

Conflict Genres and Management Strategies During China's "Ten Years of Turmoil"

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Abstract

Because China's Cultural Revolution era unleashed a large amount of publicly expressed social and interpersonal conflict, it can provide a useful window on conflict management processes employed in China both historically and today. Using the extensive autobiographical literature that continues to be published by participants in the Cultural Revolution, this paper investigates the conflict genres that characterized the CR's two major phases, and explores the rational basis of the conflict management strategies employed during the conflict episodes reported in these autobiographies. The paper concludes that many of the conflict genres and conflict management strategies are still used within Chinese society today, albeit in a less violence-prone form.

Contemporary China is a complex nation whose 20th century history is filled with tumultuous conflicts. The overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911, the civil war between the communists and nationalists which ended with the communist party victory in 1949, Mao Zedong's attempt to destroy traditional Chinese culture in order to try to create a utopian communist state between 1949 and 1976, and the economic reforms of the Deng Xiaoping era since 1978 have all contributed to deep fractures within Chinese society and promoted considerable potential for conflict both within the party leadership and among the people. In trying to understand Chinese approaches to social conflict, one significant window on the process concerns the conflict genres and conflict management strategies used during China's "Ten Years of Turmoil"- the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (CR). For during this decade-long period between May 1966 and September 1976, deeply-rooted societal conflicts that had been festering since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 were all brought publicly (and often violently) to the surface for resolution - one way or another. Some of the conflicts were Olympian - being between Mao Zedong and his inner circle of revolutionary leaders who had fought an extended civil war together to found the PRC. For they were developing differing visions concerning what the New China should be like and how to proceed with the business of governing the nation they had founded. Other conflicts were at the more mundane level - as parents and children, teachers and students, friend and friend were all pitted against one another by the ideological and social demands of the CR.

Although China's CR ended over 20 years ago with the death of its motivating force, Mao Zedong, it continues to generate a steady stream of social scientific (Huang, 1996; Wang, 1995), historical (Yan & Gao, 1996), and autobiographical (Niu-Niu, 1995; Yang, 1997) literature as people who survived the CR's extreme level of personal and social conflict tell the stories of their lives and explore the meaning of their experiences. The autobiographical literature covers a large range of conflict experience, from the Olympian (Li, 1994) to the mundane (Sun-Childers & Childers, 1996). Some of the autobiographies are written from a victim's point of view (Cheng, 1988; Lo & Kinderman, 1980; Wu & Li, 1993); others are written from the violator's viewpoint (Gao, 1987; Ma, 1995); and still others shift their perspective as the narrators describe their dawning disillusionment with the CR's values and methods (Liang & Shapiro, 1984). And since the CR may be divided into two distinct periods - the increasingly violent Red Guard phase (May 1966-April 1969) and the post-Red Guard phase (May 1969-October 1976) - some focus only on the first phase (Gao, 1987; Ling, 1972) and others primarily on the second (Min, 1993; Wong, 1996). Most, however cross over between the two periods, merely emphasizing in greater detail one period or the other. But, whatever period of time they cover, all of the autobiographies report many conflict episodes and how they are managed.

Using these autobiographies as the primary corpus for analysis, this paper explores the nature of the conflict genres and conflict management strategies used during this period of extreme social upheaval in recent Chinese history. Although the Olympian conflicts among Mao and his comrades provide the constant backdrop for events at the grassroots level - because they were responsible for unleashing the degree of grassroots conflict displayed during the CR - these higher echelon conflicts will not be the central focus here. Rather, after a brief introduction to the rhetorical situation for conflict communication that was created during the CR, this paper focuses on the grassroots conflict genres and management patterns reflected in most of the extant autobiographical materials.

The Cultural Revolution as a "Rhetorical Situation" for Grassroots Conflict Communication

The grassroots conflicts which characterize the CR were unleashed because of a fundamental and long-standing rift between Mao and his closest associates concerning the direction the party should take in developing China's future. From the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, Mao had insisted upon ideological purity and rapid advancement through socialism toward a utopian communist state. The population was therefore subjected to an almost annual series of political, social and economic movements: Land Reform in 1950-51, Thought Reform in 1951, the Three Antis and Five Antis in 1952-53, the Campaign to Uproot Hidden Counterrevolutionaries in 1955, and the far more extensive and debilitating Anti-Rightist movement of 1957, each pitting some portion of the population against another in order to reduce resistance and reeducate the former political and social elites .

Having created a climate of terrorized silence through the Anti-Rightist Campaign, where even his closest revolutionary comrades were afraid of the consequences of disagreeing with him, Mao then implemented his Great Leap Forward (1958-62), during which his unchallenged policies of collectivized farming, backyard steel mills, and close and deep planting of crops not only deforested large portions of China but also created a famine that killed 30 million people (Becker, 1996). While still technically Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), by the end of the Great Leap Forward, Mao's authority was in decline and leaders such as Liu Shaoqi (named Chairman of the Republic in 1959) and Deng

Xiaoping (General Party Secretary of the CCP) had begun to reverse a number of Mao's failed utopian policies in order to feed the population. Li (1994) provides a vivid description of the behind the scenes Olympian conflicts.

In this atmosphere of conflict among the topmost leadership, where his influence was progressively declining, Mao began laying the groundwork for bypassing the central leadership with a direct appeal to the people to destroy the old culture (and, of course, the leaders who supported it). Then, in May 1966, after successfully promoting a Maoist cult of personality (Chang, 1991; Yan & Gao, 1996), Mao declared the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and called upon the youth to help him get rid of the "four olds" - old thoughts, old culture, old customs, and old practices - without identifying precisely what these were. In this way, Mao promoted extreme conflicts among the people because virtually anyone could declare almost anything as representing the old culture and proceed to destroy it. It is, then, in this general rhetorical situation - characterized by extreme popular loyalty to Mao, terror concerning one's own fate if one failed to demonstrate that loyalty publicly at all times, relative uncertainty concerning who in particular were the counterrevolutionary revisionists and capitalist roaders to be eliminated, and an urgent call to destroy the old culture in order to make room for the new, that the grassroots conflicts during the CR were played out.

Conflict Episodes during the Red Guard Phase

As mentioned above, the CR can be divided into two phases. During the Red Guard phase, millions of young people answered Mao's call for a cultural revolution by forming what they called Red Guard units in order to take a collective action against anyone or anything which might be a vestige of the old culture. Lasting a little less than three years, this phase was characterized by increasingly violent and destructive conflict episodes in which virtually all aspects of traditional institutional authority were attacked. Eventually, competing Red Guard factions turned their violence upon one another - as they vied for power in the institutional vacuum they were creating - and Mao demobilized them, thereby initiating the second phase of the CR. Thus, this section looks first at the conflict genres which characterize the RG phase of the CR and then examines in more detail how the autobiographers describe the conflict management strategies employed within these conflict genres and episodes.

Conflict Genres

During the first phase of the CR four genres of conflict episodes are predominant within the autobiographical narratives: public struggle meetings, direct confrontations between Red Guards and citizens during home raids conducted by the Red Guards, more formal institutional interrogations, and one-to-one interpersonal confrontations between a wide variety of categories of individuals.

Public Struggle Meetings

By far the most spectacular conflict genre was the theatrically staged public struggle meeting. In this genre, a large prearranged audience would be assembled and one or more targeted individuals would be paraded before the audience to be "struggled" against - that is denounced and ridiculed. Frequently the accused would be adorned with a dunce cap, drenched with ink, given a "yin-yang" haircut, and have slogans pasted over their bodies (Chang, 1991; Wu & Li, 1993) in order to increase the humiliation. The verbal portion of the conflict event would then be orchestrated by a leader who would give a speech vividly depicting the target's "crimes." If the accused tried to deny the accusations or respond in any

way short of a confession, the crowd would usually drown them out with choric chanting of slogans such as “Down with the counterrevolutionary so-and-so,” and physical torture would be administered, to the accompaniment of additional orchestrated chants from the audience. The target would then be confronted again with evidence of their crimes, which now include the failure to confess when given the opportunity. Several cycles of this public conflict might occur within a single meeting - especially if there were several different targets on stage for the evening. The conflict episode would usually culminate in frenzied slogan chanting and violence against the accused if there was no confession. From a conflict management viewpoint, the object of this highly stylized public display of social conflict was not “resolution” per se; rather, it was designed to serve as a tangible symbolic lesson to others to toe the ideological line or suffer similar consequences. This genre of conflict episodes is probably better thought of as being “stage managed” rather than managed in the normal sense.

Red Guard Raids

Another distinctive genre of conflict episodes during this period was Red Guard raids on private homes in order to confront people who were thought to harbor vestiges of the “Four Olds” among their personal possessions. In these conflict episodes a group of Red Guards would raucously enter a home, make accusations concerning the target’s capitalist, bourgeois or anti-Mao beliefs, property or lifestyle, identify anything that could conceivably be signs of these crimes and either summarily destroy them or carry them away as evidence. This conflict genre, while not as publicly theatrical as a struggle meeting, was still relatively well stage-managed to provide community object lessons for others to follow since the RGs were quite vociferous about their arrival at someone’s home and equally demonstrative within the home and afterwards.

For example, Cheng (1988) vividly describes one of the conflict strategies used during a RG raid on her home. According to Cheng, the episode began with “the confusing sound of hysterical voices shouting slogans” (p. 70) and 30 to 40 RGs loudly demanding to be let in - a strategy designed to provoke enough fear to forestall any effort at self defense. Once inside, the leader of the RGs formally announced the beginning of the conflict episode with an air of absolute authority: “We are Red Guards. We have come to take revolutionary action against you” (p. 71). Thus, the RG leader begins the conflict episode with a legitimization strategy based on their authority as RGs. Cheng responds by trying to deny their legitimate authority, holding up a copy of the PRC Constitution and arguing from a higher authority: “It’s against the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China to enter a private house without a search warrant” (p. 71). The RG leader responds by reasserting their legitimacy, this time based upon yet a higher authority, the words of Mao: “The Constitution is abolished. It was a document written by the Revisionists within the Communist party. We recognize only the teachings of our Great Leader Chairman Mao” (p. 71). Cheng tries once more to argue from an even higher authority: “Only the People’s Congress has the power to change the Constitution” (p. 71), to which the RG leader conclusively responds, “We have abolished it. What can you do about it?” thereby ending the episode with no possibility of further rejoinder from Cheng. Subsequently many of her rare and very valuable possessions were summarily smashed for her further edification.

Institutional Interrogations

The third conflict genre, described exclusively in victim’s accounts, concerns the more formal interrogations conducted by institutional authorities once a person has been placed in

either a prison or labor reform camp. Once again, the goal of the conflict episode is to produce a confession of guilt concerning some accusation. Although reenacted throughout China and having considerable theatrical qualities for the participants, these conflict episodes were not staged for public consumption and education. They appear to be managed more for the conversion of the accused (i.e., acceptance of their guilt since most fully believed in their innocence) and the reassurance of the accuser concerning the rightness of the accusation, since such interrogations were apparently witnessed surreptitiously by the interrogator's superiors (Cheng, 1988).

This conflict genre appears to proceed through a series of stages. Interrogees were usually taken to the interrogation room with no prior notice and required to read a selection from *The Quotations from Chairman Mao* - the quotation serving as a text for the interrogator to begin a particular line of questioning or reasoning. For example, "When the enemies with guns are annihilated, the enemies without guns still remain," might be used to try to convince the target that he or she was "an enemy without guns." Subsequently, accusations would be made and a request for a confession would be urged, often supported with the slogan, "Lenient treatment to those who confess their crimes, severity to those who refuse." If the interrogee denied the accusation and argued in their own defense, the interrogator might claim that the government already had the hard evidence of the "crime" and that others had already confessed and implicated the interrogee so there was no use holding out further. As described above for Red Guard raids, the interrogators frequently resort to arguments from authority - quotations from Mao, the power of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, and so forth. While physical torture is occasionally reported, this genre is more frequently characterized by attempts to convince the accused that they will be better off confessing than by refusing. So the genre features veiled threats followed by solitary confinement and other deprivations. Virtually always, the conflict episode ends with the requirement that the accused write a detailed autobiographical statement covering some period of time that was the focus of a particular interrogation session.

One-to-One Interpersonal Confrontations

A persistent theme throughout the autobiographies is the damage done to the fabric of routine social life during the CR. For suddenly, everyone was in danger of being accused by their friends, neighbors, children and work associates, and being denounced for some real or imagined political indiscretion. This created a climate of mistrust wherein one needed to be prepared either to accuse others or risk being accused oneself, consequently fostering a high potential for interpersonal conflict at every level of society and within all categories of relationship (Feng, 1996; Wen, 1995).

Because Mao's goal during the RG phase was to destroy traditional Chinese culture in order to create an ideological space for his utopian communist vision, interpersonal conflict during the CR ripped at the fabric of all normal social relationships. Among the most significant parties between whom interpersonal conflict episodes are narrated include: teachers and students, husbands and wives, parents and children, sibling and sibling, friend and friend, RG's and traditional authorities, RG's and the narrator or narrator's family, conservative and rebel RG factions, and the narrator and various categories of institutional representatives. In order to explore the interpersonal conflict genre in greater detail, the next section looks at the conflict management strategies used within the interpersonal genre of social conflict as described in conflict episode among parties such as these.

Conflict Management Strategies

Although it would be easy to dismiss the conflicts during the CR as somehow “irrational,” because the movement so rapidly degenerated into extreme violence and most of the accusations seem so outrageous, this would be missing an important point about the rationality of the conflict strategies actually displayed. For, however disagreeably many of the conflict episodes ended, most of the episodes narrated in the autobiographies exhibit rather common inductive and deductive strategic patterns. In fact, while the autobiographies illustrate a complex array of conflict management patterns, a small number of recurrent verbal strategies seems to characterize a large portion of the conflict interactions narrated. These include argument from: (a) personal authority, (b) classifications, categories and names, (c) quotations from Mao or slogans based on Mao’s words, (d) signs, and (e) narrative probability.

Personal Authority

Chinese society has long honored traditional sources of authority - imperial rulers, educated civil servants, teachers, husbands, and parents - whose words or policies provided a direct way of solving social conflicts. Because one of Mao’s goals was to destroy traditional lines of authority, one of the most fundamental themes during the RG phase of the CR concerns the question of who the legitimate voices of authority would be. Thus, as we saw above, in confronting citizens during home raids RGs used both their own personal authority and then the authority of Mao in order to support their actions.

The shifting sands of authority-based conflict resolution were especially evident in the relationships between students and teachers, where one day the teachers might be fully in charge of their classes and ordering students to be quiet or giving them homework assignments to perform, and the next be led off to a struggle meeting to answer for their own “crimes.” A particularly vivid description of the shift from teacher to student based authority in student-teacher conflict is presented in Luo (1990).

At the beginning of an incident in which the teacher begins fully in charge of the classroom and lesson, the teacher publicly chastises the narrator for being late to class, singles out her written composition as praiseworthy before other class members, accuses a “Rightist” janitor of malingering, and conducts a class discussion of the narrator’s composition. However, during the discussion, a soon-to-be RG student challenges the political content of the essay and demands an explanation from the teacher and the narrator. Luo writes:

“Don’t try to avoid my question!” Xiao-yi Wu interrupted. “Answer me! Is Chairman Mao a good comrade? Has Chairman Mao ever made a mistake?”

The sensitive nature of the question terrified Teacher Pang, and he had difficulty formulating a response. “Well, of course, Chairman Mao is a good comrade, and he has always been great and wise.” “Don’t beat around the bush! Tell me! Has he ever made a mistake?” Xiao-yi Wu demanded. “Of course not, of course the Chairman has never made a mistake,” Teacher Pang said automatically, as though he were raising his arm to block a blow to his face. Well, all right then. In that case, this composition is anti-Revolutionary,” Xiao-yi Wu said confidently, and rose to his feet ready to leave. “I refuse to join this discussion.” The classroom was silent. (p. 8)

Here the teacher’s authority even to evaluate a student composition evaporates under the student Wu’s invocation of the authority of Mao’s “perfection” through the student’s personal assertion. The conflict is resolved in student Wu’s favor simply by invocation of Mao’s name as authority.

Classifications, Categories and Name

A significant element of human rationality is the ability to formulate meaningful categories and treat all members of a category as equivalent for a particular purpose in spite of their superficial differences. Thus, we gather all four-legged objects that may be sat upon into a category which we name as “chair,” so that the name identifies the category. We may then reason from the category/label because we know the features that define the category: “This is a chair so I can sit on it.”

During the CR, people were divided into often quite vaguely defined “Red,” “Gray” and “Black” categories and then treated “equivalently” to one another during conflict episodes because they were labeled by a particular name and its associated category. Lo (1989) describes a speech given by a student from a “poor peasant” class background that illustrates the importance of the categories as premises for how potential conflicts might be handled:

The first goal of the revolution is to clarify class lines. Those who are from the poorest peasant families or the poor factory workers’ families are the Red Sort. They are revolutionaries. Those who come from a capitalist family or a landlord family or a well-off peasant family are the Black Sort. They are enemies. The rest are the Gray Sort, who will either be revolutionaries or enemies - depending on their attitude towards the revolution. . . . From now on, the Black Sort are not allowed to smile or to cry. Their smiles mean they are laughing at the revolution; their tears are shed for their lost past. The Black Sort are not allowed to sing songs because their voices are poison arrows directed towards the revolution. (p. 8-9)

As the movement developed, Five Red Categories and Seven Black Categories were generally recognized and used to judge people (Gao & Yan, 1996). However, such labels and their associated categories continued to proliferate as the need for new labels arose. Gao (1987) provides a particularly colorful list of the accusatory categories and names which could be applied as condemnatory epithets during conflict episodes.

The list of accusations grew longer by the day: hooligans and bad eggs, filthy rich peasants and son-of-a-bitch landlords, bloodsucking capitalists and neobourgeoisie, historical counterrevolutionaries and active counterrevolutionaries, rightists and ultra rightists, alien class elements and degenerate elements, reactionaries and opportunists, counterrevolutionary revisionists, imperialist running dogs, and spies. Students stood in the roles of prosecutor, judge, and police. No defense was allowed. Any teacher who protested was certainly a liar. (p. 53)

Such a list of accusatory labels for categories made for very vivid vituperative name-calling during conflict episodes, and was a major feature of conflict management during the CR since it permitted its users to justify almost any action based on the negative characteristics associated with the label. Thus, teachers could be beaten by their students because they were “reactionary academic authorities,” “bourgeoisie intellectuals,” and even “the stinking ninth category.”

Quotations or Slogans Based on Mao’s Words

Mao Zedong was a prolific writer and political speaker with a very quotable style. During the CR, Mao's quotations were frequently used as deductive premises during conflict episodes to justify beliefs or action (Dittmer & Chen, 1981). For example, Liang (1984) writes concerning a conflict between himself and his father where his father was criticizing him for mistreating a teacher in the name of Mao:

It was unbearable to be lectured after I had expected so much glory. I answered bravely, "Doesn't Chairman Mao want us to criticize Capitalist thought? If teachers have Capitalist thought shouldn't they be criticized? Didn't you tell me yourself that we must obey the Party and carry out the Cultural Revolution?"

"Capitalist thought?" he exclaimed. . . . "Of course it's right to heed Chairman Mao's call, but the purpose of this movement is to ferret out our enemies, not to attack our friends." . . . Father went into his bedroom . . . and returned thumbing through a precious copy of the *Quotations of Chairman Mao*, the "Little Red Book" . . . "Look here," he said. "Chairman Mao may have said, 'It's right to rebel,' but he also said, 'Among Revolutionary comrades, one should not use a rough manner.'" I took the book and looked at the place Father had marked, and my heart hesitated because he was right, Chairman Mao *had* said those words. (p. 49)

Here the conflict is resolved not by an appeal to Mao's personal authority in general but to his specific words as deductive premises for both parties to reason from.

Using Mao's statements as a way to clinch an argument is a frequently repeated conflict management pattern within the autobiographies, but the quotation need not come only at the end of the episode. Very often the initiator will try to forestall a conflict in the first place by introducing an argument with a quotation from Mao as a formal premise to reason from so that the deductive pattern is enthymematically realized. For example, in a conflict over whether to admit a particular gay classmate to the RGs, an opponent argues, "Chairman Mao says everybody living in a class society is stamped with the brand of his class. 'A dragon begets a dragons, a phoenix begets phoenixes, and a mouse's children can only dig holes.' They will waver in the course of the Cultural Revolution. We cannot admit them" (p. 84). The intent is to use the Maoist maxim to end the discussion.

Luo (1990) provides two additional examples that also illustrate the formulaic nature of the introduction to whichever quotation has been selected. For in each instance, the quotation is employed in order to provide enthymematic support for the speaker's position, and the speaker's formula marks this intention. In the first instance, the truthfulness of a witness is under dispute.

"Unless you're still unsure about Zhang's anti-Revolutionary roots, you must regard with suspicion everything he did from 1957 to 1958. Chairman Mao taught us, 'Those whom our enemies support we should oppose; those whom our enemies oppose, we should support' (p. 85).

Later in the same incident, when a request for a member of the group to go get a signature on a confession has not been responded to quickly enough, the speaker says:

"Chairman Mao teaches us, 'It is our duty to be responsible to the people for our words and deeds.' Asking Zhang to sign will fulfill your responsibility to us;

Zhang's signing will fulfill his responsibility to his own words. I assume you can do this for us." (p. 85)

Signs

The first phase of the CR placed great emphasis on discovering "hidden class enemies" who "wave the Red Flag in order to destroy the Red Flag." For this reason many conflict episodes concern the interpretation of signs that would reveal one's hidden anti-socialist intentions. Thus, if oneself (or in many cases one's ancestors) had ever worked in any capacity at any time for the Nationalist cause, worked for a foreign-owned company, owned land or anything else of real material value, owned attractive clothes, used makeup, lived overseas, participated in a funeral service, defended oneself or another against RG attacks, been declared a Rightist, been a government bureaucrat, made a scribal error in writing about Mao, or failed to recite from memory the quotations from Chairman Mao when required, these were taken as signs of one's class enemy status and were enough to lead to denunciation and worse. And we have seen above how even a smile or a tear could be interpreted as a sign of one's "class stance" and invalidate one's position within a conflict episode. Wu (Wu & Li, 1993) writes about how the details of his practices as an English teacher at Anhui University were taken as signs of his anti-Maoist beliefs.

I was charged with resisting educational reform by persisting in using original literary works in English rather than English translations of Chinese political articles as teaching material; spreading enemy propaganda in my listening comprehension course; advertising the decadent bourgeois life-style depicted in O. Henry's short story "The Cop and the Anthem," which happened to contain a mallard duck, Chablis, and a demitasse; holding up a bourgeois English schoolteacher as a model to prettify all bourgeois intellectuals; attacking the New China by innuendo with *Gulliver's Travels*, and so on. (p. 194-195)

Here, all these specific teaching practices are taken as signs of Wu's underlying resistance to the values of the Communist revolution.

Narrative Probability

Because so much of the daily practice of the CR involved trying to prove that an accused person was a closet capitalist, KMT spy, counterrevolutionary, or other bad element, mountains of material about citizens' earlier activities were gathered in order to substantiate these claims. Then these details were woven into a story that would "prove" the victim guilty of whatever accusation had been made.

Cheng's (1988) recounting of her first formal interrogation session presents a clear example of how the details of one's life can be rearranged in order to construct a far different storyline from the one the narrator herself understood them to entail. Having told her interrogator that during the previous nine years she had been only a housewife, the interrogator creates a very different interpretive story.

"A housewife, were you?" the interrogator asked sarcastically. He snorted and went on. "Did you spend your time sewing, knitting, or cooking? No, you studied Marxism, read every sort of magazine and newspaper, copied down speeches by our Party and government leaders, and kept a file of resolutions passed at Party Central

Committee meetings. When the Red Guards went to your house to take revolutionary action against you, they found your bookshelves full of political books and your desk drawers full of notes in your handwriting. You had a powerful shortwave radio in your bedroom. Your servants said you were in there regularly to listen to foreign broadcasts. What housewife did all that? A housewife's concern is for her family and her home. Your concern was for politics. You were never a simple housewife by any stretch of the imagination. (p. 158)

Having heard this interpretation of her actions and possessions, Cheng tries to recast the selected details within her preferred narrative frame and reestablish the narrative probability of her actions in context.

"I'm not ashamed that my interests went beyond the house and my family. I thought the People's Government and the Communist Party encouraged women to study Marxism and to take an interest in political affairs. I merely did what I thought was the right thing to do, since women in China were liberated by the Communist Party," I told him. (p. 158)

However, Cheng's response does not end the reconstruction, as the interrogator explicitly denies the narrative probability of Cheng's constructions of the circumstances of her life.

"If you were so keen to study Marxism to raise your political consciousness, why did you not join an indoctrination class? . . . If you were interested in politics because you wished to be a good citizen, why did you turn up two hours late to cast your vote in an election for the Shanghai People's Congress? Was that the behavior of a woman conscious of her own liberation? Don't smear gold paint on your face to make yourself look like a harmless Buddha. Why not admit that your interests in politics had an ulterior purpose?"

Thus, we can see in Cheng's narrative of this conflict how both parties tried to use narrative probability to establish the correctness of their positions. Cheng loses primarily because, in the climate of the times where Mao has indicated his preference for the story that there are numerous hidden counterrevolutionaries and foreign spies who wave the red flag to oppose the red flag, her story has less plausibility to those empowered to act on her case.

Conflict Episodes during the Post-Red Guard Phase

Although it can be argued that the CR ended with the demise of the RG phase after the Ninth Party Congress of the CCP in April 1969 (Huang, 1996), the official Chinese interpretation, historical evidence, and the autobiographical materials all suggest that the period between May 1969 and the death of Mao in 1976 represents a second - albeit more complex and subtle - phase of the CR. For the assault on the old culture not only continued but there was now also an attempt to build the new Maoist culture in the aftermath. This section examines only briefly the nature of the conflict genres and conflict management strategies used during this second phase, which would require its own article-length paper to do the autobiographical literature full justice.

Conflict Genres

During the seven year period after the RG movement was terminated, the rhetorical situation of the CR changed dramatically. Having rid himself of his top ideological competitors and all but destroyed the communist bureaucratic system built up after 1949, Mao disarmed the Red Guards and sent tens of thousands of urban youths to the distant countryside for “reeducation” by the peasants. Some conflict genres from the RG phase disappear entirely (there are no more RG raids); some change in their character (struggle meetings lose most of their emotional frenzy, and their theatricality becomes more “pro forma” and perfunctory, as people’s enthusiasm evaporates and they try to return to a sense of daily routine); some genres continue (formal institutional interrogations), but with differing emphases as the shifting sands of Maoist policy pursue their zig zag path from year to year; and new genres either come into being or become featured for the first time in the narratives.

Most significantly, however, interpersonal conflict, while still motivated by CR themes, also begins to take on an air of the routine and mundane. Issues of life and love begin to appear in the later narratives, especially as youth in the countryside begin to discover their own sexuality and desire to begin creating families. The conflicts, while still set within language of the CR, begin to sound more universal and familiar. Furthermore, even the conflicts with institutional authorities, although concerned with the aftermath of the RG phase of the CR, also have a kind of institutional familiarity - dealing with the bureaucracy in order to get certain goals accomplished: trying to restore the good name of one’s parents, get permission to have one’s city residence privileges reinstated, and so forth. Conflicts between students and teachers are no longer reported because the schools have been transformed with thoroughly Maoist content. With some exceptions, routine marital and intrafamily conflict is virtually ignored within the autobiographies of this era because the autobiographers are more interested in how their families cope with their new situations. And conflicts with friends no longer relate as directly to revolutionary themes, but rather to more general social-life themes because people are trying to reconstruct a sense of routine life under the new order.

As noted above, many of the old conflict genres simply lapse in importance partially because of sheer exhaustion and battle fatigue. However, new genres also come into being which have their own dynamics and features. Three of the more widely reported conflict genres in the literature occur between (a) the urban educated youths and the illiterate rural peasants assigned to “educate” them in proletarian ways, (b) the camp guards and the rustivating youth, and (c) the neighborhood committees who were assigned the task of monitoring people in their homes and neighborhoods and report back to higher authorities the goings on under their watchful eyes.

Urban/Educated Youth and Rural/Uneducated Peasants

In late 1968, Mao began sending the urban youth, who had formed the core of the RG movement, to the countryside in order to learn from the peasants what proletarian/agrarian life was all about. They must learn to carry their own water, grow their own food, and live without the privileges of city life. However, while many youth enthusiastically followed Mao’s call, they were unprepared for either the lifestyle or the values they encountered. Furthermore, since the youth were not experienced in agrarian ways, they were relatively unable to contribute equally to the production of food and were often a burden to their “teachers.” Thus, there were many opportunities for conflict between the rustivating youth and the peasants. While the narratives of this conflict are more often humorous rather than disastrous, the conflict episodes between the illiterate peasants and mostly literate youths have

their own distinct themes and patterns. For example, Lo (1989) writes of her first encounter with her supervising peasant, when Lo inquires about the kitchen in her lodging:

“Why is the kitchen made of straw?” I asked. “It could easily catch on fire so easily.”
“You’re too demanding. Seems a big brick house to sleep in is not enough. Now you demand a brick kitchen. What’ll you want next?” Zhong Fong answered. I was stunned. I didn’t expect such hostility. (p. 195)

Illustrating both the hostility and the use of Mao’s quotations to forestall objections, Lo writes of a subsequent conflict episode:

Early next morning Zhong Fong kicked loudly at my door to wake me up. She shouted, “Out! To the fields! You should know you came to the countryside to receive your education from us peasants, not to sleep like a pig. Chairman Mao teaches us, ‘All the high school students must eat like a peasant, sleep like a peasant, and work in the field like a peasant.’” I got up. This woman was really something, I thought. She even used Mao’s quotations to wake me up in the early morning. (p. 196)

Camp Guards and the Rusticating Youth

By the early 1970s, because so many youths were being sent away in a very short period of time, they were generally not assigned to particular peasant families, but organized into large (13-20,000 students) military style collective farms and divided into small (400 students) companies (Min, 1993). Their work was supervised by young but politically trustworthy camp guards who controlled virtually every aspect of the youths’ lives. Some of the broad range of routine conflicts recounted include topics concerning work loads and production points, time off to visit parents or recover from diseases, proper social/sexual behavior under all manner of camp circumstances, and the amount and diligence of political study required during the evenings. Because the common thread in these conflicts concerns the youths’ “reeducation,” the camp guards were thoroughly versed in the latest quotations from Mao and used them in ways which have been illustrated earlier.

Residents’ Committees and the Narrator’s Family

One of the distinctive innovations during the post-RG phase of the CR was the rise in importance of the neighborhood Residents’ Committees - trusted and nosy elders who kept an eye out for unacceptable behavior and whose role it was to talk to people whose behavior might be in need of some “correction.” Describing their function, Cheng (1988) says:

Officers of the Residents’ Committee dealt directly with the people and reported to the police. The organization was responsible for the weekly political indoctrination of the residents, running the day-care centers, distributing ration coupons, allocating birth quotas, and arbitrating disputes between neighbors. In some instances, officers of the Residents’ committee even helped the police solve crimes and capture criminals, as they had such an knowledge of the life of the people in their charge. (p. 378)

Because the relatively personal nature of the topics which Residents' Committee members were authorized to keep watch over, conflicts were apparently frequent but subtle, since the Committee members' reports had the power to do considerable damage to the residents. Cheng portrays a number of incidents after her release from prison detention where her responses to Committee inquiries would appear to be cooperative while not actually revealing the information the neighborhood committee members were fishing for - all given in order to manage the potential for conflict in order to assure that no overt conflict was likely to develop. Many of the other autobiographies reveal a similar willingness to lie by omission in order to reduce the potential for overt conflict in the post-RG phase of the Cultural Revolution.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to explore the conflict genres and management strategies employed during an extreme period of social turmoil within China's recent history, the Cultural Revolution. Using autobiographies from participants as a data base, a number of conflict genres and strategies were identified: public humiliations, institutional interrogations (sometimes with threats of physical violence), argument's from personal or institutional authority, vaguely defined negative classifications and vituperative name-calling, enthymematic reasoning from Maoist slogans and other verbal formulas, selective use of signs to paint a villainous picture of the other party, and construction of storylines whose patterns create a narrative probability in favor of one party or the other. Additional methods of handling social conflict from this era might also have been mentioned: reeducation through forced labor, written self-criticisms, metaphoric analogies, metonymic vituperation, recruitment of third party support for one's side, and so forth.

However, the point to be made is that most of these strategies for managing social conflict are still widely used within contemporary China. They were not unique to the CR period (except in their extremes) and did not disappear with the death of Mao and the arrest of the Gang of Four. One hears echoes of condemnation by vague classifications and vituperative name-calling in China's response to former Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten's introduction of democratic electoral reforms, where China's Lu Ping called him a villain for a thousand generations; and Schoenhals (1992) has documented how carefully the Chinese leadership works to achieve official formulas for talking about all manner of public issues so that everyone will be operating from a common set of formulaic premises. And speeches given by China's leaders after Hong Kong's return to China on July 1, 1997, displayed a highly formulaic rhetoric. Similarly, Kluver (1996) has demonstrated how the Chinese have tried to renarrate their history in order to make their current economic reforms seem to correspond with the Party's historical policies. So, although the CR has generally been repudiated among China's leadership, and the new era of openness initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 has ushered in a new era of openness and reform, there remain important lessons to learn by studying the rhetoric of conflict and conflict management during China's Cultural Revolution.

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