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**The Blood Relation Theory and the Psychology of the  
Intellectual Youth and the Red Guard, under Mao in Dai  
Sijie's Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress**

CHIN 161

Prof. Frost

*"First we were refused admission to high school, then the role of young intellectuals was foisted on us on account of our parents being labelled 'enemies of the people'..."* (Dai 8). This is the main character's account in Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress which describes the wave of public humiliation of intellectuals and their offspring which soon followed after Mao decreed his Cultural Revolution in June 1966. The offspring of intellectuals were considered inherently unable to become part of the revolutionary stock of youth. This predicament led to harassment of such children until Mao declared their equality and right of revenge in November 1966. The offspring of intellectuals or of bourgeois families that turned revolutionary were labeled *rebels* (Ebrey 316). Rebels were eager to show their revolutionary fervor to prove that they rejected their intellectual or bourgeois upbringing, thus being accepted in society. In Dai's story, the main character describes the process by which the father of his friend Luo is humiliated in public, and Luo's reaction being, *"We'll note down everyone who denounces my father, or beats him...That way we can take our revenge when we're older"* (Dai 9). This statement rang true during phase II of the Cultural Revolution when so called rebels were allowed to attack their former harassers. Even their acquaintance Four-eyes is eager to prove himself more revolutionary than anyone else, when the narrator observes that he *"lived in constant fear of the peasants' opinion, for [they would] decide whether he had been properly re-educated...In these circumstances even the slightest defect, either political or physical, could be disastrous"* (Dai 53). Luo, Four-eyes, and the narrator from the book Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress exhibit the stereotypical characteristics of harassed children of intellectuals under the Cultural Revolution, with Four-eyes even verging on becoming a rebel.

The harassment of intellectuals, the bourgeoisie, and their children started with Mao's prodigy, the Red Guard. When Mao announced state opposition to the Four Olds in 1966, the Red

Guard took this as their cue to take all necessary action to rid the country of capitalist-inroaders. The Four Olds are old customs, old habits, old culture, old thought ("The Play's the Thing"). Such phrasing of what society should deem reactionary is so ambiguous and subjective that the Red Guard would not find it difficult to *uncover* reactionaries wherever they went. The first Red Guard, formed in Beijing at the Qing Hua University Middle School, was comprised of students whose parents represented the most dedicated and pure revolutionaries in China. These first Red Guard units journeyed across China to spread the Cultural Revolution and to have students denounce, humiliate, and even kill their teachers and other intellectuals ("No Rest for the Weary"). They considered themselves to be "natural reds," because their parents were revolutionaries and of the worker class (Ebrey 315). These "natural reds" and other students had no problem harassing the other students of intellectual or bourgeois backgrounds based on the Blood Relation Theory, a then official doctrine of the Chinese Communist Party. Under this theory, one whose parents were revolutionaries, peasants, or workers was naturally imbued with what the state saw as positive revolutionary qualities. Those who were of an intellectual background were bound to it as if it were innate, thus preventing any offspring of intellectuals to technically become part of the revolutionary class ("No Rest for the Weary").

The children of intellectuals or bourgeois families during this period would frequently come to resent their backgrounds and families because of the abuse and embarrassment inflicted upon them. The hatred imbued in the younger generation against enemies of Mao was taken out on these intellectual students. In the documentary film "No Rest for the Weary," an interviewee admits, "[w]e didn't do it out of love for Mao, rather out of indoctrinated hatred" ("No Rest for the Weary"). However, those who constantly tried to prove that they had overcome their intellectual and bourgeois deficiencies were rewarded when Mao finally proclaimed the Blood Relation

Theory a mistake. Rebel students were even encouraged to take revenge on those who had wronged them ("No Rest for the Weary"). This only unleashed even more hatred, and little did anyone see that they were all pawns in Mao's grand scheme to regain complete authority over the Chinese Communist Party.

In Dai's novel, we can distinctly recognize the psychology of the abused intellectual student in Four-eyes. Four-eyes is in near constant denial of his intellectual background, even though it would appear he does so to protect his own self-interest. It is this exact behavior which nearly makes him a rebel. He is willing to denounce his own background in order to prove that he is a revolutionary. This is made apparent in the scene where he rejects and then revises the folk songs given to him by Luo and the narrator, when he says, *"All you've brought me is useless garbage, which will only get me into trouble! And you've got the cheek to pretend they're... Good God!... All I need to do is make a few alterations"* (78). The resulting alterations destroy the authenticity of the songs, but Four-eyes does not care. For him these revised songs are about his acceptance by society. In Four-eyes we can recognize the desperate bourgeois student, trying to redeem himself, even if it means rejecting all that his class and family stand for.

In Luo and the narrator, on the other hand, we recognize another part of the bourgeois child's psychology, the sadistic desire for revenge. As mentioned previously, Luo wants revenge for the acts against his father from the outset of the book. The narrator too, exhibits signs of hatred against the headman and the state of affairs he found himself in due to the Cultural Revolution. This is made clear in the scene where he purposefully pedals the needle slowly into the headman's tooth. In his narrative he says, *"I thought about all the miseries of re-education, and slowed down the pace of the treadle. Luo shot me a glance of complicity. I pedalled even more slowly, this time to punish him for threatening to take me into custody... I had turned into a sadist"* (Dai 134). These

negative feelings resonate heavily with Luo and the narrator, leading the reader to feel sympathy. Indeed, one can sympathize with Luo and the narrator for they are clear victims, but one may not be able to sympathize with students and the Red Guard who, caught up in the Cultural Revolution, took their hatred out on their elders.

The inherent hatred imbued in the "children of Mao"--the youth who grew up during the Great Leap Forward--against counter-revolutionaries and the counter-hatred felt by the abused during the Culture Revolution led to the torture, humiliation, and deaths of half a million innocent people in China. Mao used the impressionable youth to overthrow the system he created--a system that he feared was nearing the revisionism which occurred in the Soviet Union after Khrushchev came to power. Once Mao unleashed phase II of the Cultural Revolution, the negation of the Blood Relation Theory, being an enemy of the state was even more gray and subjective than ever before. This was the environment which Mao desired, for it allowed him to debunk anyone he feared of being a potential Khrushchev, even if they thought they were supporting Mao by their actions, as was the case with the army and Liu Shaoqi ("No Rest for the Weary"). For a time, rebels and the Red Guard had joined forces, but in 1967, after the army was ordered to take control of the situation, the Red Guard armed themselves and battled one another as well as the national army. This situation proved so volatile that in 1968 Mao eventually disbanded the Red Guards. However, even though the lines between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary had been ultimately blurred during the last phase of the Cultural Revolution, the terror of capitalist invaders still continued, namely with the army's investigation of a conspiracy called the "May 16 Group" (Ebrey 319). This meant that abuse and torture against the innocent still continued in China, just not under the direct guidance of Chairman Mao.

In China during the Cultural Revolution, as in Nazi Germany, parents no longer raised their

children without the authoritarian figurehead telling their children to uncover enemies of the state. What Mao really ended up doing was to release the indoctrinated hatred inherent in the youth out on the older generation. Even the children of bourgeois and intellectual families, as in Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress, became pawns in this game. Revenge and the desire to appear revolutionary became so important to these children that Mao easily manipulated them. First enemies of the people, and then, if they displayed revolutionary fervor, they became the forerunners of uncovering more counter-revolutionaries. Psychologically, Luo, Four-eyes, and the narrator were certainly just as much victims of the Cultural Revolution as anyone else, but they certainly should count themselves lucky to have lived in isolation in the countryside during this period of time, for much worse could have befallen them in the cities. Half a million died, and millions more were physically and emotionally scarred for the rest of their lives due to the inhumanity unleashed in the Cultural Revolution.

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