Weeping for Chairman Mao Zedong

Sentimental Politics of Tears in China in 1976

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In 1976, the artist Chen Danqing 陈丹青 (born 1953) presented his oil painting *Tears Flooding the Autumnal Fields* (泪水灑滿豐收田) as part of a larger series detailing the life of Tibetans.[1] It depicted peasants crying after having received the news of Mao Zedong's death while harvesting wheat from their fields. Chen, a graduate of the China Central Academy of Fine Arts, is famous for his realist paintings that contributed to the Mao cult, most prominently the painting "Writing a Letter to Chairman Mao" expressing the desire of the young generation in the 1960s to leave the big cities and pursue the revolution in the countryside.[2]

The 1976 painting shows the immediate reaction to the sad news. The transistor radio points to the development in the rural areas of the high plateau and indicates the far-reaching impact of the central government's propaganda throughout the country. In addition, it emphasizes the immediacy of collective reaction, with the peasants bursting into tears almost simultaneously. Tears are one of the most effective forms of sentimental communication. Their affective power is derived precisely from their immediacy, for they are viewed as an uncontrollable reaction to a saddening event, may it be the death of a beloved family member in a personal context or the case of a collective catastrophe, such as earthquakes, inundations, or defeats in war battles (Lutz).

1 For an overview see Chen Daqing, "Série de peintures sur le Tibet et moi." http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/french/Culture/article/2015-02/28/content_671047.htm (last access April 10, 2024).

2 This refers to the send-down youth movement where young people (zhiqing) of the urban areas—either willingly or forced—moved to rural areas to live and work as part of the "Up the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement." (see Davies)

Figure 1: Chen Danqing, Tears Flooding the Autumnal Fields, 1976, oil on canvas, 164x235 cm

http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/french/Culture/article/2015-02/28/content_671047.htm

Though the death of Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893–1976), the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), was not unexpected, it stirred up the whole country. Workers, peasants, and party cadres expressed their sorrow in the media, as did representatives of ethnic minorities—like the Tibetans—, foreign dignitaries, and Maoist groups in Japan, West Europe, and North America, let alone the governments of socialist countries. This dimension of the chairman's mourning—a global icon of revolutionary movements in the 20th century had passed—was extraordinary. The weeping and wailing found its way into a sheer number of publications and testimonials, ranging from newspaper reports and memorial literature to photographs and TV documentaries, including a 700-page-long volume documenting the grief of foreign political and economic leaders by providing a Chinese translation of their speeches, poems and writings of condolences (Xinhua News Agency).

In contrast to the preceding demise of politicians and party leaders in the Mao era, such as the former state president Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇 (November 12, 1969), who had been persecuted during the Cultural Revolution due to alleged capitalist tendencies in his thought and behavior, and the former premier Zhou Enlai 周恩来 (January 8, 1976), who was a popular figure in the revolutionary period, the case of Mao Zedong was—given his exalted status—exceptional.

The news reports of his funeral and the nationwide mass memorial meetings reveal a particular sentimental reaction that, in the preceding decades of class struggle, enforced reeducation, and political persecution would have been unimaginable. This paper shows that the decision to allow for sentimental reactions in the public realm was not only a question of decorum and respect but also a question of "feeling rules" (Hochschild 1979, 1983), that is, regulating who was allowed to cry in public, on which occasion, and to what extent. To do so was of utmost concern for the Party, at the time when the country had just lost its paramount leader, which is reflected in the powerful images used in propaganda in late 1976.

The Chairman's Death

Mao Zedong experienced a deteriorating health since January 1976. Ten years earlier, on July 16, 1966, he still had entered the 11th cross-Yangtze contest, a mass swim across China's largest river in the city of Wuhan to prove his health and physical strength shortly before starting the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). In the communist hagiography he appears as a powerful leader who did not cry easily, even when receiving notice that his son Mao Anying 毛岸英 had died at the front line in Korea in 1950 (Quan Yanchi 50). In early 1976, his increasing weakness no longer allowed him to read and comment on official documents. Accordingly, he tasked Hua Guofeng 华国锋 (1921–2008) to take over government responsibility by uttering six characters: "With you in charge, I'm at ease" (*Ni banshi wo fangxin* 你办事我放心) that quickly became a popular saying in the media and political discourse to legitimize the Hua's succession.[3] Hua took over the post as acting Premier of the PRC and as the First Vice Chairman of the CCP after Zhou Enlai's death on January 8, 1976. He repeated this saying on numerous occasions to justify his position as new head of state and government.

On September 9, Mao's heart stopped beating after having suffered a second heart attack on June 26 and a third one on September 2. Being a heavy

3 It goes without saying that Hua Guofeng actively popularized this saying for the sake of his own legitimacy that he had to defend against the aspirations of Mao's wife, Jiang Qing. For the numerous versions of propaganda posters on this issue, see the Stefan Landsberger Collection, https://chineseposters.net/themes/huaguofeng-in-charge (last access April 30, 2024).

smoker and suffering from pneumonia, he had developed breathing problems for which Henry Kissinger had sent a respirator machine to Beijing (after his secret mission to China in 1971). In addition, he was affected by a worsening amyotrophic lateral sclerosis that had been diagnosed in 1974. The chairman was declared dead shortly after midnight, and on the same night, Hua Guofeng called for a meeting of the Politburo during which it was decided—against Mao's wish—to embalm the body and to display it in the Great Hall of the People so that the Chinese people could bid farewell (Li Zhisui, chapter 1).

During the day of September 9, the news of his passing spread throughout the country. An official proclamation was made in the afternoon when the Central People's Broadcasting Station in Beijing (中央人民广播电台) broadcasted the *Message to the Whole Party, the Whole Army and the People of All Nationalities Throughout the Country* (告全党全军全国各族人民书) issued by Central Committee of the CCP, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the State Council, and the Military Commission of the Central Committee of the CCP (*People's Daily*, September 10, 1976; Walder 1–14). According to the announcement, no amusement was to take place in the following week, flags were to be lowered half-pole during the mourning period, and the official funeral ceremony was to take place on September 18.

The news reports in the following days emphasized two important messages directed to the people. It was imperative, first, to express gratitude for the chairman's historical achievements and, second, to prevent the sad feelings from paralyzing the nation. Among the mourning people, the Red Guards (*Hongweibing*) received particular attention in state media in the first days after September 9. In the summer of 1966, the radicalized youth had been tasked by Mao Zedong to conduct the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The ensuing decade was a period of extensive political chaos that affected every part of the country. The Red Guards made large-scale efforts to rid China of liberal and bourgeois elements, to sanitize Chinese culture by destroying the "four olds" ('old ideas', 'old culture', 'old customs', and 'old habits'), and to take the class struggle to an unknown level. In struggle sessions and self-criticism, the class enemy—ranging from intellectuals to persons who had had contact with relatives in foreign countries or who had studied abroad before 1949—was declared an enemy of the people, with many being executed (Leese 2007; Walder).

Having been key in the establishment of the Mao cult and instrumental in pushing it to extremes when destroying tradition in order to establish a new and truly socialist society (Landsberger), the Red Guards were most affected by the passing of their beloved leader to whom they had dedicated their youth.

The *Peking Review* reports in the article "Carry Out Chairman Mao's Behests and Carry the Cause of Proletarian Revolution Through to the End":

> Nurtured by the Mao Tsetung Thought, Red Guards and Little Red Guards in the capital could not hold back their tears at the sight of Chairman Mao's remains. They vowed: 'Esteemed and beloved Chairman Mao, we will study well and make progress every day in line with your teachings. We will live up to your expectations, be worthy successors to the revolutionary cause and carry through to the end the proletarian revolutionary cause you pioneered!' (*Peking Review* 39/1976, 24)

Figure 2: Red Guards breaking into tears after receiving the news of Mao Zedong's death

Photo taken by Jiang Shaowu 蒋少武 1976 in Shenyang[4]

4 Charles Liu, "Chinese Unleash Rare Criticism of Chairman Mao on 39th Anniversary of His Death." September 10, 2015, https://www.thenanfang.com/support-chairman-mao-waning-40th-anniversary-death/. I thank Zhao Juan for establishing contact to his family.

News reports of the following days were full of information detailing how every person in the country reacted to the shock, and how peasants and workers in all provinces and prefectures were expressing their grief over the loss of the Chairman (Wakeman 1988). Foreigners living in Shanghai as translators and language teachers at Shanghai International Studies University were reportedly also unable to stop their tears (Masi 92–93). Deviating reactions were rare yet existed. Some individuals from the classes of peasants and workers who had been persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, for instance, celebrated the Chairman's death for which they were arrested and convicted. The accusation was that they had sullied the reputation of socialism or even tried to topple the socialist system (Leese 2020, prologue). In a time of crisis—the country had just lost its leader—such feelings could not be left unregulated, even when expressed only privately. Accordingly, the Communist Party went at great lengths to control public feelings, starting with the organization of the funeral rally on Tiananmen Square.[5]

The Funeral Rally on Tiananmen Square

The official funeral ceremony took place in Tiananmen Square on September 18. It was organized meticulously by the funeral committee that took fully into account the pressing issue of succession. Hua Guofeng, among other members of the Politburo, feared that the rivalry of different factions in the Cultural Revolution, the omnipresence of class struggle, and the craving for power by Jiang Qing 江青 (1914–1991), Mao's widow and the leading member of the Gang of Four (the left-wing faction of the Communist Party that was responsible for some of the most ruthless persecutions in the Cultural Revolution and that tried to gain control of the Party), could potentially result in chaos and conflict (Wakeman 261).

According to the report "The Nation Grieves with Deepest Sorrow" in the *Peking Review*, "all people outdoors stood in silent tribute, all vehicles stopped running and hundreds of thousands of five-star flags flew at half-

5 I rely here on Ann Cvetkovich who in her book *Depression—A Public Feeling* (Durham/London: Duke Univ. Press, 2012) situates a negative feeling such as depression in a social-political context instead of reducing it to a biological phenomenon defined by chemical imbalances of the brain. By using feeling instead of affect or emotion, she is able to integrate bodily and cognitive elements.

mast in mourning across the length and breadth of China's vast territory [...] Hundreds of millions of people were plunged into the deepest grief over the loss of their respected and beloved great leader" (*Peking Review* 39/1976, 39). Another piece entitled "Solemn Mass Meeting to Mourn the Great Leader and Chairman Mao Tse-tung" provides the following details of the ceremony:

> At 3 p.m. sharp, Comrade Wang Hung-wen, Vice-Chairman of the C.P.C. Central Committee, declared the memorial meeting open. The million mourners observed a three-minute silence amid the solemn strains of funeral music played by a 500-man military band. Live transmissions over the radio and television carried the proceedings to innumerable homes. The funeral music was heard in every corner of the country—in the cities and villages, over towering mountain ranges and rivers, and in the vast frontier regions. The great motherland fell silent. The 800 million people of China, their eyes filled with tears, stood in silent tribute. (*Peking Review*, 39/1976, 8–9)

The *Peking Review* further declared under the title "Over 300,000 People Pay Respects to Remains of the Great Leader and Teacher Chairman Mao—Seven-day Solemn Mourning Ceremony in Peking's Great Hall of the People":

> The passing of Chairman Mao Tse-tung, the esteemed and beloved great leader of our Party, our army and the people of all nationalities in our country and the great teacher of the international proletariat and the oppressed nations and oppressed people, has brought tremendous grief to the people across China and throughout the world. (*Peking Review* 39/1976, 17)

The depth of grief is described by detailing the behavior and emotional reactions of the mourning workers, peasants, cadres, and intellectuals who had the opportunity in the preceding week (September 11–17) to enter the Great Hall of the People on the Western side of Tiananmen Square and see their Great Leader for the last time:

> The mourning ceremony began at 10 a.m. on September 11. A P.L.A. band began playing the solemn funeral music. With boundless esteem, respect and love for Chairman Mao, the Party and state leaders stood before the catafalque and paid their respects to Chairman Mao. They bowed three times and stood in silent tribute for three minutes [...] From early dawn till late at night, workers, peasants, P.L.A. fighters and commanders, people of various nationalities and circles, and Party, government and army cadres

> came to Tien An Men Square in a steady stream from all parts of the city. Group after group, they filed into the hall with heavy steps […] The hall was filled with deepest grief. Slowly filing past to pay their respects to their most esteemed and beloved leader, they could not restrain their bitter grief or hold back the tears […] The steps of the magnificent Great Hall of the People were wet with tears. The funeral music in the solemn mourning hall was drowned by the sound of sobbing. (*Peking Review*, 39/1976, 18–19)

This feeling was intensified by the revolutionary song *The East is Red* (*Dongfanghong*) which had been heard regularly during the Cultural Revolution, with its most moving part being "The east is red, the sun rises. China has brought forth a Mao Tsetung. He works for the people's happiness, he is the people's great savior" (*Peking Review* 39/1976, 10). The song was followed by Hua Guofeng's memorial speech (*Funeral of Mao* 1976, 1:20:11). In it, Hua emphasized the significance of the "Three Dos and Three Don'ts," that is to practice Marxism-Leninism and not revisionism, to unite and not to split, and to be open and correct in attitude and not to become involved in conspiracies and intrigues (Representatives of Workers, Peasants, Soldiers, Students, Merchants, and the Masses of the Capital hold a Meeting). Given the fact that Mao had used the same expression to criticize the Gang of Four, the message of this quotation was clear: Hua claimed the power. He was officially announced as the new leader during a rally on Tiananmen Square on October 24, 1976 and soon pursued the establishment of a personal cult that imitated the visual language of Mao on propaganda posters and even pushed him to adopt the Chairman's hairstyle (Martin 50; Leese 2011, 246).

On September 18, mass memorial meetings took place in all parts of the country, supposedly rallying 800 million people (which would have been the whole population at the time) to observe a three-minute silence, with all factories, ships, trains, and mines to sound their sirens. The emphasis on the totality of the people attending the funeral ceremonies in Beijing and elsewhere stood in stark contrast to the restrictions of mourning in the previous decade (let alone the pre-1949 period: the socialist transformation of the People's Republic had set an end to many traditional rites that to some extent have reemerged only since the 1990s, see Watson/Rawski). During the Cultural Revolution, it was nearly impossible for the bereaved to attend the cremation of a family member. Unsure whether the deceased had been a "black element," had died from political violence, or committed suicide, the crematoria often preferred anonymous mass graves to avoid the accusation of honoring an

enemy of the people. They prohibited the attendance of family members, thus setting an unsurmountable obstacle for the families to observe proper burial rituals (Wakeman 1985, 151).

The death of a political figure whose ideological purity could not be doubted, however, allowed an unhindered expression of grief. A few months earlier when Premier Zhou Enlai had died, several hundred thousand people assembled in Tiananmen Square on the traditional Tomb-Sweeping Day (April 4), laying down wreaths commemorating the popular premier and presenting banners criticizing the Gang of Four (and by proxy Mao Zedong) for attacking Zhou during the Cultural Revolution. Seeing such opposition, the Central Committee intervened with military force, causing a violent riot. Months later, the situation changed: The unquestioned status of Mao Zedong and his popularity among the people—resulting from his personal cult in the preceding decades—made an unlimited and unrestrained expression of grief in public possible.

Figure 3: Weeping Workers in the Great Hall of the People

Exact origin of the photo unknown. Here taken from https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/423354438

Images of the events in the days after the Chairman's death testify that when people passed the catafalque in the Great Hall of the People, they sud-

denly burst into tears. Tears appear here as an immediate corporal reaction to an external stimulus. According to Helmuth Plessner, both laughing and crying are reactions to a deep crisis, experienced individually or collectively (Plessner; Fischer). Considering that many of them had never been so close to Mao when he was still alive, the opportunity and occasion of seeing his corpse caused a profound crisis, and crying was the answer to cope with it. As Jack Katz and Tom Lutz have shown respectively, the reason for weeping can be rage or joy, and sometimes it can even be caused by emotions that are inexplicable to the weeping person. Weeping relieves tension and has a cathartic function that can be found in all cultures (Katz; Lutz). Though the uncontrollable and spontaneous emotional expressions when passing the corpse contrasted with the meticulously planned ceremonies, the tears were not an irrational reaction. As argued by Martha Nussbaum, emotions are central to all forms of human action, which includes the political realm that has wrongly been seen as privileging rationalities. For Nussbaum, emotions are shaped and disseminated by education, political maneuvers, and culture, which is particularly obvious, yet not exceptional, in the case of illiberal societies (Nussbaum). I argue in the following that the organization of the memorial rallies in Beijing, Shanghai, and elsewhere, in fact, followed a specific political script that also set limits to the expression of grief. The party leadership intentionally provided for a permissible space to cry in public where grief, sadness, and loss were a controlled part of the political sphere that relied on pathos to channel the emotions, precisely at a time when the question of Mao's successor was unanswered, and rivalries between the different factions in the Party were expected.

The expression of grief was not supposed to be left unchecked. In order to rationalize public feelings, the party leadership emphasized in speeches, eulogies, and news reports that grief should not paralyze the nation, but "turn grief into strength" (化悲痛为力量).[6] This slogan, which had previously been used to mourn the death of Stalin in 1953 and the passing of Ho Chi-min 胡志明 in 1969, was a key message appearing ubiquitously in the news, amended by the vow to continue Chairman Mao's revolutionary mission.[7] It highlighted

6 As Plessner has pointed out, crying is an expression of lacking power and helplessness (352), a mental state that for a communist party emphasizing the need for permanent class struggle and continuous self-transformation of the individual was impermissible.

7 The slogan also appeared in condolence letters of other communist parties, such as the one by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Portugal (Marxist-Leninist): "When the sad news of the death of Comrade Mao Tsetung reaches the five continents, the five continents will surely turn grief into strength. We are convinced that the cause

the need to maintain the revolutionary zeal in the transition period where the successor to Mao had not been identified. For instance, the Hero Battalion of the PLA's Air Force declared in an article that although the news of Mao's death had moved them to tears instantaneously, they swore to remember his achievements and struggle against enemies in the past decades, promising to maintain their loyalty (Worker Propaganda Team for Mao Zedong Thought at Xinjiang University; Student Association of Central China Normal University in Wuhan) and to continue his legacy until the liberation of Taiwan had been achieved (Commander and Fighters of the Hero Battalion). Their grief could persist only temporarily because in socialist societies the only permissible negative emotions were anger and hate. Both were central to class struggle and the effort to create an advanced society built on historical materialism that promised a splendid and paradisiacal future where there was no helplessness, passivity, or depression.[8]

Mao's funeral was—together with Zhou Enlai's a few months earlier—one of the very rare occasions to allow tears in public. The appeal to "turn grief into strength" and the fact that the media were subject to party control reveal to what extent the party leadership intended to intervene in regulating permissible emotions, especially in a highly formal setting: Going to the Great Hall was an organized event, with specific groups chosen to pass the catafalque and with everyone expected to shed tears. The expectation to cry and the simultaneous persecution of those who did not shows how political and social pressure—the "feeling rules"—impacted people's reactions, thus potentially rendering the tears less "real." As Gary Ebersole has argued, such an interpretation is based on the "Western bourgeois sense of the individual" that privileges individual agency (or its potentiality). In addition, the distinction between real

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of communism and the cause of opposing hegemonism of the peoples of the world will surely gain a new development. The image of Comrade Mao Tsetung will undoubtedly inspire every communist fighter. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Portugal (Marxist-Leninist) extends to you its deepest condolences." (*Peking Review*, no. 40, 1976, 62).

8 Cf. the critique of the 1950 film 'The Life of Wu Xun' where a certain He Jiahuai warned against the shedding of tears, preferring anger in the struggle for a socialist society. The film depicts the efforts of a Chinese educational reformer (1838–1896) to collect money for opening a school for poor children, instead of pursuing a revolution changing the power relations in society. The film was the first one to be banned in the People's Republic of China (He Jiahui 1951).

and false tears, he points out, prevents the possibility of analyzing their local, religious, or cultural characteristics (Ebersole 213). The question at stake is whether the tears are prescribed, expected, or rather spontaneous. It is difficult to answer this because the written and visual sources at hand have more than once been manipulated for political purposes.

In some testimonials, the ceremonies are in fact described as artificial. Edoarda Masi who lived and worked in Beijing as a translator in 1976 writes in her diary in the entry of September 19:

> The Chinese have the capacity to transmute the most terrible events into theater, annulling the contingency of the moment in which they are experienced. This ceremony had nothing 'real' about it; it was an abstract, livid performance of a funeral in which everyone played a prearranged role—a moment that exists outside time and becomes forever fixed in images. (Masi 98–99)

According to her perception,

> the same acts, the same words, the same filmed reports four and five times, ten and twenty times, and were it possible, it would be a hundred and a thousand times—for a Westerner, this becomes impossible; you can't take it. After the fifth identical repetition, even if it were of the most sublime truth, you collapse. Everything becomes opaque, indistinguishable. This is not ritual for the sake of catharsis or redemption. (ibid.)

The juxtaposition of "the Chinese" and "the Westerner" not only reproduces the image of China being collective and the West being individualistic, but much more points to the assumption of strong cultural differences. Her Western gaze prevents Masi from recognizing that the ritualized behavior when passing the catafalque (the bowing), the material symbols of mourning such as white chrysanthemums attached to the chest, and the organization of where to stand and when to continue one's movement was a performative act following an established cultural script. It originated in the Confucian tradition as well as in the Soviet system of funeral rites. The former emphasized the moral duty of the son to express his filial piety towards the deceased, while the latter had established a system of regulations that granted different rituals according to the rank of the deceased. Detailed regulations had prevailed in imperial times for defining proper mourning that required scholar-officials

to mourn for their emperor or defined who was obliged to mourn for a family relative and for how long (Kutcher), and the funeral ceremonies organized by emperors of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) were to document the ruler's impeccable morality, that is to embody filial piety as one of the core Confucian values. Conducting ceremonies provided them with the necessary political legitimacy, and the expression of grief was an expected behavior. The political actors of the 20th century continued this tradition yet chose to address larger audiences. When Sun Yat-sen 孙逸仙 (1866–1925) passed away on March 12, 1925—he had founded the Republic of China in 1912 and became its first president—his death and the funeral were reported widely in magazines and newspapers (Chen Yunqian 85–146). Mao's funeral was the first time that the majority of the population was able to attend, either physically or via radio and TV broadcast. The CCP used this opportunity to instill its political message in the ceremony's participants and observers, what Wen-Hsuan Tsai has called a "framed funeral" (Tsai). Influenced by the Soviet system of funeral rites since the 1940s, the CCP followed the *nomenklatura*, granting different rituals to officials of different ranks. Thus, Mao's funeral had to be of unrivaled rank (and has not been surpassed yet)—the official funeral has to be viewed as a source of political legitimacy and as a means to ensure its hegemony, instead of leaving it exclusively to the family. The loyalty to Mao, nurtured particularly in the Cultural Revolution, and his representation as a caring father figure in the propaganda evoked reactions in the populace that were employed for distinct purposes.

In fact, the collective act of mourning was not only an expression of respect required by political and cultural norms. It was also supposed to strengthen a sense of solidarity (what Radcliffe-Brown has called an "affirmation of solidarity"). The decade preceding Mao's death, the Cultural Revolution, had witnessed numerous collective events that ripped families and social groups apart, such as when high school students beat their teachers to death or when children labeled their parents as capitalists or counterrevolutionary elements. Already in the early years of the PRC the Party taught class hate to the people, resulting in the denouncement, corporal punishment, humiliation, and execution of uncountable class enemies since the land reform in the early 1950s (Lu). The criticism of deviating political views, the persecution of political enemies, and the ubiquitous suspicion towards one's neighbor or colleague who could potentially turn against oneself had created a society deeply permeated by anti-solidarity. The act of collective mourning can be understood as a ritual in which certain values are shared among a distinct group, and, no matter

whether secular or religious, rituals generate solidarity among participants and contribute to the creation of social order. In fact, the photos of the mass mourning ceremonies demonstrate an almost military sense of formation and order, which stands in clear contrast to the previous rallies of the Red Guards characterized by chaos and confrontations.

A closer look at the visual sources depicting the actual behavior of individuals reveals that it is the shared feeling of pain and loss that seems to restore solidarity, something that Émile Durkheim called "emotional effervescence" (Durkheim), and in the case of the gathering of large crowds on public spaces (such as the Tiananmen Square), it is precisely the sentimental that moved the masses from their private homes to the public sphere. As Sarah Pritz has pointed out (cf. her contribution to this volume), one could assume a "*repertoire*" of the sentimental (following the performance studies scholar Diana Taylor). This is much more the case if we take into consideration that even when practices follow cultural scripts, it is their incidental execution that brings forth the feeling of belonging (Taylor).

The power of the political system to properly channel and control emotions, however, should not be overestimated. When the dictator Chiang Kai-shek 蒋介石 (1887–1975) died one and a half years earlier in Taiwan on April 5, 1975, the Taiwanese people reacted in a similar way, as the three-volume *Records of Mourning for Our dear President Jiang* (Committee of Compiling Records of Mourning for Our dear President Jiang) show, with photos of his son Chiang Ching-kuo kneeling, or the miles-long queues of people waiting to bid farewell (Zongtong Jiang gong aisilu bianzuan xiaozu, Vol. III; Chen Yuqian).[9] Even though the Taiwanese society was, to some degree, more liberal at the time compared to the People's Republic, this should not make us believe that differences in political systems can account for the truthfulness or authenticity

9 It is reported that between April 9 and 14, 1975 around 2.5 million Taiwanese (one-sixth of the island's population) had visited the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall in the center of Taipei. Frederic Wakeman writes: "The committee was constantly changing the hours of viewing once it became clear that the lines of six or eight persons abreast, sometimes waiting as long as ten hours in the sun, stretched for miles. Though the committee decided to keep the hall open twenty-four hours a day, a huge crowd still remained when the building was finally closed at midnight on April 14 to make preparations for the public funeral service on the 16th. By then, two and a half million mourners had passed through the memorial hall: one sixth of the island's entire population." (Wakeman 1985, 156). See also the documentary *Forever Remembering Our Leader Forever* 1979, starting from 4:40 min.

of tears. In both cases, tears are used as a medium of political communication that relies heavily on pathos.

The Weeping People

The documentary *Funeral of Mao Zedong*, broadcasted in November 1976, starts with depicting crying people, young and old, male and female, Han and ethnic minorities, soldiers, workers, and peasants while presenting the first paragraph of the official announcement of Mao's death in the voice of Hua Guofeng, followed by a summary of the Chairman's achievements formulated in superlatives. It even produced a scene that resembles Chen Danqing's picture (minute 4:00). The film included reenacted scenes in which workers, soldiers, and peasants—and especially members of the Red Guards—were instantaneously moved to tears when hearing the heart-breaking news supposedly for the first time or when walking along the catafalque in the Great Hall of the People (starting at 19:09, 20:45, 39:45, and again 46:50). The documentary highlighted that high-ranking party cadres were simply bowing their heads without resorting to strong emotions. The voice-over speaker points out that with Mao being the reddest sun, the proletariat promised to follow his path and prayed for the tears to come out of the eyes a bit slower to see Mao clearer. Likewise, the grieving people walked a bit slower to see the corpse and Mao's face for the last time to be able to remember him. Presenting the long queues walking through the rain to enter the Great Hall at the time, the speaker emphasized that under no circumstances the amount of rain could be larger than the tears. The second half of the documentary shows how the people in the countryside, in Tibet and in the Navy were remembering the Chairman. Especially moving scenes were those which depict the mourning at sites Mao Zedong had visited personally in the past, showing how individual figures re-narrate their encounter with Mao at their home. The last part of the film turns to the global sphere when showing scenes of Overseas Chinese paying their respect to a picture of Mao and the reaction of the international proletariat and the oppressed people and nations.

Figure 4: Mourning Mao Zedong in the Chinese Embassy in Bern (Switzerland), September 12, 1976

Switzerland Mourning Ceremony Mao Zedong, 1976. Copyright: Photopress Archiv/ Keystone/Bridgeman Images.

The expected behavior, or "feeling rules," aimed at the inclusion of all Chinese people, yet some were excluded or even removed. *Funeral of Mao Zedong*, for instance, showed the faces of each member of the politburo and presented their wreaths in detail (including the names and titles of donors), while avoiding any allusion to the members of the Gang of Four, as well as Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904–1997) who at the time had been removed for allegedly organizing the April 1976 protests. The person most sought to be deleted from public memory was Mao's wife Jiang Qing who reportedly did not shed a single tear when receiving the news of her husband's death. After the arrest of the Gang of Four on October 9, 1976, a frenzy started to collect material, testimonies, and documents to justify the accusation of the Gang's anti-party behavior and conspiracies to take over power. These collections were partly published and included information on the Gang's behavior shortly before and after Mao's death. For instance, when Mao's sickness was becoming severe, Jiang Qing was said to have travelled to Tianjin on August 30 to have some fun, to visit the production brigade Dazhai to ride horses, to enjoy donkeys and rabbits in early Septem-

ber, and to feast with other comrades at a rural school attached to Qinghua University on September 28: All of these reports are accompanied by photos depicting the jollity of Jiang Qing (*Material Collection for the Crimes of the Anti-Party Clique*). The last outing mentioned in the publication is the one where Jiang Qing is said to have uttered the words "After the Chairman had passed away I did not cry, and did not shed a single tear" (主席逝世后，我没哭一声，没流一滴眼泪, Jiang). These testimonies prepared the ground for the later trial at the Supreme People's Court of China where they were convicted of anti-party activities in January 1981.

Figure 5: The Weeping Widow

Chen Qifeng 陈奇峰, "Jiang Qing's Tears (Jiang Qing de yanlei 江青的眼泪), The Maoist Legacy, accessed January 15, 2025, https://www.maoistlegacy.de/db/items/show/3973.

In this context, a caricature of Jiang Qing emerged, ridiculing her weeping to be fake and insincere. The caricature, accompanied by a comment by Chen Qifeng 陈奇峰 (1918–1996) indicating that her tears had tormented him for four months, shows her dressed in a black head scarf, which she had worn during the mourning ceremonies. It interprets her tears as either ear jewelry or as a bat, thus referring to both her brutality in the persecution of political enemies and her fondness for luxury. Jiang's grief being ridiculed clearly points out to the power struggle following the arrest of the Gang of Four. Jiang Qing who had already visibly been removed from photos of the official funeral meeting on Tiananmen Square (Jaubert) is excluded from the mourning collective by depicting her tears as fake and thus openly denying her claims to be a legitimate successor to Mao.

To conclude, tears and their representation in the media were a political instrument in the struggle for power after the death of Mao Zedong. The affective performance of passing along the catafalque and its representation in photos and documentaries were used as a means of political communication. The funeral and its representation in text and image followed a distinct script according to which grief was permissible only temporarily, yet not for all. The conscious choice of whom to allow to shed tears and to participate in the memorial ceremonies juxtaposed the sobbing and grieving masses with the ambitions of the Gang of Four.

In addition, the mass mourning was a sentimental performance providing collective consolation. The sudden death of the political leader was perceived as the end of an era to which the mourning masses reacted with widespread expressions of gratitude, thanking Mao for his historic achievements in liberating China, ending the oppression and exploitation of the past and finally founding the People's Republic. The promise to continue his political legacy was not only expected in 1976 but has gained currency anew where gratitude is a part of today's propaganda. In fact, numerous blockbuster films re-narrating Mao's fight against the Japanese in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1931–1945), or the defeat of the KMT in the Civil War (1945–1949) nostalgically remember him. The popularity of actors such as Tang Guoqiang 唐国强 (born 1952) and Hou Jingjian 侯京健 (born 1985) to imitate Mao in contemporary historical drama and documentaries continues the expression of sentimental affection that still plays a role in contemporary public discourse. Facing a society where neoliberalism had created a system ridden with corruption, injustice, exploitation, and hedonistic values after the introduction of market reforms and the opening to the globalizing world, intellectuals of the Chinese

New Left yearn for a return to an era that had ended too suddenly. Being very outspoken, they lament the passing of Mao Zedong and prefer the return to a society defined by social justice and a frugal lifestyle that was the exact opposite of today's market economy (as argued by Wang Chaohua). Shortly after becoming the General Secretary of the CCP, Xi Jinping alluded to the Mao period not only in terms of imitating the cult of personality (Luqiu) but also by recalling the memory of a time that allegedly had the interests of the people at heart, as his on-going campaigns to combat corruption, strengthen socialist core values, and proudly remember the revolution indicate. To cherish the Maoist past and to emulate the values of that era has again become part of political propaganda.

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