

## **For Love or Money? Nostalgia for Maoist China**

Sarah Kelsey Hipp, Interdisciplinary Studies

Dr. Krista Van Fleit Hang, Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

### **Research Question, Goals, and Objectives**

Approaching Mao Zedong's tomb emerges a seemingly endless line of people. Once inside, people weep as they lay red and yellow roses surrounding the Chairman's tomb; however, upon exiting the tomb, piercing shouts fill the air as merchants selling Mao watches, Mao key chains, even Mao cigarette lighters, attempt to lure buyers. My main inquiry is to understand how the nostalgia for the Maoist period can persist today amid Chinese commercialism and what allows this perpetual longing for Chairman Mao. Moreover, has the love for the Chairman changed since the 1950s? I want to investigate the ironic intersection between those nostalgic for the Maoist past and the cultural producers who capitalize on this past. Ultimately, it is necessary to understand and elucidate China's nostalgia for their recent past because not only is it alive today, but it will help increase understanding of a foreign, non-western country in a highly globalized, transnationalized world.

My first goal in conducting my mentored inquiry is to question the Cold War narrative that China, under Mao, was merely repressed, brainwashed, and flooded with meaningless propaganda. I expect to prove that the Cold War narrative fails to adequately explain the Maoist Period. I also want to excite attention to the fact that the Chinese people are nostalgic for this time period, and I, therefore, want to find an underlying thread which links the past to the present to better understand this phenomenon. I believe this thread to be especially important when considering that not all who long for the Maoist Period experienced this period. I also believe this connection will reveal a fundamental characteristic which transcends time and thereby attracts these more recent generations to this period.

### **Relationship to Previous Research/Knowledge in the Field**

Prior to this cultural studies project, I have created an Interdisciplinary Studies major that focuses on both the Chinese language and Chinese literature and have formed a particular interest in the Maoist Period. I first became interested in understanding the progression of the communist experience after writing a research paper for Dr. Van Fleit Hang's Chinese 398 literature class comparing the communist path in two separate pieces of literature. Not only have I conducted prior research in class, but I have already begun an independent study of literature on this topic in the field of China studies. I have taken a particular interest in Geremie Barmé's study, which examines the early 1990s' Cult of Mao revival, or the Mao Craze<sup>a</sup>. Lisa Rofel's study examines the notion of modernity in a post-Mao China through a cross-generational study<sup>b</sup>, and I will draw inspiration from Rofel's methodology and take Barmé's research one step further in understanding the present Maoist phenomena. In relating my research of the present Maoist phenomena to Barmé's study I will be able to understand why this Maoist longing continues to exist, but also how it has changed<sup>c</sup> from Barmé's study to today. I will also employ Chen Xiaomei's research of how model operas have changed in a post-Mao China and Perry Link's study of Maoist literature<sup>d</sup>. I anticipate building on these studies as I investigate my inquiry concerning the present Maoist nostalgia<sup>e</sup>.

### **Methodology or Research Design/ Student's Role**

As I conduct my research, I will attend cultural venues such as Maoist inspired nightclub performances, art exhibits, fashion shows, and Maoist inspired restaurants as to understand how Chinese people reinterpret and express their nostalgia for their past. I will also attend performances of some of the model operas, the only plays permitted during the Cultural Revolution. I have previously studied the model operas in my Chinese literature classes and hope to employ my knowledge as I compare the performances of the model operas during the Maoist Period to the model opera performances of today. I also anticipate through this investigation I will better understand how the communist experience has changed and reveal how the love for Chairman Mao has also changed.

A cultural studies approach will allow me to produce a literary, historical, and social evaluation of the longing for the Maoist Period. I will be participating in my second study abroad in Chengdu, China, thus it is important for me to capitalize on this opportunity. My study abroad is language intensive; therefore, my research will be completely independent of my course load. I will conduct my research in Chengdu, Beijing, and Shanghai. Because the majority of my time will be spent in Chengdu, I will place a particular emphasis in understanding how this nostalgia is illustrated in everyday life; however, in Beijing I will go to a button factory that produces Chairman Mao buttons and view Mao Zedong's tomb as I further investigate the cultural producers who are capitalizing on the Maoist Period. In both Beijing and Shanghai I will focus on the said cultural venues: nightclub performances, art exhibits, restaurants, model operas, and fashion shows. As I conduct my research I will have the support of Dr. Van Fleit Hang, assistant professor in the Literatures, Languages, and Cultures department at the University of South Carolina (USC) and the guidance of Dr. Marco Moskowitz, part of the Anthropology department at USC, specializing in Chinese culture. I have worked with the Southwest University for Nationalities during my previous study abroad in Chengdu and the university has agreed to assist with any language obstacles. Once to twice a week I will have email and phone contact with Dr. Hang. Dr. Hang will also be completing a stay in Beijing as I conduct my research; therefore, she will provide an assessment of my progress while I conduct my research in Beijing in addition to our weekly emails and telephone calls.

#### **Project Timeline**

May 24-June 19: Conduct research in Chengdu

June 20-June 24: Conduct research in Beijing

June 25- June 30: Conduct research in Shanghai

July 1-August 1: Conduct research in Chengdu

August 2-August 6: Conduct research in Beijing

August 7-August 31: Reflect and begin to organize research, convert oral interviews to text, digital photographs to prints

September 1-October 31: Continue analysis and interpretation, research compiled into paper

November: Finish paper, submit to undergraduate journal

#### **Anticipated Results**

Through my investigation, I will produce one research paper that will spread a deeper understanding of Chinese culture and promote a new interpretation of the Maoist period to Western audiences. As a result of my study, I will present my research on Discovery Day and to the Chinese Literature Club. I will also submit my findings for publication in the *Wittenberg East Asian Studies Journal*, a journal devoted to undergraduate research.

#### **Student's Personal Statement**

I have recently transferred to USC from the College of Charleston to expand and enhance my opportunities as a Chinese studies student. I have created and tailored an Interdisciplinary Studies Major to focus specifically on Chinese language and literature. I have also previously conducted much research towards understanding modern Chinese literature and its relation to modern Chinese history as well as conducted multiple meetings of the Chinese Literature Club concerning my research. In addition to my literary study, I have already completed a four month language intensive study abroad in China and have completed a total of six semesters of Chinese at the College of Charleston and USC. Needless to say, I am very confident in my Chinese language skills. Thus, the Magellan Scholar program will enable me to continue my research and take it a step further. It is important for me to challenge the current scholarship produced concerning Maoist China. I want to help forge a new study of China that shatters the main Cold War narrative and ultimately continue this research into my graduate career.

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<sup>a</sup> Barmé, Geremie. *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader*. New York: M.E.Sharpe, 1996.

<sup>b</sup> Rofel, Lisa. *Other Maternities: Gendered Yearnings in China After Socialism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

<sup>c</sup>Chen, Xiaomei. *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.

<sup>d</sup> Link, Perry. *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literary System*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000.

<sup>e</sup>Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. Oshkosh: Basic Books, 2001.

Chao, Ts'ung. *The Communist Program for Literature and Art in China*. HK: Union Research Institute, 1955.

Chen, Tina Mai. "Proletarian White and Working Bodies in Mao's China." *positions* 11, 2 (Fall 2003): 361-93

----- "Dressing for the Party: Clothing, Citizenship, and Gender Formation in Mao's China." *Fashion Theory* 5, 2 (June 2001): 143-172.

Chen, Xiaoming. "The Disappearance of Truth: From Realism to Modernism in China." In Chung, ed. *In the Party Spirit: Socialist Realism and Literary Practice in the Soviet Union, East Germany and China*. Critical Studies no. 6. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996, 158-65.

Friedman, Edward. "Democracy and 'Mao Fever.'" *Journal of Contemporary China* 6 (Summer 1994): 84-95.

Mu, Aili. *Mao Zedong's Aesthetic Ideology and Its Function*. Ph.d. diss. SUNY, Stonybrook, 1996.

## Magellan Scholar BUDGET FORM

Sarah Kelsey Hipp

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student salary	Hours	Rate	Subtotal
Taking classes			\$1,100.00
Not taking classes			\$0.00

Fringe: Student salary * student fringe rate <sup>1</sup>			
Taking classes	\$1,100.00	1.00%	\$11.00
Not taking classes	\$0.00	8.45%	\$0.00

<b>Materials/Supplies</b>	<b>\$329.00</b>
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<b>Travel</b>	<b>\$1,560.00</b>
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<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,000.00</b>
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### Budget Justification

**Student Salary:** Indicate timeframe of student work

While taking summer and semester classes: salary (average 16 hours per week for 28 weeks): \$1,100.00

**Materials/Supplies:** Indicate quantity and price

Cultural event (includes tickets to model operas): \$90  
 Button factory tour: \$4  
 Maoist era cultural symbols: \$125  
 Publication fee: \$50  
 Print costs (includes cost for converting digital images to prints): \$60

**Travel:** Indicate location, purpose of travel, estimate costs.

Travel expenses while conducting research outside of Chengdu.  
 Airfare ( Chengdu to Beijing @ \$185  
     Beijing to Shanghai @ \$175  
     Shanghai to Chengdu @ \$250): \$610  
 Lodging (9 nights @ \$70 per night): \$630  
 Meals ( \$10/meal twice a day for 11 days): \$220  
 Taxis (to and from airport, during stay in Beijing, Shanghai, and Chengdu): \$100

**Budgeted amounts based on current exchange rate and are subject to change.**