

MAO ZEDONG IN PRESENT-DAY CHINA – FORMS OF DEIFICATION

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present how in China, a country combating religious beliefs, Mao Zedong has become a cult object and how the fondness towards the “Great Helmsman”, often adjacent to deification, is manifested in the present-day country. During his life, Mao Zedong was the central character of the political and social sphere of the People’s Republic of China. Admiring and, to some extent, identifying himself with the First Emperor of China, Mao was to become his contemporary version. The height of the personality cult occurred during the Cultural Revolution and was manifested in mass adoration of the Chairman. After his death and reckoning of merits and faults (in a 7:3 ratio, with dominance of the first ones), Mao seemed to be evanescent in the shadow in the modernizing China. The Maoists were fighting against religion, the feudal superstitions, however in recent years, in the officially atheist China, some beliefs in supernatural beings, power of religious rituals and offerings for ghosts reappear, as well as the interest in Buddhism, Taoism, syncretic sects and Christianity. Among the hope bringing powers there appears also deified Mao, as the creator of powerful China. The places connected with the Chairman, located on the route of the “Red Tourism” are visited by masses of the Chinese. Talismans with his image are supposed to provide security, good fortune and even prosperity. Mao is becoming a deity in the nationalistic pantheon of the power gaining China.

Key words: China, Communist Party of China, Little Red Book, Mao Zedong, nationalism

There is one special place in the middle of the “Middle Kingdom”, a place of a great symbolic meaning: Tiananmen Gate, placed between Tiananmen

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Square and the previous Emperors' Palace, Forbidden City. A huge portrait of Mao Zedong has been hanging on that gate since 1949, overlooking at China. The first portrait, hung there in February 1949, was just an early draft and it was replaced by the first official one before Mao declared the founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1st. Mao was shown in a military cap and a coarse woolen jacket. During the decades, the portraits hung at the gate were aging with the Chairman, presenting him with no head covering, in a uniform sometimes called Maoist (although the pattern originates from Sun Yat-sen) and with paternal expression. The final official portrait was based on a photo shot in 1964, presenting Mao en face, with both ears visible – like a symbol of the leader listening to the voice of the Chinese nation. Since 1949 the portrait of "The Great Helmsman" constantly overlooks the Tiananmen Square. Even during the students' protests of spring 1989, the demonstrators did not dare to remove the portrait. During those hot spring days some of them, who tried to assassinate Mao's image, have been turned over to the authorities by the other students. In recent years some voices, calling for removal of the Chairman's portrait from the Tiananmen gate and replacing it by the Sun Yat-sen's one, have started to appear. There were also some attempts to damage it. Nevertheless, Mao Zedong has remained an important symbol not only of the Communist Party of China, Chinese politics and ideology, but also of the whole nation. A national symbol, being revered and respected to the extend bordering a religious worship.

In 1958, while referring to the end of the cult of Stalin in the Soviet Union, Mao Zedong said: "There are two kinds of cult of the individual. One is correct, such as that of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and the correct side of Stalin. These we ought to revere and continue to revere for ever. It would not do not to revere them. As they held truth in their hands, why should we not revere them? We believe in truth; truth is the reflection of objective existence. A squad should revere its squad leader, it would be quite wrong not to. Then there is the incorrect kind of cult of the individual in which there is no analysis, simply blind obedience. This is not right."² Therefore a leader, representing the truth, should be revered. Mao wouldn't oppose such a justified personal cult.

On July 1921, when 27 years old Mao Zedong was among thirteen party members attending the first congress of Communist Party of China, probably no one expected how important historical role will be played by him in future. However, the First CPC National Congress Memorial Site in the Former French Concession in Shanghai presents quite a different version of history. The wax sculptures depicting the scene of that significant meeting show the other twelve members sitting around one noble, standing figure, listening and smiling as Mao Zedong makes his speech. Indeed, history is written by the victors.

2 Mao Zedong, Talks At The Chengtu Conference, 10 March 1958, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_06.htm (accessed 7.03.2012).

The height of cult of Mao Zedong

Mao Zedong as the founder of the People's Republic of China was a central figure of the Chinese politics until his death on September 9, 1976. Although at the beginning of the 1960s Mao seemed to lose his position, he managed to regain political influence. The peak of the Chairman's cult coincided with the Cultural Revolution, and manifested itself in a massive admiration for the Chairman, following his ideas and the ubiquity of images of the "Red Sun". Hysterical admiration was manifested also in ritual dances expressing loyalty to Mao. They were performed by young Red Guards in order to maintain the bond with the beloved leader. During that years children were given names associated not only with the revolution, but also with Mao Zedong personally, like Weidong (protecting Mao). The national anthem was unofficially replaced by a popular folk song, which lyrics were changed into:

"The east is red, the sun is rising,
China has brought forth a Mao Zedong.
He works for the people's welfare.
Hurrah, He is the people's great savior."

The writings of Mao Zedong were compiled by Lin Biao into a handbook, the *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong*, known as the Little Red Book. This book, containing selected quotations from Mao's speeches and writings, during the Cultural Revolution has become almost a sacred script. It was printed in 900 million copies, becoming the second most frequently published book of the world after the Bible. It should be emphasized, however, that this result was achieved in a much shorter period of time. At schools, workplaces, community centers, parks, there were sessions of reading and interpretation of Mao's statements, and many Chinese, particularly raised in his cult the Red Guards, learnt whole passages by heart.

A visual symbol of the personal cult were the Chairman Mao badges. It is estimated that in 1969 around 90 percent of the Chinese population had them pinned to the clothes just above the heart³. Some of the Mao followers wore several or even dozens of badges. The badges were produced in thousands of designs, and the number of them is estimated at about five billion. The badges were treated with great respect: there were reports of mobs attempting to lynch people who accidentally destroyed the image of Mao; they were collected and even traded. Probably the most impressive collection is that of Lin Yizhou, containing over 200 thousand badges⁴. Lin's collection began when he got a prize

3 Bishop Bill, Badges of Chairman Mao Zedong, *China News Digest International*, <http://museums.cnd.org/CR/old/maobadge/> (accessed 7.04.2009).

4 Lin Yizhou: shoucan Mao Zhuxi xiangzhang 20 duo wan mei, *Zhongshan Ribao*, <http://art.taocang.com/art/zhangjia/62951.htm>

for outstanding performance during the ideological meeting in 1966. Later he started to collect and buy them (the most expensive was bought for 5000 RMB).

Mao's appearance on posters was an important element of propagation of his cult. In many of the Chinese houses the posters and paintings depicting Mao had replaced the old ancestor altars. The scale of the phenomenon is clearly visible in numbers: it is estimated that the overall number of the Chairman's images produced during his life time exceeded 2.2 billion, surpassing three times the population of China at that time. Ways of portraying Mao on the propaganda posters were diversified. The early posters were showing Mao among the other Communist leaders. On one poster from 1950, "Celebrating the People's Republic of China's National Day"⁵, Mao's portrait is carried by a joyful parade along with that of Sun Yat-sen. Posters presenting the success of the Land Reform also include pictures of Mao placed on the walls of the peasants' houses. Three posters of this type are particularly interesting: "Moving into a new house" present the family members jointly hanging the Great Helmsman's image on the wall of their new house; "Chairman Mao gives us a happy life" poster presents a workers' family with chubby children, abundant food, colorful toys, nice clothes and modern radio and clock. There is no doubt who provided them with that wealth. The last one, "Warmly love Chairman Mao" poster, shows four children, healthy and, smiling, presenting Mao's portrait.

After the failure of the Great Leap Forward a new set of cheerful posters was designed and printed: they presented Mao visiting Chinese villages. On the "Chairman Mao loves children" poster Mao is surrounded by a group of smiling people, on the other one he is stroking a sick baby with great sensitivity and care. The next one presents the Chairman offering his car to bring a child to the hospital. The last poster of this series presents the happy family's reminiscence about that event and the little photo of the Chairman, once again clearly indicating the benefactor.

Many posters designed after 1965, like the "East is red" or "Advance victoriously while following Chairman Mao's revolutionary line in literature and the arts", show another face of Mao, being almost a personification of the sun, illuminating the surrounding with benevolent rays. One of the posters ("To go on a thousand 'li' march to temper a red heart") shows a march of young people with the painting of young Mao carried in front, just like a religious image in a procession. Sometimes the Mao's picture wasn't even necessary, since his Red Book played the same symbolical role, as on "Criticize the old world and build a new world with Mao Zedong Thought as a weapon" poster, with young, enthusiastic Red Guard members keeping the books close to their heart, while they set off to fight against the old elements at the outset of the Cultural Revolution. Similar

(accessed 27.02.2012).

5 Su Guoqing, Qingzhu Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guoqingjie, this and other mentioned here posters might be seen at site <http://chinese posters.net> (accessed 29.03.2012).

posters were created during the whole period of Cultural Revolution: "Long live chairman Mao! Long, long live!", "Firmly grasp large-scale revolutionary criticism".

On the poster "Greet the 1970's with the new victories of revolution and production" a worker and a peasant are unified in joy, with a working tool in one hand, and Little Red Book in other one. The *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong* seem to be a necessary guidebook for steelworkers, soldiers, constructors of the bridge over the Yangzi, inventors of the atom bomb, and revolutionary people all over the world (as in "Chairman Mao is the great liberator of the world's revolutionary people"). Even the Mao's wife, Jung Chang, was pictured with the Little Red Book, as on posters: "Learn from the valiant standard-bearer of the Great Cultural Revolution, comrade Jiang Qing, and pay her respect!"; "The invincible thought of Mao Zedong illuminates the stage of revolutionary art!". When millions of youth were sent from the cities to countryside, on the posters they were depicted travelling with smiles on their faces and the Little Red Books in their hands. On some posters from that period Mao is shown among people, creating waves of enthusiasm and happiness and the will to fight ("The reddest reddest red sun in our heart, Chairman Mao and us together", "Forging ahead courageously while following the great leader Chairman Mao!").

After Mao's death his images have started to be less common. However, there are at least two posters presenting him in afterlife. One, named "Celebrate a festival with jubilation" shows an imaginary scene of a cordial gathering of Mao and the other leaders of the first generation of Chinese Communists: Zhou Enlai, Zhu De and Liu Shaoqi. The "Happy universe" presents Mao sitting in the paradise, above the clouds, surrounded by birds, flowers, fruits and two sentences: "He is savior of the people" and "He gave happiness to the people".

Some of the Mao's posters are still visible, especially in rural areas. They might be found even in Tibet. The state media agency, Xinhua, gives the following explanation of this phenomenon: "many people hang Chairman's photos at home, always together with portraits of the Buddha. 'Our lives changed a lot, especially in recent years' said 45-year-old Tenzin Tsering from Gyanbe village of Konjo county, Qamdo. 'Like the living Buddhas, we revere him'⁶.

Chairman Mao is sometimes compared with previous rulers of the Middle Kingdom, and perceived as a contemporary emperor of China. He himself admired Qin Shihuangdi, the China's first emperor and was convinced that it would be very useful to combine the ideas of Marx and Qin Shihuangdi⁷. In 1958, Mao referring to the text of the historian Fan Wenlan, indicating the tradition of respect for modernity and neglect of the past, expressed his regret that the historian did not quote the first emperor, who was an expert in such activities. Mao reminded that Qin Shihuangdi "buried alive 460 scholars, while we buried

6 Chairman Mao commemorated on 35th anniversary of death, *China Daily*, 9 September 2011, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-09/09/content_13662794.htm (accessed 4.04.2012).

7 Dziak Waldemar J., Bajec Jerzy, *Mao. Zwycięstwa, nadzieje, klęski*, Wydawnictwo TRIO, Warsaw, 2007, p. 93.

46,000. In our suppression of the counter-revolutionaries, did we not kill some counter-revolutionary intellectuals? I once debated with the democratic people: You accuse us of acting like Qin Shihuangdi, but you are wrong; we surpass him 100 times. You berate us for imitating Qin Shihuangdi in enforcing dictatorship. We admit them all.”⁸ In a speech at the CPC plenum in Lushan in 1959, Mao said: “We are under combined attack from within and outside the Party. The rightists say: Why was Qin Shihuangdi overthrown? Because he built the Great Wall. Now that we have built the Tiananmen we shall collapse; this is what the rightists say.”⁹ An unsuccessful attempt to overthrow Mao, known as the “Project 571”¹⁰, based on accusing the Chairman of turning into the China’s largest feudal tyrant, reminiscent of Emperor Qin Shihuangdi. Despite any criticism, Mao’s ambition had been fulfilled; Qin Shihuangdi, went down to the history as a creator of the united China, that Mao Zedong is seen as the founder of New China, People’s Republic of China.

How much was left of the Mao’s cult after his death?

After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, retreat from his cult wasn’t immediate. His successor Hua Guofeng tried to continue China’s policy under the guidance of Mao by promoting the “Two Whatevers” policy – “We will resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and unswervingly follow whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave”. However, Hua soon was ousted from power by Deng Xiaoping and in the early 1980s Mao’s deeds were officially divided into good and bad in the ratio 7:3. Although the thought of Mao Zedong is still enshrined in the Constitution of the PRC as an ideological basis, China follows the path of transformation, designated by Deng Xiaoping. However, it seems that Mao Zedong has not disappeared completely. Moreover, in recent years he has gained a status similar to a deity in some spheres.

Mao Zedong himself remains a symbol affiliated with the New China, as a founder of the People’s Republic of China, and the Chinese version of both Lenin and Stalin in one person. He is still commonly referred to with great respect as the Chairman Mao (Mao Zhuxi). While his achievements are still being discussed, the main emphasis is not on the Communist ideology or class struggle, but on creation of the New China. The CPC could not afford to condemn Mao’s deeds, as the Great Leap Forward or the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution, because it would mean the rejection of huge part of the Party’s heritage. Furthermore, since

8 Mao Zedong, The First Speech, 8 May 1958, Internet Marxist Archive, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_10.htm (accessed 8.05.2009).

9 Mao Zedong, Speech at the Lushan Conference, 23 July 1959, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_34.htm (accessed 27.02.2012).

10 The plan prepared by Lin Biao in 1970–1971, culminating in the death of Lin. 571, *wuqi yi gongcheng*, in other tones and characters may be read as “armed uprising”. More: Jung Chang, Jon Halliday, *Mao*, Wydawnictwo Albatros, Warsaw, 2007, p. 552.

the eighties the manifestations of sentimental attitude towards Mao are found among the poorer strata of society – as a symbolic opposition to the cult of money, individualism and westernization, which are the results of Deng's reforms.

How far those sentiments are from a semi-religious cult? In ancient China, the Imperial Courts had an official pantheons of deities. High-level officials and generals were able to join the pantheon. The authority had power to validate the legitimacy of the gods, and those in turn were giving political legitimacy to a ruler. The Maoists fought against religion as a feudal superstition, that should be removed from the social life of the new Chinese nation. Temples and monasteries were demolished, countless religious artifacts were destroyed, nuns and monks were sent to re-education or forced to go back to secular life. But in the last thirty years in an officially atheist China, a great come back of the belief in supernatural beings, the power of religious rituals, sacrifices for the spirits might be observed. Since the eighties the authorities have helped to rebuild temples that serve as tourist attractions but also as a religious cult sites, attracting a growing number of pilgrims. The revived interest in Buddhism, Taoism, syncretic sects, and Christianity has been noticeable. Most of those religions or spiritual movements are acceptable, except those which might potentially jeopardize the authorities such as Falun Gong. Although there is nothing like a state temple of Mao Zedong, his image appears in a semi-religious context.

By visual dominating the Tiananmen gate by his portrait, Mao Zedong had dominated the symbolic center of the People's Republic of China during his life. After death, in the heart of China, on the central part of Tiananmen Square, the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall was erected. This most imposing building has 57 thousand square meters. Even although Mao signed the pledge to be cremated, the Politburo decided to permanently preserve his body. The mausoleum was constructed after his death, by engaging hundreds of thousands voluntary workers. It was built "with the unique national style"¹¹. The construction not only engaged people from all over the China, but also materials from many provinces. Among the stones used to build the hall there were some brought from Mt. Everest, from Tangshan (which was struck by a massive earthquake few months earlier), and also water and sand from the Taiwan Strait. Mao's body, covered with the flag of Communist Party of China, was placed in the crystal coffin, surrounded with national symbols. Nowadays the Memorial Hall is open for public and the admission is free. People still tend to line up to enter and pay tribute to the Chairman, bowing in the traditional Chinese manner and offering white flowers. However, this "traditional" pilgrimage has also undergone some touch of modernity – at present on online booking of the time of visit for the groups is possible.

Throughout the whole country, the Chinese tourists and organized school and companies groups visit places connected with the Communist Party

11 This and further information about the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall come from its official website: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/69112/113427/> (accessed 7.03.2012).

of China, the first generation of revolutionary leaders and, most of all, Chairman Mao. Those destinations are promoted among young generations to arouse patriotism. China's National Tourism Administration has named year 2005 the "Year of Red Tourism" and has issued a list of "30 choice red tourism routes" and "100 classic red tourism sites". "Red tourism" is ideologically motivated but as professor Chen Xiongzhong at the School of Society, Culture and Tourism Industry of Guangxi Normal University asserts, "Red tourism should be market-oriented. (...) Without consideration of the role of the market forces, red tourism would have no vigor."¹²

On the trail of "red tourism" there is a Shaoshan village in Hunan province, where Mao was born and his parents' house is still preserved, transformed into a kind of sanctuary. The number of visitors has increased, from 3 million in 2005 to 6.5 million in 2010¹³. The site is rarely visited by individual tourists, as if they come to Shaoshan by the public transport, they usually join the groups lead by the local guides, which prevents them from missing any of the important sites at Shaoshan. One question is: what do the standard routes look like? Stopping at the Comrade Mao Zedong Bronze Statue Square, Mao Zedong Bronze Statue, Former Residence of Mao Zedong, ancestral temple, Guanyin temple, where Wen Qimei, Mao's mother used to pray, Mao's parents' tomb, Mao Zedong Memorial Garden, Shao Peak with the park of stone tablets with inscriptions of Mao's calligraphy and his poems. An important part of the trip is a lunch at the local restaurant, offering Chairman's favorite dishes. The aim of such a visit is to touch the greatness, perceive the very beginning of a great man.

In the main hall of the Mao family ancestral temple on the central altar there are tablets with names of the deceased family members, but the place is dominated by the bust of Mao Zedong. Tourists or pilgrims visiting the place show deep respect by bowing three times. The temple has also a souvenir shop, where all kinds of books, medallions, figurines of different size, post stamps, clocks, plaques, badges, shirts, pictures of Mao and revolutionary music, movies, documentaries are sold. Among the souvenirs that may be bought in Shaoshan, there are little comic books¹⁴, which seem to be created as an element of socialization of the younger generation. They show a young boy, whom intelligence, diligence, noble character will lead to a great role in future. After buying a souvenir they may be "sacrificed" on the altar next to Chairman's bust. Also cigarettes and alcohol are being offered to the deceased. In the same temple, just behind the main altar, a small shop sells amulets in a form that resembles amulets found in Buddhist or Taoist temples – it is believed that they increase possessors' luck

12 Yan Wei, New March of Red Tourism, *Beijing Review*, 19 May 2005, <http://www.bjreview.cn/EN/En-2005/05-19-e/china-2.htm> (accessed 7.03.2012).

13 Shaoshan, <http://www.visithunan.org/jqjd/ReMenTuijian/21.shtml> (accessed 4.04.2012).

14 *Shaoshan de chuanshuo – shaonian Mao Zedong Dongshan qiudu de gushi*, Hunan Meishu Chubanshan, Changsha, 2003.

and wealth. Tourists also visit the forest of steles and several stones, on which works of Chairman's calligraphy are inscribed. On the route there is also a small temple dedicated to the Bodhisattva Guanyin, Goddess of Mercy, in which Mao's mother used to pray. Although the temple was destroyed by Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, it was later rebuilt. Another obligatory site of the pilgrimage is the tomb of Mao Zedong's parents. Here visitors pay respect, offer flowers, and pour a glass of alcohol.

Finally, the highest point of the trip is to the family home of Mao, which was quite a rich peasant family homestead. The furniture placed in it is said to come from Mao's era. Particularly noteworthy are signs describing rooms, as "the place where Mao Zedong, as a little boy, used to help his mother with the housework"¹⁵ or "The table at which the family gathered for talks. Mao Zedong exhorted them to dedicate themselves to the liberation of the Chinese people." Mao's childhood had all implications to show that he would grow up as an extraordinary person.

Shaoshan as a tourist destination reached a peak of popularity during the Cultural Revolution, and even nowadays the number of visitors is impressive¹⁶. Entrance to all of the sites is free in order to popularize the "red tourism". The media inform about official visits of the CPC leaders. The popularity creates many opportunities for the villagers to earn money. In order to protect their interests, they have already copyrighted the name "Shaoshan village".

Shaoshan, like other places associated with Mao Zedong, become a kind of popular Mao-land. Thus, tourists may find plenty of souvenirs and also take a photo with a model of Mao. While visiting they may have some rest in one of the restaurants and have lunch containing Mao's favorite dishes, typical of Hunan province. Eleven years after Mao's death, one of his distant relatives, Tang Ruiren-founded the Mao Jia (Home of Mao) Restaurant, serving Great Helmsman's favorite dishes. Twenty years later Mao Jia Restaurants operate not only in Shaoshan – in 2006 there were around 150 franchise restaurants in 20 provinces, and they had received tens of millions of Chinese and foreign guests, including party and state leaders. These restaurants serve dishes such as *huobei yu*, bitter-tasting fish baked with chili pepper, which Mao described as helping people think only of the revolution, or *hongshao rou*, red braised pork belly with sweet caramelized flavour, as Mao believed that only fatty pork provided enough nutrition to his brain to win the battle¹⁷. The restaurants specializing in Hunan cuisine, not only those of Tan Ruiren branch, are widespread throughout China, and it is common for them to place Mao's images or his quotations as major elements of decora-

15 Authentic quotations from Shaoshan.

16 Mao Zedong's Hometown Attracting More Tourists, *China.org.cn*, 5 July 2005, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/travel/134071.htm> (accessed 7.03.2012).

17 Li Li, A Red Capitalist, *Beijing Review*, 10 December 2006.

tion. Sometimes even a sort of small altar with symbolic offerings may be found.

There was a discussion whether the birthday of the “founding father” of the People’s Republic of China should be a national holiday. But even without official holiday status, annually the birth and death anniversaries of the Chairman has been celebrated by nostalgic Chinese, even if the anniversaries used to be ignored by the authorities. The queue to visit Chairman Mao Memorial Hall extends longer than usually, as people come to Beijing to pay respects. On December 26, 2008 the 115 anniversary of the birth of Mao was pompously celebrated in Shaoshan. Villagers there used to have birthday noodles¹⁸ on breakfast on Mao’s birthday every year. Because of the anniversary, the main square and the statue had been renovated.

Actually Mao is present everywhere in everyday China. His image is printed on each new RMB banknotes. In many cars there are talismans with the image of Mao, which serve a protective function – sometimes they are hung together with Buddha image. This custom is connected with a rumor circulating that during the road collision in Guangzhou a taxi driver had got away without a slightest injury, his car was also unharmed, and it was a Mao medallion which was supposed to protect him. New fashion also appears in karaoke clubs, where the revolutionary songs are sung, accompanied by videos of the Cultural Revolution.

Mao Zedong is a well recognized symbol of China. He is not only a historical figure, but also an icon of popular culture. He entered the pop-art in 1963, when Andy Warhol created oil paintings of Mao, and later, in 1973, used his image in a famous series of portraits “Mao Portfolio of 10”. In China alone the Communist leader appeared in modern art after his death. That was a kind of re-reading and deconstruction of the previous, mythical way of interpreting Mao. In 1979 Wang Keping carved the statue of Mao’s face in a style of the Buddha, giving him the title “Idol”. Since the eighties Mao’s figure was used by Chinese artists in an increasingly freer way – for example in 1986 Wang Guangyi placed the portrait behind bars, in Li Shan’s works Mao is depicted with makeup on his face, and a lotus flower in his mouth. Zhang Hongtu, who in 1982 left China for the United States, has focused on representations of Mao as the central element of his art. Among his works we can find the Mao’s image at the oatmeal tin or a series of stylized portraits of “Chairmen Mao” (1989), including Mao with pigtails or another with mustache a la Stalin and the inscription HIACS (He is a Chinese Stalin). His “Last Banquet” (1989), a version of the Leonardo da Vinci painting with Chinese characteristics (wall scrolls, rice bowls, chopsticks, spittoon under the table), where all figures were replaced by Mao, was criticized in the West. The same artist presented an installation “Material Mao”, consisting of the busts of Mao cut out of various materials like wood, stone, bricks, table tennis, lawn¹⁹. Zhang gave

18 That is a traditional Chinese food to celebrate birthday, because long noodles are believed to bring long life.

19 Official website of the artist: <http://www.momao.com> (accessed 8.12.2011).

up painting Mao in the 1990s, but still, even today, the figure of Mao remains the inspiration for young Chinese artists. Probably the most politically provocative for many Chinese is the art of brothers Gao Qiang and Gao Zhen. They created a series of Miss Mao, large busts of Mao with big female breasts and long nose, a grotesque figures in vibrant colors. Between 1989 and 2003 Gao brothers were on the government's black list and were barred from leaving the country as punishment, but nowadays their works are popular with foreign galleries. One of their foreign performances shown in Moscow in 2008 involved smashing golden statue of Miss Mao with a hammer, and inside of the statue a small figure of Lenin was hidden. In 2009 Gao brothers created a silver Miss Mao trying to pose herself balancing with a tightrope walking pole at the top of huge Lenin's head. The Gao brothers are the authors of a controversial sculpture "Mao's guilt", picturing the Chairman on his knees, confessing, with facial expression indicate deep remorse. The head of this bronze sculpture is separated from the body and in order to avoid problems, it is usually hidden in separate location. The full sculpture is shown only during underground exhibitions.

Although in principle the state cult of Mao is buried in the past, some works using the Chairman Mao figure meet with the reaction of censorship. In April 2006 censors ordered closure of several galleries in the 798 Arts District in Beijing for showing works with a content that was found too sensitive politically. One of them was a picture by Gao Qiang (not related to the Gao brothers), showing a famous photo of Mao swimming across Yangtze river in 1966, but the colors were modified: Mao's skin was sickly yellow, and he was swimming in Yangtze in the colour of blood. Another work removed from the exhibition was a one hundred yuan banknote bearing Mao's portrait with a Cultural Revolution slogans printed on it, by Huang Rui.²⁰ Gao brothers' exhibitions "Ash Red" in 798 Arts District was also shut down. Their tree-house cafe and an artists' studio was closed down in 2011²¹.

Mao's place in modern nationalism in China

When in 1978 Deng Xiaoping continued the process of modernization, China stood at the beginning of profound transformations of the economic and social system, and some limited political changes. These reforms, along with the influx of Western ideas, as well as the passing of the first generation of Communist leaders and the tragic legacy of the Cultural Revolution, led to erosion of the Maoist ideology. It has been left in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, and it was present during the great parade of the celebrations for 60th

20 Watts Jonathan, Chinese artists cross the red line, *The Guardian*, 22 April 2006.

21 China: Gao Brothers under pressure, *Radio Free Asia*, 12 August 2011, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/topic/4565c2252c4565c25f36b4e5f718131,0,RFA,,.html> (accessed 20.03.2012).

anniversary of the founding of the PRC as the core of the national ideology. Nevertheless its real influence in social life is less significant. As a result, the legitimization of the Communist Party's authority was endangered. To maintain the legitimacy, the Party had to seek an alternative ideology – and nationalism was an answer. In recent decades nationalism has been deliberately used by the CPC to conduct its internal and external policies. In domestic policy, the phenomenon of reconstructing the new Chinese nation can be noticed. That process may be understood in the spirit of constructivism, which recognizes a nation as a product of ideology that embraces nationalism. Nation-building is never completed – nations are subjects to continuous process of their reconstruction. Nations cannot exist without ideologues and leaders, realizing that by “social engineering” the ideological project of the nation continues. Particular values and norms are being inoculated into the community through repetitive sets of ritual practices of symbolic nature, such as strengthening a sense of community, territory, institutions, and legitimizing power.

Chinese nationalism never existed in one form. It adopted various forms, depending on who the “engineers of the nation” were. Nowadays there appears a powerful, top-down nationalism of the Communist Party of China, developed by the entire state apparatus, particularly through the education system and strictly controlled mass-media. Media are channels for promoting nationalism, despite their multiplicity, remain subject to the control of the Propaganda Department (responsible also for patriotic education), and self-censorship of journalists themselves. Nationalism is strongly supported by symbolism, traditions, national and state holidays and national heroes. This type of nationalism can be regarded as continuity of the early Communist Party's nationalism, though from the beginning of the PRC it has changed. In the first period it was a highly chauvinistic class nationalism, which was not only against the external enemy, but it also ruled out many Chinese considered unworthy of being a part of the new Chinese nation. The right to belong to the nation was a result of identification with the communist revolution, and consequently, love for China was equal to love for the Party and Mao Zedong. That was a useful tool for political and class struggle. This nationalism recreated the proud Chinese nation, so called “New China”, reborn after “the century of humiliation” (from Opium Wars until 1949). Under the strong leadership this nation was able to compete against the world powers.

Nationalism was an instrument used by the Communist Party of China since its very beginning, but in the reform period it began to occupy a prominent place in the ideological frame of the country. The CPC is being depicted as the sole force capable of protecting Chinese honor and defend the Chinese interests in the international Arena. The Party, underscoring its contribution to the contemporary development of China, refers to the figure of Mao Zedong as the creator of the new state. Due to the popular sentiment for the old, idealized times, it was possible to strengthen the position of Mao Zedong not only as a

national hero, but also as a kind of a deity in the nationalist 'religion'.

Chinese nationalism is not limited to the constructivist nationalism of Communist Party. That is also a popular nationalism with a slightly different characteristics. It is built on the strong sense of national humiliation and degradation. It is not so much about the "century of humiliation" that has passed, but about the contemporary humiliation experienced from the Japanese and Western politicians and organizations. According to these nationalists, the West refuse to recognize that China has changed and gained international importance and cannot be continuously depreciated. There are some books focused on such an angry nationalism, like "China Can Say No. Political and Emotional Choices in the post-Cold-War era"²², "China Still Can Say No"²³ or "Unhappy China. The Great Time, Grand Vision and Our Challenges"²⁴. In these intellectual visions, the hostile elements intend to split China and undermine national economic strength, using smokescreens of human rights or freedom of Tibet. Some of those sentiments are shared by young angry nationalists, who express themselves on the Internet. This approach may be seen as an extension of the "century of humiliation", but because its radicalism does not always suit the Party. Popular nationalism is rich in a genuine sense of national pride, which can be defined as commonly understood patriotism, clearly visible especially among the Chinese during the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008. This nationalism interacts with the policy of the CPC. It includes a growing global network of angry young Chinese nationalist, not only in the PRC, but also among the Chinese diaspora outside the country. Their actions can be observed when the Mao Zedong's image is tarnished. In addition to the official protection of Mao's image, they undertake spontaneous actions on the Internet. Any attack on the Chairman is considered by the young nationalists as an attack on the whole China. In January 2008 the Citroen advertisement campaign in Spain used a distorted portrait of Mao with face contorted in a grimace and eyes squinted. The advertisement provoked unrest in the Chinese Internet forums, and was declared to be not only offensive to the Chairman, but also to the entire Chinese nation. Therefore Citroen was forced to withdraw controversial posters and to issue an apology and acknowledgment of respect for the representatives and symbols of China.²⁵

In recent years there appeared a shift in an official image of Mao Zedong. He has been shown as a human being, much closer to the common people than ever before. A new movie titled "Mao Zedong in Anyang" was produced. It re-

22 Song Qiang, Zhang Zangzang, Qiao Bian, Gu Qingsheng, *Zhongguo keyi shuo: bu. Lengzhanhou shidai de zhengzhi yu qinggan jueze*, Zhonghua Gongshanglian Lianhe Chubanshe, Beijing 1996.

23 Song Qiang, Zhang Zangzang, Qiao Bian, Gu Qingsheng, *Zhongguo haishi neng shuo bu*, Zhongguo Wenlian Chubanshe, Beijing 1996.

24 *Zhongguo bu gaixing: da shidai, da mubiao ji women de neiyuwaihuan*, Jiangsu Renmin Chubanshe, Beijing 2009.

25 Crabb Roger, Citroen apologizes to China for scowling Mao ad, 15.01.2008, *Reuters*, <http://www.reuters.com/article/lifestyleMolt/idUSPEK16018320080115> (accessed 20.03.2012).

veals a history of a romance between Mao and his first wife, Yang Kaihui. The memoirs of Mao's bodyguard, Li Yinqiao, were printed entitled "Mao Zedong: Man, Not God". The publishing house advertises it as: the "inside story of China's dynamic leader and world statesman is told – the life and thought of Mao, the husband, father, comrade-in-arms, the peasant's son"²⁶. Despite the title, Mao is presented as a superhuman, having a noble personality, extremely courageous, risking his life for the revolution and for other comrades, but also sensitive, altruist, with sense of humor. Even while losing his temper, he was worth adoration, as that was a result of lack of sleep and his devotion and sacrifice for the Communist ideas. One of the stories in the book was about Mao seeing a child delirious with a fever. That provoked tears in Mao's eyes, because as he explains "I can't bear to see poor people cry. When I see their tears, I can't hold back my own". That is why he gave away last bottle of penicillin for the ill child, despite of his personal doctor's objection. What is mother's reaction? "She dropped to her knees, saying sobbingly to Mao, 'You're a Buddha, a life-saving Buddha!'"²⁷.

It seems that the Chinese Communist leaders may have abandoned or revised the Mao Zedong thought during the last three decades, but they did not and will not dare to fully renounce Mao and his ideology. There might be changes in the way of official showing the Chairman Mao, but it will not be possible to take him down from his pedestal. Even though the knowledge of Mao's mistakes and faults is increasing in the Chinese society, the popular sentiment places him closer to supernatural power than a man in the street, *laobaixing*.

26 Qian Yanchi, *Mao Zedong. Man, Not God*, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing 2009.

27 Qian Yanchi, *Mao Zedong. Man, Not God*, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing 2009, pp. 37-38.

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Јоана Вардега

МАО ЦЕДУНГ У КИНИ ДАНАС – ФОРМЕ ОБОГОТВОРЕЊА

Резиме

Циљ овог рада јесте да покаже како је у Кини, земљи која се бори против религиозних уверења, данас Мао Цедунг постао култ и како се склоност према "Великом Кормилару", често поред обожења, манифестује у садашњости ове земље. Током свог живота, Мао Цедунг је био централна личност политичке и друштвене сфере Народне Републике Кине. Дивећи се, и у неком облику и идентификујући, са првим кинеским царем, Мао је желео да постане његова савремена верзија. Култ личности је доживео свој врхунац током Културне револуције и био је манифестован масовним дивљењем председнику. Након његове смрти у упоређивања заслуга и грешки (у односу 7:3 за ове прве), Мао је израстао у сенку модернизације Кине. Маоисти су се борили против религије, феудалног сујеверја, али у последњим годинама, у официјално атеистичкој Кини, нека веровања у натприродна бића, моћ религиозних ритуала и духове су се поново појавила, као и интересовање за будизам, таоизам, синкретичке секте и хришћанство. Између осталих, појавио се и обоготворени Мао, као креатор моћне Кине. Места повезана са председником, лоцирана на рути која се зове "Црвени туризам", су посећена од великог броја Кинеза. Талисмани са његовом сликом би требало да осигурају сигурност, добру срећу па и просперитет. Мао постаје божанство у националистичком пантеону стицања моћи у Кини.

Кључне речи: Кина, Мао Цедунг, национализам, Комунистичка партија Кине, Мала црвена књига

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