

Mao Zedong's Cultural Theory and China's Three Mass-Culture Debates: A Tentative Study of Culture, Society and Politics

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Introduction: the Irrelevant but Similar Mass-Culture Debates In the East and the West

Mass culture, in a most simplified way, probably can be defined as a culture for the masses. But in different social and historical contexts, mass culture may place its emphasis on different aspects and thus its implications may be different. For instance, in the West mass culture refers not only to the form and content of the culture, but also refers to the means of cultural production. These three aspects almost have an equal share with an economic purpose as the core driving force of the mass culture, as MacDonald (1957) describes that a "mass culture" manufactures wholesale for the market. However, in China while mass culture also refers to a culture for the masses, it focuses mainly on the form and content of culture, e.g. the appearance and theme of culture, which are considered as the differentiations between a culture that serves the masses and a culture that uses the masses for profits. The mass culture in China bears some similarities with the Western mass culture, but it also evidently bears marks of the Soviet model of mass culture - "one of propaganda and pedagogy rather than of entertainment" (Ibid, p. 60). Nevertheless, it is important to note that, although China's mass culture was heavily based on the Marxist culture theory, it still is deeply rooted in the country's own history and civilization..

As there have been mass-culture debates in the West, China has also experienced the same kind of debate. But because of the long-time "Bamboo Curtain," the nation's intentional isolation from the outside world, mainly the West, the debates in China and the West do not have any direct

correlations. However, what is interesting is that both the debates have touched some similar questions. Therefore, it is worth examining and comparing the mass-culture debates in the two different social contexts.

Over the past fifty years or so, three debates related to mass-culture have occurred in China, each happening with a different historical background and under different social conditions. The first debate occurred during the Anti-Japanese War period around the 1940s. The second debate occurred after the Chinese Communist Party took power in 1949 and began its "socialist construction" period around the 1950s. The third one happened during the reform period around the 1980s after the Party decided to implement the newly established open policy, decentralization policy, and pluralism policy. Although the three debates were all centered on the issue of mass culture, the emphases as well as purposes were different. For example, while the first two debates concentrated on the high culture and mass culture issue, the recent one was actually a battle involving China's traditional culture and the Western mass culture.

The purpose of this article is to examine and compare China's three mass-culture debates. The efforts of this study aim at seeking to find out the implications of these debates and interrelations of culture, society and politics in contemporary China.

The First Mass-Culture Debate: A Battle between the Feudalist Culture and the New Democratic Culture

China's first mass culture debate occurred during the Anti-Japanese War period from the early 1930s to the mid-1940s. The debate was very much related to the Japanese invasion. This is understandable because, in China, culture is always considered as a reflection and an expression of society. Although China's Anti-Japanese War did not start until 1937, the cultural debate could be traced back to 1931 when the Japanese first invaded China.

The debate actually occurred in two different areas - both geographically and politically. Part of the debate was happening in big cities such as Shanghai and Beijing which were already occupied by the Japanese but were home to most of China's writers and artists. The debate was also happening in Yan'an, a remote mountain area which was the headquarters of the Chinese Communist Party from the late 1930's to the late 1940's, until the

Party took power over the whole nation in 1949. The debate in the Japanese-occupied areas was mainly between the so-called "left revolutionary writers" and the "right reactionary writers." The debate in Yan'an, where then was called the "Liberated Area," was mainly between the "Marxist writers" and the "bourgeois writers" within the Communist Party. However, the central issues debated in the two areas were basically the same:

1. When a nation is invaded, what should the writers and artists do?
2. What kind of "new culture" should writers and artists to pursue?
3. Should writers and artists purposely use culture to serve a certain type/level of people?
4. Should writers and artists debase the "high" culture to meet the mass criteria, just in order to mobilize the masses?

Many perspectives were presented during the debates in both areas. The debates were fierce. Nevertheless, the foci of the debates were finally concentrated on the following fundamental principles:

1. How to look at the then-culture? (The question actually implied how to treat traditional Chinese culture.)
2. What should the purposes and functions of a culture be - only for artistic expression, or for something else?
3. Even if a mass culture is desirable (during the debates, no one publicly denied that culture should be for the masses), what kind of content and forms should the "mass culture" take? In other words, should writers and artists "elevate" the masses or, in an opposite way, simply "popularize" the high culture?

Unlike the mass culture debate in the West, which probably never involved people other than professionals and academics, in China the mass culture debate involved many ordinary people from all walks and at all levels. Particularly, Mao Zedong, the then Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, as well as a Marxist thinker and theorist, not only actively participated in the debate, but also declared some principles for writers and artists, thus directing the debate.

As early as in the late 1920s, Mao already paid much attention to cultural issues. In one of his articles talking about the Chinese society, he pointed out that "In China 90 percent of the people have no culture or education, and of these the overwhelming majority are peasants" (1927, p. 1). Mao further indicated that in China culture and education "have always been reserved exclusively for the landlords, and the peasants were denied

access to them," but "the culture of the landlords is created by the peasants, for its source is the sweat and blood of the peasants" (Ibid).

When the debate began and many were battling over "empty" theories, in another article Mao (1938) reminded his comrades that "Marxism must be integrated with the specific characteristics of our country and given a national form before it can be put into practice." Therefore, as Mao insisted, to debate one should study the history of the nation - a nation of several thousand years of history with its own characteristics and its own type of treasures - as well as the situation and trends of the current social movement.

Around the late 1930s and the early 1940s, when China's Anti-Japanese War was entering a critical moment, the debate too reached a climax. In 1940, Mao published an article in which for the first time he systematically described his blueprint of the "new democratic culture" - a Chinese-styled mass-culture. Mao stated that a given culture is the ideological reflection of the politics and economy of a given society. According to Mao (1939), the present culture was a combination of imperialist culture and semi-feudal culture, because it was a reflection of the political and economic control of imperialism and feudalism which advocated old ideologies and opposed new ideologies; this culture must be swept away, especially when the Anti-Japanese War entered a new stage.

Obviously, Mao's culture theory is virtually derived from Marxist culture theories which regards a culture in a class society as an ideological state apparatus. But moreover, Mao emphasized the social functions of culture in a more explicit way: "Revolutionary culture is a powerful weapon for the people. Ideologically it prepares the way for revolution. From the saying: 'Without a revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement,' we can see how important the revolutionary movement is to the revolution in practice....[We] should have [our] own cultural army in the Anti-Japanese War, and this army is the broad mass of the people" (1940, p. 32). Speaking of the nature of his proposed mass-culture, Mao suggested that it be a "national, scientific and mass culture," and that it be "anti-imperialist and anti-feudal." As for the purpose of the culture, Mao stressed that the culture should belong to the people and "should serve the toiling masses of workers and peasants who make up over 90 percent of the nation's population" (Ibid).

Two years later in 1942, Mao made a well-known speech at the Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature. The forum lasted three weeks. At the end of the forum, Mao was invited to give a talk and his talk virtually became a conclusion to the mass-culture debate. For half of a century, Mao's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature" has been regarded as the basis for a fundamental culture theory of Chinese-styled Marxism. Not long ago, a series of conferences were held in China to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Mao's "Talks."

In "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature," Mao not only repeated some essential viewpoints of the Marxist culture theory, but also initiated his Chinese-styled Marxist culture theory, which pays much attention to the country's social problems. Besides once again stressing the importance, purpose and nature of the new mass culture, Mao also elaborated the content, forms, means and many other aspects of his proposed new mass culture. Several key points of his "Talks" are worth noting.

1. About the purpose of the new mass culture

More directly, Mao (1942) stated that the purpose of creating a mass culture is to gradually reduce the domain and weaken the influence of the feudal culture which appears in a form of "traditional culture" but virtually serves imperialist aggression. According to Mao, "In our struggle for the liberation of the Chinese people there are various fronts, two of which are: the cultural front and the military front. To defeat the enemy we must rely primarily on armed troops. But this is not enough; we also need a cultural army which is absolutely indispensable for our own unity and the defeat of the enemy" (Ibid, p. 62).

2. About the nature of the new mass culture

Mao admitted that the new mass culture does have a remarkable class "trademark," but he argued that there is nothing wrong with it. According to him, "Ideological expressions in the form of artistic or literary work are the product of the human brain reflecting the life of a given society" and "A fundamental Marxist viewpoint is that existence determines consciousness, that is, the objective reality of class struggle

and national struggle determines our thoughts and feelings" (Ibid, p. 73; p. 84).

3. Whom should the new mass culture serve?

Mao emphasized that "For Whom" is an essential principle of the new mass culture. According to Mao, "the masses" is not an abstract conception: "The overwhelming majority constituting more than 90 percent of our total population are the workers, peasants, soldiers and the urban petty bourgeoisie. So our art and literature are first of all for the workers, the class which leads the revolution. Secondly, they are for the peasants, the most numerous and steadfast allies in the revolution" (Ibid, p. 78).

4. How should the new mass culture work?

Should writers and artists devote themselves "to elevation or to popularization?" Mao answered that "The problem facing the workers, peasants and soldiers today is this: they are engaged in a ruthless and sanguinary struggle against the enemy, they are illiterate and uncultured as a result of the prolonged rule of the feudal and bourgeois classes and therefore they badly need a widespread campaign of enlightenment; they eagerly seek culture, knowledge, art and literature which meet their immediate needs." Mao claimed that "under present conditions, therefore, popularization is the more pressing task. To despise and neglect it is wrong" (Ibid, p. 83; p. 87).

After years of argument, the first mass-culture debate was ended with Mao's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature." In the following years, under the directions of Mao's mass-culture theory and the principles of the Party's culture policy, the goal of establishing a new democratic mass culture was basically achieved—in Yan'an, the Party founded an art school to train "new revolutionary writers and artists." After the training, most of the writers and artists were assigned to the Anti-Japanese War frontier or the vast rural areas to deliver the new mass culture to millions of soldiers and peasants. In cities like Shanghai and Beijing, the "revolutionary writers and artists" went to manufactories or opened schools to teach workers and petty

bourgeoisie to read, paint, sing and dance. Meanwhile numerous novels, films, operas, and other artistic works emerged, in which soldiers, workers, peasants and petty bourgeoisie were treated as the leading roles and appeared as heroes. Many of these works are masterpieces and have been kept as repertory in the nation's cultural stages since then.

(China's Anti-Japanese War ended in 1945 with Japanese defeat in the Second World War. After that, there was a four-year civil war in the country between the Chinese Communist Party and the China National Party, the KMT. In 1949, the civil war ended with the establishment of the People's Republic of China by the CCP and the occupation of Taiwan by the KMT.)

The Second Mass-Culture Debate: A Battle between the Proletariat Culture and the Bourgeois Culture

Although the first mass-culture debate was over, it did not mean the cultural issue was solved forever. According to the Marxist theory, in a class society class struggle is the real and only dynamic which makes the society move forward. Class struggle is endless until a society becomes classless. So, even if a society enters a new historical period, class struggle will still exist and it will be unavoidably reflected in various cultural respects. Both Marx and Mao call this the "law" of social evolution. However, almost a decade later after the first mass-culture debate, around the mid-1950s China's second mass culture debate occurred, and it partially led to the well-known ten-year "Cultural Revolution" from 1966 to 1976.

Since 1949, after several years of both political and economical recoveries from the Anti-Japanese War, the Civil War, and the Korea War, in the mid-1950s China was entering a new era of "socialist development"--the first five-year national development plan period (Chang, 1989), which included an urgent need to speed up both "economic and cultural development" (Mao, 1957a).

The second mass-culture debate bore distinct historical and social characteristics of that period. For example, the foci of the debate were on the following issues:

1. What should a new "socialist mass culture" be like? When the "turbulent class struggle" was over, should the new mass culture be the same as that of war-period type?

2. Should the socialist mass culture be built on a base of traditional culture with a neutral nature, or should it still be built on a base of politicized culture with a class nature?
3. How should the socialist mass culture be constructed? In other words, should the Party leave writers and artists alone to do their "own" work, or should this be done under the Party's guidance?

The Chinese Communist Party seemed rather active in encouraging the debate, saying that the debate was necessary and useful for writers and artists to get a clear idea and to make efforts to build a socialist mass culture. The Party even issued a special culture policy, entitled "Letting A Hundred Flowers Blossom and Letting A Hundred Schools of Thought Contend." In an article, Mao explained that "The policy of letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend is designed to promote the flowering of the arts and the progress of science; it is designed to enable a socialist culture to thrive in our land" (1957a, p. 120).

The period from 1956 to 1957 was therefore one of considerable intellectual activity in the country. There was more open criticism than at any time since 1949 when the Party became the national leadership (Chang, 1989). During the debate, participants expressed various independent views – targeting not only "cultural aspects," but political and social aspects as well. Mao was also deeply involved in the second debate, and later on he made a long speech at the Chinese Communist Party's National Conference on Propaganda Work to direct, and virtually to conclude, the second debate. In this speech, Mao's culture theory was further developed and colored much more with the Marxist theoretical framework but in a modified and advanced way. Mao's main ideas about the new socialist mass culture can be summarized as the following:

1. The class struggle during China's socialist construction period will appear mainly through the form of cultural/ideological confrontation between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

Mao widened and absolutized the class struggle. He defended his position by saying that the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie will remain the principal contradiction in socialist society. Mao (1957b) argued that the large-scale, turbulent class struggles of the masses of the previous revolutionary periods have come to an end, but there is still class struggle—mainly on the political and ideological fronts—and it is very

acute too. The question of ideology has now become very important. It is because, as Mao further stated:

In our country bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology, and Marxist ideology will continue to exist for a long time. Basically, the socialist system has been established in our country. We have won the basic victory in transforming the ownership of the means of production, but we have not yet won complete victory on the political and ideological fronts. In the ideological field, the question of who will win in the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie has not been really settled yet. We still have to wage a protracted struggle against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology. It is wrong not to understand this and to give up ideological struggle (Ibid, p. 160).

Mao therefore stressed that all erroneous ideas, all poisonous weeds, all ghosts and monsters, must be subjected to criticism; in no circumstance should they be allowed to spread unchecked (Ibid). In Mao's articles and speeches, words such as ghosts and monsters are always referred to feudalism and capitalism.

2. The ideological struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie will be a long term battle.

Mao stated that there are at least two factors which make the ideological struggle a long-term one. The first factor is that "The new social system has only just been established and requires time for its consolidation" (Ibid, p. 143). Mao warned that it must not be assumed that the new system can be completely consolidated at the moment it is established, for that is impossible. It has to be consolidated step by step. To achieve its ultimate consolidation, it is necessary not only to bring about the socialist industrialization of the country and persevere in the socialist revolution on the economic front, but also to carry on constant and arduous socialist revolutionary struggles and socialist education on political and ideological fronts. Mao therefore indicated that "In China, the struggle to consolidate the socialist system, the struggle to decide whether socialism or capitalism will prevail, will still take a long historical period" (Ibid).

The second factor is the resistance from the bourgeoisie. Mao pointed out that "The bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie are bound to give

expression to their ideologies." So, "It is inevitable that they should stubbornly persist in expressing themselves in every way possible on political and ideological questions. You can't expect them not to do so" (1957a, p. 124). The reason is simple, according to Mao, because "the influence of the bourgeoisie and of the intellectuals who come from the old society will remain in our country as the ideology of a class for a long time to come; Failure to grasp this, or still worse, failure to understand it at all, can lead to the gravest mistake—to ignoring the necessity of waging the struggle in the ideological field" (Ibid, pp. 122-3).

3. The new socialist mass culture should still have a proletariat base.

Essentially, the new socialist mass culture should be a proletariat culture. To reinforce his argument, Mao cited Lenin's perspective: "Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, 'a cog and a screw' of one single great social-democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically-conscious vanguard of the entire working class" (Lenin, 1962, p. 45).

Specifically, Mao set up six criteria for his proposed new socialist mass culture (1950a, p. 126):

- (1) It should help to unite, not to divide, the people of our various nationalities;
- (2) It should be beneficial, not harmful, to socialist transformation and socialist construction;
- (3) It should help consolidate, not undermine or weaken, the people's democratic dictatorship;
- (4) It should help consolidate, not undermine or weaken, democratic centralism;
- (5) It should strengthen, not cast off or weaken, the leadership of the Communist Party;
- (6) It should be beneficial, not harmful, to international socialist solidarity and the solidarity of the peace-loving peoples of the world.

Although the second mass-culture debate was ended soon after Mao's speech came to the public, the practice in the cultural/ideological field did not change remarkably. Mao thus severely criticized the situation, saying it was unthinkable that the "socialist culture stages" were still occupied by "ghosts, monsters, ancient emperors, kings, general and officials, but not the workers, peasants and soldiers,"--a phenomenon which had gone to an "intolerable degree." To be fair, this phenomenon was in fact caused by the

Party's internal struggle: some Party leaders stood on the opposite of Mao and supported the other cultural line – the so-called "bourgeois line within the Party." Nevertheless, Mao decided to change this situation. His decision was to carry out a cultural revolution. As an icon of the masses, Mao was able to do whatever he wanted to do. The Cultural Revolution started in the cultural/ideological field, but it was soon expanded to actually all fields of the country. However, the ten-year Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, immediately following Mao's death and the smash of the "Gang of Four," which included Mao's wife and three of his closest colleagues, and became a nightmare with a reputation of "a disaster of China's modern history."

The Third Mass-Culture Debate: A Battle between National Culture and Foreign Culture

China's third mass-culture debate occurred during the 1980s after the country entered a reform period. Like the previous two, the third debate was also lasted several years. What was different was that, although the third debate was also politicized, as were the first and the second, an academic orientation was somewhat seen in the third debate.

The third debate had much to do with China's new social context, and bore a prominent historical color--the openness to the outside world. In 1978, two years after the end of the "Cultural Revolution," China started its reform. The reform was first initiated in the economic field, and later on was introduced to the political field as well. In China, where Marxism has always been claimed as the principle for doing everything, culture has also always been considered as an ideology and a vehicle/channel for delivering ideology. According to both Marx and Mao Zedong, this is due to culture's superstructure nature, which relies on the economic base but also has its counter-impetus to the economic base. Therefore, the reform, particularly that in the political field, has inevitably touched the cultural issues.

Under the Party's reformist leadership headed by Deng Xiaoping, and because of the Party's three new policies--the open policy, the decentralization policy and the pluralism policy, which have been the principal policies for the reform, the third debate on China's mass-culture was much more open, deep, free, and perhaps also more fierce, when compared to the first and second one. During the climax of the third debate, within three years and in only a few influential journals and newspapers

there were more than 700 articles published (*People's Daily*, Feb. 22, 1990, p. 1). Many scholars who were silent for several decades just for the political "safety's sake" came out and voiced their viewpoints. A number of conferences were held, and even several international conferences regarding the traditional Chinese culture and Western mass culture were organized.

The following are some of the "hot" issues which were widely debated during the reform period:

1. How to evaluate the country's present culture? Is it a real mass-culture, or is it just a Party culture? Furthermore, is it a culture, or is it only "cultural politics?"
2. Should the pre-Maoist culture be maintained or should it be discarded?
3. How to look at the Western culture? Should China only open its "economic door" to the West, or should it open its "cultural door"?
4. Even if China should also open its "cultural door" to the West, then, should it only let the so-called Western "high" culture enter the country, or should it also allow the Western mass culture to enter the country?

Not surprisingly, during this debate occurring in a new historical and social context, various perspectives were expressed. Among them, three main viewpoints can be summarized. One was that the Chinese culture has a tradition of thousands of years and contains many unique national identities. The traditional Chinese culture, even in different historical and social context, heavily reflects Chinese philosophy, which is a precious treasure of not only the country itself but of mankind as well (*Wenhui Daily*, Oct. 21, 1989, p. 1; *People's Daily*, Apr. 28, 1990, p. 2). On the other hand, the Western mass culture is typically a culture of commercialism, a metaphor for money, violence and women, a reflection of vulgarity, and a stimulus for sensory enjoyment (*Liberation Daily*, Sept. 17, 1988, p. 8; *People's Daily*, Feb. 22, 1990, p. 1). The conclusion of this point of view was that the traditional Chinese culture should be maintained and the Western mass-culture should be kept away.

Another idea contended that the traditional Chinese culture has become a heavy social burden. It has been hindering the society from moving forward, especially when the world has already entered a new phase (*People's Daily*, Apr. 18, 1989, p. 4). This idea compared India, Egypt, and China, and concluded that, at least partially, the national cultures of these

countries, which contain many elements of conservatism, such as closeness and isolation, have barricaded their process of modernity. They argued that this phenomenon can be found not only just in the above-mentioned countries, but it can also be seen in the Western countries. For instance, according to these people, the United States, which has only some 200 years of history, is more advanced than Britain which has a much longer capitalist history. One explanation for this is because Britain has been bearing a heavy cultural burden. Also, during the debate the case of Japan was frequently cited. Although the Japanese culture has deep roots in the traditional Chinese culture, it abandoned some elements of the Chinese culture and picked up many new cultural aspects from the modern Western culture. The present superiority of Japan over many Western countries, including even the U.S., according to this idea, is very much an issue of culture (*People's Daily*, Jan. 17, 1991, p. 2). This idea further argued that Western culture, especially the Western mass culture, contains many conceptions and beliefs of democracy, science and equity, which are desperately lacking in the traditional Chinese culture. In their view, the Western mass culture is a reflection of modernization, social progression and technological development (*Jiangsu Periodical*, 1987, p. 3). This idea admitted that opening China to the Western mass culture may yield a social impact on Chinese culture and the impact may be quite strong; however, the impact should not be regarded as a threat. In contrast, the impact should be considered useful and necessary. To let the Western mass culture in would not cause the traditional Chinese culture to become extinct. Rather, it would bring about new impetus to the nation's "aged" culture (*Wenhui Daily*, Jan. 15, 1987, p. 5).

Still another idea was that while totally boycotting the West is not desirable, neither is total openness. To these people, the traditional Chinese culture is both a treasure and a burden, and the Western mass culture is both a thing to learn and a thing to criticize (*People's Daily*, Mar. 1, 1990, p. 2). According to this idea, the most serious weakness of the Chinese culture is its conservativeness, which has been an invisible barrier to people's thinking and acting and has caused many other drawbacks in the culture. On the other hand, the most problematic aspect of the Western mass culture is its profit-oriented nature, for which the culture is designed and manipulated, bringing about many negative results (*Wenhui Daily*, Jan. 15, 1988, p. 7). Their standpoint was a compromise: no more isolation, but no wholesale of Americanization either. They suggested that the right treatment to this issue

should be "selectively abandoning the negative elements of the traditional Chinese culture and critically absorbing the positive elements of the Western culture." This idea sounded like an ideal one; however, it also suffered severe attacks from both the pro and con Western mass culture perspectives, accusing it of being an unrealistic goal which is "easy to say, but hard to achieve" (*People's Daily*, Aug. 21, 1989, p. 2).

The third debate did not have an "official" conclusion as the first and second one had, and this time the Party was not directly involved. Benefited from the reform and the debate as well, however, the "cultural door" was opened, and for a while, it was opened so widely, more than any other then-socialist countries in the world. As a result, after half of a century of isolation, a great many Western cultural products entered China again, and the majority were from the U.S., and most of the cultural products were those of the mass culture. Television series, video programs, popular music, magazines, newspapers, novels and fashion shows poured into China, and many of them, for a while, became "hot" stuff all over the country (*Beijing Review*, 1991).

Nevertheless, China's third mass-culture debate did subside later on, and the "opening" wave was eventually constrained. After the student democratic movement in 1989, the Party realized that what Mao said about the culture was "extremely correct": Culture is not just a neutral entertainment, but a reflection of ideology and a tool for ideological struggle –the latter is the main form of class struggle in the socialism period; any neglect of culture/ideology would lead to the extinction of the communist Party. The country's authorities have has therefore issued some new policies for cultural affairs. However, compared to those policies in the previous periods, the current policies are relatively lenient and loose. For example, the key points of the new policies are (*Beijing Review*, 1989):

1. Culture should always uphold the principle of serving the socialism and serving the people – here socialism can be interpreted as politics and people can be interpreted as the masses;
2. Culture should prosper under the principle of "Letting a hundred flowers blossom and letting a hundred schools of thought contend" – all kinds of cultures should have equal opportunities;
3. Any culture, whether it is national or foreign, as long as it is not anti-socialism and pornographic, should be allowed to have its place in

people's daily life – the bottom line is even much "lower" than those in many non-communist countries where the "national sovereignty" has become a big concern.

Put in another way, the new mass culture proposed by the Party during the reform period should be: (1) mass-oriented; (2) of various forms; and (3) both politically and artistically healthy. Seemingly and at least temporarily it looks as if the third debate had a somewhat happy ending.

Conclusion: An Important Issue for Further Study – Would the Western Mass Culture Be A Threat to China's National Sovereignty?

The culture issue in China, probably also in elsewhere, is really a complicated one. It is not only related to politics and economy, but also very much related to ideology. As a preliminary study, it is hard to draw sound conclusions. However, based on the above review and analysis of the three debates, it is possible and useful to make some initial comments. At least, two things should be noted.

First, the most important difference between the Western mass culture and the Chinese mass culture is their driving forces: basically, the core force driving China's mass culture is not economy, but political initiatives. As MacDonald (1957) rightly states, the mass culture derived from the Soviet model is manufactured for mass consumption by technicians employed by the ruling class and is not an expression of either the individual artist or the common people themselves; like the mass culture in the West, it exploits rather than satisfies the cultural needs of the masses, though for political rather than commercial reasons. Clearly, China's first two debates show that the mass culture was explicitly treated as a tool for the Party's political ends. The third debate also shows that it was a product of politics. It was more or less utilized for political purposes: to mobilize the masses, to raise their consciousness, and to push the old society to catch up with its global neighbors.

Second, each of China's three mass culture debates has its unique colors – a distinct historical mark. The first one may be regarded as a battle between the feudalist culture and the new democratic culture. The second one may be regarded as a battle between the proletariat culture and the bourgeois culture. The third debate was a little bit different from the previous two. It may be regarded as a battle between national culture and

foreign culture. In sum, all the three debates have vividly mirrored both Mao's and the Marxist culture theories, which regard culture as a social structure as well as a political force, and assign the most important position as a social educator to mass culture, due to its effects on people, its profound influence on society, and its power on ideology (Seldes, 1957, p. 80).

However, it should also be noted that any so-called debate under the Chinese Communist system could never be a real debate. On one hand, the ruling class would not allow other social forces to have an equal opportunity to air their voices. And on the other hand, Mao Zedong was hailed as father of the party and nation, foremost Marxist-Leninist theorist, and beacon light for the oppressed people of China. "His policies were always correct, his words always omniscient, and his attitude always proper" (Scalapino, 1963). When Mao was personally and directly involved with the debate, it could only be naive to expect a fair debate.

Nevertheless, examining and comparing China's three mass-culture debates, both among themselves and in relation to the Western ones, are beneficial to the study of the Eastern mass-culture and the Western mass-culture. The Western mass-culture and the mass-culture in China are seen so differently, but they originated almost from the same historical, social and technological factors. The Western mass-culture was created and developed under the conditions such as: (a) political democracy and popular education broke down the old upper-class monopoly of culture; (b) business enterprise found a profitable market in the cultural demand of the newly awakened masses; and (c) the advance of technology made possible the cheap cultural production and created new media which are specially well adapted to mass manufacture and distribution (MacDonald, 1957, p. 59). The mass culture in China was also created and developed by these factors, except that some modifications are needed for the second condition: it was not the business enterprise but the country's authorities that found political profits in the mass-culture. Therefore, it is the difference in their second factor that makes the Western mass-culture and the mass-culture in China so different - one bears an obvious commercial mark and one is with an evident political color. However, while the Western mass-culture has been criticized for being not an art but a manufactured commodity, the mass-culture in China has been viewed as the service of the state to conform with accepted notions of the public good (Warshow, 1971; Seldes, 1957).

In spite of the differences between the Western mass-culture and the mass-culture in China, both of them have reflected both positive and negative aspects (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972). As MacDonald (1957) analyzes, mass culture breaks down the wall, integrating the masses into a debased form of high culture and thus becoming an instrument of political domination. In both the Western and Eastern societies – the West and the East, mass-culture has been more than merely a culture: it has been a dynamic, revolutionary force, breaking down the old barriers of class and traditions; it mixes and scrambles everything together, producing what might be called homogenized.

However, the differences between the purposes of creating and developing mass culture in the East and the West have caused some conflicts. In recent years, the entering of the Western mass-culture to China has begun to bring about impacts on the Chinese culture. What are these impacts? Why does the former, which only has a few hundred years of history, have such strong impact on the latter, which has thousands of years of history? And then, how are these impacts realized and what would the further potential results of these impacts be? More specifically, would the Western mass-culture be a threat to China's national sovereignty? And, would the Chinese authorities, who are afraid of this, close the door again? All these questions are worth further studying, and in order to answer these questions it is necessary and useful to look back at China's cultural history, including the three mass-culture debates, to get some ideas about the relationships among culture, society and politics in different historical and social contexts.

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