

The Myth of Mao Zedong

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Abstract

On the parapet of Tiananmen Mao Zedong on October 1, 1949, declared: "The Chinese have stood up!". We can find the beginning of the myth of Mao in this simple sentence from the father of modern free China. At this very moment, it was a god who was speaking for the Chinese. Even after the mistakes of the Great leap forward and the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong remains a myth for all Chinese, with the same characteristics as religious myth. Nowadays people still strive to get closer to Mao in the sacred space of his birth place and mausoleum, and in the sacred time of commemoration. Mao Zedong is a true myth in the criteria of Eliade, as he is the initiator of modern China and because thanks to him, China became the master of its destiny.

Introduction

Leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) 1935–76. Mao was a founder of the CCP in 1921, and became its leader in 1935. He organized the Long March 1934–35 and the war of liberation 1937–49, following which he established a People's Republic and communist rule in China. He was state president until 1959, and headed the CCP until his death. His authority diminished with the collapse of his 1958–60 Great Leap Forward. Mao emerged as a strong leader again during the 1966–69 Cultural Revolution, which he launched in order to cleanse the party of 'revisionism'.

How could a son of a peasant change the steam of History and the face of the world? How can a simple person be elevated to the status of a god by an empire, and remain a myth after terrible mistakes? We try to give answers to these question in the following paper.

After a short biography of Mao, we extract his achievements and failures in order to find elements that gave him his status in modern China. Then we present the theory of the myth of Mircea Eliade, and from the tributes to Mao Zedong paid to him on the China 50 years of communism and 110th Anniversary of Mao Zedong's Birth, try to see if Mao fits Eliade's theory. We analyze what remains from Mao Zedong's era in present time from the point of view of Eliade description of myth. The reinterpretation of his life and rituals remaining in the sacred place and sacred time that are related to his life match the description of Eliade's religious myth.

Communism put at the level of a religion in the desacralized world of modern China confirms that the myth will never disappear and that in modern societies it reasserts itself with considerable force, in the form of a political myth [Eliade1977] .

Life of Mao Zedong

The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition (2001) describes the life of Mao Zedong as follows:

Mao Zedong or Mao Tse-tung , 1893–1976, founder of the People’s Republic of China. One of the most prominent Communist theoreticians, Mao’s ideas on revolutionary struggle and guerrilla warfare were extremely influential, especially among Third World revolutionaries.

Of Hunanese peasant stock, Mao was trained in Chinese classics and later received a modern education. As a young man he observed oppressive social conditions, becoming one of the original members of the Chinese Communist party. He organized (1920s) Kuomintang-sponsored peasant and industrial unions and directed (1926) the Kuomintang’s Peasant Movement Training Institute. After the Kuomintang-Communist split (1927), Mao led the disastrous “Autumn Harvest Uprising” in Hunan, leading to his ouster from the central committee of the party. From 1928 until 1931 Mao, with Zhu De and others, established rural soviets in the hinterlands, and built the Red Army. In 1931 he was elected chairman of the newly established Soviet Republic of China, based in Jiangxi province. After withstanding five encirclement campaigns launched by Chiang Kai-shek, Mao led (1934–35) the Red Army on the long march (6,000 mi/9,656 km) from Jiangxi north to Yan’an in Shaanxi province, emerging as the most important Communist leader. During the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45) the Communists and the Kuomintang continued their civil war while both were battling the Japanese invaders.

The civil war continued after war with Japan had ended, and in 1949, after the Communists had taken almost all of mainland China, Mao became chairman of the central government council of the newly established People’s Republic of China; he was reelected to the post, the most powerful in China, in 1954. In an attempt to break with the Russian model of Communism and to imbue the Chinese people with renewed revolutionary vigor, Mao launched (1958) the Great Leap Forward. The program was a failure, 20 million people starved, and Mao withdrew temporarily from public view. The failure of this program also resulted in a break with the Soviet Union, which cut off aid. Mao accused Soviet leaders of betraying Marxism. In 1959 Liu Shaoqi, an opponent of the Great Leap Forward, replaced Mao as chairman of the central government council, but Mao retained his chairmanship of the Communist party politburo.

A campaign to reestablish Mao’s ideological line culminated in the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). Mass mobilization, begun and led by Mao and his wife, Jiang Qing, was directed against the party leadership. Liu and others were removed from power in 1968. In 1969 Mao reasserted his party leadership by serving as chairman of the Ninth Communist Party Congress, and in 1970 he was named supreme commander of the nation and army. The cultural revolution group continued its campaigns until Mao’s death in Sept., 1976. A month later its leaders were purged and Mao’s surviving opponents, led by Deng Xiaoping, slowly regained power, pushing aside Mao’s successor, Hua Guofeng, and erasing the cult surrounding Mao [Columbia2001].

John F. Burns describes the dark side of Mao's private life in the New York Times: From Short, we learn that Mao never brushed his teeth, preferring a daily mouthwash of tea, and that he had to be persuaded, after the Communist victory in 1949, to give up using his garden in the Forbidden City for an open-air toilet. In similar vein, Short and Spence take us into Mao's bedroom, chronicling his high jinks with young women assistants, several of whom might be sharing the Great Helmsman's bed at any one time. To anyone who lived in China when Mao was still alive, if always invisible after his last public appearance on May 1, 1971, this is rich indeed. Who, in 1970, could have imagined that the China that had declared extramarital sex "counterrevolutionary" was led by a man who, scarcely able to tolerate the sight of Jiang Qing, his wife, had banished her from his presence and, according to Short, had replaced her in his bed "with as many young women as he wished"? [Burns2000].

Achievements and mistakes of Mao's life

The Long march (Chin., Changzheng) was the journey of c.6,000 mi (9,660 km) undertaken by the Red Army of China in 1934–35. When their Jiangxi prov. Soviet base was encircled by the Nationalist army of Chiang Kai-shek, some 90,000 men and women broke through the siege (Oct., 1934) and marched westward to Guizhou prov. There, at the Zunyi Conference (Jan., 1935), Mao Zedong won leadership of the Communist party and decided to join the remote Shaanxi prov. Soviet base. Overcoming numerous natural obstacles (such as towering mountain ranges and turbulent rivers) and despite constant harassment by Nationalist troops and the armies of provincial warlords, the Red Army arrived at its new home in the north in Oct., 1935. However, more than half of the original marchers were lost in this almost incredible trek. Those who survived settled around the city of Yan'an [Longmarch].

The Great leap forward (1957–60) was Chinese economic plan aimed at revitalizing all sectors of the economy. Initiated by Mao Zedong, the plan emphasized decentralized, labor-intensive industrialization, typified by the construction of thousands of backyard steel furnaces in place of large steel mills. Wildly unrealistic planning, poorly planned communization of agriculture, and a poor harvest in 1959 caused mass starvation. Mao was forced to turn government administration over to Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping [Greatleap].

Cultural revolution (1966–76) has been a mass mobilization of urban Chinese youth inaugurated by Mao Zedong, attempting to prevent development of a bureaucratized Soviet style of communism. Mao closed schools and encouraged students to join Red Guard units, which persecuted Chinese teachers and intellectuals and enforced Mao's cult of personality. The movement for criticism of party officials, intellectuals, and "bourgeois values" turned violent, and the Red Guard split into factions. Many people died in the ensuing purges. The Cultural Revolution also caused economic disruption; industrial production dropped by 12% from 1966 to 1968. In 1967, Mao ordered the Army to stem Red Guard factionalism but promote the Guard's radical goals. When the military itself threatened to factionalize, Mao dispersed the Red Guards, and began to rebuild the Party [Culturalrevolution].

It is the darker aspects of Mao's rule that are the real focus of his books. Authors give appalling tolls for the upheavals Mao instigated. Spence quotes Mao as saying that 700,000 "local bullies and evil gentry" were killed in attacks on landlords and other "counter-revolutionaries" between 1950 and 1952. The Great Leap Forward of 1958, and the ensuing famine of 1960 and 1961, cost at least 20 million lives, again by Spence's reckoning, while "many millions" more died in the Cultural Revolution. Short, estimating the total number of victims at a minimum of 23 million, a maximum of 35 million, concludes that Mao "brought about the deaths of more of his own people than any other leader" in history [Burns2000].

Two other points of interest on the influence of Mao on China are on one hand the simplification of Chinese writing with the creation of the new set of ideograms. This measure was taken in order to allow mass education and teach reading and writing to the people, but also the separation of Chinese people from their history, as they were no more able to read old books. The aim was the creation of a new man in China, disconnected from his past and educated by Marxist propaganda, during political teaching that took place in schools and work places. The second point of importance was a call for a demographic movement in the 1950s, which is now responsible for the huge problem of overpopulation in China. The aim of this movement was to built an invincible China through the amount of its population.

If we summarize the influence and status of Mao Zedong, we can observe that after gaining power in China, and having declared the independence of the new communist state, his political life is characterized by many failures, first with the modernization of the country, but also his policy of demography and culture. Nevertheless, he has brought more equality in China, especially between men and women, and also mass education, even though tainted by a furious propaganda. His political era is dominated by his excesses of power and his tyranny which caused the suffering and the death of millions of people. But in the end what Chinese want to remember is that he has given them independence from foreign invasion. Thanks to him, China became the master of its destiny. He stands at the beginning of modern China, and although his status of god during his life has fallen, his myth for Chinese and many people all over the world will prevail as he is at the beginning of something that continues to be nowadays: a free and modern China.

Many authors have theorized about myth. We have chosen to study the myth of Mao in the light of Eliade theory and see if the myth of Mao Zedong fits in. The next section deals with a summary of Eliade's views and theory about myth.

Myth according to Eliade

What exactly is a myth? In the language current during the nineteenth century, a « myth » meant anything that was opposed to « reality »: the creation of Adam, of the invisible man, no less than the history of the world as described by the Zulus. In « primitive » societies myth is thought to express the absolute truth, because it narrates a sacred history; that is a trans human revelation which took place at the dawn of the Great Time, in the holy time of the beginnings (*in illo tempore*). Being real and sacred, the myth becomes exemplary, and consequently repeatable, for it serves as a model, and by the same token as a justification, far all human actions. In

other words, a myth is a true story of what came to pass at the beginning of Time, and one which provides the pattern for human behavior [Eliade1977].

Mircea Eliade defines the myth as a narration of a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the « beginnings ». In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came to existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality – an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution. Myth then is always an account of a « creation »; it relates how something was produced, began to be. Myth tells only of that which really happened, which manifested itself completely. The actors of myths are Supernatural Beings. They are known primarily by what they did in the transcendent times of the « beginnings » [Eliade1975].

In short, myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the « supernatural ») into the world.

In general it can be said that myth, as experienced by archaic societies

- 1) constitute the History of the acts of the Supernaturals
 - 2) that this History is considered to be absolutely true (because it is concerned with realities) and sacred (because it is the work of the Supernaturals)
 - 3) that myth is always related to a « creation », it tells how something came into existence, or how a pattern of behavior, an institution, a manner of working were established; this is why myths constitute the paradigms for all significant human acts;
 - 4) that by knowing the myth one knows the « origin » of things and hence can control and manipulate them at will; this is not an « external », « abstract » knowledge but that one « experiences » ritually, either by ceremonially recounting the myth or by performing the ritual for which it is the justification;
 - 5) that in one way or another one « lives » the myth, in the sense that one is seized by the sacred, exalting power of the events recollected or re-enacted.
- « Living » a myth, then, implies a genuinely « religious » experience, since it differs from the ordinary experience of everyday life [Eliade1975].

Eliade differentiates sacred space from sacred time [Eliade1957] :

- 1) a sacred place constitutes a break in the homogeneity of space
- 2) this break is symbolized by an opening by which passage from one cosmic region to another is made possible (from heaven to earth and vice versa; from earth to the underworld);
- 3) communication with heaven is expressed by one or another of certain images, all of which refer to the *axis mundi*: pillar (cf the *universalis columna*), ladder (cf Jacob's ladder) mountain, tree, vine etc;
- 4) around this cosmic axis lies the world (=our world), hence the axis is located “in the middle”, at the “navel of the earth”; it is the center of the world.

To live near to a Center of the World is, in short, equivalent to living as close as possible to the gods, and to reintegrate the sacred time of origin is equivalent to becoming contemporary with the gods, hence to living in their presence – even if their presence is mysterious in the way that it is not always visible. The intention that can be read in the experience of sacred space and sacred time reveals a desire to reintegrate a primordial situation – that in which the gods and the mythical ancestors were present, that is, were engaged in creating the world, or in organizing it, or in

revealing the foundations of civilization to man.

The temple is not only an *imago mundi*; it is also interpreted as the earthly reproduction of a transcendent model, and every religious festival, any liturgical time, represents the reactualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, “in the beginning”. If religious man feels the need of indefinitely reproducing the same paradigmatic acts and gestures, this is because he desires and attempts to live close to his gods [Eliade1957] .

The next section is dedicated to the similarities between the definition of myth by Eliade and the example of Mao Zedong myth, through the analysis of its different aspects. We have chosen most evidences of Mao's myth in the commemorations of *China 50 years of communism (1999)* and *110th Anniversary of Mao Zedong's Birth (2004)*.

The myth of Mao Zedong

The greatest symbol of Mao Zedong's myth is his portrait on the *Tian an men*, facing the *Tian an men* square. The Chinese *Tian* means at once the sky and the god of the sky [Eliade1957], *an* means harmony and *men*: door. So *Tian an men* (Gate of Heavenly Peace) is considered by Chinese like the center of the world, their *axis mundi*. It is the main entrance of the forbidden city, a palace where the emperor lived and which was forbidden to the population, a sacred place because the first emperors were said do be gods coming from heaven in order to rule the world. October 1, 1949, Chairman Mao Zedong proclaimed the founding of the new China from the top of this gate. Therefore, after the almost incredible trek of the long march, and his victory on occupying forces in China, he was believed, and still is for many Chinese, to be a god, replacing the emperors of old China. This shows that in China, the process of desacralization has never been carried out to its final extreme [Eliade1957]. The difference is that nowadays, Chinese who are asked about their religion answer that they are communist. For Eliade, Marx 's classless society, and the consequent disappearance of all historical tensions, find their most exact precedent in the myth of the Golden Age which, according to a number of traditions, lies at the beginning and the end of History [Eliade1977].

Many commemorations take place every year, TV shows and movies retrace the highlights of Mao's era. It is not hard to find other evidence that he lives on in the minds of Chinese people. From the lucky talisman which hangs from a Beijing taxi driver's windscreen, to books, badges, cigarette lighters - even Chairman Mao yo-yos - the Mao memorabilia industry is alive and well. Their motives are varied: from simple curiosity, to nationalistic pride, to nostalgia for a past which seemed to have a greater sense of moral certainty than the materialistic and commercially-driven China of today. Indeed, there is something ironic in the commercialism which surrounds much of Mao's memory. Dealers in trinkets and lucky knick-knacks - from cheap to exorbitant - would not have been approved of in politically purer days. Amongst ordinary Chinese, his legend is so woven into the fabric of society that he has gained something of the status of a popular cult. A restaurant owner intent on making money will see no contradiction in putting up a poster of the Chairman for good luck [China1999].

On the 110th Anniversary of Mao Zedong's Birth [tribute] Mao Zedong is defined like a revolutionary, prominent Communist theoretician, military genius, poet, and founder of the People's Republic of China, an icon to millions. A teacher at Peking University finds that young students are now approaching the great leader with their own understanding. She quotes some paragraphs of her students:

- "Mao Zedong used to be a god in my mind, then, his glamorous image suddenly fell to the earth as I came to know about the Cultural Revolution. But now, I would say: Mao is a great person—a great person who had made mistakes. We can't write off his achievements because of the mistakes. "
- "Mao was at the forefront of change. Usually people choose to follow the changes of the times, and wait for others to stand out. When confronted with difficulties, I always hoped someone could stand out. Now I will not retreat, and will work hard to realize my goals."
- "Mao Zedong had high aspirations and clear objectives. He is telling us what the true meaning of life is. Is it only for one's own development? No, one will only be successful when he wins and losses with the entire country."

Professor Liang Zhu, a renowned researcher on the history of Communist Party says: "Today's college students can hardly understand the hardships and difficulties experienced by past generations. They are, instead, growing up in a well-off society, without many concerns. But it doesn't mean that they have nothing to learn from the late leader. Actually, Mao Zedong's works convey high ideals and aspirations. His rally for young people to be noble-minded and pure and place moral integrity above vulgar interests is still of great value to the youth of today". Professor Liang Zhu adds Mao Zedong's love of reading, his idea of seeking truth from facts, his strict self-discipline, and his virtue of being thrifty will stand as an example for young people for years to come. "Our members come from different departments, from economy to architecture, and join in the organization voluntarily. The study of Mao Zedong Thought remains an important part of our activity. Although we argued a lot about Mao's mistakes, our evaluation of Mao tends to be more objective."

In the following of this section, we divide the evidences of Mao Zedong's myth into sacred place and sacred time according to Eliade's analysis. People try to get closer to the myth by entering sacred places or remembering the sacred time when Mao was alive.

Sacred place

birthplace & Mausoleum

Chairman Mao - the "Great Helmsman" of the Chinese revolution - still holds a dominant position at the heart of China's capital, Beijing - at least symbolically. His portrait stares out over Tiananmen Square, the place where, in 1949, he declared to ecstatic crowds that the Chinese people had "stood up" after years of corrupt rule, civil war, and foreign oppression. Every year, Chinese in their millions visit Mao's birthplace, Shaoshan, and file past his embalmed body in the Mao Mausoleum in Tiananmen Square [China1999].

"Many people are now showing interest in learning more about the great man," said 65-year-old He Bingyu, a retired worker from the station. "The 21-kilometre-long railway quickly become one of the busiest of its kind in China after it was completed in 1967. The trains were always crowded with visitors to the residence," he recalled. "As a result, one more train had to be added to the original two to share the load." A

similar situation has occurred at the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall on the Tian'anmen Square in Beijing. An official at the hall refuted reports that the influence of Mao among young Chinese has largely diminished and almost all visitors to the hall are about or below middle age. "There are lots of young people, not necessarily organized by their schools, visiting the hall to show their respect to the great man, who has led the country from war and poverty to independence and prosperity," he said [legacy2003].

Sacred time

Little red book

"My father is an old Communist Party member and took part in the revolutionary work before the liberation. He is a loyal follower of Mao Zedong, and like all others in his age group, he can recite Mao's 'Little Red Book' from memory, although he never learned how to read or write." During the 1960's and 70's Mao was feverishly revered in China and had his thoughts and theories printed into handy, small red books for the whole country to study. With a circulation of approximately 5 billion copies in different languages, the "Little Red Book," called the "Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong", was one of the world's bestsellers at the time [tribute].

Collect the Badge, Store the History

Collecting has always been a favorite hobby among Chinese people. These collectors target a wide range of items, from cigarette packages and matchboxes to stamps and stones. In the past 20 years, a new item was added to the list of highly sought-after possessions. That is a badge, with the face of the late Chinese leader Mao Zedong. The badges bear witness to the history of the Chinese Communist Party. It is thought that the first Mao Zedong Badge was made in 1942 in Yan'an in northwest China. After this, more badges were made, but in a small quantity. During the first four years of the Cultural Revolution, between 1966 and 1970, the production of Mao Zedong Badge peaked. Every factory and enterprise, or even the family, would make badges by themselves.

"During the Cultural Revolution, when I was still a middle school student, my family members all liked Mao Zedong Badges very much. My father and his colleagues often made their own. Their badges were extremely exquisite. I love them so much and have kept them until now. Sometimes I sit at my desk for hours, admiring the badges, until my wife come to turn off my desk lamp." "I want to build an online museum, which contains 50,000 types of Mao Zedong badges."

Mao Zedong Badges have earned a special place in the history of badges around the world. "Many countries, like the U.S., France or the Soviet Union, also issued beautiful and exquisite badges of various themes. But as a leader's badge, the Mao Zedong Badge is incomparable to others both in quantity and variety." People have been collecting Mao Zedong Badges for twenty years [Tribute].

Tv, cinema, songs

"The East is red, the sun has risen! China has produced Mao Zedong!" This powerful tune brings us today's China Melody. Apart from the famous song "The East is Red," songs in praise of Mao Zedong have reached every corner of China over the past half-century and have been imprinted in people's minds. During the 1950s and

60s, China produced a huge variety of popular songs. Full of admiration for the great leader and longing for a bright future, people wrote simple yet deeply affectionate songs. Many of these familiar melodies are still hummed by many middle-aged people. And in fact, more and more young singers are trying their hand at reinterpreting these classic songs. New creations do not confine themselves to old melodies, and many groups have even tried their hands at pop versions of Mao Zedong's quotations and poems [tribute].

A number of movies have been done as means of propaganda during the reign of Mao Zedong, but also many films nowadays find their sources in the period of Chinese revolution and even during the tragic period of cultural revolution. This shows the great impact in modern Chinese culture of Mao Zedong era. Television make also special programs for the birthday of Mao.

It is interesting to read how the legacy of Mao Zedong is reinterpreted in the light of present trends in China: Whereas others from Kang Youwei to Sun Yat-sen made attempts to reform China and make her take a pride of place as among the equals of the world, they never succeeded. Mao Zedong made the difference. From 1950 all vestiges of Western and Japanese past were laid to rest. China became the master of its destiny. If Mao Zedong were to say to us now, he would want us to get on in life and not harp on the past with hatred and vengeance. He might add that we must make friends with the US, the West, Japan and the rest of the world. Ever the champion of the underdogs, Mao Zedong would want us to respect and take care of our own compatriots, even if they are of different political hue. So when Mao Zedong said, "The east is red!" he meant China herald in an era of peace and tranquility, where the Chinese people is a red beacon to the rest of the world as a nation of equal rights and opportunities, and where everyone has his or her rights and freedom. Mao Zedong erred in later life, but that is for the Chinese to accept and live with his errors. In the end, the legacy Mao Zedong left behind exonerates his frailties and foibles; and his mistakes, though gigantic, never diminish his stature [ChinaDaily2004].

For all Mao's mistakes, it is more than just nostalgia which underpins his status.

For many, Mao's era symbolized a kind of higher purpose, and moral clarity, which is missing today. While many of China's dynamic entrepreneurs are too young for the Cultural Revolution to carry much meaning, Mao represents for them a fierce nationalism and pride at a time when China - after the bitter humiliations of the past - is becoming increasingly confident on the world stage [China1999].

From historical facts, we have been able to deconstruct the vision of Mao in present China and seen how his myth has been built, taking the achievement of his action, reinterpreting his ideas, and performing rituals in the sacred time and space of his legacy. It is interesting to see that most of the political acts of Mao were failures and that China is now taking a way in complete contradiction with Mao's views. This is however not a problem for a nation that proclaims "one country, two systems" and which is winning against all capitalistic countries on their field under the direction of a communist party, although the world has declared that communism was defeated with the disappearing of the Berlin wall. Mao Zedong remains a Supernatural Being that is at the origin of their modern history and stays a hero, whose life is now told as a story.

Conclusion

The analysis of the myth of Mao Zedong shows that it can fit Eliade's theory if we consider communism as a religion like Chinese do. The myth is regarded as a sacred story, and hence a « true history », because it always deals with realities [Eliade1975], and because myth relates the *gesta* of Supernatural Beings and the manifestation of their sacred powers, it becomes the exemplary model for all significant human activities. For Roland Barthes, myth is a type of speech, it is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion [Barthes1957]. Mao Zedong extraordinary life counts many failures and excess but the myth takes only into account the positive actions of his life, and mainly the independence that he brought to China.

It seems contradictory that the archetype of modernity which can be found in communism and socialism could keep kinds of religious myths in a secularized world par excellence, but Eliade stresses that modern man preserves at least some residue of « mythological behavior ». Traces as such a mythological behavior can also be deciphered in the desire to rediscover the intensity with which one experienced or knew something for the first time; and also in the desire to recover the distant past, the blissful period of the « beginnings » [Eliade1975]. The myth will never disappear; in the collective life it sometimes reasserts itself with considerable force, in the form of a political myth [Eliade1977] .

The political myth of Mao Zedong is characterized by huge suffering for the Chinese people, in relation with the struggle for liberation and the communist and later cultural revolutions, but also the break from traditional culture through political reeducation and new Chinese writing. This was in the words of Mao a way to build a new man. We can find the justification of this destruction of the structure of society and culture in the words of Eliade: For something genuinely new to begin, the vestiges and ruins of the old cycle must be completely destroyed. In other words, to obtain an absolute beginning, the end of a World must be total. There is no question of regenerating what has degenerated; nothing will serve but to destroy the old world so that it can be re-created in toto. The obsession with the bliss of the beginnings demands the destruction of all that has existed – and hence has degenerated – since the beginning of the World; there is no other way to restore the initial perfection [Eliade1975].

The French have justified the extermination of most of their aristocracy with the guillotine during the 1789 Revolution by the need to build a new society based on Liberty Equality Brotherhood, and are very proud of their human rights. Mao Zedong justified his excess of violence in more concise terms when he explained that “The revolution is not a tea party”.

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