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## **I. Knowledge and Society in China**

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### **Confucius and the Cultural Revolution: A Study in Collective Memory**

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

“Confucius declared that he was not an originator, but a transmitter. It was his mission to gather up what had been once known but long neglected or misunderstood. It was his painstaking fidelity in accomplishing his task, as well as the high ability which he brought to it, that gave the Master his extraordinary hold upon the people of his race.” Reverend Arthur H. Smith’s (1986 [1894]:115) observation is notable because it defines Confucius as a cultivator as well as an object of traditional reverence. Pastness itself impressed Confucius, just as Confucius symbolizes the pastness his successors embrace. This dual facet of Confucius’s image is instructive for the light it throws on our understanding of collective memory.

Two models frame present understandings of collective memory. In the first model, memory is context-dependent and changes as it is invoked across generations. Whether focusing on the politics of memory (Hobsbawm 1983; Alonso 1988; Tuchman and Fortin 1989; Bodnar 1992, Boyarim 1994; Gillis 1994)<sup>1</sup> or memory over the *longue duree* (Halbwachs 1941; Pelikan 1985; Kammen 1991; Peterson 1994; Ben-Yehuda 1996), Western studies endeavor to show how beliefs about the past become hostage to the circumstances and problems of the present and how different elements of the past become more or less relevant as these circumstances and problems change. Memory thus becomes a social fact as it is made and remade to serve new power distributions, institutional structures, values, interests, and needs.

In the second model of collective memory, images of the past are stabilized by the context-transcending requirements of society itself. Every society, even the most fragmented, requires a sense of sameness and continuity with what went before. Society changes constantly, Emile Durk-

heim observed ([1893] 1947), but the collective consciousness endures unchanged across generations because old phases remain intact as new ones are superimposed upon them (see also Durkheim [1915] 1965:414-433). Edward Shils also observed that beliefs about the past outlive changes in the structure of society. "No generation, even in this present time of unprecedented dissolution of tradition, creates its own beliefs...." Generations acquire most of what constitutes them from the past (1981:38). As individuals acquire understandings of the past through forebears (either through oral culture, commemoration, or professional historiography), common memories endow successive generations with a common heritage, strengthen society's "temporal integration," create links between the living and the dead, and promote consensus over time (Shils 1981:13-14, 31-32, 38, 327. Also see Freud 1939; Bellah *et al.* 1985; Schwartz 1991; Schudson 1994: 205-221).

Stable images of the past are not always demonstrably true images. Sometimes false ideas are transferred across generations and accepted as if they were true. And sometimes we do not know whether an account of the past is true or not. Truth value and its resistance to revision is plainly not the only source of the past's stability. Nor is the stability of the past necessarily the result of commemorative devices (*lieux de memoire*) that symbolize society's "grand narratives"; on the contrary, the erosion of what these sites and narratives represent, according to Pierre Nora (1996) and Jean-Francois Lyotard ([1979] 1984), is one of the late twentieth-century's distinctive characteristics.

That we should consider the stability of memory as a problem rather than a given is ironic. The pioneers of collective memory research (Cooley 1902; Czarnowski 1919; Halbwachs 1925; Mead 1929; see Coser, 1992, Schwartz 1996 for discussion) wondered how a supposedly immutable past could be so readily and so often reinterpreted. So rich has been the evidence of reinterpretation and so convincing the explanations, that the continuity of memory is now problematic. Some reviewers (Zelizer 1995:227), although focusing on collective memory's malleability, recognize the tension between continuity and change. Their understanding of the means by which continuity is sustained, however, remains unclear; the most pressing problem is still why memories and commemorations are as stable as they are. We propose to address this problem by analyzing the Chinese communist regime's representation of Confucius before (1949-1965), during (1966-1976), and after (1977-1980s) its Cultural Revolution. This case extends the range of collective memory studies from the West, where existing insights have been developed and codified, to the East, where new issues appear.

We will be concerned with the concepts of "construction" and "critical inheritance" of the past. Social construction refers to the belief that present

understandings of past events are mediated by conceptual and rhetorical apparatuses (Hobart 1989) anchored in group interests.<sup>2</sup> Sociologists and historians have long noted that the tendency to selectively ignore, decontextualize, or otherwise distort past occurrences is especially marked when a regime's legitimacy or a nation's pride is at stake. But what if historical occurrences or figures are too authoritative, important, or authentic to be distorted let alone forgotten? The Chinese past, to take one example, has been highly resistant to reconstruction, and this resistance is not an isolated trait; it is part of a syndrome of authoritarianism, conventionality, cognitive rigidity, submissiveness to authority, and traditionalism (Yang 1987). In this paper we argue that the construction of the past, although deemed universal, is least pronounced among cultures in which innovation, libertarianism, cognitive and moral flexibility are least valued.

China's traditionalism, Max Weber's (1964 [1916]) analysis suggests, has deep historical roots. Because the ancient Chinese lacked a transcendental ideal that distanced them from the world, their morality was "completely secularized," devoid of "prophetic zeal and moral dynamism." The result was not an idealistic transforming of the world, but an adjustment to it—a "relentless canonization of tradition."<sup>3</sup> Acceptance of the given meant that authoritative ideas could never be improved and that effective learning consisted of uncritically assimilating classical knowledge. Piety entailed acceptance of the order of the fathers and of duly constituted authorities. Taoism, ancient China's second major religion, rejected Confucianism's concern for ritual and form but shared its aversion to individualism, nonconformity, innovation, and this-worldly activism (p. 206. For detail, see Liao 1989, 1993).

Confucianism's cultural power would not be what it was and is if tradition and memory were constantly revised. The Chinese people's reverence for Confucius has varied from generation to generation, but they have never felt free to reconstitute his life and teachings. This does not imply that they agree on what his life and teachings mean. How much emphasis to put on Confucius's defense of slavery or on certain statements which acknowledge materialism, what he had in mind in advocating universal education, whether his conception of ethics is consistent with contemporary conditions—these questions have always been subject to debate. That Confucius stands for order, hierarchy, and tradition, however, has been beyond debate. To recognize that each generation has succeeded in finding itself in Confucius and has assigned him more or less prestige is not to say that it has transformed or "reconstructed" him. Our paper seeks to document the stability of Confucius's image and to explain how it is maintained by "critical inheritance."

### Method and Data

Much has been said about the Cultural Revolution's anti-Confucius crusade (see, for example, Fran 1975; Whitehead 1976; Louie 1980); little has been said about its failure. Drawing our analysis through the changing "discursive surround" of Confucius, we attend to the social talk that constitutes and interprets him across time. We assume that recent ideas about what Confucius means to China, how to assess them, and how, once constituted, they ought to be represented, are strongly affected by the specialized discourses of the Chinese Communist Party. Our analysis of Confucius discourse moves back and forth between party officials and their environment by attending to what they say during eras of institution building and crisis.

To grasp the Chinese Communist Party's assessment of Confucius before, during, and after the Cultural Revolution, we rely on first-hand data from three sources:

1. Two leading newspapers, *Ren Min Ri Bao* and *Guang Ming Ri Bao*, express official attitudes toward important events of the day. *Ren Min Ri Bao* is the organ of the Chinese Communist Party; *Guang Ming Ri Bao*, the major newspaper in the field of culture. Within a given era, Confucius's portrayal in these newspapers is consistent and, although we have undertaken no formal content analysis, the materials we select for illustration capture the newspapers' essential interpretations.
2. China's officials commonly introduce political directives and explain their rationale through closely integrated public speeches, a selection of which (again for the purpose of illustration) comprises a second source of data.
3. For supplementary data one of the authors interviewed a nonrandom sample of ten mainland Chinese living near a large state university in the United States. Since all respondents left mainland China for the U.S. in the 1980s, all lived through the Cultural Revolution. The purpose of these interviews is to provide a basis for speculating on the influence of official evaluations of Confucius. The respondents were asked to identify the sources of their earliest and later conceptions of Confucius, the time these conceptions were formed, and to explain their meaning. In order to generate as much information from respondents as possible, the author chose interviewees aged 27 to 56. She focused on the seven respondents over 40 because they lived through the Cultural Revolution as adults. To gauge generational differences, she also interviewed three respondents under 40 years of age who lived through the Revolution as children.

Eight of the respondents are graduate students in philosophy, comparative literature, education, entomology, economics, statistics and ecol-

ogy. The author also interviewed a visiting scholar and an immigrant from China. She took notes during the private interviews and transcribed them immediately afterwards.

## CONFUCIUS

Confucian doctrine is distinguishable from Confucius the man, but in most cases affection or hostility for one goes together with the other. Confucius, the Latinized form of *K'ung Fu-Tzu* (c. 550-476 B.C.), was a statesman, philosopher, and educator who lived at the end of “the Spring and Autumn Period” (770-475 B.C.) of Chinese history. This was a transitional period during which China developed from an ancient slave society into a feudal society. During the next 250 years, the period of “A Hundred Schools of Thought Contending,” Confucianism was but one philosophy among many, including Mohism, Taoism and Legalism. To strengthen his power, Han Wudi (140-87 B.C.), emperor of the West Han Dynasty, followed the advice of the renowned scholar, Dong Zhongshu (179-104 B.C.), by rejecting all philosophies except Confucianism. Since then all feudal rulers have followed Confucianism and enforced it as a secular religion.

Even at the end of the twentieth century, Confucius's influence on Chinese culture and social life remains powerful. The Confucian tradition, Tu Wei-Ming (1990) observes, “remains the defining characteristic of Chinese mentality” (p. 136). The power of this tradition is evident in our interviews. Six of the seven respondents who agreed to rank Confucius placed him first among ten renowned Chinese historical figures, one ranked him second. The reason given for Confucius's high ranking is his influence on Chinese culture.

The core of Confucian doctrine consists of the concepts *Ren* and *Li*. Confucius defined *Ren* as “love all men”. To put this definition into practice he taught his students: “Do nothing to others that you would not wish done to yourself” and “the man of virtue, wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others.” Since “*Ren* makes man a man,” the meaning of a person's life is defined exclusively by his fellowmen and by his community (*Analects*).

*Ren* also found expression through the performance of *Li*, which encompasses rituals, social and political structures, and status-specific behavioral norms. According to Confucius, the prince, minister, father, and son had to conform to strict codes of conduct, and in this conformity much was at stake. Only if the nation's men—from prince and minister to fathers and sons—conform to proper rules of conduct can social order be maintained. This is because the correct observance of rites signifies commitment

and deference to authority. Confucius declared: “*Ren* means to restrain oneself and observe *Li*.” Since *Li* required people to behave according to their status and rank, Confucius’s influence on the formation of Chinese culture and social life cannot be separated from his “use value” (Maines, Katovich, and Sugrue 1983) in legitimating political structures.

*How Confucius is remembered: the uses of “critical inheritance.”* Radical intellectuals have always criticized Confucius because his doctrines of self-restraint and conformity stand in opposition to ideologies of change (Louie 1980:1-16). On the other hand, Confucius has been useful to all establishments. The communist establishment, assuming power in 1949, was simultaneously drawn to Confucius because his memory legitimated its hegemony and repelled by Confucius because his ideals opposed its revolution. This dilemma was resolved by “critical inheritance”—a form of collective memory that has no close Western counterpart. The term “critical inheritance” appears mainly in political and academic discourse, but it is universally understood to mean a deliberative process wherein both positive and negative aspects of historic figures are recognized. Critical inheritance upholds traditional authority because it sustains the dignity of the past while recognizing the need of successive generations to reevaluate it. Thus, Confucius can be revered—must be revered—by the institutions and individuals that reject his political convictions.

## BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

The Communist Party, after eight years of Anti-Japanese War and three years of civil war, assumed control of China and established comprehensive reforms. From 1949 to 1966 the regime undertook two agricultural programs. The first program (1949-1952) was based on a land policy permitting retention of private farm ownership. The regime turned to Confucius, symbol of the authority of the family, to legitimize this effort because the Party’s plan for economic decentralization was based on the family unit as the pivot of agricultural production. The second phase of reform, in contrast, included the socialization of private lands and the Great Leap Forward (1953-1966)—a disaster that led to 20 to 30 million deaths between 1958 and 1962. Never was the Confucian legacy of asceticism more serviceable in sustaining loyalty to a regime than during this period of indescribable suffering.

In theory, the transition from Civil War to peace requires a shift from the pursuit of revolutionary projects to economic and social development. Institution building, however, does not always progress as planned, and Mao knew that his party’s survival required the establishment of a strong

central power (Fairbank 1992:361). Given the masses' commitment to the Confucian tradition of deference and hierarchy, political leaders seeking to legitimate their policies complimented Confucius in official publications. Our task, said Mao Zedong, "is to study our historical legacy and evaluate it critically with the Marxist method. Our nation has a history of several thousand years, a history which has its own characters and is full of treasures....We must make a summing-up from Confucius down to Sun Yat-sen and inherit this precious legacy" (Mao, 1940). Mao extolled Confucius's school in Qu Fu (1955) and deemed "the doctrine of the mean," Confucius's philosophy of moderation, a great achievement meriting close study (Hou, 1987). Liu Shaoqi, late president of People's Republic, called on "every communist who wants to become a good, politically mature revolutionary" to "make great efforts in self-cultivation" by following Confucius's example. Confucius was a feudal philosopher, Liu conceded in his famous lectures, *How to be a Good Communist*, but "he did not consider himself to have been born a sage." Confucius realized that his achievements were facilitated by his environment (Liu, 1964).

Communist ideologues, however, could not ignore the way Confucianism contradicted socialism. This is why Mao stressed the "critical" aspect of "critical inheritance." Mao's dilemma involved the antinomy of tradition and modernity: on the one hand, his regime was inclined to negate traditional symbols that could not be assimilated into communist ideology; on the other hand, his regime found in these symbols great sources of energy and attempted to exploit them by detaching them from their former contexts. In his "On New Democratism," Mao wrote: "Those who worship Confucius and advocate reading the classics of Confucianism stand for the old ethics, old rites and old thoughts against the new culture and new thought....As imperialist culture and semi-feudal culture serve imperialism and the feudal class, they should be eliminated" (Mao 1940). "Compared to Confucius's classics," therefore, "socialism is much better." If Mao and his associates rejected Confucius's ideas, however, they identified themselves with his eminence. The problem, in Mao's words, is to "keep the good things from the past while rejecting harmful feudal ideas (1955)."

Since Mao's notion of *feudal* ideas included *capitalist* ideas prevailing before the 1949 Communist Revolution, his rhetoric about Confucius was inherently ambivalent. Mao could construe Confucius his countryman but not his political ancestor. The problem appeared with great clarity in our interviews. Nine out of the ten respondents said they regarded Confucius a great thinker and educator, but some respondents nevertheless repudiated him. Two respondents, both over 50, mentioned a 1951 film, *The Life of Wu Xun*, which was criticized on its release for eulogizing the central character's readiness to submit to the landlord class. Both respondents saw

Wu Xun as the embodiment of Confucius' philosophy. Another respondent, age 44, who lived through the pre-Cultural Revolution reforms said that the simultaneous embracing and rejecting of Confucian values paralleled the political and economic situation. During the 1958 education revolution, he recalled, Confucius was rejected; but in the aftermath of the post 1961 famine, Confucius was embraced. At this time (five years before the onset of the Cultural Revolution) the memory of the ancients consoled and there was a nationwide upsurge of Confucius-worship.

### Reconstruction vs. Critical Inheritance

The concept of critical inheritance is not subsumeable under the concept of reconstruction. "Reconstruction" is a metaphor (used synonymously with "fabrication," "invention," "representation," "framing") for the process of reinterpretation. Designed to convey the assumption that knowledge of the past is affected by the context in which the past is considered, this metaphor has been applied so indiscriminantly that it has confused more than it has clarified. Efforts to reconstruct the past include, in fact, (1) the exaggeration of certain aspects of an authenticated event; (2) the focus on one phase and ignoring of other phases of an event, and (3) the dissociation of an otherwise accurate account of an event from related events.

The above interpretations are "constructions" in the weak sense, for their function is to distort rather than to invent or negate the past. Constructions, however, can also involve the making of (4) imaginary events or (5) the denial of real events. Constructions of the past might also (6) falsely define an individual into or out of existence, or, less dramatically (7), falsely ascribe characteristics to an individual or event. These last four transformations, whether resulting from unintended or deliberate misinterpretation, may be described as *reconstructions* in the strong sense.

Changing images of Western deities, heroes, and villains are, for the most part, reconstructions in the weak sense. To refer to such constructions as weak, however, is not to suggest they are inconsequential. It is precisely differential selection, emphasis, and contextualization that transformed Emma Goldman, a bloodthirsty anarchist through the 1920s, into a kindly Jewish grandmother by the 1980s (Frankel 1996). Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, like many if not most enlightened men of the late eighteenth century, considered Jesus a nondivine epitome of reason and author of revolutionary ethical codes. By mid nineteenth century, however, Jesus had become the Great Liberator—divine champion of the oppressed and enslaved (Pelikan 1985:189-193; 206-219). George Washington, America's first hero, was the consummation of gentility in the early nineteenth cen-

tury, a counterpoint to plutocracy during the progressive era, and a model for captains of industry during the 1920s. The most popular of American heroes, Abraham Lincoln, has been the most malleable. During the industrial revolution Lincoln was the champion of the free market; by the Progressive Era he had become the first labor reformer. Among whites, Lincoln was an ardent segregationist; among blacks, a compassionate friend. During the New Deal he personified the rights of racial justice as well as labor; in the late twentieth century he stood for racial integration. For every generation of conservatives, Lincoln has been the great individualist who pulled himself up by his own bootstraps; for every generation of liberals, the model of compassion for the underdog (Schwartz 1991, 1997).

The image of Confucius has never lent itself to such diverse interpretation. This is because the malleability of heroes is not in the quality of their lives but in the nature of their culture. Since critical inheritance is a collective representation, our concern is to understand it in cultural contexts. We have examined one of these contexts—the early years of the communist regime. We now move into the next phase.

### CULTURAL REVOLUTION

The sociology of memory, to turn a phrase from Clifford Geertz (1973), “ought to be called the sociology of meaning, for what is socially determined is not the nature of conception but the vehicles of conception” (p. 212). What is problematic about Confucius, then, is not his fate during the Cultural Revolution but why the customary vehicle of conception, critical inheritance, could no longer be applied to him.

Confucius, when vested with political authority, executed reformers and razed rebellious cities. His most powerful concepts, including “The Way,” “Rectification,” “Benevolence,” “Filial Piety,” “Fraternal Duty,” “The Will of Heaven,” “Fate,” and “Innate Knowledge” were designed to maintain slavery. Yet, his influence endured long after slavery had disappeared, legitimating feudalism and, in modern times, fascism and capitalism (see, for example, Yang 1974). Communism, too, accommodated Confucius, but only as long as it accommodated tradition. When its cultural revolution broke with the past, Confucius had to be totally rejected.

“At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution,” one of our respondents recalled during his interview, “Mao Zedong attacked the old Confucian culture rather than Confucius himself. There was a campaign against The Four Olds: old thought, old culture, old tradition and old custom.” This campaign intensified because the contrast “Old vs. New” resonated so intensely with “Bourgeois vs. Proletarian” and “Xenophilia vs. Nationalism.”

As Confucius embodied the Old, he inevitably became the personification of capital and foreign influence. He could no longer be reverently ignored, for he was no longer inheritable.

As the Party's campaign against the Four Olds became more energetic, the measures it took against Confucius became more radical. The revolutionaries had to destroy every reminder of Confucius—temples and relics, statues, shrines, monuments, and sacred texts (especially those located in Qu Fu, Confucius's birthplace)—to articulate fully their contempt for the old system's corruptness. Another respondent, in high school at the time, recalled: "Around March of 1974 we stopped classes for an entire month to study the history of the struggle between the Legalist School and Confucianism. Our political textbook contained criticisms of Confucius and we were all required to criticize him in our composition." It was not that tenets of antique Legalism, which existed more than 2,000 years ago, were congruent with the Cultural Revolution; it was a matter of the regime appropriating Legalism as a precedent, a second language, with which to condemn Confucius. A third respondent recalled an instance of guilt by association: "The regime's resentment of the intelligentsia extended to Confucius, a worshiper of scholarship and leader of the intelligentsia of his own day." A fourth respondent reported: "In the campaign against The Four Olds, I saw pictures and statues of Confucius among the antiques confiscated." All the media our respondents remembered—newspapers, magazines, radio broadcasts, Party Central Committee documents, journals, textbooks, political study materials—condemned Confucius in the harshest terms. (For commentary on the anti-Confucius theme in the era's children's books, see Liao 1985.)

The rhetoric of condemnation was overdetermined. It not only disparaged the past but also legitimated the Cultural Revolution, whose official targets included the local elites that Mao had himself created. His reform was an effort to make "democratic centralism" more centralized by wiping out what Alexis de Tocqueville (1945) called the *corps intermédiaire*—local institutions protecting the individual from the tyranny of the state. This intermediate body consisted of not only the school, family, and religious organizations but the entire stratum of carefully trained ministers, subordinate officials, army officers, and specially privileged party officials.<sup>4</sup> The party ideologists targeted Confucius's concepts of *Ren*, *Li*, and "Rectification" because they sanctified the decentralizing power of these local elites. In Confucius's own words: "*Ren* is self-restraint, strict observance of the rituals, and adaptation to the [decentralized feudal] political and social system (*Li*)."

Mao's attack on Confucius was designed mainly to deal with critics of his own policies and record. The great 1958-1962 famine, resulting from

Mao's reorganization of agricultural production, led party officials, including Liu Shaoqui and Deng Xiaoping, to attack him directly. Liu (an urban organizer formerly prominent in the Party hierarchy who deeply admired Confucius) defined the famine a "man-made calamity" and identified Mao as its cause. So intense was the criticism of Mao for his inept management of this and other matters that he had literally to institute a counterrevolution in order to maintain his power. The country approached civil war as Red Guard factions fought one another as well as the People's Liberation Army. Between 1966 and 1976, sixty percent of party officials were purged, a million people were persecuted, the economy collapsed (Fairbank 1992:383-405).

Concurrently, Confucius became antiquity's greatest villain. *Guang Ming Ri Bao*, to take one example, attacked Confucius's authorship of ruling class hegemony. His extolling of filial and fraternal devotion was not an end in itself but a means of preserving the order of the slaveholder (73-9-22). *Ren Min Ri Bao* attacked Confucius's educational philosophy on the same grounds. His belief in the meanness of manual labor, the revolutionary ideologues explained, was developed by Mencius (372-289 B.C.), China's "Second Sage" and the most influential follower of Confucius, into a reactionary precept: "Those laboring with their brains govern others; those laboring with their brawn are governed by others." Confucius's class prejudice ramified widely and contributed to centuries of working class misery. (Feng Youlan presented similar criticisms of *Ren*, *Li*, "Rectification" and "The Restraint of Self and Response to Li" in his book *On Confucius* [Feng, 1975].)

The regime's reinterpretation of Confucius was required by the logic of its new political cause, but the significance of that new interpretation cannot be reduced to the political interests it served. Karl Mannheim (1936:109-191) observed that all knowledge is partial because the interests in which it is rooted are partisan, but he believed this connection to be a source of enlightenment, not ignorance. Particular social standpoints yield visions of the past that are unavailable from any other standpoint. Thus, as the communist state imposed its revolution, it created conditions that not only brought Confucius's vices into sharper view but also revealed them to be more definitive of his character than previously believed.

Since moderation and self-possession were, in Confucius' philosophy, the virtues of the "superior man" of the ruling aristocracy, his "doctrine of the mean," formerly applauded by Mao himself, was now condemned as a rationalization of the status quo. A *Ren Min Ri Bao* commentator explained: "[Confucius's] 'doctrine of the mean', from the first day it was created, has stood in opposition to rebellion, progress, reform and dialectics...." This doctrine is expressed in Chinese as *Zhong Yōng*, where *Zhong*

is embodied in Li, whose ultimate referent is slave society, while *Yong* translates into “constancy” or “changelessness.” Thus, *Zhong Yong* denotes the eternal universality of the principles of slavery, which can be neither destroyed nor mitigated. The article concludes: “It has been proved by history that ‘the doctrine of the mean’ is an insidious and deadly ideological weapon. It is a reactionary philosophy employed by capitalist cliques to launch a vindictive comeback and to suppress the revolutionary people. It has the reactionary essence of stubbornly defending the old things in the disguise of eclecticism. It stands in opposition to revolutionary dialectics and the philosophy of struggle” (*Ren Min Ri Bao*: 1974-3-6).

The “Anti-Confucianism Campaign” attacked every aspect of Confucius’s thought: his preoccupation with the golden age of the past rather than the future, his male chauvinism (Liao 1990), his fetishizing of self-conquest and intellect (which lead inevitably to capitalist careerism and elitism), his inability to recognize that ethics are class-based, not universal, the affinity of his ideas with the interests of China’s seemingly indestructible clique of capitalist sympathizers and counter-revolutionaries (Whitehead 1976). And no one had forgotten that Mao’s arch-enemy, Chang Kai-shek, had invoked Confucian teachings against the communists throughout the 1930s (Fran 1975: 95; de Bary, Chan, and Watson 1960: 796-812).

Anti-Confucius sentiment was overdetermined in yet another sense. Cultural revolutionaries’ perception of wayward political leaders (including General Lin Biao, once Mao’s heir apparent who allegedly turned against the Revolution<sup>5</sup>) made more sense in light of the traitors’ devotion to Confucius. As one of our respondents observed, “To criticize Lin Biao effectively it was necessary to connect him to Confucius.” Just as “Confucius was criticized for restoring the Zhou [slaveholder] dynasty,” another respondent explained, “so Lin Biao was criticized for counterrevolutionary efforts to reinstate capitalism.” In short, Lin was a twentieth-century Confucius; Confucius, a fifth-century (B.C.) Lin. As Lin, like Liu, venerated Confucius, he made the perfect target. *Guang Ming Ri Bao*’s (1973-12-6) claim is typical: “In order to restore capitalism, Liu Shaoqi and Lin Biao dug Confucius out of his grave and extolled him to the skies.” Eight out of our ten respondents referred to the attacks on Lin and Liu and said they recognized the ulterior motive behind them.

Ironically, the regime’s attack on Confucius was inspired by Confucius’s own legacy. “Conspiracy,” according to John Fairbank, “was a continual part of Imperial Confucianism because the ruler’s legitimacy was assured only when his proper conduct produced harmony between ruler and ruled.” Criticism by invocation of historical exemplars makes sense in a society in which political consensus is so idealized. As disharmonious it must be expressed secretly (1992:403), which justifies the ruler’s

assumption of a world filled with hidden enemies and traitors and his need for symbols to represent them.

The Confucius of the Cultural Revolution is but one part of a broader “cultural profile” consisting of “images of the past, rhetorical styles, attributions of responsibility” (Olick 1994:12). All the concerns, events, and aspirations associated with the Cultural Revolution—the bridging of the gap between elite and masses, centralization of power, fear of counterrevolution, economic failure, the empowerment of the young, the excesses of the Red Guards—form this profile, this articulated whole in which it became necessary to “use Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought as a weapon [to confront] Confucius’ reactionary ideas and eliminate their pernicious influence so that people will not be poisoned by the ghost of Confucius again” (Yang 1974:66).

Since the Cultural Revolution’s characterization of Confucius conveys no information about him that was unknown in previous years, it cannot be a “reconstruction.” It was a matter of previous interpretations of Confucius—explicitly selective recognitions of his virtues and vices—losing resonance and of the regime rejecting him totally rather than inheriting him critically. That this regime did not reconstruct Confucius is, indeed, the problematic element in its reaction to him. Why could the party not construe itself as the ultimate realization of Confucius’s ideals? As certain scholars (Fan Wenlan and Lu Zhenyu) had actually defined Confucius as a progressive for his time, could it not be argued that he was a protocommunist? The French left, after all, had convinced itself that Joan of Arc was the first socialist. Why could not Confucius be thus transformed? This question assumes special relevance because the original Chinese revolution had extended rather than broken with Confucian despotism.

Liu Xiaobo, a contemporary philosopher (cited in Chong 1993), has observed that the “totalitarian Confucian value system still persists in a Marxist-Leninist guise” (p. 125). Liu’s observation on the 1949 communist revolution is paralleled by Fairbank’s (1992:252) observation on the 1912 republican revolution. The new military governors and provincial assemblies, far from adopting an active attitude toward the world, had inherited the gentry’s Confucian aversion to disorder and never developed alternatives to the patriarchal tyranny of the Confucian family system (p. 264). Even in Chinese cities, critical social movements “combined popular righteousness with a continued subservience to authority” (p. 274). The rigid cultural climate at once reflected and helped to sustain Confucian values.

To affirm the stability of Confucius’s image in the face of radical change is not to exaggerate its uniqueness. The case of Confucius actually conforms to many of the contours of recent collective memory studies, as Zelizer (1995) has described them. Confucius’s memory is *processual*—con-

stantly unfolding, changing, and transforming; it is *unpredictable*—embraced by the new communist regime and rejected unexpectedly during its Cultural Revolution; it is *partial* in that Confucius's positive and negative qualities are more or less visible according to the conditions under which they are contemplated; *usable* because invoked as a tool to defend party aims and agendas; at once *particularistic* among communists aware of its class-linked source and *universalistic* among Confucianists seeing its transcending class and national boundaries; and, finally, Confucius's image is *material*—embodied in physical objects and places. Thus, the unreconstructability of Confucius hardly revolutionizes our conception of collective memory, but it does modify our conception in a way that becomes clearer as we move into the post-revolutionary period.

### AFTER THE REVOLUTION

The campaign against Confucius grew in intensity as the Cultural Revolution gained momentum, but as the Revolution played itself out Confucius's prestige rose to a level higher than it was when the Revolution began. The new Confucius was affected by the new policies, conditions, actors, goals, and anxieties of China's present; but it was the perceived reality of the old Confucius that defined the present's moral relevance.

In 1976 Mao Zedong died, the Cultural Revolution ended, Deng Xiaoping soon assumed power, and China entered a new phase of political development. The aftermath of the Cultural Revolution included the same erosion of social values and tradition that attended the West's industrial revolutions. The first step towards stabilizing this political environment was to rehabilitate the hundreds of thousands convicted of political crimes; the second, to condemn the Cultural Revolution itself and punish its principal leaders, the Gang of Four. Mao, on the other hand, could not be summarily denounced without undermining the regime's own legitimacy. Party spokesmen resolved the dilemma by dividing his life into a good early phase, accounting for about 70 percent of his influence, and a bad late phase accounting for about 30 percent. Mao was critically inherited, and so again, after a decade of Cultural Revolution, was Confucius.

The ultimate goal of Deng Xioping's regime was move China not to its pre-Cultural Revolution state but to a new place in the world. To achieve this goal, China's moral order had to be reinforced. Before the Cultural Revolution, Confucius helped to legitimate a new and inexperienced Communist regime. After the Cultural Revolution, he was pressed to the service of broader and more ambitious ends—to dignify and stabilize a backward

society seeking a place in the modern world. To this end, an old vehicle of meaning, critical inheritance, had to be restarted.

After the new authority assumed power, it restored the Confucian shrines that the Red Guard had pillaged and punished vandals severely; some, with death. Simultaneously, it denounced the Gang of Four for its criticism of Confucius. The discursive logic centered on the relationship between present and past. One commentator, after making a positive assessment of Confucius's pedagogy, exclaimed: "... let us thoroughly criticize the Gang of Four for its anti-history fallacy of breaking completely with all the cultural heritage and totally repudiating Confucius. Let us take over all the good cultural heritage of our nation and work hard to establish a new system of proletarian education. . . " (*Ren Min Ri Bao*: 1978-7-18). An academic writer recalled that during the Cultural Revolution "restraining oneself and observing Li" were interpreted as Confucius' principles for restoring slavery. In fact, observing Li should be explained not as restoring Li but as practicing its virtues." Confucius, after all, sought order without oppression (*Journal of Northeast Normal University* 1986:2). On a more concrete level, *Guang Ming Ri Bao* reaffirmed Confucius's relevance to China's present situation by refuting the Gang of Four's claim that he was too genteel to be bothered with farming and military matters (*Guang Ming Ri Bao*: 1978-9-12). Both levels, the philosophical and the mundane, were infused by the same egalitarian logic.

Pro-Confucian discourse became more animated as China's economy opened to trade and state-regulated market enterprise in the late 1980s; yet, many young scholars saw traditional Confucian culture as an insular hindrance to modern China's development. The only way for China to survive, they said, is to replace Confucianism with western individualism. Part of the regime's conscious effort to merge the traditional with the modern (a practice more widespread in Asia than in the West [Lipset 1996]) was its establishing the Chinese Association of Confucius Study in Qu Fu. Confucius's every vice must be rejected, but his virtues must be recognized and assimilated into the Four Modernizations—industry, agriculture, national defense, science and technology. Such was the Association's mandate.

As the Four Modernizations exposed China to the outside world and made it vulnerable to the social maladies of Western commodity societies, the new Confucianists insisted that reformed governmental, business, and family ethics would preserve tradition as China modernized. Thus, in 1989, when the state decided to make explicit its acceptance of the Confucian tradition by commemorating the 2540th anniversary of Confucius's birth, Gu Mu, member of the State Council of the Peoples Republic and nominal head of the Confucius Foundation, delivered the defining address. The attendance of the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Jiang Zemin, Vice-Premier Wu Xueqian, as well as the timing of the ceremony

(soon after the Tian Anmen Square Massacre) underscored the significance of Gu's speech. Gu Mu extolled Confucius in the name of the party and the nation:

China has a long history and splendid ancient culture. The Chinese culture represented by Confucianism once shined brilliantly in our history but has become dimmer during the last two hundred years [the decline of empire and ascent of republicanism]. Since the foundation of the People's Republic of China, however, we have made rapid progress in economic and cultural construction. We are beginning to see a bright future. Vicissitudes of a country may be due to complex objective causes as well as subjective causes. We should have an introspective analysis of this problem" (Gu, 1989).

The objects of such "introspective analysis" included Mao; the instruments, Confucianism. Gu had avowed the historical role of Confucianism and the achievements of the Chinese Communist Party while calling for detailed study of the Cultural Revolution's disastrous effects (part of communism's "vicissitudes"). Doing so, he refuted radicals who would negate both the recent (communist) and remote (Confucian) past. Neither communism nor Confucianism, he said, are responsible for China's underdevelopment.

Towards the end of his speech Gu Mu stressed the Confucian concept of "the preciousness of harmony." The Tiananmen Square Massacre (June 4, 1989) made Gu's statement resonant. Chinese officials construed the Tiananmen demonstration as an example of the threat posed by anti-traditional (democratic) trends and condemned it by broadcasting quotations from Confucius (*Christian Science Monitor*, Oct. 12, 1989:6).

As Gu Mu emphasized tradition, he condemned the rejecters of Chinese culture and uncritical worshipers of western culture. Understanding Confucius is essential to the task of balancing tradition and modernity, but Gu makes no effort to reconstruct Confucius, mold him into a founder of modern China, deny the feudal framework of his philosophy, or conceal what is objectionable in his teaching. The problem, after the Cultural Revolution as before, is to know Confucius as he was, to cherish what is useful and good in his thought and to reject everything else. In Gu's words, "We can neither eulogize Confucianism blindly nor repudiate it simply. The correct attitude is to inherit it critically" (cited in Mu, 1989:19).

The ideological importance of critical inheritance was evident in methodological reform. In academic circles, the "method of class analysis," the major method of studying Confucius before the Cultural Revolution, was replaced by the "method of equivalence" and the "method of three divisions." The "method of three divisions," based on the view that Confucius' thought can be divided into categories that are totally acceptable, totally rejectable, or acceptable and rejectable in part, is the methodological component of critical inheritance. Scholars adopting the "method of equivalence" hold that the class interests with which Confucius was identified are

irrelevant to the evaluation of his historical role. The issue is whether Confucius's thought reflected the progressive or regressive trends of his own society.

The slippage between political structures and images of the past are particularly evident in the present case, which shows two very different regimes—Mao's pre-revolutionary regime seeking to establish itself and become self-sufficient and Deng's post-revolutionary regime seeking to transcend self-sufficiency and become part of a modern world—conceiving Confucius almost identically. We say "almost identically" because the need for Confucius was based on different grounds—political legitimation in the first phase; the need for meaning, national identity, and roots in the second phase. It would be fair to say that in this second phase the public was receptive to Confucianism because it sustained the tradition and proud heritage that the Cultural Revolution had deliberately attacked.

## CONCLUSION

The less traditional the culture, the more that can be done with the past interpretively. This is why American heroes, emerging in a tradition-weak society, meet the minimum definition of reconstruction while Confucius, emerging in a tradition-steeped society, does not. For reconstruction of the past to occur, moral sentiments, in Emile Durkheim's words, "must not be hostile to change, and consequently must have but moderate energy. If they were too strong, they would no longer be plastic. Every pattern is an obstacle to new patterns, to the extent that the first pattern is inflexible" (1950 [1895]:69). Chinese consciousness is not inflexible, but it is highly stable and this is why, by studying it, we gain knowledge of how collective memory resists social changes that would elsewhere induce its reconstruction. We have emphasized, in this connection, that the communist regime's quest for unity took form in continuity with the very tradition it disparaged. As Fairbank put it, "The totalitarian claims of Leninism perpetuated the claims of the imperial autocracy. The Neo-Confucian doctrines as absolute truth were substituted by Marxism-Leninism, which was equally all-embracing and absolute" (1992:430). These ironic continuities have affected deeply the workings of Chinese memory. Unlike Joan of Arc and Abraham Lincoln, who are ambiguous enough to be loved by anyone for any reason (Kertzer, 1988:71), Confucius can be unconditionally loved (uncritically inherited) only by the status quo's defenders. The core of Confucius' doctrine, which includes the concepts of "the preciousness of harmony," "the doctrine of the mean," *Ren*, and *Li* endorses the status quo and opposes revolution—cultural as well as political.

Reverence is no less profound for being conditional. If reverence for Confucius can be officially suspended, his place in the collective imagination is too deeply installed to be altered fundamentally. Confucianism's unchanging core does not mean that different generations and different people evaluate Confucius in unchanging ways. Each generation passes on to the next an image of him that differs from the image it inherited. This new image includes new evaluations of the different parts of Confucius's life and doctrine and changing levels of prestige, but its content remains stable. This is the essence of critical inheritance: the past serves present interests not by unwitting reconstruction but deliberately selective appreciation and condemnation.

That critical inheritance is useful for a society pulled in the direction of both modernity and tradition is evident, for when this tension dissipates—when society pulls in one direction only: away from the past, as it did during the Cultural Revolution—critical inheritance is abandoned and the orienting past-tense of tradition is lost. The two dimensions of critical inheritance, when in use, embody Michael Schudson's observation that "the past is constantly being retold in order to legitimate present interests." Had Confucius's assumed character and teachings not been applicable to China's changing conditions and needs, he could have never been idolized for so long. Yet, Confucius's ancient and modern images possess similar elements, which reflects Schudson's (1987) complementary belief that "the past is in some respects, and under some conditions, highly resistant to efforts to make it over" (p. 105). Tradition, Schudson added, offers the most potent resistance. The ways people reconstruct the past are "confined to the experiences of their own traditions" (pp. 108-9). Contemporary Chinese, given their valorization of piety, self-restraint, hierarchy, and tradition, have come to know and revere the same Confucius that was known and revered in earlier times.

Now, as before, "the centre stage in almost all approaches to Chinese social behaviour is commanded by Confucius" (Bond and Hwang 1987:214). Might this statement be exaggerated? As China develops technologically and becomes more open to Western influence, reverence for the past, and for Confucius in particular, must become mitigated. Indeed, the process of attrition, first articulated by the republican ideologues of the May Fourth Movement of 1919, has been evident since the beginning of the century. Confucius, although remaining at the core of the still vibrant "habits of the heart" of the Chinese people (Wei-ming, 1991:5), cannot be revered in an urban-industrial society to the same extent as he was in traditional China's agricultural society. Such is the position of China's progressives.

As China's economy moves away from orthodox socialism, however, its government finds nationalism a necessary source of ideological support. The "return to the ancients" and new interest in their great monuments

and shrines are presently invoked to articulate nationalist sentiment, and no theme in the literature on the changing China is more visible than the “remarkable comeback” and increasing relevance of Confucius as a moral model (Bordewich 1991; Spence 1993; *Christian Science Monitor*, May, 24, 1993:10; Engardio 1995). Indeed, Gu Mu, in his speech to the first meeting of the International Confucian Association on the 2,545th anniversary of Confucius’s birth gave expression to the present “Confucianism Craze” (for detail see Hongyan 1997) by announcing that Confucius remains not only the Great Presence of China but will be China’s greatest gift to the world (Ching 1994:37).

To appreciate the gift of Confucius in China, however, the role of “fabrication”—the intentional effort of one or more individuals to manipulate or even falsify history—must be discounted (see Goffman 1974:83-123). What motives, then, should we attribute to party officials resorting to Confucius? What should we make of the work of editors, political information bureaus, and other publicists? Is Confucius’s image invoked by the state and the media as Christ’s image is invoked in the West by the church? Or is his image used to manipulate the masses into supporting a cause toward which they might be otherwise indifferent.

Chinese officials do not always consciously manipulate; they often believe that their efforts to affect others’ opinions are in the general interest. The fabrication concept is useful, however, because it helps distinguish influencing agents who share their audience’s values from agents who induce their audience to adopt values to which it is not committed or of which the agents alone approve. Conflict theories of memory are referring to this kind of fabrication when they assert that any image of the past is “a product of elite manipulation” (Bodnar 1992:20). Since the dominant class’s images celebrate the dominant ideology, Baigell (1993:201, 204) observes, they “can be seen as a form of oppression” or, at best, baneful influence. The conflict theories, however, assume dissensus to be the natural state of society, dismissing the possibility that image-makers, even in an authoritarian society, might embrace the same values and goals as their audience and invoke shared symbols to articulate, rather than to manipulate, its sentiment. This second point is the most fundamental. To focus exclusively on the use of Confucius’s image by the Chinese Communist Party leads to a supply-side theory that attends to the production of images but ignores how the images are received. Reception, however, is always problematic. The state’s success or failure in generating support for itself by appealing to Confucius is determined by the public’s endorsement of the values Confucius symbolized, the public’s belief that those values are worth preserving, and its perception that the state is their custodian rather than their exploiter. Between the remembrance of Confucius and the immediate problems of maintaining authoritarian control in a rapidly democ-

ratizing world exists a relation that neither the concepts of manipulation and propaganda, nor the related concepts of dominant ideology and false consciousness, can formulate.

Thus, it will not do to universalize Maurice Halbwachs's observation that "collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past...." (1941:353). Since critical inheritance warrants the embracing of Confucius without the total acceptance of his doctrine, it enables collective memory and tradition to subserve, yet subsist independently of, present powers and policies. Allowing expression of positive attitudes toward Confucius without enshrining his negative legacy, critical inheritance seeks to preserve tradition while legitimating uninhibited modernization. Thus, Confucius, unreconstructed, remains relevant in contemporary China.

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### ENDNOTES

1. In a second strand of the politics of memory literature, power is diffused rather than concentrated and collective memories emerge out of a context of cross-cutting coalitions, networks, and enterprises. Writings on the fate of artistic (Lang and Lang 1990) and presidential (Fine 1996) reputations, Holocaust memories (Irwin-Zarecka 1994), place-naming and monument-making (Gregory and Lewis 1988; Zelinsky 1988; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991), and the organization of museums (Barthel 1996) all link memory to pluralistic networks of interest and power.
2. The "symbolically reconstructed past," for Mead, refers to a fictive past which is created to manipulate social relationships in the present (Maines, Sugrue, and Katovich 1983). Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott (1989), on the other hand, demonstrate how the collective memory of generations is affected by a psychological imprinting phenomenon.
3. So intense was the Chinese determination to adjust to rather than master the world that it seemed to many to be a biological inheritance. Weber took this claim seriously at first, but concluded that the "traits which are considered innate may be the products of purely historical and cultural influences" (Gerth: 229).
4. It is probably no coincidence that the first systematic anti-Confucius campaigns took place during the Qin dynasty. Shi Huangdi became emperor in the third century B.C. under the influence of Legalist reforms that rivaled Confucianism by emphasizing government by formal rules and centralized administration. At this time came to pass *Fenshu Kengru*, meaning literally the burning of books and the burying of Confucianists.
5. Lin Biao was the appointed successor of Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution. According to the mass media, Lin Biao and his clique tried but failed to start a military coup d'état in September of 1971. The campaign against Lin Biao and Confucius began after this event.

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