when they expelled them from Beijing their objective was to make the capital “purer and redder” (*geng chun geng hong*) (Red Guard Publications 5:1035; 16:5000, 5005, 5008; 19:6069). The urge to use the word “red” in every possible context even led the character for *hong* (red), hitherto nearly always adjectival, to grow in popularity as a verb: let the socialist flowers redden all over the world (*hong bian ren jian*) (Chuang 1967, 8).

Mao himself, as the inspiration and guide of all revolutionary action, was the reddest object of all, the sun (*taiyang*). He was the red, red sun in the Chinese people’s hearts and often the

reddest red sun. He was even, as people searched desperately for adequate superlatives, the reddest, reddest, red sun. His Thought, which sustained all his followers, was a red lantern (*hongdeng*), and his faithful followers were “red flowers (*honghua*) who always turn towards the sun.” He was also the inspiration of a subtheme in the imagery of light, for his followers were quick to note that as early as 1930 he had used the Chinese proverb “A single spark can start a prairie fire” to argue that small acts of rebellion would rapidly develop into mighty revolutions (Mao 1930, 118, 121). Borrowing the metaphor, they vowed to “spread the sparks of revolutionary rebelling,” they threatened their enemies with “the blazing flames of revolution,” they lit “the flames of criticism,” and they spoke of how revolutionaries were steeled and matured in “the furnaces of the great Cultural Revolutionary . . . crucible” (Dittmer 1987, 83).

The dominance of the color red in the imagery of light provided a new context of interpretation for the old figure of speech *ben se* (original color, pure color). Traditionally, young Chinese had been warned not to forget their original color (*wang ben*), meaning that they should not forget their ancestors and the values associated with them. Under Mao, however, the phrase was used repeatedly to warn young people from red-class families that they should not forget the revolutionary values appropriate to their class origin. The dominance of class and revolutionary values created a context of interpretation in which the figurative *ben se*, which had not referred literally to any part of the color spectrum, now referred to an actual color, red, and this in turn was a metaphor for something that was not a color at all—revolutionary character.

The capitalist roaders whom Mao named as the principal targets of the Cultural Revolution were accused of plotting to make the Communist Party and China *bian yan se* (change color). Within the context of interpretation that existed by the 1960s, everyone knew that China's existing color was red and that this was a metaphor for the country's socialist character. Similarly, everyone knew that the colors to which China was in danger of

changing were white and black—metaphors for the opposite pole of Chinese politics.

The evolving linguistic construction of the terms “white” and “black” will repay further analysis. Before the Communist takeover, “white” (*bai*) was the antonym of “black” (*hei*), symbolizing purity and goodness as opposed to darkness and evil. Under Mao, however, it gained a new meaning as the antonym of “red.” In this context, it stood for the side of counterrevolution—for the Guomindang and for all who sought its return. Coexistence of the two meanings, the traditional one and the new political one, could sometimes trap the politically naïve. Zhai Zhenhua records an argument in which one student said, “You are black! I am white!” (You are evil! I am good!) only to be crushed when her opponent shot back, “You are white! I am red!” (You are antirevolutionary! I am revolutionary!) (Zhai 1992, 59–60).

From the outset of the Cultural Revolution, however, “black” displaced “white” as the antonym of “red” in most contexts. There were good linguistic reasons for the change. The term “white” had been applied mainly to openly declared class enemies such as the Guomindang, but the Cultural Revolution was intended to expose and destroy a hidden menace—enemies who had secretly wormed their way into the Party and now threatened its red color. In this context “black” was the perfect antonym for “red,” for it was an established metaphor representing evil that involved treachery or hidden designs, and it had already been pressed into service against the Anti-Rightists in 1957. From the outset of the Cultural Revolution, the Central Cultural Revolution Group, the official press, and the Red Guard newspapers referred to their targets as black gangs (*heibang*), who conspired in black inns (*heidian*), and who sought to draw a black veil (*heimu*) over the black line (*heixian*) they secretly followed. These conspirators constituted an underground black party (*dixia heidang*), which held black meetings (*heihui*) in black headquarters (*heisilingbu*). They spoke black words (*heihua*) and issued black instructions (*heizhishi*), and they pub-

lished black books (*heishu*) and black documents (*heiwenjian*) whose poisonous influence was a black wind (*heifeng*). Though waving a red flag (*hongqi*), they owed allegiance to a black flag (*heiqi*), and from their black lairs (*heiwo*) they manipulated black backstage supporters (*heihoutai*).

As Dittmer has pointed out, linked to the dichotomy of light and darkness was another crucial polarity: that between appearance and reality (Dittmer 1987, 83–90). The inhabitants of the World of Darkness were the class enemies, who appeared to be human beings when they masqueraded in the World of Light, but who in reality were demons, spirits, and savage beasts. The official press, as usual, gave the revolutionary masses their cue:

The enemy in daylight look like men, in darkness devils. To your face, they speak human language, behind your back, the language of devils. They are wolves clad in skins of sheep, man-eating smiling tigers. . . . The enemies without guns are more hidden, cunning, sinister and vicious than the enemies with guns. (*Liberation Army Daily*, 23 August 1966; quoted in Dittmer 1987, 83)

Such enemies disguised their deadly intent with sugar-coated bullets (*tang yi paodan*). They were poisonous snakes (*du she*) and poisonous lizards (*du xiezi*) who had to be lured from their holes, foxes (*huli*) who sought to go unrecognized by hiding their tails, jackals and wolves (*chailang*) who emerged from their lairs to savage unwary revolutionaries, parasitic worms (*ji sheng chong*) and injurious vermin (*hai ren chong*) silently sapping their victims' strength. Lesser enemies were small insects (*xiao pa chong*), harmful insects (*hairen chong*), and flies (*cangying*), as well as the talons and fangs (*zhaoya*) of people such as Liu Shaoqi who stayed behind the scenes. All of these images were used to suggest deceit. Those who had no chance of hiding their villainy, such as members of the black categories or rival Red Guards, were often called dogs (*gou*), creatures not known for deception. Rebel Red Guards called pro-Party opponents loyalist dogs (*baohuanggou*), and all types of Red Guards said that their enemies had dogs' heads (*goutou*), became mad dogs (*kuang*

gou or *feng gou*) when cornered, and would end up as dead dogs (*sigou*). Red-class Red Guards referred to children of the black categories as whelps or sons of bitches (*gou zaizi*). In all cases, the descriptions were intended to degrade and dehumanize those to whom they were applied.

These terms built on the animal imagery in Mao's own writings. One of his most famous sayings, of course, was "All reactionaries are paper tigers." But everyone who read the Little Red Book knew that Mao also said that these reactionaries had once been "real tigers" that "devoured people by the millions and tens of millions." It was only after bitter struggle by the exploited that they became "paper tigers, dead tigers, bean-curd tigers" (Mao 1966b, 72–75). The tiger image was a recurrent one in Mao's writings, even in his poetry: "Only the hero can drive tigers and leopards away" (Wang 1996, 126, 137 n. 11). The tigers here were open enemies, but the Cultural Revolution was directed more at secret enemies—at those whom Mao called "enemies without guns" (Mao 1966b, 16). So the symbol makers now had to make the tigers smile and conjure up the images of the more traditionally deceitful inhabitants of Mao's antirevolutionary menagerie—creatures such as snakes and insects. All types of snakes, Mao said, whether they showed their "poisonous fangs" or changed themselves into "beautiful women," had "felt the threat of the coming winter." He warned, however, that they were "far from frozen stiff" (*Liberation Army Daily*, 22 July 1967; quoted in Wang 1996). The insects were just as capable of deceiving the unwary. Flies could be devils in disguise, and in Chinese tradition political enemies were denigrated as poisonous insects that played magic tricks. Their weak point was that they showed their true natures when cursed, and it was Mao's poetry that gave to the Cultural Revolution its standard imprecation against insects: "Sweep all harmful insects away!" (Wang 1996, 126, 137 n. 12).

Although the Cultural Revolution was directed, on one level, against feudal tradition, on another level it used feudal superstitions to foment hatred of class enemies, identifying them with

the whole pantheon of evil spirits mentioned in folklore and Buddhist mythology. The official press led the way, calling class enemies devils (*muogui*), demons (*guiguai*), vampires (*xixie*), apparitions and specters (*wangliang guimei*), monsters (*muoguai*), and Yama (*yanwang ye*)—the King of the Dead. To hide their identities they had painted skin (*huapi*), they operated through others who were their devils' claws (*muo zhao*), and they deceived their opponents with ghostly trickery (*gui huazhao*), black magic (*yaofeng*), and by speaking ghost language (*guihua*) (Chuang 1967, 22–23). The most common description of class enemies, however, was *niugui sheshen*. Literally this means “cow-ghosts and snake-gods,” but it is usually translated freely as “monsters and demons” or “ghosts and monsters.” In Chinese mythology, *niugui sheshen* were evil spirits who took human shapes to perform evil tricks, but when unmasked reverted to their ghostly forms. The term “*niugui sheshen*” was popularized by Mao when he used it in a speech in 1957: “All erroneous ideas, all poisonous weeds, all ghosts and monsters (*niugui sheshen*), must be subjected to criticism; in no circumstances should they be allowed to spread unchecked” (Mao 1957b, 496). It was widely used during the Anti-Rightist campaign to describe intellectuals who had pretended to support the Party, only to be unmasked when they launched a barrage of criticism when allowed to speak out during the Hundred Flowers campaign. The term epitomized the dichotomy between appearance (human form) and reality (demonic nature). It also pointed to the necessity of publicizing what had been concealed: the demonic (antisocialist) natures and activities of those whom the revolutionary masses were supposed to unmask. The slogan Expose all monsters and demons! was a perfect tool for fostering the climate of paranoia and hatred that fueled the Cultural Revolution.

Mao not only personally contributed *niugui sheshen* to the Chinese political vocabulary, but was responsible for the revival of demonic symbolism as a whole. No one would have dared to bring back the language of feudal superstition without his

encouragement, and it was freely given. He even supervised the selection and editing of a book of ghost stories compiled by the Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences under the title *Stories about Not Being Afraid of Ghosts*. Mao read and commented on all three versions of the book, making changes designed to turn it into “a tool of political struggle and thought struggle,” then had the book published in February 1961 to meet the needs of “cadre rectification” (Guo 1990, 189–190). The book’s purpose was to warn that the people’s enemies both in China and abroad were like ghosts, that they had a ghostlike ability to take human form, that some people were half man, half ghost, and that all enemies with ghostly characteristics had to be unmasked and wiped out. So Mao was well equipped to turn China’s feudal past to advantage during the Cultural Revolution.

As well as popularizing the imagery of ghosts, devils, and animals with supernatural powers, Mao and his symbol makers revived the art of curse sorcery (Wang 1996; Li 1997). It had been developed in ancient times when people believed that they were surrounded by mysterious and powerful supernatural forces that could not be controlled by natural means. It involved attacking the demons with curses that were verbal representations of a ferocious physical onslaught. The intention was to frighten the devils so badly that they revealed themselves, then wasted away from terror and eventually died. As creatures of the World of Darkness, they suffered from the light and heat, so curses such as Deep fry the devils! were used frequently. That exact same curse was used during the Cultural Revolution, along with variants such as Deep fry the black gangs! or Set fire to the black city government! Many of the curses were deliberately cruel. “Smash the dog’s head!” revolutionaries cried as they forced a hapless victim’s head to the ground. *Red Flag* told those struggling against Wu Han to “strip off his skin and cut his bones,” while a Red Guard ballad warned Liu Shaoqi “We will ferret you out, pull out your tendons, strip off your skin and kick your head like a ball” (quoted in Wang 1996, 130). Many of

the curses were in the spirit of a passage from Lu Xūn endorsed by Mao, urging people to “beat the [mad] dog even when it has fallen into the water” and telling them, “Once you start beating it, beat it to death.” A popular curse was Foster the spirit of beating the dog that has fallen into the water! Hit the class enemies to the ground then trample them with tens of millions of feet! Such curses, it was felt, would make the demons throw off their disguises and would drive them to their deaths. Both of these things happened often enough to inspire faith in the cursing: many class enemies revealed their demonic natures by confessing to counterrevolutionary crimes, and still others foresaw a future with endless suffering and took their own lives.

Confidence in the curses depended, too, on confidence in the spirit that inspired them. In ancient times, people invoked the support of the gods. During the Cultural Revolution, however, their confidence in victory over the demons rested on their faith in Mao. Traditionally, people had used fire, water, brooms, and mirrors—or words describing the action of these things—to make devils show their true shape, and during the Cultural Revolution they used similar words (Wang 1996). Metaphors of “sweeping away” pervaded Mao’s work (e.g., Mao 1966b, 10–11, 119), and when revolutionaries swore to Sweep away all monsters and demons! or to Sweep them into the rubbish bin of history! they had the reassurance that they were using words uttered by Mao himself to express his invincible Thought. Similarly, when they brought demons to light with the “flames of criticism” or washed away their disguises with a “red torrent” of revolutionary activity, their inspiration was Mao’s Thought. That Thought (“the sun”) was a light powerful enough to reveal all the counterrevolutionary secrets of the world of darkness; it was the criterion against which everything could be measured, the mirror in which everything could be scrutinized. As Yao Wenyan put it, “The brilliant light of Mao Tse-tung’s thought will penetrate all the dark corners and show up all the monsters and goblins in their true colours” (Yao 1966, 114).

People who used the language of the official press and called

class enemies savage beasts, poisonous snakes, or monsters and demons used words that stripped their opponents of all humanity. Such language reduced the class struggle to a battle between polar opposites—between antagonists who did not share even a common human nature. The language implied that those who were its referents were class enemies by nature—that they always had been antisocialist and always would be. So when Liu Shaoqi, for example, was labeled a “poisonous snake” and a “renegade, traitor, and scab” (*pantu, neijian gongzei*), his self-criticisms were dismissed as insincere, and his personal history was rewritten to prove that he had always secretly opposed the Party:

Liu was born in sin and grew to manhood as a “filial scion of the landlord class”; he “wormed” his way into the Party at the time of its founding to “speculate on revolution,” and he “usurped” every office he ever held. . . . Liu’s essential guilt was immutable, its appearance opportunistic; his intention to do mischief was constant, his ability dependent on circumstances. (Dittmer 1974, 312 n. 19)

So Liu, the loyal Communist, was a class enemy by his very nature, condemned never again to be called comrade. His fate, like that of other especially useful class enemies, was to be criticized time after time as a negative example (Dittmer 1974, 313). If the people needed to be warned against something, then Liu was said to have advocated it. Even after he was left to die, his illnesses untreated, half naked in a cellar in the north of China, news of his death was suppressed, and the newspapers continued to remind people of “the towering crimes” of Liu Shaoqi. The immutability of his black nature, the impossibility of genuine repentance on his part, served the purposes of the symbol masters, who educated the people by making him stand for everything they attacked during the Cultural Revolution.

Many Red Guards internalized the message of the language they learned from the newspapers. They accepted the doctrine that revolutionaries and class enemies had different natures.

They accepted that there was no middle road between the red and the black, between socialism and revisionism, between revolution and counterrevolution, between the World of Light and the World of Darkness. As well as using language that implied these claims, they articulated them explicitly and sought to convert others to them. One Red Guard newspaper called upon its readers to “Fire the moderates,” then argued:

[M]ildness (*wen*) is the biggest weak point of our Cultural Revolution movement and our most dangerous enemy at the moment. . . . Being mild is being afraid, it is being weak. It means that one does not hate the enemy of the revolution, that one is inadequate in the struggle against the counterrevolutionary line, and that one does not have a clear political stand when the critical moment comes. Being mild is being slow and lacking political sharpness. It is being weak in one’s sense of class struggle. To be mild is to lack initiative and be overcautious. In short, mildness is a Right deviation and is conservative. . . . Mildness is a manifestation of the bourgeois world outlook, and it is the reflection of the vacillating and compromising nature of the petite bourgeoisie in our revolutionary ranks. Mildness is only the surface, the real nature is selfishness. The struggle against mildness is a struggle to fight selfishness and foster public spirit. Every revolutionary comrade must let the struggle touch his soul and resolutely seize power over the selfishness in his own mind. (*Xin Beida*, 14 March 1967; in *Red Guard Publications* 5:1301)

This was an attempt to engineer semantic change. It operated on two levels. On the one hand, the passage sought to change the referents of the word “*wen*” (mildness) through an argument that, given the assumptions of Mao’s Thought, was perfectly rational. On the other hand, the passage also operated on a non-rational level, activating mechanisms of higher-order conditioning by repeatedly associating the word “*wen*” with the negative terms emphasized in the passage above. Most important, it said explicitly what the dichotomous language of the Cultural Revolution implied: that there was no middle road—that the whole conflict was between polar opposites of good and evil. In that

case, there could be no negotiations, no compromise, no peace. Such a conflict could be discussed only in the language of war.

The Language of War

Military terms and metaphors, we saw in chapter 2, had always been prevalent in Mao's China, reflecting the fact that the Communist Party had won power through more than two decades of warfare. They had been used in the rhetoric of class warfare, but often they were directed at foreign enemies or used to rally the Chinese people in the battle to increase production. During the Cultural Revolution, however, people spoke the language of war as never before, and it was directed overwhelmingly at human targets within China—the capitalist roaders, revisionists, monsters and demons, and all the other victims of the Cultural Revolution. As always in matters of linguistic form, the lead came from the top. Mao himself had called on the revolutionary masses to bombard the headquarters of the capitalist roaders within the Party; Jiang Qing had opened the attack on Deng Tuo and “Three-Family Village” with an article under the title “Open Fire at the Black Anti-Party and Anti-Socialist Line!” (*Liberation Army Daily*, 8 March 1966; quoted in Chuang 1970, 19); and Lin Biao's rhetoric rang with martial metaphors: “literary criticism must reinforce its militancy, turn literary criticism into dagger and grenade” (Red Guard Publications 16:5003). This language reflected his view that “struggle is life—if you don't struggle against them, they will struggle against you . . . if you don't kill them they will kill you” (quoted in Dittmer 1987, 117). The Maoist-controlled official press rammed home the message that the Cultural Revolution was a war:

The struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the area of the superstructure is like a battle between two armies—always one wins and one loses. Either we wipe them out or they eliminate us. We can't cease fire in ideological and cultural battle . . . otherwise we surrender to bourgeois thought and culture. (*Peo-*

ple's Daily, 29 May 1967; reprinted in Red Guard Publications 16:5007)

The Red Guards were not slow to take their cue. Most rebel units adopted names that incorporated military terminology: 8.28 Fighting Squad, First Brigade of the First Army Division of the Red Guards of Number Four School, 8.29 Revolutionary Rebellion-Making General Headquarters, and so on. They labeled their tabloid newspapers *zhan bao* (battle news) and they saw themselves as Mao's *xiao jiang* (little generals) fighting a deadly war:

"Bombard the Headquarters" is like a bugle call directing mighty revolutionary contingents. . . . We'll follow your [Mao's] great strategic plan, galloping ahead with swords drawn, carrying all before us. (*Xin hui bao*, 8 March 1968; reprinted in Red Guard Publications 5:1146)

To defend Mao and Mao's revolutionary line, we, Chairman Mao's most loyal Red Guards, dare to climb a mountain of swords or plunge into a sea of flames. We must . . . hit them all at one attempt (*yi da er guang*). We must ignite a blazing prairie fire of the people's war, bury the entire "Liu dynasty"! (*Xin Beida*, 12 April 1967; reprinted in Red Guard Publications 5:1149)

The "Summary of the Forum" is a battle order from Chairman Mao's proletarian headquarters. It is a mobilization order calling for us to take up our pens and hold tight our guns to protect proletarian power. It betokens the coming of the red storm of the proletarian Cultural Revolution. (*Jie fang jun bao*, 29 May 1967; reprinted in Red Guard Publications 16:5008)

Aiming at the heads of the capitalist roaders, fiercely hack! Aiming at their throats, shoot! We must give them a deadly blow. (*Zhi nong hong qi*, no. 7, January 1968; reprinted in Red Guard Publications 3)

We want gunpowder and the smoke of gunpowder, and we don't want rosy color! We want violence! We want to seize power! We are against reconciliation and compromise. Down with eclecticism! (*Zhan di wen yi*, no. 8; reprinted in Red Guard Publications 2)

The cultural front should fight its way out! Fight! Fight! Fight! Fight until the enemy is utterly routed. Fight till the end and never

return! Fight until a new and bright red cultural field of Mao Zedong Thought comes! (*Hong yi zhan bao*, 15 March 1967; reprinted in Red Guard Publications 7:1828)

The Capital Red Flag Red Guard is born in the gunfire and smoke of gunpowder of the life-and-death battle between the two lines. (*Shoudu hongqi chiweijun xuanyan*, 21 January 1967; reprinted in Red Guard Publications 19:6084)

The Cultural Revolution, like a thundering storm, is sweeping away one by one the bourgeoisie's obstinate blockhouses. (*Fan xiu bao* and *geming zaofan jun bao*, 23 May 1967; reprinted in Red Guard Publications 4)

These extracts and others like them are packed with terms that will be taken, in default of contextual evidence to the contrary, to have military referents: headquarters (*silingbu*), contingents (*xiaofendui*), swords (*jian*), war (*zhanzheng*), foe (*diren*), battle order (*zhandou hao ling*), battlefront (*zhanxian*), weapon (*wuqi*), guns (*qiang*), gunpowder (*zhayao*), gunfire (*paohuo*), bombard (*paohong*), encirclement (*baowei*), mobilization (*dongyuan*), blockhouse (*diaobao*), fortress (*baolei*). Nearly all these words are nouns invented to describe specifically military organization, technology, or tactics as they have developed over the years. They are used as martial metaphors for nonmilitary things, but that is a secondary function.

The description of war requires many other terms whose *prima facie* reference is less definite, but that have military referents in the context of the passages in which they occur. The Red Guard newspapers are packed with such terms, and they are nearly all verbs: *zhansheng* (vanquish), *xiji* (strike), *maizang* (bury), *fensui* (shatter), *pi* (hack), *kan* (hack), *paoji* (batter), *daji* (hit), *bodou* (fight), *qianmie* (annihilate, wipe out), *xiaomie* (exterminate, liquidate), *qingchu* (liquidate), *jikui* (rout), *dabai* (defeat), *saochu* (sweep away), *zhuiji* (pursue), *duoqu* (seize), *wuzhuang* (arm), *cuihui* (destroy), *hanwei* (defend), *baowei* (defend, guard), *baohu* (protect). These words are equally applicable to many types of aggression, for specifically military forms of attack require hardly any specialized verbs. The words are

positive from the point of view of the aggressor, so they are mostly used with reference to the actions of revolutionary forces. If they are used to describe the actions of reactionaries, they are almost invariably qualified by words such as “attempt to” or “seek vainly to.” Finally, very few of the verbs have defensive meanings—*hanwei*, *baowei*, and *baohu* being the only common exceptions. Both Chinese and English have more verbs for attack than for defense, but the disparity is not nearly as great as in the Red Guard newspapers, which had the positive and aggressive outlook of revolutionaries seeking to conquer the world for Mao’s Thought.

A further characteristic of the language of war is that it includes many metaphors based on descriptions of the forces of nature. “Red storm,” “thundering storm,” and “blazing prairie fire” are stock metaphors linked to the actions of the revolutionary masses in the passages above. Other metaphors include “the fury of a hurricane,” “the power of thunder and lightning,” “a mighty red torrent,” “surging waves,” “blazing flames,” and “the momentum of an avalanche and the force of a thunderbolt.” Most of these metaphors originated in Mao’s own writings, and many were reproduced in the Little Red Book (Mao 1927, 21–22; Mao 1930, 118–121; Mao 1966b, 119). Their purpose was to suggest the invincible power of the forces of revolution. They were far more imposing than equivalent metaphors used to describe the activities of class enemies—metaphors characterized by less striking nouns and negative adjectives. “Black wind,” “black cloud,” “black mist,” and “adverse current” were typical metaphors for antirevolutionary activity.

Finally, in the language of war the conflict was not between humans sharing a common human nature. It was between revolutionary soldiers (human but ultimately invincible) and class enemies whose nature was that of savage animals and demons from the world of darkness:

The handful of diehard capitalist roaders become more and more isolated, but they will not resign themselves to defeat. They

pounce again and again on the revolutionary masses, and launch desperate counterattacks on Mao's revolutionary line and on the proletarian revolutionary headquarters—the Central Cultural Revolution Group—with ten times more frenzy and a hundred times more hatred. They make threatening gestures with their bare fangs and claws, vainly attempting to swallow all the revolutionaries, fully revealing their wolves' natures! (*Shoudu hongqi chiweijun xuan-yan*, 21 January 1967; reprinted in Red Guard Publications 19:6084)

In the language of war, the conflict was between groups so fundamentally different that no compromise, no armistice, no peace was possible. It was a war to the death between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. In such a war, any cruelty was possible.

Language and Violence

No one knows how many people died as a result of the Cultural Revolution. John Fairbank says about four hundred thousand (Fairbank 1988, 320); Ann Thurston cites estimates of over a million (Thurston 1990, 149); R. J. Rummel raises the figure to more than two million (Rummel 1991, 254, 263); and Jean-Luc Domenach thinks that it could be anywhere between one and three million (Domenach 1992, 211; cited in Margolin 1999, 513). Whatever the true figure, the deaths represent only a tiny fraction of the violence, for most of those attacked were beaten or tortured, but not killed. The victims included disproportionate numbers of teachers, intellectuals, people with bad class backgrounds, and cadres—of whom some 60–80 percent were purged (Gong 1996; Dittmer 1987, 96). The Red Guards who attacked these groups also suffered terribly. Many were killed or injured in battles with opposing factions; and very large numbers died, often coldly executed, when Mao used armed force to restore centralized control from mid-1968.

There is no doubt that the causes of this violence were in part political, social, and institutional. Five explanations of this sort seem particularly important. First, the Communist Party

had long taught the Chinese people that violence was an essential part of revolution. As Mao put it, in words cited countless times to justify violence during the Cultural Revolution, "A revolution is not a dinner party. . . . A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another" (Mao 1927, 30). The Party taught people to hate class enemies and to act on that hatred, and it led by example. Between 1949 and 1952, it publicly executed up to a million or more members of landlord families and large numbers of counterrevolutionaries (see chapter 2). It took great pains to ensure that local people shared responsibility for the deaths, and it inflicted humiliation and lesser degrees of brutality on class enemies in many other campaigns. So when Party work teams sanctioned student violence against alleged class enemies during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, they were acting in their accustomed fashion. And when Mao removed the Party's control, inviting the revolutionary masses to conduct the revolution themselves, the resulting violence was entirely predictable. The masses were just doing what Mao and the Party had taught them (cf. Thurston 1990, 151–161; Liu 1976, 68–69, 115–121; Chan 1985).

Second, Mao and the Party had deliberately kept the class struggle alive by creating a hereditary class system. They gave special privileges to people with good class backgrounds, who were regarded as natural supporters of the revolution, and they discriminated against members of the bad classes. In successive political campaigns, they targeted the bad classes as potential class enemies, and they encouraged people to establish their revolutionary credentials by victimizing them. When Mao gave the revolutionary masses their head, this carefully cultivated class hatred exploded in a Red Terror directed mainly at the bad classes and those who had been officially labeled as counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and Rightists. However, when Mao demanded attacks on the Party, which was dominated by the red classes, most revolutionaries with good class backgrounds were reluctant to make war on their own kind. They lost the initiative to the Rebel Red Guards, whose members were

drawn largely from less privileged strata. The viciousness of the rebels' attacks on the Party reflected the fact that most of them belonged to groups that had largely been excluded from it (cf. Lee 1978; Chan, Rosen, and Unger 1980; White 1976).

Third, while some people used the Cultural Revolution as an excuse to settle personal scores, much of the violence was linked to tensions within the Chinese authority structure. Students with grievances against teachers were able to humiliate and beat them, resentful workers were able to attack their superiors and sometimes take their jobs, and the children of local cadres who had been disciplined by higher authorities were able to label those authorities capitalist roaders and attack them. Above all, people were able to avenge grievances linked to the system of tight Party control that existed until August 1966. Cadres who headed work units had extensive powers to give or refuse permission, to dispense or deny patronage, to mobilize criticism or to force self-criticism. Inevitably, even the best of them made enemies. Moreover, it was the cadres who were responsible for enforcing unpopular policies and who were often blamed for the widespread starvation of the Great Leap Forward. When Mao called for criticism of the Party, people who had grievances against particular cadres or who had a more generalized resentment of authority took a savage revenge (cf. White 1989; Liu 1976, 115–121).

Fourth, with the breakdown of established authority, an anarchic situation emerged in which Red Guards, workers, and cadres who did not use violence could not compete in the battle for survival with those who did. Successful use of force to gain power in one's own city or province became the key to personal safety. Those who succeeded were able to punish their opponents as counterrevolutionaries; those who failed were suppressed, humiliated, beaten, and sometimes killed. The self-interested pursuit of violent strategies of survival created a situation in which no one was safe. So individual rationality produced collective insanity and China descended into low-grade

civil war until Mao eventually demanded an end to the fighting and used force to restore order.

Fifth, while Mao and his associates in the Central Cultural Revolution Group warned against violence when it suited their interests, at other times they encouraged it or regarded it with benign indifference. Three events were crucial. First, on 18 August 1966, after the Red Guards had begun their reign of terror, they received Mao's blessing at a million-strong rally in Beijing. Mao accepted a Red Guard armband from a young revolutionary, then persuaded her to change her name from Binbin (refined and gentle) to Yaowu (fierce). The official media publicized the story, and Yaowu almost immediately joined her fellow Red Guards in an orgy of violence and destruction. Second, in late August the minister of public security, Xie Fuzhi, gave the Red Guards what amounted to a license to kill: "I do not approve [the] masses killing people, but if the masses hate bad people so much that we cannot stop them, then let us not insist on [stopping them]. . . . The people's police should stand on the side of the Red Guards" (Yan and Gao 1996, 76). Third, in 1967 the Central Cultural Revolution Group, the Maoist organization in charge of the Cultural Revolution, told the People's Liberation Army to "arm the rebels for self-defense." Different units adopted opposing interpretations of who the rebels were, so both sides ended up acquiring arms more easily. Mao commented: "It is not a bad thing to let the young have some practice in using arms—we haven't had a war for so long" (Chang 1992, 471).

Taken together, these five explanations of the violence have a lot of power. However, they are by no means exhaustive. One question that has not been adequately investigated is whether the violent language of the Cultural Revolution contributed to the physical violence. Most scholars have assumed—or even stated—that this hate-filled language had no independent causal efficacy, but simply reflected social and institutional tensions that were the true cause of the violence. Lynn T. White,

for example, notes that violent “linguistic symbols” were used to attack opponents, then suggests,

People chose these symbols to express the intensity of their frustration at having been manipulated by government categories, bosses, and threats. They were mad. Pastels would not do; so they chose red. Quiet sutras and relaxed muscles could not let out enough of their anger, after their lives had been exploited so egregiously for years; thus they shouted loud slogans and clenched their fists, instead. A formal consistency of many symbols in the Cultural Revolution is evident. This pattern came not because uniformity is natural, or because such things are random, but because of the need for a language to express intense motives among people who felt sharp pain at specifiable kinds of state coercion.

These symbols were just options. Different, quietistic emblems have been sometimes chosen by Chinese people. Symbols do not cause events. Their selection is a thing to be explained . . . not an explainer. Their availability tells us nothing, because their opposites were also available. (White 1989, 270–271)

White's dismissal of the causal role of language depends partly on the assumption that the Chinese people chose the linguistic symbols they used when denouncing their opponents. However, the last thing the Chinese people were free to choose was their linguistic symbols. Until August 1966, those symbols were dictated from above by the Party and by the official press; after August 1966, when the Party was made to bow to mass criticism, they were promulgated by the official press alone, now in the hands of Mao's coconspirators against the Party. These symbols were used even by people who hated what they stood for, because speaking the officially prescribed language of Mao worship and class warfare was a condition of survival. So the people did not choose red as the color of class war and revolution, but had it dictated to them by the Party long before the Cultural Revolution; they did not choose the hate-filled and empowering linguistic formulae discussed in chapter 4, but learned them from the official news media, schoolteachers, and study groups; and they did not choose the linguistic dichotomies, the animal and demon imagery or the language of class

warfare, for this was given to them by the official press. Everyone spoke the same language because it was Mao's language, because using it showed a revolutionary spirit, and because a refusal to use it was a suicidal, counterrevolutionary act.

Mao and his supporters policed the linguistic symbols so rigorously because they knew that they were not mere reflections of people's needs, passions, and desires, but independent influences on thought. We saw in chapter 1 that language influences thought partly through what Petty and Cacioppo (1986, 9) call "rather primitive affective and associational processes." These processes are especially powerful when people are exposed repeatedly to persuasive scripts and when they lack alternative sources of information. Every one of the processes discussed in chapter 1 operated through the scripts copied from the official press by revolutionaries who needed to know the correct terms of abuse for the class enemy. When people whom others admired said repeatedly that Liu Shaoqi was a spy, traitor, and scab, for instance, this tended to persuade by producing a strong modeling effect among the admirers. When members of a student group said that the biology teacher was a monster and demon, this produced a reference-group effect that tended to sway the views of those who sought the group's acceptance. When an accused person's name or face was repeatedly juxtaposed with words such as revisionist, vermin, vampire, and devil, then higher-order conditioning transferred the negative connotations associated with those words to the accused, especially when the general public had little or no personal knowledge of the accused to offset the effect. And when people were rewarded by group acceptance for cursing a class enemy, operant conditioning made them more inclined to accept the message of the curse.

One of the most interesting and important sources of attitude change was the cognitive dissonance that the language of condemnation produced in those who thought of themselves as good and kind people, and who often were good and kind. Caught up in the passion of the Cultural Revolution, seeking to

demonstrate their fervor, they condemned their victims using the only legitimate words—the terms of abuse laid down in the official press. The consequences of labeling someone with those words, however, were devastating: they were words that inspired fear and ruined lives. Callous people experienced no dissonance when they cursed their victims, no psychological discomfort caused by a discrepancy between a humane self-image and cruel behavior. Those who experienced dissonance were people who were ordinarily kind and who wanted to think of themselves as kind. Few of these people had ever done anything half so harmful to others as when they cursed their victims in language that stripped them of their dignity, denied their humanity, and labeled them class enemies. The easiest way they could justify this terrible act was to believe that those whom they condemned really were class enemies, that they had all the vile characteristics attributed to them by the curses, and that they therefore deserved their fate. When kind people voluntarily directed the official language of condemnation against another human being, dissonance shifted their attitudes in the direction of the language. They began to hate their victims.

The effects of language on thought can be illustrated from the shift in attitudes recorded in the honest and reflective autobiography of Zhai Zhenhua, a red-class Red Guard in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution (Zhai 1992). A modest girl whose best friend came from a nonred background, she was well liked and respected. When she became a Red Guard she promised “to make more friends and to unite all students.” But once she became a revolutionary leader she was subjected to new pressures and new linguistic influences. The Red Guards at this time were all of red-class origin, and the arrogant and class-conscious spirits among them invented a *duilian* or three-line stanza that asserted the red categories’ hereditary revolutionary heroism and the black categories’ hereditary baseness. Taking inspiration from the *duilian*, they composed a song that became the Red Guard anthem. It began like this:

The old man a true man, the son is a hero,
The old man a reactionary, the son is an asshole.

If you are revolutionary, then step forward and come along,
If you are not, damn you to hell.

And it ended like this:

Damn you to hell!
Depose you from your fucking post!
Kill! Kill! Kill! (Zhai 1992, 81)

All the Red Guards in Zhai's school learned the song, and she did too. At first she sang it softly, embarrassed by the crude language, but soon she was singing it confidently along with all her red-class friends. Every time she sang, mere repetition made the shocking words less distasteful. Every time she sang, she modeled class prejudice for those who looked up to her. Every time she sang, she associated bad-class students with words such as "asshole" and "hell," so higher-order conditioning diminished her respect for them. Every time she sang, she experienced a reference group effect as she took her cue from her comrades' denigration of the black categories. And every time she sang, she was rewarded by feelings of camaraderie and elation, which strengthened her belief in the hate-filled lyrics through operant conditioning.

Within a couple of weeks, she recalls, the song "had already begun to take root in me. My sympathy toward students from non-revolutionary families was rapidly disappearing." Soon she was intimidating and abusing students from the black categories, menacing them with her belt and shouting as they sat with their heads bowed before her:

This is called the "proletarian dictatorship!" It is the opposite of the "capitalist dictatorship" your parents imposed on the working people before liberation. . . . Let's imagine how it would have been if we were still in the old society. How would you have treated us? . . . You would ride roughshod over us, starve us, and make us child laborers! (Zhai 1992, 105)

"My imagination carried me away and aroused a strong indignation in me," she recalls. "I liked that because I really wanted to prove that our actions [in abusing them] were justified." She needed to persuade herself that her actions were justified

because her abusive language was inconsistent with her values and self-image, arousing severe dissonance; and she liked the strong indignation because it eased the dissonance. As she continued her harangue, her language became even more extreme, her face contorted, she swung her belt ferociously toward her audience, and she began to make herself distraught. This behavior, so inconsistent with her self-image, produced an even more extreme attitude shift. "Oh, how I hated my classmates at that moment," she said, "only because of my own flights of fancy." In the short space of a month, a popular and mild-mannered student had become the "fierce enemy" of her bad-class fellow students, "vilifying them and trampling their dignity." She was even able to prove her political consciousness by beating people from the black categories. The transition to physical violence produced more dissonance, which she eased by reciting scripts that made her hate and blame her victims:

In the beginning I dared not look at the person under my feet. I had to stiffen myself mentally to continue. I kept thinking, "These are class enemies, bad people. . . . They're only getting what they deserve. I shouldn't feel sorry for them. In class struggle, either you die or I do." . . . After a few beatings, I no longer needed to rehearse the rationale behind them. My heart hardened and I became used to the blood. . . . The Cultural Revolution had transformed me into a devil. (Zhai 1992, 106)

Zhai was just one of countless idealistic and personally kind young people who were transformed into devils by the Cultural Revolution. And a crucial element in that transformation was the language promoted by the symbol makers—a language that took root in their hearts through primitive affective and associational processes such as modeling, conditioning, reference group effects, and dissonance.¹ These young idealists adopted negative views of their victims not only because of what they heard about them, but because of what they themselves said about them; and many of them said those terrible things not because they at first really believed them, but because they wanted to be good revolutionaries. It was only after their lan-

guage helped to change their attitudes that it was able to express them.

The invective of the Cultural Revolution not only produced attitude shifts in those who used it, but it was itself a form of violence. It degraded its victims, dehumanized them, and terrified them. When it labeled them class enemies, they became outcasts with no rights, no future, no friends; their families were persecuted and pressured to disown them; and they were subjected to militant struggle (*wu dou*) by the people, a process involving physical coercion. If they were not killed, they were treated as enemies with the natures of snakes, vermin, flies, jackals, vampires, and *niugui sheshen*; and because deceit was their special skill, no one believed their protestations of innocence or repentance. They had been labeled class enemies, and their future was hopeless. Many concluded that they were better off dead. Every memoir of the Cultural Revolution mentions the suicides. No one who lived through those times is puzzled about them.

When the language of denunciation inflicted such torture on its victims, attacking them physically was not a big step. It was the natural concomitant of the vicious condemnations. When revolutionaries beat, kicked, tortured, or killed, they were simply taking the language of their curses literally, then carrying out their proclaimed intention to strike down, crush, trample, and exterminate class enemies. Everyone knew that when this language had been used in earlier revolutionary struggles, Mao and the Party had orchestrated the humiliation, physical abuse, and often the execution of alleged class enemies. So when the official media made the language of class war the prescribed language of the Cultural Revolution, it was inevitable that many people would place it in the context of earlier violence and interpret it as a call to violent struggle.

While it was easy to take the curses literally, understanding them as commands to beat and maim, other interpretations were possible. Some people read them figuratively, reducing them to harmless metaphors designed to express hatred of class

enemies and arouse enthusiasm for a campaign based on non-violent criticism. For example, when Neale Hunter asked moderate students in Shanghai what they thought of some especially blood-curdling slogans, “they laughed uncomfortably and mumbled that the slogans, though ‘admirably strong,’ were ‘of course not to be taken literally’” (Hunter 1971, 132–133). Such people played down the violent Mao, who had sanctioned repeated terrorization of class enemies. Instead, they focused on the peaceful Mao, who spoke up periodically when violence did not serve his purposes. This was the Mao whose “Sixteen Points” said that debate “should be conducted by reasoning, not by coercion or force,” the Mao who once told the Red Guards to “conduct civil struggle and refrain from physical violence” (*CCP Documents* 46–49; Yan and Gao 1996, 378). Moderates interpreted these injunctions broadly—as an instruction that the Cultural Revolution should focus not on the eradication of class enemies, but on the peaceful correction of sincere but erring comrades. They then invoked the peaceful Mao as their interpretive context, using him to justify reducing the most ferocious words to innocuous figures of speech.

When Mao could be quoted on both sides, people had to decide which Mao was relevant to the current situation. The crucial question, of course, was whether those accused were erring comrades, who could only be criticized, or class enemies, who deserved to be subjected to violent struggle. Answers to this question were often arbitrary, and once someone had suggested that the accused was a class enemy, adherents of the peaceful Mao were always at a disadvantage. Consider Jung Chang’s account of her attempt to stop Chian, an army officer’s son, from administering a merciless beating:

Now I murmured, trying to control the quaking in my voice, “Didn’t Chairman Mao teach us to use verbal struggle [*wen-dou*] rather than violent struggle [*wu-dou*]? Maybe we shouldn’t . . . ?”

My feeble protest was echoed by several voices in the room. But Chian cast us a disgusted sideways glance and said emphatically:

"Draw the line between yourselves and the class enemy. Chairman Mao says, 'Mercy to the enemy is cruelty to the people!' If you are afraid of blood, don't be Red Guards!" His face was twisted into ugliness by fanaticism. The rest of us fell silent . . . we could not argue with him. We had been taught to be ruthless to class enemies. Failure to do so would make us class enemies ourselves. I turned and walked quickly into the garden at the back. (Chang 1992, 407–408)

Fanatics such as Chian became the dominant voice of the Cultural Revolution because they drew strength from its violent slogans and because moderates were afraid to defend anyone accused of being a class enemy (cf. Huang 1996, 122). But why were people like Chian so anxious to label other people as class enemies, rather than erring comrades? Why did they so obviously prefer the violent Mao to the peaceful one? And why did they choose contexts of interpretation that led to literal readings of the curses, whereas people like Jung Chang chose contexts that yielded figurative ones? Very likely, literal interpretations appealed to those who wished to legitimize the acting out of sadistic or criminal tendencies, to those most anxious to gain prominence as uncompromising revolutionaries, to those with the most intense hatred of potential victims, to those who saw violence as an essential strategy of survival, and to those who thought that they would come out on top. Conversely, figurative interpretations probably appealed mainly to people who abhorred violence, to those who lacked the ambition that drove others to displays of revolutionary extremism, to those who felt little animosity toward potential victims, to those who did not need to use violence to survive, and to those who felt that they were more likely to be the victims of violence than its perpetrators.

Sometimes, no doubt, the choice of interpretive context was a cynical, calculated act. More often, it was innocent and automatic. When people's needs were served by violence, the maxims of the violent Mao came more readily to mind and seemed especially relevant. However, when people for some reason

opposed the violence, they could not believe that Mao would countenance it. They knew that he often had approved violence, but they told themselves that he had done so only when it was directed against real class enemies and only when the situation actually required it. Investing an idealized Mao with their own moral values, they did not believe that he would approve the arbitrary, excessive and misdirected acts of violence they witnessed in their daily lives. So it was the maxims of the peaceful Mao that sprang most readily to their minds, supplying a context of interpretation that turned the most savage language into a figure of speech.

It is clear, then, that we cannot explain the violent attitudes and actions of the Cultural Revolution as a simple product of violent language. That language could be read as an incitement to actual physical violence only with the aid of contextual assumptions that some people selected and others ignored. Those assumptions must count as codeterminants of the contrasting meanings people gave to the language. This constitutes a compelling objection to full linguistic determinism, which has to place exclusive emphasis on language as the determinant of meaning and hence of thought. Such determinism ignores the fact that words change their meaning and significance according to the context within which they are interpreted—a context that is not given, but chosen in ways that reflect our background knowledge, preconceptions, interests, and prejudices (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 132–151). So the patterning of our thoughts by words is always incomplete, mediated as it is by contextual factors that can vary from person to person. As a result, while everybody used semantically violent language, many people did not take it as a call for actual physical violence because they disarmed it with interpretive assumptions that reduced it to a harmless metaphor. Uniformity of language did not produce uniformity of thought. That, for students of linguistic engineering, is one significant lesson of the Cultural Revolution.

A second lesson is that a weak Whorfian position—that the

language we use influences our thought—is thoroughly sustainable. Many people did interpret the violent words as a call for physical violence. The fact that they did so only because they brought to the words a particular context of interpretation does not mean that the words were unimportant. Rather, it means that the words and the interpretive context together contributed to their support for physical violence. Moreover, violent words promoted violent attitudes and actions even when they were not interpreted literally. Modeling, conditioning, reference group effects, and dissonance affected the attitudes not only of those who took the curses literally, but also of those who interpreted them figuratively. These primitive affective and associational processes could increase hostility toward class enemies to the point where people who had hitherto opposed violence lost control, administering ferocious beatings. When this aroused dissonance, the easiest way to alleviate it was to invoke the violent Mao as a model and interpretive context. So the aggressors began, quite sincerely, to understand the curses literally, because they felt better when they did so.

Mao and his fellow symbol makers knew that language was a potent tool of persuasion and control. When they incited the masses against the Party, destroying the established mechanisms of coercion, they gambled on their ability to direct the Cultural Revolution by issuing instructions and manipulating words through the official press. At first, their faith in the power of language to communicate and persuade paid off. With great success, they mobilized the masses to attack the schoolteachers and intellectuals, to destroy the Four Olds, to dethrone the Party, and to mount a witch-hunt that for a time stimulated revolutionary consciousness. They also promoted a language of condemnation that dehumanized class enemies and encouraged many to beat them, torture them, and even kill them. Eventually, however, the limitations of trying to control the population simply by manipulating language became apparent. Loyalty and fear could make everyone use the same language, but nothing

could ensure that everyone brought to that language a common context of interpretation. So one person's revolutionary was another person's counterrevolutionary, and one person's call to physical violence was another person's call to strong but reasoned criticism. Language mightily influenced people's attitudes, but linguistic uniformity did not translate into uniformity of thought or action. The Cultural Revolution therefore descended into chaos.



*Institutionalizing
the Cultural
Revolution,
1968–1976*

Creating Referents and Controlling the Word

CHAIRMAN MAO'S free mobilization of the revolutionary masses had been intended to teach the Party a terrible lesson, to raise revolutionary consciousness, and to enforce conformity to his Thought. He had never had any intention of liberating the masses more than briefly from hierarchical control, or of instituting people's democracy on the model of the Paris Commune as he had promised in the "Sixteen Points." Once the rebel Red Guards and revolutionary workers had overwhelmed the Party, he quickly sought to reassert control through the PLA and through Revolutionary Committees, which were usually dominated by the PLA but included rehabilitated cadres and representatives of the revolutionary masses. Many Red Guards and some workers, however, resisted the new hierarchy, and anarchy continued in many parts of China. Finally, in July 1968 Mao personally and unequivocally ordered an end to all violence and subdued the dissidents using Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams consisting of workers or PLA members who had not been involved in the fighting, as well as regular PLA units and a specially created Central Support the Left force. Disorder still erupted periodically in some regions, but the country as a whole was progressively brought under centralized control (Liu 1976, 173–183; Lee 1978, 276–287).

Rebuilding the Institutions of Centralized Control

As Mao and his lieutenants restored hierarchical control, they effectively neutralized one source of disorder by expelling most

of the former Red Guards to the countryside. There they were to work as agricultural laborers, reforming their thoughts under the supervision of the poor and lower-middle peasants. Nearly all former Red Guards of middle or bad class origin—the backbone of the rebels who had led the attack on the Party—suffered this fate. Those who escaped were almost entirely of red class origin—workers' children assigned to factories or revolutionary cadres' children who joined the PLA (Unger 1982, 134–135). One way or the other, all the former Red Guards lost their freedom of action and all were subordinated directly to hierarchical structures whose ultimate authority was Chairman Mao.

The Chinese people were placed under a system of centralized segregation like that which had operated before the Cultural Revolution. Cross-trade alliances between students and workers were banned, and all independent organization was strictly forbidden. Unauthorized travel was prohibited, and people lived out their lives under the care and control of their work units and neighborhood committees. In the cities, the process was supervised by the PLA, with military men filling most of the crucial positions. After the death and disgrace of Lin Biao in 1971, however, the army became less influential, and rehabilitated or newly recruited cadres progressively regained their power. By then, the Revolutionary Committees had long become moribund, with reconstituted Party Committees resuming their former role after 1969. So the old structures of authority had reasserted themselves as the enforcers of Chairman Mao's new revolutionary order (Liu 1976, 176–183; Kahn-Ackermann 1982, 77; Liu 1986, 149–150; Dittmer and Chen 1981, 31; Dittmer 1987, 175–183; Lieberthal 1995, 117–118).

Consolidation of the new order was promoted by a massive Campaign to Purify the Class Ranks, which lasted from 1967 to 1969 and was conducted by special teams under the control of the Revolutionary Committees, Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams, and the PLA. The campaign was intended to root out cadres who were unreformed bourgeois power holders, renegades, and spies or who were members of the five black categories. The masses were called upon to expose and condemn

these targets, and as before were particularly hard on cadres who had earned their enmity by rigorously carrying out Party policy before the Cultural Revolution. However, popular anger was now tightly controlled, and upper-level leaders ultimately decided the fate of the accused (Lee 1978, 287–296). As the campaign developed momentum, it ruined the lives of millions of people, including many who were not cadres. Members of the black categories were hauled out for yet another round of persecution, and the hunt for spies and renegades caused countless false accusations and terrible punishments. The death toll reached at least the tens of thousands (Yan and Gao 1996; Chang 1992, 496).

The Campaign to Purify the Class Ranks was only the most far-reaching and savage of a succession of campaigns through which the Maoist leadership mobilized the masses against alleged class enemies, against leading comrades who had committed serious mistakes, or against revisionist beliefs such as the doctrine of bourgeois rights. Such campaigns included the One Strike and Three Antis movement, the Anti-Lin Biao campaign, the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius, the Campaign to Study the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, the Campaign to Criticize the Water Margin, and the Campaign to Criticize Deng Xiaoping. All these campaigns were seen, officially, as a continuation of the Cultural Revolution, institutionalizing its processes of criticism, self-criticism, and class conflict. The difference now was that the revolution was conducted in accordance with instructions issued by the Party Center. The era of free mobilization of the masses was over.

Creating Referents: The “Newborn Things,” Interpretation, and Persuasion

The institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution was intended to construct a society consistent with the revolution’s rhetoric—or at least with the ruling Maoists’ interpretation of that rhetoric. That society featured none of the Paris Commune-style democracy that the rebels had thought the rhetoric portended.

Instead, its most striking features were the “Newborn Things of the Cultural Revolution.” These, it was now officially determined, were the referents of Mao’s demand that the revolutionaries, having destroyed the old, should also create the new.

The Newborn Things were the official fulfillment of the anti-power holder rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution. They were the cornerstones of a new social order designed to prevent the emergence of a new bureaucratic and Party élite. Their purpose, however, was not to substitute rule by the people for rule by the power holders, as the Rebel Red Guards had hoped. It was to prevent the emergence of any group powerful enough to frustrate the wishes of the greatest power-holder of all—Mao Zedong himself.

The Newborn Things

Workers’ Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams. The Workers’ Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams consisted of workers, rather than members of the PLA. Early in the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution, the teams were placed in charge of schools, universities, theaters, and the entire realm of literature and culture. Their task was not only to restore order and to ensure that teaching, writing, painting, and the performing arts conformed to Mao’s Thought. It was also to put the experts in their place, to subordinate them to red-class supervisors with no relevant skills. Mao thereby hoped to prevent the reemergence of a revisionist élite whose claims sometimes rested on criteria independent of his Thought. In the ideology of the Cultural Revolution, this élite had conspired with Liu Shaoqi to pursue a “seventeen-year Black Line” between 1949 and 1966, poisoning the minds of a generation. The Workers’ Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams were intended to ensure that China’s intellectuals never again had the power to propagate a Black Line. They were among the most important officially designated referents of the Cultural Revolution’s egalitarian rhetoric.

Educated youth become workers and peasants. Education had played a vital part in élite formation in China, even after the

Communist victory in 1949. The obvious way to prevent intellectuals from regaining the positions of power from which they had been driven early in the Cultural Revolution was to break the connection between academic success and subsequent career paths. Accordingly, examination results were disregarded when students were assigned to jobs on leaving school. Many of the most brilliant students ended up as manual workers in factories and on farms. In all, somewhere between twelve million and eighteen million young urban Chinese were sent to the countryside (for varying estimates, see Bernstein 1977, 2; Unger 1982, 168, 169; Du 1993, 73; Yan and Gao 1996, 279). Children from bad-class or middle-class families, who were generally the most able students, nearly all ended up in manual occupations. However, with academic criteria irrelevant, children from red-class families had better prospects, especially the children of revolutionary cadres who used family connections to get good positions or join the PLA (see Unger 1982). This assault on meritocratic tendencies in Chinese society was seen as a practical application of the egalitarian rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution.

Worker-peasant-soldier students. Students no longer entered university directly from school, but were nominated by their urban work units or rural brigades and communes. Academic performance was entirely irrelevant to the selection process, which was based officially upon class background and political behavior. These criteria favored red-class students and ensured the exclusion of students belonging to the black categories. Those chosen sometimes had limited education and little academic ability. They were called worker-peasant-soldier students, and they were normally expected to return to their work unit or commune on graduation and to do their share of manual labor. Again, this was an attempt to prevent the reemergence of the meritocratic and technocratic élite that Mao believed had blocked the implementation of his policies and prevented China's transition to full socialism. It was of course represented as the fulfillment of the Cultural Revolution's egalitarian rhetoric.

Barefoot doctors. During the Cultural Revolution, doctors

shared the fate of other intellectuals. They were especially vulnerable because Mao publicly blamed them and the Health Ministry for the shortage of doctors in rural areas—conveniently ignoring the fact that after 1962 the overwhelming majority of new graduates were sent to rural areas (Cell 1977, 66–67; Chang 1992, 568; Unger 1982, 232). Red Guards drove many doctors from “bureaucratic élitist” hospitals and incarcerated them with other *niugui sheshen* in “cowsheds.” The doctors were then subjected to manual labor and thought reform in May 7 Cadre Schools and eventually sent to practice among the workers and peasants, treating ailments “at the front.” There was, however, still an acute shortage of doctors in rural areas—partly because the Cultural Revolution had disrupted the medical schools and health system (see Chang 1992, 574). Mao’s solution was to give peasants or rusticated urban youth a brief course of instruction, or perhaps just a copy of *A Barefoot Doctor’s Manual*, then call them “barefoot doctors.” “It is not at all necessary to have so much formal training,” he said. “They should mainly learn and raise their standard in practice” (Chang 1992, 568). This was entirely consistent with his well-established scorn for intellectual élites and book learning. “The more books you read, the more stupid you become,” he had once said (Chang 1992, 568). So the barefoot doctors became an internationally famous New-born Thing of the Cultural Revolution.

May 7 Cadre Schools. Named after a well-publicized letter from Mao to Lin Biao of 7 May 1966, these schools proliferated from October 1968 when the *People’s Daily* published a directive from Mao saying, “The rustication of great numbers of cadres is an excellent opportunity for them to study new things. This should apply to all cadres with the exception of the elderly and infirm. Cadres on duty should be sent down for labor by turns” (Yan and Gao 1996, 272). The cadre schools were rural labor camps supervised by PLA Propaganda Teams that reeducated government officials and intellectuals by compelling them to work like peasants while undergoing criticism and self-

criticism. Those who graduated from the cadre schools were regarded as rehabilitated and were then able to resume their normal duties. Cadres and intellectuals regarded as recalcitrant were refused graduation and kept in the camps. By the beginning of 1969 there were nearly three hundred camps in Guangdong Province alone, and more than a hundred thousand cadres had been sent to them for reeducation (Dittmer 1987, 178). On a nationwide basis, the number of incarcerations eventually exceeded a million (He and Yang 1998, 3). The cadre schools were justified as a means of keeping cadres in touch with the lives of the peasants, and in that way were portrayed as a referent of the Cultural Revolution's antibureaucratic rhetoric. In reality, the schools were just a means of keeping the cadres nervous, obedient, and politically correct. In the words of Wang Hongwen, a close associate of Mao and Jiang Qing, "All who disobey get sent to May 7 Cadre Schools for labor" (Yan and Gao 1996, 274). Neither Wang himself nor any other top official who remained in Mao's favor was ever sent down to the countryside or a May 7 Cadre School to get in touch with the lives of the peasants.

Interpretation and Persuasion

The Newborn Things involved massive social restructuring, which created actually existing referents for Maoist rhetoric. These referents made it much easier for cadres or soldiers to explain the flood of propagandistic messages people were required to study, discuss, and accept as part of Mao's process of continuing revolution. The interpretation of these messages was carefully controlled by the revival of centrally directed study, criticism, and self-criticism. The Revolutionary Committees ensured that in the cities every neighborhood committee and every work unit set up study groups. In extreme cases, people spent half their working hours on political study and discussion. More often they spent two or three afternoons a week. After that, there were sometimes political meetings organized

by the neighborhood committees at night. There were strenuous attempts to extend the system to the villages, but these were only partly, and often only temporarily, successful (Whyte 1974).

As before the Cultural Revolution, during study sessions cadres often explained the latest document, then required people to say things that agreed with its message and suggest ways in which it could be applied to their own lives. People were also required to make self-criticisms in the light of the document, and they were pressed to criticize others whose behavior did not measure up. Group leaders were then able to detect and correct misinterpretations of the document, ensuring substantial uniformity of interpretation. Study, criticism, and self-criticism also ensured that the information was thoroughly processed and that people linked it with other aspects of their thought and everyday lives. Thus were the persuasive messages in the study documents made easier to remember and apply.

The study groups instigated many of the other persuasive mechanisms discussed in chapter 1. They acted as reference groups to which people referred when deciding what to think; they altered attitudes and beliefs through operant conditioning by rewarding people with approval when they said correct things but criticizing them when they made mistakes; and when they prompted people to say correct things, they set in train processes of persuasion through self-perception as hitherto uncommitted people inferred their attitudes from what they had said.

The effectiveness of these mechanisms of persuasion, of course, depended on whether there were countervailing influences. They could fail utterly to convert people to views that too brutally negated their own experience or damaged their own interests. And their effectiveness could be reduced if the Maoist message was not the only message—if it was undermined by voices that preached other doctrines. The new Maoist hierarchy, however, ensured that in all public discourse its message was loud, insistent, and close to all-pervasive.

Controlling the Written Word

We saw in chapter 3 that in the absence of centralized control between 1966 and 1968, everyone continued to use the same revolutionary language, but that there were often violent disagreements about how to interpret it. So linguistic uniformity was compatible with radically different forms of revolutionary politics. It was also compatible with the birth of a semifree press in the form of the Red Guard tabloids. Some of them were highly influential and had an extensive national readership because they had more real news and less pure fiction than official publications. They printed rumors, informed gossip, and information leaked by factions within the Party élite. They also featured some effective investigative journalism, printing and analyzing information seized from Party records that the Maoist leadership would have preferred to keep secret. They practiced self-censorship, but they ignored official attempts to limit their numbers and to muzzle them. However, when Mao decided to reimpose centralized control in mid-1968, the fate of the independent Red Guard newspapers was sealed. In August 1968, Workers' Mao Thought Propaganda Teams occupied their offices and shut them down (Dittmer 1974, 318; Liu 1976, 117–118).

With its monopoly restored, the official press could be more effective in fostering a revolutionary conformity that was more than merely verbal. Its strategy was to promote Mao's Thought as the focus of a new revolutionary order. This was reflected in the rise in the number of quotations from Mao in the *People's Daily*. To plot the trend, I have counted the number of Mao quotations on the first two pages of the newspaper on the first day of every month from 1950 to 1976. Table 1 gives the annual totals of those quotations. The table shows that the number of Mao quotations rose sharply in 1967 as Mao, Lin Biao, and the Central Cultural Revolution Group sought to consolidate their victory over the Party and construct a new revolutionary order in which Mao's word was the symbol of unity. The quotations reached

their peak between 1968 and 1971 as peace was restored and full-scale institutionalized Mao worship was instituted throughout China. In those years, indeed, a typical issue of the *People's Daily* quoted Mao thirty-two times more often than did a typical issue in the period 1950–1964.

Between 1972 and 1975, the number of Mao quotations remained much higher than before the Cultural Revolution, but was far less than from 1968 to 1971. This was partly because the death and disgrace of Lin Biao in late 1971 discredited the excesses of Mao worship with which he was associated and partly because the moderate Zhou Enlai gained great power at the *People's Daily*—partially breaking the monopoly that Jiang

Table 1 Quotations from Mao Zedong on First Two Pages of *People's Daily* on First Day of Each Month (yearly totals 1950–1980)

Year	Quotations (no.)	Year	Quotations (no.)
1950	0	1966	18
1951	7	1967	89
1952	11*	1968	136
1953	6	1969	131
1954	3	1970	207
1955	4	1971	198
1956	2	1972	90
1957	1	1973	78
1958	6	1974	61
1959	4	1975	85
1960	7	1976	138
1961	6	1977	138
1962	6	1978	3
1963	8	1979	4
1964	7	1980	1
1965	11		

* One issue devoted three pages to printing the entire text of Mao's *On Contradiction*. This has been counted as a single quotation.

Qing, Yao Wenyan, Zhang Chunqiao, and their radical colleagues had enjoyed over China's media (Dittmer 1987, 188). However, Zhou died in January 1976 and his ally Deng Xiaoping was dismissed soon after, so with Jiang Qing and her colleagues in full control, Mao quotations once more returned to the same high level as in 1968–1969.

If the *People's Daily* quoted Mao more than ever before, so did everything else printed in China. This extended even to dictionaries. To illustrate this, I compare entries in the 1965 edition of *A New English-Chinese Dictionary* with matching entries in the new edition published after six years of revision in 1976, then reprinted with minor corrections until Deng Xiaoping's reforms consigned it to oblivion in the 1980s. Both dictionaries were the standard medium-sized English-Chinese reference works of their day, large enough to include sentences and phrases illustrating the use of English words whose meaning they explained. Table 2 compares illustrations of word use in the 1965 edition with usage in the 1976 edition.

The 1965 edition generally illustrated its entries with sentences and phrases typical of the spoken and written language of native speakers of English. The 1976 edition, by contrast, frequently translated into English the Mao quotations, slogans, and clichés that dominated Chinese political life. When it failed to find revolutionary illustrations of word use, it was not for want of trying.

The 1976 dictionary drummed into its users assumptions systematically linked to core concepts in the Maoist worldview. Consider the lessons on the nature of capitalist society contained in illustrative examples attached to words as diverse as “capital,” “sweep,” “unemployed,” “western,” “weary,” and “what”:

capital n. Capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt / the antagonism between labor and capital.

Table 2 Entries in Standard English-Chinese Dictionaries,
1965 and 1976

1965 Edition	1976 Edition
<p>learn v. He learns very fast / I am yet to learn / I learnt it from him / learn by rote.</p>	<p>learn v. Learn from Comrade Lei Feng [a model of revolutionary self-sacrifice] / from past mistakes to avoid future ones / learn warfare through warfare [Mao quote] / learn to swim [Mao quote].</p>
<p>apply v. Apply a rule to a case / apply a plaster to a wound / apply money to the payment of a debt.</p>	<p>apply v. It is necessary to master Marxist theory and apply it, master it for the sole purpose of applying it [Mao quote] / apply oneself to studying Chairman Mao's works.</p>
<p>teach v. Teach a child to read / this will teach you to speak the truth / teach a dog to beg.</p>	<p>teach v. The principle of officers teaching soldiers, soldiers teaching officers and soldiers teaching each other [Mao quote] / Chairman Mao teaches us to serve the people heart and soul / practice in struggle has taught us that unity means strength.</p>
<p>intellectual n. The intellectuals of a country.</p>	<p>intellectual n. Intellectuals must integrate themselves with the workers and peasants.</p>
<p>line n. Just a line to tell you that . . . / I am in the grocery line / what line (of business) are you in? / know when to draw a line.</p>	<p>line n. The Party line / draw a clear line of demarcation between the enemy and ourselves / resolutely wipe out any aggressors who dare to cross the line into our territory / struggle between the two lines.</p>
<p>team n. Football team / team spirit / inspection team.</p>	<p>team n. A Workers' Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team.</p>

- exploit** v. The workers in capitalist society are cruelly exploited by the capitalists.
- what** pron. They are what is called “the lowly” in capitalist society.
- unemployed** a. Unemployed workers in capitalist society.
- unemployment** n. Unemployment is increasing in the capitalist countries.
- sweep** v. Another storm of economic crisis has swept over the capitalist world.
- western** a. The decaying Western capitalist society.
- weary** a. Many young people in capitalist countries are weary of the way of life there.

These illustrations associated capitalism with a series of inter-related attributes, suggesting to dictionary users a schematic model of capitalist society that depicted it as cruel, exploitative, antiworker, crisis-ridden, and decaying. This was in fact precisely the schema-stereotype of capitalist society suggested by the Chinese Communist Party’s propaganda from the time of its foundation in 1921. The schema conditioned people to hate capitalist society by linking it with opprobrious terms. It was also linked to a body of theory explaining the nature of capitalist exploitation, the role of capitalism in world history, and the inevitability of its destruction at the hands of the proletariat. So regular users of the 1976 dictionary were being systematically reminded of the theoretical assumptions of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist theory.

It is instructive to compare what the 1976 dictionary says about capitalist society with what it says about the Communist Party. The qualities of that Party are stated or implied in sentences illustrating the use of words as diverse as “party,” “live,” “attribute,” “what,” “whatever,” and “wherever”:

- party** n. Ours is a great Party, a glorious Party, a correct Party. [This was a Mao quotation.]
- live** v. Without the Party and Chairman Mao I could not have lived to see today’s happiness.

attribute v. We attribute all our successes to the wise leadership of the Communist Party of China.

what pron. To fulfill the task requires of us great efforts, and, what is more important, loyalty to the Party.

whatever pron. We'll do whatever the Party calls upon us to do.

wherever adv. We will go wherever the Party directs us.

These attributes had a consistent pattern, suggesting to dictionary users a schema-stereotype of the Communist Party as great, glorious, correct, wise, a source of happiness and joy, and deserving of loyalty and obedience. These positive attributes reflected the fact that the Communist Party was once again regarded, officially, as a pliant tool of Mao Zedong's Thought, charged with guiding the masses' revolutionary activism. The language of the dictionaries, like all other language during the Cultural Revolution, served the current political line.

Control of the written word extended, less systematically and effectively, to private correspondence. Letters to and from foreign countries were frequently opened by the Public Security Service, and in any case were relatively rare because people with foreign connections were suspected of being spies. Domestic mail was monitored less systematically by the central authorities, but the Party secretaries who controlled the work units sometimes exercised their right to inspect incoming and outgoing correspondence. They could also, if they suspected that something was amiss, order a search of people's private belongings for hidden correspondence or anything else.

Most people very sensibly ensured that everything they wrote could withstand scrutiny. One way of doing this was to follow very carefully the prescribed revolutionary formulae. Letters always began with Long live Chairman Mao, with a quotation from his works, or with a revolutionary slogan. Every letter also had to end on a revolutionary note. Sometimes this was done with another slogan, such as Long live the success of

Chairman Mao's Revolutionary Line! Frequently, though, the revolutionary tone was achieved by adapting a traditional formula. Before 1949, letters to a person who was old or of higher status than the sender often ended with the words *ci zhi jingli*, which is best translated as "with high respect." This formula lingered on after the Communist victory, but during the Cultural Revolution it was abandoned entirely. The reason was, of course, that the Cultural Revolution was among other things a revolt of the young against much older people in authority. In this context, the formula expressed precisely those values against which the Cultural Revolution was directed. As Ji, Kuiper, and Shu (1990) argue, the formula was therefore adapted in three ways to make it properly revolutionary: (1) *ci zhi geming jingli!* (With revolutionary greetings!), (2) *ci zhi wuchanjieji jingli!* (With proletarian greetings!), and (3) *ci zhi wuchanjieji geming jingli!* (With proletarian revolutionary greetings!). Used with *geming* (revolutionary) and *wuchanjieji* (proletarian), *jingli* loses the connotations of respect associated with its use in the old formula. It means simply "salutations" or "greetings" and has nothing to do with saluting or greeting a superior. So age and social status were irrelevant to the employment of the new formulae. Instead, political standing or class status were decisive. People who used the first formula (With revolutionary greetings) had to be recognized as possessing a genuinely revolutionary ideology. This generally excluded those with bad class backgrounds, for they were widely regarded as unpromising revolutionary material. Those who used the second and third formulae had in addition to be classified as workers to justify the adjective *wuchanjieji*. Finally, these formulae were used to address only comrades—those who belonged to the people rather than the enemy. Those with bad class backgrounds were usually suspected of being secret class enemies, so they were addressed with the new formulae only in those rare cases in which they had managed to establish their revolutionary credentials.

Equally pervasive were the revolutionary formulae analyzed

by Ji, Kuiper, and Shu (1990) that replaced traditional deference formulae incompatible with the new political climate. Before 1949 educated Chinese had sometimes ended a formal speech or letter with a deference formula such as *qing yu haihan* (Please be magnanimous enough to forgive) or *qing duo baohan* (Please be magnanimous enough to tolerate). Semantically these formulae implied that their user had made errors or had shortcomings and was asking to be excused; however, they were not necessarily intended apologetically. They simply showed the user's modesty and were thus a form of deference behavior. In Mao's China, however, mock modesty was not enough. Nor was error to be tolerated or forgiven: "things that are wrong and erroneous must be criticized and corrected." In small group meetings, individuals were regularly forced to express their views, invite criticism, then criticize the views of others, using Mao's thought as their guide. So the traditional deference formulae were replaced by three new ones more in keeping with the practice of revolutionary criticism: (1) *qing piping bangzhu* (Please criticize and help), (2) *qing piping zhizheng* (Please criticize and correct), (3) *huanying piping* (I welcome criticism). These new formulae were well established by 1966, but because the Cultural Revolution stirred up a frenzy of criticism and self-criticism they popped up more frequently than ever before. Like their predecessors, they were used at the end of a speech or letter to indicate the user's modesty. However, instead of asking to be excused, the user asked for criticism. In revolutionary China, all were expected to invite criticism to ensure that their words and their lives were faithful to the letter and the spirit of Mao's Thought.

Correspondents had not only to observe revolutionary conventions when opening and closing letters, but to censor the letters' contents and ensure that they were larded with stock expressions of revolutionary piety. Correspondents who had been locked up for political mistakes were particularly careful, but almost everyone played it safe, as in the following letter from a student sent to the countryside:

September 15, 1969

LONG LIVE CHAIRMAN MAO

Hi Dad!

I got your letter and have read it carefully. I'd like to share a few of my own thoughts with you below, and hope you'll criticize and correct my errors.

At the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the Communist Party, our great leader Chairman Mao brilliantly pointed out that on the basis of Marxist-Leninist theory on class and class struggle, the "four existences" would remain during the entire transition period in a socialist society. He stressed that we must discuss the "two-line struggle" every year, every month, every day. [There follows a long discussion of Mao's Thought and current political developments.]

. . . There are many intellectuals in the company, and hence many problems. I want to constantly strengthen my ideological reform and endeavour to season myself so that I will become a person who will give Chairman Mao no worries.

Take care of your health, Dad!

Long live the success of Chairman Mao's revolutionary line!

Your son,

XX

P.S. I received the things you asked my classmate to bring.

P.P.S. It's harvest time already and we're busy again. And it's beginning to get cold here. (Feng 1991, 9–11)

Looking back in the 1980s, the author of this letter said, "Don't you think that letter's weird? That's how we students wrote back then. Every last one of us. And those things weren't written for outsiders, but for our own families. Revolution became part of everything" (Feng 1991, 11). Nearly all Chinese people who retain letters from the years of the Cultural Revolution now regard them as weird. But they all know why they wrote like that. Quite apart from the fact that some were enthusiastic revolutionaries, they all knew something else: that to write a nonpolitical letter was to commit the bourgeois error of subordinating the political to the personal. So almost everyone

who wrote letters communicated through the discourse of Maoism, using correct political language to express correct political sentiments. People who wanted to extract personal information from the correspondence often had to read between the lines. Only a few brave—and very foolish—souls wrote letters that flouted the conventions.

Orchestrating the Spoken Word: Linguistic Rituals and Mao Worship

The linguistic rituals of Mao worship were associated with a great campaign called the Three Loyalties and the Four Boundless Loves. The Three Loyalties were loyalty to Chairman Mao, loyalty to his Thought, and loyalty to his revolutionary line; the Four Boundless Loves were love for Chairman Mao, love for his Thought, love for his proletarian revolutionary line, and love for his proletarian revolutionary headquarters. People had repeatedly to show their boundless loyalty and love toward all these things. Lin Biao himself set the example, showing his loyalty to Mao's Thought by saying that even though he could not at times "follow the Chairman's thoughts," he still acted in accordance with them: "we must carry out not only those instructions [whose rationale] we understand, but also those [whose rationale] we fail to understand for the moment, and must try to understand them in the course of carrying them out." There was no danger in blind obedience, for Lin was convinced, or so he said, that "every sentence of Chairman Mao's works is a Truth, one single sentence of his surpasses ten thousand of ours" (quoted in Dittmer 1987, 118).

Under Lin's influence, massive statues of Mao began to appear in public places. I was one of the millions of Chinese children photographed in front of such statues, clutching the Little Red Book to my breast. All over China, places associated with Mao's life were sanctified, becoming shrines visited by pilgrims. Worship of Mao was also encouraged by numerous exhibition halls, facing toward the revolutionary east, which told the

story of his life. Some of these were enormous. In Tianjin, for example, the railway station became a Mao Zedong Thought lecture hall. It was dominated by a huge statue of Mao, together with over a hundred portraits and hundreds of quotations and posters. Like countless other children, I was taken to visit it, paying homage to China's savior.

These changes to the physical environment reminded people constantly about Mao and his teachings, as did the multitude of verbal rituals that proliferated during the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution. On getting out of bed in the morning, people were supposed to set the tone of the day by saying something like Carry the revolution through to the end! or Fight selfishness! For the Chinese people, well drilled in the assumptions of Mao Zedong Thought, this latter slogan did not mean what it would have meant to a Christian or a Buddhist. Rather, it meant they had to devote all their energies to the revolution instead of fulfilling merely personal needs or desires. In practical terms, this meant that educated youth who were serving the people as peasants or factory hands had to stop hankering after better jobs; that peasants had to stop supplementing their incomes with private production, rather than devoting themselves to collective labor; that young men and women had to contract marriages that expressed revolutionary commitment, rather than selfish, bourgeois love; and that once married, they had to accept cheerfully any instruction that they live apart, building socialism in different parts of China.

When people went to bed, they were meant to reaffirm their dedication to the revolution with a slogan like Think of Chairman Mao day and night! or Never forget class struggle! The former slogan did not mean thinking of Mao's benevolent face, but keeping his teachings constantly in mind while recalling how he had saved the workers and peasants from oppression and made them the masters of their own country. Never forgetting class struggle meant remembering the bitter past, hating unreformed members of the black categories, scrutinizing one's associates for signs that they might have links to class enemies or might

themselves be class enemies, and struggling ruthlessly against those who took the enemy's side.

Almost everyone knew what these slogans meant. It would have been nearly impossible not to know, given that they were repeatedly explained, used in numerous contexts, and reinforced by the carefully contrived structures of daily life and myriad cues from the physical environment. It was another thing altogether to get people to incorporate them into their private lives. Try as they might, the Maoist leaders could not make people into ciphers, mouthing every slogan on cue. Within the family and among close friends, sloganeering could be embarrassing if it was ostentatious or contrived. Those who actually uttered these slogans audibly first thing in the morning or just before bed at night were probably a minority. Mao's totalitarian vision had a devastating effect on the Chinese people, but at no stage did the practice fully match the ideal.

Verbal rituals became part of the routine of everyday life. The model was often the army, where the rites of worship had gone to extraordinary lengths. In Chen Village, for example, peasant families adopted the military custom of worshipping Mao before every meal. Led by the family head, they bowed to his portrait, recited quotations from Mao, sang "The East Is Red," then recited a Maoist grace-before-meals. The following grace was the most common:

We respectfully wish a long life to the reddest red sun in our hearts, the great leader Chairman Mao. And to Vice Chairman Lin Biao's health: may he forever be healthy. Having been liberated by the land reform we will never forget the Communist Party, and in revolution we will forever follow Chairman Mao! (Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1984, 170)

The Maoist grace was recited only in some regions; it was almost unknown in the predominantly academic community in which I lived in Tianjin. However, an attempt was made to ensure that other rituals became universal. Throughout China, for instance, Revolutionary Committees sought to impose the

custom of greeting comrades with a shared revolutionary quotation. To give an example, if the person initiating the greeting said, "Sailing the seas depends on the helmsman," the person addressed was supposed to complete the quotation by responding, "Making revolution depends on Mao Zedong's Thought" (see Chang 1992, 531). This made Mao worship the common currency of social relationships, and it placed pressure on people to ensure that they knew all the common Mao quotations by heart. However, the ritual did not have as much effect as the Maoist leadership desired, for among family and friends most people continued the traditional *ni hao* (how are you?) or *chi fan le ma* (have you eaten?). They saved the quotation greeting for more formal contexts or for encounters with people who might expect it. In this way, the public language of the Chinese people maintained considerable divergence from their private language.

The Cultural Revolution also influenced greeting formulae in the schools. Before the Cultural Revolution, when the teacher entered the classroom the class monitor told the students to stand up. Teacher and students then exchanged greetings using the following fixed, formulaic expressions:

TEACHER: *tongxuemen hao!*
 students well
 "Hello, students."
 STUDENTS: *laoshi hao!*
 teacher well
 "Hello, teacher."

Semantically, there was no difference between the *hao* that greeted the teacher and the *hao* that greeted the students, but the two greetings were distinguished by contexts that affected their relative significance. The *hao* uttered by the students occurred just after the students rose as a mark of respect, the accompanying *laoshi* (teacher) still carried some of its traditional prestige, and the teacher was the only person in the room

who was greeted as an individual. So the words uttered by the students were a mark of respect as well as a greeting, whereas the teacher's words were just a greeting.

The Cultural Revolution changed all this. When the schools reopened in late 1968, most of the teachers were people who had only recently been labeled by the students as monsters and demons, bourgeois reactionary authorities, and so on. They were also, by definition, intellectuals in the Chinese sense of the term and had been added to a revised and extended version of the black categories, which now included not only landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and Rightists, but also renegades, enemy agents, and capitalist roaders, with intellectuals ninth and last. To show the contempt in which they were held, they were designated the "stinking ninth category," or simply "stinking number nine." It was therefore inappropriate for students to greet teachers in the traditional respectful manner. The problem was solved by abolishing greetings at the beginning of the class altogether.

Before the first class of each day, both students and teachers engaged in the ritual of "asking for instructions in the morning." This ritual was also practiced in offices, factories, and even among peasants in the villages. Students and teachers, like workers or peasants, stood in front of Mao's portrait and raised their Little Red Books head high; then, in response to introductory words from a revolutionary leader, they chanted a litany whose first part went like this:

LEADER: *rang women jing zhu Mao zhixi*

"Let us respectfully wish Chairman Mao . . ."

PEOPLE: . . . *wanshouwujiang!* (said three times)

" . . . ten thousand years without limit!"

The expression "*wanshouwujiang*" (ten thousand years without limit) was a traditional idiom most appropriately translated as "an infinitely long life!" It was once used only as a form of greeting for the Chinese emperors, whose elevated status Mao had by

now far surpassed. It was followed immediately by the second part of the litany, which paid a less imperial tribute to Mao's good student and designated successor, the sickly Lin Biao:

LEADER: *zhu Lin fu zhuxi shenti jiankang* . . .

"Wish Vice-chairman Lin good health . . ."

PEOPLE: . . . *yongyuan jiankang!* (said twice)

" . . . Good health forever!"

Those present then sang "The East Is Red" or perhaps "Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman" and read quotations from the Little Red Book to guide their actions during the day. Significantly, in schools, the student monitor led the proceedings. The teacher was reduced to the status of one worshiper among many, reflecting the lowered status of the traditional intellectuals and bureaucrats Mao blamed for the frustration of his plans.

People in a lot of urban workplaces, some schools, and many rural areas supplemented the ritual of "asking for instructions in the morning" with the practice of "reporting back in the evening" (Chang 1992, 530–531; Liang and Shapiro 1983, 179–180; Min 1993, 54; Feng 1991, 96; Gao 1987, 317–318; Jin 1998, 200; Huang 1996, 144). After completing the day's activities, they assembled in front of Chairman Mao's portrait, sang songs of Mao worship, then confessed their shortcomings in the light of the principles of Mao's Thought: "Chairman Mao, today I did this and made such and such a mistake" (Feng 1991, 96). Most people of course tried to avoid confessing anything really serious, and the politically correct confession became a well practiced art. But even when people just went through the motions, they gave public consent to the idea that in all their actions they were responsible to Mao and that his Thought was the criterion of right and wrong.

The verbal rituals of Mao worship gave religious satisfaction to devoted revolutionaries but most provided little excitement. However, at schools, universities, workplaces, and even on the streets, worship became fun for the nimble footed as teachers

and cadres popularized loyalty dances. Before work, after work, during the morning break, at political meetings, or whenever they felt like it, people formed a big circle and danced while singing a hymn of love and praise:

Beloved Chairman Mao, beloved Chairman Mao,
 You are the Red Sun in our hearts.
 We have so many words in our hearts
 Which we want to tell you.
 Tens of thousands of red hearts
 Turn toward Beijing.
 Tens of thousands of smiling faces
 Turn toward the Red Sun.
 We wish our Great Leader Chairman Mao
 A long long life, a long long life.

The loyalty dance was taught even to the peasants in the south of China, where there was no tradition of rural dancing. Clumsy and embarrassed, they performed the dance and sang the accompanying song at their evening political meetings (Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1984, 169).

Once the Cultural Revolution was over, many people were quick to describe these forms of Mao worship as part of a deification movement (*zaoshen yundong*). They were right, of course, but the rituals and formulae that deified Mao and legitimated his rule were much more than this. From the point of view of the rulers, the scripts were a way of telling the people—those same revolutionary masses in whose name the Maoist leaders ruled—what to think. Min Anchee, chosen to star in the film version of the revolutionary opera *Red Azalea*, attributes the following sentiments to the film's director, who was both her lover and a senior cultural official close to Jiang Qing:

Who do you think people are? They are walking corpses. What do people know? The only thing they know is fear. That is why they need authority. They need to be told what to do. They need a wise emperor. It's been that way for five thousand years. They believe what rulers make them believe. That is why there are intellectual

formulas. The operas are a way to shape their minds, to keep their minds where they should be. (Min 1993, 237)

What applied to the verbal formulae of the operas, of course, applied to all the formulae of the Cultural Revolution. Formulae were simple, they could be learned by heart, they were easily transmitted to China's hundreds of millions of illiterates, and anyone who refused to speak in the proper formulaic fashion could be identified instantly as a potential class enemy and punished. So formulae, as well as influencing minds, were a powerful instrument for controlling behavior. And behavior, through modeling effects and reference group effects, in turn exerted still more influence on minds.

Formulae, too, were agents of persuasion and control that abetted Mao's purpose of chastening and coercing the pre-Cultural Revolution élites. University professors, school-teachers, writers, doctors, scientists, and bureaucrats could easily have coped with more sophisticated methods of ideological instruction. Instead, they were forced to memorize the same formulae as everyone else, then recite political platitudes and worship Mao in the same words as illiterate peasants. Under Mao, all Chinese were equal, subject to his will. This universal fact, which explains the sycophancy of Lin Biao, the forbearance of Jiang Qing, and the submissiveness of Party leaders, was expressed and enforced by the universal recitation of the formulae.

From the point of view of the ruled, the formulae represented the hope of safety. In a country where everything was political, the only totally safe political action was to promote and recite the formulae of Mao worship. Incantation of the formulae started at the top, where Mao's immediate subordinates and the highest Party officials set the example. Under them, the Revolutionary Committees discovered that "the safest and most rewarding course of action was to do nothing, except promote the worship of Mao—and, of course, continue to engage in political persecutions" (Chang 1992, 531). For ordinary people, the

formulae could be a safe way of expressing a genuine devotion to Mao—a mode of worship with none of the risks associated with improvised expressions of commitment. For believers, they were a satisfying currency of social interchange, a reassurance that others were believers too. For unbelievers, they were a mask, hiding deviant thoughts. For everyone, they were a passport that had to be presented many times a day—a passport to continued survival.

It was easy to make people recite the formulae, at least in public. It was much more difficult to determine, without further guidance, what their implications were. When those who performed the loyalty dance told Mao, “We have so many words in our hearts / That we want to tell you,” they were uncertain what words, outside the formulae, were politically acceptable. When the peasants of Chen Village vowed at mealtimes that “in revolution we will forever follow Chairman Mao,” they had many conflicting ideas about what direction to take. So often they had seen an earlier policy contradicted by a later one, with the earlier policy condemned as revisionist, left adventurist, or whatever. The problem arose from the fact that both policies had been promulgated in Mao’s name. So the formulae had no definite implications for action, and once the free mobilization phase of the Cultural Revolution had ended in mid-1968, ordinary people did not dare decide for themselves what road Chairman Mao wanted them to travel. They had all, at various times, been proved wrong. To follow their Great Leader, they needed explicit instructions for every step they took, and they still had to be watched and corrected because they so often misinterpreted those instructions. The Maoist dream of a revolutionary people retooled by formulae, propaganda, and directives to follow the correct path remained a fantasy. Words could be translated into action only under the supervision of a coercive hierarchy. This was the reality that underpinned the new structures of authority during the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution.

Controlling Culture

Literature and Dramatic Art

RULERS WITH TOTALITARIAN ambitions have always understood the importance of controlling the literary imagination. In China, to an unusual extent, this control went beyond the supervision of content and extended increasingly to the regimentation of linguistic form. The process reached its peak during the Cultural Revolution, when characters in novels and operas were required to speak in standardized scripts appropriate to their class character and ideological stance. Literature modeled the language that people were expected to use in their daily lives—language intended to transform the consciousness of everyone who used it.

Maoist Literary Theory and Cultural Revolutionary Practice

The control of literature and dramatic art during the Cultural Revolution was based on the dominant line of thinking in Mao's celebrated "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art," delivered in May 1942 (Mao 1942b). I say "the dominant line of thinking" because Mao, in characteristic fashion, wanted to have it both ways. On the one hand, he argued that "revolutionary literature and art should create a variety of characters out of real life," that they should be based on familiarity with "the rich, lively language of the masses," and that they should avoid "the

'poster and slogan style,' which is correct in political viewpoint but lacking in artistic power" (Mao 1942b, 254, 266, 276). On the other hand, most of what Mao said fostered precisely the poster and slogan style he abhorred:

There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics. Proletarian literature and art are part of the whole proletarian revolutionary cause; they are, as Lenin said, cogs and wheels in the whole revolutionary machine. Therefore, Party work in literature and art . . . is subordinated to the revolutionary tasks set by the Party in a given revolutionary period. (Mao 1942b, 271)

He argued that "each class in every class society has its own political and artistic criteria" and that "all classes in all class societies invariably put the political criterion first and the artistic criterion second." Accordingly, he condemned reactionary works with artistic merit as particularly "poisonous," directed proletarian writers to "eulogize not the bourgeoisie but the proletariat," and announced, "All the dark forces harming the masses of the people must be exposed and all the revolutionary struggles of the masses of the people must be extolled; this is the fundamental task of revolutionary writers and artists" (Mao 1942b, 275, 278).

These views fostered a literature that depicted a world in which the only important thing was the struggle between righteous revolutionaries and evil reactionaries. The simplistic dichotomy between these two camps was reinforced by Mao's denial that oppressors and oppressed shared a common human nature or that there was a love of humanity that transcended class boundaries. "In class society," he said at Yan'an, "there is only human nature of a class character; there is no human nature above classes." As for love of humanity, he decreed that "in a class society there can only be class love" and that "we cannot love enemies" (Mao 1942b, 256, 276–277).

This line of argument in the Yan'an talks had devastating implications for literature and art. It suggested that writers should confine themselves to narrow, revolutionary themes,

that they should caricature class enemies as one-dimensional embodiments of evil, and that they should depict workers and peasants as ideologically uniform repositories of revolutionary virtue. It was in constant tension with the creative spirit, even among writers who were devout Communists, and those charged with policing the Party's line on literature and art interpreted it more restrictively in some periods than in others.

Many of the cadres who formulated the Party's cultural policy were Yan'an veterans. They included Hu Qiaomu, who as Mao's secretary had helped to draft the Yan'an talks; Lin Mohan, a leading member of the Central Propaganda Department and vice-minister of culture; and He Qifang, director of the Literary Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The most important, however, was Zhou Yang, deputy director of the Central Propaganda Department, an alternate member of the Central Committee, and a leading figure in numerous cultural organizations.

During the early and mid-1950s, Zhou and his colleagues enforced literary conformity and purged some of China's leading literary figures, including the poet Ai Qing and the writer and critic Hu Feng. In conformity with Party policy, they relaxed the pressure during the Hundred Flowers period, reapplied it when the Anti-Rightist campaign began, then relaxed it once more in 1961–1962 during the reaction against the Great Leap Forward. When Mao demanded a crackdown after August 1962, they tightened the restrictions, but showed little enthusiasm for a widespread purge of those who had spoken out. Indeed, they were not aware that savage and retrospective repression was what Mao wanted, because his instructions were characteristically vague. This was their undoing. They had long been envied and mistrusted by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, whose attempts to intervene in cultural matters they had rebuffed. Now, unknowingly, they had earned the enmity of Mao himself. When Mao launched the Cultural Revolution, he made the Party's vulnerable cultural sector his initial target. He and his supporters savagely attacked the Central Propaganda Department and the

Ministry of Culture, and Zhou Yang, Hu Qiaomu, He Qifang, Lin Mohan, and countless other cultural officials, writers, critics, artists, musicians, actors, and directors were purged and subjected to a reign of terror.

The chief beneficiaries of the Cultural Revolution were Jiang Qing, Yao Wenyuan, and the other radicals, many of them ideological and cultural specialists, who were Mao's adjutants in the destruction of the Communist Party. From 1966 to 1976, they dominated cultural production, using their power to create a "new" literature. That literature was based squarely on the most restrictive interpretation of Mao's Yan'an talks and on "the combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism" that Mao had recommended in 1958 (cf. Yang 1995b). For Jiang Qing and her coterie, the test of revolutionary realism was correspondence with the claims of current revolutionary theory, not correspondence with pretheoretical observations of real life, which in their eyes often obscured deeper truths (cf. Mowry 1973, 59; Yang 1995b). The result was a new literature that was more ideological, more stereotyped, more divorced from reality and humanity than anything that had gone before. Mao did nothing to stop the disaster, but as he neared death he complained that "people are afraid to write articles or plays, and we have no novels and no poems" (Leys 1978, xiv). Steeped in the Chinese classics, he had no taste for the literary desolation he had done so much to create.

The new literature was, as Mao implied, very slow in coming. Fear silenced writers and publishers alike, for nearly all pre-Cultural Revolution literary works had been declared poisonous weeds, and most writers had been persecuted as counterrevolutionaries or monsters and demons. From the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 until early 1972 not a single novel was published in China (Yang 1995a). Indeed, for a time few books of any sort were published except for Mao's own works (Liu 1971, 149). When new literary and cultural works began to emerge, they did so in a carefully controlled trickle, a mere fraction of China's pre-Cultural Revolution output. In the

late 1950s and early 1960s, for example, the country had produced scores of feature films every year, but between 1966 and the end of 1976 only some half a dozen new feature films were approved for release (Liu 1971, 157–167, 200; Dittmer 1987, 246). Similarly, although in 1960 about 1,330 official periodicals had been published in China, in 1973 there were only about 50 (Siu and Stern 1983, xlv–xlix). This was partly a result of the fact that many talented people were afraid to write. It also reflected the caution of publishers, who judged manuscripts according to strict criteria. Those laid down by a Guangdong journal were typical:

Our publication welcomes all manuscripts which fulfill the following conditions:

A. All novels, essays, articles, works of art which present in a healthy way a revolutionary content. They must: (1) exalt with deep and warm proletarian feelings the great Chairman Mao; exalt the great, glorious and infallible Chinese Communist Party; exalt the great victory of the proletarian revolutionary line of Chairman Mao; (2) following the examples of the Revolutionary Model operas, strive with zeal to create peasant and worker heroes; (3) on the theme of the struggle between the two lines, reflect the people's revolutionary struggle, which has lasted for half a century under the leadership of our Party, and, especially, the unbroken revolutionary struggle fought under the aegis of the dictatorship of the proletariat; reflect the unanimous struggle of the population of our province following the direction given by Chairman Mao, and the unfolding of that struggle in its victorious progression.

B. In artistic and literary theory: we welcome texts that have a mass, revolutionary, and militant character . . . [etc., etc.] (*Guangdong wenyi*, no. 1, 1973; quoted in Leys 1978, xxvii, n. 5)

All fiction and literary criticism conformed rigorously to these criteria, which affected not only content but also language. Yang (1995a) has demonstrated this convincingly with respect to the meager total of 120 novels published during the Cultural Revolution—all of which appeared between February 1972 and the downfall of Jiang Qing and her allies in October 1976. Comparing a carefully matched sample of Cultural Revo-

lution novels with their pre-Cultural Revolution counterparts, he discovered that they quoted Mao directly 11 times as often as their predecessors, referred to him or his Thought 6.2 times as often, used generalized words associated with class struggle ("bourgeoisie," "class enemy," and so on) 5.5 times as often, and used ideological words ending in the phoneme *zhuyi* ("ism" as in "socialism") 3.9 times as often. These changes matched the wider politicization of language during the Cultural Revolution and reflected the novels' increasing focus on class conflict and ideological struggle.

In his "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" Mao had argued that "life as reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life" (Mao 1942b, 266). With Mao's support, Jiang Qing pushed this argument to the limit during the Cultural Revolution. It justified the creation of peasant and worker heroes who transcended the imperfections of people in everyday life—heroes who embodied the ideal of selfless revolutionaries empowered by total dedication to Mao's invincible Thought. These heroes were models for emulation, and both novels and dramatic productions had to highlight their role in accordance with Jiang Qing's doctrine of the three prominences (*san tuchu*): "among all characters, emphasize the positive personalities; among the positive, portray the heroic ones; and among the heroic, single out the central heroic figure" (Dittmer and Chen 1981, 55). These positive and heroic figures (*zhengmian renwu*) had to be perfect—tall, great, and complete (*gao da quan*). They engaged in ultimately victorious class struggle against villainous characters (*fanmian renwu*), whose unredeemed wickedness reflected their class allegiance. The villains, however, were never to be the focus of attention. Jiang Qing made this clear in her doctrine of the three accompaniments (*san peichen*), which prescribed that the villain's role was to highlight the virtues of the central heroic figure (see Dittmer and Chen 1981, 55).

These literary doctrines had a big impact. In Yang's (1995a) sample, for instance, words uttered by the central heroic characters took up almost twice the proportion of text in Cultural Revolution novels as in pre-Cultural Revolution ones. These heroic characters, as standard-bearers of the revolution, used a higher proportion of ideological language than anyone else—43 ideological words per thousand compared with 31.5 for the leading young woman in each novel and 26.2 for old poor peasants. Their language showed that they were true standard-bearers of the revolution, as required by the three prominences. Their linguistic virtue was highlighted by the villains who, in accordance with the spirit of the three accompaniments, showed their bad politics through linguistic vices. The villains used ideological language less than anyone else (17.4 ideological words per thousand); and while in a typical novel the good characters collectively mentioned Mao more than a hundred times, the villains *never* mentioned him. In the simplistic world of the novels, revolutionaries and class enemies were easily distinguished: one had only to listen to their language.

Dramatic Art: The Modern Revolutionary Opera

The most influential literary texts of the Cultural Revolution were not the novels, but the scripts of Jiang Qing's model revolutionary operas (*yangbanxi*). From as early as 1966 stories and songs from the operas were broadcast on radio, and 1970 saw the beginning of an especially energetic campaign to popularize them. Indeed, in 1971–1972, the winter-spring schedule of the Central People's Broadcast Station suggested that at least two hours a day be devoted to teaching the songs of the operas (Mowry 1973, 22). In workplaces and residential areas throughout most of China, millions of loudspeakers brought radio broadcasts of the ideologically charged songs to the Chinese people. Party committees in schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods encouraged people to learn the songs and sing them frequently. Since most traditional songs were banned, many people were

grateful to have something new to sing. Nearly all Chinese heard the songs, and they could usually sing some of them. Most people also saw filmed versions of the operas in movie theaters, on portable screens in halls or village squares, and in some cases on television. Finally, operatic troupes gave countless live performances in cities and sometimes even in villages. Every detail of the performances had to follow the model, and any deviation—a word, a movement, the detail of a costume—was regarded as the work of a class enemy trying to “sabotage the revolutionary opera” (Guo 1990, 351–352).

The revolutionary model operas had their cultural origins in forms of revolutionary theater dating from the Yan'an period. Their political inspiration, though, came from Mao and Jiang Qing. As early as 1944, Mao had complained that “the old opera (and all the old literature and art which are divorced from the people) presents the people as though they were dirt, and the stage is dominated by lords and ladies and their pampered sons and daughters” (quoted in Goldman 1981, 76–77). Then in 1963 he returned to the attack, complaining that “operas abound in feudal emperors, kings, generals, ministers, scholars, and beautiful women, but the Ministry of Culture doesn't care a bit.” He ordered the ministry to “conduct investigations, and put things right in real earnest” (quoted in Goldman 1981, 77). At the same time, he gave his full support to Jiang Qing's attempts to produce model revolutionary operas based firmly on the principles laid down in his “Yan'an Talks on Literature and Art” (cf. Mackerras 1975, 168–169).

Jiang Qing's model revolutionary operas took the place of the traditional Beijing opera (*jingju*), which was banned. As the new Beijing opera, they had one big thing in common with the old: both used stereotyped characters and plots to dramatize the confrontation between good and evil, teaching moral lessons for the benefit of the audience. The lessons they taught, however, were very different. Whereas the traditional operas defined good and evil in Confucian terms, the model revolutionary operas

defined them in Maoist ones. In the latter, the good characters were heroes from the ranks of the workers, peasants, and soldiers, and the bad ones were class enemies—evil landlords, Guomindang bandits, Japanese and American imperialists, along with their henchmen, collaborators, and puppets. The revolutionary operas were also less symbolic and less bound by unrealistic conventions than the traditional ones, using more natural stage settings and dressing the actors to resemble the types of people whom they played. They employed a lot of ordinary speech in addition to the singing, and they dropped the stylized singsong that was the substitute for speech in the traditional operas. The aim was to make the operas easier to perform, to make them accessible to a wider audience, and to facilitate the transmission of revolutionary ideology (cf. Lu and Xiao 2000).

The eight model revolutionary operas conformed perfectly to Jiang Qing's doctrines of the three prominences and the three accompaniments. Each opera put the spotlight, literally and figuratively, on a single figure—five heroes and three heroines in the eight operas—who embodied all the revolutionary virtues. These leading characters were physically perfect, their only loyalty was to the Party and the revolution, and their political consciousness and revolutionary insight were an inspiration to all the other good characters. The lesser good characters were, at heart, true revolutionaries, but they highlighted the virtues of the main character by making occasional mistakes, letting their vigilance slacken, or being deceived by a class enemy. Above all, they lacked that perfect, Mao-inspired understanding of the nature of revolutionary struggle that ensured that the main characters always made the right decisions.

The villains were literary representations of absolute evil. They were cruel, malevolent, and cunning, with no hint of redeeming virtue. They were not even particularly intelligent, being driven by their base instincts to commit foul crimes that were ultimately their undoing. Their sly natures, cruelty, and treachery were no match for the invincible intelligence of rev-

olutionary heroes and heroines armed with Mao Zedong's Thought. The villains all had evil natures stemming from their class backgrounds as landlords, Guomindang reactionaries, foreign imperialists, and their lackeys. They were never capable of reform: as Dittmer has pointed out, "in not one of these dramas does a villain succeed in making an acceptable repentance; a villain's participation in activities of redemption, such as labor or thought reform, serves only to evince his utter mendacity" (Dittmer and Chen 1981, 102).

Most of the operas were set in the period before liberation, when the class struggle involved warfare against enemies with guns. This provided excellent material for lessons in revolutionary heroism, but it gave no guidance on how to engage in class struggle against enemies without guns. Much more useful for that purpose was *On the Docks* (OTD), an opera of everyday life dealing with the attempt to unmask a saboteur through Party-directed class struggle in 1963. It is also more useful for the purposes of this study, since its theme and language were intended to serve as models of class struggle and verbal behavior during the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution. I will therefore examine it in some detail, paying particular attention to the characteristics of its language.

On the Docks was adapted from a Huai opera Jiang Qing attended in 1964. She liked the "internationalism embodied by the dockers" and asked the Beijing Opera Troupe of Shanghai to rewrite it into a Beijing opera. After "numerous struggles" it made its debut as a Beijing opera, and it was soon acclaimed as a *yangban* (model) (Mowry 1973, 76). Like all the model operas, it was constantly revised so that it served the current purposes of the Maoist propagandists. For example, the January 1972 script, which I use here, has an added episode in which the heroine joyously reads the communiqué of the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth Party Central Committee in which "Chairman Mao told us that there are still classes and class struggles and that we must remind ourselves of this every year, every month and every day" (OTD, 16–17). This was part of a wider

attempt to give more emphasis to the theme of “class struggle in the socialist era” (Mowry 1973, 76).

The opera develops these themes through a stunningly boring plot, totally devoid of the danger, bravery, and violence that enliven the other operas. The story revolves around the attempt by the villain, Qian Shouwei, to do two things: first, to delay a shipment of seed rice to Africa, thereby sabotaging the African people’s struggle against imperialism; second, to destroy China’s international trading reputation by hiding a spilled sack of contaminated wheat among the bags of rice and by including a sack of rice in a shipment of foreign-aid wheat. Fang Haizhen, the heroine, however, is armed with Mao’s Thought and aware that in socialist society there are “enemies who are disguised.” Through her superior awareness of class struggle she uncovers the plot. The villainous Qian flees but is seized offstage. We are told that he was clutching a dagger and letters of recommendation from foreign imperialists and the Guomindang.

It was no accident that the plot was so boring. The opera was intended to persuade people that class struggle was relevant to their day-to-day tasks and that maintaining the highest standards in the workplace was a matter of vital political importance. The opera made these points by applying dramatic revolutionary language to conspicuously undramatic activities. Consider, for example, the lyrics as the Party secretary and heroine, Fang, leads the dockers in song before they undertake the revolutionary task of searching for the spilled sack of wheat:

Fang: Comrades! (*sings*):

One spilled sack is extremely serious,
A severe test awaits us ahead.
True gold is to be tempered only in the fierce fire,
True fighters never shirk.
Determined, we’ll tackle the task again,
Search the warehouse by night,
And leave no stone unturned.

Gao (*sings*):

Our arms and our shoulders are tempered steel,
They can move mountains and fill seas.

Zhao (*sings*):

Strictly we'll guard the quality of foreign-aid goods,
Find the sack first, then load the ship.

Ma (*sings*):

Let this old soldier go to the front.

Men dockers (*chorus*):

We young should be in the foremost ranks.

Women workers (*chorus*):

Girl workers boldly take up the challenge.

Dockers (*chorus*):

The spilled sack shall not leave this port.

Fang (*sings*):

This is a political battle,
United we'll work to untangle the trouble.
Strike hard at imperialism, revisionism and reaction,
Firmly, thoroughly, make our search. (*OTD*, 21)

The lyrics are packed with martial words appropriate to revolutionary battles against the Guomindang or the imperialists. One character even proclaims, in a standard hyperbolic metaphor, that he doesn't mind carrying sacks of grain because "to support the world revolution, our Chinese working class will do our utmost even if it means climbing mountains of knives and going through seas of fire" (*OTD*, 4).

In *On the Docks*, as in all the model revolutionary operas, the characters conformed to the formula prescribed by Jiang Qing's doctrines of the three prominences and the three accompaniments. Fang is distinguished from everyone else by her awareness of the class struggle in socialist society, by her reliance on Mao's Thought, and by her consequent success in unmasking the class enemy. More politically advanced than everyone else, popular and a natural leader, she sets a perfect example to otherwise good characters who have let their vigilance slacken, allowing the class enemy to tamper with the rice and the wheat. Her starring role is reflected in the fact that she is given the lion's share of the script (table 3). Fang speaks or sings fully 41.7 percent of the words in the script. The second-largest roles are allotted to Gao, team leader of the dockers' brigade, and Ma, a

retired docker well equipped to give lessons in class hatred because he remembers the cruel oppression before the Communist Party liberated the workers. These two characters are exceeded only by Fang in their revolutionary virtue.

Qian, as the villain, occupies the role prescribed by the three accompaniments. The plot revolves around his act of sabotage, but he is allotted relatively few words and, as a character, he is simply a foil to Fang—malevolent, sly, but no match for the heroine. He is not even allowed to impress the audience with his voice. As table 4 shows, Qian is the only person on the stage who sings not a single word.

Table 3 Words Spoken or Sung by Characters

Character	Words	
	Number	Percentage of total
Fang Haizhen (heroine)	3,219	41.7
Gao Zhiyang	1,049	13.6
Ma Hongliang	927	12.0
Han Xiaoliang	831	10.8
Zhao Zhenshan	531	6.9
Minor characters	308	4.0
Chorus	188	2.4
Qian Shouwei (villain)	664	8.6
Total	7,717	100.0

Table 4 Lines Sung by Characters and Chorus

Character	Lines Sung	
	Number	Percentage of total
Fang Haizhen (heroine)	140	43.6
All other (good) characters	168	52.4
Chorus	13	4.0
Qian Shouwei (villain)	0	0.0
Total	321	100.0

During the Cultural Revolution, as never before, language was a badge of revolutionary virtue. A true revolutionary was supposed to imitate Lin Biao and the official press by quoting Mao, by referring frequently to him or his Thought, and by using the correct political terminology at every opportunity. We should therefore expect to find that the number of references to Mao and quotations from his works is a reliable index of revolutionary virtue. And so it is, as table 5 demonstrates. Fang displays her superior political consciousness by being the only individual character to quote Mao, and she does so three times. The only other Mao quotation is by the chorus, which is led by Fang (*OTD*, 5). Fang also mentions Mao eight times, twice as often as all the other individual characters combined, and she is the only character to quote a Party document. The workers as a group, who have the role of expressing the revolutionary solidarity of the dockers under Fang’s wise leadership, mention Mao three times as they shout in chorus “Long live chairman Mao!” and express their collective commitment to his Thought in the final scene. Qian, as the villain, neither mentions Mao nor quotes him. In this respect, the opera conforms to the pattern of the novels written during the Cultural Revolution.

The distribution of ideological terms is in most respects predictable. As expected, Fang stands out from all the other individual characters. Terms such as “class struggle,” “class enemy,” “compradors,” “revisionism,” “communism,” “internationalism,”

Table 5 Mao References and Mao Quotations

Character	Mentions of Mao		Quotations from Mao	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Fang Haizhen (heroine)	8	53	3	75
Other (good) characters	4	27	0	0
Chorus/workers in unison	3	20	1	25
Qian Shouwei (villain)	0	0	0	0
Total	15	100	4	100

“revolutionary,” “anti-imperialist,” and, of course, “Marxism–Leninism–Mao Zedong Thought” trip lightly from her tongue. Table 6 shows that she uses ideological terms at over twice the rate of other good individual characters. The table, however, has two figures that are at first sight surprising. First, the chorus uses ideological terms far more frequently than Fang. This results from the fact that the chorus has no ordinary dialogue, but functions as an echo and a megaphone for the correct political sentiments expressed by major characters, especially Fang. So when Fang sings “Strike hard at imperialism, revisionism, and reaction,” the chorus chimes in and repeats the line twice, thereby adding six ideological words to its total (*OTD*, 21, quoted above). The chorus does not surpass Fang’s level of ideological consciousness, but reproduces and broadcasts it.

Second, the villainous Qian uses ideological terms only a little less frequently than the average of all the good individual characters excluding Fang. He actually outscores old Ma, who plays an important role as a wise and class-conscious retired docker. This result emphasizes the limitations of mere word counts, divorced from any context of interpretation, as a meas-

Table 6 Frequency of Ideological Terms

Character	Ideological terms	
	Number	Number per 1,000 words
Fang Haizhen (heroine)	86	26.7
Gao Zhiyang	12	11.4
Ma Hongliang	6	6.5
Han Xiaoqiang	16	19.3
Zhao Zhenshan	6	11.3
Minor characters	3	9.7
Chorus	14	74.5
Qian Shouwei (villain)	6	9.0
All (good) individual		
characters except Fang	43	11.8
All characters and chorus	149	19.3

ure of ideological consciousness. In fact, Qian's use of ideological terms is almost invariably counterrevolutionary in intent, as when he says venomously, "Fang Haizhen, the sight of Communists like you makes me see blood," using the ideological term "Communists" as a term of counterrevolutionary abuse (*OTD*, 23). Similarly, when he addresses the dockers using the ideological "Comrades, comrades!" he is making a hypocritical attempt to persuade the dockers to trust him (*OTD*, 20).

By contrast, old Ma's low percentage of terms that are semantically ideological takes no account of the fact that he uses an exceptional number of terms that are rendered ideological by their context. Consider the following passage, in which he recalls the oppression of the workers in the bitter past:

Who worked like horses and toiled like oxen?
Who set up the steep and narrow "high plank"?
Who trudged on endlessly in sheer exhaustion?
Compare before liberation and after,
Look at the carrying pole, "high plank," and tattered clothes,
The foreman's whip and manacles. . . .
Look carefully, at each and every one. (*OTD*, 32)

The only word in this passage that is semantically ideological is "liberation," a term that all people in China link with the Communist Party's victory in 1949. However, every noun, verb, adjective, and adverb contributes to a crucial ideological claim: that until their liberation in 1949, the dockers were mercilessly exploited by their capitalist employers. So like everything else in the revolutionary operas, old Ma's language is carefully calculated to teach a political lesson—in this case a lesson in class education.

The message of the operas is paradoxical: it enjoins both outstanding initiative and total conformity. The paradox is most acute in the case of the main characters, who are at once dashingly architects of revolutionary victories and robots programmed by Maoist scripts—scripts not only in the literal sense, but also in the figurative sense in which the word is used by cognitive

psychologists: schemas that provide models for speech and action. Fang, for example, is intelligent and full of natural authority, but she owes her success entirely to her script-driven fidelity to Mao Zedong's Thought. Her goal, she says, is one she learned from "steel-strong heroes tempered in a blaze":

From them we must learn
To dedicate ourselves to world revolution,
To be a never-rusting cog
In the great revolutionary machine.
This is the grand ideal, brilliant youth,
Of every revolutionary. (*OTD*, 38)

The ideal was to live in total conformity with the Maoist scripts and to be empowered by them. It was an ideal that could be attained only on paper and in theatrical performance. In part, this was because the Maoist scripts sometimes offered unworkable advice—they were a flawed guide to reality. But a further problem was that while the scripts could be given a single, correct reading by the main character in a work of fiction, their referents were less determinate in real life. A scriptwriter can ensure that a fictional hero always chooses the correct interpretive contexts, but there is no way of ensuring that real-life heroes will do the same. So people who sought to emulate the script-inspired initiative of Fang and other leading characters ran the risk of interpreting the scripts wrongly. When that happened, interpretations and actions intended to be revolutionary were denounced by the Maoist hierarchy as counterrevolutionary. Both Liu Shaoqi and the Red Guards discovered that to their cost.

The Maoist leaders hoped that by making people learn scripts they could control their behavior, and the model revolutionary operas, whose songs most Chinese learned by heart, were intended as a rich source of such scripts. Having observed and learned the scripts, people were supposed to act them out. Life was supposed to imitate art. The scripts alone, however, were insufficient, because their implications varied with the

context of interpretation. As a result, the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution saw not only mass learning of Maoist scripts, both literal and figurative, but also the rebuilding of a coercive apparatus to guide interpretive assumptions, monitor interpretation, and correct or crush those who adopted deviant readings. Even then, we shall see, it was impossible to achieve full uniformity of thought, in part because the context of interpretation remained to some extent intractable.

Educating Revolutionaries

The Case of English Language Teaching

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION had a devastating effect on Chinese education. From mid-1966 to late 1968 the schools and universities virtually ceased to function except as revolutionary headquarters. Nearly all their staff were subjected to harrowing criticism, large numbers were beaten, and many were locked up for months or years in improvised campus jails popularly called *niu peng* (cowsheds) after the *niugui sheshen* imprisoned there. When the schools reopened, under the control of workers-peasants-soldiers propaganda teams, their teaching was at first confined largely to supervised study of Mao's works and Maoist newspaper editorials, together with talks by old workers or peasants who recalled the bitter past they had experienced before Mao and the Communist Party saved them.

The Cultural Revolution and School Curricula

In 1969 and 1970, new curricula and textbooks at last appeared, together with enough teachers (many released from the cowsheds or returned from reeducation under the peasants) to provide at least some formal classes. The new curricula and textbooks bore the unmistakable stamp of the Cultural Revolution. In Guangzhou, for example, the textbook used to teach Chinese literature and language contained mostly quotations from Mao, together with newspaper editorials on the latest political cam-

paign and occasional readings from Jiang Qing's model revolutionary operas (Unger 1982, 176). Sciences, criticized as "academic" and irrelevant to revolutionary concerns, were dropped as distinct disciplines in favor of a course on industrial-agricultural-military studies, which mentioned scientific principles only in relation to production techniques and never explained them coherently. Even the arithmetic textbook "contained mainly Mao quotes" (Unger 1982, 158, 175). So in both content and linguistic form, the new textbooks were subordinated to Maoist discourse.

In this context, it is at first sight surprising that the study of English survived the Cultural Revolution. It was even less use than physics and chemistry to the workers and peasants; no one, except a few people in high places, was going to be able to use it to talk to foreigners or to read English newspapers or books; it was the main language of the imperialists, and its diplomatic uses were limited because China's foreign relations had almost ceased to exist; and it was not even going to be of much use to scientists and technicians, hamstrung by attacks on expertise, the policy of technological self-reliance, and the cult of the untutored worker-peasant inventor. The whole logic of the Cultural Revolution implied that mass instruction in the English language was not only unnecessary, but perhaps anti-revolutionary. That, indeed, is precisely the view that prevailed in the heartland of the Cultural Revolution, Shanghai, where English was eliminated from the curriculum until 1971, when China began to emerge from diplomatic isolation (Unger 1982, 283 n. 6). Shanghai's stand almost certainly reflected the influence there of the revolutionary purists Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen—members of the Central Cultural Revolution Group and Jiang Qing's firmest allies.

In China as a whole, however, the teaching of English rapidly underwent what looked like a boom. The reason was that Mao had said, when talking to some Red Guards in 1968, "It's good to know English. I studied foreign languages late in life. I suffered. One has to learn foreign languages when one is young. . . . One

cannot study geology without a foreign language. It's good to learn English" (Unger 1982, 283 n. 5). So except in Shanghai, English was taught as soon as possible in all secondary schools. However, it had to be taught in a way consistent with the discourse of the Cultural Revolution. This resulted in remarkable pedagogical innovations, all designed to ensure that centralized control of the word never slackened. These innovations affected the teaching of vocabulary, cultural background, and even grammar. To clarify their nature, I will examine twenty-three English language textbooks published between 1969 and 1976. These textbooks were all published in important centers, they became models for texts published elsewhere, and they are typical of the genre.¹

Literary, Social, and Political Themes

Communicative competence in a foreign language requires understanding of the culturally specific contextual assumptions that guide reference assignment and determine the social significance of what is said (Saville-Troike 1996; Kramsch 1993; Sperber and Wilson 1995). So before the Cultural Revolution, foreign-language students in China were required to study not only vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, but the current situation, history, geography, culture, and customs of the country whose language they were acquiring. Their textbooks complemented this contextual information by including fables, short stories, myths, and extracts from original works by native speakers (Tang n.d. [1983?], 43).

Under no circumstances, however, were the Maoist cadres who controlled education during the Cultural Revolution going to expose language students to a discourse that reflected the assumptions of Western society. This ruled out any attempt to introduce students to Western myths, fables, literary classics, or authentic examples of contemporary writing. Indeed, it ruled out any nonpolitical material at all, for the belief that such material existed reflected the bourgeois assumption that there was a

sphere of private life, separated from politics, that could be analyzed in nonpolitical terms. For the Maoists, everything was political, and the only acceptable politics was based on Mao Zedong Thought. This “fact” had to be reflected in the contents of the textbooks. Table 7 summarizes the contents of the twenty-five lessons in a Beijing textbook that became a model for introductory texts in many parts of China. The lessons, it can be seen, were entirely political. They consisted mainly of English translations of political slogans, quotations from Chairman Mao, the inscriptions of his deputy, Lin Biao, and revolutionary songs. Their main theme was Mao worship. The first thirteen lessons, in fact, consisted of nine lessons praising Mao and four quoting him. In lesson six the only thing they learned was “Chairman Mao is the red sun in our hearts”; in lesson seven, their only task was to study Mao’s statement “Our Party is a great Party, a glorious Party, a correct Party”; and in lesson ten, they confined their attention to Lin Biao’s inscription “Long live the great teacher, great supreme commander, and great helmsman Chairman Mao! A long life to him! A long, long life to him!”

While the standard scripts of Mao worship dominated the early textbooks, they were always complemented by lessons that encoded other themes of Maoist discourse. Five themes were especially common. The first was “the bitter past of the laboring people,” which was always contrasted with the happiness and prosperity of the present:

Table 7 Contents of *English*, vol. 1, Beijing, 1969

Content of lesson	Number	Percentage
Political	25	100
Moral education, Chinese tradition	0	0
Science	0	0
Foreign stories	0	0
General	0	0
Total	25	100

I am fifteen.
 And Grandpa is sixty-three . . .
 I have bread and rice for meals.
 But he had only husks and weeds . . .
 Why are things so different?
 Because the times are different.
 Thanks to the Party and Chairman Mao, the former slaves are the
 masters of the country now. (*English*, vol. 8, Shanghai 1973)

Students were made to recite this script, which consists largely of stock phrases known to every Chinese, because most of them had been hungry during the Great Leap Forward and were still very poor. They had to be convinced that they were actually well off—or at least better off than their grandparents.

A second theme of the discourse was class struggle, which dominated lessons as never before. Its form can be exemplified from the textbooks themselves:

On the blackboard there is a quotation from Chairman Mao, "Never forget classes and class struggle." An old worker is telling the pupils about his bitter past and his happy life today. From time to time the pupils shout, "Never forget class bitterness! Always remember class hatred! Long live the Communist Party of China!" (*English*, vol. 1, Henan 1973)

Recitation of the scripts of class hatred was intended to perpetuate hostility to surviving members of the old exploiting classes, who played a useful role as targets of competitive displays of revolutionary fervor. To justify continued struggle against them, the scripts had to claim that they could never be trusted. One textbook, for example, told the story "The Farmhand and the Snake." It related how a farmhand took pity on a snake dying of cold. He picked it up and warmed it in his bosom. When the snake revived it gave the farmhand a deadly bite. The story ends like this:

Chairman Mao teaches us: "Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of first importance for the revolution." Class enemies are just like snakes. We should never expect them to change their nature. We should always be on our guard against

them and carry the revolution through to the end. (*English*, vol. 10, Shanghai 1973)

There were similar stories about the cunning and treachery of class enemies in other textbooks, many of them using the same quotation from Mao and the same stock phrases.

A third theme was reverence for workers, soldiers, and especially poor and lower-middle peasants:

We are educated young people. We receive re-education in the Red Flag People's Commune. . . . The poor and lower-middle peasants are our good teachers. They help us study Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. They often give us lessons in class struggle and the struggle for production. . . . We are determined to make revolution in the countryside all our lives. (*English*, vol. 8, Henan 1974)

There were many variations on this standardized script, revolving around the same stock phrases ("The poor and lower-middle peasants are our good teachers"; "We are determined to make revolution in the countryside all our lives."). It served two purposes. It subordinated educated people, whom Mao mistrusted, to the poor and lower-middle peasants, whom he manipulated and claimed to represent; and it forced the students to praise what some eagerly anticipated but others dreaded—exile to the countryside, where they would live out their days performing backbreaking labor.

The fourth theme was summed up by the Maoist slogan Serve the people! One textbook included an abridged version of Mao's essay that bore that title, and nearly all textbooks had stories that exemplified its theme. Characters in the books not only burned with desire to sacrifice themselves for the people in general, but actively searched for ways to sacrifice themselves for individuals, especially old people from good class backgrounds. Invariably, they were inspired by Chairman Mao who taught them, "All people in the revolutionary ranks must care for each other, must love and help each other" (*English*, vol. 5, Henan 1972).

The fifth theme was the universal appeal of Mao's Thought. Teaching students how to recite Maoist discourse in other tongues universalized its message, and the point was rammed home whenever the textbooks mentioned ordinary people from other countries. Consider the foreigner in the story "Eager to Get a Chairman Mao Badge":

The black sailor comes to China for the first time. . . . He loves Chairman Mao. Chairman Mao is the ever-red sun in his heart. He is eager to get a Chairman Mao badge. "How happy I am!" Tears in his eyes, he shouts: "Long live Chairman Mao! A long, long life to him!" (*English*, vol. 1, Beijing 1969)

Or consider the fictitious Soviet sailor who appeared elsewhere in the same book:

Comrade Mao Tse-Tung is the Lenin of our era. He is the ever-red sun in the hearts of the people of the world. He is the great leader of the world's revolutionary people. He leads us in the struggle against imperialism and revisionism. . . . We vow to follow him and make revolution forever. (*English*, vol. 1, Beijing 1969)

These stories encouraged young Chinese to believe that Mao was the inspiration of all the oppressed peoples of the world. Those oppressed peoples glorified Mao and revolution using the stock phrases of Maoist discourse. They were models for emulation—foreign clones of idealized revolutionary Chinese.

These five themes, together with Mao worship, dominated the textbooks even after Lin Biao's death and disgrace in 1971. The emphasis on politics scarcely slackened. Table 8 shows that in the three texts published in Henan in 1972, the percentage of lessons categorized as mainly political remained nearly as high as in the Beijing text of 1969. If anything, the table understates the pervasiveness of political education, for throughout the Cultural Revolution there was explicit political content in almost every lesson, whatever its overall classification. For example, in a 1974 textbook, a lesson on knowledge of the earth, which I would classify under the heading "General," attacked the dis-

course of race and expressed the discourse of class and revolution:

- A: What are the five races on the earth?
- B: They are the red, the yellow, the brown, the white and the black races. But it is nonsense to divide mankind according to the colour of the skin.
- A: How would you divide mankind, then?
- B: They may be divided into two classes, the exploiters and the exploited.
- C: You are right. They may also be divided into the revolutionary and the reactionary. (*English*, vol. 8, Henan 1974)

The main difference in the content of textbooks after Lin Biao's death was that they were purged of Lin's Mao-worshipping slogans and inscriptions. In their place were lessons that directed at Lin the standard discourse of condemnation he had once used to vilify class enemies such as Liu Shaoqi. One textbook, for example, made a former coal miner say,

Before liberation this coal-mine was owned by the Japanese aggressors. I was a coal-miner here. How I suffered in those miserable days! . . . But Lin Biao attempted to restore capitalism and sell out our country to the social-imperialists. He wanted to make us suffer under the imperialist rule once again. We will never allow such a thing to happen. We will further strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat and smash any plot for capitalist restoration. (*English*, vol. 11, Shanghai 1973)

Table 8 Contents of *English*, vols. 2, 3, 5, Henan, 1972

Content of lesson	Number	Percentage
Political	23	88.45
Moral education, Chinese tradition	1	3.85
Science	0	0.00
Foreign stories	1	3.85
General	1	3.85
Total	26	100.00

The textbooks kept in step with the latest political line by attaching different referents to the stereotyped terms of praise and condemnation specified by the discourse. It was possible to predict the contents of the books if one knew the current political situation, and one could understand the current situation simply by reading the books.

Vocabulary and Politics

People studying a new language cannot use it effectively as a medium of communication unless they know the most commonly used words. We can ascertain whether the textbooks provided a suitable grounding in the “essential nucleus” of the English language by comparing their vocabulary with the first and second word lists compiled by Paul Nation (Nation 1983; cf. Nation 1990). The first list consists of the thousand words (apart from purely structural words such as prepositions) judged most necessary for students to master if they are to use English as a system of communication. These words occur frequently, they are used in many different contexts, their inflections and syntax are relatively regular, and they are useful in defining and explaining other words. The basic vocabulary in any well-designed course of instruction in English will consist mainly of these words. The second list consists of another thousand words that, while less essential, figure prominently in the vocabulary of native speakers. Students who can recognize these words, and the thousand somewhat more advanced words in Nation’s third list, will be able to read a good deal of everyday English material without frequent use of a dictionary.

The first of our textbooks, published in Beijing in 1969, is an introductory text for students who had never learned English before. It has a total vocabulary of only 179 nonstructural words, of which only sixty (33.5 percent) are in Nation’s first list, and only another five (2.8 percent) in the second list. Most of the words, in fact, are not part of the everyday vocabulary of native speakers of English.

If so few of the 179 nonstructural words in this introductory textbook are among the 2,000 most basic words in the English language, what principles governed their selection? The answer is simple: they were the words required to translate the slogans of the Cultural Revolution. Before students were taught how to say hello or goodbye, they were taught how to say things such as “Chairman Mao leads us in the socialist revolution and socialist construction, and in the struggle against imperialism and revisionism.” It mattered not at all that few native speakers of English had more than the haziest idea of what this meant.

The influence of politics on vocabulary was particularly obvious in 1969, but it remained strong throughout the Cultural Revolution. As table 9 shows, just over 40 percent of the nonstructural words in two middle-level school textbooks published in Henan in 1972 and 1973 occur in Nation’s list of the thousand most basic words, and only 6 or 7 percent can be found among the next thousand. The table reflects that the textbooks were using the spelling and phonetics of the English language to code the Chinese political vocabulary, which remained mysterious even in translation. Few native English speakers would have guessed that the term “socialist-imperialists” referred to the leaders of the Soviet Union; fewer still would have known that the term “traitors,” when applied to people because of their

Table 9 Frequency of Occurrence of Basic Vocabulary in Intermediate Level School Textbooks, 1972 and 1973

Book	Total vocabulary		In Nation's first list		In Nation's second list	
	Num-ber	Percent-age	Num-ber	Percent-age	Num-ber	Percent-age
English, vol. 5, Henan, 1972	124	100	51	41	7	6
English, vol. 4, Henan, 1973	129	100	56	43	9	7

activities after 1949, referred exclusively to those who had betrayed their good class origins by opposing the revolutionary line; and even Western Maoists often failed to understand that in China the term “class” referred to groups that often had nothing to do with classes in any traditional Marxist sense. Other words in the textbooks that had different meanings for Chinese students than for native speakers included “reactionary,” “the people,” “landlord,” “model,” “secretary,” “instructor,” “renegade,” “bad element,” “scab,” “intellectual,” “advanced,” and “correct.” No attempt was made to teach Chinese students the meanings these terms had in the English-speaking world. So even on narrowly political topics they would have found it difficult to get their message across. In the words of one language teacher, “The English in the textbooks was not the English of any English-speaking country” (Tang n.d. [1983?], 44).

The Politics of Teaching Grammar

Before the Cultural Revolution, the teaching of English grammar in China followed the same principles that were generally used in the West: simple grammatical principles were explained before complicated ones, frequently used rules before rarely used ones, and regular forms before irregular ones. However, during the Cultural Revolution, these pedagogical principles were for a time abandoned. The first English sentence students met in the 1969 Beijing textbook, for example, was “Long live Chairman Mao!” “Long live” is a conventional expression with irregular grammar, and using purely linguistic criteria it would not have been considered for inclusion at the outset of an introductory text. However, from a political point of view, the most important sentence in the English language was “Long live Chairman Mao!” so it had to come first.

If students were to recite many of the slogans of the Cultural Revolution, they had to be introduced to the imperative mood. So the second sentence in the textbook was an imperative: “Let’s wish our great leader Chairman Mao a long, long life!” This

laid the groundwork for later lessons in which students were expected to say things such as “Down with U.S. imperialism!” and “Down with the renegade, traitor, and scab, Liu Shaoqi!”

Having learned to shout slogans in the imperative mood, students were sensibly introduced to the commonplace indicative mood and the present tense. This enabled them to chant the slogan “Workers, peasants, and soldiers love Chairman Mao best.” In this sentence, however, they met their first adverb, and it was not a simple adverb but the superlative “best.” No attempt was made to explain the use of adverbs in English, or to situate the superlative form “best” in the context of the comparative “better” or the simple “good.” From a linguistic point of view, this was poor pedagogy, but from a political point of view it was natural. The language of Chinese politics was built around dichotomies between perfect goodness and total evil, dichotomies that required the almost immediate introduction of the superlative form.

In 1969, it was necessary not only to participate in the cult of Mao worship but to acknowledge the authority of the cult's high priest, Party vice-chairman Lin Biao. This involved the recitation of Lin Biao's inscriptions, which could sometimes be translated only with the use of advanced grammatical forms. Students who knew almost no English were required to say, “Sailing the seas depends on the helmsman,/Making revolution depends on Mao Tse-tung's thought” (*English*, vol. 1, Beijing 1969). Here they met the gerundive use of “sailing” and “making.” Since Chinese verbs are not inflected, and there are no gerunds, these English words would have puzzled students who thought about them. Fortunately, the book did not add to the confusion by attempting to explain gerunds. Its concern was not the grammar, but the political necessity of worshipping Mao in the words of Lin Biao.

Mastery of the tenses of the English language presents particular problems to Chinese students, for the verbs in their own language have no tense. It is very important, from a linguistic point of view, to introduce the tenses in a clear and systematic

way. Left to themselves, Chinese teachers of English would have dealt first with the present and past tenses, leaving the rather confusing present perfect and past perfect till later. In the 1969 textbook, however, the second tense students met was the present perfect, as in the phrase “has brought forth.” This was because it was politically imperative to teach students to sing “The East Is Red” early in their studies: “The East is red, the sun rises,/China has brought forth a Mao Zedong.” It would be hard to think of a more confusing way of introducing the present perfect tense, for “brought” is the past participle of an irregular verb, and students had not yet been introduced to regular verbs. Moreover, “to bring forth” is a rather uncommon expression, unlikely to be used except when singing “The East Is Red.” And finally, this lapse into the present perfect tense was not accompanied by any attempt to explain or illustrate the principles that govern its use.

By 1972, linguistically oriented pedagogical principles had regained much of their importance in the teaching of grammar. Students still had to learn how to say Long live Chairman Mao! at the beginning of their studies, and they were still given an early introduction to the imperative so that they could recite the more inflammatory slogans. Thereafter, however, the textbooks reverted to a traditional order of presentation. By 1972, textbooks in Beijing, Henan, and elsewhere were drilling students thoroughly in the present tense, then moving systematically through the other tenses before presenting the present perfect and past perfect tenses last.

Why, when the textbooks' vocabulary lists remained politicized throughout the Cultural Revolution, did they so quickly discard most political criteria in teaching grammar? The crucial difference is that while a specialized political vocabulary was essential in order to convey correct revolutionary content, there was less need to introduce grammatical points in sequences that made no pedagogical sense. Even an introductory textbook restricted to the present tense had ample scope for Mao worship:

Chairman Mao!
You are the red sun in our hearts!
We are sunflowers.
Sunflowers always face the red sun.
We think of you day and night.
We wish you a long, long life. (*English*, vol. 2, Beijing 1972)

The textbooks had so often ignored sound pedagogical principles in teaching grammar in 1969 because Mao worship and disdain for experts were still at their height. Mao's Thought was regarded as the secret of success in all fields, and textbooks that taught grammar according to standard pedagogical principles, rather than political ones, could easily be accused of putting skills first like the number one revisionist, Liu Shaoqi. By 1972, however, the worst excesses of the Mao cult were over, the moderate Zhou Enlai had regained some of his influence, and China was reestablishing contact with the outside world. Under these circumstances, Mao agreed with Zhou Enlai and Vice-premier Li Xiannian to reemphasize the teaching of foreign languages. At the same time, Mao's allies in promoting the Cultural Revolution—his wife Jiang Qing and her radical coterie—insisted that the textbooks be dominated by political material reflecting the current Party line (Fu 1986, 84–85). The result was a compromise, weighted in the radicals' favor. The textbooks retained their revolutionary content and vocabulary, but these were now introduced in ways consistent with the proper teaching of grammar.

Discourse, Persuasion, and Worldview

Students who learned foreign languages found no respite from linguistic engineering. Their textbooks were filled with the standard Maoist formulae that permeated discourse outside the classroom. The incessant repetition of those formulae activated all the persuasive mechanisms discussed in earlier chapters. Moreover, translating the content of the formulae into a foreign language had two additional advantages. First, it involved inten-

sive mental processing, which fixed the content even more firmly in students' minds. Second, we have seen that translation helped to universalize the message of the formulae, implying that it was a matter of prime importance not just for the Chinese people, but for the whole world. Third, textbooks written in political formulae were not going to open up a window onto another world or give students access to other patterns of thought. They were deliberate attempts to prescribe a politically loaded language whose formulae limited what could be said. And because constant practice made concepts linked to the formulae easier to use, the insistence on linguistic rectitude influenced what could most easily be thought. In the language of the formulae, for instance, Western societies were simply sites of class exploitation and imperialist aggression that were ripe for revolution. Anyone who wanted to add other dimensions to the picture had to make the effort to break away, inwardly, from the enforced language of public discourse. This was not impossible, but in Mao's China few had any incentive to try.

During the Cultural Revolution real English was kept out of the classroom, confined to a tiny élite whose services were required as diplomats, translators, and interpreters. From the perspective of the linguistic engineers, it mattered not at all that most foreign-language students were taught very little except translations of Maoist scripts and Chinese political terms. These were the scripts and the terms required for correct analysis of the world. They would one day be understood and accepted in the West, as capitalism crumbled. In the meantime, China had a mission to disseminate Maoist discourse by translations and propaganda and to safeguard the revolutionary purity of its own population. In the discourse of the Cultural Revolution, China was a model for the rest of the world. The world could teach China nothing.

IV *Assessment*

China's Great Experiment

Intensity, Success, and Failure

WHEN THE COMMUNIST PARTY came to power in 1949, it was determined not merely to rule, but to transform the lives and consciousness of the Chinese people. Its leaders wanted to carry the revolution into people's souls and bring about a genuine socialist transformation. No one was more committed to this ideal than the Party's chairman, Mao Zedong. In his eyes, the Chinese people were like "a blank sheet of paper free from any mark"—a sheet on which "the freshest and most beautiful characters can be written, the freshest and most beautiful pictures can be painted" (Mao 1958, 500). He wanted to write new scripts and paint new images in their minds, and his instruments included the conventional ones of social engineering, censorship, and propaganda. However, his most precise instrument of ideological transformation was a massive, prolonged, and intensive program of linguistic engineering—a program that required people to recite, day after day, formulae that encoded the sentiments of model revolutionaries.

Intensity

Mao's commitment to linguistic engineering was not an isolated phenomenon. It was endorsed by other Party leaders in China, especially by those who rose to prominence during the Cultural Revolution. It also resembled, in varying degrees, the practice

of Communist regimes around the world. However, China's program of linguistic engineering was among the most intensive and rigorously enforced. Indeed, although it was heavily influenced by the Soviet model, it surpassed it.

The greater intensity of linguistic engineering in China can be attributed to three factors. First, as we saw in chapter 2, China had a long tradition of inculcating moral principles by rote learning and of paying great attention to correct linguistic form. There was no tradition of equivalent strength in Russia or other parts of the Soviet Union.

Second, during the Cultural Revolution, the worship of Mao and his Thought outstripped the personality cult that surrounded Stalin. Mao worship involved numerous ceremonies whose liturgy was based on the recitation of devotional formulae. It also required people to memorize Mao's words, quote them, and incorporate them into their own speech. They ended up speaking pidgin-Mao, subjecting themselves to particularly intensive linguistic engineering.

Third, in China mobilization of the masses went further. Study, criticism, and self-criticism in small groups, which in the Soviet Union were confined to the Party, were extended as far as possible to the general population (cf. Whyte 1974, chap. 3); all people were trained to act as thought police, so that secret police and specialized networks of informants were largely unnecessary; mass revolutionary breakthroughs in production were emphasized at the expense of expertise and central planning; fictitious hereditary classes were created, leading to the institutionalization of class struggle on a grand scale; and the whole population was required to participate in incessant political campaigns. So ordinary Chinese lived in a state of political mobilization that required them to incorporate displays of political consciousness into their daily lives. The easiest way to do this was to recite officially prescribed formulae or quote Chairman Mao.

By the time Mao died in 1976, the Chinese people had been subjected to this massive program of linguistic engineering for twenty-seven years. For all but two of those years (mid-1966 to

mid-1968) a centralized hierarchy had monitored not only language, but also interpretation, in an attempt to ensure that correct words were matched by correct thought. At the end of this period, what had been achieved? We can answer this question by balancing the successes of linguistic engineering against its failures.

Successes

The Communist Party's control in China did not rest simply on force, intimidation, and manufactured consent. In a country long devastated by foreign invasion, civil war, and misgovernment, many people saw in their new rulers the chance of a better future. They were relieved that the Japanese had been defeated, that the corrupt Guomindang had fled, that peace had been restored, and that mainland China had at last been reunified. Then, when the Korean War seemed to pose yet another imperialist threat, Chinese armies drove the American-led United Nations forces out of North Korea. At long last, China stood tall in the world, victorious over the foreign imperialists who had subjected the country to humiliations ever since the Opium War of 1839–1842. It was a time of hope, and numerous intellectuals returned from overseas to help in the creation of the new China. Many people were willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of the country and to cooperate willingly in their own ideological transformation.

Many elements of the Maoist discourse in the early 1950s matched the aspirations of large sections of the population: its emphasis on land reform, which won the hearts of many poor and lower-middle peasants; its nationalism, reflected in the great campaign to Resist America—Aid Korea; its purity and opposition to corruption, reflected in the Three Anti and Five Anti campaigns; its emphasis on the great task of national reconstruction; the promise that there would be a long period of “new democracy” before the establishment of socialism; and the insistence, in the language of the mass line and the united

front, that the Party must always seek to unite with at least 90 percent of the people and refrain from forcing policies on an unwilling majority.

But the Communist Party did not simply promote revolutionary discourse through the media, leaving people free to decide whether they would accept it and use it. It made sure that everyone participated in the discourse by shouting slogans and reciting approved revolutionary scripts. This was, or should have been, apparent to anyone who visited China and listened to people talk. The following model conversation, published by the New China News Agency in 1966, was no more correct than many actual conversations with foreigners:

A Japanese youth asked: "Have you ever thought of travelling abroad? Where would you like to go?"

A Tientsin [Tianjin] middle school Red Guard answered: "I have not thought about it; we do not think of sightseeing, but if I had the chance I would like to go to Vietnam and fight at the side of the fraternal Vietnamese people to wipe out the U.S. invading gangsters."

When the Japanese friends asked about their aim in life, a Red Guard from the Peking Aeronautical Engineering Institute said: "We are young people in the era of Mao Tse-tung. Chairman Mao has taught us 'The world is yours as well as ours, but in the last analysis it is yours. You young people, full of vigour and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning. Our hope is placed on you. . . .' The fact that two-thirds of the oppressed people in the world are not liberated comes to mind." (Liu 1971, 181)

Often, such words reflected people's true feelings. Even when they did not, they reinforced Mao's power. Rebellious thoughts were of limited consequence when believers and unbelievers alike adopted forms of speech that legitimated his imperial sway.

Linguistic engineering also made the categories and schemas of revolutionary thought more accessible and easier to use than rival schemas and categories. We saw in chapter 2 that by the 1960s, revolutionary concepts had become the natural categories of social analysis. While Mao lived, they remained unchal-

lenged. So when Lowell Dittmer interviewed Chinese refugees and immigrants in Hong Kong in the 1970s, they still said things such as "If you want progress, you have to have struggle" and "Without struggles, contradictions cannot be resolved." Dittmer concluded that belief in the "abstract verities" of Maoist polemics survived "at least until the death of Mao Zedong and the arrest of his most ardent supporters allowed the language itself to be reconsidered" (Dittmer 1987, 106–107). And even people who no longer believed in the verities still often spoke and reasoned in once-revolutionary categories of thought that had been assimilated into their culture (cf. Chen 1998; Zheng 2000, 2).

Throughout this study, I have stressed that verbal conformity is linked to powerful mechanisms of persuasion. It made even Mao's secret enemies model correct attitudes; it made worship of Mao and his Word a condition of acceptance by all reference groups; it linked positive words with Mao and his policies and negative words with everything he opposed; it ensured that correct views gained credibility through the validity effect; it provided opportunities to change attitudes by rewarding those who said correct things and punishing those who did not; it induced people to recite scripts that changed their attitudes through dissonance or self-perception; and it led people to say things that took Maoist assumptions for granted, strengthening those assumptions in their audience through retroactive strengthening.

These mechanisms of persuasion worked especially well when people profited from Communist Party rule. In the early 1950s, most poor and lower-middle peasants were easily won over by the discourse of land reform. They also warmed quickly to the discourse of class that made them the most prestigious group in the rural class structure. They were the class upon which the cadres were always told to rely, the class from which educated youth sent down to the countryside were told to learn, the Zhuge Liangs whose wisdom the Party was in theory supposed to tap. Moreover, the discourse of their class superiority conferred material advantages. It justified giving them more

work points, and hence higher incomes, than were given to members of the black categories; it justified giving them preference in recruitment into the Party and positions of responsibility; it justified giving them further education when their academic qualifications were poor; it gave them partial immunity from accusations that they lacked revolutionary consciousness, so that they could sometimes afford to be a little politically incorrect; and it meant that they were less likely to be blamed when something went wrong, for the discourse identified landlords and rich peasants as the most likely culprits (cf. Unger 1984; Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1984).

The discourse of collectivism was resisted by many peasants, but others found it attractive. It had great appeal for the cadres who dominated the structures of collective power, for it expanded their responsibilities and bolstered their authority. The discourse also benefited many members of the urban working class, justifying their "iron rice bowl" of permanent employment, as well as the collective provision of health care, pensions, and education. Insulated from the rigors of the market, they developed a culture of loafing on the job; and when in the 1980s they were allowed to leave state employment, they seldom took the opportunity. They preferred to take it easy at their collective work rather than moonlight at other jobs after hours, and they saw the potential closure of money-losing state industries as a threat.

Revolutionary discourse was especially popular when it assisted upward mobility. The discourse of the Newborn Things, for example, was accepted by most of the new cadres whom Jiang Qing and her allies recruited and promoted in the hope of building a power base in the Party. These helicopter cadres, as they were called, knew who their patrons were, and they avoided dissonance by accepting the message of the revolutionary language they spoke and enforced. More generally, the red classes as a whole benefited from discourses that emphasized class background and political virtue at the expense of expertise. Reducing competition from the bad and middle

classes had always been an objective of many red-class youths, and they were easily persuaded by discourses that gave them an advantage.

The ignorance of youth was a great help to language-based persuasion. By 1976, most young people knew non-Maoist worldviews almost entirely through Maoist discourse, which caricatured and condemned capitalism, liberalism, revisionism, feudalism, Confucianism, and so on. The young were vulnerable in other ways, too. When they learned and recited stories about revolutionary heroes, model workers, and model soldiers, they were less likely than their parents to know that these models were too good to be true; they had not lived long enough to know how frequently the Maoist message had contradicted itself over the years; and they had not yet accumulated a wealth of bitter experience to make them appreciate the gulf between discourse and reality. It is not surprising that during the Cultural Revolution naïve, idealistic, and ardently revolutionary young people were Mao's principal weapon against the intellectuals and the Party.

Adults were less vulnerable to linguistic engineering than children, but on many topics they, too, lacked sources of information independent of the discourse. For example, very few people knew enough about life in the West to make them doubt for long the carefully devised scripts that everyone recited. Newspapers, cadres, intellectuals, workers, peasants, and even members of the bad classes all said, "The workers in capitalist countries are haunted by the threat of starvation." People heard themselves repeating this to others, and it began to seem as true as any platitude. Similarly, when city dwellers heard peasants speak bitterness against those who had been their landlords before liberation, they were in no position to say, "These peasants are making it up or exaggerating." Few could remain skeptical when all the peasants, in the presence of outsiders whom they did not trust, stuck to the script.

Faith in Mao himself remained widespread, even as resentment at the policies implemented in his name grew. In part,

this was because Mao's own words could be interpreted in different ways, depending on the interpretive assumptions of those who heard or read them. This made it possible for people to retain their belief in Mao's wisdom by blaming, say, Jiang Qing or the Party for misinterpreting his words. It also made it possible for Mao to blame his subordinates for misunderstanding his instructions whenever their attempts to implement his apparent wishes resulted in disaster.

Mao existed for most Chinese only through his writings and the myths of discourse. Very few people were in a position to question what they were officially told or to resist the conditioning effects of formulae that constantly juxtaposed the title Chairman Mao with positive terms such as "Great Leader," "Great Helmsman," and "the red, red sun in our hearts." As a result, even those who had come to hate the Cultural Revolution and many features of Communist Party rule were often slow to blame Mao. Jung Chang, for example, detested the Cultural Revolution as early as 1966 and became progressively more alienated from the Chinese political system, but it was not until 1974 that she blamed Mao himself, rather than Lin Biao or Jiang Qing. Even then, she connected Mao with China's ills only because through a friend she read the first foreign magazine that she had ever seen—a copy of *Newsweek* that linked Mao to Jiang Qing by describing her as his "eyes, ears, and voice." This hint from a rival discourse struck her "like a flash of lightning," letting her see that "it was Mao who had been behind all the destruction and suffering" (Chang 1992, 631).

Finally, linguistic engineering was a crucial weapon in the assault by Mao and the Party on the Confucian values of harmony, moderation, and deference toward authority. We saw in chapter 2 that when the Communist Party destroyed the power of landlords, rich peasants, capitalists, and other traditional leaders in the 1950s, it manipulated workers and peasants into attacking them verbally—condemning them to their faces and demanding that they be punished. This tactic ensured that ordinary people shared responsibility for the destruction of the old

ruling groups, and it caused many of them to experience severe dissonance. Most reduced it by committing themselves to revolutionary ideology and class hatred while abandoning their regard for deference, harmony, moderation, and traditional authority.

The Party of course created a new authority structure, but this in turn was destroyed when Mao mobilized the revolutionary masses during the Cultural Revolution. In his name, millions of young people attacked, humiliated, and sometimes killed teachers, intellectuals, and cadres. Most of the abuse that these authority figures suffered was verbal. Speaking in standard revolutionary formulae, students denounced their teachers as ghosts and monsters, exposed writers as counterrevolutionaries, accused cadres of being the talons and fangs of Liu Shaoqi, and shouted violent threats. They suffered painful dissonance unless they abandoned their commitment to the ideals of deference, harmony, and moderation.

By the time Mao reimposed centralized control in the second half of 1968, old attitudes toward authority had largely been destroyed. If people now obeyed their superiors, as they mostly did, it was usually because they thought their instructions made good sense or because they feared the consequences of disobedience. In a survey of two thousand people in the greater Shanghai area in the late 1980s, Chu and Ju found that only about one-third of their respondents endorsed the traditional value of submission to authority. The vast majority of those questioned rejected the idea that people should try to please their superiors; more than 90 percent said that they would not hesitate to express disagreement with a superior; and nearly 90 percent said that they would prefer "a young, capable leader, to the highly respected elder of the past." Chu and Ju also found that very few people believed that public affairs should be "left to those with influence and experience," and that only some 25 to 30 percent endorsed forms of behavior that expressed the Confucian virtues of social harmony, tolerance, deference, and propriety (Chu and Ju 1993, 283–289).

In China today, the predominant values are radically different from those that prevailed before 1949, and Mao's linguistic and social engineering has a good deal to do with that. But the Chinese people were not, as he hoped, a blank sheet of paper on which he could write the new revolutionary characters of his imagination. Mao, the great calligrapher of human souls, had many failures. It is to these that we now turn.

Failures

Language and Its Contexts

If we want to know the Maoist ideal of the perfect revolutionary, we can find it in the leading characters of Jiang Qing's model revolutionary operas. They were heroic and decisive, they sought inspiration from Mao's words at every turn, and they always knew how to interpret and apply them.

Outside the world of Maoist fiction, the meaning and practical implications of Mao's instructions were often obscure. Jiang Qing herself sometimes floundered. When Mao heard her explanation of his purpose in criticizing the classic Chinese novel *The Water Margin*, he reportedly exclaimed, "Shit, [she is] barking up the wrong tree" (Pye 1981, 216). Her problem, and everyone else's, was not just that Mao's words were often vague, but that even clearly worded statements can mean different things, have different referents, and have different political implications, depending on their context.

While Mao ruled with and through the Party, interpretation was controlled, as far as possible, by constant monitoring and correction. The importance of hierarchical control was revealed when Mao mobilized the revolutionary masses against the Party in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. People continued to speak the common revolutionary language, but, from the perspective of the Maoist leadership, they often directed it at the wrong targets, used it inappropriately, and misinterpreted it. The link between correct language and correct thought was destroyed, and by early 1967, Mao had lost control of inter-

pretation. For some eighteen months, revolutionary language became little more than a weapon in a low-grade civil war.

Problems of interpretation were exacerbated by Mao's own policies. Under his influence, the Communist Party perpetuated class struggle in what could have been, officially, a classless society. It divided the population into artificially created good, bad, and middle classes set apart by political status, life chances, and self-interest. This division generated the class-based variations in attitudes and interpretive assumptions that led Red Guards with different class origins to understand Mao's instructions in contrasting ways.

The situation was made worse because the Party, and Mao himself, periodically legitimized the framing of targeted individuals by taking their words out of context or interpreting them arbitrarily as counterrevolutionary allegories. The practise of framing got completely out of control during the Cultural Revolution when Mao placed it the hands of the revolutionary masses and it became a weapon of mass destruction. Millions of people had the intended meaning of their words cruelly distorted, making the relationship between words, context, and meaning increasingly uncertain. This distortion and uncertainty bred cynicism about revolutionary language and subverted the link between correct verbal formulae and correct thought upon which linguistic engineering depends. In this respect, as in others, Mao unintentionally undermined the effectiveness of his own program of linguistic engineering.

Language versus Experience

The efficacy of linguistic engineering diminishes if there is a gulf between discourse and self-interest and between discourse and reality. In rural China, the discourses of collectivism and the Great Leap Forward were most vulnerable. For many Chinese peasants, the crucial year was 1955, when the Party began forcing the peasants to surrender their land to collectives controlled by the cadres. The discourse that justified the change was unpopular with many peasants from the start, and in their

eyes it was soon largely discredited because it helped to cause the disaster of the Great Leap Forward. When the peasants mouthed the slogans of collectivist Maoism, most were paying lip service to policies they detested or to claims they knew were false. They knew that collectivization had not given control of the land to the peasants, but had transferred it to the cadres; they knew that the Party, which extolled their superior wisdom, had forced them to adopt policies they knew would not work; they knew that the Great Leap Forward, officially proclaimed a success, had left them starving; and they knew that the Party that had liberated them from exploitation took as much of their production as it could and reduced most of them to poverty. The peasants suffered most as a result of collectivist discourse, and it was they who most most strongly opposed it.

Other themes in Maoist discourse failed to convince particular sections of the population. The discourse of the Party's superior wisdom did not persuade higher intellectuals to agree with less-educated cadres who told them what to write, teach, and think on academic subjects—as the outburst of criticism during the Hundred Flowers campaign demonstrated. Similarly, while the discourse of class hatred may have convinced a good many landlords, capitalists, counterrevolutionaries, and rich peasants that the class structure of prerevolutionary China was unjust, it did not make them accept all that was said about them personally. They knew too much to see themselves as the discourse described them—as one-dimensional embodiments of evil. Their children were not convinced, either. They were pressed to denounce their parents, but few did. While they tried to avoid discrimination by saying all the right things in public, they often grumbled among themselves and developed their own subculture. One bad-class interviewee told Anita Chan, “If we became red we were degrading ourselves” (Chan 1985, 119). When the discourse came up against self-interest, self-knowledge, and self-respect, its effectiveness was limited.

The numbers who resented particular applications of the discourse of class struggle were huge, for Mao's determination

to perpetuate conflict continually claimed new victims. They included, according to official Party estimates, more than twenty million people who were labeled landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, or bad elements in the early 1950s; more than half a million people who were branded as Rightists in 1957; several million peasants and other rural residents who were declared antisocialist elements during the popular backlash against collective farming and Party incompetence in the early 1960s; three million cadres who had been involved in unjust and erroneous cases during the Cultural Revolution; and 1.2 million people who were formally tried and convicted, mostly as counterrevolutionaries, during the Cultural Revolution. According to Hu Yaobang, who headed the investigation into their cases, between 1957 and 1976 the victims and their families numbered about a hundred million (Nathan 1986, 7; Rummel 1991, 261).

Many others were scarred and alienated by at least parts of the discourse. They included large numbers of red-class Red Guards who had thought of themselves as revolutionary successors. They felt betrayed when the Maoist leadership turned on them and their families in late 1966 as it mobilized the predominantly middle-class rebels against the Party. One former red-class Red Guard recalled,

It was a head-on blow. . . . I was changed from a leader of the revolution to its target overnight! I never dreamed this could happen to me. . . .

Suddenly my faith in Mao and the party center fell away. I saw all the flaws of the Cultural Revolution: there were no revisionists or capitalist roaders in the school, the working group didn't push a capitalist reactionary line, the home raids were nonsense, and fighting the Sons of Bitches [the bad classes] was totally insane. If anyone had made a mistake, it was Mao and the party by starting this damnable revolution in the first place. (Zhai 1992, 119–120)

Then, as we saw in chapter 3, both the rebels and the revolutionary workers were betrayed once they had done what the Maoists wanted—virtually destroyed the Party, which Mao no

longer trusted. They knew that they had been used by those who spoke in Mao's name, and their political naïveté vanished.

Disillusionment was followed by desocialization. Red Guards and former Red Guards often began to indulge in precisely the bourgeois habits that they had tried so strenuously to eradicate earlier in the Cultural Revolution. Zhou Enlai complained early in 1968 that one élite Red Guard unit had lost two-thirds of its members and that "the bad ones turn to lovemaking, playing poker, leading a dissipated life, having the ideas of the United Action Committee, writing reactionary handbills, etc." (Liu 1976, 184). Western novels and the Chinese classics became prized, if carefully concealed, possessions, and a black market in books developed with the highest prices paid for "yellow books" with romantic themes and references to sex. The black market dealt in many other things, too, including Mao badges; and with the breakdown of Party control gangs and lineage groups emerged to fill the void (Chang 1992, 488–496; Liu 1976, 184–185; Liu 1986, 330–333; Ling 1972; Liang and Shapiro 1983, 149–152, 191). The reimposition of centralized control after 1968 suppressed these activities and forced the younger students back to school, although it took some time to overcome widespread truancy and disorder among children who for two years had run free (Unger 1982, 149–152, 158–159, 186–187). Nothing, however, could restore the faith of the Cultural Revolution generation in those whom they blamed for their betrayal—Lin Biao, Jiang Qing and her faction, and occasionally even Mao himself.

Finally, if the Newborn Things of the Cultural Revolution won the loyalty of those who benefited from them, they aroused resentment among those whom they disadvantaged: the teachers, academics, and other intellectuals who now took their orders from sometimes illiterate workers in the Workers' Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams; urban high school graduates whose idealism did not extend to being sent to the countryside to become, in effect, peasants; the brilliant students of nonred background who were denied further education because political criteria gave preference to worker-peasant-soldier stu-

dents who were sometimes scarcely literate; and the cadres, doctors, and intellectuals who suffered in rural labor camps under the supervision of PLA Propaganda Teams. All of these had experiences that cast doubt on the philosophy that informed at least some of the revolutionary formulae that they, like everyone else, recited. They had great difficulty in accepting all the claims of a discourse that praised policies that ruined their dreams and, quite deliberately, destroyed their self-esteem.

The appeal of Maoist ideology had always been its promise that with a few years of self-sacrifice and ideological rectitude the Chinese people would create a prosperous and fully socialist society, then move rapidly to the utopia of communism. "Three years of struggle, a thousand years of communist happiness," Mao had told them (Dittmer 1987, 41). However, the failure of the Great Leap Forward buried all hope of a rapid transition, and the trauma of free mobilization of the revolutionary masses between 1966 and 1968 left most Chinese with a bad case of revolutionary burn-out. They wanted to feel safe, they wanted an end to hardship, and they wanted peace and order. Instead, they got continuing revolution: a new social order that systematically assaulted pre-Cultural Revolution élites, and an endless succession of campaigns under the banner of class struggle. At the end of it all, they were still no closer to the rich and happy society they had been promised. Indeed, according to Mao, neither they nor their children would gain any benefit. He had abandoned the goal of material betterment, saying that it impeded the transition to socialism, and he had concluded that "nothing is certain except struggle. . . . It is quite possible the struggle will last for two or three hundred years" (Dittmer 1987, 41, 134). This new message of endless revolutionary turmoil to support an uncertain and distant utopian vision was almost too much for most people to bear. Maoism was no longer an ideology of hope, but a growing and sometimes intolerable burden. People kept on mouthing the revolutionary formulae, but in many cases their revolutionary commitment was ebbing. They were beginning to lose the faith (see Ci 1994).

When people thought that their own revolutionary words sometimes had a hollow ring, they became increasingly suspicious of revolutionary rhetoric from the mouths of others. This suspicion accentuated a perennial problem in Mao's China: the inherent instability of a virtuocracy in which, in theory and often in practice, people received promotion, power, and honor for saying and doing all the right things. Everyone knew that people whose words and behavior were morally unacceptable (incorrect) would not be allowed to succeed and that the most politically virtuous tended to receive the biggest rewards. However, the problem with virtuocracies, as Susan Shirk (1984) has argued so well, is that they destroy the reign of virtue, producing opportunism, sycophancy, patronage, avoidance of activists, and privatization. When people are conspicuous for saying all the right revolutionary things, they are often just trying to advance themselves; when they say what their superiors want to hear, they are often attempting to please or flatter potential patrons; and when they obey the rules of the virtuocracy by making more than the usual innocuous criticisms of erring colleagues, they may be seeking revolutionary advancement by putting political principles above personal friendship. Most people know this, so the language of revolutionary self-sacrifice is often regarded as a manifestation of self-serving ambition; activists who use revolutionary language to criticize others are feared and avoided lest they betray their friends to prove their virtue; and true friends, who put personal loyalty above revolutionary self-advancement, become especially valued because they are so rare.

China was not, of course, a pure virtuocracy. In some periods, merit was an important criterion of advancement, although it was heavily discounted during the Cultural Revolution. Class background also played a big role, partly because the Party regarded class background as a simpler and more reliable test of political virtue than revolutionary language or political activism. However, in all periods, and especially during the Cultural Revolution, people were forced to protect themselves and seek

advancement by verbal displays of revolutionary conformity. Words were cheap and everyone knew it. So while everyone understood, and respected, a decent compliance with the norms of linguistic virtue, those who excelled often became not admired models, but objects of skepticism. The realities of life in a virtuocracy promoted cynicism about revolutionary language and undermined the effectiveness of linguistic engineering.

If personal experience caused most people to doubt some of the claims of revolutionary discourse, comparatively few people rejected that discourse wholesale while Mao was still alive. Often, they disliked particular leaders, particular policies, or particular aspects of the system they were forced to praise, but they liked other leaders, other policies, other aspects of the system. Their acceptance and rejection of the discourse was selective. Moreover, a lot of people who suffered at the hands of the system believed that it should be reformed and run better, rather than abandoned. The most obvious example of continued belief in the basic soundness of the system, despite an intimate acquaintance with its faults, is the veteran cadres who were victimized during successive Party rectifications and the Cultural Revolution. Most of them kept the socialist faith, and even when in disgrace they usually remained confident that their punishment was all a mistake—that Mao or the Party would remedy the situation and redress the wrongs they had suffered.

Cadres were, of course, more highly motivated than most people to believe that the system was fundamentally sound, but there were many others who wanted only system-preserving reform and who clung on to as much of the discourse as they could. This was often because they not only suffered under the system but benefited from it, whether as members of the red classes who enjoyed their status, as workers who valued their iron rice bowl, or as members of the middle classes who, through talent and political virtue, had overcome the disadvantage of nonred origins. At times, however, something deeper than self-interest lay behind their desire to internalize as much of the discourse as they could, rejecting only those themes that

damaged their interests or were discredited by their experience. The attraction of the discourse lay precisely in the fact that it embodied a worldview that related past, present, and future—a philosophy that seemed to explain much of what happened in the world and that gave a purpose to many of life's struggles. By the 1970s, Maoism was the only coherent worldview many Chinese knew. They were reluctant to give it up completely until they found an alternative vision—or had learned to find meaning without one.

Language versus Itself

If language is to mold thought, then it helps if the message it delivers is consistent. During the Cultural Revolution, however, the tactical requirements of the power struggle led to contradictions so blatant that few people could ignore them. We saw in chapter 3 how Mao repeatedly changed the content of crucial terms such as “revolutionary,” “counterrevolutionary,” and “revisionist” to turn the attack first against one group then against another. Every time he did this, he changed his revolutionary message. By 1968, most people were totally unsure of what that message was: they guessed, and hoped that they were right, or they suited themselves.

The confusion continued during the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution, as the message moved from the far left (1968–1970), to a more moderate stance (late 1970–1972), then back to the left (1973–1974), before renewed moderation (1975) and a final swing to the left (late 1975 and 1976). These switches reflected the power struggle between more radical and moderate factions within the Chinese leadership, which Mao played off against each other to ensure that no one faction ever became too powerful and threatened his dominance (cf. Dittmer 1987, 108–140, 172; Joseph 1984). All the switches were supported by political campaigns in which the Chinese people were required to condemn, alternately, the revisionism of the moderates and the ultraleftism of the radicals. The result was widespread con-

fusion, even among cadres, about what the proper revolutionary line really was. In the words of one of Dittmer's informants, "Before the Cultural Revolution, I would believe that Mao could reform people's thinking. After the Cultural Revolution, I did not know what kind of thinking Mao wanted to reform." Or as another said, "If it was me, my thinking would change back and forth many times. I was afraid, therefore I would change" (Dittmer 1987, 173).

For many people, a turning point came with the disgrace of Lin Biao in 1971. Most had been prepared to accept that Liu Shaoqi was a traitor whom Mao had been waiting to expose, but when Lin Biao—the high priest of Mao worship—was revealed as yet another traitor and a secret ally of Liu, the strain on most people's credulity was too great. Mao's close comrade-in-arms, his designated successor, had allegedly all along been plotting against Mao and the revolution, and Mao had just been waiting for the correct moment to expose him! If this were true, then for many years the press and the Communist Party had misled the Chinese people by portraying Lin as Mao's most loyal follower. If it were false, then the newspapers and the Party were misleading the people now. In either case, the official media and the Party had no credibility, and Mao himself was either fallible or guilty of deception. Moreover, the downfall of Lin Biao was a lesson in the nature of politics among the Chinese élite. All but the most naïve observers began to suspect that when the press and Party mobilized the people to condemn a particular leader, the intention was not to defend the revolution, but to use the people as a weapon in a ruthless struggle for power. One young peasant in Chen Village spoke for many: "I had felt faithful to Mao, but that Lin Biao stuff affected my thinking. Things always seemed to be changing at the top. You couldn't trust everything they said." Another youth said bluntly, "We came to see that the leaders up there could say today that something is round; tomorrow, that it's flat. We lost faith in the system" (Chan, Madson, and Unger 1984, 231).

Cynicism grew when the latest change in the Party line resulted in the sudden condemnation of leaders who distanced themselves from Maoist policies emphasizing revolutionary struggle. When the reform-minded Deng Xiaoping was dismissed for the second time in 1976, his speeches were distributed for criticism—speeches in which he called for more intellectual freedom and an end to victimization and in which he emphasized economic development and improved living standards rather than class struggle. We had to study those speeches and condemn them, using them as evidence that “The capitalist roader is still on the road!” As Jung Chang records (1992, 654–656), most of us went through the motions of criticizing Deng, but we felt sympathy with his words, not our own.

At this time, revolutionary discourse was dominated by Jiang Qing and her clique, who by late 1975 had gained almost total control of the media. They used it not only to criticize respected politicians such as Deng and Zhou Enlai, but to attack the very popular policies with which they were identified. These attacks further discredited the media, whose monopoly on information began partially to disintegrate. Eager to know what lay behind the official mask of Chinese politics, people in the cities increasingly resorted to “side-street news” (*xiaodao xiaoxi*)—gossip and rumor—in an attempt to get more-reliable information. The most common targets of these stories were Jiang Qing and her entourage. Stories about her love life before she met Mao, her liking for foreign movies, her alleged baldness, and her desire to succeed Mao as a *de facto* empress all circulated among people who hoped that they could trust each other not to betray the confidence. In some circles people even began to whisper that Mao was senile and to say that the young women who were seen with him in pictures and on newsreels were actually his mistresses, procured by his bodyguard Wang Dongxin. On the other side, stories were told that reflected well on Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping, the leaders who represented the best hope for stability, prosperity, and an end to revolutionary turmoil. Zhou

was depicted as wise, clever, and humane, while the stories about Deng focused on his intellectual mastery, his shrewdness, and his quick wit (cf. Nathan 1986, 175–177; Liu 1986, 272–275).

Many people who were disillusioned with the extreme Maoists and their policies began to believe that they could not be the only ones with doubts. Tentatively at first, they began to share their dissatisfaction with friends. Soon they were speaking privately in subversive discourses that contradicted some of the things they said in public. People who valued education began to mutter about the sad state of the universities: “college in name, middle school teaching materials, and elementary school level” (*daxue mingtang, zhongxue jiaocai, xiaoxue chengdu*). Workers, who were sometimes forced to repeat claims about how the abolition of material incentives had boosted productivity, knew the reality in their own factories: “low efficiency, sharing the common bowl of rice, and a job as permanent as iron” (*di xiaoliu, da guofan, tiefanwan*). They could mouth the idealistic rhetoric about the superior efficiency of work based purely on moral incentives, but many did as little work as possible, for “work or no work, the result is the same” (*gan bu gan, yige yang*). (Dittmer and Chen 1981, 49, 64).

The peasants had long been the main exponents of subversive discourses. They were the economic group most sorely oppressed, they were often emboldened by good class backgrounds, and they were less likely to be subjected to the rituals of small group criticism and self-criticism that made people in the cities fear betrayal by so-called friends if they used a word out of place (cf. Whyte 1974). Many of the peasants had been grumbling among themselves ever since collectivization, their apathy captured in a popular folk song of the era: “Commune work, drag your feet, When noontime comes, let's go and eat” (Chu and Ju 1993, 277). Their cynical attitude toward collective labor had not abated by the 1970s. One rural saying went like this: “The public work is slowly done, following the crowd. Everyone gets ten work points. Why should I work harder?”

(Zhou 1996, 30). In Chen Village, some of the younger peasants composed sardonic doggerel about cadre corruption and their own casual attitude to collective labor:

A feast is not mine to eat,
"Spoils" are not mine to grab.
Only laboring day in and out,
Why not go to the fields for a rest? (Chan, Madsen, and Unger
1984, 259)

Kate Zhou, who lived with the peasants during the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution, learned that they called the Party secretaries at the brigade and commune levels local emperors (*tuhuangdi*) and that cadres in general, adept at fleecing the peasants for the benefit of the state, were known as cadres with scissors (*jiandao ganbu*). She even heard outright condemnation: "The state is like a crazy man, always picking those things that will hurt us most" (Zhou 1996, 29, 31, 33). The peasants were undoubtedly the ones furthest down what Maoists called the capitalist road.

The development of counterlanguages was a sign that, by Mao's final years, people were seceding from the totalitarian project and that the system of linguistic engineering had begun to self-destruct. The institutional supports for the system were more formidable than ever, and the Maoist leaders' passion for linguistic uniformity was undiminished, but attempts to impose that uniformity were less and less effective. People in the cities, following weakly in the peasants' wake, had often developed a cynicism that at times crept into the language of familiar discourse. Moreover, although people continued to say the right things in the company of cadres, activists, and strangers, their faith in a good deal of what they said was collapsing.

The underlying cause of this loss of faith was that Maoist discourse was applied in ways that discredited it: people were made to say things at variance with their own experience, they were made to say things that denied deeply entrenched preferences, and they were made to say things one day that contradicted what they had been made to say the day before. In part, this

enforcement of counterproductive discourses occurred because the linguistic engineers gave the Chinese people too little credit for intelligence, regarding them as machines that could be reengineered at whim. But in part, it was because persuasion was not the only goal. The fact that people repeated things they knew to be untrue demonstrated their submission. To that extent, it did not matter if they silently resisted the anti-Deng discourse in which they publicly participated, for their participation demonstrated to them and to all the world that Jiang Qing and her friends were in charge. Linguistic engineering was not just a mechanism of revolutionary conversion, but a weapon that could be used to intimidate, to legitimate, and to control.

After Mao

Mao Zedong died on 9 September 1976. Some people wept out of genuine grief; some, like me, were relieved when the tears came, helped along by the grief of others; some cried because they feared that, with Mao gone, Jiang Qing and her cronies would have a free hand; and some buried their heads and pretended to cry, hoping they would not be discovered.

The grief and pseudo-grief of many Chinese turned into rejoicing when it was learned that Jiang Qing and her supporters, now dubbed the Gang of Four, had been arrested on 6 October. In Tianjin, there was intense excitement and relief in most intellectual circles, and many people from all social groups joined eagerly in the huge, officially organized demonstration that celebrated the Gang's downfall. In Beijing, a young Canadian Chinese student, Jan Wong, watched the public reaction in astonishment:

People literally danced in the streets. Firecrackers exploded all night. Liquor store shelves were emptied as people rushed to drink toasts. . . . Everywhere, I saw people wandering around with broad smiles and big hangovers. It seemed that the entire capital was marching deliriously to Tiananmen Square. Artists who had suffered under Madame Mao's cultural fascism sketched devastating caricatures and pasted them up in the square. Ordinary people took

turns spitting on them to see who could score the most direct hits.
(Wong 1997, 177)

Not everyone was happy. There were cadres, identified with the gang's policies, who had reason to be nervous about their futures; and there were members of the red classes, particularly worker-peasant-soldier students, who soon began to worry that the Gang's demise might bring new, meritocratic policies that would harm their futures. But these voices were silenced by fear, and by the genuine elation of the majority.

With the departure of the group blamed for the worst repression, most people felt free to speak more openly. What they now began to say sometimes shocked Western admirers of Mao who had taken the Chinese people at their word, thinking that they believed all the formulae the linguistic engineers compelled them to mouth. One such admirer was Jan Wong, who after four years in China still thought that people meant it when they declared their enthusiasm for the Cultural Revolution and the Newborn Things. She was shattered when everyone she knew celebrated the downfall of the Gang of Four, then told her that "the Cultural Revolution had been a bad, bad thing" and that "they had been waiting for years for the madness to end." "I felt betrayed," she recalls, "like the victim of a massive practical joke. Everyone had lied to me—my classmates and teachers, my friends and relatives. I knew it was not personal. They had had no choice." She had learned what most Chinese adults already knew—that "the sets were fake and people were just speaking their lines with less and less conviction." "Nobody believed in the revolution anymore," she said with pardonable exaggeration. "They hadn't for a long time, and I had been too stupid to see it" (Wong 1997, 178, 185–186).

At this stage, the only revolution most people rejected was Mao's continuous revolution, with its endless convulsions, its periodic crackdowns on small-scale private production by the peasants, and its indefinite postponement of the rewards that were supposed to come from revolutionary endeavor. This was the revolution that was extolled in the distinctive discourse of

the Cultural Revolution—the revolution that made people's lives miserable and that they blamed on the Gang of Four. But most people's attachment to any sort of revolutionary politics or utopian vision was now fragile, and a more general disillusionment was soon to come. One of its agents was Mao's successor, Hua Guofeng, who had ordered the gang's arrest. Hua claimed Mao's mantle, and he continued to manipulate revolutionary discourse in the traditional Maoist fashion. Everyone was now expected to accuse the Gang of Four of being revisionists bent on restoring capitalism. Even the dialogue in school English textbooks was pressed into the attack:

- A: The Gang of Four Anti-Party clique wanted to usurp Party and state power and restore capitalism. We Red Guards, never allow them!
- B: That's right. The struggle against the Gang of Four is a life-and-death struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, between socialism and capitalism and between Marxism and revisionism. We must fight against them. (*Yingyu*, vol. 3, Henan n.d. [1977?])

So members of the Gang were subjected to the ritual condemnation they had used to attack Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and Lin Biao. The targets changed, depending on who was in or out of power, but the discourse remained the same. Yesterday's revolutionary leaders were today's capitalist roaders and revisionists, and even the most credulous could see what was going on. "One day the earth is round, the next it is flat," said a young woman reporting on reactions in her village. "We realized that it is not possible to believe all the preposterous things we were told, especially when they would all be turned on their heads at the next minute" (Bishop 1989, 18). Even people who were delighted to see the last of the Gang of Four thought that the terms in which they were required to condemn them were preposterous. Cynicism about linguistic engineering, already far advanced, became all-pervasive.

To bolster his frail claim to legitimacy, Hua also sought to

appropriate Mao's legacy and to make himself the star of a new personality cult. People were supposed to say the sorts of things they read in the Party press and the school textbooks: "The whole Party, the whole army and the whole people love Chairman Hua. Following Chairman Hua, we will carry out Chairman Mao's behests and make revolution forever" (*English*, vol. 4, Henan 1978). The sudden creation of a personality cult around a relative nonentity like Hua again made many people cynical, and the prospect of revolution forever filled them with despair.

Materialism, which had begun to fill the void as utopian hopes faded in the later Mao era, now became rampant. In December 1976, Mao's article "On Ten Major Relationships" was republished in the Party press and set for serious study and discussion in all work units. However, these ten major relationships were soon transformed by popular doggerel into "ten major requirements" that women demanded of prospective suitors:

*Yi fang jiaju dai shafa,
Er lao jian zai neng kan wa.
San gulu yi xiang dai kacha,
Si ji yifu chuan kuaiba.
Wu guan duanzheng yi mi ba,
Liu qin bu ren wu qiangua.
Qishi yuan gongzi dai fujia,
Ba mian linglong hui shuohua.
Jiu yan bu zhan zhi he cha,
Shifen manyi jiu jian ta.*

(One room full of furniture with sofa,
Two parents healthy enough to babysit.
Three turns and one sound plus camera,
Four seasons' clothes with wool.
Five features good-looking and body tall,
Six relationships denied.
Seventy dollars in wages plus a bonus,
Popular and articulate with all.
No alcohol, no cigarettes, only tea,
I'll see him if the above are satisfactorily met.)
(Translation adapted from Dittmer and Chen 1981, 51).

The materialism of these ten major requirements is obvious, especially when we realize that the three turns were things that had parts that turned (a bike, a sewing machine, and a watch), that the one sound was a radio, and that the five features were the features of the face. Soon, people were talking and laughing about the requirements throughout urban China. This was a reflection of popular revulsion against demands for revolutionary self-sacrifice. It was also a sign that people were losing their fear and that subversive discourses were no longer confined to discreet communication among people who trusted each other.

People's loss of fear was greatly assisted by the political resurrection of Deng Xiaoping. The Party's left was weakened by the purge of the Gang of Four and its supporters; thus in July 1977 Deng's supporters were able to persuade a reluctant Hua to restore him to his former positions. Hua clung to the trappings of office until 1981, but Deng achieved dominance fairly quickly after his return and shattered both the discourse of praise for the Cultural Revolution and the discourse of denial with which the Party had sought to erase memories of the sufferings so many had endured under Mao's rule. What Deng did was seize on Mao's maxim Seek truth from facts and promote it as the essence of Mao's Thought. People had learned, under Mao, that the only facts they were allowed to discover were those consistent with Mao's Thought, but now Deng said that Mao himself had made mistakes and he quoted his neglected dictum that they should "make practise the sole criterion of truth" (Lieberthal 1995, 129–133). In this way, Deng adroitly manipulated Mao's own words to destroy the worship of his Thought. He also made people less afraid to talk about the facts, as they saw them, and he undermined the basis for any continued attempts to remake people's minds by enforcing wholesale recitation of scripts from official discourse.

Once people lost their fear, there followed an outpouring of bitterness against the wrongs that millions of people had suffered under Mao's rule: from those declared Rightists in 1957 in a campaign Deng himself, as the Party's General Secretary, had

directed; from people who had been persecuted for trivial or nonexistent offenses by overzealous or vindictive superiors; and, most numerous of all, from the victims of the Cultural Revolution. They wrote letters or traveled in person to Beijing, where two-hundred thousand cadres were given the job of investigating their grievances (Nathan 1986, 29); they plastered walls, including the famous democracy wall in Beijing, with posters that spelled out their complaints; and they told their stories, and the stories of others who had suffered, in a torrent of "wounded literature" (e.g., Barmé and Lee 1979; Feng 1991). Much of this was actively encouraged by the Party, which was concerned both to remove a dangerous accumulation of bitterness and to direct the blame away from Mao and the Party and toward individual wrongdoers—Lin Biao and the Gang of Four. But no one in China thinks that the millions who raised their voices were simply following the new Party line. They spoke from the heart, and when in 1978 and 1979 some began to argue that the root cause of the injustices was a continuing lack of democracy and accountability, they were crushed (Nathan 1986).

By the time Mao died, many people had lost faith in the official media. Interviewing a sample of sixty-nine people who left China, mostly in the late 1970s or early 1980s, Andrew Nathan (1986, 173–175) divided them into three groups on the basis of their attitudes toward the media. Members of one group read newspapers and listened to broadcasts because they needed to know what the Party wanted them to believe, but they remained agnostic about the accuracy of what they were told. Members of the second group openly scorned the reliability of the media, dismissing most news stories as untrue or distorted. Members of the third group agreed that the official press was unreliable, but felt that they could often decode it to ascertain the truth if they studied it carefully and interpreted it with the help of "side-street news," occasional access to "internal publications" intended for cadres, and information illicitly obtained from foreign radio broadcasts. Not one person in Nathan's sample

believed that the official media were generally reliable (Nathan 1986, 180).

The Party realized that the media were widely scorned, and when Deng Xiaoping gained the ascendancy he took steps to restore the media's credibility. The result was a significant increase in reliable reporting. However, in 1982 a survey of readers in Beijing still found that only 24 percent regarded the newspapers as "believable," while 21 percent saw them as "often or always untruthful." The remaining 55 percent described the newspapers as "basically believable," which presumably meant that they had no reason to misreport most things, but distorted or invented some stories for political purposes. In a survey in Tianjin, many readers accused the papers of "swaying and swinging" for political motives, while a critique published in 1984 reported that "many readers disbelieved on principle 20 to 50 percent of what they read in the press"—a finding that the author blamed on the fact that "the propaganda flavour [was] still too thick" (Nathan 1986, 191).

If faith in the official media had been shaken, so had faith in socialism. People already knew that after years of "socialist construction" China was still very poor, and they were now able to contrast that poverty with the achievements of the West because Deng, to strengthen his hand in pushing China down the road of the Four Modernizations, allowed television to show honest reports about the outside world. Increasingly, socialism seemed like a nice ideal that had not produced the material progress that people so desperately wanted. Disillusionment was particularly strong among members of the younger generation. In 1979–1980, students at the élite Fudan University in Shanghai were asked anonymously what they believed in. Only a third said "communism," nearly a quarter said "fate," and a quarter said "nothing at all" (Dittmer 1987, 260 n. 134). In another college, students in one class were asked to indicate whether they believed in socialism, capitalism, religion, atheism, or fatalism. Eighty-five percent chose fatalism; not one chose socialism

(Shirk 1984, 56). And in a survey in the late 1980s, only 6 percent of secondary school students said that they believed in communism (Chu and Ju 1993, 319).

Disillusionment and desire for a better future led increasing numbers of young Chinese to fantasize about a life abroad. In Guangdong Province, when a rumor started in 1979 that the government would no longer stop people from crossing to Hong Kong, a swarm of young people from villages near the border overwhelmed the guards and went to seek their fortunes in the capitalist colony. By the time Hong Kong took measures to stem the exodus, Chen Village, for example, had lost nearly all its young men—some two hundred of them—including the two sons of the Party secretary (Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1984, 265–267). The exodus stopped only when the Hong Kong government refused to issue identity cards to the new immigrants and imposed heavy fines on employers who hired workers who could not produce a card. All these disillusioned young people had recited the formulae of Mao worship and socialist self-sacrifice throughout their school years.

Once people had lost their revolutionary faith, what remained was the threat of nihilism—a threat that could be kept at bay only by some other ideology or by the determined pursuit of wealth and personal rewards (Ci 1994). Political liberalism has filled the void for some people, especially in the cities (Nathan and Shi 1993), and it has been crushed whenever it seems to pose a challenge to the Party's monopoly of power. For many other people, however, Deng Xiaoping's slogan To get rich is glorious! is the key to life's meaning. Table 10 summarizes the results of a social survey in Zhejiang. The results of the survey would probably shock most Westerners, whose materialism is more muted. Two results stand out. First, even the cadres have embraced materialistic values, with about as many agreeing with the statement that "the goal of life is to make money" as opposing it. Second, the most materialistic of all are the farmers, as we should call the post-Mao peasants, whose attitudes are easy to understand because for so long the Party kept them poor.

During the Mao era, the peasants were compelled to recite formulae praising collectivism, condemning individualism, and abhorring private profits, but most remained determined to travel the capitalist road as soon as there was a chance they might succeed. Their opportunity came when power struggles within the Chinese leadership after Mao's death created uncertainty among cadres about the future direction of agricultural policy and when the cadres' waning ideological commitment to collectivization made them susceptible to bribes and pressure. As early as 1977, peasants in a few areas secretly arranged with local cadres to abandon collective farming and restore family production, and the practice spread from 1978. The peasants at first acted spontaneously, without any organization or leadership, and without explicit encouragement from reformers within the Party. They got away with it because they bribed local cadres with a share of the profits and because many cadres were reluctant to confront them. Senior Party leaders at first condemned what was happening, but they were unwilling to take the decisive and ruthless action required to stop it—perhaps in some cases because they secretly sympathized with the peasants. Their vacillation lasted long enough for family production to become established in large areas of China and demonstrate its superiority to collective production. Then reformers such as Deng Xiaoping and Zhao Ziyang used its success to argue that it

Table 10 Do You Agree That the Goal of Life Is to Make Money?
(percentages)

Occupation	Agree	Disagree	Don't care
Cadre	40	41	19
Worker	66	31	5
Farmer	81	13	6
Private businessperson	59	26	15

Source: Li Qian, Yu Xianyan, and Shi Xilai, "Studies on Elements That Influence Social Values and Social Behaviour," *Sociology and Social Investigation* 5 (1992): 11–20, reproduced in Zhou 1996, 165.

should be adopted generally. After 1982, the household responsibility system, as it was called, was extended by government decree to the rest of the country. Although peasants in some areas were unhappy with decollectivization, or at least with the form it took, most accepted it willingly or even enthusiastically (Zhou 1996; Kelliher 1992; Watson 1983, 1984–1985).

Within eight years, according to one estimate, real incomes in the countryside trebled (Zhou 1996, 71). This growth reflected not only the enormous increases in agricultural productivity, but also the fact that the China's new class of market-oriented farmers began to put labor and capital into commercial enterprises and rural-based secondary industry. Moreover, despite harassment from the police, people began to flout the restrictions on residence that from 1956 had kept peasants in the countryside. They flooded into the cities, setting up numerous businesses and supplying much of the labor for the spectacular growth of new, large-scale industries. Some became millionaires. As they burst the chains with which the Party had bound them to collective poverty, the one-time peasants emerged as the most dynamic force in China's market economy (Zhou 1996).

And what of linguistic engineering after Mao? Speeches by Party leaders on formal occasions still use the language of Marxism–Leninism–Mao Zedong Thought; the state still restricts free dissemination of information and publication of diverse opinions on some topics; the Central Propaganda Department still issues instructions on the correct formulations to use when discussing politically sensitive matters; the media and cadres use those formulations, and their example is widely followed; and Party members, cadres, most journalists, teachers, students, and some others are still required to study the views of Party leaders, albeit far less frequently. As a result of all this, the vocabulary of political discourse is still more standardized than in pluralist societies, and Chinese opinion on many topics is less diverse.

Yet a great deal has changed. From 1978, with the rise of

Deng Xiaoping, China's rulers moved away from totalitarian goals and policies. They no longer sought to politicize people's private lives; they allowed, indeed encouraged, private enterprise; they permitted the formation of clubs, societies, and associations outside the control of the state; they allowed the carefully monitored publication of thousands of privately owned newspapers and magazines; they have tried to regulate, rather than suppress, the uncontrolled publications that have recently challenged the monopoly of mainstream publishing houses; they no longer require most people to engage in political study; and they allow people to say pretty much what they like in private, while crushing the public expression of views that might destabilize the Party's rule. Most important, from the perspective of this book, they no longer compel people to go about their daily lives speaking in officially prescribed scripts. The full-fledged version of linguistic engineering practiced in China between 1949 and 1978 has been abandoned.

China is now so far from the totalitarian ideal that it is better described as an authoritarian state than as a totalitarian one. It is ruled by a Party that still claims Mao as its inspiration and that still couches many official pronouncements in socialist language. However, that language is a misleading guide to current realities. It is used only because the Party is unwilling to acknowledge the extent to which its present policies are an implicit repudiation of its Maoist legacy and its own past. In current Newspeak, for example, China's mixed economy, with its rapidly growing capitalist sector, is officially described as socialism with Chinese characteristics (*you zhongguo tese de shehui-zhuyi*). This formula is intended not to raise socialist consciousness, but to hide the fact that socialism is being abandoned as China speeds along the capitalist road Mao so vehemently condemned. It is a formula designed to save face and to discourage critiques of class and exploitation under modern Chinese capitalism.

Mao's injunction Never forget class struggle! was officially laid to rest in 1979, when virtually all members of the black cat-

egories were pronounced reformed and had their "class hats" removed. The prejudice against them quickly faded, and in Chen Village by 1982 class origins no longer mattered much even in marriage decisions (Unger 1984). Popular hostility had rested largely on official policies of discrimination that most red- and middle-class people had supported as a way of elevating their own status and eliminating black competition for education and jobs. Once official discrimination disappeared, so did the motive for popular prejudice. The new discourse of harmony within socialist society quickly triumphed, for most people wanted peace, and the observed behavior of the black categories had nearly always been correct and submissive. Thirty years of ritual vilification now counted almost for nothing.

And what of Mao himself? He continues as the father figure of the Party that has dismantled his legacy, and he retains much of his popularity with the masses. His portrait is still prominent in Tiananmen Square, and it can still be found on altars in some peasant homes, where it is worshiped along with the other gods, beneficent and malevolent, whom it is necessary to thank or propitiate. In the cities, from the late 1980s, there developed a Mao craze in which the Great Leader became a teenage icon, a fashion statement, an artistic motif, and the object of commercial exploitation (Barmé 1996). In part, the craze fed off the success of linguistic engineering in endowing Mao, while he lived, with almost supernatural attributes. Popular ignorance of the real Mao was essential to the creation of the image, and popular ignorance sustains it to this day because the Party still conceals the enormity of his crimes. But the Mao craze has roots, too, in the economic and social dislocations of the 1980s and 1990s. Mao is used as a symbol of a purer age in order to criticize the development of rampant corruption within the Party. He is invoked, too, by nervous workers in inefficient state enterprises who fear that privatization, shutdowns, and the rise of the market might cost them their jobs (Barmé 1996).

The appropriation of Mao by the people is a striking manifestation of the decline of linguistic engineering and of the rise

of new discourses, uncontrolled by the Party. As a commercialized icon, as a symbol of anticorruption, and as an enemy of the market, Mao has been taken up by unofficial but highly visible discourses and used to embarrass the Party. So his continuing popularity is proof that the China he created, with its centrally directed manipulation of a monolithic discourse, is dead, if not quite buried. In most contexts, public and private, people use language that has evolved free of state direction, and they invent and borrow new linguistic forms as they see fit. One small example makes the point perfectly: the word “comrade”—once the standard revolutionary title of address—has dropped from everyday use, except in restricted Party contexts. This has freed it to render service as the marker of other forms of group identity. In particular, in major cities it has been adopted by the gay and lesbian communities, who have borrowed from Hong Kong the custom of describing as comrades people of their own sexual orientation. The Party's control of the Chinese language is much diminished, and the great attempt to produce new, revolutionary human beings by enforcing the constant repetition of revolutionary formulae is over.

Notes

Introduction

1. On linguistic engineering in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, see Young 1991. There is also relevant information in works such as Zeman 1964 (on Nazi Germany) and Benn 1989 (on the Soviet Union). Whyte (1974, chap. 3) shows that in the Soviet Union, small group rituals (a crucial agent of effective linguistic engineering) were not extended to the general population.
2. It is possible, of course, that there have been even more rigorous experiments in linguistic engineering, but they have not been sufficiently documented. Two cases that deserve investigation are the Democratic Republic of Korea (North Korea) and Pol Pot's Cambodia, although the existence of the latter was very brief (1975–1979). Other possibilities, on a much smaller scale, include some religious sects and enclosed religious communities.
3. I have borrowed the terms “logocide” and “semanticide” from Young 1991, chap. 4.
4. The field is well surveyed by Fairclough and Wodak (1997) and van Dijk (2001).

Chapter 1: Linguistic Engineering

1. Reference groups model attitudes, so there is a degree of overlap between reference group effects and modeling. However, modeling is not confined to reference groups, and reference group theory goes beyond modeling theory when it explains why we adopt attitudes modeled by some groups (our reference groups), but reject attitudes modeled by others. That is why the two theories require separate mention.

Chapter 2: Linguistic Engineering before the Cultural Revolution

1. See, for example, K. D. Yang 1998, 236: “Language is the direct reality of thought. One cannot think without language.” Similar views

are expressed by D. F. Yang 1999, 100: “As everyone knows, language is a tool of thinking. Humans can only think through language.” See also the discussion in Chen 2001, 745–754.

2. I use the term “dialect” in its Chinese sense. The Chinese word is *fangyan*, which means, literally, “region speech” or “place speech.” It refers to all regional or local varieties of speech used by the Han people, as distinct from the common language (*putonghua*). Western scholars, of course, use the term “dialect” in a variety of other senses, none of them suited to a discussion of the rise of *putonghua*.
3. See also the useful discussion in Unger 1982, 12–14, 254 n. 1. Unger, however, uses the term “*jieji chengfen*” where I use the term “*chushen*” (“class origin” or “family background”), which I discuss later. The Chinese themselves are often confused and inconsistent in their use of class terminology, and this confusion has caused problems in academic discussions of the class system.
4. I take the figure from Spence 1991, 517. Estimates by other reputable scholars of the numbers executed range up to five million (cf. Margolin 1999, 479, 790 n. 81; Domes 1973, 38, 45 n. 14; Rummel 1991, 220–223, 274–276). However, Shalom (1984, 37–43, 142–147) has strongly criticized the higher estimates. He suggests that the total deaths resulting from all campaigns in the early 1950s, including land reform, may have been only a million, while allowing that “it is possible that twice this number is closer to the mark.” The latter total is compatible with estimates of a million or more deaths linked to land reform.
5. The number of deaths is difficult to determine. Estimates generally range from seven hundred thousand to more than three million (cf. Strauss 2002, 87–89, 102 n. 26; Dittmer 1987, 47; Margolin 1999, 483; Domes 1973, 51–52; Rummel 1991, 223–226, 276–277). However, Shalom (1984, 17–43, 124–149) has cogently criticized the evidence upon which the higher estimates are based and suggests that even the figure of seven hundred thousand may be substantially inflated.
6. Some reports indicate that political prisoners subjected to thought reform in the early 1950s appeared to be more sincere in their self-criticisms than their counterparts in later years. This was no doubt partly because political prisoners in the early years were not given fixed sentences, but released when they showed evidence of reform. Moreover, in the early 1950s many still naïvely believed that if they convinced the Party that they really had reformed, they would have

a promising future in the new China. What we lack is any convincing evidence that their self-criticisms were sincere. See the discussion in Whyte 1974, 193–194, 208–209.

7. In Communist Party terminology, they were a “national bourgeoisie,” sharply distinguished from the “comprador capitalists” and “bureaucratic capitalists” who took the side of the imperialists and the Guomindang. Most of the latter had fled as Communist forces advanced between 1945 and 1949.

Chapter 3: Mao’s Revolutionary Strategy, 1966–1968

1. The term “Maoist conspiracy” is appropriate, but should not be misunderstood as implying that all the conspirators fully appreciated what was going on. Those whom Mao briefed most extensively were Jiang Qing, Kang Sheng, and Lin Biao, but he seems to have told them only what they needed to know if they were to assist his plans and avoid mistakes (cf. Wang 1988, 26). Lin Biao confirmed the existence of a Mao-centered conspiracy when he met foreign visitors with Mao in May 1967: “Now, among the central leaders, those who are highly regarded [still in authority] are invariably those whom Mao had briefed in advance about the Cultural Revolution. That is the reason they did not make mistakes” (Wang 1988, 26 n. 2). His statement also implies that Party leaders whom Mao chose not to brief would make mistakes and fall from grace—an oblique reference to one of Mao’s techniques of framing.
2. Mao himself recognized that his strategy increased the risk of a coup. In May 1966, as he purged Luo Ruiqing, the Beijing Party hierarchy, and the propaganda-media-culture apparatus, he ordered Zhou Enlai to increase security in Beijing—especially in Zhongnanhai, the leaders’ compound (MacFarquhar 1997, 459).

Chapter 5: Dichotomies, Demons, and Violence

1. The role of dissonance in leading people to despise or hate their victims emerges in other Cultural Revolution memoirs. See, for example, Yang 1997, 139:

What a pity this man died! But really he was so stupid! If he had said no to all our questions, I’m sure he would have been alive. . . . So in the final analysis everything he said and did was wrong! It was his own fault he was beaten to death. He

was so sordid! So disgusting! A real rapist and counterrevolutionary, he deserved what he got, every bit of it!

So after we killed this man in the evening, I killed him once more at night, in my mind. I killed him because I had to, or else I would not be able to sleep.

Chapter 8: Educating Revolutionaries

1. During the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution between late 1968 and 1976, centralized, authoritarian control of discourse produced remarkable uniformity within literary genres at any given point in time. So assertions that a book is typical are not problematic, as they would be if we were examining textbooks published in a pluralist society. This uniformity enhances the value of data contained in the tables in this chapter, even though they are based on very small numbers of textbooks.

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