A historical study on the "eight revolutionary model operas" in China's Great Cultural Revolution

Joe He
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds
Part of the Higher Education Commons

Repository Citation
https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds/170

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Scholarship@UNLV. It has been accepted for inclusion in UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
A historical study on the “eight revolutionary model operas” in China’s Great Cultural Revolution

He, Joe, M.A.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1992
A Historical Study On The "Eight Revolutionary Model Operas"

In China's Great Cultural Revolution

By

Joe He

A Thesis Submitted In Partial Fulfillment
Of The Requirements For The Degree Of
Master Of Arts
In History

Department of History
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

MAY 1992
The Thesis of Joe (Jianhua) He for the degree of Master of Arts in History is approved.

Sue Fawn Chang
Chairperson, Sue Fawn Chang, Ph.D.

Joseph A. Fry
Examinining Committee Member, Joseph A. Fry, Ph.D.

Stephen J. Roddy
Examinining Committee Member, Stephen J. Roddy, Ph.D.

William R. Jankowiak
Graduate Faculty Representative, William R. Jankowiak, Ph.D.

Ronald W. Smith, Ph.D.
Graduate Dean, Ronald W. Smith, Ph.D.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

May 1992
I gratefully acknowledge the guidance and help of my teacher Dr. Sue Fawn Chung, Dr. Joseph A. Fry, Dr. Stephen J. Roddy and Dr. William R. Jankowiak.

Joe He
ABSTRACT

During the Great Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) eight revolutionary model operas were popularized as a means of transformation the ideology and values of the Chinese people as well as a political tool in struggle between the Maoists and Luists. When Mao realized that his ideals were being eclipsed, he concluded that a massive revolution was inevitable and allowed his wife, Jiang Qing, to direct the "movement of popularizing model operas." The purpose of this study is to analyze the operas and their political and social significance.

During that decade eight revolutionary model operas were written based on wartime experiences or on economic and ideological class struggle. They all taught about the revolutionary heroism of the proletariat, the need to sacrifice for the Party's cause, the importance of class struggle and the continuing revolution, the ability of women to be leaders, and important value of Maoism. Leading writers and dramatists either suffered from their past "backward" performances or attained fame and power for their participation and support of the model operas. It was the first time that performing arts were used so extensive as a political tool. By 1976 almost 1 billion people were familiar with the "revolutionary model operas" and their messages.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Cast ........................................................................................................................................vi

Chapter 1. The Unprecedented Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution,

  Background and Goals .................................................................................................1

  Internal Factors .......................................................................................................2

  External Factors .....................................................................................................9

  About Jiang Qing ................................................................................................11

Chapter 2. Model Operas in the Cultural Revolution,

  Prologue .................................................................................................................20

  The Eight Revolutionary Model Operas ..............................................................31

  Typical Characteristics of the Model Operas .....................................................54

Chapter 3. Political and Social Impact of the Model Operas,

  An Unprecedented Campaign ............................................................................60

Chapter 4. Conclusion ..................................................................................................67

Notes ............................................................................................................................76

Bibliography ..................................................................................................................80
Cast

Mao Zedong (1893-1976)
Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, founder and ultimate leader of the People's Republic of China.

Liu Shaoqi (1898-1969)
Vice Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman of the People's Republic of China. Mao's major opponent among the Chinese leadership; labeled as the number one "capitalist-roader" among the Party; main target of the Cultural Revolution.

Deng Xiaoping (1904-)
Party Secretary General before the Cultural Revolution; Liu Shaoqi's major supporter; went down three time during the Cultural Revolution; reinstated as Vice Chairman of the Party and Vice Premier; officially retired from Party and State positions in late 1980s yet still remains the most powerful leader of China.

Peng Dehuai (1898-1974)
former CCP Politburo member, People's Liberation Marshall, Minister of Defense; opposed Mao's Great Leap Forward campaign and fired for criticizing Mao's economic policies in the 1950s.

Peng Zhen (189?- )
former CCP Politburo member and Mayor of Beijing; main supporter of Liu Shaoqi; President of Chinese National Congress after Cultural Revolution; retired in the 1980s from Party and State positions in 1980s but still active in political affairs.

Wu Han (1897-1969)
historian and play writer; former Deputy Mayor of Beijing; friend of Deng Xiaoping and Peng Zhen; major target during the Cultural Revolution.

Gang of Four:
Jiang Qing (1914-1991)
former rebel actress; married to Mao in 1937; member of CCP Politburo and Deputy Leader of the Cultural Revolution Leading Group of CCP Central Committee; major leader of model opera campaign; arrested in 1976 and died in 1991.

Zhang Chunqiao (189?- )

CCP Politburo member from 1969-1976; Vice Premier from 1974-1976; in charge of propaganda department in Shanghai before entered the Central Committee of CCP; arrested in 1976.

Wang Hongwen ( ? )

former mass organization leader in Shanghai; Vice Chairman of CCP from 1969-1976; arrested with Jiang Qing and other members of the Gang of Four in 1976; and still in prison.

Yao Wenyuan ( ?)

former radical writer in Shanghai; CCP Politburo member in charge of propaganda from 1969 to 1976; his article attacking Wu Han was regarded as the trigger of the Cultural Revolution; arrested in October 1976 and still in prison.
Chapter 1

The Unprecedented Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

Background & Goals

In the People's Republic of China, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 was, is and will always be, a memory of disorder, humiliation, tragedy and terror for millions of Chinese families and uncountable individuals. Today in China, the unprecedented revolution led by Mao Zedong, the ultimate leader of the Chinese Communist Party and the founder of the young republic, is now condemned both officially and unofficially as a "decade-long catastrophe." During the power struggle among the Chinese hierarchy, political campaigns distorted people's very souls in every way and violence took away innocent lives all over the country. In 1976 the arrest of the "Gang of Four" headed by Jiang Qing, the widow of Mao Zedong, marked an end of China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Since then a large number of books and articles regarding the course of the Cultural revolution in China have been published both in and out of China. Many historians and scholars have analyzed the origin and evolution of the Cultural Revolution, as well as its results. However, more attention can still be given to a very important sector -- the campaign of popularizing the Eight Revolutionary Model Operas. People who experienced the Cultural Revolution in China like myself can still remember how these model operas directly affected their ideology, sense of traditional values,
and social and political life. Yet it is still unknown to many people in the other
countries as to what these model operas were, what message they sent to the people,
what role they played and what the political motivations were behind their creation.
The evolution and development of the Eight Model Operas during the Cultural
Revolution have also proved how performing arts could be used as a means of
political power struggle beyond their basic social functions as entertainment and
education. In order to introduce and analyze the Eight Model Operas, the
background of the Cultural Revolution which was the context of their creation has
to be first discussed. As many historians and scholars have observed, the Cultural
Revolution in China was not a suddenly erupted revolution triggered by any single
event. It was gradually promoted by both external and internal factors.

Internal factors

From 1958 to 1960, Mao Zedong pushed a rapid program of economic
development as a solution to the nation's economic problems. The Great Leap
Forward, modeled after the Soviet experience of emphasizing heavy industry, set
extremely high production goals for steel, hydroelectric power and rural factories.
The radical campaign was pushed at the cost of agriculture and consumer goods.
Eventually, the impractical program, along with natural disasters and the sudden
withdrawal of Soviet technical personnel produced considerable disorder, especially
in the countryside.

Millions who had poured into the cities during the Great Leap
Forward and more millions of young people finishing school were
thrown out of work. The birth rate slumped. The death rate surged.
From recently released statistics it is estimated that for the period 1958-1962 abnormal mortalities totaled around 16 million persons. China's population declined by 1.5 percent in 1960 and 0.5 in 1961. There are scattered accounts of popular unrest and even some armed uprising.¹

The failure of the Great Leap Forward generated various kinds of criticism toward political and economic policies of Mao Zedong from both outside and within the party. Even some long-time revolutionary comrades of Mao began to keep themselves at a respectful distance from the Chairman. Being aware of the situation, Mao made a strategic retreat, just as he had done previously in his political career. He resigned from the post as the State Chairman and let Liu Shaoqi and other more pragmatic leaders such as Chen Yun and Deng Xiaoping deal with the country's devastated economy. Beginning in 1962, China entered into a period of recovery. The state apparatus led by the new State Chairman Liu Shaoqi and his associates implemented a policy of emphasizing material improvement in an effort to normalize the economy. They ignored Mao's teaching that "Political work is the life-blood of all economic work. This is particularly true at a time when the social and economic system is undergoing fundamental change."² Contrary to Mao's socialist collectivization, Liu Shaoqi's focus was on an economic policy of private plots, free markets, enterprises with sole responsibility for their own profit or loss, and fixed output quotas on a household basis. Early in 1962, Chen Yun and Deng Xiaoping pushed to popularize the "Anhui Responsibility System" which was a family-based production system resembling private farming. To advocate the implementation of the non-socialist methods in China's socialist construction, Deng Xiaoping asserted
that "it does not matter if the cat is white or black as long as it catches mice." The new methods that Liu Shaoqi and the state administration carried out helped China recover from the "three year disaster" but Mao Zedong became very concerned about a change of the nature of the hard-earned proletarian victory. He viewed the material economic incentives implemented under the leadership of Liu Shaoqi as a sign of capitalist restoration. He urged the country to focus on steering China's direction toward the proletarian ideology revolution other than material improvement. He repeatedly preached:

We must acknowledge that classes and class struggles will still exist for a long time to come, and that the reactionary classes may stage a comeback. We must heighten our vigilance and successfully educate the young people, the cadres and the masses...3

However, many Party and state leaders ignored Mao's teaching. They insisted on going their own way. Economically, they went on pursuing an enhanced material and technological improvement. Culturally, their passive attitude toward Mao's revolutionary principles created a period of cultural relaxation in which traditional themes maintained their dominance and left little room for modern revolutionary subjects. The cultural establishment downplayed Mao's emphasis that the major theme of the socialist cultural structure must be class struggle and technological improvement could not come before political study. As Chen Yi, Vice Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs, addressed: "Mei Lanfang was a great artist, and as such had won honor for our country. Did he have to study political books thoroughly? No, he did not have to."4

During the recovery period after the Great Leap Forward, the cultural
establishment was basically under the control of pro-Liu leaders such as Peng Zhen, a member of CCP Politburo and the Mayor of Beijing, Lu Dingyi, Vice Premier in charge of propaganda, and Zhou Yang, Minister of Culture. The cultural structure was described as "an independent kingdom," in which all the major newspapers and publication organs were in hands of followers and supporters of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping. In such an atmosphere, numerous books, movies, and operas emerged to question and criticize the Great Leap Forward and Mao’s leadership. However, even with the blessing of the State Chairman Liu Shaoqi and the Party General Secretary Deng Xiaoping, Mao’s critics still did not dare to criticize Mao too directly. A typical Chinese tactic "using the past to disparage the present," came into play. Movies and operas which meant to criticize Mao or undermine his principle that "culture and arts belong to the workers, peasants, soldiers and the working masses" were using historical allegories or satires to suggest anti-Maoist themes. Instead of portraying the heroic images of the proletariat, the pro-Liu cultural elite filled the Chinese theaters with traditional or ancient subjects portraying all figures but the modern working class.

As a leader who had always enjoyed unrivaled authority and obedience, Mao could not tolerate the continuous defiance of his revolutionary principles, and he certainly knew to whom the implied criticism was pointed. In 1964, the Party Chairman lashed out to criticize the cultural establishment for letting the operas of ancient and traditional subjects dominate the socialist cultural fields. Mao criticized: "Operas abound in feudal emperors, kings, generals, ministers, scholars, beautiful
women, but the Ministry of Cultural doesn’t care a bit." 5

In early 1965, the Chairman, no longer patient, seriously opened fire at the cultural establishment. He blamed the cultural bureaucrats for inviting a potential danger of changing the color of China’s revolutionary cause and eventually turning China’s socialism into another revisionism like the Soviet Union. He warned:

In socialist society, the overthrown bourgeoisie, and other reactionary classes ... sneak into the ... cultural and educational institutions so as to resist or usurp the leadership of the proletariat ... In the ideological, cultural and educational fields, they counterpoise the bourgeois world outlook to the proletarian world outlook and try to corrupt the proletariat and other working people with bourgeois ideology...6

By 1965, the Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Ministry of Culture were hardly following Mao’s teachings. Mao Zedong’s repeated warnings, continued to be ignored. The theory of class struggle still could not have its dominance as the revolutionary theme in the fields of propaganda. Novels, fiction, poems, movies, and performing arts were still reflecting the influence of the cultural establishment which, according to Mao, was ruled by bourgeois intellectuals. It became very difficult for radical Maoists to take any action in Beijing since the capital was totally controlled by the pro-Liu cultural establishment. With the support of Mao, Jiang Qing went to Shanghai to collect support from her radical comrades who controlled the Party Committee and government of Shanghai. In June 1965, they organized the East China District Drama Competition to encourage operas and dramas advocating Mao Zedong Thought and revolutionary themes. At the Beijing Opera Festival, which was part of the competition, Jiang Qing stressed the importance of implementing Mao’s revolutionary line in the field of performing
arts and her openly criticized that

Our operatic stage has been occupied by emperors, princes, generals, ministers, scholars, and beauties, and on top of these ghosts and monsters....The grain we eat is grown by the peasants, the clothes we wear and the houses we live in are all made by the workers, and the People's Liberation Army stands guard at the front of national defense for us and yet we do not portray them on stage. I'd like to ask what is the class stand of artists. Where is the 'conscience' of artists that we constantly talk about? 7

Mao Zedong did not regard the situation as merely a cultural issue. Underneath the continuous defiance of his warnings and criticisms, he saw that another line of leadership was exerting a subtle influence on the character and thinking of the country. In Mao's eyes the quiet resistance toward his policies and principles indicated "capitalist and revisionist" tendencies within the leadership of the country. In fact, Mao had first tried to reverse the trend by launching the Socialist Education Movement in 1963, hoping to revolutionize the Party and administrative organs and the cadres, and to raise the ideological awareness, thereby sustaining the proletarian revolution. However, the leaders of the Party organizations and administrative functionaries at different levels reacted passively and this greatly disappointed Mao.

Mao realized the growing danger of losing the revolution. He knew well that without a dramatic operation on the Party and State apparatus, it was impossible for him to regain the ultimate power and save his revolution. But why did Mao launch the Cultural Revolution instead of an internal purge among the Party Central Committee as it had always been the common practice in the history of the Chinese Communist Party? Apparently Mao's years of experience in power struggles had told him that it would take more than just an organizational change within the Party and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
State to prevent a Soviet style of revisionist restoration and to keep China's revolutionary cause on the Marxist-Leninist track.

The Cultural Revolution certainly had more in the designer's purposes than the name "cultural revolution." But what were the real goals of the Cultural Revolution? Historians and scholars have many different interpretations on this subject. John King Fairbank believed that the Cultural Revolution was more of a spontaneous happening than a planned program. In his opinion, Mao used this opportunity to eliminate Liu Shaoqi and his followers. Maurice Meisner described several goals that the Cultural Revolution intended to achieve: Mao's attempts to proletarianize the consciousness of the people by the total elimination of traditional values and old ideas; to revitalize the spirit of socialism so that the possibility of a bourgeoisie restoration would be eliminated; and to train the Chinese youth as revolutionary successors all were aimed at guaranteeing that China would achieve a successful transition from socialism to communism.9 Craig Dietrich has pointed out different factions to describe the goal of the Cultural Revolution. One school of thought believed that all the announced purposes by Mao and others were merely instruments of political power struggle between Mao and his opponents. The other felt that:

the Cultural Revolution was a much-needed attempt to cope with China's growing political problems: bureaucratism, social inequalities, decline of mass participation, and alienation.11

French Communist historian Jean Dauber analyzed that in addition to the aim of regaining power, Mao also had another goal in mind -- the remaking of human spirits. According to Dauber,
the tactics adopted by Mao Tse-tung during the Cultural Revolution were far more complex and subtle than simply stripping his opponents of their function and influence by administrative or strong-arm methods. Mao Tse-tung fought his opponents while at the same time trying to undermine the ideological and social base of their policies.12

All of the scholars agree that the Cultural Revolution was a power struggle among the Chinese leadership. Zhang Chunqiao, an important figure in the CCP Central Committee and a member of the "Gang of Four," declared the purpose of the Cultural Revolution to the public in Shanghai in early 1967:

Our aim in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution has always been to seize power, from the grass root to the central organization, including powers of the Party, the government, as well as in the financial, cultural and other fields.13

As the internal differences among the Chinese leadership continued to grow, the relationship between China and the Soviet Union brought new pressure on Mao. He was fully aware that without a solid and united leadership, it would be impossible to prevent a Soviet style of revisionist restoration from happening in China. In doing so, he had to take dramatic actions to eliminate deviation among the Party and State leadership.

External factors

After 1956, a split between the Soviet Union and China, the two largest communist countries in the world, seriously affected China's ideological, political and economic situation. Mao Zedong himself had never been a real follower of Joseph Stalin. Even in his early years as the leader of the CCP, his strategy of "using countryside to besiege the cities" had always contradicted the revolutionary principle of the Stalin-influenced, Soviet-controlled Comintern (Communist International). In
fact, he had been more closely aligned with the ideas of Stalin’s rival, Leon Trotsky, thus being a “maverick” to Moscow. However, Nikita Khrushchev’s repudiation of Stalin was not acceptable to Mao. The CCP Chairman made it very clear that despite the fact that Comrade Stalin made mistakes, he should still be regarded as a great Marxist-Leninist revolutionary and that his contributions to the world’s proletarian revolutionary cause could not be denied. Moscow’s repudiation of Stalin, in fact, was a betrayal of the international communist movement. Mao also strongly opposed Khrushchev’s foreign policy, especially the proclamation of peaceful coexistence with the United States. In Mao’s opinion, the denunciation of Stalin and the gesture to cooperate with the United States was simply an abandonment of Marxism-Leninism and a surrender to imperialism and capitalism. Meanwhile Mao saw Soviet revisionism as a oncoming threat to maintain the socialist revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. As he pointed out in his denunciation of Khrushchev in 1964:

the question of whether revolution ... and...the dictatorship of the proletariat should be upheld or opposed...are now the focus of struggle between Marxist-Leninists the world over and the revisionist Khrushchev clique.14

Mao Zedong blamed the Soviet Communists not only for betraying Marxism-Leninism and the proletarian internationalism, but also for the failure of China’s Great Leap Forward campaign and the subsequent criticism directed toward Mao himself. He attributed China’s economic disaster and political instability to three factors: 1) the Soviet Union’s sudden withdraw of technical support in hundreds of ongoing industrial and economic projects, 2) the pressure from Moscow for an
immediate payment of China's debuts resulting from Soviet material support during the Korean War, and 3) natural disasters. Apparently Mao believed that if the Soviet Union had not intensified China's problems, he would not have had to resign from the position as State Chairman and, more importantly, the Liu Shaoqi clique would not have had the opportunity to challenge his leadership. Mao viewed Liu Shaoqi's economic policy of material improvement as undermining socialist collective economy. For Mao, the growing power of Liu Shaoqi and his associates seemed that the leadership of China's revolution was slipping into the hands of Soviet revisionists. Mao became more fully convinced than ever that China could not maintain its proletarian dictatorship if the revisionist restoration and the "capitalist roaders" among the Chinese leadership were not eliminated. Facing the growing internal and external threats, Mao Zedong concluded that a massive revolution was inevitable. Mao realized that he needed mass support in order to change the direction of government. His own power had diminished due to the ascendancy of the Liuists and the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward. However, he still had a loyal following and looked to his wife and to Shanghai as an alternative power base. In May 1966, the ten-year Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution officially began.

About Jiang Qing

Jiang Qing, better known to the West as Madam Mao, was one of the key figures in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. It has been an arguable question as to whether she should be held solely responsible for the disastrous consequences of the Cultural Revolution. However, it would not be a controversial issue to acknowledge
her important role in the model opera campaign. But why did Jiang Qing push the model opera campaign so hard? Why did Mao entrust Jiang Qing to lead the ideological crusade? There are three basic opinions on this issue. The first holds that Mao Zedong only used Jiang Qing as his "hit person" to prepare public opinion before launching his comprehensive attack on his opponents. Another hypothesizes that it was Jiang Qing who used Mao to realize her political ambition. The last asserts that Mao and Jiang Qing were using each other for their own gains. However, no matter which explanation is accurate, Jiang Qing's leading role in popularizing the model operas must be given appropriate attention.

Jiang Qing's real name was Li Yunhe. She was born in Chucheng, Shandong province in 1914. While a movie actress in Shanghai in the 1930s, she came under a great deal of communist influence. In August of 1937, Jiang Qing went to Yan'an, the revolutionary base of the Chinese Communist Party and became a student of the Party School which was designed to train revolutionary cadres. Jiang Qing was young, beautiful and intelligent. She soon caught the attention of Mao Zedong, who had just divorced his second wife, He Zhizhen, and Jiang Qing worked as his confidential secretary. In November 1937, despite the protests of many CCP leaders and Mao's close friends, Mao Zedong and Jiang Qing were married in Yan'an. The opposition to the marriage was based upon Jiang Qing's former career as an actress, a profession held in low esteem in China. Consequently she limited her activities to being Mao's wife and mother to their two daughters until 1963. In 1963, Jiang Qing began cultivating her prominence in the cultural circles,
especially in the theatrical field. Her first important move was to organize revolutionary operas with contemporary themes. She selected "The Story of the Red Lantern" and "Sparks in the Red Marshes" (later named Shajia Village) in 1963 and had them revised for the 1964 Beijing Opera Festival. She also personally supervised the preparation of "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy" and "On the Docks" before their new appearance in 1969. Jiang Qing's active effort was a response to Mao's call to "never forget class struggle" and Mao's criticism against the cultural establishment that "many departments are still ruled by the dead figures (traditional characters)."

According to Jiang Qing, the purpose of popularizing the revolutionary model operas was to "sweep the emperors, generals, ministers, scholars, beauties, as well as monsters and ghosts, out of the theatrical stages."15 In 1964, Mao Zedong watched "Shajia Village" and instructed that revolutionary armed struggle must have its prominence on the stage. Mao's presence publicly announced his support of Jiang Qing's "Revolutionizing Beijing Opera Movement." With the green light given by the Great Helmsman, Jiang Qing had no fear in what she was advocating.

Jiang Qing also helped manufacture the "bombshell" for Mao's initiation of the Cultural Revolution. It was Jiang Qing who went to Shanghai to ask Yao Wenyuan to write an article criticizing Wu Han and his play "Hai Rui Dismissed from Office." Jiang Qing later revealed, "I dare to organize this article because I have Chairman Mao's consent. We kept the preparation secret and I can not remember how many times this article had been modified."16 In February 1966, Lin Biao, Vice Chairman of the Military Commission of CCP Central Committee (Mao was the Chairman of
that Commission) entrusted Jiang Qing to preside over the "Forum on Literature and Art Work of the People's Liberation Army" in Shanghai. On this occasion, Jiang Qing gained national attention not as Mao's wife but by her theory of attacking "dictatorship of black art line," namely the pro-Liu Shaoqi cultural bureaucrats during the past seventeen years. In May 1966, the CCP Central Committee announced the establishment of the Cultural Revolution Leading Group of CCP Central Committee which in fact replaced the CCP Central Committee Secretariat headed by Deng Xiaoping. Jiang Qing was appointed as the deputy head of this high-powered group. The appointment came as a surprise to everyone considering her low rank in the Party. It was clear to the country that she had Mao's blessing. On July 8, 1966, in a letter to Jiang Qing, Mao expressed his goals in initiating the Cultural Revolution:

> Let the great disorder happen first so that we can achieve great order later. We will continue to do this once every seven or eight years. Let the monsters and ghosts jump out on their own. Their nature destines that they can not help jumping out...Our task now is to knock down the rightists within the Party and State. In seven or eight years, we will have another campaign to sweep out the monsters and ghosts. We will have more sweeping campaigns in the future.17

From this point, it was very clear that Mao trusted her to carry out his unprecedented Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Jiang Qing's promotion at the Ninth Party Congress in 1969 also demonstrated Mao's strong support. She was elected as a member of the CCP Politburo, which was the CCP's most authoritative decision body, becoming the first woman ever to assume such a high position. This again surprised the whole country. Traditionally, the Politburo was made up of Mao and other active top Party and State leaders. All of them were Mao's long time
revolutionary associates. Jiang Qing lacked this kind of credential. She also was fully aware that most of the prominent leaders in the Party, State and the military secretly objected to her promotion. They did not openly challenge her simply because they did not want to invite any direct conflict with Mao. Realizing that the stability of her political career was still in question, she knew that she needed to make a dramatic impact upon the Party and the country so that she could secure her political position. The best field for her to operate was the cultural field.

Obviously, the popularization of the eight model operas dominated the Chinese cultural scene. To insure the prominence of these models, no other subjects were allowed. But why did Jiang Qing push such a restrictive and extremist campaign so hard, since she had always advocated Mao’s theory of "let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred school of thought contend?" What was the driving force behind Jiang Qing’s crusade? Superficially, the Chinese public hold two kinds of general beliefs. One contends that Jiang Qing was simply carrying out Mao’s will. The other asserts that it was Jiang Qing’s personal political ambition that motivated her. Both interpretations offered some insight but in my opinion there was one additional, important factor. Jiang Qing’s actions during the Cultural Revolution, as a matter of fact, were a result of an accumulation of long time depression, humiliation, scorn and thirst for revenge.

Both Jiang Qing’s supporters and opponents who knew her back in the Yan’an period agree that she was intelligent and ambitious when she joined the Communist revolution. She had never been a typical housewife in her three previous marriages.
before Mao. However, her marriage to Mao did not bring her any personal political advancement for over twenty years. On the contrary, when Mao announced his intention to marry Jiang Qing to the Party Central Committee in 1937, the majority of the leading members of the Party Central Secretariat consented only with the one condition that Jiang Qing should never participate in political affairs of the Central Committee. Even after the CCP seized power in 1949, Jiang Qing was not a member of the Party Central Committee and the National People's Congress. This had always been an ultimate humiliation and source of bitterness in her life as the wife of the founding father of the People's Republic. It would not be unusual for the wife of the President of the United States or of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. But it was unusual in China, especially at that time. A traditional Chinese saying explains such a phenomenon: "glorious husband, honorable wife, a husband rises, so does his wife." Jiang Qing could not ignore such humiliation even if she wanted to because all of the wives of Mao's associates in the Politburo of CCP held important positions and titles. Zhou Enlai’s wife Deng Yingchao, Zhu De’s wife Kang Keqing, Liu Shaoqi's wife Wang Guangmei, Li Fuchun’s wife Cai Chang were all members of the CCP Central Committee or the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. They held positions as high as Vice President of the National People's Congress, Vice Chairman of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Chairman and Vice Chairman of the National Women's Federation. They attended important Party and State affairs, accompanied their husbands visiting foreign heads of state and had prominent seats in important ceremonies. But Jiang Qing, the wife
of Mao, the ultimate leader of the country, was not allowed to wear the uniform of the People's Liberation Army and could not even stand in the main section of the Tiananmen Rostrum with other leaders' wives for the annual National Day ceremony due to the absence of any political status.

The discrimination against Jiang Qing can be traced to certain historical reasons. Mao's first marriage was a traditional arranged match and he never lived with this wife. Mao's second wife, Yang Kaihui, was the daughter of his teacher. Mao married Yang Kaihui when he was a student of the Changsha Teacher's School. Yang was a well educated and active revolutionary. In 1930, she was captured and executed by Hunan warlord He Jian. Mao's third wife, He Zhizhen, was a military commander in the Red Army. She was wounded during the Long March and suffered from a serious nervous disorder afterwards. Eventually she was sent to Moscow to be hospitalized. Mao Zedong's comrades had tremendous respect for both Yang Kaihui and He Zhizhen because of their experiences and contributions in the revolution. To the old guards among the CCP leadership, Jiang Qing did not have any qualifications to be the wife of the Chairman of the Party. In their eyes, Jiang Qing was only an actress, an occupation which was one of the lowest social positions in Chinese society. They could not stop their helmsman from marrying Jiang Qing but they could keep her from having any political or social importance. More than twenty years of humiliation and anger tortured Jiang Qing who was known to have an extremely strong ego and pride. She tried to rise in the performing field in which she had expertise in 1950s but Zhou Yang, then the Minister of Culture, did not take her
seriously.

The Cultural Revolution finally gave her the opportunity to vent her frustrations. Her position as the Deputy Head of the Cultural Revolution Leading Group gave her authority to name the bureaucrats whom she hated as "capitalist-roaders" or "monsters and ghosts" and to direct the Red Guards to attack whomever she hated. The revolutionary model operas campaign not only provided her with a weapon to repudiate the cultural establishment which had long been blocking her, but also gave her credit as the "banner holder of the performing arts revolution." Jiang Qing's restrictive requirement of emphasizing workers, peasants, soldiers and other "small persons" in the model operas revealed her resentment against the cultural establishment by eliminating all the traditional, historical and Western plays. The prominent position and importance given to the female leading roles in the model operas clearly reflected her own desire to be politically important and dealt a blow to the Liuist cultural elites. From 1966 on, Jiang Qing was no longer just the relatively unknown wife of Chairman Mao, but one of the key figures during the Cultural Revolution. The eight model operas seemed to become Jiang Qing's personal success. All the propaganda on the performing art revolution dedicated the creation of these models to Comrade Jiang Qing.

Of course many people in China did not think that Jiang Qing should be given any credit for improving the modern Beijing Operas. The expression of famous martyr Zhang Zixin (张自新), an anti-radical Communist Party member who was brutally killed during the Cultural Revolution, echoed the opinion of many:
Many movies and operas were banned. Only a few model theatrical works are left. There are only a few quotation songs to sing. To go on like this can only impoverish the country's art and culture and make them dull. I have my doubts about Jiang Qing. Jiang Qing is not a 'standard bearer', but a destroyer of China's culture, art and literature.18

Artistically speaking, Jiang Qing's effort on the model operas promoted the quality of the operas. Under her instruction and guidance, the model operas always got the best stage properties, best orchestras, best chorus, and best actors and actress. For instance, Qian Haoliang(played Li Yuhe), Tong Xianglin(played Yang Zirong), Yuan Shihai(played Hu Chuankui), Liu Changyu(played Li Tiemei), Liu Qingtang (played Hong Changqin), Du Jinfang(played Wu Qinghua), Gao Yuqian(played Grandmother Li) were all well known actors and actresses in their fields. Excellent performances of these outstanding professionals improved the acting and rhyme scheme of Beijing operas with contemporary themes. Even today when the Cultural Revolution and its product, the "movement of popularizing model operas" are criticized in China, people still generally believe that the model operas were performed well.
Chapter 2

Model Operas in the Cultural Revolution

Prologue

In the past, the Chinese ruling class had used cultural elements as a tool for consolidating its authoritarian and the oppressed classes had used it to mobilize political forces in order to attempt to seize power. But never in the long history of China had performing arts been used as intensively and extensively as in the young and disaster-ridden People’s Republic of China during the Cultural Revolution.

In the People’s Republic of China, the development of cultural elements such as movies, novels and performing arts has always been closely connected to political propaganda and power struggle. The changes of tone and plots of operas and movies often foretold the oncoming political campaign or the outcome of a power struggle among the Chinese hierarchy. All political forces within the Party and State apparatus have been using operas in the same fashion during the process of undermining and eliminating their opponents. Mao Zedong certainly had a clear understanding of using cultural forms as the means of paving the way for seizing power. As he observed at the Tenth Plenary Session of CCP’s Eighth Central Committee in August 1966:

To overthrow a political power, it is always necessary first of all to create public opinion, to do work in the ideological sphere. This is true for the revolutionary class as well as for the counterrevolutionary class.19
This theory was certainly not foreign to other political leaders who opposed Mao's economic and political policies. However, they knew well that it was unwise and risky to challenge Mao's authority directly without fully preparing the Chinese populace, which still held tremendous gratitude and worship for the founding father of the People's Republic. The revisionist leaders needed the cultural machine to create that public opinion. Mao was determined to eliminate Liu Shaoqi and his supporters both in the Party and the government. Still, he knew that without first undermining their policies and images, a comprehensive purge would jeopardize the efforts to achieve political and economic stability of the nation. Like his opponents, Mao needed to prepare public opinion. In such an atmosphere, cultural fields became the battleground of ideology and political power.

Among all the cultural tools that could be used, operas and movies had broader influence than other media because most Chinese had little education in the 1950s and early 1960s. In the countryside and even in the cities, many people could not read and write. Consequently newspapers, novels and poems would not have had an immediate or great effect upon the masses. Operas, with their visual and audio effects and story lines, were easier for them to accept. As matter of fact, operas were performed not only in the theaters, but also in thousands of different public gathering places such as the teahouses, market fairs and many other ceremonial. Traditionally the Chinese public was accustomed to discussing political and other public issues. There was no other cultural means which could have such a great exposure to the Chinese public. As one writer put it:
The Chinese people for two hundred years had followed and loved the known plots and known characters of the Beijing opera with a zeal far surpassing that of an American baseball or a British soccer fan.20

There was no doubt that operas were an ideal means to convey new ideas to the society and to prepare the public opinion.

Many scholars believe that the politics of culture, and in particular Wu Han's play "Hai Rui Dismissed from Office," triggered the catastrophic Cultural Revolution. Indeed, the play was used by both competing political forces within the Chinese hierarchy. The Liust-faction used the play to criticize Mao for the economic disorder and societal disaffection which resulted from his Great Leap Forward campaign. For the Maoists, choosing the play as the first target to attack was to prepare and mobilize the nation for the support they needed to win the power struggle.

The play "Hai Rui Dismissed from Office" was written in 1961 by Wu Han, a prominent scholar and the Deputy Mayor of Beijing. Wu Han was one of China's leading Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) historians. During the years when China was still ruled by Jiang Jieshi's (Chiang Kai-shek) Guomindang (GMD) government, Wu Han had already made his name well-known for using historical subjects to satirize the GMD regime. The play described the story of Hai Rui, a virtuous Ming Dynasty official who fought unremittingly and stubbornly for the people. Hai Rui protested against the rapacious landlords and corrupt bureaucrats who cruelly exploited and oppressed the peasants. Hai Rui also bravely criticized the paramount ruler, the Emperor, for ignoring the suffering of the people and letting the venal officials dominate. The virtuous Hai Rui was eventually dismissed from office for criticizing...
and offending the tyrannical Emperor.

Originally Mao had asked Wu Han to write a play about Hai Rui. The Party Chairman wanted to use the play to transmit a message that the Communist Party was working for the interest of the people just as Hai Rui had done centuries earlier. The underlying purpose also was to justify the Great Leap Forward.

Wu Han, however, did not write the play that Mao wanted. In his play, the complaint against the fatuous and self-indulgent Emperor implied Mao’s tyrannical leadership and the call for redress of the dismissed Hai Rui implied a strong sympathy for the ex-Minister of National Defense Peng Dehuai. Peng had favored the Soviet methods to modernize China’s military forces. During the Great Leap Forward, Peng went to many places for his on-the-spot inspections and saw the sufferings that the Great Leap Forward campaign had brought to the people. At the Lushan Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee in 1959, Peng, thinking that he had the support of the Liuist-faction, directly criticized Mao for the failure of the Great Leap Forward. In his "Letter of Ten Thousand Words" addressed to Mao, Peng attacked the Great Leap Forward campaign as a movement of putschism at the cost of Chinese people’s lives and their well being. In a bold retaliatory move, Mao fired Peng Dehuai from his post as a member of the CCP Politburo and Minister of National Defense.

Peng Dehuai had been a prestigious revolutionary veteran. Since Mao Zedong and Zhu De joined forces to found the Red Army in Jinggang Mountain in 1928, Peng had been the number two figure of the Communist military force, the Eight
Route Army, during the anti-Japanese War and the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the People's Liberation Army during the Chinese Civil War. He also served as the Commander-in-Chief of the Chinese Volunteers in the Korean War. In his revolutionary career, Peng contributed greatly to the military victories of the CCP. Peng Dehuai was not only well known for his revolutionary achievements, he had also been well respected for his simple and plain life style and his amiable and approachable personality. Peng's sudden dismissal stunned the whole nation and a general confusion arose over what was happening among the leadership of the Party and the State. In such a political climate, the play "Hai Rui Dismissed from Office" had easily suggested to the public that what had happened to the virtuous official Hai Rui was what was happening to Peng Dehuai. Viewers and readers easily saw the implication behind the play: the seizure of peasants' land equaled the movement of establishing the People's Communes; Hai Rui who protested the confiscation of peasants lands equaled Peng Dehuai who criticized the policies of Mao's Great Leap Forward campaign; the tyrannical Emperor equaled autocratic Mao Zedong. As Mao himself pointed out in 1961: "The Jiajing Emperor dismissed Hai Rui from office. In 1959 we dismissed Peng Dehuai from office. Peng Dehuai was Hai Rui too."21

Was the appearance of Wu Han's play "Hai Rui Dismissed from Office" and the dismissal of Peng Dehuai just a coincidence? Mao and his loyalists certainly did not think so. For the Maoists, the play was not only a hint of the repudiation of the Great Leap Forward campaign, but also a signal flare indicating that the quiet resistance against Mao's authority was now turning into an open challenge. They
certainly had their reasons to believe that. Wu Han had been closely connected with Mao's competing leaders in the Party and the State. He was a close associate and a friend of one of Liu Shaoqi's major supporter Peng Zhen, who was a CCP Politburo member and Mayor of Beijing. Wu Han was also a friend of with Deng Xiaoping, the Party General Secretary and right-hand man of Liu Shaoqi. They played bridge together frequently. With his political and social status, Wu Han was a perfect public opinion creator for pro-Liu bureaucrats. To counterattack, Mao linked the cultural bureaucrats to the bourgeois revisionism of the Soviet Union. At a CCP Politburo meeting in September 1965, Mao appointed Peng Zhen as the head of a "Five-Person Group" which was established to supervise a "cultural revolution" - namely, public criticism against Wu Han and other cultural bureaucrats. However, Peng Zhen did not carry out Mao's order faithfully. The Party organization of Beijing superficially criticized some less prominent scholars for not using revolutionary subjects as the themes of their cultural creations. Nothing happened to Wu Han and he continued playing bridge with Deng Xiaoping. In his report to Mao, Peng Zhen's "Five-Person Group" spoke in defense of Wu Han, declaring that he was a pure scholar and his play was for the purpose of pure art and nothing political. According to Mao's revolutionary principles, this explanation was unacceptable. As early as 1942, in his "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art," Mao had concluded:

In the world today, all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There are no such things as art for art's sake, art that stands above class, art that is detached from or independent of politics. Proletarian literature and art are part of the whole proletarian cause; they are, as Lenin said, "cogs and wheels in the whole revolutionary machine."22
Out of frustration and disaffection towards the cultural establishment and the Party propaganda organs, Mao allowed his wife Jiang Qing who had been pushing for a showdown against the cultural elite, to prepare an "arsenal" for counterattacking. Wu Han and his play were selected as the obvious targets to start the struggle. Jiang Qing enlisted Yao Wenyuan, a radical writer in Shanghai(later a CCP Politburo member and one of Jiang Qing's "Gang of Four") to write an article attacking Wu Han. In his article, Yao charged:

Not only did Wu Han distort the Ming historical record, but the play's message "returning the land" to the peasants offered ideological support for those who wanted to "demolish the people's communes and to restore the criminal rule of the landlords and rich peasants." All of this was no less than "the focal point of bourgeois opposition to the dictatorship of the proletariat." 23

However, to criticize Wu Han and therefore correct the Party's cultural line was not the real goal of the campaign. As the old Chinese saying "The drinker's heart was not in the cup" indicates, Mao had more important motives. Once the public was convinced that Wu Han's play was an anti-Party tool under cultural disguise, it was easy and to have Liu Shaoqi and others linked to the anti-Party crime. Yao Wenyuan's polemic on "Hai Rui Dismissed from Office" was finished in the Spring of 1965, yet it was not published in the Party's official paper People's Daily until November, 1965 because the Maoists in Beijing did not have control of the propaganda media. As Mao later angrily criticized:

The publication of Yao Wenyuan's article was a signal. This signal was firmly opposed by Peng Zhen and others; even my suggestion that it should be printed as a pamphlet was utterly rejected.24

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
When Yao Wenyuan’s attack on Wu Han and his play finally appeared, Mao’s opponents found themselves in a defensive position. The Wu Han issue served as the blasting fuse to trigger the massive cultural revolution. By the time the anti-Four Olds Movement and the purge of the "capitalist-roaders" unfolded, the non-Maoist cultural bureaucrats collapsed at all levels. In the summer of 1966, all the operas, dramas, movies and other art forms with traditional or Western subject matters were declared "ghost plays " by the Leading Group of Cultural Revolution of CCP Central Committee (Zhongyang Wenhua Geming Lingdao Xiaozu) led by Chen Boda (a radical Maoist) and Jiang Qing. All the writers, directors, actors and actresses who had been successful and famous in the past seventeen years suddenly became "monsters and ghosts." According to Maoists, during the past seventeen years, China’s cultural and arts field was under the dictatorship of a "black art line" of the bourgeoisie because these cultural elites had controlled the superstructure of the country denied the revolutionary culture of the proletariat.

The Red Guards movement swept away everything which was directly or remotely connected to the "black art line." From big cities like Beijing and Shanghai to very small towns, the Red Guards shut down all the performing companies. Costumes and stage properties for traditional plays were confiscated and then burnt in the public squares or major streets. The Red Guards also detained the "monsters and ghosts" and forced them to confess their crime of previously writing or performing traditional or Western subject matter. These "monsters and ghosts" were publicly humiliated in the mass criticism meetings and paraded through the streets.
They were often beaten or forced to commit suicide.

Tragedies occurred throughout China's theatrical world. Cultural celebrities like Wu Han certainly could not survive this tragic fate. From 1966 to 1967, Wu Han was paraded through the streets and frequently taken to the "mass struggle meetings." In the hot summer days, he was tied up and forced to go down on his knees under the sun while "revolutionary masses" would come by and put hot sand in his clothes. In the Spring of 1968 he was put into prison and never came home. His wife was also imprisoned in a wet and dirty shack for a long time. She was paralyzed and not allowed to have medical treatment. She died a year after Wu Han's arrest. It was not until late 1969 that Wu Han's children were informed that their reactionary father was already dead and this could not be told to others. They were also told that they must draw a clear line of demarcation between Wu Han and themselves. After all the humiliation, attack and torture, Wu Han's eldest daughter was forced to commit suicide at the age of 22.25

Numerous other tragedies occurred in the Chinese cultural world. Among the victims, Chang Xiangyu and Yan Fengying were two prominent examples. Chang Xiangyu was a nationally recognized Yu Opera (an opera in Henan province) actress in Henan province. Her successful career also brought her a high political status. Most notably, she donated a airplane to Chinese Volunteers during the Korean War. She had been a member of the Standing Committee of the National Congress for consecutive terms since the 1950s. She had performed a large number of traditional operas not only on the stage but also in movies. Her performance in Yu Opera "Mu
"Mu Lan Joins the Army" (Mu Lan Cong Jun 木兰从军) made her one of the most famous opera actresses in the country. "Mu Lan Joins the Army" described a well-known story in Chinese history. Around 500 AD in China, Mu Lan's country was engaged in a life and death battle against the Xiongnu (an ancient nationality in China) invaders. Large casualties forced a mandatory draft for both young and old throughout the country. Mu Lan's old and sick father was drafted and could not be excused from going to the battlefield. Mu Lan, a young and brave country girl, went to the battle for her father disguised as a man. Her wisdom and bravery won her a position as a general when the war ended. The story had been written and passed from generation to generation in China. Mu Lan had always been a Chinese traditional heroine. However, it became Chang Xiangyu's "crime" to have played ancient characters like Mu Lan on the socialist stage instead of portraying proletarian heroes and heroines of workers, peasants and soldiers. When the Cultural Revolution began in 1966, she was attacked in mass criticism sessions and paraded through the city day and night. She was separated from her family and her students had to denounce her in public in order to save themselves. After being beaten and humiliated, she was sent to the countryside to "reform through labor."

Yan Fengying, a Huangmei Opera actress in Anhui province, was another example of these victims. She had gained national fame by portraying heroines in traditional and historical operas. Her performances were also adopted for films and she became well known to every household. When the attack on traditional operas began to spread all over China, Yan Fengying was denounced with being one of the
most representative "black art line figures" among the "monsters and ghosts." Her most typical "crime" was that she played love stories such as "Wedded to the Goddess" (Tianxian Pei天仙配) and "The Female Son-in-law of the Emperor" (Nu Fuma 女驸馬) which served to eulogize the ruling class, advocate bourgeois love and undermine class struggle. Unable to go through all the physical and psychological tortures endured by her colleagues and the Red Guards, she threw herself from the upper floor of the building where she was imprisoned and killed herself. In death she had escaped.

To describe the repudiation on the traditional cultural work, Chinese writer Wang Kefang wrote:

...the "Gang of Four" with Jiang Qing as the ringleader completely negated achievements in the work of literature and artistic field during the seventeen years from the founding of the People's Republic of China. Large number of leading cadres in our literary and artistic circles, famous performers and folk artists were blamed for all sorts of crimes and dealt a cruel blow, many being persecuted to death.26

It did not take long for Jiang Qing and her associates to destroy their cultural opponents both spiritually and physically. As for Mao himself, he was worshipped as if he were a god. "Read Chairman Mao's books, listen to Chairman Mao's teaching and do what Chairman Mao says" became a rule for the nation to follow and the Red Guards and mass organization would not allow any one to challenge the Helmsman's authority. By 1970, China's cultural apparatus fell completely into the hands of Jiang Qing and her Gang of Four.

Once the cultural bureaucrats were no longer a threat to the Maoists, the vacuum created by the abolition of traditional culture needed to be filled. A new ideology
had to be created and popularized. During the phase of mass mobilization of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 and the subsequent establishment of revolutionary committees at all levels in 1967, songs of Chairman Mao's Quotations and revolutionary rebellion (the Red Guards and mass organization were praised as revolutionary rebels) were almost the only type of cultural performances throughout the country. By the end of 1968 and early 1969, the dismissal of the Red Guards and mass organizations marked the end of rebellion culture, namely radical songs and dances which were used for attacking pro-Liu leaders and cadres and praising Mao and the Cultural Revolution. It was clear to Mao and his followers that the Cultural Revolution would not achieve a thorough victory if they only removed the "capitalist-roaders" and modern revisionists from their positions in the Party and the State apparatus without undermining their social and spiritual foundation. Additionally, Maoists were well aware that they could not consolidate their political power without solidifying a new revolutionary ideology over the society. In so doing, a new revolutionary culture was introduced in order to remake the human spirit of the Chinese populace. Performing arts, with their special attraction to the masses, once again served to advance the political goals of the ruling elite.

The Eight Revolutionary Model Operas

The eight Revolutionary Model Operas can be categorized into two major groups. The first group was based on wartime subject matter, eulogizing how the ever-victorious Maoism led the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Liberation Arm (PLA) from victory to victory. The second group presents the theme
of class struggle in the economic and ideological fields during the years after the Communists seized power. Operas in this group emphasized Mao Zedong's theory of continuous revolution and warned of the danger of potential capitalist and revisionist restoration. All these operas were centered around heroic figures from the proletarian classes, workers, peasants and soldiers, thus following Mao's doctrine "the arts, and in particular those of the theater, should not be designed for elites."27

The origin or evolution of nearly half of the eight model operas, especially their early appearances, occurred in Shanghai, the power center of the Maoists and the Gang of Four. Three of Jiang Qing's "Gang of Four" members were in total control of the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee before they moved to national control in Party Central Committee in Beijing. Wang Hongwen (promoted by Mao as Vice Chairman of CCP at the Ninth Party Congress in early 1969) controlled Shanghai mass organizations and the militia, while Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan controlled all the propaganda organizations and the cultural apparatus. Anything related to the creation, revision or presentation of cultural works had to have their support in Shanghai. By 1969, when all the non-Maoist cultural bureaucrats were out of power, Beijing joined Shanghai as the home base for the movement of popularizing the model operas. Only one of the eight model operas was not created and presented by a Beijing Opera Troupe either in Shanghai or Beijing. This exception was created in Shandong, the home province of Jiang Qing.

But what were these model operas portraying and how they were presented? A play by play introduction and analysis of the model operas, an important aspect of
the unprecedented Chinese Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution, will show what these model operas were; what message they sent to the Chinese people; what prevailing political controversy they reflected among the Chinese leadership; and what role they played in the lives of millions of Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution. The following is a summary of the eight model operas.

"Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy" (Zhi Qu Wei Hu Shan 智取威虎山)

The novelist with the penname "Qu Bo" was a retired PLA officer. Drawing from his military career, he published his novel "Immense Forest and Snowfield" (Lin Hai Xue Yuan 林海雪源) around the mid-1950s. The book soon became popular. The story took place in the winter of 1946 during the Chinese Civil War between the Nationalists and the Communists in Northeast China (Manchuria). Former GMD Brigade Commander "Vulture" led his remnant force into the Tiger Mountain in order to harass the liberated areas nearby. Their presence seriously jeopardized the land reform and everyday life of the workers and peasants. Based on Mao's directive "build stable base areas in the Northeast," Shao Jianbo, the Chief of Staff of a PLA regiment, led a platoon to carry out Mao's directive in the Tiger Mountain area. On the one hand, the platoon helped the local railroad workers, loggers, peasants and hunters to organize their own militia and start a land reform program. On the other hand, the platoon was fully aware that in order to defeat Vulture's troops which was many times larger than the platoon forces, they had to devise a good strategy. Yang Zirong, the platoon's scout leader, pretended to be a GMD officer who survived when his unit was wiped out by the Communist troops. He offered his services to the
Vulture and was admitted into Vulture's troops after many tests. Yang Zirong's talents soon won the appreciation and trust from the Vulture. Yang Zirong was appointed the commander on duty, dispatching all activities at the New Year's Eve "One Hundred Chicken Banquet" which was an annual celebration of Vulture's birthday. With Hu Biao (Yang's false name) in command, the "bandits" believed that everything would be fine and there was nothing to worry about. While all the GMD soldiers were drinking and celebrating, Yang Zirong opened all the gates of the base and let in the platoon soldiers and local militia forces. Unprepared for any combat, Vulture's troops were wiped out and Vulture himself was captured alive by Yang Zirong.

The film "Immense Forest and Snowfield" made by the August 1 Movie Studio of the People's Liberation Army was based on this novel. It soon became one of the popular wartime type movies in the country. In 1958, it was adapted as a Beijing Opera under the title "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy" by the Shanghai Beijing Opera Troupe. After 1960, as Jiang Qing started organizing her radical cultural circle to challenge the pro-traditional cultural bureaucrats, she went to Shanghai to recruit supporting cast and materials. In Shanghai, she not only found close comrades in Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan, but also found a good example in the Beijing Opera "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy." This kind of performing art form was just what she needed as a revolutionary theme to undermine and subsequently abandon traditional and foreign plays. In 1963, Jiang Qing had the play revised and later formally presented at the 1964 Beijing Opera Festival of the East China District.
Drama Competition in Shanghai.

In 1969, after more revisions, the Beijing opera "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy" appeared on the stage again. The new version discarded all the plots and descriptions with "petty bourgeois color." For instance, in the original book and the movie version, the romantic love between the platoon leader Shao Jianbo and the beautiful platoon nurse Bai Ru was an integral part of the development of the whole story. The portrayal of their romance had been enjoyed by the readers and viewers. However, according to the Cultural Revolution standards, it was regarded as weakening the image of proletarian heroes and therefore unhealthy. The new version focused on the greatness of Maoism, proletarian class consciousness and revolutionary heroism. In every plot, when difficulties or impossible tasks appeared, Yang Zirong, Shao Jianbo and other heroes always found solutions in Mao's teachings. The development of the play followed two major cues. One concentrated on how Yang Zirong infiltrated the enemy troops and the other focused on how Shao Jianbo carried out Mao's revolutionary mass line to mobilize the local working class people. In October 1969, after Jiang Qing and other members of the Cultural Revolution Leading Group of the CCP Central Committee (most members of this Leading Group were radical Maoists) watched the new version, People's Daily, the most important and influential newspaper, declared Beijing opera "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy" to be a "revolutionary model opera" and a month later, the Communist Party organizational magazine Red Flag, the most authoritative magazine in China, published an editorial "Strive to Create the Brilliant Images of Proletarian
Heroes -- Impression on Creating the Heroic Images of Yang Zirong and Others, praising the emergence of revolutionary model opera as the victory of Chairman Mao's revolutionary performing art line. In 1970, the opera was made into a film of Beijing Opera performed by Shanghai Beijing Opera Troupe. Following "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy," several other operas were promoted to the status of model performances. Creating and performing model operas became one of the major elements of the Chinese political and cultural life from 1970 to 1976.

"The Story of the Red Lantern" (Hong Deng Ji 红灯记)

The story line of "The Story of the Red Lantern" was first presented in the movie "Revolution Will Always Have Successors" (Zi You Hou Lai Ren 自有后来人) made by the Changchun Film Studio. The story's original theatrical form was a local opera Huju (an opera performed in Shanghai area). In 1964, it was adapted as a Beijing Opera and presented at the Festival of Beijing Opera on Contemporary Themes in Beijing. The opera described how three heroic revolutionaries devoted and sacrificed their lives for the proletarian revolutionary cause.

The story took place in a Japanese occupied-Manchurian city in 1940. Railroad signalman Li Yuhe was an underground Communist Party member responsible for secret liaison work. He passed information to the guerrilla forces and arranged transportation for underground revolutionaries. Li Yuhe's real name was Zhang Yuhe. Seventeen years earlier, Zhang Yuhe and his friend Chen were apprentices of a master worker Li. They became activists in the labor movement led by underground communists. In the historical Beijing - Hankou Railroad Strike against
cruel oppression and exploitation during the regime of warlord Wu Peifu in 1923, master Li, Chen and his wife were all killed when the strike was brutally repressed. Zhang Yuhe survived and he adopted master Li’s widow as his mother and Chen’s baby girl as his daughter. He adopted his master’s name Li as the name for his new family and he henceforth became Li Yuhe.

Sergeant Wang Lianju of the local police department was an underground Communist Party member and Li Yuhe’s contact. One cold night, Li Yuhe and Wang Lianju received an order from the party organization to escort a liaison man who was on his way to the anti-Japanese guerilla forces led by the Communist Party in the North Mountain. However, the Japanese patrol team discovered the liaison man and seriously wounded him during an exchange of gunfire. When Li Yuhe found the liaison man, he was already dying. He gave Li Yuhe a code book and told Li that it must be sent the guerilla forces no matter what cost. While the Japanese troops were approaching, Wang Lianju directed them to another side of the railroad. In order to cover Li Yuhe, Wang Lianju shot his own arm at blank range. Li Yuhe got away and hid the code book in the signal lantern which he carried to work each day. However, the head of the Japanese military police, Hatoyama, was a highly intelligent professional soldier. He did not believe that Wang Lianju was wounded by the escaping Communist liaison man as Wang himself claimed. He arrested Wang Lianju. Wang quickly yielded to the torture and death threats. He told the Japanese that the signalman Li Yuhe was his contact and Li had the code book. The Japanese arrested Li Yuhe and offered him money and profitable job as long as he handed over the
code book. Unable to persuade Li Yuhe, Hatoyama jailed his adopted mother and tortured her in front of Li Yuhe. Hatoyama tried all kinds of brutal methods of torture yet Li Yuhe and Mrs. Li refused to yield. Out of frustration and anger, Hatoyama arrested Li's seventeen year-old daughter Li Tiemei, and murdered her father and grandmother in front of her. As a last resort, Hatoyama set Li Tiemei free, trying to use her as a bait to capture the code book and whoever came to contact her. Inspired by the brave examples of her father and grandmother, Li Tiemei quickly developed into a mature revolutionary. She successfully fooled Hatoyama and wisely passed the code book to the communist guerrilla forces. At the end of the play, the guerrilla forces wiped out Hatoyama and his Japanese forces. Traitor Wang Lianju was captured and executed.

"The Story of the Red Lantern" was enthusiastically received when it was presented at the 1964 Beijing Opera Festival. Jiang Qing liked the subject matter so well that she urged the adoption of this kind of play as a revolutionary theme to replace the traditional plays which had long dominated the theaters. However, even such a revolutionary play did not satisfy the extremist revolutionary theories during the Cultural Revolution. The radical Red Guards and other mass organizations criticized the opera:

The handful of counter-revolutionary revisionists in the theater, in collusion with the counter-revolutionary revisionists in the old propaganda Department of the Party's Central Committee and in the old Ministry of Culture...paid no attention to Li Yuhe and went to great pains to give a more perfect expression to the inner world of Hatoyama. They not only brought on to the stage again and again the man [Wang Lianju] who betrayed Li Yuhe, but also smuggled in the "traitor's philosophy" of China's Khrushchev [Liu Shaoqi], saying that
"there must be some reason for him to turn traitor." They wanted to make him into someone who aroused "sympathy." It was only after Jiang Qing's severe criticism that this scheme was smashed.29

Writers of the China Beijing Opera Troupe revised "The Story of the Red Lantern" and the First Troupe of China Beijing Opera Troupe successfully performed it so that it achieved the status of revolutionary model opera in 1970. All of Jiang Qing's instructions were embodied in the new version. The revolutionary heroism of Li Yuhe was emphasized as the central thrust of the play. The plots which had portrayed the inner world of Hatoyama and Wang Lianju were discarded or simplified. Large portion of Hatoyama's and Wang Lianju's lines were cut and Hatoyama was no longer an intelligent professional soldier but a brutal and stupid killer. Wang Lianju was depicted as an opportunist and a coward as soon as he appeared on the stage. On July 15, 1970, two months after the debut of the revised version, the People's Daily published an editorial calling for the inauguration of a massive mass movement popularizing revolutionary model operas. In the same year, The August First Film Studio of the People's Revolutionary Army, one of the three major film studios in China, made the opera into a film with the same name. To ensure the success and popularity of the film, the studio appointed one of its most influential senior artists Chen Yin, as the director. "The Story of the Red Lantern" soon became one of the most popular model operas and films. Even a comic book version was published.

"Shajia Village " (Shajia Bang 沙家浜)

The original form of the Beijing opera "Shajia Village" was a Huju (Shanghai
Opera) named "The Sparks in the Reed Marshes." (Lu Dang Huo Zhong 芦荡火种). It was written into a Beijing opera by the Shanghai Group of Beijing Opera Troupe, a group of Beijing opera writers who resided in Shanghai to collect material for writing more plays with revolutionary themes. In May 1970, Shanghai Beijing Opera Troupe performed the play and it was adopted as a model opera along with "The Story of the Red Lantern." A year later, the Changchun Film Studio made it into a film. The story took place in a Chinese village in a Japanese-occupied east coast province during World War II. Because the majority of the villagers were surnamed Sha, the village became known as Shajia Bang. As the Communist led New Fourth Army was fighting its way to the anti-Japanese front in North China, a group of its soldiers were wounded and could not continue northward. The party organization decided that the wounded soldiers should stay in Shajia Village until they were able to rejoin their units. The Japanese somehow learned that eighteen Communist soldiers were hidden in Shajia Village. They ordered Hu Chuankui, Commander-in-Chief of the "Salvation Army of Loyalty and Justice," a local Chinese military force, originally had resisted the Japanese and now was a subsidiary force of the Japanese occupation, to search for and eliminate these wounded soldiers.

Underground Communist Party member Mrs. Ah Qing was a teahouse owner in the Shajia Village. Her task was to protect and take care of the eighteen wounded soldiers who had been hiding in the reed marshes around the village. Using her teahouse which was the major business and meeting place in the village as a cover, she gathered information and transported food and medical supplies for the wounded
soldiers. When Hu Chuankui and his troops occupied the village and blocked all the passes into the reed marshes, the situation became critical because all of the supplies to the wounded soldiers were cut off. Mrs. Ah Qing needed to make Hu Chuankui believe that the wounded soldiers were not hiding in this area and she also had to obtain a permit for her carrier to transport supplies to these soldiers. It happened that Mrs. Ah Qing not only knew Hu Chuankui but also had saved his life once when he was being chased by Japanese troops. Intelligent and eloquent, Mrs. Ah Qing did not have much difficulty manipulating Hu Chuankui. However, Hu’s Chief of Staff Diao Deyi suspected Mrs. Ah Qing of being an underground communist. Diao Deyi was born into the richest Diao family in Shajia Village and later went to study in Japan. He always had doubts as to where Mrs. Ah Qing came from and why she was running a teahouse business alone in such a dangerous area. Despite Hu’s belief that Mrs. Ah Qing could never be an enemy, Diao Deyi tried all means to test Mrs. Ah Qing and deliberately made things difficult for her. The story developed along two lines: 1) how Mrs. Ah Qing cleverly dealt with Hu Chuankui and Diao Deyi while managing to protect and help the eighteen wounded soldiers; and 2) how Guo Jianguang, a political instructor of a Communist army command, used Mao Zedong’s teachings to encourage the wounded soldiers to fight hardship and the enemy troops. While Mrs. Ah Qing diverted the enemy, the wounded soldiers won time and space to recover and regroup. Finally they wiped out the enemy forces and executed Hu Chuankui and Diao Deyi. Mrs. Ah Qing successfully completed her task and Guo Jianguang led the soldiers to the ant-Japanese front.
"The Red Detachment of Women" (Hongse Niangzi Jun 红色娘子军)

"The Red Detachment of Women" has three forms. It was originally a movie produced in 1959 by Tianma Film Studio of Shanghai (which later merged with two other film studios to become the Shanghai Film Studio). During the Cultural Revolution it was adopted as a Beijing opera by the China Beijing Opera Troupe and it achieved its model opera status in 1970. Because of the special subject matter which focused on revolutionary women led by the Communist Party and taught by Maoism, Jiang Qing and her associates spoke very highly of it. It was made into two film versions by the Beijing Film Studio in 1971. One version of the film was based upon the Beijing opera and the other was a modern ballet drama performed by China Central Ballet Troupe. There was no substantial difference between the two films in content. The story followed the exploits of an all-female military unit under the leadership of the CCP in their battle against a local tyrant and his armed forces.

Young Wu Qinghua was from a poor peasant family in Hainan Island. Like most of the peasant families, her parents lived a miserable life under the cruel oppression and exploitation of the local tyrant dubbed "Southern Tyrant." When Wu Qinghua's parents died, she was taken into the local tyrant's mansion to be a servant. Wu Qinghua suffered all kinds of torture but she never yielded. She tried many times to escape but each time she was captured and punished brutally. One night, Wu Qinghua managed to escape from the mansion again but she soon found that the tyrant's armed guards were after her. Wu Qinghua was wounded, but she kept running while bleeding and her blood left marks on the trail. Just as the hungry, tired
and wounded girl was about to be captured again, a wealthy business man and his
servant came along and hid her in the bushes. After the tyrant's guards left, the
businessman bandaged her wounds and offered her money. Wu Qinghua did not trust
the rich businessman until he revealed his true identity. The rich businessman and
his servant were in fact Mr. Hong Changqin, the representative of the Communist
Party, and his guard Xiao Pang. Hong pretended to be a rich overseas businessman
who was on his way to visit "Southern Tyrant" in order to collect information on the
tyrant's armed forces. Knowing that Wu Qinghua had suffered greatly and she had
no place to go, Hong Changqin gave her money and directed her to join the guerilla
forces in the nearby mountains.

Hong Changqin was later ordered by the Party organization to build up the
Hainan revolutionary base. Hong Changqin's immediate task was to mobilize the
working class on the island and organize revolutionary armed forces to eliminate the
local tyrant and his troops. An all-female military unit, "The Red Detachment of
Women," was formed and Hong Changqin was appointed as the Party Representative
of the detachment. Hong Changqin admitted Wu Qinghua into the detachment and
soon became her mentor. In the Red Detachment of Women, Hong Changqin taught
Wu Qinghua Maoism and proletarian revolutionary ideology. Wu Qinghua developed
her military skills rapidly but she still sought for personal revenge.

In order to launch a deadly attack on "Southern Tyrant" and his armed forces,
Hong Changqin decided to visit the tyrant one more time so that he could gather
more information for his ambush plan. Since Wu Qinghua had worked in the tyrant's
mansion and knew the passes well, Hong Changqin took her with him disguised as one of his servants. But when Wu Qinghua saw her personal enemy, "Southern Tyrant," she could not control her anger and opened fire at the tyrant. She wounded the tyrant but revealed their identity. As a result of her rash action, the three communists were tightly surrounded by the enemy troops. During the fighting, Hong Changqin saved Wu Qinghua's life. He helped Wu Qinghua to get away but he was wounded and captured by the tyrant. Refusing to yield to the enemy, Hong Changqin was burned alive. The death of Hong Changqin taught Wu Qinghua a serious lesson. Hong Changqin's revolutionary heroism made Wu Qinghua realize that to be a real revolutionary fighter, she could never place personal emotion above revolutionary task and discipline. Under the guidance of the Party organization, Wu Qinghua soon matured into a Communist Party member and a disciplined fighter. After several brutal battles against the enemy troops, Wu Qinghua proved to the Party organization that she had become an excellent fighter. The Party organization eventually appointed her as Hong Changqin's successor, the Party Representative of the detachment. The opera ended in the victory of these revolutionary women with Wu Qinghua shooting the local tyrant.

"Raid on the White Tiger Regiment" (Qi Xi Bai Hu Tuan 千僖白虎团)

The Beijing Opera "Raid on the White Tiger Regiment" was created by Shandong Peking Opera Troupe in 1972. It was quickly promoted to the rank of a model opera. As a matter of fact, this opera was the only one which was not created and performed by Beijing Opera Troupes in Shanghai or Beijing. It was said that the
reason that this provincial product could be promoted to be a model opera on the national level was simply because Jiang Qing was from Shandong province. The newly created opera did not seem too new to the audience because it resembled the movie "Sudden Attack" (Qi Xi 奇袭) made by the August First Film Studio of the People's Revolutionary Army in the 1960s.

In order to defeat the American and the South Korean troops during the 1950-1953 Korean War, the Chinese Volunteer Headquarters decided to cut off personnel and material supplies of the enemy troops. Yan Weicai (the real Chinese Volunteer Scout hero’s name was Yang Weicai), a young, brave and intelligent scout officer, was appointed as the commander of a platoon formed by selected veteran soldiers. The mission of Yan Weicai and his platoon was to go behind the enemy line and destroy the Kangming Bridge which was the most important transportation route for the enemy troops, and was heavily guarded by American soldiers and the most prestigious South Korean regiment -- the White Tiger Regiment. The platoon had to destroy the bridge before the Chinese Volunteer's planned general attack. They only had about forty-eight hours to complete their mission. It seemed impossible for such a small unit to go behind the enemy line and accomplish such a critical mission in so short a time. In addition, they did not even know which path in the mountain would lead them to the bridge before the general attack began. However, Yan Weicai and his platoon employed outstanding strategy. Being an expert in both military factors and Maoism, Yan Weicai followed Mao’s dictum that "people's war must mobilize the masses, organize the masses and rely on the masses." His platoon
went into the Korean village and at the risk of their own lives rescued the villagers from the fire caused by the enemy's bombing. Deeply touched by the heroic deeds of the Chinese Volunteers, the Koreans offered their help which they had been too afraid to do earlier. Mrs. Cui, whose husband was an officer in the Korean guerilla forces, guided the platoon to the bridge through secret roads which could avoid all the main roads guarded by the American troops. From a prisoner whom the platoon managed to capture, Yan Weicai obtained all the passwords they needed to go through the enemy troops' check points. They disguised themselves as the soldiers of the White Tiger Regiment and wisely overcame all the difficulties along the way. In the end, they not only destroyed the bridge, but also demoralized the enemy troops by wiping out the prestigious White Tiger Regiment. The theme of the opera was to eulogize proletarian internationalism, Mao's revolutionary military line, proletarian revolutionary heroism and the friendship between North Korea and People's Republic of China. Later it was made into a film by the August First Film Studio of the People's Liberation Army and shown in every theater throughout the country like the other model operas.

"Mountain Azalea" (Dujuan Shan 杜鹃山)

The Beijing opera "Mountain Azalea" was the last one of the wartime theme operas. It was created and performed by Shanghai Beijing Opera Troupe in 1973. The background of the play was set in a border region between Henan and Jiangxi provinces soon after Mao Zedong and Zhu De formed the Red Army of Chinese Workers and Peasants. In order to expand the revolutionary armed forces, the Party
organization sent out its representatives in all directions to incorporate the scattered peasants forces. The story described how Ke Xiang, a female Party representative, went into the "Mountain Azalea" area to implement the Party's objective of incorporating rebel forces.

In the Spring of 1928, a peasant rebel force led by Lei Gang, a former sedan-chair carrier for the rich, captured a base in "Mountain Azalea." These forest outlaws had no ultimate goal for their rebellion. Their immediate program was to rob and kill the rich for revenge and help the poor. Lei Gang held a simple policy that whoever was working for the rich was their enemy and bound to be attacked. This indiscriminate policy eventually scared and hurt many the people who had to work for the rich in order to survive. The local people regarded Lei Gang and his men as bandits and wanted nothing to do with them. The Party organization believed that Lei Gang and his men could be reformed, since they were all from the proletarian classes. The only thing they needed was a correct direction. This force could be a valuable fighting force if they were given discipline and guidance. The Party organization decided to send Ke Xiang, a young but an experienced revolutionary, to accomplish the mission. In fact, Lei Gang had already realized that they needed some organization to guide them and set a noble goal for them. When he learned that there existed a party for poor people called the Communist Party, he expressed the wish to join. However, when he actually meet with Ke Xiang, he was disappointed. Lei Gang did not believe that women could lead their armed struggle. Even though Ke Xiang was officially appointed as the Political Commissar of the
newly incorporated guerilla forces, Lei Gang was not convinced that she was the right leader for his troops.

The incorporation of Lei Gang's troops by the Communists worried "Du She Dan" (Poisonous Snake Gall 毒蛇胆), the head of the local reactionary "Civil Guards." He laid a ambush with the help of Wen Qijiu, the deputy commander of Lei Gang's forces who was a traitor attempting to wipe out the guerilla forces. Despite Ke Xiang's instruction and warning, Lei Gang took Wen Qijiu's advice and led his troops for an offensive attack on the "Civil Guards." They were trapped. Ke Xiang was wounded and captured by the enemy troops while covering Lei Gang's break through the enemy's surrounding ring. The incident taught Lei Gang a good lesson. He realized that the revolution was far more complex than he thought and that he needed a guiding ideology and discipline. He regretted that he had not followed Ke Xiang's instruction. With the help of the Party organization and the local people, Lei Gang successfully rescued Ke Xiang.

As the story developed, Ke Xiang taught Lei Gang revolutionary theory and Maoism and helped him mature into a clear-headed commander. With Ke Xiang's invariable correctness in judgement, the guerilla forces became well organized and disciplined. In the end, Ke Xiang wisely exposed the traitor Wen Qijiu and the guerilla forces wiped out "Du She Dan" and his "Civil Guards." Ke Xiang successfully completed her mission and led the forces to join the main unit of the Red Army of Chinese Workers and Peasants in Jinggang Mountain.

All the model operas presenting war time subject matters emphasized three
major aspects: Maoism was invincible; the CCP and its armed forces were ever-victorious; proletarian revolutionary heroism was the essence of communist action. The themes of those model operas of war time subject matters had a clear and simple conclusion that the victory of the proletariat and the defeat of its enemies were forever inevitable. This was always conveyed to the audiences. However, the other model operas embraced more subtle and indirect themes which were more difficult for foreign audiences to understand. These model operas primarily presented the concept of class struggle, prevention of restoration of revisionism and capitalism, and continuing revolution in a socialist society.

"On the Docks" (Haigang 海港)

The Beijing opera "On the Docks" was created by the Shanghai Beijing Opera Troupe in 1972 and was also made into a movie by the Shanghai Film Studio shortly after its appearance. The story was set in a loading company at the Shanghai harbor. Fang Haizhen was a female branch leader of the Communist Party. Her efforts to save Han Xiaoqiang, a young dock worker, from being spiritually polluted by "bourgeoisie ideology" served as the thrust to preach Mao's famous theory:

After the enemies with guns have been wiped out, there will still be enemies without guns; they are bound to struggle desperately against us, and we must never regard these enemies lightly. If we do not now raise and understand the problem in this way, we shall commit the gravest mistakes.30

Han Xiaoqiang was from a proletarian family. His grandfather and father all had been dock workers and the family suffered greatly before the Communists established new China (the People's Republic of China). Han Xiaoqiang was an intelligent and
energetic high school graduate. He worked as a dockworker like his father and grandfather. The Han family had a revolutionary tradition. Both Xiaoqiang's father and grandfather were Communist Party members and activists in the labor movement led by the Party during Jiang Jieshi's regime. Xiaoqiang's father even sacrificed his life during a strike against the ruthless dock bosses. Han Xiaoqiang was expected to carry out the family tradition and train himself as an outstanding successor of the revolutionary cause of the proletariat. He worked hard to live up to the expectations from the family and the community until another worker, a former boss of the dock, came to make friends with him. Han Xiaoqiang's new friend taught him the philosophy which was centered on how a person should enjoy his life as much as he possibly could. He told Han Xiaoqiang that it was a great waste to have an intelligent young man like Han himself work as a dock worker. He deserved a decent job. He also made Han Xiaoqiang believe that there would be no future for him at the dock and the Communist Party did not care about his welfare. The "friend" started taking him out eating and drinking. Under such negative influence, Han Xiaoqiang lost his heart at work. He became addicted to drinking, eating and being merry. He was also unconsciously propagating the "new philosophy" among his fellow young workers. The Han Xiaoqiang phenomenon greatly affected the daily work of the loading company. Young workers were often late or absent for work and political study sessions. Work efficiency on the docks slowed down and accidents incurred due to negligence.

This situation caught the attention of Fang Haizhen. She called a Party Branch meeting to study Mao's teaching and analyze the situation. They decided that the
bourgeois ideology which was being passed around the company could not be from Han Xiaoqiang and other young workers because they were "born and raised under the red flag of the new China." Seeing this as a conspiracy to sabotage socialist system from the "enemies without guns" and a battle for future generations between bourgeoisie and the proletariat, Fang Haizhen went all out to teach Mao's dictum that during the socialist revolution and construction period, the whole Party and whole nation must sustain continuous revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat and never forget class struggle.

Her first step was to bring Hang Xiaoqiang to realize his wrong ideology. She made a special effort to organize a meeting of "recalling the past sufferings and remembering the source of present happiness." At the meeting, Han Xiaoqiang's grandfather told the young workers about the miserable life the dock workers had and their heroic struggle against the cruel oppression and exploitation of the dock bosses. Grandfather Han also told the young workers about the death of Xiaoqiang's father. About thirty years ago, Han Xiaoqiang's father was one of the strike leaders and he was brutally murdered by the men sent by the dock boss. Grandfather Han also emphasized the fact that it was the Communist Party that made it possible for Han Xiaoqiang to go to school and the Han family to lead the current happy life. After the meeting, Fang Haizhen repeatedly conducted one-on-one socialist education sessions with Han Xiaoqiang. The Party Secretary's untiring effort helped Han Xiaoqiang to realize his wrong ideals and behavior. He revealed that it was the former dock boss who had instilled the bourgeois ideology into the minds of the
young workers and demoralized their revolutionary spirits. After some investigation, the former dock boss was arrested for sabotaging equipment at the dock to cause an accident and making it look like it was caused by Han Xiaoqiang's negligence. All the young dock workers learned a serious lesson from the incident. They became fully aware that class struggle had never stopped and would continue to exist during the period of socialist transition. They also were convinced that work at the dock was a glorious job for the socialist revolutionary construction. The opera sent the clear message to ensure the future of the country and well-being of the people emphasizing continuing revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat must be upheld and thus people must be armed with Maoism. Otherwise, "the enemies without guns" would stage their comeback.

"Ode to the Dragon River" (Long Jiang Song 龙江颂)

After the success of "On the Docks," the Beijing opera "Ode to the Dragon River" was created by Shanghai Beijing Opera Troupe. The theme of the story was also about class struggle and continuing revolution. It served as a warning to the people that even after the proletariat seized power, the overthrown class enemies would never rest and would always seek to regain power. The story was based on the building of an irrigation project by peasants in a rural village.

Dragon River Village consisted of two parts, the front village and the rear village. The village had a history of suffering from lack of water. When China was still under the control of GMD, the peasants sacrificed many lives and finally found the secret underground water source. However the rich landlord in the rear village dominated
the water source and the villagers still suffered. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the local people’s government decided to complete an irrigation project to direct the water from the Dragon River to the villages. The leader of the project was Jiang Shuiying, a middle-aged woman and the Party Secretary of Dragon River Village. She faithfully carried out Mao’s mass line using Party members and members of the Communist Youth League as backbones in the construction. A tunnel was built so that both parts of Dragon River Village would have a permanent water source. Under the leadership of Jiang Shuiying and her Party Branch, the construction was going well.

However, the former rich landlord had been looking for a chance for revenge for years and he continuously sought to jeopardize the project. Jiang Shuiying sensed signs of the attempts and expressed her concern to the village leaders. But until she could provide solid evidence, the Head Administrator of the village refused to believe that saboteurs were at work. Like many other villagers, he believed that since Jiang Jieshi and his government were defeated and had fled to Taiwan, all the enemies were eliminated and class struggle no longer existed. On a stormy night just before the completion of the project, the former rich landlord sneaked out and tampered with the newly built dam. Suddenly the water in the Dragon River washed away the dam and flooded the village. The lands, houses, livestock and lives of the villagers were in danger. Jiang Shuiying led the villagers in fighting the flood. With the help of the People’s Revolution Army, who came to the rescue, lives were saved but the irrigation project was damaged. Jiang Shuiying persistently carried out her
investigation and eventually exposed the former rich landlord. Using the dramatic experience, Jiang Shuiying educated the villagers and helped the Head Administrator to realize that Mao's teaching of class struggle and continuing revolution could not be forgotten at any time. The play was designed to preach and teach Mao's theory that:

The imperialists and domestic reactionaries will certainly not take their defeat lying down and they will struggle to the last ditch. After there is peace and order throughout the country, they will engage in sabotage and create disturbances in various ways and will try every day and every minute to stage a come-back. This is inevitable and beyond all doubts, and under no circumstances must we relax our vigilance.31

Like the other model operas, "Ode to the Dragon River" was also made into a film by Shanghai Film Studio in 1972.

**Typical Characteristics of the Model Operas**

Speaking of the model operas during the Cultural Revolution, some audiences observed that "if you see one, you have seen them all." As a matter of fact, the general impression of the model operas was basically due to their dogmatic, rigid, dull and stereotyped nature. The eight model operas had different subject matter but they did not provide an impression of variety to the audience. Chinese critics described the model operas as "the same medicine differently prepared" (huan tang bu huan yao 换汤不换药). Jiang Qing and her followers set a formalistic style and rigid kind of story line and the resulting presentation was boring. The placed the model operas in a "revolutionary art line" frame at the beginning of their emergence. According to Jiang Qing's instruction, all types of performing arts must
illustrate the class struggle on the basis of material selected from real life; must advocate the theory of continuing revolution during the socialist construction period; must teach Mao Zedong Thought (Maoism); and must create heroic images of workers, peasants and soldiers unequivocally. Under Jiang Qing's directions, a fundamental principle called "three prominences" (San Tu Chu 三突出 ) was developed to guide the ideological and artistic forms of the model operas. The principle of "three prominences" was described as:

Among all characters give prominence to positive character.  
Among positive characters give prominence to heroic characters.  
Among heroic characters give prominence to the main heroic characters.32

In every model opera, the "three prominences" principle ruled the play in every plot and scene. All the positive characters were proletarian heroes of similar social origins, and they were all perfect human beings. Every leading hero had bitter and deep-seated hatred in his life experience. Yang Zirong's father was forced to commit suicide by the landlord. Wu Qinghua had been tortured for years by the local tyrant. Li Tiemei's parents were killed by the warlord's troops. Ke Xiang's husband was killed by the GMD government. The development of these heroic figures directly reflected the correctness and wisdom of Maoism. Under the Party's teaching that they all matured into heroes with high proletarian class consciousness and all learned the ideology of putting class interests above personal hatred. Wu Qinghua in the "Red Detachment of Women" and Lei Gang in "Mountain Azalea" were good examples. They were all driven to join the revolution by the motivation of personal revenge. They were all rash and did not have a sense of discipline. They all made
serious mistakes before they learned Mao's teaching. Fang Haizhen in "On the Docks" and Jiang Shuiying in "Ode to the Dragon River" won every round of battle with the "enemies without guns" because they mastered Maoism well. Mao's teaching guided them to discover the hidden enemies and find solutions for every problem they encountered. In general, all the heroic characters portrayed in the model operas shared the same kind of qualities. From Yang Zirong, Hong Changqin, Ke Xiang, and other characters in the operas of war time subject matter to Fang Haizhen, Jiang Shuiying and other leading characters in the operas of socialist construction subject matter, the heroes or heroines were all morally sophisticated and technically skillful. They all possessed profound knowledge of Maoism and were capable of putting it into practice.

Among the eight model operas, the heroes or heroines were only from the proletarian class. None of the operas presented any positive image of intellectuals or other classes. According to Mao's doctrine that art was the tool of class struggle and should not be used to serve the petty bourgeoisie (intellectuals were classified as a class to work with, not to depend on) or elite classes. He observed:

Here the audiences for works of literature and art consists of workers, peasants, soldiers and revolutionary cadres. There are students in the base areas, too, but they are different from students of the old type; they are either former or future cadres. The cadres of all types, fighters in the army, workers in the factories and peasants in the villages all want to read books and newspapers once they become literate, and those who are illiterate want to see plays and operas, look at drawings and paintings, sing songs and hear music.33

The eight model operas had different subject matter and different story lines but they all carried the same ideology for the same political needs. They all glorified the
forever-correct Mao Zedong revolutionary line, invincible Maoism and ever-winning People's Liberation Army. They all taught: 1) the revolutionary heroism of the proletariat; 2) the lesson of daring to struggle, daring to win and daring to sacrifice for the Party's cause; 3) that one should never forget class struggle and continuing revolution; 4) that all the negative figures on the stage must be class enemies.

Another feature that the eight model operas shared was the promotion of the status of women. This was not surprising since Jiang Qing was a woman and felt the need to combat sexual discrimination in politics, which dated back to a Confucian ideology and the concept that "Disorder is not sent down from Heaven. It is produced by women."34 She had always felt that Mao's old guards comrades rejected her because she was a woman. She was dying to prove that women could be outstanding leaders either in wartime or socialist construction. In all the eight model operas, women were the leading characters or the most important supporting heroines. In fact, five of the eight model operas had their story lines centered around female roles. Wu Qinghua in "Red Detachment of Women," Ke Xiang in "Mountain Azalea," Mrs. Ah Qing in "Shajia Bang," Fang Haizhen in "On the Docks," and Jiang Shuiying in "Ode to the Dragon River" were all leading characters in these operas. Even in "The Story of the Red Lantern" which was not specifically designed to portray female revolutionaries, Li Tiemei shared the same importance in the story line as the male role of Li Yuhe. The message was simply expressed: women had the talents and abilities to lead the proletarian revolutionary cause. Old prejudices had to be casted aside.
A notable characteristic of the model operas was the elimination and prohibition of subject or plots regarding romantic love. Being regarded as the product of Western bourgeois ideology, love was a serious evil subject to elimination. Romantic love on the stage would spiritually pollute the people. The original "Immense Forest and Snowfield" was noted for its dramatic plots and love scenes. The story of romantic love between the Platoon leader Shao Jianbo and the nurse Bai Ru was very popular. The story had received public applause for its dramatic plots and well developed romantic love story line. But when it was adopted as model opera "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy," this part was totally eliminated. "The Red Detachment of Women" suffered the same fate. The original story depicted the love that developed between Wu Qinghua and her mentor Hong Changqin as they knew each other and worked together. This chapter was omitted when it became a model opera. In all of the eight model operas, all of the revolutionary heroes were living without some one to love (except for Chairman Mao and the Party). In "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy," Yang Zirong and Shao Jianbo were all single. Li Yongqi, the local militia leader was a widower. In "The Story of the Red Lantern," Li Yuhe was a widower and Mrs. Li was a widow. In "The Red Detachment of Women," both Hong Changqin and Wu Qinghua were single. Yan Weicai in "Raid on the White Tiger Regiment," Guo Jianguang in "Shajia Bang," Fang Haizhen in "On the Docks" and Jiang Shuiying were also single. In "Mountain Azalea," Lei Gang was a bachelor and Ke Xiang was a widow. The only leading figure in the model operas who was married was "Shajia Village's" Mrs. Ah Qing whose husband was only briefly mentioned as doing business.
elsewhere and never appeared in the story. The implication for the young people growing up in the period was that romantic love and demonstrative affection were negative and bourgeoisie values. With all these specific political purposes and artistic restrictions, it was inevitable that the model operas could not have any vivid expressions but to follow the formalistic, rigid and dogmatic pattern.
Chapter 3

Political & Social Impact of the Model Operas

An Unprecedented Campaign

The People's Republic of China may not be the only country in which operas and other performing arts have always been used to reflect the ideology that the ruling class favored. Yet no other country has ever pushed a campaign for a certain group of operas which was so extensive that people from all walks of life, from all age groups and in fact from every household were involved. It was not the operas themselves but the way they were being popularized that made the model operas such a political weapon. As A.C. Scott described:

It was a time-honored method in China to get at the present through the past. There was no doubt in the mind of Mao. It is indicative of the power of the theaters in Chinese society that he used the plays as the basis of a campaign which not only toppled his political enemies, but finally consummated his plans to reform the arts and led to the turbulent period which has now been dubbed the Cultural Revolution.35

After 1969, the eight Beijing operas achieved their prominent status of revolutionary model operas one after another. The Leading Group of the Cultural Revolution of the Party Central Committee which was controlled by Jiang Qing and her radical associates officially launched a massive movement of "occupying socialist cultural land by Chairman Mao's proletarian revolutionary art line." People's Daily (Renmin Ribao 人民日报) and Red Flag Magazine (Hongqi Zazhi 红旗杂志).
authoritative voices of the Party Central Committee, simultaneously issued editorials calling for a nation-wide mass movement of "Learning the model operas, popularizing the model operas and performing the model operas." The campaign was declared a political task for the nation. In the People's Republic of China, when something was given the status of political task, it became everybody's top mission. Anything contrary to a "political task" was subversive and subject to severe punishment ranging from group criticism, mass struggle, and deprivation to imprisonment. Frequently, a person's attitude toward participation in "political tasks" was used to determine the degree of his or her loyalty to the Party and the revolutionary cause. In another sense, an active and successful participation in these political campaigns could hasten a person up to a position beyond conventional promotions. Qian Haoliang was a Beijing opera actor in China Beijing Opera Troupe. He played the role of Li Yuhe in "The Story of the Red Lantern." As the status of the opera changed, his political status changed. Appreciating his performance in the opera, Jiang Qing and her associates praised Qian Haoliang for his contribution in portraying proletarian revolutionary hero Li Yuhe. Qian Haoliang was promoted to the position of Vice Minister of the Ministry of Culture. Liu Qingtang, a ballet dancer from the Central Ballet Troupe, was the second actor promoted to the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Culture for his performance as Hong Changing in the "Red Detachment of Women." It became common to see the actors and actresses who played leading roles in the model operas promoted to the leading positions of different governmental organizations at different levels of their respective companies.
Moreover one’s involvement in the movement of popularizing revolutionary model operas, such as taking a leading role in a local or work place production, could change one’s whole life. For example, millions of former Red Guards were out of work and sent down to the country to receive re-education from the Poor-Lower-Middle Peasants. Among them, those who joined the Propaganda Teams to learn and perform the model operas received opportunities to be enrolled in the People’s Liberation Army or factories in the cities. At a minimum, the model operas performers did not have to do as much hard physical labor as others because they were given a lot of work hours to practice and rehearse the operas. In general, active involvement in the movement of popularizing model operas was directly connected to personal lives.

On the national level, the eight model operas, especially their film versions, dominated all the theaters. Provincially, all the local opera troupes were revolutionized to perform nothing but the eight model operas. Regardless of whether or not they were Chuanju (Sichuan opera), Huangmeiju (Anhui opera), Yuju ( a Henan opera), Bangziju (an opera in Henan and Hebei province), Jingju (Shanxi opera), Pingju (Hebei opera) or any other local opera, they all became copies of the eight model operas. Outside of the professional performing circles, the eight model operas were learned and performed everywhere by everyone. Almost every urban factory organized its "Propaganda Team" for performing model operas on the factory stage. In the countryside, the communes normally used the former Red Guards, now called Educated Youth, to perform the model operas. Even the university teachers...
who were reforming their thoughts through labor had to fulfil their political task. They worked on the farm during the day and rehearsed or performed model operas at night. The People's Liberation Army played an active role in popularizing the model operas. Propaganda Teams of regiments performed on a half-time basis while Propaganda Teams at division or army level were full time performing bodies. The Propaganda Teams from the People's Liberation Army not only made tours among the military units but also performed in factories, schools and rural communes. Every government and Party organization shouldered the task of making the model operas known and understood to every household. Watching the model operas and discussing them at political study sessions became a way of daily life in factory shops, commune production teams, schools and governmental administrative organs.

The debut of the eight model operas was one of the most exciting events in peoples' lives. Lines at the box offices of the Beijing theaters began to form at 6 a.m. and did not break up until evening time. All the important public facilities were made available for the model operas. The Great World of Shanghai is a group of buildings where seventeen revolutionary operas could be seen simultaneously and continuously. Puppet shows, feature films, and exhibition halls also reinforced the political themes. No other forms of entertainment was allowed in theaters and on the radio.

To ensure the success of the mass movement of learning and popularizing the model operas, Party organizations at all levels were required to organize workers, peasants, government employees, students and city residents (shimin 市民) to watch
and study the model operas. Free tickets were given and office hours were used for people to watch model operas. All the radio stations had model opera analysis programs and special hours for teaching selected model opera arias every day. Public loud speakers could be heard twice a day, the morning hour before work and during the lunch hour, playing model opera songs. High school and elementary school students were constantly given assignments to write compositions on topics such as "Learn From The Model Operas and Learn From The Revolutionary Heroes" or "Learn The Model Operas And Be Red Successors of the Proletarian Revolutionary Cause." Even in kindergartens, children were taught how to sing revolutionary model operas. Picture books, similar to comic books, were published and widely circulated. By the early 1970, for example, "The Red Detachment of Women," in three editions, sold 800,000 copies at thirty Fen each. In many factories, government offices and schools, an absence from watching the model operas without permission was treated as being absent from work and might be regarded as a questionable political attitude to be criticized. The movement of popularizing model operas became a daily political task of the Chinese society.

To emphasize the importance and broaden the influence of the model operas, all newspapers and magazines published daily articles like "Workers, Peasants and Soldiers on Model Operas" or "Workers' and PLA's Propaganda Teams Mobilizes the Masses to Use Mao Zedong Thought to Transform the Literary and Art Front" and editorials of the same nature. Theatrical Festivals of Model Operas were frequently held at national, provincial, county and other levels. Every time a Model Opera
Festival was held, the leaders at certain high levels would attend the opening and closing ceremonies. For instance, if it were held in Beijing, CCP Politburo members like Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Kang Sheng and Yao Wenyuan would attend. If it were held in a provincial city, the Director of the Provincial Revolutionary Committee (equivalent to a governor) and his deputies would attend. And from time to time, Mao Zedong, the "great revolutionary helmsman" would come to the theater and have pictures taken with the performing group. This indicated his approval of his wife's cultural handiwork.

Undoubtedly, the emergence and utilization of these model operas served as a powerful weapon for Maoists to undermine the policies and principles of their opponents and to pursue Mao's effort to remake human spirits. The dominance of the model operas provided Maoists with a means to exert their firm control over public opinion, and left no room for non-Maoists ideology. Any negative attitude toward the model opera campaign was connected to ulterior political purposes. An article to attack Deng Xiaoping by the Mass Criticism Group of Beijing and Qinghua universities illustrated this tactic:

It is crystal clear that the model revolutionary theatrical works have helped bring about the blossoming of a hundred flowers in revolutionary literature and art, but why did Deng Xiaoping regard this as 'single flower blossoming'? Did he really want to have a hundred flowers blossom in proletarian literature and art? Not at all. Facts in the past and at present have proved that he, representing the bourgeoisie both inside and outside the Party, always harbored a bitter hatred for the fragrant flowers of socialist literature and art and prostrated himself in admiration before feudal, capitalist and revisionist literature and art. What he tried to do was to smother the fragrant flowers of proletarian literature and art and let feudal, capitalist and revisionist poisonous weeds grow instead, thereby turning
literature and art into his tool for restoring capitalism.38

In general, the model operas helped to establish a Maoist dictatorship in the cultural and ideological fields of China. Mao Zedong certainly endorsed the massive movement of popularizing the eight model operas. Yet the "banner holder", the real leading figure in the unprecedented campaign, was his wife Jiang Qing. To describe the model operas, A.C. Scott wrote:

Glittering, technically efficient, melodramatic and elementary in dramatic conflict, they portray a society where every body is happy to sacrifice himself for the state. Their world is divided quite simply into pure heroes and unqualified villains and the main passion evoked is the love of Chairman Mao. In a society where the theater must propagate dogma and teach a new way of life and thought, these pieces obviously serve a function which the old theater with its stylized beauty of form and complete remoteness from reality could not encompass.39
Conclusion

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 brought about Mao Zedong's victory in the power struggle among the Chinese Communist hierarchy. It also marked a decade long human suffering and societal chaos in the history of the People's Republic of China. The Cultural Revolution was not the first time in China's thousands of years history that a power struggle among the hierarchy produced such tremendous extremism, factionalism and brutality all over the country. But it was the first time that performing arts were used so extensively as a political tool. The movement of "learning model operas, popularizing model operas and performing model operas" touched every class and fulfilled the purposes of its designers.

On the surface, Jiang Qing and her allies were implementing Mao’s principle that literature and arts must eulogize the masters of the country -- workers, peasants and soldiers and lay bare the ugly features of negative characters. They used the model operas as the epitome of new culture to reject traditional legacy and to discount the value of literature and arts which were produced during the seventeen years after 1949. The crime of the "seventeen-year black art line" was that it served the "bourgeois" elites, not the masters of the country -- the workers, peasants and soldiers. It was the mission of this revolution to put an end to that phenomenon. To carry out the movement of model operas was to establish a new culture of the
people, by the people and for the people. Underneath, the real purpose was to undermine and destroy the foundation of non-Maoist ideology, namely the principles and policies of Liu Shaoqi and other pragmatic leaders. Jiang Qing and her followers claimed that the art revolution must always be centered around Mao's principle of "let one hundred flowers blossom and one hundred school of thoughts contend" in order to achieve the unity of revolutionary political content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form. However, their campaign to popularize the model operas obviously contradicted that principle. The "three prominences" principle followed by all the model operas set an extremely restrictive pattern excluding any subject matter which was Western or traditional and any character who was not of proletarian social origin. The dominance of model operas created an artistic dictatorship. Only one flower (model operas) and one school of thought (Maoism) could exist throughout the literature and art revolution. Never in the long history of Chinese culture had the theatrical diet been as restrictive and narrow as in the model opera period of 1969-1975. Theoretically, proletarian revolutionary culture in its essence should be antithetical to religion. However, the model operas idolized Mao's wisdom and correctness to such a superstitious extent that it became a new theology in China. Chinese philosopher Xin Bishi criticized Jiang Qing and her associates for being the main authors and beneficiaries of this new theology in China. He wrote:

They borrowed the name of Marxism [during the Cultural Revolution Maoism was the equivalent to Marxism] so they could enchain the population to their own cause. The material damage cause by the Gang of Four, although considerable, can be estimated, measured. The spiritual damage is beyond calculation.40

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
It is arguable whether Mao used Jiang Qing and the model operas for his own purposes or Jiang Qing used Mao to endorse the campaign for her political ambition. Yet it was undoubtedly clear that the campaign of model operas, like other radical campaigns during the Cultural Revolution, benefitted both Mao and Jiang Qing. After Mao's death in 1976, Jiang Qing and her Gang of Four were arrested and the Cultural Revolution was condemned both officially and unofficially in China. Under the "Two Upholds" ("uphold whatever Chairman Mao taught, uphold whatever Chairman Mao decided") principle declared by Hua Guofeng, the successor of Mao, Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four were held responsible for every evil effect of the ten-year long national disaster. One of their crimes was to have practiced cultural and artistic dictatorship under the banner of the movement of revolutionary model operas. It was true that the model opera campaign served as an important political tool during the Cultural Revolution and Jiang Qing was leading the way. Using the model operas as the tool to attack the cultural bureaucrats, Jiang Qing satisfied her desire for revenge. More importantly she gained national fame and a prestigious position among the CCP ruling elite. Even so, it is still incorrect or inaccurate, if not totally unfair, to say that only Jiang Qing was responsible. As a matter of fact, Jiang Qing was also a tool just like her model operas. It was impossible for such a massive and extensive campaign like "Learning, popularizing and performing the model operas," to come into being and dominate without Mao's instruction and blessing.

For Mao Zedong, the model operas were appealing tools to instill his ideology and undermine that of his opponents. Generation after generation, the Chinese have
held a conception of literature and arts which believe that literature and arts should serve to inculcate moral and social values. Throughout the Chinese history, the traditional Chinese society taught filial piety, loyalty, propriety and other values mainly through channels of cultural elements such as The Four Books (Si Shu), namely, The Great Learning (Daxue 大学), The Doctrine of Mean (Zhongyong 中庸), The Analects of Confucius (Lunyu 论语) and Mencius (孟子), and The Five Classics (Wu Jin 五经), namely, The Book of Songs (Shijing 诗经), The Book of History (Shujing 书经), The Book of Changes (Yijing 易经), The Book of Rites (Zazhi 杂记) and The Spring and Autumn Annals (Chunqiu 春秋). Plays and stories of Water Margin (Shuihu 水浒) and The Romance of the Three Kingdoms (Shan Guo Yanyi 三国演义). It had long been a tradition that the Chinese people regarded the messages that novels or plays embodied were principles or right rules to learn and follow. In China, one often heard people quote what was said in a novel or a play to prove their rightness. Teachers and parents used what was presented in the operas, movies or novels to teach the young. Often times people would give up their doubts and questions on certain issue once they were told that it was said in a book or in a play. This long tradition of didacticism set an invisible chain for the Chinese to follow both willingly or unwillingly. To a great extent, the prevalence of such didacticism made it possible for the Maoists to use literature and arts to serve their own purposes. Most of the Chinese people, especially millions of Chinese youth who were described as "white and plain paper on which one could can draw the newest and most beautiful paintings" easily followed
the voices of the new cultural as their ancestors had followed the old one.

As a Marxist, Mao designed China's future in the firm belief that communism would eventually be realized in China. He and his revolution had successfully accomplished the first step toward that direction by establishing proletarian dictatorship since they seized power in 1949. The second step for China to take was the creation of the conditions for a future communist system through a transition period -- socialist revolution and construction. To achieve a successful transition toward communism, Mao believed that China must first eliminate three major societal distinctions: the distinction between city and countryside, between industry and agriculture, and between physical and mental labor. Without eliminating these distinctions, inequality would continue to exist and embody the major threat to the basic principle of a communist society. After the Great Leap Forward, under Liu Shaoqi's policy of emphasizing material improvement, Mao saw a trend of growing inequality and bureaucratism which threatened the progress of eliminating the three distinctions in the socialist revolution and construction period. According to Liu Shaoqi's theory, to realize communism, China had to be materially prepared first. Mao certainly could not accept the policy of seeking material improvement before spiritual preparation.

In Mao's thinking such an undertaking will move toward fruition only as social inequalities are progressively eliminated, for if on the contrary they were to increase they would bring about havoc with the planned structures, impede economic progress, and reintroduce the anarchy of the market.41

To counter the dangerous trend became a pressing task. Mao needed to
undermine Liu's policies and to instill his own Maoist ideology. He, of course, needed the continuous support of the Chinese masses to win his revolution. He had to assure the workers, peasants and soldiers that he regarded them, not some social elite, as the masters of the country.

Jiang Qing and her model operas could not have been any better messengers. The model opera movement clearly sent a message to the workers, peasants and soldiers -- 90% of the Chinese population which until this time had not been portrayed on the stage. The issue was that Liu Shaoqi's revisionist and bourgeois line had deprived them of their status as the masters of the country. Now the Chinese saw that in every model opera, the heroes and heroines were none other than workers, peasants and soldiers. For a period of time, the Chinese working people really held tremendous gratitude toward Mao for making them masters of their own country. Some believed that because of the model operas movement Maoism was invincible. In all the model operas, every time a crisis or difficult situation appeared, it was always Chairman Mao's teaching which gave the heroes or heroines a solution. Every time Mao's principle was not followed, there was a setback or severe damage to the revolutionary cause. The revolution of art and literature eliminated the dominance of traditional ideology only to replace it with blind worship of Mao Zedong. In many ways, Mao benefitted tremendously from the campaign of opera revolution.

A month after Mao's death, with the help of military leader Ye Jianying and other old guards, new Party Chairman Hua Guofeng arrested Jiang Qing and her radical associates. The eight model operas automatically were halted. When the
"capitalist-roaders"—pragmatic leaders, such as Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun and Peng Zhen, who were out of power before Mao’s death, rose back to power, they repudiated the cultural dictatorship of the Cultural Revolution. The theatrical circle once again changed its appearance to fit the political trend. Advocates of the revolution of literature and art lowered their banners and muffled their drums. Suddenly people did not see articles and commentary on the character, performing techniques and social impact of model operas, which had been on every newspaper and magazine daily. The operas with contemporary themes yield the stage to the traditional and historical operas. Heroes and heroines of workers, peasants and soldiers, as well as the theme of female leaders, were replaced by the former masters of stages—emperors, generals, scholars, princes and beauties. The Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 marked the most vibrant period of China’s performing arts. The Maoists employed operas as an effective weapon in their political power struggle. The model operas undermined the Chinese tradition and culture, shackled people’s ideology, limited the creativity of China’s artistic forces and practically imposed a radical dictatorship in the cultural history of the People’s Republic of China.

Karl Marx wrote: "the tradition of all dead generations weighs like an Alp on the brain of the living." The Cultural Revolution has vanished and China has experienced many changes since 1976. Yet, the operas and other performing arts still play the same role they have been given, not so much as a means of entertainment, but as a barometer of political changes and a tool of power struggles.
Ironically, after about ten years' silence, the model operas were heard again by new audiences in China during the past several years. It is generally agreed by the Chinese public that because of their restrictive and rigid nature, the model operas were boring and tedious despite the fact that they had a well-composed rhyme scheme and beautiful arias. Immediately after the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese public strongly disliked cultural work with dogmatic and political themes. But why are the abandoned model operas finding new appreciation in China today? Probably some audiences enjoy their arias while others have different reasons to appreciate them.

Since early 1980, Deng Xiaoping designed a more open policy for China. He, in fact, has abandoned Mao's socialist construction policy and reintroduced Liu Shaoqi's policy of emphasizing material and technological improvement. Deng's theory, "it does not matter if the cat is white and black, as long as it catches mice," stimulated material and intellectual progress. However, to maintain and sustain the effort toward modernization, a greater importance had to be attached to social groups with higher technical and sophisticated knowledge -- an educated elite, often technocrats and scientists. The workers, peasants and soldiers saw the political and social importance given by Mao (though on a superficial basis) slipping away. Many people felt that they were deprived of the feeling of being masters of the country. Meanwhile, Deng Xiaoping's economic reform in the 1980s made considerable progress yet produced all kinds of conflicts. The most noticeable problems were ever-growing inequality, bureaucratism and corruption. As a means of protest, people
began to remember Mao and his ideas. The reintroduction of some model operas could very well be a way of venting frustration and disaffection toward the new regime. At least, this phenomenon could once again prove the point that performing arts were and continue to be either weapons for political power struggles or a barometer of political changes.

Since Deng Xiaoping started his reform program in the 1980s, China had made considerable progress but not in the ways of freedom and democracy. During the reform, the younger generation of Chinese intellectuals made some progress in putting a variety of operas and movies in theaters and cinemas, audiences were able to see traditional plays, modern operas and Western movies. However, their freedom of reforming the performing arts was limited to a point that no expression of any criticism toward the existing leaders in their works. The world-socking brutal repression of the pro-democracy movement in 1989 demonstrated that as long as the basic political system of the country remained the same, China would never achieve a real successful reform. The Chinese performing arts will never be free from being a docile political tool of the hierarchy. It is still a long way to go before China's operas and movies can finally be a real means of entertainment and education.
Notes


8. Based on a series of interviews with Jiang Qing, this is the most scholarly study of this powerful woman.

9. Maurice Meisner
   This is one of the best general overviews of this period.


16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.


21 Stuart Schram, ed., *Chairman Mao Talks to the People*, New York, 1974, p.237


24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31
*Quotations From Chairman Mao Zedong*, Beijing, Foreign Language Press, 1966, p.16.

32

33
Colin Mackerras, ed., *Chinese Theater*, p.158.

34
Shijing, p.237

35
36

37
Ibid, p.xi.

38

39

40

41
Bibliography

Books


Articles


_______. "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Arts," Selected Works, Vol. III.


Government Documents


Magazine


Newspapers