Desiring revolution and revolutionary desire: gender, sexuality, and politics in three Cultural Revolution memoirs

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Abstract

The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), one of the darkest moments in twentieth-century Chinese history, has long been seen as a political tragedy linked with power struggles, ruthless violence, and even mass hysteria, but never with “sex.” Personal accounts of the events complicate the public narrative, however. In three Red Guard memoirs—Anchee Min’s *Red Azalea* (1995), Rae Yang’s *Spider Eaters* (1997), and Liang Xiaosheng’s *Confession of a Red Guard* (*Yige hongweibing di zibai*, 1988), the writers drastically contradict the typical perception, recounting revolutionary experiences that were charged with sexual escapades and erotic fantasies. Rather than producing a “sexless” young generation of Red Guards as the conventional story asserts, the ideal of an “androgynous” hero during the Cultural Revolution, with Chairman Mao Zedong himself as the ultimate model, put forward a new sex symbol that merged political conviction with sexual desire. The aim of this project is, on one hand, to examine how the Maoist discourses manipulated the concept of gender and sexualized politics in this chaotic era and, on the other hand, to incorporate these overlooked aspects into the study of the much misunderstood movement.

Introduction: remembering and rewriting the Cultural Revolution

After more than three decades, the definition of the Cultural Revolution (*wenhua da geming* 文化大革命), the most controversial chapter in the history of the People’s Republic of China, is anything but defined. Neither a master script nor a systematic game-plan, even by Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893–1976) himself, is to be found to fully explain the momentous movement. Despite the historical

ambivalence, or perhaps because of it, there is no shortage of writings about the Cultural Revolution. Political and social-scientific studies that offer different premises about its causes and effects have flooded the field. Likewise, people who went through the chaotic era have their own stories to tell, and they are telling them. This endeavor to remember has initiated an age of memoirs, especially by former “Red Guards” (hongweibing 红卫兵) who were its participants, witnesses, and victims. Filling the emotional gap left by the “objective” analyses, these autobiographies add “subjective” meanings to this episode of Chinese history. A great portion of the world has actually come to know about the Cultural Revolution through these personal accounts. By reconstructing the past into coherent and convincing narratives, these authors “arrive at a truth that is theirs alone, not quite like that of anyone else” who went through the same events. Meanwhile, all of the distinct tales are joined together by the genre of memoir, which has created a “collective” Cultural Revolution.

The mosaic of these life stories introduces a refreshing perspective from which to review the frenetic epoch. To closely contemplate the movement, the participants’ own psyches should be brought into consideration. After all, the Cultural Revolution was about “touching people to their very souls.” The significance of these memoirs, thus, lies not so much in the recording of historical facts—what really happened—but in revealing “historical realities”—the interpretation of what happened under dominant ideologies at the time. More importantly, they help to generate a new way of looking at the events, viewing the individuals who are their own agencies instead of an abstract mass. Apart from the established storyline of innocent victims versus evil villains, the understanding of the phenomenon—such as the ascendance of the Red Guards and the cult of Chairman Mao—can benefit from a more intimate rendition.

Focusing on three Red Guard memoirs—Anchee Min’s Red Azalea (1995), Rae Yang’s Spider Eaters (1997), and Liang Xiaosheng’s 楊晓声 Confession of a Red Guard 一个红卫兵的自白 (Yige hongweibing di zibai, 1988), this paper examines the most private side of the Cultural Revolution. The entanglement of gender, sexuality, and desire in the web of revolutionary politics
forms the central thread of this investigation.¹⁰ The Cultural Revolution is often seen as erratic, horrific, and catastrophic. Yet, it is never "sexual." Recent scholarship has begun to take notice of the sexual aspects of the movement.¹¹ The three memoirs, like many other autobiographical works about this period, are saturated with romantic passion and erotic overtones.¹² No matter how high-handed a political discourse is, it cannot erase sexuality completely out of existence in people’s lives, needless to say in the minds of hormone-raging adolescents. The fascinating question is not about how repressive the Chinese regime was, but where sexual desire, or more specifically libidinal energy, goes after repression. Of greater interest than the sexual politics of the Cultural Revolution is its political sexuality.

The following sections are explorations into how the Maoist discourses channeled desire and sexuality in this supposedly "puritanical" period and how to incorporate these notions into the study of the multifaceted event. The discussion starts with a brief look at the concept of sex during the Cultural Revolution. Then, the representations of gender, sexuality, and desire in the three memoirs are addressed. The topic is inspected in threefold: the construction of the female gender, the engagement of sexual politics, and the expression of revolutionary desire. The purpose of this paper is not to provide any theory to elucidate all the sexual intrigues of the Cultural Revolution. Rather, the aim is to acknowledge some of the personal aspects of the event in order to better appreciate its complexity.

Sex and politics in Cultural Revolution memoirs

All political movements are sexually charged in their own ways. The Cultural Revolution is no exception. The psychic state of desire—the primordial drives of the unconscious that are configured in sexual terms—has become a central trope in discerning political behavior as well as personal fulfillment in contemporary critical theory. Sexuality, in Michel Foucault’s words, is not an ontological property but a part of linguistic economy and political technology that virtually constitutes sex.¹³ At first glance, sex and the Cultural Revolution seem to be an odd if not
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paradoxical combination. Officially, the totalitarian regime rejected and repressed sexual desire, and that was the end of story. As a result, "the subject of sexuality—and personal life in general—has been completely ignored" in earlier inquiries about the Cultural Revolution. Throughout the fanatical movement, sex was a problematic issue. In public discussion, any hint or suggestion of it, even in condemnation, was strictly prohibited and severely punished. The three memoirs, along with other archival materials, show that sexual expression outside the sanctioned guidelines was generally criminalized.

However, sexual oppression during the Cultural Revolution had seemingly more to do with the participating individuals than the state. Party policy about sex at the time was rather unclear. It was not the central government but the local cadres—including the committees of rural state farms and urban factories, or even the young Red Guards themselves—who imposed the "informal" or "unwritten rules" to prosecute sexually corrupted individuals. In light of Slavoj Žižek's notion of the symbolic order, Mao's public law could not function without a dark double, the "obscene superego underside" of unwritten community rules. This group-policing and self-censorship of sex, serving and supporting the dominant ideology, ushered in an era of sexual silence. Although the subject of sex was removed from the limelight, it remained relevant behind the curtain and underneath the current. The perception that sex was a taboo topic in the age of Communism overlooks the considerable range of materials published on sex-related issues during the 1950s and early 1960s. Contrary to popular belief, the sexual attitudes and practices of many young people at the time had little in common with the stringent standards of the official discourse.

It is hence not surprising to find that the young revolutionary lives in the three memoirs are recaptured, albeit secretly, with an erotic twist. On the whole, the autobiographical narratives are familiar coming-of-age tales, in which naïve teenagers are caught up in the Maoist fervor. They join the Red Guard groups and devote themselves to the goals of "Attacking the Four Olds" and challenging the establishment. When the revolutionary fanfare subsides, they slowly see the insanity of the campaign, especially
during their sojourns in the desolate countryside. At the same time, the emerging political selves of the protagonists are infused with sexual struggle. Recalling their rebellious youths, all three authors feature sexuality as a forbidden yet intrinsic experience of the Cultural Revolution. Anchee Min and Rae Yang, both female writers who later migrated to the United States, compose their memoirs in English. From apt pupils in urban centers to sent-down girls in the rural wasteland, their accounts cover a great part of the revolutionary decade and conclude with their present “exile” in America. In *Red Azalea*, Anchee Min’s remembrances of her days at the Red Fire Farm are preoccupied with sexual desire, highlighted by a same-sex romance that astonishes Western readers. She also describes her physical relationship with the Supervisor, a male confidant of Madame Mao, Jiang Qing (1914–91), during her brief stint as the lead of the ill-fated film production of the revolutionary opera “Red Azalea.” In *Spider Eaters*, Rae Yang similarly recounts the blend of political and sexual awakening in her adolescent years spent in the Great Northern Wilderness. Meanwhile, Liang Xiaosheng, now a well-known literary critic in Mainland China, offers his *Confession of a Red Guard* in Chinese and concentrates only on the first two years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–68) before the “Rustication Movement” began. His story, too, is portrayed with equal eroticism, as the boyhood of the author is constantly tormented by the fantasy and fatality of sex.

Sexual desire, according to the three autobiographical texts, is tightly woven into the political fabric of the Cultural Revolution. One may discount these reflections as revisions, projecting present sensibility onto the past and recasting history with contemporary agendas. This “sexing” of the Cultural Revolution is said to have originated with post-Mao “anti-state” efforts to “modernize the period,” and to some degree, to sell books. In fact, Rae Yang and Liang Xiaosheng both acknowledge the differences between their adolescent memories and their current thoughts in the narratives. Yang uses italicized passages to indicate her bygone past, whereas Liang addresses his readers directly and comments on his juvenile actions from time to time. Obviously, it is impossible for the memoirists, after more than a decade and in different social settings, to evoke past events without the shadow of the present.
But reducing their accounts to merely a rewrite of history suggests that sexuality barely existed, if at all, during the Cultural Revolution, which seems even more unrealistic. There must have been a "variety of niches" in which sexuality could be and was a part of life.23

Interpreting the sexual elements in the Cultural Revolution as either a story of silent submission or a re-imagination of political resistance undermines the complex human factors involved. The truth was perhaps somewhere in between. Governmental sanctions and popular behavior towards sex always give rise to contradictions.24 The conventional mode tends to reconfirm the dichotomy between sex and politics—associating sex with the private, individual, and feminine, while referring politics to the public, national, and masculine.25 However, sexuality is a historical as well as personal experience.26 Its presumed nature of privacy does not prevent it from assuming "public forms in finding outlets and fulfillment."27 As both representation and self-representation, sexuality is culturally constructed by various social technologies and power mechanisms. Far from suppressing "the individual's psychic and emotional energy," the Maoist discourse aestheticizes politics and assimilates sexuality into its structure, making Communism "a full-blooded life world" that "affords personal satisfaction and fulfillment."28 The Cultural Revolution was the most intense case in this regard. In turn, this enjoyment or jouissance, tinted with physical violence, excess transgression, and perverse pleasure in pain, is fed back into the collective frenzy of the movement.29

This deployment of sexuality during the Cultural Revolution, as seen through the eyes of the three authors, provides a specific context to reconsider the intricacy of the event. In the process of producing the "sexless" Red Guards, one may argue that the revolutionary ideal, with Chairman Mao himself as the ultimate model, put forward a new "androgynous" sex symbol that merged political conviction with erotic desire. Three interconnected aspects of the Maoist discourse—female gender construction, sexual politics, and revolutionary desire—are particularly vital in shedding light on this highly controversial yet little understood subject and are discussed respectively in the subsequent sections.
Red Guards had no sex: female gender construction in the Cultural Revolution

The representation and reconstruction of the female gender have always been a contentious topic of the Cultural Revolution. As the traditional definitions of sex are thrown into question by modern feminist theories, the determination of a person's gender can no longer depend on an individual's biological sex alone. Gender itself is seen as "an artificial concept," a "performance," that is shaped by various political discourses and disguised in different power-knowledge relations. While ideology constitutes individuals as subjects, gender constitutes individuals as men and women. Nevertheless, the Chinese Communist Party is a disbeliever in feminism. Its liberation of women relies on the liberation of the proletariat class as a whole, and therefore, dismisses "the need for a specifically gendered approach" to address the problems of historical subjugation of and discrimination against women. As far as the official rhetoric goes, times have changed under the Maoist leadership. Women are now the same as men. Holding up half the sky, they have allegedly made the historic step to equality between the sexes. Reality is less rosy, of course. How the new social and ideological dicta engendered the revolutionary generation, especially the female Red Guards who carried out and were carried away by the fanatic events, deserves a closer examination.

The fundamental concern of the Maoist government is not sexual repression so much as a reconfiguration of socialization. The process of becoming a Red Guard is rather similar to learning to be a gendered person. In the Lacanian moment of the "imaginary" and pre-oedipal stage, an infant is not yet aware which sex it will maintain. The ability to recognize itself in the "mirror," to see the image as being both itself (its own reflection) and not itself (only a reflected image) is its initial step in becoming a human subject. The infant then enters into "language," followed by the formation of consciousness and sexual identity. Instead of a "gendered" subject, a child under Maoist discourse becomes a "political" subject. Being a Red Guard is the first rite of passage an adolescent embarks in order to transform into a politically-conscious "social person." A new kind of subjectivity is acquired, not as a boy or a girl, but as a Maoist faithful. It is also when the youth registers into the symbolic
order—the structure of social roles and relations which make up Communist China.

The new identity of “political” subject comes with a price. It is defined by absence and submission. One must relinquish the earlier bonds to the motherly body—as all three memoirists leave, if not break away from, their own families and teachers to become Red Guards—before he or she can submit to the Law of the Father, or more precisely, the will of Chairman Mao. No longer are the youths “gendered” sons and daughters of familial units; they are now the “genderless” children of Chairman Mao. As the symbolic order functions principally through language, the words of Mao—the Little Red Book and the Chairman’s quotations—have become the “transcendental signifiers,” or at times the fetish objects for the “lack,” which the individuals can use to grasp the real and project themselves into the order. Certainly, the individual agency formed or deformed during the movement often entails social and psychological confusions that defy rationality. The mass emotion of the Red Guards can be seen in the light of “group psychology,” in which the superego bypasses the ego and directly appeals to the id in a collective action that supports a dominant ideology.33

One of the dominant ideologies of the time was a gender-neutral ideal. The concept is based on a sexual sameness that approximates masculine standards of appearance and apparel. This “socialist androgyny” homogenizes all men and women as uniformed comrades in the new symbolic order.34 The paragon, of course, is no other than the Chairman himself. To the Red Guards, dressing up in unisex military uniforms is not only a trend but a must. These young people can be seen as solicited—or “interpellated” in Althusser’s term—by this novel system of representations, in which they perceive their special place in an unprecedented historic change.35 Inspired by Maoist heroism and also under pressure to conform, the new generation is “uniformed” as if they are the little “Red Army.” By donning such clothing endorsed and worn by Chairman Mao, they hope to transpose some “imagined” proletariat vitality in general, and the leader’s magnetism in particular, “onto their own underdeveloped bodies.”36 The ideal is a “non-gendered youth with strengths,” emulating the image of a masculine socialist hero while hiding any feminine
physical traits. In the heat of the “revolutionary fad” 林小生 remarks that female Red Guards have all “abandoned the womanly attire for a militaristic one” 刘利. 38 Rae Yang best sums it up as “Red Guards had no sex.”

We always put on the complete outfits of a Red Guard: army uniforms with long sleeves and long pants, caps on our heads, belts around our waists, armbands, army sneakers, canvas bags, and little red books. We covered up our bodies so completely that I almost forgot I was a girl. I was a Red Guard. Others were Red Guards too. And that was it. (135)

The young females refuse to call themselves “women” (funü 女) and adopt the genderless term “youth” (qingnian 青年). 40 Rae Yang cuts her hair very short, whereas some more radical girls even shave their heads. 41 Like many other female Red Guards at the time, she is proud of her cross-dressing that misleads people to take her for “Uncle Red Guard.” 42 Xiaomei Chen, another female Chinese scholar, also shared this emancipating experience:

I do not know with any certainty how my idea of a manly woman developed in my childhood. Declaring that there was nothing wrong with wearing boy’s clothing, [my teacher] encouraged my androgynous act, claiming that it accorded with the simplicity exemplified by the subalterns. I then felt freer than ever to dress and act like a boy while trying to come out as the strongest and fastest at whatever we did, whether it was physical labor or phys ed exercises. 43

The notion of gender equality, or “the non-difference of the two sexes,” is by all means a delusion. 44 The discursive discourse that engenders the Red Guards is a masculine one. The new image of woman essentially mirrors that of the man, and, for the teenage girls, this also calls for a “denial of the female body.” 45 Anchee Min remembers her many friends who know nothing about their own bodies (including menstruation) underneath the unisex uniform. 46 It is one matter to cover up their feminine physique, yet to prove that women are as strong and competent as, if not more so than, their male counterparts is another story. The body politics are clearly more demanding on girls than boys. Both Rae Yang and Anchee Min remember their hard-laboring in the countryside. Aspiring to
be "sexless" Red Guards, they push their bodies through agonizing pain in order to overcome their biological "defects."

The ability to endure physical toil becomes a personal statement as well as a way of life for most female Red Guards during the sent-down periods. There is a recurring theme in the early memories of the two female authors: the need to shape themselves into "better" and more "muscular" bodies. "Civilize the mind and make savage the body," as Chairman Mao says, delineates the idea of mental reform through physical training. In fact, physical discipline has consistently been linked to the issue of China's rejuvenation and progress. The Communist regime views the muscular human body as an overarching metaphor for a powerful proletariat nation. The new Chinese bodies, liberated from gender difference and destined to fight for social change, are perfect creations complete with robust physique and revolutionary spirit. The female images in visual and performance art of the Cultural Revolution attest to this "national myth." In many propaganda posters, women's bodies acquire biologically unrealistic proportions, such as muscular forearms and hands, which symbolize the strength of the proletarian class (figs. 1 and 2). One such powerful figure is Commander Yan Sheng of the...
Red Fire Farm in *Red Azalea*, who not only looks like but also outperforms a man.

She was tall, well-built, and walked with authority.... She had a look of a conqueror...She had a pair of fiery, intense eyes, in which I saw the energy of a lion. She had weather-beaten skin, thick eyebrows, a bony nose, high cheekbones, a full mouth, in the shape of a water-chestnut. She had the shoulders of an ancient warlord, extravagantly broad. She was barefoot. Her sleeves and trousers were rolled halfway up. (52)

Having “a man’s muscles,” Yan is famous for her “iron shoulders” that can lift more than any man in the company. Yan’s “masculinity” kindles Anchee Min’s veneration and obsession. Rae Yang, likewise, also remembers that only “formidable ‘iron girls’ created miracles and are admired by all,” the idea of “iron boys” is never heard in those years.

Contemplation of sexual politics during the Cultural Revolution often accentuates their effects on the female gender and overlooks the impact on the male Red Guards. Not only girls but also boys were indoctrinated and desexualized to become the “sexless” role-model. The gender uniformity can be empowering for young females yet equivocal for adolescent males. The identity constructions of the male Red Guards, which goes beyond the current discussion, should be dealt with separately. In Liang Xiasheng’s confession, he does offer a glimpse of the male dilemma. While both Anchee Min and Rae Yang proclaim themselves to be “vicious girls,” Liang comes across as shy, timid, and effeminate. He decries that the revolution “almost drew the gender difference out of them, who are then regarded as sexually neutral” (几乎抽掉了我们的性别, 视我们为中性). In comparison with the iron shoulders of the gallant women, Liang recalls the time when he was an “underdeveloped” seventeen-year-old who wished to carry the weight of the revolution on his “girlish and delicately slim shoulders” (如同纤纤少女般瘦削单薄的肩膀). His bashfulness becomes more evident when he encounters two female “Joint-action” Red Guards from the capital (首都联动) during his pilgrimage train ride to see Chairman Mao in Beijing. Rescuing the reticent Liang from some bullies, the two girls are “upright martial heroines” (行不更名坐不改姓的女大侠) who bewilder him with
“muddled emotions of respect, fear, gratitude, and embarrassment” (我是对她们又敬又畏又感激又羞惭). He laments that “a powerless man cannot help but feel ashamed in front of such women warriors” (无能男儿遇到巾帼英雄, 怎的不羞惭). To the two Red Guard sisters the charm of Liang lies exactly in his “lovely little-girl-like shyness” (正是喜欢他那种羞羞怯怯的小女孩味儿). Accordingly, the gender initiation of the male Red Guards is as complicated as that of their female counterparts, which merits further research.

Sex as a battlefield: the engagement of sexual politics

In the name of gender equality, the female Red Guards’ covering-up of their bodies and their eagerness to act masculine indicates that “femininity” is a target under siege during the Cultural Revolution. Victimization of women is nothing new in politics. While sexist oppression gives way to class struggle in the state rhetoric, class struggle also becomes the means to convey sexist and gendered repression. As the authority to define and to judge shifts from Confucian ethnics to Maoist ideology, what was reckoned as sexually amoral in the past is now labeled as politically reactionary. Although overthrowing the “Four Olds” primarily targets political culture, the assault is often cast in sexual terms. Some even argue that the overlap of sex and politics in slogans such as “ox ghosts and snake demons” (niugui sheshen 牛鬼蛇神), a derisive term used to denounce class enemies, taps into the rich pantheon of traditional folklore that links women’s bodies and sexuality with malevolent spirits. In contrast, the Red Guards are encouraged to emulate the “Monkey King” (Sun Wukong 孙悟空), a rebellious legendary character, who “shatters the old worlds” and safeguards the honor of his master, especially from the fiendish temptresses. The class struggle then is polarized into binary opposites: the “black” bourgeois past is feminine and sexual, whereas the “red” revolutionary present is masculine and asexual.

One of the most common failings of female individuals is their expression of overt femininity, which becomes the signifier for feudalism, capitalism, and revisionism. Rae Yang remembers that female Red Guards would never “wear skirts, blouses, and sandals”
because “anything that would make girls look like girls was bourgeois.” In Red Azalea, Anchee Min is taken as well as disturbed by Little Green, a bold eighteen-year-old beauty who dares to display her female attributes and sexuality.

Little Green upset me. She upset the room, the platoon and the company. She caught our eyes. We could not help looking at her. The good-for-nothings could not take their eyes off her, that creature full of bourgeois allure... She tapered her shirts at the waist; she remade her trousers so that the legs would look longer. She was not embarrassed by her full breasts. (57)

While Little Green’s “femininity” mocks the other female Red Guards, Min senses the “danger” awaiting her friend. Simply by being a girlish girl, Little Green is seen as full of “vanity” and “bourgeois allure.” This automatically makes her ideologically suspicious. She is under surveillance and caught having sex in the field with another sent-down youth. Eventually she goes insane and drowns herself. As a male Red Guard, Liang Xiaosheng also observes many spiteful struggles against young ladies who seem to be too “feminine.” In most cases the offensive evidence—being bourgeois, sexual, and foreign—is no more than a woman’s feminine accessories, such as long hair and lingerie.

Consequently, sexuality is no longer private but a public matter. Simply by way of association, a condemnation of the bourgeois lifestyle in terms of gender representations and sexual practices qualifies as a political attack on the class enemies as a whole. The logic is straightforward. Sex is bourgeois, and bourgeois is counterrevolutionary. The incident of Little Green, for example, is considered a “rape” by the company. Nonetheless, the delinquency of the young man is not particularly pronounced as sexual; he is flawed for being “too deeply poisoned by bourgeois thoughts.” In a similar vein, Rae Yang tells of her Red Guard unit’s interrogation of an attempted rapist, whose sexual perversity is construed as treason. After a chain of heated questions, the aggravated teenagers turn the man into a class enemy, a Nationalist agent from Taiwan, as well as an antagonist of the Cultural Revolution, which has absolutely nothing to do with the nature of his misconduct. His indecency not only infuriates the sexually innocent Red Guards, but more fatally, insults their political
integrity. At the end he is beaten to death for exposing himself. Rae Yang soon internalizes the killing as just, concluding that the sordid man is not merely “a real rapist” but also “a counterrevolutionary” even if she “never believed his confession.”

Identifying sexuality with class enemies is no doubt political. During the Cultural Revolution, the indication of sexual purity becomes the symbol of one’s revolutionary fidelity. This emphasis helps the power elite to manipulate and mobilize the Red Guard generation that Chairman Mao calls upon to start the massive movement. According to Mao, the youths, on which the hope of China is placed, are “in the bloom of life, like the morning sun at eight or nine.” The sexually untainted youth are “precious new born things” and “a new born force brimming with vigorous spirit” that can “wash away all the sludge and filthy water left over from the old society.” Concern with sexual purity is not limited to Maoist propaganda. It has been “a common feature of youth and nationalist movements, including the French Revolution and the Nazi Movement in Germany.” Engrossed in waves of idealism and ultranationalism, “youth easily cast themselves as ‘cleansers’ of the community largely because of their own naiveté and black-and-white worldview.” The Red Guards’ innocence with respect to the complications of sexuality is thought to contrast sharply to the debauched culture of the bourgeoisie. The youth, more than other groups, actually become the most vocal advocates who “invoked sexual errors as part of the broader political attacks on class enemies.”

The political line is thus drawn by a sexual marker. Red Guards’ abstinence from sex demonstrates their ideological correctness and their resistance to spiritual corruption. Because of its “bourgeois” origin, the subject of sex was “never taught at school and discussed at home;” Rae Yang remembers that she “sincerely wished she would never have anything to do with it.” Her conviction adheres to Chairman Mao’s teaching that a revolutionary should be a “pure, noble, and virtuous person, who is free of vulgar desires.” The teenage Anchee Min also believes that a good female comrade is supposed to dedicate all her energy to the revolution. She is “not permitted even to think about a man until her late twenties.” As the Supervisor firmly states, “romantic love
does not exist among proletarians. It is a bourgeois fantasy.”\(^7^7\) At the same time, Liang Xiaosheng declares astringently that every member from the Red Guard generation was “mentally and sexually repressed” (精神压抑者和性压抑者).\(^7^8\) The young comrades “never talked about topics such as love or women” (没谈论过爱，女性这一类的话题); they were educated to believe that the mere thought of sex was disgraceful.\(^7^9\)

Holding out for a hero: expression of revolutionary desire

The idea that Red Guards were sexless is a political myth rather than fact. Regardless of the Cultural Revolution’s puritanical surface, a great number of Red Guards initiated sexual experimentations or fell victims to sexual abuse during this period owing to their newly-gained freedom from parental control and ability to travel across the country.\(^8^0\) Although the Maoist discourse successfully politicized sexuality as amoral, its erasure of sex and desire from the masses was doomed to fail. All three memoirists bear witness to the occurrences of sexual activity among their peers. Rae Yang’s story begins with the incident of her fellow Laomizi, an eighteen-year-old girl who was raped by the head of the pig farm in the Great North Wilderness.\(^8^1\) The author also has her first brush with sexual desire during the sent-down days. “In spite of my pride, reason and so-called good up-bringing,” she writes, “I felt a crazy urge to mate just like pigs, right there and then, shamelessly, with whatever man.”\(^8^2\) Meanwhile, reading the “obscene books” (破书) that were uncovered in house raids is a secret pleasure in the lives of Liang Xiaosheng and his male comrades. He admits that pornographic literature is their “soul food” (精神食粮), helping them to forget the frustration, boredom, and devastation of the Cultural Revolution.\(^8^3\) Notwithstanding, the young boys also feel the excruciating contradiction. They should never allow themselves to entertain such desire. But underneath their vow of celibacy are “buried passionate hearts that desperately pine for the decadence of sex” (灵魂深处其实都同样渴望着堕落).\(^8^4\)

This erotic yearning is most explicit in *Red Azalea*. Anchee Min boldly depicts her physical intimacies with Commander Yan at the Red Fire Farm and later with the mysterious Supervisor from the
Beijing film studio. Besides her revelation, other individuals’ sexual escapades also fill her memories—such as Little Green’s rape, Yan’s liaison with her fiancé Leopard, the numerous sex stories in both male and female bathhouses, together with the masturbators and lovers in the Peace Park at night. Slipping through the iron fist of the state, sexual desires have found ways to creep into the revolutionary experiences of the three writers and the society as a whole.

Sexual desire is not necessarily bad news to socialist revolution, however. It is a powerful force that the Party cannot afford to ignore but must utilize. Communist cultures oftentimes exploit individuals’ libidinal energies for political purposes, courting exuberant passions rather than rejecting them. One way to cope with unfulfilled desires is by “sublimating” them, in Freudian terms, towards a nobler social cause. By virtue of this sublimation, channeling and harnessing sexual instincts to higher goals, an egalitarian society itself is created. In fact, the Cultural Revolution provides unconscious outlets for sexual desire. This process is also where the promotion of social androgyny crosses paths with the propagation of the Maoist creed. It comes down to the cult of the proletarian hero. The genderless icon, to whom Red Guards religiously aspire, embodies the socialist ideal of liberation and equality. The teenage Rae Yang dreams of a revolutionary hero—a Chinese Communist Party founder, a guerrilla fighter, a defender of workers and peasants—who occupies her “heart and soul” and guides her through the dull school life. From “a passionate lover” to “a loyal friend,” Rae Yang’s imaginary hero is always gorgeous, riveting, and sexy:

Tall, slender and vigorous, he is like a Greek warrior. His every movement is nimble and graceful. His voice is sweet and mellow, like music from heaven. His hair is pitch-black. His eyes are the brightest stars in the sky of a clear autumn night. His lips are warm and rosy, as intoxicating as the finest red wine. (104)

This revolutionary figure is more than a dogmatic abstraction or an erotic fantasy. Rae Yang soon finds out her dreamy protagonist is incarnated into a flesh-and-blood person. “In the summer of 1966,” she remembers, “my mind was taken by another hero, who was not a product of my imagination but real. This hero
was Chairman Mao, whose story became known to us shortly before the Cultural Revolution broke out. Apart from being "a great helmsman," Mao is also an affectionate lover. His poignant feelings towards his late first wife, as told in official myths and his poetry, deeply move the young girl. Henceforth, Rae Yang loves Mao in two different ways. On one hand, he is the seventy-two-year-old leader "with a receding hairline and rosy cheeks," whom millions of Chinese loved at the time. Mao, on the other hand, is the forever young and handsome darling of an adolescent girl:

But behind this Mao there was another: a secret, sweetheart hero of a fifteen-year-old girl. This Mao was perpetually young and handsome. He was tall and slender, with thick black hair and slightly knit eyebrow. Perhaps he was thinking about the future of China and the fate of humankind? Or was he sad because he had lost his beloved wife and children? His eyes were gentle and somewhat melancholy, with double-fold eyelids. This Mao, to me, was not the radiant sun but a vulnerable man, a tragic hero.

During the Cultural Revolution, Chairman Mao has metamorphosed into a sex symbol. Rae Yang is ready to do anything the hero "might want her to do;" she is the "Juliet" who will "drink a bottle of poison" or "stab herself in the chest" for her Romeo. As romanticism intertwines with Maoist politics, the girl in love will "continue to make revolution under proletarian dictatorship and defend his revolutionary line" at all costs.

Rae Yang is apparently not the only one who sees Mao through starry eyes. The Chinese government intentionally promoted the Chairman in two different images throughout the movement: seasoned wise leader and young energetic hero.

Fig 3: Party Poster: Chairman Mao goes to Anyuan (1968).
Representations of the two Maos appeared simultaneously in many political campaigns, posters, and art. One of the most popular images of the time is “Chairman Mao goes to Anyuan” (Maozhuxiqu Anyuan 毛主席去安源), portraying a graceful and scholarly Mao as he leaves for Anyuan in Hunan province to organize the local coal miners into a union that led to the famous strike of September 1922 (figs. 3 and 4). This version of Mao dominated the center stage of the Cultural Revolution, including the celebration of the Ninth Party Congress in April 1969 when Mao was already a stout old man with failing health. The image is always more powerful than what it is an image of. The “schizophrenic” representations of the Chairman effectively transcend temporal and spatial realities. To millions of adolescent Red Guards, Mao is not just a savior of the nation and an authoritative patriarch. He was and still is one of them. Hearing his renowned legend and seeing his youthful appearance, the new generation can relive the revolutionary glory which they missed out on and re-imagine a young Mao with whom they can romantically identify.

Concurrently juxtaposing the images of the old and young Maos accentuates the immortality of the leader, who has been transformed from a politician to an ageless heartthrob, a “godlike figure,” and “the embodiment of China itself.” On a different note, the revolutionary songs, too, are testament to this “love affair.” Popular tunes such as “The sun is the reddest; Chairman Mao is the dearest” 太阳最红，毛主席最亲 (Taiyang zuihong, Maozhuxi zuiqin), “The red, red sun in the sky” 天上太阳红彤彤 (Tianshang taiyang hongtongtong), and “Thinking of Chairman Mao
days and nights” 日夜想念毛主席 (Riye xiangnian Maozhuxi) are not just jingoistic celebrations of the country but also blatant love ballads for the Chairman. In the name of patriotism, all emotional expressions, including repressed and unfulfilled sexual desires, are funneled into this romantic devotion to Mao, as well as “rock-star” worship of him.

Another favorite Cultural Revolution image of Mao is a photograph taken in late 1937 by the American journalist Edgar Snow (1905–1972), who visited the Communist leader in Yan’an shortly after the Long March. The picture shows a soft and somber looking Mao addressing the camera in his signature jacket and People’s Liberation Army cap (fig. 5). Reproduced profusely in posters, badges, book covers, and backdrops in model operas, the portrait represents the quintessential image for the “sexless” Red Guards (fig. 6). Not only does the “socialist androgyny,” which is partially inspired by this image of a young Mao, add to the sexual egalitarianism of the revolutionary outlook, but from a more provocative point of view, it also contributes to the “omnisexual” image of Mao himself. One of Anchee Min’s female comrades is not even sure “whether Chairman Mao was a man or a woman.”

Thanks to the proliferation of these androgynous and youthful representations of Mao, the broad appeal of the leader thrives with
an enigmatic sexuality and longevity.

Naturally, the personification of this Maoist androgyny becomes the object of desire. The perfect hero, exemplified through the young image of Mao that defies time and gender, is what every person aspires to be, and at the same time, desires to be with. Fantasizing about her beloved hero, Rae Yang forgets that she was a girl. "I could be a man as well as a woman," she notes. Anchee Min’s two sexual relationships can also be viewed in this light. The fixation on her “lesbian” affair with Commander Yan seems to miss the point that the liaison is less about homosexuality than revolutionary idealism. It is tempting to interpret the two women’s relationship through the lens of Western sexual preoccupations. However, their close bonding may just as well be a need for comfort during desperate situations, and thus hinges not on sexual orientation but on human condition. Yan is clearly depicted as heterosexual, and her heart belongs to Leopard Lee, who is a male version of herself. To see her as a “lesbian” not merely undermines the multifaceted nature of human sexuality but also falls back to binarism—either “straight” or “gay”—that feminist theories rightfully challenge.

The allure of Yan, first and foremost, comes from her closeness to the Maoist model. She is Min’s revolutionary idol, and therefore, a “desirable” figure. While Yan’s physical superiority gains her respect, her name literally spells the core of the revolution—discipline (yan) and victory (sheng). In order to become a true heroine, Min needs “Yan to worship.” It is doubtful that the two female characters sexually prefer women. Both of them, however, are undoubtedly turned on by the presence and essence of Mao. In the teenage protagonist’s eyes, her female commander is “the sun,” the exclusive emblem for the Chairman. The seamless confluence of political ideology and erotic desire is best illustrated

Fig. 7: Party Poster: Learn from Comrade Jiang Qing. Pay tribute to Comrade Jiang Qing (1967).
when Mao’s quotations, the key to the symbolic order, become the seductive lines in their sexual flirtation and foreplay. To be physically intimate with Yan is the means through which Min can possess the passion of the great revolution.

The androgynous ideal also explains Min’s sexual relationship with the Supervisor, an extremely feminine man who stands for a different face of revolutionary desire. The nameless Supervisor appears to be sexually ambiguous but politically resolute. He is an unyielding fan of Madame Mao (Jiang Qing) as well as the aficionado of her mission. If Yan is a woman who epitomizes the heroism of Chairman Mao, the Supervisor is a man who espouses the ambition of Madame Mao. In fact, the Chinese “first lady,” a second-rate Shanghai film star in her youth and the third wife of the Chairman, has renounced all her former “femininity” to follow the image of her “omnisexual” husband (figs. 7 and 8). In Min’s recollection, the Supervisor provides the voice of Madame Mao, whose aching for power is often deemed to be responsible for the violence and persecutions of the movement. Min more than once points out that the Supervisor is both a man and a woman. It is quite understandable that when Min holds him, she feels Yan. Her two “lovers” signify the same revolutionary passion that takes the form of a socialist androgynous person. The Supervisor mutters that it “was desire that sparked the flame of the Great Cultural Revolution,” and it was the “same desire that made ancient tragedies stir the souls and foster civilizations.” Finally, the Supervisor unveils the eroticism of the Cultural Revolution while exposing the deception of its sexless façade:

I see the hills of youth covered with blood-colored azaleas. The azaleas keep blooming, invading the mountains and the planet. The earth is bitten and it groans, wailing nonsensically in pleasure-drive. Do you hear it? The passion they had for the
Great Helmsman has been betrayed. Oh, how grand a scene! I wish our greatest Chairman can see it. He would be shocked but impotent... (291)

Min devotes the last part of her memoir to her audition tryout for the starring role of “Red Azalea” in the film version. As if it were his own life, the Supervisor tells Min the story of “Red Azalea,” which is about “a long spiritual march, an indelible faith in Communism, and the worship of Mao.” As the title of her book, “Red Azalea” also symbolizes Min’s complex revolutionary experiences. Only through becoming the Red Azalea can Min make sense of her life—grasping the “idealism” of Madame Mao, “the essence of a true heroine,” and her love for Yan.

It was the title role of Red Azalea. Red Azalea was Comrade Jiang’s [Madame Mao] ideal, her creation, her movie, her dream and her life. If any of us grabbed it, we grabbed the dream of stardom. The story of Red Azalea was a story of passion in the midst of gunfire. It was about how a woman should live, about a proletarian love unto death. To me, it was not only about the past wartime, about history, but it was also about the essence of a true heroine, the essence of Yan, the essence of how I must continue to live my life. (192)

Revolutionary passion and sexuality are two sides of the same coin. Turning her libidinal impulses to a political cause, Min finds a sense of her own subjectivity and a certain measure of emotional fulfillment. It is through the desire of the Supervisor that she understands the meaning of the Cultural Revolution and her role in it. As the magic of Chairman Mao gradually loses its potency, it is now up to the “lustful” and “obscene” heroine Red Azalea, manifested by Madame Mao, to carry on the task. For better or for worse, the immediate hope is bleak, with the passing of the Chairman and the arrest of Madame Mao. The film “Red Azalea” is never realized. Yet, its spirit lives on. Min’s popular memoir is, above all, an erotic ode to the Cultural Revolution and a passionate attempt to rewrite history. At last, Red Azalea brings Min “the dream of stardom” for which she has been longing. It should be noted that her two follow-up fictions Katherine (1995) and Becoming Madame Mao (2001) envision a highly “sexualized” Cultural Revolution as well. And they have both made the best-
seller lists in the West. Furthermore, many recent Chinese films about the Cultural Revolution also present the experiences of the young generation from a sexual angle. From Jiang Wen’s *In the Heat of the Sun* 阳光灿烂的日子 (*Yangguang canlan de rizi*, 1994) to Joan Chen’s *Xiu Xiu the Sent-down Girl* 天浴 (*Tianyu*, 1998) to Dai Sijie’s *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse Chinoise* 巴尔扎克与小裁缝 (*Baerzake yu xiaoaifeng*, 2002), the Cultural Revolution has somehow washed off its dreadful tinges, returned to the popular culture, and become “sexier” than ever.

Similarly, although Rae Yang’s romantic hero meets his untimely death in *Spider Eaters*, he never stops coming back to reclaim her dreams.112 Ironically, Chairman Mao also made a comeback as the new millennium dawned. While his revolutionary zealots faded in the increasingly “capitalistic” China, his image has endured as “pastiche,” if not “parody,” of a re-imagined golden age of Communism.113 Since the late 1980s, “Mao fever” has turned the passé leader into a desirable commodity in the global chain of cultural consumption.114 The face of the Chairman has been resurrected as a chic icon, appearing ubiquitously in avant-garde arts, nostalgic memorabilia, tourist souvenirs, and even runway fashion. As old revolutionary songs are set to new dance beats, trendy restaurants are decorated in 1960s themes, and package tours to former Red Guard villages draw huge crowds,115 the Cultural Revolution once again shimmers in the collective Chinese memory, albeit under the cultural logic of late capitalism instead of its original socialist context.

**Conclusion**

The Cultural Revolution was political yet at the same time beyond politics. Discussions that center on national models and teleological trajectories often neglect the human aspects of the movement. Blending grand history with personal life, memoirs offer supplementary and unique interpretations of the puzzling events. It is generally agreed that “there is no such thing as a single Cultural Revolution,” rather, the movement is a complex “historical process.”116 With Anchee Min, Rae Yang, and Liang Xiaosheng as guides, their narratives offer startling tours of this historical process.
In particular, sexuality and desire play a prominent role in their turbulent experiences. All three authors verify that sexuality was repressed yet expressed during the ostensibly “sexless” era. Their stories echo the “simultaneous proliferation of sexual activity and regulation” as a way of life during the Cultural Revolution.117 Maoist politics actually acquires an “experiential richness and intensity” and “assumes sexual connotations” in “aestheticizing” the revolutionary movement.118 Providing the enjoyment of politics as oneself in a Žižekian mode is precisely where “the traps and the lures of Communist culture and revolution” lie.119

Caught in the entanglement of public discourse and private desire, the three autobiographies show how individuals try to make sense of who they are, who they once were, and what values might have shaped them as well as the whole Red Guard generation. There is no question that memories can be flawed, and memoirs may be fictional. The very genre of memoir itself is as much about self-reflection as self-reinvention. The merits of these accounts, as a result, are embedded not in what history really was but how the different owners of the same “history” historicized the past. After all, history is perhaps best considered as “allegorical” since there is always a gap between representation and materials.120 Exploring the theme of gender, sexuality, and desire, this paper is a part of the continual negotiation of reviewing the Cultural Revolution in various perspectives. Aside from the conventional narratives of tyranny, trauma, and tragedy, which are indisputable components of the events, a better understanding of the Cultural Revolution is nourished by these three authors’ unconventional journeys.

Notes

1 I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Ming-Bao Yue and Prof. Guobin Yang for their inspiration and insights. I took their joint graduate seminar “China’s Cultural Revolution” in 2004, and this article was originally a paper submitted for that seminar. A revised version was presented at the SHAPS 16th Annual Graduate Student Conference in March 2005 at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa. I thank the Chair and discussants of the panel together with all of those who have contributed critiques and suggestions. I am also grateful to Prof. Suwanna Satha-Anand as well as the anonymous reader and the language editor of Asian Review for their comments.
The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (wuhanjie ji wenhuadageming 无产阶级文化大革命) is often abbreviated as the Cultural Revolution (wengen 文革). According to the “Resolution on the Historical Questions of the Party” passed by the 6th plenary session of the 11th Central Committee on 29 June 1981, the movement lasted a decade, from 1966 to 1976, which was also known as “ten years of the Cultural Revolution” (shinian wenge 十年文革). However, some scholars challenge this official periodization, stating that the term “Cultural Revolution” should only refer to the initial three-year period (1966–69). See Anita Chen, ‘Dispelling misconceptions about the Red Guard Movement,’ in Journal of Contemporary China 1 (Fall 1992), pp. 61–85. In short, the Cultural Revolution can be divided into two distinct periods: the first phase was characterized by a rebellious insurrection associated with the Red Guards, lasting from the summer of 1966 through the fall of 1968; the second period was highlighted by elite attempts to sponsor political persecutions and channel mass mobilization. It included resettlement of urban students to rural areas, which was also known as the “Rustication Movement” (shangshan xiaxiang 上山下乡), literally meaning “Going up to the mountain and down to the countryside,” that lasted from 1968 until the late 1970s. See Lowell Dittmer, China’s Continuous Revolution: The Post-Liberation Epoch 1949–1981 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 77–8; Jiang Yarong and Davis Ashley, Mao’s Children in the New China: Voices from the Red Guard Generation (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 4.


4 “The first Red Guard group was formed in Beijing on May 29, 1966. After June 1, when Mao broadcasted his approval of philosophy teacher Nie Yuanzi’s ‘Big Character’ poster attacking the entrenched Party leadership at Beijing University, student rebels swung into action throughout the country. Within a year, the majority of high school and college students, together with many younger workers, had joined Red Guard or other rebel organizations.” Jiang and Ashley, Mao’s Children in the New China, p. 4.


8 See “Decision Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution,” also known as the “Sixteen Points,” adopted on 8 August 1966 by the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Plenum, in Schoenhals, China’s Cultural Revolution, p. 33.

Because of the influence of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, “sexuality” and “desire” have become extremely popular tokens in twentieth-century academic discourses. However, a legion of meanings is associated with these loaded terms. In Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, he uses both sex and desire in an almost interchangeable way, although he mentions sex more often than desire. For Jacques Lacan, desire “appears in the rift which separates need and demand... by definition, it is not a relation to a real object independent of the subject but a relation to fantasy.” See Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, eds., *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1974), p. 483. Judith Butler reveals that “desire does not attend to what is given in perception, but, rather what is hidden in perception; it is, in a sense, an investigation into the significant dimension of absence. It thematizes absence and thereby makes it present to itself.” Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 147. This paper uses the term “desire” in a type of shorthand that is inspired by the above writers.


14 Honig, 'Socialist sex,' p. 145.

15 Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China*, p. 7; also see Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang, "From gender erasure to gender difference: state feminism, consumer sexuality, and women’s public sphere in China," in Yang, ed., *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 44.

16 Larson, 'Never this wild,' p. 448 n.24.

17 "Issues of sexuality were not placed high (if anywhere) on the Cultural Revolution's agenda, and state policies and proclamations did not generally concern themselves with issues of sexuality. The state did, however, withdraw from its own earlier—albeit limited—participation in a discussion of sexuality." Honig, 'Socialist sex,' p. 146.


21 The "Four Olds" are old thought, old culture, old customs, and old habits/practices.

22 Wendy Larson ('Never this wild,' p. 448 n.24) argues that the autobiographies written after the Cultural Revolution, especially for the Western audience, are meant to modernize the period through rewriting it as an erotic experience.

23 Many young women and men of the Red Guard generation "found themselves free of parental supervision for the first time in their lives and able to explore sexual experiences that ridiculed the moral and ideological values of the time.... Salacious stories were frequently copied out by hand (shouchaoben) and passed around clandestinely, giving many people their first introduction to descriptions of sex." Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China*, p. 7; also see Honig, 'Socialist sex,' p. 145.

24 Honig, 'Socialist sex,' p. 145.


27 Wang, *Sublime Figure of History*, p. 134.

28 Wang, *Sublime Figure of History*, p. 124.

29 Enjoyment (jouissance), from a Žižekian perspective, not only denotes pleasure
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in a positivist and ideal sense but also embraces the irrational, perverse, or even death-wish dimension of pleasure-seeking. See Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology,* also see Ming-Bao Yue, 'Nostalgia for the future: Cultural Revolution memory in two transnational Chinese narratives,' in *The China Review* 5, 2, Fall 2005, pp. 55–9.


38 Liang Xiaosheng, *Yige hongweibing di zibai* [Confession of a Red Guard] (Chengdu: Xichuan wenyi chubandshe, 1988), p. 344. All the translations in this paper are original.

39 'Red Guards had no sex' is the title of chapter 14 in Rae Yang, *Spider Eaters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

40 Wang Zheng, 'Call me “Qingnian” but not “Funü”: a Maoist youth in retrospect,' in Zhong et al., *Some of Us,* p. 27.

41 Yang, *Spider Eaters,* p. 131

42 Yang, *Spider Eaters,* p. 131.

43 See Xiaomei Chen, 'Growing up with posters in the Maoist era,' in *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China,* p. 113. Also see other female reflections on this topic in Zhong et al., *Some of Us*

44 Meng Yue, 'Female images and national myth,' in Tani E. Barlow, ed., *Gender Politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press,
51 For female images in the Cultural Revolution posters see Evans and Donald, *Picturing Power in the People’s Republic of China*; for model plays and dramas see Meng Yue, 'Female images and national myth,' pp. 118–36.
52 Chen, 'Proletarian white and working bodies,' p. 362.
53 Min, *Red Azalea*, p. 60.
54 Yang, *Spider Eaters*, p. 178.
55 Liang, *Yige hongweibing*, p. 92.
56 "[My] body is underdeveloped and has not yet reached 1.6 meters. The swelling from eating wild vegetables has gradually gone, but my memories of starving are still engraved in my brain. My slim and delicate girly shoulder upholds a self-proclaimed mature head. The whole China as well as the whole world are kept in it. It will explode with all kinds of passion and excitement in any second." Liang, *Yige hongweibing*, p. 9.
58 Liang, *Yige hongweibing*, p. 344.
60 Meng, 'Female images and national myth,' p. 119. This article also discusses how the female body and sexuality are erased from the model play and ballet versions of 'The White Haired Girl.'
61 For example, "the 'fox spirit' was extremely beautiful and preyed on young, sexually innocent men. Together with class-based attacks on the sexual decadence of 'bourgeois' culture, the Buddhist-inspired sexuality conjured up by the 'ox ghosts' and 'snake demon' slogan provided youth with ample justification for making sexual behavior a criterion for participation in or exclusion from the new revolutionary community." Diamant, *Revolutionizing the Family*, pp. 286–7.
62 The reference to the Monkey King, a character from Chinese folklore and the classical novel *Journey to the West* (*Xiyouji* 西游记, 16th century) appeared frequently in Red Guards’ newspapers and literature. A big-character poster by the Qinghua Middle School Red Guards in late June 1966 states: "Revolution is rebellion, and the soul of Mao Zedong thought is rebellion…. The revolutionary should emulate the Monkey King, brandishing his staff and using his mystical powers to shatter the old world and to send everyone and everything into chaos,
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the more chaos the better." Yan Jiaqi and Gao Gao, *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), p. 58. It should also be noted that after the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing, Madame Mao and the head of the "Gang of Four" (sirenbang 四人帮), is often denoted as the "white-boned demon" (Baigujing 白骨精), a female fiend from the Monkey King story. See Ross Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White Boned Demon* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

64 Min, *Red Azalea*, p. 56.
65 Liang, *Yige hongweibing*, pp. 147–54.
68 Yang, *Spider Eaters*, p. 139.
69 Mao Zedong, 'A talk to Chinese students and trainees in Moscow,' 17 November 1957, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung*.
73 Honig, 'Socialist sex,' p. 148.
76 Min, *Red Azalea*, p. 64.
77 Min, *Red Azalea*, p. 263.
78 Liang, *Yige hongweibing*, p. 91.
79 Liang, *Yige hongweibing*, p. 197.
80 "The accusations of sexual immorality directed at female ‘class enemies’ were articulated at precisely the same time that ‘revolutionary’ female Red Guards, free from parental control and protection and free to travel throughout China, on one hand, were able to engage in sexual experimentation and, on the other hand, were vulnerable to extraordinary levels of sexual abuse... [While] some groups of women were subject to molestation, others were implicitly held responsible for sexual morality." Honig, 'Socialist sex,' p. 150.
84 Liang, *Yige hongweibing*, p. 197.
85 Wang, *Sublime Figure of History*, p. 123.
87 For the creation of Cultural Revolution heroes see Mary Sheridan, 'The emulation of heroes,' in *China Quarterly* 33, 1968, pp. 47–72. Also see the fictional representations of hero in Joe C. Huang, *Heroes and Villains in Communist China: The Contemporary Chinese Novel as a Reflection of Life* (New

88 Yang describes her imaginary hero in chapter 12, 'Hero in my dream,' *Spider Eaters*, pp. 101–14.

89 Yang, *Spider Eaters*, p. 110.

90 Yang, *Spider Eaters*, p. 111.

91 Yang, *Spider Eaters*, p. 112.

92 Yang, *Spider Eaters*, p. 113.

93 Yang, *Spider Eaters*, p. 113.


95 Barme, 'The irresistible fall and rise of Mao,' p. 24.

96 Edgar Snow, known as Aidejia Sinuo (埃德加.斯诺) in Chinese, is believed to be the first Western journalist to interview Mao. In addition, his book *Red Star Over China: The Rise of the Red Army* (1937) has the distinction of being the first English work that introduces the Chinese Communist movement as well as its leader to the West. His photograph of Mao, accordingly, can be seen as the first "transnational" image of the Chairman.

97 “Mao’s official portrait shows the enigmatic face of a man-woman (or grandfather-grandmother). In poetry, song, and prose he had often been eulogized as a mother/father, and his personality in all of its majesty and pettiness fits in with complex attitudes regarding sexual personae. In his dotage Mao, a bloated colossus supported by young female assistants, often looked like a grand matriarch, time having blurred his features into a fleshy, unisex mask. Li Zhisui’s memoir, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, provides numerous fascinating insights into the Chairman’s various peccadillos, not least of which was his irrepresible and, in some cases, bisexual appetite.” Barme, 'The irresistible fall and rise of Mao,' pp. 20–1.

98 Min, *Red Azalea*, p. 78.


100 Wendy Larson ('Never this wild,' p. 434) writes that “*Red Azalea* represents lesbian sexuality as the primary means of emancipation for the protagonist, named Anchee, Jade of Peace, in the first few pages of the book.”

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113 For the ideas of "pastiche" and "parody" of history, see Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

114 See Barmé, *Shades of Mao*.

115 Yue, 'Nostalgia for the future,' pp. 45–6. Also see Jennifer Hubbert, "Revolution is a dinner party: Cultural Revolution restaurants in Contemporary China" and Lei Ouyang Bryant, 'Music, memory, and nostalgia: collective memories of Cultural Revolution songs in contemporary China' in *The China Review* 5, 2, Fall 2005.


117 Honig, 'Socialist sex,' p. 171.

118 Wang, *Sublime Figure of History*, p. 124.

119 Wang, *Sublime Figure of History*, p. 124.