ART in TURMOIL
Contemporary Chinese Studies

This series, a joint initiative of UBC Press and the UBC Institute of Asian Research, Centre for Chinese Research, seeks to make available the best scholarly work on contemporary China. Volumes cover a wide range of subjects related to China, Taiwan, and the overseas Chinese world.

Glen Peterson, *The Power of Words: Literacy and Revolution in South China, 1949-95*

Wing Chung Ng, *The Chinese in Vancouver: The Pursuit of Power and Identity, 1945-80*

Yijiang Ding, *Chinese Democracy after Tiananmen*

Diana Lary and Stephen MacKinnon, eds., *Scars of War: The Impact of Warfare on Modern China*

Eliza W.Y. Lee, ed., *Gender and Change in Hong Kong: Globalization, Postcolonialism, and Chinese Patriarchy*

Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937*

James A. Flath, *The Cult of Happiness: Nianhua, Art, and History in Rural North China*

Erika E.S. Evasdottir, *Obedient Autonomy: Chinese Intellectuals and the Achievement of Orderly Life*

Hsiao-ting Lin, *Tibet and Nationalist China's Frontier: Intrigues and Ethnopolitics, 1928-49*

Xiaoping Cong, *Teachers' Schools in the Making of the Modern Chinese Nation-State, 1897-1937*

Diana Lary, ed., *The Chinese State at the Borders*

Norman Smith, *Resisting Manchukuo: Chinese Women Writers and the Japanese Occupation*

Hasan H. Karrar, *The New Silk Road Diplomacy: China's Central Asian Foreign Policy since the Cold War*
ART in TURMOIL
The Chinese Cultural Revolution
1966-76

Edited by Richard King
With Ralph Croizier, Shengtian Zheng,
and Scott Watson

UBC Press - Vancouver - Toronto
Contents

Illustrations / vii

Preface / xi

Introduction: Vibrant Images of a Turbulent Decade / 3
Richard King and Jan Walls

Part 1: Artists and the State

1 The Art of the Cultural Revolution / 27
Julia F. Andrews

2 Summoning Confucius: Inside Shi Lu’s Imagination / 58
Shelley Drake Hawks

Part 2: Artists Remember: Two Memoirs

3 Brushes Are Weapons: An Art School and Its Artists / 93
Shengtian Zheng

4 When We Were Young: Up to the Mountains, Down to the Villages / 107
Gu Xiong

Part 3: Meanings Then and Now

5 The Rent Collection Courtyard, Past and Present / 121
Britta Erickson

6 Hu Xian Peasant Painting: From Revolutionary Icon to Market Commodity / 136
Ralph Croizier
Part 4: Beyond the Visual Arts

7  Model Theatrical Works and the Remodelling of the Cultural Revolution / 167
   Paul Clark

8  Feminism in the Revolutionary Model Ballets The White-Haired Girl and The Red Detachment of Women / 188
   Bai Di

9  Fantasies of Battle: Making the Militant Hero Prominent / 203
   Richard King

Notes / 216

Bibliography / 245

Acknowledgments / 256

Contributors / 257

Index / 259
Illustrations

0.1  Wang Zhaoda, *Invincible Mao Zedong Thought Illuminates the Revolutionary Arts Stage* (painting released as poster, 1969) / after page 8

0.2  *Let’s Go and Watch the Model Theatrical Works* (poster, 1976) / 12

0.3  *Consolidate Our Forces: Enter Deeply into Condemnation of Deng Xiaoping’s Counter-Revolutionary Revisionist Line* (poster, 1976) / 13

0.4  Wang Keping, *Idol* (wood carving, 1979) / 18

0.5  Shen Jiawei, *1966 Beijing Jeep* (painting, 2002) / before page 9

1.1  *Revolution Is No Crime, Rebellion Is Justified* (poster, 1966) / after page 34

1.2  *Chairman Mao’s Heart Beats as One with the Hearts of the Revolutionary Masses* (poster, 1967) / before page 35

1.3  *We Must Implement the Proletarian Cultural Revolution to the Finish* (detail of painting released as poster, 1972) / before page 35

1.4  Hou Yimin, *Liu Shaoqi and the Anyuan Coal Miners* (painting, 1961) / 37

1.5  Weng Rulan, *A Parade of Clowns* (poster, 1967) / 40

1.6  Liu Chunhua, *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* (painting, 1967) / after page 44

1.7  Dong Xiwen, *Founding of the Nation* (painting, 1952-53) / before page 45

1.8  Lin Yong, *Great Job! Investigating the Peasant Movement in Hunan* (painting, 1970) / after page 46

1.9  He Kongde, *Gutian Meeting* (painting, 1972) / 49

1.10  Tang Xiaohe and Cheng Li, *Follow Chairman Mao Closely, Grow Up Tempered by Wind and Waves* (painting, 1972) / 51

1.12 Shen Jiawei, *Standing Guard for Our Great Motherland* (painting, 1974) / before page 47
1.13 Liu Wenxi, *New Spring in Yan’an* (poster, 1972) / after page 54
1.14 Li Shan, *The Rouge Series, no. 8* (painting, 1990) / before page 55
2.1 Shi Lu, *Fighting in Northern Shaanxi* (painting, 1959) / 63
2.2 Shi Lu, *Indian Sage-King* (1955 sketch revised in 1970 in colour) / after page 74
2.3 Shi Lu, *Eastern Venus de Milo*, alternatively titled *Goddess of Beauty* (1970 ink drawing poured with red ink, inscription added c. 1972) / before page 75
2.4 Shi Lu, *Winter Plum Illustration* (painting, 1972) / 80
2.5 *Indian Fort/Tower to Recognize the Heart of Lu Ban* (1955 sketch revised 1970 in colour) / 82
2.6 Shi Lu, *Confucius* (drawing, 1974-75) / 85
2.7 Shi Lu, *Qin Shihuang* (drawing, 1974-75) / 89
3.2 Shengtian Zheng at work on a mural portrait of Mao early in the Cultural Revolution (photograph) / 94
3.3 Wang Liuqiu, *Labour-Reform Farm Inmate* (painting, n.d.) / before page 95
3.4 *Great Yak* (jade sculpture) / 105
4.1 Gu Xiong on the eve of his journey to the countryside (photograph) / 109
4.2 Gu Xiong and friends in the countryside (photograph) / 110
4.3 Gu Xiong, *Qingping Village Scene in the Daba Mountains* (drawing, 1972) / 111
4.4 Gu Xiong, *Our Kitchen* (drawing, 1973) / 111
4.5 Gu Xiong, *Grinding Grain* (drawing, 1973) / 113
4.7 Gu Xiong, *The Entertainment Troupe Shows a Movie to the Educated Youth* (drawing, 1974) / 115
4.8 Gu Xiong, *Shattering Illusions* (drawing, 1974) / after page 116
4.9 Gu Xiong, *From Brother Laowan* (drawing, 1973) / before page 117
Illustrations

5.1 Rent Collection Courtyard (mixed media installation, 1965) / 122
5.2 Rent Collection Courtyard (detail of mixed media installation, 1965) / 122
5.3 Cai Guo-Qiang, Venice’s Rent Collection Courtyard (mixed media installation, 1999) / 123
5.4 Rent Collection Courtyard (detail of mixed media installation, 1965) / 125
5.5 Rent Collection Courtyard (detail of mixed media installation, 1974-78) / 127
5.6 Cai Guo-Qiang, Venice’s Rent Collection Courtyard (detail of mixed media installation, 1999) / 132
6.1 Liu Zhide, Old Party Secretary (painting, 1973) / after page 148
6.2 Liu Zhigui, Attending Party Class (painting, 1972-73) / before page 149
6.3 Bai Tianxue, Raising Goats (painting, c. 1973) / 150
6.4 Li Fenglan, Spring Hoeing (painting, n.d.) / after page 150
6.5 Dong Zhengyi, Communal Fish Pond (painting, 1972) / before page 151
6.6 Fan Zhihua, Digging a Well (painting, n.d.) / 151
6.7 Cao Jinying, Fish Pond (painting, c. 1982) / 154
6.8 Liu Zhide, Night Melody (painting, 1983) / 155
6.9 Liu Fengtao (photograph) / 157
6.10 Liu Fengtao, Artistic Family (painting, n.d.) / 158
7.1 Assembled characters from the model theatrical works (drawing, 1967) / 168
7.2 Fang Haizhen, Communist Party branch secretary and heroine of On the Docks (opera) / 183
8.1 Xi’er from The White-Haired Girl (ballet) / 196
8.2 The slave-girl Wu Qinghua from The Red Detachment of Women (ballet) / after page 198
8.3 Wu Qinghua from The Red Detachment of Women (ballet) / before page 199
9.1 Qingdao Workers’ Fine Arts Creation Collective, with Jiang Baoxing in charge of the brush, Steady as a Rock (painting, 1976) / 204
9.2 Yang Zirong, hero of Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy (opera) / 210
In 2002, an exhibition titled Art of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976, appeared at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery in Vancouver. Visitors to the exhibition were bombarded with the iconic images of that extraordinary decade – vivid red banners, slogans, and denunciations in bold cursive calligraphy on huge sheets of paper in the tradition of the Cultural Revolution big-character poster (dazibao), posters of peasant and proletarian heroes in attitudes of triumph and defiance, televisions playing continuous performances of revolutionary opera and ballet, and the fibreglass statue of a young Red Guard that had been created by Vancouver sculptor Arthur Cheng Shuren for the exhibition, in the style of the heroic sculptures of the mid-1960s.

Presiding over the exhibition, inevitably, was the ubiquitous image of Communist Party chairman Mao Zedong, in posters, paintings, portrait busts, and other memorabilia of the times, his face “red, smooth, and luminescent” (hong, guang, liang) in the manner prescribed for the artists of the period. Mao appeared in scenes embellished or imagined from his years as a youthful revolutionary, and in a robust middle age as a benign leader, occasionally with his colleagues but more often in isolation or surrounded by throngs of enthusiastic young people or loyal crowds carefully selected to present a wholesome blend of ages, nationalities, and the revolutionary categories of worker, peasant, and soldier, male and female. To be at the exhibition was to be transported back to the Cultural Revolution, three decades after the event, and to a country that is now barely recognizable from those days.

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the Cultural Revolution not only as a massive political and social upheaval resulting from philosophical differences and personal antagonisms, but also as a time of both brutal iconoclasm and radical experimentation in the arts, the effects of which resonate long after the Cultural Revolution was condemned in
China and the outside world. The chapters in this volume cover the visual, literary, and performing arts of this tumultuous decade, both as they were created and appreciated in the 1960s and 1970s, and as they have been interpreted, appropriated, and reinvented in the years since then. They are written by both scholars and artists, the latter having begun their careers as creators of heroic images of the Cultural Revolution and having since attained international renown as artists, art historians, and curators. All strive to understand and explain what lay behind the creation of those celebrated iconic images during the Cultural Revolution and what meaning they continue to offer in the twenty-first century, in China and beyond.
ART in TURMOIL
Vibrant Images of a Turbulent Decade

Richard King and Jan Walls

Piecing together the history of the Cultural Revolution decade remains a difficult undertaking. Many histories and memoirs of the period have been written in the four decades since the Cultural Revolution began, and it has provided material for films, novels, and works of art by those who lived through it. The political campaigns, the mass rallies, and the major documents are all matters of public record. However, much remains unclear about events away from the political centre, and the motivation of the leading participants for their actions is often a matter for contentious debate. The post–Cultural Revolution national leadership has discouraged research and teaching on the period at the nation's universities and has focused public attention on the economic successes of the present rather than revisiting a past in which the ruling Communist Party was responsible for chaos and injustice. Thus, the history of the Cultural Revolution has largely been told by those writing outside China: expatriates such as the husband-and-wife team of Yan Jiaqi and Gao Gao, authors of *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution*, or Western scholars such as Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, who wrote *Mao's Last Revolution*, and Paul Clark, author of *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*.¹ Scholars of China's arts have tended to focus on the more cosmopolitan, sophisticated, and commercial art, literature, and film of the post-Mao years in preference to the more strident images of the Cultural Revolution.² Cultural Revolution art has proved strangely persistent, however, demanding attention with its return as nostalgia or kitsch in an age when the market, rather than the Communist Party, is the arbiter of popular taste.

The visual images of the Cultural Revolution do not provide a reliable documentary record of the period; they cannot be used as evidence of historical events or of popular sentiment. The arts of the Cultural Revolution were (in the official formulation of their day) a combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism, not a picture of the world as it then was, but a vision of a utopian society to which the Communist Party (or at
least that element of the party that controlled cultural policy and the media) aspired. Histories and memoirs of the period tell a very different story, presenting the Cultural Revolution as a time of vicious internecine warfare within the ruling party, merciless persecution of officials, teachers, writers, and artists, betrayals of family members, friends, and colleagues, desperation among the youth sent to the countryside, wanton destruction of China’s heritage, and barrenness and stultification in the nation’s cultural life. We see a hint of the savagery of the mid-1960s in the cartoons by Red Guards that lampoon the senior officials who were among the first victims of the movement. We cite only the most famous (or notorious) of examples: Weng Rulan’s 1967 *A Parade of Clowns*, discussed by Julia F. Andrews in Chapter 1, is a masterful political cartoon, showing the excellent training the young artist had received. It portrays the members of the Chinese establishment who were condemned in the early months of the Cultural Revolution in the order of their downfall, each skilfully caricatured and further identified by an individual quirk. Even as we admire the considerable skill with which the artist represented the objects of her scorn, we have to remember that few of them escaped imprisonment and torture, that many were killed or driven to suicide, and that all endured humiliation and ostracism, a poor reward indeed for their loyal service to the communist cause.

The art of the period cannot be understood without a grasp of the historical and cultural background from which it arose and of the personalities, chief among them Mao Zedong and his wife, Jiang Qing, who shaped the age and the artistic images it left behind.

**The Great Leader and the Standard-Bearer**

Nowhere is the disjuncture between the historical record as it now stands and the polemic and familiar images of the Cultural Revolution more acute than in their contrasting presentations of Chairman Mao, the man who was, beyond any doubt, the instigator of the movement. The healthy, genial figure who appears on the posters surrounded by his people, and who was praised in the communist anthem “The East Is Red” as “planning happiness for the people,” is now portrayed as a vindictive, reclusive hypochondriac plotting against his enemies and friends alike, and pursuing grandiose and wasteful schemes without regard for the sufferings these imposed on the people (see, for example, the memoir by his doctor Li Zhisui and the recent biography by Jung Chang and Jon Halliday).³

In the mid-1960s, as he was setting in motion what was to be his final great campaign, Mao was in his early seventies. He had been leader of the
Communist Party for thirty years and ruler of China for half of that time, since the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949. Under him, the Communist Party had won victory in the Civil War against the Nationalists that had followed the Second World War and had embarked on the transition of China to become the world’s most populous socialist state, bringing all aspects of the life of the nation under central control. Mao’s prestige among his colleagues in the Chinese leadership had declined during the early 1960s following the Great Leap Forward campaign of the late 1950s, which had failed in its bid to propel China into the ranks of the world’s most industrially advanced and militarily powerful nations and had led to the death by starvation of millions, mostly peasants in the poorer provinces, through unrealistic production targets, excessive grain levies, and massive construction projects that squandered material resources and exhausted the population. Mao’s most trenchant critic in the leadership, Marshal Peng Dehuai, had been dismissed from his post for his blunt assessment of the Great Leap in 1959 when other leaders sided with Mao against him, but Mao was still obliged to give up some of his authority. Claiming to be stepping back from the front line and allowing others to direct the state, Mao formed a close alliance with Lin Biao, who succeeded Peng Dehuai as commander of the armed forces, to plan his revenge on those who were now managing the country and taking control of its huge bureaucracy. Lin Biao worked to build the cult of Mao’s personality in the army, in part by his promotion of the “Little Red Book” of quotations from Mao’s speeches and writings. Sensing a frustration with officialdom, particularly among the young, Mao was prepared to capitalize on it to overturn the entire system, if that was what it took to effect his return to power. He was, he told the visiting French novelist and cultural affairs minister André Malraux in 1965, alone with the people.

Mao was to launch his counterattack, the Cultural Revolution, in the field of the arts, specifically in opera. In most cultures, it would seem strange for a massive political upheaval to begin with an argument over allegorical readings of a new drama about a historical figure, but in China, and even more so in Mao’s China, politics and art were irrevocably intertwined. In the early 1940s, with the Red Army confined to “revolutionary base areas” around Yan’an in the poor and mountainous Shaanxi Province, Mao had convened a forum at which he imposed his own view of the arts on the leftist intellectuals who had joined the communist cause. For Mao, following the practice of Stalin in the Soviet Union and using Lenin’s memorable metaphor, the arts were “cogs and screws” in the revolutionary machine; art was to be produced by “cultural workers” under the supervision of the
Richard King and Jan Walls

Communist Party, rather than being the independent expression of writers and artists. In the years that followed the Yan’an Forum, Mao had intervened periodically in the arts, turning academic and aesthetic discussions into political movements aimed at contesting views of history or culture that differed from his own, but never with the ferocity that he was to demonstrate in the mid-1960s.

Shortly after the 1959 dismissal of Peng Dehuai for criticizing the Great Leap, Wu Han, a historian who was also the deputy mayor of Beijing, had begun to write his first work for the stage, which focused on a sixteenth-century “upright official” named Hai Rui. In 1961, this appeared as the Beijing opera Hai Rui Dismissed from Office, in which Hai Rui stands up for villagers tyrannized by a powerful family and is dismissed by the emperor for his temerity. The historical analogy was clear enough: Peng Dehuai had also taken the side of a devastated peasantry after the Great Leap Forward and had then been dismissed from his office by the supreme ruler. Wu’s opera represented an indirect assault that Mao was not prepared to tolerate. The attack on Hai Rui Dismissed from Office, in November of 1965, came not from Mao directly, but from one of his allies, the Shanghai journalist and critic Yao Wenyuan. He denounced the opera as portraying the peasantry as a downtrodden class dependent on the favour of the ruling elite for its salvation, rather than being, as he claimed it was, a revolutionary class capable of overthrowing its oppressors by itself.5

Yao’s criticism of Wu Han and his opera was the first of many increasingly vicious attacks that led to the denunciation of members of the intellectual elite and the official establishment. It also launched an offensive against the Chinese theatrical tradition, which, Mao complained, was dominated by emperors and generals, scholars and beauties, and against almost all of the cultural heritage then available to the Chinese people. This encompassed the classical and traditional, imported foreign culture, and even works created during the years following the communist assumption of power, when the arts had been managed, in Mao’s name, by people he no longer trusted. The destruction of the old was to be accompanied by the creation of an unprecedented new proletarian culture true to a radical interpretation of Mao’s vision of the arts at the Yan’an Forum a quarter of a century before. This revolution in the arts also began in the world of opera, and Mao’s agent was his wife, Jiang Qing, who was to assume the role of his “standard-bearer” in the arts.

Jiang Qing, Mao’s fourth wife, had been a stage and screen actress in Shanghai during the 1930s before joining the communist forces in Yan’an, where she met and married Mao. Neither welcomed nor respected by the
nation’s political and cultural elites, she was thus disposed to share her husband’s increasing animosity toward the establishment. Her opportunity for advancement came in 1964, with her attendance at a festival of Beijing operas on modern themes, at which she gave a speech that called for an operatic theatre that was tightly controlled and politically engaged, portraying communist heroes overcoming their enemies. She maintained an active interest in opera and ballet, making increasingly extreme pronouncements on the arts as her influence grew; in speeches given during the mid-1960s, she furiously denounced both Chinese tradition, which she presented as feudal, and Western traditions, which she regarded as decadent. A European scholar of Chinese literature then resident in China offered the opinion that “no Chinese authority has ever spoken so disparagingly of Western culture yet with so little knowledge of it.”

Jiang Qing’s major contribution to the arts of the Cultural Revolution was a group of performances, principally opera and ballet, the first eight of which appeared in 1967, known collectively as the revolutionary model theatrical works (geming yangbanxi). They are discussed in Chapters 7 and 8 by Paul Clark and Bai Di, who evaluate their influence and content. Jiang Qing did not claim authorship of the works, most of which had been in existence for several years before her involvement with opera at the 1964 festival, but she took credit for their transformation into models of a new revolutionary art, a task to which she relentlessly devoted herself for a decade. She clearly identified herself with the heroes of the model works and was portrayed in association with them in propaganda posters (Figure 0.1). The hyperbole often repeated by proponents of the model theatrical works was that “every word and every phrase, every tone and every beat, is soaked through with the heart’s blood of Comrade Jiang Qing.” These works, with their focus on revolutionary heroism and struggle, were intended to serve not only as models for subsequent works in the same genres, but also for all other arts: some works in other forms subsequently attained “model” (yangban) status, including Liu Chunhua’s oil painting Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan and the assemblage of sculptures known as the Rent Collection Courtyard, which are discussed below by Julia F. Andrews (Chapter 1), Shengtian Zheng (Chapter 3), and Britta Erickson (Chapter 5). The models were also intended to play a role in the transformation of human behaviour, through a process whereby the heroic actions in the performances mirrored the finest qualities of the audience and were in turn imitated by them, to the point where, in the parlance of the day, those on the stage and those in front of the stage would all be heroes. Some of the central heroic figures of the newly created model theatrical works were female, precursors of strong and
militant heroines in films, novels, and the visual arts, and prompting suspicion that Jiang Qing’s advocacy of leading roles for women onstage was a move to prepare public opinion for her own accession to supreme power when her husband died. If this had been her intention, she had seriously overestimated the suasive power of the arts: her political influence survived her husband’s death less than a month, and she was to spend the last fifteen years of her life in prison for her part in the persecutions of intellectuals and party officials during the Cultural Revolution.

The Establishment and the Red Guards

The attack on the Chinese establishment instigated by Mao in the mid-1960s was carried out on his behalf by the young members of the first generation raised under socialism. They were told by Mao that “rebellion is justified” (zaofan you li) and, in a quotation immortalized in the Little Red Book, promised the world, in words Mao had spoken almost a decade earlier: “The world is yours as well as ours, but in the final analysis, it is yours. You young people, full of vigour, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning. Our hope is placed in you ... The world belongs to you. China’s future belongs to you.” Children who had been raised to venerate Mao above all others were turned by him against their families, their teachers, and almost all other figures of authority. In the spring of 1966, the first Red Guard organizations were formed; they were sanctioned by Mao when he accepted a Red Guard armband and, in what were to be almost his only public appearances of the Cultural Revolution, reviewed the Red Guards at huge rallies in Tian’anmen Square that summer, during which he stood on the same balcony from which he had announced the foundation of the People’s Republic.

From the summer of 1966, as Mao and his associates wrested power from their rivals, the country sank into chaos. A People’s Daily editorial with the title “Sweep Away All Ox-Demons and Snake-Spirits” effectively sanctioned acts of horrific brutality against all those who had suddenly changed from authority figures to targets of the Cultural Revolution. Most of the atrocities of the first two years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-68) were committed by Red Guards. These included the beating, often to death, not only of teachers, but also officials, artists, and authors. Red Guards were responsible for the ransacking of houses owned by families under suspicion and the destruction of books, paintings, and antiques in private collections, as well as public buildings and the treasures they contained. One celebrated early victim of Red Guard violence was the novelist and playwright Lao She,
Figure 0.1  *Wang Zhaoda, Invincible Mao Zedong Thought Illuminates the Revolutionary Arts Stage* (January 1969). Poster. Jiang Qing, holding a volume of Mao's writings on the arts and with his image behind her, is circled by scenes from stage performances and recitals of the Model Theatrical Works. *Zhejiang Worker-Peasant-Soldier University of Fine Arts* (n.p.: Zhejiang People's Fine Arts Publishers, 1969).
Figure 0.5 Shen Jiawei, *1966 Beijing Jeep* (2002). The painting is a collage of images of the most famous winners and losers of the early Cultural Revolution, at the time of Mao's reviews of massed Red Guards in August 1966. Premier Zhou Enlai is driving, with Mao's (then) chosen successor Lin Biao beside him; Mao stands, dressed as he appears in pictures of his celebrated dip in the Yangtze River, with Jiang Qing at his side. Behind them are two of the major victims of the Cultural Revolution, former army marshal Peng Dehuai (left, behind Lin Biao) and President Liu Shaoqi (right), both with placards round their necks condemning them by name. Reproduced by permission of the artist.
who had been honoured with the Soviet-style title of “people’s artist” following his return to China from the West in 1949; his closeness to members of the cultural establishment may have made him particularly vulnerable to attack. In August 1966, Lao She’s house was raided by young Red Guards, he and his wife were bound, and he was beaten with Beijing opera props the Red Guards found in his home. The following day, the author drowned himself. In Chapter 3, Shengtian Zheng gives some examples of senior artists and art professors who were victimized by the Red Guards; the painter Shi Lu, the subject of Chapter 2, by Shelley Drake Hawks, was one of many artists abused and humiliated for their supposed enmity to the ideals of the Cultural Revolution. In his case, his earlier painting of Mao failed to meet the heroic standards of the mid-1960s.

Schools and universities were closed in the early months of the Cultural Revolution, though many continued to be occupied by students who had formed themselves into Red Guard factions. At the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Red Guards mounted an exhibition of works they considered “black” (counter-revolutionary) and wanted to expose to public humiliation, in August 1966; later the same month, with the assistance of Red Guards from another university, Beijing Normal, they burned teaching materials and paintings at the academy and smashed the plaster reproductions of Western sculptures that had been used as models, forcing their teachers to witness the destruction. Many of those teachers, and other artists and intellectuals, were confined in cells and rooms that were known as ox-sheds (niu peng), a name derived from the ox-demons they were accused of being.

Although subsequent accounts of Red Guard activities emphasize the violence and chaos of the mid-1960s, for many of the youth of the day, the experience was exhilarating: they had heard Mao himself express his confidence in them, they had the chance to attend the mass rallies in Tian’anmen Square, and they were able to travel the country, riding trains without paying and meeting up with young people from other parts of China in “revolutionary liaisons.” Many former Red Guards look back from middle age to their Cultural Revolution youth with nostalgia, as the best days of their lives.

The Red Guards, who included many of the most talented members of their generation, were also responsible for the creation of the earliest Cultural Revolution art, much of it in the form of caricatures and propaganda posters. Some of these works were preserved in journals put out by Red Guard organizations at universities and colleges. The year 1967 saw a number of exhibitions of Red Guard art, first in Beijing and then in other major cities and as touring shows. The first of these opened to the public at the Beijing Planetarium on 5 February 1967 and was titled Caricatures: Smashing the
Reactionary Line Advocated by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping. This exhibition was organized by student groups from twenty Beijing educational institutions, with help from factories, governmental and cultural organizations, and the military. Most of the displayed works had been shown before as big-character posters, a fact referred to in the exhibition’s subtitle – A Grand Review of the Works of Art of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

The first shows were of works from Beijing alone, but the Red Guards were soon sufficiently organized to mount an exhibition of works from around the country. On 1 October, the eighteenth anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic, Long Live the Victory of Chairman Mao’s Revolutionary Line opened at the National Art Gallery in Beijing. The scale of this show was unprecedented, displaying more than sixteen hundred works, including traditional Chinese paintings, oil paintings, prints, picture posters, clay sculptures, and arts and crafts. The press praised the exhibition for its revolutionary character, its fighting spirit, and its mass participation. Many of the paintings exhibited were portraits of Mao, including a huge oil painting titled *The East Is Red*, which showed Mao, Lin Biao, Premier Zhou Enlai, Jiang Qing, and other leaders at Tian’anmen reviewing the Red Guards. A series of woodcuts by a Red Guard group from Beijing showed Mao at various key historical moments.

The Red Guard movement was to last only two years. It became increasingly violent and factionalized, with opposing groups, each claiming to represent Chairman Mao, fighting pitched battles on university campuses (including what was referred to as the “hundred days’ war” at Beijing’s prestigious Qinghua University) and the streets of some of China’s major cities. By late 1968, with his rivals overthrown and the nation close to anarchy, Mao brought the Red Guard era to an end, instructing graduates of city schools to volunteer to leave their homes and go to the state farms of China’s northern and western borders or to the villages of rural China to be “re-educated” by the peasantry. Between 1968 and 1979, more than 17 million of China’s urban youth went “up to the mountains and down to the villages.” Their departure from the cities brought the most violent period of the Cultural Revolution to an end. It also deprived millions of a chance for higher education and gave some young artists and writers a unique insight into the poverty of rural China. Many of the finest artists of the post-Mao age had spent some of their formative years as rusticated urban youths. These include the multimedia artist Gu Xiong, now based in Vancouver, whose reflections on his “rustication” experience appear in Chapter 4 of this volume.
The Brave New World and the Final Struggle

Although some historians have suggested that the year 1969 marks the end of the Cultural Revolution, the editors of this volume have followed the dating conventionally used in China, which regards it as a ten-year period, beginning in the spring of 1966 when Mao issued the “May Sixteenth Directive” and effectively turned a power struggle within the party into a national movement, to the death of Mao in September 1976 and the arrest of Jiang Qing and her three closest associates (the Gang of Four) the following month. Certainly, the rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution continued in the Chinese media throughout the ten-year period.

The end of the Red Guard movement and the departure of the first wave of students, comprising the high school graduating classes of the mid-1960s, for the countryside, was a prelude to a return of something approaching normality in the educational system. Schools that had been closed since the first months of the Cultural Revolution reopened, as did the universities, with an intake of “worker-peasant-soldier” students selected for their political reliability, as well as their academic potential. Journals that had ceased publication in 1966 resumed circulation, and publications other than the works of Mao or party documents began to appear: there was new fiction published from the early 1970s, one of the earliest works to appear being the first volume of Hao Ran’s monumental *The Golden Road*, by far the most popular Chinese novel of the 1970s. The film industry, which, during the years since 1966 had generated little but documentaries celebrating Mao and the Cultural Revolution, resumed more varied production. The first features to appear were filmed versions of the model theatrical works, which became required viewing for the years that followed and were unremittingly promoted in the media and on posters (Figure 0.2). These were followed by dramatic movies that rewrote the history of the Chinese revolution to bring all credit to Mao and the heroes who idolized him, as well as by tales of political activism and class struggle taking place in what was presented as a new world of opportunity for the proletariat and peasantry.

Much of the visual art of the 1970s was similarly engaged in portraying a new and better world, the beginnings of a Maoist utopia: posters and paintings celebrated acts of heroism in the cause of the revolution, innovations in science and technology, the advance of women in jobs previously dominated by men, and the enthusiastic participation of the general populace in political activity. The artists who created these new images were themselves lauded as a cultural innovation – peasants, proletarians, and educated youths creating work in areas that had previously been the province of
professional artists. Peasant painters, most notably those from Hu County in Shaanxi Province, achieved national and international prominence with images of a new rural utopia. As Ralph Croizier demonstrates in Chapter 6, on the changes in the forms and messages of Hu County artists, the paintings ranged from the artfully primitive to a sophisticated realism, which demonstrated that the peasant artists had been taught by academy instructors. Although the visual arts of the 1970s featured new political content and imagery, the styles were an eclectic blend of the Chinese elite and folk traditions and techniques learned from the West, including the socialist realism of the Soviet painting instructors of the 1950s, as can be seen in the posters released during the campaign to condemn Deng Xiaoping during the final months of the Cultural Revolution (Figure 0.3). Many of the figures portrayed are depicted in militant or even military postures, an indication of the
Figure 0.3  Consolidate Our Forces: Enter Deeply into Condemnation of Deng Xiaoping’s Counter-Revolutionary Revisionist Line (April 1976). Poster. Propaganda Art Group of the Shanghai Fine Arts Publishers (Shanghai: Shanghai Fine Arts Publishers, 1976).
Cultural Revolution leadership’s fixation with struggle. Battle-readiness, even at a time when the nation was not at war, is a recurrent theme in the visual, performing, and literary arts of the Cultural Revolution, as is demonstrated in Richard King’s Chapter 9 discussion of fantasies of battle.

Political life in China during the 1970s was characterized by a series of increasingly strident campaigns, which reflected an intense struggle to replace the generation of leaders now close to death, chief among them Mao and State Premier Zhou Enlai. First, Marshal Lin Biao, who had been known as Mao’s close comrade-in-arms in the early years of the Cultural Revolution and had risen to second place in the party hierarchy, just below Mao, staged an abortive coup in 1971 and was killed with his family when their plane crashed during an attempted flight to the Soviet Union. A year elapsed before the events surrounding Lin’s death were made public; for many of those who had believed in the Cultural Revolution, including former Red Guards now in the countryside, Lin Biao’s fall and subsequent denunciation marked the beginning of their disillusionment. A political campaign to denounce Lin – called Criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius – linked him with Chinese tradition and attacked Zhou Enlai and his protégé Deng Xiaoping. Deng had been removed from office during the mid-1960s but was reinstated by Mao in 1973, to the chagrin of Jiang Qing and her allies.

The Past and the Present: Allegorical Attacks on Moderate Leaders

The practice of retelling historical events as allegorical criticism of contemporary political issues had been adopted by Wu Han in his 1961 opera *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, the first work to be criticized as the Cultural Revolution began. As early as the 1950s, Mao had advocated the study of history from the perspective of “making the past serve the present” (*gu wei jin yong*). This practice has had a long history in China, where historical documents have been seen as “mirrors” to be used by contemporary government; philosophers and rhetoricians dating back to Confucius found that the most persuasive arguments were those that could be backed by quoting a universally admired passage or citing a parallel from the distant past. But when Chairman Mao used his famous phrase, he meant that history should be seen and used as a tool to advance the interest of the working class today. One intriguing example of its application began, surprisingly, with a statement by Mao criticizing his former comrade-in-arms Lin Biao, almost two years after his failed coup attempt in the fall of 1971.

In July 1973, Chairman Mao observed to two of his confidants that, like the Nationalists whom he had defeated in the Civil War, Lin Biao
revered Confucianism and opposed Legalism. Mao believed that Legalism, the system of government practised by the unifying Qin dynasty in the third century BC, represented a positive, progressive force in Chinese history, whereas Confucianism was regressive, always glorifying and seeking to reinstate the ways of the ancient past. Mao compared Lin Biao to the Confucianists because he believed that Lin Biao and his supporters sought to negate the Cultural Revolution and restore the earlier, and less radical, system. The ultra-leftist faction (led by Jiang Qing and her allies Yao Wenyuan, Zhang Chunqiao, and Wang Hongwen, a group later castigated as the Gang of Four) used this pronouncement by the supreme leader to launch the Criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius movement, which was a thinly veiled attack against the moderates in the party, whose leading spokesman was Premier Zhou Enlai. Indeed, this movement was sometimes even referred to as a campaign to criticize Lin Biao, Confucius, and the Duke of Zhou (pi-Lin pi-Kong pi-Zhou Gong), and references were often made to “the modern-day Confucianist” and “the Communist Party Confucianist.”

The same anti-moderate criticism was promoted through another movement called the Confucianist-Legalist Struggle (Ru-Fa douzheng). Classical Chinese stories with anti-Confucian and anti-traditionalist themes were performed in all genres of popular storytelling and ballads, published as cartoon series and poster art, and discussed in polemical essays as conveying lessons from the past that showed the need for vigilance and aggressive action against the conservative and moderate forces of the present. The stories were used to support the ultra-leftist assertion that conservative and moderate leaders in the Communist Party were analogous to the reactionary Confucianist forces in ancient times. Typically, the retelling of these old stories would end with an explicit comment by the narrator, to the effect that “we must constantly stay alert and be on guard against contemporary Confucianists in our midst today!” Everyone understood that the target of criticism was Premier Zhou Enlai and the moderates who backed him.

Kitsch and Nostalgia: The Afterlife of Cultural Revolution Art

Although the Chinese media were controlled by the group around Mao, which included Jiang Qing and Yao Wenyuan, whose essay censuring Wu Han’s opera had been the first salvo in the counterattack that began the Cultural Revolution, there were indications by the mid-1970s that public sentiment had not been won over to the cause. This constituted a setback for Jiang Qing, whose role as Mao’s cultural standard-bearer was a major part of her claim to succeed him as leader of the Communist Party; she had told her
Richard King and Jan Walls

American biographer Roxanne Witke that “drama shapes consciousness” and that “the superstructure [the media and the arts] could lead the base [politics and the economy].” Events were to prove that she had seriously overestimated the success of her cultural initiatives and the media campaigns that had supported them. Evidence of popular disenchantment with the Cultural Revolution came at Qingming, the festival for commemorating the dead, in early April 1975: demonstrators took wreaths to Tian’anmen Square in Beijing in memory of Zhou Enlai, who had died in January of that year, and wrote poems condemning Jiang Qing and others close to Mao. The demonstrations were suppressed and condemned in the official press, Deng Xiaoping was ousted a second time, and a final campaign was unleashed to “beat back the right deviationist wind” and attack “capitalist-roaders” who would abandon the policies of the Cultural Revolution; but these increasingly desperate attempts were ineffective in securing the position of Jiang Qing and her allies beyond Mao’s death. Within weeks, the Gang of Four was accused of trying to take credit for any achievements that rightly belonged to Mao and of instigating all the atrocities that had occurred during what became known as the “ten-year disaster” of the Cultural Revolution, including half a million deaths and the imprisonment, torture, and maltreatment of countless innocent victims.

Almost immediately, in an ironic application of Chairman Mao’s principle of “making the past serve the present,” opera stages, storytellers, ballad singers, and serial cartoon publications throughout China were presenting the episode “Sun Wukong san-da Baigujing” (Sun Wukong beats the White Bone Demoness) from the medieval epic Journey to the West (Xiyouji), which was instantly perceived by all Chinese as an allegory on the current situation. In the story, a revered Tang monk (Chairman Mao) searches for the highest truth and is deceived three times by the disguises of the evil White Bone Demoness (Jiang Qing), who would destroy him. His clever disciple Sun Wukong (Deng Xiaoping) sees through each of her ruses and vanquishes her, only to be sternly punished by his master for harming her, until finally revealing her true demonic nature and proving his ability to do the right thing. Before long, the Cultural Revolution was denounced as a revolt against culture, with the model theatrical works and the other art of the period dismissed as aesthetically barren and motivated by the political ambitions of Jiang Qing and her allies. As established artists returned from imprisonment and exile, they joined in the chorus of scorn and derision. The art of the Cultural Revolution, it seemed, was to be consigned to the dustbin of history.

China’s rapid transition since the end of the Cultural Revolution from socialist austerity to capitalist consumerism has not meant the end of the
visual imagery of the Mao era. On the contrary, the iconic images of the Cultural Revolution have demonstrated a resilience that could not have been foreseen in the years immediately following the death of Mao and the arrest of the Gang of Four. The fiction and other writing of the period is largely forgotten, as new and adventurous authors such as Mo Yan, Yu Hua, and Nobel laureate Gao Xingjian have brought Chinese literature onto a global stage; the films of the so-called fifth- and sixth-generation directors, who learned their craft after the Cultural Revolution, have also won awards and commanded audiences worldwide, eclipsing the work of the directors who preceded them. But, in commercial popular culture, itself a product of the economic and social policies of the post-Mao years, images and icons from the Cultural Revolution have enjoyed a curious resurrection. Similarly, in formal (or at least expensive) high art, Cultural Revolution images, given a new and often ironic twist, have become profitable commodities. Mao’s fear that lingering cultural influences from the old society would poison the socialism he was trying to build was a factor in his launching of a “cultural” revolution. Do the songs, plays, and pictures recycled from the “ten-year disaster” now threaten the new post-socialist China? The posthumous history of Cultural Revolution art provides something of an answer.

In the immediate aftermath of Mao’s death and the fall of the Gang of Four, political rhetoric and political posters continued in much the same vein, except that the stalwart soldiers, workers, and peasants were now condemning the disgraced radicals instead of alleged revisionists such as Deng Xiaoping. In formal art, traditional Chinese painting enjoyed a prominent revival, with famous painters who only a few years before had been the target of Jiang Qing’s black painting exhibitions now praised and commissioned to execute the murals for Mao’s mausoleum. The ubiquitous portraits and statues of Mao did not disappear immediately as his successors tried to absolve the great architect of the Cultural Revolution from responsibility for its disastrous results. Still, in unofficial, briefly tolerated protest art at the end of the seventies, some satiric portraits did appear, notably the small wooden statue *Idol* by Wang Keping, shown at the 1979 exhibition of the group of unofficial and unauthorized artists who took the name “Stars” (Xingxing pai) (Figure 0.4). Otherwise, attacks on Mao, now covertly referred to as the fifth member of the Gang of Four in private conversations, were taboo.

By the 1980s, the official policy of “[economic] reform and opening [to the West]” had made it possible for a few artists to join the growing flow of Chinese students out of the country. Some of them found that the styles and images of Cultural Revolution art could, when given an ironic or satirical
postmodern twist, find a ready market in the West. Two innovative pioneers of this development were Zhang Hongtu in New York and Shen Jiawei in Australia. Both were young but accomplished artists who experienced all the rigours of the Cultural Revolution. Zhang was perhaps the earliest to rework Mao’s image for the benefit of foreign capitalist collectors. For him and others of his generation, this was a liberating but wrenching experience marking the final separation from the goals and ideals of their youth. His monumental oil painting *Last Supper* (1984), executed in a socialist-realist
style, played on the Leonardo da Vinci version by replacing Jesus and all his disciples with images of Mao. The painting aroused some controversy in the United States, where a conservative congressman attacked it for blasphemy in associating Mao with Christ. Subsequently, Zhang, and a few other émigré artists, produced a series of Pop Art representations of Mao, in some ways following upon Andy Warhol’s famous Mao prints of the 1960s but with much greater feeling and inventiveness. Shen Jiawei, on the other hand, successfully pioneered the overtly humorous political pop art that would emerge in China itself only after the Tian’anmen crisis of 1989. Appropriating, or cannibalizing, famous images from the Cultural Revolution in the same glossy popularized style of that time was fair game in a postmodernist Western art world where originality was no longer indispensable for serious art and Cold War news coverage enabled Westerners to recognize many of the subjects. Even if a Western audience could not identify all the figures in Shen’s Beijing Jeep, a pastiche including celebrated images of Mao and Lin Biao reviewing the Red Guards in Tian’anmen Square, they at least knew it was from a China that no longer represented a revolutionary threat to the West (Figure 0.5). They could indulge in a little radical chic, while safely enjoying the joke. In China, however, the unravelling of radical socialism was not necessarily so amusing for those involved in its cultural devolution.

After 1979, the unofficial work of the Stars artists and other subversives was driven underground along with the activists of the short-lived democracy movement. Both movements were almost entirely composed of young people, whose formative experience had been the early years of the Cultural Revolution; the later disillusionment had imbued them with unprecedented independence of thought and hunger for freedom of expression. Mao had his “revolutionary successors,” but they may not have been quite what he had had in mind.

In 1985, not coincidently the year when student protests for greater democracy broke out, the New Wave art movement surfaced, led by students and graduates of China’s elite art academies. Unlike earlier dissidents, the young artist rebels of the 1980s concentrated almost exclusively on stylistic innovation and avoided the overtly political. This presented the reformist regime of Deng Xiaoping with a dilemma: how was it to maintain a socialist agenda for the arts while opening to the West and consumer culture? Generally, the cultural authorities, often themselves rehabilitated victims of Cultural Revolution political persecution, maintained a fairly tolerant attitude toward stylistic innovation, so long as it did not directly challenge the communist state. Some young artists, notably a group at the
Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou (now the National Academy of Fine Arts), drew on symbols from the Cultural Revolution not only for paintings, but also for experimental performance and installation art.

Then, out of the same questioning of the communist system that produced the New Wave art, came the political crisis that culminated in the Tian’anmen massacre of June 1989. This might have been expected to mark a return to a socialist, if not exactly Cultural Revolution, style for art and society, but it did not. The experimentation with modern Western styles and the drive toward a consumer society integrated with world economy resumed and picked up speed. But, in the midst of rapid social and economic change, the old symbols of the Cultural Revolution resurfaced in commercialized popular culture and some of the fine arts. The Mao fever (Mao re) of the early 1990s was part of this. As the hundredth anniversary of his birth approached in December 1993, Cultural Revolution images of the chairman were suddenly everywhere again: Red Guard badges, portrait busts of Mao, posters, and copies of the Little Red Book, by no means all of them authentic, were sold at inflated prices to Chinese and foreign buyers alike. Oil portraits of the chairman tended to be sold to foreigners, thus creating a profitable, no longer state-controlled market in political pop imagery. In a sense this development was an extension of what émigré artists had already achieved during the eighties, but in China it funded a new generation of financially independent artists who no longer depended on government patronage.

On the whole, the recycled cultural products of the Mao fever era were short-lived kitsch providing an income for China’s new entrepreneurs. The Mao badges, clocks, and wristwatches, and reprinted Cultural Revolution posters remain staples of the tourist trade, but little more. The revival of Cultural Revolution-era songs, music, and stage performances seems to have had more staying power. First came the best-selling tapes and CDs of the early 1990s, with titles that were variations on the name Red Sun, rehashing revolutionary anthems in a Hong Kong–Cantopop style to a synthesized disco beat. More surprisingly, the model theatrical works of the mid-1960s – the ballets The White-Haired Girl and The Red Detachment of Women, and the operas The Red Lantern, Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy, and Shajibang – were revived in the 1990s and after 2000 to popular acclaim. At a 1996 revival of The Red Detachment of Women in Beijing, a full house gave ovations to the overture, to the first ensemble scene of the female recruits dancing a rifle-drill routine, and at several points thereafter; there are reports of similar receptions for other revivals, some of which featured dancers from the original productions returning four decades after
their first triumphs. Anachronistic as their political message is, the model theatrical works appeal to nostalgia in an older audience and seem quaint, even charming, to those who were born long after the operas and ballets lost their model status and political currency.

This afterlife of the cultural products of the Cultural Revolution continues into the twenty-first century. Filmmakers and visual artists still draw on its images and songs for stories set in that period or juxtapose them with contemporary images to make sometimes ambivalent contrasts between the present and that relatively recent past. In that sense, just as the cultural images of traditional China continued to haunt Mao and his standard-bearer Jiang Qing as they attempted to build a new revolutionary culture, these ghosts of the Cultural Revolution persist in post-socialist China. The study of the art of the Cultural Revolution, both for what it meant then and what it continues to mean, remains an important undertaking.

Nine New Takes on the Cultural Revolution

The chapters in this book shed light on the arts of the Cultural Revolution, their creators, and their changing meaning from the time of their production to the early years of the twenty-first century.

The first two chapters look back on the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution decade and its effect on those who experienced it. In Chapter 1, an overview of the art of the decade, Julia F. Andrews reminds us of the waste, the suffering, and the destruction that the Cultural Revolution brought to the Chinese people and demonstrates the various effects it had on the generations that lived through it. Her chapter provides a periodization of the Cultural Revolution and the art that it produced, from the frenzied iconoclasm of the early cartoons to the optimistic work of the young artists entrusted with the creation of a new socialist visual culture. The Cultural Revolution museum called for by the eminent writer Ba Jin may be built one day, but until then, the work of artists during and after the event can offer a virtual museum, the record of an assault on tradition and an age of (often contrived) revolutionary fervour. Chapter 2, by Shelley Drake Hawks, offers an extraordinary case study of one prominent artist who suffered at the hands of the Red Guards and the cultural authorities for his alleged ideological crimes. This was the painter Shi Lu; his tribulations, and the unique form of his resistance, are the focus of Hawks’ study. Shi Lu, who was incarcerated, condemned, and mistreated while suffering from serious mental illness, situated himself in his tormented imagination within a long-standing tradition of
righteous literati protest, expressing himself in poetry modelled after that of the third century BC statesman and poet Qu Yuan, and revisiting (or de-facing) his earlier work to express his anguish.

Chapters 3 and 4, memoirs written by artists Shengtian Zheng and Gu Xiong, recall very different experiences of their youth in the Cultural Revolution. Both men are now international artists based in Vancouver: Shengtian Zheng is an art historian and curator, editor of a journal on Chinese art, and honorary professor at his alma mater, the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou; Gu Xiong is a painter, illustrator, installation artist, and art professor at the University of British Columbia. As the Cultural Revolution began, Shengtian Zheng was a young instructor at the Zhejiang Academy, whereas Gu Xiong was a high school student in Chongqing, the largest city in Sichuan Province. Shengtian Zheng’s chapter recalls the persecution suffered by the faculty at the academy, including senior established artists and younger ones like himself. In striking contrast to Shengtian Zheng’s experience was that of his former student, the Red Guard leader Zhang Yongsheng, whose political radicalism brought him to national prominence in the Cultural Revolution but disgrace and imprisonment thereafter. Gu Xiong was one of the millions of young people sent down to the countryside after 1968; his memoir details not only the hardships he and his peers endured, but also their quest for a cultural life. Gu Xiong recorded his life in the countryside in a series of sketchbooks, which present a truthful and evocative portrait of a young man’s physical and emotional life, and of the development of his artistic talent.

Chapters 5 and 6 look at two of the most vaunted artistic achievements of the Cultural Revolution – the sculptures that comprise the Rent Collection Courtyard, and the peasant paintings of Hu County – chronicling their elevation to iconic status. In addition, they address the question of what revolutionary art becomes in a post-revolutionary age, where exploitation of the vagaries of the market (and frequently the international market), rather than the whims of the Communist Party leadership, is the key to survival and success. They also treat the issue of who owns works that were collectively constructed or created by amateur artists working under the close direction of experts sent to instruct them, when these works become valuable commodities. As Britta Erickson shows in Chapter 5, the expatriate Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang (whose name is given here in the form preferred by him, rather than as the standard pinyin romanization Cai Guoqiang) aroused considerable hostility in China when he appropriated the images of the Rent Collection Courtyard, staging a partial reconstruction of the ensemble at the 1999 Venice Biennale under his own name. The
creators of the original works emerged from their collective anonymity to protest the theft of their intellectual property, though their proposed lawsuit came to nothing. Britta Erickson’s account of this furor raises the question not only of ownership, but of meaning: what did the reconstruction of the images for a Western audience signify, more than three decades after the originals were created to teach a lesson in resistance to feudal oppression? In the case of the Hu County painters, Ralph Croizier shows in Chapter 6 how village artists adapted their style to accommodate differing political demands as Communist Party policy became more extreme, producing a strategically naive revolutionary art to meet the mood of the Cultural Revolution and then changed again to offer images of bucolic charm for a domestic and foreign market nostalgic for an unchanging rural China.

Whereas the previous chapters focus on the visual arts, the final three bring in other genres in the performing and literary arts: opera, ballet, and fiction. The most dominant works of art, and certainly the most highly praised in the media of their day, were the model theatrical works, particularly the first eight launched in 1967 by Jiang Qing. These were heralded, on Jiang Qing’s behalf, as the first truly proletarian works of art since the composition of the revolutionary anthem the “Internationale” almost a century before, at the time of the Paris Commune. The militant spirit and glorification of revolutionary heroism in the model theatrical works set the tone for the arts throughout the rest of the Cultural Revolution; after they were filmed in the early 1970s, their repeated viewing became more political duty than entertainment or education. The pre-eminence of the model works in the Cultural Revolution led to the criticism, after 1976, that the culture of the period had been limited to 800 million people watching eight shows (bayi ren kan bage xi). Chapters 7 and 8 challenge previous assumptions about the model theatrical works. The former, by Paul Clark, examines the cultural fare presented to Chinese audiences in major cities at two key points in the year – the May anniversary of Mao’s Yan’an Talks and the October National Day – and reveals that the models were not the only entertainment available and that their influence waxed and waned during the ten-year period. In Chapter 8, Bai Di discusses the two ballets among the model theatrical works, The White-Haired Girl and The Red Detachment of Women, which had their origins respectively in an opera performed in the liberated areas during the 1940s and a 1961 feature film. She demonstrates that, by creating a “feminist utopia” in which women are freed of domestic constraints to achieve heroic status, they can be seen as revolutionary in a manner differing from that claimed by their promoters at the time. Chapter 9, by Richard King, looks at one theme, the readiness to do battle, in three manifestations,
one each in the visual, performing, and literary arts; the political and aesthetic principles established during the reform of the model theatrical works in the mid-1960s can be seen to exert their influence throughout the arts of the Cultural Revolution, most notably in the portrayal of principal heroic characters.

To appreciate the persistence of militant socialist Cultural Revolution iconography in an age of rampant capitalism, it is necessary to follow the changes in meaning that these images carried, from their origins, in most cases during the years preceding the Cultural Revolution, to their place in contemporary Chinese, and global, culture. We must also assess their significance for the survivors of those days, as well as for that majority of China’s (and the world’s) population born since the end of China’s turbulent decade.
PART 1

Artists and the State
The art of the Cultural Revolution documents both the extraordinary enthusiasm of Chinese artists for the movement launched by Mao Zedong in 1966 and the twists and turns of the party politics they tried to support. Yet, as the visual culture of this era, the bright, confident, and compelling images call to mind the shattered ideals and great human tragedies of the ten-year disaster. Cultural Revolution art speaks of the dreams of an idealistic generation but at the same time carries the burden of the lies it was told by its leaders. Those who lived through the period may have fond childhood memories associated with some of the images, but equally terrible visions are brought back by the sight of others.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was one of the most profound of the many horrors to which China’s people were subjected during the twentieth century. A hideous abuse of totalitarian power, perhaps second only to that of the Nazi period in Germany, its traumas were all the greater because of the naive willingness and complicity of China’s people in the abuses visited upon their fellow citizens. In Germany, the party in whose name horrendous crimes were committed was defeated, its surviving leaders were brought to swift justice, and the causes of such murderous behaviour were publicized, analyzed, condemned, and taught as warnings in the schools. In China, however, political leaders did not confront the Cultural Revolution, choosing instead to use euphemistic labels such as the “ten lost years” and addressing it in the most abstract terms. Art historians Zhang Shaoxia and Li Xiaoshan begin their discussion of Cultural Revolution art with a quotation from a 1981 Communist Party document: “History has proved that the Cultural Revolution was erroneously launched by the leadership, was used by a counter-revolutionary group, and was an internal disturbance that brought severe suffering to the nation and to the people of all its nationalities.”

The burst of public lamentation concerning the tragedies of the Cultural Revolution, which assisted Deng Xiaoping in his 1979 rise to power,
was quickly shut down once he had gained control of key parts of the government. After a show trial during the fall of 1980, in which Mao’s wife and three others were convicted and sentenced, many Cultural Revolution policies were revoked, and the nation, unable to look back, began rebuilding. Some, but not all, of the most vicious officials and former Red Guards were arrested and quietly sent away. The call by prominent writer and Cultural Revolution victim Ba Jin for a Cultural Revolution museum was ignored. The causes, the culprits, and the effects of the Cultural Revolution were all too well understood by those who witnessed it, but this collective experience and memory was left largely unspoken and for the most part has not been passed on to the generations that followed.

Most historians agree that the Cultural Revolution was launched by Mao Zedong with the goal of removing his rivals in the party. Because he came to view his most senior colleague, President Liu Shaoqi, as an opponent yet was unable to rally Communist Party support for his purge, he mobilized millions of students to destroy the party apparatus. His goals were not known to most of his supporters in 1966, and his failure to control the activity he set in motion led to massive human suffering and loss of life.3

Three generations suffered in the terrors that began in 1966. Members of the first generation, who had grown up in the Republic of China (1911-49) and had assisted the communist regime to take power, had already reached retirement age by 1966 and had nothing left but their reputations, on the basis of which they contributed their opinions and knowledge to the new society. It was easy to deprive them of their good names by dragging them before crowds that publicly humiliated them and only slightly more difficult to hasten their departure from this world by withholding proper nutrition and needed medical care. The second-generation victims, then in their forties or fifties, had idealistically contributed their adult lives to building New China. They happily sent their teenage children to Beijing in 1966 to see Chairman Mao at Tian’anmen Square, but then, at the peak of their creative and professional careers, they too were seized, humiliated, and denounced. Many were exiled to rural areas for as long as a dozen years. Prohibited or otherwise unable to pursue the specialties for which they had been trained, few had retained the skills or creativity to resume their work when they returned to their homes after the Cultural Revolution. They survived, but that was all, and most have been too scarred to let others know what happened to them. The world will never see the scientific discoveries they might have made, the books they might have written, or the images they might have painted.
Finally, the youngest, the post-war baby boom generation, who grew up entirely in Mao’s China, suffered in a different way. Because schools were closed or radically restructured, the formal learning of all children was interrupted and in many cases terminated. Most of China’s baby boom generation lost its chance for education and a normal career. Some, as Red Guards, had abandoned all humane scruples to carry out Mao’s most vicious and paranoid retribution, actions that in some cases led to the deaths of his imagined or real enemies. Red Guards participated in publicly humiliating and even torturing their elders, as well as in fighting to the death against heretics in other Red Guard factions believed to be less loyal to Chairman Mao. In the end, once Mao’s destructive acts were successfully carried out, the Red Guards were discarded and sent out of the cities for “re-education,” to live as peasants, workers, or soldiers in China’s most remote or impoverished areas. There, they learned to farm, to survive on the most meagre of rations, and to endure the abuse of the local officials, before whose absolute power they were helpless. Only a small percentage of the brightest, most self-motivated, or best-connected were able to re-enter the educational system when the Cultural Revolution concluded in 1976. The vast majority, left behind as farmers or labourers in rusting factories, form the huge cohort of unskilled and now unemployed labourers who have been forced into an impoverished early retirement by the new economic policies. The silence of most members of this generation comes from a mixture of disillusionment, shame, and fear.

It is on the human wreckage left by the Cultural Revolution that China is building its twenty-first century. Silence on the part of those who know what happened has made it possible for China and its new generation to emerge, since about 1993, on the world economic, political, and military stage as a new nation, one that seems to have no modern history and to lack the baggage of the past. It is probably much too late to provide any meaningful recompense to those whose lives were destroyed, though the new economic possibilities opened to the younger generation may restore some measure of hope to damaged families. However, the failure to document what happened, and how it happened, deprives China and the world of a necessary admonition about what can transpire if the crimes of political leaders are ignored, propaganda is unchallenged, and patriotism is misused for cynical ends. It was the trust and idealism of China’s citizens that permitted them to be so willingly led into disaster.

The Cultural Revolution also destroyed China’s traditional culture in a way that the most iconoclastic reformers of the early twentieth century
could not have imagined. Although most old art and archaeological sites survived the campaigns against the “four olds” (siju), the people who practised and taught traditional forms of art, and who understood the culture of the past, were thoroughly demoralized, their spirits broken and their passion wiped away. The entire succeeding generation was taught to ridicule tradition rather than respect it. Replacing traditional art with a new socialist imagery had been on Mao’s agenda since the 1940s, but, during the Cultural Revolution, China’s steady progress in this direction was brought to its culmination. With the close supervision of Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing, all old art was replaced by socialist images executed in a uniform style.

The art of the Cultural Revolution may be divided into two periods that correspond with the political history of the movement. The first period lasted from its outbreak in 1966 until the mysterious death of Mao’s chosen successor Lin Biao, killed as he and his family tried to flee China by air in September of 1971. This phase produced visual art primarily focused on destroying the old culture and system, and on codifying the cult of Mao, in whose name the destruction was carried out. Much of this art was ephemeral, consisting of cartoons, drawings, gouache drafts, or woodcuts produced for broadsheets or posters. A great deal of it seems to emulate the wartime publications made by art workers at the communist base in Yan’an, a high point in Mao’s revolutionary career, and thus revives the iconoclastic art trends of early years of the People’s Republic, including the Korean War era. It sought authenticity in wartime revolutionary styles and images. The early Cultural Revolution also produced the iconic images of Mao Zedong that became permanent elements of the nation’s visual landscape. The second period of Cultural Revolution art, from 1971 to 1976, saw Mao’s actress-wife, Jiang Qing, assert more centralized control over a re-established art bureaucracy, which yielded images now made in the mediums of high art, such as oil on canvas or ink on Chinese paper, as well as a remarkably uniform national style. Although images of Mao’s benevolence continued to be produced, vignettes of the heroism and happiness of everyday people became much more common, a way of implementing Mao’s dictum that art should serve the workers, peasants, and soldiers. Thus, art moved from models of revolutionary artistic activity and revolutionary artistic styles developed by the Eighth Route Army and veterans of the Lu Xun Academy of Arts and Literature in Yan’an during the late 1930s and 1940s to a more academic socialist manner. In subject matter, the concerns of Cultural Revolution artists seem to repeat at a radically accelerated pace and miniature scale the developments of the preceding decades of Chinese communist history: first, a call to arms; second, praise for the leadership; third, a quasi-historical phase,
including praise for martyrs and exemplary communists; and finally, praise for the unity of the people and the regime.

The Chinese of the 1960s and 1970s lived in a world ornamented with inspiring visual and auditory images, from posters to broadcast music to movies and local propaganda dramas, the entire society as though (or actually) in pursuit of a utopian fantasy. At the same time, the practical needs of material existence, such as food and clothing, became ever more difficult to obtain. An entire generation grew up nourished by the same music, that of the model theatrical works of the Cultural Revolution, and the same imagery – Cultural Revolution cartoons, posters, and paintings – and all artists were trained to paint in essentially the same style. This art, like the policies that produced it, may trace its origins and aesthetic principles to the earlier history of the Communist Party, and like them, it is the result of a continuous development pushed onto an extremist byway.

The Cultural Revolution was not simply a ten-year aberration, as the euphemism the “ten lost years” implies. Instead, it built very directly on the procedures and system put in place by the Communist Party during the preceding twenty-five years, a system on which the party based its legitimacy and in which all party leaders were complicit. Political purges, arrests, and thought reform conducted within the party during the 1940s and throughout society during the 1950s provided the groundwork for the massive persecutions that took place between 1966 and 1976. The Anti-rightist Campaign of 1957, in which all work units (danwei) were ordered to identify between 5 and 20 percent of their staff as anti-party rightists, might be viewed as a trial run for the purges of the Cultural Revolution. People from all walks of life were condemned, often on fabricated charges, and their families and friends threatened with retribution for any attempt at defence. The party’s enormous propaganda machine rolled out such detailed and often-repeated accounts of the alleged crimes that people learned to recite them from memory. Demonizing the victims through propaganda was effective, and the victims, or “rightists,” came to be viewed as something “other,” less than human and not worthy of sympathy. Notable, in retrospect, is the vigour with which party members pursued attacks on their colleagues and the weakness of any defence of the rightists. The few people who loyally insisted on the innocence of their colleagues or family members were immediately labelled rightists themselves and removed from the scene. Trust in the government and fear for their own safety led colleagues and even family members to assist in patently unfair attacks. Numerous examples may be found of wives or husbands who divorced their “rightist” spouses, changed the names of their children, and completely cut off contact. Acceptance of
the government’s claims and its right to persecute its citizens laid the groundwork for what would follow during the Cultural Revolution.

It was only after the Cultural Revolution, with the wisdom of hindsight, that these “movements” to rectify political thinking, which dated all the way back to the early 1940s at the Yan’an communist base, were understood as part of a continuum. Privately, many individuals came to realize that their own words of condemnation in the Anti-rightist Campaign constituted not loyalty to the party, but betrayal of the innocent, a perspective gained by suffering a similar fate themselves in 1966 or 1967. Since virtually every party official had been involved in implementing these movements, exposing them would have required admissions of culpability that the party as a whole was not willing to make. From this viewpoint, a thorough analysis of the Cultural Revolution would require a hard look at the history of the Communist Party and the past activities of its subsequent leaders, including Deng Xiaoping, who ruled China from 1979 to 1989 and retained substantial power until his death in 1997.

The First Phase (1966-71)

The first phase of Cultural Revolution art (1966-71), produced spontaneously and quickly, supported the ever-developing political movements as they responded to every new directive or suggestion from Mao and his close supporters, including his wife, Jiang Qing.3 In February 1966, Jiang Qing held a conference on military arts and literature at which praise for the thought of Chairman Mao was the dominant theme. She singled out the *Rent Collection Courtyard*, a life-sized sculptural installation made at the Sichuan Arts Academy, as a “model” for the art world, the first such canonization in the Cultural Revolution. This installation, and its subsequent history, is the subject of Chapter 5, by Britta Erickson, in this volume. Jiang Qing’s critical stance was justified, according to the Red Guards, by the approval of workers, peasants, and soldiers.

Late in the spring of 1966, the party, on Mao’s orders, issued a paper referred to as the “May Sixteenth Directive.” It criticized Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping for “having let all of the ox-demons and snake-spirits out of their cages,” for “stuffing up our newspapers, broadcasts, periodicals, books, textbooks, performances, works of literature and art, films, plays, operas, art, music, dance, and so forth,” and for refusing to accept the leadership of the proletariat.4 Four high Communist Party officials were dismissed: Army Chief of Staff Luo Ruiqing, Beijing Mayor Peng Zhen, head of the Central Propaganda Department Lu Dingyi, and Director of the Communist Party
Central Committee Office Yang Shangkun. Staffing shifts were made throughout the propaganda apparatus so that major newspapers became more responsive to Mao’s wishes. A new Cultural Revolution Small Group was appointed directly under the Standing Committee of the Politburo to direct the movement.

The most frequently seen, yet transitory, art form of the period may have been the big-character posters (dazibao) handwritten in bold calligraphy to attack the person or policy to be discredited. Young people who had learned the traditional skills of calligraphy were much sought after, urged to turn their talents against their own birthright. Of course, the messages conveyed by the posters were intended to take pride of place, but the somewhat less revolutionary attraction of style seems to have been appreciated as well, as witnessed by the many stories of posters written by well-known calligraphers disappearing almost as quickly as they were displayed.

On 1 June, Mao approved broadcast of the text of a big-character poster that denounced the president of Beijing University. In the view of the Red Guards, he personally launched the Cultural Revolution by this act. With Mao’s support withdrawn from college administrations and party committees, most collapsed. Student activists, garbed in Yan’an-style faded army uniforms, marched from school to school in demonstrations against academic administrators. Wide leather belts with heavy buckles, a standard part of the costume, were used by some students as weapons against those who failed to pay proper respect.

By mid-June, all schools were closed. On 4 June, some middle school students at Qinghua University wrote a big-character poster with the slogan “Rebellion is justified!” (Figure 1.1). The title “Red Guard” was recognized by Mao on 1 August as the name for student activists who supported him. A meeting of Maoist members of the Communist Party’s Central Committee in early August set forth guidelines on the goals of the Red Guard movement. The Red Guards were mandated, first, to overthrow those within the party who had taken the capitalist road and, second, to uproot and destroy the “four olds.” On 5 August, Mao himself displayed a big-character poster on the door of the room where the Central Committee met, calling upon the Red Guards to “bombard the headquarters” (paoda silingbu) of his party opponents who exercised “bourgeois dictatorship.” The four olds were defined as old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits of the exploiting classes to corrupt the masses. Normal cultural activity in the capital largely ceased as students and teachers organized to support the Red Guard movement.

Over the course of 1967, well-known artists were attacked in the press and in their studios. In general, all who reached adulthood before 1949 had
“historical problems” that made them targets. In January 1967, when the communist bureaucracy was overthrown nationwide, the Chinese Artists’ Association was “smashed.”11 In this period, many young artists devoted more energy to political activities than to art of any kind. Nevertheless, academic artists, including Red Guard art students, were crucial in establishing the visual images of the Cultural Revolution.12 For example, two contending Red Guard groups from the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts – the East Is Red and Mount Jinggang – seized control of the giant billboards at the northeast and northwest corners of Tian’anmen Square. Their competition was played out in the design and execution of huge painted images, which became models for billboards throughout the nation.13 Students threw themselves into painting murals, cartoons, and posters in support of Chairman Mao and the Cultural Revolution.

Ideological struggles and personal hostilities then factionalized the Red Guard movement. The crisis of the matched couplet debate began in July 1966 when a group of middle school students at the Beijing Aeronautical Institute posted a slogan in the form of a matched couplet, which read “If the father’s a hero, the son’s a brave; if the father’s a counter-revolutionary, the son’s a bastard.”14 The slogan, which codified Maoist class distinctions as hereditary, spread throughout the capital, provoking controversy and antagonism within the Red Guard movement. Red Guard students in the colleges of music, drama, and art had particularly intense reactions to the slogan, for many of them came from “bad” class backgrounds and risked permanent exclusion from the upper social stratum of revolutionary society. Red Guards from revolutionary families, the new elite, began marching, demonstrating, and chanting in support of the slogan. Pro-slogan students eventually prevailed nationwide, and Red Guards from bad backgrounds were required to denounce their parents or quit the patriotic movement. A Hong Kong newspaper reported in November that students from politically suspect backgrounds were expelled from schools in Guangzhou by the Red Guards unless they condemned their families.15 For most of the subsequent decade, a person’s class background determined access to employment and education.

On eight occasions between August and December 1966, Mao Zedong and the reorganized Communist Party leadership received Red Guards who travelled to Beijing from all over the nation. It has been estimated that the total number of Red Guards assembled at Tian’anmen Square during the course of these receptions was between 10 and 13 million.16 Mao’s meeting with the Red Guard became a favourite subject for young artists. An anonymous oil painting titled Chairman Mao’s Heart Beats as One with the
Figure 1.2  *Chairman Mao’s Heart Beats as One with the Hearts of the Revolutionary Masses* (1967). Poster. From left are Cultural Revolution leaders Jiang Qing, Kang Sheng, Chen Boda, Zhou Enlai, Lin Biao, and Mao Zedong. *China Reconstructs*, February 1968, 22.

Figure 1.3  *We Must Implement the Proletarian Cultural Revolution to the Finish*. Detail of oil painting published as a poster. Mao Zedong, now unaccompanied by other leaders, greets his followers in this revised and retitled version of Figure 1.2. This version was painted collaboratively for the 1972 national art exhibition by senior artists Hou Yimin, Deng Shu, Jin Shangyi, Zhan Jianjun, Luo Gongliu, Yuan Hao, and Yang Lin’gui. Collection of Wang Mingxian.
Hearts of the Revolutionary Masses (Figure 1.2), published in February of 1968 but painted slightly earlier, commemorated the event. Mao, dressed in a military uniform, strides across a stone bridge in front of the old palace to shake the hands of his young supporters on Tian’anmen Square. The demonstrators are a carefully varied group of student Red Guards, workers, and soldiers of both genders. Behind Mao are key Cultural Revolution leaders: Lin Biao, Zhou Enlai, Chen Boda, Kang Sheng, and Jiang Qing. All but Kang and Zhou are in military uniforms, emphasizing Mao’s reliance on the army to maintain order after his purge of the party.

The authorship of this painting is not known, but it is clearly a collective work. The socialist-realist style encouraged by Jiang Qing and other Cultural Revolution leaders required more technical training than most Red Guards had received. Because the paintings tended to be extraordinarily large and painted on short deadlines, the young artists would often plan and execute their compositions collaboratively. If Mao were to be the focus of the picture, as he usually was, it was especially important that his face be delineated as skilfully as possible. In many cases, an experienced painter would be sought to help with this crucial part of the picture. There may have been at least three hands involved in the production of this work, typical of the collaboration encouraged by the “communistic” ideals of the Cultural Revolution. A group of Central Academy of Fine Arts professors, including Hou Yimin and Jin Shangyi, was required to paint a more polished version of this composition for the 1972 national exhibition (see Figure 1.3).

Early in the 1966 frenzy of student activism, revolutionary students and teachers of the Central Academy of Fine Arts conducted a dramatic symbolic event, the smashing of the plaster statues, which occurred on about 25 August. Sketching from plaster casts of famous European and Asian sculptures was an integral part of the Central Academy of Fine Arts curriculum, following that of the European academies on which it was based. The Red Guards decided in 1966 that the plaster reproductions of the four olds should be smashed. The academy’s collection of casts, including reproductions of such works as Michelangelo’s David, the Venus de Milo, and the Apollo Belvedere, were ritually destroyed with axes and shovels and then burned. Red Guards paraded around the fire in a victory celebration. Completion of the ambitious undertaking required a great deal of physical exertion, and the art students were assisted in this task by students from the Physical Education Department of Beijing Normal University.

Some of the most appalling incidents of the early Cultural Revolution period involved violence against people, as well as property. In order to smash the “power-holding faction,” an exhibition of newly condemned
“black paintings” was held at the Central Academy of Fine Arts by the Red Army group of the academy’s middle school, a Red Guard body composed chiefly of the sons and daughters of high-cadre families. Works of art were brought out of the academy gallery for castigation. At least four faculty members, Ye Qianyu, Luo Gongliu, Li Kuchan, and Huang Yongyu, were beaten with belts and belt buckles by Red Guard students and faculty. After being physically humiliated in front of their students, colleagues, and families, most old artists and administrators were incarcerated in makeshift campus prisons called ox-sheds, for “ox-demons and snake-spirits.”

During January and February of 1967, the National Assembly of Red Art Rebels met in the National Art Gallery in Beijing to attack the seventeen years of the black line in literature and art and to struggle against capitalist-roaders in the art world. The “rebels” (zaofanpai) included students and young artists affiliated with art and film academies, the Chinese Artists’ Association, and institutes of Chinese painting, who had travelled to Beijing from all over the nation. The Ministry of Culture auditorium, the National Art Gallery, and the Central Academy of Fine Arts auditorium were converted into “national liaison stations” for Red Guards from arts institutions. The primary targets of their campaign were the national leaders of the artists’ association and the academies. According to a former Red Guard leader, his group was granted 3,000 yuan by the Ministry of Culture to fund its criticism meetings and to publish a set of propaganda posters. The “rebellion” in the art world was government-funded.

The Red Guards published a number of new tabloids to record and encourage Cultural Revolution activities. Among them was Art Storm (Meishufenglei), first published in June 1967 by Red Guards at the academy but with co-sponsorship from many Beijing art groups. Although its editorial offices were on the Central Academy of Fine Arts campus, and groups associated with that institution played a prominent role in its activities, it was a joint effort of Red Guard groups from most Beijing art institutions. The extravagant names of the sponsoring organizations give a sense of the atmosphere of the time and indeed demonstrate both revolutionary zeal and an impulse to remake a bureaucracy to replace the one they had just overthrown: Great United Congress of Central Academy of Fine Arts Classes and Departments, Beijing Painting Institute Mao Zedong Thought Armed Struggle Group Revolutionary Committee, Red [Guard] Congress Central Academy of Fine Arts Prairie Fire Armed Struggle Team, Red [Guard] Congress Central Academy of Arts and Crafts East Is Red Commune, Museum of Revolutionary History Revolutionary Rebel United Committee, and National Art Gallery Red Rebel Group, to name only a few.
The first issue of *Art Storm* reported on a 6 June conference titled “Cut Off Liu Shaoqi’s Black Hand in the Art World – Thoroughly Eliminate the Poisonous Weeds Glorifying Liu Shaoqi.” At that staged circus, art world leaders were brought to the Museum of Revolutionary History to face public attack in front of delegates of the labour congress (gongdaihui), military, and art circles. Those criticized were held responsible for production and publication of “dog portraits” of Liu Shaoqi, many of which had been commissioned by the museum. \(^9\) *Art Storm* devoted the remainder of its first issue to castigating portraits of Liu Shaoqi and their creators. In one heinous example, it was found that 172,077 copies of Hou Yimin’s oil painting *Liu Shaoqi and the Anyuan Coal Miners* (Figure 1.4) had been published by People’s Art Press between 1962 and 1965. Other Red Guard targets were the Hangzhou oil painting professor Wang Dewei, whose picturesque portrait of Liu Shaoqi’s forest meeting with workers from the timber industry was exhibited in 1964, and the Central Academy of Fine Arts professor Li Qi, who had painted a portrait of Liu in the traditional medium of ink and

![Image](Image.png)

**Figure 1.4** Hou Yimin, *Liu Shaoqi and the Anyuan Coal Miners* (1961). In official party histories of the 1950s, Liu Shaoqi, the picture’s central figure in a white tunic, is credited with leading a 1922 coal miners’ strike in Anyuan, Jiangxi, that initiated the party’s successful effort to overturn the capitalist system. This version of the oil painting was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, but the artist subsequently painted a new one for the Museum of Revolutionary History. *Meishu* 4 (1961): 33.
colour on paper. The “erroneous” art produced between 1961 and 1965 was blamed on both the artists and their political masters, in this case Deng Xiaoping, Lu Dingyi, and Zhou Yang.20

On 23 May 1967, after a year of destruction, the Cultural Revolution Small Group announced the establishment of a Literature and Arts Group (Wenyizu) directed by Jiang Qing. Other members of the group were Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Qi Benyu. In May an exhibition of paintings by the Proletarian Cultural Revolution Red Painting Guard was held at the former Rongbaozhai Gallery. It was sponsored by various Red Guard publications, including the journal Art War Gazette (Meishu zhanbao).21 Five days later, eighty rebel units opened an even larger exhibition, called Long Live the Victory of Mao Zedong Thought Revolutionary Painting Exhibition, at the National Art Gallery, in honour of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Yan’an Talks. Former art leaders were once again humiliated and attacked before an audience of almost a thousand people.22

Soon after, Art Storm issued an attack on the Beijing Chinese Painting Institute, which had been founded in 1957 to preserve China’s endangered traditional art, for being a “royal academy” run by Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi. The Red Guards asserted that Mao and Zhou Enlai, the latter of whom was actually a strong supporter of the institute, had intended it to produce socialist-realist pictures but that the Central Propaganda Department and Beijing municipal government had led it astray.

Between 10 and 12 June 1967, a “ten-thousand person meeting” was held at the Beijing Workers Stadium under the auspices of the Literature and Arts Group of the Cultural Revolution Small Group. Cultural leaders were presented for “criticism and struggle” by the masses, a euphemism for verbal attack and physical humiliation, and one of the Rent Collection Courtyard artists gave a formal speech.23 In July and August 1967, many meetings were held to “criticize and struggle” arts administrators in the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Another black painting exhibition in late 1968 attacked the classical tradition of ink painting. Many of the leading masters of this genre were on the Central Academy of Fine Arts faculty – Qi Baishi (who had died by this time) and the senior professors Ye Qianyu, Li Keran, and Li Kuchan. Most old artists were under surveillance and were prohibited from painting during these years.

As factional loyalties to competing Red Guard groups were solidified in 1967, their allies from outside the Central Academy sought to participate in criticizing victims.24 In some instances, a faction would spirit away works of art or even people to be criticized and hide them from opposing
groups. At the height of the factional struggles in 1967, opposing Red Guard groups at the Central Academy of Fine Arts occupied the two largest buildings on campus as forts. Older faculty (and a few unlucky students) at the school continued to be physically and mentally abused throughout the first eighteen months of the Cultural Revolution. To take one notorious example – the Central Academy of Fine Arts party committee member and oil painting instructor Hou Yimin, who had been an underground party member before 1949 and had fought hard to swing the school into the communist camp during the Civil War, had initially been sympathetic to Mao’s movement but nevertheless became a Red Guard target himself. Not only had he painted the disgraced Liu Shaoqi and the Anyuan Coal Miners for the Museum of Revolutionary History, he also had a “landlord” family background and he liked to collect antiques. For these crimes, he was reportedly hung by his arms and beaten; his wife, Deng Shu, suffered a heart attack during her assault. His Japan-educated colleague Wang Shikuo was tortured into confessing to espionage; his wife was dragged by her hair down two flights of stairs. This violence at the centre of the Chinese art establishment reflected the general situation in cultural and educational circles. The desire to forget the “ten lost years” on the part of both victims and victimizers is understandable.

Red Guard Caricature: A Parade of Clowns

The Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing attracted national attention for its propaganda work at the height of the movement. A People’s Daily (Renmin ribao) report of 23 February 1967 records that “rebel artists” from the Central Academy of Fine Arts had drawn propaganda pictures based on Mao’s quotations and described this as “a new event in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and a great initiative of the fine arts circle.”25 The following day, a foreign reporter described lines of workers at post offices and other public institutions waiting to purchase a “news sheet caricaturing thirty-nine targets of the Cultural Revolution.”26 This poster fits the description of an elaborate cartoon designed by Weng Rulan, an advanced undergraduate in the academy’s guohua (traditional Chinese painting) department.27 The version reproduced below bears the title A Parade of Clowns and was issued by a transitory Red Guard group, the Preparatory Office for the Struggle against Peng [Zhen], Lu [Dingyi], Luo [Ruiqing], and Yang [Shangkun]’s Counter-Revolutionary Revisionist Group (Figure 1.5).28 When the poster was made, this organization occupied offices in the municipal government
According to Weng Rulan, the poster depicts the first thirty-nine high-ranking targets of the Cultural Revolution in the order that they were purged from government. The caricatured figures convey both their personal quirks and their political positions, and are based on the artist's visual imagination and crucial details she learned from her parents' circle of friends. One of the many ironies of the Cultural Revolution is that the young people Mao used for his political ends were products of the system they overthrew. Weng Rulan was a twenty-two-year-old Beijing native who had received an elite education at China's premier art school from the age of twelve. Her undergraduate advisor was Ye Qianyu, chairman of the academy's *guohua* department and a renowned cartoonist and satirist. Weng, like her teacher, became a specialist in the outline style.
By the time the Cultural Revolution began in 1966, Weng had completed ten years of professional art training at the Central Academy of Fine Arts and was thoroughly steeped in the principles and history of communist art. The complex composition and amusing caricatures of *A Parade of Clowns* are very much a product of that careful training. The legacy of her teacher’s ink painting and comic style, which includes slightly squared shoulders and knees as well as lively variations in line width, is evident in her cartoon, a stylistic heritage she did not reject even though Ye Qianyu was an early target of the Red Guards. Ye’s own penetrating characterization was clearly a model for this extraordinary work by his student.

The composition of *A Parade of Clowns* has other sources within the academy, including a well-published revolutionary New Year’s picture by Hong Bo from the Civil War period. In his work, twenty-five north Chinese peasants and communist cadres parade across the picture in serpentine fashion to celebrate heroes of the Civil War. Just as wartime woodcuts reworked the established iconographic forms of folk art to help Mao Zedong in propaganda battles of the 1940s, so Weng Rulan manipulated icons of early communist art to attack the Communist Party’s ousted leaders on Mao’s behalf. The first of the thirty-nine figures in *A Parade of Clowns* is Lu Dingyi, director of the Communist Party’s Central Propaganda Department and minister of culture. Lu beats a broken drum that emits noises such as “dogmatism,” “pragmatism,” and “simplification.” Wu Han, Liao Mosha, and Deng Tuo, who had been attacked for criticizing Mao in their writings, follow. Deposed vice-minister of culture Xia Yan blows a trumpet that sounds “the thirties,” alongside Zhou Yang, whose own trumpet urges “The Wang Ming Line,” “Literature of National Defence,” and “Down with Lu Xun.” Each figure is labelled and satirized. The playwright Tian Han wears a Beijing opera robe, the collar of which is embroidered with the word “counter-revolutionary.” General Luo Ruiqing, whose leg is in a cast, is carried in a basket. Luo had broken his leg the previous year in an unsuccessful suicide leap from a building.29

Wang Guangmei, Liu Shaoqi’s wife, rides a bicycle in the high heels, sheath dress, and jewellery for which the Red Guards ridiculed her.30 A book, *The Sayings of Chairman Liu*, rests on the front of her bicycle and a pile of hats on the rear. The hats are labelled counter-revolutionary, true rightist, false leftist, anti-party type, and so forth. Marshall He Long stands behind her, depicted with exaggerated emphasis on his hairy chest, arms, and moustache. He wears Beijing opera flags on his back that read “If the father’s a hero,” thus portraying him as a supporter of the “bloodlines” Red Guard group. Following in sedan chairs are Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and
their supporters. Deng plays bridge with cards that read “king” and “work teams,” the latter a reference to party officials who attempted to pacify the student rebels in the early days of the movement.

The ridicule of purged party leaders had a venerable history by the time Weng made her poster. Her work treats her subject much more mildly than some humourless cartoons conceived during the 1955 anti–Hu Feng movement, which used homophones to vilify the disgraced communist writer as a thoroughly evil tiger (hu). Weng Rulan’s work mocks rival Red Guard factions as well as the thirty-nine politicians. Trailing behind the last purged leader is a ragged line of small figures carrying the tattered flags of rival rebel groups: West Guard, East Guard, United Action Committee, Red Flag Army, and so forth.31 These groups were all associated with the slogan “If the father’s a hero, the son’s a brave; if the father’s a counter-revolutionary, the son’s a bastard.” He Long’s flags bear this slogan, an intentional irony, for his son was a leader of the United Action Committee, which promoted the elitist ditty.32 The Red Guard leader was thus attacked with his own slogan, for once his venerable father had been condemned, he must become the bastard his group had labelled others.33 Weng herself, as the daughter of two professors, was the product of what the other faction had declared to be a bad class background and thus was one who would be deprived of political and civil rights in the new social structure codified by the Cultural Revolution.

A Parade of Clowns enjoyed wide distribution and marked a short-lived publicity victory for the artist’s Red Guard faction. In poster form, it was made available to workers in Beijing, displayed throughout the diplomatic district of the city, and even mailed to foreign purchasers of Chinese books and periodicals. It documented serious business, however: two years later, the primary target of Mao Zedong’s wrath, Liu Shaoqi, died in prison of untreated pneumonia.

Much Red Guard art sought to create the directness and urgency of wartime propaganda produced in the 1940s at Yan’an. The revolutionary agenda that generated Cultural Revolution art was accompanied by claims of collectivism in the process of production, and A Parade of Clowns is typical of Red Guard propaganda pictures in being unsigned. Many bold woodcuts were also published during this period, most anonymously. Figure 1.1 incorporates the new tenets of socialist realism with the simplicity of the folk-inspired Yan’an style.

Many of the published images from the early years of the Cultural Revolution were painted for one of the many Red Guard–organized exhibitions. Red Guards, inspired by the cult of Mao Zedong and guided by Jiang Qing, set out to construct a new pictorial history for the People’s Republic of
China – one that dramatized Mao’s revolutionary role and minimized that of most other communist leaders. A publication of the period asserts, “It is Chairman Mao who points the correct direction for the revolutionary literary and art workers. It is Comrade Jiang Qing, courageous standard-bearer of the great Cultural Revolution, who persists along Chairman Mao’s revolutionary line in literature and art and leads the proletarian revolutionaries in these fields in creating ‘model’ revolutionary productions for the stage.”

One well-publicized exhibition of the period was Long Live the Victory of Chairman Mao’s Revolutionary Line, which opened at the National Art Gallery on 1 October 1967 and subsequently toured the nation. Sixteen hundred works were shown, of which 60 percent were advertised as by workers, peasants, and soldiers. (Presumably, the other 40 percent were by professionals.) Chairman Mao’s Heart Beats as One with the Hearts of the Revolutionary Masses (Figure 1.2), an oil painting prepared for this exhibition, may have been the result of amateur-professional collaboration.

An event that was even more memorable for the young artists in Beijing was Mao Zedong’s Thought Illuminates the Anyuan Workers’ Movement, an exhibition that opened in October 1967. It featured the Cultural Revolution icon Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan (Figure 1.6). The exhibition was organized at the Museum of Revolutionary History by the national labour union. Its political purpose was explicit, for it was part of an intensified campaign to discredit Liu Shaoqi. As Art Storm had indicated some months earlier, the purge of Mao’s chosen successor meant that well-known history paintings such as Hou Yimin’s Liu Shaoqi and the Anyuan Coal Miners (Figure 1.4) and Dong Xiwen’s Founding of the Nation (Figure 1.7), with its prominent image of Liu Shaoqi, were inappropriate for display. The exhibition sought to redefine the iconography of China’s revolutionary history by replacing Liu with Mao as the primary organizer of the important 1922 coal miners’ strike. Liu Chunhua’s oil painting Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan was a remarkable exception to the convention of anonymity. The young artist, whose education paralleled that of Weng Rulan, was then a college student at the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts, which he had entered from the elite art middle school of the Lu Xun Academy of Art in Shenyang.

His painting of the young Mao visiting Anyuan in 1921 would not have inspired such interest were it not for the official response it received. Jiang Qing requested that a viewing be held at the governmental compound at Zhongnanhai and in 1967 declared it a “model” for Cultural Revolution art. People’s Daily reproduced it in colour and distributed it nationwide. Parades and festivals were organized to commemorate the publication, with pretty girls in new blue overalls dancing in front of multiple reproductions.
of the picture.37 By the fall of 1968, it was institutionalized as a model painting, copied by aspiring artists nationwide, and reproduced on everything from Mao badges to pocket mirrors. Years later, in the 1980s, the artist estimated that 900 million copies had been printed during the course of the Cultural Revolution, a number greater than the entire Chinese population at that time.

The painting was an important contribution to Mao’s cult, for it possessed clear devotional appeal. Indeed, the artist claimed to have taken his inspiration from a Raphael Madonna, although a more immediate source for the composition might have been contemporary Chinese oil painting of Mao executed in the Soviet manner by the well-known Chinese portraitist Jin Shangyi.38

Although Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan’s links to earlier academic art are more evident than its innovations, it was affirmed by Cultural Revolution authorities as an icon of the new art. Features of Liu’s work that became characteristic of Cultural Revolution painting are Mao’s exaggerated eyebrows, his smooth face, and the artificially arranged clouds, which allow nature to echo Mao’s divine movements.

As Maurice Meisner has observed, by 1968 the cult of Mao had shifted from the iconoclasm of the Red Guard movement, here exemplified by the work of Weng Rulan, to the production of icons.39 Liu Chunhua’s Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan was the most important pictorial manifestation of this trend, but it was not alone. Lin Yong, in his Great Job! Investigating the Peasant Movement in Hunan (1970), is similarly successful in his portrayal of the youthful Mao as a handsome heroic figure, the perfect object of admiration for the young (Figure 1.8). Lin Yong’s attainment was all the more remarkable in winning official approval of a painting in the traditional medium of ink and colour on paper, thus setting a standard for a socialist, non-traditional, form of Chinese painting.

If the delicately refined young Mao of the paintings by Liu and Lin might present a certain view of history and serve as a model for China’s youth, an oil painting of the mature, ruddy-faced Mao by Shengtian Zheng, then a young art teacher at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou (now the National Academy of Fine Arts), and his collaborators served to reassure China’s people of the glories of their present under Mao’s firm and wise control (see Figure 3.1 in Chapter 3). This painting enjoyed less celebrity than Liu Chunhua’s, due to the preferences of Jiang Qing and the artist’s troubles at the hands of increasingly radical Zhejiang Red Guards; Shengtian Zheng’s account of the creative process, and of the contrasting fates of his
Figure 1.6 Liu Chunhua, *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* (1967). Oil painting reproduced as a poster. This painting responded to the Cultural Revolution's program of destroying the reputations of Mao's rivals as revolutionary founders and was specifically intended to replace Figure 1.4. Mao is here depicted as arriving in Jiangxi in the fall of 1921 to begin organizing the coal miners. The claim is thus asserted that Mao enjoyed precedence over the disgraced Liu Shaoqi in organizing the urban proletariat and that he personally ignited the revolutionary conflagration. Collection of Wang Mingxian.
Figure 1.7  Dong Xiwen, *Founding of the Nation* (1952-53). Oil painting reproduced as a poster (painting now damaged). Behind Mao, in the front row, from left, are General Zhu De, Liu Shaoqi, Madame Song Qingling, Li jishen, Zhang Lan, and Gao Gang, who were the six vice-chairmen of the Central People’s Government; among those in row two are Zhou Enlai at left, the elderly and bearded Shen Junru, and Guo Moruo at right; in the back row, at left, is Lin Boqu. *China Pictorial* 10 (1953): 20-21.
painting and Liu Chunhua’s *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan*, appears in Chapter 3 of this volume.

The rampant chaos of 1967 and 1968, which threatened the nation with civil war, led to a crackdown against student activism. In 1968 and 1969, all urban high school graduates were sent to labour in China's distant hinterlands – the Siberian border in the northeast, the remote mountains of Sichuan, the Mongolian steppes, and the southwestern jungles of Yunnan – in a mass rustication that brought the Red Guard art movement to its close. Simultaneously, most professional artists were removed from the art world and sent to the countryside for labour reform.

There were some regional differences in art administration during the unsettled period before 1971. In Shanghai, as in Beijing, artists who were not in prison were sent, by 1969, to do farm work at May Seventh Cadre-schools, as labour camps in the rural suburbs were called, and they remained there until 1971. Although art periodicals had ceased publication, major Shanghai newspapers continued to function and began to seek revolutionary paintings for reproduction on their pages. In 1969, for example, a young amateur named Xu Chunzhong, who had learned to paint at a Children’s Palace, was commissioned to illustrate an important article in *Liberation Daily (Jiefang ribao)* about the heroic death of Jin Shunhua, a Shanghai student who had drowned in Heilongjiang while trying to prevent timber from being swept away by flood waters. The Shanghai-born Jin was thus depicted as a martyr by another Shanghai-born rusticated youth. Technical skill was not sacrificed to political correctness, however, as Xu was assisted in this commission by one of the most talented of the young Shanghai professional artists, Chen Yifei, and the work was published under the pseudonym Yi Zhong. According to their colleagues, top Cultural Revolution administrators decided to promote Jin Shunhua as a national model of selfless sacrifice. The image was repeatedly published, including as a colour poster.

**Reconstruction of the National Bureaucracy**

The Ministry of Culture, the Central Propaganda Department, and the Chinese Artists’ Association, organizations within the party and government that were responsible for art in the centralized socialist structure before 1966, were rendered powerless and ineffective during the early years of the Cultural Revolution. By about 1970, their functions were assumed by a Culture Group under the State Council. Jiang Qing, as director of this group, was the highest authority on cultural matters. Art activities were directed by
Wang Mantian, one of the ten directors of the Culture Group, a shadowy figure who is believed to have studied art at the Lu Xun Academy of Arts and Literature in Yan’an.41

Wang Mantian began planning for a 1972 exhibition to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of Mao’s Yan’an Talks, with a meeting at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts. The choice of location for the meeting may have been due to the presence there of Zhang Yongsheng (a Red Guard leader at the Zhejiang Academy who had risen to a leadership position in the rebel factions of Hangzhou).42 Zhang Yongsheng’s Cultural Revolution exploits and his subsequent downfall are described in Chapter 3. Wang Mantian selected a young oil painting instructor, Gao Jingde, to head the exhibition effort.

Gao Jingde visited all provinces and major art institutions in the country, with the goal of assembling an unprecedented national exhibition to promote the thought of Chairman Mao. Although worker-peasant-soldier art remained extremely important, Gao sought high technical standards, which had not been the case during the spontaneous and disorganized artistic activity of the 1966-70 period.

That Gao and his assistants were products of the academy system strongly affected the direction taken by Chinese painting of the 1970s. The 1972, 1973, and 1974 exhibitions were dominated by a narrowly defined academic style. The painting that they promoted was a synthesis of the Soviet-influenced academic painting of the art colleges and the more restrictive requirements Jiang Qing developed for the model theatrical works she promoted at the same time. This style combined socialist realism with some aspects of folk art, especially its bright colour, and certain idiosyncratic Western elements derived from Jiang Qing’s personal taste, some of which may have come from her early life as an aspiring movie actress in the commercial mecca of Shanghai. Eclectic as her taste may have been, Jiang Qing’s antipathy to traditional Chinese art was almost total.

Before selection of work for the national exhibition began in the spring of 1972, all provincial and municipal Cultural Revolution Committees were asked to organize submissions. Orders were given that many artists, old and young, who had been incarcerated but not convicted were to be liberated for the purpose. A small number of old professional artists who had enjoyed Zhou Enlai’s appreciation during the 1950s were asked to paint for the exhibition; among these were Guan Shanyue, partner in a major 1959 commission illustrating Mao’s poetry for the Great Hall of the People, and Qian Songyan, active in forging the new Jiangsu style of traditional Chinese painting.
Figure 1.8  Lin Yong, *Great Job! Investigating the Peasant Movement in Hunan* (1970). The artist has imagined the young Hunanese, Mao Zedong, conducting the fieldwork that produced his seminal 1927 essay advocating the overthrow of landlords by peasant associations. Mao's theory for implementation of China's revolution through rural organization, in contrast to that of rivals in the party who focused more on the industrial urban proletariat, became an essential Maoist text.

Collection of the artist.
Figure 1.12  Shen Jiawei, *Standing Guard for Our Great Motherland* (1974). Collection of the artist.
during the late 1950s. A larger number of middle-aged professionals re-emerged, as did some former Red Guard painters.

A jury of well-known professional artists was formed to make the final selection of the many pictures submitted by provincial authorities. The dual mandate of high technical standards and "serving the people" led to an odd combination of professional and amateur activity. In spite of Gao’s efforts to include some professional artists, the Cultural Revolution’s emphasis on proletarian art by workers, peasants, and soldiers ensured that most of the successful submissions were by amateurs.

The inherent contradiction between Gao’s mandate to seek high standards and the politically correct but technically weak images by workers, peasants, and soldiers was resolved by forming Painting Correction Groups. Works by amateurs might have interesting subject matter but be poorly executed. In response to criticisms by jury members, officials, and other artists, such paintings were "corrected" by prominent young professionals who had accompanied them when each region shipped them to the capital. For the oil painting section, a representative of the artist’s own region would simply repaint problematic sections. If the officials still found the work inadequate, artists from other regions might complete the repaint. Some of the most highly skilled realists of the younger generation were selected: these included Jin Shangyi, from Beijing, a young oil painting professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts trained a decade earlier by the Soviet expert Constantine Maksimov; from Shanghai, Chen Yifei, who had studied at the Shanghai Art College; from Wuhan, Tang Xiaohe, a graduate of the Hubei Art Academy; from Kunming, Sun Jingbo, a graduate of the Central Academy of Fine Arts Middle School; from Guangzhou, Chen Yan’ning, a graduate of the Guangzhou Academy of Arts; from Qinghai, Zhu Naizheng, a talented Central Academy of Fine Arts graduate; and from Shenyang, Guang Tingbo, from the Lu Xun Academy of Art. Several other Beijing artists were given special assignments. Most of the artists were called back from labour camps or prison to participate in the exhibition.

In a departure from the conventions learned from Soviet painters, it was widely accepted among Cultural Revolution-era artists that images of Mao should be red, smooth, and luminescent. Although Soviet socialist realism was still the most evident stylistic source for such compositions, details of colour and texture may be related to the more elegant of preliberation New Year’s pictures (nian hua). Cool colours were to be avoided; Mao’s flesh should be modelled in red and other warm tones. Conspicuous displays of brushwork should be eschewed, and Mao’s face should be smooth.
The entire composition should be bright and should be illuminated in such a way as to imply that Mao himself was the primary source of light. If Mao were in the centre of a group of people, all efforts should be made to illuminate surfaces that faced him. In this way, slogans such as “Chairman Mao is the red sun in our hearts” could be made visible.

He Kongde’s *Gutian Meeting* (Figure 1.9), which was prominently hung in the oil painting section of the exhibition, does not specifically fulfill all the requirements of the red, smooth, and luminescent formulation, for the artist, unlike many graduates of the Soviet expert Maksimov’s class, never abandoned the loose textural handling of the paint common to many Soviet-trained Chinese artists. Nevertheless, he was particularly favoured by the art administrators because he combined two qualities they sought. As a member of the People’s Liberation Army, he could be considered a worker-peasant-soldier, but he was, at the same time, a professionally trained history painter.

He Kongde chose a military theme in this work, depicting Mao Zedong as he presented instructions from the party central to soldiers of the Red Fourth Army in Gutian village, Fujian, in December of 1929. This new doctrine was considered to have established the communist military structure, in which the party and its ideology possessed authority over the army. Most importantly, this painting demonstrates the party’s acceptance of Mao’s military strategy of surrounding and strangling Guomindang-controlled cities with rural communist troops, and thus implicitly credits the communist victory to his wisdom.

In *Gutian Meeting*, He Kongde made few concessions to Cultural Revolution styles: he did not banish cool colours from his palette, modify his rough brushwork, or employ irrational sources of illumination. Nevertheless, the work does not contradict the underlying aesthetic of the Cultural Revolution, for red tonalities dominate and Mao is the most brightly lit figure in the composition; furthermore, the Painting Correction Group repainted Mao’s face so that it was more smoothly rendered than the remainder of the image.

Organizing the *guohua* section of the exhibition, held the following year, was more difficult, in part due to Jiang Qing’s aversion to traditional art. Local authorities generally believed that *guohua* was part of the four olds to be eradicated by the Cultural Revolution. It was only after Gao received explicit authorization from Wang Mantian to permit *guohua* painting that he was able to persuade local art circles to submit such works. As was the case with oil painting, a Painting Correction Group was assembled to assist with preparations for the exhibition. It, like the oil painting group,
consisted of academically trained *guohua* painters from each of China’s major regions: these included, from Hangzhou, Fang Zengxian, a *guohua* figure painting professor at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts; from Xi’an, Liu Wenxi, a graduate of the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts *guohua* figure painting program; from Guangzhou, Wu Qizhong, a Guangzhou Academy of Arts graduate; from Shenyang, Xu Yong, a professor at the Lu Xun Academy of Art; and from Beijing, Zhou Sicong, a graduate of the Central Academy of Fine Arts *guohua* figure painting program.

Faulty sections of a work painted in permanent ink on paper could not be overpainted, as they might be in an oil painting. The correctors were thus required to make new paintings based on the amateurs’ compositions. The late Zhou Sicong recalled her assignment to fix a painting by a worker in a shoe factory. The worker had attempted to depict the actress of a model...
Julia F. Andrews

opera trying on her new ballet slippers at the factory. The theme was appealing to authorities at all levels: it flattered Jiang Qing and her model theatrical works, and it also documented the contribution the artist’s shoe factory was making to the Cultural Revolution. Unfortunately, the subject was difficult for an amateur to paint with any semblance of anatomical accuracy. Zhou completely repainted the work, basing her picture on the worker’s composition, and it was exhibited under the worker’s name.

The emphasis on rusticated urban youth in the 1972 exhibition left the final group of paintings with comparatively few portraits of Chairman Mao. He Kongde’s Gutian Meeting was prominently hung in the main room of the gallery. A monumental work by the young Wuhan professionals Tang Xiaohe and Cheng Li depicted Mao on the occasion of his famous 1966 swim in the Yangtze River near Wuhan (Figure 1.10). This work combined several desirable characteristics. On 16 July 1966, the elderly Mao Zedong demonstrated the virtues of physical fitness by floating and swimming for over an hour in the Yangtze River. At this crucial juncture, in the early phase of the Cultural Revolution, this praise of Mao’s physical health (whether factually accurate or not) was politically significant. It also fell into the class of revolutionary paintings of local subjects, by taking a theme specific to the artists’ own home locale and thus demonstrating the loyalty of the people of Hubei Province to Mao and the Cultural Revolution (Wuhan had experienced large-scale armed strife in 1967). Multiplied by China’s thirty provinces and cities, such local testimonials became key visual and propaganda statements.

Gao Jingde specifically commissioned another Mao portrait – We Must Implement the Proletarian Cultural Revolution to the Finish – that spoke to both Beijing events and the nation (Figure 1.3). To accomplish the creation of this large oil painting with the optimum quality and speed, he freed a group of Beijing professional artists from nearby labour camps. Thus released, Hou Yimin, Deng Shu, Jin Shangyi, Zhan Jianjun, Luo Gongliu, Yuan Hao, and Yang Lin’gui reworked the Red Guard composition discussed above (Figure 1.2). A major iconographic change is that the Cultural Revolution leadership has been removed from the composition so that Mao crosses the bridge alone. Zhou Enlai reportedly insisted that his own image be removed from the painting, which may have precipitated the revision.

The greatest number of paintings shown in 1972 were executed by amateurs, many of whom were sent-down urban youth facing permanent careers as peasants or factory labourers. When the Cultural Revolution authorities announced the forthcoming exhibition to commemorate the
thirtieth anniversary of the Yan’an Talks, some amateurs began avidly painting in their spare time. Instructions went out to all units to gather submissions from workers, peasants, and soldiers, particularly those glorifying the patriotic contributions of rusticated urban youth. The results were paintings such as *Milk Maid*, by the Shanghai student turned dairy farmer Tang Muli.

The Shanghai-born Tang Muli, son of a successful film director, began painting as a child; like Weng Rulan and Xu Chunzhong, he was a gifted product of the Children’s Palace system. Before the Cultural Revolution, Tang had studied at one of Shanghai’s best secondary schools in preparation

![Figure 1.10 Tang Xiaohe and Cheng Li, *Follow Chairman Mao Closely, Grow Up Tempered by Wind and Waves* (1972). Oil painting published as a poster. On 16 July 1966, the seventy-three-year-old Mao Zedong swam for over an hour in the Yangtze River. Wind and waves here are metaphors for the complicated and dangerous situation in the confrontation of Mao’s revolutionary line and Liu Shaoqi’s bourgeois revisionist line. Mao urges his young followers to steadfastly follow him, despite all difficulties. Collection of Wang Mingxian.](image-url)
for a career in physics. Sent to work on a dairy farm in the Shanghai suburbs rather than to college, he turned to his hobby of drawing and in 1971 submitted his first oil painting for the upcoming exhibition. In *Milk Maid*, Tang Muli, now considered a peasant, depicted a healthy dairy farmer surrounded by cows. In 1972, he was commissioned by the health service to prepare a picture highlighting acupuncture’s use as a surgical anaesthetic, a development seen as the victory of indigenous Chinese science over that of the West. *Acupuncture Anaesthesia* was well received when exhibited in Shanghai that spring. Tang was then freed from farm work to concentrate full-time on a final version to be exhibited in the national exhibition in the fall (Figure 1.11). His *Milk Maid* paints a pretty picture of the situation of his cohort of rusticated urban youth and thus indirectly praises the policy that sent them all to the countryside. Ironically, by virtue of his recognition as a painter, Tang took the first step to escaping his rural destiny.
The next major show was held in October of 1974 at the National Art Gallery, in celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the People’s Republic. Jiang Qing, then involved in a power struggle with the cancer-stricken Zhou Enlai, stepped up her personal involvement with the visual arts. She personally inspected the gallery before the opening of the exhibition, which she had not done in 1972, and she reportedly spent most of one night studying the display. The Politburo attended the opening, according unprecedented political importance to the event.

A rusticated urban student from Zhejiang, Shen Jiawei, exhibited a painting depicting the heroic activities in Heilongjiang, his new home near the Siberian border (Figure 1.12). His story would be typical of other such young artists, were it not for the extraordinary short-term success the picture brought him. Shen Jiawei’s painting, *Standing Guard for Our Great Motherland*, reportedly won Jiang Qing’s enthusiastic approval. Like Tang Muli, Shen was a rusticated urban youth, but because he worked on a military farm in Beidahuang, he was considered a soldier rather than a peasant. Born in 1949 in Jiaxing, Zhejiang, Shen was one of the 400,000 middle school graduates sent in 1968 to a farm in Heilongjiang. He was assigned to the second regiment of the fourth division of the Heilongjiang Production and Construction Corps, which had its headquarters in Jiamusi. His farm, with a population of ten or twenty thousand demobilized soldiers, rightists, and rusticated urban youth, was located in the eastern corner of Heilongjiang, an area of border conflicts with the Soviet Union, near the Muleng River. Among the many young people in Heilongjiang were some who had aspired to enter art academies before the colleges were closed. About thirty of them were graduates of the Central Academy Middle School. With the national leadership’s decision to sponsor national art exhibitions, the authorities in Heilongjiang, like those elsewhere, began organizing painters. Hao Boyi, a young oil painter and printmaker, was assigned to find and supervise the young soldier-artists. In 1971, he ordered a select group of young farmers to attend an art creation class in Jiamusi. Hao Boyi taught printmaking in the local Beidahuang style, and some of his pupils excelled at printmaking. Students who wished to work in other media experimented and taught one another. The program continued for the next five years, with artists dividing their time between artwork in Jiamusi and manual labour on their farms. Heilongjiang prints were shown in most major exhibitions of the 1970s, and many were published anonymously in *Chinese Literature* and other magazines for distribution abroad. Shen Jiawei entered the group in 1973 and produced his vision of heroic border guards during the next year. The leading national art magazine of the
late Cultural Revolution period, Zhejiang-based Art Materials (Meishu ziliao), published an article in which Shen elaborated upon his creative process. He wrote that the theme of his painting was suggested by a widely heard patriotic song of the period. While participating in a class for amateur artists in 1973, he was given an opportunity to visit the Wusuli River and to climb a watchtower where soldiers monitored the Sino-Soviet border. The spectacular natural scenery reinforced the importance of the soldiers’ patriotic duty.

Upon his return to the military camp, his sketch of the scene was approved by local authorities, who also gave him permission to collect further material during a future visit to the site. His composition, he wrote, was guided further by principles of Chairman Mao, such as “Our requirement is the unification of politics and art, the unification of contents and form, the unification of revolutionary political contents and the most perfect artistic form” and “The life reflected in artistic and literary works can be and should be loftier, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, and more ideal than ordinary actual life; thus it will be more universal.” Shen claimed additional inspiration from the study of the model theatrical works, which emphasized heroic characters. One soldier was made more prominent by following the suggestions of classmates to place him against an empty sky. His height was emphasized by shortening the railing and by aligning his head and feet with the exaggerated diagonals bordering the tower roof and the walkway floor. This construction was indeed perfectly in keeping with one of Jiang Qing’s revolutionary aesthetic principles: the three prominences (san tuchu). As discussed in Art Materials in 1973, the three prominences required that, when depicting figures, artists should emphasize those associated with positive qualities; for positive figures, they should emphasize the heroic; and for heroic characters, they should emphasize the central or most important one. What Shen did not mention was his extreme dissatisfaction with the alteration made to his painting in Beijing by a Painting Correction Group, whose representative repainted the main character’s face in the red, smooth, and luminescent manner. Because Shen Jiawei was singled out for praise by Jiang Qing, his experience resembled that of Liu Chunhua more than that of Tang Muli. Rocketed to national attention on the basis of his first major painting, he was an overnight celebrity – a fame that lasted less than two years, until Mao died and Jiang Qing was arrested. Shen Jiawei was later to find international celebrity following his move to Australia, with paintings such as Beijing Jeep (Figure 0.5 in the Introduction).

From 1973, socialist-realist ink painting (guohua), was also exhibited. Typical of the guohua of this period were works such as Liu Wenxi’s New
Figure 1.14  Li Shan, *The Rouge Series*, no. 8 (1990). Collection of the artist.
Spring in Yan’an, painted in 1972 (Figure 1.13). Liu Wenxi, a Xi’an artist who had been two classes ahead of Gao Jingde in art school, had developed an unmistakable style of figure painting characterized by strong outlines and bold colours. In this commission, the artist emphasizes the close connections between the region of his own residence and the revolutionary heritage of Mao Zedong. The work appears to document a happy reunion between Chairman Mao and the now liberated peasants of the area around Yan’an. Themes of the wartime communist base at Yan’an were considered part of the regional territory of the Xi’an artists, and the work thus combines two desirable subjects: the portrait of Chairman Mao and a scene based on the artist’s life experience.

Trained in the ink-and-colour socialist-realist figure painting program that had come to dominate Chinese painting at the former National Academy at Hangzhou, Liu Wenxi went on to develop a personal style more closely related to the crisp New Year’s picture aesthetic than to the self-expressive aspirations of Shanghai and Hangzhou ink painters. His guohua figures, carefully modelled with rich flesh tones, achieve a pronounced three-dimensionality as well as the theatricality required by Jiang Qing. The garments, less heavily shaded than they might be in an oil painting, are outlined with thick black lines, and all have much the same volumetric quality. Although principles of Western perspective dominate, the background is paler and plainer than it might be in an oil painting. During the heyday of this style, Liu was one of China’s most technically competent socialist-realist guohua figure painters.

Most of the visual images that were reproduced as posters, calendars, or in pictorial magazines from about 1971 to 1976 were prepared in the context of the new bureaucratic structure, which culminated in the series of local and national exhibitions. The close controls over official art in the late Cultural Revolution yielded an extreme and easily recognizable period style. Examination of the careers of individual artists who were part of this national phenomenon demonstrates that, as remarkable or even strange as this body of work might seem to our eyes today, it is very much part of a continuous history of modern Chinese art. The professional artists who made many of the canonical images of the era were thoroughly trained socialist realists. Many of the so-called amateurs were rusticated urban youth with years of art practice in weekend and after-school art programs at Children’s Palaces; some were graduates of elite art middle schools. A number of them have subsequently gone on to careers as professional artists and critics.

This institutional and, to some extent, stylistic continuity is not difficult to understand, as the Cultural Revolution brought to a culmination thirty
years (1949-79) of fairly steady artistic and political development. More puzzling is the emergence, three decades after the end of the ten-year disaster, of a large body of contemporary art that appropriates iconic images from the Cultural Revolution for satirical or playful purposes. Some of the earliest examples might be understood as a personal reckoning with shattered beliefs and wasted effort by artists who themselves had produced images in support of Mao and the Cultural Revolution. Li Shan’s *Rouge Mao* of 1991 (Figure 1.14), which presents China’s leader as an object of androgynous erotic desire, critiques the passion felt by many of the artist’s generation and exposes the expression of that passion in the iconic images of the day. Lin Yong’s *Great Job!* of 1970 (Figure 1.8), in which the young Mao is depicted with the utmost sincerity as an object of adoration, is only one of many such adolescent fantasies that formed the devotional canon of Maoist iconography.

Outside China, émigré artists who had escaped both their youthful Maoist hero-worship and the remaining political constraints on artistic expression in Deng Xiaoping’s China also exorcised demons from their Cultural Revolution past by recycling and subverting its iconography. Zhang Hongtu, working in New York during the 1990s, produced a series of images on the theme of Mao’s absence. The cleverest but most devastatingly bitter may be his *Pingpong Mao*, in which a hole in the shape of Mao’s head and shoulders has been cut into each side of a ping-pong table. Playing a normal game is impossible: a ball shot up the centre of the table cannot win a point, for it will simply fall through the hole; if it is shot up the side to avoid the absent Mao, it will easily go out of bounds. Another piece, evoking paranoia and nightmares, is constructed from an old apartment door. The peephole lens through which one inspects visitors has been altered to reveal not the apartment corridor, but a looming image of Mao. Such a seemingly playful work, amusing in its unexpectedness, may be interpreted more darkly when one considers the artist’s youth at the height of the Cultural Revolution’s Mao-worship and Mao-fear. For artists of the Red Guard generation now in their fifties, the utopian images of the Cultural Revolution bring forth the complicated emotions of nostalgia for the passion and simplicity of youth, a remembered pride in paintings well painted, and bitter anger at the betrayal of their idealistic faith. Older people, however, associate the Cultural Revolution pictures much more directly with the torture and humiliation they suffered, and many feel outright revulsion at their sight.

Some artists and filmmakers too young to have participated in the Cultural Revolution are now interested in its imagery. Some portray it with the innocent eyes of their own childhood selves: for them, there was no suffering,
The Art of the Cultural Revolution

only festive displays of colour and music, and many happy days without school. They appropriate Cultural Revolution images with no trace of the bitterness or pain such pictures might evoke in the victims. Others, as though regretful at having missed out on the intense Cultural Revolution experience, now aestheticize an otherwise meaningless violence and cruelty. In performance pieces that centre on sadism or masochism, passion and heroism may be absent, but the quest for a similarly extreme intensity of physical or emotional experience seems to become the purpose of art. These legacies are quite diverse in almost every way but have in common the public presentation of a kind of fictionalized remembrance. That the Cultural Revolution images – happy pictures masking a tragic reality – were often fiction themselves has been forgotten. Those that survive have outlived the truth that has not. One hopes that Ba Jin’s Cultural Revolution museum, or its virtual equivalents, will indeed preserve and document not only the art and material remains, but even more importantly, record what they meant.