Degree Project
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The Ideological Transformation of the Icon Chairman Mao during the Four Modernisations period

As illustrated by “Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul”

Author: Jeremy Biggs
Supervisor: Hu Lunglung
Examiner:
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Summary (English)

After Chairman Mao's death, in the late 1980's, Mao was removed from official government communications and his iconography transformed from having a specific meaning generation role linked to Maoist ideology, to becoming available for use as a commodity. In this research I use cultural theorist Jacques Derrida's theory of Hauntology and the deconstruction method to analyse a representative Chinese Propaganda poster, “Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul”, in order to ascertain the effect Mao's death had on the Iconography of Chairman Mao, and how Mao is ideologically transformed during this period.

Analysing the painting I found specific symbols associated with the iconography of Mao that had been adopted and transformed for the purposes of the CCP. These symbols both suggested the presence of Chairman Mao, as well as negated that presence through being co-opted for other purposes.

Using these symbols and writings about the period I deduced that during this period the CCP had to rely on existing symbols of power and authority in order to communicate and legitimise regime change whilst maintaining the semblance of continuity. At the same time they had to decouple these symbols from their original meanings in order to distance themselves from the past and redefine the ideology of China.

In the process, Mao's iconography was decoupled from its Maoist ideological heritage and transformed into abstract symbols of power, doctrine and so on. This means that the transformation had made them available to use as an “open basket” into which new, related meanings could be placed – including serving as a commodity.

Keywords: Chinese, China, Deconstruction, Iconography, Mao Zedong, Iconographic transformation, Ideology, Maoism, Four Modernisations, Hauntology
毛主席的思想改造

中文摘要：毛主席是中国历史上最有名的文化偶像之一。他的思想是中国共产党的根本基础。作为一个偶像，毛泽东在中国现代文化中是一个很重要的象征意义成分，代表着权力、中国共产党、毛泽东思想等等。

在八十年代，当毛主席死后，毛泽东作为偶像在宣传画中逐渐消失，同时也被商品化了。为了解释毛泽东作为文化偶像的影响，以及毛泽东思想在此时期的转变，本文会运用文化理论家雅克·德里达的“幽灵学”（Hauntology）和解构主义学的方法，对一具代表性的宣传画《青春的旋律，优美的心灵》进行分析。

通过分析，我们可以发现一些与毛主席有关的符号，例如：书，原子符号，光等等。这些与毛主席有关的符号，为了满足中国共产党的宣传目的，已经被转变了。而由于这些符号与毛主席有关，它们便意味着毛主席仍存在于文本中，但是因为这些符号被转变了，他们也意味着毛主席在文本中的缺席。

分析这段时间所使用的这些符号，以及阅读关于“四个现代化”的文章，我发现，在“四化”时期，为了传达政权转换的合法性，以及保持其政权连续性的假象，不得不依靠已经存在的政治符号。同时为了把实用主义放在政治理论的核心中，他们也要从旧的思想限制中解放出来，所以他们需要把某些与毛泽东有关的符号从符号里分离出来。

在过程中，偶像毛泽东转变成一种开架商品，各种意识形态都可以藉由毛泽东来贩卖。
**INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

*Mao as an Icon.* Chairman Mao is one of the most recognisable figures from recent Chinese history. As the founding father of New China, adherence to his ideology was referred to in 1959 by Zhou Enlai as the “red line of Mao Zedong Thought". (Hung, *Mao’s New World*, 121) Along with Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought was the ideological basis of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) Mao's writings, and his quotations became the embodiment of the Chinese Communist party and its power, and, furthermore, he ceased to be the unifying symbol of the revolutionary leader, and had “simply become the CCP and all that it stood for”. (Landsberger, “Mao as the Kitchen God”, 196)

As a cultural Icon, his visage graced thousands of official Chinese visual communications that were used to shape the beliefs and attitudes of the Chinese people during his lifetime. Images of Mao were embued with great cultural significance, as epitomised by the edict issued by Beijing No.26 Middle School Red Guards' "One Hundred Items for Destroying the Old and Establishing the New" which listed as number one: "Every household must have on its walls a picture of the Chairman plus quotations by Chairman

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1 The phrase "The red line of Mao Zedong Thought" appears to have been used by Zhou Enlai in September 1959, on reviewing the "July 1 Anniversary Exhibition" at the Chinese Military Museum. (Hung, 120-121). Zhou Enlai calls the red line "the fundamental and most critical issue […] that is] Chairman Mao's correct thought and the revolutionary [political] line as the guiding principle.” (Ibid, 121).

This view that "politics [must be] in command" (Ibid), is similar in sentiment to Mao Zedong's edict on the unity of art and politics from the talks at Yan'an: "In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. 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. Proletarian literature and art are part of the whole proletarian revolutionary cause; they are, as Lenin said, cogs and wheels in the whole revolutionary machine." (Mao, 86)

The phrase "red line of Mao Zedong Thought" was also used for item 21 in the Red Guards' "One Hundred Items for Destroying the Old and Establishing the New", stating that all works of literature and art "must be pervaded by the one red line of Mao Zedong Thought.” (qt. By Schoenhals, 215)

The phrase "red line" is also used in Hu Tianci's guidebook to the political theory entrance exams, to represent the connection between Mao's principle of seeking truth from facts, with Marxism, Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping's Theory and Jiang Zemin’s “The Three Represents”. (Hu, 139) In this respect I interpret "red line" (hong xian) to mean a connecting thread or fundamental political line. Put simply, the "red line of Mao Zedong Thought" is a political line in accord with Maoist ideology.
Mao." (qt. by Schoenhals 213) Furthermore, not taking care of a Mao picture, or having something above a picture of Mao could be seen to be counter-revolutionary. (Duo, Min and Landsberger 16)

Propaganda posters were ubiquitous in New China's early period. “Foreign countries called [posters] 'momentary' street art because they were distributed in public areas, such as on the street, in cinemas, exhibitions, shopping areas, airports, docks, train stations etc.” (Mi and Li, 141) That is to say that they occupied social space in the same way that Leninist 'monumental' works did in Soviet Russia (Kruk, 35). Propaganda poster's occupation and domination of social space – the fact that people would have been surrounded by images of Mao, or symbols relating to Mao, in public and private – is the method by which propaganda posters were instrumental in the formation of Mao as a quasi-religious Icon (Landsberger, Chinese Propaganda Posters, 207), and in the process he had become a symbol of the Chinese Communist Party and its power. (Ibid 184) This process, also, created the sensation that Mao was omnipresent (Donald 958).

*The Meaning of the Icon.* Hung, Powell and Wong and Donald have all touched on how Mao was a meaning making component of Chinese Propaganda Posters, and how symbols associated with Mao such as the red sun (Powell and Wong 790), and colour (Donald 671) represented power, authority, embodied the CCP, and his ideology, so that he became an omnipresent force, “closing the gap between everyday experience and political ideology.” (Donald 958)

Hung (“Oil Paintings and Politics”, 792) also notes that all paintings had to adhere to the "red line of Mao Zedong Thought" (Ibid 802). The requirement to confirm to Mao's ideology can be thought of as a form of presence, as he is present in the abstract and systematic rules that govern the creation of a painting.
Stefan Landsberger, in 1996, traces the origin of the cult of Mao, the presentation of which he links to co-opting the cultural language of the new year picture (“Mao as Kitchen God” 197). He makes note of religious practices, that sprang up around the Mao cult (Ibid 208), including the building of temples, and practices such as saying a form of grace by offering up food to Mao before eating. In this respect, he likens Mao most to the “Kitchen God”. (Ibid 196)

Talking about the ritualisation of the Mao Cult, Landsberger says that it resulted in the depersonalization of Mao. That is, rituals could be carried out in absentia: Mao himself was no longer needed to produce the major policy statements bearing his name, as they could be “pieced together from fragments of his earlier work.” (Ibid 209)

Post Mao period. When Mao died in 1976, he left an ideological vacuum with successor Hua Guofeng filling the shoes of Mao (Ibid 210). The chaos that characterised the Cultural Revolution had served to distance the people from the party, to the extent that after Mao's death a series of cultural works were created that were critical of this period. These included Lu Xinhua's 1977 stories “The Wounded” and “Class Counselor” that formed the basis of the “Literature of the Wounded” movement (Wagner, “Introduction To Chinese Literature”), as well as films like 1993’s (banned) “The Blue Kite”.

Whilst Mao's reputation, publicly at least, was insulated from a large part of the fallout by the scape-goating of the Gang of Four, (Landsberger, Chinese Propaganda Posters, 66) China's increasing relations with the west, and the growing sense that China was lagging behind the rest of the world, meant that the party began to distance themselves from Mao. Deng Xiaoping even went as far as to do away with "leader worship" (Ibid 183) by vetoing all leader portraits, with the exception of the "most beloved leader" (Ibid 183) Zhou Enlai.

By the Mid 1980's Mao almost disappeared entirely from party communications. In “the 1980's the party-state issued directives recalling the Mao badge, and
by 1988 an estimated 90% had been recovered.” (Benewick 134) His image was either relegated to part of a pantheon of figures ranging from Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, to Sun Yatsen, or replaced with abstract symbols such as the Hammer and Sickle, the state emblem (Tian'anmen) or the national symbol (five yellow stars on a red background). Landsberger attributes this substitution as a "reflection of the propagation of nationalism rather than communism as the source of regime legitimacy" (Landsberger, Chinese Propaganda Posters, 184)

Towards the tail end of the 80's and throughout the 90's Mao re-emerged as a pop-culture Icon, appearing on taxis, adverts, lighters and a whole host of other commodities. By 1993, Beijing Review featured an article entitled “Mao Badge Craze returns to China”. (Benewick 134) Barbara Mittler (471) argues that the continued existence and perpetuation of these symbols in culture (their longue-duree) is down to the context within which these propaganda Icons first appeared.

Robert Benewick (123-134) has written about Mao as an Icon, and the re-emergence and transformation of Mao to a pop Icon, but he omits to explore what implications the iconicity of Mao has for the communication of change of doctrine that occurred from 1978 onwards. He claims that the revival of Mao was symptomatic of the transfer to a market-economy, and the transformation of the “totalizing-individualizing power relationships of the Cultural Revolution and the terror it inspired to post-Maoist regimes”.(135) Furthermore, Mao was no longer an icon of power, but was useful for “legitimation of the party-state and for promoting the market economy” (Ibid).

The period from 1978, and the rise of Deng Xiaoping to power is sometimes called by western scholars the “Four Modernisations” era. This phrase is used in a way that many Chinese will not recognise, as the “Four Modernisations” is an objective, not a period in time. The phrase is used in this thesis to represent the period after Mao's death, when Zhou
Enlai's Four Modernisations in science, agriculture, national defence and industry were enacted as part of government policy.

Taking “Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul” as an example text, with support from other posters, I hope to deconstruct the iconography of Chairman Mao and look at the way Mao was transformed and the reasons for this transformation. In order to build on Benewick's work on the Icon Chairman Mao, I hope to answer the question “How was Mao the Icon ideologically transformed in the Four Modernisations period?”

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Post-structuralism and Hauntology. In 1976 Abraham and Torok published their work “Le Verbier de l'homme aux loups” in the periodical “Philosphie en effect”. The work concerned trans-generational communication and put forward the idea that descendants lives might be disturbed by the undisclosed traumas of previous generations, even “if the descendants know nothing about the distant causes.” (Davis 374)

Derrida, who edited the original publication, noticed that there was some significant cross over between the ideas expressed by Abraham and Torok and those in his own post-structuralist ideas. This lead to his eventual publication of “Spectres de Marx” which built on these ideas to create a new field that he called “Hauntology” (Hantology). (Davis 374)

“Hauntology supplants its near homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive. Attending to the ghost is an ethical injunction insofar as it occupies the place of the Levinasian Other: a wholly irrecoverable intrusion in our world, which is not comprehensible within our available intellectual frameworks, but whose otherness we are responsible for preserving.” (Davis 373) In this way, Hauntology posits the “presence” of something, such as unspoken meanings or phenomena, that haunt the text, even if they do
not exist in a real-world sense. Spectres are incursions into the present that “open us up to the experience of secrecy”, even if they do not reveal secrets.

Deconstruction as a theoretical method was originated by Jacques Derrida, following the publication of his book “Of Grammatology” in 1967. As a critical method it can be thought of as a way of reading.

It was both a reaction to, and child of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Levi-Strauss’ structuralism, and takes many of the same concepts of the sign and signifier (its physical form) that originated in Strauss' method of analysis, but posits that if consciousness is composed of language, then everything we encounter is a form of text. This does not mean that there is no objective reality, just that when we encounter objective phenomena we conceive of it and can only make sense of it in the realm of language (language here meaning any form of signification).

This means that, unlike Structuralist theory there is no objective signifier that exists outside the system of text (is transcendent), but meaning is relative, and constructed through reference to other signifiers or through comparison to what it is not. Therefore meaning itself is always either deferred, or created through difference (by a process that Derrida calls Différance). This means that language is constantly in a process of creating meaning by filling the space (abyss) that is not occupied by anything else. (Fry, “Introduction To Theory Of Literature”)

The connection between Hauntology and Post-structuralist deconstruction is that both are concerned with the suggestion of an absent presence (the spectre) that haunts (the text), perpetuating the past, or pregnant with future possibilities. Deferment of meaning in Post-structuralism also refers to changes in the meaning of signs and symbols, that happen over time.
Using the process of deconstruction, and closely reading the text, it is possible to reveal the hidden contradictory structures that break or contradict the text's construction, and thus how the text destroys (or deconstructs) itself.
Main Selected Text – Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul.

Since a full study of the Ideological transformation of Chairman Mao within all paintings of the post-Mao period is beyond the scope of this paper, it is more fitting to choose a representative example on which a qualitative analysis can be performed. “Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul” is a propaganda poster painted by artist Shen Shaolun, and published by the Shanghai People's Publishing house in 1981. It was initially issued in a run of 40,000 copies, which sold for 0.16 Yuan at Xinhua outlets in China. This painting was sourced from Max Gottschalk's Collection, published in Duo, Landsberger and Min's book “Chinese Propaganda Posters” by Taschen.

As part of my initial research into Propaganda Posters in general, I started by looking at posters from the 1980's, which seemed to be the most promising period within which comparatively little research had been conducted. “Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul” first attracted me because of its striking blue colour scheme which made it stand out in
contrast to pre 1976 posters. The presence of a Western violin within the picture was also striking because during the Cultural Revolution, the playing of Western music had been banned (Cai, “Western Classical Music in China”), and so the inclusion of a solo violin seemed significant.  

The picture's content, composition, form and style all seemed radically different from Chinese Propaganda posters of previous years, and the exact message was less overt than others that I had encountered. As I continued studying the picture, I began to detect a thread linking it to representations of Mao Zedong, and the sensation that his presence haunted the image. It contains symbols that were linked specifically to Chairman Mao such as the book, the atomic symbol and light that I will expound upon in the analysis section below. It is a contemporary work. The poster was produced and distributed en masse shortly after the death of Mao, and the rise to power of Deng Xiaoping, and communicates a change of doctrine. Additionally it was distributed before the later rise to prominence of Mao as a pop culture Icon in the 1980's.

The painting is significant in that it was produced in a period where posters were still among the main propaganda channels before their decline in the 1990's, and therefore effort was expended to ensure it transmitted the correct ideological message.

“Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul” is a representative sample. It is thematically typical of post Mao era communications and epitomises many of the significant themes, elements or target demographics identified by Stefan Landsberger as representative of the Post Mao, “Four Modernisations” period including science (Chinese Propaganda Posters 71), youth (Ibid 132), nationalism (Ibid 91, 184), leisure activities (Ibid 180) and "living the good

2 Western string instruments had been used in the Model Operas, but their usage was heavily controlled in order to obtain a particular timbre. Chinese instruments had to be given the lead and Western instruments had to be supplementary. (Rao, 224) Mari Yoshihara states that during the Cultural Revolution “Western musical instruments and musical scores were confiscated and burned.” (Yoshihara, 22)
life in a material world" (Duo, Min and Landsberger 17). It also encompasses two of the broad themes identified by Qian Pinhui (234) as being representative of this period - patriotism, the spirit of struggle (Ibid).

It's an authentic painting. It was an official government communication that was produced en masse by the Shanghai People's Art publishing House on behalf of the CCP for propaganda purposes, and distributed through Xinhua Bookshop in Shanghai. The painting was sourced from Stefan Landsberger's book "Chinese Propaganda Posters" and there is a copy in the university of Westminster's Chinese Propaganda Poster collection in London, England (Serial Number: 8081.3536).

Other than the main painting I have selected a group of paintings sharing a common theme or motif from the collections of Yang Peiming (Shanghai Propaganda Art Centre), Stephan Landsberger, Max Gottschalk, as well as Evans and Donald's collection at the University of Westminster, for the purposes of establishing an overview of the transformational process.

*Deconstruction as an analytic method.* Derrida himself rallied at the notion that Deconstruction was a method in itself or had a set procedure, but instead involved the process of unravelling the meaning in a text. (McGee and Warms 173) To that effect, “deconstruction is the rigorous pursuit of a tension embedded deep in the structure of a text that leads to a text's unravelling.” (Ibid)

This paper aims to deconstruct symbols associated with Chairman Mao in order to look at how meaning is created in the text. This involves identifying an area of aporia within a text and, by analysing the etymology of the significant symbols, it therefore becomes possible to explain the contextual (i.e. sociological) reasons why the authors may wittingly or unwittingly invoke the spectre of Mao, and the effect that this has on the text. Finally, using this information, it is possible to show how the text deconstructs itself.
Since “Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul” is a propaganda work, in order to justify why deconstruction is a suitable method we need to consider what exactly propaganda means. Jowett and O'donnell define propaganda within the context of communication theory as follows: “Propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.” (Jowett and O’donnell 7)

With regard to slogans they say, “Our language is based on a vast web of associations that enables us to judge and conceptualise our perceptions. Propagandists understand that our constructed meanings are related to both our past understanding of language and images and the culture and context in which they appear.” (Ibid 8) In other words, meanings are in a state of 'play' and meaning is constructed through the manipulation of existing symbols, including re-purposing or re-contextualising those symbols and is, therefore, a necessary component of the process of propaganda. Deconstructing those symbols will reveal the spectre gesturing “towards a still unformulated future.”(Davis 379) In other words, the absent presence that could “not (yet) be articulated in the languages available to us.” (Davis 377).

I believe that Hauntology and deconstruction as a method is suitable because the texts under analysis are Propaganda works, and representations of Mao were significant in the creation of meaning within them. As an Icon, Mao traditionally represented (amongst other things) Power, Authority, Legitimacy, the party state itself, the nation as well as the specific ideology “Mao Zedong Thought.”
**ANALYSIS OF MELODY OF YOUTH, BEAUTIFUL SOUL**

Benewick's essay on Icons of Power, raises questions regarding the transformation of Mao as an Icon, such as how do you explain the *longue duree* of images of Mao in Chinese culture? When did the meaning of Mao change, and why did this transformation occur? In this paper, by looking at Mao as a meaning generating component within the Four Modernisations era poster “Melody of Youth, Beauty of Soul”, I hope to trace the progression of change in order to explain how Mao is both present in and absent from the painting, and what the ramifications of this are.

*An Interpretation of The Painting: Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul.* The painting shows a pair of youths, one male, one female against a strong blue background, representative of a body of water, on which a rowing competition is occurring. The male holds up a magenta book titled “Motherland and I” (*zuguo he wo*) with the image of an atomic symbol superimposed over a map of China (coloured red) on the cover. The female holds up a violin, as if in the midst of playing. Both characters are in profile, with the direction of their gaze leftward, staring out of the painting. On the left side of the painting we have two expressive paint strokes, one in light green, and the other, larger with a slight red line on its left side. At the top left and bottom right we have the slogan “Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul” (*Qingchun de Xuanlu, Youmei de Xinling*), in both Chinese characters and unaccented pinyin.

The painting is rendered in broad, vigorous and expressive brush strokes, standing in stark contrast to the realistic gouache style that was so prevalent in previous decades, suggesting a departure from revolutionary romanticism. The composition itself, with the two youths hovering over the water as if situated above it in space, parallel to the water, and the presence of the two expressionist brush strokes themselves reinforce this by virtue of being non-naturalistic.
Inside the image we have explicit thematic references to nation (as symbolised by the map), science (as symbolised by the atom), competition (as symbolised by the faceless rowers) and youth (epitomised literally with the two main characters). Despite this reasonably overt use of symbols, the slogan itself does not convey its message informationally, through explicit instructions to specific forms of behaviour, (such as “study basic science well to contribute for building the Motherland” [Fig 4.1 - *nuli xuehao jichu kexue zhishi, wei zuguo cheshe gongxian liliang*]), but instead creates a vague atmosphere or mood, like an advertising slogan.

**Fig 4.1 Source: Yang Peiming’s collection at the Shanghai Propaganda Art Centre**

Taken in its entirety, "Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul" seems to be a call to participation, aimed at youth, to request collective engagement (as part of a team) in vigorous competitive activity based on the new hymn sheet of science and nationalism, which is the new face of the party.

*The Book.* Science and scientists were one of the core themes of the Four Modernisations. (Chen 109) Landsberger (Chinese Propaganda Posters 71) even claims that science was the
bedrock upon which the remaining three (industry, agriculture and national defence) were based. Therefore it comes as no great surprise that at the centre and main focal point of the painting, adorning a book, and superimposed on the outline of a map of China is the symbol of man's scientific mastery over nature, the atom.

In Chinese Socialist Realist paintings, elements are arranged to form a narrative. “The main subject of [a] painting is located in or near the centre, at the top of an imaginary triangular ground plan,” (Landsberger, “Mao as Kitchen God”, 199) So it is significant that the magenta book occupies the centre of the visual hierarchy emphasising its importance. The composition of the painting, however, is circular. The elements rotate around it, almost like it has gravity, or as if they are electrons circulating around a nucleus. This break with compositional convention underscores a second, greater break with symbolic convention, the nature of the book itself.
The most commonly depicted book in propaganda posters up until 1976 is either the little red book 'Quotations from Mao Zedong' *Mao zhuxi yulu* or the collected works of Mao Zedong *Mao zedong xuanji*, which are often shown being held aloft in the same manner as the male youth in Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul or close to their hearts (see figure 4.2 and 4.3). The little red book represented the core of the central doctrine, the red line of Mao Zedong Thought, and by extension, “Mao's spiritual presence.” (Ibid 204)

*Fig 4.2 Long Live Chairman Mao! Long may he live!*
The book in Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul is being held in a way that is reminiscent of the little red book, meaning that it carries the same kind of emotional weight and importance as the aforementioned book, but, significantly, it is not the little red book.

The book depicted in Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul is dark magenta, with yellow and red, unaccented pinyin, *zuguo he wo* (*Motherland and I*) at the top, and the Chinese characters for the same in pink at the bottom. The magenta of the book cover mediates between the saturated red of the Motherland, China, and the surrounding blue that overwhelms the rest of the painting. The pinyin at the top is painted in the same yellow as the atomic symbol, flecked with the red of the Chinese map, so that it appears embossed onto the cover.

The “quotations of Chairman Mao”, his thoughts and therefore his spiritual presence have been usurped by a new book entitled “Motherland and I”, representing a
change in doctrine. The “Motherland and I” of the book is joined by a third entity – the atom. As such, the book is symbolic of the collective unity manifest in the location of China – or in other words – the ideology of the Party-state, of which the viewer is a part (the I in “Motherland and I”).

The symbol of the book has become so synonymous with the notion of the doctrine and power, that, upon changing the basis of their ideology, the CCP were unable to do away with it as a symbol. In order to express this change of doctrine, they had to retain familiar symbols so that the people could understand the nature of change that had taken place.

*The Ideology represented by the Book.* If the book represents doctrine, then what is the doctrine represented by this new book?

First, the symbol that occupies the absolute centre of the painting - the atomic symbol, on a surface level, means quite simply the atom (e.g. matter), and is thus a proxy for materialism. It also represents man's ability to understand matter e.g. science as a method for understanding the true nature of reality, and the possibility of harnessing matter through science for a specific objective i.e. because by understanding a thing, you also have power over that thing.

As mentioned previously, science was the bedrock of the Four Modernisations, and was the pragmatic way that modernisation was going to be achieved. We see the importance of science in contemporary posters such as “love science, study science, use science” (*ai kexue, xue kexue, yong kexue* - Fig 4.4) and “study basic science well to contribute to building the Motherland” (*nuli xuehao jichu kexue zhishi, wei zuguo cheshe gongxian liliang* - Fig 4.1). Innovations in technology would increase agricultural and industrial output, create better weapons and, thus, reinforce national defence. Understanding
the nature and fabric of reality would enable China to have power over it, and enable the Chinese people to harness it for the good of the nation.

Therefore not only does the atom represent science and the pragmatic ability of modernisation to develop China, it also represents hope in the abstract, and this in turn serves as the motivation for vigorous activity. We are motivated to pursue paths because there is hope that they can be traversed in the first place.

This idea of the atom as a representation of hope and motivation for vigorous activity is also one that has a (brief) connection with Chairman Mao, except Mao thought that force of will in tandem with proletarian ideology was the greatest force for change. Mao used the splitting of the atom as a metaphor to represent the struggle for revolutionary consciousness.

Within the context of Maoism therefore the atom symbol had a specific meaning – the “spiritual atom bomb”. In 1965, Lin Biao wrote of Chairman Mao's thoughts in “Long Live the Victory of People's War”: “The spiritual atom bomb which the revolutionary people possess is a far more powerful and useful weapon than the physical atom bomb.” Lin, Biao.

3. In 1958, Mao declared: “Men are not the slaves of objective reality. Provided only that men's consciousness be in confirmity with the objective law of the development of things [in other words dialectical materialism as opposed to actual materialism], the subjective activity of the popular masses can manifest itself in full measure, overcome all difficulties, create the necessary conditions, and carry forward the revolution. In this sense, the subjective is the objective.” (Schram, The Political Thought of Mao Tse-Tung, 135-136) This, and proclamations such as “There is no such thing as poor land, but only poor methods for cultivating the land” (Schram, The Thought of Mao Tse-Tung, 132), professed Mao's “extreme voluntarism.” (Schram The Political Thought of Mao Tse-Tung, 135) His belief was that will was, regardless of the material conditions, more important than objective reality. In this sense, and in contradiction to his earlier statements of “Seeking Truth from Facts” (Mao, “Reform our Study”, 22), Mao shows an Idealistic tendency (even if he might not recognise it as Idealism).
To Mao, the “struggle of self against self” (Cook 7), was analogous to the splitting of the atom, in that this struggle alone could result in the release of an enormous amount of energetic activity. The splitting of the self was more powerful than the splitting of the atom because if revolutionary consciousness was achieved then all things would follow on naturally as a result.

Cook writes that the “spiritual atom bomb” [was] Mao Zedong Thought, and that the little red book, “a sheaf of paper bound in vinyl [was] elevated to the status of an atom bomb.” (Cook 10) The little red book was weaponised by virtue of being the primary and most powerful agent of change – ideology itself.

To Maoists, if you were filled with the revolutionary consciousness brought on by Mao Zedong Thought, you could achieve anything by force of will alone, even bend objective reality to your will, and this possibility also provided the hope and motivation for vigorous energetic activity.

The presence of the atomic symbol on the new book retains this meaning as signifying that it is a spiritual atom bomb, but that the nature of the explosive is no longer Mao Zedong Thought, but a new form of ideology that is based on science, the "Motherland" and "I".
In this context the atomic symbol takes on another meaning with the nucleus as "Motherland" and "I" as an electron that orbits that nucleus. It is the fusing of the individual and the collective into one entity, with the collective at the core. Individuals are no longer centered around Mao Zedong as shown in the painting in Fig 4.8, but around the nation. In other words, the nature of the ideology is no longer Maoist, but Nationalist.

From the perspective of the parties new ideology, the existence of the book within the painting is problematic because it reminds the viewer of its previous meaning. It cannot exist outside history or culture, as an autonomous entity, but its meaning is part of a chain of significations that have been attached to it. Therefore, if the little red book is the manifestation of the thoughts of Mao, and thus the spiritual presence of Mao, then the presence of a book that represents doctrine, also suggests that the spectre of Mao is present within the painting.

However the replacement of the doctrine with a new doctrine is an admission that either Chairman Mao's ideology is not enough to bring about the required state, or that the objectives of the party are no longer the same as Mao's. Both of these potential interpretations involve a negation of Maoist ideology.

*How prioritising materialism negates Mao's ideology.* Although Zhou Enlai put forward The Four Modernisations programme in 1963, it wasn't enacted as originally envisaged until 1978, thanks, in part to Mao's distrust of intellectuals. The enactment of the programme resulted from increasing contact with the West, and a general feeling that China was lagging behind the rest of the world. Deng Xiaoping too, felt that Mao's exaggeration of “the people's capacity to change the world by an act of will” (Schram, The Thought of Mao Tse-Tung, 202) was Mao's most fundamental error.

A key component of facilitating scientific activity was the rebuilding of educational institutions that had been dismantled during the cultural revolution and
welcoming intellectuals that had been disparaged as "bourgeois" under Mao back into public life as "mental workers". (University of Washington, "Four Modernizations Era.") In this sense, the Four Modernisations was a pragmatic vision of the attainment of a prosperous modern future (that encompasses leisure activity) achieved through scientific means. This objective was radically at odds with Mao's vision of an ideologically pure society powered by the struggle for revolutionary consciousness that had formed the backbone of his and the party's ideology up until 1978. In Mao's eyes, the prioritisation of material objectives over ideological ones was tantamount to economism.

In Marxist terms the economic structure is the sum total of the relations of production. If the ultimate goal of the Four Modernisations was productivity through material means, then this must encompass the relations of production. Therefore, if the desired outcome of economic activity is productivity itself, then, within the milieu of a society that has not yet gone through the phase of capitalism that will develop the “productive forces” (Schram, The Thought of Mao Tse-Tung, 214) to the level necessary for the “primary stage of socialism” (Ibid), this must come at the cost of the nature of the relations of production, because it will necessarily value efficiency and output over proletarian ideological concerns. Placing material objectives at the heart of policy, must therefore place economism, too, at its heart. In Mao's view, this would inevitably lead back to Capitalism itself, something that Mao opposed during his lifetime (as can be seen in Fig 4.5).
Fig 4.5 Oppose economism: destroy the new counter-offensive of the capitalist class reactionary line (Fandui jingjizhuyi: fensui zichan jieji fangdong luxiande xin fanpu)


In fact this is indeed what happened when Deng Xiaoping made his speech at the 12th National Congress in 1982 to announce the creation of “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.” (Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi) “[The term means] leading and uniting people of all ethnic groups, with economic construction as the core, adhering to the Four Basic Principles, adhering to reform and opening, with self-reliance, [with a] tough and pioneering [spirit], struggling to transform our country into a strong and prosperous, democratic and civilized modern socialist nation.” (Deng Xiaoping qt by Gang, ”The Mixed Bag of Socialism”)

This doctrinal change that stresses pragmatism over ideology is a negation of some of the core aspects of Mao's value system, and therefore also the negation of Mao’s spiritual presence.

Another problematic aspect of moving towards economism, from the party's point of view, is that their whole raison d'être is predicated on Mao Zedong thought and Marxism-Leninism. This makes it politically impossible to announce, openly, that they are
pursuing a course of action that is contrary to their ideals without undermining their own power base. In order to maintain power, the CCP needed to conceal their true motives in order to save face. This meant co-opting those existing symbols and imbuing them with new meaning, so that the introduction of economism could happen, hidden in plain sight, as though they were continuing in the same direction, but had secretly changed course.

This act of deception is manifest in the composition and form of “Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul”. As mentioned above, it is no longer overt and informational, but vague, and aspirational. In some sense its form readies the populace for what would eventually replace it: advertising. If the move towards pragmatic material objectives invokes the spectre of capitalist market activity, then that, too, hangs over this painting.

If “Mao himself was no longer needed to produce the major policy statements bearing his name, as they could be pieced together from fragments of his earlier work” (Landsberger, “Mao as Kitchen God” 209) then negating the meaning of those fragments of his earlier work, obliterates the ideological elements of Mao that are present in absentia.

Mao as a spectral light source. If Mao's “thoughts in the form of his writings were compared to … a 'beacon light' that 'graced every imaginable surface'” (Ibid 196) then in Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul, Mao himself has turned into the very light itself, so that the beacon – be it the “red sun in all our hearts”, or in fact any light source, can be absent, and yet its light is still present on the subjects who would have been originally caught in its light. We can see this transformation taking place in the following images, and how the visual syntax is derived.
The image in Fig 4.6 was created reasonably soon after the formation of New China to commemorate 10 years of the fledgling republic. Through the reflected light on the subjects faces we already have the seeds of the idea of Chairman Mao as a light source. In this picture a woman, carrying a child on her shoulders offers up a flower to a mysterious figure who is out of frame. The slogan “Long live Chairman Mao” Mao Zhuxi wan sui makes the notion explicit that the flower is being offered up to the man himself who is out of frame – and therefore his presence as the source of the ‘enlightenment’ is marked by the slogan.

In Fig 4.7, from 1960, Mao is a literal gigantic figure, his bright, shining countenance emitting light rays to the smaller population who are engaged in vigorous activity. From the position of shadows within the painting we can see that the source of the light in the painting is Chairman Mao.

This is even more apparent in the image below Fig 4.8 where Mao is very clearly a source of light, as you can tell by the circular pattern of highlights and shadows the faces of the people. Like the atomic symbol's electron caught in the orbit of the nucleus, the people appear caught in Mao's gravity.
Fig 4.7 Under the guidance of Mao Zedong Thought, enthusiastically carry out the technological revolution! Zai Mao Zedong sixiang xia, danao jishu geming.

Significantly Fig 4.8 was released in 1977, after Mao’s death, showing that, at that time, the party were trying to keep his image alive, and separate from the Gang of Four’s fall from grace.
Fig 4.8 Chairman Mao is the Sun in our hearts which never sets down

Mao zhudu shi women xin zhong yongyuan bu luo de hong taiyang

Fig 4.9 shows a series of characters of different ethnicities who are standing proudly in front of the “red sun that shines in all our hearts” that casts a rimlight onto the edge of the characters. Rimlight is a photographic term that is the presence of a strong light source that is behind a subject in a position so that it casts a light only along its edge, as seen in Fig 4.10 below:
Fig 4.9 The People of the World struggle against Imperialism

Fig 4.10 Rimlight - Picture sourced from http://img.wylio.com/flickr/3894/400/4724038449
(retrieved 01/04/2016)
Within Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul, the two main characters, the male holding the book and the female holding the violin are both illuminated by a strong light source that is not depicted in the painting, so that a rimlight is formed. How do we know this usage is not just an aesthetic feature necessary to delineate form? Because lower in the painting, the sweaters of the two youths do not also feature this rimlight and yet are still distinct, therefore the light is not strictly necessary to act as a functional element, form could still be read even if it were not there.

Two things are notable from this sharp line, first that, contrary to earlier depictions, the book, is not the light source and, rather than being the source of 'enlightenment' as in paintings such as Fig 4.3, the book is itself illuminated. If the book is the proxy for the party, then the party is not the source of the illumination.

Secondly, the light source appears to be an expressive white splash in the background of the painting. Whilst it may be that this splash represents the spray thrown up by the water, it is not a realistic depiction of water because its form does not make real world sense.

The rowers on the water are illuminated by this white splash, but not equally. Only the teams that are illuminated most by this white splash are surging ahead in the race, those that are not lit with the same intensity, even though they are well within the proximity, are lagging behind. The implication is that the light is some form of energy that is helping the rowers to win the race.

The shadows of the rowers, on the side of the book, indicate that the splash is the light source and not the book. There is no bona fide light source in a real world sense within the painting. If it were water its luminescence would be non realistic because water does not emit light, it reflects it. The physical nature of this white splash is therefore ambiguous.
The water also has a red line running through it as can be seen in Fig 4.11. The only places that red are present in the painting are in the map of China, and the slogan. Red is often associated with Mao - he is often described as the “Red Sun in all our hearts” - so there is some basis for linking the red colour here to Mao Zedong. But Red is also associated generally with socialism and communism in general. The nature of this red line further enhances the ambiguous nature of the white splash. With something as abstract and non representational as this, it is hard to say for sure.

If the splash were to represent nationalism, then taking the rowers to represent nations, if it is the party and the spirit of nationalism, then why are other nations also partially illuminated?

It could represent the spirit of socialism, although presented in the context of symbols associated with Chairman Mao, and in a manner that was historically representative of a certain type of illumination, seems to also imply a certain type of socialism (namely Maoism).

One potential solution, then, is that because it is a light energy source helping one nation to win a race, and because it contains a literal red line, and because it is present in a painting that seeks to co-opt the meaning of symbols of Chairman Mao, this is an abstract representation of the spirit of Mao Zedong thought, and Mao himself, that has become decoupled from its original symbols and exists in a formless, ethereal state as amorphous, formless light itself.
The CCP’s Identity Crisis. In 1981, the party had effectively changed the course of the country, steering slowly towards economism. By setting themselves the material targets of modernisation, they began to distance themselves from the Cultural Revolution, and from the Cult of Mao himself. But this leaves them with the question of legitimacy and identity. If Mao was the embodiment of the nation, now that he is dead – who are they? To answer this, we need to consider Mao's function as a figurehead and what exactly we mean by Mao being “the embodiment of the nation”.

Writing in the afterword to “Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China” Evans and Donald write that the function of a figurehead is “as a symbol of national security and social stability.” (143)

This is similar to the Hegelian argument for ”The Prince” (Hegel 278), that a national figurehead is a necessary prerequisite to the psychological stability of the nation by becoming the personification of the nation or “subjectivity with which rests the final
decision” (278) That is the embodiment of its ideology in human form, its sense of identity, the criteria that defines what it is for, and what it is against. Post Mao's death, absent of a human personification, the party, and hence the nation, was at risk of an identity crisis.

There were attempts to replace Mao with Hua Guofeng as figurehead, and during his presidency images were produced, that were very much in the mould of those produced for Mao in an attempt to fill the symbolic void (See Fig 4.12). But these attempts were unsuccessful, and by 1978 Hua Guofeng had been ousted in favour of Deng Xiaoping.

There are no images I was able to find of Deng in the same kind of poses as Mao or bearing the same kind of religious sentiment – instead Mao was replaced with a symbol of the Chinese Communist Party (Fig 4.13). In post 1978 paintings such as Fig 4.13 “Long Live the People's republic of China” Mao's position as the radiating sun is replaced by the national emblem of China. In this way the symbol of the Red sun in our hearts has been co-opted by an abstract symbol of power.

But who are the party? The answer lies on the book within the painting: “Motherland and I”. The party is everyone, it has every face in China, and conversely, no face at all – power then becomes truly “faceless”. (Benewick 136)

![Fig 4.12 The Revolution still has a helmsman, 1977](http://chineseposters.net/posters/e13-449.php)
In this painting the party is struggling to redefine itself, trying to forge a path towards a pragmatic, nationalist future, but with one foot, paradoxically in the ideological realm of Mao Zedong thought. This is symbolised by the tension in the painting with the ambiguity of the light source deconstructing the painting.

The main function of "Melody of Youth, Beautiful Soul” is to shape the beliefs and behaviours of the populace. It wants people to engage in vigorous, constructive activity to modernise China, and to win in the global race. In the process it is explicitly communicating a change of doctrine by calling on symbols once associated with the soul of the party, Chairman Mao, and changing their meaning. Yet, at that time, the party could not fully articulate its own identity concretely, it can only refer to other symbols of power.

From the above we know that the party is trying to co-opt the symbol of the light source and turn itself into the red sun and the book and so on, but in the painting the white splash seems to contradict this effort, because it too shines on the party and other
nations in such a way as to defy a concrete interpretation. When we try to fully identify what is meant by the white splash it remains ambiguous and contradictory.

If the party has become faceless, and Mao was the party, then he too has become faceless. But removing Mao from any signifiers associated with him previously means that the meaning of Mao breaks down.

There is also a question of the legitimacy of the party. If “portraits of Mao... evoke a trained response of respect whereby significance is accorded through the signature of the icon” (Evans and Donald 19) and Mao was omnipresent (Donald 671) then a suggestion of his presence in the painting would convey approval of the change of doctrine and hence legitimise that change.

At the same time, the party want any legitimacy to come from the new doctrine itself in the shape of material, measurable objectives. Development, compared to the nebulous objective of revolutionary consciousness, can be quantified in concrete terms. Legitimacy then becomes a matter of competency. Yet until the changes have been enacted and results forthcoming – the party needed to appear legitimate. To do that it has to remain tethered to the old conceptions of what legitimacy means else it risks opening a void to be filled with rival power structures, or the destruction of the entire system itself.

In order to ensure that there is continuity, to maintain face, and ultimately to retain power, the party would not be able to admit openly that the change in doctrine is a reversal of previous doctrine. The semblance of continuity must be maintained. Therefore it makes sense that the light in the painting shining on the book, literally represents Chairman Mao, as giving its blessing to the new doctrine. The rowers, the Youth and the book in the painting are literally graced with the spectre of Mao, who approves the change in direction from beyond the grave, and, thus illuminated by his grace, are steaming ahead in the race.
If the source of this grace was the thoughts and beliefs of Mao and he was the soul of the party, then moving down the path towards economism and negating the object of his beliefs (revolutionary consciousness) also negates the thoughts and beliefs of Mao. The spectre of Mao is both immanent as a spectral light source and yet also totally absent.

CONCLUSION

The Four Modernisations change of doctrine is in a sense an admission that the will of revolutionary consciousness alone is not sufficient to act as a “spiritual atom bomb”, but that pragmatic scientific materialism in the shape of development is also necessary.

The setting of concrete material goals for modernisation, sets a benchmark for how success as a nation is judged. Whereas previously its objective was spiritual development and fostering revolutionary consciousness, it is now material development. In this sense, the implied presence of Mao in the painting, in combination with his actual absence, produces a profound contradiction – the need to retain Mao's presence, whilst at the same time banishing him.

The party needed the suggestion of Mao in order to legitimise their change of direction and to ensure continuity of identity. Without it, the party, through the ideals on which it is founded, was itself at risk of contradiction, which left China open to potentially hostile foreign forces of systemic change – such as the introduction of western style democracy, or even devolving into anarchy. Mao could not be denied as an important presence because his identity was so tied up with the party's own.

However, they also needed to free themselves from Mao. The actions of the Cultural Revolution had tarnished Mao's image through the negative experiences of people during this period, and obedience to the red line of Mao Zedong Thought and the idea of revolutionary consciousness being the end game of struggle (as opposed to concrete goals
towards modernisation), prevented any modernising economic processes to be implemented. Therefore in order to allow themselves the freedom to move in new directions, Mao's presence had to be minimised, and in the case of what would later become market reform, his ideology negated.

This process of maintaining the presence of Mao whilst simultaneously distancing themselves may account for the ideological transformation of Chairman Mao. Distancing the symbols once associated with him away from their strict political and ideological meanings, and simply leaving the façades behind to operate as abstract symbols of power, doctrine, or as a beneficent religious Icon, and so on. This in turn allowed them to be re-purposed for other usages that included views opposite to Mao's own e.g. as a symbol of heritage amongst a pantheon of ideological gods, as a form of 'Kitchen God' watching over the household, or as a commodity that ironically fetishises 'commie kitsch'.

In effect, Mao as a symbol had become an “open basket” (Gang, “The Mixed Bag of Socialism”) into which meaning could be placed, and this in turn facilitated the ambiguous and as yet unspeakable nature of the CCP’s identity. To this end, the spectre of Mao resides at the nexus of the CCP’s identity, its Maoist past and previous ideology as well as the as yet unspoken future (other) of the Market economy.

The longue duree of symbols associated with Mao, and the eventual rebirth of Chairman Mao as a pop Icon may be because there were constant reminders of him all around. In other words, it was less that he was revived as Benewick claims (134), but more that he never fully went away in the first place.

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Benewick says that, by 1999 at least, Mao had ceased to be a symbol of power (135), but in his role as a ‘Kitchen God’, Mao still symbolised a form of power (in this case in the religious sense), and his role in legitimising the new regime came with its own implications of symbolic power, in that it is his presence that is required for the purposes of legitimacy. It's true to say, though, that he no longer publicly represented the political power of the current regime.
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