

# China the Anomaly

## Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism, and the Maoist Regime

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*European Journal of Political Theory*  
9(3) 267–286

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[DOI: 10.1177/1474885110363981]

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**ABSTRACT:** During the autumn of 1949, Hannah Arendt completed the manuscript of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. On 1 October of the same year, the People's Republic of China was founded under the leadership of Mao Zedong. This article documents Arendt's claim in 1949 that the prospects of totalitarianism in China were 'frighteningly good', and yet her ambivalent judgment, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, about the totalitarian character of the Maoist regime. Despite being the premier theorist of totalitarian formations, Arendt's interest in China was half-hearted and her analysis often wildly inaccurate. The concern of this paper, however, is less with the veracity of her remarks, than with a counterfactual question. *If* Arendt had known what we know now, would she have considered Maoist China to be a totalitarian regime? Put another way: to what extent is our modern picture of Mao's regime consistent with Arendt's depiction of the Soviet Union under Stalin or Germany under Hitler? While Arendt got many of her facts wrong, her theory of totalitarianism – as shapeless, febrile, voracious of human flesh, and endlessly turbulent – was in good measure applicable to Mao's regime, even though she failed to recognize it.

**KEY WORDS:** *global rule, Mao, movement, objective enemy, totalitarianism*

I do not doubt that in the very long run, the whole of Asia will fall under Chinese influence but not necessarily under Chinese domination. (Hannah Arendt, April 1965).<sup>1</sup>

Everything is turning upside down. I love great upheavals. (Mao Zedong, June 1966)<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

China appears only rarely in Hannah Arendt's political and philosophical analyses and even then in forays more tentative than deeply informed. This is unlikely to astonish us. It was, after all, the experiences of contemporary Europe, Israel and America that shaped Arendt's life and to which her work perennially returned. Yet perhaps her Asian deficit should surprise us a little more than it does. During her exile in Paris in the mid-to-late 1930s, Arendt met many Chinese people for

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whom she evidently felt some real affinity.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, both of her key philosophical mentors took a deep interest in Asia, particularly in China. Martin Heidegger, lecturing in 1930 on the concept of truth, famously employed the aphorisms of Zhuang-zi (Chuang-tzu) to disarm his Bremen critics. He collaborated with Paul Shih-yi Hsiao, in the summer of 1946, on a German translation of the *Dao De Jing*.<sup>4</sup> (Calligraphy from the poem adorned a wall in Heidegger's study.<sup>5</sup>) Karl Jaspers, another China enthusiast,<sup>6</sup> wrote and lectured extensively on the Confucian, Daoist and Mohist classics.<sup>7</sup> And his coinage 'the Axial Age' (800–200 BCE) fully embraced Chinese civilization together with its ancient Greek, Indian, and Near Eastern counterparts. As he once confided to Arendt, 'China has become – if I may speak in such an exaggerated and foolish way – almost a second home for me.'<sup>8</sup>

If the Middle Kingdom was largely alien to Arendt's conceptual topography it was not entirely absent from her considerations. In her last, unfinished work – *The Life of the Mind* – she acknowledged the greatness of Chinese philosophy before dilating on the strangeness of a language 'whose pictograms induce the act of thinking principally in images and not in words'.<sup>9</sup> And politically, as well as philosophically, China emerged to perturb her theoretical categories.

Because the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded in the same year – 1949 – that Arendt completed the manuscript of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she had no opportunity to consider it there. But she did offer one uncanny observation about the country that Mao was to dominate for just over a quarter of a century. It came in the context of her argument that totalitarian regimes are driven by a 'perpetual-motion mania', remaining 'in power only so long as they keep moving and set everything around them in motion' through purges, wars, deportations, and the identification of ever new objective enemies for extermination.<sup>10</sup> The Bolshevik idea of permanent revolution finds its parallel in the Nazi 'notion of a racial "selection which can never stand still" thus requiring a constant radicalization of the standards by which the selection, i.e. the extermination of the unfit, is carried out'.<sup>11</sup> In order to keep moving, and voraciously to consume human flesh, totalitarianism must have at its disposal 'sheer force of numbers' – in other words, a considerable body of people to waste – either in the form of domestic casualties or foreign hosts.<sup>12</sup> This demographic was central to Arendt's contention that smallish populations, even if they incubate totalitarian *movements*, are incapable of generating a totalitarian *regime*. Unable to feed the totalitarian juggernaut, and replenish its human fuel, they instead become stymied in more traditional forms of dictatorship. That was the fate of prewar Romania, Portugal, Hungary and Spain; totalitarian rule would have depopulated and hence destroyed these countries. Russia, in contrast, had people in abundance to consume; so did Germany – once war allowed it to expand across Europe incorporating millions of new subjects into its empire.<sup>13</sup> Only then could it advance to a stage that was 'truly totalitarian'. She added:

... the chances of totalitarian rule are frighteningly good in the lands of traditional Oriental despotism, in India and China, where there is almost inexhaustible material to feed the power-accumulating and man-destroying machinery of total domination, and where, moreover, the mass man's typical feeling of superfluousness – an entirely new phenomenon in Europe, the concomitant of mass unemployment and population growth of the last 150 years – has been prevalent for centuries in the contempt for the value of human life.<sup>14</sup>

China, with 600 million people, provided optimum conditions for totalitarian rule.

## China the Anomaly

What, then, was her estimation of the Communist regime of Mao? I mentioned that as early as 1949 Arendt offered a few fleeting remarks on the potential of China for totalitarian rule. When she did get around to a more systematic, though still truncated, appraisal of the Chinese Communist regime – in the preface to part III of the 3rd edition (1966) of *Origins* – her estimation was extremely ambivalent. Hereafter, I refer to this source simply as the '1966 Preface.'

On the one hand, she believed that, in several respects, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule fell short of a fully fledged totalitarian formation such as National Socialism or Bolshevism in its Stalinist phase. After

... an initial period of considerable bloodshed – the number of victims during the first years of dictatorship is plausibly estimated at fifteen million ... – and after the disappearance of organized opposition, there was no increase in terror, no massacres of innocent people, no category of 'objective enemies,' no show trials, though a great deal of public confession and 'self-criticism' and no outright crimes.

Citing Mao Zedong's speech to the State Council in February 1957, 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People', Arendt detected, if no evident commitment to liberty as such, at least the recognition that contradictions among classes, and between people and government, could be non-antagonistic and thus permissible in principle. This was a far cry indeed from systems in which any form of political pluralism was anathema.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, once the regime entered a phase of consolidation, dissent was met not with wholesale extermination but with measures designed to enable the 'rectification of thought', an 'elaborate procedure of constant moulding and remoulding of the minds, to which more or less the whole population seemed subject'.<sup>16</sup>

If this was terror, as it most certainly was, it was terror of a different kind, and whatever its results, it did not decimate the population. It clearly recognized national interest [totalitarianism, in contrast, was quintessentially global in its ambitions], it permitted the country to develop peacefully, to use the competence of the descendants of the formerly ruling classes, and to uphold academic and professional standards. In brief, it was obvious that Mao Tse-tung's 'thought' did not run along the lines laid down by Stalin (or Hitler, for that matter), that he was not a killer by instinct, and that nationalist sentiment, so prominent in all revolutionary upheavals in formerly colonial countries, was strong enough

to impose limits upon total domination. All this seemed to contradict fears expressed in this book.<sup>17</sup>

These ‘relevant distinctions’ between Mao’s regime, and those of Stalin and Hitler, were ‘beyond doubt’, Arendt insisted. (Mao agreed, claiming that his regime was a ‘People’s Democratic Dictatorship’ and explicitly disputing those who called it ‘totalitarian’.<sup>18</sup>)

On the other hand, ‘totalitarian traits’ seemed to ‘have been manifest from the beginning’. Salient among them were the CCP’s aspiration to become ‘international in organization, all-comprehensive in its ideological scope, and global in its political aspiration’, features that were evident from ‘the beginning’ and accentuated by the Sino-Soviet split. The CCP’s canonization of Stalin, and its associated attack on Soviet ‘revisionism’ (‘detotalitarization’), also struck Arendt as ominous. So too did its ‘utterly ruthless, though thus far unsuccessful, international policy which aimed at infiltrating all revolutionary movements with Chinese agents and at reviving the Comintern under Peking’s leadership’.<sup>19</sup> With that assessment of the Chinese anomaly she remained guarded, adopting a wait-and-see approach, and warning that, in the absence of hard data, it was perilous to generalize. Everything ‘is still in a state of flux’, she observed, though ‘state of flux’ was, of course, the very essence of totalitarian movement as she depicted it – and the regime was now over sixteen years old. But paucity of information was not the only reason for circumspection. Arendt cautioned that

... we have inherited from the cold-war period an official ‘counter-ideology,’ anti-Communism, which also tends to become global in aspiration and tempts us into constructing a fiction of our own, so that we refuse on principle to distinguish the various Communist one-party dictatorships, with which we are confronted in reality, from authentic totalitarian government as it may develop, albeit in different forms, in China.<sup>20</sup>

Arendt’s reservations about the CCP were shrewder than her more optimistic diagnoses. A full appraisal of her view of communist China, however, must acknowledge four relevant facts.

First, Arendt’s evaluation of Chinese conditions was built on the most meagre of textual foundations. Not a single academic work on communist China survives in the remnants of her personal library housed at Bard College, NY. Even the translated volumes of Mao’s selected writings look unread.<sup>21</sup> Judging from Arendt’s correspondence with Karl Jaspers, she broadly endorsed Richard Lowenthal’s analysis in *World Communism: The Disintegration of a Secular Faith* (1964 [1963]).<sup>22</sup> Yet she must have read that book very selectively. True, Lowenthal emphasized the novelty of Mao vis-à-vis the Bolshevik revolutionaries,<sup>23</sup> and focused on the regime’s geopolitical dynamics – especially its schism with Russia. But he also flagged aspects of the regime that Arendt apparently ignored or minimized, even though they are, in her own theory, plain evidence of totalitarian traits. For instance, Lowenthal emphasizes ‘the climate of permanent internal and external tension’ in China, ‘the atmosphere of a besieged fortress at home’, ‘the permanent revolution from above’, and the deliberate courting of risks. He also offered a

pregnant gloss on Mao's response to Khrushchev's 'Open Letter' to the Central Committee of the CCP. The Chinese 'Ninth Commentary' on the Soviet communication

... comes close to Stalin's 1937 thesis that the class struggle must become sharper with the progress of socialist construction – a thesis correctly denounced in Khrushchev's 'secret speech' [to the Twentieth Party Congress, 1956] as the ideological justification for the blood purges: the Chinese now argue that this struggle against the hydra-headed danger of capitalist restoration may last 'from five to ten generations' or 'one of several centuries.'<sup>24</sup>

With more curiosity, Arendt could have been better informed. She might have probed the English language debates to which Lowenthal referred or alluded – notably the dispute between Benjamin Schwartz and Karl A. Wittfogel on the 'originality' of Mao (both authors, for all their differences, concurred that Mao's China was 'totalitarian').<sup>25</sup> Before that, the Korean War had catapulted communist China to world attention as a predatory power. In 1952, under the auspices of Harvard University Press, *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism* first appeared. A standard text for a generation, and often reprinted, it contained a prescient section on 'totalitarianism' first written in 1950.<sup>26</sup> *The China Quarterly*, launched in 1960 under the editorship of Roderick MacFarquhar (and published by the Congress for Cultural Freedom) was another fertile source of information.<sup>27</sup> So, too, was *Foreign Affairs* published in Arendt's native New York city. As early as October 1955, Chao Kuo-chün was remarking in its pages about the CCP's use of 'front groups' – and for Arendt, the front organization was pivotal to totalitarianism's originality.<sup>28</sup> And, in 1961, Robert Jay Lifton's book on thought reform painted a picture of Chinese ideology' – with its 'cult of the confession' and 'thought-terminating clichés' – which should have sounded alarm bells for Arendt, despite her hostility to psychological modes of analysis.<sup>29</sup> None of the materials just cited were unambiguous. But nor were they esoteric. Many of them drew on comparisons and contrasts with Russia. The concepts of totalitarianism, 'total power' or 'totalism' were at their core. Arendt was either innocent of this discussion or paid no attention to it.<sup>30</sup>

Instead, her observations on China in the 1966 Preface to *Origins* largely recapitulate remarks she had made eight years earlier, in a discussion of the Hungarian insurrection. There, too, Arendt cited Mao's 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions', derived a similar message from it, and declared unlikely the 'type of mass liquidation of "innocents" or "objective enemies" which was so highly characteristic of both the Hitler and the Stalin regimes'. She also noted, in a throwback to comments she made in 1949, that China – with its 600 million population – was exactly the sort of country that 'could have afforded the price of totalitarian terror even more easily than Russia' (with its 200 million). She continued:

Even more important, China, its adherence to the Soviet bloc notwithstanding, has thus far refused to follow the Russian depopulation policy; for as great as the number of victims

is in the first years of dictatorial rule may appear – 15 million seems a plausible guess – it is insignificant in proportion to the population when compared with the losses Stalin used to inflict on his subjects.<sup>31</sup>

Narrative continuities between Arendt's 1958 and 1966 Preface reflections are thus quite evident. But so also are two relevant contrasts. In 1958 Arendt was especially intrigued by the geopolitical significance of China's rise as a 'power-colossus', arguing that its emergence as a strategic competitor to Russia was partly responsible for the post-Stalin 'thaw'.<sup>32</sup> Sheer numbers alone suggested that China could win at any game for totalitarian supremacy. It was hence expedient for Russia to stop killing its own people through 'depopulation', mass purge, and Gulag. Faced with a potential Chinese rival, Russia needed to conserve its human material. Arendt was uncertain whether regime relaxation was a 'tactical retreat' by Khrushchev or marked a definitive abandonment of totalitarian methods. On balance, she inclined towards pessimism, seeing the thaw as a temporary manoeuvre. (By 1966, she was fairly confident that Russia had entered a post-totalitarian phase.) Arendt also believed that Russia might well 'be interested in coming to a temporary arrangement with the United States to freeze the present constellation in which the two super-powers are bound to recognize and respect the existing spheres of influence'.<sup>33</sup> In the event, of course, it was China and the United States that, under President Nixon, moved towards rapprochement. Still, the strategic logic behind Arendt's prediction was correct: two hegemons sought to sideline or balance a third.

Another respect in which the 1958 essay differed from Arendt's later remarks on Mao concerns the question of nationalism. Whereas in 1966 she is ambivalent about the character of the CCP's 'nationalist sentiment' (a vocal complaint of Khrushchev during the Sino-Soviet schism) because it coincided with an aggressive drive towards international influence, in 1958 she was noticeably more optimistic. Though China's weight of numbers enabled it to take the totalitarian path 'Mao has deliberately chosen the national alternative and formulated a number of theories in his famous speech in 1957 which are in accordance with it and in flagrant contradiction to the official Russian ideology'.<sup>34</sup> Again, it is Mao's 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions' essay to which she repairs for verification. (Did she read anything else of his?) In that tract, she sees evidence of 'the first piece of serious writing which has come out of the communist orbit since Lenin's death, and with it the ideological initiative has shifted from Moscow to Peking'. It is not just Mao's ostensible recognition of the persistence, under communism, of contradictions among classes, and between classes and government that Arendt finds extraordinary. More remarkable still is 'the strong populist note of the speech'. To be sure, Mao has little interest in freedom, Arendt declares. Granted, he is a dictator. But by seeking 'to reintroduce *le peuple*, word and concept, into communist ideology', Mao was offering a mode of politics that was revolutionary without being necessarily totalitarian.<sup>35</sup> Karl Jaspers called Mao 'one of a kind and not a type'.<sup>36</sup> Arendt seems to have concurred.

four relevant facts. I have now mentioned two of them: the textual flimsiness of her enquiries; the largely derivative quality of the 1966 Preface which introduces nothing substantially new into considerations first formulated in 1958. The third fact is that even the brief analysis of China in the 1966 Preface to *Origins* was something of an afterthought. The Hannah Arendt Papers, now digitized at the Library of Congress, contain two drafts of this Preface – marked ‘first’ and ‘final’ in Arendt’s handwriting – together with a version complete with copy-editor’s standardizations and Arendt’s last-minute corrections. The ‘first’ draft (undated, but probably written in April 1968) contains no mention of Mao or China. The ‘final’ draft does, albeit in a format that is more compressed than its published counterpart, while retaining its key emphases.<sup>37</sup>

Why this addition? The most plausible explanation is that she realized belatedly that, in a book on total domination, something needed to be said about China, a country to which the totalitarian epithet had regularly been attached since the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950.<sup>38</sup> The date Arendt typed tantalizingly at the conclusion of the ‘final’ draft is ‘May 1966’,<sup>39</sup> a month that marked the first stirrings of the Cultural Revolution. It saw a Politburo meeting at which Peng Zhen, Luo Ruiqing, Lu Dingyi and Yang Shangkun were dismissed from their posts; the promulgation of the so-called May 16th Circular; and the formation of the Central Cultural Revolution Group, and the Central Case Examination Group, both under the chairmanship of Zhou Enlai.<sup>40</sup> But, at the time, these events were shadowy even to Sinologists, let alone an amateur such as Arendt, while the term ‘Cultural Revolution’ – in reality the Great Purge – took at least two more months before it fell into general western parlance. In contrast, during ‘the spring of 1966 China seemed a stable, disciplined, and united nation’ – at least from the standpoint of foreign observers.<sup>41</sup> In a letter to Jaspers in November 1966, Arendt mentions reading about the ‘cultural revolution’ but she saw it less as a domestic orgy of violence, orchestrated to eliminate Mao’s foes and radicalize the party, than a ‘preparation for war’ in the event of an attack from the USA.<sup>42</sup> And at no time before her death in 1975, when the events of the Cultural Revolution had started to become much clearer, did she return to the Chinese regime.

Thinkers show their discomfiture not only in what they say or fail to say, but also in the way they say it. We have already noted three peculiarities of Arendt’s treatment of China. A final anomaly – a garbled passage in the 1966 Preface to *Origins* – remains to be noted. Its context is Arendt’s observation that a ‘counter-ideology’ of anti-Communism was in danger of becoming hysterical. Perennial fear of reds under every bed was tantamount to seeing totalitarianism in every communist closet, a fiction that in its own way mirrored the global fantasies of totalitarian ideology itself. Such a fantasy impeded the ability to make vital discriminations among regime types. It was crucial, Arendt insisted, that we ‘distinguish the various Communist one-party dictatorships, with which we are confronted in reality, from authentic totalitarian *government* as it may develop, albeit in different *forms*, in China’.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, it is prudent to recognize that totalitarianism

is consistent with a wide variety of national differences. The kind of rampant drunkenness and incompetence that was such a feature of Russia in the 1930s had, in its chaotic excess, no parallel in Nazi Germany; conversely, the cruel methods of extermination perfected by the Third Reich in Poland were absent or attenuated in the Russian Gulag. One should no more expect uniformity of totalitarian conditions than one should expect identical modes of absolute monarchy in Spain, France, England, and Prussia. The decisive point, Arendt continues, is that notwithstanding these national differences, absolute monarchy 'was everywhere the same *form of government*' much in the same way that totalitarianism has an identical form once one contrasts it with 'dictatorships and tyrannies'.<sup>44</sup> Reviewing this paragraph, and the emphases I have added to Arendt's statements, the reader will see an obvious problem: on the one hand, totalitarian government appears to have a number of forms, China being one of them; on the other hand, totalitarian government appears to have a singular form. Arendt's judgment of China seems to have got stuck between these two alternatives. One response might be to say that Arendt was simply using the word 'form' in two different ways; on that account, China might conform (so to speak) to the basic template of totalitarianism while also giving it a different emphasis or modulation. Yet linguistic carelessness may suggest a level of discomfiture or confusion about the subject matter itself.

## Aspects of Chinese Totalitarianism

If Arendt had known what we know now, how would she have portrayed the Maoist regime? To what extent did the PRC, prior to Deng Xiaoping's ascent to power in the late 1970s, approximate her idea of totalitarianism? Let us grant that 'what we know now' is still a matter of scholarly contention and that the history of modern China, like history in general, is subject to continual revision. Let us also acknowledge that 'totalitarian' is an adjective that most Sinologists have rejected for at least a generation.<sup>45</sup> These truisms are no great obstacle to pursuing our counterfactual enquiry. Many aspects of the Maoist period are uncontroversial. It is how to interpret them that causes dissent. And if scholars dislike the term 'totalitarian', it is typically because they associate it with cold war polemics, or with a model of a highly centralized, coordinated, and omniscient system of rule to which the PRC never approximated. Yet Arendt never thought of totalitarianism as 'monolithic' or pervasively synchronized. Far from the 'storms of the Cultural Revolution' perturbing her theory,<sup>46</sup> they are utterly consistent with it. Totalitarianism, in Arendt's view, was *essentially* anarchic.

Aside from the standard duplicatory mode of totalitarian organization in which parallel party and government (state) administration organs seek to shadow all levels of society (center, province, prefecture, city, county, township, and commune in the Chinese case), the key 'totalitarian' features of Maoism are the following.



## Movement

If frenzy is the birthmark of totalitarian regimes, China under Mao stands as an exemplary case of totalitarian physiognomy. From the establishment of the regime (and actually before it in those parts of China, such as Yenan, that the CCP controlled) until Mao's death in 1976, the nation was continually gripped by one purge or campaign (*yundong*) after another. Between the Land Reform campaign of 1950–2 and the mobilization to Criticize Deng Xiaoping in 1976, the CCP unleashed at least nine other large movements including the Three Anti Five Anti (1951–2), the Anti-Rightist (1957), the Four Clean Ups (1963–5), the Great Leap Forward – entailing Mao's project to surpass British steel production within fifteen years – and the Cultural Revolution. Hardly a year passed before a new cascade was initiated. Andrew Nathan writes of Mao's 'fantasies of speed', while the memoir of Li Zhisui, Mao's personal physician, brims with observations of the Chairman's obsession with acceleration and destabilization. 'He was a man of tremendous energy', notes Li, whose 'iconoclasm and refusal to accept routine ... rebelled against time as well. Sleep, like bathing, was a waste of time.'<sup>47</sup> Mass orchestrator, and nodal point of a network of radical confederates such as Chen Bo-da, Kang Sheng, and Lin Biao, Mao was determined to pursue 'class struggle' in perpetuity, destroying all structures – including that of the CCP bureaucracy – that were impediments to his rule and brakes on the Party. Notoriously, Mao emphasized the power of the human will to confront and overcome insuperable obstacles. That, too, was a trait of the other totalitarian leaders that Arendt examined.

## Global Rule and Human Expenditure

Regimes such as Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia were massive consumers of human beings, whether these were their own countrymen or people of alien nations. The regimes' objective was global dominance. To the extent that they recognized no positive law, or any geographical boundary, they were the antithesis of strictly 'nationalist' liberation movements. As soon as the PRC was founded, Mao devised plans for China to rival Russia's hegemony of the communist international, then to displace it and, simultaneously, to instigate world revolution under Beijing's leadership. Many actions attest to this grand ambition which proceeded incrementally: the early idea of establishing an Asian Cominform under Chinese leadership; attempts, in 1956 and 1957, to woo away from the Soviet Union the embattled Communist regimes of Poland and Hungary; the pursuit of a military machine equipped with a massive nuclear armoury; and the active promulgation of Mao Zedong Thought throughout the world. 'We must control the Earth!' Mao told his aides on hearing of Russian provision of a cyclotron and a nuclear reactor. And by August 1962 Mao was informing a coterie of provincial chiefs: 'In the future we will set up the Earth Control Committee, and make a uniform plan

for the Earth.<sup>48</sup> Mao was thus no 'nationalist' in Arendt's sense. He also had the utmost disdain for traditional Chinese life: for the peasants, for Confucianism, for Chinese architecture. All were under perpetual assault during his regime.

Earlier, we saw Arendt's argument that totalitarian domination requires a great expenditure of bodies and hence large populations to sacrifice. Millions must be slaughtered to attain totalitarianism's goal. The Maoist regime showed the same sanguinary predilection as its Nazi and Stalinist cousins. During a much-quoted speech in Moscow in 1957, Mao repeated comments he had made three years earlier to Nehru to the effect that the destruction of 300 million people by the atomic bomb would be 'no great loss' because China could always produce more people.<sup>49</sup> (When Khrushchev made a similarly callous remark, Arendt took that as proof-positive that a totalitarian mindset, immune to facts, remained prevalent in post-Stalin Russia.<sup>50</sup>) But nuclear war was only one way in which humans might be justifiably gorged en masse. Conventional conflict would also do nicely. Both Stalin and Mao supported Kim Il Sung's invasion of South Korea because China, employing its 'People's Volunteers', had the human material to fight it. The plan was as simple as it was grotesque: hundreds of thousands of Chinese troops, not to mention North Koreans, would be sacrificed so as to create, by design, a humiliating bloodbath for the United States and its allies. In return for Chinese casualties, Stalin promised to help China become a major military force. For that never quite realized quid pro quo, Mao's regime was willing to sanction the 'human wave' battlefield tactics that turned the Volunteers into bullet fodder: 600,000 Chinese troops were killed as against 36,568 Americans.<sup>51</sup> Mao's attitude to those who perished in the Great Leap Forward showed the same indifference to human life. 'Deaths have benefits', he coolly observed in December 1958 to members of the party elite. 'They can fertilize the ground.' 'Working like this, with all these projects, half of China may well have to die.'<sup>52</sup>

### **Objective Enemies, the Camp System and the Attack on Individuality**

Totalitarianism's predatory career, according to Arendt, requires the never-ending search not simply for spies, conspirators, and wreckers but also 'objective enemies' or 'enemies of the people'. People classified in terms of these latter designations are foes in virtue of who they are, as opposed to what they may or may not have done. Objective enemies are intrinsically culpable, regardless of their subjective orientations or intentions. Mao's regime had its own peculiar version of this totalitarian idea. It came in at least three modalities. The first was a 'class status' system in which labels were inheritable or at the very least ascribed. Hence the tag 'landlord's son' was a stigma that persisted generation after generation; offspring carried the taint of the father or grandfather.<sup>53</sup> A second modality of objective enemy was the invention of foe-quotas, for instance during the Anti-Rightist purge when Mao demanded that between 1 and 10 per cent of intellectuals be individually condemned.<sup>54</sup> Third, objective enemies could be endlessly created

by inventing labels whose power lay in their very vacuity. Particularly effective were such floating signifiers of accusation as ‘rightist’, ‘revisionist’, or ‘capitalist roader’ whose arbitrary attribution was often tantamount to a death sentence. Labels could also be subdivided for greater punitive calibration. Here is Jasper Becker recounting the casuistry of Wu Zhifu, head of the Henan party organization during the Great Leap Forward, and a Maoist stalwart. At a meeting of party grandees in November 1959 in Zhengzhou, Wu reported to Mao on the excellent productivity of Henan’s agriculture but went on to enumerate a list of those to be targeted as enemies:

He said rightists included those who talked about the limitations of nature and predicted disaster, and divided them into five categories – among them the ‘push-pull faction,’ the ‘wait-and see faction,’ the ‘shaking-heads-in-front-of-the furnace faction’ and the ‘stretching-out-hands faction.’ These categories were so vague and so open to interpretation that anyone could be persecuted depending on the whim of their superiors. Fear and panic swept the province.<sup>55</sup>

Another way of putting this is to say that the whole Maoist system was a machine of lies: lies about opponents, lies which made innocent people into foes, lies to visitors (‘guests’) of China, and lies about Chinese predicaments – notably the denial of famine during the Great Leap Forward; ‘a catastrophe of lies,’ Becker called it, summarizing the experience of Henan province. Under Mao, China was one massive Potemkin Village of flourishing, rosy-cheeked peasants enjoying bumper harvests and, as one poster from the 1950s announced, surpassing America in wheat production.

The fate of enemies, objective or otherwise, was incarceration or death and often both together. Millions ended up in the so-called *laogai* or ‘reform through labor’ colonies scattered through China.<sup>56</sup> Even though millions are believed to have perished through brutalization and neglect, the *laogai* were not extermination camps. If anything they approximated the Russian Gulag system. Does this mean that the *laogai* and associated forms of internment (for example, the *laojiao*, or ‘reeducation through labor’ camps) were non-totalitarian in Arendt’s sense?<sup>57</sup> A notable feature of Arendt’s discussion of the German death camps is the little she says about death itself. It is another aspect of the *Lager* on which she dilates: their function as laboratories to demonstrate the conditions under which agency, spontaneity, and decency can be extinguished by denigrating human beings to a subhuman existence, a bundle of identical reflexes no different in principle from non-human species. We might say the same about the *laogai* and other Chinese camps; their utilitarian function as slave or penal labor was secondary to creating identical subjects, fearing the same fears, believing the same creed, repeating the same slogans, accepting their own superfluity. The camps were, in other words, sites designed to eradicate the moral personality of ordinary mortals and to refashion it in the image of the Party. This is a variant of the attempt to fabricate the New Man so beloved of other totalitarian regimes.

But camps were only one way in which plurality – individual distinctiveness

– was assailed by the Chinese regime. Another was highly public and violent ‘struggle’ sessions in which victims confessed their heresy. Struggle sessions – part and parcel of the purge cycle – were brutally transgressive affairs, designed to shatter taboos, destroy relationships by, among other things, inciting family accusation or disassociation, and forge stereotyped collective identities such as ‘workers’ or ‘poor peasants’.

The whole object of struggle was to smash prevailing social inhibitions in such a dramatic and traumatic way that the participants (both the activists and the targets) could never again reestablish their prestruggle relationship. Mao made struggle a permanent system in which some people became recurring victims, hauled out for new abuse every time the regime wanted to stir up the masses again. Such hapless individuals typically were those given ‘bad class labels’ – i.e. those designated as members of a pariah class such as capitalists, landlords, or rich peasants.<sup>58</sup>

Plurality was also in danger for all those who found themselves subject to Chinese judicial psychiatry, the subject of a remarkable report by Robin Munro.<sup>59</sup> Strongly influenced by Soviet doctrine, psychiatrists in the PRC initially took the view that many forms of political dissent were caused by mental impairment. ‘Political lunacy’ – an ailment attributed during the 1950s and 1960s to ‘sluggish schizophrenia’ or ‘paranoid psychosis’ – was attributed to such practices as sending letters of complaint to party officials, writing or shouting ‘reactionary’ slogans, and a zealous use of petitioning and litigating. A radical shift of emphasis occurred, fittingly, during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) when political psychiatry reached its moral nadir; an official survey of the proportion of ‘political cases’ appraised in 1970–1 by forensic psychiatrists at the Shanghai Municipal Health Centre, put the figure at 72.9 percent of the total. Mental illness was now understood to be a function of politics itself, or rather of ideological perversity. The treatment seemed obvious. By correcting a person’s ‘bourgeois ideological defects’, and by eliminating the anti-social stubbornness that lay at its root, psychiatrists could simultaneously cure the misguided and strengthen Maoist orthodoxy. As an editorial of the *Chinese Journal of Neurology and Psychiatry* put it, in April 1966, ‘Psychotherapy’ is ‘a kind of ideological re-education, the essence of which is to instill in the patients a revolutionary worldview and outlook on life’. Munro has a harrowing story to tell of the Chinese writer Lu Ling who earned the displeasure of Communist Party cultural commissars for repudiating socialist realism. Arrested in June 1955, Lu spent four years in solitary confinement ‘forced by his inquisitors to write endless screeds of self-denunciatory material’ before ‘he finally exploded and wrote a second major rebuttal of all the charges against him’. That transgression led to Lu’s being sent to the dreaded Qincheng Prison where his imperviousness to ideological reform resulted in further punishment. In early 1961, his health had deteriorated so markedly that Lu was transferred to a psychiatric hospital and, after three years of intensive medication, sent home. But shortly thereafter he began to write a series of petitions to the authorities seeking redress for his suffering. Though such petitions were rambling to the point

of incoherence, Lu was rearrested, sent back to prison, and by 1974 had lost all vestiges of sanity. Five years later he was officially rehabilitated.

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Like the Soviet Union after Stalin, China shed much of its totalitarian baggage once Mao left the scene. The Gang of Four was purged, and under Deng Xiaoping the PRC became what it remains to this day: a one-party dictatorship. Newer slogans of ‘spiritual civilization’, of ‘peaceful rise’, of order and harmony – however disingenuous – could not be more dissimilar to the Maoist inflammatory language of old. The matter to be discussed now, however, concerns ways that the PRC *under Mao* was not totalitarian (again, in Arendt’s sense of that term) and the implications for totalitarian theory that follow from such a demonstration – particularly in regard to Arendt’s fleeting remarks on China. Two issues are especially germane; both are amply discussed by China scholars but are little known among students of Arendt and political theorists of totalitarianism more generally (who tend, like Arendt herself, to be Europe-focused).

To begin with, Mao was a dictator who for most of his career had to share power with a cohort of other leaders. Not all were willing to kow-tow to him and even an essentially servile (and blackmailed) character such as Zhou Enlai could on occasion bare his teeth. On the international stage Mao was also vulnerable. Unlike Hitler or Stalin, Mao was for some time a dependent hegemon, reliant on Russia for aid – e.g. the Superpower program – and, to an extent, authority. (Khrushchev’s denunciation of the cult of Stalin was deeply alarming for Mao because he saw in it an augury of his own fate.) Between 1949 and the Cultural Revolution, Mao was *primus inter pares*, dominating the Politburo’s Standing Committee, but at times confounded and opposed by men with significant revolutionary – that is to say, conspiratorial and military – prestige of their own: notably, Defense Minister Peng Dehuai (1898–1974) and Liu Shaoqi (1898–1969), President of the PRC until his fall from grace. Both feared Mao but stood up to him during the Great Leap Forward and were responsible for the Chairman’s brief eclipse in the early 1960s. Peng had also, in 1956, criticized the cult of personality, arguing that instead of the armed forces swearing an oath of allegiance to Mao, they should pledge it to the nation. In 1961 at a conference of party grandees at Lushan, Mao was forced to reduce his demands for food requisitions from the peasantry by 34 percent – again, because of high-level party opposition. One cannot imagine Hitler or Stalin being in a similar predicament or, because of intra-party maneuvering, of affording Himmler or Beria the kind of influence that Mao felt compelled to grant Lin Biao. It was Lin (a marshal with similar prestige to Peng) with whom Mao was forced to share power during the Cultural Revolution to ensure that the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) remained pliable. In turn, Lin promoted his cronies to PLA senior positions; all of them owed direct loyalty to him. So powerful did Lin become that when Mao, fearing the rivalry, demanded a self-criticism in 1971, his

erstwhile ally refused. Lin died soon afterwards but his special partnership with Mao, his relative independence, and his ability to negotiate for advantage, has no parallel with the Nazi or Soviet cases.<sup>60</sup>

A second pertinent issue to consider – again, seeking to contrast the Maoist case with that of Hitler and Stalin – concerns the relative power position in the regime of the PLA and the secret police. Kenneth Lieberthal reminds us that:

The Chinese decided not to duplicate the KGB when they adopted major components of the Soviet political system under Stalin. That is, they decided that they would not develop a secret police apparatus that penetrated the party and government, that operated in highly centralized fashion, and that became a state within a state, answerable ultimately only to the supreme leader at the top. Perhaps reflecting the lessons and operational styles developed during their long guerrilla war before 1949, the Chinese communist leaders decided to develop a somewhat more decentralized repressive apparatus with greater emphasis on political controls embedded in *danweis* [work units] and with a taboo, broken only during the Cultural Revolution, on having the police apparatus penetrate the party itself.<sup>61</sup>

Of course, a very active secret police existed in Mao's time (as it does to this day). Naturally Mao employed it when he could against party competitors; a key instrument was Kang Sheng. A communist revolutionary who only joined Mao's camp in 1935, Kang had learned his police methods first hand in Moscow from the masters. Mao, recognizing his talents, appointed Kang to head the party's security service, known under the euphemism of the Social Affairs Department. Under Kang's leadership, it prosecuted a reign of terror in communist-controlled Yen-an. Once the PRC was established, Kang experienced a diminution in his power until the Cultural Revolution when his sanguinary skills were once more required. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao also adapted the classic totalitarian move of proliferating ever more radical organizations under his putative control: youthful Red Guards and the mostly adult 'Rebels' – one million strong in Shanghai alone in 1967 – who mauled the party from within. The more general points, however, are that Kang's influence was sporadic and that for most of the regime the PLA was ascendant over the secret police. That contrasted both with the Nazi case in which the army had to be corralled into the regime and Bolshevik Russia where the Red Army was established after the revolution, albeit in good measure with newly domesticated ex-Tsarist troops. In China, the situation was very different: without the PLA – a fighting force since 1927 – the revolution would never have occurred in the first place nor the PRC founded. That explains its peculiar prestige and position within the collective dictatorship that is the Chinese state.

## Concluding Remarks

This article has explored the paradox that, errors notwithstanding, Arendt's delineation of totalitarianism is in many respects applicable to the Maoist regime. Yet hostility towards the 'totalitarian model' remains entrenched among China scholars and, in good measure, for sensible reasons. We have seen two key respects in

which Mao's regime does not 'fit' the cases of Bolshevism and National Socialism – respects that Sinologists themselves have often noted. They will find nothing new in my sketch. But the fact of Maoist asymmetry is surely pertinent for the political theory of totalitarianism because of the questions it raises for those still committed to Arendt's legacy. Whether a system is dubbed totalitarian or not rests in good measure on what one chooses to consider especially significant. Should we focus on the turmoil of totalitarianism or the order that survives it? Specifically, should we, in the context of China, emphasize the chaotic political campaigns more than the durable work units that enforced them? Arendt herself offered no sustained account of workplace and occupational relations but, in China, they were integral to the regime. How many 'elements' of totalitarianism must exist, and in what articulation, for a formation to be deemed totalitarian? If, for example, the secret police really is subordinated to the army, does that mean that the political system is not authentically totalitarian? That was one question Arendt posed herself. Writing of the post-Stalin transition in Russia, she considered the prospect of the army's being employed in a similar way to the secret police and effectively usurping its function. Given the 'flexibility' of totalitarian organization, she reasoned, 'we should be prepared for the possibility of the ... transformation of the army and the military into a police organ, or for an amalgamation of military and police troops under the command of the higher officer corps of the army; as long as the party remains the uncontested higher authority, this does not necessarily preclude police methods of rule'.<sup>62</sup> Can a leader face sustained defiance or party competition and still be considered the 'motor' of a totalitarian system?<sup>63</sup> Finally, can an authoritarian system that evolves out of totalitarianism descend back into totalitarianism? That was something Arendt always feared. Perhaps it happened in China, at least if one concludes that only certain phases of the regime were totalitarian – such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution – but not the Maoist regime as a whole.<sup>64</sup>

## Notes

1. (1995) *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy 1949–1975*, p. 182. New York: Harcourt Brace. Letter of 28 April 1965.
2. Li Zhisui (1994) *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, tr. Tai Hung-chao, with a foreword by Andrew Nathan, p. 463. New York: Random House.
3. The Chinese 'are very much like us', Arendt informed Karl Jaspers. (1992) *Hannah Arendt-Karl Jaspers Correspondence 1926–1969*, tr. Robert and Rita Kimber, ed. Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, p. 74. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1st publ. 1985. Letter of 1 March 1947.
4. The story of their collaboration is recounted by Hsiao in (1987) 'Heidegger and our Translation of the Tao Te Ching', in Graham Parkes (ed.), *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, pp. 93–103. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
5. Otto Pöggeler (1987) 'West–East Dialogue: Heidegger and Lao-tzu', in Parkes (n. 4), pp. 64, 52. Pöggeler also tells of Heidegger's appreciation of Bertolt Brecht's Lao-zi poem.

6. Jaspers derived solace, during the Nazi imperium, from reading ancient Chinese philosophy. He remarked to Arendt, 'the truly great figures of the [Warring States] period were a great comfort to me after 1937'. Arendt (n. 3), p. 89; Jaspers to Arendt, 16 May 1947.
7. Arendt was the editor of the English-language version of Jaspers's (1967) *The Great Philosophers*. New York: Harcourt Brace. In that work, Confucius appears as one of the four 'paradigmatic individuals', along with Socrates, the Buddha and Jesus. Lao-tzu (= Lao-zi [Pinyin]), together with Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Plotinus and Nagarjuna, is classified under the rubric of 'the original thinkers'.
8. Arendt and Jaspers (n. 3), p. 72; Jaspers to Arendt, 1 Jan. 1947. Of Jaspers's intention to lecture on China and India, Arendt remarked, 'I don't know the first thing about them, and for years now they have always been rather exotic entities to me', *ibid.* p. 74; letter of 1 March 1947.
9. Hannah Arendt (1978) *The Life of the Mind*, p. 101. New York: Harcourt Brace. Arendt went on to say that what 'distinguishes us from them [Chinese classical philosophers] is not nous but logos, our necessity to give account of and justify in words. All strictly logical processes, such as the deducing of inferences from the general to the particular or inductive reasoning from particulars to some general rule, represent such justifications, and this can be done only in words' (pp. 101–2). Even so, she continued, there is 'one assumption we share with the Chinese: the unquestioned priority of vision for mental activities. This priority ... remains absolutely decisive throughout the history of Western metaphysics and its notion of truth.'
10. Hannah Arendt (1973) *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 306. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1st publ. 1951.
11. *Ibid.* p. 391.
12. *Ibid.* p. 308. 'Only where great masses are superfluous or can be spared without disastrous results of depopulation is totalitarian rule, as distinguished from a totalitarian movement, at all possible' (p. 311).
13. *Ibid.* p. 310.
14. *Ibid.* p. 311.
15. In a 1970 interview where she declared that the Soviet Union was no longer 'truly totalitarian', Arendt acknowledged that 'I have to admit that I am not in a position to judge China. At present only the people who dissent and are in the opposition are excluded, but this does not signify by any means that there is freedom there.' Her point was that Mao's regime lacked the concept, so fundamental to Stalin and Hitler, of the 'objective enemy'. No ruler before them had 'contested the freedom to say yes – Hitler [by] excluding Jews and gypsies from the right of consent and Stalin having been the only dictator who chopped off the heads of his most enthusiastic supporters, perhaps because he figured that whoever says yes can also say no'. Hannah Arendt (1973) 'Thoughts on Politics and Revolution' (summer 1970 interview with Adelbert Reif, tr. David Lindley), in *Crises of the Republic*, pp. 164–91, at 181. New York: Penguin, 1st publ. 1972.
16. Thought reform was bound to strike Arendt as non-totalitarian in as much as it implied that opponents were not 'objective enemies' but were capable of being redeemed. Yet, as we shall see, thought reform was also a far-reaching attack on plurality (as Arendt conceived it) and, in that sense, strikingly totalitarian. The Chinese camp system, the 'struggle sessions', and judicial psychiatry were part of an overlapping package of repression designed to coerce all minds into thinking as the party did at each stage of its haphazard trajectory.
17. Arendt (n. 10), p. xxvii. Arendt was referring to the passage, *ibid.* p. 311 (I quoted it earlier), where she refers to the prospects of totalitarianism in China being 'frighteningly good'.



18. Mao Zedong (1949) 'On the People's Democratic Dictatorship'. Canonical, the essay can be found in most editions of Mao's *Selected Works*. I have used the version in Conrad Brandt, Benjamin Schwartz, and John K. Fairbank (eds) (1952) *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism*, pp. 449–63. New York: Atheneum, 1st publ. 1952. Mao's dismissal of the totalitarian tag is on p. 458.
19. Arendt (n. 10), p. xxvii.
20. Ibid. See also Hannah Arendt (1953) 'The Ex-Communists', in *Hannah Arendt: Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn, tr. Robert and Rita Kimber, pp. 391–400. New York: Harcourt Brace. Arendt later opposed another fiction: the revolutionary romance that animated many of her, especially younger, contemporaries. The enthusiasm of radical western students for Mao – and for Castro, Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh – reminded Arendt of 'pseudo-religious incantations for saviours from another world; they would also call for Tito if only Yugoslavia were further away and less approachable'. See Hannah Arendt (1969) 'On Violence', in (n. 15), p. 98. 'The Third World is not a reality but an ideology,' she declared.
21. She appears to have perused (1957) 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People', in a supplement to *The New Leader* 40 (9 Sept.). See Hannah Arendt (1958) 'Epilogue: Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution', in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 487 n. 6. New York: Harcourt Brace; 2nd edn. This epilogue, originally written for the *Journal of Politics* 20(1) (Feb. 1958): 5–43, with the title 'Totalitarianism Imperialism: Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution', was expunged from later editions and reprintings of *Origins*.
22. Arendt and Jaspers (n. 3), p. 577; letter to Jaspers of 29 Nov. 1964. Arendt read the American version of (1964) *World Communism: The Disintegration of a Secular Faith*, tr. Lowenthal himself. New York: Oxford University Press. This is relevant because he added to the American edn two sections dealing with Mao's 'originality' that are absent from its German predecessor (1963) *Chruschtschow und der Weltkommunismus*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer GmbH.
23. Lowenthal summarized 'the three new departures of the Chinese Communists' as 'the seizure of power by means of a partisan army mainly recruited from peasants; the replacement of the coalition strategy of the "Popular Front" type by the fiction of an alliance of classes represented by the single Communist Party; the preference for 're-educating' rather than liquidating the urban and rural middle class after victory'. Ibid. pp. 114–15.
24. Ibid. pp. xi–xii. The penchant to think in centuries – the final victory of the proletariat, the Thousand Year Reich – thereby absorbing actual events into processes which only the distant future could validate, was for Arendt a hallmark of the 'fictitious world' of totalitarian ideology. See Arendt (n. 1), pp. 341–64.
25. For the most important texts in this rather acrimonious debate see Karl A. Wittfogel (1960) 'The Legend of "Maoism"' (parts 1 and 2), *China Quarterly* 1 (Jan.–March): 72–86, and *China Quarterly* 2 (April–June): 16–31. Benjamin Schwartz (1960) 'The Legend of the "Legend" of Maoism', *China Quarterly* 2 (April–June): 35–42. Benjamin Schwartz (1955) 'On the "Originality" of Mao Tse-Tung', *Foreign Affairs* 1 (Oct.): 67–76. See also Wittfogel (1957) *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 'Total power', on Wittfogel's account, was a structural feature of traditional oriental 'hydraulic societies' and thus long preceded communism.
26. Brandt et al. (n. 18), pp. 481–2 which noted, inter alia, that 'totalitarianism in Asia is not a mere revival of things past but a new invention of modern times'.
27. On the journal's origins and early development, see Roderick MacFarquhar's retrospective (1995) 'The Founding of the China Quarterly', *China Quarterly*, 143 (Sept.): 692–6.
28. Compare Chao Kuo-chün (1955) 'How Communist Power is Organized in China',

- Foreign Affairs* 1 (Oct.): 148–53, with Arendt (n. 10), pp. 364–88.
29. Robert Jay Lifton (1969) *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of 'Brainwashing' in China*, p. 429. New York: Norton, 1st publ. 1961.
  30. Vivienne Shue recalls that 'even as late as the mid-1960s, the hapless political science major who searched for a syllabus that included China, would most likely have found it only in a course entitled "Totalitarian Systems"'. Shue (1988) *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic*, p. 12. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. Shue bemoans this fact, together with the revival of the totalitarian concept in the 1970s and 1980s. But her précis of totalitarian characteristics, including 'superpenetration of the state into and overriding all aspects of individual and social life' is, in many respects, different from Arendt's own emphasis on 'the movement' rather than 'the state'. Arendt even has a section in *Origins* entitled 'The So-Called Totalitarian State': (n. 10), pp. 392–419. It is the mercurial, rather than the synchronized, nature of totalitarianism, and its anti-utilitarian character, that she accentuates.
  31. Arendt (n. 21), pp. 486–7. Jaspers appears to have been somewhat uneasy about Arendt's calculations (she repeated them in the 1966 preface to *Origins*, estimating 'fifteen million, about 3 per cent of the population in 1949'): 'I'd like to hear more from you about certain details; for example, the difference between China and Russia in terms of the mass purges (in China "only" 15 million out of 600 million). Starliner's thesis that China did not collectivize the peasantry is apparently wrong.' Arendt and Jaspers (n. 3), 334–5. Letter from Jaspers of 23 Nov. 1957. Jaspers was reading either a copy of the galleys of Arendt's 'Hungarian Revolution' piece or a pre-publication typewritten draft. A stylistically tortured footnote to Arendt's 1958 'Epilogue' (n. 21), p. 486, n. 5, is especially ironic in hindsight: 'The best proof of the difference between Mao's and Stalin's rule may be found in a comparison of the population censuses in China and Russia. The last Chinese census, counting close to 600 million people, was higher than statistical expectations, while Russian censuses for decades have been considerably lower than what statistically was expected. In the absence of reliable figures for population losses through extermination, one could guess the figure of those who were murdered in Russia from these millions of people who were "statistically lost".' 1958 was the year that Mao launched the Great Leap Forward; it killed in excess of 30 million people.
  32. Arendt (n. 21), p. 491.
  33. *Ibid.*
  34. *Ibid.* p. 487.
  35. *Ibid.* n. 6. The term 'le peuple' was used in a strongly pejorative way, denoting the starving multitude that had helped derail the French Revolution, in Arendt (1965) *On Revolution*, pp. 75 ff. New York: Penguin. As Margaret Canovan observes, it has a different referent to those individuals Arendt called 'the people'. 'The people' are that minority of actors engaged in a common enterprise 'mobilized around a shared world'. They combine unity and plurality and, given their ability to approach the world from different angles, are inoculated from ideological blinders. See Margaret Canovan (2002) 'The People, the Masses, and the Mobilization of Power: The Paradox of Hannah Arendt's Populism', *Social Research* 69(2) (Summer): 414.
  36. Arendt and Jaspers (n. 3), p. 335. Letter of 23 Nov. 1957.
  37. The Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress. Books. Origins of Totalitarianism. Introduction, third edition, 1966. Series: Speeches and Writings File, 1923–1975, n.d. Images 1–40. <http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mharendt/05/050990/0001d.gif>. Although digitized, this particular manuscript is not accessible off site. It can be viewed at one of the following locations: Library of Congress, Washington, DC, the New School University in New York City, and the Hannah Arendt Center at the University of Oldenburg, Germany. I employed the resources at the Library of Congress

- and use this opportunity to thank the staff concerned.
38. Abbott Gleason (1997) *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War*, ch. 5. New York: Oxford University Press.
  39. This becomes 'June 1966' in the published version: Arendt (n. 10), p. xl.
  40. I am drawing on Michael Schoenhals (ed.) (1996) *China's Cultural Revolution, 1966–1969: Not a Dinner Party*, pp. 362–3. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
  41. Roderick MacFarquhar (1974) *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, vol. 1, *Contradictions among the People 1956–1957*, p. 1. New York: Columbia University Press.
  42. Arendt and Jaspers (n. 3), p. 659. Letter of 3 Nov. 1966.
  43. Arendt (n. 10), p. xxvii, my emphasis.
  44. *Ibid.*, my emphasis.
  45. For a helpful overview of the various models that were applied to the CCP elite between 1949 and 1980, see Lucien Pye (1981) *The Dynamics of Chinese Politics*, pp. 41–56. Cambridge, MA: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain. Also see Perry on the three approaches (totalitarian, pluralist, state–society) that have dominated three consecutive generations of modern Sinologists. She argues that each of these generations has drawn on models (Soviet, American, and European respectively) alien to China's own traditions. E. J. Perry (1994) 'Trends in the Study of Chinese Politics: State–Society Relations', *China Quarterly* 139: 704–13. A more nuanced view is advanced by Nathan who acknowledges that, despite the Maoist regime's departure in many ways from 'the classic concept of totalitarianism', the 'concept highlights well several aspects of Mao's regime'. Andrew J. Nathan (1997) *China's Transition*, pp. 49–50. New York: Columbia University Press.
  46. Shue (n. 30), p. 13.
  47. Li Zhisui (n. 2), p. 107. (Nathan's statement comes from the foreword to this book, p. xi.) Mao's inclination towards frenzy and disharmony (the Confucian antithesis) is a leitmotif of Li's memoir. 'He wanted to move quickly, continuing the revolution' (p. 119); 'He was always in search of the new, the untested, the untried, both in his private life and in the affairs of the nation' (p. 121). During the Cultural Revolution Mao wrote to his wife Jiang Qing, 'Great chaos will lead to great order. The cycle appears every seven or eight years. The demons and monsters will come out by themselves. Their class character dictates it' (p. 461).
  48. Jung Chang and Jon Halliday (2006) *Mao: The Unknown Story*, pp. 390, 418, also 450–60. New York: Anchor Books. Chang and Halliday's biography of Mao has been criticized for its animus and for some credulity with witness accounts. Let us candidly admit that animus is as difficult to avoid in a portrait of Mao as it is in a picture of Hitler, Stalin or Pol Pot. Depravity and wickedness resist sanitized description. Even if half of Chang and Halliday's account is true, it is a devastating indictment. I have been careful, nonetheless, only to cite events that, to the best of my knowledge, are generally accepted by China scholars or consistent with their analyses. On Mao's recklessness, for instance, see Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals (2006) *Mao's Last Revolution*, pp. 132–54. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
  49. Li Zhisui (n. 2), p. 125, also p. 206. To Nehru, in Oct. 1954, Mao famously declared that the deaths of 'ten to twenty million people is nothing to be afraid of'.
  50. Arendt (n. 21), p. 492. The remark in question was 'poor men do not mind fire'.
  51. Figures cited in John Lewis Gaddis (2005) *The Cold War: A New History*, p. 50. New York: Penguin. Koreans of both sides lost over two million.
  52. Chang and Halliday (n. 49), pp. 430–1.
  53. For the lexicon of repression see Kwok-sing Li's invaluable (1995) *A Glossary of Political Terms of the People's Republic of China*, tr. Mary Lok, esp. at p. 150. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.
  54. Chang and Halliday (n. 49), p. 412.

55. Jasper Becker (1998) *Hungry Ghosts: China's Secret Famine*, p. 123. New York: Holt.
56. Sources include, Harry Wu (1992) *Laogai: The Chinese Gulag*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. Jean Pasqualini with Rudolf Chelminski (1973) *Prisoner of Mao*. London: André Deutsch. Jean-Louis Margolin (1999) 'China: A Long March into Night', in Stéfán Courtois, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, tr. J. Murphy and M. Kramer, pp. 463–546. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1st publ. 1997.
57. Roy Tsao shows that 'the core of Arendt's account of the concentration camps was first written not about the German camps at all, but Russian ones – it was adapted from a 1947 review of the book *The Dark Side of the Moon*, an anonymous compilation of testimony about conditions in Stalin's gulag'. See Tsao (2002) 'The Three Phases of Arendt's Theory of Totalitarianism', *Social Research* 69(2) (Summer): 601. Tsao conjectures that Arendt's description of the camps appears to be modelled on their earlier German manifestation, i.e. 'not the immense killing centres built in occupied Poland after 1941' (*ibid.*)
58. Kenneth Lieberthal (1995) *Governing China: From Revolution through Reform*, p. 69. New York: Norton. Figures are hard to come by but Lieberthal (*ibid.*) estimates that 'millions' were killed over the twenty-seven-year period in which the struggle sessions were mandatory. 'Tens of millions of other citizens were tortured, incarcerated, and deeply wounded.'
59. Human Rights Watch/Geneva Initiative on Psychiatry (2002) *Dangerous Minds: Political Psychiatry in China Today and its Origins in the Mao Era*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
60. On opposition to Mao, see Chang and Halliday (n. 49), pp. 390–2, 432 ff., 437–8, 462–4, 467–9, 480, 494–6, 526–9, 541.
61. Lieberthal (n. 59), p. 200; cf. Nathan (n. 45), p. 49.
62. Arendt (n. 21), p. 489. In the Mao era, the *danwei* (work unit) was the main organ of domestic control.
63. Arendt (n. 1), p. 373.
64. Recent years have seen a proliferation of new terms to describe the post-Maoist state, a veritable lexical harvest that includes 'fragmented authoritarianism', 'post-mobilization authoritarianism', 'developmental dictatorship', and even 'neo-Conservatism with Chinese characteristics'. All of these labels are testament to the major changes that have proceeded apace since Mao's death. Students of modern China, and political actors within it, disagree about these rubrics too. That is to be expected because linguistic contestation is bound up with the very nature of political change. Today it is only journalists and polemicists who still call contemporary China 'totalitarian'.