

MANAGING CULTURE *EN ROUTE* TO SOCIALISM: THE PROBLEM OF CULTURE 'ANSWERING BACK'*

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AS PART OF the process of making of Social Anthropology more applicable to understanding the problems of developing societies, tonight I wish to consider issues of cultural management. Two years ago, I was completely taken aback to be asked to give a public lecture, at the Murehwa Culture House, on 'Creating a socialist culture', as if culture was something that — with anthropological assistance — could be made to order, or indeed bought off the shelf, whole and undisputed, and handed over to those for whom it had been designed, whether they liked it or not.

My first reaction of professional alarm was to return to theories of culture, to stress Durkheim's ([1895] 1935) view that culture was a product of the collective consciousness, binding upon the individual unconsciousness; and Malinowski's (1922; 1944) point that culture comprises functionally-integrated components of a contemporary adaptation to a specific natural and social environment. But hard on that reaction I recalled my own favourite transactional theorists, Bailey (1960; 1969; 1971; 1973; 1977; 1983) and Barth (1966; 1967; 1969), whose work has clearly shown, against the theorists of culture, that social, political, economic and practically every other kind of societal change results from the manipulative tactics of individuals, whom we might call 'cultural dissidents'. Surely, from their example, those seeking to plan a socialist culture might learn something? Maybe, but cultural dissidents are firmly part of their local society, whose norms and values they breach and help to redefine while pursuing their own interests. In contrast, planners fall outside 'moral communities' scheduled for restructuring (Bailey, 1966) and are therefore unlikely to be able to use the same tactics in implementing new ideas and behaviour patterns. In frustration, then, I decided that the safest analytical approach to the problem of creating 'socialist culture' lies in questioning the concept of 'culture' itself! Although akin to a natural scientist declaring scepticism about atoms, this strategy has some support in the social sciences, from those such as Wallerstein (1986; 1988), who suggests that 'unthinking' nineteenth-century Western cultural concepts is required to understand how 'culture' has become the 'ideological battleground of the modern world-system'.

It is extremely important to remember that 'culture', the unit of evolutionary

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analysis in anthropology, was adopted from Western social usage early in the history of colonization and itself provided part of the rationale for colonization. Although in English 'cultured' has referred since AD 1510 to refinement through education (*Shorter OED*, vol. I, 1975, 471), the concept of 'a culture' comes from the German *Bildung*, popularized by late eighteenth-century, pre-unification German philosophy (Louis Dumont and Britta Rupp-Eisenreich, personal communication). 'Culture' entered anthropological analysis directly from this origin through the work of the German *émigrés* to the USA, Boas, Kroeber and others; and indirectly via Tylor's (1871, preface) English investigations into culture started in 1865.

My own problem with 'culture' began as an undergraduate, when I found it impossible to memorize Tylor's key definition:

culture or civilization, taken in its widest ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (1871, 1)

to be used to classify mankind into 'different grades of civilization' (1871, 7) for the purpose of addressing the question of social evolution. This definition struck me then as too broad to be useful. Today I recognize in it the dangers of a totalizing concept in its application, by the West, to *others* — a mechanism for aggregating and stereotyping as a means of handling the unfamiliar, which has generated a reactive pride in difference among those to whom it was applied. Such stereotypes have also frozen historical process into permanent and unchanging 'customs' or 'traditions'. In our world of change, I doubt the utility of an analytical concept which, according to Geertz (1973, 18), has constructed 'impeccable depictions of formal order in whose existence nobody can quite believe'.

Moreover, the evolutionary ranking built into this Western concept of culture is today as brutally explicit in the discourse of socialist cultural planners seeking to 'raise the cultural level' of 'backward peoples' through state-controlled education, legal reform, and the provision of proper cultural infrastructure (sports stadia, art galleries, cinemas, theatres, libraries, concert halls) as it was in some colonial writings of the past. In the China of the 1980s, for example, the title of 'civilized village' (*wenming cun*) is bestowed and accepted with pride. Although the origins of socialist cultural engineering pre-date the 1917 revolution by a century, cultural planning has become especially important, in the twentieth century, to newly socialist states in a transformational hurry to catch up with 'advanced' societies.

The creation and development of socialist culture is a planned and controlled process . . . [whereby] the alienation of the masses is overcome, and there is a revolution in the cultural development of the entire people

avers Iovchuk (1975, 197, 203) while acknowledging that there are problems of implementation.

The attractions of socialist cultural planning are obvious. What easier way to remove the inequalities of gender, status and class (if not of age) than by the stroke of a legislative pen? Put the socialist party and the law on the side of the underdogs and they will be able to fight their own way out of their structurally subordinated positions in society. True, changing laws is certainly necessary if inequalities are to be renegotiated; but it is not sufficient, particularly in remote places where the writ of state law runs small anyway. Freeing women from oppressive marital relationships, or cancelling the debts of bond-servants, are nice ideals, but if such people have no access to independent means of subsistence after acquiring their freedom, its practical value is negative. And if, as a result of their own beliefs, they remain dependent upon their previously dominating male kin or affines or former creditors for ritual services (of healing their children, for example), they may feel ideologically unable to resist their own position of subordination. So the weak and defenceless may reject well-intentioned but partial and selective help from a socialist state to 'improve' aspects of their lives which do not alter their total social position, and instead subsist upon their 'backward' cultural inequalities.

And if the oppressed feel more at ease with the oppression they know and have their own ways of manoeuvring around, the locally powerful, manoeuvring among the ambiguities of their own value system in pursuit of their own interests, are quite likely to counter external attempts to change their system's rules with a defensive cultural nationalism that rallies support around the banner of a specific identity threatened by state law and action. Fry (1976) has analysed one example of this process from our own colonial history. From the events of the last few years in both the USSR and the People's Republic of China, it is clear that socialism has not yet managed to resolve 'the nationalities question', which is integrally linked to, and in part the result of, cultural planning. Humphrey (1983), for example, in her study of Siberian collectives, has shown how local identity has been reinforced, even among the Buryat youth, against the interests of the unitary Soviet state, by adjustive changes in both Buddhist nature rituals and Buryat life-crisis rituals, which reflect the demise of patriliney, the rise of new party and government offices in the local power structure, and collectivization. 'Culture', then, as a set of ideological precepts which can be mobilized in socio-political disputes, is certainly open to internal manipulation, but responds to external efforts to transform or displace its local hegemony mainly by absorptive tactics:

Actual preferences, especially at the popular level, are stubbornly persistent . . . they change their natures, if at all, almost exclusively to suit their own dynamics and conditions of local life, and hardly at all in response to architectonic plans (Link, 1987, 156-7).

For different reasons, then, different categories of people sharing a 'backward culture' may resist their socialist state's attempts to remove the inequalities inherent in their customs — restrictive access to the means of agricultural or pastoral production, marriage payments, concubinage, polygyny, child betrothal, debt bondage, slavery, patriarchal authority, and so on. To be blunt, the direct planning and engineering of 'socialist cultures' has not been very successful. Yet cultural planning has had important consequences, 'by no means always what the policies were aiming at' (Link, 1987, 163).

The reasons for the limited and often unexpected results of cultural planning and management lie not only in local resistance to externally planned change. They also derive from the internal contradictions of socialist policy on cultural management. These policies often seek to change critically important relations of production and of power within a 'non-material' culture, while simultaneously encouraging (as a political sop and/or for reasons of tourism and 'cultural exchange' as part of international relations) what are regarded as less important, superstructural 'products and productions' (Augé, 1987) of the same 'material' culture, which may then legitimately focus a defensive cultural nationalism. And the deliberate manipulation of cultural elements to make political points, by both ordinary people and high-ranking politicians, must also be taken into account. In the rest of this lecture, based on recent research (Cheater, 1988), I shall try to show, using one small example from the People's Republic of China (PRC), precisely how and why culture may be used to 'answer back' when politician-planners seek to replace problematic traditions with approved socialist practices.

Since coming to power in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has recurrently tried to purge China of 'feudal superstition', which includes, together with folk religion and 'mercenary marriage', traditional death rites and burial practices (Feuchtwang, in press). At the risk of appearing morbid (though not, I hope, moribund), I shall focus on the latter. The CCP disapproves of these practices because the party is officially atheistic, and expensive burial mortgages, to death, both scarce land (China feeds 22 per cent of the world's population from 7 per cent of all arable land) and other resources, totalling some seven billion yuan (approx. Z\$3 500 million) annually (Wang, 1989, 7), that could be devoted to more productive use in a developing economy. On 27 April 1956, therefore, the entire CCP leadership signed the party document which adopted secularized cremation as policy (*Beijing Review*, 1988, XXXI, xlii, 28), reiterated in 1985 in the State Council's provisional regulations on funerals and interment (Wang, 1989).

Nearly a thousand years ago, during the Song dynasty, Buddhist cremation was prohibited by imperial edict (Whyte, 1988, 292) as part of a broader political crackdown on sectarian heterodoxies thought to be encouraging peasant

revolt. Since then, burial above ground in elaborate stone tombs has been the accepted tradition. Gravesites were selected and tombs positioned on the basis of geomancy. Geomancy (*fengshui*; or the *qi* of nature) refers to 'the power of the natural environment . . . the composite influence of the natural processes' (Feuchtwang, 1974, 2) based on the balance between the two cosmic forces of negative, entropic, feminine *yin* and positive, structuring, masculine *yang*. Geomantic influence was traditionally important in the selection of a gravesite and the positioning of the encoffined corpse, or bones, in the permanent tomb, for, provided that they were 'located properly and preserved from decay', these would continue to 'transmit the good geomantic influences of the cosmos' to their living descendants (Watson, 1982, 155), guaranteeing health and prosperity. To this end, in the annual spring ritual of *Qingming*, the coffins and bones were checked and the tombs cleaned and repaired. Geomantic beneficence was monopolized in family gravesites, not shared in public cemeteries, and was guarded jealously. Lin (1948) describes the 'geomantic wars' fought over competitive gravesites in Old China and, as may be imagined, the relocation of graves during collectivization ran into some difficulty.

It was generally believed that, for the spirit to have some hope of reaching Heaven eventually, the corpse must remain intact for burial (Wang, 1989, 7), during which one refraction of the spirit was despatched to the holding and sorting areas for the sub-divisions of Heaven and Hell (the administration of the afterworld being modelled on the imperial bureaucracy: Yang, 1961), with adequate food, clothing, transport and money for the journey provided by burning paper representations of the objects in question. Despite common beliefs, however, there were some differences in the actual disposal practices between the north and south of China. For those families able to afford it in the south, burial occurred in two phases (Ahern, 1973; Watson, 1982). A corpse was first buried in a wooden coffin at a temporary site. While the disordered, dangerously *yin*-charged flesh decayed, during which time the spirit remained 'extremely powerful and unpredictable' (Watson, 1982, 156), a geomantically propitious permanent gravesite was sought in the countryside, beyond city walls — preferably southfacing, backed by mountains, and a little higher than the still or running water in front of it (Feuchtwang, 1974, 2). Once a suitable site had been obtained, the temporary grave was exhumed, the flesh- and *yin*-free bones were stripped and polished by highly polluted and polluting professional funerary specialists and then reburied in masculine, *yang*-charged order in a ceramic urn in the centre of the newly constructed tomb, at the focal point of maximal concentration of geomantic force (Watson, 1982, 155). In the north of China, single burial, in a coffin preferably of heavy *Phoebe Nanmu* hardwood to preserve the body 'from the putrefaction of afterlife' (Han, 1980, 352), was the norm. After permanent burial, an engraved memorial stone named the deceased

in the tomb, while a named wooden tablet on the domestic altar marked male accession to ancestral status for the purpose of worship by his descendants. Unless its owner had been of singular wealth and social standing, this wooden tablet would last only four or five generations before its destruction to make way for those of more recently deceased ancestors.

Officially, geomancy and the whole range of traditional funerary and commemorative rites, together with domestic ancestral worship, have all been regarded as part of 'feudal superstition', and are to be replaced by secularized cremation.

However, 60 per cent of the Chinese population still lack adequate and/or convenient cremation and ash-storage facilities, which explains in part why in 1988 cremation accounted for only 28 per cent of all post-mortem disposals, over double the figure for the late 1970s (Wang, 1989, 7). A more important explanation for the low rate of cremation lies in the persistence of traditional beliefs concerning death, coupled with the new wealth resulting from the economic reforms since 1978. Feuchtwang (in press) notes that the policies encouraging individual enterprise and self-employment have again generated the production of funerary goods (incense, candles, paper property, paper money and mourning clothes), which the socialist state has steadfastly refused to manufacture, while also worrying about the ethical propriety, under socialism, of allowing such goods to be manufactured at all. Wang (1989) remarks, too, upon the resurrection of the traditional measurement of family status by the expense of the funerals it can support, and the consequent urban as well as rural switch back to traditional funerals, at a cost ten times that of cremation. While some cities are getting tough on graves, enforcing land-use planning, and even, in the case of land-short Guangzhou, promoting ash dispersal at sea, it would seem that coastal cities like Wenzhou, whose new wealth is largely privately generated through direct trade links with Paris, have been less diligent in implementing state policy (Wang, 1989).

But, in my own view, the single most important part of the total explanation for relative failure has been the fact that the party policy on post-mortem disposal and death ritual has, on extremely significant recent occasions, been contradicted by the public use of certain Chinese traditions associated with death, both by the people in conflict with the party and by party leaders in conflict with one another. Such encoding of political messages in death rites was especially notable in 1976, the year in which the triumvirate of New China's founding heroes — Zhou Enlai, Zhu De and Mao Zedong — died. Given the changed societal context in which aspects of traditional death ritual were resurrected for political use by high-ranking party leaders well as ordinary people, and given that death rituals are 'central to definitions of Chinese cultural identity' (Watson and Rawski, 1988, ix), such use probably undermined

fundamentally the credibility of the cremation policy and contributed to the problem identified by Feuchtwang (in press), namely that 'feudal superstition' has not yet been eradicated, despite four decades of trying, and therefore keeps re-appearing on the PRC's policy agenda.

The year 1976 was a year of tragedy for the CCP. The three founding heroes were lost within nine months of one another; and some invoked the 'feudal' notion that the 'mandate of heaven' was slipping when the Tangshan earthquake (in which quarter of a million people died) preceded Mao's death by less than three months (Yim, 1980, 13; Garside, 1981, 137-8). Of the three, only the aged and politically retired Zhu De was disposed of strictly according to party policy: after a low-key cremation, his ashes were placed in a wall-niche in the Hall of Revolutionary Heroes at Babaoshan cemetery.

For the ten years prior to his death of cancer in January 1976, in the context of the political crisis known as the 'great proletarian cultural revolution', prime minister Zhou Enlai had struggled to maintain the state apparatus in operation, the crisis having very rapidly decimated his State Council personnel from 70 000 to 10 000 (Han, 1980, 466). On his deathbed, Zhou ordered that his remains be cremated and then scattered over 'the rivers and mountains of China' (Terrill, 1980, 422), and that no memorial should ever be erected to his memory. (This latter order has been breached by at least two memorials; Zhang, 1980; *China Reconstructs*, 1988, XXXVII, viii, 8; and, in practice, his ashes were dispersed by an airforce plane over politically sensitive parts of China — minority areas and the Taiwan Straits — in a symbolic attempt to bind them more firmly to the central state.) His instructions, in keeping with Zhou's entire life, went beyond party policy and totally against the grain of a culture placing 'great weight on the preservation of physical remains' (Watson, 1982, 172). And whereas since the early 1930s Zhou had never publicly contradicted Mao, in death his final orders symbolized in the strongest possible terms his own personal identification with *state* authority, against disorderly *party* power. In the centre of the Altar of the Country, as part of the state cult located in the old Imperial Palace (now the Palace Museum) in Beijing, used to stand the now-destroyed white marble *jiangshanshi*, the stone of rivers and mountains, signifying that 'state power was as firm and everlasting as rivers and mountains' (Liu, 1982, 92). In his last order, Zhou was asserting, through his own post-mortem disposal, a political rejection of the Maoist line which (regardless of his own motivations) ensured him political immortality through his own physical obliteration.

Zhou's final orders in the first instance suited his political opponents very well, and they ensured that the state mourning for China's *zongli* — the ancient term for the premiership was never discarded — was perfunctory. For six days (six symbolizes the negative, feminine *yin* principle; Williams, 1913, 19) flags

were flown at half-mast. His body lay in state for two days at Beijing Hospital, where he died, and on the third day after death Zhou was cremated. For three days public respects could be paid to his ashes reposing in the Beijing Workers' Cultural Palace, formerly the imperial ancestral temple. The end of state mourning was marked by a brief ceremony in the Great Hall of the People, which foreign diplomats were asked not to attend 'out of consideration for Chairman Mao's feelings' (Wilson, 1984, 292).

The date of cremation for the most popular and well respected of New China's founding heroes was not even announced publicly. However, Beijing residents learned by word of mouth when Zhou's body would be taken for cremation and at least one, perhaps two, million of them lined Chang'An boulevard for five kilometres, paying their last respects in absolute silence in temperatures of -12°C as the ambulance carrying his body passed (Han, 1980, 626; Wilson, 1984, 291; Wakeman, 1985, 151; Yue and Wakeman, 1985, 339). At Tian'anmen Square, the cosmo-political core of New China, the cortège was forced to halt and Deng Yingchao, Zhou's widow, had to leave her car to reassure mourners personally that Zhou had wished his own cremation (Wilson, 1984, 291; Wakeman, 1985, 151; 1988, 260). There was great apprehension that Zhou's administrative legacy and political moderation would be obliterated along with his mortal remains, as China remained in the tightening political grip of the 'ultra-leftist gang of four'. Millions of mourners had expressed this anxiety, disregarding the possible political consequences, by grieving publicly in Tian'anmen and leaving their wreaths under Zhou's south-facing inscription on the Monument to the People's Heroes (Cheng and Cadart, 1977, 41; Zweig, 1978, 147).

On 19 March 1976, as the traditional *Qingming* festival for sweeping the ancestral graves approached, wreaths to Zhou again appeared on the heroes' monument (Xiao, 1979, 3). Eulogies and poems followed, from all sections of the Chinese population. By 4 April (*Qingming* eve), the 37-metre-high heroes' monument had virtually disappeared under a huge mound of remarkable wreaths, including one enormous work of stainless steel, movable only by crane (Yue and Wakeman, 1985, 343) and testifying both to the involvement of Beijing's workers and the inadequacies of factory stock-taking procedures! Fang and Fang (1986, 5) remark that 'no wreaths for any individual revolutionary leader had ever been laid at the Monument to the People's Heroes at *Qingming* time in the entire history of the People's Republic'. The eulogies rammed home the political message in a faultless dialectic:

He left no inheritance, he had no children,
 He has no grave, he left no remains.
 His ashes were scattered over the rivers and mountains of our Land.
 It seems he has left us nothing, but . . .

He has hundreds of millions of children and grandchildren
 And all China's soil is his tomb

(Garside, 1981, 117; Wilson, 1984, 292).

Overnight, the militia cleared Tian'anmen of the wreaths left by some two million people (Xiao, 1979, 4). On *Qingming* evening, in response to this provocation, violence broke out among the politically angry crowd of 100 000 mourners: the security post and the Great Hall of the People were attacked. Late that night, the militia cleared the square, detaining hundreds, while Beijing rocked with the implications of this suppression of politicized mourning (Yue and Wakeman, 1985, 345–6). The following day, similar demonstrations broke out in most major cities (Mackerras and Chan, 1982, 588).

The official press denounced the Tian'anmen crowd's open, defiant support for Deng Xiaoping, Zhou's pragmatic deputy, whose last act had been to deliver the funeral eulogy for his former boss before disappearing from public view, and expressed horror at 'those few bad elements' who had 'frenziedly directed their spearhead at our great leader Chairman Mao' (*Beijing Review*, 1976, XIX, xv, 4). This hyperbole referred to the hanging early on *Qingming* morning of 'an immense portrait' of Zhou on the north face of the heroes' monument, covering Mao's inscription there and symbolically confronting — straight down the ancient north-south axis which symbolizes the balance of the Chinese state — Mao's portrait facing south from the Tian'anmen entrance to the Palace Museum. This was intended to be, and was taken as, an open symbolic challenge to Mao: *zongli* (premier) no longer supportive of but in open opposition to *zhuxi* (chairman); the ancient office rising from the south (possibly in a political parallel to the Daoist *jiao*, or rite of cosmic renewal: see Sangren, 1987) to overwhelm the novel revolutionary office which had assumed the south-facing demeanour normal to imperial power; the upright official of popular legend pursuing the people's cause against charismatic tyranny (Hua Lin, 1977; Garside, 1981, 123–8). On the first anniversary of Zhou's death, this symbolic confrontation was re-enacted, as his commemorators shouted 'Zhou is alive! He is among us!' and, facing Mao's portrait, swore an oath of fidelity to Zhou (Garside, 1981, 176).

The popular redefinition of death ritual for purposes of political protest, pioneered in the trauma of Zhou's death, together with his own infinitely subtle use of traditional symbolism, not only had an important reviving influence on elements of 'feudal superstition' in China, reworking them into new and powerful elements of an altered political relationship between people and party. The new, politicized mourning rituals for deceased liberal leaders organized by the people have also affirmed a popular appropriation of the symbolic core of the new state, Tian'anmen Square, against its monopolization by party and state (a competitive

claim which ended in tragedy on 3–4 June 1989). There has indeed emerged a 'socialism with Chinese characteristics', the most prominent of which are more Chinese than socialist and not those favoured by Beijing's cultural planners. Their attempts to regain cultural control were seen, in the late 1970s, in the process of reappropriating as 'state hero' Zhou the 'people's hero', a process marked by assertions of Mao's approval of Zhou's 'four modernizations' programme and the resubordination of his ideas to Mao's ultimate political authority (*Beijing Review*, 1979, XXII, xv, 9–13). Yet regularly after 1976, the wreaths and eulogies to Zhou reappeared on the heroes' monument on the anniversaries of his death and at *Qingming*, and since 1976 the official press has no longer bothered to refer to *Qingming* as 'Revolutionary Martyrs' Day', the rather ephemeral post-Liberation secular substitute for ancestral gravesweeping.

In October 1976, following Mao's death, the 'gang of four' were arrested. Deng Xiaoping later reappeared on the political scene, and the economy was gradually freed of much direct state control. But political reform lagged behind economic change, and two months ago, in April 1989, there recurred politicized mourning for Hu Yaobang. Hu died a week after suffering a heart attack during a Politburo meeting, the agenda for which has not been made public (*Beijing Review*, 1989, XXXII, xvii, 5; xxvi, 19; *China Reconstructs*, 1989, XXXVIII, vii, 24–9). The same proxy confrontation between people and party hegemony, represented this time by the portraits of Hu and Mao (*Beijing Review*, 1989, XXXII, xxii, photographs), was re-enacted in the voluntary public mourning in Tian'anmen for the former secretary-general of the CCP who resigned this position in 1987 in the wake of opposition to his support for intellectuals calling for political reform. But the cultural symbols of 1976 were seemingly inadequate to the changed political needs of 1989, for at the end of May the protesting students constructed another symbol — on the axis, north of the heroes' monument — to confront Mao's portrait: a 'Goddess of Democracy' (BBC World Service, News, 30 May 1989; *Beijing Review*, 1989, XXXII, xxvi, 11; *Herald*, 3 June 1989), recalling both New York's famous statue and Guanyin, protector-goddess of Chinese Buddhists and Daoists alike, which was destroyed by military action less than a week after its erection (BBC World Service, News, 4 June 1989; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 June 1989). Moreover, Mao's portrait was bespattered with paint (*Financial Gazette World*, 2 June 1989), presumably by those who want it removed (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 Mar. 1989).

If one sees the growth and development of cultural traditions in such strategic popular innovation, what has happened when elements of traditional death ritual have been used for political ends by politicians rather than the people? Despite signing the 1956 CCP policy document, Mao Zedong not only failed to request cremation for himself before dying, but had also acquired a family gravesite at Babaoshan cemetery (Terrill, 1980, 422). Jiang Qing, his

wife and member of the 'gang of four', wanted him cremated, but refused to take public responsibility for disposing of Mao in this or any other fashion (Wakeman, 1988, 274, fn. 86).

Mao died at the grossly inauspicious hour of ten minutes after midnight on the mid-autumn festival, the birthday of the Great Yin (Palmer, 1986, 209), 9 September 1976. His birth, five days after the winter solstice in 1893, had been almost equally badly timed. In traditional Chinese cosmology, at midnight in the daily cycle and the winter solstice in the annual cycle, dangerous, feminized *yin* influence peaks. (It is perhaps worth noting, in this context, that midnight — the traditional hour for celebrating the birth of new states — was not used for New China, which was instead 'delivered', by Mao, on 1 October 1949 at 10 a.m., the hour when *yang* influence peaks.) Such 'feudal superstitions' were never even hinted at officially. However, a funeral 'committee' of over 400, including the entire CCP Central Committee, was named to organize Mao's disposal (compared to a similar 'committee' of 106 for Zhou) — effectively, as an 'arena council' in Bailey's (1965) terms, merely to rubber-stamp decisions taken elsewhere by individuals or a much smaller 'élite council'. But the funeral committee should be held collectively responsible for the state-directed procedures for mourning Mao, for, at the very least, it formally approved these procedures.

For nine days — three times three, representing the ultimate totality of heaven, earth and man in traditional cosmology: nine, symbolizing *yang*, was 'the key number at the Altar to Heaven' (Williams, 1913, 19), nine pillars supported the traditional heaven, and 'three kneelings and nine prostrations' were required at key points in the mourning rites for emperors (Rawski, 1988, 248) — for nine days the flags flew at half-mast. For seven days — the period for the cycle of funerary ritual to purification marking the end of general mourning: few observe the full 49 days of mourning (Watson, 1982, 156, 165) — Mao's body was on public display in the Great Hall of the People, resting among evergreen shrubs, symbols of fertility and longevity with high *yang* influence (Feuchtwang, 1974, 128), and was overseen for this whole period not merely by a military guard of honour but also by a round-the-clock vigil by party and state leaders. In the whole seven days, however, only 300 000 officially organized mourners were permitted to pay their last respects by filing past the remains. But a state-organized rally of one million participants did mark the end of official mourning. A prominent feature of the final rally rites was Jiang Qing's wreath, resting in front of the 7-metre-high portrait of her late husband on the Tian'anmen rostrum. A massive affair of 'sunflowers, green corn, golden ears of wheat, rice and millet, and the white blossoms and fruit of the yellowhorn' (*Beijing Review*, 1976, XIX, xxxix, 7) — '“five grains” like the life-renewing offerings once made to Heaven itself' (Wakeman 1985.161; 1988, 269) at the Altar of the Country in the old imperial palace nearby — Jiang's wreath used traditional imperial

symbols to assert Mao's transcendence even over death. Such transcendence was critically important to all of Mao's potential successors.

Mao's magnificent state funerary rites were, in contrast to the perfunctory official mourning for Zhou, clearly 'political', explicitly wearing and speaking the symbols of China's ancient imperial culture. Were these symbols as inappropriate as they might initially seem for one of the twentieth century's greatest anarchists and atheists, the architect of mass mobilization against the very concept of state order pioneered by the emperors? It was Mao who decided early in 1949 to headquarter the CCP at Zhongnanhai, the garden playground adjoining the Imperial Palace. Some of his colleagues, like Peng Dehuai, who had suffered Mao's revenge for criticizing him in closed party meetings, had been referring to Mao as 'emperor' for twenty years before his death (Terrill, 1980, 274; Teiwes, 1984; 1986). Mao himself drew parallels between himself and China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang (Mao, 1976; Terrill, 1980, 21). And if 'feudal superstition' (*fengjian mixin*) referred to traditional beliefs, during the cultural revolution 'modern superstition' (*xiandai mixin*) came to mean 'the cult of Mao's personality and the political rituals associated with it' (Feuchtwang, unpubl. MS, 15; see also Schram, 1987, 218). Besides which, on the mainland and Taiwan alike, the popular appropriation of the emperors during the twentieth century has converted 'imperial customs' into 'China's ancient culture' belonging to everyone (cf. Wakeman, 1985; 1988).

For the transcendent Mao there was ultimately neither interment nor cremation. After the rally, his body was put into refrigerated storage, sometime later to be embalmed in the tradition of Buddhist priests as well as socialist state founders, by those experts who had successfully preserved unfriendly North Vietnam's Ho Chi Min (Terrill, 1980, 422). There have been recurrent, politically malicious rumours of Mao's decomposition, which perhaps relate to Watson's (1982, 181) observation of South China: 'It is not death as such that is objectionable but, rather, disorderly decay. Like the disembodied spirit, the lifeless corpse is out of place; it is an offence to the proper order of the cosmos.' His massive final resting place in Tian'anmen Square is thus called, not a mausoleum, but 'Chairman Mao's Memorial Hall' (*Mao Zhuxi Jiniantang*). Visitors to this hall in the decennial of Mao's death did not speak as if he were dead:

'Every time I'm in Beijing I come here to visit him';

'I've longed to see him since I was a child';

'I used to think of Mao as a god. Now I see him as a man just like any other'

(*Beijing Review*, 1986, XXIX, xxxvi, 16).

Yet symbolically the memorial hall is indeed a house of death, a *yang* structure offsetting its *yin* content in its unspoken traditional symbolism which complements its explicit revolutionary symbolism. The doors to the inner shrine

chamber holding Mao's body are of *nanmu* wood; potted evergreens absorbing the pollution of death surround the body draped in the national flag; the 105 m² base is a *yang* composite (3 × 5 × 7) of uneven numbers (cf. Feuchtwang, 1974, 38; Liu, 1982, 100); the twelve pillars on each side and the roofing design recall the imperial throne hall, a *yang* structure by definition; the hall itself is situated on the ancient north-south geomantic axis on the site of the old dynastic gate (*Damingmen/Daqingmen*), which became in republican times *Zhonghuamen* ('China's gate'), almost on the southern boundary of the old Manchu city. Its sheer bulk has the visual effect of blocking the continuation of the axis southwards into the old Han city and sealing off, rather than expanding, revolutionary history as reflected in the spatial relationships within Tian'anmen Square (Wakeman, 1988, 282). This blockage may not be as accidental as Wakeman infers, for a southern locality is propitious for its high *yang* influence. None of this symbolism surprises when it is realized that Chinese traditional cosmology conceptualizes transcendence or immortality (*xian*) as 'flight into the realm of pure *yang*' (Schafer, 1986, 112) associated with the order of Heaven (Sangren, 1987).

Nor is the necessity to balance the *yin* of preserved death with a *yang* architecture the only aspect of traditional cosmology reflected in Mao's memorial hall. The exact square of the red granite-clad base symbolically replicates the earth, as well as the 'red state', while the 'four square pillars of pink marble' in the entrance hall (*China Reconstructs*, 1977, XXVI, xii, 7) recall the four cords securing the earth in its correct, balanced position in the cosmos (cf. Xiao, 1979, 10) — a strong claim for Mao's politics, and perhaps one that contributed to the desire of some Chinese politicians actually to tear down the hall (Wakeman, 1985, 177; 1988, 284-5), which would be physically, if not politically, difficult since it was built to withstand a grade 8 earthquake (Zhang, 1987, 5)!

While on the subject of the built-in symbolism, the innuendoes (*wenzhang*) which have drawn muttered public condemnation (Wu, 1987, 451), we must not omit geomancy. Among the materials used in the construction of the hall was a 200-year-old camphorwood tree from Guizhou province — from its description almost certainly a *fengshui* tree in its pre-revolutionary past (*China Reconstructs*, 1977, XXVI, ix, 5). More importantly, the hall is centred on Beijing's geomantic north-south axis, which now passes through Mao's body as well as the imperial throne. Mao lies fractionally to the south of the exact centre of his square mausoleum, the point of most concentrated geomantic force in a tomb.

Yet there is one aspect which, as Wakeman (1985, 190, fn. 153; 1988, 282) notes, seemingly reverses traditional geomantic considerations. The late Chairman's body faces north, a truly inauspicious orientation for the dead, a position assumed by the emperor only once a year — at the supreme winter solstice sacrifice to Heaven which only he could conduct (Williams, 1913,

20, 28 ff.), and an orientation assumed by Daoist temple gods only during the rite of cosmic renewal for new or rebuilt temples (Sangren, 1987, 68). However, the main danger to Mao's own policies had, since the 1920s, come from those he referred to as 'the new tsars' across China's northern border. Therefore, since the hall is located on 'China's gate', perhaps it is symbolically appropriate that he should face north rather than south, to defend his own brand of socialism from Soviet competition to define the genre: the condolences from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on Mao's death were, after all, rejected by Beijing (Mackerras and Chan, 1982, 592). Perhaps, too, there may be a quiet reminder of the consequences of ongoing cosmic renewal (in Mao's phrase, 'permanent revolution') symbolized in this northern orientation. Against such arguments, Wu (1987, 434) notes popular unease at the rudeness of turning one's back on Mao during state rallies held in Tian'anmen Square. We should note here that both leaders of and participants in New China's political rituals held regularly in Tian'anmen, including the daily flag-raising at dawn and induction into Youth League membership, normally face north. Only at state rituals do state leaders face south. But it is not inconceivable that some of his surviving colleagues would be quite satisfied to have Mao in death where, despite the notion of 'collective leadership', they could never quite manage to put him during his lifetime, namely in his proper place in their north-facing audience as they in turn assume 'the fundamental cosmo-centric ritual position of all Chinese rulers from earliest times' (Needham, 1962, 272), facing south from the Tian'anmen rostrum.

Clearly, much food for speculation is contained in Mao's memorial hall as a material product of Chinese socialist culture. It contains officially explicated symbols, which build new associations on to older connotations, of the revolutionary history of the People's Republic and Mao's role in the foundation of New China. It also contains unexplicated but equally apparent symbols of ancient cosmology, 'feudal superstition'. How did they get there? Who was responsible?

In Wakeman's (1985; 1988) view, the memorial hall was attributable, in the context of succession politicking, to the man who succeeded Zhou as premier and Mao as party chairman, and who endeared himself to China by 'smashing the gang of four', Hua Guofeng, who by 1982 had lost all of his political offices garnered so rapidly six years earlier (Bergère, 1987, 255). Hua supposedly was responsible for the decisions to preserve Mao's body and to build the memorial hall in Tian'anmen Square (rather than outside Beijing at the Ming Tombs or in the Fragrant Hills, or on the city's axis on Coal Hill or a number of possible sites in the Palace Museum). However, contrary to Wakeman, Wu (1987, 432) traces the origin of the planning for a square memorial hall, on the central axis, in the southern part of Tian'anmen Square, to long-term projections approved by

premier Zhou Enlai in 1958. The intention was, apparently, to create a monumental revolutionary counterpoint to the Palace Museum, responsibility for the planning of which rested with a sub-bureau of the Beijing municipal administration. It seems clear, however, that the specific site and the square form — rectangular, circular and hemispherical possibilities having been rejected in the early stages of planning (Anon., 1977; Wu, 1987, 436; Zhang, 1987, 5) — together with the final design, were decided collectively by the Politburo of the CCP (Wakeman, 1985, 188, fn. 120; Zhang, 1987, 5).

But what finally emerged from the scaffolding in the summer of 1977 was not, apparently, exactly what had been designed in the autumn of 1976! Wakeman (1985, 189, fn. 142) notes 'a certain degree of tension between "experts" like the architects who wrote about their work after the hall was completed and "reds" . . . workers who changed designs as they went along, meeting the actual needs of the building by altering specifications . . .' in the pattern of democratic participation so encouraged by Mao. Wu (1987, 451) states that the original design for the base was replaced in total by a 'new decision' during construction, but gives no further details of who made this decision or what, precisely, it comprised. So it is entirely possible that some of the innuendoes of Chinese traditional belief may have been built into Mao's memorial hall by the decisions and actions of the mainly rural construction workers drawn from all over China (*China Reconstructs*, 1977, XXVI, ix 4-5; Pamela Tang, personal communication), as well as by the hall's architects and designers, most of whom were young and had been trained in Beijing after Liberation (Leon Hoa, personal communication), but some of whom had studied and practised abroad (Wakeman, 1985, 173), and all of whom, as 'experts' and intellectuals, had suffered collectively, if not also individually, as a consequence of Mao's policies.

It would seem, then, that for differing reasons politicians, planners, architects and construction workers all contributed to preserving Mao Zedong in a fashion consistent with the 'feudal superstitions' denounced in CCP policy on post-mortem disposal, and never louder than by Mao (1965) himself! But perhaps, in his failure to request his own cremation, Mao may have had second thoughts? Or perhaps Mao was long intended to be an exception to policy? From these examples, it should be plain that, although 'socialist culture' as an abstraction may appeal to cultural planners, even the material products of such a culture are unlikely to come into existence except as an outgrowth of an existing cultural base. And that is problematic, as China has found, not least because political conflicts have cultural dimensions. Especially where confrontation is impossible or imprudent, such conflicts will be articulated mainly through the manipulation of cultural symbols. And death ritual, in its concern with redemption, is particularly well suited to the covert promotion of tradition, not least because any official suppression of political protest encoded in such ritual can be

presented as disrespect for the dead (cf. Cheater, 1986, 232). As Zhou Yang has observed, the dialectics of cultural engineering are, like the superstructure itself, 'complicated' (Link, 1987, 163).

So, too, is symbolic analysis, for the same symbols may say quite contradictory things simultaneously! At one, rather superficial, level of symbolic interpretation, it is possible to see Mao's memorial hall as a dialectical counterpoint to Chinese tradition and 'superstition' — Mao's *flesh* preserved, facing north, demonstrating socialist superiority over the 'safe' south-facing position of the bones of emperors and other traditionalists; the revolutionary square and its super-hero contrasting — before 'The Last Emperor' — with the faded imperial history of the Palace Museum and its throne. But in order to imply these contrasts, it is necessary to contradict socialist policy in the first place by fighting on the enemy terrain of tradition itself: to preserve the remains of *the* revolutionary hero, against party policy; to use (and thereby reinforce) the symbolic connotations of the geomantic axis; to spend enormous sums of state money (the exact amount has never been revealed) proving political piety in order to deliver symbolic cultural backhanders. And throughout this process, it seems impossible to prevent ordinary people from forming their own interpretations of, and political reactions to, what they perceive to be happening: for the nature of symbols is to allow individuals to arrive at personally satisfying meanings which do not violate extremely broad cultural and linguistic parameters, within which anything goes. And the 'culture' in question not only manages to evade liquidation through the reactions of its bearers in adapting its symbols to novel circumstances; its explanatory premises are also reinforced and updated in new contexts, as is clear from the more detailed symbolic analysis of Mao's death rites and memorial hall offered earlier.

I should like to conclude, then, by returning to the problem of conceptualizing culture as a fixed *state*, rather than as an ongoing, ever-changing, conflict-ridden *process*, and drawing to the attention of would-be cultural planners the most fundamental problem with which they must contend — the popular interpretation of and reaction to their own actions.

There is a 'management of meaning' by which culture is generated and maintained, transmitted and received, applied, exhibited, remembered, scrutinized and experimented with. Often this is much more than just a routine maintenance of culture. Where there is strain between received meanings on the one hand and personal experiences and interests on the other, and where diverse perspectives confront one another, cultures can perhaps never be worked out as stable, coherent systems: they are forever cultural 'work in progress' (Hannerz, 1987, 550) . . .

. . . capable of answering those who plan their destruction.

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