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MANEUVERING MAO :
The Legacy of Mao Zedong during Deng's Era of Reform

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Introduction

On 8th November 2021, President and General Secretary of the Central Committee Xi Jinping delivered an explanatory address on a resolution on the major achievements and historical experience of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) over the past century. [1] His explanation opened with a quote from Mao Zedong, who stated that "We will not be able to achieve greater success unless we have a clear understanding of our history and of the roads we have traveled." Indeed, history and historicism play an important role in the development, both material and ideological, of the CCP. His explanation noted the need to highlight the new era of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," underscoring the importance of Deng Xiaoping's efforts in giving a "correct appraisal of Comrade Mao Zedong and Mao Zedong Thought" and in furthering socialist modernization during his era. This address comes at a time where interest in Mao seems to be resurging in China. Both the New York Times and the Washington Post recently released articles on the topic of the resonance of Maoism in China today, especially with the younger generations. Al Jazeera questioned if the current president Xi Jinping was China's new Mao Zedong, connecting his centrality to the functioning of the party to his strict anti-corruption initiatives and his directive of adhering to the 'mass-line.' The question of the significance, the relevance, and the staying power of former Chairman Mao Zedong continues well into the 21st century.

The question is, why? Deng Xiaoping, also mentioned by President Xi in his address, does not have such questions revolving around him. As the leader of the CCP during the 1980s and 1990s, a time of globalization and ideological reorientation in China, Deng was responsible for the development of 'socialist modernization' – an attempt to marry Chinese

[1] Xi Jinping, "Explanation of the Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century," 16 November 2021., http://www.news.cn/english/2021-11/16/c_1310314613.htm.

socialism with global capitalism, while retaining a socialist structure. While his decisions and policies reflected a more pragmatic approach to the development of China, they also marked a departure, to an extent, from Mao's era. Some saw this pragmatic approach as a capitalist one that served to sever China from socialism and integrate with the global capitalist order. Uncertainty was twofold, first on the legitimacy of the CCP's claims of continuing down the path of socialism, and second on the social inequalities emerging out of the economic reforms. These issues formed the basis of ideological tensions in Deng's era, and are the results of his attempts to set the tone of the CCP as one that is striving for economic success in a global capitalist order. However, we see that this is a sentiment also shared by President Xi Jinping in his noting of the importance of socialist modernization, reform, and opening up. As such, these tensions remain to this day.

In this paper, I aim to understand why Mao remains a figure held in such fascination in China. To do so, I look to analyze the treatment of Mao and debates surrounding him and Mao Zedong Thought in the 1980s and 1990s. The 1980s was a decade of great change – the ideological reorientations made by Deng Xiaoping shifted China towards 'socialist modernization,' which in turn generated numerous debates around the validity of Chinese socialism. Discussions of Mao were not as explicit, but in this era we see the development of tensions and conditions that spilled into the 1990s. This next decade saw the explicit reemergence of public interest in Mao, in a far different form of personality cult than that which dominated the Cultural Revolution era, while Deng's ideological reorientation and economic reforms continued to promulgate. I argue that this resurgence in the 1990s had its foundations laid in the political and economic developments of the 1980s, and that it was only when impressive economic development became overshadowed by the continued growth of inequalities and rampant corruption that discontent under the banner of Mao Zedong reemerged. I further argue that due to the separation of Mao's image from his

Thought, this interest manifested in the personality and character of Mao, which (unlike his Thought) were not associated with Deng's economic reforms and ideological reorientations. While this interest was then symptomatic of the tensions of the time, it needs to be considered as having had a real impact and influence on cultural and intellectual discussions of the time.

Historiography

Historians diverge into two main groups in the discussions of China in the 1980s and 1990s. The first group of authors bring to attention the ideological tensions that were building within the post-Mao CCP due to the gradual proliferation of economic reform, marketization, and integration in the global capitalist order, focusing on the writings of key intellectuals, elite politics, and especially how the two interact. Because of this focus, these authors tend to view the reactions and views of the general public or 'the masses' as symptomatic rather than as viewpoints that contribute to the tensions in their own right. 'Mao' and 'Mao Zedong Thought' are seen as tools utilized by the state, or as legacies of which the state struggles (and fails) to let go. As such, discussions on the 'influence' and popularity of Mao in these analyses are not explicit, but we may understand from these authors how the intellectual-political movements and elite political engagements are rooted in related ideological issues. The second group of authors stand on the other side of this spectrum, as they focus primarily on public perceptions and 'the masses.' Their analysis is far less symptomatic, taking cues from the general public – in tandem with political changes and reform – to provide evidence for the discontent and tensions evident in these two decades. However, this leads to inadequate attention being given to the political and intellectual discussions and context, which were indeed of great import at the time. This historiography highlights key historians within each group, taking note of their strengths and weaknesses, in order to place my work within the existing literature, and demonstrate my aim of applying a symptomatic reading of

the ideological tensions towards a cultural analysis that takes into account the voices of the general public.

Intellectual-Political Analysis

Arif Dirlik's "Postsocialism?" is an incredibly important paper within the intellectual and political sphere, and is thus our first subject of discussion. He focuses almost wholly on the ideological issues of so-called 'socialism with Chinese characteristics,' introducing the idea of 'postsocialism' as a system brought about by a socialist country (i.e. China) rejoining a "capitalist world order."[2] Due to this move, the party therefore had to implement some capitalist elements in their socialist regime to negotiate a space for themselves in the world order, leading to "contradiction and uncertainty" [3] that further generated ideological tensions. It was thus the main aim of the party, Dirlik argues, to quell these tensions through the reimagining of 'Chinese socialism' to prove its legitimacy[4] – this is the essence of 'postsocialism.' He looks towards nationalism as a tool that enhances the staying power of socialism in China, a result of Mao's (and by extension, Sun Yat-sen's) efforts of generating a uniquely Chinese experience of socialism.[5] This, he notes, posed an issue when Deng attempted to integrate marketization and other capitalist methods while citing Maoist 'scripture' in the attempts to validate said reforms, a move that would have been seen as 'surrendering' Chinese socialism and thus by extension, the Chinese identity. In "Mao Zedong in Contemporary Chinese Official Discourse and History,"[6] Dirlik notes Deng's efforts to de-personalize Mao Zedong Thought while simultaneously upholding this thought

[2] Dirlik, Arif, "Postsocialism? Reflections on 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,'" *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 21, no. 1 (March 1, 1989): 33–44, https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.1989.10413190. 34
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid. 35
[5] Ibid. 42
[6] Dirlik, Arif and Maurice Meisner, *Marxism and the Chinese Experience: Issues in Contemporary Chinese Socialism*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1989).

to theorize the Party's changing principles was an exercise doomed to failure – a sentiment agreed across most historians in this field.

Like Dirlik, Kalpana Misra looks primarily into the intellectual debates of the 1980s and 1990s as well as the elite political moves of that period. She highlights the failure of the CCP to consolidate their legitimacy, a goal that Dirlik argued was of utmost importance in his 'postsocialist' framework. Dirlik also notes that the CCP often looked to "historical successes" to prove their faith to the socialist path, whereas Misra sees this reliance on past accolades as contributing to the weakness of the Deng Xiaoping era ideological reorientation efforts, which were largely dependent on the Maoist legacy and Mao Zedong Thought.[7] Further building upon Dirlik, she also maintains that the Mao Fever of the 1990s was symptomatic of the discontent and tensions that were generated by the contradictions of socialism and capitalism, which were worsened by the previously mentioned failed ideological reorientation attempts. The root cause of the failure, she argues, lay in the inconsistencies and lack of clarity inherent in the "patchwork official doctrine"[8] that failed to garner the attention and support of the elite intelligentsia. With them coalescing as an independent group, the intellectual establishments of the moderate and the radical formers were filled with ambiguity and uncertainty in their ideological frameworks.[9]

Xudong Zhang, a student of Dirlik's, argues that despite the 'New Era' of 1979-89 giving rise to an active intellectual life, the intelligentsia were unable to provide "solid vision of Chinese society both with respect to its own past and vis-a-vis the West as a 'universal' yet 'external' history."[10] This ties in neatly with the analyses of both Dirlik and Misra by

[7] Misra, Kalpana, *From Post-Maoism to Post-Marxism: The Erosion of Official Ideology in Deng's China* (New York: Routledge, 1998). 6
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid. 195
[10] Xudong Zhang, "On Some Motifs in the Chinese 'Cultural Fever' of the Late 1980s: Social Change, Ideology, and Theory," *Social Text*, no. 39 (1994): 129–56, https://doi.org/10.2307/466367. 134

highlighting that the CCP was not alone in grappling with the difficulties of generating and substantiating ideological reform that satisfactorily solved the contradictions and tensions brought to light by Dirlik. Thus, we see manifestations of ambiguity both within the party and outside of it, caused by these seemingly unsolvable contradictions, which he notes were rooted to the longing for "an alienated textual order" while simultaneously maintaining its "textual heritage."[11] This textual order is 'alienated' due to its contemporary nature that embodies postsocialist characteristics as well as global capitalism, representing a departure from the paradigm of the ideological discussions of the Mao era that was, in a sense, closed off from the world. In short, the intelligentsia and the elite political leaders both wanted, to a certain extent, to be able to integrate with the capitalist world order (i.e. 'modernize') while retaining their socialism and 'Chinese characteristics,' creating a rippling of ideological tensions with systems that were inherently opposed.

Thus, we see how Dirlik, Misra, and Zhang all occupy an analytical space that deals with the political and intellectual debates and movements. However, with Joseph Fewsmith we see a consideration of elite politics in this analysis. As a political scientist, Fewsmith is well placed to delve into the details of elite political events, noting the ideological debates concurrently occurring. His book, *China Since Tiananmen,* is split into sections that separate the elite politics and the ideological arguments – the latter of which is of greater importance to this paper. He highlights how Chinese political discourse after 1989 saw a greater alignment between the perspectives of intellectuals and political leadership, in the sense that the June 4th protests brought to light the previously unconsidered threat of "social and political collapse" [12] that lurked behind ideological contradictions and tensions. Thus, intellectual and elite political discussions shifted away from the 'reformist measures versus

[11] Zhang. 135
[12] Fewsmith, Joseph *China Since Tiananmen* (Cambridge University Press, 2004). 79

conservative opposition' framework of the 1980s. Instead, the 1990s gave way to the emergence of 'neoconservatism,' which aimed to achieve market economics through a greater role for the state in order to rectify the decentralization of state power that had occurred in the 1980s. In short, it attempts to marry Chinese socialism and nationalism with institutional economics, which is a Western model. Fewsmith's interpretation of neoconservatism ultimately notes that it left young intellectuals with "no faith in socialist values and yet [they] rejected the Western capitalist and cultural tropes that had dominated discourse in the 1980s."[13] Thus, we see that neoconservatism is important as it demonstrates the very ideological tensions and contradictions that Dirlik, Misra, and Zhang all touch upon.

While the previous four authors utilize compatible frameworks to a great degree, Jing Wang chooses a different method to go about her analysis of these tensions and contradictions. Presenting an intellectual and political analysis of culturally impactful literature and authors (both fiction and non-fiction) during the 1980s and 90s, she notes that "the literary, cultural, critical, and intellectual histories of the 1980s…merged to form one epochal discourse that was distinctly elitist,"[14] which demonstrates why the previous three authors also chose to focus on elite political and intellectual discourse and further validates her inclusion in this historiography's intellectual and political analysis category. She discusses the issues of alienation – political, economic, and Mao Zedong affiliated – as culminating into a "social alienation"[15] that precluded "a paradoxical phase of collaborating and an intricate process of de-alienating intellectuals."[16] While similar to Dirlik's framework of postsocialism, Wang frames social alienation in a way that includes the general public,

[13] Ibid. 97
[14] Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (University of California Press, 1996). 5
[15] Ibid. 12
[16] Ibid. 1

whom she argues is also to blame for the intense proliferation of contradictions.[17] There exists another paradox, she argues, one that circles the Cultural Discussions of the 1980s, wherein it was driven by real socioeconomic forces, and yet it "evolved into a metaphysical discourse that failed to represent… the ongoing material process of modernization."[18] This is similar to Zhang's argument that intellectuals were unable to connect or represent the feelings of the public. Unlike her fellow authors, Wang looks to the general public's perceptions of national nostalgia and their wish for harmony to demonstrate the reactivation of the Mao Fever in the 1990s, noting in particular the immense popularity of Mao Zedong's "The Red Sun' in 1991.[19] However, she is similar in that she highlights consumerism and commercialism as the main foes to Chinese writers, and their proliferation in the 1990s was indeed symptomatic, but did not necessarily contribute, to the tensions and contradictions at the time.

Thus, these authors are notable for their discussions on the political and intellectual debates and engagements of Chinese intellectuals and elite politicians in the 1980s and 1990s. They all stress the issue of ideological tensions and contradictions inherent in the attempts to marry the Chinese experience of socialism and nationalism with Western economic ideas and global capitalism, underscoring the failed attempts of ideological reconstruction from the CCP and Deng Xiaoping's era as major sources of discontent across the country. While not focused explicitly on the issue of Mao and his popularity, these authors do highlight a Maoist influence and legacy that the Party strives – yet fails to – leave behind. This failure could be deduced as the foundation of tensions in China, as Mao Zedong Thought is heralded as the basis of CCP power and legitimacy while seemingly completely mismatched with the trajectory of rejoining global capitalism. Thus, the continued tensions and failures of

[17] Ibid. 33
[18] Ibid. 55
[19] Ibid. 266

ideological reform opened a space for the growth in popularity in the image and idea of Mao being used as a rallying symbol for discontent. However, as these authors do not delve extensively into the general public cultural discussion, we must therefore look to the second main group of authors.

Cultural Analysis

While the previous group of authors have touched on culture in the sense of elite culture and its ties to intellectual and political debates within the elite sphere, the 'culture' I write of now is that of the general public – their beliefs, perceptions, and interests – in the 1980s and 1990s. The cultural historians I have engaged with are far more focused on the bottom-up popularity of Mao and his image during this time. They see the tensions and contradictions through the lens of the general public, thus seeing the engagement and interest in Mao as playing a role larger than simply being a symptom of the issues at hand.

Geremie R. Barmé stands as a great example of an author that focuses on the thoughts and actions of the general public in regards to Mao and the shifting cultural climate of the 80s and 90s. He is also one of the few authors that engages directly with the question of the popular influence of Mao in his book *Shades of Mao*. In the opening of the book, Barmé argues that the economic reforms of the 1980s led to "deep dissatisfaction with the status quo and a yearning for the moral power and leadership of the long-dead Chairman,"[20] and that the 'Mao Fever' or 'MaoCraze' that appeared in the 1990s was a manifestation of this dissatisfaction. While this does mesh well with the arguments of Misra and Fewsmith, Barmé further identifies consumerism as a key vehicle for spreading the influence of Mao, highlighting talismans, badges, portraits, and various commercial products utilizing the image and spirit of Mao to generate greater demand – purporting that this interest in Mao allowed

[20] Barmé, Geremie R, *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1995). 3

for the 'long-dead Chairman' to transcend temporal and special realities to become an almost divine figure. He argues that the renewed Mao Cult placed the chairman as a conduit of nostalgia and dissatisfaction, and that the rampant consumerism associated with his image was a way for the general public to demonstrate their feelings. Indeed, the apotheosis of Mao is a common theme within the cultural historian sphere. Thus, while noting that fad-like nature of the public interest in Mao, Barmé nevertheless strongly believes that this translated into a genuine wish of some the public to see a Maoist form of rule from the CCP, one that embodied the personal authority and moral power of the Mao era. Barmé's book is a fantastic repository for focused, specific arguments on the influence of Mao in the 80s and 90s, but does little to analyze the political and intellectual discussions and contexts that he makes brief mention of. While indeed having a heavy focus on the general public is important, his belief that the mass consumerism of Mao's image translated into a genuine wish to see a leader of the same personal authority is somewhat questionable.

Authors like Orville Schell and Dai Jinhua also highlight the rampant consumerism of Mao's image, especially in the 90s, and further use elite politics as a timeline with which to map the growing interest in Mao. Schell, in contrast to Barmé however, noted the early 1980s as a time where "most ordinary Chinese were relived to rid themselves of all the Maoist effluvia that had 'inundated' them for so long,"[21] and that it was not until 1991 when images of Mao became increasingly popular in the masses, spurred by Maoist hard-liners in the Party attempting to revive the Chairman as a political cult figure.[22] Rapidly propelled by the growing consumerism of the 90s, this interest in Mao was, according to Schell, perceived at the time as ideologically and politically relevant, noting how newspapers at the time saw this interest as "a miracle in the history of socialist China, in fact, in the history of the Communist

[21] Schell, Orveille "Chairman Mao as Pop Art," in *The Mandate of Heaven*, 1994. 279
[22] Schell. 280

movement as a whole."[23] A further analysis by Schell notes that while Mao's resurrection may have been started by Maoist hard-liners, it soon escaped their control, and the image of Mao – though seemingly becoming synonymous with the Chinese nations – also lost its ideological heft. Therefore, we see how Schell moves further away from Barmé to highlight the lack of intellectual or political foundation of the interest in Mao, strongly suggesting the fad-like nature that Barmé only hints at. Schell's piece interestingly captures the essence of ideological tensions and contradictions within the general public, with the rampant consumerism and strong nationalistic pride butting heads through the handling of the image of Mao. Thus, we see compatibility between the cultural and the intellectual and political frameworks.

This compatibility of frameworks is even further established in Dai Jinhua's "Redemption and Consumption: Depicting Culture in the 1990s." Dai is usually characterized as an intellectual and political historian, but in this paper, her focused engagement on the general public and their perceptions of the ideological reorientations and economic changes through the 1980s and 1990s places her, for this historiography, in the cultural group. Much like her peers, Dai too saw the interest in Mao grow as a result of public discontent, especially in the face of Deng's economic reforms that allowed for yawning social inequalities and high-level corruption.[24] She analyzes the public's cultural engagement of literature and film in order to argue that the 'Mao Zedong Fever' was more a symptom of discontent rather than the main focus, stating that it signified "the longing of people for a sense of trust and of 'security' in society, the memory of an age that, while not prosperous, still (at least in theory and imagination) neither knew hunger nor felt threatened."[25] While

[23] Ibid. 282
[24] Dai Jinhua, "Redemption and Consumption: Depicting Culture in the 1990s," *Positions: Asia Critique* 4, no. 1 (February 1, 1996): 127–43, https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-4-1-127. 129
[25] Jinhua. 129

somewhat similar to Barmé, Dai aligns more with Schell and more ideology-focused authors who argue that the medium of Mao's image was a political unconscious that stemmed from the growing idea that political power was tied into consumerism, another result of Deng's economic reforms. Indeed, this seems to flow into the intellectual and political sphere of analysis, but unlike authors like Jing Wang, Dai focuses on ideology as the masses understood and perceived it instead of the elite. Despite this, her overarching argument aligns with theirs, as she sees the rapid Mao-related consumerism, especially in the publication sector, as the beginning of Mao being lowered from his once-divine status, due to the lack of ideological substance. Therefore, according to Dai the reproduction of Mao's image has cultural significance in that it highlights the rapid development of consumerism as well as the outcome of Deng's attempts to 'play both sides' and retain certain aspects of Mao to validate his and the CCP's power. Interesting here is that she reaches a similar conclusion to Misra and Fewsmith while utilizing a different framework – highlighting once again how the two spheres may be used in conjunction.

Edward Friedman's analysis runs parallel to Dai's by touching on the same consumerism and weaving together his intellectual and cultural analysis of the public's views on Mao in the 1990s. He too highlights that Mao grew as an icon of Chinese nationalism in an era that was marked by the introduction and integration of foreign markets and economies – an influx that seemed to threaten the very nationalistic feeling that Mao embodied. Writing in 1994, he presses an intriguing idea that if at a public level post-Mao China seemed to promulgate bureaucratic capitalism, then Mao Zedong Thought could be used to legitimate a new democratic revolution.[26] In hindsight, it is clear that this was not the case, but Friedman's conclusion presents an image a tug-of-war between Chinese socialism and

[26] Friedman, Edward, "Democracy and 'Mao Fever,'" *Journal of Contemporary China* 3, no. 6 (June 1, 1994): 84–95, https://doi.org/10.1080/10670569408724201. 91

nationalism, and the rampant consumerism and capitalist integrations taking place at the time. Indeed, Fewsmith too notes that liberalists – especially in the 1980s – shared this thought of democratic revolution that would serve to reconsolidate state power in a way that would not lend itself to an autocratic or personal authority regime.

Therefore, with cultural historians, we see a far greater focus on the general public and their perceptions of the CCP and of Mao. Nationalism and patriotic pride take center stage here, with authors highlighting how consumerism and growing public discontent compounded to people expressing themselves through their idolatry of Mao's image. The extent to which this interest was a fad is not wholly agreed upon by historians utilizing this framework, but they all do take note of its fad-like qualities, and understand that the interest was emblematic of the discontent in the reforms being implemented at the time. Lacking in their analysis, however, is an overarching ideological framework that places the tensions and contradictions of the time in the context of their analysis. Authors like Dai and Wang stand as examples, however, of important attempts to merge the two spheres, with the former favoring a cultural analysis and the latter, the intellectual and political one. As such, I aim to also merge the two spheres of analysis, by taking the symptomatic reading of the ideological tensions and contradictions of the 1980s and 1990s, and applying it to a cultural framework to bring about a well-rounded yet in-depth analysis of the re-emergence of the popularity of Mao and his image during this time. I do this through the careful analysis of literature by key intellectuals and leaders of the 1980s and 1990s in conjunction with the CCP's attempts at ideological reorientation, while also taking note of the shifts in perception of the general public in response to said literature and reorientation.

Deng's Treatment of Mao, and Socialist Modernization

Historians, regardless of their approach, note the "Resolution on Certain Questions in the history of our party since the founding of the People's Republic of China" as a key factor

in the ideological conundrum that Deng, the CCP, and China as a whole finds itself stuck in during the 1980s and 1990s. "Resolution on Certain Questions" was meant to be a paradigm-setter for people within and outside of China, recounting and analyzing the CCP's history in order to fulfill three main objectives: affirm the historical role of Mao and Mao Zedong Thought, analyze the successes and failures of the party from the founding of New China in 1950, and provide a basic summary of the Party's past work.[27] These three objectives were repeatedly stressed by Deng during discussions of the draft resolution leading up to its release in 1981. This was because Deng wished to develop what he termed "socialism with Chinese characteristics" by paying special attention to attaining high material standards while simultaneously developing a socialist society with high cultural and ethical standards.[28] Aware that this vision of socialism would be a contentious one due to the inherent ideological contradictions between the socialist foundation and capitalist methods, Deng needed to legitimize his vision. Mao Zedong Thought, seen as a groundbreaking reorientation of Marxism-Leninism to fit the practical Chinese realities, was heralded as the foundation of the CCP, and thus of its power and authority too. Indeed, he and leading Central Committee members were cognizant that "on no account [could they] discard the banner of Mao Zedong Thought. To do so would…be to negate the glorious history of [their] Party."[29] Thus, Deng looked to co-opt Mao Zedong Thought in order to provide ideological backing to his 'postsocialist' (as labelled by Dirlik) vision. However, it had only been four years since the death of Mao and the subsequent end of the Cultural Revolution that the late Chairman helmed, and the damage (both materially and ideologically) that had been wrought across

[27] Deng Xiaoping, "Remarks On Successive Drafts of the 'Resolution On Certain Questions In the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China,'" March 19, 1980, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1981/15.htm.
[28] Deng Xiaoping, "We Are Building a Socialist Society With Both High Material Standards and High Cultural and Ethical Standards," April 29, 1983, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1983/149.htm.
[29] Deng Xiaoping, "Remarks On Successive Drafts of the 'Resolution On Certain Questions In the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China.'"

China was still fresh in the minds of the people. His focus, therefore, fell squarely on the key tenet of Mao Zedong Thought, "seek truth from facts,"[30] in an attempt to highlight 'practice' as the main criterion for truth. The Resolution makes explicit note of the distinction "between Mao Zedong Thought — a scientific theory formed and tested over a long period of time — and the mistakes Comrade Mao Zedong made in his later years,"[31] thereby discrediting Mao of the Cultural Revolution using the ideology of Mao in his early years.

After acknowledging Mao's departure from his own Thought from the mid-1960s until his demise in 1976, Deng could then highlight the various achievements of the party prior to that decade to assure the people of the continuation of the 'true' legacy of Mao Zedong Thought, underscoring it as the party's guiding beacon into the future. However, this was where the weaknesses of the ideological reorientation began to emerge. Deng and the CCP, in actively pushing the Chinese people to 'seek truth from facts' and shifting away from a dogmatic attitude in order to apply a critical lens towards the great Marxist and proletarian revolutionary figure of Mao, inadvertently left themselves open to the same criticisms and scrutiny. In a discussion with leaders of the central propaganda departments in 1981, Deng took note of a young poet's speech in Beijing Normal University that effectively countered the ideological and political work achieved by the party organization in the student body, and lamented the lack of response from the university party committee.[32] The emphasis on 'practice' and 'seeking truth from facts' meant that in the early 1980s, members of the party were cautious of criticizing the wrong trends, perhaps as an aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. In this discussion, Deng argued that the party must "demand that writers, artists

[30] Deng Xiaoping, "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China" (Chinese Communist Party, June 27, 1981), https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/history/01.htm.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Deng Xiaoping, "Concerning Problems on the Ideological Front," July 17, 1981, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1981/129.htm.

and ideological and theoretical workers in the Communist Party observe Party discipline,"[33] revealing the hypocritical advertisement of 'seeking truth from facts.' Deng makes clear here that this tenet was to be applied only to the past and to Mao, and when it came to his ideological reorientation and economic reforms, the people were meant to follow the mass line without criticism or complaint. This move marked the beginning of the de-theorization of ideology, and a focus on 'practice' instead. The intertwining of contradictions here is plentiful, and thus leaves ample space for the developing of tensions in the intellectual and public spheres, as well as within the party itself.

In a speech to the Political Bureau of the Central Committee in August 1980, Deng highlighted the need to reform and restructure the party and state leadership in order to pursue the goal of socialist modernization more effectively. He noted the primary issue of Chinese bureaucracy, which was linked to the "highly centralized management in the economic, political, cultural and social fields,"[34] and therefore looked to shift away from this form of management towards a more de-centralized approach. This meant engaging with more rightist policies that linked income and wages directly to output, skill, and expertise. Indeed, Deng noted in 1983 during a talk with members of the State Planning and State Economic Commissions that "some people in rural areas and cities should be allowed to get rich before others,"[35] based on the above criteria. This focus on output, combined with the heightened focus on scientific and technological research, marked the beginning of the de-centralization of state party participation in the industrial sector. In order to defend his subsequent rural and urban economic policies, Deng argued that in order to proceed beyond

[33] Ibid.
[34] Deng Xiaoping, "On the Reform of the System of Party and State Leadership," August 31, 1980, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1980/220.htm.
[35] Deng Xiaoping, "Our Work In All Fields Should Contribute To the Building of Socialism With Chinese Characteristics," January 12, 1983, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1983/84.htm.

the primary stage of socialism, China needed "highly developed productive forces and an overwhelming abundance of material wealth"[36] and therefore the party's primary focus was to develop said productive forces. He was adamant that socialism was not tied to 'pauperism' like it was under the Gang of Four, and further argued that foreign investment and advanced techniques would not undermine Chinese socialism as their "socialist economic base is so huge that it can absorb tens and hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of foreign funds without being shaken."[37] Deng placed a good deal of faith in this socialist economic base and development, and as noted earlier, demanded that both the party and the people do the same. As such, we also see here an emphasis on economic reform as the primary function of party work.

The combination of the de-theorization of ideology and the primacy of economic reform in party work thus led to a process of depoliticization, wherein the CCP transitioned from an organization with specific political values to a mechanism of power.[38] This was compounded by an editorial published in the People's Daily (the official newspaper of the CCP) in late 1984, which highlighted the need to study theory earnestly but to not "cling to some individual phrases or some concrete theses,"[39] and to "go deep into practice" by supporting economic reforms and growth. In attempting to integrate theory into practice, the CCP thus looked to take away power from the former to give to the latter, in order to validate its rightist economic policies in the language of Mao Zedong Thought. This is substantiated by a follow up editorial in the People's Daily which noted that Lenin, much like Mao, "was

[36] Deng Xiaoping, "We Are Building a Socialist Society With Both High Material Standards and High Cultural and Ethical Standards."
[37] Deng Xiaoping, "Building a Socialism With a Specifically Chinese Character," June 30, 1984, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1984/36.htm.
[38] Hui Wang, "Depoliticized Politics: From East to West," in *The End of the Revolution : China and the Limits of Modernity* (Verso, 2011). 6
[39] People's Daily, "'Theory and Practice,'" *China Report* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 1985): 81–82, https://doi.org/10.1177/000944558502100107.

able to discover the truth that socialism would succeed in one country…because he thought that Marxism was not a dogma but was guidance for our actions."[40] Thus, they purport that this attitude should also be upheld for Mao Zedong Thought, arguing that while theory may say otherwise, the reality was that China's socialist construction proved the necessity of commodities and money in a socialist society and legitimized the need to develop commodity production.[41] The processes of de-theorization and thus depoliticization therefore played an important role in the development of ideological tensions between Chinese socialism and capitalist economic reform. The CCP shifting focus to practice instead of theory showcases an attempt to sidestep these tensions, as they believed that Mao Zedong Thought as it originally stood would serve as a platform for critiquing their economic reforms. However, their inability to do so is rooted in their simultaneous use of his Thought to substantiate their policies, and thus allow for pockets of criticism to form.

Critiques in the 1980s

The ideological reasoning set forth by the CCP and its publications for the closer integration between the state apparatus and the international economic sphere is couched heavily in socialist language; however, this was not a sufficient stopgap against criticisms of abandoning socialism. Throughout the 1980s, Deng continued to argue that it took "courage to carry out a comprehensive reform of the economic structure."[42] However, as Misra accurately points out, in the mid-to-late 1980s we see a definite questioning of the new economic developments that had led to a growing social inequality and the empowerment of the specific social groups that Mao had argued would lead to both revisionism and capitalist

[40] People's Daily, "'More on Theory and Practice,'" *China Report* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 1985): 83–85, https://doi.org/10.1177/000944558502100108. 83
[41] People's Daily. 84
[42] Deng Xiaoping, "Reform and Opening To the Outside World Are A Great Experiment," June 29, 1985, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1985/160.htm.

restoration.[43] Indeed, Wang Ruoshi pointed out the potentiality of this occurrence in his lecture "On the Problem of Alienation" in 1980. He noted that the elimination of private ownership and of exploitation was a very important issue, and that the aim of socialist production should be to meet the needs of the people, or else economic alienation would continue to manifest.[44] The rural and urban reforms of the 1980s, however, led to the reemergence of stratification and exploiting classes dues to the de-centralizing of state authority over the economy, allowing for heightened privatization – thus seeing further alienation from workers and their productive output. Despite Deng's emphatic belief that once China's GNP was high enough, "the socialist principle of distribution [would] enable all the people to lead a relatively comfortable life,"[45] this timeline expanded too far into the future, and the growing material differentiation continued to heighten public discontent and draw attention to the ideological weaknesses of Deng's socialist modernization efforts.

Journalist and writer Liu Binyan, like Wang Ruoshi, was a critic of Deng's attempts at 'socialist modernization.' Expelled from the Party in 1987 after the General Secretary Hu Yaobang fell from power, he presented a synthesis of his issues with the Chinese system in an interview with Harvard International Review in early 1989.[46] Liu argued that people had by and large disconnected from the political and economic outcomes for their actions, held by the belief that "this factory isn't mine; the government isn't mine, the society isn't mine."[47] We see here a symptom of the aforementioned depoliticization, which is associated by Wang with economic alienation. This underscores the powerlessness felt by the general public in

[43] Misra, Kalpana, *From Post-Maoism to Post-Marxism: The Erosion of Official Ideology in Deng's China*. 133
[44] Wang Ruoshi, "On the Problem of Alienation," *China Report* 20, no. 3 (May 1, 1984): 25–35, https://doi-org.oxy.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/000944558402000304. 34
[45] Deng Xiaoping, "Building a Socialism With a Specifically Chinese Character."
[46] Liu Binyan, "A Chinese Voice of Conscience: Liu Binyan Speaks Out," *Harvard International Review* 11, no. 2 (1989): 11–64.
[47] Liu. 12

regards to enacting meaningful change. Both Wang Hui and Zhang note the inability of intellectuals to understand the social contradictions at the time[48] nor to provide a solid vision for the future of Chinese society.[49] Liu connected this to their feelings of uncertainty and passivity due to existing in a social system that suppressed the open expression of diverse political views.[50] This is not to say that criticisms were not levied, but rather that said criticisms often missed the mark, touching on the disconnect between the Party and the people rather than rightist economic reforms that were leading to heightened social injustices.[51] This may have been a result of the increase in restrictions of the freedom of the press from 1981 onwards, leading to intellectuals being forced to criticize the issues at the margins of the contradictions rather than pierce the heart of the matter, in fear of suppression and expulsion. Furthermore, these restrictions were emblematic of the contradictory nature of Deng's 'seek truth from facts', which we once again see not being applied to his own policies. By simultaneously promoting and restricting 'free' thought, Deng and the CCP allowed for discontent and unhappiness to fester in private spaces. Indeed, Liu noted that in his conversations with various elites (heads of research institutes, writers, mayors), they all "privately understand that the status quo is unacceptable…[and] wonder how the CCP could have become this corrupt."[52] This manifested economically into a growing hesitation to invest money in production or expansion of businesses, which is opposite to what Deng and the CCP wanted. Liu highlighted people hiding their money away in boxes instead of going to banks, refusing to expand, and even selling their factories and businesses in fear of policy changes that drastically impact their livelihoods.[53] In attempting to integrate privatization and

[48] Wang Hui, "The Historical Conditions of the 1989 Social Movement and the Antihistorical Explanation of 'Neoliberalism,'" in *China's New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition* (Harvard University Press, 2006). 46
[49] Zhang, "On Some Motifs in the Chinese 'Cultural Fever' of the Late 1980s." 134
[50] Liu, "A Chinese Voice of Conscience: Liu Binyan Speaks Out."
[51] Ibid. 13
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid. 64

marketization into a socialist system, Deng inadvertently developed mistrust and uncertainty above all else. The persistent inflation and economic disruption of the Chinese economy after 1985 is clear evidence for this.[54] By not coinciding 'free' market reforms with free expression, this mistrust was compounded, and thus directed towards the CCP itself – Liu thought so too, highlighting the emergence of opposing factions with the Party leading to a gradual weakening in its control.[55]

1989 Tiananmen Square Protests

The 1989 movement, also known as the Tiananmen Square protests or the June Fourth Incident, was therefore the culmination of the building pressures of mistrust, uncertainty, and social upheaval caused by Deng's economic reforms and ideological reorientation. Led by students and intellectuals, the demands of the movement make this explicitly clear, calling for

> the implementation of political democracy, media freedom, and freedom of speech and association, as well as the establishment the rule of law (as opposed to the "rule of man", or *renzhi)* and other such constitutional rights, in addition to the demand that the state recognize the legitimacy of the movement itself (that is, as a patriotic student movement).[56]

These demands highlight the very issues that Liu and Wang focused on in their criticisms of the CCP. Despite being unable to pinpoint and verbalize explicitly the contradictions that had emerged due to Deng's economic reforms, they understood the instruments necessary to counter these contradictions. Their first four demands demonstrated a desire for unrestrained cultural and political discussions within the public sphere, and for said discussions to have a concrete impact. The attention given to the 'legitimacy' of the movement is especially important, as it further signifies a desire for recognition as an agent of change in the political and economic process. Thus, the participants of the movement attempted to gain more agency

[54] Wang Hui, "The Historical Conditions of the 1989 Social Movement and the Antihistorical Explanation of 'Neoliberalism.'" 52
[55] Liu, "A Chinese Voice of Conscience: Liu Binyan Speaks Out." 64
[56] Wang Hui, "The Historical Conditions of the 1989 Social Movement and the Antihistorical Explanation of 'Neoliberalism.'" 56-7

in the implementation of reform to combat corruption and elitism, and to move beyond the three 'nothings' to become reconnected to the political and economic outcomes for their actions.

However, concurrent with the development of the 1989 protests were Deng and the CCP's growing view that stability, especially maintaining it, was the top priority. In February 1989, Deng (in a talk with President George Bush) noted that China required stability first and foremost in order to facilitate economic development, and that "if we seek the forms of democracy, we…will only throw the country into turmoil and undermine the people's unity."[57] Indeed, in a talk with leading members of the Central Committee in March 1989, he doubled down on this, arguing that stability was the key to successes in modernization, reform initiatives, and the open-door policy, firmly asserting that "we must counter any forces that threaten stability, not yielding to them or even making any concessions."[58] Going into detail, he noted that the CCP must "lose no time in drawing up laws and statutes, including ones to regulate assembly, association, demonstration, and the press and publishing. Anything that violates the law must be suppressed."[59] It is clear from these excerpts that Deng saw the maintenance of stability as a legitimizing factor for the party. It is also wholly possible that Deng and the other leading members noticed that the social unrest and discontent was about to burst, and attempted to put measures in place to tighten control and ensure stability.

However, tensions nevertheless erupted. Under the pretense of dealing with "a handful of bad people were mingled with so many young students and crowds of

[57] Deng Xiaoping, "The Overriding Need Is For Stability," February 26, 1989, https://dengxiaopingworks.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/the-overriding-need-is-for-stability/.
[58] Deng Xiaoping, "China Will Tolerate No Disturbances," March 4, 1989, https://dengxiaopingworks.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/china-will-tolerate-no-disturbances/.
[59] Deng.

onlookers,"[60] the CCP used violence as the sole force for 'maintaining stability,' brutally cracking down on protestors. Herein is where we see a slight ideological reorientation from the initial 'seek truth from facts' argument, as Deng moved to instead highlight "follow[ing] unswervingly the basic line."[61] Battered by the state that was meant to represent them, cognizant of the terrors of utter social upheaval, and aware of the consequences of not following the mass line, China thus entered the 1990s.

MaoCraze in the 1990s

While the 1980s saw China take smaller, more careful steps into integrating with the global capitalist order and with following foreign investment, the 1990s saw a headfirst leap into both. After "accumulating more experience in building a Chinese-style socialism,"[62] Deng and the CCP powered through with economic reform and the open-door policy arguing that "if we want socialism to achieve superiority over capitalism, we should not hesitate to draw on the achievements of all cultures and to learn from other countries,"[63] and that while "some areas may develop faster than others; those that develop faster can help promote the progress of those that lag behind, until all become prosperous."[64] They could do so, in part, due to the severe repression in 1989 that put a stop to any attempts at counterprotesting reforms. Indeed, this fear of repression can also credited for the distinct lack of Maoist language and rhetoric used in the quoted attempts at validation – Deng notes the Marxist essence of "seeking truth from facts"[65] which was attributed to Mao Zedong Thought in the

[60] Deng Xiapoing, "Address To Officers At the Rank of General and Above In Command of the Troops Enforcing Martial Law In Beijing," June 9, 1989, https://dengxiaopingworks.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/address-to-officers-at-the-rank-of-general-and-above-in-command-of-the-troops-enforcing-martial-law-in-beijing/.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Deng Xiaoping, "Excerpts From Talks Given In Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shanghai," February 18, 1992, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1992/179.htm.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

1980s. Though nuanced, we see that Deng and the CCP attempted to shift away from using Mao as a tool for legitimacy, and leant towards utilizing state force and violence instead – as is evidenced by Deng's call of "follow[ing] unswervingly the basic line."[66]

Student's Interest

As open protest became largely impossible, the public had to find another vehicle through which they could channel their unhappiness. In the early 1990s, this manifested in the public developing a growing interest in Mao, the person, thus limiting the extent to which Deng and the CCP could separate themselves from the former Chairman. Stemming from a phase of relative publishing freedom in the tail-end of the 1980s, books on Mao Zedong were in hot demand – be they biographical, speculation, or entirely fictitious.[67] This demand bled into the 1990s, with the growing public view of Mao as a "moral and political icon."[68] Indeed, in an editorial published in the People's Daily in early 1990, Hua Ming notes that "intense and profound reflection has led university students to the conclusion that Western remedies cannot provide cures for China's ills, and that "following last year's [1989] disturbance, university students have spoken of 'searching for Mao Zedong, and being ashamed of [their] attitude to Deng Xiaoping.'"[69] Thus, he argued that students instead had been looking towards Mao and Mao Zedong Thought for Chinese solutions to Chinese issues. Similarly, conservative writer He Xin also followed a similar thought process, arguing that the growing interest in Mao stemmed from people "having experienced many new social phenomena in the 1980s."[70] By this of course, he is referring to the social unrest and discontent and its eruption into the 1989 protests. This idea is built upon in a sociological publication in Shanghai by Zhang Weihong, who also noted the rapid development of interest

[66] Ibid.
[67] Geremie R. Barmé, *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader*. 135-9
[68] Hua Ming, "From Sartre to Mao Zedong" in Geremie R. Barmé. 144
[69] Geremie R. Barmé. 150
[70] Zhang Weihong, "A Typology of MaoCraze" in Geremie R. Barmé. 157

in Mao and his work following the protests of 1989. He broke this interest down into several sub-categories, differentiating between the theoretical-analytical types and the performance-art types, and then further into whether their interest in Mao lay at a devotional or an oppositional level.[71] He argued that the first group (regardless of their feelings for Mao) aimed to improve the conditions of society and usher in a new age and belief system that would benefit the people, and that the latter's participation was more fad-like – with the reverential type supporting the Party despite a theoretical base, and the irreverential type rejecting the Party and society based on romanticism and whims.

This dichotomy is fascinating as it cuts to the heart of the issue with the development of the MaoCraze. Within university students, the consensus seems to be that it clearly emerged from the social unrest of the late 1980s, and that the continuation of economic reform and open-door policy despite the protests of the people led to students wishing to utilize the very same legitimizing structure used by Deng and the CCP. However, this came at a time where depoliticization was at an all-time high, and the state was therefore attempting to shift away from Mao's ideological foundation to favor economic development and state violence as a legitimizing force – leading to contentions in ideas. Thus, while interest may have been heavily proliferated, the ideological impact of said interest (at least from the students' side) seems to be minimal.

General Public's Interest

In the public sphere however, interest in Mao manifested in a different way. Author Hou Dangsheng noticed that from 1991 onwards, laminated portraits of Mao appeared hanging in the windscreens or set up on the dashboards of vehicle across China. He interviewed a variety of taxicab drivers, those in the bustling cities as well as on the outskirts,

[71] Zhang Weihong in Geremie R. Barmé. 158-161

to understand the reasons behind this. The first driver claimed that he was "doing what everyone else is,"[72] and that he felt there was something mystical about the former Chairman. Indeed, he substantiated this by referring to a story of a traffic accident between a truck and a taxi where the truck driver got injured but the taxi driver came out unscathed, claiming that "they say he had a portrait of Chairman Mao in his car and that's what protected him."[73] Herein we see not an ideological basis for an interest in Mao, but rather an emotional one that leads to the likening of Mao to a "guardian god,"[74] as the driver puts it. It has been argued that because this deification lacks ideological heft, that it also lacks a real or measured influence in Chinese society. However, this is demonstrably false, as we see from discussions from the driver's friends who juxtaposed Mao's clear alignment and understanding of the common man with the "corruption and dirty government."[75] Here, we once again see the tensions and contradictions that grew throughout the 1980s continue to build, with the working public becoming more and more discontent with the moral standards of their society. Hou also interviewed another taxi driver who noted how materialistic people had become, arguing that the "the image of Mao is not simply that of an individual; rather, he is the symbol of an incorruptible, practical Chinese communist who at all times and in all circumstances considered the welfare of the masses."[76] Much like the earlier drivers, her understanding of Mao shows us how this ideal image stood in direct contrast to the CCP of the 1990s, implying that they did not always consider the welfare of the masses. While these drivers all may not have thought much of their decisions to keep laminated Mao portraits in their vehicles, looking at their actions alongside their complaints of the CCP and their views

[72] Hou Dangsheng, "Hanging Mao" in Geremie R. Barmé. 212
[73] Hou Dangsheng in Geremie R. Barmé. 212
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid. 213
[76] Ibid.

on Mao thus bring to light the extent of their discontent, and demonstrate an avenue by which they look to channel said discontent – even if they do not fully realize it.

An opinion poll conducted by the Beijing Youth Press in late 1993 provides further insight into the thoughts of the public. While older workers and peasant praised Mao wholeheartedly, middle-aged persons were argued to have a "rational and dispassionate stance in evaluating Mao's successes and failures"[77] but ultimately saw the main issues as being tied to the system as a whole rather than the leader. Those between the ages of 25 to 35 praised Mao more highly, often openly worshipping him – which the writers "were completely unprepared for."[78] Evaluating him in personal terms, and holding a deep fascination in his journey from a peasant's son to a major world figure, this age group focused on his individuality and political ability rather than the historical and political events around him. Some "even expressed doubts about the suffering they'd heard people had gone through during the Cultural Revolution."[79] In this, we see a fascinating outcome to the ideological reorientation of Deng more than a decade earlier that sought to separate Mao the person from Mao Zedong Thought in order to use the latter for legitimization. However, an unintended consequence arrived in the form of the public developing an interest solely in the personality of Mao rather than his ideological beliefs.

Intellectuals' Response

As noted earlier, open protest towards the state was no longer an option for the public who feared violent retaliation. This extended to intellectuals who engaged with this interest too; however, those who fled to Hong Kong were far more open with their analyses and criticisms. Immediately after his fourteen year stint in prison, Wei Jingsheng published a

[77] Tang Can, Zhu Rui, Li Chunling, and Shen Jie, "Galluping Mao: A 1993 Opinion Poll" in Geremie R. Barmé. 263
[78] Ibid. 264
[79] Ibid. 264

scathing article on Mao Zedong in 1993, noting that his influence lingered as there were "still people around who want to use his name for their own nefarious ends."[80] He argued that the former Chairman brought extreme poverty and backwardness to China, aided by "all the henchmen who helped him concoct those disastrous plots" and the "general mass of people who have…treated them as superior beings."[81] Wei displays an anger and a passion directed towards the state that is atypical of any source engaged with in this paper, highlighting the existence of a deep-seated distaste and unhappiness that perhaps some in the public also held. Also interesting is his strong condemnation of Mao himself, a view that is less prevalent during the MaoCraze era, and one that may have been spurred by this very interest – evidenced by his accusations against the aforementioned general mass of people. Despite this, Wei still stands as an example of why discontent had to be hidden during this time, as he was promptly arrested once again in early 1993, and allowed to move to the US in 1997. The consequences for blatantly criticizing the state in an era of depoliticization were made clear, even towards those not on mainland China.

Social and political critic Liu Xiaobo, much like Wei, found himself in writing for the Hong Kong press after being banned from publishing in mainland China in 1989. Taking note of the growing public interest in Mao by late 1994, he noted that despite its best efforts, the CCP had "no alternative [or] viable political resources for people to rely on apart from the heritage of Mao Zedong."[82] By completely negating the Maoist line with economic reform and open border policies, and further blocking attempts at democratic political reform, the people thus only had nostalgia as a way of expressing unhappiness.[83] Depoliticization, combined with the threat of violence breaking out once more, were thus effective in curbing

[80] Wei Jingsheng, "Who's Responsible" in Geremie R. Barmé. 233
[81] Ibid.
[82] Liu Xiaobo, "The Spectre of Mao" in Geremie R. Barmé. 277
[83] Ibid.

open critiques – at least, on mainland China. However, the lingering embers of nostalgia for the Mao era were stoked by this repression, and thus led to the eventual manifestation in a bloom in interest in Mao himself. Indeed, Liu highlights the absurdity of this emergence, noting that in the public's eyes "the poverty of the Mao age was emotionally satisfying and exciting [and] made people sing with joy [but] the wealth generated in the age of Deng…made the Chinese feel impotent and disgruntled."[84] Thus, we see the CCP's policies and threat of violence backfired on them, forcing them to continue to cling onto Mao Zedong Thought as a legitimizing force. Liu pinpoints this inability to generate a foundation of authoritarian power that is not related to Mao as Deng's principal failure, and as the reason why the public continued to be unhappy with the ever-growing tensions and contradictions manifesting in the form of income inequality and social stratification.[85]

Through these sources we see how different sectors of Chinese society channeled their discontent and unhappiness towards Deng's ideological and economic reforms in the 1990s, and further that all these revolved around the legacy of Mao in some form or another. This is especially interesting when we look back at the "Resolution on Certain Questions" from 1980, wherein Deng underscored that Mao was to be "held chiefly responsible"[86] for the errors of the Cultural Revolution. As noted earlier, this was an attempt to separate the man from his theory, in order to utilize the latter for legitimization purposes. However, subsequent depoliticization efforts and the implementation of state force negated this aim by forcing the public to channel their discontent and unhappiness through the only conduit left – the nostalgia for Mao. The symptomatic nature of this interest meant that this support was not conscious or purposeful, but rather emotive and unconscious, resulting from Deng and the

[84] Ibid. 278
[85] Ibid. 280
[86] Deng Xiaoping, "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China."

CCP's inability to move beyond Mao Zedong Thought as a legitimizing force. As such, Mao ultimately becomes an unconscious symbol of discontent and unhappiness, something that developed only because of the strict limitation in directly voicing said discontent and unhappiness. This is why, despite being symptomatic, this interest clearly had weight and an impact on Chinese society.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the interest in Mao that bloomed in the 1990s was a result of the political and economic events of the 1980s. Deng in 1980 attempted to separate Mao the person from Mao Zedong Thought, highlighting the tenet of 'seek truth from facts' to open the deceased Chairman up to criticism. He seemed to believe that this containment would allow him to freely utilize Mao Zedong Thought as a tool for legitimization for his policies of socialist modernization. Arguing that their route was the logical continuation of Mao's ideology, and that Mao himself had strayed from this path, Deng and the CCP thus attempted to integrate a supposedly socialist state into the global capitalist order by embarking on a process of de-theorization and placing economic reform as the primary focus of party work. However, due to the tensions from this integration, what resulted was a marked increase in corruption and social stratification, as well as a de-centralization of state authority in the market – all elements that were contradictory to the Chinese socialist system. These contradictions and their resulting impacts were thus heavily criticized by the public, who saw 'seek truth from facts' as an opportunity to voice their opinions and have an active part in the state processes. In allowing space for the critiquing of Mao, Deng and the CCP had inadvertently opened gaps for criticisms against themselves, which the public duly utilized. These tensions, criticisms, and discontent came to a head with the 1989 Tiananmen Square Protests that saw the public openly display their wish for a more democratic process that allowed their voices to be heard.

The repression of this protest through brutal state violence set the tone for the 1990s. Deng and the CCP had put an end to the overt criticisms of the state and its policies, and thus continued to embark down the road of socialist modernization by drastically picking up economic reform. However, this repression did not mean that the discontent and tensions disappeared, but rather, the public were forced to find another conduit for their unhappiness, which persisted with the continued growth of inequalities and corruption. As Mao continued to be heralded as the father of Chinese socialism and as the foundation of the CCP, and with Deng having separated the man from his ideology and associated himself with the latter, the public thus channeled their unhappiness through the nostalgia of the era of Mao, leading to the rapid rise in interest in Mao as a personality. Across the various sectors of society in the 1990s, Mao was perceived as emblematic of the Chinese socialist way and thus as antithetical to Deng's policies. While they did not necessarily subscribe to Mao Zedong Thought, he nevertheless became a figure of discontent and protest, as the fog of nostalgia and the passage of time had placed his mistakes in the background and his leadership and personality front and center – easily contrasted to Deng and his straying from the true socialist path.

I have also argued that while prior literature has either focused too heavily on an intellectual-political analysis or a cultural analysis, what is required is a marrying of the two analytical frameworks to generate a truly in-depth understanding of the legacy of Mao in Deng's era of reform. I have placed the symptomatic nature of the interest in Mao, posited by intellectual-political historians, onto the real impacts this interest had on people across Chinese society. In doing so, I demonstrated that this unconscious form of protest signified that even without ideological heft, the people could clearly feel the inherent contradictions between Chinese socialism and capitalist methods through the impacts the policies had on their lives. The interest in Mao is marked by the inability of the public to openly voice their concerns for fear of reproach. This limitation continues, having a deep impact on the psyche

of Chinese society that holds true to this day. As such, it is important to pay attention to when the banner of Mao is raised, as it heralds unrest, unhappiness, and the wish for a change.

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