CHAPTER 4

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The extreme radicalization and politicization of every aspect of Chinese society which took place in the late sixties, can be traced as far back as September 1962 to the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee at which Mao emphasized the problem of class.

"We can now affirm that classes do exist in socialist countries and that class struggle undoubtedly exists... We must acknowledge that classes will continue to exist for a long time. We must also acknowledge the existence of a struggle of class against class, and admit the possibility of the restoration of reactionary classes... otherwise a country like ours can still move towards its opposite." 1

Thereafter, minor campaigns were launched, but in steady succession serving to emphasize class and class struggle. 2 1961 and 1962 as we have seen, now stand out as a ‘unique’ period in Chinese historiography. With the benefit of hindsight however, it becomes obvious that those debates were, even as they went on, nurturing within themselves the seeds of an entirely different trend which came into the open towards mid 1963 and took on quite a different aspect particularly when they too were caught up in the general trend of accentuating class and class struggle. Although the debates which began in 1965 are not directly relevant to our propose, which primarily deals with those on Confucius, they are significant in that they are reflective of the manner in which the increased politicization of the general atmosphere was affecting academic and historical investigations. The question of class continued to loom larger and larger, yet it did not in any way prepare one for the subsequent uproar.

Almost all the major studies of the CR 3 - or at least the first phase of the CR - date its commencement with

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2. Viz, "Learn from Lei Feng", "Learn from the Army" and "The Socialist Education campaign".
the publication of the article "Comments on the Newly Written Historical Opera, 'Dismissal of Hai Rui'" by Yao Wenyuan in the Shanghai journal Wenhuibao on November 10, 1965. The author of the historical play, Wu Han, was the then Vice-Mayor of Beijing and a reputed scholar and historian of the Ming period. Not surprisingly, in the campaign that was launched against him branding him a critic of the Maoist policies of the GLF and in the charge levelled against him of distorting history to serve political ends, his contribution as a historian is not merely overlooked but even negated. This is not to suggest that the blunders he was accused of by Yao Wenyuan and other radical historians and above all by Mao Zedong, are totally fabricated. Or for that matter that Wu Han had no intention of using history to comment on contemporary politics - a tactic he had used very often in his writings particularly before 1949. What needs to be stressed is, that almost all the studies highlight the role of Wu Han and his play in the politics of the CR, the insinuations of the former as regards the power struggles of the time and the criticism of the communes implied in the slogan "tuitian" - the return of the land - which crops frequently in the play. Almost none try to see its role in the ongoing developments in theatre and the controversy as regards the relationship between theatre and history which had begun as early as 1959. This is not to suggest that such an analysis would drastically alter explanations of the origins of the CR. But by thus focussing on Wu Han the historian, what emerges is a rather intriguing facet of the prevailing views as regards the popularization of history through the medium of theatre. For it must be kept in mind that although Hai Rui Dismissed From Office was written and performed in 1961, its intentions and content were not attacked till the end of 1965 when the Maoists first took up the matter.

Peng Jen, the First Secretary of the Peking Party Committee and the head of the Group of Five in charge of revolutionizing literature and art, who had been entrusted by Mao at the CPC Work Conference of September-

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4. Text of Yao’s article in Peking Review, No. 46, 14 December 1965, pp. 8-12
5. Ibid.
6. In fact, referring to Yao Wenyuan’s article, Mao said, "Yao wenyuan’s article is also very good; it has had a great impact on theatrical, historical and philosophical circles. Its defect is that it did not hit the crux of the matter. The crux of Hai Jui Dismised from office was the question of dismissal from office." "Speech at Hangchow", 21 December 1965, in Schram, chp. 1, n. 60, p. 237.
8. In the post-GLF period, a number of plays, short stories and novels appeared, subtly criticizing and satirizing the Leap policies and the resulting disorder in society. See, M. Goldman, "The Unique ‘Blooming and Contending’ of 1961-62", chp. 3 n. 19. Although Mao in his Tenth Plenum speech had remarked, ‘Writing novels is popular these days isn’t it? The use of novels for anti-party activity is a great invention,” but it was not taken up at that time. n. 1, p. 195.
October 1965 to criticize Wu Han at the official level, sought to construe the matter in academic terms, as a question of history. He charged Deng To with the task of conducting this debate and furthermore counselled Wu Han to "examine your thinking where you are wrong and persist where you are right to uphold truth and correct mistakes." (emphasis added). Wu Han himself wrote a self-criticism of his play which was published in Renmin Ribao on December 27, 1965, but it was an exercise in scholastics, expressing academic rather than political contrition. Besides which, Peng Jen instructed Renmin Ribao not to publish anything which depicted the issue in any but academic terms. Obviously, these measures fell far short of Mao's expectations, but by all accounts he had insufficient command in Peking itself, for Yao Wenyuan's article had to be first published in Shanghai. In fact, Mao was considerably bitter about this state of affairs:

"Even a silver needle cannot penetrate into Peking, even a single drop of water cannot fall into Peking.

Peng Chen wants to transform the Party according to his world outlook."

Even the manner and parameters within which the academic debate was being carried out, was according to Mao, highly deplorable. In his 'Speech at Hangchow' on December 21, 1965, apart from his assessment of Wu Han as "going from bad to worse" and praising Yao Wenyuan's criticism, he himself clearly identified the "crux" of the matter as 'dismissal'.

"The crux of Hai Jui Dismissed from Office was the question of dismissal from office. The Chia-Ch'ing emperor dismissed Hai Jui from office. In 1959 we dismissed P'eng Te-huai from office. And P'eng Te-huai is Hal Jui too."  

By February 1966, when the 'Outline Report' of the Group of Five was brought out, the struggle was clearly on between the Maoists on the one hand and Peng Jen and his group which sought the support of Liu Shaoqi on the other. But the actual power struggle need not detain us, for our concern is with its bearing on historiographical debates and with the larger issues it subsequently raised.

12. See n.6.
As mentioned earlier, 'Hai Rui Dismissed from Office' was first performed in 1961. Wu Han, apart from writing this play, published 'Notes from the Three Family Village' which was a series of short satirical pieces he co-authored with Deng To and Liao Mosha as also a series of popular pamphlets on China's pre-modern history mainly directed towards familiarizing the young people of China with their past. As a historian, Wu Han was preoccupied by three major themes: the relevance of the past (particularly the pre-modern past) to the present, the evaluation of historical figures and the relationship of historical plays to historical reality. A collection of his writings entitled Dengxia Ji (Under the Lamplight) was published in 1960 among which was an essay entitled, Hojin bogu he guwei jinyong (Emphasize the Present and De-emphasize the Past and Make the Past Serve the Present). This essay delineated his conception of the role of a historian and defined the compass of the slogans, which have been the cornerstone of historiography in Communist China. This essay is of interest for two reasons: first, Wu Han castigated those who desired to study the role of the masses in history, to the exclusion of everything else (which was later cited as proof of his obsession with Kings, Emperors and Prime Ministers) and secondly, he hit out at those historians who wished to exclude the past entirely and concentrate only on the present. (In 1965-66, the radical historians accused Wu Han of concentrating exclusively on the past under the garb of making the past serve the present.) Furthermore, his interest in historical personalities centered around the matter of culling such figures from the past, who could be presented as models in modern China - and presented moreover in a language which could be easily and popularly grasped. To that end, the fact that these figures belonged to the ruling classes, was of secondary importance. The stress on class, Wu felt, prevented historians from discussing individuals, which seriously jeopardized the study of history. Thus although Wu Han's ultimate aims and objectives as regards history were not at great odds with the ideas of the Party leaders, his methodology was suspect and he was accused of being not merely un-Marxist, but anti-Marxist.

A fact little known and certainly never mentioned once, during the campaign against Wu Han, is that as early as March 1959, in a work conference in Shanghai, Mao exhorted his colleagues to imbibe the qualities of fearless

13. This as well was the object of scathing criticism by Yao Wenyuan in an article, "On 'Three family village'- The Rectionary Nature of 'Evening Talks at Yenshan' and 'Notes from Three Family Village'" which appeared in Shanghai's Jiefang Ribao (Liberation Daily) on 10 May 1966. Text in Peking Review, No. 22, 27 May 1966, pp. 5-18.
15. Wu Han, Dengxia Ji (Peking 1960), pp. 61-71.
remonstrance and unbending morality from no less than two Confucian bureaucrats - Wei Zheng (AD 580-643) and Hai Rui (AD 1515-87) of the Tang and Ming dynasties. Presumably, this was related to his injunctions ever since the Chengdu Conference and subsequently, to dare to think, speak and act. In April at the Seventh Plenum, he again exhorted the Party members to speak out, without fear of criticism or penalization. MacFarquhar suggests that the CC’s Propaganda Department, acting on Mao’s instructions, not only issued directions for the preparation of anthologies on the two historical figures, but that a Peking Opera singer, Zhou Xinfang was asked by Zhou Yang to write a play on Hai Rui and was also supplied with the relevant material. This play - Hai Rui Sends a Memorial - took up for its plot, the most famous act of Hai Rui’s, that of criticizing the Emperor directly, and was performed in Shanghai on the eve of the tenth anniversary celebration on 1st October 1959. At about the same time, a “leading comrade” approached Wu Han with the proposal of writing another play on Hai Rui.

Between 1959 and 1962, Wu Han was considerably taken up by the rather engrossing relationship of history and theatre. In the preface to his play, he wrote about how after he had begun research on Hai Rui and written some articles on him as well in 1959, Ma Lianliang, a leader of the Peking Opera Troupe had consulted him, Wu Han, on writing an opera on Hai Rui. Subsequently with considerable support from his friends and despite serious reservations about his ability to do so, he himself wrote not just a drama, but “a Peking Opera” It should be kept in mind however that Wu Han’s fledgling attempts at playwriting did not begin to blossom in a vacuum - cultural or political. Since 1954, much activity was going on in cultural circles concerning the reform of theatre in general and the Peking Opera, the most notable genre of traditional drama, in particular. Again, this was not a new concern: historians working on popular history and culture in the twenties itself had realized the usefulness of drama in educating the masses. The debates which lasted right up to the GLF are beyond the scope of this chapter; suffice it to say that a notable outcome was the development of the “new historical plays” (xin lishiju).

The themes of these new historical plays would be drawn from history but their thrust in substantive terms would

17. Wu Han he Hai Rui baguan (Wu Han and ‘The Dismissal of Hai Rui’) (Peking: Renmin chubanshe, 1979), p. 137.
19. Wu Han he Hai Rui baguan, n. 17. p.2. Although the “leading comrade” was never identified, MacFarquhar believes him to be Zhou Enlai. For a more detailed analysis of how and why Wu Han came to write the play, see MacrFaquhar, chp. 3, n. 1, pp. 207-12
21. Ibid.
be to serve contemporary society. The late fifties and sixties saw a virtual flowering of the new historical plays. Once again, though it would be interesting to enumerate the major plays and the manner in which they had a bearing on contemporary politics, for our purpose, the relevant point is the discussions among the historians regarding these plays. For, some of the major concerns of the historians at the time were embodied by the new historical plays and by late 1959 an interesting debate was conducted in the leading theatre journal, Xijubao under the heading, “Historical Truth and Artistic Truth”. These debates encompassed the following themes: the proper use of the past, the criteria for the evaluation of ‘feudal’ ruling class heroes and the role and the portrayal of the masses. It was by and large agreed that both, the demands of historical veracity and dramatic vigor should be satisfied and the flights of fancy indulged in, towards satisfying the latter, should not ignore the class structure of the period in which the plays were set. Neither should contemporary values be structured into an entirely different era, merely to make a political point.

Wu Han’s wishes in the matter of familiarizing the people - especially the youth - with the history of their country, led him to appreciate the contribution of historical plays in promoting and enhancing cultural consciousness because of their wider reach and facility in arousing interest. Nonetheless, theatre was not history. And, historical plays, unless they justified the rigours of historical veracity equally with dramatic intensity, could not be so termed. Moreover, if both history and drama were to be done justice to, the play in question could not deal with an entire era or life but needed to concentrate on a particular episode. The character had to behave in accordance with the spirit of his times and such virtues as were relevant for the needs of today could be usefully incorporated.

This background explains the choice of Hai Rui. Wu Han was a historian specializing on the Ming period - but he was not the only one to pick up Hai Rui for dramatic portrayal. Besides which, a quick appraisal of Hai

24. Ibid.
25. See Pusey, n. 16.
26. Ibid.
27. There were at least two or three plays written on Hai Rui before 1961. One has already been mentioned on the previous page. This had also been referred to by Wu Han in the preface to his play. Another play, Hai Rui beiqian (Hai Rui Hauls the Boat) was scripted by a team of three people and featured in Xijubao No. 20, 1959, p. 20. This issue also reported two regional theatre groups which produced plays about Hai Rui.
Rui's life and character as portrayed in the Ming Historical Records reveals that apart from his noble and upright character, dedication to duty, etc., there were two major instances in his tenure, which could easily be powerful themes for dramatization. One was his dispatching a memorial to the Emperor and the other was his dismissal from office. The former had already been dramatized, so it would not be entirely illogical to presume the reason - at least in part - behind Wu Han's choice of the theme of his play.

The above seeks to outline the background in which the play came to be written not to impose intents or purposes; neither does it follow that the considerable unrest among the peasantry or the dismissal of Marshall Peng Dehuai was nowhere in the picture - but that there was certainly more than that. So that all these factors taken together - Wu Han's specialization of the Ming Period and his interest in Hai Rui, his particular concern with inheriting the values of the past, the ferment in the cultural and dramatic circles, the debate on the relationship between history and theatre and the emerging stress on class struggle against the larger backdrop of the struggles within the Communist Party - reveal a scenario in which Yao Wenyuan's article criticizing Wu Han's play, thereby launching the CR, assumes deeper significance.

It is now an established fact that in September-October 1965, during the CPC Work Conference, Mao on the one hand, had asked Peng Jen to criticize Wu Han at the official level and on the other, charged the informal Jiang Qing group to conduct research and prepare a critique of Wu Han's play. Jiang Qing herself revealed that the article by Yao Wenyuan took seven months of secret work to prepare and revise. Nonetheless, the foregoing narrative should make it clear that the events of 1965 onwards were both a culmination and a starting point: the culmination of activities which had its roots in 1959 and even earlier; and the beginning of the CR.

In the late fifties, as we have seen, a great debate was going on in the cultural spheres. By 1962, Jiang Qing and her associates started to occupy themselves with developments in the arts and in keeping with the spirit of


29. Towards the end of 1978, Wu Han was posthumously rehabilitated. On 1 February 1979, *Renmin Ribao* published a virtually total exoneration of Wu Han and his play, laying the blame on Jiang Qing who was held responsible for a 'literary inquisition' beyond compare. But most interestingly, while admitting that Wu Han utilized Hai Rui to comment on current politics, the article denied that he was referring to Peng Dehuai as Mao had specifically charged.

30. Hong-yung Lee, n. 3, p. 11.

the Tenth Plenum, pledged to devote themselves to exposing bourgeois tendencies in the cultural sphere.\textsuperscript{32} About this time, Jiang Qing turned to the reform of the Peking Opera. Thus although it started with Wu Han and although no other person was subjected to such an intensive campaign, a purge was carried out in cultural circles in 1966, of dominant figures, with the aim of exposing the "monsters and demons" and the "black gangsters".\textsuperscript{33} This purge in cultural circles is not entirely unconnected with our objective. The manner in which events in the cultural sphere unfolded and Jiang Qing's role in them, was to have an exact parallel ahead in the early seventies just before the start of the 'Criticize Lin - Criticize Confucius' campaign which shall be the subject of the next chapter.

The other area in which a great debate was going on and which concerns us, is education. The beginning of unrest among the youth and students in 1966 and the subsequent emergence of the Red Guards warring against the "four olds" (old ideas, old customs, old culture and old habits), which crystallized in the form of denouncing Confucius and his legacy - all were thoroughly enmeshed with the larger question of the nature and role of education in China. It seems fairly clear by now - or at least ought to be - that the root of all the differences between the two factions in the CPC lay in the policies, methods and direction of education in China. In chapter two we discussed Mao's views on education which emphasized the primacy of redness over expertize among other things, as also his advocacy of the incorporation of physical labour and integration with the masses as part of the curriculum. On the other hand, Liu Shaoqi's views regarding development in China envisaged a heavy reliance on experts, trained exclusively for their job. Views so wholly at variance with each other could not but lead their proponents further and further apart.

Right from the beginning, Mao's writings have revealed a consistently critical attitude toward the old education system heavily influenced by Confucius. From the vast array of ill effects, it had led to the creation of a narrow elite divorced from and contemptuous of manual labour and by implication, the vast masses of China. This group, instead of constituting the forces of change in society had, on the contrary, become the most...

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, chp. 12. see also, Parris Chang, chp. 3, n. 3, pp. 157-58.
\textsuperscript{33} For details of this purge see, \textit{The Great Cultural Revolution in China} ed., Asia Research Centre (Rutland and Tokyo, 1968), pp 116-208.
conservative group, resisting and thwarting the transformation of society. Liu Shaoqi’s ideas regarding the path China ought to take, led by an army of experts, Mao felt, would eventually result in the creation of precisely such an elite from which point it was but a short step toward the negation of all that had been hitherto achieved. Such an outcome had to be resisted at all costs.

Ever since 1949, the Communists set about the daunting task of overhauling the entire system of education in accordance with the ideas which had been developed since the twenties and thirties, towards the training of the ‘new man’.

“'Our educational policy must enable everyone who gets an education to develop morally, intellectually and physically and become a cultured, socialist minded worker'. This is our educational principle of all-round development. 'A cultured socialist minded worker' is a man who is both politically conscious and educated. He is able to undertake both mental and manual work. He is what we regard as developed in an all-round way, both 'red' and 'expert'. He is a worker-intellectual and an intellectual-worker.”

Despite a long succession of campaigns designed to eradicate the feudal and bourgeois modes of thinking, of nearly continuous ideological remoulding and incessant rectification campaigns to eliminate bourgeois thought, as late as 1965 Mao Xedong in his ‘Speech at Hangchow’ roundly criticized the existing educational system, in particular the manner in which it led to the virtual isolation of students from the masses and from reality.

"From entering primary school to leaving college is altogether sixteen or seventeen years. I fear that for over twenty years people will not see rice, mustard, wheat or millet growing, nor will they see how workers work, nor how peasants till the fields, nor how people do business. Moreover their health will be ruined.”

Mao went on to point out a great many flaws. The curriculum was irrelevant and burdensome in the extreme, the system of admissions and examinations was quite unfair to the students, the classes absurdly time consuming and there was too much emphasis on theory. Mao urged the students to “gradually get into contact with reality.

35. “Speech at Hangchow”, Schram, chp. 1. n. 60, p. 236.
live for a while in the countryside... There's no need to read big tomes..."36

In his Directive of 7th May 1966, Mao outlined his plans for transforming the educational system anew, a task which the Army would presumably assist in.

"While the students' main task is to study, they should also learn other things, that is to say, they should not only learn book knowledge, they should also learn industrial production, agricultural production, and military affairs. They should also criticize and repudiate the bourgeoisie. The length of schooling should be shortened, education should be revolutionized and domination of our schools and colleges by bourgeois intellectuals should not be tolerated any longer."37

Shortly afterwards, the Peking Municipal Party Committee was reorganized followed by a reorganization of the Peking University Party Committee. The latter move was explained by a Renmin Ribao editorial on June 5.

"...some leading anti-party, anti-socialist members of the former Peking Municipal Committee of the Party who adhered to a revisionist line always took Peking University as a base from which to win the younger generation away from the proletariat."38

On June 13, a notice was issued by the CPC according to which enrolment to China's institutions of higher education would be postponed by six months so as to implement the new CR proposals.39 And on June 18, yet another editorial, 'Carry Out the Cultural Revolution Thoroughly and Transform the Education System Completely' emphasized the new thrust of the policies :

"A thoroughgoing revolution in the educational system will destroy the influence of the old, exploiting class educational ideas which have dominated for several thousand years, ever since Confucius, and will exterminate one of the important seats of power of the bourgeois "authorities" and scholar-tyrants in the field of ideology."40

36. Ibid.
40. Ibid., p. 17.
It may be recalled that in the mid fifties and early sixties, writings on Confucius had revealed a general admiration for his pedagogic ideas and his views on education were considered the most progressive aspect of his philosophy. And when we bear in mind the fact that the CR, in the educational sphere, was in the first instance an attack on the existing system, which had crystallized as a result of the policies implemented over the last decade, a connection seems to emerge. The Sixteen Point Circular of August 8, 1966 proclaimed that

"In the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution a most important task is to transform the old educational system and the old principles and methods of teaching. In this great Cultural Revolution, the phenomenon of our schools being dominated by bourgeois intellectuals must be completely changed." 41

It was further envisaged that the primary purpose of education would be to serve proletarian politics and combined with productive labour. There would be a reduction in the teaching material and students would be the ever vigilant forefront in the class struggle against the bourgeois and revisionist elements. 42

Thus from 1965 to 1969, China's educational system was in a state of upheaval. All efforts were geared to the criticism of bourgeois teachers and their erroneous attitudes; quite often there was serious physical attack and abuse. The students also denounced all the vestiges of the bourgeois educational system such as the separation of teaching from productive work, long school and university period, overloaded curriculum, emphasis on theory and the downplaying of class struggle. It was a fierce and violent struggle, but it must be emphasized that the violence was the unanticipated climax of a long and bitter struggle between two powerful groups, championing two opposing strategies for the development of socialism in China. It was the violence which was responsible for bringing in the Army - and the repercussions of this move were seen in the seventies. On 7 March 1967, in a bid to put an end to the internecine war and stop the various RG factions from exacerbating the tensions in society, Mao issued a directive.

"The Army should give military and political training in schools, stage by stage and group by group.

It should help in reopening the school classes, strengthening organization, setting up the leading bodies

41. Text of circular in Joan Robinson, The Cultural Revolution in China (Penguin, 1969), pp. 92-93. The extent to which there was opposition to Mao's policies is revealed by the number of personnel believed to be 'bourgeois' in the field of education, starting from the minister and director level down to the cadres, who were purged. Figures in Lofstedt, chp. 2. n. 81, p. 125.
on the principle of the three-in-one combination and carry out the task of struggle-criticism-
transformation.}\textsuperscript{43}

The CR, particularly in education, was no freakish aberration (though China could well have been spared
some of its extreme manifestations), but a concentrated attack on the innumerable controversial issues in
educational reform for over two decades. It also highlighted the fact that, despite the revolutionary beliefs
of the leaders in power and their commitment to the transformation of the educational system, the old feudal
and bourgeois ideas as regards education still prevailed among those who stood at the crucial level of the
implementation of the new policies. That is to say, among the men who controlled the educational structures and
were responsible for its functioning - the senior academicians, the professors and teachers. Not only that, in
the rural areas and at the local levels as well, old attitudes as regards education persisted, particularly among
those cadres who had been in charge of the old education system and had been drafted by the CPC in 1949 and
this was far more disturbing. In reviewing the course of the first year of the CR in 1967, Mao said,

“As I see it, the intellectuals, including young intellectuals still receiving education in school, still have
a basically bourgeois world outlook, whether they are in the Party or outside it. This is because for
seventeen years after the liberation the cultural and educational circles have been dominated by
revisionism. As a result, bourgeois ideas are infused in the blood of the intellectuals.” \textsuperscript{44}

And the intensity of the struggle testified to the resilience of the old, bourgeois and even capitalist values.

In 1967 Mao again remarked,

“Although the social and economic systems have changed, yet the vestiges of reactionary ideas left
behind from the old era are still found in the minds of quite a sizable section of the people. This... will
not change overnight. The change will take time - a very long time. This is class struggle in society.” \textsuperscript{45}

The CR was one manifestation of this class struggle - a struggle between two antithetical views as to the path
China ought to follow to change into a truly socialist system. To that end, the old system had to be thoroughly
smashed to make way for the new one.

\textsuperscript{43} As cited in Lofstedt, chp. 2, n. 81, p. 129.
\textsuperscript{44} As quoted in “Excerpts from ‘A Talk by Chairman Mao with a Foreign (Albanian) Military Delegation’”, in D. Milton and others,
People's China (New York, 1974), p.263. Guangming Ribao reported on 11 November 1964 how a young woman teacher declared that it was beneath her dignity to do manual labour. As cited in CNA No. 554, 5 March 1965, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{45} Mao Tse-tung, “Proletarian Dictatorship and Renegade China’s Khruschev”, August 1967 in CB No. 885, p. 34.
For over three years, China was galvanized into revolutionary action - a transformation that was as sensational as it was overwhelming. In almost every way, the GPCR stands out, unsurpassed by any mass movement in any independent country. In no other free nation have the masses been encouraged by the authorities in power to “bombard the headquarters” and its unprecedented nature has made it the most discussed and analysed event in the forty year old history of the PRC. Our concern is with the revolution that took place in the field of historical studies during this period, particularly in the matter of the assessment of Confucius.

In actual terms, not many articles on history were written between 1966 and 1969 after the manner of the late fifties and early sixties. Neither was Confucius a subject of serious academic and intellectual debate. Almost no articles specifically on Confucius appeared in the period 1966-67. If there were any which referred to Confucius it was only in their criticism of the methodology used in the earlier assessments of Confucius. Thus, Xia Jentao attacking Feng Youlan stated,

“Mr. Feng Youlan had said “If we want to study Confucius, then we can only take Confucius, and not replace him by Lao-tzu.” Obviously nobody could deny this. But what Mr. Feng meant was that Confucius was an independent “individual item” not related to any “class”. Was it actually like this? Confucius was the representative thinker of the slave-owning class at the end of the Spring and Autumn period... His thinking reflected the interests of the slave-owning class, and it was also something of a model for the then slave-owning class ideology. Therefore, we cannot “individualize” Confucius, and we definitely cannot make this “individualization” absolute. Not only should Confucius be treated like this, but when we study any thinker or historical figure, we should see him as the representative model of a certain class to study.”

Like every other section of Chinese society, historical studies was also sought to be - and was - highly politicized and all activity within it, was characterized by the struggle against bourgeois thinking and the

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46. This refers to the poster put up by Mao himself which was published in Renmin Ribao on 5 August 1966. It was in praise of China’s “first Marxist-Leninist big character poster” which was put up on 25 May 1966 by a young teacher of the department of philosophy in Peking University, Nie Yuanzhu, as a protest against the President of Peking University. Text of Mao’s poster in Joan Robinson, n. 41, pp. 80-81.

47. Xia Jentao, Lishi bianzhen fa ho Feng Youlan xiansheng de lishi jisi lun [Historical Dialectics and Mr. Feng Youlan’s Historical Individualism] Xin Jianshe (Beijing), nos. 1 and 2, 20 February 1966, p. 115.
bourgeois way of life. Encouraged by Mao's dictum that 'it is right to rebel,' people from all walks of life, but especially the students, entered into the attack on the 'four olds.' Accordingly, in historical studies, all intellectuals and historians perceived to be infected with bourgeois thought, were subjected to severe criticism. Academic activity was severely curtailed, academic journals like *Lishi Yanjiu* (Historical Research) and *Zhexue Yanjiu* (Philosophical Research) suspended publication and by the summer of 1966, when both enrolment for the new session as also teaching in Universities and schools was totally stopped, to enable a more complete student participation in the CR, all research came to a standstill. On June 1, an editorial in *Renmin Ribao* declared,

"Through this Great Cultural Revolution we will thoroughly destroy all the old culture, old ideas, old customs, and old habits, which were formed by the exploiting class and poisoning the people in the past several thousand years, and establish among the broad masses the new culture, new ideas, new customs and new habits of the proletariat."  

The attack on the 'four olds' and all those who were still influenced by them, involved an abrogation of the ideas and works of such intellectuals and historians who had been occupying positions of authority in historical circles, who had moreover been propagating their fallacious views, infecting the young minds in contact with them. In other words, it involved a renunciation not just of the ancient past, but of developments in the very recent past.

In historiography in the very recent past, as regards the evaluation of historical figures - particularly Confucius, the concept of class and class struggle had not been taken seriously, if not altogether sidetracked. In the next three years, historiography would be dominated by an interpretation of history, which emphasized class struggle as never before. 1965 did indeed mark the turning point in the relationship between history and politics, in the politicization of history, and was enmeshed in a very direct manner with the ongoing struggle in the CPC. The stress on class and class struggle was seen traversing an ascending spiral since September 1962, when Mao exhorted the nation "never to forget class struggle" and reached it apogee in the years 1966-69. It

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48. Joan Robinson, n. 41. p. 82.
was inevitable that the debate over historicism as against class viewpoint, which has regularly weaved in and out of historiographical debates, should crop up yet again. The 1963-64 debates, as we have seen, if not resolved, at least leaned heavily in favour of the class viewpoint and with the benefit of hindsight, the more radical articles of that period are evidence that class viewpoint and method were stepping to the centre of the stage. In 1966, the historians who had argued in favour of historicism, were hauled up for their bourgeois and rightist views - but this time they were not let off easily - prominent historians being Wu Han, Jian Bozan, Hou Wailu and Liu Danian.

On November 11, 1965, Yao Wenyuan’s article criticizing Wu Han and his play appeared in Wenhuibao. By November 26, this article in pamphlet form was on sale in Shanghai. Wu Han was accused of falsifying history, glorifying the feudal mandarins, slandering socialism and advocating that the outstanding virtues of some persons of the feudal era could become a constituent part of socialist and communist morality. If this was true, questioned Yao, then why should we learn from the thought of Mao Zedong. But above all Yao charged, Wu Han had used history to attack Mao and malign the positive achievements of Socialist China.

The reactions to this article in 1965 had one rather interesting, even unusual aspect. Till then, when anybody was criticized in the newspapers, there was the outward appearance of unanimity. But following Yao’s “Comments”, the numerous articles which appeared in the newspapers and journals were both in support of and against Wu Han. This would substantiate the belief that there was indeed a very sharp difference in thinking on basic issues. More so when one recollects Mao’s dissatisfaction with the manner in which the criticism of Hai Rui was progressing, under Peng Jen’s leadership. To be sure, the articles defending Wu Han were few in number and only appeared in the immediate aftermath of Yao’s article. But their significance lies in the revelation of the writers’ attitude toward Chinese history.

On 2nd December 1965, Wenhuibao carried an article by Yen Jen who accused Yao Wenyuan of “gross exaggeration”. He pointed out that the play did not differ in any substantial way from the historical material and Yao’s charge that the play was written with the aim of advocating the return of the land to the peasants.

51. As reported in CNA, No 606, 1 April 1966, p. 1.
revealed Yao's lack of understanding of the play. Another article in Wenhuibao on the next day by Lin Pingyi, disclaimed any connection between two such vastly different settings as Ming China and China in 1961. Should one, he asked, on account of class analysis, have a totally negative attitude towards Chinese history and its slavery and feudalism?

Underlying this exchange was the larger question of whether a class analysis of history would admit of the possibility of the existence of "honest officials" among the exploiting classes, "clean mandarins" who exercised their powers in favour of the masses of laboring people, men of remarkable virtue who easily stood out as progressive and hence possessed of morality which was above class and which could be inherited by present day China. This argument echoed the views of Wu Han and Jian Bozan in particular and was to receive substantial battering. Feng Youlan had argued similarly in favour of inheriting Confucian morality; it was glaringly de trop in an environment emphasizing class struggle.

A full page article in Guangming Ribao on 16th December, discussing the question of revolts by the peasants, thoroughly lambasted the concept of "honest officials." The Hai Rui variety of "honest officials" it was stated, appeared towards the middle or beginning of the decline of a dynasty in the midst of revolts by the peasants and by their goods acts, intended in the nature of 'concessions', attempted to soothe class conflicts. In effect, what the article seemed to be saying was, that "honest officials" were far more mischievous than the wicked ones and that praising the good deeds of Hai Rui was highly retrograde in character.

Quite obviously, historical circles were straying into fallacious and dangerous territory. Making out a positive case for the possibility of inheriting certain ancient and feudal morals was but a short step away from opening the door to other values and morals and ideas of the past, which could only have a deleterious effect on contemporary China. How could one extol the "universal" value of the Confucian concepts of benevolence and harmony in society and yet urge the people to wage a relentless war on class enemies? How could one present Confucius as a great educator but prevent the people from succumbing to the insidious claims of mental work

52. Ibid., p. 4.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
as far superior to manual labour? It could be legitimately argued that historical research and philosophical argument is one thing and common beliefs and habits another; that the former is the domain of specialists, experts who are well able to distinguish between the two. But this is precisely what Mao Zedong had been cautioning against: that you cannot very well begin a process without keeping in mind its ultimate result; that if you begin an argument with a false understanding of history as also divorced from the masses, in other words, if you proceed without grasping the dialectical nature of motive and effect, it is bound to have serious repercussions.

"...we dialectical materialists insist on the unity of motive and effect. The motive of serving the masses is inseperably linked with the effect of winning their approval; the two must be united. The motive of serving the individual or a small clique is not good, nor is it good to have the motive of serving the masses without the effect of winning their approval and benefiting them. In examining the subjective intention of the writer or artist, that is, whether his motive is correct and good, we do not judge by his declarations, but by the effect of his actions (mainly his works) on the masses in society." 

What is history? Why should one study history? How should history be studied? Why should one go among the masses? What was the purpose of history? It seemed that the majority of the historians did not have correct and clear answers to these questions. Some answers were sought to be provided in an article which appeared in *Hongqi* on the 6th December 1965 by Ji Benyu: “Study History for the Sake of Revolution”. Mao read this article three times and pronounced it excellent, though he felt that its defect was "that it does not name names." Unfortunately, by the end of 1967, Ji Benyu, who was the editor of *Hongqi*, also came in for much criticism. Nonetheless, his article delineated the criteria which would revolutionize the historical circles and channelise historical studies in the right direction. “History is a textbook on class struggle,” it stated. “A history which reflects class struggle is capable of giving the masses of people and the new generation of revolutionaries a profound class education as well as education in revolutionary tradition.” The important thing was to realize that there was no “historical research which was above class. All ruling classes of the past interpreted history according to their own class interests.”

This applied equally well to the present set up. For the Communists therefore, history was to be studied for the sake of the revolution for which the only correct methodology was to

take "the proletarian stand and engage in historical research with the proletarian view and method." 58

As Mao had said, Ji Benyu did not mention any names but attacked such "disciples" of Hu Shi who had argued that "history must not be interpreted with the theory of class struggle"; that the class viewpoint alone was insufficient in understanding history and who had championed historicalism and objectivity which was associated with a "supra class viewpoint." 59 Beyond stating that such views had been "publicly advocated" in 1963, Ji Benyu had not provided any other means of ascertaining the identity of the historians—though it obviously implicated Wu Han and Jian Bozan.

On December 18, there was an article in Renmin Ribao by Yue Hua, "Introducing the Discussion on the Question of the class Character and Inheritability of Morality." 60 This article was a summary of the reactions by different writers to the publication of Wu Han's articles in 1962 in the journal Qian Xian (Frontline) — "On Morality" and "More on Morality". The writers were Li Chixi, Shi Liangren, Wang Zusong, Feng Zhiyong, Ai Chen, Wang Xuhua and some others, whose views we have discussed in the last chapter. There was nothing substantially new in the article and it seems, that there were basically two reasons for its appearance. In the first place, it was published at a time when the matter of inheriting feudal morality had once again become controversial, vis a vis Hai Rui. Secondly, by pointing out, that even at the time the discussion took place, i.e. 1963, the majority of writers had disagreed with Wu Han, it probably sought to guide the approach to the question of the inheritability of morality. The crux of the article seems to be a quote from Li Fanfu who had advocated not inheritance but a demolition of the feudal morality and which met the radical needs of 1965. "Our country has an extremely rich cultural heritage, and of course it contains many fine things. But the morality of the exploiting classes is not among the fine things. It is in the dregs. What it involves is a question of basic overthrow and eradication and not a question of inheritance." 61 The article concluded with making short shrift of historians who were immersed in the old historical texts and then outlined the major task for workers in historical studies. "What we should do is concentrate our energy on studying the revolutionary struggles of the proletariat and discover the proletariat's own noble moral qualities..." 62

58. Ibid., p.20
59. Ibid.
60. Trans. in SCMP, no. 3668, 30 March 1966, pp. 5-10.
61. Ibid., p.8.
62. Ibid., p. 10.
Wu Han finally came up with a ten thousand word long “Self Criticism Concerning Hai Jui Dismissed Form Office” which was published in *Renmin Ribao* on 30th December, 1963. Without making an indepth analysis of the malappropriisms in his historical ideas, Wu Han began with admitting that “historical research and historical plays must serve current politics” but when he wrote the play, he never “gave any thought to the principle of ‘making modern use of ancient events’ and ‘giving greater weight to modern use of ancient things’. I merely portrayed an ancient event for its sake and wrote the play for the sake of writing the play.” 64 This makes no sense in view of Wu Han’s very definite views on the role of historical plays. Insofar as inheriting the feudal morality was concerned, Wu Han wrote that as a result of the criticism, he had come to realize that “morality is that of class, different classes have different kinds of morality and the morality of the ruled class is antagonistic to that of the ruling class. The proletariat can only criticize but cannot inherit the feudal morality or the bourgeois morality.” 65 The bulk of the self criticism is a serious historical refutation of Yao Wenyuan’s charges about class struggle and return of the land during Hai Rui’s time. What does come as a surprise is that towards the end of his self criticism, Wu Han made a strange attempt at extenuating himself, by making a distinction between his political and academic class standpoint. “I have come to realize that while my class standpoint in the political field is quite solid because I have been educated, cultivated and cared for by the Party for more than twenty years, my class standpoint in academic thought is still based upon old, antiquated, bourgeois and even feudal things.” 66 All in all, the self criticism, peppered as it was throughout by such phrases as “I was estranged from politics and reality”, “I had forgotten class struggle”, “I have paid no attention (to my bourgeois academic origins)”, etc, gives the impression of a rather unwilling admission to faults which were not faults actually but oversight and neglect. And despite the new found realization, still manages to convey an air of injured innocence. But our aim is not to discover how Wu Han felt about the criticism campaign against him. Our concern is with the reactions to his self criticism from the senior as well as the radical young historians - quite obviously, it had fooled nobody.

The radicals viewed this self criticism from the requirements of current politics and the stress on class struggle. Wu Han had not condemned his bourgeois thinking strongly enough, it was evident that old ideas yet

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63. Text of Wu Han’s self criticism in *CB*, No. 783, 21 March 1966, pp. 28-52.
64. Ibid., pp. 30-31.
65. Ibid., p. 47.
66. Ibid., p. 48.
dominated his approach to the study of history. More importantly, Mao Zedong, in his ‘Speech at Hangchow’ on 21st December 1965 had more or less sealed Wu Han’s fate. “Some intellectuals like Wu Han Chien Po-tsan are going from bad to worse.” The first half of 1966 witnessed an acceleration in the articles criticizing both these historians.

Some other reactions from the more senior historians also give us an idea as to how historians were meeting the demand for greater stress on the class method and viewpoint. It also helps in placing the activity within historical circles in the context of the ongoing power struggle for there was no doubting that Wu Han was in the thick of a very active controversy between the two factions in the CPC.

On 31st December 1965, Wenhuibao invited some historians, writers and artists of Shanghai to discuss Wu Han’s self criticism. The minutes of the meeting were published in Wenhuibao on January 7 and in Renmin Ribao on January 13, 1966. The most refreshing reaction came from the doughty sixty-eight year old Zhou Yutong, Vice President of the Institute of Historical Research of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. Reacting to the view expressed by some radical critics that the honest officials of the feudal era were far more dangerous than the corrupt ones, he asked: “Does this mean to say, then, that it was better to be a bad professor than a good one in the times of the Chiang Kai-shek gang of bandits?” The more troubling aspect of such a belief, Prof. Zhou said, was the “problem” it raised for students. “This question is now also raised by the middle school students, and the history teachers of the middle schools are at a loss to know how to teach.” The feudal characters had to be concretely analysed or else “the wholesale rejection of the history of the feudal society” which the above belief implied, would “partially submerge the fine culture of the world.” But what disturbed him by far was unconnected with Wu Han’s self criticism.

“We do not now pay much attention to our own historical and cultural legacies, but our enemy - US imperialism - is going all out to study Ming history and Japan also pays attention to the study of Chinese

68. “Some Personges from Academic Circles in Shanghai Discuss Wu Han’s ‘Self Criticism on Dismissal of Hai Rui’”, trans. in CB, No 783, 21 March 1966, pp. 58-63.
69. Ibid., p. 53.
70. Ibid.
history and is organising a society to study Hsuan-chuang of the Tang Dynasty. When in the future we want to study Chinese history of feudal society, we can only look for data from foreign countries. 71

All the participants in this discussion, without exception, found Wu Han’s political awareness and reliability highly questionnable and his attempt to detach his class standpoint in the political sphere from that in the academic sphere, as totally erroneous and illogical. Neither did anyone give any credence to Wu Han’s lapse of memory regarding class truggle. On the contrary, they believed that “he sounds modest in this regard. As I see it, he has not forgotten a bit of it.” 72 “...he played an active part in it although he stood on the bourgeois side.” 73 Or again, “He has not forgotten the class struggle, but is in the thick of it.” 74

Zhang Jiaju, Vice-Dean, Department of History of the Shanghai Normal College felt that the self criticism was full of contradictions and was written primarily to clear his own political motive. 75 Though it was entitled a self criticism, its “content” did not “justify such a title” and that it called for further criticism because it seemed that there was “basically no change in his viewpoint and standpoint.” 76

Scanning the various responses from the point of view of the larger theoretical and controversial questions in historical research, one can cull the following:

(a) That it was necessary to lay down a few principles for the evaluation of historical characters.
(b) That “concrete characters” in history necessitated a “concrete analysis” in which the crucial step was to “draw a clear line of class demarcation.”
(c) That “independent thinking” was very important but it was of no use unless it was “based upon the political thought of the proletariat” and not of the bourgeoisie, for learning was not separate from politics.
(d) That the problem of ‘honest’ and ‘wicked’ officials would have to be discussed more throughly.

In fact, this facet of the entire discussion brought forth the maximum number of queries. If one

71. Ibid.
72. Ibid., p. 63.
73. Ibid., p. 56.
74. Ibid., p. 58.
75. Ibid., p. 61.
76. Ibid.
maintained that both were of the same ilk, then "in what way is one better or worse than the other?" To say that the honest were worse than the wicked was obviously an exaggeration and some participants were at their sarcastic best in this regard. "Let us compare the honest, incorrupt officials with the corrupt officials. It is better to be exploited to a lesser or greater extent? It it better to be oppressed less heavily or more heavily?" "There is also reason to say that honest officials are worse than corrupt officials. When things are judged from the standpoint of revolutionaries it is easy to evaluate corrupt officials and tyrants, but it is difficult to evaluate so called honest officials." Finally, if one believed that the honest officials were better than the wicked, then what implications did this have in the matter of inheriting feudal morals.

(e) That criticism of historical characters did not solve the problem of how to evaluate them and that historical research should not look upon criticism as its main task.

On the whole, the entire Hai Rui affair revealed the major features of historiography and historical research in the first phase of the CR. First, the accent on class struggle, was gradually leading to an environment which demanded a complete and unqualified commitment to the class method and viewpoint in historical research accompanied by a concomitant intolerance for views argued outside of these parameters. Secondly, to constantly bear in mind the class struggle, envisaged actual and direct participation in the ongoing class struggle - indeed, the correctness or otherwise of one's attitude and work depended on the side one was on - of the proletariat or of the bourgeoisie. This did indeed put a stop, for the time being, to historical debates and research on history. Thirdly, in keeping with the calls for reforming the educational sphere, students of history and philosophy were urged to leave their ivory towers and mingle with the workers, peasants and soldiers, live with them and learn from them, for, as Mao Zedong had pointed out, they, (the masses), alone were the true source of knowledge. This would lead to the demystification of research and of abstract philosophical concepts as also eventually contribute to the formation of a truly mass based history and philosophy.

An attempt in this direction was made by a group of historians from the Department of History of the Chinese People's University who visited the Lijiazhuang production brigade, Yangbai Commune in the Wutai
Country of Shanxi province. This group published their findings in the October issue of *Lishi Yanjiu* in an article entitled, "Write the History of the Masses and Write History for the Masses." In accordance with the prevailing stress on class struggle, this group went to the rural area motivated by the following dictum of Mao's:

"In China, education has always been the exclusive preserve of the landlords, and the peasants have had no access to it. But the landlords' culture has been created by the peasants, for its sole source is the peasants' sweat and blood."

The observations and results of this group are extremely interesting and refreshing. Unfortunately, similar other accounts are not available, so it is not possible to judge whether this trend could make inroads into stereotyped notions of historical research. But it is worth going into in some detail.

The group started with trying to find out the extent of the historical knowledge of the peasants - whether they possessed a historical viewpoint and what role historical knowledge could play in their lives. The legends and folktales circulating in the countryside were discovered to be an important source of historical knowledge even though many facts were wrong and the viewpoint was not always correct. Superstition was rife and backward influences prevailed. Yet the desire to know and learn was tremendous. The group realized, that the simple and unlettered character of the villagers, made them open to unhealthy influences; hence it was imperative, that the proper attitudes towards class struggle be inculcated among them. Mao had pointed out, "Dust never vanishes itself without sweeping." So it was realized that "If the Marxist-Leninist science of history does not go to the countryside for a long time and does not take over the rural position, then historical knowledge and historical viewpoints which contain capitalist and feudalist poison will still be circulated, continuing to corrupt the minds of the peasant masses." But keeping the limitations of the rural areas in mind, it was of crucial importance for workers in the rural areas to realize that,

History is a science with a clean cury Party character (sic) ... (the) science of history... can play its role only if it meets the needs of the current era and identifies itself with the broad masses of the people. Only then can it be turned into a material force.

80. Ibid., p. 35.
Explaining why histories had hitherto been so onesided, the group pointed out that although the history of struggle is intimately associated with the lives of the peasantry, "historians have little knowledge about such mass struggles and such... historical facts are excluded from their historical records." They therefore encouraged the peasants to write the history of their own struggle, so that the science of history could reflect the services performed by the peasant masses in creating history.

The group then came up with suggestions for generating interest and enthusiasm for history among the masses such as plain language, interesting and vivid style of writing on familiar subjects apart from providing illustrations and holding more meetings and slide shows.

The group admitted that taking history to the countryside was fraught with problems and that only dogged practice would refine the methods. But, the conclusion was inescapable:

"History workers should go to the rural areas... ( and ) deliver historical knowledge of a scientific character to the rural areas so that the broad masses of the peasants will understand the real face of their own history."\(^1\)

The article makes fascinating reading. Had the method been really adopted on a large scale, there is no doubt but that it would have brought about a change of a revolutionary nature in Chinese historical circles.

Since 1964, calls for demolishing the myth of peasants being unable to comprehend philosophical and historical complexities were being made. In August 1964, Mao had said that it was pointless to discuss epistemological issues divorced from practice. "The comrades who study philosophy should go down to the countryside."\(^2\) Editorials and articles encouraged the attempts on the part of the masses to understand theories. The underlying rationale was that these theories would help them in class struggle and in solving problems of a practical nature.

"The experience of Chinchien in studying philosophy proves beyond doubt that workers, peasants and soldiers can master philosophy, because they study in the struggle and for the struggle. Their study of

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81. Ibid, p. 33.
philosophy is necessary for the three revolutionary movements and for proletarian dictatorship.” 83

Thus the situation simmered. On June 3, 1966 there appeared an editorial in Renmin Ribao “Capture the Positions in the field of Historical Studies seized by the Bourgeoisie.” 84 This editorial charged that “the bourgeois authorities” had “seized a number of positions in historical studies” and were exercising “dictatorship over the Proletariat in some departments.” 85 Not only that, they were using their positions to oppose the party and socialism, distort history and attempted to deceive the masses by satirizing the present using the past and thereby paving the way for the restoration of capitalism. These “reactionaries” who were attempting to turn back the wheel of history, eulogized only “emperors, kings, generals and prime ministers” in their desire to cater to the needs of the bourgeois and the landlord classes. Their sole motive was to protect “the old system, the conservative and the old ideology” in which they utilized their “so called” historicism, i.e. “the idealist conception of history to oppose and adulterate the Marxist-Leninist teachings on class struggle.”

Mao had pointed out that the “progressive development of socialist society must take as its key link the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and the struggle between the roads of socialism and capitalism.” This was totally valid for historical studies as well. Finally, the crucial point was hammered home.

“In this field, either the materialist conception of history is applied to interpret history in the service of proletarian politics and the socialist revolution, or the idealist conception of history is applied... in the service of bourgeois politics and the restoration of capitalism. In historical studies as in other sciences, the materialist and the idealist conception of history can never coexist in peace.” 86

It concluded with a strong injunction:

“In this great great proletarian cultural revolution, we must completely destroy the reactionary bourgeois position in historical studies and smash the counter revolutionary idealist system of historical studies which serves the restoration of capitalism.” 87 (emphasis added)

83. Philosophy Is No Mystery: Peasants Put Their Study To Work (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1972). Chinchien is the name of the production brigade which the pamphlet describes. This pamphlet was very widely distributed.
86. Ibid., p. 14.
87. Ibid., p. 15.
This editorial marked the high point of the politicization of historical studies. Its strident and uncompromising tone left no room for doubt that whoever dissented, opposed or differed would not be spared. In this respect too, the CR constitutes a unique chapter in the historiography of Communist China.

That history, historical issues and tendencies in historical circles were crucial concerns in the CR, is revealed by the fact that among the intellectuals, historians came in for the most severe attacks and criticisms. Apart from Wu Han, the other ‘bourgeois’ and ‘reactionary’ historians attacked for advocating “historicism” were Jian Bozan and Hou Wailu. Although all these “royalists in the field of historical studies” were accused of distorting history and using the past to criticize the present, their major crime was the utilization of ‘historicism’ in their historical work. As was stressed over and over again, the test of a person in the two line struggle was whether he adopted the proletarian approach and the class method and viewpoint or the bourgeois approach which downplayed class struggle. The ‘historicism’ advocated by Jian Bozan, though it did emphasize class struggle, certainly fell far short of the demand to single it out, over and above any other factor. Accordingly, the criticism campaign against him opened with a *Hongqi* article, “The Historical Viewpoint of Comrade Chien Po-tsan Ought to be Criticized” by Ji Benyu, Lin Jian and Yen Changguei. 88 Jian was accused of counter revolutionary criminal activity - of subverting the “revolutionization of historical study workers” in a number of ways: by trying to keep academics and politics in separate spheres independent of each other, by rejecting the radical historiography as indiscriminating and inappropriate and by not taking Mao’s injunction that students of history and philosophy must mingle with the masses, seriously enough. The criticism of Jian lasted throughout 1966 and included more than forty articles in a dozen different newspapers and journals. 89

Finally, in December 1966, Jian Bozan’s contribution to the field of history in China was totally dismissed by the same above mentioned authors and he was accused of being immersed in his landlord heritage and of being a stooge of Chiang Kai-shek. All his efforts as a capitalist and rightist were directed towards laying the of foundations for a capitalist restoration in China. 90

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Hou Wailu was similarly the subject of another intense criticism campaign in the latter half of 1966. An article in *Renmin Ribao* on 22nd November 1966 titled “Expose the Reactionary Substance of Hou Wai-lu’s Advocacy of Heresy” by Shi Weiding appeared. The Deputy Director of the Institute of Historical Research was censured for having urged the people to criticize the “emperor”, for having defended the right opportunists and for advocating “taking vengeance” which was interpreted as revenge against the CPC. Yet another article in *Guangming Ribao* on 23 November, accused Hou Wailu of expounding reactionary and bourgeois views, with the aim of subverting the revolutionary ideals of the young Chinese students.

The historical journal ‘*Lishi Yanjiu*’ also came under attack for peddling a reactionary point of view under the direction of the bourgeois editor Li Shu. Li Shu had objected to a disorderly and unmethodical discarding of historical concepts which was viewed as opposing Mao’s policy of ‘destruction before construction’ and which in effect was designed to compel Marxist historians to abandon their criticism of the bourgeois historical science.

The campaigns against these historians and their “heresies” constituted the last of the debates on historians, history and historiography during the CR though even these articles read more like polemical pieces than customary academic treatises. Nonetheless, not all of them can be so simply written off, for the method and viewpoint they were advocating as regards historiography, whether considered tenable or not, was proceeding in a very definite direction. It is still a matter of conjecture whether, had not the CR taken the violent turn it did in late 1966, these debates could have produced something worthwhile. On 18 February 1967, the ‘Historical Study’ supplement of *Guangming Ribao*, renamed ‘New Historical Study’ proclaimed that henceforth the aim of historical study would be

“To study history again in a new way, rewrite the whole history, write the history of class struggle, of the working people and peasant revolutionary wars and write history into textbooks on class struggle.”

The creation and activity of the Red Guards (RG) in the fall of 1966 represented an entirely new phase in the CR. When they began their campaign of denouncing Confucius, they marked the end of academic evaluations and exchanges by the scholars and historians which also signified the termination of whatever little contribution the latter were making to historiography. Strident and often hysterical in tone, the emotional outbursts of the RGs made no secret of their intentions: to uphold and propagate the thoughts of Chairman Mao and to attack everybody who was even remotely perceived as opposing it. All forms and manifestation of tradition were vehemently attacked – there was no question of critically summing up or inheriting the “valuable legacy.” If the various eyewitness accounts are perused, even allowing for distortions and exaggerations, a rather grim and ghastly picture emerges of the manner in which the RGs embarked on a destruction of everything that they believed to be symbols of feudalism and imperialism. Temples, objects of art, books, ancient scrolls, furniture, jewelry and all foreign made items were destroyed. People believed to be harbouring feudalistic and imperialistic ideas were beaten, humiliated, insulted and tortured. Their force was “irresistable” – they were the representatives, interpreters, deputies, executors and propagators of the thought of Mao Zedong and they were warring on the four olds.

In September 1966, the 2517th birth anniversary of Confucius witnessed many dramatic demonstrations and novel methods of reviling Confucius. Portraits of the Sage bearing the legend: “I am a cow-ghost and a snake demon” or “I am a feudalistic boss” were paraded in the streets. Innumerable Confucian works were burned and the Classics were denounced as nonsensical utterings of the “Number One Criminal of Feudal thinking.” News items in early 1967 reported destruction of the Confucian temple in Qufu by the RGs and a RG report in *Renmin Ribao* on 10 January 1967, ran as follows:

“Confucius is the founder of the extremely reactionary Confucianism. The class enemy always attempts to use the “honoring of Confucius and restoring of antiquity” to undertake the counter revolutionary restoration.”


The person perceived to be leading the class enemy was Liu Shaoqi. It is not the criticisms of Liu per se that concern us, but criticism of Liu as the “pious scion of Confucius” and as the “Faithful Advocate for the Way of Confucius and Mencius.” Anti-Confucianism was thus fused with the ongoing power struggle and attacks on Liu were justified as parts of the efforts to overthrow those who continued to propagate a feudal ideology. The attempt here shall be to select those criticisms which tried to demonstrate that Liu’s views were an extension of Confucianism and which sought to prove that Liu had been the driving force behind the positive assessments of Confucius in the early sixties.

The stress on class struggle and the belief that it had been neglected in the post GLF period, fuelled the drive to prove Liu Shaoqi’s active connivance and complicity in the 1961-62 appraisals of Confucius especially when it was recalled that the most important Shandong Conference of November 1962 had followed close on the heels of Mao’s famous Tenth Plenum speech. The Renmin Ribao article of 10 January 1967 mentioned above, was entitled “Forum on Confucius'- A Black Session of Monsters and Demons for Attacking the Party” and it was accompanied by an editorial note which declared that

“In our Socialist new China, there is absolutely no room for Confucian concepts and capitalist and revisionist ideas which serve the exploiting classes. If these ideas are not uprooted, it will be impossible to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat and build socialism and communism. In the great proletarian cultural revolution, one of our important tasks is to pull down the rigid feudal corpse of Confucius and thoroughly eradicate the utterly reactionary Confucian concepts... Let us sweep away all old ideas, old culture and old customs and old habits of the exploiting classes and throw them into the garbage heap of history.”

Strong language! But it was no patch on what followed. Denouncing the Shandong “Forum on Confucius” for “wantonly shaping public opinion in favour of launching a counter-revolution,” the article stated that it was clear that “the object of their advocating ‘benevolent government’ and ‘rule by moral virtue’ is to blur the class boundary and resolve class contradictions...” Finally, “whoever dares to oppose Mao Tsetung’s

97. Trans. in SCMP, No. 3863, 1967, pp. 4-5.
teachings will be denounced and pulled down by us, no matter whether he is a human being or a ghost and regardless of his position and seniority.” (Emphasis added)

The same issue of Renmin Ribao carried another article by the same group - “What Poison Was Spread by Monsters and Demons at the ‘Forum on Fonfucius’?” This article listed the arguments made at the Forum by the various historians and philosophers and grouped them under five headings with a comment at the end of each group outlining the political motivation behind those arguments and ran as follows:

“One, Frienziedly Lauding and Glorifying Confucius, Maliciously Slandering and Attacking Mao Tsetung’s Thought....

Two Propagating Confucius’ Notions of ‘Benevolent Government’ and ‘Rule by Moral Virtue’, Maliciously Attacking proletarian Dictatorship, and Openly Provoking a Counter-Revolutionary Restoration....

Three, Using Ancient Things to Satrize the Present, Attacking Others by Insinuation, Maliciously Assailing the Three Red Banners, and Cursing the proletarian Leadership....

Four, Vainly Trying To Dress Up the Idealistic World Outlook of Confucius as a World Outlook of Dialectical Materialism....

Five, Advocating the Idea of ‘Loving and Embracing One Another’ between One Individual and Another, In a Vain Attempt to Blur the class Boundary Line and Obliterate Class Struggle.”

The strident and often hysterical tone of the article and the uncompromising stand against Confucius in this article gives a fair idea of the prevailing atmosphere. From the point of view of historiography, the above is not important; its excessive cant effectively discouraging any debate whatsoever. But it is evidence of the transference of anti-Confucianism in the PRC from intellectual circles to the masses during the CR.

As the campaign against Liu Shaoqi hotted up in the latter half of 1966 and 1967, his links with the thinking of Confucius and Mencius were emphasised more and more. On 23 July 1967 an article appeared in

98. Ibid., pp. 9-13.
Guangming Ribao by the United Fighting Department of the Revolutionary Rebels of the Shandong Provincial Research Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences entitled, "The Number One Ambitionist is the Faithful Advocate for the Way of Confucius and Mencius"99 This article traced Liu’s advocacy of Confucianism to the pre-liberation days – his opposition to the thoughts of Mao Zedong thus had a long history. The proof of Liu’s Confucian ideas was his book, On Self Cultivation of Communist Party Members, first published in August 1949, the English version of which has been titled How To be A Good Communist. Liu was accused of propagating an idealist philosophy in his book when he wrote of the importance of self cultivation. He could not escape the charge of being a modern day Confucianist, on account of his use of a term so eminently feudal in origin and connotation, despite the fact that he explained the difference between idealist self cultivation and his own use of the term, which was aimed at the inculcation of Marxist materialist values.

"But the "self cultivation" pursued by many people in the past was generally idealistic, formalistic, abstract and divorced from general practice. They exaggerated the role of subjective intentions, thinking that as long as they had "goodwill" in the abstract, they could transform reality, society and themselves. Of course that is absurd. Our self cultivation cannot be done that way. We are revolutionary materialists; our self cultivation can not be seperated from the revolutionary practice of the masses."100

But, in the Guangming Ribao article it was pointed out, that according to a participant in the November 1962 Conference,

"As the ideas of Confucius and Mencius have now been critically accepted, they have been remoulded to become an important component of cultivating the proletariat and good communists. In his outstanding theoretical work, How To Be A Good Communist, Comrade Liu Shao-ch’i accomplished this task in an extraordinary and outstanding way."101

It may be recalled that in 1962, another edition of Liu’s book was brought out with much publicity on August 1, which is China’s Army Day and which in retrospect suggests a struggle or at any rate a tension between

99. CB, No. 836, pp. 46-55.
101. n. 97, p.12.
the Party and the Army. The Army under Lin Biao was inculcating the thoughts of Mao Zedong. Sixty million copies of Liu's book were printed, subsequently interpreted as an attempt to subvert Marxism. Passages were selectively picked, blown out of proportion and denounced. And though much was made of Liu's supposed endorsement of Feng Youlan's concept of 'universal from' of ideas, the following passage of Liu's book was overlooked:

"The universal morality which supposedly transcends class is sheer deceptive nonsense and is in fact a morality designed to protect the interests of the exploiting few. Such a concept of morality is always idealist."

In this manner Liu's dastardly and revisionist intentions in bringing about a capitalist restoration were established. It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the validity of the charges against Liu, but it must be stated that Liu undoubtedly was no disciple of Confucius, and his book, which is rather well written, was certainly not advocating or propagating Confucian values. It is another matter that the policies initiated by him did downplay class struggle and in the field of education, espoused expertise over redness and that his commitment to generating revolutionary consciousness in Chinese society was not as heightened as Mao's. It is a matter of speculation as to where he would have taken China. On the other hand, the charge that he acquiesced, or at any rate approved, of the overall positive assessments of Confucius is not entirely without basis. He obviously had a very strong power base among the senior historians, philosophers and the intellectuals such as Wu Han, Feng Youlan, Deng To, Zhou Yang and Jian Bozan to name a few, and moreover, till 1965 the mass media was under his control. In a highly centralized, one-Party political system, the propagation of a particular line or the widespread advocacy of a certain viewpoint, certainly implies a connection between the power holder and the viewpoint. But this is part of the overall picture - a part which need not be unduly 'politicized' as it was during the CR - in which case it gets distorted out of all proportion.

The disorder which ensued as a result of the violence of the indiscriminate attacks of the RGs on the 'handful of capitalist roaders' in the Party, left the organizational structure of the CPC virtually crippled down to the county

103 Chp. 2, n. 23, pp. 152-53.
level. Not only was there no unified structure of command, but the factionalism and the infighting, the total lack of cohesion among the radical left, that prevailed in the wake of 1966, caused a near total breakdown of the institutional processes bringing even the day to day administration to a standstill. At this stage, it was only the Army with its centralized national structure which emerged as the repository of authority and control. This was the move which propelled Lin Biao on to the centre stage of Chinese politics, setting in motion a chain of events which was to culminate in the ‘Criticize Lin Criticize Confucius’ campaign.

The analysis of Chinese politics and the power struggles since the sixties has centered around the identification of factions. There is considerable debate as to whether a factional analysis is a valid method of interpreting and comprehending Chinese politics. Yet there is no gainsaying the fact that during the period 1965-69 two distinct and major groups emerged and there was a fierce and violent struggle between them. As early as 5 March 1959, Mao had mentioned the presence of "mountain tops" in the Party and Army, which could be taken to mean factions.

"Our Party had many mountain tops in the past and we gradually united them to form a unified Party. There were also several 'mountain tops' within our troops.... What policy should we adopt? We should get to know the 'mountain tops', recognize them, take care of them, and destroy them." 104

Moreover in his speech to the Eleventh Plenum of the Eighth CC on 13 August 1966, Mao said,

"Do we have a party outside our Party? I think that we do, and that we have factions (paixi) inside the Party. We used to criticize the Kuomintang, who said: 'No Party outside the Party and no factions inside the Party.' Some people put it: 'No Party outside the Party is autocracy; no factions inside the Party is nonsense.' This applies to us. You may say that there are no factions in our Party, but there are." 105

Since much of the Chinese communist historiography on Confucius in the seventies is inexplicable without an idea of the contending groups and what they represented, this study also utilizes the terms 'radicals' and 'moderates' to identify the leading factions, as they emerged from the violence of 1967-69. The definition of the term faction is best made as,

105 "Chairman Mao Talks to the People" in, Schram, chp. 1, n.60, p. 263.
"...any constituent group of a larger unit which works for the advancement of particular persons or policies." 106

In broad terms, the 'moderates' were essentially pragmatic in outlook, stressing technical and economic development which required stability and order in society and firm Party control. The 'radicals' on the other hand, motivated more by revolutionary fervour advocated a constant struggle against what they perceived to be the evils of the old society as also the evils of the Western bourgeois society and pressed for a more active role of the masses to bring about the change.

Proceeding with an awareness of these factions, facilitates understanding of the twists and turns in Chinese politics, the reasons behind the emergence of key figures or their disappearance and the rationale behind the various policy measures adopted. More than that, this study does not attempt. Thus, the first phase of the CR beginning toward the end of 1965, witnessed increasing tensions between Mao Zedong and his radical followers and the moderates within the CPC and lasted till mid-1966 - till the Eleventh Plenum - when Liu Shaoqi was demoted in Party rankings and Mao's thought was established as the only guide for action. The Sixteen Points were issued, 107 and revisionism was identified as the worst evil. The second phase, which lasted till the end of 1966 was dominated by the Red Guards and their activities. The third phase witnessed the seizure of power from the Party organizations and the setting up of new Revolutionary Committees, consisting of members of mass organizations, (mainly Red Guards), the Party cadres and the PLA. This was the most violent phase of the CR and concluded with the decisive entry of the Army in Chinese politics. The final phase was that of rebuilding and it culminated in the Ninth Party Congress of April 1969.

It was during the CR that Jiang Qing emerged as one of the most dominant figures and the group she gathered around her, formed the ultra-left faction among the radicals. Mao in fact was so exasperated at the manner in which his instructions were being consistently thwarted by the officials in the Ministry of Culture that in his famous

Directive of May 1967, he had angrily admonished them thus: "... if it refuses to change, it should be renamed the Ministry of Emperors, Kings, Generals and Monsters, the Ministry of Talents and Beauties or the Ministry of Foreign Mummies." Possibly inspired by this statement, Jiang Qing had begun to fight against the remnants of feudal and bourgeois influences in the field of Culture and the Performing Arts and it was she who initiated the move to reform the Peking Opera. It was as a result of her activities that the relationship between theatre, history and politics acquired an extremely controversial nature. If historical figures and events were to be dramatized so as to popularize history, then it was essential to bear in mind that,

"There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes or art that is detached from or independent of politics....Literature and art are subordinate to politics, but in their turn exert a great influence on politics." 108

It is indeed ironic that it was she and her followers, and not Confucius, who ended up on the dust heap of history.

The politicization of history reached its climax during the CR - historical science was the most "important ideological battlefield." It was only to be expected that this battle would witness many casualties - especially among the senior historians who had not been stressing class-struggle hard enough. In the frontline of the attack were the young Marxist historians who were to dominate historical studies in the coming decade.

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