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### **On the(re)emergence of cultural revolution imagery in China, Hong Kong and Singapore in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

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ON THE (RE)EMERGENCE OF CULTURAL REVOLUTION IMAGERY IN  
CHINA, HONG KONG AND SINGAPORE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

NATALIE SIU-LAM WONG

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of  
Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2010

## **DECLARATION**

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy of the University of Westminster is solely my own work

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis interrogates the (re)emergence of Cultural Revolution imagery in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a cultural lens through which contemporary contradictory relations between China, Hong Kong and Singapore are revealed. Between the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s, a number of images originating from political posters produced during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of the People's Republic of China (PRC) were circulating in urban city cultures of Hong Kong and Singapore, and in cyberspace in China. Removed from their original context those images were reproduced as new cultural products and sites in new urban environments.

The research methods are predominantly shaped by the nature of the research which could broadly be described as 'visual culture' and the transformations of a set of images across time, as an extremely recent phenomenon. Drawing on key concepts in cultural studies, such as signifying practices, representation, articulation and identity, I use Cultural Revolution popular cultural products as 'media texts' to understand societies and contemporary urban popular cultures in China, Hong Kong and Singapore. As my research reveals, Cultural Revolution imagery can be flexibly transferred to different physical and virtual forms and its meaning varies according to cultural contexts, local practices which are shaped by historical backgrounds of respective locations. It is the transferability of Cultural Revolution imagery which continues to play a role in mass communication in contemporary urban popular culture.

The first chapter sets the scene for the (re)emergence of Cultural Revolution imagery in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in China, Hong Kong and Singapore. Chapter Two provides a detailed account of methodologies and examines academic literature. Chapter Three discusses the commodification of Chinese Revolutionary imagery in mobile multimedia pictures in Chinese urban culture. Chapter Four examines the ways in which Chinese Revolutionary imagery was borrowed by Hong Kong designers in the post-1997 Hong Kong context through some examples of commercial commodities using Cultural Revolution imagery as branding elements. Chapter Five discusses how Chinese Revolutionary imagery

was used in commercial spaces (i.e. theme restaurant) in Singapore at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

This thesis interrogates the emergence of Cultural Revolution imagery in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a cultural lens through which contemporary contradictory relations between China, Hong Kong and Singapore are revealed. Between the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s, images influenced by political posters produced during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of the People's Republic of China (PRC) were circulating in the urban city cultures of Hong Kong and Singapore, and in cyberspace in China.<sup>1</sup> Removed from their original context these images were reproduced as new cultural products and sites in contemporary urban environments. These products and sites included theme restaurants, stationery, mugs, T-shirts and picture messages on mobile phones.<sup>2</sup>

This use of Cultural Revolution imagery was closely related to the rise in popularity of consumer items across Asian Chinese cultures which exploited Chinese revolutionary symbols as new commodities.<sup>3</sup> Reflecting this popularity,

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<sup>1</sup> Previous studies about the commercialisation and commodification of images of Mao Zedong and Chinese revolutionary culture in the post-Mao era of the People's Republic of China can be found in such works as Geremie R Barmé, *Shades of Mao: the posthumous cult of the great leader* (New York & London: An East Gate Book M.E. Sharpe, 1996), Geremie R Barmé, *In The Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York and West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1999) and Dongfeng Tao, "The Commercialised Revolutionary Culture in Contemporary China" in *Cultural Studies in China*, ed. Dongfeng Tao and Yuan Pu Jin (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005). These studies focus on the recycling of Cultural Revolution imagery in printed or physical forms in the People's Republic of China mainly between the 1980s and the 1990s, which are discussed in Chapter 2. However, my focus in this work is the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (*Wuchan Jieji Wenhua Da Geming*) will henceforth be referred to in this thesis as the Cultural Revolution. It is generally considered to take place from 1966 to 1976, immediately after the death of Chairman Mao Zedong. The term 'China' will henceforth be used to refer to the People's Republic of China (1949-present) throughout the thesis.

<sup>2</sup> The imagery itself was typically iconic revolutionary political pictures produced in the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1967) showing Red Guards in very stylized poses with their fists clenched.

<sup>3</sup> While this thesis focuses mainly on the cultural practices and phenomena at the turn of the new millennium and in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I recognise that the recurrence of Cultural Revolution imagery, particularly in the PRC, had continued since the early 1980s. In Hong Kong and Singapore, though it is impossible to trace every individual practice, similar phenomenon has only been prevalent in local urban popular culture since the late 1990s.

Cultural Revolution motifs frequently appear in various life-style magazines.<sup>4</sup> This trend coincided with the rapid rise of contemporary China through its integration with the global market economy and developments in new technologies.<sup>5</sup> The contemporary renewal of Chinese revolutionary imagery is not only a representation of China in urban popular cultures in Singapore and Hong Kong. It is also an interface through which radical socio-economic transformations since the late 1990s can be contrasted and explored. The emergence of a 'Cultural Revolution' popular urban culture in China, Hong Kong and Singapore since the turn of the millennium, as my analysis reveals, corresponds closely with the wider cultural, social and political circumstances, local and global, specific to that period of time.

There have been significant changes in urban societies in all three locations.<sup>6</sup> Since the 1990s, continuing its policy of an open economy and the free enterprise system, the Singaporean government has encouraged local enterprises to invest outside Singapore, with the People's Republic of China and Hong Kong as two of the most important targets.<sup>7</sup> Singapore is a globally oriented city-state dependent upon trade and industry as a basis of most of its economic activity; and it is always pragmatic in its approach to foreign policy, inclined to cultivate close relations with any country of any ideological shade

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<sup>4</sup> I found quite a few lifestyle magazines featuring Cultural Revolution imagery in Hong Kong and Singapore. These magazine articles include Metropop, "衣食住行毛處不在 (Pinyin: *Yi shi zhu xing Mao chu bu zai*) (English Translation: Mao & Chic)" *Metropop Hong Kong*, 27 April 2006 (see Figure 38), Lay Hoon Thio, *How Mao!* (Poole Associate, originally published in ID Magazine Singapore (April), April 1998 [cited 6 June 2009]); available from [http://www.poole-associates.com/house\\_of\\_mao1.htm](http://www.poole-associates.com/house_of_mao1.htm), "The Great Leap Forward" *Space Magazine Singapore* 1998, "Nanny State Lifts Its Skirt" *The Independent UK*, 11 September 1998, Daniel Jill, *Party Politics* (Poole Associates' website, originally published in The Expat Magazine in February 1999, 1999 [cited February]); available from [http://www.poole-associates.com/house\\_of\\_mao1.htm](http://www.poole-associates.com/house_of_mao1.htm), "The Red Book" *The Business Times Singapore*, 14th May 1999. The fact of publication of such magazine articles mainly in Hong Kong and Singapore itself speaks for the importance of it as a new lifestyle trend in the regions at the turn of, and during the first decade of, the millennium, whereas it is not something new in the PRC. The publishing dates of these magazine articles also suggest that a similar phenomenon was popular in different regions at different times between the late 1990s and during the 2000s.

<sup>5</sup> Since the late 1970s, China has achieved averaging nearly 10 percent economic growth per year, which has been known as the fastest of any other national economy in the world. Some estimated in the late 1990s that China could become the world's largest economy during the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. See James A. Dorn, "Introduction - China in the New Millennium" in *China in the new millennium: Market Reforms and Social Development*, ed. James A. Dorn (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> John Wong, *The political economy of China's changing relations with Southeast Asia* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), 98.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

provided they lead to a further trade opportunities or business relations.<sup>8</sup> Such is the case with its relations with China ever since 1965 when Singapore became an independent state.

The overall relations between Singapore and China have been influenced by a set of conflicting forces. On the one hand, Singapore has built a close trading relationship with China. On the other hand, the Singaporean government takes a harsh view toward the spread of pro-Chinese sentiments among its ethnic Chinese population, as is evident in the purging of the top executives of the two leading Chinese newspapers in 1971.<sup>9</sup>

Since 1997, Hong Kong, the former British colonial city, has legitimately become a part of the People's Republic of China under the 'One Country Two Systems' principle, which took effect on 1 July 1997.<sup>10</sup> One of the stipulations in this agreement is that the people of Hong Kong rule themselves and also maintain their way of life for fifty years between 1997 and 2047.

Within China, social life and culture are greatly influenced by the rapid growth and development of new technologies such as the Internet and mobile phone networks. It is in such a context that Cultural Revolution imagery has reappeared in new cultural forms and has entered into new cultural practices specific to the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> This reappearance is significant in terms of its complex and multilayered integration with new information technologies in the context of China's rise as an economic power.

This thesis proposes that the cross-cultural practices of recycling Cultural Revolution imagery in popular cultural products in the 2000s should be understood as a social reality that is historically constituted, produced and reproduced.<sup>12</sup> By analysing the practices and images used to constitute and represent reality in the past, drawing on Nick Lacey's idea of an advanced textual

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Y.W. Pang, "Hong Kong and Financial Liberalization in China: Past and Future" in *China in the new millennium: Market Reforms and Social Development*, ed. James A. Dorn (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 1998), 135.

<sup>11</sup> By cultural practice, I adopt a broader definition to include a wide range of social engagement in mass culture in daily life.

<sup>12</sup> David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

analysis, I aim to understand Cultural Revolution imagery in the post-2000 context first of all in the sense that ‘the past is a precursor to the present’.<sup>13</sup> Though people can deliberately change their surrounding social and economic conditions, I recognize that their ability to do so is restrained by various forms of social, cultural and political domination, which are context specific. Thus, I propose that Cultural Revolution popular culture across borders is produced by individuals and groups of different backgrounds, in different locations, yet under the constraint of the macro social, cultural and political circumstances. This project aims to bring to light the particular conditions of this social phenomenon, and therefore, based on the common use of Cultural Revolution imagery in different urban city cultures during the same timeframe (i.e. between 1999 and 2009), I focus on the conflicts and contradictions in China, Hong Kong and Singapore, where the history and people have been under the influence of Cultural Revolution culture (i.e. political pictures and Chinese communist ideologies during the Cultural Revolution period) in specific yet different ways.

Drawing on key concepts in cultural studies, such as signifying practices, representation, articulation and identity, I use Cultural Revolution popular cultural products as ‘media texts’ to understand societies, in particular Chinese societies, and contemporary urban popular cultures in China, Hong Kong and Singapore.<sup>14</sup> At first glance, these cultural products suggest a business strategy that makes use of Chinese revolutionary symbols or images, such as Red Guards, the Little Red Book, Green Military Uniform or portraits of Mao Zedong, most of which were very popular at the time of the Cultural Revolution, for commercial purposes in the post-2000 era. This corresponds to the overall development of global economic and cultural flows as well as the rise of consumerism in Southeast Asia, which characterises the prosperity of Southeast Asian cities and countries since the 1990s.<sup>15</sup> It also refers to the rise of transnational corporations and the

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<sup>13</sup> Nick Lacey, *Image and Representation: Key Concepts in Media Studies*, Second ed. (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 83.

<sup>14</sup> I drew on Nick Lacey’s approach in which he contends that media texts can be used to understand society and they are ‘effective in enabling us to better understand society’ through which we can understand society in the present and in the past. See *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>15</sup> I read such books on the rise of Southeast Asian Chinese states since 1990s as Peter Drysdale, *Reform and recovery in East Asia: the role of the state and economic enterprise* (New York: Routledge, 2000), Gerald Tan, *The economic transformation of Asia* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1997) and Gerald Tan, *Asian Development. Introduction to Economic, Social and Political Change in Asia* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2003).

accelerated global flow of cultures and information assisted by the use of communications technologies.<sup>16</sup>

In such a context, the values and meanings of Cultural Revolution imagery attached to its original place of production and consumption remain significant, yet an extra layer of contemporary cultural meaning of the imagery is also produced in the extended networks beyond its immediate physical locations and historical contexts. I am aware that the distribution of Cultural Revolution posters during the Cultural Revolution was not limited to the national borders of the People's Republic of China. There were posters published in foreign languages to be distributed outside China to promote Chinese Communism. This is further complicated in that 'original production and consumption' not only refers to the original artefacts produced in the 1960s and 1970s but also to the new cultural products/sites which emerged in the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s.

The emergence of a cross-cultural 'Cultural Revolution' popular culture since the late 1990s brings to light a specific cultural juxtaposing, meeting and mixing in contemporary urban cultures in Chinese-dominated Asian societies.<sup>17</sup> While Cultural Revolution imagery remains a significant cultural symbol of the People's Republic of China, the cross-cultural, local-specific arrangement of the imagery in Hong Kong can be understood as a site of struggle between local cultural and political issues and those of mainland China. The use of Cultural Revolution imagery in Singaporean commercial space took place at a time when Singapore was looking for opportunities to improve its economy after the economic crisis. Cultural Revolution cultural products then appeared as consumer goods in Singaporean commercial spaces.

However, such consumer culture is simultaneously constituted by a set of contradictory values as manifest in the differences in cultures and political ideologies of mainland China, Hong Kong and Singapore. Fundamentally, therefore, my aim is to analyse the emergence of Cultural Revolution popular

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<sup>16</sup> I read such books on the rise of corporations and technologies in East Asia since 1990s as Edward J. Lincoln, *East Asian economic regionalism* (Washington D.C.: The Books Institution, 2004) and Axéle Giroud, *Transnational corporations, technology and economic development: backward linkages and knowledge transfer in South East Asia* (Cheltenham and Northampton Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, Third ed. (London: SAGE, 2008), 158.

culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in China, Hong Kong and Singapore. These are regions usually referred to as 'Greater China' with respect to the presence of dominant Chinese populations and social practices, even though Hong Kong and Singapore are former British colonies.<sup>18</sup>

### *Original Contribution*

My analysis of contemporary Cultural Revolution cultural practices/products contributes new perspectives to the historical and political studies of Cultural Revolution pictures. While, as I summarise in later paragraphs, there are a number of works that cover Chinese revolutionary culture in the reform era of China, there have been no significant academic works that focus on the shifting cultural meanings of Cultural Revolution imagery across time, media and cultures.<sup>19</sup> Previous works that relate to the commercialization of Cultural Revolution imagery mainly focus on the practices within China in the pre-2000s context without paying much attention to the impact of new technologies. In an analysis of newly emergent telecommunication virtual consumer items, I reveal the contemporary practice of distributing and consuming Cultural Revolution images via new communication technologies, as a significant cultural phenomenon in China at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>20</sup> More significantly, my

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<sup>18</sup> Wei-Ming Tu, "Cultural China: the periphery as the center" *Daedulus* 120, no. 2 (1991).

<sup>19</sup> Works covering the manifestation of Cultural Revolution culture in the culture of the reform era of China include: Tao, "The Commercialised Revolutionary Culture in Contemporary China" ; Barmé, *Shades of Mao: the posthumous cult of the great leader* Barmé, *In The Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* ; Jiehong Jiang, "Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art" in *Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art*, ed. Jiehong Jiang (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 1-32.

<sup>20</sup> The nationwide distribution of Cultural Revolution imagery during Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China was achieved by mass production of printed posters which could be widely disseminated. I am aware of the Chinese government's overall support to the nationwide development of new technologies since the 1980s. According to the statistical reports of the development of China Internet, there were 2,100,000 Internet users in China in January 1999. The number of Chinese Internet users was drastically increased to 8,900,000 in January 2000 and 22,500,000 in January 2001. The number of users that used mobile telephones or PDA to access to the internet was 200,000 in January 2000, which was increased to 720,000 in January 2001. In early 1999, only 0.7% of total internet users were under the age of 15. But it shows that 2.4% of total internet users were under the age of 16 in early 2000 and 14.93% were under the age of 18 in early 2001. The report released in 2000 shows that over 50% of total internet users could afford to pay below RMB¥100 for accessing to the internet. In 2002, report shows that 70% of internet users actually spent below RMB¥100. These data show that it was not until the early 2000s—at the time when mobile phone and access to the Internet became relatively affordable and the increasing number of young computer literates—that the social use of mobile phones and the internet became prevalent in major urban cities in China. Sources from the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Survey Report published by China Internet Network Information Centre at <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/en/index/00/02/index.htm>.



work uncovers the cross-cultural meanings of Cultural Revolution imagery in Hong Kong and Singapore in which the local residents experienced both British colonial rule and post-colonial cultural developments.<sup>21</sup> This thesis elucidates the different regional social understandings and political meanings of Cultural Revolution imagery across China, Hong Kong and Singapore due to regional differentiation in history and identities. My analysis of contemporary 'Cultural Revolution' cultural phenomena therefore contributes new perspectives to the understanding of Cultural Revolution culture in relation to the conflicts and contradictions within China, and between China and post-colonial Chinese-dominated regions in newly emerging identity formations of the 2000s. When I describe Hong Kong as 'post-colonial', I am aware of the debates on whether the post-1997 situation is in fact a 're-colonisation' by the People's Republic of China,<sup>22</sup> or whether the situation is both a de-colonization and re-colonisation at the same time. However, my focus here refers to a Hong Kong culture, even after 1997, still marked by a British influence, which creates inherent cultural differences in relation to the mainland culture and different social values toward the development of the Hong Kong political system. The reform era of China can be considered as starting from 1978 and is defined by radical changes in national economic and social policies.

I argue that the unprecedented method of distributing former political pictures via telecommunication networks and new information technologies in China's urban context significantly shows how contemporary popular culture is integrated with new technologies as a result of the official Chinese guiding principles of economic and technological growth in a socialist-market economy in

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<sup>21</sup> I recognise the global flow of Cultural Revolution imagery, particularly images of Mao Zedong, outside China other than Hong Kong and Singapore. In London, for example, a series of stationery items including folders, notepads, and pencil cases were printed with some Chinese Cultural Revolution pictures such as Red Guards, Little Red Book and the worker-peasant-soldier depiction of three model social roles, and sold at Paperchase, a chain stationery store in the United Kingdom, in between 2006 and 2007. However, my focus in this work is predominantly the Cultural Revolution imagery in China and Chinese-dominated regions like Singapore and Hong Kong where the city/state had under direct impacts of the original Cultural Revolution culture in its local history in the 1950s and 1960s respectively. I will leave discussion of the global flow of Cultural Revolution imagery in Western cultures for another occasion.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Donald Tsang's policy in 2003 is described as a policy of re-colonization. Sonny Shiu-Hing Lo, *The Dynamics of Beijing-Hong Kong Relations: A Model for Taiwan?* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), 74. Other work that describe Hong Kong post-1997 situation as being 'recolonized' include: Wing-Wah Law, "The Accommodation and Resistance to the Decolonisation, Neo-colonisation and Re-colonisation of Higher Education in Hong Kong" *Comparative Education* 32, no. 2 (1997), 187-209.

the context of rapid socio-economic transformation. Considering how political leaders have publicly announced their support for technological development and the controversies around China's engagement with the internet since the early 2000s, analysis of Cultural Revolution mobile phone pictures is an incisive way to understand the interactions between socialist culture and new technologies.

Through analysing both archival and internet-based materials (i.e. original political pictures from the 1960s and reworked pictures in mobile phone text-messaging consumer items in the 2000s), I observe the ideological conflicts and contradictions between the official guiding principles of the Cultural Revolution and those of contemporary Chinese societies in the post-reform era. This concurs with the observations of scholars such as Tao Dongfeng, Arif Dirlik and Zhang Xudong that the contemporary conditions in China are characterised by the mixing and synchronization of revolutionary culture and post-revolutionary culture, and at the same time is also defined by the contradictions between them.<sup>23</sup>

Informed by primary sources and conversations gathered during my research, I demonstrate that the use of Cultural Revolution imagery in Hong Kong popular consumer culture is closely linked with the socio-political changes in post-2003 Hong Kong. I argue that this can best be understood as a site of struggle through which the relations between HKSAR and the Beijing government in the new millennium can be explored. In the case of Singapore, my research demonstrates that the use of Cultural Revolution imagery in commercial spaces in Singapore in the late 1990s and early 2000s was highly constrained by official surveillance and shaped by the government's ruling policy at the time.

The use of Cultural Revolution imagery is taken as a cultural practice which engages with the shifting relations between China and the post-colonial Chinese-dominated cities in everyday popular culture. Based on my archival research and consideration of a wide range of written sources on the recent histories of China, Hong Kong and Singapore, I argue that the cross-cultural use of Cultural Revolution imagery can be comprehended as a series of overlapping,

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<sup>23</sup> For example, Tao Dongfeng's work on the commercialised revolutionary culture in contemporary China describes the conditions in contemporary China as a 'cultural hybridity' in which 'there are no clear distinctions between high culture and low culture, elite culture and mass culture, modern culture and traditional culture, revolutionary culture and commercial culture, etc.' See Tao, "The Commercialised Revolutionary Culture in Contemporary China", 69. See also Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang, "Introduction: Postmodernism and China" *Boundary 2: Postmodernism & China* 24, no. 3 (1997), 3.

complex and contradictory conditions which cluster around key historical moments.<sup>24</sup> In China, Cultural Revolution imagery is still integrated with day-to-day practices, as illustrated by 'Cultural Revolution' mobile phone pictures, in a context of rapid socio-economic transformation. In Hong Kong and Singapore, Cultural Revolution imagery is the cultural symbol of the mainland Chinese 'Other' through which cultural disjunctures between China and the post-colonial cities can be identified.<sup>25</sup> Thus, at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Cultural Revolution imagery remains an important cultural symbol of revolutionary history within the People's Republic of China and it has also become an emergent symbol of the Chinese cultural 'Other' in places such as Hong Kong and Singapore, where Cultural Revolution imagery is used to construct local identities through exclusions and contestations of the mainland Chinese 'Other'.

### Terms of analysis: concepts and themes

#### *Deconstruction: différance & 'under erasure'*

My understanding of Cultural Revolution imagery in contemporary contexts across cultures is marked by its unfixed and shifting signification. In this thesis, I adopt Jacques Derrida's notion of *différance* to conceptualise the instability of the

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<sup>24</sup> These written sources consulted include, but are not limited to: Zixue Tai, *The Internet in China: Cyberspace and Civil Society* (New York & London: Routledge, 2006); English People's Daily Online, "China's mobile phone users exceeds 600 million", 27 September 2007; Tao, "The Commercialised Revolutionary Culture in Contemporary China"; Wan-Chaw Shae and Pik-Wan Wong, "Popular protest and electioneering in Hong Kong" in *Elections as Popular Culture in Asia*, ed. Beng-huat Chua (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), 38-54; Haipeng Zhou, *Whose Sound and Fury? The 1967 Riots of Hong Kong through The Times* (Purdue University Calumet, 2005 [cited 21 October 2009]); available from <http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/sp05/graduatesp05/gmj-sp05gradref-zhou.htm>; Hualing Fu, Carole J. Petersen, and Simon N.M. Young, eds., *National Security and Fundamental Freedoms: Hong Kong's article 23 Under Scrutiny* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005); Hong Liu and Sin-Kiong Wong, *Singapore Chinese Society in Transition: Business, Politics and Socio-Economic Change 1945-1965* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Dated back in the 1950s and 1960s, Cultural Revolution imagery from China disseminated in Singapore and Hong Kong was mainly associated with the activities of so-called mainland Chinese leftist who reproduced and circulated political pictures from China in Singapore and Hong Kong. Cultural Revolution imagery was originally culture of China which was not part of the local culture in Singapore and Hong Kong. The colonial history of Hong Kong and Singapore prevented the development of a pro-China sentiment among the Chinese citizens in the past. With China reclaimed Hong Kong in 1997 and its closer economic ties with Singapore since the late 1990s, the relations between China, Hong Kong and Singapore have changed. Sources from: Chung Jae Ho and Lo Shiu-hing, "Beijing's Relations With the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region: An Inferential Framework for the Post-1997 Arrangement" *Pacific Affairs*, 68, No. 2 (Summer, 1995), 167-186; Tan Eugene K. B., "Re-Engaging Chineseness: Political, Economic and Cultural Imperatives of Nation-Building in Singapore" *The China Quarterly*, 175 (Sep., 2003), 751-774.

meaning of Cultural Revolution imagery across time, locations and cultures. According to Derrida, the concept of *différance* points to instabilities of cultural meaning since cultural forms are meaningful only in the way they are differentiated from each other or in relation to the other:

one could reconsider all the pairs of opposites on which philosophy is constructed and on which our discourse lives, not in order to see the opposition erase itself but to see what indicates that each of the terms must appear as the *différance* of the other, as the other different and deferred, differing-deferring...<sup>26</sup>

I argue that this concept is not only useful in identifying the different ways of consuming Cultural Revolution imagery by people with different cultural backgrounds; but it is also valuable in pointing out the essence of Cultural Revolutionary imagery within a particular point of origin is an entity open to processes of 'differing' and 'deferring'. To demonstrate how this idea can be applied in real life, John Lechte writes:

in everyday life people readily speak about difference and differences. We say, for instance, that "x" (having a specific quality) is different from "y" (which has another specific quality), and we usually mean that it is possible to enumerate the qualities which make up this difference.<sup>27</sup>

Through this example, Lechte explains why Derrida argues that language can be understood as a system of differences with positive terms because in this dimension language can be perceived and conceptualised.<sup>28</sup> To borrow Derrida's notion of *différance*, I seek to conceptualise the differences in forms, practices and contexts of Cultural Revolution imagery between the past (1966-1976) and in the present (21<sup>st</sup> century). The present as an outcome is a product of the continuous accumulation of meanings which have been added according to experiences and shifting contexts. This is how I understand difference in the sense of a 'deferred' meaning that both 'differs' and 'defers'.<sup>29</sup> I make use of this concept in order to understand the contemporary practices of reproducing and consuming Cultural Revolution imagery as a process of deferral out of which new meanings are

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<sup>26</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Difference" in *Margins of Philosophy*, ed. Alan Bass (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), 17.

<sup>27</sup> John Lechte, *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: from structuralism to postmodernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 107.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>29</sup> Derrida, "Difference", 17.

continually being constructed. Thus, in Derridean terms, the meanings of Cultural Revolution imagery in contemporary practices are 'supplemented' outcomes which suggest that neither the traditional nor the present meanings determine its meaning but rather a combination of the two.<sup>30</sup>

I recognise that to borrow the notion of *différance* means to adopt the Derridean conception of deconstruction as a whole. Deconstruction stresses the 'deferral' which refers to the play and slippage of meaning that is always at work in the process of signification. In this sense, I adopt a reading of Chinese political imagery as 'signs', taken from the concept of 'signifying systems' initiated by Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure argues that meaning is not generated because an object has an intrinsic meaning but because of the differences between signs.<sup>31</sup> According to Saussure, a signifying system refers to the meaning-making system operated by the signifier and the signified.<sup>32</sup>

Nicolas Royle points to a possible application of the Derridean concept of deconstruction to various aspects of culture:

Deconstruction is about difference or otherness, then, and doubtless this helps to explain why it has proved such a popular term for thinking about such broad topics as race, gender, nationality and so on, as well as about literature and art...Deconstruction is not only about acknowledging difference, it is also about being open to being altered in one's encounter with difference. And it is about making a difference, changing the ways we think and what we think, altering the world.<sup>33</sup>

I explore how the shifting meanings of Cultural Revolution imagery can result in the construction of something new. I deliberately make use of Derridean concepts as a way to think about how Cultural Revolution imagery is being 'processed' so that evolving meanings of nationality and identity are made possible. The notion of difference and deferral suggests the productivity of the processes of 'differing' and 'deferring' – the continual addition of meanings – which contributes to the formation of new identities.<sup>34</sup> Stuart Hall proposes a similar argument when he

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<sup>30</sup> Lechte, *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: from structuralism to postmodernity*, 107.

<sup>31</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (London: Peter Owen, 1960), 118.

<sup>32</sup> Lechte, *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: from structuralism to postmodernity*, 151.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholas Royle, "Blind Cinema" in *Screenplay on Essays on the Film: Derrida*, ed. Dick Kirby and Amy Ziering Kofman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 13.

<sup>34</sup> Lechte, *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: from structuralism to postmodernity*, 107.

asserts that cultural identity is organised around points of difference that are in a process of becoming, within a continually shifting set of subject positions, and therefore, its meaning is never finished or completed.<sup>35</sup> The various ways of adapting Cultural Revolution imagery across different Chinese societies can be considered as a process of creating 'points of difference', within a similar set of images (e.g. Cultural Revolution imagery produced in early phase of Cultural Revolution in 1966 and 1976).

I argue that if we are to accept that meanings of Cultural Revolution imagery as unfixed, changing, shifting, situational and relational, we should recognise that it is through a 'temporary closure of meaning' that the phenomena can be grasped for analysis by stabilizing the imagery's meaning at specific historical moments and in specific contexts.<sup>36</sup> For example, the flexibility of Cultural Revolution imagery is such that it appears in posters in the 1960s and then later as mobile phone screens in 21<sup>st</sup> century China. To acknowledge this, my research looks at how the meaning and the role of Cultural Revolution imagery has transformed at different points of 'closure' in order to understand its significance in specific historical moments and contexts.

In other words, meaning in Cultural Revolution imagery is constructed through how it is used in certain regulated ways in which people speak about the world and themselves. While there can be countless recurrences of Cultural Revolution imagery after its original context of production, it becomes instructive and significant through the way the imagery is used and how it relates to a specific historical moment. Thus, I argue that it is crucial to examine why certain imagery recurs, how and where it is mediated, who it is mediated for and when, in order to understand the recycling of Cultural Revolution imagery.

I argue that history should not be ignored even though the phenomenon takes place in a contemporary context. This view is attributed to my belief that previously acquired knowledge bears on the current interpretation of Chinese political posters/images in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Because different communities with distinctive cultural backgrounds understand Cultural Revolution imagery

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<sup>35</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural identity and Diaspora" in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990).

<sup>36</sup> Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasiński, eds., *Cultural studies and discourse analysis: a dialogue on language and identity* (London and Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2001), 43.

differently, an array of meanings is possible. Although I recognise that meanings are unfixed, polysemic and constructed, these considerations led to my decision to analyse the contemporary use of Cultural Revolution imagery in certain unique moments in specific cultures and places. While the region-specific experience of Chinese communist propaganda in history played a part in shaping the cultural experiences of viewers (for example, older generations in Hong Kong experienced Chinese Communist posters during the riots in the 1960s under British colonial rule and had an impact on how they think about their culture and identity). As my research reveals, the use of Cultural Revolution imagery in Hong Kong as symbolising a mainland Chinese 'Other' in the post-2003 context is not completely removed from the history of its original production (i.e. the era of Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China between 1966 and 1976). Instead, the history is deliberately recalled and borrowed to reconstruct a new Hong Kong identity today.

The example of Hong Kong also bears out my use of the Derridean notion of 'erasure' (when a word is written and then crossed out so that both the word and the crossed-out version remain visible).<sup>37</sup> I use this idea to understand the Hong Kong use of Cultural Revolution imagery as a problematic in that it brings up the inherent ideological difference and conflicts between post-colonial Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China. This culture of the 'Other' (i.e. mainland Chinese revolutionary imagery) is reformulated into a new context in contemporary Hong Kong. In this sense, in Derrida's terms, there is 'the necessity of returning to them, at least under erasure' so that certain relevant meanings of the past can be borrowed but at the same time irrelevant meanings (i.e. the outdated, historically specific information) are acknowledged as contradictory due to transformations or changes in circumstance.<sup>38</sup> With my use of the concept of 'erasure', I point to a complex doubling in the use of Cultural Revolution imagery which is complicated by a series of accumulations over time.

The concepts of *différance* and 'erasure' inform my thesis in significant ways. Consistent with these, the recurrence of Cultural Revolution imagery is not

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<sup>37</sup> Jacques Derrida, ed., *Of grammatology* (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), xv.

<sup>38</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Letter to A Japanese Friend" in *Derrida and Différance*, ed. David C. Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Warwick: Parousia, 1985), 3.

a coincidence. Such a recurrence or doubling is considered to be constitutive and can be deconstructed in order to explore new meanings. I argue that there can be two readings of Cultural Revolution imagery in the contemporary context. The first reading is concerned with the fidelity of a faithful reading of the text and following the dominant interpretation (i.e. the reading of these images as cultural products of the People's Republic of China between 1966 and 1976). The second reading is to find out what has changed, what has been excluded, neglected or repressed within the text in the process of creating rearrangements and juxtapositions beyond the original context.

In exploring the cultural meanings of Chinese political posters and imagery with respect to cultural differences, meanings of the images can only be activated when the imagery is seen as a component of context-specific cultural practices involving human interactions, utilizations and forms of consumption. The recycling and consumption of the poster imagery is part of the local culture of the cities in the research. This accords with Hall's notion of culture as 'the actual grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific society.'<sup>39</sup> The cultural practices of using Chinese revolutionary imagery as a representation of 'Communist China', 'the Cultural Revolution' and, in a broader sense, of 'contemporary lifestyles' is located in particular Chinese-dominated urban areas in Asia. These are characterised by their novelty at the moment of consumption, and are grounded practices of a culture which is concerned with, as Barker puts it, 'shared social meanings'.<sup>40</sup> Thus, in order to understand this 'Cultural Revolution' culture it is necessary to comprehend the processes of meaning production in which the imagery gives meaning to virtual and material objects and social practices. This thesis follows Hall's argument that popular culture is an arena of consent and resistance in the struggle over cultural meaning. The use of Chinese political imagery in contemporary popular culture is mainly tied to commercial activities. I follow the notion that popular culture is constituted through the production of popular meaning in the moment of consumption. Such meaning production is a site of contestation over cultural and

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<sup>39</sup> Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity" in *Stuart Hall*, ed. D Morley and D-K Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 439.

<sup>40</sup> Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, Second ed. (London: SAGE, 2003), 7.



political values. Thus it is also a site where cultural hegemony is secured or challenged (as the examples in Singapore and Hong Kong show). This thesis attempts to reveal the power and the place of popular culture within wider social formations in respective locations. For example, this thesis shows that ‘Cultural Revolution’ popular culture in Hong Kong is a site in which opinions on current political issues are strategically expressed, and the special Chinese government’s tolerance is marked.

In cultural studies, the signifying practices of language are the processes where meanings are produced. This approach draws on the work of Saussure. In the current study, Chinese revolutionary imagery and the political slogans could be seen as signifiers. For Saussure, the signifier-signified relationship is arbitrary because there can be unlimited possibilities in the combinations of the signifiers and the signified.<sup>41</sup> However, this arbitrary character is not unproblematic when I applied to my research material. This arbitrariness suggests that meaning is unfixed because it is culturally and historically specific and therefore not universal.<sup>42</sup> But in my findings Chinese revolutionary imagery did carry certain aspects of ‘mainland Chineseness’ with it even when it moved beyond its original temporal and spatial context. For example, Chinese communist propaganda was understood by the Singaporean-British government as a subversive political threat of mainland Chinese communism in the 1950s. In 2004, Chinese teenagers in Beijing used Chinese political imagery produced during Cultural Revolution to represent China’s football team in an international tournament. Both of these examples suggest that Chinese revolutionary culture has been understood as an indicator of ‘mainland Chineseness’ across time and cultural borders.

Roland Barthes’s notion of myth could explain this ‘naturalized’ meaning of Chinese revolutionary culture. For Barthes, myth makes certain meanings appear as unbreakable and exist as if they were natural.<sup>43</sup> Barthes suggests there is a polysemic nature of signs which allows them to carry many possible meanings. This idea is useful in theorising Chinese revolutionary imagery as a carrier of multiple roles and meanings in different cultures and contexts.

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<sup>41</sup> Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 67.

<sup>42</sup> Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 90.

<sup>43</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Cape, 1972).

However, this approach cannot grasp the rich layers of meanings that have ‘accumulated’ in the posters and related imagery. Using the University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection as an example, the purpose of bringing Chinese political posters into the United Kingdom was to form a collection for education and research. Turning the posters into archival objects added a further meaning to their original role as a political tool to promote China. In a sense the new enriched the old in their contemporary role as objects in archives; however, it did not completely remove the original nature of the images as ‘political posters’. As Chris Weedon, Andrew Tolson and Frank Mort argue:

Meaning is no longer fixed outside any textual location or spoken utterance and is always in relation to other textual locations in which signifier has appeared on other occasions. Every articulation of a signifier bears a trace of its previous articulations. There is no fixed transcendental signified, since the meaning of concepts is constantly referred, via the network of traces, to their articulations in other discourses: fixed meaning is constantly deferred.<sup>44</sup>

Thus in this sense, Chinese political posters have become transformed when they appear in museums or exhibitions, yet without their previous meaning as propaganda being in Derridean terms ‘erased’. In this sense, Chinese political posters were given an academic meaning in the context of European education institutions or museums, but whether or not this meaning is received by the viewer, who might see the image within other contexts, is totally unpredictable.

This unpredictability in the generation and circulation of meanings is also illustrated in Derrida’s idea of postcards. Like postcards, Chinese political posters might reach people and generate meanings different from those intended. Thus, the intended communication might be dislocated. This was the result of the Chinese political poster as archival material or museum exhibit in Europe. Interestingly, some Chinese revolutionary images have been reproduced and reworked into postcards by Stefan Landsberger in Amsterdam and Douglas Young in Hong Kong. Although the generation and circulation of these postcards could have been arbitrary, people with previous knowledge could still identify the postcard images as political posters. My point here is that although I accept Derrida’s idea of the relationship between the signifiers and the signified as arbitrary, Chinese political imagery did have more or less fixed meanings and

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<sup>44</sup> Chris Weedon, Andrew Tolson, and Frank Mort, "Introduction to Language Studies at the Centre" in *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. S Hall, et al. (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 199.

uses in practice. I borrow Michel Foucault's concept of discursive practices to explain this dilemma.

Foucault uses the concept of discourse to stress the power of historical conditions and authority in the formation of a set of regulated ways of perceiving objects. As Barker defines the function of Foucauldian discursive formation:

Discourses provide ways of talking about a particular topic with repeated motifs or clusters of ideas, practices and forms of knowledge across a range of sites of activities...A discursive formation is a pattern of discursive events that brings into being a common object across a number of sites.<sup>45</sup>

In this sense, I identified the transformation of Chinese political imagery from modern Chinese political discourse to contemporary Cultural Revolution discourse. In the original context, Chinese political posters were one of the means through which repeated revolutionary images were disseminated. There were also the practices of putting up these posters on the walls of public workplaces and domestic homes. But the posters gradually became detached from these original practices. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Chinese political imagery had become a component of a new discourse in which a narrow range of images and slogans were chosen, repeated and reworked for the urban consumer culture as commodities. In this way, the pattern of utilizing the images in the production and consumption of commodities constructed a new subjectivity through which to experience Chinese political imagery. The Foucauldian notion of discourse and discursive practice is useful in the current research in the sense that it offers a 'place' for meanings to be stabilized or shaped temporarily.<sup>46</sup> But what were the forces behind 'putting together' the poster imagery with contemporary cultural practices? I propose that this combination is best understood through the concept of articulation.

### *Articulation*

I refer to the concept of articulation - 'the formation of a temporary unity between elements that do not have to go together'- in order to theorize the relationship between the signs and practices.<sup>47</sup> The culturally constructed representation of

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<sup>45</sup> Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 102.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 9.

‘Communist China’ with the use of Chinese political imagery was ‘put together’ with the capitalist elements of commodification and consumer culture in Singapore for particular reasons. I explore not only how certain images of the past are brought into new times and spaces, in new material forms, but also how capitalist economics bears on Chinese political imagery. Here I draw on Ernesto Laclau’s idea of articulation. Laclau argues that there is no essential linkage between discursive concepts and they are said to be articulated together due to the power of custom and opinion.<sup>48</sup> For example, Chinese political posters did not have to be associated with museums or collecting practices. They were associated as such because at a certain moment the posters were deemed valuable. As John Gittings recalls there was no better way to engage with local culture in 1970s China than consuming Chinese political posters.<sup>49</sup> The value of the posters was an outcome of the context-specific temporal connection. Hall defines ‘articulation’ as:

the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is the linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? The so-called “unity” of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary “belongingness”.<sup>50</sup>

Based on the same notion, Hall suggests that the ‘unity’ of identity is the articulation of different and separate elements.<sup>51</sup> According to Hall, these elements do not necessarily go together and could be re-articulated in different ways according to other historical and cultural circumstances. In this sense, individuals are the unique historically specific articulation of discursive elements that are contingent but also socially constructed. Under the same logic, ethnic identity is also constructed through the operation of discursive practices and difference. Barker defines ethnicity as a ‘relational’ concept so that ‘what we

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<sup>48</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (London: New Left Books, 1977).

<sup>49</sup> John Gittings, "Excess and Enthusiasm" in *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*, ed. Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald (Lanham, Boulder, New York & Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC., 1999), 27-46.

<sup>50</sup> Stuart Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall" in *Stuart Hall*, ed. D Morley and D-K Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 141.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

think of as our identity is dependent on what we think we are not.<sup>52</sup> I argue that this relational concept helps in exploring why Chinese political imagery was employed in the context of Hong Kong and Singapore. In the late 1990s, Hong Kong and Singapore saw a need to identify themselves in a circumstance when their engagement with China was necessary but at the same time frustrating. There was a need to consolidate its own cultural identity in this situation. The need for signifiers that could signify mainland China as the 'other' pointed them to Chinese political imagery. Thus, the identity formation based on Chinese political imagery as the signifier of China was a highly context-specific outcome which stresses the relational differences (or similarities) between China and Hong Kong/Singapore.

In this thesis, I embrace Laclau and Hall's notion of articulation as a way to adopt the view that the different uses of Chinese political imagery in different contexts (i.e. propaganda in China, collectible in the United Kingdom, commodity in Asia) produces different 'unities' of elements under specific conditions or through a 'temporary stabilization'.<sup>53</sup> This 'unity' or 'stabilization' was significant in the sense that it was unique and context-specific, and would never be the same as another 'unity' elsewhere. To stabilize meaning for further meaning production, Hall argues that a temporary closure of meaning is required.<sup>54</sup> It is because the unlimited possibility of 'unities' could be made. Thus Hall points out that

all the social movements which have tried to transform society and have required the constitution of new subjectivities, have had to accept the necessarily fictional, but also the fictional necessity, of the arbitrary closure which is not the end, but which makes both politics and identity possible.<sup>55</sup>

By the same token, the 'unity' of cultural identities produced in the social practice of utilizing and consuming the posters was the articulation of distinctive elements under specific social, cultural, political and economic conditions. This involved

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<sup>52</sup> Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 250.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>54</sup> Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves" in *Studying Culture*, ed. A. Gray and J. McGuigan (London: Edward Arnold, 1993).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 136-137.

exploring how various contingent elements and practices are connected through the operation of power.

### *Identity and Globalization*

David Buckingham points out some assumptions about the relevance of the concept of identity in understanding young people's engagement with digital media.<sup>56</sup> Buckingham also draws our attention to at least two levels of meanings that the term 'identity' implies. The first is concerned with the individual uniqueness that we propose is more or less consistent over time.<sup>57</sup> This means that each of us is different in society. The second refers to a relationship with a broader collective or social group of some kind. It is about 'identification' with others whom we propose are similar to us (if not exactly the same) at least in some significant way.<sup>58</sup> In this sense, Buckingham's notion of identity implies both similarity and difference depending on our assumption based on a relational association with others. With this, I understand Chinese revolutionary imagery as a visual expression of this relational meaning.

In referring to Hall's notion of identity as a way to understand Chinese revolutionary imagery as a manifestation of cultural similarity and difference, this thesis looks at how Chinese revolutionary imagery is used in certain locations to imply both a cultural uniqueness (i.e. youth oriented digital media in urban China, the regional linguistic features in Hong Kong, and local specific food culture in Singapore) and a relationship between the local with a broader collective group (i.e. the world-wide popularity of the Cultural Revolution thematics as evidenced in Contemporary Chinese art, auction house sales, collecting and other museum practices, and in the presence of Cultural Revolution tourist items in flea markets).

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<sup>56</sup> David Buckingham, "Introducing identity" in *Youth, Identity, And Digital Media*, ed. D. Buckingham (Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

I recognise that globalisation has destabilised the meaning of Chinese political images<sup>59</sup> through the physical movement of the artefacts from their place of origin to other places and their virtual dissemination and circulation. These movements and circulations are closely related to technological transformation in different societies, economies and cultures. The forces of globalisation generate increasingly multi-directional economic, social, cultural and political connections which provide the conditions for Chinese political images to generate an array of differentiated meanings and roles across the world. In this study, Chinese political imagery, imported culture from China, is seen as having been adapted to different 'local' markets. In other words, Chinese political imagery as a facet of the original Chinese political culture of the 1960s has become disembedded from its original location. Thus the concept of globalisation in this thesis refers us to the trajectory of the poster as physically, and subsequently digitally, spreading inside and outside China across time, places and spaces. The transformation of population movements, flow of cultural products and electronic communications has resulted in an intensification of cultural juxtaposing, meeting and mixing. Following Chris Barker, I recognise that contemporary globalisation has increased 'the range of resources available for identity construction'.<sup>60</sup> One of the key means of globalizing the flow of cultures and information is the use of new technologies and digital media.

### **The chapters**

Chapter Two provides a detailed account of the methodology used in this thesis. It explains how I conducted the research and how I draw upon different methods to contend with dynamic situations I came across in the course of the research. It also includes a review of literature. Chapter Three starts by addressing the commodification of Chinese Revolutionary imagery in mobile multimedia pictures in Chinese urban culture. It will show how these pictures are integrated with the digital technology in 21<sup>st</sup> century China. It throws light on the

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<sup>59</sup> Books on the study of globalization I consulted include: Dani Rodrik, *Has globalization gone too far?* (Washington: Institute for International Economics, 1997) Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001); Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Making globalization work* (London and New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006); Mervyn Frost, *Global ethics: anarchy, freedom and international relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009) Manuel Castells, *Communication power* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>60</sup> Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 41.

significance of technology, urbanization and the recurrence of former revolutionary imagery in the contemporary context three decades or more after its original production (1966/1976). It explores the interactions between this contemporary cultural practice and the depoliticisation of the former political imagery through which new subjectivities and new sub-cultural identities are constructed.

Chapter Four examines the ways in which Chinese Revolutionary imagery was used by Hong Kong designers in the post-1997 Hong Kong context of branding initiatives. It provides a brief historical account to clarify the specific experience of Chinese Communist propaganda in Hong Kong during the 1960s. It shows how the people of Hong Kong borrowed certain cultural symbols of the cultural 'Other' (i.e. mainland China) that fit with their experience in order to reconstruct Hong Kong's relation to the mainland. This chapter also analyses the cultural differences and political tensions in post-1997 Hong Kong with respect to its position as a former British colony and its relation with communist China. On the one hand, Hong Kong is a good economic model for China to develop its market economy. On the other hand, the use of Cultural Revolution imagery can be associated to the wider social context of Hong Kong in which there is social dissatisfaction and a mass movement to resist the non-democratic rule of China.

Chapter Five discusses how Chinese Revolutionary imagery was used in commercial spaces in Singapore at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It offers an historical account of the Singaporean government's suppression of Chinese Communist propaganda in the past; but as my research reveals, Cultural Revolution imagery, which was banned in the 1960s, reappeared more recently in a chain of Mao-themed restaurants. This chapter shows how Cultural Revolution imagery was transformed due to the interplay between various political, economic and social forces.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Methodology and Literature Review**

#### **An interdisciplinary methodology**

The research methods I have adopted in this thesis are predominantly shaped by the nature of the research itself which could broadly be described as ‘visual culture’, and more specifically, as the transformations of a set of images through time and into different contexts. As mentioned in the introduction, I propose that contemporary popular culture based on images from the Cultural Revolution is historically constructed, produced and reproduced by people who are themselves shaped and constrained by their environments. Research on this requires an understanding of both historical events and current information that is inherently marked by spontaneity and ephemerality (i.e. popular cultural products, online information and conversations are highly contextual, time specific and can be removed anytime).

This research is informed by a variety of sources which include discussions and archival material. Through an engagement with these my specific research interests and primary sources of Cultural Revolution imagery were established. I devoted a huge amount of energy to collecting and analysing a wide range of texts, including literature on China, Hong Kong and Singapore and works on the history of the Cultural Revolution and Chinese political posters. This material was comprised of published and unpublished documents, government reports, email messages, newspaper and magazine articles. I examined historical narratives and digital material, as well as secondary sources such as literature on the relevant social, cultural and economic developments over time. Together these texts provided a wide range of perspectives from which to explore Cultural Revolution imagery. I also gathered web-based material, some of which were later used as core primary sources for this research.<sup>61</sup> This online research was

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<sup>61</sup> I am aware of the concern about classifying primary and secondary sources. Many sources can be considered either primary or secondary depending on the context in which they are examined. In this thesis, the original Cultural Revolution images in political posters produced in the People's Republic of China during Cultural Revolution are primary sources from archives and collections. When these images are reproduced in the making of new cultural products and sites consumed and integrated in the popular and consumer culture in the 2000s, the new products and sites are classified as further primary.

crucial for tracing the contemporary trajectory of images and information across different locations, and more importantly, to gather primary sources of emergent mobile phone images which are only accessible via the internet. I also obtained plenty of information about Cultural Revolution popular culture products and sites in Hong Kong through participant observation techniques and informal conversations with individuals.

The choice of the sites and the concepts around which I structure this thesis were predominantly based on the key themes that emerged from the empirical materials I collected from both primary and secondary sources. My research interests, the issues I addressed, the encounters with different individuals and textual information I gathered established certain boundaries and limits to my discussion of the practices of recycling Cultural Revolution imagery within a limited time-frame (i.e. 1999-2009). Before fully laying out the methods and techniques, I want to explain the ways in which I classified the sources.

### **Classifying sources**

The empirical material, on which this thesis is based, is categorised as either a primary or secondary source. The distinction between primary and secondary is contextual and needs further clarification due to the multi-layered structure of image-making and issue of reproduction. There are two distinct types of primary sources that I use in this research. The first of these is comprised of artefacts, documents and other sources of information such as daily objects including posters, handkerchief, toys, story books and photographs that were created at the time of the Cultural Revolution during the 1960s and 1970s. I obtained most of these primary sources from the University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection.<sup>62</sup> These materials serve as original sources of information and act as essential reference points from which to uncover the historical links between cultural practices from different contexts. Since the late 1990s, the digital images of Chinese political (propaganda) posters have been reproduced and displayed on websites. These are classified as digital primary sources, which play a similar

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<sup>62</sup> The collection will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. One significant dimension of the archival research is that these sources are geographically distant from the original source of the objects, i.e. University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection houses posters textual materials and visual objects from the 1960s and 1970s China.

role to the physical primary sources from physical collections. This source of material can be retrieved via the internet as long as these materials remain on the relevant websites. I used the online resources of the University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection<sup>63</sup> and Stefan Landsberger's Chinese Propaganda Poster Pages<sup>64</sup> to trace the original sources of images used in contemporary cultural products.

The second type of primary source refers to those cultural products or sites in which the original images or artefacts function beyond their original context of production. Such primary sources include contemporary cultural products and sites, both physical and virtual. The physical products and spaces I gathered or visited in Hong Kong are classified as primary sources. These cultural products and sites are the core source of this research through which the contemporary practices of recycling and consuming Cultural Revolution imagery can be explored. The virtual primary sources I used in this research include mobile phone pictures and photographs circulated via Chinese websites on the Internet, and company website of the theme restaurant in Singapore. With respect to mobile phone pictures produced in China, online research is the only way to access these recent 'hi-tech' cultural products.<sup>65</sup> As the form of this cultural product is intrinsically virtual and digital, these mobile phone pictures and the websites where these pictures are advertised are considered to be primary sources. The House of Mao restaurant in Singapore was closed down in early 2003 before this research commenced in November 2003, therefore the websites of the corporation and the designer serve as primary sources in this research. I made the decision not to exclude it because the emergence of this theme restaurant in Singapore between 1999 and 2003 added a significant dimension to my research. This was ostensibly the first Mao restaurant in Singapore and it was widely advertised.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Accessible at [www.china-posters.org/](http://www.china-posters.org/) and [www.home.wmin.ac.uk/china\\_posters/](http://www.home.wmin.ac.uk/china_posters/)

<sup>64</sup> Available at [www.iisg.nl/landsberger/](http://www.iisg.nl/landsberger/)

<sup>65</sup> Though these products can be seen via the websites, only the subscribers of Chinese mobile phone networks residing within mainland China (excluding Hong Kong) can download these products, which presented a methodological challenge and limited my engagement with the material to the web.

<sup>66</sup> House of Mao restaurant was written about as a novelty in *ID Magazine* in Singapore in April 1998, in *Space Magazine* in Singapore in October/November 1998, and in *Expat Magazine* in Singapore in February 1999.

The secondary sources I used in this research refer to any sources which offer analysis, interpretation or evaluation of the original information. These include articles in popular magazines and literature on the Cultural Revolution and major studies on China, Hong Kong and Singapore. Popular magazines which reported and commented on the cultural products and sites in Hong Kong and Singapore are considered as secondary sources since these provide generalised and subjective accounts of the phenomena. Publications and academic works on the study of China, Hong Kong and Singapore are secondary sources because these are analyses of past events or phenomena. Exhibitions of Chinese political (propaganda) posters are classified as secondary sources important in the contemporary circulation and display of the original artefacts that I visited during my research.

The online conversations and email messages with Ed Poole, the designer of Mao restaurants in Singapore are also considered as further sources providing information of a past and irretrievable event, and these are, practically speaking, the closest I could come to the original source. Exhibitions of Cultural Revolution relics and literature on the history of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, which provide current interpretations of relics and historical details of events, are also considered as important sources. Informal conversations and discussions I had with the owner of the People's Recreation Community and the designer of G.O.D. in Hong Kong during my fieldwork are also important sources for understanding decision-making in the design process.

### **Research structure, methods & techniques**

In this section I describe how the thesis is structured, the ways in which I gathered data for analysis, and the methods and techniques I adopted in the process of the research. The structure of this thesis in terms of choice of location is informed by the nature of Chinese political posters as objects which 'travel' through times and spaces.<sup>67</sup> Besides using the original source of images from poster collections, the primary sources of this research are cultural products and sites which draw on

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<sup>67</sup> The founding of University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection in London is a manifestation of the physical movements of artefacts from China to Europe. The viewing of these artefacts in a context beyond their original time of production marks the passage of time and transforming meanings of these artefacts in a different era.

Cultural Revolution images in their production in the new millennium. I gathered these primary sources in various specific ways. The methods and techniques I used include archival research and exhibition visits, informal discussions and conversations, observation techniques such as participant observation, online research via the Internet, as well as reading and analysing a wide range of written sources.

My research interests and conceptual ideas on this topic were established first of all through my archival research and exhibition visits in London — far from the object of research — during which I encountered the first group of Hong Kong students with whom I had informal discussions. In adopting this approach to Chinese political posters as an object of study, I primarily drew on Derrida's idea of postcards and postal systems, that meanings can never be fixed since 'meanings circulate without any absolutely authorized source or destination' due to the mobility of postcards, and also following Roland Barthes's idea of polysemic signs in which 'signs carry many potential meanings' and therefore 'texts can be interpreted in a number of different ways.'<sup>68</sup> With this, I understand archival objects based on the idea that 'it is the readers of texts who temporally "fix" meaning for particular purposes' therefore 'interpretation of texts depends on the readers' cultural repertoire and knowledge of social codes.'<sup>69</sup> Such an approach requires analysis both of the artefact itself and social experience of these images and objects in real life, which vary from individual to individual and across cultures and contexts. This approach also requires particular attention to any changes in the meanings of images and objects across time and place. I approach each of these dimensions in specific ways. First of all, I consider the existing location of the artefacts within a trajectory that moves through time and place, and which uncovers an aspect of Cultural Revolution imagery posited within the global flow of culture; thus informing my study of Cultural Revolution imagery as a topic of area studies. I regard the artefacts as specific cultural products through which wider cultural, social and political circumstances of a specific time can be explored. I use the different kinds of cultural products

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<sup>68</sup> Quotes from Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 94 and 98.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 94.

produced in different historical moments to structure the thesis with an aim to reveal the interactions between cultural forms, cultures and histories.

I treat Cultural Revolution imagery as ‘texts’ which are interpreted by different groups, and in doing so, highlight the tensions in cultural differences between Hong Kong and mainland China in the post-handover era. Inspired by my first visit to the Chinese Poster Collection in London and my discussions with Hong Kong students, I study Cultural Revolution imagery through certain themes such as British colonialism in Asian Chinese regions such as Hong Kong and Singapore.

My fieldwork and online activities offered me plenty of chances to talk to people, obtain consumer items, engage with the real life situation, access new digital products and revisit consumer products of the past. These activities availed the substantive data for this thesis. My initial approach was triggered by early informal discussions and archival research on Cultural Revolution images; and the choice of locations for fieldwork was informed by my analysis of the artefacts as objects that ‘travel’ through social practices, and certain themes emerged from my informal discussions with different individuals, such as my initial encounter with the collection at the University of Westminster.<sup>70</sup> My fieldwork gave me the opportunity to gather most of the data for Chapter Three and some information for Chapter Two and Chapter Four. I had numerous informal conversations, some interviews and observed a wide range of everyday practices in diverse environments, including exhibitions of Hong Kong culture and history in museums, communal areas and university libraries, shopping malls in the commercial and business districts in Hong Kong and Singapore, contemporary art galleries in central business districts, street corners of major commercial districts, chain-stores selling lifestyle products, and small shops with trendy popular cultural products. These spaces were full of urban consumers and young individuals. However when we acknowledge that Cultural Revolution

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<sup>70</sup> My first encounter with Chinese political posters took place in a scheduled visit to the University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection in the summer of 2003. I was with a number of students from Lingnan University of Hong Kong visiting the posters in Collection. This visit was significant to the current research because it was the particular moment that a group of young Hong Kong Chinese activated the meaning of the poster from a cultural perspective which was complicated by the blurred boundary between the post-colonial British cultural legacy and the post-1997 political influence of the People’s Republic of China on Hong Kong. The People’s Republic of China officially reclaimed Hong Kong as part of the territory on 1 July 1997.

imagery was first produced and consumed in the 1960s and the original target viewers of that generation are now mostly in their fifties or older, it is clear that there is a major difference between how the two different generations understand the same set of images.

Most of my particular observations, informal conversations and interviews with individuals came from two major sources: working in the arts and culture sector, and visiting a wide range of local cultural and commercial spaces. I worked in a Chinese furniture store in a high-end shopping mall and an antique Asian fine art shop in Hong Kong. This job offered me significant opportunities for getting to know some of the key individuals in this area of research including the specialist of Contemporary Asian Art Department at Sotheby's Hong Kong and the CEO and Design Director of G.O.D. In my visit to an upstairs business space in Causeway Bay I met the owner of the People's Recreation Community who is also the designer of most of the Cultural Revolution products in the shop. My job and connections also allowed me to visit some commercial art galleries in Hong Kong which trade in contemporary Chinese art inspired by the history and culture of the Cultural Revolution.

My countless informal conversations and interviews with these individuals serve as important sources of information for this research. In the informal conversations I had, no predetermined questions were asked in order to remain as open and adaptable as possible to the interviewees' background and priorities. However, I recognise that the place where the conversations took place, i.e. in art galleries which buy and sell contemporary Chinese art and inside the shops owned by the interviewees, may have indirectly shaped the topics discussed. I conducted three interviews with the three individuals mentioned above respectively during my fieldwork in Hong Kong. These interviews were semi-structured and open-ended with a similar set of open-ended questions were asked to all interviewees in order to facilitate faster interviews that can be more easily analyzed and compared.<sup>71</sup> My interview questions for the designers had the general goal of

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<sup>71</sup> In formulating the ideas for these interviews, I also drew upon my knowledge and experience gained from a qualitative research training course which provided practice in applying qualitative research theory to practical situations. Due to the different professional backgrounds of the individuals, it was not possible to formulate a set of standardized questions for all of them. Questions about design logic and the popularity of products were posed to designers, whereas questions about general trends in art scenes were posed to the Chinese art specialist from Sotheby's Hong Kong.

revealing the interactions between design, culture and politics, as well as showing the gap between current Hong Kong culture and Cultural Revolution culture. In adopting this approach, I drew on Hall's argument in which he contends that popular culture could be a site of consent *and* resistance in the struggle over cultural meanings.<sup>72</sup> To tie in Hall's concept, I also quote from Geremie R. Barmé, that 'unbridgeable gap between those who had lived through the Mao years and those who had not' and 'the [Mao] Cult provided a common ground and a hazy realm of consensus in a society in which the generation gap was increasingly making its impact felt' to understand Hong Kong's situation as being different from China.<sup>73</sup> However in using this semi-structured approach, I attempted to make these interviews as open and adaptable as possible to deepen the scope of my overall understanding and enrich my view of the field. For the online of the conversations and interviews I applied the same approach. I found that both formal and informal conversations provided fruitful insights. The more formal interviews produced significant information concerning the design logic behind the cultural products, which could not be obtained otherwise from other sources. Yet, the informal conversations yielded more unguarded and spontaneous insights. These conversations and interviews significantly enlighten the arguments in Chapter Three where I discuss Cultural Revolution popular culture in relation to the shaping of Hong Kong cultural identity.

#### *Museums and exhibition visits*

Altogether I visited nine museums in Hong Kong, Beijing, Guangzhou and Singapore respectively, during which I made participant observations, had informal conversations with countless people during which I made participant

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<sup>72</sup> Stuart Hall, "Culture, the Media and the Ideological Effect" in *Mass Communications and Society*, ed. J Curran, M Gurevitch, and J Woolacott (London: Edward Arnold, 1977); Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity" Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" in *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. S Hall, et al. (London: Hutchinson, 1981).

<sup>73</sup> Barmé, *Shades of Mao: the posthumous cult of the great leader*, 48.



observations and had informal conversations with countless people.<sup>74</sup> Among the museums I visited were the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, the Hong Kong Museum of History, the Hong Kong Museum of Art, G.O.D. Street Culture Museum, the National Museum of China, China Fine Arts Gallery, the Guangdong Museum of Fine Arts, the National Museum of Singapore and the Asian Civilizations Museum.<sup>75</sup> The information about the history and cultural practices of the past in each of these localities informs the background knowledge that is so crucial to this research, through which comparisons and contrasts across time and cultures are made possible. I also visited exhibitions that held Cultural Revolution relics in the United Kingdom.<sup>76</sup> I assisted intensively in curating an exhibition of Cultural Revolution imagery called *The Political Body* in which around thirty original Chinese political posters between the 1950s and 1970s were faithfully reproduced for gallery display and also used in the exhibition catalogue.<sup>77</sup> I also conducted three gallery talks at the exhibition which enabled me to hear how visitors from different backgrounds thought about the posters.

These experiences and exhibition visits informed my research in a number of ways. First, the exhibitions in the United Kingdom demonstrated the value of

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<sup>74</sup> The exhibitions of Hong Kong cultures and history I visited include: “The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947–1957” (30 May 2009 - 28 September 2009), “The Ancient Olympic Games” (3 August 2008 - 24 November 2008), “Riding a Melodic Tide – The Development of Cantopop in Hong Kong” (11 November 2007 - 4 August 2008), “Fashion Attitude – Hong Kong Fashion Design” (19 August 2007 - 31 March 2008) and “Beyond the Museum: Hong Kong Toys” (8 May 2007 - 2 July 2007) of Hong Kong Heritage Museum; “Louis Vuitton: A Passion For Creation” (22 May 2009 – 9 August 2009) of Hong Kong Museum of Art; “Impressions of the East: The Art of George Chinnery” and “East Meets West: Cultural Relics from the Pearl River Delta Region” (2005) of Hong Kong Museum of History; Singapore Biennale 2006 (4 SEPT 2006 - 12 NOV 2006) of National Museum of Singapore.

<sup>75</sup> The address of the museums I visited: Hong Kong Heritage Museum, 1 Man Lam Road, Sha Tin, Hong Kong; Hong Kong Museum of History, 100 Chatham Road South, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon, Hong Kong; Hong Kong Museum of Art, 10 Salisbury Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon, Hong Kong; G.O.D. Street Culture Museum, JCCAC L2-06, 30 Pak Tin Street, Shek Kit Mei, Hong Kong; China Fine Arts Gallery, Beijing City, Dongcheng District, May 4th street, #1, The People's Republic of China; Guangdong Museum of Fine Arts, 38 Yanyu Road, Er-sha Island, Guangzhou, the People's Republic of China; National Museum of Singapore, 93 Stamford Road Singapore 178897; Asian Civilizations Museum, 1 Empress Place Singapore 179555.

<sup>76</sup> The exhibitions of Chinese political posters in the UK that I visited include Art for the Masses: Revolutionary Art of the Mao Zedong Era 1950-1976 held at National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, UK (May 2003-March 2004) and the Political Body: Posters from the People's Republic of China in the 1960s and 1970s at Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London (April – June 2004). The latter was an exhibition I assisted with its production. There is also an exhibition of Mao badges called Icons of Revolution: Mao badges then and now organized by The British Museum (9<sup>th</sup> April and 14<sup>th</sup> September 2008).

<sup>77</sup> The Political Body: Posters from the People's Republic of China in the 1960s and 1970s (15 April – 25 June, 2004), Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. It was curated by Katie Hill. It also toured at Oriental Museum, Durham (16 Jan-17 Mar, 2005) and Museum of East Asian Art, Bath (26 Apr-14 Aug, 2005).

Cultural Revolution objects, and related history, as a subject for study in European culture. Second, the rather brief and general, if not completely absent, information on Cultural Revolution culture and history given in museums in China, Hong Kong and Singapore that I observed during my visits created a significant point of comparison with the many more exhibitions of Cultural Revolution relics held in the United Kingdom. My museum visits in general highlighted the significance of the cross-cultural dimension of using Cultural Revolution relics and their related history, and the extent to which their meanings are context-specific.

In addition to the more structured visits to galleries and museums, I also spent much of my time as a participant observer holding informal conversations with consumers of Cultural Revolution popular cultural products in the street and customers in the Cultural Revolution theme café, vendors and consumers in street markets such as Panjiayuan Market in Beijing, Huahan Antiques and Jade Market in Guangzhou, and speaking with people in the Mao memorabilia shop in Lascar Row in Hong Kong. I had casual conversations in many situations and noted down those responses that differed from existing findings. I used the information gathered from these observations and conversations to inform my argument about the Cultural Revolution popular culture as urban, touristic, and youth-oriented.

In this early phase of my research, I closely studied a large number of political posters (*xuanchuanhua*) at the Poster Collection at the University of Westminster.<sup>78</sup> Through this careful examination, I identified patterns, themes and artistic styles in pictures produced in specific periods and contexts.<sup>79</sup> I drew on John Gittings's experience and knowledge that 'Chinese posters and similar art forms during the Cultural Revolution and afterwards were closely related to current political and social themes, which often had a very short life span.'<sup>80</sup> I identified key visual features of posters produced at a specific time to support my

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<sup>78</sup> In the years between 2003 and 2006 I examined around seven hundred posters stored in the University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection. The collection at that time located at 100 Park Village East NW1 in the Centre of the Study of Democracy.

<sup>79</sup> For example, the images which became the key part of my research were mostly taken from those produced at the outset of the Cultural Revolution (1966-67).

<sup>80</sup> Gittings, "Excess and Enthusiasm" 27-46.

research argument regarding the selective use of Cultural Revolution imagery in the urban contemporary phenomenon.

Apart from examining the posters themselves as primary sources of research, I also recognised the Collection at the University of Westminster as an aspect of British colonialism in recent history. By considering Chinese political posters as an object of research and study, I also came to see the role and nature of collections in the United Kingdom as a product of globalisation and a site where ‘new’ subjectivities were formed. Gittings, founder of the Chinese Poster Collection, saw Chinese propaganda posters as valuable sources through which to understand China at a time when travelling in China was much more restricted than as it is now.<sup>81</sup> Gittings began the collection when he first visited China in 1971. The collection itself was a result of a global flow of culture, cultural objects and images. The cultural meaning of the posters as archival materials in Europe is this utilized, organised and shaped by institutional practices and the way intellectuals have framed different ways of seeing. The exhibition ‘Political Art and Popular Culture in China’ held at the Regent Street building of PCL in April 1979 was one of the first exhibitions of Chinese political posters at the time. The posters had been widely used as teaching materials in Chinese language classes.

With his Chinese Visual Arts Project at the Polytechnic of Central London (PCL), Gittings was playing a role in actively using the posters in the collection as objects for education and research.<sup>82</sup> In November 2005, I visited Stefan Landsberger’s Chinese propaganda poster collection in the Netherlands.<sup>83</sup> This collection was housed at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. Landsberger, the collector and founder of the collection, also saw the posters as good examples of illustration history for teaching and research purposes. Here I recognised the relationship of culture and power in the domains

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<sup>81</sup> Gittings travelled to China towards the end of Cultural Revolution in the early 1970s. After working as a lecturer at Central London Polytechnic (later become the University of Westminster) Gittings became the China correspondent of The Guardian Newspaper for many years. *See Ibid.*, 27-46.

<sup>82</sup> In the Chinese Poster Collection, documents of Chinese Visual Arts project mentioned poster exhibitions as a way to engage students of Chinese studies with the subject of Chinese political art. Materials such as photographic slides and photographs on cardboards are also held in the collection used as teaching materials for Chinese studies by teachers at the former Polytechnic of Central London (today’s University of Westminster).

<sup>83</sup> Stefan Landsberger’s Chinese propaganda poster collection is a private collection which is physically preserved using the technology available at International Institute of Social History, Cruquiusweg 31 1019 AT Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

of culture (i.e. education and museums) in the sense that cultures of the ‘Other’ were still utilized in the formation of ‘new’ subjectivities. This understanding of the collections and exhibitions raised questions about the different roles and cultural meanings of propaganda of China in the past across time and space. In looking at the poster as an object of study by British colonial powers attempting to understand China, I developed an interest in focusing on the relationship between the Chinese cities influenced by British colonialism and Chinese revolutionary culture, which in turn led to my eventual structuring of my thesis into the relevant locations.

### *Online research*

In addition to conducting research on the artefacts in physical spaces, I devoted considerable energy into gathering internet-based material as a primary source. My web-based research aimed at exploring the online circulation and consumption of Chinese revolutionary imagery in contemporary Chinese culture. Using the Internet I obtained the major primary source of new digital cultural products that are specific to the post-2000 era in China. In adopting this approach, I drew on the reports published by the China Internet Network Information Centre that provided statistics that pointed to the rapid development of new information technologies and their increasing social prevalence in China particularly since the early 2000s.<sup>84</sup> The reports also indicated the important role new information technologies, such as the Internet and telecommunication devices, plays in contemporary Chinese urban culture. Therefore, when I used the internet as a research tool I wanted to explore any new technological forms of circulation of Cultural Revolution imagery.

Such an approach requires a concerted effort to engage regularly with online discussions and information, both social and political, regarding the popular use of Cultural Revolution culture. I looked into countless Chinese, Hong Kong and Singaporean websites such as blogs, online magazines, news, etc. in relation to local new technological products and cultural trends. At the same time

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<sup>84</sup> Reports I have read include, but are not limited to, the following: Internet Statistics, *The 5th Survey Report* (China Internet Network Information Center, 2000 [cited 15 June 2009]); available from <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/download/manual/en-reports/5.pdf>; Internet Statistics, *The 9th Survey Report* [Online] (China Internet Network Information Center, 2002 [cited 15 April 2009]); available from <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/download/manual/en-reports/9.pdf>.

I also paid attention to any kind of circulation and consumption outside Chinese, Hong Kong and Singaporean cultures. With this, I am aware of the nature of the Internet via the World Wide Web is not free from censorship exercised by governments of different countries. Although I am able to access different cross-cultural information via the World Wide Web (hereafter referred to as ‘the web’), it does not necessarily mean that the web leads to a homogeneous way of consuming the same set of materials.

For example, Chinese mobile phone pictures produced by local internet service providers for mainland Chinese subscribers are not available for people outside China to download. I used the internet as follow-up device to further investigate sources gathered by other research techniques, to explore linkage between the sources and cultures and to obtain the most up-to-date information. In adopting the internet, my choice of search engines attended to the fact that certain search engines, which are written in local language, may be better suited than others in accessing local-specific information. I recognised that certain search engines and cultural practices were more popular in certain regions and some search engines were exclusively for local information. I attempted to cover as many search engines as possible and carry out keyword searches in both Chinese and English on certain search engines to research particular locations. These included Yahoo, Google, MSN, AOL and ASK because these were the five most common search engines on the Internet in general. Specific to my research on China and Hong Kong, there are eighteen search engines which cover 90% of consumption of the market in these respective areas.<sup>85</sup> The local search engine [www.singaporesearchengine.com](http://www.singaporesearchengine.com) was particularly useful for researching Singaporean culture. I particularly looked at the ways in which people engaged with the imagery. I carried out keyword searches, including ‘Chinese propaganda’, ‘Cultural Revolution’ and ‘Chinese political art’, using over twenty search engines in the years between 2004 and 2009. I looked for the imagery according to the above keywords by using the ‘image search’ function available in

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<sup>85</sup> The search engines for my research on China and Hong Kong included: [www.baidu.com](http://www.baidu.com), [search.china.com/search](http://search.china.com/search), [www.google.com/CN](http://www.google.com/CN), [so.163.com](http://so.163.com), [www.msn.com.cn](http://www.msn.com.cn), [www.yisou.com](http://www.yisou.com), [cha.sina.com.cn](http://cha.sina.com.cn), [cn.search.yahoo.com](http://cn.search.yahoo.com), [dir.sogou.com](http://dir.sogou.com), [i.tom.com](http://i.tom.com), [www.zhongsou.com](http://www.zhongsou.com), [search.msn.com.hk](http://search.msn.com.hk), [www.google.com.hk](http://www.google.com.hk), [cd.openfind.com.tw/HK](http://cd.openfind.com.tw/HK), [timway.com/main.php](http://timway.com/main.php), [search.sina.com.hk](http://search.sina.com.hk), [hk.search.yahoo.com](http://hk.search.yahoo.com), [www.y28.com/index.php](http://www.y28.com/index.php).

the search engines. This was useful to find out different kinds of practices that had involved or cross-cut the circulation of Chinese revolutionary imagery.

My online research was not without difficulties. Since the information circulated on the Internet is highly reflected of the most heated topics at any given time, resulting in a situation where the life of each search result could be very short. It was meant to be so in order to keep the information as current as possible. This brevity of existence was a constraint on making a critical analysis of any kind of Chinese political poster consumption singularly or in constellation as a trend or a lifestyle. The problem was that by the time I retrieved certain searches, the object of the search might have been removed from the Internet because it was already seen as old and unfashionable. This ephemeral character of online existence, and the abundant variety of information available on the Internet, made it almost impossible to track down all transactions in relation to Cultural Revolution imagery. This limitation of online research partly informs the overall research methodology of this thesis, which focuses on the study of Cultural Revolution imagery in specific periods of time in particular places or spaces. Even though online information can be gone anytime, its temporary emergence suggests its significance under specific environments.

The brevity of existence of certain findings and the relatively long life of others could be the indicators of the latest cultural role of Cultural Revolution imagery or posters at that moment. In general, the short/long life of certain online cultural practices in relation to the utilization and consumption Chinese revolutionary imagery made it unavoidable that this thesis itself was by definition 'historical'. In addition, the nature of an online research itself is already limited to looking at the specific groups of 'netizens' who had the privilege to access new information technologies. I also recognised that the prevalence of Internet usage was predominantly an urban phenomenon. As Barker points out, 'cities are the electronic hubs of a new global information economy' and 'urban areas are the nodal points of social, technological, cultural and economic networks'.<sup>86</sup>

What Barker describes here was particularly true to the rapid development of new information and telecommunication technologies in China since 1990s. From the year 2000 onwards, there had been a dramatic increase in the number of

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<sup>86</sup> Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 369.

mobile phone and Internet users. This unprecedented phenomenon marked a typical context-specific feature of China's urban city culture in the 2000s. Thus, the newly emerged information and mobile telecommunication technologies in China in the 2000s were of particular cultural significance which could be not compared to other places, particularly in the Western world, where such technologies had already been integrated with the local cultural practices for a much longer time.

I use my analysis of web-based materials to reveal that there was a particular way of circulating and consuming Chinese revolutionary imagery in Chinese urban communities which was not as common in Hong Kong and Singapore. For example, there are many specific websites in China which at the same time disseminate news of current political, social, cultural and technological issues as well as provide a large quantity of digital items that can be downloaded; while there are not as many similar websites in Hong Kong and Singapore.<sup>87</sup>

It was a highly context-specific phenomenon in China in 2004 at the time when mobile phone text messaging had become socially prevalent in urban cities which had never happened in China before. Multimedia virtual message products were available in China for the first time in 2002 when a number of internet service providers emerged. Comparatively speaking, the use of the Internet and mobile phones had long been prevalent in Hong Kong and Singapore. However similar kinds of mobile phone multimedia products were not as popular in Hong Kong and Singapore at that specific period of time. Moving images were commonly downloaded from the internet to computers, but not to mobile phones. In my examination of the websites of multimedia virtual product providers in China, such as tom.com, caishou and sohu, Chinese revolutionary images were digitally reproduced and appropriated into MMS products. This service was only available for mainland Chinese mobile phone users (excluding Hong Kong).

This finding was decisive because it proved, once more, the ways in which people consumed Chinese revolutionary imagery were not necessarily the same in different Chinese-dominated places. This was significant for the research in the way that it revealed differences in how the imagery was engaged and thus how particular cultural meanings were formed in local cultures. More significantly,

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<sup>87</sup> Websites in China which provide mobile phone pictures usually provide thousands of downloadable entertainment items. For an example of websites please refer to those mentioned earlier in footnote 79.

this research on contemporary cultural practices in the ‘new’ China, and capitalist Chinese cities like Hong Kong and Singapore, could explore the particular layer of cultural meaning of Chinese revolution imagery that was absent or inapplicable in the Western world. As mentioned earlier, this research was initiated by a context-specific tension and contradiction between Hong Kong and mainland Chinese cultures. This made the local Hong Kong consumption of mainland Chinese cultural symbols in the 2000s a site of contestation and negotiation. Interestingly, by the time Cultural Revolution images emerged in China as fashionable MMS pictures, Cultural Revolution images also appeared in Hong Kong as tourist souvenirs and lifestyle products or spaces. The ‘Cultural Revolution’ trend in China and Hong Kong consumer culture kicked off at the time when the famous ‘Mao’ theme restaurant in Singapore closed down in 2003. This ‘Mao’ restaurant was the first of its kind in Singapore when it opened in 1998. All these similar yet local-specific phenomena took place at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in China, Hong Kong and Singapore in a way that showed a pattern which was context-specific to urban Chinese-dominated city cultures in Asia. This pattern itself was a novelty because Chinese communist culture had been seen as ‘negative’ and ‘inapplicable’ to the economic growth based on capitalist ideology.

### *My personal journey*

My encounter with the Chinese Poster Collection at the University of Westminster and the undergraduate students from Hong Kong opened me to the changeable nature of the meanings of Chinese political posters when they appeared as artefacts. The students’ response, from a Hong Kong perspective in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, offered me an alternative reading, which was distinct from the angle offered by many books on the history of Cultural Revolution art from the mainland or Western perspectives. Nicholas Royle’s essay ‘Blind Cinema’ in *Screenplay and Essays on the Film: Derrida*, which paved the way for certain ideas in this thesis, addresses the unpredictability of the shifting meaning of a particular image or moment:

There is no deconstruction without surprise. When does it happen? Integral to Derrida’s thinking about the ghostly and unforeseeable is a logic of delayed effect, deferred meaning, after-effect or in French *après coup*. Deconstruction involves thinking in terms



of a sort of time-bomb. You never know when or how the meaning or significance of a particular image or moment in “real life”, or in a film, might emerge or change.<sup>88</sup>

A particular image can be in a different form, in a different time and space, and this determines how the meanings of an image will transform. This aroused my interest in how the meanings of Chinese communist propaganda are changed after three decades or more in the same place of production, and paved the way for my study of Cultural Revolution imagery in 21<sup>st</sup> century Hong Kong and Singaporean popular cultures.

Hong Kong and Singapore are both Chinese-dominated city-states which share a lot in common. For example, the majority population in both cities is the ethnically Chinese, whose ancestors originally came from mainland China. The cities are both former British colonies. British colonial rule and its aftermath were influential in establishing and consolidating the capitalist economies of Southeast Asian cities which continued in the post-colonial era. Hong Kong and Singapore both had unique but similar experiences with the spread of Chinese ‘Maoist’ communist propaganda under the suppression of the British government. This had a considerable impact on the development of the local sense of awareness among the settlers in Hong Kong and Singapore. The unique founding history of the Republic of Singapore was closely related to the Chinese student and labour movements which were believed to be supported by the Chinese Communist Party. The point here is that the historical connection with Chinese political imagery in Singaporean culture might have an impact on how the people viewed the imagery in the late 1990s/early 2000s.

My research on the historical and cultural connections between China, Hong Kong and Singapore, the history of Chinese revolutionary posters, and cultural theory was further developed by extensive consideration of texts from the Southeast Asian, China and Hong Kong sections in the libraries. The libraries I visited included the British Library, and university libraries in the United Kingdom and Hong Kong such as the School of Oriental and African Studies, the University of London, the University of Hong Kong, and the Baptist University. To view television programmes and films about the riots in Hong Kong in the 1960s, produced by the British Colonial government, I visited the Hong Kong Film Archive once a week from August to October in 2009. These visits gave me

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<sup>88</sup> Royle, "Blind Cinema", 12.

general background information on the Hong Kong and Singaporean film industries. Through this, I realised a close relationship between Hong Kong and Singapore in terms of the connections between the Shaw's Brothers film studios in the respective cities, but only a few film co-productions could be found between Hong Kong and China. These visits offered me a basic understanding of the three places in terms of local culture, history and the movement of culture and people between these places.

This research was initiated by a tension I experienced when looking, from a post-1997 Hong Kong perspective, at a Chinese political poster made by a Maoist in Hong Kong in the 1960s. With this I recognised that Cultural Revolution imagery was meaningful in the sense that it marked the context-specific cultural meaning of the poster in relation to Hong Kong identity in the year of 2003.

Any methodology necessarily has its own limitations. My choice of research methods and techniques, as well as my encounters with empirical materials, limited the themes and cultural forms I discuss in this thesis. The choice of geographical locations, the principle of looking at contemporary circulation of Cultural Revolution imagery in its origin of production, and in locations which have been influenced by both the spread of Chinese communist ideologies and British colonial rule restricted the locations I discuss. From the vast number of possible images, I generally selected the most repetitive images, which may restrict other less repetitive images to be fully discussed in current study. Inevitably, the materials I found were not and could not be comprehensive. Some data was not obtainable without the use of internet and web-based materials due to the fact that the phenomenon took place prior to my research period. Some of my source material may not be as trendy as it once appeared due to the inevitable brevity of commercial consumables, yet my discussions mark the significance of their existence in particular historical moments and places.

## Literature Review

### *A visual culture perspective*

With a research focus on Cultural Revolution imagery, this thesis is a study of the construction of new media and popular culture in everyday life in specific periods of time, in specific places. This is a project that regards Cultural Revolution imagery as the focal point in cultural processes through which meaning is made in specific cultural contexts. This perspective is influenced by my reading of Fredric Jameson's work on the idea of the cultural turn. Jameson wrote:

The very sphere of culture itself has expanded, becoming coterminous with market society in such a way that the cultural is no longer limited to its earlier, traditional or experimental forms, but it is consumed throughout daily life itself, in shopping, in professional activities, in the various often televisual forms of leisure, in production for the market and in the consumption of those market products, indeed in the most secret folds and corners of the quotidian. Social space is now completely saturated with the image of culture.<sup>89</sup>

Because Cultural Revolution imagery is commodified in Chinese-dominated urban culture, Jameson's idea of considering consumerism as contemporary culture is useful in analysing the phenomena in this thesis. The visual culture perspective I adopt in this thesis follows Margaret Dikovitskaya's view on a cultural turn in the study of images:

The cultural turn brought to the study of images a reflection on the complex interrelationships between power and knowledge. Representation began to be studied as a structure and process of ideology that produces subject positions... the work of art came to be seen as a communicative exchange. As a result, the concept of autonomy of art was replaced by the concept of intertextuality.<sup>90</sup>

This thesis sees Cultural Revolution imagery as visual representation which is embedded in cultural practices and closely related to the formation of subject positions, identifications and cultural identities across locations. Dikovitskaya's book *Visual Culture: The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn* is useful in clarifying the inherent nature of visual culture as an interdisciplinary field of study.

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<sup>89</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983-1998* (London Verso, 1998), 111.

<sup>90</sup> Margaret Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture: the study of the visual after the cultural turn* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2005), 48-49.

For example, Janet Wolff argues that the textual analysis of the visual is better integrated with sociological analysis:<sup>91</sup>

parallel experience and parallel dissatisfaction with two traditions: first, a sociological tradition that looks at cultural institutions and cultural processes but never pays attention to the text ... and which is agnostic about aesthetic question; and second, textual analysis mainly in the humanities, which for the most part pays no attention to institutions and social processes, but concentrates on readings – however interesting but nonetheless just readings – of texts and images. My argument has been that the best kind of work in visual studies manages to do both of those things and to integrate them.<sup>92</sup>

Wolff's proposal for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the visual is useful in my research because the meaning of Cultural Revolution imagery, I argue, does not fully emerge on its own but only when differences are identified in cultural practices by people from different cultural backgrounds. As Dikovitskaya further explains:

Visual culture – the study of representations – pays close attention to the image but uses theories developed in the humanities and the social sciences to address the complex ways in which meanings are produced and circulated in specific social context.<sup>93</sup>

The reason why I use both a semiotic approach as well as cultural and critical theories to analyse Cultural Revolution imagery is mainly to engage with the complexities involved in the circulation of images in different times and spaces which are historical and cultural specific. Its circulation in new popular cultural forms such as mobile phone pictures, lifestyle products and themed commercial spaces are all specific social spaces in particular locations. Thus, in this sense, these commercial Cultural Revolution products, in a context a few decades after they were originally produced, can be considered as new cultural formations which mark not only the transformation of visual meanings but also socio-economic transformation today. As Dikovitskaya writes:

The object-based theory of material culture posits that artefacts are primary data for the study of culture and that they should be used as evidence rather than illustrations; it thus deals with objects such as pieces of furniture because they have symbolic meaning or

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<sup>91</sup> Janet Wolff is the director of the Rochester Visual and Cultural Studies Programme (1991-2001), the associate dean of the School of the Arts at Columbia University (2001-2005) and currently the Professor at Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in the Arts, University of Manchester (2006 – present).

<sup>92</sup> Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture: the study of the visual after the cultural turn*, 276-277.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

symbolic capital in the antebellum United States... Visual culture pays special attention to the study of modern manufactured goods (thus distinguishing itself from art history).<sup>94</sup>

It is important to note that the circulation of Cultural Revolution imagery as a commercial product is such a complex phenomenon which is closely related not only to regional socio-cultural practices but also to differences within these practices. Through analyzing a similar set of images which appear in different kinds of practices across locations, contemporary relations and tensions between the PRC, Hong Kong and Singapore can be explored. W.J.T. Mitchell posited that visual culture is about the social formation of the visual field, or visual sociality:

Society as designating the whole realm of relations among persons, classes, groupings, i.e., so-called face-to-face relations, or immediate relations. Culture is the structure of symbols, images, and mediations that make a society possible...society consists in the relations among people, culture the whole set of mediations that makes those relations possible - or (equally important) impossible. Visual culture is what makes possible a society of people with eyes.<sup>95</sup>

These relations between peoples and groups in the consumption of images are mediated heavily by new technologies. For example, using a mobile phone to text a Cultural Revolution picture, which used to be disseminated by physically travelling with political posters between different locations, makes circulation of the same imagery much quicker than ever before. Designers from Singapore went to China to research and gather revolutionary relics, and then reproduced them as digital images. Walter Benjamin's conclusion in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' is about the change in the perceptions of people living through the historical and cultural transformations of the past century.<sup>96</sup> Thus, following Dikovitskaya, my study of the visual pays attention to how images are embedded in the contemporary use of technologies, how it is integrated in daily practice and how culture and relations between people are mediated:

[t]he latest developments in digital technology caused the immense cultural changes throughout the world that earned the visual a pre-eminent place in our everyday life. This explains visual culture's preoccupation with analysis of events in which the consumer

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid. , 55.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. , 245.

<sup>96</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction" in *Visual Culture: the reader*, ed. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi: SAGE Publications & The Open University, 1999), 18-40.

interacts with visual technologies in search of pleasure, information, or other edification...visual culture needs to position itself as a critical study of the genealogy and condition of the global culture of visibility. Globalization in its various forms – global TV channels and programs, global visual infrastructures such as cable and satellite, and the World Wide Web - is one of the key features of our lives.<sup>97</sup>

Thus, by using a visual culture perspective, this thesis

stresses the importance of contemporary visual technologies. It sheds light on those things that were noticed only in passing in the standard histories of culture but which had an enormous impact on our current condition. This new historiography requires an interdisciplinary methodology, one that has developed through its reflection on objects falling between the cracks of compartmentalized disciplines and through its use of cross-fertilizing technologies that originated in discrete research areas.<sup>98</sup>

However contemporary it is, the meaning of the Cultural Revolution imagery in 21st century popular culture is a result of meanings shaped by previous experiences accumulated across the years. Using the Hong Kong case as example, it is neither the historical nor the contemporary meaning that completes the meaning of Cultural Revolution imagery, but instead, the images become meaningful through both their historical references and their relevance to current situations. David N. Rodowick argues that the notion of visual culture needs to be applied historically.<sup>99</sup>

[f]or me, this is what visual culture is all about: how these different notions of power and knowledge change across different strategies of visualization and expression, and how they are imbricated with one another in different complex ways in different, relatively distinct, historical eras. This phenomenon is not peculiar to twentieth-century culture; I don't think the audiovisual culture of the twentieth century can be made sense of without contrasting it with what came before.<sup>100</sup>

To gather the above points from a visual culture perspective, my study of Cultural Revolution imagery provides a close examination of the visual, including both images and artefacts, and looks at how it has been integrated within the cultural practices of different societies in different historical moments. In an era

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<sup>97</sup> Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture: the study of the visual after the cultural turn*, 59-60.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 75-76.

<sup>99</sup> David N. Rodowick is a former professor at the Rochester Visual and Cultural Studies Program and the director of the Film Program at King's College (London).

<sup>100</sup> Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture: the study of the visual after the cultural turn*, 263.

significantly influenced by the role of new technologies in daily life, it pays attention to the impact of technologies in mediating visual experience.

*Chinese modernization and postmodernism*

Rapid changes in China after Mao's death had a direct impact on research, and since the late 1970s and early 1980s emphasis has been placed almost exclusively on understanding the most recent conditions in China. However, as my research reveals, traces of the culture of the Cultural Revolution have never been completely removed from Chinese societies. Using mobile phone pictures as an example, political pictures produced during the Cultural Revolution are still circulated in current Chinese urban popular culture. With this, I argue that the study of the Cultural Revolution is by no means irrelevant to understanding the changes in China in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While the major themes of political posters during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) – smashing the old and establishing the new as well as modernising the country – are evident in today's China (for example Beijing's cityscape is now dominated by high-rise new buildings designed by foreign world-renowned architects after traditional *hutong* villages are demolished), I argue that the study of the culture and practices of the Cultural Revolution is highly significant in the study of contemporary China, in which apparent social and economic changes are the results of the party's principles over a long period of time.

Joseph Esherick, Paul Pickowicz, Andrew Walder, in 'The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History: An Introduction', point out that research on has shifted dramatically over time largely due to changes in China. The authors point out that the landscape for the research on the Cultural Revolution has shifted dramatically.<sup>101</sup> The series of radical political campaigns that started around the mid-1960s, had an strong effect on the scholarship about China.<sup>102</sup> However, the study of the Cultural Revolution no longer holds such prominence in contemporary studies of China:

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<sup>101</sup> Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History: An Introduction*, ed. Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 6.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

For more than a decade [the Cultural Revolution] was the most topical of subjects, highly relevant to questions about the nation's current condition and future prospects. But after Mao's death China's unfolding transformation redirected the attention of the field: first to the tumultuous events from the Democracy Wall movement of 1978 to Tiananmen Square in 1989, and then to the accelerating economic and social transformation of China into the present country.<sup>103</sup>

One of the features of the new scholarship on the Cultural Revolution in the post-Mao era is 'the relentless demand for a present-centred kind of "relevance": the need to understand where China is today and where it will likely go in the future.'<sup>104</sup> This approach to contemporary Chinese studies makes the study of the Cultural Revolution less relevant because

China has changed so rapidly that events even a few decades old soon appear irrelevant to the present. Leadership splits and manoeuvrings in the late Mao period seemed increasingly arcane in a rapidly unfolding political scene under Deng Xiaoping and his successors, with most of the principals long since imprisoned or dead. The subject seemed even more remote in the post-Deng, post-Jiang era.<sup>105</sup>

Although dramatic transformations have clearly occurred in China, a similar set of aims can be seen to explain both the changes that took place during the Cultural Revolution *and* in the post-Mao era.

One obvious example of such a continuity is the goal of modernizing China. Coak Barnett and Ralph Clough point out that the post-Mao reforms are developed on policies previously established:

The drive to achieve "Four Modernizations" by the end of this century calls for far-reaching changes in China's agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology. Zhou Enlai first articulated the general goal of modernizing China in these four areas in the mid-1960s and then again in the mid-1970s, but opposition from China's radicals prevented any basic policy shifts until after Mao's death. Major changes began when Deng Xiaoping emerged as the dominant figure in China's leadership in late 1978; the introduction of sweeping reform policies accelerated thereafter, especially after Deng had consolidated his political position during the period 1978-1981; and these reforms have been steadily broadened ever since then.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid. , 5.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. , 7.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> A. Coak Barnett and Ralph N. Clough, "Introduction" in *Modernizing China: Post-Mao Reform and Development*, ed. A. Coak Barnett and Ralph N. Clough (Boulder & London: Westview Press, 1986), 1.



These authors point out that these reforms after 1978 were well-rooted in the earlier periods before and during the Cultural Revolution, but in the present era these former policies continue with a shift in focus. That is, the set of policies used to be based on revolutionary struggle and ideological transformation during the Cultural Revolution, but now political stability and economic development have become the priorities.<sup>107</sup> In his essay published in 1988, Denis Fred Simon points to the long standing determination in China to modernize which was expected to keep going until the 21st century. It is worth quoting Simon here at length:

Faced with the reality of a backward and generally inefficient domestic science and technology (S&T) system, leaders in the People's Republic of China (PRC) have been engaged in an all-out effort to restructure their research sector and to modernize indigenous S&T capabilities. This effort, which actually has its roots in the 1956 Twelve-Year Science and Technology Plan formulated under the direction of former Premier Zhou Enlai and Marshall Nie Rongzhen, has undergone a number of significant changes in focus and direction since its resurgence in early 1978. Nonetheless, a number of themes have remained constant, the most outstanding one being the drive to improve the links between research and production. The Chinese leadership recognizes that without significant contributions by the S&T sector to industry, agriculture, and national defence, it will be hard to sustain the long-term momentum of their modernization program and difficult to attain their goal of quadrupling the gross value of industrial and agricultural output by the year 2000.<sup>108</sup>

By acknowledging both changes and continuities, and the visual traces of the culture of the Cultural Revolution, I argue that the China of the 21st century cannot be understood without connecting it to aspects of the Cultural Revolution, and even earlier.

### *Postcolonial hybridity and cultural identity*

Postmodernism is another area closely related to the current research. The features of postmodern culture could be summarised as 'the blurring and collapse of the traditional boundaries between culture and art, high and low culture,

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Denis Fred Simon, "The Evolving Role of Reform in China's S&T System: A Critical Assessment" in *Changes and Continuities in Chinese Communism: Volume II: The Economy, Society, and Technology*, ed. Yu-ming Shaw (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1988), 244.

commerce and art, culture and commerce.’<sup>109</sup> The cultural products and phenomena studied in this research are in some respects marked by these features. For example, the prevalence of popular culture and the intense commodification of culture in Hong Kong has meant that the distinction between high and low culture is no longer viable. The auctioning of Chinese contemporary art in Hong Kong since 2004 is a good example of illustrating the collapse of the boundary between commerce and art. But what is an even more useful concept from postmodernist theory for this research is the notion of historical blurring. With this, Chinese revolutionary commodities in the 2000s in China, Hong Kong and Singapore could be seen as the rearrangement and juxtaposition of signs, previously isolated, to produce new cultural meanings in the present.

A characteristic of postmodern culture is a ‘self-conscious intertextuality’ which refers to the ‘cultural self-consciousness about the history and functions of cultural products’.<sup>110</sup> This idea challenges Jean Baudrillard’s notion of a ‘superficial’ postmodern culture in which only the sign has an exchange value, while the value of a commodity is determined not by its use-value but signs. The examples of new popular cultural products that I examine (i.e. digital mobile phone pictures, lifestyle products like note pads and underpants, theme restaurants) show how Cultural Revolution imagery is now detached from its original framing (e.g. Chinese political posters from the 1960s) and transferred to various kinds of contemporary cultural forms in which traces of history are also transferred and borrowed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Though he sees postmodernism as implicated in the loss of historical understanding, Jameson points us to the historical reality in postmodern culture which represents a cultural style of late capitalism in a new global space.<sup>111</sup> I work with Jameson’s idea to question the extent to which the process of meaning making in the contemporary juxtaposition of Chinese revolutionary imagery involved historical understanding. For example, in Chapter Four, I discuss an example of a note book product called ‘The Little Red (Note) Book’. In an advertisement of this note book product, a typical Cultural Revolution image of

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<sup>109</sup> Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 208.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>111</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" *New Left Review* 140, no. July-August (1984), 59-92.

the Red Guard has been altered to depict a recent demonstration in Hong Kong which protested against the legislation of Article 23 of Basic Law which could result in losing the freedom of expression. In this way, the past and present were at the same time represented by a single image, which was ‘double-coded’.<sup>112</sup> More significantly, the image of the Red Guards demonstration not only signified the history of China, but also the present in Hong Kong. There might be the common elements, i.e. the similarities between the Red Guard movements and the Hong Kong march, and the particular context in post-1997 Hong Kong that made the image cultural specifically meaningful. I argue that the Red Guard image used in the Hong Kong stationary product, in that particular context, is not simply superficial pastiche. Instead, the specific meaning of the mass movement represented by the Red Guard image does correspond to the current social issue.

In this sense, I reject the Baudrillardian version of a superficial, depthless postmodernism. Instead, I see the consumer as creative in that the rearrangement of existing elements, previously unconnected or connected, in postmodern culture involve active creativity in the process of selection and recombination into new meanings. Here the producer of the note book product was himself a creative reader of the image of Red Guard. My view parallels Linda Hutcheon’s suggestion that postmodernism ‘takes the form of a self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement which commits to ‘doubleness’ or ‘duplicity’.<sup>113</sup> I took Hutcheon’s view on historical consciousness which implies an active engagement and a ‘self-reflexivity’<sup>114</sup> with other cultural codes in search of ‘self-contradictory’ differences with others.

The study of the ‘new’ meaning of Chinese political posters and imagery in Asian Chinese cities also makes the colonial history and postcolonial culture of Hong Kong and Singapore relevant. As mentioned earlier, the British colonial governments introduced a capitalist system underpinned by a commodity logic which created differences from mainland China. To borrow the concept of hybridity, the British colonial past produced cultural mixing, increased boundary

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<sup>112</sup> Charles Jencks, *What is Post-modernism?* (New York: Academy/St. Martins Press, 1986), 29-30.

<sup>113</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 15.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

crossing and the emergence of new forms of identities.<sup>115</sup> But as the current study shows, this kind of mixing and crossing was not the same as the elimination of cultural boundaries. More importantly, cultural differences and similarities were reflected in local cultural practices.

In Hong Kong and Singapore, these differences in relation to mainland Chinese culture had been established for decades under different political and economic systems. Thus, a 'Cultural Revolution' theme in the postcolonial popular culture of Hong Kong and Singapore was itself a hybridity. The product drew not only on representations of the past and present, but also on an ethnic 'other' through which contradictory feelings and cultural difference were constructed. However, I argue that this did not simply refer to, in Edward Said's terminology, the binary positionings of self/other, past/present, capitalist/communist indicated in the positional superiority and hegemony of the postcolonial/capitalist difference.<sup>116</sup> Instead, I argue that this question of cultural differences between Hong Kong/Singapore and China at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a key component in new identity formation. In the rearrangement and juxtaposition of the signifier of China's past (which also signifies China's present) in its local urban cultures, it is both an engagement and disengagement at the same time, and producing a self-consciousness of cultural difference. The 'Mao' restaurants in Singapore, for example, could be seen as a popular cultural form which constructed a new form of identity forged by a shared concern for a closer relationship after the 1997 economic crisis.

Hong Kong Chinese have developed their own hybrid cultural forms along with political and cultural discourses of 'Hong Kong as a British Colony' before 1997 and 'HKSAR of China' after 1997. In some circumstances it involved an identification with 'Westernness', and at other times with aspects of Chinese culture. The year of 1997 and 2003 opened up ambiguities and insecurities around those points of identification. Since 1997, Hong Kong is no longer a British colony while the legacy of British colonialism remains. The Basic Law, which was drafted by the Chinese and British governments, became the constitutional document of post-1997 Hong Kong. In the pursuit of economic growth, Hong

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<sup>115</sup> Virinder S. Kalra, Raminder Kaur, and John Hutnyk, *Diaspora & hybridity* (London: SAGE, 2005), 71 & 79.

<sup>116</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), 46.

Kong could have gradually identified more with a Hong Kong Chinese identity. However, in 2003, the Article 23 incident shook the confidence of people in Hong Kong regarding their democratic safeguards. On the one hand, some Hong Kong Chinese identified with China as a legitimate motherland; on the other hand, they wanted to remain within the boundaries of Hong Kongness, the place of their birth and upbringing within a British political system which allowed a certain degree of democracy. This shifting allegiance was forged strategically, and was further complicated by cultural differences particularly among young Hong Kong Chinese. My work looks at the role of Cultural Revolution imagery in Hong Kong as the available source and site through which the practices of switching identification between Hong Kong and mainland cultures was marked. Under certain conditions Hong Kong people might identify themselves with mainland Chineseness and argue that Hong Kong was legitimately a part of China. Yet in the context of a discussion about democracy, they might speak from the position of Hong Kong as being protected by Basic Law agreed by China and the United Kingdom, and argue against the lack of human rights in China. My Hong Kong example particularly shows the capability of persons to move across discursive and spatial sites of activity which address them in different ways:

- mainland Chinese imagery from 1967 as a metaphor for the Hong Kong demonstration in 2003,
- the commodity highlights the way Hong Kong as a capitalist society is organized according to a dominant mode of production centred on commodification and the pursuit of profit.

In this context, the social position of the Hong Kong Chinese in the post-1997 context has particular significance. They are arguably ‘special’ by virtue of living across cultural boundaries between capitalism and communism, and yet within the boundary divisions are blurred by the hybrid nature of the Basic Law which was a combination of both the Chinese and British ways. The contradictory subject positions in Hong Kong are the outcome of the proliferation of discursive resources stemming from different conventions, sites and practices that are in contradiction with each other. (i.e. Cultural Revolution imagery, the Cultural Revolution demonstration, British tolerance of demonstration)

As Homi Bhabha suggests, all cultures are zones of shifting boundaries and hybridization, which are never fixed.<sup>117</sup> Also, engaging with Hall's argument, popular culture is a site of consent and resistance in the struggle over cultural meanings and a site where cultural hegemony is secured or challenged.<sup>118</sup> Here I use the concept of hybridity specifically as a device to capture cultural changes by way of a temporary stabilization of cultural categories. This is a strategic identity constructed in the site of popular culture and urban consumption culture. In cultural studies, there is an exploration of how people turn mundane products into popular culture serving their interests. To integrate these viewpoints, I understand the examples discussed in the following chapters as the outcome of an interplay between different forces which include the changing relationships between China, Hong Kong and Singapore, economic concerns, social hopes and a political awareness.

I will now summarise some crucial points which constitute the methodology of this thesis. The concept of articulation refers to the form of connection that can make a 'unity' of two different elements under certain conditions. It is the linkage which is not necessary determined, absolute and essential for all time. My thesis is about the unique 'unity' of Chinese revolutionary imagery and practices of consumption which was 'put together' in Chinese-dominated cities/state in a specific context (i.e. at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century). The linkage between the imagery and the practices was not necessary in the sense that any kind of imagery could have been used in mundane commodities such as restaurant decoration, postcards, notebooks, etc. Chinese revolutionary imagery was used as a representation of China. In what circumstances could such connections be forged when the articulation of Cultural Revolution imagery could be re-articulated in a wide range of ways? The examples in my work show how Cultural Revolution imagery was articulated uniquely in different Chinese-dominated regions which were somehow overlapping with each other. These were specific, historical 'articulations' of a particular set of Cultural Revolution imagery. Why did those images emerge in those locations during a specific

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<sup>117</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 159.

<sup>118</sup> Hall, "Culture, the Media and the Ideological Effect" ; Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" ; Hall, "Gramscian's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity" .

period of time and how were the respective practices unique? How were various contingent practices ‘put together’ through the operation of power?

*Communist images in capitalist cultures*

Although some postmodern theorists suggest a loss of historical understanding in postmodern culture, I reject this pessimistic view because drawing on previously unconnected cultural codes does not rule out the potential of a historical understanding. More importantly, even if an historical understanding does not concern a certain group, the use of imagery of the past still produces a potential impact on those who have lived through that particular past. I argue that the ‘unity’ of Cultural Revolution imagery and previously unconnected cultures was not totally arbitrary in the sense that the Cultural Revolution imagery did have fixed meanings and historical uses (i.e. the spread of the imagery in colonial Hong Kong and Singapore and the continual cultural meaning of Mao as the founder of the PRC). It was a practice in which the meaning-making process was based on a productive tension: the previous ‘inferior’, non-capitalist China (as symbolised by Cultural Revolution imagery) was now reconstructed as being integrated in a capitalist consumer culture, while China retained its one-party rule of the Chinese communist party. In this way ‘Chinese communism’ was put under ‘erasure’ which was at one and the same time useful, necessary, inaccurate and mistaken in the diasporic Hong Kong and Singaporean cultures.

What has been discussed here concerns the understanding of Chinese revolutionary imagery in Hong Kong and Singaporean commercial popular cultural products as unique, historically specific articulations of meanings which reflect cultural difference. But what was the place of the ‘new’ circulation of this imagery in urban China? Some may propose that this would be less complicated than the Hong Kong or Singaporean phenomena. But I argue that the ‘Cultural Revolution’ trend in mainland Chinese urban culture was not less problematic. Barmé has discussed in detail about a nationwide revival of interest in Mao Zedong’s words and images in China since the late 1980s.<sup>119</sup> The keyword ‘revival’ implies that there were two separate sets of historically specific practices of those words and images. The first took place in the original context in China

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<sup>119</sup> Barmé, *Shades of Mao: the posthumous cult of the great leader*, 4.

between the 1960s and 1970s when a variety of cultural forms were produced to promote and consolidate the political agenda of the ruling party, the Chinese Communist Party. During this period, culture in China (from pictorial art, films, performing art, music to daily objects including vases and calendars) was visually dominated by images of Mao Zedong, the Red Guards, the People's Liberation Army and other key social groups such as the peasants and workers. Most of these visual images were given taglines either to mobilise the people of the whole country with specific common goals, for example, 'Industry learns from Daqing, agriculture learns from Dazhai' (*Gongye xue Daqing, Nongye xue DaZhai*) and 'Smash the Old Four' (*po Sijiu*); or to provide generic nationalistic slogans, like 'Serving the people' (*wei renmin fuwu*), in order to maintain social stability. Among the various forms, the role of the pictorial art on posters was particularly significant. The posters themselves were temporary articulations of meaning through which the relationship between the people and the party/country was constituted and maintained, and social practice was regulated. Posters were the easiest form of Chinese political art that could be physically obtained when movies or performing arts were constrained by the availability of cinematique or theatre.

Barmé's idea of a revival of Mao Zedong's words and image refers to the 'non-official', 'spontaneous' and 'mercantile' use Mao Zedong's image and famous slogans in the 1990s.<sup>120</sup> Mao Zedong's image and other revolutionary images were repetitively reproduced in consumer objects. Barmé points out that this practice 'capitalized on China's new teeny-bopper and youth culture market' in which 'consumers of Mao products were adolescents or people in their early twenties who were unfamiliar with the Mao era'.<sup>121</sup> The 'unbridgeable gaps' between the old and young generations implied an inevitable difference in the interpretation of Chinese Revolutionary imagery. As Evans and Donald point out:

[l]ooking at the posters now, three decades or so after their production, evokes a range of contradictory responses. For many people who lived through the experiences graphically represented in the posters, these images are harrowing reminders of a painful past.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid. , 5 and 13.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. , 47.



Although revolutionary representations often seem to be forgiven the specificities of history...such images can have horrific resonances.<sup>122</sup>

In this sense the images of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Revolutionary era could have two major cultural meanings in the urban Chinese context of the 1980s. The first is that the images might arouse 'horrific resonances' for those who lived through the 'Mao' years. The second is that the images might be attractive signs for consumption. As Tao argues, this kind of commodification of revolutionary culture/discourse is an aspect of the 'Chinese postmodern condition' because 'there are no clear distinctions between modern culture and traditional, revolutionary culture and commercial culture' in the commercialized revolutionary culture.<sup>123</sup> Tao regards this kind of cultural practice as a mark of an historical blurring of a postmodern culture, and adopts the view that postmodern culture is marked by a collapse of traditional boundaries between culture and art, high and low culture, commerce and art, and culture and commerce.<sup>124</sup> However, the use of the term 'postmodern' to describe China's situation since 1990s is not without criticism. Dirlik and Zhang point out that the uneven economic, social and political development in China makes the use of the term 'postmodern' only applicable to a limited sector of society.<sup>125</sup> Instead, Dirlik and Zhang describe that China is marked by 'the coexistence of the precapitalist, the capitalist, and the postsocialist economic, political and social forms represents a significant departure from the assumptions of a Chinese modernity, embodied above all in the socialist revolutionary project.'<sup>126</sup> Dirlik and Zhang point out that 'the unevenness of regional development in China' is reconfigured by 'the incorporation of China into a global economy which both nourishes and generates differences on the same national terrain'.<sup>127</sup> Due to the uneven distribution of resources, I argue that these 'differences' lead to an identification of an urban

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<sup>122</sup> Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald, "Introducing Posters of China's Cultural Revolution" in *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*, ed. Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald (Lanham, Boulder, New York & Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC., 1999), 5.

<sup>123</sup> Tao, "The Commercialised Revolutionary Culture in Contemporary China", 69-84.

<sup>124</sup> Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 208.

<sup>125</sup> Dirlik and Zhang, "Introduction: Postmodernism and China", 3.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

Chinese identity which is marked by commodity culture and rising economic prosperity. On the one hand, there is a contradiction between the urban and rural identities in China. On the other hand, as Dirlik and Zhang continue, there are contestations and contradictions between different Chinese identities around the world, i.e. not only the PRC, Taiwan and Singapore but also the stateless Chinese ethnicities encompassed by the term 'diaspora'.<sup>128</sup> What is particularly significant is that these contestations and contradictions between the different kinds of Chinese were a unique phenomenon since the 1990s when China's economic increased. Against this background, my research looks at the engagement of regional Chinese cultures with mainland Chinese cultural symbols, as well as the commodification of these symbols in China through the use of new technologies.

*The transferability of Cultural Revolution imagery*

Chinese political posters are usually regarded as a kind of propaganda produced by the Chinese Communist Party of the People's Republic of China. The primary sources used in this thesis are posters of this kind produced in the 1960s and 1970s. The use of art for propaganda by the Chinese Communists can be traced back in both the resistance movement against the Japanese in the 1920s and 1930s as well as the communist revolution against the Kuomintang in the 1940s. A particular emphasis on the use of the visual is due to the fact that there was a large illiterate population in the rural areas and the support of this population was the key for the communist eventual success.<sup>129</sup> This art form produced in communist China was based on the theoretical basis and principles set out in Mao Zedong's famous "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" in May 1942.<sup>130</sup> These talks set out the major principles for the production of socialist art and literature in communist China that were followed until the opening of China in the early 1980s. Mao Zedong laid down the principle that literature and art must

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Gittings, "Excess and Enthusiasm", 27-46.

<sup>130</sup> Ellen Johnston Laing, *The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1988).60; Evans and Donald, "Introducing Posters of China's Cultural Revolution", 3-4; Gittings, "Excess and Enthusiasm", 29; Robert Benewick, "Icons of Power: Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution" in *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China*, ed. Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald (Lanham, Boulder, New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC, 1999), 125.

‘serve the people’ which was the major reason why he suggested that political art must draw on current art forms which were already familiar to the people.<sup>131</sup> Political posters produced by the Chinese Communist Party of China are called ‘*xuanchuanhua*’ in Chinese which literally means ‘propaganda picture’. Gittings provides a detailed account of the nature and function of Chinese political posters in the People’s Republic of China:

The term *xuanchuanhua* was appropriated to describe the new mass-produced propaganda posters only after 1949. Many were specially composed to suit the new medium, but posters continued to reproduce compositions originally designed in one of the other forms, particularly modern-style New Year prints and the popular illustrated strips that are also available in smaller book-form versions. Propaganda posters are also known as "placard pictures" (*zhaotiehua*), meaning a picture that seeks attention and is attached to some object -- an apt description for posters designed to be pinned or glued to walls.<sup>132</sup>

As Gittings points out, Chinese political posters were a unique art form because they transformed traditional art forms such as New Year prints, cartoons, woodblock prints, etc. The name in Chinese implies not only the function to ‘propagate’ but also the social practice of producing posters and putting them on walls. Thus, the meaning of Chinese political posters was also defined in relation to the specific social practice in its original context. As Gittings points out, Chinese posters and similar art forms during the era of the Chinese Revolution were closely related to current political and social themes which often had a short life span and therefore could be dated with precision.<sup>133</sup> Gittings gives examples such as a poster bearing the slogan ‘Chairman Mao is the reddest reddest red sun in our hearts’ which belongs to the period between 1966 and 1967, and posters with the theme of foreign struggle referring to the Hong Kong riots (Our victory is certain, so is defeat for the Hong Kong British [*Women bi sheng, Gang Ying bi bai*]) which also dates from these years.<sup>134</sup> (Figure 36)

Since Chinese political posters have often been regarded as pure propaganda, it makes a discussion on the definition of the term ‘propaganda’

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<sup>131</sup> Gittings, "Excess and Enthusiasm", 29.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

necessary. Randal Marlin argues that the definition of the term ‘propaganda’ is not settled and there are many definitions.<sup>135</sup> As Marlin writes:

There are many definitions, explicit and implicit, of the term “propaganda”. In some ways the term has been discredited for serious analytical purposes, but it continues to be part of the arsenal in wars of words. It is common to identify an opponent’s communications as propaganda, while maintaining that only one’s own side is telling the truth. There is a strong association, in English-speaking countries, between the word “propaganda” and the idea of lying or deception...In Latin countries, where “propaganda” means advertising, the word has no negative associations, although it is, of course, likely to be affected in time by one’s perceptions of what is propagated...Politicians and bureaucrats generally avoid using the term to describe their own activities, tending to reserve it for those of their opponents, although the difference may not be perceptible to an unbiased third party.<sup>136</sup>

For this reason, this thesis prefers the use of the term ‘Chinese political posters’ instead of ‘Chinese propaganda posters’ to avoid the unnecessary negative connotation when I refer to the original artefacts.<sup>137</sup> However, a more significant point can be made beyond this discussion: Cultural Revolution imagery is now detached, removed and thus transfer from one medium to another. When I refer to the original artefacts as political posters, this is to emphasise the physical form of Cultural Revolution imagery during specific historical moments (i.e. the 1960s and 1970s). Furthermore, as my research reveals, mobile phone pictures, lifestyle products and theme restaurants are all new cultural forms which use the same imagery which is edited in various ways. The following chapters provide detailed accounts of the historical backgrounds of specific locations (i.e. China, Hong Kong and Singapore) and the new cultural forms and practices of Cultural Revolution imagery. With these I argue that the contemporary (re)emergence of Cultural Revolution imagery evidences how Cultural Revolution imagery is itself an entity which exists on its own terms. As my research reveals, Cultural Revolution imagery can be flexibly transferred to different physical and virtual forms and its meaning varies according to cultural contexts, local practices which are shaped by historical backgrounds of respective locations. It is the

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<sup>135</sup> Randal Marlin, *Propaganda and the ethics of persuasion* (Lancaster and Sydney: Broadview Press Ltd., 2002), 15.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. , 15-16.

<sup>137</sup> I prefer to use the term ‘Chinese political posters’ when I refer to the original artefacts with the exception that in Chapter Five I still use the term ‘propaganda’ because I want to highlight the suppressed nature in a Singaporean context.

transferability of Cultural Revolution imagery which continues to play a role in mass communication in contemporary urban popular culture.

# Chapter Three

## Cultural Revolution imagery as mobile phone text pictures: culture, technology and the economic system in 21st century China

‘Whether or not the numerous problems confronting our economic construction can be effectively resolved depends on whether or not major breakthroughs can be achieved in scientific and technological areas. Similarly whether or not our economic development can keep forging ahead also depends on the most profound source of stamina, namely scientific and technological development.’<sup>138</sup>

(Premier Zhao Ziyang, March 1986)

‘We should ... recognise the tremendous power of information technology and vigorously promote its development. The melding of the traditional economy and information technology will provide the engine for the development of the economy and society in the 21st century.’<sup>139</sup>

(President Jiang Zemin, August 2000)

### Introduction

In 2008, the Beijing Olympics commenced with an opening ceremony marked by the spectacular use of high technologies. Massive digital screens and projectors, fireworks, and other audiovisual technologies were widely used to celebrate the fulfilment of a dream that China aspired to for a hundred years (*bainian mengyuan*).<sup>140</sup> This chapter explores the newly emergent phenomenon of mobile phone picture messaging with a specific focus on the digital reproduction and appropriation of Cultural Revolution imagery by commercial dotcom enterprises.

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<sup>138</sup> "Zhao Ziyang Delivers Work Report at NPC Opening (Four Session of the Sixth National People's Congress, March 25, 1986), The PRC," (Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) 1986), K1-28.

<sup>139</sup> Jiang Zemin in a speech at the World Computer Congress 2000 in Beijing, quoted after A. Lin Neumann, *The Great Firewall* (Committee to Protect Journalist, 2001 [cited 12 December 2009]); available from [http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2001/China\\_jan01/China\\_jan01.html](http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2001/China_jan01/China_jan01.html).

<sup>140</sup> Xue Li, *Bainian mengyuan zhe yi tian (The Day that China's 100-year Dream Has Come True)* [Online] (People's Daily, 2008 [cited 22 October 2009]); available from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/olympics/2008-08/08/content\\_9041223.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/olympics/2008-08/08/content_9041223.htm).

It is a phenomenon which has become more socially prevalent since 2004, if not earlier, at a time when mobile phones were becoming more affordable to urban middle-class educated consumers. It discusses how Cultural Revolution imagery re-enters mass consumption three decades or more after its original production in the form of political posters.

Using technology to modernise the country is not exclusive to the post-Mao era. In 1963 Zhou Enlai already called for scientists to realise ‘the Four Modernizations’ at the Conference on Scientific and Technological Work held in Shanghai. The People's Republic of China has always considered technology as the key to achieve modernisation, social development and economic growth.<sup>141</sup> The general goal of modernizing China was articulated twice by Zhou Enlai, the first Premier of the People's Republic of China, first in the mid-1960s and again in the mid-1970s respectively.<sup>142</sup> As manifested in many posters produced in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the future of China has always been visualised in scenarios featuring sophisticated machinery and computers, spurring great infrastructure and high productivity. (Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3) Even in the post-Mao era, the goal of modernizing China has remained unchanged with the continual promotion of the development of new technologies.<sup>143</sup> Against this background, the 1990s has seen the Chinese government's particular support and promotion of the development and social use of internet and mobile telecommunication technologies. Thus, the more prevalent social use of the internet and mobile phone in today's China is an outcome of the Chinese Communist Party's long-term goal of modernising China. In other words, the newly emergent practice of mobile phone message ‘texting’ and sending digital

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<sup>141</sup> The development of technology and plans of modernization during Mao's era were complicated by the changing relations between the PRC and the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s. The focus of this chapter is not on whether or not technological developments were successfully implemented, but rather on the early Sino-Soviet collaboration in the development of science and technology in the PRC in the 1950s. The vision to use technology to modernise China has already become apparent to some important CCP members. See Yuan-li Wu's "Economic Reform and Foreign Economic Relations: Systemic Conflicts in a Theoretical Framework" in *Changes and Continuities in Chinese Communism: Volume II: The Economy, Society, and Technology*, ed. Yu-ming Shaw (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1988), 188-229; also read A. Doak Barnett and Ralph N. Clough, "Introduction" in *Modernizing China: Post-Mao Reform and Development*, ed. A. Doak Barnett and Ralph N. Clough (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1986), 1-12.

<sup>142</sup> Barnett and Clough, "Introduction", 1.

<sup>143</sup> According to Barnett and Clough, Deng Xiaoping recognised the importance of encouraging intellectuals' creativity and mobilizing their talents, especially China's scientific and technical experts, to support China's modernization. See *Ibid.*, 7.

picture messages is a phenomenon through which Chinese modernization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be understood. Text messaging, also known as ‘texting’, refers to the exchange of short written messages between mobile phones over telecommunication networks.<sup>144</sup>

Some of these mobile phone pictures, which are produced by corporations as virtual consumables, are adaptations of political pictures that were prevalent during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). This kind of ‘high tech’ borrowing, recycling and consumption of the culture of the revolutionary past is significant not only for understanding 21<sup>st</sup> century China. More significantly, it offers a window of opportunity to investigate the nature of the Chinese revolution based on an obsession with ‘modernisation’, which has always been the national goal of the People’s Republic of China. This phenomenon seems contradictory to the post-Mao era Chinese Communist Party’s renunciation of the destruction caused by the radical Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976.<sup>145</sup> In addition, socially speaking, the Cultural Revolution has been, and still is, a taboo not to be openly discussed. In this sense, the recurrence of Cultural Revolution imagery in the form of mobile phone picture messages is a complex and seemingly contradictory phenomenon in 21st century China. It is an outcome of new technological developments that have been encouraged by the Chinese Communist Party. Yet mobile phone text messaging helps circulate the visual culture of a past denounced and suppressed by the authorities.

This chapter considers this contemporary recurrence and circulation of Cultural Revolution imagery as a mass culture, which is in many ways similar to the mass consumption of political images and sloganised culture during the Cultural Revolution, particularly during the historical moments when young Red Guards were enthusiastically engaging in activities in relation to the production, display and consumption of political posters. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 countless posters were produced to disseminate political campaigns which appealed to a predominantly young audience. Some thirty years

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<sup>144</sup> While ‘text messaging’ usually refers to messages sent using the Short Message Service (SMS), this technology has been extended to include messages containing image, video and sound content (known as MMS messages). Written messages are referred to as ‘text messages’ and messages containing images are usually referred to as ‘picture messages’.

<sup>145</sup> After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, China turned away from the focus on revolutionary struggle and ideological transformation that characterised the Maoist era in favour of political stability and economic development. See Barnett and Clough, "Introduction", 1.



later in the post-2000 era, these pictures are still consumed by the youth of the People's Republic of China, but their visual forms and the media are completely different. These digitised Cultural Revolution images, which are usually given contemporary taglines, are consumed and exchanged through new media and communication technologies. They are one aspect of a new mass culture using telecommunication technology in everyday life and an unprecedented mass consumption of the images of the past.

Mobile phone text messaging, and other kinds of new technologies closely linked with the everyday life of many urban Chinese people today, is significant for understanding Chinese modernization in the first decade of 21st century. Dirlik and Zhang offer a useful lens to understand the mobile phone circulation of Cultural Revolution imagery in 21<sup>st</sup> century in their discussion on postmodernism and China, proposing that the 'coexistence of the precapitalist, the capitalist, and the postsocialist economic, political, and social forms represents a significant departure from the assumptions of a Chinese modernity embodied in the socialist revolutionary project.'<sup>146</sup> Internet and mobile phone communication networks facilitate unprecedented methods of editing, circulating and consuming the political art of the revolutionary past, and the interactivity of this technology allows users to select people to communicate with, i.e. the user can choose which pictures to 'text'. This apparent freedom, however, does not mean the user can consume any images. Instead, like the political pictures available during Cultural Revolution, there is a restricted choice with only a limited range of images that the audience is allowed to access.

This apparent freedom of choice (although within a limited range) creates a contemporary notion of a free individual in contemporary Chinese popular culture. The meaning of former revolutionary imagery is no longer the same in a new context of 21st century China. The specific political messages written and depicted in the original images, such as those that stress ideological struggle and class conflict during the Cultural Revolution, are no longer relevant to today's Chinese context. As well, the ways that people engage with the same set of images are different and context-specific. While officials travelled with political posters in order to spread them to different areas, now mobile phone users can

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<sup>146</sup> Dirlik and Zhang, "Introduction: Postmodernism and China", 3.

circulate the same kind of pictures almost immediately. However, it is important to note that certain politically-specific themes from the Cultural Revolution, such as themes the political campaigns like 'Smash the Four Old' and 'Up to Mountain, Down to Countryside', have been removed from the 21st circulations.<sup>147</sup> In this sense, Cultural Revolution imagery is depoliticised when former political messages are removed and their political functions are considered irrelevant in the process of visual editing. For example, the visual depictions of the radical and violent Red Guards of the revolutionary past are played down by colloquial, humorous taglines in the contemporary post-2000 context. Cultural Revolution imagery is generally categorised by internet dotcom corporations as either nationalistic images or humorous pictures used to poke fun. The idea of freedom of choice, which creates a way for public access to an essentialised, stereotypical culture of the Cultural Revolution, could be a way of feeding the curiosity of the young generation about the officially denounced history. Thus, I argue that this seemingly subversive practice and the apparent 'tolerance' of the government fits very well with the overall goal of the post-Mao reform and development – to strive for 'political stability and economic development through modernisation'.<sup>148</sup>

While the art of the past remains, its new form as a digitised cultural product facilitated by new communication technology, prevalently used in the People's Republic of China since the turn of the millennium, radically changes the physically printed form in which Cultural Revolution pictures were originally produced. This digitization, and widespread usage of mobile phones, allows the transmission of information no longer limited to printed media or physical space; as well, online information can be updated quickly and constantly. However, arguably, the increasing prevalence of mobile phones in the People's Republic of China also constructs limits in the information that can be accessed.

As my research reveals, in the rise of consumer culture, Cultural Revolution imagery is posited within a practice of commercial entertainment and

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<sup>147</sup> In the early phase of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1968) one of the stated goals of the political campaigns in the People's Republic of China was to bring an end to the 'Four Olds' (*Si Jiu*), which were Old customs, Old culture, Old habits and Old ideas. This was done by physical destruction of historical artifacts such as statues of traditional religious figures and books. After the young Red Guards destroyed the cities continuously for two years, they were sent to the countryside so that the cities could be reconstructed. This the movement was called 'Up to Mountain, Down to Countryside'.

<sup>148</sup> Barnett and Clough, "Introduction", 1.

lifestyle. The producers, which are internet or telecommunication corporations, need to make money with their products. Thus, Cultural Revolution imagery, which is well-rooted in Chinese culture and which is more likely to gain a sufficiently large audience in order to secure a return on their investments, may explain why such kind of imagery is chosen. This commercial motive implies that the corporations aim to make Cultural Revolution images into a mainstream mode of representation with an appeal to mainstream audiences. In this way, studying mobile phone pictures in China is a good way to explore how the officially denounced culture of the past ‘contributes’ to the modernization and economic development of China in the present.

This chapter reveals how Cultural Revolution pictures are ‘essentialised’ in new digital forms – the reduction of the culture, image and history of the Cultural Revolution to an essential idea of what it means to be contemporary or modernised – so that certain core meanings or identities used in Cultural Revolution culture are not subject to interpretation in the new era. Besides, since the idea of the Cultural Revolution is produced by the recurrence of a few simple characteristics, the Cultural Revolution mobile phone pictures discussed in this chapter offer one-sided descriptions of Cultural Revolution culture. These pictures are simplified, partial ‘cut-outs’ of the originals which reduce people, objects and practices of the past to a limited range of features. The essentialised, stereotypical representation of the Cultural Revolution marginalises alternative modes of reading revolutionary history and therefore destabilises the original meaning of revolutionary culture and history as a whole.

To adopt the view that ‘every social practice depends on and relates to meaning, and culture is the constitutive condition of that practice’, this cultural phenomenon – processed, essentialised and stereotyped Cultural Revolution imagery – has significant social and cultural implications in 21<sup>st</sup> century China’s context.<sup>149</sup> The changing forms and means of consumption of Cultural Revolution imagery facilitated by new technology and commercialization, creates an unprecedented engagement with Cultural Revolution culture. This constitutes a highly essentialised, partial exposure of the Cultural Revolution past through the processing of imagery via websites. I argue that the new cultural form, practice

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<sup>149</sup> Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture: the study of the visual after the cultural turn*, 58.

and environment suppresses a thorough understanding of what had happened during the Cultural Revolution. Through creating a playful and ‘high tech’ way of engaging with Cultural Revolution imagery, the once serious political content becomes depoliticised and trivialised. More significantly, the limited ‘freedom’ or ‘choice’ in interacting with former political ‘rebel’ pictures creates a pseudo democratic impression when young people are allowed to devote themselves to new forms of communication and entertainment. This cultivates a new sub-cultural identity in contemporary Chinese urban societies.

Thus, to sum up, I explore how Cultural Revolution pictures are essentialised in a context of a technology-driven consumer culture in China. This is done by analyzing the differences in visual content, captions and forms in which the Cultural Revolution imagery was/is produced in different historical moments (i.e. the 1960s, 1970s and the 2000s). I then analyse the contemporary meanings of the new version of Cultural Revolution imagery by contextualising them in the 21<sup>st</sup> century urban Chinese context. With the acknowledgement of the role of capitalist corporations in the production of the Cultural Revolution mobile phone pictures, a consumption-oriented study might argue that the meanings of these pictures depend very much on whether the consumers actively engage with the pictures. However, as my research shows, young Chinese urban individuals do actively use Cultural Revolution imagery in 21<sup>st</sup> century China even outside of the commercial context. This argument is supported by examining the use of Cultural Revolution pictures by some young Chinese football fans in the Asian Cup held in Beijing in 2004.<sup>150</sup>

Before my discussion of these issues, it is necessary to give examples of the original Cultural Revolution posters produced in the early phase of the Cultural Revolution which can be seen reproduced or reworked in mobile phone pictures in the post-2000s era.

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<sup>150</sup> The Asian Cup, also called AFC Asian Cup, is one of the football competitions organised by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), which is the governing body of Asian football and one of the six Confederations making up FIFA. AFC has 46 Member Associations and these represent more than half of the world’s population, in which just India and China have more than 2.5 billion people. The AFC was founded in 1954. Its headquarter is in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

### **Youth engagements with Cultural Revolution imagery**

My online research reveals that many Cultural Revolution images in mobile phone pictures are based on images from the early phase of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1968). With the use of editing techniques to 'cut-out' parts of the original images and replace the original slogans with new ones, Cultural Revolution images are reconstructed into a new form of high technological entertainment which is closely related to the urban life of the young generation. Many mobile phone pictures show certain specific ways that Cultural Revolution images engage with new telecommunication technologies and consumer culture. First, many of the pictures that originally depicted the radical movements, enthusiasm and violence of the young Red Guards are used. Second, the new slogans promote either nationalistic sentiments or individualistic values in daily life. Third, similar to the former Red Guard engagements, the new practice of 'texting' is closely related to contemporary urban everyday life particularly among young consumers. This section compares the new versions in mobile phone pictures with the originals, and analyses an aspect of the contemporary meanings of Cultural Revolution imagery in Chinese online digital culture.

Not all political pictures produced during the Cultural Revolution employed the same theme. One of main themes was about the Red Guard's involvement in political campaigns. As Gittings point out, political art of the Cultural Revolution was closely related to current political and social themes controlled by the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>151</sup> With the very short life span of artwork due to the constantly changing political agenda, a pattern in artistic styles and specific slogans can be identified among the many posters produced during the decade. For example, the political pictures produced in the early phase of the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1968 are characterised by the radical and violent destruction of the Red Guard movements.<sup>152</sup> This period was typified by social unrest caused by Red Guards which was deemed to be a way to participate in the political campaigns summoned by Chairman Mao Zedong. The point is that Cultural Revolution imagery has been actively experienced by the young

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<sup>151</sup> Gittings, "Excess and Enthusiasm", 27-46.

<sup>152</sup> The destruction of the Red Guards was considered as the engagement of the current political campaigns which advocated 'smashing the Four Olds' and 'anti-economism', etc. See Ibid., 27-46.

generations of different eras (i.e. the 1960s/70s and the 2000s). These youth involvements create specific meanings of Cultural Revolution visual culture as youth culture.

### *Red Guards engagement with posters*

The Red Guards (*hongweibing*, literally red guarding soldiers) were a group of university or tertiary students who pioneered the mass movement which sparked off the Cultural Revolution.<sup>153</sup> It officially started when large-character posters (*dazibao*) were displayed at Peking University on 25 May 1966. This was regarded by Mao Zedong as the first Marxist large-character poster display to initiate the revolution.<sup>154</sup> The Red Guard was organised by a group of teenage students from the Middle School attached to Tsinghua University on 29 May 1966, followed by other students nationwide.<sup>155</sup> The movements of the young Red Guards were nationwide and radical. According to Jiang Jiehong's account:

[T]he Red Guards searched over ten million homes across the country and confiscated or destroyed "old" property, including dynastic calligraphy and paintings, ancient books and archives, gold, silver or jade ware and jewellery... Records indicate that there were 6,843 cultural relics registered in Beijing in 1958 but only 1,921 remained in the 1980s... These radical actions of Red Guards soon turned into the "red terror" across the country. In forty days, from the middle of August to the end of September 1966, more than 1,700 people were killed.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>153</sup> The duration of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, conventionally known as 'The Cultural Revolution', has been defined in different ways. Early scholars, such as John King Fairbank, *The Great Chinese Revolution 1800-1985* (London: Harper Perennial, 1987), 317, claimed that the Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China took place from late 1965 to April 1969. Most recent scholars, such as Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: a history* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1, defined the series of socio-political movements in the People's Republic of China between 1966 and 1976 as the Cultural Revolution. In China, Mao Zedong, the first Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, regarded the Cultural Revolution was launched after Yao Wenyuan's *Ping Xibian Lishiju 'Hai Rui Baguan'* (The Criticism on the New Version of the Historical Play 'Hai Rui Dismissed from Office') was published in Wenhui Daily on 10 November 1965. Hua Guofeng, Mao Zedong's successor, declared in the Party's Eleventh Session in 1977 that the Cultural Revolution ended following the smashing of the Gang of Four (*Siren Bang*). Cited in Jiang, "Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art" 1-32.

<sup>154</sup> Chunming Jin, *Wenhua de Geming Shigao (A History of the "Cultural Revolution")* (Chengdu: Sichuan People Publishing House, 1995), 174.

<sup>155</sup> Jiang, "Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art" , 1-32.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. , 4; Mingxian Wang, "From Red Guard Art to Contemporary Art" in *Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art*, ed. Jiehong Jiang (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 4.

The Red Guards usually wore green military uniforms with red armbands and carried the Little Red Book (*Quotations of Mao Zedong*) with them at times.<sup>157</sup> The plastic toy figures of Red Guards produced during the Cultural Revolution serve as good example of what the Red Guards looked like at the time.<sup>158</sup> (Figure 10) These figures show the classic revolutionary postures, the standardised outfits, and the popularity of the Little Red Books that were important visual elements for the Red Guards. The production of Red Guard model figures also shows how teenagers were socially shaped into a collective social role. Practices such as putting up posters, reading of *Quotations of Mao Zedong*, watching Model operas and destroying objects that were deemed to be the 'Four Olds' composed the everyday life of the Red Guards in the early phase of the Cultural Revolution.

The Red Guards put up their large-character posters to disseminate the messages of criticizing the 'Four Olds', which referred to old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits.<sup>159</sup> This was because the 'Four Olds' were regarded as the obstacle which prevented art and literature from directly serving the majority of the population who were peasants, workers and soldiers.<sup>160</sup> A political poster produced in Beijing in 1967 with the slogan *Smash the old world, Establish the new world*, may well illustrate the movement of the young Red Guards. This political picture shows a crowd of Red Guards going onto the roads and streets to disseminate large-character posters and political pictures. They rally in public with speeches and red flags, and attack signs of the 'Four Olds' or objects which represented bourgeoisie. A closer inspection of the picture reveals objects of the bourgeoisie, including music records, a *crucifix*, an image of the Buddha, casino dice and classical literature. These represented Western capitalist culture and traditional Chinese culture.

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<sup>157</sup> The practice of the Red Guards carrying the Little Red Book (*Quotations from Chairman Mao*) has been written about in many books on the history of Cultural Revolution, such as Jiang, "Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art" Wang, "From Red Guard Art to Contemporary Art" Michael Schoenhals, *China's Cultural Revolution, 1966-1969: Not A Dinner Party* (New York & London: M.E. Sharpe, 1996).

<sup>158</sup> These artefacts are housed at University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London.

<sup>159</sup> Jiaqi Yan and Gao Gao, *Wenhua Da Geming Shinian Shi (The Ten-Year History of the Cultural Revolution)*, vol. 1 (Hong Kong: Chaoliu Publisher, 1989), 90.

<sup>160</sup> Mingxian Wang and Shanchun Yan, *Xin Zhongguo Meishu Shi (The Art History of the People's Republic of China): 1966-1976* (Beijing: China Youth Press, 2000), 40.

Many of the posters illustrate how radical, violent and destructive the Red Guard movements were. The struggles of Red Guards and Rebels to “seize power” from bureaucrats and managers depicted in the posters have been described as using a style in which, quoting Gittings, ‘the fist was larger than the face.’<sup>161</sup> As Wang Mingxian points out:

In the 1960s, the world was experiencing dramatic changes; the arts were also undergoing fundamental fission and reconstruction. Red Guard art was a fanatical product of centralised power and modern superstition, as well a “red modernist” art form.<sup>162</sup>

The initial period of Cultural Revolution was also typified by a cultish emphasis on Mao Zedong and the *Quotations of Mao Zedong*. Mao and the Little Red Book were key subjects of the posters. The start of the Cultural Revolution was actually marked by a huge number of young people, many in their teens, answering Mao Zedong’s summons to struggle against the ‘Four Olds’ and the bourgeoisie.<sup>163</sup> Many political pictures at that time illustrate Red Guards holding the Little Red Books and brushes which promote the reading of *Quotations of Mao Zedong* and making posters and pictures. These messages were spread widely particularly during the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. These slogans and political pictures were characterised by the ideological struggle of Maoist communist against the intrusion of Western capitalism.

In a typical example – *Oppose Economism: Beat down the counterattack of the capitalist class’ reactionary line* – produced in Shanghai in 1967, one Red Guard rips up papers written with text ‘Economism’ (*jingjizhuyi*) and ‘Welfarism’ while other writes the slogan ‘Oppose Economism!’ on a bare wall. (Figure 4) This theme corresponded the situation where senior leaders (i.e. Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping) were accused of ‘economism’ because they offered material incentives which sidetracked the masses away from Mao Zedong’s thought. Thus, a poster bearing the slogan of *Smash the Liu-Deng [Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping] Reactionary Line* belongs to this initial period, in which a giant figure with huge fists holding *Quotations of Mao Zedong* is beating up two small figures on which the words ‘Liu’ and ‘Deng’ are written.

<sup>161</sup> Gittings, "Excess and Enthusiasm" , 32-33.

<sup>162</sup> Wang, "From Red Guard Art to Contemporary Art" , 35.

<sup>163</sup> Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: a history* , 52.



The anti-Western capitalist campaigns were necessarily related to Soviet revisionism and Western capitalism at that time. Thus, some posters produced around the mid-1960s period depict the struggle against Soviet revisionism and Western capitalism. In a typical poster, *Down with the Soviet Revisionist* produced in Shanghai in 1967, features many red fists which represent the power of the Chinese communism smashing the figures which represent Leonid Brezhnev and Alexei Kosygin, the First Secretary and Premier of the Communist Party of Soviet Union at that time. (Figure 6) This picture is described in a sub-heading: ‘Smash the dog-head Brezhnev, Smash the dog-head Kosygin’.

When the movement had become too violent and chaotic for the Party to control, the policy was put into place for the mass transfer of 'educated youth' (*zhiquing*) to the countryside. The ‘Up to the mountains, Down to the villages’ movement began in 1968 to prepare for the restoration of order in the cities and posters were important tools to encourage the Red Guards to leave the cities. A poster – New Home (*Xin Jia*) – produced in Beijing in 1974 illustrates the welcoming scene of an urban youth who is transferred from the city to a host family in a village. (Figure 7)

Posters were also used in promoting international relations policies during the Mao years. In February 1972, U.S. President Richard Nixon paid his historic visit to China, soon after the first American sports delegation visited Beijing in 1971. Two months after Richard Nixon's visit, a Chinese table-tennis delegation also visited the U.S. in April 1972. This was the well-known ‘Ping Pong diplomacy’ which was significant in normalising the relation between the People's Republic of China and the U.S. through establishing a mutual understanding of the idea of ‘One China’, and Nixon and the U.S. government reassured their mutual interests in a peaceful solution of the Taiwan question worked out by the Chinese themselves. Thus, in a poster produced in Liaoning in 1975, a group of children was depicted writing letters to their friends in Taiwan and embroidering a China national flag with two table tennis rackets and toys. (Figure 8)

Political figures were featured in posters mainly in written texts produced in the later period of the Cultural Revolution. Jiang Qing and other members of the Gang of Four became the targets of poster attacks for a short time after they

were arrested in October 1976.<sup>164</sup> A poster produced in 1976 depicting a crowd reading *Quotations of Mao Zedong* is given great emphasis with the slogans laden with dogmatic Party language: *Thoroughly expose the monstrous crimes committed while attempting to take over Party power by the anti-Party clique Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, Jiang Qing and Yao Wenyuan*. Cartoon figures of the Gang were featured in the anti-Gang propaganda campaign.<sup>165</sup> (Figure 9) These cartoons were reproduced in other cultural forms, such as the cartoons of Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen on circular target paper boards in the form of a throwing game for kids. (Figure 11)

In the previous paragraphs I briefly introduced some examples of posters and themes produced and adopted during the Cultural Revolution. These examples show how posters and slogans during the Cultural Revolution were closely related to the daily lives of people and the changing political agenda of the authorities. In the initial stage of the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards engaged in political activism by producing posters, putting them up on walls and writing slogans on walls. Through these activities a growing sense of group identification among the young students was constructed and strengthened, and formed a new kind of cultural-political identity. These street level cultural forms were complemented with highly produced posters at the Party level. The young student Red Guards engaged in a whole set of practices from the production, exhibition and dissemination of the large-character posters and political pictures with specific political messages at that time. In this case, those posters and pictures were not only produced by the students, but the artefacts also had an effect on the identity-formation of the students. After 1968 Red Guards were sent to learn from the peasants in the countryside, an experience which had a profound effect on the hardship of those young urban citizens.<sup>166</sup> Themes and slogans of the posters and other daily objects corresponded to political and social developments and were inextricably linked with the everyday life of the people.<sup>167</sup> However, almost all the original slogans of Cultural Revolution pictures were

<sup>164</sup> Gittings, "Excess and Enthusiasm" , 35-36.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. , 33.

<sup>166</sup> Jiaqi Yan and Gao Gao, *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 279.

<sup>167</sup> Gittings, "Excess and Enthusiasm" , 35-36.

replaced by new taglines, which closely related to current socio-economic developments in post-2000 China when these pictures were brought into a completely different context across time. Only a small range of Cultural Revolution themes have been made into new cultural products in the contemporary era for young urban consumers. In particular, the theme of anti-capitalism depicted in posters in the early phase of Red Guard violence contrasts radically with the new policy of a socialist market economy in the post-reform era. In the following section I explore how Cultural Revolution pictures are transferred to our current time, and how they form close relations with issues in the post-2000 era.

To examine closely the posters produced during the Cultural Revolution reveals several different ways of using the pictures with slogans. Sometimes one main message is produced by the combination of the picture and slogan. For example, in the poster – *Chairman Mao is the Reddest Reddest Red Sun in Our Hearts* – produced in Jilin around 1966 or 1967, a huge image of Mao Zedong is depicted radiating like the sun over a crowd of female Red Guards. (Figure 12) But sometimes the pictures can be less specific so that it functions as a background for a written slogan. For example, the poster of a group of Red Guards holding slogans and the Little Red Books sets the scene for the slogan 'Revolutionary Proletarian right-to-rebel troops unite!' (*Wuchan jieji zaofan pai lianhe qilai*). (Figure 13) Sometimes the visual depictions emphasise the actual physical action of how the goal stated in the written slogan can be implemented. For example, in a classic example of early Red Guard art, the male individual is smashing objects including a crucifix, a Buddha and classical Chinese texts which were considered images of the Olds and imperial domination. This picture illustrates the action of the goal stated in the slogan: 'Smash the Old World, Establish the New World' (*Dasui jiu shijie chuangli xin shijie*). (Figure 14) Some pictures with similar slogans can illustrate different aspects of how the same principle can be actualised. For example, a poster with a slogan which reads: 'Chairman Mao is the red sun in our hearts' illustrates a crowd of people of different ethnicities holding *Quotations of Mao Zedong* and the person in the front holds his book up high with his strong arm. (Figure 15). This poster has almost the same slogan as the previous example (Figure 12), but instead of illustrating the

unity among Red Guards it depicts the unity of different ethnicities within the country.

The above examples of original posters of Cultural Revolution show how the lives of Red Guards were generally depicted in political pictures in certain specific moments. It shows the visual representations of the radical movements, the enthusiasm and violence of the Red Guards and the prevalence of these art practices at the time. It is important to note that in 21st century contemporary China, similar images of the Red Guards circulated through new technologies as a new way to engage with today's urban city life. These are the mobile phone pictures which have only become available since 2002, and were not more widespread until 2004.<sup>168</sup> Like the plastic figures and posters in the past, Cultural Revolution imagery in the form of mobile phone pictures targets the teenagers who are now enthusiastic about engaging with new technologies such as the internet and mobile phones. Barmé has pointed out that an aspect of the new Mao Cult in the 1990s was that the young were the main target audience, and accordingly, the agent who consumes the Cultural Revolution products:

Many consumers of Mao products were adolescents or people in their early twenties who were unfamiliar with the Mao era. Unconcerned with the burdens of the past, they could indulge their curiosity and be playful in their approach to Mao memorabilia. Young people often regarded Mao not as a unique Great Leader but as a homebred luminary who deserved a position in the galaxy of Hong Kong and Taiwan pop stars popular on the Mainland... There was an unbridgeable gap between those who had lived through the Mao years and those who had not. The Cult provided a common ground and a hazy realm of consensus in a society in which the generation gap was increasingly making its impact felt. Young converts to the new Mao Cult also found in it a perfect way to express adolescent rebelliousness and romanticism. Here was a politically safe idol that could be used to annoy the authorities, upset parents, and irritate teachers.<sup>169</sup>

Barmé's point is still valid in the post-2000 Chinese context in the sense that, on the one hand, there was a market for Maoist imagery and thus Cultural Revolution mobile phone pictures, as new technological products, were likely to attract this particular group of young consumers.

However, unlike the role of political pictures during the Red Guard movements, these pictures are not faithful and complete reproductions of the

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<sup>168</sup> Most of the websites of internet dotcom corporations were available since 2002. In this same year mobile phones became relatively affordable than ever before when cheaper phones were available in the market.

<sup>169</sup> Barmé, *Shades of Mao: the posthumous cult of the great leader*, 47.

originals. Instead, these are edited, 'cut-out' and thus essentialised pictures of the original. Moreover, as new digital editions, the political messages attached to the original are no longer relevant or applicable in a different era. These pictures are reconstructed to become a new form of entertainment in the context of capitalistic urban culture. More significantly, both the textual and social meanings of Cultural Revolution imagery are transformed in this specific contemporary practice of reproduction and consumption.

#### *New technology development in post-2000 era*

Before discussing the examples of Cultural Revolution mobile phone pictures, it is necessary to understand the development of the internet and telecommunication technologies in the post-socialist Chinese context. According to the statistics reported by China Daily, there were more than 700 mobile telecommunications equipment users in China in 1987.<sup>170</sup> According to survey reports on Internet development in China conducted by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), in January 2000, there were 8,900,000 internet users in China. In addition to the users who accessed the internet by computer, 200,000 users employed other equipment such as mobile telephone and palmtop computer (PDA).<sup>171</sup> In 2001 the number of mobile phone users increased to over 100 million, which was the largest in the world at the time. By January 2002 there were 33,700,000 internet users in China among which 1,180,000 used mobile terminals to access to the internet.<sup>172</sup> A survey on new media awareness in China was conducted between December 2003 and January 2004 which showed that about sixty percent of one thousand Chinese aged between ten and forty-five in Beijing and Shanghai admitted that they are deeply dependent on mass media and “could not stand to live a life without a TV and the internet.”<sup>173</sup> By January 2004

<sup>170</sup> Xinhua, *China's mobile phone users exceeds 600m* [Online] (China Daily, 2007 [cited 17 September 2009]); available from [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2007-09/17/content\\_6111334.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2007-09/17/content_6111334.htm).

<sup>171</sup> China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), the state network information centre of China founded in 1997, defines an Internet user as a Chinese citizen who uses the Internet at least one hour per week. This definition excludes the citizen in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. The data was obtained from Internet Statistics, *The 5th Survey Report*.

<sup>172</sup> Internet Statistics, *The 9th Survey Report*.

<sup>173</sup> ‘China Daily, *Media Literacy Crucial in 21st Century* (30 October) (Xinhua News Agency, 2004 [cited 12 September 2009]); available from [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-10/30/content\\_387017.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-10/30/content_387017.htm).

there were 79.5 million internet users in China and 2.14 million of this population used mobile terminals. The rising number of internet users indicates the increasing popularity and prevalence of new technologies in China.

This trend shows no sign of stopping as China still has a vast rural market to open and urban mobile phone users are demanding more ‘vogue, media-rich and web-accessible’ handsets.<sup>174</sup> Since the 1980s the Chinese government has adopted a welcoming policy towards the development of new technologies in China. Zhou Yongming points out that the rapid development of the Internet in China since the 1980s was due to the Chinese government’s desire to make use of this new technology as an engine for economic and technological development, and its interest in keeping the infrastructure and services out of foreign control.<sup>175</sup> With government support, the public use of the Internet in China has drastically penetrated into aspects of everyday life. The number of Internet users in China increased from 22,500,000 in 2000 to 298,000,000 in 2008.<sup>176</sup> Since the Internet was first introduced in China, authorities have regarded this new technology as the same as other forms of mass media such as newspapers, radio and TV which are monitored and controlled by the government.<sup>177</sup> The Chinese government’s concerns about economic and technological development also led to a commercialisation of public media during the reform era, but as Zhou says, this does not mean a relaxation of control on the part of the authorities.<sup>178</sup> To understand the rapid growth of the internet in China, we must take into account the Chinese government’s principle: ‘to promote active development and take full advantage of the new technology while strengthening control and avoiding negative effects.’<sup>179</sup> To avoid ‘negative effects’ the government has issued many regulations about the use of the internet for disseminating information. Regarding

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<sup>174</sup> Xinhua, *China's mobile phone users exceeds 600m*.

<sup>175</sup> Yongming Zhou, *Historicizing Online Politics: Telegraphy, the Internet, and Political Participation in China* (Stanford and California: Stanford University Press, 2006), 137.

<sup>176</sup> Internet Statistics, *Internet Development in China between 1997 and 2009* [Online] (China Internet Network Information Center, 2009 [cited 15 Aug 2009]); available from <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/en/index/00/02/index.htm>.

<sup>177</sup> Zhou, *Historicizing Online Politics: Telegraphy, the Internet, and Political Participation in China*, 138.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 141.

content, there are numerous forbidden items of information which are not to be copied, transmitted or spread through the telecommunication networks, including references that are deemed to endanger national security, injure national unity and solidarity, harm national dignity and interest, advocate cult and feudal superstitions, promote violence or terrorism.<sup>180</sup> Control is exercised through Chinanet, the national public information network, established in order to prevent individuals and businesses connecting to the internet independently and to make sure that internet use is under surveillance.<sup>181</sup> Zhou argues that we need to pay attention to both the popular creativity in the use of technology and how the technologies have been used to serve the Chinese Communist Party's interests<sup>182</sup>.

The Chinese government's welcoming policy on the development of new technologies resulted in the availability of new information technologies such as the Internet and mobile telecommunication networks in major urban Chinese cities.<sup>183</sup> This resulted in an increasing use of the World-Wide Web and mobile phone technology among urban Chinese citizens.<sup>184</sup> These socio-economic developments made available a newly emerged cultural product called mobile phone picture (*shouji caixin* which literally means mobile phone picture message) which could be downloaded via the internet or telecommunication service through electronic devices such as computers and mobile phones, and further circulated via the Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS).<sup>185</sup> Against this socio-technological background, some of the political pictures formerly produced by the

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid. , 142.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. , 143.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. , 146-147.

<sup>183</sup> China introduced its first mobile telecommunication equipment in 1987. There were approximately 700 users. In 2001, the number of cell phone users passed 100 million. When Gome, China's largest electronic retailer, started selling mobile phones in 2002, there was a rapid increase in the number of mobile phone users. The number reached 300 million in May 2004 and 400 million in January 2006. Information about Internet development in China: Internet Statistics, *The 5th Survey Report*. Information about the mobile telecommunication development in China: Xinhua, *China's mobile phone users exceeds 600m*. Also read People's Daily, *About 40% of Chinese people use mobile phones* [Online] (English People's Daily Online, 25 December 2007 [cited 25 Dec 2008]); available from <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90882/6326944.html>.

<sup>184</sup> Internet Statistics, *Internet Development in China between 1997 and 2009*.

<sup>185</sup> Internet Statistics, *The 15th Survey Report* [Online] (China Internet Network Information Center, Jan 2005 [cited 1 Oct 2009]); available from <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/download/2005/2005012701.pdf> ; Beijing Time, *China's portals eyeing MMS for future explosive growth* [Online] (English People's Daily Online, 7th March 2004 [cited 15 June 2007]); available from [http://english.people.com.cn/200403/07/eng20040307\\_136753.shtml](http://english.people.com.cn/200403/07/eng20040307_136753.shtml).

young Chinese in the 1960s, hereafter referred to as ‘Cultural Revolution’ imagery, were integrated with the new technologies in the form of the mobile phone picture. The cultural and social meanings of these pictures have been transformed through its unprecedented usage via the new technologies and the new socio-economic environment in China in the post-2000 era.

Following the introduction of mobile phone technology and multimedia messaging service in China, an unprecedented mode of image consumption emerged. This method is called Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS), and is a wireless technology which allows mobile phone users to send pictures to other handsets. Wireless multimedia service companies have been rapidly established since the technology was introduced, and websites which provide MMS-related products have also appeared on the internet. These websites aim to provide the community with a wide range of multimedia value-added products and services (*duo mei ti zeng zhi chan pin ji fu wu*). The websites of wireless multimedia service companies not only publish written materials, but also play an important part in disseminating, and facilitating the further circulation of multimedia materials which are mainly digitalized images. One example of which is the MMS picture pages of online multimedia service providers. These pages display MMS visual products in a wide range of categories from which cell phone users can access a variety of images for decoration and entertainment purpose. In 2006 a Google search with the keyword ‘MMS download’ (*caixin xiazai* in Chinese) provided 2,560,000 results. What is more instructive is that this search was on the top of the result list, which indicates that MMS download has been the most popular among all other searches in relation to MMS technology. In 2009 this search yields 2,800,000 results on the top of the search list.

The introduction of MMS technology has formed an alternative channel for the dissemination of audio-visual materials in China since 2002.<sup>186</sup> It allows delivery of personal multimedia messages, which can contain images, graphics, voice and audio clips, from phone to phone or from phone to e-mail. The combination of the Internet, MMS and mobile phone network facilitates the

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<sup>186</sup> The Chinese telecommunication operators, such as Beijing Mobile and Fujian Mobile, cooperated with Nokia in 2002 to set up the first MMS roaming in Asia. The first MMS messages were experimentally sent between Beijing Mobile and Hong Kong CSL Ltd. and between Fujian Mobile and Hong Kong CSL Ltd. in April 2002.



production of new cultural products and their dissemination. One of the recent examples is the emergence of mobile phone multimedia graphics, which is called *Multi-media pictures (caixin)* in Putonghua, created by MMS audio-visual source providers in response to the consumption of MMS in China.

Multi-media pictures, literally meaning ‘picture messages’, refer to the multimedia graphic products purchasable through the websites of some MMS audio-visual source providers in China. Some of these multimedia pictures are moving graphics which can also go with pop music ring tones. Mobile phone users in China can buy and download their favourite photos, animations and ring tones to their mobile phones through accessing specific websites on the Internet. After a multimedia graphic is purchased and downloaded, an individual can circulate it, and any attached audio file, from a mobile phone to another mobile phone or from a mobile phone to the Internet. This mobile entertainment and commerce has radically developed in China since MMS was introduced. Some major MMS audio-visual source providers such as Tom Online, Yitang, Caixiu and Sina have emerged in China’s telecommunications market one after another since 2002. MMS was expected by the service providers to ‘encourage the deployment of content like entertainment, information, gaming and mobile commerce’ in China.<sup>187</sup>

#### *Cultural Revolution imagery as mobile phone pictures*

My online research shows that Cultural Revolution imagery, as mobile phone pictures, have been categorised under different labels by different providers. But generally I can summarise the nature of its use into three main types. The first type refers to the use of Cultural Revolution imagery as a cultural source for nostalgia. For example, the mobile phone picture provider [www.wapol.cn](http://www.wapol.cn) categorised pictures of Red Guards, Lei Feng and Chairman Mao Zedong, which were published in political posters during the Cultural Revolution, under the label ‘Fervent Red Epoch’ (*Huohong niandai*). This suggests the meaning of these images is to recall a bygone, eventful era. The second type is similar to the first in emphasizing the glorious revolutionary past, but this time the images of the past

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<sup>187</sup> China Daily, *Nokia Chips in on MMS services (31 May)* (Zhonghuawang, 31st May 2002 [cited 11 November 2009]); available from [http://service.china.org.cn/link/wcm/Show\\_Text?info\\_id=33607&p\\_qry=MMS](http://service.china.org.cn/link/wcm/Show_Text?info_id=33607&p_qry=MMS).

are used as a way to promote national unity in today's context. For example, another provider mms.etang.com placed a series of Cultural Revolution images under the category 'Cultural Revolution Series' (*Wenge Xilie*) in which taglines such as 'Learn Culture to Contribute to the Motherland' (*Xuexi wenhua baoxiao zuguo*) and 'United as One Heart to Protect the Motherland' (*Tuanjie yixin baowei zuguo*). The third type refers to the borrowing of Cultural Revolution images to produce humorous statements for general amusement. For example, mms.tom.com reworks pictures of the Red Guards and characters in model operas, and turns them into funny expressions with colloquial taglines which closely correspond to the everyday life in 21<sup>st</sup> century China. Some of these pictures are given slogans which emphasizes individualism while some others correspond to the current popular cultural trends in the society.

Some features of mobile phone pictures can be generally identified. These pictures are meant to be looked at via the screens of mobile phones after being downloaded from the Internet, which can also be accessed by desktop computers or other devices. Thus, the small screen of a mobile phone explains why the captions of these digitised pictorial products are usually abbreviated as short catchphrases. The form of technology has an impact on the scale and scope of the image/text. These brief catchphrases can also be understood as a result of a well-rooted, prevalent local cultural phenomenon called *shunkouliu*. According to Barmé, *shunkouliu* or *shunkouliu'r* could be found in the use and comic abuse of Mao quotations during the Cultural Revolution when daily life speech was under tight control.<sup>188</sup> It was an unofficial local culture through which people expressed their discontentment in an indirect and implicit way. This oral culture is characterised by humorous, ironic and rhythmic popular sayings used in daily conversations. Barmé also identified a characteristic of local culture in Beijing in early 1990s wherein the consumers of the products also enjoyed 'the clever use of language and apothegms' in Kong's T-shirts which bore humorous, ironic, political statements and illustrations.<sup>189</sup> The point here may be that the local people in China enjoy the pleasure of humorous and ironic statements and rhythmic expressions which could be a part of a long established cultural and social practice ingrained into everyday life. Here I am not suggesting that there is

<sup>188</sup> Barmé, *In The Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture*, 147.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 145 and 147.

a definite direct link between *shunkouliu* culture and the commercialised Cultural Revolution culture in postsocialist context. However, the local and unofficial nature of *shunkouliu* and its traditional use as a comic twisting of Mao quotations is only specific to mainland Chinese culture which may play an important part in the appreciation of the parodic captions in Cultural Revolution mobile phone text pictures. *Shunkouliu* culture has established a familiar way of exchanging commentary in everyday life, and the Cultural Revolution mobile phone pictures which have taglines about social life are typical cultural products from the same cultural environment.

The first example of a Cultural Revolution mobile phone picture shows a man wearing a green cap with an emblem in the front and a piece of red insignia of the Red Guards on this left arm. (Figure 16) Both the green cap and the red insignia on arm were popular during the Cultural Revolution period. This man has a big Little Red Book in his left hand which looks like *The Quotations of Mao Zedong*. In his right hand is a brush which suggests that he is writing. In the course of the Cultural Revolution, writing large character posters (*dazibao*) was a practice and form of political expression. The man writing looks like he is producing a *dazibao*. This picture is captioned with the phrase: ‘You are the best (excellent)’ (*ni shi zui bang de*) which is written vertically on the left and horizontally below the image respectively. This phrase in Chinese could be easily heard today in everyday life in China. But this statement which values individualism creates a strong contrast with the collective identities (i.e. the Red Guards, the educated youth, the PLA, the worker, peasant and soldier, etc.) and social life (e.g. mass assembly) during Cultural Revolution, when Mao Zedong was usually described as the most important leader of the country as manifested in the metaphor of Mao Zedong as ‘the red sun’.

This example is collected from the website [mms.tom.com](http://mms.tom.com) of the Tom Group (Tom Online), one of the largest wireless internet service providers in China. It started launching MMS services to provide multimedia MMS products in 2002.<sup>190</sup> Their online products include multimedia graphics and animations, ring tones, screen savers and wireless magazines. Their target customers are the

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<sup>190</sup> I saw the Cultural Revolution mobile phone pictures on [mms.tom.com](http://mms.tom.com) in late 2004. But the trend could be earlier since 2002 when the use of mobile phone started prevalent in major urban cities and most of the dotcom business websites were built since then.

young mobile phone and Internet users reside in mainland China. To successfully purchase multi-media pictures the customers need an MMS-enabled handset and internet access to download the audio-visual materials. Some providers may only provide service to users of specific cellular networks. The price varies from providers but the average cost for one multi-media picture is around RMB¥1.0 to RMB¥2.5 per download. Charges are to be made directly to the customers' mobile phone bills.<sup>191</sup>

This mobile phone picture was labelled as 'Humours and Jokes' (*youmo gaoxiao*) on Tom Online's Multi-media pictures main page.<sup>192</sup> In this case, the Cultural Revolution imagery was made into humour or jokes in everyday social life or relationships. This categorisation of Cultural Revolution imagery as everyday humour or jokes may reflect a tailored taste to match the Chinese consumer most of whom enjoy the pleasure of humorous and ironic jokes about the Cultural Revolution. Thus, this shows a relative level of sophistication that contemporary recurrence of Cultural Revolution imagery is not a simple mimicking but a process of meaning making.

This example suggests that the individual identities are given more emphasis in the reform era. On the other hand, the Cultural Revolution images were exclusively used in promoting the latest political and national goals or campaigns. Their depoliticised and decentralised use in other social aspects and more personal aspects of life enriches the role of the Cultural Revolution images in contemporary China.

The second example is a similar version but captioned differently. In this picture, a man is wearing the same green cap and red insignia on his left hand. He is also holding a brush as if he is writing. (Figure 17) What makes the difference is the neon light effect in the background which makes the Little Red Book looks like shining. This picture is captioned with the phrase: 'My wife is the red sun in

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<sup>191</sup> This price range and also the criteria of the ownership of mobile phone and necessary access to the internet suggest that the consumers of multi-media pictures are mainly the urban middle-class educated users.

<sup>192</sup> In 2004, this picture was published on one of the popular pages in Tom.com's main page. But since June 2006, I found it being removed from the main page. This picture is still available for consumption on Tom.com but not promoted by the company anymore and it is no longer as popular as it used to be.

Hyperlink to this picture before 2006:

[http://mms.tom.com/ani\\_new.html?inc=index&t=1&mobtype=10010003&catalog=9&ordby=inserttime&ord=desc](http://mms.tom.com/ani_new.html?inc=index&t=1&mobtype=10010003&catalog=9&ordby=inserttime&ord=desc).

Hyperlink to this picture after 2006:

[http://m.tom.com/search\\_newweb.php?radiobutton=all&comment\\_keyword=%C4%E3%CA%C7%D7%E%B0%F4%B5%C4&imageField.x=25&imageField.y=12](http://m.tom.com/search_newweb.php?radiobutton=all&comment_keyword=%C4%E3%CA%C7%D7%E%B0%F4%B5%C4&imageField.x=25&imageField.y=12).

my heart' (*laopo shi wo xin zhong de hongtaiyang*). To put it in mainland Chinese context, this phrase is a reference to the content of an interview in a local TV programme called 'Husband and Wife Theatre'. On 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2002, the emcee interviewed Gong Hanlin and his wife who are both popular performing artists in China. In their conversation, Gong Hanlin described the role of his wife as 'the unique sun in his life' because of her joyful and outgoing personality.<sup>193</sup> Gong Hanlin's performance on TV is well-known across China. To 'google' with the keyword 'Gong Hanli' in Chinese brings to 266,000 results in relation to his work. With the same Cultural Revolution picture being appropriated for different versions of mobile phone text pictures suggests that there is a narrow range of Cultural Revolution pictures or symbols being particularly recycled in the post-revolution era.

The same Cultural Revolution pictures provided by [www.tom.com](http://www.tom.com) could also be found commercialised at [www.etang.com](http://www.etang.com) and [www.wapol.cn](http://www.wapol.cn). For example, the picture of a male Red Guard writing big character poster used in Figure 16 is the same as the one in Figure 17, Figure 22 and Figure 23. This picture is given different captions such as 'Knowledge is Power' (*Zhishi jiushi lilian*) under the category of 'Fervent Red Epoch' at [www.etang.com](http://www.etang.com) and 'Revolt Till the End' (*Geming Daodi*) under the category of 'Cultural Revolution Series' at [www.wapol.cn](http://www.wapol.cn).

The third example '(I've) Got my red pockets' at [www.tom.com](http://www.tom.com) (Figure 18) illustrates the sending of educated youth to the countryside in 1968. In this picture, Red Guards are in the train heading to the countryside. This is a picture of two joyful young individuals travelling on a train. We can see these two young individuals wearing warm hats and coats which look like Chinese Army fur hats and uniforms. In their hands are the red envelopes which suggests red envelopes of lucky money (*yasuiqian*). This also suggests that, if the Little Red Books dominated the people's mind during Cultural Revolution, then during post-socialist, the dominating thought should be the little red pockets which suggest capitalist ideologies and money-oriented thinking. The individuals are wearing a red floral emblem (*hong xiu qiu*) which suggests that the young individuals are

<sup>193</sup> Hong Xie, *Lian jia de nanren' Gong Hanlin: Laopo shi wo xin zhong de hong taiyang (An Attentive Man At Home' Gong Hanlin: My wife is the red sun in my heart)* (Epoch Times, 2002 [cited 15 June 2004]); available from <http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/2/1/23/n165805.htm>.

educated youth who participated in the ‘Up to the mountains, Down to the countryside’ movement (*Shang shan xia xiang yundong*) which was implemented in 1968. During the movements, young individuals in the cities were summoned to go to the countryside to be re-educated by the poor and farmers in villages. It is found published in a handbook of political newspaper heading (*Baotou*) designs titled Information on headings for *Mao Zedong Thought Dissemination Board* (*Mao Zhedong Sixiang Xuanchuan Lan Baotou Ziliao*).<sup>194</sup> (Figure 25)

The book gave guidance to art workers to produce the standardised layouts of newspaper headings so that a unified style could be produced by a large number of art workers all over the country. This picture is presumably to be reproduced in a variety of cultural forms during Cultural Revolution. The original illustrates the departure of a train on which two young enthusiastic passengers wearing big grins on their faces waving their ‘Little Red Books’ which suggests *The Quotations of Mao Zedong*. There are some waving red flags which suggested a farewell scene at the train station. A slogan ‘Learn from Comrade Jin Xunhua’ (*Xiang Jin Xunhua Tongzhi Xuexi*) and the words ‘Shanghai’ are written on the train. Jin Xunhua was one of the model Red Guards in the 1960s. (Figure 26) This scene of a train departure suggests that the young individuals are leaving the city Shanghai and they are going to learn from the comrade Jin Xunhua to learn and contribute in rural areas. Like the previous examples, this picture can also be found at other websites. For example, the same image is given a different caption ‘Build up the motherland’ (*Jianshe Zuguo*) at [www.wapol.cn](http://www.wapol.cn) under the category of ‘Fervent Red Epoch’.

The third example is a picture of a man who is wearing a blue uniform with a round blue hat. (Figure 19) For readers who have little knowledge about the culture during the Cultural Revolution, the simple elements in this picture may not mean a lot. But for those who experienced that period, it is not hard to identify the man in a blue uniform as the main character named Li Yuhe in a Chinese Beijing model opera called Red Lantern (*Hongdengji*), which was popular in China around mid-1960s. This picture is given a caption: ‘I am not the boss for quite a few years)’ (*wo bu zuo da ge hao duo nian*). The origin of this

<sup>194</sup> *Baotou* is the picture by the newspapers or magazines headings with a purpose of visually highlighting the theme and decorates the cover page of a text. Claiming to encourage the participation of the general public in the making of *baotou*, handbooks were published by the Chinese Communist Party to provide samples and guidance to the painters of *baotou* particularly in the 1960s and 1970s.

phrase is from a song under this name sung by the Chinese pop star Ke Shouliang who became famous in Hong Kong in the 1980s.

The fourth example is a picture of a man who is wearing a green military uniform (*lujunzhuang*) with red insignia of the Red Guards on his collar and left arm, and a gun in his right hand. (Figure 20) Again, the visual elements in this picture are not easily identified without specific knowledge of the ballet culture during the Cultural Revolution. The posture of this Red-Guard-like man looks like the main character in the Cultural Revolution ballet play called *The White-Haired Girl* (*Bai Mao Nu*), which was originally a film and adapted into ballet under the leadership of Jiang Qing. This work was well-known during the Cultural Revolution as it was honoured as ‘one of the eight revolutionary theatrical performances’ in China.<sup>195</sup> The picture is captioned with a phrase: ‘Do you love me after all’ (*ni dao di ai bu ai wo*). This phrase also suggests a Chinese pop song with the same name composed by a local Chinese music band called Zero Point (*ling dian yue dui*). The song *Do you love me not* is popular across China, which was ranked number one for over twenty weeks in the ‘Top Ten Songs of the Week’ chart in 1997. This song also won the ‘Top Ten pop songs in China’ and ‘The Most Popular Original Chinese Song’ in China in the same year. The meaning of the new tagline becomes particularly interesting when the Cultural Revolution imagery illustrates the model performance during the Cultural Revolution. This model performance aimed to promote and cultivate a sense of self-sacrifice for the country. The original politically charged imagery has been transformed to depict a romantic, nationalistic relationship.

The last example is a picture of man wearing a green military uniform with two red insignias on his collar which suggests that he is a Red Guard. (Figure 21) This simple picture with a red background is captioned with the phrase: ‘If others leave me alone, I will leave them alone’ (*Ren bu fan wo, wo bu fan ren*), which means ‘We will not attack unless we are attacked’. This phrase is the first half of the motto which was first spoken out by Mao Zedong in 1939. The full original motto is ‘We will not attack unless we are attacked; if we are attacked, we will certainly counterattack’ (*Ren bu fan wo, wo bu fan ren; ren ruo*

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<sup>195</sup> Kwok-Sing Li, *A glossary of political terms of the People's Republic of China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1995), 156.

*fan wo, wo bi fan ren*). Mao Zedong announced in the press on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1939 that this motto is the principle/attitude of the Communist in terms of defence and offence. This is still one of the official mottos of the Communist Party of China today.<sup>196</sup> An internet search with this Chinese motto displayed 297,000 results.

During Cultural Revolution a large quantity of different Cultural Revolution pictures were produced to correspond to the latest political agenda and different campaigns at the time. However, it seems that only those pictures which are related to the radical social movements used with mobile phone pictures, such as the writing of the large character posters, the Red Guards, the sending of the youth to the countryside or pictures of revolutionary enthusiasm which are based on the image of a serious gaze suggesting hopes, spirits and determination. These particular phenomena, events and movements all involved mass social participation which dominated the everyday agenda of people from all walks of life during Cultural Revolution. The reappearance of these particular Cultural Revolution elements suggests a sense of admiration towards the enthusiasm, spirits and common goals of the mass social movements from the revolutionary past.

The above mobile phone pictures are a good example of how the culture of the Cultural Revolution is integrated with contemporary urban culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century China. These new cultural forms are significant for the study of how contemporary meanings of Cultural Revolution imagery are constructed in an unprecedented context in China which is marked by rapid developments in new technologies. In general it is obvious that the imagery has been edited and replaced by new slogans when it is used in today's urban culture. Most of the images are characterised by their origins as pictures of violent, radical and enthusiastic Red Guards with their classic revolutionary postures. Most significantly, my semiotic analysis reveals that the former use of the collective pronoun 'we' and the common political idol 'Mao Zedong' have been removed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century versions, and the use of 'I' and 'You' are more emphasized. A

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<sup>196</sup> Tom Group Caixin, *Ren bu fan wo wo bu fan ren (If others let me along, I will let them alone)[mobile phone picture]* [Online Mobile phone picture downloading page] (Tom Group China, 2002 [cited 7 Feb 2010]); available from [http://m.tom.com/dianbo\\_pic\\_new.php?type=tupian&search\\_word=%C8%CB%B2%BB%B7%B8%CE%D2,%CE%D2%B2%BB%B7%B8%C8%CB&contentid=53395](http://m.tom.com/dianbo_pic_new.php?type=tupian&search_word=%C8%CB%B2%BB%B7%B8%CE%D2,%CE%D2%B2%BB%B7%B8%C8%CB&contentid=53395).



good example can be found in the caption of the mobile phone picture (Figure 17) and the popular slogan in posters produced in the 1960s (Figure 12 and Figure 15) in which ‘Chairman Mao’ and ‘Our’ are replaced by ‘My wife’ and ‘My’. This exemplifies a very important change in the notion of self identity from the collective sense of ‘Our’ to the individual sense of ‘My’. This implies that the idea of private ownership in China is developing in the new era, along with the rise of consumerism and the use of new technologies.

### **Cultural Revolution imagery since Mao’s Death**

The mobile phone pictures discussed in the previous section throw light on the contemporary recycling of former revolutionary images in 21<sup>st</sup> century. These images of the past, which functioned as promotion tools in the political campaigns of a bygone era, are inherently outdated and irrelevant to the culture in 21<sup>st</sup> century China. However, as the mobile phone pictures show, instead of being forgotten in the new era, particular images of the Red Guards and heroes are reproduced and edited to integrate with contemporary culture. As discussed earlier, these images are given new captions to relate to current situations or reflect common ideas among the majority of people. However, this recycling of former revolutionary icons is not specific to the 21<sup>st</sup> century context. According to Gittings, the image of Mao Zedong was not absent from the people’s everyday lives even after Mao’s death in 1976. Previous studies, such as the work of Barmé and Tao, have also observed the commercialization of Cultural Revolution images, particularly the images of Chairman Mao Zedong and Red Guards were used in restaurants, tourist points and flea markets in the reform and post-reform eras. Thus these images have constantly remained in Chinese physical public spaces.

After Mao Zedong died in 1976, and thereafter the smashing of the Gang of Four, the Cultural Revolution officially ended.<sup>197</sup> However, the end of the Cultural Revolution did not mean the end of production and dissemination of Cultural Revolution imagery. It is important to note that the Cultural Revolution imagery, particularly the image of Mao Zedong, has not been removed from

<sup>197</sup> The Gang of Four (Siren Bang) was a political faction composed of four major Chinese Communist Party’s officials. It was headed by Jiang Qing, the wife of Mao Zedong, and her three other associates, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen. After Mao Zedong died in 9 September 1976, the gang was accused of plotting in 1966 to seize control of the Chinese Communist Party and thus the nation. Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: a history*, 26.

people's everyday life after his death. Instead, according to Gittings, a painting of Mao Zedong and Hua Guofeng talking in Mao's study hung for more than two years at the top of the escalator in the main hall of the Beijing Railway Station, which was only removed when Deng Xiaoping returned to power in 1979.<sup>198</sup> The Maoist Cultural Revolution imagery continued to emerge in post-Mao era. Many posters with Mao Zedong's image were published posthumously in 1977 and 1978. (Figure 27-30) In many of these posters, Mao Zedong was depicted as an important and good political leader. His portrait remained a part of people's everyday life in domestic settings or public spaces in China in the post-1976 context. It is important to note that Mao Zedong, though he has been criticised, has never been repudiated. The portrait of Mao hanging at Tiananmen Square is a good example to show Mao as an important political leader of China.

Barmé points out that there was a 'national revival of interest in Mao Zedong' in China in the late 1980s.<sup>199</sup> With this Barmé specifically points us to the emergence of a particular kind of 'Cultural Revolution Mao knick-knacks', consumer items reproduced with the image of Mao Zedong in different commodity forms, in flea markets or 'antique stores' in China's major cities.<sup>200</sup> The continuing presence of Mao and Cultural Revolution imagery in post-Mao China suggests its cultural significance.

Barmé points out an important aspect of socio-economic change in the Post-Mao era, namely, an increasingly open market under the system of 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics' adopted since late 1982.<sup>201</sup> This change in China's economy was the major factor to the emergence of 'Cultural Revolution Mao knick-knacks' in early 1980s.<sup>202</sup> These consumer items were mainly souvenirs for foreign tourists. Maoist Cultural Revolution posters and

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<sup>198</sup> Gittings, "Excess and Enthusiasm", 36.

<sup>199</sup> Barmé, *Shades of Mao: the posthumous cult of the great leader*, 40.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> The system of 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics' was adopted after the Constitution of People's Republic of China was passed on 4 December 1982. Source from *The Constitution of the People's Republic of China : adopted on December 4, 1982 by the Fifth National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China at its fifth session*, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1983), 1-19.

<sup>202</sup> The reproductions of posters and images of Mao Zedong were still prevalent and popular, and were sold at generally affordable prices. This information was gathered from my fieldwork at the Panjiayuan flea market in Beijing in May 2005.

other relics in different forms are Chinese cultural products which serve as good souvenirs to represent China in a certain way. I would argue that the survival of Cultural Revolution imagery in the post-Mao era is also because of a lack of a better signifier for the People's Republic of China. After the smashing of the Four Olds and after ten years of development in a kind of Cultural Revolution political art and sloganised culture, the layout of Cultural Revolution imagery with its taglines has become a cultural characteristic of China. This has a significant relevance to the Cultural Revolution mobile phone pictures in the post-2000 era because, as I will argue, the Cultural Revolution imagery is adopted to indicate a particular type of 'Chineseness' in the context of the globalisation of culture and rapid technological development. I will also argue that the mobile phone pictures in general inherited the layout of the Cultural Revolution poster: a big picture with attached slogans. Thus the mobile phone picture in post-2000 era could be interpreted as a newly emerged cultural form that is greatly influenced by the art of the Cultural Revolution.

Since the 1990s, the dissemination of the image of Mao Zedong and Cultural Revolution imagery has been transformed from physical objects to teleseries and documentaries.<sup>203</sup> These were produced as video compact discs or digital versatile discs which were widely available in local shops in China.<sup>204</sup> Tao has written an article about commercialised revolutionary culture in post-1989 China in which he considers the commercialisation and commodification of revolutionary symbols an aspect of the 'Chinese postmodern condition' and 'Chinese consumer culture'.<sup>205</sup> In Tao's terms, this refers to the circumstance in which 'there are no clear distinctions between high culture and low culture, elite culture and mass culture, etc.'<sup>206</sup> For Tao, postmodernity in Contemporary China does not refer to a 'new era', but to 'the synchronical condition of cultural hybridity'.<sup>207</sup> Tao gives two typical examples of how Cultural Revolution

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<sup>203</sup> Barmé, *Shades of Mao: the posthumous cult of the great leader*, 40.

<sup>204</sup> There was a collection of Mao Zedong DVD and VCD series available at Guangzhou Book Centre in China in 2005. Information gathered from my fieldwork at Guangzhou Book Centre in China.

<sup>205</sup> Tao, "The Commercialised Revolutionary Culture in Contemporary China", 69.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

culture/images are commercialised in the post-1990s socio-economic Chinese environment. The examples are advertisements for a palmtop computer (PDA) and a website of an electric business in China. Both of these print advertisements draw on the common symbols and the culture of the Cultural Revolution: the Red Guards, the Little Red Book (which appears to be *The Quotations of Chairman Mao*), the red flag (looks like the Chinese National Flag) and even uses the standardised layout of newspaper during the Cultural Revolution. These Cultural Revolution elements are recycled and remodelled to play a role in the technologised socialist market economy, and thus are used in the marketing of palmtop computers and electric business which are seen as unprecedented business opportunities in contemporary China.

The above examples exhibit the complexities involved in the commercialisation of Cultural Revolution culture. In Tao's term, the uniqueness of mainland Chinese modernity and postmodern rests on the situation that 'Chinese modernity was largely characterised by Cultural Revolution ideology... which lasted for more than half a century' and 'Chinese postmodernity is accordingly closely related to post-socialism or post-revolution' which resulted in a legacy of Cultural Revolution pictures and images in the postsocialist cultural and social context.<sup>208</sup> Thus, in this sense, the use of Cultural Revolution imagery in mobile phone pictures can be considered as a continuation of this legacy during the period of technological development. While new technologies have been rapidly developed in China, well-rooted Culture Revolution pictures serve as a stable cultural source to be integrated with these new technologies and are readily accepted by the majority of people.

### **Cultural Revolution imagery as new nationalistic icon**

The discussions in the earlier sections show a contemporary way of producing and consuming Cultural Revolution imagery in 21<sup>st</sup> century China. It is important to note that the prevalent use of the internet and mobile phones, particularly the immediate exchange of visual images via digital technologies, is a very recent phenomenon not only in China, but also in other parts of the world. Thus, the significance of this newly emerged linkage between Cultural Revolution pictures

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

and new technology, as well as capitalist commodification, should not be underestimated in a study of contemporary's culture. But what is apparently distinctive in a mainland Chinese context is the intrinsic contradiction between communist and capitalist ideologies in a 'socialist market economy'. As Dirlik and Zhang point out:

Throughout the 1980s, decentralization, the "invisible hand" of the market, global operation and competition, and the whole cornucopia of neoliberal economic doctrines were engaged ideologically and theoretically in order to create a "socialist market economy". The socio-economic change that sets the platform for discussions of Chinese postmodernity and postmodernism is, therefore, historically a state project. And it is the history of the particular state ideology or ideologies that provides the temporal as well as the social framework by which the process of Chinese "postmodernization" acquires concrete meaning as a postrevolutionary secularization. While Chinese leaders like to speak of "using capitalism to develop socialism", the current reality may well be the reverse: the use of "socialism" to achieve capitalist development.<sup>209</sup>

In this sense, the former revolutionary imagery which is now circulated on the internet and mobile phones can be understood as making use of 'socialism' to realise capitalist and technological developments, which are considered crucial for a 'socialist market economy'. For example, though the contents of slogans are changed, we can see the assertive, determined language of the Cultural Revolution style which was popular during the Cultural Revolution and is ingrained in today's culture through the use of mobile phone pictures. However, in other words, it is not inappropriate to consider that the commercialization of former revolutionary imagery helps consolidate political stability under the control of the Chinese Communist Party. For example, alongside the images with individualistic taglines shown earlier, there are also political pictures of former political leaders such as Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping circulated as mobile phone pictures with slogans: 'To Support Communism' and 'Proletarian Revolution'. (Figure 22) In Liu Kang's view, the socialist slogans of the Cultural Revolution era officially remain in postsocialist context as a means to maintain social order.<sup>210</sup> It is understandable that while the Chinese authorities consider capitalism and new technologies as a way to modernise China, the potential

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<sup>209</sup> Dirlik and Zhang, "Introduction: Postmodernism and China", 5.

<sup>210</sup> Kang Liu, "Popular Culture and the Culture of the Masses in Contemporary China" *Boundary 2: Postmodernism & China* 24, no. 3 (1997), 105.

threats to the authority of the government should not be underestimated. As my research reveals, a variety of Cultural Revolution images appearing within mobile phone pictures are available at the same time in order to offer consumers choice. The captions of these images are varied, but they all mix an ‘individualistic’ attitude with pro-government and nationalistic messages which create a new sense of Chinese identity. The increasing globalisation and integration of information and economy has necessitated a strong and modern Chinese identity. As Dirlik and Zhang point out:

Against the universal claims of the world market, these differences are constant reminders of location, boundary, and community. Thus, amid the euphoria of globalisation and integration, Chinese must also be experiencing what Ernest Gellner calls the “fatalistic” sense of belonging (and loyalty and love as a valorisation of or “supplement” to what you cannot choose), namely, an enhanced communal identity in terms of birthplace, natural environment, colour, economic condition, political culture, common history and language.<sup>211</sup>

The official use of Cultural Revolution culture in maintaining social order could be a strategic state project to construct a Chinese identity based on a common history, culture and language. In this sense, the influence of the revolutionary past in post-revolution era should not be considered as simply kitsch because ‘its aesthetic forms and structures are deeply ingrained in the Chinese cultural imaginary constituting a significant dimension in the contradiction-ridden cultural arena’ which can well be used to reconstruct a new Chinese identity in a context of technological modernization and ‘socialist market’ economy.<sup>212</sup>

Thus, the recycling of Cultural Revolution imagery in digital consumer items is a complex phenomenon. As a practice and experience specific to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, on the one hand, it shows how a socialist ideology adapts to capitalist consumer culture and new technologies in urban areas, and how Cultural Revolution imagery is reconstructed as both nationalistic and fun. In the following section I discuss an example of how the younger generation has enthusiastically engaged with Cultural Revolution imagery in a non-commercial and unofficial way, in which Cultural Revolution imagery is used as nationalistic emblems for an international sport event.

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<sup>211</sup> Dirlik and Zhang, "Introduction: Postmodernism and China", 7.

<sup>212</sup> Liu, "Popular Culture and the Culture of the Masses in Contemporary China", 102.

### Cultural Revolution posters in Asian Cup 2004

During the year when digital Cultural Revolution imagery first circulated online, Cultural Revolution posters were used by some Chinese teenage football fans in Asian Cup held in Beijing. The Asian Cup football tournament is organised by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) which was founded in 1956. Only Asian countries can join this tournament where the winning team becomes the champion of Asia and automatically qualifies for the FIFA Confederations Cup. The Asian Cup had been held every four years from 1956 to 2004.<sup>213</sup> China was the host country for the Asian Cup 2004 which was held in Beijing, the capital city of the country, from the 17<sup>th</sup> July to the 7<sup>th</sup> of August. What is noteworthy in this tournament is the patriotic and anti-foreign sentiment (especially toward the Japanese) of the Chinese football fans, tied to the traditional rivalry between China and Japan. The final match of the Asian Cup 2004 between China and Japan ended up in a riot by the Chinese football fans in part due to the Japanese victory and the historical tensions between the countries.<sup>214</sup> The young fans' use of posters of the aggressive, determined Red Guards is a good example to understand a non-commercial and less regulated deployment of Cultural Revolution imagery. (Figure 31)

#### *Poster No.1: China Team Go!*

At the time when a photograph of the Chinese football fans was circulated on the internet in July of 2004, the original of this 'China Team Go!' poster was appeared on the home page of Stefan Landsberger's website.<sup>215</sup> (Figure 32) The

<sup>213</sup> However, since the Summer Olympic Games and the European Football Championship were also scheduled in the same year as the Asian Cup, the AFC decided that the Asian Cup after 2004 was to be held in 2007 and will be held subsequently every four years. Information from AFC Asian Cup, *AFC Asian Cup 2011 History* (AFC Official Website, [cited 21 Jan 2010]); available from <http://www.the-afc.com/en/history>.

<sup>214</sup> BBC News Channel, *Chinese riot after Japanese victory (7 August)* (BBC News online, 2004 [cited 11 November 2009]); available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/3541380.stm>. Also read Mike Geddes, *Jeers as Japan win football final (7 August)* (BBC News, 2004 [cited 11 November 2009]); available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/3545474.stm>.

<sup>215</sup> When I revisited the website in October 2008, this poster has been removed from the cover page of Landsberger's website, (*Front Page*) (Stefan Landsberger at International Institute of Social History, [cited 10 October 2009]); available from <http://www.iisg.nl/landsberger/>. Landsberger is a collector of Chinese political posters and owns a physical collection in Amsterdam of the Netherlands. He started his 'Chinese Propaganda Poster Pages' online in 1997 in order to provide the public with an easier way to access his collection. Stefan Landsberger, e-mail message to author, 13 February, 2006.

original version of the ‘China Team Go!’ poster was produced in China in 1977. It was originally painted by the art worker Wang Yongqiang who was based in Shanghai following his graduation from the Shanghai Art School in 1965.<sup>216</sup> Like many other posters produced at that time, the purpose of this painting was to spread and promote the current political messages and campaign to the public at the time.

The visual composition and contents of this poster are simple but powerful. It depicts the confident and sophisticated facial expressions of two enthusiastic young Chinese individuals: a belligerent man wearing a floppy-eared winter hat and a cotton-packed jacket (*mian ao*), and a young woman shouldering a big hammer and a coil of rope with a copy of *Quotations of Mao Zedong* in her hand, positioned against an industrial field marked by oil drilling rigs and a van. To look at the poster more closely, there is also a cheering crowd holding red flags in the background. The confident facial expression and gaze were highly stylised to compose a rather standardised revolutionary posture. The original captions are: ‘Relentlessly criticise the “Gang of Four”, Set off a new upsurge of industry studying Daqing, Agriculture studying Dazhai’ (*henpi “Si ren bang” qianqi gongye xue Daqing nongye xue Dazhai xin gaochao*) and ‘Independence and complete self-sufficiency; Regeneration through our own efforts’ (*duli zizhu zili gengsheng*). This poster depicts industrial success: Daqing and Dazhai counties had been visually depicted as two model counties of the party state during the 1970s because of their regional achievements in oil drilling and agricultural mechanisation. Tools such as hammers, shovels and spanners had been used to represent the efforts and success of the industrial and agricultural mechanisation at that time.

It is understandable why such a powerful depiction of confidence and determination is used in an international sporting event like Asian Cup. While the teenagers had never experienced the Cultural Revolution and new taglines were given to the pictures, the power of Cultural Revolution imagery more than three decades after its original context, I argue, is less to do with the image’s historically specific meaning, but more likely rests on its own as an artwork with high quality aesthetics and powerful depictions, which fits well in any situation

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<sup>216</sup> Stefan Landsberger, *Wang Yongqiang 王永强* (Stefan Landsberger at International Institute of Social History, [cited 13 September 2009]); available from <http://www.iisg.nl/landsberger/sheji/sj-wyq-a.html>.



calling for national solidarity to achieve collective goals. Thus it is understandable to see such a powerful picture used by fans cheering the Chinese team in international football tournaments.

*Poster No.2: Chinese Football Nothing Is Impossible!!!*

Another poster that the Chinese fans used shows a large assembly of armed workers, peasants and soldiers (the PLA) in the front line of a battlefield under a big disembodied portrait of Mao originally produced in 1969. (Figure 33) The armed masses holding high red flags and The Little Red Book with a high morale surge towards to the direction that Mao directs. This image was captioned ‘All People of the World Unite, To overthrow American imperialism! To overthrow Soviet Revisionism! To overthrow reactionaries of all nations!’ (*Quan shijie renmin tuanjie qilai, Dadao meidi! Dadao Suxiu! Dadao geguo fandongpai!*). The romantic and idealised floating representation of Mao suggests the idea that Mao was spiritually with the people all the time without geographical constraints. The Little Red Book which represents the selected works of Mao reinforces the Mao cult encouraged by the party during the Cultural Revolution period. The meaning of this picture was also guided by the caption to stress national unity and the defeat of the American imperialism and Soviet revisionism.

These depictions of the three key social roles constructed in the revolutionary China – worker, peasant and soldier – along with the red flags, *The Quotations of Mao Zedong* and the floating disembodied Mao portrait were typical of the early Cultural Revolution posters. During the initial stage of Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1969 there were political campaigns against American imperialism and Soviet revisionist. This poster was part of the whole political visual discourse which corresponded to these campaigns. The depiction of an angry advancing crowd was another visual ‘vocabulary’ commonly used in the composition of pictorial art in China during the late 1960s. The defensive fierceness and assertiveness of the masses characterized the Cultural Revolution posters in the 1960s, while the posters in the 1970s placed relatively more emphasis on a positive perseverance in the development of national infrastructure and education of the next generations with the goal of making China an advanced country with cultured and civilised people. These were the cultural symbols of cultural unity and nationalism. Again, this example further demonstrates the

social practice of young Chinese in choosing nationalistic symbols. This was associated with the curiosity and creativity of an emergent Chinese nationalistic identity of this young generation.

The Chinese opposition to American imperialism and Soviet revisionism had continued since the outbreak of the Korean War and the Sino-Soviet split in the 1950s. The political campaigns against the reactionaries of other nations had become a hot topic for political art production. The slogan which encouraged the unity of the people and proletarians around the world came from the idea that China was the saviour of the proletarians, and could rescue them from the oppression of the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union. The new caption ‘Chinese football – nothing is impossible’ made by the football fans was followed by three exclamation marks, which may be influenced by the original slogan in which the exclamation mark was used three times to stress the defeat of the three major threats: the American imperialist, the Soviet revisionist and other reactionaries in the world. The original slogan is no longer relevant to the context of 2004, and this provides an interesting opportunity of replacing the inappropriate slogans of the past. It is also a source of irony in which the teenagers can poke fun at the culture of the past. It is amusing because of the contrast between the past and the present, but in this example the nationalistic sentiments and social solidarity depicted in the picture functioned as an instant, ‘ready-made’ template that was available for use. In fact, it is not very different from how Cultural Revolution pictures were used during the Cultural Revolution in the sense that collections of model pictures were published as references books so that art workers could easily reproduce the pictures and adapt them for different situations.

*Poster No.3: A great victory a red-letter day for the people*

The original poster was made in order to celebrate the inauguration of chairman Hua Guofeng, the successor to Mao in 1977. (Figure 34) The cheerful muscular drummer in the poster beats a big drum with a crowd of participants dancing in the ceremony under a giant yellow sun. The slogan ‘A great victory a red-letter day for the people’ (*weida de shengli renmin de jieri*) appears in the picture. Red balloons, ribbons, slogans, a big red sun and a carnival comprise the background of the picture and denote a notion of happiness. The original preferred reading of this picture can be understood in the slogan written on the white ribbons in the

image which states ‘Closely united in the surroundings under the central party’s leadership of Chairman Hua’ (*Jinmi de tuanjie zai yi Hua Zhuxi weishou de dang zhongyang zhouwei*). This kind of carnival depiction has been particularly related to the National Day and the advertising of the leadership of important political figure. The slogan on the ribbon was one of the discursive statements at the time when the message ‘All party, army and minority groups in the country are closely united in the surroundings under the central party’s leadership of Chairman Hua’ was used in different artistic forms and publications at the time.

Unlike the previous two poster examples, this poster was re-used by the Chinese fans without any textual appropriation, which may be because the image was already about a national celebration and fitted well with the context of the football tournament. Interestingly, the cheerful smiles and the dance celebration depicted in the poster were very similar to the happy smiles of the young Chinese fans and the gestures of the public in the Asian Cup. The white ribbons in the poster, for example, were well matched with the inflated plastic bags used by the supporters. This poster was different from the rest because it created a more celebratory mood which contrasted with the aggressive and defensive tone of the other three posters.

This example shows an important aspect of the reproduction of culture in contemporary China. As we can see the original slogan written in the picture (i.e. the one written on the white ribbon) can hardly be read in the reproduction used by the teenagers. Like many other pirate copies of cultural products (such as films, books, branded goods), a copy of the original is meant to be used temporarily because trendy goods are meant to be short-lived. The quality and delicate details of the original are usually not valued.

*Poster No.4: an advancing crowd with the Little Red Book*

Another poster adopted by the Chinese fans was characterised by the red-white-black colour composition which was typical of Chinese political posters produced in 1967. (see the poster on the left, Figure 31) Some distinctive features of this poster can be identified. First of all was the wood-block print style of the poster which characterised poster production in the initial stage of the Cultural Revolution. (examples such as Figure 5, Figure 14 and Figure 25) The use of woodcuts in printing has been adopted by the Chinese Communists in the new

woodcut movement of the 1930s.<sup>217</sup> At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, large quantities of posters had to be produced. Thus, woodcuts offer the best way to produce multiple copies when printing presses were in short supply. Also, the extremely short-lived nature of the posters, due to the nature of rapidly changing political campaigns, made the quick wood-block printing method the most popular form of poster production.

This type of wood-block print was usually made in a limited colour range with red, black, white, and sometimes also yellow as the most popular colours. Another feature was the depiction of the advancing masses. In many posters produced in 1967, the theme of the advancing masses, usually with an assertive gaze, was commonly used to promote the Mao Cult and the reading of the Little Red Book, and also to encourage the united action of the people. It is useful to compare this poster with other Chinese political posters produced in 1967. The posters produced in the beginning of the Cultural Revolution were very often characterised by 'extremist' expressions and illustrating scenes of popular activity 'packed with vivid detail' with a bolder and brasher style.<sup>218</sup> This kind of extreme political imagery which represents the radical campaigning in the 1960s can be seen as comparable to the post-2000 socio-economic reform.

The youth's use and reception of Cultural Revolution imagery in a context which stresses national identity and unity can be seen as a way to realise the transforming, modern Chinese identity. The striking visual elements are recycled in the new artefact, yet the more historically specific information, like the original captions, are removed and replaced. One implication of this is that though China has changed dramatically in terms of its economic and technological developments, and the young generation has become more and more distant from the history and culture of the Cultural Revolution, the images are still meaningful and powerful. It is important to note that although it suggests that the teenagers found it fun to play with Cultural Revolution images, their playfulness is not completely liberal and is strongly confined to nationalistic expressions.

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<sup>217</sup> Gittings, "Excess and Enthusiasm", 30.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 32.

### **Cultural Revolution imagery, technology and the Chinese government**

Dirlik and Zhang give a useful account of postmodern conditions in China which is inspirational in understanding contemporary China in 21<sup>st</sup> century. They point out that in the contemporary Chinese context, ‘the tradition now appears as a means to transcend the modern’ and ‘the postmodern is also the postrevolutionary and the postsocialist.’<sup>219</sup> In the case of mobile phone pictures, Cultural Revolution images are the source of traditional culture in the sense that they are cultural products specific to a historical moment. Thus in order to promote the widespread use of mobile phones, which is at the same time significant to the development of the capitalist consumerism in the country, Cultural Revolution images may be able to help in the combination between new technologies and local cultures. This is a complex situation wherein the revolutionary past has a role to play in the post-revolution era, yet at the same time the Chinese leaders promote the ‘use of capitalism to develop socialism’. In this paradoxical situation, Dirlik and Zhang are perhaps right to describe Chinese postmodernity ‘as a site of struggle between the legacy of the past and the forces of the present’ within which ‘the problem of representation in a radically unstable situation of everyday life and culture’ seems inevitable.<sup>220</sup> It is inevitable because, as manifest in mobile phone pictures and football fans’ posters, today’s China is very dynamic in taking up the latest information in order to improve efficiency in everyday life. But the rapid development of new technologies in cities further widens the technological gap between rural and urban areas. For example, although the internet and mobile phone technologies can allow a quicker exchange of information, they are still too expensive for many people who live in underdeveloped areas in rural China, and therefore these regions are still very much excluded from the use of information technologies. According to the statistics provided by CNNIC, by the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2009, the number of Chinese internet users had reached 384 million. But by the 30<sup>th</sup> of June of the same year, the penetration rate of the internet in China was only 25.5%, which was concentrated in particular urban social groups residing in cities.<sup>221</sup> In this sense, the reception of a Cultural Revolution image by

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid. , 4.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid. , 8.

<sup>221</sup> Internet Statistics, *The 24th Survey Report* [Online] (China Internet Network Information Center, 2009 [cited 10 January 2010]); available from <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/uploadfiles/pdf/2009/10/13/94556.pdf>.

an urban citizen can be very different from that by a villager in rural China. Moreover an urban netizen, such as one of the afore mentioned football fans, is likely a resident of Beijing who got hold of the Cultural Revolution images from the internet (may be on Stefan Landsberger's website), and may read about Cultural Revolution imagery from a European perspective. To select Cultural Revolution imagery from other cultural symbols to represent China could be an indirect result of the legacy of Western collection practices.

Liu reminds us of the local-global interactions that are not only nourished in Chinese postmodern conditions, but also in the contributing factors to such conditions. Liu writes:

The local, as opposed to the global, in the present context may first refer to the geopolitical and cultural specificities of China, but it then may have to be narrowed to the more specific, to the more concrete social practices of particular locations and temporalities within China. Ultimately, the global postmodern has to return to the most fundamental question of the everyday. The everyday is not only both global and local (in the sense that it must encompass different temporalities, subjectivities, spaces, and public spheres); it may also serve as a site that unravels and critiques the contradictions and fallacies of the age.<sup>222</sup>

Liu's point is useful to help understanding the Cultural Revolution mobile phone picture and the text messaging social practice as a significant case for understanding the unique Chinese postmodern condition. Internet browsing and mobile phone usage are becoming a social norm especially among the urban young generation with their strong buying power. The number of teenage netizens was 175 million by the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2009, which accounted for 51.8% of all internet users in the country. In 2004 when I first found Cultural Revolution images created as mobile phone pictures, MMS business initiatives were just beginning. As an article in the *Beijing Times* on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2004 states:

China's Internet portals are increasingly reporting that they are expanding their multimedia messaging service (MMS) as they believe the business will become another "gold mine" following online advertising, online gaming and text-based short messaging service (SMS) to prop up their profit growth.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Liu, "Popular Culture and the Culture of the Masses in Contemporary China", 102-103.

<sup>223</sup> *Beijing Times*, "China's portals eyeing MMS for future explosive growth".

To encourage the development of MMS business, China's government pushed the development of a faster technology called 3G which allows the transmission of voice, data and video along with much faster wireless internet access.<sup>224</sup> According to the list of the most searched topics in 2009 for the search engine [www.baidu.com](http://www.baidu.com) and the Internet portal [www.ifeng.com](http://www.ifeng.com), the keyword 'new 3G technology' was one of highest ranked searches, along with 'the launch of China's Growth Enterprise Market' and 'H1N1', which suggests that Chinese netizens closely follow information technology trends.<sup>225</sup> On the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2010, Premier Wen Jiabao went online to chat with Chinese netizens. Following this over 400,000 posts were received on the Xinhuanet website, a government-owned portal, and more than 100,000 text messages were sent by mobile phone users to respond to Wen Jiabao's online chat.<sup>226</sup> This suggests that 'the rising number of Chinese online population has dramatically changed the political landscape of the country.'<sup>227</sup> Regardless of the uneven distribution of resources, information technologies still play a significant role in transforming social and communicative practices and, even more significantly, in building up a 'sincere' image for the Chinese Communist government which is concerned with its public voice.<sup>228</sup>

Some may argue that although there are a huge number of Internet and mobile phone users in China, the actual users still do

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Global Times, *Most searched of 2009* (People's Daily, [cited 22 August 2009]); available from <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90782/90873/6884401.html>.

<sup>226</sup> China Daily, *Online chat focuses on pressing issues* (People's Daily, 2010 [cited 1 March 2010]); available from <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/6904657.html>.

<sup>227</sup> Xinhua, *Chinese premier to go online to meet massive netizen questions* (People's Daily, 2009 [cited 1 March 2009]); available from <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/6603121.html>.

<sup>228</sup> China Daily, *Online chat focuses on pressing issues*.

not exceed more than forty percent of the country's population. However, I would argue that what is even more instructive in the statistics is that this population of netizens and mobile phone users were almost entirely absent before 2000. The social practice of Internet browsing and using mobile phones in the everyday life is an unprecedented phenomenon, and it is temporally specific in China from the early 2000s onwards.

Early in 1983 the Chinese government had already recognised the power of new technologies in the country's reform as the former premier Zhao Ziyang announced that 'the new technological revolution or information revolution... may help China skip over some of the stages which have been experienced by other developing countries.'<sup>229</sup> However, facing the penetration of Western technologies, the Chinese government also identified the need to develop local Chinese popular culture to counter-balance the impacts of Western culture. Since the mid-1990s, Jiang Zemin allowed and encouraged China's popular-culture products to compete with the commercial popular culture of the west.<sup>230</sup> With a cautious approach, the Chinese government continues to have a welcoming attitude toward the development of new technologies because it is considered to be a crucial force for the postsocialist market economy; in fact, Jiang Zemin stated that 'none of the four modernizations would be possible without informatisation.'<sup>231</sup> Thus technological innovation has been linked with economic development. The so-called Golden Bridge Projects which started in 1993 were deliberately the outcome of this principle with a view to building a national infrastructure as a path to modernization, economic development and national unity.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Zhao Ziyang's speech is analysed in Carol Lee Hamrin *China and the Challenge of the Future* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1990), 213. This is also cited by Geoffrey Taubman, "A Not-So World Wide Web: The Internet, China, and the Challenges to Nondemocratic Rule" *Political Communication* 15, no. 2 April (1998), 262.

<sup>230</sup> Quoted after Liu, "Popular Culture and the Culture of the Masses in Contemporary China", 105.

<sup>231</sup> Jiang Zemin's slogan can be found in the preface of a book series on informatisation. See *Xinxihua Congshu (Book Series on Informatisation)*, (Beijing: Jinghua Chubanshe, 1998), quoted after Yuezhi Zhao and Dan Schiller, "Dances With Wolves? China's Integration into Digital Capitalism" 3, no. 2 April (2001).

<sup>232</sup> Peter Lovelock, *E-Government In China* (TRP Publications, it is a pre-publication version of the chapter to appear in Zhang Junhua, Martin Woesler, eds.(2002) *China's Digital Dream*, 2002 [cited 18 March 2010]); available from [http://www.trp.trpc.com.hk/publications/e\\_gov\\_china.pdf](http://www.trp.trpc.com.hk/publications/e_gov_china.pdf).



Regardless of the political and cultural reasons mentioned, the use of Cultural Revolution symbols or images for commercial goals is ultimately a business decision because these are visually exploitable images which are financially lucrative. In response to a 'Cultural Revolution' themed restaurant in Hubei province, Tao writes:

From the restaurant owner's point of view, the Cultural Revolution and the symbols, images and rituals related to it, have great commercial value. They were taken out of their original context and were put into the commercial context. This does not mean sincere nostalgia, but is a new kind of commercial promotion strategy, a fashionable lifestyle, the commercialisation of the memory of revolution.<sup>233</sup>

Thus the consumption of digital Cultural Revolution images through mobile phones is a complex phenomenon in 21<sup>st</sup> century China. While the culture of Cultural Revolution imagery is used to make the implementation of new technologies smoother, the meaning or implication of the practice as a whole is always interwoven into political, economic and social factors. Similar to other material cultural artefacts, Cultural Revolution mobile phone text pictures are socially constructed and thereby have significant socio-economic and political implications. The debate of whether the Internet is being used to create a homogenous or a heterogeneous world has been popular among scholars. While the Internet has been seen as providing the conditions for a certain universal homogeneity, its function as a platform for social communication and interactions also provides possibilities for individuals and groups to challenge dominant ideologies.<sup>234</sup> As such, new technologies such as the Internet and telecommunications must be seen as a system and source of tools, materials, structures and techniques through which local populations seek to integrate certain cultural products or practices into their own practices and beliefs, and in so doing create hybrid cultures.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Tao, "The Commercialised Revolutionary Culture in Contemporary China", 75.

<sup>234</sup> David E. Nye, "Technology and the Production of Difference" *American Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (2006), 608; Wanning Sun, "Media and the Chinese Diaspora: Community, Consumption, and Transnational Imagination" *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 1, no. 1 (2005), 66-7.

<sup>235</sup> Nye, "Technology and the Production of Difference", 607.

### **Cultural Revolution imagery and urban culture**

Thus new technologies can be used to preserve, challenge and reinvent cultural identities and traditions.<sup>236</sup> For this reason, a study of mobile phone picture messaging as both a cultural practice and product which rely heavily on the application of new technologies is useful for understanding the emerging postsocialist cultural identities and the tensions between traditions and modern culture. The Internet and mobile phone text messaging in China have increased the flow of images within local communities. However, differences in generation, education and financial backgrounds contribute to unequal access to the Internet and telecommunication networks in China. Consequently, these new technologies have contributed to the emergence of new local hierarchies among Chinese groups. I would argue that the rise of local electronic media products such as MMS pictures in postsocialist China contributes to the process of redefining cultural/social identity among Chinese communities within the context of technological innovations and consumerism.

The examples of Cultural Revolution mobile phone pictures given in the last section exhibit features of a social and cultural phenomenon in the postsocialist Chinese context of technological innovation and consumerism. In this section I will focus on ‘deconstructing’ the elements in the pictures and the associated social practices involved in the circulation and consumptions of these pictures, which I argue demonstrates an aspect of the Chinese postmodern condition.

As discussed earlier, the Chinese postmodern condition is characterised by a ‘cultural hybridity’ in the site of which both ‘revolutionary culture’ and ‘postsocialist culture’ coexist. To understand Cultural Revolution MMS pictures as a feature of the Chinese postmodern condition, it is essential to ‘deconstruct’ the revolutionary and postsocialist elements in these pictures and practices.

The examples of MMS pictures exhibit some typical Cultural Revolution visual elements such as Little Red Books, Red Guards (in particular their uniforms), and characters from films and ballets from the Cultural Revolution era (i.e. the role of Wang Dachun in *The White-Haired Girl* and Li Yuhe in *Red*

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 613.

*Lantern*, etc). In the last example a Cultural Revolution picture is attached to the famous Chinese Communist motto announced by Mao Zedong in the late 1930s. The sources of the pictures can be traced back to the original film, ballet performances and posters from the revolutionary era. However, there is an enormous gap between the original and the MMS pictures. Although these pictures may be perceived as somehow historical or traditional in the postsocialist era, the extracted images with original captions removed blur the boundary between the revolutionary past and the postsocialist present, and accordingly, the Cultural Revolution elements are distilled into a representation of the generalised distancing between the past and the present. Cultural Revolution elements are historical, yet how these were originally integrated into everyday life no longer matters in the postsocialist context. The value of Cultural Revolution culture seems that it represents the revolutionary past as a whole.

On the other hand, the postsocialist condition further complicates the meaning of Cultural Revolution culture. Though the Cultural Revolution images, pictures and symbols are generally distanced and differentiated from the post-revolution present, the juxtaposition of the traditional from the contemporary seems to legitimise their presence in a different context. For example, the social role of the Red Guards no longer exists in the post-revolution era, but the historical slogan which is still officially promoted in today's contemporary China validates the meaning of the whole MMS picture in the present. What interested me the most is not the Red Guards, which were popular and influential during the Cultural Revolution, but their gaze which suggests determination and courage, and it is these attributes which become the actual 'link' between the Cultural Revolution culture and contemporary culture.

The picture of the educated youths leaving their homes in cities and learning from the peasants in the countryside (mobile phone picture: Figure 18; the original: Figure 25) is apparently irrelevant, outdated and could be nostalgic for some people in today's China. In 1968, the youth were sent into the countryside as a government measure to control the destructive movements of the Red Guards in cities, during which political posters played an important role in coordinating campaigns. In the present context, the same type of image also targets and appeals to the urban youth. Therefore the Chinese government's censorship of search engines and blocking online social networking services such

as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are the government's measures of regulating the social use and dissemination of information in contemporary China.<sup>237</sup> If a large number of text messages are sent out from one mobile phone within a short period of time in today's China, the SMS function of this phone may be terminated and the service blacklisted by the service provider.<sup>238</sup> Thus, the development of the Internet and mobile phone technology in China does not mean that Chinese residents are able to freely exchange information with other mobile phone users globally.

By playing with the Little Red Books in Mao's era and Red pocket lucky money (*hongbao* or *yasuiqian*), the power of Mao Zedong's thought which used to mobilized the masses is now replaced by the joy of receiving lucky money. This serves as a good example to show how the meaning of an important revolutionary icon – the Little Red Book – has been destabilised in the urban youth consumer culture.

Because both the filmic and theatrical performance of *Red Lantern* and *The White-Haired Girl* played such an important role in the art and politics of the Cultural Revolution, these films and performances were the integral parts of everyday entertainment. *Red Lantern* (or *The Legend of the Red Lantern*) and *The White-Haired Girl*, replete with outspoken communist revolutionary themes, were two of the eight famous model operas or ballet plays that were permitted during the Cultural Revolution period in between 1966 and 1976. *Red Lantern* was one of the most popular model operas during the Cultural Revolution. Though these works of performance art were saturated with political content specific to the Cultural Revolution period, many of these works still remain popular more than three decades after the Cultural Revolution. The local Chinese pop music band Zero Point and the actor Ke Shouliang and their songs were well-known across the country after winning local popular music awards in different cities in China. The lyrics of these pop songs are found to be captions of some mobile phone

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<sup>237</sup> Tania Branigan, *Google to end censorship in China over cyber attacks* (The Guardian UK, 2010 [cited 13 January 2010]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2010/jan/12/google-china-ends-censorship>.

<sup>238</sup> Le Zou, *SMS blocked for texting too many group messages* (Global Times, 2010 [cited 15 January 2010]); available from <http://china.globaltimes.cn/society/2010-01/495958.html>.

pictures. The popular culture during the Cultural Revolution (i.e. model operas and the ballet) is now combined with the popular culture of the post-revolution period (i.e. pop songs) in the production of a completely new form of postsocialist popular-culture product (i.e. MMS pictures). The tension between the popular culture of different eras exists between the forms of the Cultural Revolution period, such as the Beijing model opera, ballet performances and political posters, and those of the post-Mao or post-Cultural Revolution, such as pop songs, rock bands, actors, and certainly the Cultural Revolution images in MMS pictures.

The large-character poster was one of the major means of political expression during the Cultural Revolution. Its origin began after Nie Yuanzi and some others published a large-character poster on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 1966 at Beijing University to express their discontentment with how the university being dominated by anti-revolutionaries. Chairman Mao Zedong showed his support and widely reproduced the poster in the press. Since then large-character posters were prevalent in every kind of public debate during the Cultural Revolution. In the height of the Mao cult, contents of *The Quotations of Mao Zedong* were widely disseminated on hand-written posters. In addition to this, the metaphor of Mao as the ‘red sun’ was ubiquitous during the Cultural Revolution. Phrases like ‘Chairman Mao is the red sun in my heart’ and ‘Chairman Mao is the red sun in people’s hearts’ were widely repeated, reproduced and disseminated in different forms, such as in posters, musical dramas (e.g. *Hongtaiyang*), books, vases, etc. In the current examples of MMS pictures, the metaphor of the red sun has now been changed from Chairman Mao to one’s wife. These MMS picture suggests that Mao Zedong was an important political figure during the Cultural Revolution, whose significance was comparable to the warmth and strength of the sun. Under the legacy of revolutionary culture in the post-revolution era, the ‘red sun’ still signifies someone irreplaceable in one’s life, but it is no longer exclusively used to represent Mao Zedong. It is also worth noting another layer of tension conjured up in the mixing of Cultural Revolution pictures and contemporary culture. In the revolutionary past only a limited range of slogans, mainly quotations of Mao Zedong or the latest political goals, would appeared on political posters. As the current example demonstrates, it is the words of a famous actor that are published and circulated on MMS pictures. This suggests that

popular culture is becoming the dominant ideology in contemporary Chinese societies, even as fragments of Cultural Revolution culture still remains.

In the earlier discussion I mentioned that Tao has pointed out some features of commercialised revolutionary culture in contemporary China. One of these is about the power of appropriation. It is very true that without the idea, the artistic skills and specific technologies of appropriation, MMS pictures and culture would not have been made available. In my opinion, the appropriation of Cultural Revolution culture is not only powerful in providing the conditions for a cultural hybridity. The ‘cut-outs’ of images resulting from editing determines what Cultural Revolution elements remain in the MMS pictures. Although the art during Cultural Revolution was produced according to political guidance and only a limited range of expression was allowed, it did nevertheless cover quite a vast range of topics including industry, commerce, technological development and agriculture, and a period of ten years encompassed different stages and revolutionary movements. Accordingly, it is instructive to find out that only a limited range of Cultural Revolution elements are appropriated in MMS pictures. Those which present a rather serious or sacred looking image are usually chosen. Examples include the classical revolutionary posture which references the ‘Paris Commune’ style, the confident and spiritual gaze of individuals, the Little Red Book which contained highly political and influential writings during Cultural Revolution and the ‘red sun’ which symbolised the political leader Mao Zedong. It is interesting to see that the same Cultural Revolution image can be appropriated to make two different versions of MMS pictures published on the same page of a website. From the MMS business point of view, that typical kind of Cultural Revolution image should have a great commercial value which has the potential to be the most popular MMS picture. In fact, ‘You are the best (excellent)’ MMS picture ranked in the top ten most popular MMS pictures in 2004.

Beyond the visual properties, one important implication in the commercialised Cultural Revolution MMS pictures phenomenon is that they are concrete instances which exemplify the vital role of postsocialist technological innovation in the Chinese postmodern condition. The new media and practices in relation to telecommunication networking (i.e. the use of mobile phones, text messaging and Internet browsing) are manifestations of the socio-economic

transformation of everyday life in China, particularly in post-2000 era. The above examples of Cultural Revolution mobile phone text pictures demonstrate a legacy of revolutionary images and how these images are recycled, circulated and consumed by and through the Internet and the social practice of mobile phones text messaging. What is worth noting is that the use of these new technologies and related practices tends to be dominated by an ‘urban-young-student’ community. According to CNNIC statistics, in July 2007, over 75 percent of the 162 million Internet users live in urban areas. The urban penetration rate has registered over 20 percent, while the rural rate was only 5.1 percent. Over 70 percent of Internet users were aged 30 or below, in which nearly half of this population aged was between 18 and 24 and over 50 percent were students.<sup>239</sup> It is also instructive to know that mobile phone Internet access has developed rapidly in China: over 75 percent of wireless users are mobile phone users and Wireless Application Protocol (WAP), a wireless communication network which is usually accessed from a mobile phone or a PDA, has become fashionable with an increasing number of mobile phones users in China.<sup>240</sup>

From these cases we can find that one of the major features of the Chinese postmodern condition – postsocialist technological innovation – is characterised by the increasingly prevalent use of the Internet and wireless telecommunication technologies, and as mentioned, the use of these is dominated by a specific group of young students in urban areas. In contemporary China, the development of the Internet has been officially promoted by the government because it is seen as a pervasive ‘platform for both personal life and social, economic and cultural activities’ which promotes ‘the development of the whole social economy.’<sup>241</sup> From the mobile phone pictures we can see that the technology itself suggests a fashionable lifestyle, and through the application of which different kinds of cultural products can be produced and reproduced.

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<sup>239</sup> Internet Statistics, *The 20th Survey Report* [Online] (China Internet Network Information Center, July 2007 [cited 23 July 2009]); available from <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/download/2007/20thCNNICReport-en.pdf>, 12.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 12 and 30.

<sup>241</sup> Internet Statistics, *Internet Development in Rural China 2007* [Online] (China Internet Network Information Center, 2007 [cited 22 Aug 2009]); available from [http://www.cnnic.net.cn/download/2007/2007\\_Survey\\_Report\\_on\\_Internet\\_Development\\_in\\_Rural\\_China2007.pdf](http://www.cnnic.net.cn/download/2007/2007_Survey_Report_on_Internet_Development_in_Rural_China2007.pdf), preface.

The use of Cultural Revolution culture with new technologies to some extent validates Dirlik and Zhang's claim that the tradition is now utilised as a way to 'transcend', which suggests that if these images were circulated in the printed forms of the past, they now appear in new virtual forms conveyed by mobile phones and the Internet; and if these images were once collectively appreciated in physical public spaces, they are now available in a virtual space which can be accessed individually, anytime and anywhere. It is this networked individualism and its consumption, which seemingly 'challenges' tradition, and characterises the fashionable lifestyle and the uniqueness of postsocialist consumerism and cultural products.

The above cases exemplify a legacy and reappearance of revolutionary culture in a Chinese postmodern condition dominated by technological innovations. Certainly, as Barmé and Tao suggest, this is a special phenomenon of postsocialist China.<sup>242</sup> The visual images of the Cultural Revolution create a powerful contrast between the revolutionary and the post-revolutionary. In the process and outcome of recycling the culture of the past in the postsocialist culture, some typical elements or properties are made particularly visible/invisible in their reappearance. This can be explored through four main aspects of Cultural Revolution MMS pictures.

The distance between the past and the present is amplified by the contrast between the past images and the present culture and technology. But the gap is further widened when the original properties (i.e. social and political functions, contexts, etc) are lost in translation. The concept of Cultural Revolution images as being traditional is still valid. But when these images are radically removed from their original properties they then become floating signifiers, which are open to interpretations and mean different things to different people.

This kind of violation is, in Tao's terms, an ironic alteration of the original meaning of revolutionary symbols. Tao points out three major features of this Chinese social and cultural phenomenon: 1) the appropriation of Chinese revolutionary culture resulted in a cultural mixture, cultural hybridity and the holistic meaning of revolutionary culture was ironically interpreted; 2) this kind of appropriation deconstructs the hegemony of socialist ideology; and 3)

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<sup>242</sup> Barmé, *Shades of Mao: the posthumous cult of the great leader* ; Tao, "The Commercialised Revolutionary Culture in Contemporary China" .



consumerism is becoming the new dominant ideology. When revolutionary culture and post-revolutionary culture coexist in Cultural Revolution MMS pictures, revolutionary symbols become the visual platform where the past is borrowed, challenged and violated. There is a taste for a parodic distortion of the former politic pictures/symbols in the postsocialist consumer and commercial culture. Borrowing Tao's term, the appropriation of political symbols of the past is not simply a reworking of the visual. It is an appropriation of the revolutionary culture, and accordingly, of the revolutionary socialist ideology. This use of Cultural Revolution symbols as a postsocialist phenomenon suggests the capacity or power of the revolutionary culture to persist in the new era, albeit in a different way.

Walter Benjamin's term 'aura' is helpful in understanding the role of Cultural Revolution symbols in the postsocialist Chinese context. The power of Cultural Revolution symbols in MMS pictures does not merely come from the aesthetic quality of the art itself, as the quality (display resolution) of the pictures very often deteriorates after being reworked, reproduced and displayed in the small screen of mobile phones. Rather the 'aura' of Cultural Revolution pictures inheres to the external attributes, such as the lifestyle of mobile phone messaging, the pleasure of parodic irony and in the cursory challenge to the authority, which composes the whole experience and popularity of the images beyond their original context. Benjamin wrote in the essay 'The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction' that the technique of reproduction was dominated by the medium of film which detaches the image/object from the domain of tradition. In postsocialist China, it is the Internet and telecommunication networks which allow a plurality of reworked copies to meet the customers, and reactivates the appropriated object. What is different in the postsocialist Chinese context is that it is not simply a 'liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage' that makes new technologies powerful tools. The traditional value of Cultural Revolution pictures is only partially 'liquidated' and then distilled and condensed into a generalised idea of 'the Cultural Revolution', which is adapted for use in a different age.

To further explore the external attributes of Cultural Revolution popular culture in postsocialist China, it is useful to understand the active agents in mobile phone text messaging practices. Although mobile phone text messaging has been

prevalent around the world, the infiltration of this technology in postsocialist China is a recent phenomenon. As we have discussed earlier with statistics, more than half of the country's population do not use the Internet, mobile phones or other mobile devices. However, it is instructive to know that among these users, those who live in cities are still the dominant group. For example, in 2002, in the same year that Cultural Revolution MMS pictures first appeared in China, over 40 percent of the total population of Internet users came from only five urban areas: Guangdong, Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang with the rest of the 60 percent scattered in 26 other cities.<sup>243</sup> It is also worthy to note that even it is an urban phenomenon, the distribution of the netizen population in urban areas is by no means even, with internet users in Guangdong and Beijing attributed to over 20 percent of this population. Thus, presumably, the consumption of Cultural Revolution mobile phone text picture is only popular among urban youth who come from the major city areas of China where the ratio of owners of computers and mobile phones is high.

A term 'thumb community' (*muzhi yizu*) refers to the community who use mobile phone text messaging as their main communication channel in daily life. This mobile phone messaging therefore comprises an unprecedented industry and market in China called the 'thumb economy' made up of a number of mobile phone value added service providers and run wireless and online businesses. An idea of being 'modern' or 'edgy' is related to the use of new technologies as the essential tools for obtaining the latest information of the day. The main reason for relating 'modern' or 'edgy' culture with new technologies is that the Internet and mobile phone messaging, for example, enable the fastest way to get the latest information. The speed and the idea of 'being the first to know' are particularly important in the 'modern' life style of the young community, otherwise one would become excluded from the young trendy community. There are top-ten charts of downloading multimedia pictures and ring tones on multimedia wireless service providers' websites. The word 'the latest' (*zuixin*) is stressed in most of the multimedia wireless products as a way to market the products to the 'thumb community'. Using new technologies as the tools of communicating and

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<sup>243</sup> Internet Statistics, *The 9th Survey Report*.

receiving information has become a social practice to acquire a modern ‘lifestyle’ and a young urban cultural identity.

Cultural Revolution pictures and symbols persist in the era of the Cultural Revolution and the postsocialist in China. In the revolutionary past, Cultural Revolution images were sacred and authoritative because of the cult of the political leader and the role of art in the political agenda at the time. They were ubiquitous in everyday life. In the postsocialist present, the same kind of images become icons of being cool and trendy after they are associated with the latest technology and mainstream popular culture. On one hand, Cultural Revolution culture functions like the ‘vocabulary’ of the local ‘slang’ in the postsocialist local culture. It is a manifestation of one’s cultural identity in a social space. In the revolutionary past, the images were reproduced in physical printed forms in large quantity; but in the postsocialist present, the images are everywhere as long as you have the downloading tools with you.

Though the older generation have their own personal experience to the revolutionary culture and history, the place, rituals, gaze and audience are redefined in a youth dominated popular culture which requires specific know-how to consume. Cultural Revolution culture is depoliticised in the popular culture products which are considered as having no political threat to the authority, yet in a way they are re-politicised as a tool to form new cultural and social identities. On the other hand, Cultural Revolution images are borrowed, recycled and appropriated in a ‘Chinesisation’ of the foreign new technologies which are regarded as being beneficial to economic development, yet potentially threatening to national unity and stability. While Chinese leaders sloganise ‘using capitalism to develop socialism’, and some may argue it is more valid to describe it as ‘the use of socialism to achieve capitalist development’, it may be useful to think of this in a different way: neither of them overrules the other, but it is the interaction, combination and negotiation between them which make the Chinese postmodern condition unique. It is a coexistence of the revolutionary culture, consumer culture, technological innovations and urban youth popular culture. It is the representations of Cultural Revolution culture, but not Cultural Revolution culture itself, that people are consuming. As well, the consumption of these images also provides the pleasure of confrontation and challenge to the authority represented by the Cultural Revolution culture.

## Conclusion

The contemporary renewal of Cultural Revolution imagery is an interface of the contrasting meanings of China's radical socio-economic and cultural transformation since 2004, if not earlier. It is closely related to a culture which is, on the one hand, well-rooted in the legacy of the culture of Cultural Revolution; but on the other hand, there is a newly emergent urban youth techno-culture following the development of information technologies such as the Internet and mobile phone networks. As my analysis suggests, Cultural Revolution imagery as the cultural icon of the revolutionary past continues to have commercial value in 21<sup>st</sup> century Chinese culture. Former political images and icons such as Red Guards, the Little Red Book, national heroes and model operas are made into mobile phone pictures. These images still play a role in Chinese urban consumer culture as virtual consumer items three decades or more after they were first produced during the Cultural Revolution.

When I retrieved the mobile phone pictures discussed in this chapter on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2010, some of them are still available for downloading while others are not because some service providers are now closed down.<sup>244</sup> However, those Cultural Revolution images as mobile phone pictures remained on [www.tom.com](http://www.tom.com) are no longer as popular as they used to be in 2004. This is informed by the fact that these pictures are not on the main page of the website anymore. Although its popularity fades, they are still evidence of their temporary popularity in 2004, a year of which marks the revision of the Constitution of China, and a changing and more open attitude towards idea of private ownership. The Cultural Revolution images with contemporary taglines which promote more individualistic personal values and affirmation of oneself instead of a collective self circulated online in the same year. With this I argue that the culture of the Cultural Revolution, particularly the imagery, is still useful to understand contemporary Chinese culture and society because of its continuing recurrence, and most importantly, its integration with digital technologies in the formation of new cultural forms.

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<sup>244</sup> The irretrievable websites include [mms.etang.com](http://mms.etang.com) and [www.wapol.com](http://www.wapol.com).

With the use of Cultural Revolution imagery in mobile phone pictures, a connection between two similar kinds of Chinese mass cultures across eras is established. The young Red Guards used to actively engage with the original Cultural Revolution imagery during the 1960s and 1970s, whereas a group of young urban educated consumers are the target market of these digitally reproduced revolutionary images in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through new technologies. A great deal of socio-economic transformation is evident when two different ways of engagement are compared and contrasted. The lesson of the radical and destructive Red Guard movements in the past may be able to explain China's determination to regulate and control Internet and mobile phone communications through which political actions or social movements could be coordinated and arranged.

However, irrespective of the potential threat the development of new technologies is constantly supported by the Chinese authorities as important tools to achieve modernisation. I argue that the vision of implementing new technologies to modernise the country has appeared a long time ago, although its actual realization can be seen since the early 1980s; and the social use of mobile phone, texting and Internet surfing as part of everyday life in urban cities has only become widespread recently. Technologies are significant to the development of China which is considered being able to make the country into a modernised and internationally recognised power. This is understandable in a context of the full government support in technological development and the nationalistic sentiments of Chinese people expressed in international sports events. Technology is the hope of China to shorten the period of time to become an internationally recognised developed country. Alongside with the increasing prevalence of the use of information technologies, some new slogans attached to the Cultural Revolution digital images, though somehow trivial and apparently apolitical, suggest a strong sense of individualistic attitude toward the sense of self and capitalist consumer culture.

The integration of Cultural Revolution culture with new technology and a capitalist commodification produces a Chinese identity with a sense of both integration and difference. It is in the sense that Chinese cultural symbols are available to the capitalist and technological tendency to yield different products under different social circumstances. This was in a context when both consumer

culture and new technologies just entered China in the early 2000s, and visual sources were needed to produce cultural and technological consumer items for the population at the time when not many Chinese local cultural symbols could be drawn on.

Dirlik and Zhang suppose that 'a new brand of Chinese nationalism in the marketplace seems to have everything to do with [the] residual socialism lending itself to the most unrelenting forces of late capitalism.' However, I would argue that, by using examples of Cultural Revolution mobile phone pictures, this 'lending' was not without official control in the sense that the borrowing of Cultural Revolution images was not completely liberal.<sup>245</sup> The concept of 'Chinese nationalism in the marketplace' is important in understanding the circumstances which led to the Internet and mobile phones becoming an inevitable part of urban Chinese kids' everyday experience. It is not illogical to correlate the Cultural Revolution mobile phone text pictures with a postsocialist project of a 'sinicisation' of Western technological products to counter Western cultural intrusions. Therefore these aspects form the background to the development of Cultural Revolution mobile phone pictures which could be interpreted as a strategic way to achieve a government-supported socio-economic transformation, and to enhance a sense of 'modern' and successful Chinese identity in popular culture.

The young Chinese generation can conveniently make use of the imagery of the past as a safe site to satisfy their curiosity and endeavour to engage with the upbeat culture at the time. To explore the popularity of using Cultural Revolution imagery in the social practices among the young Chinese generation, I refer to the young football fans' borrowing of a Cultural Revolution poster for the Asia Cup in 2004.

This research also reveals that the former revolutionary icons, such as the Little Red Books and the image of Mao Zedong, received special attention from different interest groups. For example, the idea of the former Little Red Book, which signifies the thoughts of Mao Zedong, has been used at the basis for Chinese 'Hong Bao' (red pocket money) which emphasises personal joy and

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<sup>245</sup> Dirlik and Zhang, "Introduction: Postmodernism and China", 6.

satisfaction with capitalist values.<sup>246</sup> This implies huge contradictions between communist and capitalist ideologies. This example is best compared with a similar manipulation of the Little Red Book in Hong Kong in 2004, as discussed in Chapter Four, in which it was used by a Hong Kong designer to express the local sense of individualism. Both of these borrowings are good examples of how the revolutionary icon is used to construct new meanings in current cultures. The Chinese government's tolerance for the reworking of Cultural Revolution imagery in the making of digital mobile phone pictures interestingly contrasts with the Chinese ambassador's intervention on the reworking of the portrait of Mao Zedong in Singapore in 1999 as discussed in Chapter Five.

Among all the above considerations, it is also important not to forget that all these examples occur in a context in which the history of Cultural Revolution is still a taboo in today's China, and it is not acceptable to refer to it in public. In this sense, is the official tolerance of essentialised, partial Cultural Revolution imagery through new information technologies in urban environments a strategy of the Chinese government to diffuse potential political motivations and curiosities of the educated urban teenagers in 21<sup>st</sup> century China?

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<sup>246</sup> 'Hong Bao' (Red Pocket money) is a monetary gift in Chinese tradition which is given during holidays or special occasions especially Chinese New Year.

## Chapter Four

### Cultural Revolution imagery in post-2003 Hong Kong: lifestyle, identity and difference

Hybridization...is not about people who eat Chinese food, wear Italian clothes, and so on; but sometimes, in a very complimentary way to me personally, it's been taken to mean some kind of diversity or multiple identities.<sup>247</sup>

Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham on Homi Bhabha's concept of 'hybridization'

Identities are constructed through, not outside, difference.<sup>248</sup>

Stuart Hall from 'Who Needs Identity?'

#### Introduction

This chapter discusses the recurrence of Cultural Revolution imagery in post-2003 Hong Kong popular culture. It argues that Cultural Revolution imagery is the sign of accumulative tensions that have been created by the cultural differences between Hong Kong and mainland China since 1967, and, more significantly, tied to the changing political and social circumstances in post-2003 Hong Kong. The use of Cultural Revolution imagery in Hong Kong popular cultural products is considered as a way of marking cultural differences by constructing a mainland Chinese cultural 'Other' and contrasting it with Hong Kong culture. The imagery is a product of cultural hybridization – the mainland cultural symbol is negotiated with Hong Kong's local culture which is itself comprised of a group of cultural minorities from China who always see, and are always seen, as both partly belonging to China and not belonging enough. This chapter further argues that Cultural Revolution imagery in post-2003 Hong Kong popular culture

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<sup>247</sup> Olson and Worsham, "Staging the Politics of Difference: Homi Bhabha's Critical Literacy" in *Race, Rhetoric, and the Postcolonial*, ed. Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham (Albany: State University of New York, 1999), 39.

<sup>248</sup> Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" in *Question of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: SAGE, 1996; reprint, 2005), 4.



commodities and sites is a way of making a transnational articulation through which Hong Kong positions itself.

In this chapter I analyse several political posters of Hong Kong produced by Chinese leftist in 1967 and compare these pictures with some examples of Cultural Revolution imagery used in recent Hong Kong popular culture. With this I demonstrate that the imagery in post-2003 Hong Kong is similar to but somewhat different from the original Cultural Revolution imagery of the 1960s. I argue that this specific way of using historical and cultural resources of the mainland Chinese 'Other' is closely related to specific social and political events which took place in the post-2003 Hong Kong context. This cultural practice, I argue, is not merely a simple repetition of unrelated cultural codes of the 'Other'. Instead, it can be understood as a process of identity formation through using a representation which is an established cultural symbol of the mainland, but at the same time functions as a meeting point between Hong Kong and China. Thus this practice is shaped by the changing relation between Hong Kong and China. This analysis of Cultural Revolution imagery, as I argue all the way through, fits into the larger discussion about the formation of a post-2003 Hong Kong identity, which is constructed through difference and exclusion.

This chapter begins with analysing three posters produced in the People's Republic of China in 1967 which were dedicated to the dissemination of Maoist communist ideologies in British controlled Hong Kong. These posters are significant for a study of the relation between the Cultural Revolution in China and the 1967 riots in Hong Kong, and more importantly, these pictures were a crucial part of the Chinese leftist movements in British Hong Kong. These leftist posters, and the related riots, had a significant impact on how the majority of people in Hong Kong position themselves in relation to China since 1967. The original posters are then compared with some Cultural Revolution imagery in Hong Kong popular cultural products in the post-2003 context. My analysis reveals that this recurrence of imagery draws on both similarities and differences between Hong Kong's current situations and the campaigns took place in China during the Cultural Revolution period. This chapter exposes how the cultural resources of the past are selectively borrowed and strategically revised to fit into a new context. This borrowing and revision is closely related to how the post-handover relation between Hong Kong and China is interpreted, which is shaped

by the wider historical circumstances since 1967. The last section of this chapter explores how my analysis of Cultural Revolution imagery fits into larger discussions about identity formations, cultural difference and transnational articulation. To contextualise the cultural difference between Hong Kong and China, it is necessary to understand the British colonial policy in Hong Kong and the development of a Hong Kong self-awareness.

### **British policy in Hong Kong since 1967**

A television news programme on the Chinese leftist riots in Hong Kong in 1967 was broadcasted to foster an irrational, impulsive and destructive image of the Chinese leftists. In one of the programmes about the riots, the narrator states:

In retrospect, 1967 was a busy year for the Hong Kong police because they needed to deal with a group of impetuous rioters. The police's patience, capability and bearing was praised by Hong Kong citizens and highly respected by the people around the world.<sup>249</sup>

The official television broadcast of this narrative can be understood as a British counter-discourse to the anti-British political posters produced by the Chinese leftists in Hong Kong at that time. It is interesting to compare the accounts of the same event in Chinese political posters. While the anti-British slogans on the Chinese leftist posters stressed the violent and brutal actions taken by the Hong Kong police, the British Hong Kong official narrative of this period of history particularly emphasized the 'patience, capability and bearing' of the police.

The narrator of the TV news programme briefly summarised that the riots in 1967 eventually ended because the rioters were unable to win the support of the majority of Hong Kong citizens. Regardless of whether it was because the lack of support from the mainland Chinese government or the violent suppression by the colonial Hong Kong police that caused the riots to fail, the Hong Kong government endeavoured to seek the people's support by indicating the difference between the people of Hong Kong and those of mainland China.<sup>250</sup> The year of 1967 was described in this programme as 'an eventful year' stirred by the aggressive and destructive Chinese leftists who made Hong Kong citizens upset and worried.

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<sup>249</sup> Hong Kong Government News programme produced in the 1960s cited in Su-kueng Ho and Feng-siu Li, "Jing tao hai lang zhong de 1967 (The Fearful Storm of 1967)" in *You 1967 kaishi (Since 1967) [TV programme broadcasted on 19 October]* (Hong Kong: Television Broadcast Limited (TVB), 2009).

<sup>250</sup> John Mark Carroll, *A concise history of Hong Kong* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 154-155.

The negative sentiments among the Hong Kong people were soon assuaged by improved living conditions as a result of a series of social reforms. After 1967 the British Hong Kong government sought to boost the economy and improve the living conditions of people. For example, ‘Hong Kong week’ was one of the important economic campaigns promoting the idea that ‘Hong Kong people buy Hong Kong-made products’ and ‘Hong Kong people join together to achieve prosperity’. It was initiated by the British Hong Kong government in 1967 to divert local sentiments toward the common goal of economic prosperity. After the 1967 riots, sixteen floor public housing estates were built with elevators, with and elevators operating from the ground floor reaching the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> floors.<sup>251</sup>

### **Development of a Hong Kong self awareness**

After the Chinese leftist riots and the colonial government’s measures in 1967, a renewed sense of self-awareness was experienced by the Hong Kong people. Initially advocated by the government, a Hong Kong local identity distinct from mainland China gradually developed. A culture of public discussion on TV became prevalent after 1967. For example, a TV programme called ‘Weekly Forum’ (*Mei zhou lun tan*), which was a forum for open discussions about social issues at the time, paved the way for a public discourse based on the respect of individual opinions. In general, the riots and other events that took place in 1967 resulted in an unprecedented sense of local awareness which stressed the ‘unbeatable’ competency of the Hong Kong people predominantly in terms of economic prosperity. Economic performance was the major source of power and identity among the people of Hong Kong at this time. Wealth and economic success conferred power and status to the city and the residents.

The point here is that the Hong Kong experience of the riots in 1967 and the political posters advanced by the Chinese leftist in Hong Kong was inevitably influenced by the counter-discourse produced by the colonial government. Hong Kong, as a British Colonial city, did not experience the Chinese Cultural Revolution in the same way as mainland China did. Ever since 1967 the people of

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<sup>251</sup> Hong Kong Housing Authority, *Historical Background of Lower Ngau Tau Kok (II) Estate* (Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region China, 2009 [cited 10 October 2009]); available from [http://www.housingauthority.gov.hk/hdw/en/aboutus/events/community/heritage/about\\_history\\_p3.html](http://www.housingauthority.gov.hk/hdw/en/aboutus/events/community/heritage/about_history_p3.html).

Hong Kong have been influenced by a culture of free speech cultivated by public discussions and other colonial reforms.

China reclaimed Hong Kong in 1997 as stipulated by the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984. The 1997 'handover' of Hong Kong was a significant historical moment which brought the established Hong Kong cultural identity into an immediate tension and confrontation with mainland Chinese national identity. These tensions and cultural differences were renewed in 2003 as manifested by the mass rally organised by a group of Hong Kong citizens who were dissatisfied with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government and were worried about a decline in the status of their democracy and a deterioration in human rights.<sup>252</sup> These historical moments were significant in shaping the continually shifting relationship between Hong Kong and China, and thus animate the particular Hong Kong reception of Chinese revolutionary cultural symbols.

### **Post-1997 Hong Kong situations**

The use of Mao's image as an icon was under official control of the socialist Chinese regime. After China's advertising law was passed in 1994, the commercial exploitation of Mao's image was banned,<sup>253</sup> although this restriction did not necessarily lead to a decline of its use in tourist products or other commercial goods such as bags and wallets. The official ban seemed to turn the commercial use of Mao's icon into a challenge against the government of China. In 1995 the marketing of Mao, which was inspired by the former revolutionary

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<sup>252</sup> According to the 'Two System' principle, Article 23 provides that Hong Kong shall enact relevant national security laws 'on its own'. Also see Kelley Loper, "A Secession Offence in Hong Kong and the 'One Country, Two Systems' Dilemma" in *National Security and Fundamental Freedoms: Hong Kong's article 23 Under Scrutiny*, ed. Hualing Fu, Carole J. Petersen, and Simon N.M. Young (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 189. The Chinese government attempted to justify its proposals to pass the National Security Bill by comparing them to relevant laws in other Western countries such as the US and the UK. However, the government overlooked the different situation in post-1997 Hong Kong. Hong Kong has reverted from the Colonial British rule to Chinese sovereignty in which Hong Kong citizens had no political right to exercise power over this decision. Hong Kong has become a small wealthy and separated city-state under a different system within the developing but still vastly poor People's Republic of China. The passing of the National Security Bill was regarded as a threat to further restrict the political and human rights of Hong Kong citizens. See Carole J. Petersen, "Introduction" in *National Security and Fundamental Freedoms: Hong Kong's article 23 Under Scrutiny*, ed. Hualing Fu, Carole J. Petersen, and Simon N.M. Young (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 2 and D.W. Choy and Richard Cullen, "Treason and Subversion in Hong Kong" in *National Security and Fundamental Freedoms: Hong Kong's article 23 Under Scrutiny*, ed. Hualing Fu, Carole J. Petersen, and Simon N.M. Young (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 187.

<sup>253</sup> Barmé, *Shades of Mao: the posthumous cult of the great leader*, 35.

China, appeared in the British colony of Hong Kong.<sup>254</sup> The play with Cultural Revolution fashion and Mao kitsch were very successful and deemed 'stylish' and 'up-market' in Hong Kong in the mid 1990s.<sup>255</sup> In the same year when Mao's image was used in stylish and expensive goods, Asian fashion designer Vivienne Tam (who studied fashion design at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University) used reworked portraits of Mao to create clothing for modern life in her Spring 1995 collection.<sup>256</sup>

Since the establishment of the HKSAR, the Chinese government policy of 'One Country Two Systems' has been implemented which guarantees that Hong Kong's socio-economic status quo will continue after its return to Chinese sovereignty at least during the first fifty years. Since then the Chinese central government has retained a policy of non-interference: Hong Kong has maintained its capitalist economic system, legal system and the Hong Kong people have also retained their previous life-style – 'horses are still racing, people are still dancing.' However, this policy of non-intervention does not mean that no concern is given by the Chinese central government. Under the influence of the Asian financial crisis, Hong Kong has been facing financial difficulties and challenges. According to Gao Shangquan, with its strengthening economy, China was able to provide effective support for Hong Kong's economy. Gao points out that China would provide strong support for Hong Kong in order to ensure local stability, and since the 1997 the partnership has become the new pattern of relations between Hong Kong and the mainland.<sup>257</sup> In my opinion, it is not only that the Chinese central government has provided strong and effective support for Hong Kong, but due to the economic crisis Hong Kong has also become more dependent on its motherland for help.

While the new pattern of relations between Hong Kong and the mainland reflects a certain level of reliance of Hong Kong, particularly in its economy, on the mainland, the incorporation of a territory which was strongly influenced by

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Valerie Steele and John S Major, *China Chic: East Meets West* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 90.

<sup>257</sup> Shangquan Gao, "Hong Kong in China: Partnership as a New Pattern of Relations" in *Hong Kong in China: Perspectives from the Region*, ed. Andrew M. Marton (Singapore & Hong Kong: World Scientific and Singapore University Press, 1999), 16-23.

British colonial rule for more than a century and which differs from Chinese mainland culture is inevitably fraught with difficulties. Lau Siu-Kai points out that one of the difficulties has to do with the identity of Hong Kong Chinese. Lau argues that while Hong Kong Chinese use the term 'Hongkongese' to refer to themselves and 'Chinese' to refer to the people who come from the mainland (*Daluren* or *Neidiren*), 'Hongkongese' and 'Chinese' are the two major identities which the Hong Kong Chinese consider meaningful. My understanding of Lau's argument is that the two terms have a locally-specific meaning for the Hong Kong Chinese community which, in my opinion, perceive a differentiation between Hong Kong and the mainland as something intrinsic.

The majority of the Hong Kong Chinese community is composed of immigrants originally from China who decided not to return to Communist China and settled in the British colony of Hong Kong in the 1960s when the control over the movement of people between Hong Kong and mainland China was tightened.<sup>258</sup> In his discussion on Hong Kong-mainland relations from a social and cultural perspective, Lau points out some political and historical factors that play an important role in contributing to the formation of Hongkongese identity before Hong Kong's hand-over to China. These factors led to an isolation of the Hong Kong Chinese from the social and cultural changes in China, and a differentiation between the capitalist and international economy of Hong Kong and the closed Maoist China after 1949. The colonial British rule of law and human rights was preferred by Hong Kong Chinese community, as well as the situation where people were more likely to have a better standard of living and economic opportunities.<sup>259</sup>

Lau also comments that for historical reasons the Hong Kong Chinese saw themselves culturally different from mainland Chinese:

[T]here was in Hong Kong a strong sentiment against the socialist regime in China...the wide disparity in the levels of development and standards of living between Hong Kong and the mainland generated a sense of superiority among the Hong Kong Chinese...the dominance of vernacular Cantonese among the Hong Kong Chinese and the gradual

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<sup>258</sup> Siu-Kai Lau, "Hongkongese or Chinese: The Problem of Identity on the Eve of Resumption of Chinese Sovereignty over Hong Kong" in *Social Development and Political Change in Hong Kong*, ed. Lau Siu-Kai (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2000), 256.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

emergence of a distinctive popular culture based on that dialect played a significant role in moulding the Hongkongese identity.<sup>260</sup>

This sentiment towards mainland China and sense of superiority over the mainlanders had been formed long before the territory's handover to China in 1997. Some would propose that this Hong Kong sentiment and sense of cultural supremacy would gradually wane, particularly under the strong economic support of China during the financial crisis. However, although many aspects of Hong Kong society have benefited from its unity with the motherland, a conglomeration between Hong Kong Chinese identity and mainland Chinese identity has not developed since 1997. This is evident in the 'psychological barrier' among Hong Kong residents in their response to the government's policy of a 24-hour opening of immigration control points between Shenzhen and Hong Kong. As Bono Lee comments, both the geographical and temporal barriers are eliminated with the passing of this policy, but psychologically Hong Kong Chinese are still full of worries about the issue of a further union with mainland China a decade after unification:

The attitude of Hong Kong Chinese towards the issue of 24-hour opening the immigration control point between Shenzhen and Hong Kong is that they always need a one-way assured protection: we can go to your side but you are not welcome to come over to our side. Thus, the immigration control point to many Hong Kong people is like a symbolic and necessary filter.<sup>261</sup>

Very similar to Lee's observations, Lo Kwai-Cheung also notices the growing negative feelings of Hong Kong locals toward recent mainland Chinese arrivals and their wish to have the right of control over a mainland Chinese influx after 1997:

In January 1999, the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal ruled that mainland residents with at least one parent who was a legal resident of Hong Kong had a constitutional right to join their parents in Hong Kong. The ruling intensified the Hong Kong people's anti-immigrant sentiments...on the other hand, mainland visitors make up the largest portion of the city's tourist industry. Twelve million tourists are expected to visit Hong Kong per year and about one-third will come from China. Hong Kong's fear of a huge influx of mainlanders results in the SAR authorities' erecting hurdles to restrict the flow of tourists and immigrants to the city. But when the city's economy is in dire straits and it becomes

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid. , 257.

<sup>261</sup> Bono Lee, *Chao Bao Zhongguo Chic China Chic* (Hong Kong: Enrich Publishing Ltd., 2008), 304.

desperate for tourist money, the SAR government pleads with Beijing to relax visa restrictions on mainland visitors and business people who want to visit.<sup>262</sup>

In the post-handover context, the people of Hong Kong had never considered themselves as mainland Chinese. However, the regional Hong Kong identity which had long been constructed under the British colonial rule remained unchanged. Therefore the post-1997 Hong Kong identity was constitutive of both the legacy of the British influence and mainland Chinese contributions and regulations. While the society has been under the positive influence of the Chinese government's economic measures, there are signs of a struggle for political rights against mainland Chinese rule.

In his discussion on the formation of Hong Kong identity in local culture, Lo points out that early in the 1940s Hong Kong filmmakers already appropriated Chineseness as a means of realising a hybrid Hong Kong identity formation:

[T]he popular culture in and of Hong Kong moves toward or away from Chineseness at different historical moments in order to accommodate the changing needs of different ideological groups.<sup>263</sup>

Lo's point is relevant for this study in the way it shows how the appropriation of mainland Chineseness is not a novelty of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In fact, Chineseness has long been used as a vehicle for the transformation of local identity in Hong Kong popular culture. With this, I propose that any other similar representations of Chineseness in the future should also be adapted and used by Hong Kong locals for their ongoing cultural purposes.

But more importantly, Lo points out that a distinctive characteristic of Hong Kong popular culture, namely, Chineseness has very often been exploited for commercial purposes, and socio-culturally this creates a space in which 'members of various communities might somehow relate and recognize themselves as Chinese'.<sup>264</sup> In his study of Hong Kong culture, Lo does not intend to assert the uniqueness of Hong Kong culture and identity. Instead, he considers how Hong Kong culture operates as 'an articulation of "transitional Chineseness"' which is by no means fixed:

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<sup>262</sup> Kwai-Cheung Lo, *Chinese Face/Off: The Transnational Popular Culture of Hong Kong* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 201.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 3.



Hong Kong cannot become Chinese without the Chinese changing into something else. The post-1997 subjectivisation of the Hong Kong people as Chinese nationals demonstrates that a different notion of Chineseness can always gratify new demands and that the return of the colony to its motherland might present a challenging perspective from which to examine the supposedly incontestable status of national identity.<sup>265</sup>

Post-1997 Hong Kong identity was marked by a tension between a strong local cultural identity and a reliance on the mainland Chinese government. Hong Kong's fear of communist China, established since 1960s, seemed to be diminishing when China provided strong support during the economic recession of the 1990s. However, the relationship between Hong Kong and the Chinese government deteriorated once again when Article 23 of Basic Law proposed by the Chinese government was deemed to be a threat to freedom of speech in Hong Kong. It is in this context that the use of Chinese Revolutionary imagery emerged in Hong Kong. I argue that to a certain extent the current relationship between Hong Kong and China is reflected in the juxtaposition between mainland Chinese cultural symbols and their articulation in various cultural elements in Hong Kong.

### **Cultural Revolution imagery of the British Hong Kong in 1967**

While revolutionary culture is deeply ingrained in the minds of those mainlanders who personally experienced the Cultural Revolution, or functions as a site of cultural imagination for younger Chinese generations, it is important to note that Hong Kong, as a former British Colonial city, never experienced that period of history in the same way. For example, when the series of political campaigns known as the Cultural Revolution kicked off in mainland China in 1966, the Hong Kong experience of the Chinese communist movements were associated with the riots in 1967 which were known by Hong Kong leftist as the 'resistance to the brutal rule of the Hong Kong British government'.<sup>266</sup> The riots initially started with strikes, demonstrations, throwing stones, burning cars and the police use of tear gas. But in the later stage the rioting turned into attempted assassinations and the production of hand-made bombs. Some political posters from the Poster

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid. , 5.

<sup>266</sup> During the 1967 riots in Hong Kong the leftist newspapers such as *Wen Wei Pao* and *Ta Gong Pao* supported the spread of the riots and justified them as a resistance to the oppressive British imperial rule. See Alice Y.L. Lee, "The Role of Newspapers in the 1967 Riot: A Case Study of the Partisanship of the Hong Kong Press" in *Press and Politics in Hong Kong: Case studies from 1967 to 1997*, ed. Clement Y.K. So and Joseph Man Chan (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1999), 35.

Collection produced in 1967 illustrate these scenarios of aggressive Hong Kong leftist demonstrators holding Little Red Books and banners with anti-British slogans. These posters belong to the theme of anti-British imperialism in the Cultural Revolution campaigns. In the paragraphs which follow I discuss three posters in this theme produced in Guangdong in the People's Republic of China which aimed to respond to the 1967 riots in Hong Kong. These posters were produced in the early Red Guard phase (1966-1968) during which the style of pictorial art was predominantly characterised by depictions of physical violence and furious gestures.<sup>267</sup>

In the first example, with the title *Blood Debts Need To Be Repaid By bloodshed!*, a huge figure of a worker leads a crowd of demonstrators and holds a wounded corpse in his arm. (Figure 35) In the front row, a female demonstrator is holding The Little Red Book which represents *Quotations of Mao Zedong*. The other male demonstrator is holding a banner written with the slogan 'Fiercely resist the fascist brutality of British rule in Hong Kong' (*Qianglie kangyi GangYing dangju de Faxisi baoxing!*). This poster depicts the violent suppression of the British colonial forces which caused the death of Chinese people. This poster was closely related to the situation in British Hong Kong in 1967 when a series of riots took place during that year. When the Cultural Revolution began in China, there were a series of large-scale and sustained disturbances in Hong Kong.<sup>268</sup> The initial demonstration was in 1967 at a factory of the Hong Kong Artificial Flower Works owned by Li Ka-Shing and turned into a riot. This original industrial dispute was seized upon by the local communists as a way to mark their entry into the Cultural Revolution, which hitherto had been exclusively in mainland China. The Hong Kong groups organised mass rallies and coordinated violent actions similar to the 'Smash the Four Olds and enemies' campaigns and rallies of the Red Guard movements in the mainland.<sup>269</sup> For example, like the Red Guard, the Hong Kong rioters used a lot of posters and

<sup>267</sup> Gittings, "Excess and Enthusiasm" , 27-46.

<sup>268</sup> Even before 1967, there were Chinese leftist movements occurred in Hong Kong in 1956 and in 1966. But the riots took place in Hong Kong in 1967 were the most sustained and destructive among all. See Lee, "The Role of Newspapers in the 1967 Riot: A Case Study of the Partisanship of the Hong Kong Press" 36. Read also Joseph Man Chan and Chin-Chuan Lee, *Mass Media and Political Transition: The Hong Kong Press in China's Orbit* (New York & London: The Guilford Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>269</sup> Steve Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 183.

banners with slogans, and they also held high *The Little Red Books* during their rallies. These were the key features of Red Guard movements particularly in the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. In another poster, entitled *We Must Triumph — The British In Hong Kong Must Be Defeated*, a typical Red Guard style rally is depicted. The picture presents a crowd of demonstrators arm in arm, holding large character banners with slogans, holding *The Little Red Book* and shouting. Again, posters, slogans and *The Little Red Book* are the key features of a mass rally in the style of the Red Guards. The slogans, which also suggest the contents of what the demonstrators are shouting, included: '*Imperialists and all reactionaries are paper tigers*', '*Quote by Chairman Mao: be firmly determined, do not fear sacrifice, surmount all difficulties, strive for victory*' and '*The Chinese people are not to be humiliated*'; these corresponded closely to the major themes of the then current campaigns in China.

These posters played a part in disseminating Maoist slogans in British Hong Kong. An emphasis on the violence of British colonial suppression against Chinese people aimed at gaining the support of the Hong Kong. In this sense, while political posters were the tools for consolidating the leadership of Mao Zedong, they played a different role in the Hong Kong context where they functioned as a media through which criticisms against the government could be expressed. It is this different function of the political posters in Hong Kong's history that plays a part in shaping the current role of Cultural Revolution imagery in contemporary Hong Kong culture.

Another poster, entitled *Give Tit For Tat, Fight Resolutely!*, depicts an angry and violent crowd of demonstrators who smash miniature figures of the then current British Hong Kong governor David Clive Crosbie Trench (戴麟趾) and the Hong Kong police with their fists and other objects such as chairs, wooden sticks and bottles. (Figure 37) This picture describes the scenario of a march to the Governor House in Hong Kong during which the aggressive rioters put up large character posters at the entrance gate of the Governor's House. This depiction is closely related to the march of pro-Chinese communist activists to the Governor's House on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 1967, which was broadcasted on television news after the riots were quelled. The poster used the typical Red Guard style of using miniature cartoon figures to represent enemies who are being smashed by huge, strong fists of the Chinese communists. However, this exaggerated style

might give an impression of an untruthful report of the event. According to Alice Y.L. Lee, the Chinese Communist failed to gain full support from the majority of Hong Kong citizens during the riots partly because of the exaggeration and bias of the leftist media who only reported the victories and the positive side of the Chinese Communists.<sup>270</sup>

Through a study of the leftist Chinese posters disseminated in Hong Kong in 1967, I reveal a different function of these posters in the British Hong Kong context. First, the poster was a visual point of reference through which the immediate conflict between the Maoist Communist movements and the British colonial government was represented. Second, to many Hong Kong people, the posters, which had anti-British slogans, were sites where criticisms opposing the ruling authority could be expressed. Third, under the British colonial rule, the posters (and also the leftist newspapers) were effective ways to become informed about Maoist China. Thus in general these pictures in the Cultural Revolution style played an important part in visualising not only the Chinese communist view of Hong Kong under foreign colonial rule, but were also significant in that such visual narratives 'positioned' Hong Kong in the middle of two authorities: the communist Chinese and the colonial British. The role of the posters in Hong Kong in 1967 can be understood as providing representations within which a sense of difference between Hong Kong and the mainland, and thus an early sense of Hong Kong identity, was constructed. This sense of difference, I argue, has remained in Hong Kong culture all the while since 1967, and shapes how Hong Kong positions itself in its relation with the mainland.

Through analysing these Cultural Revolution posters which circulated in Hong Kong in 1967, I reveal that the Cultural Revolution imagery, which played a distinct role in Hong Kong, is significant in the study of the China-Hong Kong relations and in understanding why Hong Kong has been seen, and continues to see itself as a Chinese city different from the others. It is important to note that this difference was further consolidated when the British colonial government carried out reforms and measures to improve the standard of living and to create a local sense of belonging among Hong Kong citizens (for example, the public

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<sup>270</sup> See Lee, "The Role of Newspapers in the 1967 Riot: A Case Study of the Partisanship of the Hong Kong Press", 36.

housing policy and Hong Kong Festival). For the above reasons, I argue that the recurrence of Cultural Revolution imagery in post-1997 Hong Kong context can be considered as the reminder of the in-between positioning of Hong Kong in both the post-colonial and re-colonised eras. Thus, what is more significant in the study of the recurring of Cultural Revolution imagery in post-handover Hong Kong is to look at the extent to which Cultural Revolution imagery still serves as the site where the difference between Hong Kong and China is visualised, and therefore, reveals key aspects of current China-Hong Kong relations in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the following section I give examples of some recurring Cultural Revolution images in post-2003 Hong Kong in order to explore the meaning of these images in the contemporary context.

*The Little Red Book, Red Guards mass assemblies and sloganising culture*

Daily life during the Cultural Revolution was dominated by the thoughts and influence of Mao Zedong, Red Guards movements and mass assemblies. As Paul Clark describes, the typical daily scenario during the Cultural Revolution was marked by Chairman Mao's summoning of young people:

The start of the Cultural Revolution saw young people answering Mao Zedong's call to rise up against the establishment (excluding himself) by organizing themselves into Red Guards (*Hongweibing*, literally red guarding soldiers). On several occasions when he appeared before millions of adoring Red Guards and other young people in Tian'anmen Square, Chairman Mao was very often in an army uniform.<sup>271</sup>

According to the above description, we understand that social life during the Cultural Revolution was dominated by the culture of mass gatherings in open public space with millions of Red Guards as the major participants. Alongside this practice, these Red Guards also sang or read out slogans. Clark writes about the details of this culture:

With the start of the Cultural Revolution, musical attention turned most immediately to what we might call "praise songs" for Chairman Mao and "rebel songs" for Red Guards groups. To the existing repertoire of songs glorifying Mao's wisdom were added such gems as 'Wish Chairman Mao a Long Life (*Zhufu Mao zhuxi wanshouwujiang*) and 'Chairman Mao is the Red Sun in the Hearts of the People of the Whole World (*Mao Zhuxi shi quan shijie renmin xinzhong de hong taiyang*). These songs, known as "loyalty songs" (*zhongzi ge*), served as the musical part of the 'loyalty dances' (*zhongzi wu*),

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<sup>271</sup> Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: a history*, 52.

performed by amateurs in factories, offices, and in the street during the late 1960s...Another novel kind of song was “quotation songs” (yulu ge), setting the quotations and passages from the so-called Little Red Book to music...<sup>272</sup>

The marching of the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution was not only characterised by singing or reading from *The Little Red Book*. It was also marked by the rebel movements of these young people who deliberately destroyed the ‘four olds’ (*po sjiu*). Some posters of the Cultural Revolution illustrated the Red Guard movements marching in the street with their Little Red Books and banners with slogans. One of the typical examples was produced in Jilin in 1967 which demonstrates the function of *The Little Red Books* and banners. (Figure 13) This poster illustrates a young man holding aloft his *Quotations of Mao Zedong* followed by a crowd of people who are also holding their *Little Red Books* and banners with slogans such as ‘Revolution is guiltless!’ (*Ge ming wu zui*) and ‘Revolutionary Spirits Long Live!’ (*Ge ming zao fan jing shen wan sui*)

#### *The 1967 riots and aftermath*

The spread of the Cultural Revolution from the mainland to Hong Kong was marked by social chaos and economic stagnancy. The original labour dispute was quickly subsumed by a series of large-scale demonstrations, marches and noisy street protests with stone-throwing and even the use of hand-made bombs in the city and outside of the Government House.<sup>273,274</sup> Not only were Hong Kong’s economy and social stability seriously upset, but the Hong Kong British colonial government was also challenged by the riots.<sup>275</sup>

These riots traumatized the people of Hong Kong and resulted in a fear of the ‘communist’ regime. There was a suspicion of whether China’s ‘communist’ resumption could provide an environment for Hong Kong to maintain its economic prosperity.<sup>276</sup> The intensification in emigration from Hong Kong after 1984 demonstrated the reluctance of Hong Kong citizens to cede the city’s sovereignty to China. With the impact of the Tiananmen square incident in 1989,

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid. , 182.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid. , 185.

<sup>275</sup> Lee, "The Role of Newspapers in the 1967 Riot: A Case Study of the Partisanship of the Hong Kong Press" , 36.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid. , 195; Ackbar Abbas, "Hong Kong" in *The cinema of small nations*, ed. Mette Hjort and Duncan Petrie (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 114.

anxiety among Hong Kong people was evident. Rampant emigration continued and people urged the British government to grant the right for all Hong Kong citizens to abode in the United Kingdom.<sup>277</sup> Under the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act in 1990, fifty thousand families in Hong Kong were granted British citizenship. To enable some of the population to obtain British citizenship, the act sought to maintain citizens' confidence in Hong Kong and to counteract the effects of losing many of its most talented residents through emigration. The emigration trend and the right to abode in the United Kingdom issue suggest the Hong Kong people's reluctance to be governed by the Chinese authority in the pre-handover period.

The significance of these riots in Hong Kong is not about whether the agitators succeeded or not in overthrowing British colonial rule. The riots in 1967 brought a terrible blow to the people of Hong Kong at that time which generated a domestic crisis of confidence toward the Chinese communist regime. At the same time the British carried out a lot more social reforms after 1967.

The year of 1967 is a significant year in history of Hong Kong. As mentioned, this year was marked by a series of riots. They transpired during a period of eight months between May and December in 1967, and were the most serious social disruption in Hong Kong history. A recent television series on the history of Hong Kong started from the year 1967 because this year is understood as the crucial dividing point in which the history of today's Hong Kong began to take shape. For example, it was the year in which the majority of Hong Kong citizens lived in fear of violence. Teenage agitators, and even primary school students, threw stones at the police, burnt cars and destroyed property to express their discontent of the Hong Kong British government.

### **Cultural Revolutionary imagery in Hong Kong popular commodities**

Most of the 'Chinese Revolutionary' popular cultural products in Hong Kong between 2003 and 2004 drew on a limited range of Chinese Revolutionary elements. The two major elements, *The Little Red Book* and the Red Guards, had

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<sup>277</sup> The drafting of the Basic Law coincided with the Tiananmen Square Incident in 1989. The Basic Law Drafting Committee ceased meeting and some members from Hong Kong resigned to protest the incident. When the Drafting Committee resumed meeting, the attitude of mainland Chinese representatives was far less tolerant and they insisted on strengthening the language of Article 23. See Petersen, "Introduction", 19.

frequently appeared in different kinds of commodities. The first example of Chinese Revolutionary product I discuss was a notepad called the *Essential little red (note) book* designed, produced and sold by a company called G.O.D.<sup>278</sup> (Figure 39) With the founding of G.O.D., Douglas Young claims that he wanted to establish a brand which particularly addressed the local Hong Kong people and represented Hong Kong culture to the world. As Douglas Young said, ‘We [Hong Kong people] need to assert ourselves both economically and culturally’ because ‘Hong Kong is neither China nor the West’ and ‘it is at the risk of being marginalised’.<sup>279</sup> In this sense, Douglas Young consciously considers Hong Kong cultural identity as a product of Hong Kong’s in-between positioning. Thus, his constant use of Cultural Revolution imagery in his products since late 2003 suggests that Cultural Revolution imagery does not lose its meaning in signifying difference between Hong Kong and China.

#### *The Essential little red (note) book*

*The Essential little red (note) book* was one of the products designed by Douglas Young which were sold when the 1<sup>st</sup> of July mass rally in 2003 took place in Hong Kong. The notepad looked almost the same as *The Little Red Book (The Quotations of Mao Zedong)* from the Cultural Revolution era. The book’s cover is inscribed with some slogans that praise the leadership of the Chairman Mao Zedong including ‘The Great Teacher’ (*Wei da de dao shi*), ‘The Great Leader’ (*Wei da de ling xiu*), ‘The Great Commander’ (*Wei da de tong shuai*) and ‘The Great Helmsman’ (*Wei da de duo shou*). However, a closer look at the slogans reveals that a non-Cultural Revolution slogan ‘To Live Better Long Live, Long

<sup>278</sup> The company name G.O.D. stands for ‘Goods of Desire’ in English, but according to the founder’s explanation this English abbreviation intentionally represents the Cantonese pronunciation of its Chinese name ‘住好啲’ (jyu6 hou2 di1) which literally means ‘to live better’. This company was founded in Hong Kong in 1996 by Douglas Young, who is also the founder of G.O.D. Street Culture Museum (住好啲石硤閘街頭文化館) in Hong Kong. The address of the G.O.D. Street Culture Museum is Studio Unit L2-09, The Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre, 30 Pak Tin Street, Shek Kip Mei, Kowloon, Hong Kong. Part of the exhibits were comprised of daily objects and images from Hong Kong. These included photographs of Hong Kong movie stars, clocks, calendars, furniture, etc. Its founding purpose is to establish a database and a collection of resources for Hong Kong designers to reconstruct Hong Kong identity and culture with the use of local cultural symbols. Like many other museums, some products are made from the resources of the database and they are retailed at the souvenir shop of the museum. Information gathered from my interview with G.O.D.’s CEO and Chief designer Douglas Young during my fieldwork in Hong Kong in 2006.

<sup>279</sup> Zoe Mak, *G.O.D.’s Douglas Young wants you to live better [An interview with Douglas Young on 10 September] (SCMP at Youtube, 2008 [cited 10 December 2009])*; available from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tACJMAZ1a\\_M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tACJMAZ1a_M).



Live! Long Long Live' (jyu6 hou2 di1 Wan sui, Wan sui! Wan wan sui!)<sup>280</sup> is intermingled with the other original slogans. 'To Live Better' is the name of the company which produced these 'little red (note) book' products. The design is not only borrowed and references the properties of the *Quotation of Mao Zedong* which was widely published in China in 1960s and 1970s. The print advertisement for the 'little red (note) books' shows a photograph of a group of Red Guards holding *The Little Red Book* and banners conjuring up an aspect of everyday social life during the Cultural Revolution in China. Before analysing this contemporary use of Cultural Revolution imagery, it is necessary to contextualise this social practice. There are three major aspects of social and political circumstances that we can understand in this phenomenon. These are the Basic Law and the 'One Country Two Systems' policy of China, the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2003 mass rally and the Beijing Government's reaction to the democratic movements in Hong Kong.

#### *Basic Law and the 'One Country Two Systems' policy*

The Basic Law is the constitutional document of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) which was agreed on by the British and Chinese governments in order to provide the guarantees to maintain Hong Kong's existing way of life. Since then the territory of Hong Kong has been shaped and remained unchanged under the British colonial rule. Before the British lease of the New Territories expired, the United Kingdom and China discussed the issue of Hong Kong sovereignty and signed the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984. With this agreement, the sovereignty of Hong Kong was due to return to China in 1997 and Hong Kong would be governed as a 'Special Administrative Region' of China. To preserve the economic stability and the way of life of Hong Kong, the Chinese government agreed to allow Hong Kong to retain its laws and 'high degree of autonomy', which would remain unchanged for at least fifty years after Hong Kong's sovereignty is transferred. For this purpose, Hong Kong Basic Law, the constitutional document of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, was adopted in 1990. And according to the 'One Country Two Systems' principle, socialism practised in China would not be applied to Hong Kong after 1997.

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<sup>280</sup> I transcribe the Chinese name of G.O.D. in Yale Cantonese spelling because it is only meaningful to speak in Cantonese. The rest of the Chinese characters are transcribed in Putonghua pinyin spelling.

Rather, Hong Kong would continue its capitalist system and way of life as established under British rule.

The Basic Law and the 'One Country Two Systems' principle also specifies that the Chinese government will be only responsible for 'national defence' and 'foreign affairs' and the internal social, cultural and economic affairs in post-1997 Hong Kong will be managed by the HKSAR government. However, the execution of the Basic Law and the 'One Country Two Systems' principle is not without uncertainties. As Shae and Wong point out, although article 45 of the Basic Law stipulates that the ultimate Chief Executive of the HKSAR will be elected by universal suffrage, there is no time frame to schedule 'when' this will be actualised.<sup>281</sup> A lack of social confidence in the Chinese communist rule has long been established among Hong Kong citizens for decades. To make matters worse, the economy of Hong Kong has been weakened by a chain of events since 1997. Hong Kong's economy suffered from the negative impacts of the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997/1998, the avian flu fiasco in 1998 and the SARS outbreak in 2003. To add fuel to the fire, as I discuss later, the first Chief Executive of the HKSAR, Mr. Tung Chee Hwa disappointed the Hong Kong public by dismissing public opinion. These factors altogether made up the background for the struggle for more political rights and a new way to express the discontentment towards the government.

### *The 1<sup>st</sup> July mass rally in 2003*

After the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, the British and Chinese governments agreed on a political framework stipulated in the Basic Law as the governing principle of ruling Hong Kong before and after the year of 1997. Before 1997, the British Hong Kong government began a democratisation process as a part of the British plan for decolonizing Hong Kong.<sup>282</sup> This was similar to the decolonising process in Singapore in the 1950s in the sense that the local people gradually gained more political power in the years before colonisation ended. However, unlike the Singaporean context, the British democratisation of

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<sup>281</sup> Shae and Wong, "Popular protest and electioneering in Hong Kong", 41.

<sup>282</sup> Ming Sing, *Hong Kong's Tortuous Democratization: A Comparative Analysis* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 63.

Hong Kong had to closely follow the principles laid down in the Basic Law. Thus instead of radical change, the British government carried out a series of reforms to protect the civic and political rights of the Hong Kong people.<sup>283</sup> As Wan-Chaw Shae and Pik-Wan Wong point out, this formed the context of the development of a 'partial democracy' political system in Hong Kong.<sup>284</sup> This 'partial democracy', together with a local cultural identity, have become the major components of the specific 'Hong Kong way of life' since the 1980s. This distinctive political circumstance and cultural identity has had a significant impact on Hong Kong local cultures and social practices. Since the Basic Law is the political structure that both the British and Chinese government had to follow in the ruling of Hong Kong, I will briefly lay out its core contents.

From 2003 Chinese Revolutionary symbols emerged in Causeway Bay, a heavily built-up commercial district of Hong Kong and the location of major shopping malls and tourist souvenir shops. These cultural symbols were used in popular cultural products aimed at young consumers and foreign tourists. This was an unprecedented cultural phenomenon in the sense that Chinese Revolutionary culture had never been introduced in local cultural/commercial practices in any similar way before. For example, there were previous examples of pricey 'Mao' products produced by high-end shops in the 1990s, but the use of the Chinese Revolutionary elements were mainly driven by commercial value resulting from the exotic interest of the west in China. These products were too expensive to become popular among the young local customers or the majority of foreign tourists. The use of the images of Chinese Red Guards in Hong Kong popular cultural products, as I argue, was not simply a result of a capitalist commodification, but a complex political and cultural phenomenon. The instant connection between these products and current political issues was the theme of mass demonstration.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2003, many people went on to the street to demonstrate against the HKSAR government. The reason for this was that the Beijing government proposed to the HKSAR government to pass the National Security Bill as stipulated by the Article 23 of the Basic Law:

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<sup>283</sup> Shae and Wong, "Popular protest and electioneering in Hong Kong", 39.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government, or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organizations or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region, and to prohibit political organizations or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign political organizations or bodies.<sup>285</sup>

This controversy began when Mr. Tung Chee Hwa began drafting the legislation without sufficient consultation of the public. Many Hong Kong citizens and politicians had doubts and concerns about the provisions of the proposed legislation. Some major offences were poorly defined. For example, some people found that the concepts of 'government' and 'country' were unclear and exchangeable in the proposed Bill, and would lead to treating a person opposing the government as a traitor opposing the country. In the proposed enactment, police were allowed to enter residential buildings and arrest people without court warrants. Any speech deemed as instigating unrest could be regarded as illegal, including oral, written and electronic forms; it would be a crime to express, listen or fail to report such statements.<sup>286</sup> As Shae and Wong assert, the passing of the Bill was regarded as 'seriously endangering the civil rights and freedom of the press and expression guaranteed by the Basic Law.'<sup>287</sup> These were heated issues that were debated in the public media for months, yet the HKSAR government was reluctant to postpone the deadline for passing the Bill.<sup>288</sup>

The government was unconcerned by the lack of public support and continued to press ahead. As a result, a mass rally was called by those who were dissatisfied with the Bill. Approximately 500,000 people demonstrated against the legislation of Article 23 on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2003 – the day that commemorates the establishment of the HKSAR. This mass rally was launched from the Victoria

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<sup>285</sup> Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, *Chapter 2 : Relationship between the Central Authorities and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region* [Online] (17 March 2008 [cited 12 June 2009]); available from [http://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclawtext/chapter\\_2.html](http://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclawtext/chapter_2.html).

<sup>286</sup> Kent Roach, "Old and New Versions of Security" in *National Security and Fundamental Freedoms: Hong Kong's article 23 Under Scrutiny*, ed. Hualing Fu, Carole J. Petersen, and Simon N.M. Young (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 125-128. See also Security Bureau, *Proposals to implement Article 23 of the Basic Law* [Online] (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region China, 2003 [cited 10 Oct 2009]); available from <http://www.basiclaw23.gov.hk/english/download/reporte.pdf>.

<sup>287</sup> Shae and Wong, "Popular protest and electioneering in Hong Kong", 41.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

Park of Causeway Bay and marched to the Government Offices in Central.<sup>289</sup> The 'partial democracy' in Hong Kong political system made it difficult to exercise control over the HKSAR government in the passing of the Bill. As Shae and Wong point out, Hong Kong could only enjoy partial democracy with only eight hundred people participating in the election of the Chief Executive of the HKSAR.<sup>290</sup> Only half of the Legislative Council seats were directly elected by the voters in geographical districts.<sup>291</sup> In this case, when the executive-led HKSAR government was dismissive towards public opinion, the legislature did not have sufficient power to exercise an effective control. However, the government did not pass the Bill as expected. After the leader of the pro-business Liberal Party, James Tien, declared his opposition to the passing of the Bill, the Bill was postponed for an indefinite period of time.<sup>292</sup> But it is important not to underrate the power of the social mobilisation. The 1<sup>st</sup> of July mass rally in 2003 was known as the only protest in Hong Kong history that was larger than the one supporting the Tiananmen Incident in 1989.<sup>293</sup> Demonstration as a way to voice social discontents was for the first time widely supported by a vast number of Hong Kongers. This incident was significant in the struggle for political rights and democracy because, as Shae and Wong argue, 'it is fair to say that it was the people's power as manifested in the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2003 rally that eventually stopped the legislation process'.<sup>294</sup>

### *China's measure in 2003*

However, the public wish for establishing universal suffrage for the election of the Chief Executive and the election of all members of the Legislative Council of

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<sup>289</sup> Yiu-Chung Wong, ed., *One Country, Two Systems in Crisis: Hong Kong's Transformation Since the Handover* (Lanham: Lexington books, 2004), 70.

<sup>290</sup> Shae and Wong, "Popular protest and electioneering in Hong Kong", 41.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>293</sup> One million people participated in the protests in support of the students in Tiananmen Square in May and June of 1989. These protests were not directed at the British colonial government. The government claimed that there were at least 500,000 people in the mass rally in 2003. But many believe that the number was far greater. See Petersen, "Introduction", 13. See also Louise Williams and Roland Rich, *Losing control: freedom of the press in Asia* (Canberra: Asia Pacific Press at the Australian National University, 2000).

<sup>294</sup> Shae and Wong, "Popular protest and electioneering in Hong Kong", 41.

Hong Kong is still not tolerated by the Chinese government. According to Shae and Wong, there were three major attempts of China to cool down the Hong Kong desire for such further development of a democratic government. First, an ‘ideological campaign’ was launched in February 2004 arguing that ‘the people ruling Hong Kong and those wanting to join the government must meet the “patriotic” criteria’ according to the former Chinese Communist Party leader Deng Xiaoping’s remark on patriotism.<sup>295</sup> This aimed at excluding and marginalising the pro-democracy leaders who have been labelled as being ‘unpatriotic’ in the sense that none of the twenty-five pro-democracy legislators in Hong Kong had been appointed into the Executive Council, the highest political power structure of the HKSAR.<sup>296</sup> Second, China attempted to offer a different interpretation of the Basic Law. In April 2004, some Chinese officials declared that according to their interpretation of the Basic Law ‘it would not be possible for Hong Kong to elect its next Chief Executive by universal suffrage in 2007 or to implement full democracy in the legislature by 2008’.<sup>297</sup> Third, the National People’s Congress (NPC) of China’s parliament declared that the NPC has the final say on what is needed for change and whether such change is acceptable.<sup>298</sup> These events related to the development of a democratic political system in Hong Kong happened in 2003 and 2004, and they formed the background for political struggles and identity politics.

### **Understanding Cultural Revolution imagery in post-2003 Hong Kong**

In the paragraphs above I discussed the three major aspects of the socio-political situation in Hong Kong in 2003 which forms the context for the recurrence of Cultural Revolution imagery in popular culture. The images of Red Guards in the Back to the Little Red Book advertisement creates an immediate connection with the ‘Red Guard’ style of Cultural Revolution posters which were disseminated in Hong Kong in 1967, as mentioned in the previous section. For

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid. , 42 and 52.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid. , 42.

<sup>298</sup> Eva Wu, Kang-chung Ng, and Joshua But, "Democracy Activists Planning Big March Protest Set for January 13 after Beijing Rules Out Introducing Universal Suffrage in 2012" *South China Morning Post*, 31 December 2007.

example, the advertisement uses aspects of the poster entitled *We Must Triumph – The British In Hong Kong Must Be Defeated* which featured an image of a mass rally in the early phase of the Cultural Revolution (1966-67). The advertisement has an image of a crowd of rioters holding banners with slogans and *The Little Red Books*. However, the contemporary picture is obviously not a faithful reproduction of a Cultural Revolution image because the language used in the new slogans, although similar to the original Maoist slogans, has a completely different meaning. For example, the popular saying of 'long live Chairman Mao' during the Cultural Revolution is reworked into 'To-live-better long live'. It is important to note that in the advertisement, the word 'NOTE' in between 'Red' and 'Book' does not appear in the original, but has been deliberately inserted. On the banners the words which combine to read as 'Quotations of Mao Note Pad' (*Maoyulu jishibao*) suggest a deliberate play with the language of slogans during the era of the Cultural Revolution. The original meaning of Cultural Revolution imagery is radically reworked and changed through the deliberate play of words and language but the key visual features such as *The Little Red Book*, Red Guards, banners and big character posters remain in the contemporary version.

Working with the metaphor of the Red Guard movements in contemporary situations, the Hong Kong political subjects who went out on to the streets to protest against the HKSAR government *became* the Red Guards in the new era. By positioning themselves in this way, Hong Kongers now spoke a new subversive language. This language of a democratic Hong Kong brought the practices of social struggle (i.e. rallies) particularly 'into view' and expanded the logical space for political and democratic deliberation. In this new language, the claim of a new democratic Hong Kong did not sound radical but came to be accepted as 'true' and 'historical' (in the sense that Red Guard rallies took place more than four decades ago in China). This emergence of such a language was part of an evolutionary struggle in a specific post-2003 context.

These kinds of young mass movements and sloganising culture are the exact visual elements that are borrowed and recycled in Hong Kong 'lifestyle' products. When the original slogans are changed into 'the red note book', we can see that the use of Cultural Revolution images in Hong Kong commercial culture relies very much on wordplay to adapt the images of the past into the present context. The use of words is the means through which the Cultural Revolution images can

be made suitable to a different era because the social function of Cultural Revolution images has no direct connection with the present Hong Kong culture.

Thus, in my opinion, the revisiting of the mass movements of the Red Guards focuses on the collective identity and the power of the ‘rebel’ for young audiences which is not simply spontaneous or accidental. Some may explain the commercialisation of Chinese revolutionary images as a result of the guaranteed commercial value across cultures and locations. But it is also important to note that these images are particularly connected to an idea of ‘lifestyle’ which ‘promotes’ certain attitudes toward life and living, and the customers who are foreign tourists having their temporary visit in Hong Kong. These particular linkages of Cultural Revolution images with the Hong Kong context are highly specific to the local culture and history.

In this example, the Hong Kong designer borrowed the Chinese Revolutionary elements such as *The Little Red Book* and Red Guards for reworking and manipulation. These mainland cultural symbols are both disconnected and related to the current Hong Kong context. They are disconnected because this culture did not belong to Hong Kong people. Yet post-handover Hong Kong has become a part of China which suggests an inevitable connection between the city and the country. To theorise Chinese Revolutionary popular cultural products using Hall’s idea of a cultural politics of difference, the role of Chinese Revolutionary imagery could be interpreted as the site upon which the cultural difference between Hong Kong and China is reflected. It is because Chinese Revolutionary culture did not closely relate to Hong Kongers that *The Little Red Book* and the Red Guards could be turned ‘upside-down’ and function as a way to reconstruct the self (i.e. new Hong Kong political subjects who were struggling for a democratic political system). In the process, the common element of the mass rally, as manifested by the Red Guards movements of the 1960s and the Hong Kong mass rallies of 2003 and 2004, became the essential connection between revolutionary China and the partial democracy of Hong Kong.

Moreover, an additional contemporary meaning can be revealed in the question ‘Cultural Revolution, what is it about?’ (*Wenhua da geming, zhenme huishi?*). This question, together with the inserted word ‘NOTE’ to make the Little Red Book into the Red NOTE Book, marks a double reading of the meaning of this Cultural Revolution imagery and its contemporary usage. By means of this



double reading, I understand the recurrence of an image (i.e. Communist mass rally in 1967) as a way of using resources of real history; however this image of a mass rally also connects to another historical moment in Hong Kong history — the July 1<sup>st</sup> mass rally in 2003. Thus, the meaning of this advertisement can be understood as: the Red Guards holding *Quotations of Mao Zedong* and banners written with Maoist slogans in 1967, and the recent Hong Kong protestors holding aloft their own red note books in 2003. Rather than remaining unchanging, the meaning of the Essential Little Red Book of the past is becoming the Essential Little Red NOTE Book of the present.

Derrida's concept of 'under erasure', which involves crossing a word out yet leaving both the word and its crossed-out version visible, offers a useful way to reflect on the double reading of *The Little Red Book* and the social movements of the Cultural Revolution in the Hong Kong context. By borrowing Derrida's notion of 'under erasure', I understand the designer's deliberate reference to an event of the Cultural Revolution in the advertisement as a practice of placing the Maoist *Little Red Book* and the Cultural Revolution itself 'under erasure'. It refers to the act of using particular historical moments (i.e. the Red Guard movements in China and 1967 riots in Hong Kong) and the practice of borrowing and reworking the language (e.g. Maoist style of slogans), cultural objects and practices as a process of revising and destabilizing the meaning of *The Little Red Book* and the Cultural Revolution. This is both useful and necessary for identifying Hong Kong as distinct from the mainland. For example, by inserting the word 'NOTE' to change *The Little Red Book* into the Red NOTE Book is similar to the Derridean way of erasing a word, but allowing the erased word to remain visible. In this sense, both *The Little Red Book* of the past and the Red NOTE Book in the present are put together for comparison, and it is the process of inserting the word 'NOTE' through which the difference and tension between the two similar cultural objects is articulated. Similarly, the question which interrogates the nature of the Cultural Revolution not only creates double readings of Cultural Revolution imagery and history, but also destabilizes the meaning of the term 'Cultural Revolution' from the political campaigns that took place in China during the 1960s and 1970s, and also from the socio-cultural practice (i.e. the reworking of Cultural Revolution imagery and slogans) in Hong Kong in 2004. In this way, the term of 'Cultural Revolution' is also put 'under erasure'. The

designer's questioning of the Cultural Revolution also has multiple meanings: it can at the same time address the political campaigns in China during the era of Cultural Revolution, the 1967 riots in Hong Kong, the mass rally in Hong Kong in 2003 and also the very act of reworking Cultural Revolution imagery in the making of the advertisement as a 'cultural revolution'. It is this multiple possibility of readings, and the tensions within these readings, which constructs the contemporary meaning of Cultural Revolution imagery.

Thus, my understanding through Derrida's notion of 'under erasure' sees the recurrence of Cultural Revolution imagery in Hong Kong popular culture as a social and political phenomenon, through which the temporary connection between the Red Guard rallies between 1966 and 1968 and the mass rally in Hong Kong in 2003 is forged. This temporary connection is only specific to post-2003 Hong Kong context, and its context specific meaning can only be understood by the local Hong Kong audience. This specific contemporary context for the meaning of Cultural Revolution imagery, which is socially constructed in Hong Kong popular culture in post-2003 era, suggests that Cultural Revolution imagery, like other signs, is instable. Its meaning shifts according to new practices and the unexpected occurrence of new events.

In this sense, meaning of Cultural Revolution imagery is unfixed and in process. This is the position of Roland Barthes when he writes that:

A text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.<sup>299</sup>

Barthes's point effectively explains the nature of the Cultural Revolution imagery and *The Little Red Book* in this Hong Kong recurrence which is the outcome of new relationships between texts. It brings together two different historical events and exposes the tensions within the changing relations between Hong Kong and China across time.

The idea of 'redescription' summarised by Barker – 'social change becomes possible through rethinking and redescribing the social order and the possibilities for the future' and 'this "rethinking" of ourselves emerges through social practice' which 'brings new political subjects and practices into being' –

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<sup>299</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), 146.

offers a useful lens to reflect on the social and political character of the G.O.D. designer's practice of using Cultural Revolution imagery in the contemporary context of Hong Kong popular culture.<sup>300</sup> It positions this practice as a social and political activity, that is, the activity of using the language of the cultural 'Other' to 'redescribe' the current social order in post-2003 Hong Kong. Through this social practice, the 'rethinking' of a shifting Hong Kong identity emerges also through its social contradictions and conflicts with China, particularly in the development of a democratic political system. While a 'new language' can be understood as the power to redescribe ourselves, the question of this cultural power in the recurrence of Cultural Revolution imagery translates into the purpose of cultural politics when Hong Kongers are redescribed through popular culture using images of protesters in a mass rally for political freedom. Thus, a mass rally is the social activity through which the citizens of Hong Kong struggle and re-identify themselves with and against China. Cultural Revolution imagery is the sign through which they redescribe themselves.

The Essential Little Red (NOTE) Book cultural product is a good example of how Cultural Revolution imagery, particularly pictures of the Red Guards, *The Little Red Book* and Maoist slogans, takes on different meanings in a popular culture context. In the previous paragraphs I examined how the reworking of Cultural Revolution imagery and slogans can be understood as forming a kind of 'new language', and also a process through which the post-2003 Hong Kong political situation is redescribed. Cultural Revolution imagery and history is a site where difference, contradiction and conflicts between the political systems of Hong Kong and China are revealed. When a struggle for more political rights became urgent and necessary, a mass rally was organised to defend Hong Kong's democratic government. Considering the context-specific nature of Cultural Revolution imagery, I argue that this imagery was a powerful cultural code that was widely available for exploitation, and through which Hong Kong redescribed its relationship with China. In explaining how a text can be borrowed to produce new subjectivities, Hall argued that:

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<sup>300</sup> Barker points out that 'the assimilation of poststructuralist thinking has led cultural studies to an understanding of "politics" that is centred on the power of discourse to describe and regulate cultural identities and social action.' Barker asserts that the struggle and power to redescribe ourselves in a 'new language' is a kind of social practice that makes social change possible. See Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 410.

Rasta was a funny language, borrowed from a text – the Bible – that did not belong to them; they had to turn the text upside-down, to get a meaning which fitted their experience. But in turning the text upside-down they remade themselves; they positioned themselves differently as new political subjects; they reconstructed themselves as blacks in the new world: they *became* what they are. And, positioning themselves in that way, they learned to speak a new language. And they spoke it with a vengeance....[T]hey only constitute a political force, that is, they *become* a historical force in so far as they are constituted as new political subject.<sup>301</sup>

As Hall argues, by using Rastafarians in Jamaica as an example, that new political subjects and practices are brought into being when a culture of the Other is borrowed in the construction of a 'new' language as a result of 'rethinking'. Hall's idea is helpful in seeing the use of Cultural Revolution imagery, in the context of the political situation of 2003, as a practice of borrowing a text of the cultural 'Other'. It is through differences highlighted in the process of using the cultural resources of the Other that Hong Kong identity could be reconstructed through representation.

#### *'Reading the Little Red Book' Screensaver*

In the first example, I argue that the deliberate use and reworking of Cultural Revolution imagery can be conceptualised as a site where cultural politics is played out in the process of redescribing Hong Kong identity. In the second example, I continue to explore how tensions within and differences between Hong Kong and China are articulated through the manipulation of Cultural Revolution imagery and the use of contemporary captions.

This screensaver was designed by G.O.D. which could be downloaded from its official website.<sup>302</sup> (Figure 40) In the center of this moving picture, there are two male Red Guards reading a giant *Little Red Book* together. Again, this suggests the reading of *Quotation of Mao Zedong*. The Red Guards look at each other eye to eye as if they both are very interested in *The Little Red Book*. On the cover of *The Little Red Book* under the title *Today's advice*, there are quite a few pieces of 'advice', including 'Seduce a stranger', 'Indulge in kinky sex', 'Tell your boss who's the boss', 'Laugh out loud', 'Be an angel' and 'Cook yourself a

<sup>301</sup> Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall", 143-144.

<sup>302</sup> A screensaver is a type of computer program designed to protect the computer monitor by filling the screen with moving images or patterns when the computer is not in use.

‘nice dinner’, etc. Above the two men a caption for the whole picture reads ‘We need to Live Better’ (Cantonese pronunciation: ngo5 dei6 yiu1 jyu6 hou2 di1). This suggests that nowadays people have a different way of life: if in the revolutionary past people were guided by Mao’s words, then in today’s Hong Kong people live according to a different set of ‘advice’ in order to ‘live better’. This modern advice might sound a little obscene to be considered guidance, but what is more meaningful is that it reveals the ‘obscene’ side of Hong Kong culture that plays with serious and political icons. It also discloses the variegated lifestyle of people in Hong Kong (compared to life during the Cultural Revolution).

Like the previous example, the caption in this screensaver determines the major readings of the imagery. This is a spectacular example of the instability of the meanings of Cultural Revolution imagery. With the captions changing every second, the textual meaning is unstable and cannot be confined to any single sentence or phrase. Rather, the meaning is the outcome of the relationships between the imagery and all of the captions.

I found the original source for this screensaver from a handbook for art workers published in the People's Republic of China in the 1970s. (Figure 41) The function of this publication was to provide guidance for art workers to produce standardised, officially recognised pictures for disseminating messages and coordinating political campaigns. This picture in its original context, except for the title *Quotations of Mao Zedong*, did not offer any specific clues as to its intended use, and thus could be used in a wide range of situations.

Comparing the appropriated image in the screensaver with the original, the major difference between the two is the captions used in the contemporary version. These pieces of ‘advice’, which describe contemporary situations, are in no way connected to the revolutionary past. This play of words radically destabilises the original textual meaning of the imagery, which was used to promote the leadership of Mao by advocating the habit of reading *Quotations of Mao*. Similar to the previous example, this original Cultural Revolution imagery is appropriated so that it forms a new ‘vocabulary’ in a new context. The depiction of the Red Guards is reworked from the decent portrayal to become joker-like characters, which radically violates the original sacredness and seriousness of the political picture. The new captions mainly describe trivial daily matters which contrast with the nationalistic, hopeful slogans of the Cultural Revolution.

This example shows that the meaning of an appropriated Cultural Revolution image is entirely dependent on the reworking and juxtaposition of different written texts. Some of these captions are somewhat too trivial to mention and some are awkward so that a kind of humour is constructed through such an arrangement. As a result, a detailed analysis of the captions is less important for this example because they are primarily humorous texts.

*'To Serve the People' Underpants and 'Toiling the field' Postcard*

Another feature of the use of Cultural Revolution images in Hong Kong products is that the same image could be recycled and reworked into different commercial forms. For example, the G.O.D.'s 'To serve the people' underpants (Figure 42) and 'Toiling the field' postcard (Figure 43) are products made out of the same Cultural Revolution image. The print on the underpants is a man who is happily working with a shovel. Around his neck there is a towel inscribed with the words 'People live better'. (人民住好啲) The slogan 'To serve the people' juxtaposed with this picture suggests that nowadays people work hard because they have a common goal – to make a better living. This picture of a happy worker is also reproduced in the form of postcard. In the centre of the 'Toiling the field' postcard, however, the same picture is given different captions in both English and Chinese: 'Toiling the fields' in English and 'Labour lives better' (勞動人民住好啲) in Cantonese.

This example shows how a single Cultural Revolution image can be used to make several different types of products. The original image is from a political poster from the Cultural Revolution, and shows a young worker in a field. Behind him are machines reaping grain and which symbolise the harvest of the season. The original Chinese caption of this picture is 'Reap a Good Harvest and Store Grain Everywhere' (*duo feng shou guang zhi liang*). (Figure 44) Other textual features in the original picture include a slogan which states 'Prepared for battles Prepared against famine for the people' (*Bei zhan bei huang wei ren min*). These two examples demonstrate that the reworked images on G.O.D.'s products are simplified and abstracted versions of the original in which only the human character is left intact.

In the ‘To serve the master’ postcard, we can see a picture of a dog in the centre, and below is the caption ‘To serve the masters’ (*wei zhu ren fu wu*). (Figure 45) This image seems to suggest that if it was the people who served society during the Cultural Revolution, then it is dogs which perform this function today. This may suggest that such faithfulness could only happen in the revolutionary era, or that it can only exist in a dog-human relationship today. However, with a closer look, the dog in the picture is wearing a collar which is inscribed with the words ‘SPCA’. Thus this picture also suggests that the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) works hard for the welfare of animals in today’s Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, many pet owners abandon their pets in the street. Besides collecting and rescuing abandoned animals, the SPCA in Hong Kong organises education programmes in order to improve this situation.

As the above examples show, the captions of the newly-made products play linguistically with the famous slogans, political symbols and even social practices which were popular during the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese Communist Party’s slogan ‘To serve the people’ is a good example. Its origin can be traced back to the time when Mao Zedong wrote a speech to commemorate the death of a PLA soldier, Zhang Side, who died in the collapse of a kiln in the summer of 1944. In this speech Mao said ‘we serve the people, therefore, if we have defects, we are not afraid of other people pointing them out’. Mao pointed out that the spirit of Zhang Side should be highly valued and promoted because he died for the benefits of the other. Since then the slogan ‘to serve the people’ has become a common phrase in daily life.<sup>303</sup> This and other slogans in the same discourse such, as ‘never benefit oneself, always benefit others’, also became the core principles of the Chinese Communist Party. The slogan ‘to serve the people’ is still in use in China. During the inspection of the troops of the PLA, there is a standardised ceremonial exchange between the inspecting official and the troops:

Inspecting official: ‘Greetings, Comrades!’ (*tong zhi men ni hao*)

Troop: ‘Greetings, Leader!’ (*shou zhang hao*)

Inspecting official: ‘Comrades [you] have worked hard’ (*tong zhi men xin ku le*)

<sup>303</sup> Resource Centre of News of the Communist Party of China, *Lishi Kouhao: Wei ren min fu wu (Historical Mottos: To serve the people)* [Online] (Renmin Wang, 2006 [cited 20 Nov 2009]); available from <http://cpc.people.com.cn/BIG5/64162/64170/index.html>.

Troops: ‘To serve the people!’ (*wei ren min fu wu*)

In the above examples of G.O.D.’s products, some typical features of the use of Cultural Revolution images in Hong Kong products can be identified. First, some particular cultural objects and social practices during Cultural Revolution such as *The Little Red Book*, the Red Guards, the mass assembly and slogans are borrowed and appropriated. Second, Cultural Revolution images are adapted to suit modern culture usually by inserting contemporary captions. Third, Cultural Revolution images are recycled in a variety of commercial forms which are contingent and unpredictable. Fourth, the commercial value of Cultural Revolution images is highly connected to the ‘young’ and ‘vibrant’ subculture in Hong Kong. These features are not only found in G.O.D.’s products.

### **People’s Recreation Community**

This section will examine some products in a commercial space in Hong Kong called the People’s Recreation Community. These products demonstrate the way in which Cultural Revolution imagery is used to reflect the position of post-handover Hong Kong. Hong Kong has always been seen differently from other cities in China, which has been shaped by different social and political developments. In 2003, soon after the 1<sup>st</sup> of July mass rally took place in Hong Kong, the HKSAR carried out economic measures in order to improve Hong Kong’s economy. One of these was the Individual Visit Scheme, which lead directly to a dramatic increase in the number of mainland Chinese visitors. This measure determined a new position for Hong Kong in its relationship with China — a tourist destination and a point of escape, within yet ‘outside’ of China.

#### *The Individual Visit Scheme*

The outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in Hong Kong between March and June in 2003 dealt a terrible blow to the tourist industry. In 2003 the Individual Visit Scheme began which allowed mainland Chinese tourists to visit Hong Kong and Macau on an individual basis. Before this scheme was launched, Chinese residents from the mainland could only travel to Hong Kong on business visas or in group tours. The major reason for launching the Individual Visit Scheme was to boost the economy of Hong Kong and Macau. According to the information on the Hong Kong Tourism Commission website, initially this



scheme was only introduced in four Guangdong cities including Dongguan, Zhongshan, Jiangmen and Foshan under the Closer Economic Partnership Agreement. This allowed individual residents of these cities to visit Hong Kong without joining a group tours. By January 2009, around 270 million residents of forty-nine cities in mainland China were eligible to apply for individual tourist visas to go to Hong Kong. The visa is valid for three months or one year and good for one or two visits to Hong Kong. The visa holder can stay in Hong Kong for not more than seven days on each visit. When the visa is expired the applicant may apply for a new one and there is no quota to the number of visas to be issued.<sup>304</sup> In February 2009 Mainland authorities extended the pilot scheme for Shenzhen non-permanent residents to visit Hong Kong in group tours which increased the number of eligible people under the scheme by several million.<sup>305</sup>

The series of measures to facilitate mainland Chinese residents to visit Hong Kong will continue to benefit the tourism industry of Hong Kong. The Individual Visit Scheme was expected to bring an influx of mainlanders to visit Hong Kong which lead to the authorized saving of Renminbi, and boosts in the money exchange business and retail industry in Hong Kong. Since then Hong Kong has become a popular tourist destination where a range of products have become particularly appealing to mainland Chinese visitors. For example, many mainland tourists go to Hong Kong in order to buy cheaper international brand-name products. Recently, more and more parents from the mainland go to Hong Kong to buy dairy products for their infants. The main reason for this is because of the Chinese milk scandal took place in July in 2008. Dairy products were contaminated by melamine, and at least six infants who had consumed the tainted milk died from kidney stones or kidney damage.<sup>306</sup> The milk scandal devastated both the internal sale and foreign exports of Chinese dairy products. With an increasing demand for reliable infant dairy products and the reputation of food

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<sup>304</sup> Tourist Commission, *Individual Visit Scheme* (The Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, [cited 29 December 2009]); available from: [http://www.tourism.gov.hk/english/visitors/visitors\\_ind.html](http://www.tourism.gov.hk/english/visitors/visitors_ind.html).

<sup>305</sup> Margaret Fong, *Speech by Commissioner for Tourism at 2009 Hong Kong Tourism Overview* [Online] (Tourism Board HKSAR, 20 Feb 2009 [cited 29 Dec 2009]); available from: [http://www.tourism.gov.hk/resources/tc\\_chi/paperreport\\_doc/speeches/2009-02-20/Speech\\_by\\_CT.pdf](http://www.tourism.gov.hk/resources/tc_chi/paperreport_doc/speeches/2009-02-20/Speech_by_CT.pdf).

<sup>306</sup> Tania Branigan, *Chinese figures show fivefold rise in babies sick from contaminated milk* (Guardian.co.uk, 2 December 2008 [cited 28 July 2010]); available from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/dec/02/china>.

security in Hong Kong, many mainland Chinese parents paid regular visits to Hong Kong to buy milk for their children.

The People's Recreation Community is the current name of a themed commercial space in Hong Kong which makes use of Mao icons in its company branding. This intends to make its young and dynamic image stand out from other bookstores in a competitive market place. While Cultural Revolution images are only used in some of their products, the shop owner Paul Tang sees the revolutionary images as perfect symbols for mainland China, which matches the shop's identity as a bookstore specialising in Chinese books published in simplified-characters. The first name of the bookstore 'The People's Bookstore' (in Cantonese: *yan4 man4 syu1 dim3*) directly referenced the political slogan 'To Serve the People' used during the Cultural Revolution.

In 2004 part of the bookstore was developed into a café corner, and the bookstore café was renamed as '人民公社' (in Cantonese: *yan4 man4 gung1 se5*; in Putonghua: *renmin gongshe*) which is a deliberate reference to the idea of the people's commune in the People's Republic of China since 1950s. (Figure 46) With the idea that everything in the commune was shared during the Cultural Revolution, the bookstore café is intended to be a social space for customers to spend time with people or create social networks. Differing from the highly controlled life in the people's commune in China, the bookstore café aims at providing a relaxing place for activities like reading, internet surfing and socializing; as well the bookstore provides an exhibition space for creative or artistic works, which is quite rare in a densely populated city like Hong Kong.

Echoing the name 'the people's commune', many aspects of the business are intentionally linked to the Cultural Revolution. For example, the business logo of the bookstore café is a reworked image of Mao Zedong to complete the whole idea of the 'Chinese revolutionary' theme. This Mao theme is constructed by using images of Mao and other political images originally produced in the mainland China during the 1960s and 1970s. This branding idea was used mainly because the Mao icon and images of Chinese political posters particularly from the 1960s and 1970s signify 'China' and 'communism' to people in Hong Kong. Chairman Mao is perceived to be the most influential political figure in the People's Republic of China and the images of Mao and the era of Chinese Cultural Revolution can make people think of simplified Chinese characters which are

extensively used in mainland China.<sup>307</sup> To review, the emergence of Chinese character simplifications predated the founding of the People's Republic of China. Since the use of simplified Chinese characters was promoted for the first time in 1909, many Chinese intellectuals and writers have suggested the idea of standardising the simplifications of Chinese words to help boost literacy in China. In the 1930s and 1940s discussions on character simplification took place within the Kuomintang government. Yet, most of the simplified Chinese Characters in use today are the result of the works moderated by the government of the People's Republic of China during the 1950s and 1960s. For example, the first round of official character simplifications was issued in two documents in 1956 and 1964. During the Cultural Revolution period the leftists promoted the second round of official Chinese character simplifications while those who opposed it were labelled as rightwing or anti-communist.<sup>308</sup> The People's Commune bookstore and café is an example which shows how Cultural Revolution culture is used to create associations with the simplified Chinese character books in a Hong Kong context. This issue of simplified Chinese also discloses an aspect of cultural difference between Hong Kong and mainland Chinese culture.

It is worth noting that different sets of Chinese characters are now popularly used in different Chinese locations. While simplified Chinese is widely used in the People's Republic of China and often among mainland Chinese immigrants overseas (e.g. Singapore and Malaysia), traditional Chinese is most commonly used in overseas Chinese-dominated cities or states such as Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. In post-1997 Hong Kong, traditional Chinese is still the only set of Chinese characters that are officially taught in kindergarten, schools and universities whereas simplified characters usually only appear in mainland Chinese publications or websites. While mainland Chinese publications written in simplified characters are usually much cheaper than those published in Hong Kong or overseas, those who are reluctant to buy more expensive foreign or local books would choose to buy the simplified Chinese versions. Also, since 2003, more and more mainland Chinese tourists are allowed to go to Hong Kong on an

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<sup>307</sup> Metropop, "衣食住行毛處不在 (Pinyin: *Yi shi zhu xing Mao chu bu zai*) (English Translation: Mao & Chic)".

<sup>308</sup> Peter Hessler, *Oracle bones: a journey between China's past and present* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).

individual basis, and thus there is an increasing demand for books that mainland Chinese people can read legally in Hong Kong but which are banned in mainland China.

With an increasing and freer flow of mainland Chinese traveling to Hong Kong, more and more businesses targeting mainland Chinese visitors have emerged. The People's Recreation Community is one of these emergent businesses in Hong Kong. The founding of this company in 2003 and the specific types of products and services it offers are both the immediate outcome of the Individual Visit Scheme and the position of Hong Kong as supply centre for mainland consumers. At the same time it serves as a middleman between China and the rest of the world, through which mainland Chinese visitors can obtain goods and information about the world which are banned in China, and non-Chinese visitors can place an order for any mainland Chinese goods they want from mainland China without travelling to China personally. These kinds of social practices and activities have become popular since 2003 when a specific government policy facilitated the flow of information and people. This kind of new business opportunity in Hong Kong since 2003 has become crucial to its economy.

In this sense, Bhabha's notion of 'situatedness' is useful to understand this transformative role of Hong Kong. Bhabha argues that:

I think my notion of enunciation affirms the need to each time understand what is happening at the place of utterance, what each iteration and reiteration of a particular sign is, how it produces its own strategy, its own authority... political action not merely as liberation, but also as an active process of survival...<sup>309</sup>

The founding of the People's Recreation Community was one of the commercial developments fostered by the specific government policy. The policy developed after some contradictions and conflicts between Hong Kong and China manifested in mass social movements. Hong Kong at that time was struggling with political rights in a context of economic depression. As I discuss in earlier examples, Cultural Revolution imagery in Hong Kong culture is used to mark the meeting point of cultural differences between Hong Kong and the mainland. The example of the People's Recreation Community, which has a theme of the Maoist Cultural

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<sup>309</sup> Olson and Worsham, "Staging the Politics of Difference: Homi Bhabha's Critical Literacy", 34.

Revolution, represents the new commercial opportunities and activities in this meeting point.

### *Company logo*

I will examine different editions of the People's Recreation Community logo produced between 2003 and 2006. The first logo is composed of a disembodied image of Mao Zedong afloat on a yellow star encircled by a yellow circle, which is further surrounded by a red border with eight yellow stars. As part of the logo, the name of the bookstore at the time in 2003 'The People's Bookstore' (in Cantonese: yan4 man4 syu1 dim3, in Putonghua: *Renmin shudian*) is written in Chinese simplified characters, which were separated by three white stars, and the company's website was included below the image of Mao. The image is a profile of Mao facing to the right of the viewer and looking up slightly as if peering far into the distance. He is wearing a People's Liberation Army's cap and uniform which bears the red collar insignia. An original Chinese political poster produced in the mainland China during the 1960s shows an image of Mao comparable to that of the People's Bookstore's logo. This Mao poster was one of the most widely disseminated political prints produced in the 1960s which features an outlined, disembodied portrait of Mao above a crowd of red guards, soldiers and workers carrying *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*. Except for the shadow effects, the disembodied likeness of Mao in the People's Bookstore's logo is almost identical to the image of Mao in this poster.

To correspond to the changing nature of business, the logo was reworked and the new company name was printed on business cards in 2004. (Figure 46) What interests me the most is that the yellow and red background of stars in the logo is replaced by a round frame in the second edition. The new logo bears a close resemblance to the Starbucks' logo. (Figure 47) Starbucks Coffee is a well-known international coffee and coffeehouse chain based in the United States. It is now considered to be the largest coffeehouse company in the world with over fifteen thousand stores in almost fifty countries. Since the first Starbucks coffeehouse opened in Hong Kong in May 2000, coffee culture has become more and more prevalent in Hong Kong. Starbucks in Hong Kong has been very successful, which is evident in that fact that by 2009 over one hundred branches have opened in such a small city. With many of its products being specific to the

geographical locality of the stores, Starbucks in Hong Kong is also known in Chinese as ‘星巴克’ (Cantonese: sing1 ba1 hak1; putonghua: *xingbake*) in which the Chinese word ‘星’ means ‘star’ and ‘巴克’ is a transliteration of ‘bucks’. Not only are their products adapted to local tastes, but the interior design of a Starbucks Coffee branch in Central is inspired by the fusion of an American style coffeehouse and a Hong Kong tea-house. This kind of teahouse in Hong Kong is known as ‘冰室’ (Cantonese: bing1 sat1; pinyin: *bingshi*) which refers to shops that sell iced drinks, ice-cream or shaved ice. These tea-houses were particularly prevalent in Hong Kong and Macau in the 1960s and 1970s, but most of these were closed down when tea-restaurants, which also sell local rice meals and fast foods, became more popular since 1980s. This case demonstrates the impact on Hong Kong culture from both the global influence of international chain culture and the nostalgia for local culture of the recent past. Making the company logo with the image of Mao and imitating the Starbucks Coffee logo is like putting together two popular icons of different times and spaces. In the past the posters of Cultural Revolution and *The Quotations of Mao* spread all over the world, and the American coffee chain store opened branches around the globe. This case may also suggest that both of the icons are just as popular and well-known as each other at least in Hong Kong context.

#### *Party poster*

Besides the company logo, a political poster of the Cultural Revolution period was appropriated and used in a printed advertisement for a party organised by the shop which was held at the café corner of the bookstore. (Figure 48) The cheerful and hopeful faces and smiles of the characters depicted in Cultural Revolution pictures are used in the party poster. (similar to the examples in Figure 49 and Figure 50) This example suggests that the collectiveness, the nature of the Cultural Revolution as a mass movement, and the joy and happiness depicted in Cultural Revolution pictures are borrowed and transfer to the present situation and purpose. The Cultural Revolution poster made to promote serious political campaigns contrasts strongly with the People’s Recreation Community’s poster made. One more similar example is that another Cultural Revolution poster image was reworked to advertise recycling bags which were for sale at the bookstore. (

Figure 51) These two examples, which promote a modern happy lifestyle and the use of recycling bags, are very similar to the previously mentioned G.O.D.'s products which promote the attitude of living a better life and being a responsible pet owner. These cases demonstrate a similar kind of use of Cultural Revolution images in both emphasising the difference from the values of the past and the significance of certain social values in today's Hong Kong society.

#### *Little Red Book menu*

In the café corner of the People's Recreation Community, the authentic copies of *Quotations of Mao Zedong* are converted into the café's menus with some of the original pages changed into lists of food and beverages. (Figure 52) The 'Little Red Book', once the spiritual food of everyday during Cultural Revolution in China, now engages with people's contemporary life which is very often a Westernized lifestyle. The food and beverages listed in the Mao menu are mainly coffee drinks in different flavours and cakes made with Western recipes. In fact, Hong Kong coffee culture only began after Starbucks opened their shops in 2000, before this drinking coffee was hardly a popular local practice. Cultural Revolution images are appropriated and adapted to fit the modern Hong Kong way of life.

#### *Other products*

Apart from books and coffee, the shop also produces its own 'Cultural Revolution' products such as tea cups and mugs printed with Chinese revolutionary images reproduced from posters or books published in China in the 1960s or 1970s. (Figure 53) For example, the famous poster of comrade Jin Xunhua and the image of Chairman Mao are repeatedly reproduced on mugs, tea cups and bags. (Figure 26) Like the previous G.O.D. products, the same Cultural Revolution images can appear on a variety of materials and forms. Alongside these products, the 'original' Cultural Revolution relics such as political posters, books, badges and Quotations of Mao Zedong are also available for sale, and a special ordering service is also available upon request. (Figure 54)

*Multiple businesses*

The People's Recreation Community is indeed a typical example of a Hong Kong way of doing business with one physical shop and multiple business potentials. This shop is at the same time a bookstore, a café, a souvenir shop, a wholesaler of Japanese milk, a dealer of Cultural Revolution relics, an exhibition venue, an event organising agent and currency exchange. The shop owner is the designer and producer of the Cultural Revolution products. These products and services aim at both the local Hong Kong communities and mainland Chinese visitors, with the latter responsible for the majority of sales. According to Tang, there is a constant group of non-local customers for these original relics and Cultural Revolution products. Interestingly, the shop is popular among many mainland Chinese tourists who were at first attracted by the logo of Chairman Mao. Most of them pay regular visits to this bookstore and look for books that are censored in the mainland China. As Tang described, many of these mainland Chinese customers spend the whole day in his bookstore to finish reading the books that are censored in the mainland. Many of whom are regular customers, and place orders for infant powdered milk directly imported from Japan.

China's policy of 'the socialist market economy' provides new economic opportunities for Hong Kong entrepreneurs. Since the early 1980s many Hong Kong entrepreneurs started making their investment and building factories in China.<sup>310</sup> Not only does the cheaper labour in mainland China greatly reduce the production cost of their businesses, but the availability of land and space provides better conditions for business expansion. Thus the suspicion of the Chinese regime is distracted by new economic opportunities and advantages facilitated by the rapid economic development in China. Yet, China's unprecedented industrial growth over the last two decades has raised the question of whether it poses a threat to Hong Kong. As Abbas Ackbar points out, the new opportunities also produce 'another set of anxieties for Hong Kong because after China can easy access to global networks Hong Kong had to reassess and abandon its in-between

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<sup>310</sup> Tak-Wing Ngo, ed., *Hong Kong's history: state and society under colonial rule* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 175. This article is based on a paper, "Hong Kong: Structural Change, Integration, and Economic Policies," that the author prepared for the Conference on Financial Integration in Asia and the Role of Hong Kong, which was jointly sponsored by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority and the International Monetary Fund, and held in Hong Kong on March 7, 1997.



position and all the advantages of the para-site'.<sup>311</sup> The transfer of Hong Kong's sovereignty from the British colonial authority to the socialist Chinese authority opens an imaginary space fraught with mixed feelings of fear and suspicion tempered with economic benefits and advantages. With such negative sentiments, the economic advantage is actually the key factor which smoothes the process of Hong Kong's integration with China because the citizens' major concern is for economic stability.

From the official guarantee that socialism would not be practised in post-1997 Hong Kong, we can see that a non-socialist Hong Kong has been an official criterion to maintain the status quo and stability of Hong Kong. There has been a long established fear among Hong Kong people towards 'communism'. Back in 1949 when the People's Republic of China under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party was founded, many migrants fled to Hong Kong from the mainland because of their fear of being persecuted by the Chinese Communist Party.

In his discussion on Hong Kong cinema, Abbas points out that the position of Hong Kong has always been a special case, either as an economically developed British Crown Colony or a Special Administrative Region of China, the city has been governed under a distinctive set of laws and systems.<sup>312</sup> According to Article five, Chapter One of the Hong Kong Basic Law:

The socialist system and policies shall not be practised in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years.<sup>313</sup>

The principle of 'One Country Two System' is that in spite of the practice of 'socialism' in the mainland China, Hong Kong as a former British colony can retain the established system with a high degree of autonomy for at least fifty years after reunification. It also stresses that the 'Hong Kong way of life' shall also remain as it used to be under the British colonial system. While Hong Kong has been developed as a successful financial city in the world, the local population

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<sup>311</sup> Abbas, "Hong Kong" , 115-116.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid. , 113.

<sup>313</sup> Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, *Chapter I: General Principles of the Basic Law of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China* [Online] (17 March 2008 [cited 12 June 2009]); available from [http://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclawtext/chapter\\_1.html](http://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclawtext/chapter_1.html).

has no say on the city's future, economic power and the particular 'Hong Kong way of life' has indeed become the major source of impetus for the assertion of a local sense of Chinese identity.<sup>314</sup> No matter if it was the British or the Chinese who claimed official authority over the city, Hong Kong citizens are reassured at least for the moment as the economy remains strong and local way of life unchanged. Not only are different political systems practised in mainland China and Hong Kong, but there is also a cultural difference between the country and the city which has been developed long before reunification.

### **Mass rally and freedom of expression**

Images illustrating the Red Guard rallies and protests during the Cultural Revolution in mainland China are in little way related to Hong Kong because there was no mass movement of teenagers who dressed like Red Guards in British Hong Kong during the 1960s. Thus the Red Guard identity has never been related to 'Hong Kong-ness'. However, when the Red Guard movements were rampant in the mainland between 1966 and 1967, Hong Kong had a similar kind of experience with riots in 1967. Though the radical and aggressive agitators in Hong Kong did not dress like Red Guards, the majority of them were aggressive and destructive teenagers whose actions were similar to those depicted in the Chinese political posters of the time. For example, similar to Red Guards, the Hong Kong agitators wore Mao badges, carried the Little Red Book and big-character posters, and shouted slogans when they marched to the Governor's House in Central on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 1967. The approach of the protests shared a lot in common with the mass movement and public assemblies on the mainland:

Groups converged on Government House...they were not allowed inside nor did the governor come out. Instead, they took turn reading aloud from the "little red book" of Mao's quotations in open defiance of an administration that had exerted so much effort to safeguard Hong Kong from communist political studies. The booklet and a Mao badge were standard accessories in China at the time, and Hong Kong leftist were no exception, despite many differences between the real thing and its local counterpart...the number of protestors there peaked at upwards of 2,000 when discipline finally broke on May 20, and

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<sup>314</sup> Dirlik and Zhang, "Introduction: Postmodernism and China", 3.

the post-march crowd rampaged through Hong Kong's central business district nearby in anticipation of worse to come.<sup>315</sup>

Hong Kongers in general believed that the British rule was able to restore social order after the riots ended:

Toward the end of the riots, the residents of Hong Kong, alienated by the leftists' terrorist tactics, displayed their support for social and political order, and thus for the status quo of British rule. In the meantime, the riot forced the British authorities to pay attention to public welfare and implement labour-protection laws. The bloody confrontation and the ensuing compromise led to the development of a new political consciousness, and self-identity, by the Hong Kong community. The colony began to distinguish its existence from both its British colonial master and from its Chinese motherland.<sup>316</sup>

It is noted that the impact of the riots was to form the impression that it was the violent Chinese influence that caused the social unrest and economic stagnancy in Hong Kong. Culturally, Hong Kong people have cultivated among them a sense that the British Hong Kong environment would allow the development of peaceful and stable living conditions. The Hong Kong experience of the riots in 1967 helped develop an improved relation between Hong Kong communities and the British colonial authority, and on the contrary enhance the long-time fear towards the communist China:

The stories of many of the refugees who had arrived in Hong Kong since the late 1940s, and the political and social dislocation as well as economic deprivation which accompanied the early history of the People's Republic of China, created in the majority of the Chinese in Hong Kong a fear of the Communist administration in the mainland. This fear was drastically enhanced by the Communist directed riots in 1967 in the colony and the Cultural Revolution in China which did not come to an end until after the mid 1970s. Coupled with the feeling of alienation from China was the growing search for identity of the people of Hong Kong, particularly on the part of the younger generation. The search became all the more urgent with the onset of the "borrowed place, borrowed time" syndrome after the 1967 riots.<sup>317</sup>

This shifting sense of belonging was to a great extent shaped by the propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party circulated in Hong Kong during and after the 'riots' and the British Colonial government's counter measures. In a series of campaigns which were associated with the Chinese leftist labour union took place in 1967, posters which depicted the violence of the British 'fascist' suppression and the

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<sup>315</sup> Suzanne Pepper, *Keeping democracy at bay: Hong Kong and the challenge of Chinese political reform* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 152.

<sup>316</sup> Ke-wen Wang, ed., *Modern China: an encyclopaedia of history, culture, and nationalism* (New York: Garland, 1998), 140-141.

<sup>317</sup> Kit-ching Chan Lau, *China, Britain and Hong Kong, 1895-1945* (Hong Kong: Ko's Art Printing Co., 1990), 325-326.

death of a Chinese protestor killed by the Hong Kong British government were circulated in Hong Kong:

The [Chinese] leftist also had an arsenal of propaganda equipment in Hong Kong: approximately ten left-wing newspapers; the New China News Agency, which directed the propaganda campaign and sent exaggerated reports of local support to newspapers in China; loud speakers placed outside buildings such as the Bank of China; posters demanding “Blood for Blood”, “Stew the White-Skinned Pig”, “Fry the Yellow Running Dogs”, “Down with British Imperialism” and “Hang David Trench” ...The colonial government responded with its own extensive counter propaganda campaign ...Under the Emergency Regulations Ordinance, the police were allowed to detain suspected activists without trial. In mid-May, the colonial government banned loudspeaker broadcasts such as those coming from the Bank of China. Governor Trench appeared on television and encourage the public to stand tall during the disturbances. On June 1, the government prohibited inflammatory posters and specified punishment for anyone who produced, distributed, or displayed such posters...<sup>318</sup>

Many of these posters illustrate the furious response to the British suppression which justifies the physical resistance and emotional sentiments of Hong Kong Chinese people against the violent British authority.

However, the end of the leftist movements did not mean the end of the circulation of the images of the ‘riots’. In the post-1967 period a series of short videos produced by the Hong Kong British government were broadcast on the free wireless TV channel in Hong Kong at the time. These were the official historical accounts produced by the Hong Kong British government. In one of these videos we can see the chaotic, furious Chinese agitators and the patient, lenient Hong Kong police in neat uniforms.<sup>319</sup> The British depictions of the Chinese leftist constructed a world of irrationality and impulsiveness which allowed the British to build up an image of themselves as the opposite of these features, as if under the British rule lay a world that was rational and civil, and therefore relatively favourable to live in. In this very construction of the Chinese leftist ‘Other’ and the British ‘us’, the voice-over narrates the history from a Hong Kong citizen’s perspective to project an ‘objective’ point-of-view to see the events. The series of labour campaigns were generally referred to as ‘riots’. Chinese leftists were simply described as ‘a group of impetuous rioters’. The police were identified as the ‘Hong Kong police’ and the rioters remained unnamed and objectified and viewers were not provided any clue who the ‘rioters’ were. The ‘objective’ view

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<sup>318</sup> Carroll, *A concise history of Hong Kong*, 154-155.

<sup>319</sup> Ho and Li, “*Jing tao hai lang zhong de 1967* (The Fearful Storm of 1967)”

of the British claimed that they settled the dispute rationally which legitimatised the power to ‘peacefully’ control and rule the city. In addition, news on natural disasters in China during this time were reported and broadcast on television which made China seem like a socially undesirable place to live in:

...the serious damage of the revolution in China became apparent to the people of Hong Kong as news of widespread famine on the mainland was reported on the news media and through familial network. The dead bodies of “revolutionaries” and “counter-revolutionaries” were discovered floating along the South China Sea into Hong Kong waters. Hundreds of thousands of refugees fled over the border into Hong Kong<sup>320</sup>

To understand this through Edward Said’s notion of *Orientalism*, there is a binary opposition between the ‘orient’ and the ‘occident’ which is a mutually constitutive relation, yet the ‘orient’ is always constructed by the ‘occident’ as an inferior world.<sup>321</sup>

Based on the Chinese posters and the British videos, both of accounts of the events were incomplete and biased in the sense that certain facts were left out. For example, while the Chinese posters depicted the violence of the British which caused the death of Chinese people, they never mentioned the damage from the hand-made bombs produced by Hong Kong Chinese leftists to private property and people’s lives. The British account tended to project their passive role in dealing with the aggressive ‘rioters’, yet the Hong Kong British government did impose emergency regulations granting the police special powers in attempt to put down the ‘riots’, ban leftist newspapers from publishing and leftist activists were arrested.

We can see in the above case the same incident (i.e. the labour campaigns) was being talked about and expressed differently by two political regimes (i.e. the Chinese Communist authority and the British Colonial authority) in the same place (i.e. a British colonial city in which the population was dominated by ethnic Chinese). The reactions of some local factory workers to the exploitation from the factory owners, the subsequent campaigns headed by the Chinese leftists and the evidence of posters suggest that there was resistance to the British or to the Western system established in a colonized city. This resistance was practised by a group of marginalised Chinese leftists in Hong Kong. But it is necessary to note that this group was not only marginalised in terms of the colonizer and the

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<sup>320</sup> Eric Kit-wai Ma, *Culture, politics, and television in Hong Kong* (London: Routledge, 1999), 24.

<sup>321</sup> Said, *Orientalism* .

colonized. The Chinese leftist was also the marginalized 'other' to many Hong Kong people, who fled to Hong Kong from the mainland because of their fear of the Chinese communist rule. In this sense, the group of Chinese leftists were the marginalized 'Other' within the dominant group of marginalized people who were 'colonised' under British colonial rule. The anti-British posters were thus the evidence of a resistance not merely to the British colonial government, but also to those migrants who escaped from China and favoured the colonial rule at that time. To borrow Lawrence Grossberg's notion of *fragmentation*, the Hong Kong identity in post-1967 was inherently contradictory which involved 'fragmentation of either individual identities or of the social categories (of difference) within which individuals are placed, or some combination of the two'.<sup>322</sup> Thus, in the case of the British colonial narratives, the simplistic oppositional binary concept of Coloniser and Colonised is more complicated than it seems because the category of the 'Colonised' involved a multiple of contradictory, fluid and shifting identities.

Both the Chinese posters and the British colonial videos played a significant role in constructing partial knowledge of the Chinese leftists, Hong Kong in general and the British Colonial government. Hong Kong in late 1960s as a whole was shaped by a politics which was played out between the Chinese propaganda discourse and the British Hong Kong counter discourse. I argue that the heterogeneity of Hong Kong culture today is very much influenced by the always incomprehensive knowledge constructed by both the Chinese and British colonial authorities. A demonstrate this heterogeneity can be done by engaging with the ways in which the representations, relations and practices of the past are reproduced or transformed in today's culture. As I have tried to argue all the way through, the use of Cultural Revolution images in post-1997 Hong Kong culture is a good example of the heterogeneity of Hong Kong. The social practice of protesting and marching has become a site through which the past is represented, the relations between the Chinese leftists, the Hong Kong majority and the British colonial government in the 1967 are reflected, and the practice of resistance is revealed.

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<sup>322</sup> Lawrence Grossberg, "Identity and Cultural Studies: Is That All There Is?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London, Thousands Oaks & New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1996), 87-107.

Since 1967 freedom of expression, symbolically represented by the freedom to demonstrate, has been the major political concern among Hong Kongers. As we can see from the controversy of the legislation of Article 23 of Basic Law in 2003, the largest demonstration in scale in Hong Kong history was launched mainly because of the people's worries and suspicion that the legislation would violate the freedom of speech in the city.<sup>323</sup> The demonstration on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2003 was a peaceful protest with over five hundred thousand agitators. Since then the 1<sup>st</sup> of July has become a day of mass protest for political rights such as human rights, voting rights.<sup>324</sup> As the statistics have shown, the number of protestors on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July each year since 2003 reached at least over ten thousands, which was never the case before 2003.<sup>325</sup> Thus, to protest on every 1<sup>st</sup> of July has become a regular phenomenon in Hong Kong since 2003.

Then what are the implications of the image of the Chinese leftist protest/Red Guards movements (which are exchangeable because both represent mainland China to Hong Kong) when they are reproduced and reworked in today's Hong Kong popular culture? In my opinion, the current use of these images of the past is focused on the site of resistance and counter resistance between the authorities and a site through which knowledge of the respective authorities was constructed among the Hong Kong public. When an image of the Red Guard or 1967 demonstration is reproduced, it is as if the relations and practices of the past are not only transferred but also overlapped with the current situation. For example, G.O.D.'s 'Essential Little Red (note) book' poster in 2004 is not only visually connected to the 1<sup>st</sup> July March in Hong Kong from 2003 onwards, it is also a way through which the Hong Kong long-constructed knowledge of the Chinese communist regime is used to serve the local interests and a manifestation of Hong Kong's creative resistance to the Chinese 'coloniser'. The particular reproduction of demonstrations from the Chinese revolutionary past, which may recall the Hong Kong experience of the Chinese leftist campaigns in 1967, reproduces the Hong Kong fear of the 'irrational', 'inferior'

<sup>323</sup> Kit Poon, *The political future of Hong Kong: democracy within communist China* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 163.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>325</sup> Robert Chung, *Qiyi youxing rensu diansuen jihua (1st July Protest Count on the Number of Protestors)* [Online] (University of Hong Kong 2009 [cited 9 Sep 2009]); available from <http://hkupop.hku.hk/chinese/features/july1/headcount/2009/index.html>.

world of the mainland Chinese and the Chinese communist regime, which is a knowledge cultivated under the British colonial government. The demonstration image implies the Hong Kong anxiety about the Chinese regime that would threaten the 'freedom' of Hong Kong established during the British colonial period. When the representation of an 'inferior' Chinese revolutionary world is mixed with Western individualistic values, it demonstrates a Hong Kong creative resistance to the re-coloniser and how this resistance complicates and gives texture to the Chinese policy on dealing with the special situation of Hong Kong. This creativity utilised a range of strategies, including making use of the leftist disturbance and the biased account of China created by the ex-coloniser to legitimise the dominance of Hong Kong under the rule of the re-coloniser.

### *The spirit to struggle*

Some images of the Chinese revolutionary past look exotic, primitive and difficult to connect with the city culture of Hong Kong. For example, the smiling peasant in the 'Toiling the field' postcard, happily harvesting crops, has little in common with Hong Kong which has always been a harbour city dominated by business, trading and financial exchanges. However, the attitude of struggle depicted in the original Cultural Revolution poster is highly relevant to the mind-set of many Hong Kong people. The picture of this smiling peasant was produced to encourage agricultural development in China after the three years of natural disasters between 1958 and 1961 which resulted in a great famine and millions of victims.<sup>326</sup> With a different historical and geographical background, the use of such an image in the Hong Kong context may suggest a different experience at that time. As narrated in a film set in Hong Kong in the 1950s, Hong Kong was described as 'a beautiful city in southern China where many people had to work all day but they were still unable to earn a living'.<sup>327</sup> If mainland Chinese faced the problems of natural disasters and famine, Hong Kongers suffered from drought, poverty and a low standard of living. In 1963 and 1967 serious droughts affected Hong Kong.<sup>328</sup> Water supply was unable to support the rapid population

<sup>326</sup> Judith Banister, *China's Changing Population* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 233.

<sup>327</sup> Ho and Li, "Jing tao hai lang zhong de 1967 (The Fearful Storm of 1967)".

<sup>328</sup> Pui-yin Ho, *Water for a Barren Rock: 150 Years of Water Supply in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 2001), 175.



growth. The government introduced a water restriction policy. There were periods when water supply was restricted to four hours per day.<sup>329</sup>

The year of 1967 in Hong Kong was marked by harsh living conditions. This became the driving force for the Hong Kong people to struggle for a better standard of living, which is an attitude deeply ingrained in the Hong Kong mind-set because of this social hardship. At that time the Hong Kong economy was marked by growth and success recognised by the rest of the world, and which led to the view that 'economists have cited the success of Hong Kong as an example of other developing countries'.<sup>330</sup> By 1966, Hong Kong's economy was dominated by the export of Hong Kong-made goods to the United States, the Commonwealth, Europe and Asia in which clothing and textiles comprised of half of Hong Kong's exports in 1966 following by toys, artificial flowers, electrical products, footwear and metal goods.<sup>331</sup> While people were hired to work in factories, many others spent the majority of their days at home to work on the half-finished parts of these goods before sending them back to the factories. The wages of these jobs were not high, but many local families relied on these jobs to make a living in slum areas.

Though facing different situations and difficulties, the same kind of attitude of perseverance in the face of social hardships is the common spirit of both the Chinese revolutionary era and Hong Kong in the 1960s. It was this attitude and faith that provided Hong Kongers with hope for a better future. A common goal of producing and consuming locally made products to sustain the economy was advocated by the Hong Kong British government not only because of economic reasons, but also the construction of a local identity among the Hong Kong people based on the common goal of striving for a better standard of living. The image of the hard working labourer represents this spirit of struggle which is deeply ingrained in the people of Hong Kong and endures through the years.

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<sup>329</sup> Ho and Li, "*Jing tao hai lang zhong de 1967* (The Fearful Storm of 1967)" and Trea Wiltshire, *Old Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Formasia Books Ltd, 1999).

<sup>330</sup> Roger Buckley, *Hong Kong: the road to 1997* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 73.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

*Spirited, happy and smiling faces*

I demonstrated in the previous sections that the images of the Chinese communist style of demonstration were reproduced in today's Hong Kong popular culture. While many of these typical images are dominated by furious and serious facial expressions of the characters in the posters, for example, the demonstration scene in G.O.D.'s 'Essential Little Red (note) Book' poster in no way shares this feature. Unlike many Chinese political poster images of the mass movements in the 1960s, the image chosen by G.O.D. to advertise its product depicts a peaceful march of smiling Red Guards. Those typical radical and furious faces are absent, and instead a picture of the peaceful and happy faces of the Red Guards is used to refer to the Cultural Revolution era.

In most of the examples in the previous sections, from mass protest and physical labour work, to the reading of *The Little Red Book* and the movements of Red Guards, elements of these images were brought into post-handover Hong Kong popular culture. An example of this was G.O.D.'s use of Cultural Revolution images to express the importance of freedom of speech, individualistic values and the aspiration to make a better living. In the case of the People's Recreation Community, Cultural Revolution images are used to create a space for people to get together and relax (without constraints), to read books (without censorship), to eat safely (without worries about contamination), to socialise with friends, and to express freely in artistic forms (with a low exhibition fee).

Among these examples, freedom has been repeatedly stressed. Together with the long-established fear, anxiety and suspicions among Hong Kong people towards the mainland Chinese authority, and the social demand for universal suffrage in the post-handover era, the 'freedom' that the Hong Kong people have considered as part of their way of life has become a heated topic. Freedom of expression has to be emphasized in post-1997 era because this is considered important, yet it is not necessarily the case without the effort and perseverance to struggle for it. This may be one reason why the images of happy faces during Cultural Revolution became good visual sources for the Hong Kong people to express a generic sense of 'struggle in difficult situations'. It is as if some encouraging images of happy, struggling faces are a kind of necessary relief from the anxiety, fear, suspicion and helplessness felt by the majority of Hong Kongers. The smiling Chairman Mao, which was a symbol signifying the leadership of Mao

Zedong, may now suggest that the new economic opportunities brought to Hong Kong by the growing buying power of mainland Chinese tourists forms the new ‘direction’ and future of Hong Kong.

### **Conclusion**

The above examples show some typical features of ‘Cultural Revolution’ products in Hong Kong. Looking at the image itself, the examples show that the recycled image is usually an abstracted or simplified edition of the original. Besides, the original slogans are usually replaced by contemporary slogans, some of which are specific to local Hong Kong culture or current situations. The same ‘Cultural Revolution’ image can be found reproduced in different commercial forms. To understand the recycled image with contemporary words, these products in general are characterised by playing with famous political slogans, symbols and practices during Cultural Revolution. This kind of manipulation of Cultural Revolution imagery is similar to the examples found in the mainland Chinese and Singaporean contexts, which are discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Four respectively. The meaning of ‘Cultural Revolution’ images in this particular situation is not just about what the original means but the recycling and reworking of these images in certain specific contextual moments.

However, what makes the Hong Kong case different is that the reiteration of Cultural Revolution imagery is strategic in particularly highlighting difference of certain aspects or developments between Hong Kong and China. This idea is somehow contradictory in the sense that Hong Kong is a part of China after 1997 which is supposed to be ‘One Country’, but in reality the city is governed according to a different set of law and a ‘Two Systems’ principle. As I demonstrated, the reiteration of Cultural Revolution imagery shows an immediate connection with the latest economic, social and political situations in Hong Kong. With this, I argue that Cultural Revolution imagery is a sign of the specific post-handover Hong Kong situation – the same set of cultural sources is used differently in Hong Kong according to its own way. The People’s Recreation Community’s case of selling dairy products imported from Japan also shows a continuing role of Hong Kong in the post-1997 context as the ‘middleman’ between China and the rest of the world. The practice of using and reworking Cultural Revolution imagery can be a good way to mediate the tensions,

contradictions and negotiations between Hong Kong and China so that Hong Kong can, borrowing for Bhabha's work, 'survive' the national support of China and a cultural identification produced through differences and tensions.

## **Chapter Five**

### **The Mao Restaurant in Singapore (1998-2003): identity, consumer culture and China's economic rise**

#### **Introduction**

Between 1998 and 2003 some typical Chinese communist revolutionary icons such as the images of Mao Zedong, the Red Guards and *The Little Red Book* appeared in Singaporean commercial spaces. This was an interesting phenomenon because the use and consumption of Chinese communist imagery seemed contradictory to the multiracial capitalist ruling principle of an independent cosmopolitan city-state in Southeast Asia. More significantly, the historically specific developments and practices which opposed and suppressed the spread of Communism in Singapore played a crucial role in the founding of the Republic of Singapore.

The commercial exploitation of exotic cultural imagery of the 'Other' in Singapore could be considered a result or feature of a postmodern urban lifestyle characterised by seeking satisfaction in the purchase and consumption of commodities mediated by diffuse cultural images in advertising, display and promotion.<sup>332</sup> However, I assert that the legitimate use of formerly banned imagery in Singapore in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is significant not just because it is a typical result of globalised consumption culture. Cultural Revolution imagery used in contemporary Singapore can be understood as a manifestation of the changing relationship between China and Singapore across time. I argue that the officially accepted emergence of Cultural Revolution imagery in Singapore can be interpreted as a form of recognition of the growing influence of China, both politically and economically, since the late 1990s. This time- and site-specific phenomenon is a particular post-colonial product and a consequence of the interplay between historically specific developments, temporally specific economic circumstances, consumer culture and the particular development of a Singapore-oriented identity.

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<sup>332</sup> Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (London: SAGE, 2007), 94-95.

This chapter analyses the commercial use of Chinese revolutionary imagery in Singapore between 1998 and 2003 from both historical and contemporary perspectives. It focuses on the tension and meaning between the suppression and legitimacy (from sensitive political culture to commercial popular icons) of the use and consumption of the imagery in Singapore in different eras. It is organised into four sections. In the first section, I lay out the historically specific developments and practices in Singapore in relation to the suppression of Communism, and address the issue of Chinese and multiracial identity in Singapore. The second section looks at the economic recession in Asia during the 1990s as an important context of the phenomenon. The third section addresses the development of a consumption culture in contemporary Singapore through an examination of the 'Mao' restaurant which opened in Singapore in 1998. In the last section I argue, through the work of Bhabha and others, that the contemporary use of Chinese communist revolutionary imagery can be construed as the 'meeting point' where the Singaporean past and its cultural 'Other' are 're-inscribed', 'reactivated', 'relocated' and 'resignified'.<sup>333</sup> I also argue that the imagery was the visual narrative of an historical/cultural reconstruction on which Singaporean subjectivity was constructed in relation to a fantasy of a Chinese revolutionary past/present.

### **Banned Chinese communist propaganda & an multiracial identity**

What makes the emergence of Chinese communist imagery in Singapore in the 2000s a special phenomenon is its possible relationship with the historically specific anti-communist development in the 1950s. During the 1950s, the British colonial authority in Singapore claimed to recognise signs of the spread of Communism in the region and therefore took measures to counter and suppress the 'communist movements' and 'communist propaganda'. The contrasting attitudes of the Singaporean government towards the Chinese communists in the 1950s and in early 2000s must be taken into account if we wish to understand the role of Chinese revolutionary imagery in contemporary Singapore.

In post-war Singapore a series of Chinese student and labour movements, which were widely understood in many official records as the manifestations of

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<sup>333</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 33.

the spread of Communism in the region, were deemed 'subversive' with an intention to overthrow the British colonial government.<sup>334</sup> At around the same time in the late 1950s, Singapore residents were negotiating with the British colonial authorities for a change in its political status from a colony to a state with greater political rights and power. This led to a series of corresponding changes to the structure of the government. In the course of restructuring, it was believed that the spread of communist ideology in the British colonial state was not favourable for either the expansion of sovereign rights from the British authority or internal social stability. The British colonial authority's classification of the spread of Communism as 'subversive' and their control over any suspicious 'communist' activities, such as the suppression of the student and labour movements and communist propaganda, had a considerable impact on identity formation in Singapore. As Hall argues:

We need to situate the debates about identity within all those historically specific developments and practices which have disturbed the relatively 'settled' character of many populations and culture, which I would argue are coterminous with modernity and the processes of forced and 'free' migration which have become a global phenomenon of the so-called 'post-colonial' world.<sup>335</sup>

The British-Singaporean government's proactive suppression of the spread of Communism was not unimportant because it did disturb the Chinese proportion of Singapore's population in the 1950s. The political changes in both Southeast Asia and China after 1949 resulted in a decrease in the number of immigrants from mainland China. Externally, the founding of the People's Republic of China gave reason for many overseas Chinese to go back to their 'homeland'. Internally, from 1<sup>st</sup> August 1953 onwards, immigration to Singapore was barred except for those who had British citizenship, technical specialists and spouses and children of Chinese who were already residents in the colony.<sup>336</sup> Most significantly, the British fear of the spread of Communism in Singapore paved the way for a ruling principle of the People's Action Party stressing economic strength and development of the city state. The following paragraphs give a brief historical

<sup>334</sup> For example, a chapter namely 'Subversion in the Chinese Middle Schools 1954-56' in Richard Clutterbuck, *Conflict and Violence in Singapore and Malaysia, 1945-1983* (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1984).

<sup>335</sup> Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?", 1-17.

<sup>336</sup> Liu and Wong, *Singapore Chinese Society in Transition: Business, Politics and Socio-Economic Change 1945-1965*, 48.

account of the developments and practices with a focus on the spread and resistance of Communism in the post-war period until Singapore declared its independence in 1965.

### **The political and cultural contexts in Singapore**

Demographically, Singapore is a multiracial society consisting almost entirely of immigrants.<sup>337</sup> Migrants of all kinds came to Singapore throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. They saw Singapore as a place of transition where they could make their fortunes before they returned to their homelands. Until the 1950s, the immigrants who were under British colonial rule still did not see Singapore as home. It was not until the 1949 communist takeover of China that a reorientation towards Singapore as 'home' occurred.<sup>338</sup> Culturally and ideologically, these immigrants were more oriented to their homelands of China, India and Malaya.

In his discussion on Singapore-China relations, Lee Kuan Yiu claims that 'no foreign country other than Britain has had a greater influence on Singapore's political development than China, the ancestral homeland of three-quarters of our people.'<sup>339</sup> According to Lee, the diplomatic relations between Singapore and the Chinese communist regime could be traced back to the 1920s when the Chinese Communist Party sent an agent to Singapore to build up a communist movement in Nanyang. In 1949, although both the KMT and the CCP were proscribed, the division of the Singapore community between the two remained. With the founding of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission in 1949, the PRC began radio broadcasts encouraging the 'Nanyang' Chinese to send their sons home to China for education and remittances for their relations. Despite the long cultural orientation to their homeland China, the responses of the Chinese community in Singapore were by no means one-sided and pro-China. After 1949, the parents of those who were educated in Chinese schools in Singapore avoided sending their children to China to pursue further education. There was still a high risk that the

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<sup>337</sup> Chee Kiong Tong and Kwok Bun Chan, *Introduction: A Place in Times Past*, ed. Chee Kiong Tong and Kwok Bun Chan, *Past Times: A Social History of Singapore* (Singapore: Times Media Private Ltd., 2003), 10; Beng Huat Chua, "Racial-Singaporeans: Absence after the Hyphen" in *Southeast Asian Identities: Cultural and the Politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand*, ed. Joel S. Kahn (Singapore and London: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Singapore, 1998), 28-29.

<sup>338</sup> Tong and Chan, *Introduction: A Place in Times Past*, 10.

<sup>339</sup> Kuan Yiu Lee, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story 1965-2000* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000), 573-574.



students would not be able to return to Singapore due to official restrictions on the movement of people between China and Singapore. In the 1960s, some Chinese school students participated in the communist and anti-colonial movements in Singapore. But the rioting was very much in the interest of all Singapore residents in the name of anti-colonial and pro-communist sentiments.<sup>340</sup> In response to Chinese communist propaganda during the Cultural Revolution period, the Singaporean regime only suppressed the dissemination of Chinese communist propaganda and local Maoist activists in its territories without putting a stop to its economic activities with China:

When the Cultural Revolution in China, we used to confiscate large quantities of Chinese stamps bearing “Thoughts of Mao” imported by some Chinese-language bookshops, and also thousands of copies of Mao’s Little Red Book brought in by Chinese seaman who wanted to distribute them. Even the Singapore Branch of the Bank of China joined in this madness and gave out Cultural Revolution propaganda pamphlets to customers at their counters. We arrested and prosecuted our own citizens who indulged in this frenzy, but left Chinese nationals alone to keep open the trade with China.<sup>341</sup>

After independence, Singapore had no further diplomatic contact with the PRC. Although the Singaporean government adopted a policy of intervention on the dissemination of Chinese communist propaganda during the 1960s, in fact part of its population was influenced by Mao’s thought and Maoist political slogans. Lee recalls the scenario when the Chinese Communist’s ‘Ping-Pong’ diplomacy led to a friendly visit of the Chinese ping-pong team to Singapore in 1973 when:

During the tournament, a large part of the Singaporean audience jeered at the Singapore team and shouted slogans in praise of Mao. There were ‘mini-Maos’ in Singapore in the 1970s.<sup>342</sup>

With the combination of historical, political and cultural factors, an independent Singapore not only had a problem of finding a ‘common bond’ to unite its population and of forming a shared identity; the expansion of the Chinese communists in Southeast Asia, as manifest in the dissemination of Maoist propaganda, was seen as a threat to Singapore. Only trade with China was considered beneficial. Like many other scholars, Chua points out that the

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<sup>340</sup> Maribeth Erb, “Moulding a Nation: Education in Early Singapore” in *Past Times: A Social History of Singapore*, ed. Kwok Bun Chan and Chee Kiong Tong (Singapore: Times Media Private Ltd., 2003), 29-30.

<sup>341</sup> Lee, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story 1965-2000*, 575.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 756.

Singaporean government constructed a shared Singaporean identity in economic terms:

[Singaporean] politics was reduced to economics...The “survival” of the new nation, defined in economic terms, in turn came to be entwined with the problems of how individual citizens “make a living”. National economic growth and improvement of the population’s material life became both the rational basis for organizing the new nation and the criteria by which the performance of the regime to be defined, assessed and legitimated. Sharing in this material progress became the entitlement of citizenship.<sup>343</sup>

The government’s goal of capitalist economic development in Singapore was also effective in protecting against the political threat of Maoist ideology. With an inscription of the culture of capitalism in Singapore, one of the cultural concomitants was the development of a sense of competitiveness in Singaporeans who desired to achieve comparative advantages in material consumption.<sup>344</sup> The pride of capitalist economic achievement not only contributed to a positive self-image among Singaporeans, the cultural consequences of capitalism were expressed in their necessities and preferences.<sup>345</sup> The cultural, social and political consequences of capitalist economic development constitute the predominant part of the Singaporean culture of everyday life. This pride in the development of wealth was reinforced by comparisons with others in terms of economic success. Singapore differentiated itself from other nations including China and India. As Chua argues:

comparisons with Chinese, Malays and Indians in their respective countries add to this identity building process, for the differences enable Singaporeans of Chinese, Malay and Indian background to distance themselves from whatever claims that their “lands of origin” may still make to them.<sup>346</sup>

Thus, any Singaporean connection with China was ‘motivated entirely by the opportunities for profit in which racial-affinity is but grease to the cause’.<sup>347</sup> Bearing this in mind, I argue that the employment of a Chinese Revolutionary theme in the ‘Mao’ restaurants is what Laclau and Mouffe call a ‘temporary and

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<sup>343</sup> Chua, "Racial-Singaporeans: Absence after the Hyphen", 31.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid. , 32.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid. , 34.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid. , 43.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid. , 43.

strategic alliance' which fixes differences because of economic and political interests.

### **Labour and student movements between 1940s and 1950s**

The suppression of communist activities in Singapore can be traced back to the mid and late 1940s when the labour movement developed and various strikes started to occur. It was claimed that the Malaya communists attempted to overthrow the British colonial government with the aim of turning Malaya and Singapore into communist societies. In 1948, the British colonial government announced a state of emergency to fight the communists.<sup>348</sup> From the mid to late 1950s, it was claimed that though many strikes were the result of economic factors, one-third of them were politically subversive which created social instability.<sup>349</sup> After that the attitude of the British colonial government in opposing communist activities in Singapore was clear. For example, the police attempted to drive away workers participating in strikes with water pipes and batons.<sup>350</sup>

As the labour movements grew, there were also Chinese student movements, which included both peaceful class and examination strikes and also violent confrontations with the government.<sup>351</sup> These students were fighting for a better education system. But as Liu and Wong point out, the post-war British colonial government educational policies alone were not serious enough to spark the Chinese student movements.<sup>352</sup> Liu and Wong argue that it was the National Service Ordinance announced by the government in 1954 that aroused discontent among Chinese parents. This ordinance announced that 'all healthy males between the ages of 18 and 20 had to be enrolled into the army' and 'offenders would be either jailed or fined or both.'<sup>353</sup> This policy was objected to by many Chinese parents. One of the reasons was that many Chinese people at the time

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<sup>348</sup> Liu and Wong, *Singapore Chinese Society in Transition: Business, Politics and Socio-Economic Change 1945-1965*, 174.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

were already dissatisfied with the colonial government and ‘they felt they were not obliged to provide service to the colonial government’.<sup>354</sup> Therefore, many Chinese students of national service age skipped classes to show their discontent with the ordinance. In the early stages, the Chinese student movements were peaceful and involved submitting a written petition to explain why they disagreed with the terms of the Ordinance. On 12<sup>th</sup> May 1954, some students who prepared to set off for Government House from a Chinese High School to submit the petition found themselves surrounded by armed police. The students were forced to remain on campus overnight. The next day, the submission of the petition was turned down because they were told that the demonstration was illegal and violated the 1948 Emergency Act. After this peaceful attempt failed, student responses turned into violent clashes with the police which caused many injuries; as well, the Singapore Chinese Middle Schools Student Union (SCMSSU) was established in 1955. It was a student union with an aim to unify all Chinese school students in Singapore to fight for students’ interests. However, the government believed that the Malayan Communist Party had been promoting communist thinking through student union activities such as ‘study groups’ and summer camps.<sup>355</sup> This led to more student protests against the government. While the government took harsh measures to deal with the student protesters, such as arresting student protesters and the intention to punishment of teachers and students involved, the student activities were also supported by labour unions and other pro-communist organizations.<sup>356</sup>

After the student demonstrations, another major conflict between the government and the Chinese residents was over the new education policy in 1959, when People’s Action Party (PAP) had just taken over the government from the British colonial authority. The new government announced that from 1962 onwards all students had to take a general school-leaving examination set by the government before they were allowed to move up to a pre-university level.<sup>357</sup> This provoked anger among Chinese educators and students, and eventually led to examination strikes by the Chinese students.

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid. , 148.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid. , 149.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid. , 153.

The government believed that these labour and student movements in Singapore in the 1950s were motivated and arranged by communists. It was also believed that communist propaganda had a certain impact on influencing youth and workers. According to Liu and Wong, people in Singapore at that time were moved by Mao's unification of China and the communist ideal. Some believed that the communists had gained power in many countries outside Singapore. Some students would bring up issues such as how the colonial government violated the Singaporean people to back up their support for Chinese communism.<sup>358</sup> In general, the British official view towards the communist activities in Singapore in 1950s was that the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and the pro-communist activists were the real forces behind the student and labour movements. Since Chinese students were the major force in anti-colonial rule activities, the student movements had to be put down. This resulted in the British armed suppression of student demonstrations and the government dissolved the SCMSU.

At the height of the government's clampdown on student unions and 'subversive' activities, Lee Kuan Yew, a well-known supporter of Chinese education, explained to the students that 'a fair education system was not a result of communist propaganda and people should support a multi-racial, multi-lingual education system'.<sup>359</sup> In 1961, Lee Kuan Yew, the Prime Minister, analyzed that 'the Communist Party made use of the change of school system to add salt to the wound and cause further conflicts between the government and Chinese educators' and 'the "big boss" behind the student strikes were the same "boss" of the Socialist Party'.<sup>360</sup> No matter whether the communists were the real force behind the movements, both the former British colonial government and the Singaporean government dominated by PAP saw the communists as the major cause of social unrest and destruction. Communist propaganda was believed to be the tool through which communist ideology and anti-government messages were promoted.

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid. , 145-146.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid. , 157.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid. , 154. Information originally published in *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 3 October 1961 and *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 28 November 1961.

In response to the student movements, the government began to implement the English-based education system and made English the official working language in Singapore. It is important to note that in the 1960s the most stable jobs in Singapore at that time were government jobs. This change in education policy meant that those who wanted to be civil servants had to speak English.<sup>361</sup> This was a turning point for many Chinese parents and students in Singapore because it was for the first time that they felt they would change their mind and support learning English and going to English schools.

In the previous paragraphs I provided a brief account of some key events of social movements in Singapore and some measures taken by the Singaporean government during the 1950s and 1960s. It is not my aim to question whether or not the Chinese communist movement was the ‘big boss’ behind the Chinese students and labour movements. What is more meaningful is that we can see the ways in which the idea of ‘the Communist’ as the ‘subversive political other’ were constructed in the official discourse and response of the Singaporean government; and the ways in which the Chinese students and labours claimed to engage in communist activities. The construction of a ‘subversive’ and ‘anti-government’ image of communism was a part of the politics played by the Singaporean government to justify its legitimacy to control and suppress the anti-colonial, anti-government sentiments and most importantly, the spread of communism in the region. Thus, the Singaporean government could use the excuse of ‘being communist’ or ‘being pro-communist’ to deploy government measures, harsh or violent, to suppress any anti-government activities. The meaning of communism and pro-communism in Singapore was temporarily stabilized and regulated into a set of statements, or in Michel Foucault’s term, a ‘discourse’. Chinese communism can be seen as an object ‘produced’ by the regulated ways it was spoken about. For example, the official line emphasised that communism was a danger and a threat to the safety and stability of society. In fact, according to Liu and Wong, many Singaporean-Chinese interviewers who experienced the student and labour movements still felt that it was reasonable for

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid. , 161-162.

the government to dissolve the student union, which was claimed by the government to be ‘communist’.<sup>362</sup>

What is equally significant is that we can see the Singaporean experience of the spread of communism in the 1950s as an early example of the globalisation of culture. It is obvious that the historically specific developments and practices mentioned above took place inside Singapore, but these were produced within and by a globalising communist discourse constructed through different forms of propaganda. I would argue that the communist ideology and the developments, practices and social relations associated with it were all ‘resources’ contributing to an identity construction, which paved the way for the successful construction of a multi-racial Singapore-oriented identity.

The Singaporean government’s concern about the spread of Chinese communism in 1950s was understandable. One reason was that the Chinese community played an important part in the society of Singapore. Hong Liu and Sin-Kiong Wong’s research was particularly focused on Chinese society in Singapore and stressed the significance of the Chinese community in the economy and politics of Singapore. The ethnic Chinese constituted more than 75% of the total population of Singapore. In 1957, at the time when student and labour movements were frequent, ethnic Chinese dominated 75.4 % of the total population, which saw a stable increase to 76.2% in 1970.<sup>363</sup> Thus, Chinese communist propaganda with nationalistic Chinese slogans promoting the strengthening of China would easily move the dominant Chinese population in Singapore. The British-Singaporean government’s major concern was that if the Chinese communists gained power Singapore would be turned into a communist society. There were several reasons to account for the eventual failure of the communist attempt to gain power in Singapore. The major reason was, as discussed in the last section, the Singaporean government’s proactive suppression of the spread of communism. Also the government’s control over the inflow of Chinese immigrants in 1953 effectively restricted the flow of Chinese people from mainland China to Singapore, and reduced the risk of spreading Chinese communist ideology in the region. A further reason may be that Singapore was an

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid. , 150.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid. , 46.

unfavourable environment for the rise of communism because a significant segment of local business has been traditionally controlled by the Chinese business community.

It is also important to note that identity issues for the Chinese in Singapore have always been complicated. As Wang Gungwu elucidates, there were at least three main types of Chinese who moved into Singapore in the early years under British colonial rule. The first were those who were accustomed to Western ways. The second were those who had experienced the Southeast Asian world such as Malaysia and Thailand. The third were those who came directly from China particularly from the southern provinces who had already had some connections with relatives trading in the region for decades.<sup>364</sup> These overseas Chinese considered themselves as Chinese who had an origin in China even though they resided outside China. This community of Chinese relied very much on an ‘historical’ identity which was nurtured on stories about the Chinese past and traditional family values which helped to sustain a sense of ‘mainland’ Chineseness.<sup>365</sup>

#### *Multiple identities of Southeast Asian Chinese*

Before the 1920s, the local authorities still found it acceptable for Chinese communities, who were usually successful merchants and businessmen, to preserve their Chineseness. However, because of political changes in China and Asia, the predominance of Chinese in Southeast Asia, which could threaten social stability, became problematic to local political leaders.<sup>366</sup> However, as Wang proposes, the ‘Chinese sense of their own identity could be changed by changing events’.<sup>367</sup> This is evident in how Chinese residents, who insisted on the preservation of a Chinese education system in Singapore, gradually decided to send their children to English schools and to take up a multi-racial Singaporean identity because of the changing political situation. As Hall argues, identities ‘are

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<sup>364</sup> Gungwu Wang, *China and the Chinese Overseas* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003), 186.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid. , 223.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid. , 224.



constantly in the process of change and transformation.’<sup>368</sup> Wang states that ‘modern Southeast Asian Chinese, like most other people today, do not have a single identity but tend to assume multiple identities.’<sup>369</sup>

### **The gradual detachment from China’s Chinese identity**

Facing the new political environment of the early 1950s when the British colonial authority gradually transferred greater political power to the local population, the Chinese business community became directly involved in local elections and promoting an identity oriented to the geographical place of Singapore. This identity formation also took place in a favourable context when by 1955 70% of the Chinese population in Singapore was local-born.<sup>370</sup> As a result of a number of factors including the government’s control on immigration and the spread of communism, changing political situations, the residents of Singapore began to establish a Singapore-oriented identity. The government concern about Chinese communist propaganda as a threat to social solidarity and unrest was no longer relevant to the transforming society with a cultural identity oriented to the place of Singapore. As Wang Gungwu points out:

For them, as the majority people of Singapore, ancestral cultural values will only remain useful for social intercourse and business purposes. For them, whatever links remain between Singapore and China would have to be on the same basis as those between Singapore and any other country.<sup>371</sup>

This gradual detachment from the original ethnic mainland Chinese identity among the majority of Singaporean Chinese was a factor which made the Chinese revolutionary imagery in contemporary Singapore a special phenomenon. From the examples I give in the later section, we can see that political images produced during the Cultural Revolution in the People’s Republic of China appeared in Singapore in the early 2000s. Due to immigration control and a suppression of communist propaganda, these images were unlikely to have been previously, at least publicly, disseminated in Singapore. Following Wang’s point, Chinese

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<sup>368</sup> Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" , 4.

<sup>369</sup> Wang, *China and the Chinese Overseas* , 222.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid. , 48.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid. , 199.

communist images for the majority of people in contemporary Singapore, are simply foreign culture from another part of the world.

### **Consumer Culture and the Asian Economic Recession in the 1990s**

The Republic of Singapore has been governed by the People's Action Party driven by the pursuit of national economic growth and with the goal of improving material life for Singaporeans.<sup>372</sup> This principle not only legitimises the rule of the party but also maintains the social stability and solidarity of the city-state. After its independence from the British Colonial rule in 1963 and its separation from Malaysia in 1965, the Singaporean government's emphasis on economic development enabled the emergence of a consumer culture. According to Chua Beng-huat, the emergence and expansion of consumerism led to the construction of shopping spaces for the consumption of entertainment, fashion and food since the late 1960s.<sup>373</sup> Since the mid-1980s, the cityscape of Singapore had already been marked by shopping centres for the development of tourism as a national industry.<sup>374</sup> The expansion of both local stores and foreign chains was prevalent. Orchard Road had been developed as a tourist belt with shopping spaces constructed where most of the well-known foreign brands and established local stores were located.<sup>375</sup> American fast-food chains such as McDonald's were found not only in the leisure districts but also in the public housing estates accommodating over 80% of the population.<sup>376</sup> Lifestyle in Singapore has been marked by a consumption culture which can be attributed to both local and global forces. As Chua surmises, 'the consumption patterns of Singaporeans will be increasingly cosmopolitan, determined by and fitting into the global marketing strategies of producers of consumer goods' while 'cultural differences between localities will continue to be noticeable'.<sup>377</sup> It is important to note that the Singaporean response to imported culture had been economically oriented,

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<sup>372</sup> Beng-huat Chua, *Life is not complete without shopping: Consumption Culture in Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

corresponding to the ruling policy of generating national economic growth. The business oriented values that the government implemented through measures for stimulating economic growth and stability had the effect of generating social support for the political status quo.

The expansion of the retail sector in Singapore began to shrink in the mid-1990s. The Asian Economic Crisis in 1997 was a blow to Singapore, resulting in a sustained downturn in retail and tourist industries. Though some other sectors in the city-state regained stability in late 1999, the retail sector in Singapore faced a sustained downturn. By 2000, the Singaporean economy was facing structural unemployment for the first time in four decades since the city-state was founded in 1965.<sup>378</sup> To a small city state with an economy-oriented ruling principle, the economic recession had to be tackled. The establishment of the Economic Review Committee (ERC) in 2001 was obviously a response to the economic downturn in Singapore. The committee outlined three major goals for the development of the economy. The first was to make ‘a globalised economy’ with Singapore at the centre with links to all the major economies in the world; the second was to make ‘a creative and entrepreneurial nation willing to take risks to create fresh business and blaze new paths to success’; the third was to make ‘a diversified economy’ where ‘new start-ups co-exist with traditional businesses exploring new and innovative ideas’.<sup>379</sup> The House of Mao chain restaurant was a product of this particular economic situation and the change of the government’s attitude in economic development. I argue that a ‘Chinese revolutionary’ theme restaurant was a result of the ramification of economic, cultural and political factors under the impact of globalisation. The role that Chinese revolutionary images played in this phenomenon was characterised by its temporary nature specific to a limited period of time when it was deemed ‘useful’. In the next section I lay out the role Chinese revolutionary icons played in Singaporean cosmopolitan consumption culture, with a focus on the site- and time-specific set of networks that relate the icons to other forces.

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid. , 13.

<sup>379</sup> Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, *The Economic Review Committee* [Online] (Government of Republic of Singapore, 23 Sep 2009 [cited 15 Oct 2009]); available from <http://app.mti.gov.sg/default.asp?id=505>.

### **Consumer culture in Singapore**

Singapore is recognised as a state saturated with a consumer culture with major fast food chains, fashion brands and luxury cars ubiquitously available. The establishment of this consumer culture is attributed mainly to the ruling principle of the PAP of ‘improving the material life of Singaporeans through the expansion of material consumption.’<sup>380</sup> This principle developed mainly because before independence in 1965, the first generation of people who settled in Singapore suffered from low living standards. The economic and business oriented economy of Singapore today is also a result of the history of Singapore as a trading port. The trading business tradition in exports and imports, and the transitional point for international flow of products today is an expansion of the success in the old days. Thus, it is important to note that impacts of globalisation were evident in Singaporean history for a long time, not just as in the recent past. In the discussion on consumption culture, perhaps what is more significant is the changing conditions and features of business and products that are available and popular in Singapore. Chua says that ‘Singapore exports almost everything it produces, imports almost everything Singapore consumes.’<sup>381</sup> Like consumer culture in many other urban cities, consumption in Singapore in the early 2000s involved an abundant use of signs. The Western-style food and fashion chains were ubiquitous in major shopping malls on Orchard Road. The ‘Mao’ restaurants in Singapore in the late 1990s and early 2000s were dominated by the active manipulation of cultural imagery and the nature of business as a food chain. Most significantly, the adopted ‘Mao’ theme and the marketing strategy displayed particular features of production and consumption in Singapore which had existed only for a short period of time.

#### *The Mao restaurants in Singapore between 1998 and 2003*

The ‘House of Mao’ was the name of the first restaurant with a ‘Mao’ theme opened and managed by a well-established enterprise called the Tung Lok Group. This commercial establishment owns over twenty chain restaurants in Singapore, Indonesia, China, Japan and India. Having started the design stage around mid-

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<sup>380</sup> Chua, *Life is not complete without shopping: Consumption Culture in Singapore*, 3.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 5.

1997, The House of Mao was one of the group's chain restaurants opened for about five years since March 1998. Using the same Maoist theme, the chain restaurant had branches in different locations in Singapore. The 'House of Mao' was the first opened in the China Square Food Centre on Telok Ayer Street in Singapore in March 1998, which was the name for an agglomeration of Chinese restaurants in a food court spread over five floors. 'The Little Red Book' was a branch opened in the Orchard Hotel Shopping Arcade five months later. With the local success of the House of Mao in Singapore, the Tung Lok Group had planned to franchise the operation of this theme restaurant worldwide.<sup>382</sup> However, the proposal for opening a franchised branch of the House of Mao III in London in January 2002 was eventually terminated by the group.<sup>383</sup>

The 'Mao' restaurants served Hunan-Western fusion cuisine and Chinese 'hotpot'. The marketing strategy of using a 'Mao' theme was partly because Chairman Mao was an influential Chinese figure who was widely recognised, as well, he was born in Hunan and was particularly fond of spicy Hunan cuisine. The managing director of the group, Andrew Tjioe, explained the use of the images and the 'Mao' theme in the interview in I-D Magazine:

Hunan food is spicy and an acquired taste. Chairman Mao is the greatest representative of Hunan; hence, the restaurant is called the House of Mao. There are many Mao restaurants all over China, which are often jam-packed. This is the first one outside of China.<sup>384</sup>

Mao was the icon for China, spicy Sichuan food, and more importantly, a fashionable icon in the late 1990s. It was two years after Hong Kong fashion designer Vivienne Tam made use of the images of Mao in her spring/summer collection in 1995 in New York.<sup>385</sup> The use of a Levi's stud button on a Mao portrait was seemingly, at least visually, similar to Tam's works in which some

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<sup>382</sup> The Business Times, *Mao on a roll and heading for London* (Poole Associates, originally published in The Business Times, Singapore on 14th May 1999, 1999 [cited 15 Oct 2009]); available from [http://www.poole-associates.com/house\\_of\\_mao3.htm](http://www.poole-associates.com/house_of_mao3.htm).

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Thio, *How Mao!*

<sup>385</sup> Steele and Major, *China Chic: East Meets West*.

images of Mao were created based on an original portrait of Mao.<sup>386</sup> These images broke the rule of a divine depiction of Mao in the political prints which corresponded to the ubiquitous cult of Mao in China since his rise to power, especially in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>387</sup> Tam's works were deemed controversial particularly within Chinese communities at the time of their production in the mid-1990s when the image of Mao as the 'sacred' national icon of China was still deep-rooted in people's minds.<sup>388</sup> However controversial it was, Tam's Mao collection was incorporated into the permanent archives of the Museum of FIT in New York, the Andy Warhol Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum.<sup>389</sup> The historical image of Mao, which was already accompanied by its own signifiers (i.e. Mao as a sacred figure in 1960s), was imbued with new aesthetic and cultural meanings by the mid-1990s, namely, a 'chic-and-modern-ness'. Also in using Mao as a theme, the House of Mao restaurants were branded as chic and fashionable during the time when Tam's Mao collection was internationally recognised as such. It is notable that the House of Mao in Singapore came just before the rise of the contemporary Chinese art market, with many artworks using the theme of the Cultural Revolution, from 2000 onwards.<sup>390</sup>

In China, Sichuan restaurants could be found with advertisements employing political pictures produced during the Cultural Revolution or mimicking the 'Cultural Revolution' style with symbols such as the Red Guards,

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<sup>386</sup> Tam's Mao collection in which some images were created based on an original portrait of Mao. These images included "Mao So Young" (images of Mao with pigtails, Peter Pan collar and gingham dress), "Ow Mao" (a bee was put on Mao's nose with a stripes and coloured background), "Holy Mao" (a clerical collar was added to the official portrait), "Psycho Mao" (a pair of dark hypnotic glasses were added), "Miss Mao" with lipstick on Mao and "Nice Day Mao" which was made from a yellow smile face. See Vivienne Tam and Martha Elizabeth Huang, *China Chic* (Regan Books, 2000), 88.

<sup>387</sup> I acknowledge that the depiction of Mao in political prints can be traced back to the 1930s.

<sup>388</sup> I acknowledge that some works produced by contemporary Chinese artists, such as Wang Guangyi, Yang Guoxin, in the early 1990s who produced art works based on the political images produced and circulated in the 1960s and 1970s. By Chinese societies here I mean the community which either experienced or was culturally influenced by the ideology constructed during Mao's leadership in China. It includes the refugees who fled from China to other places in the world. One of the floor tiles workmen working on House of Mao interior construction project was once in the Chinese army before he came and settled in Singapore.

<sup>389</sup> Information of Vivienne Tam is obtained from her company's website Vivienne Tam, *Biography* (Vivienne Tam's Official Website, [cited 1 January 2010]); available from <http://viviennetam.com/vt.html>.

<sup>390</sup> Information on Contemporary Chinese art market from Jonathan Wong, Specialist of Contemporary Asian Art of Sotheby's Hong Kong, Interview on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2009, Hong Kong.

green military uniforms and the revolutionary postures which were standard during the revolutionary period. This demonstrates that the 'Mao' restaurant in Singapore was an example of an 'imported commodity', which had been popular in China since the 1980s, and was used to 're-configure the similarity in the lifestyles of its customers in the different locations of the world.'<sup>391</sup> Interestingly, although an imported commodity, the food that the 'Mao' restaurant featured consisted of noodles, hotpot and spicy dishes which were typical of local Singaporean cuisine. Spicy food and noodles, for example, were specific to Singapore as there is a local expectation for how noodles are consumed and how chilli is used and served. Fusion cuisine served at 'Mao' restaurants showed an aspect of how foreign culture could be integrated with local culture to construct a modern lifestyle. It was a 'code of similarity and difference' which signified 'social affiliation'.<sup>392</sup> This was evident in the advertising strategies that created a 'lifestyle' which aimed at a specific group of young consumers.

This was incorporated closely with the marketing strategies and advertising images through which the foreign commodity was able to integrate with the local cultural context and the daily life of the people. For example, there were two famous advertisements for the House of Mao that had been published in magazines. One was a photographic image of a middle-aged man in his fifties who bore a resemblance to a solemn-looking Mao Zedong and three younger men wearing People's Liberation Army's uniforms walking out from Orchard Hotel Shopping Centre. Another image was also a photographic image of a middle-aged man in his fifties wearing a Chinese tunic suit using an escalator coming up from the Orchard station MRT. This joyful man was, again, a representation of Mao Zedong who during his life time had worn the same style of suit in public. These images were a hot topic for lifestyle magazines at this time.<sup>393</sup>

The creative advertising campaigns also included performance. Some middle-aged Chinese men wearing green PLA-style uniforms were ordered to walk around the Orchard Hotel Shopping Centre, where the restaurant was located

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<sup>391</sup> Chua, *Life is not complete without shopping: Consumption Culture in Singapore*, 5.

<sup>392</sup> Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 165.

<sup>393</sup> 'Party Politics', an article written by Jill Daniel for *The Expat Magazine* (Singapore), February 1999, original source cited on Poole Associates' website [http://www.poole-associates.com/house\\_of\\_mao1.htm](http://www.poole-associates.com/house_of_mao1.htm).

and one of the most popular shopping centres in Singapore, and other busy locations such as major entrances and exits of the Mass Rail Transit (MRT) as part of the marketing campaigns to promote the newly opened restaurant. This advertising strategy was dominated by an active manipulation of Chinese revolutionary elements, i.e. Chairman Mao and the People's Liberation Army. This was very successful in arousing public interest in the new theme restaurant. The performative advertising showed the significance of advertising in Singapore which creatively and playfully exploited imagery of the cultural 'other' in marketing mundane consumer goods. This example also showed the particularly dynamic feature of the Southeast Asian consumer culture and the extent to which people lived in a vibrant consumer culture mediated by images and oriented to visual pleasure. Tjioe was flattered that the 'House of Mao was probably the most publicised restaurant in Singapore in 1998 – there was so much publicity you wouldn't believe it'.<sup>394</sup>

The marketing strategy of the House of Mao aimed at creating a fantasy of a nostalgic and exotic 'arrival' of Chairman Mao in Singapore. By creating a 'Chairman Mao' who took the MRT, this marketing strategy not only successfully caught the attention of the majority of local Singaporeans; it also effectively produced a public image of the restaurant integrated with the everyday life of the local people. In this sense, we can see that the advertising strategies partook in the construction of the idea and image of the 'Mao' themed restaurant as a 'cosmopolitan' culture, which refers positively to a culture which appears in 'no specific geographical site in particular and thus belongs everywhere in the cosmos'.<sup>395</sup> In this way a local Chinese phenomena became local to Singapore and with the overseas expansion plan the House of Mao was intended to fit into other localities around the globe. The House of Mao in Singapore was therefore an imported commodity which was originally foreign, but was adapted to a local cultural context and which was then planned to be 'globalised'.

To attract customers to spend money in a context of serious economic depression, the House of Mao was the result of a high input of design and

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<sup>394</sup> James Lee, *Restaurateur Andrew Tjioe is cooking up a storm in Singapore* (Times Net Asia, [cited 12 January 2010]); available from <http://cargonewsasia.com/timesnet/data/ab/docs/ab3159.html>.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.



‘globally’ fashionable imagery. The interior of the restaurant was designed by the American architect Ed Poole of Poole Associate Design Company based in Singapore since 1991. The design team visited China for sourcing original information and materials for a creation of an ‘appropriate’ and ‘authentic’ interior environment for the Mao themed restaurants.<sup>396</sup> The interior of the House of Mao recreated the mood of a banquet at the Great Hall. Its interior decoration combined an ‘authentic’ Chinese setting of the 1960s with traditional Singapore coffee shop culture. Artefacts from China, mainly 1960s prints, Mao memorabilia and daily use articles, were displayed on the walls inside the restaurant. Most of the objects were sourced from China after detailed research. As the design described the design process:

All the artefacts are real, sourced over three years in Beijing. We wanted to create a space that would respect the history of the contents. So “real” were their finds that when we had finished putting up the pictures, one of the floor tiles workmen who was once in the Chinese army, actually spent hours reading the captions on each and every one!<sup>397</sup>

The cover image on the beverage list and menu was an image of Mao outlined against a red background. Different kinds of cocktail drinks were given ‘Chinese revolutionary’ names such as ‘Darling Comrade’, ‘Long March Tea’ and ‘Maogarita’. Chinese beer (Tsing Tao), Chinese wine and Japanese sake were also available. The food menu had an image of workers waving red flags beneath a disembodied Mao.<sup>398</sup>

This ‘Mao’ restaurant targeted both local and foreign customers in Singapore, and was opened at the China Square Food Centre where many locals usually met up and socialised at a cluster of coffee shops called ‘kopi tiam’.<sup>399</sup> Like McDonald’s in Singapore, the business owner wanted to make the House of Mao a place where local residents would go. At the same time dining is promoted by the Singapore Tourist Board as one of the reasons for visiting Singapore. There is a wide variety of cuisines in this multi-ethnic society and this theme

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<sup>396</sup> Ed Poole, e-mails to author between 12 and 17 July 2006.

<sup>397</sup> Thio, *How Mao!*

<sup>398</sup> Jill, *Party Politics*.

<sup>399</sup> ‘Kopi tiam’ is a traditional breakfast and coffee shop found in Singapore and Malaysia. This coffee shop culture is particularly popular mainly in Southeast Asia. The word ‘kopi’ is a Malay word for *coffee* and ‘tiam’ the Hokkien dialect word for *shop*. Menus typically feature a variety of foods based on egg, toast, coffee, tea and Milo (a malted chocolate drink which is extremely popular in Southeast Asia, particularly in Singapore). Similar to ‘kopi tiam’, there are tea restaurants (cha chaang taeng) in Hong Kong.

restaurant was a pioneer in a number of ways. Not only was it the first Mao restaurant in Singapore, the House of Mao also had a noodle bar said to be the longest in the country. Noodles are the kind of food which could be found everywhere in Singapore. Eating noodles is common not only among the Chinese dialect group but also prominent in Malay and Indian cooking.<sup>400</sup> The saluting Red Guard-like waiters and waitresses were unique at the time. (Figure 58 and Figure 59) The illusion of dining in China was completed with the use of some visual features of the bygone era such as *The Little Red Books*, Long March Chicken and Tiramisu House of Mao Style. The menu was created by an award-winning Canadian Chef of the Year (1997) in order to give additional acclaim to the popular entertaining space. An oil painting of Chairman Mao was reproduced with reference to the Mao painting in Tiananmen Square in China. The price for a dinner per head at the House of Mao was around forty Singapore dollars which covered a three-course meal and service charges. It was more expensive than going to the local food court but still widely affordable for the majority of citizens in Singapore.

Another 'Mao' restaurant in Singapore was called The Little Red Book Singapore which imitated the mood of 'a rally at Tiananmen Square in the evening'. Inside the restaurant, the dining area was full of Chinese revolutionary objects and images including a giant Mao portrait (Figure 57), an energetic youth mural (Figure 55), Mao memorabilia on walls (Figure 60), and an exhibition corner to display Dr. Yeo Seen Huat's private collection of original Chinese revolutionary relics.<sup>401</sup> (Figure 61) Some two hundred porcelain pieces and Mao memorabilia displayed in the restaurant were on loan from Dr. Yeo Seen Huat. Dr. Yeo Seen Huat is a collector of Mao memorabilia whose collection is famous for its precious porcelain objects and well-preserved prints. He started collecting Mao memorabilia, particularly porcelain, in 1993 after he saw a collector from the US looking for Cultural Revolution relics in China. The value of Yeo's collection has been rapidly rising in value. From interior design, menus, to food, the 'Mao'

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<sup>400</sup> Chua, *Life is not complete without shopping: Consumption Culture in Singapore*, 103.

<sup>401</sup> Dr. Yeo Seen Huat is a collector of over twenty thousand Cultural Revolution relics from China including porcelain, political prints, tickets and working passes, badges and leaflets. He is famous for his theme collection of Cultural Revolution chinaware. Information from Hong Shen, *Wenge Wenwu (Cultural Revolution Relic)* (Beijing: New World Press, 2003), 6-7.

restaurant was constructed as a space of fantasy with heavy emphasis on design and a marketing strategy in which the reproduction of Chinese revolutionary images and authentic relics would provide the consumer with pleasure and entertainment. More importantly, the collection also functioned as a 'code' which produced a particular meaning of Chinese communist style in the 2000s Singaporean context. Since a commodity signifies social value and status, codes of similarity and difference in consumer goods also signify social affiliation and difference.<sup>402</sup> This practice branded the 'Mao' restaurants as 'different', 'tasteful' and places 'cultured' for socialising and dining when the fame of Yeo's collection had already become renowned.

It is interesting to note that the monetary value of authentic Chinese Cultural Revolution relics had been rising in the 1990s and this was recognised by Asian Chinese collectors. Using Yeo's collection as an example:

In 1994, he [Yeo] bought a Mao Zedong brush pot at nine thousand dollars. Four years later the market value [of this brush pot] was worth ninety thousand dollars...In 1995, he bought a bowl with lotus pattern which was originally for Mao Zedong's appreciation. Three years later, the value of this lotus bowl reached fifty thousand dollars.<sup>403</sup>

With this, we can understand the value of Chinese revolutionary culture was not only cultural. Chinese Cultural Revolution relics had become investment objects for 'antique' collectors, and this was not unrelated to later high auction prices of contemporary Chinese artworks with a Cultural Revolution theme in the 2000s. The 'Mao' restaurant was one of the early signs which demonstrated the increasing commercial value of Chinese revolutionary imagery in Asia.

The third 'Mao' restaurant was planned to open in London as the first step to making the House of Mao into a global franchise. It was to be called the House of Mao London with a design concept recreating the 'ambience of subtle Chinese sophistication reminiscent of the graceful time period before the Cultural Revolution'.<sup>404</sup> The project was a business collaboration with the restaurant owned by Millennium & Copthorne Hotels in London and managed by the Tung Lok Group in Singapore. The location was proposed for 140 Gloucester Road, SW7, and it was due to open in 2002. However this overseas expansion of the

<sup>402</sup> Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 165.

<sup>403</sup> Shen, *Wenge Wenwu (Cultural Revolution Relic)*, 7.

<sup>404</sup> *The Business Times*, "Mao on a roll and heading for London".

Mao restaurant was not to be realised and the House of Mao London never opened. According to the designer, the design was finalised and the out-fit arrived at the site in London as scheduled, but the project was cancelled without an official reason. It was believed that the owner was worried that a 'Mao' restaurant in London could become a target for a terrorist attack.<sup>405</sup>

Though the London branch did not open, the 'Mao' restaurant was indeed a novelty and success in Singapore. Commercially speaking, it was successful in terms of combining local business interests and culture with foreign cultural imagery. This project won a Best New Concept Award from the trade publication *Restaurant Asia*. The House of Mao Singapore, the last 'Mao' restaurant of the Tung Lok Group, closed down in July 2003.

A particular range of Chinese revolutionary images was used in the restaurants. These images were reproduced on the walls, menus and paintings and integrated into the interior design. These were mainly images of youth in Red Guard or green military uniforms, and of course, images of Chairman Mao. The House of Mao targeted young customers because it was an ideal place for pre-party drinks.<sup>406</sup> It was recognised as a trendy meeting point for various youth communities in Singapore. Like the youth in other Asian Chinese cities, the youth of Singapore were usually the marketing target of consumer culture. As Chua points out, the youth in Singapore are the generation free from the concerns of financing 'big items' such as the mortgage of a house or the ownership of a car, and so this generation has emerged as the target for commodity consumption.<sup>407</sup>

#### *'Rally of energetic youth' mural*

The House of Mao I was situated at the outdoor terrace of the China Square Food Center. The graphics were designed by Pauline Evill, a freelance graphic designer, and painted by the muralist Willy Baet. It was designed to 'evoke the energetic youth and chaos that Mao thrived on' and painted to fit the size of the walls.<sup>408</sup> The image was split into two by the entrance in the middle where two Chinese

<sup>405</sup> Ibid. and Ed Poole, e-mails to the author between 12 and 17 July 2006.

<sup>406</sup> Juliana Chan, *Comrade in Feasting*, vol. June (Singapore: Female Magazine, 1998).

<sup>407</sup> Chua, *Life is not complete without shopping: Consumption Culture in Singapore*, 25.

<sup>408</sup> House of Mao I, website of Poole Associates [http://www.poole-associates.com/house\\_of\\_mao1.htm](http://www.poole-associates.com/house_of_mao1.htm).

style red lanterns were hung on both sides. The graphics were based on an original image with the theme of ‘Learning and Applying Mao Zedong’s thought’ with the slogan ‘To explore one step further the mass movement of “learning and applying Mao Zedong’s thought in a lively manner”’ written on a red flag, which comprised the background.<sup>409</sup> Apart from some small adjustments, such as a bundle of grain in the arm of a girl in the original being replaced by *The Little Red Book* and some of the original expressions changed slightly, the composition was for the most part closely based on the original. The original headline and texts such as ‘Unite together for even greater victory’ and ‘Quotations of Mao Zedong’ were left out because the mural image functions as a close-up of the original, focusing on the movement of the characters. The image depicts a mass of energetic youngsters holding aloft their books which have a star on the cover. Some of the youngsters wear military uniforms of the communist revolutionaries of which the style is comparable to the Red Army uniform. Some wear farmer’s sunhats and some wear the hard hats of builders or engineers. There are badges on the clothes of the youngsters standing in the front. A flying flag composes the background of the image. The youngsters look enthusiastic as if they are stepping forward. Their open mouths and facial expressions imply that they are shouting in a rally.

This mural was painted to correspond to the ‘authentic’ Mao theme of the restaurant. The original image of this mural is a typical political woodblock print characterised by its red-black-white colour composition. (Figure 56) This is one of the defining features of political woodblock prints produced during the early stage of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 or 1967. However, using only two colours – black and white – and modifying some facial expressions of the characters, the mural is actually far from an authentic reproduction. Only the human figures from the original reappear in the mural. This was mainly because of another intention of the designer to bring back the energetic youth and chaos that Mao thrived on during the early stage of the Cultural Revolution. The mural suggests a visual link between the chaotic youthfulness of 1960s China and the ‘trendy’ people gathering at the outdoor terrace at China Square in Singapore in

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<sup>409</sup> Worker "Newspapers Headings" Editorial & Drawing Team, ed., *Newspaper Heading Reference (Baotou Ziliao), Mao Zedong's Thought Publicity Board (Mao Zedong Sixiang Xuanchuan Lan)* (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1970).

the late 1990s. However trendy and youthful it was made to appear, China Square Food Centre was a social space for people in their thirties to fifties. This age group includes people who experienced the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s in China, and therefore this mural very likely triggered their memories of the Cultural Revolution<sup>410</sup>.

In one of the publicity images, four grinning young men wearing green uniforms and caps raised their right arms and fists, as they sit in front of the 'energetic youth' mural at the outdoor terrace, (Figure 55) with red 'Red Guard' emblems on their left arms. Their uniforms are visually comparable to some of the uniforms worn by the characters in the mural which represented the People's Liberation Army, one of the three important social roles in China during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>411</sup> The men in front of the mural were the waiters of the House of Mao who wore these uniforms while they were working. This image was a part of the marketing plan of the House of Mao based on the 'retro chic' look of revolutionary 1960s China. The men were grinning as if what they were doing was hilarious and trivial. The purpose of publicizing this image was to attract customers to the House of Mao as a constructed space where the waiters were obviously not real Chinese revolutionaries. One important point to note is that though the designer and the owner of the restaurant tried to make it 'authentic', the staff uniforms were in fact not faithful reproduction of the Red Guard uniforms. A faithful Red Guard style should be a green uniform with a green cap. A respectable Red Guard also wore at least one Mao badge on the left chest and a red sleeve badge which read 'Red Guard' on his or her left arm. On the other hand uniforms for the People's Liberation Army were usually characterised in political prints by a big red star on caps and a red collar insignia. However, the features of the uniforms of both the People's Liberation Army (red collar insignia) and Red Guards (red sleeve badge) appear on the staff's uniforms at the House of Mao. This amalgamation of the two styles was considered as unusual and unfaithful.<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> The three important roles: workers (*gong*), peasants (*nong*) and soldiers (*bing*) have been widely emphasized in Chinese political posters as a social structure of Chinese society in the 1960s and 1970s.

<sup>412</sup> There were no red collar insignia or stars on the uniforms and caps in the representation of the Red Guards.

*Mao portrait*

Inside the House of Mao I was a giant portrait of Mao Zedong hung at the back of the dining hall. (Figure 57 and Figure 58) The painting was entitled 'Portrait of Mao Tze-Tung' and was especially created by the graphic designer and muralist Willy Baet in 1998 for the House of Mao restaurant located at China Square Food Centre. It is an identical reproduction from the Mao portrait displayed above the Tiananmen gate in Beijing, one of the last and long-term publicly displayed portraits of Mao Zedong in China. Painted with acrylic on canvas, the painting is five feet wide and eight feet tall and was hung on the centre of the wall with a back curtain right behind a large eighteen-person table. This large round dinner table was a part of the design and represented the 'state banquettes held at The Great Hall of the People' in China'.<sup>413</sup> This table was not meant to be reserved by one large group at a time. 'Here we expect customers to share this table', Ed Poole, the designer explained in a magazine interview that he understood the idea of communal sharing in relation to the concept of Chinese communism.<sup>414</sup>

To correspond to the Mao theme of the restaurant, the owner and operator of the Tung Lok Group commissioned a large Mao portrait for the House of Mao. Although it was proposed to be an 'authentic' space, the Mao portrait more accurately makes the site into a space for creativity and cultural blending. I was told that the 'authentic' replica of Mao's portrait in the House of Mao was not simply meant to be 'authentic' but also entertaining. 'Everything [in the Mao portrait] looked pretty accurate except that they [the operator of the House of Mao] changed one of his [Mao's] buttons to a Levi's stud button.'<sup>415</sup> In the late 1990s 'Maoist China', as signified by the reproduction of the portrait of Chairman Mao at Tiananmen Square, was associated with popular commercial culture.

A photograph of some customers dining at the red round table in front of the Mao portrait indicates how the restaurant operated. A waiter wearing a Red Guard uniform was collecting some finished bowls from the customers. The idea of using Red Guard waiters and waitresses, a giant reproduction of a portrait of Mao, displaying Mao memorabilia and Cultural Revolution prints and naming the

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<sup>413</sup> Thio, *How Mao!*

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> An email reply on House of Mao restaurant from Alistair Christies on 14 March 2006.

dishes and drinks ‘Long March Chicken’ and ‘Long March Tea’, which were in fact fusions of Western and oriental tastes, all together created the House of Mao as a pathway to the past, in a bizarre but interesting vision. We can see this ‘Mao’ restaurant as a nostalgic recycling and commodification of the past in contemporary Singapore. As Mike Featherstone argues, ‘if the contemporary age can be characterised as an era of “no style”, then it points to the rapid circulation of new styles (fashion, appearance, design, consumer goods) and the nostalgic invocation of past ones.’<sup>416</sup>

Like the House of Mao I, there was a large portrait of Mao hanging on the wall at the end of the dining hall in the House of Mao II. It featured Mao Zedong wearing the uniform of the People’s Liberation Army waving his right hand as if he is facing and greeting a crowd. He is smiling and holding a burning cigarette in his left hand. The golden red lantern at the top left hand corner and the red pillar structure and panel in the background suggest that the setting is Tiananmen Square. This painting is called ‘Mao portrait’ which was created particularly for the interior design of the House of Mao II (The Little Red Book) by Willy Baet of Poole Associates Private Limited around 1998. The size of this painting is 4 x 8 feet.

This painting was placed inside the restaurant, but there was also a digitalized image of this painting uploaded on Poole Associates’ website. This website provides details of the projects that Poole Associates Limited have worked on for clients mainly in south-east Asia. Befitting the rally theme of the House of Mao II The Little Red Book, the designer reworked the static painting image to produce an animation effect of Mao waving to the people. The right arm of Mao can be seen on the website waving repetitively left to right. This is to amplify the ‘rally at Tiananmen Square’ theme of the restaurant which was represented by the historical moment when Mao Zedong summoned the Red Guards to gather in Tiananmen Square during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s.

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<sup>416</sup> Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 95.



## Analysis

The Tung Lok Group's the House of Mao and The Little Red Book restaurants are clear examples of Singapore's consumption culture in the late 1990s and early 2000s. With most of its businesses based in Singapore, the Tung Lok Group also owned restaurants overseas in China, India, Japan and Indonesia. The success of the Tung Lok Group was like a model for the government promoted the idea of a 'globalised economy'.

The use of a 'Mao' theme was 'creative' and 'risky' in the late 1990s Singaporean context because Mao and the Chinese Cultural Revolution were at the time not yet widely used in public commercial space. It was significant because it was the first time that so many Chinese revolutionary images were used in commercial spaces in Singapore:

...it was with some surprise when the image of Mao started to appear in rather more staid Singapore, where communism remains a distinctly dirty word. This time, however, it wasn't in a lifestyle store but a restaurant. Powerful advertisements picturing Mao appearing from the MRT or driving along Orchard Road suggested that making a visit to House of Mao, "a revolutionary restaurant, noodle bar and café", should be on everyone's list of must-dos.<sup>417</sup>

In a 'staid' society where people were 'bodily and emotionally controlled' when they were too stressed by unemployment and burdened by the will of property ownership, this theme restaurant was, in Featherstone's terms, a 'site of cultural disorder' in which citizens were able to temporarily indulge in the fascination of a 'communist' world where things were all shared and life was relatively simple.<sup>418</sup> Bhabha also shares a similar view of the recurrence of the past as an implication of present reality:

The idea that history repeats itself...emerges frequently within liberal discourses when consensus fails, and when the consequences of cultural incommensurability make the world a difficult place. At such moments, the past is seen as returning, with uncanny punctuality, to render the "event" timeless, and the narrative of its emergence transparent.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> Jill, *Party Politics*.

<sup>418</sup> Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 23.

<sup>419</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between" in *Question of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: SAGE, 1996), 59.

I argue that the nostalgic theme was not irrelevant to the current context because the sustained economic downturn in Singapore since the mid-1990s and the further blow of the Asian economic crisis of 1997 did put the PAP and Singapore's citizens into a difficult situation. The popularity and success of the restaurant may suggest that citizens needed such a bizarre place of 'cultural disorder' as an escape from financial pressures. More importantly, this eye-catching theme restaurant could also serve as a novel attraction for the sake of the national tourism industry.

As the designer said, 'we have done a few Chinese inspired projects [in Singapore], but nothing with Mao as an influence.'<sup>420</sup> People talked about the restaurants because of the cultural imagery of the exotic which resulted in the fact that the consumption itself was not only the physical substance of food but the symbolic aspects of signs. In Jean Baudrillard's notion of 'hyperreality', objects in consumer societies are not consumed because of their use-value. Thus, in a consumption culture it is signs which are consumed, and this has the effect of aestheticising of reality.<sup>421</sup> The Mao restaurant is an example of how, in a real situation (i.e. in Singapore in the early 2000s), consumption was largely mediated by cultural images via advertising and display in which the symbolic aspects of commodity, produced mainly by cultural imagery, became the major source of satisfaction.<sup>422</sup> As Jameson puts it: 'everything in social life can be said to have become cultural'.<sup>423</sup>

The idea that 'Mao' restaurants were recognised as 'innovative' should also be challenged because the image of Chairman Mao was prevalent in both public and domestic space, from work place to dining space in the Chinese revolutionary past. I argue that the meaning of it as innovation was site- and time-specific, and it was recognised as a novelty mainly because of the legal use of this serious political imagery of China which had been banned for many years in Singapore. Featherstone argues that consumer society becomes essentially

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<sup>420</sup> Information on design process from Alistair Christie, Creative Director of Molotov Creative Consultants Pte Ltd, Online correspondence, 15 March 2006.

<sup>421</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 148.

<sup>422</sup> Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 94.

<sup>423</sup> Jameson, "Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", 87.

cultural because social life becomes ‘deregulated’ and social relationships become ‘more variable and less structured by stable norms’.<sup>424</sup> In the case of the ‘Mao’ restaurant, I would argue that this was not a result of a total deregulation in the sense that the manipulation of the commodity-signs was obviously under the state’s surveillance. According to the designer, the business owner had commissioned a large Mao portrait for the restaurant which was an attempt to produce an authentic portrait of Mao with a creative twist by changing one of the buttons into a Levi’s stud button. After the inspection of the Chinese Ambassador in Singapore, the business owner was told to rectify it or take it down.<sup>425</sup> With this, I also argue that the ‘Mao’ restaurant was not only a pure commercial decision but it was also a consensus between the government and the business owner. With the ambassador’s warning, we can see the standardised, unchanged appearance of Chairman Mao at the Tiananmen Square in Beijing was preserved, otherwise the violated imagery would be forcibly removed. The formerly banned cultural imagery of the Cultural Revolution in Singapore looked ‘creative’ or ‘unprecedented’ but this does not mean that there was any less government control of commodity-signs. The stable and singular official meaning of ‘Mao’ in China was challenged by the commodity and advertising in Singapore, but significantly the official resistance to this challenge was present and powerful.

The above incident was significant also because we can see the clash between two sets of cultural values or ‘norms’: the political significance of Mao’s portrait to the Chinese authorities and the value of Mao as an exotic image. The idea that the simulation produced by the reproduction and manipulation of cultural imagery leads to a loss of stable meaning is true in the sense that the multiple possibilities of relational associations may overwhelm the stable norms of interpretation.<sup>426</sup> But the simulation itself is a product of these stable norms without which a ‘Mao’ restaurant would not be considered as ‘bizarre’ in relational terms.

One outstanding feature of these ‘Mao’ restaurants was the creative use of signs. Cultural imagery from the Chinese revolutionary era was used in

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<sup>424</sup> Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 15.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

advertising and in the creation of a restaurant with a 'Maoist' atmosphere. (Figure 62 and Figure 63) It is important to note that with the use of abundant signs, I observe a blurred boundary between the signs and the commodity, i.e. food and service. This feature concurs with Featherstone's idea of the 'commodity-sign' for which he further explains that 'the autonomy of the signifier...means that signs are able to float free from objects and are available for use in a multiplicity of associative relations.'<sup>427</sup> Looking at the current study, Chinese revolutionary imagery was reproduced and 'reactivated' beyond its original form and space. Thus, the 'Mao' restaurants were one of the 'associative relations' created, and this was a completely unpredictable phenomenon.

Another significant feature was that the traditional Singaporean noodle bar businesses, which were almost everywhere in Singapore, was combined with unprecedented marketing strategies so that the restaurants became popular dining places. In this respect Featherstone provides a useful observation on the function of marketing strategies and signs in the way that advertising is able to exploit a wide range of cultural associations and illusions, and attaches exotic images with mundane consumer goods.<sup>428</sup> To apply Featherstone's idea, the 'Mao' commodity and related advertising in Singapore, 'renewed the capitalist drive for novelty' and provided the source of images to summon up associations and half-forgotten illusions. The associations were never predictable because, as Featherstone points out, cultural signs are able to float free and are available for any possibility of association relations, which can be radical in the globalisation of culture. Thus, the consumption of 'Mao' and the 'Chinese revolutionary' ambience led to multiple interpretations of not only the sign itself, but also to the past Chinese leftist movements in Singapore which the signs might summon. But since the curiosity and memory of the consumer was fed by a simulation created by the visual signs in which Cultural Revolution imagery appeared divorced from their original context, the signs and thus the meanings signified were only read on the surface.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid. , 14.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid. , 23.

I apply Derrida's concepts of 'erasure' and 'différance' to understand this phenomenon in relation to identity formation. The notion of 'différance' refers to the production of meaning in the process of signification that is continually deferred and supplemented.<sup>430</sup> The meanings of Chinese revolutionary imagery were 'deferred' and crystallised again when they were used as commodity-signs in specific times and spaces. In the process both the old and the new meanings that the imagery stands/used to stand for coexist and supplement each other. Because of this, Chinese revolutionary imagery signified contradictory meanings in the Singaporean context. This is evident in the fact that the government openly suppressed it, and then later tolerated it. This contradictory view of Singapore's government, I would argue, was exposed in the 'Mao' commodity-sign phenomenon. This suggested that China, signified by those Chinese revolutionary images, meant something inappropriate and mistaken, but at the same time useful and necessary. Chinese revolutionary signs, which signify both negative effects of the spread of Communism and the rising of China's economic power, could neither be completely erased nor openly accepted. The images of a smiling and friendly Chairman Mao and the happy youth in Mao restaurants functioned as a 'supplement' which dramatically revised the meaning of 'Chinese Communism'. In this sense, the active use of Chinese revolutionary imagery formed, in Bhabha's term, 'visual narratives of historical reconstruction' which 'negotiates the recurrence of the image of the past while keeping open the question of the future'.<sup>431</sup> Bhabha points out how the narrative of historical reconstruction functions as an active agent in the meaning-making process:

the importance of such retroaction lies in its ability to reinscribe the past, reactivate it, relocate it, resignify it. More significantly, it commits our understanding of the past, and our reinterpretation of the future, to an ethics of "survival" that allows us to work through the present. And such a working through, or working out, frees us from the determinism of historical inevitability repetition without a difference. It makes it possible for us to confront that difficult borderline, the interstitial experience between what we take to be the image of the past and what is in fact involved in the passing of time and the passage of meaning.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> Derrida, ed., *Of grammatology*, 84.

<sup>431</sup> Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between", 59-60.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

More interestingly, the 'Mao' restaurant was a result of a negotiation between social interests and political claims which suggested that 'solidarity may be only situational and strategic'.<sup>433</sup> It displayed the interplay between the government and commercial interests. Singapore's position towards the history of Chinese (communist) student movements and today's China as a strategic partner was exposed here as never singular but multiple, and it shifted according to situations and interests. Hall points out that identities are about:

questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not "who we are" or "where we came from", so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might present ourselves.<sup>434</sup>

I would argue that in the case of the Mao restaurant in Singapore, identity was a question of using the resources of history, particularly illustrated visual history, in the process of becoming 'not'. The role that Chinese revolutionary imagery played in contemporary Singaporean identity was the point of reference in which the relational difference was further confirmed and solidified. I conceptualise the function and role of Chinese revolutionary imagery as a meeting point between Singapore's idea of 'communist China' and the 'real' culture of communist China. Chinese revolutionary imagery was the interface on which Singapore could engage with the rising economic power at the time. The appearance of Chinese revolutionary imagery in Singapore was a significant phenomenon in which we can understand the detachment of Singaporean Chinese identity from mainland Chineseness and the consolidated formation of a Singapore-oriented identity. On the one hand, the spread of Communism in Singapore led to the suppression of discourses and the development of measures which attempted to shape people at that time, mainly Chinese, into anti-communists in order to control anti-government forces. On the other hand, considering Hall's argument that a key to identity formation is the process which produces subjects that can be 'spoken', the idea of 'subversive' Chinese communism was in constructed by the government so that anti-government forces could be named and talked about, and thus allowing the social subjects of a Singapore-oriented identity to be distinguished

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<sup>433</sup> Ibid. , 59.

<sup>434</sup> Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" , 4.

and unified.<sup>435</sup> Thus, Chinese communist propaganda may be initially subversive, but also crucial in the construction of Singapore's counter-discourse and of Singapore identity *per se*.

### Conclusion

With the suppression of Chinese communist movements by the Singaporean government in the 1950s and 1960s, the banned images of the past were no longer considered as a threat to the Singaporeans state of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These images were used in Singaporean commercial space apparently as an 'exotic' culture which could be exploited for commercial purposes. However, the Mao restaurant in Singapore can be understood as a much more complex and significant phenomenon. As G. John Ikenberry, in his article 'The Rise of China and the Future of the West' in 2008, writes:

The rise of China will undoubtedly be one of the great dramas of the 21st century. China's extraordinary economic growth and active diplomacy are already transforming East Asia, and future decades will see even greater increases in Chinese power and influence.<sup>436</sup>

The case of the House of Mao restaurant implies that the Singapore-based Tong Lok Group was one of the pioneers who foresaw a business prospect with Cultural Revolution imagery and its fashionable yet controversial associations with China. Thus, in this sense, the business decision of a Mao theme restaurant was an attempt to make the most out of the opportunity to exploit the popular icons of China when they had a high commercial value. At the same time, with a better developed Singaporean national identity based on the place Singapore and on the government's support of creative business opportunities, Cultural Revolution imagery of the PRC was no longer politically subversive, but instead economically beneficial. The company's plan to open a branch of the House of

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid. , 5-6.

<sup>436</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *Can the Liberal System Survive?* (Foreign Affairs, 2008 [cited 11 October 2009]); available from <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/63042/g-john-ikenberry/the-rise-of-china-and-the-future-of-the-west>.

Mao in London shows how the Singaporean company saw Cultural Revolution imagery as effective commercial icons for its global business.<sup>437</sup>

This was a result of a ramification of political and economic factors when there was an increasing economic need to engage with China. It was both local and global in terms of business scope. This example shows the interplay between the various forces, such as globalisation of commodities, domestic economy, government policy, which framed the Singapore's consumption culture and their vision of global business potential.

In this chapter I argued that the government of Singapore saw it as a perfect way to reach two ends. First, the unusual juxtapositions of formerly banned communist imagery with a Western style restaurant chain destabilised the dominant meaning of Chinese communist imagery in Singapore, and was a useful and necessary 'evil' in today's globalised economy. Second, the control over the manipulation of signs produced an image of a stagnant 'China' tied to the past, which made the theme restaurant remain simply a space of fantasy and nostalgic exotica. I used the concept of 'erasure' to conceptualise the 'Mao' commodity-sign phenomenon as a crossed-out version of the 'subversive' idea of 'Chinese Communism': it was useful and necessary for economic growth in the current situation so it was present; it violated social stability in the past so it was 'erased'. The meaning of Chinese communism, signified in the imagery, was both constructive and threatening. The 'Mao' restaurant was the phenomenon in which this tension was marked and exposed.

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<sup>437</sup> Several suicide bombers did carry out terrorist attacks in central London on 7 and 21 July, 2005 in which 52 people died and hundreds of people were injured. See *London Attacks* (BBC News Online, 2008 [cited 6 July 2009]); available from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in\\_depth/uk/2005/london\\_explosions/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/uk/2005/london_explosions/default.stm).



## **Conclusion**

This research on Cultural Revolution imagery was initially inspired by the trajectory of Chinese political posters travelling from China to the United Kingdom. This physical travel of Chinese political posters and the later virtual circulation of Cultural Revolution imagery not only creates two interesting points of contrast for a discussion on the nature of these visual and material forms, but also suggests a particular value of Cultural Revolution imagery as a separate entity beyond its geo-political location. Thus, it is eventually not just about the travel of Chinese political posters, but the movement of Cultural Revolution imagery, which used to be a political tool of mass communication and a few decades later (re)emerged in new cultural forms to play a part in popular culture.

Most of the examples in this thesis show the communicative power of Cultural Revolution imagery even after its removal from the original narratives. It is this detachment and re-attachment that makes the imagery meaningful when it is used to serve the interests of different parties in different places.

However, its history is not completely removed when the imagery is detached from its original form and context. It is the choice of selection which revitalises and adapts certain historical traces of the imagery into new contexts, and which also indicates the power of Cultural Revolution imagery as a generic visual narrative which has an appeal across cultural borders. Through my personal journey I witnessed how Cultural Revolution imagery becomes geopolitical in a different context at a different time, serving particular cultural interests in different areas and spaces. As my research shows, even though Cultural Revolution imagery is circulated via new information technologies, its consumption and how it relates to daily practices of people is still very much regionally and geographically specific. Cultural Revolution imagery is found particularly re-emerging in commercialised popular products and texts aimed at mass audiences.

Cultural Revolution imagery can now be disseminated through the internet and telecommunication networks. China's technological development is extraordinary in the way it has developed so rapidly. The Chinese government

aims to use technologies to speed up the dream to become an internationally recognised and developed country. Thus, visual signs of modernisation that every developed country has, such as mobile phones, computers and the internet have become ‘must-haves’ for the Chinese government. But as a communist country with a history marked by violent mass movements, power struggles and the overthrow of the Western system, how can the Chinese Communist Party deal with the potential threat that these technologies bring to society?

Political leaders openly use online video conferences to interact with Chinese netizens, showing that the government recognises it as an effective communications tool. This serves as a good example of how new information technologies are being used by the Chinese government to project a more ‘liberal’ image to the people. In the revolutionary past, the posters were used to serve political ends, to shape how the masses think and to mobilize energetic, innocent teenagers; in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the internet and telecommunication networks are used to reinforce the rule of the Chinese Communist Party and urban youth is the group which comprises the majority of netizens. Thus, Cultural Revolution imagery in this research plays a significant role in creating interesting and inextricable connections between the two eras of the PRC.

The cases of Google China and Yahoo Hong Kong show how China exercises internet censorship and uses the internet as a monitoring tool. In 2006 a Chinese writer, Shi Tao, was arrested after Yahoo Hong Kong provided the Chinese authorities with information of Shi Tao’s personal email account. He was imprisoned for sending an internal Communist Party message to a community overseas. We can see how the CCP uses the internet to reinforce its rule: on the one hand it helps project a liberal image of the government and on the other hand the internet is an effective system of control. This is comparable to the situation when landlords were accused of being devils and demons during the Cultural Revolution, leading to the violent suppression of those who were perceived to act against the Party’s requirements.

While the internet has been considered as a ‘global’ tool for fostering freedom of expression and information exchange, the Chinese use of it as tool for regulation and surveillance could be considered as strongly nationalistic. Under tight censorship, however, digital power still has the potential to act as a counter to certain social forces. In June 2009 there were millions of posts on internet

forums about a young Chinese woman who killed a government official during an attempted rape. She was judged innocent by the Chinese courts.

While the popularity of online forums and mobile modes of communication is increasing, the significance of the physical body in Chinese mass culture still plays an important role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. During the Cultural Revolution, there are many political posters depicting Red Guards rallies and, apart from posters showing heroes and political leaders, mass movements are usually depicted as united, collective, powerful activities. In the 2008 Olympic games in Beijing, the Chinese communist style of dance and performance was amazingly collective, highly planned and cohesive. The supposedly 'live' international television broadcast of the opening ceremony was revealed by the Western media as in fact a rehearsed ceremony recorded in advance. This shows the classic Chinese communist style of highly planned systems. Besides, the national power of China still represents itself as collective and unified. It is also this strong physical sense of collectiveness that makes the history of the Cultural Revolution, and even today's China, as extraordinary and exotic to the non-communist, Western 'Other'. The point here is that 'modernised' China is still very much a rigid, centrally planned process which has a lot in common with its former revolutionary period, and new technologies play a significant role in projecting a positive, modernised, orderly image of China.

These technological changes and the construction of a 'liberal' image of the government, however, do not mean that the Chinese Communist Party has relaxed its control over society. Instead, even though the Cultural Revolution was denounced as soon as it was over, a highly regulated, didactic mass culture has still been the case for decades. Using mobile phone pictures as an example, though humorous and trivial, the taglines of reworked Cultural Revolution imagery tend to be instructive and moralizing.

Comparing the Asian Cup in 2004 with the Olympics in 2008 (although these two occasions are very different in scale and scope) reveals certain Chinese characteristics when China needs to present itself in the international arena. Cultural Revolution imagery, with new 'Go China!' slogans, was accepted in the Asian Cup as patriotic symbolism. However, during the Olympics games, the Chinese audience was not allowed to bring in Chinese language slogans like 'Go

China!’ (*Zhongguo Jiayou!*).<sup>438</sup> It was posited as an attempt to avoid miscommunication with people of different nationalities. I am not going to over-claim this as a means of suppressing Cultural Revolution imagery, but it potentially indicates a more recent Chinese notion of modernisation that projects China as moving on from its public image as dominated by violent revolutionaries to welcoming new civilized Chinese citizens. Indeed, China is moving on from the period of the Cultural Revolution which was marked by backward socio-economic developments to an ‘open’ society and an economy closely related to information technologies.

While China attempts to move on from its revolutionary past, the Hong Kong use of Cultural Revolution imagery in the 21<sup>st</sup> century may be understood as an expression of China which is still totalitarian, closed and illiberal from a Hong Kong perspective. It signifies Hong Kong as a different city in China: a place where you can be free from censorship and where you can consume something unavailable in the mainland. Hong Kong actively struggles against the rule of the central government which is deemed as potentially threatening to the freedom enjoyed in Hong Kong.

Chapter Four examines the particular rise of Hong Kong pro-democratic movements since 2003. A survey shows that there is a drop in Hong Kong citizens’ confidence towards the Beijing central government and the HKSAR.<sup>439</sup> With this, the use of Cultural Revolution imagery in Hong Kong popular culture can be understood as re-signifying an endeavour to struggle and an assertion of difference between China and Hong Kong more than a decade after the handover in 1997. On the other hand, a friendly and collaborative relationship continues between China and Singapore. Chapter Five shows an aspect of Singapore as an economic-oriented city-state. Singapore has been seeking opportunities for overseas investments and the development of creative business. The relationship between China and Singapore has developed remarkably based on collaboration and cultural exchange, such as in the project of the Suzhou Industrial Park in

<sup>438</sup> *Beijing Aozuwei jiu guansai guize zhong xianzhi fuzhuang qizhi hengfu deng wenti* (Beijing Olympics Committee's explanations about the rules for the audience about their outfits, flags and banners) (Huaxia Jingwei Wang, 23 July 2008); available from <http://www.huaxia.com/ay/azwxw/2008/07/1054274.html>.

<sup>439</sup> Man Nuo Wang, 調查：港人對中港台政府不信任比率上升 (Survey: a drop in distrust ratio among Hong Kong citizens towards China, Hong Kong and Taiwan government) (CNA News, 2010 [cited 18 March 2010]); available from <http://news.pchome.com.tw/international/cna/20100318/index-12689033565235218011.html>.

China. With major investments in research and development of creative media technologies, this has attracted thousands foreign enterprises investing 33.96 billion USD by the end of June 2008.<sup>440</sup>

Thus, my research on Cultural Revolution imagery in urban popular cultural texts, products and spaces brings out issues of wider social, cultural and political concerns in both the local and the international context relevant to China's recent development.

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<sup>440</sup> *Gathering of International Capital* (Suzhou Industrial Park, 2008 [cited 22 March 2010]); available from <http://www.sipac.gov.cn/>.

## Illustrations



**Figure 1 'Produce more without waste, realise the Four Modernisations and contribute more to the fatherland'**

Tianjin, 1980

University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London.



**Figure 2** 'Let's think about what we have done for the Four Modernisations'  
Tianjin, 1979  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



**Figure 3** 'Future summons us'  
Shanghai, 1980  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London





**Figure 4 'Oppose Economism'**  
Shanghai, 1967  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



**Figure 5** 'Completely Smash the Liu-Deng Counter-Revolutionary Line!'  
Shanghai, 1967  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



**Figure 6 'Down with the Soviet Revisionists'**  
Shanghai, 1967  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



**Figure 7** 'New Family'  
Beijing, 1974  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



**Figure 8 'Sending A Letter To Little Friends In Taiwan'**  
Liaoning, 1975  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



**Figure 9 ‘Thoroughly expose the Monstrous Crimes Committed While Attempting To Take Over Party Power By The Anti-Party Clique Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, Jiang Qing and Yao Wenyan!’**

Beijing, 1976

University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



**Figure 10 Red Guard Plastic Toys**  
China, circa 1966  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



**Figure 11 Gang of Four Toy Dart Gun**  
China, circa 1978  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London

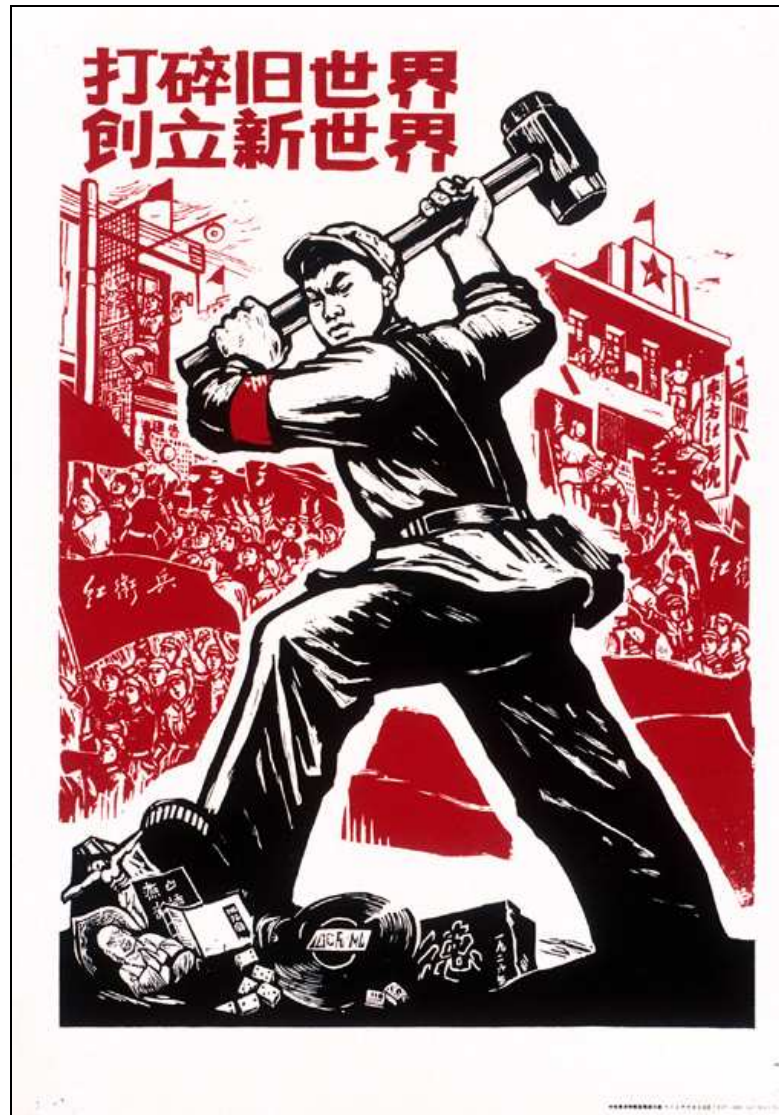


Figure 12 'Chairman Mao Is the Reddest Reddest Red Sun In Our Hearts'  
China, circa 1966  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London

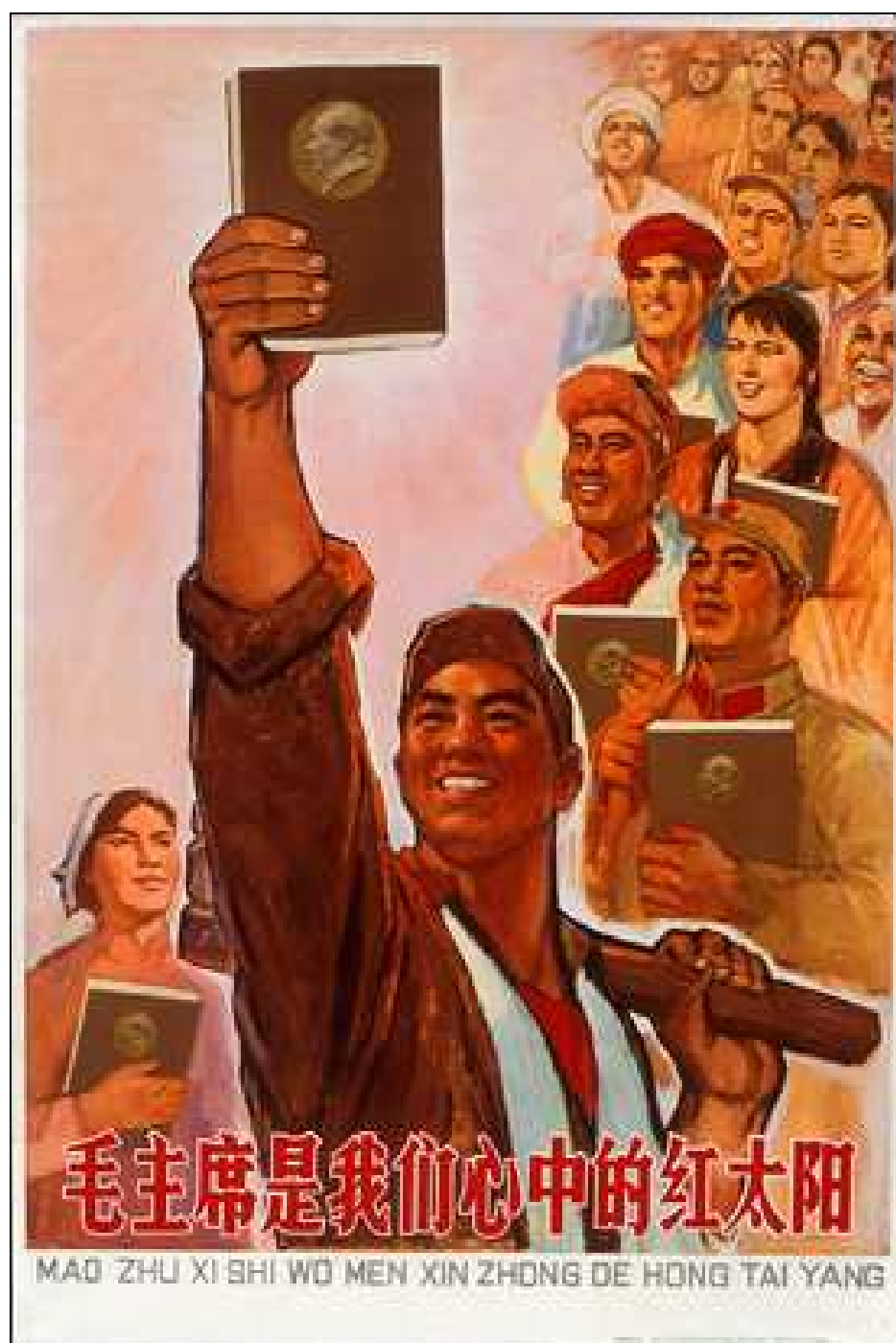




**Figure 13** 'Revolutionary Proletarian Right-To-Rebel Troops Unite!'  
Jilin, 1967  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



**Figure 14 'Smash The Old Word, Establish The New World'**  
Beijing, 1967  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



**Figure 15 'Chairman Mao Is The Red Sun In Our Hearts'**  
Shanghai, 1966  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London

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**Figure 16 'Your Are The Best'**

Mobile phone digital picture, source from mms.tom.com  
[last accessed on 7 February 2010]

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**Figure 17 'My Wife Is The Red Sun In My Heart'**

Mobile phone digital picture, source from mms.tom.com  
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**Figure 18 ‘(I’ve) Got my red pockets’**  
 Mobile phone digital picture, source from mms.tom.com  
 [last accessed on 7 February 2010]



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我不做大哥好多年

不做大哥好多年

**Figure 19 ‘I’m Not The Boss For Many Years’**  
 Mobile phone digital picture, source from mms.tom.com  
 [last accessed on 7 February 2010]



**Figure 20 ‘Do You Love Me Afterall’**

Mobile phone digital picture, source from mms.tom.com  
[last accessed on 7 February 2010]

**Figure 21 ‘If Others Leave Me Alone, I Will Leave Them Alone’**

Mobile phone digital picture, source from mms.tom.com  
[last accessed on 7 February 2010]



Figure 22 Cultural Revolution imagery on Etang website  
Internet source, last access in June 2006



Figure 23 Cultural Revolution imagery on Wapol website  
Internet source, last access in June 2006.



Figure 24 Cultural Revolution imagery on Tom Group China website  
Internet source, last access in October 2004.





**Figure 25 Newspaper Heading Reference (*Baotou Ziliao*)**  
Shanghai, 1970, p.57  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



**Figure 26 'Chairman Mao's Red Guard: Jin Xunhua'**  
Shanghai, March 1971  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



**Figure 27** 'With You In Charge, I feel At Ease'  
Shanghai, 1977  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



**Figure 28 'Chairman Mao Does Manual Labour With Us'**  
Shanghai, 1977  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London





**Figure 29** 'Asking Who Is In Charge Of The Universe'  
Shanghai, 1978  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



**Figure 30 'The Chinese People Have High Aspiration'**  
Shanghai, 1978  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



**Figure 31 Chinese Teenage Football Fans with Cultural Revolution imagery in Asian Cup**  
Beijing, China, 2004  
Internet source from NetEase Sports News online <http://sports.163.com>  
[Last accessed in June 2006]



**Figure 32** ‘Relentlessly criticise the “Gang of Four”, Set off a new upsurge of industry studying Daqing, Agriculture studying Dazhai’

China, 1977

‘Gang of Four’ of Stefan Landsberger’s Chinese Propaganda Poster Pages

<http://www.iisg.nl/landsberger/> [last accessed on 1 March 2010]





**Figure 33** ‘All People of the World Unite, To overthrow American imperialism! To overthrow Soviet Revisionism! To overthrow reactionaries of all nations!’  
China, 1969  
‘Foreign Imperialist’ of Stefan Landsberger’s Chinese Propaganda Poster Pages  
<http://www.iisg.nl/landsberger/> [last accessed on 1 March 2010]



**Figure 34** ‘A great victory a red-letter day for the people’  
China, 1977  
Cover page of Stefan Landsberger’s Chinese Propaganda Poster Pages  
<http://www.iisg.nl/landsberger/> [last accessed July 2004]



**Figure 35 'Blood Debts Need To Be Repaid With Bloodshed!'**

Guangdong, 1967

University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London





Figure 36 'We Must Triumph, The British In Hong Kong Must Be Defeated'  
Guangdong, 1967  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



**Figure 37 'Give Tit For Tat, Fight Resolutely!'**  
Guangdong, 1967  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London

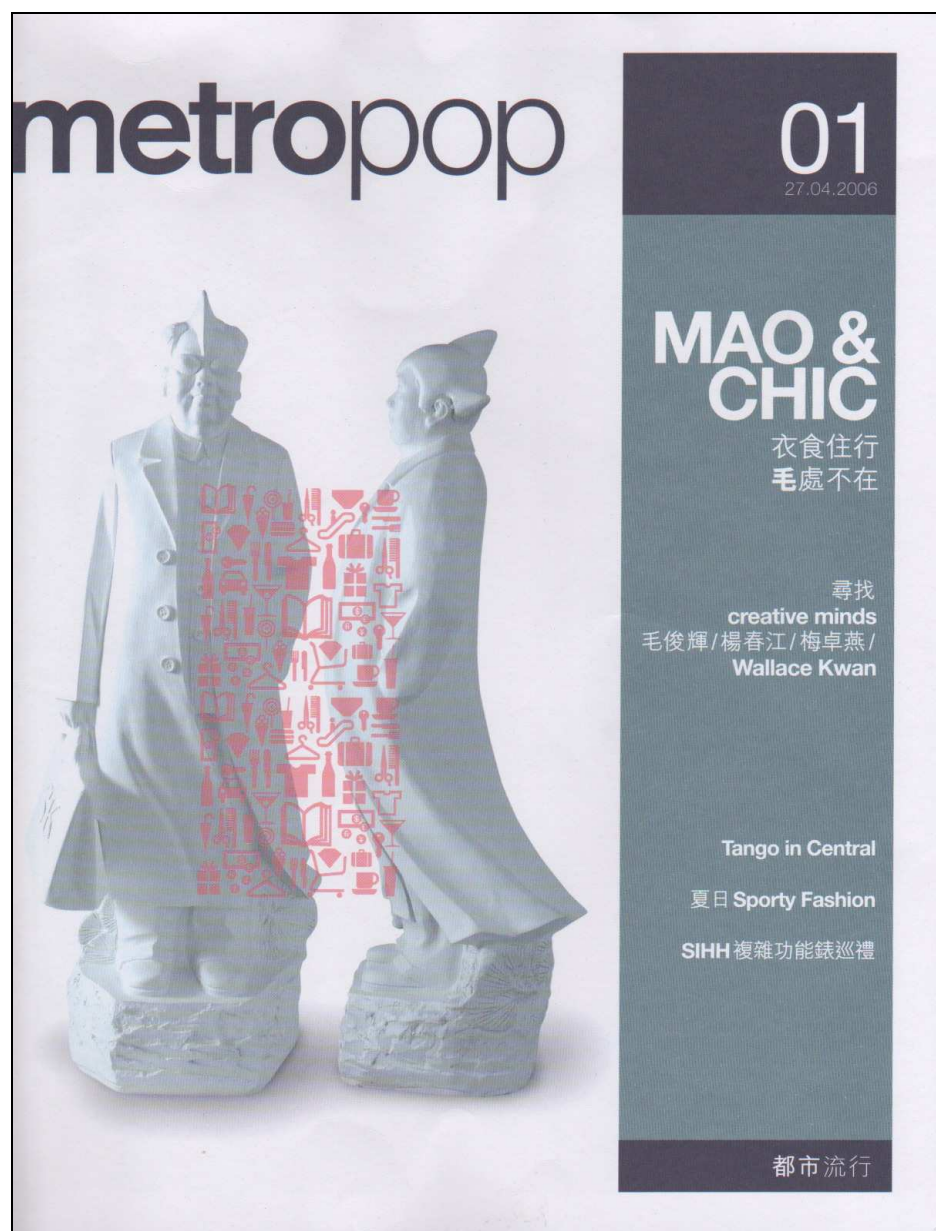
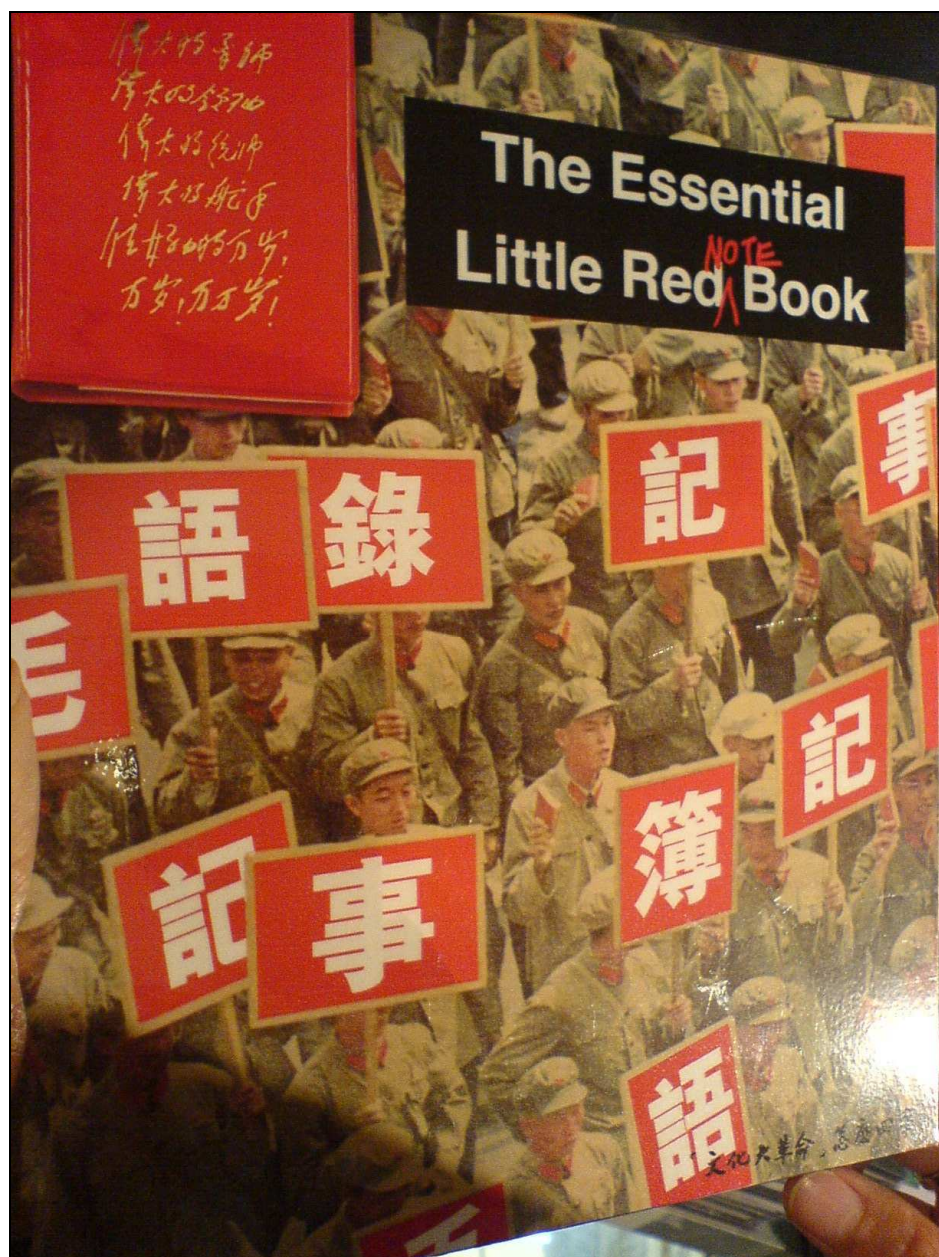


Figure 38 *Metropop Hong Kong*,  
1<sup>st</sup> issue, collected on 27 April 2006 in Hong Kong.





**Figure 39** The advert for the Essential Little Red (Note) Book  
G.O.D lifestyle chain store, Hong Kong, 2006



**Figure 40** 'To Live Better' screensavers  
2006, G.O.D company's website, <http://www.god.com.hk/index.php>



**Figure 41** *Mao Zedong's Thought Propaganda board Newspaper Headings Reference*  
Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1970, p.10.  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London





**Figure 42 Underpants designed by GOD, Hong Kong, 2005.**  
Cited in 'Mao & Chic', *Metropop*, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2006, p.18



**Figure 43 'Toiling the Field' Postcard**  
G.O.D's product, Hong Kong, purchased in 2005



**Figure 44** 'Reap a Good Harvest and Store Grain Everywhere'  
China, circa 1974  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection, London



Figure 45 'To serve the master' Postcard  
G.O.D. product, Hong Kong, purchased in 2008.





Figure 46 Business card of The People's Recreation Community (2004-2006)



Figure 47 Starbucks Coffee company international logo



Figure 48 'The People's Party' poster  
People's Recreation Community, Hong Kong, 2005.



**Figure 49** 'Strive for a rich harvest; store grain everywhere'  
Shanghai, 1973,  
University of Westminster Chinese poster Collection, London



**Figure 50** 'Holding high the red flag of Dazhai and reap a rich harvest'  
Shanghai, 1976,  
University of Westminster Chinese poster Collection, London





**Figure 51** 'The only strict truth is protecting the environment' advertisement  
The People's Recreation Community, Hong Kong, 2005



**Figure 52 ‘The Little Red Book’ beverage menu**  
The People’s Recreation Community, Hong Kong, 2006



**Figure 53 ‘Mao’ tea cups and ‘Cultural Revolution’ mug**  
The People’s Recreation Community, Hong Kong, 2006





**Figure 54** Original Cultural Revolution artefacts available at the People's Recreation Community  
Hong Kong, 2006



**Figure 55** 'Energetic youth and chaos' mural  
House of Mao Restaurant, Singapore, 1998-2003  
Source from Poole Associate's website



**Figure 56** *Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Newspaper Headings Reference*  
Shanghai People's Publishing House, May 1970  
University of Westminster Chinese Poster Collection



**Figure 57 Mao portrait at House of Mao restaurant, Singapore**  
Source from 'Restaurants' of Poole Associate's website  
<http://www.poole-associates.com/indexx.htm>





**Figure 58 'Red Guard' waiter of House of Mao restaurant, Singapore**  
Source from 'Restaurants' of Poole Associate's website  
<http://www.poole-associates.com/indexx.htm>



**Figure 59 'Red Guard' waiters of House of Mao restaurant, Singapore**  
Source from 'Restaurants' of Poole Associate's website  
<http://www.poole-associates.com/indexx.htm>



**Figure 60 Chinese political posters in Mao restaurant, Singapore**  
Source from 'Restaurants' of Poole Associate's website  
<http://www.poole-associates.com/indexx.htm>



**Figure 61 Dr. Yeo Seen Huat's private collection at Mao restaurant, Singapore**  
Source from 'Restaurants' of Poole Associate's website  
<http://www.poole-associates.com/indexx.htm>



**Figure 62 Advertising campaign of Mao restaurant, Singapore**  
Source from 'Restaurants' of Poole Associate's website  
<http://www.poole-associates.com/indexx.htm>



**Figure 63 Advertising campaign of Mao restaurant, Singapore**  
Source from 'Restaurants' of Poole Associate's website  
<http://www.poole-associates.com/indexx.htm>

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