Mao's Hidden Body: The Liu Estate and Informal Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1954-1966

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During his world-shaking visit to China in 1972, President Richard Nixon (1913-1994) spent a night in Hangzhou. This scenic city left Nixon and the First Lady with a favorable impression as he considered their brief stay in Hangzhou "the most delightful interlude of the trip."[1] The guesthouse where the president and his entourage had arranged to stay in Hangzhou on February 26, 1972 was the Liu Estate (*Liuzhuang* 刘庄), a 130-acre villa inhabited by Chairman Mao Zedong most of the time in post-1949 China.[2] According to President Nixon's biographer, the Liu Estate was defined by its seclusion from other parts of the city:

> The guest house is a pale green stucco building with a red-tiled, pagoda-style roof, in a secluded, easily guarded complex of pagodas, pavilions, gazebos, and carefully tended formal gardens just outside of town. There is only one access road.[3]

President Nixon's one-night stopover during his 1972 tour attested to the special political significance of the Liu Estate, Chairman Mao's winter villa in Hangzhou during the People's Republic of China (PRC, 1949-present). James Gao describes this estate as Mao's "forbidden city" outside Beijing, for which reason Hangzhou became the chairman's "third home."[4] As Mao visited Hangzhou over 40 times between 1953 and 1975, the Liu Estate was not only his residence but also the very location where numerous historical events occurred, and many game-changing ideas were brainstormed and disseminated, including the drafting of the PRC's first constitution in 1954 and the issuance of the "May 16 Notification" (*Wu yiliu tongzhi* 五一六通知) in 1966 that kickstarted the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).[5]

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[1] Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 573.
[2] Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 19.
[3] Richard Wilson, *The President's trip to China; A Pictorial Record of the Historic Journey to the People's Republic of China with Text by Members of the American Press Corps* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), 32.
[4] James Z. Gao, *The Communist Takeover of Hangzhou: The Transformation of City and Cadre, 1949–1954* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 221-2. The first and second homes were in Beijing and Shaoshan, Hunan.
[5] Ye Jianxin 叶建新, *Mao Zedong yu Xihu* 毛泽东与西湖 (Mao Zedong and West Lake) (Hangzhou:

Disguised as a residential complex, the Liu Estate became a political space in Mao-era China at its finest. Hung Wu defines a "political space" both "as an architectonic embodiment of political ideology and as an architectural site activating political action and expression."[6] Although it has never been as widely known as Tiananmen Square in Beijing, the Liu Estate in this article qualified as a political space because of its capacity to host numerous significant political events and generate political ideas and documents that would profoundly impact the PRC's history. It was a political space but in a different light. As James Gao notes, the Liu Estate allowed Mao to distance himself "from the formal political stage" and play "games of informal politics."[7]

The existing studies on the political space focus mostly on the visibility of political symbols as a means of fostering political/ideological meanings in formal politics.[8] By contrast, this article explores the other, but equally important, side of political culture in Mao-era China, namely, the concealment and erasure of images and traces of the PRC's most important man for political purposes. My emphasis on Mao's hiddenness and aloofness—his occasional absence from Beijing, the epicenter of national politics, and his presence at the Liu Estate—helps me make two observations. First, Mao took issue with the Soviet mode of bureaucracy and called for "continuous revolution" (*buduan gemin* 不断革命) to accelerate the transition from socialism to communism.[9] For Mao, Weberian bureaucracy, despite its rationality, efficiency, and precision, created a new problem, that is, the absence of "external control" over "bureaucratic autonomy."[10]

In this sense, Mao's antibureaucratic bent necessitated his assumption of a role as an outsider in bureaucracy. As a charismatic leader external to and above bureaucracy, Mao resorted to informal rules to defy bureaucratic routines by engaging in political activities and maneuvering in remote places like the Liu Estate. Hence, Mao's externality enabled

Hangzhou chubanshe, 2005), 174-188.
[6] Hung Wu, *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 9.
[7] Gao, *The Communist Takeover of Hangzhou*, 223-224.
[8] For example, Chang-tai Hung, *Mao's New World: Political Culture in the Early People's Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Chang-tai Hung, *Politics of Control: Creating Red Culture in the Early People's Republic of China* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2021); Wu, *Remaking Beijing*.
[9] Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic* (Third Edition) (New York, The Free Press, 1999), 295.
[10] Harry Harding, *Organizing China: The Problem of Bureaucracy, 1949-1976* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), 2.

him to tackle the inherent contradiction of bureaucracy by deploying the tactics of informal politics. Scholars are usually concerned about the difficulty of studying informal politics because one can get "a glimpse of the inner workings" of informal politics only "during the occasional outbursts of polemics,"[11] that is, severe political crises. My research into the Liu Estate transcends this crisis model by arguing that Mao's informal politics was routinized. Or, I would put it another way around: politics was deliberately informalized to counter bureaucratization in China under Mao.

Second, Mao faced another contradiction, that is, "the Lefort Paradox" as Alexei Yurchak calls it—an inherent contradiction between the external nature of objective truths in the ideological discourse and the absence of means to describe such "truths"—in all modern societies. Only the figure of "master," who is conceived of as both "standing *outside* ideological discourse and possessing *external* knowledge of the objective truth," could manage to conceal such a contradiction.[12] In post-1949 China, only Mao could be presented as such a "master" who stayed outside ideological discourse. As the Liu Estate gave this externality a physical dimension, Maoism, the very ideology created by and named after Mao, became naturalized.

I thus argue that Mao Zedong's hidden body both resulted from various contradictions, bureaucratically and ideologically, in post-1949 China and functioned to resolve such contradictions. This paradoxically allowed him to enjoy a role as an anti-establishment hero against the very establishment—the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—he had helped create and was leading, fiercely attack the bureaucratized Party organs, and assume his authority as the possessor of the objective truth, but mask the fact that he himself was the most significant contributor to the CCP's ideological discourse.

Informal Politics and the Lefort Paradox

One of the earliest studies on the informal dimension of the CCP's politics appeared in Andrew Nathan's 1973 essay, "A Factionalism Model for CCP Politics." Facing the demise of consensual politics within the upper-echelon CCP leadership in Beijing during the Cultural Revolution, Nathan ushered in the model of factionalism where informal

[11] Lowell Dittmer, "Reflections on Elite Informal Politics," in *The Nature of Chinese Politics: From Mao to Jiang*, ed., Jonathan Unger (London: Routledge, 2002), 177.
[12] Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 10.

politics was anchored and extended.[13] In post-Mao times, the research into informal politics in the PRC gained new momentum. Frederick Teiwes, for example, differentiates the CCP's "normative rules," namely "formal institutional power," from "informal and shifting" "policy alliances." Teiwes, like Andrew Nathan, underscores factionalism as a major form of the CCP's informal politics.[14]

Lowell Dittmer's more recent study also attempts to distinguish the formal and the informal by highlighting "the logic of the 'relationships'" or *guanxi* 关系. In Dittmer's words, "formal groups consist of 'purpose-rational' relations, typically recruited from current bureaucratic subordinates and colleagues, while informal groups consist of 'value-rational' relations, recruited from primordial associates and cronies."[15] Even with such a difference, Dittmer cautions against portraying informal politics in a negative light—"defining informal politics not in terms of what it is but in terms of what it is not: formal politics"—and reminds the readers of "the interdependency between formal and informal politics."[16]

Given the vital role of personal relations and power in shaping informal politics, Dittmer posits that it was more important to the CCP's higher organization, where the tasks were performed in a "relatively unstructured way" demanding personal judgment, quick decisions, and secrecy.[17] Dittmer's analysis is based upon a presumption that informal politics was antithetical to "routine bureaucratic policy-making" in Mao-era China. Therefore, he notes that informal politics arose when "the leadership [was] beset by a crisis not resolvable through standard operating procedures, permitting the existing hierarchical monopoly to break down into a more open competition among elites."[18]

It is understandable that the crisis model prevails in research into the CCP's informal political practices, for the earliest studies on the PRC's informal politics by Nathan and Tang Tsou arose precisely because of the necessity to respond to the deep political crisis unfolding during the eventful years of the Cultural Revolution. My research, by contrast,

[13] Andrew J. Nathan, "A Factionalism Model for CCP Politics," *The China Quarterly*, No. 53 (January 1973): 34-44.
[14] Frederick C. Teiwes, *Leadership, Legitimacy and Conflict in China From a Charismatic Mao to the Politics of Succession* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1984), 85-103.
[15] Dittmer, "Reflections on Elite Informal Politics," 182.
[16] Lowell Dittmer, "Modernizing Chinese Informal Politics," in *The Nature of Chinese Politics: From Mao to Jiang*, ed., Jonathan Unger (London: Routledge, 2002), 11.
[17] Dittmer, "Modernizing Chinese Informal Politics," 16-19.
[18] Dittmer, "Modernizing Chinese Informal Politics," 36.

conceives of informal politics not necessarily as an outgrowth of the intensification of intraparty clashes, but as a process immanent in the party politics in Mao's China. Mao's charismatic rule, according to Daniel Leese, was essentially based on "emotion and loyalty rather than on formal rules" and entailed a "certain aloofness" throughout the PRC's early years.[19] Rather than relying on rational (in the Weberian sense) and well-structured bureaucracy, China under Mao upheld official ideology with "an antibureaucratic cast,"[20] because the stable, routinized "*status quo* was apt to be considered 'reactionary'."[21]

Mao's loath to maintain the *status quo* characterized China's "governance techniques," which was "marked by a signature Maoist stamp." Such techniques, which Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth Perry aptly call "guerrilla-style policy-making," included "ceaseless change, tension management, continual experimentation, and ad-hoc adjustment."[22]Those creative and proactive tactics came into existence because of the CCP's rich experiences in its revolutionary past and helped the PRC weather various political crises. It is thus clear that informal politics was by no means an unusual practice in times of emergency, but a normative one in the peculiar political context of the PRC.

The key to counter-bureaucratic informal politics was the designation of an outsider to lower social and political costs of bureaucratization. Harry Harding notes that Weberian, highly rational bureaucracy is inherently flawed in that it alienates the public from the government and forestalls "external control."[23] In this sense, the Soviet-inspired formal institutions had to be adapted to fit China's unique sociopolitical conditions. In other words, there was a pressing need for a mechanism of "external control" in Mao-led China to both sustain Soviet-style bureaucracy, that is, formal politics, and carry out the CCP's "guerrilla-style policy-making," namely, informal politics.

Only Mao was entitled to occupy an external position to oversee and, if necessary, sabotage the PRC's hierarchical bureaucracy as in the case during the Cultural Revolution. Meanwhile, he also held "the imaginary external position which render[ed] ideological

[19] Daniel Leese, *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in China's Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 18-19.
[20] Harding, *Organizing China*, 2.
[21] Dittmer, "Modernizing Chinese Informal Politics," 3.
[22] Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry, "Embracing Uncertainty: Guerrilla Policy Style and Adaptive Governance in China," in *Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China*, eds., Sebastian Heilmann, and Elizabeth J. Perry (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 3-7.
[23] Harding, *Organizing China*, 2.

discourse stable" so as to tackle the Lefort Paradox.[24] Developed by Claude Lefort's (1924-2010), the Lefort Paradox pervaded not just socialist societies but the entire modern world. Lefort finds that the rule in the "social world," on the one hand, "must be abstracted from any question concerning its origin; thus, it goes beyond the operations that it controls." On the other hand, "the rule must also prove its validity through usage; it is constantly subject to the demonstration of its effectiveness, and is thus contradictorily represented as a convention." Concealing such a contradiction entails "the authority of the master," who thereby becomes an object of representation, "presented as possessor of the knowledge of the rule."[25]

Alexei Yurchak applies this notion of contradiction to the Stalinist Soviet Union and asserts that Joseph Stalin (1878-1953) stood as the master who was able to temporarily conceal "the contradiction by allowing it 'to appear through himself'." [26]The thrust of resolving the Lefort Paradox in Soviet society was to allow citizens to both submit themselves to the party leadership and gain a self-styled subjectivity as "enlightened and independent-minded" individuals who pursued "knowledge and [were] inquisitive and creative."[27]

Based on the existing literature about antibureaucratic informal politics and following Yurchak's analysis of the Lefort paradox, I contend that the Liu Estate gave Mao's "extremal position" a spatial dimension. Considering the villa's geographical isolation and its long distance from the PRC's political center, it was "external" both figuratively and literally. This external position enabled Mao to make "editorial comments" [28]—to borrow Yurchak's phrase again—about the CCP's ideological discourse and political practices at various moments in Mao-era China as if the Party's chairman were not an insider of it. It was such aloofness that entitled Mao to mount attacks on the increasingly bureaucratized Party which, according to Mao, gradually lost connection with the people.

Mao actually faced a dilemma in all socialist regimes as described by Claude Lefort: one between "the rules of organization and the rules of thought." The former—crystallized

[24] Jason McGrath, "Cultural Revolution Model Opera Films and the Realist Tradition in Chinese Cinema," *The Opera Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 2-3 (September 2010): 354.
[25] Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986), 212-3.
[26] Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 10.
[27] Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 10.
[28] Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 11-13.

in a highly hierarchical bureaucratical system—is necessary only because it functions as the expediency before the latter—the communist utopia—would finally prevail. However, in virtually all socialist societies, bureaucratic structures were "ratified as if they constituted in themselves the essence of socialism."[29] It was under this circumstance that Mao occupied a comfortable—namely, external—position to confer on the masses an identity as the subject of the new republic and simultaneously call for breaking the yoke of their subjection, that is, "to rebel is justified."

Political Space and the Body Politic

The present research highlights the Liu Estate as the very locus of Mao's externality because of this resort's remoteness and seclusion. Its political ramifications resided in its invisibility, posing a stark contrast to the visibility and accessibility of certain locations and structures with political and ideological importance in Beijing. Chang-tai Hung underscores the use of symbolism in public spaces in post-1949 Beijing to "give meaning to [China's] revolution" in his discussion of campaigns launched by the CCP to spatially refashion Beijing.[30] Similarly, Hung Wu emphasizes the symbolic significance of images at Tiananmen, such as Mao's "official photographs and paintings," in making the political space in China's capital.[31] In the process of reviewing the long history of Tiananmen, Hung Wu explores the dialectic relationship between visibility and invisibility in late imperial Beijing and argues that the concealment of the emperor "behind the walls and gates" endowed the paramount leader of the empire to watch everything outside from his private space."[32]

Given the transformation of the Forbidden City into a public museum, its hiddenness vanished in post-1949 China. Zhongnanhai 中南海, Mao's residence, office, and venue to receive guests and visitors both at home and abroad, could have taken the place of the Forbidden City by assuming a role as an invisible space for informal politics. Although it did perform a function as a locus for Mao to hold private meetings with specialists in various fields, its hiddenness was out of the question. As Chen Boda's 陈伯达 (1904-1989) son recalled, Mao had to share space inside Zhongnanhai with dozens of the highest leaders

[29] Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society*, 57-64.
[30] Hung, *Mao's New World*, 2-6.
[31] Wu, *Remaking Beijing*, 10. For the CCP's effort to remake Beijing as a political space, please also see Hung, *Politics of Control*, 147.
[32] Wu, *Remaking Beijing*, 58.

of the PRC, many of whom would become his archenemies during the Cultural Revolution,[33] rendering private consultation and clandestine planning difficult, if possible.

Beijing, therefore, was better at being a visible political space for the young republic with the exhibition of signs, symbols, and structures with special political/ideological implications. Displaying the images of the leadership as a rallying point of nationalism has been a universal and transcultural phenomenon. In the wake of the Meiji Restoration (1868-1869), for example, Japan's modernizing regime attempted to make a connection between the visibility of the emperor and the "national totality."[34] Emperor Meiji, therefore, exemplified what Ernst Kantorowicz calls "the king's two bodies": the "body natural" and the "body politic" that "reduce[d], or even remove[d], the imperfections of the fragile human nature" but embodied the immortality of the kingship.[35] In a similar fashion, Mao sometimes took control of China's "body politic" by displaying his "body natural," as in the case of his historic swim in the Yangzi River on July 16, 1966.[36] A decade later, the public exhibition of Mao's body in the Mausoleum of Mao Zedong (*Mao Zedong jinian tang* 毛泽东纪念堂) at the heart of Beijing further incarnates the dialectical relationship between mortal and immortal Chairman Mao.

This article highlights Mao's third body—his *hidden body* between the 1950s and 1970s. The Liu Estate's notorious lack of transparency and accessibility provided Mao with a space where his body was concealed. It was this hidden body in a remote location that contributed to the making of political decisions, the production of documents, and the unfolding of events with a profound impact on the history of the PRC. Aside from the PRC's first constitution and the document that jumpstarted the Cultural Revolution, informal politics inside the Liu Estate generated a series of political literature, including the (in)famous editorial in the *People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao* 人民日报) that initiated the Anti-Rightist Movement (1957) in September 1957 and Mao's two poems entitled "Farewell to the God of Plague" (*Song wenshen* 送瘟神) in 1958, signaling the final triumph of Mao's crusade against schistosomiasis.

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[33] Chen Xiaonong 陈晓农, *Chen Boda zuihou koushu huiyi* 陈伯达最后口述回忆 (Final oral memoirs of Chen Boda) (Hong Kong: Xingke'er [Xianggang] youxian gongsi, 2005), 204. Chen Boda's family lived at Zhongnanhai between 1951 and 1966.
[34] Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 24.
[35] Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 8-13.
[36] Shuk-wah Poon, "Embodying Maoism: The swimming craze, the Mao cult, and body politics in Communist China, 1950s–1970s," *Modern Asian Studies*, 2019, Vol.53 (5): 1450.

The Liu Estate: A Short History

The Liu Estate, one of the centers of Mao's informal politics, had undergone major renovation on the basis of five private villas, the largest of which was initially established and owned by Liu Xuexun 刘学询 (1855-1935), a nouveau riche from late-Qing Guangdong. Built in 1905, the Liu Estate in its original form was merely seven hectares in size.[37] After its completion, Liu spent the rest of his life decorating and beautifying the estate and, therefore, suffered from heavy debt.[38] For half a century, memoirists and tourists had mixed feelings about the refined garden and exquisite buildings inside the villa. The critics felt angered by the mushrooming of private properties—the Liu Estate in particular—and the privileged class's encroachment into the public space on the shore of West Lake during Republican times (1911-1949). For example, artist Feng Zikai 丰子恺 (1898-1975) pointed his finger at dirty money earned through corruption and exploitation of the laboring people behind the construction of personal villas in the West Lake region.[39] In a similar fashion, Huang Yanpei 黄炎培 (1878-1965), a well-esteemed industrialist and educator, expressed his abhorrence of the Liu Estate in one of his poems: He did not see the scenic beauty but could only smell "the stinks of copper [coins]" (*tongxiu* 铜臭).[40]

Other visitors felt impressed by the Liu Estate's exceptional location and the splendor of the buildings and gardens inside it. The estate was situated on the southwestern shore of the lake, a relatively quiet and secluded place uncontaminated by the waves of commercialization Hangzhou was undergoing in the first half of the twentieth century. Therefore, it escaped the harassment of the clamors of the residents and tourists in other parts of the lake. More importantly, the estate possessed a vast collection of rare antiques, rockeries, bonsais, and artistic works, making it the mecca of landscape and fine arts in this area.[41] Hence, generations of writers, artists, and tourists, such as Shi Pingmei 石评梅

[37] Feng Xiangzhen 冯祥珍, "Liuzhuang jingxi" (The Liu Estate, past and present), in *Xihu fengjing yuanlin (1949-1989)* 西湖风景园林（1949-1989） (Landscape in West Lake [1949-1989]), ed., Hangzhou shi yuanlin wenwu guanli ju (Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu chubanshe, 1990), 91.
[38] Daqiao 大乔, "Tan Da Liuzhuang" 谈大刘庄 (On the great Liu estate), in *Xihu wenxian jicheng, di 14 ce, Lidai xihu wenxuan zhuanji* 西湖文献集成，第 14 册，历代西湖文选专辑 (Collection of literature about West Lake, book 14, special volume of essays on West Lake in all ages), ed., Wang Guoping 王国平 (Hangzhou: Hangzhou chubanshe, 2004), 726-30.
[39] Feng Zikai 丰子恺, *Bai E: Feng Zikai zhuanji* 白鹅：丰子恺专集 (White Goose: special collection of Feng Zikai) (Chengdu: Tiandi chubanshe, 2015), 218.
[40] Shi Diandong, *Xihu zhi* 西湖志 (The annals of West Lake) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 337.
[41] Daqiao 大乔, "Tan Da Liuzhuang," 730-731. Also, Yao Yuqiu 姚毓璆 and Zheng Qisheng 郑祺生, "Shuishan chuchu mingxiu, qingyu shishi haoqi—Minguo shiqi Hangzhou Xihu yuanlin" 水山处处明秀

(1902-1928), ranked it as the number one garden on West Lake.[42]

The competing opinions indicated that the Liu Estate was not entirely private. It was more or less open to the public before 1949. Japanese writer Muramatsu Shōfū 村松梢風 (1889-1961), for example, visited China in the early 1920s and found that the Liu Estate had already been unoccupied by then, and any visitors could freely take a tour inside it.[43] It was thus conceivable that the Liu Estate became a public space as late as the opening years of the 1920s. The war against Japan (1937-1945) created havoc on it: Not only were its furnishings and collections robbed during the war, but some portion of the estate was also sold and refashioned into a restaurant. By the late 1940s, the Liu Estate was better known as a location to moor tourist boats on a regular basis.[44]

The Making of Mao's Resort

In the early 1950s, the majority of the Liu Estate was taken over by the Ministry of Railroad (*Tiedao bu* 铁道部) and transformed into a large sanatorium. The Liu family was allowed to keep some structures inside it, including the family shrine.[45] The sanatorium was completed in February 1951 and officially opened in April.[46] Rewarding model workers across China for their hard work by sending them to sanatoria had been of political and ideological significance in the PRC to raise the morale of the working class and display the advantage of socialism. Hangzhou's well-known scenic beauty prompted various government and Party sectors to construct their own sanatoria in this city. A *People's Daily* report in 1951 showed that the sanatorium inside the Liu Estate was a two-story western-style mansion.[47]

晴雨时时好奇—民国时期杭州西湖园林 (Waters and mountains are all gorgeous, and rain or shine, [the landscape] is always beautiful and unique—landscape on West Lake in Republican times), in *Minguo shiqi Hangzhou* 民国时期杭州 (Hangzhou in Republican times) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1997), 623.

[42] Shi Pingmei 石评梅, *Shi Pingmei zuopin ji: wuxian xiangsi wuxian hen* 石评梅作品集：无限相思无限恨 (The collection of Shi Pingmei's works: limitless yearnings and limitless remorse) (Beijing: Zhongguo Huaqiao chubanshe, 2013), 210.

[43] Muramatsu Shōfū 村松梢風, *Mato* 魔都 (Demonic capital) (Tōkyō : Yumani Shobō, 1924), 211.

[44] Hu Shanyuan 胡山源, "You Hang suiji" 游杭随记 (Desultory records about the trip to Hangzhou), in *Xihu wenxian jicheng, di 14 ce, Lidai xihu wenxuan zhuanji* 西湖文献集成，第 14 册，历代西湖文选专辑 (Collection of literature about West Lake, book 14, special volume of essays on West Lake in all ages), ed., Wang Guoping (Hangzhou: Hangzhou chubanshe, 2004), 811-813.

[45] Feng, "Liuzhuang jinxi," 92.

[46] Yu Fang 余芳, "Xihu shang de 'gongren zhijia'" 西湖上的工人之家 (The "workers' home" on West Lake), *Renmin ribao* 人民日报, September 7, 1952.

[47] Xue Zhaozhang 薛照章 and Zhang Zonghuang 張宗煌, "Zai Xihu gongren xiuyangyuan li" 在西湖工人

In 1953, the municipal government proposed to "develop Hangzhou as a city for recreation, tourism, and cultural activities."[48] To this end, West Lake's southwestern shore, including the entire Liu Estate and its neighboring villas and buildings, would be incorporated into the "West Mountain Convalesce Area" (*Xishan xiuyang qu* 西山休养区).[49] Meanwhile, another plan was afoot to construct a supersized 333-hectare public park on the southern shore to include the Liu Estate and the nearby Ding Family Mountain (*Dingjia shan* 丁家山),[50] as well as the Kang Estate (*Kangzhuang* 康庄), a residential complex formerly belonging to late-Qing reformist Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858-1927).[51]

By the time when the two plans were formulated, a secret program was set in motion. In January 1953, the Zhejiang provincial government proceeded to take back the ownership of the Liu Estate.[52] However, the planners of the Hangzhou government were kept in the dark by then. Otherwise, it would be unthinkable that a plan to overhaul West Lake's southwestern shore that included the Liu Estate still came under consideration. In 1953, the last owner of the Liu Estate, Liu Xuexun's eighth wife, moved out, paving the way for a complete renovation.[53] Very soon, the Zhejiang government, under the guidance of the vice provincial governor, started the project by purchasing facilities from Shanghai and contracting builders. By the end of April, according to a report, the Liu Estate was almost ready for an unidentified "leading cadre" (*shouzhang* 首长) to stay.[54]

休养院里 (Inside the workers' sanatorium on West Lake), *Renmin ribao* 人民日报, July 18, 1951.

[48] Gao, *The Communist Takeover of Hangzhou*, 217-218.

[49] "Xihu fengjing qu jianshe jihua dagang (chugao)" 西湖风景区建设计划大纲（初稿） (The outline of the construction plan in the West Lake scenic zone), in *Xihu wenxian jicheng di 12 ce, Zhonghua renmin gongheguo chengli 50 nian Xihu wenxian zhuanji* 西湖文献集成第 12 册 中华人民共和国成立 50 年西湖文献专辑 (Collection of literatures about West Lake, book 12, special issue of literatures about West Lake in 50 years since the founding of PRC), ed., Wang Guoping 王国平 (Hangzhou: Hangzhou chubanshe, 2004), 74.

[50] "Guanyu Xihu fengjing zhengjian gongzuo jihua de baogao" 关于西湖风景整建工作计划的报告 (A report on refashioning West Lake's landscapes), in *Xihu wenxian jicheng di 12 ce, Zhonghua renmin gongheguo chengli 50 nian Xihu wenxian zhuanji* 西湖文献集成第 12 册 中华人民共和国成立 50 年西湖文献专辑 (Collection of literatures about West Lake, book 12, special issue of literatures about West Lake in 50 years since the founding of PRC), ed., Wang Guoping 王国平 (Hangzhou: Hangzhou chubanshe, 2004), 262.

[51] Pan Zhiliang 潘志良, *Xihu shangshi* 西湖赏石 (Enjoying the rockeries on West Lake) (Hangzhou: Hangzhou chubanshe, 2014), 173.

[52] "Guanyu jieshou Liuzhuang yuanlin fangwu wenti" 关于接收刘庄园林房屋问题 (Issues of taking over the Liu Estate's gardens and mansions), Zhejiang Provincial Archives, J172-003-022 (1953), 1.

[53] Luo Yimin 罗以民, *Liuzhuang bainian* 刘庄百年 (The Liu Estate in a century) (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1998), 135.

[54] "Wei baogao Liuzhuang xiujian gongcheng jindu qingkuang" 为报告刘庄修建工程进度情况(For the

The project of making it Chairman Mao's private villa was shrouded with mystery. Not only did the builders and contractors remain uninformed about who the "leading cadre" would be, but most members of the Hangzhou government and Hangzhou citizens were also unaware of the change of the Liu Estate and the imminent arrival of Mao. After the Ministry of Railroads relocated its sanatorium and handed over the properties, some of its employees continued to possess three bungalows right in front of the Liu Estate. Clearly, those occupants failed to understand the necessity of their evacuation from this region. The Bureau of Construction (*Jianshe ju* 建设局) of Hangzhou, whose cadres were still ignorant of the nature of the ongoing project inside the Liu Estate, issued an official warning notice in May 1951 demanding the builders of the Liu Estate to demolish a kitchen for the sake of fire prevention.[55]

Two weeks later, Hangzhou's Office of Gardening Administration (*Yuanlin guanli chu* 园林管理处) felt offended by the builders' lack of response to the notice and filed a complaint about the potential fire risk and water pollution caused by the said kitchen. To the Hangzhou government's amazement, the contact person from the Liu Estate appeared rude and arrogant, brushing aside inquiries made by the Office of Gardening Administration. In addition, some Hangzhou-based cadres wondered aloud why the construction team could carve up lakeside spaces at will without prior authorization. A report dated June 1, 1953, indicated that the constructors erected giant fences to specify the boundaries of the Liu Estate, obstructing the view of the lake. The confused reporter then specifically inquired whether the Liu Estate would continue to be accessible to the public after its renovation.[56] To the author of the report, the entire process of renovating the Liu Estate was incomprehensible and mysterious. Had s/he known that the Liu Estate's future occupant would be the PRC's chairman in January 1954, s/he would have dispelled all the doubts.

The Drafting of the PRC's First Constitution

In January 1954, Mao brought his "Group of Drafting the Constitution" (*Xianfa qicao xiaozu* 宪法起草小组) to Hangzhou. Mao resided in the No. 1 Building inside the renovated Liu Estate, but the office for the group was set up in Beishan Street (*Beishan jie*

report on the progress of the project of constructing and repairing the Liu Estate), Zhejiang Provincial Archives (1953), 3-10

[55] "Wei baogao Liuzhuang xiujian gongcheng jindu qingkuang," 10-24.

[56] "Wei baogao Liuzhuang xiujian gongcheng jindu qingkuang," 25-27.

北山街) in the northern part of West Lake. In the following two months, Mao shuttled between the two locations.[57] While Mao was presiding over the group in Hangzhou, he established effective communication with other upper-echelon leaders in Beijing, particularly Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇 (1898-1969). In the initial stage, for example, Mao wrote to Liu and other comrades in Beijing asking them to read numerous editions of constitutions, including those from Russia/the Soviet Union, East European nations, France, and the Republic of China, to make preparations for reviewing the draft.[58] In Hangzhou, the group produced four drafts in total between January and February 1954. A relatively complete draft was timely delivered from Hangzhou to Beijing on February 18. It took Liu Shaoqi only two days to call for a politburo meeting. Meanwhile, Liu kept providing Mao in Hangzhou with feedback. By March 1954, the final draft gained preliminary approval in both Hangzhou and Beijing.[59]

Mao fell in love with Hangzhou as soon as the project of drafting the constitution unfolded. More importantly, this two-month period proved that the Hangzhou-Beijing and Mao-Liu connection was effective and fruitful. In the following decade, in consequence, Mao would keep visiting the city, particularly in wintertime. A great number of important documents would be prepared and sent off for nationwide circulation from the Liu Estate. Formulating and distributing political documents, according to Guoguang Wu, contributed to the establishment of "ideological legitimacy" among the PRC's top-tier leaders. The prevalence of "document politics" testified to the operation of Chinese politics at the highest level outside the bureaucracy.[60] As a matter of fact, drafting and soliciting the general population's participation in the discussion of the PRC's first constitution were, according to Neil Diamant, a manifestation of informal politics or the Party's "guerilla style" governance.[61]

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[57] Ye, *Mao Zedong yu Xihu*, 4.
[58] Huang Zheng 黄峥, "Xin Zhongguo diyibu xianfa de zhiding guocheng" 新中国第一部宪法的制定过程 (The process of making new China's first constitution), in *Mao Zedong shengping yanjiu ziliao shang* 毛泽东生平研究资料 上 (Research materials about Mao Zedong's life, book 1) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2013), 367-368.
[59] Lei Lei 雷磊, *Fada qunying: canyu gongheguo lifa de Fada ren* 法大群英：参与共和国立法的法大人 (Heroes from China University of Political Science and Law: alumni of China University of Political Science and Law who participated in making laws during the PRC) (Beijing: Zhongguo zhengfa daxue chubanshe, 2012), 46.
[60] Guoguang Wu, "Documentary Politics": Hypotheses, Process, and Case Studies," in *Decision-Making in Deng's China: Perspectives From Insiders*, eds., Carol Lee Hamrin, Suisheng Zhao, and A. Doak Barnett (London: Routledge, 1995), 24-25.
[61] Neil J. Diamant, *Useful Bullshit: Constitutions in Chinese Politics and Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), 9.

In mid-September, the Mao-Liu or Hangzhou-Beijing connection generated another work with vital historical importance: "Why Are the Bourgeois Rightists Reactionaries?" (*Weishenme shuo zichan jieji youpai shi fandong pai?* 为什么说资产阶级右派是反动派). Its publication as a *People's Daily* editorial on September 15, 1957, signaled the CCP's all-out effort to crack down on the dissidents or rightists across the country. A close investigation of the revisions of this essay shows that Mao, who was staying in the Liu Estate then, and Liu collectively rephrased it, thereby coauthoring the essay despite a 1,000-mile physical distance between the two PRC's supreme leaders.[62]

The Liu Estate as a (Hidden) Political Space

The Mao-Liu or Hangzhou-Beijing communications amid the Anti-Rightist Movement testified to the looming importance of the Liu Estate as a (hidden) space for routinized informal politics. Such informal politics, however, was by no means unofficial or ineffective. In this period, Mao occasionally flew in specialists from different fields to conduct what were known as "night chats on West Lake" (*Xihu yetan* 西湖夜谭). Here, Mao did not behave entirely differently from what he did in Zhongnanhai where he also extended invitations to renowned scholars and scientists—such as Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893-1988),[63] Qian Sanqiang 钱三强 (1913-1992), and Qian Xuesen 钱学森 (1911-2009)[64]—for private consultation in his living space.

Such conversations had never been mere casual chats but constituted a vital part of Mao's informal politics. Michael Hunt notes that private, consultative meetings afforded Mao chances to evaluate the current situations and draw up plans "patiently and informally."[65] In January 1958, for example, Mao discussed the ongoing Great Leap Forward movement with journalist Zhao Chaogou 赵超构 (1910-1992), who would soon

[62] *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao, 1956.1-1957.12* 建国以来毛泽东文稿 1956.1-1957.12 (Mao Zedong's manuscripts since the founding of the PRC, 1956.1-1957.12) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1987), 576; Zhonggong Zhongyang dangshi he wenxian yanjiuyuan, Zhongyang dang'an guan 中共中央党史和文献研究院，中央档案馆, *Jianguo yilai Liu Shaoqi wengao, di 8 ce, 1956.1-1957.12* 建国以来刘少奇文稿 第 8 册 1956.1-1957.12 (Liu Shaoqi's manuscripts since the founding of the PRC, vol. 8, 1956.1-1957.12) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2018), 442.

[63] Ma Yong 马勇, *Zhongguo shengxiong Liang Shuming zhuan* 中国圣雄 梁漱溟传 (Biography of Liang Shuming, China's sage hero) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2010), 313-314.

[64] Shuren 树人 and Jia Wei 姜葳, *Deng Jiaxian zhuan* 邓稼先传 (Biography of Deng Jiaxian) (Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe, 2013), 54.

[65] Michael H. Hunt, *The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 206.

find that Mao's remarks during their private conversation were exactly the chairman's address at the Nanning Meeting (*Nanning huiyi* 南宁会议) a week later.[66] The Liu Estate was used as a space for both domestic and foreign affairs. In July 1957, for example, Mao held a close-door meeting inside the Liu Estate with Artem Mikoyan (1905-1970), the Soviet's special envoy, to gain more information about political instability in the Soviet Union and to explore the possibility of developing China's nuclear program.[67]

As its importance grew remarkably, the Liu Estate looked antiquated and worn-out. Considering the buildings' poor light and termite infestation, one of Mao's secretaries proposed to renovate the estate once again or even rebuild it. Mao insisted that he liked the styles and furnishings of the buildings and suggested minimal alteration.[68] Despite Mao's reservations, the changes turned out to be substantial: All the old mansions were removed, and new buildings were constructed as soon as the confidential project coded 5901 kicked in in early 1959.[69] Wang Fang 王芳 (1920-2009), director of the Department of Public Security in Zhejiang and the supervisor of Project 5901, requested Dai Nianci 戴念慈 (1920-1991) to design buildings with elaborate interiors but unimpressive exteriors both because of the chairman's preferences and for the sake of safety and secrecy.[70]

Dai Nianci, a Party member since 1955, was the CCP's most trusted designer and a highly productive architect in the first several decades of the PRC. He had been the mastermind behind the construction of a number of buildings with special political importance, including the Beijing Hotel (*Beijing fandian* 北京饭店) and the Central Party School of the Communist Party of China (*Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao* 中共中央党校). Dai also concurred that the style of the new buildings should be simple and practicable to fit Mao's "plain lifestyle."[71] The end product of this project, the new buildings in the Liu

[66] Wang Haibo 王海波, *Lingting suiyue de jiaobu* 聆听岁月的脚步 (Listening to the steps of time) (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 2015), 201-202.
[67] Li Zhisui 李志绥, *Mao Zedong siren yisheng huiyi lu* 毛泽东私人医生回忆录 (The Private Life of Chairman Mao) (Taipei: Shibao wenhua, 1994), 194.
[68] Li Dalin 李达林, *Qingman Xihu—Mao Zedong zai Zhejiang jishi* 情满西湖—毛泽东在浙江纪实 (Deep affection on West Lake—a genuine record of Mao Zedong in Zhejiang) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993), 183.
[69] Wan Qian 万千, *Jianzhu shi Dai Nianci* 建筑师戴念慈 (Architect Dai Nianci) (Tianjin: Tianjin kexue jishu chubanshe, 2002), 77.
[70] Wu Delong 吴德隆, *Hangzhou laozihao xilie congshu jianzhu pian* 杭州老字号系列丛书建筑篇 (The series of Hangzhou's time-honored businesses and brands: the volume of buildings) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2008), 185.
[71] Yuan Jingshen 袁镜身, *Chengxiang guihua jianzhu jishi lu* 城乡规划建筑纪实录 (A genuine record of planning and construction in cities and the countryside) (Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe,

Estate, had a unique style that satisfied both Mao and the leadership in Zhejiang: They looked "plain, quietly elegant, and secluded" (*pusu, danya, yinbi* 朴素，淡雅，隐蔽), fully absorbed into West Lake's landscape.[72] To ensure Mao's security, a tall building in a nearby public park was forcibly pulled down.[73] Hence, the goal of making Mao's residence in Hangzhou inaccessible, unremarkable, and invisible was met.

The resort's obscurity and mysteriousness were enhanced during the 1959 project, for some most basic information seemed to be the nation's top secret. For example, the costs of its two renovations in 1952-1953 and 1959 remained unknown to the general public until today. An archived document indicated that the budget for a joint program of refashioning the Liu Estate and a nearby scenic spot in 1952-53 was slightly over 100 million *yuan* (equivalent to 100,000 *yuan* after 1955).[74] Therefore, the expense for the Liu Estate would definitely not exceed 100,000 *yuan*. For the 1959 project, a memoirist was only willing to give an estimated amount. Once again, it was less than 100,000 *yuan*.[75]

The second renovation of Mao's private villa was performed at the height of the Great Leap Forward Movement (1958-1960). The Movement's debacle in the early 1960s fundamentally changed the PRC's political landscape and Mao's understanding of China's revolution. Nick Knight posits that Mao's loss of optimism in the wake of the Great Leap Forward led to the collapse of Mao's utopianism and pragmatism. Consequently, he became more inclined to hide himself and declined to draw up a coherent and clear strategy.[76] In a similar vein, Maurice Meisner finds that when Mao grew obsessed with "fears of the past" and lost his "utopian visions of the future," he became "increasingly suspicious of the loyalty and revolutionary credentials of most of his old comrades in

1996), 395-396.

[72] Wu, *Hangzhou laozihao xilie congshu jianzhu pian*, 185.

[73] Wu Zigang 吴子刚, "Xihu ji huanhu diqu de bianqian he gongyuan lüdi de kaituo" 西湖及环湖地区的变迁和公园绿地的开拓 (The transformations and the opening of public parks in West Lake and the lakeside areas), in *Xihu fengjing yuanlin (1949-1989)* 西湖风景园林（1949-1989） (Landscape in West Lake [1949-1989]), ed., Hangzhou shi yuanlin wenwu guanli ju (Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu chubanshe, 1990), 70-71.

[74] "Kuoda Hugang guanyu fengjingdian ji xiuli Liuzhuang liangxiang gongchegnshu gaisuanshu" 扩大花港观鱼风景点及修理刘庄两项工程概算书 (The budget statement for the two projects of expanding the scenic spot of Watching fish at the flower harbor and repair the Liu Estate), Zhejiang Provincial Archives, J158-005-080-013 (1952), 13.

[75] Li, *Qingman Xihu*, 186.

[76] Nick Knight, "From Harmony to Struggle, from Perpetual Peace to Cultural Revolution: Changing Futures in Mao Zedong's Thought," in *China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: Master Narratives and Post-Mao Counternarratives*, ed., Woei Lien Chong (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefied Publishers, Inc.), 80-85.

arms."[77] Correspondingly, the nature of Mao's informal politics transitioned from a routinized one that complemented regular bureaucratized politics to one with more unpredictable political maneuvering.

The Liu Estate was, hence, the physical space to purposely segregate Mao Zedong from other leaders of the CCP. As a sense of loneliness and isolation crept in, according to Meisner, Mao "deliberately manufactured" the cult of Mao Zedong as a means to connect with the masses. Although the Mao cult was established a long time ago, this cult of personality allowed Mao to become "an institution"—instead of a flesh-and-blood human—by occupying a position "above the Party" at a historical juncture when Mao's authority was in peril. Hence, Mao was capable of imposing his personal political supremacy in the name of the "people."[78] Evidently, Meisner's observation of Mao's position "above the Party" is akin to my finding that Mao was external to the Party establishment. Daniel Leese further notes that the cult of Mao required a certain degree of "aloofness" to gain legitimacy for Mao.[79] Paradoxically, hence, Mao's position outside and above the CCP was intended to connect to the populace but simultaneously required detachment and hiddenness.

The Liu Estate provided a locus to maintain Mao's intriguing status as both being close to the masses and staying detached from them. Throughout the 1950s and the 1960s, Mao's visual and textual representations were fostered from the Liu Estate intermittently but steadily. A perusal of *People's Daily* only finds that its very first news story about Mao's stay in Hangzhou appeared as late as January 29, 1958, five long years after Mao's first lengthy stay in the city.[80] The well-known photo, "Chairman Mao in Hangzhou" (*Mao zhuxi zai Hangzhou* 毛主席在杭州) was taken beside West Lake inside the Liu Estate on December 26, 1954, Mao's 61st birthday.[81] It, however, was not officially published in any periodical press. (See Figure 1)

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[77] Maurice Meisner, *Mao Zedong: A Political and Intellectual Portrait* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 161-163.
[78] Meisner, *Mao Zedong*, 164.
[79] Leese, *Mao Cult*, 18.
[80] Yi Xintian 伊心恬, Pang Youzhong 庞佑中, and Hou Bo 侯波, "Mao zhuxi zai Hangzhou chakan weisheng gongzuo" 毛主席在杭州查看卫生工作 (Chairman Mao is inspecting hygiene work in Hangzhou), *Renmin ribao*, January 29, 1958.
[81] Chen Hanmin 陈汉民, "Gemin lingxiu zai Xihu de huodong jishi" 革命领袖在西湖的活动纪实 (A genuine record of the revolutionary leaders' activities on West Lake), in *Xihu fengjing yuanlin (1949-1989)* 西湖风景园林（1949-1989） (Landscape in West Lake [1949-1989]), ed., Hangzhou shi yuanlin wenwu guanli ju (Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu chubanshe, 1990), 367.

Figure 1: The photo, known as "Chairman Mao in Hangzhou," was taken inside the Liu Estate in December 1954. It was distributed nationwide as an independent commodity rather than an illustration in any journal.

The aforementioned 1958 poems, "Farewell to the God of Plague," were delivered to the entire country from the Liu Estate and stood as a symbol of "Party success at stamping out intractable ills, and a patriotic demonstration of the power of the people." Therefore, they were memorized by "an entire generation."[82] In May 1963, when Mao was still recovering from the fiasco of the Great Leap Forward, he spent an afternoon in Liu Estate authoring his much-read essay, "Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?" (*Ren de zhengque sixiang shicong nali laide?* 人的正确思想是从哪里来的？).[83] This 1,100-word essay became so influential in the 1960s that it ended up making four entries in the *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong* (*Mao zhuxi yulu* 毛主席语录)—the small red book that finally canonized Mao and Maoism—in 1966.[84]

The well-kept Mao's hidden body but the wide circulation of texts and images from

[82] Miriam Gross, *Farewell to the God of Plague: Chairman Mao's Campaign to Deworm China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 18.
[83] Chen, "Gemin lingxiu zai Xihu de huodong jishi," 367.
[84] *Mao zhuxi yulu* 毛主席语录 (The quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun zong zhengzhi bu, 1966), 176-179.

the obscure Liu Estate were key to naturalizing Maoism as a part of the people's everyday life. Laikwan Pang invokes the concept of "*doxa*"—the tendency to "produce the naturalization of its own arbitrariness" in any established order—to explain how the cult of Mao became self-evident in Chinese society. Maoism was widely accepted as common sense—as opposed to artificial, superimposed ideologies—"absorbed into people's everyday life and stasis"[85] in Mao-era China precisely because Mao's external position, both figuratively and literally (namely, in the Liu Estate), to the institutionalized and bureaucratized CCP. This externality, as I have discussed, enabled Mao, like Stalin in the Soviet Union, to assume a role as Lefort's "master" who "stood outside of ideological discourse," contributed to "concealing the paradox through himself," and claimed to represent the "objective truth."[86]

The May 16 Notification

By the mid-1960s, when the cult of Mao gained greater momentum, Mao's external position empowered him to convince the masses into believing that their loyalty to Mao and adherence to Maoism were a justifiable cause in pursuit of the "objective truth." At this point, the aforesaid contradiction in all socialist regimes between "the rules of organization"—here, the *insiders*, such as Liu Shaoqi in Beijing—and "the rules of thought"—here, the *outsider*, Mao in the Liu Estate—mutated into open conflicts. For Mao and Maoists, it was thus vital to smash the "insiders" of the CCP's ideological discourse—namely, the Party organization and bureaucracy—into pieces. Mao's assault on the political establishment culminated in the Cultural Revolution.

On the eve of the outbreak of this political upheaval, Mao brought informal politics into full play. Unfortunately, this time Liu, the co-founder of the communicational mode of informal politics back in the early and mid-1950s, fell victim to it. The changing relationship between Mao and Liu during the late 1950s and the mid-1960s testified to the nature of informal politics as "a form of interaction among partners enjoying relative freedom in interpretation of their roles' requirements."[87] In this case, Mao reinterpreted his and Liu's roles, of which Liu, the prime target, and most other high-ranking CCP officials remained unaware, despite their sneaking suspicion that something extraordinary was

[85] Laikwan Pang, *The Art of Cloning: Creative Production during China's Cultural Revolution* (London: Verso, 2017), 201-208.
[86] Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 10-13.
[87] Barbara A. Misztal, *Informality: Social Theory and Contemporary Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 8.

brewing.[88]

During the crunch time between March and June 1966, Mao hid himself inside the Liu Estate but kept giving the tactic command. His rift with the entire Party bureaucracy deepened. In March, Mao accused the standing committee of the Politburo in Beijing of falling short of criticizing the Soviet Union's revisionism when the CCP and Japan's communist party issued a joint statement. Among all the Beijing-based CCP leaders, Mao particularly took issue with Peng Zhen 彭真 (1902-1997) and those in Beijing's CCP Committee and in the Publicity Department of the CCP.[89] In consequence, Mao decided to bypass his colleagues in the capital city and rely on his most trusted comrades, such as Kang Sheng 康生 (1898-1975) and Jiang Qing 江青 (1914-1991), to carry out assaults on the Party establishment. It was under this circumstance that Mao's personal team led by Chen Boda convened in April in Shanghai, about 100 miles away from Hangzhou, to draft a document in preparation for the start of the Cultural Revolution.[90]

This document would be later known as the "May 16 Notification," the circulation of which, in hindsight, was deemed as the starting point of the Cultural Revolution. It is worth mentioning that Chen Boda had been the author of the constitution's first draft back in 1954 and had, therefore, been a key participant in and contributor to the Hangzhou-Beijing communications. This time, the Hangzhou-Shanghai connection would displace the Hangzhou-Beijing one. The geographical proximity between the two cities in the Yangzi Delta enabled Shanghai to be an outreach of the Liu Estate, the heart of informal politics. Throughout the mid-and late 1960s, Shanghai played a pivotal role in maintaining informal communications among different cliques inside the CCP. My research shows that during the first half of the 1960s, discussing history had become a major, albeit informal, way of exchanging political views. While some used "history to unleash attacks on Mao," radical intellectuals, such as Yao Wenyuan 姚文元 (1931-2005), deployed the same strategy to fight back. Thus, Yao's infamous article that triggered the Cultural Revolution, "On the New Historical Opera, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*" (Ping xinbian lishiju *Hai Rui*

[88] Jin Yanfeng 金延锋 and Xu Bin 徐斌, *Gongheguo de mingyun de jueze yu sikao* 共和国命运的抉择与思考 (The choice and the thoughts of the Republic's destiny) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 2009), 337.
[89] Wang Li 王力, *Wang Li fansi lu (Wang Li yigao)* 王力反思录（王力遗稿） (Wang Li's reflections [Wang Li's posthumous manuscript]) (Hong Kong: Beixing chubanshe, youxian gongsi, 2001), 379-380.
[90] Li Xinzhi 李新芝 and Zheng Mingjun 郑明俊, *Mao Zedong jishi 1893-1976 xia* 毛泽东纪事 1893-1976 下 (The chronicle of Mao Zedong, 1893-1976, part II) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2013), 943.

baguan 评新编历史剧《海瑞罢官》), exemplified the working of such informal political struggle.[91] In this sense, the production of the "May 16 Notification" was nothing but its culmination and a transition from informal to formal politics.

The process began by singling out Peng Zhen as the target of a political attack in mid-1966. Such a sweeping movement to denounce Peng commenced during Liu Shaoqi's tour of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Burma. As soon as Liu, the PRC's chairman and Peng Zhen's political ally, returned to China, he attended an enlarged politburo meeting—not in Beijing but in Hangzhou—on April 19 presided over by Mao.[92] It was thus evident that Hangzhou-based Mao was blending formal and informal politics to accomplish his goals at this point. The confused and intimidated Peng also intended to play informal political games to redeem himself. During the meeting, Peng personally gave Chen Boda a phone call in an attempt to maintain communication with this personal aide to Mao, but Chen declined.[93]

By mid-May, Mao's team in Shanghai—Chen Boda in particular—finalized what would be known as the "May 16 Notification." In the Liu Estate, Mao quickly read it and inserted some scathing remarks that called for the removal of "bourgeois authorities" from the academic, educational, journalistic, literary/arts, and publishing circles. More importantly, Mao cautioned against those "representatives of the bourgeois class" who had usurped power in the governments.[94] It would be widely known later that the "representatives of the bourgeois class" referred particularly to Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904-1997). In this sense, the roadmap of the Cultural Revolution had already been drawn when Mao hid in the Liu Estate at this point. To display this document's supreme authority, Mao ordered that it be published with no further revision. Consequently, the notification officially that came out on May 16, 1966, contained numerous typos and inconsistent formulations.[95]

Meanwhile, nevertheless, Mao purposely left Liu and other Beijing-based leaders with the impression that the Hangzhou-Beijing connection remained unhindered and effective. In early June 1966, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping paid a visit to Mao in person asking for Mao's opinions about the ongoing political disorder in Beijing. In early July 1966, Mao

[91] Qiliang He and Meng Wang, "*Wu Xun*, *Song Jingshi* and *Lin Zexu*: Cinema and Historiography in Mao's China (1949-1966)," *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (2022): 343-344.
[92] Roderick and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 32-33.
[93] Chen, *Chen Boda zuihou koushu huiyi*, 260.
[94] Li and Zheng, *Mao Zedong jishi 1893-1976 xia*, 943.
[95] Roderick and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 40.

wrote to Liu and Deng in response to their suggestions for industrial production and infrastructure construction. Mao approved the report filed by Liu and Deng with no reservation.[96] At this point, clashes in Beijing and other major cities in China had escalated into serious violence as students were mobilized to rebel against "revisionists" at different levels of the PRC government.

Chaos reigned in Beijing as Mao had expected. According to Mao's personal physician, Mao told him, "Let them (those in Beijing) create disturbances, and we can rest ourselves [in the Liu Estate]." Mao seemed to enjoy his external position in Hangzhou and was waiting to see the deteriorating situation in anarchic Beijing. In contrast to the increasingly disordered capital city, life inside the Liu Estate in May and June 1966 remained calm and enjoyable: Mao occasionally climbed the Ding Family Mountain and held dance parties twice a week. Mao's hidden body inside the Liu Estate was strategized to confuse his imagined foes inside the CCP, and Mao was quietly waiting for them to make mistakes before he could finally take over and gain absolute control over the Cultural Movement.[97]

In reality, Mao hid his body well beyond his stay in the Liu Estate. Between mid-June, when Mao left Hangzhou, and July 18, 1966, when he finally returned to Beijing, his itinerary was a well-kept secret. In a letter dated July 8, 1966, to Jiang Qing, Mao revealed his "hiddenness": He stayed in his hometown in Hunan for dozens of days with little contact with the external world and spent about ten days in Wuhan. Mao considered the prevailing disorder in the whole country as a part of his blueprint as he stated in the letter that the purpose of launching the Cultural Revolution was to accomplish the goal of getting into "a state of complete chaos" before the age of "universal peace and order" arrived.[98] It was with such a mentality that Mao appeared, from other Party leaders' standpoint, "evasive" and irresponsive as if he was dissociated from the Party establishment.[99] In so doing, Mao succeeded in weaponizing his invisibility by exuding a sense of unpredictability and unfathomability.

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[96] *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao (di 12 ce), 1966.1-1968.12* 建国以来毛泽东文稿（第 12 册）1966.1-1968.12 (Mao Zedong's manuscripts since the founding of the PRC [book 12], 1966.1-1968.12) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998), 69.
[97] Li, *Mao Zedong siren yisheng huiyi lu*, 442.
[98] *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao (di 12 ce), 1966.1-1968.12*, 71.
[99] Frank Dikötter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962-1976* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2016), 60.

When Mao was still enjoying his relatively peaceful life inside the Liu Estate in May and June 1966, Beijing began to be in tumult. On May 25, Nie Yuanzi 聂元梓 (1921-2019), a faculty member of Beijing University (*Beijing daxue* 北京大学), infamously posted the PRC's first "Big-character Poster" on campus. Nie's action instantly won Mao Zedong's acclaim because of Mao's firm belief that the "Big-character Poster" provided a novel avenue for the masses to express themselves and communicate directly with him by crushing the bureaucratized Party establishment and disrupting the existing sociopolitical order.[100]

It was thus not surprising that Mao would take the form of the "Big-character Poster" to officially start the Cultural Revolution shortly after he returned to Beijing. On August 7, 1966, Mao circulated his own "poster"—"Bombard the Headquarters–My Big-character Poster" (*Paoda silingbu—wo de yizhang dazibao* 炮打司令部—我的一张大字报)—to wage a war against the so-called "capitalist roaders."[101] In so doing, Mao underscored the role of the "masses" in initiating the ongoing revolution and managed to leave the masses an impression that they were assuming the leading role in the ongoing sociocultural revolution, and the political storm was initiated from outside the Party establishment.

Not every member of the masses followed in the footsteps of Nie Yuanzi without hesitation. A young man from a family of high-ranking CCP officials wrote in his letter that he was in disbelief when hearing that Peng Zhen and other seasoned cadres at the heart of the Party were counterrevolutionaries. However, he still believed that anyone running counter to Mao's instructions would come under the attack of the masses.[102] This letter thus testified to widespread recognition of Mao's supposed "external position" to the Party establishment. He disguised himself as an outsider—just like any ordinary citizen across the country. Thus, Mao was in a unique position: both as the supreme Party leader and as the possessor of "*external* knowledge of the objective truth." In other words, he assumed the role of Lefort's "master" in concealing the inherent contradiction of ideology.[103]

Conclusion

This article highlights Mao's routinized informal politics or informalized politics that

[100] Wang, *Wang Li fansi lu (Wang Li yigao)*, 393-394.
[101] "Paoda silingbu (wo de yizhang dazi bao)" 炮打司令部（我的一张大字报） (Bombard the headquarters [my big-character poster]), *Renmin ribao* 人民日报, August 5, 1967.
[102] Jin and Xu, *Gongheguo de mingyun de jueze yu sikao*, 337.
[103] Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 10-13.

ironically allowed the CCP's chairman to stay outside the Party as well as the PRC's bureaucracy. Mao's "externality" was made possible, in no small part, because of his physical presence away from Beijing. This externality was necessitated by the Liu Estate's hiddenness in that its invisibility obscured the fact that Mao exercised his exclusive privilege to monopolize West Lake's finest garden in this supposedly egalitarian society, leading to collective amnesia about Mao's actual position inside the Party establishment. While James Gao underscores the unofficial nature of the political games Mao played in Hangzhou,[104] this article has argued that such informality was a crucial part of the mechanism of politics and ideology in Mao-era China. On the one hand, political ideas were exchanged informally, and political affairs or struggles unfolded oftentimes in an informal manner. On the other hand, informal politics helped Mao to perform a role as an outsider of the Party institution and as an anti-establishment hero against his own establishment.

The Liu Estate, like any other designed landscape, was "an ideologically-charged and very complex cultural product" in Mao's times.[105] However, its ideological significance as a political space did not lie in its visibility and transparency, as many political symbols coming under scholars' scrutiny in recent years, especially those in Beijing. The Liu Estate, just like Mao's role as a concealer of the Lefort Paradox, was characterized by obscureness. It was because of such invisibility that the ideological discourse generated and popularized by Mao and Maoists became naturalized, transparent, and external to the Party itself.

[104] Gao, *The Communist Takeover of Hangzhou*, 224.
[105] Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin University Press, 1998), 11.