Failure of Charisma:
An Intepretation of the Chinese Cultural Revolution

Shaoguang Wang
Yale University

During the ten years between 1966 and 1976, the Chinese people were recurrently told that the Cultural Revolution (CR) was advancing from one victory to another. The movement in retrospect, however, seems to have lurched from crisis to crisis. For the first two years or so of the CR (1966-68), China was in a state of total anarchy. Neither Mao nor his close associates, who had launched the movement, were able to control it. Even after this chaotic period, the political process under Mao continued to move "elsewhere" all the time, creating unexpected crises, stagnation, frustration, and social changes. Finally, in 1976, when Mao's corpse was barely cold, all the cultural revolutionaries at the Center were rounded up at one fell swoop. In the years that followed, Mao's political line has been grossly betrayed. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that, by any measure, the CR was a colossal failure.

Why did the drama directed by a universally recognized "charismatic" leader turn out to be his stigma? The following paragraphs will try to answer this question by investigating the charismatic relationship between Mao and millions of self-claimed followers of the "great helmsman."

"True Believers" or "Rational Actors"?

In the literature on the CR, though top elites have been depicted as calculating or even astute actors, the movement itself has often been pictured as one in which anomie prevailed, as if all others were Mao's irrational followers who behaved as the vehicles of blind crowd fury.[1] However, whether one is a blindly devoted follower does not depend on what one claims to be, or

[1] Lynn T. White, III, Politics of Chaos: The Organizational Causes of Violence in China's Cultural Revolution (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 20-42.

even what one believes one is. Rather, one's behavior will reveal the truth. An individual's public pronouncement of loyalty to an ideology or to a leader is never sufficient as a sound indicator of real attachment. Only a careful analysis of the individual's private opinions, and, more important, of his behavior, would help us determine whether his public pronouncements are the same as his private opinions and represent his real desires.

Once the masses are designated as "true believers," as much of the literature on the Chinese Cultural Revolution does, the tendency has been to minimize the importance of the non-true-believer segments of the society. It is fallacious to equate the whole population with true believers. It was true that during the CR period, everyone claimed to be a true believer of Mao. We should not be fooled by such statements, however. My study show that though a majority of followers really believed in Mao's natural talents and identified with him, others accepted his initiatives because they feared punishment if they deviated. Still others were neither mesmerized by Mao's personal mystique nor subjugated by their fear of punishment, but followed him because they perceived his positions, skills, and information to be most appropriate for their own situation.[2] Obviously, the latter two groups were only self-described followers. They could hardly be called true believers.

Nevertheless, the majority of the Chinese people were true believers of Mao. They were really willing to follow Mao wherever he led them. Does it mean that they were irrational actors in the game of the CR? Not necessarily. In fact, the masses of the people were no less rational than political elites. Calculations of cost and benefit were essential on all sides of the CR from beginning to end.

Decision to Engage Contrary to the generally held view that all Chinese enthusiastically threw themselves into the movement without the least hesitation as soon as they were called by Mao to do so, adult Chinese generally made their first move with caution. Having learned from the past political campaigns that anyone who challenged the authorities would come to no good end, they had difficulty overcoming their fear of speaking up

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[2] Shaoguang Wang, "Failure of Charisma: The Cultural Revolution in Wuhan," Ph.D. dissertation of Cornell University, 1990.

independently. That was why it was politically naive students who first took spontaneous action.[3]

Formation of Conflict Groups It cannot be accidental that when spontaneous mass organizations were forming the phenomenon of "birds of a feather flock together" appeared. The members of rebel organizations were recruited mainly from the social groups that held grievances against the establishment, whereas the conservatives were principally those who had everything to gain by protecting and elaborating on the status quo.[4] Their targets of attack were distinctively different. The rebels generally ignored non-Party administrators and experts, and moved directly against the core Party leadership hierarchy of the enterprise in which they had been working. The conservatives, on the other hand, tended to attack cadres in functional fields, especially those with questionable class backgrounds and personal histories. If they criticized the Party officials who had been their patrons, their criticism was generally mild and politely stated.[5] This divergence was a direct outgrowth of the pre-CR structure of social conflicts.[6]

Even those bystanders sat on the sidelines for good reasons. For some, such as people with extremely "bad" class designations, it was too risky to take a clear-cut stand in factional conflicts; and for the others, such as middle-of-the-road workers, they expected little reward in the seemingly unprincipled chaos. It has often been said that during the period of the CR, there were basically two factions---radical and conservative. Thus a big segment of the population has been ignored, namely, the so-called xiaoyaopai. By xiaoyaopai, I refer to both those who did not join any mass organization, and those who never actively cared about what happened to their organizations though formally they were members. This is the meaning of the term as it was used during the course of the CR. Xiaoyaopai were by no means a small

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[3] Gao Yuan, Born Red (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); Anita Chan, Children of Mao (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985).

[4] Marc Blecher and Gorden White, Micropolitics in Contemporary China (White Plains, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1979).

[5] Hong Yung Lee, The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: A Case Study (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 340-343.

[6] Andrew G. Walder, Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

percentage of the population. In many communities, they accounted for one-third to 50 percent of the total population even at the zenith of the CR. And as time went on, the number of xiaoyaopai became even larger. Jinggangshan of Qinghua University was one of the most famous Red Guard organizations in the nation, and Xinhuagong of Central China Institute of Technology was one of the most influential Red Guard organizations in Wuhan. Surveying both of their newspapers quickly reveals that from early 1967 on, xiaoyaopai became a more and more widespread phenomenon within their organizations.[7] In the summer of 1968, it was reported that there were fewer than three hundred active Jinggangshan members, out of some 20,000 students and faculty at Qinghua University.[8] If that was the case, the percentage of Xiaoyaopai in other units must have been even greater. This development was so alarming that Mao himself was very worried about it.[9]

Behavior Pattern Because of the relative power position of the rebels vis-a-vis the conservatives, the two sides behaved differently. Being a minority in each unit, the rebels tended to engage actively in activities outside their own work units, for multiunit, citywide organizations were their sources of strength in the daily tussle with the conservatives in their units. In contrast to the rebels, the conservatives preferred to fight against their adversaries within the boundary of each unit because there they were not only the majority but had ready leverages to subdue the enemy.

Degree of Solidarity Olson's argument that people act collectively only when there are "selective incentives" for them to do so probably stretches the point.[10] But the concept of "selective incentive" is helpful in accounting for various degrees of solidarity in different conflict groups in the CR.

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[7] Qin hua jinggangshan [Jinggang Mountain Corp of Qinghua University] (Beijing, 1966-1968) and Xinhuagong [New Central China Institute of Technology] (Wuhan, 1967-1969).

[8] Mao Zedong sixiang wansui [Long Live Mao Zedong Thought, thereafter Wansui] (Wuhan, 1969), p. 689.

[9] Ibid., pp. 689 and 703.

[10] Bruce Fireman and William A. Gamson, "Utilitarian Logic in the Resource Mobilization Perspective", in Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy, eds., The Dynamics of Social Movement: Resource Mobilization, Social Control and Tactics (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers, 1979), pp. 8-26.

Rebel organizations were generally more soldiery than their conservative counterparts for three reasons. First, the rebels strove for social status and social acceptance,[11] which, according to Olson, are noncollective goods or "selective incentives."[12] Second, the rebels, or "challengers" in Tilly's terminology,[13] engaged in collective action because they could not increase their well-being through individual effort. Third, in a "no-exit" situation, the distinction between individual and collective benefits tended to be obliterated.[14] Although the conservative mass organizations also articulated their interests, they acted in most cases rather passively because what they attempted to defend was a public good, the existing pattern of power distribution.[15]

Even within the ranks of the rebels, people's commitment to their collective cause varied in accordance with the direct benefit they expected to derive from the realization of the conflict group's goals. From the summer of 1967 on, more and more rebel rank-and-filers came to realize that at best only a small fraction of the rebels could eventually benefit from the success of their group's goals. As a result, many lost enthusiasm and dropped out, becoming xiaoyaopai.[16] As for rebel leaders and activists, however, positive

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[11] Stanley Rosen, Red Guard Factionalism and the Cultural Revolution in Guangzhou (Canton) (Boulder: Westview, 1982).

[12] Mancur Olson, Logic of Collective Action (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 61.

[13] Charles Tilly, From Mobilization to Revolution (Reeding, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978).

[14] Albert O. Hirschman, Exit, Voice, and Loyalty (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

[15] Hong Yung Lee, The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, chapter 10 "A Test of the Radical-Conservative Hypothesis: A Case Study of the Kwangtung Cultural Revolution".

[16] A Chinese historian of the CR notes:

The people might not have possessed mature political thought, but their intuition was often surprisingly acute. After late 1967, the masses began to lose any enthusiasm for the campaign. The mass movement became increasingly that of the factional leaders...People began to show more interest in making furniture, rearing goldfish, knitting, and

selective incentives such as future leadership and opportunity for advancement should they be successful, entered their calculation. They thus had a stake in continued insurgency. Furthermore, because their previous involvement had been heavy, they were in a sense locked into a part of the social fabric from which escape was undesirable, if not impossible. Even those who became disillusioned with the cause they had committed to often found that costs and rewards were balanced in a way that made the decision to end a commitment traumatic.[17]

Relations between Rebels at the Grass-roots and Radical Leaders in Beijing

Unlike many social movements in which the diametrical confrontation between the elite and the masses was observed, the CR had a distinctive character: the elite and the masses were divided among themselves, and the division between the radicals and the conservatives cut through the elite as well as the masses.[18] But it would be a gross oversimplification to present the rebels and the conservatives at the grass-roots as homogeneous social groups ever ready to spring into action at the behest of their elite counterparts. Take the rebels. Although the rebellious masses were permeated with the slogans of the radical central leaders, their aims were qualitatively different from those of the leaders who promoted or initiated them. Mao's basic objectives were to revolutionize the superstructure, to transform Chinese people into "new men" and "new women", and above all to eliminate his opponents; and the motive of his radical retinue was to defeat their rivals

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sewing. The red hot mass movement cooled and dissipated. The struggle for power, no less intense, went on internally among the "upper echelons." Eventually, those among the latter who came away empty-handed remembered their "masses." But they could no longer elicit a warm response (Liu Guokai, A Brief Analysis of the Cultural Revolution (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1987), pp. 113-14).

[17] James V. Downton, Jr., Rebel Leadership---Commitment and Charisma in the Revolutionary Process (New York: Free Press, 1973), pp. 61-72.

[18] Hong Yung Lee, The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, pp. 1-6.

and improve their own power positions within the central leadership.[19] But most rebels threw themselves into the movement for catharsis and with a desire to change their sociopolitical status. Rebel masses and radical central leaders all attacked the establishment, but for different reasons. Moreover, what they actually attacked were different parts of the establishment, and what they attempted to achieve were in many cases at odd with each other. In a sense, both the radical central leaders and the rebels at lower levels were fighting in the CR for power redistribution. But even in this sense, their goals were different: the former were preoccupied with issues concerning the power redistribution at the very top, whereas the latter were immersed in the redistribution of local power. To a large extent, the central radicals cared about politics in the provinces only to enlist support from below to bring pressure bear on their rivals within the central leadership. Similarly, the rebel masses had little real interest in the issues causing central cleavages. That was why the criticisms of Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and Lin Biao rarely concerned the masses much.[20]

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[19] Lowell Dittmer, China's Continuous Revolution: The Post-Liberation Epoch, 1949-1981 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), chapters 3-5.

[20] In a 1986 interview, a former influential rebel organization leader acknowledged to me that he had hard a time inspiring his fellow members to criticize Liu Shaoqi in the course of the CR:

> Most of the masses, including a large part of the leaders of their organizations, not only did not understand but also did not care much about the anti-Liu campaign. What concerned them most was how to deal with immediate adversaries, namely, the power holders, the conservatives, and the army, because the result of conflicts with the immediate adversaries could have a direct impact on their vital interests. They were not anxious about "the danger of capitalist restoration," which for them was too hard to comprehend and irrelevant to their daily life. In other words, the masses did not care what Mao cared. Indeed, a lot of big character posters were put up and a lot of articles published to criticize Liu. But basically those were done perfunctorily as a mere matter of show, demonstrating our "revolutionary indignation" against Liu and "sincere desire" to follow Mao's strategic plan. Even for us,

Georges Lefebvre, in his famous study of the French Revolution, puts forth his concept of "parallel revolutions."[21] By the same token, we may argue that the CR was not a single movement but rather a series of parallel movements. The interests of the central and local radicals were parallel, this is, pointing in the same direction but never meeting.

We may hypothesize from the above observations that true believers are never homogeneous. Some further questions then raise: How could it come to pass that those real true believers often behaved as rational actors and that those who adored the same leader fought against each other and even physically attacked each other? The following paraghaphes will try to develop a meaningful interpretation of this seeming conundrum.

Anatomy of Charismatic Relationship

The Idol and His Believers A leader exists only for and through other people. The cult of personality has two poles: an idol and his believers. In view of this polarity, it is clear that the idol himself cannot produce the cult of personality. The cult of personality cannot come into being unless the idol is adored. In this sense, the existence of the personality cult depends more on believers than it does on the idol. If the cult in reality results from an interaction between the two, then exclusive concentration on the idol's traits will tell us little about the cult. This is not to deny the vital importance of the idol. It is simply that if one loses sight of the role of believers and their relations with the idol, one loses sight of a good part of the personality cult.

An often-ignored distinction between the idol and his believer is that the former is one man alone, while the latter is one of many. Any attempt to consider the relationship between idol and believer will be incomplete if it does not recognize that an idol is adored by a large number of people at different times and in different places, whose feelings toward the idol,

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the chief leaders of rebel mass organizations, Liu was understood to have symbolized the force that had suppressed us. Beyond that, we, like the ordinary members, did not have interest in criticizing him.

[21] Georges Lefebvre, French Revolution: From Its Origins to 1793 (London: Routledge & Ragan Paul, 1962).

although having elements in common, also have elements that are not necessarily shared by all. Accordingly, the larger the body of believers becomes, the greater heterogeneity of beliefs and philosophies of action may be present. It should never be assumed that the goals of an adored leader are embraced in the same way, and with equal enthusiasm, by all of his believers.

Emotional and Cognitive Dimensions of the Personality Cult The cult of personality should be measured on two dimensions, the emotional and the cognitive. The idol elicits emotions such as devotion, awe, and reverence in his believers. An examination of the effects of such emotions is the work of the first dimension. Meanwhile, the idol is subject to being perceived by his believers. The cognitive dimension involves believers' efforts to understand and to concretize the messages the idol has transmitted. These two aspects of the cult of personality have different functions. In terms of behavior, the first dimension determines the relationship between the idol and his believers and the second determines the believers' relations with one another and with the outside world. Thus, though believers may have the same nature of attachment to a common leader, they do not necessarily share the same view of the world and therefore they may behave very differently. In extreme cases, they may even engage with each other. More significantly, the believer's emotional commitment toward the adored leader does not necessarily lead to an accurate understanding of the idol. Therefore, it is not impossible for conflicts to occur between the idol and his believers.

The Idol as a Message Bearer When believers perceive an idol, what they are really doing is looking for a message relevant to their own lives. Followers and potential followers wish to know what the idol's message is. The message, then, is the most important element in the charismatic relationship. To put it perhaps more provocatively, the person of the adored leader is actually quite unimportant in the idol-believer relationship. The idol is merely a message bearer. The message, however, is not an object that stands by itself and offers the same face to each believer. Rather, it is an event, something that happens to, and with the participation of, the believers. In the process of perception, the idol's messages are interpreted.

Here, three factors need to be noted. First, in some sense, all men are invisible to one another. A cannot experience B's experience, and B cannot experience A's experience. It is out of this invisibility that arises the basic need for interpretation. Hence dyadic interaction is not given by

nature, but arises out of an interpretive activity. Moreover, an obvious and major difference between the idol-believer relationship and other forms of social interaction is that with the former there is usually no face-to-face meeting. The partners in dyadic interactions can ask each other questions to ascertain how far their perceptions have deviated from one another's original meaning or to what extent their images have bridged the gap caused by the inability to share one another's experiences. But, an idol cannot adapt himself to each believer with whom he comes in contact. Thus, it is impossible for the believer to learn from the idol how accurate or inaccurate his view of the idol is. Mao is a special case. Unlike Robespierre and Hitler, Mao was not an expressive speaker. Although he received 11 million Red Guards on Tiananmen in the first half-year of the CR, he rarely made public appearances thereafter, never made a single public speech, and never talked directly with any Red Guards until he had decided to disband the Red Guard organizations. Then he for the first time met the five most famous Red Guard leaders of Beijing, which was also the last time.[22] Because of the great distance between Mao and his followers, his followers were not able to ask him for clarification of each message he transmitted. Nor did he make attempts to do so. James Davies was probably right when he pointed out: "It is the distance itself which leads to enchantment" because "no man can be great in the eyes of his intimates."[23] But such distance also enhances the need for interpretation.

Second, because the validity of the idol's message is proved or disproved by and through events, it is clear that the message is most subject to disconfirmation when it is precise and testable; it is least vulnerable when most vague. Therefore, we find that unconsciously or deliberately, the messages transmitted by adored leaders are often very generally defined and thus are open to different interpretations. The so-called "highest directives" of Mao, for instance, were extremely fragmented and nebulous. For instance, Mao defined the CR as a class struggle, but he did not define the

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[22] It occurred on July 28, 1968. See Wansui, pp. 687-92.

[23] James Davies, Human Nature in Politics (New York: John wiley & Sons, 1963), p. 283.

concept of "class."[24] Similarly, the "power holder taking the capitalist road" was the officially sanctioned target of the CR, but this concept was never clearly defined either.[25] The two concepts were crucial for determining who should be the targets and the motive forces of the CR. The vagueness of the two key concepts enabled virtually anyone to claim her- or himself as "Maoist revolutionary" and to attack others as "class enemies." The conceptual confusion thus resulted in political chaos.

Third, while the history of ideas and of political philosophies tends to examine the intellectual component of political ideas as stated by its most articulate formulators, we are here concerned with ideologies as they are perceived and understood by the rank and file of social movements and conflict groups. Most people do not possess an articulated and intellectualized political ideology. It makes no difference, however, that the ordinary Chinese did not understand the first thing about the Mao Zedong Thought they revered. In politics, it was not relevant whether they were able to discover the core of determinate meanings of his messages. What was important was how they perceived Mao. Indeed, people interpreted Mao's messages in different, and sometimes opposite, ways. Their interpretations were influenced and structured by everything they brought with them and by their varied competences.

Interpretation becomes especially necessary when alternative ideologies are lacking. When it is possible to deny one truth in the name of another, or one value in the name of an opposing one, people may choose from available ideologies and embrace one of them. When there is only one legitimate ideology and alternatives are banned, then the only thing that can be done is to develop interpretations of the official ideology. The CR provides a

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[24] He first proposed that class could be defined by one's political attitudes as early as 1958. But he never developed this proposition in a theoretical way, and his use of the concept was rather inconsistent. As a result, even top leaders could not quite master Mao's class analysis method. Once a top leader asked Mao which class status a landlord's son should have been assigned, Mao replied that the question needed to be discussed. See Wansui, pp. 597 and 602.

[25] Mao once tried to give a definition of the concept, but he only made it more confusing. See Wansui, p. 677.

perfect example of this process. The sole legitimate ideology, Maoism, was invested with quite different meanings, despite the initial intentions and orientations of the doctrine.

(Figure 1 about here)

From the above analyses, we may conclude that perception is a constructive act. It is not the discovery of meaning but the creation of it. Once interpretations are developed, they become somewhat independent of the original message, receiving their own "life" and having their own social effect. In fact, what determines followers' behaviors is not the original meaning extracted from the message transmitted by the leader per se but the meaning constructed and experienced by followers. Therefore, the interpretations of the message's recipients are more politically relevant, for sociological analysis, than the ideology itself.

We may further conclude that the leader-follower relationship is not a one-way process in which the passive follower merely internalizes the message of the leader; rather, it is a dynamic interaction in which the active follower is constantly responding to the meaning he produces in this interaction, which may, in turn, affect the leader's future message formulation (see the Figure1). This explains why Mao constantly had to modify his plan of the CR according to the changing situation.

Different Images of the Same Adored Leader When one interprets messages from a leader in a consistent way, he creates an image of the leader. Such images are both an individual and a social phenomenon. Indeed, it might be true that every Chinese had his or her own image of Mao. But "even if individuality is unique," as Trotsky said, "it does not mean that it cannot be analyzed. Individuality is a welding together of tribal, national, class, temporal and institutional elements and, in fact, it is in the uniqueness of this welding together, in the proportions of this psychochemical mixture, that individuality is expressed."[26] Thus the way one creates his own image of a given leader is modified by his consciousness of the external world, which has been developed within the context of a particular group or groups. In this

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[26] Leon Trotsky, Literature and Revolution (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 59.

sense, we may conclude that each social group has its own relatively unified image of the leader and that different social groups have different images.

The image of an object should not be regarded as identical with the object itself, though the image-holder may not be able to distinguish what is given to him from what he produces in the process of interaction with the object. Thus, when followers think that they are following a leader, they may actually be following their images of the leader, which are their own products containing their own expectations. During the period of the CR, many Chinese, perhaps a majority, tended to see Mao largely in this way---in their own private images. They followed him not primarily because they had experienced a full conversion to the sectarian mentality of the true believers but because, for one reason or another, they had found it easy to assume that Mao was articulating their own basic resentments, hopes, and conceptions of society. Although they all used the same original words of Mao, and shouted the same prevailing slogans, they in fact expressed different and sometimes opposing feelings. Moreover, when Mao's policy diverged from their conceptions, popular support tended to ebb, and enthusiasm turned to be ritual if not outright noncooperation or even open resistance.[27]

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[27] There was a perfect example that what people actually believed in was their own image of Mao rather than Mao per se.

In the summer of 1967, Mao went to several southern provinces by train to conduct an inspection. On the way back to Beijing, Mao found that the attendants on the train were divided into three factions. To persuade them to form a great alliance, Mao first sent Zhang Chunqiao and Yang Chengwu to the attendants. They failed. Then Mao personally talked with the representatives of the three factions for more than two hours. As a result of Mao's personal presence, the three factions reluctantly agreed to accept his suggestion. But immediately after having left Mao's car, they argued with each other again. In the last resort, Zhang and Yang put pressure on them by saying that since Chairman Mao had personally made the effort to persuade them, they had to form a great alliance. Finally, an "alliance" was realized, but we have good reason to doubt how long it lasted. This case reveals that people saw something in their images of Mao which they did not see when Mao was actually present. Before having talked with Mao himself, the people in each of the three factions might think, or at least claim, that they were loyal to

One's Image of the Adored Leader and His Social Position In every social organization, as Ralf Dahrendorf has pointed out, some positions are entrusted with a right to exercise control over other positions and to ensure compliance with authority. Correspondingly, there are individuals and groups who are subject to authority rather than participants in its exercise. The division of labor creates complex relationships of exchange between different social positions. The combination of horizontal and vertical divisions of labor makes up the basic configuration of social positions, strata, and classes in the social system. Under a given social system, there exists a certain distribution pattern of scarce resources and of rewards---the good things desired and sought after by most, such as wealth, power, and prestige---among the individuals, groups, and classes. Those who are favored have a vested interest in conserving and consolidating their existing share; those who are negatively privileged seek to increase theirs, individually or collectively. It is from the structured arrangement of individuals and groups in a social system that social conflict arises.[28]

Although the Chinese political system before the CR was definitely not "one of the purest forms found in human experience of a type of association in which there was a clear-cut separation between the elite and the masses," as one observer believed,[29] there nevertheless did exist what Weber called "positively and negatively privileged social strata." The CR brought the long-suppressed latent tensions between these strata in Chinese society to the surface.

Mao and were following his "revolutionary line." The fact that when Mao was actually there they were not persuaded by him suggests that the significance of their own images of Mao outweighed that of Mao per se. We may conclude from this case that what really makes sense to followers can only be their images of an idol rather than the idol himself. See Red Guard Publications (Washington, D.C.: Center for Chinese Research Materials, 1977), vol. 19, p. 6041.

[28] Ralf Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), pp. 165-69.

[29] Tong Tsou, "The Cultural Revolution and the Chinese Political System", China Quarterly, April-June 1969, p. 63.

When people from various social groups became Mao's followers, their conflicting expectations did not disappear. Instead, they subconsciously built their expectations into their respective images of Mao. Followers thought themselves true believers of Mao, but in fact they were true believers of their own images of Mao. In this sense, the follower's willingness to accept Mao's initiative is not the result of blind faith in, or devotion to, Mao as a spokesman or embodiment of a transcendental source of authority. Rather, it is a product of his perception that Mao's initiative would provide solutions to his personal problems, though he may not realize, or may not be willing to realize, this fact. One's position in the pre-CR society to a great extent determined which side s/he took during the CR.[30] It is hard to imagine that those who came from different backgrounds and who joined opposing factions were embracing the same Mao. What they actually embraced could only be their own images of Mao. Such behavior may be called a consciously irrational and subconsciously rational one; that is, it is characterized by conscious blind faith and subconscious self-interest.[31] That is why true believers may behave as rational actors.

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[30] As they had done during the CR, even today the former conservatives still tended to accuse the radicals of having been generally composed of those who had been disciplined for their wrongdoing, those who had not been trusted because of their family background, and those who had been so ambitious that they took the CR as a good chance for upward mobility. Meanwhile, the former radicals asserted that the conservatives were those who had been active in attacking others in all the previous political campaigns, those who had fawned on their superiors for promotion, and those who had been so ignorant that they always tended to follow their immediate superiors.

[31] There has long been controversy about the nature of collective behavior: Is it rational or irrational? At least in many cases, it seems to me, it is neither totally rational nor completely irrational. The masses may not always be clear as to what they really want, but they do have a good sense of what they do not want. They may be fooled somehow, but they cannot be fooled for long. In this sense,, they are certainly not totally irrational. Yet they do not always make choices by consciously weighing the rewards and sanctions, costs and benefits. In other words, they are not totally rational, as many have supposed. In any case, it is safe to say

Conflicting Images and Conflicting Actions Since one's image of a leader contains one's own expectations, it should not be surprising to find that the images of different social groups are often very different.

In the French Revolution, George Rude has found, although the revolutionary crowd enthusiastically supported and assimilated the same objects, ideas, and slogans as the bourgeois political groups in the National Assembly, while the most constant motive of the former was the compelling need for the provision of cheap and plentiful bread and other essentials, the latter was basically seeking free trade and rights in property. Thus the demands of the two groups were often at variance with each other, which led to occasional outbreaks of independent activity by the *menu peuple*.[32]

During the period of the CR, Mao was seen as the symbol of the establishment by the conservatives but as their supreme commander to oppose the establishment by the radicals. Each side believed that Mao was behind its cause, but their images of Mao were the exact opposites of each other.

The two conflicting images clearly suggest that ultimately the follower finds in his leader nothing but what he himself has imported into his image. He bows down to the work of his own hands, an image representing his own life forces in an alienated form.

Since one's image represents one's own life force, and different social groups have different interests to seek or to protect, the different images of a common leader will necessarily lead to different patterns of behavior, which are in turn likely to lead to conflicts among true believers.

Importance of the Concept of "Images of Mao" The concept introduced here of the "image of Mao" is crucial for understanding the charismatic relationship during the CR. On the one hand, the image stands between Mao and millions of ordinary Chinese, and thus studying it will shed light on the relationship between the supreme leader and his followers. On the other hand, the image is an intermediate variable, formulation of which was determined by

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that although formulation of people's basic orientation is based on the considerations of their own interests, their behavior may often contain emotional or irrational components.

[32] George Rude, The Crowd in the French Revolution (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 196-209.

one's experiences before the CR, and which, in turn, determined to a large extent one's behavior pattern in the course of the CR (see the Figure 2).

(Figure 2 about here)

Using the concept of "image of Mao" has several advantages. Because the follower's image of Mao was not identical with Mao himself, we can more realistically study how Mao and the followers interacted with each other. Because all participants claimed to be true believers of Mao, but in fact they had their own images of Mao, this concept will help us more accurately analyze how social groups interacted with each other. Because the image of Mao contains both emotional and cognitive elements, we can coherently illustrate both rational and irrational components in the CR participants' behavior. Finally and most important, because the image of Mao is the intermediate variable between one's pre-CR experience and his behavior in the CR, we can more logically link our analysis about pre-CR Chinese society with our study of the CR itself. The concept of the image of Mao provides us with useful means to combine all of the above aspects in a coherent way.

Failure of Charisma

Now we are in a position to explain the most mysterious aspect of the CR: Why did the movement get out of hand despite Mao's charisma?

When Mao started the CR, he of course wanted to have complete control over its direction. The cult of personality seemed to him an effective tool of popular mobilization.[33] But before long, the Chairman was surprised by the sheer scope of the movement. In the following ten years, he was often to be taken aback by the torrent he had unleashed and feel powerless to change it. Why? Basically, because he created a situation in which he could not effectively exercise his leadership.

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[33] Lowell Dittmer, China's Continuous Revolution, pp. 79, 120.

Leadership in the final analysis has two functions: energetizing and directing.[34] Mao was certainly successful in energetizing the masses during the CR, probably too successful. But he failed to direct the movement. It was ironic for a leader to see the followers he had energetized moving in other directions than his'.

To direct a movement, the leadership has to select its aims, to choose a program that depicts the behavioral steps from the present state to the aims, to transform the program into behavior in order to produce the effects, to control execution to ensure that the desired behavior is correctly executed, and to adjust the behavior when it deviates from the right path. At every step, however, Mao's leadership fell far short of its functional requirement.

Incompatible Goals Unlike power, which does not require goal compatibility, but merely dependence, leadership implies some congruence between the objectives of the leader and the led.[35] However, Mao's and his retinue's aims were essentially divergent from those of the masses. Although emotionally the masses were loyal to Mao, as "strategically rational actors"[36] they had their own objectives to pursue. The divergence of interests therefore must be taken as the starting point for understanding the failure of Mao's leadership in the movement.

Inadequate Program Because the CR was a premature birth of sociopolitical conflict in the Chinese society, the parturition of which had been hastened by intraelite struggle,[37] not only did the masses have no distinct, mature, or advanced political program for directing social change, but Mao himself had not worked out a master plan for the movement at the time he started it. Mao was waging a massive "class struggle" against a newly generated "bureaucratic

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[34] Mario Von Cranach, "Leadership as a Function of Group Action", in Carl F. Graumann and Serge Moscovici, eds., Changing Conceptions of Leadership (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1986), pp. 117-18.

[35] Jeffrey Pfeffer, "The Ambiguity of Leadership", in Rosenbach and Taylor, eds., Contemporary Issues in Leadership (Boulder: Westview, 1984), pp. 4-17.

[36] Jon Elster, Ulysses and Sirens: Studies in Rationality and Irrationality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[37] Wang Xizhe, Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution (Hong Kong: Plough Publications, 1981), pp. 73-74.

class" or the "power holder taking the capitalist road," but he offered no adequate theory about the structural basis of the antagonism. The various constraints emerging in socialist China were reduced to "bureaucratism." And the problem of "bureaucratism" was treated primarily as behavioral and attitudinal rather than structural.[38] To overcome bureaucratism, it thus seemed to Mao sufficient to resort to compulsory "thought reform" and "seizure of power." It has been proved in retrospect that neither ideological solution nor personal change solution can eliminate bureaucratism. At best they can only ameliorate the problem. But Mao then did not fully realize that what he aimed to tackle were structural problems and that structural problems would require structural solutions.

Without an adequate and coherent theory as the guideline of the CR, it is not surprising to find that throughout the ten years, "Mao usually made decisions in an ad hoc manner, reacting to the various specific problems as they arose, rather than in accordance with a prearranged blueprint."[39]

Malformed Communication If there were a hierarchy of organizations to give Mao's followers authoritative interpretations of his messages, to translate them into specific decisions, and to enforce them, Mao might have been able to produce united actions. However, Mao himself destroyed vehicles of coordination to execute his decisions. At the height of the CR, governing bodies throughout China were paralyzed. To exert his control over the movement, Mao had to rely heavily on the manipulation of political symbols, but this proved to be a poor means of coordinating the movement when used without the support of mechanisms of communication and implementation.[40]

Communication is essential for clarifying a movement's goals and facilitating the efficient performance of roles. Communication is a continuous, dynamic and interactive process, which involves encoding, transmission, and decoding. First, the information must be put into a transmittable form. This is a critical point. If the message is not encoded

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[38] Richard Curt Kraus, Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

[39] Hong Yung Lee, Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, p. 331.

[40] Ibid, pp. 345-346.

fully, accurately, or effectively, it may not be received.[41] This encoded message then is transmitted. Here the problem is whether or not sufficient transmission channels exist. Finally, when the message is received in the form of a signal, it must then be decoded.

During the CR, however, communication was more confusing than clarifying. First, the prevalence of the cult reduced normal public discourse to a set of dogmatic cliches. Although behind the linguistic veneer of revolutionary rhetoric there was a constant tug-of-war over resource redistribution, participants' real motivations were rarely expressed in public. Messages in the information flow thus were by and large not veracious. Moreover, Mao's directives were often equivocal and inconsistent, leaving room for flexible interpretations.

Second, communication channels for transmitting information vertically and horizontally were malformed. Because of the "cellular" pattern of the Chinese polity, horizontal communication had long been underdeveloped in pre-CR China.[42] At the height of the CR, citywide mass organizations to some extent transcended the walls of individual units, but factionalism blocked the communication between contending groups. After 1969, as the "honeycomb"of authority was being repaired, horizontal communication was once again reduced to a minimum. For vertical communication, the significant role of the "gatekeeper" deserves special attention. In a massive movement like the CR, communication between the topmost leaders and the masses was seldom direct. Secondary leaders thus were needed to mediate the interactions between the topmost leaders and the rank-and-file participants--- "gatekeepers" in Kurt Lewin's terms.[43] The gatekeepers' main function is to regulate information flow on behalf of the topmost leaders. In the first two years of the CR, however, "gatekeepers" were largely removed. In the temporary freedom from authoritative constraints, communication channels multiplied. Communication

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[41] Wilbur Schramm, ed., The Process and Effects of Mass Communication (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), p. 4.

[42] Vivienne Shue, The Reach of the State: Stretches of the Chinese Body Politics (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

[43] Kurt Lewin, "Group Decision and Social Change", in Guy E. Swanson, Theodore Newcomb, and Eugene L. Hartley, eds., Readings in Social Psychology (New York: Henry Holt, 1952).

through well-established hierarchical channels was replaced by loose coordination among the movement's participants through the media and through personal remarks by the trusted leaders. Moreover, mass organization tabloids came to be a vast and lively alternative media system, alongside a nationwide rumor network and a network of mass organization liaison stations that penetrated every corner of the country.[44] This multiplication of information opportunities reduced the probability that a single leader or a small group of leaders could monopolize the communication flow in harmony with the goals he or they were pursuing. Later, the hierarchy of local authorities was restored, but they were by no means mechanical transmission belts for directives from Beijing. Rather, they were highly selective in responding to ambiguous signals emanating from the Center.

Decoding is more complicated and more interesting. The above discussion of "images of Mao" has established that rather than the discovery of "original" or "real" meaning, perception is the product of one's physical makeup and social setting, one's wants and needs, and one's personal experiences.[45] It should not be surprising, therefore, to find that during the CR, the participants interpreted Mao's words differently. Consciously or subconsciously, they all exploited the high-level generality of official ideology to protect their own interests.

More important, once the information from the Center had been extracted and interpreted, the masses began to encode their own message as they prepared to respond. Feedback thus occurred. Signals were returned to Beijing and the process continued through countless cycles. Instead of one-sided exploitation, at the same time that Mao's Center sought to direct the masses,

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[44] Hong Yung Lee, Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, pp. 345-346.

[45] See Albert F. Eldridge, Images of Conflict (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), pp. 1-40. In this respect, hermeneutic is suggestive. See H. G. Gadamer, Truth and Method (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd., 1975); Paul Ricoeur, The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1974); and Steven Mailloux, Interpretive Conventions: The Reader in the Study of American Fiction (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

it took direction from the masses. And instead of passive instruments, the masses left strong imprint on every phase of the movement.

Unreliable Mechanism of Implementation The capacity of Mao and his retinue to direct and control the movement was further crippled by their lack of a reliable mechanism of implementation. During the CR, they demonstrated time and again that they were able to abandon the regional apparatus of authority without any semblance of due process. But throughout the ten years they never acquired a cooperative support structure at the provincial level and below, which put them in the position of an imposing head and torso without arms and legs. With no instrument to impose unity but ideological criticism of deviation, they found themselves unable to direct the movement moving along the path they desired. To pursue radical goals, they had to rely on spontaneous mobilization, which, under the circumstances, was bound to be destructive. To resume even a minimum degree of law and order, however, they had to rely on the local authorities, which, generally hostile to radical policies and local rebels, tended to restore the pre-CR power relations. Neither was desirable, but no alternative existed. That was why Mao's Center oscillated from "left" to "right" with increasing frequency.

A Critique of "Charisma"

In social movement and collective behavior theory, it has been common to stress the charismatic qualities of some leaders to account for their successes in mobilizing a following and maintaining a high degree of commitment and loyalty among their followers. Max Weber first incorporated the concept of charisma into his theoretical formulation of authority, which included the traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal bases of rule. He referred to charisma as "a certain quality of an individual personality by which he is set apart and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities." Weber insisted that "where charisma is genuine... it is the duty of those who have been called to a charismatic mission to recognize its quality and to act accordingly, psychologically this 'recognition' is a matter of complete personal devotion

to the possessor of the quality, arising out of enthusiasm, or of despair and hope."[46]

Since Weber, the concept of charisma has been indiscriminately applied to describe the emergence of popular leaders. It has been held that where a charismatic relationship exists, the leader can generate in his followers such emotions as devotion, awe, reverence, and, above all, blind faith. In other words, in the eyes of a true follower of a charismatic leader, the leader's saying a given thing is right makes it right. The leader sets the goals and selects the means. He can change them at will, even into their opposites without necessarily losing support. The theory of charisma thus rejects all rational conduct.[47]

Mao has long been considered a charismatic leader. To the extent that he was able to inspire and sustain loyalty and devotion to him personally, he may be considered to have possessed charismatic qualities. But at least in the case of the Chinese CR, the followers' loyalty and devotion to the charismatic leader never became total dedication. Contrary to Max Weber's assumption, strategically the masses were not irrational and there were real limitations on the charismatic leader's power. It seems that something must be wrong with the conventional wisdom about the charismatic relationship. As some writers have pointed out, discussions of charisma have been speculative in nature and almost exclusively theoretical. A notion such as "blind faith"---what the charismatic leader supposedly generates in his followers---has rarely been subjected to empirical testing.[48] There is, however, plenty of evidence that

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[46] Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 359.

[47] Ann Ruth Willner, Charismatic Political Leadership: A Theory (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 4-6; James V. Downton, Jr., Rebel leadership: Commitment and Charisma in the Revolutionary Process (New York: The Free Press, 1973), pp. 209-10.

[48] Robert J. Honse, "A 1976 Theory of Charismatic Leadership", in James G. Hunt and Lars L. Larson, eds., Leadership: The Cutting Edge (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977), p. 190; S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., Max Weber: On Charisma and Institution Building (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. xvii; and A. James Gregor, Interpretation of Fascism (New Jersey: General Learning Press, 1974), p. 106.

the movement's leaders, charismatic or otherwise, were always in danger of losing their control over the forces they had called up and of seeing their ideas adapted to purposes other than those they had intended. At times, they were even compelled, to maintain their authority, to trim or adapt their policies to meet the wishes of their followers.[49] This was precisely what happened to Mao during the CR.

If the masses were rational, why do a majority of Chinese even today still insist that they were fooled by Mao into taking part in the CR, implying that they participated for Mao, not for themselves?

Social conflict is seldom a simple mechanical reaction to grievances and frustrations experienced in the pursuit and defense of material interests. Interests and dissatisfactions are experienced and interpreted by way of moral ideas about right and wrong, justice and injustice of conceptions of the social order as they are expressed in ideals and highly regarded principles.[50] It has been observed that in social conflict situations, both the established and discontented groups try hard to make claims for their goals, programs, and actions in the name of ideals and values that have some legitimacy. In such situations, they become more sensitive to those messages which seem to express their desires and more ready to respond to people or leaders who are able to present them with new symbols that can give meaning to their experiences.

Serving as the ideological foundation of the CR, Maoism was the ultimate justification for any action during the course of the movement. In a state that literally enshrined the leader's will as law, anyone who openly challenged the leader would be immediately attacked from all sides.[51] To

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[49] George Rude, The Crowd in History, 1730-1848 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1981), pp. 247-50.

[50] Barrington Moore, Jr., Injustice: the Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1978).

[51] According to a decree issued by the Maoist Center at the beginning of 1967, so-called "gongan liutiao" [six provisions concerning public security], anyone who attacked Mao and Lin Biao was to be severally punished as an "active counterrevolutionary." See Hubei Provincial Revolutionary Committee, ed., Wuchan jieji wenhua dageming wenjian huibian [A Collection of Documents Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution] (Wuhan, 1969), vol. 1, pp. 187-190.

survive politically, it thus was absolutely necessary for everyone to declare him or herself to be Mao's supporter. And to take any action, one must flaunt Mao's banner first. Many of course sincerely believed that they were fighting for Mao's holy cause. But they did not realize that there was a contradiction between the reality of their underlying and unconscious desires and the fiction of their rationalizations.

One of Freud's fundamental discoveries was that of the unconscious. He pointed out that most of what is real within ourselves is not conscious and that most of what conscious is not real. This is especially true when our desires strongly contradict certain values which we do not want to have threatened. Only through rationalization can one make it appear as though an unworthy desire is motivated by reasonable and moral motives.[52] In China, there has traditionally been a corporate concept of interest. The public interest occupies a position of sacrosanct priority, but group and individual interests may be tolerated only within the latitude of some plausible interpretation of the public interest. The CR if anything reinforced the indigenous corporate concept of interest. Everyone was eager to identify with "Chairman Mao's proletarian revolutionary line." Self-interest and group interest were condemned as a bourgeois mode of thinking that should make way for general dedication to the public interest and to universal values. The slogan "fight self, champion the public" was typical of this view. This is not to say that private interests did not exist in those years, however. On the contrary, despite the political atmosphere precluding the expression of self-interest, the open-textured quality of most ideological formulation of the public interest permitted private interests to be expressed in altruistic rhetoric and all actors did pursue their own interests in this manner.[53] Under the circumstances in which self-interest could be pursued only through subtle modification of consensually acceptable themes, many rationalized their

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[52] Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusions---My Encounter with Marx and Freud (New York: A Frident Press Book, 1962), pp. 88-133.

[53] Lowell Dittmer, "Public and Private Interests and the Participatory Ethic in China", in Victor C. Falkenheim, ed., Citizens and Groups in Contemporary China (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1987).

efforts to seek after self-interests with the belief that he was fighting for a general interest.

One who is unaware of the phenomenon of the unconscious is convinced that he speaks the truth if he says what he knows. Even if he is sincere with regard to what he is aware of, he may still be dissembling or misrepresenting "truth" because his consciousness is "false;" his consciousness does not represent the underlying real experience within himself. This is exactly what happened to many of the CR participants. When they are told that behind their sanctimonious rationalizations were the very desires they bitterly disapproved of, they even now sincerely feel indignant or misunderstood and falsely accused. The notion of "betrayed" obedience to Mao makes them more comfortable. That is why this explanation has been so popular among Chinese.

Figure 1

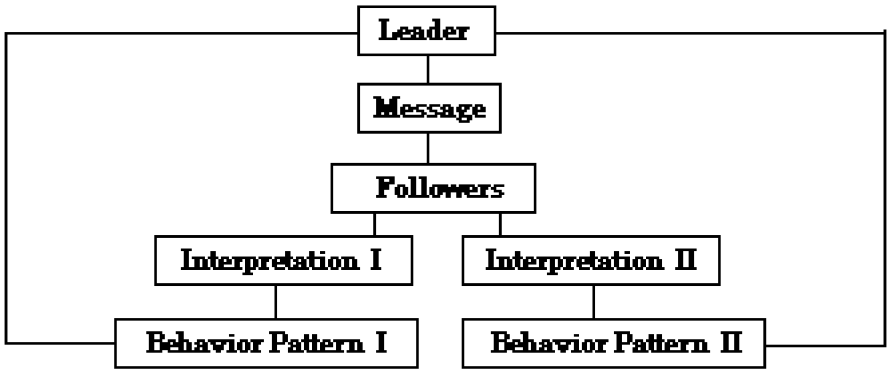

Figure 30.1 Leader-follower relationship

Figure 2

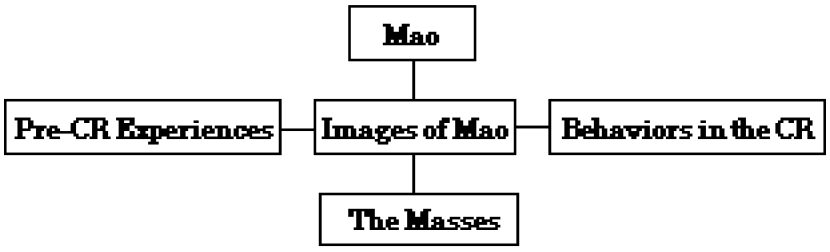

Figure 30.2 Images of Mao