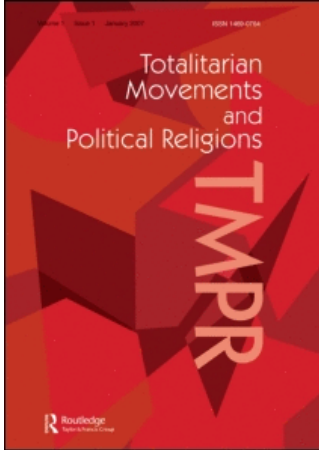


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# The Mao Cult as Communicative Space<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** *The article discusses different ways of approaching the personality cult of Mao Zedong, former Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It proposes to analyse the leader cult as a form of authoritarian political communication that affected both CCP politics and popular reaction. Intended as a loyalty-creating device to ease the identification with the communist movement for its often illiterate supporters, the cult merged the success of the revolution with the fate of a single person. Controlling the leader's image and writings thus became a formidable task. While the cult came to assume quasi-religious forms temporarily, it will be argued that these were not necessarily part of a political religion, but often demonstrations of loyalty in a climate of fear and utmost political volatility.*

The twentieth century witnessed the unprecedented rise and decline of political ideologies intended to replace existing loyalties and belief systems. The establishment of revolutionary regimes was accompanied by the creation of canonical discourses and imagery focussing on the revolutionary leader. These modern personality cults, the 'godlike glorification of a modern political leader with mass medial techniques'<sup>2</sup> supported by fanatical popular worship appear to be a near universal feature of the past century. While the Stalin cult was most influential in providing a blueprint for other socialist leader cults, none was to rival the intensity and scope of the Mao cult during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). The Little Red Book, the 'Mao Bible', has become a synonym for what in China is often referred to as 'irrational' [*shiqu lixing de*] worship of the CCP Chairman and has ever since stimulated discussions about the cult's religious or quasi-religious character.<sup>3</sup>

In this article, I propose to analyse the Mao cult primarily as a phenomenon of political communication that came to be shaped and sustained by three distinct processes. It was, first, based on the creation of a powerful image to represent the vast organisational apparatus of the CCP. This type of 'authoritarian branding', which elevated Mao Zedong above the rest of the Politburo, gained the support of his fellow CCP leaders only due to specific historical circumstances: the necessity to compete with the publicity campaigns of Chiang Kai-shek [Jiang Jieshi] in vying for public legitimacy to rule China, and the foreclosure of splitting tendencies within the Party. The Mao cult was, second, supplemented by the structural

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failure of the *nomenklatura* system to establish a regular way of political ascent. Patron-client relationships and the building of networks played a crucial role in securing individual careers and made flattering remarks directed at regional or central leaders a common trait of intra-Party communications. Finally, the cult was not simply a tool of social engineering that could be invoked at ease but was always subject to reinterpretation and local adaptation. The CCP's success in mobilising support depended on a strictly controlled public sphere. If Mao chose to invite public criticism to curb bureaucratic and dogmatist tendencies within the Party-state, his public image could receive a considerable boost but simultaneously the degree of official control declined. Ultimately, the high grounds of interpreting the symbols of power had to be secured through enforcing physical expressions of loyalty on a nationwide scale. Although a nascent Mao cult evolved in the late 1930s and matured during the Rectification Campaign of 1942–43, the cult as a Marxist 'scientific' concept only gained theoretical status within CCP discussions after Khrushchev's secret speech in February 1956. The article therefore sets out to describe the impact of Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation policies in China before turning to the different factors that contributed to the shaping and sustaining of the Mao cult.

### Stalinist model and Chinese adaptation

In his memoirs, Wu Lengxi, former editor-in-chief of the CCP's official newspaper *Renmin Ribao* [People's Daily] and head of the *Xinhua* [New China] News Agency up to the Cultural Revolution, recalled a series of nightly Politburo discussions in late March 1956 that were conducted either in Mao's bedroom or the adjacent *Yinian*-Hall in the *Zhongnanhai* compound. Roughly three weeks after the end of 20<sup>th</sup> Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Congress, a version of Khrushchev's secret speech 'On the cult of personality and its consequences' had been made available to the CCP leadership through still obscure channels.<sup>4</sup> The CCP and all other communist parties were presented with enormous difficulties by the attack on the Stalin legacy, which blamed the terror and purges of loyal CPSU members on the instigation of a 'personality cult' [*kult' lichnosti*], a phrase that had first appeared in CCP media in a translation of a 1953 *Pravda* editorial discrediting Stalin's former head of security work, Lavrenty Beria.<sup>5</sup> While all communist parties had come into contact with the cult as a historical phenomenon, its theoretical status within Marxist-Leninist theory remained unclear. In personal letters Marx and Engels had a few times expressed their contempt for the 'lick-spitting'<sup>6</sup> and 'insufferable'<sup>7</sup> cult fostered by Ferdinand Lassalle in the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein* [General German Worker's Association], but they did not relate its emergence to historical materialism. Khrushchev's conflated usage of the phrase by equating the cult with omnipresent flattery to Stalin's genius, police terror and repressions against old communist veterans described the cult's effects but did not provide explanations either about its origins or reasons for its development. The CCP therefore remained at pains to come to terms with the cult of the individual.

Sitting in a half circle around the massive, book-laden bed of the 'Chairman', who usually did not even feel the necessity of changing his sleeping gown, the Party's top echelon emphasised the measures that had been taken on Mao's behest to prevent the rise of personal worship in communist China. The most important directive had been passed at the Second Plenum of the Seventh Party

Congress in March 1949 forbidding the naming of streets, factories and public places after living political leaders. During one of these meetings, Mao reflected upon his own contributions to the Stalin cult. He had written three public eulogies, all of which he now claimed had been necessary to signal the unity of the international communist movement. By pointing out his instrumental motives in fostering the Stalin cult, Mao attempted to justify his actions on the international stage. His evaluation of the secret speech therefore hinted at its dual influence: on one hand, the speech had 'removed the lid' of dogmatism by destroying superstition in the Soviet model, but on the other hand, it had 'poked a hole'<sup>8</sup> into the armour of the international communist movement through debunking its most prominent symbol. The official CCP statement on the secret speech, an editorial published on 5 April 1956 in the *People's Daily* entitled 'On the historical experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat', invoked the relative independence of the superstructure to explain the rise of personality cults. Cults were defined as 'rotten, poisonous remnants'<sup>9</sup> of the exploiting classes, as a habitual leftover of patriarchal traditions like emperor or tsar worship that had to be rooted out through continuous socialist education.

The editorial was submitted for study purposes to all Party cells on April 4, 1956, with detailed exegetical information.<sup>10</sup> Since the 'directed public sphere'<sup>11</sup> controlled by the Central Propaganda Department and the Ministry of Culture discouraged the discussion of controversial political issues in the state media, the CCP was forced to rely on internal intelligence to gain selective information about the impact of its policies on public opinion. Internal-circulation journals were compiled by a wide array of institutions on the central, provincial and local level. Arguably the most important internal publication on domestic issues in the mid-1950s, the *Xuanjiao Dongtai* [Trends in Propaganda and Education],<sup>12</sup> was compiled by the Central Propaganda Department based on intelligence gathered by a network of lower level propaganda institutions. Although the secret speech had not been made public, the 20<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress had been avidly followed through a careful reading of translations from the *Pravda* editorials in the Chinese media<sup>13</sup> and news leaks from within the CCP's internal publications.<sup>14</sup>

The implementation of the prescribed guidelines on identifying the cult of the individual as feudal relic, however, revealed structural hindrances in overcoming the cult as historical phenomenon. A secret cable sent by the Hebei Provincial Propaganda Department to the Hebei Provincial Party Committee and the Central Propaganda Department in late May 1956 asking for guidance on matter of principle, echoed the difficulties faced by local propaganda cadres when trying to explain the evil nature of the personality cult.

1. [How are we to] correctly estimate the importance of a leader [without] aggrandising the individual; [and how are we to] distinguish between love for the leader and a personality cult? For example, some cadres from Zhangjiakou did not dare to shout 'Long live Chairman Mao' during the 1 May parades, afraid of committing the fault of worshipping the individual.

2. Concerning the question of Stalin, [many cadres] think that the other members of the Soviet Party Centre definitely share responsibility. Therefore, why are Stalin's faults exposed in public while the others do not make public self-criticisms?

3. Those cadres, who have not heard the secret speech, always request to be informed about Stalin's actual faults. Some cadres say that unless [we] come out with actual evidence, [we] won't be able to convince them.
4. Are Stalin's works still considered to be part of the canonical works, [and] what is the criterion for works to be part of the Marxist-Leninist canon? ...
5. Can Stalin still be mentioned alongside Marx, Engels and Lenin?<sup>15</sup>

The attempt to draw a line of distinction between the excesses of the Stalin cult and the Chinese experience by relating the cult's emergence to feudal relics within the superstructure failed to convince Party cadres in several crucial points on which the legitimacy of the Party rested, not least among them being the question regarding an independent criterion to determine the writings to be incorporated into the Marxist-Leninist canon as highest repository of truth.

Despite the growing confusion, the CCP leadership responded with an attempt to liberalise the public sphere, to reduce the attribution of glory to individuals and to encourage critical discussions in the state media.<sup>16</sup> Booklets on opposing personality cults were published by the state press for educational purposes with a print run of several hundred thousand copies.<sup>17</sup> Simultaneously, the restrictions on where to place leader portraits were loosened considerably by allowing for decisions 'according to local conditions'.<sup>18</sup> By late 1956, the *Xuanjiao Dongtai* did not give the CCP leadership reason to fear that the impact of the secret speech might result in upheavals like in Poland or Hungary. Quite to the contrary, according to the internal intelligence the Hungarian uprising led local cadres to wonder aloud why, as soon as Stalin had died, the international communist movement resembled a car with a 'flat tire',<sup>19</sup> and why so many people had joined the demonstrations against the Hungarian leadership.<sup>20</sup> After all, the media coverage had always emphasised the popular support for the communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

Against resistance from within the CCP leadership Mao called upon non-Party members to help rectify the CCP's shortcomings during the campaign to 'Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom'. The cult of the individual was not among the subjects that incited public criticism. It was rather the vanguard role of the CCP and the abuse of local power that came under attack, along with massive strikes among the urban working populace that ultimately resulted in the necessity to curb the protests. With the failure of the Hundred Flowers Campaign, Mao faced two 'credibility gaps'.<sup>21</sup> It had tarnished his image as omniscient helmsman of the Chinese Revolution among Party members, and the indecisive enactment of his policies led non-Party members to question his authority over the CCP.

The national and international reverberations of the secret speech led Mao Zedong to take a different stance towards the cult of personality. At the Chengdu conference in March 1958, he formulated a unique definition of personality cults that effectively justified the veneration of the CCP leaders. Mao distinguished between two types of personality cults, a correct one of emulating individuals embodying the truth like Marx, Engels and Lenin, and an incorrect worship requesting blind obedience. 'The problem does not lie in the cult of the individual but in whether it represents the truth or not. If it represents the truth, then it should be worshipped.'<sup>22</sup> With the destruction of 'blind superstition' in the Soviet

model, the correct path to socialism was to be defined only by summing up the experiences of the masses. That Mao perceived himself to be the only one capable of achieving this task, and that he was willing to employ his personal prestige to strike down intra-Party rivals, became immediately clear when purging minister of defence Peng Dehuai in 1959, the justification of which resembled a Lenin quote Mao had used in his Chengdu speech the previous year: 'It is better for me to be a dictator than it is for you.'<sup>23</sup> The advocated worship of truth could thus easily be turned into a question of personal loyalty.

Mao's increasing dominance did not only result in the massive rise of flattery, but also in a disposal of the former translation for the cult, *geren chongbai*, which was linked to worship in general. It was replaced through the pejorative phrase *geren mixin*, indicating superstitious belief.<sup>24</sup> The 1961 edition of the dictionary *Cihai* [Ocean of Words] in its entry on the cult of the individual started out with the explanations given by the 1956 editorial, but emphasised as well the aspect of superstitious belief as opposed to veneration of the Party and its leaders.

**Cult of the individual** (*Geren mixin*) = an expression of historical idealism. Its characteristics are superstitious belief in oneself, blind worship or deification of an individual. It exponents believe that the individual surpasses the masses as creator of history and thus negates the importance of the masses as creators of history. The cult of the individual is a product of the exploiting classes and further has its base among the small producers. ... It destroys the correct relationship between the proletarian political Party, the leader and the masses. The cult of the individual is fundamentally different from accepting the importance of individuals and the fervent love of the masses towards their leaders. The former characteristics are deification of the individual and blind worship; the latter derives from class self-consciousness and caring for the fundamental interests of the revolution.<sup>25</sup>

The worsening of the Sino-Soviet relationship in the early 1960s subjected the concept of the personality cult to fierce debate, first in a series of staged protests via the proxies Albania and Yugoslavia, and after mid-1963 directly in a number of public comments and open letters. Both sides accused each other of having employed the cult with ulterior motives. The CPSU charged the CCP with openly violating the principles of Marxism-Leninism through their cultivation of public worship. The CCP leadership replied that 'combating the so called cult of the individual' [*fandui suowei geren mixin*] had been turned into a bugbear to threaten leaders of communist parties not complying with Khrushchev's revisionist course. 'The "combat against the personality cult" launched by Khrushchev is a despicable political intrigue. Like someone described by Marx, "He is in his element as an intriguer, while a nonentity as a theorist."' <sup>26</sup> To oppose the political intrigue of the 'Khrushchev type swindlers', the active expounding of the dual cult of Mao Zedong as a person and his revolutionary wisdom came to be proclaimed as a safeguard against the rise of revisionism.

The ambiguous nature of the concept of the cult eased the emergence of differing opinions on how to overcome its defects. If it was rooted in a lack of 'intra-Party democracy', the phenomenon was to be ended through a return to the principles of collective leadership. If its origins were to be found in remnants of feudal or capitalist mentalities, it had to be destroyed by means of socialist educa-



tion or revolution in the realm of the superstructure. The fact that both explanations fell short of describing the reasons for the cult's emergence was clearly revealed by its continuing potency, i.e. by the epithets accorded to Khrushchev at the 22<sup>nd</sup> CPSU congress in 1961 as 'cosmic father',<sup>27</sup> and the ever more extravagant emulation of Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution. Both attempts failed to unearth the structural origins of the cult by explaining it as a phenomenon of political communication.

### Authoritarian branding

Both major socialist leader cults of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the cults of Stalin and Mao, emerged in situations of internal conflict and international crises. Both were first expounded through loyal cronies and accepted within the Party leadership as outward demonstrations of unity, symbolising the Party organisation. In the case of the Stalin cult, the first panegyrics appeared on the eve of his fiftieth birthday in 1929 but were only of an episodic nature.<sup>28</sup> His cult was reinforced from January 1933 onwards and reached its apex in the late 1930s, paralleling the rise of Stalin's personal dictatorship. The first traces of a public Maoist cult appeared in the Party journal *Jiefang* [Liberation] in 1937, but it was only after 1942 that the cult gained full prominence, as the CCP leadership realised the potency of 'setting up the image of Mao Zedong'<sup>29</sup> against the presentation of Chiang Kai-shek as the sole legitimate 'national leader' [*minzu lingxiu*] through the Guomindang (GMD). The Communists closely monitored the nationalist publicity campaigns;<sup>30</sup> especially the campaign surrounding the publication of Chiang's book *Zhongguo zhi mingyun* [China's Destiny] in March 1943 that was made required reading in the GMD controlled areas.<sup>31</sup> The nationalist claims to legitimacy and the accompanying medial campaigns compelled even those CCP leaders who were critical of the instrumental value of the cult such as Liu Shaoqi to subscribe to its rhetorical strategies by extolling the qualities of Mao against the circle of Soviet-trained students around Wang Ming, favoured by Stalin, and thus to effectively unite the Party under the 'banner of Mao Zedong Thought'. Mao Zedong and his thought thus came to serve as brand symbols for the successful merging of the abstract theories of Marxism-Leninism with Chinese realities.

Present day marketing strategists consider brands to be 'the most important and sustainable asset of any organisation'.<sup>32</sup> Besides the necessity to differentiate the brand from its competitors, the importance of intra-organisational awareness for creating a successful brand is explicitly pointed out. Without a shared vision or a common set of values, front-line employees would not be propelled to act in the interest of the firm and thus fail to win the loyalty of customers.<sup>33</sup> The CCP was faced with a similar organisational task. The rivalry with the GMD presented only one, albeit a highly important aspect. The massive influx of new Party members and the growth of the 'liberated' areas necessitated a unified vision of the common goals and a standardised interpretation of the present situation in order not to disintegrate in factional struggles. The answer to this undertaking was the Rectification Campaign of 1942–3, providing what David Apter and Tony Saich have termed 'exegetical bonding'.<sup>34</sup> Through the group study of key texts a mythical narrative was constructed around the symbolically charged Long March under the 'correct' leadership of Mao Zedong, legitimising the CCP's historical mission of liberating and ruling China. The Rectification Campaign resulted in the creation of a distinct 'communicative space'<sup>35</sup> centred on the fabricated image

Mao Zedong and his texts that served the dual function of internal integration and external signalling. It defined how the past had to be interpreted and thus provided the boundaries of legitimate speech for those within the 'inversionary discourse community'.<sup>36</sup> The cult proved to be effective in employing Mao as a potent brand symbol to secure emotionalised support for the CCP through its often illiterate followers, but it bore the danger of hijacking the image for different purposes. The CCP therefore paid enormous attention to retaining control over the works and image of Mao Zedong and repeatedly intervened against the unauthorised print and distribution of its core symbols.

Within a well-established system of rule the personality cult was able to gain certain aloofness without interfering with day-to-day politics. Its sphere was basically confined to performative politics, the propagation of ritualised formulae and commemorative events like the parades on Workers and National Day. This equilibrium, however, could be destroyed, e.g. through the influx of rapidly increasing Party membership, a split within the Politburo or dramatic policy failures like the Great Leap Forward that made lived experience contradict the officially proposed view. At such times of crisis, a united Party leadership (unlike a modern company with a fading reputation) was able to rely on disciplining methods to reinvigorate its discursive monopoly either through renewed rectification efforts or by securing its effectiveness through systematic terror. External threats at this stage were often replaced through perceived or merely fabricated enemies from within like singling out State Chairman Liu Shaoqi as a 'Chinese Khrushchev' during the Cultural Revolution. Even without a true adversary the need to praise the virtues of the leader and continuous efforts to shape his image as glorious defender of socialism thus retained its value. The second danger of employing the image of a living leader as a brand symbol was posed by the possibility that the leader himself could employ his symbolic power for an assault on adversaries within the Party or at its most extreme, against the Party itself. Yet the manipulation of the image alone would have remained insufficient. It further required the constant building of charismatic relationships through networks that were based on personal loyalty as opposed to loyalty towards the Party or Marxism. The rapid rise of personality cults was thus eased by a structural deficit of all communist parties, the lack of formal rules and transparency in awarding individual cadres with high level Party offices.

### Charismatic relationships

M. Rainer Lepsius has persuasively demonstrated that the definition of charismatic leadership should not be directed at the leader's personality itself but 'at the structures of charismatic relationships'<sup>37</sup> he was able to form. Lepsius singles out personal devotion among the followers, the dissolution of normative standards and the creation of a community based on emotion and loyalty rather than on formal rules as main criteria of such charismatic relationships. The failure to implement a regular system of succession was highly conducive to the fostering of networks built on personal loyalty and eased the formation of regional alliances within the communist party state. The centrifugal danger of networks uncontrollable by the Party Centre was made obvious in the affair around Gao Gang, the Party's highest ranking cadre in China's north-eastern provinces prior to his purge in 1954. Owing to the enormous concentration of power in his hands, he was unofficially referred to as the '*Dongbei Wang*', the 'North-Eastern King'. He



had tried to build up support for a replacement of former nationalist 'white area' cadres like Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai through veterans of the Red Army like himself. The reorganisation of CCP territorial rule in the wake of the purge of Gao Gang contributed to a strengthening of the central leader cult as opposed to local cults relying on the same mechanisms. Besides regional factionalism, the emergence of patron-client relationships within the CCP became clearly visible in times of controversy. Differing opinions on collectivisation in 1955–6, the Hundred Flower campaign and the Great Leap Forward revealed tensions within the CCP leadership. By trying to maximise the outcome of certain policy directives, provincial or county level cadres could contribute to the prestige of their patron within the Politburo. The relationship between the local and central leaders thus relied on reciprocity: personal loyalty was rewarded through securing support for political careers. An important ingredient of the personality cult was thus its function as a 'non-bureaucratic form of communication between apex and lower-rungs of the bureaucratic hierarchy'.<sup>38</sup>

The open employment of the cult to signal allegiance became only possible after the theoretical justification of the cult at the Chengdu conference in March 1958, although prior to Chengdu intra-Party communication had by no means been devoid of the strategic use of flattery like the sending of congratulatory telegrams.<sup>39</sup> But with the validation of a correct cult it was not necessary any more to 'praise the king the whole time, but, so to say, without explicit praises',<sup>40</sup> as Paul Pellisson, court historian of Louis XIV, once wrote. During the early years of the PRC, praise of Mao Zedong in public discourse had by and large been curbed with Mao's consent. But after March 1958, references to the Party Chairman and his thought witnessed a huge upsurge in the media, although in comparative perspective the excesses were dwarfed by the Cultural Revolutionary rhetoric. In the late 1950s most cadres eager to prove their loyalty to Mao tried to avoid the impression of fostering an 'incorrect cult' by defining their praise as worship of truth transcending the individual. At the Second Plenum of the Eighth Party Congress in May 1958, the delegation coming from Mao's home province Hunan expressed this equivalence in clear terms:

[F]ollowing Mao Zedong from the bottom of our hearts is no worship of the individual or superstitious belief in the individual, but the worship of truth. Decades of revolution and construction have proven that Chairman Mao is the representative of truth [*zhenli de daibiao*].<sup>41</sup>

Only a few of Mao's long standing protégées like Shanghai Party Secretary Ke Qingshi dared to immediately drop the philosophical subtleties and proclaim their determination to follow the Chairman blindly, even to the point of superstitious belief.<sup>42</sup>

The assertion of Mao's supremacy within the Politburo and public discourse created a new opportunity for those who excelled in the study of Mao Zedong Thought. The new minister of defence and long time ally of Mao Zedong, Lin Biao, was most successful in cultivating an image of 'closely following' the Chairman with a minimum of personal intellectual contribution. His steep rise to become Mao's chosen successor would not have been possible without his long standing record of personal loyalty and the high reputation as youngest of the ten Chinese marshals. But besides his revolutionary credentials that had made him Mao's favourite in the first place, Lin's post-1959 career revealed the rewards of

excessive demonstrations of loyalty at 'Mao's court'.<sup>43</sup> Anticipating Mao's increasing reliance on demonstrations of personal loyalty, Lin made sure that he publicly showed his obedience to the Chairman by having the guards inform him about the exact time of Mao's departure for public rallies in order to arrive a few minutes ahead of him.<sup>44</sup> Another important part of the performances was the omnipresent usage of the cult's primary token, the little red *Quotations from Chairman Mao* that Lin's personal bodyguard carried in a separate bag and handed to Lin as soon as the Chairman arrived.

The increasing personalisation of power gave rise to a manipulation of symbols and language that was primarily concerned with formal aspects. An extreme example is the so called 'empty verbiage', the language of flattery that dominated public discourse during the last years of Mao's and Stalin's realm. It is the most drastic expression of the communicative space characteristic of the Cultural Revolutionary Mao cult. One of the best examples can be found in the telegrams and letters sent to Mao Zedong by conventions of so called 'Study-the-important-works-of-Chairman-Mao activists' during the Cultural Revolution. By collectively sending congratulatory notes, the civil or military participants demonstrated their personal allegiance to Mao. The following excerpt is taken from the First Congress of the Navy conducted in December 1967 under the patronage of its Political Commissar Li Zuopeng:

Our most most beloved great commander Chairman Mao: ... The rising sun illuminates the azure sky, the endless maritime borders glow in red. Immeasurable is the longing of us naval soldiers, who have grown up under the nurture of your brilliant Thought, for your presence! ... Every river runs to the sea, every red heart longs for the sun. Chairman Mao, oh Chairman Mao! Mountains are high but not higher than the blue sky, rivers are deep but not as deep as the ocean; torches are bright but can not rival sun and moon. Your loving-kindness is still higher than the sky, deeper than the ocean, more magnificent than the splendour of sun and moon. Even if one could count the stars in all nine skies, your contributions to mankind would still remain beyond measure!<sup>45</sup>

Paragraphs such as this have usually attracted little attention from scholarship due to their lack of positive content. Yet their function never was to transmit any kind of raw and unprocessed data, even less were they to be taken at face value as examples of religious sentiments. Instead they were demonstrations of personal loyalty by relying on the indefinite capacity of language to produce sequences that are 'formally impeccable but semantically empty'.<sup>46</sup> The language of flattery is an extreme example of language serving a ritual function. It is the demonstration of a social skill rather than the relaying of messages. As Hegel wrote, it 'has for its content the form itself, the form which language itself is, and is authoritative as *language*. It is the power of speech, as that which performs what has to be performed.'<sup>47</sup>

Rising in the Party hierarchy was now only possible by fostering one's image as ardent student of Mao Zedong Thought that had become the only criterion of truth. Simultaneously, Mao's coterie had to keep their own minor personality cults at a level that did not hint at aims of prematurely replacing Mao, who already was well beyond the age of 70 at the outset of the Cultural Revolution. But as the Cultural Revolution turned into a true mass movement, the appropriation of

quotes and symbols in favour of specific interests posed increasing difficulties. To generate symbolic power, local factions invoked the remembrances of important speeches of central leaders seemingly in favour of their own position or flattering those considered to be close to the Chairman.<sup>48</sup> This was but one hint that once the directed public sphere had been breached after the destruction of the Party organisation in early 1967 by allowing for power seizures, strict control over the symbols of power had become illusory.

### Ambiguous Symbols

By mid-1967, Mao's approval of seizing power from CCP organisations had resulted in bringing China to the verge of anarchy, and the late Chairman even pondered the thought of arming the masses.<sup>49</sup> Tens of thousands of rival factions all claimed their unconditional loyalty to 'the reddest red sun in our hearts', Chairman Mao, but operated in highly diverse directions. These attempts to hijack the Cultural Revolution for diverging objectives will be explained by providing an example from the south-western province of Guizhou. Two major factions had emerged in early 1967, the rebel '11 April Combat Team' and the 'Support Red Faction' aided by the provincial government of Li Zaihan. By July 1967, they were locked in a series of fierce battles and employed the cult symbols for their own purposes. A famous conflict between the factions took place in the small town of Dafang. Despite the official banning of free travel to 'exchange experiences' [*chuanlian*], 38 members of the Guiyang Teacher's University 11 April faction set out to support a partner organisation in the city of Bijie on 30 June 1967. They were intercepted by 'Support Red' opponents under the leadership of local Party leaders in Dafang. During a five day siege of the wrecked bus on the main street crossing, both factions staged propaganda activities to justify the correctness of their claims by reading sections of *Quotations from Chairman Mao*. The 11 April Combat Team invoked Mao's dictum 'the basic truth of Marxism all goes back to one meaning: to rebel is justified'<sup>50</sup> and performed songs in praise of the Chairman within their vehicle. The leadership of the surrounding crowd placed a propaganda car on the opposite site of the road and blasted Mao's supreme directive 'Return to study to make revolution'<sup>51</sup> against their adversaries and advised them not to meddle with the business of local peasants. After four days, the local crowd won a decisive edge. On 3 July at noon, 'a lower middle peasant who had arrived on the scene discovered that Chairman Mao's image on the "11 April flag" had been printed in black and faced the stick' while the organisation's name had been printed in bright red. In the Manichaeic symbolic universe of the Cultural Revolution the colour red was closely associated with the forces of revolutionary action while black had come to represent revisionism. The rebel's symbolic *faux pas* severely undermined their claim of unconditional loyalty to Mao Zedong. In an attempt to hide the flag, the students placed it 'under their bottoms; this kind of behaviour, insulting the Chairman, made the masses furious'.<sup>52</sup> It was to take another week until the humiliated rebels were allowed to return to Guiyang after massive demonstrations and sit-ins of fellow supporters in the provincial capital.

Similar events, often of a much more brutal character, preceded the consolidation of power through Revolutionary Committees in 1967–8 throughout China. The employment of the Chairman's words and image for contradictory purposes made it necessary to regain control over this mighty weapon. As the uncontrolled

usage of the cult symbols had resulted in cult anarchy, military training within schools and so called 'Mao Zedong Thought Study Classes' in society at large came to propagate a ritualised acceptance of the Chairman's unquestionable authority that fuelled later debates about the religious nature of the Mao cult. Immediately after solving the Dafang incident, the Guizhou provincial government dispatched military units to places that were known as rebel strongholds such as the Guiyang Teacher's University to conduct military training.<sup>53</sup> The reports of the military training in Guizhou are among the first to mention the implementation of daily rituals like approaching the *Selected Works* of Mao by way of 'asking for instructions in the morning and reporting back in the evening' [*zao qingshi, wan huibao*] or the 'daily reading' [*tiantian du*] of Mao's quotations.<sup>54</sup> The rise of ritual modes of worshipping Mao was closely linked to its disciplinary impetus. No longer was genuine belief in the absolute truth of Mao's words of primary importance but physical performances of submission that credibly substantiated state authority. This cult of loyalty or 'loyalty-fication' [*zhongzihua*] of Chinese society resulted in nationwide efforts to prove the accordance of every word and deed with Mao Zedong Thought. In mid-1968, Mao quotes even came to replace most basic speech acts when shop vendors had to communicate through suitable Mao quotes with their customers to prove their loyalty.<sup>55</sup>

The physical presence of the People's Liberation Army was instrumental in securing the cult's disciplinary force. Yet the specific forms of demonstrating loyalty developed independently like the 'Quotation gymnastics' [*yulu cao*] or the 'loyalty dance' [*zhongzihu*].<sup>56</sup> In rural settings the worship sometimes clearly took on religious forms. Communes built 'Quotation pagodas' [*yulu ta*]<sup>57</sup> or 'Instruction tablets' [*qingshi tai*]<sup>58</sup> before which its members had to gather in the mornings and evenings. These kinds of worship, however, were not encouraged by the central leadership and only tolerated until the situation had been stabilised. The nationwide rituals of worship thus emerged as a consequence of the attempt to re-establish political and symbolic hegemony through the PLA and 'Worker-Peasant Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams' that took over control in factories, schools and political offices. They were demonstrations of loyalty within a political environment that seemed utterly unpredictable and in which symbolic transgressions, intended to or not, were reason enough to label the offender a counterrevolutionary or even to result in death penalty.<sup>59</sup> The rituals were implemented in complicated interactions between army units and civilian groups trying desperately to 'work towards the Chairman'.<sup>60</sup> A purely totalitarian understanding would grossly overemphasise the influence the CCP central leadership had on the evolution of the manifold forms of the cult. Without the massive employment of military force, the CCP Centre was unable to retain a standardized interpretation of its core symbols.

With the convention of the Ninth Party Congress in April 1969 and the formal recognition of Lin Biao's status as successor, the most visible excesses of the cult were curbed. In a discussion at the congress, members of the powerful Central Cultural Revolution Group commented on the rise of different forms of worship and requested them to be immediately terminated:

Revered Kang [*Kang lao* = Kang Sheng]: 'At present, the loyalty dance is being danced everywhere. It is something completely normal. [They] say it is loyal [to] Chairman Mao, but in reality it is opposing Chairman Mao. In the streets of Beijing the loyalty dance is also being danced. [They] say

it is loyal [to] Jiang Qing, in reality it is opposing Jiang Qing. It is even said that there are instructors, who teach it. Comrades, consider for a while what kind of problem this is. Is this loyal to Chairman Mao [?] This is opposing Chairman Mao [!] [...] There further exists "loyalise" this, "loyalise" that, wasting the nation's wealth. This is loyal [to] oneself, giving oneself political capital.'

Yao Wenyuan: 'The masses say: Determining loyalty by looking at action [*zhong bu zhong, kan xingdong*].'

Revered Kang: 'Let the masses get to know the Centre's directive, and the masses will definitely agree.'<sup>61</sup>

Two months later, the CCP Centre issued a central circular 'Concerning some Questions which should be taken care of when propagandising the Figure of Mao Zedong' that explicitly forbade a formalistic worship of the Chairman as well as the unauthorised print of his image or works, the building of statues and the manufacturing of badges.<sup>62</sup> The cult had served its disciplinary aim and thus could be reduced. Although the medial emphasis shifted away from personal worship to issues of class struggle and correct lines, the fundamental mode of communication remained unchanged even beyond Mao's death and thus could be revoked any time, as was shown by the short lived attempt of his successor Hua Guofeng to establish a policy of the 'two whatevers', announcing that all policies and directives of Mao Zedong had been correct. Yet without Mao's presence and network of charismatic relationships, the manipulation of symbols proved insufficient to secure state power, thus enabling the 'miraculous' third ascent of Deng Xiaoping.

## Conclusions

The emotional potency of personalizing products or politics especially in situations of crisis can be found under whatever rule, irrespective of its democratic or authoritarian nature. In the business world, brands are employed to generate emotional bonds, possibly even loyalty to a specific firm. The success of a brand in a market economy, however, is not determined by its propagation efforts alone, but by the level of acceptance enjoyed among the populace. The power of brands thus ultimately lies with the customers, as they only continue to buy the firm's products if their expectations are constantly exceeded or at least met. The representation of the CCP through the image of Mao as saviour of the Chinese nation relied on similar strategies as employed by modern marketing specialists and proved instrumental in increasing internal cohesion and external appeal. But physical terror and media control enabled the CCP to enforce its hegemonic view on reality irrespective of the popular appeal. A leader cult did not have to be grounded on public support to function satisfactorily, as the cult of Nicolai Ceausescu in Romania or the non-socialist cults of Hafiz al-Azad in Syria and Saddam Hussein in Iraq revealed.<sup>63</sup> Once power had been assumed by the dictatorships, there was no way of opting for a different competitor. If the divergence between altruist rhetoric and experienced practice became overwhelming, there was little choice except publicly backing the cult rhetoric if one did not want to be excluded from the 'people' or the Nazi 'national community' [*Volksgemeinschaft*].



Fear, terror and the structural deficit to provide formal rules of political ascent thus contributed to the rise of the communicative space distinctive of the cult of the individual. This cynical, low-cost instrument of rule, however, does not adequately describe the impact and character of the major cults of Stalin and Mao. Besides the posthumous manipulation of the cult images of deceased leaders for various purposes,<sup>64</sup> the cult around successful, living state founders or Party dominators often had popular appeal. Indeed, the cult around successful, living state founders or Party leaders was not solely a fabricated media phenomenon. In the case of Stalin, numerous reports and letters from the provinces revealed support for the traditions 'invented' by the cult<sup>65</sup> rather than backing for Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation policies. Similarly, Mao would not have been able to employ his prestige in unfolding the Cultural Revolution against the Party bureaucracy without sufficient public support.

One attempt to explain the mass character of leader cults has been the employment of the concept of political religion. Its re-emergence in the 1990s is closely linked to a functional, in some cases even socio-biological grounded understanding of religion,<sup>66</sup> emphasizing the cohesive power of religion and ritual in a Durkheimian fashion.<sup>67</sup> How satisfactory is this explanation in the case of the Mao cult? The cohesive function of the cult via exegetical bonding was surely important, yet it remains doubtful whether religious categories should be invoked to explain its efficiency. There clearly are phenomena of religiosity to be observed, of personal *tremendum* among the Red Guards when Mao Zedong appeared on top of the Gate of Heavenly Peace at dawn of 18 August 1966, or the emergence of prayer-like rituals before lunch or at bedtime.<sup>68</sup> But beyond the comparison of functional equivalents on a meta-level, of mythical narratives, rituals and symbols to achieve the absolute dominance of the political sphere, the concept provides little insight for the study of the Mao cult. Instead it blurs the distinctions between the different ways cults came to function in highly different contexts. The emergence of quasi-religious rituals of worship was a consequence of the cult's disciplinary function once the Mao cult had ventured beyond control. The CCP thus rather resembled Goethe's sorcerer's apprentice, unable to contain the effects and expectations created by the successful instalment of its brand and the resulting mode of political communication. Instead of hiding the crucial differences under the umbrella term of political religion, the reconstruction of the political strategies and structural limits of political communication reveals the evolving character of the cult and offers comparisons with other leader cults.

Based on top echelon support, the emergence of Mao as supreme leader was linked to the creation of a common system of values based on exegetical bonding. The employment of Mao's image as politically exploitable brand to attract followers for the communist cause, however, backfired due to structural deficits within the Party when Mao relied on the cult to turn against his former colleagues. Up to the Cultural Revolution, Mao had always been able to publicly negate his responsibility for policy failures, thus damaging the image of the Party but not his own.<sup>69</sup> The cult anarchy during the Cultural Revolution and the alleged treachery of the cult's most prominent supporter Lin Biao in 1971 resulted in a profound erosion of trust in the infallibility of the Chairman and turned the cult from a popular into a cynical device of rule. Mobilisation efforts now resulted in a mere "acting as if" that not necessarily incited belief but made the masses more docile as Blaise Pascal speculated in his wager on God.<sup>70</sup> As soon as the Mao-centred communicative space imploded in 1978, most loyalties were shifted and eased



Deng Xiaoping's radical transformation of China towards a market economy. It was to take another decade of disillusionment and the violent crack-down on the protests on Tiananmen Square before Mao made his reappearance as a 'floating signifier' imbued with all kinds of nostalgic, religious and commercial sentiments.<sup>71</sup> The deep immersion of Mao's image with CCP history and Cultural Revolutionary cleavages within the Party have perpetuated the necessity to control the public image of Mao, and have so far kept the Party leadership from following Khrushchev's example and relegating Mao finally to the 'academic turf of the historian'.<sup>72</sup> After all, the CCP had no Lenin for backup.

## Notes

1. An earlier version of this article was presented at the Sixth Conference on International History at Harvard University in March 2006. For their helpful advice the author would like to thank Roderick MacFarquhar, Thomas Gruber, Michael Schoenhals, Bernhard Gißibl and two anonymous reviewers.
2. Klaus Heller and Jan Plamper, *Personality Cults in Stalinism - Personenkulte im Stalinismus* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2004), p.33.
3. For an explicit equation between traditional Chinese religions and the Mao cult, see Zuo Jiping, "Political Religion: The Case of the Cultural Revolution in China", *Sociological Analysis* 52/1 (1991), p.99-110. Further Zhou Qun and Yao Xinrong, "Xin jiu Mao Zedong chongbai", in Liu Qingfeng (ed.), *Wenhua da geming: Shishi yu yanjiu* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1996), pp.139-47.
4. Wu Lengxi claims that the Chinese leadership got the full text of the speech from its reprint in the New York Times, see Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan - 1956-1966 ZhongGuo guanxi huiyilu*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2000 [1999]), p.4. Flora Lewis, the *New York Times* correspondent in Warsaw had gotten hold of the document in late March through the First Secretary of the Polish Worker's Party in Warsaw, Stefan Staszewski (see Teresa Toranska, *'Them': Stalin's Polish Puppets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p.174), but it was only released for publication by the US Government on 4 July and was published by the *New York Times* the following day. The speech therefore must have been delivered either through Soviet channels (the speech had been distributed to all local CPSU committees on 5 March) or through one of China's Eastern European embassies.
5. "Dang, zhengfu, Sulian renmin bu ke cuiwei de tuanjie - Sulian 'Zhenli bao' qi yue shi ri shelun", *Renmin Ribao*, 11 July 1953, p.1.
6. "Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann in Hannover, 23 February 1865", in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 42 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), p.104.
7. "Engels to Joseph Weydemeyer in St. Louis, 10 March 1865", in *ibid.*, p.124.
8. Wu Lengxi, *Yi Mao zhuxi: Wo qinsheng jingli de ruogan zhongda lishi shijian pianduan* (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1995), p.4.
9. "Guanyu wuchan jieji zhuangzheng xia de lishi jingyan", *Renmin Ribao*, 5 April 1956, p.1.
10. "Zhongyang guanyu xuexi he taolun si yue wu ri renmin ribao 'Guanyu wuchan jieji zhuanzheng de lishi jingyan' yi wen de tongzhi", 4 April 1956, Hebei Provincial Archives (HPA) 855-18-509. On the specific details of how to study the editorial see "Guanyu xuexi 'Guanyu wuchan jieji zhuanzheng de lishi jingyan' yi wen de buchong tongzhi", 6 April 1956, HPA 855-18-509.
11. Timothy Cheek, "Introduction: The Making and Breaking of the Party-State in China", in Timothy Cheek and Tony Saich (eds), *New Perspectives on State Socialism in China* (Armonk, New York, London: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), p.7.
12. In mid-October 1956, the Central Propaganda Department reorganized its internal documentation of national and international developments for the CCP top leadership. The bulletin *Xuanchuan gongzuo tongxun* [Developments in Propaganda Work] was integrated into the *Xuanjiao dongtai*, formerly a platform for national developments only. From now on it was to cover all important developments within and outside the Party, national and international, for cadres ranked provincial secretary or above. The journal continued to be published until the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution with the last issue appearing on 18 May 1966.
13. "Hebei shengwei xuanchuanbu guanyu ganbu dui Sugong di ershi ci daibiao dahui de sixiang qingkuang jianbao", 26 March 1956, HPA 864-1-157

14. On the CCP's continuing problem to control the readership of its internal publications see for example Central Document *Zhongfa* [61] 731 on the internal coverage of the 22<sup>nd</sup> CPSU Congress and the interception of the *Cankao Xiaoxi* [Reference Information] through various intermediates: 'Sometimes [the reports] are read first by the mail correspondents, the cleaning and the delivering staff before they finally reach the designated reader. Some people furthermore just leave their *Cankao Xiaoxi* anywhere so that they can be read by anyone', "*Zhongfa* [61] 739, Zhongyang pizhuan Dongbeiju 'Guanyu ganbu, qunzhong yulun SuGong ershi er da youguan wenti shi ying zhuyi shixiang de tongzhi'", 25 November 1961, HPA 855-6-2033.
15. "Hebei shengwei xuanchuanbu guanyu xuexi he taolun 'Guanyu wuchan jieji zhuangzheng de lishi jingyan' yi wen de baogao he qingshi", 25 May 1956, HPA 864-1-157
16. See for example the self-criticism of the editorial board of the *People's Daily*, "*Zhongfa* [56] 124, Zhongong zhongyang pizhuan renmin ribao bianji weiyuanhui xiang zhongyang de baogao", 1 August 1956, HPA 855-9-3983
17. Sun Changxian, *Fandui geren chongbai* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1956).
18. The extent to which the CCP was willing to liberalize the public sphere has so far been underestimated. On the question of portraits see "*Zhongyang guanyu gua xiang wenti de tongzhi*", 25 June 1956, HPA 855-9-3983
19. *Xuanjiao Dongtai* 26 (no.163), 7 November 1956, p.3.
20. *Xuanjiao Dongtai* 25 (no.161 [sic]), 4 November 1956, p.1.
21. Roderick MacFarquhar, *Contradictions among the People, 1956-1957* (Oxford, London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p.278.
22. "Mao Zedong sixiang wansui" (n.p., 1969), p.162.
23. Ibid.
24. For the first official mention of the term in the state media see Ling Lin, "Cong 'an lao fenpei, an xu fenpei' de zhengyi xiangqi de", *Renmin Ribao*, 25 December 1958, p.8.
25. *Cihai shixing ben*. Di er fence: Zhexue (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), p.51. Deng Xiaoping had been the first to proclaim this distinction at the Eighth Party Congress in September 1956, see *Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China. Documents* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1981), especially p.211.
26. *The Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), p.133.
27. Ibid. p.134
28. Benno Ennker, "The Stalin Cult, Bolshevik Rule and Kremlin Interaction in the 1930s", in E.A. Rees et al. (eds), *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships. Stalin and the Eastern Bloc* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.85.
29. Mao Zedong, "Huijian Sinuo de tanhua jiyao", 18 December 1970, in Song Yongyi (ed.), *China Cultural Revolution Database* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press/Universities Service Centre, 2002), CD-ROM.
30. On Mao's awareness of Chiang Kai-shek's attempts to model his public image as 'national leader who is above domestic contradictions and feigning impartiality to class and party', see Mao Zedong, "The Situation after the Repulse of the Second Anti-Communist Onslaught", in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1967), p.460.
31. See Raymond F Wylie., *The Emergence of Maoism. Mao Tse-tung, Ch'en Po-ta, and the Search for Chinese Theory 1935-1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980), pp.195-205.
32. Rita Clifton and John Simmons (eds), *Brands and Branding* (Princeton, NJ: Bloomberg Press, 2004), p.2.
33. Nicholas Ind, "A Brand of Enlightenment", in Nicholas Ind (ed.), *Beyond branding: How the New Values of Transparency and Integrity are changing the World of Brands* (London: Kogan Page, 2003), p.10.
34. David E. Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp.263-93.
35. The concept of communicative space has been advocated most prominently by the ongoing project 'The Political as Communicative Space in History' (German Research Foundation, SFB 584), see [http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/geschichte/sfb584/index\\_en.html](http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/geschichte/sfb584/index_en.html) (last accessed 10 February 2007).
36. Apter and Saich (note 34), p.13.
37. M. Rainer Lepsius, "The Model of Charismatic Leadership and its Applicability to the Rule of Adolf Hitler", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 7/2 (2006), p.175.
38. Graeme Gill, "The Soviet Leader Cult: Reflections on the Structure of Leadership in the Soviet Union", *British Journal of Political Science* 10 (1980), p.183.
39. See *Xuanjiao Dongtai* 20 (no.157), 26 October 1956, p.6.

40. Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p.37.
41. Lin Yunhui, "Ershi shiji liushi niandai geren chongbai de qi yuan", *Dangshi bolan* 11 (2005), p.36.
42. Cong, *Quzhe fazhan de sui yue*, p.117.
43. Frederick C. Teiwes, *Politics at Mao's Court: Gao Gang and Party Factionalism in the early 1950s* (Armonk, New York, London: M.E. Sharpe, 1990).
44. A vivid description is to be found in the memoirs of Lin Biao's former secretary, Zhang Yunsheng, *Maojiawan jishi. Lin Biao mishu huiyilu* (Beijing: Chunqiu chubanshe, 1988), pp.230f.
45. Haijun shouci xuexi Mao zhuxi zhuzuo jijifenzi daibiao dahui quanti tongzhi, "Gei weida tongshuai Mao zhuxi de zhijing xin", *Jiefangjun bao*, 6 December 1967, p.2.
46. Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), p.157.
47. Georg W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (transl. A.V. Miller) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977 [1807]), p.308.
48. Lin Biao twice rejected invocations regarding his health see "Zhongfa [67] 202, Zhonggong zhongyang zhuanfa Lin Biao tongzhi gei Zhou zongli he Zhongyang Wenge de yi feng xin", 16 June 1967, in Song (note 29). Further Lin Biao, "Guanyu xuanchuan gongzuo de yi feng xin", 13 December 1967, *ibid*.
49. Michael Schoenhals, "'Why Don't We Arm the Left?' Mao's Culpability for the Cultural Revolution's 'Great Chaos' of 1967", *The China Quarterly* 182 (June 2005), pp.277-300.
50. See "Dafang shijian de zhenxiang (di er bufen)", *411 zhanbao*, 26 July 1967, p.4. Reprinted in Zhou Yuan (ed.), *Hongweibing ziliao. A New Collection of Red Guard Publications. Part I: Newspapers*, vol.12 (Oakton: Centre for Chinese Research Materials, 1999), p.5721.
51. "'411' xuyi zhizao 'Dafang shijian' de zhenxiang", in *Liu liu zhan bao*, 9 July 1967, p.4. Reprinted in Zhou (note 50) 10, p.4784.
52. *Ibid*.
53. "Mao Zedong sixiang Guizhou shengwei geming weiyuanhui, Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun, Guizhou sheng junqu gei zai shengweiyuan nei he jie shang gao jingzuo shiwei tongxue de yi feng gongkai xin", *Liu liu zhanbao*, 13 July 1967, p.1. Reprinted in Zhou (note 50) 10, p.4785.
54. "Junzheng xunlian jiushi hao", *Liu liu zhanbao*, 13 July 1967, p.1. Reprinted in Zhou (note 50) 10, p.4785. The ritual was first mentioned in a *People's Daily* report about the experiences of implementing the new study system in the Shijingshan Middle School near Beijing through Military Unit 8729 in June 1967, see "Shijingshan zhongxue shi zenyang zai jiefangjun bangzhu xia fuke nao geming de? Zai geming de dapan zhong shixian geming dalianhe", *Renmin Ribao*, 15 June 1967, p.2
55. For a whole list of examples see Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2006), p.266.
56. "Wei 'Mao zhuxi yulu cao' de yansheng da han da jiao", *Tiyu zhanxian* (Shanghai), 20 November 1967, pp.1-4.
57. Apart from ironic references in memoirs, evidence on this stage of the Cultural Revolution can sometimes be found in county annals, especially from Shaanxi province. See for example Yan'an shizhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (ed.), *Yan'an shizhi* (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1994), p.829.
58. Baishui xian xianzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (ed.), *Baishui xianzhi* (Xi'an: Xi'an ditu chubanshe, 1989), p.459f. Further Qian xian xianzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (ed.), *Qian xianzhi* (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 2003), p.482.
59. A peasant in Ankang County (Shaanxi province) was executed on 29 June 1970 for having claimed not to have had space in his small hut to put up a Mao poster, and for having doubted the fact that Mao was to live for 10,000 years literally, see Ankang shi difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (ed.), *Ankang xianzhi* (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1989), p.908.
60. MacFarquhar and Schoenhals (note 55), p.47.
61. "Mao zhuxi zai Zhongguo gongchandang di jiuci quanguo daibiao dahui shang de zhongyao zhishi" (n.p., 1969), p.28. Thanks to Michael Schoenhals for sharing this document with me!
62. Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.), *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, vol.13 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998), p.50.
63. Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination. Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), especially chapter 1.
64. Compare Benno Ennker, *Die Anfänge des Lenin-Kults in der Sowjetunion* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1997).
65. Polly Jones, "From Stalinism to Post-Stalinism: De-Mythologising Stalin, 1953-56", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 4/1 (2004), p.135.
66. David S. Wilson, *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

67. Stanley Payne, "On the Heuristic Value of the Concept of Political Religion and its Application", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6/2 (2005), p.163.
68. Jan Plamper, "'The Hitlers come and go...' the Führer stays: Stalin's Cult in East Germany", in Heller and Plamper (note 2), p.312, n.32.
69. Similar cases are reported from the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, where "Wenn das der Führer wüsste..." ("If only the *Führer* knew that...") became a common proverb.
70. "You want to find faith und you do not know the road. You want to be cured of unbelief und you ask for the remedy: learn from those who were once bound like you and who now wager all they have. [...] They behaved just as if they did believe, taking holy water, having masses said, and so on. That will make you believe quite naturally, and will make you more docile," Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (transl. A. Krailsheimer) (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966 [1670]), pp.152f.
71. An excellent survey about the posthumous Mao cult is provided by Geremie Barmé, *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader* (Armonk, New York, London: M.E.Sharpe, 1996).
72. Michael Schoenhals (ed.), *China's Cultural Revolution 1966–1969. Not a dinner party* (Armonk, New York, London: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), p.XVII.